

Minutes of Special meeting of Leitrim County Council held in the Council Chamber, Áras an Chontae, Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim on Tuesday, 7 February 2023

Members Present: Councillor Mary Bohan
Councillor Finola Armstrong McGuire
Councillor Enda McGloin
Councillor Sean McGowan
Councillor Brendan Barry **via Online**
Councillor Frank Dolan
Councillor Gerry Dolan
Councillor Pádraig Fallon
Councillor Paddy Farrell
Councillor Des Guckian
Councillor Felim Gurn
Councillor Thomas Mulligan
Councillor Sean McDermott
Councillor Paddy O'Rourke
Councillor Enda Stenson
Councillor Justin Warnock

Councillor Ita Reynolds Flynn (Cathaoirleach) presiding

Apologies: Councillor Caillian Ellis

Officials Present: Lar Power, Chief Executive
Joseph Gilhooly, Director of Services, Economic Development, Planning and Infrastructural Services
Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services **via Online**
Bernard Greene, Senior Planner
Pio Byrnes, Senior Executive Planner
Liam Flynn, Executive Planner
Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator
Kathleen McGovern Ellis, Assistant Staff Officer

MM.26.23 **To consider the Chief Executive's Report on proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029 in accordance with Section 12(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), and having considered same, to resolve to make the Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029, with (subject to any modifications of a minor nature) or without the proposed Amendments in accordance with Section 12(10) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).**

Mr Bernard Greene delivered a presentation to the members as set out in **Appendix 1** to the Minutes of this meeting, which detailed each of the 15 recommendations contained with Chief Executive's Report on proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Leitrim County Development

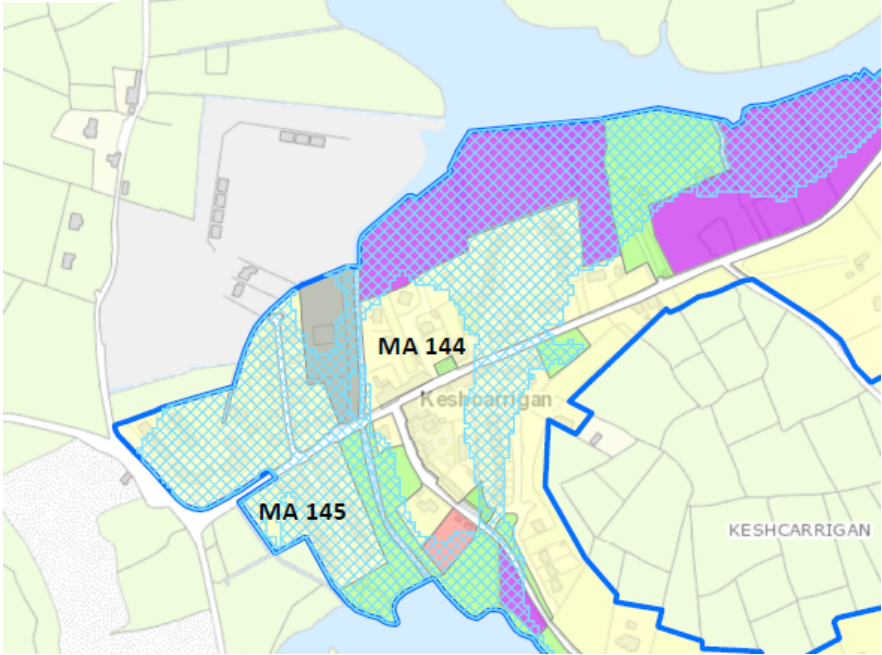
Plan 2023-2029. The presentation also considered two Notices of Motion received from elected members on the proposed amendments to the Draft Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029 and where applicable how these Notices of Motion affected the CE recommendations on the Draft Leitrim County Development Plan. An addendum to this report included final modifications to the Forestry Section of the Draft Plan.

