

An aerial photograph of Portumna Lake, showing the lake's surface with several small islands and peninsulas. The foreground is dominated by a lush green landscape with dense forests and open fields. A winding road is visible in the lower left. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme Portumna 2024



**Fáilte
Ireland**

Turasóireacht Náisiúnta
An tÚdara Eorbartha
National Tourism
Development Authority

National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme

Report for Portumna 2024

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PORTUMNA – INTERESTING FINDS

Interesting Finds

A diverse array of bird species was identified in Portumna. Though not recorded during the survey, white-tailed sea eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) have previously bred on Church Island, which is approximately 1.8km southwest of the site in Lough Derg. This was the first successful breeding attempt recorded since their reintroduction in 2007. Along with mute swan, this species is one of Ireland's largest bird species.



Features of the site

- Vehicle and bicycle parking, toilet facilities, a lifeguard hut, benches and various rubbish bins are available on this site.
- Bat boxes are located at the toilets.
- Informative and directional signage is present at the swimming area and the harbour.
- Life buoys and safety information is available at the swimming area and the harbour.
- The new Blueway trail connects the swimming area to the harbour.

Habitats

The following habitats were recorded on site:

- Limestone / Marl Lakes (FL3)
- Dry Meadows and Grassy Verges (GS2)
- (Mixed) Broadleaved Woodland (WD1)
- Reed and Large Sedge Swamps (FS1)
- Riparian Woodland (WN5)
- Scrub (WS1)
- Mixed Broadleaved / Conifer Woodland (WD2)
- Scattered Trees and Parkland (WD5)
- Improved Agricultural Grassland (GA1)
- Amenity Grassland (Improved) (GA2)
- Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)
- Treelines (WL2)
- Hedgerows (WL1)
- Sea walls, piers and jetties (CC1)
- Stonewalls and other stonework (BL1)
- Drainage ditches (FW4)

Key Recommendations

- The large crack in the paved path in Portumna Swimming Area should be repaired or the pathway replaced.
- Signage along the Blueway trail instructing recreation and amenity users to remain on the path should be considered, along with signage relating to keeping dogs on leashes should also be considered.
- Where habitat is being managed for amenity purposes, a staggered mowing regime should be considered to enhance biodiversity.
- Informative signage regarding the dangers that discarded fishing line and other waste poses to wildlife should be considered.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Roughan & O'Donovan (ROD) was appointed by Fáilte Ireland to conduct Visitor and Environmental Surveys as part of the National Environmental Surveying & Monitoring Programme. Fáilte Ireland regularly engages with environmental research that is used to make informed management decisions and produce robust guidelines to facilitate the protection of the environment. From its inception in 2014, the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Operational Monitoring Programme has been conducting research into the impacts of recreation on the receiving environment.

Building on the success of the WAW environmental monitoring programme which ran from 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland expanded the programme to a national level. From 2021 to 2022 the programme monitored 19 individual sites located in all of Fáilte Ireland's regional areas; The Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East, and Dublin. This 2024 National Monitoring report builds on environmental surveying and monitoring undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland as far back as 2015. To date (excluding 2024 data), these surveys have monitored a total of 57 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 30,000 visitors at a range of popular sites including inland, urban, coastal and WAW discovery points.

The environmental surveys and monitoring in 2023 followed the methodologies used in previous years. Following the completion of the 2023 surveys, a review of the methodology was undertaken. In developing the 2024 survey methodology, ROD considered the methodology for gathering the data, the presentation of the data, and the usefulness of the data gathered. The review also considered the time required to gather the data.

Ten sites were surveyed in 2024. Figure 1.1 below shows the locations of these sites. This report is for Portumna, Co. Galway.

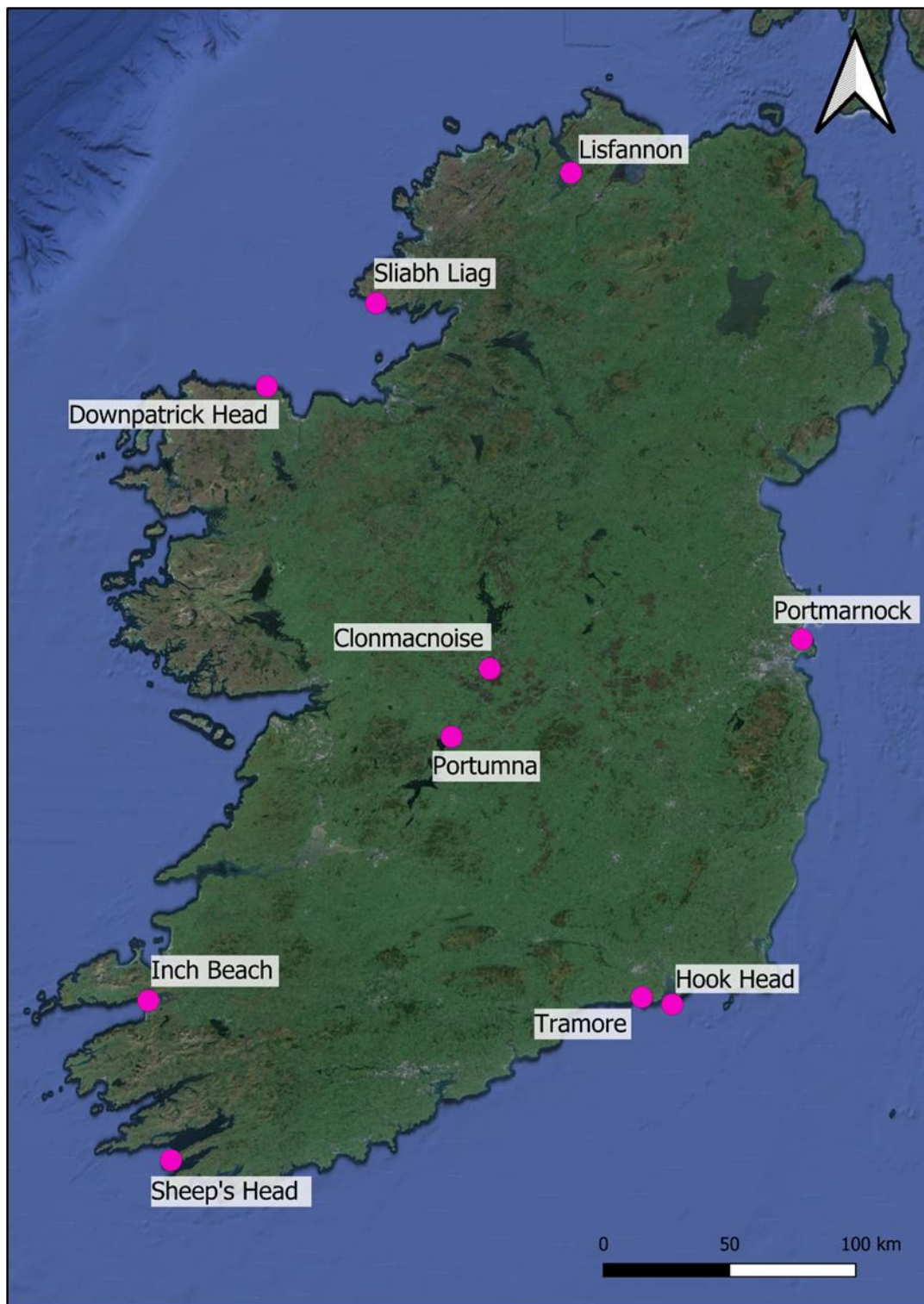


Figure 1.1 Environmental Monitoring Programme 2024 locations. Basemap provided by Google.

