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# ANNEX 4: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

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# 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This document has been prepared with reference to the Draft Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines for Local Authorities as issued by the Department of the Environment in June 2000<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter referred to as “the guidelines”). As the guidelines are still in draft format, extensive study was carried out into the area of character assessment, and this document draws heavily on recent works throughout the country and the UK. The publication “Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland”, released by the Countryside agency and Scottish Natural Heritage was used extensively due to its compatibility with the draft guidelines.

An emphasis on landscape *Character* was maintained in the formulation of this assessment. Character represents the individuality of an area based on its particular combination of features and elements. This approach contrasts with the evaluation method, which rates one particular landscape against another.

In order to formulate an effective development management and policy-making tool, the scope of the assessment must first be defined.

## 1.1 Scope

### 1.1.1 Purpose and Aims

One of the primary aims of the completed assessment is to inform the policy formulation and decision-making process in relation to the siting, design and material content of new developments.

This process is interlinked with policy documents at a national regional and local level and it is an aim of this assessment to translate the essence of these documents into a workable local context, including the following:

- National Spatial Strategy

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<sup>1</sup> It is recognised that during the statutory plan preparation period, revised guidelines were issued in June 2014 by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht entitled “A Draft National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2014 – 2024”. However, in line with the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) it was not within the scope of the prescribed timeframes to facilitate the consideration of these revised guidelines at that point in the County Development Plan process.

- Government Guidelines on sustainable rural housing, location and siting of windfarms, mobile phone antennae and support structures, quarries etc.
- Midland Regional Planning Guidelines
- Longford County Development Plan
- Longford County Heritage Plan
- Local Area Plans and Village Policy Statements

While it is an accepted fact that the landscape is not a static entity, the level and direction of change, which is deemed acceptable over a period of time, must be ascertained in order to facilitate effective and efficient development control and environmental maintenance systems.

The methodology involved in this process will produce a clear, concise and transparent background for landscape preservation, conservation and enhancement policies for the county, through the use of existing material such as soil data, landcover information and hydrological sensitivity. This will be combined with information from the public, such as the areas and places within the County that form the building blocks of its unique identity and existing policy at all levels throughout the planning process.

### 1.1.2 Stakeholder Input

The aim of this assessment is to identify, and attempt to quantify, the landscape attributes that make Longford unique. As such, stakeholder input is a basic element of this document.

## 1.2 Methodology

### 1.2.1 Desk Study

The initial investigation involved study of available material on the natural factors that influence the landscape. This included information on geology, landform, drainage, soils, landcover and vegetation. Cultural factors such as land use, settlement patterns and the change over time of these factors were also studied and mapped. This resulted in the landscape character types and areas in the following chapters.

### 1.2.2 Field Survey

The landscape types and areas derived from the desk study were then analysed in the field, whereby aesthetic and perceptual aspects, perceived character and individual condition and potential sensitivity were assessed.

These components were then classified, resulting in maps defining character types and areas, which are then described and the key characteristics of each area identified.

## 1.3 Current Landscape Policies

This section details the various national and local policies that relate to the landscape at present.

### 1.3.1 National Spatial Strategy

The NSS refers to the Midlands as a rural area that is changing and calls for policy responses that support communities where agriculture is under stress through promoting diversification in enterprise, local services and tourism. Reference is made to the protection of landscape, water resources and habitats in order to support this policy response.

Conservation of cultural identity is an important element in the development of rural areas and includes the protection of natural and other heritage resources.

Rural areas are considered in terms of a national resource, including natural environment, landscape and natural heritage, which are essential to underpin strengthened rural economies and the national economy. Resources referred to are agricultural land, water resources forestry and landscape quality.

In relation to the broad strategy for the midlands region, the NSS identifies the rural areas to the south of Longford and north of Granard as rural areas with strong potential for diversification. The area to the north of Longford and north and east of Ballymahon is identified as having village strengthening and rural area opportunities. The central area, taking in Longford and Edgeworthstown, is defined as a broad national transport corridor.

The importance of unspoilt landscapes and inland waterway networks in the Midlands region and the accessibility of these areas to Dublin is recognised in terms of its future potential to complement the agricultural sector with additional tourism and recreational activity. The potential for the worked out bogs to be utilised in the production of wind energy with ancillary manufacturing servicing and development activities is also noted.

### 1.3.2 Midland Regional Planning Guidelines

The following is the vision for the Midlands region upon which the policy framework contained in the guidelines is based:

*By 2022, the Midland Region will be a successful, sustainable and equitable region full of opportunities for its expanded population achieved through:*

- *Enhancing the critical mass of the region by combining the strengths of the linked gateway of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar, as envisaged in the NSS with those of the principal towns of Longford and Portlaoise.*
- *Developing the full potential of rural areas in the region in a manner that is compatible with the strengthening of the urban structure of the region.*
- *Offering a distinctive lifestyle rooted in a high quality living environment, rich in heritage and landscape value.*
- *Harnessing the central geographical location of the region at the “heart” of Ireland with more interregional links than any other region in Ireland, to build a strategically focused network of transport and communications links.*
- *Ensuring that the natural environment of the region such as water quality, landscape, and biodiversity is protected, maintained, and enhanced, where appropriate, as a basis for future sustainable development in the region.*

The vision outlined above relates strongly to the landscape of the area as both an entity where the functions required to drive the region take place and also a strong element of the culture and identity of the region that sets it apart from other areas in the Country.

Chapter 3 deals with the development of rural areas in the region and Section 2 of the guidelines outlines the strategic goals and Planning Considerations for the Region. Goal 11 is of particular relevance in terms of the development of rural areas and landscape implications:

*To develop and market a distinctly unique image and identity for the region that will attract investment and economic activity to the region.*

*The development of the image of the region as the heart of Ireland, an area with a high quality of life in a relatively unspoilt environment, will rely on the continued protection and enhancement of valuable natural resources (such as agricultural land, and amenities such as the lakes, rivers, canals, bogs and uplands) and the built heritage of the region. The preservation of the environmental integrity, water and air quality and the visual environment, will play an important role in maintaining this image which is vital for the attraction of investment and population growth.*

Longford County is located in the northern development area as defined by the guidelines, for which the following specific development proposal has been included

*Focused promotion and marketing of the natural heritage and cultural resources of the area and its associated high quality of life, which is vital for its development and a valuable contribution towards the identity of the region as a whole.*

The following common spatial issues are relevant to the development of landscape policy and are outlined in Section 7:

#### *Environmental Issues*

*The midlands have specific environmental advantages that can be brought together in order to foster a unique green image for the region. The recommendations under each issue aim to promote and strengthen awareness of the high quality of life that exists in the region and how this can be maintained in tandem with enhanced economic growth.*

#### *Agriculture*

*The future development of agriculture in the region should take cognisance of the following issues:*

- *Existing strong agricultural areas should be prioritised for development in this sector.*
- *Diversification of agriculture should be promoted to revitalise the social and economic climate in rural communities, particularly in areas of marginal land.*
- *Targeted promotion of agricultural activities should take place in areas where conditions are best suited for individual specialities, e.g. arable farming in the south, cattle fattening enterprises in central area etc. Land that is agriculturally important should be protected from inappropriate development.*
  - *Industrial development should be promoted in appropriate rural areas*
  - *Environmentally sustainable agricultural practices should be promoted*

#### *Waterways*

*Policy should be formulated in relation to inland waterways, taking account of the following issues:*

- *The leisure and amenity potential of the inland waterways of the region should be investigated and promoted where appropriate, particularly in line with the tourism industry.*
- *Re-opening of canals and connections between them should be prioritised as a major element in the identity and tourism potential of the region.*

#### *Bogland*

*The following issues should be considered:*

- *Alternative uses for cutaway and cutover boglands should be investigated, particularly in relation to the alternative and renewable energy industries*
- *The prominence of boglands in the social, economic and cultural development of the region and as a defining element in its identity should be recognised and promoted.*

#### *Forestry*

*The following issues should be considered in formulating forestry policies:*

- *Deciduous forestry should be promoted as an alternative land use in suitable areas of land, particularly in areas of agricultural decline*
- *The amenity and leisure and other spin-off industrial potential of forestry should be promoted in tandem with afforestation or re-afforestation plans.*

#### *Natural and Built Heritage*

*In summary, to capitalise on the heritage assets of the region, the following issues should be considered:*

- *Common heritage themes should be utilised to promote and market an identity for the region, for its internal population and in terms of the tourist industry*
- *Heritage elements should be protected through a co-ordinated effort between all four planning authorities to ensure consistency of approach.*

#### *Extractive Industries*

*Extractive industries are based on a finite resource that needs to be managed in a sustainable manner, taking account of the following aspects:*

- *Extractive industry should be monitored in line with best practice Guidelines issued by the industry.*
- *The importance of the aggregates industry to ensure an adequate supply of aggregates to implement infrastructure under the NDP is acknowledged, as is the requirement to protect this non-renewable resource.*

### 1.3.3 Longford County Development Plan, 2015-2021

The County Development Plan outlines several landscape policies in relation to landscape, which are mainly contained in Section 6. Additional policy areas including the settlement strategy at Section 2.1.6 and rural areas at 2.1.6.5 and 3.2.2 also outline policies in relation to landscape and environmental protection.

Section 3.2.2 relates to sustainable rural policy, including the aims of minimising the negative impacts of development on agriculture and the landscape and minimising the spread of urban generated rural housing around existing pressure areas and sensitive landscapes.

Policy WS6 contains policy to restrict and curtail development in areas of known aquifer vulnerability

Annex 3 refers to the proposed design guidelines – it is proposed that this landscape character assessment will inform the formulation of the design guidelines; therefore, the preparation of both documents should be carried out in tandem. It should be noted design guidelines have also been prepared and are in form.

Section 3.2.2.1, policy HOU RUR 1 deals with the suitability of a development in terms of the sensitivity of the rural area.

Policies HOU RUR 2, 3 and 4 deals with the sustainability of rural houses based on those who intend to reside in them.

Section 4.5 deals with tourism policy, which includes the extension of amenities, water based and walking in particular. Several areas are listed as base locations for the utilisation of specific natural resources while protecting them from unacceptable degradation as a result of their usage.

Chapter 6 states that the planning Authority will control development in protected areas – scenic views and prospects, ridge lines, broad zones of the lakes, European sites- where this has the potential for negative impacts on the scenic, heritage and cultural assets of the county.

Chapter 6 deals with environment and amenities and issues such as sustainability, prevention of pollution, litter, conservation and protection of heritage and amenities and recreational amenities. Sections 6.1 and 6.2 are possibly of most relevance to this document. The chapter covers policy on the conservation and preservation of monuments, Archaeological, architectural and heritage objects, flora, fauna and wildlife habitats, landscapes and inland waterways, geology, gardens and parks. European sites are listed in section 6.2.2. of the plan.

### 1.3.4 Conclusion

The policies outlined above set a clear and positive framework for the protection and enhancement of landscapes in County Longford and the natural resources, cultural heritage and social identity that lies within and arises from them.

## 2. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Character can be defined as a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another. Landscape character assessments differ from landscape evaluations in that they attempt to *classify* landscapes on their individuality rather than defining one as better as or worse than another.

Landscape can be defined as embracing all that is visible when looking across an area or areas of land. Longford County has a varied and diverse landscape for its small physical size. The upland areas of the northern county contrast sharply with the gently undulating pastoral land of the south and south east, the flat clear views over the Shannon wetlands to the river to the west, Lough Ree to the south-west, and the acres of boglands, wetlands and woodlands throughout the County.

The landscape of the County is not only important in the attraction of tourists, as has been the major emphasis on landscape preservation in the recent past. The distinctive topography, landcover and landscape elements of the County lend its population and communities a sense of identity and belonging. The aim of landscape character assessment is to identify the elements of the landscape which create this uniqueness and the extent to which it is possible to alter these landscapes before unacceptable consequences arise. The following are examples of such consequences:

- Unacceptable degradation of environmental quality, as in the case of pollution of potable water supplies/fish kills etc
- Loss of irreplaceable archaeological artefacts
- Loss or fragmentation of important natural habitats
- Irreparable damage to architectural heritage
- Privatisation of access to lakes, rivers, heritage items and scenic areas
- Visual destruction of important areas that are recognised as fundamental elements in the identity of the county.

The guidelines propose that all Local Authorities classify the landscapes in their area according to their character, values and sensitivity. The character is defined as a product of landform and landcover, including vegetation and landuse.

Every act of development changes a landscape. This change can be positive, neutral or negative. It is government policy that in deciding for or against development that the

appropriateness of that development within the given landscape context, as defined by this landscape character assessment, be considered.

## 2.1 County Overview

### 2.1.1 Landform

Landform is concerned with the spatial and formal arrangement of landscape components as a natural product of geological and geomorphological history.

#### (a) Topography

The topography of the County can be roughly divided into three types; flat wetlands in the basins of the Shannon and Lough Ree to the south and southwest, the Inny to the northeast and central peatland areas of the County.

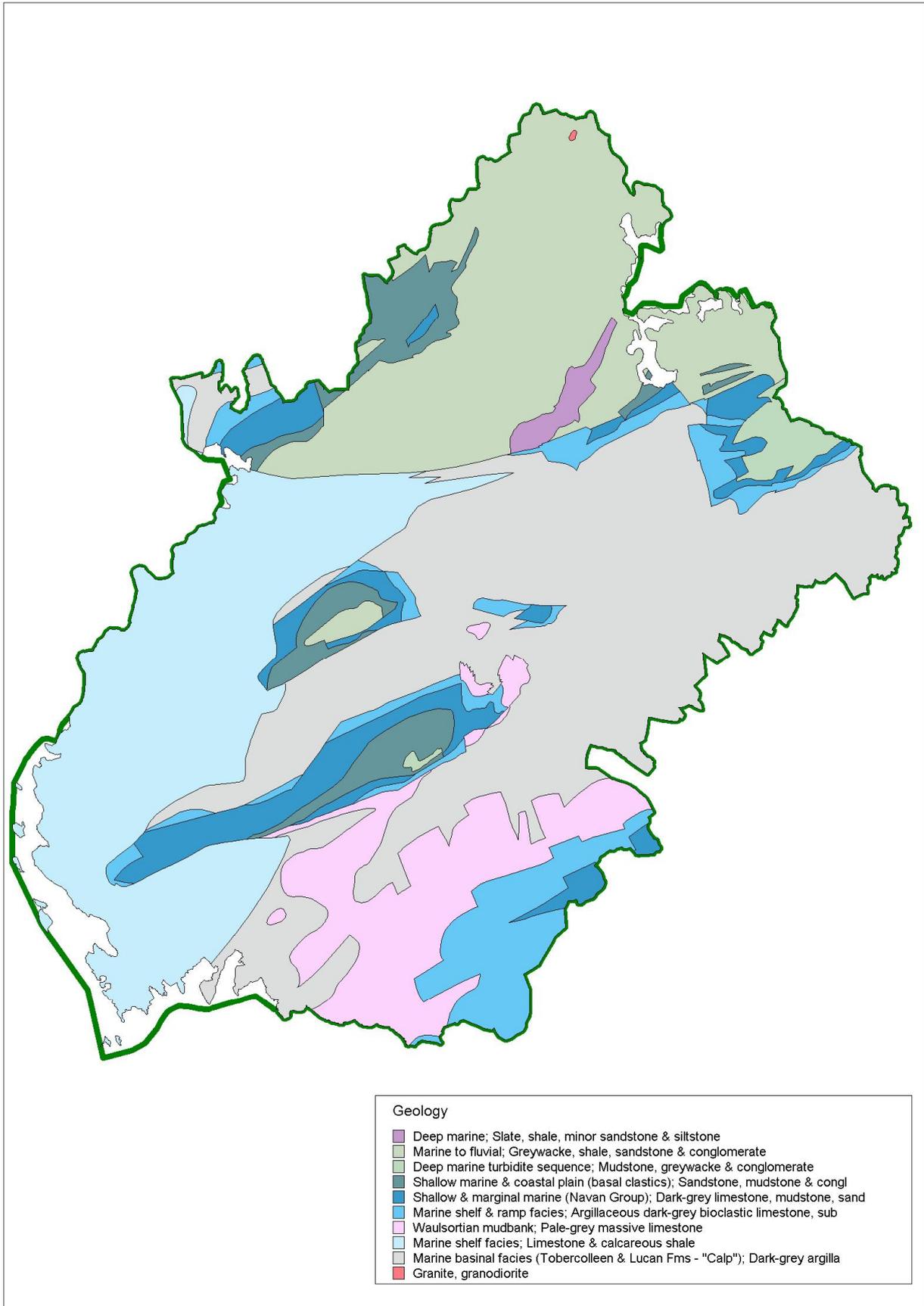
The north and northwest is characterised by typical drumlin topography, with the southeast distinguished by the gently undulating limestone pastureland of the Irish Central Plain.

#### (b) Geology and Soils

Much of the underlying geology of the County is predominantly carboniferous limestone. Ordovician and Silurian shales intrude to the northeast. The bedrock geology of the County is illustrated in greater detail in the accompanying geology map. However, there is no absolute data on the drift/surface geology that occurs within the County. The Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) hopes to conduct a full study of the County, including details on the surface geology, which will be available in 2009-2010. This data will allow for a more detailed characterisation and description of the evolution of landscape character within the County.

A layer of glacial till overlies this geology and has been moulded in places to form Drumlins. This geology results in moderately well drained clay loam soils over much of the County, with bands of poorly drained clay loam and an associated fringe of poorly drained silting clay loams with inter drumlin peats to the north of the county.

To the west of the county lie vast expanses of basin peat with some marshland. Some of the lands adjacent to Lough Ree are comprised of shallow, well-drained loams.



