



Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Longford Town Local Transport Plan Scoping Report

Longford County Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

June 2023

Version	Status	Prepared	Checked	Approved	Date
1	Draft Screening and Scoping Report (issued to client for review)	M Andrew M Mc Ginley	N James	N James	25 January 2023
2	Draft Final Screening and Scoping Report (issued for consultation)	M Mc Ginley	N James	N James	10 February 2023
3	Final Scoping Report – Published on Council website	M Andrew	M Mc Ginley	N James	16 March 2023
4	Final Scoping Report – Updated to include EPA consultation response received 30 May 23 – Published on Council website	M Mc Ginley	N James	N James	30 June 2023



Land Use Consultants Limited

Registered in England. Registered number 2549296. Registered office: 250 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8RD. Printed on 100% recycled paper

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Longford County Council (hereafter referred to as 'LCC' or 'the Council') commissioned LUC to undertake the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Longford Town Local Transport Plan (LTP).

1.2 The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process is a requirement of the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC **[See reference 1]** which requires that an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes (P/P), including land-use plans, which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. The purpose of SEA, as defined in Article 1 of the SEA 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...with a view to promoting sustainable development'*.

1.3 In Ireland, the SEA Directive has been transposed into national legislation through:

- S.I. No. 435 of 2004 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 **[See reference 2]**, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) **[See reference 3]** (i.e. the SEA Regulations).
- S.I. No. 436 of 2004 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 **[See reference 4]**, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) **[See reference 5]**.

1.4 SEA comprises the following principal stages:

- **Stage 1: Screening:** Determine whether the P/P is likely to result in significant environmental effects.
 - If the P/P falls within the remit of the SEA Regulations and/or there is uncertainty about whether it may give rise to significant effects, SEA Scoping will be required.
 - If the P/P does not fall within the remit of the SEA Regulations, SEA will not be required.
- **Stage 2: Scoping (current stage):** Consultation with the Environmental Authorities on the scope and level of detail to be considered in the assessment of the P/P.
- **Stage 3: Draft Environmental Report:** An assessment of the likely significant impacts on the environment as a result of the P/P.
- **Stage 4: Consultation on the draft Environmental Report.**
- **Stage 5: Addendum Environmental Report:** Evaluation of the submissions and observations made on the draft Environmental Report. A screening assessment of the alterations to the P/P, where proposed, would be undertaken to determine their likely significant effects. If likely significant effects are identified, an Addendum Environmental Report will be prepared.
- **Stage 6: Consultation on the Addendum Environmental Report.**
- **Stage 7: Final Environmental Report:** Preparation of a Final Environmental Report that is consistent with the finalised P/P.
- **Stage 8: SEA Statement:** Identifying how environmental considerations and consultation responses have been integrated into the final P/P.

1.5 The objective of this SEA is to ensure that the environmental effects of the Longford Town LTP are identified during its development, providing the opportunity for negative environmental effects to be avoided, mitigated or compensated and for positive environmental effects to be enhanced, where

opportunities arise. In this way, environmental considerations can be integrated into the preparation of the Longford Town LTP.

1.6 The purpose of this Scoping Report is to provide context for, and determine the scope of, the SEA of the and to set out the assessment framework for undertaking the later stages of the SEA.

Description of the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

Context for the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

1.7 County Longford is located in the Midlands of Ireland within the administrative boundary of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. It is bordered by County Westmeath (south and east), Leitrim (north-west), Roscommon (west), and Cavan (north-east). Longford Town is in the centre of the county and is the principal town of the county, with established employment areas and substantial administrative and retail functions. The plan area is shown in **Figure 1.1**.

1.8 Given its Midlands location, County Longford is strategically positioned as a portal to the Northern and Western Region, with the county well served by transport links in the form of the Dublin to Sligo rail line, and several strategic roads which traverse the county, including the N4 and N5, both of which are components of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) Comprehensive Network. This high degree of accessibility has helped retain and enhance a range of enterprises within the County, as well as attract new businesses and industries to the locality.

1.9 Longford Town has a compact and walkable centre with a distinct layout, built heritage and strong identity. The industrial, administrative, transportation and military history of the town is reflected in this identity through the Camlin River, Royal Canal, Connolly Barracks and St. Mel's College and Cathedral.

Background to the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

1.10 The current Longford County Development Plan (CDP) [\[See reference 6\]](#) came into effect on 30th November 2021. The CDP sets out the statutory framework for land-use planning and sustainable development for the six-year period between 2021 and 2027. County Policy Objective (CPO) 4.9 of the CDP states that the Council will prepare and implement a Local Area Plan (LAP) for Longford Town within two years from the adoption of the Longford CDP 2021-2027. The LAP will be informed by a LTP to be prepared for Longford Town.

1.11 The LTP for Longford Town aims to establish a strategic framework for the future development of transport infrastructure within Longford Town and its environs. The function of the LTP is to enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within Longford Town centre, by improving links between the core and surrounding areas through the further integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities.

Scope and content of the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

1.12 The LTP for Longford Town establishes a strategic framework for the future development of transport infrastructure within Longford Town and its environs. The function of the LTP is to enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within Longford Town centre, by improving links between the core and

surrounding areas through the further integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities. The Longford Town LTP does not contain any policies.

1.13 The Vision for the Longford LTP is *“to ensure that Longford is an attractive place to live, work and visit through the appropriate integration of transport and land use, with a primary focus on ease of access for all by sustainable transport”* (p.27).

1.14 The Vision for Longford Town is supported by nine principles and eight objectives that guide the strategies set out in the document. The principles of the Longford Town LTP are:

- **Integrated transport planning, land use, and urban design:** Adopt an approach where transport decisions are also focused on the image, liveability, safety and cohesion of Longford.
- **People first:** Prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport before private vehicle.
- **Maintaining and enhancing connectivity:** Maintain and enhance the capacity of the strategic rail and bus network.
- **Safe streets:** Ensure streets are safe for all users by reducing speeds, providing safe crossings and dedicated infrastructure.
- **Value for money:** Ensure proposals are assessed on their cost and ease of implementation.
- **Vibrant and great for business:** Design streets to enhance businesses in Longford and maximise street life both day and night.
- **Efficient:** Reallocate street space as efficiently as possible to optimise other functions such as footpaths, outdoor dining and furniture.

Guided by the principles above, the LTP identifies eight objectives to form an integrated strategy for the town. These are to:

- improve permeability;

- improve active travel;
- encourage public transport use;
- integrate existing and future land use and transport networks;
- utilise existing on-street parking zones to improve the public realm and provide other functions (e.g. wider footpath, cycle parking, outdoor dining, new trees/planting);
- improve and enhance safety for all;
- reduce through traffic; and
- provide good value for money.

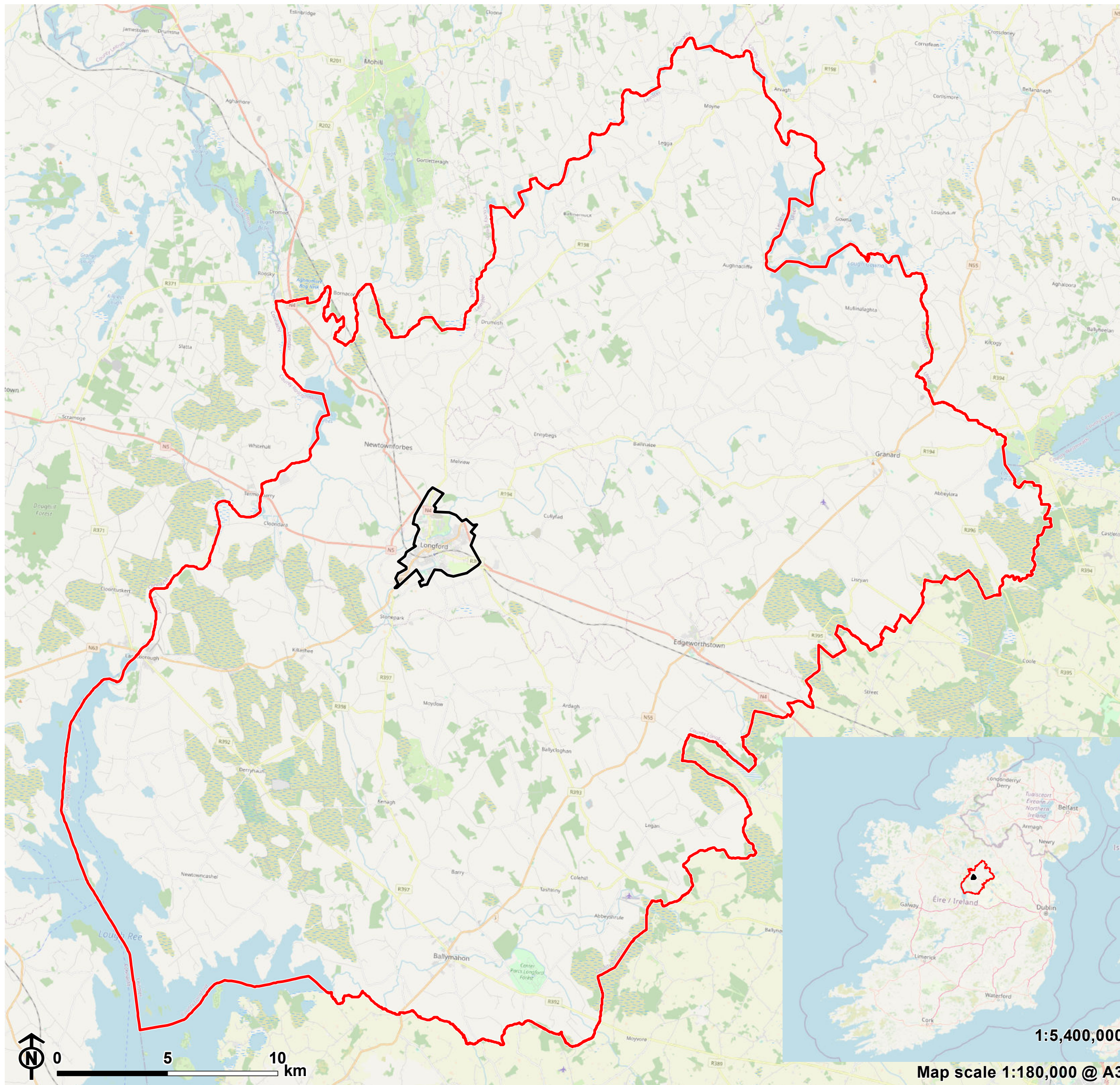
1.15 Based on the Vision, principles and objectives above, the Longford Town LTP sets out a number of focused transport strategies that provide detail about proposed interventions. These include strategies for walking, cycling, permeability, public transport, traffic management, car parking, feasibility and value for money, and an access strategy for Abbeycarton. The LTP also sets out maps of proposed schemes in relation to each of the transport strategies, an assessment of the proposed schemes, and a plan for implementation of the LTP.

Stage of the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

1.16 Arup is currently preparing the Longford Town LTP on behalf of Longford County Council. It is anticipated that the Draft LTP will be published for public consultation by the Council in July 2023. The submissions and observations received during the public consultation period will be reviewed and considered by the Council during the finalisation of the LTP. Depending on the scale and nature of changes to the Draft LTP, a revised version of the LTP may be published for public consultation. It is expected that the LTP will be adopted in autumn/winter 2023.

Figure 1.1: Location

- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area



Strategic Environmental Assessment

Stages in the SEA process

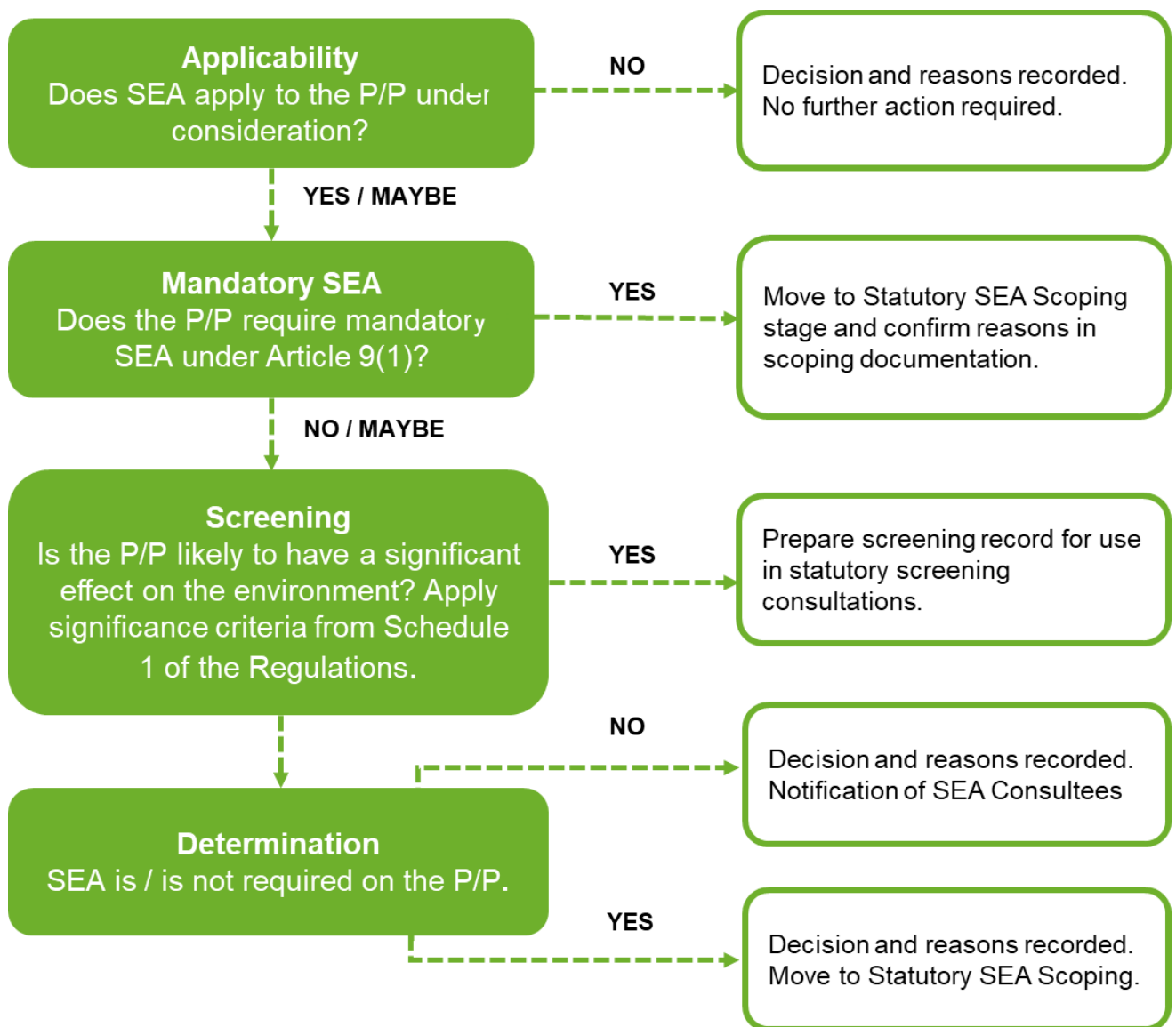
Stage 1: Screening

1.17 In deciding whether the Longford Town LTP is likely to have significant environmental effects, regard must be had to the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive, as also set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. The Screening process comprises three principal steps – applicability, screening and determination:

- **Step 1: Applicability:** To determine if the LTP falls within the scope of the SEA Directive and transposing legislation.
- **Step 2: Screening:** Should the LTP fall within the scope of the SEA Directive and transposing legislation, the next stage in the Screening assessment is to determine the characteristics of the LTP and to identify whether it may give rise to significant effects.
- **Step 3: Determination:** A determination should be made as to whether SEA is required or not. Following consultation with the Environmental Authorities, a final determination on the need for SEA will be made. The decision should be made available on the Council's website for public inspection and a copy of the final determination sent to the SEA Environmental Authorities.

1.18 **Figure 1.2** illustrates the SEA Screening methodology, as adapted from the Environmental Protection Agency's 2021 Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening [[See reference 7](#)].

Figure 1.2: SEA screening methodology



1.19 The Environmental Authorities defined in Article 9(5) of the SEA Regulations [See reference 8], as amended, are:

- Environmental Protection Agency.
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
- Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications.
- Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

1.20 The Draft Screening Report (combined with the Scoping Report) was issued to the Environmental Authorities for a four-week consultation period between 13th February and 13th March 2023. Two responses were received from Geological Survey Ireland and the Environmental Protection Agency (see **Appendix B**).

The final determination on the need for SEA of the Longford Town LTP, based on the review against the environmental significance criteria as set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive and consultation feedback from the Environmental Authorities, is that **SEA is required** as the purpose of the Longford Town LTP is to set a multi-modal framework to inform future transport infrastructure planning, investment and delivery in Longford Town. This will result in both positive and negative effects which could combine to result in cumulative effects. The LTP will also inform other plans, most notably the Longford Town LAP, however, this will be subject to a separate SEA and AA.

Stage 2: Scoping

1.21 The Scoping Report is required to provide information for consideration in respect of the requisite content of the SEA. It is obligatory to conduct the scoping stage of an SEA such that the content and boundaries for the SEA are agreed prior to commencement of the Environmental Report.

1.22 The main stages in carrying out scoping are as follows:

- Identifying plans, programmes, and environmental objectives of relevance to the LTP.
- Scoping of SEA Topics **[See reference 9]** relevant to the LTP.
- Identifying geographic, temporal and transboundary scope of the LTP.

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- Collecting baseline information.
- Identifying sustainability issues and problems.
- Developing the Environmental Protection Objectives (EPO) Framework comprising environmental objectives, indicators and targets to allow the evaluation of impacts on the environment.
- Consulting on the scope of the SEA.

1.23 In accordance with Article 11 of the SEA Regulations, the competent authority preparing the Longford Town LTP, in this case Longford County Council, is required to consult with consultation bodies on the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the Environmental Report. The Draft Scoping Report (combined with the Screening Report) was issued to the Environmental Authorities for a four-week consultation period between 13th February and 13th March 2023. Two responses were received from Geological Survey Ireland and the Environmental Protection Agency (see **Appendix B**). This report has been subsequently updated to take account of the submissions received from the Environmental Authorities.

Stage 3: Draft Environmental Report

1.24 Following the Scoping Report stage, the process will move onto the next stage where the Environmental Report (ER) of the LTP will be compiled, in line with the completed Scoping Report. The Draft ER will contain the findings of the assessment of the likely significant effects on the environment resulting from implementation of the Longford Town LTP. It will reflect the requirements of the SEA Directive and the transposed SEA Regulations.

1.25 The ER will be structured as follows:

- An outline of the LTP and its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.
- The environmental characteristics of the study area, including any problems and issues identified and their likely evolution without the LTP.

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- Key environmental policy objectives set at the international, national and local levels that are relevant to the LTP.
- The EPO Framework and the criteria used to make judgements about the effects of the LTP.
- The likely significant effects of the LTP and reasonable alternative options appraised against each of the objectives in the EPO Framework, taking into account mitigation.
- An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives and a description of any difficulties encountered during the assessment process, including data limitations.
- How consultation comments have been taken into account.
- Proposed monitoring framework for significant effects identified (including uncertain effects where these could become significant).
- Appendices, including the consultation responses tables, and SEA matrices.

1.26 The ER will clearly set out the SEA conclusions for the LTP, highlighting any likely significant effects, and would make any recommendations for mitigating potential negative effects identified. The assessment of significant effects will include likely secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short-medium-long term, permanent, temporary, positive and negative effects, as well as the interrelationships between each SEA topic, as set out in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations. The ER will be accompanied by a Non-Technical Summary document.

Stage 4: Consultation on the Draft Environmental Report

1.27 Public consultation will be carried out on the Draft Environmental Report for a four-week period from July 2023. The Draft Environmental Report and

associated Non-Technical Summary will be published on Longford County Council's website for consultation during this period.

Stage 5: Addendum Environmental Report

1.28 The submissions and observations received during the public consultation period will be reviewed and considered during the finalisation of the LTP. A screening assessment of the alterations to the LTP, where proposed, will be undertaken to determine their likely significant effects. If likely significant effects are identified, an Addendum Environmental Report will be prepared. If there are no further alterations to the LTP, a Final Environmental Report will be prepared and made available on the Council's website.

Stage 6: Consultation on the Addendum Environmental Report

1.29 Public consultation will be carried out on the Addendum ER and revised LTP for a four-week period in late summer 2023, if necessary.

Stage 7: Final Environmental Report

1.30 A Final Environmental Report and accompanying Non-Technical Summary will be prepared that is consistent with the finalised LTP and will be made available on the Council's website.

Stage 8: SEA Statement

1.31 An SEA Statement will be prepared identifying how each of the requirements in articles 16 and 17 of the SEA Regulations have been met

during the SEA process. The finalised SEA Statement will be published after the Council adopts the LTP.

SEA guidance documents

1.32 The following principal sources of guidance will be used during the overall SEA process and during preparation of the Screening, Scoping and Environmental Reports:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Pack. 2022. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference 10\]](#).
- SEA Spatial Information Sources Inventory. 2022. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference 11\]](#).
- Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening. 2021. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference 12\]](#).
- Good Practice Guidance on Cumulative Effect Assessment in SEA. 2020. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference 13\]](#).
- Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring. 2020. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference 14\]](#).
- Second Review of SEA Effectiveness in Ireland. 2020. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference 15\]](#).
- Integrating Climate Change into Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland - A Guidance Note. 2019. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference 16\]](#).
- GISEA Manual – Improving the Evidence Base in SEA. 2017. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference 17\]](#).
- Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment – Good Practice Guidance. 2015. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference 18\]](#).

- Integrating Biodiversity Impact Assessment: Streamlining AA, SEA and EIA Processes – Practitioner’s Manual. STRIVE Report Series No. 106. 2013. Environmental Protection Agency [See reference 19].
- SEA Process Checklist - Consultation Draft. 2013. Environmental Protection Agency [See reference 20].
- Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment. Guidelines for Regional Planning Authorities. November 2004. Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government [See reference 21].
- Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland. Synthesis Report. 2003. Environmental Protection Agency [See reference 22].

1.33 The SEA has also had regard to the findings of the EPA's 2012 [See reference 23] and 2020 [See reference 24] reviews of SEA effectiveness in Ireland.

Appropriate Assessment

1.34 SEA does not stand alone in environmental assessments of plans and programmes, including the proposed Guidelines. The Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening stage is particularly important as a determination on the need for AA is required before SEA screening can be completed. There is a high level of overlap between the SEA process and the AA process, in particular relating to biodiversity, human health, water, etc (see **Figure 1.3**).

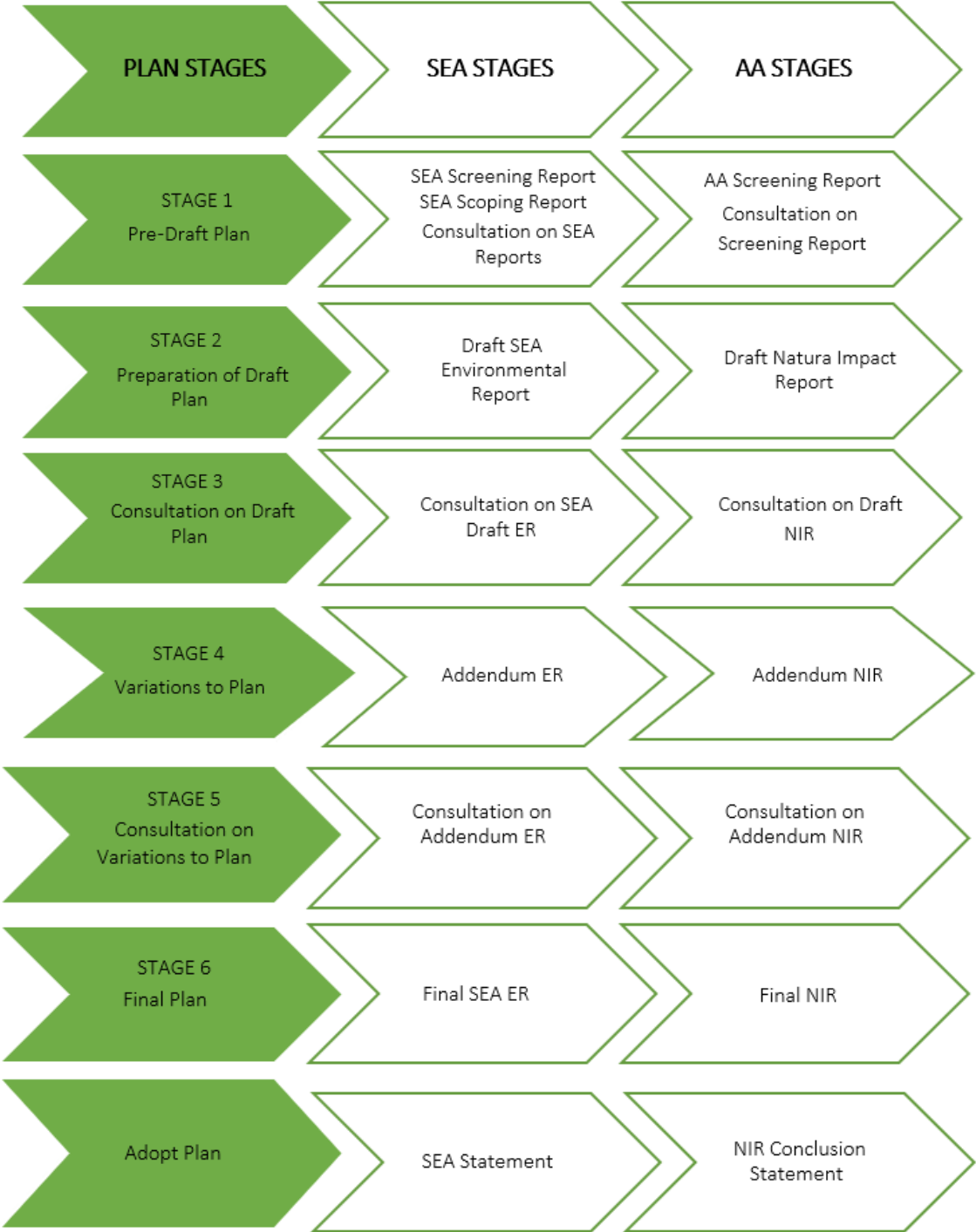
1.35 Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive [See reference 25] is transposed for certain plans in Ireland by S.I. No. 477/2011 (European Communities (Birds and Nature Habitats) Regulations, 2011 [See reference 26], as amended by S.I. No. 293 of 2021) [See reference 27], and Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended [See reference 28].

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1.36 All plans and projects that, either individually or in combination with other plans, are likely to have a significant effect on any site in the Natura 2000 network (i.e., those designated as Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas, collectively referred to as 'European sites'), require an Appropriate Assessment (AA) to determine whether these effects will adversely affect the integrity of these sites. If the effects are deemed to be significant, potentially significant, or uncertain then the plan or project must undergo Stage 2 AA.

1.37 Screening for Appropriate Assessment of the Longford Town LTP was prepared in February 2023. Due to the similar nature and geographical extent of the Longford Town LTP and the County Longford Active Travel Strategy, a combined Screening Report of both plans was prepared. The report concluded that the LTP is outside the definition of a plan for the purposes of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive and therefore does not require AA. However, the process of AA remains applicable at the project level for any new transport project proposed and at the plan level for the making of land use plans, such as masterplans.

Figure 1.3: Links between the SEA, AA and plan preparation process



Requirements of the SEA Regulations

1.38 The relevant sections of this report that are considered to meet the SEA Regulations requirements are signposted below. This information will also be included and updated, as necessary, in the Environmental Report to show how the requirements of the SEA Regulations have been met through the SEA process.

Schedule 2

1.39 The SEA Regulations require the responsible authority to prepare, or secure the preparation of, an 'Environmental Report'. The Environmental Report must identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the P/P and reasonable alternatives, taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the P/P (Article 12). The information required by Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations is set out below, indicating which part(s) of this report provide that information (as outlined above, this information will be updated in the Environmental Report):

- a) An outline of the contents, main objectives of the P/P, and relationship with other relevant P/P.
 - Covered in Chapter 1, Chapter 3 and Appendix A.
- b) The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the P/P.
 - Covered in Chapters 5-13.
- c) The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected.
 - Covered in Chapters 5-13.
- d) Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the P/P including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular

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environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.

- Covered in Chapters 5-13.
- e) The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, European Union or national level, which are relevant to the P/P and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation.
 - Covered in Chapter 3 and Appendix A.
- f) The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects.)
 - Requirement will be addressed in the Environmental Report.
- g) The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme.
 - Requirement will be addressed in the Environmental Report.
- h) An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information.
 - Requirement will be addressed in the Environmental Report.
- i) A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring of the significant environmental effects of implementation of the P/P.
 - Requirement will be addressed in the Environmental Report.
- j) A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.

- Requirement will be addressed in the Environmental Report.

Structure of this report

1.40 This chapter describes the background to the production of the Longford Town LTP and the requirement to undertake SEA. **Chapter 2** describes the scoping of the SEA. **Chapter 3** describes the relationship of the Longford Town LTP with other plans and programmes. **Chapter 4** details the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services that will be taken into account during the SEA of the Longford Town LTP.

1.41 The remainder of the Scoping Report is structured around the SEA topics listed in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations. Each chapter sets out the baseline information for the SEA topic and identifies the key environmental issues for Longford Town relating to that subject area, informed by the preceding policy context and baseline, and sets out their likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP. The subject area chapters are as follows:

- **Chapter 5:** Biodiversity, flora and fauna
- **Chapter 6:** Population and human health
- **Chapter 7:** Climatic factors
- **Chapter 8:** Air
- **Chapter 9:** Soil
- **Chapter 10:** Water
- **Chapter 11:** Cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage
- **Chapter 12:** Landscape
- **Chapter 13:** Material assets

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1.42 SEA Guidance recognises that data gaps will exist but suggests that, where baseline information is unavailable or unsatisfactory, authorities should consider how it will affect their assessments and determine how to improve it for use in the assessment of future plans. Where there are data gaps in the baseline and forthcoming reports, these are highlighted in the text. The collection and analysis of baseline data is regarded as a continual and evolving process, given that information can change or be updated on a regular basis. Relevant baseline information will be updated during the SEA process as and when data is published.

