

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

Longford County Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

June 2023

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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

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

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

- S.I. No. 435 of 2004 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 [\[See reference ii\]](#), as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) [\[See reference iii\]](#) (i.e. the SEA Regulations).
- S.I. No. 436 of 2004 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 [\[See reference iv\]](#), as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) [\[See reference v\]](#).

1.4 The objective of this SEA is to ensure that the environmental effects of the Longford Town LTP are identified during its development, providing the opportunity for negative environmental effects to be avoided, mitigated or compensated and for positive environmental effects to be enhanced, where opportunities arise. In this way, environmental considerations can be integrated into the preparation of the Longford Town LTP.

1.5 SEA comprises the following principal stages:

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

Description of the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

Context for the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

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

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

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

Background to the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

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

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

Scope and content of the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

1.11 The LTP for Longford Town establishes a strategic framework for the future development of transport infrastructure within Longford Town and its environs. The function of the LTP is to enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within Longford Town centre, by improving links between the core and surrounding areas through the further integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities. The Longford Town LTP does not contain any policies.

The Vision for the Longford LTP is *“to ensure that Longford is an attractive place to live, work and visit through the appropriate integration of transport*

and land use, with a primary focus on ease of access for all by sustainable transport". (p.27)

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

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

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

- Improve permeability.
- Improve active travel.
- Encourage public transport use.
- Integrate existing and future land use and transport networks.

- Utilise existing on-street parking zones to improve the public realm and provide other functions (e.g. wider footpath, cycle parking, outdoor dining, new trees/planting).
- Improve and enhance safety for all.
- Reduce through traffic.
- Provide good value for money.

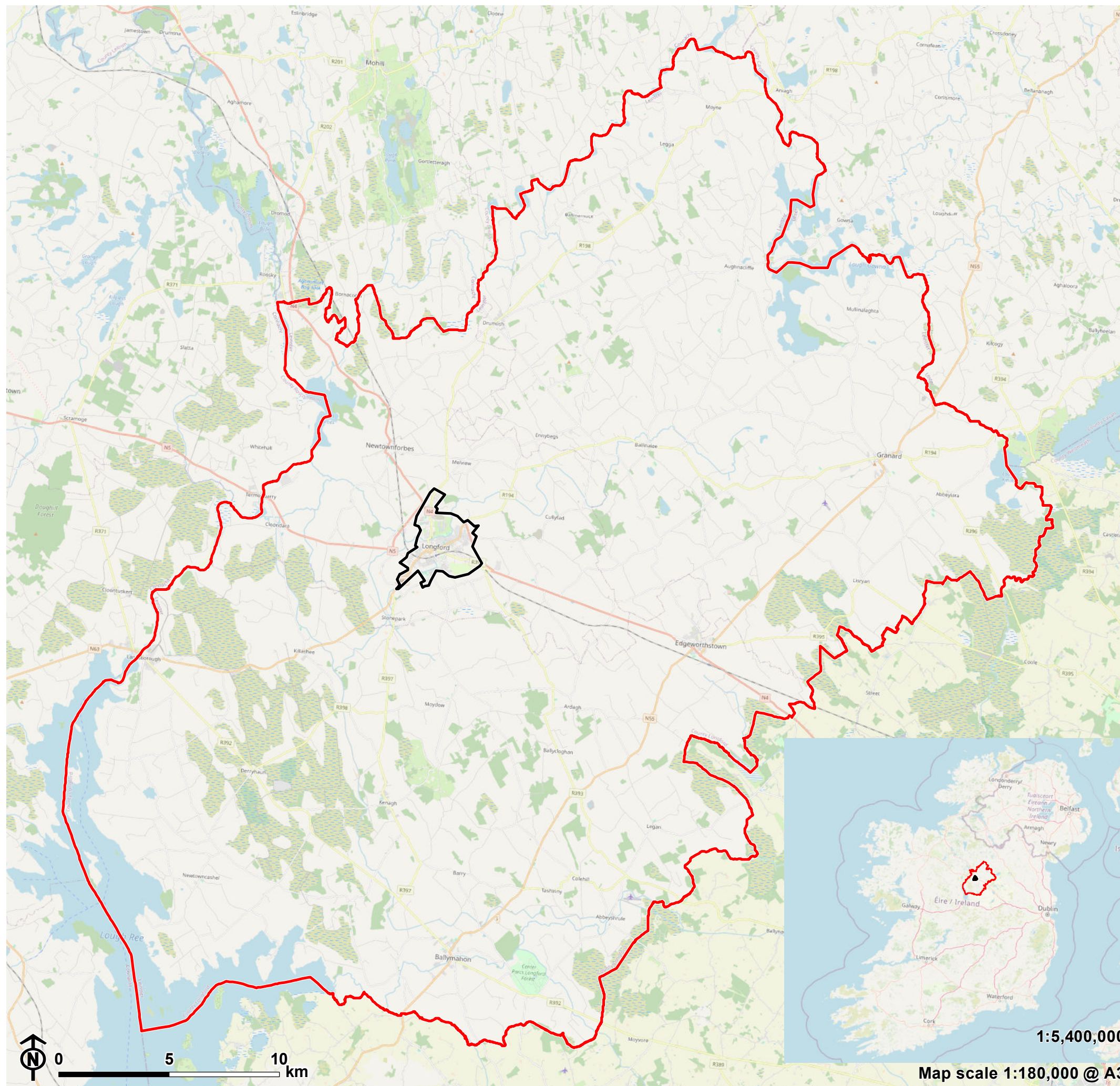
1.13 Based on the Vision, principles and objectives above, the Longford Town LTP sets out a number of focused transport strategies that provide detail about proposed interventions. These include strategies for walking, cycling, permeability, public transport, traffic management, car parking, feasibility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

