

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT AND  
DETERMINATION**

**FOR**

**LONGFORD COUNTY COUNCIL (DRAFT) NOISE ACTION PLAN 2024-2028**



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report has been prepared by Traynor Environmental Ltd on behalf of Longford County Council. This SEA Screening report considers the applicability of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations S.I.435/2004 as amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011, S.I. No. 200 of (hereafter referred to as the 'SEA Regulations'). The focus of this report is to provide justification for whether SEA is needed.

The requirement to prepare a Noise Action Plan (NAP) is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the national competent authority responsible for implementing the END and will ultimately report noise mapping and action planning to the European Commission. Under the Regulations, the APA are responsible for preparing a NAP for County Longford). This NAP has been prepared to address environmental noise from major roads in Co. Longford, with more than three million vehicles per annum.

The purpose of the NAP is to provide a strategic overview of the management of noise issues and effects within county Longford. The NAP aims to develop clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to prevent environmental noise where necessary; particularly where exposure to noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health. The NAP also identifies areas to preserve environmental acoustic quality where the baseline is good.

The END requires routine updates to noise mapping and action planning every four years. The NAP to which this SEA Screening report refers to is for the period 2024 – 2028 and is the fourth NAP for county Longford. Further details are set out within Section 3 of this report.

SEA is a formal process used to evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt the plan or programme. This SEA Screening Report considers the applicability of the SEA Regulations and the NAP ('pre-screening') as a 'plan or programme' and presents details of the SEA screening process and to determine whether further assessment is required in respect of the NAP.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been prepared concurrently with this SEA Screening Report. This considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'.

The structure of this SEA Screening is as follows:

- **Section 2: Strategic Environmental Assessment Legal Context and Approach.** This sets out the regulatory context and purpose of the SEA Regulations, along with a summary of the SEA process, focussing on Screening. Reference to SEA Screening guidance is presented;
- **Section 3: Summary of the Longford Noise Action Plan 2024 – 2028.** This summarises the NAP with a focus on the content of the NAP that could be applicable to the SEA Regulations;
- **Section 4: Longford Environmental Context.** This sets out the geographical context of the NAP and at a high level, environmental considerations proportionate to SEA and considering biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage, and landscape;
- **Section 5: SEA Screening.** Sets out the findings of pre-screening and considers the NAP against the criteria defined by SEA Regulations and guidance. This section also sets out the next steps in respect of consultation; and
- **Section 6: Conclusion.** A summary of this SEA Screening report and next steps in the SEA process.

## 2.0 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT LEGAL CONTEXT AND APPROACH

### 2.1 The SEA Regulatory Context

SEA is a systematic process designed to assess likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before it is formally adopted or implemented.

European Union (EU) Directive 2001/42/EC7 (the 'SEA Directive') requires EU Member States to ensure that certain plans and programmes are subject to a requirement for SEA. In the context of transport sectoral plans, the 'SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law through the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations, 2004 (S. I. 435/2004). This legislation has been amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 200/ 2011).

For all other sectoral plans, the SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law by European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S. I. 436/2004), as amended by European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S. I. 201/2011). As set out within the EPA Draft Guidance for Noise Action Planning the NAP is a form of 'Transport' sectoral plan. Therefore, if an SEA is required for NAPs, they would fall under the remit of S.I. 435, as amended, and not S.I. 436 of 2004.

Pre-screening checks have followed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland (2001-DS-EEP-2/5)' – Synthesis Report.

### 2.2 Existing Requirements Already in Force.

Existing requirements already in force that are taken into account by the screening exercise when considering cumulative effects and the degree of additionality that is provided for by the Noise Action Plan are identified in this section.

There are various measures already in force that provide for noise management. The Plan will further contribute towards these provisions. At a national and regional level these include:

- The Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992;
- Building Regulations;
- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, 2007;
- Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009;
- Urban Design Manual: A best practice guide;
- Guidelines for the Treatment of Noise and Vibration in National Road Schemes (National Roads Authority, now Transport Infrastructure Ireland), which set out limits and mitigation measures for noise related to both the construction and traffic flow on new road schemes;
- The Roads Act 1993;
- IPPC/ Waste Licensing and associated Guidance Note for Noise: Licence Applications, NG4
- Surveys and Assessments in relation to Scheduled Activities, containing suggested noise limits;
- Wind Energy Planning Guidelines;
- Quarry and Ancillary Activities;
- National Planning Framework;
- Economic Spatial Strategy; and
- Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035.

