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LIMERICK GREENWAY HUB @ NEWCASTLE WEST SERVICES BUILDING

Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report

Prepared for:

Limerick City and County Council



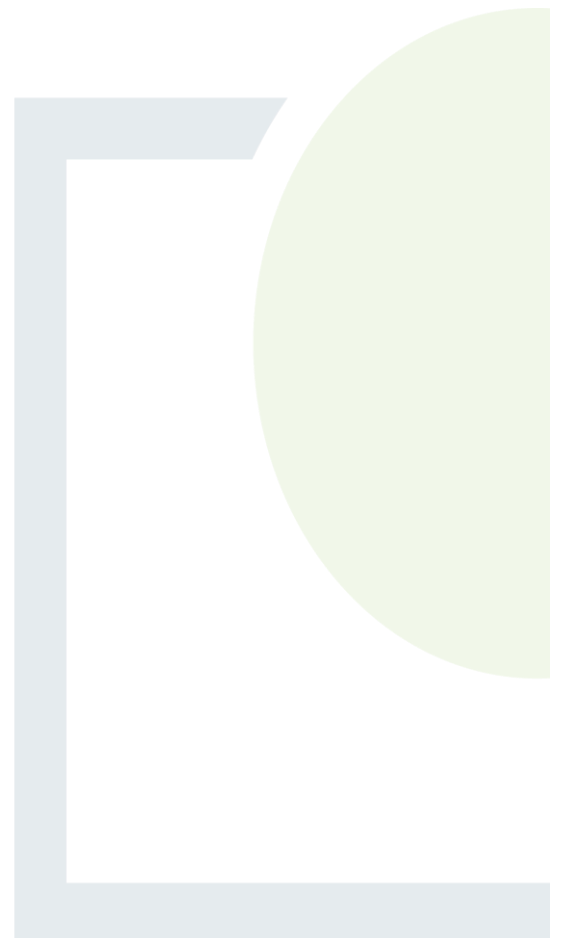
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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT FOR LIMERICK GREENWAY HUB @ NEWCASTLE WEST SERVICES BUILDING, CO LIMERICK

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Abstract: This Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report has been prepared in relation to the development of the Limerick Greenway Hub @ Newcastle West Services Building at Station Road, Newcastle West, Co. Limerick. The proposed Greenway Hub will include a purpose-built service building to facilitate a bike hire depot, coffee dock, toilets, and services alongside car parking facilities, public plazas, seating, bike stands, bins, signage, drinking water fountains, a new public road crossing and landscaping works.

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1. DESCRIPTION AND KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Development Description - Overview

Part VIII permission was previously granted for a Car Park at Station Road in 2022 (Planning Reference 228019). In light of the popularity and success of the greenway in its first year of operation it became apparent that there was a need to increase the scope of the proposed development at Station Road to transform the development from a simple car park to a complete Greenway Hub including the construction of a services building with the provision of a coffee dock, bike hire depot, store, services and toilets included. Additionally, universal access parking facilities, additional standard parking facilities, increased electric vehicle charging, additional coach and minibus facilities, a public plaza with design features including benches, bins, bike stands, landscaping, bike repair station, and finally the provision of increased connectivity to the town of Newcastle West via a new road crossing to connect to the existing Bishops Court trail. The proposed development now includes the following key design elements:

- A 243m² service building utilised as a bike hire depot;
- A coffee dock with associated canopy and outdoor seating;
- Associated building utilities including toilets, store, and services.
- A public plaza to allow for congregation and space for public amenity.
- Provision of a zebra crossing to connect the hub to the bishop's court trail which leads on the Newcastle West Town.
- Provision of ancillary public amenity features such as benches, bike stands, bike repair station, bins, drinking water fountain, route maps and signage.
- Provision of additional architectural planting and trees.
- Provision of 73 no. Standard Car Parking Spaces
- Provision of 5 no. Disability Spaces
- Provision of 1 no. Universal Access Space for Electrical Vehicle Charging
- Provision of 3 no. Spaces for Electric Vehicle Charging
- Provision of 2 no. Coach and Mini-Bus Spaces

