



Kildare County Council

**P82022.05: Green Lane Cycle Track Scheme,
Leixlip**

Information to Inform an Appropriate Assessment
Screening Report





Kildare County Council

GREEN LANE CYCLE TRACK, LEIXLIP

Information to Inform an Appropriate Assessment Screening Report



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CONTENTS

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
2	INTRODUCTION	3
2.1	BACKGROUND	3
2.2	OVERVIEW OF PROJECT	4
2.3	APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT CONTEXT	5
	STAGES OF HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT	5
	LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT	5
	EUROPEAN UNION HABITATS DIRECTIVE	5
	THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (BIRDS AND NATURAL HABITATS) REGULATIONS 2011	6
	PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS 2001-2019	6
2.4	GUIDANCE	7
3	IDENTIFICATION OF RELEVANT NATURA 2000 SITES	8
4	SCREENING OF NATURA 2000 SITES	10
5	CONCLUSIONS	12
6	REFERENCES	13
7	FIGURES	14

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kildare County Council proposes to provide segregated cycle infrastructure and upgrade existing cycle lanes on Easton Road/Green Lane in Leixlip, Kildare, as part of national initiatives to improve active travel infrastructure alongside the design of other road infrastructure such as bus stops and shelters.

This Appropriate Assessment has been prepared in order to identify any Natura 2000 sites which may be adversely affected by the Project and assess whether impacts associated with the construction or operation of the Project could have Likely Significant Effects on any of the Natura 2000 sites or their qualifying habitats and species; and hence determine whether an Appropriate Assessment is required.

The Glenasmole Valley SAC (designated for orchid-rich calcareous grassland, Molinia meadows and petrifying springs) is 15km away from the Site and is screened out on the basis that it is hydrologically and ecologically unconnected from it.

The Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC is designated for its petrifying spring habitat and for two aquatic snail species which rely on the specific hydrological conditions, water chemistry and wetland vegetation found in the Rye Water and Royal Canal. The Site is approximately 550m away from the SAC at its closest point and is not hydrologically connected to it, either directly via surface water channels, or indirectly since Green Lane/Easton Lane are serviced by the Leixlip drainage network which discharges into the River Liffey downstream of the SAC boundary. The Project would not result in changes to runoff into the drainage network and there are no pathways for effects on the Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC or its qualifying habitat or species.

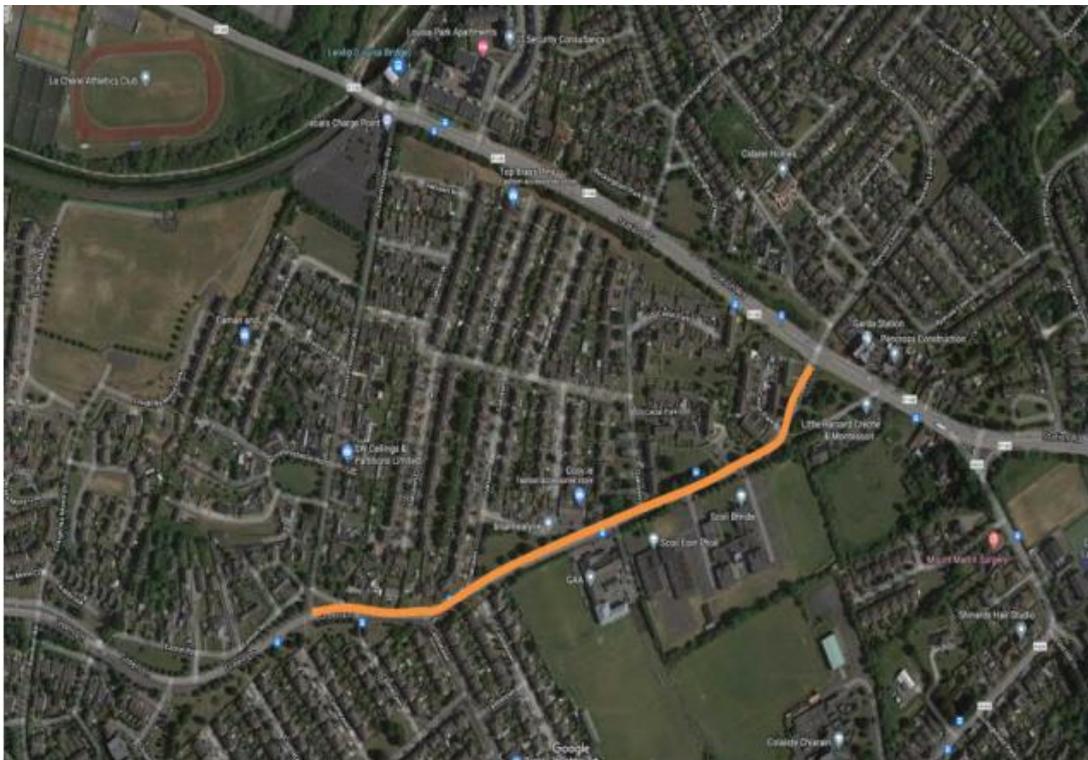
As the Project would not give rise to any LSE, an Appropriate Assessment will not be required to determine the implications for any Natura 2000 sites in view of their conservation objectives.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 BACKGROUND

