

St Nicholas Quarter Regeneration Scheme (Phase Two)

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

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1. Introduction

Background

This Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report (also known as *Stage One AA*) has been prepared by Building Design Partnership (BDP) for Louth County Council (the Applicant) to determine whether or not a Natura Impact Statement (NIS: *Stage Two AA*) is required for proposed public realm, community and residential development associated with Phase Two of the St Nicholas Quarter Rejuvenation, Dundalk, in accordance with the requirements of article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (as amended) (hereafter referred to as the “Habitats Directive”). This report addresses both the construction phase of the proposed development and its operation upon completion.

Report Structure

This report sets out the legislative context for the assessment process with reference to relevant guidelines and highlights the experience and qualifications of the authors. The relevant Natura 2000 sites are then identified, and the report details the proposed scheme and the works associated with this which are then interrogated to identify any possible effects which may be ecologically relevant. Following this, the metrics for the assessment of ‘significance’ of these effects are explained and applied to each of the European sites identified to be ecologically connected to the proposed scheme area. This assessment is undertaken in view of the conservation objectives and known sensitivities of the qualifying interests and special conservation interests for each European site. Other plans and projects are then considered to identify any likely combination effects which may result in significant adverse effects to European sites.

Legislative Context

The Habitats Directive provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the “favourable conservation status” of the habitats and species of European Community Interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives (Habitats Directive as above and Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds) with Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designed to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them. The two designations are collectively known as Natura 2000 sites. Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect such sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for AA. These requirements are implemented in the Republic of Ireland by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive States:

‘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.'

The AA process relates to the protection of habitat and species listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive which form the Natura 2000 network (Article 3(1)). Species breeding and resting places of species listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive are nationally protected in Ireland as per Articles 15 and 16 of the Habitats Directive. The species listed in Annex IV do not form part of the Natura 2000 network as they are not mentioned in Article 3(1) of the Directive which defines the Natura 2000 network.

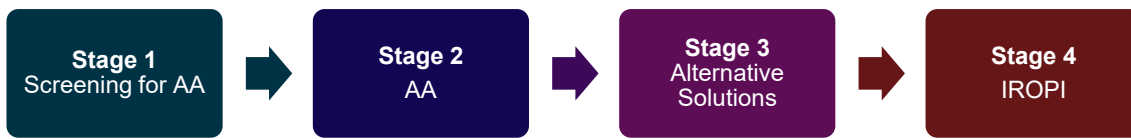
Article 3(1) of the Habitats Directive states:

'A coherent European ecological network of special areas of conservation shall be set up under the title Natura 2000. This network, composed of sites hosting the natural habitat types listed in Annex I and habitats of the species listed in Annex II, shall enable the natural habitat types and the species' habitats concerned to be maintained or, where appropriate, restored at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.'

AA is an assessment of the likely significant effects arising from a plan or project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, to assess if the plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network in view of a site's conservation objectives. The Natura 2000 network consist of SACs, SPAs and provide the protection and long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. Ramsar sites are intentionally important wetlands and are often considered within environmental assessments, although they are not Natura 2000 sites unless they overlap with SAC or SPA designations. The AA process is concluded by the relevant competent authority in the formation of a determination in accordance with article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Overview of the Habitats Directive and Appropriate Assessment Process

The Habitats Directive itself promotes a hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation, and compensatory measures. This approach aims to avoid any effects on Natura 2000 sites by identifying possible effects early in the plan or project making process and avoiding such effects. Second, the approach involves the application of mitigation measures, if necessary, during the AA process to the point where no adverse impacts on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site(s) remain. If potential significant effects on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site(s) remain, and no further practicable mitigation is possible, the approach requires the consideration of alternative solutions. If no alternative solutions are identified and the plan or project is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), then compensatory measures are required for remaining adverse effects. There are four main stages of the AA process.



Stage One: Screening

The process that identifies the likely impacts upon a European site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant.

Stage Two: Appropriate Assessment

The consideration of the impact on the integrity of a European site from the effects of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's conservation objectives.

Additionally, where there are adverse effects mitigation measures are required to avoid or minimise potential effects. The details of these mitigation measures are then assessed in the context of ecological integrity of a plan/project characteristics to determine if any significant adverse effects on European sites remain. If this assessment process shows there are no residual significant effects, then the process may end at this stage. However, if the likelihood of significant impact remains, then the process must proceed to Stage Three.

Stage Three: Assessment of Alternative Solutions

An examination of alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoids adverse impacts on the integrity of the European site.

Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain

An assessment of compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of IROPI, it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

Approach

The AA screening is based on best scientific knowledge and has utilised ecological and hydrological expertise. The following guidance documents and sources of information were consulted:

- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG, 2010 rev.) Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities;
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPWS 1/10 & PSSP 2/10;
- European Community Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) – The Habitats Directive (European Commission 1992);
- European Commission (2021) Commission Notice – 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 Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 (European Commission 1997);
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC (EC Environment Directorate-General, 2019);
- Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) (2021) OPR Practice Note PN01 Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management;
- European Community Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) – The Habitats Directive;
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Maps;
- National Parks and Wildlife Services online MapViewer;
- National Parks and Wildlife Services data (downloaded GIS shapefiles), and;
- To review other planning applications in Co. Louth – Louth County Planning Register Map Search.

The ecological desktop study that has been completed for the AA screening of the proposed project comprised the following elements:

- Identification of European sites within 15km of the site with identification of potential pathways to specific sites (if relevant) greater than 15km from the site where relevant;
- Review of the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) site synopses and conservation objectives for European sites within 15km and for which relevant potential pathways from the proposed site have been identified, and;
- Examination of available information on protected habitats and species.

Source-Pathway Receptor Model

Ecological impact assessment of potential effects on Natura 2000 sites is conducted following a standard source-pathway receptor model, where, in order for an effect to be established, all three elements of this mechanism must be in place. The absence or removal of one of the elements of the mechanism is sufficient to conclude that a potential effect is not of any relevance or significance.

- Source(s) – e.g., pollutant run-off from proposed development;
- Pathway(s) – e.g., groundwater connecting to nearby qualifying wetland habitats, and;
- Receptor(s) – e.g., qualifying aquatic habitats and species of European sites.

For the purpose of this report, receptors are the ecological features that are known to be utilised by the qualifying interests or special conservation interests of a European site. A source is any identifiable element of the proposed development that is known to interact with ecological processes. The pathways are any connections or links between the source and the receptor. This report provides information on whether direct, indirect and cumulative adverse effects could arise from the proposed development.

Author Details

This report has been prepared by Ellie Jennings, a Town Planner at BDP. Ellie has four years of experience in planning and environmental consultancy, on a range of projects from public realm projects to major development proposals. Ellie has the following qualifications: BA Applied Social Science, MSc International Planning, Licentiate Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

This report has been reviewed by Rachel Hough, an Associate Town Planner at BDP. Rachel has eight years' experience within the planning and environmental sector. She has extensive statutory planning expertise, combined with practical knowledge of environmental assessments required to deliver planning consents. Rachel has the following qualifications: BA Geography, MSc Spatial Planning, Chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

The report has been prepared with the input of Anthony Nickson. Anthony is a senior ecologist within over 17 years' experience undertaking habitat and protected species surveys and assessments including Habitat Regulation Assessments. He has also attended relevant workshops including 'An Introduction to Appropriate Assessments in Ireland' ran by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and the 'Habitat Regulation Assessment Legal Training Course' ran by Freeths LLP. Anthony is a full member of the CIEEM.

2. Project Description

Receiving Environment

The St Nicholas Quarter is located to the north of Dundalk town centre, to the south of the Castletown River Bridge. The site (Figure 2.1) has a total project area of 0.6ha, and comprises:

- Residential and commercial buildings situated between Bridge Street and Linenhall Street, and south of Northgate Street
- A car park situated off Linenhall Street
- St Nicholas Catholic Church Gardens
- Síocháin Peace Garden

The proposed development comprises the second phase of the St Nicholas Quarter Rejuvenation Project. The first phase comprised of enhancements to the public realm along Bridge Street, Linenhall Street, Northgate Street and Síocháin Peace Garden. Phase 1 received Part 8 approval in April 2018 and has been completed.



Figure 2.1 Site Location Plan

Linenhall Street is largely residential, while Bridge Street is characterised by commercial activity, including retail units, cafés, restaurants, and public houses at ground-floor level, with residential accommodation typically located above. This reflects its designation as ‘Town Centre’ zone within the Dundalk Local Area Plan 2025-2031 (2025). The Síocháin Peace Garden is located to the northeast of the area and is zoned as ‘Open Space’, while St Nicholas Catholic Church and its associated gardens are zoned as ‘Community Facilities’.

The Dundalk Local Area Plan 2025-2031 (2025) identifies the St Nicholas Quarter as historically having functioned as the northern gateway to Dundalk Town Centre prior to the construction of the Eastern Bypass in the 1990s. Since that time, the area has experienced a steady decline in pedestrian footfall and overall vibrancy. This has resulted in increasing vacancy levels, underutilisation of buildings, and a gradual deterioration in the physical condition of the built environment.

In response to this decline, the St Nicholas Quarter has been designated as a ‘Key Development Area’ within the Dundalk Local Area Plan 2025-2031 (2025). This designation presents a significant opportunity to regenerate the area from St Nicholas Catholic Church to the River Castletown. The objective is to create an inclusive and sustainable community, enhance Dundalk’s rich architectural and cultural heritage, and establish a high-quality townscape that better connects with surrounding areas of the town. Collectively, these measures aim to redefine and strengthen the northern approach to Dundalk Town Centre.

