

**Meath County Development Plan
2021-2027 Variation No.5: SEA
Statement
Strategic Environmental Assessment
(SEA) Statement**

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Strategic
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Glossary

Appropriate Assessment

The obligation to undertake Appropriate Assessment derives from Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. AA is a focused and detailed impact assessment of the implications of a strategic action or project, alone and in combination with other strategic actions and projects, on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives.

Biodiversity and Flora and Fauna

Biodiversity is the variability among living organisms from all sources including inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems' (United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity 1992).

Flora is all of the plants found in a given area.

Fauna is all of the animals found in a given area.

Environmental Problems

Annex I of Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of Ministers, of 27th June 2001, on the assessment of the effects of certain Plans and programmes on the environment (the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive) requires that information is provided on 'any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme', thus, helping to ensure that the proposed strategic action does not make existing environmental problems worse.

Environmental problems arise where there is a conflict between current environmental conditions and ideal targets. If environmental problems are identified at the outset they can help focus attention on important issues and geographical areas where environmental effects of the plan or programme may be likely.

Environmental Vectors

Environmental vectors are 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.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures are measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and, as fully as possible, offset any significant adverse impacts on the environment of implementing a human action, be it a plan, programme or project. Mitigation involves ameliorating significant negative effects. Where there are significant negative effects, consideration should be given in the first instance to preventing such effects or, where this is not possible, to lessening or offsetting those effects.

Protected Structure

Protected Structure is the term used in the Planning and Development Act and Regulations (as amended) to define a structure included by a planning authority in its Record of Protected Structures. Such a structure shall not be altered or demolished in whole or part without obtaining planning permission or confirmation from the planning authority that the part of the structure to be altered is not protected.

Recorded Monument

A monument included in the list and marked on the map which comprises the Record of Monuments and Places that is set out County by County under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994 by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland. The definition includes Zones of Archaeological Potential in towns and all other monuments of archaeological interest which have so far been identified. Any works at or in relation to a recorded monument requires two months' notice to the former Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (now Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht) under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994.

SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt it.

SEA Scoping

Scoping is the process of determining what issues are to be addressed, and setting out a methodology in which to address them in a structured manner appropriate to the plan or programme. SEA scoping is carried out in consultation with appropriate environmental authorities.

Strategic Actions

Strategic actions include: Policies / Strategies, which may be considered as inspiration and guidance for action and which set the framework for Plans and programmes; Plans, sets of coordinated and timed objectives for the implementation of the policy; and Programmes, sets of projects in a particular area.

Strategic Environmental Objective (SEO)

Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) are methodological measures developed from policies which generally govern environmental protection objectives established at international, Community or Member State level and are used as standards against which the provisions of the Masterplan and the alternatives can be evaluated in order to help identify which provisions would be likely to result in significant environmental effects and where such effects would be likely to occur, if - in the case of adverse effects – unmitigated

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This is the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement for Variation 5 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (hereafter referred to as ‘the Plan’ or MCDP).

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (the Meath CDP / CDP) was adopted on 22 September 2021 and came into effect on the 03 November 2021. The CDP is divided into four volumes. Volume 1 of the CDP sets out the policies and objectives and the overall strategy for the development of the County over the plan period 2021-2027. Volume 2 of the CDP includes written statements and accompanying maps for all settlements within the county and sets out development and land use zoning objectives for each area. Volume 3 of the CDP includes a book of maps for the county. Volume 4 includes the Environmental Assessments.

In accordance with Section 58 of the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended, Meath County Council prepared Draft Variation No.5 of the County Development Plan 2021-2027 and placed it on public display, together with associated environmental reports, from Tuesday 31 March to Friday 1 May, 2026.

The Variation was adopted by the Elected Members of Meath County Council on Monday the 8 June 2026.

This environmental report has been prepared to comply with the provisions of Article 8 of S.I. 456 of 2025 – European Communities (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations 2025).

The Report has had due regard to the SEA Regulations¹, in particular to: -

- methods of assessment;
- contents and level of detail in the Variation;
- the stage in the Plan or Programme-making process;
- the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in the decision-making process in order to avoid duplication of environmental assessment; and
- consultation with the SEA Environmental Authorities.

Brady Shipman Martin (BSM) has been appointed by Meath County Council to carry out the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) in respect of Variation No.5 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. This Environmental Report should be read in conjunction with Variation No. 5, the Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report, and the AA Screening, Natura Impact Report (NIR) and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

This SEA Statement is a reflective document that looks back on the SEA process, what has been achieved and it also sets out what monitoring will be done in the future.

