
Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan

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1. Introduction

This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening report has been prepared for the proposed Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan, Co. Meath by BDP. The purpose of this report is to determine whether the making and implementation of the plan will or will not, lead to significant environmental effects for the plan area and if it will require a full Strategic Environmental Assessment.

1.1. Strategic Environmental Assessment

The screening process includes an assessment of the details of the proposal with reference to the relevant SEA legislation including:

- European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435/2004), as amended by S.I. 200 of 2011; and
- the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004), as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011.

1.2. Appropriate Assessment and Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment

The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) requires an 'Appropriate Assessment' (AA) to be carried out where a plan or project is likely to have a significant impact on a Natura 2000 site. The first step in this process is to undertake a Screening in line with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive, as transposed into Irish Law in Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) in relation to land use planning.

The Screening represents the first stage of Article 6(3) Habitats Directive assessment process and was undertaken to identify whether the Plan has the potential to result in likely significant effects to European Sites. The first step of the Screening was to identify all land use actions proposed by The Common of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan or the land use activities likely to arise as a result of the Plan and examine the potential for these elements of the Plan to result in likely significant effects to European Sites.

The relationship between SEA and AA Screening is that the findings of the latter are one of the criteria to determine the need for full SEA. Should the Screening for the AA determine the need for Stage II Appropriate Assessment, the plan shall also require full SEA. An AA Screening Assessment has also been undertaken in conjunction with this SEA Screening Report and should be read in tandem with this and The Common of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan.

1.3. Structure of the report

This screening report includes:

2. A description of the proposed plan, including in particular;
 - A description of the receiving environment;
 - a description of the land use activities proposed in this plan or any land use activities likely to arise as a result of the plan;
3. A Screening Assessment;
 - Against the criteria provided in Schedule 2a of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2001-2011
 - including a description of any likely significant effects, to the extent of the information available on such effects, of the proposed development on the environment resulting from;
4. Conclusion.

2. Description of proposed plan

2.1. Receiving Environment

The Commons of Lloyd is located within County Meath and sits just less than 2km west of Kells Town. The site is approximately 166.20 hectares in total and is distinguished by the Tower of Lloyd¹, an 18th Century monumental structure at the summit. The hill is a natural focal feature of the landscape, being the highest elevation between Kells and the Loughcrew Hills which lie approximately 12km further west. The Commons of Lloyd is an extremely valuable area of recreational amenity and tranquillity close to the bustling town centre, whilst the Tower of Lloyd¹ is an important historical monument in the landscape of the town and its surroundings. The Commons of Lloyd has been the subject of archaeological and geophysical study which has resulted in the recognition of the Commons as a post-medieval landscape with a number of archaeological assets which date back to the Iron Age, including a hillfort around the summit. Near to the summit, there is currently car parking and a children's playground which opened in 1992.

The main entrance to The Commons of Lloyd is located off the R163 Oldcastle Road. The site is bounded to the north by the R147 and to the east by the N52. A bus stop is located on the R147. The site is approximately 68km from Dublin, 40km from Drogheda, and 20km from Navan. The closest airport is Dublin Airport, located approximately a 50-minute drive away.

To note, the River Blackwater is located north of the site; it is designated for nature conservation as both a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA). There is currently one established walking route around The Commons of Lloyd, known as the 'red walk', which includes walking along the river.

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out a vision and strategy for the sustainable development and planning of the county, through guiding policies and objectives. The Plan sets out a Land Use Zoning Map which categorises The Commons of Lloyd as Open Space/Tourism (F1/D1), with some Existing Residential (A1) and Transport and Utilities (TU) designations as illustrated below on Figure 2.1.1.

¹ The Tower of Lloyd is also known as the Spire of Lloyd and the Pillar of Lloyd.

