

Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme

Terms and Conditions

2025

Prepared by the National Parks and Wildlife Service

Contents

H	orm	1S	3
A	bbr	reviationsError! Bookmark not de	efined.
1	E	Background and Purpose of Scheme	4
2	5	Scheme Focus	5
3	F	Permissions and Consents Error! Bookmark not de	fined.
	3.1	1 Preparing for Funding	5
	3.2	Your National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) Local Ranger	6
	3.3	3 Grant Amount	6
	3.4	Financial Contribution	7
	3.5	5 Matching Funding/Contributions in Kind	7
	3.6	Professional Fees, Oversight and Certification of Works	8
	3.7	7 Advance Funding	8
	3.8	B Funding Awarded	9
	3.9	Notification of Funding Awarded	9
4	E	Eligibility for the Scheme	10
	4.1	1 What types of Projects are Eligible?	10
	4.2	Permissions and Consents Error! Bookmark not de	efined.
	4.3	Monitoring of Project Progress	11
5	1	The Application Process	11
	5.1	1 Legal Status	11
6	T	The Assessment Process	12
7	N	Method Statement	12
8	5	Statutory Requirements	13
9	T	Translation Requirements for Signage	13

10 T	he Recoupment of Funding	14
10.1	Overview of Payment Process	14
10.2	Cross-check Procedures	15
10.3	Eligible Expenditure and Professional Fees	15
10.4	Financial Management Requirements	15
11 G	eneral Information	16
11.1	Photographs/Quotes for Works/Tax Clearance Compliance	16
11.2	Tax Clearance Procedures	17
11.3	Publicity	17
11.4	Freedom of Information and Access to Information on the Environment.	17
11.5	Audit and Document Retention	18
11.6	Child Protection	18
11.7	Reallocation of Funding	18
11.8	Contact/Enquires	18
11.9	Complaints / Appeals Process	18
12 U	se of Data	19
12.1	Privacy Statement	19

Forms

Form A. Application Form

Form B. Recoupment Claim Form (for successful applicants)

1 Background and Purpose of Scheme

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has responsibility for the protection and conservation of Ireland's natural heritage and biodiversity at national government level. The responsibilities of the NPWS include the protection of habitats and species through the designation of sites as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA).

The objective of the Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme (PNCES) is to educate and raise awareness of Ireland's Natura 2000 sites (sites designated as an SAC and/or SPA) and all peatland areas, by providing grants to local community groups and organisations which will support a diverse range of initiatives with community benefit, including;

- events, education programmes, promotions, publications, exhibitions,
- development of conservation management plans,
- public amenity and recreational measures,
- maintenance to support the conservation of habitats,
- monitoring or surveying work to inform restoration/conservation projects, invasive species and fire control measures,
- anti-littering initiatives and general environmental improvements

The Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme (PNCES) has replaced the previous Peatlands Community Engagement scheme (PCES), to include communities that wish to foster better engagement with other designated and protected habitats and species as well as peatland habitats.

While the aim of the Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme is to target community engagement and awareness of Natura 2000 sites (SAC/SPA), peatland sites will not be limited to Natura 2000, all peatland sites are eligible for funding under this scheme (including NHA and undesignated sites).

In the event that the scheme is fully subscribed, projects which support the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites, will be prioritised over projects in other sites.

Please note that local authority or commercial projects are not eligible for funding under this Scheme.

2 Scheme Focus

This scheme will operate as an annual scheme subject to the normal Departmental budgetary processes. Funding must be claimed by the deadlines as specified.

Applications will be accepted for **2025 projects** until **24**th **January 2025**. This deadline may be amended at the discretion of the NPWS.

Projects funded under the scheme should be commenced as soon as practicable and must be capable of being delivered in a realistic time-frame and during the 2025 calendar year.

3 Preparing for Funding

To obtain funding the community group or organisation should have a formal status, good financial administrative and governance structure, for example registered as a charity. It is possible for one group to act as an umbrella group for others in this respect.

The group should ideally have undertaken a number of steps before an application is lodged including having a budget available to cover fundraising, have obtained quotes for the proposed project, identified who within the group has the skills to put together a strong application, identified any local or national partners, checked the need and source of matching funding, checked that the application meets all the required criteria, identified any risks or challenges to the project, be clear on project aims and objectives, have an understanding of how the project will develop in time and be able to demonstrate how the project is progressing and budget is being managed.

