Leixlip Playground, Co. Kildare

Playground and Carpark
Development,
Leixlip Amenities Sports Centre,
Maynooth Road, Leixlip
Co. Kildare
Screening Report for Habitats
Directive Appropriate Assessment

on behalf of Kildare Co. Council Parks Department

March 2023

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1.0 Introduction

Kildare County Council is proposing to develop an open access Playground and Carpark extension in the Grounds of Leixlip Amenities Sports Centre, Maynooth Road, Leixlip Co. Kildare. Pursuant to proper planning and development Kildare County Council in the Leixlip Local Area Plan ensures all proposals/projects are screened to avoid significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.

The purpose of this assessment is to determine, the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the proposed project in the context of the conservation objectives of sites which are protected for their natural habitats and species under European legislation, termed Natura 2000 sites.

2.0 Process

Ireland became a signatory to the EU Birds Directive in 1979 and the Habitats Directive in 1992. Arising from this legislation was the obligation to establish the Natura 2000 network: nominated sites of the highest biodiversity importance for rare and threatened habitats and species across the EU. In Ireland, the Natura 2000 network of European sites comprises Special Areas of Conservation (SACs, including candidate SACs), and Special Protection Areas (SPAs, including proposed SPAs).

SACs are selected for the conservation of Annex I habitats (including priority types which are in danger of disappearance) and Annex II species (other than birds). SPAs are selected for the protection of Annex I birds and other regularly occurring migratory birds and their habitats. The annexed habitats and species for which each site is selected correspond to the qualifying interests of the sites; from these, the conservation objectives of the site are derived.

The requirements for an Appropriate Assessment (AA) are fully set out in the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of this Directive state:

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

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) issued guidance on Appropriate Assessment (*Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities*) in December 2009 which provided advice on the information required in an Appropriate Assessment. Guidance from DoEHLG published in February 2010 stated that it is the responsibility of the competent authority (or consent authority) to undertake the Appropriate Assessment. The assessments may be based on information submitted by the proponent of the plan or project, in the form of a Natura Impact Statement. This Natura Impact Statement must be prepared by an ecological specialist with input from other relevant disciplines as required experts, e.g. engineers, planning specialists, and hydrologists.

This screening assessment has been prepared in accordance with the current guidance (NPWS, 2009, Revised February 2010).

3.0 Stages of the Appropriate Assessment

This document has been prepared in accordance with the European Commission Environment DG document "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", referred to as the "EC Article 6 Guidance Document". The guidance document provides a non-mandatory methodology for carrying out assessments required under Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive, and is viewed as an interpretation of the EU Commission's document "Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC", referred to as "MN2000". In addition, "Appropriate Assessment Guidance for Planning Authorities" was published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in December 2009 (DEHLG, 2009) and amended in March 2010. Cognisance has been taken of this document in carrying out this screening assessment.

The Habitats Directive promotes a hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensatory measures. In the first instance, the plan should aim to avoid any negative impacts on European sites by identifying possible impacts early in the plan-making, and writing the plan in order to avoid such impacts. Following that, mitigation measures should be applied, if necessary, during the AA process to the point where no adverse impacts on the site(s) remain. If the plan is still likely to result in adverse effects, and no further practicable mitigation is possible, then it is rejected. If no alternative solutions are identified and the plan is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI test) under Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, then compensation measures are required for any remaining adverse effect.

Screening Phase

The proposed development site is not within or directly adjacent to any Natura 2000 sites. The nearest Natura Site, is the Rye Water Valley/Carton SAC which is circa 350-400m from the site, Site Code 001398 and comprises the Royal Canal adjacent to Leixlip Spa. This section of the screening process describes the Natura 2000 site within a 2km radius of the proposed Leixlip, Playground.

A 2km buffer zone has been chosen as this radius is considered to be proportionate to the small size of the proposed development site, and its urban setting.

A map of Natura 2000 sites within the radius is provided in Appendix 2, and details of a relevant site is provided in Table 1

The integrity of a Natura 2000 site (referred to in Article 6.3 of the EU Habitats Directive) is determined based on the conservation status of the qualifying features of the SAC. The qualifying features for each site have been obtained through a review of online documentation relating to each Natura 2000 site available from the NPWS.

