



Settlement Capacity Audit

Meath County Council

Proposed Variation No.5

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Meath County Council

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Introduction

This Settlement Capacity Audit (SCA) Report outlines the steps undertaken by Meath County Council in assessing the servicing of the lands associated with proposed Variation No. 5 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. This report sets out the legislative requirement to prepare a SCA to inform the Council in respect of the land use strategy and application of the *'Tiered Approach to Zoning'* as required by Section 10 of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Section 2.4 of the NPF Implementation Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines (2025).

The report provides background to the relevant legislation and details the methodology adopted by Meath County Council in preparing the SCA. The report sets out the tiered assessments completed by the Forward Planning Team in consultation with Uisce Éireann and the Council's Transportation Department, in accordance with the NPF First Revision (2025).

Policy Context

NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2025)

In response to the National Planning Framework – First Revision (2025), the 'NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines for Planning Authorities' were issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) in July 2025. These Guidelines replace the earlier Section 28 'Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning' Guidelines published in December 2020 and provide updated housing growth requirements to planning authorities in order to facilitate the revision and update of development plans in accordance with the provision of NPF (2025).

Appendix 1 of the Guidelines sets out the housing growth requirements for each Local Authority which must be reflected in the relevant City and County Development Plans. When applied to County Meath the Guidelines require the delivery of 2,942 units annually up to 2035. This figure reduces to 1,362 from 2035 to 2040 which will require the zoning of additional lands to achieve these targets.

Local authorities are now required to update development plans to reflect on the national targets set out by the Department. In doing so, the Guidelines require that Planning Authorities prepare a "Settlement Capacity Audit" as part of the variation process in order to both identify zoned serviced / servicable lands and to highlight infrastructural requirements.

The Forward Planning Team in Meath County Council have undertaken a detailed review of zoned lands in the County to assess the ability of these lands to accommodate the revised housing targets as set out in the Guidelines. This Audit provides an analysis of the review process and sets out the rationale underpinning the decision to rezone certain lands to accommodate projected growth.

The National Planning Framework First Revision (2025)

The National Planning Framework (NPF) First Revision was published in April 2025 reflecting the significant demographic, environmental, infrastructural and housing changes that have taken place since the original publication of the NPF in 2018.

The overarching objective of the NPF remains to guide and shape the growth and development of the country up to 2040. The NPF recognises that in the period between 2022 and 2040 the country's population is expected to grow by approximately one million people which will require new homes and jobs. The ambition of the NPF is to therefore provide a strategic vision to co-ordinate Ireland's spatial, economic, social and environmental future with the aim of achieving more balanced, sustainable and inclusive growth. The revision to the NPF retains the shared set of goals for every community across the country which are expressed as National Strategic Outcomes (NSO's). The NSO's will continue to frame the revised strategy and ensure continuity of a strategic plan-led approach to the future development of the country.

The NPF sets out updated population projections and outlines ambitious housing targets of approximately 50,000 new homes to be delivered nationally per annum to 2040 to accommodate this growth. The revision also places greater emphasis on climate transition, environmental protection and sustainability, identifies 108 National Policy Objectives (NPO's), and encourages stronger integration between infrastructure delivery and housing development. Section 10 of the NPF states that:

- Planning authorities will be required to apply a standardised, Tiered Approach to differentiate between i) Zoned land that is serviced and ii) Zoned land that is serviceable within the life of the plan (NPO 101).
- When considering zoning lands for development purposes that require investment in service infrastructure, planning authorities will make a reasonable estimate of the full cost of delivery of the specified services and prepare a report, detailing the estimated cost at draft and final plan stages (NPO 102).
- When considering zoning land for development purposes that cannot be serviced within the life of the relevant plan, such lands should not be zoned for development (NPO 103).

Development Plan Guidelines (June 2022)

As set out in the Development Plan Guidelines 2022, the distribution of population and housing targets for settlements is to be informed by way of an evidence-based assessment, including the undertaking of a Settlement Capacity Audit (SCA) to identify zoned serviced and serviceable lands with residential development potential. The SCA should be carried out in accordance with Section 10 of the NPF (as outlined above) which distinguishes between lands that are 'Serviced' (Tier 1) and those that are 'Serviceable' (Tier 2).

