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Report in Support of Appropriate Assessment
Screening

Proposed Development
Starrus Eco Holdings Ltd.
Ballymount Road,
Dublin 24

On Behalf of
Starrus Eco Holdings Ltd

December 2023

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 Background	5
1.2 Aim of Report	6
1.3 Authors of Report	7
2. Regulatory Context and Appropriate Assessment Procedure	7
2.1 Regulatory Context	7
2.2 Appropriate Assessment Procedure	8
3. Receiving Environment	9
3.1 Existing Site	9
3.2 Proposed Development	10
4. Screening.....	11
4.1 Introduction	11
4.2 Study Area and Scope of Appraisal	12
4.3 Field Study.....	13
4.4 Source-Pathway-Receptor Model	13
4.5 Likely Significant Effect	13
4.6 Screening Process	14
4.7 Desktop Review	14
5. Natura 2000 Sites	14
5.1 Designated sites within likely zone of impact.....	14
5.2 European Sites Descriptions	20
5.2.1 North Dublin Bay SAC.....	20
5.2.2 South Dublin Bay SAC.....	21
5.2.3 North Bull Island SPA	21
5.2.4 South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA	22
5.3 Natura 2000 sites – Features of interests and conservation objectives	22
6. Water Quality data - River Basin Management Plan for Ireland (3rd Cycle)	25
7. Site Surveys	27
7.1 Habitat	27
7.2 Birds.....	29
7.3 Invasive Species.....	29
8. Potential Impacts.....	30
8.1 Potential Impacts from Loss of habitat	30
8.2 Potential impacts from noise and disturbance	31

8.3 Potential Impacts of Surface Water Run-off/Discharges	31
8.4 Spread of Invasive Species	33
8.5 In-combination Impacts	33
9. Screening conclusion and statement	37
References	38
Appendices	39
Appendix 1– Natura 2000 Site Synopses	39

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The information in this report has been compiled by DixonBrosnan Environmental Consultants, on behalf of the applicant. It provides information on and assesses the potential for the Proposed Development at Starrus Eco Holdings Ltd. Ballymount road, Dublin 24, to impact on any Natura 2000 sites within its likely zone of impact.

The Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and the Habitats Directive (92/42/EEC) put an obligation on EU Member States to establish the Natura 2000 network of sites of highest biodiversity importance for rare and threatened habitats and species across the EU. In Ireland, the Natura 2000 network of European sites comprises Special Areas of Conservation (SACs, including candidate SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs, including proposed SPAs). SACs are selected for the conservation of Annex I habitats (including priority types which are in danger of disappearance) and Annex II species (other than birds). SPAs are selected for the conservation of Annex I birds and other regularly occurring migratory birds and their habitats. The annexed habitats and species for which each site is selected correspond to the qualifying interests of the sites and from these the conservation objectives of the site are derived. The Birds and Habitats Directives set out various procedures and obligations in relation to nature conservation management in Member States in general, and of the Natura 2000 sites and their habitats and species in particular. A key protection mechanism is the requirement to consider the possible nature conservation implications of any plan or project on the Natura 2000 site network before any decision is made to allow that plan or project to proceed. Not only is every new plan or project captured by this requirement but each plan or project, when being considered for approval at any stage, must take into consideration the possible effects it may have in combination with other plans and projects when going through the process known as Appropriate Assessment (AA).

The obligation to undertake Appropriate Assessment (AA) derives from Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, and both involve a number of steps and tests that need to be applied in sequential order. Article 6(3) is concerned with the strict protection of sites, while Article 6(4) is the procedure for allowing derogation from this strict protection in certain restricted circumstances. As set out in Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended, a screening for appropriate assessment of an application for consent for the proposed development must be carried out by the competent authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the proposed development, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on any European site. Each step in the assessment process precedes and provides a basis for other steps. The results at each step must be documented and recorded carefully so there is full traceability and transparency of the decisions made.

1.2 Aim of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform the AA process as required under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) in instances where a plan or project may give rise to significant impacts on a Natura 2000 site. This report aims to inform the Appropriate Assessment process in determining whether the development, both alone and in combination with other plans or projects, are likely to have a significant impact on the Natura 2000 sites in the study area, in the context of their conservation objectives and specifically on the habitats and species for which the sites have been designated.

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

- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provision of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission (EC), 2018);*
- *Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodical*
- *Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission (EC), 2021);*
- *Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission, (EC) 2007);*
- *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 and PSSP 2/10 (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010);*
- *Guidelines for Good Practice Appropriate Assessment of Plans under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive (International Workshop on Assessment of Plans under the Habitats Directive, 2011);*
- *Commission notice Guidance document on wind energy developments and EU nature legislation, (EC 2020);*
- *Communication from the Commission on the precautionary principle. European Commission (2000)*
- *Assessment of plans & projects in relation to N2K sites – Methodological Guidance (EC 2021) and*
- *Guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive (EC 2021).*

1.3 Authors of Report

This report was prepared by Carl Dixon MSc. (Ecological Monitoring) and Sorcha Sheehy PhD (Ecology/Ornithology). Field survey was carried out Carl Dixon MSc.

Carl Dixon MSc (Ecology) is a senior ecologist who has over 25 years' experience in ecological and water quality assessments. Carl Dixon holds an Honours Degree (BSc) in Ecology and a Masters (MSc) in Ecological Monitoring from UCC. He is a senior ecologist who has over 25 years' experience in ecological assessment. Prior to setting up DixonBrosnan Environmental Consultants in 2000, Carl set up and ran Core Environmental Services which included Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS) planning for landowners and ecological assessments. Carl has particular experience in freshwater ecology including electrofishing fish stock assessments and water quality assessments. He also has considerable experience in habitat mapping and mammal ecology including survey work and reporting in relation to badgers and bats. Other competencies include surveys for invasive species and bird surveys. Carl has extensive experience with regards to EIAR and NIS mitigation and impact assessment. He has particular experience in large-scale industrial developments with extensive experience in complex assessments as part of multi-disciplinary teams. Such projects include gas pipelines, incinerators, electrical cable routes, oil refineries and quarries.

Dr. Sorcha Sheehy PhD (ecology/ornithology) is an experienced ecological consultant specialising in bird behaviour. Sorcha received a BSc in Applied Ecology from UCC and subsequently went on to receive a PhD in behavioural ornithology at UCC. During her PhD research, Sorcha studied bird-aircraft collision with a particular focus on bird behaviour, included field-based behavioural observations at airports, bird cadaver examination and collision classification and the use of radar tracking to model collision risk. Sorcha has worked for over 15 years in a professional ecology role and specialises in the coordination of ecology projects and assessments. She has coordinated and contributed to Habitats Directive Assessments (AA screenings and NIS) and Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EIAR) for a range of small and large-scale projects with particular expertise in assessing impacts on birds. Notable projects include Arklow Bank Wind Park, Shannon Technology and Energy Park and Waste to Energy Facility Ringaskiddy.

2. Regulatory Context and Appropriate Assessment Procedure

2.1 Regulatory Context

The Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the *Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora*) aims to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest across Europe. The requirements of these directives are transposed into Irish law through the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations; S.I. No. 477 of 2011).

Under the Directive a network of sites of nature conservation importance have been identified by each Member State as containing specified habitats or species requiring to be maintained or returned to favourable conservation status. In Ireland the network consists of SACs and SPAs, and also candidate sites, which form the Natura 2000 network.

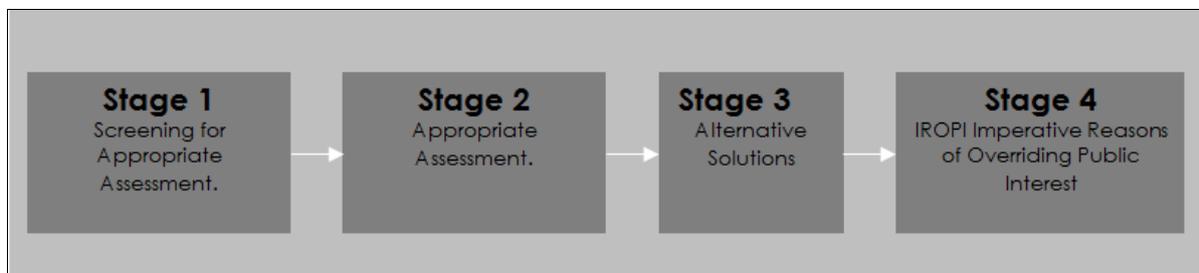
Article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the *Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora* (as amended) (hereafter 'the Habitats Directive')

requires that, any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a designated 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. A competent authority (e.g. the EPA or Local Authority) can only agree to a plan or project after having determined that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned.

The possibility of a significant effect on a designated or “European” site has generated the need for an appropriate assessment to be carried out by the competent authority for the purposes of Article 6(3). A Stage Two Appropriate Assessment is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site. The first (Screening) Stage for appropriate assessment operates merely to determine whether a (Stage Two) Appropriate Assessment must be undertaken on the implications of the plan or project for the conservation objectives of relevant European sites.

2.2 Appropriate Assessment Procedure

The assessment requirements of Article 6(3) establish a stage-by-stage approach. This assessment follows the stages outlined in the 2001 European Commission publications “Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: methodological guidance on the provisions of Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC” (2001) and Managing Natura 2000 Sites: the provisions of Article 6 of the ‘Habitats’ Directive 92/43/EEC (Draft) Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg (EC, 2015);



The stages are as follows:

Stage One: Screening — the process which identifies any appreciable impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant;

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

Stage Three: Assessment of alternative solutions: The process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site. It is confirmed that no reliance is placed by the developer on Stage Three in the context of this application for development consent;

Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain — an assessment of compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed (it is important to note that this guidance does not deal with the assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest). Again, for the avoidance of doubt, it is confirmed that no reliance is placed by the developer on Stage Four in the context of this application for development consent.

It is the responsibility of the competent authority to make a decision on whether or not the proposed development should be approved, taking into consideration any potential impact upon any Natura 2000 site within its likely zone of impact.

3. Receiving Environment

3.1 Existing Site

The site is located within the SDCC administrative area within the Ballymount industrial Estate. The site occupies approximately 1.18 hectares on Ballymount Road Upper and is positioned in close proximity to the M50. The facility has a waste licence from the EPA (No. W0039-02.) for the processing of up to 150,000 tonnes of domestic, commercial and construction and demolition waste per annum.

