

# **Strategic Environmental Assessment**

## **Environmental Report of the Proposed Amendment No. 1 of the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014-2020**

Prepared August 2017

## 1.0 Introduction and About

Westmeath County Council has prepared a proposed amendment to the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014 (LAP). This is the SEA Statement for this proposed Amendment Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). It should be noted that a Strategic Environmental Assessment was completed as part of the adoption of the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014, and that in accordance with Article 13E of the Planning and Development Regulations (Strategic Environmental Assessment ) 2004, the environmental report shall include the information that may reasonably be required taking into account the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in the decision-making process in order to avoid duplication of environmental assessment. This report should be read in the context of the environmental report of the strategic environmental assessment included with the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014. The Assessment only relates to the amendments being made, and all other relevant environmental information has been assessed as part of the adoption of the Local Area Plan.

The proposed amendment relates to the zoning objective at three separate locations and an amendment of the objective from open space and amenity to residential use. The amendment will facilitate the construction of approximately 40 additional dwellings in the town.

The proposed rezoning will allow for the potential development of an additional 40 dwellings over the lifetime of the local area plan. As the national average household size is 2.75, this will result in the provision of housing for approximately 110 people.

<b>Table 1: Sites proposed for residential use</b>					
<b>Location</b>	<b>Area (ha) approx.</b>	<b>Current Zoning</b>	<b>Proposed Zoning</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Minimum yield of dwellings</b>
Ennell Court Mullingar	0.61	Open Space O-LZ7	Residential O-LZ1	Part Westmeath County Council / part private	18 - 21
Rear of Tesco's and O'Growney, Mullingar	0.65	Open Space O-LZ7	Residential O-LZ1	Westmeath County Council	14
Robsintown Road & Delvin Road, Mullingar	0.2	Open Space O-LZ7	Residential O-LZ1	Westmeath County Council	4-5
<b>Total area of land to be rezoned</b>	<b>1.51</b>	<b>Minimum yield of total dwellings</b>		<b>40</b>	

As part of the preparation of the proposed amendment to the Mullingar Local Area Plan, Westmeath County Council has prepared an Environmental Report of the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the proposed Amendment. The Environmental Report is required to include the information that may reasonably be required, taking into account:

- Current knowledge and methods of assessment,
- The contents and level of detail in the Plan
- The stage of the Plan in the decision making process, and
- The extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in the decision making process in order to avoid duplication of environmental assessment

The purpose of this Environmental Report is to facilitate consultation with all stakeholders including environmental Authorities and to influence the preparation of the amendment to the Mullingar Local Area plan in order to ensure that account is taken of environmental considerations

As part of the adoption of the Mullingar Local Area Plan and its strategic environmental assessment, there were a number of significant issues that arose, these include:

- The provision in the proposed Mullingar Local Area Plan for increased development and the consequences of this for increased water abstraction from Lough Owel. (significant implications for AA also)
- Policy and objectives for development/improvement of access and tourism facilities to natural heritage assets in the hinterland of Mullingar.
- Sequential development
- Efficient use of existing public infrastructure (material assets)
- Identified flood risks

It is considered that the proposed amendment will have either a positive or negligible impact on these issues.

## **2.0 Statutory Context**

The requirement and mechanism for the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Development Plan review process is set out in the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004-2011 with particular reference to Articles 14A to 14 J.

## **3.0 Transportation Infrastructure**

All of the subject sites are with walking and cycling distance of public transport serving the town. Each are accessed via local roads in proximity to larger distributor/regional roads and street.

The most appropriate access must be confirmed to the O'Growney site, however this will be done at development application stage. No development will be permitted in the absence of satisfactory access arrangements being demonstrated.

## **4.0 Natural heritage biodiversity, including flora and fauna, landscape water and soil.**

### **4.1 Waste Water Treatment Infrastructure**

Mullingar Waste Water Treatment Plant was upgraded to 55,000 p.e. in 2009 along with significant investment in the collection network.

The Mullingar Wastewater Treatment Plant has an organic design capacity of 55,000PE and the current organic loading (2016) is approximately 19,000PE, so there is more than sufficient treatment capacity for an additional loading of 110PE.

As with the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014, no issues have been identified with regard to existing levels of water treatment, however the protection of this important source (material asset) from point and diffuse pollution is a wider issue outside the boundaries of the Mullingar LAP and has been highlighted in the SEA and AA of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020.

