

Habitats Directive Assessment
Screening for Appropriate Assessment for
Abbey Grounds, Wicklow, Co. Wicklow
in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive



21st September 2021

Final Report

Report prepared by

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SECTION 1

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This document is a Report for Screening for Appropriate Assessment for the proposed development of Abbey Grounds, Wicklow, Co. Wicklow. It was prepared by Faith Wilson BSc CEnv MCIEEM, an independent ecologist to facilitate the local authority, Wicklow County Council, in conducting a Part VIII planning application for the project.

The aim of the European Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of wild habitats and of wild fauna and flora) is to create a network of protected wildlife sites across Europe, which are to be maintained at a favourable conservation status.

Each member state must designate their most important natural areas as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The Directive specifies the scientific criteria on the basis of which SAC sites must be selected and very strictly curtails the grounds that can be used as justification for damaging a site. The network of sites is referred to as NATURA 2000 and includes SACs (Special Areas of Conservation) for protected habitats and species and SPAs (Special Protection Areas) for birds, which are designated under the European Birds Directive (Council Directive 79/409/EEC as amended by Directive 2009/147/EC).

It is a requirement of the Habitats Directive ((92/43/EEC) that the competent consent authority, which is either the planning authority or on planning appeal An Bord Pleanála, must ensure that a proposal, which is likely to have a significant effect on an SAC or SPA, is authorised only to the extent that the authority is satisfied it will not adversely affect the integrity of the area and that an appropriate assessment of the implications of the development for the conservation status of the site is undertaken.

The European Parliament, in a communication to the European Council in September 2000, states: The implementation of the European Habitats Directive and Birds Directive, both with respect to species conservation and with respect to the establishment of the Natura 2000 network, is one of the most important tools for achieving the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the European Union and member states (European Parliament 2000).

Article 6 of the Habitats Directive provides a strict assessment procedure for any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a

designated European site but which has the potential to have implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites (Annex 1.1). Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment (AA):

Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subjected to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In 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.

Article 6(4) states:

If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the [Natura 2000] 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 a social or economic nature, Member States 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.

The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 were implemented to transpose the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive into Irish law as well as addressing transposition failures identified in the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) judgements.

This report has taken into consideration the relevant requirements of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2010).

Following guidance issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 (*Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities*), plans and projects requiring to be considered for AA screening include:

- Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs);
- City and County Development Plans (CDPs) and any material amendments/variatioins;
- Development Plans by Town Councils (TCDPs) and any amendments/variatioins;
- Local Area Plans (LAPs) and any amendments; and
- Planning Schemes in respect of Strategic Development Zones (SDZs).

In effect, the Commission's ruling requires a robust and thorough application by all consent authorities, including planning authorities, of the requirement to undertake an appropriate assessment of the ecological implications of any plan or project, or material variation of a plan or project, whether within or outside of a designated site, which may impact upon its stated conservation objectives.

References to Natura 2000 sites throughout this report are to be taken as referring to European sites as defined in the above Planning Act.

1.2. METHODOLOGY

This report has been prepared with regard to the following guidance documents where relevant:

- *Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites: Methodological Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission Environment Directorate General, 2001)
- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (EC Environment Directorate General, 2000)
- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (Commission Notice C(2018) 7621 final, Brussels, 21.11.2018)
- *Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10*
- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities.* (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision)
- *Guidelines for Good Practice, Appropriate Assessment of Plans under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive* (International Workshop on Assessment of Plans under the Habitats Directive, 2011)
- *Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Clarification of the Concepts of Alternative Solutions, Imperative Reasons of Over-riding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence.* Opinion of the European Commission (European Commission, January 2007)
- OPR Practice Note PN01 Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management March 2021

There are four stages in an Appropriate Assessment as outlined in the European Commission Guidance Document (2001), summarised below:

• **Stage 1: Screening**

The first step to establishing if an appropriate assessment is required is referred to as 'screening' and its purpose is to determine on the basis of a preliminary assessment and objective criteria if the plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, could have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site in view of the sites conservation objectives. The process identifies any likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 Site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant.

- **Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment**

This step considers the impact of the project or plan on the integrity of the Natura 2000 Site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are deemed to be adverse impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts is considered.