With the addition of these facilities to the project scope, the layout of the development required significant change from the original design. To maximise the potential of the site, a public realm architect was engaged to advise on the new Greenway Hub design and layout. This layout not only provides a practical car parking facility, but an attractive amenity that will act as a Greenway trailhead for users and local residents in Newcastle West. The Greenway Hub building will be situated at the rear of the site, with the building positioned in such a way to allow the public aspects of the design to face both the greenway route and car parking; whilst all ancillary spaces and services face the rear. The proposed is intended to be a landmark building and a point of arrival for the locals and tourists using the greenway. It has been designed as a simple contemporary building able to respond appropriately to the context of the existing environment and function in terms of form, scale, colour, and expression.



Based on the ecological survey completed the design has been shaped around the existing habitat, the area at the back of the site consisting of blackthorn dominated scrub land, dry meadows and grassy verges will be protected and preserved in its current state. It is planned also that the hedgerows on the west and east of the site will be protected and preserved. The internal car park layout has been designed to achieve a good balance between providing sufficient public amenity space for the large number of visitors expected while also providing greenspaces and serval pockets earmarked for planting.

The existing site is steeply sloped, and the gradient will be moderated during the construction of the proposed Greenway Hub to ensure that the achieved gradient is suitable for all users. All surfacing, kerbs, access points will be designed for universal accessibility. To make the Greenway Hub attractive to local residents or greenway users without cars, a welcoming entrance plaza is proposed adjacent to Station Road with the car parking facilities located behind. This area will also be furnished with a Greenway totem, directional signage, drinking water fountains, benches, tables, and bins making the car park an attractive outdoor recreational destination in its own right. The Greenway Hub building will consist of a bike hiring depot, coffee dock, storage, toilets and services, with associated public realm space consisting of outdoor seating areas, paved and landscaped areas.

To provide safe access to both the proposed Greenway Hub and the existing civic amenity centre west of the site a shared entrance has been proposed. Within the Greenway Hub a one-way entrance/exist system is proposed. A central island will divide traffic lanes within the car park at the rear of the site where parking for vulnerable road users is to be provided. The width of the central island has been increased to provide additional space for Greenway users (in particular those towing trailers with children). Wide walkways and a two-way cycle track are to be provided down the eastern edge of the site connecting the Greenway and recreational areas to the Building Hub. Changes in road surfacing material are frequent within the proposed Greenway Hub encouraging lower vehicle speeds and highlighting areas where pedestrian and vulnerable road users may cross in front of motorists. The car parking areas are to be lined with trees, bushes and other landscaping elements to tie-in with the rear of the site and the plaza, providing a consistent aesthetic throughout the site.

An existing signalised pedestrian crossing is located 60m west of the proposed Greenway Hub. The existing pedestrian crossing services the existing school on the south side of Station Road. Following consultation with the school it has been decided to extinguish this crossing point. In its place a new 6.0m signalised and raised toucan crossing will be provided connecting the school to the Greenway Hub and car park. The raised table at the crossing and build out in the kerbing will act as a traffic calming feature and give greenway users wishing to continue on to the town centre via the Bishops Court trail section a safe, raised crossing point. Pavement build outs, bollards, road marking and road signage will be provided to slow down motorists on approach to the crossing point. Chicane gates will also be provided on approach to the crossing and plaza to slow down cyclists, further reducing the likelihood of collision between Greenway users and vehicular traffic along Station Road. Bollards and planting will be used in strategic locations to remove desire lines and funnel greenway users, school children and local residents to the wide crossing points. A non-signalised raised courtesy crossing will also be provided across the amenity centre access road as part of the development.



2. EIA SCREENING

2.1 Introduction

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a means of drawing together an assessment of the potential significant environmental effects arising from a proposed development in a systematic way. It ensures that environmental implications of decisions on development proposals are taken into account before the decisions are made. The purpose of the screening report is to assist the competent authority, Limerick City and County Council to determine if EIA is required for this project.

This EIA Screening clearly demonstrates that the proposal will not give rise to any significant environmental effects that would warrant the carrying out of an EIA; as evident from the assessment, and reports from respective consultants submitted in support of the application.

