

Castlepollard Quarry, Deerpark, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath

Castlepollard Quarry

Environmental Impact Assessment Report

Appendix 1

Background to Project

February 2022



Part of the Breedon Group

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Westmeath County Council Planning Authority - Inspection Purposes Only!

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1 APPENDIX 1. BACKGROUND TO PROJECT

1.1 NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT

1.1.1 NATIONAL CONTEXT

The production of quarry aggregates is tied to the level of economic activity, which was significantly depressed during the global financial crisis (GFC) in the late 2000's and early 2010's. The construction industry has been in recovery since 2013 but it is still grappling with nearly a decade of underinvestment and is playing catch up with an economy that has expanded strongly in the meantime. This has manifest itself in the acute housing supply shortage and infrastructure deficits across the country.

Ireland saw output of new dwellings rise from c. 50,000 units in 2000/2001 to a peak of c. 93,000 units in 2006 followed by a rapid decline to c. 8,000 units in 2012 and 2013.

Housing output rose to c. 21,087 units in 2019 but declined to 20,676 in 2020 due to severe lockdown restrictions imposed to arrest the Covid-19 pandemic. Housing completions are forecasted to reach c. 18,000 in 2021 and 21,000 in 2022, while estimates of future annual long-run housing demand is in the range of 35,000 dwellings per annum (ESRI 2021).

In 2012, during the GFC the construction sector contributed just 5% of GDP. In comparison with other countries - and taking on board long-term trends for Ireland - an economy of our size, with our remaining infrastructure deficits and positive demographics, could be capable of sustaining a construction industry equivalent to around 12% of GNP (10% of GDP). It is recognised that Ireland needs a strong and sustainable construction sector. In May 2014, the government launched "Construction 2020 – a strategy for a renewed construction sector" (DoT 2014). The central aim of the strategy was to provide homes for people by tripling housing output by 2020 and adding 60,000 jobs to the construction sector over the same period. The strategy committed to a detailed, time-bound set of actions to support the return of the sector to sustainable levels.

In 2015, with forecasts of continuing strong economic growth, the construction sector had been expected to become a €20 billion industry by 2020. The total value of Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) investment in the sector was estimated at €26 billion in 2018, while the Department of Finance predicted this will increase to €41 billion by 2023. Growth in overall building and construction investment was forecast to average 15.6% in 2019, before moderating to 10% in 2020.

Construction output still lags significantly behind the recognised European sustainable level of 10% to 12% of GDP. The commitment to increase spending on social housing and infrastructure in the National Planning Framework (NPF) is expected to act as a driver of continued growth in the construction sector. The construction sector can potentially employ 213,000 direct employees making it the largest generator of jobs in all communities around the economy. The sector is forecast to contribute around 10% of GNP to the Irish economy.

Importantly, the upturn in construction has led to a significant increase in demand for aggregates across the country, most particularly in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The increased demand for aggregates due to the upswing in the construction sector (averaging 11.3% growth per annum between 2013 and 2018), will tighten the supply available to the regional market over the lifespan for the proposed quarry development. In 2020, demand for aggregates equated to 12 tonnes per capita or 59 Mt per annum, while Project Ireland 2040 will require 1.5 billion tonnes or 75 Mt per annum (ICF 2020).

ESRI (2021) observed that expected economic growth in 2021 and 2022 is encouraging, with substantial growth of 11.1% in 2021. However, Covid-19 has had a significant adverse impact on the domestic Irish economy, and that the cost in terms of economic output in 2020 and 2021 was c. €24 billion. The pre-pandemic unemployment rate was 5% in February 2020 but peaked at 25.3% in January 2021. ESRI (2021) estimate that the average overall unemployment rate will be c. 16.3% in 2021, dropping to 7.1% in 2022. Nonetheless, ESRI have forecast that the Irish economy will continue its strong economic performance, and that GDP growth will grow from 3.4% in 2020 to 11.1% in 2021 and 6.9% in 2022. The scale of the economic hit has been much more severe during the ongoing Covid-19 induced crisis than that experienced during the GFC over a decade ago. However, the economy appears to have bounced back more rapidly on this occasion.

Construction is a vital sector in any economy with its immediate impacts on economic growth, competitiveness, jobs and productivity. A healthy construction industry requires strong private sector demand supported by a continuous pipeline of public sector infrastructure projects, sustaining jobs right across the sector, in small, medium and large construction firms. It is essential not just for the delivery of much needed physical infrastructure but is also an important driver of competitiveness. With government policy focused on restoring competitiveness, driving down costs and increasing exports, the quantity and quality of infrastructure will play an important role. High quality infrastructure improves the efficiency of the indigenous enterprise sector and also increases the attractiveness of Ireland as an investment location for foreign direct investment.

As discussed in detail above, on February 16th 2018 the government published “Project Ireland 2040”, the new overarching public policy initiative. Project Ireland 2040 consists of the National Planning Framework to 2040 and the National Development Plan 2018-2027, which essentially replace the revoked NSS and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021, respectively.

The National Development Plan (NDP) is a ten year strategy for public capital investment of almost €116 billion. This equates to almost €12 billion annually and represents a substantial increase in the average annual capital budget over that envisaged in the 2nd Infrastructure and Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021. The NDP will drive the long-term economic, environmental and social progress across all parts of the country over the next ten years.

The achievement of the objectives of Project Ireland 2040 will necessitate access to significant reserves of aggregates (stone, sand and gravel) over the lifetime of the plan. It is not an exaggeration to state that many of the investment priorities within Project Ireland 2040 will not be realised without aggregates and aggregate based materials.

Rock aggregates are an integral element of all types of construction activities, and the provision of aggregates is an economic activity that is vital for society. Aggregates are used extensively for the construction, upgrade and maintenance of our houses, schools, hospitals and places of work, as well as other essential infrastructure such as our road and transport networks and water and wastewater infrastructure. In essence, aggregates are the backbone of sustainable construction in Ireland, without which modern and future living would not be possible (ICF 2020).

Ireland has a steady but diminishing supply of high quality aggregate reserves. It is critical that Government recognises the strategic importance of access to a steady and dependable supply of local, high quality raw materials necessary for the construction of Ireland's future built environment as highlighted in Project Ireland 2040.

Currently, there are approximately 500 large commercial quarries extracting aggregates throughout Ireland. These quarries produce aggregates from crushed rock, sand and gravel, which are used as key building materials in the construction of all of Ireland's social infrastructure and are essential to our quality of life.

Due to Ireland's infrastructural deficit and dispersed pattern of settlement and its resulting large road network, the current demand for aggregates in Ireland, at 12 tonnes per capita per year, is twice the average demand in the EU 28. Project Ireland 2040 will necessitate the production of approximately 1.5 billion tonnes of aggregates.

In addition, quarries will make an important contribution to the circular economy as recycled aggregates from construction and demolition waste, while unlikely to exceed 5% of demand, will be an integral part of the future construction supply chain.

ICF (2020) state that total aggregate production in 2018 was 36 million tonnes, while Project Ireland 2040 will require the production of c. 1.5 billion tonnes of aggregates. It is critical that the Government recognises the strategic importance of a steady and dependable supply of local, high quality raw materials necessary for the construction of Ireland's future built environment. Therefore, the future supply of aggregates needs to be planned, monitored and managed in a sustainable manner. ICF (2020) recommend that:

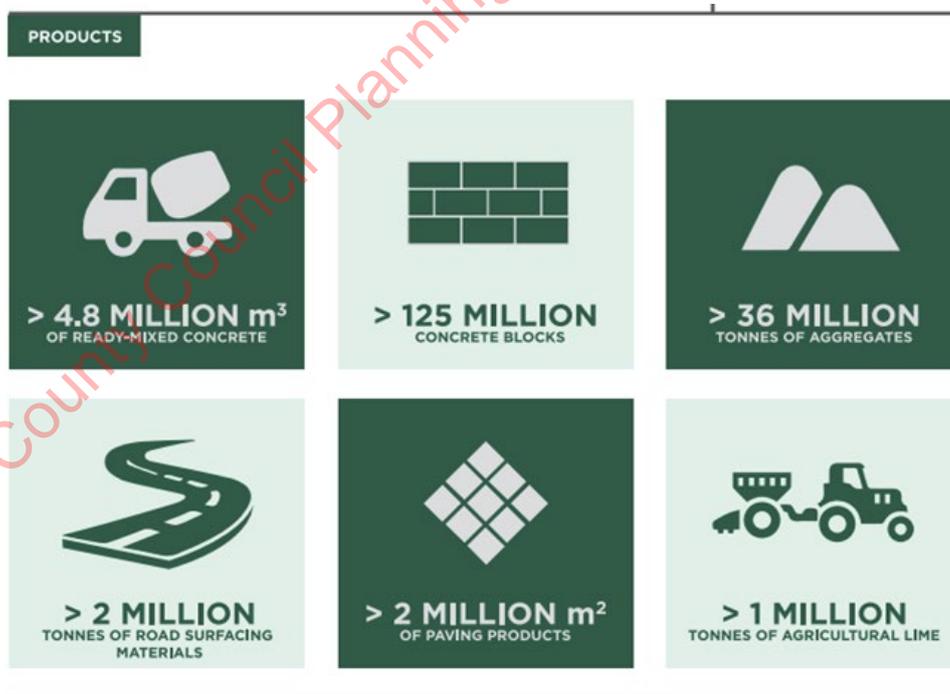
1. It is critical that the scoping process required under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations is implemented for all quarry planning applications and that planning authorities are sufficiently resourced to carry out this process effectively. An Bord Pleanála should prioritise quarry development to ensure its statutory objective of deciding appeals within 18 weeks is achieved;
2. As the vast majority of decisions by local authorities in respect of applications for large scale extractive developments are appealed to An Bord Pleanála, a process to facilitate development applications directly to An Bord Pleanála should be introduced, subject to thresholds in terms of scale or output;
3. Given the highly capital intensive nature of the extractive industry, the regulatory certainty needed for professional operators can only be provided by the granting of permissions of long-term duration — planning permission durations should be commensurate with the planned extraction of resources; and

- The planning system should ensure steady and adequate provision of aggregate supplies by issuing sufficient planning consents to meet demand. Priority should be given to existing sites to ensure existing employment and investment is maintained.



Source (ICF Essential Aggregates providing for Ireland's needs to 2040)

Figure 1 Total Aggregate Production in Ireland



Source (ICF Essential Aggregates providing for Ireland's needs to 2040)

Figure 2 Range of Quarry Products

1.1.2 REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Westmeath County Development Plan (CPD) 2021-2027 recognises that aggregate resources underpin construction output and provide employment and economic growth in the local and regional economy and that there is a need to exploit such resources in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner. It is the Policy of Westmeath County Council to facilitate adequate supplies of aggregate resources to meet the future growth needs of the County and the wider region where there is a proven need for a certain mineral/aggregate and to exercise appropriate control (including ongoing consideration of environmental impacts) while addressing key environmental, traffic and social impacts and details of rehabilitation.

Given the quantity of existing quarries in the county, the Council considers that there are already sufficient aggregate deposits available without requiring new or extended extraction pits in esker systems or any new quarries on greenfield lands. It is the policy of the Council to take cognisance of existing levels of extraction in considering new applications for development on greenfield sites and preference will be given to the sustainable continuation or extension of existing quarries.

There is a clear need for each county, including Westmeath, to make future provisions for the long-term supply of aggregates. The supply of local aggregates is essential to the sustainable development of communities. Local supplies reduce transport distances, thereby reducing their carbon footprint compared to non-local sources. By their nature, aggregate resources can only be worked where they occur. The products are generally of low unit value. The most significant cost is transportation and as a result most quarries typically operate within a c. 25 km to 50 km radius of their market (the upper limit typically relates to value added products e.g., asphalt and concrete).

The reserves at Castlepollard quarry are required to meet the demand that is being placed on the extractives industry to supply raw materials for continued social and economic growth and development within Westmeath.

The location of the proposed development, as shown on EIAR Figure 1.1, has the benefit of good access to the regional and national road network, which will allow the quarry to meet future demands for aggregate in the region. The site is strategically located on the R395 regional road and within c. 2 km south of Castlepollard, c. 5 km northwest of Collinstown, c. 8.5 km southeast of Multyfarnham, c. 13.5 km northwest of Delvin, c. 13.5 km southwest of Oldcastle, c. 15.5 km southwest of Mullingar, c. 17 km west of Clonmellon, c. 17 km southeast of Granard, c. 20.5 km east of Edgeworthstown, c. 21 km north of Killucan, c. 22.5 km south of Kilnalek, c. 23 km southwest of Ballyjamesduff, c. 23.5 km southwest of Virginia, and c. 24 km northwest of Athboy. This market covers the region of north and central County Westmeath and bordering areas of counties Longford, Cavan and Meath. There is one county town within the 25 km natural market of the Castlepollard Quarry, namely Mullingar, which is designated a Key Town, as defined in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) 2019–2031 (EMRA 2019). Furthermore, there are also 14 census towns within the market, where development is focused under the new NDP, as well as numerous smaller towns and villages.