As set out in the Guidelines, the SCA should comprise of:

- (i) A table providing, for each settlement above 1500 people, or where lands are zoned in settlements of below 1500, existing population and potential housing estimates for;
 - (a) Tier 1 Serviced Lands**
 - (b) Tier 2 Serviceable Lands**
- (ii) Accompanying maps that identify Tier 1 and Tier 2 lands or sites with potential for residential development in individual settlements

In terms of the infrastructural assessment that forms part of the SCA, the Guidelines recommend the following criteria be considered:

- Road access

- Footpath access
- Cycle access
- Public Lighting
- Foul sewerage drainage
- Water supply
- Surface water drainage

The above considerations were factored into the evaluation of the residential zoned lands following engagement with the relevant stakeholders. The scoring of the sites put forward for rezoning as part of Variation 5 under each criteria is set out in Table 2.3 below.

Methodology

Overview

An assessment was undertaken of ability of the remaining residential zoned lands throughout the county to accommodate the revised housing targets as set out in the NPF Guidelines. The need for additional zoned lands over the remaining duration of the development plan was evaluated, focusing specifically on the identification of land suitable for residential development. The first phase of this assessment considered lands that have been built out, the planning history of zoned lands (August-September 2025) and activation sites, and whether or not the lands were serviced or serviceable. The table below provides a summary overview of the planning status, quantum and potential unit yield of residential zoned land across the county.

Planning Status	Units	Hectares
Land Permitted (Not Complete)	5,458	228.44 (Combined ha of all land permitted)
Land Remaining (Undeveloped land on Mixed Use, Town Centre and Residential)	6020	221.67
One-Off Rural Housing (predicted)	600	-
Live Applications (at time of assessment)	1,263	39.31
Total	13,341	489.42

Table 2.1: Summary of Planning History Assessment

The second phase of the assessment was both quantitative and qualitative and considered the following elements in order to ensure the lands zoned are capable of delivering the annual target of 2,942 units:

- Whether the land parcels identified in Stage 1 of this assessment are fully serviced from a water, sewerage, transport and power perspective to be built out in their entirety;
- Whether the lands identified as part of the Stage 1 of this assessment included landowners with fully serviced zoned lands for extended periods of time that have not attempted to develop their lands for residential purposes and have not engaged with the Local Authority in the previous or current development plan period;
- Whether any landowners of the parcels identified in Phase 1 have expressed their desire to have their land re-zoned for other purposes as part of the RZLT consultation process, and therefore do not intend to develop their land;
- The percentage of existing planning permissions that are likely to translate to delivered units over the next two years;
- Housing delivery trends in settlements over the past 5 years.

The third phase of this assessment identified the quantum of additional lands required to meet the revised housing targets. The assessment was guided by the NPF Housing Growth Requirements to ensure that zoning for an additional provision of up to 50% was factored into the land zoning identification process.

Based on the above assessment between 76 – 89 hectares of alternative lands are required to replace lands and units that are unlikely to be brought forward for development. A Settlement Capacity Audit of all lands zoned for residential use or a mixture of uses including residential throughout the county was undertaken. The aim of the Audit is to assess the adequacy of existing zoned lands to cater for the housing growth requirements set out in the Guidelines and to identify if there are any known infrastructural constraints that would limit the ability of a settlement to achieve the revised housing targets. The lands that have been identified as being suitable for residential development following the Settlement Capacity Audit and their evaluation are detailed in the Section below.

Structure of the Settlement Capacity Audit

The Settlement Capacity Audit for proposed Variation No. 5 comprises three parts:

- Part 1: Site Context Assessment
- Part 2: Tiered Infrastructure Assessment
- Part 3: Additional Considerations

Each stage of the assessment provides a comprehensive evaluation of the suitability of each land parcel assessed for residential development.

Part 1 – Site Context

The Site Context provides baseline information for each land parcel. This stage establishes the physical characteristics, planning context and development potential of each land parcel.

In accordance with Section 4.5.2 of the Development Plan Guidelines, the following information was recorded for each land parcel as part of the Site Context:

- Site Reference Number
- Site Area (hectares)
- Land Use Zoning
- Assumed residential density
- Estimate residential unit yield
- Relevant planning history

Numbering Land Parcels

All land parcels assessed as part of the Settlement Capacity Audit were categorised as either zoned or unzoned. Land parcels with the prefix 'Z' represent lands that are currently zoned within the Meath County Development Plan, while land parcels with the prefix 'UZ' represent lands that are currently unzoned.

Each parcel of land was assigned an individual site reference number for identification purposes. These site reference numbers do not follow a sequential numbering pattern.

Estimating Capacity

In determining the projected housing yield that could be delivered on suitably located lands for future housing growth, general residential density assumptions have been applied across the subject lands. For the purpose of this exercise, a density assumption of 30-50 dwellings per hectare has been applied in accordance with the requirements of the Compact Settlement Guidelines. These are high-level assumptions across all sites and densities would vary greatly at the level of individual sites based on location and site characteristics. These are therefore rational mid-level assumptions that enable a reasonable approach to be adopted to project capacity.

