

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report

of the

Proposed Material Alterations

to the

Draft County Donegal Development Plan 2024-2030

**In accordance with the requirements of the Planning and
Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and
Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)**



**Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall**
Donegal County Council

Community, Development & Planning Services

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Draft County Development Plan 2024-2030 (the Draft Plan) was published for public consultation between the 4th August and the 13th October 2023. A Chief Executive's Report on the submissions received during the public consultation period was submitted to the Elected Members for their consideration in January 2024. At the Council Meeting of the 6th and 12th of February 2024 the Members resolved to amend the Draft County Donegal Development Plan (in accordance with S.12(6) of the Planning and Development Act 2000(As Amended) including amendments which, if made, would be material alterations to the plan.

This document comprises the Screening of said Proposed Material Alterations (PMAs) to determine if a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required in accordance with the requirements of S.12(7)(aa) of the Planning and Development Act 2000(As Amended) by considering whether or not the proposed variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

1.2 Legislative Context

The County Donegal Development Plan 2024-2030 is being adopted in accordance with the requirements set out in S.11 and 12 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

It is a requirement of S.12(7)(aa) of the said act that the Planning Authority determine if a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the is required as respects one or more Material Alteration. In doing so, the Planning Authority must consider whether or not the proposed Variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment and thus require an SEA. This process is known as the 'Screening Process'.

This Screening report takes account of the relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A 'Criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment' of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), and Appendix 1 of the European Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC on the Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

1.3 The Proposed Material Alterations to the Draft CDP 2024-2030

The Proposed Material Alterations are set out in the associated Proposed Material Alterations document. In summary they include the insertion of new policies and objectives, the amendment of existing policies and objectives, zoning changes to the Buncrana, Ballybofey/Stranorlar and Bundoran Area Plans, and amendments to Settlement Frameworks including boundary and zoning changes.

2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening

2.1 Assessment of Characteristics of the Proposed Material Alterations

The Assessment in Table 2.1 is based on the criteria for determining whether the Proposed Material Alterations is likely to have significant effects on the environment in accordance with Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended). Schedule 2A of the Regulations sets out two main types of criteria for determining whether a plan would be likely to have significant environmental effects:

1. Characteristics of the Plan: relates to the nature and scale of development likely to take place over the lifetime of the plan.
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the Area likely to be affected: relates to the cumulative impacts and vulnerabilities of the geographical area likely to be affected by the implementation of the plan.

Table 2.1: Assessment of Characteristics of the Proposed Material Alterations to Determine the Likely Significance of Environmental Effects

1. The Characteristics of the Plan Having Regard in particular to:	
Schedule 2A Criteria	Assessment
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 County Donegal Development Plan (including Proposed Materials to same) set a statutory policy and spatial framework for the Proper Planning the Sustainable Development of Donegal. It includes land use/development policies, objectives and spatial frameworks for a wide range of development issues and geographical areas (including town and villages, housing, infrastructure, economic development, tourism, natural and built heritage etc).</p> <p>Specifically, under S.34(2)(a)(i) of the Act requires that the Planning Authority have regard to the provisions of the development plan when making decisions on Planning applications.</p> <p>In doing so the Development Plan (including Proposed Material Alterations) sets a framework for the location, nature and size of a wide range of private and public development projects.</p>
The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy.	<p>The County Donegal Development Plan 2024-2030 (including Proposed Material Alterations) is set within a hierarchy of land use plans including Local Area Plans. In this regard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development plan will influence the preparation of new Local Area Plans for Dungloe, Ballyshannon, Bridgend, Carndonagh, Donegal Town and Killybegs. • The Ballybofey/Stranorlar Area Plan within the Development Plan will supersede the development policies and zonings for Ballybofey/Stranorlar section of the Seven Strategic Towns Local Area Plan 2018-2024.

