Clare County
Development Plan
2023–2029

COMHAIRLE CONTAE AN CHLÁIR
CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Proposed Variation No. 1

Non-Technical Summary

6th March 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Introduction

Clare County Council (CCC) has prepared Variation No. 1 (herein referred to as the 'Proposed Variation' or the 'Variation') to the Clare County Development Plan 2023 - 2029 (herein referred to as the 'CDP'). A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been undertaken for the Proposed Variation. The purpose of the SEA is to identify and evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Proposed Variation.

This is the non-technical summary of the Environmental Report for the SEA of the Proposed Variation.

Approach to SEA

The SEA process can be defined by four stages, all of which include some level of consultation with stakeholders and the public. These stages are defined as:

- Stage 1 – Screening: deciding whether an SEA is required, or not.
- Stage 2 – Scoping: establishing the spatial and temporal scope of the SEA and a decision-making framework that can be used to evaluate impacts.
- Stage 3 – Identification, Prediction, Considerations of Alternatives, Evaluation and Mitigation of Potential Impacts.
- Stage 4 – Consultation, Revision and Post-Adoption. This includes the implementation of statutory SEA monitoring.

Stage 2 - Scoping was completed by CCC. The SEA process runs in parallel with the Appropriate Assessment (AA) process, which is an assessment process focusing on the potential effects of a plan or project on sites designated for nature protection known as ‘European Sites.’

The Proposed Variation

The Proposed Variation to the CDP is being made in response to recent changes in national planning policy, namely:

- The preparation of the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (January 2024)
- The publication of the National Planning Framework (NPF) First Revision (April 2025)
- The preparation of NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (July 2025)
- The preparation of the Design Standards for Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (July 2025)

The overarching purpose of the Proposed Variation is to respond in a plan-led, strategic and environmentally responsible manner to the national requirement to increase the supply of zoned land so that new homes can be delivered at pace and in the right places.

The Environmental Baseline

An evaluation and a characterisation of the current state of the environment likely to be affected by the Proposed Variation has been undertaken to inform the SEA process.

The following Environmental Components were considered during this evaluation:

- Population and Human Health
- Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna
- Landscape and Visual Amenity
- Cultural Heritage - Archaeological and Architectural
- Soils
- Land Use
- Air Quality & Noise
- Water
- Material Assets
- Tourism and Recreation
- Climate Change

A non-technical and high-level summary of the baseline environment is provided in the table below. This table provides an overview of the baseline environmental features present in Clare County.

Environmental Component	Summary of the Baseline Environmental Characteristics
Population and Human Health	In the 2022 Census, the total population of Clare was 127,938 persons, showing the trend of an increase in total population in the County by ca. 7.7% (9,121 persons)1 since the previous Census. The transitional population projection for Clare as identified by the Southern Regional Assembly's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) by 2031 is between 134,000 – 137,000 persons.
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	The Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark was designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark in 2015. It has an area of 530 km. This physical landscape hosts rare natural habitats and unique floral assemblages not found anywhere else on Earth; as well as abundant legacies of human settlement dating back over 6,000 years. There are 37 designated SACs within, partially within or adjacent to the County, including: Galway Bay Complex SAC (000268); Black Head – Poulsallagh Complex SAC (000020); Lower River Shannon SAC (002165) and East Burren Complex (SAC 001926). There are 10 designated SPAs within, partially within or adjacent to the County, of which the most notable sites include: Cliffs of Moher SPA (004005); River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA (004077); Inner Galway Bay SPA (004031) and Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA (004058) There are 2 designated Ramsar sites within and adjacent to the County boundary; Ballyallia Lough and Inner Galway Bay.

[1] Central Statistics Office. 2022. FY003B - Population and Actual and Percentage Change 2006 to 2022 (cso.ie) https://data.cso.ie/table/FY003B

