



**Southern Environs of Drogheda Local Area Plan
Amendment No 1.**

Screening Report for Appropriate Assessment

30th April 2015

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Meath County Council proposed to amend the 5 Local Area Plans for Ashbourne, Drogheda Southern Environs, Dunboyne/Clonee/Pace, Dunshaughlin and Dunshaughlin.

Proposed amendments to land use plans must undergo a formal “test” or “screening” to see if they would have likely significant effects on specific sites designated for their nature conservation importance. These sites are those designated under the European Commission’s Natura 2000 network of sites. These sites are designated on the basis of the presence of certain habitats and species that are deemed to be of international importance.

The EC Habitats and Birds Directives are the framework for the designation of these sites. The EC Habitats Directive requires the “screening” of plans and projects under Article 6(3). If the screening process results in a judgement that likely significant effects may occur or cannot be ruled out, then a more detailed ‘appropriate assessment’ (AA) is required. Whilst the structure of this assessment process is not laid down in law, there are guidance documents that are used to provide and indication of how this assessment may be carried out. This Report has been prepared in accordance with the national and international guidance.

In order to ensure that the proposed amended Local Area Plan complies fully with the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and all relevant Irish transposing legislation (Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2011), Meath County Council appointed Brady Shipman Martin and Scott Cawley Ltd to prepare the relevant documentation to allow them to carry out the screening of the proposed amendments to see if they required an AA and carry out this assessment if required.

1.2 Aim of this Report

The aims of this report are to:

- to identify the Natura 2000 network within the “zone of influence” of the proposed amendments;
- to identify the linkages between the sensitivities of the individual European sites and the implications of the proposed amendments;
- to determine if the implementation of the proposed amendments could result in likely significant effects on the Natura 2000 sites in terms of impacts on their sensitivities (i.e. screening).

This Report will be used by Meath County Council to carry out their own AA Screening and to come to a conclusion as to the presence/absence of a risk of significant effects on the European sites.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

2.1 Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019

Meath County Council adopted the Meath County Development Plan 2013 – 2019 on 17th December 2012 and it took effect from 22nd January 2013. The County Development Plan sets out a vision and an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County for a six-year period. It also sets out guiding policies and objectives for the development of the County in terms of physical growth and renewal, economic, social and cultural activity, and most critically for SEA, for protecting and enhancing local assets by preserving the quality of the landscape, open space, natural, architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage and material assets. The County Development Plan takes account of various national and regional strategies and guidelines and also reflects consultation with statutory bodies, the general public and other interested bodies.

2.2 Scope of the LAP Amendment Process

Meath County Council proposed to amend the 5 Local Area Plans for Ashbourne, Drogheda Southern Environs, Dunboyne/Clonee/Pace, Dunshaughlin and Dunshaughlin and placed these amendments on public display for a 6 week period.

This process follows on from the making of Variation 2 of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 in May of 2014, which introduced land use zoning objectives and an order of priority for the release of lands (residential land evaluation) in the South Drogheda and Environs LAP area.

The introduction of the land use zoning objectives was required pursuant to the Core Strategy objectives contained in the adopted County Development Plan. The land use zoning objectives for the 5 urban centres (including South Drogheda and Environs) had previously been contained in their respective Local Area Plans. Variation No. 2 also included the introduction of policies and objectives for each urban centre following the undertaking of a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Management Plan to inform same.

The Land Use Zoning Objectives and Map, together with the Additional Policies & Objectives and Residential Land Evaluation for the South Drogheda and Environs LAP area have already been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment as part of the making of Variation 2 to the Meath County Development Plan, May 2014.

Under Variation 2, the land use zoning objectives map identified the lands required to accommodate the household allocation required to meet the provisions under the Core Strategy. The land evaluation that took place for South Drogheda and Environs under Variation 2 is based on a sequential approach to urban expansion, which ensures that development will be directed in the first instance to lands closest to the town centre and adjacent to the built up area of the town. In this context, the requirement for any further release of residential zoned land in South Drogheda and Environs will be assessed following the making of the next County Development Plan in line with the population projections contained therein.

The proposed amendments to the 5 LAPs will now ensure that they are consistent with the Development Plan, as varied. The land use zoning objectives map for South Drogheda and Environs as included in the proposed amendments is replicated from Volume 5 of the Meath County Development Plan 2013 – 2019 as introduced by Variation No. 2, referred to above. No changes to the land use zoning objectives can occur as part of this LAP amendment process.

Therefore, the objective of this amendment process is to ensure consistency between the South Drogheda and Environs Local Area Plan (and other 4 LAPs) and the County Development Plan, as varied.

The scope of the proposed amendments was to:

- *Update the narrative / commentary provided in each Local Area Plan to reflect the changes in policy direction contained in the 2013-2019 County Development Plan and 2010-2022 Regional Planning Guidelines (both of which have been adopted since the Local Area Plans were prepared and adopted in 2009), reflect the 2011 Census of Population results, and update school enrolment figures, etc.*
- *Amend the policy direction contained in each Local Area Plan to reflect the revisions to the land use zoning objectives and phasing (Order of Priority) now contained in the County Development Plan for each centre and any other amendment required to ensure consistency with the County Development Plan. This also relates to changes arising from the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Management Plan.*

The existing Local Area Plan for the Southern Environs of Drogheda 2009-2015 was subject to screening for Appropriate Assessment prior to its adoption. The current AA screening applied to the proposed amendments in isolation and also in the context of any changes that have occurred to the baseline environment since the previous AA Screening was undertaken.

In accordance with best practice in the Appropriate Assessment of plans, the screening stage is carried out prior to and during the final drafting of the objectives and policies. This is to allow the objectives and policies to be devised to take into account the relevant environmental safeguards that may be required to avoid posing an adverse impact on the Natura 2000 sites. The Screening Stage is therefore based upon the following documents:

- Land use zoning maps within current Local Area Plans;
- Policies and Objectives within current Local Area Plans;
- Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment Reports for the South Drogheda and Environs Local Area Plan 2009-2015
- Natura Impact Report for the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019.

A Screening Report was issued alongside the proposed Amendment No. 1 on 4th November 2014. Submissions were then received on the proposed Amendment No.1 and a Chief Executive's report covering the submissions on all five Local Area Plans was published on 3rd February 2015. Proposed alterations to the Amendment were scrutinised for the need to undertake an Appropriate Assessment.