3.1 Permissions and Consents

It is advisable that any permissions, consents, licensing required such as appropriate assessments, feasibility studies and planning permissions are in place or substantially progressed prior to the submission of a project application. These consents must in place prior to any proposed works and must also be stated on the application form and an outline given of when consent was requested or received.

In respect of proposed walking trails and cycle ways, please note that such proposals may likely require planning permission or consent from the relevant authorities. In this regard it is advised to plan your project on a phased basis allowing sufficient periods for each phase and seek relevant professional expertise e.g. ecological expertise and/or planning expertise particularly if proposing a project near protected or ecologically sensitive areas. Guidance on consulting with NPWS in relation to development proposals, for example, walking and cycle

trails that may require planning permission can be found at: https://www.npws.ie/development-consultations

Applicants should also ensure that all necessary consents are forthcoming from all relevant landowners (Private and Public) and contributors, for the proposed works, and that works, where applicable, comply with relevant standards set by relevant bodies. All persons whose lands or interests appear to be affected by the proposed project must, when required, prior to the commencement of project, be consulted and give written consent to the execution of the project works including for entry to their lands. This written consent must be submitted with the application form and it is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all consents are in place.

In particular, for projects relating to the development of walking trails, cycle ways etc. across private lands, proof of consultation and agreement of <u>all</u> affected local landowners must be provided with the application.

3.2 Your National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) Local Ranger

Contact should be made with your local NPWS conservation ranger **prior to submitting an application** for funding. The ranger may also offer you advice in terms of nature conservation and biodiversity aspects of your project and inform you of the consents required. You may be required to liaise with your local ranger throughout the project. If you require further information in relation to this, or to find out who you should contact in relation to your area, please contact: nature@npws.gov.ie.

3.3 Grant Amount

There are two categories of funding available:

Category 1 - Natura 2000 sites (SAC / SPA)

Grants available under Category 1 will be between €1,000 and €40,000, with the maximum grant being 80% of the costs of the project.

Category 2 – Non-Natura 2000 Peatland sites (incl. NHA's and undesignated sites)

Grants available under Category 2 will be between €500 and €20,000, with the maximum grant available being 80% of the costs of the project.

The remaining project costs must be funded through match funding in the form of financial contributions, voluntary and in-kind hours or donations.

Advance funding of up to 30% of the total grant award for a project may be made available to applicants where required, subject to repayment in the event that the project does not proceed.

In exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the NPWS a grant may be awarded outside of this range.

3.4 Financial Contribution

A minimum financial <u>cash</u> contribution of 5% of the overall project costs is required. The grantee will be required to provide confirmation that the contribution is in place and retain a record of the source of the contribution.

3.5 Matching Funding/Contributions in Kind

The remainder of the project costs (15%) must be made up by the organisation / group themselves. Full involvement by community interests will be an important feature of successful projects. Contributions in kind, e.g. voluntary work, free materials, community investment, philanthropic contributions, will be accepted as eligible matching expenditure.

Documentation such as signed time sheets, validated information on materials and/or goods donated, will be required to be submitted.

For donated goods/materials,

- · provide a description and number of items,
- · date provided, and
- the total fair market value of the items.

For facilities,

the published rental rate and hours or dates the facility was used.

For volunteers' services,

- list the number of hours worked,
- dates of service,
- type of service
- countersigned by project manager/supervisor

This documentation will be forwarded to you for completion if approved under the scheme.

Voluntary Labour: If Contribution in Kind is in the form of Voluntary labour (i.e. unpaid work), time spent on the project must be verified.

- The rate applied should be for remuneration of equivalent work. The grantee must ensure that the rate per hour applied is properly justified according to the work undertaken.
- Where Voluntary Labour forms part of a project, the grantee is advised that the requirements of all relevant Health and Safety legislation apply.
- Project administration e.g. attendance at meetings, preparation of grant application form, funding drawdown claims and management costs are not eligible as voluntary labour.

Details of all voluntary labour claimed must be maintained on a timesheet (1 timesheet per person). The time sheet will capture the following details;

- The name of the person undertaking the work
- The nature, time, dates of the works, quantity, hours worked and rate per hour,
- The signature of the person who provided the in-kind work,
- The timesheet must be signed off by the appointed project co-ordinator over the project.

