

**Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) (Section 13)**

**Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021**

**Variation No. 4**

# **Appropriate Assessment Screening Report**



**Planning Department  
Longford County Council  
Aras an Chontae  
Great Water Street  
Longford**

**June 2018**

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Longford County Council has prepared a Variation (no. 4) of the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021. As per Section 13 (13) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), it is stated that *'an appropriate assessment of a draft variation of a development plan shall be carried out in accordance with Part XAB'*. Accordingly Longford County Council as the competent authority has conducted an Article 6(3) Appropriate Assessment Screening of the proposed Variation. According to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Guidelines, issued in December 2009 and updated in 2010, on the implementation of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive as transposed into Irish Law under the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997 (G.I. 94/1997), screening is required to examine the potential effects of all projects or plans, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, upon the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites. Where there is potential for significant or indeterminate effects on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites (SACs and SPAs) as a result of the proposed plan or project, a Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment must be conducted by the competent authority, based on objective scientific information in the form of a Natura Impact Statement.

Longford County Council has therefore undertaken a Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment Screening of the Variation no. 4 of the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021 to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the Variation, individually or in combination with other plans and projects, would be likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening has also been undertaken in tandem to assess the impacts of the Variation on a number of environmental considerations including biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between these considerations, whenever applicable.

## **2.0 Description of the Proposed Variation no. 4**

In accordance with Section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), Longford County Council has prepared a Variation (no. 4) of the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021. The Variation consists of the change of land use zoning of an area of 0.39ha on lands at, Knock, Lanesborough, Co. Longford (appendix 1), from the existing land use zoning of '*Established Residential*' to '*Commercial/Residential*'. The area for variation is located within the development envelope of Lanesborough, as identified in the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021 and forms part of the commercial core of the town in the Lanesborough Local Area Plan. There is an existing established commercial property on the subject site. Residential development is located on the adjoining lands.

## **3.0 Reason for Proposed Variation no. 4**

The reason for the Variation arises as a result of the need to provide and facilitate commercial/residential development in this urban location. The site is located within the existing development envelope of the town and is served by existing public infrastructure and facilities. Commercial / residential development in this urban location would facilitate the surrounding residential catchment area and would be in accordance with the sustainable development of the area.

## **4.0 Appropriate Assessment Screening Assessment**

### **4.1 Desktop Study – European Sites in the likely Zone of Impact**

Sites within a 15km radius of the area covered by the plan were identified. In addition, using the precautionary principle, Natura 2000 sites located outside the 15km buffer zone were taken into account and assessed for potential pathways for impact, particularly where hydrological connectivity could be established. There is no potential for impacts on Natura 2000 Sites outside the 15km buffer, as there is no identifiable connectivity or pathways for significant effects. The site synopses and conservation objectives of these sites, as per the National Parks and Wildlife Service website ([www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie)), were considered.

#### **4.2. Description of any likely Direct, Indirect or Secondary Impacts on Natura 2000 Sites**

This addresses any likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the Variation, both alone and in combination with other plans or projects, on the Natura 2000 Sites by virtue of the following criteria:

- i. size and scale*
- ii. land-take*
- iii. distance from the Natura 2000 sites or key features of the site*
- iv. resource requirements*
- v. emissions*
- vi. excavations*
- vii. transportation requirements*

In relation to the aforementioned criteria it is noted that the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021, which included the subject site on zoned lands, was subject to a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment, which concluded that the Plan will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network. All recommendations made by the AA were integrated into the Plan. In relation to Variation no. 4, it is considered that the change in land use zoning will have no further potential for impacts on European Sites from those identified under the previous zoning in the County Longford Development Plan 2015-2021.

