

STRATEGIC
ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT
Screening Report

For the County Clare Noise Action Plan

Prepared for Clare County Council under SI 435 of 2004 as amended

7th August 2024

CONTENTS

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment.....	1
1.2	Scale, nature and location of County Clare NAP	2
2	Summary of current Environmental Baseline in County Clare.....	4
3	SEA Screening Schedule 2a screening assessment.....	14
3.1	Introduction.....	14
3.2	Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Determination.....	17
	Annex A: SEA Evaluation of Clare NAP actions	20

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County Clare Noise Action Plan

1 Introduction

The European Union Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) requires an environmental assessment be carried out for all plans that are prepared for certain specified sectors, of which the **County Clare Noise Action Plan (NAP)** (the plan) relates. The following Regulations transpose this Directive into Irish law:

- The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435 of 2004),
- The Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436 of 2004) and further amended by
- S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) and S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

1.1 Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment

The plan 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.
- Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, which sets out the "Criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment."

The Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations, 2004 (as amended) state that SEA is mandatory for certain plans while screening for SEA is required for other plans that fall below the specified thresholds. The purpose of this screening report is to determine whether the making and implementation of the NAP for Clare County Council will or will not, lead to significant environmental effects for the plan area and if it will require a full Strategic Environment Assessment.

In deciding whether a particular plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, regard must be had to the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive, which is reproduced in the Schedule 2A to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as inserted by Article 12 of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004.

An assessment under Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive has also been undertaken in conjunction with this SEA Screening report and should be read in tandem with this Screening Report

and the Plan. As set out within the EPA Draft Guidance for Noise Action Planning, the NAP is related to 'Transport' sectoral planning.

1.2 Scale, nature and location of County Clare NAP

The Environmental Noise Directive (“END”) (2002/49/EC) is a European Union legal instrument vital for protecting public health and the environment by addressing the adverse effects of environmental noise. The Directive’s main aim is to put in place a European-wide system for identifying sources of environmental noise pollution, informing the public about relevant noise data and then taking the necessary steps to avoid, prevent or reduce noise exposure.

The END was transposed into Irish Law by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2006 (S.I. 140/2006)¹ (the “Regulations”). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018² (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 663/2021). These regulations are commonly referred to as the Environmental Noise Regulations.

The END does not set any limit values or prescribe noise management measures to fulfil its aims. Through the establishment of noise regulations, the preparation of Strategic Noise Maps and implementation of Noise Action Plans (herein termed “NAPs”), the END strives to raise public awareness, prevent and reduce environmental noise, and preserve environmental noise quality in areas where it is good.

In Ireland, it is recommended that the NAPs support Policy Objective 65 (NPO 65) from the National Planning Framework 2040³, which states:

“Promote the pro-active management of noise where it is likely to have significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life and support the aims of the Environmental Noise Regulations through national planning guidance and Noise Action Plans.”

The County Clare NAP, and its subsequent implementation, is critical to ensuring that Clare County Council (herein termed the “Council”) achieves the aims and objectives of the END, compliance with national policy and to address local environmental noise issues.

It is the goal of the Council to adopt a strategic approach to the management of environmental noise with a view to preventing and reducing environmental noise where practicable, particularly where exposure levels may induce harmful effects on human health. The Council will also aim to preserve desirable noise environments where these are of amenity value to the public. The NAP 2024-2028 is supported by a four-year programme for implementation (2024-2028), with progress reported to the EPA on an annual basis.

The EPA provides guidance (“EPA Guidance”⁴) on the required activities to be undertaken during the implementation of the Regulations. These have been fully accounted for in the preparation of the NAP.

¹ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2006/si/140/made/en/print> [Accessed March 2024]

² <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/si/549/made/en/print> [Accessed March 2024]

³ National Planning Framework 2040: <http://www.gov.ie/en/project-ireland-2040/> [Accessed March 2024]

⁴ EPA Noise Action Planning Guidelines, 2024

⁴ EPA Noise Action Planning Guidelines, 2024

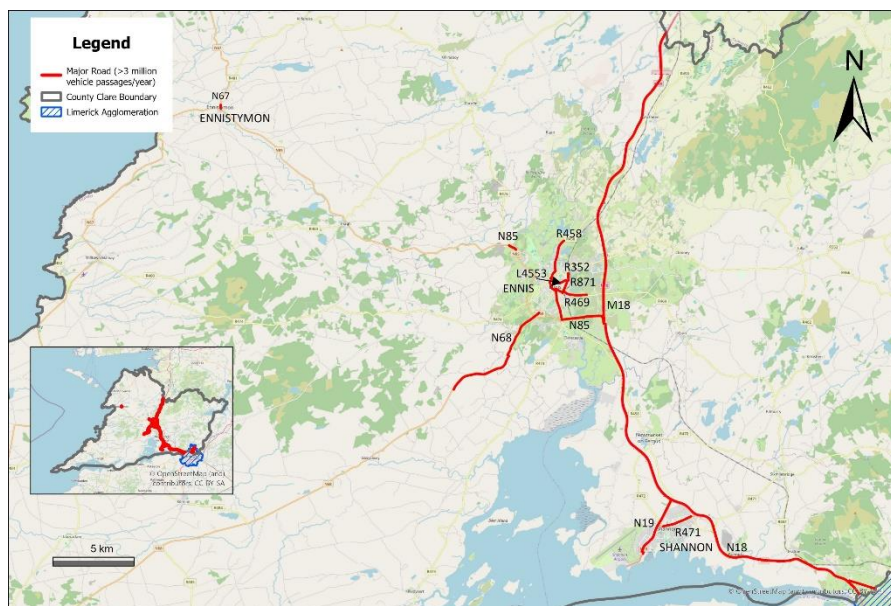
Under the Environmental Noise Regulations, 2018, the following organisations are designated as noise mapping bodies for, County Clare, outside the Agglomeration of Limerick (herein termed the Limerick Agglomeration) for the areas identified in Appendix B of the NAP:

- for major railways (sections with a flow above a threshold of 30,000 train passages per year), Iarnród Éireann or the National Roads Authority (now Transport Infrastructure Ireland), as appropriate, on behalf of the action planning authority or authorities concerned;
- for major roads (sections of road with a flow above a threshold of 3,000,000 vehicle passages per year). Transport Infrastructure Ireland is the Noise Mapping Body for national roads ; Clare County Council is the Noise Mapping Body for non-national roads:
- for major airports, the relevant airport authority, on behalf of the action planning authority or authorities concerned (airports with more than 50,000 movements, take-offs or landings, per year)

Clare County Council is the designated action planning authority for County Clare, outside the Limerick Agglomeration, and is responsible for preparing this Noise Action Plan 2024-2028. There are no major railways or major airports (annual aircraft movement figures fall below the threshold that would define Shannon as a ‘major airport’) in County Clare and so this NAP is only concerned with environmental noise from major roads.

The geographic extent of the County Clare boundary, outside the Limerick Agglomeration, and the sections of major roads that qualified for Round 4 strategic noise mapping and noise action planning are presented in **Figure 1.1**.

