

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING

FOR
PROPOSED VARIATION No. 2
TO THE
**LONGFORD COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN
2015-2021**

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF
ARTICLE 6(3) OF THE EU HABITATS DIRECTIVE

for: Longford County Council

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Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This is the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report for Proposed Variation No. 2 to the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021 in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive¹.

This report is divided into the following three sections:

Section 1	Introduction
Section 2	Stage 1 Screening
Section 3	Conclusion

1.2 Legislative Context

The Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora, better known as "The Habitats Directive", provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Articles 3 to 9 provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of sites known as Natura 2000. In Ireland, these are candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/ECC), hereafter referred to as European sites.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for AA:

"Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subjected to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.

If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the [Natura 2000] site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature, Member States shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.

Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest."

¹ Directive 92/43/EEC

These requirements are implemented in the Republic of Ireland by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011. These regulations consolidate the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 to 2005 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Control of Recreational Activities) Regulations 2010, as well as addressing transposition failures identified in judgements of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

1.3 Stages of Appropriate Assessment

This Natura Impact Report has been prepared in accordance with the following guidance:

- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010.*
- *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, European Commission Environment DG, 2002.*
- *Managing Natura 2000 sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC: European Commission, 2000.*

AA comprises up to four successive stages:

Stage One: Screening

The process which identifies the likely impacts upon a European site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant.

Stage Two: Appropriate Assessment

The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the European site of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts. 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 3.

Stage Three: Assessment of Alternative Solutions

The process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoids adverse impacts on the integrity of the European site.

Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain

An assessment of compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

The Habitats Directive promotes a hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensatory measures. First, the plan should aim to avoid any impacts on European sites by identifying possible impacts early in the plan-making process and writing the plan in order to avoid such impacts. Second, mitigation measures should be applied, if necessary, during the AA process to the point where no adverse impacts on the site(s) remain. If the plan is still likely to result in impacts on European sites, and no further practicable mitigation is possible, then it must be rejected. If no alternative solutions are identified and the plan is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI test) under Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, then compensation measures are required for any remaining adverse effect.

In the case of this AA exercise, it is found that the Proposed Variation only requires Stage 1 AA Screening.

Section 2 Stage 1 Screening

2.1 Description of County Development Plan and associated Proposed Variation No. 2

2.1.1 Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021 Overview

The Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021 is a high level plan that provides a framework for the sustainable development within County Longford. Apart from the details and zoning maps for the core settlement strategy, the Plan does not prescribe the particular locations of any developments of infrastructure. Overall, the Plan underpins the development of housing, communities and urban centres with supporting transport, water, waste, energy and communication infrastructure within the County.

The Plan has been prepared by Longford County Council and comprises of a written document with maps, and various appendices including zonings and policy for the County's settlements and County Housing and Retail Strategies.

The Plan contains a Core Strategy and various other strategies including those related to Settlement and Retail. Additional provisions are also included under the headings of Economic Development, Infrastructure and Environment, Heritage and Amenities.

The Core Strategy contained in the Plan articulates a medium to longer term evidence and quantitatively based strategy for the spatial development of County Longford, whilst demonstrating consistency with national and regional development objectives.

The County Development Plan has already been subject to a Stage 2 AA process that has successfully facilitated the integration of mitigation into the Draft Plan in order to contribute towards the protection of the Natura 2000 network of European Sites. Taking into account the measures that have been integrated into the County Development Plan, including those that were integrated through the AA process, the Stage 2 AA for the County Development Plan concluded that the Plan will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network.

2.1.2 Proposed Variation No. 2

The Proposed Variation incorporates the following into the County Development Plan:

- A. The provisions of the Longford Town and Environs Local Area Plan (LAP) as adopted, at Appendix 1A (replacing current mapping and text); and
- B. The provisions of the Urban Regeneration Housing Act, 2015.

With respect to part A, the Longford Town and Environs Draft LAP is being subjected to detailed SEA, AA and SFRA processes. Taking into account the measures that have been integrated into the Draft LAP, including those that were integrated through the AA process, the Stage 2 AA for the Draft LAP concludes that the Draft LAP will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network.

With respect to part B, the County Development Plan already provides for the development of sites and areas in need of development, regeneration and renewal. This change provides further detail on how this will be done.

The Proposed Variation and associated SEA and AA Screening documents should be read in conjunction with:

- The County Development Plan (as varied) and associated AA, SEA and SFRA documents; and
- The Draft LAP and associated SEA Environmental Report, Stage 2 AA Natura Impact Report and SFRA.

2.1.3 Relationship with other Relevant Plans and Programmes

Introduction

The Plan sits within a hierarchy of land use forward planning strategic actions. The Plan must comply with relevant higher level strategic actions and may, in turn, guide lower level strategic actions. The following sections identify a number of these strategic actions, further details of which are contained in the Plan.

The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was introduced in 2002 and sets out the spatial planning framework for the country. The strategy consists of a twenty year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic, and physical development and population growth between regions in Ireland, and to assist in the implementation of the NDP. Its focus is on people and places, and on building communities.

The NSS has established a platform upon which policies can be put in place to ensure that more balanced development is achieved.

Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines

Ireland was divided into eight regional forward planning regions, Dublin, Midlands, Mid East, Mid-West, South East, South West, West and Border, each with its own regional planning authority composed of Elected Members selected by the constituent local government councils. Regional planning authorities were required, under the Planning and Development (Regional Planning Guidelines) Regulations 2003 (SI No. 175 of 2003), to draw up Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs), long term strategic planning frameworks, for their relevant region. Since 2015, three new regional assemblies (the Northern and Western, Southern and Eastern and Midland Regional Assemblies) undertake the work previously undertaken by the Regional Authorities, including the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines. Longford County Council was part of the Midland Regional Authority and is now part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

County Longford, including Longford Town and Environs, is subject to the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region 2010-2022 that provide a framework for the long-term strategic

development of the Midlands Region. The Guidelines do this through setting out goals, policies and objectives in relation to population targets, housing, infrastructure, economic development, environment, amenities, social infrastructure and community development, ensuring the successful implementation of the NSS at regional, county and local level.

National Planning Guidelines

The preparation and adoption of the County Development Plan has considered the following guidelines;

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009);
- Architectural Heritage Protection – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2004);
- Architectural Heritage Protection for Places of Worship - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2003);
- Architecture Policy Guidelines 2009-2015;
- Best Practice Urban Design Manual (May 09) - Part 1;
- Best Practice Urban Design Manual (May 09) - Part 2;
- Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001);
- Development Contribution Scheme for Planning Authorities – (Circular PD 5/2007);
- Development Contribution Scheme for Planning Authorities - Circular PD4/2003;
- Development Management Guidelines- Guidelines for Planning Authorities (June 2007);
- Development Plans Guidelines - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (June 2007);
- Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines (January 2012);
- Funfair Guidance;
- Implementation of new EPA Code of Practice on WasteWater Treatment and Disposal Systems Serving Single Houses - Circular PSSP1/10;
- Implementing Regional Planning Guidelines- Best Practice Guidance (December 2010);
- Landscape and Landscape Assessment;
- Provision of Schools and the Planning System – Code of Practice for Planning Authorities, The Department of Education and Science and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2008);
- Quarries and Ancillary Activities- Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2004);
- Retail Planning Guidelines;
- Section 261A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 and related provisions, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (January 2012);
- Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future, A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 - 2020;
- Sustainable Rural Housing Development Guidelines (2005);
- Sustainable Rural Housing Development Guidelines - Map;
- Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (May 09);
- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartment - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2007);
- Taking in Charge of Housing Estates / Management Companies;
- Taking in Charge of Residential Developments Circular Letter PD 1/08;
- Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures-Guidelines for Planning Authorities (1996);
- The Planning System and Flood Risk Management - Guidelines for Local Authorities (Nov 09);
- The Planning System and Flood Risk Management - Technical Appendices (Nov 09);
- Tree Preservation Guidelines;
- Waste Water Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations - Circular PD 7/09; and
- Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006).

Environmental Protection Objectives

The Plan is subject to a number of high level environmental protection policies and objectives with which it must comply. Examples of Environmental Protection Objectives include the aim of the EU Habitats Directive - which is to contribute towards ensuring biodiversity through the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora in the European territory of Member States - and the purpose of the Water Framework Directive - which is to establish a framework for the protection of

inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater which, among other things, prevents deterioration in the status of all water bodies and protects, enhances and restores all waters with the aim of achieving good status by 2015.

Table 2.1 outlines plans or projects that relate to the County Development Plan and associated Proposed Variation No. 2.

Table 2.1 Plans relating to the County Development Plan

Directive	Purpose
EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)	Objectives seek to maintain and enhance the quality of all surface waters in the EU.
EU Freshwater Fish Directive (78/659/EEC)	Objectives seek to protect those fresh water bodies identified by Member States as waters suitable for sustaining fish populations. For those waters it sets physical and chemical water quality objectives for salmonid waters and cyprinid waters.
EU Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC)	This directive establishes a regime, which sets underground water quality standards and introduces measures to prevent or limit inputs of pollutants into groundwater.
EU Floods Directive (2007/60/EC)	The Floods Directive applies to river basins and coastal areas at risk of flooding. With trends such as climate change and increased domestic and economic development in flood risk zones, this poses a threat of flooding in coastal and river basin areas.
Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC)	This Directive has the objective of reducing water pollution caused or induced by nitrates from agricultural sources and preventing further pollution.
The Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC)	The primary objective is to protect the environment from the adverse effects of discharges of urban wastewater, by the provision of urban wastewater collecting systems (sewerage) and treatment plants for urban centres. The Directive also provides general rules for the sustainable disposal of sludge arising from wastewater treatment.
Sewage Sludge Directive (86/278/EEC)	Objective is to encourage the appropriate use of sewage sludge in agriculture and to regulate its use in such a way as to prevent harmful effects on soil, vegetation, animals and man. To this end, it prohibits the use of untreated sludge on agricultural land unless it is injected or incorporated into the soil.
The Integrated Pollution Prevention Control Directive (96/61/EC)	Objective is to achieve a high level of protection of the environment through measures to prevent or, where that is not practicable, to reduce emissions to air, water and land from industrial sources.
National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020	Objectives of the NSS are to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development across Ireland, supported by more effective planning.
EirGrid Transmission Development Plan 2012 - 2022	This ten year plan presents those components of the overall long-term development of the transmission system where there is a high level of certainty. In addition, other likely areas where development projects may soon be required are also discussed.
Ireland's First National Cycle policy Framework (2009)	Introduced to promote cycling as an alternative mode of transport to bus, rail, car, etc.
Regional Planning Guidelines for the Western Region 2010-2022	Policy document which aims to direct the future growth of the Western Area over the medium to long term and works to implement the strategic planning framework set out in the NSS
Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020 Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020 Leitrim County Development Plan 2015-2021 Cavan County Development Plan 2014-2020	Overall strategies for the proper planning and sustainable development of the administrative area of the relevant Local Authorities. Include provisions relating to housing, economic (including tourism), community, transport (including cycling) and infrastructural development.