The site is located within a zone of archaeological potential, and St Nicholas Catholic Church and its associated gardens are situated within the Architectural Conservation Area (Clanbrassil Street).

Site Context

The project area is located in Dundalk Town Centre, situated between Bridge Street to the east and Linenhall Street to the west. Dundalk lies on Ireland’s east coast in County Louth, with a population of approximately 139,100. The town functions as a key transportation hub, strategically positioned near the M1 (National Primary Route) and the N52 (National Secondary Route), and approximately equidistant between Dublin and Belfast.

Dundalk is identified as a regional growth centre in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031 for the Eastern and Midland Region. The RSES highlights Dundalk’s important role in supporting economic growth in the Dublin-Belfast Corridor, the largest economic agglomeration on the island of Ireland. It includes a Dundalk Urban Area Plan (UAP), which promotes the town’s development as an attractive, vibrant, and accessible regional centre through compact and targeted growth. As part of this strategy, selected sites, including St Nicholas Quarter, are prioritised for development and regeneration.

The project site is separated from the nearest Natura 2000 site by Fairgreen Road (R117), a regional road–Dundalk Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) which borders the site to the north and 600m from the Dundalk Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These designated areas extend across the Castletown River and Dundalk Harbour, which flow directly into the Irish Sea.

Details of Proposal

The proposal involves the following, which are detailed further below.

- Construction of six accessible dwellings on the Linenhall Car Park site.
- Demolition of No. 3 Bridge Street, and construction of a new commercial unit at ground floor level and a one-bedroom residential dwelling at first floor level facing Bridge Street, and a community facility facing Linenhall Street.
- Demolition of No. 2 Bridge Street and an existing modular building on the car park to facilitate the creation of an east–west pedestrian connection to the rear of St Nicholas Catholic Church.
- Landscape improvements to St Nicholas Church Gardens.
- Demolition of 27/28 Bridge Street to create an east-west pedestrian connection through Meeting House Lane and further landscape improvements.
- Landscaping improvements to the Síocháin Peace Gardens.

Construction of new accessible residential dwellings on the Linenhall Car Park

The proposal comprises the construction of six universally accessible residential units on the existing car park, set back from Linenhall Street and aligned with St Nicholas' Church. The rear of the dwellings will be fully paved and comprise a communal open space together with four parallel parking spaces and one accessible parking space.



Figure 3.1: Proposed Ground Floor (left) and First Floor (right) plan

Demolition of No.3 Bridge Street, and construction of a new mixed use development

Demolition of No. 3 Bridge Street, and construction of commercial unit at ground floor level and a one-bedroom residential dwelling at first floor level facing Bridge Street, and a community facility to the rear.



Figure 3.1: Proposed Ground Floor (left) and First Floor (right) plan

Pedestrian route to the rear of St Nicholas Catholic Church

No. 2 Bridge Street and an existing modular building within the car park will be demolished to facilitate the creation of an east–west pedestrian connection to the rear of St Nicholas' Church.

The proposed pedestrian route will provide a direct link between Bridge Street and Linenhall Street and will incorporate stairs, a pedestrian ramp and new paving.



Figure 3.2: Proposed Bridge Street elevation with new east-west pedestrian route.

Landscape improvements to St Nicholas Catholic Church Gardens

Landscape improvements to St Nicholas' Church Gardens will comprise the removal of three existing trees and the planting of two new replacement trees. A total of 152 m² of new landscaping and planting is proposed, along with the installation of three new benches.

Works also include granite re-paving throughout the garden area and the provision of a new brushed concrete pedestrian ramp to improve accessibility.

In addition, the existing Jesus statue is proposed to be relocated from the centre to an infill area in the northern part of the gardens.



Figure 3.3: Proposed landscape improvements to St Nicholas Church gardens

Meeting House Lane landscape improvements and New East-West Pedestrian Link

The demolition of 27/28 Bridge Street will facilitate an east-west connection between Bridge Street and Linenhall Street. The proposals also include landscape improvements to Meeting House Lane, incorporating planting, the addition of six new trees, and the repaving of the lane. Six Sheffield bicycle stands are proposed.



Figure 3.4: Proposed landscape improvements to Meeting House Lane

Landscape enhancements to Síocháin Peace Gardens

Landscaping improvements are proposed for the Síocháin Peace Gardens, including new walkways, a sensory play area, sensory planting, the removal of seven trees, and the planting of 23 replacement trees. The proposals also include seven benches and the relocation of an existing monument.

New play areas are proposed, including a sensory play area featuring a water prism, sound roller, stone xylophone, and wind pipes. In addition, active play elements are proposed, including a climbing structure and stepping logs.

The proposed enhancements to the park also include five Sheffield cycle stands, along with one e-scooter stand to promote active travel.



Figure 3.5: Proposed landscaping enhancements to Síocháin Peace Gardens

3. Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Introduction

This stage of the process identifies any likely significant effects on European sites from the project, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans. A series of questions are asked in order to determine:

- Whether a plan or project can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site.
- Whether the project will have a potentially significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, in view of the site's conservation objectives or if residual uncertainty exists regarding potential impacts.