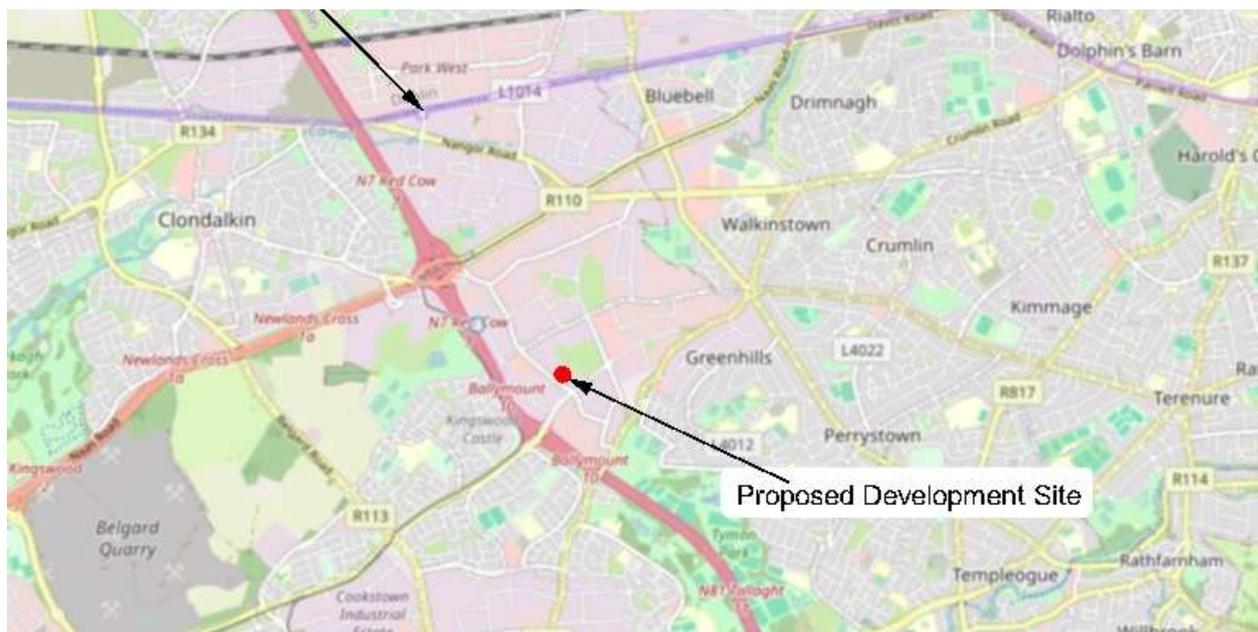
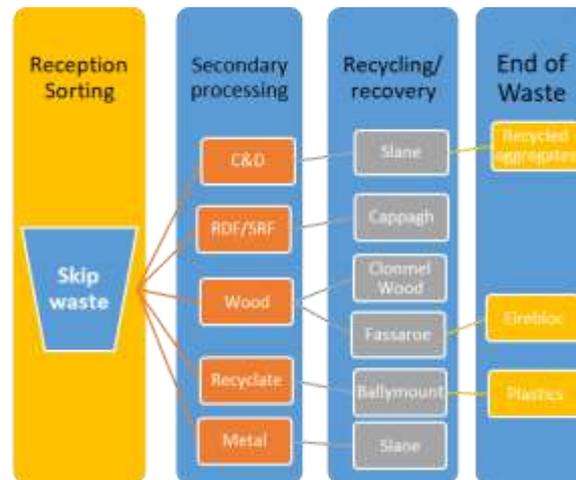


Figure 1. Site location

In accordance with the permissions outlined above together with an IE licence issued by the EPA, the existing facility accepts 150,000 tonnes per year of non-hazardous household, commercial, industrial and construction and demolition wastes. Delivery vehicles are tipped inside the existing building and separated into their constituent parts using a variety of grabs and automated segregation techniques.

Waste processing operations have evolved to become increasingly specialist and complex. As a result, certain waste streams are now processed at multiple facilities. An illustration of this situation is per the below diagram and can be described as follows: skip waste received

initially at Ballymount is segregated into its constituent parts, and these component parts are further refined at other locations.



3.2 Proposed Development

This developer seeks to expand its EPA licensed waste processing facility to ensure that there is sufficient waste processing capacity within the Greater Dublin Area to cater for population increases, growing economic activity and to comply with increasing regulatory requirements to recover raw materials from discarded resources for the circular economy (**Figure 2**).

The proposed development will also replace SEHL operations at the SDCC baling station located nearby in the Ballymount industrial estate. The movement of MSW processing from the baling station will allow far greater levels of extraction of resources such as plastics and metals from the incoming waste.

The development will see the demolition of the existing processing shed and offices and the expansion of waste processing operations on the site into a single building. The office functions have redistributed to other SEHL facilities.

It is proposed that the new Ballymount Rd Up facility will increase capacity on the site to bring capacity from 150,000 tonnes waste to 350,000 tonnes of a combination of domestic, commercial and construction and demolition waste. The materials will be processed, and resources harvested for use in the circular economy. The waste processing will occur within one building.

All equipment will be contained within a building to contain noise emissions. The facility will incorporate an air extraction and treatment system for dust and odour control. The facility will also include a modern fire detection and extinguishing system.

Deliveries will be by a combination of refuse collection vehicles and skip collection vehicles, while exports will be by articulated trucks.

In line with Beuparc's ESG commitments, the development will also include the following sustainability features: -

- 500kW of roof mounted solar panels.

- Rainwater harvesting
- Bat and bird boxes
- LED lighting inside and outside.
- Retention of existing tree cover to the maximum extent possible
- Permeable paving under the carpark.



Figure 2. Proposed Development Site Layout

4. Screening

4.1 Introduction

This section contains the information required for the competent authority to undertake screening for AA for the proposed development.

The aims of this section are to:

- Determine whether the proposed development is directly connected with, or necessary to, the conservation management of any Natura 2000 Sites;

- Provide information on, and assess the potential for the proposed development to significantly effect on Natura 2000 Sites (also known as European sites); and
- Determine whether the proposed development, alone or in combination with other projects, is likely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites in view of their conservation objectives.

The proposed development is not directly connected with, or necessary to the conservation management of any Natura 2000 sites.

4.2 Study Area and Scope of Appraisal

Natura 2000 sites (European sites) are only at risk from significant effects where a source-pathway-receptor link exists between a proposed development and a Natura 2000 site(s). This can take the form of a direct impact (e.g., where the proposed development and/or associated construction works are located within the boundary of the Natura 2000 site(s) or an indirect impact where impacts outside of the Natura 2000 site(s) affect ecological receptors within (e.g. impacts to water quality which can affect riparian habitats at a distance from the impact source).

The likely zone of impact (Zol) comprises the area within which the proposed development may potentially affect the conservation objectives (or qualifying interests) of a Natura 2000 site. There is no recommended likely zone of impact, and guidance from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) recommends that the distance should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with reference to the nature, size and location of the project, the sensitivities of the ecological receptors, and the potential for in-combination effects (cumulative).

In ecological and environmental impact assessment, for an effect to occur there must be a risk enabled by having a source (e.g. construction works at a proposed development site), a 'receptor' (e.g. SAC or other ecologically sensitive feature), and a pathway between the source and the receptor (e.g. a watercourse which connects the proposed development site to the SAC, *ex situ* foraging habitat for SCI birds). A 'receptor' is defined as the Special Conservation Interest (SCI) of SPAs or Qualifying Interest (QI) of SACs for which conservation objectives have been set for the European sites being screened.

Consideration is therefore given to the source-pathway-receptor linkage and associated risks between the proposed development and Natura 2000 sites. For a significant effect to occur there needs to be an identified risk whereby a source (e.g. contaminant or pollutant arising from construction activities) affects a particular receptor (i.e. Natura 2000 site) through a particular pathway (e.g. a watercourse which connects the proposed development with the Natura 2000 site).

The identification of risk does not automatically mean that an effect will occur, nor that it will be significant. The identification of these risks means that there is a possibility of environmental or ecological damage occurring. The level and significance of the effect depends upon the nature of the consequence, likelihood of the risk and characteristics of the receptor.

The precautionary principle is applied for the purposes of screening to ensure that consideration and pre-emptive action is undertaken where there is a lack of scientific evidence.

It is noted that mitigation measures are not taken into account in the AA screening assessment process.

Thus, any appreciable direct, indirect or in-combination impacts which could arise from the proposed development in relation to the designated sites within this zone were considered.

4.3 Field Study

A site inspection was carried out on the 9th of November 2023 to identify the habitats, flora and fauna present at the site. The surveys assessed the potential for all Qualifying Interests (QIs)/ Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) of European sites and third schedule invasive species to occur within the proposed site.

4.4 Source-Pathway-Receptor Model

The likely effects of the proposed development on any European site has been assessed using a source-pathway-receptor model, where:

- A 'source' is defined as the individual element of the proposed works that has the potential to impact on a European site, its qualifying features and its conservation objectives.
- A 'pathway' is defined as the means or route by which a source can affect the ecological receptor.
- A 'receptor' is defined as the SCI of SPAs or QI of SACs for which conservation objectives have been set for the European sites being screened.

A source-pathway-receptor model is a standard tool used in environmental assessment. In order for an effect to be likely, all three elements of this mechanism must be in place. The absence or removal of one of the elements of the mechanism results in no likelihood for the effect to occur. The source-pathway-receptor model was used to identify a list of European sites, and their QIs/SCIs, with potential links to European sites. These are termed as 'relevant' European sites/QIs/SCIs throughout this report.

4.5 Likely Significant Effect

The threshold for a Likely Significant Effect (LSE) is treated in the screening exercise as being above a de minimis level. The opinion of the Advocate General in CJEU case C-258/11 outlines:

“the requirement that the effect in question be ‘significant’ exists in order to lay down a de minimis threshold. Plans or projects that have no appreciable effect on a European site are thereby excluded.

If all plans or projects capable of having any effect whatsoever on the site were to be caught by Article 6(3), activities on or near the site would risk being impossible by reason of legislative overkill.”

In this report, therefore, 'relevant' European sites are those within the potential Zol of activities associated with the construction and operation of the proposed development, where LSE pathways to European sites were identified through the source-pathway-receptor model.

4.6 Screening Process

The Screening for Appropriate Assessment will incorporate the following steps:

- Definition of the likely zone of impact for the proposed works;
- Identification of the European sites that are situated (in their entirety or partially or downstream) within the likely zone of impact of the proposed works;
- Identification of the most up-to-date QIs and SCIs for each European site within the likely zone of impact;
- Identification of the environmental conditions that maintain the QIs/SCIs at the desired target of Favourable Conservation Status;
- Identification of the threats/impacts – actual or potential that could negatively impact the environmental conditions of the QIs/SCIs within the European sites;
- Highlighting the activities of the proposed works that could give rise to significant negative impacts; and
- Identification of other plans or projects, for which in-combination impacts would likely have significant effects.

4.7 Desktop Review

A desktop review facilitates the identification of the baseline ecological conditions and key ecological issues relating to Natura 2000 sites and facilitates an evaluation assessment of potential in-combination impacts. Sources of information used for this report include reports prepared for the area and information from statutory and non-statutory bodies. The following sources of information and relevant documentation were utilised:

- National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) - www.npws.ie
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – www.epa.ie
- National Biodiversity Data Centre – www.biodiversityireland.ie
- Invasive Species Ireland - <http://www.invasivespeciesireland.com/>
- *Best Practice Guidance for Habitat Survey and Mapping* (Heritage Council, 2011)
- South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2022-2026
- South Dublin County Council Planning Database.