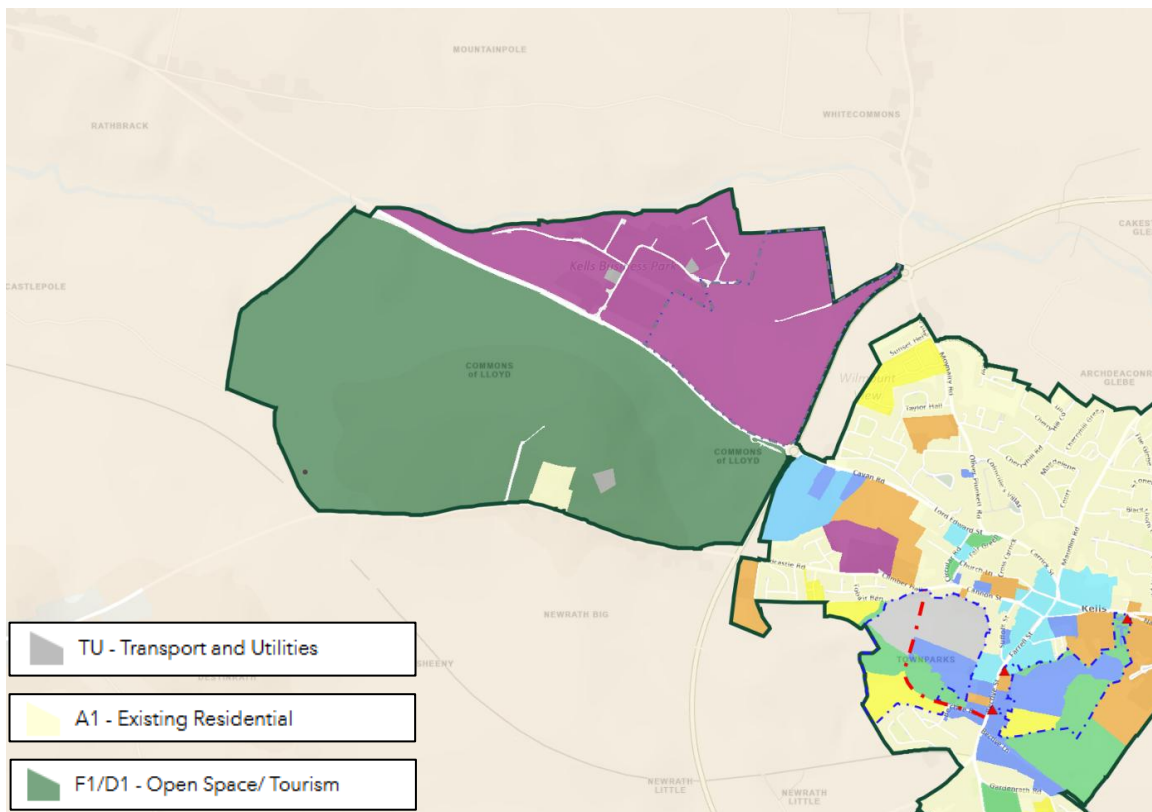


Figure 2.1.1. Land Use Zoning Map, Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

2.2. Overview of the proposed plan

The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan was commissioned by Meath County Council in 2023 to provide a blueprint for the future improvement of The Commons of Lloyd, protecting its heritage and environmental qualities whilst making it a more attractive and sustainable destination for local visitors and tourists. An illustrative sketch of the overall plan is shown in Figure 2.2.1.

The aim of the plan is to enable the Council and the local community to realise their aspirations for the enhancement of The Commons of Lloyd. Ultimately, the plan should enable the Council and local groups to leverage funding to implement the proposals identified within the plan.

The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan sets out an overall vision as: *“The Commons of Lloyd will be a vibrant and thriving space for everyone. It will be a place for all to admire the landscape, commemorate the past, appreciate archaeology and enjoy recreation. It will enhance the health and well-being of the community through fun and open-air activities in a beautiful place.”*

There are five key principles for the plan which are to:

- *Protect and conserve historic landscape character of the Commons for future generations;*
- *Facilitate ease of access from the town centre;*
- *Maximise opportunities of the park with an appropriate mix of recreational use and public appreciation that maximises visitor enjoyment;*
- *Enhance the natural environment and promote climate action and biodiversity;*
- *Increase community involvement.*



Figure 2.2.1. Illustrative Vision of the Recreation and Amenity Plan

2.3. Details of the plan

The details of The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan are shown in Figure 2.3.1, whilst Figure 2.3.2 shows the proposed character areas of the Commons.

