





APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT

FOR
PROPOSED
VILLAGE RENEWAL MASTERPLAN
AT
JOHNSTOWNBRIDGE
Co. KILDARE

ON BEHALF OF
Kildare County Council

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Enviroguide Consulting was commissioned by Kildare County Council (KCC) to prepare an Appropriate Assessment Screening Report in respect of a Proposed Village Renewal Masterplan (VRMP), hereafter referred to as 'Proposed Masterplan' or 'Site' (where referring to the area of the Proposed Masterplan), for Johnstownbridge, Co Kildare. This report contains information to enable the competent authority to undertake Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening in respect of the Proposed Masterplan.

1.2 Legislative Background

The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) seeks to conserve natural habitats and wild fauna and flora by the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) seeks to protect birds of special importance by the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs). It is the responsibility of each Member State to designate SPAs and SACs, both of which will form part of the Natura 2000 Network, a network of protected sites throughout the European Community. These designated sites are referred to as 'Natura 2000 sites' or 'European sites'. SACs are selected for the conservation of Annex I habitats (including priority types which are in danger of disappearance) and Annex II species (other than birds). SPAs are selected for the conservation of Annex I birds and other regularly occurring migratory birds and their habitats. The annexed habitats and species for which each site is selected correspond to the qualifying interests of the sites; from these the conservation objectives of the site are derived.

An AA is a required assessment to determine the likelihood of significant effects, based on best scientific knowledge, of any plans or projects on European sites. Screening for AA determines whether a plan or project, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a European site, in view of its conservation objectives.

This AA Screening has been undertaken to determine the potential for significant effects on relevant European sites. The purpose of this assessment is to determine, the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the Proposed Masterplan in the context of the conservation objectives of such sites.

1.2.1 Legislative Context

The obligations in relation to AA have been implemented in Ireland under Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended ("the 2000 Act"), and in particular Section 177U and Section 177V thereof. The relevant provisions of Section 177U in relation to AA screening have been set out below:

"177U.— (1) A screening for appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or application for consent for proposed development shall be carried out by the competent authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if that Land use plan or proposed development, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the European site.

(2)...

(3)...

(4) The competent authority shall determine that an appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or a proposed development, as the case may be, is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the draft Land use plan or proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

(5) The competent authority shall determine that an appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or a proposed development, as the case may be, is not required if it can be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the draft Land use plan or proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.”

An Appropriate Assessment is required under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive where a project or plan may give rise to significant effects upon a European site. Paragraph 3 states that:

“6(3) Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site, in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”

1.2.2 Stages of Appropriate Assessment

This AA Screening Report (the 'Screening Report') has been prepared by Enviroguide Consulting. It considers whether the Proposed Masterplan is likely to have a significant effect on any European sites and whether a Stage 2 AA is required.

The AA process is a four-stage process (Figure 1). Each stage requires different considerations, assessments and tests to ultimately arrive at the relevant conclusion for each stage. An important aspect of the process is that the outcome at each successive stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required.

Overview of Screening and Appropriate Assessment

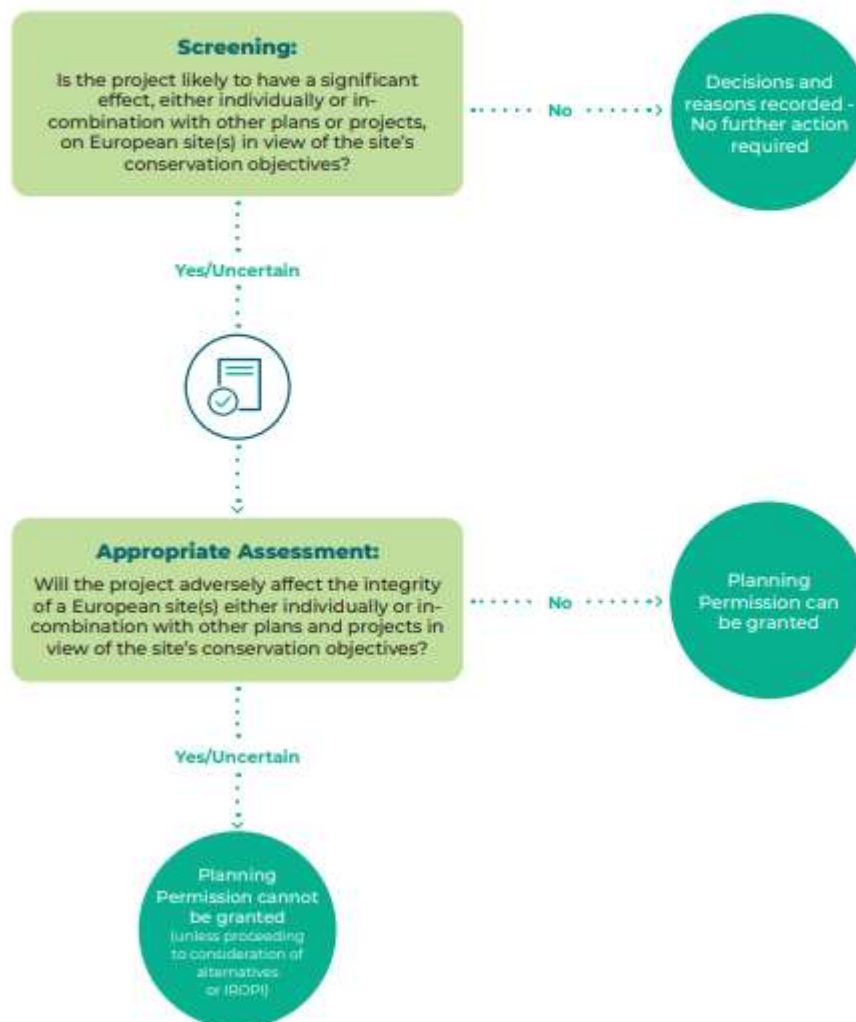


FIGURE 1. OVERVIEW OF SCREENING AND APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT (OPR, 2021).

The four stages of an AA, can be summarised as follows:

- Stage 1: *Screening*. The first stage of the AA process is to determine the likelihood of significant effects of the proposal, this addresses:
 - whether a plan or project is directly connected to or necessary for the management of the European site, or
 - whether a plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a European site in view of its conservation objectives.
- Stage 2: *Appropriate Assessment*. The second stage of the AA requires the competent authority to determine whether the project or plan (either alone or in combination with other projects or plans) will have an adverse effect on the integrity of the European site, having regard to the conservation objectives of the site and its ecological structure

and function. The developer must provide a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) to the competent authority to inform the AA, which is a statement, for the purposes of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive of the potential impacts of a proposed development, on its own or in combination with other plans or projects, for one or more than one European site, in view of the conservation objectives of the site or sites. It must include a report of a scientific examination of evidence and data, carried out by competent persons to identify and classify any potential impacts for one or more than one European site in view of the conservation objectives of the site or sites. The competent authority must consult with the public in relation to any plan or project that requires AA. If the competent authority determines that the plan or project would have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site, it can only grant consent after proceeding through stages 3 and 4.

