



Sligo County Council
Comhairle Chontae Shligigh



SEA Screening Report

relating to the

Draft Variation No. 1

of Sligo CDP 2024-2030

Sligo County Council
**Development
Planning Unit**

20 January 2026

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Executive Summary

Sligo County Council intends to vary its County Development Plan 2024-2030 to align it with the *Housing Growth Requirements: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (July 2025), which are ministerial guidelines issued in accordance with Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

It is also proposed to change the zoning objectives for two sites, in accordance with Sligo County Council's determinations in respect of submissions received on the Draft *Residential Zoned Land Tax* Map 2026.

The **Draft Variation No. 1 of Sligo CDP 2024-2030** consists of four parts. The first three parts seek to give effect to the Housing Growth Requirements (HGR) Guidelines. The fourth part addresses the zoning of the aforementioned two sites.

A Preliminary Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report was prepared in December 2025 for consultation with prescribed environmental authorities, as required by Article 13K(3) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

In accordance with Regulation 16 contained in the European Union (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2025, a screening for environmental assessment initiated under S.I. 436 of 2004 should be completed under the same Statutory Instrument, which amended the Planning and Development Regulations 2001.

The process of screening the Draft Variation No. 1 of Sligo CDP was initiated in December 2025, under Article 13(K)(1) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), which states:

"Where a planning authority proposes to make a variation of a development plan under section 13 of the Act, it shall, before giving notice under section 13(2) of the Act, consider whether or not the proposed variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking into account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A."

This Report, prepared for public consultation, outlines the SEA screening process to date, indicating the methodology used to evaluate the potential environmental effects of the Draft Variation (and of the Development Plan as varied).

The Report should be read in conjunction with the Draft Variation No. 1, the current Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 and its associated SEA Environmental Report.

The Draft Variation No. 1 can be viewed online and downloaded from the Council's Consultation Portal, <https://consult.sligococo.ie/en/browse> and from the Council's website.

The CDP and associated documents, including environmental reports, are available for viewing and downloading from Sligo County Council's website at www.sligococo.ie/cdp

Planning Authority's SEA screening determination

As required by Art. 13K(1) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), the Planning Authority has considered whether or not the Draft Variation No. 1 of Sligo CDP 2024-2030 would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking into account the relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the Planning Regulations.

Following consideration under sub-article 13K(1) and preliminary consultation with prescribed environmental authorities, the Planning Authority has determined that the Draft Variation No. 1 is NOT likely to have significant effects on the environment.

For the full text of the SEA Screening Determination, please refer to the separate Screening Determination signed by the Director of Services (Placemaking) on behalf of Sligo County Council.

1. Background to SEA screening of the Draft Variation

1.1 Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030

The Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 (CDP) was adopted in October 2024 and came into force on the 11 November 2024, except for those parts of the Plan which currently remain subject to a Draft Ministerial Direction issued on 8 November 2024, not yet finalised.

The CDP underwent a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and was subject to Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment as part of its preparation. All assessments have informed the policies and objectives of the Plan.

The Environmental Report documenting the SEA process concluded that the overall impact of implementing the policies and objectives of the Sligo CDP 2024-2030 would be neutral or positive for the environment.

The (consolidated) Natura Impact Report demonstrated that, upon the inclusion of suitable mitigation measures, the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 will not result in any adverse effects on the ecological integrity of any European site.

1.2 Description of the Draft Variation No. 1

It is proposed to vary the County Development Plan in the following manner:

- I. **replace the contents of CDP Section 3.1.3 Consistency with national housing supply targets** with updated wording to reflect the replacement of the Housing Supply Target allocation (2020) with the new Housing Growth Requirements target (2025), as per the S. 28 HGR Guidelines.
- II. **delete Table 5.2 Adjusted total housing demand in Co. Sligo during the Development Plan period** from CDP Chapter 5 Settlement Strategy (Vol. 1 of the CDP), because it has become redundant as a consequence of the 2025 HGR Guidelines replacing the S. 28 Housing Supply Target Methodology Guidelines (2020).
- III. **amend the Strategic Land Reserve Policies** included in **CDP Volume 2, Chapter 10 Urban development principles** to allow for consideration of planning applications for residential development on Strategic Land Reserve sites which are demonstrably serviced and where such development would also have regard to the Compact Growth policies of the CDP.
- IV. **rezone two sites** in accordance with the Planning Authority's determinations on submissions RZLT 25-01 and RZLT 25-02 received in 2025 following public consultation on the Draft Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT) Map 2026.

1.3 SEA screening overview

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

Screening is the process for determining whether a particular plan, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would thus warrant SEA.

As required by Article 13K(1) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), in December 2025 the Planning Authority carried out SEA screening of the Draft Variation No. 1 of Sligo CDP 2024-2030 in order to determine whether it would be likely – or not – to have significant environmental effects, taking into account the criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the Regulations.

A **preliminary version** of the **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report of the Draft Variation No. 1** was prepared for consultation with prescribed environmental authorities (see Section 1.7 below).

1.4 Appropriate Assessment

The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) requires that proposed plans and programmes (including amendments or variations) undergo screening for likely or potential effects on European Sites (also Natura 2000 sites) arising from their implementation.

Section 13(13) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) specifies that “*An appropriate assessment of a draft variation of a development plan shall be carried out in accordance with Part XAB [of the Act]*”.

In December 2025, the Draft Variation No. 1 was subject to screening for Appropriate Assessment. The screening process determined that the implementation of the Draft Variation no. 1 – individually or in combination with other plans or projects – is not likely to adversely affect the integrity of any European Sites. Therefore, AA is not required.

1.5 Flood Risk Assessment

The Sligo CDP 2024-2030 – which zones land for development in thirty-two settlements – has been subject to Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), ensuring the integration of flood risk management considerations into the Plan, as required by the Flood Risk Management Guidelines.

As the Draft Variation does not propose additional lands to be zoned for development, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is not required. The Plan, as varied, will continue to be consistent with the Flood Risk Management Guidelines.

1.6 Preliminary screening conclusion

The preliminary SEA screening examined the Draft Variation No. 1 against relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations, as amended – refer to Section 2 of this Report.

The Planning Authority also considered appropriate to evaluate each component of the Draft Variation No. 1 in the same manner as the original Development Plan policies/objectives and the adopted amendments – refer to Section 3 of this Report.

The evaluation found that the Draft Variation No. 1 would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects. The AA screening of the Draft Variation had likewise determined that a full Appropriate Assessment was not required.

Therefore, in December 2025, on the basis of the above screening conclusions, it was considered that the Draft Variation No. 1 of the CDP was not likely to have significant effects on the environment and did not require full SEA.

1.7 Consultation with prescribed authorities

In accordance with Art. 13K(3)(a), the following authorities (specified in Art. 13A(4)) were notified on 18 December 2025 that **a determination under sub-article (2) had not been made by the Planning Authority:**

- A. the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- B. the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- C. the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications
- D. Leitrim County Council
- E. Mayo County Council
- F. Roscommon County Council

Since the Draft Variation is not likely to affect fisheries or the marine environment, it was not considered necessary to notify the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The prescribed environmental authorities were invited to make submission or observations in relation to the Draft Variation No. 1, indicating whether (or not) the implementation of the Development plan, as varied, would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

The deadline for making submissions or observations was **4 pm on Monday, 19 January 2026**.

