

Report

Draft Cork Agglomeration Noise Action Plan 2024-2028

## **SEA Screening**

For Cork City Council (CCiC) and Cork County Council (CCC)

28 March 2024

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<b>Prepared By:</b>	Jake Ross
<b>Reviewed By:</b>	Ros Boalch (Technical Director)

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Registered Office: 23 Coldharbour Road, Bristol BS6 7JT Tel: +44(0)117 974 1086

24 Greville Street, Farringdon, London, EC1N 8SS Tel: +44(0)20 3873 4780

First Floor, Patten House, Moulders Lane, Warrington WA1 2BA Tel: +44(0)1925 937 195

Avenue du Port, 86c Box 204, 1000 Bruxelles Tel: +44(0)20 3873 4784R

## Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Strategic Environmental Assessment Legal Context and Approach	6
3	Cork Agglomeration Noise Action Plan 2024-2028	10
4	Cork Agglomeration Environmental Context	13
5	SEA Screening	18
6	Consultation and Next Steps	20

## Tables

Table 2-1: Stage 1 Applicability Steps	7
Table 2-2: Stage 2 Screening Steps	8
Table A-1: Stage 2 Screening Table – The characteristics of plans and programmes	21
Table A-2: Stage 2 Screening Table - Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected	23

## Figures

Figure 4-1: Cork Agglomeration	13
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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report has been prepared by Logika Consultants Ltd. on behalf of Noise Consultants Ltd for the Cork Agglomeration Action Planning Authorities (APAs)<sup>1</sup>. This SEA Screening report considers the applicability of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations S.I.435/2004<sup>2</sup> as amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011, S.I. No. 200<sup>3</sup> of (hereafter referred to as the 'SEA Regulations'). The focus of this report is to provide justification for whether SEA is needed.

The requirement to prepare a Noise Action Plan (NAP) is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law<sup>4</sup> and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the national competent authority responsible for implementing the END and will ultimately report noise mapping and action planning to the European Commission. Under the Regulations, the APA are responsible for preparing a NAP for the Cork Agglomeration.

The purpose of the NAP is to provide a strategic overview of the management of noise issues and effects within the Cork Agglomeration. The NAP aims to develop clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to prevent environmental noise where necessary; particularly where exposure to noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health. The NAP also identifies areas to preserve environmental acoustic quality where the baseline is good.

The END requires routine updates to noise mapping and action planning every four years. The NAP to which this SEA Screening report refers to is for the period 2024 – 2028 and is the first NAP for the Cork Agglomeration. Further details are set out within **Section 3** of this report.

SEA is a formal process used to evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt the plan or programme. This SEA Screening Report considers the applicability of the SEA Regulations and the NAP ('pre-screening') as a 'plan or programme' and presents details of the SEA screening process and to determine whether further assessment is required in respect of the NAP.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been prepared concurrently with this SEA Screening Report. This considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'.

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<sup>1</sup> The APA comprises Cork City Council (CCiC) and Cork County Council (CCC).

<sup>2</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 435/2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: [S.I. No. 435/2004 - European Communities \(Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes\) Regulations 2004 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/435/made/en/print)

<sup>3</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 200/2011, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2011/si/200/made/en/print>

<sup>4</sup> The END was transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 20061 (S.I. 140/2006) (the "Regulations"). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 20213 (S.I. 663/2021).

The structure of this SEA Screening is as follows:

- **Section 2: Strategic Environmental Assessment Legal Context and Approach.** This sets out the regulatory context and purpose of the SEA Regulations, along with a summary of the SEA process, focussing on Screening. Reference to SEA Screening guidance is presented;
- **Section 3: Summary of the Cork Agglomeration Noise Action Plan 2024 – 2028.** This summarises the NAP with a focus on the content of the NAP that could be applicable to the SEA Regulations;
- **Section 4: Cork Agglomeration Environmental Context.** This sets out the geographical context of the NAP and at a high level, environmental considerations proportionate to SEA and considering biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage, and landscape;
- **Section 5: SEA Screening.** Sets out the findings of pre-screening and considers the NAP against the criteria defined by SEA Regulations and guidance. This section also sets out the next steps in respect of consultation; and
- **Section 6: Consultation and Next Steps.**

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## 2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Legal Context and Approach

### 2.1 The SEA Regulatory Context

SEA is a systematic process designed to assess likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before it is formally adopted or implemented.

European Union (EU) Directive 2001/42/EC7 (the 'SEA Directive') requires EU Member States to ensure that certain plans and programmes are subject to a requirement for SEA. In the context of transport sectoral plans, the 'SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S. I. 435/2004). This legislation has been amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 200/ 2011). For all other sectoral plans, the SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law by Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations<sup>5</sup> (S. I. 436/2004), as amended by Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011<sup>6</sup> (S. I. 201/2011). As set out within the EPA Draft Guidance for Noise Action Planning<sup>7</sup>, the NAP is a form of 'Transport' sectoral plan. Therefore, if an SEA is required for NAPs, they would fall under the remit of S.I. 435, as amended, and not S.I. 436 of 2004.

Pre-screening checks have followed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland (2001-DS-EEP-2/5)' – Synthesis Report (Appendix B; SEA Checklist). The SEA process is defined by a series of stages which has been described in section 2.2.