1.43 Chapter 14 sets out the EPO Framework against which the effects of the Longford Town LTP will be assessed and explains how this has been developed. **Chapter 15** outlines the next steps in the SEA process.

1.44 The SEA Regulations also require the interrelationship between the various SEA topics to be addressed. It is acknowledged that many of the environmental topics and SEA objectives overlap and interact. For example, biodiversity is affected by climate change, air pollution and environmental pollution. Human health is also influenced by these topics and by biodiversity itself. In order to minimise repetition, enable assessment and highlight specific effects, the policy review, baseline and EPO Framework are separated by topic, with the information most relevant to that topic included. Significant interactions between different effects on different topic areas will be acknowledged in the Environmental Report.

1.45 The main report is supported by **Appendix A** which details the review of plans and programmes most relevant to the Longford Town LTP. **Appendix B** details the submissions/observations received from the Environmental Authorities during the consultation period.

Chapter 2

Scoping the SEA

Geographical and transboundary scope of the SEA

2.1 The Longford Town LTP covers the town of Longford and its environs and sets a strategic framework for future development of transport infrastructure in the town. The Longford Town LTP will inform the Local Area Plan (LAP) that is being prepared for Longford Town and environs as recommended in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. The focus of the LTP will be meeting the needs of Longford Town however consideration will also be given to the effects beyond the plan area boundary in the wider County Longford area.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the geographical extent of the Longford Town LTP.

Temporal scope of the SEA

2.2 The Longford Town LTP will cover a period up to 2029, in line with the timeframe for the Longford Town LAP. In line with the SEA Regulations, short, medium and long-term impacts (including secondary, cumulative, synergistic, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects) will be considered during the assessment.

2.3 For the purpose of this SEA, the following time frames will be considered:

- The short term will consider the period up to 2024.
- The medium term will consider the period up to 2026.
- The long term will consider the period up to 2029 and beyond.

Environmental scope of the SEA

2.4 In accordance with the SEA Regulations, consideration has been given to whether the environmental effects, both positive and negative, of the Longford Town LTP are likely to be significant. A summary of the potential issues is presented below by environmental topic and whether the SEA topic is scoped in or out for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna

- Potential for loss of functionally linked habitat and fragmentation of the network of biodiversity sites from transport infrastructure developments.
- Potential for additional pressure on biodiversity sites (which may already be under pressure from recreational access and disturbance, pollution, and climate change) from improved accessibility as a result of the Longford Town LTP.
- SEA topic **scoped in** for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Population and human health

- Population growth will place pressure on the transport network.
- COVID-19 has changed work habits as the need to access workplaces is reduced. This may place different demands on transport services for example changes to commuting patterns.
- Potential for the Longford Town LTP to reduce air and/or noise pollution by supporting a modal shift to active travel and public transport within the town.
- SEA topic **scoped in** for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Climatic factors

- The Longford Town LTP provides various opportunities to contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by:
 - reducing the need to travel by diesel and petrol vehicles;
 - accelerating a shift from private car to active transport (walking and cycling);
 - supporting the delivery of electric vehicle charging infrastructure to encourage the use of electric vehicles.
- The Longford Town LTP also provides an opportunity to ensure new transport infrastructure is designed to be resilient to climate change impacts.
- SEA topic **scoped in** for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Air

- Transport is a significant contributor to poor air quality with resultant adverse effects on human health. The Longford Town LTP will have a positive effect on this SEA topic as it seeks to reduce emissions by supporting a modal shift to active travel and public transport.
- SEA topic **scoped in** for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Soil

- Potential pressure from transport infrastructure development may cause an increase in demand for land and result in the loss of valuable soils. There is also potential for contamination of soils from transport developments.
- SEA topic **scoped in** for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Water

- The Longford Town LTP has the potential to negatively affect the water environment as new infrastructure may reduce the area of permeable surfaces resulting in an increase in flood risk.
- The Longford Town LTP also provides an opportunity to ensure new transport infrastructure is designed to be resilient to flood risk.
- SEA topic **scoped in** for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Cultural heritage including architectural heritage

- The Longford Town LTP may negatively affect heritage assets due to loss or damage or setting impacts.
- Archaeological and paleo-archaeological interests could also be at risk from new transport infrastructure development.
- The Longford Town LTP could positively contribute to the rejuvenation of the historic town by enhancing accessibility and sustainable mobility within the town centre and between the core and surrounding areas through the integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities.
- SEA topic **scoped in** for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Landscape

- New transport infrastructure may adversely affect landscape quality, including the character and visual amenity of areas beyond designations.
- SEA topic **scoped in** for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Material assets

- Potential impacts include conflict with other land uses, and the generation of construction waste from new schemes.

Chapter 2 Scoping the SEA

- SEA topic **scoped in** for assessment in the Environmental Report.

Chapter 3

Relationships with other plans

3.1 The proposed Longford Town LTP is greatly influenced by other plans/programmes and by broader environmental objectives. The Longford Town LTP must conform to environmental protection legislation and the environmental objectives established at international, European, and national levels, as well as contributing to the goals of a wider range of other plans and programmes.

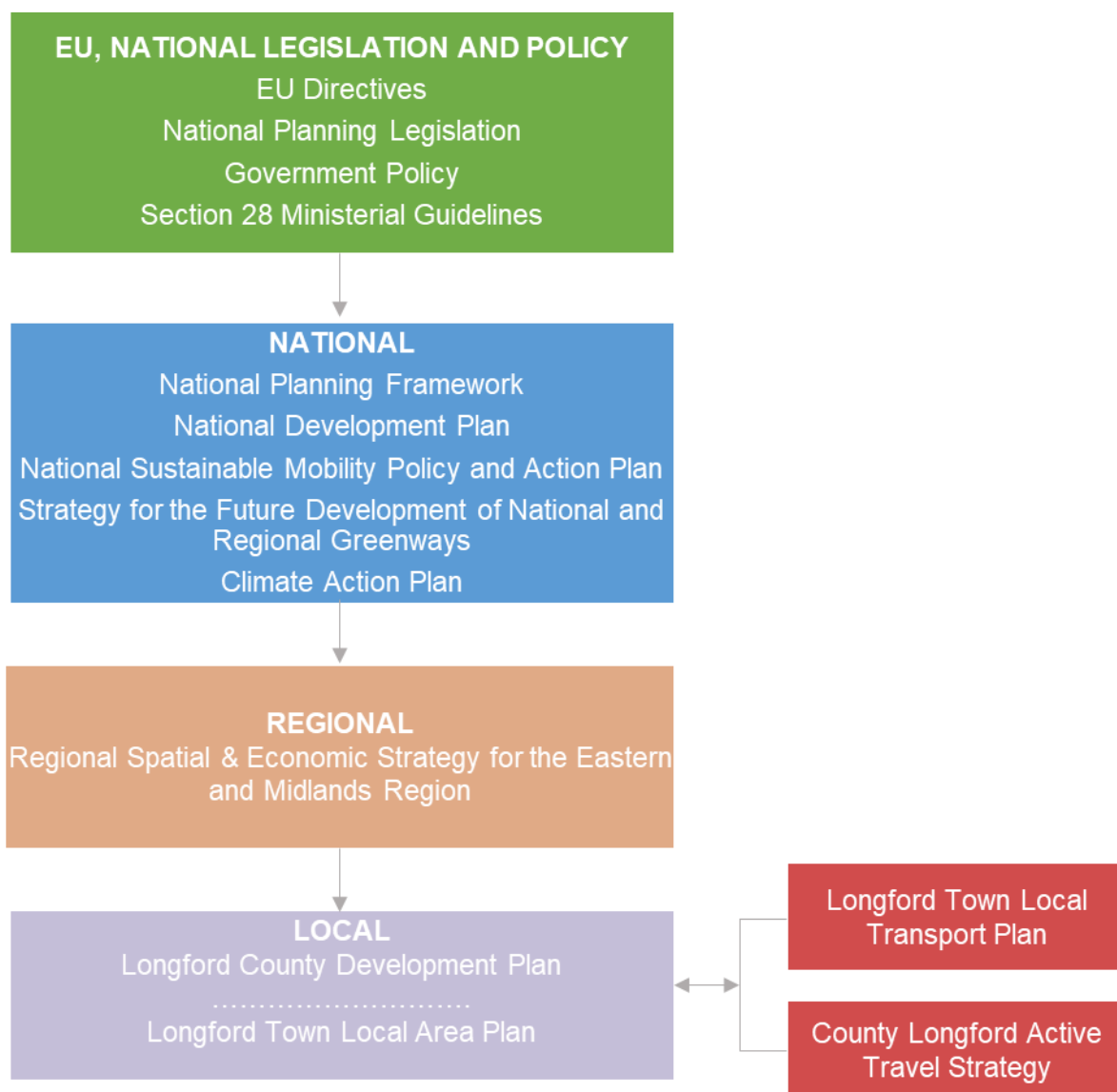
Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations requires, among other things:

- *“an outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan or programme...and relationship with other relevant plans or programmes”;*
and
- *the environmental protection objectives, established at international, European Union or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme...and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation”.*

3.2 A review of the key international, European and national legislation and plans and programmes of relevance to the Longford Town LTP is detailed in **Appendix A**. It should be noted that this Scoping Report has been prepared to be proportionate to the scale and nature of the proposed changes that may result from the implementation of the plan. It is not intended to be a register of all legislation / plans / programmes, but rather an examination of the key environmental protection objectives relevant to the Longford Town LTP. A summary of the most relevant plans / programmes is provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

3.3 Figure 3.1 illustrates the links and inter-relationships between the Longford Town LTP and other key relevant international, national, regional and local plans / programmes.

Figure 3.1: Policy context for the Longford Town Local Transport Plan



Key international plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives

3.4 United Nations Paris Climate Change Agreement (2015) [See reference 29] is the international agreement to keep global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Ireland signed up to the Paris Agreement in 2016. Achieving the goals of the agreement will require an intensive programme of decarbonisation across nations, including within the transport sector, as one of the largest contributors to carbon emissions. The Longford Town LTP supports these goals through measures to encourage modal shift to sustainable modes of travel.

3.5 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) [See reference 30], adopted by all United Nations Member States, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet and includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Relevant to the Longford Town LTP are:

- SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing
- SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
- SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 13: Climate Action.

3.6 At the international level, **Directive 2001/42/EC** [See reference 31] on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (the 'SEA Directive') and **Directive 92/43/EEC** [See reference 32] on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the 'Habitats Directive') are particularly significant as they require SEA and Appropriate Assessment (AA) to be undertaken of certain plans / programmes. These processes should be undertaken iteratively and integrated into the development

Chapter 3 Relationships with other plans

of the LTP in order to ensure that any potential negative environmental effects (including on European-level nature conservation designations) are identified and can be mitigated. There are also several other directives that focus on protecting and conserving the natural environment which are relevant to the Longford Town LTP. These include the **Air Quality Directive [See reference 33]**, the **Water Framework Directive [See reference 34]**, and the **Birds Directive [See reference 35]**.

3.7 The European Green Deal [See reference 36] was published by the European Commission in 2019 and is a roadmap for making the European Union's (EU) economy environmentally sustainable. It outlines the actions and targets needed to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. As an intermediate step towards climate neutrality, the EU has raised its 2030 climate ambition committing to cutting emissions by at least 55% by 2030 which is known as the **Fit for 55 package [See reference 37]**. The EU is working on the revision of its climate, energy and transport-related legislation under the Fit for 55 package in order to align current laws with the 2030 and 2050 ambitions.

3.8 The European Commission subsequently launched its **Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy [See reference 38]** in 2020. It aims to put the EU on the path to creating a sustainable, smart and resilient mobility system and bring about the fundamental changes needed to achieve the objectives of the Green Deal. The strategy is structured around three key objectives – making the European transport system sustainable, smart and resilient. It highlights the importance of making mobility available and affordable for all, that rural and remote regions must remain connected, and that European transport must offer good social conditions to its workers and provide attractive jobs. The strategy sets out a four-year action plan structured around 10 key flagship areas for action. Of particular relevance to the Longford Town LTP are the following flagship aims of the Strategy:

- Flagship 3: Making interurban and urban mobility more sustainable and healthy.
- Flagship 6: Making connected and automated multi-modal mobility a reality.

- Flagship 9: Making mobility fair and just for all.
- Flagship 10: Enhancing transport safety and security.

Key national plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives

Project Ireland 2040

3.9 The Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework (NPF) [See reference 39] is the national planning framework to guide development and investment in Ireland up to 2040. It is accompanied by the **Project Ireland 2040 – National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 [See reference 40]** which sets out investment priorities. The two documents combine to form Project Ireland 2040. The National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of relevance to the Longford Town LTP are:

- NSO1: Compact growth.
- NSO 2: Enhanced regional accessibility.
- NSO 3: Strengthened rural economies and communities.
- NSO 4: Sustainable mobility.
- NSO 8: Transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society.

3.10 Growth of the Eastern and Midland Region is a clear priority in both the NPF and NDP, with growth in population (to around 2.85 million) and employment (to 1.34 million) targeted. The NPF recognises the strategic importance of the Midlands stating that:

“its central location in Ireland can be leveraged to enable significant strategic investment to a greater extent than at present, supported by a sustainable pattern of population growth, with a focus on strategic national employment and

infrastructure development, quality of life and strengthening the urban cores of the county towns and other principal settlements” (p.33).

3.11 Placemaking, sustainable mobility, prioritising alternative forms of transport to car and developing comprehensive walking and cycling are key objectives identified in the documents which are relevant to the Longford Town LTP.

3.12 The NDP outlines a €165 billion capital investment plan for the decade, of which €35 billion is allocated for transport which will enable the development of a range of active travel and bus and rail infrastructure over the coming years to facilitate the transition to sustainable mobility and meet our climate goals.

National Sustainable Mobility Policy and Sustainable Mobility Policy Action Plan 2022-2025

3.13 The **National Sustainable Mobility Policy [See reference 41]** was published in April 2022 and sets out a strategic framework to 2030 for active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport to help Ireland meet its climate obligations. It aims to deliver:

- at least 500,000 additional daily active travel and public transport journeys by 2030; and
- a 10% reduction in the number of kilometres driven by fossil fuelled cars.

3.14 The policy is accompanied by the **Sustainable Mobility Policy Action Plan 2022-2025 [See reference 42]** which contains actions to improve and expand sustainable mobility options across the country, from demand management and behavioural change measures to managing daily travel more efficiently and reducing the number of journeys taken by private car. It aims to make it easier for people to choose walking, cycling and public transport daily instead of a petrol or diesel car. This Policy and Action Plan builds on and

replaces the active travel and public transport policy documents: Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future and the National Cycle Policy Framework.

Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways

3.15 The Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways (2018) [See reference 43] recognises the benefits that can arise from further development of greenways in Ireland: as a tourism product, for local communities economic benefit, and for physical activity and a contributor to health and wellbeing. It aims to assist in the strategic development of nationally and regionally significant greenways in appropriate locations constructed to an appropriate standard in order to deliver a high-quality experience. It also aims to increase the number and geographical spread of greenways in Ireland.

Climate Action Plan 2023

3.16 The Climate Action Plan 2023 [See reference 44] charts a course to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet our commitments to a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030 and to reach net zero no later than 2050. There are numerous actions in the Climate Action Plan, classified into several topic areas: governance, a just transition, citizen engagement, the public sector, carbon prices, electricity, industry, the built environment, transport, agriculture, land use / land use change / forestry, the marine environment, the circular economy, and international climate action. Ten actions are identified to achieve a just transition in the Midlands region which includes County Longford. Those of relevance to Longford Town include:

- Supporting regeneration, repurposing and sustainable development of walking and cycling tracks and trails, and waterways.

- Supporting the decarbonisation of public and private local rural bus routes.
- Supporting the installation of publicly available fast and high-powered charge point infrastructure.

Our Rural Future 2021-2025

3.17 Our Rural Future 2021-2025 [See reference 45] is the national rural development policy. It recognises that people living in rural areas should have access to good quality public services that enable them to continue to live sustainably in rural communities and help them to maintain a good quality of life. Transport services are very important for people who live and work in rural Ireland. Improvement and further integration of rural public transport services will enable people to continue to live in rural area and to access work, education and social activities, while development of active travel amenities will bring economic and social benefits to communities.

Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030

3.18 Underpinning the Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 [See reference 46] is Ireland's long-term goal of achieving Vision Zero (zero road deaths or serious injuries) by 2050. Vision Zero was formally adopted in the Programme for Government in 2020 and underpins the EU Road Safety Policy Framework (2021-2030) [See reference 47] and the UN's Second Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021-2030) [See reference 48]. To ensure this long-term goal is achieved, the Road Safety Strategy sets a target to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by 50% by 2030.

3.19 Seven Safe System priority intervention areas have been identified including safe and healthy modes of travel to promote and protect road users engaging in public transport or active travel. It involves the promotion of safer public transport modes and the promotion and provision of safe road environments for otherwise healthy active modes. This includes walking and

cycling where the risks of death and serious injury are higher than for protected, in-vehicle road users. The Strategy's actions under safe and healthy modes of travel align with objectives of the Longford Town LTP to maintain and improve our existing sustainable mobility system while also providing a safe space for all road users.

Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Well-being 2013-2025

3.20 Healthy Ireland Framework [See reference 49] was launched in 2013 as a strategic framework to improve the health and well-being of the nation. The Framework and associated **Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025 [See reference 50]** support the development of places which encourage active travel (walking and cycling) in urban areas.

National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland

3.21 The National Physical Activity Plan [See reference 51] for Ireland was published in 2016 following a commitment in the Healthy Ireland Framework. The key target of the plan is to increase the number of people taking regular exercise by 1% a year over ten years by making exercise a normal part of everyday life and giving people more opportunities to be active.

Key regional and local plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region 2019-2031

3.22 The **Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region (RSES) 2019-2031** [See reference 52] sets out the framework to direct future growth in the Eastern and Midlands Region over a decade. Longford falls under the jurisdiction of the Eastern and Midlands Region RSES. One of the strategy's key regional strategic outcomes is to integrate transport and land use. The aim is to promote best use of transport infrastructure, existing and planned, and promote sustainable and active modes of travel to ensure the proper integration of transportation and land use planning.

3.23 The RSES recognises that County Longford is strategically located as a portal to the northwest on the Dublin to Sligo rail corridor, also serving the key towns of Mullingar and Maynooth. Longford Town is identified as a 'Gateway Region Key Town' as it is strategically located on the N4/M4 motorway and the Dublin to Sligo rail line, acting as a portal to the northern and western region and providing a supporting role to the 'Regional Growth Centre' of Athlone.

3.24 The RSES identifies the following Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) of relevance for Longford Town:

- RPO 4.59: To enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within the town centre by improving links between the core and surrounding areas through the further integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities.

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- RPO 4.63: Support Longford Town as a strategic portal to the northwest and south in recognition of its location at the junction of the N55; M4/N4 Dublin/Sligo and N5; due to its proximity to the regional growth centre of Athlone; and support its role as a strategic employment centre.
- RPO 6.19: Support the local strategies that are already in place to link the River Shannon Blueway, The Royal and Grand Canal Greenways and the proposed Barrow Blueway right across the Midlands, incorporating the towns of Longford, Athlone, Mullingar, Tullamore and Portarlington.
- RPO 8.6: Prepare a Local Transport Plan for Longford Town. Such LTPs will include transport priorities for each settlement in terms of public transport infrastructure and services; cycle investment; improvements to the pedestrian environment; and road enhancements.

Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027

3.25 The **Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027** [See reference 53] sets out the planning policies and objectives for the sustainable development of the county.

County Policy Objective 4.9 states that the Council will prepare and implement a Local Area Plan (LAP) for Longford Town to align with the policy objectives of the NPF, Eastern and Midlands RSES and Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, within two years from the adoption of the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027. Any such LAP will be informed by a LTP to be prepared for Longford Town. Accordingly, a LAP and separate LTP is to be prepared for Longford Town.

3.26 Other key County Policy Objectives specific to transport and travel include:

- Encouraging a general shift towards increased use of public transport in the county (CPO 5.5).

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- Improving transport connectivity and establishing integrated transport nodes (CPO 5.7)
- Reducing the need to travel by private vehicle (CPO 5.3).
- Encouraging and facilitating walking and cycling, putting the pedestrian first in residential and urban areas (CPO 5.4).
- Providing high quality road access on routes of economic importance whilst ensuring road safety (CPO 5.12).
- Supporting and facilitating the development of infrastructure to increase the usage of electric vehicles (CPO 5.62).
- Promoting place-making in towns and villages to improve quality of life (CPO 5.6; CPO 5.8).
- Relieving traffic congestion particularly in town centres by means of traffic calming and traffic management (CPO 5.26).

Longford Town Local Area Plan

3.27 The function of a Local Area Plan (LAP) is to set out policies and objectives for the proper planning and sustainable development of a specific area which should be consistent with the provisions of the NPF, Eastern and Midland RSES and the Longford County Development Plan. As the population of Longford Town is over 5,000 people, a LAP is required for the area.

3.28 The current **Longford Town and Environs Local Area Plan [See reference 54]** sets out a strategy and framework for the development of the town up to 2022. It outlines the policies and objectives relating to residential, industrial and commercial development in the town as well as more detailed objectives and standards for development control. Longford County Council is currently preparing the next iteration of the Longford Town Local Area Plan covering the period 2023 to 2029. The emerging Longford Town LTP will inform the Longford Town Local Area Plan, as recommended in the RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region. The **Longford Town Local Area Plan** will be a

statutory document that sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Longford Town over a six-year horizon (2023-2029) and will have a strong focus on the integration of land-use and transportation. The Longford Town Local Area Plan will consist of a written statement containing a broad set of aims and objectives for the town, in addition to detailed policies and guidance for the sustainable development of social, physical and environmental infrastructure within Longford Town. The Longford Town Local Area Plan will include maps detailing specific land-use zonings within the town, which will be informed by the Longford Town Zonings that were updated and included in the recently adopted Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 Volume 2 – Appendix 1 Land Zonings [See reference 55].

A detailed review of the key international, European, national, regional and local plans / programmes of relevance to the Longford Town LTP is detailed in **Appendix A**.

Implications of the policy review for the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

3.29 The following paragraphs detail the implications of the policy review for the Longford Town LTP for each SEA topic.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna

3.30 In order to align with international, national, regional and local policies, the Longford Town LTP should seek to protect and enhance ecological features and biodiversity and encourage habitat restoration or creation as part of transport and travel proposals. The Longford Town LTP should seek to ensure that environmental pollution from travel infrastructure is minimised in order to protect land, water and air quality.

The SEA is able to respond to this through the inclusion of Environmental Protection Objectives relating to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, air pollution, water quality and contaminated land.

Population and human health

3.31 In order to align with international, national, regional and local policies, the Longford Town LTP should seek to encourage healthy and active lifestyles; create fair, safe and inclusive communities; and to improve the sustainable transport network within Longford Town.

The SEA is able to respond to this through the inclusion of Environmental Protection Objectives relating to health and wellbeing, social inclusion and sustainable transport.

Climatic factors

3.32 In order to align with international, national, regional and local policies, the Longford Town LTP should seek to ensure that new transport infrastructure is designed to be resilient to climate change impacts. The Longford Town LTP should seek to reduce transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by:

- reducing the need to travel by diesel and petrol vehicles;
- accelerating a shift from private car to active transport (walking and cycling);
- supporting the delivery of electric vehicle charging infrastructure to encourage the use of electric vehicles.

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3.33 The Longford Town LTP should also seek to reduce carbon emissions from the construction of new/upgraded transport infrastructure by encouraging the use of sustainable construction methods and materials.

The SEA is able to respond to this through the inclusion of Environmental Protection Objectives relating to the mitigation of climate change, adaptation to climate change, sustainable construction, flooding and sustainable transport.

Air

3.34 In order to align with international, national, regional and local policies, the Longford Town LTP should seek to reduce air pollutant emissions from road and rail.

The SEA is able to respond to this through the inclusion of Environmental Protection Objectives relating to protecting and improving air quality.

Soil

3.35 In order to align with international, national, regional and local policies, the Longford Town LTP should seek to minimise adverse impacts on the soil environment from transport development.

The SEA is able to respond to this through the inclusion of Environmental Protection Objectives relating to the protection and enhancement of soil resources and geological assets.

Water

3.36 In order to align with international, national, regional and local policies, the Longford Town LTP should seek to minimise adverse impacts on the water environment from transport development.

The SEA is able to respond to this through the inclusion of Environmental Protection Objectives relating to the protection and enhancement of water quality and quantity.

Cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage

3.37 In order to align with international, national, regional and local policies, the Longford Town LTP should seek to protect heritage and cultural assets (both designated and undesignated), and local character and distinctiveness; and to improve access to heritage assets.

The SEA is able to respond to this through the inclusion of Environmental Protection Objectives relating to the conservation of the historic environment and the character of landscapes and townscapes, and the improvement of access to heritage assets.

Landscape

3.38 In order to align with international, national, regional and local policies, the Longford Town LTP should seek to protect and enhance designated and valued

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landscapes, and to ensure that new transport development is sympathetic to local character and history including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.

The SEA is able to respond to this through the inclusion of Environmental Protection Objectives relating to the protection of the character and visual amenity of landscapes / townscapes.

Material assets

3.39 In order to align with international, national, regional and local policies, the Longford Town LTP should seek to develop an integrated transport and active travel network; to prevent loss or sterilisation of minerals from transport infrastructure development; and to ensure the effective management of waste and the efficient use of resources during the construction of transport infrastructure.

The SEA is able to respond to this through the inclusion of Environmental Protection Objectives relating to waste management and the efficient use of land and natural resources.

Chapter 4

Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services

4.1 Longford Town's natural capital comprises its renewable and non-renewable resources (e.g. plants, animals, air, water, soils, minerals) that combine to yield a flow of ecosystem services that provide benefits to people. These benefits can include clean air and water, a stable climate, protection from floods, recreation, etc. Managing natural capital so that it can continue to deliver the ecosystem services that give us these benefits is important in order to ensure sustainable development. Unmanaged natural capital risks the continued degradation and depletion of these assets, and in turn, of their capacity to provide the economy and society with the ecosystem benefits that they depend on.

4.2 Ecosystems are multifunctional communities of living organisms interacting with each other and their environment. Ecosystems provide a series of services for human well-being (ecosystem services) either directly or indirectly contributing towards human wellbeing. There are four main types of ecosystem services [[See reference 56](#)]:

- **Provisioning services** are the products obtained from ecosystems such as food, fresh water, wood, fibre, genetic resources and medicines.
- **Regulating services** are defined as the benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes such as climate regulation, natural hazard regulation, water purification and waste management, pollination or pest control.
- **Support services** highlight the importance of ecosystems to provide habitat for migratory species and to maintain the viability of gene pools.
- **Cultural services** include non-material benefits that people obtain from ecosystems such as spiritual enrichment, intellectual development, recreation and aesthetic values.

Chapter 4 Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services

4.3 The following natural capital and ecosystem services issues are relevant to this SEA and will be taken into account in the preparation of the Longford Town LTP:

- Air quality.
- Noise pollution.
- Light pollution.
- Water quality and integrated catchment management including interactions with soil.
- Soil and vegetation carbon, which helps to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.
- Soil / geological storage of water, contributing towards flood control.
- Natural resources supporting energy production and recreation.

Chapter 5

Biodiversity, flora and fauna

Baseline information

Due to the potential for effects from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP to extend beyond the Longford Town boundary, a description of the baseline information relevant to both Longford Town and County is provided in the subsequent paragraphs in relation to 'biodiversity, flora and fauna'.

Current baseline information

5.1 Figure 5.1 illustrates the location and extent of biodiversity sites in Longford. There is a large diversity of species and habitats within County Longford, many of which have been designated because of their importance at European and national level. Longford's varied landscape of upland areas, low-lying peatland and lakes support a range of biodiversity, wildlife and habitats.

5.2 Lough Ree is the third largest lake in Ireland and is situated in an ice-deepened depression in Carboniferous limestone on the River Shannon system between Lanesborough and Athlone. It is designated as both a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA). It is one of the most important sites in the midlands for wintering waterfowl, with nationally important populations of Little Grebe, Whooper Swan, Golden Plover, Common Tern, and Lapwing. There are currently seven other SACs in County Longford [[See reference 57](#)]:

- SAC 002341 **Ardagullion Bog SAC.**

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- SAC 002346 **Brown Bog SAC.**
- SAC 002348 **Clooneen Bog SAC.**
- SAC 000448 **Fortwilliam Turlough SAC.**
- SAC 001818 **Lough Forbes Complex SAC.**
- SAC 002202 **Mount Jessop Bog SAC.**
- SAC 002201 **Derragh Bog SAC.**

5.3 There are currently three other SPAs in County Longford. These designations are typically wetlands, bogs, and lakes **[See reference 58]**:

- SPA 004101 **Ballykenny-Fishertown Bog SPA.**
- SPA 004061 **Lough Kinale & Derragh Lough SPA.**
- SPA 004045 **Glen Lough SPA.**

5.4 Other relevant European sites connected to the county via hydrological links include:

- UK9020071 **Upper Lough Erne SPA.**
- UK0016614 **Upper Lough Erne SAC.**
- SPA 004151 **Donegal Bay SPA.**
- SAC 002241 **Lough Derg-North East Shore SAC.**
- SPA 004058 **Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA.**
- SPA 002165 **Lower River Shannon SPA.**
- SPA 004077 **River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA.**

5.5 Further detail regarding the qualifying features and key sensitivities of European designated sites and others within 15km of the study area (and those that are hydrologically linked to the study area) is provided in the Screening for Appropriate Assessment of the County Longford ATS and Longford Town LTP (February 2023).

5.6 County Longford contains six Natural Heritage Areas, all of which are designated as raised boglands [\[See reference 59\]](#):

- 000422 **Aghnamona Bog NHA** (peatlands).
- 000691 **Rinn River NHA** (peatlands).
- 000985 **Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough NHA** (peatlands and birds).
- 001423 **Cloonagheeher Bog NHA** (peatlands).
- 001448 **Forthill Bog NHA** (peatlands).
- 001450 **Mount Jessop Bog NHA** (peatlands).

