



Comhairle Contae Lú  
Louth County Council

# Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment Determination

**Under Regulation No. 4 of the European Union (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2025 (SI No. 456 of 2025) for:**

## **Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027, as varied**

This Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) determination regarding whether or not implementation of Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 (as varied) would be likely to have significant effects on the environment is being made under the above Regulations, taking account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2 of the above Regulations. These criteria are taken into account as follows:

### **PART 1**

**1. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources**

Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 (as varied) is being prepared by Louth County Council. The basis of and the emerging content for the Variation is detailed in the accompanying Summary of Variation No. 4 document.

The focus of the Variation is to ensure the alignment of the County Development Plan with Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines 'NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines', which were published in response to the Revised National Planning Framework requirements on housing growth. Proposed Variation No. 4 will include changes to both the written text of the Plan and land use zoning maps for some of the County's settlements.

The purpose of Variation No. 4 is to:

- Integrate the housing growth requirements set out in the NPF Implementation – Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines;
- Update the housing allocation for County Louth for the remainder of the 2021-2027 plan period;
- Facilitate the delivery of an additional 2,856 housing units, increasing the total allocation from 6,524 units to 9,380 units;
- Identify and zone/re-zone additional residential lands where deficiencies have been identified;
- Enable both short-term housing delivery and longer-term strategic growth beyond the life of the current LCDP.

**2. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the degree to which the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy**

The Proposed Variation will be guided by the First Revision to the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region and the existing Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 (as varied). The varied County Development Plan will provide the framework for decision-making, and consent granting at project level and will guide any lower-tier plans and future proposals for land use developments and activities in County Louth.

**3. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development**

The Proposed Variation will integrate environmental considerations with a view to continuing to promote sustainable development at county and local levels in Louth.

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#### **4. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: environmental problems relevant to the plan**

Environmental problems arise where there is a conflict between current environmental conditions and legislative targets.

It is intended that, through provisions relating to environmental protection and management, the Proposed Variation will contribute towards ensuring that environmental conditions do not get worse and, where possible, they contribute towards its amelioration. as not achieving the *good* or *high* status that is required by the Water Framework Directive (for example: Ballymascanlan, Dee, Termonfeckin, and Flurry Rivers; transitional waters of Castletown, Ballymascanlan and Boyne estuaries; Boyne Estuary Plume Zone and Inner Dundalk Bay coastal waters; and Wilkinstown and Bettystown groundwater bodies).

#### **5. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste-management or water protection)**

The Proposed Variation relates to the land use and town planning sector and will be consistent with EU and national legislation on the environment, including those relating to the waste management and the Water Framework Directive.

## **PART 2**

#### **1. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects**

The development of the Proposed Variation area will relate to a range of land use developments and activities that would be likely to, if unmitigated, significantly affect all environmental components; this would include positive and negative effects across the county and beyond. Such effects would encompass short term construction effects and longer-term operational effects. Effects could be mitigated by integrating measures relating to environmental protection and management into the Proposed Variation and by adhering to such provisions from the existing Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027, as varied.

#### **2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the cumulative nature of the effects**

There are two types of potential cumulative effects that would be likely to occur, namely:

- Potential intra-Plan cumulative effects - these would be likely to arise from the interactions between different types of potential environmental effects resulting from the Proposed Variation. Examples of interrelationships between environmental components that help determine such effects include those between: human health and water quality; human health and air quality; human health and flood risk; and ecology and water quality.
- Potential inter-Plan cumulative effects - these would be likely to arise when the effects of the implementation of Variation occur in combination with those of other plans, programmes, etc. such as the Development Plan and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

#### **3. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the transboundary nature of the effects**

Potential effects, if unmitigated, such as those on water, will extend beyond the Plan's boundary, however; significant environmental effects on another country are unlikely.

#### **4. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)**

Human health has the potential to be impacted upon by environmental vectors (i.e. environmental components such as air, water or soil through which contaminants or pollutants, which have the potential to cause harm, can be transported so that they come into contact with human beings). Hazards or nuisances to human health can arise as a result of exposure to these vectors arising from incompatible adjacent land uses for example. There is historic and predictive evidence of fluvial and coastal flooding in various locations across the county.

#### **5. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)**

The spatial extent of potential effects includes the Plan area and areas downstream. The population most likely to be affected would be the population of the Plan area. The most recent Census 2022 has recorded a population of 139,703 persons for County Louth.

