



**PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO SUPPORT SCREENING FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT
PROPOSED VARIATION NO. 5 TO THE MEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013-2019**

MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Appropriate Assessment Screening Report: Purpose and Process

Meath County Council is proposing Draft Variation No. 5 to the adopted Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019. The key purpose of this proposed Variation to the Meath County Development Plan is to facilitate the provision of much needed social and affordable housing in line with Pillar 2 of the Government's 'Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland'.

In summary, the proposed Variation includes the following amendments to the previous Meath County Development Plan:

- To re-allocate 31 available housing units to Donore;
- To redesignate the subject lands at Donore from Residential Phase II (Post 2019) to Phase I Residential Development; and,
- To include an objective on the subject lands to provide for social and affordable residential development.

Proposed land use plans and proposed variations must undergo a formal "test" or "screening" to ascertain whether they are likely to result in any significant adverse effects on specific sites designated for their nature conservation importance. These sites are those designated under the European Commission's Natura 2000 network of sites (hereafter "European sites"¹). These sites are designated on the basis of the presence of certain habitats and species that are deemed to be of international importance. The Irish Government and local planning authorities have a legal obligation to protect these sites.

The EC Habitats and Birds Directives are the framework for the designation of these sites. The EC Habitats Directive requires the "screening" of plans and projects under Article 6(3). If the screening process results in a judgement that likely significant effects may occur or cannot be ruled out, then a more detailed 'appropriate assessment' (AA) is required.

Scott Cawley Ltd. was appointed by Meath County Council to analyse the proposed Variation during early stages of preparation and prepare an AA Screening Report to inform the Council's own AA Screening.

2 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

The Meath County Development Plan and its Variations set out the vision and direction for the strategic future development of the county.

The village of Donore is located within the Boyne catchment and sub-catchment. According to the EPA's online Map Viewer, the River Boyne is present c. 1km north-west of the village and flows in a north-easterly direction. The closest waterbody is a tributary of the River Boyne located c. 700m north-west of the village.

¹ Natura 2000 sites are defined under the Habitats Directive (Article 3) as a European ecological network of special areas of conservation composed of sites hosting the natural habitat types listed in Annex I and habitats of the species listed in Annex II. The aim of the network is to aid the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. In Ireland these sites are designed as *European sites* - defined under the Planning Acts and/or Birds and Habitats Regulations as (a) a candidate site of Community importance, (b) a site of Community importance, (c) a candidate special area of conservation, (d) a special area of conservation, (e) a candidate special protection area, or (f) a special protection area. They are commonly referred to in Ireland as candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

From there the River Boyne flows in a north-easterly direction before ultimately discharging to the Irish Sea, to the east of Drogheda. The waters of the River Boyne have a Water Framework Directive (WFD) status of “Good” in the section nearest to Donore village (*Waterbody Boyne_180*²). The water quality of the Boyne Estuary transitional waterbody is classified as “Intermediate” and the Boyne Estuary Plume Zone is classified as “Unpolluted”. As such, there have been no breaches of the EPA’s threshold values for nutrient enrichment, accelerated plant growth, or disturbance of the level of dissolved oxygen normally present under the EPA’s “Trophic Status Assessment Scheme” classification (EPA 2010) in the Boyne Estuary Plume Zone.

The subject lands are located within the “Donore” groundwater body which has an overall status of “Good”. According to the EPA Envision Map Viewer this groundwater body is described as ‘poorly productive bedrock’. The bedrock of the area is classified as ‘Shale, sandstone and limestone’.

3 IDENTIFICATION OF EUROPEAN SITES, GENERIC THREATS AND PRESSURES

As part of the analysis of the proposed Variation, all European sites (SACs and SPAs) within the zone of influence of the Donore Village boundary were identified. Any Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) which were deemed to act as connecting features to European Sites were identified. NHAs, pNHAs and other designated sites such as Nature Reserves, Wildfowl Sanctuaries and Ramsar sites do not form part of the European site network, however they often provide an important supporting role to the network, particularly when it comes to fauna species which often do not obey site boundaries. A list of all European and National sites located within the Zone of Influence can be found in Section 3.1.

