

# APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT - SCREENING REPORT -

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
ARTICLE 6(3) OF THE EU HABITATS DIRECTIVE

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FOR THE

## WICKLOW COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2010-2016

**for: Wicklow County Council**

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## Section 1 Preamble

This is the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report of the Wicklow County Development Plan (CDP) 2010-2016 - in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC).

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive states:

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.

Furthermore, Article 6(4) states:

If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature, the Member State shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted. Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

In Ireland, Natura 2000 comprises sites that are designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and/or Special Protection Areas (SPAs)<sup>1</sup>.

AA comprises four stages<sup>2</sup>:

### **Stage One: Screening**

The process which identifies the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant.

### **Stage Two: Appropriate Assessment**

The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts.

### **Stage Three: Assessment of Alternative Solutions**

The process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

### **Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain**

An assessment of compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

This report documents the first of these stages. It's conclusion that significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites are unlikely means that further AA stages are not required.

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<sup>1</sup> including Ramsar sites (classified under the Ramsar Convention 1971)

<sup>2</sup> *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites (Methodological guidance on the provision of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC)*, European Commission, 2002

## Section 2 The Plan

### 2.1 Format

The headings in this and the following sections are derived from the European Commission's guidance document: *"Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites (Methodological guidance on the provision of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC)"*<sup>3</sup>

### 2.2 Brief Description of the Plan

Under Section 9 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, every planning authority must make a development plan, setting the framework for all future development in the planning authority's area for the stated period, for the whole functional area of the authority every six years. Development Plans are required to set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in question. It is in this context in which Wicklow County Council - the planning authority for County Wicklow - has adopted the County Development Plan. The Plan embraces the entire County excluding the Town Council Areas of Bray, Wicklow and Arklow. However, components of the County Plan such as Population and Settlement Strategy, the Housing and Retail Strategies will advise and guide the development of these towns and find expression in the form and content of their respective Town Plans.

The County Development Plan replaces the old 2004-2010 Plan and it is intended to provide for the proper planning and sustainable development for the administrative area of Wicklow County Council for a duration of six years from the date on which it was adopted, unless amended. The Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and the various provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations) 2004.

The Plan puts forward the following vision for the County:

*For County Wicklow to be a cohesive community of people enjoying distinct but interrelated urban and rural environments; where natural surroundings and important resources are protected; where opportunities abound to live and work in a safe atmosphere, allowing people to enjoy the benefits of well paid jobs, a variety of housing choices, excellent public services, ample cultural and leisure opportunities, and a healthy environment.*

In order to help implement this vision, the Plan sets out a number of strategic goals that underpin all the policies and objectives of the Plan.

### 2.3 Is the Plan Necessary to Management of Natura 2000 Sites?

The Plan is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the Natura 2000 sites in the Plan area. However, it does include, inter alia, measures to protect, conserve and manage in a prudent and sustainable manner Wicklow's natural heritage, including Natura 2000 sites and to seek its enhancement where appropriate and feasible.

### 2.4 Mitigating Measures in Plan

The CDP contains numerous measures which will contribute to the conservation of Natura 2000 sites in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive. Chapter 3 Vision and Strategic Goals contains the following overriding policy under *Goal 9 - To protect and enhance the diversity of the County's natural and built heritage:*

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission 2002

**Policy**

To ensure the conservation, wise management of areas of natural heritage value, and of features of natural interest and value such as woodlands, wetlands, watercourses and areas of unspoilt uplands. To protect plant animal species and habitats which have been identified in the Habitats Directive, Birds Directive, Wildlife Act (1976) and the Flora Protection Order 1999 and in particular, to ensure that any programme, plan or project carried out on foot of this development plan, including an variation thereof, with the potential to impact upon a Natura 2000 site(s) shall be subject to an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive 1992 and "Appropriate Assessment of plans and projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities" (DoEHLG 2009).

Chapter 17 *Natural Environment* contains the following provisions:

**Strategies**

- To avoid negative impacts upon the natural environment;
- To promote appropriate enhancement of the natural environment as an integral part of any development;
- To mitigate the effects of harm where it cannot be avoided;
- To promote a reasonable balance between conservation measures and development needs in the interests of promoting the orderly and sustainable development of Wicklow.

**Biodiversity Objectives**

**BD1** To produce a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (in accordance with the objectives of National Biodiversity Plan 2002), identifying species and habitats of importance at a County level, and identifying and promoting appropriate action for the conservation and management of these.

**BD2** To ensure that the impact of new developments on bio-diversity is minimised and require measures for the protection and enhancement of bio-diversity in all proposals for large developments

**BD3** To maintain the favourable conservation value of existing and future Natura 2000 sites (SACs and SPA's) and Annex I - Habitats and Annex II – Animal and Plant species in the County

**BD4** Any programme, plan or project carried out on foot of this development plan, including any variation thereof, with the potential to impact upon a Natura 2000 site(s) shall be subject to an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive 1992 and "Appropriate Assessment of plans and projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities" (DoEHLG 2009).