Environmental Component	Summary of the Baseline Environmental Characteristics
	There are 14 designated NHAs within, partially within or adjacent to the County; including Slieve Aughty Bog NHA (001229) and Derryoober Bog NHA (002379). There are approximately 61 pNHAs within, partially within or adjacent to the County; of which the most notable sites include: Fergus Estuary and Inner Shannon, North Shore pNHA (002048) and East Burren Complex pNHA (001926). There are 3 designated Flora Protection Order Sites in the County; Scarriff, Cathair Chomain, Fanore. There are 3 designated wildfowl sanctuaries in the County; which are Ballyallia Lake (WFS-05), Islandavanna (WFS-06), and Mutton Island (WFS-07). The most dominant land cover type is agricultural pastures and heterogenous areas. Wetlands are found scattered across the County but are most dominant within the Slieve Aughty Mountains, the Lisdoonvarna area, as well as the southwest and southeast areas of the County. These wetland areas are often accompanied by coniferous forests with transitional woodland scrub and herbaceous vegetation. Urban fabric/artificial surfaces can be found mainly in Ennis and Shannon. The area of the East Burren Complex/Burren National Park contains mostly open spaces of bare rock with little to no vegetation. The Burren National Park is located within the northern part of the County. There are 4 designated Nature Reserves located within the County; including Caher (Murphy); Dromore; Keelhilla (Slieve Carron); and Ballyteigue.
Landscape and Visual Amenity	The 2004 Landscape Character Assessment for County Clare[2] identifies 21 Landscape Character Areas and 26 Landscape Character Types. In addition to this, High Amenity Areas have been identified in the County. The west boundary of the County runs along the coastline where in meets the Atlantic Ocean. This coastline includes beaches, wetland habitats (i.e. turloughs, fens and marshes) and cliffs. The coast and the Cliffs of Moher are significant features of the County and are used for a variety of purposes. The County has a diverse topography, varying from karst landscapes to estuarine mudflats, from high Atlantic cliffs to inland waterways and lakes.
Cultural Heritage - Archaeological and Architectural	There are over 7,500 Recorded Sites and Monuments within the county. There are 37 monument sites in State Care in the county. There are approximately 1,000 inclusions on the Record of Protected Structures within the county, which include many notable buildings in the County such as: Doonbeg Castle, O'Brien's Tower, and Knappogue Castle. There are various Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) designated within the County, including: • Ennis – Historic town centre ACA • Ennistymon – Town centre ACA • Kilkee – Town centre ACA • Kilrush – Town centre ACA • Killaloe – Town centre ACA • Liscannor – Village centre ACA • Tulla – Town centre ACA • Scariff – Town centre ACA • Corofin – Village centre ACA • Clonlara – Village centre ACA • Lisdoonvarna – Town centre ACA • Miltown Malbay – Town/village ACA • Quin – Village ACA • Sixmilebridge – Village ACA

[2] Landscape Character Assessment of County Clare (2004), Available online at: https://www.clarecoco.ie/services/planning/publications/landscape-character-assessment-of-co-clare-2004-26526.pdf; Accessed 20/01/2026

Environmental Component	Summary of the Baseline Environmental Characteristics
Soils	The dominant soil type in the County is Gley soils. Other soil types include Brown Podzolics, Rendzinas, Grey-Brown Podzolics, Urban soils, Brown Earths / Acid Brown Earths and Alluvial soils. Clare is dominated by a unique Karst landscape, characterized by exposed limestone bedrock, and a range of important geological, hydrogeological and hydrological features, including the Burren, karst aquifers, turloughs etc.
Land Use	Land use mapping for County Clare is included in the main body of the SEA Environmental Report. This mapping shows the extent of all land use present in the County (e.g., urban fabric, agricultural land use, forest, peatland etc.) Land use in the county is predominantly rural and natural in nature, with dispersed settlement (towns and villages), significant levels of forestry and wetlands/peatlands.
Air Quality and Noise	The Air Quality in Ireland 2024 report prepared by the EPA identifies that air quality in Ireland is moving in a positive direction, however Ireland has not yet met the Clean Air Strategy and Guidelines set forth by the World Health Organisation. Air quality monitoring results in 2024 show that fine particulate matter (PM2.5) mainly from burning solid fuels in our homes, and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) mainly from vehicle emissions, remain the main threats to good air quality. Under the Clean Air for Europe Directive [Directive 2008/50/EC], Ennis Town in County Clare is part of 'Zone C', while the rural areas within the County make up parts of 'Zone D'. The current air quality in Ennis Town is identified by the EPA as being of Good status. Rural air quality in the County is also generally good, although ambient air quality in settlement in the County can be affected by localised emissions from domestic solid fuel burning. The noise environment in the County is predominantly affected by national and regional roads, and agricultural and forestry activity. Shannon Airport is a signficant noise source in the County. Localised industrial noise is also present in industrial estates present at settlements in the County. Noise levels are generally low in rural areas of the County.
Water	The County is located mainly within the Shannon Estuary North, Mal Bay, Galway Bay South East and Lower Shannon catchments. The WFD status of coastal water bodies (2019-2024) for the Shannon Plume, Outer Galway Bay, Doonbeg Bay and Ballyvaghan Bay are currently identified as being of High status, while Mouth of the Shannon, Liscannor Bay and Aughinish Bay are of Good status. The WFD groundwater status (2019-2024) underlying Clare is generally identified as being of 'Good' status, with the exception of an industrial site (P0012-04) and GWDTE-Caherglassaun Turlough being identified as having Poor status. The WFD status of rivers and streams (2019-2024) draining Clare ranges from high (sections of rivers and streams, including, Corra_010, and Caher (CLARE)_010), to good (sections of rivers and streams, including Cloghaun_020 & 030, Blackwater (CLARE)_010 & 020, Shannon (Lower)_040, Graney (Shannon)_030, Owengarney_060, Cloon (Clare) _010, Inch (Clare)_010, and etc.,) to moderate (sections of rivers and streams including Rine_010, 020 & 030, Owenslieve_020, Moyasta_010, Inagh (Ennistymon)_040, Inch (Clare)_020, Broadford_020 & 030, and etc.,) and to poor (sections of rivers and streams including Moyree_030, Craggaunboy_010, Crompuan (EAST)_010, Cloverhill Stream_010, Shallee_010, Doonbeg_030, Doonaha_010, and etc.,) and finally to bad (sections of rivers and streams including Annagh (Clare)_010.) 19 settlements in Clare were identified by the OPW in 2012 as requiring detailed assessment of flood risk (Areas for Further Assessment)3.
Material Assets	County Clare is traversed by four major road networks – the M18/N18, N68, N85 and the N67. The County is served by Iarnród Éireann's Intercity Rail service (Limerick to Galway-Athenry). Further to this, TFI Bus Éireann and Local Link as well as a number of other private operators provide bus services to the County and its rural areas. The existing Green Infrastructure in County Clare boasts many key features and activities along the coast and across the urban and rural areas. Many of these are iconic in nature, including the numerous parks and open spaces of County and national significance.