## 2.3 SEA SCREENING

### 2.3.1 Overview

The procedure of undertaking SEA screening is based upon the evaluation of specific criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive (Schedule 1)

According to the EPA Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening the screening process covers three different stages as below:

- Applicability;
- Screening; and
- Determination.

The core guidance declares that the overall characteristics of the plan should be checked to determine if the plan falls within the overarching requirements of the SEA Directive. This is therefore the first stage of 'Applicability' screening.

Should the first check determine that the plan falls within the requirements of the SEA Directive, further consideration should be made of any potential environmental significance resulting from implementing the plan itself. At this stage, the significance criteria outlined in Annex II (2) of the SEA Directive (Stage 2 'Screening') should be followed.

### 2.3.2 Stage 1 'Applicability' Methodology

The applicability stage of SEA screening consists of a 4-step process as outlined in the EPA Good Practice Guide on Screening (2021). Table 2-1 sets out these stages as below:

**Table 2.1: Applicability Steps - Stage 1**

Applicability Step	Step Guidance
<b>Step 1</b>	<p>Establish and identify the status of the plan to be assessed, or the competent authority compiling the programme.</p> <p>Is the plan (ie. The NAP) prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional, or local level?</p> <p>Is the plan prepared by a relevant authority for associated adoption through a parliamentary or governmental legislative procedure?</p>
<b>Step 2</b>	<p>Establish the description of the plan or programme.</p> <p>Is the NAP required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?</p>
<b>Step 3</b>	<p>Determine if the NAP is not exempt from SEA screening.</p> <p>Is the sole purpose of the NAP for national defense, civil emergency, or finance/budget?</p>
<b>Step 4</b>	<p>Does the NAP require mandatory SEA?</p> <p>Is the NAP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecoms, tourism, town and country planning or land use, and does the NAP set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the Annexes of the EIA Directive?</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Will the NAP require assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the EU Habitats Directive?</p>

Following this stage of SEA screening, there are three possible outcomes regarding whether the SEA Directive applies in this case:

- The SEA Directive **does not** apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is not of a type which falls within the remit of the regulations themselves, and therefore there is no requirement to notify environmental authorities.
- The SEA Directive **does** apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is of a type that falls within the remit of the regulations and therefore triggers mandatory SEA. This then triggers the process of proceeding to SEA scoping and relevant consultation with designated authorities.

The SEA Directive **may** apply to the NAP – in this scenario, the NAP may be within the remit of the SEA Directive because there is some uncertainty with the provisions considered at Stage 1 screening, therefore a case-by-case determination is required. At this point, the screening would proceed to Stage 2.

### 2.3.3 Stage 2 'Screening' (If Applicable)

If there is potential that the NAP may give rise to significant effects or there is uncertainty on key characteristics, Stage 2 Screening helps to determine if SEA is required for the NAP. While it is not a mandatory requirement, the production of a screening report has become good practice as part of the overarching process. Stage 2 is a four-step process as per the EPA's Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening Reports. Table 2 below summarises the next steps.

**Table 2.2: Screening Steps - Stage 2**

Screening Step	Step Guidance
<b>Step 1</b>	Describe the features of the NAP and the environment in which it would be received, outlining any environmental challenges.
<b>Step 2</b>	Identify the potential for significant environmental effects.
<b>Step 3</b>	Statutory consultation with designated environmental authorities (a minimum of 4 weeks).
<b>Step 4</b>	Draft determination.

Part of this screening stage includes a screening of environmental significance, to assess whether the plan is likely to result in significant effects and therefore taken forward for SEA. The criteria for undertaking this are embedded into Annex II of the SEA Directive and is transposed into Irish legislation as Schedule 1 of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 as amended.

The criteria that will be used as part of Section 5 of this report, is outlined in section 7 Stage 2 SEA Screening. The aforementioned EPA's Good Practice Guidance on SEA and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (2022) have been used to guide this assessment. At this stage it is required to consult with the relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks (Step 3), after which a draft determination can be prepared (Step 4) and finalised as Stage 3 following the input from consultation.

### 2.3.4 'Determination' - Stage 3

Following the consultation with the relevant authorities, after the competent authority has made their final decision as to whether SEA applies to the NAP, a summary of the screening should be available for public inspection both digitally and as a hard copy. A copy of the final determination should also be made available to relevant SEA authorities who were also consulted during screening.

## 2.4 Appropriate Assessment

It should be noted that concurrently an Appropriate Assessment Screening has been undertaken and a report documenting this prepared. The AA Screening considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'. The overarching goal of the Habitats and Birds Directives are to uphold or restore the 'favourable conservation status' of habitats and species recognised as of European Community Interest.