1.2 Aim of the Report

The purpose of the monitoring programme is as follows:

- To gain insight from an environmental perspective at popular tourism sites across Ireland;
- To obtain data on path and trail conditions etc. for each site;
- To obtain data relating to habitats, flora, and fauna for each site;
- To identify observable trends or variations among the sites;
- To make recommendations where appropriate for site management for the benefit of the site, the visitor, and the natural environment.

1.3 Site Description of Portumna

The area being surveyed for this report ("the site") encompasses Portumna Castle Harbour, Portumna Swimming Area, and the new Blueway trail and surrounding habitats. Portumna Castle is located c. 200m north of Portumna Harbour, and c. 550m to the northwest of Portumna Swimming Area. The site is located c. 800m south of Portumna village in Co. Galway and is accessible via two local roads connected to the N65 that run through the town. The village is also accessed by the R352 to the west. The site boundary is presented in Figure 1.1 below.

Public toilets, informative signage, bins and bike parking facilities are available at the site. The lakeshore area adjacent to the site forms part of the Portumna Water Recreation Park to Portumna Forest Park Blueway trail. The new Blueway trail runs through the site and connects with Portumna Forest Park to the west of the site via forest roads. Lifeguards are present at Portumna Swimming Area from 11am to 7pm on weekends in June, every day from July to the beginning of September, and on weekends until September 12th.

Portumna features in the Galway County Development Plan (Galway County Council, 2022) as a location to be included in 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands', a plan which was launched in 2018 to rebrand midland areas located around the River Shannon with the aim of attracting greater numbers of tourists through the development of walking 'hubs', trails, and new food networks.

The site is located within the boundaries the Lough Derg, North-east Shore Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the River Shannon Callows SAC, the Lough Derg (Shannon) Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Middle Shannon Callows SPA.



Figure 1.2 Site Location. Basemap provided by Google.

1.4 Critical Infrastructure

Tables 1.1 - 1.3 below provide information on the infrastructure at Portumna. Uisce Éireann's website was used to access information on the Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment Capacity Registers for County Galway (Uisce Éireann 2023a, b).

Table 1.1 Portumna Wastewater Infrastructure

Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toilet / shower facilities are available at the site. Wastewater treatment is provided by Portumna WWTP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portumna WWTP is operating below capacity.

Table 1.2 Summary of Drinking Water Infrastructure at Portumna Beach

Drinking Water	Water Resource Name (WRZ)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
The nearest is Portumna village.	Portumna PS	Potential Capacity available (Level of service improvement required).

Table 1.3 Summary of Transport Infrastructure at Portumna

Nearest Settlement	Current Transport Infrastructure	Comment
Portumna village	Portumna town is accessed by the R342 and the N65. Two local roads branching from the N65 connect Portumna village to the site, located c. 800m south of the village. There are two car parks at the site - one at Portumna Castle Harbour and one at Portumna Swimming Area.	Portumna town is served regularly by buses from Limerick, Dublin and Galway. The site is a 15min walk from Portumna town.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The following surveys were undertaken:

- Habitat survey
- Pathway condition survey
- Survey of the features, signage and hazards

The survey at Portumna was undertaken on the 22nd of May 2024. The weather conditions clear with some light rainfall. The sub-sections below present the methodology used.

2.1 Habitat Condition Assessment Methodology

The habitats within the site were classified and mapped in accordance with *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000) and *Best Practice Guidance for Habitat Surveying and Mapping* (Smith et al. 2011). Notes were taken on species composition and habitat condition. Fossitt habitats corresponding to Annex I habitats were noted using the *Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats* (EC, 2013). A desktop study was also undertaken to identify designated sites and rare and protected species in the vicinity of each site. Incidental sightings of birds, mammals, reptiles, etc. were also recorded during the site surveys.

The condition of the habitat in each polygon or line will were noted, including any damage and the likely cause of the damage. The areas along pathways are outlined by the pathway condition assessment in Section 2.2 below. The following criteria were used to assess habitat condition:

- Extent of habitat degradation;
- Impact of habitat degradation (localised or widespread);
- Potential for the habitat to recover; and
- Whether or not intervention is required.

2.2 Pathway Condition Assessment Methodology

The main paths were defined during the site visit and a desk study which included a review of the Strava heat maps (www.strava.com/heatmap), and a review of the previous site monitoring reports, if available. Typically, the main paths are formalised waymarked trails or heavily trafficked paths that are not formalised. These paths usually link the site entry points and car parks to a destination or feature of interest. The paths were categorised into sections by type and composition. The different types of path are described in Table 2.1 below. Visitor Characterisation Surveys were undertaken by Fáilte Ireland and are presented in Appendix A. Each path section is described as 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory' based on the condition of the path and whether or not it could accommodate the current levels of use. Indicators that a path was not suitable for the current levels of use included the presence of wet areas, erosion, trip hazards, damaged pavement, braiding, path widening and habitat loss along the path. Paths that generally facilitated unobstructed movement between locations were deemed as 'satisfactory'.

Table 2.1 Pathway Types

Pathway Type	Description
Paved Car Park	An area used for parking, wider than the road, that is paved, usually with tarmacadam.
Gravel Car Park	An area used for parking, wider than the road, that is gravel or crushed stone.
Paved Road	A road that is paved with tarmacadam or similar hard material.
Gravel Road	A road consisting of gravel or crushed stone, with no grass in the middle.
Gravel Track	A single vehicle pathway used by small numbers of vehicles. Tracks are normally paved with gravel and can have grass in the middle
Grassy Track	A single vehicle pathway used by small numbers of vehicles. These tracks are not paved and are used primarily by tractors, quads or small numbers of private vehicles.
Paved Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic. Paved paths are found in more developed areas, to cater for higher levels of traffic.
Gravel Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic and can be a single track or a track wide enough for several people to walk abreast. Gravel paths are found in more developed areas, to cater for higher levels of traffic.
Grassy Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic and can be a single track or a track wide enough for several people to walk abreast. Grassy paths are found in less developed areas, often beyond feature of interest, and are used less frequently.
Bare Ground Path	These paths occur where the vegetation had been eroded by foot traffic and is bare ground, or damages vegetation. These paths are often widespread on sites where formal waymarked trails are not provided.

2.3 Features, Signage and Hazards

Signage, features of interest, and hazards were recorded, photographed and mapped. Features includes built heritage, sculptures as well as toilets and bins. Hazards including unstable walls, broken fences or unprotected cliff tops.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Habitat Condition Assessment

Habitats were surveyed during the optimum habitat survey season i.e., April to September (Smith et al., 2011). Habitats were classified according to *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000). Table 3.1 lists the habitats identified in Portumna along with their corresponding Annex I habitats. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 displays examples of the habitats found at Portumna. A habitat map is presented in Figure 3.3. It should be noted that having a corresponding Annex I habitat does not mean the Annex I habitat is automatically present.