- **Stage 3: Alternative Solutions**

This stage examines alternative means of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that aim to avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

- **Stage 4: Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest**

This stage is the main derogation process outlined in Article 6(4) which examines whether there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for allowing a plan or project which will have adverse effects on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site to proceed.

This report consists of one stage in Appropriate Assessment; a report for Screening for Appropriate Assessment (Stage 1) was prepared. **Neither a full Appropriate Assessment (Natura Impact Statement) (Stage 2), or Stage 3. Assessment of Alternative Solutions nor Stage 4. Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain were applicable in this instance**, as in the opinion of this author, the proposed development of the Abbey Grounds will not adversely affect the integrity of any Natura 2000 site.

The current screening exercise was based on a desk-top study, drawing on information sources which included the following: NPWS on-line data for Natura 2000 sites; Ordnance Survey of Ireland mapping and aerial photography; geological, hydrological and soils data available from GSI; and a series of field surveys conducted in July and August 2021.

SECTION 2 SCREENING FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

2.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAN OR PROJECT

2.1.1 Description of the Proposed Development

It is proposed to develop a public space and amenity on the Abbey Grounds in Wicklow Town as shown on **Figure 1** below.



Figure 1. Abbey Grounds, Wicklow Town. Source: Google Maps.

2.1.2 Desk Study, Consultation and Field Survey

A desk study was carried out to collate the available information on the ecological environment of the Abbey Grounds and wider environs. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) database of designated conservation areas and NPWS records of rare and protected plant species were checked with regard to the location of Wicklow Town.

Information on protected species of fauna and flora listed for protection under Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), Annex I of the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act (2000) was also sought from NPWS and published sources. Recent, high resolution, colour aerial photographs were also used to identify and map potential habitats.

The site was visited in July and August 2021 by Faith Wilson.

2.1.3 Description of the Receiving Environment

The main habitats present within the Abbey grounds include the abbey and the coach house (BL3), which is surrounded by mature trees in open parkland (WD5) and areas of grassland which are closely mown and managed as amenity grassland (GA1). A small watercourse, the Ashtown Stream, which is best described as a lowland depositing stream (FW2), flows through the property and is a tributary of the Vartry River. These are mapped below on **Figure 2**.

Species recorded in unmown grassland within the site, along the watercourse and on the edges of the site boundaries include; red clover (*Trifolium pratense*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*), bush vetch (*Vicia sepium*), Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), crested dog's tail grass (*Cynosurus cristatus*), ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), yellow clover (*Trifolium dubium*), oxeye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), common figwort (*Scrophularia nodosa*), angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), water dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), prickly sow-thistle (*Sonchus asper*), rough hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidus*), rosebay willow herb (*Epilobium angustifolium*), dandelion (*Taraxacum* agg), fool's watercress (*Apium nodiflorum*), ground elder (*Aegopodium podagraria*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), tufted vetch (*Vicia cracca*), lords and ladies (*Arum maculatum*), rosebay willow herb (*Chamerion angustifolium*), meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*), meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*), St. John's-wort (*Hypericum androsaemum*), selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), hairy willow herb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and red fescue (*Festuca rubra*).

In disturbed ground within the gravel at the entrance greater plantain (*Plantago major*), annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*), Canadian fleabane (*Conyza canadensis*), groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*), common speedwell (*Veronica arvensis*), daisy (*Bellis perennis*), mouse ear chickweed (*Cerastium fontanum*), common knotgrass (*Polygonum aviculare*), field penny-cress (*Thlaspi arvense*), corn chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*), spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) and nipplewort (*Lapsana communis*).

The treeline bounding the site contains sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), ivy (*Hedera helix*). A double treeline of yew (*Taxus baccata*) are a notable feature of the grounds. A number of other planted specimen trees are recorded including Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*), NZ Cabbage Tree (*Cordyline australis*) and some ornamental shrubs. These include; Cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), Himalayan honeysuckle/pheasant berry (*Leycesteria formosa*), Honey spurge (*Euphorbia mellifera*) and Fuchsia (*Fuchsia* sp.).



Figure 2. A habitat map (to Fossitt Level 3) of Wicklow Abbey.

The stone walls within and surrounding the site are often covered in dense ivy (*Hedera helix*) which provides habitat for nesting birds, foraging habitat for bats, refugia for invertebrates, flowers for pollinators and seeds for birds and other fauna. Other species recorded here include common polypody fern (*Polypodium vulgare*), red valerian, ivy leaved toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*) and dense ivy.

