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Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

FOR
PROPOSED
TOWN RENEWAL MASTERPLAN
AT
Athgarvan
Co. Kildare

ON BEHALF OF
Kildare County Council

Prepared by
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1 INTRODUCTION

This Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report has been prepared by Enviroguide Consulting (on behalf of Kildare County Council) for the Proposed Town Renewal Masterplan (TRMP) at Athgarvan, Co. Kildare, hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Masterplan' in this document. The 'Site' refers to the area within the Proposed Masterplan, i.e., the town of Athgarvan. This report considers whether the Proposed Masterplan is likely to cause significant effects on the environment, and whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required.

1.1 Legislative context for SEA

An SEA is a process for the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt the plan or programme. SEA aims to provide a high level of protection to the environment and contribute to the integration of environmental considerations during the preparation and adoption of plans with a view of promoting sustainable development.

The SEA evaluation process of plans and programmes is required by European Directive 2001/42/EC ('the SEA Directive'). For a specific range of land-use plans, this Directive is transposed into Irish law by Statutory Instrument (S.I.) No. 436 of 2004 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

For all other relevant plans and programmes in Ireland (including other types of plans in the land-use planning sector), the SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law by S.I. No. 435 of 2004 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011). The Proposed Masterplan presented in this report falls under S.I. 435/2004.

1.2 Requirement to carry out SEA – Pre-Screening Checklist

In order to determine if the Proposed Masterplan is considered a plan/programme under Article 3 of the SEA Directive, a pre-screening check is necessary. Figure 1 shows a decision-tree which reflects the SEA Directive and how it may be concluded (using the steps set down in S.I. 435 of 2004, as amended): a) if a plan is exempt from the Directive's requirements; b) if SEA is mandatory or c) if screening for SEA is required.

Following finalisation and publication, the Proposed Masterplan will be adopted by Kildare County Council and will act as a non-statutory guiding document for future urban development in the town of Athgarvan. Therefore, the Proposed Masterplan "*sets a framework for future development consent of projects (EIA and non-EIA projects)*", and thus Screening for SEA is required.

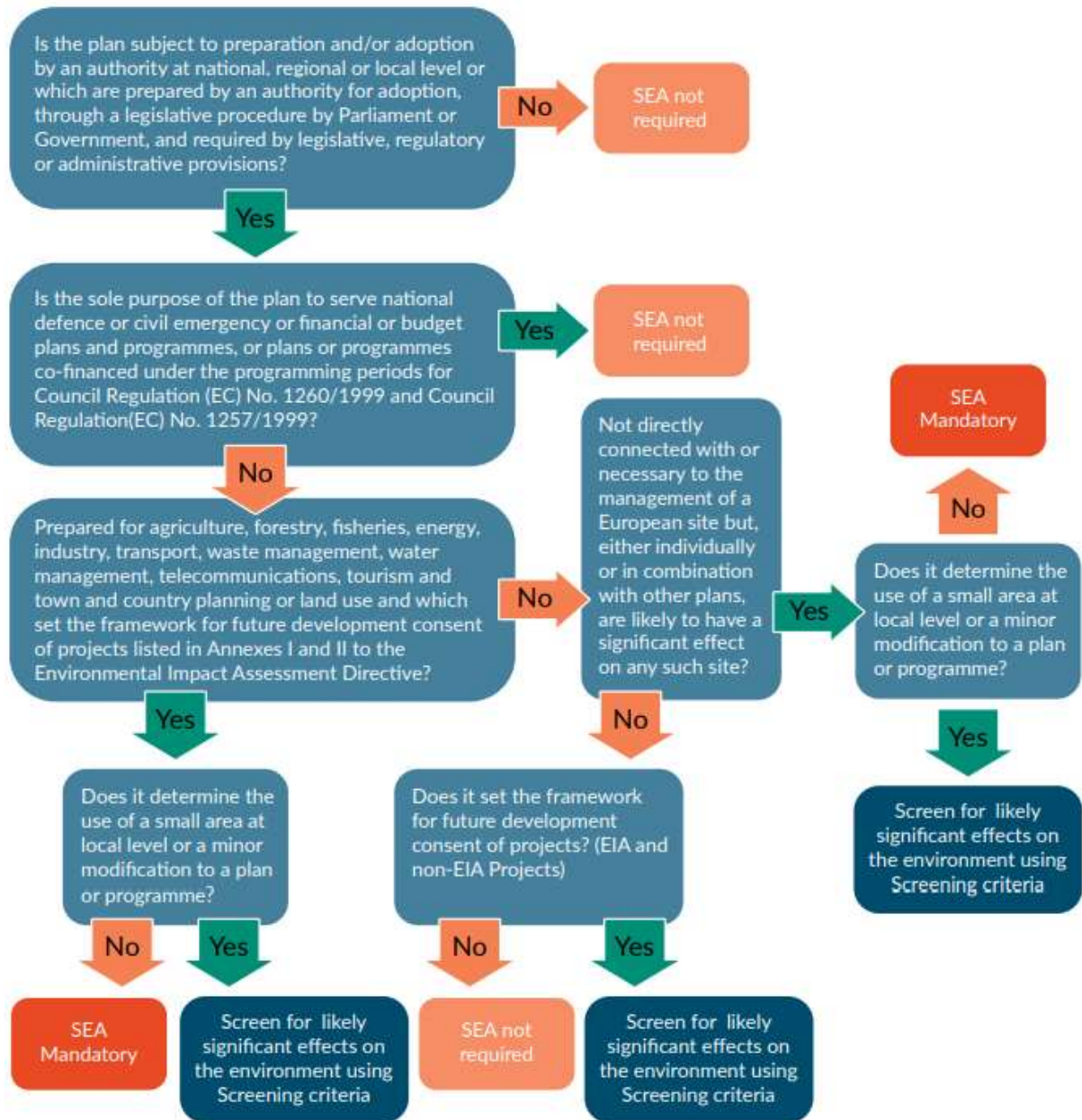


FIGURE 1. DECISION-TREE SETTING OUT REQUIREMENTS FOR SEA UNDER S.I. 435 OF 2004, AS AMENDED (SOURCE: DHLGH, 2022).