The area around the Tower of Lloyd² will be retained as a memorial garden with the existing entrance, car parking and Community Allotments.

A new main entrance is proposed at the eastern corner of the Commons which is closer to Kells town and has more favourable topography than the current main entrance which requires a steep drive to reach the car park. This entrance is intended to be more accessible to a range of transportation modes, including, pedestrian, bus, and cycle links, as well as providing new car parking, disabled and age-friendly parking which is intended to be sensitively incorporated into the landscape with additional overspill car parking. This eastern corner is proposed to become a focus of amenity, with a proposed Community Centre building which will also provide a commercial opportunity for a café. A new space for children's play and recreation will be introduced at this corner, providing nature-inspired play facilities. A nature cycle trail facility is proposed beside the play space. Close to this there is an events lawn proposed which will provide space to host small outdoor events.

The northern edge of The Commons of Lloyd is proposed to be enhanced as a biodiversity and natural area, introducing new planting (except for in areas with archaeological sensitivity and subject to the correct measures) and habitats to make this route more interesting and enjoyable and improve the biodiversity.

The existing woodland to the west is proposed to be extended into The Commons of Lloyd, creating a new woodland area with a woodland park and picnic zone.

Another new entrance at the northwest corner of the site is proposed to improve connections to the site. This will introduce a small amount of car parking provision along with improved picnic areas to provide an attractive amenity space for visitors. This is an existing small pedestrian entrance with a small picnic area but no car parking facilities. Animal grazing will be managed and contained within proposed zones as shown on Figure 2.3.2.

A series of new paths are proposed to improve the walking and cycling circulation around the site. This is in addition to the existing 'Red Walk' which is a 2.5km loop. The plan proposes to provide a circular route around the perimeter of the Commons, which would take advantage of walking through the biodiversity and nature areas along the northern edge and the extended woodland zones at the west. This route is estimated to be around 5km. Another proposed route would enable visitors to walk from the new main entrance to the Tower of Lloyd² as a 2.5km loop. A shorter version of the aforementioned route would be around 1.7km mostly around the new play facilities, providing a range of options for different abilities and preferences. The routes have been sensitively designed around the archaeological sensitivity of the site and propose a no-dig method of laying the paths to ensure minimal disruption.

² The Tower of Lloyd is also known as the Spire of Lloyd and the Pillar of Lloyd.



