



APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT

**APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED
VARIATION NO. 1 TO MEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013-2019**

MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	3
1.1	Requirement for Appropriate Assessment	3
1.2	Appropriate Assessment Process.....	3
2	Stage 1 Screening.....	5
2.1	Overview of Variation	5
2.2	Description of European Designated sites in the surrounding area	5
2.3	Description of Other Designated sites in the surrounding area	6
2.4	Reasons for Designation, Site Sensitivities and Threats	9
2.5	Other Plans or Projects nearby which may lead to cumulative impacts upon local ecology	9
2.6	Likely Significant Effects from the Variation No 1 on European Sites	10
2.7	Conclusions of Screening Assessment Process	11
3	References.....	12

1 Introduction

1.1 Requirement for Appropriate Assessment

This Screening Report has been prepared by Scott Cawley Ltd. on behalf of Meath County Council. It provides information on and assesses the potential for the proposed Variation to the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, to impact on European sites within the Natura 2000 network. This Appropriate Assessment Screening Report is published alongside the Variation and serves as a documented record of the Appropriate Assessment of the Variation.

The proposed variation refers to changes to text and Objectives within Chapter 2 “Core Strategy”.

The preparation of the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report adopted a similar methodology, described within the Natura Impact Statement of the adopted Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, Volume IV and used similar data sources.

The preparation of the Report has had regard to Article 6 of the *Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora* (as amended) (hereafter referred to as the Habitats Directive). This is transposed in Ireland primarily by Part XAB of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. 477) (hereafter referred to as the Habitats Regulations).

This Screening Report is the documented record of the screening of the proposed Variation to the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019.

1.2 Appropriate Assessment Process

The preparation of the Variation has had regard to Article 6 of the *Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora* (as amended) (hereafter referred to as the Habitats Directive). This is transposed in Ireland primarily by Part XAB of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. 477) (hereafter referred to as the Habitats Regulations).

The AA Screening process took account of guidance contained in the following documents:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities. (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision).
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10.
- Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission Environment Directorate-General, 2001); hereafter referred to as the EC Article 6 Guidance Document. The guidance within this document provides a non-mandatory methodology for carrying out assessments required under Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive.
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat’s Directive 92/43/EEC (EC Environment Directorate-General, 2000); hereafter referred to as MN2000.

- Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC. Clarification of the Concepts of Alternative Solutions, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence. Opinion of the European Commission (European Commission, January 2007).
- Guidelines for Good Practice Appropriate Assessment of Plans Under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive (International Workshop on Assessment of Plans under the Habitats Directive, 2011).

Meath County Council provided the Appropriate Assessment team with a draft written statement of the Variation for the screening process. The results of the AA Screening of the Variation to the Core Strategy are provided in Section 2 of this report.

2 Stage 1 Screening

2.1 Overview of Variation

The Core Strategy of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 included proposals to reduce the number of LAPs in place in the County, from 40 at present (including individual and grouped urban centres) to six in total. 29 centres are to be incorporated into the County Development Plan which will replace the LAPs for these centres, each of which will be subsequently revoked.

To assist this process, the Variation proposes to firstly introduce land use zonings for these centres into the County Development Plan.. For the 29 centres, detailed objectives and land use zoning objectives will be incorporated into the County Development Plan ensuring that such objectives are consistent with the County Development Plan. Subsequently the LAPs relating to these centres will be revoked.

The proposed Variation notes that it is the intention of Meath County Council to include all lands which have the benefit of an extant planning permission for multiple unit residential developments as part of the lands identified for release for residential purposes, within the life of this County Development Plan.

The proposed Variation proposes to make amendments to the following Objectives in the Core Strategy:

- enable development objectives for particular centre to be incorporated into the County Development Plan (CS OBJ 1);
- publish a variation to the CDP within a year to introduce land use zonings objectives and to create an order of priority for the release of lands for Ashbourne, Drogheda Environs, Dunboyne/Clonee/Pace, Dunshaughlin and Ratoath. Following this Meath County Council will publish amendments to the to the Local Area Plans of Ashbourne, Drogheda Environs, Dunboyne/Clonee/Pace, Dunshaughlin and Ratoath to ensure that they are consistent with the Development Plan, as varied (CS OBJ 2);
- revoke the Local Area Plans for which detailed development and zoning objectives have been incorporated into the County Development Plan (CS OBJ 3);
- publish a variation to the Navan Development Plan to ensure it is consistent, within one year of the adoption of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 (CS OBJ 4);
- allow the land use zoning objectives map to determine whether or not lands with residential land use zoning objectives with extant planning permissions or those commitments which do not receive an extension of the appropriate period as per the Planning and Development Act are to be identified for release as part of any phasing arrangement having regard to guidance in Section 2.3.4 (CS OBJ 6);
- enable Meath County Council to prepare a new LAP for Bettystown/Laytown/Mornington East/ Donacarney/Mornington within one year of the adoption of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 (CS OBJ 8).

