
Hook Rural Tourism Ltd

Biodiversity Feasibility Study



Clumps of Tall Sea-lavender (*Limonium procerum*) (foreground) sporting small, lilac-blue flowers, growing on bare, outcropping limestone rock at Hook Head. (Photo: Jim Hurley)

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— Report dated 12 January 2021 —

Report compiled by Jim Hurley

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SWC Promotions: promoting the natural heritage resource values of the South Wexford Coast.

— Summary of this report —

1. Hook Rural Tourism Limited is a community-based organisation on the Hook Peninsula in south-west County Wexford. The organisation has been in existence for over 50 years and is a not-for-profit enterprise. Among the very many different aspects of its work, it promotes the Hook Peninsula as a tourist destination in a manner that protects the area's unspoiled coastal landscape and significant heritage resource values.
2. The project area, that is, the location 'the Hook Peninsula' as promoted by Hook Rural Tourism Limited, is shown below (Figure 1). On its northern side the area extends to the town of New Ross. On its eastern side it includes the village of Wellingtonbridge and the Keeragh Islands. To the south and west the area is bounded by the Celtic Sea, Waterford Harbour estuary, and the River Barrow that flows through New Ross. The distance by road from Hook Head to New Ross is nearly 40km and the extent of the project area is 400km² approximately. All of the project area used to be in the New Ross Municipal District but since the 2018 revision of electoral areas, the eastern edge of the project area is now in the Rosslare Municipal District.

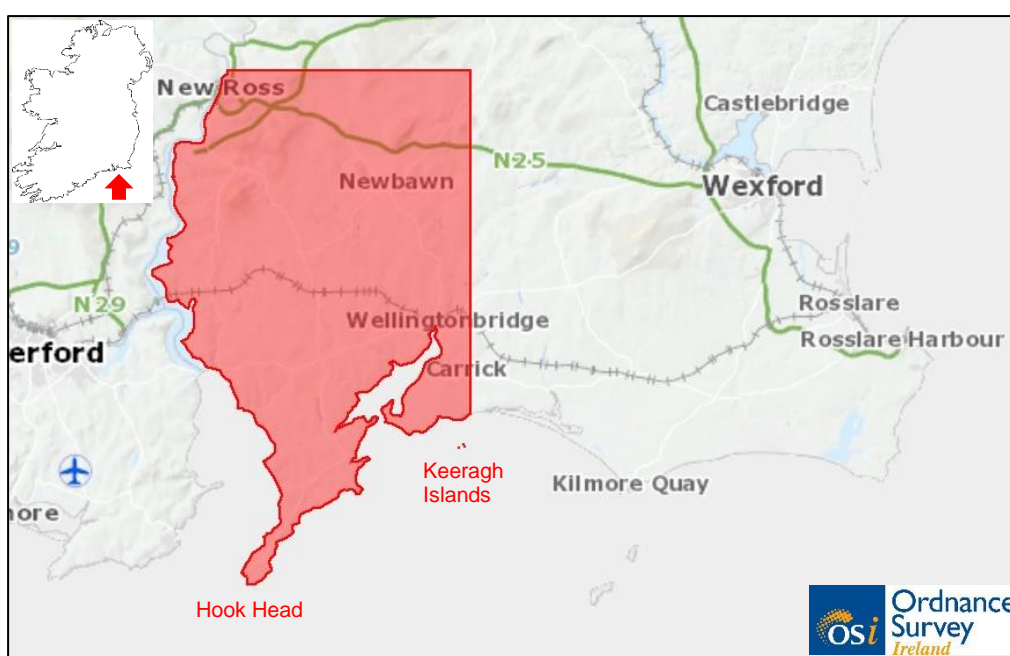


Figure 1. Location of the project area (red fill).

(Base map source: screen snip from <https://maps.wexford.ie/imaps/>. Ordnance Survey Ireland Permit No MP 0002120. © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland)

3. It has always been an objective of Hook Rural Tourism Limited to increase environmental awareness and understanding of the natural heritage resource values of the peninsula by disseminating information on the biodiversity of the area in a variety of media to local residents, the public and tourists visiting the Hook Peninsula.
4. In 2020 that generic, long-standing objective crystalised into the 'Biodiversity Project', a focused attempt to promote the biodiversity of the Hook Peninsula. As a starting point, this feasibility study was commissioned.
5. This 'Biodiversity Feasibility Study' seeks to identify and list the natural heritage resource values of the project area, to explore how best these values can be developed for local people and visitors alike to experience and enjoy, and to make recommendations regarding the steps the Biodiversity Project might take to achieve its overarching aims.
6. During November 2020, a draft report was circulated to the board and members of Hook Rural Tourism Limited, tourism stakeholders, those involved in promoting biodiversity in the project area, and other interested parties inviting comment before 31 December 2020. The draft report was also posted online (<https://hookpeninsula.com/biodiversity/>) and public notice of its existence was flagged in the local press (*New Ross Standard*, December 2020 issues dated 1st, pages 50-51; 8th, pages 59-60; 15th, pages 68-69, 22nd pages 77-78, and 29th pages 67-68).
7. This final report incorporates comment and feedback received regarding the draft report, together with fleshing-out, corrections, amendments, updating and additional photographs.

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— Acknowledgements —

Several people commented favourably on the earlier draft of this report, circulated it to other interested parties, provided further information and/or photographs, and shared their knowledge of, and wildlife experiences in, the project area. Their comments, inputs, encouragement and assistance are all greatly appreciated.

The following made submissions or contributed more detailed comments regarding their areas of expertise and the biodiversity of the project area. Their inputs are gratefully acknowledged as their inputs contributed significantly to improving the earlier draft report.

- ❑ Sinéad O'Brien, Executive Officer, Development Applications Unit, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- ❑ Aileen Dowling, Fáilte Ireland, Ireland's Ancient East Officer for Co Wexford.
- ❑ Billy Byrne, Tourism Development Officer, Economic and Enterprise Development, Wexford County Council
- ❑ Karin Dubsky, Director, Coastwatch.
- ❑ Paul Green, Vice-County Recorder for Co Wexford for the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland.
- ❑ Dr Yvonne Byrne, Rural Development Consultancy Limited.
- ❑ John Lovatt, author of 'Birds of Hook Head'.
- ❑ Pádraig Whooley, Sightings Officer, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group.
- ❑ Liam Ryan, local farmer, photographer, naturalist and author.
- ❑ Regina Classen, Marine Project Officer, Irish Wildlife Trust.

Thanks too to Alison Little for highlighting the ongoing need for dedicated walks along the coast of the project area rather than on public roads with no footpaths, and to Martin Power for sharing his extensive knowledge of the biodiversity of Carrickbyrne Hill.

And, last but by no means least, I thank Hook Rural Tourism Limited for taking the initiative to do more to promote the biodiversity of the Hook Peninsula and for involving me in it. I especially thank John Rogers of Hook Tourism who assisted the project in several ways, proofread this report, and helped bring this feasibility study to what I hope is a successful conclusion for the promotion and conservation of the biodiversity of the wonderful natural amenity that is the Hook Peninsula.

Jim Hurley,
12 Jan 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

- 1.1.1. **The Promoter.** This project is promoted by Hook Rural Tourism Limited, a community-based organisation on the Hook Peninsula in south-west County Wexford. The organisation has been in existence for over 50 years and is a not-for-profit enterprise. Among the very many different aspects of its work, it promotes the Hook Peninsula as a tourist destination in a manner that protects the area's unspoiled coastal landscape and significant heritage resource values. Contact details: Hook Rural Tourism Limited, Duncannon, New Ross, Co Wexford Y34 X593. Email: info@hooktourism.com. 'Phone: +353 (0)51 389530. Website: <https://hookpeninsula.com/>.
- 1.1.2. **The Project.** The overall project is called the 'Hook Peninsula Biodiversity Project'.
- 1.1.3. **This study.** This study, the 'Biodiversity Feasibility Study', is the first step in advancing the 'Hook Peninsula Biodiversity Project'. Basically, this study is tasked with drawing up an inventory of the resources of the project area and recommending how these natural heritage resource values can best be presented for both local people and visitors to experience and enjoy.
- 1.1.4. **Biodiversity.** Biodiversity is generally understood to mean the diversity of life forms found in a particular place. In addition to the living life forms, the biodiversity of the Hook Peninsula is considered to include the abundant extinct life forms to be seen in fossilised form in rock exposures. However, while fossils are included, both the structural and other elements of the geology and the geomorphology of the area are outside the remit of the present project.
- 1.1.5. **Feasibility study.** A feasibility study is an assessment of the practicality of a proposed plan. The proposed plan is the desire of Hook Rural Tourism Limited to do more to promote the biodiversity of the area. It is self-evident that that proposed plan is entirely practical and laudable. The overall aim of the project is to evaluate how best to disseminate information on the biodiversity of the area, via a variety of media to local residents, and to the public and tourists visiting the Hook Peninsula, and to identify which locations to direct people to to experience and enjoy local wildlife.
- 1.1.6. **Project area.** For the purposes of this project the spatial extent of 'the Hook Peninsula' is defined as the mapped area shown in Figure 1 above, in Appendix 1 at Section 22.1 below, and at <https://hookpeninsula.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Hook-Peninsula-Map-and-Listings.pdf>.
- 1.1.7. **Funding.** This project is funded by Hook Rural Tourism Limited with LEADER grant aid from Wexford Local Development under Theme 3: Rural Environment, Sub Theme: Protection and Improvement of Local Biodiversity (Project Reference: 33LDRWEX111964).



1.2. Terms of reference

- 1.2.1. Jim Hurley, SWC Promotions, was commissioned by Hook Rural Tourism Limited to compile this report.
- 1.2.2. Specific criteria of his terms of reference are set out in the project brief below (Appendix 2, Section 22.2).
- 1.2.3. The brief for this 'Biodiversity Feasibility Study' comprises the following five elements.
 - a desk study researching existing published works, scientific literature, websites, and other information sources to identify and list the natural heritage resource values of the project area, areas of specific protection, areas of special interest, unique flora or fauna, etc.,
 - from that overall inventory to identify and recommend areas and items likely to be of interest to a general audience and things that people might realistically expect to be able to see during a visit to the area and the heritage aspects that Hook Rural Tourism Limited should promote by various means and employing a variety of media to disseminate information,
 - site visits to check out and review key locations,
 - consultations with key stakeholders, information providers, and other interested parties, and
 - the collation and compiling of all of the information gained in a final report.

Note. Site visits were curtailed, and several proposed meetings did not happen due to necessary government restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 2. The River Barrow at New Ross.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

2. NATURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES

2.1. Introduction

- 2.1.1. While the project area enjoys a wealth of natural resources in terms of clean air, unpolluted waters, a great diversity of underlying bedrocks, a variety of fertile soil types, distinctive landscapes with sea views, clean beaches, etc., the focus of this report is the area's biological resources.
- 2.1.2. Surveys of the natural heritage resource values of the project area have been ongoing since the 1970s (Goodwillie, 1979). Most biodiversity hot spots in the area have been identified by now and the most important ones have been designated. While conservation objectives have been published and legislation has been enacted to protect these resources, many fail to achieve favourable conservation status. Management plans and the conservation measures that need to be taken to conserve and/or restore these sites are not in place and may be the subject of legal action taken against Ireland by the European Commission.
- 2.1.3. In order of their importance for biodiversity, protected areas comprise five Natura 2000 sites, one Ramsar Site, and six proposed Natural Heritage Areas. These twelve areas are described individually below.
- 2.1.4. While the Keeragh Islands are widely flagged a Natural Heritage Area there is no statutory instrument to give effect to such a designation.
- 2.1.5. Bannow Bay is a 'Wildfowl Sanctuary' (No WFS-65), that is, it is an area excluded from 'Open Season Orders' so that game birds can rest and feed undisturbed. Shooting of game birds is not allowed in wildfowl sanctuaries (<https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/wildfowl-sanctuaries>).



Figure 3. A male Beautiful Demoiselle.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

The Beautiful Demoiselle has metallic cobalt wings and is a common damselfly along the banks of the Corock River. It flies from late May to early September.

3. NATURA 2000 SITES

3.1. Introduction

- 3.1.1. The most important natural heritage resources in the project area, in alphabetical order, are (1) Bannow Bay for its bird life, (2) Bannow Bay for its habitats, (3) Hook Head, (4) Keeragh Islands, and (5) the River Barrow. These five areas are important because they are Natura 2000 sites.
- 3.1.2. Natura 2000 sites are sites in the Natura 2000 network, a web of some 27,000 nature conservation sites spread throughout the territories of the member states of the European Union (EU). On-going development of the network is the centrepiece of EU policy with regard to the conservation of nature and biodiversity (https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm).
- 3.1.3. Natura 2000 sites may be either Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for wild birds or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for the habitats and species they support. The Keeragh Islands are a SPA. Hook Head and the River Barrow are SACs. Much of Bannow Bay has dual SPA/SAC designation due to overlap.

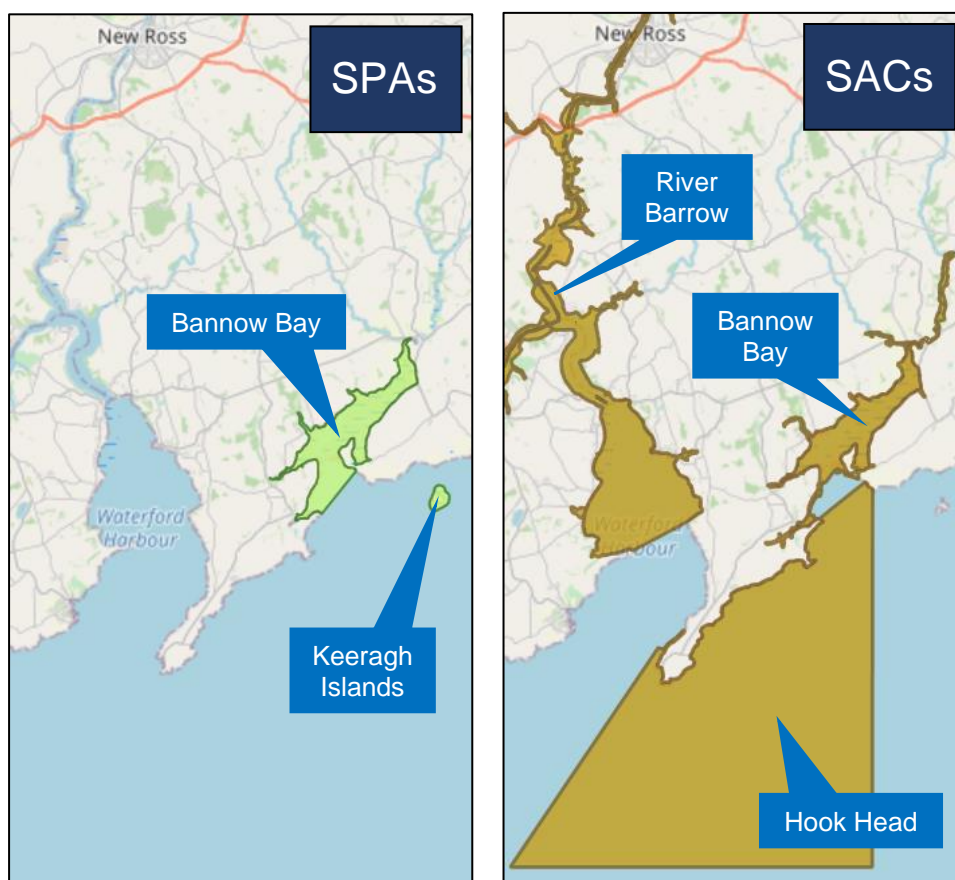


Figure 4. SPAs (green) and SACs (brown) in the project area.

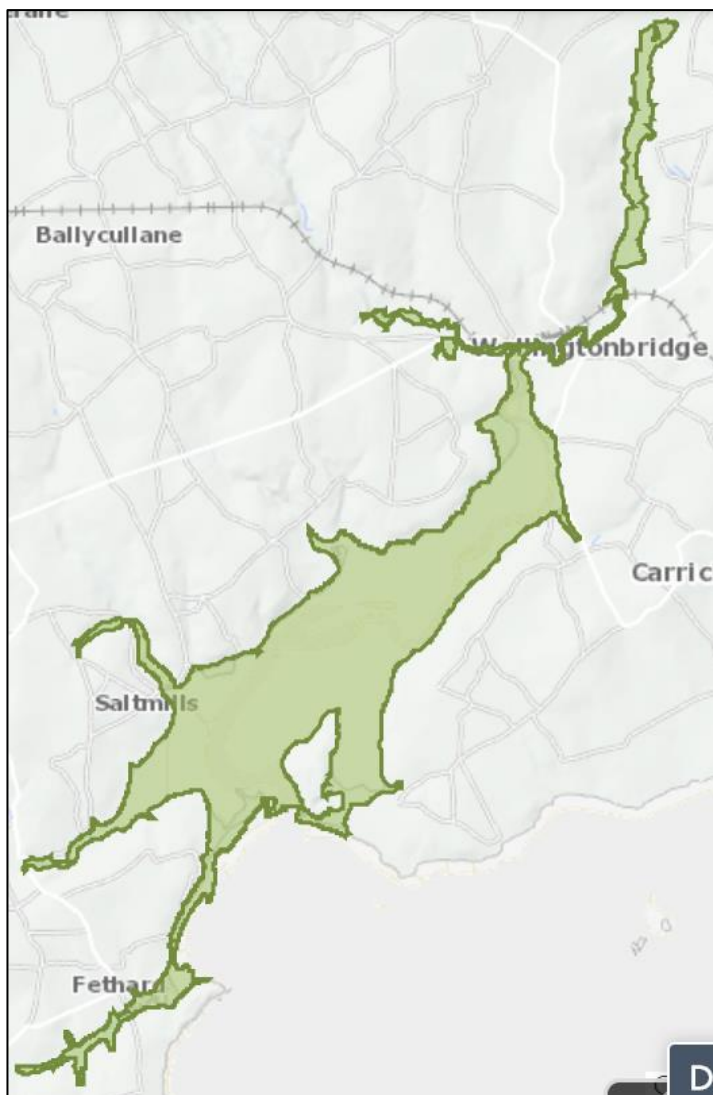
(Source: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool>)

- 3.1.4. Habitats are places that support wildlife. The 1992 EU Habitats Directive sets out obligations on Member States to protect vulnerable habitats. Annex 1 of the Directive lists 233 natural habitats found in the territories of Member States that are of Community interest and that require the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Fifty-eight of these Annex 1 habitats occur in Ireland.
- 3.1.5. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), one of the technical services of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, is the government agency in Ireland with overall responsibility for managing Natura 2000 sites. The NPWS website at www.npws.ie gives descriptions of all SPAs and SACs together with maps, aerial photographs and other useful information. The NPWS contact person for the South Wexford Coast is Tony Murray, Conservation Ranger, telephone 076 100 2662, email Tony.Murray@chg.gov.ie.
- 3.1.6. Natura 2000 sites are listed in the current *Wexford County Development Plan* (WCC, 2013a), the draft plan for the period 2021-2027 (WCC, 2020), and the *County Wexford Biodiversity Action Plan* (WCC, 2012), all policy documents of Wexford County Council. These documents may be accessed at www.wexfordcoco.ie. Via its function as the local Planning Authority, Wexford County Council is a major player in conserving Natura 2000 sites in County Wexford. The Wexford County Council contact person is Niamh Lennon, Biodiversity Officer, telephone 053 919 6540, email niamh.lennon@wexfordcoco.ie.
- 3.1.7. Each of the five Natura 2000 sites found in the project area is described briefly below. Full details may be accessed at www.npws.ie.