Table 3.1 Fossitt (2000) habitats and links to Annex I habitats.

Fossitt 2000 Habitat	Corresponding Annex I habitats (Natura 2000 code)
Limestone / Marl Lakes (FL3)	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. (3140)
Dry Meadows and Grassy Verges (GS2)	Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> , <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>) (6510)
(Mixed) Broadleaved Woodland (WD1)	None
Reed and Large Sedge Swamps (FS1)	None
Riparian Woodland (WN5)	None
Scrub (WS1)	<i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands (5130)
Mixed Broadleaved / Conifer Woodland (WD2)	None
Scattered Trees and Parkland (WD5)	None
Improved Agricultural Grassland (GA1)	None
Amenity Grassland (Improved) (GA2)	None
Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)	None
Treelines (WL2)	None
Hedgerows (WL1)	None
Sea walls, piers and jetties (CC1)	None
Stonewalls and other stonework (BL1)	None
Drainage ditches (FW4)	None

Limestone / Marl Lakes (FL3)

The site is situated on the northern shore of Lough Derg. At the swimming area, the lake is accessible for swimmers and other recreational activities and is relatively shallow at the shore. At the harbour, the water is deeper to accommodate boating activities. Though swimming and boating activities occur throughout Portumna, no impacts to this habitat were noted during the survey. Areas of rushes and reeds were recorded throughout this habitat, with bog-rush (*Schoenus sp.*), water lily (*Nymphaea sp.*), and reeds (*Phragmites spp*) among the plant species observed. Wetland and waterbirds were also recorded in this habitat during the survey, including Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) signets and Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) ducklings.

Dry Meadows and Grassy Verges (GS2)

At the entrance to the carpark, a small, isolated area of amenity grassland contains two sections which are being managed for wildlife, as is displayed on a sign. No impacts to this habitat were noted. Though these areas are small, they are diverse, containing poppy (*Papaver sp.*), narrow-leaf hawksweed (*Hieracium umbellatum*), ragged robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), Cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Common Chickweed (*Stellaria media*), Creeping Buttercup, Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Germander Speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*), Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), Meadow Foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*), Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Red Clover, Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), Scarlet Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis*), Silverweed, Smooth Meadow-grass (*Poa pratensis*), Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Perrenial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), thistles (*Cirsium spp.*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*), dandelion.

Dry meadows are present on either side of the new Blueway trail. Informal pathways run through it, though some of these may be the result of mammal movements. This habitat is in an overall satisfactory condition. The vegetation found in this habitat includes Bush Vetch (*Vicia sepium*), Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), Cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Common mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*), Creeping Buttercup, Daisy, Germander Speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*), Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), Meadow Foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*), Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Red Clover, Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Perrenial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), thistles (*Cirsium spp.*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*), dandelion, Scorpion grass (*Myosotis scorpioides*) and other grass species. It was also noted that trees were being planted in this habitat, though they were contained within tree guards, and as such, their species is unknown. Various invertebrate species were also recorded in this habitat, including damsel flies (Zygoptera), amber snails (Succineidae), European nurseryweb spiders (*Pisaura mirabilis*), wolf spiders (Lycosidae), and bee and fly species.

(Mixed) Broadleaved Woodland (WD1)

Two areas of this habitat are present south of the new Blueway trail. The westernmost area is dominated by Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). Calls could be heard during the survey coming from the undergrowth, which were attributed to rodents or shrews. Mammal paths and deer tracks and scat were also recorded here. A larger area of woodland to the east of this, bordering the agricultural grassland, contains lime (*Tilia cordata*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), poplar (*Populus sp.*), willows (*Salix spp.*), and blackthorn, with some areas of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and bramble. Mammal paths were also noted here. A small pocket of this habitat is present north of the new Blueway trail, with Red Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus carnea Briotii*), Rowan, and sycamore being the dominant species. No impacts from recreation and amenity users were noted in this woodland habitat.



Figure 3.1 Dry meadow (GS2) with the new Blueway trail to the left, and newly plant trees and mixed broadleaved woodland (WD1) in the background.

Reed and Large Sedge Swamps (FS1)

This habitat is present throughout Lough Derg. Rushes (*Juncus* spp), cattails (*Typha* sp.), and yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) were among the species recorded in this habitat. Given the nature of the site, and that this habitat is aquatic, it was often difficult for the surveyor to fully assess the species composition and extent of this habitat. No impacts to this habitat were noted during the survey.

Riparian Woodland (WN5)

This habitat is found in the south of the site. As it is surrounded by dense scrub and woodland to the north, and meets Lough Derg to the south, the habitat composition and extent was difficult to assess. No visitor impacts were observed here. This habitat is dominated by willow species.

Scrub (WS1)

Scrub habitat is present at the wall north of the new Blueway trail, and is comprised of brambles (*Rubus* spp.), nettle, cherry (*Prunus* sp.), willow, and poplar. South of the new Blueway trail, a large area of scrub is present, and is comprised of bramble and willowherb (*Epilobium* spp). A smaller pocket of scrub is present west of this comprised of bramble and nettles.

(Mixed) Broadleaved / Conifer Woodland (WD2)

A small pocket of mixed broadleaved and conifer woodland is present north of the new Blueway trail. A short informal pathway leads through this woodland, where a fire pit is present. No other impacts were found in this woodland. Beech, Blackthorn, Rowan, Pine (*Pinus* spp.), Sycamore are among the species found here.

Scattered Trees and Parkland (WD5)

Scattered trees and parkland habitat is present at Portumna swimming area. There are some tire marks on the grass, and one area of tire marks which appears to lead to the wetland north of the swimming area, which is beyond the site boundary. No other impacts from recreation and amenity users to this habitat were noted. The trees present in this habitat include lime, Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*), Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), Birch (*Betula* sp.), Hawthorn, and maple (*Acer* sp.). daisy, silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*), Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*), and creeping buttercup comprise the lawn areas, which was being mown at the time of the survey.



Figure 3.2 Limestone/marl lakes (FL3) and Reed and large sedge swamps (FS1) habitats with piers and Scattered trees and parkland (WD5) in the background.

Improved Agricultural Grassland (GA1)

Directly west of the swimming area is an area of agricultural fields with the new Blueway trail dividing them. Stock-proof fencing and locked gates prevent access into the fields, and as such, no impacts from recreation and amenity users were recorded in them. The northernmost field was being grazed by cattle at the time of the survey, and it was noted that cattle movements have resulted in areas of bare ground. The southernmost field merges into reeds and large sedge swamps with proximity to the lake. Species observed in this habitat were cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), curly dock (*Rumex crispus*), cut-leaved crane's bill (*Geranium dissectum*), daisy, dandelion (*Taraxacum vulgaria*), field speedwell (*Veronica agrestis*), hedge mustard (*Sisymbrium officinale*), meadow buttercup, nettle, prickly sowthistle (*Sonchus asper*), red clover, scurvygrass (*Cochlearia anglica*), thistle (*Cirsium* spp.) white clover, and Yorkshire fog.

