



**Initial Draft AA Screening Report  
Proposed Variation no. 1  
of Longford CDP 2021-2027**

**March 2026**

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## Executive Summary

Longford County Council intends to vary its County Development Plan 2021-2027 to align it with the *Housing Growth Requirements: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (July 2025), which are Ministerial guidelines published in accordance with Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). The Proposed Variation consists of the amendment to the **Strategic Residential Reserve Zoning Objective text contained in Volume 2: Appendices.**

The reason for the Proposed Variation no. 1 is in light of the updated policy objectives and growth projections set out in the First Revision of the National Planning Framework (2025) and associated guidelines and acknowledging the constrained delivery of housing in recent years. As such the Proposed Variation of the Development Plan now seeks to facilitate appropriate development proposals on lands zoned ‘*Strategic Residential Reserve*’. Activation of these lands will be subject to the principles of infrastructure-led compact growth, as well as the environmental considerations that underpin the Development Plan

In compliance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), as transposed into Irish legislation by the Natura 2000 Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), a screening for Appropriate Assessment of a Proposed land use plan or application for consent for proposed development ‘*shall be carried out by the competent authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if that Land use plan or proposed development, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the European Site*’ (Section 177 U (1)).

It is intended to carry out the variation procedure in accordance with Section 58 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 (as amended). Section 58(6) of the 2024 Act requires the following: “*A screening for appropriate assessment and, where required, an appropriate assessment of a variation proposed under subsection (3) or (4) shall be carried out in accordance with Part 6.*”

This report outlines the Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening process. It has been prepared in order to inform the Planning Authority’s determination as to whether a Natura Impact Report (Stage Two AA) is required for the Proposed Variation.

The examination of the Proposed Variation has found that it will not introduce new sources of impact to European Sites, in addition to those already considered in the **Consolidated Natura Impact Report** of the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027.

Due to its nature, the Proposed Variation will not result in any future land use activities other than those already provided for in the Development Plan, which already includes mitigating policies and objectives designed to safeguard the integrity of European Sites. Therefore, there is no potential for in-combination or cumulative impacts on the qualifying interests and conservation objectives of such sites.

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<sup>1</sup> Natura 2000 network sites or European Sites are those identified as Sites of Community Importance under the Habitats Directive (Special Areas of Conservation) or classified as Special Protection Areas under the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC).

# 1. Background to AA screening of the Proposed Variation

## 1.1 Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 (CDP) was adopted on 19 October 2021 and came into force on 30 November 2021.

The CDP underwent a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and was subject to Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment as part of its preparation. All assessments have informed the policies and objectives of the Plan. The Environmental Report documenting the SEA process concluded that the overall impact of implementing the policies and objectives of the Longford CDP 2021-2027 would be neutral or positive for the environment.

The **Consolidated Natura Impact Report** (October,2021) as contained in **Volume 4 of the CDP** demonstrated that, having incorporated mitigation measures, the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 is not foreseen to give rise to any significant effects on the integrity of any European Sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

The CDP, associated documents and environmental reports are available for viewing and downloading from Longford County Council's website at [Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027](#)

## 1.2 Description of the Proposed Variation No. 1

It is proposed to vary the County Development Plan in the following manner:

- **amend the 'Strategic Residential Reserve' Zoning Objective text** included in **CDP Volume 2: Appendices**, to allow for consideration of planning applications for residential development on Strategic Residential Reserve sites which are demonstrably serviced and where such development would also have regard to the Compact Growth policies of the CDP.

## 1.3 Strategic Environmental Assessment

This AA Screening Report has been prepared in parallel with the SEA Screening Report of the Proposed Variation no. 1 of the CDP. The SEA screening has examined the Proposed Variation No. 1 against relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations, as amended.

The screening conclusion was that ***"the Proposed Variation no. 1 of the CDP would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and does not require full SEA"***.

## 1.4 Flood Risk Assessment

The Longford CDP has been subject to Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), ensuring the integration of flood risk management considerations into the Plan, as required by the *Flood Risk Management Guidelines*. **As the Proposed Variation does not propose additional lands to be zoned for development, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is not required.** The Plan, as varied, will continue to be consistent with the Flood Risk Management Guidelines.

## 2. AA screening overview

Appropriate Assessment (AA) is the mandatory, formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant effects<sup>2</sup> on European Sites of implementing a plan or programme, or a variation to a plan or programme, before a decision is made to adopt it.

In the case of Proposed Variation no. 1 of the Longford CDP 2024-2030, the assessment relates to the implications for European Sites, their qualifying features of interest (i.e. those Annex I habitats and Annex II species of SACs and Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) of SPAs) and associated conservation objectives.

The objective of the present screening is to identify whether or not the Proposed Variation (and any land-use activities that may arise from its implementation) are likely to impact on the physical environment, wild fauna or flora or their habitats and whether such impacts have the potential to negatively affect the conservation objectives of European Sites.