3.2. Bannow Bay (SAC IE000697)

Extent: This site comprises Bannow Bay, the lower reaches of River Owenduff, the River Corock as far north as Haresmead, part of the environs of Tintern Abbey, Bannow Strand, Grange Strand and part of Fethard Bay, The Glen at Fethard and Fethard Dock.



Qualifying interests: The qualifying interests of the site are the following 11 named habitat types followed by their EU code numbers.

- Estuaries [1130]
- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]
- Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210]
- Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220]
- *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]
- Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) [1330]
- Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*) [1410]
- Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (*Sarcocornetea fruticosi*) [1420]
- Embryonic shifting dunes [2110]
- Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (white dunes) [2120]
- Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]

Figure 5. Bannow Bay Special Area of Conservation (green fill).

(Sources: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool> and <http://dahg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8f7060450de3485fa1c1085536d477ba>)

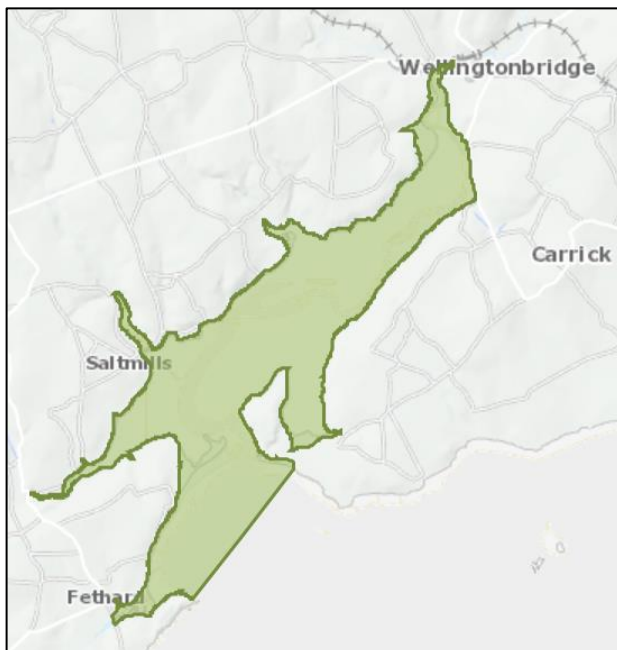
Conservation objectives: The overall aim is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. Site-specific conservation objectives are detailed in a 29-page report available online at http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000697.pdf.

Overlap: This SAC overlaps, in part, with Bannow Bay SPA No IE004033 and is adjacent to Hook Head SAC No IE000764.

3.3. Bannow Bay (SPA IE004033)

Extent: This site comprises Bannow Bay and an area of seabed and foreshore at the mouth of the bay.

Qualifying interest: The qualifying interests of the site are its 'Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]' especially the following 13 named species followed by their EU code numbers.



- Light-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota* [A046]
- Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* [A048]
- Pintail *Anas acuta* [A054]
- Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* [A130]
- Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* [A140]
- Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* [A141]
- Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* [A142]
- Knot *Calidris canutus* [A143]
- Dunlin *Calidris alpina* [A149]
- Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* [A156]
- Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* [A157]
- Curlew *Numenius arquata* [A160]
- Redshank *Tringa totanus* [A162]

Figure 6. Bannow Bay Special Protection Area (green fill).

(Sources: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool> and <http://dahg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8f7060450de3485fa1c1085536d477ba>)

Conservation objectives: The overall aim is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. Site-specific conservation objectives are detailed in a 21-page report available online at http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004033.pdf.

Overlap. This SPA overlaps, in part, with Bannow Bay SAC No IE000697 and joins Hook Head SAC No IE000764.



Figure 7. Light-bellied Brent Geese feeding at Saintkierans.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

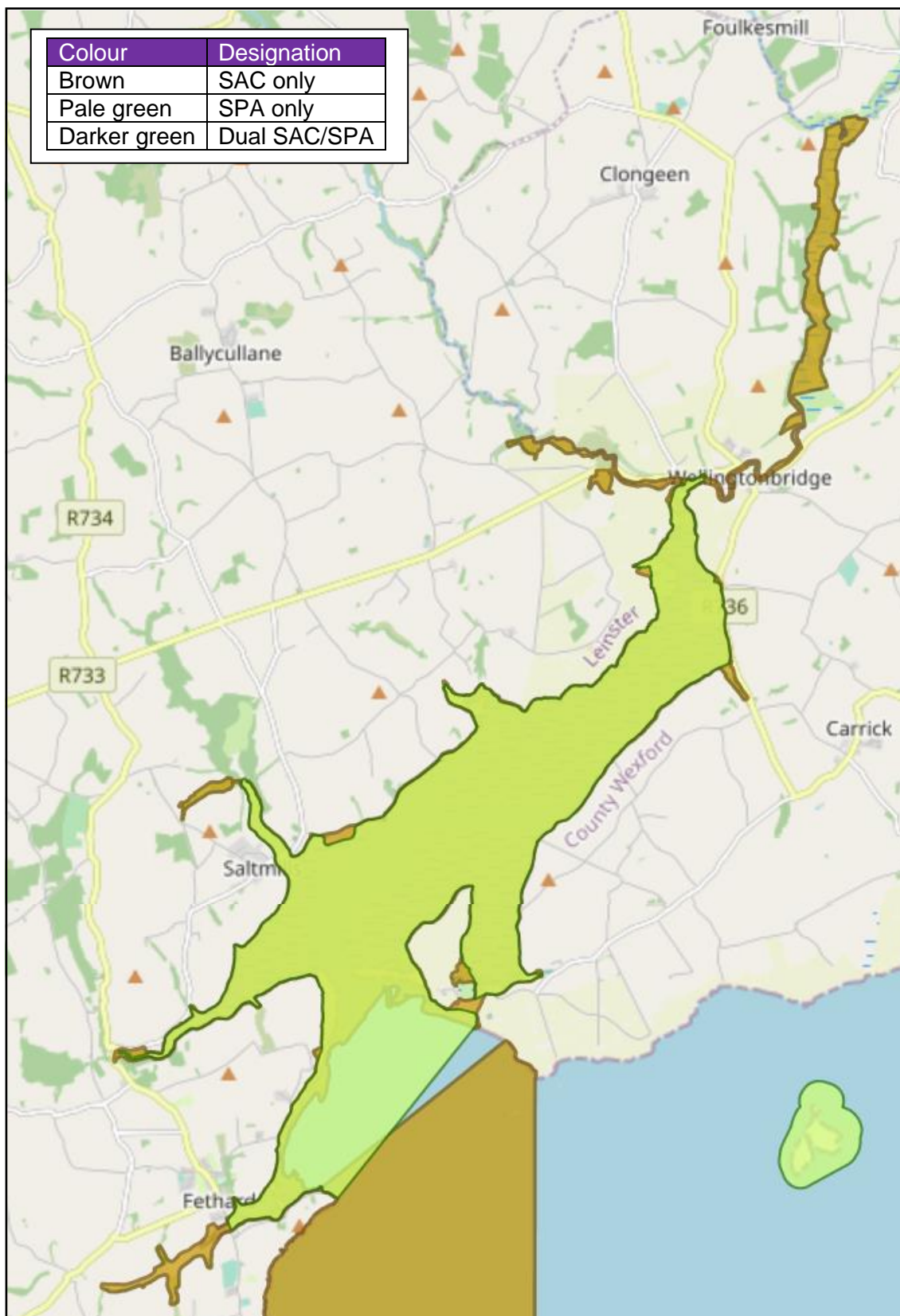


Figure 8. Two overlapping Bannow Bay Natura 2000 sites.

(Source: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool/>)

The bottom of the figure shows the Keeragh Islands SPA (right; green), and part of Hook Head SAC (centre; brown).

3.4. Hook Head (SAC IE000764)

Extent: Hook Head Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (highlighted below in the green colour), comprises an extensive area of seabed off Hook Head together with the foreshore of the western side of the peninsula south of Loftus Hall, all of the foreshore of the eastern side of the peninsula, and the foreshore at Clammers Point near Bannow.

Qualifying interests: The qualifying interests of the site are the following three named habitat types followed by their EU code numbers.

- Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] (part of Ballyteige Bay)
- Reefs [1170] (reefs are exposures of outcropping bedrock)
- Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230]

Conservation objectives: The overall aim is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of the three habitats. Site-specific conservation objectives for Hook Head SAC are detailed in a 14-page report available online at http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000764.pdf.

Overlap: Hook Head SAC overlaps with and adjoins a small portion of Bannow Bay SPA No IE004033 at its northern extremity.

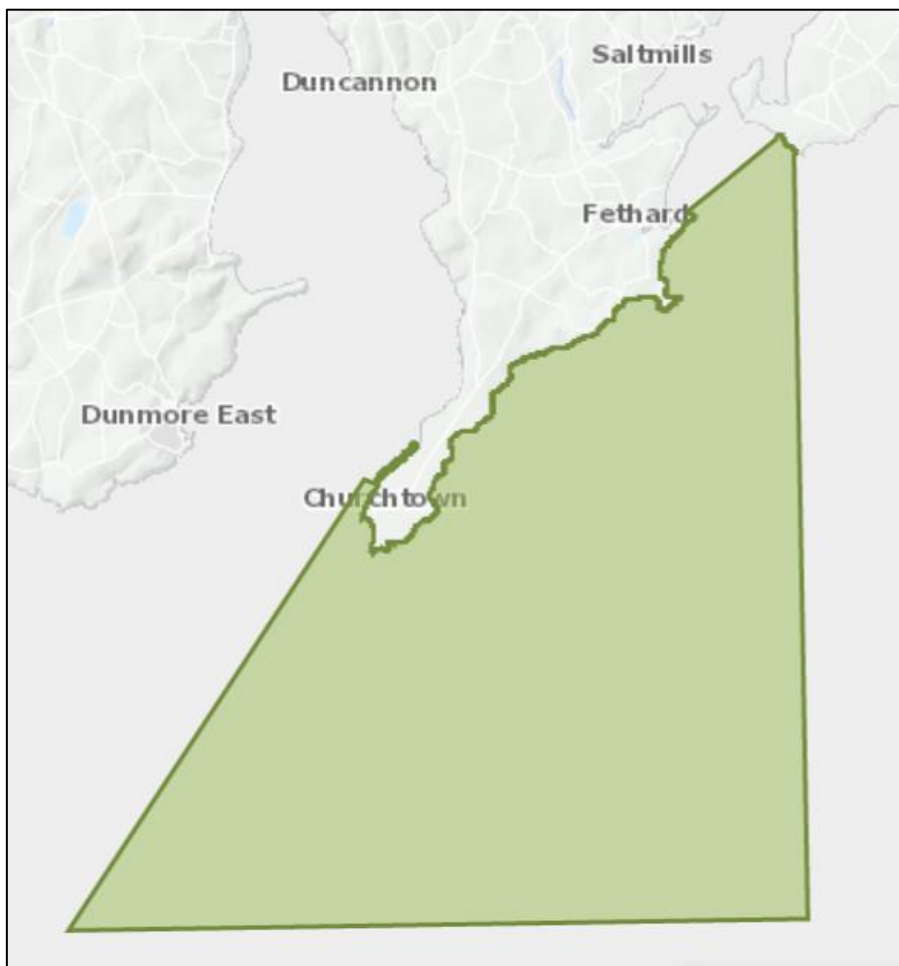


Figure 9. Hook Head Special Area of Conservation (green fill).

(Sources: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool> and <http://dahg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8f7060450de3485fa1c1085536d477ba>)

3.5. Keeragh Islands (SPA IE004118)

Extent: The 22-hectare protected area comprises the two Keeragh Islands, the associated low-tide rocky shorelines and reefs, and the surrounding near-shore seabed around both islands for a distance from the shore of 200 metres approximately.

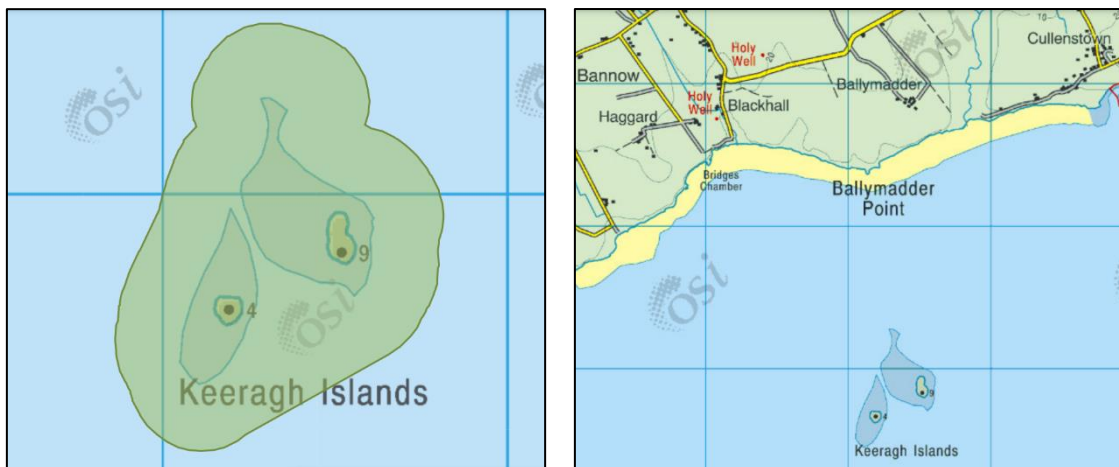


Figure 10. Keeragh Islands Special Protection Area (SPA) (green fill).

(Sources: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool>, <http://dahg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8f7060450de3485fa1c1085536d477ba> and <https://maps.wexford.ie/imaps/>.)

Qualifying interest: The sole special conservation interest of the site is the population of breeding Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* [A017].



Figure 11. Great Cormorants nesting on the Big Keeragh.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

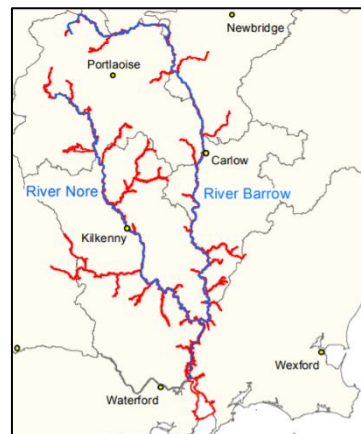
Conservation objective: Site-specific conservation objectives have not yet been published for the SPA. The generic conservation objective is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Great Cormorants (Source: http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004118.pdf).

Overlap: The Keeragh Islands SPA does not overlap with any other Natura 2000 site.

3.6. River Barrow and River Nore (SAC IE002162)

Extent: After the River Shannon, this river system is the second longest in Ireland as it straddles eight counties in south-east of the country: Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Offaly, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford. The site comprises freshwater, brackish water and the tidal portion of the estuary into which the River Suir, one of The Three Sisters, also flows. In addition to these waters, the site comprises several adjoining wetland habitat types and the life forms they support. The portion in the project area lies south of New Ross.

Qualifying interests: The qualifying interests of the site are the following 22 named habitat types and species followed by their EU code numbers.



- Estuaries [1130]
- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]
- *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]
- Atlantic salt meadows (*Glaucopuccinellietalia maritimae*) [1330]
- Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*) [1410]
- Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculum fluitantis* and *Callitriche-Batrachion* vegetation [3260]
- European dry heaths [4030]
- Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels [6430]
- Petrifying springs with tufa formation (*Cratoneurion*) [7220]
- Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles [91A0]
- Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion albae*) [91E0]
- *Vertigo moulinsiana* (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016]
- *Margaritifera margaritifera* (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]
- *Austropotamobius pallipes* (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]
- *Petromyzon marinus* (Sea Lamprey) [1095]
- *Lampetra planeri* (Brook Lamprey) [1096]
- *Lampetra fluviatilis* (River Lamprey) [1099]
- *Alosa fallax* (Twaiite Shad) [1103]
- *Salmo salar* (Salmon) [1106]
- *Lutra lutra* (Otter) [1355]
- *Trichomanes speciosum* (Killarney Fern) [1421]
- *Margaritifera durrovensis* (Nore Pearl Mussel) [1990]

Conservation objectives: The overall aim is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. Site-specific conservation objectives are detailed in a 46-page report available online at http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO002162.pdf.

Summary map showing the locations of Natura 2000 sites in the project area.