These specific habitats and species are outlined in the Habitats and Birds Directives, with the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) aimed at safeguarding the most vulnerable among them. Together, these designations are commonly referred to as European Sites, also known as Natura 2000 sites. Should AA Screening determine that the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant, then this will also trigger the requirement of SEA for the plan.



### 3.0 COUNTY LONGFORD NOISE ACTION PLAN 2024- 2028

#### 3.1 Background and Overview

Longford County Council is the Action Planning Authority for this Noise Action Plan. In County Longford, the noise source to be considered in this Noise Action Plan, as required under the Regulations relates to major roads carrying in excess of 3 million vehicles per year.

This is the fourth NAP for Co. Longford which reports the findings of the strategic noise mapping prepared in consultation with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), Irish Rail and the EPA, for major roads with a flow threshold of 3,000,000 vehicles per year. The following sections of road in Co. Longford were deemed to be above this threshold.

- N4 from the County Boundary with Westmeath to the County boundary with Leitrim.
- N63 from its junction with the N4 at Lisnamuck, east of Longford Town to its junction with the R397 west of Longford Town
- R198 from its junction with the N63 in Longford Town to Melview Junction Cross
- N55 from junction with R392 in Ballymahon to Ballymahon Mart
- R392 from junction with N55 at Creevagh, Ballymahon to Mercy Secondary School, Main St., Ballymahon

As required by the END, the NAP seeks to provide a framework for long-term management of environmental noise from transport systems, referring to the results of the strategic noise maps to inform assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise.

As part of this management, areas are identified for noise management activities during the implementation of the NAP, and the recommended protection of quiet areas within Co. Longford is also set out within the NAP. The temporal framework for the NAP is 4 years, at which time the noise mapping will be reviewed as well as the NAP.

This Noise Action Plan has been prepared by Longford County Council for major roads carrying more than three million vehicles per annum, which in County Longford comprises sections of – N4, N63, N55, R198 and R392 listed above.

For the purpose of the SEA, relevant sections of the NAP include the overarching long-term strategy which incorporates the Noise Policy Statement, as set out in Section 3.2 of this document. By way of a summary the management of noise within Co. Longford focusses on Prevention, Protection and Mitigation Measures as set out within the Noise Policy Statement.

#### 3.2 Noise Policy Statement

The Noise Policy Statement for Co. Longford is detailed as follows:

*"Longford County Council will seek to address environmental noise from major roads, as defined in the Environmental Noise Regulations, in the county. Longford Co. Council will endeavour to maintain satisfactory noise environments, where they exist and will have regard to the protection and improvement of the noise environment in the planning process, Longford County Council will endeavour that future developments include provisions to protect the population from the effects of environmental noise in the interests of residential amenity and public health."*

Example mitigation measures as set out in the NAP include the identification and implementation of priority areas and at noise sensitive buildings. Noise mitigation measures within these areas should be evaluated of their effectiveness through the following steps set out in the NAP:

- Identification of practical noise mitigation options
- Appraisal of noise mitigation options monetised benefits to health
- Financial assessment of noise mitigation options
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Recommendation of noise mitigation measure(s).

Once the extent of the existing noise exposure levels have been confirmed for a PIA, potential noise mitigations measures will be investigated and a cost benefit analysis undertaken for each, with the aim of developing a selection matrix which leads towards a recommendation for action.

Noise mitigation measures can be implemented on or directly alongside the sources, in this case the road (source control), others may be in the region between the roads and the dwellings (pathway control) and others may be at the noise sensitive locations (receiver control). 10 no. of PIAs have been identified along busy transport routes within towns, in Longford Town, Edgeworthstown, Newtownforbes and Ballymahon. Measures that may be considered along major roads generally will include alternative lower noise road surfaces (e.g. porous pavements), the construction of noise barriers and changes in traffic flows and speeds.

In terms of prevention the NAP sets out that prevention is achieved by existing overarching policy for development, LDP objective TR O54 (Noise Sensitive Development) for all new residential development, and the requirement to follow 'Professional Practice Guidance on Planning and Noise: New Residential Developments' (ProPG).

For public open space the NAP also identifies early input in the design of public spaces by considering the acoustic environment offers the opportunity to maximise the benefits of taking an integrated approach to design. This is also a feature of existing policy and guidance such as Local Area Plans, Development Plans, and other complementary plans such as:

Protection measures as set out in the NAP includes the identification of candidate quiet areas to which protection measures should be put in place to manage activities in these areas which would impact the acoustic environment.

### **3.3 Longford County Development Plan**

The Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets a Noise Policy CPO 12.109 - To promote the implementation of the Noise Directive 2002/49/EC and associated Environmental Noise Regulations 2006.