#### *viii. Duration of Longford County Development Plan 2015 – 2021*

The Longford County Development Plan (CDP) is consistent in safeguarding European Sites. There is an overarching message to ensure that all plans and projects in the County which are likely to have significant effect on a European Site, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, shall be subject to Appropriate Assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. Of particular relevance are the environment and heritage policies outlined in Chapter 6 outlining details of sites and species that are designated under National and European legislation and discusses the role of Longford County Council in protecting designated sites, in conjunction with NPWS. Overall, the Development Management process and the application of

policies/objectives will assess any future development proposals to ensure the protection of the natural environment and in particular European Sites.

A detailed Natura Impact Report in support of the AA of Longford County Development Plan 2015 - 2021 was completed. This process resulted in a robust set of mitigation and monitoring measures to ensure there were no likely significant adverse effects to any European Site arising from the implementation of the CDP. It is recognised that the identification of effects is limited and effects to the integrity of European Sites will be further assessed through project-level AA.

The County Development Plan was also subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to ensure that environmental considerations were fully integrated into the plan during its preparation. The Development Plan is subject to a number of high level environmental protection policies and objectives with which it must comply, including those which have been identified as Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEO'S) (Table 1). These were developed from international and national policies which generally govern environmental protection objectives. Such policies include those of various European Directives which have been transposed into Irish law and which are intended to be implemented within the Plan area.

**Table 1: Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021 - Strategic Environmental Objectives**

<b>B1</b>	To ensure compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives with regard to the protection of Natura 2000 Sites and Annexed habitats and species.
<b>B2</b>	To ensure compliance with Article 10 of the Habitats Directive with regard to the management of features of the landscape which - by virtue of their linear and continuous structure or their function act as stepping stones - are of major importance for wild fauna and flora and essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.
<b>B3</b>	To avoid significant impacts on relevant habitats, species, environmental features or other sustaining resources in Wildlife Sites and to ensure compliance with the Wildlife Acts 1976-2010 with regard to the protection of species listed on Schedule 5 of the principal act.
<b>B4</b>	To sustain existing sustainable rural management practices - and the communities who support them - to ensure the continuation of long established managed landscapes & the flora and fauna that they contain.
<b>PHH1</b>	To protect populations and human health from exposure to incompatible land uses.
<b>S1</b>	To avoid damage to the hydrogeological and ecological function of the soil resource in County Longford.
<b>W1</b>	To maintain and improve, where possible, the quality and status of surface waters.
<b>W2</b>	To prevent pollution and contamination of ground water.
<b>W3</b>	To comply as appropriate with provisions of the Planning System & Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2009).
<b>M1</b>	To serve new development with adequate & appropriate waste water treatment.
<b>M2</b>	To serve new development with adequate drinking water that is both wholesome and clean.
<b>M3</b>	To reduce waste volumes, minimise waste to landfill and increase recycling and reuse.
<b>C1</b>	To reduce travel related emissions to air and to encourage modal change from car to more sustainable forms of transport.
<b>CH1</b>	To protect archaeological heritage including entries to the Record of Monuments and Places and/or their context.
<b>CH2</b>	To protect as appropriate architectural heritage including entries to the Record of Protected Structures, their context & Architectural Conservation Areas.
<b>L1</b>	To avoid significant adverse impacts on the landscape, especially with regard to protected views and prospects and broad zones including lakes, rivers, canals and deciduous woodlands.

As such the Variation will also be subject to a number of high level environmental protection policies and objectives with which it must comply. It is considered that the Variation will not involve any considerable impact outside the Strategic

Environmental Objectives identified in the Development Plan and that the associated mitigation measures detailed in the Development Plan will apply.

*ix. Cumulative Impacts with other Projects or Plans*

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires an assessment of a plan or project to consider other plans or programmes that might, in combination with the plan or project, have the potential to adversely impact upon European Sites. The Variation was considered in combination with other plans and projects in the area that could result in cumulative impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Other plans considered include:

- Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020
- Westmeath County development Plan 2014-2020
- Cavan County Development Plan 2014-2020
- Leitrim County Development Plan 2015-2021
- Shannon International River Basin Management Plan

No cumulative impacts are predicted as each plan has a range of environmental and natural heritage policy safeguards in place. These safeguards to protect the natural environment and European Sites will also apply to the Variation. Therefore, as there will be no significant impacts, it is considered unlikely to influence other plans or projects in a manner that could result in effects on any European site. As such it is considered that the proposed rezoning will not cause significant impact.