An important element of the AA process is the identification of the “conservation objectives”, “Qualifying Interests” (QIs) and/or “Special Conservation Interests” (SCIs) of European sites requiring assessment. QIs are the habitat features and species listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive for which each European site has been designated and afforded protection. SCIs are wetland habitats and bird species listed within Annexes I and II of the Birds Directive.

It is also vital that any threats to the ecological/environmental conditions that are required to support QIs and SCIs are considered as part of the assessment.

Site-specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) have been designed to define favourable conservation status for a particular habitat or species at that site. According to the European Commission interpretation document ‘Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC’, paragraph 4.6(3):

“The integrity of a site involves its ecological functions. The decision as to whether it is adversely affected should focus on and be limited to the site's conservation objectives.”

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- Its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing;
- The specific structure and functions which 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 dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats;
- The natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is 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 of the Appropriate Assessment where they were deemed relevant to the European sites and their QIs/SCIs.

Identification of relevant European sites

This section of the screening process describes the Natura 2000 sites which exist within the Zone of Influence (ZOI) of the site. The Department of the Environment (2010) Guidance on AA recommends that a 15km zone to be considered. On a precautionary basis this radius has been adopted for this AA. A review of all sites within the ZOI has identified that in absence of significant hydrological links, the characteristics of the proposed development will not impose effects beyond 15km. Sites beyond 15km which are designated for vagile species are identified to use isolated resources across the landscape; therefore, potential effects to such species at this scale are not identified to be significant due to the broad home range available to these species and the availability of alternate resources.

European sites that occur within 15km of the proposed development are listed in Table 3.1 and illustrated in Figure 3.2.1 below.

In order to determine the potential effects of the proposed development, information on the qualifying features, known vulnerabilities and threats to site integrity pertaining to any potentially affected European sites has been reviewed.

Background information on threats to individual sites and vulnerability of habitats and species that was used during this assessment included the following:

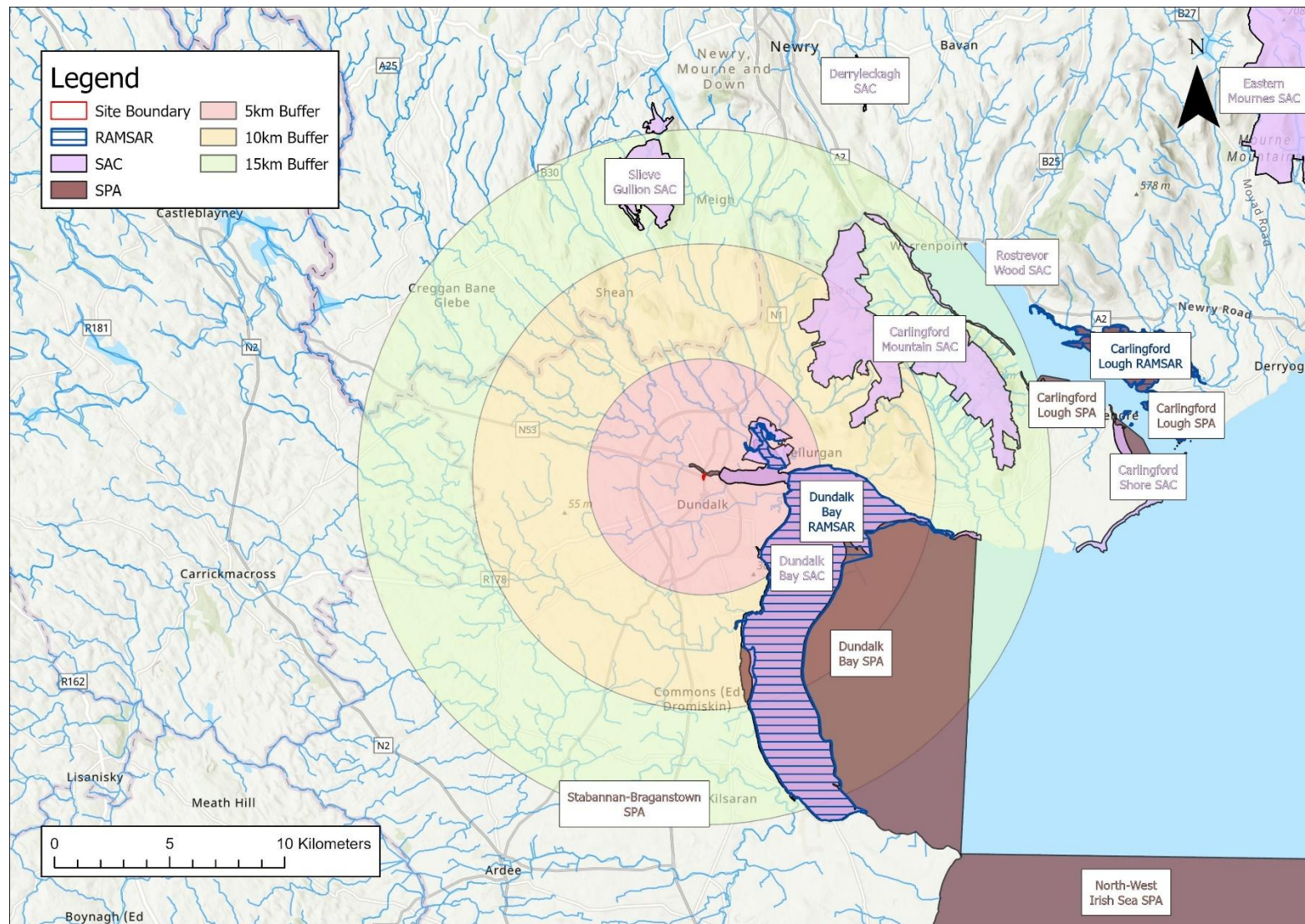
- Ireland's Article 17 Report to the European Commission "*Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland*" (NPWS, 2025).
- Site Synopses¹; and
- NATURA 2000 Standard Data Forms²

