



# APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT

FOR  
UPGRADE/INSTALLATION OF  
BROADBAND NETWORK

AT  
DA186, Mountrath

ON BEHALF OF



National Broadband Ireland

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Enviroguide Consulting was commissioned by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) to undertake a screening for Appropriate Assessment with respect to the upgrade/installation of broadband services to buildings in the Mountrath area. This Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (the "Screening Report") considers whether the Proposed Project is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site and whether a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is required. The Proposed Project entails the upgrade and installation of telecommunications infrastructure to buildings in Mountrath and the surrounding area in County Laois, covering an approximate area of 337 km<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of this report is to provide information to assist the relevant competent authority to carry out a screening for Appropriate Assessment. This AA Screening report has been prepared on the basis of design data presented in (DA186 LLD06)

## 1.2 Relevant Legislation

### 1.2.1 Legislative Background

Member States are required to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protected Areas (SPAs) under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, respectively. SACs and SPAs are collectively known as European Sites. A screening for AA determines whether a plan or project, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a European Site (without the application of mitigation measures to avoid or reduce significant effects to a European Site), in view of its conservation objectives.

If likely significant effects are identified or cannot be ruled out, an 'Appropriate Assessment' (AA) is required to determine whether the significant effects of the project, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, would have an adverse effect on the integrity of the European Sites, having regard to their conservation objectives and best scientific knowledge.

This AA Screening has been undertaken to determine the potential for significant effects on relevant European Sites.

### 1.2.2 Legislative Context

The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) seeks to conserve natural habitats and wild fauna and flora by the designation of SACs and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) seeks to protect birds of special importance by the designation of SPAs. It is the responsibility of each Member State to designate SPAs and SACs, both of which will form part of Natura 2000, a network of protected sites throughout the European Community.

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

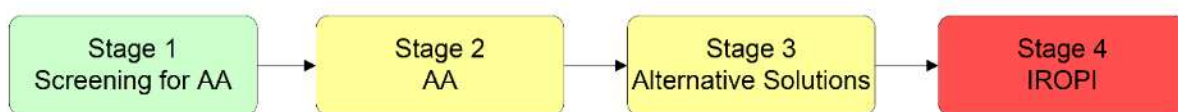
*"6(3) Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site, in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the*

*assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”*

These obligations in relation to Appropriate Assessment have been implemented in Ireland under Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (“the 2000 Act”) and the Birds and Natural Habitat Regulations 2011, as amended.

### 1.2.3 Stages of AA

The AA process is a four-stage process, with issues and tests at each stage. An important aspect of the process is that the outcome at each successive stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required.



**FIGURE 1. THE FOUR STAGES OF THE APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT PROCESS (DEHLG, 2010).**

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

- Stage 1: *Screening*. The first stage of the AA process is to determine the likelihood of significant impacts of the project or plan.
- Stage 2: *Natura Impact Statement (NIS)*. The second stage of the AA process assesses the impact of the project or plan (either alone or in combination with other projects or plans) on the integrity of the European Site, with respect to the conservation objectives of the site and its ecological structure and function. A Natura Impact Statement containing a professional scientific examination of the project or plan is required and includes any mitigation measures to avoid, reduce or offset negative impacts.
- Stage 3: *Assessment of alternative solutions*. If the outcome of Stage 2 is negative i.e., adverse impacts to the sites cannot be scientifically ruled out, despite mitigation, the plan or project should proceed to Stage 3 or be abandoned. This stage examines alternative solutions to the proposal.
- Stage 4: *Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain*. The final stage is the main derogation process examining whether there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for allowing a plan or project to adversely affect a European Site, where no less damaging solution exists.

The Competent Authority must determine that an NIS is required where the project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a European Site and if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information following screening, that the plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European Site.

## 2 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT – STAGE 1 SCREENING

### 2.1 Guidance

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

- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities*. (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision).
- *Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities*. Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10.
- *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, 2001).
- *Communication from the Commission on the precautionary principle* (European Commission, 2000).
- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission, 2019).
- *Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 Sites - Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC Brussels, 28.9.2021 C* (European Commission, 2021); and,
- *Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, OPR Practice Note PN01, Office of the Planning Regulator March 2021*.

### 2.2 Screening Steps

Screening for AA involves the following steps:

- Establish whether the project is directly connected with or necessary for the management of a European Site.
- Description of the project and the description and characterisation of other projects or plans that in combination have the potential for having significant effects on the European Site.
- Identification of European Sites potentially affected.
- Identification and description of potential effects on the European Site(s).
- Assessment of the likely significance of the impacts identified on the European Site; and

Determination on whether it can be objectively concluded that there will be no significant effects, (without the application of mitigation measures to avoid or reduce significant effects to a European Site).

## **2.3 Management of European Sites**

The development and operation of the plan by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) to install/upgrade the broadband services in the area of Mountrath (the Project) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of European Sites in the area or elsewhere.

## **2.4 Description of the Project**

### **2.4.1 Project Overview**

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the largest telecommunications project undertaken by the Irish State. It aims to transform the country's broadband landscape through the delivery of high-speed broadband to all parts of Ireland where such services are not available commercially.

The network will be designed, built and operated by National Broadband Ireland, using a combination of State subsidy and commercial investment. NBI will make its services available to the entire rollout area, which accounts for 23% of the population in approximately 537,000 homes, farms, schools and businesses.

In summary NBI will provide:

- A world-class, high-speed broadband network.
- The largest telecommunications project ever undertaken by the Government of Ireland.
- Around 146,000 kilometres of fibre to connect over half a million homes, covering 96% of Ireland's land mass.
- Up to 1,800 people will be working on the project at its peak.
- High speed broadband to approximately 115,000 farms, schools and businesses in the first two years, with an additional 70,000-100,000 per year after that.
- Before the fibre can be laid, the rollout area will be surveyed completely so that all existing infrastructure can be taken into account.
- In year one, NBI will also deliver approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) offering high-speed broadband access across every county in the nation.
- A range of wholesale services for broadband providers in the residential and business markets.
- Services to all broadband service providers.

To deliver on the commitments outlined above NBI has broken the country down into 227 separate project locations known as Deployment Areas or DAs.

### **2.4.2 Brief Description of Installation Activities**

Where possible, existing infrastructure such as utility poles, cable ducts and underground chambers will be utilised for the installation of new broadband infrastructure.

Where this is not possible, the main installation activities include:



- Erection of new poles
  - Proposed installation locations are safety checked for underground services and a temporary works area around the installation location is barriered off for reasons of safety.
  - A hole of sufficient diameter to accommodate each pole is due to a typical depth of 1.5 – 1.7m below ground level.
  - The hole is dug using a utility truck mounted auger as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.
  - Approximately 115kgs (1-2 wheelbarrows) of soil is dug by the auger for the installation of each pole.
  - The pole is lowered into place using lifting equipment. If required, cable stays will be installed to support the pole.
  - The void around the newly installed pole is backfilled with excavated material, all surplus material is placed into suitable containers and removed from site by truck for compliant waste management (maximum 115kgs per pole).
  - The installation of a single pole typically takes 20 – 30 minutes to complete.



**FIGURE 2. UTILITY TRUCK CARRYING UTILITY POLES AND TRUCK MOUNTED AUGER**



**FIGURE 3. (A) UTILITY TRUCK MOUNTED AUGER EXCAVATING HOLE FOR UTILITY POLE, (B) AND (C) NEWLY INSTALLED UTILITY POLES.**

- Installation of new underground chambers and fibre ducts
  - o Proposed installation locations are safety checked for underground services and a temporary works area around the installation location is barriered off for reasons of safety.
  - o A tracked mini-excavator or a wheeled back-hoe such as a JCB will excavate to the design depths required, a trench for the installation of ducting, or a hole for the installation of a chamber at the infrastructure installation location(s).
  - o All excavation works will be undertaken in accordance with the project specific risk assessment and method statement.
  - o Once the infrastructure has been installed the open excavation will be back-filled with the previously excavated spoil and the ground made good.
  - o The quantity of excavated material is dependent on the length and depth of the required excavations.
  - o All surplus material is placed into suitable containers and removed from site by truck for compliant waste management.



**FIGURE 4. NEWLY INSTALLED CHAMBER.**

All new and existing infrastructure within the Deployment Area (DA) is outlined in Table 1.

### **2.4.3 Contractor Compounds**

The deployment of broadband infrastructure may require the use of a temporary compound including temporary office accommodation and welfare facilities, within the DA, for the storage of plant, equipment, and materials. Such temporary compounds will be situated in a fixed location for the duration of the activities. The minimum location and design standards for compounds are:

- Secure, fenced off locations with lockable gates.

- Impermeable concrete hardstanding areas with surface water drainage from the compound required to pass through a Class 1 petrol/oil interceptor with adequate silt storage capacity (maintained to manufacturer's specifications).
- Materials and waste storage will comply with the following criteria:
  - Storage of poles in bunded area
  - Waste must be appropriately stored and suitably bunded to prevent leakage.
  - There must be unobstructed access for loading and unloading as well as in case of emergencies.
  - Waste should only be handled by competent employees.
  - The management of all waste electrical and electronic equipment and materials and comply with its obligations under the WEEE Regulations; and
- No vehicle refuelling will take place at any of the compounds.

These design standards are in compliance with NBI's Environmental Management System (EMS) (outlined below).

#### **2.4.4 Routine Operational Measures**

The environmental commitments of the Proposed Project will be managed through the Environmental Management System (EMS). The implementation of the proposed operational protocols, monitoring and follow-up arrangements and management of impacts, will be managed through the Environmental Management Plan. The routine operational measures to be implemented are, by their very nature routine; none of the routine operational measures to be implemented are being implemented to avoid likely significant effects on any European Site.

Design standards for the compounds will be in compliance with NBI's EMS. NBI have developed Standard Operating Procedures for the completion of the specific installation elements of the project, referred to as Workmanship Standards, and must be considered along with the Design, Design Risk Assessments (DRAs). The Workmanship standards applicable to the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure in each DA are provided to the Project Supervisor Construction Stage (PSCS) in the DA Build Pack (project information). Workmanship Standards do not contain any specific measures targeted at avoiding likely significant effects on a European Site.

#### **2.4.5 Project Specific Description**

This screening report is based on the proposal by NBI to install/upgrade broadband services to buildings in Mountrath (DA186) and the surrounding areas. The area under assessment is approximately 337 km<sup>2</sup> of mainly rural environment.

As noted previously, existing infrastructure (poles, underground ducting, and chambers) will be used for the installation of cable providing broadband service to buildings in the Project area. There is a requirement to supplement existing infrastructure with new additional infrastructure. Table 1 identifies the existing telecoms infrastructure in the project area and the new additional infrastructure to be installed as part of the Proposed Project.



**TABLE 1. EXISTING AND PROPOSED ADDITIONAL TELECOMS INFRASTRUCTURE**

Infrastructure description	Existing Infrastructure	Additional Proposed Infrastructure
Above ground / overhead cable	319.5 km	38.1 km
Underground cable and ducting	41.4 km	17.3 km
Network Utility Poles	6629	652
Underground chambers	571	70
Co-Locations/Cabinets	Yes	0

The vast majority of the additional network equipment identified in Table 1 will be installed in the roadside verges, or under existing carriageways.

The installation of the infrastructure will not require water course crossing, or instream works.

New overhead cables will be slung between newly installed poles.

Underground ducting will follow the existing road network.

Table 2 identifies the installation location type and total length of underground ducting to be installed in each location type.

It is expected that the rollout of the infrastructure will commence 02/06/2023 with a completion date of 12/01/2024.

**TABLE 2 NEW UNDERGROUND DUCTING INSTALLATION LOCATION TYPE AND LENGTH**

Type of install location	Total Length km
Installation in roadside verge	12.6 km
Installation under existing footway	1.5 km
Installation under existing carriageway	3.1 km

#### **2.4.6 Operation, maintenance and decommission project phases.**

During the operation of the network, reactive maintenance of the new infrastructure will occur once an issue has been reported/detected e.g., pole broken, pole leaning, underground cable cut etc. Replacement of damaged underground cable will use existing ducting. During the operational phase, poles will be stored in established contractor's storage areas, in compliance with current legislation. Poles which are being replaced by NBI during the operational phase will be removed and disposed of by the appropriate means.

All operational maintenance, repair, replacement and upgrade of network equipment will be undertaken in strict compliance with the Workmanship Standards.

