



**Initial**  
**Draft Strategic Environmental Assessment**  
**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.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report is required in accordance with the SEA Directive (DIR 2001/42/EC) and pursuant to the Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations 2025 (S.I. 456/2025), as amended, in order to consider whether or not the Proposed Variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking into account the relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2 of S.I. 456/2025, as amended. Following consideration under Schedule 2 of S.I. 456/2025, as amended, **a Determination under Schedule 2 of S.I. 456/2025, as amended, HAS NOT BEEN MADE by the Planning Authority.**

This report outlines the SEA screening process to date, indicating the methodology used to evaluate the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Variation (and of the Development Plan as varied).

As part of the SEA screening process, environmental authorities will be notified that a submission or observation in relation to whether or not implementation of the Proposed Variation will be likely to have significant effects on the environment may be made to the Council.

# 1. Background to SEA 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 the 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 CDP and associated documents are available for viewing and downloading from Longford County Council's website at [Longford County Development Plan-2021-2027](#)

## 1.2 Description of Proposed Variation no. 1

It is proposed to vary the County Development Plan in the following manner to reflect the replacement of the Housing Supply Target allocation (2020) with the new Housing Growth Requirements target (2025), as per the S. 28 HGR Guidelines.

- **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 SEA screening overview

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report is required in accordance with the SEA Directive (DIR 2001/42/EC) and pursuant to the Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations 2025. (S.I. 456/2025) in order to consider whether or not the Proposed Variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking into account the relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2 of S.I. 456/2025, as amended.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or program, or variation to a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt it.

**Screening** is the process for determining whether a particular plan, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would thus warrant SEA.

This report outlines the SEA screening process to date, indicating the methodology used to evaluate the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Variation (and of the Development Plan as varied).

This document is the **Initial version** of the **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report** prepared for **Proposed Variation no. 1** of the Longford County Development Plan 2021- 2027 (CDP).

It should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Proposed Variation no.1 of the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027
- Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027
- SEA Environmental Report which accompanies the Longford CDP 2021-2027
- Appropriate Assessment (AA) Natura Impact Report which accompanies the CDP.

## **1.4 Appropriate Assessment**

The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) requires that proposed plans and programmes (including amendments or variations) undergo screening for likely or potential effects on European Sites (also Natura 2000 sites) arising from their implementation.

The Proposed Variation no. 1 has undergone screening for Appropriate Assessment. The screening process has determined that the implementation of the Plan, as modified by the Proposed Variation – individually or in combination with other plans or projects – is not likely to adversely affect the integrity of any European Sites. Therefore, AA is not required.

Any proposed changes to the Proposed Variation will be subject to further AA (and SEA) screening.

## **1.5 Flood Risk Assessment**

The Longford CDP 2021-2027 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. SEA Screening

The screening of the Proposed Variation has been conducted in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 2 of the Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations 2025 (S.I. 456/2025), as amended, under the following headings:

### 2.1 Characteristics of the Plan

**The characteristics of the plan having regard to 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**

The Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, as adopted, sets a framework for development by zoning land for specific purposes. It also provides guidance regarding the nature, location, and size and operating conditions for certain activities which involve physical interventions in the environment.

The current CDP includes a substantial '*Strategic Residential Reserve*', containing sites considered suitable for residential development over a longer term, beyond the life of the CDP.

The Proposed Variation No. 1 introduces the following change:

- alterations to the zoning objectives which set out criteria for residential development on sites included in the '*Strategic Residential Reserve*'; these alterations would support residential development on SRR lands which become fully serviced during the life of the CDP.

No additional land is proposed to be zoned for development, and no other Plan policies or objectives are proposed to be altered.

The extent to which the Proposed Variation no. 1 modifies the framework for projects or other activities — whether in terms of location, nature, size, operating conditions, or resource allocation — is considered minor.

**The characteristics of the plan having regard to the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy**

The current Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 sits within a hierarchy of plans, programmes, legislation and guidelines that comprise high-level environmental protection and management policies and objectives.

The Plan must be consistent with these higher-level plans, in particular with the National Planning Framework Revision (2025) and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly's Regional and Social Economic Strategy (EMRA RSES).

The main purpose of Proposed Variation no. 1 is to ensure the Development Plan's consistency with the NPF Revision and associated updated housing target, through the alteration of SRR policies to facilitate the implementation of the updated housing target.

While the CDP has the capacity to influence lower-level plans and development projects, the degree to which Proposed Variation No. 1 would contribute to such influence is considered minor and unlikely to result in significant environmental effects.

**The characteristics of the plan having regard to the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development**

The content of the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 has been informed by SEA, AA and SFRA undertaken as a parallel processes in tandem with each stage of the Plan preparation, thereby ensuring full integration of environmental considerations in the promotion of sustainable development.

