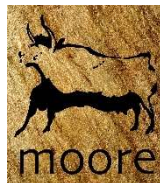


Report for the purposes of
Appropriate Assessment Screening

Achill Sound Residential Development

Prepared by: Moore Group – Environmental Services

26 October 2021



On behalf of Mayo County Council

Project Proponent	Mayo County Council
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Abbreviations

AA	Appropriate Assessment
EEC	European Economic Community
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographical Information System
LAP	Local Area Plan
NHA	Natural Heritage Area
NIS	Natura Impact Statement
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OSI	Ordnance Survey Ireland
pNHA	proposed Natural Heritage Area
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area
SuDS	Sustainable Drainage System
WFD	Water Framework Directive

1. Introduction

1.1. General Introduction

This report for the purposes of Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening has been prepared to support a Planning Application for the Proposed Development (described in Section 3 below). This report contains information required for the competent authority to undertake screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) in respect of the construction of a residential development at Pollranny, Achill Sound, Co. Mayo (hereafter referred to as the Proposed Development) to determine whether it is likely individually or in combination with other plans and projects to have a significant effect on any European sites, in light of best scientific knowledge.

Having regard to the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (section 177U and 177V), the purpose of a screening exercise under section 177U of the PDA 2000 is to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the proposed development, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a European site.

If it cannot be *excluded* on the basis of objective information that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site then it is necessary to carry out a Stage 2 appropriate assessment.

When screening the project, there are two possible outcomes:

- the project poses no risk of a significant effect and as such requires no further assessment; and
- the project has potential to have a significant effect (or this is uncertain) and AA of the project is necessary.

This report has been prepared by Moore Group - Environmental Services to enable Mayo County Council to carry out AA screening in relation to the Proposed Development. The report was compiled by Ger O'Donohoe (B.Sc. Applied Aquatic Sciences (GMIT, 1993) & M.Sc. Environmental Sciences (TCD, 1999)) who has over 27 years' experience in environmental impact assessment and has completed numerous Appropriate Assessment Screening Reports and Natura Impact Statements on terrestrial and aquatic habitats for various development types.

1.2. Legislative Background - The Habitats and Birds Directives

Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive is transposed into Irish Law inter alia by the Part XAB of the Planning Acts (in particular section 177U and 177V) which governs the requirement to carry out appropriate assessment screening and appropriate assessment, where required, per Section 1.1 above.

The Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora) is the main legislative instrument for the protection and conservation of biodiversity in the European Union (EU). Under the Habitats Directive, Member States are obliged to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) which contain habitats or species considered important for protection and conservation in a EU context.

The Birds Directive (Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds), transposed into Irish law by the Bird and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 as amended, and the Wildlife Act 1976, as amended, is concerned with the long-term protection and management of all wild bird species and their habitats in the EU. Among other things, the Birds Directive requires that Special Protection Areas (SPAs) be established to protect migratory species and species which are rare, vulnerable, in danger of extinction, or otherwise require special attention.

SACs designated under the Habitats Directive and SPAs, designated under the Birds Directive, form a pan-European network of protected sites known as Natura 2000. The Habitats Directive sets out a unified system for the protection and management of SACs and SPAs. These sites are also referred to as European sites.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the requirement for an assessment of proposed plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on Natura 2000 sites.

Article 6(3) establishes the requirement to screen all plans and projects and to carry out an appropriate assessment if required (Appropriate Assessment (AA)). Article 6(4) establishes requirements in cases of imperative reasons of overriding public interest:

Article 6(3): *“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 subjected to an 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 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.”*

2. Methodology

The Commission’s methodological guidance (EC, 2002, 2018, 2021 see Section 2.1 below) promotes a four-stage process to complete the AA and outlines the issues and tests at each stage. An important aspect of the process is that the outcome at each successive stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required.

Stages 1 and 2 deal with the main requirements for assessment under Article 6(3). Stage 3 may be part of Article 6(3) or may be a necessary precursor to Stage 4. Stage 4 is the main derogation step of Article 6(4).

Stage 1 Screening: This stage examines the likely effects of a project either alone or in combination with other projects upon a Natura 2000 site and considers whether it can be objectively concluded that these effects will not be significant. In order to screen out a project, it must be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the Proposed Development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment: In this stage, there is a consideration of the impact of the project with a view to ascertain whether there will be any adverse effect on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site 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 predicted impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts is considered.