FIGURE 1-1 COUNTY CLARE BOUNDARY AND MAJOR ROADS QUALIFIED FOR ROUND 4 STRATEGIC NOISE MAPPING AND PLANNING



2 Summary of current Environmental Baseline in County Clare.

The following summary text is from the SEA ER of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.

County Clare is situated on the west coast of Ireland in the province of Munster, covering an area of 318,784 hectares (787,715 acres) and home to a population of 127,938 (Census 2022).

The National Planning Framework sets out the population target for growth for the County to 2031. The population target is lower than previous population target allocations for the County. The Core Strategy for the new County Development Plan 2023-2029 must realign population growth in terms of its distribution throughout the towns and villages of the County. It is bounded by the counties of Galway to the north, Tipperary to the east and Limerick to the south. Its natural surface water boundaries comprise of Galway Bay to the north, the River Shannon and Lough Derg to the east and the Shannon Estuary to the south and the Atlantic seaboard to the west.

The County has a diverse topography, varying from bare limestone pavement to estuarial mudflats and from high Atlantic cliffs to inland water ways and lakes. The County's coastline is 360km in length. Much of the county has underlying limestone strata which is highly permeable. County Clare is noted for its agriculture, tourism and landscapes including the Burren National Park, renowned for its physical and cultural heritage.

Ennis is the County town and the administrative centre of County Clare as well as being identified as a Key Town in the RSES for the Southern Region. As outlined in the Regional Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region, Ennis is identified as a large population scale urban centre functioning as self-sustaining regional driver and as a key town. With a population of 25,276 in 2016, it is the largest town in Munster and the fifth largest settlement in the Region. The triangle of Limerick Shannon-Ennis is recognised as the economic engine of the Mid-West. The M18 has created a greater synergy and connection between Ennis and Galway and there is potential to attract economic drivers/infrastructure such as data centres.

Shannon forms part of the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area and is seen as a significant employment centre with assets such as Shannon International Airport, Shannon Free Zone and the International Aviation Services Centre (IASC). The Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) seeks to integrate sustainable economic and social development with the protection and enhancement of the natural environment whilst ensuring our transition to a climate resilient society. Shannon will be a key economic driver within the Metropolitan Area and will accommodate significant job and population increases within the lifetime of the new Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.

The County is well served by air, road, and rail transport facilities. Shannon International Airport caters for over 2 million passengers per year (pre COVID) providing services to the UK, Europe, and USA. Strategic road access is provided by the Ennis by-pass and the N18/M18 motorway, creating easy connectivity with the rest of the country. The Western Rail Corridor provides regular daily commuter services between Ennis and Limerick to Dublin and between Ennis and Athenry and Galway. Marine

access and transport are provided for at Moneypoint, Killimer, Shannon Airport and harbours along the Atlantic coastline. The potential for greater accessibility along the deepwaters of the Shannon Estuary has been the subject of the Strategic Integrated Framework Plan for the Shannon Estuary. Commerce and trade are the greatest source of employment in the County.

Outside the Industrial/business, retail and administrative employment centres of Shannon, Ennis and Kilrush, tourism and agriculture are two of the primary industries in the County. The physical, social and community infrastructure in the towns and villages around the County continue to be progressed.

2.1.1 Population and Human health

County Clare according to the Census 2022, has a population of 127,419. The Census pre-dates the arrival of almost 5,000 refugees, mainly from Ukraine so the population of Clare, as this draft socio-economic analysis is being drafted, is likely to be in the order of 133,000 people. All these people have public service needs, mainly provided by Clare County Council, the Health Service Executive, the Limerick Clare Education Training Board as well as other public bodies like An Garda Síochána and various Government Departments.

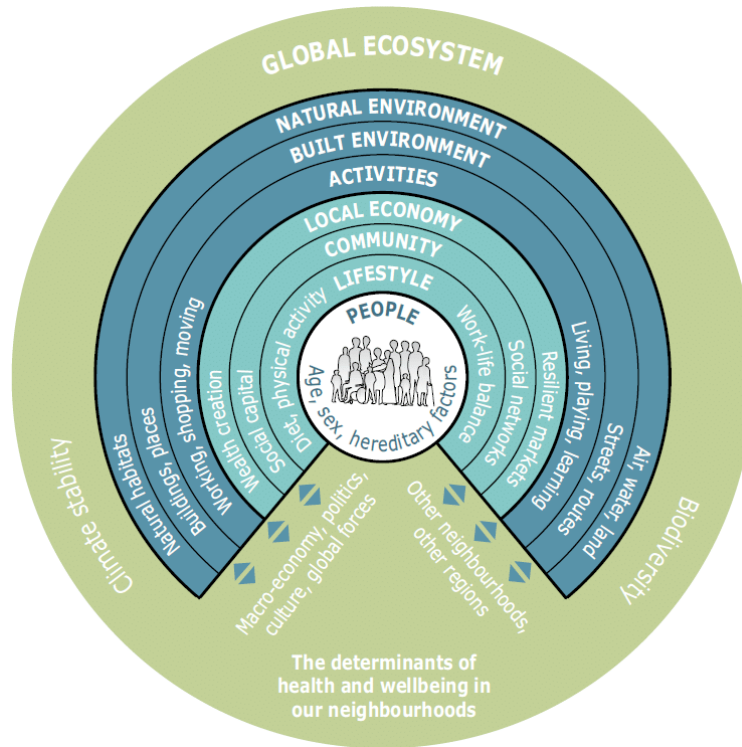
In delivering these services, the role of the local community development sector in Clare plays a really important role while many local and county wide voluntary bodies, often supported by Clare Public Participation Network, also are critical in making sure the people of Clare have access to the services they need, from education and training to employment, from health care to justice. Each of those bodies will have local business plans, supported very often by regional and national policies. Each will often need to work with each other to make sure the people of Clare as well as future generations of Clare people, have access to quality public services. In addition, each will be looking to the future to make sure their services are fit for purpose. All of them will be committed to improving life in Clare and to making sure the County remains one of the most vibrant, community orientated places in Europe.

A really important aspect of doing so is that the many bodies that are central to improving life in Clare now and into the future, will be able to work and plan together, drawing on their understanding of present and future needs of the people of Clare, making sure that the people of Clare can enjoy a full vibrant life while underpinning their sense of community and economic potential.

The interaction between environmental aspects such as water, landscape, biodiversity, air, noise, energy and human beings is important.¹ Figure 2.1 presents the determinants of human health and well being, highlighting the interactions between environmental quality, social factors and human health and well being.