2.1.1. WSP has been commissioned by Kildare County Council (KCC) to undertake an environmental assessment for the provision of segregated cycle infrastructure and to upgrade existing cycle lanes on Easton Road/Green Lane in Leixlip falling within Kildare County, Republic of Ireland, over a distance of approximately 700m (the 'Project'). This section of cycle route forms part of a feeder route improving access to several schools, recreational facilities and a dense urbanised residential area as identified within the National Transport Authority (NTA) Cycle Network Plan maps for the cycle network of Leixlip¹. The location of the Project (the 'Site') is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Location of the Green Lane Cycle Track (the Site)



2.1.2. Under the requirements of European Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna (the 'Habitats Directive'²), it is necessary to undertake an Appropriate Assessment, to consider whether a proposed plan or project may have likely significant effects (LSE's) upon areas of nature conservation importance designated under the Directive, so called European, or Natura 2000 sites. Natura 2000 sites consist of Special Areas of Conservation

¹ Available at https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/English_04c_Proposed_Network_Towns.pdf.

² https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm

(SACs) designated for habitats and species of community importance, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)³ designated for sites recognised for supporting important populations of birds. This requirement is translated into Irish law¹ through The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended) ('The Habitats Regulations')⁴.

- 2.1.3. The Habitats Regulations and Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) place a duty upon 'Competent Authorities' (in this case KCC) to consider the potential for effects of proposed developments upon Natura 2000 sites (either alone or in combination with other projects or plans) prior to granting consent. Should likely significant effects be identified by the initial screening process (Stage 1), it is necessary to further consider the effects by way of an 'Appropriate Assessment' (Stage 2), the findings of which are reported in a Natura Impact Statement (NIS). Further details of the applicable legislative context are summarised within Section 1.3 below.
- 2.1.4. The aims of this Appropriate Assessment Screening are to:
- Introduce the Project;
 - Identify any Natura 2000 sites which may be adversely affected by the Project;
 - Identify the potential environmental impacts associated with the Project during both its construction and operation with the potential to result in adverse effects on the identified Natura 2000 sites either alone or in combination with other plans/projects; and,
 - Identify whether any of the impacts associated with the Project could have likely significant effects (LSE) on any of the Natura 2000 sites identified, and hence determine whether further assessment of those effects is required or not (i.e. through an Appropriate Assessment), as detailed in Section 1.3 below.
- 2.1.5. The findings of this Appropriate Assessment Screening will be presented to KCC (as Competent Authority) in order to seek their agreement, in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) on the approach and scope of the screening process and they requirement for any further assessment on both the Project and the Appropriate Assessment process. It will also offer KCC, and NPWS, the opportunity to provide any necessary advice on under-sights or additional aspects which require consideration.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

- 2.2.1. The Project is being developed in accordance with the National Cycle Manual and is aimed at providing a balance of provision between various competing transport modes. The
- 2.2.2. Project is to provide segregated cycle infrastructure and upgrade existing cycle lanes on Easton Road/Green Lane, Leixlip over a distance of approximately 700m. This section forms part of a feeder route improving access to several schools, recreational facilities and a dense urbanised residential area as identified within the NTA Cycle Network Plan maps for the cycle network of Leixlip.

³ SPAs are identified through the criteria outlined in Directive 2009/147/EC, (the codified version of 79/409/EEC as amended) on the conservation of wild birds (the 'Birds Directive') but designated and protected under the Habitats Directive.

⁴ <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/guidance-appropriate-assessment-planning-authorities>.