2.2 Description of European Sites in the surrounding area

In accordance with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government guidance (DoEHLG, 2010), an initial distance of 15km from the boundary of County Meath was selected for consideration of European Sites. This distance was deemed to be sufficient to cover all likely significant effects which may arise from the implementation of the Variation on European Sites. Spatial boundary data on the European network was extracted from the NPWS website.

All European sites which fall within 15km of County Meath are listed in Table A1, Appendix A and illustrated in Figure 2a of the Meath County Development Plan Natura Impact Report, Volume IV. In order to identify those sites that could be potentially affected, it was necessary to describe the European Sites in the context of why it has been designated (its “Qualifying Interests”) and the environmental and ecological conditions that maintain the condition of these features. The Qualifying Interests and threats to the sites were extracted from the NPWS website database (www.npws.ie) in 2012 and 2013 as part of the AA of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019. The underpinning conditions that are required to maintain the ‘health’ of these features are listed in this table. Reference should be made to Appendix A to guide the reader. All Natura 2000 sites which fall within 15km of the County boundary are listed in Table 1, Volume IV and duplicated below in Table 1. These sites are also displayed in Figure 2a, Volume IV of the NIS.

Table 1 European Designated Sites within County Meath and within 15km buffer zone	
Sites within County Meath	
Candidate Special Areas of Conservation	Special Protection Areas
Boyne Coast and Estuary	Boyne Estuary
River Boyne and Blackwater	River Nanny Estuary and Shore
Rye Water Valley / Carton	Lough Sheelin
Mount Hevey Bog	River Boyne and Blackwater
White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo	
Lough Bane and Lough Glass	
Killyconny Bog (Cloughbally)	
Monybeg and Clareisland Bogs	
Within 15km Buffer Zone of County Meath	
Candidate Special Areas of Conservation	Special Protection Areas
Ardagullion Bog	Stabannan Braganstown
Garriskil Bog	North Bull Island
Lough Lene	(South Dublin Bay) Sandymount Strand / River Tolka Estuary
Lough Ennell	Baldoyle Bay
Raheenmore Bog	Rogerstown Estuary
The Long Derries, Edenderry	Skerries Islands
Ballynafagh Bog	(Malahide Estuary) Broadmeadow / Swords Estuary
Ballynafagh Lake	Dundalk Bay
North Dublin Bay	Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough
Baldoyle Bay	Garriskill Bog
Malahide Estuary	Lough Derraghvarragh
Rogerstown Estuary	Lough Ennell
Clogher Head	Rockabill
Dundalk Bay	

2.3 Description of Other Designated sites in the surrounding area

In addition to examining European Sites, the Screening process also examined national-level and other designated sites which fall within 15km of the Draft LAP boundary. Although Natural

Heritage Areas (NHAs) and proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHA) and other designated sites such as Nature Reserves, Wildfowl Sanctuaries and Ramsar sites (although the latter normally overlap with SPA's) do not form part of the Natura 2000 Network, they often provide an important supporting role to the network, particularly when it comes to fauna species which often do not obey site boundaries. Article 10 of the Habitats Directive and the Habitats Regulations 2011 places a high degree of importance on such non-Natura 2000 areas as features that connect the Natura 2000 network. For example, a pNHA/NHA that provides regular feeding grounds for a population of Golden Plover for which a separate site is designated as an SPA plays a role in the maintenance of the species at favourable conservation status for that SPA. In other words, in that example, in order to protect the European network it may also be important to protect the pNHA /NHA which provides a supporting role to it. There are however, NHAs and pNHAs that are designated for features that are not important at an international level and may not interact with the Natura 2000 network. Table 2 lists the non-European Sites illustrated in conjunction with national and international sites in Figure 2b, Volume IV of the NIS.