#### **4.2 Water Supply**

Mullingar is served predominantly through water abstraction from Lough Owel at Portloman Water Treatment Plant. The Environmental Report accompanying the Mullingar Local Area Plan identified the wider issue of pressure on this water source and the allowable extraction consistent with the environmental impact assessment for this abstraction.

Portloman Water Treatment Plant supplies drinking water into three Regional Water Supplies – Mullingar High Level, Mullingar Low Level, and Mullingar Town Independent.

The average daily output from the Plant in June 2017 was 17,940m<sup>3</sup>/day, ranging from 16,229m<sup>3</sup>/day to 20,567m<sup>3</sup>/day (i.e. from -9.5% to +14.6%); for the Town Independent Supply alone, the average daily output in June 2017 was 8,764m<sup>3</sup>/day, ranging from 7,660m<sup>3</sup>/day to 9,846m<sup>3</sup>/day (i.e. from -12.5% to +12.3%).

The volume of water required to supply an additional 110PE is approximately 39m<sup>3</sup>/day, representing an additional 0.2% of total production or 0.45% for Mullingar Town Independent alone and is well within the normal daily variation in production at the Plant.

Consequently, it is not considered that the addition demand of a potential 110p.e will have a significant impact on the water supply. Abstraction rates from this water body will be required to be within limits determined by scientific study and investigation.

#### **4.3 Landscape and Biodiversity**

The subject sites are in fallow use, with no particular biodiversity features. The site of O'Growney is bound on its east and south side by hedgerow, which may be maintained as part of any development. The Robinstown road site is located at a prominent location and so its development will have an impact on the suburban landscape.

#### **4.4 European Sites**

Map 4.5 of the SEA statement accompanying the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014 shows the locations of the sites considered to be of European and National importance (Natura 2000) within 15km of Mullingar. As determined in the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report that accompanies this amendment, it is considered that there will be no impact on these designated sites through any works facilitated by this amendment.

#### **4.5 Natural Heritage Areas**

The Ennell Court sites are adjacent to, but not within the proposed Natural Heritage Area associated with the Royal Canal (Site Code: 002103). An Open Space buffer will be maintained between Site A

and Site B in Ennell Court and the Royal Canal, this buffer comprises the existing towpath and currently forms and will continue to function as an extended linear amenity and wildlife corridor.

## **5.0 Built and cultural Heritage**

### **5.1 Archaeological**

There are no areas of archaeological potential recorded on or in the vicinity of any of the three sites subject of this amendment.

### **5.2 Architectural**

Each of the subject sites are in the vicinity of mature residential areas. There will be minimal impact on the existing architectural heritage of Mullingar town, but there will be an opportunity to create a gateway development at Robinstown Road and interesting and valuable modern residential development in the remaining sites.

## **6.0 Climatic Factors**

In the course of carrying out the SFRA and justification tests for any lands on which a flood risk has been identified the issue of climate change shall be factored in as required in The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities Nov 2009.

The development of the subject sites within the contiguous built up areas of Mullingar will be more efficient than edge of town development in terms of transport and provision of service, it is considered that this will have a positive impact on air quality and climate

## **7.0 Spatial Policy Context, Targets and land use zoning objectives.**

The 2010 – 2022 Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) have set a target population for Mullingar of 30,934 by 2020 subject to that this must be contingent on the provision of waste – water treatment systems that ensure no negative impact on receiving waters. The total additional population target planned for in the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014-2020 derived from the RPG's is 10,831 persons. The 2016 Census recorded the population of Mullingar as 20,928 people rather than the 27,357 previously projected, consequently, it is likely that the projection will fall short of the target by 2020 and that the proposed amended of the zoning of land, that will accommodate a potential additional population of 110 people, is well within the projected targets of the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014.

The Core Strategy of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020 has set a target of 193 Ha as the zoning requirement for Mullingar to make housing provision for a population target of 10,831. However, there are only 149 Ha of undeveloped residentially zoned lands actually designated in the current Local Area Plan. The proposed amendment will increase this by 1.51ha or less than eight tenths of one percent and will seek to meet the targets set out in the MRPGs, and the Westmeath County Development Plan.

The proposed amendment will also reduce the available land for Open Space provision. 195 Ha of land has been zoned Open Space in the proposed Mullingar Local Area Plan, and the proposed

reduction of 1.51ha constitutes approximately seven tenths of one percent. The environmental report of the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014 identified that there was an emphasis on amenity rather than biodiversity in the land zoned. None of the subject sites are currently being used for amenity or are of particular biodiversity value, and currently consist of underused vacant sites.

