
Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

BDP has been appointed on behalf of the client, Meath County Council, to prepare this Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report (also known as *Stage One* AA) to determine whether or not a Natura Impact Statement (NIS: *Stage Two* AA) is required for the Recreation and Amenity Plan in Commons of Lloyd, Co. Meath, 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”).

1.2. Report Structure

This report sets out the legislative context for the assessment process with reference to relevant guidelines and highlight the experience and qualifications of the author. It then details the 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 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.

1.3. 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 European 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 species listed in Annex I and Annex II 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 European site concerned including implications in view of the European site's conservation objectives. These sites consist of SACs and SPAs and provide the protection and long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. 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.

1.4. 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 European 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 site(s) remain. If potential significant effects on the integrity of European sites 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, then compensation 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 the European site of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's structure and function and its 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 the plan/project characteristics to ensure no significant adverse effects on European sites. 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 imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

1.5. 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, 2000);
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2018);
- 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. Meath – Meath Planning Viewer.

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

- Identification of European sites within 15km of the site;
- 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;
- Review of the NPWS site synopses and conservation objectives for European sites within 15km and for which potential pathways from the site have been identified, and;
- Examination of available information on protected species.

Source-Pathway Receptor Model

Ecological impact assessment of potential effects on European 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 Recreation and Amenity Plan;
- 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 Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan 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.

1.6. Author Details

This report has been produced by Anthony Nickson and Duncan Mackay (both of BDP).

Anthony Nickson is BDP's lead ecologist with over 14 years' experience working on major and local scale projects. Anthony graduated from the University of Liverpool in 2005 with a BSc degree in biological science, and in 2007 with a MSc degree in ecology.

Duncan Mackay is an Associate Town Planner with nearly 20 years' experience working in both local government and in the private sector. Duncan has particular expertise in the planning of major schemes and regeneration projects. He has extensive experience combining statutory planning expertise with practical knowledge of environmental assessments required to deliver planning consents. Duncan is the BDP lead consultant for environmental assessment and has lead SEAs and EIAs across the British Isles.

2. Description of plan

2.1. Receiving Environment

The Commons of Lloyd is located within County Meath and sits just less than 2km west of Kells Town. The site is approximately 166.20 hectares in total and is distinguished by the Tower of Lloyd¹, an 18th Century monumental structure at the summit. The hill is a natural focal feature of the landscape, being the highest elevation between Kells and the Loughcrew Hills which lie approximately 12km further west. The Commons of Lloyd is an extremely valuable area of recreational amenity and tranquillity close to the bustling town centre, whilst the Tower of Lloyd¹ is an important historical monument in the landscape of the town and its surroundings. The Commons of Lloyd has been the subject of archaeological and geophysical study which has resulted in the recognition of the Commons as a post-medieval landscape with a number of archaeological assets which date back to the Iron Age, including a hillfort around the summit. Near to the summit, there is currently car parking and a children's playground which opened in 1992.

The main entrance to the Commons of Lloyd is located off the R163 Oldcastle Road. The site is bounded to the north by the R147 and to the east by the N52. A bus stop is located on the R147 Road. The site is approximately 68km from Dublin, 40km from Drogheda, and 20km from Navan. The closest airport is Dublin Airport, located approximately a 50-minute drive away.

To note, the River Blackwater is located north of the site; it is designated for nature conservation as both a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA). There is currently one established walking route around the Commons of Lloyd, known as the 'red walk', which includes walking along the river.

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out a vision and strategy for the sustainable development and planning of the county, through guiding policies and objectives. The Plan sets out a Land Use Zoning Map which categorises The Commons of Lloyd as Open Space/Tourism (F1/D1), with some Existing Residential (A1) and Transport and Utilities (TU) designations as illustrated below on Figure 2.1.1.