**BD7** To protect non-designated sites from inappropriate development, where it is considered that such development would unduly impact on locally important natural habitats or wildlife corridors.

**BD8** To facilitate, in co-operation with the relevant statutory authorities and other groups, the identification of valuable or vulnerable habitats of local or regional importance, not otherwise protected by legislation

**BD9** The National Parks and Wildlife Service will be invited to prioritise the preparation of Management Plans for Natura 2000 Sites which are located within the County. This will facilitate the development of site specific Conservation Objectives in the context of the proper planning and sustainable development of the County.

**WH5** To encourage the preservation and enhancement of native and semi-natural woodlands, groups of trees and individual trees, as part of the development control process, and require the planting of native, and appropriate local characteristic species, in all new developments

**WH6** To encourage the retention, wherever possible, of hedgerows and other distinctive boundary treatment in the County. Where removal of a hedgerow, stone wall or other distinctive boundary treatment is unavoidable, provision of the same type of boundary will be required of similar length and set back within the site in advance of the commencement of construction works on the site.

**WT1** To implement the *EU Water Framework Directive* and associated River Basin and Sub-Basin Management Plans and the EU Groundwater Directive to ensure the protection, improvement and sustainable use of all waters in the County, including rivers, lakes, ground water, coastal and estuarine waters, and to restrict development likely to lead to a deterioration in water quality.

**WT2** To resist development that would interfere with the natural water cycle to a degree that would interfere with the survival and stability of natural habitats.

**WT5** To promote the development of riverine walks and parks, subject to the sensitivity and / or designation of the riverside habitat particularly within 10m of the watercourse.

Other relevant measures include the following:

**General Coastal Zone Objective GCZ2**

To ensure that no reclamation of estuary land or coastal marshland occurs which would damage coastal habitats.

**Pertinent Policies**

CZ5 2 To control and limit residential development to that shown to be strictly necessary (in accordance with the County settlement and rural development strategies) and to require the highest standards of siting and design for any new dwellings and regard to environmental designations.

CZ5 3 To prohibit the development of new dwellings within 100m of the shoreline.

CZ5 6 To facilitate the development of a coastal walk (having due regard to environmental designations and compliance with the EU Habitats Directive) and to restrict development that interferes with the achievement of this objective.

## 2.5 Other Instruments

Numerous other higher level measures further mitigate potential impacts of the Plan. These measures include EU Directives, National legislation and various guidelines. Principal among these are the following:

- **The Habitats Directive (HD):** The European Council Directive on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (92/43/EEC) (Habitats Directive)
- **The Water Framework Directive (WFD):** The Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC
- **The National Biodiversity Plan (NBP):** UN Convention on Biological Diversity 1992 - National Biodiversity Plan 2002 is as a result of this.
- **The Wildlife Act (WA):** Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 (Wildlife Act)
- **The Birds Directive (BD):** The 1979 European Council Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC) (Birds Directive)
- **The Ramsar Convention (R):** Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar)
- **The Bathing Water Directive (BW):** Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC)
- **The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (WW):** (91/271/EEC) (amended by Directive 98/15/EEC)

## 2.6 Cumulative Effects

The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 and the National Development Plan 2007-2013 set the planning framework within which the Wicklow CDP has been prepared with the objective of achieving an optimal balance of social, economic and physical development across the County. The effects of the higher level Strategy and Plan are considered insofar as they inform the CDP.

## Section 3 Natura 2000 Sites

County Wicklow has four Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and thirteen candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). There are twelve Natura 2000 sites outside of County Wicklow but within the 15km boundary. These and surrounding sites are all mapped on Figure 1. There are no Ramsar sites in the Plan area.

### 3.1 Special Areas of Conservation

Candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) have been selected for protection under the European Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (92/43/EEC), referred to as the Habitats Directive, by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government due to their conservation value for habitats and species of importance in the European Union. The sites are candidate sites because they are currently under consideration by the Commission of the European Union.

There are thirteen cSACs within the Plan area which are detailed in Section 3.1.1 below. The ten cSACs which fall within 15km of the Plan boundary are set out in Section 3.1.2 of this report. Conservation Objectives for all cSACs are listed.