3.6 Professional Fees, Oversight and Certification of Works

All works must be carried out to the best standards and major works and those deemed by the NPWS as relevant must be overseen and certified by a suitably qualified professional. A maximum 5% of the grant awarded can be used towards the cost of professional fees where professional oversight/certification is necessary (e.g. Engineer / Architect / Ecologist etc.) These may include fees for surveys and method statements, on-site supervision and monitoring, reasonable travel and subsistence costs and sign-off on project.

3.7 Advance Funding

Should the applicant or group require **advance funding**; the NPWS can on a case by case basis prefund the project or works **up to a total of 30%** of the total project value, subject to sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, which will need to be used prior to the release of more funding. Paid invoices/receipts must be submitted as proof. Further funding will be released once the initial start-up funds have been spent in full. If advance funding is released and the project does not progress this funding **will be recouped**.

The remainder of the funds granted will be paid out on the basis of vouched expenditure only.

Applicants must demonstrate clearly how the advance funding and the remainder of the funds will be spent. Project budgets should be well set out and **as per best procurement practice a minimum of three quotations should be obtained as appropriate**. Project timelines and milestones should also be provided. Quotations must be supplied from the supplier for specific goods/materials/services. Goods catalogues will not be accepted as quotations. Please submit the preferred quotation with your application but retain on file other quotes received for audit purposes.

3.8 Funding Awarded

The precise level of grant for an individual project will depend on the nature and quality of the proposal.

The funding offered must only be used for the purposes specified in the application and any alterations to the proposed use of the funding must be approved in advance.

Change of suppliers, materials used or change of project objectives must be notified to the NPWS and approval received prior to any alterations to the use of funding.

3.9 Notification of Funding Awarded

Following the approval of projects for funding, successful applicants will be notified of provisional offers of funding. This notification will detail the level of funding approved, the timeline for the completion of the project and the terms and conditions of the funding awarded in sufficient time to enable the applicant to complete the project and recoup funding by the required deadline.

Final sanction will be given by the NPWS once the applicant satisfies any outstanding conditions. Details of projects awarded funding under this scheme will be published by the NPWS.

Applicants will be required to complete an Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) Form. Payment will be only made by means of EFT to a bank account in the name of the group or organisation and not to any individual member.

If your application has been deemed ineligible, you will receive a letter informing you that your application will not be assessed. If your application has been unsuccessful, you will receive a letter informing you that your application has not been successful. You may contact nature@npws.gov.ie for feedback on your application.

4 Eligibility for the Scheme

4.1 What types of Projects are Eligible?

The categories of projects eligible for grant funding are as follows: (These lists are not exhaustive). Applications for sites that are not Natura 2000 will only be considered if they are **peatland sites**. The NPWS would encourage responsible projects on designated Natura sites which seek to restore and conserve the habitats and species for which the site is designated. Particular care should be taken with proposed works in designated areas, such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA).

Education, Awareness and Conservation Programmes that will promote the public's engagement with and awareness of habitats, species and designated sites including, but not limited to; raised and blanket bog designated sites.

Potential applications may include: undertaking educational tours, school day trips or summer projects i.e. recreational and educational activity, encouraging voluntary participation, which involve improving the awareness of the conservation and restoration of the designated sites and the protection of habitats and species.

Events, Exhibitions and Promotional campaigns connected to conservation, restoration, awareness or promotion of habitats, species and sites that will allow the public an opportunity to engage with or experience our natural heritage.

Publications, Leaflets and Local Nature Newsletters that promote an appreciation for and understanding of the immense intrinsic value of habitats and species to Ireland's rich natural heritage and would contribute to national enjoyment of said heritage.

Conservation, Enhancements and Improvement Measures supporting local environmental projects and volunteer groups that directly address threats to Natura sites and align with conservation objectives. This includes assisting with maintenance work to improve areas surrounding and within SAC networks.

We would advise any group undertaking walk-way or trail measures to consult with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and seek advice of other organisations who have undertaken similar projects.

Please contact your local NPWS ranger for guidance regarding the undertaking of works or the erection of signage in the vicinity of protected sites (e.g. SACs, SPA's).

Funding for access or road improvement measures or drains on bogs being used for turf cutting or commercial uses will not be eligible for funding under this scheme.

Improvement works must be necessary and not merely ordinary maintenance or of a kind which the applicants could reasonably be expected to do for themselves.

This scheme will not fund activities involving:

- Projects that solely benefit an individual
- Equipment, unless directly associated with the project
- Income generating projects

A maximum of 10% of the funding allocated may be used for overhead costs. These costs must be identified and outlined in the application form.