4.0 Description of the Project and Whether is it Required for proper management of a European Site

The project as outlined is not required for the proper management of a European Site i.e a SAC or SPA site.

The project involves the proposed development of a Playground and Carpark extension within the grounds of the Leixlip Amenities Sports Centre, Maynooth Road Leixlip. A Site location map is included in Appendix 1.

The design of the proposed development takes into account the best environmental engineering design to ensure the minimum impact on the local environment.

Engineering details have been provided by the Parks Section of Kildare County. Council.

The proposal includes the provision of 79 car parking spaces. This will include 74 standard spaces $(2.5 \times 5m)$ and 4 spaces designated as accessible car parking spaces $(3.6 \times 6m)$. Accessible parking for a multi-purpose vehicle with ramps or hoist $(7.8 \times 5.4 \text{ m})$ will also be included within the proposed design. Parking for 10 bicycles will be provided at the entrance to the playground. A tarmac-paved surface will be installed in the car and bike parking areas.

The proposed works area will 3900 sq. m approximately.

The proposed playground will occupy 1130 square metres and the carpark area will be circa 2800 square metres.

It is proposed to utilize the existing hedge on the northern boundary and existing weld-mesh fencing on the south and east boundaries will be retained, a new 2-metre mesh fence will be constructed on the western boundary of the playground.

The entrance to the playground will provide both pedestrian and service access. The pedestrian entrance will be 1.8m wide with a self-closing gate and a 2.2 m gate which will give additional width for maintenance and servicing of the playground.

The playground will contain a range of equipment including Swings, Slides, Rockers, Seesaw, zip wire, Play Panels, Multi Play Units, Sand & Water Play & landscaping.

It is envisaged that the grass will be utilized as a play surface where possible.

Additional surfaces which may be used in the design of the playground are rubber surfacing, woodchip and sand. The design also contains landscape features such as mounding, sand pit, planting and living willow structures and tree and shrub planting.

It is envisaged that construction of the carpark will take place before the playground, carpark works will be circa 12 weeks in duration. In addition, it is likely the construction of the playground will take 12-16 weeks from starting on site to completion and opening. This timeframe is dependent on weather and ground conditions.

Carpark grey water and surface water from the Playground area will be directed through a network of drainage channels to a fuel and oil separator and hence to an existing stormwater drain as outlined in the engineering design included with this application.

A hydro-brake is included in the design to ensure that water draining from the carpark and playground areas will be managed to ensure that the amount of water runoff from the drained areas will be controlled in conditions of extreme rainfall.

Site water management has been designed in consultation with consultant engineers to ensure that water leaving the site will be treated and controlled.

The construction phase will involve soil excavation, movement and reprofiling.

The construction of the car parking spaces and playground involves the import of construction materials, concrete, tarmacadam and vehicle and machinery operation on-site.

Construction of foundations of carpark, pathways, and fencing structures will not exceed 500mm in depth.

Landscaping will only use clean uncontaminated topsoil or topsoil excavated from within the site.

Minor vegetation clearance may be required, this will not occur within the bird breeding season from the 1st of March to the 1st of September.

Planting schemes will not include any known invasive alien species as defined by Invasive Species Ireland.

General Site Construction Environmental Measures Consistent with Best Practice, Standards, Design and Controls

General Measures

Raw or uncured waste concrete should be disposed of by removal from the site.

The amount of in-situ concreting required should be minimised by maximising the use of pre-cast or permanent formwork.

Ready-mix suppliers should be used in preference to on-site batching.

Washout of concrete trucks should occur off-site at a designated, contained impermeable areas, however, if it is necessary to wash down the truck chutes it must be conducted in a dedicated bunded impermeable and signposted washout area;

Prior to any work, it should be ensured that all construction equipment is mechanically sound to avoid leaks of oil, fuel, hydraulic fluids and grease.

All vegetation clearance shall be carried out in one period outside the breeding bird's nesting period which runs from 1st March to the 31st of August.

Runoff and sediment control

Normal construction site pollution control measures shall be implemented to ensure that pollutants and sediment are not deposited within any local drains in so far as possible.

