

# VARIATION No.1 - MEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027 SEA SCREENING REPORT

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## Strategic Assessment **Built Environment**

Client:

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## Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).....	5
2.1	Introduction.....	5
2.2	Appropriate Assessment (AA).....	6
3	Description of the Proposed Variation No.1 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 .....	7
3.1	Overview .....	7
3.2	Schedule of the Proposed Variation No.1.....	7
3.3	Public Consultation.....	11
4	Screening for Requirement for SEA .....	11
5	Public Consultation – Draft Variation No.1 of Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 .....	17
6	Recommendation on Requirement for SEA.....	25
7	References.....	25



# 1 Introduction

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 was adopted on 22 September 2021 and came into effect on the 03 November 2021 (hereafter the Meath CDP). The CDP is divided into four volumes. Volume 1 of the CDP sets out the policies and objectives and the overall strategy for the development of the County over the plan period 2021-2027. Volume 2 of the CDP includes written statements and accompanying maps for all settlements within the county and sets out development and land use zoning objectives for each area. Volume 3 of the CDP includes a book of maps for the county, which includes the UNESCO heritage site of Brú na Bóinne. Volume 4 includes Environmental Assessments.

In accordance with Section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, Meath County Council is proposing Variation No. 1 of the County Development Plan 2021-2027.

Brady Shipman Martin (BSM) has been appointed by Meath County Council to carry out screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) in respect of the *Variation No. 1 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027* (hereafter the 'Variation No.1').

This report documents the screening exercise for SEA in respect of Variation No. 1 for the purposes of consultation, in accordance with Article 13K of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended and S.I. 436 of 2004 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011.

This SEA Screening should be read in conjunction with Variation No. 1 of Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (MCC, 2024) and the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report (BSM, 2024).

Meath County Council is also proposing *Variation No. 2 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027*. Variation No.2 is subject to a separate screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

## 2 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

### 2.1 Introduction

Directive 2001/42/EC<sup>1</sup> of the European Parliament and of the Council on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (the 'SEA Directive') requires EU Member States to assess the 'likely significant environmental effects' of plans and programmes prior to their adoption. This provides for the assessment of strategic environmental considerations at an early stage in the decision-making process.

Article 1 of the SEA Directive states that:

*"The objective of this directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that, in accordance with this directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment."*

The SEA Directive was transposed into Irish law through:

- Statutory Instrument (S.I.) No. 435 of 2004 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011); and
- S.I. No. 436 of 2004 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011, relates to SEA as it applies to plans or programmes prepared for *"agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism and town and country planning or land use"*<sup>2</sup>.

S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, relates to SEA as it applies to plans or programmes where the context requires, *"a development plan, a variation of a development plan, a local area plan (or an amendment thereto), regional planning guidelines or a planning scheme"*<sup>3</sup>.

As the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 is a statutory plan, the *Draft Variation No. 1* was screened for the requirement for SEA under the requirements of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011.

This screening report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the S.I. No. 436 of 2004 (as amended). Article 13(K)(1) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended states that:

*"Where a planning authority proposes to make a variation of a development plan under section 13 of the Act, it shall, before giving notice under section 13(2) of the Act, consider whether or not the proposed variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking into account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A."*

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<sup>1</sup> SEA Directive: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32001L0042&from=EN>

<sup>2</sup> See Section 9(1)(a)

<sup>3</sup> Section 5(c)

## 2.2 Appropriate Assessment (AA)

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the 'Habitats Directive') require Appropriate Assessment (AA) to be carried out where a plan or project is likely to have a significant impact on a Natura 2000 site. Natura 2000 sites include:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC), designated for the conservation of Annex I habitats and Annex II species of the Habitats Directive; and
- Special Protection Areas (SPA), designated for the protection of Annex I birds of Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds (the 'Birds Directive') and other regularly occurring migratory birds and their habitats.

Stage 1 in the AA process is to establish whether AA is required for the particular plan or project. This stage is referred to as 'screening for the requirement for AA', and its purpose is to determine:

- Whether a plan or project is directly connected to or necessary for the management of the site; and
- Whether a plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives.

As set out in Department Circular Letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/08<sup>4</sup> (15 February 2008), Screening for AA is of relevance to SEA in that *"where following screening, it is found that the draft plan or amendment may have an impact on the conservation status of a Natura 2000 site or that such an impact cannot be ruled out, adopting the precautionary approach:*

- An AA of the plan must be carried out, and
- In any case where SEA would not otherwise be required, it must also be carried out."

Hence, if the Draft Plan requires AA, it shall also require SEA.

