

# CARRICK LANDFILL INVESTIGATION

## Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

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IBE1771  
Carrick Landfill  
F02  
May 2021

## Document status

Version	Purpose of document	Authored by	Reviewed by	Approved by	Review date
D01	Draft	Caoimhe Murray/Kelly Clinton	Mark Magee	Mark Magee	20/11/2020
F01	Final	Caoimhe Murray/Kelly Clinton	Mark Magee	Mark Magee	24/02/2021
F02	Final	Mark Magee	Mark Magee	Mark Magee	28/05/2021

## Approval for issue

Mark Magee



28/05/2021

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Prepared by:

Prepared for:

**RPS****Donegal County Council****Mark Magee****Julie McMahon**

**Senior Associate - Water Environment and Flood Risk Management**

**Executive Engineer**

Enterprise Fund Business Centre, Business Park Road,  
Ballyraine  
Letterkenny, Co. Donegal F92 AF43

**T** +353 74 916 1927

**E** mark.magee@rpsgroup.com

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This Appropriate Assessment Screening Statement has been prepared by RPS on behalf of Donegal County Council, the operator of the decommissioned landfill site at Carrick, County Donegal.

This Appropriate Assessment Screening Statement has been prepared to assist the EPA in its role as a Competent Authority, fulfilling its duties in accordance with European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations (S.I. No. 94 of 1997) under Regulation 31 (Annex 1.2). An appropriate assessment screening and, if required, an appropriate assessment, is required under the Habitats Directive for any plan or project likely to have significant effect on a Natura 2000 site.

This Appropriate Assessment Screening Statement documents the evaluation and analysis, undertaken on behalf of Donegal County Council, seeking to establish whether the Carrick Landfill site, hereafter referred to as the development, is likely to have a significant effect on any European site, and if so whether those Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) will adversely affect the integrity of any European site.

The exercise considers the proposed site by itself has been undertaken in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the site concerned. Measures intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of the proposed development on European sites have not been taken into account at screening stage, in accordance with the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in case [C-323/17](#) (People Over Wind).

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## 2 APPROACH

### 2.1 Guidance Documents

This NIS supporting the restoration works at the Carrick Landfill has been carried out using the following guidance:

- Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government Circular NPW 1/10 and PSSP 2/10 on *Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive – Guidance for Planning Authorities* March 2010.
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2009; <http://www.npws.ie/en/media/NPWS/Publications/CodesofPractice/AA%20Guidance.pdf>
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: the provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, European Commission 2000; [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/provision\\_of\\_art6\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/provision_of_art6_en.pdf)
- 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; [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/natura\\_2000\\_assess\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/natura_2000_assess_en.pdf)
- Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC – Clarification of the concepts of: alternative solutions, imperative reasons of overriding public interest, compensatory measures, overall coherence, opinion of the commission. [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/guidance\\_art6\\_4\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/guidance_art6_4_en.pdf)

### 2.2 Likely Significant Effect

The threshold for a Likely Significant Effect (LSE) is treated as being above a *de minimis* level. A *de minimis* effect is a level of risk that is too small to be concerned with when considering ecological requirements of an Annex I habitat or a population of Annex II species present on a European site necessary to ensure their favourable conservation condition. If low level effects on habitats or individuals of species are judged to be in this order of magnitude and that judgment has been made in the absence of reasonable scientific doubt, then those effects are not considered to be likely significant effects.

“...the requirement that the effect in question be ‘significant’ exists in order to lay down a *de minimis* threshold. Plans or projects that have no appreciable effect on a European site are thereby excluded. If all plans or projects capable of having any effect whatsoever on the site were to be caught by Article 6(3), activities on or near the site would risk being impossible by reason of legislative overkill”.

[Paragraphs 46-50 of the Opinion of the Advocate General in the Court of Justice of the European Union case (CJEU) [C-258/11](#)]

### 2.3 Mitigation Measures

In relation to mitigation measures, EC (2001) states that “*project and plan proponents are often encouraged to design mitigation measures into their proposals at the outset*”. However, it is important to recognise that the screening assessment should be carried out in the absence of any consideration of mitigation measures that form part of a project or plan and are designed to avoid or reduce the impact of a project or plan on a Natura 2000 site”. This direction in the European Commission’s guidance document is unambiguous in that it does not promote the inclusion of mitigation at screening stage.