Part 2 – Tiered Infrastructure Assessment

The Tiered Infrastructure Assessment evaluates whether the lands are capable of being developed within the lifetime of the County Development Plan, having regard to the availability and capacity of

key enabling infrastructure. This assessment has been undertaken in compliance with National Policy Objectives 101, 102, and 103 of the NPF First Revision.

Infrastructure Provider Engagement

Uisce Éireann

Uisce Éireann was consulted as part of the Tiered Assessment to determine the availability and capacity of water supply and wastewater infrastructure. The Uisce Éireann assessment considered:

- Water supply and wastewater capacity
- Distance to the nearest watermain and sewer
- Water and wastewater infrastructure upgrade requirements
- Estimate cost of upgrade requirements
- Estimate delivery timeframe

Transportation

Meath County Council's Transportation Department was consulted as part of the Tiered Assessment to assess the availability and capacity of transportation infrastructure serving each land parcel. The Transportation assessment considered:

- Road access
- Road capacity issues
- Footpath provisions
- Public lighting provisions
- Infrastructure upgrade requirements
- Estimate cost of delivery
- Estimate delivery timeframe

Examples of the questions issued to Uisce Éireann and the Transportation Department are provided in Appendix A.

Tiering Classification

In accordance with national policy, sites were classified as follows:

- **Tier 1 – Serviced Lands:**
Lands fully serviced by existing infrastructure and ready for development
- **Tier 2 – Serviceable Lands:**
Lands capable of being serviced within the lifetime of the County Development Plan
- **Unserviceable Lands:**
Lands that cannot be serviced within the lifetime of the County Development Plan

Traffic Light Scoring System

To clearly establish the servicing status of lands, a traffic-light scoring system was applied as part of the Tiered Assessment.

Traffic Light	Tier Classification	Score	Description
	Tier 1	10	Fully serviced
	Tier 2	5	Serviceable
	Unserviceable	0	Lands unsuitable for development

Table 2.2: Scoring System

The Tiered Infrastructure Assessment applies a combined tiering, scoring and traffic-light system to clearly define the servicing status of lands.

Each site was classified as Tier 1, Tier 2 and Unserviceable based on the responses from Uisce Éireann and Trasport. A numerical score was assigned to each tier to support comparison between sites. Tier 1 – Serviced lands were assigned a score of 10, Tier 2 – Serviceable lands were assigned a score of 5, and Unserviceable lands were assigned a score of 0.

Where a site was confirmed by Uisce Éireann and Transportation as being generally serviced, but an identified deficiency remained in any element of the critical infrastructure (for example, the absence of public lighting), the site was not eligible for Tier 1 classification. In such circumstances, the site was automatically classified as Tier 2 – Serviceable which ensures that only lands with no infrastructure deficiencies are classified as Tier 1.

The detailed Tiered Assessment and Land Use Evaluation Scoring Matrix underpinning this classification is provided in Table 2 below.

Summary of Sites Assessed

A Settlement Capacity Audit was undertaken of undeveloped lands within the county, with the lands proposed to be brought forward for residential development and their scoring criteria reproduced in Table 2.3 below. All lands proposed to be zoned for residential development as part of Variation No. 5 are located within Settlement Capacity Audit sites that have been classified as Tier 1 – Serviced lands.

Below are the results of Tiered Infrastructure Assessment:

Table 2.3: Tiered Assessment & Land Use Evaluation

Tiered Assessment & Land Use Evaluation - 18 Sites																		
Settlement	Navan (PA 3)	Navan (PA 1 & 2)	Dunboyn e (PA 1)	Southern Environs of Drogheda (PA 2)	Southern Environs of Drogheda (PA 1)	Kilcock (PA 1)	Dunshaughlin (PA 1)	Dunshaughlin (PA 2)	Enfield (PA 2)	Enfield (PA 1)	East Meath (Bettystown - PA 1)	East Meath (Donacarny - PA 1)	Duleek (PA 2)	Duleek (PA 1)	Stamullen (PA 1)	Athboy (PA 1)	Carlanstown (PA 1)	
Site Number	Z28023	Z28026	Z13015	Z35015	Z35020	Z21001	Z14001	Z14004	Z15005	Z15008	Z05003	UZ05011	UZ12005	UZ12006	UZ36005	UZ202016	UZ06004	
Land Use Zoning	A2	A2	A2	WL	WL	A2	A2	A2	A2	A2	WL	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Site Area (Ha)	7.76	18.61	8.56	4.89	15.77	6.81	1.45	4.44	3.48	0.81	9.7	5	1.89	1.43	5.11	3.63	0.8	
Density of Site (dph)	50	50	30-50	30-50	30-50	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	30	30	35	30	30	
Tiered Assessment																		
Tier 1=10																		
Tier 2=5																		
Public Lighting																		
Water																		
Wastewater																		
Tier 1	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Tier 2																		
Other Considerations																		
1-5	5	4	4	2	2	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	5
1-5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	1	4	5	
1-5	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	
1-5	5	5	4	5	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	
Total (Including Tiered Assessment Score)	30	29	27	26	24	28	28	29	29	30	30	28	27	27	25	27	30	