2.2.3. A core objective of the project is to deliver segregated cycle infrastructure, to create infrastructure suitability for school children and novice users and shall encompass all modes of active travel including cycling and walking alongside the design of other road infrastructure such as bus stops and shelters, road carriageway improvements intended at creating a calmer and safer environment, traffic signals and crossings, and urban enhancements.

2.2.4. The key components of the Project are:

- Upgrade of 6no. road junctions to include crossings or advance stop lines for pedestrians and cyclists;
- Removal of hedgerows and setting back of garden wall and fences in 2no locations;
- Realignment of an existing footpath behind a row of mature trees in the school grounds;
- Adjustment of the carriageway to 14m standard width with 2m footway/2m cycle track on each side of the road and 6m carriageway along Green Lane; and
- Addition of 4no. island bus stops/shelters.

2.3 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT CONTEXT

2.3.1. An Appropriate Assessment is a multi-stage process as described below. This report covers Stage 1, which involves screening for LSE on Natura 2000 sites. A brief description of the legislative context is also provided.

STAGES OF HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT

2.3.2. Guidance on the Habitats Directive (European Commission, 2018) sets out the step-wise approach which should be followed to enable Competent Authorities to discharge their duties under the Habitats Directive and provides further clarity on the interpretation of Articles 6 (3) and 6 (4). The process used is usually summarised in four distinct stages of assessment.

- Stage 1: Screening: the process which identifies whether effects upon a Natura 2000 site of a plan or project are possible, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects and considers whether these effects are likely to be significant (i.e. LSEs).
- Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment: the detailed consideration of the effect of the plan or project, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites, with respect to the site's conservation objectives and its structure and function. This stage allows for consideration of mitigation proposals designed to reduce impacts upon the Natura 2000 site.
- Stage 3: Assessment of alternative solutions: the process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the plan or project that avoid adverse effects on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.
- Stage 4: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse effects remain: an assessment of whether the development is necessary for IROPI (Imperative Reasons of Public Interest) and, if so, of the compensatory measures needed to maintain the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network.

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

EUROPEAN UNION HABITATS DIRECTIVE

2.3.3. Article 6 (3) of the Habitats Directive sets out the need for 'Appropriate Assessment' of plans or projects which have potential to affect the integrity of a Natura 2000 site (SPAs and SACs as well as

proposed SPAs (pSPAs) and candidate SACs (cSACs)) based on their proximity, or connectivity to the Project):

- 'Any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall undergo an Appropriate Assessment to determine its implications for the site. The competent authorities can only agree to the plan or project after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned' (Article 6.3).

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (BIRDS AND NATURAL HABITATS) REGULATIONS 2011

2.3.4. The Habitats Directive is translated into Irish law through The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended) ("The Habitats Regulations"). Part 5 of the Habitats Regulations sets out the circumstances under which an 'Appropriate Assessment' is required. Section 42(1) states that a screening for Appropriate Assessment is required for any project which is not connected with or necessary for the management of a European site but which either alone or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on the European site.

2.3.5. Section 42(2) expands on this, stipulating that a public authority must carry out a screening for Appropriate Assessment before consent for a plan or project is given, or a decision to undertake or adopt a plan or project is taken. To assist a public authority to discharge its duty in this respect, Section 42(3)(a) gives them the authority to direct a third party to provide a Natura Impact Statement and Section 42(3)(b) allows them to request any additional information that is considered necessary for the purposes of undertaking a screening. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has to include such information or data as the public authority considers necessary to enable it to ascertain if the plan or project will affect the integrity of a Natura 2000 site. Where appropriate, a NIS also needs to include:

- The alternative solutions that have been considered and the reasons why they have not been adopted;
- The imperative reasons of overriding public interest that are being relied upon to indicate that the plan or project should proceed notwithstanding that it may adversely affect the integrity of a European [Natura 2000] Site; and,
- The compensatory measures that are being proposed.

2.3.6. Section 42(6) requires that the public authority determines whether or not (on the basis of objective scientific information presented through the screening process) the plan or project will have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS 2001-2019

2.3.7. Section 250 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 to 2019 sets out the circumstances under which an Appropriate Assessment is required, which are summarised here:

- A local authority shall carry out (or delegate to be carried out) a screening of the proposed development to assess whether a development proposal would – in view of best scientific knowledge – result in LSE on a Natura 2000 site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects;
- If LSE on a Natura 2000 site cannot be screened out an Appropriate Assessment is required and the local authority is required to prepare an NIS in respect of the proposed development and submit this to the Board for approval;

- The Board shall request an NIS from the local authority if it determines that a proposed development is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site; any person may make a representation to the Board to request a determination, provided the reasons for forming the view that significant effects are likely as a result of the proposed development are stated.
- The local authority is responsible for applying to the Board and for providing all information requested by the Board to inform their decision.

