

Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment Determination

under Regulation No. 4 of the European Union (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2025 (SI No. 456 of 2025) for:

Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028

This Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) determination regarding whether or not implementation of Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 (as varied) would be likely to have significant effects on the environment is being made under the above Regulations, taking account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2 of the above Regulations. These criteria are taken into account as follows:

PART 1

1. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources

Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 is being prepared by Cork City Council to accelerate housing delivery and to align the Plan with the "NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines for Planning Authorities" (2025) published in accordance with Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

The Guidelines require local authorities to use all available means to ensure that the objectives of the Guidelines are incorporated within Development Plans as quickly as possible through the Variation of the current adopted Development Plan. The city capacity audit carried out by the Council on foot of the Guidelines reveals that 450 hectares of zoned and serviced or serviceable residential land is available within Cork City Council's administrative area. There is also a substantial quantum of un-zoned long-term strategic development land identified in the City Development Plan, and more land not identified in the Plan that can contribute toward transport-oriented development up to 2040 and beyond.

However, having regard to the provision of the Guidelines – in particular Policy and Objectives 1 to 3¹ – in order to secure the objectives of the Guidelines, Cork City Council is preparing the Variation to give effect to the housing growth requirements and additional provision to 2030. The Variation is expected to aim to rezone an additional 250 to 280 hectares of land for residential purposes. This takes into account Cork City Council's intention to seek a two-year extension to the Cork City Development Plan, extending the Plan period from 2028 to 2030. This is in part to align with the revised Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy which is to be reviewed. Proposed Variation No. 3 also seeks to amend the rural housing policy set out in the City Development Plan in order to align it with updated Census data on farm size and viability, and includes minor amendments to update the City Development Plan in relation to Ministerial Guidelines issued since the adoption of the Plan in 2022.

2. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the degree to which the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy

The Proposed Variation will be guided by the First Revision to the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region and the existing Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028. The varied Development Plan will provide the framework for decision-making and consent granting at project level and will guide any lower-tier plans and future proposals for land use developments and activities in Cork City.

3. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development

The Proposed Variation will integrate environmental considerations with a view to continuing to promote sustainable development at city level in Cork.

¹ Policy and Objective 1: It is a policy and objective of these Guidelines that the housing growth requirements for each planning authority set out in Appendix 1 are reflected in the relevant City or County Development Plan, subject to consistency with the policies and objectives of the National Planning Framework – First Revision (2025), relevant Ministerial Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), relevant Government policy, and the undertaking of necessary environmental assessments. Policy and Objective 2: It is a policy and objective of these Guidelines that 'additional provision' of up to 50% over and above the housing growth requirement for each local authority set out in Appendix 1 is reflected within the relevant City or County Development Plan, subject to consistency with the policies and objectives of the National Planning Framework – First Revision (2025), relevant Ministerial Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), relevant Government policy, and the undertaking of necessary environmental assessments.

Policy and Objective 3: It is a policy and objective of these Guidelines that planning authorities should use all available means to ensure that the objectives of these Guidelines are incorporated within development plans as quickly as possible through the variation of the current adopted development plan. Where a planning authority is undertaking a development plan review under the Act of 2000 or preparing a new development plan under the Act of 2024, a parallel process of varying the current adopted development plan, as appropriate, should be undertaken. The policies and objectives of these Guidelines should not be reflected in Local Area Plans without also being reflected within the relevant development plan.

4. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: environmental problems relevant to the plan

Environmental problems arise where there is a conflict between current environmental conditions and legislative targets.

It is intended that, through provisions relating to environmental protection and management, the Proposed Variation will contribute towards ensuring that environmental conditions do not get worse and, where possible, they contribute towards its amelioration.

Environmental challenges within Cork City include those relating to: accommodating new populations and growth which ensuring the appropriate protection and management of the environment; fluvial and coastal flood risk; and achieving at least 'good status' under the European Water Framework Directive as various waterbodies draining and downstream of the city are identified not achieving *good or high status* as is the objective of the Water Framework Directive (for example: stretches of the Bride, Glasheen and Moneygurney rivers, are identified as being of *poor* status; the Lee Lower Estuary transitional water body is identified as being of *poor* status; the Lee Upper Estuary and Lough Mahon transitional water bodies are identified as being of *moderate* status; and groundwater bodies at Tramore Valley Park are identified as being of *poor* status).

5. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste-management or water protection)

The Proposed Variation relates to the land use and town planning sector. The Proposed Variation will be consistent with EU and national legislation on the environment, including those relating to the waste management and the Water Framework Directive.

PART 2

1. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects

The development of the Proposed Variation area will relate to a range of land use developments and activities that would be likely to, if unmitigated, significantly affect all environmental components; this would include positive and negative effects across the city and beyond. Such effects would encompass short term construction effects and longer-term operational effects.

Effects could be mitigated by integrating measures relating to environmental protection and management into the Proposed Variation and by adhering to such provisions from the existing Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028.

