

# National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme

## Sheep's Head 2024



**Fáilte  
Ireland**

Turasóireacht Náisiúnta  
An tÚdara Eorbartha  
National Tourism  
Development Authority

# National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme

## Report for Sheep's Head 2024

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## SHEEP'S HEAD – INTERESTING FINDS

### Interesting Finds

Heath habitat is abundant across Sheep's Head, with both dry and wet heath habitat fragmented by exposed rocky sea cliffs. A range of flowering plants is present across site including heath-spotted orchid, cross leaved heath, bell heather, ling heather and bog cotton.



### Features of the Site

- Vehicle and bicycle parking at the start of the Lighthouse Loop.
- There are toilet facilities and picnic tables by the carpark.
- There is a dedicated viewpoint over Lough Akeen.
- There are stairs to the Lighthouse at the end of the walkway.
- There is signage throughout the site indicating the trail route.
- There is a strict no-dogs policy at the site.

### Habitats

The following habitats were recorded on site:

- Rocky sea cliffs (CS1)
- Reed and large sedge swamps (FS1)
- Dry-humid acid grassland (GS3)
- Wet grassland (GS4)
- Dense bracken (HD1)
- Dry siliceous heath (HH1)
- Wet heath (HH3)
- Dry siliceous heath / Wet heath (HH1/HH3)
- Upland blanket bog (PB2)

### Key Recommendations

- Existing fencing and barriers at areas of the track that are close to the cliff edge should continue to be maintained and improved.
- The site contains some paths that are in poor condition. Consideration should be given to improving these paths.
- Railings should be considered in areas where the track is uneven and slippery, and to improve accessibility for less able-bodied people.
- A formalised lookout area at the Éire 31 sign should be considered.
- New signage should be considered to inform visitors of the importance of staying on the tracks and off the surrounding habitat.
- Raise awareness and support farmers and landowners on the benefits of sustainable grazing practices to allow for habitat recovery.

## **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, Irelands 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 Sheep's Head, Co. Cork.