The proposed alterations comprised the following:

- Strategic Policy SP 1 (iii): Inclusion of New Policy in relation to extant planning permissions.
- Objective DE 11: Inclusion of additional sentence in relation neighbourhood centres and their link to the phasing of residential development.
- Objective DPRC3: Amendment and addition of text of Interchange and accompanying transport assessments.
- RT POL 12: Inclusion of new policy - Traffic and Transport Assessments.
- WM 5: Inclusion of new objective – water supply.

- FWD6: Inclusion of new objective – wastewater treatment.
- SWD10: Inclusion of new objective – flood risk.

No likely significant effects on European sites as a result of these alterations were identified and as such, the Amendment was adopted on 2nd March 2015. This Screening Report is published alongside the adopted amended LAP and is accompanied by an AA Screening Determination issued by Meath County Council, the competent authority in this case.

2.3 South Drogheda and Environs – The Plan Area

The current Local Area Plan (LAP) for the Southern Environs of Drogheda, which was subject to AA Screening, dates from 2009. Subject to limitations set out under Sub-section 1.3 Scope of the LAP Amendment Process (above), Meath County Council now proposes to amend the LAP for South Drogheda and Environs. The boundary for the amended Local Area Plan is as provided on the land use zoning map for South Drogheda and Environs introduced to the County Development Plan via Variation No. 2 in May 2014.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Formal Guidance

The Screening stage has taken account of guidance contained in the following documents:

- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities.* (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision).
- *Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities.* Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10.
- *Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission Environment Directorate-General, 2001); hereafter referred to as the EC Article 6 Guidance Document. The guidance within this document provides a non-mandatory methodology for carrying out assessments required under Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive.
- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC* (EC Environment Directorate-General, 2000); hereafter referred to as MN2000.
- *Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC. Clarification of the Concepts of Alternative Solutions, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence.* Opinion of the European Commission (European Commission, January 2007).
- *Guidelines for Good Practice Appropriate Assessment of Plans Under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive* (International Workshop on Assessment of Plans under the Habitats Directive, 2011)

3.2 Sources of Information Used

Sources of information relied upon are listed below:

- Ordnance Survey of Ireland mapping and aerial photography available from www.osi.ie
- Online data available on Natura 2000 sites as held by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) from www.npws.ie
- Information on water quality in the area available from www.epa.ie
- Information on the River Basin Districts from www.wfdireland.ie
- Information on soils, geology and hydrogeology in the area available from www.gsi.ie

- *Status of EU Protected Habitats in Ireland.* (National Parks & Wildlife Service, 2008)
- *The Status of Birds in Ireland: An Analysis of Conservation Concern 2008-2013* (Lynas *et al*, 2007)
- Relevant County Development Plans in neighbouring counties.

4 SCREENING OF SITES

4.1 Identification of Natura 2000 sites

In accordance with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government guidance (DoEHLG, 2010), an initial distance of 15km from South Drogheda and Environs was selected for consideration of Natura 2000 sites.

This distance was deemed to be sufficient to cover all likely significant effects which may arise from the implementation of the amendments on European sites. Spatial boundary data on the Natura 2000 network were extracted from the NPWS website on 21st October 2014.

In addition to examining European sites, Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHA) which fall within 15km of South Drogheda and Environs were also examined. Although NHAs and pNHAs do not form part of the Natura 2000 Network, they often provide an important supporting role to the network, particularly when it comes to fauna species which often do not obey site boundaries. For example, a pNHA/NHA that provides regular feeding grounds for a population of Golden Plover for which a separate site is designated as an SPA plays a role in the maintenance of the species at favourable conservation status for that SPA. In other words, in that example, in order to protect the Natura 2000 network it may also be important to protect the pNHA /NHA which provides a supporting role to it. There are however, NHAs and pNHAs that are designated for features that are not important at an international level and may not interact with the Natura 2000 network.

European site within 15km of the LAP boundary are listed in Table 1 below. Table 2 lists the non-Natura 2000 sites.

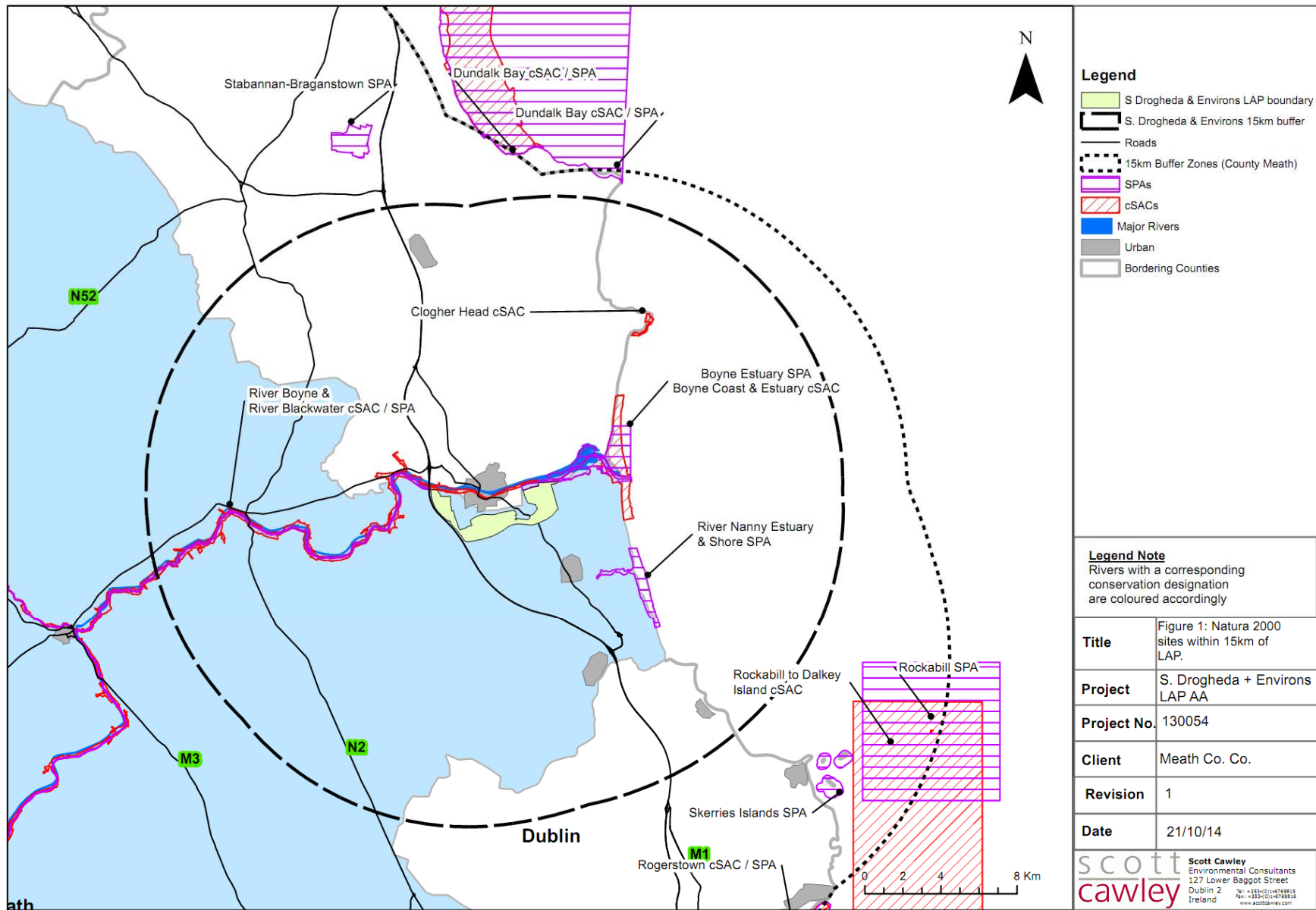
Table 1: Natura 2000 sites found within 15km buffer zone.

