

## Chapter 2. Climate action

Climate Action is a significant priority for the Irish government, which considers it “the most critical long-term global challenge of our time” (as per the *Local Authority Climate Action Plan Guidelines*, 2023).

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 provides the framework for Ireland to meet its international and EU climate commitments and to become a leader in addressing climate change.

Through strengthened climate legislation and an annually updated Climate Action Plan, the Government intends to halve Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and to put Ireland on course to becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

### 2.1 Climate Action Plan (CAP)

The Climate Action Plan 2023 is the second annual update to Ireland’s Climate Action Plan 2019. This plan is the first to be prepared under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, and following the introduction, in 2022, of economy-wide carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings. The plan sets a roadmap for taking decisive action to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050.

The CAP23 indicates that spatial planning provides “an important enabling framework for individual, household, community, and company-level climate action”. Along with government policies on taxation/expenditure, digital transformation and the bioeconomy, spatial planning is stated to “have a key role to play in supporting delivery of emissions reductions in sectors with emissions ceilings”.

#### **The role of spatial planning in implementing the CAPs**

Section 11.2.3 of the CAP23 addresses “Spatial and Planning Policy” by referring to the National Planning Framework, which must inform regional and local decision-making, through RSES and local authority development plans.

The CAP23 specifies, inter alia, that spatial planning is critical for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by promoting low-carbon, sustainable transport, and for facilitating renewable energy infrastructure.

### 2.2 National Adaptation Framework (NAF)

The National Adaptation Framework (NAF), first published in 2018, sets out Ireland’s strategy for the application of climate adaptation measures across different government sectors and bodies, including local authorities. The aim of the strategy is to reduce the vulnerability of the State to the negative impacts of climate change, but also to identify opportunities that may result from the transition to a climate-resilient economy and society.

Local authorities must ensure that climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all local policy, including planning policy.

Following a review of the existing NAF under the 2021 Climate Action Plan, an updated NAF was expected to be published in 2023 (at the time of drafting this development plan).

## 2.3 *Climate action* in the National Planning Framework

**At national level**, the NPF states that “the planning process provides an established means through which to implement and integrate climate change objectives, including adaptation, at local level”.

The National Planning Objective **NPO 54** requires the reduction of the “*carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions*”.

The “transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society” is the 8th of the 10 National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs), i.e. the “shared goals” expressed in the NPF. The detailed description of **NSO 8** (p. 147 of the NPF) relates entirely to the transition to sustainable energy.

In addition to the above, **NPO 21** (supporting the diversification of rural economy), **NPO 41b** (addressing coastal flooding and erosion) and **NSO 9** (sustainable management of water and other environmental resources) specifically mention climate change and adaptation.

Other relevant National Policy Objectives (NPOs) are:

- **NPO 53** – *Support the circular and bioeconomy including through greater efficiency in land management, greater use of renewable resources and by reducing the rate of land use change from urban sprawl and new development;*
- **NPO 55** – *Promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050;*
- **NPO 56** – *Sustainably manage waste generation, investing in different types of waste treatment and support circular economy principles, prioritising prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery, to support a healthy environment, economy and society.*

These NPOs inform the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), which contain Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) to ensure emissions can be reduced and targets met.

## 2.4 *Climate action* at regional level

In 2018, four **Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO)** were established for the purpose of coordinating climate action at regional and local levels. As specified in its **Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)**, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly supports the work of the Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO).

**RPO 5.1** indicates that “*the Assembly will support through CARO and Local Authorities the preparation and implementation of Local Climate Strategies which will, inter alia, address vulnerability to climate risks and provide prioritised actions in accordance with the guiding principles of the National Adaptation Framework*”.

The **Atlantic Seaboard North** CARO coordinates climate action undertaken by the five local authorities of Donegal, Sligo, Mayo, Galway County and Galway City. The office is funded by the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment, and is hosted by Mayo County Council as the lead local authority for the Region.

The CAROs are mandated to assist in the development of local authority climate action plans and to provide a strong support function in this regard.

## 2.5 *Climate action* at Local Authority level

### **Climate-Ready Sligo**

Sligo County Council's first **Climate Change Adaptation Strategy**, titled **Climate-Ready Sligo**, was prepared in 2019. The Strategy set out the Local Authority's strategic priorities, measures and responses for adaptation in County Sligo over the subsequent five years, to 2024. The Adaptation Strategy, which was required by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, contains over 40 actions under the three goals of *Engagement, Planning and Adaptation to climate change*.

Based on the complementary objectives of adaptation (identifying risks and taking action to prevent or minimise damage) and mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions to limit climate change), the strategy identified the scale of the challenge posed by climate change.

The main existing and potential future climate risks for Sligo are flooding, coastal erosion, threats to biodiversity, risks to critical infrastructure and buildings, and threats to agriculture. This CDP addresses the identified risks essentially through an integrated land-use/settlement and transport strategy, as well as through policies and objectives on flood risk, coastal erosion, renewable energy production and the protection of biodiversity.

### **Local Authority Climate Action Plan**

Under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, local authorities must prepare their own Climate Action Plans. These plans must cover both mitigation and adaptation, and must be updated at least once every five years.

In accordance with Action 78 (Implement the NPF) of the CAP21 Annex of Actions, the *Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities* issued in 2022 specify that "local authority development plans must be aligned with each local Climate Action Plan."

The *Local Authority Climate Action Plan Guidelines* (published in March 2023) have been developed in response to Section 16 of the Climate Amendment Act 2021 and are intended to support local authorities in both the content and preparation of their local authority climate actions plans. They aim to ensure that a coherent and consistent approach to climate action planning is adopted by local authorities, but seek to avoid being prescriptive, for example, by determining the specific content or providing sector specific information.

