

MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL AUTHORITY BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2025-2030

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

Prepared for:

Meath County Council



comhairle chontae na mí
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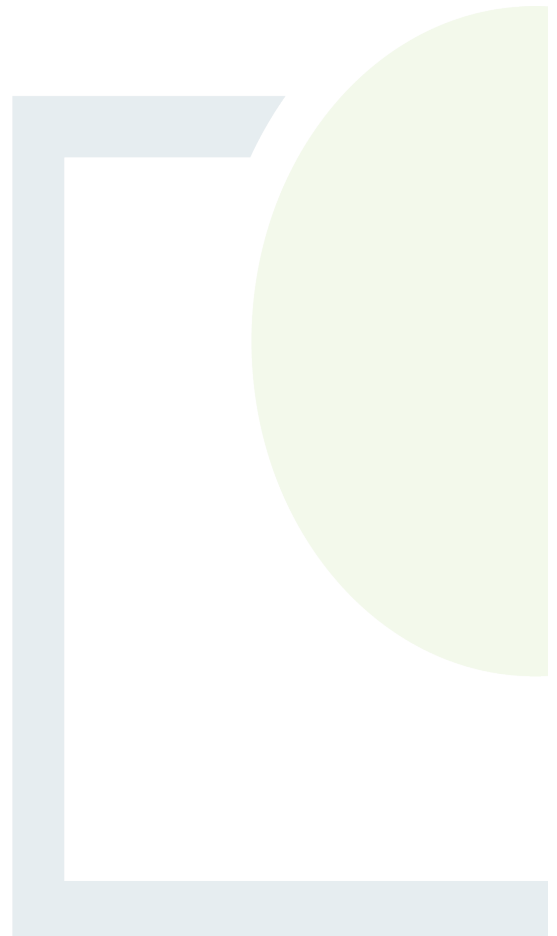
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Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan SEA Screening Report for Meath County Council

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Abstract: Fehily Timoney and Company is pleased to submit this SEA Screening Report to Meath County Council for their Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Meath County Council (MCC) is in the process of preparing a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan (LABAP) for its functional area (the Plan Area) for the years 2025-2030. The aim of the LABAP is to promote biodiversity conservation at local authority level.

MCC appointed Fehily Timoney and Company (FT) to conduct SEA and AA Screening of the LABAP.

This report documents the SEA Screening undertaken to identify the need for full SEA for the LABAP. This Screening Report should be read in conjunction with the corresponding AA Screening Report and the LABAP.

1.2 Background to Biodiversity Action Plans

LABAPs must be prepared in accordance with The Heritage Council's Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Guidelines (2024). These guidelines provide best practice guidance to local authorities on preparing and implementing biodiversity conservation actions within their functional area. These guidelines advise that LABAPS *'should aim to record, conserve, restore and promote biodiversity, and to increase awareness, understanding and appreciation of it among the people of the area.'*

LABAPS are designed to provide a structured approach to biodiversity conservation at local level. Local authorities are required to develop a compelling vision for their LABAP and a set of clear, measurable and achievable objectives for biodiversity conservation in their functional area. LABAPs are developed by local authority Biodiversity Officers with the support of a dedicated Biodiversity Working Group. Public engagement and consultation must be undertaken at the Pre-draft and Draft Plan stages of the Plan-making process. All submissions from stakeholders and members of the public should be considered during the development of a LABAP.

LABAPs should serve to define targeted and focussed action for promoting biodiversity conservation through the functions of a local authority in alignment with nature legislation and higher order policy such as the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan and inter-related plans and programmes. LABAPs should be in harmony with and support the land use planning framework, including City and County Development Plans and Local Area Plans.

LABAPs - as non-statutory land use plans - should be screened for the need for SEA and AA.

2. SEA SCREENING METHODOLOGY

2.1 Overview of SEA

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

SEA aims to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.

SEA of plans and programmes is required by European Directive 2001/42/EC ('the SEA Directive'). For a specific range of land-use plans, this Directive is transposed into Irish law by Statutory Instrument (S.I.) No. 436 of 2004 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

For all other relevant plans and programmes in Ireland (including other types of plans in the land-use planning sector), the SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law by S.I. No. 435 of 2004 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

2.2 Overview of the SEA Process

The SEA process comprises the following steps:

- Screening – the process whereby a decision is made on whether a particular plan or programme other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would require SEA. This report relates to this stage of the SEA process.

The following steps are necessary if a plan or programme requires SEA:

- Scoping – Scope and level of detail in the environmental assessment is decided upon, in consultation with the identified statutory bodies;
- Environmental Assessment - An assessment of the likely significant impacts on the environment as a result of the relevant plan or programme;
- Preparation of an Environmental Report;
- Consultation of the plan or programme and associated Environmental Report;
- Evaluation of the submission and observations made on the plan or programme and environmental report; and
- Provision of an SEA Statement, identifying how environmental considerations and consultation have been integrated into the final plan or programme

SEA is intended to provide the framework for influencing decision-making at an earlier stage when plans or programmes – which give rise to individual projects – are being developed. It is noted that SEA should result in more sustainable development through the systematic appraisal of policy options.

2.3 Legislative Context

LABAPs, as non-statutory land use plans, require to be screened for the need for SEA in accordance with the requirements of:

- The SEA Directive, particularly Articles 3(3), 3(4) and 3(5) in relation to ‘screening’; and,
- The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No 435 of 2004), as amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 200 of 2011)(termed 'SEA Regulations' from this point onward), particularly Schedule 1, which sets out the *'Criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment.'*

2.4 Overview of the SEA Screening Process

The first step of the SEA process is to carry out SEA Screening to determine the need for SEA of a plan or programme

The first stage in determining whether a plan or programme requires SEA is the carrying out of a 'Pre-screening Check' (also known as a 'Stage 1 Applicability'). This allows rapid screening-out of a plan or programme that is clearly not going to have any environmental impact and screening-in of those that do require SEA. The second stage in determining whether a plan or programme requires SEA is known as 'Stage 2 Screening.' The purpose of this stage is to determine whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment and whether SEA must be carried out in conjunction with a plan or programme. The application of environmental significance criteria is important in determining whether an SEA is required. Annex II of Directive 2001/42/EC sets out the statutory criteria that should be addressed when undertaking this stage. This process is typically undertaken following a broad 8-step approach, as depicted in Figure 2-1.

