



Kilkenny County Council

Urlingford Town Centre Masterplan

Screening for Appropriate Assessment

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RSK



RSK GENERAL NOTES

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This work has been undertaken in accordance with the quality management system of RSK Ireland.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This statement to inform a Screening for Appropriate Assessment report has been prepared by RSK Ireland on behalf of Turley and their client, Kilkenny County Council (the applicant), as part of the Urlingford Town Centre Masterplan . The aim of this report is to identify if there are any likely significant effects from the proposed works on any Natura 2000 sites.

In accordance with their obligations under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (SI 477/2011), the planning authority must assess whether the proposed masterplan could have 'likely significant effects' on any Natura 2000 sites. This document provides supporting information to assist the authority with an Appropriate Assessment screening exercise, including: a description of the plan, a review of the site's environmental setting, details of Natura 2000 sites within the potential zone of effect based on an appraisal of source-pathway-receptor relationships, and an assessment of potential impacts.

The Masterplan area is not within or adjacent to any European sites, and no feasible pathways for indirect impacts were identified to any European sites. Therefore, we conclude that the plan poses no risk of direct or indirect impacts on any European sites, and that Appropriate Assessment is not required.

When considering planning permission for individual projects within the Masterplan Area, Kilkenny County Council will carry out additional site-specific screening exercises in order to confirm that this conclusion remains valid.



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to Appropriate Assessment

- 1.1.1 Approximately 10% of the land area of Ireland is included in the European Network of Natura 2000 sites, which includes Special Protection Areas (SPAs) to protect important areas for birds, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to protect a range of habitats and species, and RAMSAR to protect wetlands. Legal protection for these sites is provided by the European Council *Birds Directive* (79/409/EEC) and E.C. *Habitats Directive* (92/43/EEC, as amended), which are jointly transposed into Irish law by the *European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011* (SI 477/2011, as amended).
- 1.1.2 Regulation 42 (1) states that: “*Screening for Appropriate Assessment of a plan or project for which an application for consent is received [...] shall be carried out by the public authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the site, if that plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on [any Natura 2000 sites].*” To ensure compliance with this regulation, public authorities must screen all land-use plans for potential impacts on Natura 2000 sites.
- 1.1.3 This document provides background information to support a ‘Screening for Appropriate Assessment’ for the Urlingford Town Centre Masterplan involving the construction and development of an urban regeneration scheme. It includes a description of the plan, a review of the site’s environmental setting, details of Natura 2000 sites within the zone of influence of the project (i.e. the potential zone of impact), an appraisal of source-pathway-receptor relationships, and an assessment of potential impacts.

1.2 Statement of Authority

- 1.2.1 This report was written Robyn Maby. Robyn is an Assistant Ecologist at RSK Ireland and has an MSc in Ecological Management and Conservation Biology from Queen’s University Belfast. Robyn worked for several years at a conservation charity and has experience in writing species-specific survey reports, Appropriate Assessments, Biodiversity Checklists, Habitats Regulation Assessments, and Biodiversity Management Plans. Robyn is a qualifying member of CIEEM.
- 1.2.2 Technical and quality review has been undertaken by Emma Mundy, an ecologist at RSK ADAS Ltd. She has an ecologically relevant B.Sc. and MSc from Napier University and is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and a Chartered Ecologist and Environmentalist. Her experience in commercial consultancy exceeds 16 years. She was lead ecologist for a number of solar farm and residential development projects requiring ecological assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessments.



1.3 Methods

1.3.1 This report has been prepared with reference to the following guidelines:

- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland (Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government, 2009)*
- *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4), E.C., 2002.*
- *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, and Coastal (Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, 2019)*

It also heeds recent case law (*Case C-323/17 People Over Wind and Sweetman*) which establishes that a Screening for Appropriate Assessment exercise cannot take account of proposed or standard site-management or mitigation procedures when making any assessment of likely significant impact on a Natura 2000 site. To quote the determination: “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 must be interpreted as meaning that, in order to determine whether it is necessary to carry out, subsequently, an appropriate assessment of the implications, for a site concerned, of a plan or project, it is not appropriate, at the screening stage, to take account of the measures intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of the plan or project on that site”.

1.3.2 In accordance with Section 3.2 of *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland*, the screening exercise was conducted using the following steps:

- Description of the plan and local site characteristics.
- Identification of relevant Natura 2000 sites, and compilation of information on their qualifying interests and conservation objectives.
- Assessment of potential impacts upon Natura 2000 sites, including:
 - Direct impacts (e.g. loss of habitat area, fragmentation).
 - Indirect impacts (e.g. disturbance of fauna, pollution of surface water).
 - Cumulative / 'in-combination' effects associated with other concurrent projects.
- Screening Statement with conclusions.

1.3.3 A desk-based study was carried out using data from the following sources:

- The building and landscape plans for the proposed scheme, and specialist reports prepared in support of any planning application for it.
- Qualifying interests / conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites from www.npws.ie.
- Bedrock, soil, subsoil, surface water and ground water maps from the Geological Survey of Ireland webmapping service (www.gsi.ie/mapping.htm), the National Biodiversity Data Centre (<http://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/>), and the Environmental Protection Agency web viewer (<http://gis.epa.ie/Envision/>).



- The *Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027*; and details of proposed developments from same planning authority's online register.

