

LOUTH COUNTY COUNCIL

Ardee Castle Refurbishment, Ardee Co.Louth

The proposed works involve the following:

- Main entrance relocation to the adjoining building on Castle Street to facilitate universal access
- Rear extensions encompassing external stair, lift and services core finished externally in zinc cladding with some glazed openings to a height of 4 floors to rear of buildings providing universal access and egress to ground and upper levels of the building.
- Refurbishment of the interior of the Castle building
- All associated site development works.

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report
February 2024

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Section 1

Introduction:

The proposal is conservation and refurbishment proposal of Ardee Castle on Castle Street in Ardee Town. The castle complex comprises the medieval Tower-House, the Bridewell to its immediate east and the 'Judges Chambers' a two storey house built against the Tower House

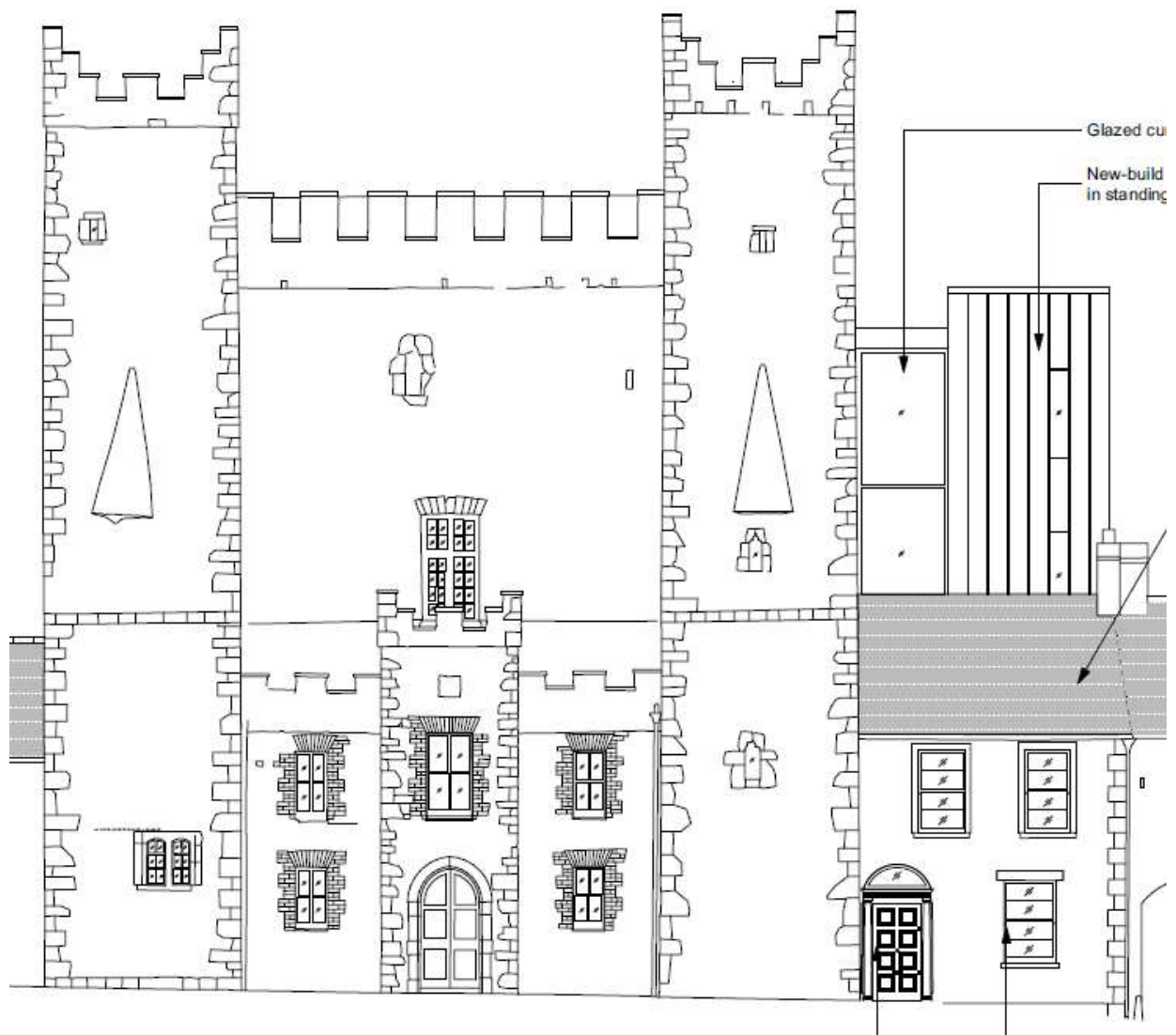
Map 1: below illustrates the location of the site in a local context.