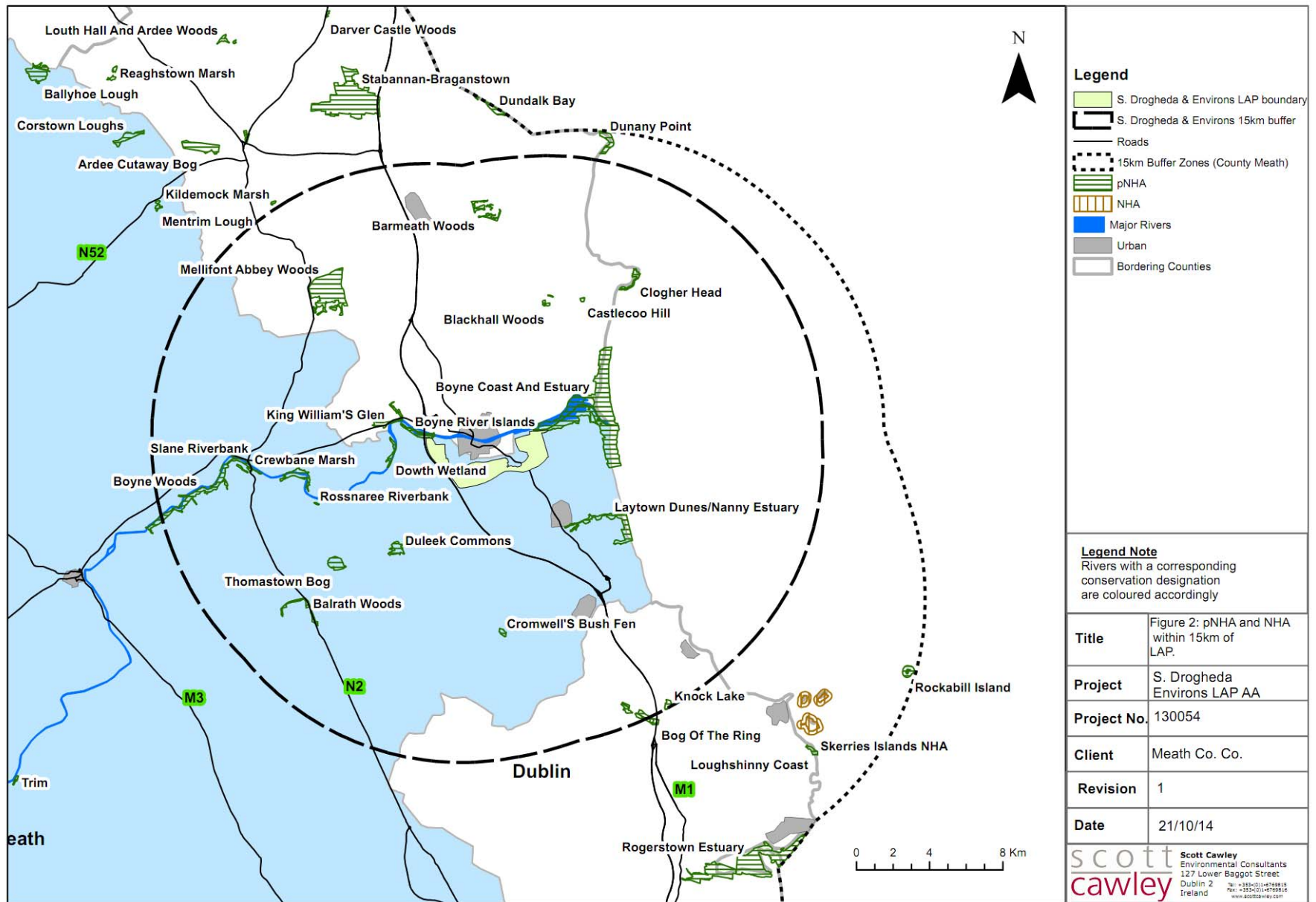
Candidate Special Areas of Conservation	Special Protection Areas
Boyne Coast and Estuary	Boyne Estuary
River Boyne and Blackwater	River Nanny Estuary and Shore
Clogher Head	River Boyne and Blackwater

All of these sites are presented on Figure 1.

Table 2: Natural Heritage Areas and Proposed Natural Heritage Areas found within 15km buffer zone.