1.3.4 All web-based resources were accessed in December 2022 and January 2023.

1.4 Limitations

1.4.1 It is important to note that this screening exercise was predominantly carried out using desktop resources, including information from public sources (e.g. online mapping systems). This is standard practice for Stage 1 of the Appropriate Assessment process, for which the purpose is to identify any risk of significant impacts. If such a risk is identified as part of this assessment, it would proceed to Stage 2 of the process, and any required site inspection would then be carried out.

1.4.2 As the plans are only in the preliminary design stage nothing has been finalised and many of the proposed plans are likely to change. Therefore, if significant changes do occur, an updated screening will likely be required.



2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

2.1 Environmental Setting

Site location and surroundings

- 2.1.1 The Masterplan area encompasses the whole town of Urlingford, Co. Kilkenny (Figure 2). Urlingford, Co. Kilkenny (hereafter referred to as “the site”) is approximately 65 ha, it is centred around the R639, which functions as the main road through the town with the river Ardreagh running through the middle south to north and the river Goul directly to the west also flowing south to north, eventually joining the River Barrow and River Nore (Figure 2). The site is predominantly residential and commercial with built and artificial habitats, with the surrounding area being mostly of an agricultural landscape.
- 2.1.2 In the *Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027* the site is zoned as ‘Rural Towns and Villages’.

Geology and soils

- 2.1.3 Mapping at 1:100,000 suggests that the bedrock of the majority of the town is dark shaly micrite, peloidal limestone, with a smaller area to the west being pale-grey cherty crinoidal limestone (online information from the Geological Survey of Ireland websites <https://www.gsi.ie/en-ie/data-and-maps/Pages/default.aspx>).
- 2.1.4 Limestone is considered to have good porosity and permeability, meaning that it is relatively easy for water from the site to enter deep aquifers.

Hydrology

- 2.1.5 A tributary of the River Goul passes through the center of the Site (underneath the Urlingford Arms and visible on the other side of the road at “Goul Garden”). This tributary (the Ardreagh) flows into the Goul approximately 200m to the north of the town, and continuing before feeding into the river Erkina, where it received protections as part of the River Barrow and Nore SAC after approx. 15km. The River Goul also extends to the west of the site and makes up the border between Counties Kilkenny and Tipperary. The Borrisbeg tributary runs approximately 1.7 km to the east of the site and flows from The Loughans SAC into the river Goul approximately 1.5 km to the north of the site (Figure 1).
- 2.1.6 Using the Water Framework Directive maps (<https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/Water>, accessed January 2023), the status assessments for 2016 – 2021 classify water quality in the Ardreagh, Borrisbeg and Erkina as “moderate”, the Goul’s status is either “poor” or “moderate” at different sections. The water quality in the river Nore however, is classified as “good”.
- 2.1.7 The entirety of the approximately 100 km stretch of the River Nore from sea to the northern edge of the 15 km site buffer zone site is classified as an SAC.



2.2 Description of the Plan

2.2.1 The Masterplan has outlined a range of objectives, themes and proposed activities to improve access and amenity in the area and to address dereliction in the town by refurbishing/repurposing vacant and/or derelict buildings and the development of the underutilised infill/backland areas. Key development activities within the masterplan are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Masterplan Objectives, Themes and Activities

| Placemaking Theme | ID | Project Theme | Description of Proposed Activities |
|---------------------------|----|---|--|
| Streets and Public Spaces | 1 | Public Realm Enhancement of Main Street, Mill Road (part) and New Road (part) | Preparation of a comprehensive public realm enhancement scheme in order to provide an attractive Town centre. The scheme will include widened pavements, will support active and sustainable travel choices designed to serve the whole community. |
| | 2 | Town Squares / Raised Tables | Key areas of public realm developed at key nodes or a civic building. The Town Squares would be developed as part of the public realm enhancement of Main Street, Mill Road (part) and New Road (part) |
| | 3 | Green Loop | Develop a green loop along the River Goul providing a dedicated cycle and pedestrian greenway for residents and visitors alike |
| | 4 | New Town Park | A new park located close to Main Street, along the proposed Green Loop and connected to the Community Centre would provide a dedicated public green space in the centre of the Town. It will include a playground and a pavilion (potentially providing for bike hire, tourism support and facilities to support park users) |
| Movement | 5 | New Town Car Park | Develop a new car park to provide affordable, accessible and appropriate car parking in the Town Centre. The new car park will allow for public realm enhancement and provide a "park and walk/cycle" facility. |
| | 6 | Reducing the impact of on-street parking | Rebalancing the street to reduce the impact of on-street parking by providing spaces in a more compact arrangement, allowing the use of these spaces for short-stay visitors. |
| | 7 | Pedestrian and Cycle Network Improvements | New and enhanced footpaths are required on Mill Road to provide safe access to the Community Centre and beyond to the proposed Green Loop and existing heritage assets such as Urlingford Castle |
| | 8 | School Street | It is proposed that at key times of the day the New Road becomes a 'School Street' creating a safer and calmer route to school for children travelling to school |



