



Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination

CP1571 Athy - Coolnabacky 110kV OHL Fibre-wrapping, and Athy Station and Coolnabacky Station Works [Exempted Development] County Kildare and County Laois

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, whether CP1571 Athy - Coolnabacky 110kV overhead line (OHL) fibre-wrapping, and Athy Station and Coolnabacky Station Works [Exempted Development] ('the Development') individually or in-combination with other plans or projects will result in likely significant effects (LSE) on a European site(s).

This project will cover the 18.1km of OHL between Athy and Coolnabacky stations.

- Fibre-wrap on the OHL between Athy Station and Coolnabacky Station.
- Replacement of 110kV Current Transformers (CTs) within Athy station on Coolnabacky (ex-Portlaoise) bay (change existing 1000 / 1Amp (A) CTs to 110kV standard 1250 / 1A).
- Replacement of existing Toshiba Generic Relay Zone (GRZ) Distance only relays with Toshiba GRL200 Combined Distance/Differential relays at both ends of the circuit within Athy and Coolnabacky stations.
- Installation of Teleprotection and Binary Interface (TFBIT) in the Optical Multiplexers (OPMUXs) within Athy and Coolnabacky stations.
- Proposed conductor uprated to 430mm² Aluminum Conductor Steel Reinforced (ACSR) or equivalent.
- Bay conductor within Athy station to be uprated to the rating equivalent to 430mm² plus 10% overload capability.

Works within Athy and Coolnabacky energized substations will be carried out entirely within the boundary of the existing substations and carried out above ground on existing structures. Fibre-wrapping works will be carried out along the existing 18.1km OHL between Athy and Coolnabacky substations; however, these works will utilise the existing line infrastructure and will not require vegetation clearance or other intrusive ground works.

Analysis of Pathways to European sites

Based on the works involved, the only possible impact that is considered potentially relevant to the Development is 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 (SPAs) 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 (Zol) of the Development:

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 19 January 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.tide-toolbox.eu/tidetools/waterbird_disturbance_mitigation_toolkit/ (Accessed 27 January 2026).

- River Nore SPA (Site Code: 004233³) is located at its closest approximately 14.1km south-west of the Development site, at Coolnabacky 110kV. The site is designated for the following Special Conservation Interest (SCI): kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*.
- Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA (Site Code: 004160⁴) is located at its closest approximately 16.7km north-west of Coolnabacky Station. The site is designated for the following SCI: hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*.

There is no direct hydrological connectivity between the Development and any European site, and the Development will not involve any intrusive works. While the Development lies within a catchment with previous records of freshwater pearl mussel, the current status of the species within the catchment is unknown. In the absence of any hydrological pathway to a European site, there is therefore no potential for LSE related to water quality on any European site.

Athy 110kV Station is located approximately 300m from the Grand Canal (Barrow Line), which flows approximately 1.1km downstream to the River Barrow, forming part of the River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation (SAC). While the SAC is designated for mobile species such as otter *Lutra lutra*, the Development area comprises existing substation infrastructure and hardstanding, which does not provide suitable habitat for this species. Furthermore, given the limited scale, short duration, and non-intrusive nature of the works, there is no pathway for disturbance or other effects on otter or any QI species of River Barrow and River Nore SAC.

The Development does not provide suitable habitat for kingfisher, an SCI of the River Nore SPA, as works are confined to existing substations and OHL infrastructure comprising hardstanding and modified environments. The River Nore SPA is located approximately 14.1km from the Development at its closest point, and there is no hydrological or source-pathway with habitats used by this species. Therefore, no pathway for LSE arises in respect of disturbance or any other potential impact to cause likely significant effects to kingfisher.

Hen harriers have a core foraging range of 2km during the breeding season, with a maximum range of 10km. NatureScot⁵ guidance recommends a buffer zone of 300-750m during breeding. The Development is located well beyond a distance at which any LSE 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 SCI birds either within the boundaries of Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA located over 10 km away or using potential functionally linked habitat in proximity to 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 LSE in view of the relevant European site's Conservation Objectives. Due to the nature of the Development, there is no potential for in-combination effects.

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:



³ NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: River Nore SPA 004233. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

⁴ NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA 004160. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

⁵ 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>

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