### 2.2 SEA Screening

#### 2.2.1 Overview

The procedure of undertaking SEA screening is based upon the evaluation of specific criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive (Schedule 1)<sup>8</sup>.

According to the EPA Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening<sup>9</sup>, the screening process covers three different stages as below:

- Applicability;

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<sup>5</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 436/2004, Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/436/made/en/print>

<sup>6</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 201/2011, Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (Accessed February 2024) Available at:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2011/si/201/made/en/pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Environmental Protection Agency (2024). DRAFT Guidance Note for Noise Action Planning For the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018, Draft Version 2 (January 2024).

<sup>8</sup> European Union, Directive 2001/42/EC, Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment, as transposed by Irish Statute Book, S.I. 435/2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/435/made/en/print#article1>

<sup>9</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, SEA Screening Good Practice 2021 [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-screening-good-practice-2021.php>

- Screening; and
- Determination.

The core guidance declares that the overall characteristics of the plan should be checked to determine if the plan falls within the overarching requirements of the SEA Directive. This is therefore the first stage of 'Applicability' screening.

Should the first check determine that the plan falls within the requirements of the SEA Directive, further consideration should be made to any potential environmental significance resulting from implementing the plan itself. At this stage, the significance criteria outlined in Annex II (2) of the SEA Directive (Stage 2 'Screening') should be followed.

### 2.2.2 Stage 1 'Applicability' Methodology

The applicability stage of SEA screening consists of a 4-step process as outlined in the EPA Good Practice Guide on Screening (2021). Table 2-1 sets out these stages as below:

**Table 2-1: Stage 1 Applicability Steps**

Applicability Step	Step Guidance
Step 1	<p>Establish and identify the status of the plan to be assessed, or the competent authority compiling the programme.</p> <p>Is the plan (ie. The NAP) prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional, or local level?</p> <p>Is the plan prepared by a relevant authority for associated adoption through a parliamentary or governmental legislative procedure?</p>
Step 2	<p>Establish the description of the plan or programme.</p> <p>Is the NAP required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?</p>
Step 3	<p>Determine if the NAP is not exempt from SEA screening.</p> <p>Is the sole purpose of the NAP for national defence, civil emergency, or finance/budget?</p>
Step 4	<p>Does the NAP require mandatory SEA?</p> <p>Is the NAP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecoms, tourism, town and country planning or land use, and does the NAP set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the Annexes of the EIA Directive?</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Will the NAP require assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the EU Habitats Directive?</p>

Following this stage of SEA screening, there are three possible outcomes regarding whether the SEA Directive applies in this case:

- The SEA Directive **does not** apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is not of a type which falls within the remit of the regulations themselves, and therefore there is no requirement to notify environmental authorities.

- The SEA Directive **does** apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is of a type that falls within the remit of the regulations and therefore triggers mandatory SEA. This then triggers the process of proceeding to SEA scoping and relevant consultation with designated authorities.
- The SEA Directive **may** apply to the NAP – in this scenario, the NAP may be within the remit of the SEA Directive because there is some uncertainty with the provisions considered at Stage 1 screening, therefore a case-by-case determination is required. At this point, the screening would proceed to Stage 2.

### 2.2.3 Stage 2 ‘Screening’ (If Applicable)

If there is potential that the NAP may give rise to significant effects or is uncertainty on key characteristics, Stage 2 Screening helps to determine if SEA is required for the NAP. While it is not a mandatory requirement, the production of a screening report has become good practice as part of the overarching process.

Stage 2 is a four-step process as per the EPA’s Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening Reports. Table 2 below summarises the next steps.

**Table 2-2: Stage 2 Screening Steps**

Screening Step	Step Guidance
Step 1	Describe the features of the NAP and the environment in which it would be received, outlining any environmental challenges.
Step 2	Identify the potential for significant environmental effects.
Step 3	Statutory consultation with designated environmental authorities (a minimum of 4 weeks).
Step 4	Draft determination.

Part of this screening stage includes a screening of environmental significance, to assess whether the plan is likely to result in significant effects and therefore taken forward for SEA. The criteria for undertaking this are embedded into Annex II of the SEA Directive and is transposed into Irish legislation as Schedule 1 of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 as amended. The criteria that will be used as part of Section 5 of this report, is outlined in Appendix A Stage 2 SEA Screening. The aforementioned EPA’s Good Practice Guidance on SEA and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (2022)<sup>10</sup> have been used to guide this assessment.

At this stage it is required to consult with the relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks (Step 3), after which a draft determination can be prepared (Step 4) and finalised as Stage 3 following the input from consultation.

### 2.2.4 Stage 3 ‘Determination’

Following the consultation with the relevant authorities, after the competent authority has made their final decision as to whether SEA applies to the NAP, a summary of the screening should be available

<sup>10</sup> Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2022). Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities. (Accessed February 2024) Available at: [218356\\_6c57ccf6-3d2b-4c43-b871-1698e7daab5d \(1\).pdf](#)



for public inspection both digitally and as a hard copy. A copy of the final determination should also be made available to relevant SEA authorities who were consulted during screening.