Proposed Natural Heritage Areas	Natural Heritage Areas
Balrath Woods	<i>None</i>
Boyne Coast and Estuary	
Boyne River Islands	
Boyne Woods	
Crewbane Marsh	
Cromwells Bush Fen	
Dowth Wetland	
Duleek Commons	
Laytown Dunes / Nanny Estuary	
Rosnaree Riverbank	
Thomastown Bog	
Barmeath Woods	
Blackhall Woods	
Castlecoo Hill	
Clogher Head	
King William's Glen	
Mellifont Abbey Woods	
Slane River Bank	
Knock Lake	
Bog of the Ring	





4.2 Reasons For Designation, Site Sensitivities And Threats

In order to identify those sites that could be potentially affected, it was necessary to describe the European site in the context of why it has been designated (i.e. its “Qualifying Interests”) and the environmental and ecological conditions that maintain the condition of these features. The Qualifying Interests and threats to the sites were extracted from the NPWS website database (www.npws.ie). Threats to sites were also scoped during informal consultation with regional NPWS staff during the AA of the County Development Plan.

The results of this desktop exercise are presented in are listed in Table A1, Appendix A and illustrated in Figure 2a of the Meath County Development Plan Natura Impact Report, Volume IV. In order to identify those sites that could be potentially affected, it was necessary to describe the European Sites in the context of why it has been designated (its “Qualifying Interests”) and the environmental and ecological conditions that maintain the condition of these features. The Qualifying Interests and threats to the sites were extracted from the NPWS website database (www.npws.ie) in 2012 and 2013 as part of the AA of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019. The underpinning conditions that are required to maintain the ‘health’ of these features are listed in this table. Reference should be made to Appendix A to guide the reader. All European sites which fall within 15km of the County boundary are listed in Table 1, Volume IV and those that are within 15km of the LAP boundary are duplicated below in Table 1 in this AA Screening Report. These sites are also displayed in Figure 2a, Volume IV of the NIS.

Table 3 presents the full list of qualifying interests that are contained within European sites located within 15km of the LAP. The underpinning conditions that are required to maintain the ‘health’ of these features are listed in this table.

Table 3: Qualifying Interests in the relevant European sites and the underpinning environmental conditions.

Qualifying Interests	Key environmental conditions supporting site integrity
Alkaline fens	High water table. Ground surface water supply. Calcium-rich conditions.
Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)	Riparian/lacustrine habitat prone to flooding
Atlantic Salmon <i>Salmo salar</i>	Riverine habitat. Water quality (Q4-5). Riverbed breeding gravels. Quality riparian vegetation. Unhindered migratory routes.
Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>)	Frequency of tidal submergence
Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>)	Food availability (intertidal fauna/pasture). Flooding regime of coastal grasslands. Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding areas.
Embryonic shifting dunes	Dune-building grasses <i>Elytrigia juncea</i> and <i>Leymus arenarius</i> . Supply of windblown sand
Estuaries	Supply of riverine freshwater. Unimpeded tidal flow. Shelter from open coasts. Diverse invertebrate communities.
European dry heaths	Free-draining nutrient poor acid soils. Grazing and burning.
Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)	Low wind, weakly saline conditions in shelter of <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> dunes. Grazing.

Qualifying Interests	Key environmental conditions supporting site integrity
Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>)	Food availability (intertidal fauna/pasture). Flooding regime of coastal grasslands. Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding areas.
Grey Plover (<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>)	Food availability (intertidal fauna/pasture). Flooding regime of coastal grasslands. Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding areas.
Kingfisher (<i>Alcedo atthis</i>)	Marine/freshwater food availability. Undisturbed soft substrate riparian nest sites. Regularity of extreme weather. Water quality.
Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>)	Food availability (intertidal fauna/pasture). Flooding regime of coastal grasslands. Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding areas.
Little Tern (<i>Sterna albifrons</i>)	Sea level. Natural/artificial nest site availability. Undisturbed breeding sites. Regularity of extreme weather events. Marine prey availability (sand eel).
Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>)	Frequency of tidal submergence.
Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide	Silt deposits in sheltered estuaries.
Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Prey availability. Water Quality. Riparian vegetation for breeding sites. Unhindered passage along waterways.
Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>)	Food availability (intertidal fauna/pasture). Flooding regime of coastal grasslands. Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding areas.
Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>)	Food availability (intertidal fauna/pasture). Flooding regime of coastal grasslands. Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding areas.
Ringed Plover (<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>)	Food availability (intertidal fauna/pasture). Flooding regime of coastal grasslands. Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding areas.
River Lamprey <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>	Riverine habitat. Water quality. Riverbed breeding gravels and silt nursery substrate. Unhindered migratory channels.
Salicornia and other annuals colonizing mud and sand	Frequency of tidal submergence. Absence of erosion.
Sanderling (<i>Calidris alba</i>)	Food availability (intertidal fauna/pasture). Flooding regime of coastal grasslands. Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding areas.
Shelduck (<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>)	Food availability (intertidal flora and fauna/pasture/cereal). Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding sites.
Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes)	Supply of wind-blown sand.
Turnstone (<i>Arenaria interpres</i>)	Food availability (intertidal fauna/pasture). Flooding regime of coastal grasslands. Undisturbed coastal roosting sites close to feeding areas.
Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts	Flat topography on coastal cliff bedrock. High pH influence of sands and seabird guano.

The key output of this stage was the identification of the types of threats to the integrity of the European sites. These can then be related to the consequences of implementing the proposed amendments to see if there is a risk of any likely significant effects.

The following generic threats to the European sites were identified and are listed below. It should be noted that many of these activities and their consequences would not be expected to result from the implementation of the proposed amendment due to the nature of the proposed land uses and the geographic location of the settlements concerned.

Rural/Agricultural activities

- Agricultural Intensification;
- Fertilisation;
- Grazing, (undergrazing /overgrazing);
- Restructuring agricultural land holdings;
- Forestry (afforestation/deforestation);
- Stock Feeding;
- Drainage/flooding;
- Offshore/onshore aquaculture;
- Pesticides, and;
- Peat Extraction.

Economic and Infrastructural Development

- Golf Courses;
- Roads, motorways;
- Coastal protection works;
- Sewage outflows;
- Housing developments;
- Communications Networks;
- Quarries;
- Canalisation;
- Landfill land reclamation;
- Disposal of household waste;
- River Channel Maintenance, and;
- Invasive Alien Species.

Recreation and Leisure

- Walking, horse riding and non-motorised vehicles;
- Offshore motorised vehicles;
- Bait Digging, and;
- New Paths and Tracks.

The above list describes generic threats and does not take account of specific sensitivities at the European sites. Section 5 presents the impact types that are deemed to be relevant to the amendment of the Southern Environs of Drogheda Local Area Plan 2009-2015.

