

Report

Cork County Council draft Noise Action Plan 2024-2028

SEA Screening

For Cork County Council (CCC)

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report has been prepared by Logika Consultants Ltd. on behalf of Noise Consultants L5th December 2024 (Ref: 15570A-20-R01-05-F03). td for), Cork County Council (CCC) the Action Planning Authority (APA). This SEA Screening report considers the applicability of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations S.I.435/2004¹ as amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011, S.I. No. 200² of (hereafter referred to as the 'SEA Regulations') in relation to the CCC *draft* Noise Action Plan (NAP) 2024 – 2028 dated The focus of this SEA Screening report is to provide justification for whether SEA is needed.

The requirement to prepare a NAP is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law³ and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the national competent authority responsible for implementing the END and will ultimately report noise mapping and action planning to the European Commission.

Within Ireland the 31 Local Planning Authorities are designated as APAs responsible for making and approving NAPs in consultation. Small areas within the administrative boundary of CCC, adjacent to Cork are covered by a NAP prepared separately for the Cork Agglomeration which also includes Cork City Council (CCiC). The majority of the administrative area within CCC⁴ is covered by the CCC *draft* NAP and is the focus of this SEA Screening report. The geographical scope of the CCC *draft* NAP and that of the Cork Agglomeration are set out in **Section 4** of this report.

The purpose of the CCC NAP is to provide a strategic overview of the management of noise issues and effects within County Cork. The NAP aims to develop clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to preventing environmental noise where necessary; particularly where exposure to noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health. The NAP also identifies areas to preserve environmental acoustic quality where the baseline is good.

The END requires routine updates to noise mapping and action planning every four years. The NAP to which this SEA Screening report refers to is for the period 2024 – 2028. Further details are set out within **Section 3** of this report.

SEA is a formal process used to evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to formally adopt the plan or programme. This SEA

¹ Irish Statute Book, S.I. 435/2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: [S.I. No. 435/2004 - European Communities \(Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes\) Regulations 2004 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/si/2004/04/01/european-communities-environmental-assessment-of-certain-plans-and-programmes-regulations-2004)

² Irish Statute Book, S.I. 200/2011, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2011/si/200/made/en/print>

³ The END was transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 (S.I. 140/2006) (the "Regulations"). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 663/2021).

⁴ Hereafter referred to as 'County Cork' and meaning the administrative area of Cork County Council outside the Cork Agglomeration.

Screening Report considers the applicability of the SEA Regulations and the NAP ('pre-screening') as a 'plan or programme', presents details of the SEA screening process and ultimately determines whether further assessment is required in respect of the NAP.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been prepared concurrently with this SEA Screening Report. This considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'.

The structure of this SEA Screening Report is as follows:

- **Section 2: Strategic Environmental Assessment Legal Context and Approach.** This sets out the regulatory context and purpose of the SEA Regulations, along with a summary of the SEA process, focussing on Screening. Reference to SEA Screening guidance is presented;
- **Section 3: Summary of the draft Cork County Council Noise Action Plan 2024 – 2028.** This summarises the NAP with a focus on the content of the NAP that has potential relevance for the purpose of the SEA Regulations;
- **Section 4: Cork County Council Environmental Context.** This sets out the geographical context of the NAP and at a high level, environmental considerations proportionate to SEA and considering biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage, and landscape;
- **Section 5: SEA Statutory Screening.** Sets out the findings of pre-screening and considers the NAP against the criteria defined by SEA Regulations and guidance. This section also sets out the next steps in respect of consultation; and
- **Section 6: Consultation and Next Steps.**

2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Legal Context and Approach

2.1 The SEA Regulatory Context

SEA is a systematic process designed to assess likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before it is formally adopted or implemented.

European Union (EU) Directive 2001/42/EC7 (the 'SEA Directive') requires EU Member States to ensure that certain plans and programmes are subject to a requirement for SEA. In the context of transport sectoral plans, the 'SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S. I. 435/2004). This legislation has been amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 200/ 2011). For all other sectoral plans, the SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law by Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations⁵ (S. I. 436/2004), as amended by Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011⁶ (S. I. 201/2011). As set out within the EPA Draft Guidance for Noise Action Planning⁷, the NAP is a form of 'Transport' sectoral plan. Therefore, if an SEA is required for NAPs, they would fall under the remit of S.I. 435, as amended, and not S.I. 436 of 2004.

Pre-screening checks have followed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland (2001-DS-EEP-2/5)' – Synthesis Report⁸. The SEA process is defined by a series of stages which has been described in Section 2.2.

2.2 SEA Screening

2.2.1 Overview

The procedure of undertaking SEA screening is based upon the evaluation of specific criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive (Schedule 1)⁹.

⁵ Irish Statute Book, S.I. 436/2004, Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/436/made/en/print>

⁶ Irish Statute Book, S.I. 201/2011, Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (Accessed February 2024) Available at:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2011/si/201/made/en/pdf>

⁷ Environmental Protection Agency (2024). DRAFT Guidance Note for Noise Action Planning For the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018 (2024).