2.2 European sites in and within 15 km and those hydrologically linked to the County

2.2.1 cSACs and SPAs

This section of the screening process describes the European sites within a 15 km of the County and those which occur outside 15 km from the County boundary and are hydrologically linked.

Those European sites that occur within 15km of the Plan Area are listed in Table 2.1 and illustrated in Figure 1 below while those sites which occur beyond 15km but are located downstream of the Plan Area are listed in Table 2.2.

In order to determine the potential for impacts from the Proposed Variation, information on the qualifying features, known vulnerabilities and threats to site integrity pertaining to any potentially affected European sites was reviewed. Background information on threats to individual sites and vulnerability of habitats and species that was used during this assessment included the following:

- *Ireland's Article 17 Report to the European Commission "Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland" (NPWS, 2013).*
- *Site Synopses.*
- *NATURA 2000 Standard Data Forms.*

Since the conservation objectives for the European sites focus on maintaining the favourable conservation condition of the qualifying interests of each site, the screening process concentrated on assessing the potential implications of the Plan against the qualifying interests of each site.

2.2.2 Qualifying Interests (QIs) and Special Conservation Interests (SCIs)

Those relevant cSAC sites are selected for a range of different habitats and species listed on Annex I and Annex II of the habitats directive, known as Qualifying Interests (QIs).

Those SPA sites listed have been selected for the protection of endangered species of wild birds. Each SPA has been selected for one or a combination of the following:

- Listed rare and vulnerable species (as listed on Annex I of EU Birds Directive 2009/147/EC);
- Regularly occurring migratory species, such as ducks, geese, and waders;
- Wetlands, especially those of international importance, which attract large numbers of migratory birds each year.

The features for which SPAs have been selected are referred to as Special Conservation Interests (SCIs).

Those QIs and SCIs for which sites are selected are presented in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2.

2.2.3 Conservation Objectives

The Habitats Directive requires the focus of the assessment at this stage to be on the integrity of the site as indicated by its Conservation Objectives. The Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) is in the process of drawing up Site Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) for all European sites.

These SSCO aim to define favourable conservation condition for the qualifying habitats and species at that site. The maintenance (or restoration) of the favourable condition for these habitats and species at the site level will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a species can be described as being achieved when: 'population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced or likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.'

Favourable conservation status of a habitat can be described as being achieved when: 'its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable'.

For those sites where no SSCOs are available, the DAHG has provided generic Conservation Objectives for designated European sites. The following is the generic Conservation Objective for cSACs:

- *To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected.*

The following is the generic Conservation Objective for SPAs:

- *To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA*

Detailed SSCOs are likely to be more useful for project level AA. SSCOs have been prepared for the sites including Lough Forbes Complex SAC and the Brown Bog SAC. Any significant adverse effects on these site features are likely to give rise to impacts on site integrity as indicated by the conservation objectives of individual sites.

Table 2.2 European Sites which occur within 15 km of the Plan Area, Relevant Qualifying Features and Site Vulnerability