Fuel Management

Fuel management measures will be implemented which will incorporate the following elements: fuels, lubricants and hydraulic fluids for equipment used on the construction site should be carefully handled to avoid spillage, properly secured against unauthorised access or vandalism, and provided with spill containment according to current best practice (Enterprise Ireland BPGCS005)2.

Fuelling and lubrication of equipment should be carried out off-site in an appropriately contained site.

Emergency fuel spill kits with oil boom, absorbers etc. will be kept on-site in the event of an accidental spill. This should be available on-site, for any spillage of fuels, lubricants or hydraulic oils which should be immediately contained and the contaminated soil removed from the site and properly disposed of.

Waste oils and hydraulic fluids should be collected in leak-proof containers and removed from the site for disposal or recycling.

Procedures and contingency plans will be set up to deal with an emergency situation.

Site Waste Management and Prevention of Spread of Alien Invasive Species

Waste management measures shall be implemented to ensure that waste generated on-site is managed appropriately:

During the construction phase of the project waste will be controlled and segregated appropriately on-site by means of dedicated skips which will be disposed of off-site by a licensed waste operator.

It is also important to note that as all trucks transporting materials to and from the site will be cleaned as per site biosecurity protocol the potential to spread alien invasive species to the nearby SAC habitats as part of the works will be excluded. No invasive alien species have been recorded from the area of works so it is highly unlikely that any spread of invasive aliens will occur because of site works.

5.0 Sources for Information on Natura 2000 sites to Inform Screening Process

5.1 Nature Conservation Sites and Available Information

Data and information about European sites, and other nature conservation sites, were acquired from www.npws.ie. This includes site boundaries, site synopses, lists of qualifying interests (SACs) and special conservation interests (SPAs), and conservation objectives (European sites).

European sites have site-specific conservation objectives, and the associated supporting documents were sourced from the NPWS website.

- National Biodiversity Data Centre.
- EISs, NISs and other reports for projects in the general area, including previous Natura 2000 Screening Reports in Leixlip area held by Kildare County Council.
- Leixlip Local Area Plan and Kildare County Development Plan.
- Geological Survey of Ireland Website

• REFERENCES

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009.
- Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, European Commission Environment DG, 2000.
- Fossitt, J. A. (2000) A Guide to the Habitats of Ireland. The Heritage Council, Ireland.
- Managing Natura 2000 sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC: European Commission, 2000

6.0 Features of the Development that Could Impact on Natura 2000 Sites

6.1 Brief Description of the Natura 2000 Site

This section of the screening process describes the Natura 2000 sites within a 2km radius of the proposed development area. As previously stated a 2km buffer zone has been considered sufficient for this assessment as this radius is considered to be proportionate to the small size of the proposed development site, and its urban setting.

A map of Natura 2000 sites within the radius is provided in Appendix 2, and details of relevant sites are provided in Table $\bf 1$

Table 1. Natura 2000 sites within 2km of Proposed Leixlip Playground.

Site Name (code)	Qualifying Interests Habitats and Species	Minimum Distance from Playground (m)	
Rye Water Valley / Carton SAC (site code	Annex I habitats: • Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion)	350-400m	
1398)	Annex II species: • Narrow-mouthed whorl snail Vertigo angustior • Desmoulin's whorl snail Vertigo moulinsiana		

6.2 Conservation Objectives

A Natura 2000 site's conservation objectives are defined by DAHG and are, "intended to ensure that the relevant Annex I habitats and Annex II species present on a site are maintained in a favourable condition" (DEHLG, 2010). The DEHLG guidelines state that, "The Conservation Objectives derive from the qualifying interests, the Natura 2000 standard data form, and the management plan for the site, with summary information also available in the site synopsis." Whilst the Natura 2000 standard data forms and site synopses do present details of the qualifying features of Natura 2000 sites, and list the generic threats to those features, they do not define the conservation objectives of the site.

For the purposes of this assessment, information on the conservation objectives for the sites has been gained from consultation with NPWS relating to the Border Regional Planning Guidelines and NPWS generic Conservation Objectives for Natura 2000 Sites where no Management Plan is yet available.

Generic conservation objectives for SPAs are as follows:

• To maintain the bird species of special conservation interest for which the SPA has been listed, at favourable conservation status.