Section 12.19 on Noise and Light Pollution states:

The Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 give effect to EU Directive 2002/49/EC relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise. The impact of noise pollution is an important consideration in assessing all new development proposals, as it can impact people's quality of life and health. Through the Development Management process, the Council will seek to reduce noise and/or vibration at site boundaries or within adjacent sensitive areas, especially residential areas, by measures such as layout, design and/or attenuation mechanisms. The Council will require the submission of Noise Impact Assessments, which proposes introducing noise-creating uses in proximity to noise-sensitive uses, such as residential areas. If permission is granted, it may impose conditions mitigating impact. Similarly, where noise-sensitive uses are proposed within proximity to a noise source, such as national roads, rail lines, etc., proposals shall include noise and/or vibration attenuation measures in any planning application.

Using the provisions of the development management process, the planning authority will aim to take account of and mitigate noise and/or vibration at site boundaries or adjacent to noise sensitive locations, in particular residential properties with reference to layout, design and/or noise attenuation measures. Consideration also needs to be given to avoid adverse impacts when introducing noise sensitive uses in proximity to existing and future national roads. Where warranted proposals should include mitigation and should have regard to Section 3.7 of the DoECLG Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines.



## 4.2 Baseline

### 4.2.1 Biodiversity, Flora, and Fauna

County Longford baseline for biodiversity can be quantified in terms of the number of designated sites and an indication of the habitats and species across the County. Government data indicates that there are four Special Protection Areas (SPA) Glen Lough SPA (004045) Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA (004061) Lough Ree SPA (004064) Ballykenny Fisherstown Bog SPA (004101), and six Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's), Lough Ree SAC (000440), Fortwilliam Turlough SAC (000448), Lough Forbes Complex SAC (001818), Ardagullion Bog SAC (002341), Brown Bog SAC (002346), Clooneen Bog SAC (002348) located within the County. Areas designated as Natura 2000 sites, are an EU-wide network of protected areas covering vulnerable species and habitats, designated under the Birds and Habitats directives. Further details on each protected site and why they are designated, can be found within the accompanying Appropriate Assessment Screening of the NAP. There are no Ramsar sites identified across the County, which are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar convention and are also often designated as SPA and SAC sites.

In terms of the identified habitats and species across County Longford, Wetlands, Improved grassland, woodland and Lakes are present within the County. In terms of identified species in the County, there are a number of species records present, including amphibians, and mammals such as otter and Irish hare. Article 6 of the Habitats Directive obligates Ireland to maintain and/or restore natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora. The National Biodiversity Action Plan aims to meet urgent conservation and restoration needs for habitats and species in Ireland.

### 4.2.2 Population and Human Health

The focus of the County Longford baseline for population and human health is about the number of people affected by noise. It is a predominantly rural county with approximately 65% of its population living in rural settings. According to the most recent census from the Central Statistics Office in 2022, Longford has a population of 46,751 which is an increase of 14% from the 2016 census. Longford is the second smallest county in Ireland in terms of population.

The assignment of population to the calculated noise levels is set out within Annex II of the END (CNOSOS-EU), where harmful effects due to noise are statistically assessed at geographically specific locations. The EPA Guidance sets out the process for using the calculated number of people Highly Annoyed to generate a gridded "heatmap" of values which represent (approximately) the number of people 100m<sup>2</sup>. Using the heatmap, the areas of higher concentrations of people highly annoyed (HA) are identified and delineated as a digital polygon. The EPA Guidance sets a density criterion of 15 or more people per 100m<sup>2</sup> as being the most appropriate for Most Important Areas in main urban areas, with lower criteria of 10 and 7.5 people per 100m<sup>2</sup> appropriate on the edge of urban or in rural areas. A summary of the Most Important Areas identified along the major routes using the EPA Guidance density criteria (Highly Annoyed Threshold) of 7.5, 10 and 15 or more people per 100m<sup>2</sup> is provided in the NAP.

### 4.2.3 Water and Soils

The County Longford baseline for water and soils can generally be quantified in terms of soil status, underlying geology, and Water Framework Directive (WFD) status.

County Longford, in terms of its underlying geology, is a mixture of bedrock comprising of Lower Carboniferous limestone and Glacial deposits, Ordovician, Ordovician & Silurian, Devonian sandstones and conglomerates, according to GSI bedrock data.