[3] Available online at Microsoft Word - PFRA Main Report - Rev D.doc.

Environmental Component	Summary of the Baseline Environmental Characteristics
	The 360km long coastline of Clare is amongst the most sensitive and valuable resources in the County, in terms of natural and cultural heritage, scenic beauty and recreation. One pressure facing the County is the availability of wastewater treatment capacity. According to the latest Uisce Eireann's Wastewater Treatment Capacity Register, the following settlements in the County are affected by wastewater treatment capacity constraints: • Ennis - Limited available capacity at Clareabbey WWTP. • Ennistimon - Limited available capacity at Ennisytymon WWTP. • Miltown Malbay - No available capacity at Miltown Malbay WWTP. • Tulla- Limited available capacity at Tulla WWTP. • Lehinch - Limited available capacity at Lahinch WWTP. • Kilkeshin - No available capacity at Kilkeshin WWTP. • Doonbeg - Limited available capacity at Doonbeg WWTP. • Kilkee - Limited available capacity at Kilkee WWTP. • Ballycannon - Limited available capacity at Ballycannon WWTP. • Kildysert - No available capacity at Kildysert WWTP. • Kilmihil - Limited available capacity at Kilmihil WWTP.
Tourism and Recreation	Tourism and recreation are influenced by a range of factors in Ireland. International tourism has increased in recent years. Fáilte Ireland has recently published their four regional brand strategies which will define the spatial scope and spread of future tourism developments within Ireland. The Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme and the Hidden Heartlands Regional Development Strategy were launched, and the global brand successes resulted in infrastructure demands to previously less trafficked areas. At a county level, CCC has developed the County Clare Tourism Strategy 2030. Tourism is an important sector in County Clare. A wide range of tourism and attractions are present in the County, including the Wild Atlantic Way, the Burren, the Cliffs of Moher, Aillweee Cave. There is a strong traditional music scene in the County and wide variety of historic and heritage sites that attract visitors. Adventure and marine sports are prevalent in coastal locations in the County.
Climate Change	County Clare is affected by climate change policy and issues broadly. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 was established to provide for the approval of plans by the Government in relation to climate change. This aims at pursuing the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich and climate neutral economy by no later than the end of the year 2050. Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP25) sets out Ireland's national and sectoral targets in this regard. The Clare Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029 (LACAP) defines community/local level actions for climate mitigation and adaptation in the County. A Baseline Emission Inventory completed to inform the LACAP for the County provides a breakdown of sectoral Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in the County. • Residential - 16% • Commercial and Industrial -11% • Industrial Processes - 3% • Agriculture - 44% • Transport - 20% • Waste and Wastewater - 1% • LULUCF - 5% Total GHG emissions in the County is estimated at 1,965,524 tCO2-eq. Future changes in climate and associated impacts on sea level, rainfall patterns/intensity and river flow will influence flooding frequency and extent in the future. Local Authorities, in compliance with the Regional Planning Guidelines, are attempting to adopt sustainable flood risk strategies in areas likely to be at risk of flooding in the future in the context of climate change and changing weather patterns. Changes to climate could lead to an increase in flooding events in Ireland, including in County Clare. The County is particular susceptible to coastal erosion, extreme weather events, rising sea levels and flood.

Section 4 of the main body of this Draft SEA Environmental Report contains further detail on baseline environmental characteristics, including a variety of detailed environmental maps, for those who wish to develop a more in-depth understanding of the environmental baseline. Section 7 of the main body of this Draft SEA Environmental Report contains a summary of the evaluation of the environmental effects of the implementation of the Proposed Variation, including a summary of the various positive, negative and cumulative effects associated with Variation implementation.

Evolution of the Baseline Environment

The SEA Directive requires that consideration is given to the likely evolution of the baseline environment in the event the Variation is not adopted and implemented. It is predicted that the following would occur in the event the Proposed Variation to the CDP is not made:

- There would be absence of an appropriately focused strategy for developing additional housing and supporting infrastructure to meet housing targets for the County.
- There would be insufficient lands zoned for residential use, resulting in constraints on housing development in the County. This would increase the likelihood that housing targets for the County would not be achieved.
- Planning and environmental protection requirements defined in legislation, the current CDP and higher order plans would still apply to Clare.
- There would not be a strong planning framework for delivering additional housing in line with housing targets, however.
- The baseline environment would still be strongly influenced by the current CDP, the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031, the Clare Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029 and Local Area Plans (LAPs) for the County.
- The development of additional housing and supporting infrastructure in Clare would not be subject to strategic and appropriately focussed development control. There would be a greater risk of improper planning and unsustainable development occurring in the County. This scenario has greater potential to result in adverse environmental effects on all environmental components due to the carrying out of inappropriate development, including adverse effects on:
    - Population and Human Health – e.g., through reductions in residential amenity, noise, dust.
    - Biodiversity – e.g., through the loss of valuable habitat, habitat fragmentation, effects on protected species.
    - Landscape Character and Visual Amenity – e.g., through loss of scenic value, diminishment of landscape character and visual amenity.
    - Cultural Heritage – e.g., through effects on or diminishment of built heritage including protected structures and historic fabric.
    - Soils – e.g., through ground contamination, effects on soil structure and function.
    - Land use – e.g., as a result of development-led planning, which is unsustainable, incoherent and inconsistent with good planning practice and higher-order planning policy.
    - Water – e.g., through the carrying out of development that results in adverse effects on water quality or increased flood risk.
    - Material Assets – e.g., as a result of failing to provide supporting infrastructure and services (e.g., water supply, wastewater services) for additional housing development to be carried out in the County in the long-term.

- The potential positive effects of the Proposed Variation on environmental components will not be realised, including potential positive effects on:
    - Population and Human Health – e.g., through the delivery of sustainable, plan-led, environmentally responsible housing and supporting infrastructure.
    - Biodiversity – e.g., through the implementation of measures that afford focussed protection to biodiversity in and surrounding areas likely to be subject to future housing development.
    - Landscape Character and Visual Amenity – e.g., through the implementation of measures that control the scale and appearance of built development and serve to protect and enhance landscape character and visual amenity.
    - Cultural Heritage – e.g., through appropriately focussed measures that ensure adequate consideration is given to potential effects on built and archaeological heritage during the carrying out of additional housing development.
    - Land use – e.g., through the promotion of plan-led, strategic and environmental responsible housing development.
    - Water – e.g., through the adoption of appropriately focussed pollution prevention measures and the application of good and proper flood risk management under the land use planning process.
    - Material Assets – e.g., through the appropriately phased delivery of supporting infrastructure and services in the County (e.g., water supply, wastewater services) in line with housing development.

Strategic Environmental Objectives

The SEA Directive states that an SEA should also look at *'the environmental protection objectives, established at International, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation.*' The identification of environmental protection objectives relevant to a plan provides the basis for evaluating the significance of impacts during the SEA process. All environmental protection objectives relevant to the Proposed Variation have been identified.

Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) are methodological measures which facilitate the development of targets against which the environmental effects of a plan or programme can be assessed. They are based on wider environmental protection objectives on a local, regional, national, European and international level. They are high-level in nature and set strategic goals for improvement. SEOs have already been developed for the current Clare CDP. These SEOs are applicable to the Proposed Variation and can be used to measure the environmental effects of the Proposed Variation.

All SEOs defined in the current CDP which are applicable to the Proposed Variation are presented in table below.

Environmental Component	SEO Code	Strategic Environmental Objective
Population and Human Health	P1	Protect, enhance, and improve people's quality of life based on high quality residential, community, educational, working, and recreational environments and on sustainable travel patterns.
	P2	To protect human health.
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	B1	Protect, conserve, enhance where possible and avoid loss of diversity and integrity of the broad range of habitats, species, wildlife corridors, ecosystems, and geological features.
	B2	To achieve the conservation objectives of European Sites (SACs and SPAs) and other sites of nature conservation.
	B3	Conserve and protect other sites of nature conservation including NHAs, pNHAs, National Parks, Nature Reserves, Wildfowl Sanctuaries as well as protected species outside these areas as covered by the Wildlife Act.
	B4	Meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive and the River Basin Management Plan.
	B5	To minimise and, where possible, eliminate threats to biodiversity including invasive species.
	B6	Promote green infrastructure networks, including riparian zones and wildlife corridors.
	B7	No net loss of biodiversity.
Landscape and Visual Amenity	L1	Conserve, protect and enhance valued natural, cultural and built landscapes, views of local value and features including those of geological and aesthetic value.
	L2	Maintain and enhance landscape quality within the plan area by minimising visual impacts through appropriate design, assessment, and siting.
Cultural Heritage	CH1	Protect and conserve the cultural heritage including the built environment and settings; archaeological (recorded and unrecorded monuments), architectural (Protected Structures, Architectural Conservation Areas, vernacular buildings, materials and urban fabric) and manmade landscape features (e.g., field walls, footpaths, gate piers etc.) of the county.
	CH2	To protect, conserve and enhance local folklore, traditions, and placenames within the Plan area.
	CH3	To ensure the restoration and re-use of existing uninhabited and derelict structures where possible opposed to demolition and new build (to promote sustainability and reduce landfill).
Soils & Geology	S1	To maximise the sustainable re-use of the existing built environment, derelict, disused and infill sites (brownfield sites), rather than greenfield sites. (This is in line with the Active Land Management Strategy RPO34 – Regeneration, Brownfield, Infill Development).
	S2	Minimise the excavation and movement of soils within site works.
	S3	Minimise the consumption of non-renewable deposits on site.
Air and Noise	C1	Minimise all forms of air pollution and maintain/improve ambient air quality.