### 2.1 Stages of Appropriate Assessment

There are four main stages in the AA process, as follows:

**Stage One: Screening** – involving the identification of the likely impacts arising from a plan on a Natura 2000 site.

**Stage Two: Appropriate assessment** - involving the consideration of the impact of the plan on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans and appropriate mitigation measures. If adequate mitigation is proposed to ensure no significant adverse impacts on European sites, then the process may end at this stage. However, if the likelihood of significant impacts remains, then the process must proceed to Stage Three.

**Stage Three: Assessment of alternative solutions** – involving the examination of alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan, in order to avoid adverse impacts.

**Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain** – involving the formulation of compensatory measures if the project must proceed on the basis of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI).

The assessment may end at any of the above stages, depending on the outcomes of the stage.

### 2.2 Stage One AA

AA screening – also known as “Stage One AA” – has been undertaken to determine whether or not a Natura Impact Report (“Stage Two AA”) is required for the proposal by Longford County Council to vary the current Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 (Proposed Variation no.1).

**The examination of the Proposed Variation has found that it will not introduce new sources of impact to European Sites, in addition to those already considered in the Natura Impact Report of the CDP.**

Due to its nature, the Proposed Variation will not result in any future land use activities other than those already provided for in the Development Plan, which already includes mitigating policies and objectives designed to safeguard the integrity of European Sites. Therefore, there is no potential for in-combination or cumulative impacts on the qualifying interests and conservation objectives of such sites.

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<sup>2</sup> Significant effects on a European Site are those that would negatively undermine the conservation objectives supporting the favourable conservation condition of the Qualifying Interest (QI) habitats and/or the QI/Special Conservation Interest (SCI) species of a European site(s).

QIs are the habitat features and species listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive for which each European site has been designated and afforded protection. SCIs are wetland habitats and bird species listed within Annexes I and II of the Birds Directive. It is also vital that the threats to the ecological/environmental conditions that are required to support QIs and SCIs are considered as part of the assessment.

Section 3 of this **Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report** outlines the methodology used and details the screening steps.

This Report should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Proposed Variation no.1 of the County Development Plan 2021-2027
- Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027
- **Consolidated Natura Impact Report** which accompanies the Longford CDP 2021-2027
- SEA Environmental Report which accompanies the Longford CDP 2021-2027
- Initial Draft SEA Screening Report prepared for Proposed Variation no.1 of the CDP

## 2.3 Reference documents

The following documents have been consulted as part of the preparation of this Appropriate Assessment Screening Report:

- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities* (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009/2010 revision);
- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission, 2019).
- *Assessment of Plans and Projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites – Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission, 2021);
- *Practice Note PN01 - Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management* (Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021)

The principal source of information was the **Consolidated Natura Impact Report in Support of the Appropriate Assessment for the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027** (CAAS, October 2021)

## 3. Screening for Appropriate Assessment

### 3.1 Methodology

The methodology adopted for the screening of the Proposed Variation consists of a desktop study comprising the following steps:

1. description of the Proposed Variation – see Section 1.2 of this Report
2. identification of European Sites occurring within the Zone of Influence of the Longford County Development Plan (to which the Proposed Variation relates), and compilation of information on their qualifying interests (QI) and conservation objectives (CO)
3. identification of whether or not there are elements of the Proposed Variation with the potential to give rise to likely significant effects – direct, indirect etc. - on the conservation objectives of European Sites
4. identification of other plans or projects that, in combination with the Proposed Variation, have the potential to affect European Sites
5. conclusion of the screening assessment process – see Section 4 of this Report.

### 3.2 AA screening steps

#### 3.2.1 Determination as to whether the Proposed Variation is directly connected to or necessary for the conservation management of a European Site(s);

The Proposed Variation is not directly connected to or necessary for the conservation management of any European Site.

#### 3.2.2 Identification of European Sites occurring within the Zone of Influence of the Longford County Development Plan, to which the Proposed Variation relates

The AA Guidelines (DEHLG, 2009/2010) recommend a 15-km pathway zone to be considered. All European sites within a 15-km radius of the County Longford boundary were examined as part of the Appropriate Assessment carried out for the County Development Plan 2021-2027 (to which the Proposed Variation No. 1 relates), to assess potential connectivity corridors on a landscape scale, and potential interactions between the Plan and the Conservation Objectives (COs) of each of the sites.