1.8 Response to consultation on preliminary SEA screening

1.8.1 Recommendations received from the Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) responded on 13 January 2026, acknowledging the Planning Authority's notice and attached Preliminary SEA Screening Report relating to the Draft Variation No. 1 of the Sligo CDP 2024-2030.

Regarding the SEA Determination, the EPA refers to "the SEA Regulations, Schedule 2 (S.I. No. 456 of 2025) or Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended), as appropriate", which "set out the 'Criteria for determining whether a Plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment'".

The submission recommends that the Planning Authority take into consideration the guidance available on the EPA website, and provides links to the relevant documents, including the [Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities](#) (DHLGH, 2022).

The EPA makes further generic recommendations regarding Strategic Environmental Assessment, referring to:

- alignment with the *National Planning Framework First Revision* and the NWRA's *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy*;
- sustainable development and alignment with the OPW's *Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2009);
- resources such as the EPA website, the EPA SEA WebGIS Tool and Catchments.ie;
- the requirement to carry out SEA screening for any amendments/changes made prior to finalisation of the CDP Variation process;
- the requirement to carry out Appropriate Assessment screening of the Draft Variation and the availability of the EPA AA GeoTool to help in this process.

Planning Authority's response to recommendations

The recommendations of the EPA have been taken into consideration and are reflected in the final form of this SEA Screening Report.

1.8.2 Recommendations received from the Development Applications Unit (DAU) of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

The Development Applications Unit (DAU) responded on 19 January 2026, acknowledging the Planning Authority's notice and attached Preliminary SEA Screening Report relating to the Draft Variation No. 1 of the Sligo CDP 2024-2030.

The Department's comments relate to nature conservation and include three recommendations, followed by extracts from a large number of documents (national guidance and EU legislation) addressing artificial lighting at night (ALAN). The recommendations are as follows:

- "The Department notes that Artificial Light At Night (ALAN) has not been addressed in the screening for SEA, and recommends consideration of the increasing impacts of ALAN in the screening for SEA. See further detail on Light Pollution below.

- *To ensure the Planning Authority can meet its International, European and National obligations in relation to the protection and restoration of biodiversity, the Department advises inclusions of measures that will ensure impacts to biodiversity will be assessed by the preparation of a non-statutory Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) for developments that do not require Environmental Impact Assessment.*
- *The Department recommends the council establishes a monitoring system to record Biodiversity Loss and Enhancement on all projects."*

Planning Authority's response to recommendations

The DAU/Department's recommendations are similar to those made on the Draft Sligo CDP 2024-2030, as part of Submission 124, received on 21 December 2023.

In response to that submission, the Chief Executive recommended amendments to the Draft CDP, as follows:

- inclusion of subsection 24.1.5 Artificial lighting at night;
- inclusion of three Artificial lighting at night policies (P-ALAN-1 to P-ALAN-3) and one Artificial lighting at night objective (O-ALAN-1);
- inclusion of eight additional requirements – under the heading "Minimising light pollution" – in Section 33.2.14 Illumination and spread of light (Chapter 33 Development management standards);
- inclusion of an additional policy for Nature conservation outside designated sites, P-NCODS-4, requiring applications for development that is likely to have significant impact on natural habitats or species to be accompanied by an ecological impact assessment/EclA (Chapter 24 Natural Heritage, Section 24.1.3 Nature conservation outside of designated sites).
- Inclusion of requirements for BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain) for projects on sites larger than 0.5 ha – in Sections 33.2.12 Site landscaping and retention of biodiversity, 33.3.7 Public open space in multi-unit housing schemes and 33.11 Energy and telecommunications infrastructure (Chapter 33 Development Management Standards).

All the above amendments were supported by the Elected Members of Sligo County Council and are now incorporated into the adopted Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030. The amendments were positively assessed in the SEA Environmental Report which accompanies the CDP.

An assessment of the degree of implementing biodiversity-related policies will be undertaken and the results will be published as part of the *Two-Year Progress Report*, as specified in the Development Plan Guidelines (2022).

In addition, the County Sligo Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030 contains actions and objectives designed to implement and monitor the implementation of biodiversity-related objectives and policies included in the CDP 2024-2030.

Furthermore, artificial lighting at night (ALAN), ecological impact assessment of proposed developments and monitoring of biodiversity loss/enhancement are all outside the scope of Draft Variation No. 1, which has as its main purpose the alignment of the CDP with updated housing targets.

The minor zoning amendments for two small pieces of land located in Ballysadare and Collooney, within village development limits, are intended to facilitate the retention of current agricultural uses, without significant effects on biodiversity.

It is not considered necessary to address ALAN, EclA and biodiversity loss or enhancement monitoring of all projects as part of this SEA Screening Report.

2. SEA Screening (Schedule 2A criteria)

The screening of the Draft Variation has been conducted in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 2A **Criteria for determining whether a plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment** of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended. (S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011).

The criteria are set out under two principal headings:

- characteristics of the Plan; and
- characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected.

The corresponding sub-criteria are addressed in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 below.

2.1 Characteristics of the Plan

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

The Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030, as adopted, sets a framework for development by zoning land for specific purposes in thirty-two settlements. It also provides guidance regarding the nature, location, and size and operating conditions for certain activities which involve physical interventions in the environment.

The current CDP includes a substantial Strategic Land Reserve, containing sites considered suitable for residential development over a longer term, beyond the life of the CDP. Their inclusion in the SLR was due mainly to certain deficiencies in service infrastructure.

The Draft Variation No. 1 introduces the following changes:

- a new housing target for the County, increasing from 4029 units to 4032 units for the six-year life of the CDP; this insignificant increase does not require additional residential zoning;
- alterations to the policies which set out criteria for residential development on sites included in the Strategic Land Reserve; these alterations would support residential development on SLR lands which become fully serviced during the life of the CDP;
- rezoning of two small parcels of land from nRES (new residential uses) to GB (Green Belt) and BIE (Business, Industry, Enterprise), thus allowing the current (agricultural) use of the lands to continue unchanged.

No additional land is proposed to be zoned for development, and no other Plan policies or objectives are proposed to be altered.

The extent to which the Draft Variation No. 1 modifies the framework for projects or other activities – whether in terms of location, nature, size, operating conditions, or resource allocation – is considered minor.

The characteristics of the plan having regard to the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy

The current Sligo County Development Plan sits within a hierarchy of plans, programmes, legislation and guidelines that comprise high-level environmental protection and management policies and objectives.

The Plan must be consistent with these higher-level plans, in particular with the National Planning Framework Revision (2025) and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's Regional and Social Economic Strategy (NWRA RSES).

The main purpose of the Draft Variation No. 1 is to ensure the Development Plan's consistency with the NPF Revision through the incorporation of an updated housing target, and through the alteration of SLR policies to facilitate the implementation of the housing target.

While the CDP has the capacity to influence lower-level plans and development projects, the degree to which the Draft Variation No. 1 would contribute to such influence is considered minor and unlikely to result in significant environmental effects.

