

Ecological Assessment Report



Project: Grange Road Cycle Route Part 8 South Dublin County Council



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South Dublin County Council
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report has been compiled to outline the existing ecological conditions relevant to the proposed project site: Grange Road Cycle Route (hereon referred to as the 'Site') and to assess any likely significant effects, direct and indirect, that the proposed cycleway may have on the environment with particular reference to the fauna and flora in the area and any important habitats present. The information contained in this report has been used to inform the Part 8 planning application. A separate Screening for Appropriate Assessment was also completed and should be referred to in conjunction with this report.

1.2 Scope of the Ecology Survey

This report presents the findings of a desk study and site walkover undertaken to assess potential ecological impacts the proposed development may have on protected sites, fauna, flora and any priority habitats and species present. The assessment comprises a desk study reviewing publicly available records on protected species within 1km of the Site and species that may be present and/or are likely to use the Site. A walkover survey of the Site was undertaken to determine the suitability of the Site to support protected species; record all habitats; record protected higher plants; and, inform an evaluation of their conservation status. The objectives for this assessment are:

- To identify and broadly describe the habitats within the application boundary of the Site using the Fossitt classification system (Heritage Council, 2011);
- To identify any particularly important habitats or species on the site (e.g. Priority Habitats and Red List species);
- To determine whether the proposal is likely to have a significant impact on important habitats or species and identify impact types and significance indicators; and,
- To recommend where necessary further species specific survey work to inform the planning application (as necessary), prescribe specific mitigation measures to avoid adverse impacts on the Site, and detail any positive enhancement for biodiversity (habitat creation) post-construction.

1.3 Main Sources of Consultation

- National Parks & Wildlife Service (2013) The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland. Volume 2 & 3: Article 17 Assessments. Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht;
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2010) Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities;
- European Community Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) – The Habitats Directive;
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011;
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPWS 1/10 & PSSP 2/10;
- European Commission Environment Directorate-General (2001). Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC

- European Commission Environment Directorate-General (2000) Managing European Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC;

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Consultation & Desk Study

The purpose of the desk study was to review information available in the public domain and to obtain information held by statutory and non-statutory consultees. 5km and 1km buffer zones for designated sites and protected species records respectively were considered to be sufficient for the desk study based on the size of the Site (1.6km linear stretch) and the category of development (construction of cycleway).

ArcView software using Ordnance Survey maps and NPWS shapefiles were used to identify the boundary of the Site in relation to Natura 2000 sites, i.e. Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the EC Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated under the EC Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147 EC); and, other sites of conservation importance, for instance, Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) and Nature Reserves.

As part of the information gathering process, a desk study was carried out to identify recent and historical records of protected species within and adjacent to the Site. The desk study was conducted using the following sources:

- National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC Online Interactive Map);
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS – Map Viewer); and
- National Parks & Wildlife Service (2013) The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland. Volume 2 & 3: Article 17 Assessments. Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht.

As with all desk studies, the data considered were only as good as the data supplied by the recorders and recording schemes. The recording schemes provide disclaimers in relation to the quality and quantity of the data they provide and these were considered when examining out-puts of the desk study.

2.2 Site Walkover Survey

A walkover survey was conducted on 9th October 2015. The entire Site was walked at a slow pace to accurately identify all the habitats and examine the area for any signs of protected species. Plant species were identified and habitat types assigned in the field.

Any notable signs of protected species were also recorded during the site visit. A preliminary bat roost assessment was also carried out for the site during the site walkover survey. A number of trees have been identified for removal and were assessed for suitability as bat roosts by a suitably qualified ecologist following a recognized methodology (Hundtz, 2012).

2.3 Survey Limitations

Standard survey methods were followed (Heritage Council, 2011) however, any biases or limitations associated with these methods could potentially affect the results collected. Furthermore, while every effort was made to provide a full assessment and comprehensive description of the site, the Fossitt Habitat survey was conducted in October 2015 and this would not be considered an optimal time of

year for habitat surveys. The optimum time of year for broad habitat surveys is considered to be between May and September. However, given the small scale nature of the works involved and also the limited habitats and species diversity on site it was considered unlikely that any additional habitats are present on site that may require surveys during optimal survey periods.