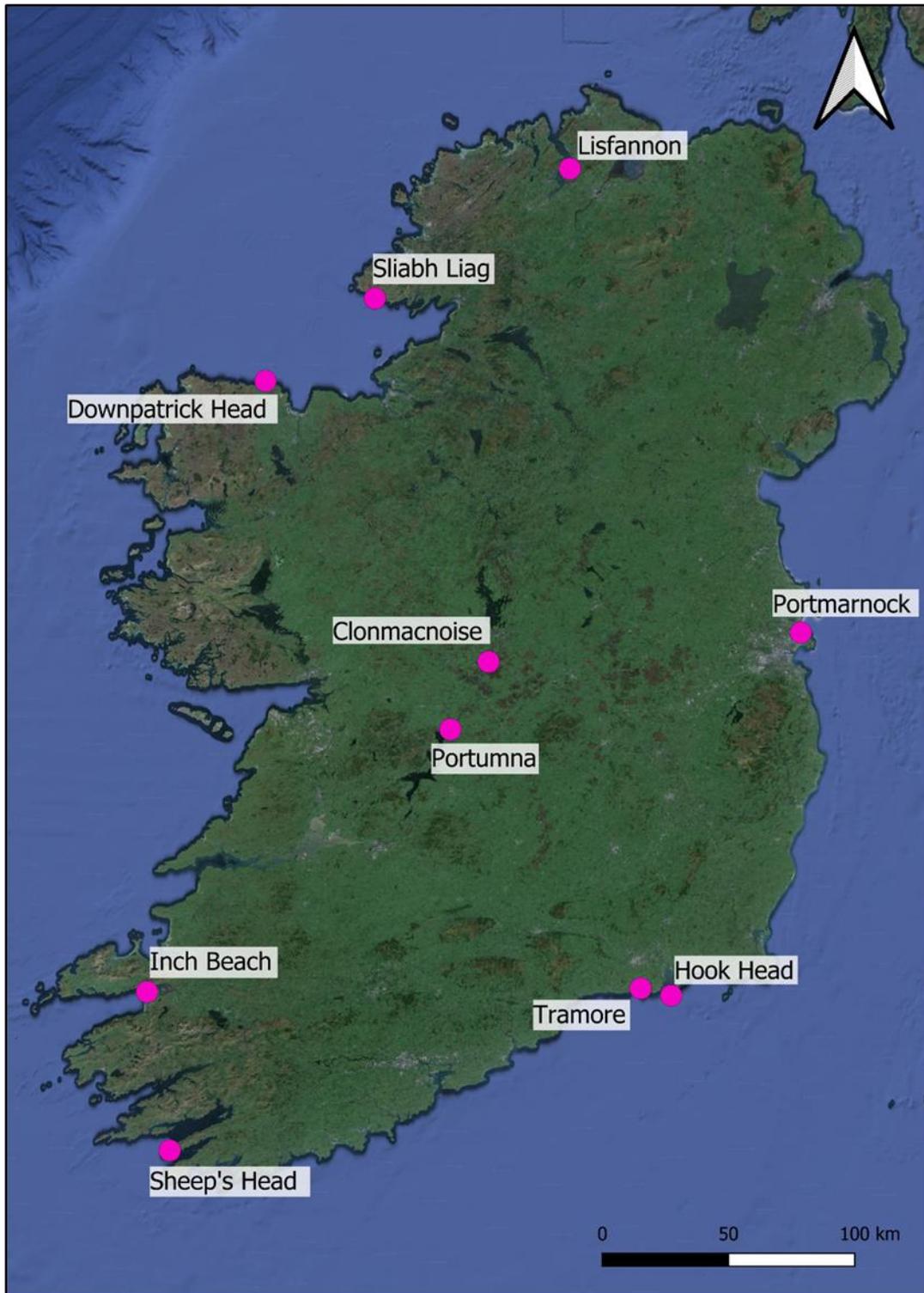


Figure 1.1 Environmental Monitoring Programme 2024 locations. Basemap provided by Google.

## 1.2 Aim of the Report

The purpose of the monitoring programme is as follows:

- To gain insight from an environmental perspective at amenity and recreation 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 Sheep's Head

Sheep's Head is a narrow peninsula with a north-east to south-west orientation, bounded on the northern side by Bantry Bay and on the southern side by Dunmanus Bay. The site extends from near Ahakista in the east, to the Sheep's Head lighthouse in the west, presented in Figure 1.2 below. Sheep's Head lighthouse loop forms part of the larger Sheep's Head Way walk which is approximately 93 km long. At the start of the loop, there is a car and bike park, café, toilets, informative signage and seating areas. Along the loop track to the lighthouse, visitors will see a range of habitats, sheep grazing and impressive sea cliffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

The site is within Sheep's Head SAC (Special Area of Conservation), Sheep's Head to Toe Head SPA (Special Protection Area) and Sheep's Head pNHA (proposed National Heritage Area).



Figure 1.2 Site boundary outlined in red. (World Imagery Basemap provided by Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, USDA FSA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community).

## 1.4 Critical Infrastructure

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

**Table 1.1 Sheep's Head Wastewater Infrastructure**

Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toilet facilities are available on this site.</li> <li>Wastewater treatment is provided by Kealkill WWTP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This WWTP has available capacity.</li> </ul>

**Table 1.2 Summary of Drinking Water Infrastructure at Sheep's Head.**

Drinking Water	Water Resource Name (WRZ)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
The nearest settlement to Sheep's Head Beach is Sheep's Head.	Kilcrohane	Potential Capacity Available - Level of service improvement required.

**Table 1.3 Summary of Transport Infrastructure at Sheep's Head.**

Nearest Settlement	Current Transport Infrastructure	Comment
Kilcrohane	Sheep's Head is accessed by the L4704. There is one carpark on site. Lay-by parking is also provided at various locations along the L4704 from Kilcrohane.	There is no public transport directly to the Lighthouse Loop at Sheep's Head. The 232 local link bus stops at Kilcrohane village, where visitors can access other walks which are part of the Sheep's Head Way, including the Kilcrohane Trailhead..

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The following surveys were undertaken:

- Habitat Surveys
- Pathway Condition Surveys
- Survey of the features, signage and hazards

The site survey at Sheep's Head was undertaken on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2024. The weather conditions were clear, with a moderate breeze. The sub-sections below present the methodology used at each site.

### 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 were noted, including any damage and the likely cause of the damage. The areas along the paths are described in 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 pathways were defined during the site visit and a desk study which included a review of the Strava heat maps ([www.strava.com/heatmap](http://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 pathways that are not formalised. These paths usually link the site entry points and carparks to a destination or feature of interest. The pathways were categorised into sections by type and composition. The different types of pathway are described in Table 2.1 below. 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'. It should be noted that the methodology outlined here is



independent of and not linked to the trail registration and management process run by Sport Ireland Outdoors.