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| | | | (potentially school traffic could travel in a 'one-way' manner using Lumper Lane). Set-down and pick up parking for the school is also proposed. |
| | 9 | Explore Urlingford 'Bike Hub' Concept | A purpose built or refurbished hub facility could support these visitors and attract new business to the town. Bicycle Hire / Shared Bicycle Facility – Promote sustainable travel and enable visitors to explore the Town by providing a bicycle hire / shared bicycle facility with appropriately located parking/docking stations. Engage with Bolt or other to explore feasibility. |
| | 10 | Traffic Calming | Traffic calming measures to reduce speed of vehicles approaching town. A number of interventions including signage, speed bumps, and carriageway narrowing could be employed to achieve this. |
| | 11 | Wayfinding | Improve signage, facilities and services which support sustainable movement, interpretation of heritage. Also exploring technology as a way of improving overall ease and experience. |
| Heritage and Identity | 12 | Shopfront Enhancement | Carry out shopfront enhancement utilising government supports and funding. Preparation of a shopfront enhancement strategy should be considered which includes site-specific guidance for Urlingford. |
| | 13 | Town Gateways | The Northern Gateway and the Southern approach to the Town should be redesigned in order to provide an attractive approach to the Town. The use of sculpture and / or public art should be considered in combination with planting. |
| | 14 | Celebrating Heritage | Celebrate and realising Urlingford's culture and heritage by preparing a Culture and Heritage Strategy for the Town. Identify, adapt, conserve / restore and reuse historic buildings and use interpretation and heritage trails to tell the story of the Town. |
| Built Form and Land Use | 15 | The Old Bank | The Community Centre is in need of refurbishment to bring it up to a standard that will ensure it continues to be used by the community of Urlingford. |
| | 16 | Community Centre | The Community Centre is in need of refurbishment to bring it up to a standard that will ensure it continues to be used by the community of Urlingford. |
| | 17 | Improved Local Convenience Retailing | Engage with national businesses in order to understand the feasibility of establishing a grocery store / supermarket at the site of the former Josephine's Restaurant. |
| | 18 | Hotel Accommodation Feasibility Study | A feasibility study should be undertaken to explore the potential of an existing or a new (infill) building to provide a boutique hotel or hostel accommodation, in |



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| | | | turn supporting potential tourism initiatives in the Town. |
| | 19 | Promote Compact Town Centre Development | The Urlingford Town Centre First Plan shows how a range of potential development sites might come forward. |
| | 20 | Provide a mix of well-designed housing types | <p>Backland / Infill housing opportunity - Opportunity for infill / backland housing providing a range of housing types, and adjacent workspace development which creates a new direct walking link from Main Street and to the School.</p> <p>Self-build homes opportunity - A number of sites within the town provide an opportunity for housing as individual development or self-build housing</p> |
| Vibrancy | 21 | Targeting Programme to Address Vacancy & Dereliction | This is a key priority under the national Town Centre First policy framework. A Vacancy and Dereliction Survey has been prepared alongside this plan. Feedback from the local community also revealed the issue as a local priority for those who live and work in the town. |
| | 22 | Business Development Officer | Appoint / recruit a Business Development Officer for the Town. The Business Development Officer role should be located at the Bank (working hub) to support new and existing and new businesses, individuals and organisations in the Town. The Business Development Officer would play a key role in liaising with the LEO. |
| | 23 | Broadband | Urlingford must prioritise the provision of Fibre Broadband in the Town. Improving local connectivity to principal communication (broadband), is essential to promote new economic opportunities from digital connectivity. |
| | 24 | Cycling and Walking Trails | – Design and implement cycling and walking trails and loops. Active Tourism initiatives should highlight historic assets. Consider inclusion of off-road biking areas within proposed Green Loop. |
| | 25 | Heritage Trail | Tell Urlingford's stories using interpretation, signage, wayfinding. |
| | 26 | Explore Potential for a New Culture and Events Centre | Potentially related to Action 17, a feasibility study to explore the potential for a new culture and events centre in the town. With so many heritage assets and with its strategic location close to Kilkenny, and with links between these centres being improved, the business case for a new cultural and events centre should be explored. |
| | 27 | Events | Enhance the town's programme of events and activities which celebrate aspects of the town's identity |



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| | | | and appeals to a range of people in the community as well as visitors. |
| | 28 | 'Place-Brand', Promotion and Marketing | Commission marketing and branding strategy for the Town. |
| Sustainability and Resilience | 29 | Governance | Support groups and organisations established to improve and develop the Town of Urlingford including the Town Team and the Tidy Towns. Consider establishing a 'Neighbourhood Watch' Network with input from KCC and local Gardai. |
| | 30 | School Capacity | Ensure sufficient school capacity and designate sufficient lands surrounding the existing National School in order to allow for extension of same. |
| | 31 | Health and Well-Being | Provide the spaces, buildings, services and facility and amenity necessary to provide a Town that supports the health and well-being of its residents and visitors. Prepare a Health and Well-being Audit to identify potential enhancement opportunities. |
| | 32 | Greening and Sustainable Drainage | Prepare a plan to introduce, greening, planting, growing and sustainable drainage to create an attractive streetscape, improve biodiversity, create shaded areas, and help mitigate the effects of climate change such as flooding and extreme heat. |
| | 33 | EV Charging | Prepare a plan to introduce, greening, planting, growing and sustainable drainage to create an attractive streetscape, improve biodiversity, create shaded areas, and help mitigate the effects of climate change such as flooding and extreme heat. |
| | 34 | Circular Economy | Embracing the circular economy approach to prevent, minimise and recycle waste. |

2.2.2 At the time of writing, there has been no confirmation of surface water discharge proposals. However, considering there is existing water sewer infrastructure for the town, it will be possible for newly built infrastructures to be connected to these

2.3 Other Nearby Developments (Potential In-combination Effects)

2.3.1 Within c. 2 km of the site, any active planning applications for relevant development proposals are discussed in section 4.3.