- **Stage 3: Assessment of alternative solutions.** If the outcome of Stage 2 is negative i.e., adverse impacts to the sites cannot be scientifically ruled out, despite mitigation, the plan or project should proceed to Stage 3 or be abandoned. This stage examines alternative solutions to the proposal.
- **Stage 4: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain.** The final stage is the main derogation process examining whether there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for allowing a plan or project to adversely affect a European site, where no less damaging solution exists.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Guidance

This Screening Report has been undertaken in accordance with the following guidance:

- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities.* (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision);
- *Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities.* Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10;
- *Communication from the Commission on the precautionary principle* (European Commission, 2000);
- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission, 2019);
- *Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites – Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission, 2021); and
- *Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, OPR Practice Note PN01, Office of the Planning Regulator March 2021.*

2.2 Screening Steps

This Screening Report has been undertaken in accordance with the European Communities Methodological Guidance on the provision of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2002) and the European Commission Guidance 'Managing Natura 2000 sites' (EC, 2000). Screening for AA involves the following steps:

- Establish whether the plan is directly connected with or necessary for the management of a European site;
- Description of the plan or project and the description and characterisation of other projects or plans that in combination have the potential for having significant effects on the European site;
- Identification of European sites potentially affected;
- Identification and description of potential effects on the European site;
- Assessment of the likely significance of the effects identified on the European site; and
- Exclusion of sites where it can be objectively concluded that there will be no significant effects.

2.3 Desk Study

A desktop study was carried out to collate and review available information, datasets and documentation sources relevant for the completion of this Screening Report. The desktop study relied on the following sources:

- Information on the network of European sites, boundaries, qualifying interests and conservation objectives, obtained from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) at www.npws.ie;
- Text summaries of the relevant European sites taken from the respective Standard Data Forms and site synopses available at www.npws.ie;
- Information on waterbodies, catchment areas and hydrological connections obtained from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at www.gis.epa.ie;
- Information on bedrock, groundwater, aquifers and their statuses, obtained from Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) at www.gsi.ie;
- Satellite imagery and mapping obtained from various sources and dates including Google, Digital Globe, Bing and Ordnance Survey Ireland; and
- Information on the existence of permitted developments, or developments awaiting decision, in the vicinity of the Proposed Masterplan from KCC.

For a complete list of the specific documents consulted as part of this assessment, see *Section 5 References*.

2.4 Field Surveys

No field surveys were deemed necessary for the preparation of this Screening Report.

2.5 Identification of European sites

In order to identify the European sites that potentially lie within the Zone of Influence (ZOI) of the Proposed Masterplan, a Source-Path-Receptor (S-P-R) method was adopted, as described in 'OPR Practice Note PN01 - Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management' (OPR, 2021), a practice note produced by the Office of the Planning Regulator, Dublin. This note was published to provide guidance on screening for AA during the planning process, and although it focuses on the approach a planning authority should take in screening for AA, the methodology is also readily applied in the preparation of Screening Reports such as this.

The methodology used to identify relevant European sites comprised the following:

- Identification of potential sources of effects based on the Proposed Masterplan description and details;
- Use of up-to-date GIS spatial datasets for European designated sites and water catchments – downloaded from the NPWS website (www.npws.ie) and the EPA website (www.epa.ie) to identify European sites which could potentially be affected by the Proposed Masterplan; and
- Identification of potential pathways between the Proposed Masterplan and any European sites within the ZOI of any of the identified sources of effects.
 - The catchment data were used to establish or discount potential hydrological connectivity between the Proposed Masterplan and any European sites.
 - Groundwater and bedrock information used to establish or discount potential hydrogeological connectivity between the Proposed Masterplan and any European sites.
 - Air and land connectivity assessed based on Proposed Masterplan details and proximity to European sites.

There is absolutely no reliance placed in this Screening Report on mitigation measures intended to avoid/reduce harmful effects on the European sites.

2.6 Assessment of Significant Effects

The potential for significant effects that may arise from the Proposed Masterplan was considered through the use of key indicators, namely:

- Habitat loss or alteration
- Habitat/species fragmentation
- Disturbance and/or displacement of species
- Changes in population density
- Changes in water quality and resource

In addition, information pertaining to the conservation objectives of the European sites, the ecology of the designated habitats and species and known or perceived sensitivities of the habitats and species were considered.

3 STAGE 1 SCREENING

3.1 Management of European Sites

The Proposed Masterplan at Johnstownbridge is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European sites.

3.2 Johnstownbridge Village Renewal Masterplan

3.2.1 Johnstownbridge Village – Location & Description

Johnstownbridge (Droichead Baile Sheáin) is a village located in the north of Kildare, immediately south of the M4 motorway (Figure 2). Johnstownbridge acts as a local service centre for its inhabitants and the surrounding rural area with a population of 683 people (Census 2016).

Johnstownbridge is situated close to the larger towns of Enfield (2km) and Edenderry (15km). With and excellent access on to the M4 Motorway, Johnstownbridge is also an attractive location for commuters to Dublin (20minutes drive to M50).

The prime land use within Johnstownbridge is residential, with some community (health centre, school and church) and commercial land uses, which represent the key destinations for trips to and within the village (Figure 3).

Given the size of the village it is likely that other key destinations for trips (work and education) are located outside of Johnstownbridge village. In addition, within a short drive from the village is the Donadea Forest Park, Ballindoolin House & Gardens, Carbury Castle and Motte, Donadea Castle and Wallaby Woods.

Johnstownbridge is a linear village with R402 which passes through the centre and it connects Johnstownbridge to the M4 motorway link and Enfield town (south County Meath) to the north of the village and Carbury village and Edenderry town (east County Offaly) to the south-west of the village. The R402 is a two-way road, comprising a single carriageway (one lane in each direction) through the village.

The M4 provides a connection to Dublin in the east and to Sligo in the west, as well as to the wider motorway and national primary road network (including the M6 to Galway and the N5 to Westport).

Johnstown Bridge is not served by public transport services. The nearest public transport services are available in Enfield, County Meath, approximately to the northeast of the village.

