

# Lanesborough Park, Finglas, County Fingal Preliminary Ecological Assessment



*Lanesborough Park hedgerow*

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This report has been written at the request of Ait to assist Fingal County Council in carrying an ecological assessment of a proposal to redevelop Lanesborough Park, north of Finglas village.

The park is situated in a residential area north of Finglas village (Fig.1).

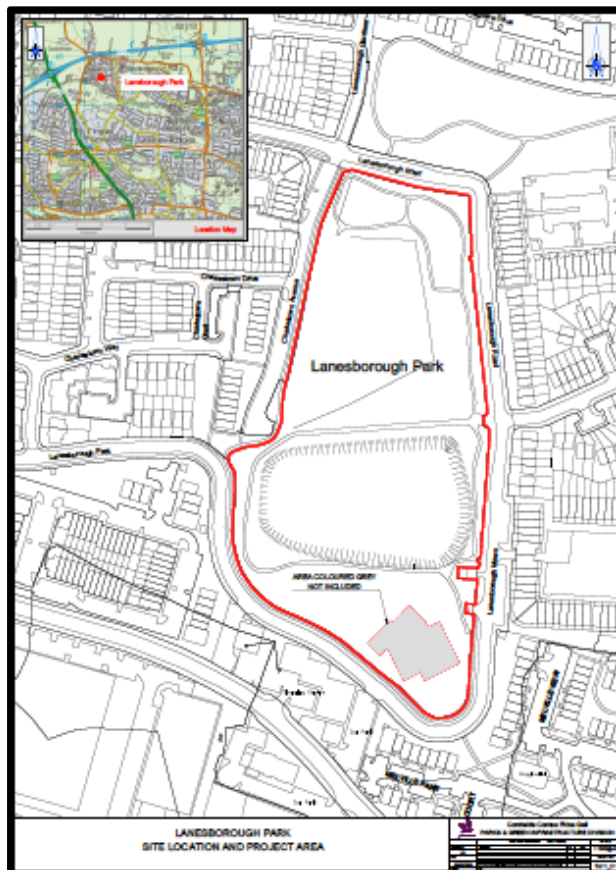


Fig. 1 Lanesborough Park, Finglas

## 1.2 Brief

The brief was 1) to provide an ecological assessment of the site to inform the landscaping plan and 2) advise on the need for further ecological studies to ensure landscaping scheme would be compatible with biodiversity.

The project was carried out by Dr Mary Tubridy, MCIEEM, MIPI. Mary is the principal of Mary Tubridy and Associates an ecological consultancy set up in 1995. She has worked with specialist associates to examine the environmental impact of numerous developments as well as being involved in strategic studies for the government examining the relationship between biodiversity

and spatial planning. The assessment took full regard for legislation and best practice in biodiversity recording and assessment.

## **2 Methodology**

### **2.1 Desk research**

The following sources of published material were consulted:

Review of the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) natural heritage database covering designated areas of ecological interest and sites of nature conservation importance adjacent to the site. Designated sites within the zone of influence were identified and their relationship to the features of biodiversity interest was assessed. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are sites of international importance due to the presence of Annex I habitats and / or Annex II species listed under the EU Habitats Directive. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated for birds based on the presence of internationally significant populations of listed bird species. Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) are sites deemed to be of national ecological importance and are afforded protection under the Wildlife (Amendment Act) 2000.

Review of Ordnance Survey maps and ortho-photography to examine the history of land use at the site.

Review of the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) database for records of rare and protected species and invasive species.

Review of the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) database for mapping of the ~~map~~ of Bat Landscapes for Ireland (Lundy *et al.*, 2011) and bat roost sites within a 10km radius of the site.

Recent Aerial Photography to examine the history of land use at the site.

1:50,000 Ordnance Survey (OS) Map; Discovery Series.

### **2.2 Fieldwork**

A walkover survey of the site was undertaken in January 2021 by Dr Mary Tubridy and an associate to identify habitats, plant species and inspect site for evidence of bats, badger and Brent geese. The habitats found in these areas were classified in accordance with the guidelines set out in 'A Guide to Habitats in Ireland' (Fossitt, 2000), which classifies habitats based on the vegetation present and management history. Dominant plant species, indicator species and / or species of conservation interest were recorded during the walkover survey following the nomenclature as given in the '*New flora of the British Isles*' (Stace, 2010). Habitats were also assessed for their potential for use, or confirmed ~~use~~ by protected species of flora and fauna during the site walkover. Fauna were surveyed through observation of field signs such as direct observation, tracks, feeding signs and droppings.

The assessment of the value of these sites for birds was based on an expert assessment of the value of suitable habitats for either bird feeding, roosting or nesting.