Stage 3 Assessment of Alternative Solutions: This stage examines alternative ways of implementing the project that, where possible, avoid any adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Stage 4 Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain: Where imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) exist, an assessment to consider whether compensatory measures will or will not effectively offset the damage to the sites will be necessary.

To ensure that the Proposed Development complies fully with the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and all relevant Irish transposing legislation, Moore Group compiled this report to enable Mayo County Council to carry out AA screening in relation to the Proposed Development to determine whether the Proposed Development, individually or in combination with another plan or project will have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site.

2.1. Guidance

This report has been compiled in accordance with guidance contained in the following documents:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities. (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 rev.)(soon to be superseded by EC Guidance in prep.).
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPWS 1/10 & PSSP 2/10.
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2018).
- Guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive (EC, 2021).
- 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 (EC, 2021).

- Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) Practice Note PN01 Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management (OPR, 2021).

2.2. Data Sources

Sources of information that were used to collect data on the Natura 2000 network of sites, and the environment within which they are located, are listed below:

- The following mapping and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) data sources, as required:
 - National Parks & Wildlife (NPWS) protected site boundary data;
 - Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI) mapping and aerial photography;
 - OSI/Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rivers and streams, and catchments;
 - Open Street Maps;
 - Digital Elevation Model over Europe (EU-DEM);
 - Google Earth and Bing aerial photography 1995-2022;
- Online data available on Natura 2000 sites as held by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) from www.npws.ie including:
 - Natura 2000 - Standard Data Form;
 - Conservation Objectives;
 - Site Synopses;
- National Biodiversity Data Centre records;
 - Online database of rare, threatened and protected species;
 - Publicly accessible biodiversity datasets.
- Status of EU Protected Habitats in Ireland. (National Parks & Wildlife Service, 2019); and
- Relevant Development Plans;
 - Mayo County Development Plan 2021-2027

3. Description of the Proposed Development

The Proposed Development consists of the construction of a residential development and all associated and ancillary development at Pollranny, Achill, Co. Mayo.

Figure 1 shows the Proposed Development location and Figure 2 shows a detailed view of the Proposed Development boundary on recent aerial photography. Figure 3 shows the layout of the Proposed Development.

