

Appropriate Assessment Screening for the Limerick Greenway Hub @ Ardagh

Prepared on behalf of the Limerick City and County Council, by Rory Dalton, Independent Ecologist.



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1. Executive Summary

This document comprises the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report to provide information to the competent authority to complete their own screening for Appropriate Assessment for the proposed Limerick Greenway Hub @ Ardagh. It has been concluded that the proposed project will not have likely significant effects on any Natura 2000 (European) site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

2. Introduction

Rory Dalton was appointed by Limerick City and County Council to undertake an Appropriate Assessment Screening for work to be completed at the Limerick Greenway Hub @ Ardagh site. This Screening Statement outlines the results of a Habitats Directive Stage 1 Screening Assessment for the proposed work. This is a Screening Statement of the proposed project and has been undertaken in order to comply with the requirements of the Habitats Directive Article 6(3). The function of this Screening Statement is to provide information that will facilitate the competent authority in completing a Stage 1 Screening Assessment of the proposed project's potential to result in likely significant effects to the Conservation Objectives of Natura 2000 Sites.

2.1 Appropriate Assessment Process

Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (Habitats Directive) provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance.

The Directive requires that where a plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site, while not directly connected with or necessary to the nature conservation management of the site, it will be subject to 'Appropriate Assessment' to identify any implications for the European site in view of the site's Conservation Objectives. Specifically, Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive states:

" 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 subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public."

The provisions of Article 6(3) do not apply where the proposed plan or project is '*connected with or necessary to the management of the site*'. In this case, the proposed development is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site(s) and as such an assessment as to whether the project would be likely to have significant effects on European Sites must be carried out.

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive is implemented by the provisions of sections 177U and 177V of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended). Article 177U requires that before consent is given, the competent authority must carry out a screening for appropriate assessment to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the development, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the 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, an appropriate assessment of its implications for the Site(s) in view of the Site's conservation objectives is required to be carried out. Section 42, paragraph 13 of the S.I. No. 293/2021 - European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Amendment) Regulations 2021, has also introduced a mandatory requirement for the public authority to undertake consultation with the public prior to the Appropriate Assessment determination being made, and that the public authority shall have regard to any submissions or observations received during the public consultation.

2.2 Methodology

Documents associated with the proposed project and relevant ecology databases were consulted as part of this assessment, with a site walkover also undertaken. Furthermore, the following guidelines were used in the completion of this assessment;

- Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites – European Commission Methodical Guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission 2021).
- Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment – Streamlining AA, SEA and EIA Processes: Practitioner's Manual (EPA 2013).
- European Commission, (2019). Commission notice 'Managing Natura 2000 sites. The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC'. (2019/C 33/01). OJ C 33, 25.1.2019.
- Office of the Planning Regulator Practice Note PN01 Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management (March 2021).
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG 2010).

The Screening Stage of Appropriate Assessment is used to identify whether the Plan, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site. This report follows European Commission (2021) guidance which recommends that screening should follow a four step process as outlined below:

1. Determine whether the plan is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site. If it is, then no further assessment is necessary.
2. Describe the plan and other plans and projects that, 'in combination', have the potential to have significant effects on a European site.
3. Identify the potential effects on the European site.
4. Assess the significance of any effects on the European site

3. Brief Description of the Sites and Proposed Works

3.1 Site Description and Location

The proposed development is located on the perimeter of the village of Ardagh, ITM Coordinates E 528371 N 638543. Ardagh is a village in the South West area of County Limerick, situated three miles from Newcastle West. This location will provide greenway users starting their journey at Ardagh with the choice of travelling east towards Rathkeale (8.8km) or west towards Newcastle West (3.8km), Templeglantine (17km) and Abbeyfeale (26.1km). The former train station was once an important stop along the Great Southern Railway's Limerick to Tralee line, which is also known as the 'North Kerry Line'. In 1880 the line from Limerick to Barnagh and onto Tralee opened providing a link for the transport of both passengers and goods. The North Kerry Line ceased to carry passengers in 1963, however the line continued to carry goods traffic until 1977. The tracks of the Limerick to Tralee line were finally removed in 1988. The line has since become a Greenway providing amenity to locals and visitors.