5.7 In addition to these, there are currently 17 proposed NHAs (pNHA) that are awaiting designation to NHA status. These non-statutory designations are primarily bogs and lakes [\[See reference 60\]](#):

- 000440 **Lough Ree pNHA.**
- 000442 **Brown Bog pNHA.**
- 000445 **Clooneen Bog pNHA.**
- 000447 **Derrymore Bog pNHA.**
- 000448 **Fortwilliam Turlough pNHA.**
- 001818 **Lough Forbes pNHA.**
- 002069 **Ardgullion Bog pNHA.**
- 001822 **Carrickglass Demesne pNHA.**
- 001821 **Cordara Turlough pNHA.**
- 001444 **Derry Lough pNHA.**
- 001687 **Glen Lough pNHA.**
- 00449 **Lough Bannow pNHA.**
- 001819 **Lough Bawn pNHA.**
- 000992 **Lough Gowna pNHA.**

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- 001449 **Lough Naback pNHA.**
- 001443 **Lough Slawn pNHA.**
- 002103 **Royal Canal pNHA.**

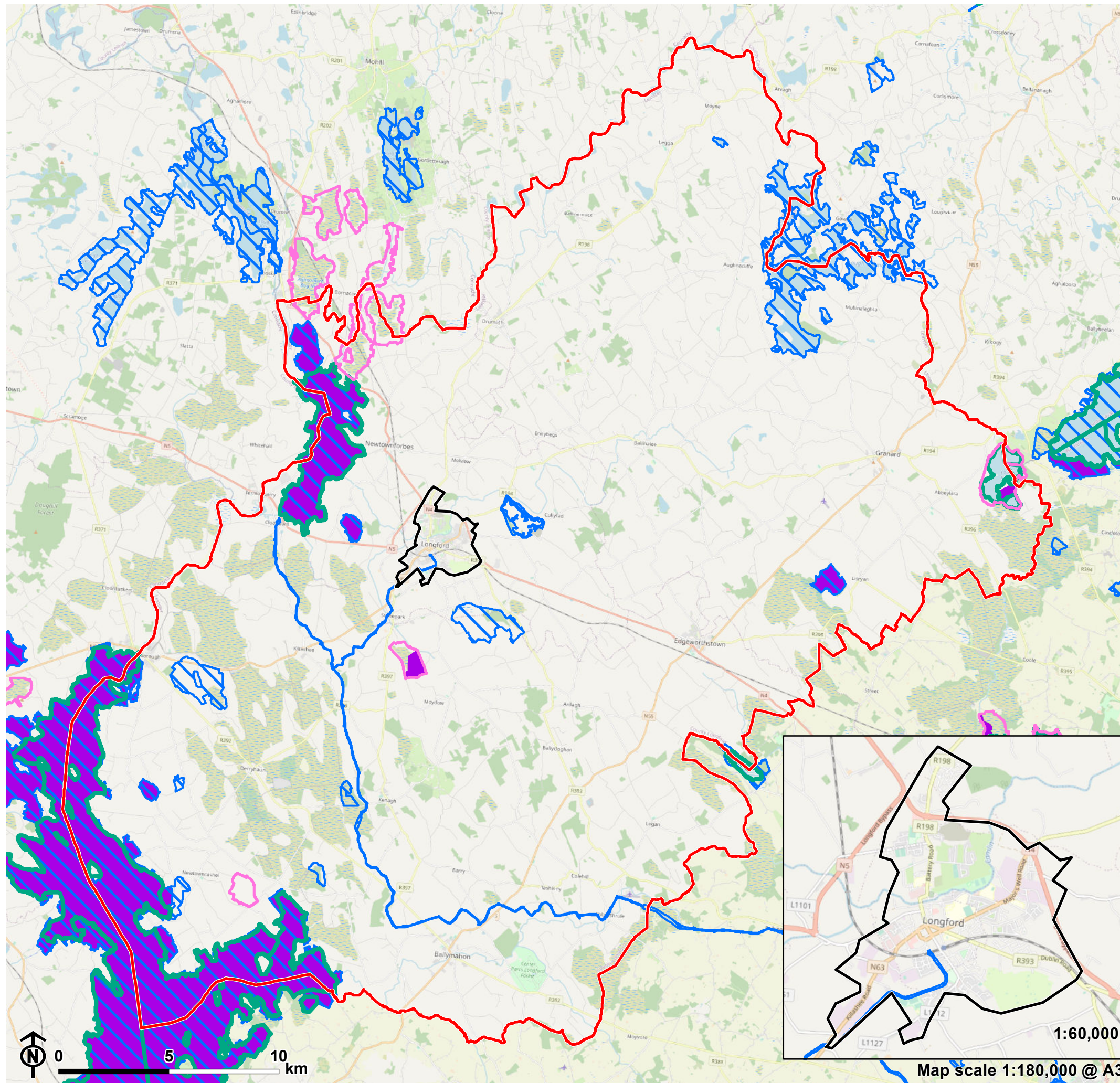
5.8 Within Longford Town there is one pNHA, the Royal Canal. The Royal Canal pNHA begins approximately 200m from Longford train station and follows the canal south towards Ballymacormick. The pNHA forms a link between Longford and Dublin, connecting designated and undesignated sites across the country. There are no other protected sites within Longford Town.

5.9 There are 13 ancient and long-established woodland sites in the county, the largest being Clonguish Woods (Castle Forbes) and Annagh Wood (Castle Forbes) (long-established woodland; evidence not ancient) [See reference 61]. All ancient and long-established woodland sites in County Longford are illustrated in **Figure 5.2**. There are no ancient and long-established woodland sites in Longford Town.

5.10 There are no National Parks or National Nature Reserves in County Longford.

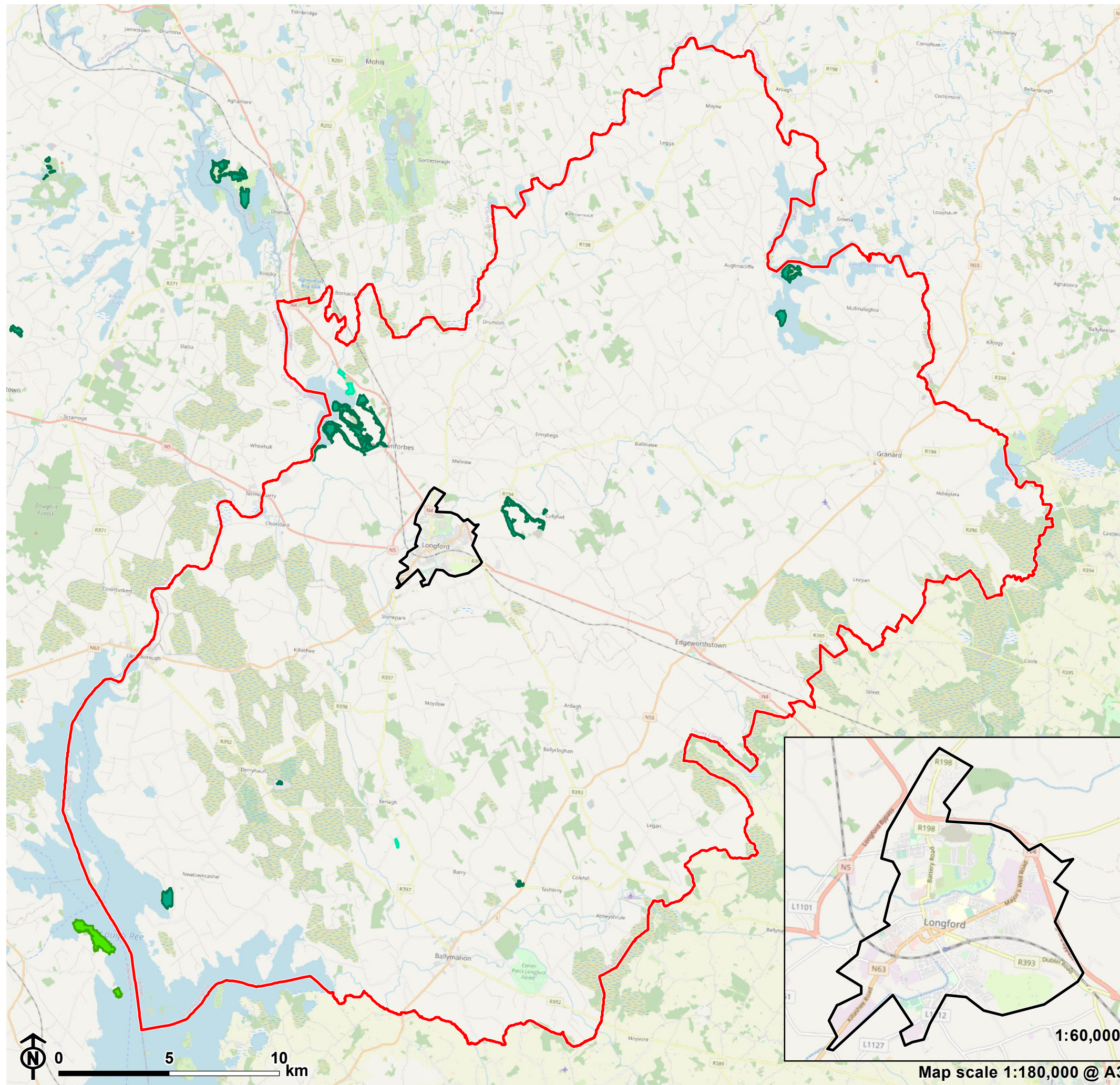
5.11 Beyond the boundaries of designated sites, there are further areas that provide important habitats for flora and fauna, including vulnerable species. A wetland field survey undertaken in 2019 identified 18 wetland sites deemed to be of 'county conservation value' (Ballin Lough and Kileen Bog) or of 'high local conservation value' (Lough Sallagh; Black Lough; Kileen Lough; Currygrane Lough; and Kileen Pond North-Ballin Lough) [See reference 62]. The network of hedgerows across the county provides valuable links for the movement and dispersal of species. The Longford Hedgerow Study [See reference 63] identified 9,903 km of hedgerows in County Longford. Longford Town also contains areas of woodland, trees, hedgerows, rivers, streams and other landscape features that form part of the ecological network.

Figure 5.1: Biodiversity Sites



- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Natural Heritage Area (NHA)
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA)
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Figure 5.2: Ancient and long established woodland sites



- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Ancient and long established woodland sites**
- Possible ancient woodland
- Ancient woodland
- Long-established woodland

Projected baseline information

5.13 At national level, assessment of Ireland's biodiversity shows that a significant portion of the country's biodiversity is in a vulnerable state. Without substantial change to existing trends there is unlikely to be significant increase in the pressures on biodiversity in coming decades from agricultural practices, forestry and fisheries, natural system modifications, mining and quarrying, climate change, pollution and invasive and problematic species [See reference 64]. It is difficult to predict future changes in the baseline for biodiversity, flora and fauna. However, previous trends have shown that development can have both direct and indirect effects (e.g. lighting, noise, etc.) and adverse and beneficial impacts on biodiversity, flora and fauna. Development can cause loss and damage to habitats, but innovative design and the creation of green corridors can help offset such impacts and even enhance biodiversity at local level.

5.14 Within Longford, the proposed Mid Shannon Wilderness Park will include Lough Ree, the rivers Shannon, Inny and Camlin, the Royal Canal, Newcastle Wood and other forests and the future rehabilitated Bord na Móna bogs. The project aims to strengthen the integration of tourism and natural heritage, and to reconcile tourism development with conservation of biodiversity. It is also proposed to create a dedicated Lough Ree Biosphere Reserve, due to rich natural heritage of the lake, raised bogs and wetlands. The proposed Biosphere Reserve project is a collaboration between the relevant local authorities including Longford County Council, Bord na Móna and the National Parks and Wildlife Services, Waterways Ireland and Fáilte Ireland. Whilst encouraging recreation and tourism in the area, the Wilderness Park also aims to enhance local biodiversity through management of rehabilitated bogs and maintenance of biodiversity corridors across much of the south of County Longford. The Mid Shannon Wilderness Park Plan [See reference 65] suggests that the park will form biodiversity and recreational connections across much of the south-west of County Longford, all the way to Longford Town via the Royal Canal.

5.15 The Royal Canal reflects the county's transport past and has received significant resources for blueway/greenway development at a national level.

The Royal Canal Greenway project is planned to be the longest greenway in Ireland (144km in length). There is potential the blueway/greenway to be utilised as a wildlife corridor to prevent fragmentation of habitats and allow migration of species under climate change pressure.

Key environmental issues and likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP

5.16 Longford contains many areas of high ecological value including the Royal Canal pNHA in Longford Town. Development proposed in the Longford Town LTP has the potential to put pressure on these sites including through disturbance and damage from recreational use, air pollution, and loss of functionally linked habitat. Although designated sites represent the most valued habitats, the overall ecological network is important for biodiversity as a whole. Fragmentation and erosion of habitats and the ecological network in the town is an ongoing threat to biodiversity.

5.17 If the Longford Town LTP was not implemented, it is considered that adequate protection would be afforded to Longford's habitats and species through policies in the Longford County Development Plan (most notably through the policies in Chapter 12: Natural Heritage and the Environment, and in particular policies CPO 12.1- CPO 12.85) as well as through the statutory protection of certain habitats and species. However, without the Longford Town LTP it is possible that transport infrastructure could be sited inappropriately and adversely impact biodiversity sites, even if indirectly. The Longford Town LTP provides an opportunity to ensure that biodiversity is protected and enhanced through the transport and active travel system by:

- Locating active travel/transport infrastructure away from the most sensitive locations.

- Providing for new green and blue infrastructure which supports habitat creation and connections.
- Providing for habitat enhancement measures as part of active travel developments.
- Ensuring that active travel projects do not adversely affect the current condition of biodiversity sites but, where possible, contribute to their improvement.
- There may also be indirect benefits for species from improved air quality due to the reduction in road traffic and congestion.

Corresponding Environmental Protection Objectives in the EPO Framework

- Environmental Protection Objective 1: **Biodiversity, flora and fauna** - Conserve and enhance Longford's biodiversity including designated sites, habitats and protected species.
 - Does the LTP conserve and enhance designated and undesignated ecological assets, including promoting habitat connectivity; avoiding fragmentation; and adverse impacts on habitats and species from transport-related changes to air quality, water quality and quantity, noise levels and light levels?
 - Does the LTP maintain and enhance the nature network of ecological assets and green/blue spaces, taking into account the impacts of climate change?

Chapter 6

Population and human health

Baseline information

Due to the potential for effects from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP to extend beyond the Longford Town boundary, a description of the baseline information relevant to both Longford Town and County is provided in the subsequent paragraphs in relation to 'population and human health'.

Although preliminary results from the 2022 Census have been released, the full 2022 Census data will not be available until April 2023. Therefore, reference is made to the 2016 Census data, where more up-to-date data is not available.

Population

Current baseline information

6.1 County Longford is the fourth smallest county in area and the second smallest county in terms of population in Ireland. According to preliminary results from the 2022 Census, the population of County Longford is 46,634 [See **reference 66**]. The population is relatively well distributed across each Municipal District (MD) in the county with 16,046 people within Longford MD; 10,674 people within Granard MD; and 14,153 people within Ballymahon MD,

with relatively higher concentrations around the larger towns of Longford Town, Ballymahon, Granard, Lanesborough and Edgeworthstown.

6.2 Overall, the population distribution within County Longford has remained relatively consistent over time [See reference 67]. According to the 2016 Census, 34.2% of the population were living in urban settlements in Longford whilst 65.85% were living in smaller towns and villages, as well as in the rural remainder of the county.

County Longford has seen a significant increase in population in recent years. The county saw the highest population growth in Ireland between 2016 Census and 2022 Census (+14.1%), above the national average (+7.6%). At the time of writing, the 2022 Census figures are the preliminary figures from June 2022 and are subject to change, for example, the population increase in Longford may be reduced once ‘not normally resident’ population is stripped out as the high population increase may be attributable to people staying at Centre Parcs.

6.3 Table 6.1 sets out the population change in County Longford since Census 1996. Since 2006, Longford’s population has increased at a rate greater than the national average [See reference 68].

Table 6.1: Population change in County Longford

Census year	Population of Longford	Percentage change since previous Census – Longford (%)	Percentage change since previous Census – Ireland (%)
1996	30,166	-0.4	+2.8
2002	31,068	+3.0	+8.0
2006	34,391	+10.7	+8.2

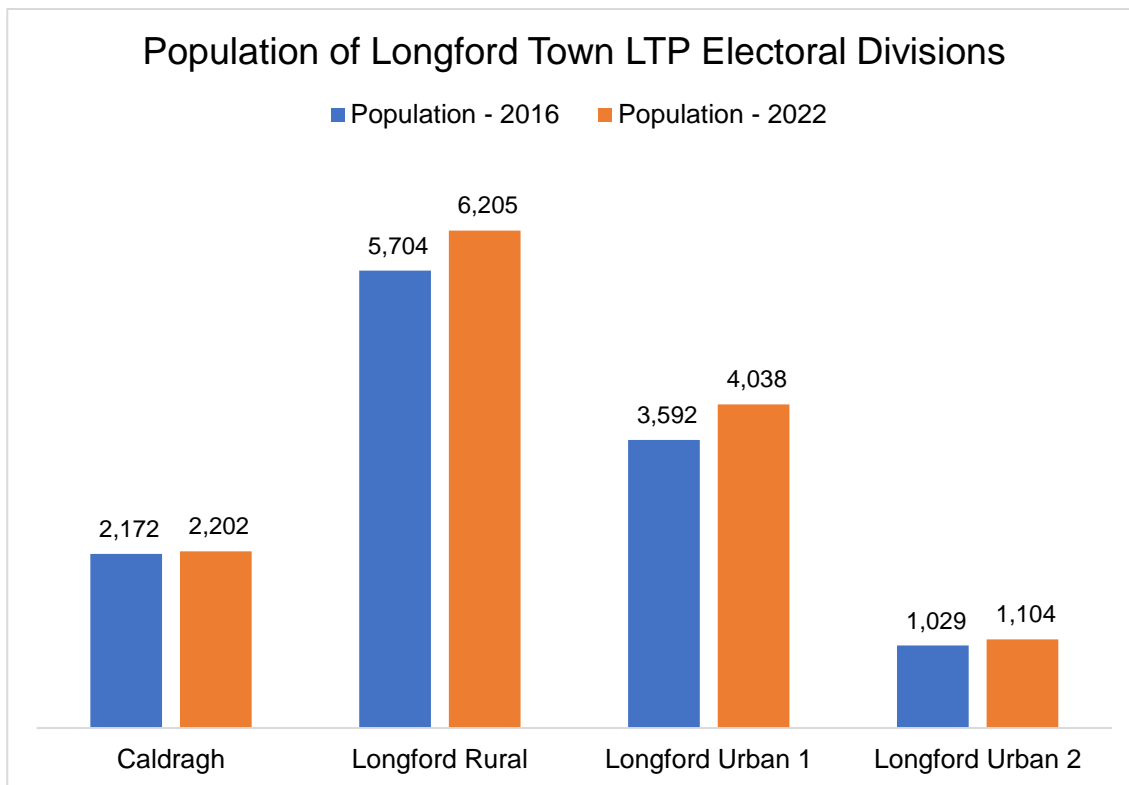
Census year	Population of Longford	Percentage change since previous Census – Longford (%)	Percentage change since previous Census – Ireland (%)
2011	39,000	+13.4	+8.2
2016	40,873	+4.8	+3.8
2022	46,634	+14.1	+7.6

6.4 Longford Town is the largest settlement in County Longford in terms of population, economic activity, level of infrastructure and service and connectivity. The Longford Town LTP study area comprises the following Electoral Divisions (EDs) in the 2022 Census – Longford Urban 1, Longford Urban 2, Longford Rural and Caldragh. The population of these EDs in 2022 was 13,549 people, compared to 12,497 people in the 2016 Census. However, it should be noted that the EDs cover a larger area than the Longford Town LTP area, therefore population estimates are likely to be higher than within the actual LTP area.

6.5 As illustrated in **Figure 6.1**, the population for each ED in the LTP study area has increased since the 2016 Census. The highest percentage increase has been in the Longford Urban 1 area with a 12.4% increase in population since the previous census, followed by Longford Rural at 8.8%, Longford Urban 2 at 7.3% and Caldragh with a 1.4% increase in population. The most densely populated areas being:

- Annaly Park / St. Michael’s Road.
- Ardnacassa.
- McEoin Park.
- Park Road and adjoining estates.
- Templemichael.

Figure 6.1: Population of Longford Town LTP Electoral Divisions



6.6 The average age in County Longford (36.8 years) is slightly below the national average (37.4 years), while the average age in Longford Town is even lower at 35.2 years, which is generally reflective of the slightly younger age profile within the broader Eastern and Midlands Region [See reference 69]. In County Longford, approximately 62.5% of the population are of working age (i.e. 15 to 64 years). The county has a large youth demographic, with approximately 25% of the population within the 0-19 years age group. 14.2% of the population are over 65 years which is above the national average of 13.4%.

Projected baseline information

6.7 The Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework [See reference 70] predicted that County Longford would grow to 45,500 by 2026 and to 47,000 people by 2031 (based on population projection estimates from 2016 Census) [See reference 71]. The preliminary 2022 Census figures demonstrate that the county has already reached these figures with 46,638 inhabitants as of 2022 [See reference 72].

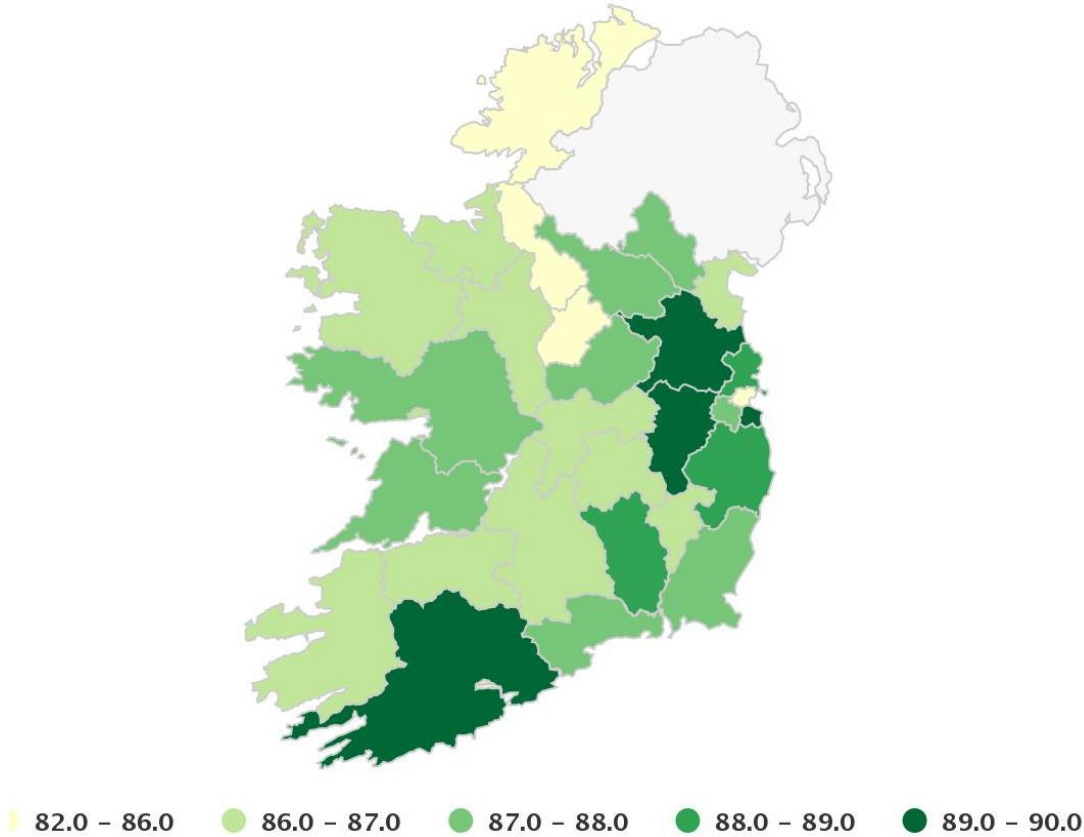
6.8 The statistics from the 2016 Census indicate a strong current working age population within Longford, with a substantial young population which is significant in terms of sustaining future economic activity in the county. In line with national trends, the older population in Longford is projected to grow significantly, placing additional pressures on housing and social care services, as well as public transport services.

Health

Current baseline information

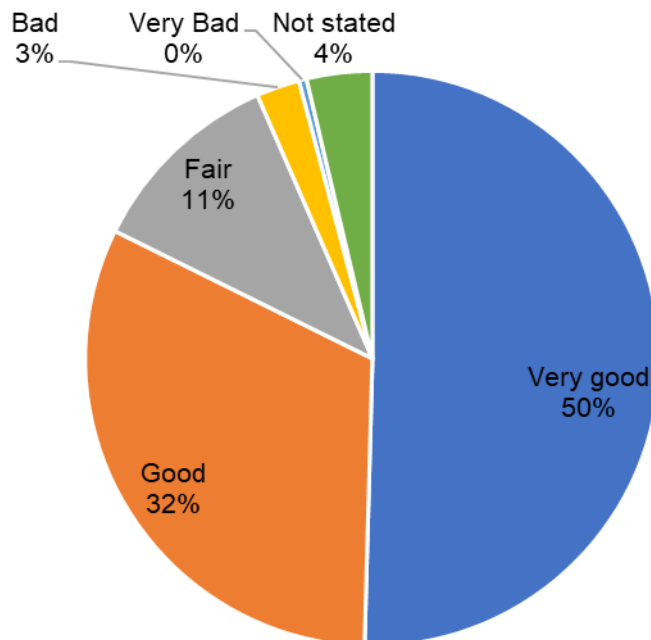
6.9 Based on 2016 Census data, 85.3% of Longford's population recorded that they were either in 'very good' or 'good' health. This is lower than the national average of 87%, and of the surrounding counties of Westmeath (87.3%), Cavan (87.4%), Roscommon (86.6%) and Leitrim (85.8%). Behind Dublin City and Cork City, County Longford had the lowest population in Ireland who stated that their health was 'very good' or 'good' (see Figure 6.2) [See reference 73].

Figure 6.2: Percentage of persons with ‘very good’ and ‘good’ health



6.10 In the 2016 Census, Longford Town recorded the lowest number of people in ‘very good’ health (5,048 people; 50.4%) and the highest number of people in Ireland who stated that their health was ‘bad’ (245 people; 2.4%) or ‘very bad’ (43 people; 0.4%) [See reference 74] (see Figure 6.3). There is often a strong correlation between people reporting poor health and less affluent areas [See reference 75].

Figure 6.3: Health of residents in Longford Town (2016 Census)



6.11 A recent report from the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that by 2025, obesity prevalence would increase in 44 out of 53 countries in the WHO European region. Of these, Ireland is estimated to have the highest prevalence of obesity, with 43% of the population projected to be obese by 2025. Being overweight or obese carries numerous health risks, including increased likelihood of type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart and liver disease, stroke and related mental health conditions. It is estimated this health issue places a cost of at least €1.13 billion on the HSE every year [See reference 76]. A breakdown of the proportion of the population of Longford who are overweight or obese is not available, however, it is assumed that the county experiences rates of obesity in line with the national average.

6.12 Only 31% of Irish adults report to undertake at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week, while only 19% of primary aged children and 12% of post-primary aged children report to take part in at least 60 minutes

of moderate exercise per day [See reference 77]. A breakdown of the proportion of the population of Longford who are inactive is not available, however, it is assumed that the county experiences rates of inactivity in line with the national average.

6.13 Ireland has one of the highest rates of mental health illness in Europe with 18.5% of the population recorded as having a mental health illness such as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, or alcohol / drug use [See reference 78]. A breakdown of the proportion of the population of Longford who experience mental health issues is not available, however, it is assumed that rates of mental health issues in the county are in line with the national average.

6.14 The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted health inequalities nationally, including the differences in people's health and well-being that result from the conditions in which they are born, grow, live, work and age. For example, the pandemic has impacted social and community networks, showing that lack of social contact has a detrimental impact on mental health (causing or facilitating anxiety and depression). It also had a negative impact on individual lifestyle factors such as lack of exercise and unhealthy diet, causing other health issues.

6.15 Active travel helps to improve physical fitness and health, as well as mental health and wellbeing. As well as the health benefits from active travel, when more people walk or cycle and fewer journeys involve the car, community vibrancy, sociability, and cohesion are improved. Mental Health Ireland report that 39% of people exercise to improve their mental health and wellbeing [See reference 79]. A recent report by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland found that a lack of safe, active travel routes was a key factor in obesity and levels of inactivity, particularly in children [See reference 80].

6.16 Baseline information for air quality in Longford is fully considered in **Chapter 9: Air**. Longford generally experiences good air quality. However, increased vehicle usage, burning of fossil fuels including peat for domestic purposes, and emissions from industry and agricultural practices are a threat to air quality in the county. The most pronounced areas in relation to air pollution are built-up urban areas and major transport routes, including along the Dublin

to Sligo rail line and the four national roads (N4, N5, N55 and N63). Air pollution is associated with a number of adverse health impacts and is recognised as a contributing factor in the onset of heart disease, lung cancer, stroke, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases, including asthma [See reference 81]. It is estimated that there are approximately 1,300 premature deaths annually in Ireland due to poor air quality from fine particulate matter [See reference 82]. Pollution particularly affects the most vulnerable in society such as children, the elderly, and those with existing heart and lung conditions. There is also often a strong correlation between poor air quality areas and less affluent areas.

6.17 Noise is a common problem arising from transport, and studies have shown it can have major negative direct and indirect effects on health and well-being, on quality of life, and on wildlife. Exposure to noise can increase stress levels, disrupt communications and disturb sleep. There is scope for noise emissions from transport to be reduced by reducing the number of cars on the road, supporting a modal-shift to active travel, and developing green infrastructure along transport corridors.

6.18 Provisional road collision statistics show that the number of road deaths in Ireland in 2021 were at a record low, since recording began in 1959, however, this may also be partly due to the restrictions on personal mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were three road deaths in Longford in 2021 and zero in 2020 [See reference 83].