In April 2018, the CJEU issued a ruling in case [C-323/17](#) (People Over Wind) that Article 6(3) of Directive 92/43/EEC must be interpreted as meaning that, in order to determine whether it is necessary to carry out, subsequently, an appropriate assessment of the implications, for a site concerned, of a plan or project, it is not appropriate, at the screening stage, to take account of the measures intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of the plan or project on that site.

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## 3.4 Site Restoration

No restoration works are proposed due to the monitoring information that has been gathered and interpreted. The screening of these results against Environmental Quality Standards (EQS) has determined that the historical landfill does not represent a significant risk to the receiving environment.

This AA screening has reviewed the monitoring results in the context of the supporting conditions for ecological status and the potential pathway to downstream Natura 2000 Sites and the potential to impact on their conservation objectives.

The proposed project is a remediation scheme for the former landfill and given the nature of the site and the minimal contamination present, as established from the monitoring results, it is anticipated that works will be limited to an ongoing watching brief with the decommissioning of the existing boreholes on site which will involve the backfilling, sealing and capping of the boreholes, which is detailed below.

### 3.4.1 Decommissioning of Boreholes

Improperly abandoned boreholes may act as preferential pathways for groundwater or contaminant transport which may result in groundwater contamination, mixing of groundwaters of variable quality from different aquifers or present a physical hazard. It is proposed that the six boreholes onsite should be decommissioned in line with Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) guidance 'Good Practice for Decommissioning Redundant Boreholes and Wells'. It is recommended the advice of a specialist well contractor is sought prior to decommissioning works. The ground conditions of the site and health and safety must be carefully considered prior to decommissioning works.

#### Headworks and casing

All above ground headworks will be removed. Purging pipework will also be removed to prevent any interference with the sealing of the hole.

#### Backfilling

The borehole will be backfilled with clean, inert, uncontaminated or excavated materials so that the permeability of the selected materials is similar to the properties of the geological strata against which they are placed. This will protect groundwater flow and quality. Suitable materials recommended in the SEPA guidance include pea gravel, sand, shingle, concrete, bentonite, cement grout and uncontaminated rock.

For shallow boreholes (BH04-BH06) installed with a response zone in the waste material, the entire borehole will be backfilled with low permeability material such as concrete or bentonite cement grout.

