

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT

Limerick City and County Local Economic and Community Plan
2023-2028

Prepared for Limerick City and County Council under SI 435 of 2004 as
amended

September 2024

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This report has been prepared by Minogue Environmental Consulting Ltd with all reasonable skill, care and diligence. Information reported herein is based on the interpretation of data collected and has been accepted in good faith as being accurate and valid.

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SEA Screening Report: Limerick City and County Local Economic and Community Plan

1 Introduction – Strategic Policy Context

1.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

The European Union Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) requires an environmental assessment be carried out for all plans that are prepared for certain specified sectors, including land use of which the proposed Limerick City and County Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) (the Plan) relates. The following Regulations transpose this Directive into Irish law:

- The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435 of 2004),
- The Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436 of 2004) and further amended by
- S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) and S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

The Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations, 2004 (as amended) state that SEA is mandatory for certain plans while screening for SEA is required for other plans that fall below the specified thresholds. The purpose of this screening report is to determine whether the making and implementation of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) for Limerick City and County will or will not, lead to significant environmental effects for the plan area and if it will require a full Strategic Environment Assessment.

In deciding whether a particular plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, regard must be had to the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive, which is reproduced in the Schedule 2A to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as inserted by Article 12 of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004.

The approach to this SEA screening assessment is to assess the Draft Plan based on the LECP Guidelines 2021 prepared by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage against the criteria contained in Schedule 2a of the SEA Regulations. This assessment is presented in Section Four of this Screening Report and Annex A presents the assessment of the high-level goals, sustainable community, economic and integrated objectives, and their respective actions areas.

An assessment under Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive has also been undertaken in conjunction with this SEA Screening report and should be read in tandem with this Screening Report and the Draft Plan.

1.2 Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)

The development of an LECP is informed by the overall vision for Local Government as set out in Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government (2012), the need “to promote the well-being and quality of life of citizens and communities”.

The LECP Guidelines (2021) form part of the statutory responsibilities assigned to the Minister for Rural and Community Development (DRCD), under the Local Government Reform Act of 2014, to support the development and implementation of the LECP. The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) is charged with oversight of the economic elements of the LECP.

The LECP Guidelines (2021) state the plan preparation process should consist of two parts including;

- a) the development of an overall LECP framework detailing the High-Level Goals and Sustainable Community and Economic Objectives as well as consideration of outcomes and high-level indicators for the 6-year LECP period. Consideration of any potential actions should form part of the development of the High-Level Goals and Objectives in the LECP framework but the detailing of prioritised actions as well as specific performance indicators and commitment to their implementation is a function of the implementation plan.
- b) The development of Implementation Plans to detail the inputs, actions and resources required for that implementation plan period as well as relevant specific key performance indicators to facilitate evaluation.

The LECP is an important plan to support the implementation at local level of National and Regional policies. Objectives and actions in the LECP must align with National policy priorities so they contribute locally to important policy agendas. National, Regional, and local plans must also align with over-arching International and EU policy frameworks. Appendix 6 of the LECP Guidelines (2021) lists relevant policies and strategies to inform the development of the LECP.

There are four phases to the preparation of the Plan. These are presented below in Table 1 and show how the SEA relates to the Plan preparation stages.

Table 1 Stages in LECP and SEA

Local Economic Community Development Plan Process	SEA/Environmental Inputs
Stage 1: Preparation	
a) Establish & analyse the socio-economic evidence base b) Review of relevant high-level strategies and plans. c) Develop a socio-economic statement for Limerick City and County and develop high level goals for the integrated LECP d) Advisory steering group to prepare, and to adopt the statement for public consultation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screening of the SEA Goals and Objectives
Stage 2: Public Consultation	
a) Undertake a public consultation on the socio-economic statement & high-level goals b) Revise the statement and refer to the Municipal Districts (MD) & Regional Assembly (RA).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review consultation feedback from specified environmental authorities. SEA consideration of consultation feedback
Stage 3: Develop the Objectives & Actions	

a) Develop detailed objectives for the plan underpinned by clear, measurable actions b) Advisory steering group to prepare, agree to the objectives & actions c) Advisory steering Group to submit a final draft incorporating the statement & goals, objectives & actions for consideration by MDs and RAs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screening of the Detailed Objectives for the Plan taking into consideration any amendments as a result of consultation feedback
Stage 4: Finalise Plan (Current Stage)	
a) Consider & adopt final draft (revised as necessary following consideration by the MDs and RAs). b) Local Authority to adopt the final draft of the LECP c) Final Plan submitted to the Minister & published by LA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise determination to establish if SEA or AA required. SEA Determination
Stage 5: Implementation Plan	
a) the Implementation Plan process b) Consideration of available Resources c) Ongoing flexible implementation	
Stage 6: Monitoring, Evaluation & Review	
a) KPIs to address proposed outcomes b) Ongoing data collection including case studies c) Implementation report d) Advisory Steering Group to monitor progress on actions & against measureable targets for the objectives e) Review of the Plan.	

2 Limerick City and County LECP (The Plan)

2.1 Introduction

The first LECP for Limerick City and County (2016-2021) has come to the end of its timespan. This is the second Limerick City and County LECP (the Plan) which will extend from 2023-2028 to cover a six-year period. Its primary aim is to set out, for a six-year period, the high-level goals, economic, community and integrated objectives and their respective action areas needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of Limerick City and County, both by the Local Authority directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders. The Plan is an important way to set out how Government and other stakeholders can work together to ensure that their initiatives, programmes and projects support an improved quality of life for people living and working in the County.

The Plan will support the sustainable development of Limerick by setting out a blueprint for the development of Limerick from a physical, economic, social and environmental perspective until 2028. It will provide the framework for local implementation of National and Regional framework plans that set out the development path for the State and the Region over the next 10 to 20 years. The key spatial plans at National and Regional level are the National Planning Framework Ireland 2040 and the National

Development Plan 2021-2030 (NPF/NDP) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES). The Plan identifies objectives from those framework plans to be implemented locally. It identifies local objectives under other National and Regional policies in areas including social inclusion, rural development, urban regeneration, health and well-being, education, training and skills development, employment, enterprise and climate change/climate action.

However, while this Plan is an important tool to support the implementation of International, National and Regional policy on economic and local/community development, it will not set a framework in itself either with regard to location, nature, size or operating conditions or by allocating resources but will compliment and be consistent with the existing policy frameworks.

Therefore, the Plan must be consistent with overarching local authority plans, in particular, the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028.

2.2 Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028

The statutory Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 is the most important spatial plan in the County setting. The Development Plan sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the functional area of Limerick over a six-year period between 2022 and 2028.

The Plan has been prepared in accordance with Project Ireland 2040 and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region. As set out in the NPF, sustainability is at the centre of long-term planning. In this regard, Ireland is a signatory to the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Transforming our World. The seventeen SDGs reflect economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and set a framework for national level policies and agendas to 2030.

The vision as set out in the Limerick Development Plan is that by 2030, Limerick will become a green city region on the Shannon Estuary connected through people and places. At the core of the vision are cohesive and sustainable communities, where our cultural, natural and built environment is protected. The vision embraces inclusiveness and a high quality of life for all, through healthy place-making and social justice, including the ongoing development of the Regeneration Areas and disadvantaged communities. An integrated approach will align housing and public transport provision. Human and environment wellbeing including climate adaptation are at the core of the vision. This will be achieved through engagement, innovation and resilient urban development and self-sustaining rural communities. This Plan supports the development of a robust city, towns and villages across Limerick, placing quality of life at the centre of decision-making.

In accordance with European and National legislation, Limerick City and County Council has carried out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), an Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), which have informed the preparation of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028.

In summary, the Plan provides the social and economic vision for Limerick city and county while the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 provides for the proper planning and sustainable spatial development of Limerick. Both plans deliver a strategic and operational framework for integrated planning. While, the Plan will include a spatial planning dimension it will be consistent with the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, which will aim to enhance Limerick City and County Council's role in economic development and forge a stronger link between spatial planning and economic development. The Plan will be complementary to the Limerick Development Plan 2022 -2028 that sets important statutory frameworks in relation to, for example, appropriate locations for new development such as business parks, retail development and industry. The Plan needs to be consistent with the spatial policies of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 and not present alternate or competing proposals that would lead to inconsistency.

Thus, the Plan will have to comply, where relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Ecological Impact Assessment and requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting. Actions arising from the Plan will demonstrate compliance with the environmental protection measures in the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varied, and its associated SEA Environmental Report and Natura Impact Report.

2.3 The Plan Process

The Plan was developed using a collaborative, consultative and participative approach, affording key stakeholders the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way.

The stages involved in the preparation of the Plan as outlined in the LECP Guidelines (2021) issued by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), and applied in the preparation of the Plan are shown in **Table 1** above. The process for the development of the Plan consists of four broad phases: preparation, public consultation, development of High-Level Goals, objectives and outcomes, and finalisation of the LECP as outlined in **Table 1** above which also shows how the SEA relates to the Plan preparation stages. The Plan layout is as follows:

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: Strategic Policy Context
- Section 3: Highlights from the Socio-economic Analysis
- Section 4: Public Consultation: Process and Findings
- Section 5: Economic and Community: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT) Analysis
- Section 6: Local Economic and Community Plan Vision and High-Level Goals
- Section 7: Implementation Arrangements
- Section 8: Monitoring and Evaluation of the LECP

The preparation and drafting of the Plan have been assisted by an Advisory Steering Group at all stages of development. A collaborative approach was taken and this is reflected in the joint oversight of the Limerick Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), responsible for the community elements of the Plan and the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) of the Council, responsible for the economic elements of the Plan. A local-led and coordinated approach are also key characteristics of this Plan with collaborative partnerships developed with organisations representatives across the public, voluntary and community sector and business and sectoral interests (e.g., environment, farming community, rural and urban). Community and voluntary organisations on the Advisory Steering Group include representatives from youth services, community and social inclusion and the environment sector. Some of these members are nominated by the Public Participation Network (social inclusion and environment).