Projected baseline information

6.19 Given that the county, particularly Longford Town, has performed poorly for perception of personal health against neighbouring local authority areas, it is likely to continue to do so without intervention. However, the 'strategies' identified in the Longford Town LTP to reduce car dependency by creating a network of accessible and safe active travel routes in the town will have a positive effect on the health and wellbeing of the population of Longford as more people engage in physical activity which will improve their physical and mental health.

6.20 There is a direct relationship between air quality levels, traffic and congestion and health issues. The predicted growth of Longford's population as outlined in the Longford County Development Plan [See reference 84] will inevitably result in an increase in road-based traffic and congestion which will adversely affect the air quality in the county, particularly in Longford Town. In the 2016 Census, Longford Town recorded the highest number of people in Ireland who stated that their health was 'bad' or 'very bad' (2.9%) [See reference 85] and these health issues may be exacerbated by the predicted increase in transport-related emissions. Conversely, increasing the provision of active travel routes and electric vehicle charging infrastructure in Longford is likely to reduce transport-related emissions, thereby improving air quality and the health and wellbeing of Longford's population.

6.21 Ireland's Government Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 [See reference 86] aims to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on Irish roads by 50% over the next 10 years. Key interventions include improving the quality of roads, reducing speeds to safe levels, promoting and protecting road users engaging in public or active transport, and improving road user standards. The Longford Town LTP will implement some of these measures by implementing traffic calming / traffic management measures and by reducing dependency on cars in favour of increased walking, cycling and public transport use.

Access to services, facilities, and open spaces

Current baseline information

6.22 Good and equitable accessibility to services, facilities and open spaces is vital to the health and well-being of a community. Services and facilities include hospitals and GPs, recreational resources, food retailers, employment and education centres, and other aspects of social infrastructure such as community centres and places of worship.

6.23 The most recently available census data, the 2016 Census, shows that there is a high proportion of residents in County Longford commuting to other areas for employment, averaging commuting distances of approximately 20km. The majority of commuting trips are by car at 61% and 70% in the county and town, respectively. The number of commuting trips by car nationally is 66%, which demonstrates the above average level of car dependency in Longford Town [See reference 87]. Walking is the only other significant mode of transport used to travel to work and school, with 19% of people walking to work and 30% of students walking to school. Only 1% of people use public transport to travel to work in Longford Town, while 12% of students use public transport to go to school. Cycling has a particularly low level of usage in the town, accounting for only 2% of journeys to work and 1% of journeys to school.

6.24 As detailed in **Chapter 14: Material assets**, there are several constraints to the existing active travel network in Longford which impede active travel to key services and facilities, including:

- Lack of safe crossings and facilities (especially at roundabouts and on Longford Main Steet).
- Fragmentation and variable quality of the cycle network.
- Lack of permeability between key areas in the town and to key destinations (e.g. schools, train station, etc.).
- Lack of footpaths, or only on one side, particularly around the edges of Longford Town.
- Limited cycling facilities in Longford Town (Main Street / Earls Street).
- Physical barriers to the active travel network from the rail and national road infrastructure, and waterways.

6.25 Similarly, **Chapter 14: Material assets**, identifies the following constraints to the public transport network which may account for the low level of use by residents in Longford Town to access services and facilities:

Chapter 6 Population and human health

- Only two train stations within the county at Longford Town and Edgeworthstown.
- Infrequent local bus services.
- Scheduling issues between transport modes.
- Longer bus journey times compared to car journeys.
- The accessibility of the train stations by walking and cycling is an issue.

6.26 Travel times to key services and facilities in the town are detailed in **Table 6.2**. The national average journey times by car (61%), walking (58%) and cycling (71%) are less than 15 minutes [[See reference 88](#)]. As illustrated in **Table 6.2** journey times to key services and facilities by car and bike generally take less than 15 minutes, in line with the national average. However, access to many services and facilities in the Longford Town by walking will generally take longer than the national average journey time.

Table 6.2: Travel times between key services and facilities

From	To	Distance	Walking (travel time)	Cycling (travel time)	Car (travel time)	Public transport
Train/Bus Station	Main Street	600m	6 mins	2 mins	1 min	-
Axis Retail Centre	Main Street	~2km	23 mins	9 mins	8 mins	-
Longford Business and Technology Park	Main Street	~1.6km	20 mins	8 mins	5 mins	-
Royal Canal	Main Street	~450m	6 mins	2 mins	3 mins	-
McEoin Park	Main Street	~1.4km	18 mins	7 min	5 mins	-

From	To	Distance	Walking (travel time)	Cycling (travel time)	Car (travel time)	Public transport
Pearse Park GAA	Main Street	~1.4km	17 mins	5 mins	4 mins	-
Longford Rugby Club	Main Street	~1.6km	20 mins	7 mins	4 mins	-
Longford Slashers GAA	Main Street	~1.9km	23 mins	6 mins	5 mins	-
Abbeycarton	Main Street	~1.3km	16 mins	5 mins	3 mins	-
Adrnacassa Ave	Main Street	~1.4km	17 mins	6 mins	6 mins	-
Cartronageeragh Business Park	Main Street	~2.1km	27 mins	7 mins	6 mins	-
Coonbalt Wood	Main Street	~2.4km	30 mins	9 mins	5 mins	-
Longford	Athlone	~40km	-	-	45 mins	49 mins (bus)
Longford	Dublin (Connolly Station)	~120km	-	-	1 hr 40 mins	1 hr 50 mins (train) 2 hrs (bus)

6.27 County Longford is also served by a network of greenways, blueways, peatways, cycle routes and walking trails. Existing blueways include scenic routes along the River Shannon and Royal Canal, connecting Longford with neighbouring counties. There are a number of greenways in the county including the Royal Canal, as well as several Public Rights of Way, including The Mall Walk. The Royal Canal is classed both as a greenway and Public Right of Way.

6.28 There are a number of recreational areas within Longford Town, including the Albert Reynolds Peace Park (the Mall) containing the Mall Walking Trail; the

Leisure complex; the Royal Canal Greenway; County Longford Golf Club; the former Longford greyhound racing stadium; Pearse Park GAA stadium; Longford Rugby Club grounds, Tennis club, bowling centre as well as other residential amenity areas and open spaces with the town.

Projected baseline information

6.29 Development pressures could lead to loss of some existing open space and sports/recreation facilities, whilst projected population increases are likely to increase demand for such facilities. Access to key services and facilities could become more challenging as the population in Longford continues to grow and age.

6.30 There are several transport projects in the pipeline which will improve access to key services, facilities and opens spaces in Longford Town, most notably:

- N4/M4 Mullingar to Longford (Roosky) upgrade – The portion of road which will be upgraded passes through the settlements of Edgeworthstown, Longford and Newtownforbes [\[See reference 89\]](#).
- The Royal Canal Way – The 16.5km Cloondara Greenway forms part of the extended Royal Canal Quay which provides an off-road trackway between Longford to Killashee and along the Royal Canal towards Cloondara Harbour. This will provide a multi-purpose active transport route that connects to the ongoing improvements to the Royal Canal Way, which extends to Dublin.
- National Cycle Network – Connecting Longford Town to Roscommon in the south-west and Sligo in the north.
- ‘Longford Connected’ and the ‘Camlin Quarter Regeneration Project’ aim to deliver urban realm improvements and improve the environmental quality, walkability and liveability of the town and enhance the existing townscape. The Camlin Quarter Regeneration Project includes Connolly

Barracks, Church Street, Great Water Street, Little Water Street and the Albert Reynolds Peace Park.

- Interurban cycle and walking connections in Longford Town.

6.31 The 'strategies' in the Longford LTP will have a positive effect on improving the health and wellbeing of the population of Longford by encouraging active travel choices; improving access to health and welfare services; and improving access to open spaces.

Affluence and deprivation

Current baseline information

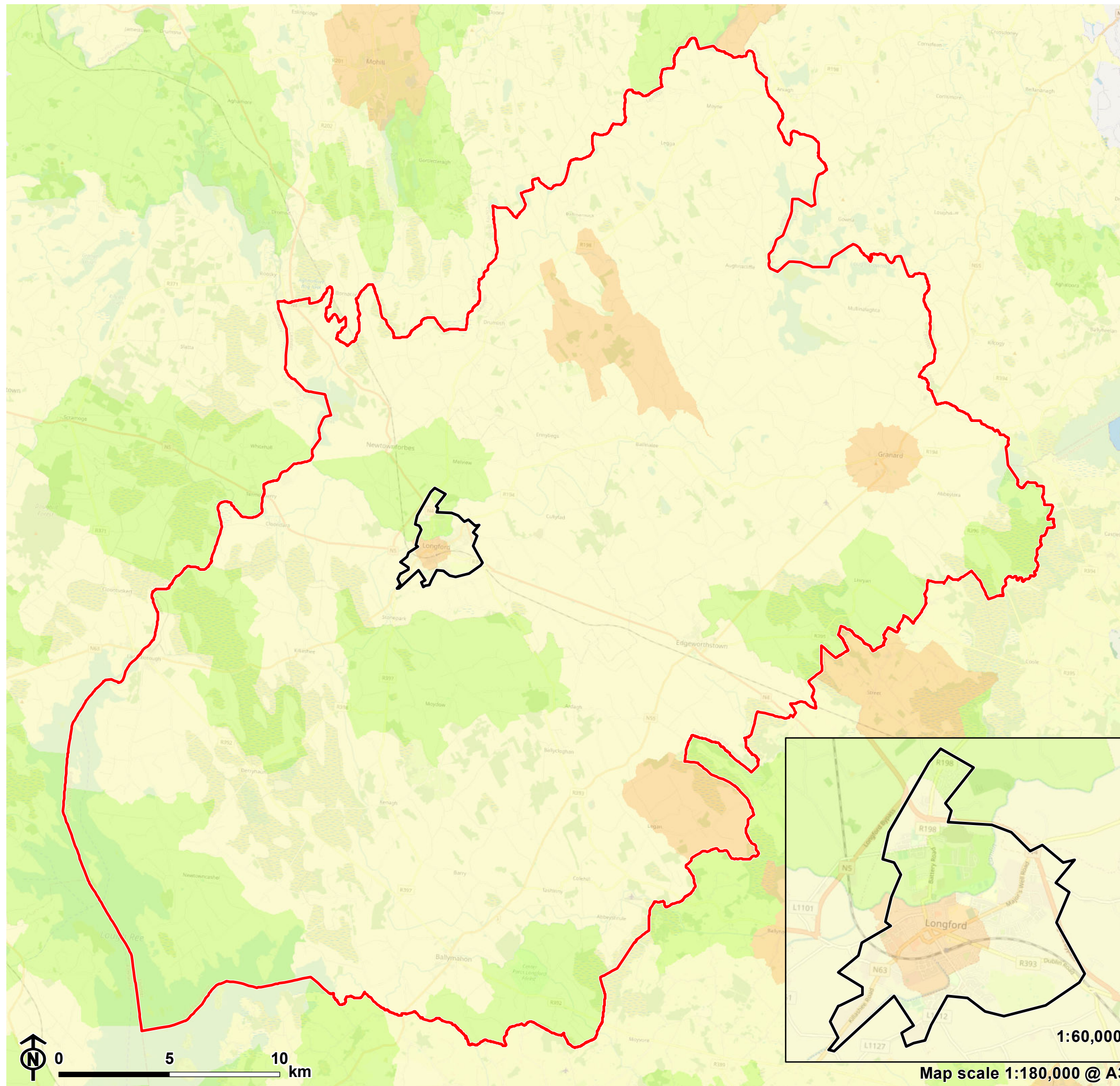
6.32 The Pobal HP deprivation Index provides a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area using data compiled from various censuses. It is a recognised resource for identifying affluence and disadvantage, by providing local analysis of relevant metrics such as unemployment, educational attainment and population change.

6.33 According to the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, County Longford is the eighth most deprived region in the country and generally experiences varied levels of deprivation (see **Figure 6.4**). Most areas in the county are categorised as 'marginally above average' or 'marginally below average'. However, the most disadvantaged and affluent areas are within Longford Town. Areas of the town described as 'affluent' are areas in the north of the town off Battery Road. McEoin Park in the south of Longford Town experiences the highest level of disadvantage, described as 'extremely disadvantaged'. The remaining town is considered 'marginally below average', 'disadvantaged' or 'very disadvantaged' [\[See reference 90\]](#).

Projected baseline information

6.34 The Longford County Development Plan supports the economic, social and physical regeneration of deprived areas in the county. Areas such as the Ardnacassa area, McEoin Park and other areas suffering from social and economic deprivation in the town are identified as areas which will be prioritised for regeneration in the Longford County Development Plan. Therefore, levels of deprivation may improve as a result of targeted regeneration plans for the town. Similarly, the Longford Town LTP seeks to improve active travel infrastructure throughout the town and to key employment and education locations, thus removing one of the barriers to future employment for many social groups.

Figure 6.4: Affluence and deprivation in Longford



- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Pobal HP Deprivation Index**
 - Marginally above average
 - Marginally below average
 - Disadvantaged

Key environmental issues and likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP

6.35 Population growth and demographic change will place additional demand on the transport network (as well as on housing availability, education, health and social care facilities, etc.). The Longford Town LTP offers an opportunity to deliver an integrated and accessible transport system that improves access to services and facilities for all of Longford's population. As the older population of Longford is predicted to grow, the Longford Town LTP offers an opportunity to consider age friendly design, including design for dementia, and potential for increasing access to health services in development of transport proposals to better an older population.

6.36 High levels of car dependency amongst the population of Longford and HGV traffic travelling through the town contribute towards traffic congestion and a decline in air quality, particularly during peak commuter times. There is potential for the Longford Town LTP to reduce air and/or noise pollution by supporting a modal shift to active travel and public transport within the town, thereby improving the health and wellbeing of the population of Longford.

6.37 The most densely populated areas in Longford Town are generally in the centre, south and eastern parts of the town. These areas tend to coincide with higher levels of relative deprivation and unemployment, along with lower levels of educational attainment. The Longford Town LTP seeks to improve active travel infrastructure throughout the town and to key employment and education locations, thus removing one of the barriers to employment for many social groups.

6.38 Lack of safe and accessible cycling and walking networks discourage active travel in the town. In the 2016 Census, Longford Town recorded the highest number of people in Ireland who stated that their health was 'bad' or

'very bad' (2.9%) [See reference 91]. The LTP has an important role to play in improving health of the residents of Longford Town through improving access to services and facilities (including health facilities), encouraging active travel modes such as walking and cycling, reducing transport-related air and noise pollution, and reducing spatial connectivity inequalities that impact health.

6.39 In the absence of the Longford Town LTP, the policies in the Longford County Development Plan would apply, however, without the Longford Town LTP, these sustainability issues would be less well addressed, and the opportunities identified above may not be fully exploited.

Corresponding Environmental Protection Objectives in the EPO Framework

- **Environmental Protection Objective 2: Population and human health -** Create a healthy living environment, encourage healthy lifestyles and improve safety.
 - Does the LTP protect physical and mental health and wellbeing by preventing, avoiding and mitigating adverse health effects associated with air, noise, vibration, and light pollution from transport infrastructure?
 - Does the LTP promote healthy lifestyles by encouraging and facilitating active travel, such as walking and cycling?
 - Does the LTP improve road user safety and reduce the risk of accidents, such as through traffic calming measures or improved crossings?
 - Does the LTP facilitate access to key services, facilities and employment areas for all, including ensuring easily accessible and affordable public transport, particularly in more deprived areas?
 - Does the LTP minimise journey times for commuting?

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- Does the LTP improve access to open spaces and recreational facilities to improve physical and mental health?

Chapter 7

Climatic factors

Baseline information

Due to the potential for effects from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP to extend beyond the Longford Town boundary, a description of the baseline information relevant to both Longford Town and County is provided in the subsequent paragraphs in relation to 'climatic factors'.

As climate change affects most SEA topics, this chapter should be read in conjunction with the other SEA topic chapters.

Climate change predictions

Current baseline information

7.1 Climate change presents a global risk, with a range of different impacts that are likely to be felt within Longford across numerous receptors. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on global warming outlines that, under emissions in line with current pledges under the Paris Agreement, **global warming is expected to surpass 1.5°C**, even if these pledges are supplemented with very challenging increases in the scale and ambition of mitigation after 2030. This increased action would need to achieve net zero CO₂ emissions in less than 15 years [See reference 92]. In light of IPCC work, the Government of Ireland declared a Climate Emergency in May 2019 [See reference 93]. In December 2019, the Cathaoirleach and Chief

Executive of County Longford signed the Climate Action Charter, demonstrating Longford County Council's commitment to providing local leadership on climate action [See reference 94] and prepared a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy [See reference 95]. The objectives of the Strategy of most relevance to the Longford Town LTP are to:

- Incorporate climate action awareness and response throughout council policy.
- Ensure / increase the resilience of infrastructural assets and inform investment decisions.
- Maintain the integrity of public infrastructure against negative climate change impacts and increase the design resilience of planned developments into the future.
- Promote a combined climate action response to infrastructure provision.
- Integrate climate action considerations into land use planning policy and influence positive behaviour.
- Manage the risk of flooding through a variety of responses and to mitigate the risk and impact of flooding.
- Provide for enhancement of the natural environment to work positively towards climate action, to promote effective biodiversity management and enhance protection of natural habitats and landscapes and protect heritage and cultural infrastructure.
- Support climate action initiatives in line with local economic and community plan (LECP) actions.
- Build capacity and resilience within communities.

7.2 The Strategy outlines next steps including setting out short, medium and long-term actions to deliver the above objectives. Carbon neutrality and increasing Longford's resilience to climate change therefore needs to be fully woven into the Longford Town LTP and form a key part of the SEA.

7.3 Ireland has experienced a general trend towards warmer average temperatures in recent years with temperatures increasing by 0.9°C during the period 1900 to 2019. Fifteen of the top twenty warmest years on record have occurred since 1990. In Ireland, 2019 was the ninth consecutive year with temperatures above normal. There has also been a significant reduction in average annual levels of spring and summer rainfall with a substantial increase in the frequency of heavy precipitation events in winter and autumn [See reference 96].

7.4 The following statistics, derived from the nearest Met Éireann weather station at Mullingar, approximately 43km from Longford Town, indicate that Longford, in line with the national trend, has also been experiencing increases in average daily temperatures and rainfall [See reference 97]:

- The mean temperature between 1960 and 1990 is recorded at 8.8°C and between 1979 and 2008 at 9.3°C (representing a 0.7°C increase over the period 1960-2008).
- The average rainfall 1960-1990 was recorded as 934.3mm and 1979-2008 941.3mm (representing a 7mm increase over the period 1960-2008).

7.5 Recent significant weather events in Longford include [See reference 98]:

- Extreme flooding events in 2009, 2011 and 2015 around Longford Town, Newtoncashel and Cloondara and threatened areas around Ballymahon and Lanesborough. Local spot flooding in rural areas was also a significant problem.
- Significant snow events in 2018 and severe winters in 2009/10 and 2010/11.
- Prolonged dry and hot spell in 2022 (warmest year on record), causing damage to transport infrastructure and increased woodland / peatland fires (similar dry spells recorded in 2018, 2006 and 1996).
- Storm events in years (e.g. Storm Ophelia in 2017) causing major disruption due to fallen trees and powerlines.

Projected baseline information

7.6 In general, climate change projections are indicating a greater chance of hotter, drier summers and warmer, wetter winters in Ireland. Ireland's climate is changing in line with global trends and by the middle of the century (2041-2060), annual temperatures are projected to increase between 1-1.2°C and 1.3-1.6°C, depending on the emissions trajectory. Projections indicate a substantial increase in the frequency of heavy precipitation events in winter and autumn, an increase of approximately 20%. Sea levels and the number of intense storms are also projected to increase [See reference 99]. Climate change has the potential for diverse and wide-ranging impacts, as detailed overleaf.

Risks

- The number of incidents of food poisoning, heat stress and heat related deaths may increase in summer.
- Domestic energy use may increase during summer months as refrigeration and air conditioning demand increases.
- Wetter winters and more intense rainfall events throughout the year may result in a higher risk of flooding from rivers.
- More intense rainstorms may in some locations result in the amount of surface water runoff exceeding the capacity of drainage systems, consequently leading to more frequent and severe localised flash flooding.
- More frequent storms and floods may cause increased damage to property and infrastructure, resulting in significant economic costs.
- Periods of drought in summer could lead to soil shrinking and subsidence, causing damage to buildings and transport networks. Drought may also impact negatively on agriculture, industry and biodiversity.
- Warmer and drier summers are likely to affect the quantity and quality of water supply, which will need careful management.

- The changing climate will impact on the behaviour and distribution of species and may encourage the spread of invasive species.

Opportunities

- Milder winters should reduce the costs of heating homes and other buildings, helping to alleviate fuel poverty and reducing the number of winter deaths from cold.
- Domestic energy use may decrease in winter due to higher temperatures.
- Warmer and drier summers may benefit the recreation and tourism economy.
- Ireland's agriculture and forestry may be able to increase production with warmer weather and longer growing seasons.

Greenhouse gas emissions

Current baseline information

7.7 Longford County Council identified Longford Town as a decarbonisation zone, in line with Action 165 of the Climate Action Plan 2019, which requires every local authority to identify a pilot decarbonisation zone to test the scale and scope of decarbonising society and the economy **[See reference 100]**.

7.8 Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2023 **[See reference 101]** sets out decisive action to reduce overall greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to put Ireland on a more sustainable path. The rate of emissions reductions in Ireland was modest until 2008 and since 2011 emissions have trended upwards again, with an overall peak in 2018 (60.9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (MT CO₂eq). GHG emissions are failing to fall consistently each year. In 2021, Ireland's provisional GHG emissions are estimated to be 61.53MT CO₂eq which is 4.7% higher than emissions in 2020, likely due to some sectors recovering

from the COVID-19 pandemic, and higher than the 2018 figure of 60.9MT CO₂eq [See reference 102]. Agriculture is the largest source of emissions in Ireland, representing 33.3% of the nation's total emissions in 2021. The transport (15.7%) and energy (primarily power generation) (14.4%) sectors represent the second and third largest share of emissions.

The transport sector has been the fastest growing sector of GHG emissions over the past three decades, with a 112% increase between 1990 and 2021.

7.9 Despite the impacts of COVID-19, GHG emissions in Ireland only decreased 3.6% in 2020. However, 2021 saw GHG emissions rise again by 4.7% as some sectors recovered.

Projected baseline information

7.10 Ireland is committed to reaching a legally binding target of net-zero emissions no later than 2050, and a reduction of 51% (compared to 2018 levels) by 2030 under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 [See reference 103]. The latest EPA GHG projections [See reference 104] show that currently implemented measures will achieve a reduction of 10% on 2025 levels by 2030, significantly short of the 30% reduction target. GHG emissions are failing to fall consistently each year with the provisional 2021 figure higher than the previous year and higher than the 2018 peak figure (since 2011). GHG emissions in Longford are likely to follow the national trend, although the implementation of the Longford Town LTP is likely to have a positive effect on transport-related emission generation as it seeks to reduce dependency on cars (and their associated transport emissions) and support a modal shift from private car use to public transport and active travel.

Road travel and associated energy consumption

Current baseline information

7.11 Longford is well served by transport links in the form of the Dublin to Sligo rail line, and several strategic roads which traverse the county, including the N4 and N5, both of which are components of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) Comprehensive Network. The most recently available census data, the 2016 Census, shows that there is a high proportion of residents in County Longford commuting to other areas for work, averaging commuting distances of approximately 20km. Conversely, Longford Town experiences a high level of inbound commuters. The majority of commuting trips are by car at 61% and 70% in the county and town, respectively. The number of commuting trips by car nationally is 66%, which demonstrates the above average level of car dependency in Longford Town **[See reference 105]**. The 2022 Census results will not be available until April 2023, and it is likely that COVID-19 has significantly impacted commuter numbers in recent years.

7.12 According to the Energy in Ireland 2021 Report **[See reference 106]**, the significant restrictions on personal mobility during 2020 had a direct effect on transport energy use, especially on private car use. However, private car energy use still dominates and accounts for 42% of transport energy use in 2020.

Transport energy use remains dominated by fossil fuels, which accounted for over 95% of transport energy use in 2020.

7.13 Renewable energy made up just 4.5% of transport energy use in 2020, up from 3.6% in 2019, however, electricity remains a very small share of transport energy use at just 0.2% in 2020. There continues to be a clear shift from petrol

to diesel private cars, and in 2020, petrol accounted for 28% and diesel for 72% of all private cars.

7.14 An independent report commissioned by the Society of the Irish Motor Industry identified that there are currently 1,900 electric vehicle (EV) charging points in the country across 800 sites, of which there are 19 in County Longford [See reference 107]. There are five electric charging points in Longford Town at Market Square, Bridge Street, Richmond Street, Camlin Service Station, Dublin Road and Irish Rail, Earl Street. A report issued by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly in 2022 highlights that Longford is one of the counties with the lowest number of EV charging points in Ireland, with only Leitrim having fewer EV charging points [See reference 108].

Projected baseline information

7.15 The majority of commuting trips in the county and town are by private car and this trend is likely to continue without significant intervention.

7.16 In terms of transport energy use, there has been very little decarbonisation of the transport fuel mix to date, with transport CO₂ emissions remaining tightly coupled to energy use which is dominated by fossil fuels and accounted for over 95% of transport energy use in 2020. In 2019, transport CO₂ emissions were the same as they had been in 2005. If this trend continues, Ireland will miss its target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and reach net-zero no later than 2050.

7.17 Ireland proposes to have 1 million electric vehicles on the road by 2030, which will require 100,000 public chargers. As stated above, there are 1,900 charging points currently which falls far short of the number needed to support the increase in electric vehicles. Without targeted intervention, Longford will remain as one of the lowest counties for EV infrastructure which will adversely affect the take-up of electric vehicles in the county, resulting in a continued reliance on petrol and diesel vehicles.

Flooding and heat events

Current baseline information

7.18 Flood risk in the county is implicitly linked to climate change considering the changes predicted in weather patterns which could lead to more frequent flooding in Longford. Longford is affected by flooding from several sources: fluvial, surface water, ordinary watercourses, sewer and groundwater. Flooding has been an issue in the county over recent years, with extreme flooding events in 2009, 2011 and 2015 around Longford Town, Newtoncashel and Cloondara and threatened areas around Ballymahon and Lanesborough. Local spot flooding in rural areas was also a significant problem [\[See reference 109\]](#).

7.19 Longford Town has a history of flooding as the town is drained by the River Camlin and a number of tributaries. Significant areas of flood risk are identified along the River Camlin and downstream to the west of the town where there are various areas of raised ground. There are existing flooding issues with the Dublin-Sligo rail line immediately west of Longford Town which are likely to be exacerbated by increased rainfall [\[See reference 110\]](#).

7.20 Longford has experienced several prolonged hot and dry spells, particularly in the summers of 2022 (hottest on record), 2018, 2006 and 1996, which caused damage to buildings, transport infrastructure and increased woodland and peatland fires. The warmer and drier summers also affected the quantity and quality of water supply, negatively impacting agriculture, industry and biodiversity. Flooding and extreme heat events also negatively impacted more vulnerable members of the county, including young children, older people, people with health issues, people with physical mobility issues, etc.

Projected baseline information

7.21 As outlined in the 'Climate change predictions' section of this chapter, the climate in Longford is changing, resulting in an increase in prolonged dry spells, intense rainfall events and more frequent storms and floods, leading to adverse effects on people's health and wellbeing and increased damage to property and infrastructure resulting in significant economic costs.

Key environmental issues and likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP

7.22 There is a need to significantly reduce the Longford's greenhouse gas emissions to help meet international and national greenhouse gas reduction targets. The effects of climate change in Longford are likely to result in extreme weather events (e.g., intense rainfall and flooding, prolonged high temperatures and drought) becoming more common and more intense. Climate change is therefore likely to affect habitats and species and how people live, work and play. In the absence of the Longford Town LTP, the actions outlined in the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and the policies of the Longford County Development Plan will apply which seek to respond to the Climate Emergency by reducing energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions, including transport-related emissions; improving energy efficiency of buildings; maintaining and enhancing green infrastructure; and supporting low carbon and renewable energy generation (Climate Change policies CPO3.1 -CPO3.19). The Longford Town LTP provides an opportunity to adapt and mitigate to climatic factors by promoting sustainable development of transport infrastructure, for example by locating transport infrastructure in sustainable locations that would not be significantly impacted by flooding (or likely to increase flooding elsewhere) and ensuring it is designed to be flood resilient; reducing the need to travel by private car; creating and enhancing green and blue infrastructure networks; incorporating Sustainable urban Drainage Systems

(SuDS) as part of new transport and active travel schemes; identifying suitable locations for new public EV charging infrastructure; and through low carbon design of new transport infrastructure and the use of renewable energy for electricity in electric vehicles.

Corresponding Environmental Protection Objectives in the EPO Framework

- **Environmental Protection Objective 3: Air quality and climate change mitigation** - Improve air quality and minimise greenhouse gas emissions by reducing concentrations of harmful atmospheric pollutants and avoiding their emission.
 - Does the LTP reduce the need to travel by petrol or diesel vehicles?
 - Does the LTP improve air quality by minimising pollutant emissions from the transport sector?
 - Does the LTP help to address road congestion and its impact on air quality?
 - Does the LTP encourage a modal shift to sustainable modes of transport by supporting maintenance and expansion of public and active transport networks?
 - Does the LTP support the provision of facilities for electric vehicle charging?
 - Does the LTP encourage the use of sustainable construction methods and materials in the development of transport infrastructure, with a focus on reducing the embodied carbon in new transport infrastructure?
- **SEA objective 4: Flood risk and climate change adaptation** - Reduce the risk and effects of flooding, both now and in the future.

Chapter 7 Climatic factors

- Does the LTP direct transport away from areas at highest risk of flooding and avoid inappropriate transport-related development in areas at risk of flooding, taking into account the effects of climate change and mitigate residual risks without increasing flood risk elsewhere?
- Does the LTP increase the resilience of transport systems to the effects of climate change, via flood resilient design?
- Does the LTP promote the use of SuDS, where appropriate?
- Does the LTP encourage the creation, management and enhancement of a coherent green and blue infrastructure (GBI) network?