⁸ Scott and Marsden (2001), Environmental Protection Agency Report, Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland (2001-DS-EEP-2/5) – Synthesis Report (Accessed July 2024) Available at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/synthesis-report-on-developing-a-strategic-environmental-assessment-sea-methodologies-for-plans-and-programmes-in-ireland.php>

⁹ European Union, Directive 2001/42/EC, Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment, as transposed by Irish Statute Book, S.I. 435/2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/435/made/en/print#article1>

According to the EPA Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening¹⁰, the screening process covers three different stages as below:

- Applicability;
- Statutory Screening¹¹; and
- Determination.

The core guidance⁸ states that the overall characteristics of the proposal should be checked to determine if the proposal is a plan or programme as defined for and is not exempt from the requirements of the SEA Directive. This is therefore the first stage of 'Applicability' screening.

If it is determined that the proposal is a plan or programme as defined for purposes of the SEA Directive and is otherwise exempt from those requirements, further consideration must be given to any potential environmental significance resulting from implementing the plan itself. At this stage, the significance criteria outlined in Annex II (2) of the SEA Directive (Stage 2 'Statutory Screening') should be followed.

2.2.2 Stage 1 'Applicability' Methodology

The applicability stage of SEA screening consists of a 4-step process as outlined in the EPA Good Practice Guide on Screening (2021). **Table 2-1** sets out these stages as below:

Table 2-1: Stage 1 Applicability Steps

Applicability Step	Step Guidance
Step 1	Establish and identify the status of the plan to be assessed, or the competent authority compiling the programme. Is the plan (i.e. The NAP) prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional, or local level? Is the plan prepared by a relevant authority for associated adoption through a parliamentary or governmental legislative procedure?
Step 2	Establish the description of the plan or programme. Is the NAP required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?
Step 3	Determine if the NAP is not exempt from SEA screening. Is the sole purpose of the NAP for national defence, civil emergency, or finance/budget?
Step 4	Does the NAP require mandatory SEA?

¹⁰ Environmental Protection Agency, SEA Screening Good Practice 2021 [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-screening-good-practice-2021.php>

¹¹ "Screening" is used to denote two distinct concepts in the Good Practice Guidance. In the first instance, it is used to describe the determination of whether a proposal requires SEA for any reason, including whether it is a plan or programme as defined in the SEA Directive. In the second instance, it is used to describe a particular step in that determination process, which is the statutory requirement to consider whether a proposal, having been determined to be a plan or programme as defined in the SEA Directive, is likely to have significant effects on the environment, which step requires, amongst other things, consultation with environmental authorities. To distinguish the two concepts, this report calls the former "Screening" and the latter "Statutory Screening".

Applicability Step	Step Guidance
	<p>Is the NAP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecoms, tourism, town and country planning or land use, and does the NAP set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the Annexes of the EIA Directive?</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Will the NAP require assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the EU Habitats Directive?</p>

Following this stage of SEA screening, there are three possible outcomes regarding whether the SEA Directive applies in this case:

- The SEA Directive **does not** apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is not of a type which falls within the remit of the regulations themselves, and therefore there is no requirement to notify environmental authorities.
- The SEA Directive **does** apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is of a type that falls within the remit of the regulations and therefore triggers mandatory SEA. This then triggers the process of proceeding to SEA scoping and relevant consultation with designated authorities.
- The SEA Directive **may** apply to the NAP – in this scenario, the NAP may be within the remit of the SEA Directive because there is some uncertainty with the provisions considered at Stage 1 screening, therefore a case-by-case determination is required. At this point, the screening would proceed to Stage 2.

2.2.3 Stage 2 'Statutory Screening' (If Applicable)

If the SEA Directive applies to the NAP and the NAP is not otherwise exempt from the SEA Directive, Stage 2 Statutory Screening helps to determine if SEA is required for the NAP. While it is not a mandatory requirement, the production of a screening report has become good practice as part of the overarching process.

Stage 2 is a four-step process as per the EPA's Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening Reports. Table 2 below summarises the next steps.

Table 2-2: Stage 2 Screening Steps

Screening Step	Step Guidance
Step 1	Describe the features of the NAP and the environment in which it would be received, outlining any environmental challenges.
Step 2	Identify the potential for significant environmental effects.
Step 3	Statutory consultation with designated environmental authorities (a minimum of 4 weeks).
Step 4	Draft determination.

Part of this screening stage includes a screening of environmental significance, to assess whether the plan is likely to result in significant effects and therefore taken forward for SEA. The criteria for undertaking this are embedded into Annex II of the SEA Directive and is transposed into Irish legislation as Schedule 1 of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and

Programmes) Regulations 2004 as amended. The criteria that will be used as part of Section 5 of this report, is outlined in Appendix A Stage 2 SEA Statutory Screening. The aforementioned EPA's Good Practice Guidance on SEA and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (2022)¹² have been used to guide this assessment.

At this stage it is required to consult with the relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks (Step 3), after which a draft determination can be prepared (Step 4) and finalised as Stage 3 following the input from consultation.

2.2.4 Stage 3 'Determination'

Following the consultation with the relevant authorities, after the competent authority has made their final decision as to whether SEA applies to the NAP, a summary of the screening should be available for public inspection both digitally and as a hard copy. A copy of the final determination should also be made available to relevant SEA authorities who were consulted during screening.