The *Draft Variation No.1* was screened for the requirement for AA. The AA Screening Report, (BSM, 2024: refer to standalone report under separate cover) has concluded that:

*"Following review of the Variation No.1 against the Conservation Objectives of the relevant European sites, it is concluded that there is no possibility that the implementation of the Variation No.1 could result in any likely significant effects on European sites on its own or in combination with other plans and programmes. This conclusion was reached without considering or taking into account mitigation measures or measures intended to avoid or reduce any impact on European sites.*

*In view of best scientific knowledge therefore, this report concludes that the Variation No.1 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, individually or in combination with another plan or project, is not likely to have a significant effect on European sites under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) in light of their conservation objectives. The Variation does not require an Appropriate Assessment and the preparation of a Natura Impact Report."*

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<sup>4</sup> NPWS SEA letter: <https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/circular-sea-01-08.pdf>

## 3 Description of the Proposed Variation No.1 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

### 3.1 Overview

The purpose of Variation No. 1 is to give effect to Amendments to the two chapters of Vol. 1 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 where modifications are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans and to introduce flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy where appropriate and in line with national and regional policy.

The Variation also provides for the removal of unnecessary duplication of objectives contained in Volume No. 2 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 that are appropriately addressed in Chapter 2 Core Strategy of Volume No. 1 Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. These objectives are listed in Appendix 2 of Variation No. 1 (MCC, March 2024).

### 3.2 Schedule of the Proposed Variation No.1

The detail of the proposed variation is set out in the following with deleted text shown in ~~strike through~~ and new text shown in **bold blue text**.

#### **Chapter 1 Introduction**

##### Proposed text update to Section 1.5.1 Existing Suite of Local Area Plans

~~A Local Area Plan is currently in place for the following settlement centres: Ashbourne, East Meath, Dunshaughlin, Dunboyne, Ratoath and the Southern Environs of Drogheda.~~

A Written Statement and Land Use Zoning ~~objectives~~ map to establish a framework for inter alia the future LAP's, to support economic development and to provide a basis for continued operation of the development management process pending the completion of the LAP's (in the case of Drogheda the UAP) has been included in Volume 2 for each Settlement. ~~center.~~ **These Written Statements will continue to have effect unless they are replaced and superceded by their respective Local Area Plan, Joint Local Area Plan or Joint Urban Area Plan.**

##### **INT OBJ 1**

**When adopted, the Local Area Plan, Joint Local Area Plan or Joint Urban Area Plan will replace the respective Written Statement and update the relevant household allocation while retaining the land use zoning objectives contained in Volume 2 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. During the intervening period, the Written Statement contained in the Meath County Development Plan will continue to have effect.**

#### **Chapter 2 Core Strategy**

##### Proposed text update to Section 2.8.1 Guiding Principles for Core Strategies

##### **2.8.1.1 Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022)**

**The publication of the Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022) provides clarity in respect to excess zoned residential lands stating that it is a policy and objective of these Guidelines that**

*'zoned housing land in an existing development plan, that is serviced and can be developed for housing within the life of the new development plan under preparation, should not be subject to de-zoning' but should instead take a phased approach. Alternative zoning uses and deletion of the zoning objective can also be considered when addressing excess.*

*The Guidelines outline that de-zoning should occur where the land zoned has remained undeveloped and un-serviced through one or more development plan cycles, with no prospect of being serviced within the six-year life of the development plan.*

*The guidelines also acknowledge that in providing housing sites for development within settlements, it may be necessary to zone more serviced land and sites for residential (or a mixture of residential and other uses), than would equate to meeting precisely the projected housing demand for that settlement. The approach outlined in Section 4.4.2 of the guidelines accepts that a degree of choice in development sites is desirable to avoid restricting the supply of new housing development through inactivity on a particular landholding or site.*

*The release of such lands can compensate for lands with live planning permissions that have no subsequent activity within the duration of their permission will ensure site options are not curtailed at the advanced stages of the County Development Plan period and will ensure that a steady supply of land for housing in the right locations are built into the system.*

*In identifying the residential land requirement for this Plan and addressing the issue of excess lands, a significant quantum of residential lands were de-zoned in accordance with the RSES guidance during the CDP review. — consideration will be given to both options set out above. An Having regard to the limited availability of remaining undeveloped residential zoned lands in some settlements, which was established following a detailed analysis at the two year review of the plan, a comprehensive evaluation of all undeveloped residential lands in each settlement by way of Settlement Capacity Audits (SCA) will inform future zoning and phasing of residential lands. The SCA will inform a future variation to the CDP. has been carried out. The prioritisation/phasing of residential lands will only be utilised in the larger settlements where population growth is to be concentrated i.e. Regional Growth Centre, Key Town, or Self-Sustaining Growth Towns and only where there are fundamental reasons which support the requirement to phase such lands.*