¹ For example: Research 348: Nature and Environment to Attain and Restore Health (NEAR Health) 2020 EPA

FIGURE 2-1 THE DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS (SOURCE: HUMAN ECOLOGY MODEL OF A SETTLEMENT, BARTON AND GRANT, 2006)



2.1.2 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

The Plan area is rich in biodiversity, containing many important, and protected, habitats and species such as the Shannon Estuary, lakes, turloughs, fens, wetlands, woodlands, bats, wildfowl (duck and geese), waders, salmon, lamprey, and otters. However, it also contains many other habitats which are not protected such as scrub, parks, streams, hedgerows, tree lines, roadside verges, housing estate open spaces and gardens. It is these locally important habitats and species within the landscape, including extensive areas of wetland, fens, broadleaf woodlands, grasslands and turloughs, which provide links between the more rare and protected habitats, and are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild plants and animals such as garden birds (robins, wrens, finches, etc.) and migrant summer visitors (swallows, cuckoos, warblers, etc), otters, hedgehogs, bats, pigmy shrew and other Irish mammals, lamprey, salmon and other fish species, and a variety of invertebrates, including beetles, bees, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. They also allow for the spread of seeds, which benefit the wildflower populations of County Clare. It is recognised that many rare and protected species are reliant on locally important species, and as such the protection of common habitats and species should not be underestimated. Within County Clare there are habitats of high biodiversity and conservation value, including the wildlife sanctuary of Mutton Island and the Keelhilla nature reserve. There are several designated sites associated within the county which are designated as Ramsar Sites, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs). Please see Figures 2.2 to 2.4 for SACs, SPAs and p/NHAs.

FIGURE 2-2 SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION

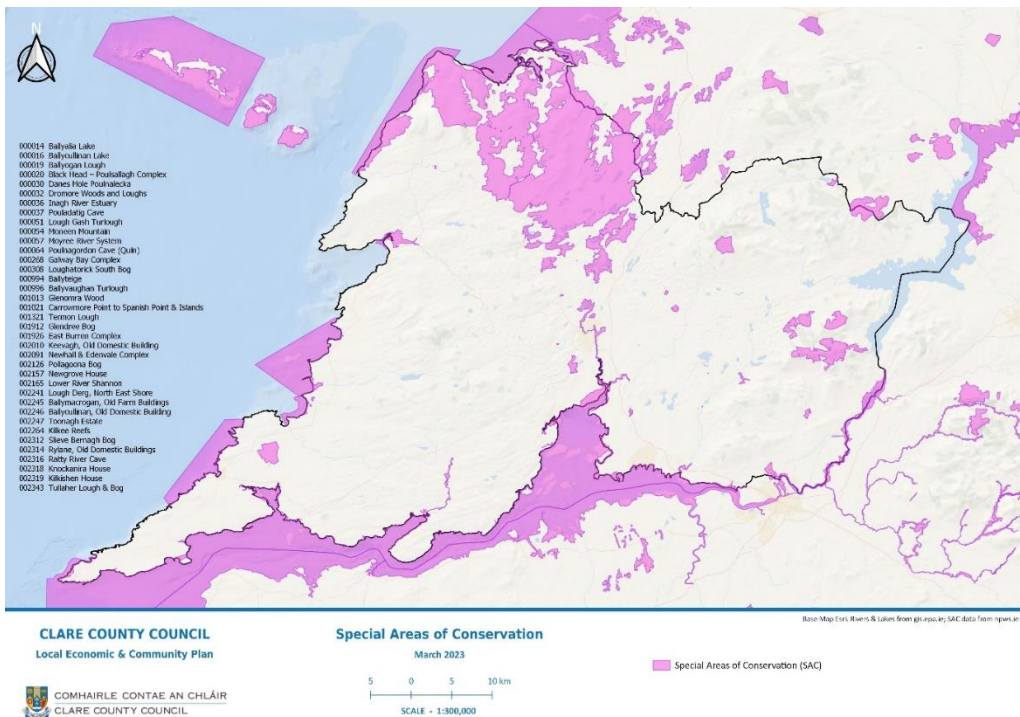


FIGURE 2-3 SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS

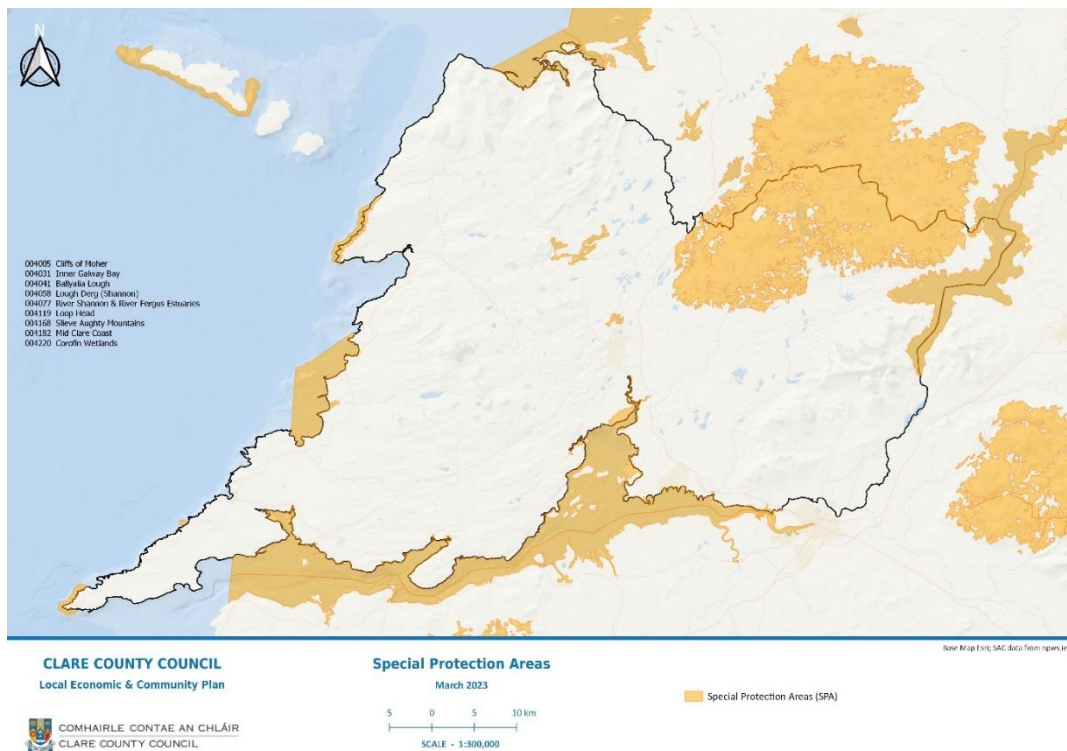
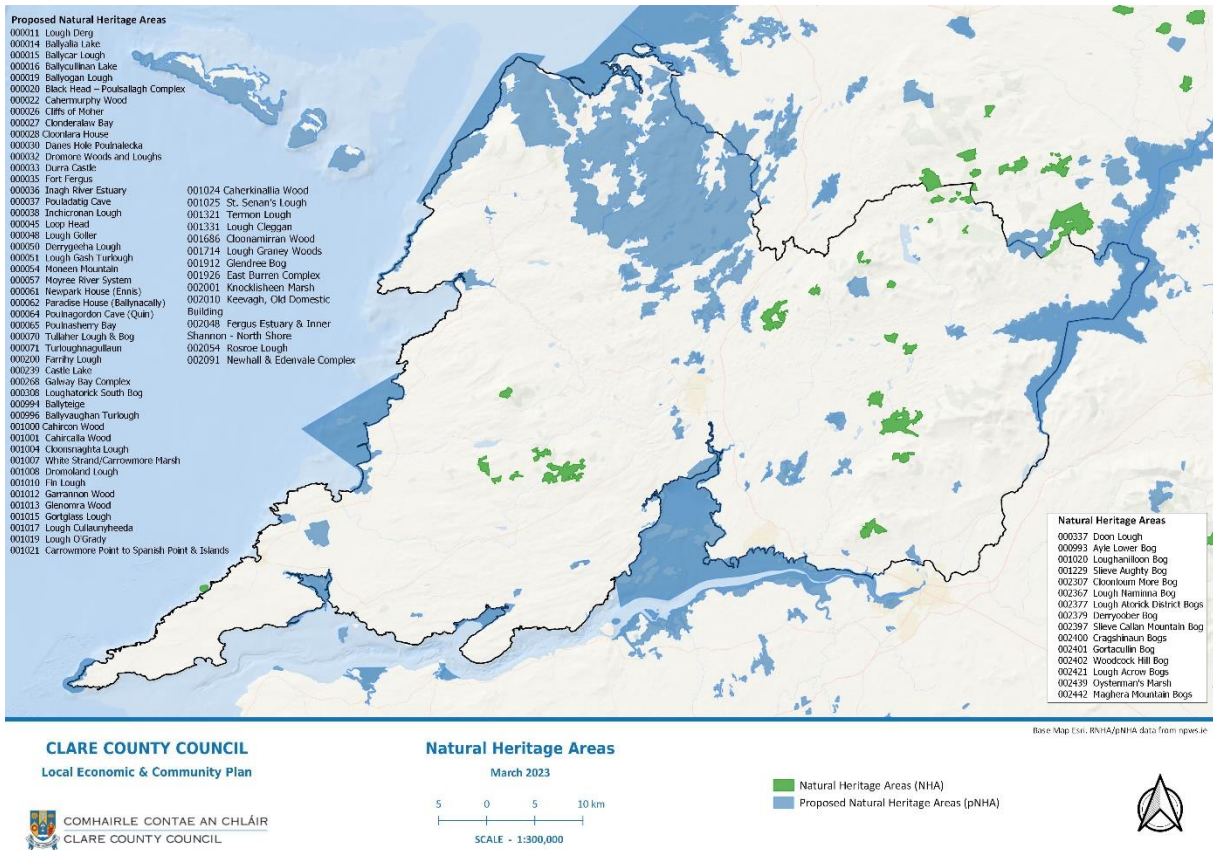


