



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION





1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

The Dundalk Local Area Plan, hereafter referred to as 'the Plan' or 'LAP' provides a spatial framework for the future growth and development of Dundalk for the next six years and beyond. This Plan has been prepared in accordance with *Sections 18, 19 and 20 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended)*. It will remain in force for a period of six years from the date on which it was made, or for an extended period as provided under *Section 19(1)(d) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended)*.

National and regional planning policy recognises the strategic importance of Dundalk through its designation as a Regional Growth Centre in the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)* for the Eastern and Midland Region and its location along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor in the National Planning Framework (NPF).

The Regional Growth Centre designation is a testament of the importance of Dundalk being one of the principal locations for employment and economic development in the north-east of the country. This Plan will seek to enable Dundalk to consolidate this role and will support continued population and economic growth in the town in accordance with national, regional, and county development plan policy.

A strong emphasis will be placed on consolidation, urban regeneration and the promotion of sustainable patterns of development that encourages the creation of a vibrant urban core where there is a quality and attractive living and working environment.

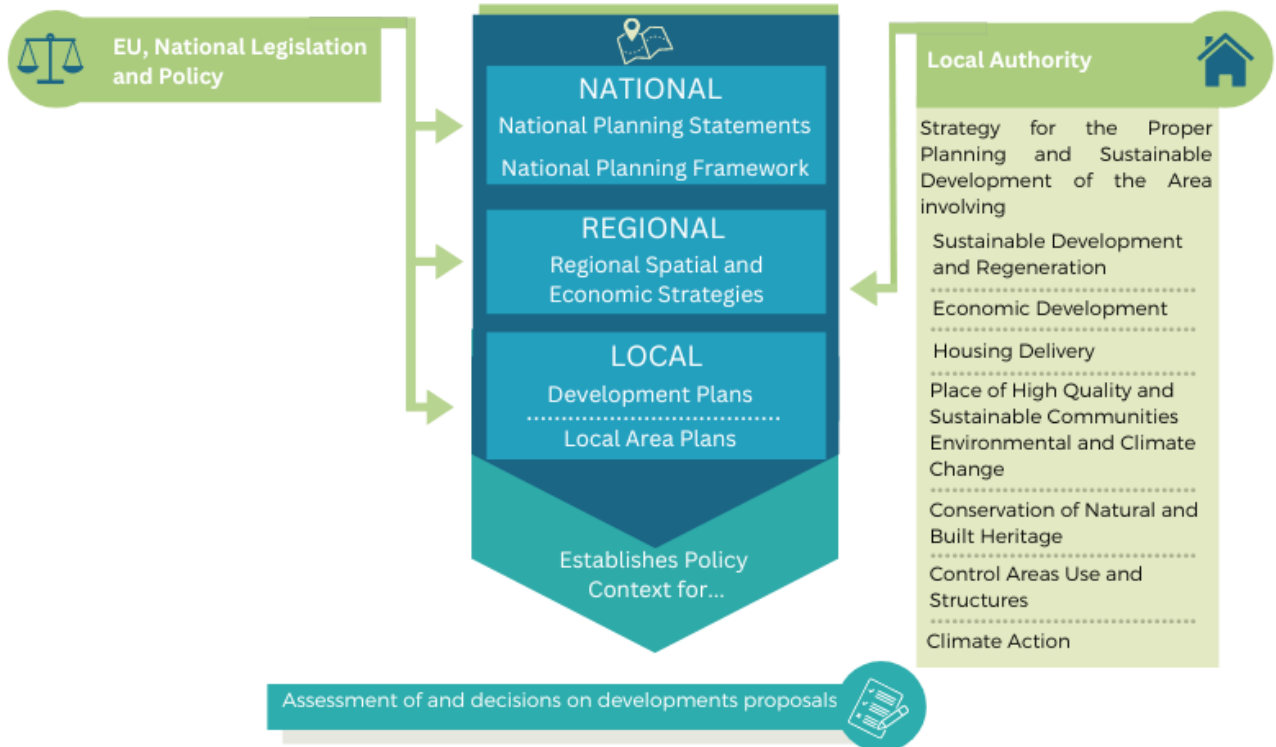
1.2 Relationship with Other Plans and Guidelines