Table 2 Proposed Natural Heritage Areas, Nature Reserves and Wildfowl Sanctuaries within County Meath and within 15km buffer zone	
Sites within County Meath	
Proposed Natural Heritage Areas	Natural Heritage Areas
Ballyhoe Lough	Girley Bog
Ballynabarny Fen	Jamestown Bog
Balrath Woods	Molerick Bog
Boyne Coast and Estuary	
Boyne River Islands	
Boyne Woods	
Breaky Loughs	
Corstown Loughs	
Crewbane Marsh	
Cromwells Bush Fen	
Dowth Wetland	
Duleek Commons	
Kilconny Bog (Cloghbally)	
Laytown Dunes / Nanny Estuary	
Lough Naneagh	
Lough Sheelin	
Lough Shesk	
Mentrim Lough	
Mount Hevey Bog	
Rathmoylan Esker	
Rossnaree Riverbank	
Royal Canal	
Rye Water Valley / Carton	
Slane Riverbank	
Thomastown Bog	
Trim Wetlands	
White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo	
Sites within County Meath	
Aghalasty Fen	Black Castle Bog

Ardagullion Bog NHA	Carbury Bog
Ardee Cutaway Bog	Cloncrow Bog (New Forest)
Baldoyle Bay	Hodgestown Bog
Baldoyle Bay	Lough Derravaragh
Ballina Bog	Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough
Ballynafagh Bog	Milltownpass Bog
Ballynafagh Lake	Skerries Islands
Barmeath Woods	Wooddown Bog
Blackhall Woods	
Bog of the Ring	
Castlecoo Hill	
Clogher Head	
Creevy Lough	
Darver Castle Woods	
Dodder Valley	
Donadea Wood	
Drumcah, Toprass and Cortial Loughs	
Dunany Point	
Dundalk Bay	
Feltrim Hill	
Garriskil Bog	
Grand Canal	
Hill of Mael and Rock of Curry	
Kildemock Marsh	
King William's Glen	
Knock Lake	
Liffey Valley	
Lough Bane	
Lough Ennell	
Lough Fea Demesne	
Lough Glore	
Lough Gowna	
Lough Naglack	
Lough Ramor	
Lough Sheever Fen / Slevin's Lough Complex	
Loughshinny Coast	
Louth Hall and Ardee Woods	
Lugmore Glen	
Malahide Estuary	
Mellifont Abbey Woods	
Monalty Lough	
Mount Hevey Bog	
Nafarty Fen	
North Dublin Bay	
Portrane Shore	
Raheenmore Bog	
Reaghstown Marsh	
Rockabill Island	
Rogerstown Estuary	
Santry Demense	

Slade of Saggart and Crooksling Glen	
Sluice River Marsh	
Spring and Corcrin Loughs	
Stabbanan-Braganstown	
Stephenstown Pond	
The Long Derries, Edenderry	

2.4 Reasons for Designation, Site Sensitivities and Threats

In order to identify those European Sites that could potentially be affected, it was necessary to describe each European Site in the context of why it has been designated (its “Qualifying Interests”) and the environmental and ecological conditions that maintain the condition of these features. The Qualifying Interests and threats to the sites were extracted from the NPWS website database (www.npws.ie, 2012) and Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland (NPWS, 2007). Threats to sites were also scoped during informal consultation and meetings with NPWS staff during 2012 as part of the Appropriate Assessment of the County Development Plan.

The results of this desktop exercise were presented in Appendix A, Volume IV (NIR) of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019. This table provided details on the European Sites within 15km of the Variation (as listed above in Table 2), their qualifying interests for European Sites, key environmental conditions supporting each qualifying interest and key threats to each qualifying interest. The key output of this stage was the identification of the types of threats to the integrity of the European Sites. These were then be related to the consequences of implementing the proposed Variation to see if there is a risk of any likely significant effects.

2.5 Other Plans or Projects nearby which may lead to cumulative impacts upon local ecology

The E.C. Habitats Directive and the Irish Habitats Regulations 2011 require that the impacts on Natura 2000 sites be assessed from the plan or project in question and also in the presence of other plans and projects that could affect the same Natura 2000 sites. Projects and/or plans that have potential to act in combination with the Variation and potentially result in adverse impacts on European Sites are listed below. This Section identifies if these plans/projects have undergone an Appropriate Assessment themselves as it is assumed that if a plan/project has been adopted following an AA then it cannot pose likely significant adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites.

The identification of in-combination impacts focused on the following other plans and projects.