4.2 Monitoring of Project Progress

The NPWS may, at any stage following receipt of an application, request further information and carry out inspections of all projects if deemed necessary.

A completion report will be required on completion of the project. The applicant will be supplied with the necessary form once the project is approved for funding under the scheme.

We request that any ecological data arising from your project is submitted to the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

5 The Application Process

Applicants must **submit 1 copy** of the completed and signed application form along, with any other supplementary materials, including a method statement, where relevant, by email to nature@npws.gov.ie.

The scheme will be advertised in local papers, on the National Parks and Wildlife Service website www.npws.ie, on the website of the Department www.housing.gov.ie and on other social media.

Applicants are advised that failure to provide adequate detail on the application form and supplementary material may delay the application.

Incomplete and unsigned applications will not be considered.

5.1 Legal Status

Proof of the legal status of any community group or organisation must be submitted with an application.

6 The Assessment Process

The NPWS will assess and recommend applications for consideration for funding under the scheme. Proposals will be examined on merit and considered subject to sufficient funding being available. Projects should also represent good value for money and be in line with the overall objective of the scheme.

Projects will be assessed based on the information submitted and under the following weighted criteria:

Criteria		Weighting
Project structure, permissions, supplementary materials	 Must show well thought out project with approach/ methodology Materials to include if relevant maps, permissions and photos 	30 marks
Budget	 Must show project is fully costed with supporting quotes Good value and a good investment for conservation 	30 marks
Public and community benefit	Projects that include; • Wide range of community engagement • Minimise negative impacts on the environment through good practice	40 marks

In approving applications and selecting the successful projects, a number of factors will be considered by the NPWS, including the information supplied in the application form and supplementary material, including the range, mix, quality and impact of proposed projects and how the project supports the conservation objectives of the sites and other relevant considerations. An example of an SAC with conservation objectives can be found here https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/000572

7 Method Statement

For physical works a **method statement** must be also submitted appropriate to the scale and nature of the project. A method statement is a document detailing how a particular task or

activity will be carried out. It should specify the activities to be undertaken on a stage by stage basis. Please see template guidance below.

Applicants are advised that failure to provide adequate detail on the method statement may seriously weaken their application. A brief guidance note on method statements can be found at **Appendix 1** in this document.

8 Statutory Requirements

Works approved under this scheme must meet all statutory requirements including, but not limited to the following legislation:

- · Safety, Health and Welfare
- Employment Act
- Environmental Act
- Planning and Development Acts
- Wildlife Act 1976, as amended
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended
- National Monuments Acts

In particular, proof must be provided by the applicant that the statutory requirements which relate to their project under these Acts/Regulations have been complied with. Depending on the nature of the project permission may be required from other consent authorities. Any measures undertaken to improve access to peatland areas must have consideration to relevant safety and liability and access implications.

9 Translation Requirements for Signage

The Regulations issued under subsection 9(1) of the Official Languages Act, 2003 impose a statutory language duty on public bodies in relation to signage: see details below:

Paragraph 6(1) and 7(2) of the Regulations are as follows:

- 6. (1) Subject to the provisions of this Regulation, in relation to any sign erected by a public body, or erected on behalf of any public body in any location—
 - (a) in the State, or
 - (b) except in the case of an enforcement body, outside the State it will be in Irish or in Irish and English'.

- 7. (2) The following provisions shall apply in relation to a sign in Irish and in English placed by a public body in any location:
 - (a) the text will be in Irish first,
 - (b) the text in Irish will be as prominent, visible and legible as the text in English,
 - (c) the letters in the text in Irish will not be smaller, in terms of size, than the letters in the text in English,
 - (d) in relation to the text in Irish, it will convey the same information as the information conveyed by the text in English, and
 - (e) a word in the text in Irish will not be abbreviated unless the word in the text in English, of which it is a translation, is also abbreviated.

10 The Recoupment of Funding

10.1 Overview of Payment Process

The NPWS is responsible for the payment of funds approved under the Scheme to successful applicants. Any funds offered will be solely for the project described in the letter of approval.

All projects must be completed and certified, where necessary, by a relevant professional before the applicant may seek the payment of funding.