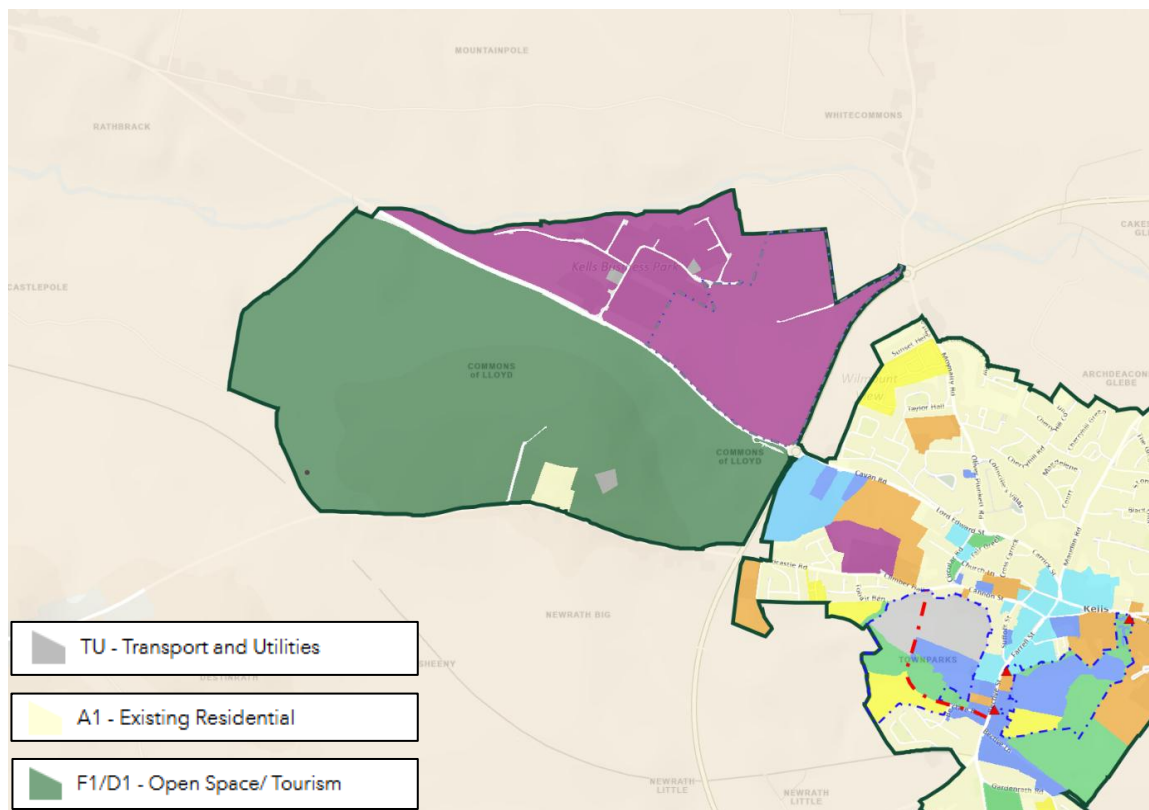


Figure 2.1.1. Land Use Zoning Map, Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

¹ The Tower of Lloyd is also known as the Spire of Lloyd and the Pillar of Lloyd.

2.2. Overview of the plan

The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan was commissioned by Meath County Council in 2023 to provide a blueprint for the future improvement of the Commons of Lloyd, protecting its heritage and environmental qualities whilst making it a more attractive and sustainable destination for local visitors and tourists. An illustrative sketch of the overall plan is shown in Figure 2.2.1.

The aim of the plan is to enable the Council and the local community to realise their aspirations for the enhancement of the Commons of Lloyd. Ultimately, the plan should enable the Council and local groups to leverage funding to implement the proposals identified within the plan.

The Recreation and Amenity Plan sets out an overall vision as: *“The Commons of Lloyd will be a vibrant and thriving space for everyone. It will be a place for all to admire the landscape, commemorate the past, appreciate archaeology and enjoy recreation. It will enhance the health and well-being of the community through fun and open-air activities in a beautiful place.”*

There are five key principles for the plan which are to:

- *Protect and conserve historic landscape character of the Commons for future generations;*
- *Facilitate ease of access from the town centre;*
- *Maximise opportunities of the park with an appropriate mix of recreational use and public appreciation that maximises visitor enjoyment;*
- *Enhance the natural environment and promote climate action and biodiversity;*
- *Increase community involvement.*



Figure 2.2.1. Illustrative Vision of the Recreation and Amenity Plan

2.3. Details of the plan

The details of the Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan are shown in Figure 2.3.1, whilst Figure 2.3.2 shows the proposed character areas of the Commons.

The area around the Tower of Lloyd² will be retained as a memorial garden with the existing entrance, car parking and Community Allotments.