5. Natura 2000 Sites

5.1 Designated sites within likely zone of impact

Natura 2000 sites the likely zone of impact of the proposed development site are listed below in **Table 1** and shown in **Figure 3**.

The proposed development is not located within any Natura 2000 site. The Coolafan Stream, a 2nd order tributary of the River Liffey is located approximately 410m north of the proposed development site. This stream meets the waters of Dublin Bay approximately 14.7km

downstream of the proposed development site at Ballymount. The South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA, South Dublin Bay SAC, North Dublin Bay SAC and North Bull Island SPA are located within Dublin Bay. Surface waters generated during construction could potentially carry silt, hydrocarbons or other contaminants into either the local sewer network or the local surface water network which ultimately discharges to Dublin Bay. There is also a potential risk that surface waters may be contaminated as a consequence of groundwater discharges, as some localised contaminated land may be encountered. It is noted that there will be no process or wastewater emissions to water as part of the proposed development. The existing waste facility could potentially provide roosting habitat for SCI birds of River Tolka Estuary SPA and North Bull Island SPA such as Black-headed gull. However, the industrial facility will not provide *ex-situ* habitat for Annex II mammal species such as Otter or Annex I bird species such as Peregrine Falcon.

Therefore, a source-pathway-receptor link has been identified between the source (the proposed development) and the receptors (South Dublin Bay SAC, North Dublin Bay SAC, North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA) via a potential pathway (surface water run-off/discharge during construction/operation, disturbance to SCI species (i.e. Gulls) and the spread of invasive species). Site synopses for these Natura 2000 are included in **Appendix 1**.

Given the limited scale of the proposed development, the lack of a hydrological connection, the manmade habitats at the site, the dilution provided in the estuarine/marine environment, and the distances involved, no potential impact on other designated sites has been identified.

Table 1. Natura 2000 sites and their location relative to the proposed development site

Natura 2000 Sites	Site Code		Distance at closest point and potential source-pathway-receptor link
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)			
Glenasmole Valley SAC	001209	Habitats 6210 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) 6410 Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) 7220 Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion)*	6.0km northwest. No hydrological or other pathway identified.
Wicklow Mountains SAC	001209	Habitats 3110 Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) 3160 Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds 4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix 4030 European dry heaths 4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths 6130 Calaminarian grasslands of the Violetalia calaminariae 6230 Species-rich Nardus grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas, in Continental Europe)* 7130 Blanket bogs (* if active bog) 8110 Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (Androsacetalia alpinae and Galeopsietalia ladani) 8210 Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation 8220 Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation 91A0 Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles Species 1355 Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	8.4km south. No hydrological or other pathway identified.
South Dublin Bay SAC	000210	Habitats 1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low	9.7km northeast. Although unlikely, a source-pathway-receptor link has been identified between the source

Natura 2000 Sites	Site Code		Distance at closest point and potential source-pathway-receptor link
		tide 1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines 1310 Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand 2110 Embryonic shifting dunes	(proposed development site) and the receptor (South Dublin Bay SAC) via a potential pathway (impacts on water quality and spread of invasive species during construction or operational phase).
Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC	001398	Habitats 7220 Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion)* Species 1014 Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail (<i>Vertigo angustior</i>) 1016 Desmoulin's Whorl Snail (<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>)	8.0km west. No hydrological or other pathway identified
North Dublin Bay SAC	000206	Habitats 1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide 1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines 1310 Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand 1330 Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) 1410 Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) 2110 Embryonic shifting dunes 2120 Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) 2130 Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)* 2190 Humid dune slacks Species 1395 Petalwort (<i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i>)	12.7km northeast. Although unlikely, a source-pathway-receptor link has been identified between the source (proposed development site) and the receptor (North Bull Island SAC) via a potential pathway (impacts on water quality and spread of invasive species during construction or operational phase).
Knocksink Wood SAC	000725	Habitats 7220 Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion)* 91A0 Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles 91E0 Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>)*	14.7km southeast No hydrological or other pathway identified

Natura 2000 Sites	Site Code		Distance at closest point and potential source-pathway-receptor link
Special Protection Area (SPA)			
Wicklow Mountains SPA	004040	Birds A098 Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i> A103 Peregrine <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	9.0km south. No hydrological or other pathway identified
South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA	004024	Birds A046 Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) A130 Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>) A137 Ringed Plover (<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>) A141 Grey Plover (<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>) A143 Knot (<i>Calidris canutus</i>) A144 Sanderling (<i>Calidris alba</i>) A149 Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina</i>) A157 Bar-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa lapponica</i>) A162 Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>) A179 Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) A192 Roseate Tern (<i>Sterna dougallii</i>) A193 Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) A194 Arctic Tern (<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>) Habitats Wetlands	9.8km northeast Although unlikely, a source-pathway-receptor link has been identified between the source (proposed development site) and the receptor (South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA) via a potential pathway (impacts on water quality, disturbance and spread of invasive species during construction or operational phase).
North Bull Island SPA	004006	Birds A046 Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) A048 Shelduck (<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>) A052 Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) A054 Pintail (<i>Anas acuta</i>) A056 Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>) A130 Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>) A140 Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) A141 Grey Plover (<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>) A143 Knot (<i>Calidris canutus</i>)	12.7km northeast. Although unlikely, a source-pathway-receptor link has been identified between the source (proposed development site) and the receptor (North Bull Island SPA) via a potential pathway (impacts on water quality, disturbance and spread of invasive species during construction or operational phase).

Natura 2000 Sites	Site Code		Distance at closest point and potential source-pathway-receptor link
		A144 Sanderling (<i>Calidris alba</i>) A149 Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina</i>) A156 Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>) A157 Bar-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa lapponica</i>) A160 Curlew (<i>Numenius arquata</i>) A162 Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>) A169 Turnstone (<i>Arenaria interpres</i>) A179 Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) Habitats Wetlands	

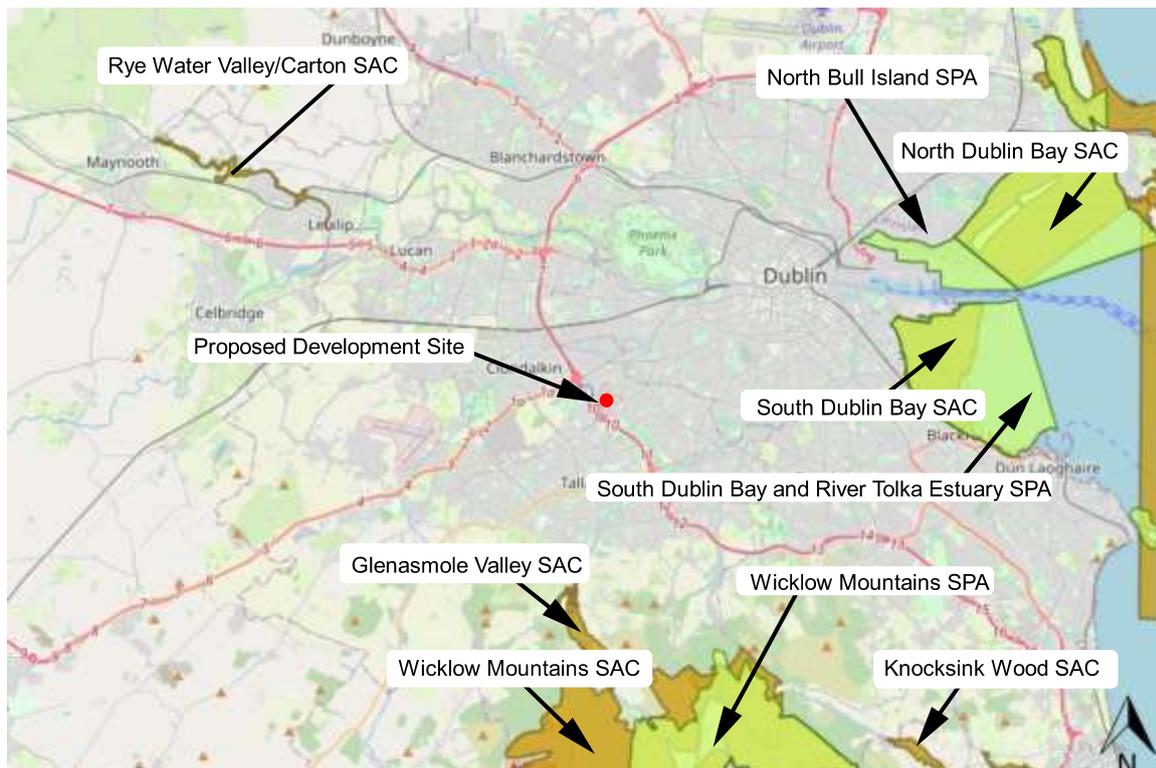


Figure 3. Location of the proposed development boundary and Natura 2000 sites | Source: EPA Envision mapping (<https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/>) | Not to scale

5.2 European Sites Descriptions

5.2.1 North Dublin Bay SAC

The North Bull Island sand spit is a relatively recent depositional feature, formed as a result of improvements to Dublin Port during the 18th and 19th centuries. It is almost five kilometres long and one kilometre wide and runs parallel to the coast between Clontarf and Sutton. The sediment which forms the island is predominantly glacial in origin and siliceous in nature. Between the island and the mainland there occurs two sheltered intertidal areas which are separated by a solid causeway constructed in 1964. The seaward side of the island has a fine sandy beach. A substantial area of shallow marine water is included in the site. The interior of the island is excluded from the site as it has been converted to golf courses. The proximity of the North Bull Island to Dublin City results in it being a very popular recreational area. It is also very important for educational and research purposes. Nature conservation is a main land use within the site.

Site possesses an excellent diversity of coastal habitats. The North Bull Island dune system is one of the most important systems on the east coast and is one of the few in Ireland that is actively accreting. It possesses extensive and mostly good quality examples of embryonic, shifting marram and fixed dunes, as well as excellent examples of humid dune slacks. Both Atlantic and Mediterranean salt marshes are well represented and a particularly good marsh zonation is shown. The salt marshes grade into mudflats and sandflats, some of which are dominated by annual *Salicornia* species. *Petalophyllum ralfsii* occurs at its only known station away from the western seaboard. The site has five Red Data Book vascular plant species and four Red Data Book bryophyte species. This is one of the most important sites for wintering waterfowl in Ireland, with internationally important populations of *Branta bernicla horta*, *Calidris canutus* and *Limosa lapponica*, plus nationally important numbers of a further 14 species. 20% of the national total of *Pluvialis squatarola* occurs here. Formerly it had important colony of

Sterna albifrons. North Dublin Bay is nationally important for three insect species. The scientific interests of the site have been well documented and future prospects are good owing to the various designations assigned to site.