Chapter 8

Air

Baseline information

Due to the potential for effects from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP to extend beyond the Longford Town boundary, a description of the baseline information relevant to both Longford Town and County is provided in the subsequent paragraphs in relation to 'air'.

Current baseline information

8.1 Emissions from home heating, agriculture, transport and energy generation all contribute to poorer air quality throughout the year. By European standards, Ireland's ambient air quality is relatively good and ambient air quality limit values are respected. The EPA's Air Quality in Ireland 2021 Report [[See reference 111](#)] found that there were no exceedances of air pollutants above the EU annual limit values. However, the pollutants of most concern are those whose main source is traffic (particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂)). These pollutants exceed the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Air Quality Guidelines (AQGs) for health and in 2021 Ireland did not meet the WHO AQGs for health. The health implications associated with poor air quality are outlined in **Chapter 6: Population and human health**.

8.2 In addition to their potential negative effects on human health, emissions of NO₂ and PM can affect ecosystems. It is likely that the strongest effect of emissions of nitrogen oxides across Ireland is through their contribution to total nitrogen deposition. All plants need nitrogen to grow but if too much nitrogen is

present, it becomes a pollutant and can result in biodiversity change. Nitrogen deposition can also increase the risk from abiotic factors (e.g. drought and frost) or cause acidification of soils. As well as these effects of nitrogen deposition, direct effects can occur on habitats and species where there is high exposure (e.g. habitats adjacent to national roads, and habitats in and around urban centres). Particulates (i.e. PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}) are essentially dust emissions that can settle on vegetation and affect animal respiration.

8.3 Longford Town was designated as a smokeless fuel zone as of 1st September 2020, where the marketing, sale, distribution and burning of specified fuels is prohibited [See reference 112]. From October 2022, the Solid Fuel Regulations 2022 [See reference 113] apply nationwide which restricts the commercial sale of smoky fuels, including smoky coal, turf and wet wood, aiming to prevent harmful pollution from domestic burning of solid fuels. However, people with turbary rights will be unaffected by these regulations and will be able to continue to use turf as a source of fuel for domestic purposes.

8.4 County Longford currently enjoys a high air quality standard, with the Air Quality Index for Health (AQIH) rating air quality in the county as 'Good'. However, increased vehicle usage, burning of fossil fuels including peat for domestic purposes, and emissions from industry and agricultural practices are a threat to air quality in the county. The closure of the peat-generated ESB power station at Lanesborough at the end of 2020 has had a significant positive effect in terms of reducing air pollution in the county. The most pronounced areas in relation to air pollution are built-up urban areas and major transport routes, including along the Dublin to Sligo rail line and the four national roads (N4, N5, N55 and N63). The air quality index for Longford Town is calculated on an hourly basis. The monitoring site is located on the Dublin Road, less than a mile from Longford Town Centre. The AQIH rating for air quality in the town is 'Good'. However, there is a decline in air quality during peak commuter times and in the winter (from emissions from fires and stoves) [See reference 114]. In December 2022, freezing weather conditions saw a significant spike in air pollution with the monitoring site on Dublin Road recording the highest level of air pollution in the country [See reference 115]. Further details on the transport network are detailed in **Chapter 13: Material assets**.

Projected baseline information

8.5 The introduction of the Solid Fuel Regulations 2022 is likely to reduce air pollution from domestic burning of solid fuels, however, the extent of the positive effect is limited as people with turbary rights are able to continue to burn turf as a source of fuel for domestic purposes.

8.6 There is a direct relationship between air quality levels and traffic growth. The predicted growth of Longford's population as outlined in the Longford County Development Plan [See reference 116] will inevitably result in an increase in road-based traffic and congestion which will adversely affect the air quality in the county, particularly in Longford Town. Conversely, increasing the provision of active travel routes and electric vehicle charging infrastructure in Longford is likely to reduce transport-related emissions.

8.7 There are likely to be lasting changes to people's travel habits as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as improvements in technology and infrastructure. Evidence suggests that office-based staff are working remotely/at home more often thereby reducing the need to travel to offices and transport-related emissions [See reference 117].

8.8 There is a possibility that air quality may worsen in the long-term as a result of climate change, due to a greater likelihood of prolonged periods of still, dry days, and to-date this relationship has been difficult to predict.

8.9 Overall, future changes in air quality are difficult to predict.

Key environmental issues and likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP

8.10 In the absence of the Longford Town LTP, the legally binding ceilings for emissions of air pollutants would continue to apply set by the EU Air Quality Directive [See reference 118], as well as the policies in the Longford County Development Plan which support the preservation of ‘best ambient air quality’ in the county, the promotion of alternative and sustainable transport methods to maintain good air quality, and the retention and planting of green infrastructure as a means of air purification and filtering (Air Quality policies CPO12.104 - CPO12.108). However, the Longford Town LTP provides an opportunity to improve air quality and reduce emissions by minimising traffic growth, supporting a modal shift towards public transport, walking and cycling, and providing electric vehicle charging infrastructure to support the uptake of electric vehicles in preference to petrol/diesel vehicles.

8.11 Without targeted action through the Longford Town LTP, it is likely that traffic congestion and high levels of car dependency will continue to increase in the town centre and may worsen with the rising population, exacerbating air quality issues, particularly at commuter times.

Corresponding Environmental Protection Objectives in the EPO Framework

- **Environmental Protection Objective 3: Air quality and climate change mitigation** - Improve air quality and minimise greenhouse gas emissions by reducing concentrations of harmful atmospheric pollutants and avoiding their emission.

- Does the LTP reduce the need to travel by petrol or diesel vehicles?
- Does the LTP improve air quality by minimising pollutant emissions from the transport sector?
- Does the LTP help to address road congestion and its impact on air quality?
- Does the LTP encourage a modal shift to sustainable modes of transport by supporting maintenance and expansion of public and active transport networks?
- Does the LTP support the provision of facilities for electric vehicle charging?
- Does the LTP encourage the use of sustainable construction methods and materials in the development of transport infrastructure, with a focus on reducing the embodied carbon in new transport infrastructure?

Chapter 9

Soil

Baseline information

Due to the potential for effects from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP to extend beyond the Longford Town boundary, a description of the baseline information relevant to both Longford Town and County is provided in the subsequent paragraphs in relation to 'soil'.

Geology, soils and previously developed land

Current baseline information

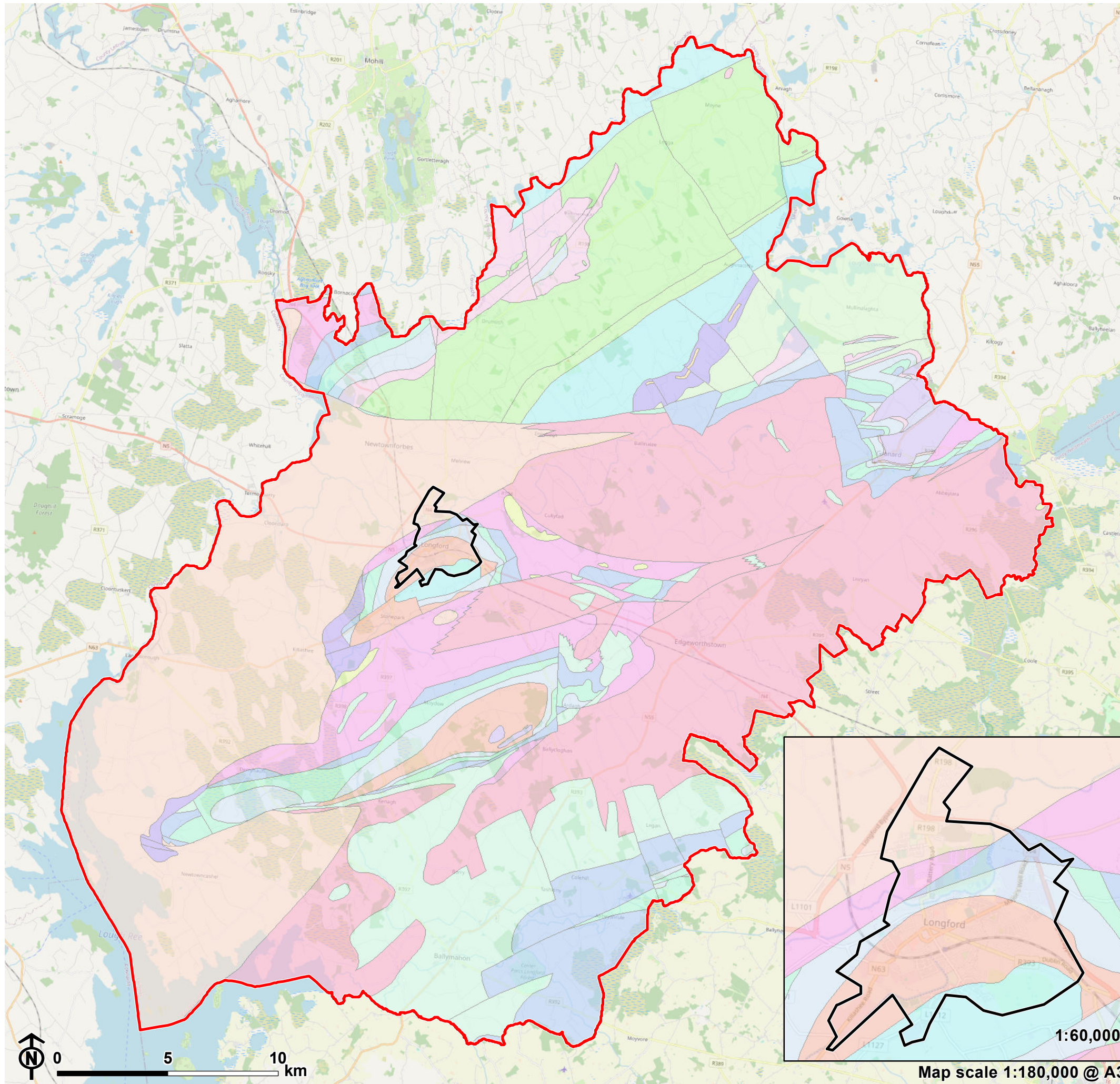
9.1 County Longford has a range of Geological Sites, many of which fall within existing pNHAs and SACs where ecological interest is founded upon the underlying geodiversity. The north of the county has some of the oldest rock comprising sandstones and shales from the Ordovician period. Most of the remaining bedrock geology of the county, including Longford Town, comprises limestone, as illustrated in **Figure 9.1**. There are 15 Geological Sites in County Longford with a concentration of these in the north-east and south-east parts of the county and there is one Geological Site within Longford Town, St Mel's Cathedral (see **Figure 9.2**). St. Mel's Cathedral is a landmark building in Longford Town for its excellent display of rock used as building material, both in the original edifice and in its restoration following a fire in 2009.

9.2 Figure 9.3 illustrates the main types of landcover. According to the CORINE land cover data, the most dominant land cover types in the county are pastures [See reference 119] and peatbogs. Luvisols soils [See reference 120] and peat-based soils are the two most dominant soil types in the county. However, the majority of Longford Town comprises 'continuous urban fabric', which is assigned to areas that have greater than 80% of land surface covered by impermeable features such as buildings, roads, etc [See reference 121].

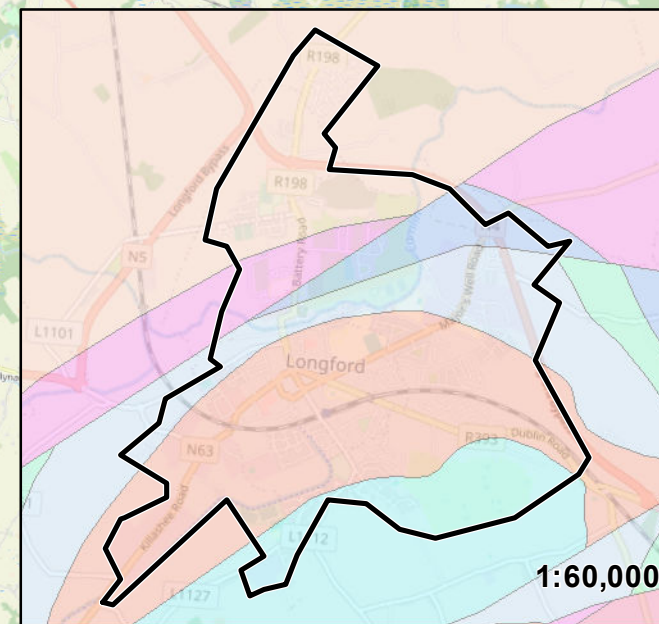
9.3 There are currently 35 sites listed on the Derelict Sites Register in Longford Town, the largest of which is on Little Water Street, and two sites listed on the Vacant Sites Register at Little Water Street and Richmond Street.

9.4 There are several notable construction projects that are either planned, programmed or underway in Longford, which will require significant amounts of mineral resources in the future, including the N4/M4 Mullingar to Longford (Roosky) Upgrade which will pass Longford Town and the Royal Canal Way.

Figure 9.1: Bedrock Geology

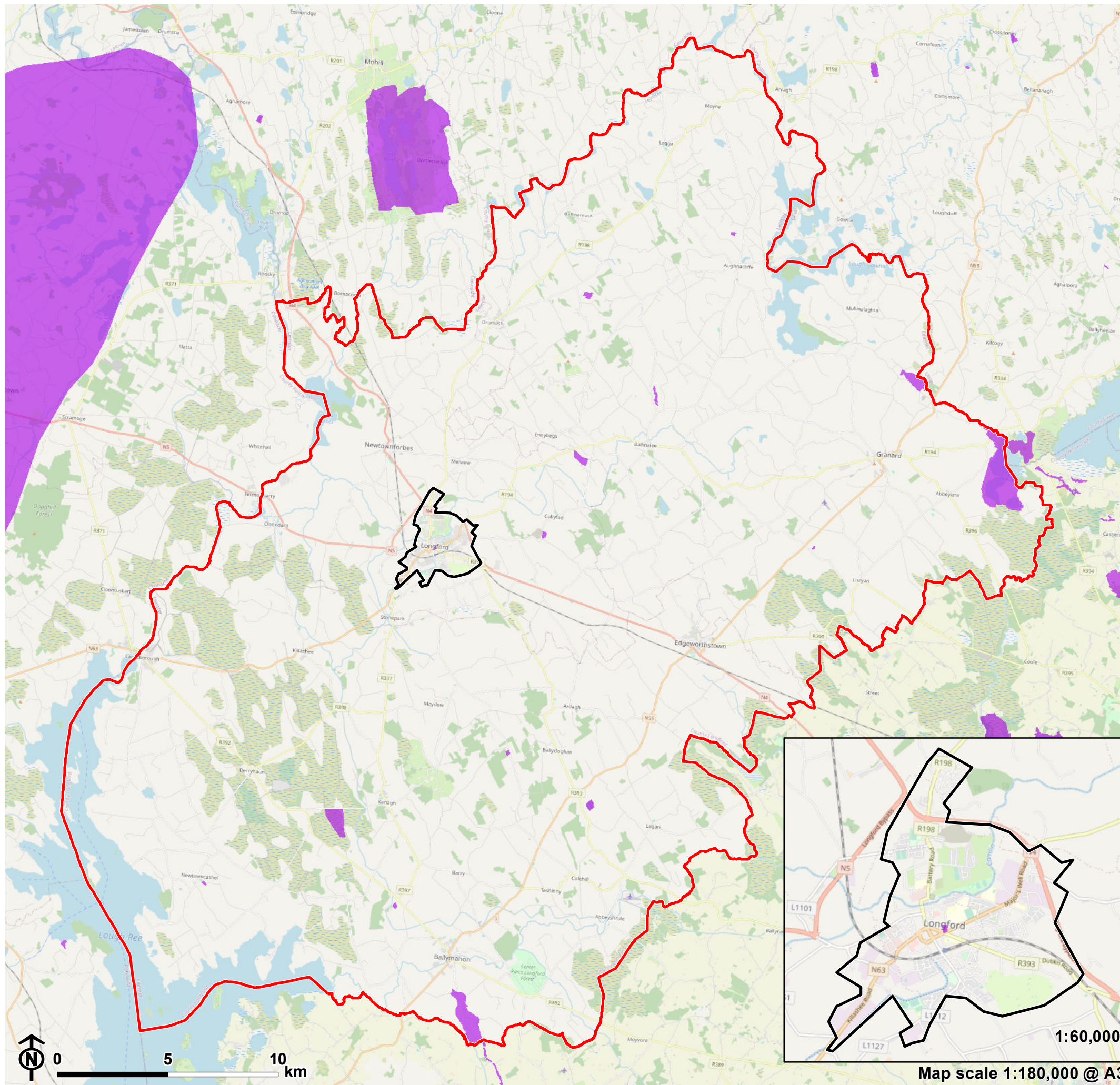


- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Bedrock Geology**
- Aghaward Formation
- Argillaceous Limestones (Visean)
- Arva Granodiorite
- Ballysteen Formation
- Basal clastics
- Carrickateane Formation
- Corn Hill Formation
- Coronea Formation
- Fearnaght Formation
- Finnlaghta Formation
- Glen Lodge Formation
- Lough Avaghon Formation
- Lucan Formation
- Meath Formation
- Moathill Formation
- Mudbank limestone
- Pollareagh Member
- Red Island Formation
- Slieve Glah Formation
- Visean Limestones (undifferentiated)
- Waulsortian Limestones
- in Coronea Formation
- in Dartry Limestone Formation
- in Glen Lodge Formation



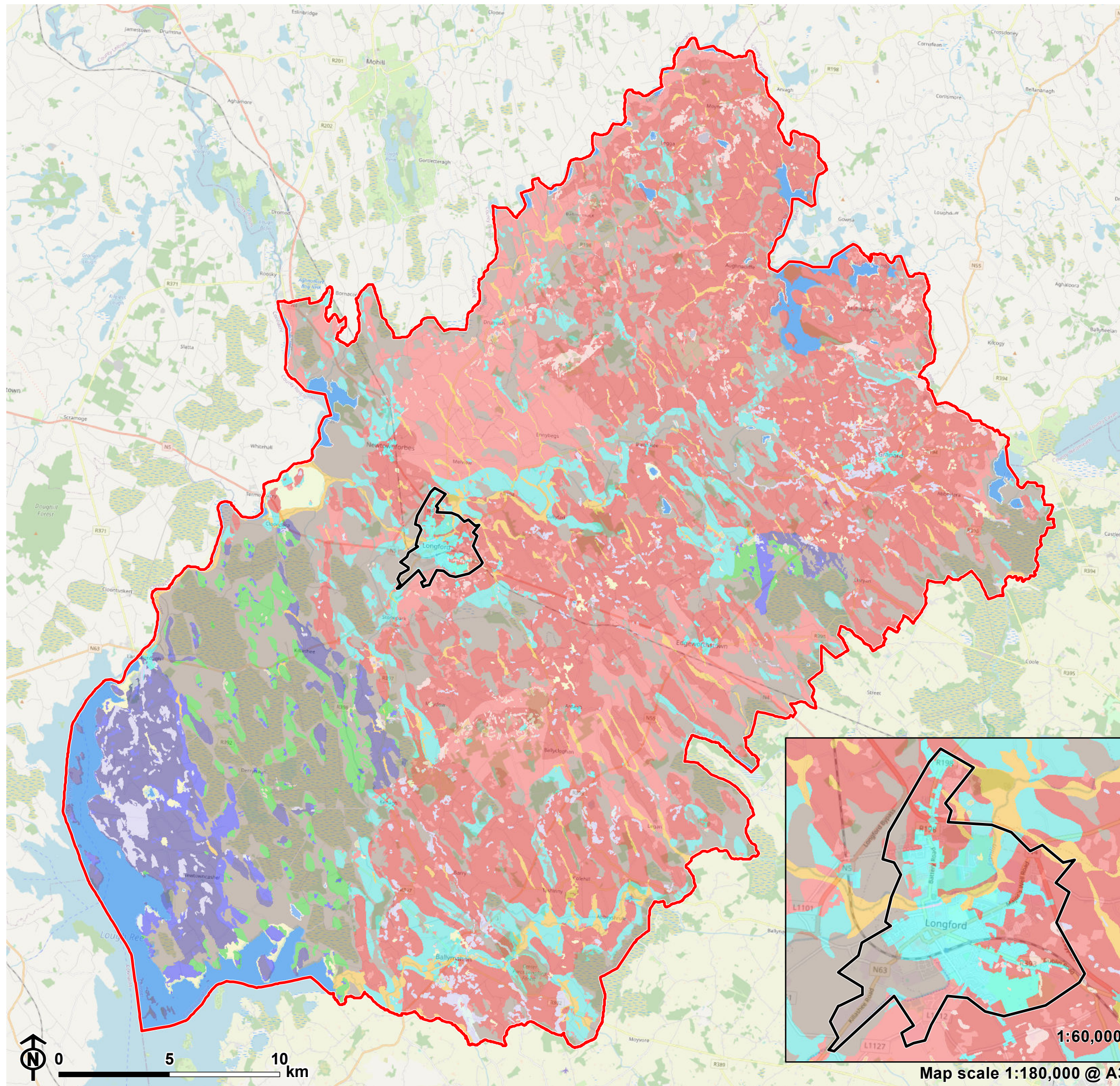
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Figure 9.2: Geological Sites



- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Geological Heritage Site

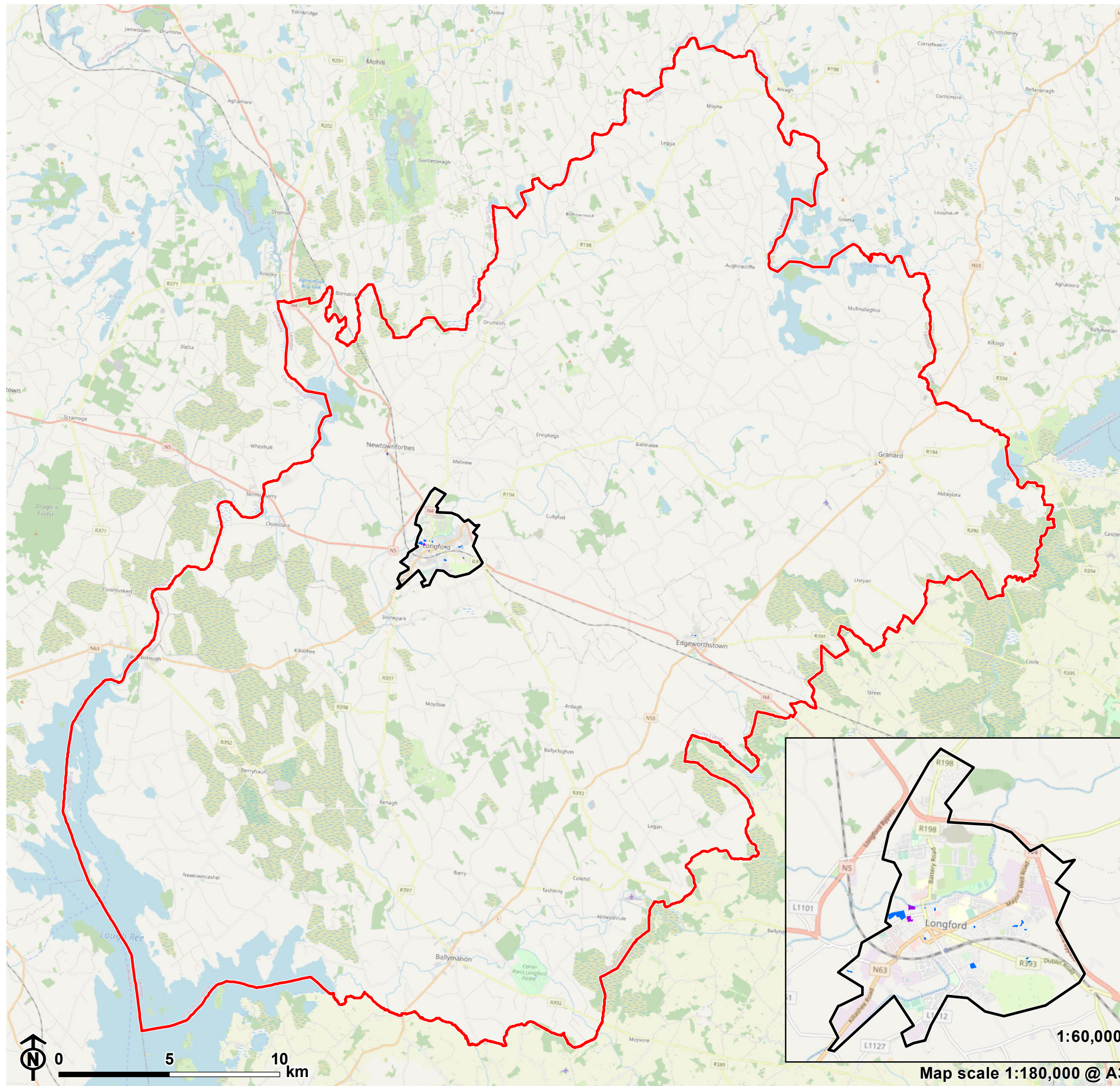
Figure 9.3: Soil Type



- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Soil Type**
- AlluvMIN - Mineral alluvium
- AminDW - Acid Brown Earths / Brown Podzolics
- AminPD - Surface water Gleys / Ground water Gleys Acidic
- AminPDPT - Peaty Gleys Acidic
- AminSP - Surface water Gleys / Ground water Gleys Shallow
- AminSRPT - Podzols Peaty
- AminSW - Lithosols / Regosols
- BktPt - Blanket peat
- BminDW - Grey Brown Podzolics / Brown Earths Basic
- BminPD - Surface water Gleys / Ground water Gleys Basic
- BminPDPT - Peaty Gleys Basic Parent Materials Basic
- BminSP - Surface water Gleys / Ground water Gleys Shallow
- BminSPPT - Peaty Gleys Shallow
- BminSRPT - Lithosols Peats
- BminSW - Renzinas / Lithosols
- Cut - Raised Bog cutaway/cutover
- FenPT - Fen peat
- Lac
- Made
- Water

Figure 9.4: Vacant and Derelict Sites

- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Derelict Sites
- Vacant Sites



Projected baseline information

9.5 The Longford County Development Plan [See reference 122] promotes urban ‘compact growth’ regeneration of Longford Town. It seeks to bring redundant, underutilised and derelict land and buildings back into active use in preference to the continued sprawl of urban development into the countryside. This will reduce the need for greenfield development; support the urban fabric; and re use existing resources. This approach will have a significant positive effect on protecting valuable soil resources in the future.

9.6 New development, recreational and environmental pressures, such as extreme weather and flooding, present the greatest risk to Geological Sites.

9.7 Soils in Ireland have degraded significantly over the last two decades due to erosion by wind and rain, compaction of soil from new development, organic matter decline, and climate change. These trends are likely to continue.

Key environmental issues and likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP

9.8 There are several vacant sites in Longford, however, the extent of infill / brownfield land and vacant and derelict buildings is likely to be reduced in the future as the regeneration of Longford Town progresses. The town contains one proposed Geological Site, St. Mel’s Cathedral, which should not be lost or compromised as new development occurs. There are several notable construction projects that are either planned, programmed or underway in Longford, which will require significant amounts of mineral resources in the future, including the N4/M4 Mullingar to Longford (Roosky) Upgrade which will pass Longford Town and the Royal Canal Way.

9.9 In the absence of the Longford Town LTP, the policies in the Longford County Development Plan would apply. These support the protection of Geological Sites, the reuse of brownfield land, the remediation of contaminated land, and the protection of high-quality agricultural soils (Soil Protection policies CP012.115-CPO12.124). However, the Longford Town LTP provides an opportunity to ensure that transport development and active travel infrastructure is located and designed to take into account the sensitivities of the soil environment and geological sites of value. Furthermore, the Longford Town LTP will support the regeneration of Longford Town's infill/brownfield land by outlining the sustainable transport elements of the regeneration programme.

Corresponding Environmental Protection Objectives in the EPO Framework

- Environmental Protection Objective **5: Soil** - Conserve and enhance Longford's soil resources and geological sites.
 - Does the LTP avoid the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land?
 - Does the LTP conserve designated and undesignated geological assets?
 - Does the LTP direct new transport development to brownfield / previously developed land in preference to greenfield land, where appropriate?

Chapter 10

Water

Baseline information

Due to the potential for effects from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP to extend beyond the Longford Town boundary, a description of the baseline information relevant to both Longford Town and County is provided in the subsequent paragraphs in relation to 'water'.

Current baseline information

10.1 The River Shannon forms the western boundary of County Longford, running through Lough Forbes in the west and Lough Ree in the south, which forms much of the county's southern boundary. In the north, Lough Gowna and Lough Gahmna sit on the border with County Cavan. Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough is located in the north east of the county and River Inny marks much of the eastern boundary of the county. Within County Longford, the River Camlin rises near Granard and flows through Clonbroney, Ballinalee, Killoe and Longford Town before its two distributaries enter the River Shannon. The Royal Canal is a 145km canal linking Dublin and the River Shannon. It passes north to south through County Longford joining the River Shannon at Cloondara in the west. A spur of the Royal Canal originates in Longford Town, exiting south out of the town (see **Figure 10.1**).

10.2 The EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) sets out the protection and enhancement of the country's water sources and aims to improve water quality. County Longford is primarily located within the Shannon (International) River

Chapter 10 Water

Basin District (RBD), with a small portion in the north of the county draining to the North Western RBD. RBDs are further identified by 'catchments' and 'sub-catchments'. County Longford covers a number of river catchments:

- Erne (catchment code 36);
- Upper Shannon (code 26C);
- Upper Shannon (code 26E);
- Upper Shannon (code 26F).

10.3 In 2022, the EPA published a report 'Water Quality in Ireland 2016-2021' [See reference 123] which provides an assessment of the ecological health of Ireland's water resources. The assessment found that there has been an overall decline in surface water quality, including in Ireland's rivers and lakes, since the previous assessment in 2013-2018. Ireland's Third Cycle Draft River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) 2022-2027 [See reference 124] outlines measures required to improve water quality and achieve a 'good' ecological status by 2027. Within County Longford, the RBMP has identified two 'Areas Prioritised for Action' for improvement in water quality, namely Lough Forbes and the River Camlin which runs through the north of Longford Town from east to west. Excessive amounts of nutrients and total ammonia are the main issues that are causing the River Camlin to fail in its achievement of WFD objectives. These nutrients are mainly from urban wastewater diffuse pollution, industry and agricultural lands in the catchment [See reference 125].