## 2.3 Appropriate Assessment

It should be noted that concurrently an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening has been undertaken and a report documenting this prepared. This AA Screening considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'. The overarching goal of the Habitats and Birds Directives are to uphold or restore the 'favourable conservation status' of habitats and species recognised as of European Community Interest. These specific habitats and species are outlined in the Habitats and Birds Directives, with the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) aimed at safeguarding the most vulnerable among them. Together, these designations are commonly referred to as European Sites, also known as Natura 2000 sites. Should AA Screening determine that the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a plan, either along or in combination with other projects or plans and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant, then this will also trigger the requirement of SEA for the plan.

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## 3 Cork Agglomeration Noise Action Plan 2024-2028

### 3.1 Background and Overview

As required by the END, the NAP seeks to provide a framework for long-term management of environmental noise from transport systems referring to the results of the strategic noise maps to inform assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise. As part of this management, the protection of quiet areas within the Cork Agglomeration is also set out within the NAP. The temporal framework for the NAP is 5 years<sup>11</sup>, at which time the noise mapping and NAP will be reviewed as well as the NAP, and where necessary revised.

For the purpose of the SEA, relevant sections of the NAP include the overarching long-term strategy which incorporates the Noise Policy Statement and Responsible Aims, are set out in **Section 3.2** and **3.3** of this document.

The management of noise within the Cork Agglomeration focusses on Prevention, Protection and Mitigation Measures.

Prevention measures, as set out in the NAP, could include the implementation of separately adopted planning policy and associated guidance which will, for instance require acoustic design statements for new residential applications,

Protection measures as set out in the NAP includes the identification of candidate quiet areas to which protection measures may be required to manage activities in these areas which would impact the acoustic environment. Implemented quiet areas should be considered within City or County Development Plans as well as Local Area Plans.

Mitigation measures as set out in the NAP include the identification and implementation of priority important areas. Noise mitigation measures within these areas should be evaluated for their effectiveness through the following steps as set out in the NAP:

- Noise measurements at Priority Important Areas;
- Review of the assumptions used to identify the Priority Important Areas;
- Re-evaluation of Priority Important Areas;
- Identification of practical noise mitigation measures;
- Appraisal of noise mitigation measures monetised benefits to health;
- Financial assessment of noise mitigation measures;
- Cost-benefit analysis; and
- Recommendation of noise mitigation measure(s).

How the NAP identifies areas to be preserved for environmental noise quality, is also relevant to this assessment. The results of the strategic noise mapping have been used to identify areas within the agglomeration to be considered for preservation. The assessment of Candidate Quiet Areas for the purpose of designation as a Quiet Area includes consideration of factors, including noise, land-use, local amenity value, accessibility, user and visitor experience, and stakeholder engagement. Within

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<sup>11</sup> The European Commission allowed for one additional year for the Round 4 NAPs, reducing the five-year implementation period to four-years.

this NAP, the primary tool has been the identification of major parks and gardens over 1 hectare in size. Further details area includes within Section 7.4 of the NAP.

## 3.2 Noise Policy Statement

The Noise Policy Statement for the Cork Agglomeration is detailed as follows:

*“The Agglomeration APAs will adopt a strategic approach to managing environmental noise from road traffic, rail traffic, airports, and industrial activity sites, including ports, within its functional area, with the following overarching policy principles:*

- **Prevention** – manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where it is likely to have significant adverse impact on health and quality of life.
- **Protection** - protect areas which are desirably quiet, or which offer a sense of tranquillity through a process of identification and validation followed by formal designation of “Quiet Areas”.
- **Mitigation Measures** – identify and prioritise appropriate mitigation measures to reduce noise levels where they are potentially harmful.”

## 3.3 Responsible Aims

The Responsible Aims that underpin the Noise Policy Statement and are set out within the NAP, are as follows:

- **“RA\_1 - Policy and Guidance Development** – Encourage the integration of noise considerations into the ongoing process of policy and guidance development, and actively promote existing policies and guidance related to noise.
- **RA\_2 - Working Groups** – Participate in technical working groups pertinent to the implementation of the Environmental Noise Directive and with the assistance of the Environmental Protection Agency, a Round 4 Noise Action Plan Implementation Working Group shall be established.
- **RA\_3 - Noise Mitigation** – In collaboration and consultation with relevant Noise Mapping Bodies, noise management interventions shall be applied on a priority basis during existing maintenance and improvement programs, where appropriate. This application will be based on a relevant evaluation of whole-life costs and benefits.
- **RA\_4 - Protection** – Assess and, where appropriate, propose Candidate Quiet Areas to the Environmental Protection Agency for designation as Quiet Areas by the Minister.
- **RA\_5 - Prevention** – Evaluate and condition planning proposals for noise sensitive development near major noise sources.
- **RA\_6 - Community Engagement** – Commit to proactive and inclusive engagement with communities and collaboratively address noise issues for the improvement of our shared living environment.
- **RA\_7 - Manage Noise Complaints** – Review and respond to all environmental noise complaints in accordance with their Customer Charter.
- **RA\_8 - Regulatory Engagement** – Report the progress on the implementation of Noise Action Plans, including the investigation and implementation of noise management measures in Priority

*Important Areas, and the assessment of Candidate Quiet Areas for preservation of environmental noise quality, to the Environmental Protection Agency on an annual basis."*