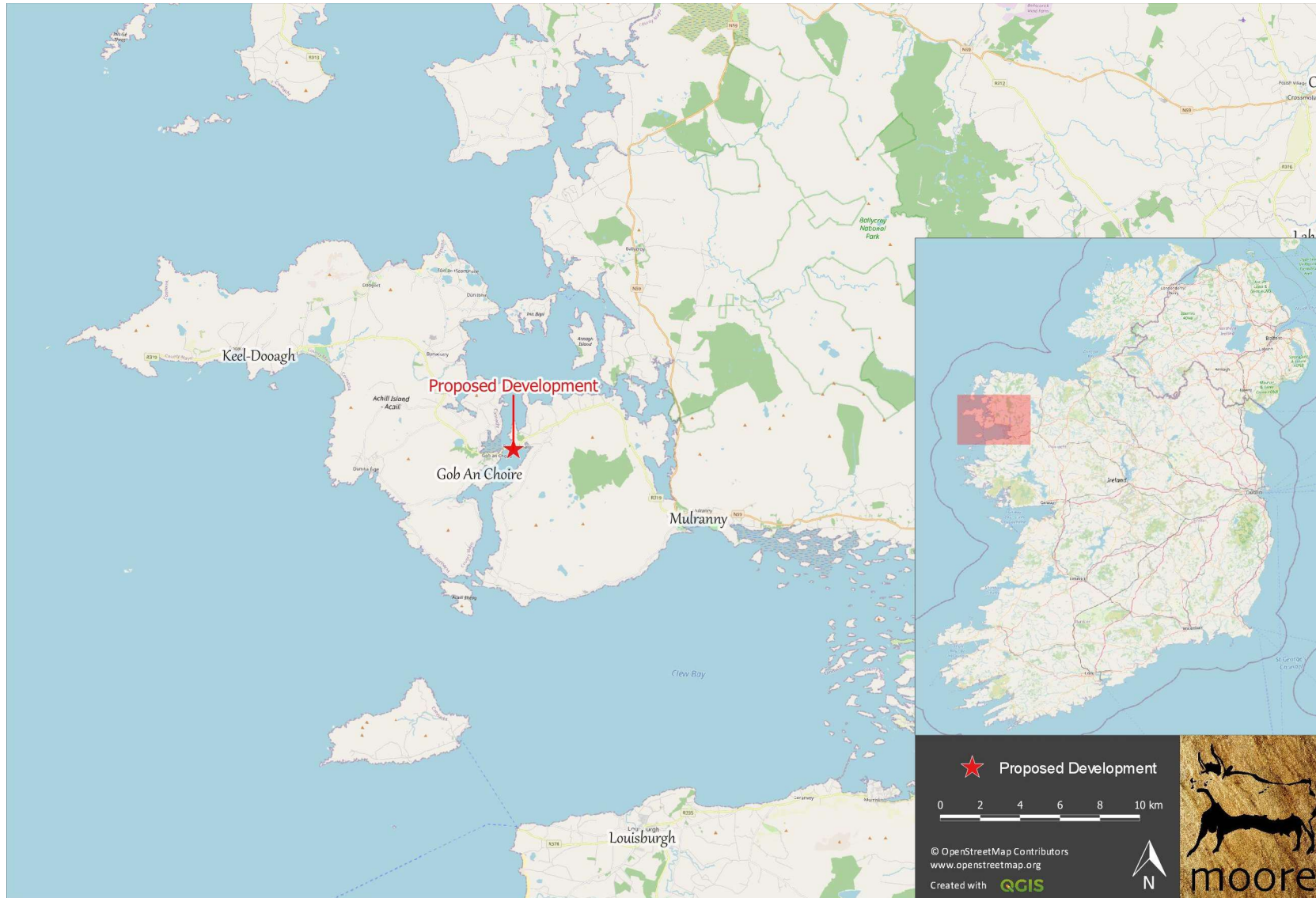


Figure 1. Showing the Proposed Development location at Pollranny, Achill Sound, Co. Mayo.



Figure 2. Showing the Proposed Development boundary on recent aerial photography.



Figure 3. Plan of the Proposed Development.

4. Identification of Natura 2000 Sites

4.1. Description of Natura Sites Potentially Affected

A Zone of Influence (Zoi) of a proposed development is the geographical area over which it could affect the receiving environment in a way that could have significant effects on the Qualifying Interests of a European site. In accordance with the OPR Practice Note, PN01, the Zoi should be established on a case-by-case basis using the Source- Pathway-Receptor framework.

The European Commission's "Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Methodological Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC" published 28 September 2021 states at section 3.1.3:

Identifying the Natura 2000 sites that may be affected should be done by taking into consideration all aspects of the plan or project that could have potential effects on any Natura 2000 sites located within the zone of influence of the plan or project. This should take into account all of the designating features (species, habitat types) that are significantly present on the sites and their conservation objectives. In particular, it should identify:

- *any Natura 2000 sites geographically overlapping with any of the actions or aspects of the plan or project in any of its phases, or adjacent to them;*
- *any Natura 2000 sites within the likely zone of influence of the plan or project Natura 2000 sites located in the surroundings of the plan or project (or at some distance) that could still be indirectly affected by aspects of the project, including as regards the use of natural resources (e.g. water) and various types of waste, discharge or emissions of substances or energy;*
- *Natura 2000 sites in the surroundings of the plan or project (or at some distance) which host fauna that can move to the project area and then suffer mortality or other impacts (e.g. loss of feeding areas, reduction of home range);*
- *Natura 2000 sites whose connectivity or ecological continuity can be affected by the plan or project.*

The range of Natura 2000 sites to be assessed, i.e. the zone in which impacts from the plan or project may arise, will depend on the nature of the plan or project and the distance at which effects may occur. For Natura 2000 sites located downstream along rivers or wetlands fed by aquifers, it may be that a plan or project can affect water flows, fish migration and so forth, even at a great distance. Emissions of pollutants may also have effects over a long distance. Some projects or plans that do not directly affect Natura 2000 sites may still have a significant impact on them if they cause a barrier effect or prevent ecological linkages. This may happen, for example, when plans affect features of the landscape that connect Natura 2000 sites or that may obstruct the

movements of species or disrupt the continuity of a fluvial or woodland ecosystem. To determine the possible effects of the plan or project on Natura 2000 sites, it is necessary to identify not only the relevant sites but also the habitats and species that are significantly present within them, as well as the site objectives.