The GSI's online mapping website shows that there were five other active quarries within a 25 km radius of the Castlepollard Quarry in 2014 (Refer Appendix 1, Figure 3).

The cherty limestone at Castlepollard exhibits exceptional hardness, which is a critical parameter in certain high specification grades of aggregates. The ICF (2020) report that it is increasingly difficult to source quality aggregates required for construction products, such as high specification concrete, adjacent to major population centres, particularly Dublin.

The proposed development will ensure the continued viability of aggregate supply for Lagan's many business interests in the construction sector. It is against this economic background that the applicant wishes to continue the operations in the quarry at Castlepollard.

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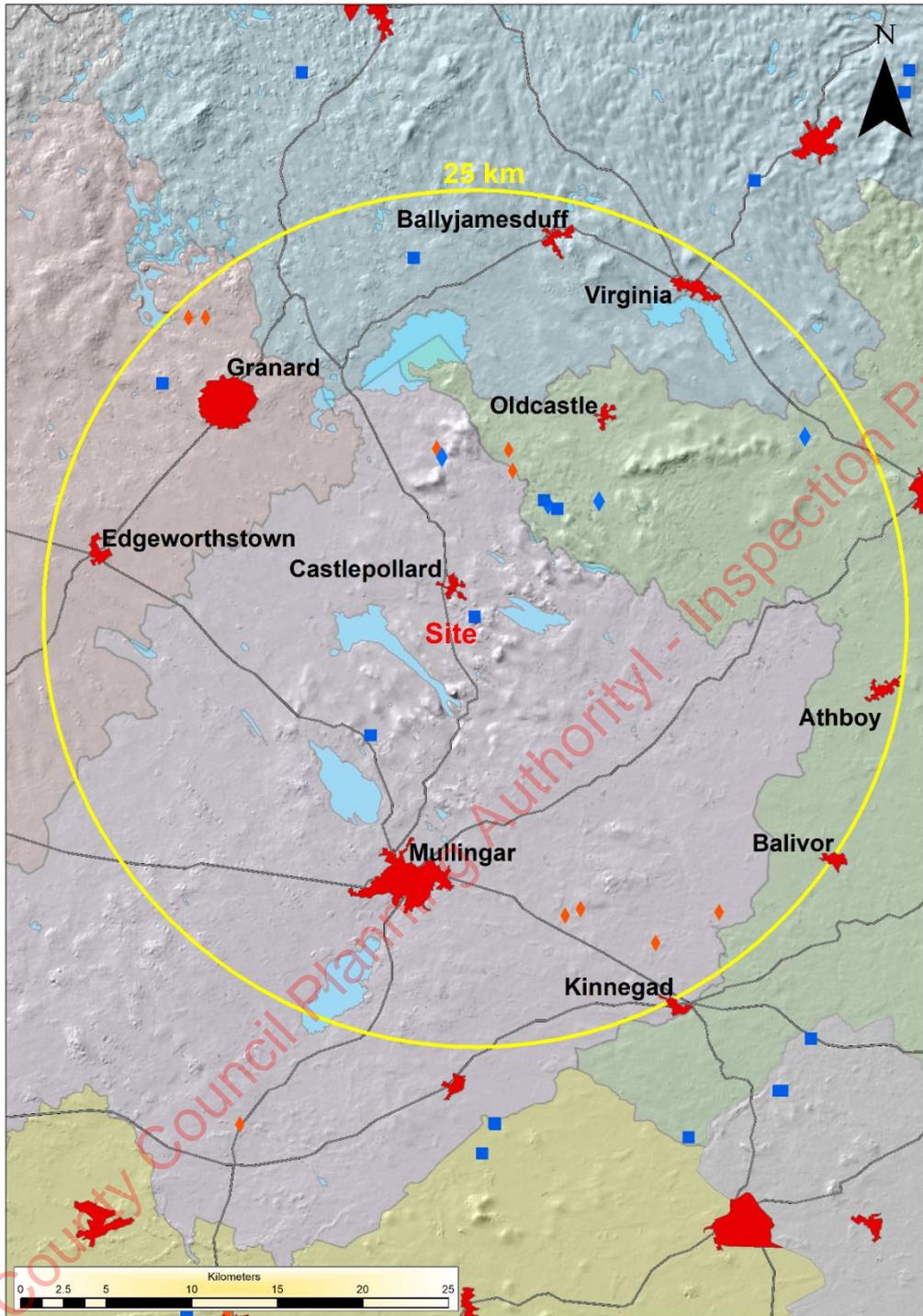


Figure 3 Map of Wider Region around Castlepollard Quarry

Hill-shaded relief map of Castlepollard Quarry and surrounding region showing 25 km radius market around quarry. Location of active quarries in 2014 (■), sand and gravel pits (◆), and active sand and gravel pits in 2021 (◆). Major towns and national road network and parts of regional network are also shown. Rendered in ArcGIS 10.3.1 using hill-shaded relief map derived from EU-DEM data as a basemap with data from the GSI.

1.2 STRATEGIC PLANNING CONTEXT

1.2.1 EIA DIRECTIVES

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a systematic process undertaken to identify and evaluate the potential environmental impact of proposed projects. The EIA also seeks to consider alternatives and propose mitigation measures to ensure the development is carried out within recognised and accepted standards. Thus, the EIA is a dynamic process in which environmental consideration delivers significantly improved project configurations in respect of environmental protection and sustainability. Projects likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of their nature, size and location are subject to the requirement for an EIA, prior to gaining development consent.

The first EIA Directive (85/337/EEC) came into force in 1985 and applied to a wide range of public and private projects, which were defined in Annexes I and II.

Mandatory EIAs applied to all projects listed in Annex I, which were considered as having significant effects on the environment (e.g., long-distance railway lines, include motorways, airports with a basic runway length \geq 2100 m, etc.).

EIAs at the discretion of the Member State applied to projects listed in Annex II, which the national authorities had to decide whether an EIA was needed. This is done by a "screening procedure", which determines the effects of projects on the basis of thresholds/criteria or a case by case examination.

The EIA Directive of 1985 was amended three times, in 1997, in 2003 and in 2009. The initial Directive of 1985 and the latter three amendments were subsequently codified by Directive 2011/92/EU of 13 December 2011. The latter Directive was itself amended in 2014 by Directive 2014/52/EU.

Article 5 of the EIA Directive provides where an EIA is required, the developer shall prepare and submit an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) previously referred to as an Environmental Impact Statement ('EIS'). The information to be provided by the developer shall include at least:

1. A description of the project comprising information on the site, design, size and other relevant features of the project;
2. A description of the likely significant effects of the project on the environment;
3. A description of the features of the project and/or measures envisaged in order to avoid, prevent or reduce and, if possible, offset likely significant adverse effects on the environment;
4. A description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the developer, which are relevant to the project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the project on the environment; and

5. Any additional information specified in Annex IV relevant to the specific characteristics of a particular project or type of project and to the environmental features likely to be affected.

The EIA procedure can be summarised as follows:

1. The developer may request the competent authority to specify what should be covered by the EIA information to be provided by the developer (Scoping Stage);
2. The developer must provide information on the environmental impact (EIA report – Annex IV);
3. The environmental authorities and the public (and affected Member States) must be informed and consulted;
4. The competent authority decides, taking into consideration the results of consultations; and
5. The public is informed of the decision and can appeal the decision to An Bord Pleanála and challenge the decision before the courts.

The Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), which replaces the previous Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), is the new formal statement or document produced as a result of that process. The EIAR provides information on the receiving environment and assesses the likely significant effects of the project, and proposes mitigation measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate these effects. The function of the EIAR is to provide information to allow the competent authority to conduct the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the proposed development.

1.2.2 PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT ACT 2000

As a member State of the EU, Ireland is required to transpose EU directives into Irish Law within specified periods of their enactment. Prior to 2000, the rules in respect of EIA contained in the various EC Directives were brought into force by the European Communities (EIA) Regulations 1989, the EC (EIA) (Amendment) Regulations, 1999 and the Local Government (Planning & Development) Regulations 1999. These were largely consolidated within the terms of Part X of the Planning & Development Act, 2000, and Part 10 and Schedules 5, 6 and 7 of the 2001 Planning and Development Regulations, 2001. Therefore, under Irish Law, proposed developments are required to comply with the Planning and Development Acts, 2000, as amended and related secondary legislation in the form of Statutory Instruments or Regulations.

A new EIA Directive 2014/52/EU came into effect in 2014, which each Member State is required to transpose into law. Directive 2014/52/EU was finally transposed into Irish Law and adopted in September 1st 2018. The European Union (Planning and Development)(Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 296 of 2018) transposed the EIA Directive 2014/52/EU, and gave further effect to the 2011 Directive by means of extensive amendments to the existing planning legislation. The amended Directive uses the term Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) for what was formerly referred to in Irish legislation as an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

An administrative consolidation of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (No. 30 of 2000) has been issued by the Law Reform Commission on 9th September 2021, and provides a valuable reference to the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended.

The responsibility for the planning and environmental regulation of developments rests with the local authorities, the designated Competent Authority in this instance. These and An Bord Pleanála enforce compliance by attaching conditions relating to the environmental management of granted planning permissions.

In respect of the Planning & Development Regulations S.I. No. 600 of 2001, Schedule 5, Part 1 specifies projects requiring an EIA (reflecting Annex I of the EIA Directive), and Schedule 5, Part 2 specifies those projects where the Member State decides on the thresholds in terms of project scale, as to whether an EIA is required (reflecting Annex II of the EIA Directive). Schedule 6 specifies information to be contained in an EIA, while Schedule 7 specifies the criteria used for determining Sub-Threshold projects, which for reasons of location and characteristics of the development and related impacts, require an EIA.

The relevant classes/scales of development that normally require EIA are set out in Schedule 5 (Part 2) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended. The relevant class of development in the case of a quarry relates to "*Extraction of stone, gravel, sand or clay, where the area of extraction would be greater than 5 hectares*", as per Item 2 (b) of the Schedule. In addition, Paragraph 13(a) of Part 1 requires Environmental Impact Assessment where there is "*Any change or extension of development already authorised, executed or in the process of being executed (not being a change or extension referred to in Part 1,) which would:-*

- i. *result in the development being of a class listed in Part 1 or paragraphs 1 to 12 of Part 2 of this Schedule; and*
- ii. *result in an increase in size greater than – 25 per cent, or an amount equal to 50 per cent of the appropriate threshold, whichever is the greater."*



1.3 GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Government's strategy for the construction sector, Construction 2020, sets out a cross-government action plan to help support a sustainable construction sector over the longer term.

The Government has through the National Development Plan and the National Spatial Strategy made clear its objective to facilitate more balanced social and economic growth throughout the State.

There are two main documents which underpin the direction of spatial development in the county. Firstly, at a National level the National Spatial Strategy and secondly at a Regional level, the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region, albeit the latter have recently been superseded by the Eastern & Midlands Region SRES.

The economic development of Westmeath can no longer be viewed in isolation from adjoining counties and regions. Ireland as a country has become an open economy and as a result the economic development of Westmeath must now be considered in the context of regional, national and global influences.

1.3.1 NATIONAL CONTEXT

1.3.1.1 National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was launched by the government in late 2002 and is designed to provide a framework for balanced social, economic and physical development between the regions for the next 20 years (DoELG 2002). The strategy is based on a hierarchy of settlement; Gateways, Hubs and County Towns along with the need to support the role of smaller towns, villages and diverse rural economies.

The NSS provides a framework to promote and balanced regional development and sustainable growth. It also guides policies, programmes and investment. The strategy emphasizes continued strong growth in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), but with significant improvement in the regions outside the capital and more particularly in the nine gateway cities and nine hub towns.

The NSS recognises that quality of life is increasingly important to people and that unbalanced development affects quality of life. The growing trend of long distance commuting, and the dislocation between centres of employment and residential development are economically, socially and environmentally unsustainable. The NSS recognises that the solution lies in balanced regional development, whereby the potential of each area to contribute to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the State is developed. Ireland's growing population can be accommodated within existing settlements, by renewing and developing our cities, towns and villages, and ensuring that urban land is used sensitively and efficiently in order to provide attractive, sustainable, compact, public transport friendly forms, whilst avoiding urban sprawl.