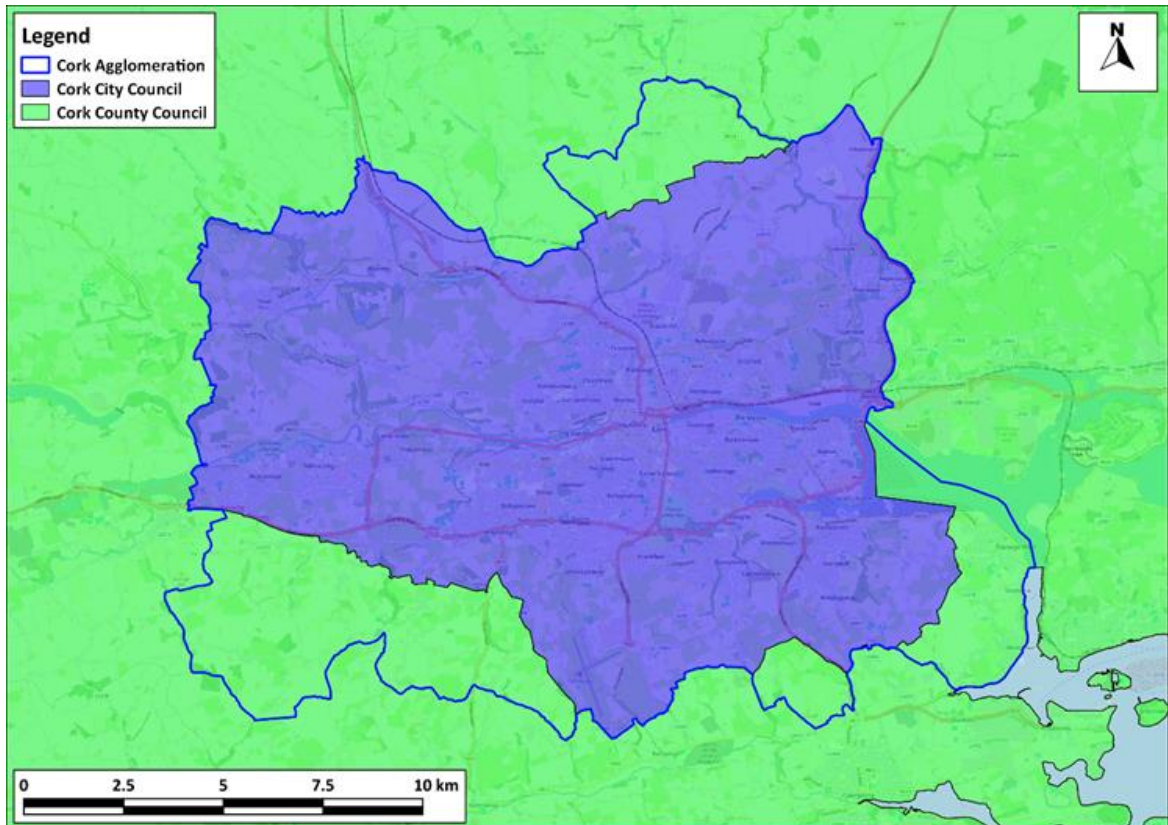
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# 4 Cork Agglomeration Environmental Context

## 4.1 Context

The Cork Agglomeration as defined in the Regulations and covers an area of 241km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 219,287 and is shown in **Figure 4-1**.

**Figure 4-1: Cork Agglomeration**



As detailed in the NAP, the total population of the Cork Agglomeration is approximately 219,287. In terms of noise sources, there are 9 industry sites and approximately 1,300,746 metres of road (including major roads), and 25,763 metres of rail in the Agglomeration. There are also a total of 269 noise sensitive buildings (schools and hospitals) located within the Agglomeration.

The environmental context of the Cork Agglomeration has been identified to understand the environmental issues, trends, and characteristics. Setting this environmental context can inform, if the NAP were considered a plan or programme in accordance with the SEA Regulations, what potential significant environmental effects could arise. The environmental context is set out with reference to the environmental issues indicated within the SEA Regulations (biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape). The information presented is proportionate to the strategic nature of the environmental assessment required and the scale of the NAP itself.

## 4.2 Baseline

### 4.2.1 Biodiversity, Flora, and Fauna

The Cork Agglomeration baseline for biodiversity can be quantified in terms of the number of designated sites and indication of the habitats and species across the agglomeration. Government data indicates that there is one Special Protection Area (SPA) (Cork Harbour SPA) and two Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) (Great Islands Channel SAC and Blackwater River SAC) located within the Agglomeration<sup>12</sup>. These sites are designated as Natura 2000 sites, which is an EU-wide network of protected areas covering vulnerable species and habitats, designated under the Birds and Habitats directives<sup>13</sup>. Further details on these SPA and SAC sites and why they are designated, can be found within the accompanying AA Screening of the NAP. There are no Ramsar sites identified across the Agglomeration, which are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar convention and are also often designated as SPA and SAC sites<sup>14</sup>.

In terms of the identified habitat across the Cork Agglomeration, coastal estuary, alluvial and old oak woodland, heath, and scrub, as well as bogs, mires and fens are present within the Agglomeration<sup>15</sup>. In term of identified species in the Agglomeration, there are a number of species records present, including non-vascular plants, mammals including otter and mountain hare, arthropods, and amphibians<sup>16</sup>. Article 6 of the habitat's directive obligates Ireland to maintain and/or restore natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora. The National Biodiversity Action Plan<sup>17</sup> aims to meet urgent conservation and restoration needs for habitats and species in Ireland.