#### **2.4.7 Existing Environment**

The Project is located within an area that is a mainly rural (grazing/agricultural/forestry). The project route also contains the urban centre of Mountrath.

A number of lake waterbodies, river waterbodies and groundwater bodies, are located within the project area and environs, which are shown in figure 5.

*Slieve Bloom Mountains SAC, River Barrow And River Nore SAC, Coolrain Bog SAC, Knockacoller Bog SAC, Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA and River Nore SPA* are located within the project route at various points, see figure 6 below for details.

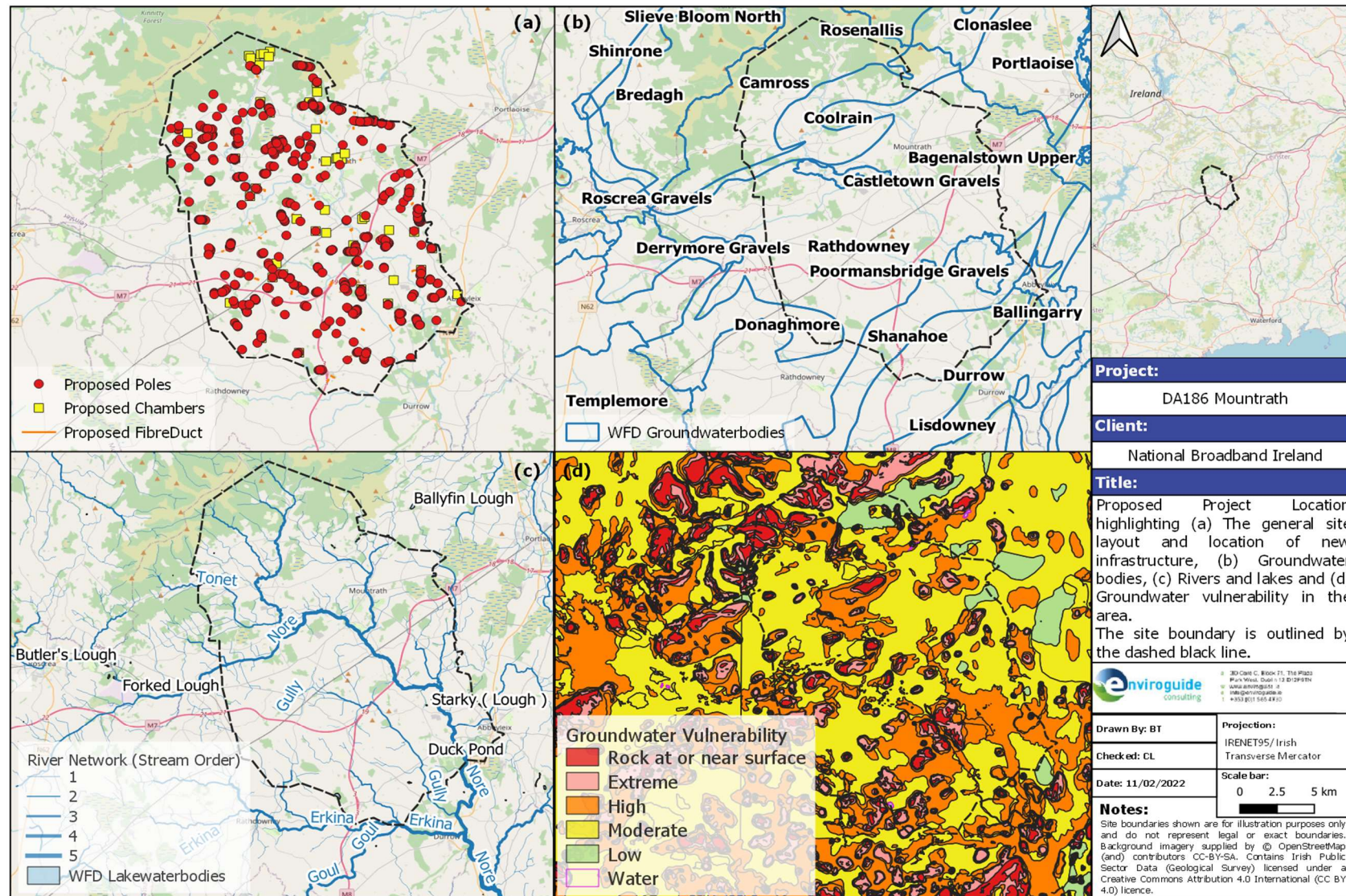


FIGURE 5. PROPOSED PROJECT LOCATION SHOWING THE LOCATION OF NEW INFRASTRUCTURE AND VARIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES



## 2.5 Methodology

### 2.5.1 Desk Study

A desktop study was carried out to collate and review available information, datasets, and documentation sources relevant for the completion of the Screening Report. The desktop study, completed in May 2022, relied on the following sources:

- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) datasets.
- Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) online datasets and mapping.
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) mapping and datasets.
- OSI aerial imagery and Discovery Series mapping.
- Satellite imagery from various sources and dates (Google, Digital Globe, Bing).
- The Status of EU Protected Habitats in Ireland (NPWS).
- Office of Public Works (OPW) Flood Plans (<https://www.floodinfo.ie/map/floodplans/>).
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Forestry Licence Viewer <https://forestry-maps.apps.rhos.agriculture.gov.ie/>

For a complete list of the specific documents consulted as part of this assessment, see *Section 4 References*.

### 2.5.2 Assessment of Impacts

Once the potential impacts that may arise from the Proposed Project are identified, the significance of these is assessed through the use of key indicators:

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

In line with the EPA Guidelines (EPA, 2017), the following terms are defined when quantifying duration:

**TABLE 3. DEFINITION OF DURATIONS (EPA, 2017).**

Description of Duration	Corresponding Time Frame
<b>Momentary Effects</b>	Effects lasting from seconds to minutes
<b>Brief Effects</b>	Effects lasting less than a day
<b>Temporary Effects</b>	Effects lasting less than a year
<b>Short-term Effects</b>	Effects lasting one to seven years.
<b>Medium-term Effects</b>	Effects lasting seven to fifteen years.
<b>Long-term Effects</b>	Effects lasting fifteen to sixty years

<b>Permanent Effects</b>	Effects lasting over sixty years
<b>Reversible Effects</b>	Effects that can be undone, for example through remediation or restoration
<b>Frequency of Effects</b>	Describe how often the effect will occur. (once, rarely, occasionally, frequently, constantly – or hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, annually)

The criteria for confidence levels of the predicted likely impacts are given below in Table 4. The impact significance criteria follow EPA guidance (EPA, 2017).

**TABLE 4. IMPACT SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA (EPA, 2017).**

Significance of Effects	Definition
<b>Imperceptible</b>	An effect capable of measurement but without significant consequences.
<b>Not significant</b>	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment but without significant consequences.
<b>Slight Effects</b>	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities.
<b>Moderate Effects</b>	An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends.
<b>Significant Effects</b>	An effect which, by its <b><u>character</u></b> , <b><u>magnitude</u></b> , <b><u>duration</u></b> or <b><u>intensity</u></b> <b><u>alters a sensitive aspect of the environment</u></b>

### 2.5.3 Identification of Relevant European Sites

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

The guidance document published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (then DEHLG) 'Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities' (2009) recommends an arbitrary distance of 15km as the precautionary ZOI for a plan or project being assessed for likely significant effects on European Sites, stating however that this should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

As such, the 15km ZOI is used in this report as an initial starting point for collating European Sites for AA screening.

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

- Use of up-to-date GIS spatial datasets for European designated sites and water catchments – downloaded from the NPWS website ([www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie)) and the EPA website ([www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie)) to identify European Sites which could potentially be affected by the Proposed Project;
- The catchment data were used to establish or discount potential hydrological connectivity between the Project and any European Sites. The hydrological catchments are shown in Figure 5.
- Where relevant, the presence of a substantial marine buffer was used to discount potential marine hydrological connectivity between the Project Boundary and any European Sites.
- All European Sites within 15km of the Proposed Project were identified and included in the precautionary Zone of Influence (ZOI) of the Proposed Project ( Figure 6 and Table 5). In addition, the potential for connectivity with European Sites at distances of greater than 15km from the Proposed Project was also considered in this initial assessment. In this case, there is no potential connectivity between the Proposed Project site and European Sites located at a distance greater than 15km.
- Table 5 provides details of all relevant European Sites as identified in the preceding steps which are within the precautionary ZOI of the Proposed Project. The potential for pathways between European Sites and the Proposed Development Site was assessed on a case-by-case basis using the Source-Pathway-Receptor framework as per the OPR Practice Note PN01 (March 2021). Where significant effects are ruled out, a rationale is provided. Pathways considered included:
  - a. Direct pathways (e.g., proximity (i.e., location within the European Site), water bodies, air (for both air emissions and noise impacts).
  - b. Indirect pathways (e.g., disruption to migratory paths, 'Sightlines' where noisy or intrusive activities may result in disturbance to shy species.
- The site synopses and conservation objectives of these sites, as per the NPWS website ([www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie)), were consulted and reviewed at the time of preparing this report.

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

#### **2.5.4 Identification of Infrastructure Installation activities within/adjacent to European Sites**

To assess whether installation activities were proposed adjacent to European Sites, proposed installation activities within 30m or less of European Sites were assessed.

To identify these items of infrastructure, the following process was undertaken:

- Using a Geographic Information System (GIS) the locations of all new proposed items of infrastructure were overlayed onto the locations of all European Sites in Ireland and Northern Ireland.
- Analysis was performed using GIS which identified any individual feature proposed to be installed within 30m or less of a European Site.

If individual features are identified, they are recorded and presented on a drawing or series of drawings as required.

### **2.5.5 Assessment of the Impact of Infrastructure Installation activities within, adjacent to or upstream of European Sites**

The following process is undertaken to assess whether the installation of individual items of new infrastructure within, adjacent to or upstream of a European Site may give rise to significant effects upon a European Site:

- The survey data for each proposed location is reviewed along with available aerial imagery of the location.
- If the proposed infrastructure locations lie along the public road network, Google street-view imagery of the location is reviewed, if available.
- The context of the proposed infrastructure is also considered; for example, the new infrastructure is assessed to determine if it will be filling in gaps in an existing run of poles, or if it will be an entirely new string of poles.
- The QI/SCI species and Conservation Objectives of the European Site are considered when reaching a conclusion as to whether or not the infrastructure has the potential to give rise to a significant effect.
- All items of infrastructure within 30 metres of relevant EPA waterbody GIS layers (e.g., river, lakes, transitional and coastal waterbodies) were assessed to determine potential hydrological linkages with European Sites. A distance of 30m was chosen to account for differences in river width and potential mapping errors.
- If the location of the proposed infrastructure is validated as being correct, and the site where the installation activities are proposed cannot be adequately assessed using aerial and other available imagery, the location of the proposed infrastructure will be assessed by way of a field survey to identify potential likely significant effects on the European Site.

## **2.6 European Sites within the Zone of Influence**

Twelve SACs and two SPAs are located within the precautionary ZOI of the Proposed Project site.

Installation work within European Sites will be limited to a total of 66 new items of infrastructure (30 poles, 13 chambers and 23 lengths of Fibre Duct) as outlined above, which will be installed exclusively within *Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA* (Figure 7). The impact of the installation of each item of equipment inside the aforementioned European Site is further assessed in Section 2.9.

Proposed new items infrastructure within 30m of European Sites are identified in Figure 8 and Figure 9. A total of 38 no. items of infrastructure (14 poles, 2 chamber and 22 length of Fibre duct) are proposed to be installed within 30m of European Sites.

Finally, a total of 18 poles, 6 chambers and 19 lengths of ducting are proposed to be placed within 30m of watercourses which may ultimately flow into European Sites within the precautionary ZOI of the Project.

A desk study was sufficient to assess the majority of the proposed infrastructure as the proposed locations within European Sites was located adjacent to the existing public/private road network and could be readily assessed using aerial imagery and up-to-date GIS data available from the NPWS<sup>1</sup>. The habitat at these roadside locations consisted of made ground, grassy verges and/or hedging and was not a QI habitat for any European Site or important habitat for any QI/SCI species. The results of the assessment methodology detailed in section 2.5.5 of this report are presented in section 2.9.