A new main entrance is proposed at the eastern corner of the Commons which is closer to Kells town and has more favourable topography than the current main entrance which requires a steep drive to reach the car park. This entrance is intended to be more accessible to a range of transportation modes, including, pedestrian, bus, and cycle links, as well as providing new car parking, disabled and age-friendly parking which is intended to be sensitively incorporated into the landscape with additional overspill car parking. This eastern corner is proposed to become a focus of amenity, with a proposed Community Centre building which will also provide a commercial opportunity for a café. A new space for children's play and recreation will be introduced at this corner, providing nature-inspired play facilities. A nature cycle trail facility is proposed beside the play space. Close to this there is an events lawn proposed which will provide space to host small outdoor events.

The northern edge of the Common is proposed to be enhanced as a biodiversity and natural area, introducing new planting (except for in areas with archaeological sensitivity and subject to the correct measures) and habitats to make this route more interesting and enjoyable and improve the biodiversity.

The existing woodland to the west is proposed to be extended into the Commons of Lloyd, creating a new woodland area with a woodland park and picnic zone.

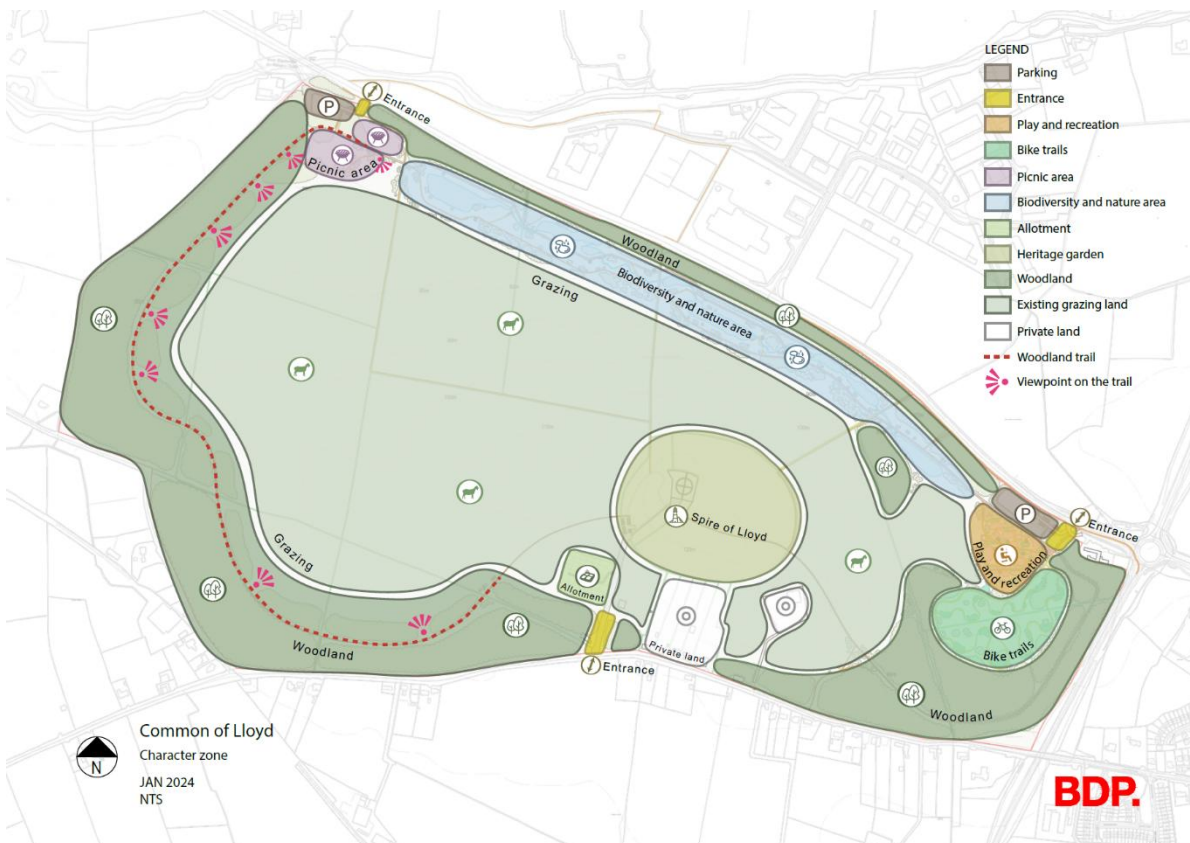
Another new entrance at the northwest corner of the site is proposed to improve connections to the site. This will introduce a small amount of car parking provision along with improved picnic areas to provide an attractive amenity space for visitors. Animal grazing will be managed and contained within proposed zones as shown on Figure 2.3.2.