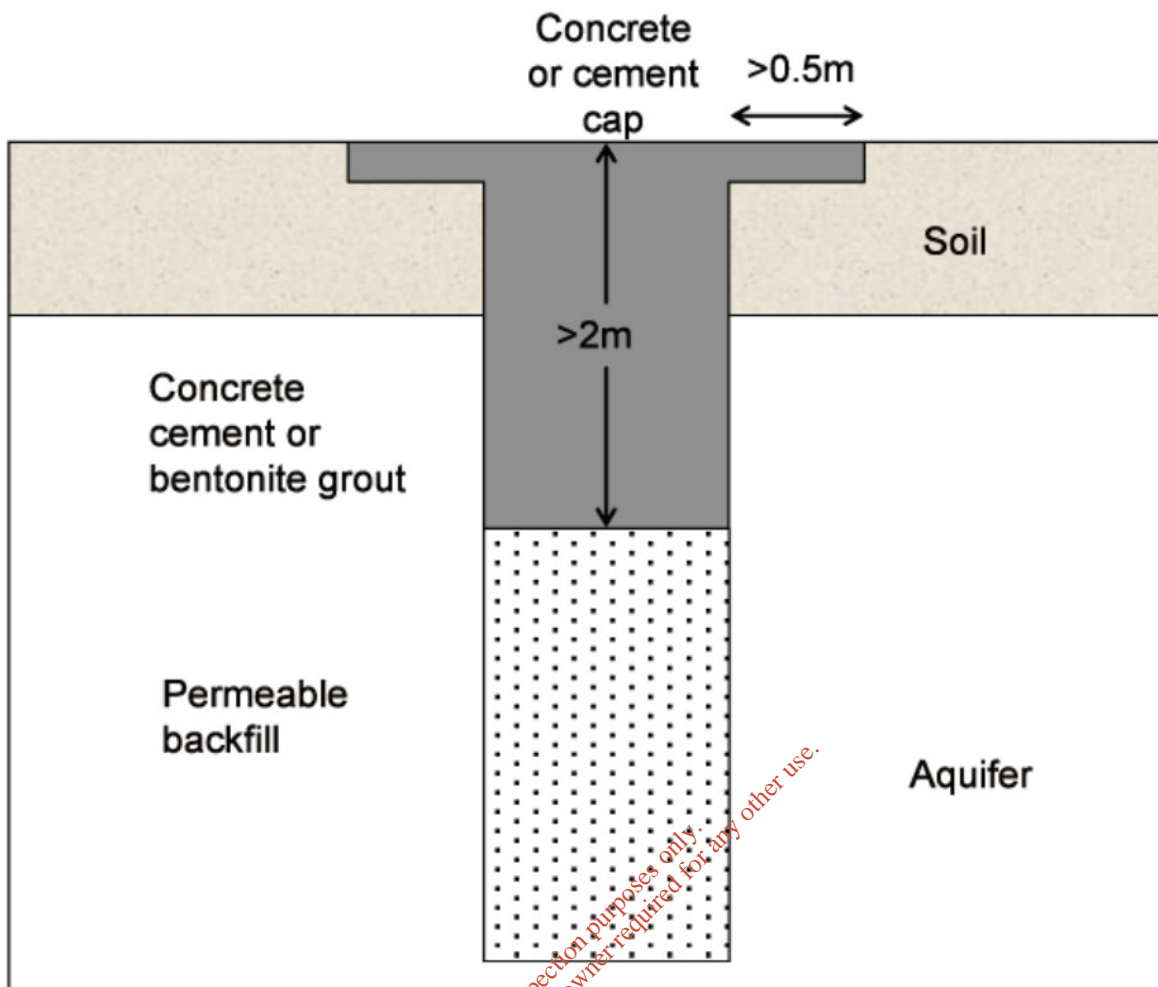
Deep boreholes (BH01-03) installed with a response zone in the Schist bedrock will be backfilled with permeable aggregates such as sand and pea gravel adjacent to the aquifer horizon in the schist bedrock. The boreholes will then be backfilled with low permeability materials such as concrete or bentonite cement grout from the schist bedrock back to ensure that a vertical pathway is not created.

The geochemical environment of the borehole will be considered when backfilling as materials may behave differently under different environmental conditions. The grain size of the aggregates will be selected that allows easy delivery into the borehole and will be delivered in a controlled manner to prevent 'bridging' or the creation of voids in the borehole. The volume of backfill will be monitored as it is placed to check for 'bridging' within the borehole or any loss to formation.

#### Sealing of borehole

The backfilled borehole will be complete with an impermeable plug and cap to prevent potentially contaminated surface runoff entering the backfilled borehole. The top two meters will be filled with cement, concrete or bentonite grout. A concrete cap of suitable strength with a diameter at least one metre greater than the width of the backfilled borehole will then be installed as per Figure 3.1.





**Figure 3.2 Sealing and capping of borehole (Source: SEPA 'Good practice for decommissioning redundant boreholes and wells')**

## 4 SCREENING FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them. These two designations are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network.

This screening exercise principally considers European sites (Special Areas of Conservation or SACs and Special Protection Areas or SPAs designated under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC).

The proposed development must be screened against those sites for which a pathway of effect can be reasonably established between a receptor and the proposed development.

### 4.1 Establishing an Impact Pathway

Current guidance (DEHLG, 2010) on the Zone of Influence to be considered during the Screening for AA states the following:

“A distance of 15km is currently recommended in the case of plans, and derives from UK guidance (Scott Wilson et al., 2006). For projects, the distance could be much less than 15km, and in some cases less than 100m, but this must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with reference to the nature, size and location of the project, and the sensitivities of the ecological receptors, and the potential for in-combination effects”.