Generic conservation objectives for SACs are as follows:

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

The favourable conservation status of a species can be described as being achieved when: population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat can be described as being achieved when: its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined below.

6.3 Relevant SACs Descriptions and Potential Impact

The Rye Water Valley / Carton SAC

The Rye Water Valley / Carton SAC has been designated for the protection of petrifying springs (wetland habitats fed by upwelling groundwater), and two species of whorl snail (which live in freshwater marshes). In the site synopsis of the SAC it is noted that the springs and whorl-snails occur at a wetland complex near Louisa Bridge; this area is at its closest approx. 350-400m to the north east of the proposed development site.

Indirect impacts to this SAC can only occur if there is a viable pathway between the source (the proposed development site) and the receptor (the habitats and species for which a site has been designated). The most common pathway for deleterious impacts is surface water, where a pollutant is released to a watercourse/drainage channel, and hence travels downstream to reach sensitive aquatic habitats or species. Other potential pathways are groundwater, air (e.g. airborne dust or sound waves), or land (e.g. flow of liquids, vibration).

The zone of effect for hydrological impacts can be several kilometres, but for air and land it is rarely more than one hundred metres. An appraisal of potential pathways for impacts on the Natura 2000 sites referenced in Table 1 is provided below.

Carpark grey water management will be directed to a network of drainage channels and hence to a fuel and oil separator as outlined in the engineering design included with this application and hence to an existing storm water drain.

Surface water from the Playground area will be directly channelled to the storm drain.

A hydrobrake is included in the design to ensure that water draining from the carpark and playground areas will be managed to ensure that the amount of water runoff from the drained areas will be minimised in conditions of extreme rainfall.

Site water management has been designed in consultation with consultant engineers to ensure that water leaving the site will treated and controlled.

Therefore only treated water will leave the site and therefore, the potential impact on this SAC will be minimal and is not expected to have a deleterious impact on species or habitats of the SAC.

There is no direct terrestrial habitat linkage to the SAC as the site is isolated from the proposed development site by existing urban infrastructure of the Maynooth Road and the Intel Factory.

Therefore, all receptor pathway linkages to the SAC from the proposed Playground Development site at the Leixlip Amenities Sports Centre can be considered to be of no significant impact to the SAC, as only treated water will leave the proposed carpark/playground site and therefore there will be no deleterious impact to the SAC water quality also there is no direct terrestrial habitat linkage to the site.

Receiving Environment-Terrestrial Habitats

The proposed Playground is located adjacent to the Leixlip Amenities Sports Centre, Maynooth Road, Leixlip, Co. Kildare. The site is underlain by a good depth of mineral topsoil.

The site comprises a relict field area with dry meadow, a managed hedgerow, and adjacent running track and associated amenity grassland and tarmac and concrete bounded car park and roads/paths.

No annexed habitats occur within the footprint of the development.

The proposed Carpark/Playground is located at least 300m from nearest SAC

A site visit was carried out in September 2022.

The habitats of the site have been recorded as part of the overall assessment of the site habitat follows (Fossitt 2000).

Habitats of the proposed Carpark/Playground

The habitats of the proposed development site comprise artificial surfaces (tarmac and concreted existing carpark) BL3 and amenity grassland GA2, Dry Meadow GS2 and Hedgerow WL2.

The amenity grassland GA2 sward comprise a variety of grasses, broadleaved herbs such as Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Dandelion (Taraxacum spp.), clovers (*Trifolium* spp.) and plantains (*Plantago* spp.) are common.

Dry meadows GS2 which is dominated by coarse and tussocky grasses such as False Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*) and Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*). Other grasses include Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and Smooth Meadow-grass (Poa pratensis). The forb species associated with this rough grassland include Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), and Bush Vetch (*Vicia sepium*).

A managed hedgerow WL2, comprising mostly hawthorn, ivy, and bramble occur along the road boundary behind a low wall. This hedgerow will be retained.

Ecological Value

The site is highly modified and managed and is of general low habitat and species value which is characteristic of the urban location of the site.