2.4 GUIDANCE

2.4.1. In undertaking this Appropriate Assessment Screening, the following guidance was referred to:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). Dublin. (DoEHLG, 2009)
- Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission, 2018); and
- Communication from the Commission on the Precautionary Principle (European Commission 2000).

3 IDENTIFICATION OF RELEVANT NATURA 2000 SITES

3.1.1. DoEHLG (2009), recommend that the scope of Appropriate Assessment Screening should consider the following:

- Any Natura 2000 sites within or adjacent to the plan or project area;
- Any Natura 2000 sites within the likely zone of impact of the plan or project. A distance of 15km is currently recommended in the case of plans, but for projects could be much less than that, in some cases less than 100m, but this must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with reference to the nature, size and location of the project, and the sensitivities of the ecological receptors, and the potential for in combination effects; and,
- Natura 2000 sites that are more than 15km from the plan or project area depending on the likely impacts of the plan or project, and the sensitivities of the ecological receptors, bearing in mind the precautionary principle. In the case of sites with water-dependent habitats or species, and a plan or project that could affect water quality or quantity, for example, it may be necessary to consider the full extent of the upstream and/or downstream catchment.

3.1.2. For this Appropriate Assessment Screening, Natura 2000 sites with the potential to be affected by the Project were identified based on their proximity to the Site as well as their potential to be connected to it, either directly (e.g. via watercourses) or indirectly (e.g. whereby associated qualifying species use habitats within, or in close proximity to the Site for foraging or roosting (termed ‘functionally linked’ habitat)). Given the scale and nature of the Project, a search radius of 15km was considered appropriate. This 15km search radius is also deemed appropriate for light-bellied brent geese (*Branta bernicla hrota*) which are known to range to inland foraging areas from their Dublin Bay roosting grounds (Benson, 2009). The search radius was also extended to 20km for ‘grey geese’ (i.e. greylag goose *Anser anser* and pink-footed goose *A. brachyrhynchus*) based on maximum documented foraging distances as documented in Scotland (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2016).

3.1.3. Table 2-1 lists the Natura 2000 sites located within 15km of, or hydrologically connected with the Site or which are within the 20km search radius for SPAs designated for grey geese. The location of Natura 2000 sites in relation to the Site is shown on Figure 2a and Figure 2b.

Table 3-1 - Natura 2000 sites within 15km of, or potentially connected with the Site

Site Name	Distance from Site	Overview of Qualifying Features
Rye Water Valley/ Carton SAC	520m north and east	Rye Water Valley/Carton SAC extends along the Rye Water – a tributary of the River Liffey – between Leixlip and Maynooth. The river features Annex I priority habitat petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) and supports populations of the rare narrow-mouthed whorl snail (<i>Vertigo angustior</i>) and Desmoulin's whorl snail (<i>V. moulinsiana</i>).
Glenasmole Valley SAC	15km south	This valley is on the edge of the Wicklow uplands and has non-calcareous bedrock overlain by drift deposits partly covered in scrub, woodland and grasslands. Freshwater springs induce local patches of calcareous fen and petrifying springs. Designated for three Annex I habitats:

		<p>Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (an important orchid site)</p> <p>Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils</p> <p>Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion).</p>
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3.1.4. The closest SPA for which light-bellied brent goose is designated is South Dublin Bay and Tolka Estuary SPA (004024) which is 17.9km east of the Site while the closest SPA designated for greylag geese is Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA (04063) which is 20.4km south of the Site. As such, these SPAs are outside the respective search radii and are not given any further consideration in relation to the Project.

