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Pedestrian and Cycle Bridges at Spencer Dock

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Roughan & O'Donovan (ROD) was appointed by Dublin City Council to prepare an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report in respect of the Pedestrian and Cycle Bridges at Spencer Dock ("the Project"). The AA Screening Report is intended to assess the likelihood of the Project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, significantly affecting areas designated as being of European importance for nature conservation ("European sites"), thereby enabling Dublin City Council, as the Competent Authority in this case, to comply with its obligations under 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 ("the Habitats Directive").

The AA Screening Report focuses on the potential for the Project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, to give rise to ecological impacts that would constitute likely significant effects on one or more European sites, in view of best scientific knowledge and the sites' Conservation Objectives. During preparation of the AA Screening Report, the statutory consultee, the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), provided data on the designations of sites, habitats and species (including birds) of conservation interest.

This document comprises the AA Screening Report in respect of the Project and was prepared by ROD on behalf of Dublin City Council and in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive, the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) ("the Planning and Development Acts") and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (as amended) ("the Habitats Regulations"). The aim of this AA Screening Report is to assess the likely significant effects of the Project, thereby informing and assisting the Competent Authority in carrying out its AA Screening.

It is the considered the opinion of ROD, as the author of this AA Screening Report, that the Project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is not likely to have a significant effect on two European sites, namely the South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA and the North Bull Island SPA.

1.2 Legislative Context

The Habitats Directive and Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds ("the Birds Directive") list habitats and species which are, in a European context, important for conservation and in need of protection. This protection is afforded in part through the designation of sites that, in a European context, support significant examples of habitats or populations of species. These sites are generally referred to as "European sites". Specifically, sites designated for wild birds are termed "Special Protection Areas" (SPAs) and sites designated for natural habitat types or other species are termed "Special Areas of Conservation" (SACs). The complete network of European sites is referred to as "Natura 2000".

In order to ensure the protection of European sites in the context of land use planning and development, Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that:

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

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has interpreted this requirement as follows:

"Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site is to be subject to an appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that it will have a significant effect on that site, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects."[1]

In accordance with the Precautionary Principle, the ECJ interpreted the word "likely" as meaning that as long as it cannot be conclusively demonstrated that a given effect will not occur, that effect is considered "likely" to occur. A likely effect considered to be "significant" only if it interrupts or causes delays in progress towards achieving the Conservation Objectives[2] of the relevant European site(s).

In Ireland, this requirement is transposed into national law by Part 5 of the Habitats Regulations and Part XAB of the Planning and Development Acts, and the process is termed "Appropriate Assessment" (AA). Stage 1 of the process, i.e. determining whether or not a plan or project meets the above criteria for requiring a full AA, is referred to as "AA Screening".

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive goes on to specify that AA must be carried out by the "competent national authorities". In Ireland, the "competent authority" is the relevant planning authority for each plan or project, e.g. the local authority or An Bord Pleanála. Consequently, the responsibility for carrying out AA Screening lies solely with the competent authority. In that respect, the AA Screening Report is not in itself an AA Screening, but provides the competent authority with the information it needs in order to carry out its AA Screening.

1.3 Screening Methodology

At this stage of the process, the AA Screening Report assesses the potential impacts from the plan or project on the European sites within the likely zone of impact and evaluates them in view of the sites' Conservation Objectives.

Best practice in undertaking AA Screening involves five steps as follows:

1. The first step involves gathering the information and data necessary to carry out a screening assessment. These include, but are not limited to, the details of all phases of the plan or project, environmental data pertaining to the area in which the plan or project is located, e.g. rare or protected habitats and species present or likely to be present, and the details of the European sites within the likely zone of impact.
2. The second step involves examining the information gathered in the first step and a scientific analysis of the potential impacts of the Project on the receiving environment, particularly the European sites in the likely zone of impact.
3. The third step evaluates the impacts analysed in the second step against the Conservation Objectives of the relevant European sites, thereby determining

[1] Landelijke Vereniging tot Behoud van de Waddenzee, Nederlandse vereniging tot Bescherming van Vogels *v*. Staatssecretaris van Landbouw, Naturbeheer en Visserij (Waddenzee) [2004] C-127/02 ECR I-7405.
[2] Conservation Objectives are referred to, but not defined, in the Habitats Directive. In Ireland, Conservation Objectives are set for Qualifying Interests (the birds, habitats or other species for which a given European site is selected) and represent the overall target that must be met for that Qualifying Interest to reach or maintain favourable conservation condition in that site and contribute to its favourable conservation status nationally.

whether or not those impacts constitute "likely significant effects", within the meaning of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

4. The fourth step involves considering the potential for likely significant effects to arise from the combination of the impacts of the plan or project with those of other plans or projects. If it is determined in the third step that Stage 2 (AA) is required, consideration of potential cumulative impacts may be deferred to that stage.