As stated above, the Plan needs to be consistent with the spatial policies of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 and not present alternate or competing proposals that would lead to inconsistency. The review role of Regional Assemblies and Municipal Districts is important in this regard. Under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (and planning acts), in the process of preparation and approval of the Plan, consultation with the Regional Assembly is required to ensure consistency of the Plan with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES). Consultation with the Municipal District members is required to ensure consistency between the economic and community elements of the Plan and with the core strategy and objectives of the statutory Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028. Statements of consistency are required from both sets of structures, i.e., the Regional Assembly and the Municipal Districts.

Having regard to the over-arching international and EU policy frameworks as outlined in Appendix 6 of the LECP Guidelines the most relevant policies and strategies to inform the development of the Plan are presented in summary and reviewed in **Section 2** - Strategic Policy Context of the Plan. In addition, consideration must be given to the potential impact of the Plan on a number of cross-cutting or “horizontal” priorities also known as “proofing”. “Proofing” involves screening the Plan to identify any elements that are likely to impact negatively on the above issues and address them so that a positive impact can be achieved. This Plan is developed with reference to national policies in these areas and with attention to these issues and so that it can have a positive impact. These priorities are:

- Sustainability including Climate Change
- Equality
- Poverty
- Rurality
- Age
- Disability

The Socio-economic analysis in **Section 3** outlines the monitoring and evaluation framework in the Plan developed with reference to the baseline local conditions, i.e., the evidence base for the Plan.

A comprehensive public consultation process was carried out across Limerick City and County engaging groups not traditionally well-represented in such consultations. This comprehensive public consultation was an important element of the preparation of the Plan Framework. In the roll-out of the public consultation process, a wide representation of local communities, interests and groups in society (young people, migrants, people with disabilities) was achieved through a mix of online consultation and workshops. The findings from this process are summarised in **Section 4** of the Plan.

As part of the Plan process Limerick City and County carries out an economic and community: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. **Section 5** of the Plan presents a summary statement which draws on the social economic analysis, the policy review and especially the finding from the local consultation process. It is an important part of the evidence base development of the High-Level Goals in Stage 3: Develop the Objectives and Actions outlined in **Section 6** of the Plan.

The High-Level Goals were elaborated further to develop specific, measurable sustainable economic, community and Integrated Objectives and their respective Action Areas, as follows:

1. Sustainable Economic Development Objectives (SEDOs)
2. Sustainable Community Development Objectives (SCDOs)
3. Integrated Objectives with shared objectives and outcomes across Economic and Community elements (IOs)

A Plan High-Level Goals, Sustainable Community Development Objectives (SCDOs), Sustainable Economic Development Objectives (SEDOs), Integrated Objectives (IO) and their associated actions areas were prepared at the time of the preparation of this Screening Report for Strategic Environmental Assessment. More detailed commentary on the Plan’s high-level goals, objectives (community, economic and integrated) and their action areas are provided in **Annex A** to this Screening Report.

A new element of the Plan in 2023-2028 compared with the previous LECP (2016-2021) is the preparation of a two-year Implementation Plan (Stage 5). The delivery of the objectives and ultimate realisation of the outcomes are supported by practical, time-bound actions as part of the Implementation Plan process. There is a stronger emphasis on implementation of actions in this Plan and follow-up on these through engagement with other agencies and support actions within the Council’s own functions. The key agencies and areas for action are identified under each of the objectives in the Plan. The Implementation Plan will contribute to the delivery of these objectives and

their associated action areas considering the relevant context and the resources available within the time period, including funding through various funding streams. This will then provide the information for the monitoring, evaluation and review of the Plan required in Stage 6. The monitoring and evaluation framework is part of a cycle of planning, implementation, progress reporting (monitoring), identifying what has been achieved or the impact (evaluation), learning from the experience and applying that learning in subsequent plans.

3 Summary of current Environmental Baseline in Limerick

The statutory Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 is the most important spatial plan in the County setting. This Plan supports the development of a robust City, towns and villages and connecting transport infrastructure across Limerick (**Figure 1.1**). The Core Strategy Map of Limerick (**Figure 1.2a and Figure 1.2b**) shows the Metropolitan Area, the key towns and villages in the settlement hierarchy.

The following Section summarises the current environmental baseline as outlined in the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varies, associated SEA Environmental Report and the Limerick City and County LECP 2023-2028 (the Plan).

Population and Human Health Population

The National Planning Framework Project 2040 sets out that half of the overall national growth in terms of population, employment and housing will be targeted in Ireland's five Cities, Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. It is the objective of the National Planning Framework to redistribute growth in a more balanced manner, which would see each of the cities grow by 50% by 2040. The Framework foresees the population of Limerick City reaching approximately 150,000 by 2040.

The Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 envisages growth in the existing built-up areas of Limerick City and Environs including Mungret and Annacotty by 50%; Newcastle West, the largest town outside of Limerick urban area, is targeted as a key town for growth. Generally, Limerick's towns and villages will also be expected to grow their populations. Projected population growth for Limerick to 2026 is 229,000 to 235,500, and for 2031 to 246,000-256,000, an increase of between 41,000 and 51,000 from its population base in 2022 (population 205,536, Census 2022 Preliminary Results). Sufficient lands have been zoned to accommodate over 15,500 new homes in Limerick over the lifetime of the Plan. Growth in population will need to be supported by strong economic activity, high quality environments and adequate social and physical infrastructure.

The Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 seeks to support the development of a robust City, towns and villages across Limerick, placing quality of life at the centre of decision-making. It focuses on the development of "ten-minute" neighbourhoods, supporting people to live, work and engage in recreation in their local neighbourhoods.

Sufficient lands have been zoned to accommodate over 15,500 new homes in Limerick over the lifetime of the Plan. The Development Plan to 2028 focuses on sustainable growth of the built environment, employment generation and the provision of community and social services in a low carbon, compact, consolidated and connected pattern of development. Strategic objectives include: Revitalisation and consolidation of the City, towns and villages, through public realm and place-making initiatives and addressing vacancy and dereliction to create compact attractive, vibrant and safe environments in which to live, work, visit and invest; Creation of a competitive environment in which to do business, promoting and enabling sustainable and economic development, enterprise and employment generation; Sustainable development of rural Limerick where residents can enjoy a high quality of life and access to quality services and to promote connection and balanced developed across urban and rural Limerick

and development of sectors that are important in the rural economy (e.g., tourism) and Transition to a low carbon economy and society, mobility solutions centred on sustainable transport and public transport.

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

The SEA ER noted that the AA concentrates on possible effects on Natura 2000 sites such as Special Areas of Conservation (**see Figure 1.3**) and Special Protection Areas (**see Figure 1.4**) and not on Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and other national level ecologically designated sites.

NHAs are designated due to their national conservation value for ecological and/or geological/geomorphological heritage. They can be nationally important semi-natural and natural habitats, landforms or geomorphological features, wildlife plant and animal species or a diversity of these natural attributes. NHAs are designated under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000. There are four NHAs designated in County Limerick: -Lough Gay Bog (002454) -Grageen Bog and Fen (002186) - Moyreen Bog (002361) -Carrigkerry Bogs (002399).

Ecologically sensitive areas located within Limerick include aquatic and terrestrial ecological areas, which are part of the Limerick's extensive network of watercourses and wetlands comprising: -Rivers, streams and riparian zones (such as River Shannon, River Maigue, River Feale and River Allaghaun), - Loughs (such as Lough Gur, Dohyle Lough), -Bogs and fens (such as Griston Bog and Ellaha fen).

The link between the quality of the local environment, of which trees are an important component and human well-being, is one that is increasingly recognised. In this regard, the policies that protect trees and groups of trees have been updated in the Plan.

Public facilities

Increased population will also lead to increased demands for resources such as potable water, infrastructure and wastewater disposal and transport, while leisure needs will lead to increased demands for parks and leisure facilities, often with associated demands on landscape and habitats. The provision of adequate services, such as waste disposal will have beneficial effects on human health. This has added emphasis during the preparation of the Plan, as both the population of what had been referred to as the City area and suburbs located in the county (Castletroy and Southern Environs), will have to be considered in terms of the capacity of the receiving waste water treatment plants.

The main Waste Water Treatment Plant for the City is the plant at Bunlicky. Capacity is adequate for the City's and Plan area needs with a population capacity of 180,000PE. The plant came into operation in 1999. While the question of it operating close to capacity has been raised, discussions with Irish Water and Water Services Section of Limerick City and County Council have indicated that new working procedures, in addition to the construction of an anaerobic digester and other upgrades, will ensure that the plant will be able to keep pace with development within the agglomeration that it serves. Recent meetings between Irish water and the Planning section of Limerick City and County council, also indicates that a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) application is being prepared for further extension of the facilities at Bunlicky.

There are three Seveso sites in the Plan area. One is a 'lower tier' sites and is in the city area. These is Grassland Fertilizers, on the Dock Road. There are two higher tier sites in the County area, Atlantic Fuels Supply Company, Foynes Port, Foynes, and Gouldings Fertiliser, Morgan's South, Askeaton, Co. Limerick. These are included in the Health and Safety Authority referral list, and are also referred to the Emergency Services for comments should any applications be received, either on those sites or close to them.

Air Quality

Air quality in Ireland is generally of a high standard across the country. There are three air quality monitors located in and close to Limerick City, one of which is in Mungret, the other in Castletroy and the other in the People's Park. There is another located in Askeaton. The current air quality report from the Askeaton monitor is good (14th June 12:00). On occasion, particularly during holiday periods, through traffic traversing the City and towns in Limerick can create localised issues with traffic fumes, particularly with peak traffic flows along the nearby Dock Road. This road has been selected for improvement works by Limerick City and County Council, which should improve traffic flows in the longer term.

Climate Change

Climate change impacts may present challenges to future land use and the location of development in the Plan area, particularly in urban areas. Predicted impacts from projected temperature rises include more concentrated periods of higher rainfall and more exposure to flood risk. Aside from climate change, "natural variations in climate has resulted in more frequent late summer flooding" (Jacobs CFRAM, 2012, p.7). The issue of flooding in relation to the review and climate change generally will be dealt with in more detail later in this report. However, it should be noted that one of the greatest influences on flooding in the Limerick City, Askeaton and Foynes areas is that of tidal flooding (JBA, August 2020).