Consultation of the NPWS Natura 2000 data forms and liaison with regional staff allowed site-specific sensitivities to be identified. These site-specific sensitivities are presented in the following sections.

5 IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

5.1 Likely Significant effects in isolation and combination

This section documents the final stage of the screening process. It used the information collected on the sensitivity of each Natura 2000 site and describes any likely significant effects of implementation of the proposed amendments. This assumes the absence of any controls, conditions or assumption of mitigation measures.

5.2 Potential linkages between the LAP and European Sites

Table 4 identifies the sensitivities of the qualifying interests for the European sites that are within 15km of the Local Area Plan. It was clear that nearly all of the qualifying interests were influenced by changes to the aquatic (marine, estuarine, coastal and inland freshwater) environment and by the potential to give rise to increased recreational pressures.

The Drogheda Main Drainage Scheme resulted in the construction of a Wastewater Treatment Plant (WwTP) of Phase 1 design capacity of 67,000pe and large diameter interceptor sewers laid along both the north and south banks of the River Boyne to intercept the existing foul and combined sewers and convey the sewage to a pumping station at Newtown, from where it is pumped to the WwTP. Thirteen combined sewer overflow structures, 'Stormkings', were constructed on the new interceptor sewers to discharge excess flows to the River Boyne during heavy rainfall events.

The WwTP has been extended (Phase 2) to provide a design capacity of 101,000 p.e. The WwTP is operated by Drogheda Borough Council and Meath County Council has been allocated a reserve capacity of 27,500pe out of the Phase 2 design capacity of 101,000 p.e.

Wastewater from the East Meath settlements of Mornington East, Bettystown, Laytown, Julianstown, Donacarney and Mornington is currently pumped to Drogheda Wastewater Treatment Plant for treatment and disposal. The East Meath Coastal Area Sewerage Scheme, which serves these settlements has been designed to deliver a dry weather flow (DWF) of 4,335m³/day, which equates to a population equivalent (p.e.) of 24,086 to the Drogheda WWTW.

The current Meath loading is approximately 17,000 p.e. However, with the addition of pending load (i.e. development granted permission but not yet developed and occupied) the existing committed loading from Meath is c22,000 p.e. Further options exist to increase Meath's capacity allocation significantly in a relative short timeframe, should the need arise. Protective policies in the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 WS SO8, WS POL11 and RD POL52 ensure that the receiving watercourses will not be threatened by wastewater treatment plants that operate beyond their design capacity.

Drogheda Environs is served from the East Meath, South Louth & Drogheda Water Supply Scheme. This scheme supplies treated water to Drogheda Environs in addition to the coastal settlements of, Laytown, Bettystown, Mornington East, Donacarney and Gormanston. The scheme also serves the centres of Donore, Kentstown, Stamullen, Duleek, Ashbourne, Ratoath & Kilbride. The main water source for East Meath, South Louth and Drogheda is the abstraction from the River Boyne at Roughgrange. Raw water is pumped from the canal intake at Roughgrange to the Staleen Water Treatment Works (WTW), where it is treated and distributed to East Meath and Drogheda. This plant serves an area of approximately 600 sq. km. with storage provided at Stalleen itself, at Windmill Hill, Kiltrough, Donore, Balloy, Carnes and Rath.

Whilst the water treatment plant in Stalleen is located within Co. Meath, it is operated by Louth County Council. The nominal treatment capacity of the Staleen WTW is 31.5 MI/day. There is an agreement between Louth County Council and Meath County Council to allocate 47% of the capacity of this plant to Meath. The capacity allocation to Meath equates to approximately 15,000 m³/day. It is estimated that Meath currently uses 11,000 m³/day of that allocation. The remaining 16.5MI/d is used to supply the Drogheda network. The Staleen WTW is currently operating at the limit of its capacity.

The Donore Service Reservoirs located to the south – west of Drogheda is supplied via a 375mm diameter main from Staleen WTW. The Donore Reservoirs consist of two 4,545m³ pre-stressed

concrete cells, each with a TWL of 79Mod. A 600mm diameter trunk main runs from the Donore Reservoirs serving the DBC and environs area. Distribution mains in Drogheda Town range in size from 450mm diameter down to 50mm diameter. DBC exports water (unmetered) to Meath County Council at Rathmullen and at housing developments on the R108 (Naul Road) at Lagavooreen

An evaluation of the existing water supply and proposals for a future water supply scheme to supply the East Meath, South Louth and Drogheda region was undertaken by Consulting Engineers McCarthy/Tobin JV for Meath County Council. The Preliminary Report for the new East Meath, South Louth and Drogheda Water Supply Improvement Scheme, July 2009, indicated that to meet projected needs it will be essential to maximise the use of existing sources together with the development of new sources. Future demands will be met through the conjunctive use of surface and groundwater sources. While the existing River Boyne abstraction at Roughgrange will be maintained as a primary source, the potential for additional abstraction from the River Boyne is limited. The report recommended therefore, that potential yield from groundwater sources to serve East Meath should be developed.

The new East Meath, Drogheda and South Louth Water Supply Scheme will cater for the water services needs of East Meath, Drogheda and South Louth up to at least the year 2030. This will include the development of substantial groundwater sources in the East Meath Area to meet the projected water supply needs of East Meath and the Meath environs of Drogheda. In 2010 Meath County Council completed Phase 1 of the Kiltrough Augmentation Scheme which provides an additional 3,000 cubic metres per day of water to East Meath from boreholes at Kiltrough water tower. This, together with recent new water sources and treatment plants developed by the Council at Rath and Dunshaughlin as well as substantial gains made through water conservation, through active leakage control, pressure management and water conservation awareness campaigns, has reduced substantially the reliance on Stalleen Water Treatment Plant and will play a major role in contributing towards meeting the needs of the existing and future population for potable water. Protective policies in the County Development Plan WS POL2 will prevent unsustainable use of the groundwater resources.

In terms of recreational impacts on coastal sites, policies within the LAP that promote the provision of local open space and recreational facilities will address any risk of increasing recreational pressures on the coastline. In addition, SOC POL 38 in the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 will help to protect against proposals for recreation facilities being inappropriately located or designed.

On the basis of this information regarding water supply and water treatment and discharge and recreation, it was concluded that there was no real risk of significant effects on the integrity of the European sites.