**Sligo County Council's first Climate Action Plan was adopted in February 2024. [PA-1]**

A **Climate Change Risk Assessment** carried out in May 2023 (by consultants KPMG Future Analytics) identified flooding as the main potential threat to communities in County Sligo. The frequency of river and pluvial flooding is stated to be on the rise, while coastal erosion and coastal flooding have already damaged habitats and disrupted transport networks. Sligo County Council will need to proactively plan for and adapt to the current and future climate change risks identified.

**The strategic objectives of the Sligo CAP include the following:**

- **Achieve the carbon emission reduction target of 51% for 2030, progressing to the 2050 target for carbon neutrality.**
- **Enable the 'just transition' so that no household, community or business is disadvantaged by decarbonisation measures.**
- **Cultivate decarbonization co-benefits across key sectors in the county/city.**
- **Provide supports to communities and organisations and foster collaboration to achieve the above.**

**This Development Plan has taken account of the Local Authority Climate Action Plan and is consistent with the CAP in terms of spatial planning. [PA-1]**

## 2.6 Integrating *climate action* in the Development Plan

The Planning and Development Act 2000 was amended in December 2021 to bring it in line with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. Section 10(2)(n) of the Planning and Development Act (as amended) specifically identifies **Climate Action (adaptation and mitigation)** as a mandatory objective to be included in development plans. This must be achieved through the promotion of sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas, the promotion of measures to reduce energy demand and anthropogenic GHG emissions and the integration of climate adaptation measures in the location, layout and design of new development.

### **Embedding *climate action* in the Core Strategy**

The Core Strategy supports compact settlement growth, in line with NPF and RSES, with a focus on regeneration, consolidation and the redevelopment of brownfield lands. Compact growth leads to energy efficiency throughout the County, reducing costs and carbon emissions. Promoting brownfield over greenfield development also protects natural areas, ecosystems and biodiversity.

Most of the County's targeted population and housing growth has been allocated to towns and larger villages, with the biggest share of future development to be located within Sligo Town, the principal urban area of the designated Regional Growth Centre. Such distribution facilitates the delivery of improved public transport infrastructure, thus reducing the need for private car use and contributing towards a reduction in GHG emissions.

### ***Climate action* through development management policies**

Many of the policies and objectives set out in this Development Plan have been designed to promote the achievement of climate action ambitions, either by mitigating the impacts of climate change or through adaptation to its adverse effects.

**Mitigation** means making the impacts of climate change less severe by preventing or reducing the emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) into the atmosphere. Mitigation is achieved either by reducing the sources of these gases – e.g. by increasing the share of renewable energies, or establishing a cleaner mobility system – or by enhancing the storage of these gases – e.g. by increasing the size of forests.

**Adaptation** means anticipating the adverse effects of climate change and taking appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damage they can cause or taking advantage of opportunities that may arise. Examples of adaptation measures include building defences against sea-level rise or reducing the risk of flooding by restricting development, while protecting wetlands and enhancing aquatic ecosystems.

## Strategic policies for *climate action*

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- SP-CA-1** Support the implementation of the government’s climate action policy in accordance with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, the national Climate Action Plan 2023, the National Adaptation Framework 2018 and all subsequent relevant updates.
  
- SP-CA-2** Ensure that Sligo County Council’s Climate Adaptation Strategy, Climate Action Plan and County Development Plan are fully aligned.
  
- SP-CA-3** Integrate appropriate climate mitigation and adaptation considerations and measures into all relevant development management and development planning processes.

**Table 2.1 Envisaged *climate action* effects of the Development Plan**

Development Plan Volume	Climate adaptation and mitigation effects of the Development Plan provisions
<p><b>Volume 1 – Core Strategy</b>  Including chapters on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Settlement Strategy</li> <li>– Housing Strategy</li> <li>– Economic Strategy</li> <li>– Transport Strategy</li> </ul>	<p>The preferred spatial development option was selected as part of Strategic Environmental Assessment, which includes Climate Action considerations.</p> <p>The preferred option integrates land-use and transport in a manner that seeks to reinforce the existing settlement structure, focusing on the Regional Growth Centre, enhanced public transport and active travel provisions with consequent GHG emissions reduction.</p>
<p><b>Volume 2 – Urban development</b>  Including <b>Sligo Town Plan</b> and similar land-use plans for Support Towns, Satellite Villages and Villages with Special Coastal Tourism Functions</p>	<p>Settlement consolidation, compact housing and commercial development, regeneration and reuse of brownfield lands – all these measures support energy efficiency and a reduction in traffic-related greenhouse gas emissions.</p>
<p><b>Volume 3 – General Development Policies</b>  Including chapters on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Natural heritage</li> <li>– Residential, community, economic development</li> <li>– Transport, water, energy infrastructure</li> <li>– Flood risk management</li> </ul>	<p>A safe and climate-resilient living environment can be created through energy-efficient design and layout of buildings, appropriate mix of uses, densities, height and the sensitive integration of the natural and built environment.</p> <p>Locating homes close to workplaces, services, amenity and leisure facilities reduces the need to travel by car and can result in significant reductions in GHG emissions. Promotion of sustainable travel modes and patterns contributes to emission reductions.</p>

Development Plan Volume	Climate adaptation and mitigation effects of the Development Plan provisions
	The preservation of a robust green infrastructure network and the use of nature-based solutions for urban rainwater drainage contribute directly to carbon sequestration and water quality improvements, in addition to decreasing flood risk to settlements.
<b>Volume 4 – Village development</b> Including plans for Villages Sustaining Rural Communities	The principles of consolidation, regeneration and compact development are applied to villages, supporting energy and resource efficiency, with consequent reductions in GHG emissions and protection of the rural/natural environment.