7.0 Likely Impact on the Natura 2000 Sites

The possible impacts that might arise from the proposed development have been examined in the context of the factors that could potentially affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites. As part of the screening stage process the proximity and qualifying interests of the Natura 2000 sites in the wider hinterland of the proposed playground, at Leixlip were considered. In assessing the sites that could potentially be impacted by the proposed development a source-pathwayreceptor model was used. All sites potentially impacted were considered in relation to the size and nature of the proposed development and the sensitivity of the receptors in the wider locality. If a Natura 2000 site of particular significance/relevance exists beyond a nominal screening area this was also included in the screening appraisal. Accordingly, all potential pathways for impact on designated sites were included in this screening exercise both within and outside a nominal 2km zone which was chosen to display the location and discuss the site most proximate to the proposed development. Table 2 summarises the location and qualifying interests of the designated site in the area.

7.1 SAC Sites

The nearest SAC within the 2km distance from the proposed development site lies at a distance of 350m-400m from the proposed site but is not directly linked by habitat connectivity to the area of the proposed development site at Leixlip Amenities Sports Grounds. The SAC site is separated from the proposed development site by the Maynooth Road and associated urban infrastructure.

It also should be noted that as part of the proposed development carpark grey water and playground surface water will be directed to a network of drainage channels and hence to a fuel and oil separator as outlined in the engineering design included with this application and hence to an existing stormwater drain.

A hydro brake is included in the design to ensure that water draining from the carpark and playground areas will be managed to ensure that the amount of water runoff from the drained areas will be minimised in conditions of extreme rainfall.

Site water management has been designed in consultation with consultant engineers to ensure that water leaving the site will be treated and controlled.

Therefore, only treated water will leave the site and the potential impact on this SAC will be minimal and is not expected to have a deleterious impact on species or habitats of the SAC.

Also existing grey water management at the adjacent Leixlip Amenities Sports Grounds is of sufficient capacity and contains a network of fuel interceptors and a sufficiently large soakaway to allow only clean water to leave the site so no in combination effect is envisaged as part of the proposed development.

No significant impact is expected on groundwater or surface water leaving the site.

The proposed development will not impact the local groundwater hydrological processes as the deepest construction depth will be circa 500mm below the surface and is above any area of groundwater movement.

It is therefore concluded that it is highly improbable that a project of this nature and scale will have any measurable impact on the groundwater quality-dependent qualifying interests of the Rye Water Valley / Carton SAC. For this European site, there will be no reduction in habitat area of qualifying interest **Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion)**, or species of qualifying interest **Narrow-mouthed whorl snail Vertigo angustior** or **Desmoulin's whorl snail Vertigo moulinsiana**

No disturbance to key species or habitats, no reduction in species density or no changes in key indicators of conservation value.

Table 1 summarises the location and qualifying interests of designated sites within a 2km radius of the proposed development site.

Table 2 outlines a screening matrix for potential impacts on the SAC sites

Table 2.

Site Name	Reduction in Habitat Area of Habitat of Qualifying Interest Possible Potential Impacts	Disturbance to Key Habitats or Species Possible Potential Impacts	Habitat or Species Fragmentation Possible Potential Impacts	Reduction in Species Density Possible Potential Impacts	Changes in Key Indicators of Conservation Value Possible Potential Impacts
The Rye Water Valley / Carton SAC 1398	No	No	No	No	No

Cumulative Impact

A requirement of the AA process is to take into consideration any cumulative impacts because of other plans in the area. As the existing grey water management at the adjacent Leixlip Amenities Sports Grounds is of sufficient capacity and contains a network of fuel interceptors and a sufficiently large soakaway to allow only clean water to leave the site no in-combination effect is envisaged as part of the proposed development.

It is considered that because of the small scope and scale of the proposed development and the fact that it is highly unlikely to lead to any adverse impact to any Natura 2000 sites within a 2km radius of the site, no cumulative impact will result from the proposed development in combination with any other proposals in the Leixlip area.

8.0 Screening Conclusions

The likely impacts that will arise from the proposed development of works have been examined in the context of the key environmental factors that could potentially affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network, e.g. disturbance, habitat loss, etc. and the results of the Screening Assessment, as presented in Tables 2. The tables indicate "no" for sites where no negative impact is anticipated on the conservation objectives or on the overall integrity of the site.