There are a number of species present within the Abbey Grounds some of which would have been deliberately planted within the gardens of the Parochial House and are now recognised as being invasive in nature. These include Cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), Himalayan honeysuckle/pheasant berry (*Leycesteria formosa*), Canadian fleabane (*Conyza canadensis*), red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), and winter heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*). Honey spurge (*Euphorbia mellifera*) was also recorded and can be invasive.

A good variety of common bird species were recorded during the surveys. These include blackbird (*Turdus merula*), wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), robin (*Erithacus rubecula*), dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*), greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*), song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), and mistle thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*).

Other common species recorded include; great tit (*Parus major*), coal tit (*Parus ater*), blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*), long tailed tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*), goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*), rook (*Corvus frugilegus*), jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*), pied wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*), hooded crow (*Corvus cornix*) and magpie (*Pica pica*). Both feral pigeon (*Columba columba domest.*) and woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*) were also encountered and flocks of starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) may also occur.

Species typically associated with buildings include swifts (*Apus apus*) and boxes are erected for these on the Parochial House, while swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and house martins (*Delichon urbicum*) are likely to feed over the grounds.

Species associated with the Ashtown Stream include grey wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) and moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*).

Likely birds of prey include sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) while buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) and red kite (*Milvus milvus*) are also seen in the environs of Wicklow Town.

The Leitrim River to the north of the Abbey Grounds and connected to it via the Ashdown Stream supports a number of bird species, including many of those associated with Broadlough and The Murrough SPA. Species frequently observed on the Leitrim River include;

- Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), which is regularly recorded on this stretch of the Leitrim River and may breed nearby
- Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), which is regularly recorded on this stretch of the Leitrim River
- Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*), which are frequent along the Murrough
- Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*), which are frequent along the Murrough
- Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*), which are frequent along the Murrough
- Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), which are frequent along the Murrough
- Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), which are frequent along the Murrough
- House martin (*Delichon urbica*), which nest on the cliffs at Bride's Head
- Swift (*Apus apus*), which breed in Wicklow Town
- Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), which breed in Wicklow Town

Other species associated with Wicklow Head and recorded in the environs of The Murrough include;

- A variety of rare and uncommon gull species have been recorded from the environs of Wicklow town, these include: Little Gull (*Larus minutus*), Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*), Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*), Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*)
- Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), regularly seen feeding offshore, large breeding colony on Wicklow Head
- Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*), which are frequent along the Murrough
- Raven (*Corvus corax*), breed on Wicklow Head
- Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), breed on Wicklow Head
- Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*), breed on Wicklow Head and feed offshore
- Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*), breed on Wicklow Head and feed offshore
- Herring gull (*Larus argentatus*), breed on Wicklow Head and feed offshore
- Guillemot (*Uria aalge*), breed on Wicklow Head and feed offshore
- Razorbill (*Alca torda*), breed on Wicklow Head and feed offshore
- Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*), breed on Wicklow Head and feed offshore
- Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), seen feeding offshore

The site synopsis for The Murrough SPA reports the following:

'The Murrough SPA is an important site for wintering waterbirds, being internationally important for Light-bellied Brent Goose and nationally important for

Red-throated Diver, Greylag Goose, Wigeon, Teal, Black-headed Gull and Herring Gull. It is probably the most important site in the country for nesting Little Tern. 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 Bat Conservation Ireland Database of bat records was searched for records of bats from Wicklow Town. The database contains records of roosts, ad hoc observations and the results of surveys such as the BATLAS 2010 project and the All Ireland Daubenton's Monitoring Project. There are currently no records of bat species recorded from Wicklow Town. Three species of bats were recorded from the Abbey Grounds. These were

- Common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*),
- Soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*),
- Leisler's bat (*Nyctalus leisleri*),
- an unidentified pipistrelle species (*Pipistrellus* sp.).

The three species of bats were all recorded foraging over the grounds and hunting. A large number of social calls were heard indicating that a roost was nearby. There was no evidence of any roosting bats within the coach house but it offers good potential as does the ruined Abbey walls and the Parochial House. Many of the mature sycamore trees and yews within the yew walk offer roosting potential for bats.

The buildings within the Abbey Grounds all offer potential to support roosting bats. All bat surveys, unless repeated throughout the year, are snapshots of bat activity in a particular location and are influenced by the time of year, climate and detection efficiency.