FIGURE 2-4 PROPOSED NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS



2.1.3 Soil and Geology

The western area of County Clare consists of Namurian sandstone and shale which are sedimentary rocks. Marine shelf facies stretch from the north of Clare, through the centre of the county, down to the southern centre of the county and into the east – the last glaciation event carved into these deposits which now form the limestone pavements making up the Burren landscape. The south of Clare also contains three small areas of Waulsortian mudbank deposits. The east of the county consists of three corridors and four small areas of Waulsortian mudbank. In addition, there are two patches of marine shelf facies, two corridors and six patches of Courcayan limestone, two large and two small areas of Upper Devonian to Lower Carboniferous Old Red Sandstone, five areas of Silurian sandstone/greywacke/ shale, two small areas of Mid to Upper Ordovician acid volcanics, two small areas of marine shelf facies, two small areas of Mid to Upper Ordovician slate, one small area of Carboniferous volcanics and minor intrusions and three corridors and three small areas of lower limestone shale. There are 45 sites of geological importance within County Clare, which include cave systems, limestone pavements and mushroom stones. The Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) has identified some of these areas as Geological Heritage Sites as part of their Irish Geological Heritage Programme

2.1.4 Air and Climate

Air quality is dependent on several factors including the source of potential pollutants and weather conditions. The Air Framework Directive (96/62/EC) requires member states to divide countries into zones for the assessment and management of air quality. Ireland is divided into four zones which include:

- Zone A – Dublin Corporation

- Zone B – Cork Conurbation
- Zone C – Other Cities and large towns; and
- Zone D – Rural Ireland.

The majority of County Clare falls within Zone D except for Ennis Town and the surrounding urban area which falls under Zone C. Transport and industries are the main influences on air quality in County Clare. Ennis and Environs falls within Zone C and the main influences on air quality here are from transport and industrial activity. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) manages the ambient Air Quality Network and there is a monitoring station located in Ennis at the Local Authority building at Waterpark House. The air quality index is calculated based on the information gathered from the monitoring stations using a Quality Index for Health, which is calculated every hour and indicates if air quality is good, fair, poor, or very poor. The air quality in the Rural West Region and County Clare is “good” with daily up to date information available for download from <http://www.epa.ie/air/quality/#.VgAeTlc4yg>

The EPA has also published its Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections for 2019 – 2040.³⁰ The report provides an updated assessment of Ireland’s total projected greenhouse gas emissions out to 2040 which includes an assessment of progress towards achieving its emission reduction targets out to 2020 and 2030 set under the EU Effort Sharing Decision (Decision No 406/2009/EU) and Effort Sharing Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2018/842). The EPA’s latest emissions projections show a significant shift in terms of decarbonising the Irish economy in the period out to 2030. The Clare Climate Action Plan 2024 -2029 was approved in early 2024 and forms the statutory basis for climate action by Clare County Council over the next five years.

2.1.5 Water

This section looked primarily at water quality in accordance with the Water Framework Directive and looked at Flooding and Climate Change to a degree although this is dealt with across several the SEA parameters as there is significant inter-relationships.

Of note since the last River Basin Management Plan is the decline in High Status water bodies across Ireland. In Clare, there are four high status river water bodies, Ardcloony_010, Ayle_010, Corra_020 and Glenmora Wood Stream_010, all of which are within Hydrometric Area 25 – Lower Shannon. Across Ireland, high ecological status objectives have been set for 319 river water bodies which are either at high status or were at high status in the recent past, but which have since declined . The aim of this is to protect the water bodies which are currently at High Status and restore those which were High Status in the recent past. Of these, 13 High Status Objectives Waters³ are found within County Clare; Owenslieve_010, Aughaglanna_010, Blackwater (Clare)_010, Ardcloony_010, Broadford_020, Owenogarney_020, Cloghaun_010, Ayle_010, Graney (Shannon)_030, Corra_020 and Bleach_020. The Owendalulleegh_040 and Owendalulleegh_050 are both found on the border of Clare and Galway and small tributaries of these rivers rise within Clare County.

Flooding is a major issue in relation to County Clare, particularly over recent years, and the issues of flood risk management; through mitigation and adaptation measures and developing overall resilience to climate change are of critical importance. A strategic approach to the management of flood risk is important in County Clare as the risks are varied and disparate, with scales of risk and scales of existing and proposed development varying across the county.