#### 3.1.1 cSACs within the Plan Area

**Ballyman Glen cSAC** (Site Code 000713): Ballyman Glen is situated approximately 3 km north of Enniskerry. It is orientated in an east-west direction with a stream running through the centre. The presence of alkaline fen and of petrifying spring/seepage areas on the site is particularly notable, as these habitats are listed, the latter with priority status, on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion); Alkaline fens.
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Bray Head cSAC** (Site Code 000714): This coastal site is situated in the north-east of Co. Wicklow between the towns of Bray and Greystones. Bray Head is of high conservation importance as it has good examples of two habitats (sea cliffs and dry heath) listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive. It also supports a number of rare plant species and has ornithological importance.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts; European dry heaths
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Buckroneys-Brittias Dunes and Fen cSAC** (Site Code 000729): This site is a complex of coastal habitats located about 10 km south of Wicklow Town. It comprises two main sand dune systems, Brittias Bay and Buckroneys Dunes, connected on the coast by the rocky headland of Mizen Head. Several coastal habitats listed on the EU Habitats Directive, including two priority habitats - fixed dune and decalcified dune heath - are present. Little Tern, a species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive, has bred or attempted to breed at Buckroneys strand in recent years.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Annual vegetation of drift lines; Perennial vegetation of stony banks; Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*); Embryonic shifting dunes; Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (white dunes); Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous

- vegetation (grey dunes); Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (Calluno-Ulicetea); Dunes with *Salix repens* ssp. *argentea* (*Salix arenariae*); Humid dune slacks; Alkaline fens
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
  3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Carriggower Bog cSAC** (Site Code 000716): Carriggower Bog is situated on Calary plateau at the eastern edge of the Wicklow Mountains. The site is an area of wet bog and poor fen, flanked by the Vartry River on the south-western side. This site is a candidate SAC selected for transition mire, a habitat listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitat for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Transition mires and quaking bogs.
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve cSAC** (Site Code 000717): Deputy's Pass woodland is located on the northern spur of the Deputy's Pass near Glenealy, Co. Wicklow. Deputy's Pass is managed as a Nature Reserve and is part of an internationally important series of Oak woods in County Wicklow (Glendalough, Clara Vale, Ballinacor, amongst others), which are almost certainly natural in origin and which retain much of their original character and species composition.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitat for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in British Isles
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Glen of the Downs cSAC** (Site Code 000719): This site is a semi-natural Oak wood situated within an impressive glacial overflow channel. It is located on the Dublin-Wexford road about 7 km south of Bray, Co. Wicklow. The site supports Oak woodland of a type that is listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitat for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in British Isles.
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Holdenstown Bog cSAC** (Site Code 001757): Holdenstown bog is situated about 3 km south-east of Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow. It is a small raised bog surrounded by transition mire which has developed in a kettle hole. Holdenstown Bog is a candidate SAC selected for transition mire, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Holdenstown Bog is of conservation importance as an intact example of transition mire, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, and for a range of plant species typical of incipient raised bog development.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitat for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Transition mires and quaking bogs.
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Knocksink Wood cSAC** (Site Code 000725): Knocksink Wood is situated in the valley of the Glencullen River north-west of Enniskerry. The importance of this site lies in the diversity of woodland habitats which occur. The presence of rare or threatened plants and invertebrates adds to the interest. Much of



this site has been designated a Statutory Nature Reserve and there is presently an educational centre within the site.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion); Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae).
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Magherabeg Dunes cSAC** (Site Code 001766): This sand dune system is situated at Ardmore Point, about 5 km south of Wicklow Head. The site is of importance in that it is a fine example of a dune system which is fairly intact and which has a well-developed flora. The lack of easy public access to this site as undoubtedly been responsible in preventing damage and erosion from amenity activities. The presence of wetland vegetation on the site is of additional interest.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Annual vegetation of drift lines; Embryonic shifting dunes; Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (white dunes); Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes); Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (Calluno-Ulicetea); Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion).
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site  
To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**The Murrough Wetlands cSAC** (Site Code 002249): See also of The Murrough SPA (Site Code: 004186): The Murrough is a coastal wetland complex which stretches for 15 km from Ballygannon to north of Wicklow town, and in parts, extends inland for up to 1 km. A shingle ridge stretches the length of the site and carries the mainline Dublin-Wexford railway. The site supports a number of habitats listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive and a number of bird species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive, as well as a wide range of important migratory birds. There are also many rare plants in the site. This site is of importance as it is the largest coastal wetland complex on the east coast of Ireland. Although much affected by drainage, it still contains a wide range of coastal and freshwater habitats including five listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive, some of which contain threatened plants. Areas on the site contain a rich invertebrate fauna, including several rarities. It is an important site for both wintering and breeding birds and supports a wide variety of species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Annual vegetation of drift lines; Perennial vegetation of stony banks; Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*); Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*); Calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the *Caricion davallianae*; Alkaline fens.
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Vale of Clara (Rathdrum Wood) cSAC** (Site Code 000733): The Vale of Clara woodland, situated mostly on the east side of the Avonmore River, immediately north of Rathdrum, between 107 and 244 m above sea level, forms an integral part of one of the most scenic valleys in Wicklow. The Oak woods are good examples of the species-poor *Blechno-Quercetum* vegetation community, a habitat listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive and are best developed in the Cronybyrne area.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitat for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in British Isles
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site