3. RESULTS

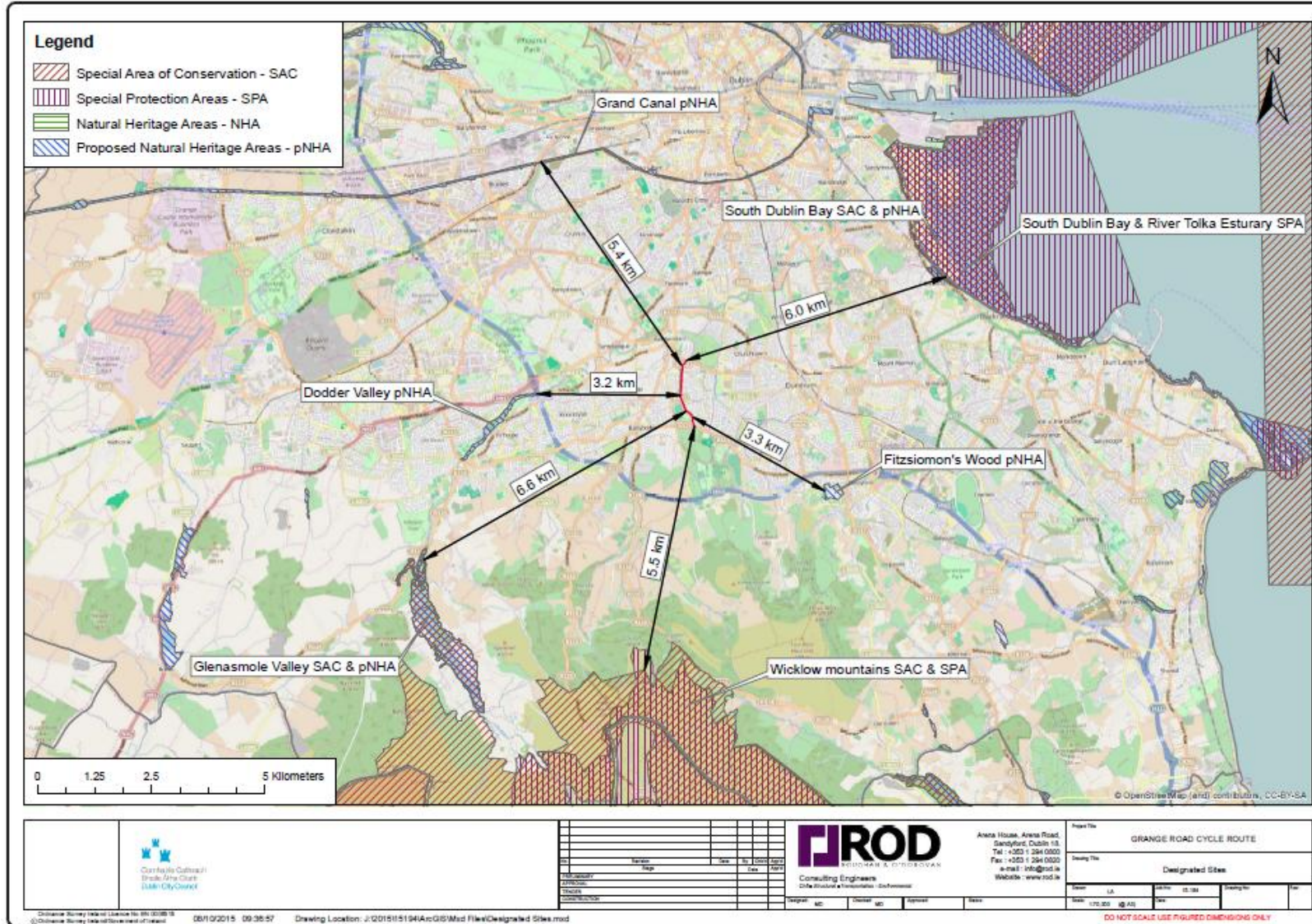
3.1 Proximity of Designated Sites

A review of all designated sites within close proximity to the site was undertaken to identify habitats and species of conservation importance within the wider area and to ensure that any designated features linked to these sites and that have potential to occur within the Site were a material consideration during the survey. The location of these sites is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Three designated sites, all proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHAs), are located within a 5km radius of the site. These are the Grand Canal pNHA (Site Code: 002104), Dodder Valley pNHA (Site Code: 000991) and Fitzsimon's Wood (Site Code: 001753). Proposed NHAs are sites considered important for the habitats present or which hold species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection. All pNHAs were published on a non-statutory basis in 1995. The nearest pNHA, the Dodder Valley pNHA is located 3.2km west of the proposed development. No direct or indirect connections between the project site and those pNHA sites listed above were identified, therefore no impacts on any of the species of habitats present in these sites is expected.

A Screening for Appropriate Assessment for the proposed development was also carried out to assess any likely significant impacts that the project may have on the conservation objectives of designated Natura 2000 sites. The results of this report are summarised in Section 4.1.

Figure 3.1 Location of the Site in relation to surrounding designated sites



3.2 Protected Species

Online sources of publicly available data offered by National Biodiversity Centre (NBDC) informed the desk study. A 1km buffer was examined for any protected species within close proximity to the site. The following species were identified within that area.

Table 3.1: Notable Protected Species Records within the 1km Site.