The Council intends to prepare an Urban Area Plan (UAP) for Sligo Town and Environs, which is a designated Regional Growth Centre in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). The UAP will include specific policies and objectives tailored to Sligo Town and designed to support its long-term development. As a lower-level plan, the UAP will have to be consistent with the various provisions of the CDP, as varied, that relate to sustainable development and the protection and management of the environment.

In accordance with planning legislation, the UAP will be subject to SEA screening and possibly full strategic environmental assessment. Any potential impacts of the UAP on the environment will be assessed at that stage.

The characteristics of the plan having regard to the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development

The content of the Development Plan has been informed by SEA, AA and SFRA undertaken as parallel processes in tandem with each stage of the Plan preparation, thereby ensuring full integration of environmental considerations in the promotion of sustainable development.

The Draft Variation No. 1, while not relevant for the integration of environmental considerations in the Development Plan, is consistent with the sustainable development strategies, policies and objectives of the Plan.

Having regard to the SEA of the CDP, it is considered that the Plan – as varied – would not result in significant environmental effects.

The characteristics of the plan having regard to the environmental problems relevant to the plan

The environmental problems relevant to the Sligo CDP are detailed in the Strategic Environmental Assessment prepared for the Plan and have been addressed in the resulting SEA/Environmental Report finalised in 2024.

The Draft Variation No. 1, if adopted in its currently proposed form, will not change the assessment and conclusion of the CDP Environmental Report of 2024.

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 Draft Variation No. 1 must be considered in the context of the Sligo CDP, which contains certain policies reflecting national legislation derived from EU legislation on the environment.

The Development Plan refers, where appropriate, to the EU Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the Bathing Water Directive, the Major Accidents Directive etc. The Plan contains policies and objectives seeking to implement relevant EU and national environmental legislation.

The CDP sections dealing with the implementation of EU Directives and corresponding national legislation are not proposed to be amended.

The Draft Variation No. 1, on its own, is not relevant for the implementation of any EU or national legislation on the environment, but the relevance of the CDP – as varied – remains unchanged.

2.2 Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected

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 Draft Variation No. 1 does not involve the zoning of any additional land for development. It does not change the duration, frequency or reversibility of the effects of (urban) development on the area covered by the CDP, but it might generate a slight increase in the probability of such development.

All the land parcels potentially affected by the Draft Variation No. 1 have been identified for long-term development, have been included in the current Plan's Strategic Land Reserve and were subject to the SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.

The Draft Variation No. 1 does not alter in any way the conclusions of the SEA for the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 and is not likely to result in significant environmental effects.

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

The Draft Variation No. 1 does not involve the zoning of any additional land for development. All the land parcels potentially affected by the Draft Variation No. 1 have been identified for long-term development, have been included in the current Plan's Strategic Land Reserve and were subject to the SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.

The Draft Variation No. 1 does not alter in any way the conclusions of the SEA for the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 and is not likely to result in significant cumulative effects on the environment.

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

The Draft Variation No. 1, like the Sligo CDP 2024-2030, will not have effects beyond the area of County Sligo. The nature of the Draft Variation precludes the possibility of transboundary effects.

The Draft Variation No. 1 will not result in national, regional or inter-county transboundary effects, over and above the effects of the strategy, policies and objectives of the CDP.

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)

The Draft Variation No. 1 does not involve the zoning of any additional land for development. All the land parcels potentially affected by the Draft Variation No. 1 have been identified for long-term development, have been included in the current Plan's Strategic Land Reserve and were subject to the SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.

The Draft Variation No. 1 does not alter in any way the conclusions of the SEA for the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 and is not likely to result in risks to human health or the environment.

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
- (b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values
- (c) intensive land-use

The Draft Variation No. 1 does not involve any changes to CDP policies or objectives related to natural or cultural heritage (Chapter 24 and 25), to environmental quality (Chapters 30 and 32) or to the intensification of any land uses.

All the land parcels potentially affected by the Draft Variation No. 1 have been identified for long-term development, have been included in the current Plan's Strategic Land Reserve and were subject to the SEA as part of the plan-making and adoption process.

The Draft Variation No. 1 does not alter in any way the conclusions of the SEA for the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 and is not likely to result in negative effects on natural or cultural heritage, in exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values or in intensive land uses beyond what is envisaged in the current Development Plan.

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.

No additional lands are proposed to be zoned for development. The Draft Variation No. 1 would not result in any negative effect on designated EU-level or internationally / nationally protected areas or landscapes.

3. Evaluation of the Draft Variation No. 1

3.1 Methodology

The Development Plan's policies and objectives, including the adopted amendments arising from public consultation in 2024, were evaluated in the Environmental Report (2024) using a set of Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs).

The interactions between the SEOs and the policies and objectives of the Plan determine the likely significant effects of implementing the Plan. These effects include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects.

It was considered appropriate to evaluate each component of the Draft Variation No. 1 in the same manner as the original Plan policies/objectives and the adopted amendments.

Table 3.1 below (same as Table 8.1 on pages 95-96 in the Environmental Report of 2024) lists the SEOs developed from international, national and regional policies which generally govern environmental protection objectives.

Table 3.1 Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs)

Environmental component	SEO code	Strategic Environmental Objectives
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	BFF	▪ To preserve, protect, maintain and, where appropriate, enhance the terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity, particularly EU designated sites and protected species. ▪ Ensure no adverse effects on the integrity of any European site, with regard to its qualifying interests, associated conservation status, structure and function. ▪ Safeguard national, regional and local designated sites and supporting features which function as stepping stones for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species. ▪ Enhance biodiversity in line with the National Biodiversity Strategy and its targets. ▪ To protect, maintain and conserve the County's natural capital
Population and Human Health	PHH	▪ Promote economic growth to encourage retention of working age population and funding of sustainable development and environmental protection and management. ▪ Ensure that existing population and planned growth is matched with the required public infrastructure and the required services. ▪ Safeguard the County's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being
Soil (and Land)	S	▪ Protect soils against pollution and prevent degradation of the soil resource. ▪ Promote the sustainable use of infill and brownfield sites over the use of greenfield within the County. ▪ Safeguard areas of prime agricultural land and designated geological sites
Water	W	▪ Ensure that the status of water bodies is protected, maintained and improved in line with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive ▪ Ensure water resources are sustainably managed to deliver proposed regional and County growth targets in the context of existing and projected water supply and wastewater capacity constraints ensuring the protection of receiving environments. ▪ Avoid inappropriate zoning and development in areas at risk of flooding and areas that are vulnerable to current and future erosion, including coastal areas. ▪ Integrate sustainable water management solutions (such as SUDS, porous surfacing and green roofs) into development proposals