2 NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PLANS AND POLICY

2.1 National Context

2.1.1 Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is the government's long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all and to build a more resilient and sustainable future. The strategy ensures the alignment of investment plans with the stated National Strategic Objectives for 2040 in a considered, cohesive, and defined manner. This represents a shift from the approach of the past, which saw funding spread thinly across sectors and public investment decisions. Alongside the development of physical infrastructure, Project Ireland 2040 supports business and communities across all of Ireland in realising their potential.

2.1.2 National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of the country to the year 2040. The NPF sets out ten National and Strategic Outcomes and 75 National Policy Objectives. The purpose of the NPF is to enable all parts of Ireland, whether rural or urban, to successfully accommodate growth and change, by facilitating a shift towards Ireland's regions and cities other than Dublin, while also recognising Dublin's ongoing key role.

Both the SEA and Appropriate Assessment (AA) processes were undertaken during the preparation of the NPF. The SEA and AA processes have ensured that potential environmental impacts (both positive and negative) associated with the NPF have been given due consideration in the finalisation of the NPF.

The NPF was supported by the publication of the Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework ('Roadmap') which was published on the 3rd of July 2018. This document confirmed that the NPF was adopted as a strategy to replace the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) (2002-2020) and advised that the NPF is of direct relevance to the preparation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and County Development Plans.

2.2 Regional Context

2.2.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

The RSES 2019-2031, prepared by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), seeks to determine at a regional scale how best to achieve the shared goals set out in the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF. To this end, the Strategy sets out 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), which are aligned with international, EU and national policy and which in turn set the framework for city and county development plans. Thus, the RSES can assist local authorities in aligning with EU priorities to leverage funding and partnership opportunities.

The RSES outlines a set of Regional Policy Objectives for rural areas that shall be implemented by the local authorities when preparing and applying their own local Development Plans.

2.2.2 Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023

The settlement strategy in Volume 1, Chapter 3 of the Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 (KCDP 2017-2023) allocates 3.7% of the overall population growth for the county to 15 designated towns (of which Athgarvan is one). This equates to up to 25% growth in population for each town over the period of this Plan.

Section 1.2 of Volume 2 of the Development Plan sets out a Town Plan for Athgarvan and consists of specific objectives and a land use zoning map that will ensure the sustainable development of the town over the period of the Plan.

Section 1.2.7 of Volume 2 details specific Development Objectives for Athgarvan, covering the following topics:

- Residential Development;
- Town Centre;
- Public Utilities;
- Flooding;
- Transportation;
- Employment;
- Community and Educational;
- Heritage; and
- Amenity and Recreation.

Furthermore, the SEA process for KCDP 2017-2023 identified specific aims, policies, and objectives within the plan to mitigate any potentially negative effects on the environment.

2.2.3 Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029

The new KCDP 2023-2029 takes effect from the 28th of January 2023. As such, although the Proposed Masterplan was originally prepared with cognisance to the old KCDP, it is also aligned with the new plan and the policies detailed for 17 designated villages of which Athgarvan is one.

The settlement strategy in Volume 1, Chapter 2 of the new plan allocates 4.7 % of the overall population growth for the county from 2023-2029 to the designated villages. Similar to the KCDP 2017-2023, the new plan sets out the objectives for development of the settlement core, existing built-up area, settlement expansion areas and serviced sites.

The KCDP 2023-2029 underwent the statutory SEA process for county development planning and identified specific aims, policies and objectives within the plan to mitigate any potentially negative effects on the environment.

3 PROPOSED MASTERPLAN DESCRIPTION

3.1.1 Athgarvan Town – Location & Description

Athgarvan is situated in central County Kildare between the town of Newbridge and Kilcullen, and between the Curragh Plains and the River Liffey (Figure 2). The town is situated at an almost equal distance (of approximately 3.5km) from both Kilcullen to the southeast of the M9 and Newbridge to the north of the M7. The town of Athgarvan functions as a small local service centre for the resident population. Athgarvan originally developed in the vicinity of the Mill, between Athgarvan Crossroads, Athgarvan House and the River Liffey. The town has evolved to become a largely residential area, with development taking place to the west of the River towards Curragh, to the north towards the Newbridge and to the south towards Kilcullen. The earliest definite reference to a mill at Athgarvan comes from the Noble and Keane map of County Kildare of 1752.

Today, Athgarvan town has a population of 1176 people (Census 2016). The primary land use within the Athgarvan is residential, with some educational (Montessori and primary school), commercial (retail convenience shop) and sport facilities (Athgarvan GAA club and Athgarvan pitch and putt), which represent the key destinations to and within the town.

Athgarvan lies on the R416, which connects the small town with Newbridge and the M7 to the north. The L2032 also runs through the study area and connects to the R413, which provides a connection between Athgarvan and the M9 / Kilcullen to the south-east and to the Curragh and the M7 (Junction 12) to the west. Athgarvan is served by bus route 129 (operated by Kenneally's Buses), providing a connection to Newbridge town to the north and Kilcullen to the south-east to Athgarvan. Route 129 stops at the two bus stops on the R416, Athgarvan Inn. The town is also served by a JJ Kavanagh service between Newbridge and Kilcullen, which stops at both the Athgarvan Inn stops and the bus stop on the L2032.

The town extends over a wide area with a distance of approximately 2km between the primary school at the western edge of the town and Athgarvan Bridge at the eastern end of the development boundary. Urban development, low-density one-off dwellings and agricultural lands are interspersed between both of these areas. No large public open space or park is provided in Athgarvan.