Details of European sites that occur within the 15-km zone of, or have hydrological/groundwater connectivity with it, are contained in **Section 3.2** of the **Consolidated NIR** which accompanies the CDP

Information on qualifying interests (QIs), special conservation interest (SCIs), site-specific vulnerabilities and sensitivities and background information (such as that within Ireland's Article 17 Report to the European Commission, site synopses and Natura 2000 standard data forms) has also been considered by the Appropriate Assessment of the CDP. The conservation objectives (Cos) of the European sites were sourced from NPWS documents (refer to pages 6-9, Table 3.1 and Appendix I of the NIR [Volume 4 Environmental and Flood Reports](#))

#### 3.2.3 Identification of whether or not there are elements of the Proposed Variation with the potential to give rise to likely significant effects – i.e. direct, indirect etc. - on the conservation objectives of European Sites

The Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 was subject to Stage 2 AA, which identified sources for likely significant effects on European Sites and facilitated the integration of measures into the Plan, to ensure the appropriate protection and management of European Sites.

The main purpose of the Proposed Variation is to align the Plan with the Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2025).

There is no additional source of any likely significant effect on any European Site that would be introduced by the Proposed Variation no. 1, that has not already been considered by the Stage 2 AA undertaken for the County Development Plan.

Considering the above, alongside the Conservation Objectives and known threats and pressures relating to the relevant European Sites, no further assessment is required.

The **Appendix** to this Report details the assessment of likely significant effects arising from the changes proposed in the Proposed Variation no.1 of the CDP.

### **3.2.4 Identification of other plans or projects that, in combination with the Proposed Variation, have the potential to affect European Sites**

Appendix II of the Consolidated NIR details the relationships between the County Development Plan and other plans and programmes. The Proposed Variation does not affect these relationships in any way.

All lower-tier plans and projects proposed within the area covered by the CDP, to which the Proposed Variation relates, will be required to demonstrate compliance with the provisions of the Development Plan, as well as with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements, as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework.

All projects within the Plan area and receiving environment will be considered in combination with any other lower-tier projects that may arise due to the implementation of the Plan, as varied. The Proposed Variation no.1 does not introduce any additional sources of effects. Therefore, there no additional in-combination effects can be identified.

## **4. AA screening conclusion**

The Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 (CDP) provides for sustainable development and proper planning within the administrative area of Longford County Council. The main purpose of the Proposed Variation no. 1 is to align the CDP with Ministerial Guidelines published in accordance with Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), i.e. the Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2025).

The CDP was subject to Stage 2 AA, which identified sources for likely significant effects on European Sites and facilitated the integration of measures into the Plan to ensure the appropriate protection and management of European Sites with which all lower-tier plans and projects must comply.

The Proposed Variation no. 1 would not introduce sources of likely significant effects on any European Sites in addition to those already considered by the Stage 2 AA undertaken for the County Development Plan.

It is concluded that the Proposed Variation no. 1 has no likelihood for any significant effect on any European Site, alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Consequently, Stage Two AA (including the preparation of a Natura Impact Report) is not required.

Any potential amendments to the Proposed Variation will undergo AA screening and may require a subsequent determination by the Council.

## Appendix: Assessment of Likely Significant Effects (LSE) of the Proposed Variation no. 1 of Longford CDP 2021-2027

The Longford CDP 2021-2027, to which the Proposed Variation No. 1 relates, provides a framework for the sustainable development of County Longford.

Elements of the CDP that could potentially have a likely significant effect (LSE) on European sites include zoning objectives and planning policies. The elements of the Plan with the highest potential to give rise to LSE indicated above are generally associated with development projects, i.e. construction phase elements of the implementation of the Plan.

The Consolidated Natura Impact Report associated with the CDP has assessed all policies and objectives with respect to the ecological integrity of each of the European sites identified, considering the sensitivities/vulnerabilities of the QIs and SCIs in relation to all potential sources for effects and potential pathways for such effects.

The Source-Pathway-Receptor (S-P-R) model is used to assess whether any significant effect may result from implementing the Proposed Variation no. 1. The detailed considerations in the table below indicate that the Proposed Variation no. 1 does not alter the SLR policies and relevant zoning objectives in a manner that would introduce new sources of impact.

The CDP already includes mitigation measures that prioritise the avoidance of effects in the first place and mitigate against the identified potential significant effects where these cannot be avoided. In addition, all lower-level plans and projects arising through the implementation of the Plan will themselves be subject to AA/screening for AA when further details of design and location are known.

| Description of Proposed Variation no. 1   | Potential source of impacts   | Pathway | Receptor | Potential for Likely Significant Effects (LSE)   |
|---|---|---------|----------|--|
| Amend the 'Strategic Residential Reserve' Zoning Objectives included in CDP Volume 2. | <p>The amendments to SRR objectives do not alter the amount of land allocated for future residential development. The amended objectives continue to restrict building on SRR lands unless certain stringent conditions are met.</p> <p>All the land parcels potentially affected by the amendments to the SRR objectives have been identified for long-term development and were subject to AA and SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.</p> <p>The predicted impacts on European sites of reserving these lands for future residential development was assessed in the NIR and mitigated by a range of policies included in the CDP.</p> | N/A     | N/A      | Potential for LSE does not exist, as no source of impacts can arise from the amendments to SRR objectives. |