Amenity Grassland (Improved) (GA2)

Amenity grasslands are present throughout Portumna Harbour, and in a small pocket at the entrance to the swimming area carpark. No recreation and amenity user impacts were noted to this habitat, though it was heavily mown. Species found here were Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*), creeping buttercup, daisy, meadow buttercup and other grasses and mosses.

Buildings and Artificial Surfaces (BL3)

This habitat is present throughout the site, and is primarily comprised of Portumna Swimming area, Portumna Harbour and the new Blueway trail which connects them.

Hedgerows (WL1) and Treelines (WL2)

At the entrance of Portumna Swimming area is a cypress (*Cupressus* sp.) treeline. At the northeast corner of the site, a treeline extends north of the new Blueway trail, and is dominated by cherry (*Prunus* sp.) and birch, with brambles and ivy in the undergrowth. Portumna Harbour is separated from the jetty to the east by a treeline largely comprised of ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and hawthorn, with brambles in the undergrowth. A beech hedgerow west of Portumna Harbour car park was the only hedgerow noted on site. Four treelines were identified on the site. North of Portumna Harbour, where the site borders the grounds of Portumna Castle is a beech treeline.

Sea walls, piers and jetties (CC1)

This habitat type was present in the form of Portumna Harbour, the jetty to the east of the harbour, and small piers present in Portumna Swimming Area. The jetty, which is used by the Portumna & District Angling Association, was not accessible at the time of the survey, as a gate leading to it was locked, however it was possible to see through the gate, and view the jetty to some extent from the harbour. Mallards, wagtails (*Motacilla alba yarrelli*), and rooks (*Corvus frugilegus*) were noted foraging at this habitat, and were accustomed to human presence, with mallards approaching visitors as they arrived.

Stonewalls and other stonework (BL1) and Drainage ditches (FW4)

Stone walls were noted at four locations on the site. A stone wall runs north to south where the swimming area joins the new Blueway trail, with a gap in the wall allowing for access. A drainage ditch runs adjacent to this. A high stonewall is present in the northeastern corner of the site, and runs east to west, separating the site from a park area. A stonewall is also present in front of the beech treeline north of the harbour, and a stone wall surrounds the harbour itself.

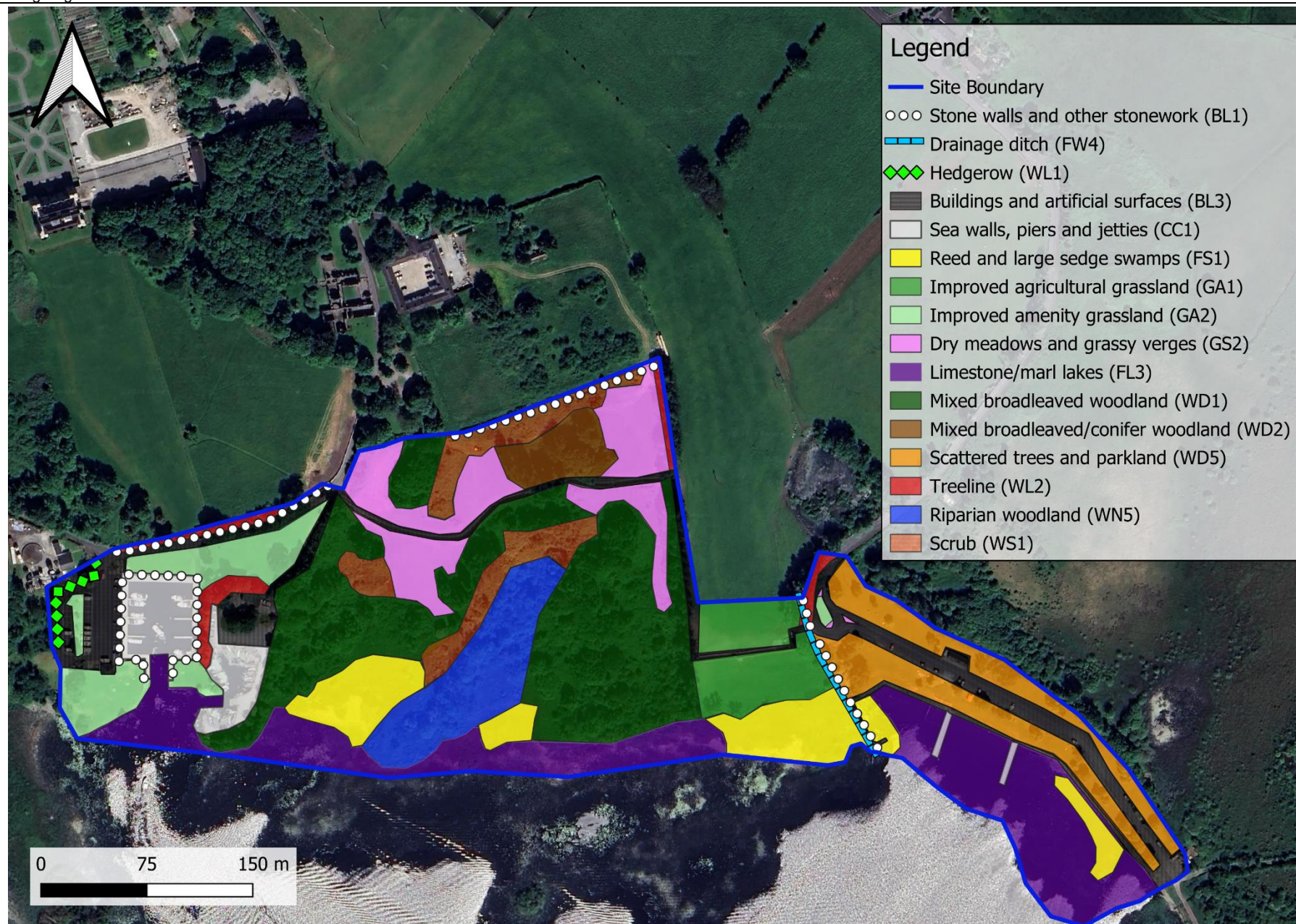


Figure 3.3 Habitat map of Portumna. Basemap provided by Google.

3.2 Pathway Condition Assessment

All of the pathways are in satisfactory condition, with the exception of one small pathway, which is discussed below. A paved car park is located in Portumna Swimming Area and runs parallel to a paved path along the lakeshore area. Leading westward from Portumna Swimming Area, the new Blueway trail is a gravel path utilised by walkers and cyclists to access Portumna Harbour. Fencing separates it from the agricultural fields which it runs through. This is displayed in the top left corner of Plate 3.1. A number of informal grassy paths stray from the Blueway trail into the surrounding habitats. An example of this is displayed in the top right corner of Plate 3.1. A bare ground path also leads from the Blueway trail into a mixed conifer and broadleaved woodland, where a firepit is located. The only unsatisfactory path in Portumna is a small bare ground path measuring 1-2 ft. in width that temporarily strays from the Blueway trail for a few paces. This is displayed in the bottom left corner of Plate 3.1.

