comhairle chontae na mí
meath county council

PROPOSED VARIATION NO. 6

Meath County Development Plan 2021-2030 (as varied)

November 2026

Meath County Council

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Introduction

Notice is hereby given pursuant to Section 58 of the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended, that Meath County Council has prepared proposed Draft Variation No. 6 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2030.

Reasons for the Variation

The purpose of Variation No. 6 is to give effect to a plan led evidence-based approach to the protection of existing energy infrastructure assets within the County and potential co-location with large energy users to enable the transition to a low-carbon economy on a commercial, industrial and community scale. The National Planning Framework (NPF) 2025 indicates that the future planning and development of our communities at local level is being refocused to tackle Ireland's higher than average carbon-intensity per capita and enable a national transition to a competitive low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050, through harnessing our country's prodigious renewable energy potential. Further, the NPF recognises that the 'development of onshore and offshore renewable energy is critically dependent on the development of enabling infrastructure including grid facilities to bring the energy ashore and connect to major sources of energy demand'. Locating large energy users next to renewable energy sources and grid infrastructure will help drive down carbon footprint and net zero carbon.

In 2022 the Government published a statement on the Role of Data Centres in Ireland's Enterprise Strategy which noted the following: *'Outside of Dublin, there may also be opportunities to develop additional grid capacity where private investment can co-deliver grid connection, electricity generation and demand opportunities, perhaps alongside fibre optics/telecoms infrastructure, in strategically and environmentally suitable locations close to significant national infrastructure'.* The Climate Action Plan 2025 seeks a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030 and part of this is to be achieved by decarbonising industry and enterprise by changing how we produce, consume and design our goods and services by breaking the link between fossil fuels and economic growth.

In considering this, Meath County Council is providing a policy framework for the protection of existing infrastructure assets while identifying a potential strategic site where co-location with a large energy user would strengthen the national grid and help in the transition to a low to zero carbon economy.

This Variation is guided by the National Planning Framework 2018 and first revision April 2025, the Climate Action Plan 2025, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region, The Government Statement on the Role of Data Centres in Ireland's Enterprise Strategy 2022, the Meath Climate Action Plan 2024, Eirgrids Data Centre Connection Offer Process and Policy Version 3 (2026), the Large Energy-User Action Plan 2026 published by the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment and the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment and the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2030, as varied.

Public Display / How to Make a Submission

The proposed draft Variation No. 6 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2030 (as varied) will be available for inspection from **Tuesday 24th November to 4pm Tuesday 22nd December 2026** online at https://consult.meath.ie/ and also at the following locations **(during normal opening hours)**:

- Meath County Council, Buvinda House, Dublin Road, Navan, Co. Meath, C15 Y291
- Ashbourne Municipal District,1-2 Killegland Square Upper, Ashbourne, A84 NY73
- Kells Municipal District, Town Hall, Headfort Place, Kells, A82 W2R3
- Laytown/Bettystown Municipal District, Main Street, Duleek, A92 R9KW
- Ratoath Municipal District, Drumree Road, Dunshaughlin, A85 XK20
- Trim Municipal District, Mornington House, Summerhill Road, Trim C15 P2HE

Written observations or submissions regarding **proposed Variation No. 6 amendments only** must be received by **4pm on 22nd December 2026**.

Submissions should be in **ONE** medium only i.e. online or hard copy and made as follows:

- Online https://consult.meath.ie/

OR

- In writing marked **'Draft Variation No. 6 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2030 (as varied)'** to: Senior Executive Officer, Planning Department, Meath County Council, Buvinda House, Dublin Road, Navan, Co. Meath, C15 Y291

Submissions/Observations **must** include:

- Proposed Amendment(s) number as shown in the document
- Full Name and Address of person(s) making submission or observation
- Details of organisation, community group, company which you represent, where relevant.

Late or emailed submissions will be considered as invalid and cannot be accepted.

Please note that submissions can only be considered if they relate to proposed Draft Variation No. 6. Submissions that do not relate to proposed Draft Variation No. 6 cannot be considered.