In 2020, Limerick City & County Council purchased the old Ardagh station house, Goods Shed and site as part of its efforts to conserve and promote the railway heritage associated with the former Limerick to Tralee Railway Line which is now the Limerick Greenway. A refurbishment works contract has been completed to carry out initial stabilization and conservation works to the Station House and Goods Shed (stonework repairs and re-pointing, new roof and coverings). A temporary car parking facility is in place for members of the public to access the Limerick Greenway from Ardagh.

3.2 Site Visit

A site visit was carried out on the 4/09/2020 by Independent Ecologist Rory Dalton. The existing environment was studied in relation to the proposed works put forward by the Limerick County Council.

3.3 Proposed Works

The Limerick Greenway has proved to be an extremely popular recreational amenity with a footfall of close to 600,000 in its first year of operation and close to 700,000 in its second year. The Ardagh Station House, goods shed and site will become one of the main Visitor Experience and Service Centre Hubs on the Limerick Greenway. The Station House and Goods Shed sit on a 2.2 acre site and the hub will be a trailhead and an access point for the Greenway providing a range of tourism, community and hospitality related services. These will include food offering, retail, bike hire, visitor information, railway and local history interpretation.

The overall objective of developing the Station House site and buildings is to ensure that Ardagh becomes a destination in its own right with visitors and users travelling to the Limerick Greenway Hub @Ardagh, parking-up, accessing the Greenway but also availing of the facilities and services on offer. The hub is to reinforce existing connections to Ardagh village.

The proposed Limerick Greenway Hub @ Ardagh includes.

Refurbishment and renovation of the Ardagh Station House and Goods Shed (which is a protected structure, RPS 900) and change of use to commercial, community and tourism. Develop the buildings and site to include toilets, café, playground, interpretation and camper van facilities. The provision of on-site parking to include car and universal access parking spaces, electric vehicle charging point spaces and camper van parking bays. Installation of a railway carriage on the site for commercial, community, and tourism use, and all associated site works. Construction of extensions to the Station House and Goods Shed. Works to include all site development works for the buildings and site including utilities, drainage, landscaping and public realm. Widening of the existing entrance to accommodate 2-way traffic.

Station House Design Intent

Ardagh Station House is to be brought back to life via restoration and new build proposals. As one enters the main entrance, they are greeted with a retail/shop space immediately left and a counter/food prep area on the right. Through passage of the counter spaces, one is brought to the glazed link to the rear. This allows a person to internally navigate safely and securely from the WC's and newly proposed café extension. The glazed material is chosen for the link to allow people who are using the greenway route to maintain that visual connection with the original façade facing what was, the rail line.

The café space also allow people to have direct passage out into the proposed train carriage entrance. Through this rejuvenation of the Ardagh Station House layout, it means visitors get to experience it in its completeness.

The café materiality is stone, to connect with the existing through a modern cut to bring it into the current. The scale is to mirror that of the existing extension on the northern section of the Station House.

Between the café space and the train carriage rest a proposed canopy, offering both a visual connection linking the two and providing shelter for people dining outside and passing through the station house and train carriage.

Selected materials.

1. Selected Stone Façade.
2. Selected Aluminium Windows and Door System
3. Refurbished & Reintroduced Sliding Slash Windows
4. Selected Steel Canopy

Good's Shed Design Intent

The Good's Shed is to be restored and repurposed as a segregated male and female WC's and changing/shower area. External access is provided via a new compliant set of steps.

The new build dining area is scaled similarly to the existing Good's Shed, to compliment it. The brick flooring taken from the cattle pen on site will be repurposed as the flooring in the dining, with the remaining made of a polished concrete – differentiating between new and old. As

this is a semi-internal/external space, the upper sections of the walls are made up of timber shutter; allowing for the space to be opened during the day and securely closed during the night.