As stated above, a buffer of 15km is typically taken as the initial Zone of Influence extending beyond the reach of the footprint of a plan or project, although there may be scientifically appropriate reasons for extending this Zone of Influence further depending on pathways for potential impacts.

The possibility of significant effects is considered in this report using the source-pathway-receptor model. ‘Source’ is defined as the individual elements of the proposed works that have the potential to affect the identified ecological receptors. ‘Pathway’ is defined as the means or route by which a source can affect the ecological receptor. ‘Ecological receptor’ is defined as the qualifying feature of European sites (and for which conservation objectives have been set in the case of SACs or SPAs) being assessed. Each element can exist independently however an effect is created when there is a linkage between the source, pathway and receptor.

This source pathway receptor model has been used to screen the potential for impact on those Natura 2000 sites. Given that the assessment is based on the EQS for surface water that provide a hydrological link to the Natura 2000 network the 15km distance is considered inadequate to screen all likely significant effects that might impact upon European Sites. This is primarily due to the need to consider the potential for likely significant effects on European Sites with regard to aquatic and water dependent receptors that are hydrologically linked to the reach of the River Glen that is adjacent to the Carrick Historical Landfill. Therefore, the Zone of Influence for this project includes all of the hydrologically connected surface water sub catchments which have the potential to impact on a downstream Natura 2000 site.

Figure 4.1 includes illustrates the Natura Network within the Zone of Influence. The relevant sites are listed below with details on their qualifying features included in Table 4.1:

- Slieve League SAC (000189)
- West Donegal Coast SPA (004150)
- Inishduff SPA (004115)



**Table 4-1: Downstream European sites, their qualifying features and relative distances from the proposed development**

European Site	Downstream distance	Qualifying features
Slieve League SAC (000189)	Approximately 5.0km from the closest part of the SAC to the site (See Appendix A)	Reefs [1170] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix [4010] European dry heaths [4030] Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060] Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels [6430] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130] Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (Androsacetalia alpinae and Galeopsietalia ladani) [8110] Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8210] Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]
West Donegal Coast SPA	Approximately 4.5km from the closest part of the SPA to the site (See Appendix A)	Fulmar (Fulmarus glacialis) [A009] Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo) [A017] Shag (Phalacrocorax aristotelis) [A018] Peregrine (Falco peregrinus) [A103] Herring Gull (Larus argentatus) [A184] Kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla) [A188] Razorbill (Alca torda) [A200] Chough (Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax) [A346]
Inishduff SPA (004115)	Approximately 11.0km from the closest part of the SPA to the site (See Appendix A)	Shag (Phalacrocorax aristotelis) [A018]



## 4.2 Initial Screening of European Sites within the Zone of Influence

### 4.2.1 Slieve League SAC

#### 4.2.1.1 Reefs

A review of the Site Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) (NPWS, 2015) for this habitat show that there will be no likely significant effects as the conservation objectives of this qualifying feature is not dependent on water quality. There are, therefore, no likely significant effects and this feature can be screened out of any further assessment.

#### 4.2.1.2 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230]

A review of the SSCO (NPWS, 2015) for this habitat show that there will be no likely significant effects as the conservation objectives of this qualifying feature is not dependent on water quality. There are, therefore, no likely significant effects and this feature can be screened out of any further assessment.

#### 4.2.1.3 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]

The soil nutrients measures target for the wet heaths is to ensure soil pH and appropriate nutrient levels to support the natural ranges, with nitrogen deposition as being particularly relevant.

#### 4.2.1.4 European dry heaths [4030]

No conservation objectives. No potential for significant effects due to the fact that the water bodies draining the site are not significantly impacted, their hydrological distance from the site to the SAC and large dilution volume there are no likely significant effects.

#### 4.2.1.5 Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

The soil nutrients measures target for the wet heaths is to ensure soil pH and appropriate nutrient levels to support the natural ranges, with nitrogen deposition as being particularly relevant.

A review of the SSCO (NPWS, 2015) for this habitat show that there will be no likely significant effects as the conservation objectives of this qualifying feature is not dependent on surface water quality. There are, therefore, no likely significant effects and this feature can be screened out of any further assessment.