A series of new paths are proposed to improve the walking and cycling circulation around the site. This is in addition to the existing 'Red Walk' which is a 2.5km loop. The plan proposes to provide a circular route around the perimeter of the Commons, which would take advantage of walking through the biodiversity and nature areas along the northern edge and the extended woodland zones to the west. This route is estimated to be around 5km. Another proposed route would enable visitors to walk from the new main entrance to the Tower as a 2.5km loop. A shorter version of the aforementioned route would be around 1.7km mostly around the new play facilities, providing a range of options for different abilities and preferences. The routes have been sensitively designed around the archaeological sensitivity of the site and propose a no-dig method of laying the paths to ensure minimal disruption.

² The Tower of Lloyd is also known as the Spire of Lloyd and the Pillar of Lloyd.



Figure 2.3.1. Recreation and Amenity Plan details



2.3.2. Proposed Character Zones

Figure

3. Screening for Appropriate Assessment

3.1. 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 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.

3.2. Identification of relevant European sites

This section of the screening process describes the European sites which exist within the Zone of Influence (ZOI) of the site. The Department of the Environment (2009) 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 Recreation and Amenity Plan 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 Recreation and Amenity Plan are listed in Table 1 and illustrated in the Figure below. Conservation objectives that have been considered by the assessment are included in the following National Parks and Wildlife Service documents:

- NPWS (2015) Conservation Objectives for Killyconny Bog (Cloghbally) SAC [IE000006] Version 1.
- NPWS (2021) Conservation Objectives for River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC [IE002299] Version 1.
- NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives for River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA [IE004232] Version 1.
- NPWS (2023) Conservation Objectives for Girley (Drewstown) Bog SAC [IE002203] Version 1.

In order to determine the potential effects of the proposal, 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, 2019).
- Site Synopses³; and
- NATURA 2000 Standard Data Forms⁴

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 Recreation and Amenity Plan against the QIs/SCIs of each site. The conservation objectives for each site have been consulted throughout the assessment process.

³ NPWS (2019); NPWS Database of protected site data and associated documents for each European site, available at: <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites> (accessed 11th March 2024).

⁴ NPWS (2019) NPWS Database of protected site data and associated documents for each European site; available at: <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites> (accessed 11th March 2024).

