

Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement

Prepared in part fulfilment of the

Habitats Directive Assessment

of

**Ireland West Airport Knock
Local Area Plan 2012 - 2018**



**Mayo County Council
October 2012**

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1 Introduction

Following the application by Mayo County Council in 2008 to designate the lands in the vicinity of Ireland West Airport Knock as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ), the DoEHLG advised adopting a best practice approach similar to other SDZ designations by the preparation of a Local Area Plan (LAP).

The principle aim of the LAP is to facilitate the development potential of the area, while ensuring the efficient and effective running of the airport. Hence, the development includes, *inter alia*, provision of business park developments which will likely be to the north and north west of the current airport boundary, accommodating up to 50,000 m² of gross floor space and generating a working population of circa 5000 people. Development is envisaged to aspire to this target over a 20-year period.

The Ireland West Airport Knock Local Area Plan 2012–2018 was formally adopted in October 2012.

As with all plans or programmes of Mayo County Council, this LAP was put in place with the purpose of effectively achieving its intended purpose, whilst protecting environmental considerations and Mayo's important wildlife sites. Hence, in addition to a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Flood Risk Assessment, a Habitats Directive Assessment was also deemed necessary to ensure that the LAP and its associated policies and objectives would not have significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites within or adjacent to the LAP boundary.

2 Habitats Directive Assessment Process

Briefly, the Habitats Directive Assessment process is an iterative one with the outcome at each successive stage determining whether a further stage in the process is required. A number of European and Irish guidance documents were utilised during the process, which also included an aquatic and terrestrial ecological survey.

The HDA process includes:

- screening for likely significant effects;
- scoping and further information gathering
- assessing the impacts

- preparation of the Natura Impact Report (or Natura Impact Statement in the case of a project), and
- preparation of the AA Conclusion Statement.

The following flow diagram summarises the principle stages involved in the HDA process.

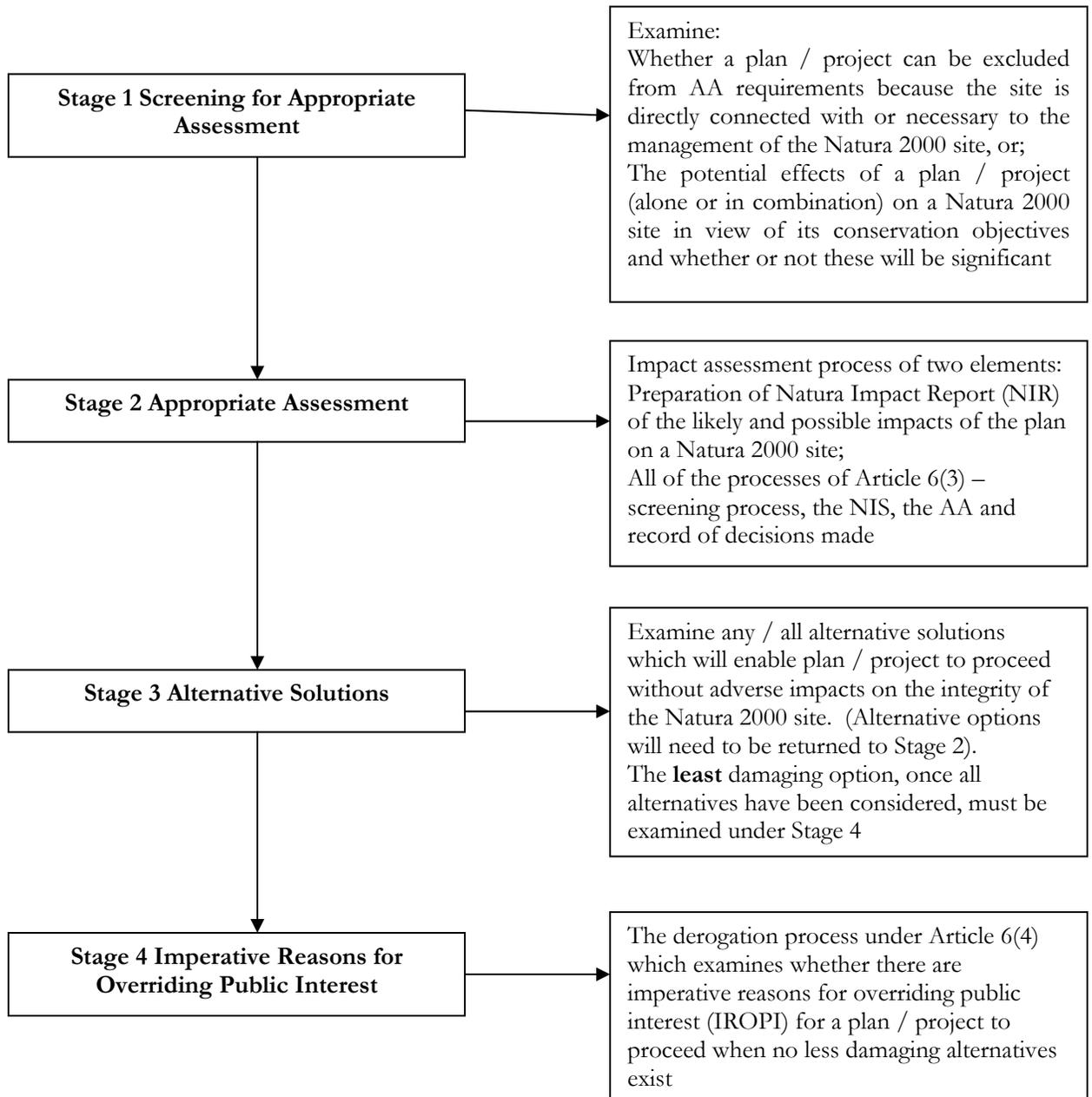


Fig. 1.1 Habitats Directive Assessment Stages

3 Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement

3.1 Statement Introduction

The current document is the Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement and follows the recommended format of:

1. Summary of how the findings of the AA were factored into the plan;
2. Reasons for choosing the plan as adopted, in light of other reasonable alternatives considered as part of the AA process; and
3. A declaration that the plan as adopted will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site or sites.
4. Copy of NIR

(The NIR is not contained in this document but as a separate document in the HDA file.)