The first environmental significance criterion relates to the characteristics of the plan or programme, having regard to: the degree to which the plan or programme sets out a framework for other projects and activities; the influence of the plan or programme on other projects, plans or activities; the role of the plan for integrating environmental considerations to promote sustainable development; environmental issues of relevance to the plan or programme and the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of EU legislation on the environment.

The second environmental significance criterion refers to the characteristics of the effects and area likely to be affected, having regard to; the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects; the cumulative nature of the effects; the transboundary nature of the effects; the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to special natural characteristics or cultural heritage, exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values or intensive use; the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European or international protection status.



Figure 2-1: SEA Screening steps as per the EPA's Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening

2.5 Relevant SEA Guidance

This SEA Screening has been carried out in accordance with and having appropriate regard to the following guidance documents primarily:

- Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening (EPA, 2021).
- Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (DHLGH, 2022)
- SEA of Local Authority Land-Use Plans - EPA Recommendations and Resources (EPA, 2024)

2.6 Appropriate Assessment and Relationship to SEA Screening

The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) requires an 'Appropriate Assessment' (AA) be carried out where a plan or project is likely to have a significant impact on a Natura 2000 Site. Natura 2000 Sites in Ireland include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Areas of Protection (SPAs).

The first step is to establish whether AA is required for the particular plan or project. This is referred to as Screening for AA and the purpose is to determine, on the basis of a preliminary assessment and objective criteria, whether a plan or project, alone and in combination with other plans or projects, could have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site in relation to the site's conservation objectives.

Screening for AA is relevant to Screening for SEA where it is found that a plan may have an impact on the conservation status of a Natura 2000 Site, or where such an impact cannot be ruled out taking a precautionary approach, an appropriate assessment of the Plan must be carried out, and in any case where a SEA is not otherwise required.

Article 3(c) of the SEA Directive requires that an SEA is carried out on a plan or programme wherever such a plan or programme requires an AA under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

Therefore, where the LABAP requires an appropriate assessment, it will also require an SEA.

This SEA Screening Report and the LABAP is accompanied by an AA Screening Report which should be read in conjunction with this document. The AA Screening Report concluded *'beyond reasonable scientific doubt, in view of best scientific knowledge, on the basis of objective information, that the plan, individually or in combination with other plans and projects, is not likely to have a significant (negative) effect on European sites.'*

3. LOCAL AUTHORITY BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

3.1 Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan

The overarching aim of the LABAP is to record, conserve, restore and promote biodiversity, and to increase awareness, understanding and appreciation of it among the people of the area.

The following Themes are defined in the LABAP:

- Reaching a deeper spatial understanding of nature in Meath.
- Leading the way - policy, planning and practice.
- Action for biodiversity.
- Research and monitoring.
- Raising awareness and appreciation of biodiversity.

A series of Actions have been defined in the LABAP under each Theme. The higher-level Themes are broader in scope, while the Actions underpinning the Themes are more defined and measurable. These are presented in Table 3-1.



Table 3-1: LABAP Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Action Code	Action
1. Reaching a deeper spatial understanding in County Meath.		1	Undertake a state of knowledge exercise of biodiversity in County Meath.
		2	Undertake a countywide wetland resurvey and mapping project, building on the information garnered from the County Meath Wetlands and Coastal Habitats Survey (2010).
		3	Undertake a countywide resurvey and mapping project of Meath's trees, woodlands and hedgerows, building on the baseline information garnered from the County Meath Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Survey (2010).
		4	Undertake a countywide survey and mapping project of Meath's semi-natural grassland habitats.
		5	Using an evidence based approach, create a detailed geodatabase 'Site Inventory' of designated and non-designated sites of high intrinsic biodiversity value within County Meath.
		6	Using an evidence based approach, identify and map Locally Important Biodiversity Sites (LIBS) in County Meath, according to Heritage Council guidelines, to ensure their continued protection through existing or new policies in the County Development Plan.
2. Leading the way – policy, planning and practice.	Policy	7	Align the Meath County Development Plan, all area plans and the Meath Biodiversity Action Plan with the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan, where relevant.
		8	Devise and support the implementation of good governance strategies to facilitate the integration of EU and national biodiversity legislation and policy requirements into Council plans, projects, and services, where relevant.
		9	Support the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives in protecting, and where possible, in achieving an improvement in the conservation status of protected species and habitats in County Meath.
		10	Support the review and update of policies, objectives and development management standards in the Meath County Development Plan.
		11	Work with the relevant authorities to support the preparation of, and implement, Ireland's Nature Restoration Plan, when adopted, and where relevant for Meath County Council, to help achieve national restoration targets.
		12	Identify locally important breeding sites in County Meath for select rare and threatened species, such as the Swift & Barn Owl, and ensure these are mapped and protected through inclusion of policies and objectives in the County Development Plan.



Theme	Sub-Theme	Action Code	Action
	Planning	13	Promote a policy to ensure the purchase and use of native hedge and tree stock of local provenance where possible in plans and projects and avoid the use of species classified as 'invasive' such as Cherry Laurel.
		14	Provide a central place for all biodiversity data for decision-makers in Meath County Council.
		15	Develop and implement a Green Infrastructure Strategy in accordance international best practice and emerging national guidance.
		16	Support habitat retention and the integration of biodiversity measures into plans and the design and delivery of public projects and private developments, aiming for no net loss of biodiversity and biodiversity net gain where possible.
		17	Support the integration of nature-based solutions into plans and the design and delivery of public projects and private developments.
		18	Align public projects and private developments with Inland Fisheries Ireland's guideline document 'Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment' and update development management standards as appropriate.
		19	Apply appropriate lighting specifications and mitigation measures to new development, new projects, lighting upgrades and existing lighting stock, as appropriate, to minimise disturbance to local biodiversity.
		20	Protect existing Swift nesting sites where possible, establish new sites in existing public and private properties; and request integration of artificial swift nest bricks & boxes in new development.
		21	Develop and provide guidance on the management of biodiversity issues for developers in the planning process.
		22	Pilot an Urban Nature Plan for Navan.
	Practice	23	Adopt and implement a pesticide reduction strategy within Meath County Council.
		24	Develop a training programme for Meath County Council staff.
		25	Produce Biodiversity Best Practice Guidelines for staff across all sections of the local authority.
		26	Engage with neighbouring local authorities on biodiversity projects that require a landscape and/or catchment scale approach.