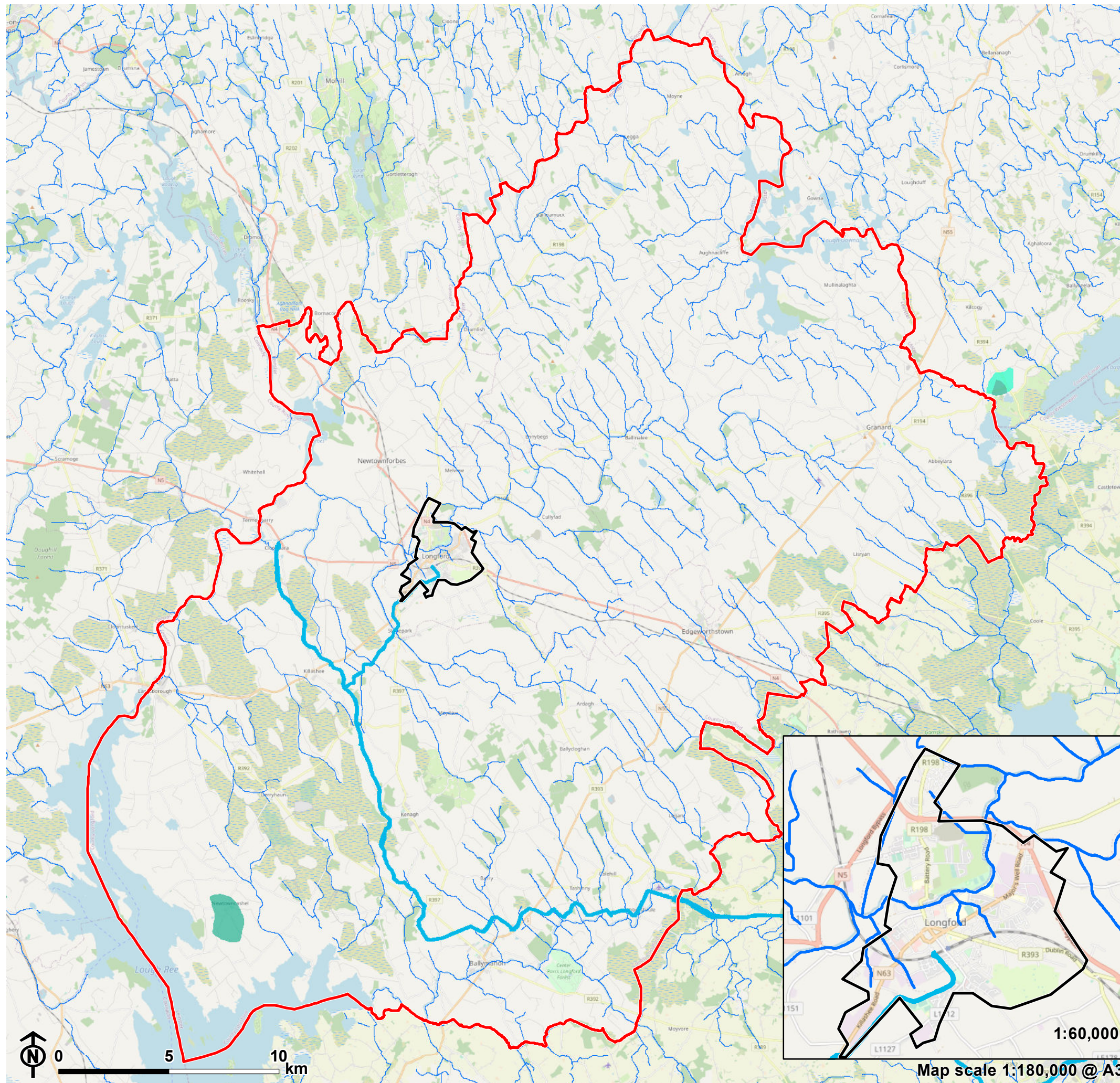
10.4 Source Protection Areas are defined around large and public potable groundwater abstraction sites. These provide additional protection by constraining the proximity of an activity that can impact the quality of drinking water. **Figure 10.1** illustrates the Source Protection Areas and main watercourses within Longford.

10.5 Three types of bedrock aquifers are located in across the LTP plan area. A 'locally important aquifer' (bedrock which is moderately productive only in local zones) covers most of the town. A 'poor aquifer' (generally unproductive except for local zones) covers areas south of the town at Glebe and Farnagh, and a

Chapter 10 Water

'regionally important aquifer' (karsitified (conduit)) is located over the northern portion of the town (i.e. Lisbrack and Cloobalt). The groundwater vulnerabilities of the Longford Town vary across the area. There are areas of moderate, high and extreme vulnerability across the plan area including small areas of 'rock at or near surface'. Any groundwater-surface interactions that might occur would be greatest in these areas [\[See reference 126\]](#).

Figure 10.1: Watercourses and Source Protection Zones



- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Canal
- River
- Public Supply Source Protection Areas**
 - Inner Protection Area
 - Outer Protection Area

Projected baseline information

10.6 Under predicted climate change scenarios, more frequent drought conditions are expected in Ireland, along with increased demand on water resources. Future developments will create additional demand for water abstraction from surface and groundwater sources in Longford.

10.7 Water quality in Ireland's rivers and lakes is continuing to decline, with Ireland's surface water quality poorer now than in the previous assessment period 2013-2018. This trajectory is likely to continue without the implementation of the measures outlined in the Draft River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) 2022-2027 [See reference 127]. Similarly, without targeted intervention, it is likely that water quality in the River Camlin will continue to deteriorate. However, the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) advisors are currently working with the Council, landowners and other stakeholders to develop actions to improve the water quality of the river [See reference 128]. It is predicted that through the implementation of these actions the river's water quality will improve in line with WFD objectives. However, water quality is influenced by a wide range of internal and external factors including climate change, geology and soils, population change and pollution from human activities such as industry and agricultural practices. Future development, particularly in areas close to water bodies, may present a challenge in improving water quality.

Key environmental issues and likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP

10.8 The River Camlin is failing to meet the WFD objective of 'good' ecological and chemical status. Without the Longford Town LTP, it is possible that transport developments and active travel interventions could be located in areas

that could lead to further water quality issues and risks to the natural environment. The water environment has the potential to be both directly and indirectly affected by the Longford Town LTP, with transport and active travel development potentially contributing to the pollution of nearby watercourses and groundwater and adversely affecting drainage of surface water. However, existing safeguards, such as the Water Framework Regulations, would help to reduce the potential for this to occur. Policies in the County Development Plan also seek to protect and enhance water quality (Water Quality and Groundwater Protection Policies CPO12.92 – CPO12.103). The Longford Town LTP provides an opportunity to ensure that transport and active travel development is located and designed to take into account the sensitivities of the water environment. Without the Longford Town LTP, these sustainability issues would be less well addressed, and the opportunities may not be fully exploited.

Corresponding Environmental Protection Objectives in the EPO Framework

- Environmental Protection Objective **6: Water** - Preserve and enhance the quality and quantity of waterbodies and groundwater.
 - Does the LTP maintain or improve the quality of waterbodies and groundwater by avoiding adverse impacts from pollution / changes to drainage?
 - Does the LTP minimise and mitigate runoff from new transport and active travel infrastructure?
 - Does the LTP minimise inappropriate development in groundwater Source Protection Areas?

Chapter 11

Cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage

Baseline information

Due to the potential for effects from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP to extend beyond the Longford Town boundary, a description of the baseline information relevant to both Longford Town and County is provided in the subsequent paragraphs in relation to ‘cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage’.

Current baseline information

11.1 Longford has a range of unique heritage assets that contribute to the character of the county. Some of the most significant visible monuments include the portal tomb at Aughnacliffe, ringforts, standing stones, an Iron age timber roadway (toghers) at the Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre, and the linear earthworks that make up the Black Pigs Dyke in north Longford. The locations of Longford’s heritage assets are shown in **Figure 11.1**.

11.2 The Record of Protected Structure (RPS) is a live register of assets that the local authority considers to be of special interest from an architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical perspective. There are 531 Protected Structures within County Longford [**See reference 129**] of which 154 are located within Longford Town, including Sean Connolly Barracks, St Mel’s Cathedral and St. Mel’s College. Of the 154

Chapter 11 Cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage

Protected Structures in Longford Town, 125 of these are also listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage [See reference 130]. Within Longford Town there are also 20 areas identified as ‘zones of notification’ around the protected monuments.

11.3 Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA) are places, areas, or groups of structures or townscape that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical perspective. There are two ACAs within the county:

- Ardagh Town; and
- Battery Road, Longford Town.

11.4 As stated above, Longford Town contains one ACA along Battery Road. Battery Road is located in the northern portion of the town and the ACA encompasses an area stretching from the existing roundabout at Lisbrack Road in the north, down to and including Church Street in the south. The ACA is centred along the main vehicular carriageway, Battery Road. The characteristics of the ACA for which it is designated include the large plot sizes and distinct spatial quality, the architectural styles of the houses, distinct landscaping, historic boundary walls and nineteenth century footpath.

11.5 There are also over 1,700 archaeological sites and monuments identified and recorded in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP), with numerous sites in Longford Town listed on the RMP for their archaeological significance. Of these, there are 380 monuments which are also included on the Register of Historic Monuments (RHM) [See reference 131]. Other key archaeological and heritage assets within the county include:

- Six National Monuments in State ownership or guardianship.
- 10 monuments protected under Preservation Orders, of which two are in Longford Town, namely the church and ecclesiastical enclosure in Aghafad.
- 57 monuments of Archaeological, Historical and Cultural Interest.

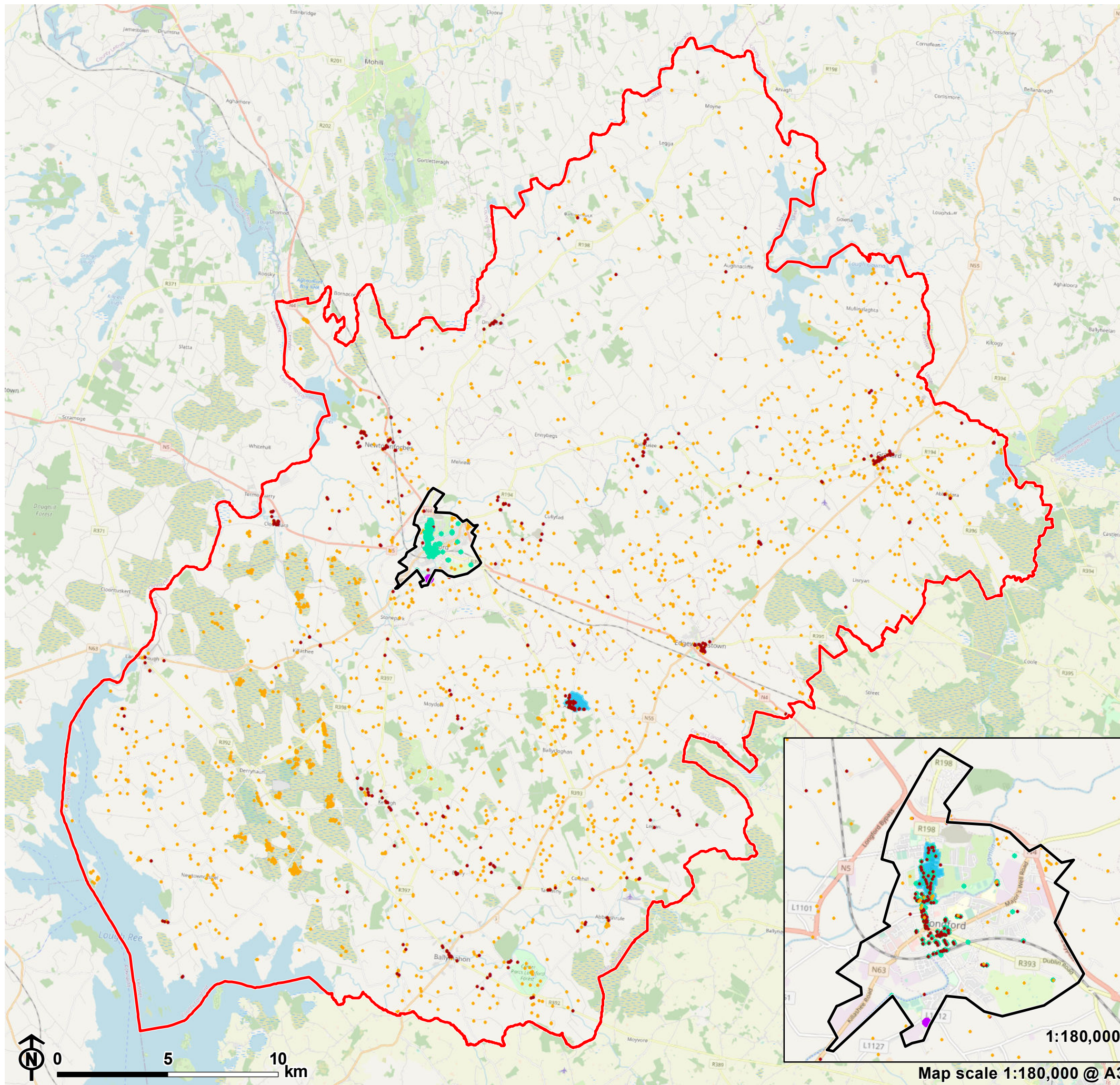
Chapter 11 Cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage

11.6 Archaeological structures may appear on both the RMP and the RPS. There are two specific archaeological sites of specific importance within the county. These are:

- Corlea Bog Trackway – the visitor centre on the site conserves an Iron Age bog road which was built in the year 148 BC across surrounding bogland.
- Granard: Norman Motte – the visitor centre celebrates Ireland’s highest Norman motte built in 1199.

11.7 Longford Town is identified as a historic town in need of regeneration in the Eastern and Midlands RSES and Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, partly due to the high number of prominently located vacant or derelict historic building stock.

Figure 11.1: Heritage Assets



- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Conservation Area
- Record of Protected Structure
- National Monument
- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Monuments with Preservation Order

Projected baseline information

11.9 As identified above, Longford Town is identified as a historic town in need of regeneration in the Eastern and Midlands RSES and Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027. Without targeted action, it is likely that the condition of historic buildings will deteriorate, with more historic buildings falling into disrepair and potentially become derelict. The Council is committed to working with stakeholders in the promotion of heritage-led regeneration which is likely to result in the regeneration of prominently located vacant or derelict historic building stock in the future [See reference 132]. Many opportunities exist for the sensitive and adaptive reuse of Protected Structures, historic building stock and industrial structures in the town. Examples of heritage-led regeneration plans are the Connolly Barracks and the Camlin Quarter area in Longford Town.

11.10 The historic environment can be considered a finite resource. It cannot be replaced and is susceptible to decline over time as historic features experience degradation and decay. However, cultural heritage as a whole can evolve and change, and features which are not currently considered a valued part of the historic environment may become so in the future, either due to their uniqueness, past use or historic and cultural significance.

11.11 At a local level within County Longford and Longford Town, new development, infrastructure and environmental pressures such as extreme weather and flooding present risks to cultural heritage assets.

Key environmental issues and likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP

11.12 There are many heritage assets and areas of historical and cultural interest in Longford that could be adversely affected by poorly located or designed transport development or active travel interventions. The increasing occurrence of extreme weather events means that all cultural asset structures, particularly those in a ruinous or dilapidated condition, are susceptible to the effects of climate change. Air pollution can also contribute to the degradation of heritage assets. Increasing transport levels from the projected population increase can have a range of direct and indirect effects on heritage assets including effects from noise and air pollution from busy traffic in close proximity to culturally significant areas which may make them less appealing to visit or decrease their visual amenity.

11.13 In the absence of the Longford Town LTP, the statutory protection of important heritage assets, such as the protection of RPS and ACA designations through the Planning and Development Act and the National Monuments Acts would continue to apply, as well as the policies in the Longford County Development Plan (Built and Cultural Heritage Policies CPO 11.1 - 11.57) which support the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their settings and the promotion of access to and understanding of heritage assets in Longford.

11.14 However, the Longford Town LTP provides opportunities to protect these assets (including their settings) from inappropriate transport and active travel development. It is likely that the maintenance and management of existing transport infrastructure, and the delivery of any new transport infrastructure, would be required to consider the potential effects on any nearby heritage assets and historic areas, and to incorporate elements that help to enhance their setting. A key element of the regeneration of Longford Town will be the creation of enhanced accessibility and sustainable mobility within the town.

Chapter 11 Cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage

Improving the public transport and active travel connectivity of Longford Town, as proposed in the Longford Town LTP, could help enhance the accessibility of historic areas and heritage assets for people from all backgrounds, including local people and tourists. This would help to promote the importance of these assets and areas and could subsequently lead to new investment, such as through an increase in the number of visitors, that would help to preserve heritage assets and areas for future generations to enjoy. Furthermore, the Longford Town LTP provides an opportunity to reduce the need to travel by diesel and petrol vehicles; to accelerate a shift from private car to active and public transport; and to decarbonise road vehicles, all of which will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion, thereby helping to reduce degradation of heritage assets and improve their settings.

Corresponding Environmental Protection Objectives in the EPO Framework

- **Environmental Protection Objective 7: Cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage** - Conserve and enhance the significant qualities, fabric, setting and accessibility of Longford's historic environment.
 - Does the LTP conserve designated and undesignated heritage assets, including their setting and their contribution to wider local character and distinctiveness, avoiding adverse effects on their significance from direct loss, damage, or detracting from their setting?
 - Does the LTP improve access to heritage assets and areas of historical and cultural interest?
 - Does the LTP support heritage-led regeneration of Longford Town?

Chapter 12

Landscape

Due to the potential for effects from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP to extend beyond the Longford Town boundary, a description of the baseline information relevant to both Longford Town and County is provided in the subsequent paragraphs in relation to 'landscape'.

Baseline information

Current baseline information

12.1 Longford has a rich and diverse landscape. A Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) [See reference 133] is contained within the Longford County Development Plan. The LCA identifies seven broad Landscape Character Types (LCT) within the county, as set out below. **Figure 12.1** illustrates the location of each LCT in the county.

- **Unit 1 – Northern Drumlin Lakeland** (low to medium with some high sensitivity in the vicinity of the lakes and designated scenic routes).
- **Unit 2 – Northern Upland** (medium to high sensitivity).
- **Unit 3- Shannon Basin/Lough Ree** (medium sensitivity along the southern-eastern border to high sensitivity along the shores of the lake, islands, the riverbanks and in the vicinity of the aquifer).
- **Unit 4 – Central Corridor** (generally low sensitivity. Potential areas of medium to high sensitivity in the vicinity of protected woodlands, riverbanks and in the vicinity of the aquifer).

Chapter 12 Landscape

- **Unit 5 – Inny Basin** (generally low sensitivity. Potential areas of medium to high in the vicinity of protected woodlands and riverbanks).
- **Unit 6 – Peatlands** (visual sensitivity generally low as their flat nature allows development to be accommodated with minimum screening needed to achieve integration into its surrounds. An exception to this designation is the vicinity of the Royal Canal where sensitivity is high. In environmental terms, sensitivity is medium to high due to the limited capacity of the receiving environment).
- **Unit 7 – Open agricultural** (visual sensitivity generally low to medium. Exception in the vicinity of the Royal Canal, the River Inny, in Upland Areas with designated scenic views and in proximity to the heritage village of Ardagh where sensitivity is high).

12.2 Longford Town and its environs are located within **Unit 4 – Central Corridor** LCT. Longford Town is the dominant settlement in the county in terms of population, economic activity, level of service, infrastructure and connectivity. The urban network is strongest in this area of the county with a defined hierarchical system dominated by the settlements of Longford, Edgeworthstown and Newtownforbes which are situated along the main transport routes. The road network is dense in this area of the county due to the relatively flat topography. Agriculture is well developed in the wider LCT surrounding Longford Town and the main industrial centre of the county is located at Longford Town with major installations at Lisnamuck/Templemichael, Townsparks, Ballymacormack and the Athlone Road. There is a high capacity for the absorption of additional development in this LCT compared to other areas of the county due to the existing strong urban network **[See reference 134]**. In response to this the Longford CDP zoned the land in the town into the following categories:

- Town core uses including retail, residential, commercial and other uses.
- Residential development (e.g. potential sites may range from small gap infill, unused or derelict land, sites within an established residential area.)
- Residential development with the provision of necessary social and physical infrastructure (new residential development in an area).

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- Strategic residential reserve (longer-term housing requirements).
- Industrial/workshop, warehouse and commercial, and/or business development (e.g. offices).
- Recreational open space and ancillary structures.
- Educational, health, social, cultural, religious and community facilities.
- Area of constrained land use (management and sustainable use of flood risk areas).

12.3 Longford Town is identified as a town in need of regeneration in the Eastern and Midlands RSES and Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027. Several strategic sites are designated as regeneration areas in the Longford CDP including:

- Connolly Barracks / Northern Quarter.
- Market Square.
- Ballymahon Street.
- Longford Shopping Centre.
- Little Water Street.
- Athlone Road Commercial/Industrial Area.
- The Mall and Camlin Village.

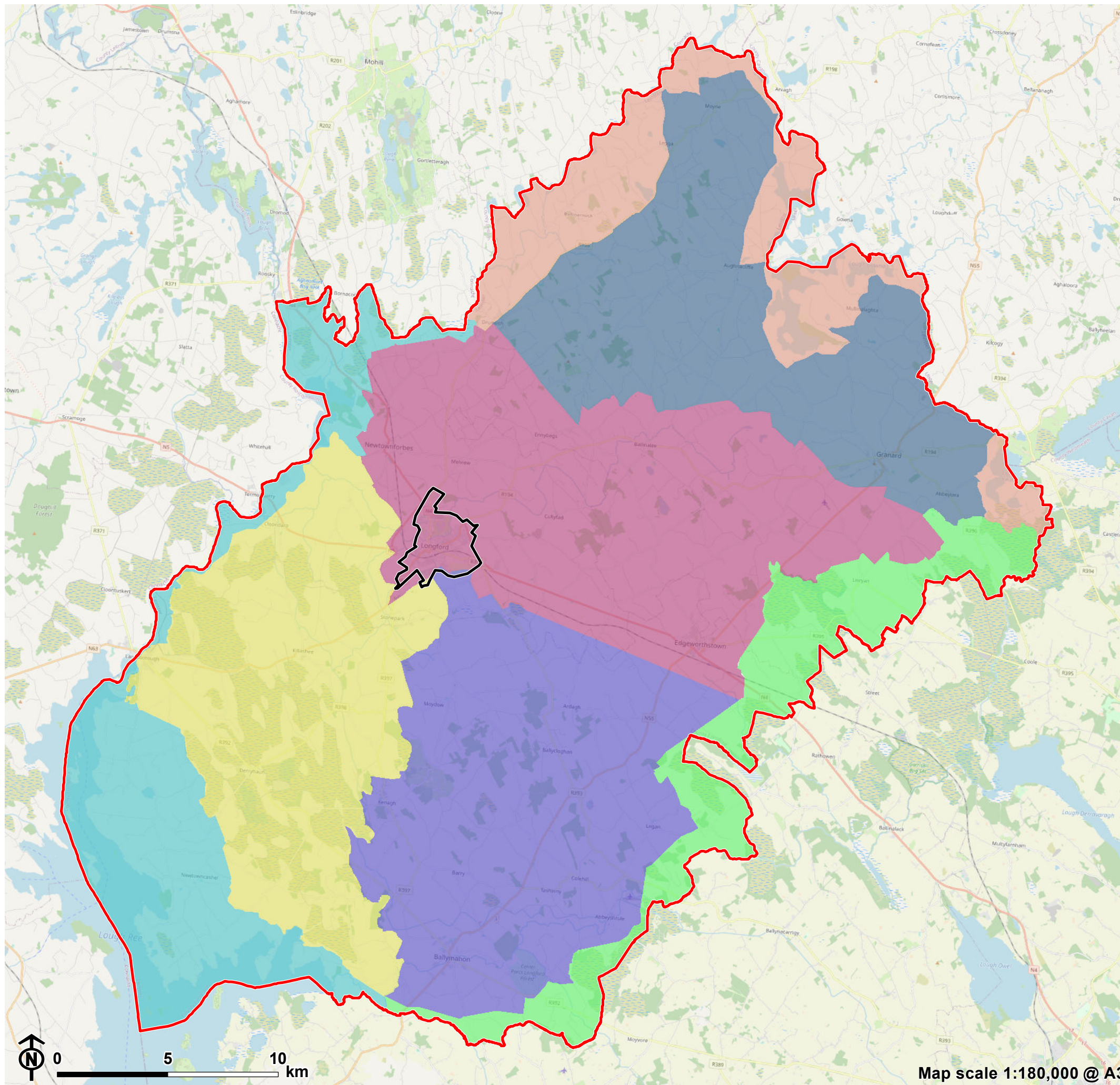
12.4 These areas contain lands that detract from the overall area in which they are situated, either by way of heightened levels of vacancy (commercial, industrial, residential) or through poor maintenance and/or dereliction, or a mix of these attributes. These areas are prominently located and have a significant visual impact that affects the overall image and investment potential of Longford Town [**See reference 135**].

12.5 Longford has many vantage points offering attractive views from upland areas, along river valleys and boglands. The Longford CDP identifies two types of views: 1) Full (uninterrupted) and 2) Intermittent (broken or sporadic). A 'full

Chapter 12 Landscape

(uninterrupted) protected view' is identified passing through Longford Town, along the N63 to Lanesborough [\[See reference 136\]](#).

Figure 12.1: Landscape Character Types



- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Landscape Character Type**
- Central Corridor
- Inny Basin
- Northern Drumlin Lakeland
- Northern Upland
- Open Agricultural
- Peatlands
- Shannon Basin/Lough Ree

Map scale 1:180,000 @ A3

Projected baseline information

12.7 Major transport infrastructure, renewable / non-renewable energy developments (e.g. large-scale windfarms and the extension to the Ballymahon Gas Pipeline), and regeneration projects are likely to be key drivers for landscape change in the county. The development of the following projects is likely to influence the townscape of Longford Town:

- N4/M4 Mullingar to Longford (Roosky) upgrade – The portion of road which will be upgraded passes through the settlements of Edgeworthstown, Longford Town and Newtownforbes in County Longford [See reference 137].
- The Royal Canal Way – The 16.5km Cloondara Greenway forms part of the extended Royal Canal Quay which provides an off-road trackway between Longford to Killashee and along the Royal Canal towards Cloondara Harbour. This will provide a multi-purpose active transport route that connects to the ongoing improvements to the Royal Canal Way, which extends to Dublin.
- ‘Longford Connected’ and the ‘Camlin Quarter Regeneration Project’ aim to deliver urban realm improvements and improve the environmental quality, walkability and liveability of the town and enhance the existing townscape. The Camlin Quarter Regeneration Project includes Connolly Barracks, Church Street, Great Water Street, Little Water Street and the Albert Reynolds Peace Park.

Key environmental issues and likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP

12.8 Major new development projects, including those relating to transport infrastructure, renewable and non-renewable energy development, and

regeneration and public realm enhancements have the potential to influence both positive and negative landscape / townscape change. In the absence of the Longford Town LDP, the policies in the Longford County Development Plan will apply which seek to conserve and enhance the uniqueness of each LCT; preserve important views; support public realm improvements; encourage the redevelopment of infill / brownfield land in preference to greenfield sites; support the regeneration of key strategic sites in Longford Town; and develop the green and blue infrastructure network (Landscape Character policies CPO14.1 – CPO14.37; Regeneration policies CPO6.62 – 6.85; and Green Infrastructure policies CPO13.1 – CPO13.35).

12.9 The Longford Town LTP offers an opportunity to ensure that the variation in landscape character is taken into account in the design and siting of transport developments and active travel interventions, and that opportunities for the protection and enhancement of the landscape are maximised. The LTP provides an opportunity to improve urban and rural connectivity and therefore deliver improved access to valued landscapes, townscapes and viewpoints, including by sustainable and active travel modes to reduce the impact of road traffic. The LTP provides an opportunity to reduce petrol and diesel vehicles on the roads which would help to minimise the adverse effects that busy roads can have on landscape and townscape character, including through noise, air and light pollution. Furthermore, the LTP provides an opportunity to promote the creation and enhancement of active travel corridors which would benefit visual amenity value in Longford Town. Without the LTP, the sustainability issues would be less well addressed, and the opportunities may not be fully exploited.

Corresponding Environmental Protection Objectives in the EPO Framework

- Environmental Protection Objective **8: Landscape** - Conserve and enhance Longford's landscape and townscape, ensuring transport and

Chapter 12 Landscape

related development does not detract from the quality of views and local distinctiveness.

- Does the LTP adversely impact, protect or enhance the townscape and visual amenity of Longford Town?
- Does the LTP improve access to valued landscapes, townscapes and viewpoints, including by sustainable and active travel modes to reduce the impact of road traffic?
- Does the LTP encourage the retention and planting of green infrastructure along transport corridors to protect landscape character and create a sense of place?

Chapter 13

Material assets

Baseline information

Due to the potential for effects from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP to extend beyond the Longford Town boundary, a description of the baseline information relevant to both Longford Town and County is provided in the subsequent paragraphs in relation to 'material assets'.

This chapter should be read in conjunction with 'Road travel and associated energy consumption' in **Chapter 7: Climatic factors**.

13.1 Material assets and resources are broad terms, taken in this context to mean physical materials that are valued and/or used by people. These can include buildings and infrastructure, transport routes, minerals and land. Assets and resources relating to population and housing, energy, landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity, and soil and water resources are examined under other headings in this report. The material asset considered in this section is transport infrastructure.

Transport infrastructure

Current baseline information

13.2 The transport network in County Longford is shown in **Figure 13.1**.

Road network

13.3 County Longford is traversed by four national road:

- N4 Dublin to Sligo (passing through Edgeworthstown and Longford Town).
- N5 Longford Town to Westport/Castlebar.
- N63 starts in Longford Town, passing Lanesborough and continuing in the direction of Galway until it merges with the M18 in Annagh Cross.
- N55 from Cavan to Athlone takes a north-south route through the east of the county, passing through Granard, Edgeworthstown and Ballymahon.