An extensive Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) has been prepared for the City and Plan area and urban areas in the County to inform the Draft Development Plan preparation process. The SFRA accompanies this SEA Environmental Report.

The issue of climate mitigation and renewable energy has also been addressed in this report. Since the last Plan there has been huge changes in the technology used to harness renewable energy. Numerous solar energy applications have been received since 2010, however only one application has been received for wind energy. The Plan policies require updating to reflect this. Wind energy sites are well established in Limerick and the region as a whole.

Geology and Soils

The geology of the urban areas of Limerick has been much modified by generations of building activity, where the original soil cover was removed or covered by the built environment. At this stage in the Plan process deficiencies in the information available have been identified. A geological survey with the GSI has been planned and funding has been obtained from the Heritage council to facilitate this work. This survey will then be incorporated into the environmental report, following its completion. An Foras Taluntais, now Teagasc, had by March 1966 completed a county wide survey of soils and published the results in Soil Survey Bulletin No.16, the second county level survey to be produced. Works by other agencies since, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, have added to this body of knowledge. The 1966 survey grouped the soils of Limerick into 11 different groups (Brown Earth, Brown Podzolic, Grey Brown Podzolic, Gley, Podzol, Lithosol, Organic Soils or Peats, Lake Alluvial Soils, River Alluvial Soils, Estuarine Alluvial Soils and other soils).

Each group has varying characteristics, including drainage. This has implications for agriculture and for the effective functioning of wastewater treatment units for smaller scale developments. The 1966 report does acknowledge the varying qualities of Limerick soils with a description of West Limerick Soils as being "less favoured".

Cultural Heritage

Figure 1.5 and **Figure 1.6** highlights the Architecture and Protected Structures in Limerick. Cultural Heritage involves the need to maintain the character of the historical areas in the city and county. A key challenge for the architectural heritage of the city and county is sustainable and sympathetic reuse,

regeneration and development of the built environment whilst retaining and protecting the distinctive character of the area.

The objectives of the National Landscape Strategy prepared by the DECLG are to implement the European Landscape Convention by integrating landscape into Ireland's approach to sustainable development. To have a sustainable society, environment and economy, it is required to both embrace change and manage our landscape in a considered, integrated and planned way. The implementation of a National Landscape Strategy involves a number of core objectives with associated actions derived from the European Landscape Convention. These will ensure that landscape is integrated in the collective decision-making processes and that all landscapes are recognised in this regard.

In general terms the Plan in both urban and rural areas, calls for high quality design and the sustainable reuse of the existing built environment, which would help retain the character of the area. Future developments will be required to be sympathetic to their settings in terms of design and building height. In this regard, there is a Building Height Strategy which has informed preparation of the Plan. This document is important in informing planning response to higher buildings within the City area and accompanies the Plan. Some of the strategy's recommendations in terms of tentative urban character areas reflect those suggested in the pre-draft Environmental Reports. The suburban areas in the environs of the City all have newer development patterns than the old City areas, with much new housing development being constructed from the 1960s onwards.

Material Assets

Material assets are taken to include infrastructure and utilities including rail, road, water supply and wastewater treatment facilities. It also includes economic assets such as buildings, lands and water resources which support tourism and amenities. Material assets are the critical infrastructure essential for the functioning of society, such as electricity generation and distribution, water supply, wastewater treatment, transportation and public facilities such as parks and green space. Policies have been included in the Plan to emphasise the need for climate resilient infrastructure.

Other infrastructure

Investment in City infrastructure has resulted in a total storage capacity of 18 million gallons (75,000m³) of water. A major extension to the water treatment plant at Clareville to the east of the City has started which will double output to nearly 8 billion gallons per annum. The Development Management section have indicated that recent meetings with Irish water were held to prepare for a Strategic Infrastructure Development application to An Bord Pleanála, to further expand capacity at the Bunlicky Waste Water Treatment plant.

In terms of material assets, one asset that should be considered is that of the broadband network. With the potential for working from home as a means of reducing transport emissions the importance of access to broadband in both urban and rural areas should be a topic to be considered.

Water

The hydrology of County Limerick is dominated by the River Shannon and its tributaries. There are a number of rivers, streams and tributaries in the County. **Figure 1.7** highlights the surface water in Limerick. Of 102 water bodies assessed, two, the Mague estuary and the Deel estuary in Co. Limerick, exceeded the relevant salinity related winter phosphorus thresholds (Environmental Protection Agency/Water Quality in Ireland 2013 - 2018). It should also be noted that groundwater quality is an important resource for potable water in County Limerick and geological conditions in the County mean that much of it is vulnerable to contamination.

The following Figures 1.1 to 1.5 present information on main settlements, the transport network, sites designated for European conservation value and cultural heritage.

FIGURE 1-1 TRANSPORT AND SETTLEMENT MAP OF LIMERICK

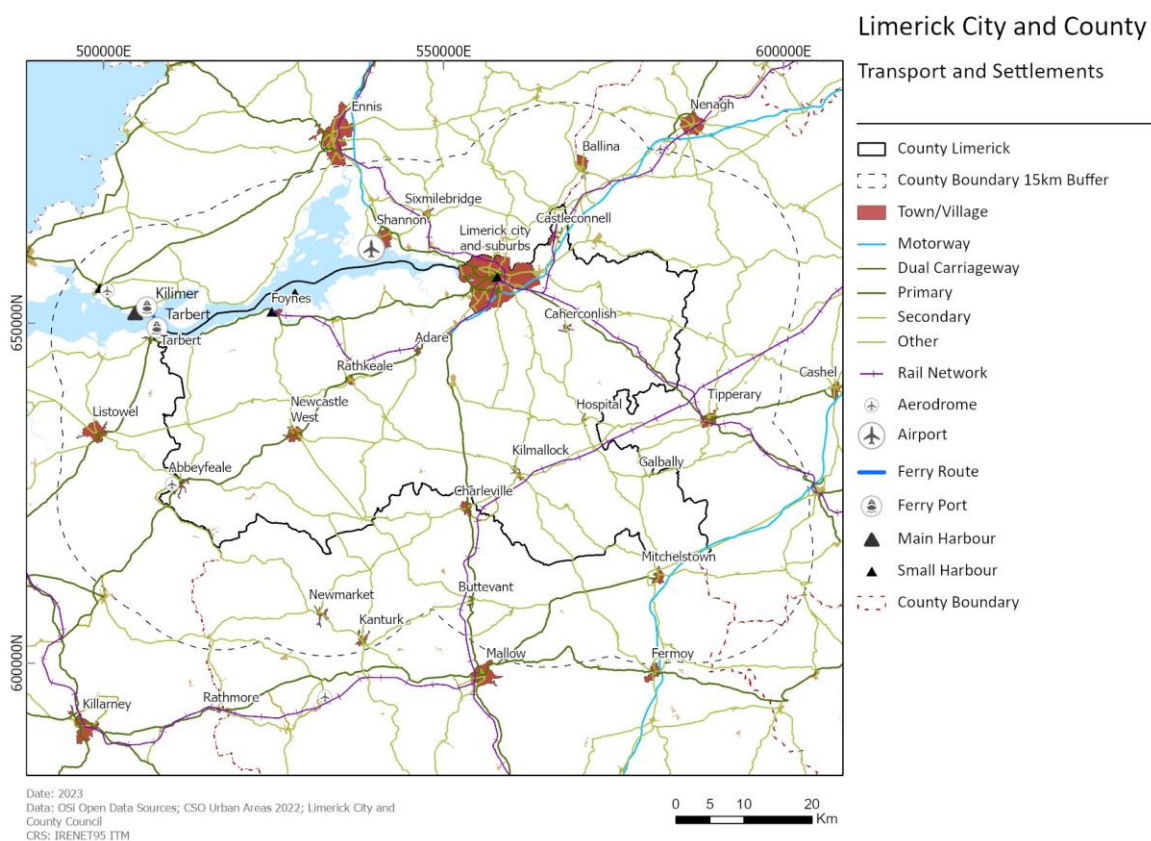
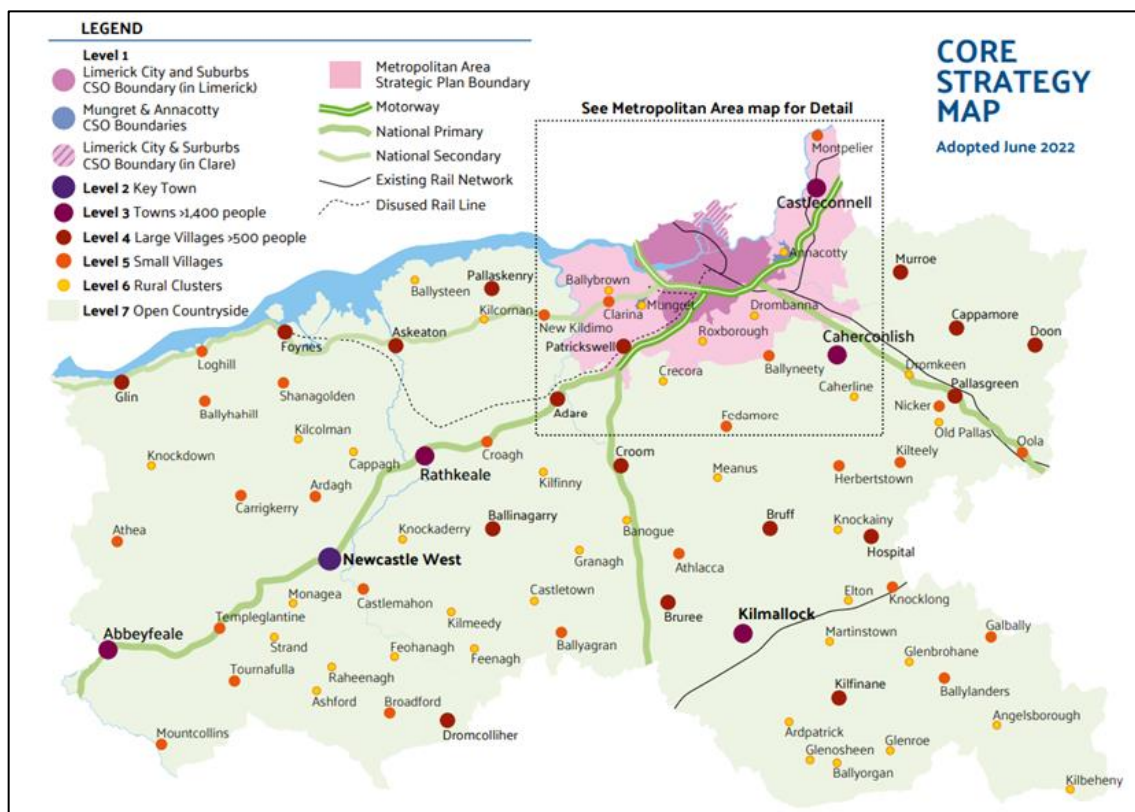
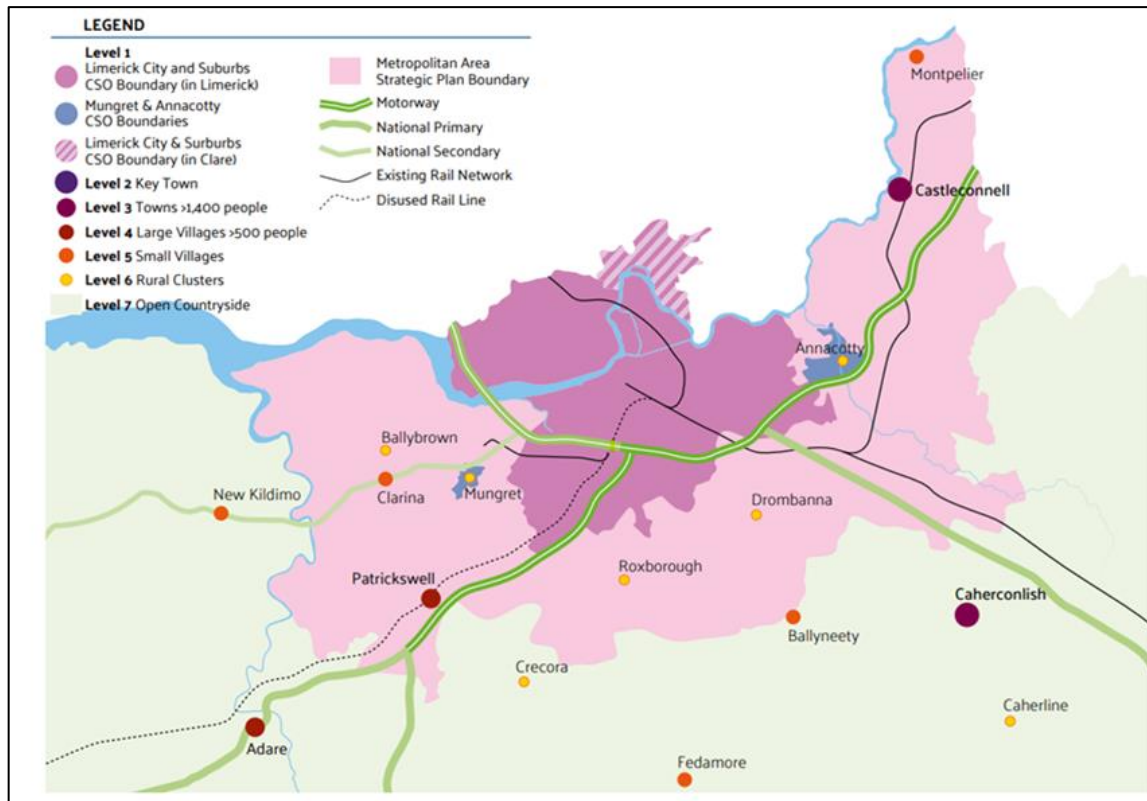