	<p>In addition, the variation will inherently influence the implementation of 'superior' plans including the National Planning Framework, and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly Area.</p> <p>Other plans whose implementation may be impacted include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Development Plan 2018-2027. • Climate Action Plan 2024 (and subsequent plan) • Donegal Local Economic and Community 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>	<p>As stated the County Donegal Development Plan 2024-2030 (including Proposed Material Alterations) sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of County Donegal.</p> <p>In particular the Development Plan (and in particular several of the Proposed Material Alterations) include/affect a variety of policies/objectives which specifically relate to environmental considerations including, for example, and in summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CA-P-1: Integrate Green Infrastructure into new developments. • TV-P-7: Protect and enhance the unique physical character of historic town and village centres. • TV-P-8: Promote heritage -led regeneration in the County's towns and villages. • F-P-2: Not to support the discharge of additional surface water to combined sewers. • E-O-6: Support and facilitate proposals for hybrid energy systems. • E-P-7: Support and facilitate proposals for secure, appropriately scaled energy storage systems and infrastructure, • WE-P-2: The augmentation, upgrade and improvement of existing wind farms, windfarms under constructions, etc will be open to consideration. • BIO-O-2: Have regard to the objectives of any extant National Biodiversity Action Plan and National Peatlands Strategy • BIO-P-3: Protect features of local biodiversity value. • AH-p-3: Promote the maintenance and appropriate re-use of existing building stock. • AH-P-4: Protect the special built character and function of Heritage Towns.
<p>Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.</p>	<p>As indicated in the Environmental Report for the Draft Plan there are several Environmental Problems relevant to said Plan including, and in summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cumulative direct loss and fragmentation of habitats (e.g. loss of woodland, field boundaries, hedgerows, riparian habitats, wetlands and peatlands) arising from both dispersed development in the wider countryside and within and adjacent to urban areas. • Disturbance to species during the construction and operational phases of developments. • Threats to biodiversity flora and fauna due to poor water quality.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively high social deprivation rates in rural and peripheral parts of the County. • Urban sprawl/dispersed development pattern resulting in a spatial dislocation between the residential development and key services. • Disturbance and depletion of the overall soil resource arising from construction. • Water pollution/poor WFD water quality status in rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters arising from inadequate effluent treatment in urban and rural areas and diffuse run-off. • Extreme pluvial weather events whose frequency or severity may be related to climate change. • Increasing vulnerability of rural and urban areas in Donegal to climate change including from fluvial and coastal flooding. • Poor quality urban environment, and high levels vacancy and dereliction in many towns and villages. • Loss of RPS, NIAH and vernacular buildings as a result of neglect or unauthorised redevelopment/demolition. • Impacts on landscape and visual assets as a result of growth in one off rural housing particularly in the hinterlands of town and villages and certain coastal areas
<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 Development Plan (including the Proposed Material Alteration) sets out a land use/development policies/objectives and spatial frameworks for a wide range of development issues and geographical areas (including town and villages, housing, infrastructure, economic development, tourism, natural and built heritage etc). Consequently the plan may affect the implementation of European Legislation on the Environment including, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birds Directive (79/409/EEC as amended by 2009/147/EC). • Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). • Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC). • Floods Directive (Directive 2007/60/EC). • Strategic Environmental Assessment (Directive 2001/42/EC). • Environmental Impact Assessment (Directive 2011/92/EU). • Air quality (Directive 2008/50/EC).
<p>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</p>	
<p>The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.</p>	<p>The Development Plan (including the Proposed Material Alterations) will provide for a wider range of physical development including, residential, commercial, infrastructural tourism, etc which are likely to cause a range of environmental effects including, for example, and in summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The loss of biodiversity in both urban and rural areas arising from the loss of existing natural habitats and species, disturbance to species arising from site clearance and noise impacts during the construction and operational phases of development. • Noise pollution arising from the construction and operational phases of residential and commercial development and associated increases in traffic levels.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disturbance and depletion of the overall soil resource arising from construction. • Air pollution arising from additional traffic related to new residential and commercial development facilitated by the plan and construction of such development. • Impacts on water quality arising from contaminated runoff during construction and from effluent from new residential and commercial development. • Construction and transport related greenhouse gas emissions arising from residential, commercial, infrastructural and tourism developments facilitated by the plan. • Landscape and visual impacts arising from residential, commercial and energy developments (e.g. wind energy), <p>The frequency of such effects occurring will be influenced by the exact location, nature and design of such development, the implementation of environmental construction management practices etc.</p> <p>In terms of duration some effects would be limited to the construction phase of the project arising out of the variation (e.g. negative impacts on water quality arising from construction). However other effects such as; the loss or fragmentation habitat within Natura 2000 sites, the loss of habitats of species elsewhere, noise pollution, landscape impacts and impacts on cultural heritage may be long term and irreversible.</p> <p>The probability, of the effects on climate change will depend on such factors as the uptake of new opportunities for sustainable modes of transportation and the adoption of less polluting modes of vehicular transport such as electric vehicles.</p>
<p>The cumulative nature of the effects.</p>	<p>The scale and scope of development facilitated by the Development Plan (including Proposed Material Alterations) may give rise to additive and synergistic cumulative effects on biodiversity, water quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and landscape in combination with existing development and land use patterns.</p> <p>In this regard biodiversity is under significant threat in the wider environment as a result of existing development and agricultural practices, many of Donegal's water bodies have a poor or moderate WFD water quality status, we have a significant greenhouse gas emissions profile, and Donegal's landscape has already been significantly impacted by urban and rural sprawl.</p>
<p>The transboundary nature of the effects.</p>	<p>The residential, commercial, infrastructural and energy developments facilitated by the Development Plan (including Proposed Material Alterations) the potential to cause transboundary effects in Northern Ireland, for example: impacts on aquatic species (e.g. Salmon, Otter), downstream impacts on water quality (including on downstream Natura 2000 sites), and landscape impacts.</p>