2.2 EIA Project Types and Legislative Basis

The European Union Directive 2014/52/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, requires member states to ensure that a competent authority carries out an assessment of the environmental impacts of certain types of projects, as listed in the Directive, prior to development consent being given for the project.

The EIA Directive requires that:

“in order to ensure a high level of protection of the environment and human health, screening procedures and EIA assessments should take account of the impact of the whole project in question, including where relevant, its subsurface and underground, during the construction, operational and, where relevant demolition phases”.

The Requirement for the EIA of various types of development are transposed into Irish legislation under the:

- Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (As amended). Schedule 5, Part 1 of the Planning Regulations 2001 (as amended) includes a list of projects which are subject to EIA based on their type. Part 2 of the same schedule includes a list of projects which by reason of scale also fall into the EIA category.
- European Union (Roads Act 1993) (Environmental Impact Assessment)(Amendment) Regulations 2019. Section 5 amends Section 50 of the Roads Act 1993 as amended in respect of road developments that shall be the subject of an EIA. Article 8 of the Roads Regulations 1994 prescribe road development that shall be subject to an EIA.

2.3 Determining Whether EIA is Required

The Requirement for the EIA of various types of development are transposed into Irish legislation under Schedule 5, Part 1 of the Planning and Development Act and the Planning and Development (Amendment) Regulations 2001-2021, together with the Roads Act 1993, and Road Regulations 1994 as amended. These Acts and Regulations define a list of projects which are subject to mandatory EIA based on their type.



Reviewing the applicable Acts and Regulations, Schedule 5, Part 1 of the Planning and Development Act and the Planning and Development (Amendment) Regulations 2001-2021 specifies that an EIA must be completed for Infrastructure projects including car parks with 400 or more spaces.

The proposed Greenway Hub at Newcastle West includes 84 spaces, significantly less than 400 spaces, the proposed development therefore does not trigger mandatory EIA under the above provision.

Schedule 5, Part 1 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) specifies that an EIA must be completed for urban development projects which would involve greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 Hectares in the case of other built-up areas and 20 hectares elsewhere.

The proposed Greenway Hub at Newcastle West will occupy 1.2 hectares and is a built-up area. As this is below the 10 hectare threshold it therefore does not trigger mandatory EIA under the above provisions.

With respect to the Roads Act 1993, and Road Regulations 1994 the proposed Greenway Hub is not considered to fall into or above any of the type or scale thresholds requiring a mandatory EIA.

Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) also includes a section relating to 'sub threshold' (discretionary) EIA. This is where any project listed in Schedule 5 Part 2 which does not exceed a quantity, area or other limit specified in respect of the relevant class of development should be subject to EIA where the project would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, having regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Regulations. Therefore, whilst the project by virtue of its scale is minor in nature, applying the precautionary principle the project is screened for EIA below.

2.4 Sub-Threshold EIA Screening

This section of this report screens the project in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 7 and Annex III of the EIA Directive. The screening demonstrates that there will be no significant impacts associated with the proposed development on the receiving environment in isolation or cumulatively with other projects or proposals in the area.

It is noted that the proposed scheme is a Local Authority own development and therefore, the requirement for sub-threshold EIA is addressed under Article 120 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), which states:

- a) Where a local authority proposes to carry out a subthreshold development, the authority shall carry out a preliminary examination of, at the least, the nature, size or location of the development.
- b) Where the local authority concludes, based on such preliminary examination, that:
 - i. there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed scheme, it shall conclude that an EIA is not required,
 - ii. there is significant and realistic doubt in regard to the likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed scheme, it shall prepare, or cause to be prepared, the information specified in Schedule 7A for the purposes of a screening determination, or
 - iii. there is a real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed scheme, it shall— (I) conclude that the development would be likely to have such effects, and (II) prepare, or cause to be prepared, an EIAR in respect of the development.



Annex III of the EIA Directive details the criteria to be used to determine whether a project should be subject to EIA and Schedule 7 of the European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 implements this Directive in Ireland.