### Proposed update to Section 2.9.3 Recent Activity in Residential Construction

#### Section 2.9.3 Recent Activity in Residential Construction

*The continuation of the economic recovery, the associated increase in employment, and improved consumer confidence has resulted in increased activity in residential construction, particularly in the southern and eastern parts of the County.*

*This has been particularly evident from 2014, with year on year increases in the number of Commencement Notices received for multi-unit residential developments. These Commencement Notices are being translated into completed units. The CSO Report 'New Dwelling Completions' 2011-18 recorded that there were 1,512 residential units completed in Meath in 2018. This represents an increase of almost 40% on 2017 when 1,091 units were completed. In comparison to other parts of the region Meath is one of the most active counties behind Fingal (2,140 units), Dublin City (1,843 units), and South Dublin (1,654 units).*



### **Section 2.9.3 Monitoring of Population Growth and Housing Growth in the County**

*Section 10.3 of the Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2022 requires monitoring of the Core Strategy for the county. This monitoring must be carried out annually and include a breakdown of the following indicators:*

Indicator	
Residential	
1.	New home completions (including through refurbishment/conversions)
2.	New home completions per NPO 3 (see below)
3.	Planning permissions granted for residential development with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) A breakdown of 1, 2, 3 and 4+ units permitted and</li> <li>(ii) A breakdown per Tier 1 and Tier 2 lands</li> </ul>
4.	Breakdown by relevant rural area type of rural housing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Planning Applications lodged</li> <li>(ii) Breakdown in decisions</li> <li>(iii) New home completions</li> </ul>

*To address this requirement, a Residential Tracking Monitoring System for County Meath was established as a key quantitative data source to analyse and report residential planning and construction activity. This internal dataset is informed by Central Statistic Office (CSO) data on population and employment figures, internal housing completions records and Building Control Management System data.*

*A review of internal planning permission data and 2022 census data indicates that market and infrastructural constraints has restricted the delivery of housing across the county. It is a target of the County Development Plan to deliver 1,880 Units per annum up to 2027. Notwithstanding this, 2022 census data for the county shows that the total housing stock grew from 70,649 to 78,759 between 2016-2022. This indicates an average increase of 1,352 units annually since 2016. While internal monitoring reflects an increase in construction in more recent years, this data also indicates a shortfall of an average of 528 residential units annually on the planned housing delivery for County Meath. Having regard to the recent 2022 census data and the unanticipated population growth in Meath, the Council are reviewing the causes of this shortfall with the intention of identifying and addressing obstacles to the delivery of housing within the county.*

*Consequently, careful monitoring must be carried out for both permissions granted, units delivered, infrastructural or other impediments to ensure the likelihood of housing delivery is considered in the context of the various obstacles. In accordance with the Development Plan Guidelines, the anticipated rate of housing delivery and the likelihood of expiring permissions commencing must also be factored into the various considerations that form part of the successful delivery of the Core Strategy. The proposed phasing of larger residential developments must also be considered.*

*Notwithstanding that the county has zoned a sufficient amount of land to accommodate the household allocation up to 2027, regard must be had to the historical trends for housing delivery and the significant complexities that exist in delivering housing including issues such as economic viability, site assembly and site ownership, funding, timescales for delivering the necessary physical infrastructure and the nature of speculative land management that may render certain lands unavailable within the lifetime of the plan. Accordingly, where lands cannot be bought forward for development within the Core Strategy period, a degree of flexibility in the distribution of the housing and population targets, in*

line with national and regional policy, is required to facilitate an adequate supply of housing to meet demand in the county. This may include allowing 'additional provision' of lands to provide some degree of competition and choice in the residential development land market.

Where such flexibility is awarded, an evidence-based assessment will be carried out that will consider active and expiring planning permissions, units delivered, the function of the settlement and the existing and planned infrastructural, employment and community services available to the settlement (the Asset-Based Approach). The focus and target must however be based on housing delivery as opposed to meeting targets.

In recognition of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, self-sustaining settlements with existing or planned high quality transport services must also be recognised for their potential to contribute to national objectives to transition to a climate resilient and low carbon society. Recognition of high-quality transport settlements also accords with RPO 8.1 of the RSES which states "The integration of transport and land use planning in the region shall be consistent with the guiding principles expressed in the transport strategy of the RSES".

Active Land Management measures undertaken by the Council such as the Residential Zoned Land Tax will also support the delivery of housing in the county and ensure compliance with National and Regional Planning Policy.