This Local Area Plan has been prepared having regard to national, regional and local policy documents, in addition to ministerial guidelines issued under *Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)*. The Plan has also taken account of Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) contained in Section 28 ministerial guidelines which, as set out under *Section 28 (1C) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)*, the Plan is required to comply with. Any Section 28 Guidelines referenced in this Plan may be superseded by subsequent publications and these shall be applied accordingly. The *Louth Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2024-2029* has also informed this Plan. The purpose of the LECP is to promote the local and community development within the County, act as a roadmap for the development of the County and, ensure the effective co-ordination of publicly funded programmes. This Plan is also informed by the *Louth Climate Action Plan 2024-2029*, which provides a strategy on the delivery of national climate obligations at a local level.



Figure 1.1: The Planning Hierarchy (Source: DHLGH)

The Planning Hierarchy An Overview



1.3 Local Area Plan vs Urban Area Plan

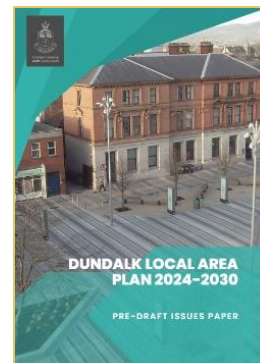
Regional Policy Objective 4.19 of the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)* for the Eastern and Midland Region requires that an Urban Area Plan is to be prepared for Dundalk.

National Policy Objective 70 of the *National Planning Framework (NPF)* indicates that Urban Area Plans will be prepared under the provisions of the legislation of local area plans. In the absence of legislation that expressly provides for 'Urban Area Plans' this Plan is being prepared as a Local Area Plan.

1.4 Preparation of the LAP

The first stages in the preparation of the Dundalk Local Area Plan involved a review of the *Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 (as varied)* and the previous Dundalk Development Plan.

Background information was gathered, and discussions took place with external stakeholders and various sections within Louth County Council. The Pre-Draft Issues Paper for the Dundalk Local Area Plan was placed on public display on 1st June 2023 for a 4-week period until the 30th June 2023, inclusive. Public 'drop in' events took place on Tuesday 6th June and Thursday 8th June 2023 in Dundalk Library.





Additionally, a neighbourhood walk, and a Community Mapping workshop were organised in collaboration with University College Dublin (UCD), the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); the purpose of which was to promote public engagement in the preparation of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Plan.

Community Mapping Workshop



Neighbourhood Walk



A total of 45 submissions were received during the public consultation period for the Pre-Draft Issues Paper. All submissions were read, analysed, summarised and issues responded to in a Report on Submissions Received. This Report was circulated to the elected members and published on the Council website.

The draft Plan was placed on public display from Tuesday 17th July 2024 until Tuesday 10th September 2024. 154 submissions were received during the consultation period.

The elected members, having considered the Draft Local Area Plan and Chief Executive's Report on submissions received, resolved, following a Special Council Meeting, to amend the Draft Dundalk Local Area Plan.

The proposed Material Alterations to the Draft Dundalk Local Area Plan and accompanying Environmental Reports were placed on public display from Friday 6th December 2024 until Monday 13th January 2025. 15 no. submissions were received during this public consultation period.

A Chief Executive's Report in response to submissions/observations received to the proposed Material Alterations was prepared and given to the elected members for their consideration. The elected members, having considered the Chief Executive's Report and the documents associated with the Draft Dundalk Local Area Plan, resolved to adopt the Local Area Plan at a Special Council Meeting on the 6th March 2025.

1.4.1 Evidence-based Planning

As part of the evidence-based approach to the preparation of this Plan data was gathered and analysed in relation to population and housing growth and socio-economic trends. This data was obtained from various sources including Census 2022 and Central Statistics Office housing completions data.

