



## **Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination**

### **CP0867 Flagford to Louth 220kV Overhead Line Refurbishment Project**

#### **[Exempted Development] Counties in Roscommon, Leitrim, Cavan, Longford, Monaghan and Louth**

In accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) and Regulation 42(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended ('The Regulations'), EirGrid has undertaken Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge and the Conservation Objectives of relevant European sites, if the CP0867 Flagford to Louth 220kV Overhead Line (OHL) Refurbishment Project [Exempted Development] ('the Development') individually or in-combination with other plans or projects will result in likely significant effects on a European site(s).

The Development which involves the refurbishment of the existing 220kV line, comprises the following:

- replacement of towers INT 5, INT 21, INT 31, INT 53, INT 71, INT 98, INT 181, INT 228, INT 238, and INT 271 to be 2m higher. The breaking out and reconstruction of the concrete foundation and shear blocks at the majority of end/angle mast structures, painting of mast structures, replacement of insulators, crossarms, stays and/or fittings on existing structures;
- no additional structures are proposed along the existing circuit. Any replacement structure will be constructed at, or immediately adjacent to the existing structures they will replace and will be of a generally similar appearance;
- replacement of the existing conductor along the line with a higher rated conductor; and,
- associated site development works to gain access to the existing structures include clearance of vegetation, disassembly and reassembly of walls and gate posts and removal and reinstatement of existing fencing.

#### **Analysis of Pathways to European sites**

The nearest European sites to the Development are the Lough Oughter Complex SPA [004049]<sup>1</sup> and Lough Oughter and Associated Loughs SAC [000007]<sup>2</sup>, which lie at distances of approximately 5.8km and 5.9km from the Development, respectively. The flowpath distance to these European sites is approximately 8.5km downstream of the Site via the River Erne. All downstream European sites were considered for potential for direct water quality impacts but given that there will be no instream works, the risk of any pollutants reaching European sites is very low because attenuation/dilution processes would provide an adequate buffer against water pollution. In addition, tower replacement works, the refurbishment activities with the highest water quality impact potential, will only be carried out at specific locations, as detailed above, and other proposed works will be localised to existing infrastructure.

The Site and surrounding area was not considered to be functionally-linked to any nearby SACs in relation to mobile Qualifying Interest (QI) species and no SACs were considered further in relation to potential water quality impacts on designated QI species. The Development traverses a rural landscape of arable fields and grassland, which Special Conservation Interest (SCI) species may use for foraging. However, the potential loss of foraging habitat is not considered significant as the SCI birds could readily make use of the extensive alternative

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<sup>1</sup> NPWS (2025). Conservation Objectives: Lough Oughter Complex SPA 004049. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

<sup>2</sup> NPWS (2021). Conservation Objectives: Lough Oughter and Associated Loughs SAC 000007. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

suitable habitat available in the wider area. There will therefore be no likely significant effects on any SPA related to loss of functionally-linked habitats.

Disturbance of waterbirds due to visual and noise disturbance can occur at distances of up to 300m from construction works according to Cutts *et al.*<sup>3</sup> and as such disturbance impacts to SCI species that may potentially be foraging within fields adjacent to the OHL during construction were considered further. However, there is an extensive resource of similar habitats in closer proximity to the SPAs, all of which are more likely to be used due to birds attempting to reduce energy usage. In addition, if disturbance were to occur, the SCI birds could readily make use of the extensive alternative suitable habitat available in the surround and the works will be minor in scale, as well as sequential and temporary in nature. There will therefore be no likely significant effects on any SPA related to visual and noise disturbance in functionally-linked habitats.

Potential noise and visual disturbance impacts were also considered on QI otter from the Lough Oughter and Associated Loughs SAC. Due to their extensive home ranges, otter are expected to frequently utilise resting places and holts along watercourses beyond the designated site boundary, including those traversed by the Development. However, the scale, sequential phasing and temporary nature of the Development is unlikely to be associated with significant disturbance impacts. For example, even if refurbishment works were undertaken close to watercourses within the home ranges of QI otter, such activities would be very short-term. Moreover, construction/refurbishment works will be undertaken during the daytime, whereas otter show peak activity levels at night, and it should be noted that the construction works for the Development will not involve any piling activities (works with greatest at-source sound pressure levels). Therefore, likely significant effects are excluded.

There are no other European sites nearby, or potentially connected to the Development via a source-pathway-receptor link that may result in likely significant effects in view of the applicable site Conservation Objectives.

#### **AA Screening Statement**

In accordance with Regulation 42(7) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 SI 477 as amended, EirGrid has made a Determination following Screening that an Appropriate Assessment is not required as the project individually or in-combination with other plans or projects is not likely to have a significant effect on any European sites. The risk of likely significant effects on European sites can be excluded on the basis of objective evidence.

This Determination is based on the location, scale, extent and duration of the Development, including temporary works, and has not taken account of measures intended to avoid or reduce significant effects on European sites.

Signed:



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Susanne Dunne ACIEEM Senior Ecologist

23 May 2025

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<sup>3</sup> Cutts, N., Hemingway, K and Spencer, J. (2013). Waterbird Disturbance Mitigation Toolkit: Informing Estuarine Planning & Construction Projects. Produced by the Institute of Estuarine & Coastal Studies (IECS) University of Hull.