5.2.2 South Dublin Bay SAC

This intertidal site extends from the South Wall at Dublin Port to the West Pier at Dun Laoghaire, a distance of approximately 5 km. At their widest, the intertidal flats extend for almost 3 km. The seaward boundary is marked by the low tide mark, while the landward boundary is now almost entirely artificially embanked. Several permanent channels exist, the largest being Cockle Lake. A small sandy beach occurs at Merrion Gates, while some bedrock shore occurs near Dun Laoghaire. A number of small streams and drains flow into the site. The proximity of the site to Dublin City results in it being a very popular recreational area. It is also important for educational and research purposes.

Site possesses a fine and fairly extensive example of intertidal flats. Sediment type is predominantly sand, with muddy sands in the more sheltered areas. A typical macro-invertebrate fauna exists. Has the largest stand of *Zostera* on the east coast. Supports part of the important wintering waterfowl populations of Dublin Bay. Regularly has an internationally population of *Branta bernicila horta*, plus nationally important numbers of at least a further 6 species, including *Limosa lapponica*. Regular autumn roosting ground for significant numbers of *Sterna* terns, including *S. dougallii*. The scientific interests of the site have been well documented.

5.2.3 North Bull Island SPA

The North Bull Island sand spit is a relatively recent depositional feature, formed as a result of improvements to Dublin Port during the 18th and 19th centuries. It is almost 5km long and 1km wide and runs parallel to the coast between Clontarf and Sutton. The sediment which forms the island is predominantly glacial in origin and siliceous in nature. A well-developed dune system runs the length of the island, with good examples of embryonic, shifting marram and fixed dunes, as well as excellent examples of humid dune slacks. Extensive salt marshes also occur. Between the island and the mainland occur two sheltered intertidal areas which are separated by a solid causeway constructed in 1964. The seaward side of the island has a fine sandy beach. A substantial area of shallow marine water is included in the site. Part of the interior of the island has been converted to golf courses. The proximity of the North Bull Island to Dublin City results in it being a very popular recreational area. It is also very important for educational and research purposes. Nature conservation is a main land use within the site.

The site is among the top ten sites for wintering waterfowl in the country. It supports internationally important populations of *Branta bernicila hrota* and *Limosa lapponica* and is the top site in the country for both of these species. A further 14 species have populations of national importance, with particular notable numbers of *Tadorna tadorna* (8.5% of national total), *Anas acuta* (11.6% of national total), *Pluvialis squatarola* (6.9% of national total), *Calidris canutus* (10.5% of national total). North Bull Island SPA is a regular site for passage waders such as *Philomachus pugnax*, *Calidris ferruginea* and *Tringa erythropus*. The site supports *Asio flammeus* in winter. Formerly the site had an important colony of *Sterna albifrons* but breeding has not occurred in recent years. The site provides both feeding and roosting areas for the waterfowl species. Habitat quality for most of the estuarine habitats is very good. The site has a population of the rare *Petalophyllum ralfsii* which is the only known station away from the western seaboard as well as five Red Data Book vascular plant species and four

bryophyte species. It is nationally important for three insect species. Wintering bird populations have been monitored more or less continuously since the late 1960s, and the other scientific interests of the site have also been well documented. Future prospects are good owing to various designations assigned to site.

5.2.4 South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA

This site comprises a substantial part of Dublin Bay. It includes virtually all of the intertidal area in the south bay, as well as much of the Tolka Estuary to the north of the River Liffey. A portion of the shallow bay waters is also included. In the south bay, the intertidal flats extend for almost 3 km at their widest. The sediments are predominantly well-aerated sands. The sands support the largest stand of *Zostera noltii* on the East Coast. Several permanent channels exist, the largest being Cockle Lake. A small sandy beach occurs at Merrion Gates, while some bedrock shore occurs near Dun Laoghaire. The landward boundary is now almost entirely artificially embanked. Sediments in the Tolka Estuary vary from soft thixotropic muds with a high organic content in the inner estuary to exposed, well aerated sands off the Bull Wall. The proximity of the site to Dublin City results in it being a very popular recreational area. It is also important for educational and research purposes.

The site possesses extensive intertidal flats which support wintering waterfowl which are part of the overall Dublin Bay population. It regularly has an internationally important population of *Branta bernicla hrota*, which feeds on *Zostera noltii* in the autumn. It has nationally important numbers of a further 6 species: *Haematopus ostralegus*, *Charadrius hiaticula*, *Calidris canutus*, *Calidris alba*, *Calidris alpina* and *Limosa lapponica*. It is an important site for wintering gulls, especially *Larus ridibundus* and *Larus canus*. South Dublin Bay is the premier site in Ireland for *Larus melanocephalus*, with up to 20 birds present at times. Is a regular autumn roosting ground for significant numbers of terns, including *Sterna dougallii*, *S. hirundo* and *S. paradisaea*.

5.3 Natura 2000 sites – Features of interests and conservation objectives

The EU Habitats Directive contains a list of habitats (Annex I) and species (Annex II) for which SACs must be established by Member States. Similarly, the EU Birds Directive contains lists of important bird species (Annex I) and other migratory bird species for which SPAs must be established. Those that are known to occur at a site are referred to as ‘qualifying interests’ and are listed in the Natura 2000 forms which are lodged with the EU Commission by each Member State. A ‘qualifying interest’ is one of the factors (such as the species or habitat that is present) for which the site merits designation. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) are responsible for the designation of SACs and SPAs in Ireland.

The conservation objectives for the site are detailed in:

- NPWS (2013) *Conservation Objectives: North Dublin Bay SAC 000206. Version 1.* National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
- NPWS (2013) *Conservation Objectives: South Dublin Bay SAC 000210. Version 1.* National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
- NPWS (2015) *Conservation Objectives: North Bull Island SPA 004006. Version 1.* National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

- NPWS (2015) *Conservation Objectives: South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA 004024. Version 1*. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them. These two designations are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network. European and national legislation places a collective obligation on Ireland and its citizens to maintain at favourable conservation status sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. The Government and its agencies are responsible for the implementation and enforcement of regulations that will ensure the ecological integrity of these sites.

The maintenance of habitats and species within Natura 2000 sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level. Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced or likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis. The species and/or habitats listed as features of interests for the South Dublin Bay SAC, North Dublin Bay SAC, North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA are included in **Tables 2 to 5**.

Table 2. Qualifying interests for North Dublin Bay SAC

Habitat/species Code	Habitat /Species	Conservation objective
1140	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide	Maintain
1210	Annual vegetation of drift lines	Restore
1310	Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand	Restore
1330	Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>)	Maintain
1410	Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>)	Maintain
2110	Embryonic shifting dunes	Restore
2120	Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes)	Restore
2130	Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)	Restore
2190	Humid dune slacks	Restore
1395	Petalwort <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i>	Maintain

Restore = Restore favourable conservation condition, Maintain = Maintain favourable conservation condition

Table 3. Qualifying interests for South Dublin Bay SAC

Habitat/species Code	Habitat /Species	Conservation objective
1140	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide	Maintain
1210	Annual vegetation of drift lines	Maintain/Restore
1310	Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand	Maintain/Restore
2110	Embryonic shifting dunes	Maintain/Restore

Restore = Restore favourable conservation condition, Maintain = Maintain favourable conservation condition

Table 4: Special Conservation Interests for North Bull Island SPA

Species Code	Species	Scientific name	Conservation objective
A046	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	Maintain
A048	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Maintain
A052	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Maintain
A054	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Maintain
A056	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Maintain
A130	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Maintain
A140	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	Maintain
A141	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Maintain
A143	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Maintain
A144	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Maintain
A149	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>	Maintain
A156	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Maintain
A157	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Maintain
A160	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Maintain
A162	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Maintain
A169	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Maintain
A179	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Maintain
A999	Wetlands & waterbirds		Maintain

Restore = Restore favourable conservation condition, Maintain = Maintain favourable conservation condition

Table 5: Special Conservation Interests for South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA

Species Code	Species	Scientific name	Conservation objective
A046	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	Maintain
A130	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Maintain
A137	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Maintain
A141	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Maintain
A143	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Maintain
A144	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Maintain

Species Code	Species	Scientific name	Conservation objective
A149	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>	Maintain
A157	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Maintain
A162	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Maintain
A179	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Maintain
A192	Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	Maintain
A193	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Maintain
A194	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Maintain
A999	Wetlands & waterbirds		Maintain

Restore = Restore favourable conservation condition, Maintain = Maintain favourable conservation condition

To acknowledge the importance of Ireland's wetlands to wintering waterbirds, "Wetland and Waterbirds" may be included as a Special Conservation Interest for some SPAs that have been designated for wintering waterbirds and that contain a wetland site of significant importance to one or more of the species of Special Conservation Interest. Thus, a further objective is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the wetland habitat within the North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA as a resource for the regularly occurring migratory waterbirds that utilise them.

It should be noted that some of the Natura 2000 sites overlap each other and thus the conservation objectives for these sites should be used in conjunction with those for overlapping and adjacent sites as appropriate.

6. Water Quality data - River Basin Management Plan for Ireland (3rd Cycle)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) sets out the environmental objectives which are required to be met through the process of river basin planning and implementation of those plans. Specific objectives are set out for surface water, groundwater and protected areas. The challenges that must be overcome in order to achieve those objectives are very significant. Therefore, a key purpose of the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) is to set out priorities and ensure that implementation is guided by these priorities.

The third-cycle RBMP aims to build on the progress made during the first cycle. Key measures during the first cycle included the licensing of urban waste-water discharges (with an associated investment in urban waste-water treatment) and the implementation of the Nitrates Action Programme (Good Agricultural Practice Regulations). The former measure has resulted in significant progress in terms both of compliance levels and of the impact of urban waste-water on water quality. The latter provides a considerable environmental baseline which all Irish farmers must achieve and has resulted in improving trends in the level of nitrates and phosphates in rivers and groundwater. It is acknowledged, however, that sufficient progress has not been made in developing and implementing supporting measures during the first and second cycles.

Overall, RBMP assesses the quality of water in Ireland and presents detailed scientific characterisation of our water bodies. The characterisation process also takes into account wider water quality considerations, such as the special water-quality requirements of protected

areas. The characterisation process identifies those water bodies that are At Risk of not meeting the objectives of the WFD, and the process also identifies the significant pressures causing this risk. Based on an assessment of risk and pressures, a programme of measures has been developed to address the identified pressures and work towards achieving the required objectives for water quality and protected areas.. Data relating to the watercourses within the study area is provided in **Table 6** and the location of these shown in **Figure 4**.