Grants are only payable on completion of the project and on submission of the following documentation before the final draw down of the funding is made:

- Completion of EFT;
- Completion of Recoupment Form B sheet;
- Certification of works by relevant professional (e.g. Architect, engineer, surveyor);
- Vouched receipts that have been **SIGNED** and **DATED** by the supplier;
- Invoices marked paid that have been SIGNED and DATED by the supplier;

NOTE: an invoice simply stamped PAID is not sufficient

- Completion report and;
- Provision of supplementary information including photographs, copy of any material produced e.g. books, booklets, and reports where necessary

Applicants making claims for grant funding on the basis of vouched expenditure are required to state that:

- the invoices used to support their claims relate to activities and services appropriate to the Scheme objectives and have been paid; and
- the invoices have not and will not be used in support of another claim for reimbursement from any other funder(s) (except as provided for in an agreed jointfunding arrangement).

In the event of the project being withdrawn, the applicant must notify the NPWS immediately and also refund the full amount where funding has been provided.

10.2 Cross-check Procedures

In some cases, projects may be eligible to receive funding from more than one publicly funded scheme or programme. In such cases to ensure that the limit of the total project cost from public funding, inclusive of VAT, is not exceeded, save in exceptional circumstances, information provided by the applicant may be crosschecked with other public bodies within data protection guidelines.

10.3 Eligible Expenditure and Professional Fees

Value Added Tax (VAT) is allowable as eligible expenditure under this Scheme. However, it is only allowable for that portion of works which is being funded and only in circumstances where such VAT is not recoverable by the beneficiary by any other means.

10.4 Financial Management Requirements

The Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme operates under the principles of the public spending code whereby all Irish public bodies are obliged to treat public funds with care and ensure that the best possible value-for-money is obtained whenever public money is being spent or invested. Further details are available at the following link - https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/public-spending-code/?fl=en

Particular attention by grantees should be paid to Circular 13/2014: Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds.

*The overall principle is that there should be transparency and accountability in the management of public funds, in line with economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The circular outlines, for example, that grant recipients should not dispose of publicly funded assets without prior approval.

Grantees must ensure that there is proper financial management and that an adequate audit trail exists and is maintained for funding awarded under this scheme.

Financial Statements will be required to be submitted to the NPWS at the end of the financial year. Where audited accounts are not available the NPWS must be satisfied that suitable financial statements are acceptable as an alternative.

In addition, successful applicants will be required to report in their financial statements, where they produce such statements, on funding received from the scheme as below:

- The name of the Department, specifying the exact title that is to be used in the report i.e. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage;
- The actual name of the Scheme i.e. Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme;
- The amount of funding accounted for in the current financial statement;
 Whether and how the use of the funding is restricted (i.e. is it for a particular project or for the delivery of a service).

All applications should be aware of any State Aid implications. State aid is defined as an advantage in any form whatsoever conferred by national public authorities to undertakings on a selective basis. Therefore, subsidies granted to individuals or general measures open to all enterprises are not covered by this prohibition and do not constitute State aid (examples include general taxation measures or employment legislation).

11 General Information

11.1 Photographs/Quotes for Works

The NPWS requests that the applicant(s) provide where relevant good quality digital photographs or videos of the project before any works/measures commence and after the project/work is completed, which may be used later for a 'before and after' comparison for reporting purposes.

Please note that the NPWS may use any or all images supplied by the applicant(s) to advertise or publicise the Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme until instructed otherwise by applicant. Applicants are advised to obtain permission to use images (if necessary) before they submit them to the NPWS and to confirm this in writing.

11.2 Tax Clearance Procedures

Relevant tax clearance procedures in respect of public sector grant payments as set down by the Revenue Commissioners must be adhered to. Please take note of Tax Clearance procedures. Please refer to www.revenue.ie for further details. In line with Section 4(1) of Department of Finance Circular 44/2006: Tax Clearance Procedures:

Grants, Subsidies and Similar Payments, please ensure that the proper tax clearance procedures are being adhered to by applicants, contractors and subcontractors.

11.3 Publicity

Recipients of funding under the scheme will be required to acknowledge the contribution of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and reference Natura 2000 (where relevant, for projects within SAC or SPA sites) in all their printed and online publicity channels that relate to the project being funded along with the inclusion of the relevant logos.

These include the following:

- Site signs, hoardings, information boards and interpretation panels;
- Printed and online publications;
- Printed publicity materials such as flyers, event programmes and posters, brochures, leaflets, newsletters and press releases;
- Advertising;
- Educational materials and presentations;
- CD and DVD sleeves and related product packaging; and
- Film, television and online video credits.