The assessment takes consideration of the SSCOs of each of the sites within the ZOI. Since the conservation objectives for the European sites focus on maintaining the favourable conservation condition of the QIs/SCIs of each site, the screening process has focussed on assessing the potential effects of the proposed development against the QIs/SCIs of each site. The conservation objectives for each site have been consulted throughout the assessment process.

¹ NPWS (2019); NPWS Database of protected site data and associated documents for each European site, available at: <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites> (accessed 20th January 2023).

² NPWS (2019) NPWS Database of protected site data and associated documents for each European site; available at: <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites> (accessed 20th January 2023).

Figure 3.2.1 European sites within 15km of the proposed development site³



³ Source: NPWS (datasets downloaded April 2026).

Assessment criteria

Is the development necessary to the management of European sites?

Under the Habitats Directive, projects that are directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site do not require an AA. For this exception to apply, management is required to be interpreted narrowly as nature conservation management in the sense of Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive. This refers to specific measures to address the ecological requirements of annexed habitats and species (and their habitats) present on a site(s). This relationship should be shown to be a direct and not a by-product of the project, even if this might result in a positive or beneficial effect for a site(s).

The primary purpose of the proposed development is not the conservation management of the sites, but rather to enhance the landscape, alongside the provision of new residential dwellings and a community centre within St Nicholas Quarter. Therefore, the proposed development would not be considered by the Habitats Directive to be directly connected with or necessary to the management of European designated sites.

Elements of the proposed development with potential to give rise to effects

This screening assessment process identifies whether the changes brought about by the proposal are likely to cause any direct, indirect, or secondary effects (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the European sites. During this assessment a number of factors have been taken into account including the sites' conservation objectives and known threats. The overall aim of the assessment is to attempt to predict the consequences that can be reasonably foreseen by implementation of the proposed development.

For the purposes of this assessment the proposed development is identified to have potential to have both construction and operational phase effects. The operational phase of the project will be consistent with the surrounding urban context of the site - therefore, it is not foreseen to interact with European sites. The construction phase elements of the project introduce potential sources for effects to ecological processes such as:

- Disturbance effects through noise;
- Earthworks (removal of vegetation etc);
- Dust; and
- Surface water run-off.

The construction phase will be minor and temporary. The construction phase effects identified are considered in the context of European sites identified above, their sensitivities and conservation objectives.

Identification of potential effects and screening of sites

This section documents the final stage of the screening process. It has used the information collected on the sensitivity of each Natura 2000 site and describes any potential effects on the sites resulting from the proposed development. This assumes the absence of any controls, conditions, or mitigation measures. In determining the potential for effects, a number of factors have been taken into account. Firstly, the sensitivity

and reported threats to Natura 2000 sites. Secondly, the individual elements of the proposed development and the potential effects they may cause on the sites considered. The elements of the proposed development with potential to affect the integrity of European sites are presented in Table 3.1.

Sites are screened out based on one or a combination of the following criteria:

- Where a site is located at such a distance from the proposed development that effects are not foreseen; and
- Where it can be shown that there are no significant pathways such as hydrological links between activities at the proposed development and a site;
- Where known threats or vulnerabilities of a site cannot be linked to potential impacts that may arise from the proposed development.