Please note that submissions received by Meath County Council will be available for public viewing on the Council's consultation portal and website, when compliant under General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and will also form part of the statutory Chief Executive's Report to be presented to the full Council. You are responsible for ensuring that no vexatious, libelous or confidential information, including confidential information in relation to a third party (in respect of which the third party has not, expressly, or impliedly in the circumstances, consented to its disclosure) is included in your submission. The Planning Authority reserves the right to redact any submission or part thereof. Meath County Council will treat all personal data you may give as confidential. Data protection information can be found at https://www.meath.ie/council/your-council/your-data-and-access-to-information/data-protection

Accompanying Reports

Proposed Variation No. 6 is accompanied by the following materials:

- Proposed Variation No. 6 Map 12 - Volume 3 Book of Maps

- Proposed Variation No. 6 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report Non-Technical Summary
- Proposed Variation No. 6 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report
- Proposed Variation No. 6 Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report and Natura Impact Report
- Proposed Variation No. 6 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)
- Proposed Variation No. 6 Newspaper Notice

Identifying the Proposed Changes

Changes to the text are indicated as follows:

New Text is in blue and deleted text will have a ~~strikethrough.~~

Proposed Variation No. 6 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2030

Table 1 sets out the sections/tables/policies/objectives/map in the County Development Plan that are proposed to be amended/included as part of the proposed variation.

MCDP 2021-2030 Chapter/Volume	Section/Table/Policy Objective/Map	Proposed Change
Chapter 6 Infrastructure Strategy	Add section 6.15.4.1 (b) Substations	Add a list of substations in the County
	Amend section 6.15.4.2	Update in relation to North-South interconnector
	Add section 6.15.4.3 Green Energy Parks	Add a paragraph in relation to Green Energy Parks
		Add a number of objectives EP OBJ 1-6
Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives	Section 11.8.7 Large Energy Users	New objectives and policy (LEU OBJ 1- 3 and LEU POL 1) in relation to the assessment of large energy users with reference back to objectives and guidance in Chapter 6
	Section 11.14.6 Land Use Zoning Categories	Amendments to TU Transport and Utility Infrastructure zoning objective and guidance
Volume 3 Book of Maps	Volume 3 Book of Maps	New Map 12 Woodlands Energy Park added

Table 1: sections/tables/policies/objectives/map in the County Development Plan that are proposed to be amended/included

Proposed text update to Chapter 6 Infrastructure Strategy

Section 6.15.4.1 (b) Energy Assets: Substations

The following is a list of substations in the County from 38kV up to 400kV:

38 kv Substations

Number	Name
1	Kilcock 38kV Substation
2	Academy Street 38kV Substation
3	Abbeylands 38kV Substation
4	Lloyd 38 kV Substation
5	Kells 38kV Substation
6	Oldcastle 38kV Substation
7	Indaver 38kV Substation
8	Ashbourne 38kV Substation
9	Julianstown 38kV Substation
10	Randalstown 38kV Substation
11	Trim 38kV Substation
12	Duleek 38kV Substation
13	Athboy 38kV Substation
14	Kingscourt 38kV Substation
15	Clarkstown 38kV Substation
16	Slane 38 kV Substation

110kV-400kV Substations

Number	Name	Voltage
1	Kinnegad 110kV	110
2	Platin Substation	110
3	Woodland 400kV Transmission Substation	400
4	Portan Converter Station	400
5	Gorman 220kV Substation	220
6	Navan 110kV Substation	110
7	Baltrasna 110kV Substation	110
8	Meath Hill 110kV Substation	110
9	Knockumber (1) 110kV Substation	110
10	Clonee 220kV Substation	220
11	Bracetown 220kV Substation	220
12	Garballagh 110 kV Substation	110
13	Oldbridge 110 kV Substation	110
14	Blundelstown 110 kV Substation	110
15	Ballymacarney 110 kV Substation	110
16	Muckerstown 110 kV Substation	110

Source: OSM Data

Section 6.15.4.2 North-South Interconnector

Planning permission was granted by An Bord Pleanála for the sections in Counties Meath, Cavan and Monaghan in December 2016. ~~Following a successful legal challenge, planning permission for the northern section of the interconnector has been delayed.~~ In 2026 Eirgrid is in the process of writing to landowners along the route in respect of the placing of infrastructure on or across their lands.

Section 6.15.4.3 Green Energy Parks

In 2026, electricity demand has never been higher however there are already times when renewable energy in Ireland cannot be deployed because of limitations in the electrical grid. When this happens Eirgrid must curtail renewable generation and allow fossil fuel plants to supply the shortfall. In 2023, the total wind dispatch down lost energy in Ireland was 10.7% which was an increase from 8.5% in 2022[1]. In 2025 this figure had rose to 11.4% thus there is a trend upwards. Increased electricity demand has coincided with a challenging environment for the delivery of grid infrastructure and new generation facilities. The pace at which new electricity demand is being sought by large energy users is faster than the pace of network infrastructure delivery and the development of new generation capacity. Consequently, developing more renewable power is just one part of enabling Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy; we also need to protect and develop our electricity grid to accommodate it.