A Settlement Capacity Audit (Appendix 1 in Volume 3) was carried out to ensure there is alignment and co-ordination between the zoning of lands and the availability of infrastructure, while a Local Transport Plan (Appendix 2 in Volume 3) has been prepared to ensure the integration of land use and transport planning. A Social Infrastructure Audit of community facilities in the town was carried out, (Appendix 5 in Volume 3). A Retail Strategy was undertaken as part of an analysis of retail activity and demand in Dundalk (Chapter 7 - Retail Strategy and Tourism, and Appendix 3 in Volume 3).



1.4.2 Environmental Assessments

The **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** process is the formal systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt the plan or programme. It informs the plan-making process of the likely environmental impact of alternative action and contributes to the integration of environmental considerations of the Plan. Under the provisions of the *Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011*, SEA is mandatory for plans for areas with a population of 5,000 persons or more; therefore, SEA is required for the Dundalk Local Area Plan.

The findings of the SEA are set out in the Environmental Report, which, while constituting part of the Plan documentation, is presented as a separate document in Volume 4.

The Environmental Report provides a clear understanding of the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the location of development in the Plan area. The mitigation measures needed to offset the potential adverse effects of the Plan and future monitoring proposals have been transposed from the Environmental Report into the Plan.

The requirements for **Habitats Directive Assessment** for plans or projects, is outlined in *Article 6(3) and (4) of the European Communities (1992) Council Directive 92/43/EEC* on the conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity (Habitats Directive).

The Dundalk Local Area Plan was screened for **Appropriate Assessment (AA)**. This screening concluded that likely significant effects of the Local Area Plan on the European Sites (Dundalk Bay Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation), could not be ruled out, and therefore a full Appropriate Assessment would be required.

The mitigation measures identified in the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (i.e. Natura Impact Report, NIR) have been incorporated into the Local Area Plan. The NIR has been published as a separate document to this Plan and is included in Volume 4.

A **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)** was prepared for Dundalk as part of the Plan preparation. It is an analysis of flood risk and provides information relating to the spatial distribution of flood risk in the Dundalk area. The SFRA has taken into account a range of factors including flood related data sourced from the Office of Public Works (OPW).

The SFRA is required to be prepared in accordance with the requirements of *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines (2009)* and is set out in Volume 4.

1.5 Historic Origins of Dundalk

Research indicates that when the Dundalk area was first inhabited, at the end of the last ice age, it was in the vicinity of Castletown Motte. In the Middle Ages, Dundalk established itself as a Norman stronghold and the town shifted eastward to the ford at Castletown River, which was a vital trade route. Market Square developed as the commercial and civic heart of the town and subsequently a north-south thoroughfare was formed linking the Castletown River with Market Square. This strong north-south emphasis remains readily visible today in the form of Clanbrassil Street and Bridge Street.

During the Plantation of Ireland, Dundalk endured warfare and depopulation, however towards the end of the 17th century economic conditions improved with the development of a new harbour and reclamation of lands to the east.

Dundalk includes the urban village of Blackrock which is located to the south east of the town centre.



Blackrock initially developed as a fishing village in the 19th century, and with the construction of the sea wall in the 1800's it rapidly developed as a popular visitor destination. Today, Blackrock remains a vibrant tourism destination and an attractive residential area.

With the arrival of the railway and subsequent industrial revolution, Dundalk's shipbuilding, brewing, textile and tobacco industries flourished. Dundalk's location on the border with Northern Ireland meant that the town inadvertently suffered as a result of 'The Troubles', however following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement levels of inward investment increased providing commercial and economic benefits.

1.6 Profile of Dundalk

Dundalk had a population of 43,112 people in Census 2022, making it the second largest town in the country. It is located along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and benefits from a strong economic and employment base. It has established itself as a centre of excellence for education and employment sectors including engineering and pharma. Furthermore, the town has a thriving arts and heritage scene, a vibrant leisure and sports culture and is located within a culturally significant landscape.

1.7 Overview of Core Issues and Challenges

A fundamental objective of the Plan is to create an environment where Dundalk can fulfil its potential and continue to be a focal point for population and economic growth and investment in the north-east of the country.