### 4.2.2 Population and Human Health

The focus of the Cork Agglomeration baseline for population and human health is about the number of people affected by noise. Assessment within the Cork Agglomeration NAP suggests that 8.21% of the Agglomeration population is classed as Highly Annoyed (HA) by noise with 1.6% of the population classed as Highly Sleep Disturbed (HSD). The population of the Agglomeration is more likely to be at risk of noise annoyance or sleep disturbance from road traffic noise, as opposed to railway sources. While variations between regions can present a different picture, from a national perspective approximately 10.3% of people in Ireland consider their health to either be fair, bad, or very bad<sup>18</sup>. In terms of the population who are affected by ambient noise, national figures suggest that approximately 131,767 people across Ireland are directly affected by noise annoyance via road, rail,

<sup>12</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

<sup>13</sup> European Environment Agency, The Natura 2000 protected areas network [Accessed March 2024] available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/natura-2000#:~:text=Natura%202000%20is%20a%20network,on%20land%20and%20at%20sea.>

<sup>14</sup> Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee, Ramsar sites in Ireland [Accessed March 2024] available at: <https://www.irishwetlands.ie/irish-ramsar-sites/>

<sup>15</sup> National Parks and Wildlife Service, Habitat and Species Data, 2019 Article 17 Report, The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland, Terrestrial Habitats [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/1a721520030d404f899d658d5b6e159a>

<sup>16</sup> National Parks and Wildlife Service, Habitat and Species Data, 2019 Article 17 Report, The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland, Terrestrial Species [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/1a721520030d404f899d658d5b6e159a>

<sup>17</sup> National Parks & Wildlife Service, National Biodiversity Action Plan [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://www.npws.ie/legislation/national-biodiversity-action-plan>

<sup>18</sup> Central Statistics Office, Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results, General Health [Accessed March 2024] available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/>

and air<sup>19</sup>. Noise levels can be concentrated into specific areas depending on receptors, perhaps making it difficult to positively affect change. While the data shows that there is a downward trend from 2018 onwards, 1,891 noise complaints were received by local authorities in 2019, which perhaps indicates the public concern over noise<sup>20</sup>.

#### 4.2.3 Water and Soils

The Cork Agglomeration baseline for water and soils can generally be quantified in terms of soil status, underlying geology and Water Framework Directive (WFD) status.

The Cork Agglomeration, in terms of its underlying geology, is a mixture of bedrock comprising of visian limestone and calcareous shale, tournaisian limestone sandstone and mudstone, as well as smaller areas of Up, Devonian sandstone and mudstone (Old Head Sandstone Fm) according to GSI bedrock data<sup>21</sup>.

The Agglomeration's underlying soils are comprised mainly of made soils, alluvium and areas of bedrock at surface<sup>22</sup>.

The WFD helps to quantify water quality status, bathing water quality, protected areas, and groundwater vulnerability across Ireland. Within the agglomeration, there are 3 WFD waterbodies classified as having poor ecological status and one classified as bad<sup>23</sup>. There are several WFD protected areas within the Cork Agglomeration, and there is also differentiated areas in terms of groundwater vulnerability, with moderate vulnerability in central areas and areas of extreme vulnerability in other areas of the agglomeration.

#### 4.2.4 Air Quality

The Cork Agglomeration baseline for air quality can be quantified in terms of emissions levels of PM2.5 and NO<sub>2</sub>. In terms of both, EU legal air quality limits were met in 2022<sup>24</sup>. Ireland is moving towards measuring their performance regarding these emissions to a more stringent air quality guideline set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) rather than the EU. Latest modelled maps for PM2.5 show European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (EMEP) annual averages across the agglomeration range from <2.0 in the south to between 9.0-10.0 in the central Cork area. Burning solid fuels in homes remains a key issue to reduce PM2.5 emissions across the agglomeration and indeed Ireland. In terms of NO<sub>2</sub>, latest modelled maps for NO<sub>2</sub> show EMEP annual averages across the agglomeration range from <2.5 in the south, to between 40.0 and 50.0 in concentrated areas (primarily urban road areas in and around Cork city centre). NO<sub>2</sub> emissions are mainly derived from road traffic, which is a key barrier to the reduction of these emissions generally.

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<sup>19</sup> Central Statistics Office, Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results, General Health [Accessed March 2024] available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/>

<sup>20</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Noise Complaints [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/noise/environmental-noise-complaints/>

<sup>21</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

<sup>22</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

<sup>23</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

<sup>24</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, Air [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/air/>

#### 4.2.5 Climatic Factors

Emissions data is not defined for the Cork Agglomeration and so national emissions are considered. In 2022, emissions across Ireland were estimated to be 60.76Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq<sup>25</sup>. This figure is 1.9% lower than the previous yearly data and is contextualised by the EU target to reduce emissions outside of the EU ETS scheme by 30% by 2030<sup>26</sup>.

#### 4.2.6 Material Assets

The Cork Agglomeration baseline for material assets can be quantified in terms of the rate of housebuilding within the Agglomeration as well as the number of vacant properties. In terms of housebuilding, across Ireland there was an overarching target to build 29,000 new units in 2023<sup>27</sup>. This target was exceeded, with approximately 32,695 units built across Ireland. More specific data on vacant properties within the agglomeration (not including data from Cork County Council) suggests that there are approximately 5,061 properties vacant across the Cork City Council<sup>28</sup>. This baseline information is set against the Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023-2026, which aims to provide every citizen with good quality homes through various interventions and investments<sup>29</sup>.