Theme	Sub-Theme	Action Code	Action
		27	Provide updates to the Meath Biodiversity Working Group on unauthorised developments impacting the integrity and ecological health of protected and Locally Important Biodiversity Sites, where possible.
		28	Pilot a biodiversity inclusive design for a social housing estate, prioritising retention of pre-existing habitats and a number of other possible actions such as the regeneration of semi-natural grasslands, installation of blue/green roofs, green walls, wetland & pond SUDS, green carparking, nest boxes in facades and wildlife friendly shrubs and trees in open space.
		29	Continue to deliver local authority led actions in relation to monitoring, protection and the restoration of ecological status of waterbodies in County Meath.
		30	Implement the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan as part of Meath County Council's partnership agreement with the National Biodiversity Data Centre.
		31	Develop biodiversity management plans for select open spaces / parks / greenways within local authority ownership, focusing initial pilots on Blackwater Park and the Boyne Valley to Lakelands Greenway.
3. Action for biodiversity.		32	Where possible, support Inland Fisheries Ireland in the removal/alteration of disused weirs to facilitate migration.
		33	Where possible, work with relevant partners to protect and/or restore high ecological status waterbodies in County Meath and along its borders.
		34	Plant native woodland on appropriate local authority owned sites.
		35	Facilitate the planting of groups of native trees within the boundary/built footprint of existing built-up areas.



Theme	Sub-Theme	Action Code	Action
		36	Assess the feasibility of developing a native tree nursery and outdoor classroom space on a local authority owned site with a view to rearing stock of local provenance that can supply local projects and initiatives.
		37	Continue to implement biodiversity and habitat management measures recommended for Balrath Woods.
		38	Continue and expand biodiversity-friendly grassland management practices which benefit biodiversity on the Commons of Lloyd and seek to implement similar practices on other public lands.
		39	Continue 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.
		40	Support the preparation and implementation of projects which promote the conservation of County Meath's coastal dune habitats.
		41	Support local communities with the creation and implementation of Community Biodiversity Action Plans.
		42	Continue to deliver the Hare's Corner project.
		43	Continue to support Barn Owl conservation in County Meath in conjunction with partners.
4. Research and monitoring.		44	Implement ecological surveys targeting NHAs, pNHAs and non-designated sites in County Meath, where possible.
		45	Implement an annual programme of ecological surveys, climate change risk assessments and ecological conservation work, as necessary, on local authority owned lands.



Theme	Sub-Theme	Action Code	Action
		46	Explore opportunities to progress river restoration measures, natural water retention measures and nature-based solutions for integrated catchment management (NbS-ICM) in appropriate locations in the Boyne catchment, where feasible and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.
		47	Consider projects that include the mapping, appropriate treatment and eradication where possible of Invasive Alien Species.
		48	Support and encourage the volunteer network and local communities to carry out biological recording and citizen science projects.
5. Raising awareness and appreciation of biodiversity.		49	Develop and implement an outreach and engagement programme for the general public.
		50	Facilitate and support a landowner and land manager network for those interested in farming sustainably and managing space for nature in the countryside.
		51	Explore the use of demonstration farm(s) for biodiversity conservation e.g. hedgerow management, field margins, river management, soil improvement, Integrated pest management, nest boxes etc.
		52	Produce Tree Planting and Management Guidelines for communities.
		53	Continue to work with the Meath County Council Culture and Creativity Team to promote biodiversity through creative projects, and with support from the Creative Ireland programme.
		54	Develop guidance and supports for schools and school teachers in County Meath relating to biodiversity.

3.2 Relationship with other relevant Plans and Programmes

The LABAP sits within a hierarchy of plans and has been informed by and is consistent with the aims and objectives of other plans, programmes and strategies developed at national, regional and local levels. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

National Level

- Project Ireland 2040 : National Planning Framework (2018).
- Heritage Ireland 2030: A Framework for Heritage (2022).
- Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023-2028 (2023).
- The 4th National Biodiversity Plan 2023 - 2030 (2024) (discussed further in Section 3.1.1 below).
- Climate Action Plan (2024).

Regional and Local Level

- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the region.
- The County Development Plan for the local authority functional area.
- The Local Authority Climate Action Plan for the local authority functional area.
- The Heritage Plan for the local authority functional area.

3.2.1 The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) sets the national biodiversity agenda for the period 2023-2030 and aims to deliver the transformative changes required to protect and value nature. The aim is to ensure that every citizen, community, business, local authority, semi-state and state agency has an awareness of biodiversity and its importance, and of the implications of its loss, while also understanding how they can act to address the biodiversity emergency as part of a renewed national effort to 'act for nature.' This plan provides the overarching arching framework for delivering biodiversity conservation through LABAPs.

This National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 builds upon the achievements of the previous Plan. The five overarching objectives to address new and emerging issues include the following:

- Objective 1 - Adopt a Whole of Government, Whole of Society Approach to Biodiversity
- Objective 2 - Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs
- Objective 3 - Secure Nature's Contribution to People
- Objective 4 - Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity
- Objective 5 - Strengthen Ireland's Contribution to International Biodiversity Initiatives

The NBAP contains actions pertaining to the preparation to LABAPs under *Objective One: Adopt a Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society Approach to Biodiversity* and *Objective Three: Secure Nature's Contribution to People*, including the following:

Table 3-2: NBAP Actions pertaining to the preparation to Local Biodiversity Plans

Action Number	Action
1C5	The Heritage Council will publish updated guidelines for the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans and their integration with City and County Development Plans
1C6	All Local Authorities will have a Biodiversity Action Plan adopted by the end of 2026 which is subject to regular review and revision processes in line with relevant guideline standards
3A3	Local Authorities will work to identify and respond to opportunities for enhancing the biocultural value of GBUE through appropriate design strategies, the use of visual and performing arts, and enhancing equity of access and promoting use of GBUE by community groups, and integrating cultural services in local biodiversity action plans

Local Authorities are expected to align their LABAPs with national commitments defined in the NBAP to ensure a cohesive approach to biodiversity conservation across the country.

4. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCREENING

This section of the report documents the SEA Screening undertaken.

Stage 1 Applicability Analysis was undertaken initially. This analysis is detailed in Section 4.1 of this report (Table 4-1 and Table 4-2).

Stage 2 Screening Analysis was then undertaken. This analysis is detailed in Section 4.2 of this report (Table 4-3, Table 4-4 and Table 4-5).

4.1 Stage 1 - SEA Applicability Analysis

Table 4-1: SEA Applicability Analysis

SEA Applicability Analysis	
Status of Plan/Programme (P/P) Maker	
Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?	The LABAP has been prepared by a local authority.
Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?	The LABAP is required by administrative provisions. The local authority is required to prepare the LABAP by the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 - 2030. The NBAP has been prepared by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The NPWS is an executive agency within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) of the Government of Ireland.
Nature of the Plan/Programme	
Is the P/P prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use?	LABAPs are non-statutory land use plans.
Does the P/P provide a framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive?	No.
Is the P/P likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site which leads to a requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments?	No.

SEA Applicability Analysis	
Exemptions	
Is the sole purpose of the P/P to serve national defence or civil emergency or is it a financial/budget P/P or is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme?	No.

Table 4-2: Summary of SEA Applicability Analysis

Summary of SEA Applicability Analysis	
Applicability Analysis Criterion	Outcome (Yes or No)
Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?	Yes
Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?	Yes
Is the P/P prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use?	Yes
Does the P/P provide a framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive?	No
Is the P/P likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site which leads to a requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments?	No
Is the sole purpose of the P/P to serve national defence or civil emergency or is it a financial/budget P/P or is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme?	No
Conclusion	
Having regard to the SEA Screening Process defined in Section 2,4, it has been concluded that Stage 2 SEA Screening Analysis is required to determine whether the plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment, and whether a full SEA of the plan is needed.	



4.2 Stage 2 - SEA Screening Analysis

To inform the Stage 2 SEA Screening Analysis, an evaluation of the potential environmental effects of LABAP Actions has been undertaken. This evaluation is presented in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3: Evaluation of Potential Environmental Effects of LABAP Actions

Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
1. Reaching a deeper spatial understanding of nature in Meath.	1	Undertake a state of knowledge exercise of biodiversity in County Meath.	This action proposes the carrying out of baseline surveying in the plan area. Developing an understanding of biodiversity in County Meath will underpin and support effective implementation of plan and potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity improvements. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	2	Undertake a countywide wetland resurvey and mapping project, building on the information garnered from the County Meath Wetlands and Coastal Habitats Survey (2010).	This action proposes the carrying out of further baseline surveying of wetlands in Meath. It will underpin and support effective implementation of the plan and potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity improvements. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	3	Undertake a countywide resurvey and mapping project of Meath's trees, woodlands and hedgerows, building on the baseline information garnered from the County Meath Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Survey (2010).	This action proposes the carrying out of further baseline surveying of trees, woodlands and hedgerows in Meath. It will underpin and support effective implementation of the plan and potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity improvements. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	4	Undertake a countywide survey and mapping project of Meath's semi-natural grassland habitats.	This action proposes the carrying out of baseline surveying of semi-natural grasslands in Meath. It will underpin and support effective implementation of the plan and potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity improvements. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	5	Using an evidence based approach, create a detailed geodatabase 'Site	This action proposes the carrying out of a detailed biodiversity/site inventory survey in Meath. It will underpin and support effective implementation of the plan and



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
		Inventory' of designated and non-designated sites of high intrinsic biodiversity value within County Meath.	potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity improvements. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	6	Using an evidence based approach, identify and map Locally Important Biodiversity Sites (LIBS) in County Meath, according to Heritage Council guidelines, to ensure their continued protection through existing or new policies in the County Development Plan.	This action proposes the carrying out of ecological surveying of Locally Important Biodiversity Sites (LIBS) in Meath. LIBS are areas of local interest or significance which form an integral part of the ecological network and provide a range of ecosystem services in the local authority. It will underpin and support effective implementation of the plan and potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity protection. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
2. Leading the way – policy, planning and practice.	7	Align the Meath County Development Plan, all area plans and the Meath Biodiversity Action Plan with the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan, where relevant.	This action will fully integrate the objectives of this Plan with higher-level Meath County Plans. Alignment of lower-order plans with higher-order plans avoids conflicts with targets/objectives, ensures compliance and contributes to the achievement of national targets and ambitions. It will contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	8	Devise and support the implementation of good governance strategies to facilitate the integration of EU and national biodiversity legislation and policy requirements into Council plans, projects, and services, where relevant.	This action supports the full integration of EU and national biodiversity legislation and policy requirements into Council plans, projects and services. It has the potential to improve biodiversity related expertise and underpin and support biodiversity improvements within Meath. Alignment of lower-order plans with higher-order plans avoids conflicts with targets and/or objectives, ensures compliance and contributes to the achievement of national targets and ambitions. It also has the potential to contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	9	Support the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives in protecting, and where possible, in achieving an improvement in the conservation status	This action will support the conservation of protected species present in the plan area and connected areas. It has the potential to generate a positive effects for said



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
		of protected species and habitats in County Meath.	protected species and for biodiversity generally. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	10	Support the review and update of policies, objectives and development management standards in the Meath County Development Plan.	This action proposes the review of and, if necessary, updates to policies, objectives and development management standards in the Meath CDP. It will contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. The proposed action will support the functions and obligations of the forward planning section of the local authority with the view to promote biodiversity protection. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	11	Work with the relevant authorities to support the preparation of, and implement, Ireland's Nature Restoration Plan, when adopted, and where relevant for Meath County Council, to help achieve national restoration targets.	This action will create and foster a collaborative approach to implementing biodiversity and restoration initiatives and improving biodiversity and environmental restoration in the plan area. It will contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. Alignment of lower-order plans with higher-order plans avoids conflicts with targets and/or objectives, ensures compliance and contributes to the achievement of national targets and ambitions. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	12	Identify locally important breeding sites in County Meath for select rare and threatened species, such as the Swift & Barn Owl, and ensure these are mapped and protected through inclusion of policies and objectives in the County Development Plan.	This action will support the identification and protection of rare and threatened species present in the plan area and connected areas. Said species include the Swift and Barn Owl. Inclusion of protection of these species through County Policy and the Development Management Process has the potential to enhance conservation efforts and generate positive effects for rare and threatened species. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	13	Promote a policy to ensure the purchase and use of native hedge and tree stock of local provenance where possible in plans and projects and avoid the use of	This action promotes the use of native species in the plan area. Ecologically-valuable plans or projects should prioritise native species of local provenance, as they are more likely to thrive, adapt well to local environmental conditions, and provide critical support to local wildlife, including birds, mammals, and insects.