2.3 Appropriate Assessment

It should be noted that concurrently an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening is being undertaken. The AA Screening considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'. The overarching goal of the Habitat Regulations are to uphold or restore the 'favourable conservation status' of habitats and species recognised as of European Community Interest. These specific habitats and species are outlined in the Habitats and Birds Directives, with the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) aimed at safeguarding them. Together, these designations are commonly referred to as European Sites, also known as Natura 2000 sites.

The Habitats directive does not specifically define what is a plan or project. Relevant case law¹³, as well as a judgement in the High Court (England and Wales)¹⁴ concluded that for the purposes of the Habitats directive, if an activity could have impacts upon a European site, it should therefore be considered as a plan or project. As such, should the AA Screening determine that the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans and considers these to be significant, then this will also trigger the requirement of SEA for the plan.

¹² Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2022). Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities. (Accessed February 2024) Available at: [218356_6c57ccf6-3d2b-4c43-b871-1698e7daab5d \(1\).pdf](#)

¹³ European Court of Justice judgement in case C-127/02 "Waddenzee"

¹⁴ R. (on the application of Akester) v Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Case No. CO/1834/2009) [2010] EWHC 232

3 *draft* Cork County Council Noise Action Plan 2024-2028

3.1 Background and Overview

Once adopted the CCC NAP will replace the current NAP for the period 2018-2023. As required by the END, the NAP seeks to provide a framework for long-term management of environmental noise from transport systems referring to the results of the strategic noise maps to inform assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise. As part of this management, the protection of quiet areas in open country within the County Cork is also set out within the NAP. The temporal framework for the NAP is 5 years¹⁵, at which time the noise mapping and NAP will be reviewed as well as the NAP, and where necessary revised.

For the purpose of the SEA, relevant sections of the NAP include the overarching long-term strategy which incorporates the Noise Policy Statement and Responsible Aims, are set out in **Section 3.2** and **3.3** of this report.

The management of noise within County Cork focusses on Prevention, Protection and Mitigation Measures.

Prevention measures, as set out in the NAP, could include the implementation of separately adopted planning policy within relevant Development Plans and associated guidance which will, for instance require Acoustic Design Statements for new residential applications.

Protection measures, as set out in the NAP, include the protection of desirably quiet areas and consideration of their formal designation as Quiet Areas in open country.

Mitigation measures, as set out in the NAP, include the identification and implementation of priority important areas. Noise mitigation measures within these areas should be evaluated for their effectiveness through the following steps as set out in the NAP:

- Noise measurements at Priority Important Areas;
- Review of the assumptions used to identify the Priority Important Areas;
- Re-evaluation of Priority Important Areas;
- Identification of practical noise mitigation measures;
- Appraisal of noise mitigation measures monetised benefits to health;
- Financial assessment of noise mitigation measures;
- Cost-benefit analysis; and
- Recommendation of noise mitigation measure(s).

3.2 Noise Policy Statement

The Noise Policy Statement for the County Cork is detailed as follows:

¹⁵ The European Commission allowed for one additional year for the Round 4 NAPs, reducing the five-year implementation period to four-years.

“Cork County Council will adopt a strategic approach to managing environmental noise from major roads within its functional area, and will aim to:

- **Prevention** – manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where it is likely to have significant adverse impact on health and quality of life.
- **Protection** - protect areas which are desirably quiet, or which offer a sense of tranquillity through a process of identification and validation followed by formal designation of “Quiet Areas in open country”.
- **Mitigation** – identify, and prioritise, appropriate mitigation measures to reduce noise levels where they are potentially harmful.”

3.3 Responsible Aims

The Responsible Aims that underpin the Noise Policy Statement and are set out within the NAP, are as follows:

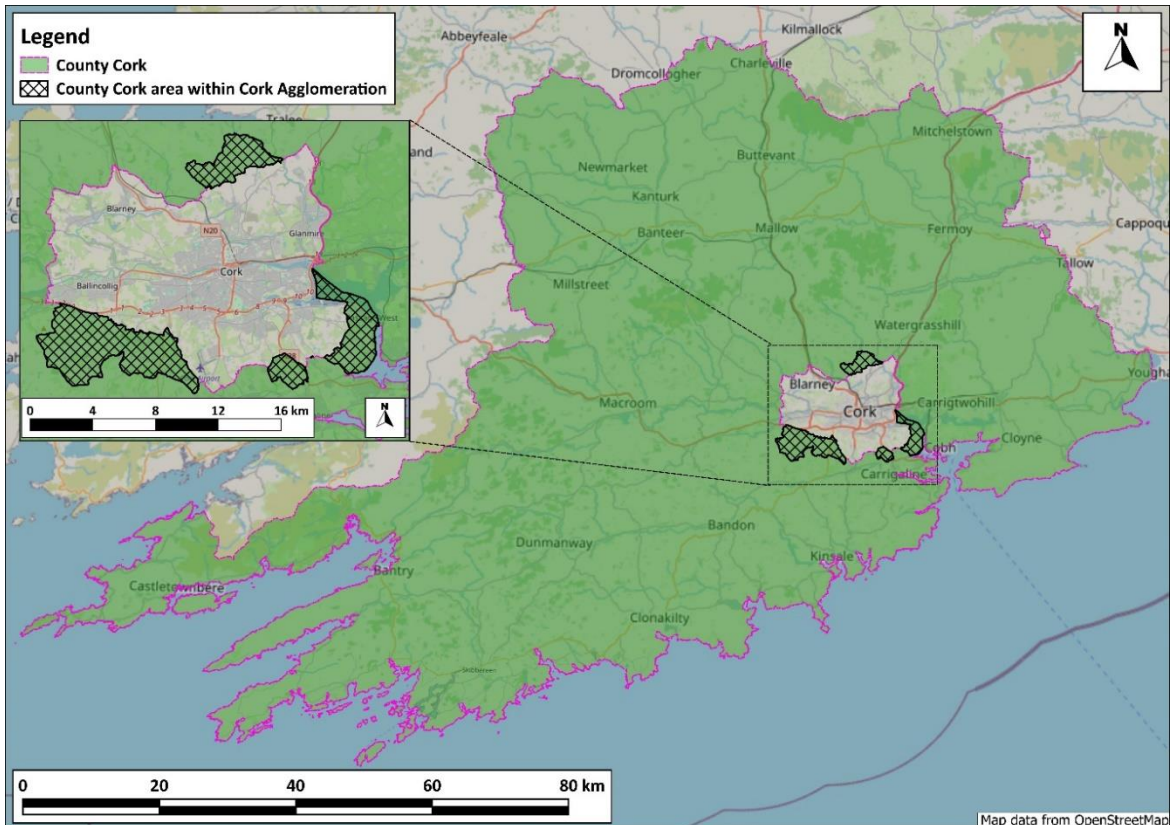
- **“RA_1 - Policy and Guidance Development** – Encourage the integration of noise considerations into the ongoing process of policy and guidance development, and actively promote existing policies and guidance related to noise.
- **RA_2 - Working Groups** – Participate in technical working groups pertinent to the implementation of the Environmental Noise Directive and with the assistance of the Environmental Protection Agency, a Round 4 Noise Action Plan Implementation Working Group shall be established.
- **RA_3 - Noise Mitigation** – In collaboration and consultation with relevant Noise Mapping Bodies, noise management interventions shall be applied on a priority basis during existing maintenance and improvement programs, where appropriate. This application will be based on a relevant evaluation of whole-life costs and benefits.
- **RA_4 - Protection** – Assess and, where appropriate, propose Candidate Quiet Areas to the Environmental Protection Agency for designation as Quiet Areas in open country by the Minister.
- **RA_5 - Prevention** – Evaluate and condition planning proposals for noise sensitive development near major noise sources.
- **RA_6 - Community Engagement** – Commit to proactive and inclusive engagement with communities and collaboratively address noise issues for the improvement of our shared living environment.
- **RA_7 - Manage Noise Complaints** – Review and respond to all environmental noise complaints in accordance with their Customer Charter.
- **RA_8 - Regulatory Engagement** – Report the progress on the implementation of Noise Action Plans, including the investigation and implementation of noise management measures in Priority Important Areas, and the assessment of Candidate Quiet Areas in open country for preservation of environmental noise quality, to the Environmental Protection Agency on an annual basis.”

4 Cork County Council Environmental Context

4.1 Context

The extents of County Cork relevant to the NAP, as well as the administrative area of CCC that is located within the Cork Agglomeration, are shown in **Figure 4-1**.

Figure 4-1: County Cork and Cork Agglomeration Boundaries



As detailed in the NAP, the total population of the County Cork is approximately 351,029. In terms of noise sources, there are approximately 328,762 metres of major road, and no major rail sources. There are also a total of 128 noise sensitive buildings (schools and hospitals) located within the County Cork.

The environmental context of the County Cork has been identified to understand the environmental issues, trends, and characteristics. Setting this environmental context can inform, if the NAP were considered a plan or programme in accordance with the SEA Regulations, what potential significant environmental effects could arise. The environmental context is set out with reference to the environmental issues indicated within the SEA Regulations (biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape). The information presented is proportionate to the strategic nature of the environmental assessment required and the scale of the NAP itself.

4.2 Baseline

4.2.1 Biodiversity, Flora, and Fauna

The County Cork baseline for biodiversity can be quantified in terms of the number of designated sites and indication of the habitats and species across the area. Government data indicates that there are 22 Special Protection Areas (SPA) and 45 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) located within County Cork¹⁶. These sites are designated as Natura 2000 sites, which is an EU-wide network of protected areas covering vulnerable species and habitats, designated under the Birds and Habitats directives¹⁷. Further details on these SPA and SAC sites and why they are designated, can be found within the accompanying AA Screening of the NAP. There are five Ramsar sites identified across CCC, which are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar convention and are also often designated as SPA and SAC sites¹⁸.

In terms of the identified habitat across County Cork, coastal, alluvial and old oak woodland, heath, scrub, freshwater, grassland, and rocky, as well as bogs, mires and fens are present¹⁹. In term of identified species in County Cork, there are a number of species records present, including non-vascular plants, mammals including otter, bats and mountain hare, arthropods, and amphibians²⁰. Article 6 of the habitat's directive obligates Ireland to maintain and/or restore natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora. The National Biodiversity Action Plan²¹ aims to meet urgent conservation and restoration needs for habitats and species in Ireland.