Threats and pressures to the integrity of the European sites within the zone of influence of the Donore Village Plan have been identified and can be found in Section 3.2.

3.1 European and National Sites within the Zone of Influence of the proposed Draft Variation

The zone of influence is a distance within which a proposal could potentially affect the conservation condition of qualifying interest habitats or species or special conservation interest species. There is no set recommended distance for which European sites are considered as being relevant (i.e. within the zone of influence of proposed works) for AA. Available guidance (NPWS, 2010) recommends that “the distance should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with reference to the nature, size and location of the project, and the sensitivities of the ecological receptors, and the potential for in-combination effects”. As a general rule of thumb, it is often considered appropriate to examine all European sites within 15km as a starting point. In some instances where there are far-reaching hydrological/hydrogeological connections, a whole river catchment or a groundwater aquifer may need to be included in determining the zone of influence.

All European sites within 15km of the Plan’s boundary are as follows:

- River Boyne and Blackwater SAC;
- Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC;

² According to EPA’s online mapviewer. Available at <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/> (Accessed 8th November 2018)

- River Boyne and Blackwater SPA;
- Boyne Estuary SPA; and,
- River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA.

Figure 1 shows all European sites within 15km of the Donore village boundary. Information regarding these European Sites located within 15km of Donore village are outlined in Table 3.1.1.

Table 3.1.1. European Sites within 15km of the Draft Plan.

European Sites within 15km of the Draft Plan			
Site Code	Special Areas of Conservation	Site Code	Special Protection Areas
Sites within 15km of Draft Plan's Boundary			
002299	River Boyne and Blackwater SAC	004232	River Boyne and Blackwater SPA
001957	Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC	004080	Boyne Estuary SPA
		004158	River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA

The Qualifying Interests of the European Sites within 15km of the Donore village boundary are presented in Table 2.1.2 below.

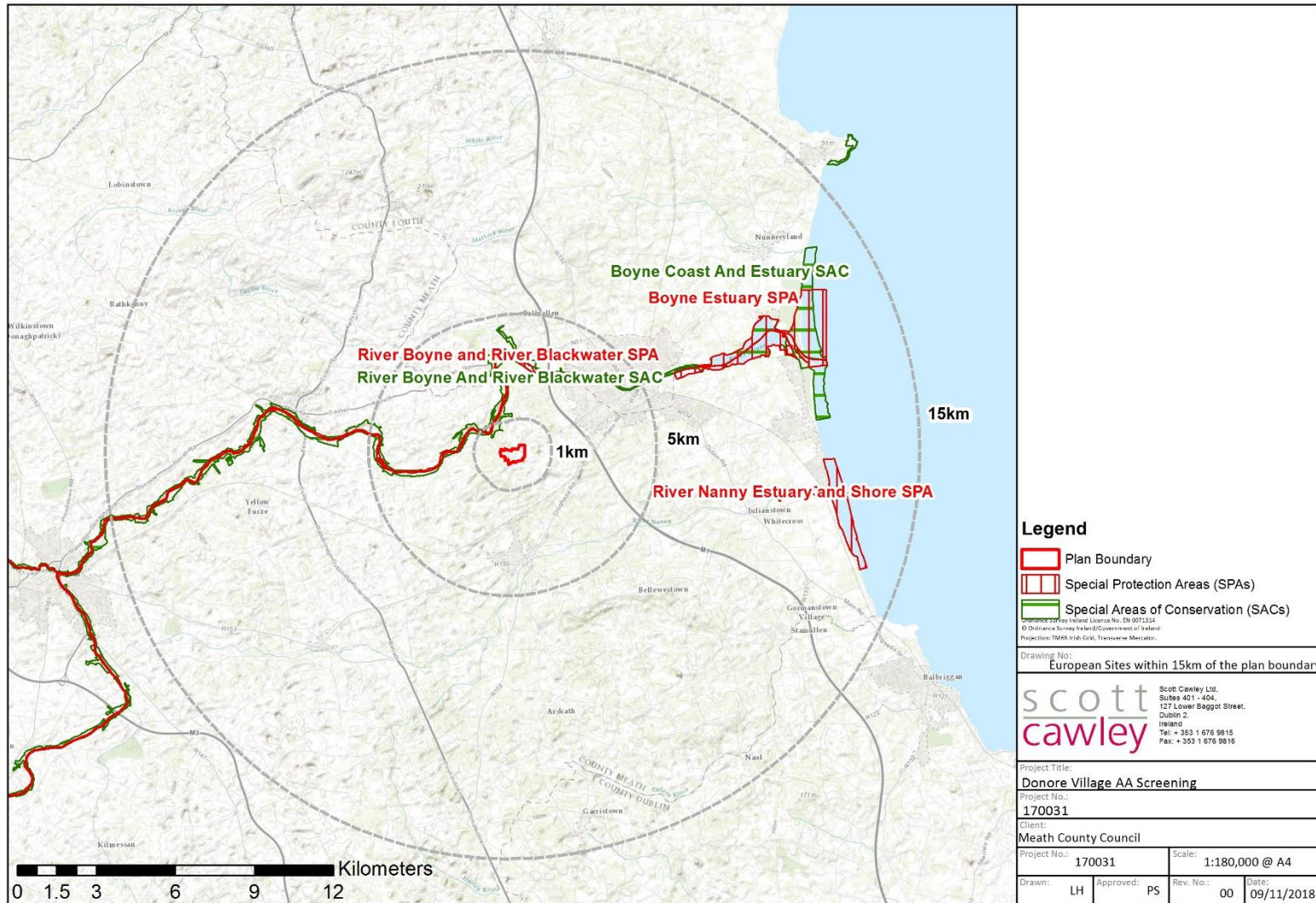
Table 2.1.2 Qualifying Interests of European sites within 15km of the Draft Plan.