Environmental component	SEO code	Strategic Environmental Objectives
Material Assets	MA	- Optimise existing infrastructure and provide new infrastructure to match population distribution proposals in the County. - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all which encourages a broad energy generation mix to ensure security of supply – wind, solar, hydro, biomass, energy from waste and traditional fossil fuels. - Promote the circular economy, reduce waste, and increase energy efficiencies. - Ensure there is adequate sewerage and drainage infrastructure in place to support new development. - Reduce the energy demand from the transport sector and support moves to electrification of road and rail transport modes. - Encourage the transition to a zero-carbon economy by facilitating the development of a grid infrastructure to support renewables and international connectivity. - Reduce the average energy consumption per capita including promoting energy efficient buildings, retrofitting, smart- buildings, cities and grids
Air	A	- To avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment as a whole resulting from emissions to air from all sectors with particular reference to emissions from transport, residential heating, industry and agriculture. - Maintain and promote continuing improvement in air quality through the reduction of emissions and promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency. - Promote continuing improvement in air quality. - Reduction of emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, ammonia and fine particulate matter which are responsible for acidification, eutrophication and ground-level ozone pollution. - Meet Air Quality Directive standards for the protection of human health – Air Quality Directive - Significantly decrease noise pollution by 2020 and move closer to WHO recommended levels
Climatic Factors	C	- To minimise emissions of greenhouse gasses - Integrate sustainable design solutions into the County's infrastructure (e.g. energy efficient buildings; green infrastructure) - Contribute towards the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in line with national targets. - Promote development resilient to the effects of climate change. - Promote the use of renewable energy, energy efficient development and increased use of public transport
Cultural Heritage	CH	Protect places, features, buildings and landscapes of cultural, archaeological or architectural heritage
Landscape	L	To implement the Plan's framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes having regard to the European Landscape Convention

3.2 Determination of potential interactions

Three of the four parts of the Draft Variation No. 1 have been evaluated as having no interaction with the status of SEOs. In Part IV, one of the two proposed rezonings– RZLT-01, rezoning from eRES (existing residential uses) to GB (green belt) – is likely to have a positive interaction with two SEOs.

Part I – Replacement of Section 3.1.1 in Chapter 3 (Core Strategy Statement)

This update to the narrative in Chapter 3 reflects the replacement of the Housing Supply Target Methodology (HSTM) Guidelines (2020) with the Housing Growth Requirements (HGR) Guidelines (2025) and the corresponding modification of the County housing target from 4,029 (671.5 units per year) to 4,032 (672 units per year) for the duration of the Development Plan. Such update to the text of the CDP would not generate any interactions with the status of the SEOs.

Part II – Deletion of Table 5.2 from Chapter 5 (Settlement Strategy)

Table 5.2 details the method of calculating the “adjusted total housing demand” for the six-year Development Plan period. This method (and the corresponding table) became obsolete in July 2025, when the HGR Guidelines replaced the HSTM Guidelines. The deletion of Table 5.2 would not result in any interactions with the status of SEOs.

Part III – Amendments to Strategic Land Reserve (SLR) policies in Chapter 10

The policy P-SLR-4, which specifies that lands can be released from the SLR only by varying the Development Plan, is to be deleted. This would not interfere with the status of SEOs.

P-SLR-3 is to be incorporated into P-SLR-2, replacing one of the conditions. The substantive requirements of P-SLR-2 remain largely unchanged, as the policy would continue to require any development proposal on SLR lands to demonstrate that the lands are fully serviced. In addition, such development proposals must have regard to the Compact Growth policies of the Plan.

The principal change in P-SLR-2 is the elimination of the clause specifying that land can be released from the SLR “only in exceptional circumstances”, such as if the Planning Authority considers that “the development of zoned lands is progressing faster than expected ... etc.”

Since the zoning of all lands included in the SLR has been subject to SEA, AA and SFRA as part of the Development Plan preparation, the conclusions of the respective earlier assessments would not change. The impacts of any projects or lower-level plans will be evaluated through the development management process or as part of a lower-tier environmental assessment.

Any potential environmental impacts will be determined by the nature and extent of individual projects and site-specific environmental factors. Avoidance of conflict is dependent upon the Council managing development in a way which does not conflict with the status of SEOs. Provided that other Plan measures are complied with, any potential conflicts with SEOs would be avoided or mitigated in full.

Part IV – rezoning of two sites within settlement development limits

Both sites – one in Ballysadare, the other one in Collooney – are located within the development limits of the respective villages. The rezoning is proposed on foot of Sligo County Council’s determinations after public consultation on the Draft Residential Land Tax Map 2026.

In Ballysadare, the rezoning of a portion of the site RZLT 25-01 from eRES (existing residential uses) to GB (green belt) reflects the current use of the land, which – according to the landowners – will remain unchanged for the duration of the Development Plan. Removing the residential zoning objective from this piece of land is likely to have positive effects on soil and wildlife, therefore it is likely to generate a small improvement in the status of the corresponding SEOs: Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna (BFF) and Soil (S).

In Collooney, the rezoning of a portion of the site RZLT 25-02 from nRES (new residential uses) to BIE (business, industry, enterprise), while not reflecting the current (agricultural) use of the lands, matches the zoning of the adjoining lands to the south, which are in the same ownership. The intention of the landowners is to retain the current use for the remaining life of the Development Plan. This is not likely to generate any interactions with the status of SEOs.

3.3 Evaluation of the Draft Variation component parts

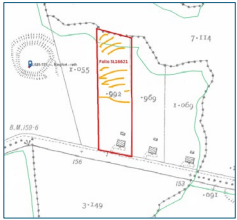
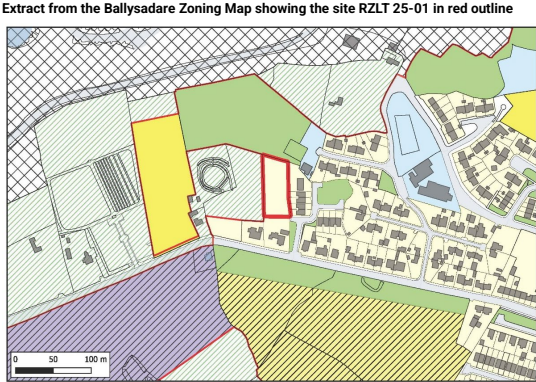
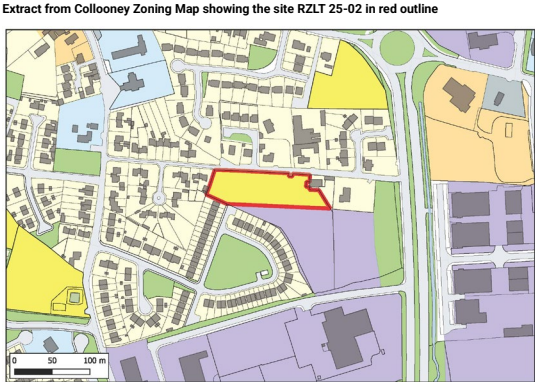
Description of the Draft Variation component	Likely to Improve the status of SEOs	Probable conflict with status of SEOs, unlikely to be mitigated	Potential conflict with status of SEOs, likely to be mitigated	No likely interaction with status of SEOs
I. Replacement of Section 3.1.3 in Chapter 3 (Core Strategy Statement)				
In Volume 1, Chapter 3 of the CDP (Core Strategy Statement), Section 3.1.3 Consistency with national housing supply targets shall be updated to reflect the replacement of the Housing Supply Target allocation (2020) with the new Housing Growth Requirements allocation (2025), as per the S. 28 HGR Guidelines, and to clearly indicate the new housing growth requirement for County Sligo. The following subsection shall be deleted: 3.1.3 Consistency with national housing supply targets The Core Strategy requirement is that each development plan must set out a clear housing supply target for the relevant six-year plan period calculated in accordance with the methodology prescribed in the Housing Supply Target Methodology Guidelines (HST Guidelines), which were issued by the DHLGH in 2020 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). For County Sligo, the total adjusted demand corresponding to the Plan period is 4,029 units. The calculations are detailed in Chapter 5 Settlement Strategy, Table 5.2.				All SEOs