SPECIES	CLOSEST PROXIMITY AND DATE	SUITABLE HABITAT WITHIN THE SITE
Pine Marten (<i>Martes martes</i>)	150 metres east of site (2015)	No
Bat Species	Several records of within 1km	Yes

As several trees are to be removed as part of the scheme a preliminary bat roost assessment was carried out, the details of this survey are contained in Section 3.4.

3.3 Fossitt Habitat Survey

The Fossitt habitat categories are outlined in Table 3.2 below. Overall, the Site largely comprises artificial surfaces and hard standing, amenity grassland and treelines. A description of each of these habitats and where they occur throughout the site is provided in Section 3.3.1 below.

Table 3.2: Fossitt Habitat Classifications found within the Site.

CODE	FOSSITT HABITAT CLASSIFICATION
GA2	Amenity Grassland
BL3	Buildings & Artificial Surfaces
WL2	Treelines

3.3.1 Fossitt Habitat Descriptions

GA2 Amenity Grassland

This type of grassland is improved, or species-poor, and is managed for purposes other than grass production. It includes amenity, recreational or landscaped grasslands, but excludes farmland. Amenity grassland is typically associated with lawns and other managed grassland areas in gardens, parks, grounds of various buildings or institutions etc. Most areas of amenity grassland have been reseeded and are regularly mown to maintain very short swards. This habitat was found at several locations along the project site in the form of road side verges and also mown amenity grassland (See Plate 3.1). Small sections of this habitat will be lost as a result of the proposed development mainly in areas where it is necessary for the widening of the road or cycleway, however it is not expected that this will have any significant impact on the local environment as these areas are of low species diversity.



Plate 3.1 Strips of amenity grassland visible close to the junction with Grange Road and Nutgrove Avenue