Stage of the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

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

Figure 1.1: Location

- Longford County
- Longford Town LTP Study Area



Strategic Environmental Assessment

Stages in the SEA process

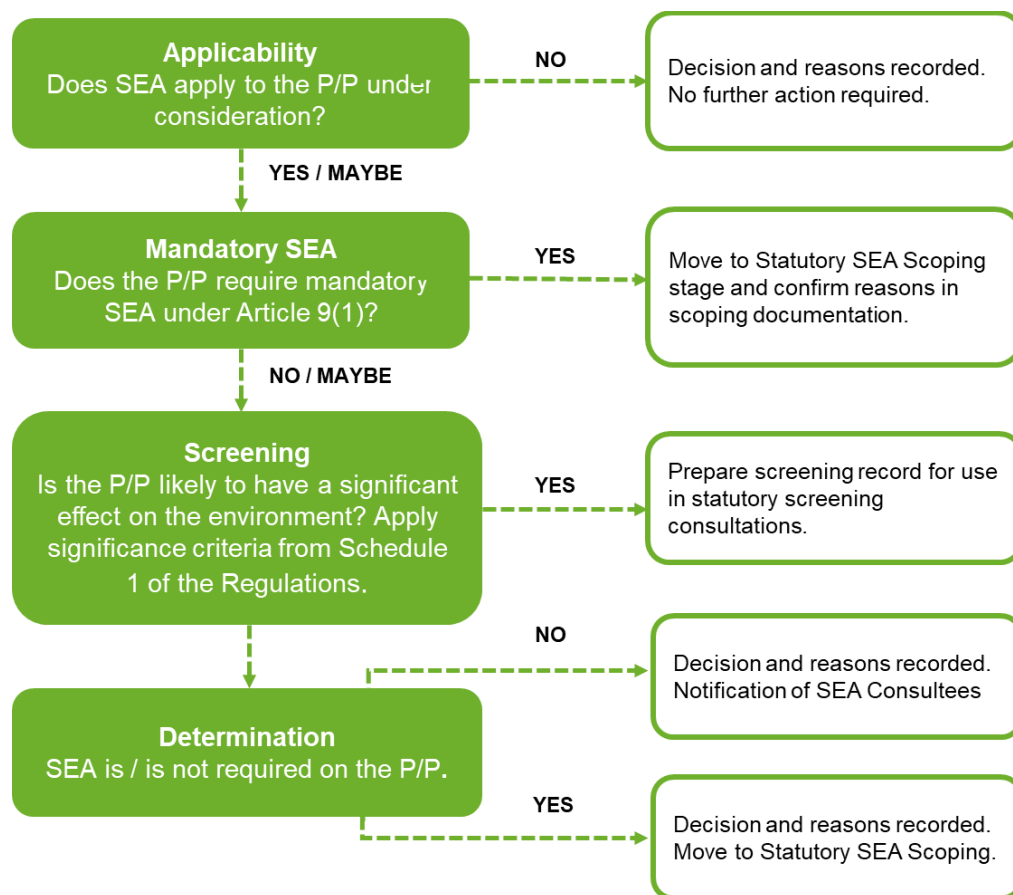
Stage 1: Screening

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

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

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

Figure 1.2: SEA screening methodology



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

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

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

This report has been subsequently updated to take account of the submissions received from the Environmental Authorities.