The relevant logos will be provided by the NPWS.

11.4 Freedom of Information and Access to Information on the Environment

Applications for funding under this scheme are subject to the **Freedom of Information Acts** and the **Access to Information on the Environment Regulations**.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2014, details contained in applications and supporting documents may, on request, be released to third parties. If there is information contained in your application which is sensitive or confidential in nature, please identify it and provide an explanation as to why it should not be disclosed. If a

request to release sensitive information under the legislation is received, you will be consulted before a decision is made whether or not to release the information. However, in the absence of the identification of particular information as sensitive, it could be disclosed without any consultation with you.

11.5 Audit and Document Retention

Projects may be subject to audit by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General. All documentation regarding this Scheme must be kept on file for at least 7 years after the closure of this Scheme.

If documents are stored electronically procedures used to do so should be in compliance with the **E-Commerce Act**, **2000**.

11.6 Child Protection

Grantees shall adhere to the Childrens' Act 2015 and 'Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children'. Where projects/events/activities funded involve children assurances will be sought from grantees that the proper child protection policies/arrangements are in place.

11.7 Reallocation of Funding

The NPWS may reallocate funding if projects have not commenced by the specified dates and been completed by the deadline. Any issues regarding the administration of this scheme should be addressed in the first instance to the NPWS using the contact details below.

11.8 Contact/Enquires

For further information or enquiries regarding the operation of this scheme, applicants may contact nature@npws.gov.ie

11.9 Complaints / Appeals Process

In the event of a complaint in relation to the administration of the Scheme, applicants may refer the matter to the NPWS for an internal management review with an option if unsatisfied with the outcome for a second review at a more senior management level within the NPWS/Department. Following that if they feel that their complaints have not been dealt with satisfactorily by the Department the applicant can contact the Office of the Ombudsman (details below):

Address: 6 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 W773.

Phone: +353 1 639 5600

Website https://www.ombudsman.ie/

Twitter: @OfficeOmbudsman

12 Use of Data

12.1 Privacy Statement

The Department is committed to protecting and respecting your privacy and employs appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect your information from unauthorised access. The Department will not process your personal data for any purpose other than that for which they were collected. Personal data may be exchanged with other Government Departments, local authorities, agencies under the aegis of the Department, or other public bodies, in certain circumstances where this is provided for by law.

The Department will only retain your personal data for as long as it is necessary for the purposes for which they were collected and subsequently processed. When the business need to retain this information has expired, it will be examined with a view to destroying the personal data as soon as possible, and in line with Department policy.

The Department's Privacy Statement in relation to individual suppliers, payees and grantees and further information on Data Protection can be found on our website at: gov.ie - Data Protection (www.gov.ie)

Appendix 1 - Brief Guidance Note on Method Statements

The Method Statement should be appropriate to the nature and scale of the proposed works.

The Method Statement for physical works should include:

- 1. A concise description of the existing area where works / project is planned.

 This should be a concise description of the area as it currently exists, noting all its salient features, its appearance, setting, form, condition, present function and significance.
- 2. A site location map of suitable scale and quality clearly marked must also be provided.

Any 'on the ground measures' and physical works proposed should be specific and detailed in as far as practicable.

3. A concise description of the works / project proposed.

This should identify any issues that are causing risk, what works are proposed, how the work will be done, necessary safety measures and what specification and materials will be used. It must include relevant plans, drawings and supporting visual media such as photographs or other illustrations and should typically address the following (but by no means exclusive) issues:

- a) Are the works temporary or permanent?
- b) What types of work are being proposed and in which locations?
- c) Details of on-site supervision and monitoring
- d) A brief schedule or sequence of works
- e) Is there adequate access/egress?
- f) An estimated project cost
- g) Estimated start date and completion date
- 4. An impact statement and proposed mitigation measures (if applicable).

This should address any likely impact of works and outline ways of mitigating adverse impacts.

- 5. A detailed description of future phases of the project (if applicable)
- 6. Please complete table below and provide details of any contractors, tradesperson or personnel

Contractor(s)/Tradesperson(s)/(Personnel)		
Name:		
Position:	Address:	
Telephone/Mobile No:	Email:	Telephone/Mobile No:
Tax Reference No:	Date:	

Can Be Continued On Separate Sheet If Necessary

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