



# Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020

## Volume 7 AA Conclusion Statement

## **1.1 Introduction**

In accordance with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government publication, *'Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities (December 2009)'*, a clear and discrete AA Conclusion Statement as a distinct section in the written statement of the Plan separate to the SEA Statement is to be prepared by the Planning Authority.

## **1.2 Format for Statement**

- a. Summary of how the findings of the AA were factored into the Plan;
- b. Reasons for choosing the Plan as adopted, in the light of other reasonable alternatives considered as part of the AA process;
- c. A declaration that the Plan as adopted will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site or sites.

## **2. Summary of how the findings of the AA were factored into the Plan**

Appropriate Assessment (AA) has been fully integrated with the various stages of the Development Plan process in order to ensure that the ecological implications of the Plan do not impact upon any areas designated as Natura 2000 Sites. The Planning Authority carried out a screening exercise of policies and or objectives throughout the Development Plan process. The screening stage of the Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 found that the Draft Plan had potential to have significant adverse impacts upon Lough Ree cSAC, Lough Ree SPA, River Shannon Callows cSAC, Middle Shannon Callows SPA and Crosswood Bog cSAC. Applying the precautionary principle, a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment was considered necessary for these sites. Potential impacts to these sites are taken forward for detailed Assessment in Stage Two. All other Natura 2000 sites within 15 kilometre radius were considered as to the likelihood of significant impacts on these arising from the Athlone Town Development Plan. Potential for adverse impacts was ruled out due to the lack of any source-pathway-receptor link between these sites and the Plan.

The AA has been completed prior to any decision to authorise, adopt or proceed with the Development Plan. Throughout the finalisation of the Draft Development Plan, the Natura Impact Report (NIR) was revised and up-dated for any new or amended policies /objectives and represents a final screening and assessment of the adopted Development Plan. This approach enabled measures necessary to avoid or mitigate impacts on Natura 2000 sites to be incorporated into the policy/objective or detail of the Plan before finalisation.

### **3. Adjacent Local Authority Plans**

#### **Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2010 – 2016**

Lough Ree SPA, Lough Ree SAC, Middle Shannon Callows SPA, River Shannon Callows SAC, Lough Croan Turlough SPA, Roscommon River Suck Callows SPA are all Natura 2000 sites shared by Roscommon and Westmeath. The Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2010-2016 carried out a Screening Report of the Plan which concluded that an Appropriate Assessment of the Plan was not required. There are a number of policies included within that Plan to avoid adverse primary or secondary impacts to the quality of Natura 2000 sites. Therefore no cumulative impacts are predicted as a result of implementation of the Plan.

Both the SEA and AA process refer to the objective to prepare a unitary Plan for Athlone encompassing that area of the town within County Roscommon and recommendations in relation to identification, assessment and mitigation of likely significant effects on Natura 2000 sites for such Plan were incorporated into policy. A further recommendation in relation monitoring developments in the Bellanamulla/Monksland Plan area in Co. Roscommon has been included in the Town Plan. The unitary Plan should be subject to AA and SFRA to ensure consistency in identification, assessment and mitigation of likely significant effects on Natura 2000 Sites and policy should be amended accordingly.

### **4. Reasons for choosing the Plan as adopted, in the light of other reasonable alternatives considered as part of the AA process;**

#### **Consideration of Alternative Strategies**

Alternative strategies that were considered are as outlined below. Each alternative was considered in terms of environmental parameters including potential for impacts on biodiversity and the natural environment, including habitats sites.

**Alternative A:** Do Nothing Scenario (discussed in Chapter 4)

**Alternative B:** Promote the Gateway Status of the Town

**Alternative C:** Greenfield expansion at outer periphery

**Alternative D:** Consolidation of Urban Core and plan led expansion of Inner edge and environs (De-zoning)

Alternatives development scenarios were considered in the light of the significant environmental issues for the plan area which were raised in the both the SEA Environmental Report and AA Screening Report. The preferred alternative was that of the 'Consolidation of Urban Core and Plan led expansion of inner edge and environs. This alternative also involved de-zoning of lands located within flood plains and on the outer edge of the urban area.

Given the constraints of the town, in terms of flood risk and availability of suitable lands for development, there may be pressure to develop on lands close to designated sites. Expansion on greenfield land without consolidation, would pose a significant risk of fragmentation or destruction of existing habitats resulting in the further loss or damage to the integrity of Natura sites. It was

considered that the selected alternative would prevent development in areas that are deemed inappropriate such as SAC or SPA lands and would therefore have positive effects on biodiversity.

**5. A declaration that the Plan as adopted will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site or sites.**

With the implementation of the mitigating policies, the Draft Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 will not result in any significant long-term impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Where the necessary capacity or infrastructure has not been provided, future development will not be progressed until the necessary upgrades have been completed. The Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 includes the necessary policy safeguards and standards to ensure that no negative significant environmental effects will arise singularly or in a cumulative manner.

With the implementation of the mitigating policies, the Draft Athlone Town Development Plan will not result in any significant long-term impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Where the necessary capacity or infrastructure has not been provided, future development will not be progressed until the necessary upgrades have been completed. The Assessment process for this report has resulted in a conclusion that mitigation measures identified in Stage 2 are adequate to ensure that the integrity of sites in the Natura 2000 network will not be adversely affected as a result of potential impacts of the policies contained within the Plan. On the basis of Appropriate Assessment screening of the Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2010 – 2016 conducted by the competent authority, in combination effects with the other Local Area Plans are unlikely to have potential significant adverse impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Therefore it is concluded that with the inclusion of relevant mitigating policies in the Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020, there is no potential for significant effects arising from the Draft Plan either alone or in combination with other plans.



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