Stage 2: Scoping

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

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

- Identifying plans, programmes, and environmental objectives of relevance to the LTP.
- Scoping of SEA Topics [\[See reference ix\]](#) relevant to the LTP.
- Identifying geographic, temporal and transboundary scope of the LTP.
- Collecting baseline information.
- Identifying sustainability issues and problems.
- Developing the Environmental Protection Objectives (EPO) Framework comprising environmental objectives, indicators and targets to allow the evaluation of impacts on the environment.
- Consulting on the scope of the SEA.

1.21 In accordance with Article 11 of the SEA Regulations, the competent authority preparing the Longford Town LTP, in this case Longford County Council, is required to consult with consultation bodies on the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the Environmental Report. As noted above, a combined Screening and Scoping Report was issued to the Environmental Authorities for a four-week consultation period between 13th February and 13th March 2023. **Appendix A** sets out the submissions received and how their comments have been addressed in this report.

Stage 3: Draft Environmental Report

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

1.23 The ER will be structured as follows:

- An outline of the LTP and its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.
- The environmental characteristics of the study area, including any problems and issues identified and their likely evolution without the LTP.
- Key environmental policy objectives set at the international, national and local levels that are relevant to the LTP.
- The EPO Framework and the criteria used to make judgements about the effects of the LTP.
- The likely significant effects of the LTP and reasonable alternative options appraised against each of the objectives in the EPO Framework, taking into account mitigation.
- An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives and a description of any difficulties encountered during the assessment process, including data limitations.
- How consultation comments have been taken into account.
- Proposed monitoring framework for significant effects identified (including uncertain effects where these could become significant).
- Appendices, including the consultation responses tables, and SEA matrices.

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

Stage 4: Consultation on the Draft Environmental Report

1.25 Public consultation will be carried out on the Draft Environmental Report for a four-week period from July 2023. The Draft Environmental Report and associated Non-Technical Summary will be published on Longford County Council's website for consultation during this period.

Stage 5: Addendum Environmental Report

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

Stage 6: Consultation on the Addendum Environmental Report

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

Stage 7: Final Environmental Report

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

Stage 8: SEA Statement

1.29 An SEA Statement will be prepared identifying how each of the requirements in articles 16 and 17 of the SEA Regulations have been met during the SEA process. The finalised SEA Statement will be published after the Council adopts the LTP.

SEA guidance documents

1.30 The following principal sources of guidance will be used during the overall SEA process and during preparation of the SEA reports:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Pack. 2022. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference x\]](#).
- SEA Spatial Information Sources Inventory. 2022. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xi\]](#).
- Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening. 2021. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xii\]](#).

- Good Practice Guidance on Cumulative Effect Assessment in SEA. 2020. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xiii\]](#).
- Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring. 2020. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xiv\]](#).
- Second Review of SEA Effectiveness in Ireland. 2020. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xv\]](#).
- Integrating Climate Change into Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland - A Guidance Note. 2019. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xvi\]](#).
- GISEA Manual – Improving the Evidence Base in SEA. 2017. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xvii\]](#).
- Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment – Good Practice Guidance. 2015. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xviii\]](#).
- Integrating Biodiversity Impact Assessment: Streamlining AA, SEA and EIA Processes – Practitioner’s Manual. STRIVE Report Series No. 106. 2013. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xix\]](#).
- SEA Process Checklist - Consultation Draft. 2013. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xx\]](#).
- Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment. Guidelines for Regional Planning Authorities. November 2004. Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government [\[See reference xxi\]](#).
- Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland. Synthesis Report. 2003. Environmental Protection Agency [\[See reference xxii\]](#).

1.31 The SEA has also had regard to the findings of the EPA's 2012 [\[See reference xxiii\]](#) and 2020 [\[See reference xxiv\]](#) reviews of SEA effectiveness in Ireland.