Treated wastewater from the proposed development site will ultimately be discharged to the transitional waters (Liffey Estuary Lower) / coastal waters (Dublin Bay) via a primary discharge point from the Ringsend WWTP. The 2020 AER for the Ringsend WWTP notes that the discharge from the wastewater treatment plant does not have an observable negative impact on the water quality in the near field of the discharge and in the Liffey and Tolka Estuaries. However, the WFD characterisation process concluded that the Ringsend WWTP is a significant pressure on the Liffey Estuary Lower water body.

Table 6. WFD Status

Catchment: Liffey and Dublin Bay (Code 9) 3rd Cycle			
<p>This catchment includes the area drained by the River Liffey and by all streams entering tidal water between Sea Mount and Sorrento Point, Co. Dublin, draining a total area of 1,616km². The largest urban centre in the catchment is Dublin City. The other main urban centres are Dun Laoghaire, Lucan, Clonee, Dunboyne, Leixlip, Maynooth, Kilcock, Celbridge, Newcastle, Rathcoole, Clane, Kill, Sallins, Johnstown, Naas, Newbridge, Athgarvan, Kilcullen and Blessington. The total population of the catchment is approximately 1,255,000.</p> <p>The Liffey catchment contains the largest population of any catchment in Ireland and is characterised by a sparsely populated, upland south eastern area and a densely populated, flat, low lying area over the remainder of the catchment basin.</p> <p>The Liffey catchment comprises 17 sub-catchments with 77 river water bodies, six lakes, six transitional and five coastal water bodies, and 16 groundwater bodies</p> <p>Proposed Development Site – Sub catchment Liffey_SC_090. A predominantly urban sub-catchment as it flows through Dublin City from Lexlip, it displays some of the major issues associated with inefficient drainage systems and problems with misconnections. This is a known major issue for the respective Local Authorities and work is underway to further identify sources of these pressures. Combined sewer overflows have also been identified as a significant pressure in Dublin City Council. This data needs to be reviewed before further work can be prioritised.</p>			
Waterbodies relevant to the proposed project			
Waterbody	River Waterbody WFD Status 2016-2021	River Waterbodies Risk	Pressure Category WFD Status
Camac_040	Poor	At risk	Hydro-morphology, urban runoff, urban wastewater
Liffey Estuary Upper	Good	Review	Urban wastewater
Dublin Bay	Good	Not at risk	n/a

Source: EPA envision mapping and www.catchments.ie 01/12/23

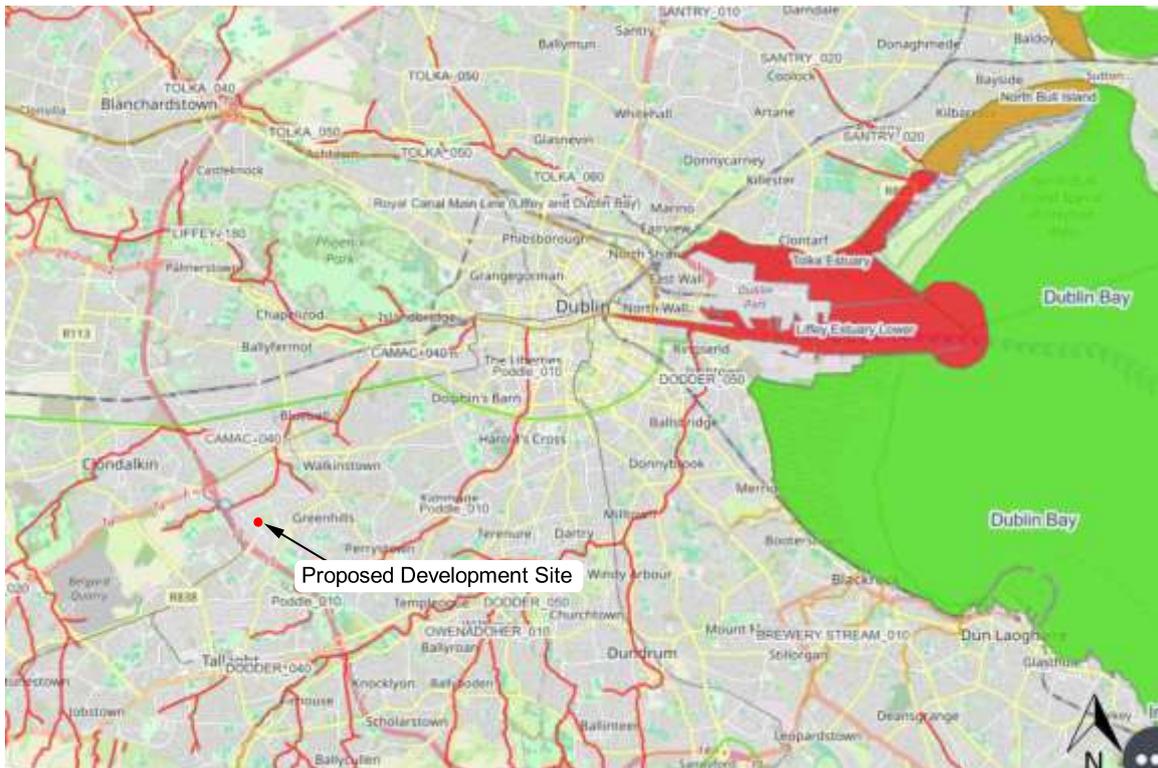


Figure 4. WFD status - waterbodies in the vicinity of the proposed development | Source: EPA Envision mapping | not to scale. Red lines 'At Risk'.

7. Site Surveys

7.1 Habitat

Site surveys were carried out on the 9th November 2023. Habitat mapping was carried out in line with the methodology outlined in the Heritage Council Publication, *Best Practice Guidance for Habitat Survey and Mapping* (Heritage Council, 2011). The terrestrial and aquatic habitats within or adjacent to the proposed development site were classified using the classification scheme outlined in the Heritage council publication *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000) and cross referenced with Annex I Habitats where required. The survey results are representative of the habitats within the application site and include the dominant and characteristic species of flora.

The habitats recorded onsite as well as their ecological value is detailed in **Table 7**. The proposed development site is within an existing industrial facility and is dominated by man-made habitats which are not of ecological value. There is some vegetation on the boundary of the site and on small unused corners of the site. No rare plant species were recorded within the works area during the site survey. Although the survey was conducted outside the main growing season the presence of rare or uncommon species is unlikely,

Table 7. Habitats recorded within proposed development site

Habitat	Description
<p>Treeline WL2/Hedgerow W1</p>	<p>There is a mixture of patchy treeline and some non-native hedging along some of the external boundaries of the existing facility. The trees are planted and along the Ballymount Road there is a mixture of dense Cherry Laurel and Norway Maple forming a coherent linear feature. The dense cherry laurel creates heavy shade and suppresses ground flora. Elsewhere there are more patchy lines of sycamore with some leylandii also present. Due to poor structure and dominance by non-native species this habitat is of low value.</p>
<p>Buildings and artificial surfaces BL3/recolonising bare ground ED3/Flower beds and borders BC4.</p>	<p>The site is dominated by artificial surfaces including roads, yards, the existing office building, areas of gravel and the existing waste management facility. Some early successional species have become established in small areas on the margins. Species noted include red fescue, cleavers, rosebay willowherb, prickly sow thistle, wild rose and spear thistle. There is some planted immature cherry laurel and pampas grass planted in managed beds. Buddliea is occasional.</p>
<p>Dry meadow and grassy verge GS2/Scrub WS2</p>	<p>To the rear of the existing waste management building there is an areas of unused ground which has been colonised by a mixture of taller, coarse grasses and scrub. Species noted include Canadian fleabane, buddleia, bramble, nettle, woody nightshade, wild clematis with occasional immature sycamore. In the absence of active management this area will is expected to develop as an area of dense scrub.</p>

7.2 Birds

Bird surveys were carried out on the 9th November 2023. There is no significant bird breeding habitat on site and specialised breeding bird surveys were not considered necessary. During the survey, all birds seen or heard within the development site were recorded.

In general the site is of low value for terrestrial birds. Boundary habitats are dominated by introduced species which are of low value for birds and scrub is limited in extent. Levels of disturbance is high with ongoing traffic movement and pedestrian movement. Although a small number of species which are relatively common in the urban environment were recorded i.e. Blackbird, Rook, Starling, Robin, Blue Tit, Magpie, Jackdaw, in general the site is considered of negligible value for most bird species. It is noted that Starling is Amber list species of conservation concern in Ireland. However, the habitats at the site are unlikely to provide high value nesting or foraging habitat for this species.

The waste activities on site attract corvids and gull species 'checking' for foraging opportunities. During the survey most of the gulls were recorded roosting on the roof of an existing industrial building adjoining and to the west of the site. The following species were recorded 22 Black-headed gull, 35 Herring gull, 5 Lesser black backed gull and 5 Common gull) with smaller numbers nesting on the main waste hall (8 Herring gull, 2 Lesser black backed gull).

Overall, the proposed development site is of low local value for bird species that are relatively common in urban/suburban environments with very little nesting or foraging habitat available. However, waste activities at the site do attract gulls and corvids to the site.

7.3 Invasive Species

Non-native plants are defined as those plants which have been introduced outside of their native range by humans and their activities, either purposefully or accidentally. Invasive non-native species are so-called as they typically display one or more of the following characteristics or features: (1) prolific reproduction through seed dispersal and/or re-growth from plant fragments; (2) rapid growth patterns; and (3) resistance to standard weed control methods.

Where a non-native species displays invasive qualities and is not managed it can potentially: (1) out compete native vegetation, affecting plant community structure and habitat for wildlife; (2) cause damage to infrastructure including road carriageways, footpaths, walls and foundations; and, (3) have an adverse effect on landscape quality.

The control of invasive species in Ireland comes under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000, where it states that:

'Any person who— [...] plants or otherwise causes to grow in a wild state in any place in the State any species of flora, or the flowers, roots, seeds or spores of flora, ['refers only to exotic species thereof'][...] otherwise than under and in accordance with a licence granted in that behalf by the Minister shall be guilty of an offence.'

The Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (SI 477 of 2011), Section 49(2) prohibits the introduction and dispersal of species listed in the Third Schedule, which includes Japanese

Knotweed *Fallopia japonica*, as follows: “any person who plants, disperses, allows or causes to disperse, spreads or otherwise causes to grow [...] shall be guilty of an offence.”

No third schedule invasive species or species which are at risk of having damaging effects (Kelly et al 2013), were recorded within the proposed development site. The non-native invasive species *Buddleia* was recorded at the site. This species is not included in the Third Schedule of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (SI 477 of 2011). Therefore, its presence at the site does not have the potential to lead to an offence under the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011). However, *Buddleia* is classified as an Amber Threat species by Invasive Species Ireland which under the right ecological conditions may have a negative impact on native species or habitats.

8. Potential Impacts

All potential impacts would relate to direct and indirect impacts to relevant habitats and fauna of the South Dublin Bay SAC, North Dublin Bay SAC, North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA. Impacts are based on the EC (2018), professional judgement and criteria or standards where available.