## **2.3 Assessment**

The conservation status of mammals was considered with reference to the Irish Wildlife Act (as amended), Red List of Terrestrial Mammals (Marnell et al. 2009) and the EU Habitats Directive. The conservation status of habitats and flora was considered in respect of the following: Irish Red Data Book for Vascular Plants (Wyse Jackson et al. 2016); Flora Protection Order (2015) and the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

The valuation of ecological features is in accordance with the methodology detailed in National Roads Authority Guidelines (2009). To qualify as an ecological feature (referred to as key ecological receptors in the NRA Guidelines), features must be at least of local ecological importance (higher value).

A preliminary ecological impact assessment (EcIA) of the proposed landscaping scheme was made following the methodology set out in CIEEM (2018) and with reference to BS 42020:2013.

A significant effect is defined in CIEEM (2018) as:  
*“an effect that either supports or undermines biodiversity conservation objectives for ‘important ecological features’.... or for biodiversity in general”*.

## **3 Results**

### **3.1 Desk research**

#### **Proximity to designated sites**

Fig. 2 shows the location of Natura sites within 15km of the park.

Table 1 provides information on the important habitats and species associated with those sites. An account of the nearest Natura site South Dublin Bay and Tolka Estuary is in Appendix 1.

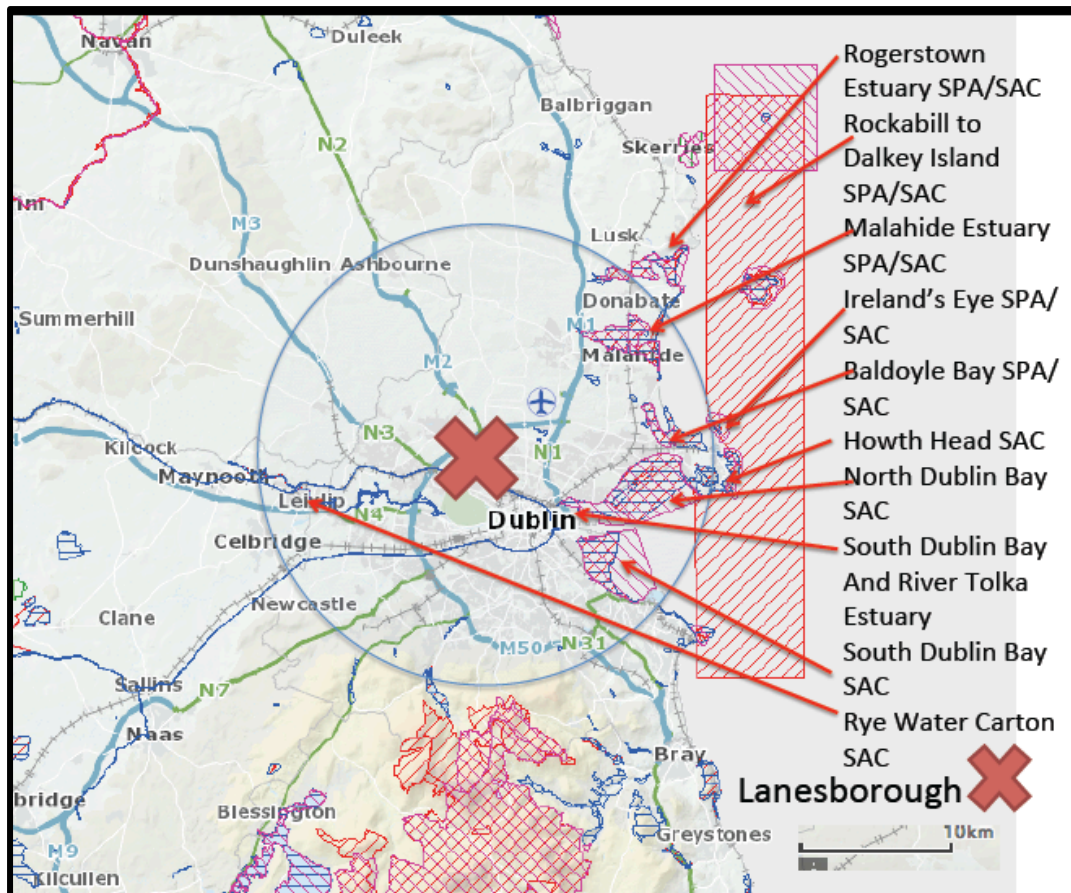


Fig. 2 Natura sites within 15km of Lanesborough

It is noteworthy that the Natura sites in the vicinity of the park are dominated by wetland habitats, principally associated with the coast. Only one of the QI species Light bellied Brent goose could use Lanesborough Park (as a feeding site).

### Historic research

Historic research confirmed with the exception of hedgerows there was no evidence that the park has supported semi-natural habitats.