Green energy parks provide a potential solution to strengthen the electricity grid and optimise the deployment of renewables. They propose bringing together renewable power (wind/solar etc), energy storage and other grid support infrastructure on a single site close to a high-capacity grid access point, such as a substation. They integrate multiple renewable energy sources and storage solutions like

[1] Annual Renewable Energy Constraint and Curtailment report 2023, April 2024, Eirgrid.

batteries and have potential to co-locate with large energy users such as data centres, all connected to the grid at a single point. In doing so, it can optimise the storage and deployment of renewable electricity across the electricity grid in the region. Woodland Energy Park has been identified as a potential location to develop a low carbon energy park in County Meath primarily due to its location adjacent to the 400kV Woodland substation and the East West Interconnector station. Woodland Energy Park has been identified as a strategic location suitable for the co-location of large energy users with energy grid infrastructure. Large energy users require a reliable, high-capacity energy supply and include data centres, distribution centres, life sciences etc. The role of data centres in our economy is highlighted in the Programme for Government 2025, which outlines an ambition to facilitate data centre growth in the context of efficient grid usage and a reduction in carbon emissions, among other factors. Further policy on data centres is set down in Chapter 4 of this Plan.

EP OBJ 1: To support and promote the protection, improvement and expansion of the energy infrastructure assets identified in section 6.15.4.1 (b) as critical to the economic development of the County.

EP OBJ 2: To support and facilitate the development of a low carbon Green Energy Park at Woodlands adjacent to the existing 400kV substation and East West Interconnector station that integrates renewable energy generation, storage solutions and grid infrastructure while co-locating with large energy users (Volume 3, Map 12 refers).

EP OBJ 3: To require the submission of a supporting statement with any planning application on lands identified at Woodlands for a Green Energy Park demonstrating how the development constitutes a 'large energy user' and the suitability of the development at the location.

EP OBJ 4: To provide a dedicated direct access point from the Green Energy Park at Woodlands to the R154 to ensure seamless, safe and efficient transportation logistics for construction and operational phases.

EP OBJ 5: To allow for agricultural uses such as vertical farms that are complementary to the development of the lands identified for a Green Energy Park at Woodlands.

EP OBJ 6: To require that development on the TU zoned lands at Woodland Energy Park is informed by a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment, including hydraulic modelling of all watercourses within the lands, and applies the sequential approach such that:

1. highly vulnerable development, including substations, generation plant, energy storage and large energy user buildings, is located in Flood Zone C;
2. a riparian setback of not less than 30metres from top of bank is maintained either side of all watercourses, in accordance with INF OBJ 38 of this Plan, free of development other than water-compatible uses and essential crossings;
3. less vulnerable elements, such as solar arrays, are only located in Flood Zones A or B where flood depths are shallow and there is no loss of floodplain storage or conveyance; and
4. surface water is managed through SuDs to greenfield runoff rates.

Any new or altered watercourse crossing would also require consent from the OPW.

Proposed text update to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives

Section 11.14.6 Land Use Zoning Categories

TU Transport, ~~and~~ Utility and Energy Infrastructure (including energy generation, storage and large energy user industry) Objective: To provide for essential transport, ~~and public~~ utilities and infrastructure including rail stations, park and ride facilities, energy infrastructure (including energy generation, storage, digital infrastructure and large energy user industry), water and wastewater infrastructure, electricity, gas and telecommunications infrastructure.

Guidance

These lands have been identified to provide for essential ~~public~~ transport and utility infrastructure including green energy parks. The nature of these facilities is such that the use of the lands is dedicated to the provision, ~~and~~ maintenance and expansion of this infrastructure. It is acknowledged however that there are instances where additional uses may be appropriate. This would ~~primarily~~ relate to rail stations and park and ride facilities close to or within town centres where additional commercial uses may be acceptable and the co-location of large energy users adjacent to existing energy generation assets such as high capacity substations. Applications for a commercial/mixed use/green energy park/large energy user on such lands will be assessed on a case by case basis and will be required to demonstrate that such a use would be compatible to the location and would not undermine the primary use of the land which is to provide essential infrastructure and services. Any application for a large energy user must include a supporting statement demonstrating how the development constitutes a 'large energy user' and the suitability of the development at the location.

