

CHAPTER 8

**Cultural and Natural
Heritage Strategy**

8.1 Introduction

The County's wealth of built heritage makes it exceptional in Ireland. It includes the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne, the seat of the High Kings of Ireland at Tara, the passage tombs of Loughcrew, the largest Anglo-Norman castle in Europe at Trim, the historic towns of Navan, Trim and Kells, great country houses, demesne landscapes and a significant industrial heritage of canals and mills.

The County's natural heritage includes scenic river valleys, rolling farmland, a network of mature hedgerows and diverse coastal habitats.

The identity of the County is linked to its heritage, and is central to how we see ourselves as individuals, communities and as a County. Our unique heritage is an intrinsic part of the character and attractiveness of the County and is a catalyst in attracting tourism and investment.

Where natural and cultural heritage features are relevant to any development proposal, applicants are required to contact the Planning Department, who will facilitate pre-application discussions at the earliest opportunity.

8.2 Vision

To identify, protect, conserve and manage the cultural and natural heritage of the County and to encourage its sensitive integration into the sustainable development of the County for the benefit of present and future generations. The Plan seeks to achieve a balance between the foregoing and economic prosperity and social integration.

8.3 Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage¹ refers to monuments, buildings, groups of buildings, and sites which are the combined works of nature and man. Within this great variety of building types and uses are structures of significance and distinctive character that are deemed worthy of protection.

8.4 Statutory Context

The State has signed and ratified a number of International and European Conventions and EU Directives and in so doing agreed to abide by the principles contained therein. These Conventions and Directives have guided the formulation of national legislation and national and regional policy to protect the built and natural heritage.

8.4.1 Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended

Section 10 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, sets out a list of mandatory objectives to be included in a development plan. A number of these relate to cultural heritage, including - the protection of archaeological heritage, structures and areas of special interest, the preservation of the character of the landscape, views and prospects.

8.4.2 The National Monuments Acts 1930 – 2004

These Acts provide for the protection of the archaeological heritage.

¹ World Heritage Convention, 1972

8.4.3 The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, 1992 - the Valletta Convention (ETS No. 143)

The Convention provides the basic framework for policy on the protection of archaeological heritage as a source of the European collective memory. The State undertakes to seek to reconcile and combine the respective requirements of archaeology and development plans by ensuring that archaeologists participate in planning policies, development schemes, development plans, environmental impact assessments and recommendations regarding the retention of elements of the archaeological heritage in-situ.

8.4.4 The Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, 1985 - the Granada Convention (ETS No. 121)

This Convention was ratified by Ireland in 1997 and recognises that architectural heritage constitutes an irreplaceable expression of the richness and diversity of Europe's cultural heritage which fosters the economic, social and cultural development of states and regions.

8.4.5 European Landscape Convention, 2000 – the Florence Convention (ETS No. 176)

This Convention defines landscape as '...an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural

and/or human factors' and applies to both rural and urban landscapes. The Convention requires landscape to be integrated into planning policies and promotes interaction between local and central authorities, and trans-frontier cooperation to protect landscapes.

8.4.6 Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, 1998 - the Aarhus Convention

The Aarhus Convention lays down a set of basic roles to promote citizens involvement in environmental matters and improve enforcement of environmental Law; its provisions are broken down into three Pillars: Access to information, Public Participation in environmental decision making and Access to Justice. Same has given rise to the European Directive 2003/4/EC on Public Participation, both of which have been transposed into Irish Law. Ireland ratified the Convention on 20th June 2012.

8.5 Policy Context

8.5.1 Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (1999); Policy and Guidance on Archaeological Excavation (1999)

This Framework and these principles which stipulate the basic principles for the protection of archaeological heritage are based on a presumption of avoiding development impacts

on archaeological heritage with preservation in-situ being the first option followed by preservation by record where the archaeological heritage is affected or proposed to be affected by the development.

8.5.2 Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015

The Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015 and beyond recognises the place of architecture in society as an expression of cultural, aesthetic and social values both past and present. Its recommendations include the implementation of 45 actions by a number of government departments over a period of time.

8.5.3 The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines 2011

These Guidelines are issued under Section 28 and Section 52 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Under Section 52(1), the Minister is obliged to issue guidelines to planning authorities concerning development objectives, a) for protecting structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, and b) for preserving the character of architectural conservation areas. Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Act require planning authorities to have regard to them in the performance of their functions.

8.5.4 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031

The RSES acknowledges that the region's historic environment provides a unique sense of place

and makes a positive contribution to quality of life. The RSES highlights the importance of incorporating best practice in heritage management into land use planning through the protection of historic urban fabric, the sensitive reuse of historic properties and the enhancement of places of special cultural or natural significance and the provision of high quality public realm and recreational spaces. It is a regional policy objective to - promote historic towns in the Region in the practice of heritage-led generation, to promote sensitive and adaptive re-use of historic building stock, industrial features and protected structures; support the designation of UNESCO candidate sites in the Region

8.6 Archaeological Heritage

Archaeology is the study of human societies through the investigation and analysis of the material evidence left behind. It is most useful for periods and civilisations that existed prior to written records. The archaeological heritage of an area includes monuments, sites, and objects whether situated on land or under water. In this respect, the County has a significant archaeological heritage, and provides a valuable cultural, educational and tourism resource.

Copies of the Record of Monuments and Places for County Meath are available at www.archaeology.ie.

Details of statutory objectives, international and national legislation are contained in Appendix no. 1 and 2. A list of National Monuments and Registered Historic Monuments are contained in Appendix no. 9.

New sites are continually being discovered

through research and development including delivery of infrastructure projects and it is advisable to check the National Monument Archaeological database on www.archaeology.ie when considering development on any site.

Archaeological structures may, in some situations, also be considered as architectural heritage and therefore may appear on both the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) and the Record of Protected Structures (RPS).

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 1

To protect archaeological sites, monuments, underwater archaeology and archaeological objects in their setting, which are listed on the Record of Monuments and Places for Meath.

HER POL 2

To protect all sites and features of archaeological interest discovered subsequent to the publication of the Record of Monument and Places, in situ (or at a minimum preservation by record) having regard to the advice and recommendations of the National Monuments Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

HER POL 3

To require, as part of the development management process, archaeological impact assessments, geophysical survey, test excavations or monitoring as

appropriate, for development in the vicinity of monuments or in areas of archaeological potential., Where there are upstanding remains, a visual impact assessment may be required.

HER POL 4

To require, as part of the development management process, archaeological impact assessments, geophysical survey, test excavations or monitoring as appropriate, where development proposals involve ground clearance of more than half a hectare or for linear developments over one kilometre in length; or developments in proximity to areas with a density of known archaeological monuments and history of discovery as identified by a licensed archaeologist.

HER POL 5

To seek guidance from the National Museum of Ireland where an unrecorded archaeological object is discovered, or the National Monuments Service in the case of an unrecorded archaeological site.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 1

To implement in partnership with the County Meath Heritage Forum, relevant stakeholders and the community the

County Meath Heritage Plan and any revisions thereof.

HER OBJ 2

To ensure that development in the vicinity of a Recorded Monument or Zone of Archaeological Potential is sited and designed in a sensitive manner with a view to minimal detraction from the monument or its setting.

HER OBJ 3

To seek to protect important archaeological landscapes from inappropriate development.