¹ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2025/si/456/made/en/print>

1.2 Description of Variation No.5 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

Variation No.5 has been prepared in response to the recent changes in National Planning Policy, namely the publication of the National Planning Framework (NPF) First Revision and the publication of Section 28 Guidelines, NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements, Guidelines for Planning Authorities issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), both published in 2025.

Variation No. 5 is being brought forward to contribute to delivering the NPF housing requirement set out by the NPF Implementation Circular. The measures set out in the Variation primarily relate to the following amendments.

1. Proposed Amendment No. 1: Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 Volume 1 - Written Statement

To update the County Development Plan to take account of the new housing targets set out in the National Planning Framework Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in July 2025 and issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

In addition to updates as required to the text to the CDP Written Statement the amendment provides for the following updated/new objectives:

- Updated objectives CS OBJ 3, CS OBJ 8 and CS OBJ 11 in Chapter 2 Core Strategy
- Updated objectives SH OBJ 2, SH OBJ 7 and SH OBJ 20 in Chapter 3 Settlement and Housing Strategy
- New objective INF OBJ 25B in Chapter 6 (in relation to Protection of Surface Waters)

2. Proposed Amendment No.2: Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 Volume 2 - Written Statement for Settlements

In order to ensure consistency with the Written Statement of the Development Plan (Volume 1) and the revised housing targets, the Written Statements for the settlements that contain lands proposed for rezoning are required to be amended as part of this variation. The amendments primarily relate to adjustments to the household allocation for the relevant areas and projected population growth having regard to Census 2022 data and the new annual housing growth requirements for the county as set out in the NPF Implementation Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines 2025.

In addition to updates as required to the text to the CDP Written Statement for Settlements, the amendment provides for the following new objectives:

- New objective DCE OBJ 23 (Flood Risk Management) (Dunboyne)
- New objective DNS OBJ 14 (Flood Risk Management) (Dunshaughlin)
- New objective KIL OBJ 5B (Flooding) (Kilcock)
- New objective NAV OBJ 38 (Flood Risk Management) (Navan)

3. Proposed Amendment No.3: Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 Volume 2 - Maps for Settlements

In order to ensure consistency with the National Planning Framework and accommodate revised housing targets for the County, it is proposed to amend land use zonings as shown on the County Development Plan Map Sheets. It is also proposed to amend the development / settlement boundaries

accordingly to ensure any lands that have been identified for development within the lifetime of the Plan fall within the development boundary of the relevant settlement.

The proposed rezonings are summarised below with details provided as to the existing and proposed land use zoning objectives for each individual area. The proposed rezonings are illustrated individually through updated land use zoning map sheets for the relevant settlements / areas with the proposed variations clearly marked on each sheet. Where no zoning changes are proposed in settlements under this Variation, the current map sheets remain in effect.

Lands in 11 settlements have been identified for rezoning as follows:

- Dunboyne
- Southern Environs of Drogheda
- Navan
- Kilcock
- Dunshaughlin
- Enfield
- Bettystown-Laytown-Mornington East-Donacarney- Mornington(East Meath)
- Duleek
- Stamullen
- Athboy
- Carlanstown

1.3 Appropriate 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. Natura 2000 sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA).

Stage 1 is to establish whether AA is required for the particular plan or project. This stage is referred to as 'screening for the requirement for AA', and its purpose is to determine, on the basis of a preliminary assessment and objective criteria, whether a plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, could have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site, in view of the site's conservation objectives.

As set out in Department Circular Letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/08² (15 February 2008), Screening for AA is of relevance to SEA screening in that "*where following screening, it is found that the draft plan or amendment may have an impact on the conservation status of a Natura 2000 site or that such an impact cannot be ruled out, adopting the precautionary approach:*

- *An AA of the plan must be carried out, and*
- *In any case where SEA would not otherwise be required, it must also be carried out."*

Hence, where a plan requires AA, it shall also require SEA.

Draft Variation No.5 was screened for Appropriate Assessment (AA) in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992) and it was concluded that potential for effects on the integrity of European sites cannot be excluded beyond all reasonable scientific doubt and a Natura Impact Report (NIR) has been prepared.

Variation No.5 has been subject to 'Stage 2 AA' as required by Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and a NIR was prepared and accompanied Draft Variation No.5 on public display.