Qualifying Interests of European sites within 15km of the Draft Plan	
Site Name:	River Boyne and Blackwater SAC
Site Code:	002299
Distance:	Located c. 540m from Donore village at the closest point
Qualifying Interests:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alkaline fens [7230] ▪ Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0] ▪ River Lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>) [1099] ▪ Salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>) [1106] ▪ Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) [1355]
Source: (NPWS, 2018) <i>Generic Conservation Objectives for River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC [002299] (21/02/2018)</i>	
Site Name:	Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC
Site Code:	001957
Distance:	Located c. 7.5km from Donore village at the closest point
Qualifying Interests:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Estuaries [1130] ▪ Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] ▪ Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] ▪ Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] ▪ Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) [1330] ▪ Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] ▪ Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120] ▪ Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]
Source: (NPWS, 2012) <i>Conservation Objectives: Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC 001957. Version 1.0 (13/10/2012)</i>	
Site Name:	River Boyne and Blackwater SPA
Site Code:	004232
Distance:	Located c. 737m from Donore village at the closest point
Qualifying Interests:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kingfisher (<i>Alcedo atthis</i>) [A229]

Source: (NPWS, 2018) <i>Generic Conservation Objectives for River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA [004232] (21/02/2018)</i>	
Site Name:	Boyne Estuary SPA
Site Code:	004080
Distance:	Located c. 6.3km from Donore village at the closest point
Qualifying Interests:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shelduck (<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>) [A048] ▪ Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>) [A130] ▪ Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140] ▪ Grey Plover (<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>) [A141] ▪ Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142] ▪ Knot (<i>Calidris canutus</i>) [A143] ▪ Sanderling (<i>Calidris alba</i>) [A144] ▪ Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>) [A156] ▪ Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>) [A162] ▪ Turnstone (<i>Arenaria interpres</i>) [A169] ▪ Little Tern (<i>Sterna albifrons</i>) [A195] ▪ Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]
Source: NPWS (2013) <i>Conservation Objectives: Boyne Estuary SPA 004080. Version 1. (26/02/2013)</i>	
Site Name:	River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA
Site Code:	004158
Distance:	Located c. 9.8km from Donore village at the closest point
Qualifying Interests:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>) [A130] ▪ Ringed Plover (<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>) [A137] ▪ Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140] ▪ Knot (<i>Calidris canutus</i>) [A143] ▪ Sanderling (<i>Calidris alba</i>) [A144] ▪ Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>) [A184] ▪ Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]
Source: NPWS (2013) <i>Conservation Objectives: River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA 004158 Version 1. (21/09/2012)</i>	

These European sites were not regarded to have viable source-pathway-receptor relationships with the plan area as the nearest watercourse is located c. 700m from Donore village at the closest point.