**Table 2.1 Pathway Types**

Pathway Type	Description
Paved Carpark	An area used for parking, wider than the road, that is paved, usually with tarmacadam.
Gravel Carpark	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 Sheep's Head along with their corresponding Annex I habitats. A habitat map is presented in Figure 3.2. It should be noted that having a corresponding Annex I habitat does not indicate 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) <sup>1</sup>
Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)	None
Rocky sea cliffs (CS1)	Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts (1230)
Reed and large sedge swamps (FS1)	None
Dry-humid acid grassland (GS3)	*Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> grasslands on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas in continental Europe) (6230) Calaminarian grasslands of the <i>Violetalia calaminariae</i> (6130)
Wet grassland (GS4)	<i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils ( <i>Molinion caeruleae</i> ) (6410)
Dense bracken (HD1)	None
Dry siliceous heath (HH1)	European dry heaths [4030] <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands (5130)
Wet heath (HH3)	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> [4010]
Dry siliceous heath / Wet heath (HH1/HH3)	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> [4010] European dry heaths [4030] <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands (5130)
Upland blanket bog (PB2)	Blanket bog (*if active bog) [7130] Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]

#### Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)

This habitat was recorded at the carpark and adjoining roads at the east of the site as well as a small portion of the western side of the site, where the paved steps lead to the Sheep's Head Lighthouse. This habitat is considered to be of low biodiversity value. As such, there were no recorded impacts to this habitat during the survey.

#### Rocky sea cliffs (CS1)

Due to the location of this site on the southwest coast, Rocky Sea Cliffs were recorded all around the southern, western and northern boundaries of the site. These cliffs are dangerous, with many warning signs posted at intermittent locations near the cliff edge. No visitor impacts were recorded on the cliffs due to their hazardous nature. Much of this habitat is comprised of rock; however plant species recorded in this habitat include grasses, Daisy (*Bellis perennis*) and Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), which were present in small pockets along the cliff edge (Plate 3.1).

<sup>1</sup> \* Indicates priority habitat



**Plate 3.1 Rocky sea cliff habitat with small pockets of thrift**

Reed and large sedge swamps (FS1)

This habitat was recorded on the west side of Lough Akeen. The area of this habitat was small, as pictured below in Plate 3.2. And was dominated by Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinaceae*) and Bulrushes (*Typha latifolia*).



**Plate 3.2 Reed and large sedge swamp habitat adjacent to Lough Akeen**

Dry-humid acid grassland (GS3)

This habitat was recorded inland from the cliff edge southwest of Lough Akeen. Due to the presence of livestock and subsequent overgrazing, this habitat has become severely degraded (Plate 3.3). Plant species, which include daisy and thrift, are limited to the cliff edges due to this overgrazing.



**Plate 3.3 Overgrazed grassland habitat close to the southern cliff edge**

Wet grassland (GS4)

This habitat was restricted to small areas west of the carpark and west of Lough Akeen where the lake drains to the sea. No watercourse was identified during the survey, however there is an EPA-identified watercourse running from Lough Akeen to the sea through this habitat. A wooden bridge has been installed to allow walkers to cross this area (Plate 3.4). Species recorded here include Sweet Vernal Grass, Rushes (*Juncus* spp.), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Marsh Thistle (*Cirsium palustre*), Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) and Bog Cotton (*Eriophorum angustifolium*).



**Plate 3.4 Wooden Bridge crossing the Wet Grassland habitat**

### Dense bracken (HD1)

This habitat was recorded on the northern side of the site along the Lighthouse Loop. It was located between the main path and the lower part of the sloped hillside leading towards Lough Akeen. The habitat was dominated by Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) with Ling heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) recorded on the sloping hillside. This habitat, where it intersects with Dry heath and Wet heath habitat, is shown in Plate 3.5 below.

### Dry siliceous heath (HH1)

This habitat comprised a large area of the site, typically occurring in the higher altitudes in the centre of the Lighthouse Loop. Species recorded in this habitat include Bell Heather, Tormentil, Sweet Vernal Grass, Crested Dogs'-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*), Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*), Marsh Thistle, Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), Lousewort, Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) with sparse instances of Bog Cotton and Deergrass (*Trichophorum germanicum*).

### Wet heath (HH3)

The largest cover of this habitat was recorded on the northern side of the site along the cliff edge. Localised pools of water recorded within this habitat provide potential amphibian habitat. Ling heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) was abundant along the sloped area between the cliff edge and Lough Akeen. Other species recorded in this habitat include Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Sweet Vernal Grass, Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Brambles (*Rubus fruticosus*), Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Dandelion (*Taraxacum* spp.), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*) and Marsh Thistle (*Cirsium palustre*). Small patches of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) were also recorded along the margins between this habitat and another.