Description of the Draft Variation component	Likely to Improve the status of SEOs	Probable conflict with status of SEOs, unlikely to be mitigated	Potential conflict with status of SEOs, likely to be mitigated	No likely interaction with status of SEOs
The following subsection shall be inserted: 3.1.3 Consistency with national housing growth requirements New guidance on the implementation of the NPF was published in July 2025 in the form of <i>"Housing Growth Requirements – Guidelines for Planning Authorities"</i> (HGR Guidelines). These are Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). The HGR Guidelines translate the national and regional projections contained in the NPF (First Revision 2025) to annual housing growth requirements for each county. The new annual housing growth requirement to 2034 for County Sligo is 672 units per year, i.e. 4,032 units for the six-year life of the current Development Plan. It is a <i>Policy and Objective</i> of the HGR Guidelines that an additional provision of up to 50% be incorporated into the Development Plan over and above the new housing requirement for the Plan period. Applying the full 50% additional provision to the housing requirement for County Sligo results in an annual housing requirement of 1,008 units, i.e. 6,048 units over six years.				

Description of the Draft Variation component	Likely to Improve the status of SEOs	Probable conflict with status of SEOs, unlikely to be mitigated	Potential conflict with status of SEOs, likely to be mitigated	No likely interaction with status of SEOs																																																
II. Deletion of Table 5.2 from Chapter 5 (Settlement Strategy)																																																				
Table 5.2 Adjusted total housing demand in Co. Sligo during the Development Plan period shall be deleted from Chapter 5 Settlement Strategy (Vol. 1 of the CDP), because it has become redundant as a consequence of the 2025 Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines replacing the S. 28 Housing Supply Target Methodology Guidelines (2020). <table><tr><th colspan="4">Table 5.2 Adjusted total housing demand in Co. Sligo during the Development Plan period</th></tr><tr><th colspan="2">Plan period: Q3 2024 to Q3 2030 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2030</th><th>Annual average households</th><th>Total households</th></tr><tr><td>A</td><td>ESRI NPF scenario projected new household demand 2017 to Q2 2030 (end of Plan period)</td><td>896 p.a. (over the 6 years of the Plan)</td><td>5,381 (from ESRI research)</td></tr><tr><td>B</td><td>Actual new housing supply 2017 to Q4 2022 and estimated future delivery in 2023 and Q1-Q2 2024</td><td></td><td>1,345 (from CSO completion data and estimation of 2024 delivery)</td></tr><tr><td>C</td><td>Homeless households (latest data from January 2023 Homeless Report), and unmet demand as at Census 2016</td><td></td><td>59 (from DHLGH and Census) (was 43 originally)</td></tr><tr><td>D</td><td>Plan Housing Demand = Total (A-B+C) (Projected ESRI NPF demand - new completions) + Unmet demand</td><td>682 p.a.</td><td>4,095</td></tr><tr><td>E</td><td>Potential adjustment 1 to end 2026 portion of plan period to facilitate convergence to NPF strategy (where justified)</td><td>Mid-point between ESRI NPF and baseline scenarios to 2026 in lieu of A above</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>E1</td><td>ESRI Baseline scenario projected new household demand 2017 to Q4 2026</td><td></td><td>4,056 (from ESRI research)</td></tr><tr><td>E2</td><td>ESRI NPF scenario projected new household demand 2027 to Q2 2030 (Plan end)</td><td></td><td>1,315 (from ESRI research)</td></tr><tr><td>E3</td><td>Mid-point between A-E2 (ESRI NPF and Baseline scenarios to Q4 2026)</td><td></td><td>4,000</td></tr><tr><td>E4</td><td>Adjusted Total Plan Demand calculation based on E2 + E3 in lieu of A above</td><td>671</td><td>4,029 (E2 + E3 - B + C = total)</td></tr><tr><td>F</td><td>NOT APPLICABLE IN THIS EXAMPLE Potential adjustment 2 to end 2026 portion of plan period to facilitate convergence to NPF strategy, applicable where B exceeds or is close to D (where justified)</td><td>Mid-point between ESRI NPF and baseline scenarios to 2026 in lieu of A above, plus up to 25%</td><td></td></tr></table>	Table 5.2 Adjusted total housing demand in Co. Sligo during the Development Plan period				Plan period: Q3 2024 to Q3 2030 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2030		Annual average households	Total households	A	ESRI NPF scenario projected new household demand 2017 to Q2 2030 (end of Plan period)	896 p.a. (over the 6 years of the Plan)	5,381 (from ESRI research)	B	Actual new housing supply 2017 to Q4 2022 and estimated future delivery in 2023 and Q1-Q2 2024		1,345 (from CSO completion data and estimation of 2024 delivery)	C	Homeless households (latest data from January 2023 Homeless Report), and unmet demand as at Census 2016		59 (from DHLGH and Census) (was 43 originally)	D	Plan Housing Demand = Total (A-B+C) (Projected ESRI NPF demand - new completions) + Unmet demand	682 p.a.	4,095	E	Potential adjustment 1 to end 2026 portion of plan period to facilitate convergence to NPF strategy (where justified)	Mid-point between ESRI NPF and baseline scenarios to 2026 in lieu of A above		E1	ESRI Baseline scenario projected new household demand 2017 to Q4 2026		4,056 (from ESRI research)	E2	ESRI NPF scenario projected new household demand 2027 to Q2 2030 (Plan end)		1,315 (from ESRI research)	E3	Mid-point between A-E2 (ESRI NPF and Baseline scenarios to Q4 2026)		4,000	E4	Adjusted Total Plan Demand calculation based on E2 + E3 in lieu of A above	671	4,029 (E2 + E3 - B + C = total)	F	NOT APPLICABLE IN THIS EXAMPLE Potential adjustment 2 to end 2026 portion of plan period to facilitate convergence to NPF strategy, applicable where B exceeds or is close to D (where justified)	Mid-point between ESRI NPF and baseline scenarios to 2026 in lieu of A above, plus up to 25%					All SEOs
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Description of the Draft Variation component	Likely to Improve the status of SEOs	Probable conflict with status of SEOs, unlikely to be mitigated	Potential conflict with status of SEOs, likely to be mitigated	No likely interaction with status of SEOs
III. Amendments to Strategic Land Reserve policies in Chapter 10				
The Strategic Land Reserve Policies included in CDP Volume 2, Chapter 10 Urban development principles should be amended to allow for consideration of planning applications for residential development on SLR sites which are demonstrably serviced and where such development would also comply with Compact Growth policies of the CDP. Existing SLR policies in Chapter 10 (Urban development principles) (the text in red shall be deleted): Strategic Land Reserve policies It is the policy of Sligo County Council to: P-SLR-1 Restrict development on lands included in the Strategic Land Reserve, which are shown on the Zoning Maps pertaining to the towns and villages plans contained in this CDP. P-SLR-2 Release lands from the Strategic Land Reserve only in the following exceptional circumstances: A. The Planning Authority considers that the development of zoned lands is progressing faster than expected and a shortage of residential land may arise during the lifetime of the CDP, as a result of zoned land not coming forward for development due to demonstrable constraints. B. The lands have been identified for the provision of social and affordable housing as part of the Local Authority Housing Delivery Action Plan. P-SLR-3 Any land release from the SLR shall be supported by factual evidence demonstrating that the lands proposed to be released are/have become fully serviced and can deliver residential development within the lifetime of the Plan, thus facilitating progress towards the housing targets for the respective settlement. P-SLR-4 The land release shall be done using the development plan variation procedure.				All SEOs