Figure 1. European Sites within 15km of the Donore Village Plan's Boundary.



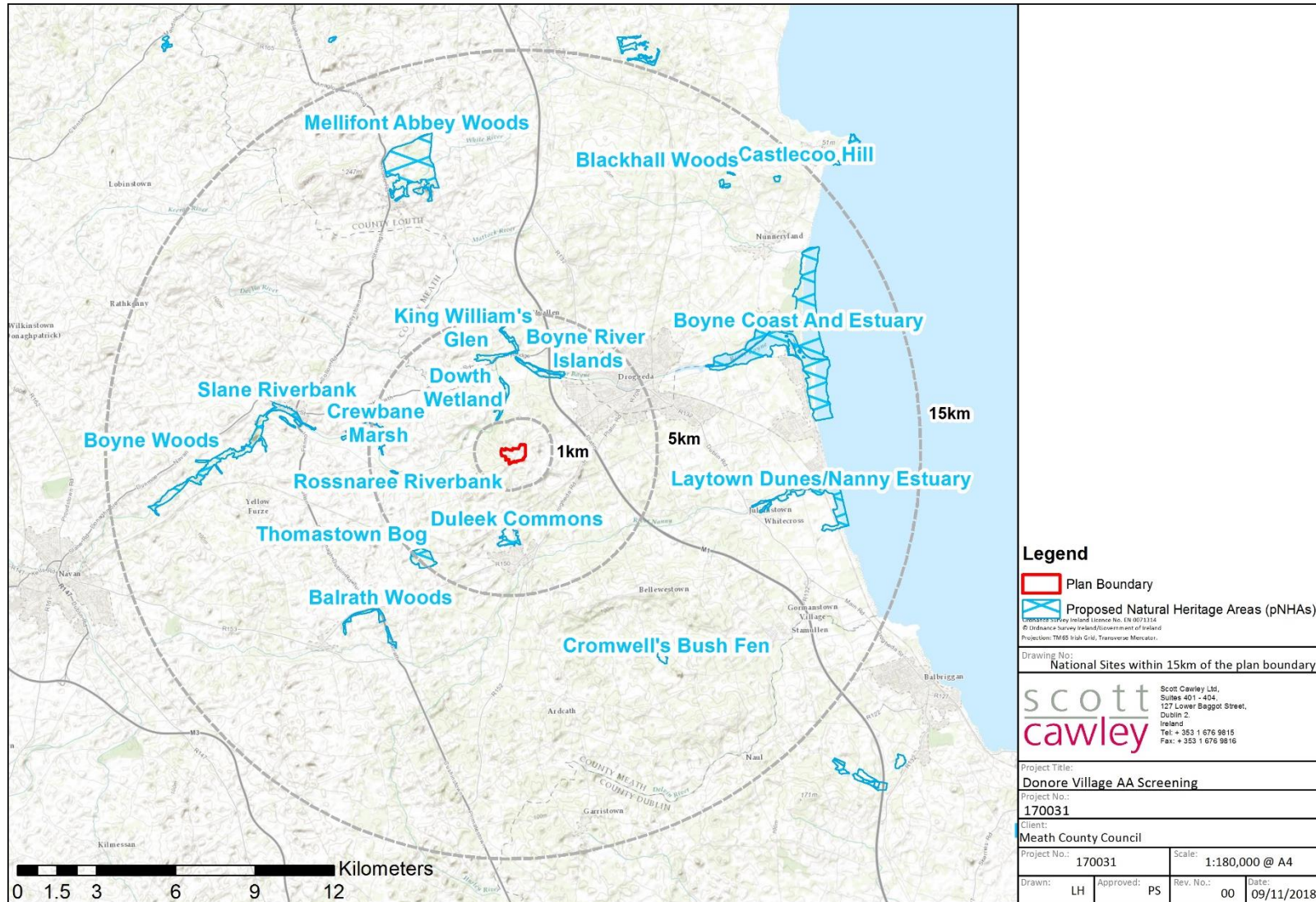
Sites of national importance were also considered throughout this screening exercise. No Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) are within the zone of influence of the Donore Village plan. There are 16 proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) within the plans's zone of influence. These sites were considered as they were deemed to provide connectivity to European sites. These sites are presented in Table 2.1.3 below.