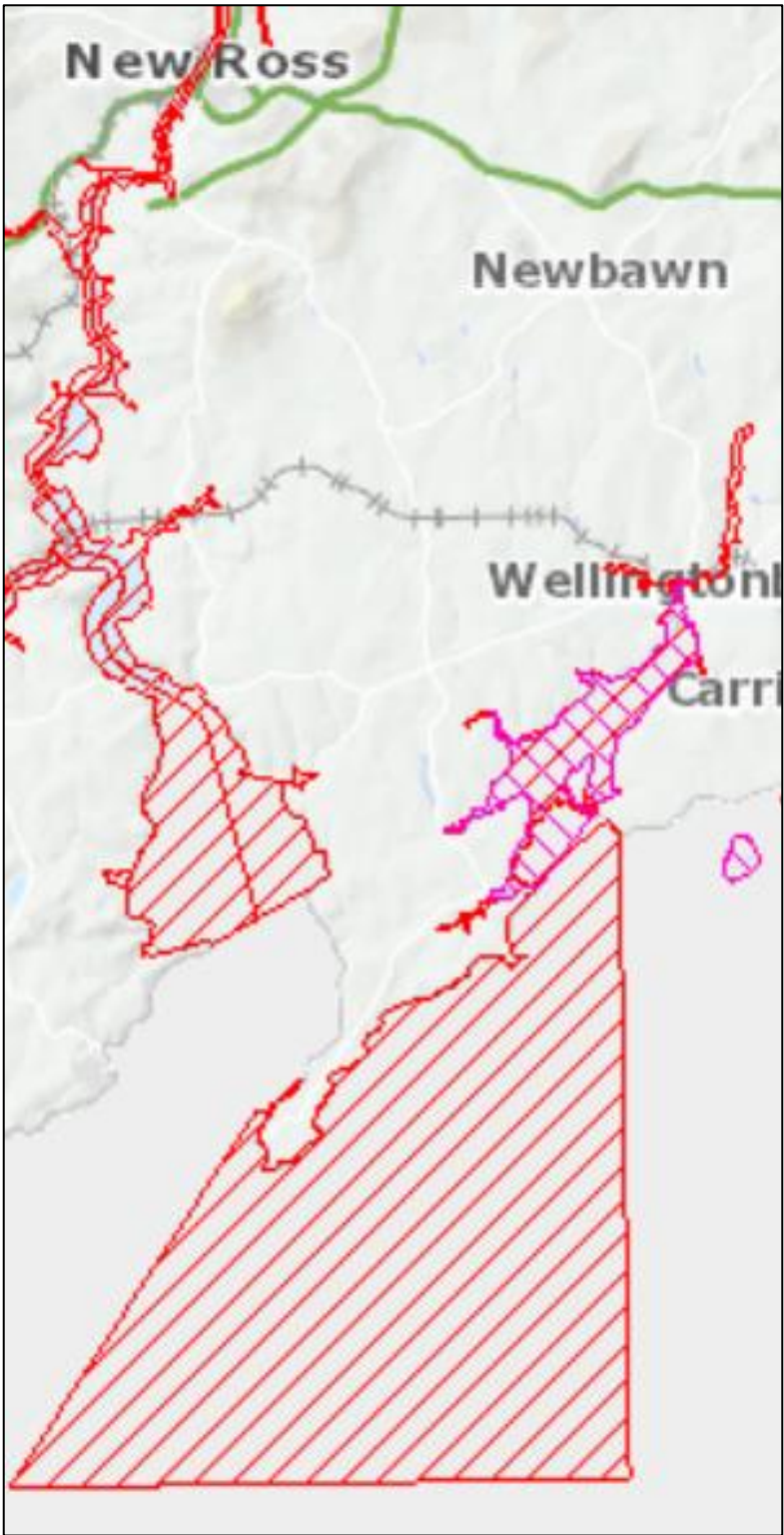


Figure 12. Designated Natura 2000 sites.

Designated Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are shown filled with upward diagonal red lines.

The **Hook Head** SAC is largely a triangular area of seabed south and east of the peninsula.

The **River Barrow** SAC extends southwards from New Ross. Its southern boundary is a line across Waterford Harbour from Creadon Head in Co Waterford to Broomhill Point in Co Wexford.

Designated Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are shown filled with downward diagonal magenta lines.

The small **Keeragh Islands** SPA lies offshore south of Carrick.

Bannow Bay has dual designation, so the overlapping upward diagonal red lines and the downward diagonal magenta lines form a cross-hatched pattern where they coincide.

(Source:

<http://dahg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8f7060450de3485fa1c1085536d477ba>)

4. BANNOW BAY RAMSAR SITE

4.1.1. Named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the Convention was signed in 1971, and also known by its short name: the 'Convention on Wetlands', the Ramsar 'Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat', is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands (<https://www.ramsar.org/about-the-convention-on-wetlands-0>).

4.1.2. The Convention's mission is *"the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world"*.



4.1.3. The Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

4.1.4. Bannow Bay was designated Ramsar site number 840 by the Irish government on 11 June 1996. The site overlaps part of the designated Natura 2000 site (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Ramsar site No 840.

(Source: Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee at <http://irishwetlands.ie/irish-sites/>.
Ordnance Survey Ireland Permit No MP 0002120. © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland)

The Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee was set up by the government to assist Ireland in meeting its requirements as a signatory to the Ramsar Convention.

The Committee is a widely representative group, set up to assist in the protection, appreciation and understanding of wetlands in Ireland and to promote the implementation of the Convention.

For further information see <http://irishwetlands.ie/>.



5. PROPOSED NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS

5.1. Introduction

- 5.1.1. The basic designation for wildlife in Ireland is the Natural Heritage Area (NHA). This is an area considered important for the habitats present or which holds species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection (<https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/nha>).
- 5.1.2. In 1995, 630 sites of significance for wildlife and habitats were identified as proposed NHAs (pNHAs); these were published on a non-statutory basis. Six of the pNHAs are in the project area (Table 1 and Figure 14). To date, none has been statutorily proposed or designated. It is intended to review the conservation status of these sites over the coming years with a view to reassessing their conservation value for possible designation.

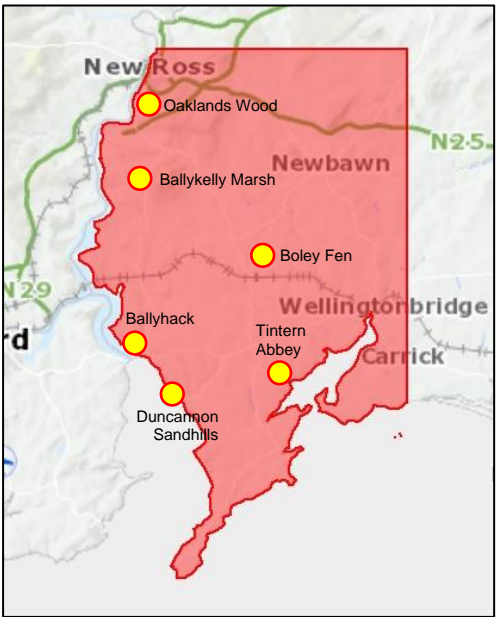
Name of the pNHA	Code No	Area (ha)
Ballyhack	000695	8.62
Ballykelly Marsh	000744	11.04
Boley Fen	000699	47.82
Duncannon Sandhills	001738	68.65
Oaklands Wood	000774	36.51
Tintern Abbey	000711	0.49

Table 1. Proposed Natural Heritage Areas.

(Source:

<http://dahg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8f7060450de3485fa1c1085536d477ba>)

- 5.1.3. In alphabetical order, each of these six pNHA sites is described briefly below from the National Parks and Wildlife Service’s pNHA Site Synopses PDF portfolio archive at https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/pNHA_Site_Synopsis_Portfolio.pdf with accompanying maps (blue hatching) sourced from <https://maps.wexford.ie/imaps/>.



In addition to the six pNHAs shown here there are several small areas of pNHA around the Bannow Bay, Hook Head and River Barrow Natura 2000 sites that, for one reason or another, were not included in the Natura 2000 sites when these sites were designated. These small areas are not named and the reasons for their inclusion as pNHAs, and their exclusion from the Natura 2000 sites, are not known.

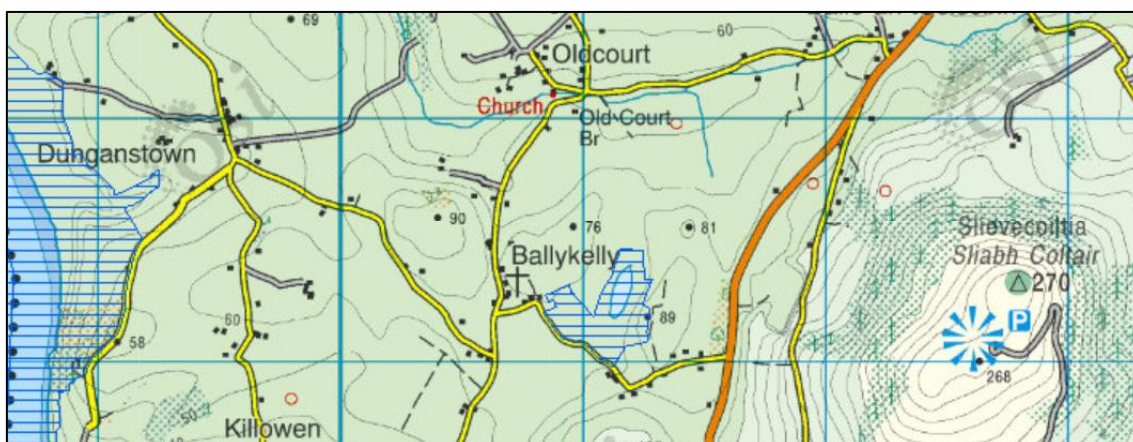
Figure 14. Locations of six pNHAs.

5.2. Ballyhack (pNHA No 000695)



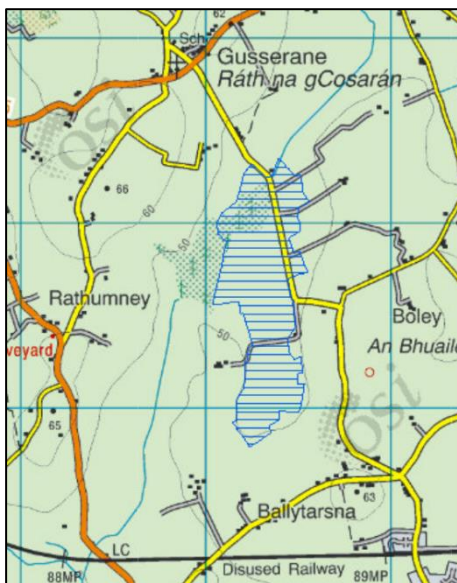
This 8.62ha site extends along the R770 road from Ballyhack to Arthurstown. While there is no information in the National Parks and Wildlife Service's pNHA Site Synopses PDF portfolio archive, the site was originally selected because its landward side supported good examples of the species-rich plant communities found on thin soils and on sandstone rock. Stands of Clustered Clover (*Trifolium glomeratum*) were of particular note. The top of the roadside sea wall also supported a diverse range of wild plants (Goodwillie, 1979 pages 83-85). Almost all of the pNHA is already in the River Barrow and River Nore SAC.

5.3. Ballykelly Marsh (pNHA No 000744)



"This site combines an arable field with a high quality wetland site. The arable field contains a rare arable weed community including the protected flora species Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*). Adjacent to this field is a small species-rich lake and fen area. Such small wetlands are characteristic of the south-east of Ireland but are decreasing rapidly due to drainage and land reclamation." (NPWS Site Synopsis dated 12.11.2009). The privately-owned site covers an area of 11.04ha.

5.4. Boley Fen (pNHA No 000699)



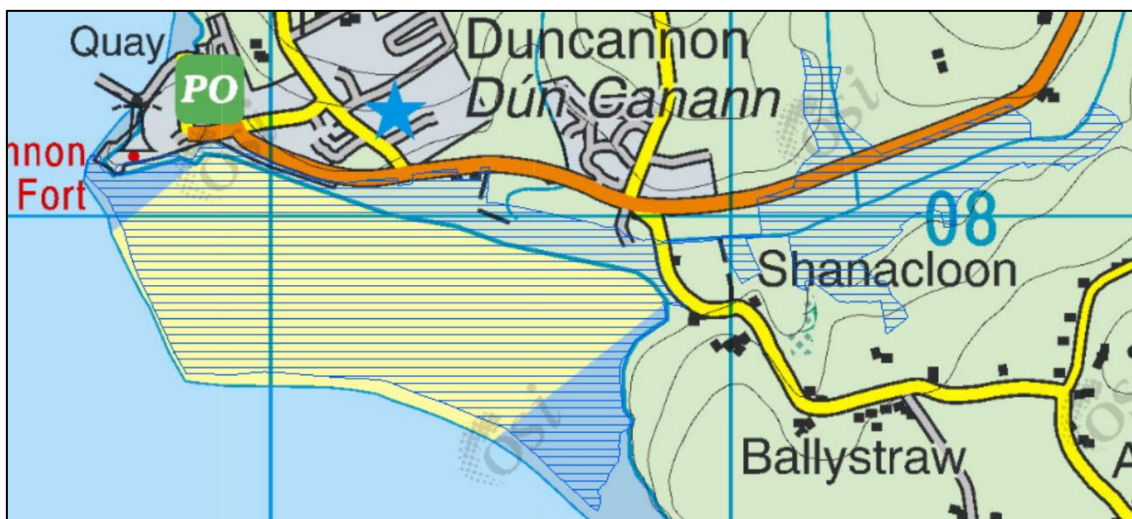
A fen is a wetland system with a permanently high water level at, or just below, its surface. Fens are usually not as acid as bogs.

*“Boley Fen is located at Rathumney, approximately 5km east of Campile, in Co. Wexford. It comprises intermediate fen with wet grassland and tall sedge (*Carex* spp.) communities with encroaching scrub, mainly willows (*Salix* spp.). Areas of the site have been afforested. The site is of interest due to its location; fens are uncommon in south-east Ireland. More importantly, it is noted as nationally important for the following rare species of Diptera (flies): *Anasimyia lunulata*, *Psacadina zernyi*, *Parhelophilus consimilis*, *Pteromicra angustipennis* and *Tetanocera punctifrons*.”* (NPWS Site Synopsis dated 12.11.2009).

The privately-owned site at Boley covers an area of 47.82ha.

5.5. Duncannon Sandhills (pNHA No 001738)

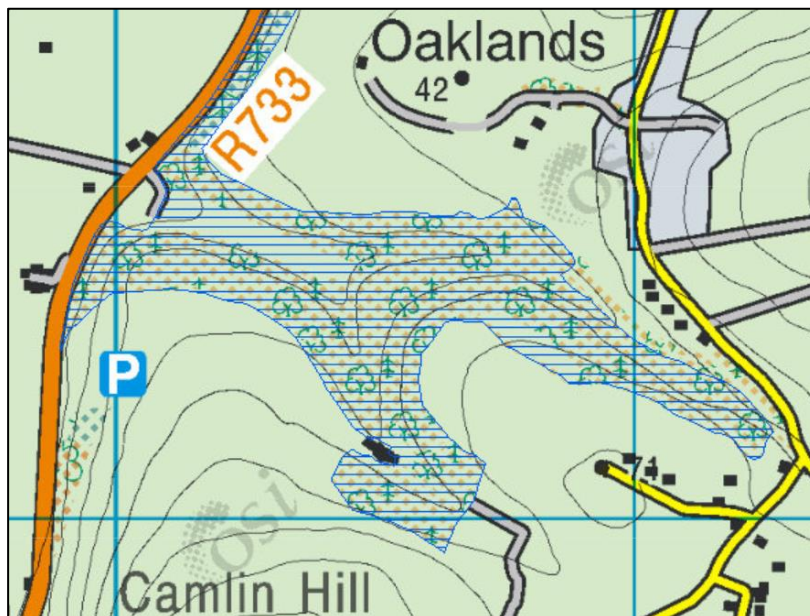
This 68.65ha site extends around the rocky headland at Duncannon Fort, eastwards along the seashell-rich beach, through the dunes and continues up the valley of the Kilbride stream together with its associated wetlands. There is no information about the site in the National Parks and Wildlife Service's pNHA Site Synopses PDF portfolio archive. Almost all of the pNHA is already in the River Barrow and River Nore SAC.



The site was most likely selected because it supports a diverse range of habitats and some rare plants, especially Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*) an aromatic sage and member of the mint family. Wild Clary is a knee-high, hairy plant that supports long, loose spikes of bluish-purple flowers between June and September. It is a native species in Ireland, but it is rare and is confined to a number of coastal areas, one of which is Duncannon. However, it has not been seen there since 2010 (personal communication, Paul Green). The area is also important for seabirds. In autumn, the beach supports the most important post-breeding aggregation of Sandwich Terns in Co Wexford (Burke, *et al.*, 2020) and roosting gulls are present throughout the winter months.

5.6. Oaklands Wood (pNHA No 000774)

"This site is a mixed coniferous and deciduous wood located approximately 2km south of New Ross in Co. Wexford. Oak (*Quercus* spp.) is the dominant species in parts of this wood, although coniferous species have been widely planted. Beech (*Fagus*



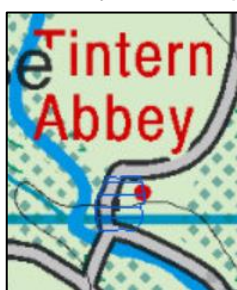
sylvatica) also occurs and is regenerating. The trees reach about 15m in height and create a closed canopy above abundant Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). The ground flora includes Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), with a variety of woodland herbs such as Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Sanicle

(*Sanicula europaea*), Goldenrod (*Solidago vigaurea*) and Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*). Tree felling, coupled with replanting with coniferous species, has occurred within the site. If allowed to continue, this will damage the interest of the area. The site is of interest as it is a representative area of broadleaved woodland and its associated flora." (NPWS Site Synopsis dated 12.11.2009).

The low-lying portion of the 36.51ha woodland, also known as Kelly's Wood, is now flooded and is being managed as a coarse angling amenity and resource (<https://oaklandslake.com/>).

5.7. Tintern Abbey (pNHA No 000711)

This tiny site comprises the abbey and its associated outbuildings. These structures support breeding colonies of a number of species of bats including the rare Whiskered Bat.



"A nursery colony of Whiskered Bat (*Myotis mystacinus*) was recorded in the roof of a building in the grounds of Tintern Abbey, Co. Wexford in 1987. The building was in a bad state of repair at that time and has since collapsed. Other sections of the abbey were restored

by the Office of Public Works in 1993. It is possible that the colony remained in the area and if this is the case, the new roosting site should be fully protected. As the national population of this species is only several hundred, all nursery colonies are of national importance." (NPWS Site Synopsis dated 12.11.2009).

Figure 15. Bat in the hand of a licenced bat researcher.