HER OBJ 4

To encourage the management and maintenance of the County's archaeological heritage, including historic burial grounds², in accordance with best conservation practice that considers the impact of climate change.

HER OBJ 5

To promote awareness of, and encourage the provision of access to, the archaeological resources of the county.

HER OBJ 6

To work in partnership with key stakeholders to promote County Meath as a centre for cultural heritage education

and learning through activities such as community excavation and field/summer schools.

8.6.1 UNESCO World Heritage Site - Brú na Bóinne

The World Heritage Site of the *Archaeological Ensemble of the Bend of the Boyne* is commonly known as Brú na Bóinne. It refers to the area within the bend of the River Boyne around Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth, and is one of the world's most important archaeological complexes. Brú na Bóinne contains many outstanding archaeological features, including the largest assemblage of megalithic art in Europe, large and varied grouping of monuments, and evidence of continuous settlement and activity in the area for some 7,000 years. The international significance of Brú na Bóinne has gradually been revealed through an ongoing process of discovery and research which began 300 years ago. In December 1993 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) inscribed Brú na Bóinne as a World Heritage Site. This inscription recognises the universal importance of this landscape to the whole of humanity and requires the State to protect the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the area of the World Heritage Site to the highest international standards.

One of the best known features of Brú na Bóinne is the mid-winter solstice phenomenon, when the sun, rising over the ridge of Red Mountain, shines through the roof box above the entrance to the tomb at Newgrange to light the chamber within.

Brú na Bóinne is one of the foremost and popular heritage site visitor attractions in the Country

² Heritage Council (2011). Guidance for the Care, Conservation and Recording of Historic Graveyards

and as such, is a very important Local, Regional and National tourism asset with 261,340 visitors recorded in 2018.

8.6.2 Sustaining the Outstanding Universal Value

The first management plan for the site was published in 2002 by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. The management plan was included in the 2013-2019 County Development Plan. Under the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (July 2013), every site contained on the World Heritage list must have a management plan which explains how the Outstanding Universal Value is to be maintained. The replacement for this 2002 management plan was sent to UNESCO in January 2017 by the Department of Heritage, Culture and the Gaeltacht. The Management Plan is not a statutory planning document.

Planning Guidance, additional information on UNESCO World Heritage and the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for Brú na Bóinne and Brú and Bóinne World Heritage Site Management Plan are contained in Appendix 8 of the County Development Plan.

8.6.3 Statement of Policy

Meath County Council is committed to the protection and conservation of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne. The Council acknowledges the need for additional bed spaces and other tourist facilities to enable the local community to benefit from the area's World Heritage Site status. The refurbishment of existing building stock will be supported and encouraged in this regard. The World Heritage

site is a key component of Ireland's Ancient East and its potential to generate additional tourist activity in the wider Boyne Valley region as a generator of local employment is acknowledged. The Council welcomes the support of key national stakeholders in developing appropriate policies to ensure the area benefits from its unique International heritage standing.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 6

To protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne in accordance with the relevant guidelines and national legislation, so that its integrity, authenticity and significance are not adversely affected by cumulative inappropriate change and development.

HER POL 7

To encourage the retention, conservation, and appropriate re-use of traditional buildings within the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne in preference to either their replacement, or the construction of new buildings on green field sites.

HER POL 8

To ensure that development within the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne shall be subject to the Development Assessment Criteria set out in Appendix no. 8 and the Development Management Guidelines in Chapter 11.

HER POL 9

To consider individual housing within the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne, as shown on Map No 8.1, only for those involved locally in full time agriculture and who do not own land outside of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne and subject to compliance with all other relevant provisions contained in this Development Plan.

HER POL 10

To ensure that residential extensions within the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne are in character with the original buildings.

HER POL 11

To support the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and all stakeholders in the implementation of the Brú na Bóinne Management Plan, 2017.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 7

To work in partnership with the community and all other relevant stakeholders to promote, understand, conserve and sustainably manage the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne.

HER OBJ 8

To encourage and facilitate pre-application discussions, in conjunction with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, regarding the siting and design of developments affecting the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne and the scope of any necessary impact assessments.

HER OBJ 9

To refer all planning applications within the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne to the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht for comment. These comments will be considered in the assessment of all such planning applications.

HER OBJ 10

To actively support and encourage the re-use of vacant and derelict dwellings within the Core and Buffer Zone of the World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne by providing assistance and professional advice to owners seeking to re-develop such sites.

HER OBJ 11

To protect the ridgelines which frame views within and from the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne from inappropriate or visually intrusive development.

HER OBJ 12

To prepare and implement a Business Plan for the World Heritage Site in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, subject to funding.

8.6.4 World Heritage Tentative List

The protection of the world's cultural and natural heritage is of importance for present and future generations and to this end the State is committed to the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and promotion of the World Heritage Site in accordance with Article 4 of the World Heritage Convention.

A Tentative List is an inventory of those properties which a country intends to consider for nomination to the World Heritage List. The current Tentative List was approved by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and submitted to UNESCO in March 2010. The nomination of any property from the Tentative List for inscription on the World Heritage List will only take place after consultation with local communities and other relevant stakeholders. Two sites in the County have been included on the Tentative List as part of larger assemblies of sites:

- The Tara Complex as part of The Royal Sites of Ireland (Cashel, Dún Ailinne, Hill of Uisneach, Rathcroghan Complex and Tara Complex)
Kells, as part of the Early Medieval Monastic Sites (Clonmacnoise, Durrow, Glendalough, Inis Cealtra, Kells and Monasterboice)

In January 2019, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht invited applications for Ireland's Tentative List of properties for potential future nomination to the World Heritage List 2020-2030.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER OBJ 12

To recognise and respect potential World Heritage Sites in Meath on the UNESCO Tentative List – Ireland.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 13

To support the State in the nomination process of Tara and Kells to World Heritage status as part of an assemblage of Royal and Monastic Sites in co-operation with the relevant Local Authorities.

8.6.5 Walled Towns

Navan, Trim, Kells and Athboy are medieval walled towns. Of these, only Trim has substantial lengths of town wall remaining upstanding. While the others have some fragmentary upstanding remains, parts of the walls have been shown to survive below ground. Town defences include walls, gates, bastions, banks, ditches, outworks and other features. Each walled town is considered as a single recorded monument and the line of the town walls and defences are classed as National Monuments under the National Policy on Town Defences 2008.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER OBJ 13

To protect and preserve in situ all surviving elements of medieval town defences.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 14

To retain the surviving medieval street pattern, building lines and burgage plot widths in historic walled towns.

8.7 Architectural Heritage

The architectural heritage of Meath contributes to its unique sense of place. The Council wishes to ensure that those buildings, streetscapes and features which are of merit are protected and managed so that they retain their character and special interest.

8.7.1 Record of Protected Structures

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (Part II, Section 10) places an obligation on all Local Authorities to include in their Development Plan objectives for the protection of structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. These buildings and structures are compiled on a register known as

the Record of Protected Structures (RPS).

The RPS may be varied by a Section 55 process separately to a review of the Plan and an up-to-date RPS, including any additions, deletions or amendments can be viewed on the Council's website or checked at the public counter of the Council's Planning Office. Developers and persons proposing to purchase historic buildings are advised to check the updated Record of Protected Structures.