A field study was conducted in April 2022 by expert ornithologist Eric Dempsey to assess the potential effects of proposed infrastructure installations on nesting Hen Harrier in Slievebloom Mountains SPA.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npws.ie/maps-and-data/habitat-and-species-data>



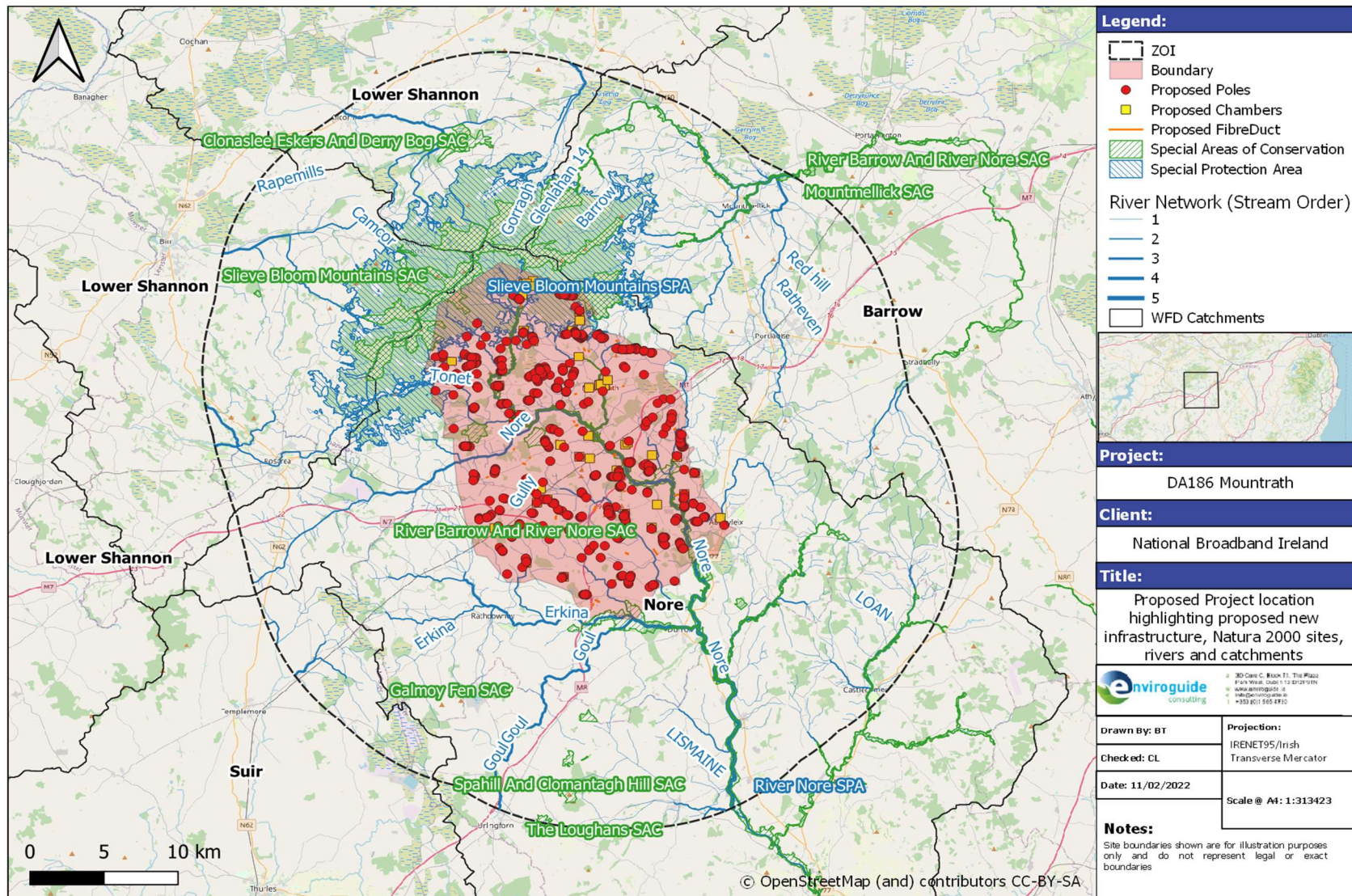


FIGURE 6 PROPOSED PROJECT LOCATION



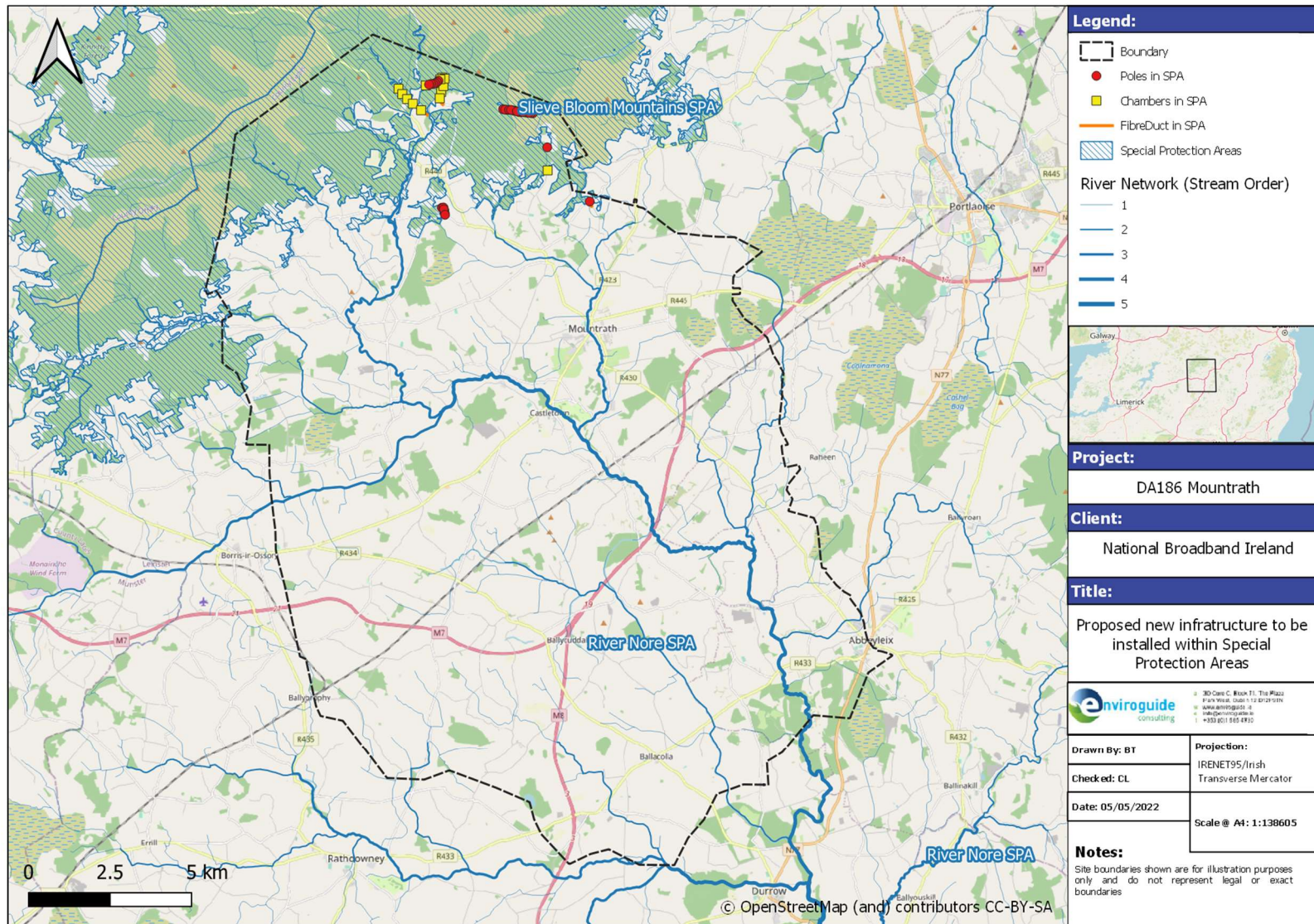


FIGURE 7 NEW ITEMS OF INFRASTRUCTURE LYING WITHIN SPA SITES

**TABLE 5 EUROPEAN SITES WITHIN THE PRECAUTIONARY ZONE OF INFLUENCE OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT SITE, THE DISTANCE BETWEEN EACH EUROPEAN SITE AND THE PROJECT BOUNDARY AND THE POTENTIAL PATHWAYS BETWEEN THEM, AND POTENTIAL DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS ON EACH EUROPEAN SITE AS A RESULT OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT. WHERE NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS ARE ENVISAGED, A RATIONALE IS PROVIDED.**

Site Name & Code	Qualifying Interests	Distance to Project Route	Pathway	Potential Direct Effects	Potential Indirect Effects	Rationale for exclusion
<b>Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)</b>						
Slieve Bloom Mountains SAC (000412)  <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000412">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000412</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2016a)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> [4010]</li> <li>- Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]</li> <li>- Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0]</li> </ul>	Within Project Route	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection
River Barrow And River Nore SAC (002162)  <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002162">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002162</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2011)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Estuaries [1130]</li> <li>- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]</li> <li>- Reefs [1170]</li> <li>- Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]</li> <li>- Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) [1330]</li> </ul>	Within Project Route	Air/Hydrological	None envisaged	Potential disturbance to SCI species due to construction activities immediately adjacent to SAC  Pollution of watercourse from potential sediment / pollutants entering	No potential direct effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC.

Site Name & Code	Qualifying Interests	Distance to Project Route	Pathway	Potential Direct Effects	Potential Indirect Effects	Rationale for exclusion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410]</li> <li>- Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculus fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitriche-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260]</li> <li>- European dry heaths [4030]</li> <li>- Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels [6430]</li> <li>- Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]</li> <li>- Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles [91A0]</li> <li>- Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0]</li> <li>- <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i> (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016]</li> <li>- <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</li> <li>- <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i> (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]</li> </ul>				SAC due to installation activities within 30m of waterbodies which flow into SAC.	

Site Name & Code	Qualifying Interests	Distance to Project Route	Pathway	Potential Direct Effects	Potential Indirect Effects	Rationale for exclusion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Petromyzon marinus</i> (Sea Lamprey) [1095]</li> <li>- <i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096]</li> <li>- <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099]</li> <li>- <i>Alosa fallax fallax</i> (Twaiite Shad) [1103]</li> <li>- <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106]</li> <li>- <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</li> <li>- <i>Trichomanes speciosum</i> (Killarney Fern) [1421]</li> <li>- <i>Margaritifera durrovensis</i> (Nore Pearl Mussel) [1990]</li> </ul>					
Coolrain Bog SAC (002332) <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002332">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002332</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2016b)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Active raised bogs [7110]</li> <li>- Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120]</li> <li>- Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]</li> </ul>	Within Project Route	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection

Site Name & Code	Qualifying Interests	Distance to Project Route	Pathway	Potential Direct Effects	Potential Indirect Effects	Rationale for exclusion
Knockacoller Bog SAC (002333) <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002333">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002333</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2016c)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Active raised bogs [7110]</li> <li>- Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120]</li> <li>- Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]</li> </ul>	Within Project Route	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection
Lisbigney Bog SAC (000869) <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000869">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000869</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2021a)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> [7210]</li> <li>- <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i> (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016]</li> </ul>	3.3 km	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection



Site Name & Code	Qualifying Interests	Distance to Project Route	Pathway	Potential Direct Effects	Potential Indirect Effects	Rationale for exclusion
Cullahill Mountain SAC (000831) <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000831">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000831</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2021b)</b> - Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates ( <i>Festuco-Brometalia</i> ) (* important orchid sites) [6210]	6.5 km	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection
Galmoy Fen SAC (001858) <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/001858">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/001858</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2019a)</b> - Alkaline fens [7230]	7.1 km	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection
Clonaslee Eskers And Derry Bog SAC (000859) <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000859">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000859</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2019b)</b> - Alkaline fens [7230] - <i>Vertigo geyeri</i> (Geyer's Whorl Snail) [1013]	8.2 km	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur

Site Name & Code	Qualifying Interests	Distance to Project Route	Pathway	Potential Direct Effects	Potential Indirect Effects	Rationale for exclusion
						within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection
<p>Spahill And Clomantagh Hill SAC (000849)</p> <p><a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000849">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000849</a></p>	<p><b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2021c)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) (* important orchid sites) [6210]</li> </ul>	9.6 km	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection
<p>Island Fen SAC (002236)</p> <p><a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002236">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002236</a></p>	<p><b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2018)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]</li> <li>- Alkaline fens [7230]</li> </ul>	11.9 km	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection



Site Name & Code	Qualifying Interests	Distance to Project Route	Pathway	Potential Direct Effects	Potential Indirect Effects	Rationale for exclusion
Mountmellick SAC (002141) <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002141">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002141</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2021e)</b>  - <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i> (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016]	14.2 km	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection
The Loughans SAC (000407) <a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000407">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000407</a>	<b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2020)</b>  - Turloughs [3180]	14.4 km	None	None envisaged	None envisaged	No potential direct or indirect effects as no proposed activities occur within the SAC or immediately adjacent to it. No hydrological connection

Site Name & Code	Qualifying Interests	Distance to Project Route	Pathway	Potential Direct Effects	Potential Indirect Effects	Rationale for exclusion
<b>Special Protection Areas (SPA)</b>						
<p>Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA (004160)</p> <p><a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/spa/004160">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/spa/004160</a></p>	<p><b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2021d)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hen Harrier (<i>Circus cyaneus</i>) [A082]</li> </ul>	Within Project Route	Land/Air/Hydrological	<p>Loss / alteration of habitat within SPA due to installation of new infrastructure</p> <p>Potential disturbance to SCI species due to construction activities within and immediately adjacent to SPA</p>	<p>Pollution of watercourse from potential sediment / pollutants entering SPA due to installation activities within 30m of waterbodies which flow within or into SPA.</p>	
<p>River Nore SPA (004233)</p> <p><a href="https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/spa/004233">https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/spa/004233</a></p>	<p><b>Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 (NPWS, 2021f)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kingfisher (<i>Alcedo atthis</i>) [A229]</li> </ul>	Within Project Route	Hydrological	None envisaged	<p>Pollution of watercourse from potential sediment / pollutants entering SPA due to installation activities within 30m of waterbodies which flow within or into SPA.</p>	<p>No potential direct effects as no proposed activities occur within the SPA.</p>

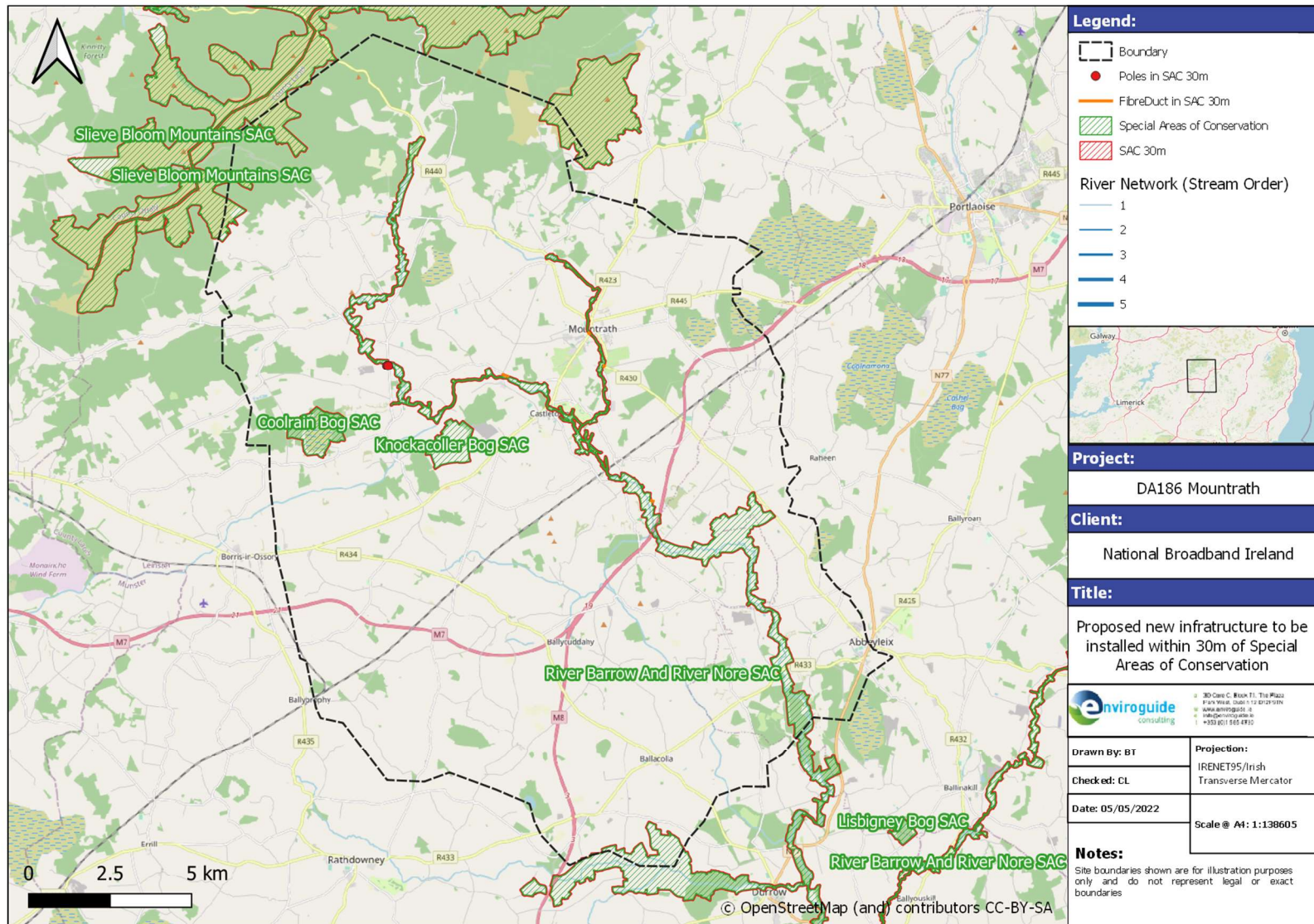


FIGURE 8 NEW INFRASTRUCTURE FEATURES WITHIN 30M OF SAC SITES.



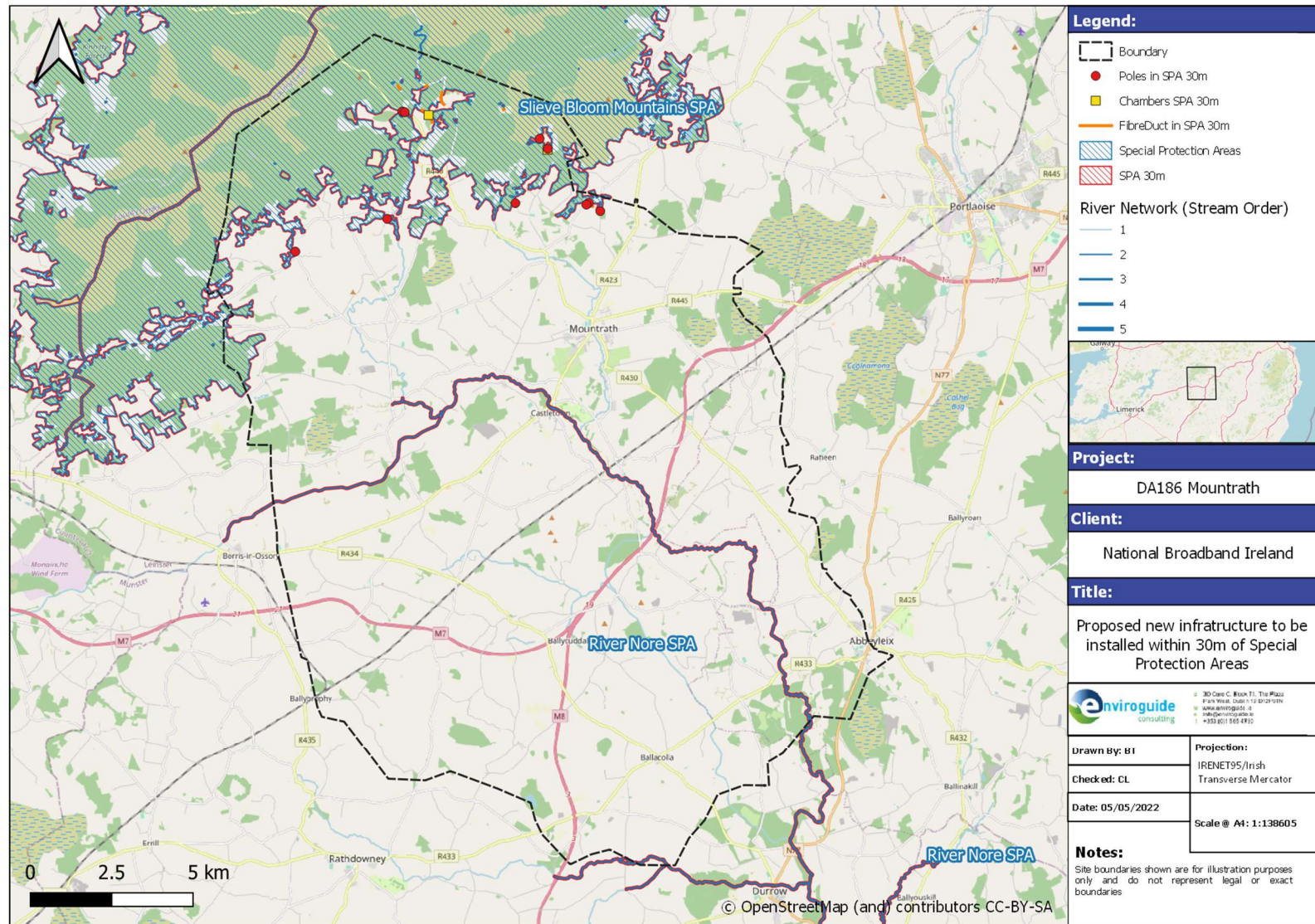


FIGURE 9 NEW INFRASTRUCTURE FEATURES WITHIN 30M OF SPA SITES.

## 2.7 Brief Description of European Sites

All 14 of the European Sites within the precautionary ZOI of the Project were assessed for potential direct and indirect impacts. A total of 11 European Sites were screened out following this assessment (Table 5). It was concluded that these European Sites would not be directly or indirectly affected by the Proposed Project due to the minimal nature of the proposed installation activities and the absence of pathways (e.g., hydrological, land, air) between the Project and the European Site. Shown below are brief descriptions of the remaining 3 European Sites which will be further assessed in section 2.9 as they have a direct connection with, or are within close proximity to, the project route. The below descriptions are taken from the "Site Description" section of the NPWS Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms.

### 2.7.1 River Barrow And River Nore SAC (002162)

*This Site consists of most of the freshwater stretches of the Barrow/Nore River catchments. The Barrow is tidal as far upriver as Graiguenamanagh while the Nore is tidal as far upriver as Inishtioige. The Site also includes the extreme lower reaches of the River Suir and all of the estuarine component of Waterford Harbour extending to Creadan Head. The larger of the many tributaries include the Lerr, Fushoge, Mountain, Aughavaud, Owenass, Boherbaun and Stradbally Rivers of the Barrow and the Delour, Dinin, Erkina, Owveg, Munster, Arrigle and King's Rivers on the Nore. Both rivers rise in the Old Red Sandstone of the Slieve Bloom Mountains. They traverse limestone bedrock for a good proportion of their routes, though the middle reaches of the Barrow and many of the eastern tributaries run through Leinster Granite. A wide range of habitats associated with the rivers are included within the Site, including substantial areas of woodland (deciduous, mixed), dry heath, wet grassland, swamp and marsh vegetation, salt marshes, a small dune system, biogenic reefs and intertidal sand and mud flats. Areas of improved grassland, arable land and coniferous plantations are included in the Site for water quality reasons.*

*The Site supports many Annexed habitats including the priority habitats of alluvial woodland and petrifying springs. Quality of habitat is generally good. The Site also supports a number of Annex II animal species - *Salmo salar*, *Margaritifera margaritifera*, *M.m. durrovensis*, *Alosa fallax fallax*, *Austropotamobius pallipes*, *Petromyzon marinus*, *Lutra lutra*, *Lampetra fluviatilis* and *L. planeri*. Annex I Bird species include *Anser albifrons flavirostris*, *Falco peregrinus*, *Cygnus cygnus*, *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*, *Limosa lapponica*, *Pluvialis apricaria* and *Alcedo atthis*. A range of rare plants and invertebrates are found in the woods along these rivers and rare plants are also associated with the saltmarsh.*