Site Code	Site Name	Qualifying Features	Location Site Vulnerability
0007	Lough Oughter and Associated Loughs SAC	Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or <i>Hydrocharition</i> -type vegetation, - Bog woodland <i>Lutra lutra</i>	In Co. Cavan, approx. 7 km north of the Co. Longford border. Hydrologically connected to Co. Longford via the River Erne which flows from Lough Gowna to Lough Oughter. While naturally eutrophic, the water quality is artificially enriched by waste discharges and fertiliser runoff. The main threats to the quality of the site are water polluting activities such as run-off from fertiliser and slurry application and sewage discharge which have raised the nutrient status of some lakes to hypertrophic. Housing and boating developments are on the increase, adjacent to and within the site respectively. There is also significant fishing and shooting pressure on and around the lakes. Increased afforestation has resulted in some loss of wetland habitat and also loss of feeding ground for wintering birds such as Greenland White-fronted Geese
0216	River Shannon Callows SAC	Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> , <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>), Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinia caerulea</i>)- Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnus incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>) Limestone pavements <i>Lutra lutra</i>	In Co. Roscommon, approx 8 km south of the Co. Longford border. Hydrologically linked via the River Shannon. The main threats to the Annex I habitats (and the other humid grasslands) on the site come from intensification of grassland management which would destroy their semi-natural nature and reduce botanical diversity. The flooding regime generally mitigates against intensification but herbicides and high fertiliser applications have been effectively used in a few places and this trend may increase. Most of the meadows are old meadows and any trend towards change to permanent pasture would be detrimental. This has not happened to date but may in the future, especially if deterioration in the flooding regime makes it more difficult to harvest. Large scale drainage of this section of the river is considered unlikely at present. The limestone pavement is threatened by removal of rock and scrub clearance. Drainage schemes, agricultural pollution and wildfowling threaten the bird-life in the area. Power lines across the site are also hazards for flying birds.
0610	Lough Croan Turlough SAC	Turlough	In Co. Roscommon, approx. 14km from Co. Longford Hydrologically connected to the River Shannon via the Cross River, Upstream of Co. Longford. The southern side of the wetland includes and adjoins intensive farmland and there is a likelihood of eutrophication from this source. Further drainage would damage the site: it could be done through the Cross River.
0611	Lough Funshinagh SAC	Turlough	In Co. Roscommon, approx. 8km west of Co. Longford. Within the same hydrometric area, but no direct hydrological link. Adverse effects through eutrophication from agricultural intensification in the catchment and also from housing on shore. Actual drainage or a lowering of regional watertables would also be damaging as would an increase in human disturbance.
0679	Garriskil Bog SAC	Active raised bogs- Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration, - Depressions on peat substrates of the <i>Rhynchosporion</i>	In Co. Westmeath, approx. 4km from Co. Longford. Hydrologically connected via the River Inny. Raised bogs are vulnerable to water loss caused by peat cutting, drainage and fire. There is no active peat cutting at this site at present. In general, human landuse within the site is low, with much of the previous cutaway areas reverting to semi-natural wilderness. Burning in the past has caused damage, with some bare peat exposure evident in places. This is always a very real threat to a bogland habitat. Past drainage of the bog has unfavourably impacted on the site, although many of these drains have now been infilled and blocked. However, a more serious threat is the arterial drainage of the R. Inny. This could result in major and irreversible damage to the hydrological integrity of this raised bog habitat.
0688	Lough Owel SAC	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp., Transition mires and quaking bogs, Alkaline fens, <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>	In Co. Westmeath approximately 10km from Co. Longford. Located upstream of hydrological connections to Co. Longford. Potential threats to the conservation interest of the lake include the increasing level of water supply to Mullingar, overfishing, eutrophication caused by local farming practices and pressure from amenity uses such as boating and fishing.
0692	Scragh Bog SAC	Alkaline fens Transition mires and quaking bogs <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i> <i>Drepanocladus vernicosus</i>	In Co. Westmeath 12 km from Co. Longford. Located upstream of hydrological connections to Co. Longford. In the Brosna WMU, not linked to Co. Longford. Site well protected as a National Nature Reserve but nonetheless vulnerable to deterioration in water quality if intensification in agricultural practices occurs. The outflow stream is included in the site, since interference with this outflow could damage the site hydrology
1625	Castlesampson Esker SAC	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco Brometalia</i>)(*important orchid sites) Turloughs	In Co. Roscommon 15km from Co. Longford. In the Hind/Lough Ree WMU, linked to Co. Longford. The site is vulnerable to grassland improvement, i.e. fertilization and reseedling, to both overgrazing and undergrazing (the latter would encourage scrub encroachment onto the esker grassland) and to gravel extraction.
1626	Annaghmore Lough (Roscommon) SAC	Alkaline fens <i>Vertigo geyeri</i>	In Co. Roscommon 15km from Co. Longford. In a separate WMU to Longford (Shannon). The quality of this site is threatened by several activities. Drains have been inserted in the past and any further attempts at drainage could be damaging to the hydrology of the lake and wetland vegetation. Severe burning of part of the <i>Schoenus</i> fen has occurred and repeated burning events would be