2.1.6 Material Assets

Access to an efficient transport network contributes to opportunities for all sectors of the population to access services, facilities and social networks that are necessary to meet daily needs. Ease of accessibility enhances quality of life, promotes social inclusion, presents opportunities, and promotes human health through expansion of cycle and walking infrastructure.

Road Network: The road network in the county is made up of motorway, national primary roads, and national secondary roads, regional and local roads. County Clare has a large rural area with a dispersed population with the result that the car is the predominant mode of transport. The maintenance and upgrade of the existing road network and, where necessary, the provision of new road networks or realignments are essential to achieve modern high standards.

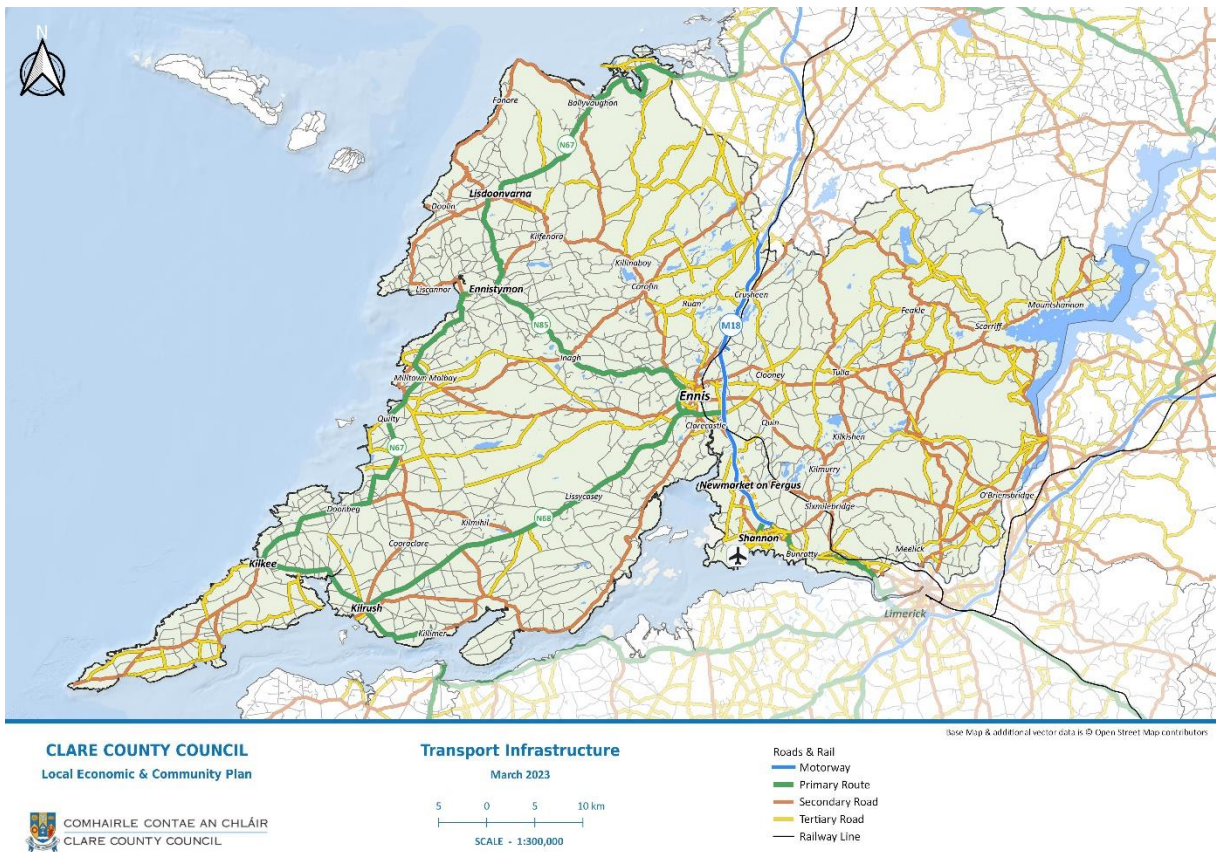
Bus Network: Bus Eireann operates regular services from their centrally located newly refurbished bus station to Shannon Airport, Galway, Limerick, Cork, and Dublin. Private operator, Dublin Coach also operate several (up to twenty-five during peak times) daily express services between Ennis, Limerick, Kildare, and Dublin. Bus Eireann also provides an infrequent service from Ennis to north and west Clare and a regular service to Shannon Airport. Local Services are provided for by Clare Bus, a not-for-profit bus service, which has many routes that connect Ennis with its extensive rural hinterland. The services provided are designed to support communities and increase transport options at a local level while opening access to the national transport network. The route schedules connect with national transport links provided by Bus Eireann, Dublin Coach, and Irish Rail in Ennis.

Rail Network: The rail services within County Clare consist of a branch off the Limerick line which serves Ennis. The Draft Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy promotes an integrated transport strategy for walking, cycling, bus, rail and road to support planned growth up to 2040. The Western Rail Corridor underwent significant upgrades with 36 miles of track and associated infrastructure, as well as the provision of five stations at Gort, Ardahan, Craughwell, Sixmilebridge and Oranmore. Ennis is situated on the western rail corridor which has undergone substantial investment over recent years. Ennis rail and bus station is located within walking distance of the town centre of Ennis.

Air: Shannon Airport is located within the southern part of the county. It is a critical element of the transport network in the region with both a national and international role. It is strategically located between Limerick and Galway with capacity to serve an increased market to the west should future development take place in the Shannon Estuary which requires air transport.

Figure 2.5 provides information on the main transport routes.

FIGURE 2-5 MAIN TRANSPORT ROUTES



Waste Management: Clare falls under the Southern Region Waste Management Plan area for which the management plan was published in May 2015. Within the County Development Plan Area there are a range of waste recycling facilities which include five recycling centres and transfer stations as follows;

- Central Waste Management Facility, Inagh
- Ennis Recycling Centre, Ennis
- Lisdeen Recycling Centre and transfer station, Kilkee
- Scarriff recycling centre and transfer station, Scarriff
- Shannon recycling centre

Domestic and commercial waste collection is undertaken solely by private permitted collectors, which include waste separation to aid waste recycling. There is an extensive education and awareness programme of waste prevention initiatives to minimise waste going to landfill.

Water supply: Uisce Eireann is currently carrying out a strategic review of water supply in the Mid-West Region. Initial indications are that the Clareville Water Treatment Plant in Limerick, which currently serves Limerick City and its environs, has the capabilities to supply a large regional area within the Mid-West. In general, there is sufficient water supply treatment capacity in the county to meet the needs of the target population identified in the core strategies.

Wastewater: The Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC, amended by Directive 98/15/EEC) aims to protect the environment from the adverse effects of wastewater discharges by ensuring that wastewater is appropriately treated before it is discharged to the environment. Such

treatment is essential to meet the requirements of the WFD. SEA Non-Technical Summary – Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 38 Wastewater within the county is treated either through wastewater treatment plants (48%) or individual septic tank units (44%). Many of the buildings which are located outside of the larger towns and villages are not connected to the public wastewater disposal system, and the effluent must be treated by individual proprietary wastewater treatment plants and septic tanks. There are 31 urban wastewater treatment plants in County Clare.