### 2.7.2 Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA (004160)

*The Site lies on the Offaly-Laois border and runs along a NE-SW ridge for approximately 25km. Much of the Site is over 200 m in altitude, with a maximum of 527 m at Arderin. The mountains are of Old Red Sandstone, flanked by Silurian rocks. Several important rivers rise within the Site, including the Barrow, Delour, and Silver rivers. Approximately 60% of the Site is afforested, including both first and second rotation plantations and clearfell areas. Roughly one-quarter of the Site is unplanted blanket bog and heath, with the remainder of the Site largely rough grassland that is used for hill farming. Some stands of deciduous woodland and scrub also occur, especially within the river valleys.*

*Supports 3.7% of the all-Ireland population of Circus cyaneus and among the top 5 most important sites in the country for this species. Also the most easterly population in the country. Habitat excellent for nesting and foraging purposes. Also has nesting Falco peregrine, Falcon columbarius and Lagopus lagopus, the later a Red Data Book Species.*

### 2.7.3 River Nore SPA (004233)

*The River Nore SPA is a long linear Site that includes the following river sections: the River Nore from the bridge at Townparks, (north-west of Borris in Ossory) to Coolnamuck (approximately 3 km south of Inistioge) in Co. Kilkenny; the Delour River from its junction with the River Nore to Derrynaseera bridge (west of Castletown) in Co Laois; the Erkina River from its junction with the River Nore at Durrow Mills to Boston Bridge in Co. Laois; a 1.5 km stretch of the River Goul upstream of its junction with the Erkina River; the Kings River from its junction with the River Nore to a bridge at Mill Island Co. Kilkenny. The Site includes the river channel and marginal vegetation.*

*The River Nore support nationally important numbers of Alcedo atthis. Other species which occur within the Site include Cygnus olor, Anas platyrhynchos, Phalacrocorax carbo, Ardea cinerea, Gallinula chloropus, Gallinago gallinago and Riparia riparia.*

## 2.8 Conservation Objectives

Table 6 identifies the Conservation Objectives of European Sites which have a direct connection, or are within close proximity, with the project route. The contents in the below table are taken from the NPWS conservation objectives documents. The Conservation Objectives for other European Sites which lie within the precautionary ZOI, but which have been screened out by virtue of distance or no other possible link (Table 5), are not included in this document.

**TABLE 6 CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES OF EUROPEAN SITES WHICH HAVE A DIRECT CONNECTION, OR ARE WITHIN CLOSE PROXIMITY, WITH THE PROJECT ROUTE.**

European Site & code	Conservation Interests
<b>Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)</b>	
River Barrow And River Nore SAC (002162)	<p>To <u>maintain</u> or <u>restore</u> the favourable conservation condition of the habitats and species for which this SAC is designated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Estuaries [1130]</li> <li>- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]</li> <li>- Reefs [1170]</li> <li>- <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]</li> <li>- Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>) [1330]</li> <li>- Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410]</li> <li>- Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculum fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitriche-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260]</li> <li>- European dry heaths [4030]</li> <li>- <i>Hydrophilous</i> tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels [6430]</li> <li>- Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]</li> <li>- Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles [91A0]</li> <li>- Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0]</li> <li>- <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i> (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016]</li> <li>- <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</li> <li>- <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i> (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]</li> <li>- <i>Petromyzon marinus</i> (Sea Lamprey) [1095]</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096]</li> <li>- <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099]</li> <li>- <i>Alosa fallax fallax</i> (Twaite Shad) [1103]</li> <li>- <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106]</li> <li>- <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</li> <li>- <i>Trichomanes speciosum</i> (Killarney Fern) [1421]</li> <li>- <i>Margaritifera durrovensis</i> (Nore Pearl Mussel) [1990]</li> </ul>
<b>Special Protection Areas (SPA)</b>	
Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA (004160)	<p>To <u>maintain</u> or <u>restore</u> the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hen Harrier (<i>Circus cyaneus</i>) [A082]</li> </ul>
River Nore SPA (004233)	<p>To <u>maintain</u> or <u>restore</u> the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kingfisher (<i>Alcedo atthis</i>) [A229]</li> </ul>

## 2.9 Assessment of Significance of Potential Impacts

Installation work within European Sites will be limited to a total of 39 new item of infrastructure:

- 30 poles
- 13 chambers
- 23 length of Fibre Duct

which will be installed exclusively within *Slievebloom Mountains SPA*.

In summary, it was concluded that there is no potential for significant effects on European Sites. Due to the minor, temporary nature of the proposed new infrastructure installations, no significant loss or fragmentation of QI habitat will occur as a result of the proposed Project, there will be no significant effects on QI/SCI species regarding disturbance, displacement or changes to population density and there will be no significant effects to the water quality and resource of any European Site. The following paragraphs outline the rationale for these conclusions.

### 2.9.1 Habitat Loss and Alteration

Should any of the estimated additional poles, chambers, or any excavations for underground cables fall within a European Site, it could conceivably constitute a loss/alteration of habitat, although extremely insignificant in size, at the designated site. Furthermore, tree trimming along the stretches of the route that pass within/adjacent to the European Sites also has the potential to cause minor habitat alteration/loss.

Installation work within European Sites will include a total of 66 new items of infrastructure as outlined above. Importantly, all the above listed infrastructure will be placed along existing roadside verges or carriageways. The habitat at these roadside locations mainly consists of grassy verges and hedging, which are not qualifying interests for the European Sites.

It is noted that the vast majority of infrastructure required for the project is already in place and, as a result, tree trimming has been historically occurring along these sections on a regular basis. Therefore, it is considered that the proposed works will not cause a significant effect on the European Sites.

In conclusion, due to the minor and localised nature of the works, and the absence of loss/alteration of QI habitats designated for the European Sites due to the Proposed Works, it is considered that the Proposed Project will not cause any significant negative impacts in relation to habitat loss/alteration at any European Site.

## **2.9.2 Habitat / Species Fragmentation**

Habitat fragmentation has been defined as the 'reduction and isolation of patches of natural environment' (Hall et al., 1997 cited in Franklin et al., 2002) usually due to an external disturbance such that an alteration of the spatial composition of a habitat occurs that alters the habitat and 'create[s] isolated or tenuously connected patches of the original habitat' (Wiens, 1989 cited in Franklin et al., 2002). This results in spatial separation of habitat units which had previously been in a state of greater continuity.

Given the nature of the installation activities, and as there will no significant loss of QI habitats within any European Site, it is not considered that habitat fragmentation will arise from the Proposed Project.

## **2.9.3 Disturbance and/or Displacement of Species**

As part of the project works, there may be installation activities taking place within/adjacent, or in close proximity to European Sites. The installation activities, as described in section 2.4.2 consist of the erection of new poles, installation of new underground chambers and placement of new underground cable ducts.

The Hen Harrier is the primary bird species associated Slievebloom Mountains SPA. The proposed new items of infrastructure were assessed for the likelihood of significant effects on the Hen Harrier within the Slievebloom Mountains SPA. In particular, the potential for installation works during the nesting season to cause disturbance and/or displacement of nesting Hen Harrier was assessed. Eric Dempsey (expert ornithologist) conducted field surveys on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 at the locations of proposed infrastructure which were identified during desk studies to pose a potential disturbance risk to Hen Harrier. It was concluded that these new items of infrastructure would not result in significant effects on Hen Harrier within Slievebloom Mountains SPA due to the following reasons.

- Lack of suitable Hen Harrier nesting habitat adjacent to or within the immediate vicinity of the proposed installation locations.
- No evidence or sightings of Hen Harrier holding territory or nesting in the vicinity of the proposed installation locations during field surveys in April 2022.

Therefore, it is the considered opinion of Eric Dempsey (expert ornithologist) that the proposed installation works within Slievebloom Mountains SPA during the nesting season will not a significant effect of Hen Harrier populations.

### **2.9.3.1 Potential Impacts to QI and SCI Species**

Installation work within European Sites will be limited to a total of 66 new items of infrastructure as outlined above, which will be installed exclusively within *Slievebloom Mountains SPA*.

Figure 10 to Figure 23 below detail the location and name of the additional infrastructure that will be installed.

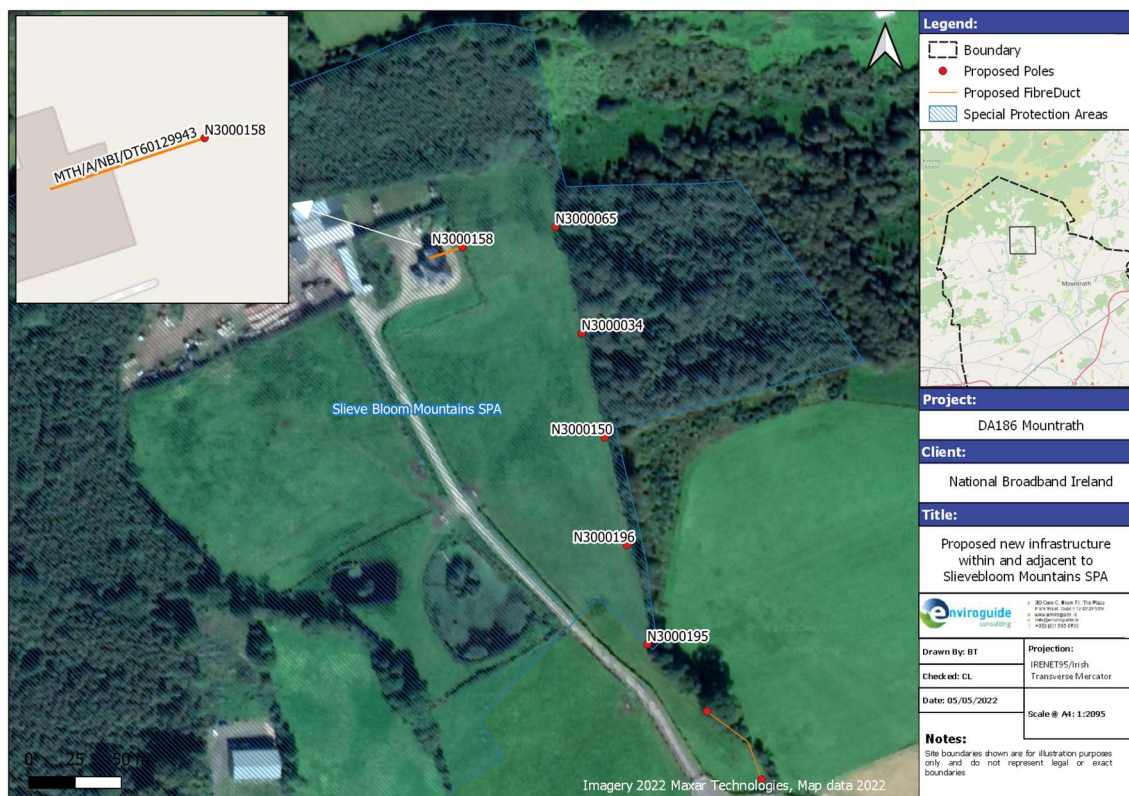


In addition, a total of 18 poles, 6 chambers and 19 lengths of ducting are proposed to be placed within 30m of watercourses which may ultimately flow into European Sites within the precautionary ZOI of the Project. There are aquatic mammal and bird species associated with these Sites which may be affected by the project activities, particularly within *River Barrow and River Nore SAC* and *River Nore SPA*.