### Dry siliceous heath / wet heath (HH1/HH3)

Where dry heath and wet heath habitats frequently graded into each other and it was difficult to differentiate between the habitats, they were recorded as complex mosaics. This primarily occurred closer to the southern coastline but there was also a mosaic of these habitats immediately north of Lough Akeen. The species recorded here included those listed in the above habitat descriptions for Dry siliceous heath and Wet heath habitat.



**Plate 3.5** Intersection of Dense Bracken, Dry Heath and Wet Heath habitat along the northern side of the site.

Upland blanket bog (PB2)

This habitat was restricted to a small area south of Lough Akeen, bordered by dry and wet heath habitat (see Figure 3.2). This habitat was located immediately adjacent to the main gravel path and was dominated by grasses and rushes including Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans*, Sweet Vernal grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Bog Cotton (*Eriophorum angustifolium*). Other species recorded in this habitat include Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*), Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). The western side of this habitat was noticeably wetter and localised, dominated by *sphagnum* and Reed Canary-grass (Plate 3.6).



**Plate 3.6**      **Small pocket of bog habitat adjacent to the southern track.**

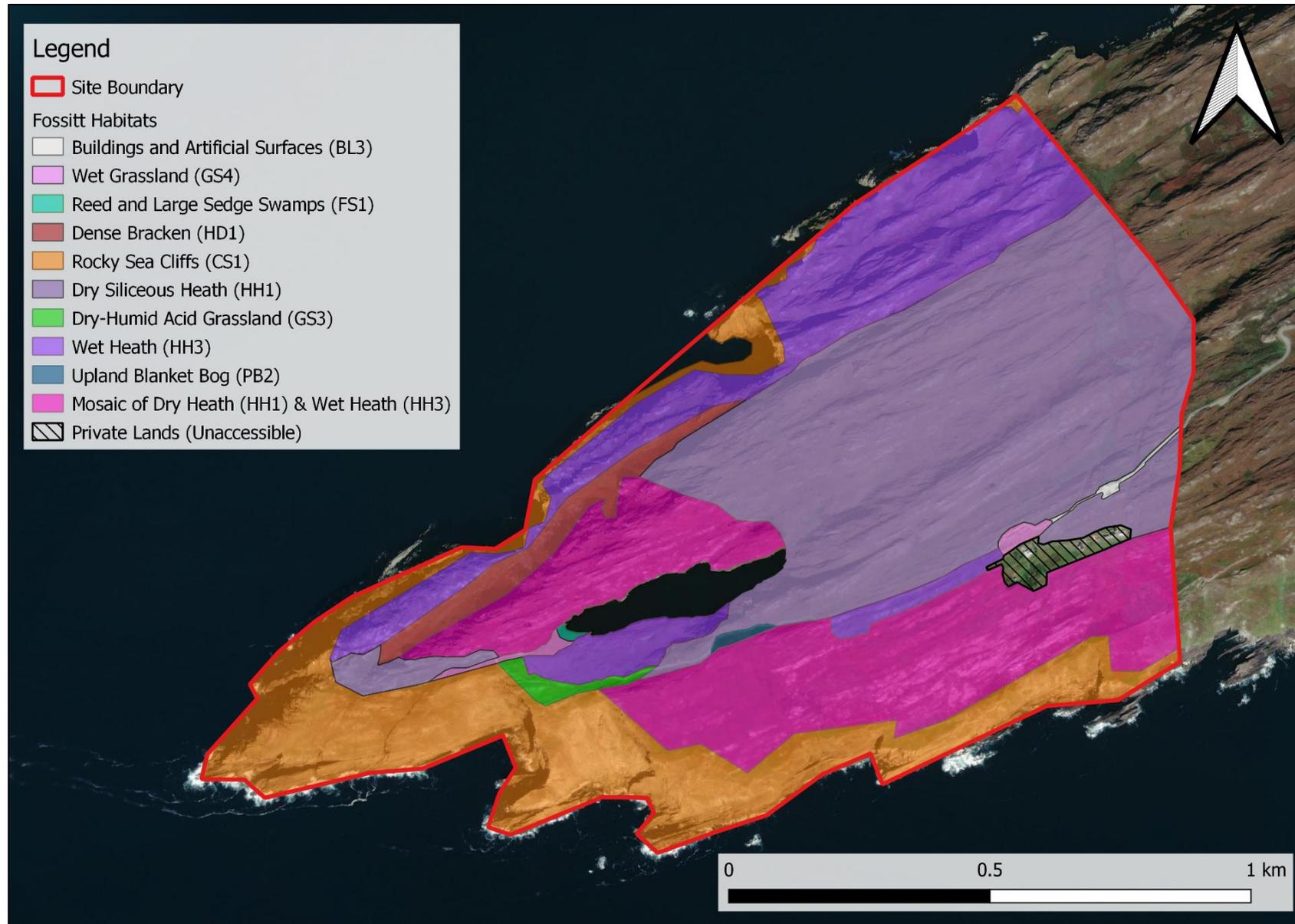


Figure 3.2 Habitat map of Sheep's Head. Basemap provided by Google.