The underlying soils in the north Drumlin Lakeland are predominantly poorly drained gley soils with some peats. In the northern upland which consists of the central northern section of the County, the Geology and Soils are predominantly Gley Soils. Towards the south of the county till derived from chiefly from limestone are described as Mineral poorly drained (Mainly basic)

The WFD helps to quantify water quality status, bathing water quality, protected areas, and groundwater vulnerability across Ireland. Within the county, there are a number of WFD waterbodies classified as having poor ecological status.

There are several WFD protected areas within the county, and there is also differentiated areas in terms of groundwater vulnerability, with low vulnerability in some areas and areas of moderate, high, and extreme vulnerability in other areas of Co. Longford.

#### **4.2.4 Air Quality**

The County Longford baseline for air quality can be quantified in terms of emissions levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub>. In terms of both, EU legal air quality limits were met in 2022 Ireland is moving towards measuring their performance regarding these emissions to a more stringent air quality guideline set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) rather than the EU. Latest modelled maps for PM<sub>2.5</sub> show European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (EMEP) annual averages across the county range from <2.0 in areas outside of the towns, to between 8.0-9.0 in the urban centres. Burning solid fuels in homes remains a key issue to reduce PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions across the County and indeed Ireland.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in partnership with Local Authorities, have implemented the Ambient Air Monitoring Programme with comprises of a network of 116 monitoring stations strategically positioned across the country measuring 'real-time' concentrations of atmospheric pollutants. At present, one Air Monitoring Station (AMS) is operational in Co. Longford, located in Longford Town.

#### **4.2.5 Climatic Factors**

Emissions data is not defined for County Longford and so national emissions are considered. In 2022, emissions across Ireland were estimated to be 60.76Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq. This figure is 1.9% lower than the previous yearly data and is contextualised by the EU target to reduce emissions outside of the EU ETS scheme by 30% by 2030.

#### **4.2.6 Material Assets**

The Water Services Section of Longford County Council will co-operate with Uisce Éireann to provide and maintain an adequate public water supply and waste water infrastructure network to serve the County over the lifetime of this Development Plan and beyond. Future capital investment in infrastructure will be achieved through the Capital Investment Plan. The provision and maintenance of quality waste water treatment infrastructure is critical in the interest of sustainable development and to protect public health. Irish Water is responsible for the treatment and disposal of waste-water in towns and villages. Irish Water's operations will be regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency who set environmental standards which must be complied with in respect of the provision of wastewater infrastructure.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of multi-unit residential schemes completed over the previous plan period. During the lifetime of the previous County Development Plan most houses were built in rural locations on unserviced land and, in more recent times, by social housing bodies. 16.7% of the housing stock in County Longford was vacant during the most recent Census, of which 278 units were unoccupied holiday homes and 2,824 units were other vacant dwellings.

#### **4.2.7 Cultural Heritage**

The Co. Longford cultural heritage baseline indicated that there are many heritage areas, sites, and monuments across the county. For example, there are hundreds of specific sites and monuments of cultural interest, including Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) and National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) records. Generally, sites are mainly concentrated in urban areas.

As part of the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, there is a requirement to compile and maintain a Record of Protected Structures (RPS) under the Planning Act 2000 (as amended). RPS includes over 2000 structures which are of special architectural interest across the County. Across Ireland, key environmental issues such as land use change, climate change and biodiversity loss may have a long- term impact upon the cultural heritage baseline in the county. Heritage Ireland 2030 sets out a framework to focus on protecting and managing Ireland's heritage assets.

#### 4.2.8 Landscape

##### **Unit 1 – Northern (Drumlin Lakeland)**

This area consists of the North West fringe of the County and extends from Drumlish in the west to the County boundary in the north. This landscape unit also includes the areas surrounding Lough Gowna and Lough Kinale in the east of the County. The southern boundary is mainly formed by the R198 Regional route from Longford to Arva, the Aughnacliffe to Enaghan Road and other relevant features such as the 100m contour line.

##### **Unit 2 – Northern (Upland)**

This unit consists of the central northern section of the County, stretching from Drumlish in the west to Moyne in the north, Esker in the south and including the towns of Granard and Abbeylara in the east, up to and including the county boundary with Cavan.

##### **Unit 3 – Shannon (Basin/Lough Ree)**

This unit is located along the western boundary of the County forming the border with Counties Leitrim, Roscommon and Westmeath and taking in the Rivers Shannon, Inny and Rinn and Lough Forbes and Lough Ree. This unit has large amounts of water cover with inland marshes, bogland and tracts of deciduous forestry in the northern section around Lough Forbes. Land cover becomes less diverse travelling south of Lanesborough on the western shores of Lough Ree, with poorly drained agricultural land forming the majority of the landcover in the area.