Table 2.1.3 Proposed Natural Heritage Areas within 15km of the Draft Plan

Proposed Natural Heritage Areas within 15km of the Draft Plan		
Site Code	proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs)	Distance from Draft Plan's Boundary
001861	Dowth Wetland	c. 1.1km north
001578	Duleek Commons	c. 2.4km south
001862	Boyne River Islands	c. 2.7km north
001804	King William's Glen	c. 3.3km north
001589	Rossnaree Riverbank	c. 4km east
000553	Crewbane Marsh	c. 4.5km west
000410	Thomastown Bog	c. 4.5km south-west
001592	Boyne Woods	c. 7.1km west
001579	Balrath Woods	c. 7.4 km south-west
001957	Boyne Coast and Estuary	c. 7.4km north-east
001591	Slane Riverbank	c. 7.7km west
000554	Laytown Dunes/ Nanny Estuary	c. 8.7km east
001576	Cromwell's Bush Fen	c. 8.9km south-east
001464	Mellifont Abbey Woods	c. 9.8 km north
001293	Blackhall Woods	c. 12.3km north-east
001458	Castlecoo Hill	c. 13.8km north-east

A map of these sites is presented in Figure 2 (overleaf).

Figure 2. National Sites within 15km of the Donore Village Plan's Boundary.



3.2 Threats and Pressures

The threats to, and pressures on, the integrity of the European sites within the Zone of Influence of the Plan, as obtained from relevant published NPWS materials are displayed below (Table 3.2.1).

Table 3.2.1 Threats and Pressures

Threats and Pressures	
Site Specific Threats/Pressures:	
Site Name:	River Boyne and Blackwater SAC
Site Code:	002299
Threats/Pressures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Other Sport/Leisure Complexes ▪ Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions ▪ Tree surgery, felling for public safety, removal of roadside trees ▪ Disposal of industrial waste ▪ Industrial or commercial areas ▪ Roads and motorways ▪ Other discharges ▪ Invasive non-native species ▪ Other human intrusions and disturbances ▪ Management of aquatic and bank vegetation for drainage purposes ▪ Bridge, viaduct ▪ Other human induced changes in hydraulic conditions ▪ Pollution to surface waters (limnic, terrestrial, marine and brackish) ▪ Removal of hedges and copses of scrub ▪ Use of biocides, hormones and chemicals ▪ Cultivation ▪ Outdoor sports and leisure activities, recreational activities ▪ Stock feeding ▪ Artificial planting on open ground (non-native trees) ▪ Sand and gravel extraction ▪ Other patterns of habitation ▪ Fertilisation ▪ Storage of materials
Source: (NPWS, undated) NATURA 2000- Standard Data Form for River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC [002299]	
Site Name:	Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC
Site Code:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 001957
Threats/Pressures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Storm, cyclone ▪ Dykes, embankments, artificial beaches, general ▪ Storage of materials ▪ Invasive non-native species ▪ Biocenotic evolution, succession ▪ Urbanised areas, human habitation ▪ Other human intrusions and disturbances ▪ Disposal of inert materials ▪ Pollution to surface waters (limnic, terrestrial, marine & brackish) ▪ Removal of sediments (mud...) ▪ Bridge, viaduct ▪ Sea defense or coast protection works, tidal barrages ▪ Vandalism ▪ Walking, horseriding and non-motorised vehicles ▪ Disposal of household / recreational facility waste