BL3 Buildings & Artificial Surfaces

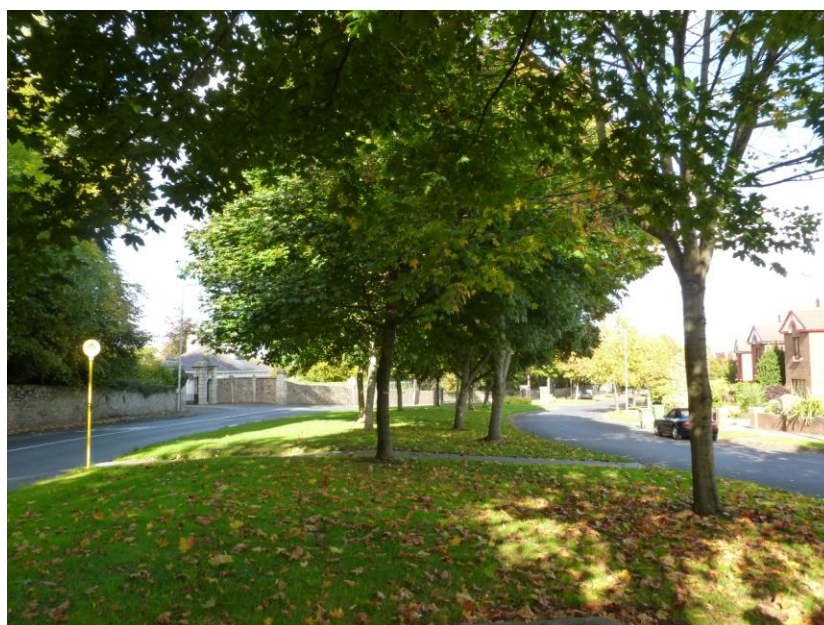
This broad category incorporates areas of built land that do not fit elsewhere in the classification. It includes all buildings (domestic, agricultural, industrial and community). It also includes areas of land that are covered with artificial surfaces of tarmac, cement, paving stones, bricks, blocks or astroturf (e.g. roads, car parks, pavements, runways, yards, and some tracks, paths, driveways and sports grounds). This classification comprises Grange Road – public road and much of the area adjacent to the road including individual entrances to residential properties, junction areas, bus stops, existing cycleways and footpaths.



Plate 3.2 Road carriageway and entrances categorised as BL3 south of Dispensary Lane close to Loreto Abbey.

WL2 Treelines

A treeline is a narrow row or single line of trees that is greater than 5 m in height and typically occurs along field or property boundaries. This category includes tree-lined roads or avenues, narrow shelter belts with no more than a single line of trees, and overgrown hedgerows that are dominated by trees. Most treelines are planted and trees are often regularly spaced. This habitat occurs along various sections of the 1.6km stretch. A mature treeline exists to the northern section of Grange Road planted in the median of the roadway (See Plate 3.4). This treeline consists of Horse Chestnut and Oak and will not be impacted by the proposed scheme. Other stretches of treeline can be found along the boundaries of residential amenity areas such as those situated to the side of the Grange Road south of Barton Drive and also the treeline adjacent to Grange Road to the front of the Priory housing estate. The species in these areas are comprised mainly of Norway Maple with the occasional Oak, Rowan, Cheery, Ash or Sycamore.



**Plate 3.3
Estate**

Treeline adjacent to Grange Road to the front of the Priory Housing



Plate 3.4 Treeline along the grassy median on the northern end of Grange Road

3.4 Protected Mammal Survey

3.4.1 Potential Bat Roosts

All trees marked for removal as detailed in the Arboriculturist's Report were assessed for their suitability to support a bat roost. This comprised a visual assessment of each tree for the likely presence of bats according to those categories listed in the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) Tree Assessment Protocol. The categories identified on site are detailed in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3 Categories identified on site

Tree Category & description	Stage 1 Survey requirements prior to determination	Stage 2 Further measures to inform mitigation	Stage 3 Likely mitigation
Category 2b Trees with a moderate to low potential to support bat roosts	None	Avoid construction disturbance to trees where possible No further surveys	Trees would be felled taking reasonable avoidance measures – allowing trees to rest on site for a period of 24hrs (overnight)
Category 3 Trees with negligible potential to support bat roosts	None	None	No mitigation for bats required.

As per BCT Guidance (2012) no trees were considered of higher value than Category 2b. No trees were found to have any physical signs of use by bats however some were considered due to their age and type/structure to have some limited potential to support bats. These trees are located to the front of the Priory Housing estate where the scheme works will require their removal.

The specific tree numbers (as identified in the Tree Survey Report which will accompany the Part 8 application) are:

545ap – Mature Ash –categorised as 3/2b – this tree could possibly be used as a satellite roost for males during the summer months but is unlikely to be used during the winter months. Removal of this tree during summer months would require the additional precaution of leaving the tree rest in situ for 24hours to allow any bat species present to leave any possible roost. Removal during the summer would not require any mitigation.

547 – Mature Sycamore – categorised as 2b – as a precaution if this tree is felled it should be retained in situ at the base of the tree for at least 24 hours before removal off Site.