Many of the trees within the grounds offer high roosting potential for bats and these and the watercourse form an important habitat for foraging and commuting bats in the site.

No evidence of badger (*Meles meles*) was recorded within the Abbey Grounds.

No evidence of otter (*Lutra lutra*) was recorded on the Ashtown Stream but their presence is not ruled out. The invasive species American mink (*Neovison vison*) may also occur.

The habitats in the environs of Wicklow Town, which have been mapped as sites of local biodiversity importance in the Wicklow Urban Habitat Mapping project provide good habitat for a range of common and ubiquitous mammal species.

Mammals known from the general Leitrim River area within the town include;

- Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)
- Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)
- Otter (*Lutra lutra*)
- Brown Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*)
- House Mouse (*Mus musculus*)

- Field Mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*)
- Grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)

The grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) is one of two seal species which breed around the Irish coast. Records of its occurrence in the Republic of Ireland date to 1837. Like the smaller harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina vitulina*), grey seals have established terrestrial colonies (or *haul-outs*) around the island, which they leave when foraging or transiting between sites, for example, and to which they return to breed, rest, moult, engage in social activity, etc.

Grey seal have in recent years been recorded in increasing numbers at Lime Kiln Bay on Wicklow Head and breed there annually. The 2005 All Ireland Seal Survey reported a single pup at this location (O’Cadhla *et al.* 2005)¹. The grey seal moult population surveys in 2007 estimated haul-out group sizes of 22 at Wicklow Head (O’Cadhla *et al.* 2007)². A local seal known as ‘Sammy’ regularly travels up the Vartry (Leitrim) River into the town.

The Abbey Grounds would be deemed of high local biodiversity importance within the environs of Wicklow Town.

2.2 ASSESSMENT OF RELEVANCE OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT TO NATURA 2000 SITES

In line with the European Commission Methodological Guidance (EC (2001)) and the DoEHLG Guidance (DoEHLG (2010)) a review of all Natura 2000 sites that could be potentially affected by the proposed project was made using the NPWS online map viewer. These included any Natura 2000 sites within or adjacent to the site, and any Natura 2000 sites within the likely zone of impact of the proposed development (a 15km radius).

The Abbey Grounds are not currently designated for any nature conservation purposes under either international or national conservation legislation

A number of sites of international conservation importance adjoin Wicklow Town which are of relevance. These are:

- The Murrrough Wetlands Special Protection Area (SPA) - Site Code: 004186
- The Murrrough Wetlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) - Site Code: 002249)
- Wicklow Head Special Protection Area (SPA) - Site Code: 004127
- Wicklow Reef Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Site Code: 002274

¹ Oliver Ó Cadhla, Denis Strong, Ciarán O’Keeffe, Mary Coleman, Michelle Cronin, Callan Duck, Tony Murray, Pascal Dower, Richard Nairn, Paul Murphy, Pat Smiddy, Cyril Saich, David Lyons, Lex Hiby (2005). Grey seal breeding population assessment in the Republic of Ireland, 2005. Final Project Report for National Parks and Wildlife Service.

² Oliver Ó Cadhla and Denis Strong (2007). Grey seal moult population survey in the Republic of Ireland, 2007. Final Project Report for National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Some of these sites are also of national conservation importance and hence are designated as proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs). They include:

- The Wicklow Town Sites proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) (Site Code: 001929)
- Wicklow Head proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) – Site Code: 000734
- The Murrough proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) – Site Code: 000730

The Wicklow Head Special Protection Area (SPA) – Site Code: 004127, which is also designated as a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) – Site Code: 000734, and the Wicklow Reef Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Site Code: 002274 are located to the South of the town.

The Murrough Wetlands Special Protection Area (SPA) (Site Code: 004186) is within 150m of the Abbey Grounds and is hydrologically linked to it by the Ashtown Stream. The boundary of the Murrough Wetlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site Code: 002249), is found further to the north and east of the Abbey Grounds.

The Wicklow Town Sites proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) (Site Code: 001929), is found to the north east of the Abbey Grounds where it is located on the eastern side of the River Leitrim and to the east at Black Castle.

The locations of these sites are shown on **Figure 3** below.