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the cumulative nature of the effects

There are two types of potential cumulative effects that would be likely to occur, namely:

- Potential intra-Plan cumulative effects - these would be likely to arise from the interactions between different types of potential environmental effects resulting from the Proposed Variation. Examples of interrelationships between environmental components that help determine such effects include those between: human health and water quality; human health and air quality; human health and flood risk; and ecology and water quality.
- Potential inter-Plan cumulative effects - these would be likely to arise when the effects of the implementation of Variation occur in combination with those of other plans, programmes, etc. such as the Development Plan and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

3. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the transboundary nature of the effects

Potential effects, such as those on water will extend beyond the Plan's boundary, however; significant environmental effects on another country are unlikely.

4. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)

Human health has the potential to be impacted upon by environmental vectors (i.e. environmental components such as air, water or soil through which contaminants or pollutants, which have the potential to cause harm, can be transported so that they come into contact with human beings). Hazards or nuisances to human health can arise as a result of exposure to these vectors arising from incompatible adjacent land uses for example. There is historic and predictive evidence of fluvial and coastal flooding in various locations across the city.

5. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)

The spatial extent of potential effects includes the Plan area and areas downstream. The population most likely to be affected would be the population of the Plan area.

The most recent, 2022 Census has recorded a population of 224,004 persons for Cork City.

6. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;

Protected sites within and adjacent to the city include:

- Three European sites within 15 km of the city: two Special Areas of Conservation (Great Island Channel SAC, c.1.4 km to the east of the City, and Blackwater River Cork/Waterford SAC, c.7 km to the north of the City); and one Special Protection Area (Cork Harbour SPA, partially within the eastern parts of the City).
- Eleven proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) within or adjacent to the city (Lee Valley pNHA, Shournagh Valley pNHA, Blarney Castle Woods pNHA, Douglas River Estuary pNHA, Glanmire Wood pNHA, Cork Lough pNHA, Dunkettle Shore pNHA, Ballincollig Cave pNHA, Blarney Lake pNHA, Ardamadane Wood pNHA, and Blarney Bog pNHA).
- Sections of the River Lee, which are listed under the 1988 Slamoid Regulations.
- Cork Harbour Ramsar site.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA), and possibly subsequent stages of assessment, will be undertaken on the Proposed Variation. On finalisation of the Screening for AA process, it may be determined that Stage 2 AA must be undertaken alongside the Variation. The SEA Directive (Article 3 para. 2) requires that SEA is carried out for certain plans and programmes that are being subject to Stage 2 AA.

There are 60 archaeological sites within Cork City Centre and c. 400 entries to the Record of Monuments and Places within the surrounding towns, villages and hinterland. Regarding architectural heritage, there are currently 1,218 structures on the Development Plan's Record of Protected Structures. There are 42 Architectural Conservation Areas designated within the Plan area.

b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, and;

The current Water Framework Directive status of various waterbodies draining and downstream of the city are identified as being of *poor*, or *moderate*, not *good* or *high* as is the objective of the Water Framework Directive, for example: stretches of the Bride, Glasheen and Moneygurney rivers, are identified as being of *poor* status; the Lee Lower Estuary transitional water body is identified as being of *poor* status; the Lee Upper Estuary and Lough Mahon transitional water bodies are identified as being of *moderate* status; and groundwater bodies at Tramore Valley Park are identified as being of *poor* status.

Provisions contributing towards the Water Framework Directive's overall objective of good status are provided by the existing Development Plan 2022-2028 and the Proposed Variation will be consistent with these measures.

c) intensive land-use.

The Proposed Variation will include provisions for the relative intensive land use of a number of areas within the administrative area of the City Council.

7. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status

The Cork City Development Plan seeks to protect and enhance the landscape character of the City by protecting the significant landscape elements that contribute to the general amenity of Cork City. Areas of High Landscape Value and Landscape Preservation Zones are identified in the Plan and must be considered when assessing planning applications. Areas of High Landscape Value display an intrinsic landscape character and a special amenity value. Landscape Preservation Zones are areas in need of special protection as their character and amenity value is considered to be highly sensitive to development.

Other landscape designations within the city include:

- Panoramic viewing locations are accessible to the public and facilitate views of Strategic Landmark Buildings/Strategic Cityscapes and Strategic Landscapes. Strategic and local landmark buildings have been identified so that linear views of these buildings can be protected through the management of development.
- Strategic landmark buildings are those that are widely appreciated due to their visual prominence and the role that they play in helping people to orientate themselves within the City. Local landmark buildings are important within the City's neighbourhoods due to their local visual prominence.
- Rivers corridors provide expansive views of the City and rural areas, and include views from quays, bridges and riverbanks.
- Scenic routes of amenity value identified within the hinterland area benefit from protection with the aim of ensuring that the natural beauty of these routes is maintained. The objective of the designation is to manage development along these routes in order to ensure that distinctive landscape value and quality is maintained.

With reference to the foregoing information, it is determined that Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 (as varied) may, if unmitigated, result in likely significant environmental effects and that SEA is required to be undertaken on the Proposed Variation.


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