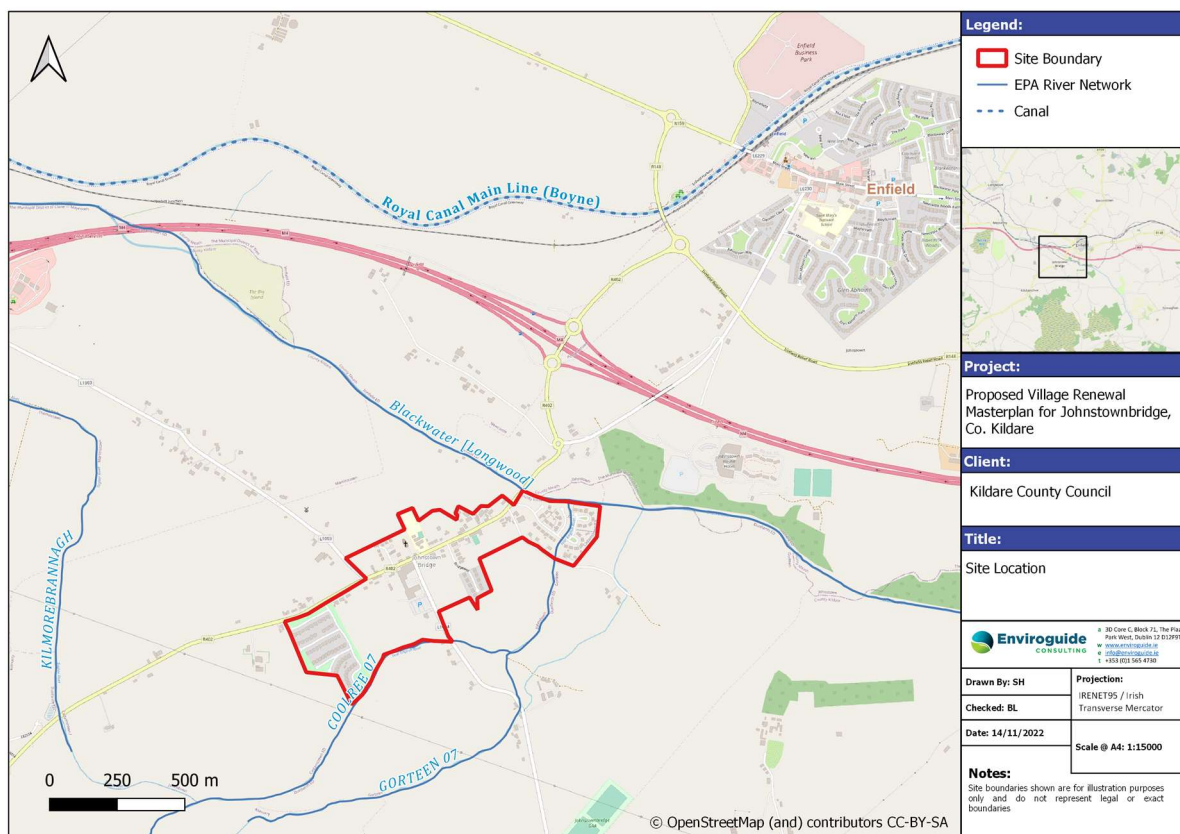


FIGURE 2. SITE LOCATION

3.2.2 Johnstownbridge Village Renewal Masterplan – Main Objectives

The central aim of the Proposed Masterplan is to support the renewal of Johnstownbridge in order to improve the living and working environment of its communities and increase its potential to support tourism and economic activity into the future. The overall intention is to:

- Increase the attractiveness of the village as a service centre for its rural hinterland, and as a result increase its sustainability as a place in which to live and work;
- Enhance the village environment and amenities in the interests of residents, businesses, and visitors; and
- Promote the village potential for tourism and as a centre for culture and local heritage, thus enhancing the sense of identity – physically and socially.

The renewal plan seeks to build on the very strong asset base of Johnstownbridge, to ensure it retains its strong identity, to contribute to its enhancement, and to create opportunities which are unique to Johnstownbridge for its citizens to identify with. As a village with growth potential, it needs to ensure that its current and future growth areas stitch into the village centre and its community base, and draw on its character and sense of place (Figure 4).

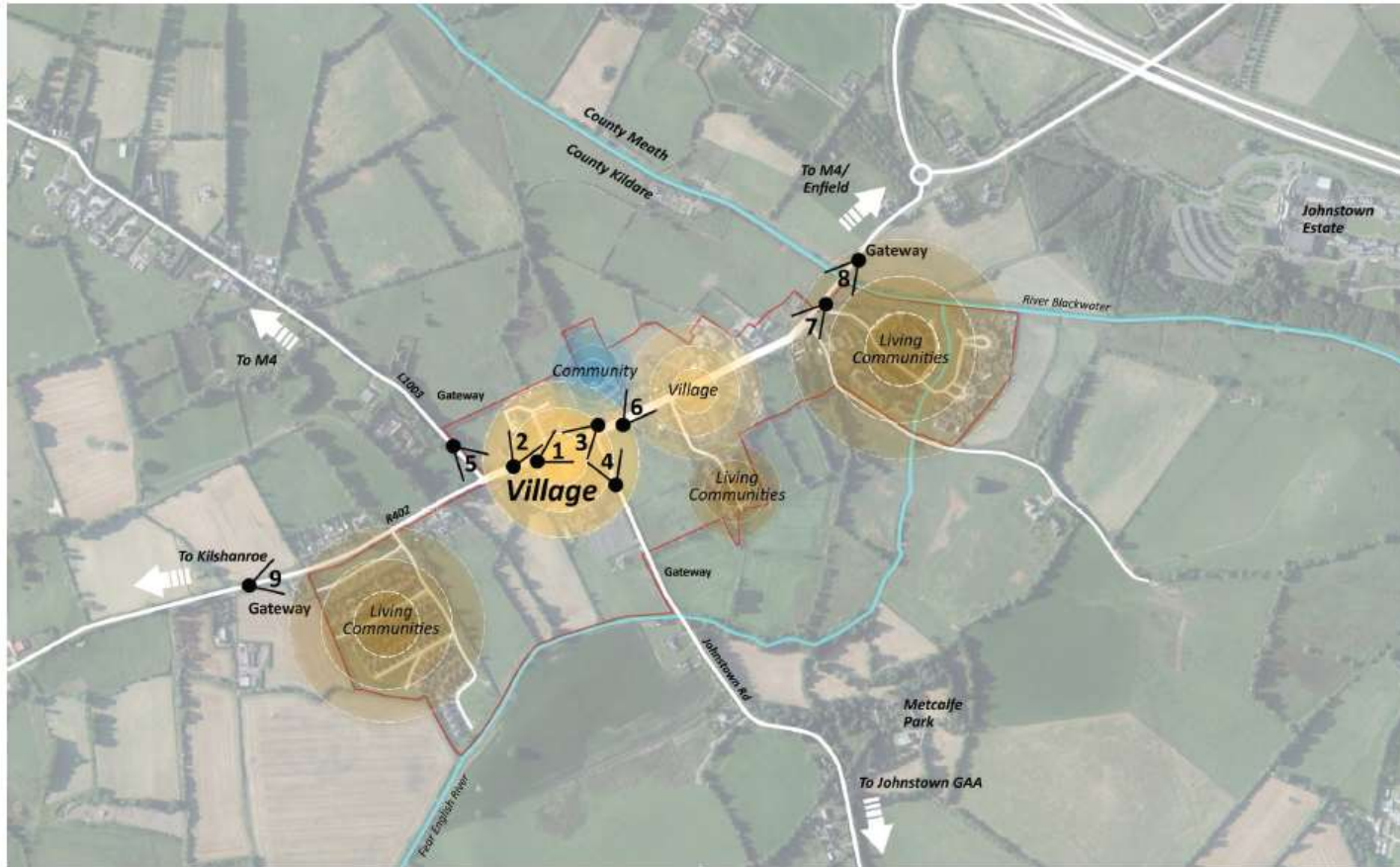
The objectives of the Renewal Plan are to:

1. Create the opportunities for enabling strategies that the local community, stakeholders, and Kildare County Council can support and sustain for the future development of the village.
2. Enhance the vitality and vibrancy of Johnstownbridge through ensuring future growth areas are woven into the village and the urban structure is consolidated.

3. Create an enhanced environment for people living, working, and visiting the village through public realm interventions, encouraging and sustaining economic growth.
4. Re-balance the movement network ensuring accessibility for all, to further enhance the walking and cycling environment, prioritizing public over private transport, and creating safe connections and places for people.
5. Enhance landscape quality and positive 'sense of place' in the village which in turn will not only help combat the effects of climate change but also support higher property values and rental yields.
6. Create a Compact Low-Carbon Climate Resilient Village including strategic regeneration proposals incorporating best practice in low-carbon placemaking and design, the promotion of sustainable transport modes and the enhancement of biodiversity in the village through blue and green infrastructure developments.