This Blueway trail runs westward for c. 200m before connecting to a paved road that leads into Portumna Harbour and a paved car park. The paved road continues west beyond the site, connecting to a larger network of cycling and walking trails in Portumna Forest Park. Portumna Harbour contains paved pathways leading to the boats, with a small paved pathway leading to the benches south of the parking area. The paved pathways in Portumna Harbour are displayed in the bottom right of Plate 3.1. Running along the eastern boundary of Portumna Harbour is a bare ground path which leads to a bench by the water. This informal path is the only access point to this bench, which is separated from the main harbour area by a wall.



Satisfactory Gravel Path (Blueway trail)



Satisfactory Grassy Path



Plate 3.1 Examples of pathways in Portumna

Figure 3.4 presents a Strava heat map for the site. Strava aggregates data from users on its app who opt-in to share their activities and locations. The pathway condition assessment map is presented in Figure 3.5 below.



Figure 3.4 Heat map of visitor movements in Portumna (Strava, 2024).



Figure 3.5 Pathway types and conditions present on the site. Basemap provided by Google.

3.3 Features, Signage and Hazards

3.3.1 Features and Signage

The swimming area in Portumna has car and bicycle parking, toilet facilities, a lifeguard hut, life buoys, seating areas, a water bottle refill station, a kayak storage area, and various bins, which also provide dog waste bags. The lifeguard hut and toilet facilities were locked for the duration of the survey. Bat boxes are located on the toilet facilities in Portumna Swimming Area, and are displayed in Plate 3.3 below. Signage relating to water safety and biodiversity is present at the swimming area, including signs from the Golden Eagle Trust Ltd. at the kayak storage advising visitors on avoiding disturbing nesting birds, and to keep a minimum of 250m from Church Island between March and August. Examples of this signage is displayed in Plate 3.2 below. A notice board with emergency information was also present.

The shared services at Marina and Mororhome Park is located in Portumna Harbour. There are also toilet facilities, directional signage and signage relating to water safety and biodiversity was present, as well as a notice board with emergency information, and a community book exchange station. Life buoys were present throughout the harbour. Benches with paved pathways leading to them were available, though one was only accessible via an informal path, and was blocked by a harbour wall. The benches at Portumna Harbour are displayed in Plate 3.3 below.



Plate 3.2 Signage relating to biodiversity and disturbance to nesting birds in Portumna Swimming Area.



Plate 3.3 Bat boxes at Portumna Swimming Area toilet facilities (left), and benches at Portumna Harbour (right).

3.3.2 Hazards

The site is located on the shore of Lough Derg. As such, the open water creates a risk to recreation and amenity users, however, there are life buoys available at Portumna Swimming Area and Portumna Harbour. Additionally, there is a lifeguard hut is present at the swimming area. Also at the swimming area, a section of the pathway at the water's edge was cracked, creating a significant trip hazard. The location of this is provided in Figure 3.5 above. Abandoned fishing line was found on the amenity lawn by the lake edge in Portumna Harbour. Mallards and rooks were observed using this area for foraging. Discarded fishing line is a hazard for wildlife, as they can become tangled in it, and injured or killed as a result. The hazards discussed here are displayed below in Plate 3.4. It should be noted that the fishing line was wrapped up by the surveyor, but was found in a long line which was difficult to see.



Plate 3.4 Cracked pavement in Portumna Swimming Area (left) and discarded fishing line (right).

3.4 Ecological Constraints

3.4.1 Protected Sites

As discussed in Section 2.1, a desk study was undertaken to identify designated sites and rare and protected species in the vicinity of the site. There are four European (SACs and SPAs) and two nationally designated sites (NHAs and pNHAs) within or adjacent to Portumna. Information on these sites was obtained from the NPWS website and their respective Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms. These sites are described in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Designated sites within 2 km of the Portumna site.

Site Name [Site Code]	Qualifying Interests	Distance (km) from Site	Pressures and Threats (those related to recreation are in bold)
European Designated Sites			
Lough Derg, North-east Shore SAC [002241]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130] Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the Caricion davallianae [7210] 	Within Site boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paths, tracks, cycling tracks Piers, tourist harbours or recreational piers Pollution to so surface waters (limnic, terrestrial, marine and brackish)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alkaline fens [7230] • Limestone pavements [8240] • Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] • <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles [91J0] 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invasive non-native species • Eutrophication (natural) • Intensive grazing • Removal of hedges and copses or scrub • Problematic native species • Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions • Species composition change (succession) • Temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature and extremes) • Droughts and less precipitations • Flooding and rising precipitations • Fertilisation • Mining and quarrying • Outdoor sport and leisure activities, recreational activities • Diffuse pollution to surface waters due to household sewage and waste waters • Infilling of ditches, dykes, ponds, pools, marshes or pits • Management of aquatic and ban vegetation for drainage purposes
River Shannon Callows SAC [000216]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) [6410] • Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>, <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>) [6510] • Alkaline fens [7230] • Limestone pavements [8240] • Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] • Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) [1355] 	Within Site boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artificial planting on open ground (non-native trees) • Abandonment of pastoral systems, lack of grazing • Fertilisation • Trampling, overuse • Use of biocides, hormones and chemicals • Flooding • Landfill, land reclamation and drying out, general • Removal of hedge and copses or scrub • Grazing in forests / woodland • Mechanical removal of peat

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siltation rate changes, dumping, depositing of dredged deposits • Modifying structures of inland water courses • Predation • Non intensive mixed animal grazing • Intensive grazing • Modification of hydrographic functioning, general • Outdoor sports and leisure activities, recreational activities • Paths, tracks, cycling tracks • Abandonment / Lack of Mowing • Hunting
Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA [004058]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>) [A017] • Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>) [A061] • Goldeneye (<i>Bucephala clangula</i>) [A067] • Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) [A193] • Wetland and Waterbirds [A999] • 	Within Site boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hunting • Leisure fishing • Nautical sports • Fertilisation
Middle Shannon Callows SPA [004096]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>) [A038] • Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) [A050] • Corncrake (<i>Crex crex</i>) [A122] • Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140] • Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142] • Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>) [A156] • Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) [A179] • Wetland and Waterbirds [A999] 	Within Site boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking, horseriding and non-motorised vehicles • Nautical sports • Abandonment of pastoral systems, lack of grazing • Grazing • Paths tracks, cycling tracks • Bridge, viaduct • Fertilisation • Urbanised areas, human habitation • Dispersed habitation • Leisure fishing • Hunting

Nationally Designated Sites			
Lough Derg pNHA [000011]	No site description available. Refer to Lough Derg North- east Shore SAC and Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA above.	Within Site boundary	No site description available. Refer to Lough Derg North- east Shore SAC and Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA above.
River Shannon Callows pNHA [000216]	No site description available. Refer to River Shannon Callows SAC and Middle Shannon Callows SPA above.	Within Site boundary	No site description available. Refer to River Shannon Callows SAC and Middle Shannon Callows SPA above.

3.4.2 Incidental Species Recorded

Portumna supports a range of habitats and species. Table 3.3 below presents the bird species recorded during the ecological surveys at Portumna, along with their Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) status (2020–2026) (Gilbert et al., 2021). White-tailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), which are listed as Annex I species under the EU Birds Directive, have nested in the past on Church Island off the shore of Portumna Forest Park. This was the first successful breeding attempt recorded in Ireland since the beginning of their reintroduction programme in 2007. This species was not identified during surveys at the site but may potentially forage in the area around site.