4 SCREENING OF NATURA 2000 SITES

- 4.1.1. This section identifies whether the impacts associated with the Project could potentially give rise to LSE upon the Natura 2000 sites identified above.
- 4.1.2. The Glenasmole Valley SAC is located on the edge of the 15km buffer. Leixlip is in a different river catchment which is not connected with the River Dodder (which flows through Glenasmole Valley) and is separated from it by at least three main road/motorways, the River Liffey and a number of towns and outlying villages. As such there is no connectivity between the Project and the Glenasmole SAC and this Natura 2000 site is not considered further.
- 4.1.3. As identified in Table 2-1 and Figures 2a and 2b, the Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC flows approximately west to east within approximately 520m of the Site at its closest point. The easternmost (downstream) extent of the SAC is approximately 800m to the east of the Site (downslope). The Site is not connected to the river for example via watercourses.
- 4.1.4. The Rye Water forms a series of artificial lakes where it is dammed in the Carton Estate at its western end (approximately 1.4km north west/upslope of the Site); and at the eastern end includes a section of railway, part of the Royal Canal and aqueduct (Louisa Bridge approximately 600m west of the Site). The SAC is underlain by carboniferous limestone which gives rise to the thermal, mineral, petrifying spring which is the Annex I habitat for which the SAC is designated. Tufa formation is associated with groundwater rich in calcium bicarbonate reaching the surface and depositing calcium carbonate. The habitat type is particularly vulnerable to changes in hydraulic conditions for example resulting from human habitation and changes to land use and water quality upstream.
- 4.1.5. The calcareous marsh vegetation near Louisa Bridge is the favoured habitat of the two mollusc species for which the site is designated: narrow-mouthed whorl snail and Desmoulin's whorl snail. Both snail species are restricted to marshy or calcareous wetlands bordering lakes and rivers and are particularly vulnerable to drainage or afforestation of the sites where they survive, being highly dependent on maintenance of existing local hydrological conditions. The Proposed Project is over 600m from Louisa Bridge and would not result in any changes to the wetland and peripheral vegetation on which the snails require. The Project would also not result in any changes to the water levels in either the canal network or the Rye Water itself – the reasons for this being provided below.
- 4.1.6. The Rye Water is also a spawning ground for brown trout (*Salmo trutta trutta*) and Atlantic salmon (*S. salar*), and the rare, white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) has been recorded at Leixlip. The latter two species are listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive although are not a reason for the Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC's designation.
- 4.1.7. The Site is not hydrologically connected to the SAC since there are no rivers or ditches connecting Easton Road or Green Lane with the Rye Water or the Royal Canal and there would be no direct habitat loss to the SAC as a result of the Project nor to any functionally linked habitats such as waterways or calcareous springs. Leixlip forms part of the Lower Liffey Valley Regional Sewerage Scheme (LLVRSS). Foul and drainage water is treated via mains sewerage at Leixlip Wastewater Treatment Plant on The Black Avenue prior to discharge into the River Liffey approximately 1km east (downstream) of the Site. The Project described in Section 1.2 of this document is for an on-line upgrade and widening (for the addition of dedicated footways and cycle lanes) along a 700m section of an existing road (Green Lane). The widening will take place within an existing road/footpath corridor with minor landtake of garden walls, hedges and amenity grassland in three locations and this would

tie in to the existing drainage network without augmenting the volume of surface water flow into the drainage network or resulting in overflow or upslope flood risk. As such, the Project is not connected to the Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC due to the fact that the urban environment which includes the Site is connected to a drainage network which bypasses the Rye Water (including the SAC designated river) and discharges into the River Liffey downstream of the confluence of the Rye Water.

- 4.1.8. The land within Leixlip up to the edge of the river and the Royal Canal is flat and there is no significant surface water influx into the SAC watercourses or their tributaries. Consequently, there is no potential for the Project to result in water pollution which could lead to the deterioration of qualifying habitats or habitats supporting qualifying species.
- 4.1.9. The Project is not necessary for the management of the SAC and taken in isolation there is no LSE of the Project on the Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC.