4.2.2 Population and Noise

The focus of the County Cork baseline for population and noise is about the number of people affected by noise. Assessment within the NAP suggests that 2.37% of the population is classed as Highly Annoyed (HA) by noise with 0.73% of the population classed as Highly Sleep Disturbed (HSD). The population of the County Cork is more likely to be at risk of noise annoyance or sleep disturbance from road traffic noise, as railway noise and aircraft noise thresholds are not exceeded within County Cork. While variations between regions can present a different picture, from a national perspective approximately 10.3% of people in Ireland consider their health to either be fair, bad, or very bad²². In terms of the population who are affected by ambient noise, national figures suggest that as of 2017, approximately 950,200 people across Ireland were directly exposed to high levels of noise above 55dB, from noise sources including road, rail and air²³. Noise levels can be concentrated into specific

¹⁶ Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

¹⁷ European Environment Agency, The Natura 2000 protected areas network [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/natura-2000#:~:text=Natura%202000%20is%20a%20network,on%20land%20and%20at%20sea>.

¹⁸ Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee, Ramsar sites in Ireland [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.irishwetlands.ie/irish-ramsar-sites/>

¹⁹ National Parks and Wildlife Service, Habitat and Species Data, 2019 Article 17 Report, The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland, Terrestrial Habitats [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/1a721520030d404f899d658d5b6e159a>

²⁰ National Parks and Wildlife Service, Habitat and Species Data, 2019 Article 17 Report, The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland, Terrestrial Species [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/1a721520030d404f899d658d5b6e159a>

²¹ National Parks & Wildlife Service, National Biodiversity Action Plan [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.npws.ie/legislation/national-biodiversity-action-plan>

²² Central Statistics Office, Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results, General Health [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/>

²³ European Environment Agency, Ireland noise fact sheet 2021, Number of people exposed to high noise levels – Ireland [Accessed August 2024] available at:

areas depending on receptors, perhaps making it difficult to positively affect change. While the data shows that there is a downward trend from 2018 onwards, 1,891 noise complaints were received by local authorities in 2019, which perhaps indicates the public concern over noise²⁴.

4.2.3 Water and Soils

The County Cork baseline for water and soils can generally be quantified in terms of soil status, underlying geology and Water Framework Directive (WFD) status.

The WFD helps to quantify water quality status, bathing water quality, protected areas, and groundwater vulnerability across Ireland. Within County Cork, there are 48 WFD waterbodies classified as having poor ecological status and three classified as bad²⁵. There are many WFD protected areas within the CCC, and there is also differentiated areas in terms of groundwater vulnerability, with large areas of high and extreme vulnerability, as well as areas of low and moderate vulnerability in northern areas and rock at or near the surface in southwestern areas.

Cork County's underlying geology is primarily composed of Old Red Sandstone, sandstone, conglomerate, mudstone, and Tournaisian limestone. There are also smaller areas that feature Upper Devonian sandstone and mudstone (Old Head Sandstone Formation), Namurian shale, siltstone, coal, and Carboniferous volcanic rocks²⁶.

4.2.4 Air Quality

The County Cork baseline for air quality can be quantified in terms of emissions levels of PM2.5 and NO₂. In terms of both, EU legal air quality limits were met in 2022²⁷. Ireland is moving towards measuring their performance regarding these emissions to a more stringent air quality guideline set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) rather than the EU. Latest modelled maps for PM2.5 show European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (EMEP) annual averages across County Cork range from <2.0ug/m³ in the west and north to between approximately 7.0-8.0ug/m³ in the central Cork area. Burning solid fuels in homes remains a key issue to reduce PM2.5 emissions across County Cork and indeed Ireland. In terms of NO₂, latest modelled maps for NO₂ show EMEP annual averages across County Cork range from <2.5ug/m³ in the southwest, to between 15.0 and 17.5ug/m³ in concentrated areas primarily urban road areas outside of the boundary of the Cork Agglomeration area. NO₂ emissions are mainly derived from road traffic, which is a key barrier to the reduction of these emissions generally albeit the growing trend of vehicles being powered by non-fossil fuel means, is and will continue to benefit air quality.

4.2.5 Climatic Factors

CO₂ emissions data is not defined for County Cork and so national emissions are considered. In 2022, CO₂ emissions across Ireland were estimated to be 60.76Mt CO₂ eq²⁸. This figure is 1.9% lower than the

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/human/noise/noise-fact-sheets/noise-country-fact-sheets-2021/ireland>

²⁴ Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Noise Complaints [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/noise/environmental-noise-complaints/>

²⁵ Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

²⁶ Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

²⁷ Environmental Protection Agency, Air [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/air/>

²⁸ Environmental Protection Agency, "Ireland's 2022 Greenhouse Gas Emissions show a welcome decrease, but much work remains to be done" [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2023/irelands-2022-greenhouse-gas-emissions-show-a-welcome-decrease-but-much-work-remains-to-be->

previous yearly data and is contextualised by the EU target to reduce emissions outside of the EU ETS scheme by 30% by 2030²⁹.