Characterising potential significant effects

This section of the report explains the metrics used when assessing if the potential effects (previously identified) will have significant implications for Natura 2000 sites. The following parameters are described when characterising impacts (following guidance from the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Environmental Protection Agency and National Roads Authority):

- Direct and Indirect Impacts - An impact can be caused either as a direct or as an indirect consequence of a Plan/Project.
- Magnitude - Magnitude measures the size of an impact, which is described as high, medium, low, very low or negligible.
- Extent - The area over that the impact occurs – this should be predicted in a quantified manner.
- Duration - The time that the effect is expected to last prior to recovery or replacement of the resource or feature.
 - Temporary: Up to 1 Year;
 - Short Term: The effects would take 1-7 years to be mitigated;
 - Medium Term: The effects would take 7-15 years to be mitigated;
 - Long Term: The effects would take 15-60 years to be mitigated; and
 - Permanent: The effects would take 60+ years to be mitigated.
- Likelihood – The probability of the effect occurring taking into account all available information.
 - Certain/Near Certain: >95% chance of occurring as predicted;
 - Probable: 50-95% chance as occurring as predicted;
 - Unlikely: 5-50% chance as occurring as predicted; and
 - Extremely Unlikely: <5% chance as occurring as predicted.

CIEEM guidelines for ecological impact assessment (2016) define an ecologically significant impact as an impact (negative or positive) on the integrity of a defined site or ecosystem and/or the conservation status of habitats or species within a given geographic area; and the integrity of a site as the coherence of its ecological structure and function, across its whole area, which enables it to sustain the habitat, complex of habitats and/or the levels of populations of the species for which it was classified.

The Habitats Directive requires the focus of the assessment at this stage to be on the integrity of the site as indicated by its Conservation Objectives. It is an aim of NPWS to draw up conservation management plans for all areas designated for nature conservation. These plans will, among other things, set clear objectives for the conservation of the features of interest within a site.

SSCOs have been prepared for a number of European sites. These detailed SSCO aim to define favourable conservation condition for the qualifying habitats and species at that site by setting targets for appropriate attributes which define the character habitat. The maintenance of the favourable condition for these habitats and species at the site level will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a species can be described as being 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.’

Favourable conservation status of a habitat can be described as being 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.’

A Generic Conservation Objective for a SAC is provided below:

- To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected.

A Generic Conservation Objective for a SPA is provided below:

- To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA.

A Generic Conservation Objective for a RAMSAR is provided below:

- To maintain the ecological character and conservation integrity of the Ramsar site, including the habitats, species, hydrological regime, and supporting processes, and to avoid any adverse effect on site integrity in accordance with the Habitats Directive

Types of potential effects

EC guidance⁴ outlines the types of effects that may affect Natura 2000 sites. These include effects from the following activities:

- Land take
- Resource requirements (drinking water abstraction etc.)
- Emissions (disposal to land, water or air)
- Excavation requirements
- Transportation requirements
- Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning

The 2001 European Commission AA guidance outlines the following potential changes that may occur at a designated site, which may result in effects on the integrity and function of that site:

- Reduction of habitat area
- Disturbance to key species
- Habitat or species fragmentation
- Reduction in species density
- Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.)
- Climate change

The elements detailed above were considered with specific reference to each of the Natura 2000 sites identified below.

Loss/reduction of habitat area

The existing site is predominantly hardstanding, comprising Linenhall Car Park, the two proposed east–west connections (including a new accessible route to the rear of St Nicholas Catholic Church), and Meeting House Lane. Landscape improvement proposals within Síocháin Peace Gardens and St Nicholas Catholic Church Gardens include the removal of 10 trees, which will be replaced with 25 new trees. These areas do not contain Annex I habitats or supporting habitat for Annex II species. As such, the works are not considered to result in a loss of or reduction to habitat area.

While the closest European is adjacent to the proposed landscaping improvements to Síocháin Peace Gardens, there are no known direct hydrological pathways linking the project area to the SAC, and a buffer

⁴ 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, European Commission Environment DG, 2021

created by the existing road Fairgreen Road, ensures there will be no effects posed to European sites in this respect.

Habitat or species fragmentation

No loss of habitat within any SAC or SPA can occur. The site involves is already a hard surface site in an urban context, excluding the landscaping improvements to the Peace Gardens. There are no direct surface hydrological connections to any European sites. Therefore, there are no ecological corridors connecting any of the European sites identified above. Therefore, there will be no effects posed to European sites in this respect.

Disturbance to key species

The site does not support Annex I habitats or provide supporting habitat for Annex II species. The nearest European site lies adjacent to the Peace Gardens, on the opposite side of Fairgreen Road, which provides a buffer between the two.

The proposed construction works within the Gardens are limited to landscaping, primarily involving the installation of footpaths with minimal foundations. Any cutting of natural stone will be carried out with appropriate noise and dust suppression measures in place, along with vibration monitoring. Existing trees will be protected through suitable measures to prevent root compaction.

Construction vehicles for the proposed landscaping works to the Gardens will be limited to a 3T dumper and excavator to limit noise and disturbance to key species.