### 3.2 Pathway Condition Assessment

There is a tarmacadam carpark adjacent to Bernie's Café on the Sheep's Head, which marks the start of the Lighthouse Loop walk. There is a gravel road running through the carpark in a westerly direction which leads to a cul-de-sac for private access only. This gravel road is also used as the entry point to the main walking track, which veers off the private road approximately 80 m west of the carpark. This walking track develops into a bare ground track, which comprises much of the walking loop track. The bare ground track is generally a mosaic of bare ground with loose rocks/stones. Overall, this track is in unsatisfactory condition, particularly along the southern part of the loop, due to erosion, widening and braiding. This is due to the natural topography and the nature of the rock outcropping. It is also understood that the rough terrain is part of the appeal of the trail. In this instance, the unsatisfactory condition of the path is primarily due to the off-trail activities of the visitors degrading the existing path

There are areas of the pathway in slightly better condition, notably along the northern part of the loop, which are considered satisfactory relative to the foot traffic. This is likely due to physical limitations of the terrain (e.g. large rocky outcrops in proximity to the cliff edge) preventing visitors from widening the path or creating diversions in these areas. A 15 m-long raised wooden bridge allows visitors to safely to cross wet grassland habitat west of Lough Akeen, where the lake drains towards the sea.

Overgrazed areas of short-sward grassland habitat have likely caused visitors to widen the track between the lighthouse and the Eire 31 sign, likely as a viewpoint to the southern coastline. Other areas of grassy paths are exposed to soil erosion and high foot traffic and have started to degrade into bare ground.

Potentially hazardous areas along the walking loop include areas of the path which are loose rock scree or uneven, rocky surfaces on sloping surfaces, creating a hazard for slips, trips and falls. The pathway condition assessment map is presented in Figure 3.4 below.

Figure 3.3 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.



**Figure 3.3** Heat map of visitor movements in Sheep's Head. The Lighthouse Loop is located at the southwestern point, with Bernie's Café utilised as the start/end point (Strava, 2024).