4.2.6 Material Assets

The County Cork baseline for material assets can be quantified in terms of the rate of housebuilding as well as the number of vacant properties. In terms of housebuilding, across Ireland there was an overarching target to build 29,000 new units in 2023³⁰. This target was exceeded, with approximately 32,695 units built across Ireland. More specific data on vacant properties within County Cork (including the area included in the agglomeration) suggests that there are approximately 11,994 properties vacant across the County³¹. This baseline information is set against the Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023-2026, which aims to provide every citizen with good quality homes through various interventions and investments³².

4.2.7 Cultural Heritage

The County Cork cultural heritage baseline indicated that there are many national heritage areas, sites, and monuments across area. For example, there are thousands of specific sites and monuments of cultural interest, including approximately 19,883 Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) and approximately 8,467 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) records within CCC and Cork City Council³³. However, most of the NIAH sites are located outside of County Cork, in Cork City Council. As part of the Cork County Council Development Plan 2022-2028, there is a requirement to compile and maintain a Record of Protected Structures under the Planning Act 2000 (as amended)³⁴. RPS includes 2,995 structures which are of special architectural interest across County Cork. Across Ireland, key environmental issues such as land use change and climate change may have a long-term impact upon the cultural heritage baseline, due to the loss of heritage landscapes from human interventions, and increased biodiversity degradation which may have physical impacts on heritage assets across Ireland. Heritage Ireland 2030 sets out a framework to focus on protecting and managing Ireland's heritage assets³⁵.

[done.php#:~:text=Provisional%20national%20total%20emissions%20\(including,EU%20and%20UN%20in%202024.](#)

²⁹ European Commission, Climate Action, Effort sharing 2021-2030: targets and flexibilities [Accessed August 2024] available at: https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/effort-sharing-member-states-emission-targets/effort-sharing-2021-2030-targets-and-flexibilities_en

³⁰ Government of Ireland, Housing for All Q4 2023 Progress Report [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/281768/bba967b9-80b9-4e5a-a876-d0239c805883.pdf>

³¹ Central Statistics Office, Census of Population 2022 Profile 2 – housing in Ireland [Accessed August 2024] Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp2/censusofpopulation2022profile2-housinginireland/vacantdwelling/#:~:text=Vacancy%20by%20Dwelling%20Type%20and,fell%20by%207%25%20from%20140%2C120.>

³² Gov.ie, Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023-2026, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/df86c-vacant-homes-action-plan-2023-2026/>

³³ National Monuments Service, Historic Environment Viewer [Accessed August 2024] available at <https://www.archaeology.ie/archaeological-survey-ireland/historic-environment-viewer-application>

³⁴ Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028, Volume 1 – Main Policy Material [Accessed August 2024] available at <https://www.corkcoco.ie/sites/default/files/2022-06/volume-1-main-policy-material.pdf>

³⁵ Gov.ie, Heritage Ireland 2030, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/778b8-heritage-ireland-2030/>

4.2.8 Landscape

The County Cork landscape baseline indicates that, in terms of land cover, the vast majority is comprised of natural grassland. Additionally, there are Peat Bogs in the west, and pockets of Coniferous Forest, Mixed Forest, Fruit Trees and Berry Plantations, Non-irrigated Land and Complex Cultivation Patterns, and Continuous Urban Fabric located across County Cork.

The National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025) is a key driver for landscape targets in Ireland and the County Cork. The National Landscape Strategy for example, sets out to implement the European Landscape Convention to integrate landscape into the country's approach to sustainable development³⁶.

³⁶ Gov.ie, National Landscape Strategy, Department of Housing, Local government and Heritage [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8a59b-national-landscape-strategy/>

5 SEA Screening

5.1 Stage 1 – SEA ‘Applicability’

5.1.1 Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional, or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?

Yes. The NAP is prepared and then will be adopted at a regional level by the Action Planning Authority, Cork County Council.

5.1.2 Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?

Yes. The NAP is required by The Environmental Noise Directive (“END”) (2002/49/EC). A European Union legal instrument vital for protecting public health and the environment by addressing the adverse effects of environmental noise. The END was transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 (S.I. 140/2006) (the “Regulations”). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 663/2021).

5.1.3 Is the P/P prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use?

Yes, the NAP is being prepared for the transportation sector. Noise issues and interventions may have relevance for other sectors but is being prepared in the context of planning and land use.

5.1.4 Does the P/P provide a framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive?

According to the European Commission ‘Guidance on the implementation of Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment,’ this would “normally mean that the plan or programme contains criteria or conditions which guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent. Such criteria could place limits on the type of activity or development which is to be permitted in a given area; or they could contain conditions which must be met by the applicant if permission is to be granted; or they could be designed to preserve certain characteristics of the area concerned (such as the mixture of land uses which promotes the economic vitality of the area).”

The NAP does **potentially** set a locational framework for interventions within identified quiet areas in open country and important areas regarding noise, but due to its broad and overarching level of intervention and recommendations, it does not therefore provide a framework for development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive.

5.1.5 Is the P/P likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site which leads to a requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments?