3.0 IDENTIFICATION OF EUROPEAN SITES

3.1 Natura 2000 sites in the surrounding area

3.1.1 There are no Natura 2000 sites within or adjacent to the site. Sites within the surrounding area are listed in Table 2 and mapped in Figure 2. Potential source-pathway-receptor relationships to these sites are reviewed in Section 3.2.

3.1.2 A 15 km radius of the surrounding area was considered for appropriate assessment purposes. This distance was deemed to be sufficient to cover all likely significant effects which may arise from the implementation of the development on Natura 2000 sites. This distance was applied on a precautionary principle as a result of:

- The proximity of the Application Site to the River Ardreagh and River Goul which both eventually flow into the River Barrow and River Nore SAC 15 km north of the site. Hydrological pathways extend over greater distances than air/noise pollution pathways and therefore, 15 km was deemed to be a suitable distance.

3.1.3 The information in Table 2 used for the assessment has been based on the site information sheets available online from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form.

Table 2: Natura 2000 sites within 15 km of the site.

| Natura 2000 Site | Distance | Area (Ha) | Site No. | Qualifying Feature(s) |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------|--|
| The Loughans SAC | 2.9 km east | Approx. 44 Hectares | 000407 | Qualifying interests: Turloughs [3180] |
| Spahill & Clomantagh Hill SAC | 4.9 km north-east | Approx. 146 Hectares | 000849 | Qualifying interests: Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) [6210] |
| Cullahill Mountain SAC | 9.6 km north-east | Approx. 55 Hectares | 000831 | Qualifying interests: Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) [6210] |
| Galmoy Fen SAC | 9.6 km north | Approx. 25 Hectares | 001858 | Qualifying interests: Alkaline fens [7230] |



| Natura 2000 Site | Distance | Area (Ha) | Site No. | Qualifying Feature(s) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|--|
| River Barrow and River Nore SAC | 10.3 km south and 15 km north | Approx. 6736 Hectares | 002162 | <p>Qualifying interests: Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Reefs [1170] Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410] Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculon fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260] European dry heaths [4030] Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels [6430] Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220] Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0] Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i> (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016] <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029] <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i> (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092] <i>Petromyzon marinus</i> (Sea Lamprey) [1095] <i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096] <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099] <i>Alosa fallax fallax</i> (Twaite Shad) [1103] <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355] <i>Trichomanes speciosum</i> (Killarney Fern) [1421] <i>Margaritifera durrovensis</i> (Nore Pearl Mussel) [1990]</p> |
| River Nore SPA | 14.9 km north-east | Approx. 415 Hectares | 004233 | <p>Qualifying interests: <i>Alecedo atthis</i> (Kingfisher) [A229]</p> |