<p>The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents).</p>	<p>The broad risks to human health and the environment have already been noted in the preceding sections of this assessment.</p> <p>However specifically the Development Plan (including the Proposed Material Alterations) for have the potential to give rise to risks to human health and the environment resulting from accidents including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spillage of hydrocarbons or chemical during the construction and operational phase of development projects resulting in direct or indirect impacts on human health or flora and fauna in the immediate area. • Health and safety risks associated with the physical construction of certain project.
<p>The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <p>a) Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage.</p> <p>b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values</p> <p>c) intensive land-use</p>	<p>Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage.</p> <p>Within the Donegal and within adjoining counties there are a significant number of areas of special natural characteristics or cultural heritage which may be impacted by development facilitated by the Development Plan (including the Proposed Material Alterations) including for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Areas of Conservation • Special Protection Areas. • Natural Heritage Areas. • Natural Heritage Areas and proposed Natural Heritage Areas. • Ramsar Sites • Areas of Especially High Scenic Amenity and High Scenic Amenity. • Built Heritage features including sites on the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP), structures on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) and structures on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH). • Archaeological Heritage including features on the Record of Monument and Places (RMP) and Record of Historic Monuments (RHM). <p>Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values</p> <p>The Water Framework Directive requires the achievement of good WFD water quality status in all Waterbodies by 2027. Currently many water bodies in Donegal have a poor or moderate WFD water quality status. In particular Waterbodies in aquatic/marine based Natura 2000 sites which have a poor or moderate WFD water quality status (e.g. River Finn, Lough Swilly estuary) may be vulnerable to addition pollution.</p> <p>The cumulative development facilitated by the plan (including residential, commercial, infrastructural) has the potential to generate water pollution from effluent discharges, diffuse urban runoff and sedimentation and thus hinder the achievement of these water quality standards.</p> <p>Intensive land-use</p> <p>The Development Plan (including Proposed Material Alterations) provides for new residential and commercial development on greenfield sites and thus has the potential to intensify land use on said sites.</p>

