



Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination

Ground Investigation Works for CP1533 Derrycarney-Portlaoise 110kV OHL [Exempted Development] County Laois and County 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 Ground Investigation (GI) Works for CP1533 Derrycarney-Portlaoise 110kV overhead line (OHL) ('the Development') individually or in combination with other plans or projects would be likely to have a significant effect (s) on a European site(s).

The works to inform the Development comprise of Intrusive Foundation Investigations (IFI) and Dynamic Probing (DP) for structures 12, 19, 40, 70, 86, 102, 121, 150, 178, 188, 202, 222 and 225 only. The works require digging at the structure foundations with a tracked machine and taking concrete samples for testing.

Analysis of Pathways to European sites

Based on the works involved, the following possible impacts/effects are considered potentially relevant:

- Disturbance of qualifying species (e.g. visual, noise, vibration or artificial light). According to published research¹, the maximum distance to which non-breeding bird species for which Special Protection Areas (SPA) are designated may theoretically travel to forage is 20km from the boundary of such a site (though in reality, most species' foraging distances are significantly lower than this). Cutts *et al.* (2013)² provides species-specific information on the sensitivity of several bird species which are qualifying features of SPAs to disturbance impacts from construction works.

Consequently, the following European sites are considered to be within the potential zone of influence (ZoI) of the works:

- Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA, site code 004160³. The closest structure associated with the works to the SPA is structure 150 (200m away). The SPA is designated for breeding hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*.
- Clonaslee Eskers and Derry Bog SAC, site code 000859⁴. The closest structure associated with the works to the SAC is structure 86 (118m away). The SAC is designated for petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion), alkaline fens, and Geyer's whorl snail *Vertigo geyeri*.

¹ Scottish Natural Heritage (2016). Assessing Connectivity with Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Version 3 – June 2016 (online). Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/assessing-connectivity-special-protection-areas> (Accessed 05 August 2026).

² 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. (online). Available at: https://www.tidetoolbox.eu/tidetools/waterbird_disturbance_mitigation_toolkit/ (Accessed 05 August 2026).

³ NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA 004160. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

⁴ NPWS (2026) Conservation Objectives: Clonaslee Eskers and Derry Bog SAC 000859. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

- River Barrow and River Nore SAC, site code 002162⁵. Structure 202 is 14m from a drainage ditch which is hydrologically-linked to the SAC. The SAC is designated for a variety of habitats and species.

There is no potential for likely significant effects related to water quality on any European site given the distance between the structures requiring GI works and surrounding waterbodies. The works are of a nature which means that significant waterborne pollution events cannot occur, for example, no large excavations are required which could result in substantial volumes of sediment being generated. The Development is located within a catchment with previous records of freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera*, although the current status of the species is unknown. There is currently no catchment of SAC populations present.

Hen harriers have a core foraging range of 2km during the breeding season, with a maximum range of 10km¹. NatureScot⁶ guidance recommends a buffer zone of 300-750m during breeding. There are no suitable breeding habitats for hen harrier within the Zol of the works. Therefore, no likely significant effects on breeding hen harriers or any likely significant effects on hen harrier breeding sites associated with Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA could occur. Additionally due to the minor scale and temporary nature of the works, there will be no likely significant noise and visual disturbance of Special Conservation Interest (SCI) birds either within the boundaries of Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA or using potential functionally linked habitat in proximity to the works.

Clonaslee Eskers and Derry Bog SAC is ca. 118m away from structure 86. There is no potential for disturbance to Qualifying Interest (QI) Geyer's whorl snail given the intervening habitat of grassland, treeline and scrub.

Potential noise and visual disturbance impacts on QI otter *Lutra lutra* from the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC were also considered. Due to their extensive home ranges, otter are expected to frequently utilise resting places and holts along waterbodies beyond the European site boundary; however, there is no optimal otter habitat within the Zol of the works. Furthermore, otter are nocturnal mammals, and no night-time works will be undertaken. Given, therefore, that works will be set back from waterbodies, will be temporary and short-term, and minor in nature, likely significant effects on otter associated with European sites as a result of disturbance are excluded.

There are no other European sites nearby or potentially connected to the Development works via a source-pathway-receptor link that may result in likely significant effects in view of the relevant European sites' 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 works, including temporary works, and has not taken account of measures intended to avoid or reduce significant effects on European sites.

Signed:

⁵ NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: River Barrow and River Nore SAC 002162. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

⁶ NatureScot (2022). Disturbance Distances in Selected Scottish Bird Species – NatureScot Guidance. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/disturbance-distances-selected-scottish-bird-species-naturescot-guidance> (Accessed 05 August 2026).



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