

*Proposal by Mayo County Council to construct a
Helipad and Access Road at Bellavaun, Inishturk, Co.
Mayo*



**Article 6 Assessment: Statement for Screening
for Appropriate Assessment**

Prepared for Mr Tomás McLoughlin, Mayo County Council

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Non-technical summary

This screening statement for appropriate assessment has been undertaken for a proposal by Mayo County Council to construct a helipad and access road at Bellavaun, Inishturk, Co. Mayo.

The site proposed for construction of the helipad (the application site) is an east facing section of land located just to the east of the main public road on the island and directly opposite the island community centre. Total area of the site is approximately 1.2ha. The terrain within the application site comprises grass pasture and bedrock outcrops.

The helipad will be concentrically divided into three sections as follows:

- A 5 metre wide Safety Area on western side of the helipad periphery.
- A Final Approach and Take-off area comprising a hard standing which will be 23.5m wide and surface dressed with chippings
- A Touchdown and Lift-off area in the centre of the helipad comprising a circular concrete reinforced pad with a minimum diameter of 22.5m. Ground lighting is to be included within the concrete pad to assist landing and take off

The slope of the hillside entails that all excavated rock and soil material will be reused on-site to create a level platform for construction of the helipad. Road access to the helipad is to be from the local road network via the existing field entrance on the northwest section of the application site boundary. This will be a 5m wide road, constructed from a base layer of stone with a surface dressing. Site boundaries are to be fenced with post and wire sheep fencing.

The sole Natura 2000 site to be considered in this assessment is the West Connacht Coast SAC (002998), a marine SAC for which Bottlenose Dolphin is the sole qualifying feature. The boundary of the SAC is denoted by the lower littoral (shore) margins along the eastern section of the island. The nearest sections of coastline and SAC boundary are approximately 100 metres and 115 metres respectively from the application site. Habitats within the vicinity of the application site largely comprise grassland habitats which are locally and regionally common and are not of significant conservation value - either in the context of the West Connacht SAC or the Inishturk pNHA. There is a potential indirect hydraulic linkage between the application site and the West Connacht SAC via diffuse creeping movement of shallow groundwater downhill towards the coastline.

Emissions of silt and building materials via indirect hydraulic linkages were the sole potential impact identified for this project. However such hydraulic linkages are tenuous and comprise potential diffuse, creeping movement of shallow groundwater towards the coastline; given the distance of separation of the application site from the coastline (100 metres plus), much of the particulates within the groundwater (such that may occur) will be polished/filtered by the soil layer in the inter-lying area and the volume of unpolished water that may reach the coastline (having originated from within the application site) would be extremely small in comparison with the volume of seawater within the SAC. The receiving waters of the SAC have an open ocean mixing regime with a high turnover/flushing rate such that any suspended particulates entering the SAC will be rapidly dissipated. Even in a worst case scenario event (i.e. wholesale deposition of excavated spoil or construction materials on steeper sections of the lower part of the application site during heavy rainfall events), impacts within the SAC will be imperceptible owing to the high flushing rate of the receiving waters. However such a worst case scenario event is readily avoidable by

the storage of excavated material and building materials in more gently sloped sections of the central and upper section of the application site where there is adequate depth of soil and vegetation cover to attenuate potential run-off/discharge of particulates. In conclusion, no impacts on the receiving waters of the SAC (or by extension, Bottlenose Dolphin habitat) arising from emissions are predicted.

It is the conclusion of this Screening for Appropriate Assessment Statement that the proposed construction of a helicopter landing pad at Bellavaun, Inishturk is compatible with the Conservation Objectives for the qualifying interests of The West Connacht Coast SAC *i.e.* significant effects accruing from the proposed development on this Natura 2000 site do not have potential to occur. Therefore it is the recommendation of this Screening for Appropriate Assessment Statement that further phases of the Habitats Directive Assessment Process will not be required for the proposed development.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

This screening statement for appropriate assessment has been undertaken for a proposal by Mayo County Council to construct a helipad and access road at Bellavaun, Inishturk, Co. Mayo.

A more detailed description of the proposed development is contained in Section 6 of this document. This screening report includes a consideration of the existing local environment in the vicinity of the application site and the potential impacts arising from the proposed development on relevant Natura 2000 sites – namely West Connacht Coast SAC.

1.2 Natura 2000 Sites

Natura 2000 sites are also known as European Sites and include Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the EU Birds Directive and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the EU Habitats Directive. Natura 2000 is an EU wide network of nature protection areas, the aim of which is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

1.3 The purpose of Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA)

Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA) is an evaluation of the potential impacts of a plan or project on the conservation objectives of a Natura 2000 site(s), and the development, where necessary, of mitigation or avoidance measures to preclude negative effects. Principally, the purpose of Appropriate Assessment (AA) is to identify the possible effects of implementing a Plan or Project on the conservation status of designated Natura 2000 sites within the Plan or Project area. Directive 92/43/EEC *on the conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna* – the 'Habitats Directive' provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Article 2 of the Directive requires the maintenance or restoration of habitats and species of interest to the EU in a favourable condition.