The strategy emphasizes the critical role of 'Gateway' and 'Hubs' in delivering future economic growth. "The Dublin Gateway is recognised as an international driver of enterprise within the GDA and is supported by regionally designated strategic employment centres, serving the



urban and rural hinterlands. These economic growth areas, which take advantage of nationally important transport hubs and corridors, will provide the focal point for diverse regional enterprise and economic clustering activity. Westmeath is increasingly coming under the influence of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) given its proximity of only c. 65 kms to the Dublin metropolitan area. There is a network of sizable urban settlements within the natural catchment of the Castlepollard Quarry, including the region of central and north Westmeath bordering parts of counties Longford, Cavan and Meath. These settlements include the Gateway town of Mullingar with its own hinterland and sphere of influence, and extensive services. The RPG economic strategy focusses growth on the multi-modal transport corridors of the GDA, which connect the economic growth centres within the region and NSS gateways in adjoining regions (e.g., Mullingar, which lies within 25 km of the quarry).

The NSS 2002-2020 was revoked in 2013, as it had failed to meet its objectives, largely due to: (1) designation of too many hubs and gateways; (2) a lack of resources due to poor fiscal position; (3) weak political buy-in, as revealed by the decentralization plan; and (4) lack of a statutory footing, which meant it received 'due regard' as opposed to 'compliance'. The Government has made clear its objective to facilitate more balanced social and economic growth throughout the State, and has announced it would seek a successor National Spatial Strategy. This would take account of both the need to acknowledge changed national and international circumstances and continue to set long term national planning and development aims. Such balanced regional growth will result in an increased requirement for social and economic infrastructure with a consequential increase in demand for construction aggregates and related products including asphalt.

1.3.1.2 Infrastructure & Capital Investment Plans

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013 was revoked in 2010 and was succeeded by the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Plan 2012-2016. In 2011, the Government agreed an exchequer capital programme amounting to €17 billion for the 5 year period 2012-2016. This €17 billion of Exchequer investment was directed at addressing critical infrastructure investment gaps in order to aid economic recovery, social cohesion and environmental sustainability. The sectors prioritised for investment in the Framework include education, health, jobs and enterprise.

The focus of the capital spending was to be on supporting those sectors and projects which will best contribute to sustainable job creation. The review of Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2012-16 (DoPER 2011) assessed the existing capacity of Ireland's infrastructure and identified remaining gaps that must be addressed to aid economic recovery, social cohesion and environmental sustainability.

The approach identified four main components of the investment strategy, namely:

- Economic infrastructure – encompassing transport networks, energy provision and telecommunications capacity;
- Investment in the productive sector and human capital – such as capital investment in education infrastructure;
- Environmental infrastructure – including our waste and water systems; and

- Critical social investment – such as the health service and social housing programmes.

Amongst the main priorities over the medium term were:

- Ensuring adequate maintenance of the National Road Network in order to protect the value of previous investments; and
- Targeting the improvement of specific road segments where there is a clear economic justification, including advancing two key PPP roads projects.

In September 2015, the Government launched a second Infrastructure and Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021, whose principal stated goal is “Building on Recovery”. With steadily improving public finances, the Government was able to commit to increasing the level of expenditure on capital infrastructure gradually over the programme period, in a way that is sustainable and long term. The plan represented a €42 billion framework for infrastructure investment in Ireland over the period. The plan combined direct investment by the Exchequer of €27 billion, a third phase of PPP investments of about €500 million and State-owned sector investment of around €14.5 billion. In total, this State-backed investment package represented over 3.5 percent of GNP each year between 2016 and 2021, and it supported more than 45,000 construction-related jobs.

The Plan prioritised spending on those areas of greatest need as the economy continued its strong recovery. The considerable improvement in the public finances had allowed the Government to increase the level of expenditure on capital infrastructure gradually over the course of the next six years, in a way that was sustainable and long term in its design and focus. Economic growth is dependent on the capacity to move people and goods around the country quickly and easily, and significant strides had been made since 2000 in improving Ireland’s national transport infrastructure. Nonetheless, transport was allocated the largest sectoral share of 29% of the Exchequer Capital Envelope under the Plan. In particular, the national, regional and local road network was allocated €591 million in 2016, progressively increasing to €1,082 million in 2022, and totaling €6 billion over the period of the Plan.

Continuation of the public capital programme would have beneficial effects on the construction industry, and on the wider economy in terms of employment, continued recovery and national competitiveness. In their report Building a Better Ireland, the Construction Industry Council (2010) stated that as the economy continued to grow and the population increased towards its projected 2020 level of 5,000,000, real planning for the future is vital. It was in this context that, on February 16th 2018, the government adopted “Project Ireland 2040”, the new National Planning Framework—the successor national spatial plan to replace the revoked NSS.

1.3.1.3 Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is the Government’s new overarching public policy initiative, which emphasizes “social outcomes and values consistent with prudent economic and budgetary policy” (DoHPLG 2018). Project Ireland 2040 consists of the National Planning Framework to 2040 and the National Development Plan 2018-2027. These will essentially replace the revoked NSS and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021, respectively. The key difference with all previous spatial planning policies is that it represents an alignment of the investment strategy with the strategic planning policy, to create a unified and coherent

plan for the country. Insofar as the Plan is underpinned by investment and placed on a statutory footing that it will receive 'compliance' as opposed to 'due regard', it will have the force of both funds and law.

The objective of Project Ireland 2040 is to provide a "comprehensive social, economic and cultural infrastructure for all our people to flourish". The policy seeks to achieve ten strategic outcomes, building around overarching themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity. The ten shared priorities will ensure a consistent approach between planning objectives under the National Planning Framework and investment commitments under the National Development Plan. These are:

1. Compact Growth;
2. Enhanced Regional Accessibility;
3. Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities;
4. Sustainable Mobility;
5. A Strong Economy, supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills;
6. High-Quality International Connectivity;
7. Enhanced Amenity and Heritage;
8. Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society;
9. Sustainable Management of Water and other Environmental Resources; and
10. Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services.

1.3.1.3.1 National Planning Framework to 2040

The new draft National Planning Framework (NPF) is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of the country. The NPF sets out a spatial strategy for Ireland, to accommodate in a sustainable and balanced fashion, the significant projected changes in demographics, such as a population growing by an extra million, and which is increasingly aging and living in smaller family units. The NPF will guide development and investment over the next two decades and will empower each region to lead in the planning and development of their communities, based on a common set of national objectives and key principles.

The above vision will be achieved by:

- Developing a new region-focused strategy for managing growth;
- Linking the NPF to a new 10-year investment plan, the National Development Plan;
- Using state lands for certain strategic purposes;
- Supporting the NPF with more environmentally focused planning at local level; and
- Backing-up the NPF in law with an Independent Office of the Planning Regulator.

Some of the key provisions are as follows:

- A roughly 50:50 distribution of growth between the Eastern and Midland region, the Southern and the Northern and Western regions, with 75% of the growth outside of Dublin and its suburbs;
- The five cities in terms of population size (pop. > 50,000): Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, will be targeted for 50% of overall national growth between them, with Ireland's large and smaller towns, villages and rural areas accommodating the other 50% of growth;
- Major new policy emphasis on renewing and developing existing settlements rather than continual expansion and sprawl of cities and towns into the countryside, with a target of at least 40% of all new housing to be delivered within the existing built-up areas of cities, towns and villages on infill and/or brownfield sites;
- Implementation of the NPF will be fully supported by the Government's investment strategy for public capital investment and investment by the State sector in general, as outlined in the National Development Plan;
- The State owns key parts of our cities and towns, the development of which can play a vital role in reshaping those urban areas, providing homes, places of work and recreation, and a new national Regeneration and Development Agency will be established to harnessing public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and investment;
- The future planning and development of our communities at local level will be refocused to enable a national transition to a competitive low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050, through harnessing the country's prodigious renewable energy potential;
- More strategic and co-ordinated planning of our cities and large towns across local authority boundaries will be introduced, including statutorily backed Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans in the five cities;
- The NPF will be given full legislative support within the planning system, including regular reviews and updates to reflect changing circumstances as necessary. The legislation underpinning the Framework will create a new independent Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) to monitor its implementation of the NPF; and
- For each of the three regions, the Regional Assemblies will prepare their own strategy in accordance with the framework, and these will be completed by early 2019 and will be known as Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). County and City Development Plan review cycles will then fall in to line with their respective regional strategies, ensuring that the shared vision is carried through to the local planning level.

The NPF includes 75 National Policy Objectives, of which the following are considered particularly relevant here:

National Policy Objective 1a

The projected level of population and employment growth in the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly area will be at least matched by that of the Northern and Western and Southern Regional Assembly areas combined.

National Policy Objective 2a

A target of half (50%) of future population and employment growth will be focused in the existing five cities and their suburbs.

National Policy Objective 3a

Deliver at least 40% of all new homes nationally, within the built-up footprint of existing settlements.

National Policy Objective 3b

Deliver at least half (50%) of all new homes that are targeted in the five Cities and suburbs of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, within their existing built-up footprints.

National Policy Objective 3c

Deliver at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements other than the five Cities and their suburbs, within their existing built-up footprints.

National Policy Objective 4

Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being.

National Policy Objective 5

Develop cities and towns of sufficient scale and quality to compete internationally and to be drivers of national and regional growth, investment and prosperity.

National Policy Objective 6

Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets, that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity and enhanced levels of amenity and design quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area.

National Policy Objective 12

The Government will establish a National Regeneration and Development Agency to work with local authorities, other public bodies and capital spending departments and agencies to co-ordinate and secure the best use of public lands, investment required within the capital envelopes provided in the National Development Plan and to drive the renewal of strategic areas not being utilised to their full potential. The Government will consider how best to make State lands available to such a body to kick-start its development role and to legislate for enhanced compulsory purchase powers to ensure that the necessary transformation of the places most in need of regeneration can take place more swiftly and effectively.



National Policy Objective 32

To target the delivery of 550,000 additional households to 2040.

National Policy Objective 35

Increase residential density in settlements, through a range of measures including reductions in vacancy, re-use of existing buildings, infill development schemes, area or site-based regeneration and increased building heights.

National Policy Objective 75

Ensure that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the National Planning Framework are subject to the relevant environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA and AA as appropriate.

Key future planning and development and place-making policy priorities for the Eastern and Midland Region include:

- Enabling the complementary development of large and county towns in the wider Greater Dublin Area and Midland areas on the key strategic and public transport routes in a regionally co-ordinated manner;
- More effective strategic planning and co-ordination of the future development of nationally and regionally strategic locations at points that straddle boundaries between this and neighbouring regions as in the example of Athlone;
- A focused approach to compact, sequential and sustainable development of the larger urban areas along the Dublin – Belfast economic and transport corridor, along which there are settlements with significant populations such as Dundalk and Drogheda;
- More emphasis on consolidating the development of places that grew rapidly in the past decade or so with large scale commuter driven housing development, with a particular focus on addressing local community and amenity facility provision in many of the larger commuter towns;
- Preparing and implementing a regional priorities programme, to shape and inform delivery of the Regeneration and Development Initiative. It should identify significant ready-to-go city, rural town and village and rural rejuvenation priorities which could harness publicly owned land and other assets that are not being used presently, which together with community and wider private and public sector support and investment, could deliver transformation in an integrated manner;
- Tourism development and promotional branding to ensure that areas like the Midlands and Lakelands areas are developed and promoted in such a way as to play their full part in tapping the economic potential in the region;
- Harnessing the potential of the region in renewable energy terms across the technological spectrum from wind and solar to biomass and, where applicable, wave energy, focusing in particular on the extensive tracts of publicly owned areas of peat extraction in order to enable a managed transition of the economies in such areas; and
- Building on the progress made in developing an integrated network of greenways, blueways and peatways, that will support the diversification of rural and regional



economies and promote more sustainable forms of travel and activity based recreation utilising canals, former railways, and other routes.

1.3.1.3.2 National Development Plan 2018 to 2027

The National Development Plan (NDP) is the companion document to the NPF and is a ten year strategy for public capital investment of almost €116 billion. This equates to almost €12 billion annually and represents a substantial increase in the average annual capital budget over that envisaged in the 2nd Infrastructure and Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021. The NDP will underpin the NPF and drive its implementation, as well as driving long-term economic, environmental and social progress across all parts of the country over the next ten years.

The future success of Ireland rests on ensuring readiness for a changing world and the continued successful development of the knowledge economy, and as such on also adopting a strongly strategic approach to public capital investment in the NDP. The NDP represents a response to significant deficits in Ireland's public infrastructure and identifies the strategic priorities for public capital investment for all sectors.

There are many major challenges that form the context for the NPF and the NDP's strategic investment priorities, and these include:

- Demographic change;
- Need for Ireland to become a low-carbon, climate-resilient society;
- Brexit; and
- Realising sustainable growth.

The NDP is a blueprint, setting out a strategic framework for public capital investment over the next ten years with a particular focus, beyond simply underpinning the NPF, but on achieving the following over-arching objectives:

- Meeting Ireland's infrastructure and investment needs over the next ten years through a total investment of an estimated €116 billion over the period; and
- Reforming how public investment is planned and delivered by shifting to integrated regional investment plans, stronger co-ordination of sectoral strategies to secure mutually reinforcing outcomes, and more rigorous selection and appraisal of projects to secure value-for-money.