##### **Unit 4 – Central Corridor**

This area consists of the centre of the County and includes the settlements of Newtownforbes, Longford Town and Edgeworthstown extending in a northerly direction towards Drumlish in the west and Granard in the east. The southern boundary is mainly formed by the N4 National route from Longford to Mullingar.

##### **Unit 5 – Inny Basin**

This area is located to the east of the County and forms the border with County Westmeath. The landcover in this area is dominated by peatlands and mixed woodlands interspersed with pastures of varying quality. The area maintains a relatively flat and level topography.

##### **Unit 6 – Peatlands**

This area is located in the west of the County and includes the settlements of Lanesborough and Clondra and extends towards Ballymahon in the south. Located in the western half of the County, this area is dominated by extensive tracts of raised bog interspersed with mixed forestry and areas of scrubby vegetation. The topography is notably flat, with the majority of the land lying below the 50m contour line. This, when combined with the limited vegetation cover and extensive peat land cover mean that views are available across wide areas throughout the unit.

##### **Unit 7 – Open Agricultural**

This area is located in the east of the County and contains twelve settlements including, Ballymahon, Ardagh and Keenagh. The unit extends from below the N4 Longford to Mullingar road towards the southern edge of the County. Located in the southeast of the County, this area contains the most versatile agricultural land in the County and is generally characterised by larger, open fields, interspersed with mature trees. Plantations of deciduous and mixed woodland punctuate the landscape.

Longford's unique drumlin landscape is encapsulated in its Irish name Mhuineachain which means "little hills or shrubbery". The landscape is varied to include the uplands of Sliabh Beagh and Mullyash to the north and east of the county respectively. In the central part of the County a series of low-lying lakes and wetlands extend from west to east. To the north and south of this belt of lakes the landscape character consists of high drumlin farmland.

The landscape in Longford is different to the more open landscapes encountered elsewhere in the country due to the deposition of drumlins at the end of the last glaciations. The landscape vegetation has evolved over centuries due to changes in agricultural practices, settlement patterns and infrastructural development.

The National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025) is a key driver for landscape targets in Ireland and County Longford. The National Landscape Strategy for example, sets out to implement the European Landscape Convention to integrate landscape into the country's approach to sustainable development.



## 5.0 SEA SCREENING

### 5.1 Stage 1 – SEA ‘Applicability’

**Table 5.1 SEA ‘Applicability’**

<b>Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional, or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?</b>
Yes. The NAP is prepared and then will be adopted at a regional level by the Action Planning Authority Working Group who comprise the following: Longford County Council.
<b>Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?</b>
Yes. The NAP is required by The Environmental Noise Directive ("END") (2002/49/EC). A European Union legal instrument vital for protecting public health and the environment by addressing the adverse effects of environmental noise. The END was transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 (S.I. 140/2006) (the "Regulations"). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 663/2021).
<b>Is the P/P prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use?</b>
Yes. the NAP is being prepared for the transportation sector. Noise issues and interventions may have relevance for other sectors but is being prepared in the context of planning and land use.
<b>Does the P/P provide a framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive?</b>
According to the European Commission 'Guidance on the implementation of Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment,' this would "normally mean that the plan or programme contains criteria or conditions which guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent. Such criteria could place limits on the type of activity or development which is to be permitted in a given area; or they could contain conditions which must be met by the applicant if permission is to be granted; or they could be designed to preserve certain characteristics of the area concerned (such as the mixture of land uses which promotes the economic vitality of the area)." The NAP does potentially set a locational framework for interventions within identified quiet areas and important areas regarding noise, but due to its high level of intervention recommendations, it does not therefore provide a framework for development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive.
<b>Is the P/P likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site which leads to a requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments?</b>
No. The NAP is a strategic-level document which is designed to provide direction for action through the designation of strategic priority areas to preserve low noise levels and reduce areas where noise disturbance is high. The NAP does however locate where potential interventions (including mitigation and prevention measures) could take place, which may correlate with Natura 2000 sites. However, as outlined in the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report, the NAPs elements are not identified as having any direct or indirect impact on Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, there are no predicted likely significant effects upon the identified Natura 2000 sites and no requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments.
<b>Is the sole purpose of the P/P to serve national defence or civil emergency or is it a financial/budget P/P or is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme?</b>
No. The NAP's sole purpose is not to serve national defence or civil emergency nor is it a financial/budget P/P nor is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme.



## 5.2 Outcome of Stage Applicability

The pre-screening checks as set out in Section 5.1, indicate that the NAP is not a plan or programme to which the SEA applies and it is concluded that an SEA is not required, for completeness the plan was assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states 'A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (..) are likely to have significant effects on the environment'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations. A table detailing the environmental significance is presented within the following.