The Proposed Masterplan identifies five key priority projects for the regeneration of Johnstownbridge (Figure 5), these include:

1. **Public Realm Design Guidelines:** These guidelines would be prepared in an aim to create a unified and visually attractive environment. This effort will ultimately act as an investment catalyst, encouraging private property upgrades and new development.
2. **Village Centre:** A number of potential projects are identified, and key recommendations are made by the Proposed Masterplan to improve traffic flows, pedestrian safety and sense of place in the village centre, as well as enhance the currently underutilised green spaces via provision of outdoor recreational facilities (e.g., picnic tables, gym equipment, etc.) and additional green landscaping.
3. **Johnstown Rd to GAA:** The Proposed Masterplan makes recommendations for improving the safety for non-vehicular access to the village, introduce consistent street-lighting, and provide measures for traffic calming at critical locations along the road.
4. **Village Gateways:** The Proposed Masterplan makes recommendations for creating legible and attractive entry points with strong first impressions, and strengthening the sense of arrival and 'welcome' experience within and around the village.
5. **Village Traffic Calming:** The Proposed Masterplan makes recommendations to tighten turning radiuses at more generous junctions and introduce speed bumps and other traffic calming measures in critical locations within the village. Additional recommendations are made to replace bollards with additional landscaping.



1 Village Centre at Contra/Hamlet Court Hotel



2 Green Open Space opposite Contra



3 Main Street from Johnstown Road Junction



4 Johnstown Road approaching St. Patrick's Church



5 L1003 Junction @ Johnstownbridge Health Centre



6 St. Patricks National School Entrance Zone



7 Maxol Filling Station



8 Johnstown Bridge at County Boundary



9 Approach from Kilshanroe

FIGURE 3. JOHNSTOWNBRIDGE VILLAGE EXISTING LAYOUT (SOURCE: JOHNSTOWNBRIDGE VRMP (KCC 2022))

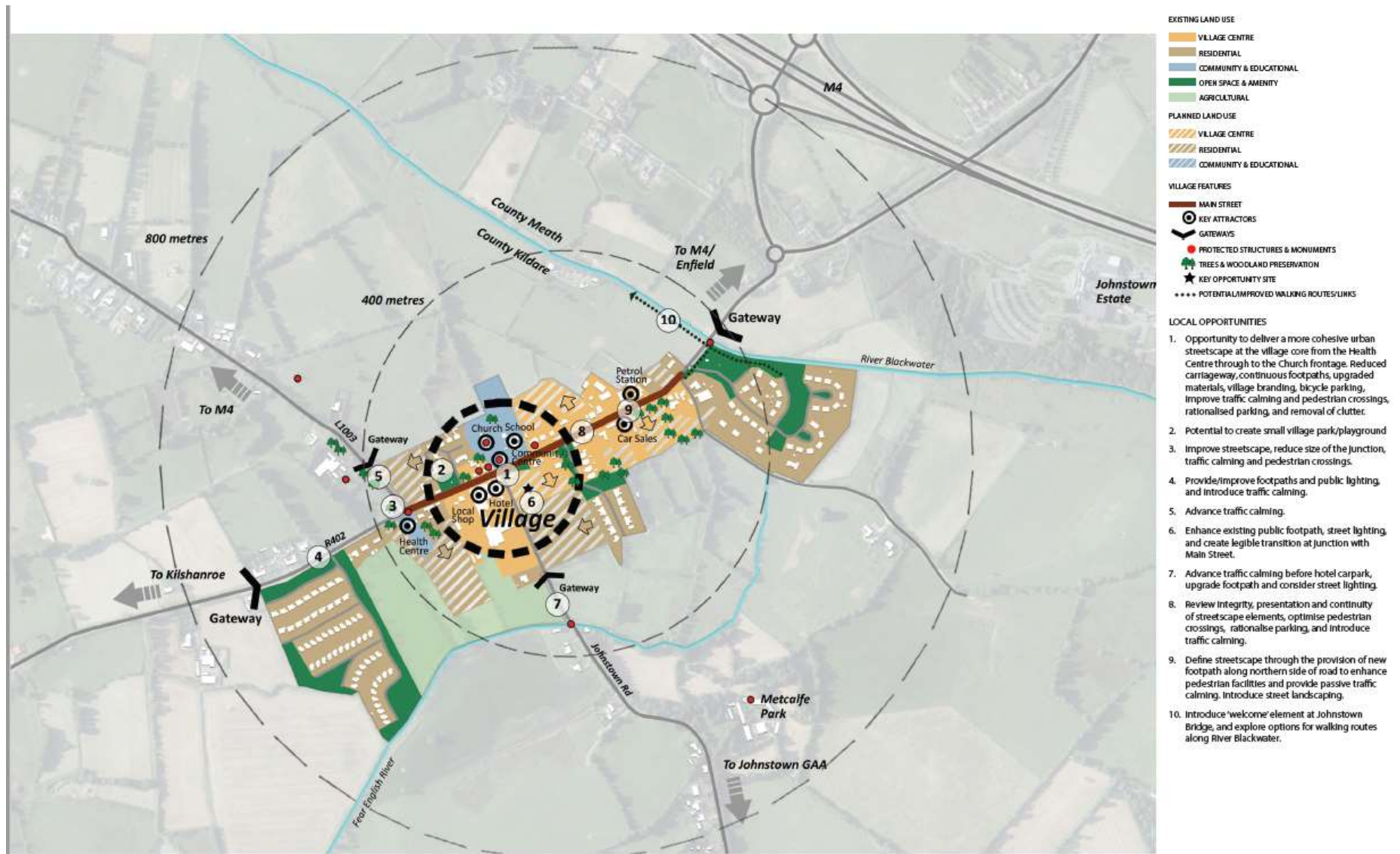


FIGURE 4. PROPOSED OPPORTUNITY AREAS (SOURCE: JOHNSTOWNBRIDGE VRMP (KCC, 2022))



KEY PROJECTS

1. Public Realm Design Guidelines
2. Village Centre
3. Johnsown Rd to GAA
4. Village Gateways
5. Village Traffic Calming



Village Centre



Main Street at School



Village Gateway (from Enfield)

FIGURE 5. PROPOSED KEY PRIORITY PROJECTS (SOURCE: JOHNSTOWNBRIDGE VRMP (KCC, 2022))

3.3 Existing Environment

3.3.1 Hydrology

The Site has been mapped by the EPA (EPA, 2022b) to be within the Boyne Water Framework Directive (WFD) Catchment (ID: 07), the Boyne_SC_020 and Blackwater[Longwood]_SC_010 Sub-Catchments, (Sub-catchment IDs: 07_16 and 07_6, respectively) and the Blackwater(Longwood)_030 and Blackwater(Longwood)_020 WFD River Sub Basins (European Codes: IE_EA_07B020200 and IE_EA_07B020100, respectively).

The village is bounded by a tributary to the Blackwater-Longwood River (EPA name: COOLREE_07) as well as its main channel (Figure 2), both of which have been assessed under the WFD name Blackwater (Longwood)_020. This waterbody has been assigned a *Moderate* ecological status based on monitoring, however it is projected to be *At risk* of not achieving its WFD objectives (EPA, 2022).

For the Blackwater-Longwood River, a Q-value of 3 was recorded in 2020 from Bridge at Johnstown, while approx. 5.6km downstream at 'Bridge ESE of Longwood' the Q-values in 2020 were recorded as 3-4 (EPA, 2022).

The Royal Canal Main Line (Boyne) (EU Code: IE_07_AWB_RCMLE) is located approximately 1km north of the Site. It has been assigned a *Good* ecological status and is *Not at risk* of not achieving its WFD objectives (EPA, 2022).