Ardee Castle roadside elevation:



Proposed extension and dwelling displayed below:



1.2 Appropriate Assessment Process (a)

The purpose of this Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening process is to determine whether the proposed development, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, could have significant effects on any European site, in view of that European site's conservation objectives. This screening¹ process determines whether appropriate assessment is necessary by examining:

¹ Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland- Guidance for Planning Authorities, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2009 (revised 2010).
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1. Whether a plan or project can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site, and
2. The potential effects of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, on a European site in view of its conservation objectives, and considering whether these effects will be significant.

1.3 The Appropriate Assessment Process (b)

Article 6 (3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive² requires an assessment of a project or plan which may give rise to a significant effect on a European site. There are four stages included in the AA process which may be summarised below. This screening report is a first step assessment of the proposed project.

Stage 1: Screening

The first step to establishing if an appropriate assessment is required is referred to as ‘screening’ and its purpose is to determine on the basis of a preliminary assessment and objective criteria if the plan, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, could have a significant effect on a European site in view of the sites conservation objectives. The process identifies any likely impacts upon a European Site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant.

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment

The consideration of the impact of the project or plan on the integrity of the European site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans to the site’s structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts would be required.

Stage 3: Alternative Solutions

The process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the European Site.

Stage 4: Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest

This stage is the main derogation process of Article 6(4) which examines whether there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for allowing a plan or project which will have adverse effects on the integrity of a European Site to proceed.

² Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora
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Section 2 – The Project

2.1. Site Description:

- Ardee Castle is located on the east side of Castle Street in Ardee town. The castle complex comprises the medieval Tower-House and dwelling house and is a prominent feature on the streetscape. The existing castle is not occupied and has not been occupied for some time. The Judge's Chambers is quite dilapidated.

The main elements of the works which are subject to this Part 8 are an altered and extended external stair, lift and services core to height of 4 floors to rear of buildings providing universal access and egress to ground and all upper levels of the building.

2.2 CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS: -

The following is a non-exhaustive list of materials that have been identified during construction and commissioning:-

- Aluminum copings
- Standing seam zinc cladding
- PPC Aluminum windows
- Blockwork construction
- In-situ and pre-cast concrete
- Timber windows
- Natural slate

2.3 Restrictions on Working Hours

Normal working hours are as follows:

0800 - 1800 hrs Monday-Friday

0800 – 14.00 hrs Saturday

2.4 TIMESCALE FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE CONSTRUCTION WORK

It is intended that the project would be completed within a five year timeframe.

Section 3 European Sites

3.1 Introduction

There are two types of EU designated sites in the locality; Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to habitats and species listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives. The overall aim of the EC Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. EU law requires Local Authorities to have regard to the integrity and conservation objectives of these sites when considering development proposals in their vicinity. The aim of the Birds Directive is to provide a framework for the conservation and management of wild birds in Europe and the maintenance of the populations of all wild bird species across their natural range.

3.2 European Sites within Co. Louth

Table 1 provides a list of European sites within 15km of the site location. Best Practice³ recommends that a distance of 15km is used as the likely zone of impact of a plan or project. Those European sites which are located within a buffer of 15km are listed below. These have been considered in the context of the proposed works and it is not considered that the conservation objectives or the integrity of any of these sites would be affected.

