SITE SYNOPSIS

Site Name: Scohaboy (Sopwell) Bog SAC

Site Code: 002206

Scohaboy (Sopwell) Bog SAC occurs within the larger raised bog system that is designated as Scohaboy Bog NHA (000937). It is situated 4 km north-west of Cloughjordan in Co. Tipperary. It lies within the townland of Sopwell. The underlying geology is carboniferous limestone.

The site comprises a relatively large, flat area of raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog. The high bog has some steep marginal slopes associated with peat-cutting, drainage and forestry. The site is bounded by peatland on all margins, apart from the north where a stream flows along the northern margin. Cutover bog occurs in the south-east of the site and an area of clear-felled coniferous plantation is present on the high bog to the north of the site. Over 43 ha of the high bog was never afforested but a considerable proportion of that area was subjected to intensive, but shallow drainage. That drainage was not maintained and in some areas has naturally partly infilled by bog moss *Sphagum* species regrowth over the years. The afforested area was planted in the 1980s and was all clear-felled by 2013 and the drains blocked as part of a restoration project. Overall the high bog now appears to be re-wetting with large areas of wet flats and hummock/hollows developing.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

[7120] Degraded Raised Bog

Degraded Raised Bog corresponds to those areas of high bog where the hydrology has been adversely affected by peat cutting, drainage and other land use activities, but which are capable of regeneration to Active Raised Bog within 30 years.

Much of the unafforested high bog has vegetation typical of Midland Raised Bog type, consisting of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cottongrass (*Eriophorum* spp.), abundant Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) and White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba).* Typical characteristic species for Midland Raised Bogs such as Bog Rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) and Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos)* are present. Bog moss (*Sphagnum* species*)* cover is regenerating with drains and former pool systems beginning to infill with *Sphagnum papillosum*, *S. capillifolium* and *S. cuspidatum*. The two scarce hummock forming bog mosses, *Sphagnum fuscum* and *S. austinii* occur, with the latter being locally frequent in places. Some of the recovering pool systems

are quite large with Bog Bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) present.

When the conifer plantation within the SAC was removed, the intensive drainage system associated with it was blocked by 2014 as part of an E.U. funded Coillte LIFE Project *Demonstrating Best Practice in Raised Bog Restoration in Ireland*. This project aimed to raise the water table and restore Active Raised Bog (ARB) on the site. Prior to the felling there were relatively few bog species present within most of the plantation. With the clear-felling of conifers and blocking of drains the high bog appears to be re-wetting, with limited areas of wet flats and hollows already developing and water-levels now remain high throughout the year. While some recovery of bog vegetation has occurred, the majority of the former plantation will not develop raised bog vegetation characteristic of the wettest conditions as the surface slopes in this area are too steep and there is a considerable amount of conifer and birch regeneration occurring in these areas. The main benefit of the tree removal and the drain blocking will be to improve the hydrology of the adjacent areas of high bog. On the unafforested bog to the south of the plantation, three areas covering over 11.6 ha have been identified as Degraded Raised Bog (DRB) habitat. These now have standing surface water in the drains, hollows and pools for most of the year and considerable areas of regenerating *Sphagnum* species. It is considered that this area will rapidly develop into Active Raised Bog habitat within 10 years. It is not expected that the restoration works carried out on this site to date will provide significant benefits for the conservation of Degraded or Active raised bog habitats in the adjacent areas of Scohaboy Bog NHA due to the presence of significant drains on the site boundaries.

Much of the cutaway in the south-east of the site is dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), with scattered scrub of Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*). Peat cutting ceased in the area in 2015 and the cutover drains were all blocked in late 2015. The area has now rewetted and should eventually support raised bog communities and species.

Current landuse on the site consists of conservation management by the site owners, Coillte. Until recently, there was also turf cutting in the south-eastern corner of the site but this has now ceased. Damaging activities associated with this landuse, including drainage and burning, are continuing within Scohaboy Bog NHA. Drainage activities for turf cutting occurred widely in the past on adjacent areas of the high bog, but many of these drains have been blocked by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) following acquisition of the land. Fire damage has been recorded in the 1980s and more recently in the west of the site and there is evidence of regular burning throughout the area. These activities have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Scohaboy (Sopwell) Bog cSAC is a site of considerable conservation significance comprising raised bog, a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. The site contains good examples of

the E.U. Habitats Directive Annex I habitat Degraded Raised Bog (capable of regeneration) and supports a good diversity of raised bog microhabitats including some hummock/hollow complexes, tear pools and cutover bog. The site is being actively managed for conservation as part of a Coillte EU LIFE Project. This site is one of the more southerly raised bogs in the country, adding significantly to its ecological importance. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of raised bog (over 50%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level. The presence of White-clawed Crayfish, a species listed in Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, adds to the diversity and scientific value of the site.