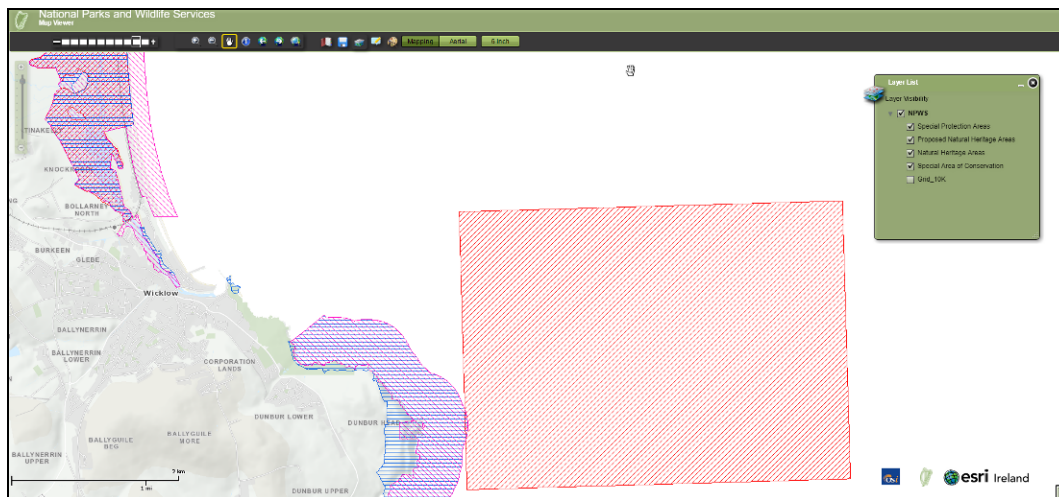


Figure 3. Site Designations and boundaries at Wicklow Town. SPA site boundary shown by pink hatching, pNHA site boundary shown by blue hatching and SAC site boundary shown by red hatching.

Best practice recommends assessing Natura 2000 sites located within 15km of a proposed plan or project. Those Natura 2000 sites occurring within a 15km radius of the site are detailed in **Table 2.2** below. These include;

- The Murrough SPA (Site Code: 004186)
- The Murrough Wetlands SAC (Site Code: 002249)
- Wicklow Head SPA (Site Code: 004127)
- Wicklow Reef SAC (Site Code: 002274)

- Magherabeg Dunes SAC (Site Code: 001766)
- Buckronev-Brittis Dunes And Fen (Site Code: SAC 000729)
- Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve SAC (Site Code: 000717)
- Vale Of Clara (Rathdrum Wood) (Site Code: SAC 000733)
- Wicklow Mountains SAC (Site Code: 002122)

There are no other designated biodiversity areas potentially affected by the proposed development that have a recognised European Union or International protection status beyond those listed above.

The importance of the Abbey Grounds as a green open space for both people and biodiversity within Wicklow Town has been highlighted in a number of studies including:

- Preliminary Study - A Green Infrastructure Plan for Wicklow Town (Austen & Associates (2011))
- Meehan, S. and D. D'Arcy (2017). A Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Wicklow Town 2017 - 2020.
- The Wicklow Urban Habitat Study

Table 2.2. Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the Abbey Grounds.

Site Code	Site Name and Designation	Approximate distance from the Abbey Grounds	Qualifying Interest <i>Priority Habitats are indicated with an asterisk</i>	Conservation Objectives
004186	The Murrough SPA	Within 150m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red-throated Diver (<i>Gavia stellata</i>) • Greylag Goose (<i>Anser anser</i>) • Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) • Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) • Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) • Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) • Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>) • Little Tern (<i>Sterna albifrons</i>) • Wetlands & Waterbirds 	<p>Source: NPWS (2021) Conservation objectives for The Murrough SPA [004186]. Generic Version 8.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Accessed 20th September 2021.</p> <p>To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the wetland habitat at The Murrough SPA as a resource for the regularly-occurring migratory waterbirds that utilise it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red-throated Diver (<i>Gavia stellata</i>) • Greylag Goose (<i>Anser anser</i>) • Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) • Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) • Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) • Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) • Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>) • Little Tern (<i>Sterna albifrons</i>) • Wetlands & Waterbirds