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Infilling of ditches, dykes, ponds, pools, marshes or pits ▪ Off-road motorized driving
Source: (NPWS, undated) NATURA 2000- Standard Data Form for the Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC [001957]	
Site Name:	River Boyne and Blackwater SPA
Site Code:	004232
Threats/Pressures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Roads and motorways ▪ Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions ▪ Discontinuous urbanisation ▪ Urbanised areas, human habitation
Source: (NPWS, undated) NATURA 2000- Standard Data Form for River Boyne and Blackwater SPA [004232]	
Site Name:	Boyne Estuary SPA
Site Code:	004080
Threats/Pressures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urbanised areas, human habitation • Marine and Freshwater Aquaculture • Leisure fishing • Reclamation of land from sea, estuary or marsh • Golf course • Walking, horseriding and non-motorised vehicles • Invasive non-native species • Modification of hydrographic functioning, general • Siltation rate changes, dumping, depositing of dredged deposits
Source: (NPWS, undated) NATURA 2000- Standard Data Form for Boyne Estuary SPA [004080]	
Site Name:	River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA
Site Code:	004158
Threats/Pressures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking, horseriding and non-motorised vehicles • Continuous urbanisation
Source: (NPWS, undated) NATURA 2000- Standard Data Form for River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA [004158]	

4 ECOLOGICAL ISSUES REGARDING IMPLEMENTING THE DRAFT VARIATION

The following issues have been noted as being pertinent to the assessment of the proposed Variation:

1. **Hydrological/hydrogeological linkages to European sites and potential for impacts arising to and from surface and ground water quality** - Potential transfer of harmful and contaminating substances through the local surface water network (rivers and streams which drain surrounding lands as well as the local surface water drainage network) which ultimately drains into the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC. The proposed Draft Variation No. 5 is not located close to any hydrological links such as watercourses and development within the lands can take place without posing any likely significant effect on the European Site.
2. **Direct habitat loss, habitat degradation or loss of ecological networks supporting European sites** – The lands covered by the proposed Draft Variation no. 5 will not result in any habitat loss within the European site. Since the lands are also not connected by any obvious ecological corridors such as hedgerows, woodland or watercourses to the European site, there is no reasonable likelihood of any indirect effect or degradation of the ecological network supporting the European site.

- 3. Direct or indirect disturbance to European site species** - Disturbance to QI bird species such as Kingfisher, a species for which the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA is designated, could be detrimental to the local population through disturbance during the breeding season, resulting in reduced breeding success, as well as disturbance at other times of the year impacting on foraging success and territories. Since the lands are also not connected by any obvious ecological corridors such as hedgerows, woodland or watercourses to the European site and the lands are located nearly 1km from the European site, there is no reasonable likelihood any direct or indirect disturbance.

5 CONSIDERATION OF OTHER PLANS AND PROJECTS

Having considered all aspects of the proposed Draft Variation No. 5 including the nature, scale, timing, duration and location, it was concluded that it is eliminated from further assessment including further consideration of other plans and projects because it could not have any conceivable effect on a European site on its own.

6 CONCLUSION OF THE SCREENING PROCESS

Following an examination, analysis and evaluation of the relevant information, including in particular, the nature of the proposed Draft Variation and its potential relationship with European sites, as well as considering other plans and projects, and applying the precautionary principle, it is the professional opinion of the authors of this report that it is possible to rule out likely significant effects on European sites.

The AA screening process has identified that 5 European Sites lie within the potential zone of influence of the proposed Variation:

- River Boyne and Blackwater SAC (Code 002299);
- Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC (Code 001957);
- River Boyne and Blackwater SPA (Code 004232);
- Boyne Estuary SPA (Code 004080); and
- River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA (Code 004158).

These European Sites are not deemed to be at risk of likely significant effects from the proposed Draft Variation. This judgement has been reached for the reasons outlined in Section 4 above. The lack of hydrological and ecological connectivity and the distance from the European site has ruled out any risk of significant effects.

However, the authors of this report acknowledge that it is for Meath County Council, as the competent authority, to carry out a screening for AA and to reach one of the following determinations:

- a) AA of the proposed Draft Variation is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed Draft Variation, individually or

in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on any European sites;

- b) AA of the proposed Draft Variation is not required if it can be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed Draft Variation, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on any European sites.

Meath County Council will be required to issue a determination as to whether they are of the opinion that there are likely significant effects of the implementation of Variation No. 5 independently and in combination with other plans and projects.

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NPWS (2013) *Conservation Objectives: River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA [004158] Version 1.* (21/09/2012)

NPWS (2018) *Generic Conservation Objectives for River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC [002299]* (21/02/2018)

NPWS (2018) *Generic Conservation Objectives for River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA [004232]* (21/02/2018)