Findings of the Tiered Infrastructure Assessment

The Tiered Infrastructure Assessment determined that all lands proposed to be zoned for residential use under the lifetime of the current Plan are classified as Tier 1 – Serviced Lands.

Engagement with Uisce Éireann and the Transportation Department confirmed that all Tier 1 sites:

- Are serviced by existing water supply and have adequate wastewater capacity
- Have sufficient available capacity to accommodate additional residential development
- Are accessible via existing road networks
- Benefits from footpath and public lighting provisions

In terms of the broader SCA and in relation to lands that have been identified as Tier 2 – Serviceable lands, the classification reflects the identification of infrastructure requirements that must be addressed prior to or in conjunction with development. The Tier 2 designation does not preclude residential development but confirms that development relies on the delivery of the identified enabling infrastructure.

In all land parcels classified as Tier 2, the infrastructure requirements identified are capable of being delivered within the lifetime of the Development Plan. The sites are well located within their respective settlements and benefit from proximity to existing services and community infrastructure.

The results of the Settlement Capacity Audit are reflected in the maps contained in Appendix B of this report.

Part 3 Additional Considerations

In accordance with Section 6.2 of the Development Plan Guidelines, the assessment recognises that infrastructure availability alone is not sufficient in determining the suitability of lands for zoning.

When assessing each land parcel, the following factors were considered:

- Proximity to town and village centres
- Accessibility of community facilities and services
- Availability of public transport
- Proximity to schools
- Environmental constraints

Methodology for Additional Considerations Scoring

As part of the assessment of additional considerations, a distance-based scoring methodology was applied to evaluate the locational suitability of each site in relation to key services and facilities.

The distance from each land parcel to the nearest relevant facility was measured, and a score ranging from 1 to 5 was assigned to each criterion, with 5 representing the highest outcome and 1 representing the lowest outcome.

The individual scores assigned to each criterion were combined to provide an overall score for additional consideration, with a maximum achievable score of 20.

This score was then combined with the score assigned as part of the Tiered Infrastructure Assessment, to generate an overall score for each land parcel. The maximum achievable overall score for a land parcel was 30.

The scoring for each criterion and the overall parcel score can be found in Table 2.

Findings of Additional Zoning Assessment

The assessment found that all land parcels demonstrated strong locational suitability, are well integrated within the existing settlement, and have good access to community services and public transport.

In relation to environmental constraints, the assessment identified no constraints that preclude residential development on the land parcels. Where the potential for flooding could not be discounted, a spot objective was included on the relevant land parcels requiring the submission of a detailed SFRA as part of any planning applications for development on the subject lands.

Conclusion

The Settlement Capacity Audit confirms that the lands proposed for zoning as part of the proposed Variation No. 5 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021- 2027 are appropriately located, and capable of accommodating residential development to meet the housing growth target figures.

Appendix A - Questions Used to Assess the Land Parcels

Uisce Éireann Questions - Water

1	Is there available water service infrastructure at the site?
2	Is there available water capacity?
3	What is the distance to the watermains?
4	Are there water infrastructure requirements identified?
5	Estimate cost?
6	Estimate delivery?
7	Are the water networks predominately developer driven?

Uisce Éireann Questions - Wastewater

1	Is there available wastewater service infrastructure at the site?
2	Is there available wastewater capacity?
3	What is the distance to the sewer?
4	Are there wastewater infrastructure requirements identified?
5	Estimate cost?
6	Estimate delivery?
7	Are wastewater works predominately developer driven?

Transportation Questions

1	Can the land be accessed directly from the public road?
2	Is there a public footpath to the site?
3	Is there public lighting at the site?
4	Does the site have road capacity issues?
5	Are there any infrastructure requirements?
6	Estimate cost?
7	Estimate delivery?

Appendix B – Settlement Capacity Audit Maps