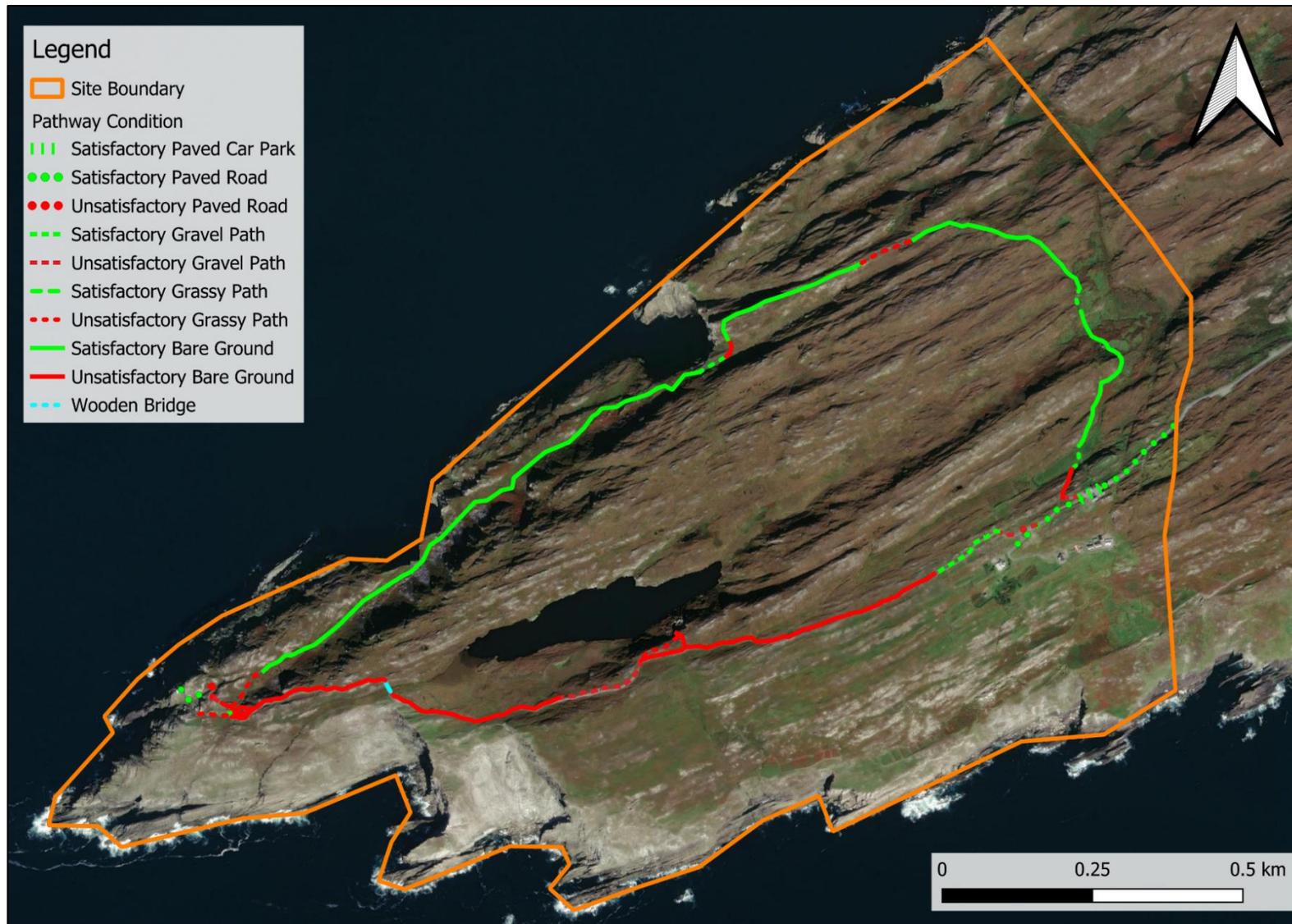


Figure 3.4 Pathway types and conditions present on the site. World Imagery Basemap provided by Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, USDA FSA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community.



**Tarmacadam Carpark**



**Paved steps**



**Bare ground track**



**Grassy Path**



**Wooden bridge**

**Plate 3.7 The different pathway types recorded along the Lighthouse Loop of the Sheep's Head Way.**

Two areas of the track were identified as potential trip hazards. One area, adjacent to the lighthouse steps contains exposed rock on a rise followed by a steep decline and larger rocks. This area is particularly important as it is located between the helicopter landing area and the lighthouse and would require unimpeded access in an emergency. A 'sudden drop' warning sign is present in this area (Plate 3.8).

The other area was an incline of the track covered in loose scree south of Lough Akeen, which is a slipping hazard and has led visitors to make their own paths through the grass on either side for a safer ascend/descend. There is no signage at this location to indicate this track is potentially hazardous. Both areas are documented in Plate 3.8 below.



**Plate 3.8 Hazardous parts of the track by the lighthouse (above) and on a scree-coated incline south of Lough Akeen (below).**

The pathway leading to the Lough Akeen viewpoint is in unsatisfactory condition due to braiding and erosion along the pathway and trampling and erosion at the viewpoint. However, it is acknowledged that by creating a dedicated viewpoint, it lessens the likelihood of visitors creating new viewpoints, potentially resulting in further, more widespread damage. Therefore, this degradation is considered acceptable considering it is very localised (Plate 3.9).



**Plate 3.9** Pathway leading to the Lough Akeen viewpoint (L) and the Lough Akeen viewpoint (R)

### 3.3 Features, Signage and Hazards

#### 3.3.1 Features and Signage

Car and bike parking, a café and toilet facilities are available in at Tooreen carpark at the starting point of the Lighthouse Loop (Plate 3.10). Informative signage on the various walks of the Sheep's Head Way, the no-littering and no-dog policies are clearly highlighted at the carpark (Plate 3.11).



Plate 3.10 Amenities at the start of the Lighthouse Loop of Sheep's Head.



Plate 3.11 Signage at the carpark of Sheep's Head.

A Grotto dedicated to Our Lady of the Wayside is a feature of the walk southeast of Lough Akeen. One of the most well-known features of the site is the Sheep's Head Lighthouse, which is located on the western tip of the Sheep's Head Peninsula (Plate 3.12). While visitors can walk to the lighthouse, public access inside the lighthouse is not permitted.



**Plate 3.12** Sheep's Head Lighthouse on the tip of the Sheep's Head Peninsula

Along the track, there are also signs indicating the hazardous nature of the site, owing to unprotected and exposed cliff faces. Directional signposts are available along the walking loop, highlighting features and the navigational direction of the various walking loops. Post and wire fencing has been erected in certain areas of site as barriers for stock exclusion, as well as in some areas of exposed cliffs.