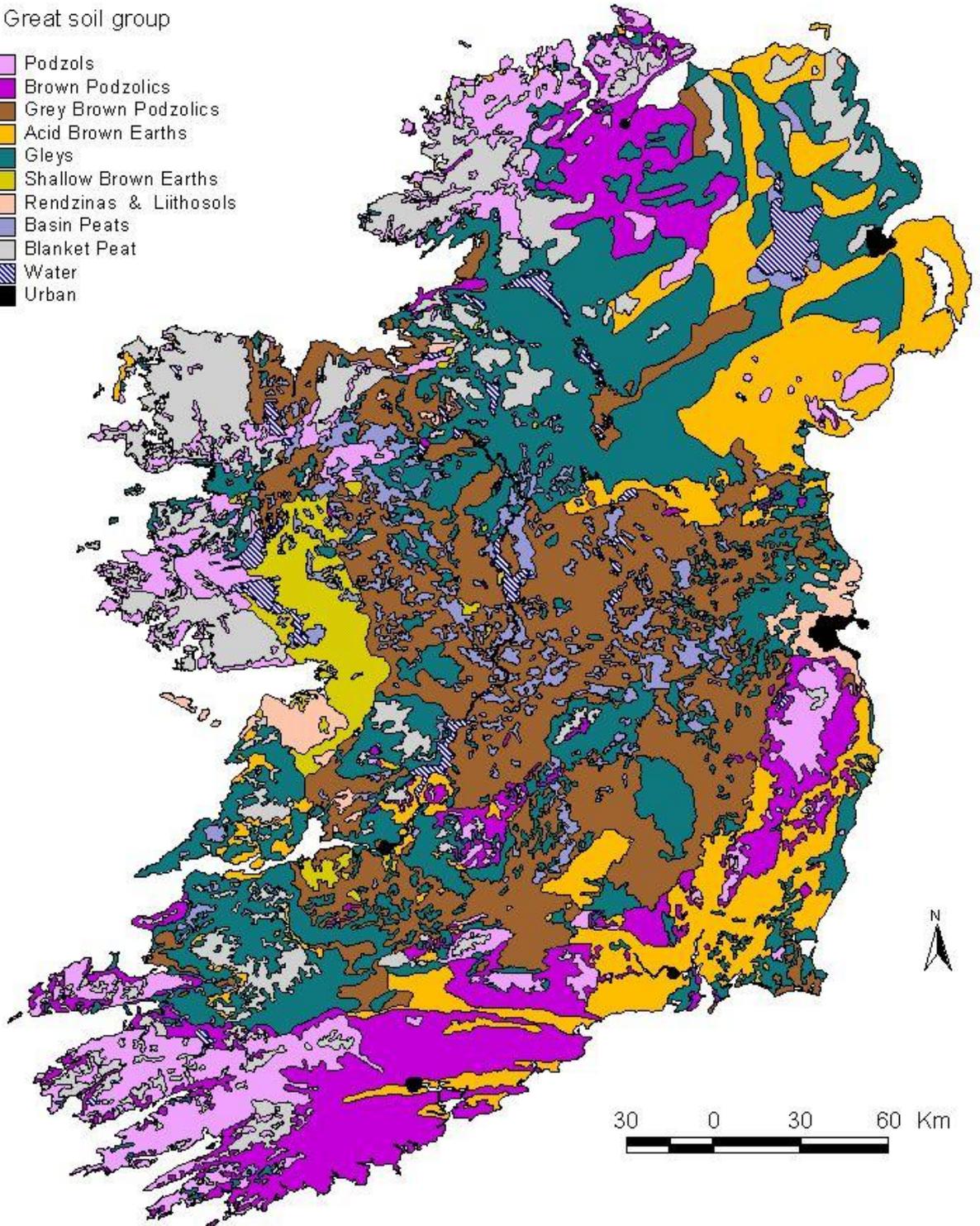
Bedrock Geology of County Longford (Source GSI)

# Ireland : Great Soil Groups

(Categorised from the General Soils Map 1980)

Great soil group

- Podzols
- Brown Podzolics
- Grey Brown Podzolics
- Acid Brown Earths
- Gleys
- Shallow Brown Earths
- Rendzinas & Lithosols
- Basin Peats
- Blanket Peat
- Water
- Urban



GIS Dr. BSCoulter & EJ McDonald  
(C) TEAGASC JOHNSTOWN CASTLE 2001

Ref. MJ Gardiner et al, National Soil Survey 1980  
N.I. Soils S. McConaghy & V. McAllister

Soil types have an extensive influence on the environment of the County, dictating the landcover and landuse and the extent of both. All aspects of life are influenced either directly

or indirectly by soil types, including settlement patterns, transport routes, communications infrastructure, location of archaeological deposits and economic activity. Soils represent an important and non-renewable natural resource.

Longford County can broadly be categorised into three areas for classification under the great soil groups. The north of the County (the area mainly above the 100m contour) is mainly composed of gley soils, while a broad strip of basin peats runs diagonally from mid/north west to south east. Pockets of gleys and basin peats abound throughout the County. The remainder of the soils are broadly classified as grey brown podzolics. The map shown on the previous page indicates illustratively the soil groups that can be found within the County.

Gley soils are heavy, poorly drained soils not given to arable cultivation without extensive drainage and artificial enrichment. This is reflected in the pattern of agricultural activity in the northern section of the County, which tends to have smaller, more fragmented landholdings with extensive farming practices.

Landspreading of farm effluent and application of fertilisers in these areas is a delicate balance, given the poor permeability of the soil and the proliferation of waterbodies in this area, many of which are protected as European Sites and vulnerable to eutrophication through excessive nitrate run-off from land.

Threats to surface water are further increased through the poor viability of these smaller farm units as permission is sought for dwelling sites to augment farm incomes and the soil's poor percolation characteristics render them unsuitable in the most part for conventional septic tank methods of domestic effluent disposal. These problems are consistently highlighted by the Northern Regional Fisheries Board in submissions on planning applications in the area.

Due to their relatively poor agricultural characteristics, a substantial portion of these soils has been subject to afforestation, with substantial and long-term visual impacts. The forestry industry has now turned toward the use of more productive soils. The implications of this trend have yet to become apparent, but may include the proliferation of non-managed exotic monoculture forestry tracts in previous permanent pasture regions and large areas of acidified soils.

The peat soils of the County have been harvested in antiquity, yet only on an industrial scale over the last few decades. The large scale harvesting of peat has an inordinate visual

impact, given the flat nature of the landscape in which it is found and, as such, the visibility of the operation and its results over large distances.

The method of harvesting also contributes to the visual impact with large mounds of plastic covered milled peat glinting in the sunlight for kilometres and large amounts of airborne particulates being generated and dispersed during dry weather.

The biggest single environmental impact of peat harvesting is its subsequent burning to generate electricity and heat, instantaneously releasing CO<sub>2</sub> that has remained locked inside this carbon sink for thousands of years and contributing to the global greenhouse effect. The power station at Lanesboro in the west of the County, operated by ESB and Bord na Mona, also abstracts water from the Shannon for use as a coolant. This water is then returned to the river at a substantially higher temperature, impacting on the flora and fauna of the river system at this point.

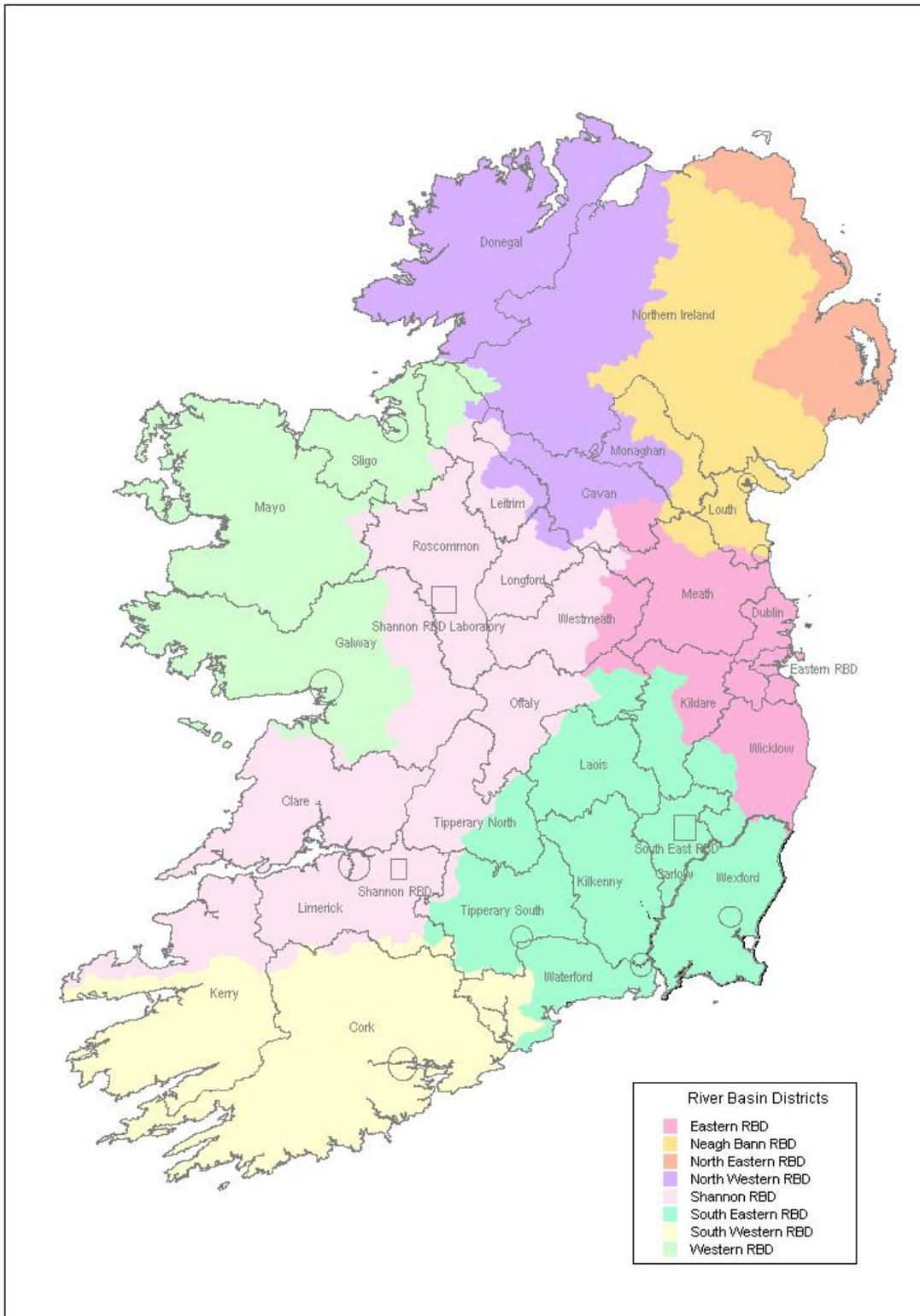
The re-use of cut-away bog is an important issue that has yet to be addressed, that may have wide-ranging implications across a broad range of environmental sectors. This is also true of the power station itself, due for decommissioning in the next two decades.

Grey brown podzolics are more suited to agricultural practice, reflected in the number of larger landholdings and intensive farming, particularly dairying, where these soils exist. These areas exhibit a distinct landscape character, typified in the "Goldsmith Country" of the southeast County, where verdant rolling pastures predominate, with intermittent stands of mature trees and crumbling demesne walls.

Mapping of geology, in particular the drift geology, in the Longford area is poor to date.

#### (c) Drainage patterns

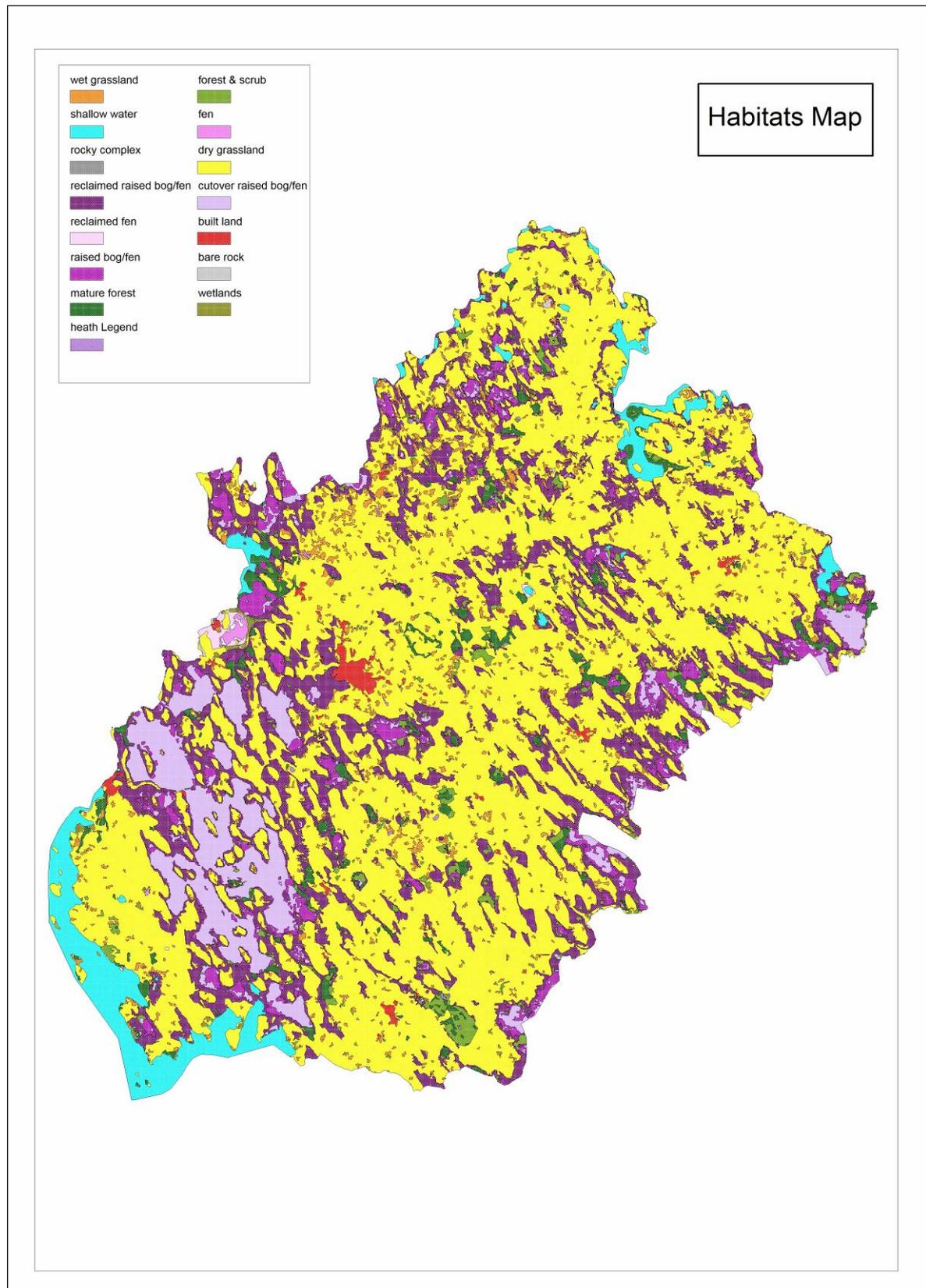
Most of County Longford is situated in the Shannon basin and lies along the north eastern shore of Lough Ree. The northern section of the County lies within the Erne catchment to the southwestern shores of Lough Gowna. The major Rivers in the County are the Camlin, which drains the midsection of the County and meets the Shannon at Clondra and the Inny, which runs along most of the southeastern county boundary to enter Lough Ree south of Ballymahon. The map overleaf shows the River Basin Districts.



Numerous lakes dot the northern section of the County, the largest of which is Lough Gowna, forming the boundary with Cavan. The north-western boundary of the County is formed by a string of lakes along the Leitrim border.

## 2.1.2 Landcover

Landcover in County Longford can be broadly categorised into several areas as indicated in the thematic map shown below (based on Teagasc and Corine data).

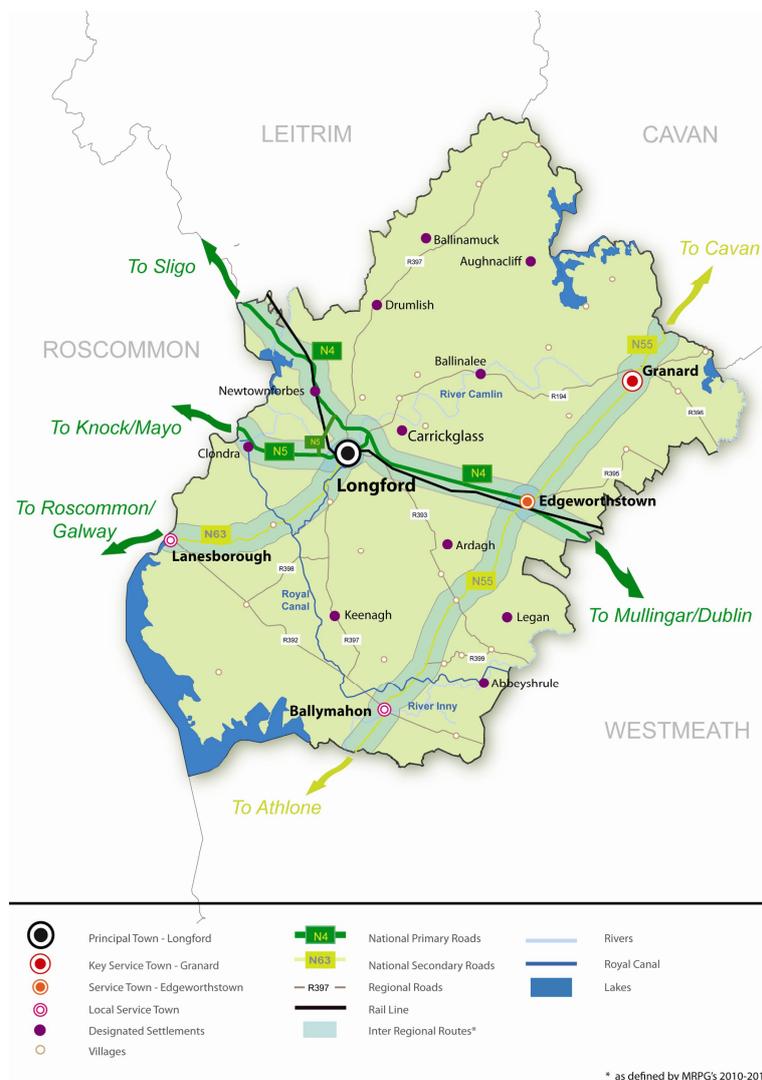


As can be seen, the dominant landcover category is dry grassland, which indicates the continued importance of agriculture in the landscape. The interspersed bog and fen, much of which is cutover and reclaimed, also represents a significant element in the landscape.