3.1.2 Athgarvan Town Renewal Masterplan – Main Objectives

The central aim of this study is to support the renewal of Athgarvan in order to improve the living and working environment of its communities and increase its potential to support economic activity into the future (Figure 3 & Figure 4). The overall intention is to:

- Increase the attractiveness of the town as a local commercial and social centre, and as a result increase its sustainability as a place in which to live and work.
- Enhance the town environment and amenities in the interests of residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Promote the town potential for tourism and as a centre for culture and local heritage, thus enhancing the sense of identity – physically and socially.

The renewal plan seeks to build on the very strong asset base of Athgarvan, to ensure it retains its strong identity, to contribute to its enhancement, and to create opportunities which are unique to Athgarvan for its citizens to identify with. As a town with growth potential, it needs

to ensure that its current and future growth areas stitch into the town centre and its community base and draw on its character and sense of place. The objectives of the Renewal Plan are to:

1. Create the opportunities for enabling strategies that the local community, stakeholders, and Kildare County Council can support and sustain for the future development of the town.
2. Enhance the vitality and vibrancy of Athgarvan through ensuring future growth areas and underutilised/derelict sites are woven into the town and the urban structure is consolidated.
3. Create an enhanced environment for people living, working, and visiting the town through public realm interventions, encouraging and sustaining economic growth.
4. Re-balance the movement network ensuring accessibility for all, to further enhance the walking and cycling environment, prioritising public over private transport and creating safe connections and places for people.
5. Enhance landscape quality and positive 'sense of place' in town which in turn will not only help combat the effects of climate change but also support higher property values and rental yields.
6. Create a Compact Low-Carbon Climate Resilient Town including strategic regeneration proposals incorporating best practice in low-carbon placemaking and design, the promotion of sustainable transport modes and the enhancement of biodiversity in the town through blue and green infrastructure developments.

The Proposed Masterplan identifies six key priority projects for the regeneration of Athgarvan, and areas of opportunity (Figure 4):

1. **Public Realm Design Guidelines:** These guidelines would place emphasis on creating a safe and suitable pedestrian environment, with particular attention paid to the design of new and replacement footpaths, pedestrian crossings, use of storefront displays and merchandising to promote pedestrian traffic, and the provision of outdoor dining areas. This effort will ultimately act as an investment catalyst, encouraging private property upgrades and new development.
2. **Town Centre:** The Proposed Masterplan makes recommendations for improving pedestrian crossings, tightening turning radii and reducing road widths, landscaping, footpaths, new bus shelters, improved community space and children's play areas.
3. **R413/ Curragh Rd Junction & National School:** The Proposed Masterplan makes recommendations for improving pedestrian crossings, landscaping, footpaths, new bus shelters, improvement of school drop off/pick up area.
4. **R416 To Newbridge:** Reduction of carriageway width to reduce speeds and calm traffic, provision of landscaping, footpath widening & tree planting, introducing a change in road surface to high friction within school zone with gateway signage treatment and school branding.
5. **Pedestrian Facilities & Traffic Calming:** Provisions to reduce speed limits in the town to 30kph and introduce more traffic calming along all roads and the town gateways to allow cyclists and pedestrians safely use existing infrastructure. To tighten turning radiuses at the junctions. To introduce/improve traffic calming in form of raised platforms. To widen existing footpaths, improve footpath quality, and provide a number of legible pedestrian crossings.

- 6. Community Park and Other Recreational Amenities:** Proposed provision of playgrounds, outdoor seating, children's play areas, community gardens, and adult recreation areas.