The Proposed Variation no. 1, while not relevant for the integration of environmental considerations in the Development Plan, is consistent with the sustainable development strategies, policies and objectives of the Plan.

Having regard to the SEA of the CDP, it is considered that the Plan – as varied – would not result in significant environmental effects.

**The characteristics of the plan having regard to the environmental problems relevant to the plan**

The environmental problems relevant to the Longford CDP are detailed in the Strategic Environmental Assessment prepared for the Plan and have been addressed in the resulting SEA/Environmental Report finalised in 2021.

The Proposed Variation no. 1, if adopted in its currently proposed form, will not change the assessment and conclusion of the CDP Environmental Report of 2021.

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

The Proposed Variation no. 1 must be considered in the context of the Longford CDP, which contains certain policies reflecting national legislation derived from EU legislation on the environment.

The Development Plan refers, where appropriate, to the EU Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the Bathing Water Directive, the Major Accidents Directive etc. The Plan contains policies and objectives seeking to implement relevant EU and national environmental legislation.

The CDP sections dealing with the implementation of EU Directives and corresponding national legislation are not proposed to be amended.

The Proposed Variation no. 1, on its own, is not relevant for the implementation of any EU or national legislation on the environment, but the relevance of the CDP – as varied – remains unchanged.

## 2.2 Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected

**Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected having regard, in particular, to the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.**

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not involve the zoning of any additional land for development. It does not change the duration, frequency or reversibility of the effects of (urban) development on the area covered by the CDP, but it might generate a small increase in the probability of such development.

All the land parcels potentially affected by Proposed Variation no. 1 have been identified for long-term development, have been included in the current Plan's '*Strategic Residential Reserve*' and were subject to the SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not alter in any way the conclusions of the SEA for the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 and is not likely to result in significant environmental effects.

**Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected having regard, in particular, to the cumulative nature of the effects**

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not involve the zoning of any additional land for development. All the land parcels potentially affected by Proposed Variation no. 1 have been identified for long-term development, have been included in the current Plan's '*Strategic Residential Reserve*' and were subject to the SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not alter in any way the conclusions of the SEA for the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 and is not likely to result in significant cumulative effects on the environment.

**Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected having regard, in particular, to the transboundary nature of the effects.**

The Proposed Variation no. 1 will not result in national, regional or inter-county transboundary effects, over and above the effects of the strategy, policies and objectives of the CDP.

**Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected having regard, in particular, to the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)**

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not involve the zoning of any additional land for development. All the land parcels potentially affected by Proposed Variation no. 1 have been identified for long-term development, have been included in the current Plan's '*Strategic Residential Reserve*' and were subject to the SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not alter in any way the conclusions of the SEA for the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 and is not likely to result in risks to human health or the environment.

**Characteristics of the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).**

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not involve the zoning of any additional land for development. All the land parcels potentially affected by Proposed Variation no. 1 have been identified for long-term development, have been included in the current Plan's '*Strategic Residential Reserve*' and were subject to the SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not alter in any way the conclusions of the SEA for the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 and is not likely to result in an increase in the risk in terms of the magnitude or to the population above that identified in the SEA of the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027.

**Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected having regard, in particular, to the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:**

- (a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage**
- (b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values**
- (c) intensive land-use**

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not involve any changes to CDP policies or objectives related to natural or cultural heritage (Chapter 12 and 11), to environmental quality (Chapters 12) or to the intensification of any land uses.

All the land parcels potentially affected by Proposed Variation no. 1 have been identified for long-term development, have been included in the current Plan's '*Strategic Residential Reserve*' and were subject to the SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.

The Proposed Variation no. 1 does not alter in any way the conclusions of the SEA for the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 and is not likely to result in negative effects on natural or cultural heritage, in exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values or in intensive land uses beyond what is envisaged in the current Development Plan.

**Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected having regard, in particular, to the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status.**

No additional lands are proposed to be zoned for development. The Proposed Variation no. 1 would not result in any negative effect on designated EU-level or internationally / nationally protected areas or landscapes.

### 3. Evaluation of the Proposed Variation No. 1

#### 3.1 Methodology

The Development Plan’s policies and objectives, including the adopted amendments arising from public consultation, were evaluated in the Environmental Report (2021) using a set of Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs).

The interactions between the SEOs and the policies and objectives of the Plan determine the likely significant effects of implementing the Plan. These effects include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects.

It was considered appropriate to evaluate each component of the Proposed Variation No. 1 in the same manner as the original Plan policies/objectives and the adopted amendments.

**Table 3.1** below (same as Table 8.1 on pages 87-88 in the Environmental Report of 2021) lists the SEOs developed from international, national and regional policies which generally govern environmental protection objectives.