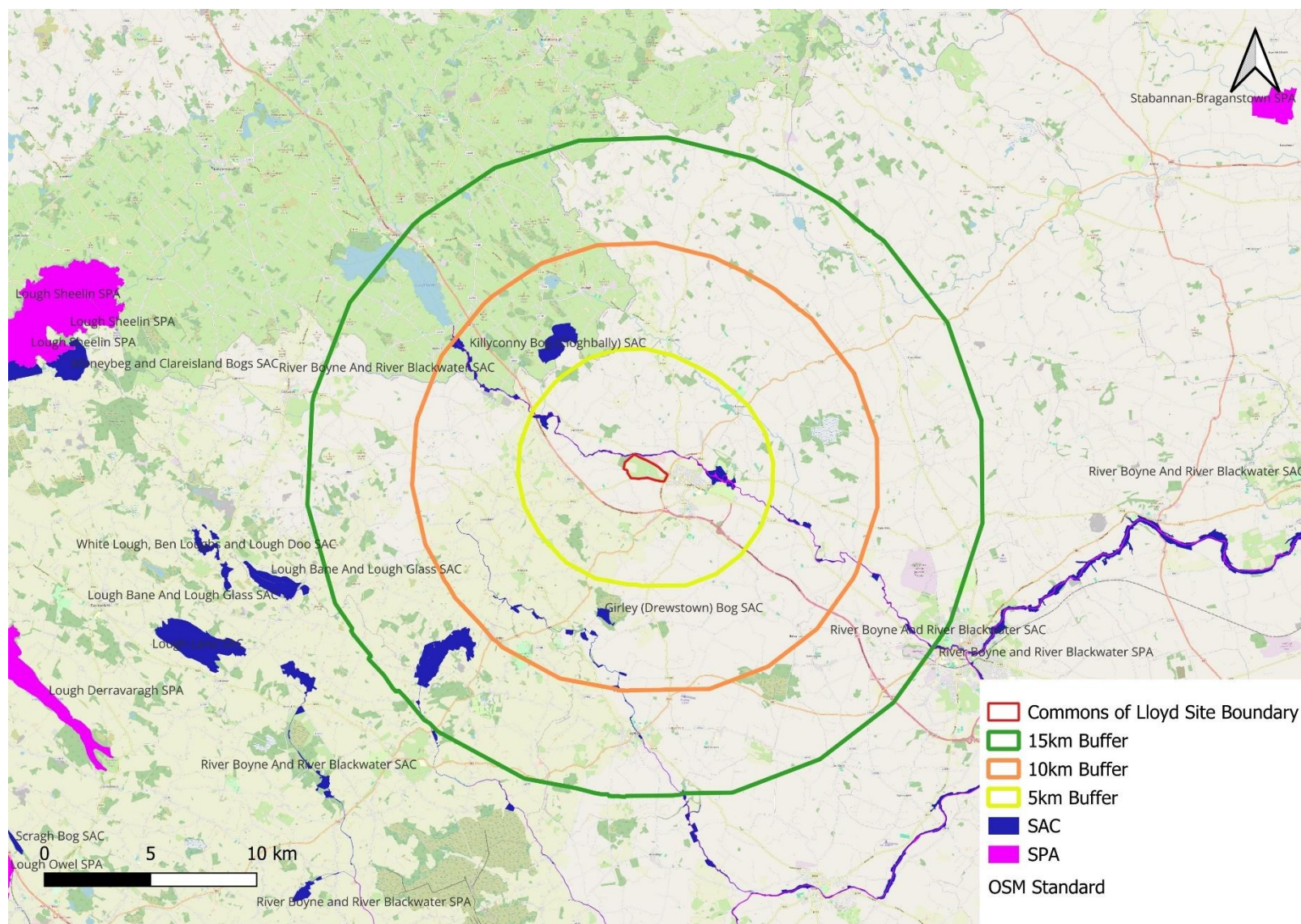


Figure 3.2.1 European sites within 15km of the Commons of Lloyd Site Boundary

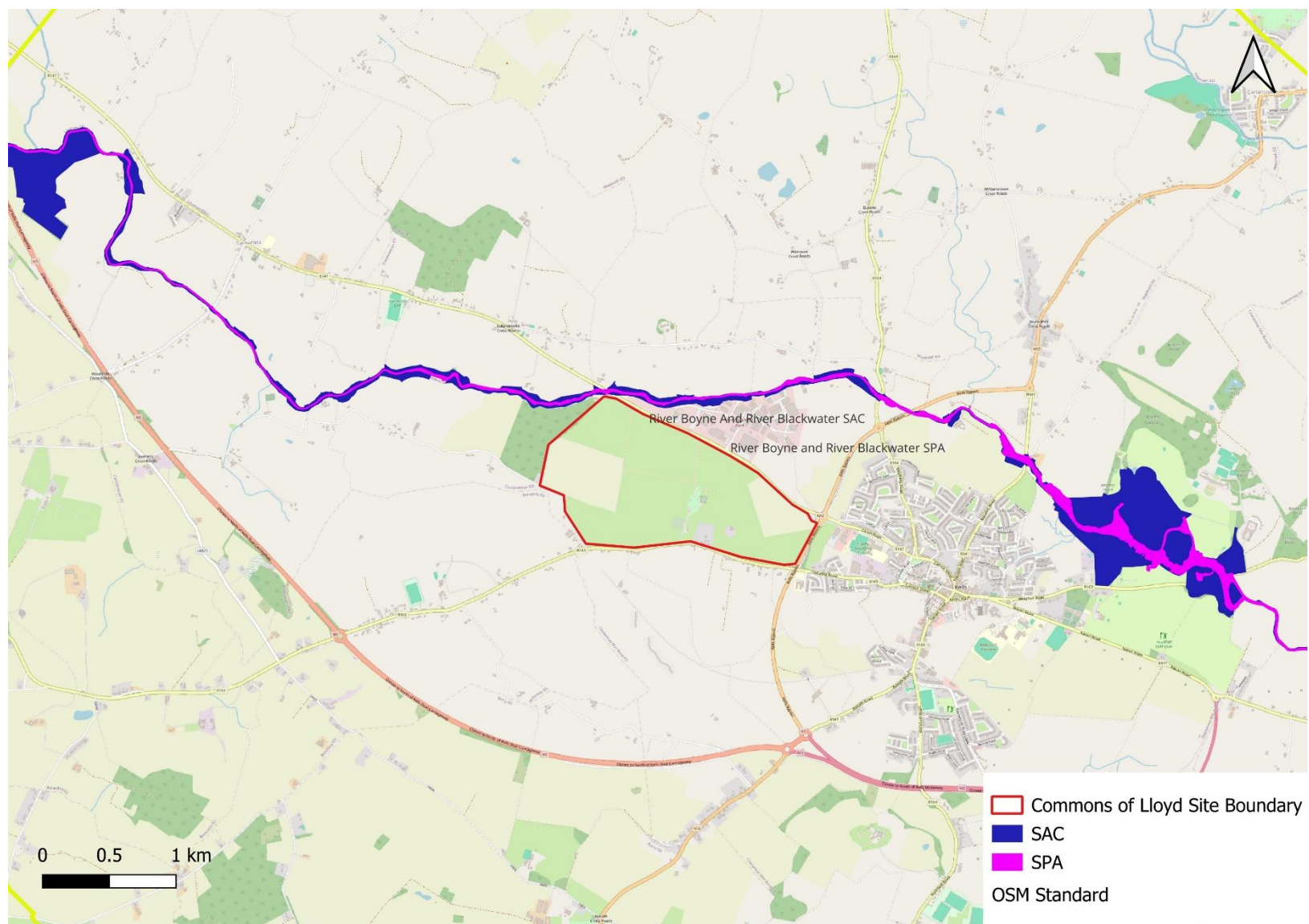


Figure 3.2.2 Relationship to European Sites from Site Boundary

3.3. Assessment criteria

3.3.1. 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 Recreation and Amenity Plan is not the nature conservation management of the sites, but to guide the future development and management of the Commons of Lloyd to improve its amenity, tourism, and heritage aspects. Therefore, the proposed Recreation and Amenity Plan would not be considered by the Habitats Directive to be directly connected with or necessary to the management of European designated sites.

3.3.2. Elements of the Recreation and Amenity Plan 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 Recreation and Amenity Plan.

For the purposes of this assessment the Recreation and Amenity Plan is identified to have potential to have both construction and operational phase effects. The operational phase and construction phase elements of the Plan 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 modest in scale and temporary. The construction phase effects identified are considered in the context of European sites identified above, their sensitivities and conservation objectives.

3.3.3. 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 European site and describes any potential effects on European sites resulting from the Recreation and Amenity Plan. 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 European sites. Secondly, the individual elements of the Recreation and Amenity Plan and the potential effects they may cause on the sites considered. The elements of the Recreation and Amenity Plan with potential to affect the integrity of European sites is presented in Table 3.1.

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

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

3.4. 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 European 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.

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (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.

3.4.1. Types of potential effects

EC guidance⁵ outlines the types of effects that may affect European 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 European sites identified below.

Loss/reduction of habitat area