Renewable Energy: The term ‘renewable energy’ refers to those energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment including the sun, wind, oceans, and the fall of water. Geothermal energy, plant material and combustible or digestible agricultural, domestic, or industrial waste may also be regarded as renewable sources of energy. The Council recognises the importance of developing renewable energy sources in the interest of achieving a low carbon economy and security of energy supply. A Renewable Energy Strategy forms part of the Clare CDP 2023 -2029.

2.1.7 Built Heritage

There are currently c. 8387 monuments in Clare, which is more than most counties in Ireland. Notably, there is little evidence from the earliest period, the Mesolithic, but the Neolithic or New Stone Age and subsequent eras are well represented with many sites and artefacts demonstrating life in Clare for the past 6,000 years. These early farmers left little evidence of their settlements, but their territorial/burial monuments survive. Large numbers of megalithic structures are found in the Burren including the Poulawack Cairn, a burial mound constructed more than 5500 years ago, which is of National importance. Nearby are Parknabinnia Chambered Tomb and a pre-historic quarry possibly used to extract stone to build these structures. North of this cluster stands what is possibly the most iconic monument in County Clare, the Poulabrone Portal Tomb. Various megalithic tombs also survive in other areas of the County.

Rivers have acted as focal points for both settlement and ritual activity through all periods of human settlement; this is borne out in County Clare by the number of recorded archaeological sites close to the river Fergus, for example Knockanoura Castle (CL033-087) and Skehanagh Castle (CL041-089). Under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act (2004) the archaeological heritage within County Clare is protected. The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for County Clare is an inventory of archaeological sites of significance and according to the CDP there are approximately 8,387 archaeological sites within County Clare

There are 911 protected structures in the plan area ranging from churches, bridges, grain stores, houses, shops, and public buildings. Many structures of industrial and railway heritage are also included in the Record. The town centre which has survived almost intact since the late 16th century and other groups of buildings in the plan area are designated Architectural Conservation Areas, affording protection to the exterior of all structures within the ACAs to protect the unique architectural character of an organically evolved, mediaeval, Gaelic market town. An ACA refers to a place, area, group of structures or townscape, that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social, or technical interest or that contributes to the appreciation of a protected structure, and whose character it is an objective of a Local Area Plan to preserve. Its inclusion within the Plan, in terms of Section 81, Part IV of the Planning and Development Act, 2000

(as amended) affords greater control over the form of development that may be permitted and reduces instances of inappropriate development, demolition and unnecessary change within the designated area.

2.1.8 Landscape and Seascape

Landscape Characteristics of the Plan Area The components of Landscape Character Assessment are Landscape Character Types, Landscape Character Areas, and Seascape Character Areas.

Landscape Character Types: There are 26 landscape types identified within the County, sub-divided into three groups, namely Upland Types, Lowland Types and Coastal Types. In addition, the Landscape Character Assessment identified: Habitat Types – an area in which an organism or group of organisms lives and is defined by the living and non-living components of the environment. The latter includes physical, chemical, and geographical factors, in addition to human impact or management;

Historical Landscape Types – an archaeological or historic landscape is a discrete landscape based on the “scale and integrity of the archaeological features (that) reflect significantly on the human history and land use of that area”.

Landscape Character Areas Landscape Character Areas (LCA) are units of the landscape that are geographically specific and have their own character and sense of place. Each Landscape Character Area’s distinctive character is based upon patterns of geology, landform, land-use, cultural, historical, and ecological features. The Landscape Character Assessment for County Clare identified 21 Landscape Character Areas.

Regional Seascape Character Areas In 2020 the Marine Institute published a report outlining the Regional Seascape Character Areas for Ireland. The report presents the seascape character assessment which will form a core component of the evidence base for Marine Spatial Planning and marine policy formulation. Seascape Character Assessment (SCA) has emerged as a method for assessing, characterising, mapping, and describing seascape character. The process of SCA follows the well-established, and widely used, process of Landscape Character Assessment as outlined in (b) above. The Regional SCA identifies three Regional Seascape Character Areas for Clare as follows and as shown in conjunction with the Seascape Character Areas

- SCA6 – Atlantic Galway Bay & islands
- SAC7 – Atlantic Clare Cliffs
- SCA8 – Shannon Estuary and Tralee Bay.

3 SEA Screening Schedule 2a screening assessment

3.1 Introduction

The following section and table below present the SEA Screening assessment of the plan against the criteria provided in Schedule 2a of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2001-2011 which details the criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Table 3.1 SEA Screening

Criteria for determining whether the proposed County Clare NAP is likely to have significant effects on the environment
1. The characteristics of the Plan having regard, in particular, to:
<i>the degree to which the Plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources,</i>
<p>The plan does not set the framework for projects. The plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting framework.</p> <p>The Clare County Development Plan (CDP) 2023-2029 set out the Vision and objectives for the development of the County over a six-year period. These aim to plan for and support the sustainable long-term development of Clare; provide for the future wellbeing of the residents and promote an appropriate balance of development across the County. All planning proposals are assessed against the objectives of the Clare CDP 2023-2029, and all lower plans must be consistent with the County Development Plans</p>
<i>the degree to which the Plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy,</i>
<p>The plan sits beneath the statutory landuse plans notably the County Development Plan 2023-2029. The Clare CDP 2023-2029 has undergone full SEA and AA and consultation with environmental bodies. All measures included in the SEA and AA of the Clare CDP 2023-2029, and the superseding plan would apply, as appropriate.</p>
<i>The relevance of the Plan in the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,</i>
<p>The NAP is required to be consistent and compliant with all relevant environmental policy and legislation. The requirement to prepare a NAP is established by the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), transposed into Irish law. The NAP must align with the END Directive which explicitly seeks to address adverse effects of noise on human health and environment. By identifying key areas of the transport network that require noise reduction and mitigation measures, positive effects are identified in terms of noise impacts on populations and wildlife in particular.</p>
<i>Environmental problems relevant to the plan</i>
<p>The SEA ER of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 identifies a number of environmental problems relevant to the plan, including the following:</p>