## 3.2 Results of fieldwork

### Habitat biodiversity

Habitats feature GA2 (Amenity grassland (Improved) and Hedgerows (WL1). The principal habitat in the park is GA2. All hedgerow lengths were present on the 1<sup>st</sup> ed OS map and were assessed as being important for bird feeding, roosting and nesting. Within the park is found small plantations of native trees with oak and ash c. 20-30 years old and a recently planted apple orchard at the northern end of the park (2-3 years old). The park boundary has a mixed shrubbery which includes much native bramble.

No sign of badger usage was found at the park nor signs of feeding by Brent geese. There was no suitable habitat for amphibians and reptiles. None of the trees proposed for felling were considered to be potential bat roosts. As the walkover survey did not suggest that the sites proposed for landscaping were important for bat roosting, and that none of the trees proposed for felling were considered to be potential bat roosts it was considered that bat surveys did not need to be carried out. During the walkover survey particular care was taken to examine sites for signs of badger activity. As badger activity was not detected therefore a badger specific survey was not undertaken. As the walkover survey in November did not reveal suitable habitats for these groups a reptile and amphibian survey was not recommended. While surveys for invertebrates were not specifically undertaken the importance of these sites and features to invertebrates was interpreted by its relationship to the habitats and plant species found at each location.

### **3.3 Assessment of the impacts of development**

#### **Landscaping scheme**

Details of the landscaping scheme are shown in Fig. 3



Fig. 3 Details of the landscaping scheme

The proposal is obviously informed by the initial biodiversity audit prepared for this site (see Appendix 2) as it involves the retention of existing hedgerows in the park, their enhancement by the location of tall grass nearby and their integration into the design of amenity areas particularly by the installation of a short bridge over their associated ditch. Almost all trees will be retained. Species diversity in existing small woodlands and grasslands around the perimeter of the park will be improved through specialised planting and reseeding. Lighting is not proposed thus avoiding any disturbance to nocturnal species. Best practice construction methods will be adhered to, to avoid causing pollution and minimize damage to root protection areas.

No direct, indirect or secondary impacts will occur to designated sites or species requiring protection. Fieldwork in January 2021 suggests that the habitats are not similar to those found in the Natura sites. Habitats which will be disturbed are common types, principally GA2 (Improved Amenity grassland).

Neither will the landscaping works lead to the fragmentation of the habitats used by species associated with the nearby Natura sites as fieldwork in January confirmed that the park is of low potential as feeding, roosting or nesting sites for these species. It was also considered that the park has low potential as a foraging, commuting or roosting area for bats. Any works near the hedgerows will occur between 1st September and 1st March to avoid disturbance to nesting birds.

Indirect impacts such as through water quality will not occur. Water if needed to establish landscaping will be provided through the council's supply.

While some disturbance will occur to biodiversity, this will be of limited duration and the final scheme once mature will improve the biodiversity interest of the park.

## **4 Conclusions**

The overall conclusions from this assessment are:

With the exception of hedgerows the biodiversity interest of the park is currently low.

Redevelopment will integrate the principal feature of interest, the hedgerows into the landscaping scheme.

Biodiversity in this park will improve as a result of redevelopment.



## **References**

CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Coastal, Freshwater and Marine. The Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management.

Fossitt J.A. (2000). A Guide to Habitats in Ireland. Heritage Council, Kilkenny.

Lundy, M.G., Aughney, T., Montgomery, W.I., & Roche, N., (2011) Landscape conservation for Irish bats & species specific roosting characteristics. Bat Conservation Ireland.

Marnell, F., Kingston, N. & Looney, D. (2009) Ireland Red. List No. 3: Terrestrial Mammals, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (2009) Guidelines for Assessment of Ecological Impacts of National Roads Schemes, National Roads Authority, Dublin.

Stace, C. (2019) New Flora of the British Isles 4<sup>th</sup> ed. C and M Floristics, UK.

Wyse Jackson M., *et al* (2016) Ireland Red List No. 10: Vascular Plants. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Dublin, Ireland.

## **Appendix 1 Site synopsis for nearest Natura site Dublin Bay South and Tolka estuary SPA SITE CODE: 004024**

The South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA comprises a substantial part of Dublin Bay. It includes the intertidal area between the River Liffey and Dun Laoghaire, and the estuary of the River Tolka to the north of the River Liffey, as well as Booterstown Marsh. A portion of the shallow marine waters of the bay is also included.