Substantial growth is planned in public capital investment over the coming years, but this must be consistent with the fundamental requirements of overall economic and fiscal sustainability. Over the period 1995 to 2015, Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Ireland was comparable to the EU15 average of 3% over the same period. This indicates that a value of 3% of national income can be considered as an appropriate target for the long-term average level of public capital spending. Under the NDP, it is projected that public capital investment will reach 3.8% of Gross National Income (GNI) in 2021 and 4% by 2024, with sustained investment averaging 4% on an annual basis over the period 2022 to 2027. Public capital investment in Ireland will therefore become among the highest in the EU, and will also ensure that public

investment underpins the sustainability of economic growth, but avoids contributing to economic instability and exacerbating any risks of unbalanced and inflationary growth.

Exchequer funding allocated for public capital investment over the ten-year period will amount to €91 billion, and will be supplemented with State-backed investment by commercial State owned enterprises to generate a total 10-year investment programme estimated at €116 billion. The Exchequer resources allocated for investment under the NDP are based on projected nominal growth in national income (GNI) averaging 4% over the period 2022-2027. This is consistent with long term growth forecasts for the Irish economy produced by various international organisations. The total annual capital expenditure will thus increase from €8.4 billion in 2018 to €14.0 billion in 2027 under the Plan.

Indicative resource allocations for delivery of the National Strategic Outcomes, and for named Strategic Investment Priorities under each Outcome, over the period ten-year period are detailed in the Plan (See Table 3.2, p. 21-22 of NDP) These allocations will be updated and adjusted where necessary as the Plan is implemented, in light of:

- Progress achieved in relation to public capital investment priorities currently underway or planned;
- Ongoing assessment of longer-term infrastructural priorities across sectors underpinning the implementation of NPF priorities; and
- Different planning horizons applying to different types of capital expenditure.

This will allow for appropriate flexibility and responsiveness of capital allocations to changing circumstances and priorities.

1.3.2 REGIONAL CONTEXT

The *National Spatial Strategy (NSS)* for Ireland set out the basis on which all areas of the country will have the opportunity to develop to their potential within a national spatial planning framework for the period up to 2020 (DoEHLG 2002). The Regional Authorities were entrusted with the important responsibility of implementing the NSS and successor spatial plans at regional level.

The Planning and Development Act, 2000 conferred on the Regional Authorities the power to make Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) for their functional areas. The RPGs, which also incorporate a socioeconomic development strategy, are intended to constitute a strategic planning framework for the period 2010-2022 for the development of each region and for inter-regional cooperation. The strategic policies and objectives set out in the RPG will form the backdrop for socio-economic planning by national and regional agencies and will constitute the policy framework within which county, city, town and local area development plans will be made. Thus, although the NSS has been revoked, its legacy persists in the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs), which remain in effect until 2022 or until otherwise replaced by new Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies (RSES).

The Southern, the Northern and Western, and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assemblies were established on 1st January 2015, following on from the dissolution of the Border, Midland and Western and the Southern & Eastern Regional Assemblies, under the Government's regional reform process, as enacted in the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The Eastern

and Midland Regional Assembly has twelve constituent local authorities split into three Strategic Planning Areas. The Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019-2031 was adopted by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly on June 28th 2019 (EMRA 2019). The RPGs for the Midland Region are now superseded by the RSES, and will be incorporated into the next iteration of the Westmeath County Development Plan.

The review of the Westmeath County Development Plan has been completed and the new Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 has come into effect as of May 3rd 2021. The quarry is currently permitted under P.A. Ref. 01/525, PL 25.128072. The application for planning permission for continuance of use and operation of the existing quarry, including deepening of the quarry that will accompany this document (i.e., EIAR), will be submitted under the new CDP. Thus, the prevailing CDP during the application for, and life of, the project will be reflective of the 2019 RSES, and not the 2010 RPGs. Thus, the RSES for the Eastern & Midland Region 2019–2031 are discussed in the next subsection.



1.4 EASTERN & MIDLAND REGIONAL SPATIAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY 2018-2031

A Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape future development and to better manage regional planning and economic development throughout the Eastern & Midland Region. The RSES identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives.

The principal statutory purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Region. The RSES is a significant evolution of regional policy-making and replaces the 2010-2022 Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs).

Developing the Strategy is achieved through the integration of spatial and economic policy. By ensuring good alignment with European and National policy, the RSES can ensure that investment is targeted towards identified policy and objectives. Key policy parameters for the RSES growth strategy are also set by national policy documents, including Project Ireland 2040 (i.e., NPF and NDP 2018-2027) and Ireland's National Enterprise Policy 2015-2025, Enterprise 2025.

One of the key drivers for the NPF is the promotion of effective regional development that manages more balanced growth between the three Irish Regions—the Eastern & Midland Region, the Northern & Western Region and the Southern Region. The NPF sets out a preferred 'regional parity' scenario in which the growth of the other Regions would at least match that of the Eastern and Midland Region.

The key elements identified at the national level, which set the parameters for the development of the RSES growth strategy, include:

- Regional parity between the EMRA, and NWRA and SRA combined;
- Regional concentration toward cities and some regionally important larger settlements;
- A focus on contained growth and reduced sprawl by targeting infill and brownfield lands in existing built-up areas;
- Sequential provision of infrastructure with some critical infrastructure in place to promote investment;
- A Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan to deliver compact regeneration and growth in the Dublin metropolitan area; and
- A comprehensive approach to rural fabric supporting sustainable growth and reversing decline.

The Eastern & Midland Region is the smallest in terms of land area but the largest in population size, with over 2.3 million people. The Eastern and Midland Region is also the primary economic engine of the state providing more than 1 million jobs. The main settlement is the capital city of Dublin, which is home to 1.2 million people and is supported by a network of regional and county towns and an extensive rural hinterland.

The Region contains some of the fastest growing communities in the Country which increases demand for housing, infrastructure and services in those areas. In line with the prevailing state-wide trend of urbanisation, the Region saw the continued increase in the share of population residing in urban areas. However, alongside this is a trend for counter urbanisation with strong growth in the peri-urban and rural areas surrounding Dublin.

A key objective of the NPF is to enable all parts of the Country – both urban and rural – to achieve their full potential. The RSES reflects this core objective and aims to strengthen the fabric of rural Ireland, supporting rural towns and communities as well as the open countryside, improving connectivity, and supporting job creation, particularly in a more diverse range of sectors. The rejuvenation of rural towns and villages requires that appropriate job creation can be supported in rural areas. Traditional sectors such as agriculture, tourism, extractive industries and forestry are complemented by diversification in sectors such as food, renewable energy and opportunities provided from improved digital connectivity.

The RSES sets out a settlement and economic growth strategy that seeks to ensure that the needs of the Region's citizens are met. Thus, there is significant policy alignment between the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the NPF's National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs), to which the development of the Regional Strategic Outcomes in the RSES are closely aligned and supportive.

The Vision Statement of the RSES is "To create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all."

The Strategy is underpinned by key cross-cutting principles that reflect the three pillars of sustainability; Social, Environmental and Economic, and expressed in a manner which best reflects the challenges and opportunities of the Region. The three Key Principles are:

- **Healthy Placemaking:** To promote people's quality of life through the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, visit, invest and study in.
- **Climate Action:** The need to enhance climate resilience and to accelerate a transition to a low carbon society recognising the role of natural capital and ecosystem services in achieving this.
- **Economic Opportunity:** To create the right conditions and opportunities for the Region to realise sustainable economic growth and quality jobs that ensure a good living standard for all.

The NPF sets the policy parameters for the Region to better manage the growth of Dublin as a city of international scale supported by the growth of the key Regional Growth Centres of Athlone, Dundalk and Drogheda, which form the upper two tiers in the settlement hierarchy.

Strategically located in the centre of Ireland at a key node on the River Shannon between Dublin and Galway, Athlone has direct national connectivity to towns such as Longford, Mullingar, Tullamore, Maynooth, Portlaoise, Ballinasloe and Roscommon. Due to its scale of population, employment and services, Athlone acts as a key regional centre for an extensive catchment that extends into the Northern and Western Region. Athlone is situated c. 50 km west southwest of Castlepollard, such that is unclear to what extent the proposed growth of Athlone will benefit the quarry at Castlepollard.

To achieve effective regional development, Dublin and the Regional Growth Centres will be supported by the complementary development and regeneration of a small number of selected Key Towns. The RSES identifies a third tier of Key Towns, such as Swords, Mullingar, Portlaoise and Graiguecullen (Carlow). They are large economically active service and/or county towns, with high quality transport links that play an important service role for their catchments and that have the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement Dublin and the Regional Growth Centres. Mullingar is situated c. 15.5 km southwest of Castlepollard, and thus lies within the natural market of the quarry, such that the proposed development and regeneration of Mullingar will certainly benefit the Castlepollard Quarry through demand for aggregates.

The town of Mullingar, with a population of 20,928 in 2016 is located on the Dublin to Sligo rail line and M4 motorway, provides an essential role in supporting population and job growth and in this regard acts as a crucial centre for the surrounding hinterland. The advancement of Mullingar includes the promotion of economic development and employment creation; support for the development of the town's assets in built and natural heritage; encourages the continued investment in arts, culture and outdoor recreational activities; and provides for the continued development of the tourist economy. The consolidation and regeneration of Mullingar is a key priority to support the overall role and function of the town. The promotion of town centre enhancements and public realm improvements will contribute to the sustainability of the town centre and improve opportunities for sustainable transport choices.

The RSES provides Regional Policy Objectives in respect of the Mullingar, which are relevant to this proposal, and are given here:

RPO 4.64 Support Mullingar's role as a tourism hub having regard to its accessibility to key tourist destinations in the region, including proximity to natural amenities and recreational opportunities including the Galway to Dublin Greenway.

RPO 4.65 Promote the plan led development and regeneration of publicly owned land banks in the town for employment, education, community, cultural and recreational opportunities and to support the economic development and regeneration of the town centre.

RPO 4.67 Support Mullingar's role as an important employment hub by promoting economic development and clustering of related enterprises.

Supporting the regional driver role of Key Towns, are Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, which are towns such as Castlepollard that contain a reasonable level of jobs and services and which adequately caters for the people of its service catchment. This may include sub-county market towns and commuter towns with good transport links, which have capacity for continued commensurate growth.

A key objective of the NPF is to enable all parts of the country – both urban and rural – to achieve their full potential. Hence, the RSES aims to strengthen the fabric of rural Ireland, supporting rural towns and communities as well as the open countryside.

RPO 4.77 In development plan policy, local authorities shall prioritise the regeneration of rural towns and villages through identification of significant regeneration projects for rural villages and rural areas which could harness untapped assets with

community and wider private and public sector support and investment including the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

RPO 4.79 Local authorities shall identify and provide policies that recognise the contribution that small towns, villages and rural areas contribute to social and economic wellbeing. As part of this policy provision that seeks to support and protect existing rural economies such as valuable agricultural lands to ensure sustainable food supply, to protect the value and character of open countryside and to support the diversification of rural economies to create additional jobs and maximise opportunities in emerging sectors, such as agri-business, renewable energy, tourism and forestry enterprise is supported.

The RSES provides Regional Policy Objectives in respect of the Rural Economy, one of which is relevant to this proposal, and is given here:

RPO 6.7 Support local authorities to develop sustainable and economically efficient rural economies through initiatives to enhance sectors, such as agricultural and food, forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bioeconomy, tourism, and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting the natural landscape and built heritage.

1.5 WESTMEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027

The County Development Plan (CDP) 2021-2027 sets out the Council's proposed policies and objectives for the development of the County over the Plan period. The CDP seeks to develop and improve, in a sustainable manner, the social, economic, environmental and cultural assets of the County. Consideration will be given to the policies and objectives in the CDP that are of relevance to the proposed development at Deerpark.

Since the adoption of the Westmeath CDP 2014–2020 there have been significant developments at national and regional level in terms of strategic economic and planning policy - in particular, the publication of the National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040 (NPF), the National Development Plan 2018-2027 (NDP) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) 2019–2031.

The new CDP policy context is primarily guided and informed by NPF and the RSES in addition to the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the relevant ministerial guidelines.

In terms of the settlement hierarchical structure, the NPF revoked the linked Gateway status which was attributed to the gateway towns of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar under the NSS. Athlone has now been designated as a 'Regional Centre' and has been identified as a focal point within the region and neighbouring regions in economic and employment, transport, education and public service delivery and retailing terms. The designation of Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre supported by the identification of Mullingar as a Key Town in the National Planning Framework has elevated Westmeath's position in the Midlands region. The inclusion of Athlone as a regional driver will provide for increased employment and investment opportunities supported by the strong tourism assets identified throughout the County and targeted regeneration projects.