3.3.2 Geology and Hydrogeology

The Site is situated on the Trim (IE_EA_G_002) groundwater body. The WFD status of the Trim GWB is *Good* but is projected to be *At Risk* of not achieving its WFD objectives. The bedrock aquifer in the area is a '*Locally Important Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Moderately Productive*'. The groundwater rock units underlying the aquifer are classified as *Dinantian Upper Impure Limestones*. The level of vulnerability to groundwater contamination from human activities varies from *Low* to *High* across village (GSI, 2022).

The village is underlain by five types of subsoils. *Made* ground covers the majority of the main street, surrounded by Carboniferous *Limestone till* and *Limestone sands and gravel*. The Blackwater-Longwood is underlain by undifferentiated *Alluvium*, while its tributary (COOLREE_07) is underlain by undifferentiated *Lake sediments* (EPA, 2022).

3.4 Identification of Relevant European Sites

The following sections detail the results of the S-P-R method applied as outlined in section 2.5.

3.4.1 Potential Sources of Effects

The Proposed Masterplan will act as a non-statutory framework for the enhancement of the Johnstownbridge Village, including recommendations for public realm design guidelines, road and traffic flow improvements, enhancing the feel of "welcome" at gateways to the village, addition of green spaces and footpaths and exploring the potential for increased connectivity via public transport to and from the village. The Proposed Masterplan itself does not propose any direct works.

Therefore, potential sources of effects do not directly relate to development proposals but are identified to represent *potential development projects* undertaken as recommended by the Proposed Masterplan.

The following elements of the Proposed Masterplan were identified and assessed for their potential to cause likely significant effects on European sites:

- Uncontrolled releases of surface water containing silt/sediments and other pollutants into the Blackwater-Longwood River and its tributary during any road improvement projects.
- Uncontrolled releases of surface water containing pollutants into the ground water during road improvement projects.
- Accidental spread of invasive plants from greening projects.
- Increased traffic and associated pollution as a result of increased visitors by private car.

Although assessed here as part of the Proposed Masterplan, any future development projects undertaken with cognisance to the Proposed Masterplan are subject to the appropriate environmental assessments as per the policies set out in the Kildare County Development Plan (KCDP) 2023-2029.

3.4.2 Potential Pathways to European Sites

For the above listed potential sources of effects to have the potential to cause likely significant effects on any European site, a pathway between the source of potential effects (i.e., the Site of the Proposed Masterplan) and the receptor is required. The potential for pathways between European sites and the Proposed Masterplan Site was assessed on a case-by-case basis using the S-P-R framework (OPR, 2021). Pathways considered included:

- a. Direct pathways e.g., proximity/location within a European site, water bodies, air (for both air emissions and noise impacts).
- b. Indirect pathways e.g., disruption to migratory paths, 'Sightlines' where noisy or intrusive activities may result in disturbance to shy species.

Potential impact pathways are discussed in the following sections in the context of the potential impact sources as identified in section 3.4.1.

3.4.2.1 Direct Pathways

Hydrological pathways

The Site is located adjacent to the Blackwater-Longwood River, which flows in a north-westerly direction past the village. This river ultimately joins the Boyne River approx. 14km downstream, where it also connects to two European sites:

- River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (002299)
- River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (004232)

Any potential pollutants that may enter the Blackwater-Longwood River at the Proposed Masterplan Site would become diluted to indiscernible levels within the receiving freshwater environment of the river, prior to reaching the European sites.

Invasive floral species may however spread into the connected European sites via this hydrological pathway, and the potential for likely significant effects from invasive species is therefore assessed further in this Screening Report.

No other European sites are linked to the Site via hydrological means.

Hydrogeological pathways

During groundworks and other construction activities that may result from developments made under the Proposed Masterplan, the ground will be exposed and any potential accidental discharges to ground could potentially migrate vertically downward to the underlying bedrock aquifer and laterally within the aquifer to downgradient receiving surface waterbodies, i.e., the Blackwater-Longwood River. However, considering the combined distance from the Site via groundwater and the riverine system any potential pollutants would have to travel prior to reaching the European sites downstream, it is considered the dilution and dispersion potential of the receiving ground and freshwater environments deems the hydrogeological pathway insignificant.

Air and land pathways

No air and land pathways from the Proposed Masterplan to any European sites were identified, as the distance between the Site and the nearest designated sites (River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC/SPA, approx. 8.5km northwest) is deemed sufficient to exclude any potential for impacts from increases in noise, lighting and/or dust or other airborne pollutants.

3.4.2.2 Indirect Pathways

No indirect pathways (e.g., disruptions to migratory paths) were identified.

3.4.3 Relevant European Sites

A European site will only be at risk from likely significant effects where an S-P-R link of note exists between the Proposed Masterplan Site and the European site. The preceding steps identified two European sites that are hydrologically linked to the Proposed Masterplan (Figure 6):

- River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (002299)
- River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (004232)

These sites are linked to the Proposed Masterplan via a hydrological link capable of transporting invasive floral species downstream into these European sites.

No other European sites are connected to the Proposed Masterplan via any direct or indirect pathways. The European sites considered under the various potential pathways are listed in Table 1, and European sites within a 10 km radius of the Proposed Masterplan are shown in Figure 6 for information purposes.

TABLE 1. EUROPEAN SITES CONSIDERED WITH THE SOURCE-PATHWAY-RECEPTOR (S-P-R) METHOD TO ESTABLISH NOTABLE LINKS BETWEEN THE SOURCES OF EFFECTS ARISING FROM THE PROPOSED MASTERPLAN, AND ANY RELEVANT EUROPEAN SITES. THOSE SITES WITH NOTABLE S-P-R LINKS ARE HIGHLIGHTED IN GREEN (IF ANY).

European site	QIs / SCIs	Potential Pathways
Special Areas of Conservation		
River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (002299) Linear Distance to Proposed Masterplan: approx. 8.5 km	Habitats 7230 Alkaline fens 91E0 Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>)* Species 1355 Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) 1106 Salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>) 1099 River Lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>)	Weak hydrological via the Blackwater-Longwood River.
Special Protection Areas		
River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (004232) Linear distance to Proposed Masterplan: approx. 8.5 km	Birds A229 Kingfisher (<i>Alcedo atthis</i>)	Weak hydrological via the Blackwater-Longwood River.

3.4.3.1 Relevant European Sites – Site Descriptions

River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC

The following description is extracted from the Standard Data Form Quality and Importance section for the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC:

*“The main channel of the Boyne contains a good example of alluvial woodland of the *Salicetum albo-fragilis* type which has developed on three alluvium islands. Alkaline fen vegetation is well represented at Lough Shesk, where there is a very fine example of habitat succession from open water to raised bog. The Boyne and its tributaries is one of Ireland's premier game fisheries and offers a wide range of angling, from fishing for spring salmon and grilse [*Salmo salar*] to sea trout fishing and extensive brown trout fishing. The site is one of the most important in eastern Ireland for *Salmo salar* and has very extensive spawning grounds. The site also has an important population of [river lamprey] *Lampetra fluviatilis*, though the distribution or abundance of this species is not well known. [Otter] *Lutra lutra* is widespread throughout the site. Some of the grassland areas along the Boyne and Blackwater are used by a nationally important winter flock of [whooper swan] *Cygnus cygnus*. Several Red Data Book plants occur within the site, with [Round-leaved Wintergreen] *Pyrola rotundifolia*, [Fowl bluegrass] *Poa palustris* and [Round-fruited Rush] *Juncus compressus*. Also occurring are a number of Red Data Book animals, notably [badger] *Meles meles*, [pine marten] *Martes martes* and [common frog] *Rana temporaria*. The River Boyne is a designated Salmonid Water under the EU Freshwater Fish Directive.”*

River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA

The following description is extracted from the Standard Data Form Quality and Importance section for the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA:

“The River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA supports nationally important numbers of [kingfisher] *Alcedo atthis*. Other species which occur within the site include [mute swan] *Cygnus olor*, [eurasian teal] *Anas crecca*, [mallard] *Anas platyrhynchos*, [great cormorant] *Phalacrocorax carbo*, [grey heron] *Ardea cinerea*, [moorhen] *Gallinula chloropus*, [snipe] *Gallinago gallinago* and [sand martin] *Riparia riparia*.”