Section 11.8.7 Large Energy Users

This section sets down objectives that apply when assessing applications for large energy users. Applications for large energy users should have regard to Eirgrids Data Centre Connection Offer Process and Policy Version 3 published in May 2026 and the Large Energy-User Action Plan published by the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment and the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment. Further objectives can be found in Chapter 6, section 6.15.4.3 Green Energy Parks in relation to the co-location of large energy users with grid infrastructure.

LEU POL 1: To ensure that large energy user development, including extensions and intensification of existing facilities, achieves high standards of energy and water efficiency, environmental protection and resource management.

LEU OBJ 1: Require all planning applications for large energy users to be accompanied by a Development Statement addressing:

- Anticipated electrical and gas demand profile (peak MW, annual MWh).
- Grid operator engagement and confirmation of capacity solution.
- Renewable energy procurement and decarbonisation pathway.
- Efficiency plans.
- Heat-reuse feasibility and identified off-takers.
- Water demand and cooling technology specification.
- Connectivity (fibre and network resilience).
- Environmental, transport, and biodiversity assessments.
- Site specific flood risk assessment and surface water management strategy.
- Decommissioning and community benefit commitments.

LEU OBJ 2: Applications for large energy users should include a supporting statement to include the following:

- Demonstrate how the development constitutes a large energy user;

- Demonstrate availability of firm power capacity or delivery of new capacity without adverse impact on the grid;
- Demonstrate a clear energy strategy that priorities proximate low-carbon sources, private-wire renewable generation, and/or storage in line with Government policies;
- Details measures to maximise renewable energy use, reduce lost energy from this recourse and potentially reduce redispatch costs on the grid;
- Details efficient water use, with preference for public water supply and for low-water or closed-loop cooling technologies;
- Illustrates compatibility with gas or alternative fuels infrastructure, with preference for dual-fuel or low-carbon readiness;
- Demonstrates adequate digital connectivity and network resilience;
- Details design solutions that mitigate environmental, landscape, biodiversity, noise and traffic impacts;
- Details for decommissioning and site restoration plan, and where feasible, provision for adaptive reuse.
- Identifies community benefit measures, including local employment, skills or energy and recreational initiatives that align with the local community's needs.

LEU OBJ 3: (a) To require energy-efficient design and operation, including cooling and associated plant, and demonstration of anticipated annual and peak electricity demand and energy-efficiency performance.
(b) To require 80% of annual operational electricity consumption in line with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (Large Energy User Connection Policy, 2025) and compliance of emissions with legislation and EPA guidelines.
(c) To require compliance with applicable electricity connection requirements while promoting measures, where feasible and consistent with grid operator requirements, to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and improve alignment with renewable generation, including appropriate storage and demand flexibility.
(d) To require demonstration of sufficient electricity, water and wastewater capacity, having regard to cumulative demand from existing, permitted and reasonably foreseeable development, and to ensure that necessary infrastructure is available before the relevant phase becomes operational via engagement with relevant authorities.
(e) To require cooling systems that minimize freshwater consumption and water losses through efficient design, recirculation and appropriate use of harvested rainwater or reclaimed water. System selection shall address combined water and energy performance, peak demand, drought resilience and projected climate change.
(f) To require avoidance of route potable-water use for cooling unless demonstrated necessary following assessment of practicable alternatives. Water supply, abstraction and discharge shall protect community water supplies, prevent deterioration of waterbody status and safeguard ecological flows and water-dependent habitats and species, including during drought and cumulatively with other development.
(g) To require recovery and beneficial use of waste heat where technically, environmentally and economically feasible. Where immediate use is not feasible, proposals shall demonstrate the reasons and safeguard practicable opportunities for future heat recovery and connection to heat networks.
(h) To require measures to minimise whole-life greenhouse-gas emissions and resource consumption, including sustainable construction, equipment repair and reuse, responsible waste management, and appropriate decommissioning and site reuse or restoration.
(i) To require demonstration that noise, vibration, lighting, air emissions, fuel storage and discharges will not give rise to unacceptable environmental or amenity effects, individually or cumulatively, including during generator testing and emergency operation.
(j) To require measurable commitments and arrangements for monitoring electricity consumption, renewable electricity matching, greenhouse-gas emissions, water consumption and losses, and useful heat recovery, with implementation and proportionate reporting.

Volume 3 Book of Maps: Woodlands Energy Park (Map 12)