Table 3.3 Incidental Species Records & BoCCI Status

Scientific Name	Common Name
Amber List	
<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed gull
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Cormorant
<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Great-crested grebe
<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	House martin
<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Linnet
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard
<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Mute swan
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Starling
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Swallow
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow warbler
Green List	
<i>Turdus merula</i>	Blackbird
<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Blackcap
<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Blue tit
<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Bullfinch
<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch
<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Cuckoo
<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Goldcrest
<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Goldfinch
<i>Parus major</i>	Great tit
<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Heron
<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Hooded crow
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Jackdaw
<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Little grebe
<i>Pica pica</i>	Magpie
<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Moorhen
<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	Pied wagtail
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Reed bunting
<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Robin
<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Rook
<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	Sedge warbler
<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song thrush
<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren

3.4.3 Records of Rare, Protected and Invasive Species

Records of rare, protected, and invasive species from the past ten years from Hectads M80L, M80M, M80R and M80S were obtained the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) online database. These records are presented in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 Rare, protected, and invasive species recorded in the past decade from Hectads M80L, M80M, M80R and M80S from NBDC database.

Scientific name	Common Name	Date of last record	Status*
Terrestrial Mammals			
<i>Meles meles</i>	Badger	16/02/2018	WA
<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus sensu stricto</i>	Common Pipistrelle	26/06/2018	Annex IV HD; WA
<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>	Daubenton's Bat	26/06/2018	Annex IV HD; WA
<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	Hedgehog	05/06/2020	WA
<i>Nyctalus leisleri</i>	Leisler's Bat	26/08/2018	Annex IV HD; WA
<i>Martes martes</i>	Pine Marten	29/06/2021	Annex V HD; WA
<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	Soprano Pipistrelle	23/08/2021	Annex IV HD; WA
<i>Mustela erminea</i> subsp. <i>hibernica</i>	Stoat	12/04/2015	WA
Birds			
<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	18/02/2020	WA; Red List
<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Buzzard	02/02/2023	WA
<i>Fulica atra</i>	Coot	23/03/2022	WA; Amber List
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Cormorant	23/03/2022	WA; Amber List
<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Great Crested Grebe	23/03/2022	WA; Amber List
<i>Dendrocopos Major</i>	Great Spotted Woodpecker	12/03/2021	WA
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	18/02/2020	WA; Amber List
<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Red-breasted Merganser	18/04/2019	WA; Amber List
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing	23/03/2022	WA; Red List
<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Snipe	30/01/2019	WA; Red List
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Swallow	26/03/2015	WA; Amber List

<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Water Rail	21/03/2022	WA
Invasive Species			
<i>Mustela vison</i>	American Mink	11/06/2019	High Impact Species; S.I. 477/2011
<i>Fallopia japonica</i>	Japanese Knotweed	07/06/2022	High Impact Species; S.I. 477/2011
<i>Crocidura russula</i>	Greater White-toothed Shrew	19/07/2020	Medium Impact Species
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	12/06/2014	Medium Impact Species

*Abbreviations: Annex IV/V (non-avian species) = Habitats Directive (HD); Birds Directive (BD); Red/Amber List = Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020-2026 (BOCCI) (Gilbert et al., 2021); Wildlife Act, 1976 (WA).

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information discussed and displayed above, the following recommendations are made:

- The paved path at the water in Portumna Swimming Area has a large crack, which creates a trip hazard for recreation and amenity users. This section of the pathway should be repaired or replaced.
- Informal pathways were recorded in the habitats surrounding the new Blueway trail. While these were largely in satisfactory condition, continuous use of these pathways may result in the deterioration of the habitats over time in Portumna. Signage along the Blueway trail instructing recreation and amenity users to remain on the path would prevent habitat damage to the grasslands and woodlands in Portumna. Signage relating to keeping dogs on leashes should also be considered, as this would aid in preventing disturbance to ground nesting birds, mammals, and other wildlife.
- Where habitat is being managed for amenity purposes, such as in Portumna Swimming Area and Portumna Harbour, a staggered mowing regime should be considered to enhance biodiversity.
- Discarded fishing line was found in Portumna Harbour. While rubbish bins are provided, informative signage regarding the dangers to wildlife of not properly disposing fishing line would be beneficial.
- Where instructional signage is being implemented, teleological signage (signage with instruction and justification for the instruction) should be used. An example of teleological signage is presented below.
- Since the site visit was undertaken for Portumna, Fáilte Ireland visitor monitoring was undertaken in September 24 and identifies some of these recommendations addressed, including improvements to informal pathways (See Appendix A).



5.0 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A
Fáilte Ireland Visitor Characterisation Surveys



Portumna – Visitor Monitoring Assessment

September 2024

Contents

- **1.0 Introduction:**
- **2.0 Visitor Characterisation Survey Methodology:**
- **3.0 Results:**
 - **Prevalence of Group Type**
 - **Prevalence of Transport Type**
 - **Activity Levels**
- **4.0 Observations**

Appendix 1 – Activity & Impact Codes

1.0 Introduction:

Background

Fáilte Ireland regularly engages with environmental research that is used to make informed management decisions and produce robust guidelines to facilitate the protection of the environment. From its inception in 2014, the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Operational Monitoring Programme has been conducting research into the impacts of tourism on the receiving environment. These surveys have been monitoring 57 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 26,000 visitors to WAW discovery points.

Building on the success of the WAW environmental monitoring programme which ran from 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland expanded the programme to a national level. From 2021 to 2022 the programme monitored 19 individual sites located in all of Fáilte Ireland's regional areas: The Wild Atlantic Way, Irelands Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East, and Dublin. The environmental monitoring builds on environmental surveying and monitoring undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland as far back as 2015, and to date (excluding the 2024 data), the surveys have monitored a total of 66 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 30,000 visitors at a range of tourism sites (including inland, urban, coastal and WAW discovery points).

2.0 Visitor Characterisation Survey Methodology:

- Visitor Characterisation Surveys

The visitor characterisation survey was undertaken by the Fáilte Ireland Planning and Environmental team at Portumna Swimming area to supplement and be appended to the National Environmental Monitoring Programme 2024 Report undertaken by Roughan O'Donovan Consulting Engineers. The survey was undertaken on the 18th of September 2024 from 15.00-17.00 on a dry, bright and sunny Wednesday afternoon. The survey was undertaken at various locations from the carpark at the Portumna swimming area to Portumna Castle Harbour along the newly constructed cycle and walking trail.

For the purposes of this assessment a 'visitor' refers to an individual, couple or group who arrive together. The following variables were recorded for each visitor:

- Activity Type
- Group Type
- Transport Type
- Activity Levels; and
- Impact Severity Levels.