#### Proposed Introduction of Text and Table under Table 2.12:

A review of the Residential monitoring data that informed Table 2.12: Core Strategy Table, on Population and Household distribution to 2027 has identified an issue in the existing residential planning permissions in the County. While it was previously understood that the existing units not yet built in the county comprised 5,820 units, subsequent commencement and completion data as part of the Two-Year Review of the County Development Plan identified that 781 of these units were completed and/or expired in 2019 and therefore were outside of the household allocation period of 2020 -2027. This situation occurred as a result of delays in the preparation and adoption of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 which was originally planned for adoption in 2019 but incurred significant delays pending the publication of the National Planning Framework 2018, Regional and Economic Spatial Strategy in 2019 and the Covid pandemic in 2020.

In Variation No. 1, it is now proposed to re-allocate these units to larger Settlements in Tier 1 – 5 in accordance with the CDP growth and settlement strategy and to ensure full utilisation of existing infrastructure and resources in the County. This data coupled with the fact that a number of settlements are reaching or have reached their targeted household allocation demonstrates the need for incorporating flexibility into the Core Strategy to ensure appropriate housing delivery against the backdrop of the current housing crisis and in line with the Government Housing Strategy, Housing for All (2021).

Settlement	Additional Household Allocation 2020-2027
Settlement Tiers 1-5	781*

\* Units recorded as extant permissions that were completed prior to 2020.

#### Proposed Text Changes to 2.14.1 Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

**CS POL 1**

To promote and facilitate the development of sustainable communities in the County by **monitoring** and managing the level of growth in each settlement to ensure future growth is **informed by** ~~accordance with~~ the Core Strategy and County Settlement Hierarchy in order to deliver compact urban areas and sustainable rural communities.

**Proposed text changes to 2.14.2 Objectives**

It is an objective of the Council:

**CS OBJ 3**

To **be guided by** ~~ensure the implementation of~~ the population, ~~and~~ housing growth **and** household allocation set out in the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy, in so far as practicable. Meath County Council will monitor the number of units that are permitted and **delivered** ~~under construction/built~~ as part of the implementation of this objective, **in compliance with the Development Plans Guidelines 2022.**

**Insert New Objective**

*CS OBJ 3A: The 781 residential units shall only be applied to Tiers 1 to 5 Settlements where there is a demonstrated demand for housing and sufficient supporting services available. This will be implemented through the Development Management function and applicable until such time as the NPF Review is completed and adopted.*

For further details refer to the Variation No.1 of Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (MCC, March 2024).

### 3.3 Public Consultation

Draft Variation No.1 and its supporting documents – the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report, the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report, were placed on public display between 27 March and 26 April 2024.

## 4 Screening for Requirement for SEA

The screening for the requirement for SEA has been conducted in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 2A of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011.

The criteria are set out under two principal headings:

- Characteristics of the Plan; and
- Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected.

The corresponding sub-criteria are addressed in **Tables 4.1** and **4.2**, below, respectively.

**Table 4.1: Characteristics of the Plan, having regard, in particular, to:**

*The degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions, or by allocating resources*

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (adopted on 22 September 2021 and came into effect on the 03 November 2021) sets a framework for projects and other activities within County Meath and was subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment as part of the plan making and adoption process.

The proposed Variation No. 1 to the County Development Plan proposes amendments across 3 broad areas:

First, where modifications are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans which will replace the respective Written Statements.

Second, to introduce flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy, where appropriate and in line with national and regional policy.

And third, for the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives in Vol. No.2 of the Development Plan with those already in Chapter 2 of Vol. No.1 of the Plan.

Introducing flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2: Core Strategy, is in accordance with Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Development Plans – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022)*<sup>5</sup>, which aim to ensure Development Plans take into account the forecasted amount of housing in an area and that sufficient new homes can be built in key areas of housing demand. No new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed and there is no change in the manner in which the Plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions, or by allocating resources.

The modifications warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans and the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives has no effect on the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions, or by allocating resources.

There is no change to the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

#### *The degree to which the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy*

Under the Spatial Planning Hierarchy in Ireland, the Meath County Development Plan (CDP) 2021-2027 sits at the Local Government level and is below the Regional, National and International levels. The CDP influences plans at a lower level of plan hierarchy, including Local Area Plans and other area-specific plans such as Local Biodiversity Action Plan, Local Heritage Plan, Local Climate Action etc. The CDP was subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

Previous local area plans within Meath including Dunshaughlin, Dunboyne Clonee Pace and Ratoath, were superseded by the Written Statement and Land Use Zoning Map contained within Volume 2 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. The proposed amendments also include modifications that are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans.

No new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed and there is no change in the manner in which the Plan influences on other plans, including those in a hierarchy.