(Photo: Jim Hurley)

6. FOSSIL SITES

- 6.1.1. Information on 42 sites in County Wexford that are of geological, geomorphological and/or earth sciences importance is contained in an audit of such resources (Meehan *et al*, 2019). Twelve of these 42 sites are in the project area (Figure 16; yellow stars). Five of the 12 project area sites are fossil sites: Booley Bay, Hook Head, Loftusacre, Oldtown to Harrylock Bay, and Sandeel Bay.

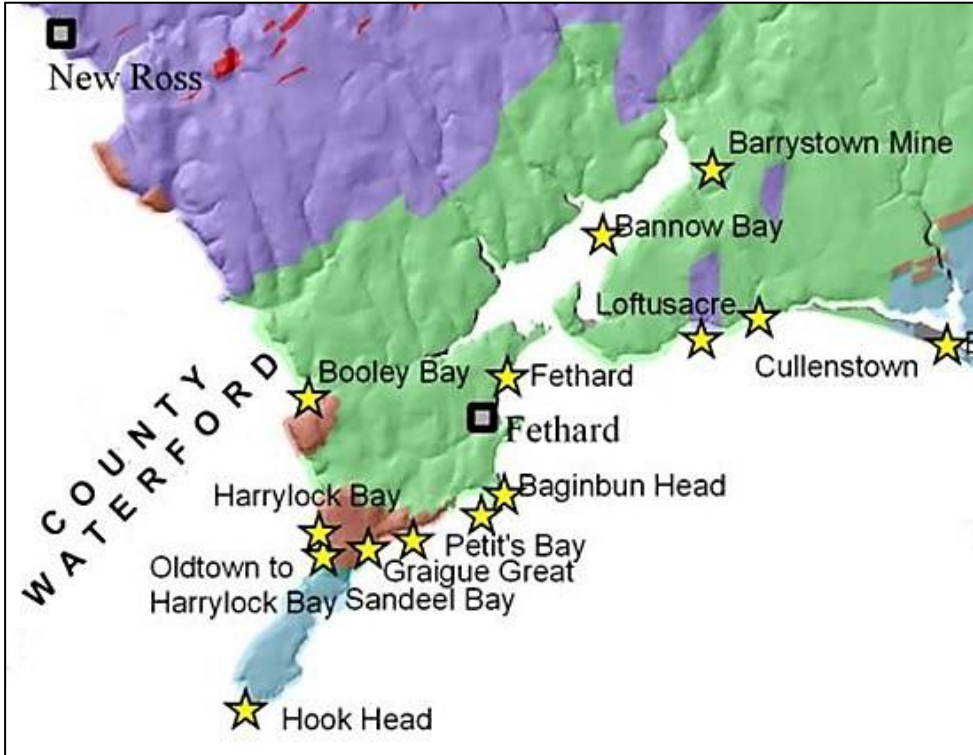


Figure 16. Map of geological heritage sites in Co Wexford.

(Source: Meehan *et al*, 2019, Section 2, page 4)

- 6.1.2. The approximate age of each fossil site is measured in millions of years ago (Table 2).

Site	Fossils	Age
Booley Bay	Soft-bodied, oceanic life forms and jellyfish-like creatures	490
Loftusacre	Starfish, graptolites and lamp shells	450
Oldtown to Harrylock Bay	Plants and plant spores	375
Sandeel Bay	Tree ferns and other plants	375
Hook Head	Hundreds of species of shallow-water, marine animals	350

Table 2. Fossil sites in the project area.

(Source: Meehan *et al*, 2019 and <https://stratigraphy.org/icschart/ChronostratChart2020-03.pdf>)

6.1.3. The locations of the five fossil sites are shown below (Figure 17); more detailed site location maps are available (Meehan *et al*, 2019).

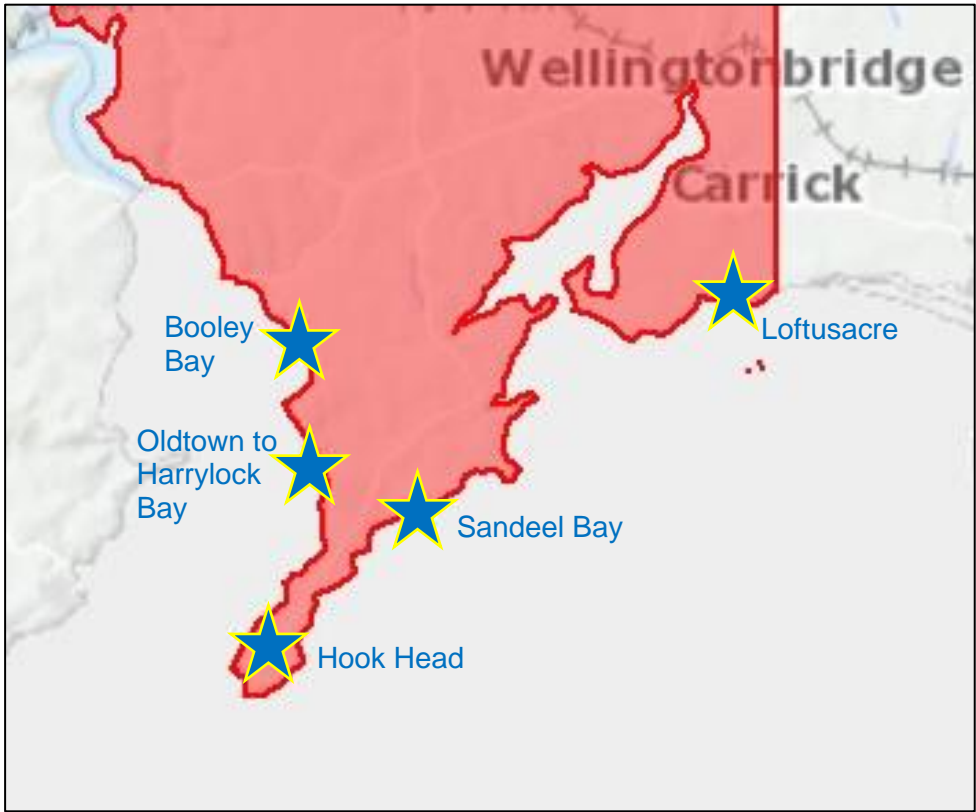


Figure 17. Locations of five fossil sites.

(Source: Meehan *et al*, 2019)



Figure 18. Sandeel Bay, an important fossil site.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

7. AREAS OF SPECIFIC PROTECTION

7.1. Natura 2000 sites

- 7.1.1. The five Natura 2000 sites in the project area are subject to the greatest level of site protection (<https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites>). Four of the five sites are covered by a statutory instrument (Table 3). While legislation is pending, the outstanding site enjoys similar protection as case law has ruled that Natura 2000 sites are protected from the time they are first advertised.

Natura 2000 site	Statutory instrument (S I)
Bannow Bay SAC	S I No 420 of 2018 at http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/si/420/made/en/pdf
Bannow Bay SPA	S I No 592 of 2011 at http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2011/si/592/made/en/print
Hook Head SAC	S I No 509 of 2017 at http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/si/509/made/en/pdf
Keeragh Islands SPA	S I No 68 of 2010 at http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2010/si/68/made/en/print
River Barrow and River Nore candidate SAC	Legislation pending

Table 3. Statutory instruments covering Natura 2000 sites.

7.2. Proposed NHAs

- 7.2.1. Prior to review and status evaluation for possible statutory designation, the six proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) detailed above (Section 5) are subject to limited protection in the form of:
- Agri-environmental farm planning schemes support the objective of maintaining and enhancing the conservation status of pNHAs.
 - Forest Service requirement for NPWS approval before they will pay afforestation grants on pNHA lands.
 - Recognition of the ecological value of pNHAs by Planning and Licencing Authorities.

(Source: <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/nha>)

- 7.2.2. In addition to these six pNHAs, there are several small areas of pNHA around the Bannow Bay, Hook Head and River Barrow Natura 2000 sites that, for one reason or another, were not included in the Natura 2000 sites when these sites were designated. These small areas are not named and both the reasons for their inclusion as pNHAs, and their exclusion from the Natura 2000 designation process are not known. Since the Natura 2000 designation process has been completed for the sites in question, it appears unlikely that additional small areas will be added without good reasons for doing so.

7.3. Bannow Bay Ramsar site

- 7.3.1. Bannow Bay does not derive any legal protection on foot of its designation a Ramsar site. Protection stems from the site's dual designation a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA).



Figure 19. Cowslips in St Mary's Church graveyard at Saltmills.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)



Figure 20. The Blue Jellyfish is a scarce native at Bannow Bay.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

7.4. Fossil sites

- 7.4.1. The five fossil sites detailed above (Section 6) are all on the seashore so, in a general way they come under the provisions of the *Foreshore Act* (S I No 12 of 1933 as revised and updated to 11 December 2014; [https://www.lawreform.ie/ fileupload/RevisedActs/WithAnnotations/EN_ACT_1933_0012.PDF](https://www.lawreform.ie/fileupload/RevisedActs/WithAnnotations/EN_ACT_1933_0012.PDF)).
- 7.4.2. Sites of geological importance are recognised in the draft *Wexford County Development Plan 2021-2027* (WCC, 2020). Of the 42 sites identified in Co Wexford (Meehan *et al.*, 2018), 16 are rated of national importance and these are recognised in the draft plan as County Geological Sites (CGSs) (WCC, 2020 pages 497-500 and Table 13.3). All five fossil sites in the project area are CGSs as they are listed among the 16 sites of national importance. The protection of these sites is given due consideration by the County Council’s Planning and Licencing Authorities.
- 7.4.3. Three of the five fossil sites gain further legal protection by virtue of the fact that they are located within the boundaries of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Table 4).

County Geological Site (CGS)	Located in Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
Booley Bay	River Barrow and River Nore SAC No IE002162
Loftusacre	None
Oldtown to Harrylock Bay	None
Sandeel Bay	Hook Head SAC No IE000764
Hook Head	Hook Head SAC No IE000764

Table 4. CGSs in SACs.



Figure 21. The stalk and crown of a fossil crinoid or Sea Lily at Hook Head.
(Photo: Jim Hurley)

8.AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

8.1. Introduction

- 8.1.1. The expression ‘areas of special interest’ is understood to mean both features of, and places in, the project area that are unique or intensely interesting for some reason. These areas of special interest are considered below under the following three headings: habitats, species and places.

8.2. Habitats of special interest

- 8.2.1. A habitat is a place where plants and animals live, for example, a pond, a wood, a rocky seashore, etc.
- 8.2.2. One hundred and seventeen habitat types have been identified and documented in Ireland (Fossitt, 2000). Fine examples of many of these habitats are to be found throughout the project area.
- 8.2.3. Arising from its concern regarding the loss of biodiversity through the territory of the European Union (EU), the European Commission (EC) contracted a panel of experts to identify the habitats that were under most threat in the territory of the EU and that Member States needed to take action to protect. The resulting list of vulnerable habitats is known as ‘Annex 1’ of the Habitats Directive (EC, 1992). Annex 1 lists 233 habitats, each of which is defined and described (EC, 2013). The Directive requires that Member States designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to conserve representative examples of these habitats. Fifty-eight of the 233 vulnerable Annex 1 habitats occur in Ireland (NPWS, 2019a and NPWS, 201b). The following 17 of these 58 habitats are qualifying interests of the three SACs in the project area (Table 3).

Annex 1 habitat name and [code]	HH	BB	RB
Estuaries [1130]		■	■
Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]		■	■
Large shallow inlets and bays [1160]	■		
Reefs [1170]	■		
Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210]		■	
Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220]		■	
<i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]		■	■
Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) [1330]		■	■
Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410]		■	■
Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (<i>Sarcocornetea fruticosi</i>) [1420]		■	
Embryonic shifting dunes [2110]		■	
Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120]		■	
*Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]		■	
Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230]	■		
Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculon fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260]			■
Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles [91A0]			■
*Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0]			■

Table 5. Qualifying interest habitats of the SACs.

(Source: NPWS, 2011a, NPWS,2011b and NPWS2012b)

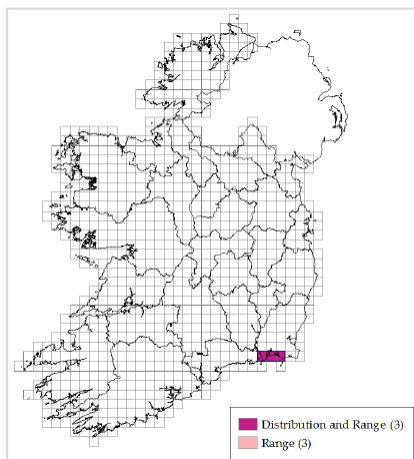
■ = The habitat is a qualifying interest of the particular SAC.
 HH = Hook Head, BB = Bannow Bay, and RB = the River Barrow south of New Ross.



Figure 22. Reefs and rock pools exposed on the shore at low tide.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

- 8.2.4. A saltmarsh is defined as an expanse of coastal vegetation that, while it need not necessarily be marshy, is regularly flooded by saltwater (IRWC, 2018). One of the very rarest of the 58 Annex 1 habitats found in Ireland is a type of saltmarsh called ‘Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (*Sarcocornetea fruticosi*)’, Code No 1420. In Ireland, that particular habitat is found only on the South Wexford Coast at two locations: Bannow Bay and Ballyteige Lough making it the habitat of greatest interest in the project area (attached distribution map from NPWS, 2019a page 18).



- 8.2.5. The remaining 16 Annex 1 habitats found in the project area are reasonably common throughout Ireland. The most significant habitats found in the project area are ‘grey dunes’ and ‘alluvial forests’ because both of these are rated ‘priority habitats’ in need of stricter protection.

- 8.2.6. 'Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes")', Code No 2130, are a priority habitat. Small examples of these dunes occur at both sides of the mouth of Bannow Bay: at Bannow Strand and Bannow Island on the eastern side and at Grange on the western side (Figure 23; yellow).

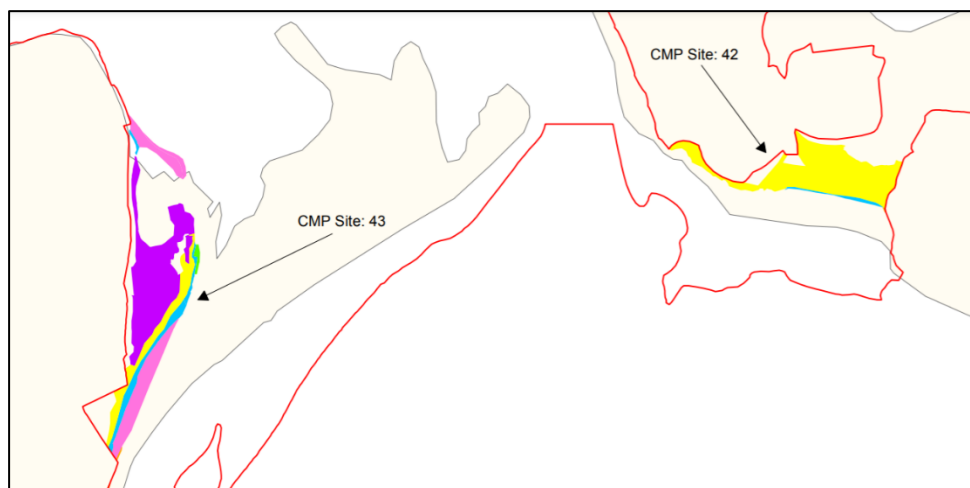


Figure 23. Grey dunes (yellow) at the mouth of Bannow Bay.

(Source: NPWS, 2012b, Map 7 extract)

- 8.2.7. Grey dunes are subject to coastal erosion (Figure 24), so much so that the former extensive area of tall dunes known as 'Big Burrow' no longer exists. These dunes supported a diverse flora including three prostrate specimens of Wild Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) at the northern edge of the dunes, a shrub that is fairly frequent as a planted garden hedge and garden escape but very rare as a native on sand dunes (Parnell and Curtis, 2012 page 332). Big Burrow was one of two sites in Ireland that supported dune scrub of Wild Privet, the other site being Tramore, Co Waterford (personal communication, Tom Curtis, NPWS and *New Ross Standard*, issue of 18 September 1996, page 10).



Figure 24. Erosion of a dune face at Big Burrow.

(Photo: Jim Hurley, circa 1989)

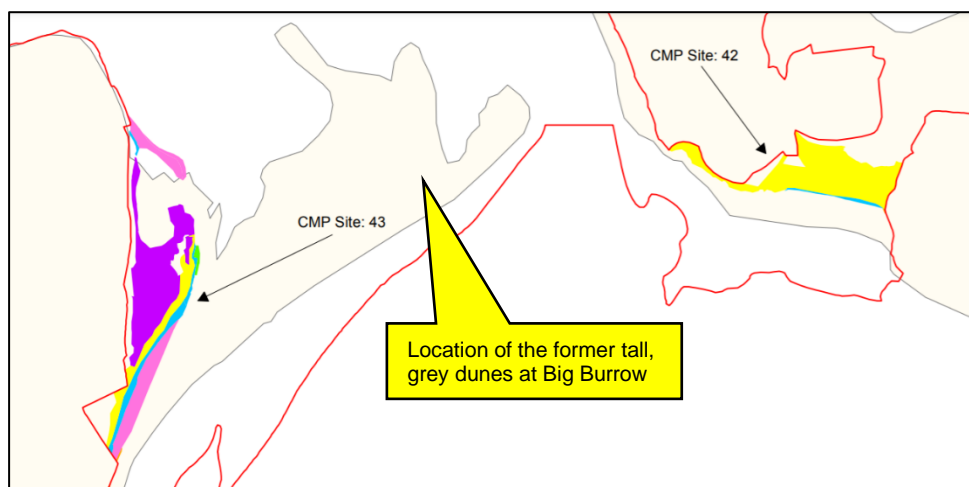


Figure 25. Grey dunes at Big Burrow.

(Source of base map: NPWS, 2012b, Map 7)

While coastal erosion at Big Burrow was an ongoing phenomenon, it accelerated significantly during the late 1970s coinciding with the large-scale removal of beach material for commercial purposes. Wexford County Council was aware of the illegal activity and noted: *“fairly extensive removal of beach material with the aid of mechanical equipment was reported to be taking place at ... Bannow”* (WCC. 1978 page 9). To make matters worse, the blading of gravel off the beach face was taking place at a traditional nesting site of Little Terns during the birds’ breeding season. The area was one of only two sites on the South Wexford Coast where Little Terns were known to nest, the other being Cullenstown. Little Terns no longer nest on the South Wexford Coast.