The Zone of Influence may be determined by considering the Proposed Development's potential connectivity with European sites, in terms of:

- Nature, scale, timing and duration of all aspects of the proposed works and possible impacts, including the nature and size of excavations, storage of materials, flat/sloping sites;
- Distance and nature of potential pathways (dilution and dispersion; intervening 'buffer' lands, roads etc.); and
- Location of ecological features and their sensitivity to the possible impacts.

The potential for source pathway receptor connectivity is firstly identified through GIS interrogation and detailed information is then provided on sites with connectivity. European sites that are located within a potential Zone of Influence of the Proposed Development are listed in Table 1 and presented in Figure 4 below. Spatial boundary data on the Natura 2000 network was extracted from the NPWS website (www.npws.ie) on 26 October 2022. This data was interrogated using GIS analysis to provide mapping, distances, locations and pathways to all sites of conservation concern including pNHAs, NHA and European sites

Table 1 European Sites located within the potential Zone of Influence¹ of the Proposed Development.

Site Code	Site name	Distance (km) ²
000485	Corraun Plateau SAC	1.60

The nearest European sites to the Proposed Development are associated with Corraun Plateau and include the Corraun Plateau SAC (Site Code 000485), which is located just over 1.6km to the south.

The Qualifying Interests (QIs) and Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) of the European sites in the vicinity of the Proposed Development are provided in Table 2 below.

¹ All European sites potentially connected irrespective of the nature or scale of the Proposed Development.

² Distances indicated are the closest geographical distance between the Proposed Development and the European site boundary, as made available by the NPWS. Connectivity along hydrological pathways may be significantly greater.