3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Wicklow Mountains cSAC** (Site Code 002122): The vegetation provides examples of the typical upland habitats with heath, blanket bog and upland grassland covering large, relatively undisturbed areas. In all ten habitats listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive are found within the site. Several rare, protected plant and animal species occur. This site is a complex of upland areas in Counties Wicklow and Dublin, flanked by Blessington Reservoir to the west and Vartry Reservoir in the east, Cruagh Mt. in the north and Lybagh Mt. in the south.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the Littorelletea uniflorae and/or of the Isoëto-Nanojuncetea; Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds; Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*; European dry heaths; Alpine and Boreal heaths; Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas, in Continental Europe); Blanket bog; Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (*Androsacetalia alpinae* and *Galeopsietalia ladani*); Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in British Isles.
2. To maintain the Annex II species for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: *Lutra lutra*.
3. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
4. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Wicklow Reef cSAC** (Site Code 002274): Wicklow Reef is of high conservation value as it is the only documented example in Ireland of a biogenic reef. Reefs are listed under Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive. Wicklow Reef is situated just to the north of Wicklow Head on the east coast of County Wicklow.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitat for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Reefs.
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

### 3.1.2 cSACs within 15km of the Plan Area

**Blackstairs Mountains** (Site Code 000770): The Blackstairs Mountains are located along the border of the counties Wexford and Carlow, forming a mountain chain that runs in a north-east/south-west direction for approximately 22 km and including six peaks over 520 m. The range has a core of granite, and on the Carlow side, erosion has cut deeply into the dome exposing successive layers of granite, giving a steeply stepped slope. On the east side some overlying Ordovician slates and sandstones are evident. The site is important for extensive areas of dry heath - a habitat listed under Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The Blackstairs Mountains cSAC is the only example of moorland above 300 m in counties Wexford and Carlow. It includes good examples of dry heath, a habitat that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The plant and animal communities are typical of the uplands and the growth of Heather is particularly profuse, rivalling some of the larger areas of Heather cover in Co. Wicklow.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*; European dry heaths.
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Glenasmole Valley** (Site Code 001209): Glenasmole Valley in south Co. Dublin lies on the edge of the Wicklow uplands, approximately 5 km from Tallaght. The River Dodder flows through the valley and has been impounded here to form two reservoirs which supply water to south Dublin. The site provides excellent habitat for bat species, with at least four species recorded: Pipistrelle, Leisler's, Daubenton's and Brown Long-eared Bat. Otter occurs along the river and reservoirs. These habitats also support Kingfisher, an Annex I species under the EU Birds Directive. Glenasmole Valley contains a high diversity of habitats and plant communities, including three habitats listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive. The presence of four Red Data Book plant species further enhances the value of the site as does the presence of populations of several mammal and bird species of conservation interest.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco Brometalia*); *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*); Petrifying springs with tufa formation (*Cratoneurion*).
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Kilpatrick Sandhills** (Site Code 001742): Kilpatrick Sandhills are located about 8km south of Arklow town, and just south of the Wicklow/Wexford county border. The site is comprised of a mosaic of coastal habitats but primarily a mature sand dune system which extends along 2 km of coastline. The site is ecologically important as a good example of a mature and fairly intact sand dune system which shows the developmental stages of dunes from fore dunes to mature grey dunes. A good diversity of habitats and species are present. Fixed dunes and dune heath are priority habitats under Annex I of the European Habitats Directive.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Annual vegetation of drift lines; Embryonic shifting dunes; Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (white dunes); Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes); Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (*Calluno-Ulicetea*).
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**North Dublin Bay** (Site Code 000206): This site covers the inner part of north Dublin Bay, the seaward boundary extending from the Bull Wall lighthouse across to the Martello Tower at Howth Head. The North Bull Island is the focal point of this site. The island is a sandy spit which formed after the building of the South Wall and Bull Wall in the 18th and 19th centuries. It now extends for about 5 km in length and is up to 1 km wide in places. This site is an excellent example of a coastal site with all the main habitats represented. The holds good examples of ten habitats that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive; one of these is listed with priority status. Several of the wintering bird species have populations of international importance, while some of the invertebrates are of national importance. The site contains a numbers of rare and scarce plants including some which are legally protected. Its proximity to the capital city makes North Dublin Bay an excellent site for educational studies and research.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide; Annual vegetation of drift lines; *Salicornia* and other annuals colonizing mud and sand; Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima*); Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*); Embryonic shifting dunes; Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (white dunes); Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes); Humid dune slacks.
2. To maintain the Annex II species for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: *Petalophyllum ralfsii*.
3. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site
4. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Pollardstown Fen** (Site Code 000396): Pollardstown Fen is situated on the northern margin of the Curragh of Kildare, approximately 3km west-north-west of Newbridge. It lies in a shallow depression, running in a north-west/south-east direction. About 40 springs provide a continuous supply of water to the fen. These rise chiefly at its margins, along distinct seepage areas of mineral ground above the fen level. The continual inflow of calcium-rich water from the Curragh, and from the limestone ground to the north, creates waterlogged conditions which lead to peat formation. There are layers of calcareous marl in this peat, reflecting inundation by calcium-rich water. This peat-marl deposit reaches some 6 m at its deepest point and is underlain by clay. Pollardstown fen is the largest spring-fed fen in Ireland and has a well developed flora and fauna. Owing to the rarity of this habitat and the numbers of rare organisms found there, the site is rated as of international importance.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the Caricion *davallianae*; Petrifying springs with tufa formation (*Cratoneurion*); Alkaline fens.
2. To maintain the Annex II species for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: *Vertigo geyeri*, *Vertigo angustior*, *Vertigo moulinsiana*.
3. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
4. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Red Bog, Kildare** (Site Code 000397): Red Bog, Kildare is located 3 km north of the village of Blessington in east Co. Kildare, close to the boundary with Co. Wicklow. It comprises a wetland complex of lake, fen and bog situated in a hollow between ridges of glacially-deposited material and underlain by rocks of Ordovician age. The site is a candidate SAC selected for transition mire, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Red Bog, Kildare is a site of particular conservation significance, supporting as it does, a good example of a transition mire, a habitat that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Transition mires and quaking bogs.
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**River Barrow and River Nore** (Site Code 002162): This site consists of the freshwater stretches of the Barrow/Nore River catchments as far upstream as the Slieve Bloom Mountains and it also includes the tidal elements and estuary as far downstream as Creadun Head in Waterford. The site passes through eight counties – Offaly, Kildare, Laois, Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Wexford and Waterford. The site is a candidate SAC selected for alluvial wet woodlands and petrifying springs, priority habitats on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The site is also selected as a candidate SAC for old oak woodlands, floating river vegetation, estuary, tidal mudflats, *Salicornia* mudflats, Atlantic salt meadows, Mediterranean salt meadows, dry heath and eutrophic tall herbs, all habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The site is also selected for the following species listed on Annex II of the same directive – Sea Lamprey, River Lamprey, Brook Lamprey, Freshwater Pearl Mussel, Nore Freshwater Pearl Mussel, Crayfish, Twaite Shad, Atlantic Salmon, Otter, *Vertigo moulinsiana* and the plant Killarney Fern. Overall, the site is of considerable conservation significance for the occurrence of good examples of habitats and of populations of plant and animal species that are listed on Annexes I and II of the E.U. Habitats Directive respectively. Furthermore it is of high conservation value for the populations of bird species that use it. The occurrence of several Red Data Book plant species including three rare plants in the salt meadows and the population of the hard water form of the Pearl Mussel which is limited to a 10 km stretch of the Nore, add further interest to this site.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Estuaries; Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide; *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand; Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima*); Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*); Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitriche-Batrachion* vegetation;