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
		species classified as 'invasive' such as Cherry Laurel.	This action has the potential to have positive effects for biodiversity, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	14	Provide a central place for all biodiversity data for decision-makers in Meath County Council.	This action proposes facilitating data-sharing between MCC departments via the MCC mapping system. This will create and foster a collaborative approach to implementing biodiversity initiatives and improving biodiversity in the plan area. It will contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	15	Develop and implement a Green Infrastructure Strategy in accordance international best practice and emerging national guidance.	<p>This action is aimed at enhancing biodiversity in County Meath through the development of a Green Infrastructure Strategy and integration of national guidance. The proposed action is aligned with and contributes to the achievement of various higher-order and interrelated biodiversity-oriented policy contained within the MCDP, the Eastern and Midlands RSES, the National Planning Framework and its First Revision (2025).</p> <p>An overarching Green Infrastructure Strategy that integrates national guidance will have the benefit of providing a cohesive strategy for interacting and focussed biodiversity enhancements. This action has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats and key species, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. The development of such a Strategy does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.</p>
	16	Support habitat retention and the integration of biodiversity measures into plans and the design and delivery of public projects and private developments, aiming for no net loss of biodiversity and biodiversity net gain where possible.	This action supports the integration of biodiversity consideration and improvements within the development planning process. In doing so, this action would foster habitat retention and integration of biodiversity measures into planning processes. It has the potential to contribute to the realization of positive effects on biodiversity, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	17	Support the integration of nature-based solutions into plans and the design and delivery of public projects and private developments.	Nature Based Solutions (NBS) involve assimilating nature into addressing societal issues to support human and biodiversity wellbeing. The integration of NBS into local authority projects and private developments will underpin and support biodiversity improvements within the Plan Area. The action will not generate any negative



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
			environmental effects. The development of any NBS infrastructure will be undertaken under the land use planning framework and will require appropriate planning consent.
	18	Align public projects and private developments with Inland Fisheries Ireland's guideline document 'Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment' and update development management standards as appropriate.	This action supports the integration of Inland Fisheries Ireland guidelines into watercourses planning of both public projects and private developments. MCC intends to align planning processes with Inland Fisheries Ireland guidelines by updating development management standards. This action has the potential to have positive effects for biodiversity. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	19	Apply appropriate lighting specifications and mitigation measures to new development, new projects, lighting upgrades and existing lighting stock, as appropriate, to minimise disturbance to local biodiversity.	This action supports the control and management of lighting of new developments, upgrades and existing lighting infrastructure in the plan area. The action is aligned with higher-order and interrelated policy, such as the Eastern and Midlands RSES (RPO 7.9) and the MCDP (HER OBJ 60). It will contribute to preventing and reducing the impact of lighting on light sensitive species, such as bat species. This action has the potential to have positive effects for biodiversity. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	20	Protect existing Swift nesting sites where possible, establish new sites in existing public and private properties; and request integration of artificial swift nest bricks & boxes in new development.	This action will support the conservation of Swift nesting sites present in the plan area and connected areas, and the establishment of new nesting sites in both private and public properties via the integration of nest bricks and boxes through the development management process of the land-use planning framework for County Meath. It has the potential to generate a positive effects for this key species and for biodiversity generally. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	21	Develop and provide guidance on the management of biodiversity issues for developers in the planning process.	<p>This action supports the integration of biodiversity consideration and improvements within the development planning process and the promotion of awareness of biodiversity among developers. This provides an opportunity to incorporate biodiversity enhancement measures into planned development and contribute to Biodiversity Net Gain.</p> <p>It has the potential to contribute to the realization of positive effects on biodiversity, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.</p>