A Protected Structure, unless otherwise stated in the RPS, includes:

- the interior of the structure;
- the land lying within its curtilage;
- any other structures within the curtilage, and their interiors, and;
- all fixtures and features which form part of the interior or exterior of any of these structures.

The term 'curtilage' is generally taken to mean those lands immediately associated with the structure, and in the case of smaller properties usually means all land within the boundaries. In the case of larger properties, the curtilage must be determined on a case by case basis.

A review of the RPS was undertaken in preparation for this Plan. Additions, deletions and amendments are proposed and may be viewed in Volume 2, and on the Meath County Council Map Portal. Following the abolition of the town councils³ of Navan, Trim and Kells, the RPS for those towns has been incorporated in the County RPS.

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, places an onus on owners and occupiers of Protected Structures to ensure that the structure, or any element of the structure which contributes to its special interest, is

³ Local Government Reform Act 2014

not endangered either through neglect, or by inappropriate works. Owners and occupiers are advised to consult the Planning Department if they are considering works to or affecting Protected Structures.

Section 5 of the Planning and Development Act and supporting regulations set out those works which constitute exempted development and therefore do not normally require planning permission. However, in the case of a Protected Structure, such works can only be carried out without planning permission if it is determined that the works would not affect the character of the structure or any element of the structure that contributes to its special interest. An owner or occupier may seek a declaration from the Council as to the types of works, which would or would not, materially affect the character of the structure and would or would not require planning permission.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 14

To protect and conserve the architectural heritage of the County and seeks to prevent the demolition or inappropriate alteration of Protected Structures.

HER POL 15

To encourage the conservation of Protected Structures, and where appropriate, the adaptive re-use of existing buildings and sites in a manner compatible with their character and significance. In certain cases, land use zoning restrictions may be relaxed in order to secure the conservation of the protected structure.

HER POL 16

To protect the setting of protected structures and to refuse permission for development within the curtilage or adjacent to a protected structure which would adversely impact on the character and special interest of the structure, where appropriate.

HER POL 17

To require that all planning applications relating to Protected Structures contain the appropriate accompanying documentation in accordance with the *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011)* or any variation thereof, to enable the proper assessment of the proposed works.

HER POL 18

To require that in the event of permission being granted for development within the curtilage of a protected structure, any works necessary for the survival of the structure and its re-use should be prioritised in the first phase of development.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 15

To review and update the Record of Protected Structures on an on-going basis

and to make additions and deletions as appropriate.

HER OBJ 16

To identify and retain good examples of historic street furniture, e.g. cast-iron post boxes, water pumps, light fixtures and signage, as appropriate.

HER OBJ 17

To promote best conservation practice and encourage the use of appropriately qualified professional advisors, tradesmen and craftsmen, with recognised conservation expertise, for works to protected structures or historic buildings in an Architectural Conservation Area.

HER OBJ 18

To provide detailed guidance notes and continue to develop the Council's advisory/ educational role with regard to heritage matters and to promote awareness, understanding and appreciation of the architectural heritage of the County.

8.7.2 Architectural Conservation Areas

An Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape, which is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.⁴ They may also include

areas which contribute to the appreciation of Protected Structures.

An ACA may consist for example, of a terrace of houses, a street, town centre or a cluster of structures associated with a specific building such as a mill or country house. Although the individual buildings may not be of special merit, their importance is in their context and interrelationship and the contribution each makes to the character of the area. Unless a structure is also included on the Record of Protected Structures, the protected status afforded from inclusion in an ACA only applies to the exteriors and streetscape.

Piecemeal alterations on individual non protected structures can have a significant cumulative effect on a streetscape. Any works which would have a material effect on the special character of an ACA require planning permission.

The following areas have been designated as ACAs:

- Ardbraccan Demesne
- Athboy
- Dunboyne
- Dunsany Castle Demesne
- Headfort Demesne
- Julianstown
- Kells Historic Core Kells – Headfort Place
- Kilmessan
- Laytown – Netterville and Victoria Terrace
- Longwood
- Moynalty
- Navan Historic Core
- Oldbridge Demesne
- Oldcastle
- Slane
- Slane Castle Demesne
- Slane Mill Complex
- Somerville Demesne

⁴ Section 81, Planning and Development, 2000 (as amended)

- Stackallen Demesne
- Summerhill
- Trim Historic Core
- Trim Porch Fields

The boundaries of these areas are defined on Map 8.3 -8.3.23 in Volume 2 and on the Meath County Council Map Portal. Character statements have been prepared for the ACA's to guide further redevelopment proposals. These are contained in Appendix no. 7. It is intended that character statements for Ardraccon Demesne, Dunsany Castle Demesne, Oldbridge Demesne, Slane Castle Demesne and Stackallen Demesne will be prepared during the life of the Plan.

It is the Policy of the Council:

HER POL 19

To protect the character of Architectural Conservation Areas in Meath.

HER POL 20

To require that all development proposals within or contiguous to an ACA be sympathetic to the character of the area, that the design is appropriate in terms of height, scale, plot density, layout, materials and finishes and are appropriately sited and designed with regard to the advice given in the Statements of Character for each area, where available.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 19

To identify places of special character, with a view to their designation as

Architectural Conservation Areas and to modify existing ACAs, where necessary.

HER OBJ 20

To prepare and review, where necessary, detailed character statements and planning guidance for each ACA.

HER OBJ 21

To avoid the demolition of structures and the removal of features and street furniture which contribute to the character of an ACA. The Council will require that any planning application for demolition or alteration within an ACA be accompanied by a measured and photographic survey, condition report and architectural heritage assessment.

8.7.3 Historic Building Stock and Vernacular Architecture

Historic buildings form the backdrop to most of the towns, villages and rural areas in the County. Although some may have used architects in their design, most are in the vernacular tradition – the homes and workplaces built by local people using local materials. Generally these buildings are not so special as to be designated Protected Structures, however, small differences in materials, layout and forms contribute to local distinctiveness and the character of the area.

Further policies relating to traditional and vernacular rural houses are contained in Chapter 9 Rural Development strategy.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 21

To encourage the retention, sympathetic maintenance and sustainable re-use of historic buildings, including vernacular dwellings or farm buildings and the retention of historic streetscape character, fabric, detail and features.

HER POL 22

Seek the retention of surviving historic plot sizes and street patterns in the villages and towns of Meath and incorporate ancient boundaries or layouts, such as burgage plots and townland boundaries, into re-developments.

HER POL 23

To actively promote the retention and restoration of thatched dwellings as a key component of the built heritage of the County.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 22

To ensure that conversions or extensions of traditional buildings or the provision of new adjoining buildings, are sensitively designed and do not detract from the character of the historic building.

HER OBJ 23

To update the survey of surviving thatched structures in the County and to promote available grant schemes to assist owners with their retention and repair.

HER OBJ 24

To carry out a survey of Land Commission dwellings over the life of the Development Plan, to acknowledge their contribution to the building stock of the County, as appropriate.

8.7.4 Industrial Heritage

Industrial heritage consists primarily of structures associated with manufacturing, transportation, communications, public utilities and materials extraction. Examples include canals, railway structures, mills, warehouses, lighthouses, lime kilns and milestones. A desktop survey of the industrial heritage of the County was carried out in 2008⁵.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 24

To encourage appropriate change of use and reuse of industrial heritage structures provided such a change does not seriously impact on the intrinsic character of the structure and that all works are carried out in accordance with best conservation practice, subject to compliance with normal planning criteria.