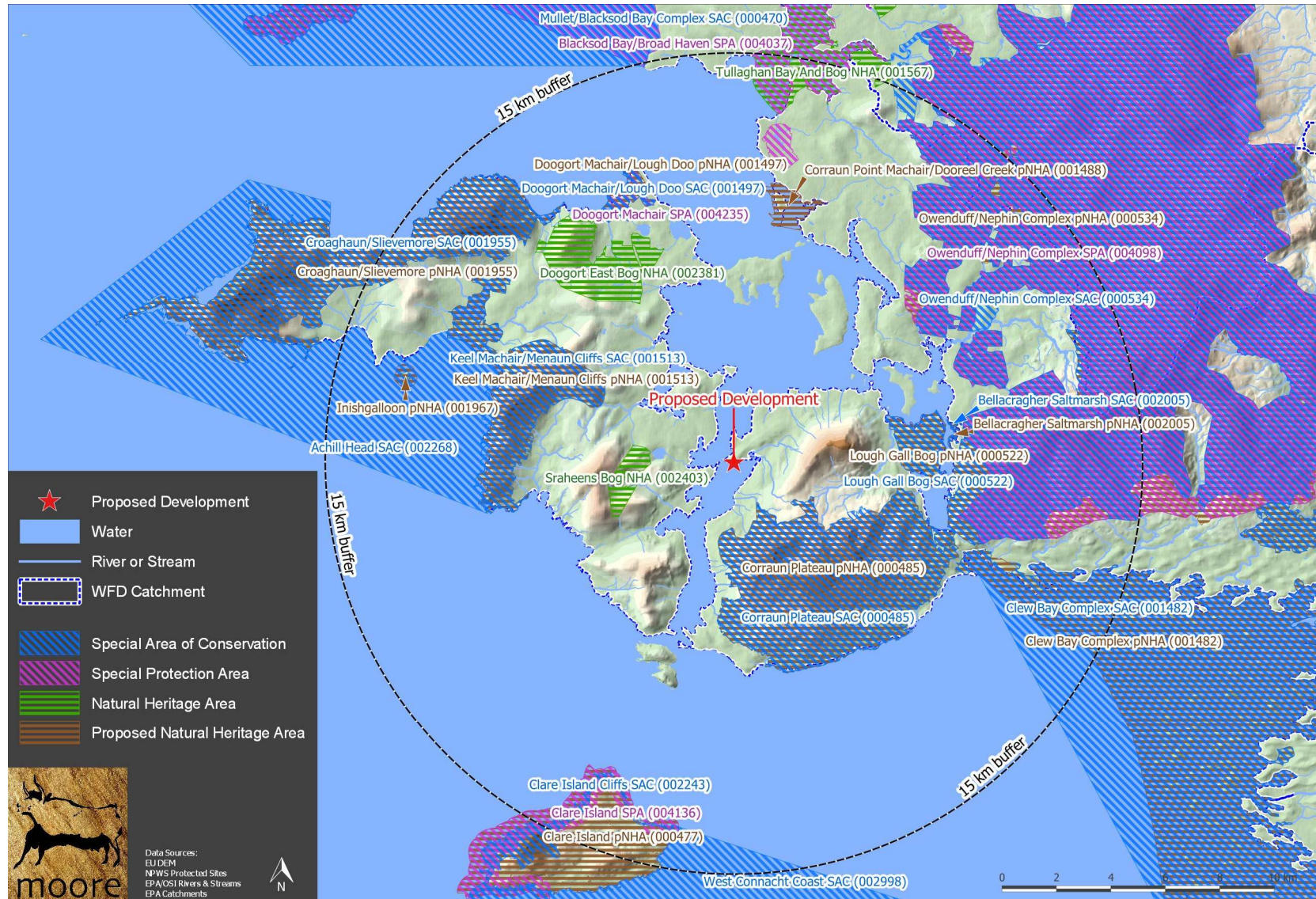


Figure 4. Showing European sites and NHAs/pNHAs within the wider Potential Zone of Influence of the Proposed Development.

Table 2 Identification of relevant European sites using Source-Pathway-Receptor model and compilation of information QIs and conservation objectives.

European site name & Site code	Location Relative to the Proposed Development Site	Connectivity – Source-Pathway-Receptor	Considered further in Screening – Y/N
<p>Corraun Plateau SAC (000485)</p> <p>NPWS (2016) Conservation Objectives: Corraun Plateau SAC 000485. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs</p>	<p>1.6km to the south of the Proposed Development</p>	<p>No</p> <p>There are no pathways or connectivity to the habitats or species of this site.</p>	<p>N</p>

4.2. Ecological Network Supporting Natura 2000 Sites

A concurrent GIS analysis of the proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHA) and designated Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) in terms of their role in supporting the species using Natura 2000 sites was undertaken along with GIS investigation of European sites. It was assumed that these supporting roles mainly related to mobile fauna such as mammals and birds which may use pNHAs and NHAs as ecological corridors or “stepping stones” between Natura 2000 sites.

Article 10 of the Habitats Directive and the Habitats Regulations 2011 place a high degree of importance on such non-Natura 2000 areas as features that connect the Natura 2000 network. Features such as ponds, woodlands and important hedgerows were taken into account in the decision process and during the preparation of this AA Screening report.

There are no other areas of conservation concern that would be affected by the Proposed Development.

The NHAs and pNHAs identified in Figure 4 are located outside the Zone of Influence. There are no areas of supporting habitat that will be affected by the Proposed Development.

5. Identification of Potential Impacts & Assessment of Significance

The Proposed Development is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the sites considered in the assessment and therefore potential impacts must be identified and considered.

5.1. Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

The consideration of all potential direct and indirect impacts that may result in significant effects on the conservation objectives of a European site, taking into account the size and scale of the Proposed Development are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Assessment of Likely Significant Effects.

Identification of all potential direct and indirect impacts that may result in significant effects on the conservation objectives of a European site, taking into account the size and scale of the project.	
Impacts:	Significance of Impacts:
<p>Construction phase e.g.</p> <p>Vegetation clearance</p> <p>Demolition</p> <p>Surface water runoff from soil excavation/infill/landscaping (including borrow pits)</p> <p>Dust, noise, vibration</p> <p>Lighting disturbance</p> <p>Impact on groundwater/dewatering</p> <p>Storage of excavated/construction materials</p> <p>Access to site</p> <p>Pests</p>	<p>The Proposed Development site is not located adjacent or within a European site, therefore there is no risk of habitat loss or fragmentation or any effects on QI habitats or species directly or ex-situ.</p>
<p>Operational phase e.g.</p> <p>Direct emission to air and water</p> <p>Surface water runoff containing contaminant or sediment</p> <p>Lighting disturbance</p> <p>Noise/vibration</p> <p>Changes to water/groundwater due to drainage or abstraction</p> <p>Presence of people, vehicles and activities</p>	<p>All foul and surface water runoff, once the facility is operational, will be contained on site and discharged to urban drainage systems.</p> <p>There is no real likelihood of any significant effects on European Sites in the wider catchment area.</p> <p>The proposed development is located at a distance of removal such that there will be no disturbance to qualifying interest species in any European sites.</p>