European dry heaths; Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels; Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion); Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in British Isles; Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)

2. To maintain the Annex II species for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: *Vertigo moulinsiana*; *Margaritifera margaritifera*; *Austropotamobius pallipes*; *Petromyzon marinus*; *Lampetra planeri*; *Lampetra fluviatilis*; *Alosa fallax*; *Salmo salar*; *Lutra lutra*; *Trichomanes speciosum*; *Margaritifera durrovensis*
3. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site
4. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Rye Water Valley/Carlton** (Site Code 001398): This site is located between Leixlip and Maynooth. It extends along the Rye Water, a tributary of the R. Liffey. Within the woods, Blackcap, Woodcock and Long-eared Owl have been recorded. Little Grebe, Coot, Moorhen, Tufted Duck, Teal and Kingfisher, the latter a species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive, occur on and about the lake. The Rye Water is a spawning ground for Trout and Salmon, 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. The semi-aquatic snails *Vertigo angustior* and *V. moulinsiana* occur in marsh vegetation near Louisa Bridge; both are rare in Ireland and Europe and are listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive. The scarce Dragonfly, *Orthetrum coerulescens*, has been recorded at Louisa Bridge. The main importance of the site lies in the presence of several rare and threatened plant and animal species, and of a rare habitat, thermal, mineral, petrifying spring. The woods found on Carlton Estate and their birdlife are of additional interest.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitat for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion).
2. To maintain the Annex II species for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: *Vertigo angustior*; *Vertigo moulinsiana*.
3. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
4. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**Slaney River Valley cSAC** (Site Code 00781): This site comprises the freshwater stretches of the Slaney as far as the Wicklow Mountains; a number of tributaries the larger of which include the Bann, Boro, Glasha, Clody, Derry, Derreen, Douglas and Carrigower Rivers; the estuary at Ferrycarrig and Wexford Harbour. The site flows through the counties of Wicklow, Wexford and Carlow. Towns along the site but not in it are Baltinglass, Hacketstown, Tinahely, Tullow, Bunclody, Camolin, Enniscorthy and Wexford. The river is up to 100 m wide in places and is tidal at the southern end from Edermine Bridge below Enniscorthy. The site supports populations of several species listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive, and habitats listed on Annex I of this directive, as well as important numbers of wintering wildfowl including some species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive. The presence of wet and broad-leaved woodlands increases the overall habitat diversity and the occurrence of a number of Red Data Book plant and animal species adds further importance to the Slaney River site.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitats for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in British Isles; Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae); Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation; Estuaries; Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide
2. To maintain the Annex II species for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: *Alosa fallax*, *Lampetra fluviatilis*, *Lampetra planeri*, *Petromyzon marinus*, *Salmo salar*, *Margaritifera margaritifera*, *Lutra lutra*
3. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the
4. entire site
5. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