- habitat loss, loss of biodiversity/stepping-stones or features of ecological interest and an under appreciation of their importance to designated sites,
- impacts on water quality and of particular and recent concern in County Clare the issues surrounding Climate Change and Flooding which has significant interrelationships with Population and Human Health.
- The population of Ennis (including Clarecastle) increased by 2.26% between 2011-2016 and compared with other Hub towns it has seen one of the lowest increases. Of concern is the significantly higher growth seen in the environs which has greater environmental implications.
- The unemployment rate in Clare stands at 12.4% (Census 2016). To avoid continued losses there must be a pro-active approach to encourage the existing population of the area to remain by providing employment opportunities, services and resources which will benefit the entire county.
- Most greenhouse emissions are related to energy generation, transport, agriculture, and industry sectors. Focus is being put on predicting how a changing climate will impact on some of our most threatened species, for example, species at the range limits. Sea level rise is another issue of concern.
- Alternative energy options are being explored in the County. A common concern in relation to wind energy developments relates to impacts on peat soils and hydrogeology, impacts on bird species, and habitat disturbance.
- The key pressures on water bodies continues to be agriculture (nutrient run-off and sediment, point pressures such as farmyards), followed by hydro morphological issues (e.g., land drainage, channelisation), urban wastewater discharges and forestry, as well as other pressures. The key nutrients pressures are from phosphorus (the dominant nutrient of concern for surface waters) and nitrate (a particular problem in the south and south-east, as well as for groundwaters). Invasive or alien species remain a problem.
- Flooding is a major issue in relation to County Clare, particularly over recent years, and the issues of flood risk management; through mitigation and adaptation measures and developing overall resilience to climate change are of critical importance. A strategic approach to the management of flood risk is important in County Clare as the risks are varied and disparate, with scales of risk and scales of existing and proposed development varying greatly across the county.
- There is a need to increase energy efficiency and conservation within County Clare and it is obliged to reduce carbon emissions by 50% by 2030.
- There is insufficient wastewater treatment to cater for existing and projected population growth within some settlements across the county. Therefore, there is a need to provide additional wastewater treatment infrastructure/ capacity by Irish Water across this and future planning cycles and/or for the Local Authority to establish innovative solutions to water treatment at a local level.

the relevance of the plan in the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste-management or water protection).

The NAP is required to be consistent and compliant with all relevant environmental policy and legislation. The requirement to prepare a NAP is established by the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), transposed into Irish law. The NAP must align with the END Directive which explicitly seeks to address adverse effects of noise on human health and environment. By identifying key areas of the transport network that require noise reduction and mitigation measures, positive effects are identified in terms of noise impacts on populations and wildlife in particular.

Proposals that may give rise to landuse effects would be subject to detailed design and requirements of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, and as the plan is consistent with the Clare County Development Plan, it allows for the implementation, as relevant to European environmental legislation as established in the county plan, as varied.

These include, *inter alia*, the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), the EU Water Framework Directive (2006/60/EC), the EU Groundwater Directive 92006/118/EC), the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2014 S.I. 350 of 2014 and national legislation including the Wildlife Act 1976, as amended, and Flora Protection Order 1999.

Should development arise, the application of appropriate legislation such as the Water Framework Directive, the Habitats Directive, the SEA directive and the EIA Directive, will apply as appropriate.

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

the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,

The NAP provides a strategic approach that aims to address adverse effects on human health and the environment from excessive noise from transport. The measures will provide positive effects on these parameters at strategic scale as are mitigatory measures provided in the NAP. Should some measures require statutory consenting these will be applied in compliance with the statutory environmental requirements.

the cumulative nature of the effects,

Given the nature and scale of the NAP no adverse cumulative effects are identified; this is due to the strategic nature, the aims to improve noise quality arising from transport and should landuse projects arise, the provisions and environmental protections in the statutory Clare CDP 20243 -2029.

the trans boundary nature of the effects

No transboundary effects are identified due to the areas identified for noise action.

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

No such risks are identified as arising from the plan at this stage. Positive effects are identified where noise abatement from transport will take place.

<i>the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).</i>
At this scale, no such effects are identified.
<i>the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</i>
(a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage A screening statement in support of Appropriate Assessment has also been prepared for this plan in line with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). It has concluded that no likely significant effects are identified associated with the implementation of the Clare NAP 2024-2029.
(b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, In order to be realised, potential projects or proposals arising from the NAP will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting framework. Such legislation, policies, plans and programmes include lower tier environmental assessment including Environmental Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment. Should projects arise from the plan, the statutory consent process as outlined above will apply.
(c) intensive land-use, The areas for action relate to identified transport routes already constructed and at this juncture no such effects are identified.
(a) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status. A Screening report for Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken and accompanies this strategy and SEA Screening report. The AA screening report has concluded that the plan will not have the potential to result in land use activities that have the potential to result in negative impacts to the qualifying features of interest of European Sites and will not have the potential to compromise the achievement of the conservation objective of European Sites.

3.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Determination

The plan 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.
- Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, which sets out the "Criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment"

Section 9 (1) of the (2004) Regulations (S.I. No. 435) (as amended) states "*subject to sub-article (2), an environmental assessment shall be carried out for all plans and programmes*

*(a) which are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, **transport**, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism and town and country planning or land use, and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, or ”*

(b) which are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site but, either individually or in combination with other plans, are likely to have a significant effect on any such site.”.

The County Clare NAP does not provide consent, establish a framework for granting consent or contribute towards a framework for granting consent. In order to be realised, potential projects or proposals arising from the plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting framework.

This SEA Screening report was issued to statutory environmental authorities under SI 435 of 2004, as amended from 10th May until 21st June 2024 for the six week statutory period. Responses were received from the following:

- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- Department of Transport
- Clare County Council Planning Department
- Health Service Executive
- A resident in Ennis living near train tracks /Quin Road Industrial Estate
- A resident living in the Ballaghboy area, Ennis.

Key observations included:

- Clarification of roles and responsibilities
- Reference to key policies and Climate Action plans
- Addressing typos and clarification
- Highlighting local noise emissions related to M18, Quin Road and Railway tracks.

Observations have been responded to by Clare County Council and minor updates to the final NAP have been made ,these relate to minor amendments to text, a new table 2.1 showing links between human health and noise. Additional text has been provided in the mitigation measures in Section 9 CCC2.4 and CCC2.5 that clarifies responsibilities for Clare County Council actions and other agencies. These updates are shown in red font in Annex A updated to reflect same. These changes are not identified as significant as shown in Annex A. The submissions have been considered and the SEA screening process has been concluded and an SEA Determination that the Clare Noise Action Plan does not require full SEA has been made.

This is the final SEA Screening determination and an accompanying SEA Determination will be issued.

Annex A: SEA Evaluation of Clare NAP actions

This table provides a commentary in terms of the SEA Screening and measures within the NAP.

TABLE A-1

NAP measures

Clare County Council will adopt a strategic approach to managing environmental noise, within its administrative area, and will aim to:

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

SEA comment: These are positive in terms of an overall approach to minimising and reducing noise emissions from transport.

Noise Policy Statement

The implementation of the NAP spans a four-year time frame, beginning in 2024. Clare County Council (CCC) commits to a series of Implementation Actions during current and future noise action planning. The environmental noise management measures within the framework are presented across the three policy principle categories covered by the Noise Policy Statement, together with a fourth supporting ‘General’ category as follows:

- General – Noise Management Measures;
- Mitigation – Noise Management Measures
- Prevention – Noise Management Measures;
- Protection – Noise Management Measures.

The General noise management measures cover a range of activities to support the implementation of the NAP including other measures across the three policy principle categories. Mitigation measures relate to activities to support the investigation of noise abatement measures in the Priority Important Areas and engagement with the relevant stakeholders with influence to implement them. Prevention measures relate to activities to support planning where there may be proposals to bring people to noise from major road sources or there is a material consideration of environmental noise required in the development of plans, strategies, policies and objectives. They also relate to maintaining or improving the acoustic environment for new public realm where feasible. Protection measures relate to the protecting the acoustic environment where environmental noise does not dominate.