FIGURE 1-2A CORE STRATEGY MAP OF LIMERICK



(Ref: Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028)

FIGURE 1-2B CORE STRATEGY MAP OF LIMERICK



(Ref: Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028)

FIGURE 1-3 SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION IN LIMERICK

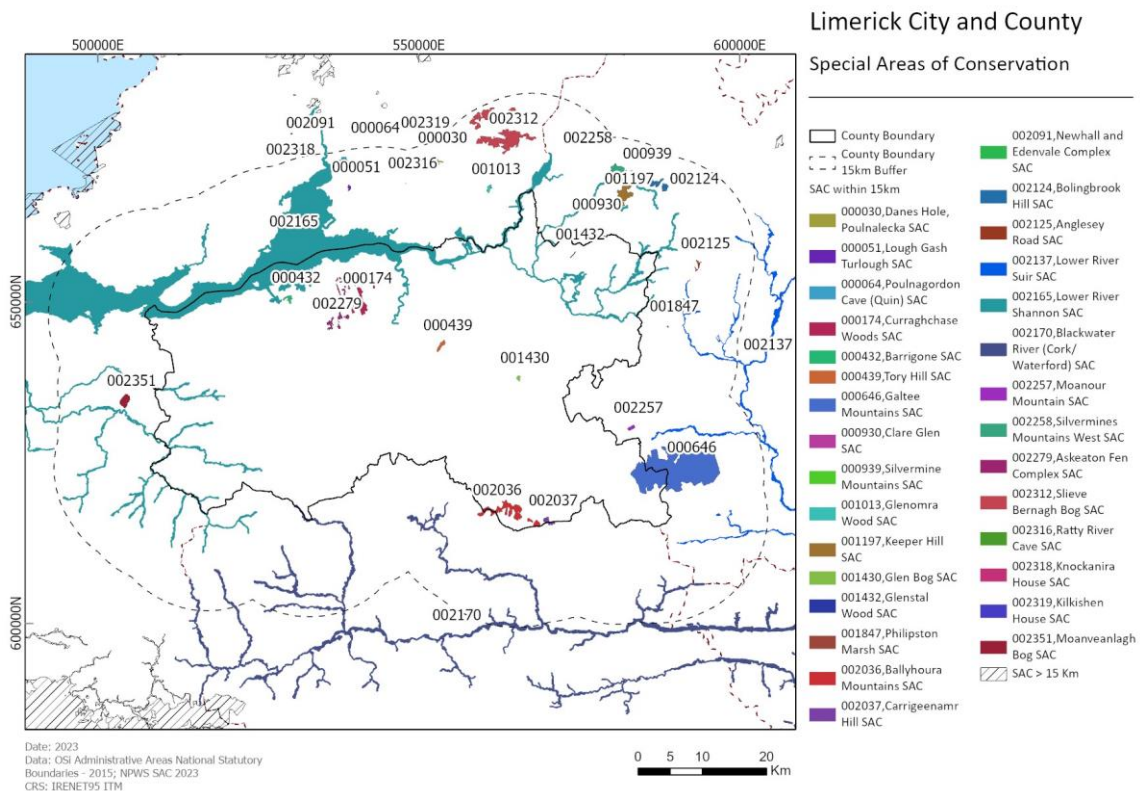


FIGURE 1-4 SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS IN LIMERICK

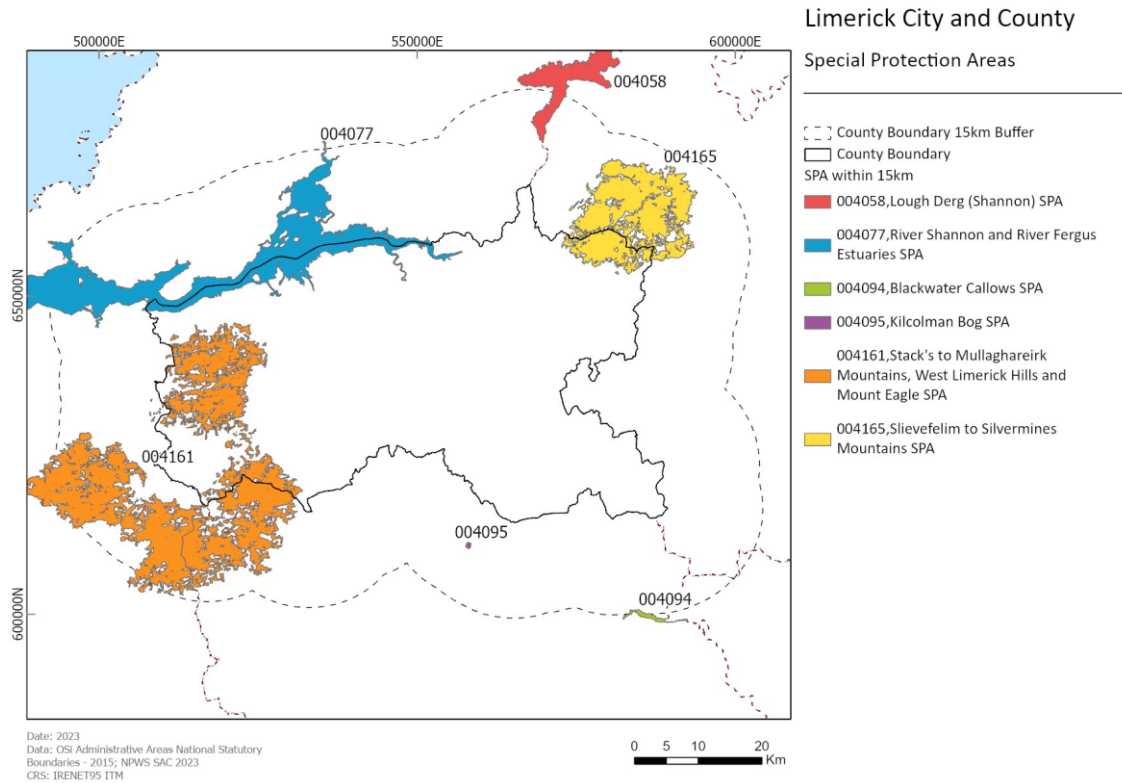


FIGURE 1-5 ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE OF LIMERICK

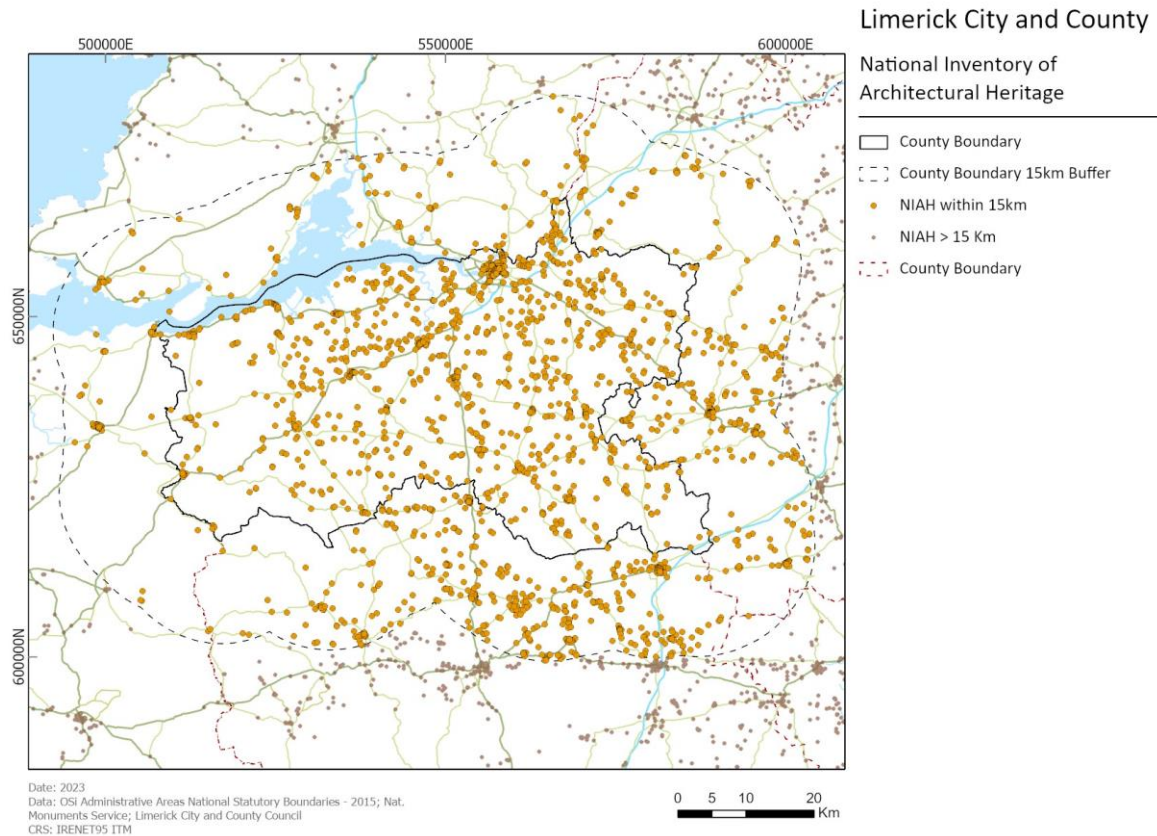


FIGURE 1-6 RECORD OF PROTECTED STRUCTURES OF LIMERICK

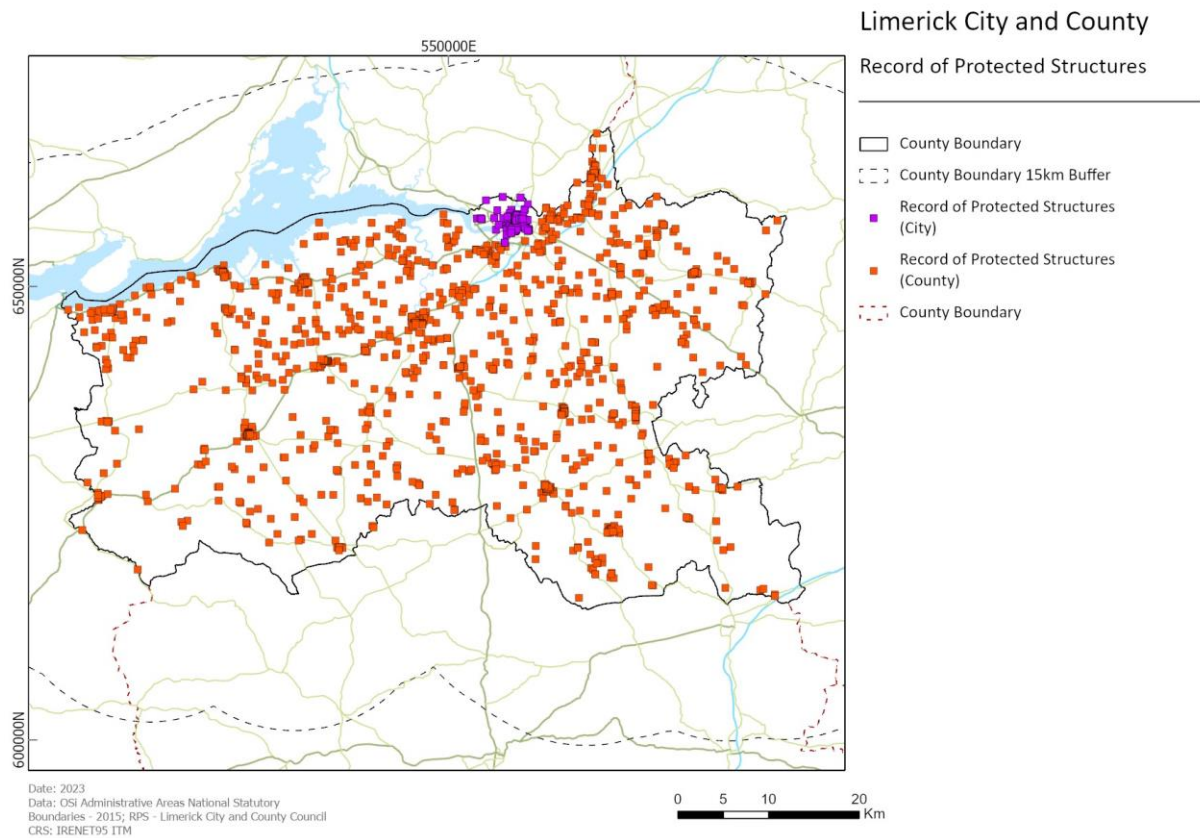
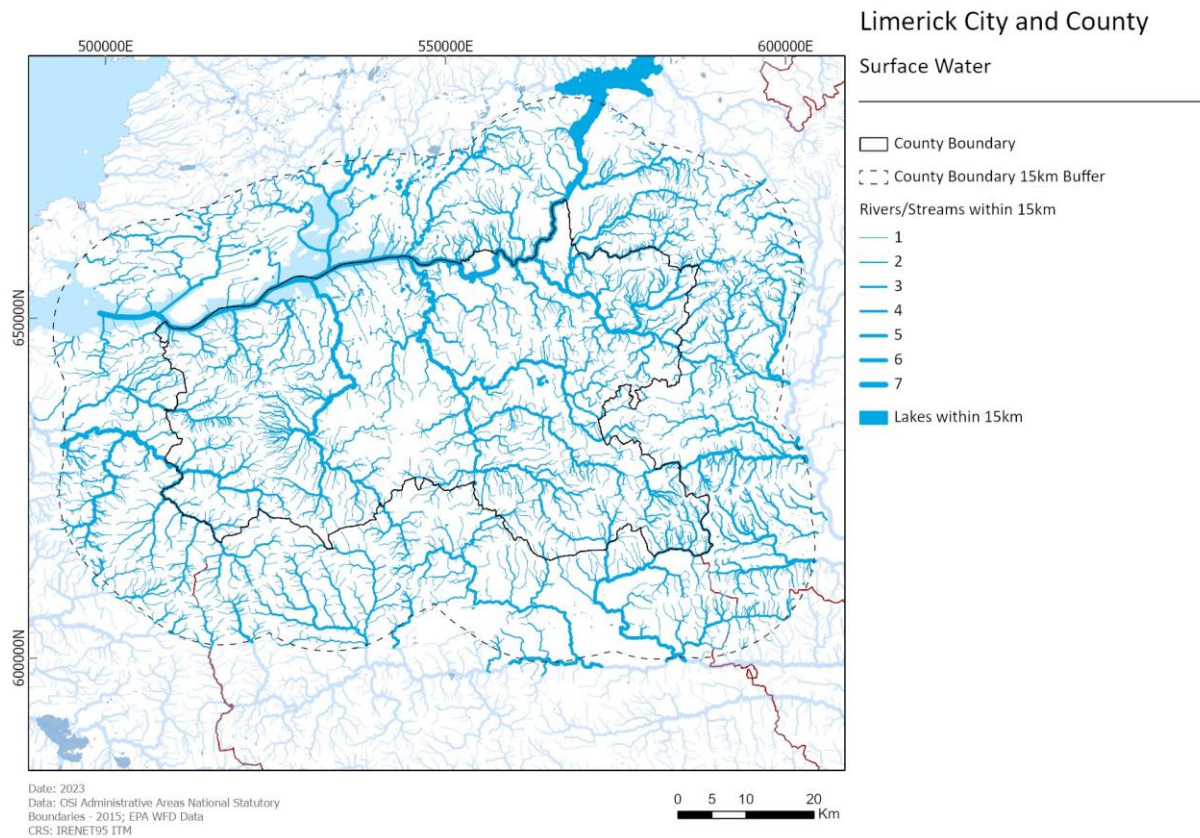


FIGURE 1-7 SURFACE WATER OF LIMERICK



4 Schedule 2a Screening Assessment

4.1 Introduction

The following Section and **Table 2** below presents the SEA Screening assessment of the Plan against the criteria provided in Schedule 2a of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2001-2011 which details the criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

More detailed commentary on the Plan's high-level goals, objectives (community, economic and integrated) and their action areas are provided in **Annex A** to this Screening Report.

This Screening assessment should be read in conjunction with the Plan and the accompanying Habitats Directive Screening Report.