### 2.1.3 Human Influence

#### (a) Settlement pattern

The current County Development Plan, 2009-2015, identifies forty-one designated settlements, which are relatively evenly dispersed throughout the County between north and south. There appears to be a current trend towards more dispersed forms of rural settlement. It is a stated aim of this character assessment to evaluate the ability of certain landscapes to absorb such settlement forms and inform policy decisions accordingly.



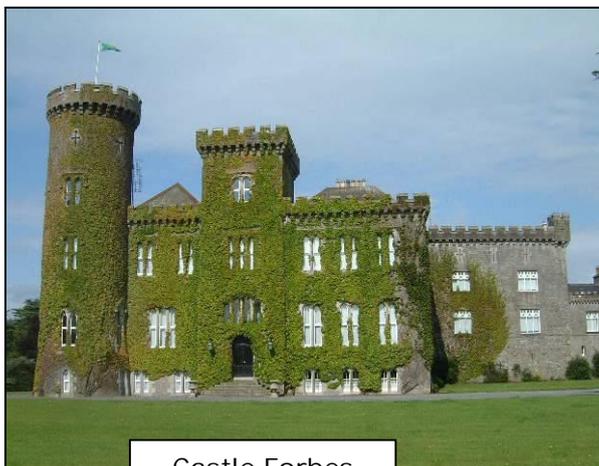
Settlements within County Longford

The population of Longford has been subject to devastating changes since famine times which had a dramatic impact on the settlement pattern of the County. Between 1841 and 1996 Longford County lost a staggering 74% of its population (from 115,491 to 30,166)<sup>2</sup>

This historical trend of depopulation would appear to be reversing, with a modest 3% population growth between 1996 and 2002 being followed by a more substantial 10% growth up to 2006. Census 2011 results show that Longford's population has continued to grow strongly since Census 2006, increasing by 4, 609 persons to 39,000 persons. This represents an increase of 13.5% per cent over the 5 year intercensal period. There implications of this growth on the landscape are inevitable, not just at a County level but also on a national one, as demands for accommodation, transport and communications and other modern essentials spiral upwards.

Several major architectural phases are represented in County Longford, indicating the length and intensity of settlement within the County. The following are some examples:

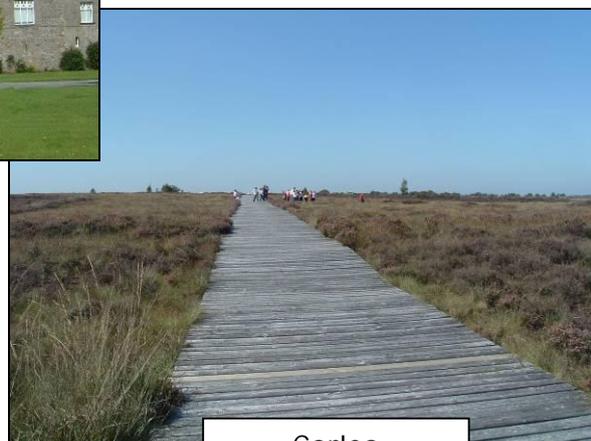
- *Prehistoric*: Corlea Bog trackway, Flint implements at Lough Kinale
- *Early Christian/Celtic Churches*: St. Mels, Ardagh, St. Diarmuids, Inchcleraun Island
- *Medieval*: Chancel Church and Augustinian monastery, Inchcleraun, Abbeysrule, Abbeylara, All Saints Priory, Saints Island, Clondra Abbey, Rathcline castle, Castlerea, Elfeet, Mornin.



Castle Forbes

house, Longford

- *18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup>c*: Ledwithstown house, Ardagh Glebe, Castle Cor, St.



Corlea

- *16<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup>c*: Castle Forbes (built 1628, rebuilt after fire 19<sup>th</sup>c) Water garden, Rathcline Castle, Market

<sup>2</sup> "North Leinster" Casey C. Rowan A., 1993 Penguin

Johns Church, Longford, Kilcommock (ruin), Courthouse, Longford, Clock tower, Keenagh, Coolamber Manor, Carriglass Manor, Ballymacormack COI, Newtownforbes COI, Ballinalee COI, Killoe COI, Forgney COI, Ardagh COI, Ballymahon COI, Keenagh COI, Edgeworthstown COI, Taghshinny RCC, Newtowncashel RCC, Lanesboro RCC, Market house Ballymahon.

- *Victorian:* St. Mels Cathedral, Longford, St. Mel's Diocesan Seminary, Longford, St. Mary's Granard, Edgeworthstown RCC, Longford and Edgeworthstown Railway Stations, Bank of Ireland, Longford, Ulster bank, Longford, rebuilding of Castle Forbes.

It should be noted that the presence of these features might not accurately illustrate the age of a particular settlement but rather the static nature of development in a particular area.

Significant work has been carried out by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in the identification of architectural structures of merit throughout the County through the preparation of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. This inventory is invaluable in the augmentation of the list of protected structures for the County, a process to be carried out in tandem with the preparation of the new County Development Plan.

#### (b) Agriculture

While the agricultural industry remains an important element in the national and local economy, it is extremely vulnerable to global changes and EU policy reform. The habitats map illustrated above indicates the dominance of agricultural land in a County context. Substantial changes in the maintenance and management of agricultural land will therefore have an inordinate visual impact at this level.

Recent changes in agricultural practices have lead to trends toward enlargement in the more fertile, south eastern areas of the County, while fragmentation has occurred in the less profitable drumlin landscapes of the northern County, as farmers strive to maximise farm income from smaller, less fertile tracts of land. Farm fragmentation often occurs in the form of selling of half-acre sites for houses along road frontages. This coupled with the fact that the land in these areas is amongst the poorest in the county, the most elevated and visible, the least efficient in terms of the disposal of domestic effluent and require the removal of substantial sections of hedgerows for access purposes, the potential for landscape impact is particularly high.

Grant aid and legislation are major factors in the determination of farming practices throughout the County. Schemes such as the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme promote environmentally sensitive practices and are taken up to a greater degree throughout the County. Habitat identification and conservation, hedgerow replacement and maintenance and watercourse protection are some of the measures introduced relating to landscape.

The introduction of the nitrates regulations, in tandem with grant aided schemes for the construction of farm buildings and effluent storage, have the potential to create a significant visual impact throughout the County. The number of planning applications for slatted sheds increased significantly during this period. These regulations also place limits on livestock numbers on land which may influence vegetation growth, particularly in marginal areas where poaching is a particular problem over the winter period.

### (c) Forestry

The development of forestry has a significant impact on the landscape of the County, particularly as areas chosen tend to be marginal and elevated, two factors that can equate with the most scenic areas of the County. The most familiar landscape impact of forestry is the use of non-native species planted in strong geometric patterns in elevated areas that create a stark and artificial impression when viewed from a distance. Attempts have been made to address this issue through guidelines adopted by the industry in new planting, such as careful mix of species, particularly along forest edges and maintenance of the harvest to minimise negative visual impacts.



Areas of Forestry within the County

However, there are several more subtle ways in which forestry can influence the perception of landscape. The slow and steady growth of trees can lead to the gradual and therefore imperceptible loss of views and prospects that might otherwise have been framed or enhanced by judicious and well planned planting.



deposits. It is suggested that any such designation, once complete, should form part of this assessment.

(e) Culture

It is envisaged that the preparation of this document will run in tandem with the preparation of the heritage plan and result in the identification of the cultural elements that make Longford unique so that these can be protected and or promoted as part of the Council's duties and activities.

Cultural heritage includes landscapes made famous by literary figures, mythological legends and historical events. Festivals, fairs and community activities may also be included, particularly where they have a spatial dimension.

## 2.2 Landscape Character Units

The Clare Landscape Pilot Study differentiates between Landscape Character types and Landscape character areas. *Landscape character types* (LCT) are defined as landscapes that may occur in many areas throughout the Country and are composed of similar combinations of elements such as topography, geology, drainage and settlement patterns, landcover and use. *Landscape character areas* (LCA) are sections of the County that are treated as a unit in visual and physical terms, and that may consist of several landscape character types.

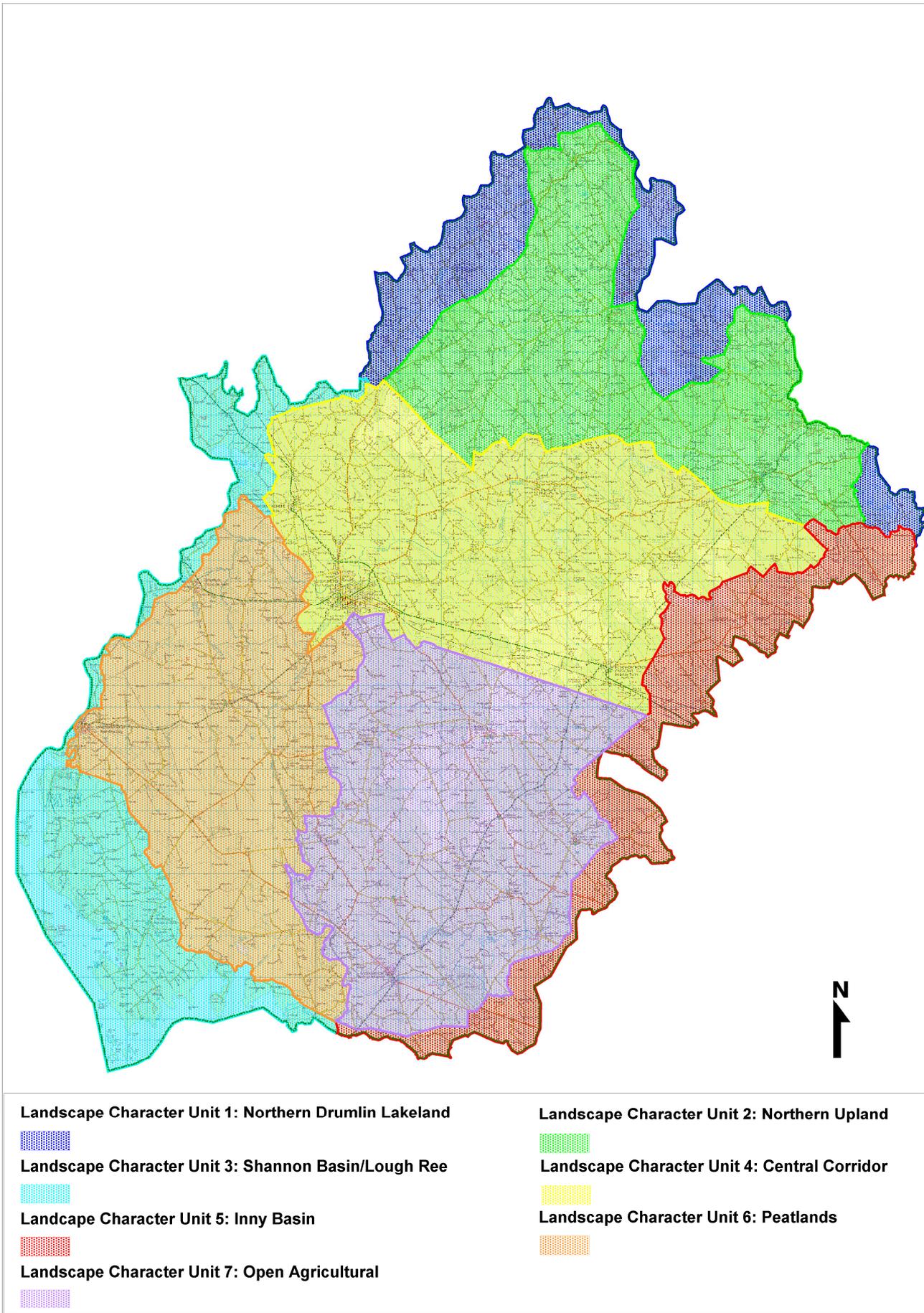
Landscape Character types in County Longford would include the peatlands/wetlands, Shannon basin and northern uplands. Landscape character *areas* are the individual representation of a landscape character type, e.g. Bagnagh Bog.

Longford is a relatively small County with a low number of well-defined Landscape Character Types. These broadly correlate with Landscape character areas, as they tend to be geographically specific and the predominantly flat nature of the landscape facilitates topographical definition of units. For this reason, it is considered that a landscape character unit, combining both LCA and LCT as defined in the guidelines, is an appropriate method of assessment in this instance.

In broad terms, there are seven basic landscape character units in Longford which are illustrated on the map overleaf (Please also consult Appendix 1 for maps of each area.)

- Unit 1 – Northern Drumlin Lakeland
- Unit 2 – Northern Upland
- Unit 3 – Shannon Basin/Lough Ree
- Unit 4 – Central Corridor
- Unit 5 – Inny Basin
- Unit 6 – Peatlands
- Unit 7 – Open Agricultural

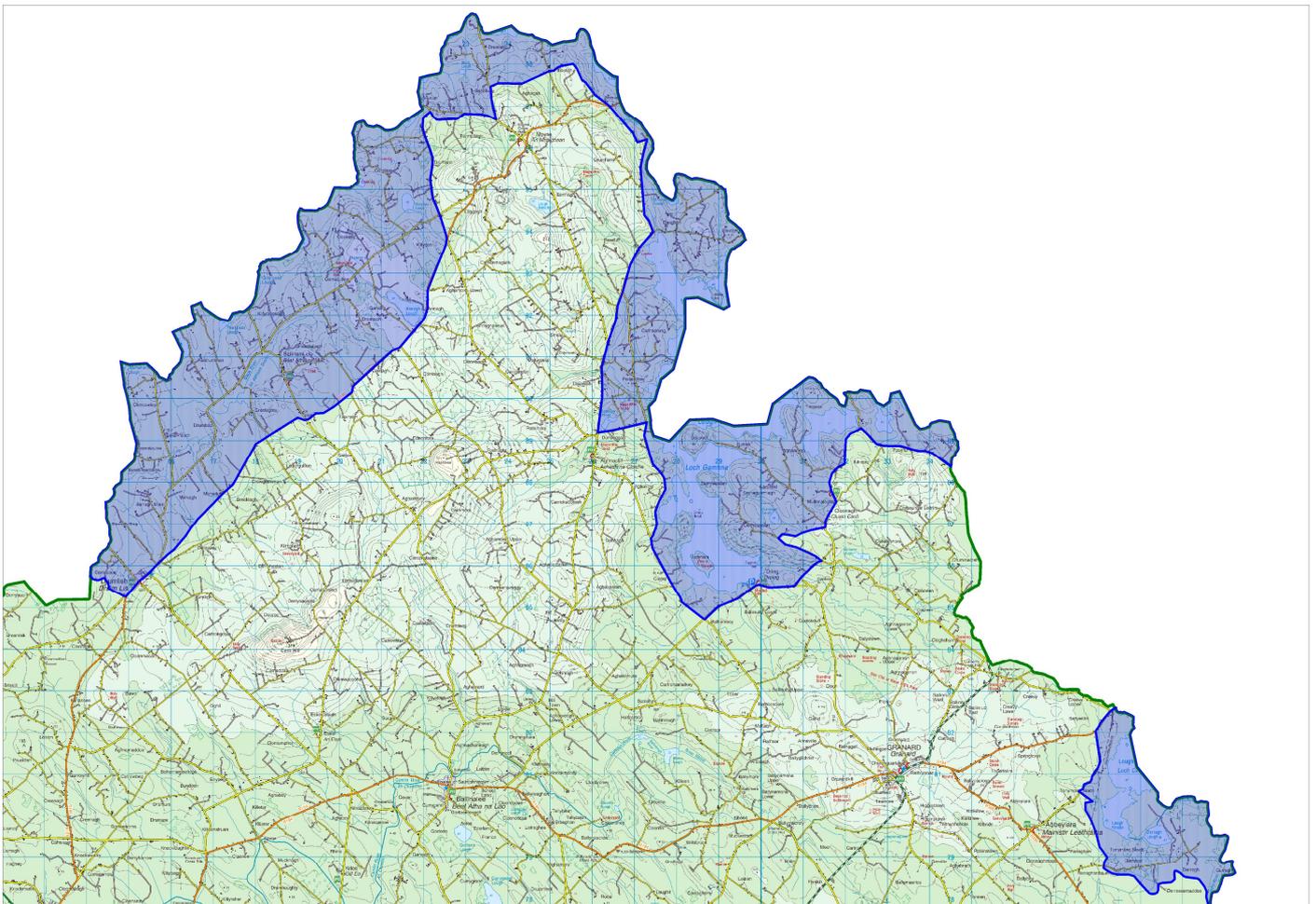
A general overview of the County is provided, following which each Character Unit is assessed in turn, providing details on the landform, characteristics, threats and degree of sensitivity of the each area.



## Landscape Unit 1 – Northern Drumlin Lakeland

### Location and Physical Characteristics

This area consists of the North West fringe of the County and extends from Drumlish in the west to the County boundary in the north. This landscape unit also includes the areas surrounding Lough Gowna and Lough Kinale in the east of the County (also see map of the area in the context of Longford in Appendix One).