**Table 3.1 Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs)**

Environmental component	SEO code	Strategic Environmental Objectives
<b>Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna</b>	<b>BFF</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To preserve, protect, maintain and, where appropriate, enhance the terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity, particularly EU designated sites and protected species</li> <li>▪ Ensure no adverse effects on the integrity of any European site, with regard to its qualifying interests, associated conservation status, structure and function</li> <li>▪ Safeguard national, regional and local designated sites and supporting features which function as stepping stones for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species</li> <li>▪ Enhance biodiversity in line with the National Biodiversity Strategy and its targets</li> <li>▪ To protect, maintain and conserve the County’s natural capital</li> </ul>
<b>Population and Human Health</b>	<b>PHH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promote economic growth to encourage retention of working age population and funding of sustainable development and environmental protection and management</li> <li>▪ Ensure that existing population and planned growth is matched with the required public infrastructure and the required services</li> <li>▪ Safeguard the County’s citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being</li> </ul>
<b>Soil (and Land)</b>	<b>S</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Protect soils against pollution and prevent degradation of the soil resource</li> <li>▪ Promote the sustainable use of infill and brownfield sites over the use of greenfield within the County</li> <li>▪ Safeguard areas of prime agricultural land and designated geological sites</li> </ul>
<b>Water</b>	<b>W</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ensure that the status of water bodies is protected, maintained and improved in line with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive</li> <li>▪ Ensure water resources are sustainably managed to deliver proposed regional and County growth targets in the context of existing and projected water supply and wastewater capacity constraints ensuring the protection of receiving environments</li> <li>▪ Avoid inappropriate zoning and development in areas at risk of flooding and areas that are vulnerable to current and future erosion, including coastal areas</li> <li>▪ Integrate sustainable water management solutions (such as SUDS, porous surfacing and green roofs) into development proposals</li> </ul>

Environmental component	SEO code	Strategic Environmental Objectives
<b>Material Assets</b>	MA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Optimise existing infrastructure and provide new infrastructure to match population distribution proposals in the County</li> <li>▪ Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all which encourages a broad energy generation mix to ensure security of supply – wind, solar, hydro, biomass, energy from waste and traditional fossil fuels</li> <li>▪ Promote the circular economy, reduce waste, and increase energy efficiencies</li> <li>▪ Ensure there is adequate sewerage and drainage infrastructure in place to support new development</li> <li>▪ Reduce the energy demand from the transport sector and support moves to electrification of road and rail transport modes</li> <li>▪ Encourage the transition to a zero-carbon economy by facilitating the development of a grid infrastructure to support renewables and international connectivity.</li> <li>▪ Reduce the average energy consumption per capita including promoting energy efficient buildings, retrofitting, smart- buildings, cities and grids</li> </ul>
<b>Air</b>	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment as a whole resulting from emissions to air from all sectors with particular reference to emissions from transport, residential heating, industry and agriculture</li> <li>▪ Maintain and promote continuing improvement in air quality through the reduction of emissions and promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency</li> <li>▪ Promote continuing improvement in air quality</li> <li>▪ Reduction of emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, ammonia and fine particulate matter which are responsible for acidification, eutrophication and ground-level ozone pollution</li> <li>▪ Meet Air Quality Directive standards for the protection of human health — Air Quality Directive</li> <li>▪ Significantly decrease noise pollution by 2020 and move closer to WHO recommended levels</li> </ul>
<b>Climatic Factors</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To minimise emissions of greenhouse gasses</li> <li>▪ Integrate sustainable design solutions into the County's infrastructure (e.g. energy efficient buildings; green infrastructure)</li> <li>▪ Contribute towards the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in line with national targets</li> <li>▪ Promote development resilient to the effects of climate change</li> <li>▪ Promote the use of renewable energy, energy efficient development and increased use of public transport</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	CH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Protect places, features, buildings and landscapes of cultural, archaeological or architectural heritage</li> </ul>
<b>Landscape</b>	L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To implement the Plan's framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes having regard to the European Landscape Convention</li> </ul>

## 3.2 Determination of Potential Interactions

### Amendments to Strategic Residential Reserve (SRR) Zoning Objective in Volume 2

The reason for 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

While the Proposed Variation indicates the elimination of the clause specifying that land can be released from the SRR "*in exceptional circumstances*", the '*Strategic Residential Reserve*' Zoning Objective text will require any development proposal on SRR lands to demonstrate that the lands are fully serviced. In addition, such development proposals must have regard to the Core Strategy County Policy Objectives of the Development Plan.