Table 2 SEA Screening

Criteria for determining whether the proposed Limerick City and County LECP 2023-2028 is likely to have significant effects on the environment
1. The characteristics of the Plan having regard, in particular, to:
<i>the degree to which the Plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources,</i>
<p>The Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) for Limerick City and County (the t Plan) supports the sustainable and integrated economic and community development of Limerick. The LECPs were first described in <i>Putting People First: Action Plan for Effective Local Government (2012)</i> and then formalised in the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The preparation and implementation of the LECP is supported by collaborations with other public agencies, community and voluntary bodies and sectoral interests in the local setting. A local-led, coordinated and collaborative approach are key characteristics of the LECP. The first LECP for Limerick City and County (2016-2021) has come to the end of its timespan. This is the second LECP to cover the six-year period 2023-2028.</p> <p>The Plan will not set a framework in itself either with regard to location, nature, size or operating conditions or by allocating resources but will compliment and be consistent with the existing policy frameworks.</p> <p>The LECP provides the framework for local implementation of National and Regional Framework Plans that set out the development path for the State and the Region over the next 10 to 20 years. The key spatial plans at National and Regional level are the National Planning Framework Ireland 2040 and the National Development Plan 2021-2030 (NPF/NDP) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES). The LECP identifies objectives from those framework plans to be implemented locally. It identifies local objectives under other National and Regional policies in areas including social inclusion, rural development, urban regeneration, health and well-being, education, training and skills development, employment, enterprise and climate change/climate action.</p> <p>It must be consistent with overarching local authority plans, in particular, the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, Limerick City and County Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 and Limerick City and County Council's Corporate Plan 2019-2024.</p> <p>The strategic vision of the Plan is:</p> <p><i>To create healthy resilient communities with good infrastructure and services and a resilient sustainable economy providing quality jobs and decent incomes for people. Households,</i></p>

communities and businesses are supported to adapt to the green transition and sustainable living. Equality, civic participation and social inclusion are promoted in a diverse and multi-cultural Limerick where people and places are connected to each other. Drawing on innovation and creativity, our communities find solutions to challenges and Limerick continues to build its attractiveness and reputation in the regional, national and international context.

This vision is supported by four High-Level Goals which are further elaborated in Sustainable Community Development Objectives, Sustainable Economic Development Objectives and Integrated Objectives (see Annex A for more details).

The Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 as varied sets out the proposed vision and objectives for the development of the County over a six-year period. These aim to plan for and support the sustainable long-term development of Limerick; provide for the future wellbeing of the residents and promote an appropriate balance of development across the County. All planning proposals are assessed against the objectives of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varied, and all lower plans must be consistent with the County Development Plan.

Limerick City and County Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 was developed under the National Adaptation Framework (NAF) and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Act 2015. The aim of Limerick City and County Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 is to mainstream climate adaptation in all the functions and activities of the local authority. Themes of the Limerick Strategy are: Extreme weather event response; Land Use Planning; Infrastructure, Built Environment; Environment, Economic Development Activities and Emerging Issues. Specific objectives and action focus on risk assessment and mitigation, building climate resilience, climate proofing and measures in climate adaptation and mitigation.

The Limerick City and County Council's Corporate Plan 2019-2024 is a five-year strategic action framework and is a central component of Limerick City and County business architecture, linking policy, organisational activity, governance and performance management and actions.

The Plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes, e.g., SEA and Habitats Directives, including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate, that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting framework.

Thus, the Plan will form the basis for interventions at a local level that are complementary to and consistent with the RSES, the County Development Plan 2022-2028 and its associated SEA and AA and the relevant National strategies and policies listed in Appendix 6 of the LECP 2021 guidelines.

the degree to which the Plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy,

The Plan is statutory requirement under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and must be consistent with overarching local authority plans mentioned above, namely, the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varied. The Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 has undergone full SEA and AA and consultation with environmental bodies. All measures included in the SEA and AA of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, and any superseding Plan would apply, as appropriate. In addition to the above key Plans, there is a large number of framework Plans and sectoral Plans relevant to LECP objectives, delivered under other separate Strategies and action plans of the local authority. These include:

- Limerick City and County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024
- Limerick City and County Council Housing Strategy 2021
- The Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2022
- Limerick City and County Council Climate Action Plan (in development in 2023)

- Limerick Tourism Development Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2023
- Limerick Gateway City
- Limerick Cultural Strategy: A Framework 2026-2030
- Limerick Cultural and Arts Strategy (new strategy in development, 2023)
- Limerick City and County Council Digital Strategy 2017-2020
- Limerick Rural Development Strategy incorporating LEADER 2023-2027
- Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Strategy (updated 2022)
- Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan 2013-2023
- Limerick City & Environs Greenway & Blueway Infrastructure Strategy (in development 2023)
- Limerick Age-friendly Strategy (new strategy in development 2023)
- Belonging to Limerick – Limerick City and County Integration Plan 2019-2023
- Learning Limerick Strategic Plan 2018-2022
- Retail Strategy for Limerick – Shannon Metropolitan Area and County Limerick 2022 –2028

The Plan will forge strong links between all of the above and its economic and community sustainable high-level goals, objectives and actions areas, and will complement the planning policy framework and be consistent with the provisions of the above Plans and any other relevant and/or future plans, etc..

The relevance of the Plan in the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,

The Plan will promote sustainable recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and adaptation to new ways of living and working in a world facing the enormous challenge of climate change. These priorities are reflected in Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021) which incorporates NextGenerationEU – the European Union's response "*to address the economic and social impact of the pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions*".

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to which Ireland is a signatory, aim to address urgent economic, social and environmental challenges. Ireland strives to align itself with the UN SDGs which aim to address these challenges in a harmonised way across all governments of the world.

The Plan's current strategic policy context is in line with international frameworks, i.e., the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal, the European Pillar on Social Rights, EU Cohesion Policy, EU Innovation and Digitalisation Agenda and the EU Common Agricultural Policy, through National, Regional and local level Strategies and Plans. The "green agenda" is a core cross-cutting element in all current/new strategies and must continue progressing in its implementation. Important current policy priorities are:

Places and Cross-cutting Issues

- Advancing balanced regional development with population growth and development outside of the Dublin Region, especially to the other cities and larger towns across the state.
- Compact and sustainable growth of cities, towns and villages as socially vibrant places with quality accessible services, amenities and good quality of life. Regeneration and renewal of the physical fabric and economic and social functions of the core of cities and rural towns and villages is an important line of action with funding streams specifically addressed to this.
- Investment in public social infrastructure – especially housing to expand supply, improve quality and energy efficiency of the housing stock, address housing needs of more vulnerable groups in the population, affordability and provision of mix of housing types and tenures.

- Developing our transport infrastructure connectivity, expanding public transport and active / sustainable travel with specific attention to reducing reliance on the car for everyday travel.
- Roll-out of the National Broadband Plan infrastructure and improved digital connectivity to all areas across the state.

Social and Community

- Progressing universal health care, improving access, advancing public health promotion/well-being of the population in general and addressing health inequalities.
- Community building around placemaking, citizen / community engagement and adopting the principle of co-design of services, projects and local initiatives.
- Social inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups where there is evidence they are falling further behind (e.g., disabled people, Travellers, disadvantaged from migrant backgrounds).
- Recognising and celebrating societal diversity, acknowledging advantages of diversity, promoting integration between new cultural communities and the host community.
- Mobilising and engaging with youth as well as adapting to challenges of demographic ageing – positive ageing, active ageing and age-friendly strategies.
- Addressing the digital divide and progressing digital inclusion.
- Supporting a “Just Transition” in climate action adaptation and mitigation.

Economic

- Consolidation of our economic progress, promoting diversification as a response to changing market conditions, innovation and building resilience of the national, regional and local economies underpinned by human capital development, a learning culture and continuous upskilling.
- Expanding economic activities in the knowledge economy and high value-added sectors based on Research & Development & Innovation (RDI) capacity especially drawing on RDI in Ireland’s third level institutions and private industry in advanced sectors.
- Planning for and putting in place the business (land, premises and associated infrastructures) and social infrastructure (housing, schools) as well as supporting the human capital development and quality of life factors needed to attract Foreign Direct Investment. The geographic distribution of such investment should promote balanced regional development.
- Promote enterprise development in the indigenous economy focused on micro, small and medium sized businesses in view of their importance in local job creation, sectoral profile and their important role in terms of products and services to people and businesses. Policy measures continue to focus on ensuring the services and infrastructure are available to support start-up, operation and expansion / upscaling of SMEs, with a strong emphasis on support for digitalisation.
- Focus on sectors of particular importance in the local economic including agri-food sector, tourism, cultural industries and new opportunities especially in renewable energy and the green economy.
- Expanding social enterprise and the circular economy.
- Taking advantage of digitalisation and new models of work (remote working) and service delivery.

This screening is part of the SEA process which is an integral part of the Plan. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is defined as a systematic process for evaluating the environmental implications of proposed policies, plans or programmes. The objectives of SEA are to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to promote sustainable development. Thus, the Plan supports the

sustainable development of Limerick City and County. The High-Level goals will be underpinned by specific sustainable community, economic and integrated objectives and their respective action areas (see Annex A below).

Environmental problems relevant to the Plan

The SEA Environmental Report of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 identifies a number of environmental problems/pressures relevant to the Plan area, including the following:

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

- One of the most pressing issues is prevention of encroachment on sites of ecological interest, both designated and non-designated. There is increasing pressure for public access, often intensified by Covid19 preventative restrictions. This increased disturbance and footfall can cause both physical damage and disturbance to habitats and species.
- Closely related to this is fragmentation and isolation of habitats as a result of development. Connectivity of habitats to permit species movement needs to be addressed and will form part of the forthcoming Blue Green Infrastructure Strategy. While agri-environmental schemes are beyond the scope of the Plan, measures through these schemes, allied to plan-led measures, may help prevent isolation of habitats and species. One other aspect of ecological isolation and fragmentation is that of barrier creation to species movement, either through development, or instream obstacles in the case of watercourses.
- Similar to the section on water quality, a decline in water quality, pollution and dumping has adverse effects on habitat.

Population and Human Health

- The need to integrate the policy content of both the NPF and the RSES with their emphasis on concentration of development and the population figures assigned to Limerick.
- The need to ensure that Waste Water infrastructure keeps pace with development, in rural towns and villages in particular.
- Ensuring adequate zoning for Community and Educational usage, including provision of medical and leisure at a level appropriate to the settlement position in the hierarchy.
- Maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the urban and rural surroundings and ensuring continued access to amenities and services is essential for human health and wellbeing.