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Site Code	Site Name	Qualifying Features	Location Site Vulnerability
			damaging. Part of the marginal wetland vegetation along the northern shore of the lake, which is very close to a road, has been infilled for parking areas - further infilling would be very damaging. Grazing pressure. These various activities are all relevant for the conservation of the <i>Vertigo geyeri</i> population.
1810	White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo SAC	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>	On the Westmeath/Meath border, 10 km from Co. Longford. In a separate WMU (Deel). Although small, this is a good example of an oligotrophic system which is not showing any obvious signs of eutrophication. Interest of site is increased by presence of <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i> and <i>Lutra lutra</i> . Attempts at agricultural improvement, which have already occurred on a small scale, is the main threat to this site. Recurrence of crayfish plague could have serious impact on the population of that species.
2120	Lough Bane and Lough Glass SAC	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>	On the Westmeath/Meath border, 12 km from Co. Longford. In a separate WMU (Deel). The site is vulnerable to eutrophication, mainly by run-off from surrounding agricultural fields. Some afforestation is occurring near the site - should this increase, water quality could be affected. Increased use of lake for boating could cause physical damage to <i>Chara</i> communities.
2121	Lough Lene SAC	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>	In Co. Westmeath, 10 km from Co. Longford. In a separate WMU (Deel). The main threat to this site is eutrophication caused by agricultural run-off from surrounding areas. Any further reclamation of the semi-natural habitats around the lakes shore would be detrimental to the overall ecology of the lake system. Increased usage of the lake for boating and angling could cause physical damage to the <i>Chara</i> communities. The crayfish population is vulnerable to water pollution and to further introductions of the crayfish fungus.
2313	Ballymore Fen SAC	Transition mires and quaking bogs	In Co. Westmeath, 5 km from Co. Longford. In a shared WMU (Inny). There are no known threats to this site at present. Peat cutting by hand occurred in the distant past and is unlikely to happen again. Some nutrient runoff from surrounding agricultural land is likely to be entering the site but this is not considered to be significant as the intensity of farming in the surrounding area is low.
2336	Carn Park Bog SAC	Active raised bogs Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration	In Co. Westmeath, 15 km from Co. Longford. In a shared WMU (Inny). Current landuse on the site consists of mechanised peat-cutting, forestry and agricultural reclamation around the edge of the high bog. Peat-cutting is carried out along the track and road, which form the northern and north-western site boundaries. Afforestation occurs on the bog margins and extends onto intact or high bog. Some agricultural grassland has been reclaimed from cutover bog to the south and northwest of the site. The site continues to be subject to the damaging effects of drainage caused by afforestation and, to a lesser extent, peat-cutting. It is considered that the long-term future of the high bog is dependent on the removal of the conifer trees and the blocking of the main drains. Burning of the bog surface has occurred in the past and any further burning events would be damaging to the high bog.
2337	Crosswood Bog SAC	Active raised bogs Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration	In Co. Westmeath, 15 km from Co. Longford. In a shared WMU (Inny) Current landuse on the site consists of peat-cutting around the edge of the high bog; it is more intensively cut on the western and southern margins. While the northern margin has drains that extend into the intact bog it is relatively protected from development due to the proximity to the railway. Forestry is found to the south of the site on areas of cutover bog. Some fields on old cutover are used for pasture and are presently undergoing further reclamation. Damaging activities associated with these landuses include drainage throughout the site (both old and recent) and extensive burning of the high bog. These are activities that have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.
2339	Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC	Turloughs, Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration- Bog woodland- Active raised bogs- Depressions on peat substrates of the <i>Rhynchosporion</i>	In Co. Roscommon, approx. 9km from Co. Longford. In a shared WMU (Hind/Lough Ree), no direct hydrological links The main threats to this site are peat-cutting and associated activities such as drainage and burning. Burning appears to be a frequent occurrence on the peatland area of this site and this damages the structure of the bog surface. The bog woodland, however, may be somewhat protected from burning by the surrounding wet flush vegetation. Agricultural reclamation and afforestation are potential threats to cutover areas of bog within the site. The turlough area is especially vulnerable to agricultural reclamation, drainage and water pollution.
2340	Moneybeg and Clareisland Bogs SAC	Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration- Active raised bogs- Depressions on peat substrates of the <i>Rhynchosporion</i>	In Co. Westmeath within 2 km of Co. Longford. In a shared WMU (Inny) Landuse at Moneybeg Bog includes active peat-cutting to the east and west and forestry along the western margin. Current landuse at Clareisland Bog includes peat cutting to the west and north-west of the high bog and forestry along the southern margin. Damaging activities associated with these landuses include drainage and burning. Drainage has occurred on these high bogs in the past and at Moneybeg Bog there is evidence of recent and frequent burning of the high bog. These activities have resulted in habitat loss and damage to the hydrological status, and pose a continuing threat to the viability of these high bogs.
2349	Corbo Bog SAC	Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration	In Co. Roscommon, within 5km of Co. Longford. In shared WMU (Hind/Lough Ree). Peat-cutting and, to a lesser extent, burning are the main threats to Corbo Bog at present. Active cutting is common all along the margins of the high bog

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Site Code	Site Name	Qualifying Features	Location Site Vulnerability
		Active raised bogs Depressions on peat substrates of the <i>Rhynchosporion</i>	and cessation of cutting is essential for the long-term survival of the bog. Drains in the east of the site have also had a damaging effect. These are all activities that have resulted in the loss of habitat, damage the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.
4043	Lough Derravaragh SPA	Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>)- Pochard (<i>Aythya ferina</i>)- Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>) Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>)- Wetlands & Waterbirds	In Co. Westmeath, 7 km from county boundary. In a shared WMU (Inny). Direct links to Co. Longford via tributaries of the Inny. Enrichment of the lake, mainly by agricultural run-off, is a threat and could affect the bird populations and especially the diving ducks. An increase in recreational and wildfowling activities could cause disturbance to the birds though this is not considered to be a major threat.
4046	Lough Iron SPA	Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>), Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>), Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>), Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>), Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>) Wetlands & Waterbirds	In Co. Westmeath, 6 km from county boundary. In a shared WMU (Inny). As the water body is relatively small, the lake is particularly vulnerable to water pollution from, for example, agricultural run-off. Further afforestation in the vicinity of the lake shore is a threat and could affect grassland habitats used by the birds
4047	Lough Owel SPA	Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>) Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) Wetlands & Waterbirds	In Co. Westmeath, 7 km from county boundary. In a shared WMU (Inny). Lough Owel is vulnerable to pollution from agricultural and domestic sources though water quality has been satisfactory in recent years. Deterioration in water quality could affect bird populations. Some of the areas above the shoreline, which are not within the site, have been afforested - further afforestation could be damaging to the system. An increase in recreational and wildfowling activities could cause disturbance to the birds though this is not considered to be a major threat.
4065	Lough Sheelin SPA	Great Crested Grebe (<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>) Pochard (<i>Aythya ferina</i>) Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>) Goldeneye (<i>Bucephala clangula</i>) Wetlands & Waterbirds	On the Cavan/Westmeath/Meath border, 2km from Co. Longford. In a shared WMU (Inny). Co. Longford is downstream from the catchment. The variable water quality over the years, with periods of highly eutrophic conditions, undoubtedly has had some adverse impacts on the wintering waterfowl, and especially the diving duck. This would appear to be borne out by very variable numbers over the years. The lake is still considered to be vulnerable to pollution and there is a need to reduce the phosphorus inputs to the feeder streams entering the lake. Recreational and wildfowling activities currently cause some disturbance to the birds and any increase in such activities would be of concern.
4096	Middle Shannon Callows SPA	Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>) Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) Corncrake (<i>Crex crex</i>) Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>) Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) Wetlands & Waterbirds	This SPA shares a border with Cos. Roscommon, Westmeath, Offaly, Galway and Tipperary and is downstream of Co. Longford. The principal threat to the ornithological interests in this site is agricultural improvement including drainage attempts to reduce winter flooding. Agricultural intensification may also be affecting numbers of breeding waders. Wildfowling causes some disturbance.
4102	Garriskil Bog SPA	Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>)	In Co. Westmeath, 6 km from county boundary. In a shared WMU (Inny). There is little active peat cutting taking place at this site and recent information suggests that fire damage has been slight recently. The apparent abandonment of the site by wintering <i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i> reflects a general move away from raised bogs and is not considered to be due to conditions at the site.
4139	Lough Croan Turlough SPA	Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>) Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>) Wetlands & Waterbirds	In Co. Roscommon, 15km from Co. Longford. In a separate WMU (Suck). The main threat to the birds at this site would be degradation of the wetland habitats as a result of drainage. Disturbance is not considered a problem as the site is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.