5 CONCLUSIONS

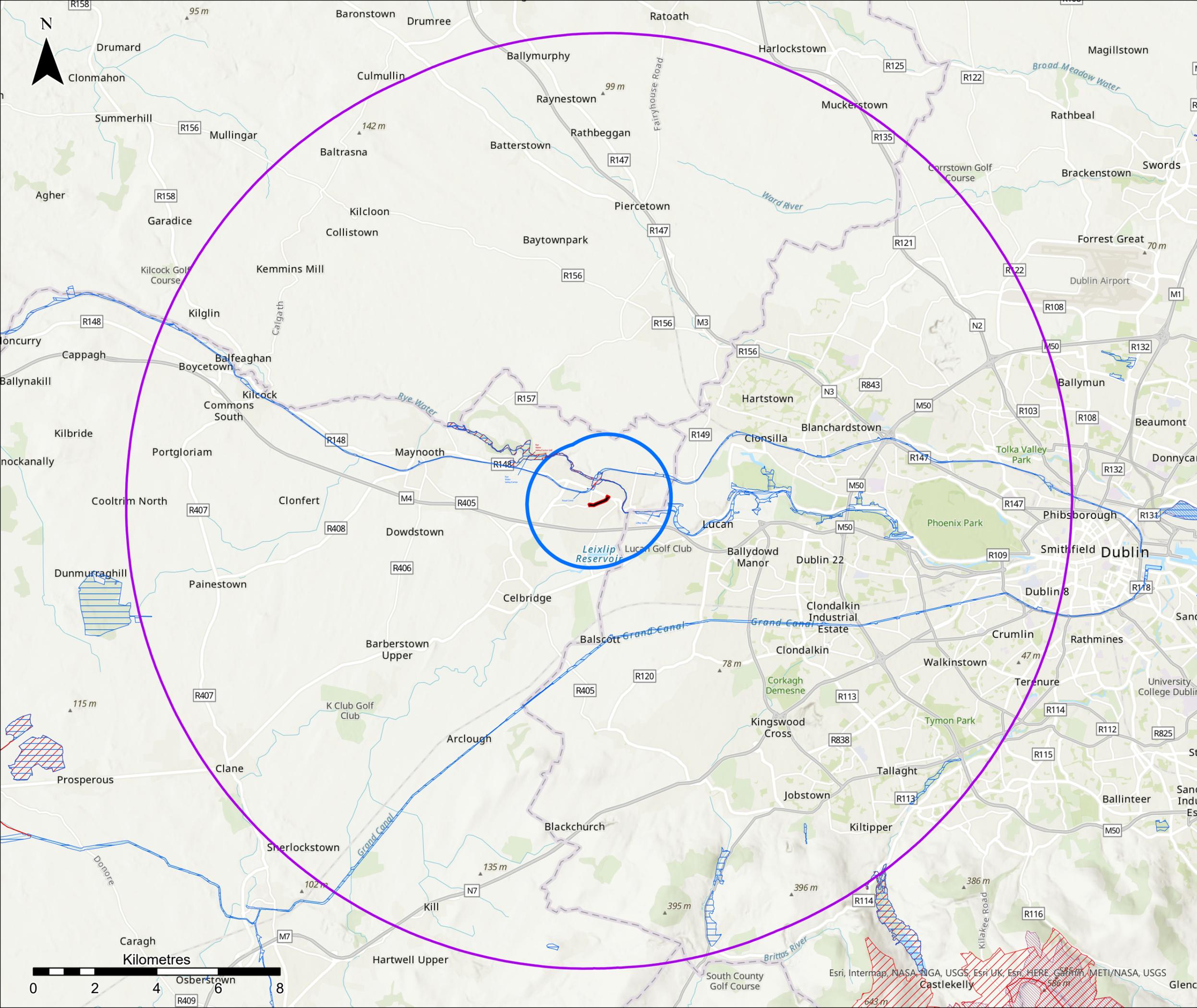
- 5.1.1. There are two Natura 2000 sites within the 15km study area; Glenasmole Valley SAC (designated for its orchid-rich calcareous grassland, Molinia meadows and petrifying springs) is at the edge of the study area and is hydrologically and ecologically distinct from it and is screened out. The Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC which protects the Annex I petrifying spring habitat and two snail species which rely on the calcareous vegetation in the river and adjacent canal network is within 550m of the Site. This report considers the potential for hydrological connectivity between the Project and the qualifying interests of the Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC and concludes that there is no potential for impacts (such as from pollution or siltation) due to the fact that the Project is downstream of the designated site by way of the drainage network.
- 5.1.2. As the Project would not give rise to any LSE, an Appropriate Assessment will not be required to determine the implications for this designated site in view of its conservation objectives.