Water

- Quality of both surface and ground water resources in Limerick.
- Ensuring that there is sufficient capacity in Waste Water Treatment Plants to avoid pollution from these sources and to ensure that their capacity keeps pace with development.
- Ensuring that there are sufficient potable water resources for Limerick's Population. It is important to avoid over abstraction as this will have adverse hydrological and ecological effects.
- Ensuring that the issue of water management as a whole is addressed in Limerick. There is a need for water management to take into account not just flooding but variations in supply and demand as demand grows. There is also a need to ensure that the water supply system can function in a climate altered future, in a fashion that will not have adverse ecological and hydrological effects.

Air and Climate

- Currently there are no significant concerns with regard to air quality in the City as was indicated earlier in this report. It is hoped that the gradual transition to electric vehicles will play a part in

reducing traffic emissions and have a positive long-term effect on air quality in the Plan area and the metropolitan area as a whole. Pressures on air quality from transport is addressed in the Plan.

- Climate change impacts may present challenges to future land use and location of development in the Plan area. Predicted impacts from projected temperature rises include more concentrated periods of higher rainfall and more exposure to flood risk. As indicated earlier in this report, tidal flooding is a huge part of the flood risk in Limerick. A comprehensive Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has informed the Plan and the zoning pattern has been guided by this.
- There is the continued need to comply with current and emerging guidance on climate adaptation and mitigation as it emerges from central government. At present the Limerick Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019- 2025 is the most evolved of internal climate response documents in the Council and has informed the climate action sections of the Plan.

Soils and Geology

- Soil conservation in its general terms is the biggest issue in that dispersed development patterns lead often to unnecessary use of greenfield sites.
- The issue of contaminated soils is also a growing issue. One part of the contamination issue that has not been mentioned above is that of the presence of invasive species which have often colonised brownfield sites. The policy content of the plan has been updated to reflect this. Movement of soils with seed stock of invasive species in them can lead to contamination elsewhere.
- Lack of knowledge of geological heritage sites. This will be addressed through a survey funded by the Heritage Council in 2021.

Cultural Heritage

- Landscapes: There are two major challenges for the current Plan, the first being the incorporation of City and County landscapes in an overall assessment and the second being the consideration of the county landscape areas in the context of the new seascape assessment, being carried out for the maritime area planning Bill process.
- Archaeological Heritage: The need for development to take into account, not just individual archaeological sites but also their setting.
- Archaeological Heritage: Climate change will prove an issue for more exposed sites and monuments and may also prove a threat to more common and widely known monuments such as older graveyards still in use.
- Architectural Heritage: The combination of the two lists of protected structures from the City and County given the changes that have taken place in the time-period since the preparation of the last two Plans. This is a difficult task and an up-to-date list is essential as a basis for their future management.
- Architectural Heritage: The management and integration of protected structures into modern developments. In this regard, the Living City Initiative in Limerick may well prove to be a valuable incentive.

Material Assets

- Protection of the carrying capacity and the strategic transport function of the transport network is an objective of the Draft Limerick Development Plan and requires continuous assessment.
- It will be important to ensure that the provision of WWTP capacity keeps pace with development.
- All new infrastructure is required to be designed and built in a fashion so as to ensure it can function in a climate altered future. This issue has been included in policy content in Chapter 8 –

Climate Action, Flooding and Transition to a Low Carbon Economy of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 SEA ER.

Interrelationships between the environmental factors

- The interrelationships between the range of environmental topics is an important consideration in the environmental assessment. Table 4 in the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 SEA ER. indicates the interrelationships identified between the environmental topics in this assessment.
- The relationship between adequate wastewater treatment and water quality and Ireland's obligations under the Water Framework is evident.
- Open space, blue space and green infrastructure is now recognised as an important concept in land-use planning and environmental protection. It relates to the network of open spaces, parks, gardens, green corridors, woodlands, waterways and urban tree lines. Green space and biodiversity provide environmental, social, economic and physical benefits and give added value for quality of life, with consequent benefits for human health. It can also influence the layout of the urban landscape, with its emphasis on adequate open space, amenity provision and landscaping. However, what is termed green infrastructure and its associated human access needs to be managed to ensure that such access does not cause damage or disturbance to wildlife and habitats that are present.
- There are many issues at play in the relationship between different factors. Issues of climate change and cultural heritage are now linked, with the recent publication of 'The Built and Archaeological Heritage Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan' in 2019. It highlights that climate change can be expected to give rise to structural damage to monuments and historic properties, the undermining of structures, loss of ground adjacent to structures, exposure and erosion of archaeological sites and collapse of unstable masonry elements.
- The 'Built and Archaeological Heritage Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan' also identifies slow onset risks, such as the loss of historic landscape features, decay of building fabric caused by increased saturation, microbiological growth to interiors and contents and increased corrosion of metal elements. Another threat is maladaptation – the inadvertent loss or damage to heritage structures and sites during adaptation works by others, or the carrying out of poorly informed or reactive works. This is an issue that applies to all sectors undertaking climate adaptation works and not just the heritage sector.
- There are more immediate environmental threats to the environment than climate change. Many of the activities regulated by planning legislation have the potential to cause environmental and ecological damage if carried out inappropriately, or at the wrong scale or location. The Development Management Chapter is perhaps one of the most important parts of the Plan in dealing with these issues.

the relevance of the plan in the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste-management or water protection).

As discussed above the Plan's current strategic policy context outlines a strategic fit with International frameworks, i.e., the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal, the European Pillar on Social Rights, EU Cohesion Policy, EU Innovation and Digitalisation agenda and the EU Common Agricultural Policy, through national, regional and local level strategies and plans.

The Plan is an important tool to support the implementation of EU (and National) policy on economic, community and integrated development. The Plan is complementary to the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 that sets important statutory frameworks. The Plan needs to be consistent with the

spatial policies of this Development Plan and not present alternate or competing proposals that would lead to inconsistency.

The Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varies, is compliant with existing EU (and national) legislation and policy which include policies relating to environmental protection, water supply, water quality, ground water, waste management, landscape and cultural heritage, e.g., SEA Directive, Water Framework Directive, Groundwater Directive, Habitats Directive and Birds Directive and the Flood Directive. The Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 has undergone full SEA and AA and consultation with environmental bodies. All measures included in the SEA and AA of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, and any superseding Plan would apply, as appropriate. Thus, the Plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes, e.g., SEA and Habitats Directives, including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate, that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting framework.

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

the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,

The Plan is for a six-year period, and as stated above must be compliant and consistent with the statutory planning framework. Since the Plan is consistent with the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, any effects will be compliant with the CDP's objectives which in turn were subject to SEA and AA.

Currently, the implementation of the Plan will not give rise to specific environmental effects.

It is considered that effects arising from the Plan action areas in the future will be addressed under the existing statutory planning framework and probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects are not assessed as being significant at this stage. Any action areas in the Plan that result in the development of new projects must be carried out in compliance with the statutory planning and environmental framework and higher-level plans, i.e., Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varied, which has been subject to SEA and AA. They must also be subjected to the appropriate environmental assessments required at project stage as discussed above.

the cumulative nature of the effects,

The key objective of the Plan is to promote sustainable economic and community development within the framework of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028. A guiding principle is sustainability, and promoting a more resource efficient, green and inclusive society and economy. Increased economic development is expected but without adverse environmental effects as the selected development and the environmental protection objectives of the Limerick Development Plan, mitigates same. Community development should not result in adverse impacts as it is more about stakeholder actions and relationships than spatial planning.

Once the environmental protection measures within the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 and its associated SEA and AA are followed, adhered to and implemented, it is predicted that the Plan will not compromise the quality of the receiving environment.

Thus, it is considered that negative cumulative effects would not arise in relation to the Plan as the high-level goals, objectives and action areas are consistent with current policy and the statutory planning framework for Limerick.

The AA screening notes:

Having regard to the foregoing no significant effects on European Sites have been identified or are currently envisaged. Furthermore, as all of the HLGs have been assessed as not having the potential, in their own right, to result in likely significant effects, there will be no potential for them to combine with other objectives of the statement to result in cumulative negative effects.

The AA Screening will be updated at relevant stages during the process. Detailed actions (which may include specifications such as those relating to the location of development) would have to be considered in later in the LECP preparation/AA screening process.

the trans boundary nature of the effects

The Plan will be consistent with the statutory planning framework and as such it is not considered that transboundary effects would arise in relation to the Plan. No transboundary effects are identified at this stage. Implementation of the Plan will be subject to environmental protection objectives set out in the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 as varied, which has been subject to SEA and AA to ensure that negative transboundary effects do not occur.

the risks to human health or the environment (e.g., due to accidents),

The Seveso II Directive (96/82 EC) and the EC (Control of Major Accident Hazards Involving Dangerous Substances) Regulations 2000 (S.I. No. 476 of 2000) seek to prevent major accidents, involving dangerous substances and chemicals, through controls on the location of new establishments, modifications to existing establishments and development in the vicinity of an establishment which, by virtue of its type or location, is likely to increase the risk or consequences of a major accident. The Directive defines major accident hazard sites as those that store or can generate quantities of dangerous substances in excess of specified thresholds. Dangerous substances are classified as toxic, flammable/explosive or dangerous for the environment. Threshold quantities are specified in the legislation for named substances, categories of substances and groups of categories. Sites are classified as Lower Tier or Upper Tier, depending on whether the lower or upper threshold is exceeded. The Health and Safety Authority provides advice where appropriate, in respect of planning applications within a certain distance of the perimeter of these sites. Seveso Site Consultation Distances are specified in the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) (SI No 600 of 2001). Distances vary depending on the nature of activity at the site. Such technical advice will be taken into account when considering applications for planning permission, on and within the vicinity of Seveso sites.