Figure 2.3.1. Recreation and Amenity Plan Details

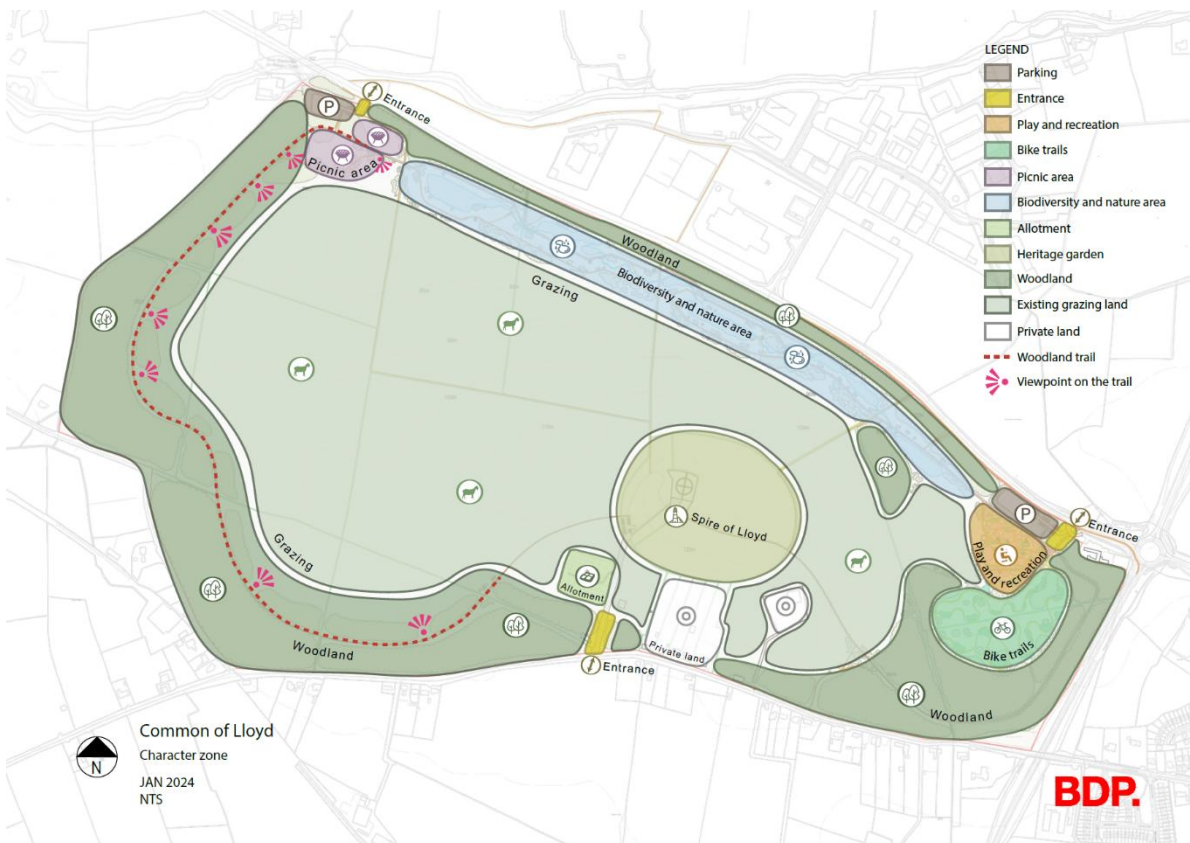
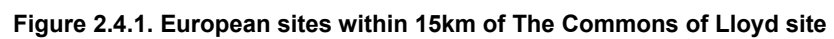