² NPWS SEA letter: <https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/circular-sea-01-08.pdf>

1.4 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

Variation No.5 has been subject to a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) which addresses the issues of assessment and management of flood risk relevant to the Variation. The SFRA identified potential flood related considerations in relation to the proposed land use zonings in Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Kilcock and Navan and specific new objectives (DCE OBJ 23; DNS OBJ 14; KIL OBJ 5B, and NAV OBJ 38 – refer to Section 2.2 of this report and to the Variation) have been included in the Variation.

The SFRA has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of *The Planning System and Flood Risk Assessment Guidelines for Planning Authorities*³, and accompanied Draft Variation No.5 on public display.

1.5 Content of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement


In accordance with Article 12(1) of the European Union (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2025, the SEA Statement will summarise the following:

- (a) *how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan,*
- (b) *how—*
 - (i) *the environmental report prepared under Regulation 8,*
 - (ii) *submissions and observations made to the competent authority in response to a notice under Regulation 9 or Part 3 of the Act, and*
 - (iii) *any consultations under Regulation 10,**have been taken into account during the preparation of the plan,*
- (c) *the reasons for choosing the plan, as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with, and*
- (d) *the measures decided upon to monitor, in accordance with Regulation 14 the significant environmental effects of implementation of the plan.*

1.6 SEA Stages and Process

The key focus of SEA is to take environmental issues, and in particular ‘*likely significant environmental effects*’ of a plan or programme (P / P), into consideration during the P / P making process. The key stages in the SEA process as they relate to Variation No. 5 of the MCDP are outlined in **Table 1.1** below.

Table 1.1 Outline of the SEA Process

Stage	Description	Status
1. Screening	<p>The requirement to undertake a SEA is mandatory for certain Plan / Programme (P / P). Where SEA is not a mandatory requirement, the P / Ps is subject to a ‘Screening process’, to consider if it is <i>likely to have significant effects</i> on the environment, and therefore, if SEA is required.</p> <p>The preparation of the <i>Draft Variation</i> was screened for Appropriate Assessment (AA) and it was concluded that potential for effects on the integrity of European sites cannot be excluded beyond all reasonable scientific doubt and is required to undergo Appropriate Assessment.</p>	<p>Completed</p> 

³ Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government: <https://www.opw.ie/en/media/Planning%20Guidelines%20-%20FRM%20-%20Nov%202009.pdf>

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Stage	Description	Status
	Therefore, in accordance with <i>Circular Letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/08</i> the <i>Draft Variation</i> was also required to undergo a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with <i>Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment</i> (known as the SEA Directive).	
2. Scoping	<p>Preparation of a SEA Scoping Report highlighting that the Environmental Report is required to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ methods of assessment; ■ contents and level of detail in the Plan / Programme; ■ the stage in the Plan or Programme-making process; and ■ the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in the decision-making process in order to avoid duplication of environmental assessment. <p>Scoping provides for consultation with the Environmental Authorities specified in S.I. No. 456 of 2025, and the process allows for incorporation of the views of the environmental authorities within the P / P and the SEA Environmental Report.</p>	Completed 
3. Environmental Report	<p>Preparation of a systemic identification and evaluation of alternatives and assessment of the <i>likely significant environmental effects</i> of implementing the P / P.</p> <p>The findings of the assessment, which is carried out at various stages in the P / P making (<i>e.g.</i> Draft, Amended Draft <i>etc.</i>), are provided in the SEA Environmental Report in accordance with Article 12 (including Schedule 2) of S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended by Regulations S.I. No. 200 of 2011.</p> <p>The output from this stage is an Environmental Report which accompanied the draft P / P required on public display.</p>	Completed 
4. SEA Statement	<p>Completion / adoption of the Plan, taking account of <i>likely significant environmental effects</i>, any submissions or observations received from consultations and integration of mitigation and monitoring measures within the Plan.</p> <p>The Environmental Report is concluded and an SEA Statement is prepared in accordance with Article 12(1) of S.I. No. 456 of 2025, as noted in Section 1.5 of this report (above).</p>	Current Stage
5. SEA Monitoring	The Plan is adopted and implemented, and the environmental effectiveness of the implementation of the Plan is monitored and reported on through the life of the Plan.	On-going Stage

2 Integration of Environmental Considerations into the Plan

2.1 Introduction

This section details how both the SEA Environmental Report and submissions and observations made to Meath County Council on the Environmental Report and SEA process have been taken into account during the preparation of Variation No. 5 of the MCDP.