The centre creates a flat roof connection – bridging new and old, whilst also providing space for storage and a UAWC/shower area.

The materiality is a mix of smooth and corrugated fibre cement panels, green in colour to tie in with the greenway narrative. These fibre cement panels, although modern are a call back to Ireland's historical farmland buildings and storage sheds.

Selected materials

1. Selected Aluminium Windows and Door System.
2. Selected Steel Canopy
3. Selected Fibre Cement Panels (smooth finish and corrugated finish)

4. Natura 2000 Sites and the Potential for Significant Effects

4.1 Natura 2000 sites within the zone of influence

The following is a table outlining Natura 2000 sites in the vicinity of the project.

Table 4.1 Nature 2000 Sites within the zone of influence

Natura Site	Distance	Conservation Interests	Inclusion in the current Screening
Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA (004161)	Proposed works would be, at closest point, 1.7km from this SPA	(A082) Hen Harrier	Proposed works within 15km of the protected area
Askeaton Fen Complex SAC (0002279)	Proposed works would be 10.7km from this SAC	[7210] Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> [7230] Alkaline fens	Proposed works within 15km of the SAC
Barrigone SAC (000432)	Proposed works would be 11.3km from this SAC	[5130] <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [6210] Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) (* important orchid sites) [8240] Limestone pavements [1065] <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i> (Marsh Fritillary)	Proposed works within 15km of the SAC

4.2 Conservation Interests and Likely Significant Effects

The following table assesses the potential for impacts to each individual conservation interest of each Natura 2000 site within 15km of the study area and thereby determines the need for mitigation and further analysis through Stage 2 NIS

	Conservation Interest	Assessment of Potential Impacts	Mitigation required
Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA (004161)	Hen Harrier (Circus cyaneus) [A082]	No significant negative impacts are envisaged for this habitat. Potential nesting or foraging habitat does not exist within or adjacent to the footprint of the works.	No
Askeaton Fen Complex SAC (0002279)	[7211] Cladium Fens	No significant negative impacts are envisaged for this habitat. This habitat does not exist within the footprint of the works, nor is the site hydrologically connected to this habitat	No
	[7230] Alkaline Fens	No significant negative impacts are envisaged for this habitat. This habitat does not exist within the footprint of the works, nor is the site hydrologically connected to this habitat	No
Barrigone SAC (000432)	[5130] Juniper Scrub	No significant negative impacts are envisaged for this habitat. This habitat does not exist within the footprint of the works.	No
	[6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland*	No significant negative impacts are envisaged for this habitat. This habitat	No

		does not exist within the footprint of the works.	
	[8240] Limestone Pavement	No significant negative impacts are envisaged for this habitat. This habitat does not exist within the footprint of the works.	No
	[1065] Marsh Fritillary (<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>)	No significant negative impacts are envisaged for this habitat. During the site visit, the larval food plant devils bit scabius <i>Succisa pratensis</i> did not exist within the footprint of the works.	No

4.3 Cumulative Effects

As no pathways to any Natura 2000 sites were identified, there is no potential for cumulative effects between the proposed project and any other plans or projects. The proposed Limerick Greenway Hub @ Ardagh will form part of the Limerick Greenway. The Limerick Greenway has already been constructed. No large scale projects are planned for the immediate location. As such, no cumulative effects are envisaged.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion it has been determined that the works as outlined above in the “Proposed Works” section of this document will not have a significant negative impact on a Natura 2000 site.