#### 4.2.7 Cultural Heritage

The Cork Agglomeration cultural heritage baseline indicated that there are many national heritage areas, sites, and monuments across the agglomeration. For example, there are hundreds of specific sites and monuments of cultural interest, including approximately 272 Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) and approximately 2,869 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) records within the central area of Cork itself<sup>30</sup>. Generally, sites are mainly concentrated in urban areas. As part of the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028, there is a requirement to compile and maintain a Record of Protected Structures under the Planning Act 2000 (as amended)<sup>31</sup>. RPS includes over 1,200 structures which are of special architectural interest across Cork City Council. Across Ireland, key environmental issues such as land use change, climate change and biodiversity loss may have a long-term impact

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<sup>25</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, "Ireland's 2022 Greenhouse Gas Emissions show a welcome decrease, but much work remains to be done" [Accessed February 2024] available at: [https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2023/irelands-2022-greenhouse-gas-emissions-show-a-welcome-decrease-but-much-work-remains-to-be-done.php#:~:text=Provisional%20national%20total%20emissions%20\(including,EU%20and%20UN%20in%202024.](https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2023/irelands-2022-greenhouse-gas-emissions-show-a-welcome-decrease-but-much-work-remains-to-be-done.php#:~:text=Provisional%20national%20total%20emissions%20(including,EU%20and%20UN%20in%202024.)

<sup>26</sup> European Commission, Climate Action, Effort sharing 2021-2030: targets and flexibilities [Accessed March 2024] available at: [https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/effort-sharing-member-states-emission-targets/effort-sharing-2021-2030-targets-and-flexibilities\\_en](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/effort-sharing-member-states-emission-targets/effort-sharing-2021-2030-targets-and-flexibilities_en)

<sup>27</sup> Government of Ireland, Housing for All Q4 2023 Progress Report [Accessed March 2024] available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/281768/bba967b9-80b9-4e5a-a876-d0239c805883.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Central Statistics Office, Census of Population 2022 Profile 2 – housing in Ireland [Accessed March 2024] Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp2/censusofpopulation2022profile2-housinginireland/vacantdwelling/#:~:text=Vacancy%20by%20Dwelling%20Type%20and,fell%20by%207%25%20from%20140%2C120.>

<sup>29</sup> Gov.ie, Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023-2026, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage [Accessed March 2024] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/df86c-vacant-homes-action-plan-2023-2026/>

<sup>30</sup> National Monuments Service, Historic Environment Viewer [Accessed March 2024] available at <https://www.archaeology.ie/archaeological-survey-ireland/historic-environment-viewer-application>

<sup>31</sup> Cork City Council, Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028, Volume 3 – Built Heritage Objectives [Accessed March 2024] available at <https://www.corkcity.ie/en/cork-city-development-plan/volume-3-built-heritage-objectives/>



upon the cultural heritage baseline in the Cork Agglomeration. Heritage Ireland 2030 sets out a framework to focus on protecting and managing Ireland's heritage assets<sup>32</sup>.

#### 4.2.8 Landscape

The Cork Agglomeration landscape baseline indicates that, in terms of land cover, the central area of the agglomeration is largely comprised of continuous and discontinuous urban fabric, as well as industrial or commercial units. Areas outside of Cork are largely comprised of non-irrigated land, pastures, and complex cultivation patterns. There are also pockets of broad-leaved forest, coniferous forest, and mixed forest<sup>33</sup>. The National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025) is a key driver for landscape targets in Ireland and the Cork Agglomeration. The National Landscape Strategy for example, sets out to implement the European Landscape Convention to integrate landscape into the country's approach to sustainable development<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Gov.ie, Heritage Ireland 2030, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/778b8-heritage-ireland-2030/>

<sup>33</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

<sup>34</sup> Gov.ie, National Landscape Strategy, Department of Housing, Local government and Heritage [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8a59b-national-landscape-strategy/>

## 5 SEA Screening

### 5.1 Stage 1 – SEA ‘Applicability’

#### 5.1.1 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.** The NAP is prepared and then will be adopted at a regional level by the Action Planning Authority Working Group who comprise the following local authorities: Cork City Council and Cork County Council.

#### 5.1.2 Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?

**Yes.** The NAP is required by The Environmental Noise Directive (“END”) (2002/49/EC). A European Union legal instrument vital for protecting public health and the environment by addressing the adverse effects of environmental noise. The END was transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 (S.I. 140/2006) (the “Regulations”). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 663/2021).

#### 5.1.3 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,** the NAP is being prepared for the transportation sector. Noise issues and interventions may have relevance for other sectors but is being prepared in the context of planning and land use.

#### 5.1.4 Does the P/P provide a framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive?

According to the European Commission ‘Guidance on the implementation of Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment,’ this would “normally mean that the plan or programme contains criteria or conditions which guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent. Such criteria could place limits on the type of activity or development which is to be permitted in a given area; or they could contain conditions which must be met by the applicant if permission is to be granted; or they could be designed to preserve certain characteristics of the area concerned (such as the mixture of land uses which promotes the economic vitality of the area).”

The NAP does **potentially** set a locational framework for interventions within identified quiet areas and important areas regarding noise, but due to its high level of intervention recommendations, it does not therefore provide a framework for development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive.