There are no European sites present within the redline boundary and the closest European site is 0.03km away. Similarly, there were no Annex I habitats or supporting habitat for Annex II species identified on site. Therefore, there will be no effects posed to European sites in this respect.

Habitat or species fragmentation

There is a hydrological pathway identified between the Commons of Lloyd boundary and the River Boyne and Blackwater SPA and SAC. At the northern corner to the Commons, the site comes within 0.03km of the river but is separated by the Regional Road R147. Given the proximity, the surface water run-off of the Commons of Lloyd is assumed to discharge to the river. Therefore, given the sensitivity of the SPA and SAC, it is imperative that the proposals do not affect the water run-off rate and maintain the current levels of run-off and water quality. To ensure the protection of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA, the necessary ecological surveys must be taken at a project level when a planning application comes forward.

There were no Annex I habitats or supporting habitat for Annex II species identified on site. Therefore, there will be no effects posed to European sites in this respect.

Disturbance to key species

⁵ 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, 2001

None of the species and/or habitats identified in Table 3.1 were recorded on site. The nearest European site is 0.03 km away from the proposed site. The northern corner of the site would be the most sensitive given its proximity to the nearest SPA and SAC, and only includes limited proposals for a small amount of car parking and enhanced picnic facilities, which would be located within the Common, separated from the SPA and SAC by Regional Road R147. Therefore, the proposals are not expected to cause disturbance to key species.

Reduction in species density

There is an ecological corridor between the site and the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA and SAC. These European sites are located 0.03km away. However, there is an existing barrier in the way of a hard surface road. The current drainage scheme will not be altered, and additional oil interceptors and sediment traps will prevent any adverse effects. Similarly, there are no habitats identified on site of any ecological significance. Therefore, there will be no reduction in species density of any of the QI or SCI species.