<p>The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status.</p>	<p>National Parks are designated on the basis of criteria defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) including that they contain '<i>a natural landscape of great beauty</i>'. Glenveagh National Park was designated by the Government of Ireland in 1984 and covers a significant portion of central Donegal. Neither the Development Plan (or the Proposed Material Alterations) provide for any significant development within the Park. However, impacts on the visual and scenic amenities of the park arising from the variation cannot be screened out without further assessment.</p> <p>The County Donegal Development Plan 2018 -2024 designates several scenic landscapes throughout Donegal including Especially High Scenic Amenity areas and High Scenic Amenity and. These scenic areas have the potential to be impacted by residential and commercial or infrastructural development facilitated by the plan.</p> <p>Otherwise, it is noted that there are no UNESCO World Heritage sites located within Donegal</p>
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3 Recommendation

The above assessment has been carried out pursuant to S.12(7)(aa) of the Planning and Development Act 2000(as amended) having regard to the criteria detailed in Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001(as amended).

RECOMMENDATION

Based on said assessment it is considered that the Proposed Material Alterations of the Draft County Donegal Development Plan 2024-2030 'would be likely to have significant effects on the environment' and it is therefore recommended that the Planning Authority determine that Strategic Environmental Assessment of same is required in accordance with S.12(7)(aa) of said Act.

This assessment has been based on the fact/consideration that the Development Plan (including the Proposed Material Alterations) including the development facilitated by same:

- Sets a statutory policy and spatial framework for the Proper Planning the Sustainable Development of Donegal and the Planning Authority is required to have regard to it when making planning decisions.
- Will influence the preparation of new Local Area Plans and the implementation of other higher level plans including the National Planning Framework, National Development Plan 2018-2027 and the Climate Action Plan.
- Includes a variety of policies/objectives related to environmental considerations.
- Is relevant to several Environmental Problems including the loss of biodiversity, water pollution, urban sprawl, water pollution, climate impacts, and landscape and visual impact
- Is relevant to the implementation of EU Environmental Legislation (e.g. Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, Water Framework Directive, Flood Directive etc).
- Has the potential to give rise to a number of environmental effects including:
 - The loss of biodiversity in both urban and rural areas arising from the loss of existing natural habitats and species, disturbance to species arising from site clearance and noise impacts during the construction and operational phases of development.
 - Noise pollution arising from the construction and operational phases of residential and commercial development and associated increases in traffic levels.
 - Disturbance and depletion of the overall soil resource arising from construction.
 - Air pollution arising from additional traffic generated by residential and commercial development of from the construction of such development.
 - Impact on water quality arising contaminated runoff during construction and from effluent generated or operational phases of such development.
 - Construction and transport related greenhouse gas emissions arising from residential, commercial, infrastructural and tourism development facilitated by the plan.
 - Landscape and visual impacts arising from residential, commercial and energy developments (e.g. wind energy),
- May give rise to additive and synergistic cumulative effects.
- Has the potential to give rise to transboundary effects in Norther Ireland including downstream effects on water quality and transboundary Natura 2000 sites.
- Poses potential risks to human health and the environment arising from accidents.
- Has the potential to impact valuable/vulnerable areas including Natura 2000 Sites, Natural Heritage Areas, Areas of Especially High Scenic Amenity and High Scenic Amenity etc and may affect the ability to met statutory Water Framework Directive water quality objectives.
- Has the potential to impact on visual and scenic amenities of areas of Especially High Scenic Amenity.



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4 Next Steps

If, on foot this report/recommendation, the Planning Authority determines that the Proposed Material Alterations 'would be likely to have significant effects on the environment' (and therefore Strategic Environmental Assessment is required) in accordance with S.12(7)(aa) of the Act the Authority shall take the following steps:

- Publish a newspaper notice of the making of said SEA Determination in accordance with S.12(7)(ac) and (ad)of the Act.
- Carry out Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Proposed Material Alterations in accordance with S.12(7)(ae) of said Act.