The southern boundary is mainly formed by the R198 Regional route from Longford to Arva, the Aughnacliffe to Enaghan Road and other relevant features such as the 100m contour line.



*Lough Sallagh in the North-West fringe of the County*

Views are available to the north into Counties Leitrim and Cavan, which more or less mirror the landscape inside the Longford Boundary.

- Landcover

Landcover consists of predominantly small agricultural holdings, interspersed with bogland, which becomes more dominant toward the eastern boundary of the unit and lakeland areas that dominate on the western County Boundary.

- Topography

The area primarily consists of rolling drumlin landscape, with agricultural land tending to be tightly enclosed and bounded by small but well established hedgerow species, at times permitting limited views of the string of lakes that border the County.



*Annagh Lough*

- Geology/Soils

The soils in this area are predominantly poorly drained gley soils with some peats.

- Drainage patterns

Drainage patterns are extremely complex, giving way to peatlands in the valley of the Black River and the vicinity of Annagh Lough. This area type includes the Lough Gowna Complex to the northeast of the County (included in An Foras Forbartha *Inventory of Outstanding Landscapes in Ireland*, 1977) and Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough in the northeast.



*Lough Nabelwy*

Drainage is divided between the two major River catchments of the Shannon to the southwest and the Erne to the northeast.

## Human Influence

- Settlement pattern

The settlement pattern in the area is highly dispersed due to the nature of the topography and its influence on the agricultural practices in the area. Drumlish and Ballinamuck are the only settlements in the area, with the main concentration of development centred on these villages.



Drumlish has seen a substantial level of development over the period of the previous two Development Plan periods relative to its size with a number of recently added housing developments situated within the development boundary.

Ballinamuck has also experienced a level of housing development in recent times but at a much lesser rate to that of Drumlish.

- Transport and Communications

The road pattern throughout the area is relatively sparse with an emphasis on north-south communication.

The undulating drumlin nature of the topography of the area is unattractive to mobile telephony infrastructure and other masts/antennae support structures, these preferring the higher ground of the adjacent areas, while retaining strong intervisibility from this area.

- Agriculture

Agriculture tends to be extensive and part-time in nature, given the limited capacity of the soils in the area. Farms tend to remain fragmented, which reinforces and perpetuates the patterns of small, tightly packed fields and highly dispersed settlement.

*Pylons, Farmullagh*



- Industry and services

Industrial development in the area is limited given the lack of concentrated settlement and the poor road network.

In common with the majority of rural areas throughout the Country, utility poles and overhead wiring line the roadsides and traverse fields. Two sets of 110 kV electricity lines and their associated pylons enter the County at Farmullagh and Corglass and create a

striking landscape impact.

Coarse fishing and angling on the numerous lakes is an important element of the tourist industry in the area.

- History, Archaeology and Culture

Known Archaeology in the area is comparatively sparse, with the exception of the islands and shores of Loughs Gowna and Kinale and in the vicinity of Cloonagh and Mullinlaghta to the east of the area. The Black Pig's Dyke, an important linear earthwork, commences at Dring on the southern shores of Lough Gowna and runs down toward Lough Kinale.

The 1798 battlefield and associated sites and monuments are significant culturally important items and are located at and in the vicinity of Ballinamuck.

- Recreation and Amenity

The potential for recreational and amenity development in the area is high, given the lakeshore frontage that exists for walking, angling and swimming. The local community has established a swimming pool at Annagh Lough.

## Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of much of this landscape can be classified as LOW to MEDIUM with some HIGH sensitivity in the vicinity of the lakes and designated scenic routes

- Threats
  - Loss of inherent character due to altered landscape management practices arising as a result of EU agricultural policy reforms/further decline in agriculture
  - Removal of existing network of hedgerows and boundaries distinctive to the area through farm fragmentation/road frontage and ribbon development
  - Loss of integrity of important historical sites and cultural heritage, such as 1798 battlefield, due to insensitive or poorly located development
  - Agricultural activity and residential development in the vicinity of the lakes threatens water quality and fish stocks
  - Unsympathetic residential or amenity development at lakeshores or within their visual areas.
  
- Opportunities
  - Dense field patterns and substantial boundaries provide an enclosed landscape that can accommodate appropriately sited development without major landscape change
  - Opening up of access to lakeshores for amenity purposes
  
- Policy Responses



- Support appropriate development in areas of population decline
- Encourage setting back of dwellings into fields retaining existing plot size and boundary treatment
- Permit hedgerow removal only where necessary for road safety and, where removal is required, encourage replacement with native hedgerow species
- Encourage access to lakes and watercourses and development of tourist accommodation within or in the

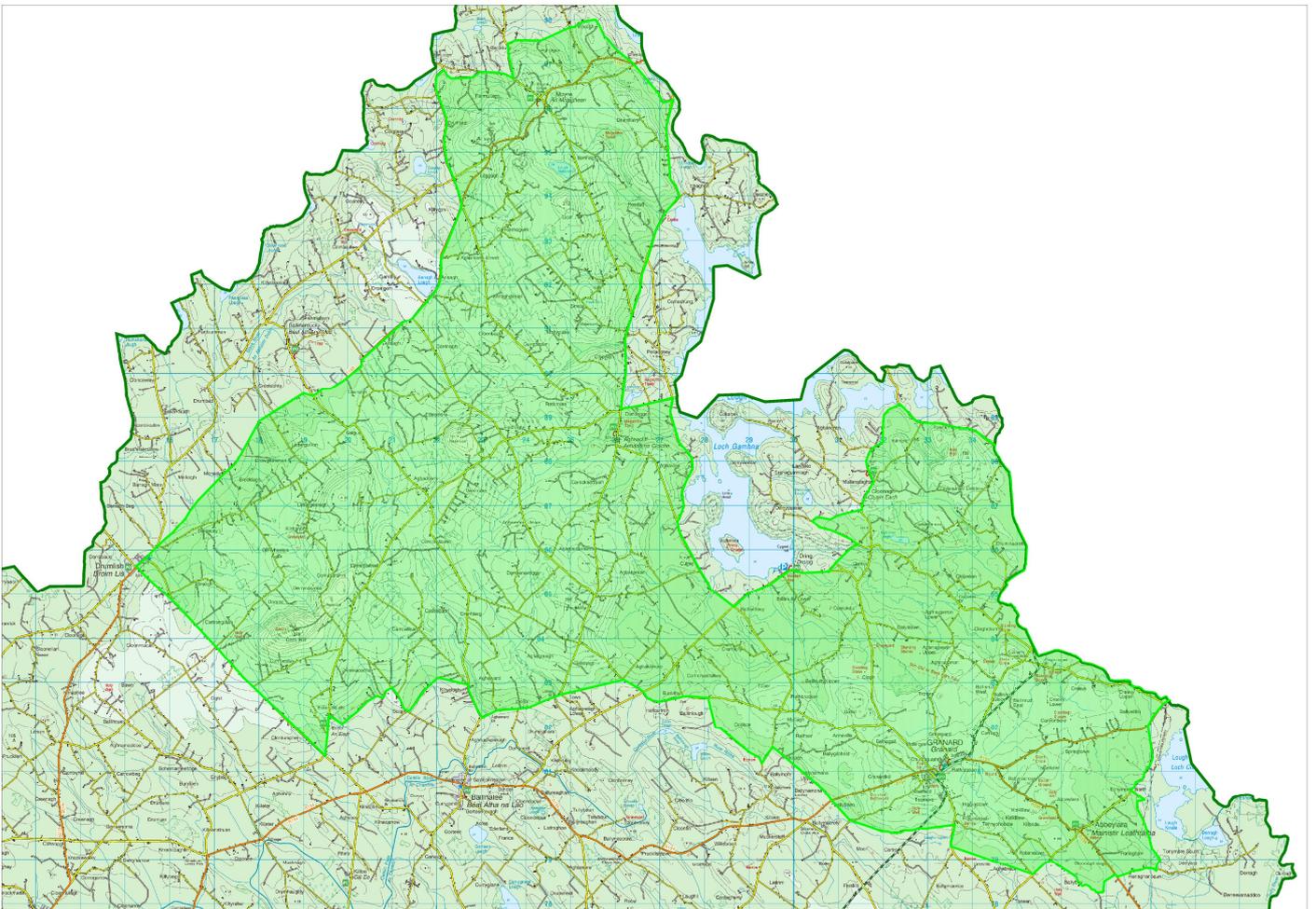
vicinity of settlements, while monitoring amenity development /restricting access in environmentally sensitive locations.

- Restrict housing on lakeshores and within their visual areas.

## Landscape Unit 2 – Northern Upland

### Location and Physical Characteristics

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



Many of the important views listed in the County Development Plan are located in this landscape unit.

- Landcover

Forestry is well established in the area with large coniferous and mixed forestry tracts at Corn Hill, Edenmore and Crott, with smaller pockets scattered throughout the area.



Boggy areas predominate to the western boundary in the lower reaches of the river valleys where drainage becomes sluggish and a transition zone is formed between Landscape units 1 and 2.

- Topography

The majority of this unit lies above the 100m contour line to the north of the County and contains Corn Hill, Edenmore and Crott.

Visible from a significant distance, given the flat nature of the surrounding Midland and Border Counties, the highest point is 278m at Corn Hill. There is high intervisibility between this area and other isolated upland areas such as Ardagh Mountain in the south of the County, the Hill of Uisneach in Westmeath and Sliabh Bán in County Roscommon.

- Geology and Soils

Predominantly Gley Soils, much of which is in typical drumlin formation.



- Drainage patterns

Drainage in the northern section of the unit is dominated by the Lough Gowna Lake complex, which falls under the catchment of the River Erne. The southern portion is drained towards the Shannon via the Camlin and Inny Rivers and their tributaries.

#### Human Influence

- Settlement pattern

The main settlements within this unit are Granard, supported by the villages of Abbeylara, Moyne, Legga, Bunlahy and Aughnacliffe.

While there has been significant activity in terms of planning applications in Granard and environs recently, few of these have been translated into actual development.

Abbeylara, a short distance to the southeast of Granard has also seen significant growth over recent times.

The village of Aughnacliffe (overleaf) and its environs enjoys views over Lough Leebeen and Lough Gowna, a possible factor in the number of development proposals in the area - over 100 dwellings have been granted in the village over the previous two Development Plan periods, a portion of which have been developed. Many of these new developments are highly visible due to the steeply undulating nature of the topography of the village, which provides enclosure to and otherwise linear and ribbon-like settlement pattern.



Moyne and Legga are located to the north of the County near the Cavan border off the R198 regional route, while Bunlahy is located to the south of the area in the vicinity of Ballinalee. These settlements were designated due to their existing level of service provision and/or facilities, such as church, school, and crèche, playing pitches etc., which provide natural congregation areas. Development has yet to become established to any significant degree in these settlements.

Rural housing in the area follows the dense pattern of extensive agriculture and the complex road network, tending to be highly dispersed with some local concentrations.

- Transport and Communications

The area is served by an extensive county road network, which is heavily influenced by the elevated topography and associated drainage patterns. Many of these roads are little more than laneways through the hills and valleys and are substandard in width and alignment.

The height of Corn Hill in relation to the surrounding Midland topography has made it an attractive site for the establishment of communications masts, which remain a substantial landscape feature.

A portion of the now disused Cavan railway lies to the east of Abbeylara.

- Agriculture

Agriculture in this area tends to be extensive, given the poor soil, drainage and access characteristics, and results in a similar but somewhat less enclosed field pattern than Landscape Unit 1. This more open feeling in the landscape may also be attributed to the elevated nature of the topography.



- Industry and services

Industrial development in the area is limited, with the exception of the Granard area, where the Keirnan Feed factory dominates the landscape for a substantial distance on the approach from Ballinalee. Other industrial developments, including Pat the Baker, are predominantly located within the town where their scale is contained and their landscape influence is minimal.



The Roadstone Quarry at Moyne (left) exerts a considerable landscape influence over Lough Naback, however, this serves to lessen the influence of the pylons and associated 110kv overhead wiring traversing the unit from east to west at this point.

- History, Archaeology and Culture

This landscape area has a particularly high concentration of archaeological heritage, most notably to the eastern side of the unit where the megalithic tombs at Aughnacliffe, the Black Pig's Dyke running from Dring to Lough Kinale, the Abbey at Abbeylara and the old town at Granardkille are substantial landscape features with important national heritage and mythological associations.

Holy wells are important cultural landscape features and are scattered throughout the eastern section of the unit.

- Recreation and Amenity

Mainly confined to sports grounds and GAA pitches.

### Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of much of this landscape can be classified as MEDIUM to HIGH

- Threats
  - Potential future development of large-scale utility infrastructure in the upland areas
  - Encroachment of forestry onto important upland slopes and interference with designated scenic views
  - Potential loss of material and/or integrity of setting of archaeological features and artefacts
  - Potential loss of character of existing towns and villages
  - Further loss of population in Granard creating settlement pressure in surrounding rural area and historic landscape
  - Encroachment on protected views by dwelling units.
- Opportunities
  - Towns and villages throughout the unit are capable of accommodating substantial additional development to remove pressure from sensitive areas
  - Potential for further tourism related development, particularly in Granard

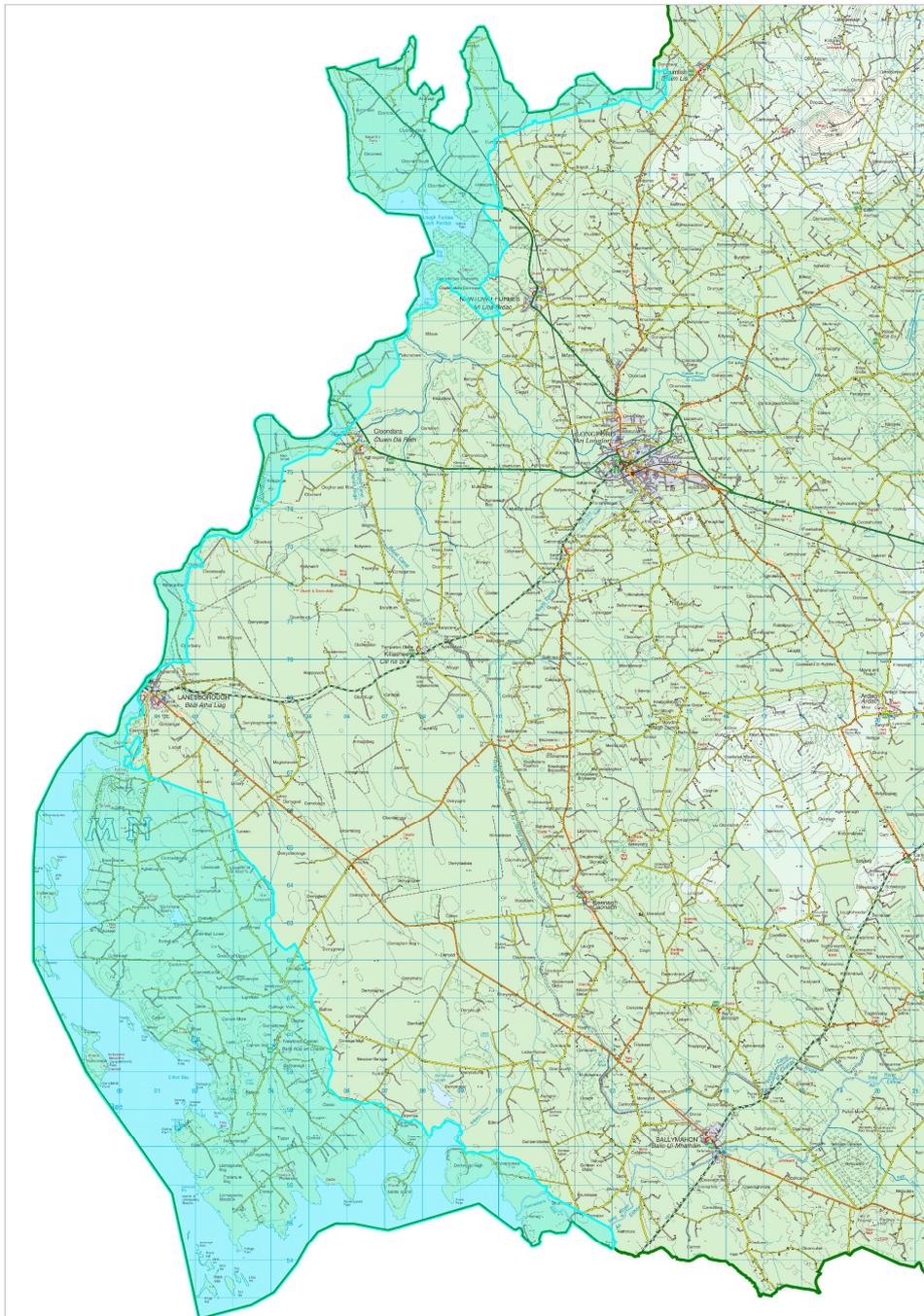
## Policy Responses

- The development of coherent countywide framework for large-scale utility infrastructure including identification and designation of permitted and restricted areas.
- The concentration of heritage artefacts and features in the eastern section of this unit may warrant the designation of a specific historic landscape to ensure heightened public awareness and their continued protection.
- Facilitate co-ordination between Coillte/Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine and natural Resources forestry strategies and development Plan Policy
- Develop identity and character in new developments in towns and villages through the application of area specific design criteria laid out in design guide.
- Protect views and prospects.

## Landscape Unit 3 – Shannon Basin/Lough Ree

### Location and Physical Characteristics

This unit is located along the western boundary of the County forming the border with Counties Leitrim, Roscommon and Westmeath and taking in the Rivers Shannon, Inny and Rinn and Lough Forbes and Lough Ree.