The status of Big Burrow during the 1970s and early 1980s was the subject of detailed study. It was found that the Bannow compartment was deficient in sediment and that Big Burrow (referred to as the ‘Newtown spit’) was subject to erosion. Investigations of the beach profile over a three-year period (1980-1982) showed that there was large-scale movement of material on and off the lower shore at the tidal inlet/outlet of Bannow Bay (Ruz, 1989, Figure 8).

In a 1992 assessment of areas at risk from coastal erosion, attention was drawn to the *“serious gaps”* in information with regard to coast recession, sediment, wave refraction, etc., and the absence of any data for Bannow Bay (Brady Shipman Martin, 1992 pages 13-14).

On 9 April 1994, a seminar on coastal erosion was organised by Coastwatch in Hotel Naomh Seosamh, Fethard, and on-going erosion at Big Burrow was discussed at length and was reported in the press (*Wexford People* issues dated 31 March 1994 and 7 April 1994, page 13).

Erosion of Big Burrow continued to accelerate. The remains of the dune system were isolated from the mainland following storms at the end of December 1997 (*New Ross Standard*, issue dated 28 January 1998, page 25).

The severe weather in October 2004 caused further erosion. The former dune system no longer existed in 2006 (Figure 26).



Figure 26. Erosion of Big Burrow: before (top) and after (bottom).

(Photos: Jim Hurley, late 1980s top, and 3 April 2006 bottom)

While Big Burrow washed away, some of its sand is still being recycled in the area. A complex arrangement of spits and bars has developed between Newtown, Grange and Bannow Island, but none is vegetated (Figure 27). Since there is a deficit of sand in the sediment compartment it appears unlikely that tall dunes will reform in the foreseeable future.



Figure 27. The site of the former Big Burrow in December 2020.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

The low-water view in Figure 27 is from The Windy Gap at Newtown, Grange, looking north-east across to Bannow Island (Figure 28, arrowed).



Figure 28. Bing aerial image.

- 8.2.8. 'Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion albae*) [91E0]', are a priority habitat. A small patch of wet woodland believed to be representative of the habitat, occurs west of the John F Kennedy Arboretum in the inlet at grid reference S697182 at Poulmaloe (Figure 29; arrowed purple) beside the entrance to Moorlands House, Fisherstown (Eircode Y34 W893).

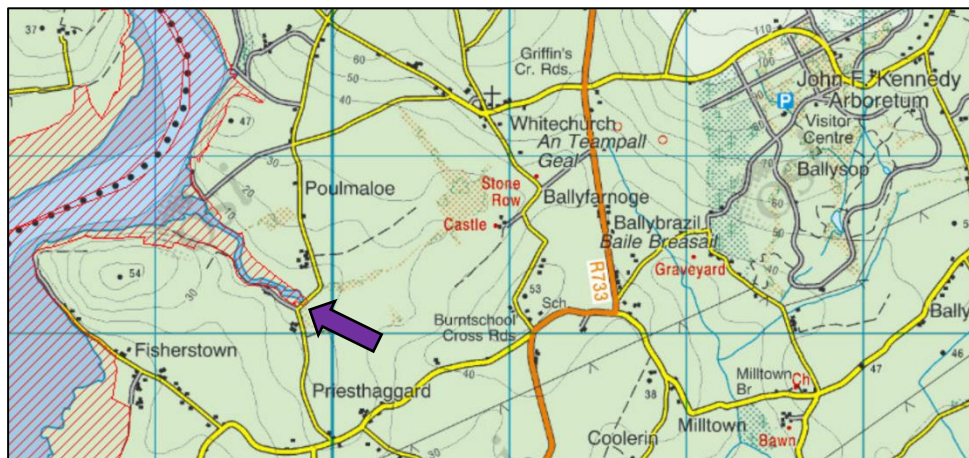


Figure 29. Patch of possible alluvial forest habitat (arrowed).

(Source: <https://maps.wexford.ie/imaps/>)



Figure 30. Wet woodland at Poulmaloe, Campile.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

- 8.2.9. In summary, there are many fine examples of habitats in the project area. The sole example of a habitat of special interest is the saltmarsh called 'Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (*Sarcocornetea fruticosi*)', Code No 1420, found at Bannow Bay.

8.3. Species of special interest

- 8.3.1. Natura 2000 sites are designated for habitats, species or a combination of both. The following table (Table 6) summarises the number of habitats and/or species that are qualifying interests of the five Natura 2000 sites in the project area. Habitats are described above; species are described in more detail below.

Natura 2000 site	Habitats	Species
Bannow Bay SAC	11	0
Bannow Bay SPA	0	13
Hook Head SAC	3	0
Keeragh Islands SPA	0	1
River Barrow SAC	11	11

Table 6. Natura 2000 habitats and species.

(Sources: <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites>)

- 8.3.2. The **Bannow Bay** SPA is designated for ‘Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]’ in general and the following 13 named species of wild birds with their code numbers in square brackets.

- Light-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota* [A046]
- Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* [A048]
- Pintail *Anas acuta* [A054]
- Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* [A130]
- Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* [A140]
- Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* [A141]
- Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* [A142]
- Knot *Calidris canutus* [A143]
- Dunlin *Calidris alpina* [A149]
- Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* [A156]
- Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* [A157]
- Curlew *Numerius arquata* [A160]
- Redshank *Tringa totanus* [A162]

- 8.3.3. The **Keeragh Islands** SPA is designated for just one species.

- Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* [A017].

- 8.3.4. The **River Barrow** and River Nore SAC is designated for the following 11 species.

- Killarney Fern *Trichomanes speciosum* [1421]
- Nore Pearl Mussel *Margaritifera durrovensis* [1990]
- Desmoulin's Whorl Snail *Vertigo moulinsiana* [1016]
- Freshwater Pearl Mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera* [1029]
- White-clawed Crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* [1092]
- Brook Lamprey *Lampetra planeri* [1096]
- Salmon *Salmo salar* [1106]

- Sea Lamprey *Petromyzon marinus* [1095]
- River Lamprey *Lampetra fluviatilis* [1099]
- Twaite Shad *Alosa fallax* [1103]
- Otter *Lutra lutra* [1355]

The first six of those listed above are not known to occur south of New Ross, that is, in the portion of the SAC that overlaps with the project area, so they are no longer relevant here. Salmon are designated when they occur in freshwater only, so since the River Barrow is tidal to New Ross they are also excluded from further consideration. The four species of interest in the project area are therefore as follows.

- Sea Lamprey *Petromyzon marinus* [1095]
- River Lamprey *Lampetra fluviatilis* [1099]
- Twaite Shad *Alosa fallax* [1103] and
- Otter *Lutra lutra* [1355]

- 8.3.5. **Perennial Glasswort.** The very rare saltmarsh habitat found at Bannow Bay (see paragraph 8.2.4 above) is characterised by the presence of a plant called Perennial Glasswort (*Sarcocornia perennis*). Since the habitat is very rare in Ireland and is confined to the South Wexford Coast, it follows that the species that characterises the habitat is also very rare and is consequently of special interest.



Figure 31. Perennial Glasswort *Sarcocornia perennis* in flower at Bannow Bay.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

8.3.6. **Rare plants.** Paul Green is the Vice-County Recorder for Co Wexford for the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland. He is familiar with all parts of the county and commented as follows regarding the project area: “*The area covered is one of the nicest parts of the county to look at plants. So many rare species for the area compared with much of the county.*” He provided the following information about wild plants that the project area is notable for.

- ❑ Divided Sedge (*Carex divisa*) is confined in Ireland to a small area of the estuary of the River Barrow near Campile.
- ❑ Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), a very rare mint with purple flowers, is found nowhere else in Co Wexford outside of the project area.
- ❑ Rare plants found in the project area include Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*), Tall Sea-lavender (*Limonium procerum*) (see front cover), Sea Carrot (*Daucus carota* subsp *gummifer*), Allseed (*Radiola linoides*), One-flowered Glasswort (*Salicornia pusilla*), Lesser Centaury (*Centaureum pulchellum*) (see Figure 32 below), Knotted Pearlwort (*Sagina nodosa*), Long-stalked Orache (*Atriplex longipes*), Meadow Barley (*Hordeum secalinum*), Clustered Clover (*Trifolium glomeratum*), Rough Clover (*Trifolium scabrum*), Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*), Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*), Fiddle Dock (*Rumex pulcher*), Common Cudweed (*Filago vulgaris*), Greater Broomrape (*Orobanche rapum-genistae*), Devon Whitebeam (*Sorbus devoniensis*), Irish Whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*), Bird's-foot Clover (*Trifolium ornithopodioides*), Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*), and Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*).



Figure 32. Lesser Centaury (*Centaureum pulchellum*).

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

Lesser Centaury (*Centaureum pulchellum*) is a tiny gentian that grows in damp, short turf. Each of its flowers has five, bright pink petals. Since it is rare, it is a protected species under the *Flora (Protection) Order, 2015* (<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/si/356/made/en/print>).

- 8.3.7. **Sabellaria reef.** A species of marine worm called the Honeycomb Worm *Sabellaria alveolata* lives a sedentary life. The pink worms use sand grains, fragments of broken seashells, and other debris to build tubes to live in. The tubes are anchored on a rock or other hard substrate. When the number of worms is high, the tubes of neighbouring worms get cemented to each other and large colonies can build a structure known as a 'Sabellaria reef' or 'honeycomb reef' (Figure 33). One of the Sabellaria reefs in Waterford Harbour is very extensive (1.5km long approximately) (Figure 34); Karin Dubsky, Coastwatch, suggested it may be a contender to be among the longest in Europe (<https://coastwatch.org/europe/a-quest-to-beat-the-european-sabellaria-reef-size-record-has-been-launched/>).



Figure 33. Part of the Sabellaria reef at Baginbun beach.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)



Figure 34. Large Sabellaria reef (yellow) north of Booley Bay.

(Source: NPWS, 2011; extract from Map 4)

- 8.3.8. **Fossils.** Several species of fossil are of special interest as some are named after places in the project area, for example, *Wexfordia hookense*, a lycopod, a fossil plant somewhat like a tree fern, found at Sandeel Bay and named after both Wexford and the Hook Peninsula, and *Ediacaria booleyi*, a jellyfish named after Booley Bay. Hook Head is known internationally for the hundreds of species of fossilised shallow-water, marine animals found there. A fossil starfish called *Petraster kinahani* was found at Loftusacre and is unknown from any other locality, so it is unique to the project area. The fossil site at Booley Bay is rated of international importance (Meehan *et al.*, 2018).



Figure 35. Fossilised *Ediacaria booleyi* at Booley Bay.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

9. EXISTING ACTIVITIES

- 9.1.1. While existing biodiversity activities in the project area are diverse, the Hook Peninsula is probably best known for bird watching, whale watching and fossil spotting.

10. BIRDWATCHING

10.1. Introduction

- 10.1.1. Birdwatching is popular and the most widely used birdwatching locations in the project area are Bannow Bay, Hook Head and Arthurstown.

10.2. Bannow Bay

- 10.2.1. Bannow Bay is a ria, a funnel-shaped estuary at the mouth of the River Slaney when that river ran to Bannow during the last ice age. Swollen with glacial meltwaters, the river gouged out a broad channel. When the ice melted, the River Slaney changed course to discharge at Wexford Harbour, the lower river valley at Bannow filled with sand, silt and mud, and the area was flooded by tides as sea level rose.
- 10.2.2. Today, at low tide, very extensive areas of sand and mud are exposed, and these areas attract wild birds to feed on the life forms that live hidden in the substrate.
- 10.2.3. Bannow Bay is mainly of interest in the winter half of the year (August to March/April) as it supports significant numbers of overwintering waterbirds (wildfowl and waders) with Pale-bellied Brent Geese and Black-tailed Godwits in internationally important numbers and several species in nationally important numbers.
- 10.2.4. The bay is a difficult place for the birdwatcher as it is very extensive to cover (7km long x 3km wide at its broadest), the birds are often far away, and public access to the shore is limited. It is best to visit two hours either side of high tide when birds are forced closer to the shore eventually to concentrate at high-water roosting areas. The best spots are the Barrystown slipway, Kiltra, New Quay and the Cackle Strand in morning light and both Saintkierans and a walk from Windy Gap to Oyster Point in afternoon light. Pale-bellied Brent Geese often feed close to the public road at Saintkierans. Tintern Bridge at Saltmills is very often a good spot.



Birdwatching spots

1. Barrystown slipway
2. Kiltra
3. New Quay
4. Cackle Strand
5. Saintkierans
6. Windy Gap to Oyster Point
7. Tintern Bridge

Figure 36. Birdwatching at Bannow Bay.

(Base map source: screen snip from <https://maps.wexford.ie/imaps/>. Ordnance Survey Ireland Permit No MP 0002120. © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland)

- 10.2.5. Guidebooks contain further information, maps and lists of species likely to be seen (Merne, 1974 pages 18-19; Dempsey and O'Clery, 2007 pages 170-171; and Milne and Hutchinson, 2009 pages 224-225).

10.3. Hook Head

- 10.3.1. Over 200 species of wild bird have been recorded on the Hook Peninsula (Lovatt, 1984). Hook Head, the extreme southerly tip of the Hook Peninsula, is popular with birdwatchers for two reasons: migrants and sea watching.

- 10.3.2. After Saltee Island Great, Hook Head is regarded the second best spot in Co Wexford for seeing migrant birds arriving in springtime and departing in autumn. Since the peninsula is one of the closest landfalls to Britain and mainland

Europe, Hook Head is an important entry and exit point for migrant birds arriving from and departing to southern climes. The main arrival and departure times for migrants are mid-April to mid-May and late August to early November, respectively. The best time for seeing spring



migrants arriving is early morning between mid-April and mid-May, especially after an extended period of south-easterly winds and following a night with fog and late rain. Roads in the area are narrow and visitors should be very careful not to block access to the homes, work places or fields of local residents and landowners. Parking is available in the large car park at Hook Lighthouse and Heritage Centre and the birds are best seen in hedgerows and roadside gardens on a walk along the public road from the lighthouse to Slade and back (round trip 5km approximately). On returning to the car park, the Lightkeeper's House Café and Gift Shop are well worth a visit before leaving the area.

- 10.3.3. The fact that the peninsula sticks out into the sea, the headland is also a good spot for sea watching for passing seabirds from the small car park at the tip of the peninsula.
- 10.3.4. The cliffs near Carnivan Head and Baginbun Head support small colonies of breeding seabirds including Northern Fulmar, European Shag, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot, Common Guillemot and Razorbill.

10.3.5. Guidebooks contain further information, maps and lists of species likely to be seen (Merne, 1974 pages 21-22; Dempsey and O’Clery, 2007 pages 173-174; and Milne and Hutchinson, 2009 pages 221-223). Liam Ryan, a local naturalist and authority on the birds of the Hook Peninsula, has produced a photographic guide to some of the birds found on the peninsula.

10.4.Arthurstown

10.4.1. When the tide has ebbed, King’s Bay is a good spot for studying gulls and shorebirds as it is very easily over-looked from both the quay and the public road footpath. Being beside the road, the birds are habituated to disturbance caused by pedestrians and passing traffic. While Duncannon Strand is a better location, the birds there are much farther away so a telescope and good light are essential.



Figure 37. Footpath at King’s Bay, Arthurstown, looking south-east.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)



Figure 38. Large mixed flock of roosting gulls, looking north-west.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

11. WHALE WATCHING

- 11.1.1. Sightings of whales, dolphins and porpoises are an irregular and unpredictable occurrence off the southern extremity of the project area.
- 11.1.2. Hook Head and Baginbun Head are the best locations for land-based watches.
- 11.1.3. Large whales tend to normally occur several kilometres offshore during the wintertime (November – February). Occasionally they venture inshore following shoals of Sprat and/or Herring that they feed on. At times, they even venture into the mouth of Waterford Harbour and have been seen at close range in the estuary between Hook Head and Dunmore East.
- 11.1.4. When large whales stay offshore, a telescope or binoculars are essential aids for spotting them from the mainland.
- 11.1.5. Fin Whales make up the majority of large whale sightings off the project area in early winter. Humpback Whales are a lot less common. Minke Whales are seldom seen.
- 11.1.6. The Humpback Whale that breached several times close inshore to Hook Head during January 2010 provided a spectacular nature experience. However, it was an unusual event. Perusal of the database of sightings maintained by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) (www.iwdg.ie) shows that sightings of large whales close inshore at Hook Head are by no means a regular occurrence.



Humpback Whale breaching off Hook Head, January 2010. (Photo: Pádraig Whooley, IWDG)

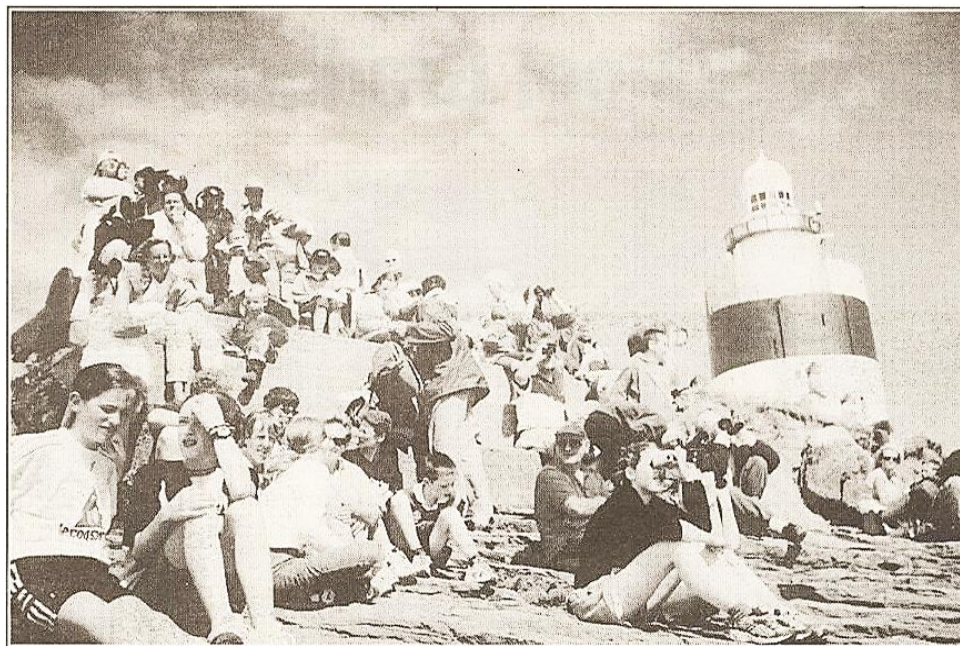


Figure 39. Pod of Bottlenose Dolphins passing Hook Head.