6. Figures

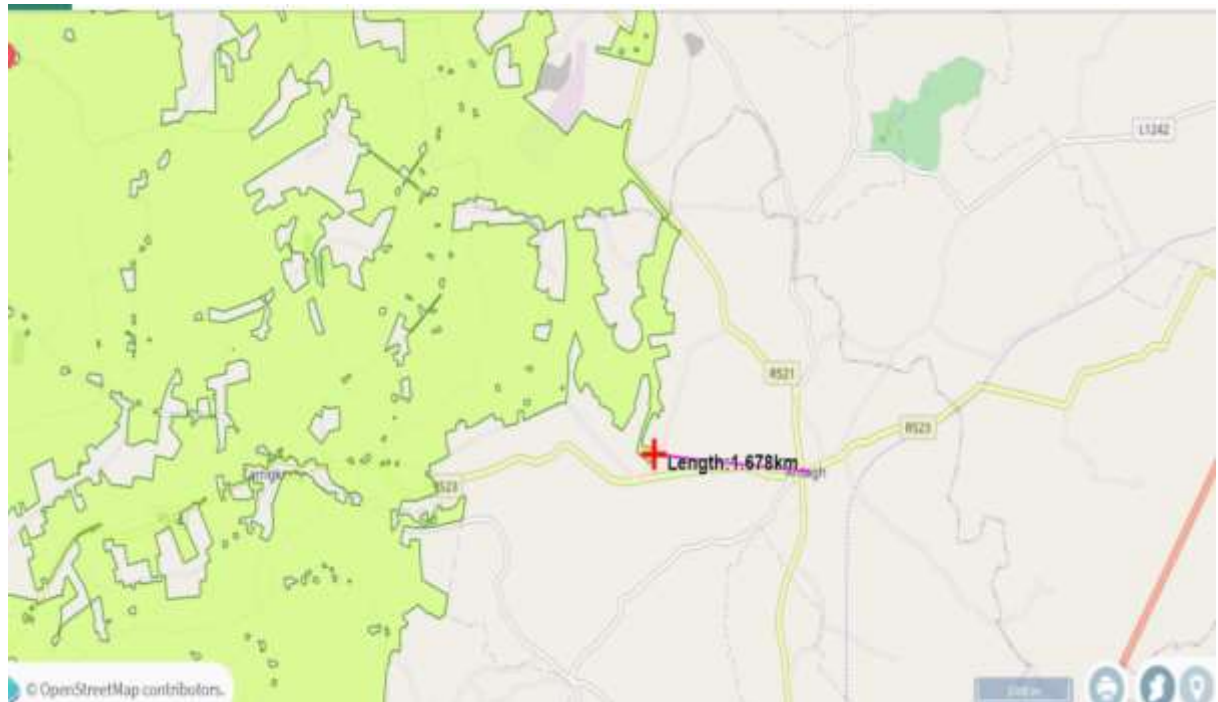


Figure 1: Distance from proposed site and the Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA (004161)