Since the zoning of all lands included in the SRR has been subject to SEA, AA and SFRA as part of the County Development Plan preparation, the conclusions of the respective earlier assessments would not change. The impacts of any projects or lower-level plans will be evaluated through the development management process or as part of a lower-tier environmental assessment.

Any potential environmental impacts will be determined by the nature and extent of individual projects and site-specific environmental factors. Avoidance of conflict is dependent upon the Council managing development in a way which does not conflict with the status of SEOs. Provided that other Plan measures are complied with, any potential conflicts with SEOs would be avoided or mitigated in full.

As such Proposed Variation no. 1 and its associated update to text has been evaluated as having no interaction with the status of SEOs.

### 3.3 Evaluation of the Proposed Variation Component Parts

Description of the Proposed Variation component	Likely to Improve the status of SEOs	Probable conflict with status of SEOs, unlikely to be mitigated	Potential conflict with status of SEOs, likely to be mitigated	No likely interaction with status of SEOs
<p><b>Proposed Variation no. 1 Longford CDP 2021-2027: Amendments to ‘Strategic Residential Reserve’ Zoning Objective Text in Volume 2: Appendices</b></p>				
<p>The existing ‘Strategic Residential Reserve’ Zoning Objective text in Volume 2: Appendices shall be amended as follows:                  the text in blue strike through shall be deleted:                  the text in red shall be added.</p> <p><b>Strategic Residential Reserve</b>  <b>To provide for the longer-term housing requirements of the town.</b></p> <p><del>Residential development, other than that set out below, will not be permitted on these lands during the lifetime of the Plan. (It should be noted that lands zoned for the purposes of strategic residential reserve may be released for development over future plan periods).</del> The following residential type of development may be considered acceptable:</p> <p>1) Where there is a live permission for residential development that has not been activated. The life of these permissions may be extended in accordance with the provisions of Section 42A of the Planning &amp; Development Act 2000, as amended. <del>Proposals for new developments will not be considered over the lifetime of the current plan period.</del></p> <p>2) A proposal for a single dwelling house may be considered under this zoning where:</p> <p>a) the unit to be provided will serve as the permanent place of residence of the landowner or a member of his/her immediate family.</p> <p>b) and where it can be clearly demonstrated that the provision of such a unit would not compromise the ability of the wider area of zoned land to be developed in the future.</p> <p>c) and the dwelling would easily integrate with the existing and future development of the lands and those in the vicinity.</p>				<p>All SEOs</p>

<p>3) <del>In exceptional circumstances, where it can be clearly demonstrated by the developer that there is a significant difficulty in the release or identification of lands for a specific residential type development,</del> consideration will be given to the release of lands zoned Strategic Residential Reserve, subject to established planning criteria and including in particular:</p> <p>a) The requirement to remain within the overall residential land use targets as set out in the Core Strategy.</p> <p><del>b) The lands are being developed in a sequential manner.</del></p> <p><del>c) It has been clearly justified and demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority, that there is a clear discrepancy between the</del>  <del>supply and release of residentially zoned lands and the demand for residential units.</del></p> <p><i>b) There is factual evidence that such lands are/have become fully serviced in terms of water supply, wastewater and transport infrastructure.</i></p> <p><i>Any proposal for residential or mixed-use development (including residential) on such lands must have regard to the Core Strategy County Policy Objectives set out in Chapter 4 of the Development Plan.</i></p> <p><i>The proposal must also demonstrate capability to deliver residential development within the lifetime of the Plan, thus facilitating progress towards the housing targets for the respective settlement.</i></p> <p><i>Certain developments that can demonstrate a strategic element, (e.g. a significant commercial or social element), may be deemed acceptable.</i></p>				
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### **3.4 Emerging Conclusion**

The Initial SEA screening has examined Proposed Variation no. 1 against relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2 of A Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations 2025 (S.I. 456/2025), as amended – refer to Section 2 of this Report.

The Planning Authority has also considered appropriate to evaluate each component of the Proposed Variation no. 1 in the same manner as the original Development Plan policies/objectives and the adopted amendments – refer to Section 3 of this Report.

The evaluation has found that Proposed Variation no. 1 would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects. The AA screening of the Proposed Variation has likewise determined that a full Appropriate Assessment is not required.

The emerging conclusion of the SEA Screening process is that potential effects arising from the Proposed Variation will be mitigated by provisions already in force so as not to be significant (adverse). Therefore, it is determined that SEA is not required to be undertaken on the Proposed Variation. Therefore, on the basis of the above screening conclusions, it is considered that Proposed Variation no. 1 of the CDP would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and does not require full SEA.

Any future submission made by environmental authorities during the SEA screening consultation process will be taken into account when finalising this emerging conclusion. A one-page SEA determination will be prepared to accompany the final SEA Screening Report.