

Mr Thomas McEvoy
A/Director of Services
Town Hall, Crowe Street
Dundalk,
Co. Louth
A91 W20C

27th May 2022

Our Ref: 220205.1

Re. SEA Screening for Proposed Variation 1 to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027

Dear Mr McEvoy,

We acknowledge your notice, dated 18th May 2022, in relation to the Proposed Variation 1 of the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 (the 'Variation') and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening.

The EPA is one of the statutory environmental authorities under the SEA Regulations. In our role as an SEA environmental authority, we focus on promoting the full and transparent integration of the findings of the Environmental Assessment into the Plan and advocating that the key environmental challenges for Ireland are addressed as relevant and appropriate to the plan. Our functions as an SEA environmental authority do not include approving or enforcing SEAs or plans.

As a priority, we focus our efforts on reviewing and commenting on key sector plans. For land use plans at county and local level, we provide a 'self-service approach' via our guidance document '[SEA of Local Authority Land Use Plans – EPA Recommendations and Resources](#)'. This document is updated regularly and sets out our key recommendations for integrating environmental considerations into Local Authority land use plans. In finalising your SEA screening determination, we suggest that you take this guidance document into account and incorporate the relevant recommendations as relevant and appropriate to the Plan.

Proposed SEA Determination

We note your proposed determination regarding the need for SEA of the Variation.

Guidance on the SEA process, including an SEA pack and checklist available on our website at: <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-resources-and-guidance/>.

We recommend that you take the available guidance into account in finalising your SEA Screening Determination and incorporate the relevant recommendations as relevant and appropriate to the Variation.

Sustainable Development

In proposing and in implementing the Variation, Louth County Council should ensure that the Variation is consistent with the need for proper planning and sustainable development. Adequate and appropriate critical service infrastructure should be in place, or required to be put in place, to service any development proposed and authorised during the lifetime of the Variation.

In considering the Variation Louth County Council should take into account the need to align with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as incorporating any relevant recommendations in sectoral, regional and local climate adaptation plans.

Louth County Council should also ensure that the Variation aligns with key relevant higher-level plans and programmes and is consistent with the relevant objectives and policy commitments of the National Planning Framework and the Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

State of the Environment Report – Ireland’s Environment 2020

In preparing the Variation and associated SEA screening, the recommendations, key issues and challenges described in our published State of the Environment Report [*Ireland’s Environment – An Integrated Assessment 2020*](#) (EPA, 2020) should be considered, as relevant and appropriate to the Variation. It should also be taken into account, in preparing the Variation.

Available Guidance & Resources

Our website contains various SEA resources and guidance, including:

- SEA process guidance and checklists
- Inventory of spatial datasets relevant to SEA
- topic specific SEA guidance (including *Good practice note on Cumulative Effects Assessment* (EPA, 2020), *Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring* (EPA, 2020), *Integrating climatic factors into SEA* (EPA, 2019), *Developing and Assessing Alternatives in SEA* (EPA, 2015), and *Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment* (EPA, 2012))



You can access these guidance notes and other resources at: <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-topic-and-sector-specific-guidance/>

Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) WebTool

This new tool was launched recently by the EPA. It is a new decision support tool to assist SEA and planning processes in Ireland. It is available at www.enviromap.ie. The tool brings together over 100 datasets and allows users to create plan-specific environmental sensitivity maps. These maps can help planners examine environmental considerations, anticipate potential land-use conflicts, and help identify suitable development locations while also protecting the environment.

EPA SEA WebGIS Tool

Our SEA WebGIS Tool has been updated recently and is now publicly available at <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>. It allows public authorities to produce an indicative report on key aspects of the environment in a specific geographic area. It is intended to assist public authorities in SEA screening and scoping exercises.

EPA WFD Application

Our WFD Application provides access to water quality and catchment data from the national WFD monitoring programme. The Application is accessed through EDEN <https://wfd.edenireland.ie/> and is available to public agencies. Publicly available data can be accessed via the www.catchments.ie website.

Future amendments to the Variation

Where changes to the Plan are made prior to finalisation, or where modifications to the Plan are proposed following its adoption, these should be screened for potential for likely significant effects in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the SEA Regulations (S.I. No. 436 of 2004).

Appropriate Assessment

You should ensure that the Variation complies with the requirements of the Habitats Directive where relevant. Where Appropriate Assessment is required, the key findings and recommendations should be incorporated into the SEA and the Variation.

EPA AA GeoTool

Our AA GeoTool application has been developed in partnership with the NPWS. It allows users to select a location, specify a search area and gather available information for each European Site within the area. It is available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool>.

Environmental Authorities

Under the SEA Regulations, prior to making your SEA determination you should consult with:

- Environmental Protection Agency;
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage

- Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications; and
- Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous to the area of a planning authority which prepared a draft plan, proposed variation or local area plan.

SEA Determination

As soon as practicable after making your determination as to whether SEA is required or not, you should make a copy of your decision, including, as appropriate, the reasons for not requiring an environmental assessment, available for public inspection in your offices and on your website. You should also send a copy of your determination to the relevant environmental authorities consulted.

If you have any queries or need further information in relation to this submission, please contact me directly. I would be grateful if you could send an email confirming receipt of this submission to: sea@epa.ie.

Yours sincerely,

Lee Kelly
SEA Section
Office of Evidence and Assessment