The proposed amendments have no influence on other plans, including those in a hierarchy and there is no change to the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f9aac-development-plans-guidelines-for-planning-authorities/>

***The relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development***

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 provides a positive vision for Meath which will enable the county to continue to make a significant contribution to national economic recovery by promoting sustainable development and facilitating stable economic growth thus delivering long term benefits for the County.

The content of the Development Plan has been informed by SEA, AA and SFRA undertaken as parallel processes in tandem with each stage of the Development Plan, thereby ensuring full integration and consideration of environmental issues.

Introducing flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2: Core Strategy, is in accordance with Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Development Plans – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022)*, and while no new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed the associated amendments will have the positive effect of enhancing the delivery of residential development on appropriately zoned and serviced lands.

The modifications warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans and the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives do not adversely alter the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.

There is no change to the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

***Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme***

The environmental problems relevant to the Meath CDP 2021-2027 are detailed in the Strategic Environmental Assessment prepared for the plan.

Introducing flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2: Core Strategy, is in accordance with Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Development Plans – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022)*, and while no new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed the associated amendments will have the positive effect of enhancing the delivery of necessary residential development on appropriately zoned and serviced lands.

The modifications warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans and the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives do not give rise to environmental problems for the Plan area.

There is no change to the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

***The relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste management or water protection)***

The Development Plan includes a wide range of policies and objectives in relation to implementation of European Union legislation on the environment. The proposed amendments do not include changes to policies and objectives in relation to the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment.

The proposed amendments do not affect the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste management or water protection) and there is no change to the

findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

**Table 4.2: Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:**

<i>The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects</i>
<p>The proposed Variation No. 1 to the County Development Plan proposes amendments across 3 broad areas:</p> <p>First, where modifications are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans which will replace the respective Written Statements.</p> <p>Second, to introduce flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy, where appropriate and in line with national and regional policy.</p> <p>And third, for the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives in Vol. No.2 of the Development Plan with those already in Chapter 2 of Vol. No.1 of the Plan.</p> <p>No new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed and the proposed amendments are limited in nature and will not result in significant effects on the environment.</p> <p>Therefore, considerations of probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects arising from Variation No.1 do not arise and there is no change to the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.</p>
<i>The cumulative nature of the effects</i>
<p>The content of the Development Plan has been informed by SEA, AA and SFRA undertaken as parallel processes in tandem with each stage of the Development Plan, thereby ensuring full integration and consideration of environmental issues. Variation No. 1 is compatible and complementary with the strategies, policies and objectives of the Development Plan relating to compact growth, population distribution, settlement strategy, urban regeneration, mixed-use development and with environmental protection.</p> <p>The proposed Variation No. 1 to the County Development Plan proposes amendments across 3 broad areas:</p> <p>First, where modifications are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans which will replace the respective Written Statements.</p> <p>Second, to introduce flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy, where appropriate and in line with national and regional policy.</p> <p>And third, for the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives in Vol. No.2 of the Development Plan with those already in Chapter 2 of Vol. No.1 of the Plan.</p> <p>No new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed and the proposed amendments are limited in nature and will not result in significant effects on the environment.</p> <p>No cumulative effects on the environment arise from Variation No.1 and there is no change to the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.</p>

<i>The trans-boundary nature of the effects</i>
The Variation No.1 will have no national, regional or inter-county transboundary effects, over and above the effects of the strategy, policies and objectives of the Development Plan.
<i>The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)</i>
<p>The Variation No.1 would not give rise to risks to human health or the environment due to accidents owing to the limited scale, nature and character of the proposed amendments. The Variation is consistent with the existing and current land use and no new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed.</p> <p>The proposed amendments do not give rise to effects for human health or the environment and there is no change to the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.</p>
<i>The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)</i>
<p>The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, as adopted underwent Strategic Environmental Assessment for the entire of the Meath County Council's area. The proposed Variation No. 1 to the County Development Plan proposes amendments across 3 broad areas:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">First, where modifications are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans which will replace the respective Written Statements.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Second, to introduce flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy, where appropriate and in line with national and regional policy.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">And third, for the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives in Vol. No.2 of the Development Plan with those already in Chapter 2 of Vol. No.1 of the Plan.</p> <p>No new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed.</p> <p>The proposed amendments do not give rise to significant effects and the issue of the magnitude or spatial extent of effects does not arise. There is no change to the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.</p>
<i>The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</i>
<i>(a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage</i>
<p>The proposed Variation No. 1 to the County Development Plan proposes amendments across 3 broad areas:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">First, where modifications are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans which will replace the respective Written Statements.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Second, to introduce flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy, where appropriate and in line with national and regional policy.</p>