The potential impacts associated with the proposed development are discussed in the following section with respect to their likelihood to have significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites. As part of the assessment direct, indirect and cumulative impacts were considered. Direct impacts refer to habitat loss or fragmentation arising from land-take requirements for development. Indirect and secondary impacts do not have a straight-line route between cause and effect, and it is potentially more challenging to ensure that all the possible indirect impacts of the project/plan - in combination with other plans and projects have been established.

As part of the assessment the potential for impacts associated with the development were reviewed as outlined below:

- Loss of habitat
- Noise and disturbance
- Surface water run-off
- Spread of invasive species
- In-combination Impacts

8.1 Potential Impacts from Loss of habitat

The proposed development site is not located within a designated site. The habitats recorded within the proposed development site do not correspond to habitats listed on Annex I of the Habitats Directive or to qualifying habitats for the South Dublin Bay SAC and North Dublin Bay SAC. The habitats within the proposed development area are considered of a low value at a local level and are relatively common in the surrounding landscape.

The habitats within the development area may be utilised on occasions by roosting gulls, however the area to be affected is not likely to be a critical feeding resource for these species in the context of the wider landscape.

No foraging habitat of significant value for species listed as qualifying interests for the North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA will be affected. No breeding habitat for species listed as qualifying interests for the North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA will be affected. Therefore, the proposed development will not result in any significant deterioration in habitat quality or loss of habitat within the North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA.

The proposed development will not result in any loss of habitat within Natura 2000 sites. The recorded habitats are considered of low value at a local level and are common in the surrounding landscape. No potential for habitat fragmentation has been identified. Thus no effects on the qualifying interests and conservation of objectives of Natura 2000 site due to habitat loss will occur.

8.2 Potential impacts from noise and disturbance

Potentially increased noise and disturbance associated with the site works could cause disturbance/displacement of fauna. If of sufficient severity, there could be impacts on reproductive success.

The potential effects and impacts of disturbance have been widely recognised in wildlife conservation legislation, as has the need to develop conservation measures for birds whilst taking human activities into account. Article 4.4 of the Bird's Directive (79/409/EEC) requires member states to *"take appropriate steps to avoid... any disturbances affecting the birds, in so far as these would be significant having regard to the objectives of this Article"*. This specifically relates to conservation measures concerning Annex I species.

The South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA and North Bull Island SPA are located 9.8km and 12.7km respectively of the site and no impacts on birds within these SPA's will occur. The wintering birds listed as qualifying interests for the North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA are strongly associated with estuarine shoreline areas or wetlands. No wetland or grassland habitat suitable for inland foraging, were present within the footprint of the proposed development or in proximity to the development site. It is noted that a number of Black-headed Gulls, an SCI species for North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA, were recorded at the site. Gulls are likely to be attracted to waste facilities. However, given that this is unlikely to provide a critical resource for these species and that there is no change to the use of the site, any birds which use this area are already habituated to existing industrial activity.

Given the existing noise and disturbance levels at the site, and the distance from the estuarine waters of North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA, no effect from increased noise and disturbance on bird populations listed as qualifying interests for relevant SPAs during construction or operation is predicted to occur.

8.3 Potential Impacts of Surface Water Run-off/Discharges

Potential impacts on aquatic habitats which can arise from this type of development include increased silt levels in surface water run-off, inadvertent spillages of hydrocarbons from fuel and hydraulic fluid. As noted above in **Section 5.1**, there will be no process or wastewater emissions to water as part of the proposed development.

High levels of silt in surface water run-off from the storage areas, can impact in particular on fish species, in particular salmonids. If of sufficient severity, adult fish could theoretically be affected by increased silt levels as gills may become damaged by exposure to elevated suspended solids levels. If of sufficient severity, aquatic invertebrates may be smothered by excessive deposits of silt from suspended solids. In areas of stony substrate, silt deposits may result in a change in the macro-invertebrate species composition, favouring less diverse assemblages and impacting on sensitive species. Aquatic plant communities may also be affected by increased siltation. Submerged plants may be stunted and photosynthesis may be reduced. It is noted that there are no watercourses within the proposed development site and the closest watercourse, the Coolabaun Stream, is located c.410m from the site.

Elevated silt levels could theoretically, if of sufficient magnitude, result in changes in the ecology of receiving waters. The risk of significant silt levels being deposited within nearby watercourses during the construction phase of the development is considered low and due to the dilution provided in the estuarine environment and naturally fluctuating levels of silt impacts are only likely to arise from extremely severe levels of siltation. Likewise given the location of the works, the distance of the proposed development from the estuarine environment, the robust nature of qualifying habitats (e.g. Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140], Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310], Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima*) [1330], Mediterranean salt meadows) and the dilution provided in the estuarine/marine environment, no impacts on water quality within European sites due to elevated silt levels during construction will occur. Inadvertent spillages of hydrocarbons during construction could introduce toxic chemicals into the aquatic environment via surface water run-off or groundwater contamination and have a direct toxicological impact on habitats and fauna.

It is noted that environmental control measures will be implemented during construction in line with standard guidelines. Whilst the implementation of such measures during construction will assist in minimising impacts on the local environment, the implementation of these measures has not been taken into consideration in this screening report when reaching a conclusion as to the likely impact of the development on Natura 2000 sites. During construction there will be no emissions to on or off-site water features and therefore no impacts on surface waters. While there is potential for localised impacts on groundwater during construction works, given the distance from surface water receptors and the distance from Natura 2000 sites, no potential pathway for significant impacts on South Dublin Bay SAC, North Dublin Bay SAC, North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA have been identified.

The EPA licence will specify emission limit values for the discharge to the sewer designed to prevent pollution of the Uisce Eireann storm sewer and will require routine monitoring to confirm compliance with the limits. The storm water drainage system design includes a range of SuDs measures. The permeable paving that will be provided in the parking areas is designed to filter out silt and adsorb and subsequently biodegrade low level oil contamination caused by small amounts of oil that may leak from parked vehicles. All surface water run-off discharging to the existing Uisce Eireann storm sewer will pass through a Class 1 Full Retention Oil Separator designed to achieve an oil concentration in the outflow of less than 5mg/l. A range of fire safety measures have also been included in the project design to provide adequate firewater retention capacity. A shutoff valve will be installed on the surface water inspection chamber upstream of the soakaway which can be closed in the event of a

fire to prevent the entry of firewater run-off. Shut off valves will also be installed to prevent the entry of firewater run-off to the Uisce Eireann storm and foul sewers.

The SuDs infiltration measures in surface water drainage system will maximise the groundwater recharge within the site. The provision and maintenance of the Class 1 Oil Separator on the outflow to the Uisce Eireann storm sewer will mitigate the impacts of any minor oil leaks that occur from vehicles. In the areas where the permeable paving is provided the biodegradation of hydrocarbons will occur within the subbase. (The measures above and below are 'standard mitigation features' as defined in CJEU Judgment *Eco Advocacy CLG v An Bord Pleanála C-721-21*).

The impermeable paved yards and the building floor will be subject to regular inspection and repair as required by the conditions of the EPA licence. The above ground oil storage bund and the underground drains will be subject to regular inspection, with integrity testing completed every three years as required by the EPA licence.

Given the existing surface water design and monitoring measures within this EPA licensed facility, there is no risk of accidental discharge to the local surface water network or nearby watercourses during operation. A range of SuDS measures have also been built into the project design to protect local groundwaters.

Given the existing surface water drainage measures, the distance from surface water receptors and the distance upstream of Natura 2000 sites the proposed development will not impact surface water quality or affect conservation objectives of the South Dublin Bay SAC, North Dublin Bay SAC, North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA. Therefore, no significant effects on Natura 2000 sites will occur.

8.4 Spread of Invasive Species

No third schedule invasive species or species which are at risk of having damaging effects were recorded within the proposed development site. The medium impact species *Buddleia* was recorded onsite. No precise studies have been done on the level of impact of *Buddleia*, likely due to its long history of naturalisation but it is likely to displace native plants where it is present. However, given the distance from Natura 2000 sites, no pathway for impact has been identified.

8.5 In-combination Impacts

In-combination impacts refer to a series of individually impacts that may, in combination, produce a significant impact. The underlying intention of this in combination provision is to take account of in-combination impacts from existing or proposed plans and projects and these will often only occur over time.

High negative threats, pressures and activities identified for the South Dublin Bay SAC, North Dublin Bay SAC, North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA include roads and motorways, bridges, shipping, urbanised areas, industrial or commercial development, walking, horse-riding, golf courses, land reclamation and accumulation of organic material.

Other developments near the proposed development site and their potential in-combination impacts are listed in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Other developments near site and potential in-combination impacts

Plans and Projects	Key Policies/Issues/Objectives Directly Related to the Conservation of the Natura 2000 Network	Impact
River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027	<p>The project should comply with the environmental objectives of the Irish RBMP which are to be achieved generally by 2027.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure full compliance with relevant EU legislation • Prevent deterioration • Meeting the objectives for designated protected areas • Protect high status waters • Implement targeted actions and pilot schemes in focus sub-catchments aimed at: targeting water bodies close to meeting their objective and addressing more complex issues which will build knowledge for the third cycle. 	<p>The implementation and compliance with key environmental policies, issues and objectives of this management plan will result in positive in-combination effects to European sites. The implementation of this plan will have a positive impact for the biodiversity. It will not contribute to in-combination or cumulative impacts with the proposed development.</p>
Inland Fisheries Ireland Corporate Plan 2021-2025	<p>To ensure that Ireland’s fish populations are managed and protected to ensure their conservation status remains favourable. That they provide a basis for a sustainable world class recreational angling product, and that pristine aquatic habitats are also enjoyed for other recreational uses.</p> <p>To develop and improve fish habitats and ensure that the conditions required for fish populations to thrive are sustained and protected.</p> <p>To grow the number of anglers and ensure the needs of IFI’s other key stakeholders are being met in a sustainable conservation focused manner.</p> <p>EU (Quality of Salmonid Waters) Regulations 1988. All works during development and operation of the project must aim to conserve fish and other species of fauna and flora habitat; biodiversity of inland fisheries and ecosystems and protect spawning salmon and trout.</p>	<p>The implementation and compliance with key environmental issues and objectives of this corporate plan will result in positive on-combination effects to European sites. The implementation of this corporate plan will have a positive impact for biodiversity of inland fisheries and ecosystems. It will not contribute to in-combination or cumulative impacts with the proposed works.</p>
Irish Water Capital Investment Plan 2020-2024	<p>Proposals to upgrade and secure water services and water treatment services countrywide.</p>	<p>Likely net positive impact due to water conservation and more effective treatment of water.</p>
Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP, 2015)	<p>Irish Water has prepared a Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP, 2015), under Section 33 of the Water Service No. 2 Act of 2013 to address the delivery of strategic objectives which will contribute towards improved water quality and biodiversity requirements through reducing:</p>	<p>The WSSP forms the highest tier of asset management plans (Tier 1) which Irish Water prepare and it sets the overarching framework for subsequent detailed implementation plans (Tier 2) and water services projects (Tier 3). The WSSP also sets out the</p>