Changes of indicators of conservation value

The site is 0.03km from the closest European site, and given the nature of the proposed work, the scale and the localised and temporary nature of the potential effect we believe 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 is a hydrological link identified between the site and the closest European sites (located 0.03km away). However, given the scale, adequate mitigation and the temporary timescale of the construction phase, hydrological effects are deemed to be not significant.

Climate change

The proposed works will not result in any additional greenhouse gas emissions to air during the operational phase, compared to the existing activities on site. The construction phase works will have increased temporary emissions which will be localised. Such effects upon greenhouse gas emissions will not affect changes projected to arise from climate change to the degree that it would affect the QIs or SCIs of the European sites considered.

Table 3.1. Screening assessment of the potential effects arising from the Recreation and Amenity Plan

Site Code	Site Name	Distance (Km)	Qualifying Feature	Potential Effects	Pathway for Significant Effects	Potential for In-Combination Effects
004232	River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA	0.03	Kingfisher (<i>Alcedo atthis</i>) [A229]	There is a hydrological pathway identified between the Commons of Lloyd boundary and the River Boyne and Blackwater SPA and SAC. At the northern corner to the Commons, the site comes within 0.03km of the river but is separated by the Regional Road R147. Given the proximity, the drainage of the Commons of Lloyd will interact with the river. Therefore, given the sensitivity of the SPA and SAC, it is imperative that the proposals do not affect the water run-off rate and maintain the current levels of run-off. Furthermore, bare soil should be contained during construction and the operational phase, for example, no bare soil exposed for the nature bicycle trail or the nature playground. The new car parking facilities must implement adequate oil interceptors and sediment traps to prevent any adverse hydrological effects. To ensure the protection of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA, the necessary ecological surveys must be taken at a project level when a planning application comes forward. At this stage, no further considerations are required.	There is a surface hydrological pathway. However, there is an existing barrier from the hard surface road, and associated drainage strategy. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No.

002299	River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC	0.03	Alkaline fens [7230] Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0] <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099] <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]	There is a hydrological pathway identified between the Commons of Lloyd boundary and the River Boyne and Blackwater SPA and SAC. At the northern corner to the Commons, the site comes within 0.03km of the river but is separated by the Regional Road R147. Given the proximity, the drainage of the Commons of Lloyd will interact with the river. Therefore, given the sensitivity of the SPA and SAC, it is imperative that the proposals do not affect the water run-off rate and maintain the current levels of run-off. Furthermore, bare soil should be contained during construction and the operational phase, for example, no bare soil exposed for the nature bicycle trail or the nature playground. The new car parking facilities must implement adequate oil interceptors and sediment traps to prevent any adverse hydrological effects. To ensure the protection of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA, the necessary ecological surveys must be taken at a project level when a planning application comes forward. At this stage, no further considerations are required.	There is a surface hydrological pathway. However, there is an existing barrier from the hard surface road, and associated drainage strategy. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No.
000006	Killyconny Bog (Cloghbally) SAC	6.4	Active raised bogs [7110] Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120]	There are no surface water interactions identified from the European site and proposed Recreational and Amenity Plan. Given the distance and topography of the bog identified, there is no ecological pathway. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No.	No.
002203	Girley (Drewstown) Bog SAC	6.5	Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120]	There are no surface water interactions identified from the European site and the proposed Recreational and Amenity Plan. Given the distance and topography of the bog identified, there is no ecological pathway. Therefore, no further considerations are required.	No.	No.

3.5. 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 European sites.

Plans of relevance in the context of this proposal include:

- Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

The proposals contained within the Recreation and Amenity Plan are entirely consistent with the Meath County Development Plan (MCDP) 2021-2027 and subject to full adherence and implementation of land use zoning objectives, policies and environmental protection measures in the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, no significant cumulative adverse effects to European sites are identified.