5. The last step involves the issuing of a statement of the determination of the AA Screening. Notwithstanding the recommendation made in the AA Screening Report, the responsibility for completing this step lies solely with the competent authority.

The following guidance documents informed the assessment methodology:

- EC (2000) *Managing Natura 2000 sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*. Environment Directorate-General of the European Commission.
- EC (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*. Environment Directorate-General of the European Commission.
- DEHLG (2010) *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities*. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin.
- NPWS (2010) *Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities*. Circular Letter NPWS 1/10 & PSSP 2/10. National Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin.

1.4 Ecological Assessment

A desk study was undertaken in June 2018. The desk study included a review of reporting under Article 12 of the Birds Directive[3] (Eionet, 2017) and *Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2014-2019* (Colhoun & Cummins, 2013), and a review of the Site Synopses, Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms, Conservation Objectives and Supporting Documents for the relevant European sites.. The baseline ecological information gathered during the desk study was used to inform this AA Screening Report.

Following a thorough examination of the information obtained as part of the desk study in the context of the geographic information used in the determination of the likely zone of impact of the Project, it was considered that sufficient data had been gathered to allow for analysis of the likely effects of the Project on European sites without the need for further field surveys. The data gathered and examined as part of the desk study was used in the impact analysis in the following section (Section 3) of this AA Screening Report.

[3] Every three years, Member States of the European Union are required by Article 12 of the Birds Directive to report on implementation of the Directive. The most recent reporting available is for the period 2008-2012.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

2.1 Overview

The Project aims to provide two new bridges across the mouth of the Royal Canal in front of Spencer Dock, in Dublin Port, to carry pedestrians and cyclists along the Liffey campshires (the stretches of land between the quay and road on both the north and south quays in Dublin). The fundamental design intent of the works is to provide an enhanced pedestrian and cycling experience for residents, workers, and visitors in the area. It is envisaged that the scheme will ultimately be complemented by a more extensive reconfiguration of the Liffey campshires.

The proposed works seek to:

- Increase capacity for pedestrians and cyclists along the campshires;
- Improve access into the North Lotts Area;
- Facilitate the future Liffey Cycle Route and Bus Connects projects; and
- Enhance the amenity of the campshires.

The decision to have two separate bridges as opposed to one large bridge is based on

- Advice from the conservation department of DCC on minimising impact on the protected structures
- To provide clear connections to existing and planned cycleway infrastructure
- To allow the pedestrians to be segregated from cyclists so people are more inclined to linger on it and look down at the canal where it meets the Liffey
- To preserve a sense of connection with the water of the canal as it is crossed.

The Project is not directly connected with or necessary for the management of any European site.

2.2 Location

The location of the Project is at Spencer Dock, where the Royal Canal meets the River Liffey, on the river side of the existing historic Scherzer Bridges; which are protected structures, along with the stonework associated with them.

2.3 Detailed Description

The Project involves the construction of two lightweight steel bridges over the mouth of the Royal Canal where it meets the River Liffey, one bridge for pedestrians and the other for cyclists, both will be 12m in length. The bridge closest to the Liffey will cater for pedestrians, connecting the existing pathway on the campshires across the mouth of the Canal. The cycleway bridge will be closer to the Scherzer Bridges, and will integrate with the current cycle arrangement. It is expected that the cycle route approaching the bridge will be significantly upgraded in the coming years, and the cycle bridge has been designed to facilitate this. Pedestrian areas will be paved using granite flagstones and cycling areas will be paved in asphalt. Areas in between will be paved re-using granite cobbles already present on the campshires. The

Project includes the removal of the existing street furniture and replacement with new street furniture and tree planting. The Project includes all necessary service, utility and associated site works. The proposed bridges will overspan the capping stones of the Royal Canal and no works will be undertaken to the historic canal walls. A simple, lightweight metal form, which can be fabricated off site and installed within minimal impact on the quays, is proposed. The proposed bridges can also be relatively easily removed so are temporary in function, and can be moved–for maintenance and repair, avoiding risk to the waters of the canal, the river and the Bay. The works will be programmed such that disruption is minimised.