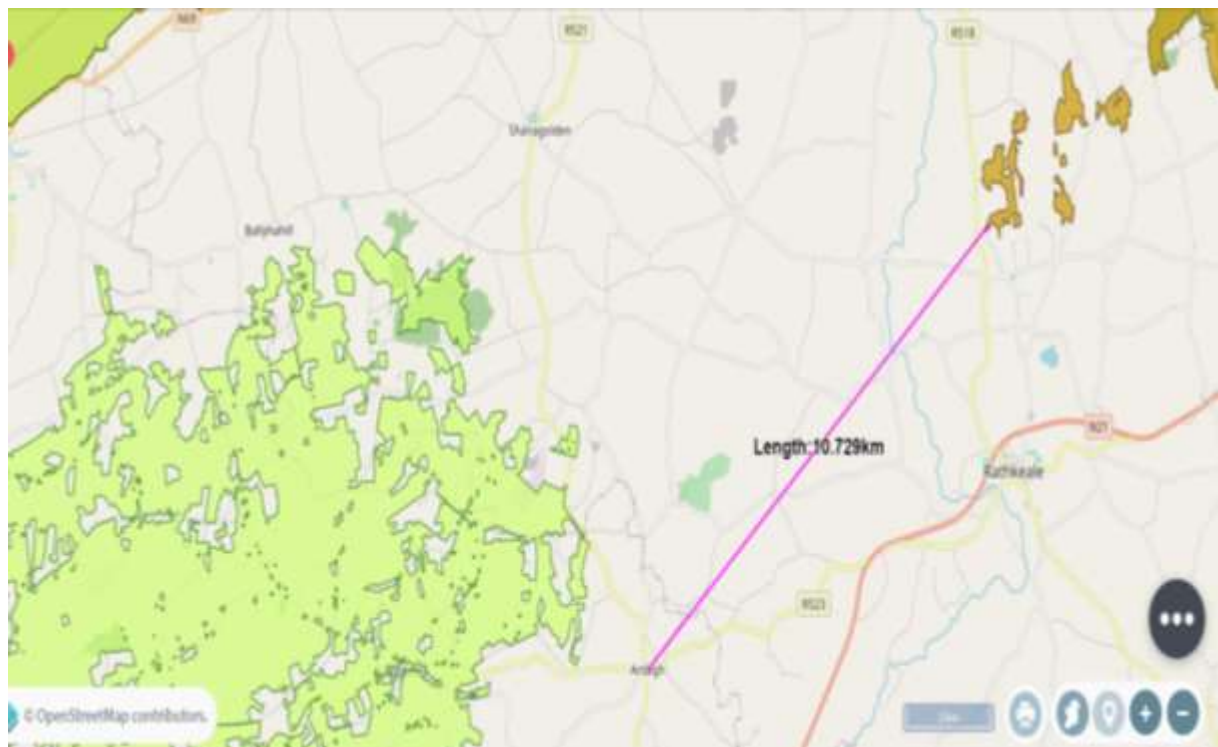


Figure 2: Distance from the proposed site and the Askeaton Fen Complex SAC (0002279)

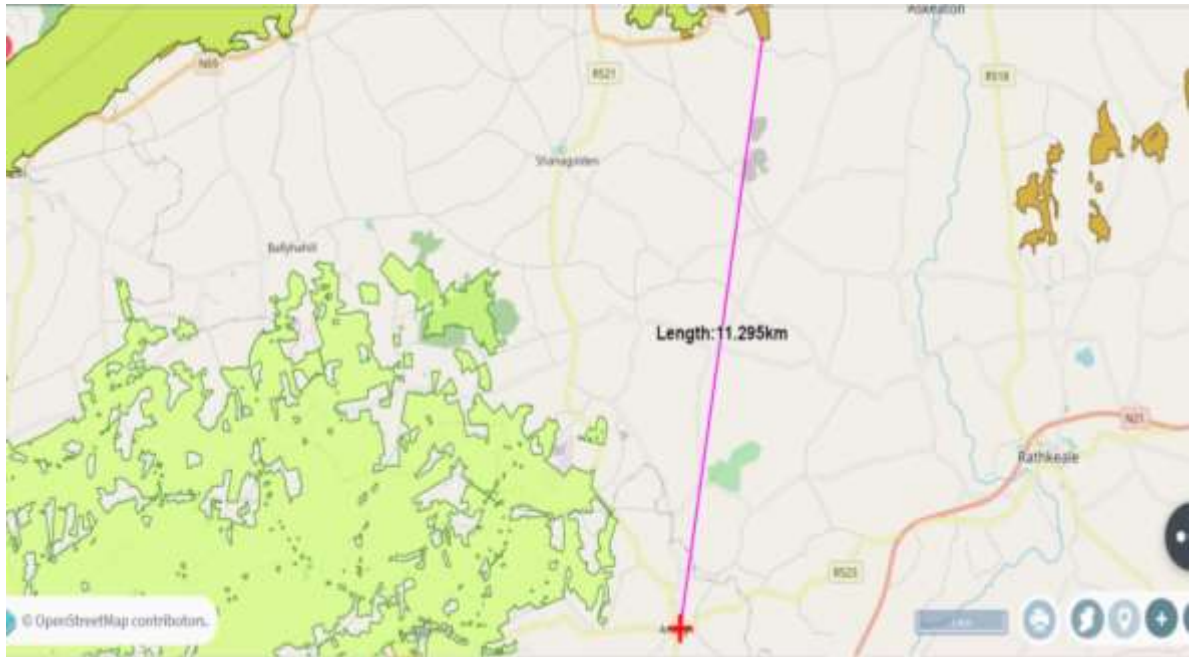


Figure 3: Distance from proposed site and Barrigone SAC (000432)