Description of the Draft Variation component	Likely to Improve the status of SEOs	Probable conflict with status of SEOs, unlikely to be mitigated	Potential conflict with status of SEOs, likely to be mitigated	No likely interaction with status of SEOs
Proposed amendments to SLR policies (the text in blue shall be inserted): Strategic Land Reserve policies It is the policy of Sligo County Council to: P-SLR-1 Restrict development on lands included in the Strategic Land Reserve, which are shown on the Zoning Maps pertaining to the towns and villages plans contained in this CDP. P-SLR-2 Exceptions to the above policy will only be considered in the following circumstances: A. The lands have been identified for the provision of social and affordable housing as part of the Local Authority Housing Delivery Action Plan OR B. There is factual evidence that such lands are/have become fully serviced in terms of water supply, wastewater and transport infrastructure. Any proposal for residential or mixed-use development (including residential) on such lands must have regard to the Compact Growth policies set out in Section 10.4, Chapter 10 (this chapter) of the Development Plan. The proposal must also demonstrate capability to deliver residential development within the lifetime of the Plan, thus facilitating progress towards the housing targets for the respective settlement.				

Description of the Draft Variation component	Likely to Improve the status of SEOs	Probable conflict with status of SEOs, unlikely to be mitigated	Potential conflict with status of SEOs, likely to be mitigated	No likely interaction with status of SEOs
IV. Rezoning of sites RZLT 25-01 and RZLT 25-02				
RZLT 25-01: The rear portion of the site (0.2 ha) located in Ballysadare shall be rezoned from “existing residential use” (eRES) to “green belt” (GB). RZLT 25-02: The northern portion of the site (0.61 ha) located in Collooney shall be rezoned from “new residential uses” (nRES) to “business, industry, enterprise” (BIE).  Map from submission RZLT 25-01  Extract from the Ballysadare Zoning Map showing the site RZLT 25-01 in red outline  Map from submission RZLT 25-02  Extract from the Collooney Zoning Map showing the site RZLT 25-02 in red outline	RZLT-01: BFF, S			RZLT-02: All SEOs

APPENDIX

Correspondence received from prescribed environmental authorities

in response to the Planning Authority's request for comments
on the preliminary SEA screening determination relating to the
Draft Variation No. 1 of Sligo CDP 2024-2030

Email: dpu@sligococo.ie

Mihaela Davidescu
Senior Executive Planner
Development Planning Unit
Sligo County Council
Sligo City Hall
Quay Street
Co Sligo

13th January 2026

Our Ref: 251206.1

Re. SEA Screening for Variation no. 1 of Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030

Dear Sir/Madam,

We acknowledge your notice, dated 18th December 2025 in relation to the Variation No. 1 of Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening.

In our role as an SEA environmental authority under the SEA Regulations, we focus on promoting the full and transparent integration of the findings of the Environmental Assessment into plans and programmes¹ and advocating that the key environmental challenges for Ireland are addressed as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme. Our functions do not include approving or enforcing SEAs or plans or programmes.

As a priority, we focus our efforts on reviewing and commenting on key sector plans. For land use plans at county and local level, we provide a 'self-service approach' via our guidance document '[SEA of Local Authority Land Use Plans – EPA Recommendations and Resources](#)'. This document is updated regularly and sets out our key recommendations for integrating environmental considerations into Local Authority land use plans. In finalising your SEA screening determination, we suggest that you take this guidance

¹ 'Plan or programme' is defined in the SEA Directive as including modifications to plans or programmes, which in the Irish context, includes material amendments/alterations, variations etc.

document into account and incorporate the relevant recommendations as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme.

SEA Determination

If a proposed SEA determination hasn't been made regarding the plan or programme, you should determine whether implementing the plan or programme would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

The SEA Regulations, Schedule 2 (S.I. No. 456 of 2025) or Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended), as appropriate, set out the '*Criteria for determining whether a Plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment*' to use to determine whether the plan or programme would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Guidance on the SEA process, including an SEA pack and checklist, is available on our website at: <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-resources-and-guidance/>.

We recommend that you take the available guidance into account in making your SEA Screening Determination and incorporate the relevant recommendations as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme.

EPA SEA Screening Guidance

Our [*Good Practice Guidance for Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\) Screening*](#) (EPA, 2021) provides specific stand-alone guidance to assist plan or programme makers and SEA practitioners. It focuses primarily on plans/programmes in the non-land use sector in Ireland and includes an elaboration of the steps needed for screening, the legislative landscape underpinning SEA screening, and step-by-step process and templates to assist in preparing the required documentation.

Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Planning Authorities

The [*Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities*](#) (DHLGH, 2022) provides advice on carrying out SEA in the land-use planning sector. These plans comprise regional, county and local plans, including Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, County or City Development Plans, variations of Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Planning Schemes for Strategic Development Zones. The Guidelines replace previous guidance for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities published in 2004.

Alignment with the National Planning Framework First Revision

National Policy Objective 1 of the National Planning Framework (NPF) First Revision² requires that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the NPF are subject to the relevant environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA, SFRA and AA as appropriate. Where existing zoning in the County Development Plan (CDP) does not accommodate the proposed increase in housing targets, as set out in the NPF,

² DHLGH, 2025. [The National Planning Framework](#)

for the county and has not been previously assessed under SEA, AA, and SFRA at an appropriate level, then consideration should be given to these assessments for additional zoning and/or rezoning of lands that have potential for significant environmental effects.

In particular, we highlight potential for significant negative effects on population and human health, water quality (see Water Action Plan³) and flood risk, biodiversity, flora and fauna, landscape and soil. In addition, climatic factors should be considered with reference to the most up to date Climate Action Plan and relevant Flood Risk Management Plan. The availability and capacity of existing critical infrastructure including wastewater and water supply should be considered in the context of the likely population increase associated with the proposed housing target being accommodated.

You're also referred to the Environmental Monitoring set out in Table 7.1 of the NPF's SEA Statement⁴. This monitoring should be reflected, where relevant and appropriate, in the context of future, environmental monitoring and related reporting associated with the revised CDP implementation.

Sustainable Development

In proposing and in implementing the plan or programme, you should ensure that the plan or programme is consistent with the need for proper planning and sustainable development. Adequate and appropriate critical service infrastructure should be in place, or required to be put in place, to service any development proposed and authorised during the lifetime of the plan or programme.

In considering the plan or programme, you should take into account the need to align with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as incorporating any relevant recommendations in sectoral, regional and local climate adaptation plans.