- Landcover

This unit has large amounts of water cover with inland marshes, bogland and tracts of deciduous forestry in the northern section around Lough Forbes. Land cover becomes less diverse travelling south of Lanesboro on the western shores of Lough Ree, with poorly drained agricultural land forming the majority of the landcover in the area.

Relatively small and isolated pockets of bog and marshland create important habitats at Fortwilliam Turlough, Commons North and Portanure, while the Portanure Pine Woods are an important stand of trees on the shores of the lake.

- Topography

Lough Ree is interspersed with several small, uninhabited islands and the predominantly flat landscape provides for panoramic vistas across the lake at numerous locations.

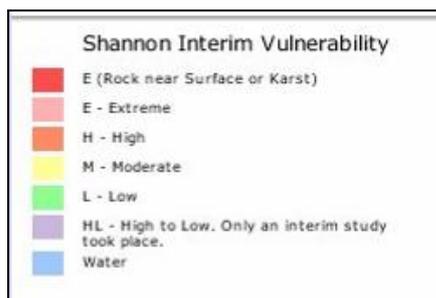
Small hills such as those at Newtowncashel, Cullentra and Rathcline (none of which break the 90m contour line) appear much larger in this context and act as punctuation marks in otherwise homogenous topography.

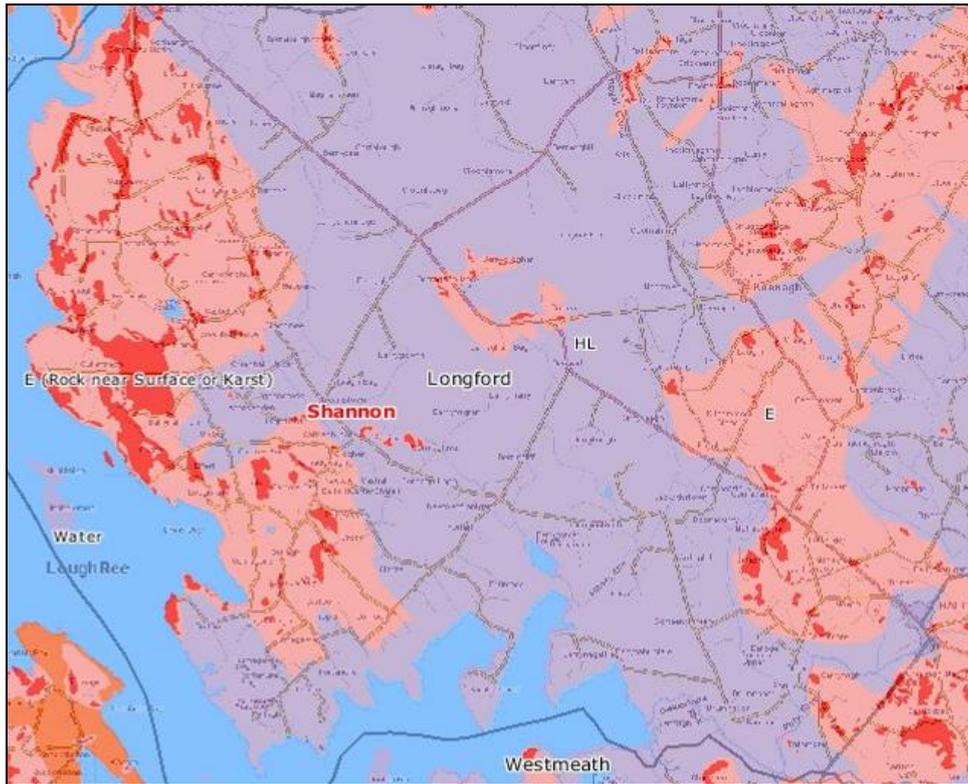
The area around Lough Forbes is relatively inaccessible and visibility limited due to extensive afforestation.

- Geology

Much of the geology in the area to the south of Lanesboro is classified as a regionally important aquifer.

The Geological survey of Ireland has classified this area as highly to extremely vulnerable by the Geological survey of Ireland (GSI - see map).





- Drainage patterns

The River Shannon enters the northwestern fringe of the County south of Rooskey, where it is joined by the Rinn River in Lough Forbes. Views of the watercourse are limited in this northern section due to a combination of local topographical and landcover characteristics.

The Shannon continues towards Clondra where it is joined by the Camlin River and on towards Lanesboro where it broadens out into Lough Ree. This area is particularly susceptible to flooding.

To the south of the County, the Inny enters Lough Ree via the Owenacharra River.

### Human Influence

- Settlement pattern

The only significant settlement in the unit is Newtowncashel, a small village located in an elevated position commanding extensive views over the lake. The area has witnessed relatively low levels of development in recent times.

This lack of a defined urban or village structure means that the area is under particular pressure for once-off rural settlement, which is generally dispersed throughout the area, although to a lesser extent than the north of the County.

Some areas of concentrated ribbon development have occurred in the vicinity of adjacent settlements, such as Fisherstown at Clondra and along the Rathcline Road south of Lanesboro.

- Transport and Communications

The area is traversed to the north by three of the four national routes that run through the County, the N4 north of Newtownforbes, the N5 at Clondra and the N63 at Lanesboro. The remainder of the road network is relatively sparse except for the southern section and consists of third and fourth-class county roads and supporting networks of lanes and boreens.

- Agriculture

Agriculture in the area is, in a similar vein to the majority of the County, extensive in nature. The requirements of the nitrates regulations in terms of effluent storage and the structures required to facilitate these standards, is likely to have significant landscape impact over the coming years.

- Industry and Services

Industry and services are limited in the area given the highly dispersed nature of the settlement, however, those that exist have considerable visual impact. These include:

- County Council Water treatment Plant – Lough Forbes
- Former denim factory (Burlington) at Fisherstown
- Power station at Lanesboro



The former denim factory at Fisherstown is an immense structure (in the region of 29,000m<sup>2</sup>) the impact of which is reduced given its isolated position, single storey nature and the predominantly flat landscape in which it is situated. The factory is currently

occupied by a timber-frame dwelling distribution company.

- History, Archaeology and Culture

Castleforbes Demesne is a private estate located to the north of the unit within extensive woodlands.

Extensive early Christian remains are located in the south of the unit and on Saints Island and Inchcleraun.

Waterways corridor study has identified the potential for the discovery of underwater archaeology which is not addressed at present in the County development Plan.

- Recreation and Amenity

Access to and awareness of water courses and water bodies tends to be restricted in this area, given the limited road network in the vicinity and landcover barriers such as forestry and wetlands.

Parking and amenity areas have been established at Loughfarm, Bleanavoher and Barley Harbour.

An extensive amenity area has been developed south of Lanesboro, which is extensively used as a walking route by locals and has been zoned for further amenity related uses under the Lanesboro Local Area Plan.

## Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscapes in this unit range from MEDIUM - along the southeastern border of the unit - to HIGH sensitivity - along the shores of the lake, islands, the riverbanks, and in the vicinity of the Aquifer.

- Threats

- Pollution of ground and surface water sources from residential or intensive agricultural development
- Inappropriate development and privatisation of lakeshores and riverbanks

- Road network insufficient to cater for large numbers of visitors associated with tourism development
  - Loss of important archaeological and architectural features and/or their setting, underwater and lakeside archaeology in particular
  - Proliferation of invasive species – Japanese knotweed, rhododendron, zebra mussel – threatens biodiversity and ecosystem functioning
- Opportunities
    - Development of Amenity areas along lakeshore
    - Development of accommodation base within existing village
    - Strong community involvement in village development (Tidy Towns)

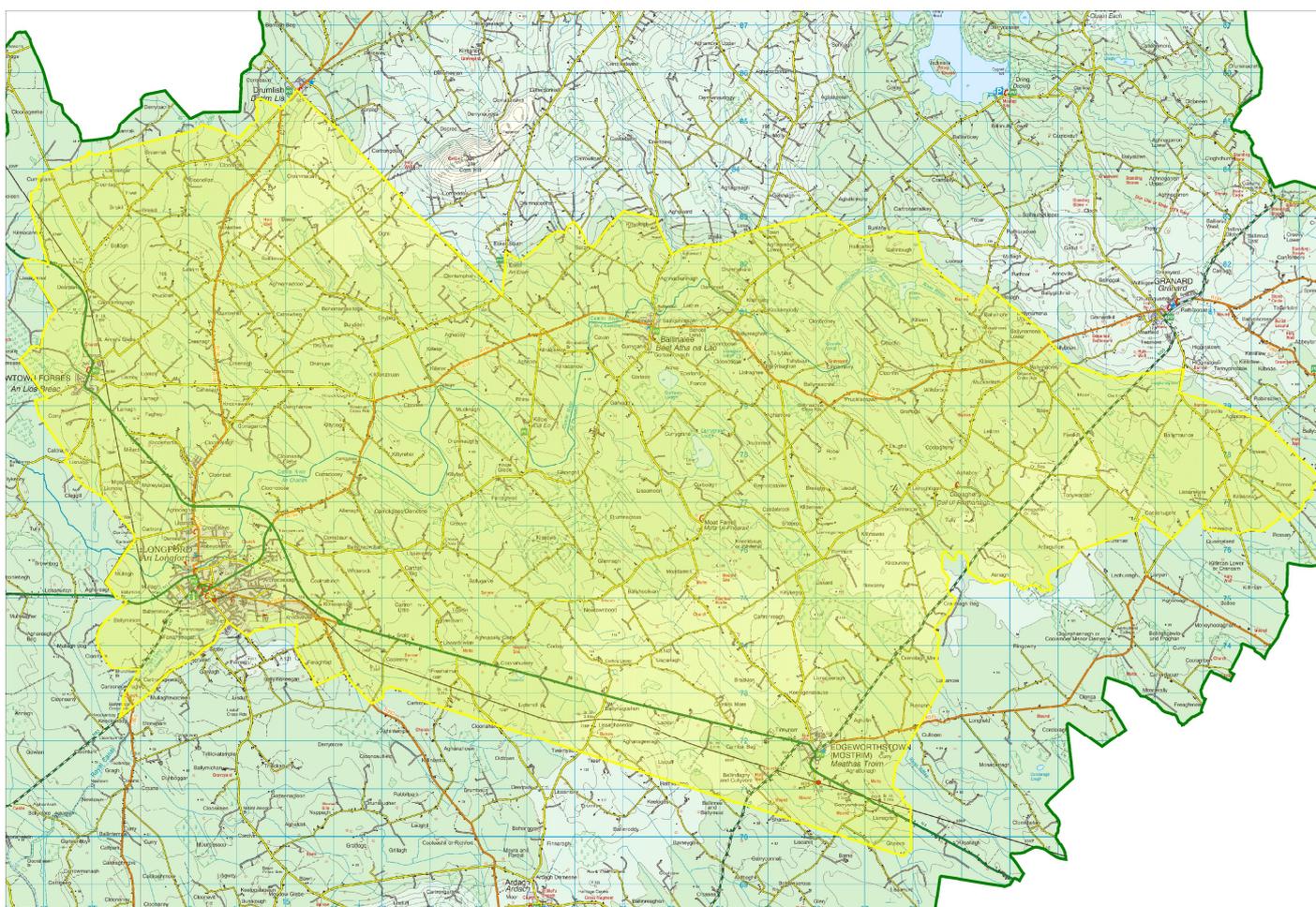
### Policy Responses

- Restrict development in the vicinity of the lakes and maintain aquifer protection zone for 1km around boreholes at Carrowroe
- Effluent treatment systems in the vicinity of the lake to have nitrogen and phosphorous cleansing capabilities
- Prepare Village policy statement for Newtowncashel to include provision for the protection of scenic route
- Promote appropriate schemes for the control/eradication of invasive species

## Landscape Unit 4 – Central Corridor

### Location and Characteristics

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



- Landcover

As with the rest of the County, the main landcover constituent in this unit consists of agricultural pastures. The urban fabric of Longford Town, Edgeworthstown and Newtownforbes also cover extensive areas.

Deciduous and mixed forestry are present in pockets throughout the centre of the unit, notably at Carrickglass and Farraghroe.

- Topography

The land in this unit is relatively flat and low-lying, rarely breaking the 100-metre contour line, meaning that trees, field boundaries, buildings and other features generally restrict views over any significant distance.

This is contrasted with areas of distinct demesne type landscapes such as at Moatfarrell/Corbeagh.



*View across agricultural landscape at Corbeagh*

- Geology

Aquifer

- Drainage patterns

Drainage is toward the Shannon via a complex network of Rivers and Streams accessing the Camlin River, which is subject to seasonal flooding.

Human Influence

- Settlement pattern

The urban network is strongest in this area of the County, with a defined hierarchical system dominated by the settlements of Longford, Edgeworthstown and Newtownforbes, which lie along the main transport routes. Edgeworthstown and Longford exhibit a certain amount of commuter traffic to the Dublin area, but not yet to an economically significant degree.

Ballinalee is located to the northern portion of the unit and has experienced some development in recent times, consolidating the existing settlement within its defined envelope.

A Local Area Plan was prepared for Carrickglass in 2004, adding this area to the list of designated settlements in the County. There is little visibility into the remaining demesne, which is largely contained by mixed tree planting which forms a NHA due to its importance as a habitat. Permission has been granted for over 30 housing units, a retirement village, a hotel, golf course and the refurbishment of the protected manor house. The remaining elements outside of the main demesne walls, particularly the walled garden on the western side of the regional route, and the gates and lodges in the main demesne walls create notable landscape features and a particular atmosphere in the area.

Smaller designated settlements in the area include Kilnatruan on the R194, Enybegs and Coolarty.

Significant pressure exists for "one-off" housing development along the R198 regional route from Longford to Arva and there is an established ribbon development pattern in place in the Clonbalt/Cloonrollagh/Creenagh area. This pattern is repeated at Kilnashee and Cloonagh further north along this route on the approach to Drumlish.

- Transport and Communications

The road network is at its most dense at this point given the relatively favourable flat topography of the area. All four national routes (N4 – Dublin/Sligo N5- Longford/Castlebar, N55 Athlone/Cavan, N63-Longford/Roscommon) traverse this Landscape Unit.

The Dublin/Sligo Rail line traverses the County through the Central Corridor.

Almost one-third of the planning applications for large-scale communications infrastructure in the County have been made in this area.

- Agriculture

Agriculture in this area is well developed in comparison to much of the County, with a wide range of agricultural activity, from large-scale dairying activity to smaller scale extensive uses, particularly to the west of the area.

- Industry and Services

The main industrial centre of the County is centred at Longford Town, with major installations at Lisnamuck/Templemichael, Townsparks, Ballymacormack and the Athlone Road.

Edgeworthstown has two large factories, C&D Pet foods and Paul & Vincent.

- History, Archaeology and Culture

A wide range of architectural and cultural heritage is present in this area, with the important occupied demesnes of Castleforbes and Carrickglass. Former settlements have left their mark on the landscape at Farraghroe, Corbeagh and Moatfarrell.

- Recreation and Amenity

A wide range of recreational facilities are available at Longford Town, including leisure centres and swimming pools, with planning permission granted for additional facilities in the vicinity and at Carrickglass and Edgeworthstown.

The Mall sports complex and walkway through Longford is an important and widely used amenity, augmented by Sli na Sláinte (around Longford bypass) and proposed for further links as part of the Longford Town Development Plan.

The Camlin River is a slow moving river. It holds good stocks of bream, roach and hybrids with some tench to 5lbs. Fishing is into depths of about 5ft to 10ft in normal conditions. There are some good stretches, but can be difficult to find for first time visiting anglers. Anglers can have good sport here particularly during the early summer months. The Camlin River is part of the Midland Fisheries Group of Shannon Regional Fisheries Board managed waters and requires a fishing permit

There are also a number of GAA and soccer pitches within the Unit and a golf course in Longford Town.

## Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscapes in this unit is generally LOW. Potential areas of MEDIUM to HIGH sensitivity exist in the vicinity of protected woodlands, riverbanks and in the vicinity of the Aquifer.