3.0 Results:

3.1 Visitor Characterization Survey:

The visitor monitoring survey undertaken on the 18th of September 2024 from 15.00-17.00 on a dry, bright and sunny Wednesday afternoon. A total of 51 No. visitor groups comprising 115 No. Individuals were recorded. This site during the survey period was most popular amongst the 'Families' group followed by the 'Individual adult' and 'Couple' groups. The following activities undertaken by groups during the survey are listed in order of occurrence rate below:

- Walking, running or cycling on paths, marked trails or hard surfaces
- Any Movement leaving an existing trail or marked path
- Swimming, sailing, surfing in water
- Resting, reading, looking, picnicking, sightseeing, painting, photographing

3.2 Prevalence of Group Type

Figure 1 presents the prevalence of group types observed visiting the site, either without a dog or with a dog. 'Family' made up the largest proportion of group type with 33% of visitor groups observed. The second largest group type was 'Individual Adult' with 20%. The third largest was the 'couple' group type with 16%. The remaining group types observed in order of prevalence were 'Small Adult Group', 'Mixed Small Group', 'Individual Elderly' and 'Elderly Couple'. The only group types observed with dogs were the 'Couple', 'Individual Adult' and 'Family' groups with only 1 No. dog observed off its lead.

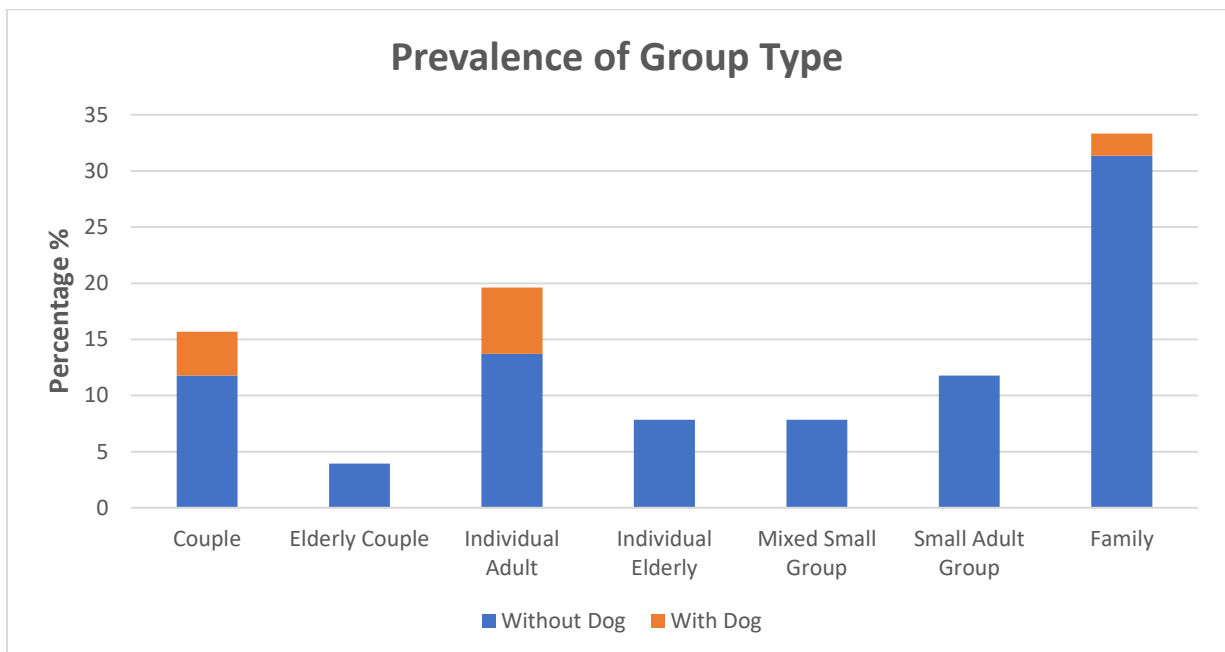


Figure 1: Prevalence of Group Type

3.3 Activity Levels

Figure 2 below presents the activity levels at Portumna Marina and swimming area. A sample of 51 visitor groups' activities were observed. The results from this are shown below in Figure 2. Activity categories are detailed in Appendix I. Activities such as Swimming, walking, running or playing on level sands is considered a low-level activity, whereas any movement leaving an existing trail or marked path is considered a medium level activity. 94% of the activities observed at Portumna were considered low level activities. The remaining 2% of medium level activity and 1% high level activity generally comprised groups walking leaving existing trails or marked paths and disturbing wildlife (birds) respectively.

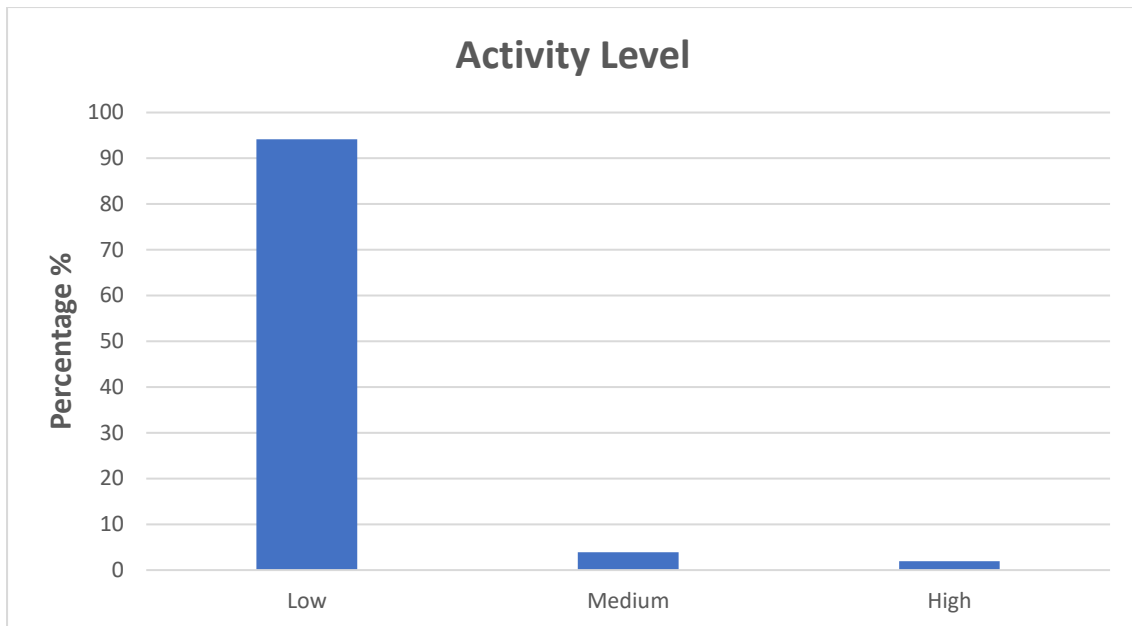


Figure 2: Activity Levels

3.5 Impact Severity Levels

Figure 3 presents the impact severity level observed at the site. Again, a sample of 51 visitor groups' activities were observed. Impact severity level relates to the damage of an activity on the site. The levels of impact severity are detailed in Appendix I. Similar to the impact type above, the survey found that 94% of the activities observed had low level impact severity on the site. Medium level severity levels include disturbance of wildlife, desire lines or tracks visible outside of marked paths or existing trails and comprised 6% of activities observed.