⁵ <https://www.meath.ie/council/council-services/heritage-architectural-conservation/heritage/heritage-projects-and-grants/projects/meath-industrial-heritage-survey>

HER POL 25

To protect and enhance the built and natural heritage of the Royal Canal and Boyne Navigation and associated structures and to ensure, in as far as practically possible, that development which may impact on these structures and their setting be sensitively designed with regard to their character and setting. Where likely significant effects on European Sites are identified, alternative locations and/ designs will be developed to ensure that flood defence structures will not adversely affect the integrity of European Sites, either alone or in combination with any other plans or projects. Considering the general location provided for these upgrades and the ecological information and assessment required to be carried out to inform their design, it is reasonable to assume that at the detailed design stage any potential for a project element to impact on the European Site could, and will, be resolved through the exploration of alternative locations or designs. If, despite the implementation of mitigation measures, there remains a risk that the proposals will adversely affect the integrity of the European Sites, the project will not be progressed unless an alternative solution can be implemented which avoids/ reduces the impact to a level that the integrity of the European Site(s) is(are)_ unaffected.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 25

To require an architectural / archaeological

assessment, as appropriate, which references the Meath Industrial Heritage Survey and other relevant sources, for all proposed developments on industrial heritage structures or sites.

HER OBJ 26

To carry out Phase 2 of the Industrial Heritage Survey which will comprise a field survey and assessment of surviving structures and site and consider if appropriate proposing them for addition to the Record of Protected Structure.

8.7.5 Designed Landscapes, Gardens and Demesnes

Historic designed landscapes consist of private gardens, public parks and the gardens and landscapes associated with country house demesnes. In the County, the designed landscapes are largely found in demesne or estate lands and frequently form the setting for protected structures.

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) carried out a desktop survey of Historic Gardens and Demesnes in Ireland, which commenced in 2003 and identified approximately 300 such sites in the County. This survey can be seen on their website www.buildingofireland.ie.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 26

To encourage the protection and

enhancement of heritage gardens and demesne landscapes, and to support, in consultation with the owners, the provision of public access to these sites as appropriate.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 27

To discourage development that would adversely affect the character, the principal components of, or the setting of historic parks, gardens and demesnes of heritage significance.

HER OBJ 28

To require that proposals for development in designated landscapes and demesnes include an appraisal of the landscape, designed views and vistas, including a tree survey, where relevant, in order to inform site appropriate design proposals.

8.8 Natural Heritage

8.8.1 Introduction

The County's natural heritage and biodiversity is of local, national and international importance. It includes geology and forms a central component of the landscape of the County. Protecting and enhancing our biodiversity and landscapes is vital to the health, well-being and quality of life of our communities and assists societal adaptation to the challenges of climate change.

8.8.2 Statutory Context

8.8.2.1 EU Birds and Habitats Directives

The Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora, better known as "The Habitats Directive", provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Articles 3 to 9 provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of sites known as the Natura 2000 network. The Natura 2000 network is made up of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/ECC).

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment (AA). This requirement is implemented in the Republic of Ireland by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (SI 477/2011) as amended and the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The Government published *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities* in December 2009 (revised in February 2010).

8.8.2.2 Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended

Development Plans must include mandatory objectives for the conservation of the natural heritage and for the conservation of European sites and any other sites which may be prescribed.

8.8.2.3 Wildlife Act 1976, as amended

The Wildlife Act 1976, as amended is the principal national legislation providing for the protection of wildlife and the control of some activities which may adversely affect wildlife.

8.8.2.4 Flora (Protection) Order, 2015

Sets out the current list of plant species protected by Section 21 of the Wildlife Act, 1976, as amended.

8.8.3 Policy Context

8.8.3.1 Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)

Ireland is a signatory to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Cancun Declaration (CBD, 2016), which focuses on the need for governments at the national, sub-national and local levels to mainstream the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for human well-being. All parties to the Convention are required to prepare national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

8.8.3.2 National Biodiversity Plan(s)

Ireland's first National Biodiversity Plan was published in 2002. The second National Biodiversity Plan – *Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016* was published in November 2011. The Plan was developed in line with EU and International Biodiversity strategies and policies. It recognised that locally-led action is crucial in protecting biodiversity and ecosystem services and sets out the measures Ireland should take to ensure its conservation. The third National Biodiversity

Action Plan 2017-2021 was published by the Department Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in October 2017.

8.8.3.3 Local Biodiversity Action Plan(s)

The Council adopted its first Biodiversity Action Plan in April 2010 in accordance with the National Biodiversity Plan. The second *County Meath Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2015-2020* was adopted in April 2015. The Plan provides a framework for the conservation of biodiversity and natural heritage at a local level.

8.9 Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth – all plants and animals (including humans), fungi, algae and micro-organisms, the habitat where they live and their genetic diversity. Biodiversity is important because all of life depends on biodiversity for survival and humans in particular rely on it for food, clean air and water, clothing and building materials, as well as for medicines and places in which to unwind and reconnect with nature. Our biodiversity underpins important economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism and provides many other benefits or ecosystem services free of charge which can be grouped into four main categories:

- **Provisioning services** (production of food and water, etc.)
- **Regulating services** (e.g. the control of climate and disease)
- **Supporting services** (e.g. nutrient cycling and crop pollination)
- **Cultural services** (such as spiritual and recreational benefits)

The protection and wise use of the county's

natural resources is vital to achieving sustainable development. The economic value of biodiversity to Ireland has been calculated as at least €2.6 billion per annum (IEN, 2012).

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 27

To protect, conserve and enhance the County's biodiversity.

HER POL 28

To integrate in the development management process the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and landscape features wherever possible, by minimising adverse impacts on existing habitats (whether designated or not) and by including mitigation and/or compensation measures, as appropriate.

HER POL 29

To raise public awareness and understanding of the County's natural heritage and biodiversity.

HER POL 30

To promote increased public participation in biodiversity conservation by supporting and encouraging community-led initiatives.

HER POL 31

To ensure that the ecological impact of all development proposals on habitats

and species are appropriately assessed by suitably qualified professional(s) in accordance with best practice guidelines – e.g. the preparation of an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA), Screening Statement for Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), Natura Impact Statement (NIS), species surveys etc. (as appropriate).

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 29

To implement, in partnership with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, relevant stakeholders and the community, the objectives and actions of *Ireland's National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017 - 2021* which relate to the remit and functions of Meath County Council.

HER OBJ 30

To implement, in partnership with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, relevant stakeholders and the community, the objectives and actions of the *County Meath Biodiversity Plan 2015-2020* and any revisions thereof.

HER OBJ 31

To actively support the implementation of the *All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020*.

8.9.1 Protecting Biodiversity in Meath – Sites Designated for Nature Conservation

There are a number of international and nationally important sites designated for nature conservation in the County.

Natura 2000 Sites The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) provide for the conservation and protection of core breeding and resting sites for rare and threatened species, and rare habitat types in a European context considered to be most in need of conservation. Such sites form part of an EU network of ecologically important and protected sites known as the Natura 2000 network and comprise:

- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** – these sites are selected for the conservation and protection of plant and animal species (other than birds) and habitats listed in Annex I and Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) respectively.
- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** – these sites are selected for the conservation and protection of birds and their habitats designated under the EU Birds Directive

2009 (2009/147/EC) (first adopted in 1979) and transposed into Irish law by the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations (SI 291 of 1985).