- Threats
  - Pollution of Groundwater sources in the vicinity of the aquifer to the north of Longford Town
  - Loss/fragmentation of important agricultural land/tree stands and woodlands
  - Continued ribbon development in pressure areas
  
- Opportunities
  - High capacity for absorption of additional development
  - Existing strong urban network upon which settlement strategy can be based

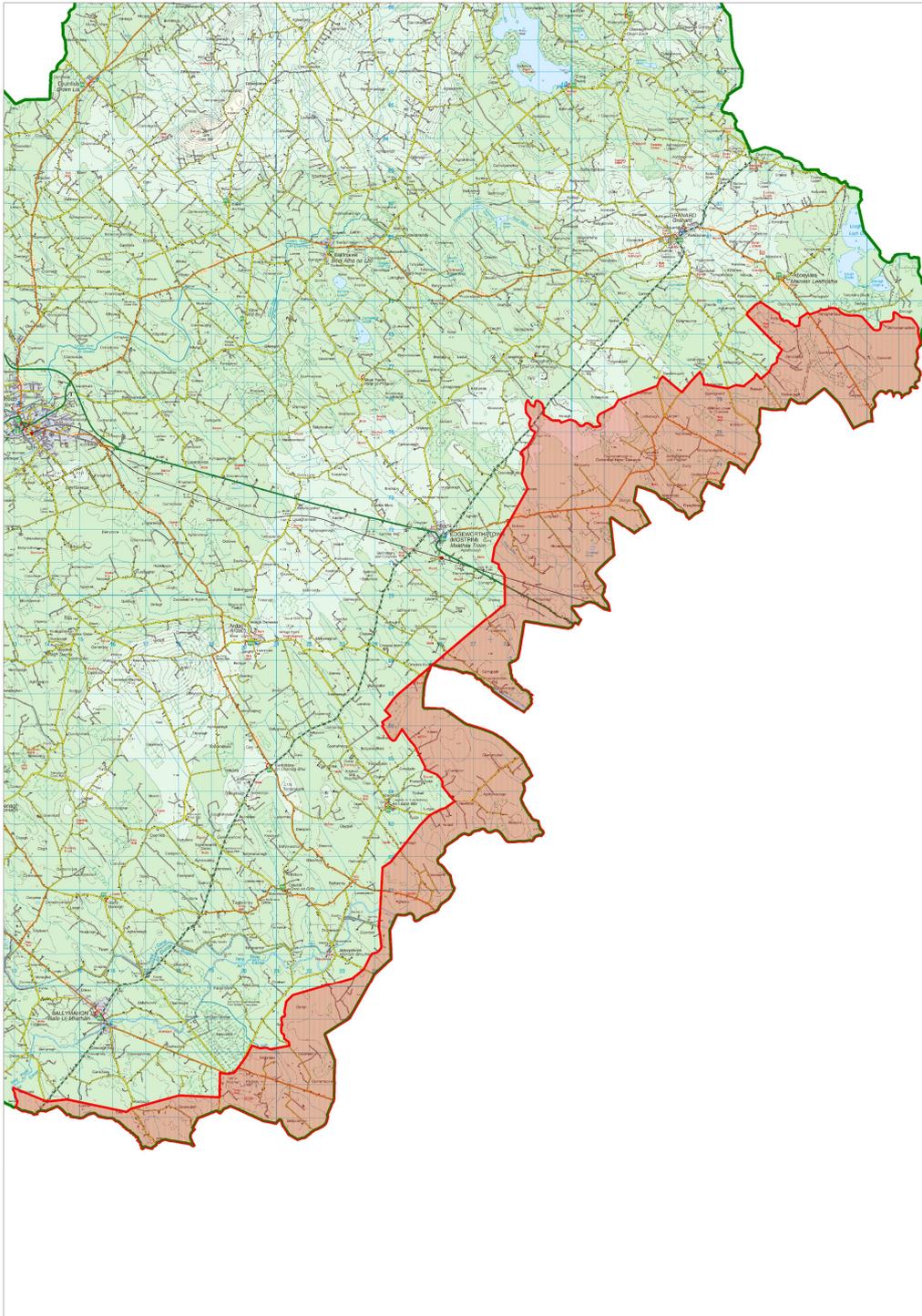
### Policy Responses

- Restriction of development in pressure areas
- Relaxed restrictions in areas of high capacity
- Groundwater protection scheme to be installed around potential groundwater supplies
- Important areas of agricultural land to be identified and protected from further fragmentation
- Encourage use of existing large-scale communications infrastructure for future proposed developments

## Landscape Unit 5 – Inny Basin

### Location and Characteristics

This area is located to the east of the County and forms the border with County Westmeath.



- Landcover

The landcover in this area is dominated by peatlands and mixed woodlands interspersed with pastures of varying quality.

- Topography

The area maintains a relatively flat and level topography.

- Drainage patterns

The Inny River makes its way from Lough Kinale in Unit 1 and follows the County Boundary for a time before veering south into County Westmeath and Lough Derravarragh. The River re-enters County Longford east of Legan and continues west toward Ballymahon and onto Lough Ree.

The Inny dominates the drainage pattern of the area. Flows tend to be sluggish given the nature of the landcover and topography. There is one seasonal lake to the north of the region, however visibility of the lake and the River from the public road is poor and awareness of these features low, with the possible exceptions of locals and seasoned anglers.

## Human Influence

The difficult nature of the terrain has meant that human influence on the landscape of the area has been limited in comparison to other units.

- Settlement pattern

There are two designated settlements in this unit, one in the south at Forgney and the other in the North at Lisryan. Settlement is greatest in the areas outlying Legan and Edgeworthstown, while Lisryan in particular has experienced some growth in recent times.

- Transport and Communications

The area is roughly bisected between north and south by the N4 and the Dublin-Sligo rail line running parallel. The remainder of the road network in the area is sparse, composed mainly of portions of County roads and small laneways.

- Agriculture

Agriculture in the area appears well developed in reclaimed areas

- Industry and Services

There are few industries in the area given the limited road network and unstructured settlement pattern.

Services are generally confined to a local level, such as primary schools, shop, GAA pitch etc. and these facilities are generally located within the two settlements of Forgney and Lisryan.

- History, Archaeology and Culture

Coolamber Manor

Goldsmith – Forgney Church, Hill, Pallas

- Recreation and Amenity

Mainly confined to local GAA pitches.

### Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscapes in this unit are generally LOW. Potential areas of MEDIUM to HIGH sensitivity exist in the vicinity of protected woodlands, riverbanks.

- Threats

- Continued depopulation and associated loss of landscape management

- Opportunities

- Existing designated settlements in the area provide potential for population growth

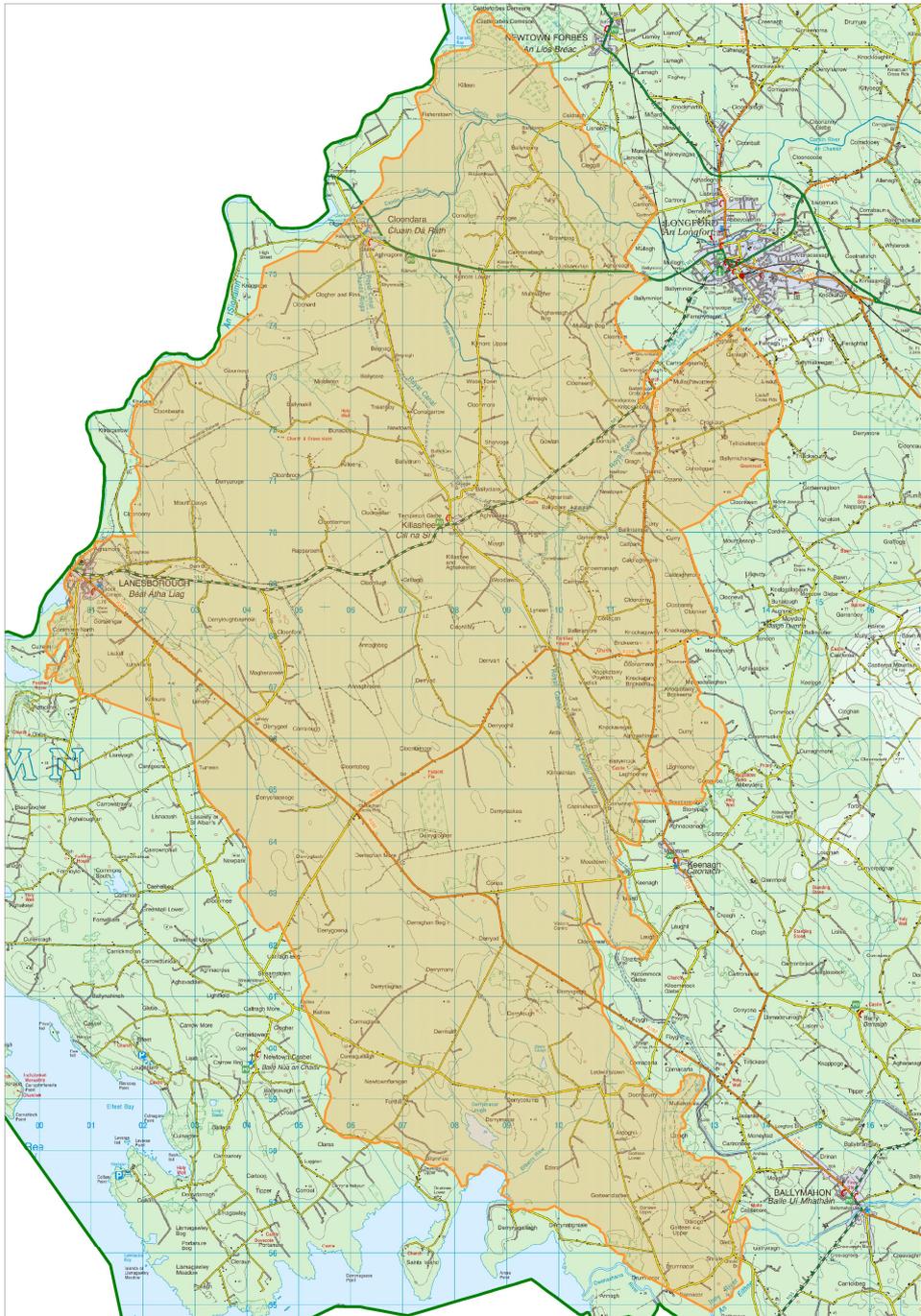
### Policy Responses

- Target growth to existing settlements
- Encourage provision of facilities to strengthen settlements
- Facilitate rural housing where appropriate and in accordance with normal planning criteria

## Landscape Unit 6 – Peatlands

### Location and Characteristics

This area is located in the west of the County and includes the settlements of Lanesboro and Clondra and extends towards Ballymahon in the south.



- Landcover

Located in the western half of the County, this area is dominated by extensive tracts of raised bog interspersed with mixed forestry and areas of scrubby vegetation.

- Topography

The topography is notably flat, with the majority of the land lying below the 50m contour line. This, when combined with the limited vegetation cover and extensive peat land cover mean that views are available across wide areas throughout the unit.

- Drainage patterns

Drainage patterns in the area are heavily influenced by artificial means employed to retain water levels and prevent inundation of commercial peatlands. The Shannon system is the main natural influence, draining the area via the Camlin, Fallan and Bilberry rivers. Seasonal flooding persists in the northern sector, particularly in the vicinity of the Camlin River.

## Human Influence

- Settlement pattern

The settlement pattern in this unit tends to be less dispersed and more focussed into the designated towns and villages than other areas, given the difficult nature of the terrain.

The Main settlement in the area is Lanesboro, for which a Local Area Plan has been prepared. Lanesboro is located on the River Shannon at the northern end of Lough Ree and at the junction of the N63 to Roscommon and R392 to Mullingar. Historically an important fording point of the Shannon, Lanesboro declined in strategic importance with the development of Athlone to the south. The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midlands have recognised this strategic location and role, designating Lanesboro as a local Service town in the urban hierarchy of the region, to provide local level retailing, social and leisure facilities.

Clondra is a small settlement located on the Royal Canal and at the confluence of the Camlin and Shannon Rivers, which is important in terms of its character, scenic quality and tourism potential. Local community interest in the development of the village is high.

Kilashee is a small settlement located on the N63 that has seen substantial residential planning applications under the Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme.

Derraghan consists of a housing estate built by Board na Mona for its workers. Set in the centre of commercial peatlands, the area is distinctive in settlement and landscape terms, given its design, layout and density in relation to its remote location, there has been little development in the vicinity in recent years. The installation of traffic calming signage along the R392 creates an urban effect along an otherwise remote rural setting.

One off development in the area tends to be confined to specific pressure areas, for example, Kilmore/Cloonmore and Tullyvrane/Lehery outside Lanesboro.

- Transport and Communications

The road network, particularly in the southern section, has been curtailed by the hostile landscape conditions, however communication lines become more complex in the vicinity of Longford and the Royal Canal to the north.

The road pattern around Lanesboro, particularly the R392 that travels east to Ballymahon, is notable due to its straightness and lack of consideration for the topographical features that it traverses. This is a former toll road, constructed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and connecting Dublin to the main areas of industrial activity in the Country, at which time, Lanesboro marked the western boundary. The straight road and predominantly flat topography create a distinct and unique landscape experience while travelling across the unit.

The remains of an ancient toher road, constructed of timber, can be seen at Corlea Bog.

The Royal Canal is an important landscape feature, not only due to its heritage associations but also its wider influence on the landscape including features that were built to support it, such as the bridges, towpaths, lock keepers cottages and lock gates. Works are ongoing on the opening up of the canal, which will have a considerable impact on how the landscape is perceived throughout the area.

The area is well served by mobile and broadband wireless communications.

- Agriculture

Agricultural potential in the area is limited given the nature of the dominant landcover, however, some reclaimed sections of land support large pastoral farming enterprises, particularly in the northern sector.

- Industry and Services

The ESB power station at Lanesboro dominates the landscape of the area for a considerable distance, particularly at night time. Much of the industrial development in this unit is planned adjacent to the power station where it is anticipated that the landscape impact will be limited.

- History, Archaeology and Culture

The area has a strong industrial history in terms of the historical harvesting of peat and the transport of the finished product along the Royal Canal. The landscape impacts of this history are manifested in the industrial architecture and archaeology that abounds throughout the area.

The Corlea visitor centre interprets an iron-age bog road built across the boglands to the south of the unit. Bord na Mona preserves the boglands in the vicinity in conjunction with the Department of the Environment

- Recreation and Amenity

Canal/Clondra Harbour

Longford Town football ground

Future use of peatlands

### Landscape Sensitivity

The visual sensitivity of the landscapes in this unit are generally LOW, as their flat nature allows development to be accommodated with minimum screening needed to achieve integration into its surrounds. An exception to this designation is the vicinity of the Royal Canal, where sensitivity is HIGH.

In environmental terms, sensitivity can be generally termed MEDIUM to HIGH due to the limited capacity of the receiving environment to cater for additional effluent loading.

- Threats

- Inappropriate development in the vicinity of the Royal Canal

- Pollution of ground and surface water due to inadequate or malfunctioning effluent treatment systems
- Opportunities
  - Existing and potential recreational and amenity development
  - Ability to accommodate development in appropriate areas

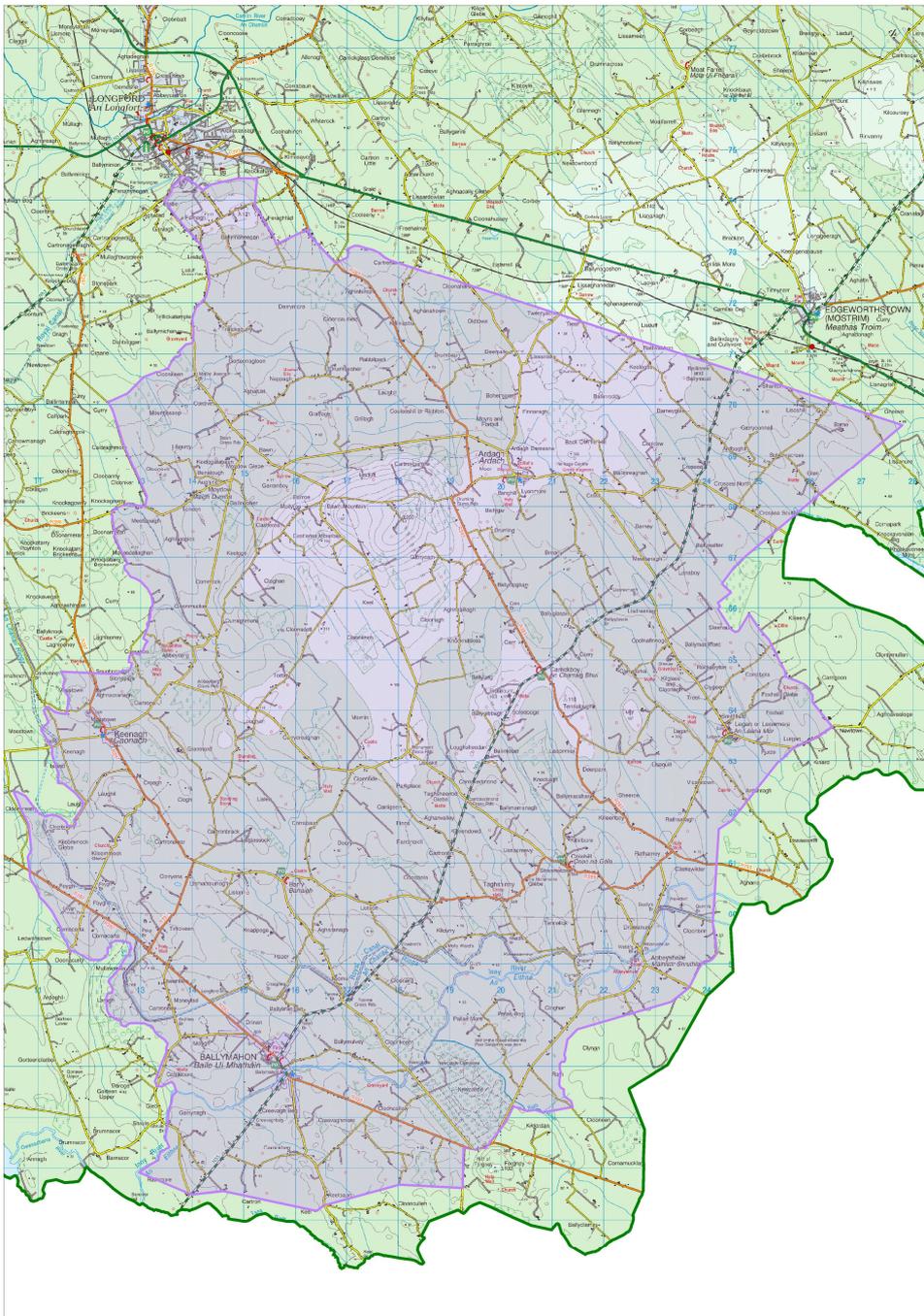
#### Policy Responses

- Identify appropriate areas for development
- Develop guidelines for screening and siting measures to facilitate development

## Landscape Unit 7 – Open Agricultural

### Location and Characteristics

This area is located in the east of the County and contains twelve settlements including, Ballymahon, Ardagh and Keenagh. The unit extends from below the N4 Longford to Mullingar road towards the southern edge of the County.



- Landcover

Located in the southeast of the County, this area contains the most versatile agricultural land in the County and is generally characterised by larger, open fields, interspersed with mature trees. Plantations of deciduous and mixed woodland punctuate the landscape.

- Topography

The northern section of the unit contains the most elevated area, including Farnagh Hill and Ardagh (Bawn) and Castlerea Mountain, all of which contain full and/or intermittent scenic views listed for preservation under the County Development Plan.

The southern and eastern sections of the unit consist mainly of gently undulating pastoral land.