**South Dublin Bay** (Site Code 000210): This site lies south of the River Liffey and extends from the South Wall to the west pier at Dun Laoghaire. It is an intertidal site with extensive areas of sand and mudflats, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The sediments are predominantly sands but grade to sandy muds near the shore at Merrion gates. The main channel which drains the area is Cockle Lake. This site is a fine example of a coastal system with extensive sand and mudflats, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. South Dublin Bay is also an internationally important bird site.

Conservation Objectives:

1. To maintain the Annex I habitat for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status: Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide.
2. To maintain the extent, species richness and biodiversity of the entire site.
3. To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

## 3.2 Special Protection Areas

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) have been selected for protection under the 1979 European Council Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC) - referred to as the Birds Directive - by the DEHLG due to their conservation value for birds of importance in the European Union.

There are four SPAs within the Plan area which are detailed in Section 3.2.1 below. The two SPAs which fall within 15km of the Plan boundary are set out in Section 3.2.2 of this report. Conservation Objectives for all SPAs are listed.

### 3.2.1 SPAs within the Plan Area

**Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA** (Site Code 004063): Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA, located in the western foothills of the Wicklow Mountains, was created in 1944 by damming of the River Liffey for the purpose of generating electricity from hydropower. The reservoir covers an area of approximately 20 km<sup>2</sup> and is the largest inland water body in the Mideast and south-east regions. The principal interest of the site is the Greylag Goose population, which is of international importance. A range of other wildfowl species also occurs, including Whooper Swan, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The site is also notable as a winter roost for gulls, especially Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Main conservation objective: To maintain the special conservation interests for this SPA at favourable conservation status: Greylag Goose, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Wetland & Waterbirds.

**The Murrough SPA** (Site Code 004186): The Murrough SPA comprises a coastal wetland complex that stretches for 13km from Kilcoole Station, east of Kilcoole village in the north to Wicklow Town in the south, and extends inland for up to 1 km in places. The regular occurrence of Red-throated Diver, Little Egret, Whooper Swan, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Golden Plover, Little Tern, Sandwich Tern, Short-eared Owl and Kingfisher is of note as these species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The site also supports a typical diversity of birds associated with reed swamp, including Reed Warbler, a very localised species in Ireland. The site is also of considerable importance for the wide range of coastal and freshwater habitats that it supports, including several that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

Main conservation objective: To maintain the special conservation interests for this SPA at favourable conservation status: Light-bellied Brent Goose, Little Tern, Red-throated Diver, Greylag Goose, Wigeon, Teal, Black-headed Gull, Herring Gull.

**Wicklow Head SPA** (Site Code 004127)<sup>4</sup>: Wicklow Head is a rocky headland with extensive exposures of mica-schist. It is situated approximately 3km south of Wicklow Town. The Kittiwake and Black Guillemot populations are of National Importance. The site also supports a pair of breeding Peregrines, a species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive. Ravens nest annually on the cliffs, and the heath

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<sup>4</sup> This site is currently under review with regard to its designated status. Conservation objectives are not available at time of preparation of this assessment.

supports such species as Stonechat, Whitethroat and Linnet. This site is important as it has a well-documented seabird colony, with two species having populations of national importance.

**Wicklow Mountains SPA** (Site Code 004040): This is an extensive upland site, comprising a substantial part of the Wicklow Mountains. This site is of high ornithological importance as it supports very good examples of upland and woodland bird communities. Several of the species which occur are very rare at a national level. Two species, Ring Ouzel and Red Grouse, are Red-listed and their status is of high conservation concern. Also of note is that Merlin and Peregrine are both listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

Main conservation objective: To maintain the special conservation interests for this SPA at favourable conservation status: Merlin, Peregrine.