Table 1: List of SACs and SPAs within 15 km radius of the site

Natura 2000 site	Site Code	Designation	Distance from Site
Dundalk Bay SAC	000455	Coastal / Estuarine	12.9 km to the east
Dundalk Bay SPA	004026	Coastal / Estuarine	12.9 km to the east
Stabannon/Braganstown SPA	004091	Wetland/grassland	5.37 km east

3.3 Conservation Objectives⁴

³ Appropriate Assessment of Plan and Projects in Ireland, Guidance for Planning Authorities. DoEHLG, 2010.

⁴ NPWS (2011) Conservation objectives for Dundalk Bay SAC (000455) Generic Version 4.0. Conservation objectives for Dundalk Bay SPA (004026) Generic Version 3.0. Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht.

The maintenance of habitats and species within European sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a natural habitat is achieved when:

1. its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing, and
2. the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
3. the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

1. population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and
2. the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and
3. there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

3.4 Conservation Objectives for the European Sites within Co.Louth

Conservation Objectives for each of the European sites within County Louth have been detailed below from the best available data from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This information is currently available by way of generic and specific conservation objectives, site synopsis (Appendix 1) and Natura 2000 data forms. As stated above the aim for all European sites is to either restore or maintain “*favourable conservation status*” of the habitats listed below.

Table 2 Conservation Objectives for Dundalk Bay SAC 000455

Conservation Objectives	Potential Impacts on SAC
<p>Objective:</p> <p>1.To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Estuaries in Dundalk Bay SAC</p> <p>2.To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide at Dundalk Bay SAC</p> <p>3.To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Perennial vegetation of stony banks in Dundalk Bay SAC</p> <p>4.To restore the favourable conservation condition of Salicornia and other annuals colonizing mud and sand in Dundalk Bay SAC</p> <p>5.To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Atlantic salt meadows in Dundalk Bay SAC,</p> <p>6.To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Mediterranean salt meadows in Dundalk Bay SAC,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality/pollution • Direct loss of habitat to development • Recreational/amenity use • Sea level rise • Coastal defences • Physical obstructions to the natural circulation of sediment and organic matter

Table 3: Conservation Objectives for Dundalk SPA 004026

Conservation Objectives	Potential Impacts on SAC
<p>Objective:</p> <p>1.To maintain the favourable conservation condition of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Crested Grebe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality/pollution • Direct loss of habitat to development • Recreational/amenity use

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greylag Goose • Light-bellied Brent Geese • Shelduck • Teal • Mallard • Pintail • Common Scoter • Red-breasted Merganser • Oystercatcher • Ringed Plover • Golden Plover • Grey Plover • Lapwing • Bar-tailed Godwit • Curlew • Redshank • Black-headed Gull • Common Gull • Herring Gull <p>2.To maintain the favourable conservation condition of the wetland habitat in Dundalk Bay SPA as a resource for the regularly-occurring migratory waterbirds that utilise it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea level rise • Coastal defences • Loss of foraging/nesting grounds for birds • Water and general pollution • Disturbance
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Table 4 Conservation Objectives for Stabannon and Braganstown SPA

Conservation Objectives	Potential Impacts on SAC
Objective: To maintain the favourable conservation condition of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality/pollution/ quantity • Disturbance • Direct loss of habitat to development

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greylag Goose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational/amenity use • Animal grazing
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Section 4:

Screening Assessment

The following screening assessment integrates the information currently available on the European sites and the proposed works. The following template for this assessment is derived from the European Commission 2002 “*Assessment of plans and [projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 site, Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6 (3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*”.

Describe the individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) with the potential to give rise to impacts on any of the European sites identified above.

Stabannon and Braganstown SPA is approximately 5.37km and Dundalk Bay SPA/SAC 12.9km away from the proposed project. The designation of these European sites relates to the maintenance of the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) for which the SPAs and SAC has been selected are listed above.