Physical presence of structures (e.g. collision risks)	
Potential for accidents or incidents	
Describe any likely changes to the European site:	
<p>Examples of the type of changes to give consideration to include:</p> <p>Reduction or fragmentation of habitat area</p> <p>Disturbance to QI species</p> <p>Habitat or species fragmentation</p> <p>Reduction or fragmentation in species density</p> <p>Changes in key indicators of conservation status value (water quality etc.)</p> <p>Changes to areas of sensitivity or threats to QI</p> <p>Interference with the key relationships that define the structure or ecological function of the site</p> <p>Climate change</p>	<p>None.</p> <p>The Proposed Development site is not located adjacent or within a European site, therefore there is no risk of habitat loss or fragmentation or any effects on QI habitats or species directly or ex-situ.</p> <p>It can be noted that the level of development recorded during fieldwork and distance from the coastal SPAs do not present opportunities to support the bird species for which the nearby SPAs are designated.</p>
Are 'mitigation' measures necessary to reach a conclusion that likely significant effects can be ruled out at screening?	
No	N/A

On the basis of the information supplied, which is considered adequate to undertake a screening determination and having regard to:

- the nature and scale of the proposed development,
- the intervening land uses and distance from European sites,
- the lack of direct connections with regard to the Source-Pathway-Receptor model,

It may be concluded that the proposed development, individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, would not be likely to have a significant effect on the above listed European sites or any other European site, in view of the said sites' conservation objectives.

5.2. Assessment of Potential In-Combination Effects

In-combination effects are changes in the environment that result from numerous human-induced, small-scale alterations. In-combination effects can be thought of as occurring through two main pathways: first, through persistent additions or losses of the same materials or resource, and second, through the compounding effects as a result of the coming together of two or more effects.

As part of the Screening for an Appropriate Assessment, in addition to the Proposed Development, other relevant plans and projects in the area must also be considered at this stage. This step aims to identify at this early stage any possible significant in-combination effects of the Proposed Development with other such plans and projects on European sites.

A review of the National Planning Application Database was undertaken. The first stage of this review confirmed that there were no data gaps in the area where the Proposed Development is located. The database was then queried for developments granted planning permission within 2km of the Proposed Development within the last three years, these are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Planning applications granted permission in the vicinity of the Proposed Development.

Planning Ref.	Description of Development	Comments
19446	Construct single storey dwelling with rooms in the roof and a lean-to garage for one car	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
19554	Construct a standalone sports hall facility to include, a new purpose built indoor 668 sqm sports hall with recreational and play area, purpose built sports gymnasium, changing rooms with toilet and shower facilities, storerooms, ancillary accommodation and office accommodation. The development will be inclusive of site development works with car parking and drainage connections to existing services along with all necessary site works and ancillaries	The proposed development, by itself or in combination with other developments in the vicinity would not be likely to have a significant effect on European sites.
203	New front entrance lobby, external terrace area, canopy and signage to supermarket. Retention of unauthorised structures comprising part of retail area and stair well of existing supermarket of total 64sqm. Retention of temporary car park on west side granted under planning reference 08/453 for supermarket customer and staff use and forming new vehicle entrance, modification to vehicle entrance to existing car park on east side, setting back boundary walls, forming new footpaths, parking spaces, accessible ramps and steps between both vehicle entrances. New entrance gate to builder's providers' yard off existing car park, modification to car park layout and goods vehicle set down area	The proposed development, by itself or in combination with other developments in the vicinity would not be likely to have a significant effect on European sites.
20253	Construct a private dwelling house with connection to public services together with all ancillary site works	The proposed development, by itself or in combination with other developments in the vicinity would not be likely to have a significant effect on European sites.
20386	Carry out alterations/modifications to existing dwelling house comprising of 1. Demolition of existing flat roof rear extension and front porch and 2. Construction of a new	No likely impacts on Natura 2000 network arising from this development.