The main aim of the Habitats Directive, which was adopted in 1992, is to maintain or restore favourable conservation status for habitats and species that are considered rare, threatened or in danger of disappearance in the EU. The Habitats Directive was transposed into Irish law through the European Union (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997, which have been amended twice in 1998 and 2005. The 1997 Regulations and their amendments were subsequently revised and consolidated in the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011.

There are 13 Natura 2000 sites within the County. The National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht identify, evaluate and propose sites for designation. The boundaries of protected areas may change and/or new sites may be proposed for designation during the lifetime of this Plan. Up-to-date information on boundaries, and details, of designated sites is available on the National Parks and Wildlife Service website (www.npws.ie).

Table 8.1 Special Areas of Conservation in County Meath

Site Name	Site Code
Mount Hevey Bog	002342

Table 8.2 Candidate Special Areas of Conservation in County Meath

Site Name	Site Code
Killyconny Bog (Cloghbally)	000006
Rye Water Valley/Cartron	001398

White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo	001810
Boyne Coast and Estuary	001957
Lough Bane and Lough Glass	002120
River Boyne and River Blackwater	002299
Moneybeg and Clareisland Bogs	002340
Girley (Drewstown) Bog	002203

Table 8.3 Special Protection Areas in County Meath

Site Name	Site Code
Lough Sheelin	004065
Boyne Estuary	004080
River Nanny Estuary and Shore	004158
River Boyne and River Blackwater	004232

Planning Authorities are required to ensure that an Appropriate Assessment (AA Screening and AA, where required) of the implications of proposals on (Natura 2000) sites is undertaken. This assessment is required for all planning applications to determine if the proposal is likely to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site through a screening process. Screening for Appropriate Assessment applies to all development proposals, either within or outside a Natura 2000 site. If there is a likelihood of significant effects, or uncertainty around same, AA must be carried out to determine if the proposal will adversely affect the integrity of any Natura 2000 site. (Please refer to Tables 8.1, 8.2, 8.3 and Map 8.3).

8.9.2 Natural Heritage Areas

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) are designated

under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 and encompass nationally-important semi-natural and natural habitats, landforms and geomorphological features.

8.9.3 Statutory Nature Reserve

In January 2019 the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht published notice of making Statutory Instrument (S.I. No. 602 of 2018) under section 16 of the Wildlife Act established the first Nature Reserve in County Meath at Newcastle Lough. The reason for recognising the land as nature reserve is the presence of lake, reed bed, wet grassland and woodland habitats and an associated diversity of flora and fauna. The objective for which the land is to be used or managed as a nature reserve is to maintain and enhance the diversity of the habitats and species on the land.

Table 8.4 Natural Heritage Areas in County Meath

Site Name	Site Code
Jamestown Bog	001324
Girley Bog	001580
Molerick Bog	001582

Table 8.5 Proposed Natural Heritage Areas in County Meath

Site Name	Site Code
Ballyhoe Lough	001594
Ballynabarny Fen	001573
Balrath Woods	001579
Boyne Coast and Estuary	001957
Boyne River Islands	001862
Boyne Woods	001592
Breaky Loughs	001558
Corstown Loughs	000552
Crewbane Marsh	000553
Cromwell's Bush Fen	001576
Dowth Wetland	001861
Doolystown Bog	001577
Duleek Commons	001578
Kilconny Bog (Cloghbally)	000006
Laytown Dunes / Nanny Estuary	000554
Lough Naneagh	001814
Lough Sheelin	000987
Lough Shesk	000556
Mentrim Lough	001587
Mount Hevey Bog	001584
Rathmoylan Esker	000557

Rossnaree Riverbank	001589
Royal Canal	002103
Rye Water Valley / Carton	001398
Slane Riverbank	001591
Thomastown Bog	001593
Trim Wetlands	001357
White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo	001810

Table 8.6 Natural Heritage Areas in County Meath

Site Name	Site Code
Jamestown Bog	001324
Girley Bog	001580
Molerick Bog	001582

Table 8.7 Statutory Nature Reserves in County Meath

Site Name	Site Code
Newcastle Lough ⁶	NA

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 32

To permit development on or adjacent to designated Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, or those proposed to be designated over the period of the Plan, only where an appropriate level of assessment carried out to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority, in consultation with National Parks and Wildlife, can clearly demonstrate that it will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

HER POL 33

To have regard to the views and guidance of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in respect of proposed development where there is a possibility that such development may have an impact on a designated European or National site or a site proposed for such designation.

HER POL 34

To undertake appropriate surveys and collect data to provide an evidence-

⁶ Nature Reserve (Newcastle Lough)

base to assist the Council in meeting its obligations under Article 6 of the Habitats Directives (92/43/EEC) as transposed into Irish Law, subject to available resources.

It is an objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 32

To ensure an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) and Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directives (92/43/EEC) and in accordance with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities, 2009* and relevant EPA and European Commission guidance documents, is carried out in respect of any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary for the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site(s), either individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, in view of the site's conservation objectives.

HER OBJ 33

To protect and conserve the conservation value of candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, as identified by the Minister for the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and any other sites that may be proposed for designation during the lifetime of this Plan in accordance with the provisions of the Habitats and Birds Directives and to permit development in or affecting same only in accordance

with the provisions of those Directives as transposed into Irish Law.

8.9.4 Protecting Biodiversity in Meath - Non- Designated Sites

There are many sites throughout the County that host a range of plant and animal species or their habitats (including Annex I Habitats, Annex I Birds, Annex II and IV species, Flora (Protection) Orders etc.), which are not designated for nature conservation but nonetheless their ecological value is of high importance in the county.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 35

To ensure, where appropriate, the protection and conservation of areas, sites, species and ecological/networks of biodiversity value outside designated sites and to require an appropriate level of ecological assessment by suitably qualified professional(s) to accompany development proposals likely to impact on such areas or species.

8.9.5 Protected Species

Certain plant, animal and bird species are protected by law. This includes plant species listed in the Flora Protection Order, 1999 (or other such Orders) and animals and birds listed in the Wildlife Act, 1976 and subsequent statutory instruments, those listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), and those listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive. Proposals for

developments, where appropriate, will require an assessment of the presence of bats and/or other protected species and ensure that suitable avoidance and/or mitigation measures are put in place accordingly.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 36

To consult with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and take account of their views and any licensing requirements, when undertaking, approving or authorising development which is likely to affect plant, animal or bird species protected by law.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 33

To ensure that development does not have a significant adverse impact, incapable of satisfactory avoidance or mitigation, on plant, animal or bird species protected by law.

8.9.6 Woodlands, Hedgerows and Trees

Although the County is one of the least wooded counties, its woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees contribute positively to biodiversity and landscape character. (Please refer to Chapter 9, Forestry Map 8.7 and Chapter 9, Tree Preservation, in this regard).