13.4 There are also nine regional routes connecting these as well as a network of country roads.

13.5 Longford Town is strategically positioned at the meeting of two of Ireland's National Primary Routes, the N4 and N5, and the National Secondary Routes, the N55 and N63.

Public transport network

13.6 The Dublin – Sligo rail line traverses the county from east to west alongside the N4. The rail line serves Longford Town and Edgeworthstown stations. During the working week there are ten trains in each direction. Journey times are approximately 2 hours to Dublin and 1 hr 25 mins to Sligo. According to the National Transport Authority Heavy Rail Census Report in 2019 [See [reference 138](#)], passenger volumes at Longford and Edgeworthstown are both at a little under 1,000 passengers in each direction, with slightly more passengers travelling through Edgeworthstown than Longford.

13.7 There are also a number of bus and coach which connect through County Longford. These services are operated by Expressway, Bus Éireann, TFI, Local Link and M4 Direct:

Chapter 13 Material assets

- Expressway Services:
 - 22: Dublin – Ballina
 - 23: Dublin – Sligo
- Bus Éireann Routes:
 - 65: Galway – Athlone – Cavan – Monaghan
 - 73: Waterford – Athlone – Longford
 - 111A: Cavan – Granard – Delvin
 - 425 Galway – Mountbellew – Roscommon – Longford
 - 463: Longford – Carrigallen
 - 466: Athlone – Ballymahon - Longford
 - 467: Longford – Lanesborough – Roscommon
- Transport for Ireland Service:
 - 975: Cavan – Crossdoney - Drumlish - Longford
- M4 Direct Service
 - 842: Ballymahon - Edgeworthstown – Dublin

13.8 Within the county, local connections are provided by on-demand bus services Local Link however the frequencies of current services are limited **[See reference 139]**.

13.9 The Draft Longford LTP identifies the following constraints associated with public transport in the town:

- Only two train stations within the County at Longford Town and Edgeworthstown.
- Infrequent local bus services.
- Scheduling issues between transport modes.
- Longer bus journey times compared to car journeys.

- The accessibility of the train stations by walking and cycling is an issue.

Walking, wheeling and cycling network

13.10 The active travel network in County Longford comprises footpaths, Greenways and cycle paths. With relatively compact town centres, including in Longford Town, distances are walkable. However, the pedestrian network generally will cover the town centre area but disappears at the edge of the settlement, which disconnects settlements from each other [See reference 140].

13.11 The Royal Canal Greenway is one of the most popular active travel routes and connects Longford Town and Cloondara. The Greenway provides a high-quality travel with segregated facilities for active modes of travel.

13.12 The existing cycle network in the county is largely similar to the walking network and includes the Royal Canal Greenway and the Peatland Trails. Moreover, there are some signed on-road cycle routes across the county which require cyclists to share the road with motorised vehicles. There are a number of segregated cycling projects under construction within Longford Town, however, these provide only limited improvements to the accessibility of key destinations within the town [See reference 141].

13.13 The Draft Longford LTP identifies the following constraints associated with active travel in Longford Town:

- Lack of safe crossings and facilities (especially at roundabouts and on Longford Main Steet).
- Fragmentation and variable quality of the cycle network.
- Lack of permeability between key areas in the town and to key destinations (e.g. schools, train station, etc.).
- Lack of footpaths, or only on one side, particularly around the edges of Longford Town.

- Limited cycling facilities in Longford Town (Main Street / Earls Street).
- Physical barriers to the active travel network from the rail and national road infrastructure, and waterways.

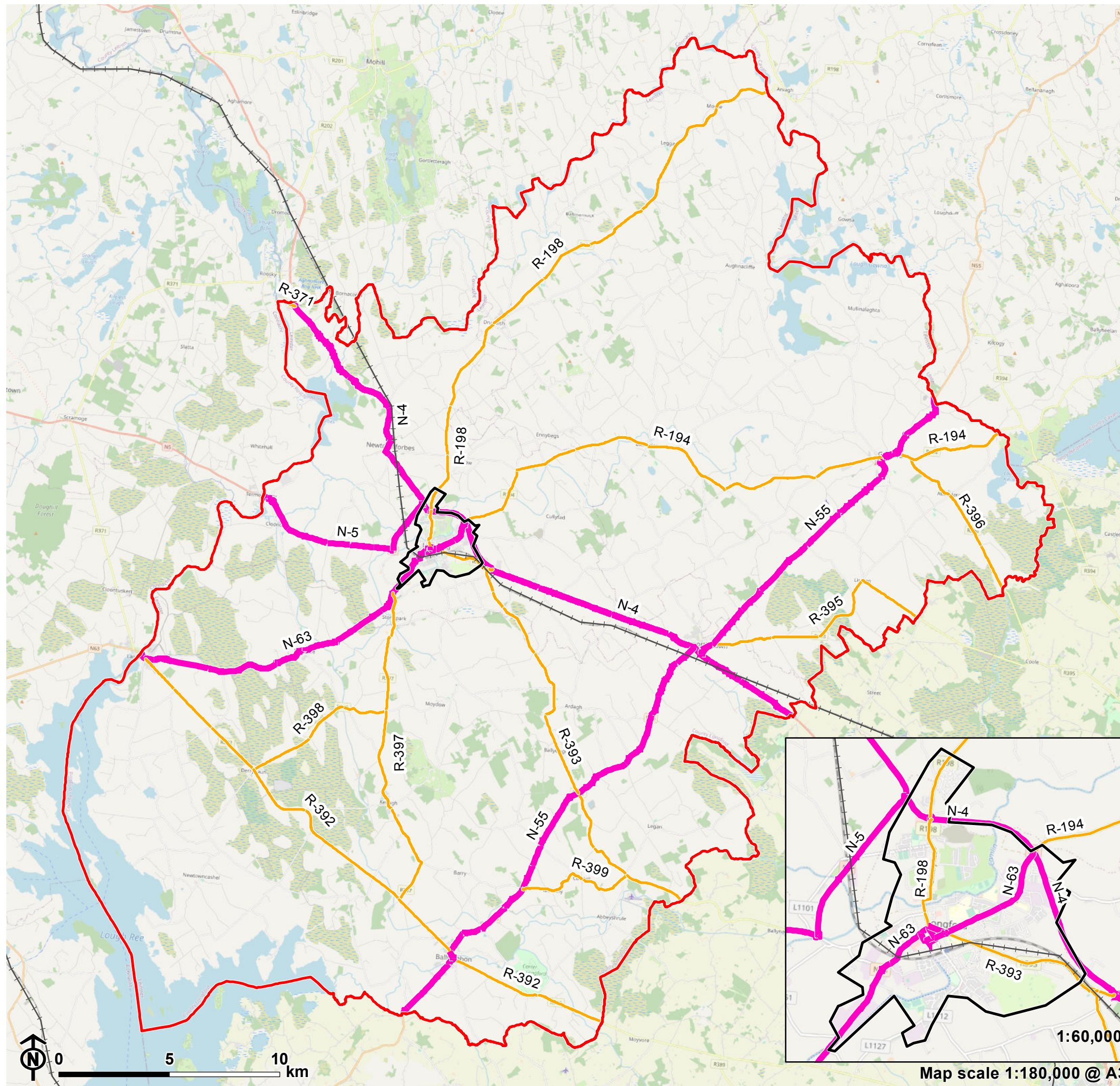
Projected baseline information

13.14 The predicted growth of Longford's population will increase pressure on Longford's transport systems, increasing congestion and road maintenance requirements. Further to this, effects of climate change are predicted to result in disruption to transport infrastructure and services in the future. Potential impacts include deterioration of road surfaces impacting local transport networks and businesses.

13.15 There are several transport projects in the pipeline which will significantly alter the transport network in Longford, most notably:

- N4/M4 Mullingar to Longford (Roosky) upgrade – The portion of road which will be upgraded passes through the settlements of Edgeworthstown, Longford Town and Newtownforbes [\[See reference 142\]](#).
- The Royal Canal Way – The 16.5km Cloondara Greenway forms part of the extended Royal Canal Quay which provides an off-road trackway between Longford to Killashee and along the Royal Canal towards Cloondara Harbour. This will provide a multi-purpose active transport route that connects to the ongoing improvements to the Royal Canal Way, which extends to Dublin.
- National Cycle Network – Connecting Longford Town to Roscommon in the south-west and Sligo in the north.
- 'Longford Connected' and the 'Camlin Quarter Regeneration Project' aim to deliver urban realm improvements and improve the environmental quality, walkability and liveability of the town.
- Interurban cycle and walking connections in Longford Town.

Figure 13.1: Transport Networks



- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area
- Railway
- Road Network**
- National Road
- Regional Road

Key environmental issues and likely evolution without the Longford Town LTP

13.16 Longford Town experiences high levels of car dependency and ownership with low levels of public transport usage, poor train frequencies, limited bus services and connectivity, fragmented and poor cycling facilities, and traffic/parking issues along Main Street.

13.17 In the absence of the Longford Town LTP, the policies in the Longford County Development Plan would apply (Transport policies CPO5.1 – CPO5.80). These support measures to reduce dependency on cars; improve traffic and travel management; develop active travel networks; support a modal shift from private car use to walking, cycling and public transport; and to direct new development to sustainable locations which limits the need to travel and offer a choice of transport modes. However, without targeted action at the local level, it is anticipated that car dependency will continue to increase with the rising population. The Longford Town LTP provides an opportunity to develop an accessible and inclusive transport network that supports the needs of the population of Longford Town by:

- Reducing dependency on cars in favour of increased walking, cycling and public transport use.
- Supporting a modal shift from private car use to public transport and active travel.
- Reducing road accidents and creating a sense of safety for all transport network users.

Corresponding Environmental Protection Objectives in the EPO Framework

- Environmental Protection Objective **9: Material assets** - Use resources intelligently, optimising reuse and recovery of materials, minimising impacts on the transport network.
 - Does the LTP optimise existing infrastructure and provide new infrastructure sufficient to meet demand?
 - Does the LTP reduce the energy demand from the transport sector and support moves to electrification of road and rail transport modes?

Chapter 14

Proposed framework for assessing significant environmental effects

14.1 A key purpose of Scoping is to set out sufficient details about the proposed methodological framework for the assessment of environmental effects to allow the consultees to form a view on this matter. It is proposed to use an objectives-led assessment which will involve assessing the Longford Town LTP and its reasonable alternatives against defined Environmental Protection Objectives (EPOs) for each of the SEA scoped-in topic areas. The assessment will be supported by other tools such as GIS-based spatial analysis and other quantitative data as available.

14.2 The preceding chapters have identified the environmental characteristics and key environmental issues relating to the Longford Town LTP and the key influences from external plans and programmes. This chapter uses that information to set out a series of draft EPOs. These will be used in the Environmental Report to provide a framework against which to assess the likely environmental effects of the LTP and, subsequently, monitor implementation of the plan.

14.3 The EPOs and appraisal guidance (which provide a guide to the factors that should be considered when carrying out assessments) set out in the EPO Framework are subject to change as new information comes to light during the SEA process. The EPO Framework will likely to be amended following consultation with statutory consultation bodies to reflect their recommendations.

14.4 The EPO framework is set out overleaf; each primary bullet point constitutes an EPO and the sub-bullet points set out further guidance to help guide the appraisal of each objective. The EPO framework is structured to encompass each SEA topic, however, some topics are covered in more than

Chapter 14 Proposed framework for assessing significant environmental effects

one EPO. **Table 14.1** details each SEA topic and the corresponding Environmental Protection Objective(s).

Table 14.1: SEA topic and corresponding EPOs

SEA topic	SEA objective
Biodiversity, flora and fauna	EPO 1: Biodiversity, flora and fauna EPO 2: Population and human health
Population and human health	EPO 2: Population and human health EPO 3: Air quality and climate change mitigation EPO 4: Flood risk and climate change adaptation EPO 5: Soil EPO 6: Water
Climatic factors	EPO 3: Air quality and climate change mitigation EPO 4: Flood risk and climate change adaptation
Air	EPO 3: Air quality and climate change mitigation
Soil	EPO 5: Soil
Water	EPO 6: Water
Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage	EPO 7: Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage
Landscape	EPO 8: Landscape
Material assets	EPO 9: Material assets EPO 2: Population and human health

EPO framework

EPO 1: Biodiversity, flora and fauna

- Conserve and enhance Longford's biodiversity including designated sites, habitats and protected species.
 - Does the LTP conserve and enhance designated and undesignated ecological assets, including promoting habitat connectivity; avoiding fragmentation; and adverse impacts on habitats and species from transport-related changes to air quality, water quality and quantity, noise levels and light levels?
 - Does the LTP maintain and enhance the nature network of ecological assets and green/blue spaces, taking into account the impacts of climate change?

EPO 2: Population and human health

- Create a healthy living environment, encourage healthy lifestyles and improve safety.
 - Does the LTP protect physical and mental health and wellbeing by preventing, avoiding and mitigating adverse health effects associated with air, noise, vibration, and light pollution from transport infrastructure?
 - Does the LTP promote healthy lifestyles by encouraging and facilitating active travel, such as walking and cycling?
 - Does the LTP improve road user safety and reduce the risk of accidents, such as through traffic calming measures or improved crossings?
 - Does the LTP facilitate access to key services, facilities and employment areas for all, including ensuring easily accessible and affordable public transport, particularly in more deprived areas?

Chapter 14 Proposed framework for assessing significant environmental effects

- Does the LTP minimise journey times for commuting?
- Does the LTP improve access to open spaces and recreational facilities to improve physical and mental health?

EPO 3: Air quality and climate change mitigation

- Improve air quality and minimise greenhouse gas emissions by reducing concentrations of harmful atmospheric pollutants and avoiding their emission.
 - Does the LTP reduce the need to travel by petrol or diesel vehicles?
 - Does the LTP improve air quality by minimising pollutant emissions from the transport sector?
 - Does the LTP help to address road congestion and its impact on air quality?
 - Does the LTP encourage a modal shift to sustainable modes of transport by supporting maintenance and expansion of public and active transport networks?
 - Does the LTP support the provision of facilities for electric vehicle charging?
 - Does the LTP encourage the use of sustainable construction methods and materials in the development of transport infrastructure, with a focus on reducing the embodied carbon in new transport infrastructure?

EPO 4: Flood risk and climate change adaptation

- Reduce the risk and effects of flooding, both now and in the future.

Chapter 14 Proposed framework for assessing significant environmental effects

- Does the LTP direct transport away from areas at highest risk of flooding and avoid inappropriate transport-related development in areas at risk of flooding, taking into account the effects of climate change and mitigate residual risks without increasing flood risk elsewhere?
- Does the LTP increase the resilience of transport systems to the effects of climate change, via flood resilient design?
- Does the LTP promote the use of SuDS, where appropriate?
- Does the LTP encourage the creation, management and enhancement of a coherent green and blue infrastructure (GBI) network?

EPO 5: Soil

- Conserve and enhance Longford's soil resources and geological sites.
 - Does the LTP avoid the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land?
 - Does the LTP conserve designated and undesignated geological assets?
 - Does the LTP direct new transport development to brownfield / previously developed land in preference to greenfield land, where appropriate?

EPO 6: Water

- Preserve and enhance the quality and quantity of waterbodies and groundwater.
 - Does the LTP maintain or improve the quality of waterbodies and groundwater by avoiding adverse impacts from pollution / changes to drainage?
 - Does the LTP minimise and mitigate runoff from new transport and active travel infrastructure?

Chapter 14 Proposed framework for assessing significant environmental effects

- Does the LTP minimise inappropriate development in groundwater Source Protection Areas?

EPO 7: Cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage

- Conserve and enhance the significant qualities, fabric, setting and accessibility of Longford's historic environment.
 - Does the LTP conserve designated and undesignated heritage assets, including their setting and their contribution to wider local character and distinctiveness, avoiding adverse effects on their significance from direct loss, damage, or detracting from their setting?
 - Does the LTP improve access to heritage assets and areas of historical and cultural interest?
 - Does the LTP support heritage-led regeneration of Longford Town?

EPO 8: Landscape

- Conserve and enhance Longford's landscape and townscape, ensuring transport and related development does not detract from the quality of views and local distinctiveness.
 - Does the LTP adversely impact, protect or enhance the townscape and visual amenity of Longford Town?
 - Does the LTP improve access to valued landscapes, townscapes and viewpoints, including by sustainable and active travel modes to reduce the impact of road traffic?
 - Does the LTP encourage the retention and planting of green infrastructure along transport corridors to protect landscape character and create a sense of place?

EPO 9: Material assets

- Use resources intelligently, optimising reuse and recovery of materials, minimising impacts on the transport network.
 - Does the LTP optimise existing infrastructure and provide new infrastructure sufficient to meet demand?
 - Does the LTP reduce the energy demand from the transport sector and support moves to electrification of road and rail transport modes?

Use of the EPO framework

14.5 The findings from the SEA will be presented in SEA matrices, which will include a colour coded symbol showing the score of each option (including reasonable alternatives) against each of the EPOs along with a concise justification for the score given. The SEA matrices will be presented as an appendix to the Environmental Report. Summaries of the findings for each component of the Longford Town LTP will be described in the main body of the Environmental Report.

14.6 The use of colour coding in the matrices will allow for likely significant effects (both positive and negative) to be easily identified, as shown in **Table 14.2**.

Table 14.2: SEA scoring of effects

SEA effect	Description of effect
++/-	Mixed significant positive and minor negative effects likely
+	Minor positive effect likely
+/-	Mixed minor effects likely

Chapter 14 Proposed framework for assessing significant environmental effects

SEA effect	Description of effect
++/--	Mixed significant effects likely
-	Minor negative effect likely
--/+	Mixed significant negative and minor positive effects likely
--	Significant negative effect likely
0	No or negligible effect likely
?	Likely effect uncertain
N/A	Assessment criterion not applicable

14.7 The dividing line between environmental scores is often quite small. Where significant effects are distinguished from more minor effects this is because, using the appraisal questions and criteria and applying professional judgement, the effect of the option in relation to achievement of the EPO will be of such magnitude that it will have a noticeable and measurable effect compared with other factors that may influence the achievement of that objective.

Assessment of impacts and mitigation

14.8 In undertaking the assessment of likely significant effects on the environment of the Longford Town LTP, the range of effects will include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects as well as the interrelationships between the environmental topics.

14.9 Table 14.3 identifies the potential inter-related topics that will be subject to consideration during the assessment stage (green = inter-related topics; white = no relationship between topics; grey = not applicable).

Chapter 14 Proposed framework for assessing significant environmental effects

14.10 Where lack of data or technical issues arise in relation to the assessment of effects these will be acknowledged. Where significant adverse effects are identified during the SEA process, relevant and appropriate mitigation measures will be recommended in the Environmental Report. Consideration will be given to residual impacts, where relevant.

Table 14.3: Interaction between topics

	Biodiversity	Population and human health	Climatic factors	Air	Soil	Water	Historic and cultural heritage	Landscape	Material assets
Biodiversity									
Population and human health									
Climatic factors									
Air									
Soil									
Water									
Historic and cultural heritage									
Landscape									
Material assets									

Consideration of reasonable alternatives

14.11 One of the requirements of the SEA process is to provide an evaluation of the likely environmental consequences of reasonable alternatives to the proposals in the Longford Town LTP. The reason for assessing alternatives is to determine if the significant adverse effects of the Longford Town LTP can be reduced or avoided. Therefore, the SEA must appraise not only the proposed strategies for transport and travel for inclusion in the plan but also 'reasonable alternatives' to these. This implies that alternatives that are not reasonable do not need to be subject to appraisal.

14.12 In order to be considered reasonable, the alternatives appraised by the SEA should meet the following criteria:

- take into account the geographical scope, hierarchy and objectives of the LTP – **be realistic**;
- Be based on socio-economic and environmental evidence – **be justified**;
- Be capable of being delivered within the LTP's timeframe and resources – **be implementable**; and
- Be technically and institutionally feasible – **be viable**.

14.13 The consideration and assessment of alternatives will be fully developed and explored in the Environmental Report, however, we would welcome feedback from the consultation bodies on potential reasonable alternatives. Longford County Council's reasons for selecting the alternatives to be included in the Longford Town LTP will be reported in the Environmental Report.

Monitoring

14.14 A monitoring programme will be developed to facilitate monitoring of environmental effects during implementation of the Longford Town LTP. This will be focussed on key impact issues identified during the assessment phase. The monitoring programme will be presented in the Environmental Report and will be informed by the monitoring programme proposed in the Longford Town LTP, as well as the monitoring programmes in the proposed Longford Town Local Area Plan and the Longford County Development Plan.

Chapter 15

Conclusion and next steps

Statutory consultation process

15.1 Article 11 of the SEA Regulations sets out the details of the requirements for consultation with the Environmental Authorities on the scoping of the Environmental Report. In accordance with those requirements, the following Environmental Authorities were notified that an SEA is to be conducted as part of the preparation of the Longford Town LTP, in recognition of the likely significant effects on the environment:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine;
- Minister Environment, Climate and Communications; and,
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

15.2 Furthermore, this report was also issued to the adjoining local authorities of Cavan, Leitrim, Roscommon and Westmeath for their consideration.

The Scoping Report (combined with the Screening Report) was issued to the Environmental Authorities for a four-week consultation period between 13th February and 13th March 2023.

15.3 In particular, the Environmental Authorities were requested to consider:

- Whether the defined geographic, temporal and environmental scope is appropriate for the SEA of the Longford Town LTP (**Chapter 2**).

Chapter 15 Conclusion and next steps

- Whether there are any additional plans or that are relevant to the SEA that should be included in the SEA of the Longford Town LTP (**Chapter 3** and **Appendix A**).
- Whether the baseline information provided is robust and provides a suitable baseline for the SEA of the Longford Town LTP (**Chapters 5-13**).
- Whether there are any additional key environmental problems and issues relevant to the Longford Town LTP and SEA that should be included (**Chapters 5-13**).
- Whether the EPO Framework is appropriate and includes a suitable set of SEA objectives for assessing the effects of the Longford Town LTP and its reasonable alternatives (**Chapter 14**).

15.4 Two consultation responses were received from Geological Survey Ireland and the Environmental Protection Agency which are detailed in **Appendix B**. The responses were reviewed and appropriate amendments made to the detail contained in this report, including the baseline information chapters, where necessary.

Next steps

15.5 As the Longford Town LTP is drafted, it will be subject to SEA using the EPO Framework. A full Environmental Report (incorporating the later stages of the SEA process) will then be produced and made available to other stakeholders and the general public for wider consultation alongside the Draft Longford Town LTP.

LUC

June 2023

Appendix A

Plans and programmes

International – relevant policy and legislation

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)

15.6 The 2030 Agenda [See reference 143] is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom and eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions. It sets out the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets; a collection of interlinked global goals designed to be a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They were developed as the future global development framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals which ended in 2015 and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **promote sustainable development**.

UN Paris Climate Change Agreement (2015)

15.7 The main aim of the Paris Agreement [See reference 144] centres on keeping global temperature rise this century below 2°C above preindustrial levels. Frameworks are to be put in place to help achieve these goals.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **adapt and mitigate climate change**.

IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report on Climate Change

15.8 To limit and/or reduce all greenhouse gas emissions which contribute to climate change [See reference 145].

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **support reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases.**

The Cancun Agreement (2010)

15.9 Shared vision [See reference 146] to keep global temperature rise to below two degrees Celsius, with objectives to be reviewed as to whether it needs to be strengthened in future on the basis of the best scientific knowledge available.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives **support the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation to climate change.**

Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development (2002)

15.10 Commitment to building a humane, equitable and caring global society aware of the need for human dignity for all [See reference 147]. Areas of focus include:

- Sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- Accelerate shift towards sustainable consumption and production – 10-year framework of programmed of action.
- Reverse trend in loss of natural resources.
- Renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Appendix A Plans and programmes

- Urgently and substantially increase Global share of renewable energy.
- Significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010
- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **enhance the natural environment and promote renewable energy and energy/resource efficiency.**

Florence (European Landscape) Convention (2000)

15.11 The European Landscape Convention [[See reference 148](#)] is part of the Council of Europe's work on natural and cultural heritage, spatial planning and the environment. The Convention states that:

- The landscape contributes to the formation of local cultures and that it is a basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity; and
- That developments in agriculture, forestry, industrial and mineral production techniques and in regional planning, town planning, transport, infrastructure, tourism and recreation and, at a more general level, changes in the world economy are in many cases accelerating the transformation of landscapes.

15.12 The aims of this Convention are to promote landscape protection, management and planning and to organise European co-operation on landscape issues.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect, manage and enhance the landscape.**

World Health Organisation (WHO) Air Quality Guidelines (1999) and Guidelines for Europe (1987)

15.13 A comprehensive set of guidelines for air quality [See reference 149]. Develops consistent rules for assessing 28 chemical air contaminants. Its primary aim is to provide a basis for protecting public health from adverse effects of air pollution and for eliminating, or reducing to a minimum, those contaminants of air that are known or likely to be hazardous to human health and wellbeing. The guidelines are intended to provide background information and guidance to governments in making risk management decisions, particularly in setting standards, but their use is not restricted to this.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect air quality**.

Aarhus Convention (1998)

15.14 Established a number of rights of the public with regard to the environment [See reference 150]. Local authorities should provide for:

- The right of everyone to receive environmental information.
- The right to participate from an early stage in environmental decision making.
- The right to challenge in a court of law public decisions that have been made without respecting the two rights above or environmental law in general.
- Ensure that **the public are involved and consulted** at all relevant stages of SEA production

Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC (1997)

15.15 The Kyoto Protocol [\[See reference 151\]](#) to the UNFCCC established the first policy that actively aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by industrialised countries.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable development.**

UN Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)

15.16 The Convention on Biological Diversity [\[See reference 152\]](#) is a multilateral treaty dedicated to promoting sustainable development signed by 150 government leaders at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The convention has three main goals: the conservation of biological diversity (or biodiversity); the sustainable use of its components; and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. Its objective is to develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and it is often seen as the key document regarding sustainable development.

- The SEA should reflect objectives **protecting biodiversity and sustainable use of its components.**

European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta) (1992)

15.17 Revision of the 1985 Granada Convention. Protection of the archaeological heritage, including any physical evidence of the human past that can be investigated archaeologically both on land and underwater [\[See reference 153\]](#).

- The EPO Framework should include objectives **to protect archaeological heritage.**

Grenada Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (1985)

15.18 The main purpose of the Convention [See reference 154] is to reinforce and promote policies for the conservation and enhancement of Europe's heritage. It also affirms the need for European solidarity with regard to heritage conservation and is designed to foster practical co-operation among the Parties.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect archaeological heritage**.

Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979)

15.19 The Convention [See reference 155] is an intergovernmental treaty under the United Nations Environment Programme. The aim is for contracting parties to work together to conserve terrestrial, marine and avian migratory species and their habitats (on a global scale) by providing strict protection for endangered migratory species. The overarching objectives set for the Parties are:

- Promote, co-operate in and support research relating to migratory species
- Endeavour to provide immediate protection for migratory species included in Appendix I
- Endeavour to conclude Agreements covering the conservation and management of migratory species included in Appendix II
- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect and enhance biodiversity**.

Bern Convention on European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979)

15.20 The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (the Bern Convention) [See reference 156] was adopted in Bern, Switzerland in 1979, and came into force in 1982. The principal aims of the Convention are to ensure conservation and protection of wild plant and animal species and their natural habitats (listed in Appendices I and II of the Convention), to increase cooperation between contracting parties, and to regulate the exploitation of those species (including migratory species) listed in Appendix III. To this end the Convention imposes legal obligations on contracting parties, protecting over 500 wild plant species and more than 1,000 wild animal species.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect and enhance biodiversity**.

Geneva Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (1979)

15.21 The 1979 Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution [See reference 157] was the first multilateral agreement addressing transboundary pollution. It created a regional framework applicable to Europe, north America, Russia and former Eastern Bloc countries for reducing transboundary air pollution and better understanding air pollution science.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect air quality**.

UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972)

15.22 The 1972 World Heritage Convention [See reference 158] links together in a single document the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation

of cultural properties. The Convention recognizes the way in which people interact with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two.

15.23 The Convention defines the kind of natural or cultural sites which can be considered for inscription on the World Heritage List. It also sets out the duties of States Parties in identifying potential sites and their role in protecting and preserving them. By signing the Convention, each country pledged to conserve not only the World Heritage sites situated on its territory, but also to protect its national heritage.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to the **conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage and natural heritage.**

Ramsar Convention – Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (1971)

15.24 To promote the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international co-operation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world **[See reference 159]**.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives which aim to **promote conservation and wise use of wetland areas.**

European – relevant policy and legislation

SEA Directive 2001

15.25 Provide for a high level of protection of the environment and contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development [See reference 160].

- Requirements of the SEA Directive will be met.

European Climate Law (2021)

15.26 The European Climate Law [See reference 161] writes into law the goal set out in the European Green Deal for Europe to become climate neutral by 2050. The law also sets the intermediate target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **reducing GHG emissions and enhancing renewable energy production and energy efficiency.**

Air Quality Directive (2008)

15.27 Directive 2008/50/EC [See reference 162] on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe. Avoid, prevent and reduce harmful effects of ambient noise pollution on human health and the environment.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **maintain and enhance air quality.**

Renewable Energy Directive (2009, as amended in 2018)

15.28 Directive EU 2009/28/EC (as amended by 2018/2001) [\[See reference 163\]](#) on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources.

15.29 The Renewable Energy Directive establishes an overall policy for the production and promotion of energy from renewable sources in the EU. It requires the EU to fulfil at least 32% of its total energy needs with renewable energy by 2030 and builds on the already achieved progress.

Effort Sharing Regulation (2018)

15.30 Regulation (EU) 2018/842 [\[See reference 164\]](#) on binding annual greenhouse gas emissions reductions by Member States from 2021 to 2030 contributing to climate action to meet commitments under the Paris Agreement and amending Regulation (EU) No 525/2013. The Effort Sharing Regulation establishes emissions reduction targets for the EU and for Member States for sectors not included in the EU ETS (such as transport, buildings, agriculture, waste).