No. The NAP is a strategic-level document which is designed to provide direction for action through the designation of strategic priority areas to preserve low noise levels and reduce areas where noise disturbance is high. The NAP does however locate where potential interventions (including mitigation and prevention measures) could take place, which may correlate with Natura 2000 sites. However, as outlined in the Appropriate Assessment Screening Statement, the NAPs elements are not identified as having any direct or indirect impact on Natura 2000 site. Therefore, there are no predicted likely

significant effects upon the identified Natura 2000 sites and no requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments.

5.1.6 **Is the sole purpose of the P/P to serve national defence or civil emergency or is it a financial/budget P/P or is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme?**

No. The NAP's sole purpose is not to serve national defence or civil emergency nor is it a financial/budget P/P nor is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme.

5.2 **Outcome of Stage Applicability**

The pre-screening checks as set out in **Section 5.1**, indicate that the NAP is not a plan or programme to which the SEA applies, as the NAP does not provide a framework for development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive (see **Section 5.1.4**). However, for completeness the NAP was assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states '*A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (...) are likely to have significant effects on the environment*'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations (Stage 2 as follows).

5.3 **Stage 2 – SEA 'Screening'**

As the NAP does not provide a framework for development consent nor will it have a significant effect upon a Natura 2000 site (assessed through the categories established within the Stage 1 criteria), it is concluded that an SEA is not required. However, the NAP has been assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states '*A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (...) are likely to have significant effects on the environment*'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations³⁷. A table detailing the Stage 2 SEA screening of significance, is presented in Appendix A1 of this report.

5.4 **Outcome of Stage 2 Screening (Steps 1 and 2)**

The Stage 2 Screening of the Cork County Council NAP, as detailed in Appendix A1, determines that no further SEA is required. It has been determined that the NAP will operate at a high level and therefore a full SEA would not be proportionate relative to the NAP itself. The NAP does not satisfy the conditions for mandatory SEA under S.I. 435/2004.

This report will now be sent as part of a request for consultation with the environmental authorities (Step 3).

³⁷ Irish Statute Book, S.I. 435/2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/435/made/en/print#article1>

6 Consultation and Next Steps

6.1 Overview

Step 3 of Stage 2 of SEA Screening indicates there is a specific requirement to consult with relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks, regarding the outcomes of the SEA screening report. These authorities are:

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Development Application Unit
- Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Following consultation, an SEA Screening Statement (Stage 3: Determination) can be prepared by the competent authority to be appended to the SEA screening report. This Screening Statement should be made publicly available upon determination.

A1 Stage 2 SEA Statutory Screening

Table A-1 and Table A-2 sets out the SEA criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive (Steps 1 and 2 of Stage 2: SEA Screening).

Table A-1: Stage 2 Screening Table – The characteristics of plans and programmes

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork County Council NAP
1 The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to	
<p>The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources</p>	<p>The primary objective of the NAP is aimed at the long-term management of environmental noise and is based on the results of the strategic noise maps which informed assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise.</p> <p>Therefore, the mapping and the results of exposure assessments do not represent a framework. However, the NAP does set out principles and locational allocation of PIAs, along with mitigation which could constitute a plan or programme depending on their scale, nature, and details of the mitigation.</p> <p>The locational provision of quiet areas in open country is an effort to maintain an environmental status quo, rather than allocating resources or ringfencing specific projects or activities outside of these areas. Similarly, where mitigation is set out in the NAP for PIAs these are suggested approaches and not site specific, they do not set out operating conditions or allocate resources. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives specific change is limited and therefore not significant.</p> <p>As there is no provision in legislation upon which the actions outlined in the NAP can be enforced, reliance will be made on various other plans and policies such as the Cork County Council Development Plan 2022-2028, the National Planning Framework 2040, and the Planning Acts, for their implementation. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives other activities, is not significant.</p>
<p>The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programme including those in a hierarchy</p>	<p>The degree to which the NAP influences other plans and programmes is deemed to be minimal. It can be argued that the NAP sits within a horizontal hierarchy. The NAP refers to and relied upon other plans and programmes existing and proposed within County Cork. The NAP does not require new plans or policies to be created to help implement its key aims. Therefore, there are no new environmental effects as they already have been considered in the assessment of other plans and policies themselves. For example, as part of the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040</p>

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork County Council NAP
	<p>(CMATS), an SEA was produced at draft stage to assess at a strategic level, the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the draft strategy.</p>
<p>The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development</p>	<p>The Cork County Council NAP promotes environmental considerations and sustainable development, through the identification of noise-related issues in the area. Therefore, the NAP does not go as far as recommending specific actions to deliver sustainable development within County Cork. The provision of noise important areas should make decision-makers aware of noise issues and should supplement other initiatives indirectly. Therefore, the NAP does not go against the principles of sustainable development, but it also does not have a direct influence over its integration. Therefore, the relevance of the NAP against this metric is deemed to be not significant.</p>
<p>Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme</p>	<p>The NAP directly addresses environmental noise within the CCC area and sets out clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to preventing environmental noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health.</p> <p>Overall, the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health. In SEA terms it is not deemed that, when considered against other environmental conditions and problems, the Cork County Council NAP (as set out within Section 4) would give rise to significant environmental effects on account of the high level and strategic nature of the mitigation set out in the NAP. This is also on account of the reliance upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA.</p>
<p>The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection)</p>	<p>The requirement to prepare a NAP is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs. Therefore, the NAP must be consistent with the implementation of this EU Directive which is directly related to the protection of the environment and human health.</p>