## 5.3 Stage 2 – SEA 'Screening'

As the County Longford NAP is not within any of the categories established within the Stage 1 criteria, it is concluded that an SEA is not required. However, the NAP has been assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states 'A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (..) are likely to have significant effects on the environment'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations. A table detailing the Stage 2 SEA screening of significance, is presented in section 7 of this report.

## 5.4 Outcome of Stage 2 Screening (Steps 1 and 2)

The Stage 2 Screening of the County Longford NAP, as detailed in section 7, determines that no further SEA is required. It has been determined that the NAP will operate at a high level and therefore a full SEA would not be proportionate relative to the NAP itself. The NAP does not satisfy the conditions for mandatory SEA under S.I. 435/2004.

This report will now be sent as part of a request for consultation with the environmental authorities (Step 3).

## 6.0 CONSULTATION AND NEXT STEPS

Step 3 of Stage 2 of SEA Screening indicates there is a specific requirement to consult with relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks, regarding the outcomes of the SEA screening report. These authorities are:

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Development Application Unit
- Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
- Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine
- Any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous

Following consultation, an SEA Screening Statement (Stage 3: Determination) can be prepared by the competent authority to be appended to the SEA screening report. This Screening Statement should be made publicly available upon determination.

## 7.0 STAGE 2 SEA SCREENING

Table 7.1 and Table 7.2 set out the SEA criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive (Steps 1 and 2 of Stage 2: SEA Screening).

**Table 7.1: Stage 2 Screening Table – The Characteristics of Plans and Programmes.**

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	County Longford NAP  (Relating to Major Roads Within County Longford Carrying More Than 3,000,000 Vehicle Passages Per Year)
<b>1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to</b>	
<p>The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size, and operating conditions or by allocating resources</p>	<p>The primary objective of the NAP is aimed at the long-term management of environmental noise and is based on the results of the strategic noise maps which informed assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise.</p> <p>Therefore, the mapping and the results of exposure assessments do not represent a framework.</p> <p>However, the NAP does set out principles and locational allocation of Priority Important Areas and Candidate Quiet Areas, along with mitigation which could constitute a plan or programme depending on their scale, nature, and details of the mitigation.</p> <p>The locational provision of quiet areas is an effort to maintain an environmental status quo, rather than allocating resources or ringfencing specific projects or activities outside of these areas. Similarly, where mitigation is set out in the NAP for Priority Important Areas these are suggested approaches and not site specific, they do not set out operating conditions or allocate resources. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives specific change is limited and therefore not significant.</p> <p>As there is no provision in legislation upon which the actions outlined in the NAP can be enforced, reliance will be made on various other plans and policies such as the Longford Development Plan 2021-2027 and other Development Plans within the County, the National Planning Framework 2040, and the Planning Acts, for their implementation. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives other activities, is not significant.</p>
<p>The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programme including those in a hierarchy</p>	<p>The degree to which the NAP influences other plans and programmes is deemed to be minimal. It can be argued that the NAP sits within a horizontal hierarchy. The NAP refers to and relied upon other plans and programmes existing and proposed within the County itself. The NAP does not require new plans or policies to be created to help implement its key aims. Therefore, there are no new environmental effects as they already have been considered in the assessment of other plans and policies themselves.</p>

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	County Longford NAP  (Relating to Major Roads Within County Longford Carrying More Than 3,000,000 Vehicle Passages Per Year)
The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	The County Longford NAP promotes environmental considerations and sustainable development, through the identification of noise- related issues in the County. However, the NAP does not go as far as recommending specific actions to deliver sustainable development within the County. The provision of noise important areas should make decision-makers aware of noise issues and should supplement other initiatives indirectly. Therefore, the NAP does not go against the principles of sustainable development, but it also does not have a direct influence over its integration. Therefore, the relevance of the NAP against this metric is deemed to be not significant.
Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	<p>The NAP directly addresses environmental noise within Longford sets out clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to prevent environmental noise where necessary; particularly where exposure to noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health.</p> <p>Overall, the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health. In SEA terms it is not deemed that, when considered against other environmental conditions and problems, the County Longford NAP (as set out within Section 4) would give rise to significant environmental effects on account of the high level and strategic nature of the mitigation set out in the NAP. This is also on account of the reliance upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA.</p>
The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste- management or water protection)	<p>The requirement to prepare a NAP is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs.</p> <p>Therefore, the NAP must be consistent with the implementation of this EU Directive which is directly related to the protection of the environment and human health.</p>