Site Code	Site Name and Designation	Approximate distance from the Abbey Grounds	Qualifying Interest <i>Priority Habitats are indicated with an asterisk</i>	Conservation Objectives
002249	The Murrough Wetlands SAC	0.8km N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1210) Annual vegetation of drift lines • (1220) Perennial vegetation of stony banks • (1330) Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) • (1410) Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) • (7210) * Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> • (7230) Alkaline fens 	<p>Source: NPWS (2021) Conservation objectives for The Murrough Wetlands SAC [002249]. Generic Version 8.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Accessed 20th September 2021.</p> <p>To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitats for which the SAC has been selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1210) Annual vegetation of drift lines • (1220) Perennial vegetation of stony banks • (1330) Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) • (1410) Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) • (7210) * Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> • (7230) Alkaline fens

Site Code	Site Name and Designation	Approximate distance from the Abbey Grounds	Qualifying Interest <i>Priority Habitats are indicated with an asterisk</i>	Conservation Objectives
004127	Wicklow Head SPA	1.8km SE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A188 Kittiwake <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> 	<p>Source: NPWS (2021) Conservation objectives for Wicklow Head SPA [004127]. Generic Version 8.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Accessed 20th September 2021.</p> <p>To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A188 Kittiwake <i>Rissa tridactyla</i>
002274	Wicklow Reef SAC	3.7km E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reefs [1170] 	<p>Source: NPWS (2013) Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Reef SAC 002274. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Accessed 20th September 2021.</p> <p>To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitats for which the SAC has been selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reefs [1170]

Site Code	Site Name and Designation	Approximate distance from the Abbey Grounds	Qualifying Interest <i>Priority Habitats are indicated with an asterisk</i>	Conservation Objectives
001766	Magherabeg Dunes	5.5km S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] • Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] • Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120] • Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]* • Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (Calluno-Ulicetea) [2150]* • Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]* 	<p>Source: NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Magherabeg Dunes SAC 001766. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Accessed 20th September 2021.</p> <p>To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitats for which the SAC has been selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] • Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] • Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120] • Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]* • Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (Calluno-Ulicetea) [2150]* • Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]*

Site Code	Site Name and Designation	Approximate distance from the Abbey Grounds	Qualifying Interest <i>Priority Habitats are indicated with an asterisk</i>	Conservation Objectives
000717	Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve	8.3km SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91A0 Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles 	<p>Source: NPWS (2021) Conservation objectives for Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve SAC [000717]. Generic Version 8.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Accessed 20th September 2021.</p> <p>To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitats for which the SAC has been selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91A0 Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles
000729	Buckroneys-Brittis Dunes And Fen	9.2km S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] • Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] • Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410] • Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] • Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120] • Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]* • Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (<i>Calluno-Ulicetea</i>) [2150]* 	<p>Source: NPWS (2017). Conservation Objectives: Buckroneys-Brittis Dunes and Fen SAC 000729. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Accessed 20th September 2021.</p> <p>To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitats for which the SAC has been selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] • Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] • Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410] • Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] • Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila</i>

Site Code	Site Name and Designation	Approximate distance from the Abbey Grounds	Qualifying Interest <i>Priority Habitats are indicated with an asterisk</i>	Conservation Objectives
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dunes with <i>Salix repens</i> ssp. <i>argentea</i> (Salicion arenariae) [2170] • Humid dune slacks [2190] • Alkaline fens [7230] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120] • Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]* • Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (Calluno-Ulicetea) [2150]* • Dunes with <i>Salix repens</i> ssp. <i>argentea</i> (Salicion arenariae) [2170] • Humid dune slacks [2190] • Alkaline fens [7230]
000733	Vale Of Clara (Rathdrum Wood)	11.6km W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91A0 Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles 	<p>Source: NPWS (2021) Conservation objectives for Vale of Clara (Rathdrum Wood) SAC [000733]. Generic Version 8.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Accessed 20th September 2021.</p> <p>To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitats for which the SAC has been selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91A0 Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles
002122	Wicklow Mountains SAC	15km NW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (3130) Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the Littorelletea uniflorae and/or of the Isoëto-Nanojuncetea • (3160) Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds, 	<p>Source: NPWS (2017). Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Mountains SAC 002122. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Accessed 20th September 2021.</p>