The SEA and AA team worked with the Plan-preparation team at Meath County Council in order to integrate requirements for environmental protection and management into the Plan. Consideration has been given to the requirement to undertake environmental assessment of this Plan in order to ensure full legal compliance and to further integrate protection, enhancement and promotion of the environment in developing and implementing the Plan.

2.2 SEA Consultation

A number of opportunities are integrated into the plan-making process to allow for consultation with the environmental authorities and the general public on the plan and SEA. Submissions and observations were made at each of these stages, and these informed the preparation and finalisation of the Plan and the SEA process.

2.2.1 SEA Scoping Consultation

SEA Scoping (Stage 2) consultation with the Environmental Authorities specified in Article 2(1) of S.I. No. 456 of 2025 and for incorporation of the views of the Environmental Authorities within the Plan or Programme and the SEA Environmental Report.

SEA Scoping consultation was undertaken with the following Environmental Authorities between 10 February and 10 March 2026:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage;
- The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Development Applications Unit;
- The Minister for the Climate, Energy and the Environment;
- The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine;
- Louth County Council;
- Monaghan County Council;
- Cavan County Council;
- Westmeath County Council;
- Offaly County Council;
- Kildare County Council;
- Fingal County Council.

Submissions / observations on the scoping of the Environmental Report received from environmental authorities informed the Variation and Environmental Report as set out in **Table 2.1**.

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Table 2.1 SEA Scoping Submissions / Observations from Environmental Authorities

Environmental Authority	Outline of Nature of the Submission	Response to consideration of nature of submission
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Ensure that the Variation aligns with key higher-level plans and programmes and is consistent with the relevant objectives and policy commitments of the revised National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region.	The information provided has informed the preparation of the Variation and the Environmental Report.
	Climatic factors should be considered with reference to the most up to date Climate Action Plan and relevant Flood Risk Management Plan.	These factors have been referenced
	Data / Resources - The Submission provides links to a range of SEA guidance and resources	The information provided has informed the preparation of the Environmental Report.
	State of the Environment (EPA, 2024) - The Submission refers to key relevant areas in the EPA State of the Environment Report (2024).	
	Reference is provided to the Environmental Monitoring set out in Table 7.1 of the revised NPF's SEA Statement. This monitoring should be reflected, where relevant and appropriate, in the context of future, environmental monitoring and related reporting associated with the revised CDP implementation.	This is noted. In addition as a Variation to the Development Plan, monitoring as detailed in the Environmental Report prepared for the Development Plan remains relevant to Variation as noted in this Environmental Report.
	The Variation should align with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as relevant sectoral, regional and local adaptation plans.	The information provided has informed the preparation of the Plan.
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	<p>The submission notes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide map of protected structures from Record of Protected Structures ■ Reference to historic designed landscapes (or cultural heritage landscapes), gardens and demesnes ■ Have regard to Ministerial Guidelines '<i>Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i>' ■ Note sections from Chapter 8 of Development Plan relating to built heritage ■ Proximity of new zonings to ACAs architectural conservation areas and protected structures, their curtilage/s and/or associated historic demesne/s ■ Provides definitions for aspects of architectural heritage 	<p>The information provided has been reviewed and has informed the preparation and assessment of the Environmental Report and the Appropriate Assessment/Natura Impact Report, as relevant.</p> <p>Map for Record of Protected Structures is included in the Environmental Report.</p> <p>A new objective (INF OBJ 25B) has been included in the Draft Variation in relation to the</p>

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Environmental Authority	Outline of Nature of the Submission	Response to consideration of nature of submission
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In relation to nature conservation the submission endorses the approach set out in the scoping report ■ Evaluate whether subsequent development of lands to be rezoned in the East Meath area between Bettystown and Laytown and in Donacarney, and in the southern environs of Drogheda as proposed in Variation No. 5 might affect the ex-situ usage of these lands by Special Conservation Interest (SCI) bird species for the nearby River Nanny Estuary and Shore Special Protection Area (SPA) and Boyne Estuary SPA, such as Oystercatcher, Golden Plover, Lapwing and Redshank. ■ Evaluation of the possible effects that pollutants entering the Rye Water from developments on the rezoned Kilcock lands during both the developments' construction and operational phases might have on Qualifying Interests (QIs) for the downstream Rye Water Valley/Carton SAC. ■ Proposed rezoning in vicinity of Duleek Commons pNHA 	<p>protection of all surface waters (including the Rye Water – as noted in the submission).</p> <p>The proposed rezoning in the vicinity of Duleek Commons pNHA is from A2 – New Residential to Whitelands – therefore, there is no risk to the pNHA.</p>
Louth County Council	SEA scoping report is acknowledged and notes that LCC is satisfied that it has been prepared in accordance with the relevant legislation and best-practice guidance.	Noted

2.2.2 Draft Plan Consultation

The Draft Variation, together with the SEA Environmental Report, Natura Impact Report (NIR) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment were placed on public display between 31 March 2026 and 1 May 2026 and 79 submissions / observations were received.