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	22	Pilot an Urban Nature Plan for Navan.	This action proposes the development of an Urban Nature Plan for Navan. This envisaged Plan would promote awareness of biodiversity and biodiversity-related initiatives in County Meath and would contribute to improved biodiversity in Urban centres in the Plan area. This action will not result in the occurrence of any real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	23	Adopt and implement a pesticide reduction strategy within Meath County Council.	This action supports the prevention and reduction of pesticides that may affect biodiversity components in the plan area. It is inherently positive in nature. It has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats, key species, soil, and watercourses as well as indirect positive effects on human health and livestock. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	24	Develop a training programme for Meath County Council staff.	This action promotes biodiversity-related training for MCC staff. It has the potential to improve biodiversity related expertise and underpin and support biodiversity improvements within the plan area. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	25	Produce Biodiversity Best Practice Guidelines for staff across all sections of the local authority.	This action will promote awareness of biodiversity and biodiversity-related initiatives among MCC staff. It has the potential to foster further interest in biodiversity protection and enhancement throughout the local authority as an organisation and the wider community. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	26	Engage with neighbouring local authorities on biodiversity projects that require a landscape and/or catchment scale approach.	This action will create and foster a collaborative approach to implementing biodiversity initiatives and improving biodiversity in the Plan area and neighbouring local authorities. It will contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	27	Provide updates to the Meath Biodiversity Working Group on unauthorised developments impacting the integrity and ecological health of protected and Locally Important Biodiversity Sites, where possible.	This action will promote awareness of the negative impacts of unauthorised developments on the integrity of biodiversity. It has the potential to foster further interest in biodiversity protection and enhancement throughout the local authority as an organisation and the wider community. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	28	Pilot a biodiversity inclusive design for a social housing estate, prioritising retention of pre-existing habitats and a number of other possible actions such as the regeneration of semi-natural grasslands, installation of blue/green roofs, green walls, wetland & pond SUDS, green carparking, nest boxes in facades and wildlife friendly shrubs and trees in open space.	This action is aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity in social housing estates in the plan area. MCC intends to foster biodiversity protection and education through regeneration of semi-natural grasslands, integration of green infrastructure, SUDS and the development of open spaces. Such projects will be undertaken in accordance with the land-use planning framework (the current MCDP), which has been subject to its own assessment. It has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats, human health and key species, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	29	Continue to deliver local authority led actions in relation to monitoring, protection and the restoration of ecological status of waterbodies in County Meath.	This action is aimed at protecting and enhancing waterbodies in the plan area. It has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components such as soil and aquatic biodiversity, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components such as ecological and chemical status of waterbodies. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	30	Implement the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan as part of Meath County Council's partnership agreement with the National Biodiversity Data Centre.	This action supports the aims and objectives of the national All-Ireland Pollinator Plan which will have positive effects for biodiversity, such as the improvement in the diversity of plants and the conservation and protection of pollinator species. This will enhance the relationship between pollinators and the conservation of native floral species. It does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	31	Develop biodiversity management plans for select open spaces / parks / greenways within local authority ownership, focusing initial pilots on Blackwater Park and the Boyne Valley to Lakelands Greenway.	This action supports the development of biodiversity management plans for certain open spaces, parks and greenways within the Plan area. It has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats and key species, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
3. Action for biodiversity.	32	Where possible, support Inland Fisheries Ireland in the removal/alteration of disused weirs to facilitate migration.	This action supports the enhancement of weirs and migration within the Plan area and will foster collaboration between Inland Fisheries Ireland and MCC. It has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components such as key species, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. This will consequently contribute to the expansion of habitats and habitat availability for key species in the plan area. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	33	Where possible, work with relevant partners to protect and/or restore high ecological status waterbodies in County Meath and along its borders.	This action will create and foster a collaborative approach to enhancing and restoring waterbodies in the plan area and neighbouring local authorities. It will contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. This will consequently contribute to the restored/improved ecological and chemical status of waterbodies in the plan area. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	34	Plant native woodland on appropriate local authority owned sites.	This action promotes the use of native species in the plan area. The promotion of native species on local authority-owned sites has the potential contribute to ecological diversity and sustainability. This action has the potential to have positive effects for biodiversity, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. This will consequently contribute to the viability of native woodland in the plan area and will provide support to local wildlife. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	35	Facilitate the planting of groups of native trees within the boundary/built footprint of existing built-up areas.	This action promotes the use of native tree species in built-up areas within the plan area. The promotion of native species on local authority-owned sites has the potential contribute to ecological diversity and sustainability.



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
			This action has the potential to have positive effects for biodiversity, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	36	Assess the feasibility of developing a native tree nursery and outdoor classroom space on a local authority owned site with a view to rearing stock of local provenance that can supply local projects and initiatives.	This action will promote awareness of native tree species and biodiversity-related initiatives. It has the potential to foster further interest in biodiversity protection and enhancement throughout the community. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	37	Continue to implement biodiversity and habitat management measures recommended for Balrath Woods.	This action is aimed at enhancing biodiversity and habitat management in Balrath Woods, in alignment with Objective Reference HER OBJ 37 of the MCDP. It has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats and key species, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	38	Continue and expand biodiversity-friendly grassland management practices which benefit biodiversity on the Commons of Lloyd and seek to implement similar practices on other public lands.	This action is aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity of grasslands in the plan area. It has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats and key species, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	39	Continue 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.	This action will create and foster a collaborative approach to implementing biodiversity initiatives and improving peatland conservation and promotion of peatlands as educational tools in the plan area. It will contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	40	Support the implementation of projects which promote the conservation of County Meath's coastal dune habitats	This action supports the protection and enhancement of coastal dune habitats in the plan area. This action has the potential to have positive effects for biodiversity in coastal areas, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	41	Support local communities with the creation and implementation of Community Biodiversity Action Plans.	This action will create and foster a collaborative approach to implementing biodiversity initiatives and improving biodiversity among communities in the plan area. It will contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	42	Continue to deliver the Hare's Corner project.	This action supports the progression of Hare's Corner projects within the Plan area. The Hare's Corner initiative aids landowners in creating space for biodiversity enhancement through the development of small-scale ecological projects, such as mini-woodlands, wildlife hedges, mini-orchards and wildlife ponds. It has the potential to contribute to the realization of positive effects on biodiversity, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	43	Continue to support Barn Owl conservation in County Meath in conjunction with partners.	This action will support the conservation of Barn Owls, a red-listed species, present in the plan area and connected areas. It has the potential to generate a positive effects for this key species and for biodiversity generally, and to foster collaboration with MCC partners. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
4. Research and monitoring.	44	Implement ecological surveys targeting NHAs, pNHAs and non-designated sites in County Meath, where possible.	This action proposes the carrying out of environmental surveys of NHAs, pNHAs and non-designated sites in the plan area. It will underpin and support effective implementation of plan and potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity improvements. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	45	Implement an annual programme of ecological surveys, climate change risk assessments and ecological conservation work, as necessary, on local authority owned lands.	This action proposes the carrying out of ecological surveys, climate risk assessments and conservation initiatives in the plan area. It will underpin and support effective implementation of plan and potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity improvements on local authority-owned lands. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	46	Explore opportunities to progress river restoration measures, natural water retention measures and nature-based solutions for integrated catchment management (NbS-ICM) in appropriate locations in the Boyne catchment, where feasible and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.	This action supports the restoration and enhancement of rivers, and management of NbS-ICM in the Boyne catchment area. The River Boyne is an integral biodiversity feature in the plan area and acts as an important habitat and ecological corridor. This action has the potential to have positive effects for biodiversity, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	47	Consider projects that include the mapping, appropriate treatment and eradication where possible of Invasive Alien Species.	This action will prevent and minimise the spread of invasive species in the plan. This action has the potential to have positive effects for biodiversity, such as native species and habitats, that are at risk due to invasive species spread. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	48	Support and encourage the volunteer network and local communities to carry out biological recording and citizen science projects.	This action will create and foster a collaborative approach to implementing biodiversity initiatives in the plan area. Citizen science initiatives enable data collection by members of the public to contribute to research and add to the national dataset on Ireland's biodiversity and biological data. Such research can help identify trends in biodiversity and improve understanding of the ecological baseline in the Plan Area. The action has the potential to improve awareness and knowledge of local biodiversity in County Meath, which will underpin and support improvements in the area. In isolation, the action, in and of itself, does not have the potential to generate any significant, adverse environmental effects.
5. Raising awareness and appreciation of biodiversity.	49	Develop and implement an outreach and engagement programme for the general public.	This action will promote awareness of biodiversity, biodiversity related initiatives and biodiversity-related education generally. It has the potential to foster further interest in biodiversity protection and enhancement throughout the local authority as an organisation and the wider community. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.