Site Code	Site Name and Designation	Approximate distance from the Abbey Grounds	Qualifying Interest <i>Priority Habitats are indicated with an asterisk</i>	Conservation Objectives
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (4010) Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>, • (4030) European dry heaths, • (4060) Alpine and Boreal heaths, • (6230) Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas, • (7130) Blanket bog (*active only), • (8110) Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (<i>Androsacetalia alpinae</i> and <i>Galeopsietalia ladani</i>), • (8210) Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation, • (8220) Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation, • (9990) Blanket bog (not active), • (1355) Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>), • Peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>), • Merlin (<i>Falco columbarius</i>) 	<p>To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitats or Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (3130) Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the Littorelletea uniflorae and/or of the Isoëto-Nanojuncetea • (3160) Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds, • (4010) Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>, • (4030) European dry heaths, • (4060) Alpine and Boreal heaths, • (6230) Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas, • (7130) Blanket bog (*active only), • (8110) Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (<i>Androsacetalia alpinae</i> and <i>Galeopsietalia ladani</i>), • (8210) Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation, • (8220) Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation, • (9990) Blanket bog (not active), • (1355) Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>), • Peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>), • Merlin (<i>Falco columbarius</i>)

SECTION 3 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Wicklow County Council is developing a planning strategy and master plan for the future use and management of the Abbey Grounds as a public space and amenity as shown in **Figure 4** below.

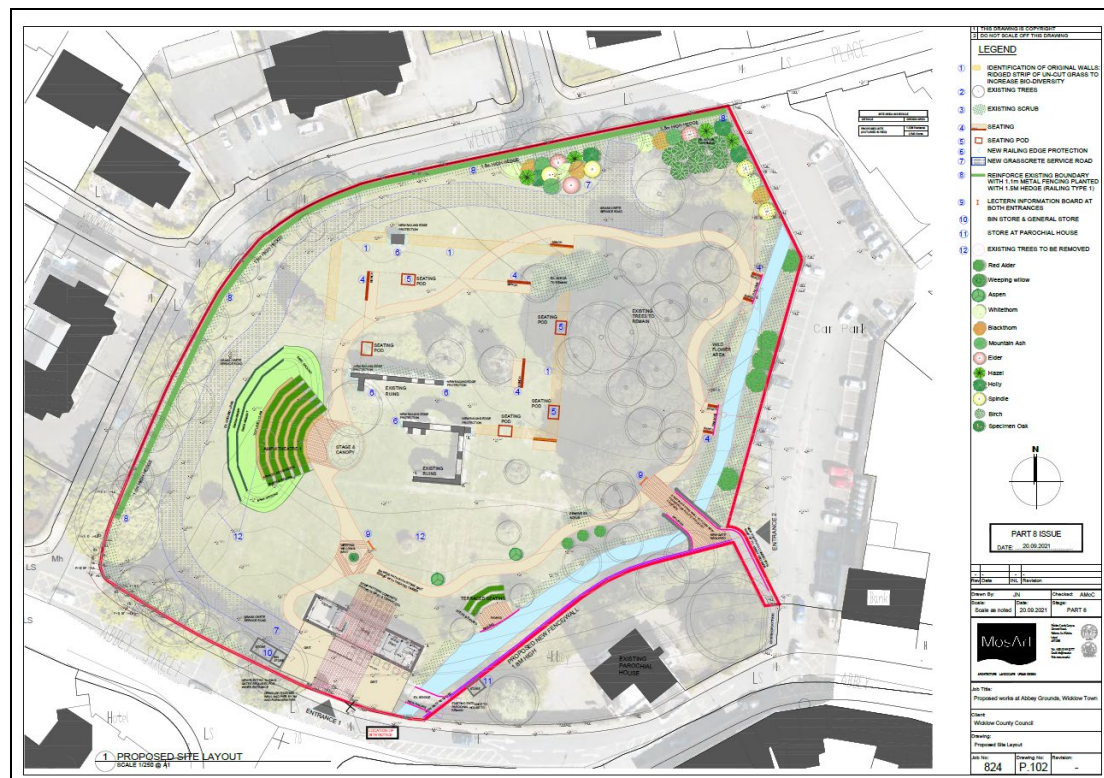


Figure 4. Proposed Site Layout.

The design proposals include:

- change of use for the Coach House building to a Café/Retail/Exhibition space and extension to same
- the provision of public toilets
- the development of an amphitheatre
- the development of a vehicular service route and pedestrian pathways
- the development of a terraced area adjoining the stream
- the provision of park benches and pods
- lighting
- landscaping and associated planting.

SECTION 4 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

4.1 ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT.