1.5.1 CHAPTER 2. CORE STRATEGY

The Core Strategy focuses on defining a settlement hierarchy for the County that is consistent with the NPF and RSES, and transposing the prescribed NPF and RSES housing and population targets set at County level for the rural and urban centres identified within the settlement hierarchy.

In relation to Westmeath, the Settlement hierarchy for the region designates Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre and Mullingar as a Key Town. This designation for Athlone and Mullingar sits within a wider settlement hierarchy which consists of seven settlement tiers as follows; Dublin City and Suburbs; Regional Growth Centres; Key Towns; Self Sustaining Growth Towns; Self Sustaining Towns; Towns and Villages; Rural.

Key Towns are large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres (i.e., Mullingar). Self-Sustaining Growth Towns are those with a moderate level of jobs and services – includes sub-county market towns and commuter towns with good transport links and capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 2.5 Support the continued growth and sustainable development of Mullingar to act as a growth driver in the region and to fulfil its role as a Key Town in accordance with the principles and policies of the RSES.

CPO 2.6 Prepare a local Area Plan (LAP) for Mullingar to align with the RSES and this Core Strategy.

The CDP identifies Castlepollard as a Self-Sustaining Growth Town. Castlepollard is the largest town in the northern part of the County and is an important economic driver for areas that are comparatively remote from the main population centres of the region.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 2.7 Promote consolidation in Self-Sustaining Growth Towns coupled with targeted investment where required to improve local employment, services and sustainable transport options and to become more self-sustaining settlements, in line with settlement specific policy contained within Chapter 8 of the plan.

Westmeath County Council shall ensure that the future spatial development of Westmeath is directed by means of a plan-led approach, directing residential and employment generating development to locations in accordance with National and Regional Policy. This approach is enshrined in a series of Core Strategy Policy Objectives, one of which may have a bearing on the proposed development, and which is given below.

It is a Policy Objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 2.15 In the assessment of development proposals, to take account of transport corridors, environmental carrying capacity, availability and/or capacity to provide waste water and water supply services, potential to conflict with Water Framework Directive objectives, potential to impact on the integrity of European sites and Annexed Habitats and species, features of biodiversity value including ecological networks, impact on landscape and visual characteristics, education and other socioeconomic objectives.

1.5.2 CHAPTER 5. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

The aim of the Plan is to facilitate the economic development of Westmeath to create a viable and favourable economic environment for business and enterprise whilst delivering sustainable jobs, employment opportunity and an enriched standard of living for all.

Policies and objectives in respect of Economic Development that are relevant to the proposed development are given below. It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 5.2 Facilitate the economic development of Westmeath to create a viable and favourable economic environment for business and enterprise whilst delivering sustainable jobs, employment opportunity and an enriched standard of living for everyone, both within the County and beyond.

CPO 5.10 Accommodate valid propositions for enterprise development that may emerge for which there are strong locational or asset-based drivers that do not apply to the same extent elsewhere.

Mullingar

Mullingar is the County town and a designated Key Town with a strategic central location within the County, and as such is a strong economic driver with the capacity to act as a regional driver and complement Athlone, the Regional Growth Centre.

It is an Economic Development policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 5.16** Provide for, as part of any future Local Area Plan (LAP) for Mullingar, the development of Mullingar as an attractive, vibrant and highly accessible Key Town and economic base for the Region.
- CPO 5.17** Support Mullingar's role as an important employment hub by promoting economic development and clustering of related enterprises. Continue to build resilience within Mullingar's enterprise base, to allow businesses to withstand new challenges and realize sustained growth and employment creation for the longer-term.
- CPO 5.19** Promote the plan led development and regeneration of publicly owned land banks in Mullingar for employment, education, community, cultural and recreational opportunities and to support the economic development and regeneration of the town centre.

Castlepollard

Castlepollard is a self-Sustaining Growth Town and an important driver for the local economy of north Westmeath and its bordering counties. Opportunity exists in building upon its established economic base, in particular the strong manufacturing, retail and agricultural sectors, promoting its role as a tourism base for north Westmeath and securing benefits from spin-offs given its proximity to Mullingar.

It is an Economic Development policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 5.21** Seek to encourage investment in self-sustaining towns by identifying and establishing new economic roles and functions and enhancement of local infrastructure and amenities; facilitating amenities and services catch-up, jobs and/or improved sustainable transport links to surrounding settlements.
- CPO 5.22** Support the proportionate economic growth of and appropriately designed development in self-sustaining towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal.

Rural Places: Towns, Villages and the Countryside

Westmeath's rural towns, villages and the open countryside are vital to sustaining the County's wider rural hinterland, providing sustainable rural employment including local services provision, appropriate scale commercial enterprises, indigenous industry and micro-enterprise.

It is an Economic Development policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 5.29** The Council will favourably consider proposals for enterprise and employment uses on their merits in rural locations and where their specific location offers amenity, environmental and economic advantage. Such enterprises or considered industrial projects, new or expanded, may sometimes require sites outside



settlements because of their size or other specific site requirements. Such projects will be assessed taking account of:

- The contribution of the proposed development to the county's economy;
- The contribution of the proposed development to the county's environment and the principles of sustainable development;
- Assessment of any potential environmental effects;
- The economic viability and availability of alternative sites; and
- National planning policy

It will be the responsibility of the developer to explore all environmental impacts, both local and of wider consequence. The Council will consider not only the immediate needs and benefits, but the wider long-term environmental effects of the proposal.

1.5.3 CHAPTER 8. SETTLEMENT PLANS

The aim of the Plan is to create a network of attractive, liveable towns and villages in the county with increased levels of population, employment activity and enhanced levels of amenity that support a high quality of life and well-being.

Castlepollard

Castlepollard serves as the principal town in the northern part of the county and is located close to counties Meath, Cavan and Longford. The town is located 20 km north of Mullingar and 97 km west of Dublin. It is served by a good quality road network, three regional roads converge in the centre of the town; the R394 from Mullingar to Finnea which links to the N55, the R195 to Oldcastle, and the R395 from Delvin to Edgeworthstown which links to the M4 and N55. According to the 2016 census, the population of the town was 1,163 residents

Castlepollard is recognised as the main service centre in north Westmeath and is designated as a Self-Sustaining Growth Town and thus is an important economic driver for the region. Opportunity exists to increase the economic profile of the town by zoning additional lands for employment use and by maximizing the potential of the strategic location of Castlepollard as a tourist base for local attractions such as Tullynally Castle, Fore Abbey, Mullaghmeen Forest and Lough Lene. The significant tourism potential of this area is widely recognised due to the unique cluster of noteworthy heritage sites and visitor attractions within a small geographical area, coupled with an exceptional picturesque landscape of hills and limestone lakes.

Significant residential development in Castlepollard in recent years has resulted in a population increase of 30% since the 2002 census. The development strategy for Castlepollard is to support new housing and population growth, facilitating compact growth and providing a viable alternative to rural one-off housing. There is potential for better use of under-utilised and vacant sites and buildings within the existing footprint of the town, which could drive the delivery of quality housing, services and employment opportunities.

It is a Settlement Plan policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 8.1 Promote the development of Castlepollard as a driver of economic growth for the North Westmeath region and fulfil its role as a designated Self-Sustaining Growth Town.

1.5.4 CHAPTER 9. RURAL WESTMEATH

The aim of the Plan is to support the role of rural areas in maintaining a stable population base through a strong network of villages and small towns and strengthening rural communities by supporting a resilient rural economy and the sustainable management of land and resources. Traditionally, rural areas have been largely dependent on farming, but this is no longer the case. The facilitation of sustainable sources of income and enterprise such as rural tourism, farm diversification, forestry, rural based enterprise to complement the agri-food sector and an increasing potential for the growth of the renewable energy sector is encouraged.

Policies and objectives in respect of Rural Westmeath that are relevant to the proposed development are given below. It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 9.24 Restrict development not related to farming practices and tourism in all High Amenity Areas, with the exception of housing for the immediate family (son/daughter) of established residents living on landholdings, who demonstrate a housing need and have long-term intrinsic links with the area. The entire landholding will be demonstrated to have been in the resident's ownership 5 years prior to the date of application.

The Council will continue to support the role of rural areas and the countryside in sustaining the rural economy and its role as a key resource for agriculture and agri-food, forestry, energy production and carbon reduction, tourism, recreation, **mineral extraction** and/or other new and emerging rural based enterprises. Some enterprise and employment uses may not always be appropriately located on Enterprise and Employment Zoned lands, and may require sites outside settlements because of their size, type or specific site requirements. Such developments will be subject to policy objectives in relation to development accessing National Roads, in the context of traffic safety and the protection of the National Road Network.

Extractive Industry

The County contains a variety of natural resources such as raw materials critical to the construction industry, in the form of sand, gravel, stone reserves, and including high purity limestones and shale used in cement and magnesia manufacture, as well as base metal deposits. The Council recognises the potential of these resources to underpin construction output and provide employment and economic growth in the local and regional economy, as well as the need to exploit such resources in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner.

The Council acknowledges that a balance is required between the needs of the construction industry and the need to protect the environment. As a result of the Section 261A process, the Council concluded that there are 42 quarries in the county.

The suitability of any extraction enterprise shall be assessed on the basis of the sensitivity of the local environment, the scale of the development proposed and the capacity of the road network in the area to accommodate associated traffic. Extractions that would result in a

reduction of the visual amenity of Areas of High Amenity or damage to areas of scientific importance or of geological, botanical, zoological and other natural significance, including all designated European Sites, shall not be permitted.

All extraction operations shall be subjected to landscaping requirements and worked out quarries shall be rehabilitated to a use agreed with the Planning Authority, which could include recreational, amenity and end-of-life uses. The use of these rehabilitated sites shall be limited to inert waste as defined in the Waste Management (Licensing)(Amendment) Regulations, 2002, and shall be authorised under the provisions of the Waste Management Act, as amended.

The Planning Authority will have regard to the Department of the Environment's Guidelines for Planning Authorities for Quarries and Ancillary Activities, 2004 when assessing applications relating to the extraction industry. Bonds or levies will be required by the Council as a condition of any planning permission granted to ensure satisfactory reinstatement on completion of extraction. The Council will require the payment of a contribution towards the cost of road improvement and reinstatement works necessitated by permitted developments.

The Council considers that there are already sufficient aggregate deposits available without requiring new or extended extraction pits in esker systems or any new quarries on greenfield lands. It is the policy of the Council to take cognisance of existing levels of extraction in considering new applications for development on greenfield sites and **preference will be given to the sustainable continuation or extension of existing quarries.**

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 9.62 Ensure that development for aggregate extraction, processing and associated concrete production does not significantly impact the following:

- Areas of Geological interest as identified in the County Esker Survey
- Existing and Candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- Existing and proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs)
- Other areas of importance for the conservation of flora and fauna
- High Amenity Areas
- Zones of archaeological potential
- Important aquifers and sensitive groundwater resources
- The vicinity of a recorded monument
- Sensitive landscape areas
- Established rights of way and walking routes.

CPO 9.63 Facilitate adequate supplies of aggregate resources to meet the future growth needs of the County and the wider region where there is a proven need for a certain mineral/aggregate and to exercise appropriate control (including ongoing

consideration of environmental impacts) while addressing key environmental, traffic and social impacts and details of rehabilitation.

- CPO 9.64** Facilitate the exploitation of the County's natural resources and to exercise appropriate control over the types of development, including rural housing taking place in areas containing proven deposits, whilst also ensuring that such developments are carried out in a manner which would not unduly impinge on the visual amenity or environmental quality in the area.
- CPO 9.65** Ensure that extractions (quarries / sand and gravel pits) which would result in a reduction of the visual amenity of areas of high amenity or damage to designated sites, habitat types or species shall not be permitted.
- CPO 9.66** Ensure that extractive developments do not adversely impact on environmental quality, including water quality, tourism value, existing infrastructure, residential amenity or the amenity value of neighbouring lands.
- CPO 9.67** Ensure that all extractions shall be subjected to landscaping requirements and that worked out quarries should be rehabilitated to a use agreed with the Planning Authority which could include recreational, biodiversity, amenity or other end-of-life uses. The use of these rehabilitated sites shall be limited to inert waste and sites shall be authorised under the appropriate waste regulations.
- CPO 9.68** Ensure that the extractive industry and associated development minimises adverse impacts on the road network in the area and that the full cost of road improvements, including during operations and at time of closure, which are necessary to facilitate those industries are borne by the industry itself.

1.5.5 CHAPTER 10. TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENERGY

The aim of the Plan is to achieve a sustainable, integrated and low carbon transport system with excellent connectivity within and to Westmeath by enhancing existing strategic transportation infrastructure in the County. To provide, improve and extend water, wastewater, surface water and flood alleviation services throughout the county, and to achieve improved environmental protection and to protect public health.