### 3.2.2 SPAs within 15km of the Plan Area

**North Bull Island SPA** (Site Code 004006): This site covers all of the inner part of north Dublin Bay, with the seaward boundary extending from the Bull Wall lighthouse across to Drumleck Point at Howth Head. The North Bull Island sand spit is a relatively recent depositional feature, formed as a result of improvements to Dublin Port during the 18th and 19th centuries. It is almost 5 km long and 1 km wide and runs parallel to the coast between Clontarf and Sutton. Part of the interior of the island has been converted to golf courses. The North Bull Island SPA is an excellent example of an estuarine complex and is one of the top sites in Ireland for wintering waterfowl. It is of international importance on account of both the total number of waterfowl and the individual populations of Lightbellied Brent Goose, Black-tailed Godwit and Bar-tailed Godwit that use it. Also of significance is the regular presence of several species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, notably Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit, but also Ruff and Short-eared Owl.

Main conservation objective: To maintain the special conservation interests for this SPA at favourable conservation status: Light-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Pintail, Shoveler, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Knot, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Turnstone, 20,000 wintering waterbirds, Teal, Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Sanderling, Curlew, Black-headed Gull, Wetland & Waterbirds.

**South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA** (Site Code 004024): The South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA comprises a substantial part of Dublin Bay. It includes the intertidal area between the River Liffey and Dun Laoghaire, and the estuary of the River Tolka to the north of the River Liffey, as well as Booterstown Marsh. A portion of the shallow marine waters of the bay is also included. The South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA is of international importance for Light-bellied Brent Goose and of national importance for nine other waterfowl species. As an autumn tern roost, it is also of international importance. Furthermore, the site supports a nationally important colony of Common Tern. All of the tern species using the site are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, as are Bartailed Godwit and Mediterranean Gull.

Main conservation objective: To maintain the special conservation interests for this SPA at favourable conservation status: Light-bellied Brent Goose, Knot, Sanderling, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Roseate Tern, Common Tern, Arctic Tern, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Dunlin, Black-headed Gull, Wetland & Waterbirds.