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 light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and 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"*.

Article 6(4) states *'if, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economical nature, the Member State shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted'*.

1.4 Overview of Habitats Directive Assessment Process

The European Commission, as well as the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government have both published methodological guidance, as listed in 1.5, both of which recommend a four stage approach in carrying out the entire Habitats Directive Assessment process as follows:

Stage 1 – Screening:

Determines whether a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have an impact on a Natura 2000 site, and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant;

Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment (AA):

Considers the impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, with respect to the site’s structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, it assesses the potential mitigation of those impacts;

Stage 3 – Assessment of Alternative Solutions:

Examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site;

Stage 4 – Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest:

Assess compensatory measures where in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) it is deemed that the plan or project should proceed.

Each stage determines whether the next stage in the process is required. If, for example, it is concluded at the end of Stage 1 that there will be no significant impacts on the Natura 2000 site, there is no requirement to proceed further. However if it is concluded after Stage 1 that significant impacts are likely or unknown then Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment is required.

1.5 Guidance Documents

In preparing this Screening report the following guidance documents were consulted (both documents are issued by Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government):

- 'Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10 (March 2010)'
- 'Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009),'

In addition, the following European Union published documents were consulted (See Section 10 for a full list of references):

- European Commission (2000). Managing Natura Sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Office for Official Publications for the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- European Commission (2002). 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. Office for Official Publications for the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- European Commission (2007). Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC: Clarification of the concepts of: alternative solutions, imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, compensatory measures, overall coherence, opinion of the Commission.

- European Commission (2006). Nature and Biodiversity Cases: Ruling of the European Court of Justice. Office for Official Publications for the European Communities, Luxembourg.

In keeping with the guidelines outlined in the above documents, the aims of this report are to produce a Screening for Appropriate Assessment report through following the procedure outlined for Appropriate Assessment. The aims of this report can therefore be summarised as follows:

- Determining whether the project or plan is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the Natura 2000 site.
- Describing the project or plan and the description and characterisation of other projects or plans that in combination have the potential for having significant effects on the Natura 2000 site(s).
- Characteristics of the Natura 2000 site – identification of the relevant Natura 2000 sites and compiling of information on their qualifying interests and conservation objectives.
- Identification of possible impacts caused by the development to the Natura 2000 site
- Assessment of the significance of potential impacts – To assess the potential for significant direct, indirect and combined impacts on Natura 2000 sites caused by the site development.

2.0 Statement of Qualification

This report was prepared by Conor Ryan, MSc, and Dr Derek McLoughlin. Mr Ryan has considerable experience in the requirements under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and has prepared a large number of Article 6 assessments for both plans and projects. He has 10 years experience in ecological surveying in the west of Ireland, in a variety of upland, lowland and aquatic habitats.

Dr McLoughlin has worked as an ecologist since graduating in 2003. He has worked in a number of capacities on a wide range of ecological disciplines including ornithology, on which subject he has a PhD. He has published several international peer-reviewed papers on various ecological topics including plants, mammals, and birds. He is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecological and Environment Management, adhering to their code of best conduct.

3.0 Methods

Desktop Review

This report is based on an assessment of the potential for the proposed development to cause significant impacts to the integrity of Natura 2000 sites, with particular reference to the qualifying criteria of the relevant SACs and/or SPAs and their associated conservation objectives. A desktop survey was conducted to ascertain the site's proximity to Natura 2000 sites and to compile information on qualifying interests and conservation objectives of relevant Natura 2000 sites along with their likely ecological connectivity to the proposed site development. The West Connacht Coast SAC (Site code 002998) was found to be the sole Natura 2000 site of relevance to this assessment; Owing to the confined scale of the project, it was considered that potential impacts on designated sites other than the West Connacht Coast SAC could be readily screened out (See Section 5).

Site specific conservation objectives and associated backing documents for the West Connacht Coast SAC have been contemporaneously prepared by NPWS; the information contained in these documents was used to inform the assessment.

Site Visit

A site visit was conducted on 11/07/2020. The vicinity of the proposed application site and the inter-lying area between the site and the SAC was walked over and the constituent habitats were noted. The potential connectivity of the proposed project site (to be referred to as the “application site” in the remainder of this document) with the SAC was assessed during the walkover.

Report Format

Sections 4 to 7 outline the relevant Natura 2000 sites – in this case the West Connacht Coast SAC - and the existing environment in the vicinity of the proposed project location. Section 8 comprises the screening matrix for this assessment which follows the template recommended in the guidance literature. A ‘Finding of no significant effects’ matrix is contained in Section 8.1. Section 9.0 comprises screening conclusions.

4.0 Connectivity of the development to the management of Natura 2000 sites

The proposed development is not connected with the management of Natura 2000 sites.