Table A-2: Stage 2 Screening Table - Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork County Council NAP
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 measures within the NAP aim to have an overall positive effect on noise levels and consequently human health and the environment in the long term. The mitigation set out is high level and strategic. Consequentially, details that would identify duration, frequency and reversibility of effects are not available. Furthermore, there is a reliance in the NAP placed upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development.
The cumulative nature of the effects	The Cork County Council NAP is prepared alongside other national plans and programmes to act in conformity with the suite of measures that they identify. The environmental impact of those measures with be evaluated within the plans themselves, some of which will be subject to mandatory SEA and AA. Therefore, because this NAP is not in direct conflict with the external overarching aims, the NAP itself is unlikely to have resulting significant effects and therefore cannot be cumulative in nature.
The transboundary nature of the effects	On account of the scale and nature of the NAP, and the high-level strategic nature of the mitigation presented, the Cork County Council NAP will have no direct transboundary effects of its own account.
The risks to human health of the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	There are no expected risks to human health or the environment because of the NAP. Overall, the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health.
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The Cork County Council NAP covers a large geographic area. The overall population of the area is approximately 351,029. The population that is directly affected or considered as part of the NAP's aims (the implementation of noise important areas) is however considered to be limited and at a small scape compared to the wider context. For example, in County Cork there are approximately 2,007 people within identified Most Important Areas (MIA) associated with the 10 Priority Important Areas. The PIAs cover, statistically, 503 people highly annoyed, 168 highly sleep disturbed and one person at increased risk of ischemic heart disease, with the potential to benefit from consideration of noise management measures. On this basis and considering the strategic nature of the NAP mitigation, the environmental

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork County Council NAP
	effects are not considered to be significant because they are strategic.
<p>The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage; • Exceeded environmental quality standards or thresholds; or • Intensive land use 	<p>Where areas identified within the Cork County Council NAP coincide with areas of special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage, owing to the reliance in the NAP placed upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development, it is unlikely a significant effect would arise. This also applies to intensive land use.</p> <p>Through its noise policy statement, the NAP will aim to prevent additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where it is likely significant adverse impacts are likely to occur. It will aim to protect areas which are desirably quiet, and it will also identify appropriate mitigation measures to reduce noise levels where they are potentially harmful. A set of implementation actions underpin the statement itself.</p>
<p>The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status</p>	<p>The Cork County Council NAP covers an area which includes 22 SPA and 45 SAC sites, which are sites with national and EU protection status regarding flora, fauna, species and habitats.</p> <p>Measures included in the NAP will in some cases have specific geographic relevance to these protected sites. For example, Priority Impact Area 4 is located within the boundary of the Great Island Channel SAC and the Cork Harbour SPA. This is however due to the area itself already being designated and therefore under a high level of protection which consequently reduces noise levels from factors such as transport. Therefore, while the NAP and its subsequent interventions will geographically affect areas and landscapes with a high level of protection status, it will not necessarily lead a change as noise areas aim to maintain rather than reduce noise levels. Subsequently, the factors to which ecologically designated sites such as SPA and SAC sites are protected, does not necessarily correlate with changing noise levels.</p> <p>Therefore, in summary, the Cork County Council NAP is not considered to have a significant effect upon recognised protected sites within County Cork itself. This is consistent with the findings of the AA Screening report.</p>
Section 5: Summary and Conclusion	
<p>In terms of setting a framework, the Cork County Council NAP does in one sense set out a locational framework for noise, but it is however limited in terms of scale and does not necessarily drive specific changes or actions.</p>	

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Cork County Council NAP
	<p>It should also be noted that the NAP will have a minimal influence on other plans and programmes within County Cork. The NAP is inherently a plan which promotes environmental best practice, but it does not influence the implementation of sustainable development principles.</p> <p>There are several designated sites across County Cork and various social, economic, and environmental factors which indicate a diverse geographic area. The NAP is also relevant in the context of EU Directive implementation and must be consistent with these relevant directions.</p> <p>In terms of the characteristics of effects the NAP is a strategy which should not have any transboundary effects of its own accord, nor bring any expected human health or environmental risks because of its implementation. The NAP is also unlikely to be cumulative in nature because it should be implemented in compliance with other plans and programmes that have been considered by the SEA process. While the County Cork is geographically large, the NAP's interventions are relatively localised. Therefore, the vulnerability and value of the area likely to be affected by the NAP is also relatively localised because areas where environmental thresholds are (or are not) exceeded are small, pocketed areas within County Cork. The effects of the NAP upon national, EU or internationally protected sites is not significant because the areas to which the NAP identifies for interventions are mostly not corresponding to protected sites within County Cork.</p> <p>To conclude, this stage of the SEA screening process determines that the Cork County Council NAP does not require further SEA consideration.</p>
	Section 6: Statutory Consultation
	<p>The following statutory and non-statutory bodies have been consulted with through the SEA screening process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Protection Agency; • Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; • Department of Environment, Climate and Communications; and • Development Applications Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.



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