Woodlands tend to be small and highly fragmented for the most part and are more frequent near rivers, particularly along the

lower stretches of the River Boyne. The most abundant native woodland habitat type in the County is Oak-Ash-Hazel woodland (WN2) reflecting the limestone derived soils. A large proportion of the County's woodlands are parklands associated with historic demesnes. Hedgerows are perhaps the most characteristic feature of the County's landscape and provide an important habitat for many species and act as a wildlife corridor in a landscape dominated by large tracts of intensive agriculture. Under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000 the cutting of hedges (and uncultivated vegetation) during the bird-nesting season (March 1st to September 1st) is prohibited, except in certain legally defined circumstances.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 37

To encourage the retention of hedgerows and other distinctive boundary treatments in rural areas and prevent loss and fragmentation, where practically possible. Where removal of a hedgerow, stone wall or other distinctive boundary treatment is unavoidable, mitigation by provision of the same type of boundary will be required.

HER POL 38

To promote and encourage planting of native hedgerow species in new developments and as part of the Council's own landscaping works.

HER POL 39

To recognise the archaeological importance

of townland boundaries including hedgerows and promote their protection and retention.

HER POL 40

To protect and encourage the effective management of native and semi-natural woodlands, groups of trees and individual trees and to encourage the retention of mature trees and the use of tree surgery rather than felling, where possible, when undertaking, approving or authorising development.

HER POL 41

To protect trees the subject of Tree Preservation Orders (see Map 9.3), Champion and Heritage Trees identified on the Tree Register of Ireland and Heritage Tree Database (see Map 9.3.1) when undertaking, approving, or authorising development.

HER POL 42

To promote the preservation of individual trees or groups of trees as identified on the Heritage Maps in Volume 2 and to manage these trees in line with arboricultural best practice.

It is an objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 35

To promote awareness, understanding

and best practice in the management of the County's woodland, tree and hedgerow resource.

HER OBJ 36

To continue to work in partnership with relevant stakeholders to develop and enhance Balrath Wood and to explore opportunities to develop additional sites under the Neighbour Wood Scheme.

HER OBJ 37

To review the Meath Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Survey (2011), over the life of the Development Plan, as appropriate.

8.10 Invasive Species

Invasive non-native plant and animal species are a major threat to biodiversity (www.invasivespeciesireland.com) and prohibitions are in place in relation to the introduction or dispersal of certain invasive species as set out in the *Third Schedule of the European Communities (Birds and Habitats Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477/2011))* and as set out in EU Regulations 1143/2014 on the Prevention and Management of the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Alien Species.

Invasive alien species can negatively impact on native species, transform habitats and threaten whole ecosystems causing serious problems to the environment and the economy. They may in certain cases pose a threat to human safety. There is potential for the spread of invasive species during excavation and construction

works and for such species to be introduced into the environment via spreading from private gardens, boat users, horticulture etc. e.g. Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 43

To promote best practice in the control of invasive species in the carrying out its functions in association with relevant authorities including TII and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

HER POL 44

To require all development proposals to address the presence or absence of invasive alien species on proposed development sites and (if necessary) require applicants to prepare and submit an *Invasive Species Management Plan* where such a species exists to comply with the provisions of the *European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2015*.

8.11 Peatlands

The County represents the eastern limit of raised bogs in Ireland and the Council recognises the potential for utilisation of protected areas for tourist, amenity, educational and research purposes. The Council will liaise with the various government and non-government organisations involved in an effort to secure the conservation of the peatland areas.

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 45

To ensure that peatland areas which are designated (or proposed for designation) as NHAs, SACs or SPAs are conserved for their ecological, climate regulation, archaeological, cultural and educational significance.

It is an objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 38

To work in partnership with relevant stakeholders on a suitable peatland site(s) to demonstrate best practice in sustainable peatland conservation, management and restoration techniques and to promote their heritage and educational value subject to Ecological Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment Screening, as appropriate.

8.12 Geological Heritage

The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) are currently drawing up a list of nationally important geological sites. As part of this process the GSI undertook an audit of *The Geological Heritage of Meath* in 2007, which identified 28 sites of county geological importance (Table 6.5). These sites will be designated in due course, as Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), because of their geological interest from a national perspective. In the interim, the Council, through the Plan, will protect and will maintain the geological heritage value of these sites. Any development proposals

within or likely to have an impact on County Geological Sites may be referred to the GSI to

seek their advice.

Table 8.5 County Geological Sites⁷

1. Gibbstown Castle	15. Boyne Valley
2. St. Keeran's Well	16. Galtrim Moraine
3. Bellewstown	17. Mullaghmore
4. Grangegeeth	18. Murrens
5. Barley Hill Quarry	19. Rathkenny
6. Cregg	20. Rathmolyon Esker
7. Poulmore Scarp	21. Trim Esker
8. Laytown to Gormanston	22. Altmush Stream
9. Benhead	23. Bray Hill Quarry
10. Blackwater Valley	24. Duleek Quarry
11. Kilbride Quarry	25. Riverbank at Nobber
12. Painestown Quarry	26. Rockwood Cliffs
13. Carricleck Quarry	27. Dunshaughlin (site)
14. Boyne River, Trim	28. St. Gorman's Spring

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 46

To maintain the geological and geomorphological heritage values of County Geological Sites listed in Table 8.5 and, through consultation with the Geological Survey of Ireland, protect them from inappropriate development.

8.13 Inland Waterways

The County contains significant stretches of both operational and derelict waterways including stretches of the Royal Canal and Boyne

Navigation Canal. Both the navigable and non-navigable waterways are an important amenity and wildlife habitat. All development proposals shall be subject to Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) and screening for Appropriate Assessment (as appropriate).

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 47

To protect the ecological, recreational, educational, amenity and flood alleviation potential of navigational and non-navigational waterways within the County, towpaths and adjacent wetlands.

It is an objective of the Council:

⁷ Clarke, A., Parkes, M. and Gately, S. (2007). The Geological Heritage of County Meath. Geological Survey of Ireland and Meath County Council. Report available at www.gsi.ie

HER OBJ 39

To work in partnership with Waterways Ireland and relevant stakeholders to encourage best practice biodiversity management of canal and towpath habitats.

8.14 Wetlands

Wetlands range from ponds to rivers, reed beds to bogs and fens and can also include areas influenced by the marine – from coastal and estuarine salt marshes, dune slacks and saline wet meadows and lagoons. They support a variety of habitats and species, function in the protection of water quality and/or flood control, are important carbon stores contributing to climate resilience and provide open space and recreational opportunities. The *County Meath Wetland and Coastal Habitats Survey, 2010* provides baseline ecological data. Any proposals for land reclamation in coastal areas shall be subject to Screening for Appropriate Assessment and to an assessment of any likely impacts on wetlands, coastal habitats, estuarine marsh lands and on coastal processes (including erosion, deposition, accretion and flooding particularly in light of climate change).

HER POL 48

To manage, enhance and protect the wetlands of the County having regard to the '*County Meath Wetland Survey 2010*' and ensure that there is an appropriate level of assessment in relation to proposals which would involve draining, reclaiming or infilling of wetland habitats.

8.15 Coastal Zone

The coastal zone of the County contains important resources that provide economic, recreational, aesthetic and conservation benefits. The coastline of the County is classified as a soft coast and stretches between the Boyne Estuary in the north and the River Delvin in the south. The coastline is home to a variety of natural habitats and there are several species of flora and fauna, reflected in the cSAC, pNHA and SPA designations that cover much of the area (please refer to Map 8.5).

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 49

To protect the character, visual, recreational, ecological and amenity value of the coast and provisions for public access, in assessing proposals for development.

HER POL 50

To ensure that the County's natural coastal defences, such as beaches, sand dunes, coastal wetlands and estuaries are not compromised by inappropriate works or development.