### 3.3.2 Hazards

The steep sea cliffs surrounding the Lighthouse Loop of Sheep's Head are a hazard. As there are exposed edges, loose gravel/scree on the tracks and wet ground underfoot in some areas (e.g. wet heath habitat), trips and falls are a safety issue. Along areas close to steep edges, cautionary signage and fencing is used, as seen in Plate 3.13. All features, signage and hazards recorded on site during the survey are mapped below in Figure 3.5.



**Plate 3.13** Cautionary signage (L) and fencing in areas (R) at steep edge

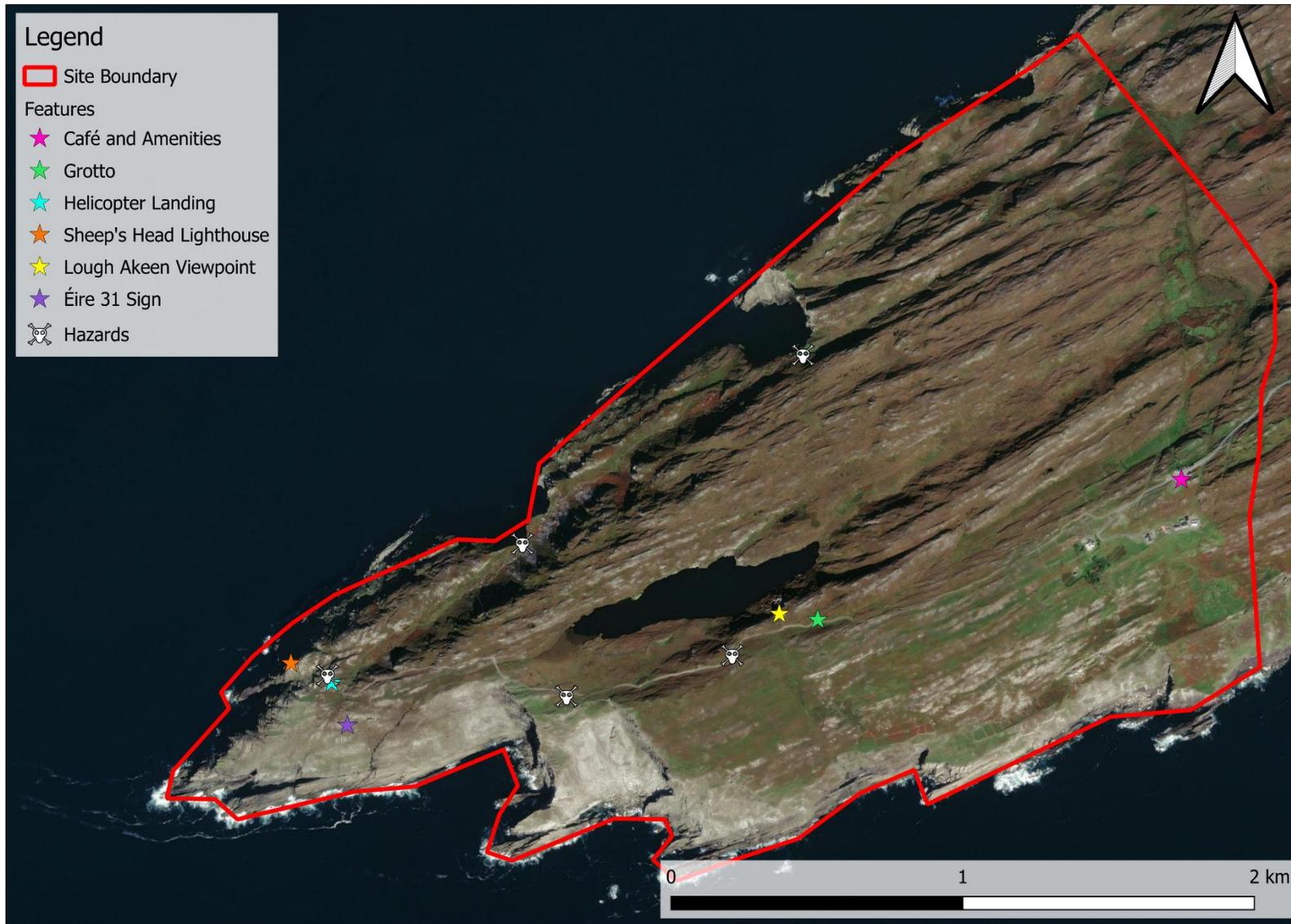


Figure 3.5 Hazards and Features present on the site. World Imagery Basemap provided by Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, USDA FSA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community.