Conclusion of screening stage

In conclusion, to determine the potential impacts, if any, of the proposed Leixlip Town Playground on nearby Natura 2000 sites, a screening process for AA was undertaken. The proposed development is within 2km of 1 Natura 2000 site.

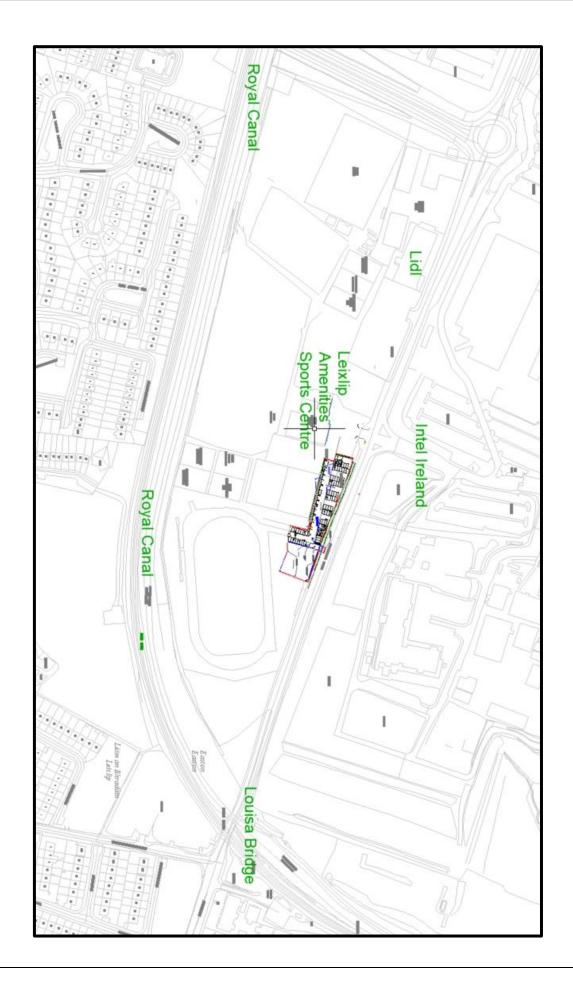
It is considered that the proposed development does not include any element that has the potential to significantly alter the favourable conservation objectives associated with the species and habitats, or, interfere with the key relationships that define the structure or function, either alone or in combination with other impacts, of the Natura 2000 sites considered in this document provided that the following is carried out:

The proposed development is completed as described in section 4.

The programme of measures consistent with best practice, standards, design and controls as outlined in section 4 are implemented as outlined in this document.

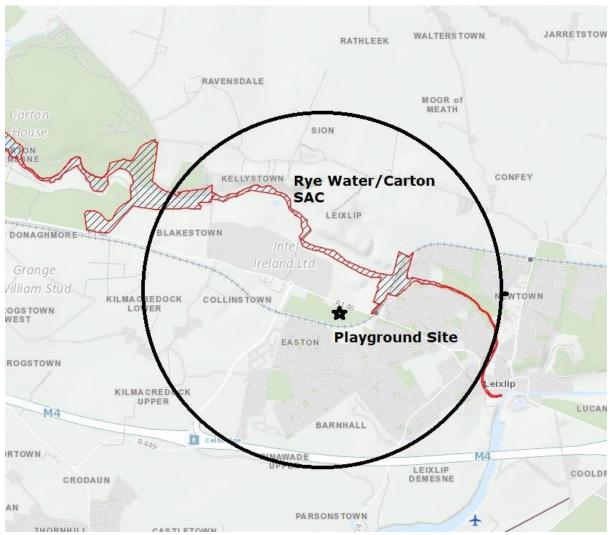
It has been objectively concluded during the screening process that no European Site likely to be significantly impacted by the proposed Leixlip Playground, in this instance there will be no deleterious impact to **The Rye Water Valley / Carton SAC Site Code 001398.** Therefore there is no requirement to proceed to Stage 2 of the Appropriate Assessment Process.

Appendix 1. Location and Layout of Proposed Playground and carpark Development



Appendix 2

Natura 2000 Sites within a 2km radius of the proposed development site



Appendix 3

Site Photographs