The original LAP adopted in 2009 includes objectives for a new crossing of the Boyne

“RT9 To cater for the increased town based traffic movements, Meath County Council in conjunction with adjoining Local Authorities shall investigate the feasibility of a future strategic road crossing of the Boyne east of the Railway Viaduct, which would link with the Northern Port Access Road. This study shall include details on the proposed funding mechanisms for such infrastructure.”

DE5 To upgrade the Mill Road and Marsh Road to provide for pedestrian footpaths and to provide on-street cycle tracks along the entirety of these roads. Further to this, a transport study should be carried out to ascertain the appropriate size, specification and location of a new river crossing to link the proposed distributor road with the proposed Northern Port

Access Route provided on the Northside of Drogheda in Co. Louth (in line with the recommendations of the Planning Strategy for the Greater Drogheda Area)."

The proposed amendment to the 2009 LAP has not removed these objectives. The location of the proposed bridge is directly to the east of Stagrennan Polder, an artificially-created mudflat that was specifically designed to replace the loss of natural polder mudflats during dredging and deposition activities at the Boyne Estuary. This area is part of the Boyne Estuary SPA and the River Boyne and River Blackwater cSAC and immediately upstream of the Boyne Coast and Estuary SPA.

The location of this indicative bridge crossing is not consistent with that shown on the North Drogheda Environs LAP 2004 prepared by Louth County Council which shows this bridge aligning with the existing Mill Road further east. The proposal for this location is also noted as being strategic and indicative in nature and located within lands which are not identified for release during the life of the County Development Plan i.e. consist of white lands, Phase II residential or H1 'Natural Beauty'. Therefore since the proposal for this infrastructure is unlikely to be implemented under the LAP it was not considered to pose any likely significant risk to the European sites.

In Table 4, likely significant effects of the proposed amendments are presented both in isolation and potentially in combination with other plans.

Table 4: Likely Significant Effects of implementing the proposed Amendments (in the absence of mitigation)

Site	Potential Impacts arising from the proposed Amendments	Is there a likely risk of a Significant Effect?	Other plans to be considered in Combination? ¹	Is there a risk of Significant Impact in combination?
CANDIDATE SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION				
Boyne Coast and Estuary cSAC	No connection between proposals under the amended LAP and the physical coastal processes in the coast and estuary habitats so no direct or indirect impacts on these elements. Indirect impacts due to increased levels of recreational activities unlikely given the range of policies and objectives promoting zoning of inland sites for recreational facilities in the existing LAP.	No	Louth County and local plans and other regional plans and strategies.	No
River Boyne and Blackwater cSAC	No connection between proposals under the amended LAP and the alluvial woodland or alkaline fen habitats or in-stream species. Indirect impacts due to increased levels of recreational activities unlikely given the range of policies and objectives promoting zoning of lands for recreation facilities in the existing LAP.	No	Louth County and local plans and other regional plans and strategies.	No
Clogher Head	No connection between proposals under the amended LAP and the heath and sea cliff habitats. Indirect impacts due to increased levels of recreational activities unlikely given the range of policies and objectives promoting zoning of lands for recreation facilities in the existing LAP.	No	Louth County and local plans and other regional plans and strategies.	No
SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA				
Boyne Estuary SPA	Direct impacts on SPA and pNHA sites within Meath will be avoided and hence no consequences on population dynamics of birds (Shelduck, Black-tailed Godwit and others). Indirect impacts due to increased levels of recreational activities unlikely given the range of policies and objectives promoting zoning of lands for recreation facilities in the existing LAP.	No	Louth County and local plans. River Basin Management Plans.	No
River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA	Direct impacts on SPA and pNHA sites within Meath will be avoided and hence no consequences on population dynamics of birds (Oystercatcher, Ringer Plover and others). Indirect impacts due to increased levels of recreational activities unlikely given the range of	No	Dublin City and Fingal County Development Plan. River Basin Management Plans.	No

¹This list is not considered to be exhaustive.

Site	Potential Impacts arising from the proposed Amendments	Is there a likely risk of a Significant Effect?	Other plans to be considered in Combination? ¹	Is there a risk of Significant Impact in combination?
	policies and objectives promoting zoning of lands for recreation facilities in the existing LAP and distance (6km) to the coastal sites.			
River Boyne and Blackwater SPA	Direct impacts on SPA and pNHA sites within Meath will be avoided and hence no consequences on population dynamics of birds (Kingfisher). Indirect impacts due to increased levels of recreational activities unlikely given the range of policies and objectives promoting zoning of lands for recreation facilities in the existing LAP.	No	Louth County and local plans County Development Plan. River Basin Management Plans.	

5.3 Ecological Network Supporting European Site Integrity

An analysis of the proposed Natural Heritage Areas and designated Natural Heritage Areas in terms of their role in supporting the species using European sites was undertaken. It was assumed that these supporting roles mainly related to mobile fauna such as mammals and birds which may use pNHAs and NHAs as “stepping stones” between Natura 2000 sites.

Article 10 of the Habitats Directive and the Habitats Regulations 2011 place a high degree of importance on such non-Natura 2000 areas as features that connect the Natura 2000 network. Features such as ponds, woodlands and important hedgerows were taken into account during the rest of the AA process.

Table 5: Other Ecological designations that may support the Natura 2000 network.

Name of Proposed Natural Heritage Area/Natural Heritage Area.	Feature and Habitat Used by Feature	Natura 2000 Site potentially linked to the pNHA/NHA Supported
Boyne Coast and Estuary	Otter, Salmon and River Lamprey and wetlands/streams. Kingfisher breeding/feeding.	River Boyne and Blackwater cSAC and SPA.
Boyne River Islands		
Boyne Woods		
Rosnaree Riverbank		
King William’s Glen		
Dowth Wetland		
Laytown Dunes / Nanny Estuary	Overwintering wildfowl and waterbirds.	River Nanny Estuary and Shore

6. PROTECTIVE POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES IN THE MEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013-2019.

The screening of the proposed amendments involved the analysis of the proposed policies and objectives and where necessary, the inclusion of mitigation measures to ensure that the implementation of the proposed amendment does not result in adverse impacts on European sites. In doing so, there were several “protective” policies and objectives that existed within the County Development Plan (CDP) - whose specific function was to protect the integrity of the sites and the environmental conditions underpinning them. These were taken into account in the screening of the proposed amendments as these protective policies in the CDP could help to mitigate any potential impacts on designated sites.