Table 2.3 European Sites which occur beyond 15 km of the Plan Boundary but are Hydrologically Connected to the Plan Area

Site Code	Site Name	County	Qualifying Features	Location and Site Vulnerability
4097	River Suck Callows SPA	Galway; Roscommon	Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus Cygnus</i>); Wigeon (<i>Anas Penelope</i>); Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>); Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>); Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>)	The SPA occurs approximately 32 km south-east of the LAP boundary (ca 75.5 km downstream). Arterial drainage implemented into area in the past has reduced naturally flooded grasslands. Land improvement and drainage remain the key threat for the site. Due to the intensification in agriculture, particularly in the shift from hay to silage production, significant threats are posed to Corncrake breeding and existence within the SPA. Disturbance is caused by wildfowling, however, there is a Wildfowl Sanctuary at Muckanagh.
2241	Lough Derg, North-east Shore cSAC	Galway; Tipperary	Residual alluvial forests*; Cladium fen*; Limestone pavement*; Taxus baccata woods*; Alkaline fens; Juniper scrub	Lough Derg occurs approximately 73.5 km south south-east of the Plan Area (ca 109.5 km downstream). The lake is vulnerable to water polluting operations from the surrounding agricultural activities. Wetland habitats are threatened by private and holiday home developments and the construction of new marinas and jetties at the lake edge.
4058	Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA	Clare; Galway; Tipperary	Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>); Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>); Goldeneye (<i>Bucephala clangula</i>); Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>), Wetlands	Lough Derg occurs approximately 74 km south south-east of the Plan Area (ca 109.5 km downstream). Lough Derg was classified as being strongly eutrophic in the early 1990s. Since 1997, a monitoring programme on the Shannon lakes has shown that the symptoms of eutrophication previously documented (i.e. high chlorophyll level and reduced water visibility) have been ameliorated significantly. These reductions have coincided with the invasion of the Shannon system by the Zebra mussel (<i>Dreissena polymorpha</i>), a species which feeds on plankton, and also improvements to reduce phosphorus in sewage plants in the catchment. Enrichment of the lake, both by agricultural run-off and sewage, remains a threat and could affect the bird population, especially the diving duck.
2165	Lower River Shannon cSAC	Clare, Cork, Kerry; Limerick; Tipperary	Residual alluvial forests*; Lagoons*; Atlantic salt meadows; Estuaries; Large shallow inlets and bays; Mediterranean salt meadows; Molinia meadows; Tidal mudflats; Perennial vegetation of stony banks; Reefs; Salicornia mud; Sandbanks; Sea cliffs; Floating river vegetation; River Lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>); Brook Lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>); Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>); Freshwater Pearl Mussel (<i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i>); Sea Lamprey (<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>); Atlantic Salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>); Bottle-Nosed Dolphin <i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	The Lower River Shannon cSAC occurs approximately 108.5 km south of the Plan Area. The estuarine habitat and associated species are vulnerable to land reclamation, industrial development, water pollution (from industrial, agricultural and domestic sources) and spread of Spartina. The dolphins are vulnerable to underwater aquatic disturbance, entanglement in fishing gear and collision with fast moving craft. The main threats to the terrestrial habitats are over-grazing, while the rivers and associated annexed species are threatened by water pollution and flood relief works (e.g. dredging). Sublittoral sediments and submerged sand banks could be threatened by future wind-farm developments.
4077	River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA	Clare; Kerry; Limerick	Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>); Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>); Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>); Shelduck (<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>); Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>); Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>); Pintail (<i>Anas acuta</i>); Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>); Scaup (<i>Aythya marila</i>); Ringed Plover (<i>Charadrius</i>	This SPA occurs approximately 125 km south of the Plan Area. The site receives pollution from several sources, including industry and agriculture, but it is not known if this has any significant impacts on the wintering birds.