Construction Sequence

Enabling works will be undertaken on site first, including realignment of services and installation of bridge abutments behind the canal walls. The bridges will then be craned into place, having been manufactured off-site. The approach ramps will then be completed using a combination of granite and asphalt paving.

Materials

It is proposed to replicate the palette of materials that has been used for new road and Luas infrastructure in the docklands, and to reuse historic materials in the current campshires construction. Silver grey granite paving is proposed for the carriageways and footpaths. The decking of the new bridges will be constructed using perforated aluminium, which will achieve the optimal balance between traction, cleanliness and aesthetics.

See Appendix A for Project drawings.

Relationship with Other Plans and Projects

The Project is located within the North Lotts & Grand Canal Dock Strategic Development Zone (SDZ). Relevant to the proposal is Section 4 (Movement) and Section 5.5.21 (Blocks 21 & 22). Specifically relevant are:

Objective MV3 "to provide additional cycle and pedestrian bridges across the canals and rivers in the SDZ to form part of strategic cycling and walking routes"; and

Objective MV4 "to create and support a well-designed network of pedestrian infrastructure to promote and facilitate walking an cycling; provide priority for pedestrians and cyclists along key desire lines, developing routes within the Docklands and linking with the surrounding walking and cycling networks in Dublin City."

The provision of improved pedestrian and cycle connections at this location is compatible with the policies and objectives of the SDZ and also in keeping with the Public Realm Strategy prepared for the SDZ area.

Mitigation was included in the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock SDZ to protect biodiversity flora and fauna. Objectives GI12 and GI13 in the planning scheme are relevant:

Objective GI12 "to enhance the bio-diversity value of the local area by protecting habitats, in particular along water bodies, and to create opportunities for new habitats through appropriate native species landscaping schemes, to integrate the natural environment with high-quality urban development.

Objective GI13 "Any plan or project with the potential to give rise to significant direct, indirect or secondary impacts on a Natura 2000 site(s) shall be subject to an appropriate assessment in accordance with Article (3) of the Habitats Directive.

The potential for the Project to significantly affect European sites in combination with other plans or projects is addressed in Section 3 of this AA Screening Report.

2.4 Potential Ecological Effects

During the construction phase, the Project will give rise to levels of noise and artificial lighting that would be considered normal for developments of this nature and scale. The only ecological features potentially affected by these impacts are wild birds. The maximum flushing distance for any of the birds of conservation concern in the wider Dublin Bay system is 550 m.

Routine practice and procedures will be used and these will ensure that any dust, fine sediments, hydrocarbons or other pollutants are controlled and do not give rise to significant environmental impacts. Therefore, there will be no effect on the aquatic environment as a result of the Project.

It is considered that, during its operation, the Project will not add significantly to existing patterns of noise, lighting or other forms of disturbance.

3.0 EUROPEAN SITES LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED

3.1 Establishing the Likely Zone of Impact

Section 3.2.3 of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government's *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities* (DEHLG, 2010) outlines the procedure for selecting the European sites to be considered in AA Screening. It states that European sites potentially affected should be identified and listed, bearing in mind the potential for direct, indirect and/or cumulative effects. It also states that the specific approach in each case is likely to differ depending on the scale and likely effects of the plan or project. However, it advises that the following sites should generally be included:

- All European sites within or immediately adjacent to the plan or project area;
- All European sites within the likely zone of impact of the plan or project; and,
- In accordance with the Precautionary Principle, all European sites for which there is doubt as to whether or not they might be significantly affected.

The "likely zone of impact" of a plan or project is the geographic extent over which significant ecological effects are likely to occur. In the case of plans, this zone should extend to a distance of 15 km in all directions from the boundary of plan area. In the case of projects, however, the guidance recognises that the likely zone of impact must be established on a case-by-case basis, with reference to the following key variables:

- The nature, size and location of the project;
- The sensitivities of the ecological receptors; and,
- The potential for cumulative effects.

For example, in the case of a project that could affect a watercourse, it may be necessary to include the entire upstream and/or downstream catchment in order to capture all European sites with water-dependent features of interest.