<p>And third, for the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives in Vol. No.2 of the Development Plan with those already in Chapter 2 of Vol. No.1 of the Plan.</p> <p>No new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed.</p> <p>The Variation will not result in impacts on special natural characteristics or cultural heritage.</p>
<p><i>(b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values</i></p>
<p>The proposed Variation No. 1 to the County Development Plan proposes amendments across 3 broad areas:</p> <p>First, where modifications are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans which will replace the respective Written Statements.</p> <p>Second, to introduce flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy, where appropriate and in line with national and regional policy.</p> <p>And third, for the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives in Vol. No.2 of the Development Plan with those already in Chapter 2 of Vol. No.1 of the Plan.</p> <p>No new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed.</p> <p>The Variation will not result in exceedance of environmental quality standards or limit values.</p>
<p><i>(c) Intensive land-use</i></p>
<p>The proposed Variation No. 1 to the County Development Plan proposes amendments across 3 broad areas:</p> <p>First, where modifications are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans which will replace the respective Written Statements.</p> <p>Second, to introduce flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy, where appropriate and in line with national and regional policy.</p> <p>And third, for the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives in Vol. No.2 of the Development Plan with those already in Chapter 2 of Vol. No.1 of the Plan.</p> <p>No new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed.</p> <p>The Variation will not result in intensification of land use.</p>
<p><i>The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status</i></p>
<p>The proposed Variation No. 1 to the County Development Plan proposes amendments across 3 broad areas:</p> <p>First, where modifications are warranted to give effect to the adoption of upcoming Local Area Plans, Joint Local Area Plans or Joint Urban Area Plans which will replace the respective Written Statements.</p>



Second, to introduce flexibility in the permitting, delivery and distribution of housing set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy, where appropriate and in line with national and regional policy.

And third, for the consolidation / removal of duplication of objectives in Vol. No.2 of the Development Plan with those already in Chapter 2 of Vol. No.1 of the Plan.

No new land use zonings or changes to land use zonings are proposed.

Variation No. 1 will not result in any significant effect on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status and there is no change to the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and associated environmental report and statement prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

## 5 Public Consultation – Draft Variation No.1 of Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Draft Variation No. 1 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 went on public display from 27 March (Wednesday) until 26 April (Friday) 2024 at the offices of Meath County Council, Buvinda House, Dublin Road, Navan, Co. Meath, during normal opening hours and the following Municipal District Offices during normal opening hours - Ashbourne Municipal District, 1-2 Killegland Square Upper, Ashbourne, Kells Municipal District, Town Hall, Headfort Place, Kells, Laytown/Bettystown Municipal District, Main Street, Duleek, Ratoath Municipal District, Drumree Road, Dunshaughlin and Trim Municipal District, Mornington House, Summerhill Road, Trim.

In accordance with the requirements of S.I. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011, and Article 13K(3) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, Meath County Council notified the environmental authorities, specified in Article 13A(4) of the 2001 Regulations that the planning authority proposes to make a variation of the development plan under section 13 of the Act. Submission was received from the Environmental Protection Agency providing information on guidance and legislation in relation to SEA. This information has been taken into account in this screening report.

A total of 17no. submissions were received during the Proposed Draft Variation No.1 consultation period. The submissions received and outcome of the consultation process has been summarised in the Chief Executive's (CE) Report prepared by Meath County Council. The CE report sets out the Chief Executive's response to the issues raised in the submissions, and makes recommendations on the proposed amendments, as appropriate.

The alterations were screened for the requirement for Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment and no likely significant environmental effects were identified. Refer to **Table 5.1** below.

In the following table, text deleted from Variation No. 1 is shown ~~red strikethrough~~, while new text is shown *green italic*. New text as included in the Draft Variation which remains unaltered is in *blue text*.

Table 5.1 Screening of Alterations for AA and SEA

Section of the Variation document	Revised Text	Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA)
Amendment No. 2 - Chapter 2 'Core Strategy' & Volume 2 Written Statements (Page 3 of 12)	<p>[...]</p> <p>Where settlement household allocations are therefore reaching or at capacity and where centrally located brownfield/infill sites remain available for development, prioritization will be given to vacant sites in town centre locations once physical and social infrastructure is available and adequate. <del>Such development in brownfield or town centre locations should be considered Core Strategy neutral and therefore acceptable subject to all other normal planning considerations.</del></p>	Having regard to the criteria set in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, no likely significant environmental effects arise as a result of the deletion of this text in the Variation No. 1. and the requirement for SEA is screened out.	No likely significant environmental effects on European sites arise as a result of the deletion of this text in the Variation No. 1.  The requirement for Stage 2 AA is screened out.
	CS OBJ 3: To <del>be guided by</del> ensure the implementation the population, housing growth and household allocation set out in the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy, in so far as practicable. Meath County Council will monitor the number of units that are permitted, under construction and delivered /built as	Having regard to the criteria set in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, no likely significant environmental effects arise as a result of this non-material amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1 and the requirement for SEA is screened out.	No likely significant environmental effects on European sites arise as a result of this non-material amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1  The requirement for Stage 2 AA is screened out.

