SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LEE VALLEY

SITE CODE: 000094

This site occupies five separate sections of the valley of the River Lee, immediately to the west of Cork City. One section passes close to Ballincollig, and the Ballincollig Regional Park makes up a portion of the site. A diverse range of semi-natural habitats occurs here, with those described below being the most prevalent:

Wet broadleaved woodland has developed in a number of places on the river side. The dominant trees are either Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*) or Small-leaved Elm (*Ulmus minor*). Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) is often present also. Typical species occurring in the ground flora include Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Canary-grass (*Phalaris* spp.), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*) and Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*). Other parts have abundant Hemlock Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), Fool’s Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*) and Purple-loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*).

Some areas behind the riverbank are frequently flooded and support wet grassland communities. Species of the wet woodland ground flora described above occur in many of these stands, as do Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*), Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*) and Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*).

Dry broadleaved woodland exists in other sections of the valley, with the most important trees being Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus* spp.) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) are important components of some stands, while the exotic species Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) occur in others. The ground flora of many of these woods is relatively species-rich and includes Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Ground-ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*), Bramble (*Rubus fruiticosus* agg.), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and False Brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*).

In places, Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), Male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*) and Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*) are common, and one stand has a very well-developed shrub layer of Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*).

Unimproved dry grassland occurs on an area of soil that has probable glacial origins. Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*), Sweet Vernal-grass, Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*), Spring-sedge (*Carex caryophyllea*), Wild Carrot (*Daucus*

carota), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*) and Cowslip (*Primula veris*) are all present here.

Freshwater marsh fringes the river itself in places. Here, Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Canary-grass, Meadowsweet, Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), Marsh-marigold and Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) are all species frequently encountered.

A number of wetland bird species breed here, including Mallard, Heron, Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers and Reed Bunting and two rather locally distributed butterflies, the Small Blue and the Wood White also occur.

Land-use in the site consists of a little cattle-grazing and hay-making in the grasslands. Sections of the valley have been improved for agriculture in the past, so that the site now consists of five sub-sites. This should not be allowed to infringe further into the site. The spread of Sycamore poses a threat to the naturalness of parts of the woodlands, as do river engineering works to the river bank communities. Recreation is important in the Valley, especially in the Ballincollig Regional Park.

The diverse range of intact semi-natural habitats in the Lee Valley makes this a site of regional conservation importance.

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