6 REFERENCES

- Benson, L. (2009). Use of inland feeding sites by Brent geese in Dublin Bay 2008-2009: a new conservation concern? *Irish Birds*, 8:563-570.
- DoEHLG (2009). *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities*. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). Dublin. Revised February 2010.
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7 FIGURES

FIGURE 2 ECOLOGICAL DESIGNATION



- Legend**
- Red Line Boundary
 - 2 Km Buffer
 - 15 Km Buffer
 - Special Area of Conservation
 - Proposed Natural Heritage Areas

DRAWING STATUS:
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PROJECT:
**Green Lane Cycle Track,
Leixlip**

TITLE:
**Figure 2:
Ecological Designation**

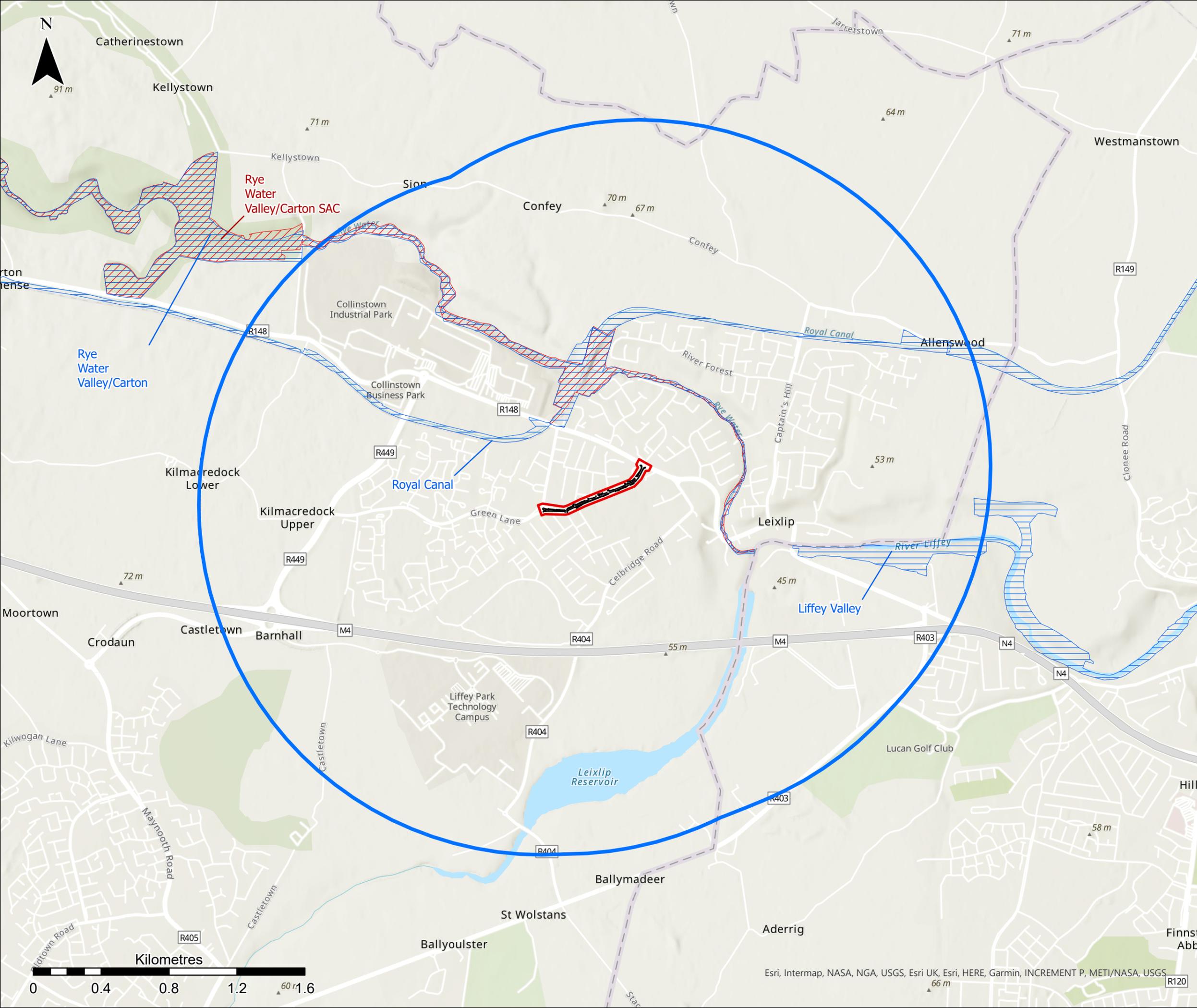
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FIGURE 2A ECOLOGICAL DESIGNATION





Legend

- Red Line Boundary
- 2 Km Buffer
- Special Area of Conservation
- Proposed Natural Heritage Areas

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PROJECT:
**Green Lane Cycle Track,
Leixlip**

TITLE:
**Figure 2a
Ecological Designation**

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