Appropriate Assessment

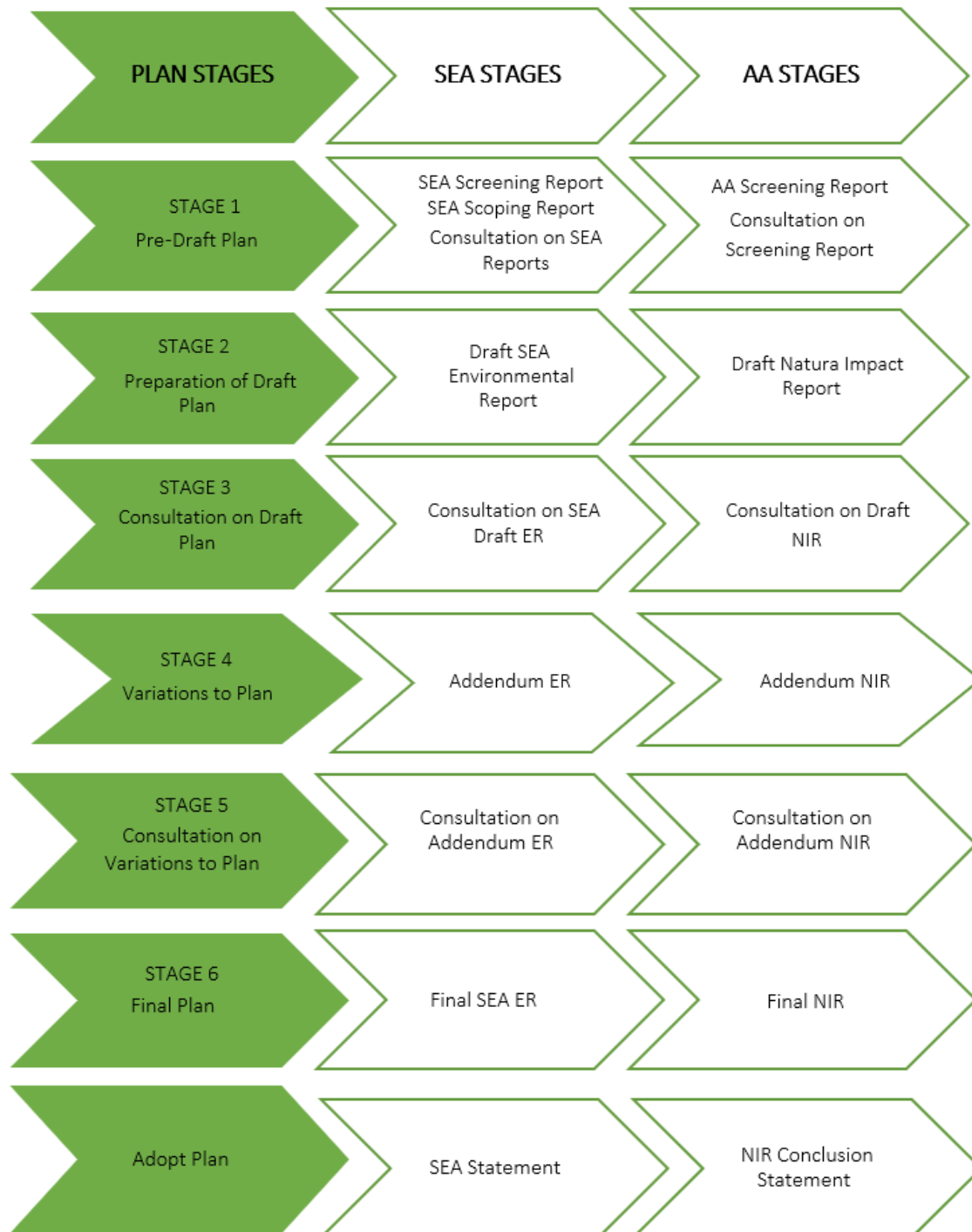
1.32 SEA does not stand alone in environmental assessments of plans and programmes, including the proposed Guidelines. The Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening stage is particularly important as a determination on the need for AA is required before SEA screening can be completed. There is a high level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

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

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

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

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



Requirements of the SEA Regulations

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

Schedule 1

1.36 The SEA Regulations require that the competent authority, in this case Longford County Council, must determine on a case-by-case basis whether a plan or programme (P/P) would or would not be likely to have significant environmental effects on the environment, taking into account the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. The qualitative criteria in Schedule 1 have been used to assist in the determination as to whether the Longford Town LTP is likely to have significant effects on the environment, with the findings presented in Chapter 2.