This assessment utilises the Screening Checklist as detailed in the EU Guidelines to screen the proposed development with regard to EIA requirements and this checklist encompasses the details required under Annex III of the EIA Directive and in Schedule 7 of the 2018 EIA Regulations – refer to Table 2.1. Any potential impacts are then assessed with regard to their characteristics.

In completing this screening assessment regard has also been had to EIA Screening Guidelines contained in the Office of the Planning Regulator’s Practice Note PN02 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening.



Table 2-1: Sub Threshold EIA Screening Checklist

Checklist Question	Yes/No/Briefly Describe	Is this likely to result in a significant impact? Yes/No/Why?
1. Will construction, operation, decommissioning, or demolition works of the Project involve actions that will cause physical changes in the locality (topography, land use, changes in waterbodies, etc.)?	Yes. The existing landscape will be modified to accommodate the proposed Greenway Hub. The proposed development will occupy lands previously undeveloped. The development will respect the visual quality of the amenity area. It will not affect any changes in waterbodies. Due to the scale of the project it is not considered to have a significant impact.	No, due to the scale of the development this is not likely to result in a significant impact.
2. Will construction or the operation of the Project use natural resources such as land, water, materials or energy, especially any resources which are non-renewable or are in short supply	Yes. The proposed development will occupy land which is previously undeveloped. An ecological survey of the area has been completed. The most valuable habitat from an ecological perspective is at the Northern end of the site. The proposed design will retain a significant portion of this habitat. Due to the scale of the project the proposed use of natural resources is not considered to have a significant impact.	No, due to the scale of the development this is not likely to result in a significant impact.
3. Will the Project involve the use, storage, transport, handling or production of substances or materials which could be harmful to human health, to the environment or raise concerns about actual or perceived risks to human health?	No. All materials used during construction are standard materials with associated best practice measures for the use of such – for example small scale concrete works.	No, this is not likely to result in a significant impact.
4. Will the Project produce solid wastes during construction or operation or decommissioning?	Yes. There will be some material waste during construction and decommissioning. All waste will be removed by a licenced waste operator and disposed of appropriately.	No, this is not likely to result in a significant impact. All waste will be removed by a licenced waste operator and disposed of appropriately.
5. Will the Project release pollutants or any hazardous, toxic or noxious substances to air or lead to exceeding Ambient Air Quality standards in Directives 2008/50/EC and 2004/107/EC?	No risk to human health due to pollution is likely considering adoption of best practice construction methods.	No, this is not likely to result in a significant impact.



Checklist Question	Yes/No/Briefly Describe	Is this likely to result in a significant impact? Yes/No/Why?
6. Will the Project cause noise and vibration or the releasing of light, heat energy or electromagnetic radiation?	During construction noise emissions will occur from construction plant and will be a maximum 63 dBL _{aeq} at nearest receptors. No heat energy or electromagnetic radiation will be released.	No, levels of noise and vibration anticipated during construction are not likely to cause significant impact.
7. Will the Project lead to risks of contamination of land or water from releases of pollutants onto the ground or into surface waters, groundwater, coastal waters or the sea?	No, drainage for the proposed development will be designed in accordance with SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) manual to maintain existing water flows.	No, this is not likely to result in a significant impact with normal best practice construction practices and sustainable designed on-site drainage
8. Will there be any risk of accidents during construction or operation of the Project that could affect human health or the environment?	Yes. A Health and Safety Plan and emergency response procedures will be prepared to identify the hazards and ensure that the overall risks are mitigated down to a low level.	No, this is not likely to result in a significant impact with normal best practice construction practices implemented on site.
9. Will the Project result in environmentally related social changes, for example, in demography, traditional lifestyles, employment?	Yes, the proposed project will improve the safety and utility for existing greenway users. The proposed will create employment opportunities within the area and will serve as a social amenity for greenway users and residents. Positive developments along the greenway also has potential to boost businesses in the area as the developed site will bring a greater volume of visitors to the area.	No, this is not likely to result in a significant impact.
10. Are there any other factors that should be considered such as consequential development which could lead to environmental impacts or the potential for cumulative impacts with other existing or planned activities in the locality?	No. The proposed Greenway Hub will form part of the Limerick Greenway which has already been constructed and consented.	No. The project will not result in significant cumulative impacts with other projects.



