SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: ROCK FARM QUARRY, LITTLE ISLAND

SITE CODE: 001074

Rock Farm Quarry is located c. 9km west of Cork City on the southern shore of Little Island in the River Lee estuary. It is situated on limestone which is of Carboniferous age and was formed of a shell reef. There are a range of rock types in the area including fine-grained crinodal limestone, pseudobreccia, reef limestone and a conglomerate - the Cork marble. Formerly, the area was quarried for its limestone, but it is now no longer actively quarried and a golf course occupies much of the site. This site's southern boundary is along the top edge of the quarries' rock cliffs.

The habitats within the site include unimproved lowland dry grassland, amenity grassland (the improved tees and greens of the golf course), scrub woodland and the exposed rock and spoil of the quarries.

On the floor of the quarries and around their edges, a rich calcareous flora has developed and within this small area (30ha) there is a considerable diversity of species. The calcareous grassland species include grasses such as Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Downy Oat-grass (*Helictotrichon pubescens*) and a small annual species, Fern-grass (*Desmazeria rigida*). Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*) is also frequently encountered. Some of the herbs present include Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllus vulneraria*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*), Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*). The rock from the quarries also supports the growth of a distinct flora including species such as Round-leaved Crane's-bill (*Geranium rotundifolium*), Weld (*Reseda luteola*), Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*) and Great Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*). Ferns noted in the area are Maidenhair Spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*) and Rustyback (*Ceterach officinarum*).

There are small areas of scrub woodland, mainly of Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) with Traveller's-joy (*Clematis vitalba*) and the exotic and invasive species Japanese Knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*). The proximity of the site to the sea also gives a maritime influence to the site and the presence of White Campion (*Silene alba*), Wild Madder (*Rubia peregrina*) and Portland Spurge (*Euphorbia portlandica*) are noted. Many orchids are found in the site including the Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*), Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) and Dense-flowered Orchid (*Neotinea maculata*), a species usually only found occasionally in the west and centre of Ireland. Also of note is a parasitic plant on Ivy, the Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederae*).

Although the present land use within the site would appear to maintain the sites interest, alteration or extension of the golfing activities may be potentially damaging to the site. It is suggested that no new areas of 'rough' should be taken into the golf course, heavy fertiliser application should be avoided, as should the dumping of mown grass on the dry calcareous grassland areas; extensive reseeding or top seeding

of greens and trees with rye-grass mixtures would also be detrimental to the areas species composition and diversity.

The area is of considerable interest botanically because of its species diversity and the presence of 'rarities' for the region, such as Dense-flowered Orchid and Portland Spurge. The area could also be used as an educational resource for local schools - for example, projects such as comparing the species composition and phenology of the cut and uncut areas of the golf course, species composition changes with scrub invasion, invertebrate sampling and fossil identification.

17.11.2009