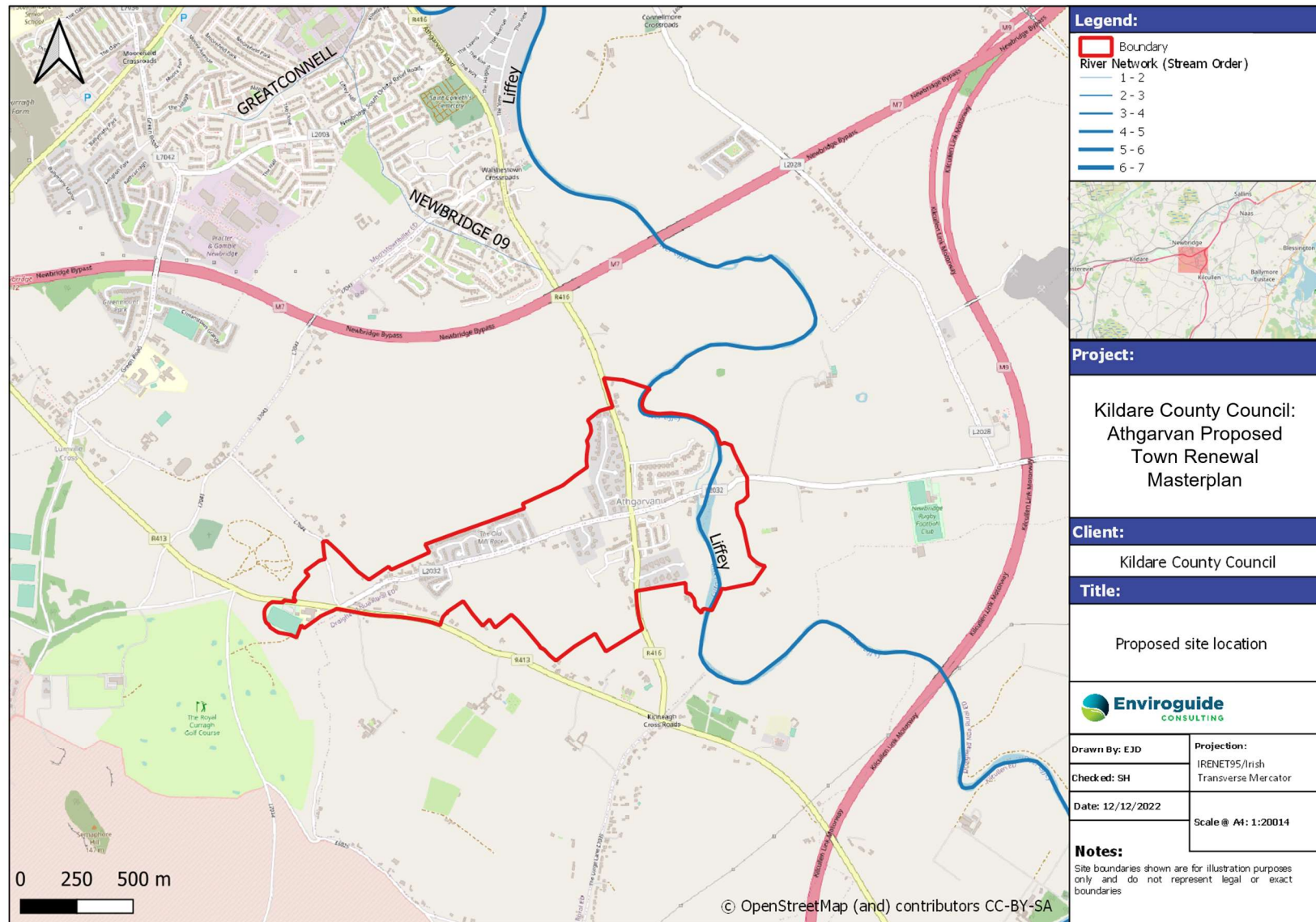


FIGURE 2. SITE LOCATION



FIGURE 3. ATHGARVAN TOWN EXISTING LAYOUT (SOURCE: ATHGARVAN TRMP (KCC 2022)). NOTABLE LOCATIONS INCLUDED IN INSET [1 – 9]



KEY PROJECTS

1. Public Realm Design Guidelines
2. Town Centre
3. Curragh Rd / R413 Junction & School
4. R416 to Newbridge
5. Pedestrian Facilities and Traffic Calming
6. Community Park and other Recreational Amenities



Athgarvan Crossroads



Curragh Rd / R413 Junction



National School

FIGURE 4. KEY PROJECTS & PRIORITY AREAS (SOURCE: ATHGARVAN TRMP (KCC, 2022))

4 SEA SCREENING

4.1 Screening Criteria

The Proposed Masterplan is a non-statutory land use plan and is being screened for the requirement for SEA in accordance with the requirements of:

- Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive) and particularly Articles 3(3), 3(4) & 3(5) relate to 'Screening' for the requirement for SEA.
- S.I. No. 435 of 2004 European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 - European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011.

The Proposed Masterplan for Athgarvan is therefore screened using the criteria contained in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 435/2004 - European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004. Table 1 details the screening assessment using the *criteria for determining the likely significance of effects* as set out in Schedule 1.

TABLE 1. SCREENING DETERMINATION FOR DETERMINING THE LIKELY SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS AS PER SCHEDULE 1 OF S.I. NO. 435/2004.

1. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to *(the following criteria)*:

The degree to which the plan or programme, or modification to a 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.

The Proposed Masterplan document will act as a guidance document for projects and other activities for Athgarvan town. It sets a non-statutory framework for projects that focus on delivering the policy objectives for the town of Athgarvan, as detailed in the KCDP 2017-2023, with a strong focus on establishing connections between the town and the wider area for all transport modes, and improving movement in the form of an integrated, safe, multi-use network connecting Town Centre, Athgarvan GAA, National School, River Liffey, and all residential areas. Improvements within the public realm include replacing road surfaces in disrepair and adding greenery and new footpaths. Interventions can be locally delivered through community projects, with strong commitment required from public funding to target more permanent interventions that deliver on a common vision.

The TRMP does not propose direct works but puts forward key recommended projects and proposes design guidelines for the town to ensure development is conducted in a unified way. The Design Guidelines, once prepared, will likely have an impact on the design of future development projects in the town, as the planning authority is likely to place some consideration on how development applications have incorporated/addressed the guidelines in their designs to ensure unity in the sustainable development of the town.

Future individual development within the Site of the Proposed Masterplan will be considered under the SEA, EIA and/or AA processes as appropriate.

The degree to which the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, influences other plans including those in a hierarchy.

The Proposed Masterplan will be a non-statutory plan that provides detail and clarity with regard to the existing land use objectives for the town. The principles at the core of the Proposed Masterplan are informed by the existing policy and key objectives in the current KCDP 2017-2023, as well as the strong idea of retaining and enhancing the character and identity of Athgarvan town, and to create opportunities which are unique to Athgarvan for its citizens to identify with. Therefore, future development will continue to accord with the objectives and policies, including the environmental requirements of the KCDP 2023-2029.

The Proposed Masterplan will not have significant influence on other plans in the hierarchy, instead it will be led by those higher up in the process. As a Masterplan, it is compatible and complementary with the vision and objectives of the KCDP 2023-2029 and will be led by the higher-level plans such as the RSES and the NPF.

Additionally, future individual development projects within the town and Proposed Masterplan area must be considered under the SEA, EIA and/or AA processes as appropriate.

The relevance of the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.

The Proposed Masterplan Site is envisioned to support the renewal of Athgarvan in order to improve the living and working environment of its communities and increase its potential to support economic activity into the future. The overall intention is to:

- Increase the attractiveness of the town as a local commercial and social centre, and as a result increase its sustainability as a place in which to live and work.
- Enhance the town environment and amenities in the interests of residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Promote the town potential for tourism and as a centre for culture and local heritage, thus enhancing the sense of identity -physically and socially.

These recommendations are consistent with the objectives for Athgarvan as detailed in the KCDP 2017-2023 (Volume 2, section 3.8.1), by reinforcing the town centre (i.e., settlement core) as the service centre and enhancing its character, as well as improving the interconnectedness of the existing residential areas and the amenities of the town.

The KCDP 2023-2029, which underwent full SEA and AA, integrated the findings of these processes into the Plan, contributing towards both environmental protection and management and sustainable development within the county.

Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme.

The Proposed Masterplan is not prepared in response to a particular environmental problem, nor are any major environmental problems known from the Site of the plan.

The SEA process for the KCDP 2017-2023 identified the majority of the county as *low environmental sensitivity*, with the level of environmental sensitivity increasing towards the centre of the county, concentrated between the areas of Kildare Town, Kilcullen and Newbridge. This is due to a variety of overlapping and related factors including soil type (peat), groundwater status (bad), landscape value (exceptional), ecological designation (proposed Natural Heritage Area) and geological designation (County Geological Heritage Area). Elevated levels of sensitivity are also found in the foothills to the west of the Kildare / Wicklow County boundary. The SEA process for the KCDP 2023-2029 came to the same conclusions.

With regards to the environmental concerns of the River Liffey, excess nutrients are the most prevalent issue in the River Liffey. The main significant pressures are agriculture followed by urban run-off, urban wastewater, domestic wastewater, hydromorphology, other, industry, forestry and mines & quarries.

Athgarvan falls within the Upper Liffey Valley Sewerage Scheme (ULVSS). Wastewater from the area is sent to a wastewater treatment plant at Osberstown for treatment. The Osberstown plant has already been upgraded to increase capacity, and to ensure that wastewater is treated to meet the requirements of European regulations.¹

Athgarvan town does not have any perceived high environmental sensitivities.

The relevance of the plan or programme, or modification to a 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).

The EU has a wide range of environmental legislation, dealing with such issues as tackling climate change, sustainable development, waste management, air pollution, water protection, nature and biodiversity, soil protection and noise pollution:

- EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC),
- EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC),
- EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2006/60/EC),
- EU Groundwater Directive 92006/118/EC),
- European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2014 S.I. 350 of 2014
- Wildlife Act 1976, as amended,
- Flora Protection Order 1999, and
- EU Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC).

The Proposed Masterplan will be a non-statutory framework document which outlines potential development arrangements for Athgarvan town in a manner which is entirely consistent with the specific policies and objectives for the town as established in the KCDP 2023-2029. By its nature as a guiding document, it is not directly linked to the implementation of any of the aforementioned legislation, however, all recommendations made within the Proposed Masterplan will have cognisance of the international legislation related to the protection of the environment.

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:

¹ <https://www.water.ie/projects/local-projects/upper-liffey-valley-sewer/> Accessed: December 2022

The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects

The probability that the Proposed Masterplan will result in significant, long-term environmental impacts is moderate. It is expected that the effects will be largely positive, since additional pedestrian routes and greenspaces, promoting sustainable energy sources and modes of travel, as well as increasing public transport links, will likely enhance and improve various environmental aspects of the town. These positive impacts are reversible to an extent, for instance via the degeneration of the new recommended greenspaces, however, alterations are envisioned to provide lasting, positive impacts on the town.

There is also a low probability of negative effects associated with the construction of any future developments under this Proposed Masterplan, however, due to the scale of the Proposed Masterplan, these are not considered to be of significant magnitude. It is also likely that any negative impacts (e.g., from construction activity) are of a temporary nature.

Final decisions relating to architectural detail and public realm and other issues will be determined through the development management process, and any individual future developments under this Proposed Masterplan will be subject to the appropriate environmental assessments.

The cumulative nature of the effects

No cumulative effects are identified for the Proposed Masterplan. There are no specific development proposals arising from the Proposed Masterplan and no changes to the Core Strategy which could potentially lead to cumulative effects with the KCDP 2023-2029. The preparation of the Proposed Masterplan has been undertaken with consideration to the overall balanced development strategy of KCC, and the specific objectives for Athgarvan town, as set out in the KCDP 2017-2023 and KCDP 2023-2029.

The transboundary nature of the effects

The Site of the Proposed Masterplan is entirely within KCC's administrative area and is not expected to have any effects (negative or positive) on areas outside of the county boundaries.

The risks to human health or the environment (e.g., due to accidents)

No risks to human health or to the environment due to accidents or other considerations due to the preparation of the Proposed Masterplan have been identified.

The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).

The area of the Proposed Masterplan Site encompasses the Athgarvan town centre and the immediate residential areas adjacent to the settlement core. Any potential environmental effects are expected to be largely confined to the area within and in the immediate vicinity of the Site of the

Proposed Masterplan. The current population within the Site of the Proposed Masterplan is estimated to be approximately 1176 as of the 2016 Census.

The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

- (a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,*
- (b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values,*
- (c) intensive land-use*

Several features of archaeological/cultural heritage significance are within the boundary of the town and the Proposed Masterplan, being within or scheduled for inclusion in the Record of Monument & Places². The historic character of the town is exemplified in the 19th century bridge and Malthouse along the L2032 on the eastern side of the town. The 19th century Church and Graveyard of Blackrath and Athgarvan are located south of the bridge and malthouse. Encircling the town are archaeological sites consisting of Rath's (ringforts), Castles, and a series of ditch-barrows, which are funerary monuments dating to the Neolithic period (c. 4000 – 2400 BC), and also the Bronze Age (2400 BC – AD 400).