Due to its strategic location in the middle of the country, Westmeath and its main urban centres are well served by a hierarchy of roads, including sections of motorways, national roads, regional roads, local roads and urban roadways. The M6/N6, M4/N4, N51, N52, N55 and N62 traverse the county providing important linkages and networks within, into and out of the county.

Policies and objectives in respect of Transport and Infrastructure that are relevant to the proposed development are given below.



Non-National Roads

There are 306 km of regional routes in the county, of which there are six Strategic Regional Roads in the county linking the main towns to the national routes and motorways. The R395 is designated a Strategic Regional Road and connects Delvin – Castlepollard – Lismacaffrey – Longford County Boundary.

It is a policy objective in respect of Non-National Roads of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 10.52** Safeguard the carrying capacity and safety of the County's regional and local road network.
- CPO 10.55** Improve the standards and safety of our Regional and Local roads and to protect the investment of public resources in the provision, improvement and maintenance of this public road network.
- CPO 10.60** Protect strategic regional roads listed in Table 10.2, against development where a maximum speed limit applies, except in exceptional circumstances, in order to protect the carrying capacity and safety of such roads.
- CPO 10.61** Seek to implement Regional Road Improvement Schemes as indicated in Table 10.3.
- CPO 10.62** Require all applications for significant development proposals affecting Regional or Local Roads to be accompanied by a Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) and Road Safety Audit (RSA), carried out by suitably competent persons, in accordance with the TII's Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines.

Water

The Council remains the designated Water Authority for the assessment and approval of on-site wastewater treatment systems and is responsible for surface water drainage, flooding, monitoring of water pollution and is an agent of Irish Water for the maintenance of operational facilities throughout the County. Protection of the surface and groundwater resources is directly related to health, well-being and ultimately quality of life.

In 2018, the Council produced an average of 33,393 m³ per day of drinking water from three water supply sources (Lough Owel, Lough Lene and the River Shannon) to serve a population of approximately 75,400 in the major towns and villages in the county as well as a wide rural area, through an extensive network of public water mains and public group water supply scheme extensions to the public mains.

The EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) sets out the protection and enhancement of the country's water resources. The River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021 outlines the measures required to improve water quality and achieve 'good' ecological status in water bodies (rivers, lakes, groundwaters) by 2027.

Development management can play a significant role in the prevention of further deterioration of water status and in the protection of existing high and good quality waters. Water protection measures are best incorporated into site selection and site design plans. Therefore, developers should adequately assess environmental risks, take account of site limitations and prepare a water protection plan. Water protection plans should aim to prevent contamination



of storm water, minimise soiled and waste waters, install proper containment for material storage, install appropriate treatment and disposal arrangement for soiled and waste waters and take account of legal requirements for discharges to ground and surface waters.

Ground waters are of importance as a water source for private wells, group schemes and local authority supplies and for use in a range of commercial activities. Over 60% of the public drinking water supply in Westmeath is sourced from Lough Owel and Lough Lene. These lakes are fed by springs (groundwater), with many private homes also relying on individual wells for drinking water supply, such that the protection of groundwater is important. The Council protects the groundwater by ensuring compliance with the following:

- The appropriate control of development in areas of high groundwater vulnerability;
- Implementation of the Programme of Measures as required in the River Basin Management Plans (Eastern and Shannon);
- Licensing of discharges of effluent to groundwater, having particular regard to the requirements of the EC Environmental Objectives (Groundwater) Regulations, 2010 (S.I. No. 9 of 2010);
- Implementation of the European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 605 of 2017) as amended which give effect to several EU Directives including in relation to protection of waters against pollution from agricultural sources ("the Nitrates Directive"), dangerous substances in water, and protection of groundwater; and
- It is essential that ground water resources and abstraction points are recognised, and such sources and their zones of contribution are protected and safeguarded in the interest of the common good and public health.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.83 Support the implementation of the relevant recommendations and measures as outlined in the relevant River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021, and associated Programme of Measures, or any such plan that may supersede same during the lifetime of the plan. Development proposals shall not have an unacceptable impact on the water environment, including surface waters, groundwater quality and quantity, river corridors and associated woodlands.

CPO 10.85 Contribute towards, as appropriate, the protection of existing and potential water resources, and their use by humans and wildlife, including rivers, streams, wetlands, groundwater and associated habitats and species in accordance with the requirements and guidance in the EU Water Framework Directive 2000 (2000/60/EC), the European Union (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (as amended), the European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009 (as amended), the Groundwater Directive 2006/118/EC and the European Communities Environmental Objectives (groundwater) Regulations 2010 (as amended) and other relevant EU Directives, including associated national legislation and policy guidance (including any superseding versions of same).

CPO 10.88 Ensure that in assessing applications for developments, that consideration is had to the impact on the quality of surface waters having regard to targets and measures set out in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 and any subsequent local or regional plans.

CPO 10.89 Ensure that development would not have an unacceptable impact on water quality and quantity including surface water, ground water, designated source protection areas, river corridors and associated wetlands.

The OPW is the lead agency for flood risk management in Ireland and is the national competent authority for the EU 'Flood' Directive. The Council works in close cooperation with the OPW in delivering both the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme for the watercourses of Westmeath and the Athlone Flood Relief Scheme.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.106 Ensure that a flood risk assessment is carried out for any development proposal within 200m of a watercourse and at risk of flooding, in accordance with the "Guidelines for Planning Authorities on the Planning System and Flood Risk Management" (DoEHLG/OPW 2009). This assessment shall be appropriate to the scale and nature of risk to the potential development.

The management of surface and storm water is important so as to avoid increased flood or pollution risk in the storm water network, rivers and streams in the County's towns, villages and rural areas. The Council will require compliance with best practice guidance for the collection, reuse, treatment and disposal of surface waters for all future development proposals.

Sustainable Drainage Systems, commonly known as SuDS is an approach that seeks to manage the water as close as possible to its origin by various engineering solutions that replicate natural drainage processes before it enters the watercourse. The incorporation of SuDS techniques allows surface water to be either infiltrated or conveyed more slowly to water courses using porous surface treatments, ponds, swales, filter drains or other installations.

SuDS provide an integrated approach which addresses water quantity, water quality, amenity and habitat. The Council will require the application of SuDS in development proposals, for example through reducing the extent of hard surfacing, and using permeable pavements.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.119 Require that planning applications are accompanied by a comprehensive SUDs assessment that addresses run-off quantity, run-off quality and its impact on the existing habitat and water quality.

CPO PO 10.123 Ensure appropriate maintenance of surface water drainage infrastructure to avoid flood risk.

Waste Management

The Council seeks to ensure the provision of the highest standards of waste management and environmental services to prevent and control water, air and noise pollution.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.123 Encourage and support waste prevention, minimisation, reuse, recycling and recovery as methods of managing waste.

CPO 10.124 Facilitate the transition from a waste management economy to a green circular economy to increase the value recovery and recirculation of resources.

Air Quality

Air pollution is monitored by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Westmeath County Council.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.130 Promote the preservation of best ambient air quality compatible with sustainable development in accordance with the EU Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe (CAFE) Directive (2008/5/0/EC) and ensure that all air emissions associated with new developments are within Environmental Quality Standards as set out in the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2011 (SI No. 180 of 201) (or any updated/superseding documents).

Noise Pollution

The impact of noise pollution is an important consideration in assessing all new development proposals as it can impact on people's quality of life and health. The Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 give effect to EU Directive 2002/49/EC relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise. The Council will seek through the Development Management process to reduce noise and/or vibration at site boundaries or within adjacent sensitive areas, especially residential areas, by measures such as layout, design and/or attenuation mechanisms.

The Council will require the submission of Noise Impact Assessments where it is proposed to introduce noise creating uses in proximity to noise sensitive uses, such as residential areas, and if permission is being granted may impose conditions mitigating impact. The Council has prepared the Westmeath Noise Action Plan 2013-2018, which sets out an approach to the strategic management and control of environmental noise.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.132 Support the implementation of the Noise Directive 2002/49/EC and associated Environmental Noise Regulations 2006.

CPO 10.133 Support the Implementation of the Westmeath Noise Action Plan 2013-2018 (and any revision made thereto)



CPO 10.134 Require all developments to be designed and operated in a manner that will minimise and contain noise levels having regard to relevant national guidelines and in the absence of national guidelines, to relevant international standards, where appropriate.

Light Pollution

Light spillage from excessive or poorly designed lighting is increasingly recognised as a potential nuisance to surrounding properties and a threat to wildlife. The Council will consider the potential problems of light pollution relating to new development and the intensification or alteration of existing development. The limitation of light pollution is important in the interests of nature conservation, residential amenity and energy efficiency.

It is a Light Pollution Policy Objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.135 Control lighting in urban and rural areas and in particular in sensitive locations, in order to minimise impacts on residential amenity, habitats and species of importance.

1.5.6 CHAPTER 12. NATURAL HERITAGE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The aim of the Plan is to continue to protect and enhance the county's natural heritage and biodiversity and ensure that networks of green infrastructure are identified, created, protected and enhanced to provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits to communities.

Westmeath supports a wide range of habitat types and landscapes, including peatlands, lakes, canals, woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, eskers and hedgerows. Natural heritage and biodiversity are integral to the image of Westmeath and contribute to the well-being and quality of life of those living in and visiting the county.

The Plan sets out to contribute towards the protection of designated ecological sites including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Ramsar Sites, Flora Protection Order Sites, Wildlife Sites (including Nature Reserves), certain entries to the Water Framework Directive Register of Protected Areas, Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs), Wildfowl Sanctuaries and Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs).

Policies and objectives in respect of Natural Heritage that are relevant to the proposed development are given below. It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 12.1 Contribute as appropriate towards the protection of designated sites in compliance with relevant EU Directives and applicable national legislation.

Appropriate Assessment

The Habitats Directive requires that the impacts of any plans or projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites are assessed by the Planning Authority. This process is known as Appropriate Assessment (AA). Appropriate Assessment means an assessment, based on best scientific knowledge, of the potential impacts of a plan or project, wherever located, on the conservation

objectives of any Natura 2000 site within 15 km and the implementation, where necessary, of mitigation or avoidance measures to preclude negative effects.

All projects and plans arising will be screened for Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. A plan or project will only be authorised after the Council has ascertained, based on scientific evidence, Screening for Appropriate Assessment, and subsequent Appropriate Assessment, where necessary, that it will not give rise to significant adverse direct, indirect or secondary effects on the integrity of any European Site (either individually or in combination with other plans or projects).

Following a finding that a proposed development will adversely affect the integrity of a Natura 2000 site, planning permission may only be granted in exceptional cases, in the absence of any alternatives, for Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI) subject to the strict requirements of Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive.

Natura 2000 Sites

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated to conserve habitats pursuant to the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), while Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated to conserve species of European importance pursuant to the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/ECC). These sites are part of a pan-European network of internationally and nationally designated sites known as Natura 2000.

Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive requires that Member States establish the necessary conservation measures for European Sites involving, if need be, appropriate management plans specifically designed for the sites or integrated into other development plans.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 12.4 Protect and conserve Special Areas of Conservation, candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and candidate Special Protection Areas, designated under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives respectively.

CPO 12.5 Ensure that no plans, programmes, etc. or projects giving rise to significant cumulative, direct, indirect or secondary impacts on European Sites arising from their size or scale, land take, proximity, resource requirements, emissions (disposal to land, water or air), transportation requirements, duration of construction, operation, decommissioning or from any other effects shall be permitted on the basis of this Plan (either individually or in combination with other plans, programmes, etc. or projects).

Footnote: Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be a) no alternative solution available, b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the project to proceed; and c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

CPO 12.6 Ensure that any plan or project that could have a significant adverse impact (either by themselves or in combination with other plans and projects) upon the conservation objectives of any Natura 2000 Site or would result in the deterioration of any habitat or any species reliant on that habitat will not be permitted.

Footnote: Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be a) no alternative solution available, b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the project to proceed; and c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

CPO 12.7 Assess any plan or project in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive to determine whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the site either individually or cumulatively upon the integrity, conservation objectives and qualifying interest of any Natura 2000 Site.

CPO 12.8 Require an ecological appraisal for development not directly connected with or necessary to the management of Natura Sites, or a proposed Natura Site and which are likely to have significant effects on that site either individually or cumulatively.

CPO 12.11 Promote the maintenance and as appropriate, achievement of favourable conservation status of habitats and species and to improve the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network, by maintaining and where appropriate, developing features in the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora.

Natural Heritage Areas (NHA)

Under the Wildlife (Amendment Act) 2000, Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) are being designated to conserve flora, fauna, habitats and geological sites of national importance and are legally protected from damage from the date they are formally proposed for designation. Nature conservation is the primary objective and takes precedence over all other activities.