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Site Code	Site Name	County	Qualifying Features	Location and Site Vulnerability
			<p><i>hiaticula</i>); Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>); Grey Plover (<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>); Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>); Knot (<i>Calidris canutus</i>); Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina</i>); Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>); Bar-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa lapponica</i>); Curlew (<i>Numenius arquata</i>); Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>); Greenshank (<i>Tringa nebularia</i>); Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>); Wetlands</p>	

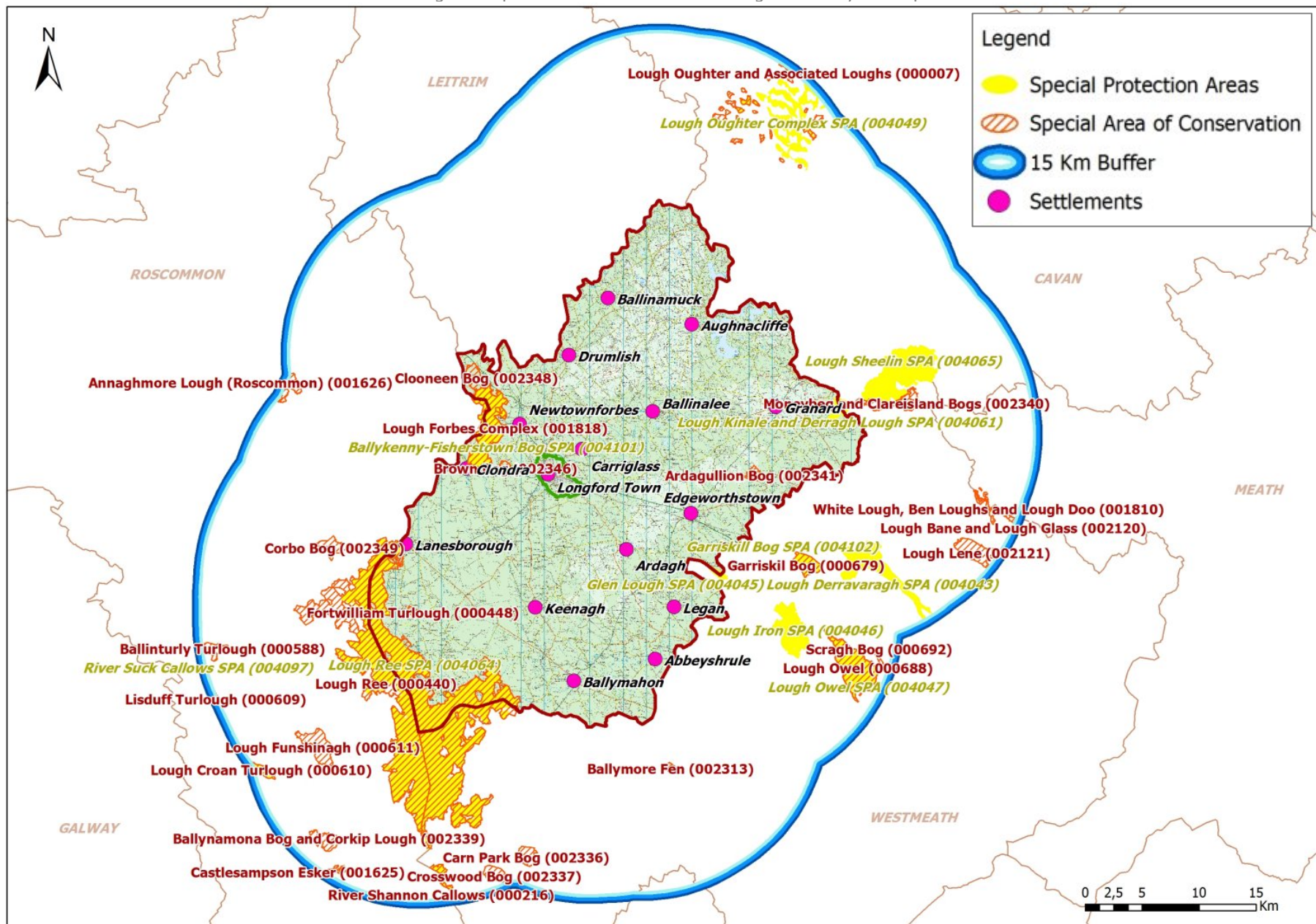


Figure 1 European sites within 15 km of the Plan Area

Source: NPWS (datasets downloaded February 2016)

2.3 Assessment Criteria

2.3.1 Is the Plan Necessary to the Management of European Sites?

Under the Habitats Directive, Plans that are directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site do not require AA. For this exception to apply, management is required to be interpreted narrowly as nature conservation management in the sense of Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive. This refers to specific measures to address the ecological requirements of annexed habitats and species (and their habitats) present on a site(s). The relationship should be shown to be direct and not a by-product of the plan, even if this might result in positive or beneficial effects for a site(s).

The primary purpose of Proposed Variation No. 2 is not the nature conservation management of European sites but to provide for development within County Longford. Therefore, the Proposed Variation is not considered by the Habitats Directive to be directly connected with or necessary to the management of European designated sites.