Meath County Council prepared a Chief Executive's Report (May 2026) to present the outcomes of the consultation process carried out on Proposed Variation No.5 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, as varied. Its primary function is to list and summarise the main issues raised in the submissions received during the consultation process and to provide recommendations in response to the submissions. This report, which was issued to the Elected Members of Meath County Council for consideration, included minor modifications to the Draft Variation based on the submissions received.

The consultation process included submissions / observations from the following Environmental Authorities:

- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- EPA
- Fingal County Council
- Louth County Council

The Department noted the inclusion of a specific objective in the Draft Variation following on from their submission to the SEA Scoping consultation. The EPA provided further guidance on the SEA process and closing out the SEA Statement. The planning authorities noted the Draft Variation but did not raise any specific comments.

3 SEA Environmental Report

The SEA Environmental Report has been prepared to comply with the provisions of Article 8 of S.I. 456 of 2025 European Union (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2025.

Article 5(1) and Annex I of the *SEA Directive* provides detail on the information to be included in an Environmental Report. **Table 3.1** provides a checklist of the information referred to in Article 5(1) with a confirmation of where the relevant information is contained within the SEA Environmental Report. (Refer to the standalone SEA Environmental Report prepared for the Variation).

Table 3.1 Information required under Annex I of the SEA Directive

Information referred to in Article 5(1)	Environmental Report Section
(a) an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	Section 2 & Section 4
(b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;	Section 5
(c) the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	Section 5
(d) any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;	Section 5
(e) the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	Section 6
(f) the likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;	Section 8 and Appendix 1
(g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;	Section 9
(h) an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;	Section 7
(i) a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Article 10;	Section 10
(j) a non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.	Refer to Non-technical Summary Report

3.1 Strategic Environmental Objectives

The SEA Directive requires that *‘the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation.’*

A series of Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) have been prepared based on the SEOs in the Environmental Report for the existing Development Plan revised in line with current guidance for Variation No.5 (refer to **Table 3.2**). The SEOs provide a basis for the assessment of the environmental effects of the Variation No.5 and are framed in such a manner as to enable the Variation No.5 to be fully assessed in environmental terms.

SEOs are distinct from the objectives within the CDP, although they often overlap and are developed from international, national and regional policies which generally govern environmental protection objectives. These high-level SEOs are paired with specific targets which can be monitored using indicators (see Section 10 of this Report).

Table 3.2 Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) for USSEB DEDP

Theme	SEO Code	Strategic Environmental Objective
Biodiversity (Flora & Fauna) (B)	B_1	Ensure compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives with regard to the protection of Natura 2000 Sites and Annex habitats and species and no adverse impact on the integrity of any European site, with regard to its qualifying interests, associated conservation status, structure and function.
	B_2	Preserve, protect, maintain and where appropriate restore the terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity, including internationally, EU and nationally designated sites and protected species.
	B_3	Ensure the Plan does not contradict biodiversity protection, restoration and rehabilitation objectives in the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027
Population & Human Health (PHH)	PHH_1	Provide high quality residential, community, working and recreational environments with access to sustainable transport options.
	PHH_2	Protect human health and well-being.
Soils & Geology (SG)	SG_1	Safeguard land and soil resources from pollution and degradation.
Water Quality (WQ)	WQ_1	Protect and where necessary improve and maintain water quality and the management of watercourses, groundwater and the marine environment, in compliance with the requirements of the WFD objectives and measures.
	WQ_2	Implement and comply with the provisions of the Flood Risk Management and Sustainable Drainage Systems Guidelines to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding.
Air Quality, Noise & Climate (ANC)	ANC_1	Maintain and promote continuing improvement in air quality and noise emissions through the reduction of emissions.
	ANC_2	Contribute towards climate adaptation and mitigation and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in line with National targets, including Ireland's commitment to realising a climate neutral economy by 2050.
Material Assets (MA)	MA_1	Make best use of existing infrastructure, contribute towards the protection of public assets and infrastructure and promote the sustainable development of new infrastructure to meet the needs of