#### **4.3 Likely Changes to Natura 2000 Sites – European Commission Criteria 2001**

The following criteria outlined by the European Commission (2001) were examined for likely changes to the Natura 2000 sites:-

- i. reduction of habitat area
- ii. disturbance to key species
- iii. habitat or species fragmentation
- iv. reduction in species density
- v. changes in key indicators of conservation value (e.g. water quality etc.)
- vi. climate change.

It is considered that the proposed change of zoning from *'Established Residential'* to *'Commercial/Residential'* will not result in any additional impact of significance under the aforementioned indicators.

#### **4.4 Indicators of Significance as a Result of the Identification of Effects**

Indicators of significance for any impacts identified in terms of the following were examined:-

- i. habitat loss*
- ii. fragmentation*
- iii. disruption to processes*
- iv. disturbance to species*
- v. changes to key elements of the site.*

It is considered that the proposed change of zoning from *'Established Residential'* to *'Commercial/Residential'* will not result in any additional impact of significance under the aforementioned indicators.

#### **4.5 Elements of the Proposed Variation with Potential to Give Rise to Effects**

The existing Longford CDP 2015-2021 provides for development within the Longford County Area. The Variation consists of a land area already zoned for development in the existing Development Plan. It is considered that the change in zoning will not give rise to significant additional impacts. The existing CDP already accounts for development within this zoning area and there are no additional sources for effects identified in the Variation. Notwithstanding it is recognised that the identification of effects is limited and effects to the integrity of European Sites will be further assessed through project-level AA.

#### **4.6 Is the Plan Necessary to the Management of Natura 2000 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 the Variation is not the nature conservation management of the sites, but involves a change of zoning from *'Established Residential'* to *'Commercial / Residential'*. 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.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

Stage 1 Screening for AA of the Variation to the Longford County Development Plan 2016- 2021 has been carried out. The Appropriate Assessment screening of the Variation no. 4 of the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021 concludes that implementation of the Variation does not have the potential to give rise to impacts on the conservation objectives of any Natura 2000 site, or to influence other plans or projects in a manner that could potentially impact thereon.

As per the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021 preparation of a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment was undertaken alongside the preparation of the Plan. The associated AA concluded that the Plan will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network. All recommendations made by the AA were integrated into the Plan. The Variation must comply with the policies, objectives and mitigation measures contained with this existing Longford County Development Plan 2015 - 2021.

It is concluded that the Variation to the Longford County Development Plan 2015 - 2021 is not foreseen to give rise to any significant adverse effects on designated European sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Consequently the Variation therefore does not require a Stage 2 NIS. It is recognised that the identification of effects is limited and effects to the integrity of European Sites will be further assessed through project-level AA.

A Screening Determination is provided overleaf:

**Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Determination under:  
The Planning and Development Acts 2000 Act (as amended):  
Variation No. 4 to the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021**

Section 12 (7) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), requires, inter alia, a determination to be made as to whether Variation No. 4 warrants the undertaking of AA. An Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening determination has been made by Longford County Council regarding proposed Variation No. 4 to the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021.

The Variation consists of the change of land use zoning of 0.39ha on lands at, Knock, Lanesborough, Co. Longford (appendix 1), from the existing land use zoning from *'Established Residential'* to *'Commercial/Residential'*. There is an existing established commercial property on the subject site. Residential development is located on the adjoining lands.

The Variation has been screened out for the following reasons:-

- The Variation does not have the potential to result in impacts on any European sites or to influence other plans or projects in a manner that could potentially impact thereon, and therefore does not require a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive.
- 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.

Taking all of the above into account, it is determined that the Variation will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network of sites. Consequently further assessment is not required.

# APPENDIX 1