Checklist Question	Yes/No/Briefly Describe	Is this likely to result in a significant impact? Yes/No/Why?
<p>11. Is the Project located within or close to any areas which are protected under international, EU or national or local legislation for their ecological, landscape, cultural or other value, which could be affected by the Project?</p>	<p>The 3 closest protected European Sites are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA located 4.0km from the proposed development. • Lower River Shannon SAC, located 8.2km at the closest point from the proposed development. • Askeaton Fen Complex SAC, located 13.6km from the proposed development. <p>Based on the site surveys and subsequent AA screening completed the proposed development will not have any significant impact on the sites listed above.</p>	<p>An Appropriate Assessment Screening has been carried out in more detail regarding this. The localised scale of the works coupled with the distance from the protected sites confirms that no protected sites being affected.</p> <p>The project will not result in significant impacts.</p>
<p>12. Are there any other areas on or around the location that are important or sensitive for reasons of their ecology e.g. wetlands, watercourses or other waterbodies, the coastal zone, mountains, forests or woodlands, that could be affected by the Project.</p>	<p>The proposed development will occupy land which is previously undeveloped. An ecological survey of the area has been completed. The most valuation habitat from an ecological perspective is at the Northern end of the site. The proposed design will retain a significant portion of this habitat. Due to the scale of the project the habitat loss is not considered to have a significant impact.</p>	<p>No. The project will not result in significant impacts.</p>
<p>13. Are there any areas on or around the location that are used by protected, important or sensitive species of fauna or flora e.g. for breeding, nesting, foraging, resting, overwintering, migration, which could be affected by the Project?</p>	<p>No. A site survey and ecological appraisal of the site has been completed and significant impact from the proposed development have been ruled out.</p>	<p>No. The project will not result in significant impacts.</p>



Checklist Question	Yes/No/Briefly Describe	Is this likely to result in a significant impact? Yes/No/Why?
14. Are there any inland, coastal, marine or underground waters (or features of the marine environment) on or around the location that could be affected by the Project?	No. There are no inland, marine or underground waters on or around the location that will be affected.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.
15. Are there any areas or features of high landscape or scenic value on or around the location which could be affected by the Project?	The area is located in the western uplands as defined by the Limerick City and County Development Plan. The proposed development will incorporate planting, hedgerows and landscaping which are in keeping with the surrounding landscape.	Impact on the landscape character of the area is considered to be slight and not significant.
16. Are there any routes or facilities on or around the location which are used by the public for access to recreation or other facilities, which could be affected by the Project?	The Limerick Greenway serves as a recreational route in the area and will be positively impacted by the development which will provide improved access and facilities for greenway users.	No. The project will not result in significant negative impacts.
17. Are there any transport routes on or around the location that are susceptible to congestion or which cause environmental problems, which could be affected by the Project?	The proposed development will provide additional parking facilities for greenway users which will alleviate nuisance parking and congestion in the area. The provision of increased connectivity to the town of Newcastle West via a new signalised toucan pedestrian and cycle road crossing to connect to the existing Bishops Court trail, will aid congestion and safety for all road users. The Hub shall help alleviate traffic congestion and sporadic parking around Newcastle West.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.
18. Is the Project in a location in which it is likely to be highly visible to many people?	The proposed project will be visible from Station Road Newcastle West. The Hub building is located to the rear or the site and will also be visible to greenway users. The proposed development includes landscaping and public realm design elements to ensure that the development will fit within the context of its surroundings.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.