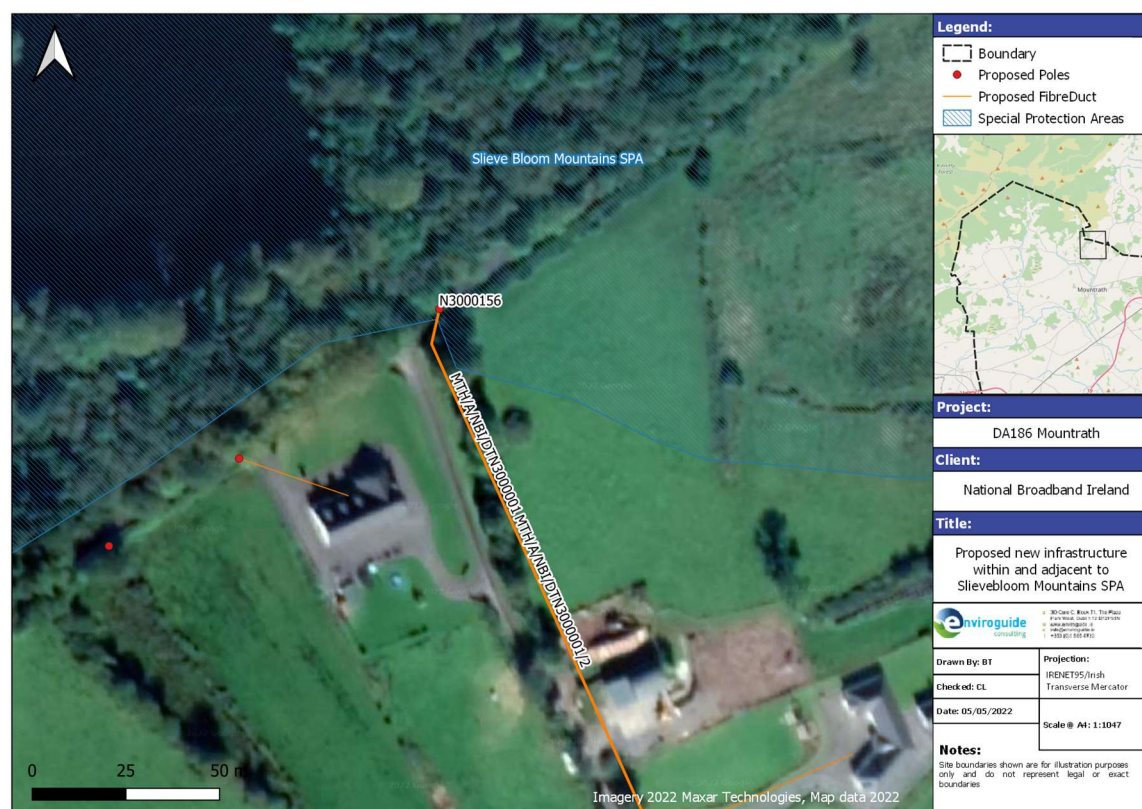
These new items of infrastructure were assessed for potential significant effects on downstream European Sites and the species designated for them. As noted previously, a distance of 30m was chosen to account for differences in river width and mapping errors. It was concluded following desk studies that these new items of infrastructure would not result in significant effects on European Sites and the aquatic species therein for one or more of the following criteria:

1. The new item(s) of infrastructure being placed an acceptable distance from a watercourse (e.g., not on or immediately adjacent to a riverbank),
2. The new item(s) of infrastructure being placed on the opposite side of the road/laneway/track to the watercourse,
3. The presence of a vegetation buffer (e.g., hedgerow) between the new item(s) of infrastructure and the watercourse,
4. The distance between the new item(s) of infrastructure and downstream European Site, and consequent dilution factor.
5. The very minor nature and temporary duration of the Project activities

Particular mammal and bird species listed for the aforementioned European Sites (otter and kingfisher) may be susceptible to noise disturbance. However, given the very minor nature and short-term duration of the project activities (the installation of a new pole and ducting will be within a very small, localised footprint and will not generate significant amounts of noise) it can be concluded that the Proposed Project will not have a significant effect on the aforementioned species associated with European Site in close proximity to the activities. In addition, the habitat at the roadside locations where new infrastructure will be placed consists of roadside grassy verges which does not provide important habitat for the bird species associated with the European Sites within the Project boundary. In addition, no proposed items of infrastructure within 30m of watercourses will result in significant downstream effects on protected species.



**FIGURE 10 PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN AND ADJACENT TO SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA**

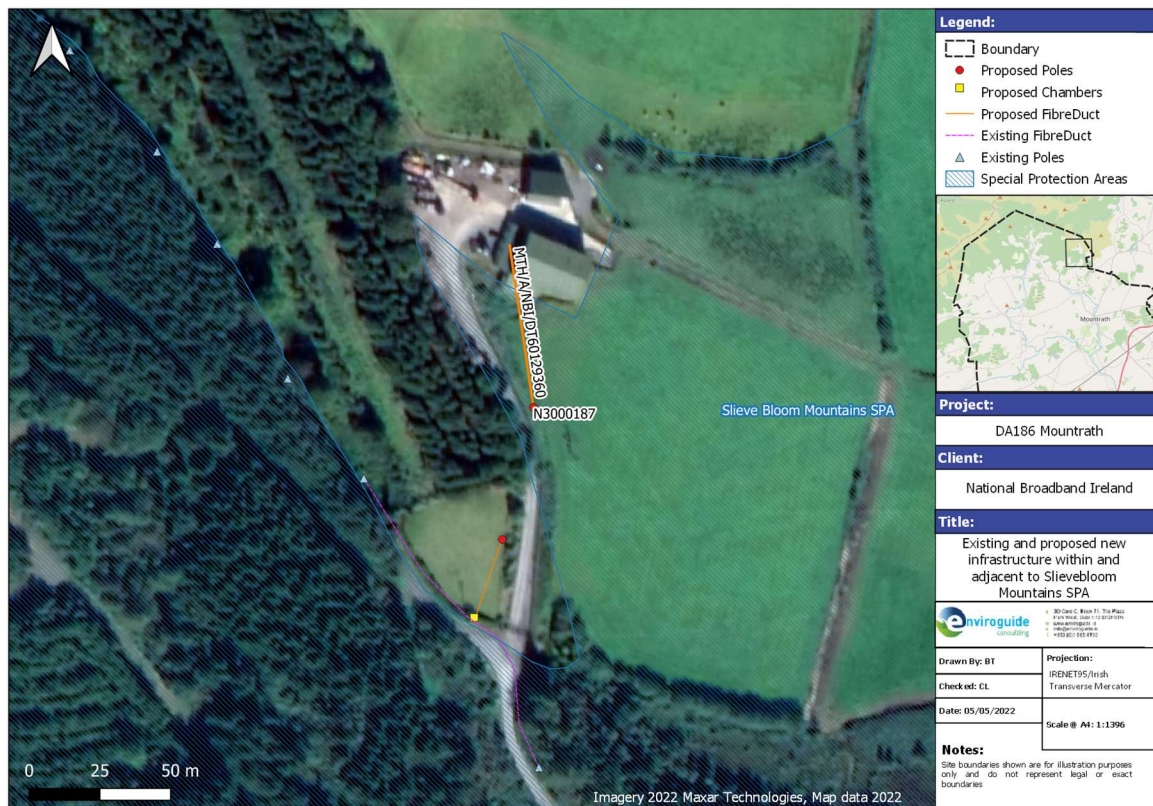


**FIGURE 11 PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN AND ADJACENT TO SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA**



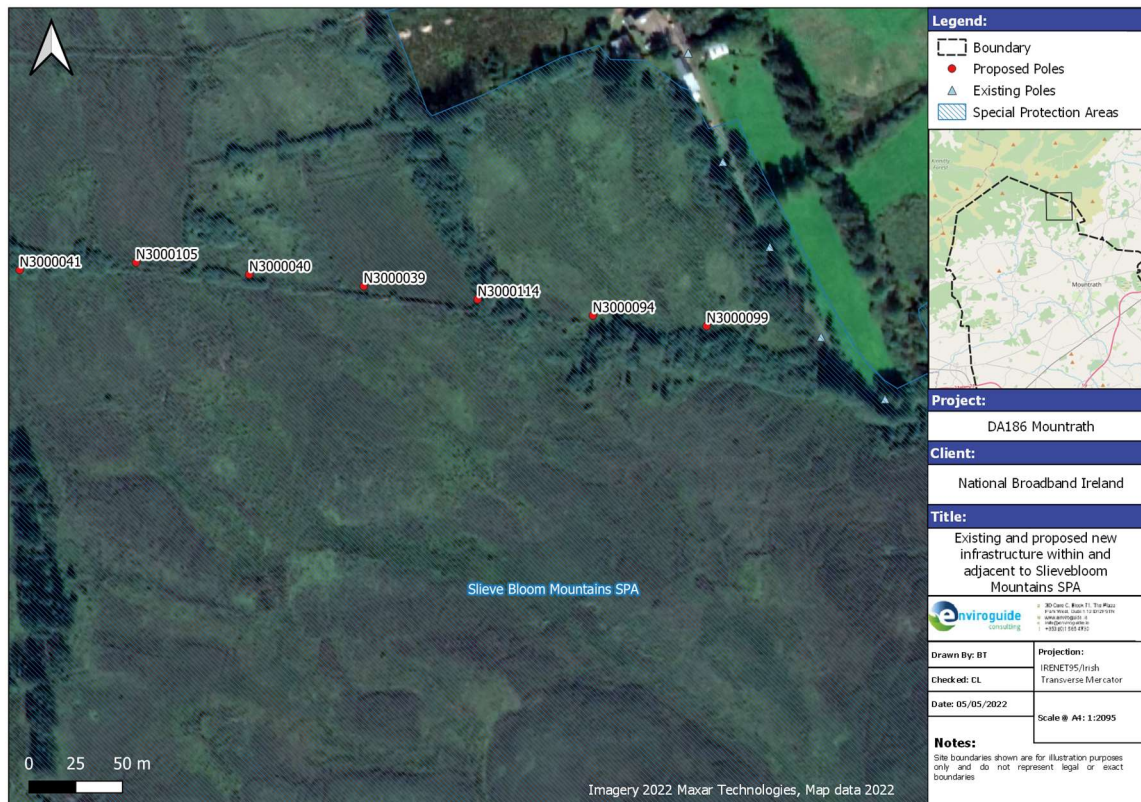


**FIGURE 12 EXISTING AND PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN AND ADJACENT TO SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA**

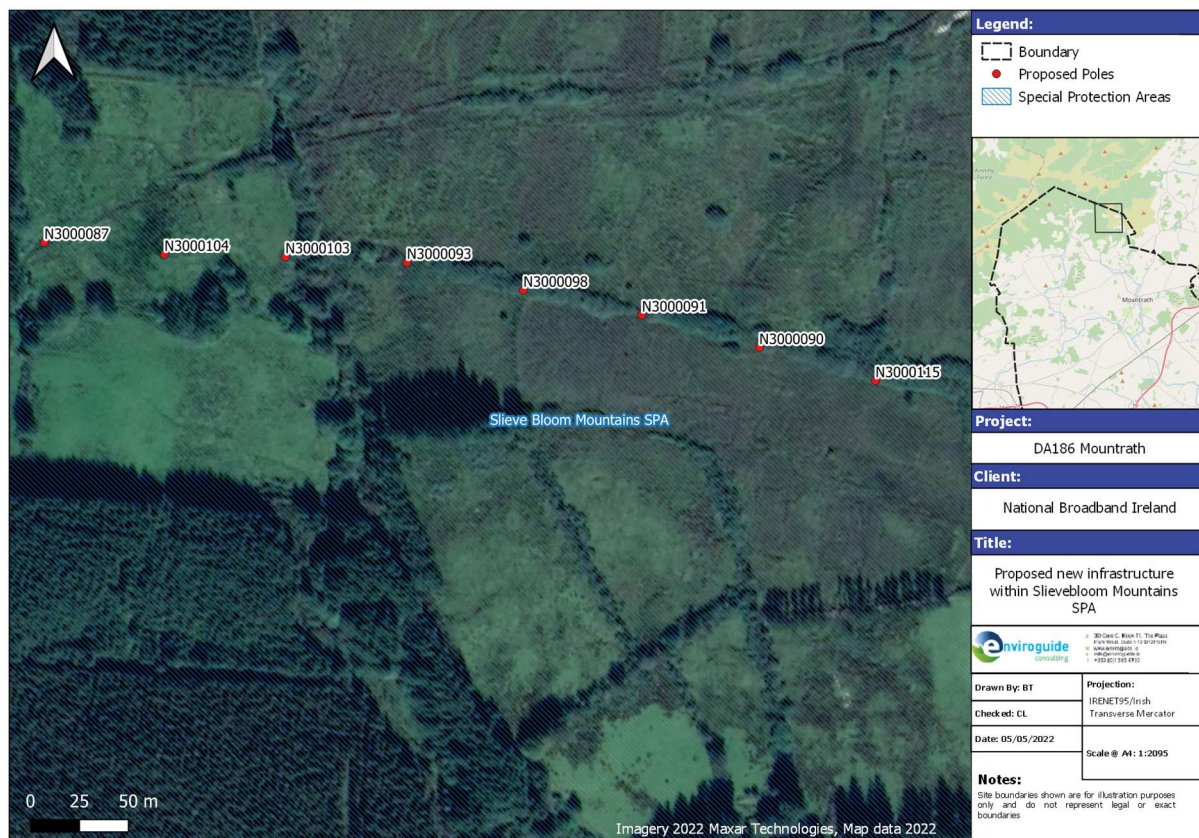


**FIGURE 13 EXISTING AND PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN AND ADJACENT TO SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA**