Plans and Projects	Key Policies/Issues/Objectives Directly Related to the Conservation of the Natura 2000 Network	Impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat loss and disturbance from new / upgraded infrastructure; • Species disturbance; • Changes to water quality or quantity; and <p>Nutrient enrichment /eutrophication.</p>	<p>strategic objectives against which the Irish Water Capital Investment Programme is developed. The current version of the CAP outlines the proposals for capital expenditure in terms of upgrades and new builds within the Irish Water owned assets.</p> <p>Therefore, no adverse significant in-combination effects are envisaged.</p>
NPWS Conservation Management Plans	<p>Conservation Management Plans have not been fully prepared for the European sites being assessed. However, conservation objectives are not available for all sites.</p>	<p>The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest.</p> <p>A site-specific conservation objective aims to define favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at that site. The maintenance of habitats and species within Natura 2000 sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.</p> <p>The resultant effects of conservation objectives are a net positive and there is no potential for in combination effects on European sites.</p>
Commercial and Residential Applications Under consideration	<p>A search of South Dublin County Council's online planning registry map was carried out for applications that have been permitted in the last 10 years or are pending a decision (within 1km radius)</p> <p>Our search has resulted in identifying the following applications, which may be of relevance to the assessments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SD23A/0135 – warehouse expansion 2. SD23A/0071 – change of use to recycling facility 3. SD23A/0025 – new TII bus interchange 4. SD23A/0127 – alterations to Reg. Ref. SD22A/0099 including car parking alterations (minor 	<p>Future developments will only be granted permission where discharges from same meet with relevant water quality standards. The long-term in-combination impact is predicted to be negligible.</p>

Plans and Projects	Key Policies/Issues/Objectives Directly Related to the Conservation of the Natura 2000 Network	Impact
	but maybe relevant) 5. SD23A/0179 – 3 light industrial units additional to Reg. Ref. SD22A/0099 masterplan 6. SD22A/0099 – 5 warehouses and ancillary office units 7. SD21A/0213 – additional bus depot parking for Go Ahead Ireland	

The potential for the proposed development to indirectly impact the South Dublin Bay SAC, North Dublin Bay SAC, North Bull Island SPA and the South Dublin Bay & River Tolka Estuary SPA has been assessed. Potential in-combination impacts on the sites may arise owing to an alteration to water quality or quantity. Deterioration in water quality can occur as an indirect consequence of point source or diffuse pollution, which in turn changes the aquatic environment and reduces its capacity to support certain plants and animals. This leads to potential negative consequences for the qualifying interests that rely on the maintenance of water quality within the Natura 2000 site.

The area surrounding the proposed development is heavily urbanised with a mixture of commercial properties scattered within, which have the potential to produce “in combination” effects to water quality in Dublin Bay. Sustainable drainage proposals at this site will ensure that operational surface water runoff arising from this development will be treated prior to discharge to the existing storm sewer. In the absence of any significant impact associated with this project no in-combination impacts on water quality have been identified. Similarly, no significant in-combination impacts in relation to noise and disturbance have been identified.

9. Screening conclusion and statement

This AA screening report has been prepared to assess whether the proposed development, individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, and in view of best scientific knowledge, is likely to have a significant effect on any European site(s).

The screening exercise was completed in compliance with the relevant European Commission guidance, national guidance, and case law. The potential impacts of the proposed development have been considered in the context of the European sites potentially affected, their qualifying interests or special conservation interests, and their conservation objectives.

Through an assessment of the source-pathway-receptor model, which considered the ZoI effects from the proposed development and the potential in-combination effects with other plans or projects, the following findings were reported:

- The proposed development either alone or in-combination with other plans and/or projects, does not have the potential to significantly affect any European Site, in light of their conservation objectives.

Therefore, a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is deemed not to be required.

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Appendices

Appendix 1– Natura 2000 Site Synopses

Site Name: North Dublin Bay SAC

Site Code: 000206

This site covers the inner part of north Dublin Bay, the seaward boundary extending from the Bull Wall lighthouse across to the Martello Tower at Howth Head. The North Bull Island is the focal point of this site.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

- [1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats
- [1210] Annual Vegetation of Drift Lines
- [1310] Salicornia Mud
- [1330] Atlantic Salt Meadows
- [1410] Mediterranean Salt Meadows
- [2110] Embryonic Shifting Dunes
- [2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)
- [2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)*
- [2190] Humid Dune Slacks
- [1395] Petalwort (*Petalophyllum ralfsii*)

North Bull Island is a sandy spit which formed after the building of the South Wall and Bull Wall in the 18th and 19th centuries. It now extends for about 5 km in length and is up to 1 km wide in places. A well-developed and dynamic dune system stretches along the seaward side of the island. Various types of dunes occur, from fixed dune grassland to pioneer communities on foredunes. Marram Grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) is dominant on the outer dune ridges, with Lyme-grass (*Leymus arenarius*) and Sand Couch (*Elymus farctus*) on the foredunes. Behind the first dune ridge, plant diversity increases with the appearance of such species as Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Common Restharrow (*Ononis repens*), Yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*). In these grassy areas and slacks, the scarce Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) occurs.

About 1 km from the tip of the island, a large dune slack with a rich flora occurs, usually referred to as the 'Alder Marsh' because of the presence of Alder trees (*Alnus glutinosa*). The water table is very near the surface and is only slightly brackish. Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus maritimus*) is the dominant species, with Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) being frequent. The orchid flora is notable and includes Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*), Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*), Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) and Marsh Orchids (*Dactylorhiza* spp.).

Saltmarsh extends along the length of the landward side of the island. The edge of the marsh is marked by an eroding edge which varies from 20 cm to 60 cm high. The marsh can be zoned into different levels according to the vegetation types present. On the lower marsh, Glasswort (*Salicornia europaea*), Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*), Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*) and Greater Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia media*) are the main species. Higher up in the middle marsh Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*), Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*), Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*) and Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) appear. Above the mark of the normal high tide, species such as Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*) and Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*) are found, while on the extreme upper marsh, the rushes *Juncus maritimus* and *J. gerardi* are dominant. Towards the tip of the island, the saltmarsh grades naturally into fixed dune vegetation.

The habitat 'annual vegetation of drift lines' is found in places, along the length of Dollymount Strand, with species such as Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*), Oraches (*Atriplex* spp.) and Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*).

The island shelters two intertidal lagoons which are divided by a solid causeway. The sediments of the lagoons are mainly sands with a small and varying mixture of silt and clay. The north lagoon has an area known as the "Salicornia flat", which is dominated by *Salicornia dolichostachya*, a pioneer glasswort species, and covers about 25 ha. Beaked Tasselweed (*Ruppia maritima*) occurs in this area, along with some Narrow-leaved Eelgrass (*Zostera angustifolia*). Dwarf Eelgrass (*Z. noltii*) also occurs in Sutton Creek. Common Cordgrass (*Spartina anglica*) occurs in places but its growth is controlled by management. Green algal mats (*Enteromorpha* spp., *Ulva lactuca*) cover large areas of the flats during summer. These sediments have a rich macrofauna, with high densities of Lugworms (*Arenicola marina*) in parts of the north lagoon. Mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) occur in places, along with bivalves such as *Cerastoderma edule*, *Macoma balthica* and *Scrobicularia plana*. The small gastropod *Hydrobia ulvae* occurs in high densities in places, while the crustaceans *Corophium volutator* and *Carcinus maenas* are common. The sediments on the seaward side of North Bull Island are mostly sands. The site extends below the low spring tide mark to include an area of the sublittoral zone.

Three rare plant species which are legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999 have been recorded on the North Bull Island. These are Lesser Centaury (*Centaureum pulchellum*), Red Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis angustifolia*) and Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*). Two further species listed as threatened in the Red Data Book, Wild Clary/Sage (*Salvia verbenaca*) and Spring Vetch (*Vicia lathyroides*), have also been recorded. A rare liverwort, *Petalophyllum ralfsii*, was first recorded from the North Bull Island in 1874 and has recently been confirmed as still present. This species is of high conservation value as it is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The North Bull is the only known extant site for the species in Ireland away from the western seaboard.

North Dublin Bay is of international importance for waterfowl. During the 1994/95 to 1996/97 period the following species occurred in internationally important numbers (figures are average maxima): Brent Goose 2,333; Knot 4,423; Bar-tailed Godwit 1,586. A further 14 species occurred in nationally important concentrations - Shelduck 1505; Wigeon 1,166; Teal 1,512; Pintail 334; Shoveler 239; Oystercatcher 2,190; Ringed Plover 346; Grey Plover 816; Sanderling 357; Dunlin 6,238; Black-tailed Godwit 156; Curlew 1,193; Turnstone 197 and Redshank 1,175. Some of these species frequent South Dublin Bay and the River Tolka Estuary for feeding and/or roosting purposes (mostly Brent Goose, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Sanderling and Dunlin).

The tip of the North Bull Island is a traditional nesting site for Little Tern. A high total of 88 pairs nested in 1987. However, nesting attempts have not been successful since the early 1990s. Ringed Plover, Shelduck, Mallard, Skylark, Meadow Pipit and Stonechat also nest. A well-known population of Irish Hare is resident on the island.

The invertebrates of the North Bull Island have been studied and the island has been shown to contain at least seven species of regional or national importance in Ireland (from the Orders Diptera, Hymenoptera and Hemiptera).

The main land uses of this site are amenity activities and nature conservation. The North Bull Island is the main recreational beach in Co. Dublin and is used throughout the year. Much of the land surface of the island is taken up by two golf courses. Two separate Statutory Nature Reserves cover much of the island east of the Bull Wall and the surrounding intertidal flats. The site is used regularly for educational purposes. North Bull Island has been designated a Special Protection Area under the E.U. Birds Directive and it is also a statutory Wildfowl Sanctuary, a Ramsar Convention site, a Biogenetic Reserve, a Biosphere Reserve and a Special Area Amenity Order site.

This site is an excellent example of a coastal site with all the main habitats represented. The site holds good examples of nine habitats that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive; one of these is listed with priority status. Several of the wintering bird species have populations of international importance, while some of the invertebrates are of national importance. The site contains a numbers of rare and scarce plants including some which are legally protected. Its proximity to the capital city makes North Dublin Bay an excellent site for educational studies and research.