(Photo: Liam Ryan)

- 11.1.7. Boat-based whale watching trips are offered, whales and weather permitting, departing from both Duncannon and Ballyhack (<http://seatours.ie/>).

- 11.1.8. All Irish waters are a whale and dolphin sanctuary. Consequently, for the animals' welfare, boat operators should never harass whales or dolphins by chasing them to get closer views or better photographs. Guidelines for best practice when whalewatching are set out in Marine Notice No 15 of 2005 (Guidelines for Correct Procedures when encountering Whales and Dolphins In Irish coastal waters) (<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/22237/d2598e638ddf4aeca1f88c515b885892.pdf#page=1>).



■ Enjoying the whale watch at Hook Head.

Whale watchers hit Hook Head

THERE WAS a good turnout for the recent whale watch at Hook Head, one of six taking place the same day at centres throughout the Ireland.

But despite a lot of interest and dozens of eagle eyes on the water, no whales were spotted, although local naturalist and environmentalist Jim Hurley, who led the watch, said there were possible sightings of harbour porpoises and common dolphins.

'People felt they saw harbour porpoises and common dolphins, but

nothing was confirmed,' said Mr. Hurley.

He said there was a hard core of between 70 and 80 out for the watch and floating groups of visitors who remained for a shorter time than the full watch between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.

'We had a beautiful afternoon and were delighted with the response,' he said.

Organised by the Irish Whalewatch and Dolphin Group (IWDG), in association with Patagonia and Innis, the purpose of the watch was to mark the 10th

anniversary of the declaration of Irish waters as a whale and dolphin sanctuary and to promote interest in whales and dolphins.

'About 80 different species of whales and dolphins occur worldwide, 23 of them have been recorded in Irish waters, 13 on the South Wexford coast,' said Mr. Hurley, adding that most local records were of animals stranded dead on the shore.

The IWDG is a voluntary organisation dedicated to the conservation and better under-

standing of whales, dolphins, and porpoises in Irish waters.

Figure 40. Whale watching press cutting.

(Source: *New Ross Standard*, issue dated 15 August 2001, page 15)

12. NATURE WALKS

12.1.1. Many people are interested in walking and while the main motivation is to get exercise, the enjoyment of nature along the way is very often a significant factor in choosing which walk to go on. While very many walking areas are rich in biodiversity, there is no dedicated nature walk or nature trail in the project area. The following are the main walks in the project area.

12.1.2. Wexford Walking Trails (WWT) is a network of walking trails throughout County Wexford. One of the aims of developing the network is to enhance the visitor experience of Wexford's biodiversity. There are three WWTs in the project area featuring the following 10 trails.

- **Tintern Trails**, a series of five trails around the environs of Tintern Abbey, through the woodlands and to the shore of Bannow Bay

(<http://wexfordwalkingtrail.ie/tintern-abbey/>). One of the trails features an information panel with photographs of wildflowers by botanist Zoë Devlin (<http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/>).

See also

<https://www.sportireland.ie/outdoors/walking/trails?county=66&grade=All&length=All>.



- **Carrickbyrne Hill**, a public woodland with three waymarked forest trails (<http://wexfordwalkingtrail.ie/carrickbyrne-hill/>).
- **Oaklands Wood**, also known as Kelly's Wood, an elevated, oak woodland with two looped walks (<https://wexfordwalkingtrail.ie/kellys-wood/>).

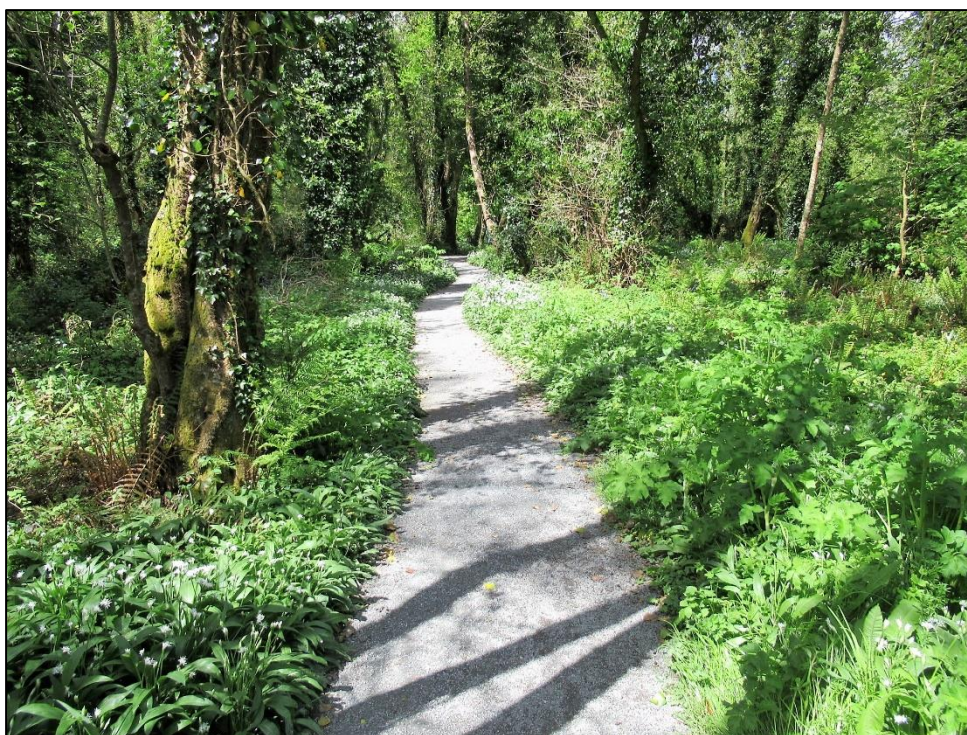


Figure 41. A Tintern Trail through the woods.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

- 12.1.3. The **John F Kennedy Arboretum** is a very popular walking area. The Slieve Coillte Lookout is a 1.3km lightly-trafficked, loop trail with scenic views (<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/ireland/county-wexford/slieve-coillte-lookout>). The arboretum covers 252 hectares on the summit and southern slopes of Slieve Coillte and contains some 4,500 species of trees and



shrubs from all temperate regions of the world. A wide range of facilities is available including guided tours. The site features a lake and some native woodland. Photo of the entrance above, Jim Hurley.

(<https://heritageireland.ie/places-to-visit/the-john-f-kennedy-arboretum/>).

- 12.1.4. The **New Ross Riverside Walk** was conceived and designed by staff of Wexford County Council in 2017-2018 under the direction of New Ross district director Eamonn Hore as part of flood protection works for the town. The elevated walk is flat, is fully accessible and wheelchair friendly, and consists largely of a 2m-wide dense bitumen macadam path on a compacted base on top of a new, riverside, flood-protection embankment. The walk starts at the Three Sisters Marina in New Ross and ends near Oaklands Roundabout. It features street furniture, seats, lighting, and signs. Large photographic panels by local wildlife photographer Edno Delaney celebrate the river's plants and animals together with information panels with text highlighting the natural history of the river and its hinterland (<https://visitnewross.ie/listings/the-riverside-walkway-new-ross/>).

- 12.1.5. **Duncannon Eco Trail** was initiated by Stafford McLoughlin Archaeology as part of their work at Duncannon Fort. Four stand-alone themed panels were erected: (1) the harbour, (2) the historic graveyard, (3) rocks on the beach, and (4) the sand dunes. However, these were not connected by any signage.



(Photo: Jim Hurley)

- 12.1.6. **Fethard Castle Trail** is an easy, looped walk in the village of Fethard starting at Fethard Castle. From the castle, the 1km-long, 15-minute walk goes through Grangeville woodlands, over a stream, and back to the village via the Sluice Lane beside Dillon's Londis supermarket. (<https://www.sportireland.ie/outdoors/walking/trails/fethard-castle-trail>).
- 12.1.7. **Arthurstown**. A looped trail starting at the harbour in Arthurstown is at an advanced stage of development and Sport Ireland accreditation is pending (personal communication, Yvonne Byrne).

12.1.8. **Slí Charman.** In 1987, the concept of a long-distance (221km) walking trail along the entire coastline of Co Wexford was the brain-child of Noel Dillon, then County Manager. Since then, the trail has been variously known as Slí Charman, ‘The Coastal Path’, and ‘Wexford County Council’s Coastal Trail’. The portion of the trail in the project area starts and/or finishes at Ballyhack (Figure 42). One of the founding objectives of the trail was to promote environmental awareness and eco-tourism. Since 1987, several attempts were made to develop the trail, including portions in the project area, but these had limited success due to lack of funding for the project, legal difficulties regarding rights of way across farmland and private property, health and safety issues, issues regarding coastal erosion and protection works, etc. While the development of the entire trail is not being actively advanced, portions of it are being developed. Rehabilitation works have recently been carried out at four locations in the county: Ballymoney Lower, Cahore Point, Blackwater to Knocknasilloge and Rosslare Harbour (<https://www.wexfordcoco.ie/community/recreational-and-community-development-projects/sli-charman-coastal-trail-rehabilitation>).

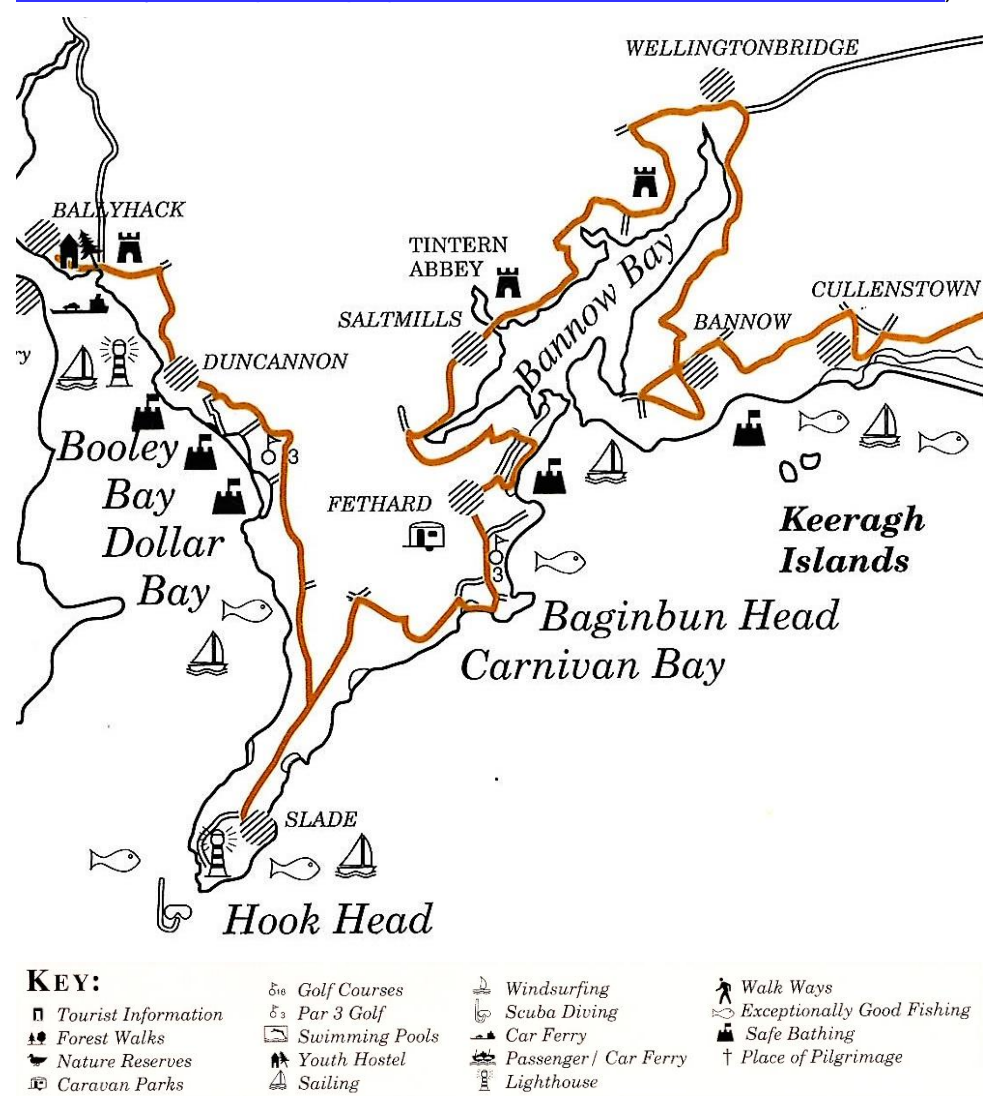


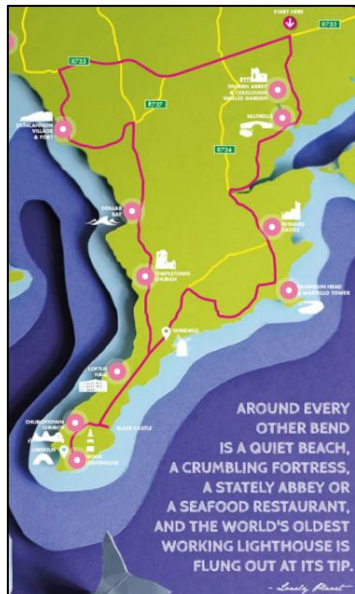
Figure 42. Part of the Slí Charman walking trail.

(Source: WCC, 1993)

13. VEHICLE-BASED EXPERIENCES

13.1.1. Vehicle-based drives in the project area focus mainly on history and scenery with minor references to biodiversity. The main vehicle-based drives and cycle routes are described briefly below.

13.1.2. **Ring of Hook Coastal Drive.** The Ring of Hook Coastal Drive takes less than one hour to complete. The drive starts at Curraghmore cross roads on



regional road R733 and loops around the peninsula with several opportunities to soak up the stunning coastal and rural scenery while catching sight of some of our county's most important built heritage sites (<https://hookpeninsula.com/explore/coastal-drive/>). The Celtic Routes project highlights coastal trails and destinations in West Wales and south-east Ireland. On the South Wexford Coast, three 'Celtic Routes' are featured: the Ring of Hook Coastal Drive, the Tintern Trails, and Fethard Dock. Hook Head lighthouse is flagged as a 'Celtic Beacon' and 'Whales breaching at Hook Head' in November are signalled as a seasonal 'Celtic Moment' (<https://celticroutes.info/> and <https://www.wexfordcoco.ie/community/celtic-routes-project>).

13.1.3. **Bannow Drive.** The Bannow Drive is a 20-mile drive on the eastern fringe of the project area starting near Corock Avenue and Mick's Car Wash on regional road R736 at Wellingtonbridge. The brain child of the Bannow Development Association, the focus along the route is on the Norman heritage. The drive finishes in the village of Duncormick.

13.1.4. **Cycle route.** Eurovelo 1 Route is an 11,000km cycle route extending along the Atlantic fringe of Europe from the extreme north of Norway to the extreme south of Portugal (<https://en.eurovelo.com/ev1>). Starting at Rosslare Harbour Ferry, the 120km Wexford stretch of the route quickly takes cyclists to mainly quiet, scenic country roads and villages along the South Wexford Coast finishing at Ballyhack Ferry. The route hugs the coastal roads predominantly and is well-signed (<https://www.wexfordcoco.ie/roads-travel-and-parking/cycling-and-public-transport/eurovelo-cycle-route>). The cycle route is well signposted through the Hook Peninsula (<https://hookpeninsula.com/eurovelo/>).



13.1.5. **The Norman Way.** The Norman Way, a heritage driving and cycling trail along the South Wexford Coast, was official launched on Wednesday 24 May 2017. The 22km-long trail was developed by Wexford County Council with support from Fáilte Ireland “as a true treasure of Ireland’s Ancient East” (<https://www.wexfordcoco.ie/news/2017/05/26/official-launch-of-the-norman-way-heritage-and-cycling-trail>). The trail features and documents

sites of interest. The following 20 sites are in the project area; details at (www.thenormanway.com).



- The Bannow Font
- Bannow
- The Little Sea
- Tintern Abbey
- Saltmills
- Fethard Castle
- Baginbun
- Slade Harbour
- Hook Lighthouse
- St Dubhán's Church
- Loftus Hall
- Templetown
- Duncannon Fort
- Ballyhack
- Dunbrody Abbey
- Kilmokea
- JFK Arboretum
- Kennedy Homestead
- Stokestown Castle
- St Mary's Church, New Ross

Figure 43. The Norman Way.

(Source: www.thenormanway.com)

14. WATER-BASED EXPERIENCES

- 14.1.1. In addition to walks, drives and cycle routes on land, water-based experiences in the project area are offered by a number of operators either by boat departing from Duncannon and/or Ballyhack (<http://seatours.ie/>) and Waterford (<https://www.traditionalboatcharters.com/>) and/or Dunmore East (<http://dunmoreboatrips.ie/eco-tourism.html> and <https://www.ireland.com/what-is-available/touring-holidays/boat-tours/destinations/republic-of-ireland/waterford/dunmore-east/all/1-90126/>) or by kayak (<https://www.theirishexperience.com/product/sea-kayaking-experience/>). Further developments based in New Ross are planned. Underwater experiences are also available (<http://diving.ie/hook-head/>, <http://hooksubaqua.com/> and <http://www.shoredive.ie/hook-head.php>).
- 14.1.2. Some areas are particularly sensitive to disturbance caused by visiting boat-based parties. For example, the Keeragh Islands are a Special Protection Area for Great Cormorants. These birds nest on the ground. If people land on the normally deserted islands during the breeding season, the birds rise from their nests. If eggs are present, they to get cold and/or are predated by gulls. If large nestlings are present and are spooked, they stampede trampling over other nests, eggs and hatchlings and/or running over the edges of cliffs. Since ground-nesting birds are particularly vulnerable to disturbance, these islands are not suitable for landing on during the breeding season that extends from May to October each year.
- 14.1.3. While there are several beaches in the project area, Duncannon is the only 'Designated Bathing Area' on the Hook Peninsula (<https://www.wexfordcoco.ie/environment/beaches/beaches-blue-flag-green-coast-and-identified-bathing-waters/duncannon-beach>). There is no Blue Flag beach; three beaches are recipients of Green Coast Awards: Booley Bay, Grange, and Baginbun (<https://beachawards.ie/green-coast/sites/>).

