

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Development Plan](#)
Subject: Variation No. 1 to the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029
Date: Tuesday 7 April 2026 15:04:00
Attachments: [REDACTED]

A Chara,

Please find enclosed An Taisce's submission on the above consultation.

Is mise le meas,

Seán O'Callaghan
Planning and Environmental Policy Officer
An Taisce – The National Trust for Ireland
Email: [REDACTED]
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An Taisce

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Clare County Council,
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Sent by email to: devplan@clarecoco.ie

7th April 2026

Re: Variation No. 1 to the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.

A Chara,

An Taisce – The National Trust for Ireland would like to make the following observation on the above consultation.

It is noted that the proposed variation seeks to amend current zoning of the Páirc na Coille site from SR8 – Strategic Residential Reserve to R39 – Residential, which raises significant concerns about the loss of an ecologically rich site to support future residential development. It would appear that the site is likely to support populations of bat species, particularly Lesser Horseshoe Bat which is a strictly protected species under Annex II and IV of the EU Habitats Directive, necessitating strict protection wherever they occur both within and outside Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). This species is also protected under the Wildlife Acts 1976-2000. Consequently, prior to any rezoning decision, it must be demonstrated via robust ecological surveying methods that the species would not be adversely impacted by the loss of roosting, foraging and commuting habitat to facilitate future development.

This is of particular significance in the midst of a biodiversity emergency and given the “inadequate” designation of the species conservation status within the latest NPWS Article 17 report (2025, p. 57). Notably, the report highlights how *“Lesser Horseshoe Bats are faithful to their roost and will return to the same sites each year.”* The subject site appears to provide biodiversity and landscape features which may be utilised by the species for roosting, navigation and feeding, and which may be lost to facilitate future development. This also applies to other species of bat and fauna, necessitating a robust Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) to inform this rezoning proposal and a systematic assessment of alternative sites for residential zoning purposes which are less ecologically impactful.

We would also highlight the requirement of Article 10 of the Habitats Directive which seeks to preserve stepping stones and ecological corridors including nature conservation sites (other than European sites), habitat areas and species’ locations:

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Finbarr Murray, Helen Shaw, Tony Holohan

*"Member States shall endeavour, where they consider it necessary, in their land-use planning and development policies and, in particular, with a view to improving the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network, to encourage the **management of features of the landscape** which are of **major importance for wild fauna and flora**.*

*Such features are those which, by virtue of their linear and continuous structure (such as rivers with their banks or the traditional systems for marking field boundaries) or their function as stepping stones (such as ponds or small woods), are essential for the **migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species**."*

[An Taisce emphasis].

It should be ensured that the proposed rezoning will not exacerbate further fragmentation of biodiversity habitat which would be detrimental to the movement of certain species and would hinder species richness and lead to declines in genetic diversity.

It is submitted that the proposed rezoning requires assessment in light of the goal of the landmark Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, which filters through the EU Biodiversity Strategy, National Biodiversity Action Plan and county/local level plans, including the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031. Close consideration of conservation of the abundant naturally regenerating habitat and biodiversity currently present at the subject site is required as a result.

Section 59(B) of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023 provides for public bodies to have regard to plans, programmes or strategies concerning the promotion of biodiversity conservation and the objectives/targets of the most recent National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) in the performance of its functions. It is submitted that this applies to the Council's decision-making function when assessing the subject proposed rezoning, which contains biodiversity conservation concerns.

Furthermore, the planning authority is also governed by the National Planning Framework (NPF) in carrying out its decision-making duties, where in Section 21(2)(f) of the Planning and Development Act (PDA) 2024 (as commenced on 2 October 2025) it is stated that the NPF must consist of, *"the integration of the pursuit and achievement of the national climate objective and National Biodiversity Action Plan into plan-led development in the State."* It is submitted that the proposal requires assessment for its adherence to the NBAP given the potential for adverse impacts upon biodiversity.

Additionally, Section 21(3)(d)(ii)&(iii) identifies how the NPF makes provision for the conservation of the environment, including ecology and biodiversity, which the Council should have regard to.

Close consideration should also be given to Section 50 of the PDA 2024 (as commenced on 31 December 2025) which seeks the protection of trees and other significant ecological features within planning authority strategies, in accordance with the EU Biodiversity Strategy and NBAP:

"50. (1) A planning authority shall prepare a strategy for the conservation, protection, management and improvement of the natural, archaeological and built heritage and landscape in the functional area of the planning authority.

...

biodiversity in accordance with the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the National Biodiversity Action Plan including in particular the protection of trees, groups of trees or other features of ecological significance,"

Finally, the change of land-use from a biodiversity rich site to one which would facilitate residential development requires assessment against the biodiversity objectives contained in the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 to ensure that biodiversity interests are balanced with housing need.

The housing crisis and need for rapid housing and infrastructure delivery should not justify the rolling back of environmental safeguards. Compact settlement guidance and objectives with regard to prioritising brownfield sites rather than greenfield sites, in tandem with the need for reversal of biodiversity loss under international, EU, national and local biodiversity objectives, need to be borne in mind when assessing variations to Development Plan such as that proposed.

Please acknowledge our submission and advise us of any further consultation periods.

Is mise le meas,

Seán O'Callaghan
Planning and Environmental Policy Officer
An Taisce – The National Trust for Ireland