Having regard to the aforementioned key variables, the likely zone of impact of the Project was defined as:

- The entire area within 550 m of the Project boundary;
- The Liffey Estuary Lower transitional waterbody as far as the North Bull and Poolbeg Lighthouses.

A geographical representation of the likely zone of impact was generated in ArcGIS 10.4 using the Project boundary, publicly available basemaps (OpenStreetMap) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) shapefiles. This was used in combination with NPWS shapefiles to identify the boundaries of European sites in relation to the likely zone of impact (see Figure 3.1).

It was determined that one European site, namely the South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA, occurs within the likely zone of impact of the Project and that a further three sites, namely the North Bull Island SPA, the North Dublin Bay SAC and the South Dublin Bay SAC, occur adjacent to the likely zone of impact. The North Bull Island SPA is considered to be connected to the Project as birds belonging to that site are likely to feed within the likely zone of impact. The North Dublin Bay SAC and the South Dublin Bay SAC are not considered to be in any way connected to the

Project as the North Bull Wall and the Great South Wall form an effective barrier against any impacts from the Project to the Qualifying Interests of these sites.

Table 3.1 below lists all of the European sites which are connected to the Project and describes how those sites are connected to the Project. There are no connections between the Project and any European sites other than those listed in Table 3.1. Detailed descriptions of those sites are given in Sections 3.2.

Table 3.1 European sites connected to the Project.

European site [site code]	How is the Project connected to this site?
South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA [004024]	The shortest absolute distances from the Project to this site are 1.5 km north-north-east to the Tolka Estuary and 2.3 km south-east to Sandymount Strand. These distances are over land and neither of those locations are within the likely zone of impact, i.e. there is no connection along these distances. The shortest distance from the Project to the site via a hydrological connection is 3.5 km east (down the River Liffey) to Dublin Port which is within the likely zone of impact. Therefore, the effective distance to the site is considered to be 3.5 km.
North Bull Island SPA [004006]	The shortest absolute distance from the Project to this site is 4.1 km north-east. This distance is over land, i.e. there is no connection along this distance. The shortest distance from the Project to the site via a hydrological connection is 5.1 km east (down the River Liffey and across the River Tolka Estuary) to the Bull Wall, which is within the likely zone of impact. Therefore, the effective distance to the site is considered to be 5.1 km.