Figure 2.3.2. Proposed Character Zones for the Commons of Lloyd



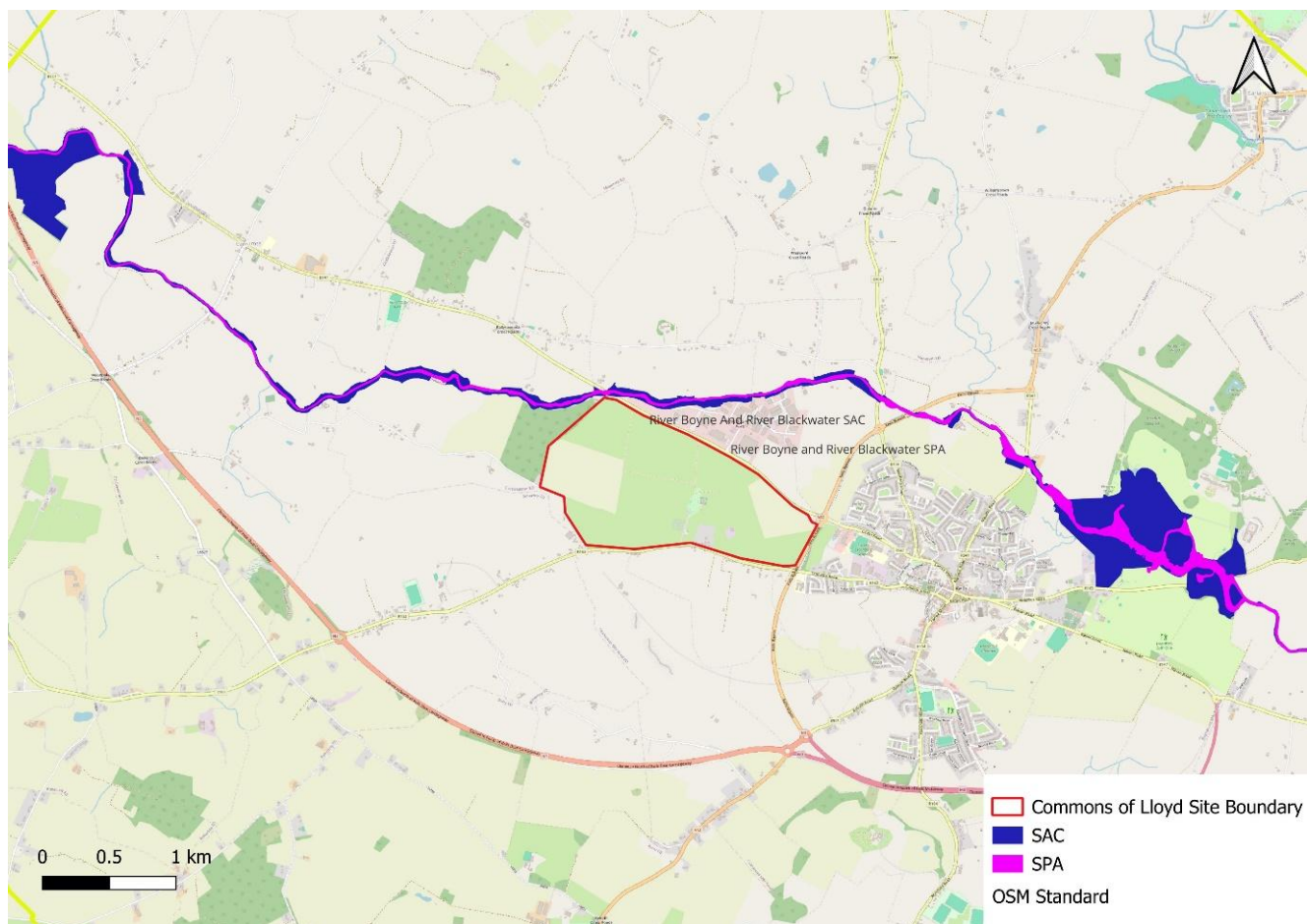


Figure 2.4.2. European sites within close proximity to The Commons of Lloyd site

3. Schedule 2a Screening Assessment

3.1. Criteria

This section presents the SEA Screening assessment of The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan against the criteria provided in Schedule 2a of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2001-2011 which details the criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment. These factors are considered in turn below.

3.2. The characteristics of a plan or programme having regard, in particular, to

The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to location, nature, size and operating conditions, or by allocating resources;

The Recreation and Amenity Plan sets out a range of strategies, proposals and actions to enhance the recreational usage and amenities of The Commons of Lloyd site. The strategies and proposals contained within this Plan are consistent with the land use zoning objectives set out for The Commons of Lloyd in the Meath County Development Plan (MCDP) 2021-2027.

The degree to which the Plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy,

The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan is a non-statutory document. Its purpose is to provide a strategic vision for the enhancement of The Commons of Lloyd recreational and amenity value, with respect to the site's heritage and appropriate conservation measures. The content within The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan is informed by the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 and national policy.

The relevance of the Plan in the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,

The Recreation and Amenity Plan is non-statutory and has strategic aims to improve the sustainable transport connectivity of the site by providing a more accessible entrance point by bus, cycling or walking than the current entrance which is designed around cars. The new entrance will be closer to the existing bus stop and will include cycle parking. The proposals to provide a community centre and café, an improved play area and nature bicycle trail, more walking routes and picnic facilities, all aim to improve the amenity value of the Common, to provide local people of Kells with a valuable open space asset close to their home. The proposals also aim to promote sustainable tourism of the site.

The Plan has been prepared and informed within the context of EU, national, regional and local development plan policies and future development will be prepared in line with the policies, and land-use objectives contained within the MCDP 2021-2027, including environmental enhancement and protection measures in particular.