Checklist Question	Yes/No/Briefly Describe	Is this likely to result in a significant impact? Yes/No/Why?
19. Are there any areas or features of historic or cultural importance on or around the location that could be affected by the Project?	There are no recorded archaeological sites within the proposed site boundary or within a 200m radius of the site.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.
20. Is the Project located in a previously undeveloped area where there will be a loss of greenfield land?	The project is located within previously undeveloped greenfield lands. Based on the ecological surveys completed, the most important habitat areas are on the northern side of the site, a portion of this habitat will be retained and incorporated within the development. The remaining habitat is a mix of greenfield and previously developed lands. Due to the scale of the proposed project and the measures included in the design to preserve the existing habitat, the project will not result in significant impacts. It is also planned that the hedgerows on the west and east of the site will be protected and preserved. The internal car park layout has been designed to achieve a good balance between providing sufficient public amenity space while also providing greenspaces and several pockets earmarked for planting.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.
21. Are there any plans for future land uses within or around the location that could be affected by the Project?	No. There are no plans for future land uses in the immediate area which might be negatively affected by the project.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.
22. Are there areas within or around the location which are densely populated or built-up, that could be affected by the Project?	No. The site is located within Newcastle West town. The proposed development will provide improved facilities in support of the Limerick Greenway. This will have a positive effect on the local area.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.
23. Are there any areas within or around the location which are occupied by sensitive land uses e.g. hospitals, schools, places of worship, community facilities, that could be affected by the Project?	A primary care centre is under construction to the south of the proposed development. The existing Gaelscoil O'Doghair is also located south of the proposed development on the opposite side of Station Road.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.



Checklist Question	Yes/No/Briefly Describe	Is this likely to result in a significant impact? Yes/No/Why?
	The proposed development will be complementary to these existing land uses and will not have any significant negative impact.	
24. Are there any areas within or around the location which contain important, high quality or scarce resources e.g. groundwater, surface waters, forestry, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, minerals, that could be Affected by the Project?	No. There are no areas in proximity to the site which contain important, high quality or scarce resources that could be affected by the project.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.
25. Are there any areas within or around the location which are already subject to pollution or environmental damage e.g. where existing legal environmental standards are exceeded, that could be affected by the Project?	No. The air quality in the area is considered good and the catchment water body in the area is considered good.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.
26. Is the Project location susceptible to earthquakes, subsidence, landslides, erosion, flooding or extreme or adverse climatic conditions e.g. temperature inversions, fogs, severe winds, which could cause the Project to present environmental problems?	No. The project location is not susceptible to natural disasters. Ground conditions are stable and not susceptible to erosion and the site is not located within a flood zone.	No. The project will not result in significant impacts.



2.5 Impact Characterisation

In summary, it is noted that the proposed works will have an overall positive impact on users of the Limerick Greenway and local residents. Once completed, the proposed will result in improved facilities and access in support of the Greenway and as a social amenity space for the community along with improved connectivity with Newcastle West. As detailed in Table 2-1, there are no likely significant negative impacts associated with the proposed works.



3. CONCLUSION

The subject works which relate to the construction of the Limerick Greenway Hub at Newcastle West do not individually or cumulatively fall into a class of development set out in Schedule 5, Part 1 and 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended). The subject works do not fall into any of the categories of development for which EIA is considered mandatory under the Roads Act 1993 (as amended) or the Road Regulations 1994 (as amended). Therefore, the requirements for a mandatory EIA can be screened out.

However, sub-threshold EIA may be required where the project would be likely to have significant effects on the environment. Criteria for the consideration of sub-threshold EIA is set out in Schedule 7 and Schedule 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended). These criteria have been set out within this document with respect to the subject development.

As mentioned above, the potential for the proposed project to have significant effects on nearby protected habitats has been considered, however it is concluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt that the integrity of the 3 no. nearest European Sites will not be affected.

Potential impacts to the receiving environment during construction have been set out. Slight air quality and noise impacts are likely during the construction phase of the project due to the operation of construction machinery and the carrying out of other construction activities, however, these are not considered to be significant given the distance to nearby receptors and the nature of the proposed works.

Slight visual impacts as a result of the subject development are noted, however, these impacts are not considered significant with regard to the visual vulnerability of the area, and the proposed development type.

A slight loss of habitat has been noted, the proposed design has been selected to minimize the loss of the most valuable portion of habitat at the Northern end of the site. Due to the scale of the development and proposed retention of a portion of the habitat this loss is not considered to have a significant impact.

It is therefore submitted that sub-threshold EIA is not required for the subject remediation works, due to the project's limited impact on the receiving environment with respect to Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), Annex II of the EIA Directive and the screening checklist provided in the EC guidance document for EIA Screening, as set out in this document.



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