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Theme	SEO Code	Strategic Environmental Objective
		the county's and Meath's population. Ensure new developments are served with adequate and appropriate critical infrastructure with sufficient capacity (drinking water, wastewater, waste and transport) that does not present a danger to human health.
	MA_2	Promote sustainable waste management, minimisation and recovery.
	MA_3	Promote sustainable transportation including increased use of public transport and active travel measures.
Cultural Heritage (CH)	CH_1	Protect, conserve and avoid impact on places, features and landscapes of cultural and archaeological importance, including entries to the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) and Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).
	CH_2	Protect, conserve and avoid impact on places, features, buildings and landscapes of architectural heritage, (including entries to the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) and National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAHs)).
Landscape & Visual (LV)	LV_1	Protect and maintain the special qualities of the landscape character including coastal character within Meath, minimise the loss of historic landscape features such as mature trees and hedgerows and scenic views.
	LV_2	Avoid impacts on the statutory landscape & visual designations as identified in the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 and Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027.

4 Assessment of Effects of Variation No. 5

The Variation was subject to an assessment for potential effects arising from the implementation of the Plan on the baseline environment as characterised. The assessment was carried out having regard to the Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) established for the aspects of the baseline environment which have potential to be impacted by the Variation.

The environmental assessment of the 'Strategic Objectives' of the Variation are set out separately in the Environmental Report. The provisions of Variation No.5 have been subject to environmental assessment as set out in the Environmental Report. Where potential for likely significant environmental effects arise these provisions have been identified for mitigation measures. It is noted that some provisions have screened in for Appropriate Assessment and these are discussed in further detail in the Natura Impact Report (NIR) which accompanies Variation. Likewise it is noted that the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) identified flood considerations on a number of lands (refer to Section 3.5 of the Environmental Report) and again these are referenced in the SRFA which accompanies the Variation.

Where potential negative or uncertain environment effects have been identified appropriate mitigation has been provided as set out in **Section 4.1** of this Report.

In working with the SEA process, the Variation acknowledges the requirement for any development to adhere to best practice in terms of environmental governance. Indeed, protection and enhancement of the environment is a critical pillar underpinning the core objectives and success of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 as varied. In this context any proposals for development arising from the Variation must meet the proper planning and sustainable development policies, objectives and development management provisions.

Following the consultation stage, a number of minor modifications were made to the Variation. These modifications having regard to Schedule 2 of S.I. 456 of 2025 European Union (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2025. The modifications are minor in nature and provide for clarification and do not give rise to any significant effects on the environment either by means of the Characteristics of the plan or the Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected.

4.1 Mitigation Measures

The finding of the environmental assessment in the Environmental Report is that, if unmitigated, a number of the provisions of the Variation No.5 have potential for uncertain or negative effects on aspects of the environment. These potential negative and / or uncertain effects, which derive from potential works resulting from the provisions of the Variation, focus primarily on biodiversity (including appropriate assessment), water (including flood risk), climate and landscape. This section of the Environmental Report identifies measures for the mitigation and avoidance of potential uncertain or negative environmental effects.

The majority of the mitigation measures are achieved through the detailed environmental protective policies and objectives as set out in the existing Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. The Development Plan provides for sustainable planning and management control of all development in County Meath – including any development or works deriving from the Variation.

The environmental protective policies and objectives of the Development Plan are detailed in Tables 9.1A and 9.1B of Appendix 9.1 of the SEA Environmental Report.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement

During the Variation-making process a number of potential environmental considerations were identified during the assessment process and specific mitigation measures were proposed and are included in the Variation. These include:

In relation to European sites and Surface Water Management during construction and operation for all new developments:

INF OBJ 25B

Planning applications for new developments in the potential Zone of Influence of a European site shall submit details of surface water management plans for construction and operation to ensure compliance with the water quality standards and to protect the water quality and flow regime of surface and groundwater resources.

In relation to Flood Risk Management on the Amendment 01 lands in Dunboyne:

DCE OBJ 23

Planning applications for development proposals on the lands that are subject to Spot Objective DCE OBJ 23 shall be accompanied by a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment carried out in accordance with the requirements of the “Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities.”