Any works that may arise on the recommendation of the Proposed Masterplan are subject to the appropriate environmental assessments, including consideration for impacts on cultural heritage. KCDP 2023-2029 contains the following policies and objectives that will govern any detailed development proposals that may have an impact on the aforementioned items:

- **Policy AH P2:** *“Protect and enhance archaeological sites, monuments and where appropriate and following detailed assessment, their setting, including those that are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) or newly discovered archaeological sites and/or subsurface and underwater archaeological remains.”*
- **Objective AH O3:** *“In co-operation with the National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage require archaeological impact assessment, surveys, test excavation and/or monitoring and/or underwater archaeological impact assessments for planning applications in areas of archaeological importance and where a development proposal is likely to impact upon in-situ archaeological monuments, their setting and archaeological deposits, based on recommendations of a suitably qualified archaeologist and the Council will seek and have regard to the advice and recommendations of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.”*
- **Objective AH O23:** *“Require an Architectural Heritage Assessment Report, as described in Appendix B of the Architectural Heritage Protection, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011), to accompany all applications with potential for visual or physical impacts on a Protected Structure, its curtilage, demesne and setting. This report should be prepared by a person with conservation expertise that is appropriate to the significance of the historic building or site and the complexity of the proposed works.”*
- **Objective GO 17:** *“Preserve and protect the structures and items listed in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) identified in the County Development Plan and as may be amended during the lifetime of the Plan; and ensure an Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment Report prepared by an accredited conservation architect or equivalent accompany planning applications for works to protected structures.”*

² <https://maps.archaeology.ie/HistoricEnvironment/> Accessed: December 2022

- **Objective GO 18:** *“Require archaeological impact assessment, prepared by a suitably qualified archaeologist for any development within or in close proximity to Zones of Archaeological Potential.”*

Additionally, Athgarvan town is located adjacent to the River Liffey. The Liffey is an important habitat for a variety of birds and fish, particularly salmon (*Salmo salar*) and eel (*Anguilla anguilla*). Each year, salmon enter the Liffey from the sea and swim upstream to spawn in the upper reaches of the river and its tributaries. Eels undertake the same migratory process in reverse. The KCDP 2017-2023 provided a planning framework for the development of small towns and towns. Section 3.8 (Volume 2) describes Athgarvan’s form, context and objectives for future development such as Residential Development, and explicitly stated that the River Liffey shall be protected and enhanced in terms of its recreational and ecological potential.

The Proposed Masterplan sees the Liffey as underutilized in terms of being a town amenity, envisions to maximise the potential of the River Liffey for tourism and recreational purposes by improving public access to the River Liffey, thus potentially increasing the anthropogenic pressures felt on the river from the baseline. However, it is unlikely that any increases in the intensity of use of this amenity arising from the Proposed Masterplan will be of sufficient scale to result in significant adverse impacts on the species and habitats of the river.

As the Proposed Masterplan and any works arising from it must be consistent and compliant with the KCDP 2023-2029 including specific provisions regarding environmental quality standards such as those contained in the WFD and other environmental standards it is not anticipated that any environmental quality standards will be exceeded.

The Proposed Masterplan proposes development of open space adjacent to Athgarvan GAA grounds, in south westernmost point of the town. This area is located within a Proposed Natural Heritage Area (NHA), that of the Curragh (Kildare). The proposals for this area are minor in nature, consisting of road widening and footpath improvement. Such future individual developments within the Site of the Proposed Masterplan will be considered under the SEA, EIA and/or AA processes as appropriate to ensure no adverse impacts are inflicted on this nationally unique site.

The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status

The Site of the Proposed Masterplan does not contain any land associated with- or pathways, either direct or indirect to European sites, i.e., Special Protection Areas for birds, Special Areas of Conservation for habitats and species, Ramsar wetland sites or European marine sites. It does, however, contain a small section of a Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA). The preparation of the Proposed Masterplan itself is not anticipated to result in any significant impacts on the identified pNHA. However, any future development applications made with cognisance to the proposed masterplan should give due consideration for the potential impacts on this nationally designated site in line with the development standards set out in the KCDP 2023-2029.

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs & pNHAs) are considered in Volume 1, Chapter 12 of the KCDP 2023-2029.

4.2 Appropriate Assessment and relationship to Screening for SEA

The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) requires an AA to be carried out where a plan or project is *likely to have a significant impact* on a European site. European sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The first step in the process is to establish whether AA is required for the particular plan or project. This first step is referred to as Screening for the requirement for AA and the purpose is to determine, on the basis of a preliminary assessment and objective criteria, whether a plan or project, alone and in combination with other plans or projects, could have significant effects on a European site in view of the site's conservation objectives.

As set out in Department Circular Letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/084 (15th February 2008), Screening for AA is of relevance to screening for SEA in that ***“where following screening, it is found that the draft plan or amendment may have an impact on the conservation status of a Natura 2000 site or that such an impact cannot be ruled out, adopting the precautionary approach:***

- *An AA of the Proposed Masterplan must be carried out, and*
- *In any case where a SEA would not otherwise be required, it must also be carried out.”*

Hence, where the Proposed Masterplan *requires* AA it shall *also require* a SEA.

4.2.1 Appropriate Assessment Screening Conclusion

The Proposed Masterplan was screened for the requirement of AA to determine the potential for significant effects on relevant European sites. The conclusion from the AA Screening Report accompanying this SEA Screening Report under separate cover is reproduced below:

“The Proposed Town Renewal Masterplan for Athgarvan, Co. Kildare, has been assessed taking into account:

- *The nature, size and location of the proposed works and possible impacts arising from the construction works.*
- *The qualifying interests and conservation objectives of the European sites.*
- *The potential for in-combination effects arising from other plans and projects.*

In conclusion, upon the examination, analysis and evaluation of the relevant information and applying the precautionary principle, it is concluded by the authors of this report that, on the basis of objective information; the possibility may be excluded that the Proposed Development will have a significant effect on any European sites.

As such, no further assessment is required. In carrying out this AA screening, mitigation measures have not been taken into account. Standard best practice construction measures which could have the effect of mitigating any effects on any European sites have similarly not been taken into account.”

Thus, it is determined that AA is not required for the Proposed Masterplan.

5 CONSULTATION

5.1 Statutory Consultation

5.1.1 Environmental Authorities

Unless it has been determined that SEA is mandatory for the Proposed Masterplan concerned, a formal 'screening notice' must be issued to the relevant environmental authorities (including the adjacent planning authorities), consulting them on whether they consider significant effects on the environment are likely to arise.