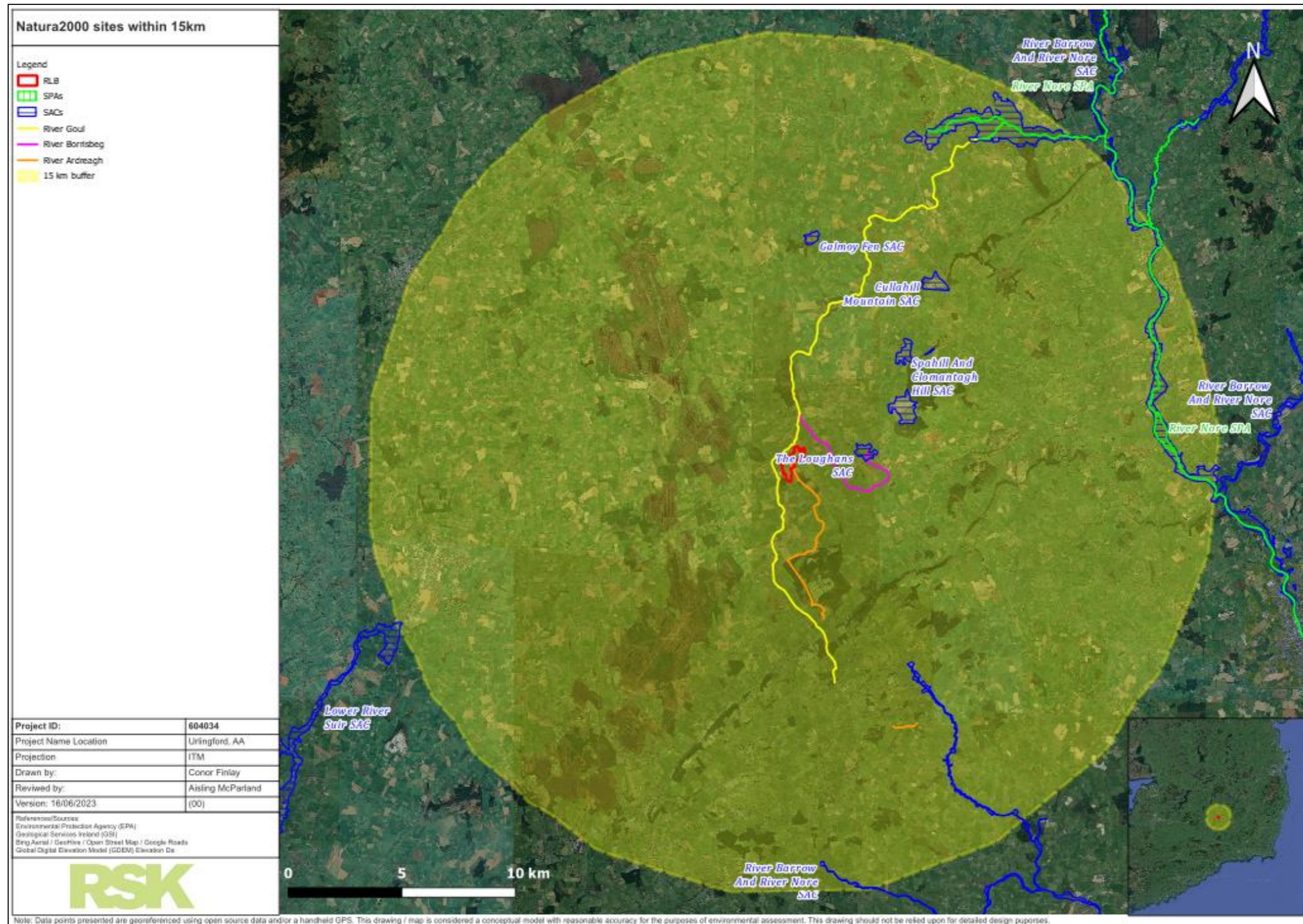


Figure 1: Natura 2000 sites within 15 km of the Site (with connection river pathways visible)