Planning applications for proposed developments within the plan area that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment may need to be accompanied by one or more of the following: Environmental Impact Statement, an Ecological Impact Assessment Reports, a Habitats Directive Assessment Screening Report or a Natura Impact Statement, as appropriate.

Environmental problems relevant to the plan

The implementation of the Recreation and Amenity Plan is not likely to create or exacerbate environmental problems. Kells water supply is sourced from the Kells/Oldcastle Supply. There is capacity in this water supply.

Wastewater is discharged to the Treatment Plant on Headfort Road. There is limited capacity at this Treatment Plant. There are, however, plans by Irish Water to upgrade the treatment plant's capacity from 8,000 PE to 13,500 PE.

The implementation of the Recreation and Amenity Plan is not likely to have a significant effect on the capacity or quality of the water infrastructure.

The SEA ER of the MCDP 2021-2027 identified the following environmental issues relevant to the plan area.

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna: Legislative objectives governing biodiversity and fauna were not identified as being conflicted with.

Population and Human Health: The impact of the plan upon Population and Human Health is influenced by a number of environmental components such as air, water and soil which have the potential to cause harm. Population and Human Health has the potential to interact with identified existing issues including, flood risk and exposure to radon.

Soil: Legislative objectives governing soil were not identified as being conflicted with.

Water: Zones of flood risk have been identified and informed the MCDP and it includes provisions to contribute towards improvements in the status of waters.

Air and Climatic Factors: Legislative objectives governing air and climatic factors in MCDP were not identified as being conflicted with.

Material Assets: Continued development across County Meath will need to be accompanied by contributions towards the protection of the environment with regard to impacts arising from material assets.

Cultural heritage: No existing conflicts with legislative objectives governing archaeological and architectural heritage have been identified. The Plan has been informed by the existing archaeological studies relating to The Commons of Lloyd and has been informed by a review and recommendations by County Meath's Conservation Officer. The implementation of the Recreation and Amenity Plan would support enhance key cultural and historical assets of the site, and not adversely affect them.

Landscape: Legislative objectives governing landscape and visual appearance were not identified as being conflicted with.

The Recreation and Amenity Plan's aims to enhance the accessibility and amenities with respect to the site's heritage and biodiversity contribute towards promotes the site to visitors and tourists. The plan outlines strategic actions in a manner consistent with the land use zoning objectives (open space and tourism) in the MCDP 2021-2027 that was subject to an SEA and AA Screening.

The relevance of the Plan in the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste-management or water protection)

As stated previously, the Recreation and Amenity Plan is non-statutory and prioritises the objectives within the MCDP 2021-2027. The MCDP includes for the implementation of EU environmental legislation which has therefore guided and informed the Recreation and Amenity Plan.

3.3. Characteristics of the effects of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to

The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,

The implementation of the Recreation and Amenity Plan has potential impacts on the entire plan area in a phased manner throughout its lifetime. The MCDP has designated relevant open space and tourism objectives, and points to providing and improving recreational amenities and sustainable visitor/tourist facilities. In line with key principles, strategic level placemaking principles and prioritisation of MCDP objectives, environmental effects are identified as being positive at strategic scale.

The cumulative nature of the effects,

The Recreation and Amenity Plan supports and is informed by the MCDP 2021-2027 which was subject to an SEA ER 2021 and NIR 2021. It is consistent with the policies and objectives of the overarching county-wide policy and as a result will not have a significant cumulative effect on the environment, when taken with other plans and strategies within the county. Subject to full adherence and implementation of land use zoning objectives, policies and environmental protection in the MCDP, no significant cumulative adverse effects are identified, and significant positive environmental effects are identified.

The trans boundary nature of the effects

Given the location of the site, the lack of connectivity of environmental factors to transboundary areas, and the low level of likely environmental impacts, it is not considered that transboundary effects are likely.