It is an objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 40

To maintain the beaches along the coast to a high standard and develop their recreational potential as a seaside amenity, subject to appropriate environmental

assessments and in co-operation with the relevant agencies, in order to bring them to a Blue Flag standard.

HER OBJ 41

To undertake conservation works in accordance with best practice on the coastal dune systems subject to ecological impact assessment and Appropriate Assessment, as appropriate.

HER OBJ 42

To implement, in partnership, with all relevant stakeholders the *Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington Beach Management Plan*.

HER OBJ 43

To maintain and enhance our natural coastal defences to increase resilience to climate change.

HER OBJ 44

To investigate how the County's natural coastal defences, can be enhanced to increase climate resilience of our coastal communities.

8.16 Public Rights of Way

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended requires that development plans include an objective for *'the preservation of*

public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility, which public rights of way shall be identified both by marking them on at least one of the maps forming part of the development plan and by indicating their location on a list appended to the development plan'.

Appendix 12 provides a list and mapping of such public rights of ways, identified to date, in accordance with this provision. It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list and that the omission of a right of way from this list shall not be taken as an indication that such a right of way is not a public right of way.

It is a policy of the Council:

HER POL 51

To preserve and protect for the common good, existing public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility as identified in Appendix 12I and Map 8.61-8.6.24.

It is an objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 45

To seek to identify and protect over the lifetime of the Plan further existing rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility (accompanied by mapping showing public rights of way).

HER OBJ 46

To seek to negotiate access to lands using permissive access agreements, where appropriate and feasible, in order to provide public access to lands for public amenity purposes.

8.17 Landscape

8.17.1 Statutory Context

The definition of 'landscape' as defined by the European Landscape Convention has been included in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The Act also specifies that development plans shall contain particular objectives relating to landscape, including objectives in accordance with *'relevant policies or objectives ... relating to providing a framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes having regard to the European Landscape Convention'*.

8.17.2 Policy Context

8.17.2.1 The European Landscape Convention and National Landscape Strategy

The European Landscape Convention (ELC), ratified by Ireland in 2002 and which came into effect on 1st March 2004, states that landscape means *'...an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'*, and this definition has been incorporated into the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The Convention requires landscape to be integrated into planning policies and

promotes interaction between local and central authorities and trans frontier co-operation to protect landscapes. The Convention recognises the cultural, environmental and economic value of landscape and how it contributes to our quality of life and sense of place. The implementation of the recently published *National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025 (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht)* will ensure compliance with the *European Landscape Convention* in Ireland.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 46

To support the aims and objectives of the European Landscape Convention by implementing the relevant objectives and actions of the National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025.

8.17.3 Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is a process which describes, maps and classifies landscapes. Landscape character is defined as *'a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse'*⁸. Defining landscape character enables an understanding to be formed of the inherent value and importance of individual landscape elements and the processes that may alter landscape character in the future. The cultural and ecological aspects of the landscape cannot be subtracted from its physical and visual characteristics so all of these elements are considered.

⁸ Swanwick, C. (2002). Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland

Draft Guidelines for Landscape Character Assessment were published by the DoEHLG in 2000 and a Landscape Character Assessment for the County was carried out in 2007. A key objective of *The National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025* is to develop a National Landscape Character Assessment and to publish statutory guidelines on local Landscape Character Assessments, following best international practices and incorporating Historic Landscape Characterisation for Planning Authorities. The key objectives of the Landscape Character Assessment are -

1. To improve the understanding of the County's landscape in terms of its inherent and unique character and to recognise what elements should be preserved, conserved or enhanced.
2. To predict the broad pattern of future changes and devise policies and objectives as guidance to planners and other parties which will ensure that change is complimentary to landscape character. Sensitivity and capacity of the landscape should be given due consideration in all aspects of decision-making,
3. To assist in the achievement of sustainable development. This underlying principle of all current planning practice and legislation will be adhered to by promoting a unified approach to landscape planning and management which links policies and recommendations for landscape character to existing planning policies.

The Landscape Character Assessment forms Appendix 5 to the Plan. It provides guidance for a detailed understanding of the landscapes of the County, and sets out guidance and recommendations to assist in the development

of related planning policies, development of strategies and development management within the County.

8.17.4 Landscape Character Types and Areas

Landscape Character Types are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character and are generic in nature in that they may occur in different localities throughout the County. Nonetheless, where they do occur, they commonly share similar combinations of geology, topography, land cover and historical land use, e.g. Hills and Upland Areas.

Landscape Character Areas are units of the landscape that are geographically specific and have their own character and sense of place.

Each has its own distinctive character, based upon patterns of geology, landform, landuse, cultural, historical and ecological features e.g. the Boyne Valley.

The Landscape Character Assessment 2007 divides the county into 4 landscape character types (LCTs). These are:

- Hills and Uplands Areas;
- Lowland Areas;
- River Corridors and Estuaries;
- Coastal Areas.

These LCTs are sub-divided into 20 geographically specific landscape character areas.

8.17.5 Landscape Character Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the Landscape Character Areas is defined as its overall resilience to sustain its character in the face of change and

its ability to recover from loss or damage to its components. Sensitivity is evaluated using criteria ranging from 'High' to 'Low' and is based on the interaction of individual components such as landform, amount of evident historical features (time depth) and distribution of viewers. A highly sensitive landscape is likely to be vulnerable, fragile and susceptible to change whereas a landscape with low sensitivity is likely to be more robust and/ or tolerant of change. A Matrix of Landscape Character which indicates the Value, Importance and Sensitivity of Landscape Character Areas is included in the Meath Landscape Character Assessment 2007 which forms Appendix 5 of this Plan.

8.17.6 Landscape Capacity

The potential capacity of each LCA is based on indicative types of development that are likely to occur within the study area. Capacity is the ability that the landscape has to absorb specific types of development. It is only possible to define actual capacity on a case-by-case basis because it will vary according to the type and form of development, its location in relation to the landscape character area in question, and its visibility from it.

It is a policy of the Council:

HER POL 52

To protect and enhance the quality, character, and distinctiveness of the landscapes of the County in accordance with national policy and guidelines and the recommendations of the Meath Landscape Character Assessment (2007) in Appendix 5, to ensure that new development meets high standards of siting and design.

HER POL 53

To discourage proposals necessitating the removal of extensive amount of trees, hedgerows and historic walls or other distinctive boundary treatments.

It is an objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 48

To ensure that the management of development will have regard to the value of the landscape, its character, importance, sensitivity and capacity to absorb change as outlined in Appendix 5 *Meath Landscape Character Assessment* and its recommendations.

HER OBJ 49

To require landscape and visual impact assessments prepared by suitably qualified professionals be submitted with planning applications for development which may have significant impact on landscape character areas of medium or high sensitivity.

HER OBJ 50

To review and update (if required), in the context of a regional approach to landscape assessment, the County Landscape Character Assessment following publication of statutory guidelines for Planning Authorities on local Landscape Character Assessments, as outlined in the *National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025*.

8.17.7 Historic Landscape Characterisation

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is concerned with identifying and detailing the contribution of the past to the present day landscape and broadens the understanding of landscape character. HLC is an important contribution to landscape management because it considers the historical development of the landscape and the relationship of buildings and monuments to landscape patterns. The Council has completed a pilot project on Historic Landscape Characterisation of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne with the School of Archaeology in UCD in accordance with the Heritage Council guidance on *Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) in Ireland: Policy and Best Practice Guidance (2010)*.