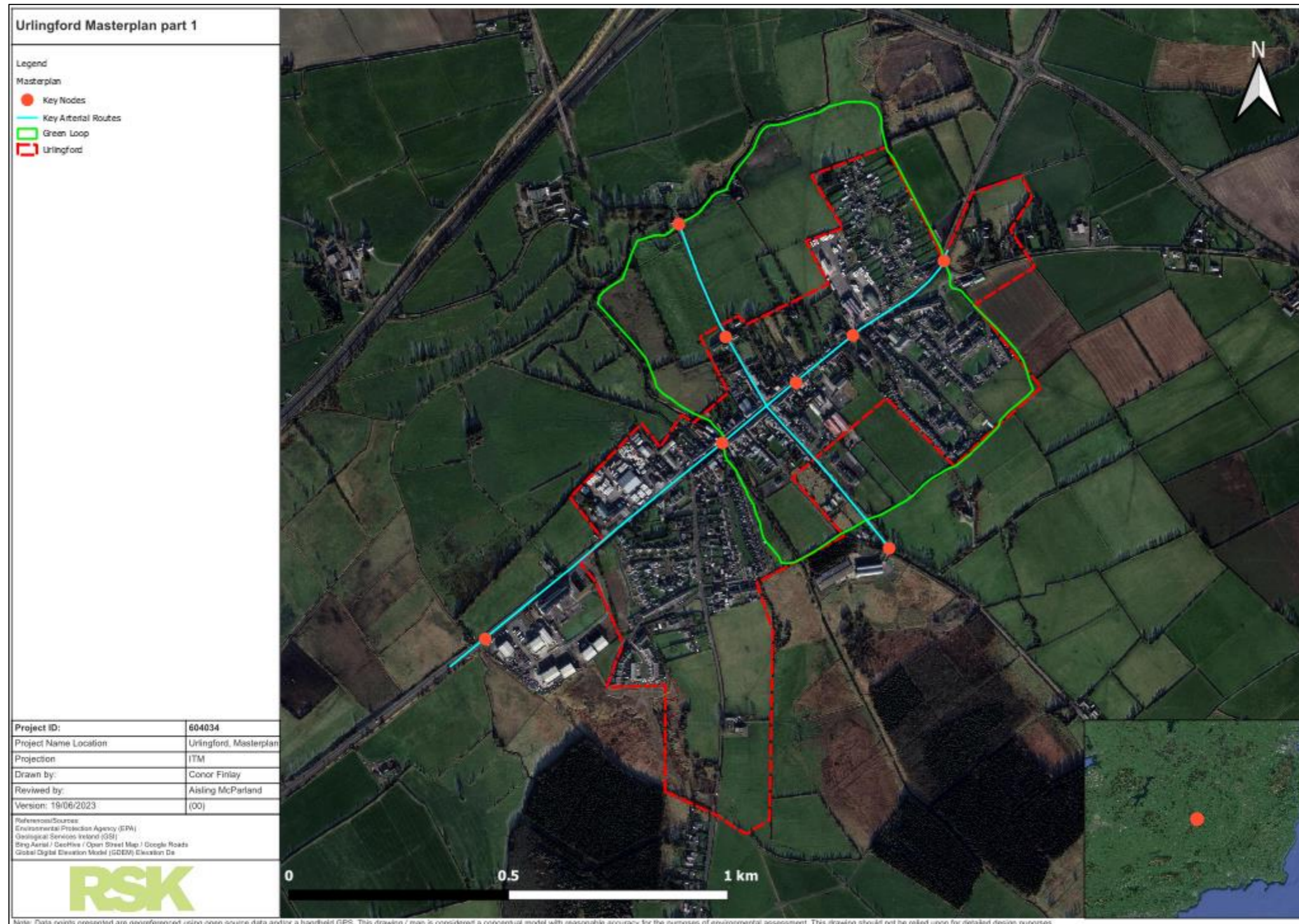


Figure 2: Urlingford Masterplan part 1



Figure 3: Urlingford Masterplan part 2

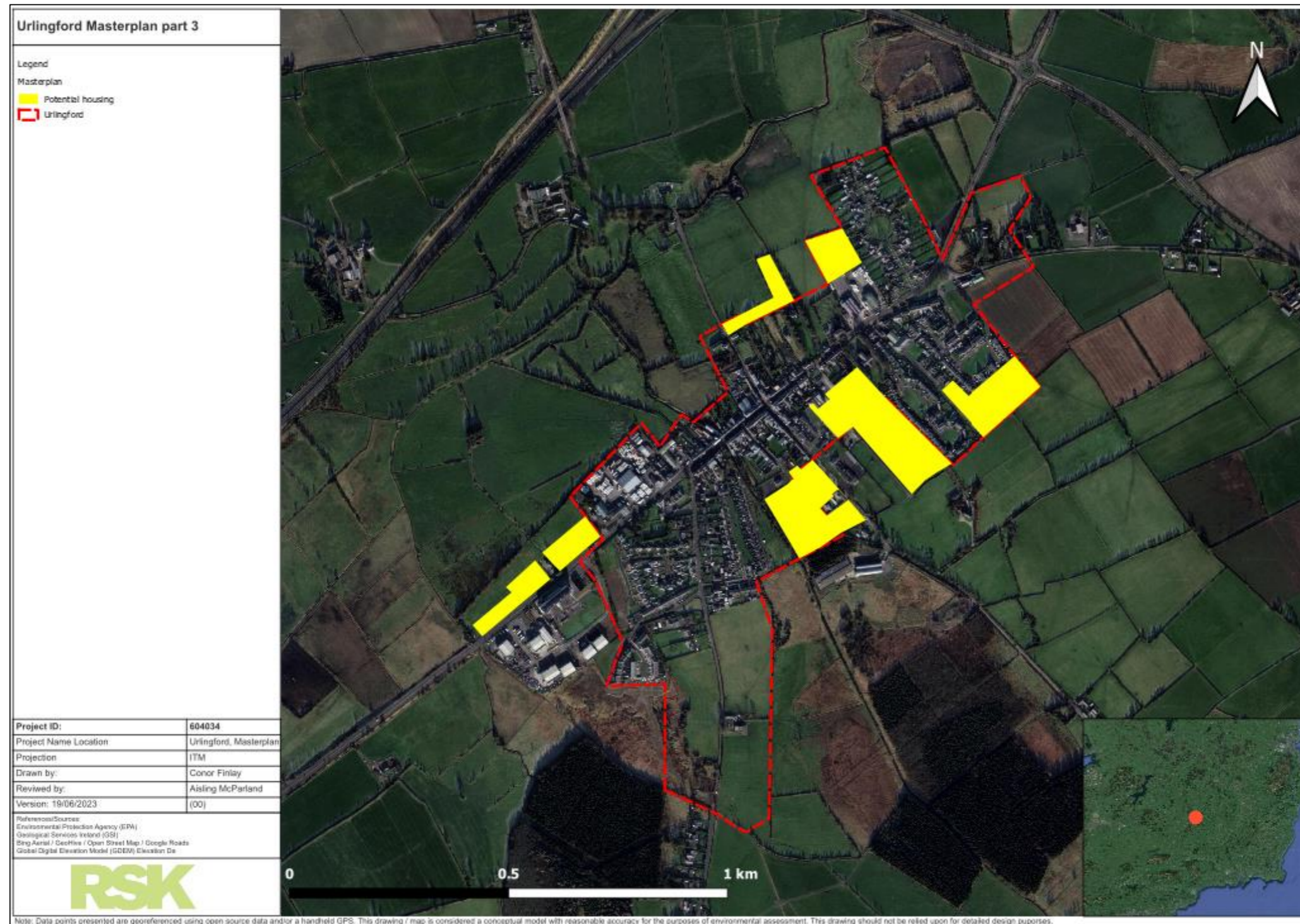


Figure 4. Urlingford Masterplan part 3

Urlingford, Co. Kilkenny
 Screening for Appropriate Assessment
 604034



3.2 Identification of Potential Pathways for Indirect Impacts

- 3.2.1 Indirect impacts can occur if there is a viable pathway between the source (the site) and the receptor (the habitats and species for which a Natura 2000 site has been designated). The most common pathway for impacts is surface water, e.g. if a pollutant reaches a river and is carried downstream into a Natura 2000 site. Other potential pathways are groundwater, air (e.g. airborne dust or sound waves), or land (e.g. flow of liquids, vibration). The zone of effect for hydrological impacts can be several kilometres, but for air and land it is considered to be rarely more than c.100 m. An appraisal of potential pathways for impacts on Natura 2000 sites is provided below.
- 3.2.2 There are six Natura 2000 sites within 15 km of the site, these are listed in Table 1 along with their qualifying features. The closest is The Loughans SAC which is 2.9 km east and Spahill & Clomantagh Hill SAC which is 3.9 km north-east. Galmoy Fen SAC and Cullahill Mountain SAC are both 9.6 km to the north and northeast respectively, the River Barrow and River Nore SAC occur at two different points within the Zol: 10.3 km to the south and 15 km to the north and the River Nore SPA is 14.9 km north-east.