Theme	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	50	Facilitate and support a landowner and land manager network for those interested in farming sustainably and managing space for nature in the countryside.	This action is aimed at supporting sustainable farming practices in the plan area. It has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats and key species, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components particularly soil health. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	51	Explore the use of demonstration farm(s) for biodiversity conservation e.g. hedgerow management, field margins, river management, soil improvement, Integrated pest management, nest boxes etc.	This action is aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity, and promoting biodiversity education in the plan area. It has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats and key species, as well as co-benefits for other environmental components. This action also has the potential to foster transferring of knowledge and capacity building of sustainable farming practices. It does not have the potential to generate any adverse environmental effects.
	52	Produce Tree Planting and Management Guidelines for communities.	This action will create and foster a collaborative approach to implementing tree planting initiatives and improving biodiversity in the plan area. It will contribute to the effective delivery of the plan and biodiversity improvements generally. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	53	Continue to work with the Meath County Council Culture and Creativity Team to promote biodiversity through creative projects, and with support from the Creative Ireland programme.	This action will promote awareness of biodiversity and biodiversity-related initiatives. It has the potential to foster further interest in biodiversity protection and enhancement throughout the local authority as an organisation and the wider community. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	54	Develop guidance and supports for schools and school teachers in County Meath relating to biodiversity.	This action promotes biodiversity-related education in schools within County Meath. It has the potential to improve biodiversity knowledge among youth groups, promote community engagement, and underpin and support biodiversity improvements within the plan area. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental effects in and of itself.



Table 4-4: Criteria for Determining the Likely Significance of Environmental Effects - Characteristics of the Plan

Potential Significant Effects	
Characteristics of the plan or programme having regard, in particular to:	
The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	<p>The LABAP provides a general framework for biodiversity protection and enhancement on lands in the plan area, including local authority controlled lands. The LABAP defines a vision for biodiversity in the plan area, and themes, aims and targets for achieving this vision. The LABAP proposes a number of biodiversity management related projects and activities, including projects and activities at specific areas. These projects and activities all relate to biodiversity protection and enhancement, however.</p> <p>The LABAP does not propose or support any intensive land use or development projects outside the land use planning framework and will not in and of itself set the context for future development consent.</p> <p>Considering the Precautionary Principle enshrined in European Union (EU) environmental law, the Objectives and Actions in the LABAP should be assessed having regard to criteria defined in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations.</p>
The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	<p>The LABAP is defined as a Tier 2 Local Action Plan under The Heritage Council's Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Guidelines (2024). The LABAP is therefore a lower order plan in the context of the European, national, regional and local plan hierarchy.</p> <p>Local Action Plans set out specific objectives and actions for managing and protecting heritage in a particular area, such as biodiversity, archives, archaeology, heritage engagement, education etc., within the context of a higher order heritage related plan, for example. Each Local Action Plan is developed by a Working Group that includes representatives from relevant stakeholders and is led by heritage professionals within the local authority. The LABAP fits into this tier of plans.</p> <p>The LABAP supports the development of lower order area specific biodiversity management plans and supports the implementation of biodiversity related measures defined in inter-related plans, including the County Development Plan.</p>
The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	<p>The LABAP supports and promotes the integration of biodiversity protection and enhancement measures into development and activities occurring in the plan area and supports ecological sustainability. The LABAP does not, however, stipulate specific development planning requirements and will not in and of itself set the context for future development consent.</p>



Potential Significant Effects

Characteristics of the plan or programme having regard, in particular to:

<p>Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme</p>	<p>Biodiversity in the plan area faces a number of known threats and pressures, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development (residential, commercial, infrastructural and agricultural), • Agricultural activity and expansion, • Urbanization, • The spread of invasive species, • Pollution (e.g., air, noise, water, light pollution), • Climate change, • Recreational activity, • Land abandonment, • Urban wastewater, • Changes in the hydrological environment. <p>These threats and pressures may cause a range of negative impacts on biodiversity, including habitat loss , reduction and fragmentation; disturbance to key species; reduction in species density, impacts on designated sites and locally important non-designated sites present or connected to the plan area, or changes to indicators of conservation value (i.e. water quality, air quality, habitat quality).</p> <p>The LABAP defines a variety of actions to address these threats and pressures.</p>
<p>The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g., plans linked to waste-management or water protection)</p>	<p>The LABAP is a non-statutory land use plan. It does however support the achievement aims of EU nature-related legislation at a local level, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, • Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2024 on nature restoration and amending Regulation (EU) 2022/869 (the 'Nature Restoration Law'), • Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds ('the Birds Directive'),



Potential Significant Effects

Characteristics of the plan or programme having regard, in particular to:

- Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora ('the Habitats Directive'),
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), as amended,
- Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy ('the Water Framework Directive'),
- European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722/2003), as amended ,
- Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy ('the Marine Strategy Framework Directive'),
- European Communities (Marine Strategy Framework) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 249/2011), as amended,
- Directive 2007/60/EC on the assessment and management of flood risks ('the Floods Directive'),
- European Communities (Assessment and Management of Flood Risks) Regulations 2010 (S.I. No. 122/2010), as amended,
- Directive 2006/113/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on the quality required of shellfish waters ('the Shellfish Waters Directive'),
- European Communities (Quality of Shellfish Waters) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 268/2006), as amended.