#### 5.1.5 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.** The NAP is a strategic-level document which is designed to provide direction for action through the designation of strategic priority areas to preserve low noise levels and reduce areas where noise disturbance is high. The NAP does however locate where potential interventions (including mitigation and prevention measures) could take place, which may correlate with Natura 2000 sites. However, as outlined in the Appropriate Assessment Screening Statement, the NAPs elements are not identified as having any direct or indirect impact on Natura 2000 site. Therefore, there are no predicted likely

significant effects upon the identified Natura 2000 sites and no requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments.

#### 5.1.6 **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.** The NAP's sole purpose is not to serve national defence or civil emergency nor is it a financial/budget P/P nor is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme.

## 5.2 **Outcome of Stage Applicability**

The pre-screening checks as set out in **Section 5.1**, indicating that the NAP is not a plan or programme to which the SEA applies and it is concluded that an SEA is not required, for completeness the plan was assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states 'A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (..) are likely to have significant effects on the environment'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations. A table detailing the environmental significance is presented within the following.

## 5.3 **Stage 2 – SEA 'Screening'**

As the Cork Agglomeration NAP is not within any of the categories established within the Stage 1 criteria, it is concluded that an SEA is not required. However, as part of SEA best practice, the NAP has been assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states 'A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (..) are likely to have significant effects on the environment'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations<sup>35</sup>. A table detailing the Stage 2 SEA screening of significance, is presented in Appendix A1 of this report.

## 5.4 **Outcome of Stage 2 Screening (Steps 1 and 2)**

The Stage 2 Screening of the Cork Agglomeration NAP, as detailed in Appendix A1, determines that no further SEA is required. It has been determined that the NAP will operate at a high level and therefore a full SEA would not be proportionate relative to the NAP itself. The NAP does not satisfy the conditions for mandatory SEA under S.I. 435/2004.

This report will now be sent as part of a request for consultation with the environmental authorities (Step 3).

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<sup>35</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 435/2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/435/made/en/print#article1>

## 6 Consultation and Next Steps

Step 3 of Stage 2 of SEA Screening indicates there is a specific requirement to consult with relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks, regarding the outcomes of the SEA screening report. These authorities are:

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Development Application Unit
- Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous

Following consultation, an SEA Screening Statement (Stage 3: Determination) can be prepared by the competent authority to be appended to the SEA screening report. This Screening Statement should be made publicly available upon determination.

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# A1 Stage 2 SEA Screening

Table A-1 and Table A-2 sets out the SEA criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive (Steps 1 and 2 of Stage 2: SEA Screening).

**Table A-1: Stage 2 Screening Table – The characteristics of plans and programmes**

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork Agglomeration NAP
1 The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to	
<p>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>	<p>The primary objective of the NAP is aimed at the long-term management of environmental noise and is based on the results of the strategic noise maps which informed assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise.</p> <p>Therefore, the mapping and the results of exposure assessments do not represent a framework. However, the NAP does set out policy principles and locational allocation of Priority Important Areas and Candidate Quiet Areas, along with mitigation which could constitute a plan or programme depending on their scale, nature, and details of the mitigation.</p> <p>The locational provision of quiet areas is an effort to maintain an environmental status quo, rather than allocating resources or ringfencing specific projects or activities outside of these areas. Similarly, where mitigation is set out in the NAP for Priority Important Areas these are suggested approaches and not site specific, they do not set out operating conditions or allocate resources. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives specific change is limited and therefore not significant.</p> <p>As there is no provision in legislation upon which the actions outlined in the NAP can be enforced, reliance will be made on various other plans and policies such as the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 and other Development Plans within the Agglomeration, the National Planning Framework 2040, and the Planning Acts, for their implementation. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives other activities, is not significant.</p>
<p>The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programme including those in a hierarchy</p>	<p>The degree to which the NAP influences other plans and programmes is deemed to be minimal. It can be argued that the NAP sits within a horizontal hierarchy. The NAP refers to and relied upon other plans and programmes existing and proposed within the agglomeration itself. The NAP does not require new plans or policies to be created to help implement its key aims. Therefore, there are no new environmental effects as they already have been considered in the assessment of other plans and policies themselves. For example, as part of the</p>

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork Agglomeration NAP
	<p>Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040 (CMATS), an SEA was produced at draft stage to assess at a strategic level, the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the draft strategy.</p>
<p>The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development</p>	<p>The Cork Agglomeration NAP promotes environmental considerations and sustainable development, through the identification of noise-related issues in the agglomeration. Therefore, the NAP does not go as far as recommending specific actions to deliver sustainable development within the Agglomeration. The provision of noise important areas should make decision-makers aware of noise issues and should supplement other initiatives indirectly. Therefore, the NAP does not go against the principles of sustainable development, but it also does not have a direct influence over its integration. Therefore, the relevance of the NAP against this metric is deemed to be not significant.</p>
<p>Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme</p>	<p>The NAP directly addresses environmental noise within the Cork Agglomeration and sets out clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to prevent environmental noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health.</p> <p>Overall the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health. In SEA terms it is not deemed that, when considered against other environmental conditions and problems, the Cork Agglomeration NAP (as set out within <b>Section 4</b>) would give rise to significant environmental effects on account of the high level and strategic nature of the mitigation set out in the NAP. This is also on account of the reliance upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA.</p>
<p>The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection)</p>	<p>The requirement to prepare a NAP is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs. Therefore, the NAP must be consistent with the implementation of this EU Directive which is directly related to the protection of the environment and human health.</p>