The risks to human health or the environment (e.g., due to accidents),

No such risks are identified as arising from The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan. The improved walking and cycling proposals associated with the Plan may create positive local effects on human health with increased and enhanced access to quality open space along with improved recreation and amenity facilities will be of benefit.

The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)

The proposals in The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan are reflective and consistent with the MCDP 2021-2027 objectives and are focused on the accessibility and amenity value of the site. Effects are considered to be focused in and around the plan area.

The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

a) Special nature characteristics or cultural heritage,

The Commons of Lloyd character has been shaped by its heritage due to the culturally and archaeologically significant features present on the site. Located within The Commons of Lloyd is the Tower of Lloyd³ which is a protected structure. Recently archaeological evidence has also uncovered many important features on the site such as ringforts and enclosures.

The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan is centred around the objectives of improving accessibility, recreational amenities, and visitor facilities in relation to the historic and ecological significance of the site. Positive effects are anticipated arising from the strategic opportunities and interventions in this regard.

b) Exceeded environmental quality standards or limits values,

³ The Tower of Lloyd is also known as the Spire of Lloyd and the Pillar of Lloyd.

It is not anticipated that any environmental quality standards or limit values will be exceeded.

c) Intensive land-use,

The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan supports the improvement of on-site facilities and amenities and is consistent with the open space and tourism objectives set by the MCDP 2021-2027. In seeking to prioritise the objectives of the MCDP, the Plan aims to further enhance the accessibility, heritage and biodiversity of The Commons of Lloyd in order to promote the site to visitors from Kells and tourists.

d) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status,

There are no European site present within The Commons of Lloyd site boundary but the closest European sites are 0.03km away. Similarly, there were no Annex I habitats or supporting habitat for Annex II species identified on site. Therefore, there will be no effects posed to European sites in this respect.

There is a hydrological pathway identified between The Commons of Lloyd boundary and the River Boyne and Blackwater SPA and SAC. At the northern corner to the Commons, the site comes within 0.03km of the river but is separated by the Regional Road R147. Given the proximity, the drainage of The Commons of Lloyd will interact with the river. Therefore, given the sensitivity of the SPA and SAC, it is imperative that the proposals do not affect the water run-off rate and maintain the current levels of run-off. To ensure the protection of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA, the necessary ecological surveys must be taken at a project level when a planning application comes forward.

The proposals included within The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan are in alignment with the MCDP 2021-2027 and the zoning objectives, which have had an AA and SEA screening. In line with this, it would be recommended that all developments in The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan undergo stringent water quality assessments. Due to the sensitivity of the river, discharges should comply with the higher water quality values outlined in the Quality of Salmonid Waters (SI 293/199825) and Surface Water Regulations (SI 272/2009)²⁶. Consultation with Inland Fisheries Ireland should be carried out in relation to all developments that could potentially impact the River, either through construction or operational impacts.

4. Conclusion

Following detailed review and assessment it is considered that The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan will not result in significant adverse environmental effects and therefore, does not require further assessment of the likely effect on the environment of the implementation of The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan through SEA. The assessment is derived from consideration of the following factors:

- The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan is non-statutory and is consistent with the land-use zoning objectives of the MCDP 2021-2027.
- The MCDP 2021-2027 was subject to a full SEA and AA in 2021.
- The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan sits beneath the MCDP 2021-2027 within the statutory planning hierarchy.
- The proposals within The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan aims to prioritise the objectives of the MCDP 2021-2027, in particular the Open Space and Tourism Objectives of which the site is designated. The Recreation and Amenity Plan addresses Policy Objectives such as F1 - *To provide for and improve open spaces for active and passive recreational amenities*, and D1 - *To provide for appropriate and sustainable visitor and tourist facilities and associated uses*.
- The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan has been determined not to give rise to likely significant effects on the conservation management objectives of European Sites of River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA.
- The scale, nature and extent of The Commons of Lloyd Recreation and Amenity Plan proposals and the absence of significant adverse environmental effects arising from these.

This determination will be finalised upon consultation with the environmental authorities.