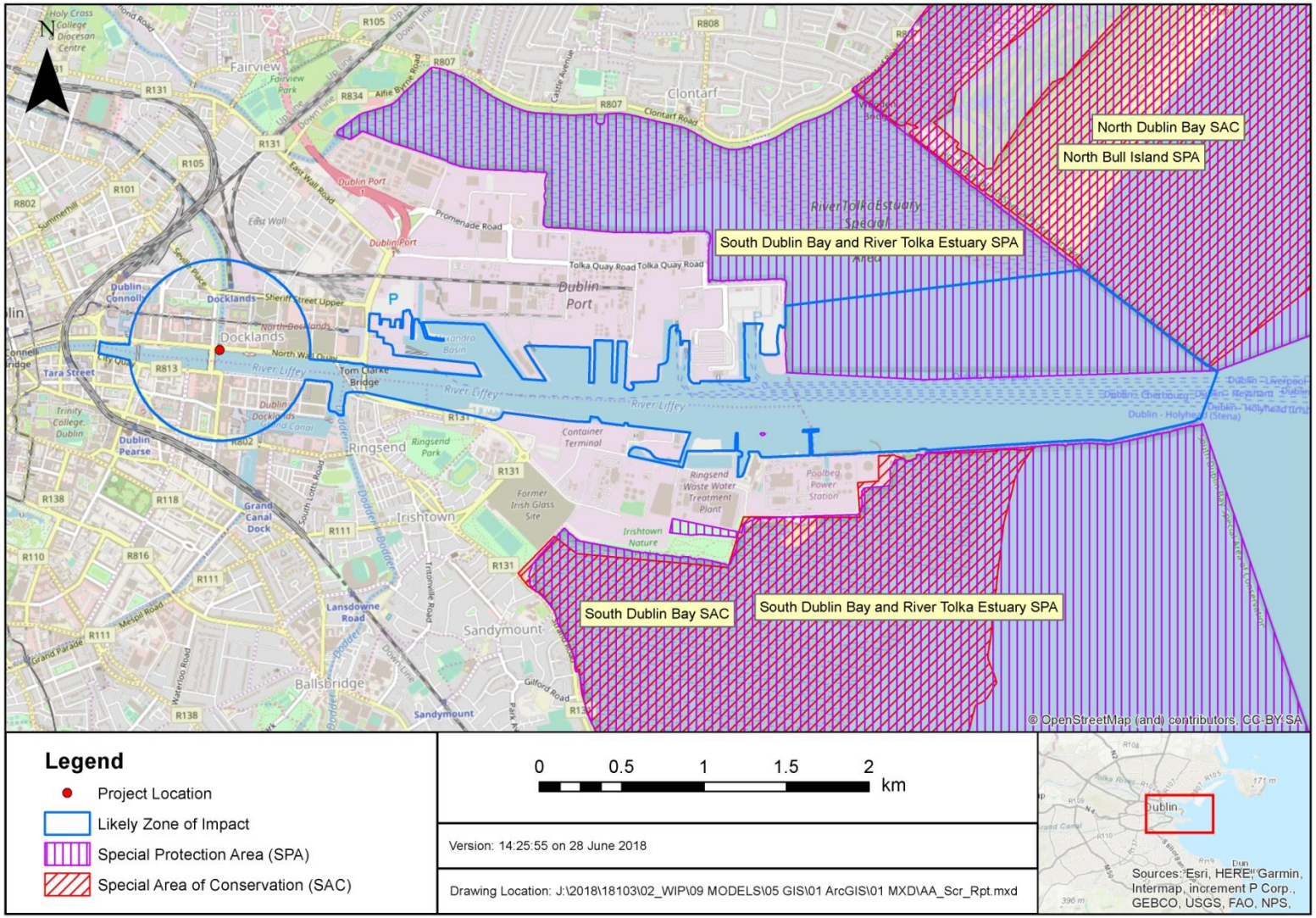

Figure 3.1 Location of European sites in relation to the likely zone of impact.

3.2 Site Descriptions

3.2.1 South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA

The description of the South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA provided here is based on the Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2015c), Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2015a) and Natura 2000 Standard Data Form (NPWS, 2015d) for the site, as well as the Conservation Objectives Supporting Document (NPWS, 2014b).

Site Overview

This site comprises a substantial part of Dublin Bay. It includes the intertidal area between the River Liffey and Dún 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.

The site 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. Notably, four of the species that regularly occur at this site are listed on Annex I of the Birds Directive, namely Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Tern, Arctic Tern and Roseate Tern. Parts of the site are also designated as the Ramsar Convention site "Sandymount Strand/Tolka Estuary".

Qualifying Interests of the Site

[A046] Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*)

[A130] Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

[A137] Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

[A141] Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

[A143] Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

[A144] Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

[A149] Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

[A157] Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)

[A162] Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

[A179] Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)

[A192] Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*)

[A193] Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

[A194] Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

[A999] Wetlands

Being an integral part of the internationally important Dublin Bay complex, the site is important for wintering waterfowl – 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 the Merrion Gates. 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 ESB 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).

Sensitivities of the Site and its Qualifying Interests

As this site is mostly comprised of coastal wetlands and is located directly adjacent to a major city and port, expansion of the city and port poses the greatest threat to its integrity. Reclamation of land from the sea, estuary or marsh represents a direct loss of key Qualifying Interests of the Site. Roads, urbanisation, human habitation, industrial and commercial activities and discharges present pressures on the site in terms of disturbance and pollution.

Watersports, walkers, horse riding and non-motorised vehicles also cause persistent disturbance to the birds within the site. Angling, particularly bait collection, causes both disturbance to birds and reduces food availability. The site is also subject to some natural eutrophication pressures.

Conservation Objectives for the Qualifying Interests

All of the Qualifying Interests of the site are currently considered to be in a favourable conservation condition. Therefore, all Qualifying Interests, with the exception of Grey Plover, which is proposed for removal as a Qualifying Interest, have been assigned Conservation Objectives requiring the maintenance of this condition. These Conservation Objectives predominantly focus on the Attributes of "*Population trend*" and "*Distribution*", but those for the three tern species cover a broader range of Attributes, e.g. "*Breeding population abundance: apparently occupied nests (AONs)*" and "*Productivity rate: fledged young per breeding pair*", and that for Wetlands focuses exclusively on the Attribute of "*Habitat area*".

