

Meeting Notes



*Job Title / Ref.:	A2 Shore Road Greenisland		Job No. S 100532
	Project No.		
Subject of Meeting	EHS	Meeting No.: EHS 1	Date & Time: 21-Oct-05
Attendees:	Paul Byrne EHS (Conservation, Designations & Protection) Ian Enlander EHS (Conservation Science, Onithology) Lionel Walsh RS Nigel Hackett SW Susan Briggs SW	Venue: Commonwealth House	Notes By: SEB
		Distribution: Core Team	

Item No.	NOTES	ACTION
1	<p>Introductions were made and SEB explained the reason for seeking a meeting as follows: Scott Wilson and Ferguson McIlveen have been appointed by Roads Service to consider options for improvement of the A2 Shore Road at Greenisland. In the course of considering options it has become apparent that a route along the shore of Belfast Lough would be best in traffic terms (and possibly also in economic terms); feasible in engineering terms but very difficult environmentally. The other options, (on-line widening and an inland route) are less straightforward in some ways and would have major impact on people in terms of noise, air quality, severance and loss of property, which could make them undeliverable. Therefore, although their initial reaction was that a shore route was not an option, SW / FMCI and RS are seeking to explore the implications with EHS to make sure the option has not been dismissed without proper consideration. Similar meetings have been held with PSNI, UUU and Housing Executive to discuss the inland route.</p> <p>Drawings of all three options were tabled and discussed. With reference to the 'shore' option, the key question is: <i>Is there any realistic potential for either of the illustrated routes or something in a similar vein?</i></p>	
2	<p>Paul Byrne confirmed that Belfast Lough including the foreshore is designated as an ASSI to protect over-wintering birds, (waders and waterfowl), and areas of geological interest (igneous exposures) on both the northern and southern shores. The same area is further protected by European and International designations as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special Protection Area (SPA) for over-wintering redshank (20 Aug 1998); - proposed SPA for Great Crested Grebe (Will be SPA by March 2006); - Ramsar Site (5 Aug 1998). <p>While all the designations are important, the European SPA designation carries the most protection.</p>	
3	<p>Article 6 of the Habitats Regulations prescribe a process for assessment of any proposals that have potential impact upon an SPA, which takes account of ecological factors only.</p> <p>Stage 1 is to examine the need for an Appropriate Assessment (AA). An AA is required if there could be a significant impact on the protected site. The competent authority, which decides if an AA is required, is Roads Service. EHS adopt the 'precautionary principle' which means that if there is any doubt they will assume there is a significant impact.</p> <p>Stage 2 is to undertake an AA of all potential impacts on the designated site and its features, with particular reference to the site's conservation objectives. EHS must be consulted at this stage. Mitigation (measures to reduce the impacts, not compensation) must be considered.</p> <p>If the AA identifies any significant adverse impact on the protected site then Stage 3 is to consider alternatives. The alternatives are assessed in terms of their impact on designated sites and protected species only; or, in other words, ecological impact only. Social and economic impacts, for example, are <u>not</u> considered. If there is a feasible option that does not impact on the designated site, then the proposal is rejected.</p> <p>Stage 4. If there are no alternatives and for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, the scheme <u>must</u> go ahead then compensatory measures may be considered. These must be demonstrably effective and must in place before the scheme can proceed.</p>	

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4	<p>LW asked EHS if, in their opinion, it would be possible to develop any scheme along the shore or in the lough that would not have a significant impact on the existing and proposed SPAs. While EHS could not answer the question definitively, they indicated that it was highly unlikely as impacts could take the form of loss of habitat, loss of food sources, disturbance or pollution.</p>	
5	<p>IE provided more detail on the reasons for the designations (summarised in item 2), and on the availability of data that could be used for assessment purposes.</p> <p>Belfast Lough is well covered by two bird survey programmes: WEBS (monthly high-tide counts of species) and a programme of 3 low-tide counts a year carried out during the winter. The data is held by the British Trust for Ornithology.</p> <p>Benthic (sea-bed ecology) data may be available. Contact Joe Breen in EHS Marine Unit.</p> <p>If the available data proved inadequate to fully assess impacts, additional data collection would be required. The time scale for collecting new data could be 2 to 3 years depending on exactly what was required.</p>	
6	<p>In view of the SPA and Ramsar designations, IE recommended the appointment of a local ornithologist for this project. He also recommended consulting Mark McCoughlin in the Fisheries Division of the Department of Agriculture.</p>	
7	<p>SEB asked EHS if they could confirm the team's understanding that there were no designated sites or other particularly sensitive ecological issues affected by the inland and on-line routes. PB and IE were not aware of any particular issues.</p>	
8	<p>Finally, (and separate from the main meeting), EHS requested the name of a senior contact in RS with whom they could agree a seminar for Project Sponsors etc on the Habitats Directive and in particular the Article 6 Assessment Process. It is becoming clear from other jobs (A1/N1 and A6) that there is a lack of understanding within RS and their consultants of the implications of the legislation. PB noted that in the event of non-implementation, the UK Government is fined. The Treasury has determined that the Agency responsible for the breach will pay. (Costs of the order of £80K/day). Northern Ireland is already under investigation for failure to adequately protect mussel beds in Strangford Lough. PB to send background information to LW and request seminar.</p>	

Copy to: Job file S100532/A4, Core Team plus Alison Daugherty and Lynn Masterson