- 1. The characteristics of the P/P, or modification to a P/P, having regard, in particular, to
 - the degree to which the P/P, or modification to a P/P, sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources,
 - the degree to which the P/P, or modification to a P/P, influences other plans including those in a hierarchy,
 - the relevance of the P/P, or modification to a P/P, for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,
 - environmental problems relevant to the P/P, or modification to a P/P,

- the relevance of the P/P, or modification to a P/P, for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. P/P linked to waste management or water protection).
- 2. 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 cumulative nature of the effects,
 - the transboundary nature of the effects,
 - the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents),
 - the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),
 - 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 effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status.

Structure of this report

1.37 This chapter describes the background to the production of the Longford Town LTP and the requirement to undertake SEA. **Chapter 2** details the Screening assessment undertaken to determine whether the Longford Town LTP falls within the scope of the SEA Regulations and to identify whether it is likely to have any significant environmental effects. The main report is supported by **Appendix A** which details the submissions/observations received from the Environmental Authorities during the consultation period.

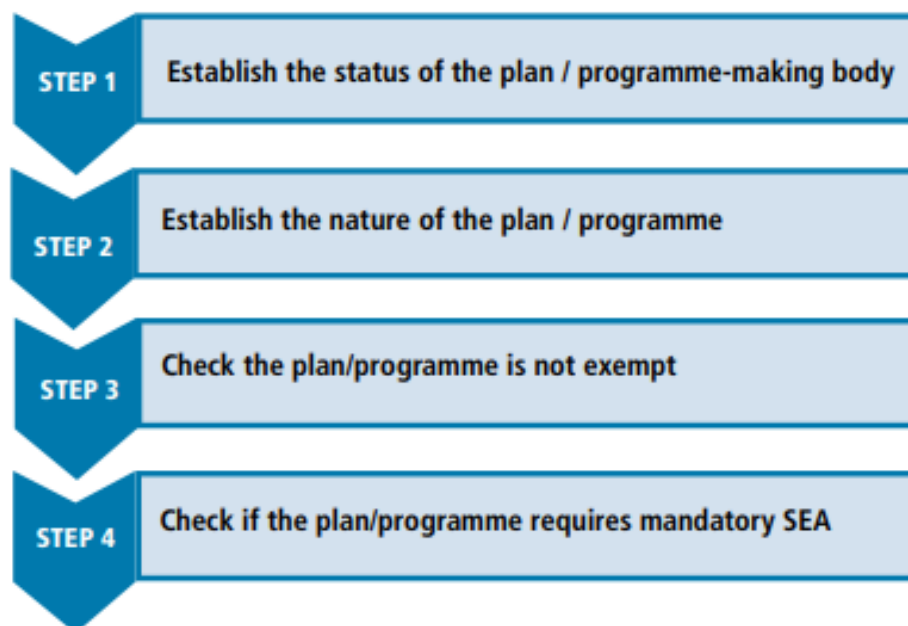
Chapter 2

Screening of the Longford Town Local Transport Plan

Step 1: Applicability

2.1 The first step in the Screening process is to determine if the Longford Town LTP falls within the scope of the SEA Directive and transposing legislation, and to confirm if it constitutes a plan / programme (P/P) that requires mandatory SEA. The steps involved in the Applicability stage are outlined in **Figure 2.1** (figure extracted from the EPA's Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening [See reference xxix]).

Figure 2.1: Steps involved in the applicability stage



2.2 The bullet points below reflect each question outlined in Annex II of the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations and sub-bullet points provide a response to each question with regard to the Longford Town LTP.

Status of the plan / programme-making body

- 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?
 - **Longford Town LTP** – Yes – The Longford Town LTP is being prepared by Arup on behalf of Longford County Council.

Status of the plan / programme

- Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?
 - **Longford Town LTP** – Yes - The Longford Town LTP is being prepared to fulfil Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 8.6 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region 2019-2031 [See reference xxx] which requires a LTP for Longford Town to be prepared. RPO 8.6 requires the LTP to include transport priorities for each settlement in terms of public transport infrastructure and services; cycle investment; improvements to the pedestrian environment; and road enhancements. The preparation of the LTP also fulfils County Policy Objective (CPO) 4.9 of the adopted Longford County Development Plan which states that the Council will prepare and implement a LTP to inform the LAP for Longford Town. Therefore, it can be deemed that the Longford Town LTP is required by administrative provisions.
- 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 Structural Funds / Regional Development Funds programme?
 - **Longford Town LTP** - No – The Longford Town LTP is not a type of P/P that is exempted from SEA.