Environmental Component	SEO Code	Strategic Environmental Objective
	C2	Minimise emissions of greenhouse gases and contribute to a reduction and avoidance of human induced global climate change.
Water	W1	Implement appropriate Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) in the County with a focus on Nature Based Solutions. (Attenuate, innovate, reuse, reimagine & utilise water in a different way).
	W2	Reduce the impact of polluting substances to all waters and prevent pollution and contamination of ground water by adhering to aquifer protection plans and to maintain and improve the quality of drinking water supplies.
	W3	Promote sustainable water use and water conservation in the plan area and to maintain and improve the quality of drinking water supplies.
	W4	Protect flood plains and areas of flood risk from development through avoidance, mitigation, and adaptation measures.
	W5	To promote a responsible attitude to recreation and amenity use of water in relation to water quality and disturbance to species and to prevent pollution and contamination of designated bathing waters.
Material Assets	Transport	
	T1	Maximise sustainable modes of transport and encourage use of walkways/cycle paths as alternative routes to school, work, and shops.
	T2	Provide for ease of movement for all road users and to promote development patterns that protect and enhance road safety.
	Waste	
	WA1	Implement the waste pyramid and encourage reuse/recycling of material wherever possible.
	Water Supply	
	WS1	To ensure adequate and clean drinking water supplies.
	WS2	Improve efficiency in distribution of potable water to the population through pipe rehabilitation and to promote water conservation and sustainable water usage for long-term protection of available water resources.
	Wastewater	
	WW1	To ensure that all zoned lands (existing and proposed) are connected to the public sewer network ensuring treatment of wastewater which meets EU requirements prior to discharge.
	WW2	Reduce the dependency on individual proprietary wastewater treatment facilities and ensure the highest standards possible in existing and future wastewater treatment facilities.
	Renewable Energy	
	RE1	Reduce waste of energy, promote use of renewable energy sources and support energy conservation initiatives across all sectors including the development of low carbon business practices and buildings.

Environmental Component	SEO Code	Strategic Environmental Objective
Climate Change	CC1	Reduce the need to travel/increased use of public transportation and achieve modal shift in transport across the county.
	CC2	Reduce the need to travel/increased use of public transportation and achieve modal shift in transport across the county.
	CC3	Integrate Climate Change mitigation measures into every fabric of spatial planning through the restriction of inappropriate development/land-use zoning in flood risk zones, inclusion of green infrastructure as the status quo and the incorporation of suitable Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) into all developments.
	CC4	Maintain and protect our natural carbon sinks (bogs/marshes/forests/fens/Peatland and Wetlands) as decarbonising areas which can serve a dual purpose in terms of enhancement of biodiversity and mitigation against Climate Change.
	CC5	Encourage and support the utilisation of energy efficient and water-efficient building design to better equip homes and businesses to cope during times of shortage and service interruption, such as grey-water recycling, the use of solar PVs, passive houses etc.
	CC6	Encourage the retrofitting of buildings with a particular focus on the existing council housing stock ensuring a Just Transition for all.
	CC7	Avoid situations that limit adaptation to climate change such as zoning lands in close proximity to a known flood risk area.
	CC8	In preparing the spatial plan for our county that we develop ecologically resilient and varied landscapes through the establishment and preservation of ecological networks and stepping-stones as part of our settlement zonings and objectives and foster adaptive management practices in the face of uncertainty, favouring flexible adaptation options and allowing for alterations of the Plan as monitoring and evaluation data become available during its implementation.

Additional SEOs to support the measurement of the effects of the Proposed Variation have also been defined. These are as follows:

- Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna: Aim for no net contribution to biodiversity losses or deterioration, and seek opportunities to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain, in response to the biodiversity emergency, and in line with the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 - 2029 and the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 - 2031.
- Climate: Support the achievement of the Clare Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029 (LACAP) Objectives and Actions.
- Air Quality (and Noise): Support the achievement of Actions for Clare defined in the County Clare Noise Action Plan 2024 - 2028.

Description and Evaluation of Plan Alternatives

The SEA Directive requires that reasonable alternative means of achieving the strategic goals of the Proposed Variation (taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of a plan or programme) are identified, described and evaluated for their likely significant effects on the environment. Such reasonable alternatives must be realistic and capable of implementation. Reasonable alternatives were assessed against the SEOs established for the aspects of the baseline environment which are likely to be significantly affected by the Variation.

The underpinning goal of the reasonable alternative evaluation process was to ensure that the selection of preferred alternatives by the local authority is informed by environmental considerations.

Reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Variation were identified as the Variation development process evolved. Details on all Reasonable Alternatives considered during Variation development and a brief summary of reasoning for selecting preferred alternatives are presented in the table below.