- Eastern River Basin District Management Plan (2009-2015)

The Eastern River Basin District covers a large portion of County Meath. The Article 6 Assessment notes the implementation of the Programme of Measures are overall highly desirable in order to protect, improve or maintain the current conservation status of many of Irelands Natura 2000/Ramsar sites, and the consequences of not implementing the measures to achieve ‘good status’ under the WFD would have a far more significant effect on these sites. The report however recommends that screening for potential impacts under the Habitats Directive Article 6 process is put in place once the details of the implementation of the Programme of Measures under the Draft RBMP are known, so as to ensure no ‘in combination’ effects with other Plans and Programmes at the time of implementation.

- Neagh Bann International River Basin District Management Plan (2009-2015)

This international River Basin District covers the north-eastern edge of Meath County. A review of the Article 6 Assessment indicated that the Measures proposed within the Plan are

consistent with the mitigation policies within the County Development Plan in a similar manner to the ERBDMP.

- Shannon International River Basin District Management Plan (2009-2015)

The SIRBD is the largest river basin district in Ireland, comprising a land area of approximately 18,000 km² and includes an extensive area of central Ireland, from its source in County Cavan to the mouth of the Shannon Estuary. It drains only a small part of the County, containing Oldcastle town. Article 6 Assessment indicated that the Measures proposed within the Plan are consistent with the mitigation policies within the County Development Plan in a similar manner to the ERBDMP. There is no significant risk of in-combination effects. The Article 6 Appropriate Assessment notes screening of programmes of measures are recommended once the details are known to avoid any in-combination effects.

- Heritage Capital- Marketing Tourism in Meath 2005 – 2010

Whilst the Strategy does not appear to have undergone any AA, there are several recommendations that overlap with protective Policies in the Meath County Development Plan. It is noted that this Strategy was prepared in the peak of the Celtic Tiger era and that pressures to develop hotel and leisure developments are no longer viable. Such developments could have posed a conflict with the protection of some Natura 2000 sites.

- Fingal and East Meath Flood Risk Assessment and Management Study SEA Environmental Report (2011)

This strategic analysis of flood risk and relief options identified potential for impacts on the River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA and Boyne Estuary SPA as a result of embankment proposals at Laytown/Bettystown. It was recommended that the timing of the proposed works on the River Nanny Estuary take place between April and August to avoid the main bird migration and wintering period; the reduction of noise by using appropriate construction methods; and the setting back of the flood defences and road, or the creation of new intertidal habitat to mitigate for habitat likely to be lost through coastal squeeze.

- National Cycle Network Application no.1; Phase I of the Drogheda, Navan, Trim Cycleway

Funding was sought for Phase I of this project which stretches from Drogheda Ramparts to Oldbridge entrance (Battle of the Boyne site). The extent of the full route is from Drogheda, via Slane, Navan and Trim and connecting into the Dublin to Galway corridor at Enfield. Works on this project were to commence this year on the Drogheda to Slane section of the cycling route along the River Boyne (<http://www.meathchronicle.ie/news/roundup/articles/2013/02/12/4014414-25-million-for-transport-projects/> : July 2013). Meath County Council website notes that the development has been the subject of an Appropriate Assessment screening <http://www.meath.ie/CountyCouncil/NewsandEvents/Name,51599,en.html>; July 2013).

An analysis of the surrounding County Development Plans was undertaken as part of the Appropriate Assessment for the Meath County Development Plan, the Report of which can be viewed in Volume IV and therefore not repeated here. No potential in-combination impacts are envisaged.

2.6 Likely Significant Effects from the Variation No 1 on European Sites

This section documents the final stage of the Screening process. It used the information collected on the sensitivity of the qualifying interests of each European site and describes any likely significant effects of implementation the Enabling Variation.

The proposed Variation included revisions to seven of the nine objectives, each of which were screened for potential significant impact, alone and/or in combination with other plans or projects on the European Sites listed in Table 1.

“Protective policies” of the Meath County Development Plan, as described in Table 8 of the NIR contained within Volume IV of the County Development Plan, act cumulatively to protect the individual Natura 2000 sites. This list identified those that address specific sensitivities of European Sites. The revisions proposed as part of the Variation were therefore screened in the context that these protective policies would be implemented as required by the adopted CDP.

Assuming that these policies were implemented fully, no likely significant adverse impacts were identified on any of the European Sites listed in Table 1.

2.7 Conclusions of Screening Assessment Process

The proposed Variation was screened for potential significant adverse impacts on European Sites in County Meath and within 15km of the County boundary. This was determined by assessing the potential for significant impacts on the qualifying interests. It was considered that significant adverse impacts would not be likely due to the benign nature of the Variation and the protective policies engrained within Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, (as listed in Table 8 of the NIR), Volume IV. No further assessment is required.

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