You should also ensure that the plan or programme aligns with any key relevant higher-level plans and programmes and is consistent with the relevant objectives and policy commitments of the National Planning Framework and the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

The Plan should also align with the OPW's '[The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities](#)' (OPW, 2009), as relevant and appropriate, in the zoning and development of lands.

Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024

In 2024, the EPA published the latest iteration of our 4-yearly State of the Environment Report. This report should be considered, and relevant aspects integrated as appropriate, in implementing the Plan outputs/ recommendations. It is available at:

³ DHLGH, 2024. [River Basin Management Plan 2022 - 2027](#)

⁴ DHLGH, 2024. [First Revision of the National Planning Framework](#)

<https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/state-of-environment-report/>.

Available Guidance & Resources

Our website contains various SEA resources and guidance, including:

- SEA process guidance and checklists;
- Inventory of spatial datasets relevant to SEA;
- Topic and sector specific SEA guidance (including [SEA and Integration Guidance](#) (EPA, 2025), [Good practice note on Cumulative Effects Assessment](#) (EPA, 2020), [Developing and Assessing Alternatives in SEA](#) (EPA, 2015), and [Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment](#) (EPA, 2012)).

You can access these guidance notes and other resources at: <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-topic-and-sector-specific-guidance/>

EPA SEA WebGIS Tool

Our SEA WebGIS Tool has been updated recently and is now available at <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>. It allows an indicative report on key aspects of the environment in a specific geographic area to be produced. It is intended to assist public authorities in SEA screening and scoping exercises.

Catchments.ie

Our <https://www.catchments.ie/maps/> website provides a single point of access to water quality and catchment data from the National WFD monitoring programme.

Future amendments to the plan or programme

Where changes to the plan or programme are made prior to finalisation, or where modifications to the plan or programme are proposed following its adoption, these should be screened for potential for likely significant effects in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 2 (S.I. No. 456 of 2025) or Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended) of the SEA Regulations, as appropriate.

Appropriate Assessment

You should ensure that the plan or programme complies with the requirements of the Habitats Directive where relevant. Where an Appropriate Assessment is required, the key findings and recommendations should be incorporated into the SEA and the plan or programme.

EPA AA GeoTool

Our AA GeoTool application has been developed in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It allows users to select a location, specify a search area and gather available information for each European Site within the area. It is available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool>.

Environmental Authorities

Under the SEA Regulations, prior to making your SEA determination you should consult with:

- Environmental Protection Agency;
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage,
- Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment; and,
- Minister for Agriculture, Food, and the Marine.

For land use plans covered under S.I. No. 456 of 2025, you should also consult with:

- any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous to the area of a planning authority which prepared a draft plan, proposed variation or local area plan.

SEA Determination

As soon as practicable after making your determination as to whether SEA is required or not, you should make a copy of your decision, including, if appropriate, the reasons for not requiring an environmental assessment, available for public inspection in your offices and on your website. You should also send a copy of your determination to the relevant environmental authorities consulted.

If you have any queries or need further information in relation to this submission, please contact me directly. I would be grateful if you could send an email confirming receipt of this submission to: sea@epa.ie.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Eleanor Ryan'.

*Strategic Environmental Assessment Unit
Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring*

Eleanor Ryan



Planning Ref: FP-2025-133
(Please quote in all related correspondence)

19 January 2025

Director of Services – Planning
Sligo County Council
County Hall
Riverside
Sligo
F91 Y763

Via email: dpu@sligococo.ie

Re: Notification under Article 28 (Part 4) or Article 82 (Part 8) of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended.

Proposed Development: Consultation on SEA screening of the Draft Variation No. 1 of Sligo CDP 2024-2030.

A chara

I refer to correspondence received in connection with the above. Outlined below are heritage-related observations/recommendations co-ordinated by the Development Applications Unit under the stated headings.

Nature Conservation

The following observations are made by the Department in its role as a prescribed body under planning legislation and as the authority with overarching responsibility for nature conservation and the nature directives and wider biodiversity.

The Department acknowledges the submission of: Consultation on SEA screening of the Draft Variation No. 1 of Sligo CDP 2024-2030

- The Department notes that Artificial Light At Night (ALAN) has not been addressed in the screening for SEA, and recommends consideration of the increasing impacts of ALAN in the screening for SEA. See further detail on Light Pollution below.
- To ensure the Planning Authority can meet its International, European and National obligations in relation to the protection and restoration of biodiversity, the Department advises inclusions of measures that will ensure impacts to biodiversity will be assessed by the preparation of a non-statutory Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) for developments that do not require Environmental Impact Assessment.

Aonad na nIarratas ar Fhorbairt

Development Applications Unit

Oifigí an Rialtais

Government Offices

Bóthar an Bhaile Nua, Loch Garman, Contae Loch Garman, Y35 AP90

Newtown Road, Wexford, County Wexford, Y35 AP90



- The Department recommends the council establishes a monitoring system to record Biodiversity Loss and Enhancement on all projects.

Artificial light at night:

“Sensitive, subtle, sustainable and responsive lighting”

The west of Ireland is one of the few places in the developed world where light pollution is still limited. County Sligo has an opportunity to retain our precious darkness and to reverse the over-bright lighting decisions that have intensified in recent years.

Proposed developments may bring overly-bright artificial light to a previously dark and natural area. There is technically no requirement for public lighting in Ireland, and over-bright glaring lights impacts wildlife and peopleⁱ. The Department recommends that a Lighting Masterplan is required for projects, including a non-technical summary (NTS) to declare the intent to minimise light pollution.

Truly sensitive and subtle outdoor lighting is a biodiversity enhancement as well as improving the quality of life for users. Amber-coloured outdoor lighting with the aim of “as inconspicuous as possible” should be the objective. Albeit energy efficient, ALAN with a pronounced blue content such as “cold-white” LEDs has significantly increased light pollution on a landscape scale because blue light is more easily distributed in the atmosphere and many biological responses are particularly sensitive to this wavelengthⁱⁱ.

Light pollution, the *excessive* or *inappropriate* use of artificial light at night, disrupts natural patterns of nocturnal and diurnal wildlife including migrating fish and birdsⁱⁱⁱ, contributes to the increase in carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere and disrupts sleep^{iv}. Over-bright lighting impacts habitats and species and increases light pollution across the country, whether it is installed for travel routes, car parks, housing, sports, commercial premises etc.

Species such as birds, bats (especially species such as Brown Long Eared and Lesser Horseshoe Bats), pollinators and salmon have been shown to be adversely affected by excessive light (REFS^{v,vi}). This is particularly important in relation to protected species and European sites. Across Ireland, some 41 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) include Lesser Horseshoe Bats as a Qualifying Interest (QI) and 40 SACs include salmon as a QI, while another 104 Irish rivers host protected salmon stocks^{vii}. Salmon are particularly vulnerable to lighting along rivers and bridges, which can disrupt their migration^{viii}.

To minimise light pollution:

Recognise that light is not a obligation. Evaluate the need to light:

Light “*needs to be justified on each occasion, e.g. on safety grounds and, given the importance of the environment, consideration should be given to the reduction in **light level** or **duration** and, potentially, the reduction or **removal** of existing lighting in egregious cases, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas*” (Dark Sky Ireland^{ix}).