- Drainage patterns

Drainage in the southern and eastern section of the unit is dominated by the River Inny, which is fed by numerous tributary streams and rivers. The northern section drains toward the Camlin River.

## Human Influence

- Settlement pattern

This unit has the most developed urban structure of the County, being served by twelve designated settlements. Settlements tend to be established longer than in other units throughout the County and as, such, generally exhibit a strong character, identity and sense of community.

One-off and ribbon development tends to be more pronounced in the northern section of the unit, tapering off to the south where the more agriculturally productive lands are located.

Ballymahon is the largest of the settlements in this unit, having a population in the region of 830 at the last census. The town has its own unique character, with a wide street and strong horizontal and vertical building lines. Good examples of relatively intact Victorian architecture

line the eastern end of the Main Street, while the centrally located Courthouse, unfortunately in a poor state of repair, occupies a plaza-like position.

Pressure for development in Ballymahon has been steady over the last number of years with over 800 housing units granted within the settlement envelope. It is therefore likely that the population figure has increased substantially since the census.

A significant number of these applications have translated into completed houses, considerably altering the appearance of the town. The most notable change has been at the Inny Bridge, where the old mill has been refurbished and an additional apartment building constructed within a linear parkland setting along the banks of the River.

A substantial townhouse and apartment development has taken place on the approach from Mullingar, which has significantly altered the appearance of the area where linear one-off development dominated.

Moydow is centrally located within the County and is a small settlement with a nucleus of a church and school. Sporadic development has taken place with permission granted for 18 houses in the vicinity.

Keenagh village, located to the western boundary of the unit, is a well-established settlement in a linear formation, located along the R397. The village has witnessed a substantial level of development over recent Development Plan periods relative to its size. Fortunately, most of these developments have managed to retain a sense of village character and identity in terms of their layout and design, relating strongly to the street and, by utilising backland and infill sites, maintaining a pedestrian emphasis to the village. A commensurate increase in the level of social and community facilities available will help to ensure the viability and cohesion of village life in this settlement.

Ardagh is a former estate village located to the northern section of the unit. A consistently high performer in the Tidy Towns Competition, the village has a wealth of architectural heritage, which defines the settlement and creates a unique sense of place. Historically important as an Episcopal seat, the central area of the village remains relatively undeveloped and has an Architectural Conservation Area in place.

Abbeyshrule is a small village located on the Royal Canal and the River Inny. The substantial industrial architecture associated with the Canal, the Abbey, associated graveyard and the flat, pastoral environs create the distinctive ambiance of the settlement. Two housing estates

are situated in the centre of the village both of which respect the scale and character of the settlement in terms of their layout, density and design.

The designated settlement of Ratharney is located nearby, at the junction of the R399 and R393. Centred on the existing shop and petrol pump (now unfortunately closed) permission has been granted for three additional houses.

Barry, Taghshinny and Colehill are small settlements clustered around a central nucleus, such as a post office in the case of Colehill, schools and pubs in Taghshinny and a "street" containing a shop in the case of Barry. Each is well established with distinctive architecture and features in each case.

Carrickboy and Ballycloughan are located to the east of the unit. Ballycloughan lies 2km south of Ardagh on the R393. The settlement consists of recent single-house development in a linear format centred on the parish church. The use of bright colours, distinctive boundary treatments and sculpture give a village feel to what would otherwise appear as standard ribbon development.

Carrickboy is located approximately 1km further south along the R393 at its junction with the N55. Consisting of a garage, former pub and a handful of houses, there is little to perceptually tie development together as a settlement. The nearby school may have a potential role in the creation of an identity for this village.

Legan is a well-established settlement on the eastern border of the County in the parish of Kilglass. Adjacent to the former Foxhall Glebe, with its important architectural and archaeological remains, the village has developed in a linear fashion with a central nucleus where the majority of recent development has taken place. Facilities in the village are well articulated.

- Transport and Communications

The road network in the unit is relatively dense, with the exception of the elevated areas around Ardagh and Castlerea Mountain. The N55 traverses the unit from northeast to southwest, and is served by a network of five regional routes.

The Royal Canal is important as an amenity, a landscape feature and a significant influence on the history, culture, architecture and archaeology of the area. The waterway traverses the southern portion of the unit.

The area contains almost one quarter of the mobile communications infrastructure in the County.

- Agriculture

Agriculture exists mainly in the northern section of this unit.

- Industry and Services

The majority of industry and services are provided within Ballymahon and these include Scientific Games Worldwide Services Ltd, Kepak and Readymix. It is considered that their respective locations within the town have minimal landscape impact.

- History, Archaeology and Culture

This area holds historical and cultural significance with the Irish writer Oliver Goldsmith as he spent time within this area of Longford.

The location of the Royal Canal within this unit also meant that a number of the settlements evolved around the Canal and indeed some of the traditional architecture within this unit is reflective of this.

- Recreation and Amenity

The Royal Canal and River Inny provide important amenity and recreation facilities within the unit. The Inny Kayaking Club which is based within Ballymahon has developed over the years and optimises use of this recreational resource.

Abbeyshrule Airport has developed significant aviation facility within the village of Abbeyshrule and is extremely popular with aviators from both Ireland and the UK.

### Landscape Sensitivity

- Threats

- Inappropriate development within the vicinity of the Royal Canal and River Inny.

- Encroachment of development onto the upland areas with potential interference with designated scenic views.
  - Potential loss of character of existing towns and villages including unsympathetic residential developments in areas of high architectural quality, particularly within the heritage village of Ardagh.
- Opportunities
- Existing and potential recreational and amenity development, particularly with relation to the River Inny and Royal Canal.
  - Existing strong settlement base which has capability to absorb further development.

### Policy Responses

- Fast track the formulation of Local Area Plans/ village policy statements throughout the county to create, preserve and enhance village character.
- Promote the development of adequate community and social facilities in smaller villages to maintain character, identity and pedestrian scale.

## 2.3 Identification of Visual Units

Visual units can be described as areas defined by spatial enclosure and pattern, which are determined, by landform and landcover.

Boundaries of visual units can usually be divided into several or a combination of the following:

- The physical limits of a view or prospect
- The physical limits of a water catchment
- The “gateway” between areas contrasting in their degree of spatial containment

Identification of visual units is a complex process, not least because the visual limits of an area can span several counties.

## 2.4 Identification of Image Units

Image units are generally composed of landscape areas that are dominated by a major focal point, where a visual field results from the association of this part of the landscape with this feature. Obvious examples of image units in the Longford context would include Ardagh Mountain, Corn Hill and the many lakes, rivers and other waterways throughout the county. These features exert a disproportionately large impact on their surroundings by reason of their size; shape, colour and how they interact with adjacent landscape components.

### 3. LANDSCAPE VALUES

Landscape values can be described as the environmental or cultural benefits, including services and functions that can be derived from various landscape attributes.

The following landscape elements are considered to be important within the County.

Feature	Location	Value
Boglands	Begnagh, Clonard, Kilashee, Commons North, Curry Bog.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural
Rivers	Shannon, Inny, Camlin and associated banks and callows	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural
Lakes	Lough Ree, Lough Gowna, Lough Forbes, and other lakes in the County and associated shores and islands.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological
Uplands	Ardagh mountain, Cairn hill	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological
Archaeological sites, artefacts, structures and objects	Mornin and Castlerea castles, Abbeylara, Abbeyshrule, Saints Island, Inchcleraun, Granard Moat, Granardkille.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological
Woodlands	Newtownforbes, Newcastle, Derrycassan, Carriglass, Portanure, Legan.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical.
Architecture	Mill buildings, the Royal Canal and its associated structures, built fabric of towns and villages, churches, courthouses.	Aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious.

In addition, the importance of existing artefacts etc. contained in the SMR and NHAs, SACs, SPAs and ASIs were emphasised and their continued protection underlined.

## 4. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

The sensitivity of a landscape can be described as the measure of its ability to accommodate change or intervention without suffering unacceptable effects to its character and values.

In order to assess sensitivity, it is necessary to evaluate what development, if any, it is possible to locate within any given area without causing negative impact on the landscape character or values of that area.

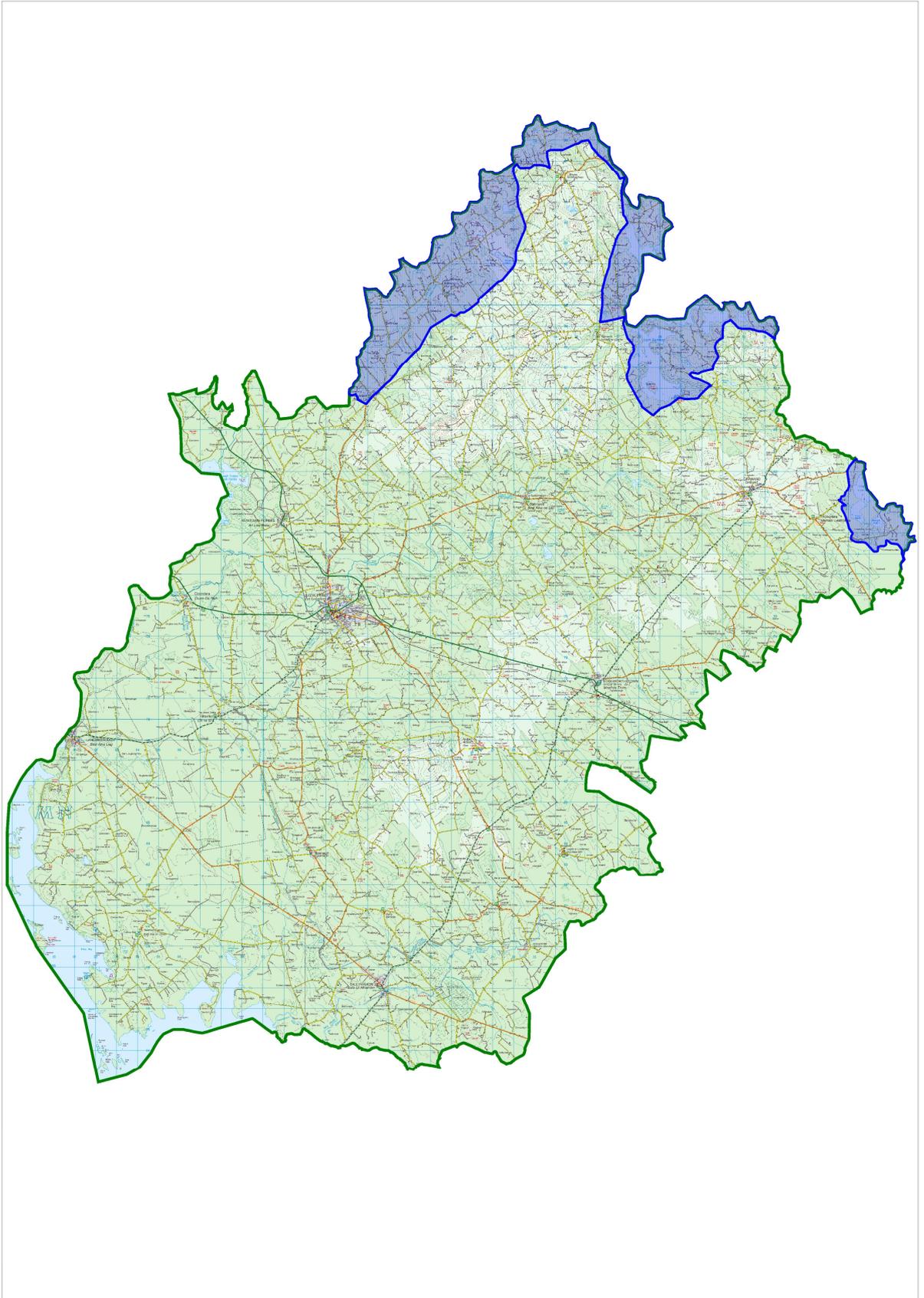
Where it is considered that development can be located within a particular area without giving rise to negative impacts, this landscape can be deemed to be of a low sensitivity.

Conversely, an area where development would seriously damage character or damage/eliminate irreplaceable values associated with a landscape, this landscape can be termed highly sensitive.

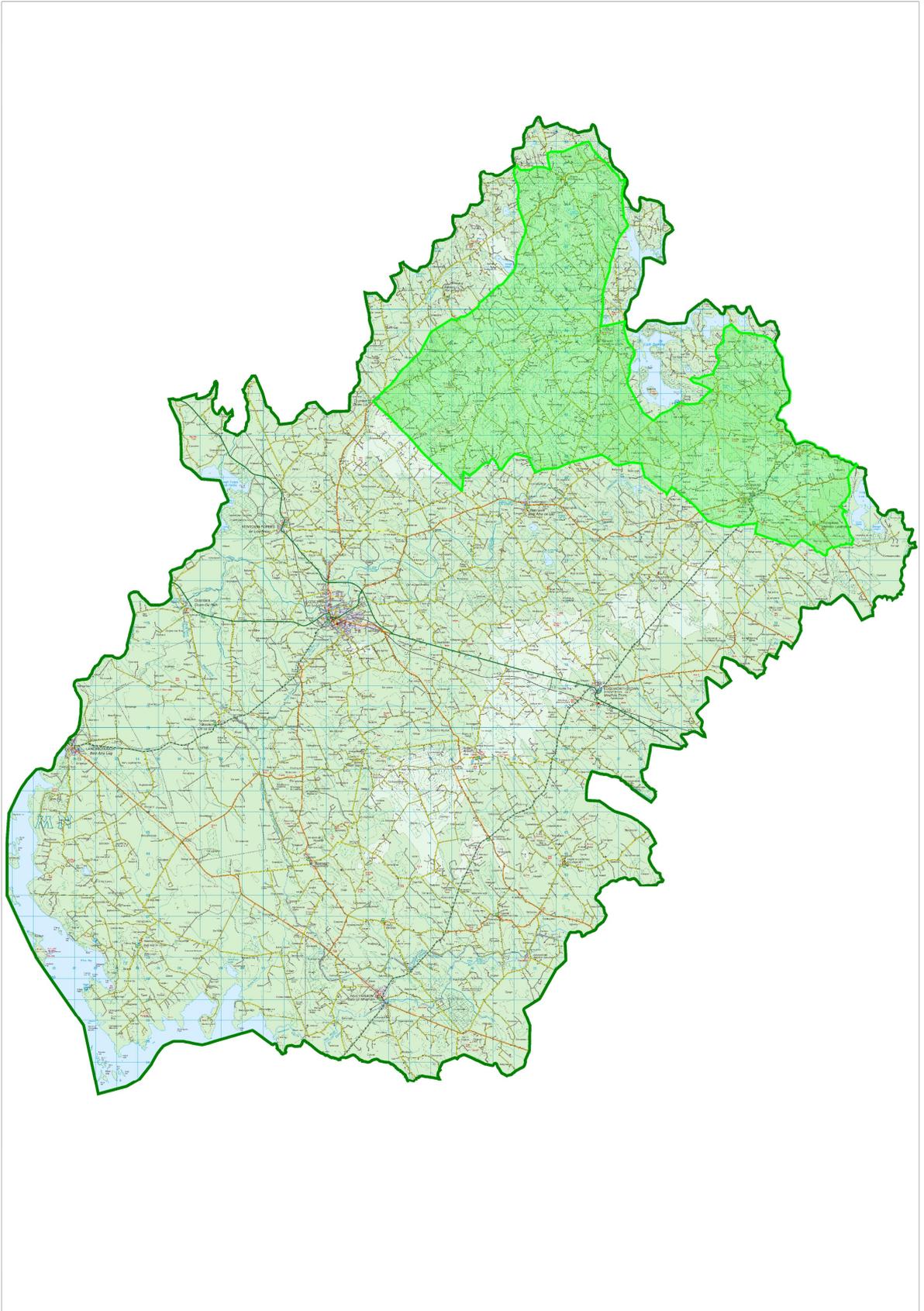
Areas which are considered as sensitive fall into the following categories:

- Areas, structures artefacts, ruins, objects, views and routes identified as important within the County.
- Areas listed as Natural Heritage Areas and/or Special Protected areas at national level and areas included in the European Communities (Conservation of Wildbirds) (Amendment No.2) Regulations, 1996.
- Views listed for protection in the current County Development Plan, 2015-2021.
- Views/tourist designations on published maps of the County
- Recognised areas of literary/cultural importance