Section of the Variation document	Revised Text	Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA)
	part of the implementation of this objective, <i>in compliance with the Development Plan Guidelines 2022.</i>		
<p>Amendment No. 01 - Chapter 1 Introduction</p> <p>Text update to Section 1.5.1 <del>Existing Suite of Local Area Plans</del> <i>Written Statements for Settlements in Meath.</i> (Page 6 of 12)</p>	<p><i>A Written Statement and Land Use Zoning objectives map to establish a framework for inter alia the future LAP's, to support economic development and to provide a basis for continued operation of the development management process pending the completion of the LAP's (in the case of Drogheda the UAP) has been included in Volume 2 for each Settlement. center. —These Written Statements will continue to have effect unless they are replaced and superceded by their respective Local Area Plan, Joint Local Area Plan or Joint Urban Area Plan. On adoption, the Local Area Plan, Joint Maynooth Local Area Plan or Joint Drogheda Urban / Local Area Plan will replace the respective Written Statement in Volume 2 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 by way of a variation to the Plan. During the intervening period,</i></p>	<p>Having regard to the criteria set in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, no likely significant environmental effects arise as a result of this amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1 and the requirement for SEA is screened out.</p>	<p>No likely significant environmental effects on European sites arise as a result of this amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1</p> <p>The requirement for Stage 2 AA is screened out.</p>

Section of the Variation document	Revised Text	Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA)
	<p><i>the Written Statement contained in the Meath County Development Plan will continue to have effect.</i></p> <p><del><b>INT OBJ 1</b></del></p> <p><del><i>When adopted, the Local Area Plan, Joint Local Area Plan or Joint Urban Area Plan will replace the respective Written Statement and update the relevant household allocation while retaining the land use zoning objectives contained in Volume 2 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. During the intervening period, the Written Statement contained in the Meath County Development Plan will continue to have effect.</i></del></p>		
Amendment No. 02 - Chapter 2 'Core Strategy' & Volume 2 Written Statements (Page 6 & 7 of 12)	<p>2.8.1.2 Development Plan Guidelines for Local Authorities (2022)</p> <p>[...]</p> <p><i>In identifying the residential land requirement for this Plan and</i></p>	Having regard to the criteria set in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, no likely significant environmental effects arise as a result of this non-material amendment	<p>No likely significant environmental effects on European sites arise as a result of this non-material amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1</p> <p>The requirement for Stage 2 AA is screened out.</p>

Section of the Variation document	Revised Text	Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA)
	<p><i>addressing the issue of excess lands, <del>consideration will be given to both options set out above. A</del> significant quantum of residential lands was de-zoned <del>in accordance with the RSES guidance</del> to align the amount of lands zoned with the housing allocation for each settlement during the County Development Plan review. Having regard to the limited availability of remaining undeveloped residential zoned lands in some settlements, which was established following a detailed analysis at the Two Year Review of the Plan, a comprehensive evaluation of all undeveloped residential lands in each settlement by way of a Settlement Capacity Audit (SCA) will inform future zoning and phasing of residential lands. The SCA will inform a future variation to the County Development Plan. A significant quantum of residential lands were de-zoned in accordance with the RSES guidance during the County Development Plan review.</i></p>	<p>to the text in the Variation No. 1 and the requirement for SEA is screened out.</p>	

Section of the Variation document	Revised Text	Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA)
Text changes to 2.14.1 Policies (Page 9 of 12)	<p>CS POL 1</p> <p>To promote and facilitate the development of sustainable communities in the County by <b>monitoring</b> and managing the level of growth in each settlement to ensure future growth is <b>in accordance</b> with the Core Strategy and County Settlement Hierarchy in order to deliver compact urban areas and sustainable rural communities.</p>	<p>Having regard to the criteria set in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, no likely significant environmental effects arise as a result of this non-material amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1 and the requirement for SEA is screened out.</p>	<p>No likely significant environmental effects on European sites arise as a result of this non-material amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1</p> <p>The requirement for Stage 2 AA is screened out.</p>
Text changes to 2.14.2 Objectives (Page 9 &10 of 12)	<p>CS OBJ 3</p> <p>To <del>be guided by</del> <b>ensure the implementation</b> of the population, <del>and</del> housing growth <b>and</b> household allocation set out in the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy, in so far as practicable. Meath County Council will monitor the number of units that are permitted and <b>delivered</b> <del>under construction/built</del> as part of the implementation of this objective, <b>in compliance with the Development Plan Guidelines 2022.</b></p>	<p>Having regard to the criteria set in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, no likely significant environmental effects arise as a result of this non-material amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1 and the requirement for SEA is screened out.</p>	<p>No likely significant environmental effects on European sites arise as a result of this non-material amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1</p> <p>The requirement for Stage 2 AA is screened out.</p>