At present there are a number of registered Seveso Sites in Limerick, namely: Upper Tier Establishments: Atlantic Fuel Supply Company Ltd. (Foynes Harbour, Durnish, Foynes) and Goulding Chemicals Ltd, (Morgans South, Durnish, Askeaton, Co. Limerick), and Lower Tier Establishments: Grassland Agro, (Dock Road, Limerick City) Exolum Shannon Ltd. (formerly Inter Terminals Shannon Ltd.) (Foynes Harbour, Foynes, Co. Limerick) and Analog Devices International (Bay F1, Raheen Business Park, Co. Limerick).

The Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 contain a number of objectives across a range of chapters which guide the sustainable development of the County and seek to minimize risks to human health. The main objective is IN 024 Seveso Sites in Chapter 8: Infrastructure.

No such risks are identified as arising from the Plan at this stage.

All planning policy has been set within the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 and its associated SEA and AA. This Development Plan requires development(s) to taking account of the Major Accidents Directive (Seveso Directive) and the possible impact on public health and safety.

The Plan will not create any risks to human health or the environment. It is a High-Level Goal (HLG1) to achieve health and well-being for all. The Plan includes objectives to improve the quality and

availability of health services and to provide a safe and secure environment for all (see Annex A below).

the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).

The area under the Plan consideration is the same as that of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028. Limerick City and County has a population of 209,536 (CSO Census 2022) and a geographical area of 2,756Km².

The Plan will be consistent with the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 and will not result in any significant adverse impacts on the receiving environment as discussed above.

the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

(a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage

Limerick City and County has a rich reserve of heritage encompassing the natural environment, cultural heritage, archaeology and built heritage.

The area has a very rich and diverse range of natural ecosystems, including 19 European protected sites, i.e., 12 Special Areas of Conservations (SACs), 3 Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and 4 Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs). It also has a number of other natural characteristics such as protected views and prospects located across the City and County.

Limerick City and County has a rich history and strong cultural heritage, which remains ever present in its structures, its streets and its people. It is steeped in a long, colourful and unique history, with many historical buildings, events and characters that are influential even to this day. There is evidence of human existence in both the City and County long before the Viking invasions, with evidence of human existence over 8,000 years ago. This long history of human settlement is very much based around economic activity and community development. These can be seen through the historic buildings, structures and stories present in the County along with its archaeological resources. Limerick's remarkable archaeological and historical landscape is influenced by and complimented by a diverse high quality natural environment.

The Plan will not set the context for land use or development activities outside of that already established by the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varied, and its associated SEA And AA, and therefore, no negative affected are identified at this time for natural and/or cultural heritage.

The Plan will complement the planning policy framework and be consistent with the provisions of the above Plan and any other relevant and/or future plans, etc..

A screening statement in support of Appropriate Assessment has also been prepared for this Plan in line with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). The conclusion of the screening statement is as follows:

The findings of this Screening Assessment are presented following the European Commission's Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly affecting Natura 2000 Sites: Methodological Guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2021) and Managing Natura 2000 Sites: the provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2018) as well as the Department of the Environment's Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG, 2010).

The requirement for a Stage 2 AA would arise if the LECP were likely to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site. This screening report evaluates the Socio-Economic Statement and High-Level

Goals as part of the Limerick City and County Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) to determine if it needs to be the subject of a Stage 2 AA.

The AA Screening finds that the Socio-Economic Statement and High-Level Goals shall not give rise to significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, in accordance with the methodological guidance on the provision of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, it is concluded that the Socio-Economic Statement and High-Level Goals of the LECP does not require any further assessment to demonstrate compliance with the Directive.

AA Screening will continue throughout the LECP preparation process, as the LECP becomes more detailed.

(b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values,

It is anticipated that environmental quality standards will not be exceeded by the Plan as it will be consistent with the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varied, and its associated SEA And AA. In particular, the Plan seeks to ensure that the residential amenities of towns and villages are enhanced through a variety of social, economic and environmental objectives based on the principles of sustainable development of these areas and the efficient and effective use of services and facilities.

The Plan will be consistent with the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 and will not result in any significant adverse impacts on the receiving environment as discussed above. In order to be realised, potential projects or proposals arising from the Plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies and plans (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting framework. Should projects arise from the Plan, the statutory consent process as outlined above will apply.

(c) intensive land-use,

The Plan is not a land use plan and does not set the framework for intensive land-use development not already zoned or identified within the remit of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varied, and its associated SEA And AA. Therefore, such effects are not identified.

(d) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status.

The Plan identifies a few action areas (see Annex A) which have the potential to have impacts on the receiving environment. However, these specific action areas as outlined in Annex A are consistent with existing policies and objectives in the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 which has been subject to the SEA Directive and Habitats Directive process. All other action areas are generic in nature and therefore impacts on the European protected sites (listed below) are not envisaged or likely at this stage.

The Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 recognise the importance of sites with National and European designations and sets out policies and objectives for their protection. Therefore, it is not considered the implementation of the Plan will have significant negative effects on areas or landscapes which have recognised national, European Union or international protection status.

Development which may arise from the Plan will be subject to an appropriate project level environmental assessment and Habitats Directive Assessment (where necessary). The Plan will have to comply, where relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Ecological Impact Assessment and requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting. Actions arising from the Plan will demonstrate compliance with the environmental

protection measures in the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, as varied, and its associated SEA Environmental Report and Natura Impact Report.

A Screening report for Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken and accompanies the LECP and this SEA Screening report. The AA Screening finds that the Socio-Economic Statement and High-Level Goals shall not give rise to significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, in accordance with the methodological guidance on the provision of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, it is concluded that the Socio-Economic Statement and High-Level Goals of the LECP does not require any further assessment to demonstrate compliance with the Directive. AA Screening will continue throughout the LECP preparation process, as the LECP becomes more detailed.

European protected sites in Limerick City and County:

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs):

Askeaton Fen Complex SAC (002279), Ballyhoura Mountains SAC (002036), Barrigone SAC (000432), Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC (002170), Carrigeenamronety Hill SAC (002037), Clare Glen SAC (000930), Galtee Mountains SAC (000646), Glen Bog SAC (001430), Glenstal Wood SAC (001432), Lower River Shannon SAC (002165), Tory Hill SAC (000439), Curraghchase Woods SAC (000174).

Special Protection Areas (SPAs):

River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA (004077), Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains SPA (004165), Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA (004161).

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs):

Carrigkerry Bogs NHA (002399), Grageen Fen and Bog NHA (002186), Lough Gay Bog NHA (002454), Moyreen Bog NHA (002361). Additionally, there are also a variety of Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) which were published on a non-statutory basis in 1995 but have not since been statutorily proposed or designated. These sites are of significance for wildlife and habitats. There are 67 in the Limerick area.

4.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Determination

The Plan was screened under the requirement for SEA in accordance with the following legislation:

- Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive) and particularly Articles 3(3), 3(4) & 3(5) relate to 'Screening' for the requirement for SEA.
- S.I. No. 435 of 2004 European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 - European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011.
- Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, which sets out the "Criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment"

Section 9 (1) of the (2004) Regulations (S.I. No. 435) (as amended) states "*subject to sub-article (2), an environmental assessment shall be carried out for all plans and programmes*

*(a) which are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism and **town and country planning or land use**, and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, or "*

(b) which are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site but, either individually or in combination with other plans, are likely to have a significant effect on any such site.”

The Plan (Limerick City and County LECP 2023-2028) does not provide consent, establish a framework for granting consent or contribute towards a framework for granting consent. Thus, the Plan will not set the framework for future development consent of projects and is required to be consistent with the RPGs, Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 or any higher-level plans and not present alternate or competing proposals that would lead to inconsistency. Any projects that may arise in the future associated with the Plan will be subject to the requirements of the relevant national planning procedures and be consistent with existing frameworks, as appropriate, all of which have been subject to SEA and developed in accordance with the principles of sustainability. In order to be realised, potential projects or proposals arising from the Plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting framework.

In accordance with Article 9(5) of S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011, Limerick City and County Council provided notice to the specified environmental authorities that implementation of the Limerick City and County LECP 2023-2028 would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and sought submissions or observations prior to finalising the Screening for the requirement for SEA.

The following submissions were received from:

- EPA

The EPA submission can be found in Annex B of this Final SEA Screening report. Key issues raised by EPA are summarised as follows:

As an SEA environmental authority, the EPA focus on promoting the full and transparent integration of the findings of the Environmental Assessment into plans and programmes and advocate that the key environmental challenges for Ireland are addressed as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme. As a priority, the EPA focus on reviewing and commenting on key sector plans.

In finalising the SEA screening determination, the EPA suggest that a number of guidance documents are taken into account and the relevant recommendations are incorporated as relevant and appropriate to the Plan. Guidance notes and other resources can be accessed at:

<https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-topic-and-sector-specific-guidance/>

The Habitats Directive must be complied with where relevant, and Appropriate Assessment key findings and recommendations should be incorporated into the SEA and the Plan.

The Plan must be consistent with the need for proper planning and sustainable development with adequate and appropriate critical service infrastructure in place to service any development proposed and authorised during the Plan lifetime. Ensure alignment with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, plus incorporate any relevant recommendations in sectoral, regional and local climate adaptation plans. Also ensure alignments with any key relevant higher-level plans and programmes and consistency with the relevant objectives and policy commitments of the NPF and the relevant RSES.

Future amendments to the Plan made prior to finalisation, or where modifications to the Plan are proposed following its adoption, should be screened for likely potential significant effects in accordance with the SEA Regulations, as appropriate.

The SEA Determination including the reasons for not requiring an environmental assessment should be available for public inspection and a copy sent to the relevant environmental authorities consulted.

Upon receipt of submissions/observations, the SEA Screening determination was finalised. Post consultation minor changes were made to the LECP itself including amendment/deletion of action areas under the following SEDOs:

- E1. Labour market activation
- C1 Education & learning
- C7 Societal / community awareness of climate action
- C9 Integration of migrants & diverse cultural communities

These have been evaluated under the updated Annex A of this Screening report and likely significant effects are not identified. Please see Annex A for the evaluation of updated actions.

This is the final SEA Determination and please see accompanying SEA Determination of same.

Annex A: SEA Evaluation of HLG and Actions

Annex B: EPA Screening response Limerick City and County Council LECP 2023-2028