The potential impacts of the proposed development on The Murrough SPA and other nearby Natura 2000 sites are assessed using the following factors:

- 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.
- reduction of habitat area
- disturbance to key species
- habitat or species fragmentation
- reduction in 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

Brief description of the project or plan	It is proposed to develop a public park within the Abbey Grounds, Wicklow.
Brief description of the Natura 2000 sites	The site is located in close proximity to the boundary of The Murrough SPA (Site Code: 004186) and is hydrologically linked to it by the Ashtown Stream. Other Natura 2000 sites occurring within a 15km radius are detailed above in Table 2.2 .
Describe the individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) likely to give rise to impacts on the Natura 2000 sites	<p>The proposed development will utilise existing infrastructure (mains water supply and sewage) in Wicklow Town.</p> <p>There are no cumulative elements expected which are likely to give rise to impacts on Natura 2000 sites.</p>
Describe any likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the Natura 2000 site by virtue of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; 	<p>The development does not impact directly on any Natura 2000 site. The development is located within 150m of the boundary of The Murrough SPA (Site Code: 004186) and is hydrologically connected to it by the Ashtown Stream.</p> <p>There will no impacts arising from the project regarding size and scale or land-take on any Natura 2000 site.</p> <p>There are no requirements to abstract water from any Natura 2000 site for the proposed</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transportation requirements; • duration of construction, operation, decommissioning, etc.; • other 	<p>development which will be served by the mains water supply.</p> <p>There will be no emissions or excavation requirements arising from the development within any Natura 2000 site. The development will be served by the mains sewage system.</p> <p>There are no impacts to any Natura 2000 sites expected from transportation, duration of construction, operation, or decommissioning of any element of the proposed development.</p>
<p>Describe any likely changes to the site arising as a result of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction of habitat area • disturbance to key species; • habitat or species fragmentation; • reduction in species density; • changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.); • climate change 	<p>There are no changes expected to any Natura 2000 site relating to habitat or species reduction, changes to key indicators of conservation value, or to climate change as a result of the proposed development.</p> <p>The following species, which form the qualifying interests of The Murrough SPA, do not occur and would not be expected to occur within the Abbey Lands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red-throated Diver (<i>Gavia stellata</i>) • Greylag Goose (<i>Anser anser</i>) • Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) • Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) • Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) • Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) • Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>) • Little Tern (<i>Sterna albifrons</i>) • Wetlands & Waterbirds <p>They are all species associated with mudflats, lagoons, saltmarshes and other wetland habitats, which do not occur within the site.</p> <p>There will be no fragmentation of any habitats on which the bird species listed as qualifying interests for the SPA rely.</p> <p>The corridor of the Leitrim River and the boundaries of The Murrough SPA (Site Code: 004186) which are within 150m of the Abbey Grounds are not impacted by the proposed development. All existing vegetation along the boundary of the grounds will be retained in full. The existing vegetation along the Ashtown Stream within the grounds will be further augmented with native species to provide additional habitat for wildlife along the stream and to mitigate for disturbance to fauna using the river corridor.</p>

	The works will not result in any reductions of species density or changes in key indicators of conservation value such as water quality.
<p>Describe any likely impacts on the Natura 2000 site as a whole in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interference with the key relationships that define the structure of the site • interference with key relationships that define the function of the site 	There will be no impacts or interference to the key relationships that define the structure and functions of the site.
<p>Provide indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects set out above in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss • Fragmentation • Disruption • Disturbance • Change to key elements of the site (e.g. water quality etc.) 	There will be no impacts to Natura 2000 sites relating to loss, fragmentation, disruption, disturbance, or changes to the key elements of the site.
Describe from the above those elements of the project or plan, or combination of elements, where the above impacts are likely to be significant or where the scale or magnitude of impacts is not known.	There will be no direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts from the proposed development on any of the Natura 2000 sites.

SECTION 5 CONCLUSIONS

This report for screening for appropriate assessment has evaluated the proposed development of the Abbey Grounds, Wicklow as a public space to determine whether or not significant negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites are likely to arise by virtue of its construction and use.

The report finds that the project will not, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, give rise to significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 site.

A full Appropriate Assessment is therefore not required in this instance.

A number of measures to reduce or ameliorate impacts on the local biodiversity of the Abbey Grounds Ashtown Stream are presented in the ecological impact assessment report which accompanies the planning application.

SECTION 6 REFERENCES

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