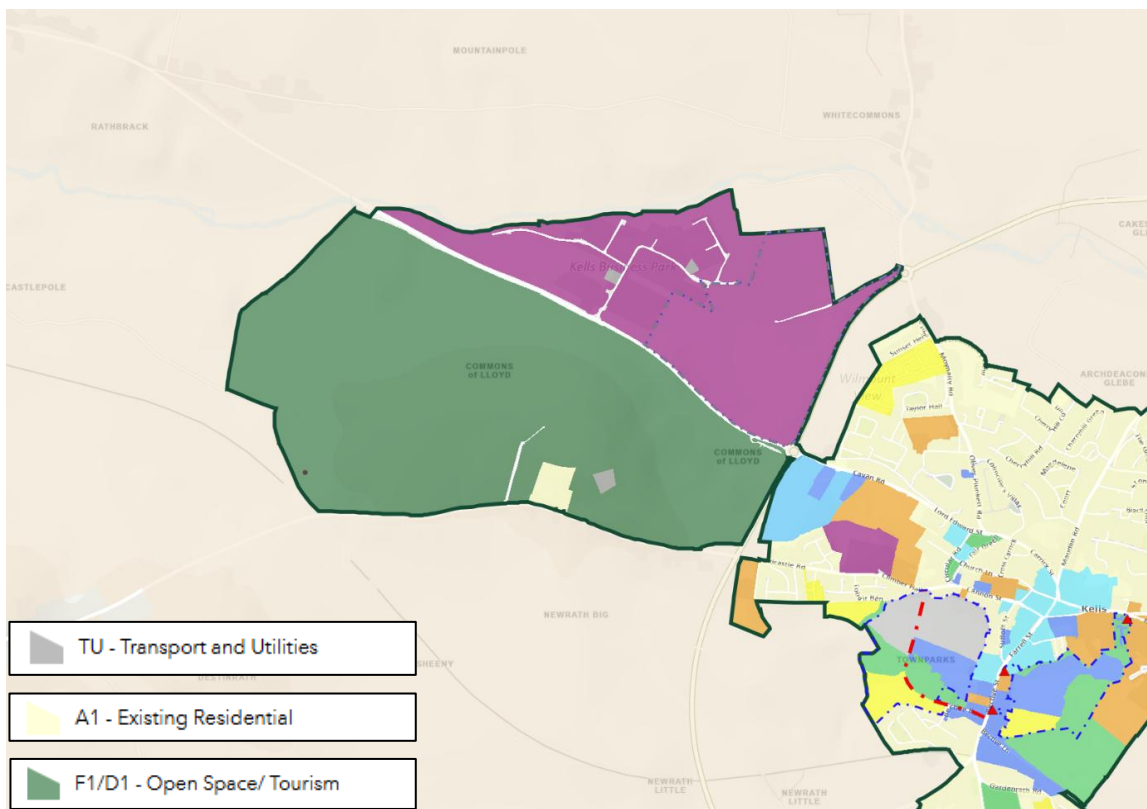


Figure 3.5.1 Land Use Zoning Map, Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (Meath County Council)

Within the MCDP, the Commons of Lloyd site is primarily designated as F1/D1.

F1 Open Space Objective:

To provide for and improve open spaces for active and passive recreational amenities

D1 Tourism Objective:

To provide for appropriate and sustainable visitor and tourist facilities and associated uses

The Recreation and Amenity Plan aligns with these policy objectives. The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan is a non-statutory document which sits beneath the MCDP in the statutory planning hierarchy. The MCDP was subject to a Natura Impact Report (NIR) in 2021. The results of the Appropriate Assessment concluded that the Plan will not result in likely

significant effects to the conservation status of European Sites, and any identified likely effects could be mitigated. Settlements were initially screened for the potential to adversely affect nearby European sites. Kells was brought forward for further analysis due to the Rive Boyne and Blackwater SAC and SPA flowing to the north of the settlement, as well as being within the Boyne catchment.

A Stage 2 AA followed from the Screening Assessment which identified modifications and material amendments which sought to avoid significant environmental effects during the development of the draft MCDP. These safeguards included recommended rewording of existing mitigatory policies/objectives to further strengthen their protective environmental role or the recommendation of additional mitigatory measures in the form of new policies or objectives. Material Alterations were considered at a Special Planning Meeting in September 2021, with the MCDP and most of the proposed amendments being adopted. The results of the Appropriate Assessment of the Material Alterations and the final MCDP concluded that the Plan will not result in likely significant effects to the conservation status of European Sites.

4. Conclusion

This stage one screening for AA of the Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan demonstrates that the plan is not likely to have any significant effects on any European site.

The AA screening process has considered potential effects which may arise 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 European 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 European site.

The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan is consistent with the County Meath Development Plan 2021-2027 which was subject to an AA screening and Stage 2 AA, which found no likely significant effects on European sites. The site is 0.03km away from the closest SAC and 0.03km away from the SPA. Given the nature of the work, the scale and the localised and temporary nature of the potential effects, the plan will not lead to any significant effects in combination with effects arising from any other plans or projects.

It is concluded that the Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan 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.