Nature of the plan / programme

- 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 AND does the P/P set the framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive?
 - **Longford Town LTP** – Yes – The Longford Town LTP would fall under the ‘transport’ category covered by the SEA Directive and transposing legislation. The LTP for Longford Town establishes a strategic framework for the future development of transport infrastructure within Longford Town and its environs. The function of the LTP is to enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within Longford Town centre, by improving links between the core and surrounding areas through the further integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities. It identifies ‘strategies’ for delivery of pedestrian and permeability improvements; cycle routes; public transport; car parking; bicycle parking; traffic management; and the access strategy for Abbeycartron. Therefore, it is determined that the Longford Town LTP will set the framework for the future consent of development projects listed in the EIA Directive.
- 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?
 - **Longford Town LTP** - No - Screening for Appropriate Assessment was undertaken in February 2023 which concluded that the LTP is outside the definition of a plan for the purposes of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive and therefore does not require AA.

Conclusion

- Summarise the relevant information informing the assessment and the main reasons the P/P **does or does not fall within the scope of the SEA Directive**.

The Longford Town LTP falls within the scope of the SEA Directive as it:

- is being prepared by Longford County Council;
- is required to be prepared by administrative provisions, i.e. through policy objectives in the RSES and Longford CDP; and
- would fall under the ‘transport’ category covered by the SEA Directive and transposing legislation and will set the framework for the future consent of development projects listed in the EIA Directive.

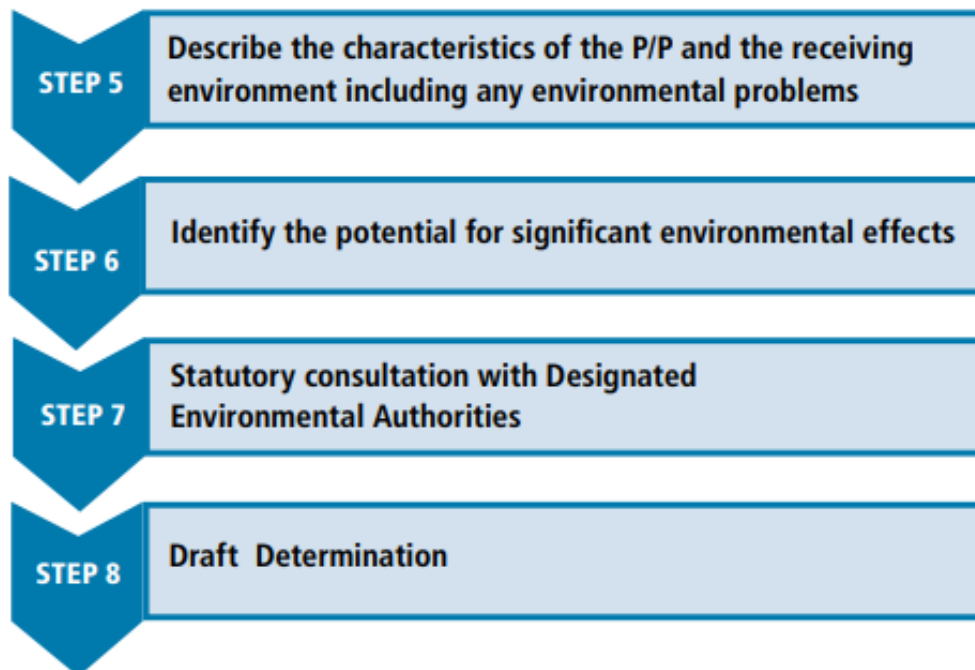
Therefore, **the SEA Directive applies to the Longford Town LTP and it is deemed to require Stage 2: Screening.**

Step 2: Screening

2.3 This section sets out the Screening assessment to determine the characteristics of the Longford Town LTP and to identify whether the LTP may give rise to significant environmental effects. This section of the report includes consideration of the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. These qualitative criteria are used to assist in the determination as to whether the Longford Town LTP is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

2.4 The steps involved in the Screening stage are outlined in **Figure 2.2** (figure extracted from the EPA’s Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening [[See reference xxxi\]](#)).