Pollution from surface water

During the construction phase there may be disruption to surface water sewers as no drainage is proposed in the park. This may result in the loss of sediment to the sewer, and which may ultimately enter the Dundalk Bay SAC/SPA. However, in assessing the potential impact on these areas two points are considered:

1. Estuaries and their associated habitats depend upon large quantities for their functioning and to maintain their structure. Sediment is therefore not a serious pollutant in the way it is in freshwater portions of rivers where it can affect fish spawning habitat.
2. The quantities of sediment likely to be released during this phase are likely to be small as the ground here is already composed of hard surfaces with compacted subsoil (as opposed to a scenario where large areas of unconsolidated soil are exposed from land clearance).

For these reasons it is considered that this aspect of the project cannot affect the conservation objectives of the SAC or SPA. The impact is not significant.

Reduction in species density

There are no ecological corridors between the site and any Natura 2000 site. Similarly, there are no habitats identified on site of any ecological significance. As there is no supporting habitat and/or connectivity between the proposed development and any European site, there will be no reduction in species density of any of the QI or SCI species.

Changes of indicators of conservation value

The proposals at Síocháin Peace Gardens are adjacent to the closest Natura 2000 site but separated by Fairgreen Road. Given the nature of the proposed work, the scale and the localised and temporary nature of the potential effect we consider the scope for impacts to be negligible. The potential effects are taken to be those typically arising from small scale construction activity; noise, dust and run-off from excavations. The operational impacts are deemed to be negligible. There are no direct hydrological linkages identified between the site and any Natura 2000 site, or ecological pathways for effects between Natura 2000 sites and the proposed development. Therefore, there are no sources for effects with pathways that will affect any conservation indicators related to Natura 2000 sites.

Climate change

The proposed development has the potential to result in additional greenhouse gas emissions to air during both construction and operational phase in comparison to the existing urban activities on site. Such effects upon greenhouse gas emissions will not however affect changes projected to arise from climate change to the degree that it would affect the QIs or SCIs of the Natura 2000 sites considered.

Table 3.1. Screening assessment of the potential effects arising from the proposed development

Site Code	Site Name	Distance (Km)	Potential Effects	Pathway for Significant Effects	Potential for In-Combination Effects
004026	Dundalk Bay SPA	Adjacent to the application site	Dundalk Bay SPA is designated as an SPA due to the international importance of its wintering waterbird assemblages. Given the urban context of the application site and the nature of the proposed works, no viable ecological pathways have been identified which would have a significant impact on the qualifying interests of Dundalk Bay SPA. Therefore, no further considerations are required. The Dundalk Bay SPA is adjacent to the proposed landscaping works at Síocháin Peace Gardens. The construction of the proposed landscaping enhancements at the Gardens will not involve significant works. Any hard landscaping proposed will require minimal foundations, and any cutting of natural stone will be carried out with best practice noise and dust suppression measures, alongside vibration monitoring. Works located close to existing trees will incorporate suitable protection measures to prevent compaction of tree roots. The proposals at Síocháin Peace Gardens will not involve any new surface water drainage; therefore, no additional hydrological pathways to the SPA will be created.	No	No

Site Code	Site Name	Distance (Km)	Potential Effects	Pathway for Significant Effects	Potential for In-Combination Effects
			Fairgreen Road lies between the SPA and the Gardens, and it already contributes to existing disturbance from traffic. Given the location of the proposed landscaping works, it is anticipated that both the construction and operational phases are unlikely to have a significant adverse effect on wintering birds (as outlined in Appendix A).		
000455	Dundalk Bay SAC	0.6km	Given the urban context of the site, and nature of proposed works there are no viable ecological pathways identified between the project site and the qualifying interests (Appendix A) of the SAC. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No	No
834	Dundalk Bay RAMSAR	2.2km	Given the urban context of the site, and minor nature of proposed works there are no viable ecological pathways identified between the project site and the qualifying interests of the RAMSAR. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No	No
000453	Carlingford Mountain SAC	6.6km	Given the urban context of the site, and minor nature of proposed works there are no viable ecological pathways identified between the project site and the qualifying interests of the SAC. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No	No
004091	Stabannan -	13.4km	Given the urban context of the site, and minor nature of proposed works there are no viable ecological pathways identified between the project	No	No

Site Code	Site Name	Distance (Km)	Potential Effects	Pathway for Significant Effects	Potential for In-Combination Effects
	Braganstown SPA		site and the qualifying interests of the SPA. Therefore, no further considerations are required.		
UK0030277	Slieve Gullion SAC	10.9km	Given the urban context of the site, and minor nature of proposed works there are no viable ecological pathways identified between the project site and the qualifying interests of the SAC. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No	No
002306	Carlington Lough SAC	14.4km	Given the urban context of the site, and minor nature of proposed works there are no viable ecological pathways identified between the project site and the qualifying interests of the SAC. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No	No
002306	Carlingford Shore SPA	14.8km	Given the urban context of the site, and minor nature of proposed works there are no viable ecological pathways identified between the project site and the qualifying interests of the SPA. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No	No

Other plans and projects

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires an assessment of a plan or project to consider other plans or projects that might, in combination with the plan or project, have the potential to adversely affect Natura 2000 sites.