It was from these NHAs that the most important sites were selected for international designation as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

The Council will normally only grant permission where it is clearly demonstrated that a proposal will have no significant adverse impact on the habitats and species of interest in the designated area and its ecological integrity.

Rare and Protected Species and their Habitats

The Council recognise that certain plant, animal and bird species are threatened and rare. This includes nationally rare plants, plants listed in the Red Data Lists of Irish Plants, Flora Protection Order 2015 (or other such Orders) and their habitats, birds listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive, and animals and birds listed in the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 and subsequent statutory instruments. Annex IV species may occur outside of designated sites but still have strict legal protection, such that wherever they are present, all possible measures to avoid damage and disturbance to them must be taken in the formulation of proposals for development.

The planning process will seek to protect rare and threatened species, including species protected by law and their habitats. Applicants must demonstrate that proposals will not have a significant adverse impact on such species and their habitats.

An Ecological Impact Assessment will be required for any proposed development likely to have a significant impact on rare and threatened species, including species protected by law and their habitats. The Council will normally only grant planning permission where it is clearly demonstrated that a proposal will have no significant adverse impact, incapable of satisfactory avoidance or mitigation, on the species of interest and associated habitat(s).

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 12.13** Protect, manage and enhance the natural heritage, biodiversity, landscape and environment of County Westmeath, in recognition of its importance as both a non-renewable resource and a natural asset.
- CPO 12.14** Require all new developments in the early pre-planning stage of the planning process to identify, protect and enhance ecological features by making provision for local biodiversity (e.g., through provision of swift boxes, bat roost sites, green roofs, etc.) and provide links to the wider Green Infrastructure network as an essential part of the design process.
- CPO 12.20** Protect and conserve NHAs and pNHAs including NHAs that become designated and notified to the Local Authority during the lifetime of the Plan and seek to develop linkages between designated sites, where feasible and as resources permit.
- CPO 12.21** Lighting fixtures should provide only the amount of light necessary for personal safety and should be designed so as to avoid creating glare or emitting light above a horizontal plane. Lighting fixtures should have minimum environmental impact and Dark Sky lighting should be considered in the interest of reducing the impact of lighting on wildlife as part of any future planning application, thereby contributing towards the protection of amenity and the protection of light sensitive species such as bats. EUROBATs guidelines should be applied in informing proposed development(s), where relevant.
- CPO 12.22** Require, in special circumstances where protected species/habitats are identified in association with a development proposal, that an 'Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA)' prepared by a suitably qualified and indemnified person be undertaken for a proposed development which may potentially have a significant impact on rare and threatened species.

There are many important wildlife habitats in County Westmeath that do not meet the criteria for designations as an NHA, but are important on a county or local basis, as they act as stepping stones in a wider ecological network. These include rivers and river banks, ponds, small woods and hedgerows which are essential to the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species. Article 10 of the Habitats Directive states that Member States shall endeavour in their land use planning and development policies, to encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 12.24** Protect and where possible enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity, including woodlands, trees, hedgerows, semi-natural grasslands, rivers, streams, natural springs, wetlands, geological and geo-morphological systems, other landscape features, natural lighting conditions, and associated wildlife where these form part of the ecological network and/or may be considered as ecological corridors or stepping stones in the context of Article 10 of the Habitats Directive. Appropriate mitigation and/or compensation to conserve biodiversity, landscape character and green infrastructure networks will be required where habitats are at risk or lost as part of a development.
- CPO 12.25** Recognise that nature conservation is not just confined to designated sites and acknowledge the need to protect non-designated habitats and landscapes and to conserve the biological diversity.

Geology

Westmeath has an extensive and diverse range of geological heritage sites, many of which fall within existing pNHAs and SACs.

Most of the bedrock geology of Westmeath comprises of Carboniferous Limestone, which over time was exposed and subjected to intense weathering leading to some karstic landscape features. The hill at Deerpark is composed of Carboniferous cherty limestone, and the existing quarry is designated a County Geological Sites (CGS) (i.e., Deerpark Quarry: CGS WH005; Primary Theme: IHG8 Lr. Carboniferous). The Site report states that in terms of Management/promotion issues “The geological heritage interest relies on continued working of the quarry as a place to see the strata that is exposed”.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 12.30** Contribute towards the appropriate protection and maintenance of the character, integrity and conservation value of features or areas of geological interest listed in Table 12.3.
- CPO 12.31** Support the implementation of recommendations made in the County Westmeath Geological Audit.
- CPO 12.32** Consult with the Geological Survey of Ireland when undertaking, approving or authorising developments which are likely to impact on County Geological Sites or involve significant ground excavations.
- CPO 12.34** Encourage and promote, where appropriate, public access to geological and geomorphological sites and avoid inappropriate development through consultation with the Geological Survey of Ireland, subject to environmental and habitats assessment.

Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

Trees, woodlands and hedgerows are important natural and landscape assets in County Westmeath and provide a biodiversity function in the provision of food, habitat and shelter in exposed areas and function as pollution filters and carbon sinks. Hedgerows are important habitat and wildlife corridors for small mammals, birds and bat species.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 12.37** Preserve and enhance the amenity and biodiversity value of the County, by promoting the protection of trees, groups of trees and ancient woodlands, of significant amenity value, especially native and broadleaf species.
- CPO 12.39** Discourage the felling of mature trees and hedgerow, particularly species rich roadside and townland boundary hedgerows to facilitate development and seek Tree Management Plans to ensure that trees are adequately protected during development and incorporated into the design of new developments.

Waterways

Inland waterways, which include lakes, rivers, canals and streams, are living systems that are home to a wide variety of habitats and species. They function as ecological corridors that connect related habitats and designated sites, which enable species to move from place to place. Waterways also contribute significantly to the character and amenity of the county and support tourism, recreation and quality of life for those living in and visiting the county.

Westmeath has a number of large lakes, most of which are part of the River Shannon catchment, while Lough Lene, a limestone lake is situated in the Upper Boyne catchment. Many of the water resources have been afforded protection as NHAs, SACs or SPAs.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 12.56** Protect the biodiversity of rivers, streams and other water courses and maintain them in an open state and discourage culverting and realignment.
- CPO 12.57** Consult with Waterways Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Government, Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and local communities on development proposals that may affect inland waterways, rivers, lakes, canals or water courses.
- CPO 12.59** Consult, as appropriate, with Inland Fisheries Ireland in relation to any development that could potentially impact on the aquatic ecosystems and associated riparian habitats.
- CPO 12.60** Ensure that run off from a proposed development does not result in a deterioration of downstream watercourses or habitats.

1.5.7 CHAPTER 13. LANDSCAPE AND LAKE AMENITIES

The aim of the Plan is to improve the understanding of the county's landscape and lakelands, and enhance the overall characteristics, qualities and diversity of landscape character, its sense of place and local distinctiveness in recognition of the amenity potential of the county.

Westmeath is known as the Lakeland County, but its landscape includes a diversity of landscape types, ranging from rolling hills and lakes to peatlands, grasslands, woodlands, eskers and wetlands. The range of different landscapes found in Westmeath each have varying visual and amenity values, topography, exposure and contain a variety of habitats. Each landscape type also has a varying capacity to absorb development relative to its overall sensitivity. It is recognised that the landscape and lakes are key assets in sustaining a high quality of life for the residents of the county and an important sustainable tourism resource.

Policies in respect of Landscape Character and Lake Management that are relevant to the proposed development are given below. It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 13.2** Protect the distinctiveness, value and sensitivity of County Westmeath's landscapes and lakelands by recognising their capacity to sustainably integrate development.
- CPO 13.4** Conserve and enhance the high nature conservation value of the Landscape Character Areas in order to create/protect ecologically resilient and varied landscapes.
- CPO 13.6** Require that development is sensitively designed, so as to minimise its visual impact on the landscape, nature conservation, archaeology and groundwater quality.

Character Area 1 Northern Hills and Lakes

This Landscape Character Area consists of prominent hills topped with chert or cherty limestone with enclosed lakes and areas of peat deposits, mostly fen. The LCA has a rural landscape of particularly high scenic quality containing a number of lakes with several preserved views, Lough Lene Area of High Amenity and Fore Special Heritage Area.

The area is also of high nature conservation value with many NHAs and SACs. The historic settlement of Fore is of high cultural significance due to its monastic origins, including many features of built and cultural interest around the site. There are a number of quarries operating in the area.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 13.8** Protect the landscapes and natural environments of the County by ensuring that any new developments do not detrimentally impact on the character, integrity, distinctiveness or scenic value of their area. Any development which could unduly impact upon such landscapes will not be permitted.
- CPO 13.9** Ensure the preservation of the uniqueness of a landscape character type by having regard to the character, value and sensitivity of a landscape in new development proposals.



CPO 13.10 Ensure development reflects and, where possible, reinforces the distinctiveness and sense of place of the landscape character types, including the retention of important features or characteristics, taking into account the various elements which contribute to their distinctiveness.

CPO 13.12 Require a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for proposed developments with the potential to impact on significant landscape features within the County.

CPO 13.17 Minimise impact on the ecological, archaeological, biodiversity and visual amenity surrounding quarry sites and quarrying of sensitive sites within the Landscape Character Areas including the lake valley landscape, eskers and canal corridor.

Areas of High Amenity (High Landscape Value)

Much of Westmeath's landscape, particularly its lake landscape is highly regarded for its amenity and recreational value and should be protected. The Council has specifically designated several lakes as High Amenity Areas (HAA), including Lough Lene HAA and Lough Derravaragh HAA.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 13.20 Protect High Amenity Areas from inappropriate development and reinforce their character, distinctiveness and sense of place.

Lake Amenities

Westmeath is uniquely positioned given its majestic lakes, the River Shannon and the Royal Canal. Internationally renowned as the 'Lake County', the lakes of Westmeath are of local, national and international status and are a significant asset and resource to the county. The five most important lakes are Lough Ennell, Lough Owel, Lough Derravaragh, Lough Lene and Lough Ree, all of which are within designated High Amenity Areas, SACs, SPAs and NHAs.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 13.29 Protect the County's lakes and their shorelines, islands, amenity and biodiversity from inappropriate development.

Lough Derravaragh

Lough Derravaragh provides one of the enduring images of County Westmeath, because of its associations with the Legend of Lír. The lake is located on the identified Táin Trail (tourist driving/cycling route) and along the proposed northern sector of the Westmeath Way (walking route) and is scenically important. Leisure activities associated with the lake include fishing, canoeing and water sports, while more passive recreational areas are important as retreats for writers, artists and walkers. The landscape around the lake has generally retained its rural character.

Lough Lene

Lough Lene is located in the highly scenic, undulating, hilly landscape in the north of the county, and is designated as an SAC. Its associations with the nearby historic monastic



settlement of Fore and location on an existing tourist trail require its future development to be considered sensitively. Lough Lene is also an important public water supply source for the county.

The lake is particularly known for its clear waters. Recreation in the form of angling is well renowned on Lough Lene. Lough Lene is considered to be located in a sensitive tourist landscape as it lies within the Fore Special Heritage Area.

Views and Prospects

The Council has reviewed the Protected Views in the county, and identified 36 Protected Views, which are categorised according to their significance, at a national, regional, county and local level. It is Council policy to sustain the established character of existing views and protect against development that would adversely impact upon such views. None of these views are located near or incorporate the application site.

Protected views are under constant review, and as such pre-planning discussions with the Planning Authority are essential to agree suitable assessment points for views of strategic and local significance in order to enable the proper visual assessment of a development proposal.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 13.81 Protect and sustain the established appearance and character of views listed in Appendix 5 of this plan that contribute to the distinctive quality of the landscape from inappropriate development.

1.5.8 CHAPTER 14. CULTURAL HERITAGE

Westmeath County Council recognises the importance of identifying and safeguarding our archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage for future generations and aims to do so by means of proper management, sensitive enhancement and/or appropriate development of this resource.

Westmeath has a rich and unique heritage. Tangible aspects of this cultural heritage include archaeological sites and monuments, vernacular structures, and historic buildings – the landscape indicators of our past. Intangible aspects of our cultural heritage include mythology associated with the county such as the story of the Children of Lír, An Táin Bó Cúailgne (the Cattle Raid of Cooley), links to historic figures and events, as well as language, folklore and place names. The vast array of archaeological, built, cultural and natural assets in the county are the cornerstone of our tourism product.

Archaeological Heritage

Archaeological monuments include upstanding structures such as churches, graveyards, castles, ringforts and holy wells, as well as sites that have little or no visible surface expression for example: settlements, burials, fulachta fiadh, ditches and pits. County Westmeath boasts a wealth of archaeological monuments including the royal site of Uisneach, prehistoric barrow burials, wooden trackways, such as the Bronze Age roadway at Mayne, earthworks, crannógs and ringforts. There are many fine examples of mottes, tower houses, and several deserted medieval settlements. The rich ecclesiastical heritage includes church and abbey ruins, graveyards, high crosses and holy wells— notable sites include those in Fore.