**FIGURE 14 PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN AND ADJACENT TO SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA**



**FIGURE 15 PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA**





FIGURE 16 PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA

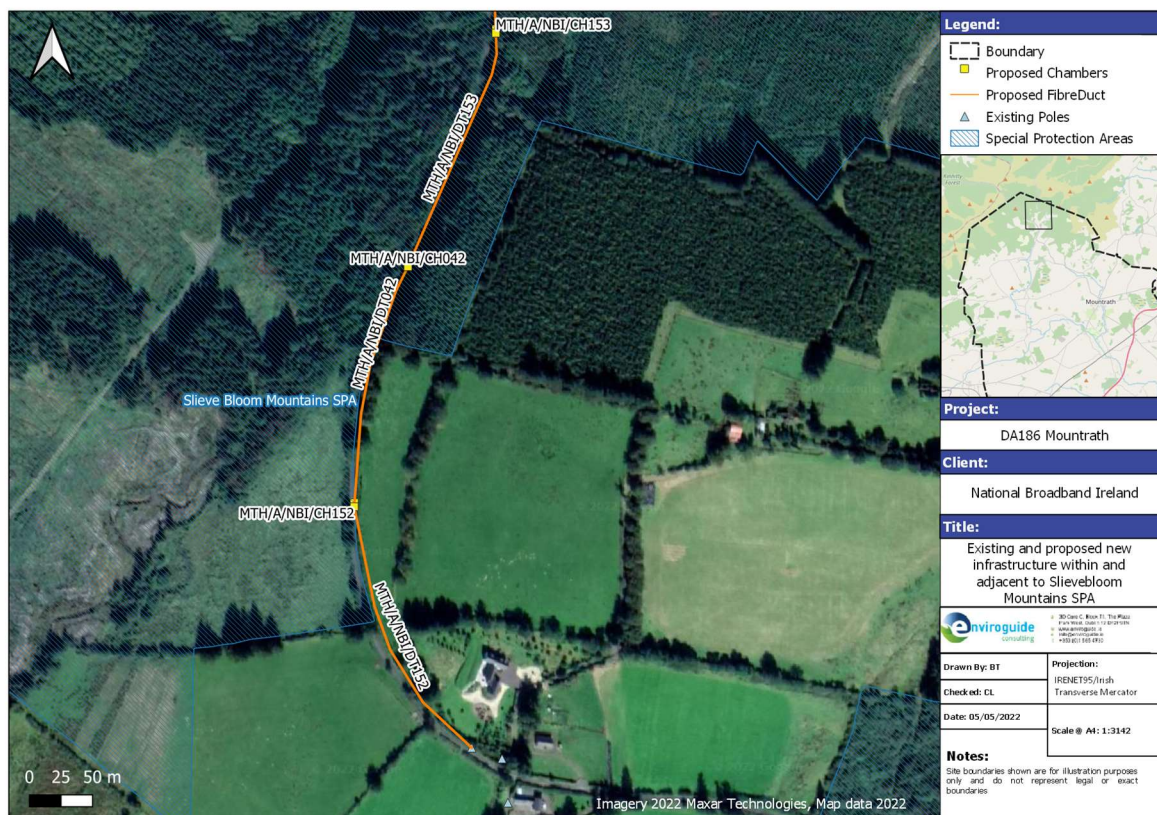


FIGURE 17 EXISTING AND PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN AND ADJACENT TO SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA









FIGURE 20 PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA

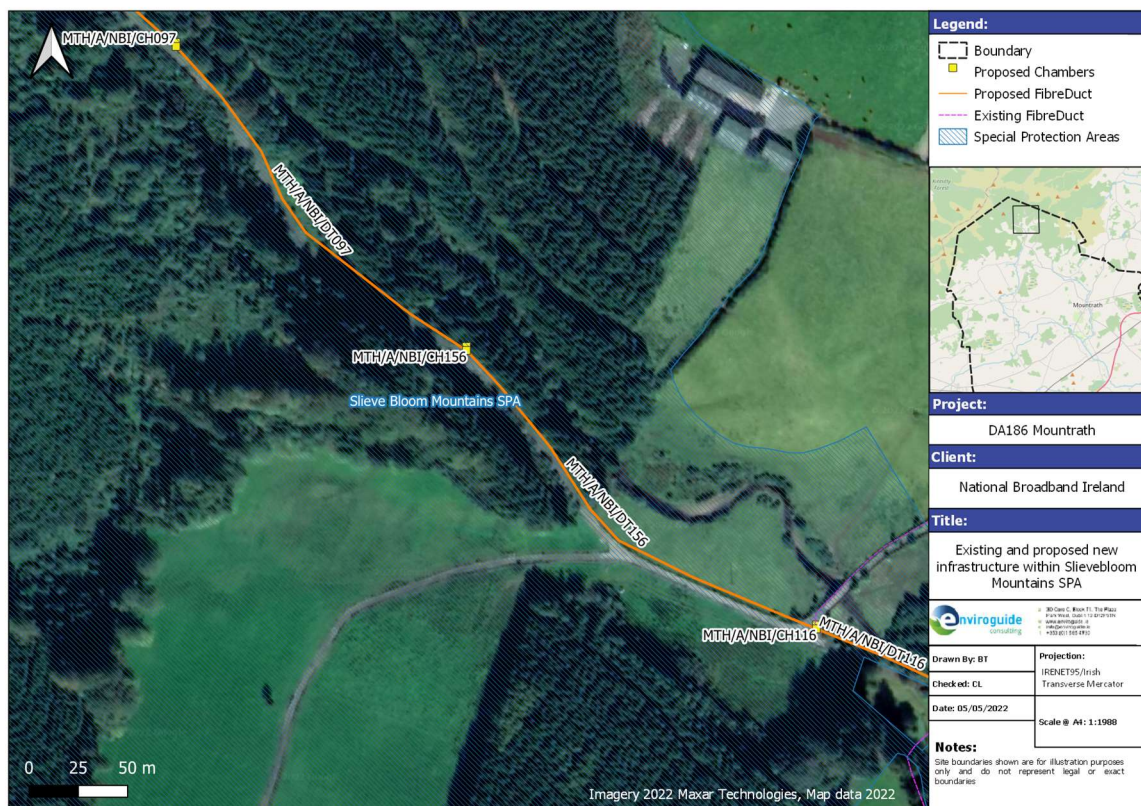
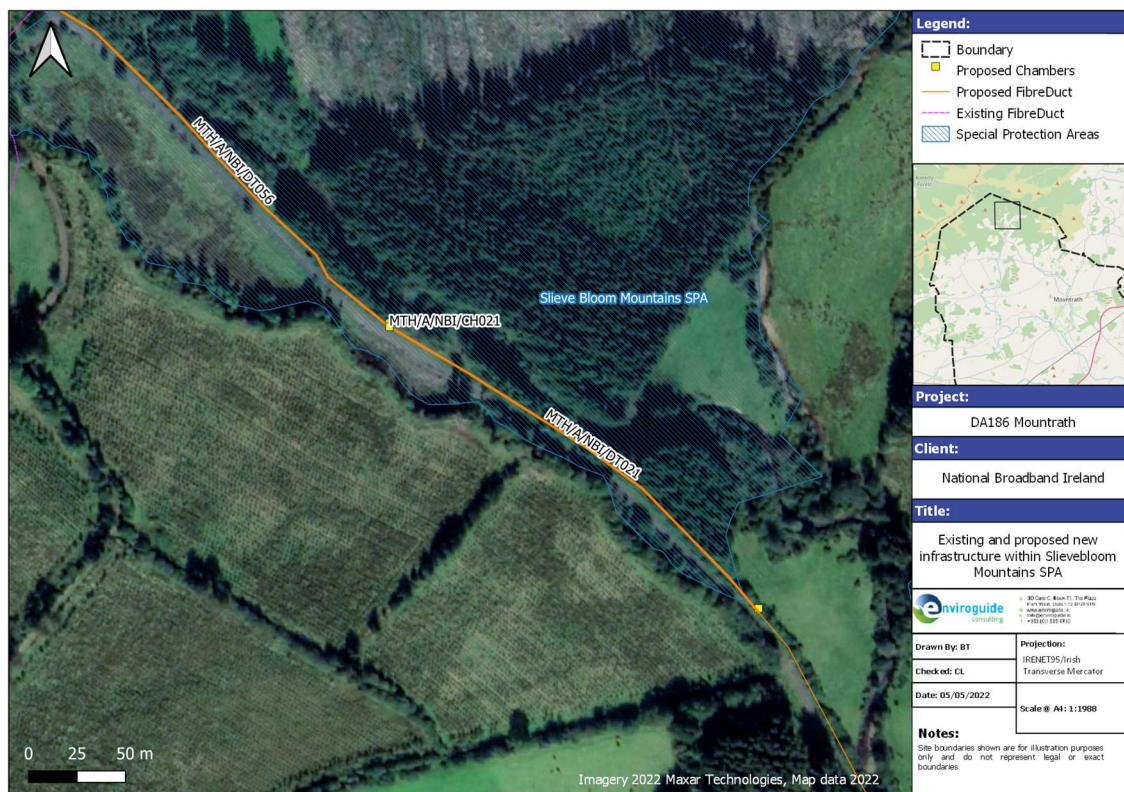


FIGURE 21 EXISTING AND PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA





**FIGURE 22 EXISTING AND PROPOSED NEW INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN SLIEVEBLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA**

## 2.9.4 Changes in Population Density

For the reasons outlined in section 0 above, the Proposed Project will not cause any reduction in the baseline population of species associated with any European Site.

The Hen Harrier is the primary bird species associated with the Slievebloom Mountains SPA which may be affected by the Project works. The proposed new items of infrastructure were assessed for the likelihood of significant effects on Hen Harrier populations within the Slievebloom Mountains SPA due to collisions with proposed poles. It was concluded following a desk study of proposed and existing pole locations and aerial imagery that these new items of infrastructure would not pose a collision risk to Hen Harrier for the following reasons:

- The presence of tall hedgerows and trees along roadways which proposed poles will be located. New poles will not be higher than these hedgerows and treelines and do not pose a collision risk.
- The presence of existing similar infrastructure adjacent to proposed poles. Raptor species will have become acclimatised to presence of infrastructure in the area. Proposed poles will not negatively affect the breeding/ hunting success or population density of raptors.
- Proposed poles are infilling or adding on to runs of existing infrastructure in the area.

Therefore, it is not considered that that the proposed poles will pose a significant collision risk to Hen Harrier in the Slievebloom Mountains SPA and will not result in changes to Hen Harrier population densities.

### 2.9.5 Changes in Water Quality and Resource

The project route intersects with a large number of rivers and streams, which either flow through or discharge into a number of European Sites.

A potential impact on the water quality of these European Sites was identified through possible sediment run-off, caused by the project activities, into waterbodies in close proximity to the project activities. An additional potential impact on water quality was identified through accidental spillages of fuel or other substances.

All items of infrastructure within 30m or less of a waterbody were assessed using GIS imagery, street view or photos provided by NBI to determine potential hydrological linkages with European Sites. It was concluded, following desk studies that these items of infrastructure would not result in significant effects on European Sites and the aquatic species therein as each of the proposed infrastructure met one or more of the following criteria:

1. The new item(s) of infrastructure being placed an acceptable distance from a watercourse (e.g., not on or immediately adjacent to a riverbank),
2. The new item(s) of infrastructure being placed on the opposite side of the road/laneway/track to the watercourse,
3. The presence of a vegetation buffer (e.g., hedgerow) between the new item(s) of infrastructure and the watercourse,
4. The distance between the new item(s) of infrastructure and downstream European Site, and consequent dilution factor.
5. The very minor nature and temporary duration of the Project activities.

The results of the assessment of each of the proposed features on the basis of criteria 1-4 as described above are presented in Appendix 1

In addition, the project activities do not include any water course crossing or instream works. The installation of each new pole or replacement of existing poles or installation of underground ducts or chambers takes place within a very small, localised footprint and will not generate significant amounts of sediment. The Proposed Project will have no impact on the flow rates or nutrient levels of any waterbody.