#### **6. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:**

- a) **special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;**

Protected sites within and adjacent to the county include those relating to:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) – including Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC, Carlingford Mountain SAC, Carlingford Shore SAC, Clogher Head SAC, Dundalk Bay SAC, and River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC.
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs) – including Boyne Estuary SPA, Carlingford Lough SPA, Dundalk Bay SPA, River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA, and Stabannan-Braganstown SPA.
- Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) – including Carlingford Lough NHA, Carlingford Mountain NHA, Dundalk Bay NHA, Stabannan-Braganstown NHA, Blackhall Woods NHA, Liscarragh Marsh NHA, Ardee Cutaway Bog NHA, Castlecoo Hill NHA, Clogher Head NHA, Darver Castle Woods NHA, Drumcah, Toprass and Cortial Loughs NHA, Mellifont Abbey Woods NHA, Woodland at Omeath Park NHA, Trumpet Hill (Louth) NHA, Louth Hall and Ardee Woods NHA, Barmeath Woods NHA, Stephenstown Pond NHA, King William’s Glen NHA, Ravensdale Plantation NHA, Kildemock Marsh NHA, Reaghstown Marsh NHA, Dunany Point NHA, Boyne River Islands NHA, and Boyne Coast and Estuary NHA.
- Dundalk Bay Ramsar site.
- Dundalk Bay Marine Protected Area, under OSPAR Convention to Protect the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA), and possibly subsequent stages of assessment, will be undertaken on the Proposed Variation. On finalisation of the Screening for AA process, it may be determined that Stage 2 AA must be undertaken alongside the Variation. The SEA Directive (Article 3 para. 2) requires that SEA is carried out for certain plans and programmes that are being subject to Stage 2 AA.

There are many sites of significant archaeological interest in County Louth. There are currently approximately 1,600 structures listed in the Record of Monuments and Places for County Louth. The Record of Monuments and Places is an inventory, put on a statutory basis by amendment to the National Monuments Act 1994, of sites and areas of archaeological significance, numbered and mapped. Clusters of monuments in County Louth are located within the County’s settlements, including Drogheda and Dundalk which are referred to as Areas of Special Archaeological Interest. Brú na Bóinne (UNESCO World Heritage Site) is located partially within the Plan area. One site in Louth has been included on the inventory of properties which Ireland intends to consider for nomination to the World Heritage List: Early Medieval Monastic Sites (including Monasterboice).

There are currently approximately 1,500 structures listed in the Record of Protected Structures within the County. Similar to the general spatial spread of archaeological heritage, clusters of architectural heritage are indicated within and adjacent to the existing built-up footprint of the County’s settlements and in rural areas. Notable Protected Structures in the County include St. Andrew’s Church Drummullagh; the Water Lodge Balregan; Carlingford House, Abbeyview; Arhurstown Thatch; and Cistercian Abbey, Mellifont.

There are 36 Architectural Conservation Areas designated within the County.

**b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, and;**

Various waterbodies draining and downstream of the county are identified as not achieving the *good* or *high* status that is required by the Water Framework Directive (for example: Ballymascanlan, Dee, Termonfeckin, and Flurry Rivers; transitional waters of Castletown, Ballymascanlan and Boyne estuaries; Boyne Estuary Plume Zone and Inner Dundalk Bay coastal waters; and Wilkinstown and Bettystown groundwater bodies). Provisions contributing towards the Water Framework Directive’s overall objective of good status are provided by the existing County Development Plan 2021-2027 and the Proposed Variation will be consistent with these measures.

**c) intensive land-use.**

The Proposed Variation will provide for the relative intensive land use areas within some of County Louth’s settlements.

**7. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status**

There are two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) designated in the existing County Development Plan: Carlingford and Feede Mountains in the north of the County; and Clogherhead and Port Oriel in the south of the County. AONBs have been identified by the Council to facilitate the protection and enhancement of their unspoiled natural landscapes and spectacular scenic quality.

Areas of High Scenic Quality (AHSQs) have also been designated in the existing County Development Plan to facilitate the protection and enhancement of natural scenic landscapes within the County. All of the Areas of High Scenic Quality are currently farmed, although the quality of the land for farming purposes varies

considerably from area to area. The Council considers it important that AHSQs are protected from excessive development, particularly from inappropriate, one-off, urban-generated housing, in order to preserve their unspoiled rural landscapes. There are six designated Areas of High Scenic Quality in the County: Feede Mountains and Cooley Area; Monasterboice; Boyne Valley / King Williams Glen; Collon Uplands; Dunany; and Ardee Bog.

Furthermore, 23 Scenic Routes and 76 Protected Views and Prospects are designated in the existing County Development Plan.

With reference to the foregoing information, it is determined that the Proposed Variation may, if unmitigated, result in likely significant environmental effects and that a SEA is required to be undertaken on Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027, as varied.



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**Signed on behalf of Louth County Council**

**Date: 27<sup>th</sup> April 2026**