3.4.3.2 Relevant European sites – Conservation Objectives

Each European site is designated based on a unique set of Qualifying Interests (QIs) or Special Conservation Interests (SCIs), which can be species and/or habitats of conservation and/or community interest, and typically each of these will have a set of Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCO). Where SSCOs have not been compiled, generic objectives are used. The SSCOs for the relevant European sites are detailed in Table 2.

TABLE 2. QUALIFYING INTERESTS (QIS) / SPECIAL CONSERVATION INTERESTS (SCIS) AND THEIR CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR THE RELEVANT EUROPEAN SITES. THE CONSERVATION STATUS OF EACH QI / SCI WAS SOURCED FROM THE RELEVANT STANDARD DATA FORMS, AVAILABLE FROM THE NATURA 2000 NETWORK VIEWER¹.

QI / SCI	Conservation Status	Conservation Objective
River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (002299)		
7230 Alkaline fens	Good	To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Alkaline fens in River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:
91E0 Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>)	Good	To restore the favourable conservation condition of Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>)* in River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC.
1355 Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	Excellent	To maintain the favourable conservation condition of River Lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>) in River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:
1106 Salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>)	Good	To restore the favourable conservation condition of these species in River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC/
1099 River Lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>)	Good	
River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (004232)		
A229 Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Good	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of this bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA.

¹ Available at: <https://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/>

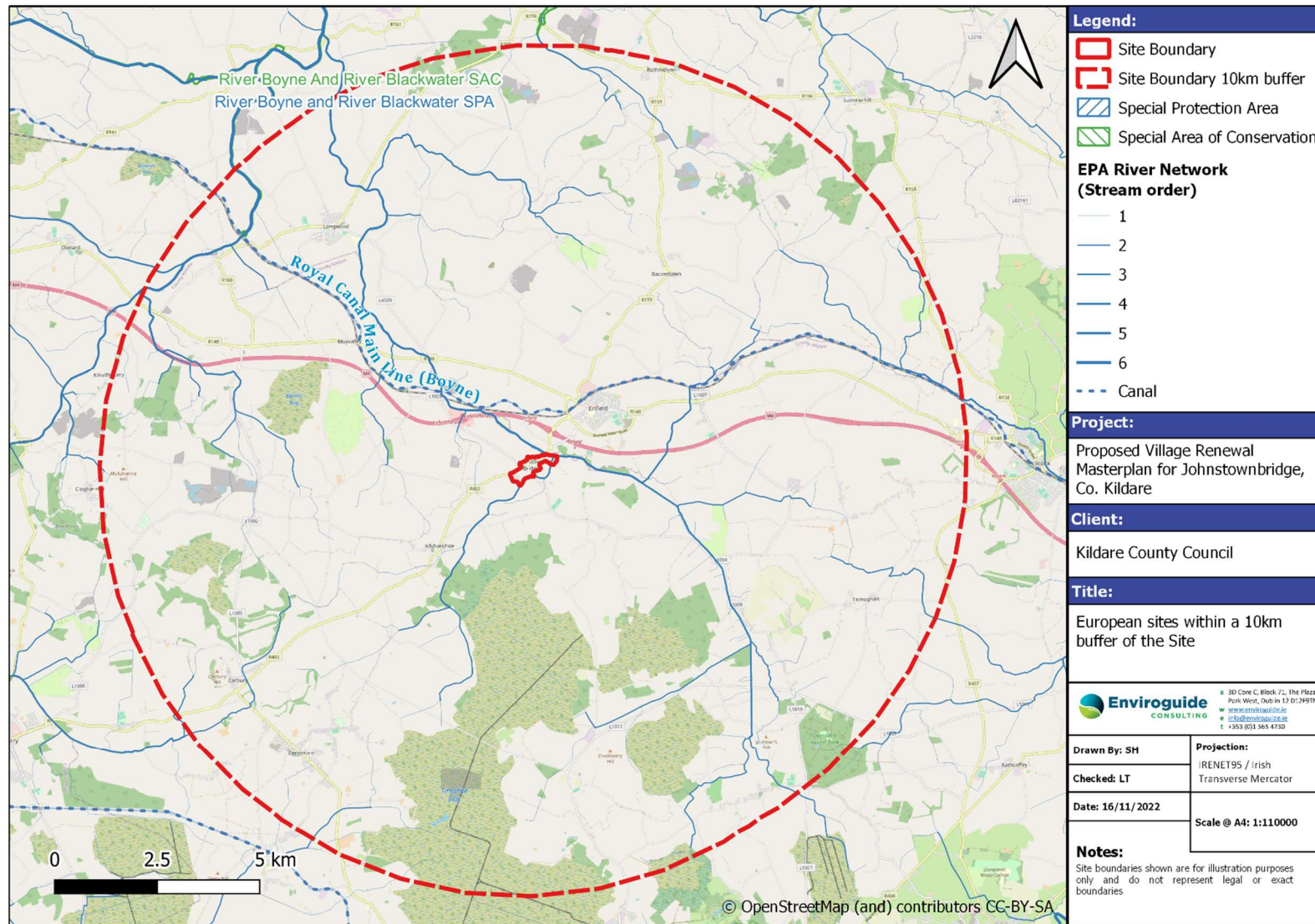


FIGURE 6. EUROPEAN SITES WITHIN A 10KM RADIUS OF PROPOSED MASTERPLAN

3.5 Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

The following sections discuss the potential for likely significant effects on the relevant European sites, taking into consideration their QIs, SCIs and SSCOs, and assesses whether the Proposed Masterplan has the capacity to adversely affect the integrity of any of the relevant European sites.

3.5.1 Habitat Loss or Alteration

The Proposed Masterplan is not within any European site boundaries and is thus not expected to lead to direct loss of habitats or alteration of same.

However, habitat loss or alteration can also occur as a result of invasive species introductions. Fragments and seeds can travel considerable distances in watercourses. The Proposed Masterplan includes recommendations for improvement of gateways into the village, one of which is located at Johnstown Bridge over the Blackwater-Longwood River. The proposed projects and key recommendations put forward by the Proposed Masterplan are subject to detailed design and individual planning, which must accord to the KCDP 2023-2029 objectives and policies on Development Management Standards, including the standards set for Soft Landscaping. These standards state that “*New planting should consist of local native plant types indigenous to the area*” and provide a table of acceptable tree and shrub species (Table 15.1 (a) in the KCDP 2023-2029). Additionally, the KCDP 2023-2029 provides for protection of designated sites via policies on the overall protection of the European sites network (e.g., BI P2, BI O9, BI O10), as well as specific policies regarding potential spread of Invasive Species:

- BI P9: “Implement and support measures for the prevention and/or eradication of invasive species within the county and the control of noxious weeds”.
- BI O58: “Require all development proposals to address the presence or absence of invasive alien species on proposed development sites and (if necessary) require applicants to prepare and submit an Invasive Species Management Plan where such species exist, in order to comply with the provisions of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011”.