Under S.I. 435 of 2004, as amended, SEA may be required for all sectoral plans, including land-use plans (except for those specific land use plans covered by SI 436 of 2004, as amended).

The following environmental authorities have been notified of this SEA Screening for comments on the Proposed Masterplan:

- Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") – *Required for all cases.*
- Development Applications Unit ("DAU"), Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage – *Required where there might be significant effects on architectural or archaeological heritage or nature conservation.*
- Department of Environment, Climate and Communications – *Required where there might be significant effects on climate or inland fisheries*
- Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine– *Required where there might be significant effects on sea fisheries or the marine environment.*

5.1.2 Consultation Responses

The EPA responded to the Screening Notice on the 19th of December 2022. The EPA noted the Proposed Determination of the Proposed Masterplan and provided a number of guiding comments, focusing their efforts on reviewing and commenting on key sector plans. While noting the nature of the Athgarvan TRMP, the EPA recommend that guidance document '*SEA of Local Authority Land Use Plans – EPA Recommendations and Resources*' should be taken into account in the finalisation of the Proposed Masterplan, and relevant recommendations be incorporated as appropriate to the Plan.

No changes to the Proposed Masterplan in response to the EPA's submission are anticipated that would require a renewed SEA Screening.

The DAU responded on the 27th of January 2023 noting particularly the Archaeological and Architectural Heritage within the village of Athgarvan. The submission has been summarised below:

- To revise the report to include an assessment of the architectural heritage that is subject to statutory protection.
- Give due cognisance to the following:

- The definition of a Protected Structure as per the Planning and Development Act which includes, (i) the interior of the structure, (ii) the land lying within the curtilage of the structure, (iii) any other structure lying within the curtilage and their interiors, and (iv) all fixtures and features which form part of the interior or exterior of any structure or structures referred to in subparagraph (i) or (iii).
- The presence of historical, urban and planned landscapes, which may form part of a protected structure and/or may contribute to the landscape characterisation of an area which may be of importance to an area/region.
- The Heritage Council in conjunction with numerous partners has developed a trans-disciplinary Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Programme. The Health Check will establish an innovative baseline which can be employed to monitor and plan for the future of Irish Towns.
- Seek the inputs of a suitably qualified person in respect of matters relating to the architectural heritage.

As such, section 4.1 – Screening Criteria was updated as follows:

- Existing RPS and RMP records for the village of Athgarvan were included in Table 1 and their potential links to any of the identified key projects were noted.
- It was further clarified that the Proposed Masterplan is a conceptual plan providing a vision for the future development of Athgarvan and does not put forward detailed development proposals or applications.
- Inclusion of details of policies and objectives in the KCDP 2023-2029 that ensure all development proposals, including those arising as a response to the Proposed Masterplan are subject to the appropriate environmental assessments. These include where necessary an Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA) in line with the KCDP 2023-2029.

Thus, due to the high-level vision that the Proposed Masterplan provides for Athgarvan, the lack of detailed development proposals within the Proposed Masterplan, and the existing policies in the new KCDP 2023-2029 to protect cultural and built heritage, it is deemed that the concerns expressed by the DAU are covered higher in the planning hierarchy and will therefore be addressed appropriately at detailed design stages for any key projects identified within the Proposed Masterplan.

DECC responded confirming no comments, and no response was received from DAFM.

6 SCREENING DETERMINATION

The Proposed Masterplan for Athgarvan Town Renewal Masterplan, Co. Kildare, is a non-statutory development framework which translates and implements the statutory policies and objectives of the relevant national and regional development plans and frameworks.

Considering the objectives, scale and nature of the Proposed Masterplan, and with due regard to the screening criteria as set out in Schedule 1, it is at this stage determined that the Proposed Masterplan does not require an SEA.

The principal reasons the Proposed Masterplan does not require an SEA are as follows:

- The Proposed Masterplan does not provide a framework for plans/projects listed on Annex I or Annex II of the EIA Directive.
- All individual planning applications made with consideration of the Proposed Masterplan framework are subject to the appropriate environmental assessments (i.e., AA, SEA, EIA) where required under the KCDP 2023-2029.
- The Proposed Masterplan does not require Stage 2 AA (see AA Screening Report accompanying this report under separate cover).

7 REFERENCES

DHLGH (2022). Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities. Prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, March 2022.

EPA (2021). '*Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening*', prepared by RPS Consultants, with input from A&L Goodbody, on behalf of the EPA. Published December 2021

Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023: Volume 1

Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023: Volume 2

Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023: Strategic Environmental Assessment

Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029

Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029: Strategic Environmental Assessment

Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework

Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework: SEA Statement

East and Midlands Regional Assembly, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031

EMRA RSES 2019-2031: SEA Statement

Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU (EIA Directive)

APPENDIX I – NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) are areas considered important, at a national level, for the habitats present, or which hold species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection. Proposed NHAs (pNHAs) are areas which were published on a non-statutory basis in 1995 but have not since been statutorily proposed or designated. These sites are deemed to be of significance for wildlife and habitats. Some pNHAs occupy a relatively small area, such as a roosting place for rare bats, while others are relatively large e.g., a woodland or a lake. Under the Wildlife Amendment Act (2000), NHAs are legally protected from damage from the date they are formally proposed for designation. Two pNHAs are located within the 10km ZOI of the Proposed Masterplan for Athgarvan (**FIGURE 5**). Details of both sites are provided below:

Curragh (Kildare) (000392)

Curragh (Kildare) pNHA is partly located within the boundary of the Proposed Masterplan, and hence a direct land pathway is identified between the Proposed Masterplan site and *Curragh (Kildare)* pNHA.

Site Description: The Curragh is an extensive open plain which lies about 3km southwest of Newbridge in Co. Kildare. It is bisected by the M7/N7 motorway and a railway line. The Curragh Camp and Curragh Racecourse are located within the plain. The site extends for some 10km in a north-west/south-east direction and is approximately 5km at its widest. The Curragh possesses a unique and somewhat intangible landscape quality, albeit somewhat compromised by various developments such as the military camp, racecourse complex, railway, motorway and power lines. Despite these the site is of considerable natural heritage significance, for the diversity of habitats, plants, fungi, and animals that it supports.