3.2 Summary of how the findings of the AA were factored into the Plan

The Ireland West Airport Knock LAP 2012–2018 was adopted in October 2012. In the context of the Habitats Directive Assessment and in particular the Appropriate Assessment (Stage 2) the LAP as selected was evaluated for its significant effects on the River Moy cSAC, following the screening out of four other Natura 2000 sites within a 15 km boundary outside of the LAP area. The AA demonstrated that, due to the proximity of the Plan to the Sonnagh River, a tributary of the River Moy, there was potential for indirect significant effects on the cSAC. However, with appropriate mitigation, these effects could be prevented / reduced considerably.

The Plan as adopted contains a number of policies and objectives which are deemed conducive to the protection and conservation of the qualifying interests of the River Moy cSAC and aimed at the prevention of any impacts on the integrity of the site's conservation objectives.

Those policies and objectives are included as follows:

Policy / Objective reference ¹	Content
HP1	It is the policy of the Council to preserve, protect and enhance the character of the LAP area as defined by its natural heritage and biodiversity, its built environment, landscape and cultural heritage.

¹ Where H refers to natural heritage, P denotes policy and O refers to objective

HP3	It is a policy of the Council to preserve, enhance and conserve designated sites such as Candidate Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas through the implementation of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive, and to subject any future plan or project arising from the Plan likely to impact on Natura 2000 or European Sites (SACs, SPAs), whether directly, indirectly or in combination with other plans or projects, to an appropriate assessment in order to inform the decision making process.
HP4	It is the policy of the Council to have regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity and support the implementation of the National Heritage and Biodiversity Plan; the County Heritage Plan and Local Biodiversity Action Plan and to encourage the ‘halt biodiversity loss by 2010 – and beyond’ campaign in accordance with the 2006 EU Biodiversity Action Plan
HP5	It is the policy of the Council to prevent the spread of, aquatic and terrestrial, invasive and alien invasive species
HO4	It is an objective of the Council to require an ecological assessment, undertaken by a suitably qualified person, to inform decision making of all proposed significant planning applications, where it is considered that the proposed development may have an adverse impact on the environment of designated site
HO5	It is an objective of the Council to ensure that any development proposals, alone or in combination with other developments, do not have an adverse impact on any Natura 2000 site in the wider area. The Council may require Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive

The above policies and objectives were considered concise and adequate in terms of the aim of protection and conservation of the River Moy cSAC and consequently the findings of the AA were factored into the Plan by virtue of their inclusion.

3.3 Reasons for choosing the plan as adopted

Essentially, a total of six alternatives were assessed during the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the draft LAP. Their location was broadly the same, with variations in the alternatives based on the land zoning within the LAP. Briefly, the alternatives considered were:

Alternative Scenario	Brief description
Do Nothing scenario	Retain Mayo County Development Plan policies and objectives
Scenario 1	Expand existing situation

Scenario 2	Expand Business Park Development to the east and relocate airport to the west of the campus
Scenario 3	Provide a larger plan area and expand development naturally around the existing campus
Scenario 4	Airport Development Zone to the north with a large buffer zone of rural character
Scenario 5	Smaller buffer zone and an expanded Airport Development Zone.

Scenario 5 was the option that emerged as the alternative that balanced environmental protection with sustainable economic development and hence the one evaluated during the AA process.

Essentially, as the location of this LAP was determined by the location of the Ireland West Airport Knock and with the volume of protected sites in Mayo (52 SAC and 18 SPA) there are few locations in the county, if any, where a protected site is not impacted by a plan or projects, in particular by an indirect pathway.

The Ireland West Airport Knock Local Area Plan, as adopted, has potential to impact upon one Natura 2000 site but due to its proximity (circa 4 km) from the River Moy cSAC, the absence of land-take from the Natura 2000 site, the unanticipated reduction of habitat area and the more notable situation that this LAP is not *within* any protected site, this Plan as adopted was deemed more conducive to the protection and conservation of Natura 2000 sites and the environment at large than other potential Greenfield sites within the county.

3.4 A declaration that the plan as adopted will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site or sites



**Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo
Mayo County Council**

Habitats Directive / Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement

Ireland West Airport Knock Local Area Plan

A Habitats Directive Assessment was carried out on the Ireland West Airport Knock Local Area Plan (LAP). A review of the conservation objectives and potential threats to site integrity for the Natura 2000 sites within 15 km of the Plan area was undertaken to identify sites that may be impacted by the Plan.

The Plan principal objectives are:

- to enable the development of Ireland West Airport Knock as a strategically important international gateway to the Region through the continued growth of Ireland West Airport Knock as a major transportation hub;
- to enable the full development potential of Ireland West Airport Knock as a strategic economic / enterprise hub for the Region, to be fully realised in a sustainable, co-ordinated and plan-led manner whilst ensuring the efficient and effective operation of Ireland West Airport Knock; and
- to support the designation of the Ireland West Airport Knock LAP area as a Strategic Development Zone

Consideration has been given to the direct, indirect and secondary effects on the Natura 2000 network from all aspects of the Plan and appropriate mitigation measures proposed with available information at this time, will ensure that the Ireland West Airport Knock Local Area Plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites.

Dated this:

Signed:

NAME

Director of Services