Planning Ref.	Description of Development	Comments
	extension to southern side of existing dwelling (to be partly located on footprint of extensions to be removed including all ancillary site development works.	
20476	Construct dwelling house with waste water treatment tank and ancillaries along with all necessary site works and ancillaries.	The proposed development site is not located within or immediately adjacent to any site designated for nature conservation. For this reason, no appropriate assessment is required.
20628	Construct extensions to the front and side of the existing dwelling house along with alterations and modifications to existing dwelling house	The proposed development, by itself or in combination with other developments in the vicinity would not be likely to have a significant effect on European sites.
20824	Construct new single storey dwellinghouse with connection to public services along with all necessary site works and ancillaries.	The proposed development, by itself or in combination with other developments in the vicinity would not be likely to have a significant effect on European sites.
211100	Construct dwelling house, proprietary effluent treatment unit, percolation area and detached domestic garage including all ancillary site works	The proposed development, by itself or in combination with other developments in the vicinity would not be likely to have a significant effect on European sites.
211229	Construct 2 single storey extensions to the front of existing dwelling house. retain and complete partly erected storey and a half extension to the rear of the dwelling house (retention of partly constructed rear extension previously permitted under p07/1993)	The proposed development, by itself or in combination with other developments in the vicinity would not be likely to have a significant effect on European sites.
211347	Construction of a domestic house and garage with effluent treatment system and to include all other ancillary site development works associated with this development	The proposed development, by itself or in combination with other developments in the vicinity would not be likely to have a significant effect on European sites.
21444	Construction of a dwelling house, proprietary effluent treatment system, percolation area and associated siteworks	The proposed development, by itself or in combination with other developments in the vicinity would not be likely to have a significant effect on European sites.

There are no predicted in-combination effects given that the reasons discussed in the 'Comments' column of Table 4 above and given that the Proposed Development is unlikely to have any adverse effects on any European sites.

The Mayo County Development Plan in complying with the requirements of the Habitats Directive requires that all Projects and Plans that could affect the Natura 2000 sites in the same zone of impact of the Proposed Development site would be initially screened for Appropriate Assessment and if requiring Stage 2 AA, that appropriate employable mitigation measures would be put in place to avoid, reduce or ameliorate negative impacts. In this way any, in-combination impacts with Plans or Projects for the proposed development area and surrounding townlands in which the proposed development site is located, would be avoided.

The listed developments have been granted permission in most cases with conditions relating to sustainable development by the consenting authority in compliance with the relevant Local Authority Development Plan and in compliance with the Local Authority requirement for regard to the Habitats Directive. The development

cannot have received planning permission without having met the consenting authority requirement in this regard. There are no predicted in-combination effects given that it is predicted that the Proposed Development will have no effect on any European site.

Any new applications for the Proposed Development area will be assessed on a case by case basis *initially* by Mayo County Council which will determine the requirement for AA Screening as per the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

6. Conclusion

There is no connectivity to the Corraun Plateau or to any other European sites within or outside the potential zone of influence.

There are no predicted effects on any European sites given:

- The distance between the Proposed Development and any European Sites;
- The lack of connectivity between the Proposed Development and any hydrological pathways; there are no watercourses within the Proposed Development boundary and there is no connectivity between the Proposed Development site and any European sites;
- The Proposed Development is to be connected to the existing public sewer network for the treatment of wastewater.
- There are no predicted emissions to air, water or the environment during the construction or operational phases that would result in significant effects.

It has been objectively concluded by Moore Group Environmental Services that:

1. The Proposed Development is not directly connected with, or necessary to the conservation management of the European sites considered in this assessment.
2. The Proposed Development is unlikely to either directly or indirectly significantly affect the Qualifying interests or Conservation Objectives of the European sites considered in this assessment.
3. The Proposed Development, alone or in combination with other projects, is not likely to have significant effects on the European sites considered in this assessment in view of their conservation objectives.
4. It is possible to conclude that significant effects can be excluded at the screening stage.

It can be *excluded*, on the basis of objective information, that the Proposed Development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

An appropriate assessment is not, therefore, required.

A final determination will be made by the competent authority in this regard.

7. References

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2010) Guidance on Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland (as amended February 2010).

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