2.3.2 Elements of the Proposed Variation with Potential to Give Rise to Significant Effects

The Proposed Variation has been assessed in relation to its potential to result in likely significant effects on European sites within and beyond the administration area of the Council – see Table 2.4. The full range of environmental effects², including cumulative effects are considered by this assessment.


As outlined in the European Commission Environment DG document "*Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*", impacts that require consideration can be categorised under a number of headings:

- Loss / reduction of habitat area (e.g. due to the development of new projects);
- Disturbance to Key Species (e.g. increased public access to protected sites, or during the construction phase of infrastructure projects);
- Habitat or species fragmentation;
- Reduction in species density; and
- Changes in key indicators of conservation value such as decrease in water quality / quantity (e.g. through inadequate wastewater treatment, run-off of pollutants during construction and operation of developments, agricultural runoff).

In summary, it is determined that the Proposed Variation is not expected to result in any significant effects on European sites.

² These include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects

Table 2.4 AA Screening of Proposed Variation

Proposed Variation Part	Proposed Variation Text	AA Screening Determination	AA Screening Determination Explanation
<p>A</p>	<p>Incorporate the provisions of Longford Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2016-2022 as adopted, at Appendix 1A (replacing current mapping and Text)</p> <p>The purpose of the proposed variation is to provide for the areas to be covered by the Longford Town and Environs LAP within the CDP. This LAP will consolidate the zoning regime in Longford Town and Environs and provide an overall planning framework in the context of recent local government reform, incorporating zoning provisions for the Town and Environs area under the current county development Plan (CDP), town development Plan, northern environs LAP and southern environs LAP. This LAP will also provide for Masterplan areas to promote the physical, social, economic and environmental development of Longford Town in line with its designated position within the settlement hierarchy at National, Regional and County Level.</p> <p>The LAP has been subject to detailed Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) processes.</p> <p>The area concerned is outlined hereunder:</p> 	<p>Stage 2 AA is not required.</p>	<p>This part of the Proposed Variation incorporates the Longford Town and Environs LAP into the County Development Plan. The LAP is being subjected to detailed Stage 2 AA³.</p> <p>Taking into account the measures that have been integrated into the Draft LAP, including those that were integrated through the AA process, the Stage 2 AA for the Draft LAP concludes that the Draft LAP will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network. The Stage 2 AA has considered potential effects arising from interactions with other plans and programmes.</p> <p>Taking all of the above into account, it is determined that this part of the Proposed Variation will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network of sites. Consequently further assessment is not required.</p>

³ This SEA Screening Report should be read in conjunction with:

- The County Development Plan as varied and associated AA, SEA and SFRA documents; and
- The Draft LAP and associated SEA Environmental Report, Stage 2 AA Natura Impact Report and SFRA.

Proposed Variation Part	Proposed Variation Text	AA Screening Determination	AA Screening Determination Explanation
B	<p>To incorporate the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act, 2015</p> <p>The following amendment (amended text in italics) is proposed to existing policy CS 2 in the County development plan to facilitate the application of the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act, 2015:</p> <p>Functional roles of the larger towns shall be maintained and supported by the promotion of appropriate development in these areas and through the development management process <i>and other mechanisms and initiatives, including the vacant sites levy, as opportunities arise. It is an objective of this plan to encourage and facilitate the appropriate development of sites and areas in need of development and renewal in order to prevent:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Adverse effects on existing amenities in such areas, in particular as a result of the ruinous or neglected condition of any land</i> • <i>Urban blight or decay</i> • <i>Anti-social behaviour, or</i> • <i>A shortage of habitable houses or of land suitable for residential use or a mixture of residential and other uses</i> <p><i>Lands designated for regeneration within the "Town Core" and "Residential" character areas in the Longford Town and Environs Local Area Plan may include lands in need of development and/or renewal in the context outlined above and will be examined to determine if there are sites where the Vacant Site Levy is applicable under the provisions of Urban Housing and Regeneration Act 2015 and all associated regulations and guidance.</i></p> <p>The Proposed Variation has been subject to SEA and AA Screening processes and SEA and AA Screening Reports and associated SEA and AA Screening Determinations accompany the Proposed Variation on public display.</p> <p>This proposed Variation and associated SEA and AA Screening documents should be read in conjunction with the Draft Local Area Plan Document and associated SEA Environmental Reports, Stage 2 AA Natura Impact Report and SFRA document.</p>	SEA is not required.	<p>The County Development Plan already provides for the development of sites and areas in need of development, regeneration and renewal - this change provides further detail on how what is already provided for in this regard will be achieved. There are no additional effects on European Sites arising from this change (significant, potential or uncertain) that were not envisaged and mitigated by the Stage 2 AA of that Plan including Policy CS 2. That Stage 2 AA process successfully facilitated the integration of mitigation into the Draft Plan in order to contribute towards the protection of the Natura 2000 network of European Sites.</p> <p>Taking into account the measures that have been integrated into the County Development Plan, including those that were integrated through the AA process, the Stage 2 AA for the County Development Plan concluded that the Plan will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network.</p> <p>Taking all of the above into account, it is determined that this part of the Proposed Variation will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network of sites. Consequently further assessment is not required.</p>

Section 3 Conclusion

The AA Screening finds that the Proposed Variation shall not give rise to effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 site. Therefore, in accordance with the methodological guidance on the provision of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, it is concluded that the Proposed Variation does not require any further assessment to demonstrate compliance with the Directive.