In some instances, measures do not necessarily stand in isolation and may be relevant, or overlap, with other categories. When considering the broader framework of measures and actions aimed at mitigating exposure to environmental noise from the roads, it is important to emphasise that CCC, in some instances, does not have exclusive ownership or influence over certain noise sources, areas, and the measures presented in this NAP. Many of the measures

and actions will require input and collaboration with other authorities with responsibility for infrastructure, along with support from government departments and bodies through relevant legislation and funding
No specific actions identified at strategic scale the location of the action areas are mapped and no landuse effects identified at this juncture.

Table 9.1 of the NAP

Measures	Summary Actions	Time Scale
Noise Action Plan 2024-2028 Preparation		
	Noise Action Plan Finalised	18 th July 2024
General - Noise Management Measures		
CCC1.1	Noise Action Plan Working Group(s) – Action Planning Authorities and Noise Mapping Bodies	Support the establishment, terms of reference and membership for a Noise Action Plan Implementation Working Group. Hold meetings twice yearly or more frequently as matters require.
Short-term		
Relates to working group only; Does not give rise to environmental impacts		
CCC1.2	Support the development of national and other related policy and guidance	Support the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and other government departments and bodies in the development of national noise and other related policies and guidance, and assist in their implementation once in place.
Short-term		
Does not give rise to environmental impacts, guidance only		
CCC1.3	Report to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Prepare an annual progress report regarding the implementation of the NAP and submit it to the EPA.
Annual		
Reporting only; does not give rise to environmental impacts		
CCC1.4	Continued investigation and management of complaints	Review and investigate all noise complaints received in line with Clare County Council Customer Charter and in accordance with national and international best practice.
Ongoing		
Investigation only; does not give rise to environmental impacts		

CCC1.5	Stakeholder collaboration	Liaise and collaborate with a range of key stakeholders to address noise-related issues to ensure the effective management of noise from related infrastructure.	Ongoing
Investigation only; does not give rise to environmental impacts			
CCC1.6	Community engagement	Publish the final NAP and provide updates on the progress made with its implementation.	Ongoing
Engagement with communities; does not give rise to environmental impact			

Table 9.1. Noise Management Framework – Summary of measures.

Measures		Summary of Actions	Time Scale
Mitigation - Noise Management Measures			
CCC2.1	Existing plans, projects and strategies	Collaborate with relevant internal CCC sections and third party organisations to support the implementation of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Travel Programmes; • LSMATS; • Climate Action Plans. 	Short- to Long-term
These have been subject to appropriate scale environmental assessment and no environmental effects are identified at strategic level.			
CCC2.2	Noise sensitive buildings	For relevant plans, projects and strategies liaise with appropriate internal Council Sections and/or third party organisations to ensure consideration given to good acoustic design principles to mitigate noise at noise sensitive buildings	Medium- to Long-term
Positive for human health at strategic level to facilitate good acoustic design principles. No locations provided at this juncture and statutory planning provisions would apply as appropriate.			
CCC2.3	Review assumptions used for Priority Important Areas (PIAs)	Undertake a review of the Strategic Noise Maps for the PIAs and the assumptions used in the calculation models. <i>Where the PIA relates to infrastructure that is exclusively the responsibility of and managed by CCC, then the evaluation will be completed by CCC. Where the PIAs relate to infrastructure for</i>	Short-term

		which a third-party organisation has overall responsibility, then the evaluation will require liaising and collaborating with the relevant infrastructure owner. Appraisals should review the potential reduction in harmful effects (as required under the Environmental Noise Regulations, 2018)	
Review only; no landuse or environmental impacts identified.			
CCC2.4	Appraise noise mitigation measures for PIAs	Where the PIA relates to infrastructure that is exclusively the responsibility of and managed by CCC, then the evaluation will be completed exclusively by CCC. Where the PIAs relate to infrastructure for which a third party organisation has overall responsibility, then the evaluation will require significant input from the relevant infrastructure owner. Appraisals should review the potential reduction in harmful effects (as required under the Environmental Noise Regulations, 2018)	Short- to Long-term
Positive for noise reduction re human health and wildlife. Should landuse impacts be identified and projects arising that require planning and consenting, these will be subject to all relevant measures in the Clare CDP 2023 -2029 as appropriate, including, <i>inter alia</i> : CDP 10.15 Environmental Impact Assessment CDP 15.3 European Sites CDP 15.4 Requirement for Appropriate Assessment			
CCC2.5	Implementation of recommended noise mitigation measures	Liaise with relevant internal CCC Sections, third party organisations, and government departments to secure funding for noise mitigation measures. Implement the measures for which CCC has responsibility and support third party organisations in the implementation of their measures. Liaise with relevant internal CCC Sections, third-party organisations, and government departments to explore all funding opportunities for noise mitigation measures. Implement the	Short- to Long-term

		measures for which CCC has responsibility and where infrastructure is the responsibility of a third-party organisation, liaise and collaborate with that organisation to identify opportunities to implement an appropriate measure/s.	
Positive for noise reduction re human health and wildlife. Should landuse impacts be identified and projects arising that require planning and consenting, these will be subject to all relevant measures in the Clare CDP 2023 -2029 as appropriate, including, inter alia: CDP 10.15 Environmental Impact Assessment CDP 15.3 European Sites CDP 15.4 Requirement for Appropriate Assessment			
Prevention – Noise Management Measures			
CCC3.1	Planning referrals	Report on planning applications and enforcement of planning conditions in relation to noise emissions in the context of Strategic Noise Maps and the NAP.	Ongoing
Input to planning referrals is positive in terms of highlighting the NAP and emissions from same; positive impacts identified re human health and wildlife			
CCC3.2	Support the development of local authority policies and objectives	In preparation of plans, strategies, local policies and objectives give due consideration to the NAP to support them.	Ongoing
The Clare CDP 2023-2029, and any other statutory landuse plans such as Local Area Plans, or the Climate Action Plan have been approved and were subject to full SEA and AA as appropriate. Policy preparation and support only at this juncture, no environmental impacts identified; positive effect re wildlife and human health.			
CCC3.3	Support the development of new public realm and green and blue infrastructure	Support the implementation of new public realm and green and blue infrastructure where feasible to provide appropriate acoustic environments for citizens health and well-being.	Short- to Long-term

Table 9.1. (Continued). Noise Management Framework – Summary of measures.

Measures	Summary of Actions	Time Scale
Protection - Noise Management Measures		

CCC4.1	Evaluation of Potential Candidate Quiet Areas (PCQAs)	For each PCQA carry out an investigation of the area and make a recommendation on whether to designate each area as a Quiet Area or not.	Ongoing
Research and evaluation only; no environmental impacts identified.			
CCC4.2	Proposal for Quiet Areas(s) designation	For all CQAs recommended for designation, prepare proposal for EPA consultation and Ministerial Approval.	Annual
Proposal only; no environmental impacts identified;			