5.0 Relevant Natura 2000 Site – qualifying criteria and conservation objectives

There are various terrestrial Natura 2000 sites located on the neighbouring islands of Clare Island and Inishbofin and the mainland of West Mayo which are within 10 to 15 km of the application site. Impacts on these Natura 2000 sites can be readily discounted owing to the absence of linkages between the application site and these sites.

Therefore the sole Natura 2000 site to be considered further in this assessment is the West Connacht Coast SAC (002998), the boundary of which is denoted by the lower littoral (shore) margins along the southern and eastern sections of the island. The nearest section of the SAC boundary is approximately 115 metres to the east of the application site.

Figure 1 shows the position of the application site relative to the West Connacht Coast SAC.

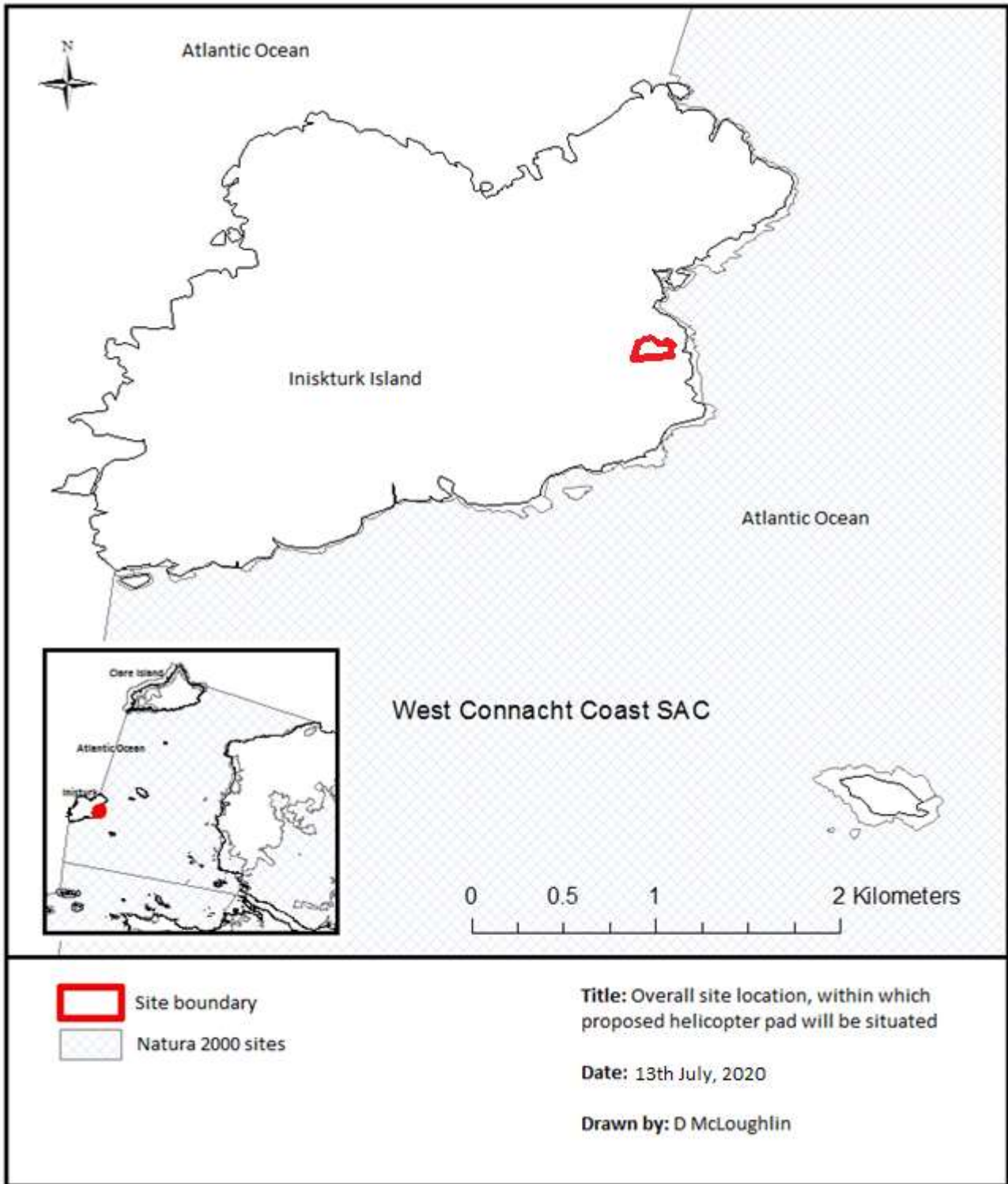


Figure 1. Map of proposed development location in relation to the West Connacht Coast SAC



Figure 2. Map of proposed development location (outlined in red) in relation to the West Connacht Coast SAC. Olive shading denotes extent of SAC coverage.