**Table 7.2: Stage 2 Screening Table - Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected.**

<b>Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive</b>	
<b>County Longford NAP - (Relating to Major Roads Within County Longford Carrying More Than 3,000,000 Vehicle Passages Per Year)</b>	
<b>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to</b>	
The probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the effects	<p>The measures within the NAP aim to have an overall positive effect on noise levels and consequently human health and the environment in the long term. The mitigation set out is high level and strategic.</p> <p>Consequently, details that would identify duration, frequency and reversibility of effects are not available. Furthermore, as is a reliance in the NAP placed upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development.</p>
The cumulative nature of the effects	The County Longford NAP is prepared alongside other national plans and programmes to act in conformity with the suite of measures that they identify. The environmental impact of those measures will be evaluated within the plans themselves, some of which will be subject to mandatory SEA and AA. Therefore, because this NAP is not in direct conflict with the external overarching aims, the NAP itself is unlikely to have resulting significant effects and therefore cannot be cumulative in nature.
The transboundary nature of the effects	On account of the scale and nature of the NAP, and the high-level strategic nature of the mitigation presented, the County Longford NAP will have no direct transboundary effects of its own account.
The risks to human health of the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	There are no expected risks to human health or the environment because of the NAP. Overall, the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health.
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The County Longford NAP covers a large geographic area. The overall population is approximately 46,751. The population that is directly affected or considered as part of the NAP's aims (the implementation of candidate quiet areas and noise important areas) is however considered to be limited and at a small scale compared to the wider context. For example, in County Longford, the MIA calculation process identified 10 no. MIAs along major routes in the County. On this basis and considering the strategic nature of the NAP mitigation, the environmental effects are not considered to be significant because they are strategic.

<p>The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage;</li> <li>• Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or</li> <li>• Intensive land use</li> </ul>	<p>Were areas identified within the County Longford NAP to coincide with areas of special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage, owing to the reliance in the NAP placed upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development, it is unlikely a significant effect would arise. This same also applies to intensive land use.</p> <p>In respect of Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, through its noise policy statement, will aim to prevent additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where it is likely significant adverse impacts are likely to occur. It will aim to protect areas which are desirably quiet, and it will also identify appropriate mitigation measures to reduce noise levels where they are potentially harmful. A set of implementation actions underpin the statement itself.</p>
<p>The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status</p>	<p>The County Longford NAP covers an area which includes ten nationally and EU-level protected sites regarding flora, fauna, species, and habitats. Subsequently, the factors to which ecologically designated sites such as SPA and SAC sites are protected, does not necessarily correlate with changing noise levels. Therefore, in summary, the County Longford NAP is not considered to have a significant effect upon recognised amenity sites within the County itself.</p> <p>This is consistent with the findings of the AA Screening report.</p>
<b>Section 5: Summary and Conclusion</b>	
<p>In terms of setting a framework, the County Longford NAP does in one sense set out a locational framework for noise, but it is however limited in terms of scale and does not necessarily drive specific changes or actions at a site-specific level which would be undertaken separately. It should also be noted that the NAP will have a minimal influence on other plans and programmes within County Longford. The NAP is inherently a plan which promotes environmental best practice, but it does not influence the implementation of sustainable development principles.</p> <p>There are ten designated sites across the County and various social, economic, and environmental factors which indicate a diverse geographic area. The NAP is also relevant in the context of EU Directive implementation and must be consistent with these relevant directions. In terms of the characteristics of effects the NAP is a strategy which should not have any transboundary effects of its own accord, nor bring any expected human health or environmental risks because of its implementation. The NAP is also unlikely to be cumulative in nature because it should be implemented in compliance with other plans and programmes that have been stress tested by the SEA process. While Longford is geographically moderate in size, the NAP's interventions are relatively localised. Therefore, the vulnerability and value of the area likely to be affected by the NAP is also relatively localised because areas where environmental limit values are (or are not) exceeded are small, pocketed areas within County Longford. The effects of the NAP upon national, EU or internationally protected sites is not significant because the areas to which the NAP identifies for interventions are mostly not corresponding to protected sites within County Longford.</p> <p>To conclude, this stage of the SEA screening process determines that the County Longford NAP does not require further SEA.</p>	

**Section 6: Statutory Consultation**

The following statutory and non-statutory bodies will be consulted with through the SEA screening process. Following this consultation, updates will be made to summarise the issues raised by those consulted, and how this has influenced the final screening determination.

The SEA environmental authorities according to the regulations are as follows:

- Environmental Protection Agency;
- Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine;
- Development Applications Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage;
- Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications; and
- Any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous to the area of the planning authority