Theme	Description of Reasonable Alternatives	Preferred Alternative	Reasons for Selecting Preferred Alternatives
Environmental Ambitions	Alternative 1: Aim to deliver environmental protection in line with current legislative and higher-order policy requirements. Alternative 2: Aim to deliver both environmental protection and enhancement, going beyond current legislative and higher-order policy requirements.	Alternative 2	Alternative 2 was selected due to its more ambitious approach and for increasing the likelihood and magnitude of potential positive effects associated with the implementation of the Proposed Variation. Ambitious environmental enhancement-related measures that deliver both on environmental protection and enhancement, in line with current legislation and policy and emerging policy have been incorporated into the Proposed Variation.
Environmental Commitments	Alternative 1: Relying on the existing framework of environmental mitigation defined in the current Clare County Development Plan 2023 - 2029. Alternative 2: Adopting a 'Belt and Braces' approach, and developing and adopting a more focused framework of environmental mitigation for lands subject to zoning objective changes under the Proposed Variation.	Alternative 2	Alternative 2 was selected as it is in line with the environmental ambitions outlined for the Proposed Variation. Additional specific mitigation was integrated into the Proposed Variation to support the delivery of environmental protection and enhancement in line with the overall ambitions for the Variation. This has the potential to increase the likelihood and magnitude of potential positive effects associated with implementing the Proposed Variation.
Approach to Environmental Protection Avoidance or Mitigation	Alternative 1: Place a stronger emphasis on taking avoidance measures to avoid conflicts with and potential adverse effects on important/sensitive environmental features. Alternative 2: Place a stronger emphasis on using Plan-level mitigation measures to prevent potential adverse effects on important/sensitive environmental features.	Alternative 1	A 'long-list' of sites were considered for zoning objective changes early on in the Variation development process. These sites were subject to Preliminary Environmental Appraisals. The SEA/AA Team and the Variation Development Team worked closely to ensure the suitable protection of the receiving environment at these sites. A strategic decision was made to avoid development at or near to important important/sensitive environmental features, (such as heritage features, surface water bodies, wetlands of important, groundwater features, designated sites, locally important ecological features etc.). It was determined that this would provide maximal environmental protection and better support the SEOs defined for the CDP and the Proposed Variation.
Wastewater Treatment Capacity for Additional Housing	Alternative 1: Zoning lands for residential development only in settlements where spare wastewater treatment capacity is available. Alternative 2: Zoning lands for residential developments across all settlement in the County, including in settlements with no or limited wastewater treatment capacity.	Alternative 1	Alternative 1 was selected in cognisance of the most recent Uísce Eireann Wastewater Treatment Capacity Register (September 2025), which identifies Miltown Malbay, Kildysert and Kilkishen as having no spare Wastewater Treatment capacity and Ennis (Clareabbey), Ennistymon, Tulla, Lahinch, Doonbeg, Kilkee, Ballycannon and Kilmihil as having limited spare capacity. Some settlements such as Miltown Malbay and Kilgysert have no spare capacity and others such as Tulla, Lahinch, Ennis (Clareabbey) are deemed 'Amber' which implies there is potential spare capacity available.

Theme	Description of Reasonable Alternatives	Preferred Alternative	Reasons for Selecting Preferred Alternatives
			It was determined that the best mechanism in the land use planning process to avoid placing additional loading pressures on wastewater treatment plants in the County was to avoid zoning for residential development at settlements with no current wastewater treatment capacity. This affords maximal environmental protection for various environmental components, including water quality, biodiversity and population and human health.
Sustainable Transportation	Alternative 1: Focus additional residential zoning in settlements that are provided with public transport. Alternative 2: Focus residential development across all settlement and areas, including areas not provided with public transport services.	Alternative 1	A strategic decision was made early on in the Variation development process to confine zoning proposals to areas that are provided with public transport services. This was to ensure the Variation accords with and support higher-order and CDP sustainable travel and transport policy, including the National Sustainable Mobility Policy and Development Plan Objectives CDP 2.15, CDP 4.1, CDP 11.2, and CDP 11.9. Ensuring that land use development accords with sustainable travel and transport will create positive interactions with other environmental components through the reduction of private car use and creation and promotion of a well-supported and well-used public transport system.

Evaluation of the Environmental Effects of Variation Implementation

A detailed evaluation of the potential effects of the Preferred Variation on the baseline environment was carried out in accordance with the SEA Directive and best practice guidelines. A concise and non-technical summary of the key environmental effects associated with implementing the Proposed Variation is presented below. The potential negative effects presented assume the absence of the appropriate mitigation defined in this Non-technical Summary and in Section 8 of this SEA Environmental Report.