The greatest threats to this European site in the context of the conservation objectives are from

- Water quality/pollution/ quantity
- Disturbance
- Direct loss of habitat to development
- Recreational/amenity use
- Animal grazing
- Direct loss of habitat to development
- Sea level rise
- Coastal defences
- Physical obstructions to the natural circulation of sediment and organic matter

The proposed project involves the renovation and extension of Ardee Castle in Ardee Town centre. The scheme does not encroach into the habitat areas. This project does not propose to alter any of those habitats listed under qualifying interests. Furthermore, there will be no alterations to the hydrological regime as a result of the

proposed development. Surface water will be disposed of using existing surface water discharge points to existing facilities. The Castle is connected to public services.

Describe any likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plan or projects) on the European site by virtue of:

Size and scale;	This proposal is for the refurbishment and extension of Ardee Castle. The proposed four storey extension is to be located to the rear of the Tower House. The proposal also provides for general site works associated with the development.
Land-take;	There are no proposals to encroach into or remove any of the habitats listed as qualifying interests of any of the European sites.
Distance from the European site or key features of the sites;	5.37m west from the boundary of the Stabannon/ Braganstown SPA and 12.9 km from Dundalk SPA/SAC
Resource requirements (water abstraction etc);	There are no resource requirements for the construction or operation of the development. The site is connected to public services. The existing public roadways will be utilised for the construction traffic.
Emissions (disposal to land, water or air);	Existing surface water discharge points remain unaltered. No alterations to the hydrological regime as a result of the proposed development.
Excavation requirements;	Excavation on site relating to the construction of foundations for the proposed extension. It is not proposed that there will be any excavation within the SPAs/SAC. The proposed works at the site will not encroach onto the SPAs/SAC.
Transportation requirements;	Transportation of materials will be required during construction which should be appropriately managed as part of waste management proposals, prior to transportation onto the site. Works will be controlled through a detailed site management system which shall ensure there is no impact on the habitats listed for Conservation Interest in the SPAs/SAC
Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning, etc;	The duration of the construction period will be 2 years

Other	No other impacts are envisaged during construction or operation.
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Describe any likely changes to the European site arising as a result of:

Reduction of habitat area;	There will be no reduction in the habitat areas listed as qualifying interests for any of the European Sites
Disturbance to key species,	It is not proposed that there would be any disturbance to key species within any of the European Sites, in particular Braganstown and Stabannon SPA and Dundalk Bay SPA/SAC during construction or operation of the works. This is due to the scale and nature of the proposed works. A desktop survey was undertaken with regard to the possible disturbance to protected species by analysis of the details of the site synopsis and information contained on both the NPWS and National Biodiversity Centre website. It was concluded that there should be no disturbance to any species protected within any of the European Sites
Habitat or species fragmentation,	There will be no changes to the habitats of any of the European Sites
Reduction in species density;	There will be no reduction in species density from the proposed development. The employment of best construction methods shall ensure that the existing habitats and species are protected in their natural state and that the proposed works should have no negative impact on the SPAs/SAC or any other European site
Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality);	There are no proposed changes to key indicators of conservation value due to the proposed development
Climate change	It is not envisaged that these activities or the construction works would lead to an increase in climate change.

Describe any likely impacts on the European site as a whole in terms of:

- **Interference with the key relationship that define the structure of the site,**
- **Interference with key relationship that defines the function of the site,**

Provide indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects set out above in terms of:

Loss,	There is to be no habitat loss as a result of these proposed works and therefore no significant impact.
Fragmentation;	The project does not propose to cause any fragmentation to any of the identified European Sites by way of construction or operation.
Disruption & Disturbance;	There is no proposed land take or any features of the proposed construction or operation which should impact on the water quality. Best practice construction works will be employed.
Change to key elements of the site (e.g. water quality etc)	<p>There are no identified elements of the project which should cause any significant impact on the water quality or integrity of the European sites within 15km of the proposed development.</p> <p>It is not proposed that the construction or operation of the site will impact on the water quality. Additionally site management during construction will take cognisance of the adjoining European sites as follows:</p> <p>Prior to commencement of construction works, a construction management plan for the construction phase will be prepared by the successful contractor. The successful contractor will be required to submit detailed method statements containing site specific measures to ensure avoidance of pollution or disturbance related impacts during the construction stage.</p>

Describe from the above those elements of the project or plan, or combination of elements, where the above impacts are likely to be significant or where the scale or magnitude of impacts is not known;