The qualifying attributes and conservation objectives of the West Connacht Coast SAC are outlined in Table 1. A full site synopsis and conservation objectives for the SAC is available at www.npws.ie.

Table 1: Site details for West Connacht Coast SAC

| | |
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| Site Name and Location | West Connacht Coast SAC (002998) – located 115 m east of the application site |
| Site Description | <p>This site consists of a substantial area of marine waters lying off the coasts of Counties Mayo and Galway in the west of Ireland. The waters of the West Connacht Coast represent an exceptional area of key conservation importance for Bottle-nosed Dolphin in Ireland. Comprising two parts, in its northern component the site extends from the coastal waters off Erris Head westwards beyond Eagle Island and the Mullet Peninsula in Co. Mayo. From there it extends southwards immediately off the coast as far as the entrance to Blacksod Bay. In its southern component, the site stretches from Clare Island and the outer reaches of Clew Bay at Old Head and continues southwards off the Mayo coast to the Connemara coast near Clifden and Ballyconneely, Co Galway.</p> <p>The site contains physical and hydrographic features believed to be important for Bottle-nosed Dolphin, one of two cetacean species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.</p> <p>Bottle-nosed Dolphin occurs within the site in all seasons and the area comprises a key habitat for the species both regionally and within Irish waters as a whole.</p> <p>Local population estimates off south-west Co. Mayo and Connemara, Co. Galway describe a minimum of 123 dolphins, with possibly up to 150-200 individuals or more, occurring within the site as a whole</p> |
| Qualifying Interests of the Site | <p>The site is designated for the following Annex II species:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [1349]Bottle-nosed Dolphin <i>Tursiops truncatus</i> |
| Conservation Objectives for West Connacht Coast SAC | <p>The site-specific conservation objectives for the SAC are as follows:</p> <p>To maintain the favourable conservation condition of bottlenose dolphin in West Connacht Coast, which is defined by the following targets and attributes:</p> <p>Target 1: <i>Species range within the site should not be restricted by artificial barriers to site use.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target may be considered relevant to proposed activities or operations that will result in the permanent exclusion of bottlenose dolphin from part of its range within the site, or will permanently prevent access for the species to suitable habitat therein. • It does not refer to short-term or temporary restriction of access or range. • Early consultation or scoping with the Department in advance of formal application is advisable for proposals that are likely to result in permanent exclusion. <p>Target 2: <i>Human activities should occur at levels that do not adversely affect the bottlenose dolphin population at the site.</i></p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proposed activities or operations should not introduce man-made energy (e.g. aerial or underwater noise, light or thermal energy) at levels that could result in a significant negative impact on individuals and/or the population of bottlenose dolphin within the site. This refers to the aquatic habitats used by the species in addition to important natural behaviours during the species annual cycle.• This target also relates to proposed activities or operations that may result in the deterioration of key resources (e.g. water quality, feeding, etc.) upon which bottlenose dolphins depend. In the absence of complete knowledge on the species ecological requirements in this site, such considerations should be assessed where appropriate on a case-by-case basis.• Proposed activities or operations should not cause death or injury to individuals to an extent that may ultimately affect the bottlenose dolphin population at the site. |
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6.0 Description of Proposed Development

This proposed project comprises the construction of a helicopter landing pad. The site proposed for construction of the helipad (the application site) is an east facing section of land on a hillside at Bellavaun on Inishturk. The site is located just to the east of the main public road on the island and directly opposite the island community centre. Total area of the site 1.2ha. The terrain within the application site comprises grass pasture and bedrock outcrops.

The helipad will have a total diameter of 56.6m and an area of circa 2,515m². The helipad will be concentrically divided into three sections as follows:

- A 5 metre wide Safety Area on western side of the helipad periphery.
- A Final Approach and Take-off area comprising a hard standing which will be 23.5m wide and surface dressed with chippings
- A Touchdown and Lift-off area in the centre of the helipad comprising a circular concrete reinforced pad with a minimum diameter of 22.5m. Ground lighting is to be included within the concrete pad to assist landing and take off

The slope of the hillside entails that all excavated rock and soil material will be reused on-site to create a level platform for construction of the helipad. Road access to the helipad is to be from the local road network via the existing field entrance on the northwest section of the application site boundary. This will be a 5m wide road, constructed from a base layer of stone with a surface dressing. Site boundaries are to be fenced with post and wire sheep fencing.

7.0 Existing Environment in vicinity of Application Site

7.1 Location and Setting (See Appendix A for photographs of proposed location)

The terrain on Inishturk is moderately to steeply undulating throughout the entirety of the island. The land cover comprises small to medium sized agricultural pasture fields in lower sections of the east and south sections of the island with the remainder of the island comprising commonage which is primarily used for grazing of sheep. Grazing intensity on the island is quite high, particularly in areas of commonage, with the sward being closely cropped in many areas. The habitat type in the majority of the east and south of the island primarily comprises dry humid acid grassland interspersed with patches of improved grassland, wet grassland, Bracken swathes, exposed bedrock outcrops and poor flushes. Heath vegetation is restricted by grazing intensity but fragmented forms of heath occur along the bases of stone walls and along the coastal fringes. The remainder of the island interior comprises a mosaic of grassland, heath and shallow blanket bog habitats interspersed with numerous sections of exposed bedrock of sandstone and conglomerate. Exposed rock is particularly abundant in more exposed and elevated sections of the island.