#### 4.2.1.6 Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels [6430]

No conservation objectives. No potential for significant effects due to the fact that the water bodies draining the site are not significantly impacted, their hydrological distance from the site to the SAC and large dilution volume there are no likely significant effects.

#### 4.2.1.7 Blanket bogs (\* if active bog) [7130]

The soil nutrients measures target for the wet heaths is to ensure soil pH and appropriate nutrient levels to support the natural ranges, with nitrogen deposition as being particularly relevant.

A review of the SSCO (NPWS, 2015) for this habitat show that there will be no likely significant effects as the conservation objectives of this qualifying feature is not dependent on surface water quality. There are, therefore, no likely significant effects and this feature can be screened out of any further assessment.

#### 4.2.1.8 Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (*Androsacetalia alpinae* and *Galeopsietalia ladani*) [8110]

No conservation objectives. There will be no likely significant effects as the conservation objectives of this qualifying feature is not dependent on surface water quality. There are, therefore, no likely significant effects and this feature can be screened out of any further assessment.

#### 4.2.1.9 Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8210]

The soil nutrients measures target for the wet heaths is to ensure soil pH and appropriate nutrient levels to support the natural ranges, with nitrogen deposition as being particularly relevant.

A review of the SSCOs (NPWS, 2015b) for this habitat show that there will be no likely significant effects as the conservation objectives of this qualifying feature is not dependent on water quality. There are, therefore, no likely significant effects and this feature can be screened out of any further assessment.

#### 4.2.1.10 Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]

The soil nutrients measures target for the wet heaths is to ensure soil pH and appropriate nutrient levels to support the natural ranges, with nitrogen deposition as being particularly relevant.

A review of the SSCOs (NPWS, 2015b) for this habitat show that there will be no likely significant effects as the conservation objectives of this qualifying feature is not dependent on water quality. There are, therefore, no likely significant effects and this feature can be screened out of any further assessment.

### 4.2.2 West Donegal Coast SPA

The bird species that are regarded as qualifying interests of the West Donegal Coast SPA are listed above (table 4.1). The SPA habitat has the potential to be impacted by deterioration in water quality and pollutants. There is potential for impact on these qualifying features, however due to the fact that the water bodies draining the site are not significantly impacted, their hydrological distance from the site to the SPA and large dilution volume there are no likely significant effects.

### 4.2.3 Inishduff SPA

The bird species that are regarded as qualifying interests of the Inishduff SPA are listed above (table 4.1). The SPA habitat has the potential to be impacted by deterioration in water quality and pollutants.

There is potential for impact on these qualifying features, however due to the fact that the water bodies draining the site are not significantly impacted, their hydrological distance from the site to the SPA and large dilution volume there are no likely significant effects.

The Carrick site is not located or directly connected with any European site. Therefore, there will be no direct impact on the footprint of the SAC or SPA listed and thus no habitat loss from any of the European sites listed in Section 4.1 above.

## 4.3 Water Quality and Habitat Deterioration

The site of the proposed development is not directly linked to any European site listed above but may be indirectly linked. As a result, the European sites listed above must be taken into consideration due to their hydrological connection to the development. However only the qualifying features within these European Sites that have the potential to be impacted through a hydrological link to the historical landfill will be considered.

In terms of the hydrological link the key consideration must relate to the status of the relevant water bodies, as determined under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), and the associated water dependent protected areas including the European sites listed above. The key objectives of the WFD



are that surface water bodies attain at least good surface water status, requiring both ecological status and chemical status to be at least good, that there will be no deterioration in status in addition to achieving the protected area objectives of connected water dependent protected areas. The River Glen (Carrick) and underlying groundwater body are:

- River Glen (Carrick (IE\_NW\_37G010200))
- Donegal South Groundwater (IE\_NW\_G\_047)

The landfill is situated within the proximity of the Glen (Carrick) River which lies within the sub-catchment of the Glen Carrick River which resides within the Donegal Bay North catchment. The overall Donegal Bay North catchment comprises five sub-catchments with 50 river water bodies, 12 lakes, four transitional, six coastal water bodies and eight groundwater bodies. The tributaries of the Eany (water), the Eany More and Eany Beg, drains the southern slopes of the western half of the Bluestack Mountains. The river past Inver, where it flows out into Donegal Bay via Inver Bay.