Grey Plover is proposed for removal from the list of Qualifying Interests[4] of the site. Therefore, there is currently no site-specific Conservation Objective for Grey Plover in the South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA.

3.2.2 North Bull Island SPA

The description of the North Bull Island SPA provided here is based on the Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2014a), Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2015b) and Natura 2000 Standard Data Form (NPWS, 2017) for the site, as well as the Conservation Objectives Supporting Document (NPWS, 2014b).

Site Overview

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 c. 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.

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 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.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

[A046] Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*)

[A048] Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

[A052] Teal (*Anas crecca*)

[A054] Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

[A056] Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)

[A130] Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

[A140] Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

[A141] Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

[A143] Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

[A144] Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

[A149] Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

[A156] Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

[A157] Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)

[A160] Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

[A162] Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

[4] In NPWS (2015a), Grey Plover is referred to as a "Special Conservation Interest" of the site. This term is sometimes used in place of "Qualifying Interest", but has the same meaning.

[A169] Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)

[A179] Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)

[A999] Wetlands

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*).

This site 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.

Sensitivities of the Site and its Qualifying Interests

The greatest pressures/threats to the integrity of the North Bull SPA come from the bridge/viaduct located within the site (and the potential for other structures to be built within the site) and from walking, horse riding and non-motorised vehicles within the site. Bait digging/collection, nautical sports and the golf course (all inside the site) and roads, motorways, shipping lanes, continuous urbanisation and industrial or commercial areas (all outside the site) also represent significant pressures/threats to the integrity of this site. Other patterns of habitation within the site represent a lower-level pressure/threat.

Conservation Objectives for the Qualifying Interests

All of the Qualifying Interests of the site are currently considered to be in a favourable conservation condition. Therefore, all Qualifying Interests have been assigned Conservation Objectives requiring maintenance of this condition. These Conservation Objectives focus on the Attributes of "*Population trend*" and "*Distribution*", but that for Wetlands focuses exclusively on the Attribute of "*Habitat area*".

3.3 Evaluation against Conservation Objectives

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 detail the evaluation of the likely effects of the Project in view of the Conservation Objectives of the sites identified in Section 3.1 and described in Section 3.2. As explained in Sections 1.2 and 1.3, AA Screening is carried out in view of the Conservation Objectives of the relevant European sites, which are in turn defined by detailed Attributes and corresponding Targets. Therefore, the evaluation of whether or not a likely effect is significant (in view of the Conservation Objective in question) is made with regard to these Targets.

Table 3.2 Evaluation of the likely effects of the Project in view of the Conservation Objectives of the South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA.

Qualifying Interest	Conservation Objective as per NPWS (2015a)	Does the Project provide for any potential delay or interruption in the achievement of this Conservation Objective, as defined by its Attributes and Targets?	Likely Significant Effect
Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*) [A046]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Light-bellied Brent Goose in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*	Owing to the nature and scale of the Project, the duration of construction, ambient disturbance levels in the existing environment and the small area of the site likely to be affected, it does not provide for any effect on either the long-term population trend or the distribution of Light-bellied Brent Goose, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank or Black-headed Gull within the site. Therefore, the Project does not have the potential to significantly affect these Qualifying Interests, in view of their Conservation Objectives.	No
Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) [A130]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Oystercatcher in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No
Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) [A137]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Ringed Plover in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No
Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141]	*"Grey Plover is proposed for removal from the list of Special Conservation Interests for South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA. As a result, a site-specific conservation objective has not been set for this species."*		No
Knot (*Calidris canutus*) [A143]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Knot in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No
Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) [A144]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Sanderling in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No
Dunlin (*Calidris alpina alpina*) [A149]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Dunlin in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No

Qualifying Interest	Conservation Objective as per NPWS (2015a)	Does the Project provide for any potential delay or interruption in the achievement of this Conservation Objective, as defined by its Attributes and Targets?	Likely Significant Effect
Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Bar-tailed Godwit in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No
Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Redshank in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No
Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Black-headed Gull in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No
Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) [A192]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Roseate Tern in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*	Owing to the nature, scale and location of the Project, the duration of construction, ambient disturbance levels in the existing environment and the small area of the site likely to be affected, it does not provide for any effect on the passage population, number of nests, productivity rate, distribution of roosting and breeding sites, prey biomass available, barriers to connectivity or disturbance of Roseate Tern, Common Tern or Arctic Tern within the site. Therefore, the Project does not have the potential to significantly affect these Qualifying Interests, in view of their Conservation Objectives.	No
Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Common Tern in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No
Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Arctic Tern in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA"*		No
Wetlands [A999]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of the wetland habitat in South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA as a resource for the regularly occurring migratory waterbirds that utilise it"*	The Conservation Objective for Wetlands is defined by a single Attribute, namely "Habitat area", the Target for which is "*The permanent area occupied by the wetland habitat should be stable and not significantly less than the area of 2,192 hectares, other than that occurring from natural patterns of variation. See map 3*". As the Project does not provide for any reduction in the permanent area of this habitat within the site, it has no potential to delay or interrupt the achievement of this Conservation Objective.	No