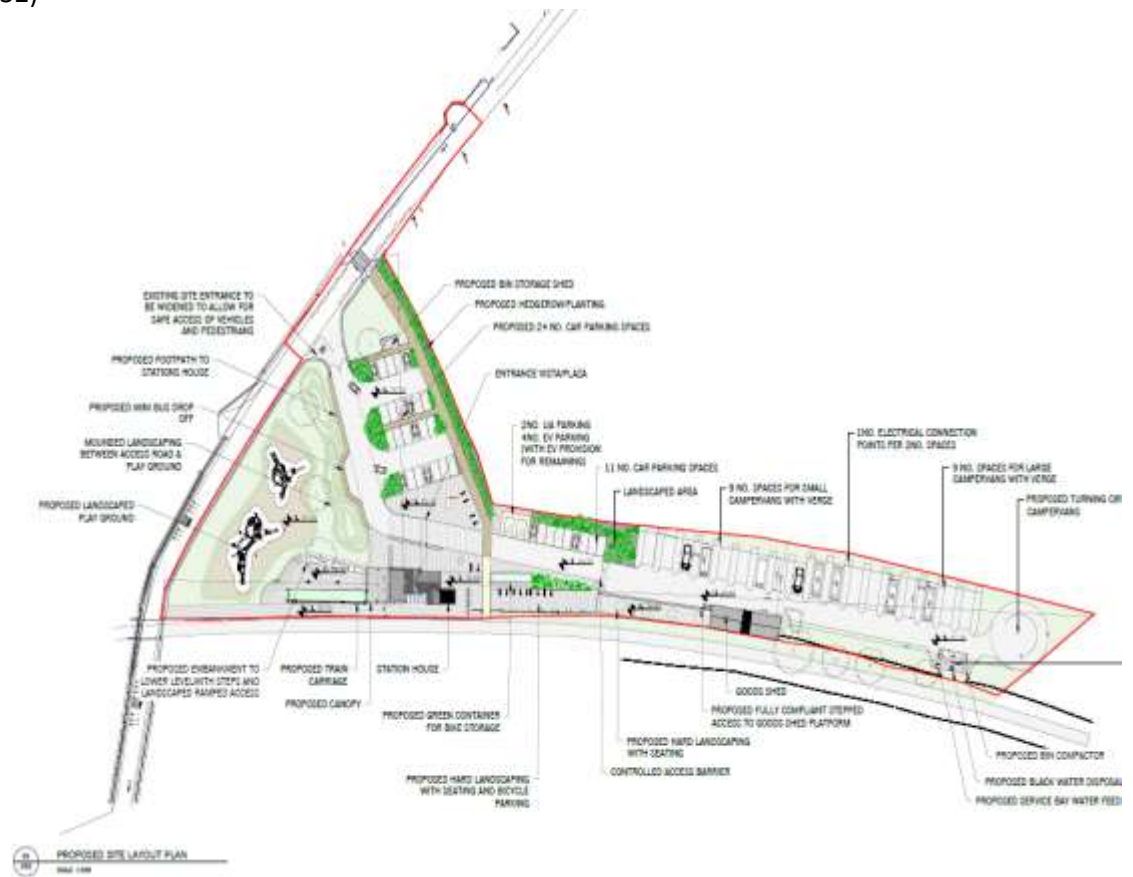


Figure 4: Limerick Greenway Hub @ Ardagh Layout Plan



Figure 5: Location of proposed works

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