### 3.4 Ecological Constraints

#### 3.4.1 Protected Sites

A desk study was undertaken to identify designated sites and rare and protected species in the vicinity of the site. There are two European (SACs and SPAs) and one nationally designated sites (NHAs and pNHAs) within or adjacent to Sheep's Head. Information on these sites was obtained from the NPWS website and the sites' 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 Sheep's Head site.

Site Name [Site Code]	Qualifying Interests	Distance (km) from Site	Pressures and Threats (those related to recreation are in bold)
<b>European sites</b>			
<b>Sheep's Head to Toe Head SPA [004156]</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peregrine (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) [A103]</li> <li>• Chough (<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>) [A346]</li> </ul>	Within site boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predation</li> <li>• Grazing</li> <li>• Competition (fauna)</li> </ul>
<b>Sheep's Head SAC [000102]</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> [4010]</li> <li>• European dry heaths [4030]</li> <li>• <i>Geomalacus maculosus</i> (Kerry Slug) [1024]</li> </ul>	Within site boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Paths, tracks, cycling tracks</b></li> <li>• Non-intensive grazing</li> <li>• Stock feeding</li> <li>• Restructuring agricultural land holding</li> <li>• Fire and fire suppression</li> <li>• Abandonment of pastoral systems, lack of grazing</li> </ul>
<b>Nationally Designated Sites</b>			
Sheep's Head pNHA [000102]	No site description. Refer to Sheep's Head SAC and Sheep's Head to Toe Head SPA.	Within the site boundary	No site description

### 3.4.2 Incidental Species Recorded

Sheep's Head supports a range of habitats and species. Table 3.3 below presents the bird species recorded during the ecological surveys at Sheep's Head, along with their Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status (2020–2026).

**Table 3.3 Incidental Species Records**

Scientific Name	Common Name
<b>Red Status</b>	
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull
<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Meadow pipit
<b>Amber</b>	
<i>Morus bassanus</i>	Gannet
<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Lesser Black-backed Gull
<b>Green</b>	
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Jackdaw
<i>Corvus corax</i>	Raven
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Reed bunting
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Swallow
<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 Hectad V73B were obtained the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) online database. These records are presented in Table 3.4 below.

**Table 3.4 Rare, protected, and invasive species recorded in the past decade in the site polygon from NBDC database.**

Common Name	Scientific name	Date of last record	Status
<b>Terrestrial Mammals</b>			
Irish Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>	31/03/2016	EU Habitats Directive: Annex V    Wildlife Acts
<b>Marine Mammals</b>			
Bottle-nosed Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	06/11/2016	EU Habitats Directive: Annex II; Annex IV    Wildlife Acts
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	19/08/2020	EU Habitats Directive: Annex IV    Wildlife Acts
Common Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	25/03/2018	EU Habitats Directive: Annex II    Wildlife Acts; OSPAR Convention
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	19/08/2020	EU Habitats Directive: Annex IV    Wildlife Acts
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	19/08/2020	EU Habitats Directive: Annex IV    Wildlife Acts
<b>Birds</b>			
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	20/06/2002	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern – Amber List
Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	16/05/1999	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern – Amber List
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	24/05/2015	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern – Red List
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	24/05/2015	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern – Amber List
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	14/04/2023	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern – Amber List
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	24/05/2015	Wildlife Acts   Birds of Conservation Concern – Amber List
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	27/06/2022	EU Birds Directive >> Annex I    Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern – Amber List
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	14/04/2023	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern – Amber List
<b>Reptiles</b>			
Common Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>	16/04/2023	Wildlife Acts

## 4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Existing fencing and barriers should continue to be maintained and improved along areas where the path get close to the cliff face.
- Consideration should be given to improving areas of the path that are in poor condition.
- Railings should be considered in areas of slight inclines where there is loose scree. Additional tracks through the grass are being formed to avoid slipping on the scree. Railings should have a natural, rustic aesthetic in keeping with the landscape.
- Fáilte Ireland should liaise with the Commissioners of Irish Lights to improve and formalise the path between the helicopter landing and the lighthouse steps to reduce the risk of injury.
- A formalised lookout with wooden fencing to create a secure area and a signpost directing to a dedicated lookout spot along the southern track (either before or close to Éire 31) could direct visitors away from the cliff faces and reduce the creation of additional tracks to look for viewpoints along the coastline.
- Fáilte Ireland should consider adding signage indicating that the terrain is uneven and potentially hazardous at the steep track south of Lough Akeen.
- Where new signage is being considered in the future, teleological signage (signage with instruction and justification for the instruction) should be used.
- Fáilte Ireland should support farmers and landowners and raise awareness on the benefits of sustainable grazing which would allow the habitat to recover.

## 5.0 REFERENCES

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**Fáilte  
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