Potential Negative Environmental Effects (in the absence of environmental mitigation)

- The Proposed Variation supports the carrying out of housing and infrastructural development. The construction phases of such development has the potential to result in environmental impacts, such as dust, noise, or traffic disruption, that may affect various environmental components, including population and human health, the air quality environment, the noise environment, the water environment, biodiversity or traffic and transport conditions. The operational phases of such development has the potential to result in environmental effects on various environmental components, such as population and human health, traffic and transport conditions, landscape character and visual amenity.
- Development construction activities, generally, may generate dust emissions, vibration or noise that may impact residential amenity, human health and well-being, and biodiversity.
- The Proposed Variation provides a land use framework for development that has the potential to generate environmental impacts (e.g., habitat loss) that directly or indirectly cause adverse effects on European sites, such as disturbance to key species, reduction in species density, impact on non-designated sites or habitat that support European sites, or changes in indicators of conservation value.
- Development may lead to adverse effects on biodiversity, including loss, disturbance or damage to biodiversity, flora and fauna; effects on important sites and their ecological features/qualifying interests; effects on ecological connectivity; and effects on locally important biodiversity (e.g., Lesser Horse Shoe Bat, County wetlands, avian species utilising Special Protection Areas in the County, groundwater dependent habitat, such as turloughs {at designated sites and non-designated features}).
- Development may generate an increase in the quantum of light transmitted to sensitive ecological receptors, resulting in increased vulnerability and sensitivity of light-sensitive species (e.g., Lesser Horse Shoe Bat present and surrounding Special Areas of Conservation).
- The Proposed Variation supports development construction at greenfield locations where invasive species may exist. Construction and waste management activities may increase the risk of the spread of invasive species.
- Greenfield development may damage known heritage features (e.g., Ringforts, Fulacht fiadh) or unknown archaeological remains.
- The Proposed Variation is supportive of the carrying out of development at sensitive locations (e.g., at sites which contain important hedgerow, trees or woodland; in proximity to surface water bodies that hydrologically link the sites to designated sites; or in the vicinity of important wetland and designated sites) which could potentially affect sensitive aspects of the environment, including biodiversity (habitats and species), water quality, landscape character and visual amenity, and built and archaeological heritage.

- Development, including larger scale development of a sizeable mass and form, may generate negative impacts on the physical integrity, character and settings of built heritage (e.g., protected structures) and historic fabric, including Architectural Conservation Areas at settlements in the County.
- Significantly scaled residential development may adversely affect visual amenity in the vicinity of these developments, streetscape character and wider landscape character (especially in the context of coastal locations or areas with a wide vista or designated views and prospects).
- Inappropriate or improperly designed greenfield development may contribute to significant hydrological changes and increases in flood risk.
- Development may generate adverse effects upon the status of water bodies arising from changes in quality, flow and/or morphology, resulting in conflict with Water Framework Directive Objectives.
- Development will increase the quantum of water supply, wastewater and energy provisions and infrastructure required in the County. Development at settlements with no or limited wastewater treatment capacity may result in overloading of WWTPs and a deterioration in water quality and aquatic ecology due to releases from these plants. It is important the residential development at these settlements occurs concurrently with the provisions of suitable supporting infrastructure, including wastewater treatment capacity.
- Development arising due to the Proposed Variation may generate an increase in traffic levels resulting in effects on existing traffic and transportation conditions and dynamics. Development occurring around the fringes of existing settlement may create road safety issues if improperly designed or not occurring concurrently with suitable traffic and transport infrastructure upgrades.
- Development related excavation has the potential to result in the generation of substantial levels of material and waste, that will need to be appropriately and sustainably managed in accordance with 'Waste Hierarchy' principles.
- Infrastructure development may have the potential to restrict or reduce the quality of resources important for recreation and/or tourism. Adverse effects on biodiversity, cultural heritage or landscape character have the potential to indirectly tourism and amenity value in the County.

Potential Positive Environmental Effects

- The Proposed Variation has the potential to contribute to the provision of additional housing, and sustainable development and proper planning in accordance with the land use planning framework and higher order planning policy and other inter-related policy, resulting in positive effects across all environmental components. The implementation of the Proposed Variation has the potential to support strategic, plan-led, balanced, integrated and socially beneficial development and environmental protection and enhancement in the County.
- The delivery of housing and community infrastructure has the potential to generate positive effects on population and human health (people and communities).
- The Proposed Variation is supportive of the minimisation of flood risk in the County area. This will generate positive environmental effects on water quality, hydrology and biodiversity. Reducing flood risk can generate significant, positive effects for a variety of environmental receptors that could be negatively impacted by flood events, including human receptors, material assets, ecological receptors and cultural heritage assets.
- The Proposed Variation supports the development of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) - in response to flood and climate related risk - which are supportive of biodiversity protection and enhancement. The promotion of NBS has the potential to create positive effects for biodiversity, flora and fauna, water quality and hydrology.

- The framework of locally focused and site-specific, environmental protection and enhancement related policies and objectives integrated into the Proposed Variation support the carrying out of considered, appropriate development sensitive to the receiving environment at areas subject to rezoning. Generally, this has the potential to generate positive effects on all environmental components.

Transboundary Environmental Effects

The Proposed Variation does not have the potential to introduce sources of impact that may be transmitted outside of Ireland, considering the nature of the proposed changes to the current CDP and the location of the County.

Mitigation Measures

The SEA Directive requires that mitigation measures to prevent and reduce any potential significant negative environmental effects due to the implementation of a plan are defined.

The following forms of mitigation have been adopted to mitigate the negative effects of the Proposed Variation and maximise its potential positive effects:

- Mitigation through consideration of alternatives.
- Mitigation through avoidance
- Mitigation through environmental mitigation defined in the current CDP, and through integrating environmental considerations into the Proposed Variation.