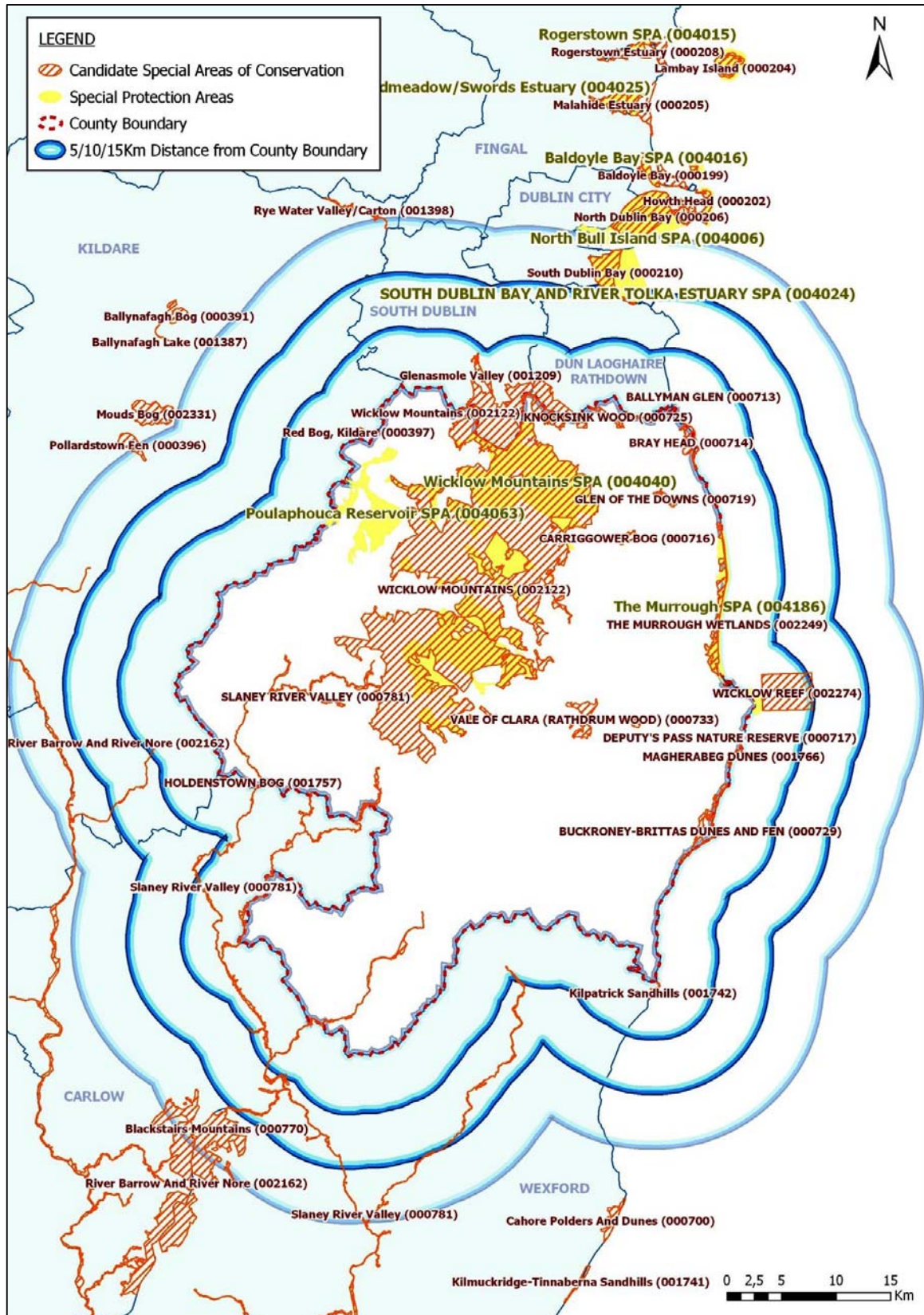


Figure 1 Natura 2000 Sites within the Plan area and within 5, 10 and 15km of the Plan Boundary



## Section 4 Assessment Criteria

### 4.1 Elements of the Plan with Potential to Give Rise to Significant Effects

A list of the individual policies and objectives of the Plan (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) with potential to give rise to impacts on the Natura 2000 sites is included in the left hand column of Table 1.

These have been taken from Section 8 - *Evaluation of Plan Provisions* - of the Environmental Report which has been prepared as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process. In that evaluation each of the Plan's policies and objectives were evaluated against the Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) listed below:

SEO B1: To avoid loss of relevant habitats, geological features, species or their sustaining resources in designated ecological sites.

SEO B2: To avoid significant adverse impacts, including direct, cumulative and indirect impacts, to relevant habitats, geological features, species or their sustaining resources in designated ecological sites by development within or adjacent to these sites.

SEO B3: To sustain, enhance or - where relevant - prevent the loss of ecological networks or parts thereof which provide significant connectivity between areas of local biodiversity.

Thus the policies and objectives which have been identified by the SEA process as having probable or potential conflict with the above SEOs are further examined in this Habitats Directive Assessment. Any policies or objectives relevant to the Habitats Directive Assessment with an uncertain interaction with the SEOs were brought forward to be screened in the Appendix to this document

### 4.2 Elements of Plan Likely to Cause Impacts

The tables in the accompanying Appendix identify whether these policies and objectives are likely to cause any direct, indirect or secondary impacts (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the sites by assessing them against the sites' conservation objectives.

Where potential impacts are identified, then avoidance/mitigation measures contained as policies or objectives within the Plan as well as other laws/standards/procedures are cited and it is determined whether there will be any residual impacts or not.

## Section 5 Conclusions

### 5.1 Criteria for Assessment

On the basis of the above analysis it can be concluded that no projects that will cause significant adverse direct, indirect or secondary impacts on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites shall be permitted on the basis of this Plan<sup>5</sup> (either individually or in combination with other plans or projects), considering the following factors<sup>6</sup>:

- size and scale
- land-take
- distance from the Natura 2000 site or key features of the site
- resource requirements (water abstraction etc.)
- emissions (disposal to land, water or air)
- excavation requirements
- transportation requirements
- duration of construction, operation, decommissioning, etc.
- habitat area
- disturbance to key species
- habitat or species fragmentation
- species density
- changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.)
- climate change
- key relationships that define the structure of the sites
- key relationships that define the function of the site

Furthermore, such developments as will be permitted on foot of the provisions of this Plan shall be required to conform with the relevant regulatory provisions for the prevention of pollution, nuisance or other environmental effects.

### 5.2 Conclusion

The trigger for a Stage Two<sup>7</sup> AA would be if the Plan were likely to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site. This screening report evaluates the Plan to see if it needs to be the subject of a Stage Two AA. It finds that the Plan has been formulated to ensure that uses, developments and effects arising from permissions based upon the Plan (either individually or in combination with other plans or projects) shall not give rise to significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, in accordance with the *Methodological guidance on the provision of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*, it is concluded that the Plan does not require any further assessment to demonstrate compliance with the Directive.

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<sup>5</sup> Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. there must be:

- (a) no alternative solution available;
- (b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the plan to proceed; and
- (c) adequate compensatory measures to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000

<sup>6</sup> These factors have been taken from *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites (Methodological guidance on the provision of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC)*, EC, 2002

<sup>7</sup> ref. Section 1