The Proposed Masterplan, as already stated, does not constitute a statutory framework of development, and it does not put forward individual planning applications. Therefore, it can be concluded that any potential projects arising as advised by the Proposed Masterplan must adhere to the policies of the KCDP 2023-2029 to protect European sites and to prevent the spread of invasive species. Thus, the potential for significant habitat loss/alteration as a result of invasive species spread arising from the preparation of the Proposed Masterplan **can be excluded**.

All projects and key recommendations implemented as a result of the Proposed Masterplan are subject to the appropriate environmental assessments, including the AA process.

3.5.2 Habitat / Species Fragmentation

Habitat fragmentation has been defined as the ‘reduction and isolation of patches of natural environment’ (Hall *et al.*, 1997 cited in Franklin *et al.*, 2002) usually due to an external disturbance such that an alteration of the spatial composition of a habitat occurs that alters the habitat and ‘create[s] isolated or tenuously connected patches of the original habitat’

(Wiens, 1989 cited in Franklin *et al.*, 2002). This results in spatial separation of habitat units which had previously been in a state of greater continuity.

As there will be no habitat loss within any European sites, no habitat fragmentation will arise as a result of the Proposed Masterplan.

3.5.3 Changes in Water Quality and Resource

As detailed in section 3.4.2.1, the potential for any surface water discharges containing pollutants from any of the recommended projects by the Proposed Masterplan to reach the downstream European sites is deemed negligible due to the distance between the Site and the designated sites. However, it is important to note that all future developments within the Site will be subject to the appropriate environmental assessments at detailed design stage as set out in the KCDP 2023-2029.

The Proposed Masterplan does not recommend increases in local population and/or residential dwellings, and as such will not result in added pressures on water resources or the treatment volumes of foul water.

Considering the above, the potential for likely significant effects on water quality and/or resource arising from the Proposed Masterplan **can be ruled out**.

3.5.4 Changes in Population Density

Adverse effects on the attributes pertaining to vegetation and plant community structure of the Annex I habitats of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (see Table 2) could occur as a result of invasive species introductions, which can alter the density of the characteristic species. However, as noted above in section 3.5.1, invasive species introductions are not expected as a result of the Proposed Masterplan, as all projects and developments at the Site are subject to the policies and development standards as set out in the KCDP 2023-2029.

No S-P-R links to the attributes of the Annex II species (salmon, lamprey, otter and kingfisher) of the relevant European sites were identified.

Therefore, potential for likely significant changes to population densities of QI/SCI species within the relevant European sites **can be ruled out**.

3.5.5 Disturbance and/or Displacement of Species

As noted above in sections 3.5.1.1 and 3.5.4, invasive species spread to the relevant European sites is not expected as a result of the Proposed Masterplan. As such, significant displacement via competitive exclusion of plant species **can be ruled out**.

No S-P-R links to the attributes of the Annex II species (salmon, lamprey, otter and kingfisher) of the relevant European sites were identified.

3.5.6 Potential for In-combination Effects

Although the Proposed Masterplan is not considered to have the capacity to cause significant effects on any European sites alone, it is important to consider the potential for cumulative effects with other plans and/or projects. The following sections outline existing granted or pending planning permissions in the vicinity of the Proposed Masterplan and assess the potential for adverse in-combination effects on any European sites.

3.5.6.1 Existing Granted or Pending Planning Permissions

A search of planning applications located within the Proposed Masterplan area and within a 1 km radius of the Site was undertaken using online planning resources such as the National Planning Application Database (NPAD) (MyPlan.ie) and Kildare County Council's Planning Applications Map Viewer (<http://webgeo.kildarecoco.ie/planningenquiry>). Any planning applications listed as granted or decision pending from within the last five years were assessed for their potential to act in-combination with the Proposed Masterplan and cause likely significant effects on the relevant European sites. Long-term developments granted outside of this time period were also considered where applicable.

It is noted that the majority of developments within the Site of the Proposed Masterplan are applications granted for new build dwellings and/or changes to existing dwellings (e.g., extensions). With due consideration of the distance to the nearest European sites, it is considered that **no potential exists** for significant in-combination effects on any European sites.

The larger existing projects within the Proposed Masterplan area that have not yet commenced construction or are under construction, and within a 1 km radius are detailed below (all references are for the KCC unless otherwise stated).

Reg. Ref. 21349 (Meath CoCo), approx. 300m west along the Blackwater-Longwood. Granted on 31/05/21 (15 conditions).

“Permission for the development will consist of construction of 11 No. Reed Beds measuring 20m (long) by 15m (wide) by 2.0m (high), 2 No. 18.3m (approximate) diameter reinforced concrete Final Settlement Tanks (1,300 m³) with associated access/viewing platform, 1 No. WAS Holding Tank (90m³), 2 No. 60m long Transfer pipelines beneath the bed of the River Blackwater between the new and existing treatment infrastructure, 1 No. Sludge Import facilities, construction of various pump sumps and the installation of duty/standby pumps, 1 No. 2m by 1.5m Box Culvert, new site surface water drainage pipework, sustainable drainage attenuation and manholes, new internal roads, installation of a new 2.4 m high wire mesh boundary fence with lockable access gates, new outfall to the River Blackwater for treated effluent and attenuated surface water runoff, landscaping and reinstatement including tree and hedge planting, localised scour protection and bank repair works to a part of the riverbank, new kerbs and flood defence measures on the existing [Wastewater Treatment Plant] WWTP site, decommissioning of existing clarifiers and belt press and removal of the Picket Fence Thickener and all ancillary works. Access is via an existing access off the R402. The development is an extension to Enfield WWTP to increase the treatment capacity and has an overall site area of 2.7ha. A Natura Impact Statement accompanies this planning application.”

Reg. Ref. 191018, approx. 850m southwest of Proposed Masterplan Site area, Granted on 13/08/2020 (17 conditions):

“Permission for importation of clean topsoil and subsoil into the subject site of 4.29 hectares at Kilmurry, Johnstown Bridge, Co. Kildare, in order that the site can be rendered suitable for agriculture. It is proposed to improve approximately 3.79 ha of the site and it is estimated that this will require approximately 62457 cubic metres of greenfield, inert soil and stone. The applicant also proposes to install a temporary site office and canteen, wheelwash, portaloo and carry out all ancillary site works. The application relates to an activity requiring a Waste

Facility Permit from Kildare County Council. Revised by significant further information consisting of; an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) has been submitted.”

3.5.6.2 Relevant Policies and Plans

The following policies and plans were reviewed and considered for possible in-combination effects with the Proposed Masterplan:

- Kildare County Development Plan (CDP) 2017-2023.
- Kildare County Development Plan (CDP) 2023-2029.

Both County Development Plans have directly addressed the protection of European sites through specific policies and objectives. Additionally, the Natura Impact Report for the Kildare CDP Draft 2023-2029 concludes that *“the Plan itself, subject to it securing the mitigation detailed in this report, will not adversely affect the integrity of any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.”* Therefore, **no in-combination effects are expected** with the relevant policies and plans.