In relation to Flood Risk Management on the Amendment 01 lands in Dunshaughlin:

DNS OBJ 14

Planning applications for development proposals on the lands that are subject to Spot Objective DNS OBJ 14 shall incorporate a minimum 10m wide riparian buffer strip measured from the top of the bank either side of the water course running through the lands to protect future development from flood related impacts.

In relation to Flooding on the Amendment lands in Kilcock:

KIL OBJ 5B

Planning applications for development proposals on the lands that are subject to Spot Objective KIL OBJ 5B shall be accompanied by a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment carried out in accordance with the requirements of the “Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities.” Lands that are impacted by Flood Zone B and Climate Change shall be reserved for storage areas only and kept free from vulnerable land uses.

In relation to Flooding on the Amendment lands in Navan:

NAV OBJ 38

Planning applications for development proposals on the lands that are subject to Spot Objective NAV OBJ 38 shall be accompanied by a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment carried out in accordance with the requirements of the “Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities.”

In addition to the above, the key environmental protective policies and objectives from the existing Meath County Development Plan, which will ensure avoidance and mitigation of potential uncertain and / or negative environmental effects are set out in **Table 4.1** below and in Appendix 9.1 of the SEA Environmental Report.

Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 Variation No.5: SEA Statement

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement

Table 9.1 Mitigation Measures (i.e. Policies and Objectives from the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027) for Potential Negative and / or Uncertain Environmental Effects of Variation No.5

(SEO Key: B – Biodiversity, PHH – Population & Human Health, LSG – Land, Soils & Geology, WQ – Water Quality, AN – Air Quality & Noise, CC – Climate Change, MA – Material Assets, CH – Cultural Heritage, LV – Landscape &

Provision	Potential Negative SEO Effects	Potential Uncertain SEO Effects	Potential Neutral / Positive SEO Effects	Mitigation Measures (Refer also to Tables 9.1A & 9.1 B in Appendix 9.1)
Proposed Amendment No.3 (Proposed Zonings)				
Lands in 11 settlements have been identified for rezoning as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dunboyne ■ Southern Environs of Drogheda ■ Navan ■ Kilcock ■ Dunshaughlin ■ Enfield ■ Bettystown-Laytown-Mornington East – Donacarney – Mornington (East Meath) ■ Duleek ■ Stamullen ■ Athboy ■ Carlanstown 	B (B1, B2, B3) WQ (WQ1, WQ2),	SG (SG1) AN (AN1, AN2) CH (CH1, CH2) LV (LV1, LV2)	PHH (PHH_1, PHH_2) MA (MA1, MA2, MA3)	Policies INF POL 7; INF POL 8; INF POL 12; INF POL 16; INF POL 17; INF POL 18; INF POL 20; INF POL 22; SOC POL 39;
				Objectives INF OBJ 7; INF OBJ 8; INF OBJ 11; INF OBJ 19; INF OBJ 20; INF OBJ 21; INF OBJ 25; INF OBJ 37; INF OBJ 38; HER OBJ 33; HER OBJ 34; HER OBJ 60; RUR DEV SO 2; DM OBJ 11;
				Policies INF POL 8; INF POL 22; HER POL 1; HER POL 3; HER POL 4; HER POL 14; HER POL 16; HER POL 17; HER POL 21; HER POL 26; HER POL 28; HER POL 32; HER POL 35; HER POL 37; HER POL 40; HER POL 46 HER POL 48; HER POL 50;
				Objectives HER OBJ 3; HER OBJ 22; HER OBJ 28; HER OBJ 29; HER OBJ 49; HER OBJ 56; DM OBJ 11
				N/A

The mitigation measures included with Variation No. 5, in combination with the development planning and control related environmental protection measures defined in the Meath County Development Plan will prevent and mitigate any potential negative environmental effects due to the implementation of the Variation. No further mitigation measures are required.

5 Assessment of Alternatives

5.1 Introduction

Article 5(1) of the SEA Directive requires the Environmental Report to consider reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme and the significant environmental effects of the alternatives selected.

Alternatives put forward should be reasonable, realistic and capable of implementation. They should also be in line with the appropriate strategic level at which the plan will be implemented within the national planning hierarchy.

Local authorities are now required to update development plans to reflect on the national targets given by the Department. The NPF Housing Growth Requirement Guidelines requires sufficient zoning in County Meath to deliver 2,942 units annually up to 2035. This figure reduces to 1,362 from 2035 to 2040. The County Development Plan is mandated to be consistent with the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. Accordingly, Variation 5 is required to integrate the updated housing figures into the Core Strategy to ensure consistency with the planning hierarchy. Therefore, a 'do-nothing' scenario is not viable alternative.