Site Name: South Dublin Bay SAC

Site Code: 000210

This site lies south of the River Liffey in Co. Dublin, and extends from the South Wall to the west pier at Dun Laoghaire. It is an intertidal site with extensive areas of sand and mudflats. The sediments are predominantly sands but grade to sandy muds near the shore at Merrion Gates. The main channel which drains the area is Cockle Lake.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

- [1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats
- [1210] Annual vegetation of drift lines
- [1310] *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand
- [2110] Embryonic shifting dunes

The bed of Dward Eelgrass (*Zostera noltii*) found below Merrion Gates is the largest stand on the east coast. Green algae (*Enteromorpha* spp. and *Ulva lactuca*) are distributed throughout the area at a low density. Fucoid algae occur on the rocky shore in the Maretimo to Dún Laoghaire area. Species include *Fucus spiralis*, *F. vesiculosus*, *F. serratus*, *Ascophyllum nodosum* and *Pelvetia canaliculata*.

Several small, sandy beaches with incipient dune formation occur in the northern and western sectors of the site, notably at Poolbeg, Irishtown and Merrion/ Booterstown. The formation at Booterstown is very recent. Drift line vegetation occurs in association with the embryonic and incipient fore dunes. Typically drift lines occur in a band approximately 5 m wide, though at Booterstown this zone is wider in places. The habitat occurs just above the High Water Mark and below the area of embryonic dune. Species present are Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*), Frosted Orache (*Atriplex laciniata*), Spear-leaved Orache (*A. prostrata*), Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*) and Fat Hen (*Chenopodium album*). Also occurring is Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*), Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*) and Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*). A small area of pioneer saltmarsh now occurs in the lee of an embryonic sand dune just north of Booterstown Station. This early stage of saltmarsh development is here characterised by the presence of pioneer stands of glassworts (*Salicornia* spp.) occurring below an area of drift line vegetation. As this is of very recent origin, it covers a small area but ample areas of substrate and shelter are available for the further development of this habitat.

Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*), Cockles (*Cerastoderma edule*) and annelids and other bivalves are frequent throughout the site. The small gastropod *Hydrobia ulvae* occurs on the muddy sands off Merrion Gates.

South Dublin Bay is an important site for waterfowl. Although birds regularly commute between the south bay and the north bay, recent studies have shown that certain populations which occur in the south bay spend most of their time there. The principal species are Oystercatcher (1215), Ringed Plover (120), Sanderling (344), Dunlin (2628) and Redshank (356) (average winter peaks 1996/97 and 1997/98). Up to 100 Turnstones are usual in the south bay during winter. Brent Goose regularly occur in numbers of international importance (average peak 299). Bar-tailed Godwit (565), a species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, also occur.

Large numbers of gulls roost in South Dublin Bay, e.g. 4,500 Black-headed Gulls in February 1990; 500 Common Gulls in February 1991. It is also an important tern roost in the autumn, regularly holding 2000-3000 terns including Roseate Terns, a species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. South Dublin Bay is largely protected as a Special Protection Area.

At low tide the inner parts of the south bay are used for amenity purposes. Baitdigging is a regular activity on the sandy flats. At high tide some areas have windsurfing and jet-skiing.

This site is a fine example of a coastal system, with extensive sand and mudflats, and incipient dune formations. South Dublin Bay is also an internationally important bird site.

Site Name: South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA

Site Code: 004024

The South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA comprises a substantial part of Dublin Bay. It includes the intertidal area between the River Liffey and Dun Laoghaire, and the estuary of the River Tolka to the north of the River Liffey, as well as Booterstown Marsh. A portion of the shallow marine waters of the bay is also included.

In the south bay, the intertidal flats extend for almost 3 km at their widest. The sediments are predominantly well-aerated sands. Several permanent channels exist, the largest being Cockle Lake. A small sandy beach occurs at Merrion Gates, while some bedrock shore occurs near Dun Laoghaire. The landward boundary is now almost entirely artificially embanked. There is a bed of Dwarf Eelgrass (*Zostera noltii*) below Merrion Gates which is the largest stand on the east coast. Green algae (*Ulva* spp.) are distributed throughout the area at a low density. The macroinvertebrate fauna is well-developed, and is characterised by annelids such as Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*), Nephthys spp. and Sand Mason (*Lanice conchilega*), and bivalves, especially Cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*) and Baltic Tellin (*Macoma balthica*). The small gastropod Spire Shell (*Hydrobia ulvae*) occurs on the muddy sands off Merrion Gates, along with the crustacean *Corophium volutator*. Sediments in the Tolka Estuary vary from soft thixotropic muds with a high organic content in the inner estuary to exposed, well-aerated sands off the Bull Wall. The site includes Booterstown Marsh, an enclosed area of saltmarsh and muds that is cut off from the sea by the Dublin/Wexford railway line, being linked only by a channel to the east, the Nutley stream. Sea water incursions into the marsh occur along this stream at high tide. An area of grassland at Poolbeg, north of Irishtown Nature Park, is also included in the site.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Light-bellied Brent Goose, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Roseate Tern, Common Tern and Arctic Tern. The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands, and as these form part of the SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds.

The site is an important site for wintering waterfowl, being an integral part of the internationally important Dublin Bay complex – all counts for wintering waterbirds are five year mean peaks for the period 1995/96 to 1999/2000. Although birds regularly commute between the south bay and the north bay, recent studies have shown that certain populations which occur in the south bay spend most of their time there. An internationally important population of Light-bellied Brent Goose (368) occurs regularly and newly arrived birds in the autumn feed on the Eelgrass bed at Merrion. At the time of designation the site supported nationally important numbers of a further nine species: Oystercatcher (1,145), Ringed Plover (161), Grey Plover (45), Knot (548), Sanderling (321), Dunlin (1,923), Bar-tailed Godwit (766), Redshank (260) and Black-headed Gull (3,040). Other species occurring in smaller numbers include Great Crested Grebe (21), Curlew (127) and Turnstone (52). Little Egret, a species which has recently colonised Ireland, also occurs at this site.

South Dublin Bay is a significant site for wintering gulls, with a nationally important population of Black-headed Gull, but also Common Gull (330) and Herring Gull (348). Mediterranean Gull is also recorded from here, occurring through much of the year, but especially in late winter/spring and again in late summer into winter.

Both Common Tern and Arctic Tern breed in Dublin Docks, on a man-made mooring structure known as the E.S.B. dolphin – this is included within the site. Small numbers of Common Tern and Arctic Tern were recorded nesting on this dolphin in the 1980s. A survey in 1995 recorded nationally important numbers of Common Tern nesting here (52 pairs). The breeding population of Common Tern at this site has increased, with 216 pairs recorded in 2000. This increase was largely due to the ongoing management of the site for breeding terns. More recent data highlights this site as one of the most important Common Tern sites in the country with over 400 pairs recorded here in 2007.

South Dublin Bay is an important staging/passage site for a number of tern species in the autumn (mostly late July to September). The origin of many of the birds is likely to be the Dublin breeding sites (Rockabill and the Dublin

Docks) though numbers suggest that the site is also used by birds from other sites, perhaps outside the state. This site is selected for designation for its autumn tern populations: Roseate Tern (2,000 in 1999), Common Tern (5,000 in 1999) and Arctic Tern (20,000 in 1996).

The South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA is of ornithological importance as it supports an internationally important population of Light-bellied Brent Goose and nationally important populations of a further nine wintering species. Furthermore, the site supports a nationally important colony of breeding Common Tern and is an internationally important passage/staging site for three tern species. It is of note that four of the species that regularly occur at this site are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Tern, Arctic Tern and Roseate Tern. Sandymount Strand/Tolka Estuary is also a Ramsar Convention site.

Site Name: North Bull Island SPA

Site Code: 004006

This site covers all of the inner part of north Dublin Bay, with the seaward boundary extending from the Bull Wall lighthouse across to Drumleck Point at Howth Head. The North Bull Island sand spit is a relatively recent depositional feature, formed as a result of improvements to Dublin Port during the 18th and 19th centuries. It is almost 5 km long and 1 km wide and runs parallel to the coast between Clontarf and Sutton. Part of the interior of the island has been converted to golf courses.

Saltmarsh extends along the length of the landward side of the island and provides the main roost site for wintering birds in Dublin Bay. The island shelters two intertidal lagoons which are divided by a solid causeway. These lagoons provide the main feeding grounds for the wintering waterfowl. The sediments of the lagoons are mainly sands with a small and varying mixture of silt and clay. Green algal mats (*Ulva* spp.) are a feature of the flats during summer. These sediments have a rich macro-invertebrate fauna, with high densities of Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*) and Ragworm (*Hediste diversicolor*).

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Light-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Teal, Pintail, Shoveler, Oystercatcher, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank, Turnstone and Black-headed Gull. The site is also of special conservation interest for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 wintering waterbirds. The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands and, as these form part of this SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds.

The North Bull Island SPA is of international importance for waterfowl on the basis that it regularly supports in excess of 20,000 waterfowl. The site supports internationally important populations of three species, Light-bellied Brent Goose (1,548), Black-tailed Godwit (367) and Bar-tailed Godwit (1,529) - all figures are mean peaks for the five winters between 1995/96 and 1999/2000. The site is one of the most important in the country for Light-bellied Brent Goose. A further 14 species have populations of national importance – Shelduck (1,259), Teal (953), Pintail (233), Shoveler (141), Oystercatcher (1,784), Grey Plover (517), Golden Plover (2,033), Knot (2,837), Sanderling (141), Dunlin (4,146), Curlew (937), Redshank (1,431), Turnstone (157) and Black-headed Gull (2,196). The populations of Pintail and Knot are of particular note as they comprise 14% and 10% respectively of the all-Ireland population totals. Other species that occur regularly in winter include Grey Heron, Little Egret, Cormorant, Wigeon, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Ringed Plover and Greenshank. Gulls are a feature of the site during winter and, along with the nationally important population of Black-headed Gull (2,196), other species that occur include Common Gull (332) and Herring Gull (331). While some of the birds also frequent South Dublin Bay and the River Tolka Estuary for feeding and/or roosting purposes, the majority remain within the site for much of the winter. The wintering bird populations have been monitored more or less continuously since the late 1960s and the site is now surveyed each winter as part of the larger Dublin Bay complex.

The North Bull Island SPA is a regular site for passage waders, especially Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank. These are mostly observed in single figures in autumn but occasionally in spring or winter.

The site formerly had an important colony of Little Tern but breeding has not occurred in recent years. Several pairs of Ringed Plover breed, along with Shelduck in some years. Breeding passerines include Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat and Reed Bunting. The island is a regular wintering site for Short-eared Owl, with up to 5 present in some winters.

The North Bull Island SPA is an excellent example of an estuarine complex and is one of the top sites in Ireland for wintering waterfowl. It is of international importance on account of both the total number of waterfowl and the individual populations of Light-bellied Brent Goose, Black-tailed Godwit and Bar-tailed Godwit that use it. Also of significance is the regular presence of several species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, notably Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit, but also Ruff and Short-eared Owl. North Bull Island is a Ramsar Convention site, and part of the North Bull Island SPA is a Statutory Nature Reserve and a Wildfowl Sanctuary.