## **8.0 Spatial and Environmental Policy Hierarchy Context of proposed Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014.**

Section 3.2 of the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the proposed Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014 outlines the Policies, Plans and Strategies that will inform the context of development in the plan area. The Westmeath County Development Plan 2014 was adopted and will run to 2020.

## **9.0 Alternatives**

The alternative scenario to the proposed amendment is that it is not pursued or adopted. This has been considered as part of the current plan. This would have little impact on the environment, there are no plans to develop the lands for amenity or biodiversity uses. This alternative would forego the opportunity to provide much needed housing contiguous to the existing built up area of Mullingar, where there are available services and public transport.

## **10.0 Monitoring**

Monitoring of the effects of the implementation of the plan will be as outlined in Table 4.2 of the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the proposed Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014.

## 11.0 Submission from the Environmental Protection Agency

A response from the EPA was received in response to the scoping request.

Submission Text	Westmeath County Council to consider in response
<p><b>Flood Risk Management</b></p> <p>In the context of proposed additional lands zoned for housing, the Amendment should consider and implement the requirements of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines (DEHLG, 2009), as relevant and appropriate. Additionally, the Shannon CFRAMS and associated relevant Flood Risk Management Plan(s) should also be integrated as appropriate.</p>	<p>In respect of the lands at Tesco/O'Growney a justification test has been undertaken in accordance with the s.28 Flood Risk Management Guidelines, a reduced quantity of land was zoned for residential development in order to mitigate potential flood risk.</p> <p>Lands at Site B in Ennell cCourt have an identified surface water disposal issue relating to the existing sewer capacity. This issue may be addressed at project approval stage.</p> <p>Also, Policies/objectives already in force within Section 6.17 of the existing Plan provide for appropriate levels of flood risk management at project level (e.g. site specific FRA, compliance with the Guidelines, CFRAMS/Flood Risk Management Plans).</p>
<p><b>Scoping Process Guidance</b></p> <p>Guidance on the SEA Scoping Process, including an SEA Pack, Integration Guidance, SEA Checklist, SEA Spatial Information Sources and guidance on Integrating Climate Change into SEA, is available on the EPA website and should be considered in the preparation of the SEA. This can be consulted at the following address: <a href="http://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/ea/">http://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/ea/</a></p>	<p>Noted. Resources have been utilised by the scoping process and used throughout SEA as relevant.</p>
<p><b>EPA State of the Environment Report 2016</b></p> <p>The EPA has published our State of the Environment Report for 2016 'Ireland's Environment – An Assessment (EPA, 2016). The recommendations, key issues and challenges described within this report should be taken into account, as relevant and appropriate to the Plan area in preparing the Draft Plan and associated SEA. This report can be consulted at: <a href="http://www.epa.ie/irelandsenvironment/stateoftheenvironmentreport/">http://www.epa.ie/irelandsenvironment/stateoftheenvironmentreport/</a></p>	<p>Considered as part of the compilation of this report.</p>

**SEA WebGIS Search and Reporting Tool**

The EPA SEA WebGIS Search and Reporting Tool is a GIS based web application that allows users to explore, interrogate and produce an indicative report on key aspects of the environment in specific geographic areas. These reports are indicative and will provide an overview of key aspects of the environment within a specific plan area. This may be used to inform the SEA screening and scoping stages for Plans and Programmes with particular reference in the first instance to the land use sector, though it is also applicable to other sector plans. It may be accessed via [www.edenireland.ie](http://www.edenireland.ie)

Noted and considered.



## **12.0 Non-Technical Summary and Conclusion**

The proposed amendment relates to the zoning objective at three separate locations and an amendment of the objective from open space and amenity to residential use. The amendment will facilitate the construction of approximately 40 additional dwellings on a total of 1.51ha in the town. As the national average household size is 2.75, this will result in the provision of housing for approximately 110 people.

The existing sites are considered of limited biodiversity value and there is sufficient wastewater treatment and water supply capacity in the town. It is considered that the development of the sites may contribute positively to the urban and suburban landscape and make more efficient use of existing transportation and services infrastructure.

No European Sites will be adversely affected by the development of the subject lands.

Mullingar Local Area Plan and its accompanying SEA Statement allowed for an overall population increase to 30,934 by 2020. The 2016 Census recorded the population of Mullingar as 20,928 people rather than the 27,357 previously projected, consequently, it is likely that the projection will fall short of the target by 2020 and that the proposed amendment of the zoning of land, that will accommodate a potential additional population of 110 people, is well within the projected targets of the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014.