Table 3.3 Evaluation of the likely effects of the Project in view of the Conservation Objectives of the North Bull Island SPA.

Qualifying Interest	Conservation Objective as per NPWS (2015b)	Does the Project provide for any potential delay or interruption in the achievement of this Conservation Objective, as defined by its Attributes and Targets?	Likely Significant Effect
Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*) [A046]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Light-bellied Brent Goose in North Bull Island SPA"*	Owing to the nature, scale and location of the Project, the duration of construction, ambient disturbance levels in the existing environment and the small area of the site likely to be affected, it does not provide for any effect on either the long-term population trend or the distribution of Light-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Teal, Pintail, Shoveler, Oystercatcher, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Turnstone, or Black-headed Gull within the site. Therefore, the Project does not have the potential to significantly affect these Qualifying Interests, in view of their Conservation Objectives.	No
Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) [A048]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Shelduck in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Teal in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Pintail (*Anas acuta*) [A054]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Pintail in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) [A056]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Shoveler in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) [A130]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Oystercatcher in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Grey Plover in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Grey Plover in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Knot (*Calidris canutus*) [A143]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Knot in North Bull Island SPA"*		No

Qualifying Interest	Conservation Objective as per NPWS (2015b)	Does the Project provide for any potential delay or interruption in the achievement of this Conservation Objective, as defined by its Attributes and Targets?	Likely Significant Effect
Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) [A144]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Sanderling in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Dunlin (*Calidris alpina alpina*) [A149]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Dunlin in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) [A156]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Black-tailed Godwit in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Bar-tailed Godwit in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) [A160]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Curlew in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Redshank in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) [A169]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Turnstone in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Black-headed Gull in North Bull Island SPA"*		No
Wetlands [A999]	*"To maintain the favourable conservation condition of the wetland habitat in North Bull Island SPA as a resource for the regularly occurring migratory waterbirds that utilise it"*	The Conservation Objective for Wetlands is defined by a single Attribute, namely "Habitat area", the Target for which is "*The permanent area occupied by the wetland habitat should be stable and not significantly less than the area of 1,713 hectares, other than that occurring from natural patterns of variation. See map 3*". As the Project does not provide for any reduction in the permanent area of this habitat within the site, it has no potential to delay or interrupt the achievement of this Conservation Objective.	No

4.0 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that AA be carried out in respect of any plan or project which is likely to have a significant effect on one or more European sites, "*either individually or in combination with other plans or projects*". Therefore, regardless of whether or not the likely effects of a plan or project are significant when considered in isolation, the potential for the plan or project to significantly affect European sites in combination with other past, present or foreseeable future plans or projects must also be assessed.

In the case of the Pedestrian and Cycle Bridges at Spencer Dock, it is clear from the assessment shown in Section 3 of this AA Screening Report that the Project does not provide for any effects whatsoever that are relevant for European sites. Therefore, as explained in Section 1.3, it is not necessary to undertake an assessment of the potential for the Project to significantly affect European sites in combination with other plans or projects.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, Part 5 of the Habitats Regulations, Part XAB of the Planning and Development Acts, the relevant case law, established best practice and the Precautionary Principle, this AA Screening Report has considered the Project and the potential for the Project to have likely significant effects on European sites. This report has concluded, on the basis of objective information, that the Project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is not likely to give rise to impacts that would constitute significant effects, in view of the Conservation Objectives of those sites.

In light of this conclusion, it is the considered opinion of ROD, as the author of this AA Screening Report, that Dublin City Council, as the Competent Authority in this case, should find in completing its AA Screening in respect of the Pedestrian and Cycle Bridges at Spencer Dock that the Project, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, is not likely to have a significant effect on any European site.

6.0 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A
Project Drawings