From the information contained above it is evident that the proposed development is not likely to cause any significant adverse effects on the integrity of the Conservation Objectives of the identified European sites. The construction or operation is not likely to have adverse effect on the European conservation objectives of the identified sites. Best practice construction measures will be employed and are classified as intrinsic measures to the overall project so as not to cause any environmental damage on any surrounding areas. The qualifying interests of the Stabannon and Braganstown SPA and Dundalk Bay SPA/SAC and the other European Sites would not be affected due to the location of the project site relative to these sites and intervening terrain/topography, the nature and scale of the project works and urban location of the site connected to public services. Further, construction

runoff will be controlled by site management and will not impact on the water quality or species listed within the SPAs/SAC.

Section 5:

1.0 Finding of No Significant Effects matrix⁵ (FONSE) and conclusion of determination.

Following the assessment in section 4.0 of the proposed works and regarding the conservation objectives of the European sites in accordance with the '*Methodological guidance on the provision of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43*', a Screening Matrix and Findings of No Significant Effects Matrix have been completed and included below.

Table 4: Finding of no significant effects matrix (FONSE)

Name of Project	Ardee Castle Refurbishment
Name and location of Natura 2000 site	The site is located 5.37 km away from Braganstown and Stabannon SPA and 12.9km away for Dundalk Bay SPA/SAC. The conservation objectives of the SPAs and SAC are set out in this report.
Description of the project	The project entails a four storey extension to the rear of Ardee Castle so as to accommodate universal access
Is the project directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site (provide details)?	No, the project is not connected to the management of Stabannon/Braganstown SPA and Dundalk Bay SPA/SAC
Are there other projects that together with the	This proposed development supersedes the previously permitted development under ref no: 17/137. and ref no. 22/229. The proposed development is similar in nature to the previously permitted development

⁵ Section of screening form derived from Annex 2 of the document *Assessment of plans and projects significant affecting Natura 2000 sites- Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*, developed by Oxford Brookes University on behalf of DG Environment and published by the European Commission in 2002.

project or plan being assessed could affect the site (provide details)?	under 17/137 and 22/299. It is not anticipated that the developments proposed under 17/137 or 22/299 or this proposed development will have any impact on the aforementioned SPAs and SAC. There is currently an application for decision with Louth County Council, ref 23/60274. It is not anticipated that this proposed development will have any impact on the aforementioned SPAs and SAC.
<i>The Assessment of Significance of Effects</i>	
Describe how the project or plan (alone or in combination) is likely to affect the European site	The proposed works do not give rise to any direct impacts on the habitats for which the above identified European Sites are protected for in particular Stabannon/ Braganstown SPA and Dundalk Bay SPA/SAC . This is due to the characteristics and location of the site (within an existing urban streetscape) and nature and scale of works. The employment of a construction plan will ensure that any possible indirect effects from the site works on the European sites will be negligible and do not give rise to any reasonable scientific doubt regarding potential adverse effects.
Explain why these effects are not considered significant	The indirect effects are not considered to be significant as they would not cause any likely significant adverse effects on the qualifying interests of any of the European site by way of habitat loss or changes to hydrological regimes pertaining to any of the designated sites
<i>Data collected to carry out the assessment</i>	
Who carried out the assessment	Louth County Council.
Sources of data	Field Assessment (Louth County Council). Design and Construction details (Louth County Council) National Parks and Wildlife Survey (Natura 2000, Site Synopsis, Conservation Objectives and EU data forms).
Level of assessment	Screening for Appropriate Assessment: (In addition to field assessment an extensive desktop survey was used to assess the significance of the proposed works on the European sites).

Where can the full results of the assessment be accessed and viewed?	This screening report will be made available to the public on request
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Conclusions and determination of screening report by Louth County Council.

It is reasonable to conclude that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to have a significant effect on Stabannon/ Braganstown SPA or Dundalk Bay SAC/SPA or any other European Sites, in view of the sites' Conservation Objectives and a Stage 2 AA and a Natura Impact Statement is not therefore required.