Much of the southern, western and northern coastline of the island comprises steep sea cliffs of sandstone and shale. Along the inland edge of the cliffs, a low growing band of maritime plantain sward occurs which is dominated by plantain species including *Plantago maritima* and *Plantago coronopus*.

The majority of Inishturk Island, along with a strip of seaward area approximately 300 to 500 metres wide along the north and west coast of the island, is designated as a proposed National Heritage Area (pNHA) – site code 000509. As a proposed NHA, the area within its' boundaries is not statutorily designated but is subject to limited forms of protection, including recognition of its' value by licensing and planning authorities, agri-environmental farm planning schemes (including REPS and AEOS) and forestry service requirements for clearance from NPWS prior to afforestation schemes on pNHA lands. The primary ecological importance of the island is described in the NPWS site synopsis for the pNHA as being its flora and bird life, particularly seabirds. Flora of interest includes vegetation communities growing on the steep cliffs on the south, west and north coasts of the island. The Spotted Rock-rose *Tuberaria guttata* - a red data listed plant which grows on shallow soils in association with coastal heath habitats – is reported to occur on the island.

The well grazed grassland terrain of the island provides suitable foraging habitat for Chough, a species listed under Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive, and one or two breeding pairs and up to 8 non-breeding individuals are known to occur on the island. Chough nesting sites are typically located in crevices and caves in coastal cliffs and rock formations near the coast. The main areas of importance on the island for seabirds are the aforementioned sea cliffs on the south, west and north coasts of the island. The cliffs play host to several species of breeding seabirds – Fulmar (775 pairs in 1969) and Black Guillemot (28 individuals in 1969). Other breeding seabirds in 1969 included Razorbill (168 individuals), Guillemot (109 individuals) and Puffin (28 individuals). Manx Shearwaters were recorded breeding in 1977 and Storm Petrel may have been breeding. Arctic Tern has nested here in the past (30 pairs in 1969) but were not recorded in 1979/1984. Inishturk is also a traditional wintering site for Barnacle Geese which forage along the shore and on grassland (All NPWS, 2009).

Application Site Vicinity

The application site comprises a section of a large field with a habitat composition that is typical of the locality. The application site is rectangular in shape and has an easterly aspect. The ground has a relatively even, moderate downhill profile in the mid to upper section of the site but becomes steeper and more uneven in the lower section of the site, particularly in the northeast corner of the site where the bedrock protrudes frequently. A short cliff face occurs just outside the northeast site boundary and overlooks a narrow valley floor (also outside the site boundary) which runs eastwards.



Plate 1: View from upper (west) section of application site looking east across grassland habitats within the application site.

The outlines of old potato growing ridges (lazy beds) are visible in much of the site. The upper west section of the site is bordered by a low stone wall topped with a wire and post fence, with a public road running parallel with the boundary on the west side of the wall. The island community centre is located on the west side of the public road, directly opposite the mid-section of the western boundary of the site. A small enclosed plot which comprises a garden of sorts (containing abundant Montbretia and New Zealand Flax) is located directly north of the community centre building – this plot is currently used as a breeding site by Corncrake, hence is of significant conservation value (Plate 2).



Plate 2: View looking south along western boundary of application site with Community Centre building and garden plot (Corncrake breeding site) visible in upper right side of photo

The south side of the application site is bordered by a low stone wall and a wire and post fence, to the south of which lies a field crossed by a gravel access track which links Tranaun Beach to the public road. The north side of the site is bordered by a low stone wall with agricultural fields located north of the wall.

The eastern edge of the application site simply comprises an open boundary, with grassland habitats extending downhill beyond the boundary for circa 100 metres until they meet the rocky coastline which comprises fingers of rock shelf and ledges which extend across the littoral zone to a sand low littoral area (Plate 1).

Ground cover within the site is predominantly grassland and there are 3 types of grassland present within the site - namely improved grassland, wet grassland and dry humid acid grassland. These 3 habitats form mosaics with one another in much of the site, however the overall trend is such that improved grassland predominates in the upper (western) and central section of the site and the improved influence diminishes as one moves downslope to the east, with a commensurate increase in occurrence of bedrock outcrops in the lower (eastern) section of the site.