The members considered each of the following Chief Executive’s recommendations with the Senior Planner outlining the response contained in the submitted Chief Executive’s report:

No	Submission	Chief Executive’s Recommendation
1	OPR	<p>That the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 114 amended as follows:</p> <p>KLN 14 Facilitate a phased work out of the Lough Melvin Forest Park unfinished housing development over the life of this Development Plan. This Development Plan supports the principle of the completion and occupation of a total of 50 no. houses to include the 24 no. houses effectively completed adjoining Clanchy Court housing development. Subject to the completion and occupation of these 50 no. houses to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority, further consideration to an additional phase may be permitted by the Planning Authority subject to the implementation of the Housing Strategy and confirmation that the Local Authority remain within the overall housing units provided for within the Core Strategy. The principle of completion of the hotel / leisure centre is acceptable in principle and the office development is open to consideration. Any further uses within the overall lands zoned for ‘New Residential’ will be considered on their individual merits within this context and guided by the Zoning Matrix. The completion of the Lough Melvin Forest Park development shall provide of an area of open space and amenity for the wider community to include people who have mobility issues and the facilitation of a foul sewer connection to serve the adjoining Eco Park on the Rossinver Road, subject to the agreement of Irish Water.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Justin Warnock Seconded by Councillor Mary Bohan and resolved</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 114 amended as outlined above.</p>

2	<p>OPR * See Submission from Cllr Paddy O'Rourke</p>	<p>That the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 119 amended as follows:</p> <p>CN 8 Reserve the lands zoned <i>Social & Community</i> to the south of the existing Scoil Mhuire Naofa National School to accommodate the potential relocation of Carrigallen Vocational School should the Department of Education determine that the potential expansion of the school cannot be accommodated at its current location.</p> <p>CN 9 — To allow for the provision of residential development on the lands zoned <i>Social & Community</i> to the south of the existing Scoil Mhuire Naofa National School in the event that the relocation of Carrigallen Vocational School to these subject lands is not required and subject to the following criteria being met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.— The Planning Authority receives written confirmation from the Department of Education that the subject lands are not required in accommodating the proposed expansion/relocation of Carrigallen Vocational School. 2.— The upgrade of the Carrigallen Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) to increase headroom capacity within the settlement has been completed or is scheduled for completion to the satisfaction of Irish Water with sufficient capacity to accommodate any residential development on the subject lands. Written confirmation from Irish Water to the Planning Authority is required confirming same. 3.— Any potential development of the lands for residential development would be limited to a maximum of 20 no. units within the life of this Development Plan. <p>In considering this recommendation, the members agreed to consider Cllr Paddy O'Rourke's Notice of Motion at this point of the meeting as it contained an alternative proposal to the CE's recommendation.</p>
<p>NOM 1</p>	<p>Cllr. Paddy O'Rourke</p>	<p>I wish to propose to the Elected Members not to accept the Chief Executive's recommendation No. 2 with respect to the removal of the objective for Carrigallen – CN 9. This objective allows for the possible development of up to 20 no. houses on a site within the existing village of Carrigallen should the need for or the suitability of this site not be required / accepted by the Department of Education to replace the</p>

	<p>existing Vocational School. The site is located closer to the village than Church Manor housing estate and once the wastewater treatment plant is upgraded will have capacity to cater for this size of development. I would request that the objective be amended, or an additional objective included in the Plan to provide for the missing section of footpath along the Longford Road between Masterson’s commercial premises and the footpath opposite inclusive of a pedestrian crossing being provided. This would ensure a continuous footpath from the crossroads to the national school, community childcare facility, St. Mary’s Church and Church Manor but also the site in question.</p>
<p>Response of CE to NoM</p>	<p>The response contained in the Chief Executive’s report was summarised by the Senior Planner. Having considered the proposal in regard to objective CN 9, being cognisant of the detail set out in the response above and notwithstanding Recommendation No 2 previously, the inclusion of CN 9 as set out in the proposal would not be opposed.</p> <p>To include an additional objective CN 10 in the Carrigallen Settlement Statement (Volume II) as follows:</p> <p>To provide for the extension of the public footpath / street lighting along the Longford Road from Masterson’s commercial property to connect to the footpath opposite inclusive of a pedestrian crossing.</p> <p>Councillor Paddy O’Rourke outlined his reason for presenting this Notice of Motion, as he considered that the OPR did not have the knowledge of what was happening locally in Carrigallen and what he has put forward is a true reflection of the situation in Carrigallen which may have been missed by the OPR. Councillor O’Rourke said there is currently no property available to rent or buy in the area. Councillor O’Rourke said in the event that the zoned land in question is not needed for school buildings, then it could facilitate up to 20 housing units.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Paddy O’Rourke Seconded by Councillor Sean McGowan and resolved</p> <p>It was AGREED not to accept the removal of objective CN9 (MA119 refers) as outlined in the CE’s recommendation and it was agreed to include an additional objective CN 10 in the Carrigallen Settlement Statement (Volume II) as follows:</p> <p>To provide for the extension of the public footpath/street lighting along the Longford Road from Masterson’s commercial property to connect to the footpath opposite inclusive of a pedestrian crossing.</p>