The National Monuments Acts 1930-2014 provide for the protection of archaeological sites, monuments, artefacts and shipwrecks that are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP). The list is updated as and when previously unrecorded archaeological sites are discovered, and currently there are over 4,000 archaeological monuments recorded in Westmeath. Where new development is being considered, the archaeological potential of the site should be considered at the earliest stages of planning by checking the National Monuments Service's Archaeological Survey Database on <https://www.archaeology.ie/>.

Policies in respect of Cultural Heritage that are relevant to the proposed development are given below. It is a policy of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 14.5** Seek to ensure the protection and sympathetic enhancement of archaeological heritage, and in this regard applications will be referred to the National Monuments Service, Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht for comment.
- CPO 14.6** Seek to ensure the protection of archaeological sites and monuments and their settings and archaeological objects that are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places, in the ownership/guardianship of the State, or that are the subject of Preservation Orders or have been registered in the Register of Historic Monuments. Seek to ensure the protection and preservation of archaeological sites, which have been identified subsequent to the publication of the Record of Monuments and Places.
- CPO 14.7** Ensure that any development adjacent to an archaeological monument or site shall not be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site, or its setting and shall be sited in a manner which minimises the impact on the monument and its setting. Development which is likely to detract from the setting of such a monument or site will not be permitted.

Fore Special Heritage Area

In recognition of its exceptional archaeological and historical importance and its significant contribution to tourism in north Westmeath, a Special Heritage Management Study has been prepared for Fore (Westmeath County Council 2010). The wealth of the archaeological and historical remains in Fore Village, together with the attractive landscape in which they are set mark this area out as one of national importance. Fore is one of the main tourist attractions promoted in Westmeath under the Ireland's Ancient East brand.

Although the quarry site entrance and access road lie within the Fore Special Heritage Area, the quarry proper lies just west and outside of the Fore Special Heritage Area. Indeed, the proposed development is located on the opposite side of Lough Lene from Fore, with intervening topographic ridges obscuring all views.

It is a policy of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 14.16** Continue to protect and enhance the Fore Special Heritage Area in accordance with the Fore Special Heritage Management Study adopted in 2010, and any update made thereto.



- CPO 14.18** Ensure that new development proposals which have the potential to impact on Archaeological Heritage must be accompanied by an Archaeological Assessment in accordance with requirements of the National Monuments Service Monuments Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
- CPO 14.19** Ensure that development proposals that would detrimentally impact upon the setting and interpretation of archaeological monuments, historic landscape or buildings of architectural value at Fore will not be permitted.
- CPO 14.20** Protect and sustain the established appearance and character of views over the off-road walking routes of Fore, sustain the established appearance and character of views, that contribute to the distinctive quality of the landscape.

Architectural Heritage

Westmeath has many significant built heritage sites and historic landscapes, including such well known examples as Tullynally Castle, Moydrum Castle and Belvedere House & Gardens. Along with fine historic houses and their associated demesne lands and follies, our architectural heritage includes vernacular buildings. In urban settings, there are many areas of architectural significance, several of which have been designated Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), such as in the planned town of Castlepollard and walled town of Athlone. There are also a variety of industrial heritage sites, which include our canals, bridges, railways, mills and distilleries.

Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires planning authorities to include in their CDPs, policies and objectives for the protection, enhancement and preservation of the built heritage in their functional area. The two principal mechanisms for the protection of built heritage assets are by maintaining a Record of Protected Structures (RPS) and designating Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs).

Architectural Heritage and Protected Structures

Each Local Authority has a legal responsibility to compile a Record of Protected Structures (RPS). Structures, or parts of structures, can be added to the Record if they are deemed of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

- CPO 14.27** Protect and conserve buildings, structures and sites contained in the Record of Protected Structures and to encourage the sympathetic re-use and long-term viability of such structures without detracting from their special interest and character.

Architectural Conservation Areas

An Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value, or contributes to the appreciation of Protected Structures, which may be included in a Development Plan where it is considered necessary to preserve its character. ACAs are chosen very often because they contain a group of historic buildings,

have a distinctive street pattern or plot size, which gives the area a distinct character and contributes to the town or village wherein it is located.

The Square and surrounding streetscape extending along the Dublin Road and Church Street in Castlepollard have been designated an ACA.

1.5.9 CHAPTER 16. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

Development Management is the statutory process undertaken in the assessment of planning applications and is an essential tool utilised in implementing the CDP. All planning proposals should comply with the standards applicable to particular development types, be consistent with the policy objectives set out within the CDP and be compliant with legislative requirements.

Pre-Planning Consultation

Pre-planning consultations are facilitated and encouraged by the Planning Authority prior to the making of a formal planning application in accordance with Section 247 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Appropriate Assessment (AA)

In accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (1992), there is a requirement placed on the competent authority to consider and determine the possible nature conservation implications of any plan or project (and also the in-combination impacts with other plans and projects) on the Natura 2000 site network before any decision is made to allow that plan or project to proceed. If the Screening for Appropriate Assessment process considers that Appropriate Assessment is required, the applicant will be required to prepare a Natural Impact Statement.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is the process of examining the potential effects of a proposed development on the receiving environment. The Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) lists the mandatory development thresholds where an Environmental Impact Assessment is required in respect of applications for specified classes. In the case of sub-threshold projects, the Council may request by notice in writing a discretionary EIAR, where it considers that the project proposed would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Other Assessments

Other assessments that may be required as part of planning proposals, in certain instances, include but are not limited to the following:

- Flood Risk Assessment
- Traffic and Transport Assessment
- Architectural Assessment

- Archaeological Assessment
- Landscape Appraisal and Visual Assessment
- Ecological Assessment.

Roads and Transportation

The provision of a safe vehicular access is a prerequisite for all development proposals in the interest of traffic safety for all road users.

It is a policy objective of the Council in assessing development proposals, that the following road safety considerations be taken into account:

CPO 16.35 Traffic Management and Road Safety

All new road layouts should be designed in accordance with the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) and relevant TII publications.

Development proposals should also include provision for a sustainable modal split, with pedestrian and cycling facilities recognised as an important aspect of new design proposals.

Road Safety Audit

A Road Safety Audit may be required to demonstrate that a proposed development does not pose a risk to road users, create a traffic nuisance or contribute to congestion. It should be carried out on all new national road infrastructure projects and on any schemes/proposal which results in a permanent change to the layout of a national road by suitably competent persons, in accordance with TII Publications GE-STY-01024 Road Safety Audit).

Traffic and Transport Assessments (TTAs)

Development proposals that are likely to create significant vehicular movements will be required to undertake a site-specific assessment to demonstrate the impact of the proposal on the integrated transport system by means of a Transport and Transport Assessment (TTA). The TTA should include an assessment of the impact of the proposal on the full range of modes of transport and incorporate traffic impact statements, road safety audits and measures to maximise accessibility of non-private car related movement, carried out by suitably competent persons, in accordance with the 'TII's Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines'.

Extractive Industry (Quarries/Sand and Gravel Pits)

Planning applications for any extractive industry should have regard to the Quarrying and Ancillary Activities (DEHLG 2004), Guidelines for Environmental Management in the Extractive Sector (EPA, 2006), Guidance on Biodiversity in the Extractive Industry (NPWS), GSI's Geological Heritage Guidelines for the Extractive Industry, the Archaeological Code of Practice and the Irish Concrete Federation Environmental Code (2005) and any other relevant superseding policy guidance. Planning applications for any extractive industry should have regard to relevant policy guidance.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to assess planning applications which relate to the extractive industry (including quarries and sand and gravel pits), having regard to the following:

CPO 16.55 Details which should be submitted by the applicant as part of proposal:

- Map detailing total site area, area of excavation, any ancillary proposed development and nearest dwelling and/or any other development within 1km of the application site.
- Description of the aggregate to be extracted, method of extraction, any ancillary processes (crushing etc.), equipment to be used, stockpiles, storage of soil and overburden and storage of waste materials.
- Total and annual tonnage of extracted aggregates, expected life time of the extraction, maximum extent and depth of working and a phasing programme.
- Details of water courses, water table depth and hydrological impacts, natural and cultural heritage impacts, traffic impact and waste management.
- Assessment of cumulative impact when taken with any other extractive operations in the vicinity.
- Likely environmental effects, proposed mitigation measures and restoration.
- Detailed Rehabilitation and after-care proposals. These should include a report with plans and section drawings, detailing the following:

1. Anticipated finished landform and surface/landscape treatments (both of each phase proposed (where applicable) and the excavation as a whole),
2. Quality and condition of topsoil and overburden,
3. Rehabilitation works proposed,
4. Type and location of any vegetation proposed,
5. Proposed method of funding and delivery of restoration/reinstatement works etc.

- Current Legal Planning Status of the Existing Development (Quarry/Sand and Gravel Pit).
- Justification on need for the development proposed, the extent of existing authorised quarry supplies available and the impact of the development on the local environment.
- Limited duration on permissions may be provided to allow for the reevaluation of the development in light of unforeseen environmental implications and in light of changes in environmental standards and technology.

CPO 16.56 Require by way of planning condition that the developer lodge a financial bond to ensure the satisfactory reinstatement of the site following the completion of extraction. This bond shall be index linked.

CPO 16.57 Require that a special contribution levy may be required from the developer towards the cost of upgrading or repairing the local roads serving the quarry and to minimise the adverse impacts of associated quarry operations on the road network.

Archaeology

The importance of the preservation in-situ of all archaeology remains is recognised by the Council. It is also recognised that in exceptional circumstances, preservation by record may be required.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 16.60 In the assessment of any application for development which is sited within the designated zone of archaeological potential and/or on sites on or abutting monuments identified by the Sites and Monuments Record, any may affect archaeological remains due to ground and sub-surface works and disturbance, the following considerations will be taken into account:

- Development proposed within designated Zones of Archaeological Potential and in sites on or abutting Monuments identified by the Sites and Monuments Record, the Council will refer applications for proposed developments to National Monuments Service of the Department of the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, to ascertain their requirements and consider their response to same.
- A preliminary archaeological investigation by a licensed archaeologist will normally be required where a proposed development would result in significant ground disturbance within a Zone of Archaeological Potential.
- A comprehensive archaeological report from a licensed archaeologist will normally be required to be submitted to the Council and to National Monuments Service of DoECLG, for their assessment, prior to the commencement of any development on site, or where considered appropriate prior to the decision by the Council on a Planning Application.
- Where a proposed development would result in significant ground disturbance leading to potentially significant archaeological implications in a Zone of Archaeological Potential or in sites on or abutting Monuments identified by the Sites and Monuments Record it will be a requirement that a licensed archaeologist be retained on site to monitor all site works, and in appropriate circumstances the preservation of all or part of any archaeological material so discovered will be required.

Given that the Zone of Archaeological Potential (now Notification) around each of the RMPs is 100 m, and as the stand-off distance to the nearest RMP is in excess of 600 m, the site is not on or abutting the RMPs or within their Zones of Archaeological Potential (Refer to Chapter 12 Cultural Heritage).

1.6 RELEVANT GUIDANCE

The EIAR was prepared in accordance with various Government and commonly accepted standards and guidelines that have a bearing on various aspects of the proposed development.

In addition to planning policy within the County Development Plan, planning guidelines have been issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). These guidelines are titled 'Quarries and Ancillary Activities Guidelines for Local Authorities (2004) and set out typical planning conditions and suggest environmental limits which may be imposed on any subsequent planning consent. Due consideration has been given within Sections 4 and 15 of the EIAR to comply with best practice mitigation measures set out in Chapter 3 of these guidelines. In this regard detailed best practice mitigation measures which will be implemented on site are described within the relevant sections of the EIAR.

Environmental Management in the Extractive Industry (Non-Scheduled Minerals) Environmental Management Guidelines (2006) have also been produced by the EPA. These guidelines are intended to provide general advice and guidance in relation to environmental issues to practitioners involved with the planning, design, development, operation and restoration of quarry developments and ancillary facilities.

These relevant guidelines are presented below.

1.6.1 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) replaced the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) with the transposition of Directive 2014/52/EU into Irish Law in 2018 (i.e., European Union (Planning and Development)(Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 296 of 2018)), and hence both terms appear in recent literature.

Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on Carrying Out Environmental Impact Assessment. Dept of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DoHPLG), Dublin, Ireland, 2018.

Advice Notes on Current Practice for preparing Environmental Impact Statements, Draft. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford, Ireland, 2015.

Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Statements, Draft. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford, Ireland, 2017.

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Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects: Guidance on Scoping (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU). European Union (EU) Commission, Brussels, Belgium, 2017.

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1.6.2 EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY

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