The following habitats occur within the site (Code refers to Fossitt (2000) habitat classifications):

- Improved grassland GA1
- Wet grassland GS4
- Dry humid acid grassland GS3
- Exposed siliceous rock ER1

- Stone walls and other stonework BL1

Improved grassland GA1

Patches of species poor improved grassland occur in the upper and central section of the site. Grass species include Common bent and Yorkshire fog with herb species including White clover, Broadleaved dock, Spear thistle, Meadow buttercup, Self heal and Daisy.



Plate 3: View looking south across central area of application site (helipad location) with improved agricultural grassland visible in the foreground.

Wet grassland GS4

The wet grassland habitat comprises species poor sections of the site where Yorkshire fog and Soft rush are the dominant species with *Carex* spp, White clover, Autumn hawkbit and Common sorrel variously occurring in different sections. Patches of this habitat form mosaics with the above grassland habitats throughout the site. Drainage in most of the habitat appears to be reasonable; the sole section of habitat where some minor water logging appears to occur is in the northwest corner of the site, with a small stand of Yellow flag iris and Soft rush occurring here.



Plate 3: View looking southeast from northwest section of application site with wet grassland and improved agricultural grassland visible in the foreground.

Dry humid acid grassland GS3

The Dry Humid Acid Grassland (GS3) habitat is most frequent in the lower section of the site (Plate 5) but elements of this vegetation community occur within grassland habitat mosaics in other sections of the site also. The graminoid (grass) species include Sweet vernal grass, Crested dog's tail and Common bent, with Purple moor grass occurring occasionally. Various moss species are also abundant. The herb species include both agricultural herbs and those more indicative of acidic influence. Autumn hawkbit is abundant throughout the habitat with Common sorrel frequent. Bracken becomes abundant in the northeast section of the application site but is rare or absent elsewhere. Heath bedstraw and Meadow thistle occur occasionally to frequently in lower sections of the site. Sheep's bit scabious, Wild thyme and Sea plantain occur occasionally to frequently near rock outcrops in the lower section of the site. Bog pimpernel occurs occasionally, where minor flushing occurs.

Exposed siliceous rock ER1

The exposed siliceous rock comprises sandstone type bedrock. Small sections of exposed bedrock occur occasionally in the upper and mid section of the site and these sections are generally flat in profile and do not protrude much above the surrounding ground. Exposed bedrock becomes more frequent in the lower section of the site, particularly in the northeast corner of the site where the gradient becomes very steep and the exposed bedrock occurs in a series of steps with near vertical faces (Plate 5). The rock faces are largely bare, except for patches of crustose lichen mats. Wild Thyme occurs occasionally to frequently

around the soil/rock interface with Sheep's bit scabious and Bird's foot trefoil also occurring occasionally near the base of the rocks.



Plate 5: View looking west across northeast (lower) section of site with dry humid acid grassland and exposed siliceous rock habitats visible

Stone walls and other stonework BL1

Dry stone walls line the western, southern and northern boundaries of the application site. They are built from island stone and are largely devoid of specific vegetation communities.

Site Hydrology

The soil type at the site is shown to correlate with peaty podzols – such soils tend to have moderate to poor drainage properties. The bedrock of the east section of the island comprises sandstone, mudrock conglomerate and tuff. The impermeable bedrock restricts and limits discharge to groundwater; the entirety of the island is classified as Poor Aquifer-“Bedrock which is Generally Unproductive except in Local Zones” (GSI 2017).

The application site is devoid of any surface water drainage features and there are no named or mapped streams within the wider vicinity of the application site. The nearest drainage feature to the application site is a naturalised narrow drainage ditch channel which commences on the floor of the low lying narrow valley overlooked by the northeast boundary of the application site and runs downhill to the coastline. The channel bed commences circa 14 metres north of the northeast boundary of the application site and was

dry at the time of the site visit i.e. it only contains water during spate conditions. Peak flow volumes in the ditch are adjudged to be very modest as evidenced by the narrow dimensions of the ditch.

Given the absence of surface water features in the application site vicinity, there is no direct hydraulic connectivity between the application site and the nearby coastal waters. However, owing to the moderate to steep easterly gradient of the site, there is likely to be some indirect hydraulic connectivity via diffuse shallow groundwater movement in an easterly downhill direction towards the coastline; such flow is likely to occur via creeping movement within the soil layer rather than within the bedrock, owing to the impermeable nature of the bedrock. Some of this water may potentially also move into the drainage ditch channel to the northeast of the application site and then subsequently discharge on to the coastline via the ditch channel (See plates 5 and 6).



Plate 5: Upper Section of drainage ditch channel located to the northeast of the application site. Application site boundary (stone wall) is visible in upper left section of photo.



Plate 6: View looking east from mid-section of northern application site boundary with adjacent valley running seawards visible in mid-section of photo.