<p>3</p>	<p>OPR</p>	<p>That the Plan be made without proposed Material Alteration MA 145. (Keshcarrigan land use zoning objective)</p>  <p>Mr Bernard Greene advised that Leitrim County Council will make a formal request to the OPW on this matter and will revert to the Ballinamore Municipal District once a response from the OPW has been received. There is a facility whereby the OPW can be requested to review the flood risk mapping contained on floodinfo.ie. Councillor Brendan Barry said he would like to meet with the OPW at the lands in question on this matter.</p> <p>Mr Bernard Greene said he will forward this request to the OPW.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Brendan Barry Seconded by Councillor Enda McGloin and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Plan be made without proposed Material Alteration MA 145.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>OPR</p>	<p>Update the Plan to refer to the <i>National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022)</i> instead of the <i>Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future, A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009–2020</i>.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Mary Bohan Seconded by Councillor Sean McDermott and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Plan be amended as outlined above.</p>

5	NWRA	<p>Review Volume I of the Draft Plan (Written Statement) with a view to reducing the volume of policy context recorded in the Written Statement and expanding Appendix X of the Draft Plan to address policy context references in the Written Statement.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Sean McGowan Seconded by Councillor Enda Stenson and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Plan be amended as outlined above.</p>
6	TII	<p>That the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 3 amended as follows:</p> <p>CS OBJ 9 To prepare a Joint Local Area Plan (LAP) for Carrick-on-Shannon/Cortober in conjunction with Roscommon County Council and informed by a Local Transport Plan prepared in consultation with the National Transport Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland and other stakeholders within one year of the adoption of the Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029. The Local Area Plan shall determine the land use zoning objectives for Carrick-on-Shannon and ensure that the quantum of land identified for residential development adheres to that indicated in Table 2.6 of this Core Strategy. The LAP shall ensure sustainable, compact, sequential growth in the combined urban centre by consolidating the existing footprint with a focus on the redevelopment and regeneration of identified infill and brownfield sites.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Enda Stenson Seconded by Councillor Finola Armstrong McGuire and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 3 amended as outlined above.</p>
7	TII	<p>That the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 59 amended as follows:</p> <p>Government policy regarding access onto national roads as provided for in the “<i>Spatial Planning & National Roads Guidelines</i>” seeks to avoid the creation of any additional access point from new development/intensification of traffic from existing entrances onto national roads outside the 60 kph speed limit. Section 2.6 of the guidelines provides for exceptional circumstances to the above general policy provision. Planning Authorities may identify stretches of national roads where a less restrictive approach may be applied as part of the Development Plan process. The guidelines provide that a less restrictive approach may be adopted in the case of developments of national and regional strategic importance which by their nature are most</p>

appropriately located outside urban areas, and where the locations concerned have specific characteristics that make them particularly suitable for the developments proposed.

It is not the intention of the Planning Authority to identify any such locations in the Draft Plan. It is the intention of the Planning Authority to develop and agree a policy for access off the national roads in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland in the following instance:

-
To facilitate a significant economic development off the N4 National Primary Road east of Carrick-on-Shannon.

This development is of regional strategic importance and is included in the RSES:

~~Public water and wastewater projects will be progressed in the county over the coming years which may require the creation of additional access points or the generation of increased traffic from existing accesses to national roads to which speed limits greater than 60 km/hr apply. These projects are necessary to meet strategic growth and environmental objectives in local, regional and national planning policy. Such projects may also be applicable to the provisions of 'exceptional circumstances' and subject to engagement between Irish Water, TII and Leitrim County Council.~~

-
On the **Proposal** of Councillor Sean McGowan
Seconded by Councillor Paddy O'Rourke and **resolved**.


It was **AGREED** that the Plan be made with the proposed Material Alteration MA 59 as amended above.