5.2 Alternative 1: Restricted Delivery of Units

This alternative could achieve the required residential units by limiting delivery within Tier 1 Settlements only. This would entail additional zoning of existing rural areas or whitelands.

5.3 Alternative 2: Distributed Delivery of Units

This alternative could achieve the required residential units by distributing the delivery within a wider range of settlements. This would minimise additional zoning of existing rural areas or whitelands.

5.4 Assessment of Alternatives

Three reasonable alternatives for the MCDP have been identified and assessed as set out in **Table 5.1**. The potential effects of the reasonable alternatives on the SEOs categorised as follows:

- Potential Positive Environmental Impact (indicated by '+')
- Potential Negative Environmental Impact (indicated by '-')
- Potential Positive and Negative Environmental Impacts (indicated by '+/-').
- Uncertain Environmental Impact ((indicated by '?').
- Neutral, No or Insignificant Environmental Impact (indicated by '0')

5.5 Reasoning for Selection of the Preferred Alternative

Alternative 2 is selected as the preferred approach as it has the greatest potential to deliver the required residential units in a sustainable manner throughout the county, making best use of existing and planned infrastructure, and which for the most part most-part expands on existing, emerging and planned development in the settlements.

Alternative 2 allows for selection of the most suitable lands and places a balanced emphasis environmental factors, minimising likely significant effects.

Table 5.1 Assessment of Alternatives for Variation No.5

Reasonable Alternative Description	SEO	Environmental Assessment	Environmental Evaluation
<p>Alternative 1</p> <p>Restricted Delivery of Units</p> <p>This alternative could achieve the required residential units by limiting delivery within Tier 1 Settlements only.</p> <p>This would entail additional zoning of existing rural areas or whitelands</p>	B_1	0	<p>This alternative will lead to some positive environmental effects especially in terms of growth within the main settlements and making best use of existing infrastructure.</p> <p>This alternative will restrict growth in other settlements, where there is equal requirement for residential units and where there are some better placed and better serviced lands than in the additional zoned lands that would be required in the Tier 1 settlements.</p> <p>With the required zoning of additional lands in restricted areas, this alternative would likely have a negative impact on local diversity, land / soils, and have uncertain impacts on water, air quality / climate, heritage and the landscape.</p>
	B_2	-	
	B_3	-	
	PHH_1	+	
	PHH_2	+/-	
	LSG_1	-	
	WQ_1	-	
	WQ_2	+/-	
	AN_1	+/-	
	AN_2	+/-	
	MA_1	+	
	MA_2	+	
	MA_3	+	
CH_1	+/-		
CH_2	+/-		
LV_1	+/-		
LV_2	+/-		
<p>Alternative 2</p> <p>Distributed Delivery of Units</p> <p>This alternative could achieve the required residential units by distributing the delivery within a wider range of settlements.</p> <p>This would minimise additional zoning of existing rural areas or whitelands.</p>	B_1	0	<p>This alternative will lead to positive environmental effects especially in terms of distributed growth on the best sites within settlements.</p> <p>This alternative will distribute growth across a wide range of settlements in the county – thereby making use of the best placed and best serviced lands available for consideration.</p> <p>With required zoning of some additional lands, this alternative would likely have uncertain impacts on lands / soils, water, air quality / climate, and heritage, and neutral impacts on protected features and the landscape.</p>
	B_2	-	
	B_3	-	
	PHH_1	+	
	PHH_2	+	
	LSG_1	+/-	
	WQ_1	+/-	
	WQ_2	+/-	
	AN_1	+/-	
	AN_2	+/-	
	MA_1	+	
	MA_2	+	
	MA_3	+	
CH_1	0		
CH_2	+/-		
LV_1	0		
LV_2	0		

6 Monitoring

Monitoring of the Variation and its implications on the environment is important to ensure that the environment is not adversely affected through the implementation of the Plan. In accordance with Article 10 of the SEA Directive, monitoring must be carried out of the significant environmental effects directly related to the implementation of the Plan “in order to, inter alia, identify at an early stage unforeseen adverse effects and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial action.”

However, as a Variation to the County Development Plan, once adopted, monitoring will be undertaken as part of the on-going monitoring and review of the Meath County Development Plan.

Meath County Council is responsible for monitoring and the preparation of monitoring evaluation report(s), the publication of these reports and, if necessary, the carrying out of corrective action.

7 References

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