Table 6 shows a summary of the Policies and Objectives contained within the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 which act cumulatively to protect the individual European sites. This list does not cover all of the Policies or Objectives of a protective or mitigatory nature but identifies those that address specific sensitivities of the sites.

Table 6: Policies protecting individual European sites.

Site	Sensitivity/threat	Mitigation Policy/Objective
Candidate SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION		
Boyne Coast and Estuary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water quality Changes in coastal geomorphology 	ED OBJ 2; ED POL 10; ED POL 11; ED POL 40; TRAN OBJ 2; TRAN OBJ 8; TRAN OBJ 9; TRAN POL 32; WS SO 7; WS SO 8; WS POL 11; WS OBJ 13; WS OBJ 15; EC POL 23; NH POL 5; NH OBJ 2; NH OBJ 3; RUR DEV SO 9
River Boyne and Blackwater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groundwater changes near alkaline fens Direct and indirect impacts on alluvial forests Disturbance of otter holts Instream obstructions affecting fish passage 	ED OBJ 2; ED POL 40; TRAN OBJ 8; TRAN OBJ 9; TRAN POL 32; WS SO 7; WS SO 8; WS POL 2; WS POL 11; WS OBJ 8; WS OBJ 15; EC POL 23; NH POL 5; NH OBJ 2; RUR DEV SO 9; RD POL 18; RD POL 21; RD POL 52; RD POL 53
Clogher Head cSAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recreational activities 	ED OBJ 2; ED POL 9; NH POL 5; NH OBJ 2; RUR DEV SO 9
SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS		
Boyne Estuary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disturbance from recreation/development 	ED OBJ 2; ED POL 9; ED POL 40; TRAN OBJ 2; TRAN OBJ 8; TRAN OBJ 9; TRAN POL 32; WS SO 7; WS SO 8; WS POL 11; NH POL 5; NH OBJ 2; RUR DEV SO 9
River Nanny Estuary and Shore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disturbance from recreation/development Water quality. 	ED OBJ 2; ED POL 9; ED POL 40; TRAN OBJ 8; TRAN OBJ 9; TRAN POL 32; WS SO 7; WS SO 8; WS POL 11; WS OBJ 8; WS OBJ 13; WS OBJ 15; NH POL 5; NH OBJ 2; RUR DEV SO 9; RD POL 18; RD POL 21
River Boyne and Blackwater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disturbance from recreation/development Water quality 	ED OBJ 2; ED POL 40; ED OBJ 10; TRAN OBJ 2; TRAN OBJ 8; TRAN OBJ 9; TRAN POL 32; WS SO 7; WS SO 8; WS POL 11; WS OBJ 8; WS OBJ 15; NH POL 5; NH OBJ 2; RUR DEV SO 9; RD POL 18; RD POL 21; RD POL 52; RD POL 53

7. INTERACTION WITH OTHER PLANS

The E.C. Habitats Directive and the Habitats Regulations 2011 require that the impacts on European sites be assessed from the plan or project in question and also in the presence of other plans and projects that could affect the same European sites.

The screening process identified other plans and projects that could act in combination with the Amendments to theoretically pose likely significant effects on European sites. This Section identifies if these other Plans and Projects have undergone an appropriate assessment themselves as it is assumed that if a Plan has been adopted following an AA then it cannot pose likely significant adverse effects on European sites.

The cumulative/in-combination impact assessment focused on the other County Development Plans and Local Area Plans that had the highest potential to affect the same European sites that could be affected by the Amendments. Other higher-level plans that could promote infrastructure are integrated within the County Development Plan 2013-2019 itself and have been assessed as such.

- Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019
 - The AA of the County Development has addressed many of the potential issues arising from the amended Local Area Plan. The implementation of the amended Local Area Plan will refer to the protective policies in the County Development Plan as a form of mitigation of potential effects on the European Sites. Therefore, assuming that both the County and Local Area Plan are implemented in accordance with the policies and objectives in both Plans then significant adverse effects on European sites will be avoided.
- Fingal County Development Plan 2011-2017
 - Potential for impacts from recreational users of the beach at the River Nanny and Shore SPA are acknowledged and policies integrated to the Plan to ensure the AA is carried out for such proposals. Cumulative impacts caused by increased populations in East Meath and in Fingal, on Rogerstown and Malahide Estuaries have been addressed by mitigation policies in the Fingal County Development Plan.
- Louth County Development Plan 2009-2015
 - The Boyne Estuary SPA, River Boyne and Blackwater cSAC and SPA are all shared by Louth and Meath. Policies have been assessed as part of a comprehensive appropriate assessment and changes made to protect these specific sites. As a result there are no predicted cumulative impacts from the implementation of this Plan.
- North Drogheda Environs Local Area Plan 2004
 - The Plan area sites on the opposite bank of the Boyne Estuary and hence could act in combination with the Southern Environs Local Area plan to affect the European sites that abut both Plans. The 2004 LAP does not seem to have undergone appropriate assessment and no other type of formal recognition of environmental sensitivities is evident. In the absence of policies at the LAP level the protective policies in the Louth CDP would apply.

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- Dublin City Development Plan 2011-2017
 - There are no European sites shared by the two Counties. At the screening stage it was purported that there could be indirect impacts if bird populations in Meath/Louth SPAs were adversely affected (Shelduck, Black-tailed Godwit, Golden Plover and others).
 - Policies have been proposed to provide for protection of the coastal European sites in Dublin City that could share species with the River Nanny and Boyne Estuary sites in Meath. As a result there are no predicted cumulative impacts from the implementation of this amended Plan.

 - Fingal and East Meath Flood Risk Assessment and Management Study SEA Environmental Report (2011)
 - This strategic analysis of flood risk and relief options identified potential for impacts on the River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA and Boyne Estuary SPA as a result of embankment proposals at Laytown/Bettystown. It was recommended that the timing of the proposed works on the River Nanny Estuary take place between April and August to avoid the main bird migration and wintering period; the reduction of noise by using appropriate construction methods; and the setting back of the flood defences and road, or the creation of new intertidal habitat to mitigate for habitat likely to be lost through coastal squeeze.

 - Eastern River Basin District Management Plan (2008)
 - A review of the Article 6 Assessment indicated that the Measures proposed within the Plan are consistent with the mitigation policies within the Draft County Development Plan. Key issues such as buffer strips alongside rivers, control of invasive species, upgrade and capacity of wastewater treatment plants lend support for the Policies in the amended Plan.