Section of the Variation document	Revised Text	Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA)
<p>Amendment No. 3 – Reallocation of residential units (Page 10 &amp; 11 of 12)</p>	<p>In Variation No. 1, it is proposed to re-allocate these units to larger Settlements in <del>Tier 1 – 5</del> Tier 3 – 4 in accordance with the CDP growth and settlement strategy and to ensure full utilisation of existing infrastructure and resources in the County.</p> <div style="background-color: #f4a460; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><i>Settlement Additional Household Allocation 2020-2027</i></p> </div> <div style="background-color: #fff9c4; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>Settlement Tiers 781* 3-4 Tiers 1-5</i></p> </div>	<p>Having regard to the criteria set in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, no likely significant environmental effects arise as a result of this amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1 and the requirement for SEA is screened out.</p>	<p>No likely significant environmental effects on European sites arise as a result of this amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1</p> <p>The requirement for Stage 2 AA is screened out.</p>
	<p><b>Insert New Objective</b> <i>CS OBJ 3A: The 781 residential units shall only be applied to <del>Tier 1 to 5</del> Tier 3 to 4 Settlements where there is a demonstrated demand for housing and sufficient supporting services available including access to employment, public transport, water/wastewater, commercial/retail services and social infrastructure. This will be</i></p>	<p>Having regard to the criteria set in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, no likely significant environmental effects arise as a result of this amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1 and the requirement for SEA is screened out.</p>	<p>No likely significant environmental effects on European sites arise as a result of this amendment to the text in the Variation No. 1</p> <p>The requirement for Stage 2 AA is screened out.</p>

Section of the Variation document	Revised Text	Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA)
	<p><i>implemented through the Development Management function, monitored by the Forward Planning Department, and applicable until such time as the National Planning Framework Review is completed and adopted.</i></p>		



## 6 Recommendation on Requirement for SEA

As the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 is a statutory plan, *Variation No. 1* has been screened for the requirement for SEA under the requirements of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011.

Variation No.1 has been considered in respect of the SEA screening criteria set out in Schedule 2A of S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, and the findings are set out in [Section 4](#) of this report. It is considered, on the basis of this exercise, that the implementation of Variation No.1 has no real likelihood of having likely significant negative effects on the environment.

The Screening for Appropriate Assessment (BSM, 2024) has concluded that-

*“...the Variation No.1 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, individually or in combination with another plan or project, is not likely to have a significant effect on European sites under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) in light of their conservation objectives. The Variation does not require an Appropriate Assessment and the preparation of a Natura Impact Report.”*

In accordance with the requirements of S.I. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011, and Article 13K(3) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, Meath County Council did give notice to the environmental authorities, specified in Article 13A(4) of the 2001 Regulations, that Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

It is therefore recommended that the competent authority reach a determination that **Variation No.1 is not likely to have significant negative effects on the environment and, therefore, SEA is not required.**

## 7 References

*Council Directive Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.*

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2022). *Development Plans – Guidelines for Planning Authorities*

Environment Director General of the European Commission (2003). *Implementation of Directive 2001/42 on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.*

EPA (2024). *EPA Maps.*

EPA (2023b). *SEA of Local Authority Land-Use Plans – EPA Recommendations and Resources.*

EPA (2022). *Spatial Information Resources Inventory.*

EPA (2022). *SEA Pack.*

EPA (2020). *Ireland’s Environment – An Integrated Assessment 2020.*

EPA (2015). *Strategic Environmental Assessment Resource Manual for Planning Authorities – Integration of SEA Legislation with Procedures for Land Use Plans.*

EPA (2008). *SEA Process Checklist* [Consultation Draft 18<sup>th</sup> January 2008].

EPA (2003). *Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland – Synthesis Report.*

*European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No. 435/2004).*

*European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 200/2011).*

*European Parliament and Council Directive 2001/42/EC of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.*

*Government of Ireland (2018). Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework.*

*Government of Ireland (2004). Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment – Guidelines for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities.*

*GSI (2024). Geological Survey of Ireland Map Viewer.*

*OPW (2009). The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities.*

*Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.*

*Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.*

*Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 201/2011).*

*Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004).*

*University College Dublin, AIRO, EPA, OSi, OPR & Geohive (2022). ESM Webtool.*



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