A number of alternatives were considered at an early stage in the Variation development process. The environmental effects of these alternatives were evaluated during the SEA process. The preferred Variation was chosen over other alternative options having due regard to the potential environmental effects (positive and negative) associated with the alternatives considered.

The Variation development process was carried out in parallel with the SEA, AA and SFRA processes. Regular communication and interaction took place between the environmental assessment team and the plan development team. Environmental considerations that came to light during the SEA, AA and SFRA processes, including consultation processes, were regularly communicated to CCC.

Environmental assessment was undertaken early on in the process and in an iterative manner. Environmental considerations shaped the refinement of land use zoning proposals throughout the process. A wide range of avoidance measures were recommended and taken to avoid conflicts between land use zoning proposals and sensitive environmental features. Zoning proposals at sites were avoided or suitably refined, depending on the presence of sensitive environmental features. The SFRA produced for the Variation suitably informed this process.

Additional environmental mitigation measures to mitigate the potential negative environmental effects of implementing the Proposed Variation were developed and then integrated into the Proposed Variation. This process was carried out in an iterative manner to ensure optimal plan making and environmental outcomes. Environmental considerations were also integrated into the Variation so as to facilitate maximising identified positive environmental effects of the Proposed Variation. The environmental mitigation measures integrated into the Variation were site specific in nature and were an additional layer of environmental mitigation beyond the framework of Development Plan Objectives currently in the CDP which serve to guide development in the County and which would be applicable to the Variation. This 'belt and braces' approach has resulted in maximal environmental protection. Environmental mitigation measures focussing on environmental enhancement opportunities have also been defined on a site-specific basis.

Due to the inter-relationship between various environmental components, environmental mitigation measures defined for one component can also serve to benefit other environmental components.

Conclusions

The reasonable alternatives presented in Section 6 of the main body of this SEA Environmental Report has resulted in the development of a Proposed Variation that achieves the best environmental outcomes in comparison to other reasonable alternatives considered.

Environmental protection-related Development Plan Objectives defined within the current Clare CDP, which apply to the Proposed Variation objectives, will mitigate potential significant negative effects associated with the Proposed Variation. The implementation of the site-specific and locally focussed integrated into the Proposed Variation will also serve to prevent and reduce potential significant negative environmental effects due to the implementation of the Proposed Variation.

No further mitigation measures are required for the Proposed Variation.

Monitoring Measures

The SEA Directive requires that the environmental effects of the implementation of a plan or programme (or plan variation in this case) are monitored in order *'to identify at an early stage unforeseen effects, and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial action'*.

It is proposed that existing monitoring measures and associated indicators and targets defined in the current CDP are used to monitor the environmental effects of the implementation of the Proposed Variation. The monitoring measures, indicators and targets defined are deemed appropriate for measuring the full range of potential environmental effects that may occur due to the implementation of the Variation. Utilising these existing measures will also avoid the unnecessary duplication of environmental monitoring processes.

Where monitoring identifies that the implementation of the Variation is having a significant negative environmental effect, an in-depth review of the CDP should take place and the CDP should be updated in a manner that satisfactorily mitigates these environmental effects (i.e., through the adoption of additional environmental mitigation measures). Similarly, where monitoring indicates that potential positive environmental effects associated with Variation implementation are not being adequately realised, the Variation should be reviewed and updated in a manner that supports the realisation of all potential positive environmental effects, having regard to the ambitions and goals of the CDP and the Proposed Variation.

Additional SEOs and monitoring measures have been defined for the CDP/Proposed Variation. Details on these SEOs, including their Monitoring Indicators and Targets are presented in the table below. These have been included to ensure alignment with the latest wider environmental protection objectives.

Environmental Component	SEO	Monitoring Indicator	Targets	Data Sources
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	Aim for no net contribution to biodiversity losses or deterioration, and seek opportunities to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain, in response to the biodiversity emergency, and in line with the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 - 2029 and the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 - 2031.	Compliance of development with actions providing for the protection and enhancement of Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna defined in the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 - 2031.	No contravention of actions providing for the protection and enhancement of Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna defined in the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 - 2031.	Internal monitoring of proposed developments. Internal Reporting for County Biodiversity Action Plan.
		Number of developments consented that deliver biodiversity enhancement.	Increase number of developments consented that deliver biodiversity enhancement.	Internal monitoring of proposed developments.
Climate	Support the achievement of the Clare Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029 (LACAP) Objectives and Actions.	Status of Objectives and Actions for the LACAP.	Achievement of Objectives and Actions for the LACAP.	Internal Reporting on Key Performance Indicators under the Clare Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029.
Air Quality (and Noise)	Support the achievement of Actions for Clare defined in the County Clare Noise Action Plan 2024 - 2028.	Status of Actions for the County Clare Noise Action Plan 2024 - 2028.	Achievement of Actions for the County Clare Noise Action Plan 2024 - 2028.	Internal monitoring of performance under the County Clare Noise Action Plan 2024 - 2028.

COMHAIRLE CONTAE AN CHLÁIR | CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL

Áras Contae an Chláir
New Road, Ennis
County Clare V95 DXP2

www.clarecoco.ie