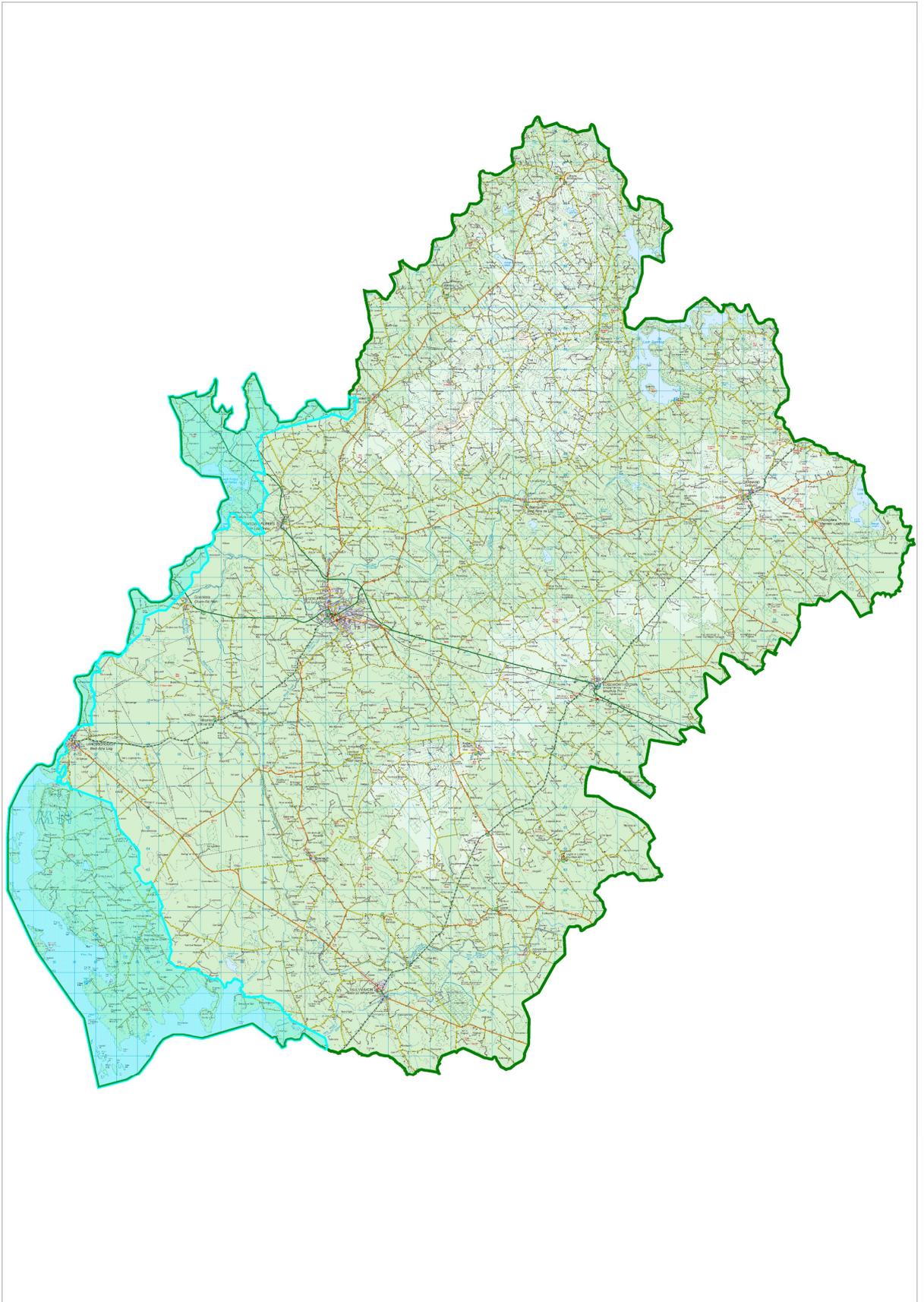
## APPENDIX 1



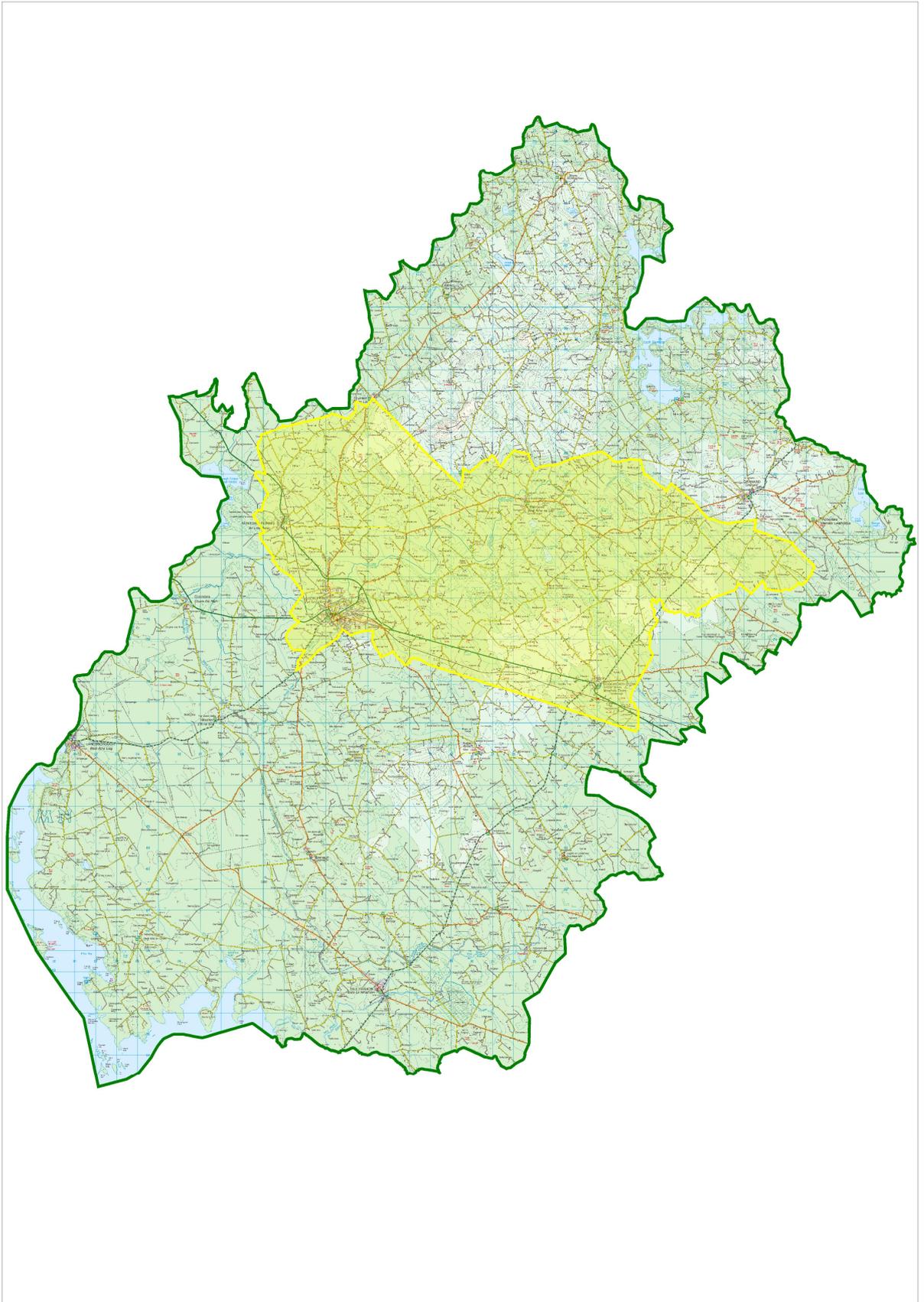
Landscape Unit 1: Northern Drumlin Lakeland



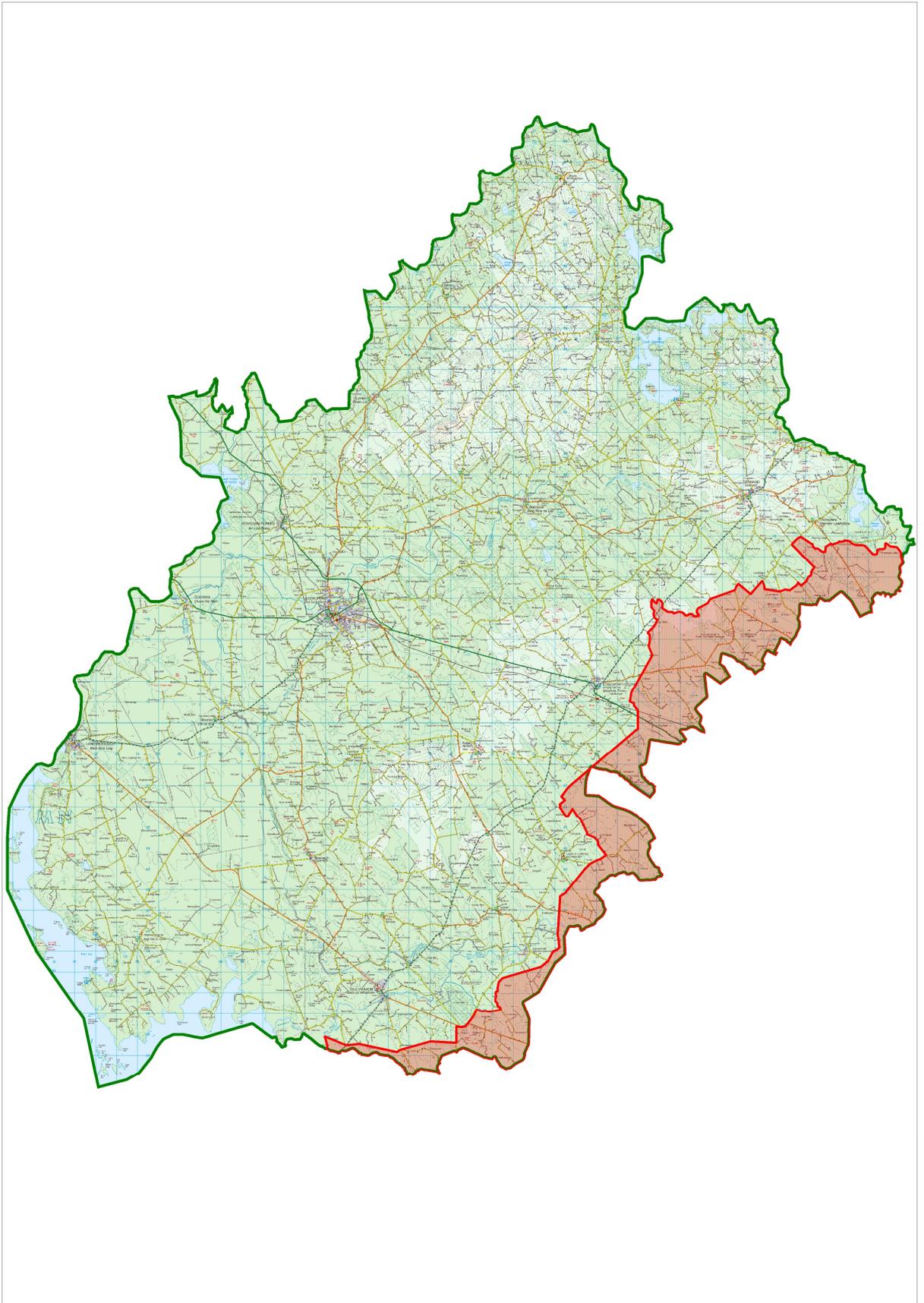
Landscape Unit 2: Northern Upland



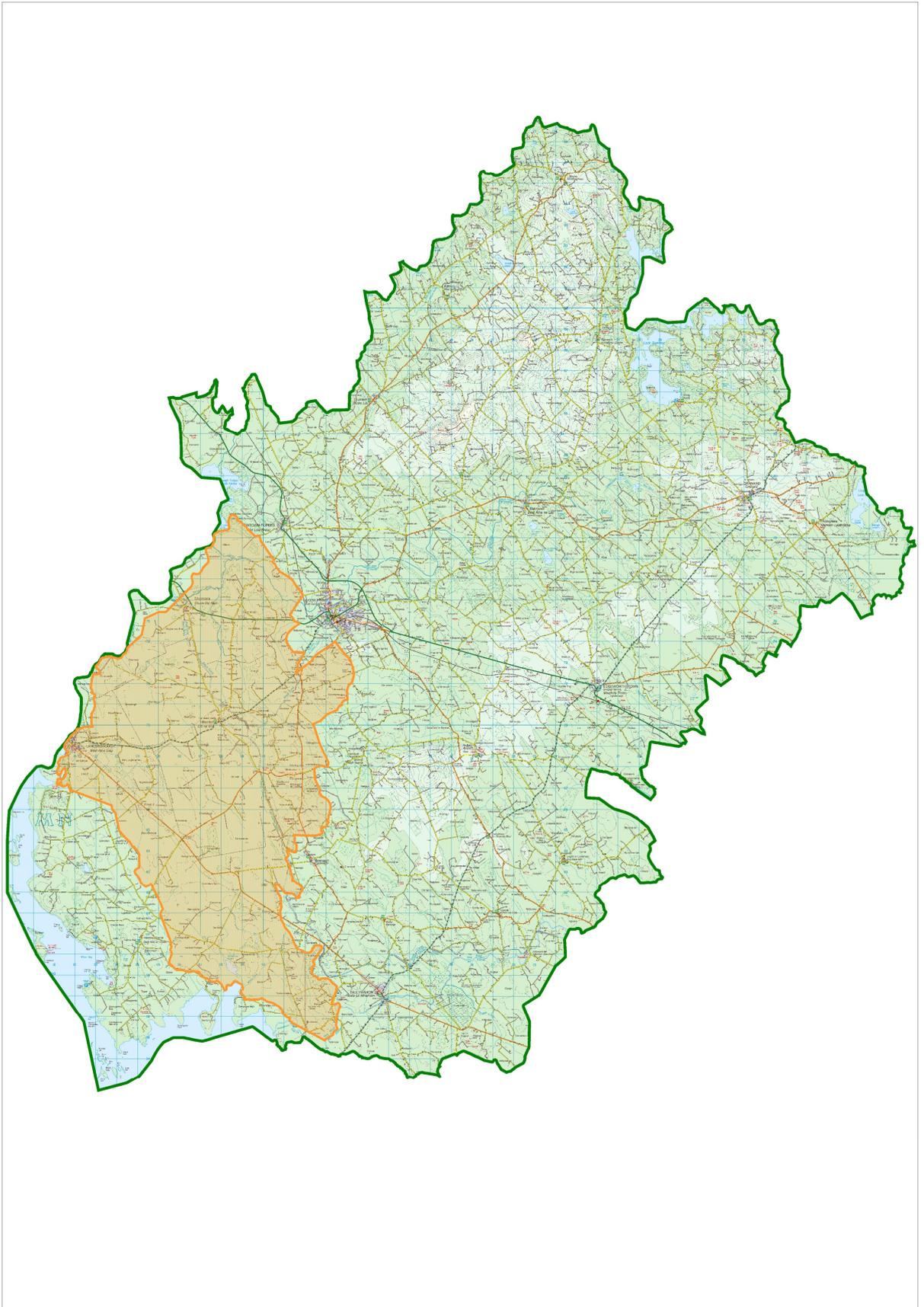
Landscape Unit 3: Shannon Basin/Lough Ree



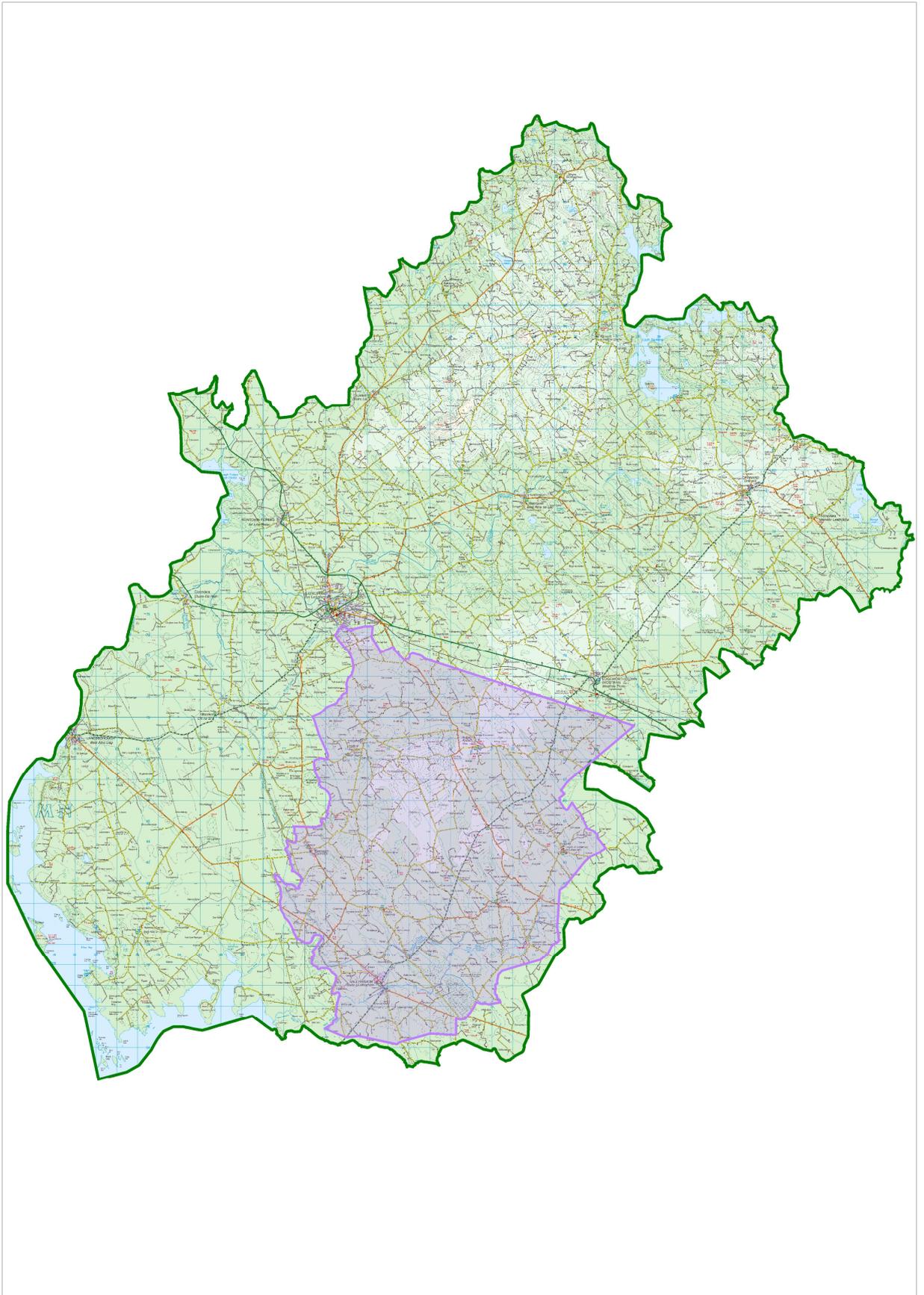
Landscape Unit 4: Central Corridor



Landscape Unit 5: Inny Basin



Landscape Unit 6: Peatlands



Landscape Unit 7: Open Agricultural