Hydrological pathways

- 3.2.3 On consideration of any hydrological impact pathways between the Site and an area of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC to the south and The Loughans SAC, it is noted that no hydrological pathways exist between the Site and these Natura 2000 sites (Figure 1). The Site is separated from these areas by higher altitude lands. On the basis that water does not flow uphill, the distance of 10.3 km between the Site and the River Barrow and River Nore SAC, and 2.9 km from the site to The Loughans, and the landscape features that occur between them; it is deemed that no potential impact pathway exists between the Site and these Natura 2000 sites.
- 3.2.4 Additionally, no hydrological pathways exist between the Site and Spahill & Clomantagh Hill SAC, Cullahill Mountain SAC or Galmoy Fen SAC.
- 3.2.5 The northern section of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC, however, does have an indirect hydrological pathway to the site via the Ardreagh and Goul, both of which flow into it. As such, there is the potential for water surface runoff from the development to enter the Ardreagh and eventually this Natura 2000 site. However, the dilution effect associated with a 15 km distance rules out any indirect pathways.

Groundwater pathways

- 3.2.6 The underlying bedrock of the Site is comprised of limestone, which is considered to have good porosity and permeability to water. Given the bedrock type, it is considered there is also potential for groundwater connectivity from the Site to River Barrow and River Nore SAC. However, given the distance and that the town is largely hardstanding, any groundwater infiltration will be negligible and there will be an existing system of urban drainage in place, groundwater connectivity is not considered to be likely to cause a significant impact on the integrity of the SAC.

Airborne pathways

Commented [EM1]: Would be worth having a similar section for Direct Impacts just to make it clear both have been considered

Commented [EM2]: This is quite a long section, splitting it up into sub-sections might help keep the message clear



3.2.7 It is considered that the distances between all of the Natura 2000 sites and the development Site are too great for airborne transfers (especially considering 3.2.1). It is also deemed that airborne transfers are not a risk *via* deposition into hydrological pathways in the case of the southern section of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC, The Loughans SAC, Spahill & Clomantagh Hill SAC, Cullahill Mountain SAC or Galmoy Fen SAC due to the lack of connectivity.

3.2.8 Airborne pollution pathways may also exist around the site, but the distances to the Natura 2000 site would involve considerable attenuation of any pollutant release.

Invasive non-native species

3.2.9 In relation to the spread of invasive non-native species, there is no evident reason for materials to be moved by personnel or vehicles from the Site to any of the Natura 2000 sites, other than accidentally with extremely remote probability. The site is not known to contain any invasive non-native species (RSK ecological walkover: August 2022). Therefore, it is concluded that transference of such species to any Natura 2000 site is unlikely.

3.2.10 These statements encompass all the sites in Table 1. In summary there seems to be no viable surface water, airborne or groundwater pathway connecting the site to any of the Natura 2000 sites.

3.3 Conservation Objectives

3.3.1 The standard conservation objective for all SACs and SPAs in Ireland is “*to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the qualifying interests for which the SAC / SPA has been selected*”. In addition, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has produced detailed conservation objectives for the sites listed in Table 1. They can be viewed on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (<http://www.npws.ie/protected-sites>), but are not reproduced here in the interests of brevity.

3.3.2 As no potential indirect pathways have been identified in Section 3.2, individual conservation objects for the sites do not need to be detailed further.



4.0 ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 It is important to note that the Masterplan considers high-level proposals for the regeneration of the plan area, and that detailed designs and construction techniques have not yet been developed. Therefore, the Appropriate Assessment screening also considers potential effects on European sites at a high level. The primary consideration is whether any part of the Masterplan Area is within the boundary of any European sites, because this could lead to direct effects; this is reviewed in Section 4.2. The secondary consideration is whether any aspect of the Masterplan would be likely to have indirect effects on the identified Natura 2000 sites; this is reviewed in Section 4.3. Finally, potential in-combination effects are considered in Section 4.4.
- 4.1.2 When the Masterplan has been approved, individual projects within the Masterplan Area will be subject to detailed design and planning applications will be submitted. These projects will also be subject to screening for Appropriate Assessment as part of the planning process. The project-level screening will be more detailed than the plan-level screening provided in this document.

Commented [EM3]: These need updating to Section 4 not 3

4.2 Direct impacts

- 4.2.1 The site is not within, adjacent to, or near any Natura 2000 sites, so there is no risk of loss, fragmentation, direct damage or direct disturbance to qualifying habitat types within any Natura 2000 sites, nor to any qualifying species populations while resident there.
- 4.2.2 Of the qualifying species associated with adjacent Natura 2000 sites, only the salmon and otter are sufficiently mobile to range over large distances for purposes such as foraging, breeding or nesting. Such movements however are likely to be transitional and of minimal impact to the site (e.g. dispersal).
- 4.2.3 Otters can travel considerable distances from appropriate foraging habitats to rest sites although this is generally capped at no more than 1km and mostly within 500m (Vincent Wildlife Trust Ireland 2021 and Chanin 2003). As such loss of supporting habitat for qualifying species while ranging outside their Natura 2000 sites is not a possibility.

