



## **Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination CP1002 Cushaling-Newbridge 110kV Uprate Project [Exempted Development] Counties Kildare and Offaly**

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 CP1002 Cushaling-Newbridge 110kV Uprate 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 comprises the uprating of the existing 110kV line between Cushaling, Co. Offaly, and Newbridge, Co. Kildare. The uprate works will comprise a range of activities, including:

- replacement / restringing of the existing overhead line circuit conductor and wires with new higher capacity conductor wires;
- replacement of Intermediate Polesets (IMP; wooden polesets) and steel masts (with replacement structures being constructed at or adjacent the structures they will replace);
- replacement of hardware and fittings (e.g. suspension clamps, insulators and vibration dampeners) at all structures as required;
- re-capping and remedial works for shear blocks at identified steel masts;
- associated site development works, including foundation upgrades, strain assemblies, vegetation clearance, disassembly / reassembly of gate posts / piers and removal / reinstatement of existing fencing; and,

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

The closest European sites to the Development with sensitivity to water quality changes are the Mouds Bog Special Area of Conservation (SAC)<sup>1</sup> (site code 002331; approximately 226m distance) and Pollardstown Fen SAC<sup>2</sup> (site code 000396; approximately 489m distance). While there is no direct hydrological link to the Mouds Bog SAC via watercourses or drainage ditches, the site is considered here due to its proximity and similar elevation to the Development. The Pollardstown Fen SAC is connected to the Development via an engineered drain that traverses the overhead line route. Furthermore, while the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (site code 002162)<sup>3</sup> lies approximately 9.7km from the Development, it is in hydrological continuity via the Grand Canal Barrow Line, which is crossed by the overhead line at Newtown. As a precautionary measure, it is assumed that watercourses that are linked to the SAC constitute functionally-linked habitat (i.e. it could be used by a significant proportion of the populations of relevant Qualifying Interest (QI) species, including white-clawed crayfish, sea lamprey, river lamprey, twaite shad, Atlantic salmon and otter). It is noted that the Development does not lie within an identified SAC catchment of QI freshwater pearl mussel and, therefore, there is no potential of impact to this species.

Steel mast replacement works are the construction activities with the highest water quality impact potential. However, these works will only be carried out at isolated locations. The

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<sup>1</sup> NPWS (2015) Conservation Objectives: Mouds Bog SAC [002331]. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

<sup>2</sup> NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: Pollardstown Fen SAC [000396]. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>3</sup> NPWS (2011) Conservation Objectives: River Barrow and River Nore SAC [002162]. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

nearest steel masts where works will be undertaken are located approximately 230m (steel mast 122) from the Mouds Bog SAC, 313m (steel mast 122) from the drain linking to the Pollardstown Fen SAC and 380m (steel mast 71) from the nearest hydrological link to the River Barrow and River Nore SAC respectively. These distances are considered too far for any material water quality impacts to occur. Furthermore, steel mast replacement works are temporary (maximum two week duration per mast), which further reduces the potential for likely significant effects even in-combination.

The easternmost section of the Development is situated approximately 18.8km from the Poulaphouca Reservoir Special Protection Area (SPA) (site code 004063)<sup>4</sup>, which is designated for mobile greylag goose. According to guidance published by Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot), the core foraging range of greylag goose is 15-20km<sup>5</sup>, placing the Development within the wider area potentially used by this Special Conservation Interest (SCI) species. However, the scope of the uprate works does not encompass conversion of greenfield land to development. Therefore, there is no potential for the loss of functionally linked foraging habitat of greylag goose.

Both the Mouds Bog SAC (QI bog habitat) and Pollardstown Fen SAC (QI fen habitat and whorl snail species) are sensitive to atmospheric pollution from construction traffic associated with the Development. The construction period will likely involve traffic volumes of 16 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT), which is far below the number of traffic movements triggering a requirement for traffic and air quality modelling. Furthermore, a review of existing road infrastructure indicates that the Development and any access routes lie beyond 200m from any designated QI habitat or habitat supporting QI species.

Potential noise and visual disturbance impacts on QI otter from the River Barrow and River Nore SAC were also considered. 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, otter are very tolerant of anthropogenic disturbance and it should be noted that the construction works for the Proposed Development will not involve any piling activities. Furthermore, otter are nocturnal mammals, and no night-time works will be undertaken for the Development.

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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Robert Fennelly CEcol MCIEEM Lead Senior Ecologist 17 August 2023

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<sup>4</sup> NPWS (2022) Conservation objectives for Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA [004063]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage. (2016). Assessing Connectivity with Special Protection Areas (SPAs). 4pp.