 - Heritage Capital- Marketing Tourism in Meath 2005 – 2010
 - Whilst the Strategy does not appear to have undergone any AA, there are several recommendations that overlap with protective Policies in the amended LAP. Proposals to protect the beaches from parking and to provide adequate parking whilst respecting the need to protect the designated sites, is one such example.
 - It is noted that this Strategy was prepared in the peak of the Celtic Tiger era and that pressures to develop hotel and leisure developments are no longer viable. Such developments could have posed a conflict with the protection of some European sites.

 - Regional Planning Guidelines for Greater Dublin Area 2010-2022²
 - Section 4.6 of the Habitats Directive Assessment of the Regional Planning Guidelines set out the mitigation measures that have been passed down into the current AA of the amended Local Area Plan. These include, but are not limited to:
 - GIP2; SIR6: Ensure that plans and projects relating to recreational, leisure or tourism activity which have the potential to negatively impact on European sites undergo a HDA in the early stages of planning. Where mitigation is feasible, measures should be prescribed to actively manage visitor access

² <http://www.rpg.ie/>

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- and ensure that sensitive areas are protected. Where such measures are not feasible or uncertain, mitigation is through avoidance.
- GIP2; GIP3; GIP4; PIR18; GIR21; GIR22, GIR23: Ensure protection of coastal waters and coastal sites, which have been identified as particularly vulnerable to increased pressure, through integrated coastal zone management and early consideration of Article 6 requirements for all plans and projects potentially impacting on European site.
 - GIP2; FRI; FR4: Ensure protection of Natura 2000 sites supporting rivers or streams by avoiding development on floodplains and ensure that flood risk assessment policies, plans or projects are compliant with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and avoid or mitigate negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites.
- Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border Region 2010-2022³
 - INFP 1, FRP3, ENVP 4, ENVP 5: Ensure the protection of the Natura 2000 sites' supporting rivers and streams by avoiding development in areas at risk from flooding, whilst facilitating the continued growth and expansion of the key urban settlements that are at risk from coastal or fluvial flooding. INFP 1, FRP 1, ENVP 4, and ENVP 5: Ensure that development and local area plans adopt a strategic approach to flood risk management to avoid any negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites. INFP 1, INFP 19, ENVP 4, and ENVP 5: Ensure that all plans and projects associated with the provision of water and sewerage facilities comply with the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.
 - Draft Transport Strategy for Greater Dublin Area 2011-2030⁴
 - The Natura Impact Statement identified the potential for significant impacts on the River Boyne and Blackwater cSAC (SPA not designated at that time). It stated: "It is considered possible that general pressures on water quality in the Boyne and Blackwater catchments resulting from, agriculture, forestry, housing, industry, etc, in combination with any deterioration in water quality resulting from construction activity during construction of either the new Navan Rail Line or the Leinster Orbital Route, could potentially result in significant negative impacts on the cSAC and this needs to be taken account of in any Appropriate Assessment at project level". It identified that the most effective mitigation for both of these transport impacts would be at the project level.
 - Meath Local Authorities Climate Change Strategy and Energy Management Action Plan 2011-2012⁵
 - The Plan has not undergone an AA but many of the proposed measures would combine with the measures proposed in the amended Local Area Plan to reduce the likelihood of any significant effects on the European sites. Many of the policies aiming for better water usage, increased energy efficiency, waste, housing and planning are directly compatible with the Draft Local Area Plan. Only policies that promote cycling at the coast could put increased pressure on the coastline in the form of potential disturbance. However the mitigation measures in the amended Plan would offset the potential for such an impact to occur.

³ <http://www.border.ie/downloads/RPGs/Regional%20Planning%20Guidelines%202010%20-%202022.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.nationaltransport.ie/publications/transport-planning/>

⁵ <http://www.meath.ie/CountyCouncil/Environment/ClimateChange/LargeFileDownload,44533,en.pdf>

8. SCREENING CONCLUSIONS

The Screening process has identified that several European sites were within 15km of the Southern Environs of Drogheda LAP boundary. These sites and their qualifying interests would be sensitive to changes in the estuarine, marine and inland hydrological environment and increased recreational pressures. Analysis of the proposed amendments to the Local Area Plan did not highlight any policies or objectives that would pose a risk of likely significant effects to the integrity of the European sites in terms of both direct impacts in isolation and on a cumulative basis.

9. REFERENCES

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Forward Planning Section

14th May, 2015.

Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination under Section 177U (5), Part XAB, Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010

Southern Environs of Drogheda Local Area Plan Amendment No. 1

An Appropriate Assessment screening determination has been made by Meath County Council regarding Amendment No. 1 to the Southern Environs of Drogheda Local Area Plan.

This decision has been informed by information prepared by Scott Cawley Ltd. on behalf of the Council - Appropriate Assessment Screening Report dated April 30th 2015 and consideration of drawings and other information provided in the Amendment documentation. This AA Screening report described the nature of the proposed amendment, the nature of the European sites within the zone of influence of the LAP and the relationship between the two such that any impact pathways could be identified. It sets out the nature of the proposed works and assesses any potential for direct, indirect or cumulative impacts of the proposed works on all relevant European Sites.

The Council has examined likely significant effects of the proposed works on European Sites within the zone of influence of the proposed works, in light of the specific Qualifying Interests and conservation objectives of all relevant European Sites.

Having reviewed and considered this Appropriate Assessment Screening Report and general information on the nature of the amendment, the Council has been able to conclude that there was no likelihood of any significant effects on any European Sites arising from the proposed amendment, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. The Council agrees with the Screening process that several European sites were within 15km of the Southern Environs of Drogheda LAP boundary and that some of these sites and their qualifying interests would be sensitive to changes in the estuarine, marine and inland hydrological environment and increased recreational pressures. It concurs with the analysis of the proposed amendments to the Local Area Plan that did not highlight any policies or objectives that would pose a risk of likely significant effects to the integrity of the European sites in terms of both direct impacts in isolation and on a cumulative basis.

Therefore it is our view, in relying on the information prepared by Scott Cawley and details in the amendment documentation, that an Appropriate Assessment is not required for the proposed amendment.

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Senior Executive Planner.

Patrick Gallagher,
Senior Planner.