In the south bay, the intertidal flats extend for almost 3 km at their widest. The sediments are predominantly well-aerated sands. Several permanent channels exist, the largest being Cockle Lake. A small sandy beach occurs at Merrion Gates, while some bedrock shore occurs near Dun Laoghaire. The landward boundary is now almost entirely artificially embanked. There is a bed of Dwarf Eelgrass (*Zostera noltii*) below Merrion Gates which is the largest stand on the east coast. Green algae (*Ulva* spp.) are distributed throughout the area at a low density. The macro- invertebrate fauna is well-developed, and is characterised by annelids such as Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*), *Nephtys* spp. and Sand Mason (*Lanice conchilega*), and bivalves, especially Cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*) and Baltic Tellin (*Macoma balthica*). The small gastropod Spire Shell (*Hydrobia ulvae*) occurs on the muddy sands off Merrion Gates, along with the crustacean *Corophium volutator*. Sediments in the Tolka Estuary vary from soft thixotropic muds with a high organic content in the inner estuary to exposed, well-aerated sands off the Bull Wall. The site includes Booterstown Marsh, an enclosed area of saltmarsh and muds that is cut off from the sea by the Dublin/Wexford railway line, being linked only by a channel to the east, the Nutley stream. Sea water incursions into the marsh occur along this stream at high tide. An area of grassland at Poolbeg, north of Irishtown Nature Park, is also included in the site.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Light-bellied Brent Goose, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Roseate Tern, Common Tern and Arctic Tern. The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands, and as these form part of the SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds.

The site is an important site for wintering waterfowl, being an integral part of the internationally important Dublin Bay complex – all counts for wintering waterbirds are five year mean peaks for the period 1995/96 to 1999/2000. Although birds regularly commute between the south bay and the north bay, recent studies have shown that certain populations which occur in the south bay spend most of their time there. An internationally important population of Light-bellied Brent Goose (368) occurs regularly and newly arrived birds in the autumn feed on the Eelgrass bed at

Merrion. At the time of designation the site supported nationally important numbers of a further nine species: Oystercatcher (1,145), Ringed Plover (161), Grey Plover (45), Knot (548), Sanderling (321), Dunlin (1,923), Bar-tailed

Godwit (766), Redshank (260) and Black-headed Gull (3,040). Other species occurring in smaller numbers include Great Crested Grebe (21), Curlew (127) and Turnstone (52). Little Egret, a species which has recently colonised Ireland, also occurs at this site.

South Dublin Bay is a significant site for wintering gulls, with a nationally important population of Black-headed Gull, but also Common Gull (330) and Herring Gull (348). Mediterranean Gull is also recorded from here, occurring through much of the year, but especially in late winter/spring and again in late summer into winter.

Both Common Tern and Arctic Tern breed in Dublin Docks, on a man-made mooring structure known as the E.S.B. dolphin – this is included within the site. Small numbers of Common Tern and Arctic Tern were recorded nesting on this dolphin in the 1980s. A survey in 1995 recorded nationally important numbers of Common Tern nesting here (52 pairs). The breeding population of Common Tern at this site has increased, with 216 pairs recorded in 2000. This increase was largely due to the ongoing management of the site for breeding terns. More recent data highlights this site as one of the most important Common Tern sites in the country with over 400 pairs recorded here in 2007.

South Dublin Bay is an important staging/passage site for a number of tern species in the autumn (mostly late July to September). The origin of many of the birds is likely to be the Dublin breeding sites (Rockabill and the Dublin Docks) though numbers suggest that the site is also used by birds from other sites, perhaps outside the state. This site is selected for designation for its autumn tern populations: Roseate Tern (2,000 in 1999), Common Tern (5,000 in 1999) and Arctic Tern (20,000 in 1996).

The South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA is of ornithological importance as it supports an internationally important population of Light-bellied Brent Goose and nationally important populations of a further nine wintering species. Furthermore, the site supports a nationally important colony of breeding Common Tern and is an internationally important passage/staging site for three tern species. It is of note that four of the species that regularly occur at this site are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Tern, Arctic Tern and Roseate Tern. Sandymount Strand/Tolka Estuary is also a Ramsar Convention site.

30.5.2015

## **Appendix 2**

### **Preliminary ecological assessment to inform landscaping scheme**

Notes from Lanesborough Park Walkover Survey December 4<sup>th</sup> 2020  
Mary Tubridy and Field Assistant

#### **Geodiversity/landscape interest**

Original soils present near hedgerows. Otherwise man-made.

#### **Areas of biodiversity interest where great care is needed in planning and development**

Hedgerows in northern end of park. On 1<sup>st</sup> ed OS map but not townland boundaries  
Common nesting birds (robin and blackbird) seen near native shrubs  
bramble and dog rose.

#### **Other areas of interest**

Small plantations of native trees c. 20-30 years old with potential for enhancement (oak and ash)  
Pollinator friendly plants including bramble in shrubberies along boundary fence  
Recently planted apple orchard at northern end (2=3 years old)  
All native trees (oak, ash)

#### **Places of low value but good for Green Infrastructure** (water penetration, carbon storage and amenity)

All grasslands, shrubberies of low value to pollinators and birds. All trees.

Notes: some conifers doing very badly. Traces of small bonfires otherwise little sign of anti-social activity i.e. drinking etc.