8.17.8 Landscape Conservation Areas

Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended enables a Planning Authority to designate a Landscape Conservation Area, within its functional area, in order to preserve it. The Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013 had an objective to explore the designation of Landscape Conservation Area(s), in respect of their core areas for (a) Tara Skryne area (s) and (b) Loughcrew and Slieve na Calliagh Hills.

In March 2009, the Council in partnership with then named Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Heritage Council commenced the process of the designation of a Landscape Conservation Area for the Tara/Skryne landscape (as a national pilot project). A draft Landscape Conservation Area was published in May 2010. However, there

is no statutory timeframe for adoption of a Landscape Conservation Area.⁹

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 54

To protect the archaeological heritage, rural character, setting and amenity of the Tara landscape and Loughcrew and Slieve na Calliagh Hills.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 51

To support the designation, of a Landscape Conservation Area, pursuant to Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, for the Tara Skryne Landscape, in conjunction with the relevant Government Departments and other stakeholders.

HER OBJ 52

To explore, over the life of the Plan, the designation of a Landscape Conservation Area, pursuant to Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in respect of Loughcrew and Slieve na Calliagh Hills.

HER OBJ 53

To work in partnership with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, OPW, local communities and all relevant stakeholders to complete and

⁹ Project information is available at www.taralandscape.ie

implement the *Conservation Management Plan for the State Owned Lands at Hill of Tara*.

HER OBJ 54

To work in partnership with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, OPW, local community and all relevant stakeholders to address visitor management issues and augment the visitor experience at the Hill of Tara.

8.18 Views and Prospects

The landscape of the County has many vantage points which offer attractive views from hilltops and upland areas, along river valleys and the coast. Many of these views are associated with heritage and tourism sites and provide vantage points over high quality landscapes. These scenic views are of an amenity and tourism value and contribute to our quality of life. It is not envisaged that the designation of a protected view would prohibit all development within the view, rather that any development proposed within the view should be designed and located so as not to obstruct the view or be unduly intrusive in the landscape as seen from these vantage points.

It is an objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 55

To preserve the views and prospects listed in Appendix 10, in Volume 2 and on Map 8.4 and to protect these views from

development which would interfere unduly with the character and visual amenity of the landscape.

8.19 Green Infrastructure

The term Green Infrastructure¹⁰ (GI) can be broadly defined as '*Green Infrastructure is a strategically planned and managed network featuring areas with high quality biodiversity (uplands, wetlands, peatlands, rivers and coast), farmed and wooded lands and other green spaces that conserve ecosystem values which provide essential services to society*'. The environmental and heritage resources of the County are vital resources for the County and can be described as the County's 'Green Infrastructure'.

Green Infrastructure can include parks, open spaces, rivers, farmland, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens which surround and intersperse our towns and villages. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of economic, environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities including:

- Attracting businesses and inward investment by creating an attractive environment;
- More places for people to access nature, outdoor recreation and for social interaction;
- Local food production - in allotments, gardens and through agriculture;
- Encouraging physical activity and improved health and well-being by providing quality green spaces for walking and cycling and

¹⁰ Comhar (2010) Creating Green Infrastructure for Ireland: Natural Capital for Human Wellbeing. Comhar - Sustainable Development Council.

other physical activity;

- Creating a sense of place and local distinctiveness;
- Space for nature and wildlife to flourish;
- Climate change adaptation - for example flood alleviation and cooling urban heat islands,
- Environmental education.

The European Union's Biodiversity Strategy, 2011 seeks to halt biodiversity loss in Europe by 2020. This strategy is built around six mutually supportive targets which address the main drivers of biodiversity loss. Target 2 aims to ensure that 'by 2020, ecosystems and their services are maintained and enhanced by establishing Green Infrastructure and restoring at least 15% of degraded ecosystems'. In 2013 the EU published *Building a Green Infrastructure for Europe and Green Infrastructure: Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital* to provide a framework and strategy in order to promote and facilitate Green Infrastructure projects. The EU GI Strategy is made up of the four key elements:

- Promoting GI in main EU policy areas;
- Supporting EU-level GI projects;
- Improving access to finance for GI projects;
- Improving information and promoting innovation

Nationally, there are a number of organisations responsible for developing GI guidance and GI actions in Ireland, namely the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, The Heritage Council, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Comhar - Sustainable Development Council are a number of the key state stakeholders in providing information on GI in Ireland as well implementing the delivery of GI actions. Comhar - The Sustainable Development Council

published *'Creating Green Infrastructure for Ireland: Enhancing Natural Capital for Human Wellbeing'* (August 2010) and this document is a key tool in GI as it sets out how a network of green spaces can be developed to benefit natural heritage and biodiversity as well as the greater economy and society.

The Council acknowledges that Green Infrastructure planning involves a holistic approach and should be provided as an integral part of sustainable development, alongside other infrastructure such as utilities and transport networks, if we are to get the maximum benefit from our natural assets.

It is through the conservation of ecological infrastructure such as hedgerows and riparian corridors that we can develop a 'network of sites' to strengthen and enhance our green infrastructure. These allow for the migration and the exchange of species between conservation areas. To this end, and with a view to improving the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network, the Council will encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora. In addition, the Council will identify sites of local biodiversity value through the ongoing implementation of the County Heritage Plan 2015-2020 and County Biodiversity Plan 2015-2020. The Council will also encourage the management of features of the landscape which can help us adapt to a changing climate.

8.19.1 Green Infrastructure Strategy for County Meath

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy supports further development of a Green Infrastructure policies and the coordination of mapping of strategic Green Infrastructure in the Region. The principles of a Green Infrastructure

approach to land use planning has been embedded as a cross cutting theme in the policies and objectives of this Plan.

The Council has commenced the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy, in accordance with international best practice and emerging national guidance. The network will operate at all spatial scales from urban areas to the wider countryside and to the regional landscape, providing connections between these scales.

The strategy addresses the four main themes identified, namely:

- Biodiversity and natural heritage;
- Landscape, recreation and amenity;
- Water resources,
- Built heritage and culture

It is the policy of the Council:

HER POL 55

To recognise the economic, social, environmental and physical value of Green Infrastructure.

HER POL 56

To require that all Land Use Plans protect, manage and provide where possible green infrastructure in an integrated and coherent manner.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 56

To develop and support the implementation of a Regional and

County Green Infrastructure approach by working in partnership with the Eastern Midland Regional Authority and other key stakeholders to identify, protect, enhance and manage existing green infrastructure within the County and to provide additional Green Infrastructure, where possible.

HER OBJ 57

To identify and map green infrastructure assets and sites of local biodiversity value over the lifetime of the Plan.

HER OBJ 58

To encourage, pursuant to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), the management of features of the landscape, such as traditional field boundaries, important for the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network and essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.

HER OBJ 59

- (a)** To actively promote the conservation and protection of areas designated as NHA (including proposed sites) and to only consider proposals for development within or affecting an NHA where it can be clearly demonstrated that the proposed development will not have significant adverse effect on the NHA or pNHA;
- (b)** To identify and afford appropriate protection to any new, proposed or modified NHAs identified during the lifetime of this Plan.