This Plan will place a strong emphasis on consolidation and urban regeneration and will promote sustainable patterns of development which encourage the creation of a vibrant urban core where there is a high quality, attractive and functional living and working environment.

The Plan will also have a key role in facilitating and promoting tangible actions to address climate change.

1.8 Dundalk Population and Housing – Key Facts and Figures

In the 2022 Census the population of Dundalk was 43,112 persons, which accounted for 30.8% of the County population.

The 2022 population represents a 10.5% (4,108 persons) increase on the 2016 population. With regards to age profile the Census data indicates that Dundalk has a higher-than-average population under 20 (28%) when compared to the average for the state (26%). The average age of the population was 37.2. This is below the average age of the County population, which was 38.2. The cohort of population in the working age category in Dundalk 20-64 (58%) is comparable to the overall percentage in the State (59%). 13.5% of the population were over the age of 65 compared to 14.2% for the County and 15.1% for the State.

1.8.1 Housing Stock

The total housing stock in Dundalk at Census 2022 was 17,470 units. This is an increase of 1,119 units (6.8%) on the total housing stock in 2016. The vacancy rate in 2022 was 6.5% (1,132 units) compared to 9% (1,472 units) in 2016. Of the 17,470 total housing stock (permanent dwellings), 15,936 private households were recorded. A breakdown of the private households consisted of 91% houses (14,509 units) and 9% apartments (1,402 units).

Between 2016 and 2022 the number of private households in Dundalk increased by 1,478 units, from 14,458 to 15,936, which equates to a 10.2% increase.

An average household size of 2.7 persons was recorded in 2022. This was below the average household size for the County of 2.8 persons and the national average of 2.74 persons.



Source CSO 2022

Population
43,112

Male 49% **Female** 51%

37.2 yrs
Average Age

15,936 Private Households

Above National Average of 8.1%

65% of the Population is **15 - 64** Years Old

Population increase of **10.5%** since 2016

17,470 Total Housing Stock

DUNDALK
Key Facts and Figures

Housing Vacancy Rate **6.5%**

1,402 Apartments

14,509 Houses

2.7 Persons Household Size

9,096 Owned

5,916 Rented

How We Travel

28.9
Average Travel Time
28.9 minutes

Walked
20%

Travelled by car
62.3%

Cycled
36.7%

Public Transport
6%

Where we Work

Total Number of Residents in Dundalk who are working
19,661

Wholesale & Retail
1,963

Manufacturing
1,367

Professionals
3,223

Health & Social Care
1,703



4,792 people - Working from Home

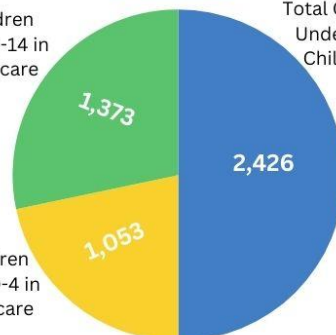


80% of the population stated their health as very good/ good

Childcare

Children Ages 5-14 in Childcare

Children Ages 0-4 in Childcare



Total Children Under 15 in Childcare

3,241 - Total Children aged between 0-14 years
2,426 - Total Children aged between 0-14 years in childcare **74.8%**



1.9 Vision

VISION

To support and grow the Regional Growth Centre of Dundalk as a uniquely attractive and inclusive place to live, work, visit, invest and do business and which capitalises on its strategic location along the Dublin–Belfast Economic Corridor, provides a strong economy, and access to quality, affordable housing, educational, health, social and community services for current and future residents, enhances and protects the natural and built environment while transitioning to a low carbon and climate resilient society through compact growth and sustainable mobility.



The Vision for this Plan seeks to ensure Dundalk fulfils its role as a Regional Growth Centre while delivering a thriving town as an inclusive, attractive place and which enshrines the principles of compact growth, environmental, social and economic sustainability, protects and enhances the natural and built environment and which supports a strong economy while ensuring a transition to a low carbon, climate resilient society.