Table 4-5: Criteria for Determining Potential for Significant Effects - Characteristics of the Effects

Potential for Significant Effects	
Characteristics of the Effects and the Area likely to be affected, having regard in particular to:	
<p>The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects</p>	<p>The LABAP provides a general framework for biodiversity protection and enhancement on lands in the plan area. It defines the biodiversity actions that support and promote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practice biodiversity management and improvement, • Local authority biodiversity protection and enhancement initiatives, • The improvement of biodiversity on local authority controlled lands, • Biodiversity training and awareness events, • Biodiversity education and training, • Planting of native species (i.e. trees, shrubs, plants etc.) • Ecological surveying and mapping to identify areas of risk from threats and pressure and areas for targeted biodiversity protection/enhancement action, • Collaborating with key stakeholders and the public to achieve biodiversity aims. <p>The range of actions defined in the LAPAP have the potential to have a range of likely, slight to very significant, temporary to long-term, positive environmental effects, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive effects on biodiversity, including habitats, key species, designated sites and locally important non-designated sites. • Indirect positive effects on water quality and hydrology - e.g., through the promotion of the use Nature Based Solutions in drainage management and the protection of the aquatic environment. • Positive effects on population and human health - e.g., - through the protection and enhancement of areas of biodiversity that provide amenity value, and support public health and well-being. • Positive effects on the soils environment - e.g., biodiversity has the potential to improve soil quality, structure and function. • Positive effects on Climate - e.g., through the promotion of areas of enhanced biodiversity that can contribute to Greenhouse Gas (GHG) sequestration levels, and protect against the effects of climate change related events (i.e. floods, erosion etc.).



Potential for Significant Effects

Characteristics of the Effects and the Area likely to be affected, having regard in particular to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive effects on landscape and visual amenity - e.g., through the promotion of natural heritage that contributes to scenic value and visual amenity. <p>All actions in the LABAP are aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity. They have been carefully reviewed and it has been concluded that these actions do not have the potential to have unintended negative effects on the receiving environment.</p> <p>The actions in the LABAP do not support intensive land use or development projects sitting outside the land use planning framework that can cause significant negative environmental effects. The LABAP will not in and of itself set the context for future development consent. There is no real likelihood of significant negative environmental effects occurring as result of the implementation of the LABAP.</p>
The cumulative nature of the effects	<p>The LABAP is in harmony and consistent with inter-related plans, including land use plans relevant to the plan area, higher order heritage related plans, the Local Authority Climate Action Plan, the national Climate Action Plan and the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan. The range of positive effects that may be realised by the implementation of the LABCAP have the potential to interact and combine with positive effects associated with biodiversity measures defined in these inter-related plans to create larger, more significant positive effects.</p> <p>All actions in the LABAP are aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity. The implementation of the LABAP will not give rise to likely significant negative effects on the environment that have the potential to interact and combine with negative effects associated with measures defined in these inter-related plans or projects to create larger, more significant negative effects.</p>
The transboundary nature of the effects	<p>The LABAP has the potential to generate positive effects on the receiving environment present in or connected to the plan area. These effects will be relatively localised however given that the LABCAP is a local action plan. These effects have the potential to be transmitted to areas surrounding and outside the local authority functional area via environmental pathways. It is unlikely most of these effects will be transmitted Northern Ireland or any other country outside of Ireland however given the distance from the local authority functional area to these other countries and the lack of direct environmental pathways from the functional area to these countries. Actions in the LAPAB that may benefit migratory birds have some degree of potential to create positive effects beyond the national boundary of Ireland, however.</p>



Potential for Significant Effects

Characteristics of the Effects and the Area likely to be affected, having regard in particular to:

	The implementation of the LABAP will not give rise to likely significant negative effects on the environment that have the ability to be transmitted beyond the national boundary of Ireland.
The risks to human health or the environment (e.g., due to accidents)	The implementation of the LABAP will not give rise to likely significant negative effects on the environment that have the potential to create risks to human health or the environment.
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The LABAP has the potential to generate positive effects on the receiving environment present in the plan area or connected to the plan area via environmental pathways, including elements that may up the receiving biodiversity environment such as habitats, key species, designated sites and non-designated locally important sites.
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:	<p>The LABAP has the potential to generate positive effects that contribute to enhanced biodiversity and natural heritage; enhanced water, soil or air quality in the plan area, and more sustainable, ecologically diverse land use.</p> <p>The implementation of the LABAP will not give rise to likely significant negative effects on the environment that may affect special natural characteristics or cultural heritage (including built or archaeological heritage), or contribute to the exceedance of environmental quality standards, in the plan area.</p> <p>The LABAP does not support or promote intensive land use or development projects that may create negative environmental effects.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive land-use 	
The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognized national, community or international protection status	<p>There are a variety of sites designated for their ecological value (e.g., Special protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, proposed Natural Heritage Areas) present in and connected to the plan area. The actions in the LABAP have been carefully designed to support the protection and enhancement of these designated sites.</p> <p>There are sites in the plan area that are designated for their landscape and visual amenity value. The implementation of the LABAP has the potential to have positive effects on landscape and visual amenity generally and such designated sites - e.g., through the promotion of natural heritage settings that contributes to landscape character, scenic value and visual amenity.</p>

Table 4-6: Summary of SEA Screening Analysis

Summary of SEA Screening Analysis

Having regard to the evaluation undertaken in Table 4-3 and the Stage 2 Screening Analysis undertaken in Table 4-4 and Table 4-5, it is concluded that there is no real likelihood of significant negative environmental effects occurring as result of the implementation of the LABAP.

5. CONCLUSIONS

An SEA Screening Assessment was undertaken to determine the need for an SEA for the Meath County Council LABAP. It has been concluded that there is no real likelihood of significant negative environmental effects occurring as result of the implementation of the LABAP. The principal reasons for this are as follows:

- The LABAP does not introduce any source of negative environmental effect.
- All actions in the LABAP are aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity. There is no requirement to integrate further environmental considerations into the LABAP given its intrinsic nature, its stated aims and objectives, and the potential positive effects associated with its actions.
- The LABAP is in alignment with nature legislation and higher order policy such as the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan and inter-related plans and programmes.
- The actions in the LABAP do not support intensive land use or development projects sitting outside the land use planning framework that can cause significant negative environmental effects.
- The LABAP is not a statutory land use plan. The LABAP will not in and of itself set the context for future development consent. It aligns with and supports with policy defined in the Meath County Development 2021 – 2027.

Therefore, a full SEA of the LABAP is not required.

The local authority is now required to consult with the Environmental Authorities on the above conclusion.



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