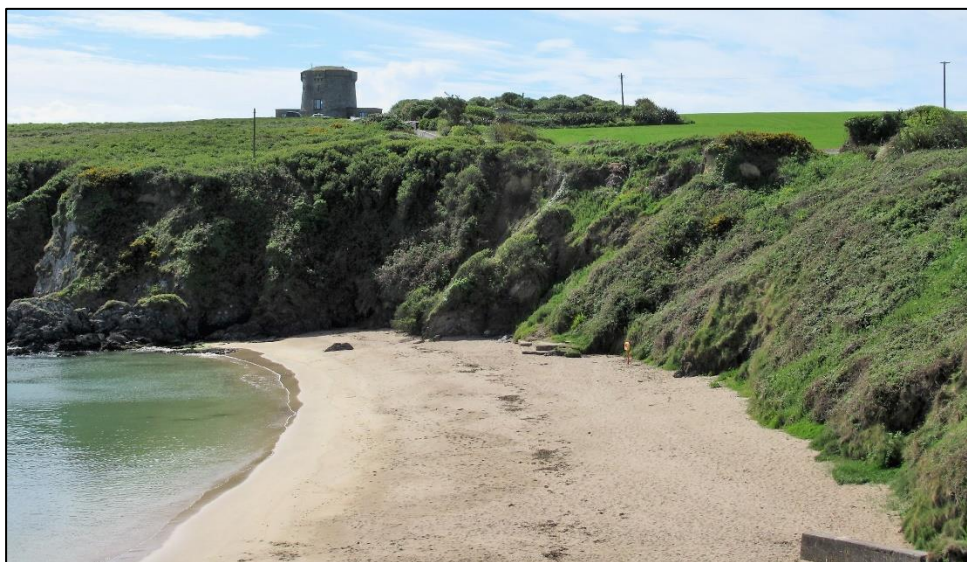


Figure 44. Baginbun, a Green Coast Award beach.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

15. AREAS OF GENERAL INTEREST

15.1.Introduction

- 15.1.1. While some places in the project area are unique or intensely interesting because they support the habitats and/or species of special interest detailed above, many other areas are of great value, not because of any particular or specific feature they possess, but because of their synergy, that is, the combined working together of their wealth of biodiversity, landform, seascape or landscape, and a sense of tranquillity, peace and beauty that makes them special. Since identifying such places are very often a matter of personal taste, no attempt is made here to list them.



Figure 45. Tintern River, a place of beauty and tranquillity.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

- 15.1.2. Similarly, tourism destinations and amenities in the project area that are not intrinsically focused on promoting or interpreting local biodiversity, often have a significant biodiversity or educational element.



Figure 46. Dr Daniel Buckley giving a public talk about bats at Tintern Abbey.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

15.2.Existing attractions

15.2.1. The main locations in the project area that offer visitors and tourists an existing, high-end, nature experience are tabulated below (Table 7).

Location	Nature experience
Hook Head	Birdwatching, whale watching, fossil spotting, scuba diving, and walks.
Tintern Abbey	Woodland walks with a river and estuary.
Bannow Bay	Birdwatching and walks.
John F Kennedy Arboretum	Trees and shrubs, a lake, guided tours, and walks.

Table 7. Existing attractions.



Figure 47. The Peacock is one of Ireland’s largest and most colourful butterflies.
(Photo: Jim Hurley)

16. EXISTING BIODIVERSITY PLANS

16.1.Introduction

- 16.1.1. In drawing up plans to promote biodiversity in the project area, Hook Rural Tourism Limited is mindful of the policy objectives set out in existing published biodiversity plans at international, European Union, national and local level.

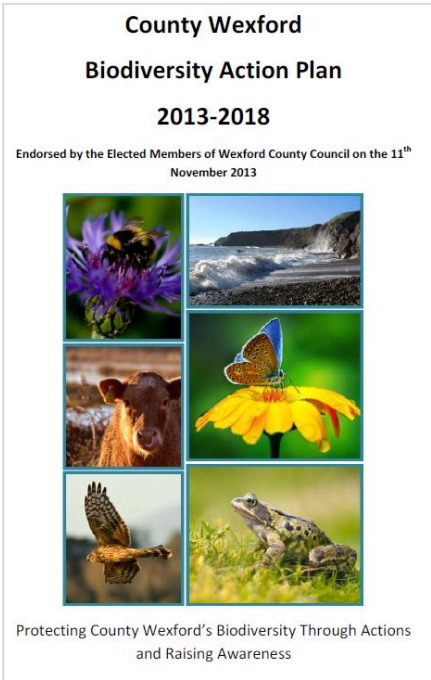
16.2.Ireland’s Biodiversity Action Plan

- 16.2.1. The Irish government’s current national Biodiversity Action Plan (DCHG, 2017), its third such plan, sets out actions through which a range of government, civil and private sectors will undertake to achieve Ireland’s ‘Vision for Biodiversity’. Developed in line with EU and international biodiversity strategies and policies, the plan contains 119 targeted actions underpinned by seven strategic objectives.
- 16.2.2. The objectives of the national plan include increasing public awareness and participation, and ensuring conservation of biodiversity in the wider countryside and in the marine environment.



16.3.Wexford’s Biodiversity Action Plan

- 16.3.1. Wexford County Council’s current Biodiversity Action Plan (WCC, 2012), its first such plan, was prepared to address the way in which wildlife resources of the county will be managed and protected. The plan shares the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the National Biodiversity Plan, and translates them into actions at a local level. The plan sets out 34 targeted actions underpinned by five strategic objectives.



- 16.3.2. Objective 3 aims “To raise awareness across all sectors, groups and ages for the following; (a) Wexford’s Biodiversity, (b) its value, (c) the issues facing it, and (d) encourage people through using various media, training, and innovative initiatives to support biodiversity conservation.” (WCC, 2012 page 2).
- 16.3.3. Objective 4 seeks “To promote and support best practice in biodiversity conservation, taking into account national and local priorities.” (WCC, 2012 page 2).

17. SUMMARIES OF SOME SUBMISSIONS

17.1. National Parks and Wildlife Service

- 17.1.1. Coordinated by the government's Development Applications Unit, the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media welcomed the Biodiversity Feasibility Study and felt that the recommendations made *"fit well with local and national biodiversity policy, particularly the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2018-2021 ... and the Wexford Biodiversity Action Plan 2013-2018"*. The submission made several detailed and helpful suggestions and observations (see Appendix 5).

17.2. Fáilte Ireland

- 17.2.1. In their submission, Fáilte Ireland feel that the Hook Peninsula Biodiversity Project is *"a good initiative"*, that *"from a tourism perspective the Hook Peninsula is an appealing area"*, and that Fáilte Ireland's objective for the area *"is to build brilliant visitor experiences that will unlock the tourism economy of this area. Our research tells us that visitors are looking for 'experiences' – e.g. experiences which are enjoyable, interactive, immersive and memorable."* (see Appendix 6).

17.3. Wexford County Council

- 17.3.1. Wexford County Council confirmed that *"the Hook Peninsula is a big asset to the tourism offering in County Wexford and the area is currently promoted by Visit Wexford through its various marketing projects including Social Media."* Furthermore, *"Hook Tourism have a representative on the board of Visit Wexford which is a tourism industry and public sector initiative aimed at promoting Wexford County, and is supported by Fáilte Ireland, Wexford County Council, Wexford Local Development, local tourism groups and other entities from the Wexford tourism sector."* (see Appendix 7).



Hook lighthouse. Photo: Jim Hurley

18. CONCLUSIONS

- 18.1.1. This study concludes that promotion of the biodiversity of the Hook Peninsula is entirely feasible.
- 18.1.2. In the past, there was a tendency by some accommodation providers to take the view that local biodiversity had little to offer and that tourists needed to be directed out of the project area to the major, man-made tourism hot spots of the day (Behan, 2000).
- 18.1.3. Increasing visitor numbers recorded at existing natural attractions in the project area evidence their popularity.
- 18.1.4. The series of free leaflets regarding aspects of the biodiversity of the South Wexford Coast (SWC) produced by SWC Promotions continues to prove popular and evidence a desire and demand for information. Similarly, when nature walks and talks are held they are well attended and are well received.
- 18.1.5. The key biodiversity attractions of the project area already exist to enjoy. Minimal capital investment is often not required. The challenge is to manage and promote the existing attractions in a sustainable way as products to benefit local tourism.



Figure 48. Short-eared Owl at Newtown.

- 18.1.6. The Hook Peninsula Biodiversity Project is well placed to capitalise of the growing level of awareness among the public of the need to conserve biodiversity and the increasing appetite for information and interpretation.
- 18.1.7. Success will hinge on the ability of Hook Rural Tourism Limited to attract the support and resources required to drive the project forward.

(Photo: Liam Ryan)

19. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 19.1.1. When local people or visitors to the Hook Peninsula enjoy a swim in the sea, a walk on the beach, a trek through a woodland, time spent exploring a rock pool or examining fossils in a limestone outcrop, all of the amenities they enjoy are environmental services provided by nature entirely free of charge and with little or no need for any manmade infrastructure.
- 19.1.2. These free services exist in abundance on the Hook Peninsula and are valuable products in local tourism.
- 19.1.3. Mindful of the short-sighted action of the man and his wife who, motivated by greed, destroyed their valuable resource for short-term gain when they killed their goose in Aesop's fable 'The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs', it is fundamental that the biodiversity resources of the Hook Peninsula are conserved and protected so that they can continue to go on producing the environmental services that people want and need.
- 19.1.4. A recent (November 2020) 460-page assessment of the state of the environment in Ireland noted that we are *"witnessing the erosion of ecosystems and biodiversity on an unprecedented scale. We seem unable to stem the tide of nature's destruction and may not fully understand its full impact until it is too late."* (EPA, 2020 page 12).
- 19.1.5. Nature conservation must be the linchpin of the Hook Peninsula Biodiversity Project. Pious aspirations regarding the halting of the loss of biodiversity must become realities.
- 19.1.6. Since local people involved in the tourism sector are often the first point of contact with visitors and tourists, they are ambassadors for promoting biodiversity. It is essential that they are encouraged to buy in to the Biodiversity Project and are kept informed and updated regarding developments related to the natural heritage resource values of the Hook Peninsula.
- 19.1.7. Any new marine or land-based eco-tourism plan, project or proposal, especially on state-owned property, should be subject to early engagement with the relevant statutory authorities as there may be a requirement for Appropriate Assessment of proposed projects under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).



Figure 49. Fethard saltmarsh from Fethard Bridge.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

20. RECOMMENDATIONS

As a deliverable of this biodiversity feasibility study, the following recommendations are made to Hook Rural Tourism Limited for consideration by board members. These recommendations are explicitly linked to the following national and local biodiversity policy objectives.

- National Biodiversity Action Plan 2018-2021 - Objective 3: *“Increase awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystems services”*, (DCHG, 2017 pages 40-45) and
- Wexford Biodiversity Action Plan 2013-2018 - Objective 3: *“To raise awareness across all sectors, groups and ages for the following; (a)Wexford’s Biodiversity, (b) its value, (c) the issues facing it, and (d) encourage people through using various media, training, and innovative initiatives to support biodiversity conservation.”* (WCC, 2012 page 2).

1. **Appoint a Biodiversity Officer** to be the engine room to drive the Hook Peninsula Biodiversity Project forward by drawing up a programme of work, managing the project for the company, and reporting to its annual general meeting each year.
2. **Design a logo and branding** for the project; most likely a modification of the existing logo and branding used by Hook Rural Tourism Limited.
3. **Liase and build linkages** with Wexford County Council, Fáilte Ireland, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Office of Public Works, Coillte, the Wexford Walking Trail network, and other agencies, regarding areas of mutual interest and plans they may have to promote biodiversity in the project area.
4. **Produce a brochure or booklet** for tourism outlets, accommodation providers, visitors, schools and colleges, and others, outlining the biodiversity resources and attractions of the project area in an accessible way with suggestions regarding places to visit, a map, things to look out for, seasonal content, etc., while emphasising the conservation message. Make the publication available for reading and downloading on the Hook Tourism website (<https://hookpeninsula.com/>). On that website, consider a landing page ‘Biodiversity for Visitors’ tiering information for people with different interests and different levels of knowledge, and multilingual provision for the primary languages of the target audience.
5. **Maintain contact.** Produce a dedicated newsletter, or use social media, to keep interested parties in a feedback loop regarding developments in the Biodiversity Project.
6. **Provide training** in biodiversity for tourism operators / local community groups to support their role as local ambassadors promoting the Biodiversity Project.
7. **Organise talks and walks.** Organise a series of winter lectures by invited experts (each covering topics such as birds, marine life, fossils, whales, wildflowers, bats, etc.), and summer nature walks, addressing different aspects of the biodiversity of the project area. Keep records of all events on file to build into a heritage resource for the project area.

8. **Encourage people** in the project area to participate in citizen science initiatives, to engage with the natural world, to record both their garden birds (<https://birdwatchireland.ie/our-work/surveys-research/research-surveys/irish-garden-bird-survey/>) and their local biodiversity (<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/start-recording>), to buy in to the project and to develop both a personal bond with, and a sense of ownership of, their natural heritage.
9. **Liaise with farming organisations**, landowners, and other interested parties regarding the conservation and protection of hedgerows, wayside trees, stone walls, watercourses, and the many other features that combine to create the unique rural character of the project area.
10. **Investigate signage**. Investigate the availability of low-maintenance, environmentally-friendly, branded, biodiversity information signs for the areas of greatest tourist footfall, existing walking trails, areas of greatest impact, etc.
11. **Widen the target audience** for the Biodiversity Project by including those whose main focus of interest is walking, photography, *plein-air* (outdoors) painting, SCUBA diving, etc.
12. **Conduct a survey of tourists and visitors** to establish what nature experiences they have had and the ones they most enjoyed. The outcome of that survey would inform and might determine how the visitor experience of the natural heritage resource values of the project area could be enhanced.
13. **Assess disturbance** of wildlife, a negative impact associated with visitor usage and tourism. The government's National Parks and Wildlife Service feels it is an issue within the project area that needs to be investigated to establish current levels. Establishing the current level of disturbance within the project area is considered to be a good baseline to inform future tourism projects (see Appendix 5).
14. **The Hook Aquarium**. Investigate the feasibility and possibility of attracting funding for a large-scale capital project with a potential to be a honeypot tourist attraction of regional importance. An appropriate biodiversity-based tourism initiative might be a saltwater aquarium featuring the marine life of the marine protected areas (MPAs) in the project area as well as displaying all the common food fish and popular iconic species such as sharks, octopuses and seahorses. With offices, highly-skilled staff, car parking, shop, restaurant, guided tours, interpretative and information centre, child-friendly interactive area and touch-tank, lecture and/or workshop spaces, videos of whale activity, and associated outreach and educational facilities, the aquarium could be a stand-alone, year-round, major tourist attraction that could provide employment in marine conservation and could act as an incubation hub and springboard from which visitors would disperse to explore the project area in a low-impact way.
15. **Review and amend** the above recommendations as the context changes, for example, with the proposed publication of a project proposal for the Waterford estuary in January 2021 (personal communication, Karin Dubsky), and the government's objective to have a marine spatial plan in place by spring 2021.

21. COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

- 21.1.1. Cost benefit analysis of tourism projects is a decision-making tool to establish the profit that is likely to be earned from advancing a project by subtracting the cost of setting up the project from the anticipated income that the project is likely to generate.
- 21.1.2. Such analysis makes perfect sense in the case of recommendation No 14 above (aquarium). The costs associated with buying land, erecting the building, employing staff, running the facility, etc., can all be quantified from the four existing examples of successfully operating aquaria elsewhere in Ireland (Dingle, Galway, Portaferry and Bray) and abroad. These costs can then be related to the anticipated income likely to be generated from the expected footfall of paying visitors to the facility, spinoffs to the local economy, etc.
- 21.1.3. Analyses of the benefits of many of the other recommendations are more problematic as it is not possible to put a monetary value on the pleasure to be gained from collecting seashells on the beach at Duncannon, from walking among Bluebells blooming on a Tintern Trail, or from admiring the panorama of scenic landscape seen from the top of Slieve Coillte on a fine day.
- 21.1.4. The costs of promoting biodiversity are relatively modest. The benefits that accrue for individual tourists are enhanced visitor experiences, and for the common good are implementation of published policies of both local and central government (see Section 16).
- 21.1.5. Depending on how it is implemented, advancement of the Hook Peninsula Biodiversity Project may not result in significant tourism footfall, job opportunities and spin-off for the local economy, but it will certainly result in a better quality experience of the natural world for both local residents and visitors, and will be a positive contribution to addressing the biodiversity emergency accepted by all parties on 9 May 2019 in Dáil Éireann without a vote.



Figure 50. Dog Whelks feeding on barnacles on the Keeragh Islands.

(Photo: Jim Hurley)

22.2. Appendix 2: Hook Tourism Biodiversity Project Brief

The following is the brief that was circulated to those who were invited to tender for the contract to conduct the 'Biodiversity Feasibility Study'. Contact person for the Biodiversity Project is John Rogers at office@hooktourism.com.

Hook Tourism Biodiversity Project Brief

The overall aim of this project is to disseminate information on the biodiversity of the area in a variety of media to the general public visiting the Hook Peninsula. As such this feasibility study aims to recommend relevant aspects of biodiversity as per the criteria outlined below and to make conclusions as to the feasibility of future expansions of this project.



There are many scientific reports out there that provide a wide variety of information (such as, but not limited to, the NPWS SAC/SPA reports, previous biodiversity surveys, etc.) but these reports are in a form that is not easily understood by the general public. There are many publications that cover various aspects of biodiversity in the area already and part of the outcome would be to source and distil these to the relevant facts.

For the purposes of this report the area being considered is that covered by our new map which can be found at: <https://hookpeninsula.com/peninsula-map/>.