7.2 Ecological Assessment of Application Site and adjacent sections of SAC

The application site consists of terrestrial habitats which are locally and regionally common and are not of significant conservation value - either in the context of the West Connacht SAC or the Inishturk pNHA. The presence of a confirmed Corncrake breeding site adjacent to the community centre building is of considerable ecological conservation significance, albeit is not relevant to the West Connacht SAC conservation objectives. There is a potential indirect hydraulic linkage between the application site and the West Connacht SAC via diffuse creeping movement of shallow groundwater downhill towards the coastline.

8.0 Assessment of Significance of Potential Impacts

| Screening Matrix for Assessment of Significance of Potential Impacts | |
|--|--|
| Describe the individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) likely to give | Owing to the location of the application site in a terrestrial environment at a distance of approximately 100 metres from the coastline and 115 metres from the SAC boundary, pathways by which direct impacts (from the proposed development) could occur to Bottlenose Dolphins do not exist. The sole potential impact which could arise would be a very minor impact on water quality via transmission of silt or other fine sediments (arising from excavation and construction) via diffuse downhill movement of shallow groundwater from the |

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| <p>rise to impacts on the Natura 2000 Sites</p> | <p>application site towards the coastline (Impacts on water quality is one of the potential impacts identified in Target 2 of the site specific conservation objectives). See section regarding “Emissions” in this matrix for further assessment.</p> |
| <p>Assessment of likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the Natura 2000 sites</p> | <p>Size and scale;</p> <p>Likely Impacts: None. Given the small scale and size of the proposed development and the distance of the application site from the coastline, no negative impacts are predicted in this regard.</p> <p>Land-take;</p> <p>Likely Impacts: None. The application site is located outside the SAC boundary in a terrestrial environment at a significant remove from the marine environment of the SAC</p> <p>Distance from the Natura 2000 site or key features of the site;</p> <p>Likely Impacts: None. The application site is located in a terrestrial setting over 115 metres from the SAC and 100 metres from the coastline.</p> <p>Resource requirements (water abstraction etc);</p> <p>Likely Impacts: None. No resources from within the SAC will be required.</p> <p>Emissions (disposal to land, water or air);</p> <p>Likely Impacts: Emissions of silt and building materials via indirect hydraulic linkages were the sole potential impact identified for this project. However such hydraulic linkages are tenuous and comprise potential diffuse, creeping movement of shallow groundwater towards the coastline; given the distance of separation of the application site from the coastline (100 metres plus), much of the particulates within the groundwater (such that may occur) will be polished/filtered by the soil layer in the inter-lying area and the volume of unpolished water that may reach the coastline (having originated from within the application site) would be extremely small in comparison with the volume of seawater within the SAC. The receiving waters of the SAC have an open ocean mixing regime with a high turnover/flushing rate such that any suspended particulates entering the SAC will be rapidly dissipated. Even in a worst case scenario event (i.e. wholesale deposition of excavated spoil or construction materials on steeper sections of the lower part of the application site during heavy rainfall events), impacts within the SAC will be imperceptible owing to the high flushing rate of the receiving waters. However such a worst case scenario event is readily avoidable by the storage of excavated material and building materials in more gently sloped sections of the central and upper section of the application site where there is adequate depth of soil and vegetation cover to</p> |

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| | <p>attenuate potential run-off/discharge of particulates. In conclusion, no impacts on the receiving waters of the SAC arising from emissions are predicted.</p> <p>Excavation requirements;</p> <p>Likely Impacts: None. All material excavated will be reutilised on-site in order to create a level foundation for the pad construction</p> <p>Transportation requirements;</p> <p>Likely Impacts: None. The proposed construction of the landing pad facility may cause a brief increase in boat traffic accessing the island but this will be temporary and short in duration.</p> <p>Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning;</p> <p>Likely Impacts: None. The development is sufficiently removed from the SAC such that the duration of construction is not relevant to the impacts on the SAC.</p> <p>Noise and Light Pollution;</p> <p>Likely Impacts: None. The application site is sufficiently removed from the SAC such that noise or light related impacts on the SAC will not occur.</p> <p>Potential In-combination impacts;</p> <p>Likely Impacts: None. No in-combination impacts associated with the proposed development will occur.</p> |
| <p>Likely changes to the Natura 2000 sites arising from the development as a result of:</p> | <p>Reduction of habitat area;</p> <p>None. The habitats within the application site are terrestrial habitats which are not of any value to the marine habitats of the SAC.</p> <p>Disturbance to key species;</p> <p>The key species of the SAC is Bottle-nosed Dolphin. This species will not be impacted by the construction of a concrete structure over 100 metres inland from the water's edge.</p> <p>Habitat or species fragmentation;</p> <p>No changes are predicted.</p> <p>Reduction in species density;</p> <p>No changes are predicted.</p> <p>Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.); Changes in water quality was the sole potential indicator of conservation value identified as having very minor potential to be impacted. However no such impacts will arise,</p> |