National Emission Reduction Commitments Directive (2016)

15.31 Directive 2016/2284/EU [\[See reference 165\]](#). The NEC Directive sets 2020 and 2030 emission reduction commitments for five main air pollutants (NO_x, NMVOCs, SO₂, NH₃ and PM_{2.5} as well as carbon monoxide (CO)): Ceilings from 2020-2029 - SO₂ (65%); NO_x (49%); NMVOCs (25%); NH₃ (1%); and PM_{2.5} (18%). It also mandates the development of a National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP) for each Member State.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to **energy efficiency and emissions reduction**.

Birds Directive (2009)

15.32 Directive 2009/147/EC [See reference 166] is a codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended. The preservation, maintenance, and re-establishment of biotopes and habitats shall include the following measures:

- Creation of protected areas.
- Upkeep and management in accordance with the ecological needs of habitats inside and outside the protected zones.
- Re-establishment of destroyed biotopes.
- Creation of biotopes.
- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to the **protection and enhancement of habitats for protected bird species**.

Habitats Directive (1992)

15.33 Directive 92/43/EEC [See reference 167] on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. Promote the maintenance of biodiversity taking account of economic, social, cultural and regional requirements. Conservation of natural habitats and maintain landscape features of importance to wildlife and fauna.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect and maintain the natural environment and important landscape features**.

Water Framework Directive (2000)

15.34 Directive 2000/60/EC [See reference 168] establishing a framework for community action in the field of water policy. Protection of inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect and minimise the impact on water quality.**

Floods Directive (2007)

15.35 Directive 2007/60/EC [See reference 169] on the assessment and management of flood risks. Establish a framework for the assessment and management of flood risks, aiming at the reduction of the adverse consequences for human health, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity associated with floods.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives that relate to **flood management and reduction of risk.**

Drinking Water Directive (1998)

15.36 Directive 98/83/EC [See reference 170] on the quality of water intended for human consumption. Protect human health from the adverse effects of any contamination of water intended for human consumption by ensuring that it is wholesome and clean.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect and enhance water quality.**

European – relevant plans and programmes

EU Eighth Environmental Action Programme (2020)

15.37 The 8th Environment Action Programme [See reference 171] will guide European environmental policy until 2030. It aims to accelerate the transition to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient and regenerative economy. It recognises that human wellbeing and prosperity depend on the healthy ecosystems within which we operate. The EAP has six priority objectives:

- achieving the 2030 greenhouse gas emission reduction target and climate neutrality by 2050;
 - enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change;
 - advancing towards a regenerative growth model, decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation, and accelerating the transition to a circular economy;
 - pursuing a zero-pollution ambition, including for air, water and soil and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans;
 - protecting, preserving and restoring biodiversity, and enhancing natural capital (notably air, water, soil, and forest, freshwater, wetland and marine ecosystems); and
 - reducing environmental and climate pressures related to production and consumption (particularly in the areas of energy, industrial development, buildings and infrastructure, mobility and the food system).
- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect and enhance the natural environment and promote energy efficiency.**

2030 Climate Target Plan (2020)

15.38 This assessment shows how all sectors of the economy and society can contribute to the EU's ambition of reducing greenhouse gases for the next 10 years and sets out policy actions required to achieve this [See reference 172]. Its objectives include:

- Set a more ambitious and cost-effective path to achieving climate neutrality by 2050.
- Stimulate the creation of green jobs and continue the EU's track record of cutting greenhouse gas emissions whilst growing its economy.
- Encourage international partners to increase their ambition to limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5°C and avoid the most severe consequences of climate change.
- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions**.

2050 Long-Term Strategy (2020)

15.39 The EU aims to be climate-neutral by 2050 – an economy with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. This objective is at the heart of the European Green Deal and in line with the EU's commitment to global climate action under the Paris Agreement [See reference 173]. EU Member States are required to develop national long-term strategies on how they plan to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions reductions needed to meet their commitments under the Paris Agreement and EU objectives.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions**.

Fit for 55 Package (2021) and European Green Deal (2019)

15.40 The Fit for 55 Package [See reference 174], published as part of the European Green Deal in 2021 [See reference 175], sets out a suite of legislative initiatives across various sections, including energy, transport and buildings, which are intended to keep Europe on track to deliver on its climate targets.

15.41 The European Green Deal provides an action plan to:

- Boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy;
- Restore biodiversity and cut pollution.

15.42 The Deal aims to ensure:

- No net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050;
 - Economic growth decoupled from resource use; and
 - No person and no place left behind.
- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **promote efficient use of resources and protect and enhance the natural environment.**

EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (2020)

15.43 The European Commission has adopted an ambitious new strategy to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU by 2030 [See reference 176]. The six targets cover:

- Full implementation of EU nature legislation to protect biodiversity
- Better protection for ecosystems, and more use of green infrastructure

Appendix A Plans and programmes

- More sustainable agriculture and forestry
- Better management of fish stocks
- Tighter controls on invasive alien species
- A bigger EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss.
- The EPO Framework should include objectives **to value, protect and enhance biodiversity.**

European Spatial Development Perspective (1999)

15.44 Economic and social cohesion across the community. Conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage. Balanced competitiveness between different tiers of government [\[See reference 177\]](#).

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **conserve natural resources and cultural heritage.**

National – relevant policy and legislation

European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004) and European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) (S.I. No. 200 of 2011)

A.1 These Regulations carry into effect in Ireland Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment insofar as the Directive relates to plans and programmes in all of the sectors listed in article 3(2) of the Directive except land-use planning **[See reference 178] [See reference 179]**.

- They concern the consideration of the likely significant effects on the environment of such plans and programmes.
- They prescribe procedures and contents of environmental reporting, monitoring and assessment in relation to all plans and programmes which are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications and tourism.
- Aims to set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive.
- Considers transboundary environmental effects in specified cases.

- Requirements of the SEA Regulations will be met.

The Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000

A.2 The main objectives of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000 [See reference 180] are to:

- provide a mechanism to give statutory protection to NHAs;
- provide for statutory protection for important geological and geomorphological sites, including fossil sites by designation as NHAs;
- improve some existing measures, and introduce new ones, to enhance the conservation of wildlife species and their habitats;
- enhance a number of existing controls in respect of hunting, which are designed to serve the interests of wildlife conservation;
- broaden the scope of the Wildlife Acts to include most species, including the majority of fish and aquatic invertebrate species which were excluded from the 1976 Act;
- introduce new provisions to enable regulation of the business of commercial shoot operators;
- ensure or strengthen compliance with international agreements and, in particular, enable Ireland to ratify the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement (AEWA).
- increase substantially the level of fines for contravention of the Wildlife Acts and to allow for the imposition of prison sentences;
- provide mechanisms to allow the Minister to act independently of forestry legislation, for example, in relation to the acquisition of land by agreement;

Appendix A Plans and programmes

- strengthen the provisions relating to the cutting of hedgerows during the critical bird-nesting period and include a requirement that hedgerows may only be cut during that period by public bodies, including local authorities, for reasons of public health or safety;
 - strengthen the protective regime for Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) by removing any doubt that protection will in all cases apply from the time of notification of proposed sites;
 - and give specific statutory recognition to the Minister's responsibilities in regard to promoting the conservation of biological diversity, in light of Ireland's commitment to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.
- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to the **protection of wildlife.**

European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011 as amended)

15.45 The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011) [[See reference 181](#)] transpose the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive. Previously, the Birds and Habitats Directives had been transposed into Irish law through inter alia the Wildlife Act 1976 and the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997. However, two judgments of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) – notably cases C-418/04 and C-183/05 - found that Ireland had not adequately transposed the two Directives. Therefore, the 2011 Regulations consolidate the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 to 2005 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats)(Control of Recreational Activities) Regulations 2010, as well as addressing transposition failures identified in CJEU judgments.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to the **protection of birds and natural habitats.**

Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021

15.46 The Act [See reference 182] commits the Government to transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich and climate neutral economy by 2050 and to thereby promote climate justice. The Act set targets for Ireland to deliver up to 80% of electricity from renewables and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and reach net-zero no later than 2050. The Act also introduces the following requirements:

- To make certain changes to the Climate Change Advisory Council.
 - To provide for carbon budgets and a sectoral emissions ceiling to apply to different sectors of the economy.
 - To provide for reporting by Ministers of the Government to a joint committee of the Houses of the Oireachtas.
 - To provide for local authority climate action plans.
 - To amend the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.
 - To provide that local authorities shall, when making development plans, take account of their climate action plans and, for that purpose to amend the Planning and Development Act 2000.
 - To extend the purposes for which moneys may be paid out of the Climate Action Fund and, for that purpose to amend the National Oil Reserves Agency Act 2007.
- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to climate action including **reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supporting renewable and low carbon development.**

Town Centre First Policy (2022)

15.47 The Town Centre First Policy [See reference 183] seeks to target resources towards towns. It sets out a range of actions which collectively will create the framework required to help build sustainable vibrant town centres. The Town Centre First Policy supports providing *"a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income and mobility"*. Investment programmes, including the Croí Cónaithe Fund and Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, support a proactive approach to rejuvenating towns and villages in Ireland.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives **reflecting the objectives of the Town Centre First Policy.**

National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022)

15.48 The Policy [See reference 184] sets out a strategic framework to 2030 for active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport journeys to help Ireland meet its climate obligations. It is accompanied by an action plan to 2025 which contains actions to improve and expand sustainable mobility options across the country by providing safe, green, accessible and efficient alternatives to car journeys. It also includes demand management and behavioural change measures to manage daily travel demand more efficiently and to reduce the journeys taken by private car.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives **relating to the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and encouraging a modal shift to sustainable modes of transport.**

Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (2018)

15.49 National Planning Framework [See reference 185] guides high-level strategic planning and development for the country over the next 20+ years. The key objectives of the Framework are to:

- Guide the future development of Ireland, taking into account a projected 1 million increase in our population, the need to create 660,000 additional jobs to achieve full employment and a need for 550,000 more homes by 2040;
- Enable people to live closer to where they work, moving away from the current unsustainable trends of increased commuting;
- Regenerate rural Ireland by promoting environmentally sustainable growth patterns;
- Plan for and implement a better distribution of regional growth, in terms of jobs and prosperity;
- Transform settlements of all sizes through imaginative urban regeneration and bring life / jobs back into cities, towns and villages;
- Co-ordinate delivery of infrastructure and services in tandem with growth, through joined-up NPF/National Investment Plan and consistent sectoral plans, which will help to manage this growth and tackle congestion and quality of life issues in Dublin and elsewhere.

15.50 The EPO Framework should include objectives to **sustainably guide development**.

Programme for Government: Our Shared Future (2020)

A.3 The Programme for Government [See reference 186] sets out actions over the next five years with an objective to positively contribute towards a wider global response to the post-COVID recovery is shaped and become an exemplar in decarbonising of the economy.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives **reflecting the objectives of the Programme for Government.**

National Adaptation Framework (2018) and Sectoral Adaptation Plans (various years)

15.51 National Adaptation Framework [See reference 187] was published in 2018 and it sets out the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of positive impacts.

15.52 Building on the measures outlined in the National Adaptation Framework, the Government has prepared 12 Sectoral Adaptation Plans, including one for Transport Infrastructure.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to **climate adaptation.**

National – relevant plans

Climate Action Plan 2023

A.4 The **Climate Action Plan 2023** [See reference 188] charts a course to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet our commitments to a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030 and to reach net zero no later than 2050. There are numerous actions in the Climate Action Plan, classified into several topic areas: governance, a just transition, citizen engagement, the public sector, carbon prices, electricity, industry, the built environment, transport, agriculture, land use / land use change / forestry, the marine environment, the circular economy, and international climate action.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to **mitigation of and adaptation to climate change**.

Ireland's fourth Draft National Biodiversity Action Plan (2022)

15.53 The draft Biodiversity Action Plan [See reference 189] sets out objectives and actions for the conservation and restoration of biodiversity in Ireland. The Draft Plan sets the national biodiversity agenda for the period 2023-2027 and aims to deliver the transformative changes required to the ways in which we value and protect nature.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to the **protection and restoration of biodiversity**.

Draft River Basin Management Plan for Ireland (RBMP) 2022-2027 (2022)

15.54 The Draft RBMP [See reference 190] sets out a programme of measures, to protect and where necessary restore bodies of water in Ireland, building on progress under the previous plan. It sets out the environmental improvements to be delivered during a river basin planning cycle, including water quality objectives and a programme of measures to achieve those objectives. The Draft Plan is currently undergoing consultation.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives **to protect and minimise the impact on water quality.**

National Clean Air Strategy (in preparation) and Cleaning our Air: Public Consultation to inform the development of a National Clean Air Strategy

15.55 This consultation document [See reference 191] aims to inform the development of a national clean air strategy in order to address the challenges and impacts of air pollution. It provides a background to the national, EU and international approaches to improving air quality and seeks to set out the main sectoral issues in relation to air quality which are of relevance, and for which further actions could be considered in a national clean air strategy. The main issues are identified, based on the overall importance of the emission sources, the consequential public exposure to air pollution, and the resulting health and environment impacts.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **maintain and enhance air quality.**

National Landscape Strategy 2015-2020 (2015)

15.56 The National Landscape Strategy [See reference 192] was introduced in 2020 and it is used to ensure compliance with the European Landscape Convention and to establish principles for protecting and enhancing it while positively managing its change. It is a high-level policy framework to achieve balance between the protection, management and planning of the landscape by way of supporting actions. The key objectives of the Strategy include:

- implement the European Landscape Convention by integrating landscape into our approach to sustainable development;
 - establish and embed a public process of gathering, sharing and interpreting scientific, technical and cultural information in order to carry out evidence-based identification and description of the character, resources and processes of the landscape;
 - provide a policy framework, which will put in place measures at national, sectoral - including agriculture, tourism, energy, transport and marine - and local level, together with civil society, to protect, manage and properly plan through high quality design for the sustainable stewardship of our landscape;
 - ensure that we take advantage of opportunities to implement policies relating to landscape use that are complementary and mutually reinforcing and that conflicting policy objectives are avoided in as far as possible.
- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to **landscape management and protection**.

Heritage Ireland 2030 (2021)

15.57 Heritage Ireland 2030 [See reference 193] is Ireland's new national heritage plan. It sets out values, principles, strategic priorities to guide and inform the heritage sector over the next decade.

15.58 The EPO Framework should include objectives to **protect cultural and natural heritage assets**.

Local – relevant plans

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midlands Region 2019-2031

15.59 The RSES [See reference 194] sets out the framework to direct future growth in the Eastern and Midlands Region over a decade. Its aim is *“to create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment for all”* (p.6). It is underpinned by three principles, which are:

1. Healthy placemaking: to promote people’s quality of life through the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, visit, invest and study in.
 1. Climate action: the need to enhance climate resilience and to accelerate a transition to a low carbon society recognising the role of natural capital and ecosystem services in achieving this; and
 2. Economic opportunity: to create the right conditions and opportunities for the Region to realise sustainable economic growth and quality jobs that ensure a good living standard for all.
- The EPO Framework should include objectives that **align with the RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region**.

Longford County Development Plan (CDP) 2021-2027

15.60 The Longford CDP [See reference 195] sets out the planning policies and objective for the sustainable development of the County. With relation to transport policy, many of the strategic objectives align with national and regional policy. Some key objectives for transport and travel include:

- Encourage a general shift towards increased use of public transport in the County;
 - Improve transport connectivity and establish integrated transport nodes;
 - Reduce the need to travel by private vehicle;
 - Encourage and facilitate walking and cycling, putting the pedestrian first in residential and urban areas;
 - Provide high quality road access on routes of economic importance whilst ensuring road safety;
 - Support and facilitate the development of infrastructure to increase the usage of electric vehicles;
 - Promoting place-making in towns and villages to improve quality of life; and
 - Relieving traffic congestion particularly in town centres by means of traffic calming and traffic management.
- The EPO Framework should include objectives that **align with the Longford CDP**.

Longford Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2022

15.61 The LECP [See reference 196] sets out, for a six year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support both the economic and community development of the Local Authority area. The vision for the County Longford in the plan is for a *‘regenerated economically sustainable County which values equality of opportunity, excellent quality of life, collaborative community and rural development, sense of place and where the wellbeing of all residents and future generations is central to everything we do’*. Longford Council and the Longford Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) are currently preparing for the Longford Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2023-2029.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives that **align with the Longford LECP.**

Active Travel Strategy for County Longford (in preparation)

An Active Travel Strategy for County Longford is currently in preparation. The aim of the Active Travel Strategy is to establish a strategic framework for the future development of active travel in County Longford and to support Longford County Council’s ambition to *“establish Longford as a pioneering county for active travel”* by *“making active travel an attractive and realistic choice for short journeys”*.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives to **encourage a modal shift to sustainable modes of transport.**

Camlin Quarter Urban Design Framework (2019)

The Camlin Quarter Urban Design Framework [See reference 197] provides a guide to the enhancements and development of the Camlin Quarter as a *'connected, competitive, creative and caring environment in the historical heartland of Longford Town'*. It sets out the vision, context and considerations, key objectives and urban design response for the regeneration of the area which has been identified by the County Longford Development Plan as a strategic regeneration site.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives that **align with the Camlin Quarter Urban Design Framework.**

Longford Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019

15.62 This Strategy [See reference 198] sets out the main challenges for Ireland and for Longford in relation to climate change. It sets out the adaptation goals, objectives and actions for the County and a number of actions to meet these objectives.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to **climate adaptation.**

County Longford Tourism Strategy 2017-2022

15.63 The Tourism Strategy [See reference 199] has the aim of creating increased linkages and targeted integration of key tourism opportunities within County Longford. This includes the development and improvement of the walking and cycling network in the County, the enhancement of Greenways, Blueways and Peatways and other recreational routes, trails and connections.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives that **align with the County Longford Tourism Strategy**.

Longford Noise Action Plan 2018 – 2023 (2018)

A.5 The Longford Noise Action Plan [See reference 200] has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the EU Directive 2002/49/EC – Environmental Noise Directive, transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations. The plan has been prepared to address environmental noise from major roads within County Longford. It sets out related legislation and guidance, a description of the area and noise mapping, mitigation and protection measures, and a plan of key actions.

- The EPO Framework should include objectives relating to **preventing and reducing noise pollution**.

Appendix B

Consultation submissions/observations

Geological Survey Ireland

Geoheritage

- The audit for Co. Longford was carried out in 2015. The full report details can be found here. Our records show that there is a CGS within the boundary of the Longford Town LTP Study Area.
 - **St Mel's Cathedral**, Co. Longford (GR 213494, 275286), under IGH theme: IGH15 Economic Geology. The Cathedral is built mainly from Carboniferous Limestone rock from around 340 million years ago, and was constructed from 1840 onwards. Detailed history survives of the construction and local sources of stone and building materials at different times in the 1840s and 1850s, including Newtowncashel. Whilst many of the elements of great public interest are the religious iconography, artworks and artists involved, the geological elements are also very significant. In particular, the total replacement of 28 massive columns of limestone with stone quarried from Old Leighlin in Carlow is most Notable. Extensive restoration work was completed between 2010 and 2014. Link to Site Report: LD015.
- With the current plan, there are no envisaged impacts on the integrity of current CGSs by the proposed development. However, if the proposed development plan is altered, please contact GSI for further information and possible mitigation measures if applicable.

Groundwater

- Geological Survey Ireland's Groundwater and Geothermal Unit, provides advice, data and maps relating to groundwater distribution, quality and use, which is especially relevant for safe and secure drinking water supplies and healthy ecosystems.
- Proposed developments need to consider any potential impact on specific groundwater abstractions and on groundwater resources in general. We recommend using the groundwater maps on our Map viewer which should include: wells; drinking water source protection areas; the national map suite - aquifer, groundwater vulnerability, groundwater recharge and subsoil permeability maps. For areas underlain by limestone, please refer to the karst specific data layers (karst features, tracer test database; turlough water levels (gwlevel.ie). Background information is also provided in the Groundwater Body Descriptions. Please read all disclaimers carefully when using Geological Survey Ireland data.
- The Groundwater Data Viewer indicates aquifers classed as a 'Poor Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Unproductive except for Local Zones', a 'Locally Important Aquifer - Bedrock which is Moderately Productive only in Local Zones, and a 'Regionally Important Aquifer - Karstified (conduit)' underlie the proposed LTP Study Area.
- The Groundwater Vulnerability map indicates the range of groundwater vulnerabilities within the area covered is variable. We would therefore recommend use of the Groundwater Viewer to identify areas of High to Extreme Vulnerability and 'Rock at or near surface' in your assessments, as any groundwater-surface water interactions that might occur would be greatest in these areas.
- GWClimate is a groundwater monitoring and modelling project that aims to investigate the impact of climate change on groundwater in Ireland. This is a follow on from a previous project (GWFlood) and the data may be useful in relation to Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and management plans. Maps and data are available on the Map viewer.
- Geological Survey Ireland has completed Groundwater Protection Schemes (GWPSs) in partnership with Local Authorities, and there is now

national coverage of GWPS mapping. A Groundwater Protection Scheme provides guidelines for the planning and licensing authorities in carrying out their functions, and a framework to assist in decision-making on the location, nature and control of developments and activities in order to protect groundwater. The Groundwater Protection Response overview and link to the main reports is here: <https://www.gsi.ie/en-ie/programmes-and-projects/groundwater/projects/protecting-drinking-water/what-is-drinking-water-protection/county-groundwater-protection-schemes/Pages/default.aspx>

Geological mapping

- Geological Survey Ireland maintains online datasets of bedrock and subsoils geological mapping that are reliable and accessible. We would encourage you to use these data which can be found here, in your future assessments.
- Please note we have recently launched QGIS compatible bedrock (100K) and Quaternary geology map data, with instructional manuals and videos. This makes our data more accessible to general public and external stakeholders.

Geotechnical database resources

- Geological Survey Ireland continues to populate and develop our national geotechnical database and viewer with site investigation data submitted voluntarily by industry. The current database holding is over 7500 reports with 134,000 boreholes; 31,000 of which are digitised which can be accessed through downloads from our Geotechnical Map Viewer. We would encourage the use of this database as part of any baseline geological assessment of the proposed development as it can provide invaluable baseline data for the region or vicinity of proposed development areas. This information may be beneficial and cost saving for any site-specific investigations that may be designed as part of the project.

Geohazards

- Geohazards can cause widespread damage to landscapes, wildlife, human property and human life. In Ireland, landslides, flooding and coastal erosion are the most prevalent of these hazards. We recommend that geohazards be taken into consideration, especially when developing areas where these risks are prevalent, and we encourage the use of our data when doing so.
- Geological Survey Ireland has information available on landslides in Ireland via the National Landslide Database and Landslide Susceptibility Map both of which are available for viewing on our dedicated Map Viewer. Associated guidance documentation relating to the National Landslide Susceptibility Map is also available.
- Geological Survey Ireland also engaged in a national project on Groundwater Flooding. The data from this project may be useful in relation to Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and management plans, and is described in more detail under 'Groundwater' above.

Natural resources (minerals/aggregates)

- Geological Survey Ireland provides data, maps, interpretations and advice on matters related to minerals, their use and their development in our Minerals section of the website. The Active Quarries, Mineral Localities and the Aggregate Potential maps are available on our Map Viewer.
- We would recommend use of the Aggregate Potential Mapping viewer to identify areas of High to Very High source aggregate potential within the area. In keeping with a sustainable approach we would recommend use of our data and mapping viewers to identify and ensure that natural resources used in any proposed transport infrastructure projects are sustainably sourced from properly recognised and licensed facilities, and that consideration of future resource sterilization is considered.

Geochemistry of soils, surface waters and sediments

- Geological Survey Ireland provides baseline geochemistry data for Ireland as part of the Tellus programme. Baseline geochemistry data can be used to assess the chemical status of soil and water at a regional scale and to support the assessment of existing or potential impacts of human activity on environmental chemical quality. Tellus is a national-scale mapping programme which provides multi-element data for shallow soil, stream sediment and stream water in Ireland. At present, mapping consists of the border, western and midland regions. Data is available at <https://www.gsi.ie/en-ie/data-and-maps/Pages/Geochemistry.aspx>.

Other comments

- Should development go ahead, all other factors considered, Geological Survey Ireland would much appreciate a copy of reports detailing any site investigations carried out.

LUC response

The recommended data sources have been reviewed and used to update the baseline sections for **Chapter 9: Soil** and **Chapter 10: Water** where relevant.

Environmental Protection Agency

SEA Determination

B.1 If a proposed SEA determination hasn't been made regarding the plan or programme, you should determine whether implementing the plan or programme would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

B.2 The SEA Regulations, Schedule 2A (S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended) or Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended), as appropriate, set out the 'Criteria for determining whether a Plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment' to use to determine whether the plan or programme would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

B.3 Guidance on the SEA process, including an SEA pack and checklist, is available on our website at: <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-resources-and-guidance/>

B.4 We recommend that you take the available guidance into account in making your SEA Screening Determination and incorporate the relevant recommendations as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme.

SEA Screening Guidance

B.5 Our Good Practice Guidance for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening (EPA, 2021) provides specific stand-alone guidance to assist plan or programme makers and SEA practitioners. It focuses primarily on plans/programmes in the non-land use sector in Ireland and includes an elaboration of the steps needed for screening, the legislative landscape

underpinning SEA screening, and step-by-step process and templates to assist in preparing the required documentation.

Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Planning Authorities

B.6 The Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (DHLGH, 2022) provides advice on carrying out SEA in the land-use planning sector for those plans listed in S.I. No.436 of 2004, as amended. These plans comprise regional, county and local plans, including Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, County or City Development Plans, variations of Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Planning Schemes for Strategic Development Zones. The Guidelines replace previous guidance for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities published in 2004.

Sustainable Development

B.7 In proposing and in implementing the plan or programme, you should ensure that the plan or programme is consistent with the need for proper planning and sustainable development. Adequate and appropriate critical service infrastructure should be in place, or required to be put in place, to service any development proposed and authorised during the lifetime of the plan or programme.

15.64 In considering the plan or programme, you should take into account the need to align with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as incorporating any relevant recommendations in sectoral, regional and local climate adaptation plans.

15.65 You should also ensure that the plan or programme aligns with any key relevant higher-level plans and programmes and is consistent with the relevant

objectives and policy commitments of the National Planning Framework and the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

State of the Environment Report – Ireland’s Environment 2020

15.66 In preparing the plan or programme and associated SEA screening, the recommendations, key issues and challenges described in our published State of the Environment Report Ireland’s Environment – An Integrated Assessment 2020 (EPA, 2020) should be considered, as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme.

Available Guidance & Resources

15.67 Our website contains various SEA resources and guidance, including:

- SEA process guidance and checklists
- SEA Spatial Information Sources Inventory
- Topic specific SEA guidance (including Good practice note on Cumulative Effects Assessment (EPA, 2020), Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring (EPA, 2020), Integrating climatic factors into SEA (EPA, 2019), Developing and Assessing Alternatives in SEA (EPA, 2015), and Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment (EPA, 2012))

15.68 You can access these guidance notes and other resources at:

<https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-topic-and-sector-specific-guidance/>

Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) WebTool

15.69 This tool is a decision support tool to assist SEA and planning processes in Ireland. It is available at www.enviromap.ie. The tool brings together over 100 datasets and allows users to create plan-specific environmental sensitivity maps. These maps can help planners examine environmental considerations, anticipate potential land-use conflicts, and help identify suitable development locations while also protecting the environment.

EPA SEA WebGIS Tool

15.70 Our SEA WebGIS Tool has been updated recently and is now publicly available at <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>. It allows public authorities to produce an indicative report on key aspects of the environment in a specific geographic area. It is intended to assist public authorities in SEA screening and scoping exercises.

EPA WFD Application

15.71 Our WFD Application provides access to water quality and catchment data from the national WFD monitoring programme. The Application can be accessed via the www.catchments.ie website.

Future amendments to the plan or programme

15.72 Where changes to the plan or programme are made prior to finalisation, or where modifications to the plan or programme are proposed following its adoption, these should be screened for potential for likely significant effects in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 2A (S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as

amended) or Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended) of the SEA Regulations, as appropriate.

EPA AA GeoTool

15.73 Our AA GeoTool application has been developed in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It allows users to select a location, specify a search area and gather available information for each European Site within the area. It is available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool>

Appropriate Assessment

15.74 You should ensure that the plan or programme complies with the requirements of the Habitats Directive where relevant. Where an Appropriate Assessment is required, the key findings and recommendations should be incorporated into the SEA and the plan or programme.

SEA Determination

15.75 As soon as practicable after making your determination as to whether SEA is required or not, you should make a copy of your decision, including, if appropriate, the reasons for not requiring an environmental assessment, available for public inspection in your offices and on your website. You should also send a copy of your determination to the relevant environmental authorities consulted.

LUC response

The suite of guidance documents from the EPA will be used during the overall SEA process and during preparation of the SEA reports.

Appendix B Consultation submissions/observations

The State of the Environment Report and the ESM Mapping Tool are principal sources of information used throughout the SEA to determine the baseline and key environmental issues for each SEA topic.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment is being undertaken in parallel with the SEA process. The findings will be incorporated in the SEA.

The Final Screening Report will be made available on Longford County Council's website for inspection.

References

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- 2 [S.I. No. 435 of 2004](#)
- 3 [S.I. No. 200 of 2011](#)
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- 6 Longford County Council (2021) Longford CDP Volume I: Written Statement [online] Available at: [https://www.longfordcoco.ie/services/planning/longford-county-development-plan-2021-2027/#:~:text=The%20County%20Development%20Plan%20is,Regulation%202001%20\(as%20amended\)](https://www.longfordcoco.ie/services/planning/longford-county-development-plan-2021-2027/#:~:text=The%20County%20Development%20Plan%20is,Regulation%202001%20(as%20amended))
- 7 EPA (2021) Good practice guidance on SEA Screening [online] Available at: https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/SEA_Screening_GoodPractice_2021.pdf
- 8 A number of government departments have changed name and certain responsibilities have migrated between departments. The SEA legislation has not yet been updated to reflect these changes however, for clarity the current relevant departments are listed.
- 9 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna; Population and Human Health; Climatic Factors; Air; Soil; Water; Cultural Heritage including Architectural and Archaeological Heritage; Landscape; Material Assets.
- 10 EPA (2022) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Pack. Available at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/SEA-Pack-2022.pdf>
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