If light is deemed absolutely necessary for developments:

- a) Assess the ecological impact of lighting and develop an ecologically suitable lighting plan
- b) Conserve dark areas, particularly around native vegetation, waterways, coasts^x and any areas that may be in use by bats, birds, fish and nocturnal mammals.



- c) Use warmer spectrum (lower CCT (correlated colour temperature) of 2200K (kelvins), i.e. amber coloured lighting which has less environmental intrusion.
- d) Lower overall brightness levels. The EU adopted a new “Green Public Procurement Policy” on Road Lighting in 2019^{xi}, which has limitations on LED white-light.
- e) Use *low*, and fully shielded/cowled *downward*-pointing lights, smart sensors and trimming (part-night lighting/curfew) schemes.
- f) Avoid upward and horizontal-facing lighting (0.0% Ratio of Upward Light Output (RULO)) EPA^{xii}.

Detailed guidance can be found in:

- Dark Sky Ireland - Environmentally Friendly Lighting Guide 2024^{xiii} for concise explanations of fundamental principles and Irish and Welsh case studies.
- EUROBATs 8, 2018^{xiv}, particularly for chapters on impact assessments, avoidance, mitigation and compensation/ restoration.
- ILP Guidance note for the reduction of obtrusive light 2021^{xv}, especially for specifics and design guidance, references Commission Internationale De L'Eclairage (CIE) documents 1997 and 2017.
- Guidelines for Consideration of Bats in Lighting Projects, 2023^{xvi}, see street lighting powers and retaining ecologically functional ‘dark corridors’.
- Public Lighting Recommendations for RMO - Dark Sky Ireland 2020^{xvii}, notable for discussion on associations between light level/colour and safety.
- EU Future Brief 2023^{xviii}, for future trend, research, overview and emerging solutions.
- Five Principles for Responsible Outdoor Lighting, Dark Sky International^{xix}. **Useful, Targeted, Low Level, Controlled and Warm Coloured.** Light where you need it, when you need it, in the amount needed, and no more. If light is deemed useful and necessary, follow these guidelines to prevent, or when that’s not possible, minimise light pollution.

Note that the LED standard which is often quoted in older guidelines to reduce light pollution is $\geq 3000\text{K}$ (kelvins) CCT (correlated colour temperature), but more recently this guidance may be regarded as excessively ‘blue’ white which is proven to have adverse effects both on biodiversity and sky-glow (Responsible Outdoor Lighting at Night (ROLAN), 2022^{xx}.

Wherever possible, the Department recommends the use of an ecological/ dark sky lighting plan using LEDs of a warm spectrum (lower CCT of ideally, **2200K**), i.e. subtle amber coloured lighting, for reduced environmental intrusion, and more pleasant night time spaces. This guideline is in keeping with changes made by the International Dark Sky to its Principles for Responsible Outdoor Lighting^{xxi}.

Extracts from EU Future Brief 2023:

“Technological solutions, in the form of tuneable spectra LED, dimmable lighting and sensor timing systems, alongside better lighting design incorporating shielding and shutters, have all helped to mitigate the impacts of ALAN in areas that require lighting. We need engineers and lighting designers to help to create luminaire systems that further reduce reflection, glare and light spill”.



Lighting Masterplan: A strategic document that acts as a framework for design decisions on public lighting

Sustainable Development: Sustainability needs to be integrated into the design creation and maintenance of outdoor lighting

Dark Infrastructure: Darkness is a quality to preserve and restore an ecological network with a level of darkness that enables maintenance of biodiversity

Cross cutting Approaches: Measures to address the impacts of light pollution at the species or ecosystem function level.

Environmental Lighting Zone: A method to limit environmental harm, using specified zones with a max admissible level of pollutant.

ALAN-Free areas: Retain Darkness: Enable the implementation of the strictest limits on the spectrum, shielding and total amount of illumination

The EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL):

EU Regulation 2024/1991, better known as the Nature Restoration Law (NRL), was passed by the European Council in June 2024 and came into force two months later. The Nature Restoration Law is the first continent-wide, comprehensive law of its kind. This regulation will require all EU member states to draft and begin implementing national restoration plans by July 2026.

– some NRL extracts relevant to lighting:

(44a) With artificial light increasing, light pollution has become a pertinent issue. Its sources include building exterior and interior lighting, advertising, commercial properties, offices, factories, streetlights and illuminated sporting venues. Light pollution is a driver of insect declines. Many insects are drawn to light, but artificial lights can create a fatal attraction. Declining insect populations negatively impact all species that rely on insects for food or pollination. Some predators exploit this attraction to their advantage, affecting food webs in unanticipated ways. [Am. 2]^{xxii} July 2023

(49) “Scientific evidence suggests that artificial light negatively impacts biodiversity. Artificial light can also impact human health. When preparing their national restoration plans under this Regulation, Member States should be able to consider to stop, reduce or remediate light pollution in all ecosystems.”^{xxiii} February 2024

The NRL is a key element of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. It requires Member States to jointly restore at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030 and repair all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050.

Consideration of the Nature Restoration Law, and its implications for planning authorities, including aspects of artificial lighting, will ensure the future-proofing of Sligo's County Development Plan.

You are requested to send further communications to this Department's Development Applications Unit (DAU) at manager.dau@npws.gov.ie where used, or to the following address:



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ii Environmental Impacts of Artificial Light at Night. Kevin J. Gaston. University of Exeter. Annual Review of Environment and Resources, Vol. 47, pp. 373-398, 2022
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4252371

iii Longcore, Travis & Rich, Catherine. (2016). Ecological and Organismic Effects of Light Pollution.
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v Ref - Experimental illumination of natural habitat—an experimental set-up to assess the direct and indirect ecological consequences of artificial light of different spectral composition.
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vi References:

Freshwater fish frequently experience nocturnal illumination, which can disturb the precise timing and optimisation of their biological rhythms, for example daily and seasonal rhythms of hormones, food consumption or migratory behaviour.



https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361634272_Light_pollution_a_landscape-scale_issue_requiring_cross-realm_consideration. Jun 2022

Timing of seaward migration of salmon smolts occurs during night (Grau et al., 1981) and ALAN can disturb this timing in Atlantic salmon smolts (Riley et al., 2012). Moreover, fry of Atlantic salmon disperses from their nests during darkness and streetlights can seriously delay fry dispersal into times of daylight, when fry is more easily visible to predators (Riley et al., 2013).

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& Reflections on the challenges of tackling artificial light at night in coastal and marine waters - Ocean and Coastal Futures

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[WEB_EUROBATS_08_ENGL_NVK_19092018.pdf](https://www.eurobats.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/WEB_EUROBATS_08_ENGL_NVK_19092018.pdf)

xv ILP - Institution of Lighting Professionals | Guidance Note 1 for the reduction of obtrusive light 2021
<https://theilp.org.uk/publication/guidance-note-1-for-the-reduction-of-obtrusive-light-2021> Guidance Note 1 for the reduction of obtrusive light 2021 | Institution of Lighting Professionals

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http://www.tara.tcd.ie/bitstream/handle/2262/91582/Lighting_guidelines_13Feb2020.pdf?sequence=1

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<https://www.darksky.org/responsible-outdoor-lighting-at-night-rolan-manifesto-for-lighting/>

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