Liffey Bank Above Athgarvan (001396)

Liffey Bank Above Athgarvan NHA is located upriver of the town of Athgarvan, adjacent (300m southeast) to the Proposed Masterplan site, on the River Liffey.

Site Description: This site is located on the River Liffey about 3km north-west of Kilcullen in Co. Kildare. On one of the meanders above Athgarvan, the Liffey has cut into a very sandy patch of boulder clay, steepening its banks beyond the point where continuous vegetation can exist. The resulting unstable sandy slope faces south and is colonised by an interesting flora characteristic of unstable soil. Beds of harder rock boulder clay make small cliffs in places and the grassland above these is of Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) with Wild Garden (*Thymus polytrichus*), Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*) and Spring-sedge (*Carex caryophylla*). The scientific interest of this site lies in the occurrence of an assemblage of plants typical of disturbed and unstable habitats. Such areas of natural habitats are rare in Co Kildare.

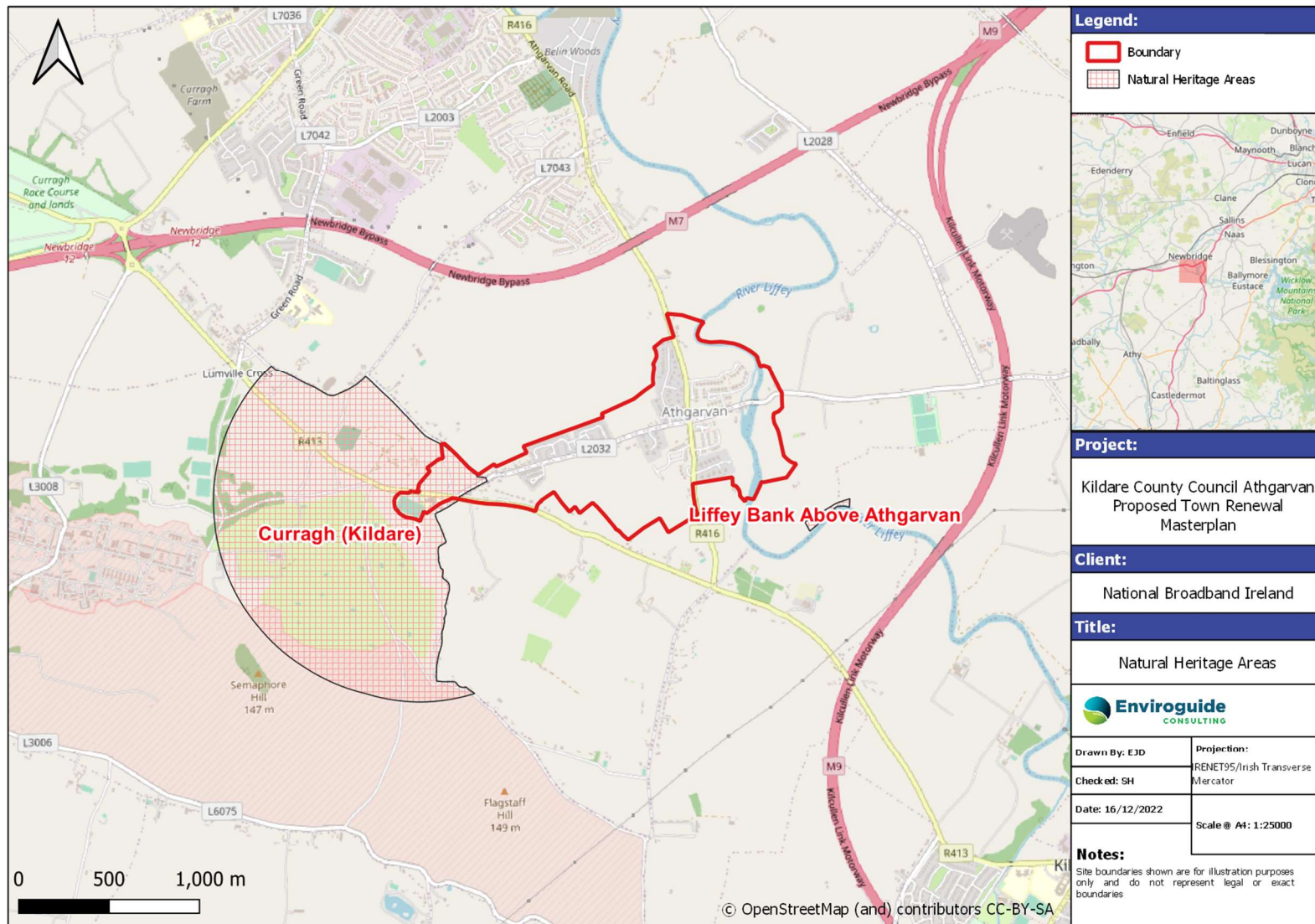


FIGURE 5 NHAS & PNHAS RELEVANT TO THE PROPOSED MASTERPLAN.

TABLE 2 PROPOSED NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS LOCATED WITHIN THE PRECAUTIONARY 10KM ZOI OF THE PROPOSED MASTERPLAN SITE.

Site Name & Code (Receptor)	Distance to Proposed Development	Potential Pathway to receptors
Proposed Natural Heritage Area		
<i>Curragh (Kildare)</i> 000392	Within Project Boundary	Land pathway. Due consideration required for any proposed development.
<i>Liffey Bank Above Athgarvan</i>	300m southeast of the Proposed Masterplan site	No hydrological connection or other impact pathway exists.

Any Proposed Development within the Proposed Masterplan site will need to give due consideration to the potential land pathway with pNHA *Curragh (Kildare)* as part of pre-planning environmental assessment.