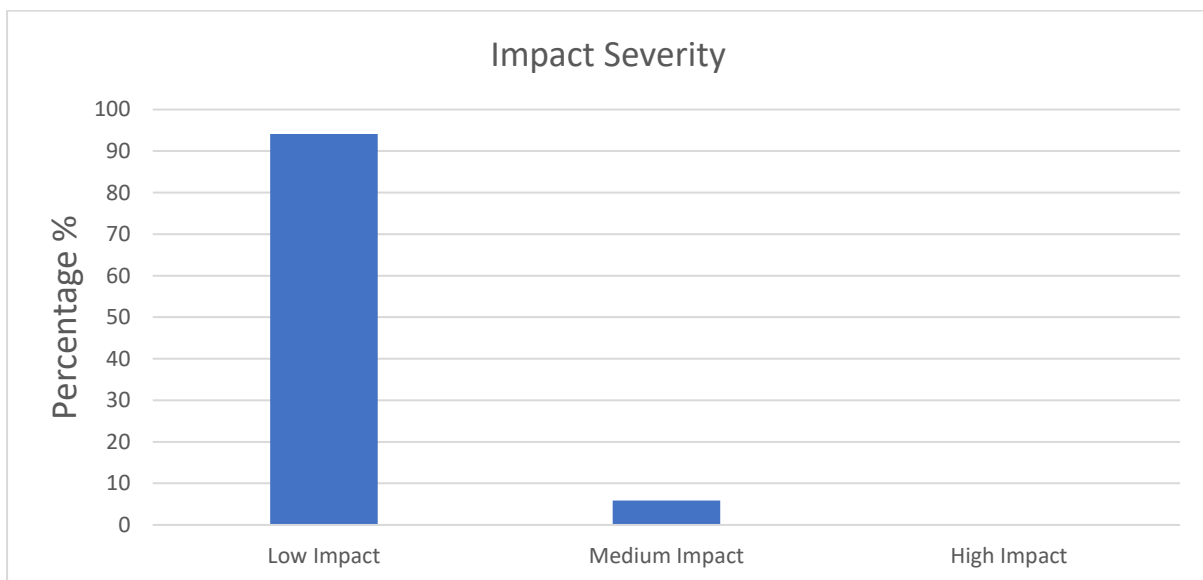


Figure 3: Impact Severity Levels

3.6 Activity Types

Figure 4 presents the Activity Types observed at the site. The survey found that 59% of the activities observed comprised a mix walking, running, cycling or playing on marked trails or hard surfaces with 22% undertaking swimming, sailing, surfing in water.

16% comprised resting, reading, looking, and picnicking. The remaining 2% comprised movement leaving an existing trail or marked path and disturbance to wildlife.

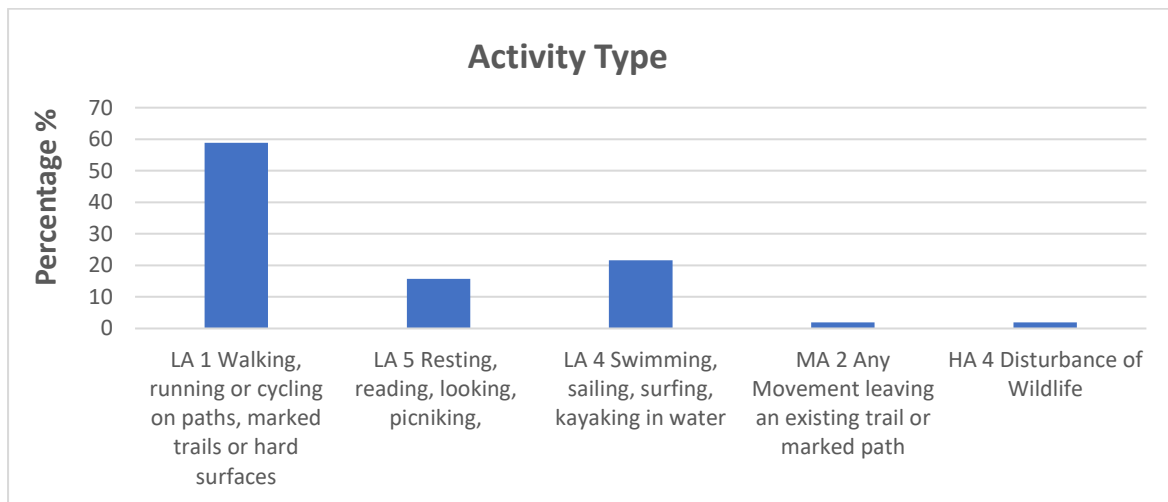


Figure 4: Activity Types

4.0 Observations

The site survey was undertaken on the 18th of September just following the official opening of the new cycle and walking trail linking Connaught Harbour to Portumna town and Lough Derg Blueway. Shallow berms were observed at locations most likely to keep walkers on the established path and to reduce the establishment of off-track desire lines.



Photo 1: Trail Head leaving Connaught Harbour towards Swimming Area



Photo 2: Portumna Swimming Area



Photo 3: Berms at potential 'desire line' locations from Blueway Path

Appendix 1 – Activity & Impact Codes

Activities		
Category 1 Low Level		
Walking, running or cycling on paths, marked trails or hard surfaces		LA 1
Walking, running, cycling or playing in mown grass, managed grassland or level sand		LA 2
Sitting on benches, walls, mown grass, sand		LA 3
Swimming, sailing, surfing, kayaking in water		LA 4
Resting, reading, looking, picnicking, sightseeing, painting, photographing		LA 5
Vehicular movement on roads and parking areas		LA 6
Watching nature in hedges, woods, streams, pools and intertidal areas		LA 7
Category 2 Medium Level		
Powered movement through water		MA 1
Any movement leaving an existing trail or marked path		MA 2
Any movement leaving a trail through leafy vegetation		MA 3
Any movement leaving a trail through woody vegetation		MA 4
Climbing on walls, loose stones, sand, soil etc.		MA 5
Fishing		MA 6
Category 3 High Level		
Walking through wet/muddy soil		HA 1
Scrambling on steep or loose slopes		HA 2
Off road vehicular movement		HA 3
Disturbance of wildlife		HA 4
Deliberate building or moving or knocking site materials - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand etc.		HA 5
Picking herbaceous vegetation		HA 6

Impacts		
Category 1 Low Impact		
No identifiable effect		LIE 1
Desire lines or trails visible on grass and leafy vegetation		LIE 2
Temporary disturbance (including chasing and feeding) of insects, fish, amphibian, reptiles, insects, birds and mammals		LIE 3
Temporary change of character - due to the appearance or nature of activities (noise, crowds, etc.)		LIE 4
General/light littering		LIE 5
Category 2 Medium Impact		
Desire lines or tracks visible outside of existing trail or marked path		MIE 1
Trampling of herbaceous vegetation		MIE 2
Damage to woody vegetation		MIE 3
Incidentally moving or knocking site materials - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		MIE 4
Addition/alteration of site features, transient emissions, noise		MIE 5
Transient disturbance, emissions, noise		MIE 6
Disturbance of wildlife		MIE 7
Category 3 Severe Impact		
Direct interference with site material - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		SIE 1
Removal of material - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		SIE 2
Vandalism or graffiti		SIE 3
Destruction of structures, vegetation or fauna		SIE 4
Heavy littering or dumping quantities of waste		SIE 5
Burning materials or lighting a fire		SIE 6
Injuring, killing or taking wildlife		SIE 7



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