1.9.1 Strategic Objectives

The vision for Dundalk will be achieved through the realisation of the following Strategic Objectives:

SO 1

To promote the development and growth of Dundalk as a Regional Growth Centre along the Belfast–Dublin Economic Corridor through sustainable economic development including increased and competitive enterprise and employment opportunities.

SO 2

To achieve sustainable growth and consolidation of the existing built environment of Dundalk through the delivery of the principles of compact growth, infill and brownfield development, the delivery of a suitable mix of quality housing in appropriate locations, the creation of neighbourhoods where there is a sense of place and where housing is supported by the requisite physical and community infrastructure.

SO 3

To promote and facilitate sustainable mobility, prioritising walking, cycling and public transport through the improvement of existing infrastructure, connectivity and the implementation of the Local Transport Plan.



SO 4

Transition to a low carbon and climate resilient town, prioritising climate mitigation and adaptation measures in line with the Louth Climate Action Plan and implementing any actions identified for the Dundalk Blackrock Decarbonisation Zone.

SO 5

To recognise, protect and enhance the character, and in particular, the built and archaeological heritage of Dundalk while facilitating regeneration and growth in an appropriate and sustainable manner.

SO 6

To protect, conserve, enhance and sustain the natural environment of Dundalk while promoting climate adaptation and enhancing biodiversity through the protection and promotion of green infrastructure for future generations.

SO 7

To ensure the provision of appropriate levels of community, cultural and civic amenities and infrastructure to meet the needs of existing and future residents.

1.10 Structure of the Plan

This Local Area Plan comprises of a written statement with accompanying maps and appendices.

The written statement shall take precedence over the maps should any discrepancy arise. Table 1.1 sets out the documents and maps associated with the Plan.

Table 1.1 – Structure of the Plan

Volume 1	Written Statement
Volume 2	Map 1 – Zoning and Flood Zones Map 2 – Composite Map
Volume 3	Appendix 1 – Settlement Capacity Audit Appendix 2 – Local Transport Plan Appendix 3 – Retail Strategy Quantitative Analysis Appendix 4 – Mullagharlin Masterplan Appendix 5 – Social Infrastructure Audit Appendix 6 – Architectural Conservation Areas
Volume 4	Environmental Reports: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Natura Impact Report (NIR) Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)



1.10.1 Interpretation of the Plan and Development Management Guidance

As set out in the planning hierarchy in Figure 1.1 in this chapter, the Dundalk Local Area Plan sits below the County Development Plan.

It is important to note that when reading this Plan, the policy objectives of the County Development Plan are relevant and, in this regard, both documents should be read in tandem with each other.

When preparing planning applications, the Development Management Guidelines in the County Development Plan (Chapter 13) should be consulted. The standards and guidelines set out in the County Development Plan are required to be applied in the assessment of applications alongside any other policy objectives, designation or standard relevant to the application.

1.10.1.1 Policy Objectives

DM 1

To require planning applications to be consistent with the relevant guidance and comply with the relevant standards set out in the Development Management Guidelines of the County Development Plan and any relevant policy objectives, designation, or standards set out in this Plan, the County Development Plan, or Section 28 Guidelines.

DM 2

To ensure the Dundalk Local Area Plan is consistent with the County Development Plan. A Variation to the County Development Plan will be required to take account of any amendments made to text, policy objectives, zoning and flood zones map / composite map and appendices relating to Dundalk during the preparation of this Plan.

1.10.2 Aligning the Local Area Plan with the County Development Plan

Under Section 19(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) a Local Area Plan is required to be consistent with the objectives and core strategy of the County Development Plan.

1.10.2.1 Policy Objective

DM 3

To publish and adopt a Variation to the County Development Plan following the adoption of the Dundalk Local Area Plan to ensure the alignment of the Dundalk Local Area Plan with the County Development Plan.¹

¹ Note that until this Variation has been adopted any text, policy objectives or maps relating to Dundalk in the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 shall take precedence over the text, policy objectives, maps, and appendices in this Local Area Plan.