4.3 Indirect impacts

4.3.1 Potential changes in water quality (construction phase)

In the absence of standard best practice mitigation, construction works may release various substances into surface water flows of diverse types. For example, soil disturbance may generate fine sediments (silts), powdery construction materials such as cement may escape, and there may be accidental spills of oil or other toxic chemicals. Any of this could be harmful to aquatic and marine habitats and species if there is a pathway by which such substances can reach them. Surface water flows are the most likely pathway by which such substances might theoretically reach a Natura 2000 site at a distance.



4.3.2 Oil and related substances account for around 25% of all reported pollution events in Britain (NRA, 1994a). Oil and petroleum products are often complex mixtures of alkanes with low water solubility and low densities allowing them to float in rivers. Spills to rivers have been known to result in severe short-term impacts on macroinvertebrate fauna and fish discernible up to 4 km with ecological effects up to 10 km (Smith *et al.* 2010).

4.3.3 From Section 3.2, there is only a potential indirect, hydrological pollution pathway from oil spills (or similar spills of ordinary construction materials) to pass from the site to the River Barrow and River Nore SAC. There is also a potential pathway to this SAC via groundwater. However, prior to filtration into groundwater soil bank and geology would filter out much of the contamination and furthermore dispersion, dilution and distance would render any impact on the SAC negligible. This applies not only to impact on their qualifying features, but also to any prospect of impact on their wider non-qualifying interest, or their condition.

4.3.4 Potential changes in water quality (operational phase)

Foul water discharge and surface water drainage plans have not been provided at the time of writing. However, considering there is existing water sewer infrastructure for the town, it will be possible and expected for new built infrastructures to be connected to these. The ecologist would recommend that the increased capacity is considered prior to the commencement of works.

Providing this is the case, foul water drainage and surface water drainage discharges from development would not cause likely significant impacts on the designated features of interest for the Natura 2000 sites.

4.3.5 Potential changes in air quality (construction and operational phase)

Distances between the site and the Natura 2000 sites are too large for releases of dust and other airborne pollutant to have any likely significant effect on any of the sites. with construction activities.

During operation the development might give rise to extra vehicle movements.

4.3.6 Conservation Objectives

In largely dismissing any prospect of likely significant impact, the assessment in the preceding paragraphs further implies that the delivery of conservation objectives for the SACs (Section 3.3) would be unaffected too.

4.4 Potential in-combination effects

4.4.1 An Appropriate Assessment must consider the potential implications of a project both in isolation and in-combination with other plans and projects in the surrounding area. An 'in-combination effect' can occur when a project will have a non-significant residual effect (when considered in isolation), that subsequently becomes significant when the additive effects of other plans and projects in the surrounding area are considered. However, it should be noted that a project that has no residual effects (in isolation) cannot have in-combination effects.

4.4.2 As the Masterplan will have no residual effects in isolation, the risk of in-combination effects can be ruled out.



4.5 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

- 4.5.1 A Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report for the Urlingford Town Centre Masterplan was prepared by Turley. The Screening Report had due regard to the criteria contained within Schedule 2A Criteria for determining whether a plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment. It was determined that a full SEA for the Plan is not required in accordance with the SEA requirements under the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) of the European Parliament and of the Council of Ministers of 27 June 2001 and the Assessment of Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment; and European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004), as amended. The SEA Assessment was undertaken in consideration of the findings contained within this Appropriate Assessment Screening Report.



5.0 SCREENING STATEMENT

5.1 Conclusion

5.1.1 In Section 3.2.5 of *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland (NPWS 2010)*, it is stated that the stage 1 of the AA process can have three possible conclusions:

- *AA is not required*
Screening, followed by consultation and agreement with the NPWS, establishes that the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the nature conservation management of the site
- *No potential for significant effects / AA is not required*
Screening establishes that there is no potential for significant effects and the project or plan can proceed as proposed.
- *Significant effects are certain, likely or uncertain*
The plan or project must either proceed to Stage 2 (AA), or be rejected.

5.1.2 Having considered the indicative proposals, we conclude that this application meets the second conclusion, because there is no risk of likely significant effects on any Natura 2000 sites.

5.1.3 Therefore, with regard to Article 42 (7) of the *European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011*, it can be concluded on the basis of objective scientific information following screening, that the plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have no likely significant effect on any European site. Consequently, we conclude that Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required.

5.2 Afterword

5.2.1 Though this screening assessment has looked primarily at effects on the qualifying features of Natura 2000 sites, the impact assessment also suggests that there will be no likely significant effects on their non-qualifying biodiversity interest or on their condition.

5.2.2 This screening assessment has taken no account of the fact that the various construction sites will operate under standard pollution prevention and control measures set out in site specific Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP), or that the project design may incorporate various mitigatory features through SuDS design etc., thus further reducing the significance of any potential effects on Natura 2000 sites discussed here. Additionally, it is recommended that where individual developments are to take place, appropriate Preliminary Ecological Appraisals (PEA) and ecological assessments are to be undertaken to provide site specific ecological information and mitigation measures.

5.2.3 It is recommended that standard pollution mitigation measures are implemented.



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