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| | <p>as described previously in this matrix - see “Assessment of Likely Impacts - Emissions”.</p> <p>Climate change;</p> <p>No changes are predicted.</p> |
| <p>Likely impacts on the Natura 2000 sites as a whole in terms of:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interference with the key relationships that define the structure of the site; • Interference with key relationships that define the function of the site; <p>No significant impacts arising from the development on key relationships that define the structure or function of the West Connacht Coast SAC are foreseen.</p> |
| <p>Indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects set out above in terms of:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss; • Fragmentation; • Disruption; • Disturbance; • Change to key elements of the site (e.g. water quality etc.). <p>No significant impacts are predicted on any facet of the West Connacht Coast SAC</p> |
| <p>Elements of the project or plan, or combination of elements, where the above impacts are likely to be significant or where the scale or magnitude of impacts is not known.</p> | <p>None - there are no such elements of the project where the above impacts are likely to be significant or where the scale or magnitude of impacts is not known.</p> |

8.1 Finding of No Significant Effects Matrix

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| Name of Project or Plan | Construction of a helicopter landing pad at Bellavaun, Inishturk, Co. Mayo |
| Names and locations of relevant Natura 2000 sites | The West Connacht Coast SAC (002998) is the sole relevant Natura 2000 site – the proposed project is to be located over |

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| | 100 metres inland of the coastline and 115 metres from the SAC boundary on the east coast of Inishturk Island. |
| Description of the project or plan | This project comprises the construction of a helicopter landing pad which will have an overall diameter of 56.6m. The inner circle of the pad will be constructed from concrete and the outer circle will be constructed from stone. The pad will be accessed by a 5m wide road constructed from a base layer of stone with a surface dressing. |
| Is the project or plan directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site (provide details)? | No |
| Are there other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could affect the site (provide details)? | No |
| The assessment of significance of effects | |
| Describe how the project or plan (alone or in combination) is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site. | It is the conclusion arising from the foregoing assessment that significant effects on the West Connacht Coast SAC will not arise from the proposed project. The potential for impacts arising on the SAC is very limited, as the proposed development will be located in a terrestrial environment approximately 100 metres from the coastline and 115 metres from the SAC boundary. The sole potential impact that could arise from the project would be a very minor impact on seawater quality in the immediate vicinity of the coastline section to the east of the application site. |
| Explain why these effects are not considered significant. | Emissions of silt and building materials via indirect hydraulic linkages were the sole potential impact identified for this project. However such hydraulic linkages are tenuous and comprise potential diffuse, creeping movement of shallow groundwater towards the coastline; given the distance of separation of the application site from the coastline (100 metres plus), much of the particulates within the groundwater (such that may occur) will be polished/filtered by the soil layer in the inter-lying area and the volume of unpolished water that may reach the coastline (having originated from within the application site) would be extremely small in comparison with the volume of seawater within the SAC. The receiving waters of the SAC have an open ocean mixing regime with a high turnover/flushing rate such that any suspended particulates entering the SAC will be rapidly dissipated. Even in a worst case |

| | <p>scenario event (i.e. wholesale deposition of excavated spoil or construction materials on steeper sections of the lower part of the application site during heavy rainfall events), impacts within the SAC will be imperceptible owing to the high flushing rate of the receiving waters. However such a worst case scenario event is readily avoidable by the storage of excavated material and building materials in more gently sloped sections of the central and upper section of the application site where there is adequate depth of soil and vegetation cover to attenuate potential run-off/dischage of particulates. In conclusion, no impacts on the receiving waters of the SAC (or by extension, Bottlenose Dolphin habitat) arising from emissions are predicted.</p> | | |
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| <p>List of agencies consulted: provide contact name and telephone or e-mail address.</p> | <p>N/A</p> | | |
| <p>Response to consultation.</p> | <p>N/A</p> | | |
| <p>Data collected to carry out the assessment</p> | | | |
| <p>Who carried out the assessment?</p> | <p>Sources of data</p> | <p>Level of Assessment</p> | <p>Where can the full results of the completed assessment be accessed and viewed?</p> |
| <p>Conor Ryan MSc</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Site Visit conducted on 11/07/2020 2. NPWS Site Synopses, Conservation Objectives and backing documents and NATURA 2000 Forms for the relevant Natura 2000 sites. 3. Remote sensing images and aerial photographs. 4. Drawings of the proposed development as supplied by Tomás McLoughlin of Mayo County Council. | <p>Stage 1 Screening Assessment</p> | <p>The full results of the completed assessment should be available to be viewed through Mayo County Council</p> |

9.0 Screening Conclusions

It is the conclusion of this Screening for Appropriate Assessment Statement that the proposed construction of a helicopter landing pad at Bellavaun is compatible with the Conservation Objectives for the qualifying interests of The West Connacht Coast SAC *i.e.* significant effects accruing from the proposed development on this and other Natura 2000 sites do not have potential to occur. Therefore it is the recommendation of this Screening for Appropriate Assessment Statement that further phases of the Habitats Directive Assessment Process will not be required for the proposed development.

10.0 References

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