The poles being erected may carry the risk of contamination of soil and/or groundwater with creosote which is used as a preservative for telecommunications poles. Creosote is a dense non-aqueous liquid which is not soluble in water. Therefore, the risk associated with its use will be extremely localised by virtue of it not migrating through the watercourse or soil. The impact associated with its use can therefore be deemed negligible.

### 2.9.6 In-combination Effects

Cumulative impacts can be defined as “*impacts that result from incremental changes caused by other past, present or reasonably foreseeable actions together with the project*”. Effects which are caused by the interaction of effects, or by associated or off-site projects, are classed as indirect effects. Cumulative effects are often indirect, arising from the accumulation of different effects that are individually minor. Such effects are not caused or controlled by the project developer.

Plans include all statutory and non-statutory land use, framework and sectoral plans and strategies to the extent that they have the potential to have significant effects on a European

Site. This incorporates 'plans and programmes' covered by the SEA Directive, and other plans and strategies, including those that are designed or intended to benefit the environment or heritage, such as Heritage and Biodiversity plans, recreation/amenity plans or strategies, and River Basin Management Plan (*Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities*. Report (2009). Prepared by Department Environment, Heritage and Local Government).

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

- The National Broadband Plan,
- County Laois Development Plan 2021 – 2027,
- 2nd Cycle River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021,
- Draft River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027,
- Flood Risk Management Plan for the Nore Catchment (2018).

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) has been considered and while detailed designs are not currently available for neighbouring DAs, based on the same criteria used in this assessment, it is deemed that the NBP as a whole will not give rise to in-combination effects with the Mountrath Project. There are no neighbouring DAs scheduled for which installation activities will occur in parallel with the Mountrath DA build. Therefore no in-combination effects from adjoining DA's are possible.

The Laois County Development plan (2021-2027) outline specific objectives and policies for the protection of European Sites (BGPO 1, NRPO 2, DM NR 1, DM NR 2, TC 14, RTP 17, ES, 27, BNH 5, DM BNH 2 and BNH 23).

The River Basin Management Plans are set out to protect and improve water quality, and as such will not result in negative in-combination effects with the current Project. The proposed measures for the Flood Risk Management Plan for the Nore Catchment (including Mountrath) include the maintenance of arterial drainage schemes, the development and progression of technically viable flood relief schemes within the catchment. As these schemes are in the early stages of planning and design, information as to the extent and nature of these flood relief interventions is not yet available. However, it is not considered that these existing and proposed measures will act in combination with the Proposed Project. Thus, upon examination of the listed plans, it is concluded that there is no possibility for any in-combination effects between these plans and the Proposed Project.

Projects considered to have significant effects on a European Site and require consideration for Appropriate Assessment, include the following:

- All development that requires a planning permission process.
- All public development carried out by planning authorities.
- Exempted development either within a European Site or which could potentially have a significant effect on European Sites.
- All material contravention proposals.



- All other local authority authorised 'projects' – waste permits, discharge licenses; and
- recreation and amenity projects and road works.
- Forestry Operations
- Flooding and Drainage

Recent (within the last 3 years) pending and/or permitted planning permissions within c.500m of the proposed infrastructure located within a European Site were reviewed, using the National Planning Application Database<sup>2</sup> and the Laois Planning Application Interactive Map<sup>3</sup>. Given the minor and temporary nature of the installation activities, a relatively small buffer of 500m was considered sufficient to assess in-combination effects with existing proposed and/or permitted developments. Withdrawn, refused, and incomplete applications were eliminated from the search. In this instance, all pending or permitted developments were small in scale to the extent that no significant in-combination effects were considered likely to arise (Table 7).

#### **2.9.7 Proposed Infrastructure within 30m of European Sites.**

Proposed new items infrastructure within 30m of European Sites are identified in Figure 8 and Figure 9. A total of 27 no. items of infrastructure (14 poles, 1 chamber and 12 length of Fibre duct) are proposed to be installed within 30m of European Sites.

Having assessed these items of infrastructure following the methodology outlined in section 2.5.5, it was concluded that none of the new items of infrastructure would result in significant effects to any European Sites. The items outlined above are proposed to be installed within agricultural land or along roadways, tracks and lanes, in both urban and rural areas, thus resulting in no significant habitat loss. Furthermore, the project activities will be very minor in nature and short-term in duration and therefore do not present a threat to any protected species.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://housinggovie.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=9cf2a09799d74d8e9316a3d3a4d3a8de>

<sup>3</sup> <https://Laoiscoco.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2b1fc4da0e214d25b5727fecb908ae27>

**TABLE 7 SUMMARY OF INTERSECTING INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN EUROPEAN SITES.**

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000158	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	Ref:19441 Ref: 20126	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022  Planning applications are small scale (retaining a church hall and toilet and construction of a swelling house)	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000156	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000041	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000150	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	Ref:19441 Ref: 20126	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022  Planning applications are small scale (retaining a church hall and toilet and construction of a dwelling house)	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000043	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000098	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000099	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000094	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects



Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000039	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000040	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000065	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	Ref:19441 Ref: 20126	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022  Planning applications are small scale (retaining a church hall and toilet and construction of a swelling house)	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000104	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000114	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000196	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	Ref:19441 Ref: 20126	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022  Planning applications are small scale (retaining a church hall and toilet and construction of a dwelling house)	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000091	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000115	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000105	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000034	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	Ref:19441 Ref: 20126	Proposed Location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022  Planning applications are small scale (retaining a church hall and toilet and construction of a dwelling house)	No likelihood of significant effects



Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000187	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000087	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000103	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000093	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000195	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	Ref:19441 Ref: 20126	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022  Planning applications are small scale (retaining a church hall and toilet and construction of a dwelling house)	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000090	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on historic laneway verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000741	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000742	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000743	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000744	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects



Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
N3000745	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000746	Utility Pole	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/CH124	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery	None	Proposed location on roadside carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH097	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery	None	Proposed location on roadside carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/CH042	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH152	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/CH153	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH154	Chamber	Grass	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on grassy roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects



Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/CH156	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH116	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/EIR/CH034	Chamber	Grass	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on grassy roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH125	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH021	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/EIR/CH087	Chamber	Carriageway Other	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH157	Chamber	Grass	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT035/2	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. Suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity but no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/DT60129943	FibreDuct	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT152	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT154	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects



Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/DTN300001/2	FibreDuct	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on roadside verge which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT38130375	FibreDuct	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT60129360	FibreDuct	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/DT156	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. Suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity but no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT124	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. Suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity but no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT3186 000004	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. Suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity but no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/DT4079 7744	FibreDuct	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT153	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DTN300 0001	FibreDuct	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/DT042	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT125	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DTN3000741	FibreDuct	Verge	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects



Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/DT097	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. Suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity but no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT021	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT116	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/DT056	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT035	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. Suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity but no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT087	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

Barcode/Duct Label	Infrastructure Type	Location	Site Name	Assessment Methodology	Recent permitted or pending planning permissions within c. 500m of feature	Assessment Findings	Conclusion
MTH/A/NBI/DT157	FibreDuct	Carriageway	Slievebloom Mountains SPA	Visually assessed using aerial imagery and field survey	None	Proposed location on road carriageway which is not QI habitat for this SPA. No suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the vicinity and no Hen Harrier observed holding territory or nesting in the area in April 2022	No likelihood of significant effects

**TABLE 8 SUMMARY OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON EUROPEAN SITES FROM THE PROPOSED PROJECT.**

<b>Site</b>	<b>Habitat Loss / Alteration</b>	<b>Habitat or Species Fragmentation</b>	<b>Disturbance and/or Displacement of Species</b>	<b>Changes in Population Density</b>	<b>Changes in Water Quality and/or</b>	<b>Stage 2 AA Required</b>
Slieve Bloom Mountains SAC (000412)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Clonaslee Eskers And Derry Bog SAC (000859)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
River Barrow And River Nore SAC (002162)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Coolrain Bog SAC (002332)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Lisbigney Bog SAC (000869)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Mountmellick SAC (002141)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Island Fen SAC (002236)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
The Loughans SAC (000407)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Galmoy Fen SAC (001858)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Cullahill Mountain SAC (000831)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Knockacoller Bog SAC (002333)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Spahill and Clomantagh Hill SAC (000849)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA (004160)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>
River Nore SPA (004233)	No	No	No	None	None	<b>No</b>



### 3 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The Proposed Project consisting of the installation of Broadband Network at DA186 Mountrath has been assessed taking into account:

- the nature, size and location of the proposed activities and possible impacts arising from the installation activities.
- the qualifying interests and conservation objectives of the European Sites.
- the potential for in-combination effects arising from other plans and projects.

In conclusion, upon the examination, analysis and evaluation of the relevant information and applying the precautionary principle, it is concluded by the authors of this report that, on the basis of objective information; the possibility **can be excluded** that the Proposed Project will have a likely significant effect on any of the European Sites listed below:

**Slieve Bloom Mountains SAC (000412)**

**River Barrow And River Nore SAC (002162)**

**Coolrain Bog SAC (002332)**

**Knockacoller Bog SAC (002333)**

**Lisbigney Bog SAC (000869)**

**Cullahill Mountain SAC (000831)**

**Galmoy Fen SAC (001858)**

**Clonaslee Eskers And Derry Bog SAC (000859)**

**Spahill And Clomantagh Hill SAC (000849)**

**Island Fen SAC (002236)**

**Mountmellick SAC (002141)**

**The Loughans SAC (000407)**

**Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA (004160)**

**River Nore SPA (004233)**

Thus, it can be concluded on the basis of the results of Stage 1 of the Appropriate Assessment process that there is no requirement to proceed to Stage 2 of said process; and the preparation of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is not required.

## 4 REFERENCES

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NPWS (2019b) Conservation Objectives: Clonaslee Eskers and Derry Bog SAC 000859. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

NPWS (2020) Conservation Objectives: The Loughans SAC 000407. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

NPWS (2021a) Conservation Objectives: Lisbigney Bog SAC 000869. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

NPWS (2021b) Conservation Objectives: Cullahill Mountain SAC 000831. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

NPWS (2021c) Conservation Objectives: Spahill and Clomantagh Hill SAC 000849. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

NPWS (2021d) Conservation objectives for Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA [004160]. Generic Version 8.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

NPWS (2021e) Conservation Objectives: Mountmellick SAC 002141. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

NPWS (2021f) Conservation objectives for River Nore SPA [004233]. Generic Version 8.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

## APPENDIX 1

The following table presents the results of the assessment of all items of infrastructure within 30m or less of a waterbody against the following criteria:

1. The new item(s) of infrastructure being placed an acceptable distance from a watercourse (e.g., not on or immediately adjacent to a riverbank),
2. The new item(s) of infrastructure being placed on the opposite side of the road/laneway/track to the watercourse,
3. The presence of a vegetation buffer (e.g., hedgerow) between the new item(s) of infrastructure and the watercourse,
4. The distance between the new item(s) of infrastructure and downstream European Site, and consequent dilution factor.

**Table 1: Summary of the likely impacts of proposed infrastructure within 30m of watercourses leading to European Sites.**

Infrastructure Barcode	Location	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Conclusion
N3000186	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000183	Verge	Yes	NA	No	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000570	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000636	Verge	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000153	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000652	Verge	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000679	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000534	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000674	Verge	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000526	Verge	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000103	Verge	No	NA	Yes	Yes	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000655	Verge	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000670	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000358	Verge	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000686	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000626	Verge	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000643	Verge	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000596	Verge	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
N3000151	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH097	Carriageway Other	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH156	Carriageway Other	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH116	Carriageway Other	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH125	Carriageway Other	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/CH021	Carriageway Other	Yes	No	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/C/NBI/CH195	Grass	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT60129300	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/C/NBI/DT80392453	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects



MTH/C/NBI/DT36689231	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/C/NBI/DT40343172	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/C/NBI/DT40238322	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT154	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/C/NBI/DTN3000570	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/C/NBI/DT36689171	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT155	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT156	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT124	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/C/NBI/DT01343035	Verge	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/C/NBI/DT195	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT125	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT097	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT021	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT116	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT056	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects
MTH/A/NBI/DT00173031	Carriageway	Yes	NA	Yes	No	No likelihood of significant effects