The final resource produced as a result of this phase of the project should focus on:

- Items that are interesting to a general audience
- Things that you are realistically able to observe in the area
- Areas of special interest (eg: unique flora or fauna)
- Areas of specific protection

The final resource will be a collation of materials both summations of relevant aspects of existing published works and any collection of additional details as required. This can include maps/co-ordinates of any areas highlighted as per the above criteria.

(Source: Hook Rural Tourism Limited)



22.3. Appendix 3: County Wexford Tourism Strategy

The following are extracts from the County Wexford Tourism Strategy 2019-2023 (WCC, 2019).

The top visitor attractions in the project area are the John F Kennedy Arboretum, Hook Lighthouse Visitor Centre and the Tintern Abbey complex (WCC, 2019 Table 3.3.2).

3.3.2|What Is Currently Attracting Visitors? Wexford Top Attractions 2016

Wexford top attractions 2016	Visitors
Wells House & Gardens	130,239
The JFK Memorial Park	105,594
Irish Agricultural Museum & Johnstown Castle Gardens	80,584
Dunbrody Famine Ship	66,400
The Irish National Heritage Park	60,400
Hook Lighthouse Visitor Centre	46,593
Dunbrody Abbey and Visitor Centre	20,000
Wexford Wildfowl Reserve	19,733
Colclough Walled Garden	18,161
Tintern Abbey	16,114
Kennedy Homestead	9,000

Source: Fáilte Ireland's Survey of Visitor Attractions

Figure 51. Top visitor attraction in 2016.

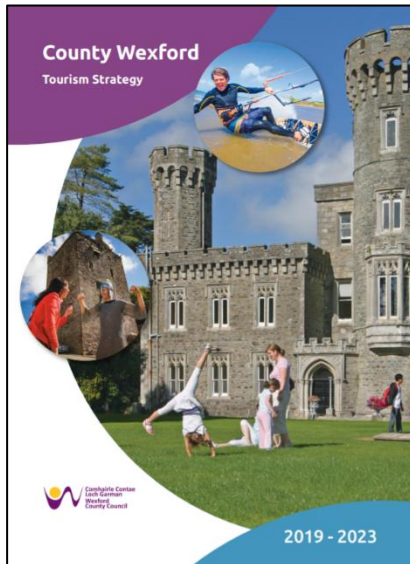
(WCC, 2019 Table 3.2.2)

“By 2020, 50% of travellers worldwide will be millennials (born 1974 - 1980), they are therefore becoming the most important generation of travellers and must be considered when creating a tourism product. ... Activity destinations that offer music, food and up-close nature experiences are top of mind for millennial travellers in 2018.” (WCC, 2019 page 25).

“Many countries point to their cultural and natural heritage as lying at the heart of their visitor appeal. A recurring theme internationally is the maximisation of initiatives which focus on nature-based tourism, wilderness areas and outdoor activities.” (WCC, 2019 page 28).

The importance of the coastline

“The coastline of Wexford is what the county is most famed for from a domestic tourism perspective. The county has managed and benefited from using its coast as a key draw to motivate consumers to visit Wexford, with towns from Gorey, Courtown to Kilmore Quay recognised as leading seaside destinations. However, analysis undertaken as part of the strategy development process indicates that the perception of Wexford’s coastal offering, although positively, is considered traditional. With this in mind there is a significant opportunity to



rejuvenate the positioning of Wexford’s coastal holiday experience offering, making it more contemporary and holistic.

This repositioning will involve integrating and promoting the best that Wexford’s coastline has to offer in a renewed and contemporary way, drawing on a range of key dimensions of the visitor experience. Cornwall in the UK represents a good case study and model for the development of the coastal proposition from Wexford.

As a destination Cornwall draws on its natural environment, flora and fauna, wildlife, history and heritage, food culture, water sports, beach life, culture and the arts to attract both domestic

and international visitors (with a notable number of Irish visitors). Sector investment has transformed Cornwall from a high volume, low value mass market to a higher value multi-niche market that is far less seasonal. Cornwall is ranked number one in the UK for visitor satisfaction, brand ranking, repeat business and loyalty. As a destination it leveraged its strengths of landscape, beaches, heritage and culture to build distinctiveness. In their journey Cornwall focused on harnessing its assets, relentlessly improving quality in the key areas of outdoor leisure, food, drink and events whilst also getting the basics right in terms of accommodation, public realm, visitor services and facilities.

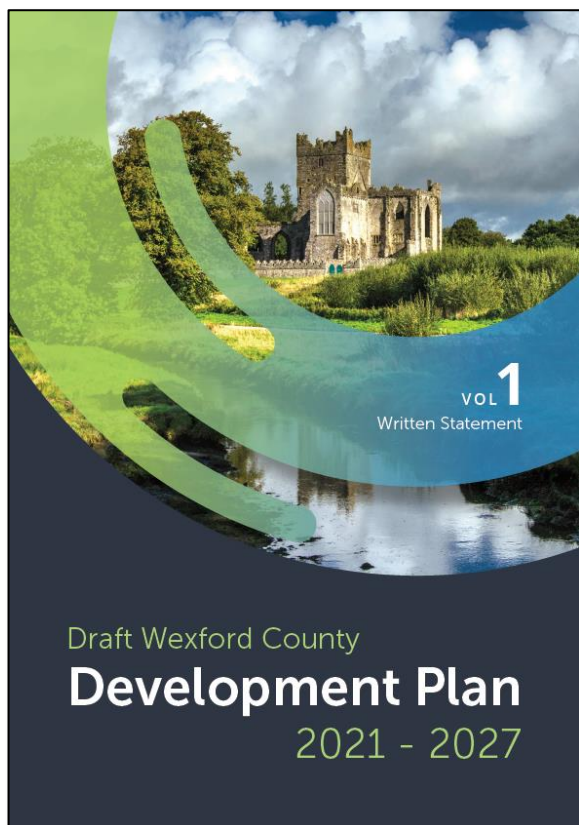
Building on Wexford’s coastal towns and villages, beachfront accommodation, increasingly developed blue and greenways, coastal drives and walks (such as the Sli Carman Coastal Walks), water and land-based sports activities, range of islands reachable on day trips, nature and wildlife reserves, food and drink offering and culture the renewed proposition should be developed and promoted.

It is also however important to note that whilst Wexford’s coastal offering should be developed and promoted so that a wide range of destinations, regions and communities benefit. It will also be important to develop a number of leading lights within the experience offering (similar to how Cornwall champions St. Ives and Penzance), with Courtown, Curracloe, Rosslare, Kilmore Quay and the Hook Peninsula receiving particular focus.”

(WCC, 2019 page 74).

22.4. Appendix 4: Draft Wexford County Development Plan

The following are extracts from the Draft Wexford County Development Plan 2021-2027 (WCC, 2020).



7.4 Tourism Product

"County Wexford is a popular tourist destination for both overseas and domestic visitors. In 2017 the county attracted 232,000 overseas visitors which generated approximately €61 million revenue for the county. In the same year, the county attracted 654,000 domestic visitors, generating revenue of approximately €146 million."

(WCC, 2020 page 251)

7.5.1 Overall Goal

"It is the goal of the Council, as set out in its County Tourism Strategy, to become one of Ireland's most compelling tourism destinations and in doing so improve the quality of life of

people and communities throughout the county. To achieve this, the Council will utilise Wexford's history, unique natural and built tourism assets and its strategic location to further develop tourism as a key economic driver for the county while ensuring that this takes place in a manner which respects the county's heritage, cultures, its people and environment."

(WCC, 2020 pages 253-254)

Tourism Strategic Objectives

It is the objective of the Council:

Objective TM01

"To protect and sustain the natural, built and cultural features that form the basis of the county's tourism industry including landscapes, historic buildings and structures, habitats, species and areas of natural heritage value and water quality."

(WCC, 2020 pages 255)

22.5. Appendix 5: Comments from the DAU/NPWS



An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

Our Ref: **G Pre00237/2020**

(Please quote in all related correspondence)

30 December 2020

Jim Hurley,
SWC Promotions,
Grange,
Kilmore,
Co Wexford
Y35 YN35

Via email: southwexfordcoast@gmail.com

Re: Biodiversity Feasibility Study by Hook Rural Tourism Ltd. for Hook Peninsula, County Wexford

A chara

I refer to correspondence to the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht on 18th November received in connection with the above.

Outlined below are Nature Conservation observations/recommendations co-ordinated by the Development Applications Unit.

Nature Conservation

The Department welcomes this Biodiversity Feasibility Study, commissioned by Hook Rural Tourism Ltd. and prepared by SWC Promotions, which focuses on promoting the biodiversity of the Hook Peninsula for local people and visitors to experience and enjoy. Project recommendations (Section 17, page 45) fit well with local and national biodiversity policy, particularly the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2018-2021 objective to '*Increase awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystems services*' and the Wexford Biodiversity Action Plan 2013-2018 objective to '*raise awareness across all sectors, groups and ages of (a) Biodiversity, (b) its value and (c) the issues facing it, and (d) encourage people through using various media, training, and innovative initiatives to support biodiversity conservation*'. The Department suggests that recommendations could be explicitly linked to national and local biodiversity policy objectives.

The Department recommends that disturbance to wildlife, a negative impact associated with visitor usage and tourism, is an issue within the project area and a topic which is which could be included in the study. Establishing the current level of disturbance within the project area

Aonad na nIarratas ar Fhorbairt

Development Applications Unit

Oifigí an Rialtais

Government Offices

Bóthar an Bhaile Nua, Loch Garman, Contae Loch Garman, Y35 AP90

Newtown Road, Wexford, County Wexford, Y35 AP90



would be a good baseline which could inform future tourism projects. The study refers to the blading of gravel off the beach face taking place at a traditional nesting site of Little Terns at Big Burrow (Section 8.2.6, page 32). While this species does not nest on this site anymore, it may do so in the future and so this area should be protected from disturbance by visitors. Little Tern also previously nested at Cullenstown on the tip of Ballyteige Burrow National Nature Reserve and Sandeel Bay on Hook Head and similar protection should apply in these areas. Duncannon, part of the River Barrow and Nore Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site Code 002162), is a well-known gull and autumnal tern roost and is, in particular, of importance to sandwich tern¹. The site suffers from much disturbance, in particular from dog walkers.

The report references boating and kayaking. It should be noted that Keeragh Islands Special Area of Protection (SPA) (Site Code 004118) (S.I. No. 68 of 2010) is particularly vulnerable to any activity or landings during the breeding season. The Department advises that such activity should not be promoted.

In winter large cetaceans are associated with the sprat and herring fishery. A Humpback Whale that took up residence was subject to continuous disturbance by whale watching boats. The Department advises that a commitment should be made in the feasibility study that any marine eco-tourism proposals abide by Marine Notice 15 of 2005 'Guidelines for Correct Procedures when Encountering Whales and Dolphins in Irish Coastal Waters'². The requirement for Appropriate Assessment of proposed projects under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) should be outlined in the feasibility study. Any proposed project on state-owned land should be subject to early engagement with the relevant statutory authority.

As well as habitats and species protected under the EU Habitats Directive and EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), reference could be made to habitats and species of national and local biodiversity importance such as species protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976, as amended, for example plants listed on the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015. Any Local Biodiversity Sites, as outlined in the Wexford Biodiversity Action Plan, within the study area could also be referenced. Reference could also be made to important Green Infrastructure, such as wildlife corridors, within the project area.

The study states 'The project area does not support any World Heritage Site, National Park, Nature Reserve, Biosphere Reserve, Refuge for Fauna or Flora, Natural Heritage Area, or Wildfowl Sanctuary, but it does contain several significant habitat types, plants and animals subject to varying designations and levels of protection.' This statement should be amended as Bannow Bay is a Wildfowl Sanctuary³

¹ Irish Birds 42: 35-44 (2020)

² <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/22237/d2598e638ddf4aeca1f88c515b885892.pdf#page=1>

³ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1982/si/266/made/en/print>



The above observations/recommendations are based on the papers submitted on a preplanning basis and are made without prejudice to any observations that may be made in the context of any consultation arising on foot of any development application referred to the Minister, by the planning authority/ies, in their role as statutory consultee under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

You are requested to send further communications to the Development Applications Unit (DAU) at manager.dau@chg.gov.ie, or to the following address:

The Manager
Development Applications Unit (DAU)
Government Offices
Newtown Road
Wexford
Y35 AP90

Is mise, le meas

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Sinéad O'Brien', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Sinéad O' Brien
Development Applications Unit

22.6. Appendix 6: Comments from Fáilte Ireland

RE: Draft Biodiversity Feasibility Study on the Hook Peninsula



Aileen Dowling <Aileen.Dowling@failteireland.ie>

To SWC Promotions

Cc Mary Houlihan

On Wed, 16 Dec 2020 at 18:54, Aileen Dowling <Aileen.Dowling@failteireland.ie> wrote:

Hi Jim,

Many thanks for sharing the draft Biodiversity Feasibility Study on the Hook Peninsula and for giving us an opportunity for comment – this is a good initiative

We have reviewed your report and the following are our comments:

- From a tourism perspective the Hook Peninsula is an appealing area for both Domestic & International visitors to Wexford with the Hook Lighthouse being a motivating visitor attraction in Co. Wexford
- Other supporting motivators that resonate with the visitor on the Hook Peninsula include Tintern Abbey, Tintern Trails, JFK Arboretum, The Kennedy Homestead, Colclough Walled Gardens, Kilmokea Gardens & Tea Rooms and of course the range of beaches and water based activities including Sea Cave Kayaking with The Irish Experience.
- We are currently working with the tourism Industry in this area, as part of a New Ross and Hook Peninsula cluster, helping them to develop and improve visitor experiences as well as drive demand. Our objective is to build brilliant visitor experiences that will unlock the tourism economy of this area. Our research tells us that visitors are looking for ‘experiences’ – e.g. experiences which are enjoyable, interactive, immersive and memorable
- You could consider visitor experiences around biodiversity. However these will need to be motivating and appealing to visitors. Therefore the focus should be on how to make them consumable so that they deliver for Hook Peninsula. Biodiversity is something that could appeal to a niche market segment including the education market e.g. schools and third level institutes and could be used to target off season visitors
- In the report in the chapter on recommendations the following comments apply:
 - a. We welcome recommendation no.3 to Liaise and build linkages with Wexford County Council, Fáilte Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service regarding plans Hook Rural Tourism may have to promote biodiversity in the project area
 - b. On recommendation no. 4 to produce a brochure – we recommend considering a digital format too because our consumer research is showing us that more and more visitors are researching destinations online before deciding on visiting an

area. Perhaps also consider a landing page for 'Biodiversity for visitors' on the Hook Peninsula webpage. Also in this recommendation you mention to 'emphasis the conservation message'. We suggest liaison with 'Leave No Trace' - an Outdoor Ethics Education Programme designed to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships, as increasing numbers of people seek the beauty and exhilaration of outdoor travel and recreation, our collective mark on the environment and its natural processes increases. <https://www.leaveonotraceireland.org/>

- c. On recommendation no. 11, it is a good idea to conduct a survey with tourists and visitors to find out what nature experiences they have most enjoyed. In addition to this, you could use this survey to find out if there are gaps and opportunities to develop particular areas of biodiversity experiences that would be of interest to visitors.
- d. On recommendation no. 12, Wexford County Council has received category 2 funding under the Rural Regeneration Development Fund for a large scale iconic capital project at Hook Lighthouse. This development should be taken into consideration before investigation or planned delivery of any new capital experience on the Hook peninsula - therefore we would recommend that you liaise with the Board of Hook Lighthouse to get a full understanding of their proposal.

If you've any questions on the above don't hesitate to contact me.

Best regards

Aileen

Aileen Dowling

Officer – Ireland's Ancient East | Fáilte Ireland

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Editorial note. The comments made above regarding recommendations No 11 (visitor survey) and No 12 (aquarium) refer to the numbering used in the November 2020 draft report. In this final report, draft recommendation No 11 is now listed as No 12, and draft recommendation No 12 is now listed as No 14 (see Section 20).

22.7. Appendix 7: Comments from Wexford Co Council



RE: Hook Peninsula

3 messages

Billy Byrne <Billy.Byrne@wexfordcoco.ie>

4 January 2021 at 12:16

To: "southwexfordcoast@gmail.com" <southwexfordcoast@gmail.com>

Hi Jim

Happy New Year to you

I have read over your report which is very interesting. I am not in a position to offer any comments in relation to corrections of factual errors that may be contained in the report. I have circulated the report to a number of people in the industry that I thought would be good to review also. I was also in touch with the planning Dept. of Wexford County Council and I believe Sonia Hunt has responded to you directly.

I would like to see (and I apologise if I have missed it) what the additional promotion of biodiversity tourism would bring to the area in relation to the Local economy and what increase in Visitor numbers could be expected, especially those interested in walking, nature, environmental issues, etc.

I was very interested to note that when you mentioned Fossils below the word Wexfordia came up. There is a project that the Special Projects team of Wexford County Council are working on with a cluster of attractions and the working title is Wexfordia so I am interested to see if they got the working title from this fossil name (I will have to check that out)

Several species of fossil are of special interest as some are named after places in the project area, for example, Wexfordia hookense, a lycopod, a fossil plant somewhat like a tree fern, found at Sandeel Bay and named after both Wexford and the Hook Peninsula,

I was astonished to read that over 200 species of wild bird have been recorded on the Hook Peninsula.

I completely agree with your statement below and this could possibly be extended to the front line staff of local attractions and accommodation providers.

Since local people involved in the tourism sector are often the first point of contact with visitors and tourists, they are ambassadors for promoting biodiversity. It is essential that they are kept informed and updated regarding developments related to the natural heritage resource values of the Hook Peninsula area.

Hook Tourism have a representative on the board of Visit Wexford which is a tourism industry and public sector initiative aimed at promoting Wexford County, and is supported by Fáilte Ireland, Wexford County Council, Wexford Local Development, local tourism groups and other entities from the Wexford tourism sector.

The Hook Peninsula is a big asset to the tourism offering in County Wexford and the area is currently promoted by Visit Wexford through its various marketing projects including Social Media.

As stated previously well done to Hook Tourism for having a feasibility Study carried out to promote biodiversity tourism throughout the Hook Peninsula and if there is anything else I can be assistance with Jim please feel free to contact me.

Regards

Billy

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