As part of this assessment each plan or project is considered within a radius of the red line boundary of the proposed area as defined by the ecologist. The distance of this radius works from a standard 200m, but can be extended if the ecologist deems it necessary depending on whether certain characteristics are present, such as:

- Direct or indirect connectivity to a European site;
- In close proximity to a European site;
- The proposal is of a substantial scale relative to the conditions and/or current works taking place in the surrounding landscape.

These factors are considered particular to each proposal for each particular location and specification.

Considering the characteristics of the proposed development with respect to the scale and nature of the works, a 200m search for in-combination effects was deemed to be sufficient.

Plans of relevance in the context of this proposal include:

- Dundalk Local Area Plan 2025-2031 (2025)
- Northern and Western Regional Assembly: Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032

The proposed works are aligned with the Dundalk Local Area Plan 2025-2031 (2025) and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032.

Considering that the proposed development has a temporary construction phase and the operational phase is complimentary to the existing and neighbouring land uses, it is not foreseen that proposed development will have any significant in-combination effects with the above plans.

Projects of relevance to this development:

To identify projects for consideration for the in-combination effects section, the Louth County Council Planning Application database was used⁵. A review of all planning applications within the identified zone (200m) was conducted focusing on all applications within the past 5 years⁶.

The proposals are located approximately 110 metres east of a pending planning application (ref. 2560624) relating to the demolition of an existing warehouse and the construction of a multi-storey apartment building comprising 20 dwellings. An AA screening report has been submitted with this planning application which stated that significant effects upon the QIs of the Dundalk Bay SAC/SPA will not arise during the construction and operation of the development.

Additionally, the proposals are located approximately 150 metres north of an approved planning application (ref. 2560114) for accessibility works to Saint Nicholas Church of Ireland Parish Church. Given the nature and limited scale of the proposed works, no potential for cumulative effects is considered to arise.

Given the nature the nature, scale and location of these developments, it is not expected that either of these projects will given rise to significant adverse effects on European sites, whether individually or in combination

Beyond the developments above, none of the planning applications in the last 5 years were more than domestic in scale or would result in significant new construction and/or demolition. A number of change of use applications were noted in recent years relating to light industrial premises to office space, but there has been relatively little significant planning activity within 200m of the proposal site in recent years.

⁵ <https://louthcoco.ie/en/services/planning/>

⁶ Planning applications have a standard lifespan of 5 years as per Section 40 (3)(b) of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended; therefore, these are viewed to be the 'live' applications, all other projects are considered as part of the site context

4. Conclusion

This stage one screening for AA of the proposed works demonstrate that the proposed development is not likely to have any significant effects on any European site.

The AA screening process has considered potential effects which may arise during the construction and operational phases as a result of the implementation of the project. Through an assessment of the pathways for effects and an evaluation of the project characteristics, taking account of the processes involved and the distance of separation from the Natura 2000 sites, it has been evaluated that there are no likely significant adverse effects on the qualifying interests, special conservation interest or the conservation objectives of any designated Natura 2000 site.

The proposed development is adjacent to Dundalk Bay SPA but there are no known direct hydrological pathways linking the project area to the SPA, and a sufficient buffer by way of Fairgreen Road which reduces the likelihood of ecological impact. Given the nature of the proposed work, the scale and the localised and temporary nature of the potential effects, the proposed project will not lead to any significant effects in combination with effects arising from any other plans or projects.

It is concluded that the proposed development is not foreseen to give rise to any significant adverse effects on any designated European sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This evaluation is made in view of the conservation objectives of the habitats or species for which these sites have been designated. Consequently, a Stage Two AA (NIS) is not required.

Appendix A – Dundalk Bay SPA/SAC (Qualifying Interests)

Qualifying Interests		
* indicates a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive		
000455	Dundalk Bay SAC	
QI	Description	
1130	Estuaries	
1140	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide	
1220	Perennial vegetation of stony banks	
1310	<i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonizing mud and sand	
1330	Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>)	
1410	Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>)	
004026	Dundalk Bay SPA	
QI	Description	
A005	Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	wintering
A043	Greylag Goose <i>Anser anser</i>	wintering
A046	Light-bellied Brent Goose <i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	wintering
A048	Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	wintering
A052	Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	wintering
A053	Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	wintering
A054	Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	wintering
A065	Common Scoter <i>Melanitta nigra</i>	wintering
A069	Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i>	wintering
A130	Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	wintering
A137	Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	wintering
A140	Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	wintering
A141	Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	wintering
A142	Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	wintering
A143	Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i>	wintering
A149	Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>	wintering
A156	Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i>	wintering
A157	Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>	wintering
A160	Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>	wintering
A162	Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	wintering
A179	Black-headed Gull <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	wintering
A182	Common Gull <i>Larus canus</i>	wintering
A184	Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i>	wintering
A999	Wetlands & Waterbirds	