Figure 2.2: Steps involved in the screening stage



Criteria 1 – The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to:

- The degree to which the plan 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 Town LTP details a multi-modal framework to inform future transport infrastructure planning, investment and delivery in Longford Town. The LTP identifies strategies for the delivery of pedestrian and permeability improvements; cycle routes; public transport; car parking; bicycle parking; traffic management; and the access strategy for Abbeycartron. The Longford Town LTP will inform the forthcoming Longford Town Local Area Plan.
- The degree to which the plan influences other plans including those in a hierarchy:

- The Longford Town LTP is being prepared to fulfil Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 8.6 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region 2019-2031 [See reference xxxii] which requires a LTP for Longford Town to be prepared. RPO 8.6 requires the LTP to include transport priorities for each settlement in terms of public transport infrastructure and services; cycle investment; improvements to the pedestrian environment; and road enhancements. The preparation of the LTP also fulfils County Policy Objective (CPO) 4.9 of the adopted Longford County Development Plan which states that the Council will prepare and implement a LTP to inform the LAP for Longford Town.
- The Longford Town LTP will inform the forthcoming Longford Town LAP by setting out the town's future transport strategy. The LTP may also inform more detailed masterplanning of strategic sites in the town.
- The relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development:
 - As the LTP is being prepared to inform the LAP, it provides an opportunity to ensure that the development set out in the emerging LAP is supported by sustainable transport. The LTP seeks to enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within Longford Town centre, by improving links between the core and surrounding areas through the further integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities. Promoting active travel is a vital component of sustainable development as it encourages a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions derived from vehicles; reduces exposure to air pollution; improves health and wellbeing; supports the Government's net zero by 2050 target; and helps to respond to the Climate Change Emergency.
 - The Longford Town LTP aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) [See reference xxxiii], by setting out strategic measures for sustainable transport networks, ensuring the growth and expansion of Longford Town is sustainable. It also aligns with the environmental and sustainability objectives set out in the Longford CDP which support

integrating land use and transport planning to facilitate sustainable urban development reducing the need to travel.

■ Environmental problems relevant to the plan:

- The most densely populated areas in Longford Town are generally in the centre, south and eastern parts of the town. These areas tend to coincide with higher levels of relative deprivation and unemployment, along with lower levels of educational attainment. The Longford Town LTP seeks to improve active travel infrastructure throughout the town and to key employment and education locations, thus removing one of the barriers to employment for many social groups.
- High levels of car dependency amongst the population of Longford and HGV traffic travelling through the town contribute towards traffic congestion and a decline in air quality, particularly during peak commuter times. There is potential for the Longford Town LTP to reduce air and/or noise pollution by supporting a modal shift to active travel and public transport within the town.
- Poor train frequencies, limited bus service and connectivity, and fragmented cycling networks discourage active travel in the town. In the 2016 Census, Longford Town recorded the highest number of people in Ireland who stated that their health was 'bad' or 'very bad' (2.9%) [See reference xxxiv]. The Longford LTP seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Longford by encouraging active travel choices; improving access to health and welfare services; and improving access to open spaces.
- Longford Town has a history of groundwater, pluvial (resulting from high intensity rainfall events) and fluvial flooding (where watercourse capacity is exceeded or the channel is blocked). Flood risk is implicitly linked to climate change considering the changes predicted in weather patterns. The Longford Town LTP has the potential to negatively affect the water environment as new infrastructure may reduce the area of permeable surfaces resulting in an increase in flood risk. However, it also provides an opportunity to ensure new transport infrastructure is designed to be resilient to flood risk.

- Longford Town contains many areas of ecological value including the Royal Canal proposed Natural Heritage Area. Although designated sites represent the most valued habitats, the overall ecological network is important for biodiversity as a whole. Fragmentation and erosion of habitats and the ecological network in the town is an ongoing threat to biodiversity.
- Longford Town is identified as a historic town in need of regeneration in the Eastern and Midlands RSES and Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027. The Longford Town LTP seeks to enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within the town centre by improving links between the core and surrounding areas through the integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities.
- 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 Longford Town LTP will help support the implementation of plans and programmes related to EU environmental legislation, including the [Air Quality Directive](#), [UN Paris Climate Change Agreement](#), and the achievement of the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Criteria 2 – 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 effects of the Longford Town LTP are expected to generally be long-term, although any built development projects will also have shorter term construction impacts. ‘Strategies’ that would not result in built development, such as those relating to provision of additional bus services will have reversible impacts, but proposals resulting in built development will be permanent.
- The cumulative nature of the effects:

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- Developing an accessible and inclusive transport network in Longford Town is likely to result in positive, long-term cumulative effects at a county level.
- The transboundary nature of the effects:
 - The geographical scope of the LTP is Longford Town. Transboundary effects under the SEA Regulations refers to transboundary effects on EU Member States; therefore, they are not likely from the implementation of the Longford Town LTP.
- The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents):
 - The implementation of the Longford Town LTP is likely to result in an overall reduced risk to human health and the environment from reduced transport-related greenhouse gas emissions, increase in active modes of travel, and increase in the safety of the road network. However, improvements to the road network will inevitably result in risks to human health and the environment, for example through air pollution, noise disturbance or fuel spillage.
- The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected):
 - The LTP covers Longford Town. However, there is the potential for the wider county to be affected and or other local authority areas, particularly on routes heavily utilised by those passing through Longford to and from other areas.
- 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 LTP is applicable to Longford Town which contains the Royal Canal proposed Natural Heritage Area (NHA) as well as numerous heritage assets. Individual transport development will be assessed for compliance against the Longford CDP and Longford Town LAP policies and may be subject to site-specific EIA and AA.
 - There is no potential for exceedance of environmental quality standards or limit values from the implementation of the LTP.

- The LTP does not determine strategic land-use in Longford Town, which is determined through the zoning policies in the Longford CDP.
- The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status:
 - There are no statutory nature conservation or landscape designations in the town. Longford Town contains the Royal Canal proposed NHA however, this has not been formally adopted as a NHA.

Draft determination

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

Statutory consultation

2.6 Prior to finalising the determination on the need for SEA and in accordance with Article 9(5) of the SEA Regulations, the following Environmental Authorities were notified of the draft determination that an SEA should be undertaken as part of the preparation of the Longford Town LTP, in recognition of the likely significant effects on the environment:

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

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

Step 3: Determination

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

Appendix A

Consultation submissions / observations

Geological Survey Ireland

Geoheritage

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

Groundwater

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

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

Geological mapping

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

Geotechnical database resources

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

Geohazards

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

Natural resources (minerals/aggregates)

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

Geochemistry of soils, surface waters and sediments

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

Other comments

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

LUC response

The recommended data sources will be reviewed and used to update the baseline sections for the chapters on soil and water in the Scoping and Environmental Reports, where relevant.

Environmental Protection Agency

SEA Determination

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

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

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

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

SEA Screening Guidance

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

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

Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Planning Authorities

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

Sustainable Development

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

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

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

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

State of the Environment Report – Ireland’s Environment 2020

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

Available Guidance & Resources

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

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

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

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

Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) WebTool

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

EPA SEA WebGIS Tool

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

EPA WFD Application

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

Future amendments to the plan or programme

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

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

EPA AA GeoTool

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

Appropriate Assessment

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

SEA Determination

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

LUC response

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

Appendix A Consultation submissions / observations

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

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

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

References

- i [SEA Directive 2001/42/EC](#)
- ii [S.I. No. 435 of 2004](#)
- iii [S.I. No. 200 of 2011](#)
- iv [S.I. No. 436 of 2004](#)
- v [S.I. No. 201 of 2011](#)
- vi Longford County Council (2021) Longford CDP Volume I: Written Statement [online] Available at:
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- vii EPA (2021) Good practice guidance on SEA Screening [online] Available at: https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/SEA_Screening_GoodPractice_2021.pdf
- viii A number of government departments have changed name and certain responsibilities have migrated between departments. The SEA legislation has not yet been updated to reflect these changes however, for clarity the current relevant departments are listed.
- ix Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna; Population and Human Health; Climatic Factors; Air; Soil; Water; Cultural Heritage including Architectural and Archaeological Heritage; Landscape; Material Assets.
- x EPA (2022) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Pack. Available at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/SEA-Pack-2022.pdf>
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Report produced by LUC

Report produced by LUC

Bristol

12th Floor, Colston Tower, Colston Street, Bristol BS1 4XE
0117 929 1997
bristol@landuse.co.uk

Cardiff

16A, 15th Floor, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Rd, Cardiff CF24 0EB
0292 032 9006
cardiff@landuse.co.uk

Edinburgh

Atholl Exchange, 6 Canning Street, Edinburgh EH3 8EG
0131 202 1616
edinburgh@landuse.co.uk

Glasgow

37 Otago Street, Glasgow G12 8JJ
0141 334 9595
glasgow@landuse.co.uk

London

250 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8RD
020 7383 5784
london@landuse.co.uk

Manchester

6th Floor, 55 King Street, Manchester M2 4LQ
0161 537 5960
manchester@landuse.co.uk

landuse.co.uk

Landscape Design / Strategic Planning & Assessment
Development Planning / Urban Design & Masterplanning
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Landscape Management / Ecology / Historic Environment / GIS & Visualisation