## 4.4 Summary of the Screening Assessment

### 4.4.1 Habitat Loss

Likely significant effects have been discounted for all European sites.

### 4.4.2 Water Quality and Habitat Deterioration

The principle issue of concern raised in the assessment, is that of the potential impact of groundwater surface water interactions from the historic landfill on the receiving waterbody, Glen (Carrick) River, and those further downstream waterbodies which are hydrologically connected to the site. The site will require an ongoing watching brief to ensure that there will be no negative impacts on the WFD status of waterbodies that are hydrologically connected to the site, including the protected area objectives of the European Sites. The possibility of likely significant water quality and habitat deterioration effects can be discounted for the Slieve League SAC, West Donegal Coast SPA and Inishduff SPA due to the fact that the surface water bodies are not impacted by the historical landfill site which is not preventing the water bodies from achieving their environmental objectives under the WFD.

## 4.5 Likely Significant Effects (LSE)

The site's nearest WFD monitoring station is 500m downstream of Carrick Bridge. Analysis of the available monitoring information from the EPA shows that ammonia levels are listed as 'high' for indicative quality and display a downward trend in ammonia concentration over the last two monitoring programmes which is statistically significant. Therefore there is no current risk of ammonia leading to the exceedance of conditions capable of supporting high ecological status in the waterbody. There is therefore no risk to the subsequent ammonia levels at Slieve League SAC or West Donegal Coast SPA.

The levels of contaminants analysed at the surface waters upstream and downstream of the landfill site and the borehole monitoring undertaken for the tier 3 report are within the environmental quality Standard (EQS) required to sustain at least good ecological status.

The site represents no risk to the achievement of the WFD objectives of the Glen (Carrick) River nor the waterbodies downstream. There is therefore no potential to impact the conservation objectives of the water dependent protected areas downstream, i.e. Slieve League SAC, West Donegal Coast SPA and Inishduff SPA due to the hydrological connectivity. This indicates that there is no need for remediation works and the existing boreholes on the site will therefore be decommissioned which will involve the backfilling, sealing and capping of the boreholes. The decommissioning is necessary to prevent a pathway to contamination of the shallow groundwater and potential to impact on surface water through the groundwater interaction and will not pose a significant threat to the associated water bodies given the nature and scale of the works. Therefore there will be no risk to the downstream hydrologically connected European Sites.

This Appropriate Assessment Screening has been prepared by RPS on behalf of Donegal County Council in support of the proposed restoration works for the Carrick Landfill. The purpose of the report is to document the evaluation and analysis of the potential impact on the waterbodies and conservation objectives of connected Natura 2000 sites.

Having regard to the methodology employed and the findings of the screening stage exercise, it is concluded that an appropriate assessment of the Carrick Historical Landfill site is not required.

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## 5 CONCLUSION

The report was prepared with regards to relevant legislation outlined in Section 1 of this report and methodological guidance outlined in Section 2 of this report.

A screening exercise was completed in Section 4 of this report to determine whether or not 'Likely Significant Effects' on any European site could be discounted as a result of the development.

From the findings of the screening stage exercise, the possibility of likely significant water quality and habitat deterioration effects could be discounted for Slieve League SAC, West Donegal Coast SPA and Inishduff SPA.

The assessment concludes that no adverse effect upon the integrity of any European site will occur. There are no remediation works proposed at the historical landfill site as the risk presented by the site is not significant. The analysis has demonstrated that the site in its current form does not impact on hydrologically linked water bodies downstream of the site and will therefore not impact on the SSCOs for the water dependent downstream Natura 2000 sites.

On the basis of these findings, it is concluded that the Carrick Historical Landfill:

- (i) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site

and

- (ii) is not having significant effects on the conservation objectives of the qualifying habitats and species of the River Glen, or the downstream Slieve League SAC, West Donegal Coast SPA and Inishduff SPA.

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