4 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING CONCLUSION

The Proposed Village Renewal Masterplan for Johnstownbridge, Co. Kildare, has been assessed taking into account:

- The nature, size and location of the proposed works and possible impacts arising from the construction works.
- The QIs and conservation objectives of the European sites.
- The potential for in-combination effects arising from other plans and projects.

In conclusion, upon the examination, analysis and evaluation of the relevant information and applying the precautionary principle, it is concluded by the authors of this report that, on the basis of objective information; the possibility **may be excluded** that the Proposed Masterplan will have a significant effect on any European sites.

As such, no further assessment is required. In carrying out this AA screening, mitigation measures have not been taken into account. Standard best practice construction measures which could have the effect of mitigating any effects on any European Sites have similarly not been taken into account.

5 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX – SITE-SPECIFIC CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The following table lists the QIs/SCIs and their site-specific conservation objectives for the relevant European sites assessed in this Screening Report. Those attributes and targets for which the risk of significant impacts via the identified S-P-R connections was assessed in this Screening Report are highlighted in green. See main text for detailed assessment.

Attribute	Target	S-P-R connection
River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (NPWS, 2021)		
7230 Alkaline fens:		
<u>Conservation Objective:</u> To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Alkaline fens in River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:		
Habitat area	Area stable or increasing, subject to natural processes.	None
Habitat distribution	No decline, subject to natural processes.	None
Ecosystem function: soil nutrients	Maintain soil pH and nutrient status within natural ranges.	None
Ecosystem function: peat formation	Maintain active peat formation, where appropriate.	None
Ecosystem function: hydrology - groundwater levels	Maintain, or where necessary restore, appropriate natural hydrological regimes necessary to support the natural structure and functioning of the habitat.	None
Ecosystem function: hydrology - surface water flow	Maintain, or where necessary restore, as close as possible to natural or semi-natural, drainage conditions.	None
Ecosystem function: water quality	Maintain appropriate water quality, particularly pH and nutrient levels, to support the natural structure and functioning of the habitat.	None
Vegetation composition: community diversity	Maintain variety of vegetation communities, subject to natural processes.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Vegetation composition: typical brown mosses	Maintain adequate cover of typical brown moss species.	None
Vegetation composition: typical vascular plants	Maintain adequate cover of typical vascular plant species.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Vegetation composition: native negative indicator species	Cover of native negative indicator species at insignificant levels.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Vegetation composition: non-native species	Cover of non-native species less than 1%.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Vegetation composition: native trees and shrubs	Cover of scattered native trees and shrubs less than 10%.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Vegetation composition: algal cover	Cover of algae less than 2%.	None
Vegetation structure: vegetation height	At least 50% of the live leaves/flowering shoots are more than either 5cm or 15cm above ground surface depending on community type.	None
Physical structure: disturbed bare ground	Cover of disturbed bare ground not more than 10%.	None
Physical structure: tufa formations	Disturbed proportion of vegetation cover where tufa is present is less than 1%.	None
Indicators of local distinctiveness	No decline in distribution or population sizes of rare, threatened or scarce species associated with the habitat; maintain features of local distinctiveness, subject to natural processes.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway

Attribute	Target	S-P-R connection
Transitional areas between fen and adjacent habitats	Maintain adequate transitional areas to support/protect the alkaline fen ecosystem and the services it provides.	None
91E0 Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae): <u>Conservation Objective:</u> To restore the favourable conservation condition of Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)* in River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:		
Habitat area	Area stable or increasing, subject to natural processes.	None
Habitat distribution	No decline, subject to natural processes.	None
Woodland size	Area stable or increasing. Where topographically possible, "large" woods at least 25ha in size and "small" woods at least 3ha in size.	None
Woodland structure: cover and height	Total canopy cover at least 30%; median canopy height at least 7m; native shrub layer cover 10-75%; native herb/dwarf shrub layer cover at least 20% and height at least 20cm; bryophyte cover at least 4%.	None
Woodland structure: community diversity and extent	Maintain diversity and extent of community types.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Woodland structure: natural regeneration	Seedlings, saplings and pole age-classes of target species for 91E0* woodlands and other native tree species occur in adequate proportions to ensure survival of woodland canopy.	None
Hydrological regime: flooding depth/height of water table	Appropriate hydrological regime necessary for maintenance of alluvial vegetation	None
Woodland structure: dead wood	At least 19 stems/ha of dead wood of at least 20cm diameter.	None
Woodland structure: veteran trees	No decline.	None
Woodland structure: indicators of local distinctiveness	No decline in distribution and, in the case of red listed and other rare or localised species, population size.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Woodland structure: indicators of overgrazing	All five indicators of overgrazing absent.	None
Vegetation composition: native tree cover	No decline. Native tree cover at least 90% of canopy; target species cover at least 50% of canopy.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Vegetation composition: typical species	At least 1 target species for 91E0* woodlands present; at least 6 positive indicator species for 91E0* woodlands present.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Vegetation composition: negative indicator species	Negative indicator species cover not greater than 10%; regeneration of negative indicator species absent.	Invasive species spread via hydrological pathway
Vegetation composition: problematic native species	Cover of common nettle (<i>Urtica dioica</i>) less than 75%.	None
1099 River Lamprey <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>: <u>Conservation Objective:</u> To restore the favourable conservation condition of River Lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>) in River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:		

Attribute	Target	S-P-R connection
Distribution	Restore access to all water courses down to first order streams.	None
Distribution of larvae	Not less than 50% of sample sites with suitable habitat positive for larval brook/river lamprey.	None
Population structure of larvae	At least three age/size classes of larval brook/river lamprey present.	None
Larval lamprey density in fine sediment	Mean density of brook/river larval lamprey in sites with suitable habitat more than 5/m ² .	None
Extent and distribution of spawning nursery habitat	No decline in extent and distribution of spawning and nursery beds.	None
1106 Salmon <i>Salmo salar</i>:		
<u>Conservation Objective:</u> To restore the favourable conservation condition of Atlantic Salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>) in River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:		
Distribution: extent of anadromy	100% of river channels down to second order accessible from estuary.	None
Adult spawning fish	Conservation limit (CL) for each system consistently exceeded.	None
Salmon fry abundance	Maintain or exceed 0+ fry mean catchment-wide abundance threshold value. Currently set at 17 salmon fry/5 minutes sampling.	None
Out-migrating smolt abundance	No significant decline.	None
Number and distribution of redds	No decline in number and distribution of spawning redds due to anthropogenic causes.	None
Water quality	At least Q4 at all sites sampled by EPA.	None
1355 Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>:		
<u>Conservation Objective:</u> To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) in River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:		
Distribution	No significant decline.	None
Extent of terrestrial habitat	No significant decline. Area mapped and calculated as 447.6ha along riverbanks/ lake shoreline/around ponds.	None
Extent of freshwater (river) habitat	No significant decline. Length mapped and calculated as 263.3km.	None
Extent of freshwater (lake) habitat	No significant decline. Area mapped and calculated as 31.6ha.	None
Couching sites and holts	No significant decline.	None
Fish biomass available	No significant decline.	None
Barriers to connectivity	No significant decline.	None
River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (NPWS, 2022)		
A229 Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>:		
<u>Conservation Objective:</u> To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA.		
<p><i>No SSCOs for this SCI species have been prepared. The following objectives are extracted from the generic Conservation Objectives document for the SPA:</i></p> <p>The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and 		None

Attribute	Target	S-P-R connection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.	