**Table A-2: Stage 2 Screening Table - Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected**

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork Agglomeration NAP
2. 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 measures within the NAP aim to have an overall positive effect on noise levels and consequently human health and the environment in the long term. The mitigation set out is high level and strategic. Consequentially, details that would identify duration, frequency and reversibility of effects are not available. Furthermore, as is a reliance in the NAP placed upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development.
The cumulative nature of the effects	The Cork Agglomeration NAP is prepared alongside other national plans and programmes to act in conformity with the suite of measures that they identify. The environmental impact of those measures with be evaluated within the plans themselves, some of which will be subject to mandatory SEA and AA. Therefore, because this NAP is not in direct conflict with the external overarching aims, the NAP itself is unlikely to have resulting significant effects and therefore cannot be cumulative in nature.
The transboundary nature of the effects	On account of the scale and nature of the NAP, and the high-level strategic nature of the mitigation presented, the Cork Agglomeration NAP will have no direct transboundary effects of its own account.
The risks to human health of the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	There are no expected risks to human health or the environment because of the NAP. Overall the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health.
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The Cork Agglomeration NAP covers a large geographic area, which also includes the city of Cork itself. The overall population of the agglomeration is approximately 219,287. The population that is directly affected or considered as part of the NAP's aims (the implementation of candidate quiet areas and noise important areas) is however considered to be limited and at a small scape compared to the wider context. For example, in Cork City Council there is approximately 9,218 people within identified Most Important Areas (MIA) associated with the 9 Priority Important Areas within Cork City. On this basis and considering the strategic nature of the NAP mitigation, the environmental effects are not considered to be significant because they are strategic.

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork Agglomeration NAP
<p>The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage;</li> <li>• Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or</li> <li>• Intensive land use</li> </ul>	<p>Were areas identified within the Cork Agglomeration NAP coincide with areas of special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage, owing to the reliance in the NAP placed upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development, it is unlikely a significant effect would arise. This also applies to intensive land use.</p> <p>In respect of Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, through its noise policy statement, will aim to prevent additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where it is likely significant adverse impacts are likely to occur. It will aim to protect areas which are desirably quiet, and it will also identify appropriate mitigation measures to reduce noise levels where they are potentially harmful. A set of implementation actions underpin the statement itself.</p>
<p>The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status</p>	<p>The Cork Agglomeration NAP covers an area which includes one nationally and EU-level protected site regarding flora, fauna, species, and habitats (Cork Harbour SPA). Measures included in the NAP are not likely to have specific geographic relevance because there is no candidate quiet areas, MIA or PIA which overlap with the geographic extent of the Cork Harbour SPA. Therefore, the NAP and its subsequent interventions may not necessarily lead to positive effects on protected sites. It should also be noted that the factors to which ecologically designated sites such as SPA are protected does not necessarily correlate with changing noise levels. Therefore, in summary, the Cork Agglomeration NAP is not considered to have a significant effect upon recognised protected sites within the Agglomeration itself. This is consistent with the findings of the AA Screening report.</p>
<p>Section 5: Summary and Conclusion</p>	
<p>In terms of setting a framework, the Cork Agglomeration NAP does in one sense set out a locational framework for noise, but it is however limited in terms of scale and does not necessarily drive specific changes or actions.</p> <p>It should also be noted that the NAP will have a minimal influence on other plans and programmes within the Agglomeration. The NAP is inherently a plan which promotes environmental best practice, but it does not influence the implementation of sustainable development principles.</p> <p>There are several designated sites across the Agglomeration and various social, economic, and environmental factors which indicate a diverse geographic area. The NAP is also relevant in the context of EU Directive implementation and must be consistent with these relevant directions.</p> <p>In terms of the characteristics of effects the NAP is a strategy which should not have any transboundary effects of its own accord, nor bring any expected human health or environmental risks because of its implementation. The NAP is also unlikely to be cumulative in nature because it should be implemented in compliance with other plans and programmes that have been stress</p>	



Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork Agglomeration NAP
	<p>tested by the SEA process. While the Cork Agglomeration is geographically large, the NAP's interventions are relatively localised. Therefore, the vulnerability and value of the area likely to be affected by the NAP is also relatively localised because areas where environmental limit values are (or aren't) exceeded are small, pocketed areas within the Agglomeration. The effects of the NAP upon national, EU or internationally protected sites is not significant because the areas to which the NAP identifies for interventions are mostly not corresponding to protected sites within the agglomeration.</p> <p>To conclude, this stage of the SEA screening process determines that the Cork Agglomeration NAP does not require further SEA.</p>
Section 6: Statutory Consultation	
	<p>The following statutory and non-statutory bodies will be consulted with through the SEA screening process. Following this consultation, updates will be made to summarise the issues raised by those consulted, and how this has influenced the final screening determination.</p> <p>The SEA environmental authorities according to the regulations are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Protection Agency;</li> <li>• Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine;</li> <li>• Department of Environment, Climate and Communications;</li> <li>• Development Applications Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and</li> <li>• Any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous to the area of the planning authority.</li> </ul>



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