549 - Mature Sycamore – categorised as 2b – as a precaution if this tree is felled it should be retained in situ at the base of the tree for at least 24 hours before removal off Site.

Although no other trees were identified as having bat roost potential, it was considered that linear stretches of treeline along the scheme may provide suitable foraging habitat. Replacement planting in these areas would be encouraged to maintain these linear habitats and use by bat species in the area.

3.4.2 Other Protected Mammals

No evidence of any other protected species was found during the site survey. The site is urban in nature and if protected species are present in the vicinity it is thought their habitats would be located in adjacent parklands e.g. St Enda's Park. It is not considered that the proposed development will have any direct or indirect impacts on these species.

4. DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1 Qualifying Features of Natura 2000 Sites

A review of the designated sites and their qualifying interests within 5km of the Site identified that no Natura 2000 sites occur within the zone of impact to proposed works for engineering construction at the Site. An Appropriate Assessment Screening report has been completed for the proposed development and this has concluded that no likely significant effects are possible on the conservation objectives of any of the Natura 2000 sites identified; therefore no further assessment is required.

4.2 Evaluation of Habitats

The survey aimed to identify all potential habitats that could support protected and red listed species on Site. The predicted impacts of the proposed development will not involve the loss of habitat that corresponds with any annexed habitat. No annexed habitats linked to the SACs that occur within close proximity to the Site were recorded. There will be no predicted impacts on any habitats or plant species of conservation importance as a result of the proposed construction works at Grange Road. No protected or red listed species were recorded during the surveys and are considered absent.

4.3 Predicted Impacts from Construction on Protected Mammals

The visual inspection of trees within the Site, with particular focus on the value of the trees to bats, determined that no trees on Site fulfilled a higher category than "no obvious potential" or "limited potential" and no impacts are expected. The removal of trees may result in a net loss of foraging habitat for bats, however on the whole no significant negative impacts are expected.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation of habitats on Site determined that the amenity grassland, grassy verges and localised stretches of trees along Grange Road are not of an ecological quality of local, regional or national importance. However, grassy verges do provide some functional and refuge value for grassland specialists e.g. small mammals and invertebrates. Irrespective of size, connections between these habitat patches can be important for biodiversity with even remnant or perforated habitats, such as inter-worked "mid-development" patches functioning as a source and refuge for species in an urban landscape where they have largely been removed for development. The role of these patches and verges as "stepping stones" between isolated fragments of quality habitat in residential areas is also a significant actual or potential value.

No protected species were confirmed to be present at the Site, however this is not to say that mammals do not use areas of the Site. Mammals will often continue to try and use established paths, despite any obstacles or dangers that appear on site after works have started. However given the minor nature of the construction works proposed and the established urban nature of the site it is not expected that the works on site will cause any additional disturbance to mammals that may use the area.

The preliminary bat assessment did not confirm any trees with high potential to support bat roosts. However as a precaution, it is recommended that if those trees identified in Section 3.4.1 are felled, they should be retained in situ at the base of the tree for at least 24 hours before removal off Site.

6. CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the desk study and informed by an ecological survey and assessment, indicators of significance show that there is no potential for localised short term or long term interference with any priority habitat, corresponding annex habitat, the breeding places of any protected species or red listed species through proposed works of engineering construction at the Site. Mitigation has been identified if any of those trees identified in Section 3.4.1 are to be felled.

As discussed and informed from the results of the Site habitat survey there are no areas of habitat that are connected to; corresponding with; or important for the survival of qualifying interests of any Natura 2000 sites. A Screening for AA has been completed for the proposed project, the results of which have confidently and objectively concluded that the project will have no potential effects either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, with respect to the structure and function of Natura 2000 sites and their conservation objectives.

No habitats or biogeochemical processes connected to or necessary for any other level of designated site (pNHA) will be impacted, directly or indirectly or in the short to long term through the works for engineering construction.

No further surveys for protected mammals are required for engineering construction works to proceed in compliance with requirements of the Wildlife Act 1976 (as amended 2000).

7. REFERENCES

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