8	OPW	<p>Include an additional breakdown of each criterion in part 2 of the Justification Test in the final Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) of the Plan.</p> <div style="background-color: #f9e7d3; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>2 The zoning or designation of the lands for the particular use or development type is required to achieve the proper planning and sustainable development of the urban settlement and, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Is essential to facilitate regeneration and/or expansion of the centre of the urban settlement²; (ii) Comprises significant previously developed and/or under-utilised lands; (iii) Is within or adjoining the core³ of an established or designated urban settlement; (iv) Will be essential in achieving compact and sustainable urban growth; and (v) There are no suitable alternative lands for the particular use or development type, in areas at lower risk of flooding within or adjoining the core of the urban settlement. </div> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Sean McGowan</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Seconded by Councillor Finola Armstrong McGuire and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the final Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the Plan be amended as outlined above.</p>
9	OPW	<p>Update the Plan and associated documents to refer to the the <i>Flood Risk Management – Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan 2019</i> instead of the <i>OPW Draft Guidance on Assessment of Potential Future Scenarios for Flood Risk Management</i>.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Paddy O’Rourke</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Seconded by Councillor Sean McGowan and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Plan be amended as outlined above.</p>
10	OPW	<p>Include additional detail to the Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) text in the final SFRA of the Plan featuring additional detail as to what types of SuDS may be suited to certain opportunity sites in the county and identify the types of areas in settlements where integrated and area-based provision of SuDS may be appropriate.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Sean McDermott</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Seconded by Councillor Sean McGowan and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the final Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the Plan be amended as outlined above.</p>

<p>11</p>	<p>OPW</p>	<p>That the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 110 modified as follows:</p> <p>DSO 24 Permissible uses for undeveloped lands within Flood Zones A and B that are zoned <i>Social & Community and Tourism Related Development</i> in this settlement shall be constrained to those ‘water compatible’ and ‘less vulnerable’ uses as appropriate to the particular Flood Zone (please refer to the Flood Risk Management provisions in Volume I of the Draft Plan and to the accompanying Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)).</p> <p>The Senior Planner outlined to the Members before a decision was taken in this regard that an error was included in the Chief Executive’s Report on submissions to the proposed material alteration. The amendment to the objective should refer to both Social & Community and Tourism Related Development. The proposed modification to the material alteration had replaced Tourism Related Development with Social & Community land use where it should relate to both.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Enda Stenson Seconded by Councillor Gerry Dolan and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 110 modified as outlined above.</p>
<p>12</p>	<p>Irish Water</p>	<p>That the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 39 amended as follows:</p> <p>An infrastructure assessment was undertaken to differentiate between zoned land that is available for development and that which requires significant further investment for such development to be realised. This is referred to as a ‘<i>tiered zoning approach</i>’ and is required by the NPO 72 of the NPF. Irish Water were integral to the undertaking of this assessment and their co-operation is acknowledged in this regard. However It is the expressed view of Irish Water that there was not considered the county is well served by its water and wastewater treatment plants and, notwithstanding constraints associated with the Carrick-on-Shannon water treatment plant and the wastewater treatment plants at Drumshanbo, Mohill and at Carrigallen which are expected to be addressed over the lifetime of the Plan, it is envisaged that the water and wastewater treatment plants can generally accommodate there were no capacity issues in any wastewater treatment plant or water treatment plant identified which would prohibit the realisation of the household or population levels stated in the Core Strategy of this Plan. In the case of Drumshanbo and Mohill wastewater treatment plants however, potential availability of capacity is dependent on any additional load not resulting in a significant breach of the</p>

		<p>combined approach as set out in Regulation 43 of the Waste Water Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007.</p> <p>Councillor Paddy O'Rourke welcomed this amendment proposal.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Paddy O'Rourke Seconded by Councillor Paddy Farrell and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 39 as amended above.</p>
13	Irish Water	<p>Update Section 4.11.10.1 <i>Wastewater</i> and Section 4.11.10.2 <i>Water Supply</i> of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report and Section 3.8 <i>Material Assets</i> of the SEA Non-Technical Summary to reflect the water supply and wastewater infrastructure capacities outlined in Recommendation No. 14.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Mary Bohan Seconded by Councillor Enda Stenson and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the final Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report and Non Technical Summary to the Plan be made with proposed Material Alteration MA 39 amended as outlined above.</p>
14	DHLGH	<p>Reject proposed Material Alteration MA 149 and amend Section 3.8.4 <i>Cultural Heritage</i> of Appendix IX – Part A – <i>Draft County Leitrim Renewable Energy Strategy</i> as follows:</p> <p>3.8.4 Cultural Heritage</p> <p>Whilst the sieve mapping undertaken as part of this Renewable Energy Strategy does not incorporate features of cultural or built heritage as part of the suite of environmental constraints in its analysis, the potential impact of proposed renewable energy projects on such features should be assessed at project level. Renewable energy developments should avoid adversely impacting the cultural heritage in the county. The architectural and archaeological protected structures, sites and areas within Leitrim have been identified and mapped. The National Monuments Act established a list of Recorded Monuments and Places (RMP) that are of historical and archaeological significance. These sites are scattered throughout the county, with higher concentrations in the larger urban areas. A number of buildings in Leitrim are included in the Register of Protected Structures (RPS) as being of special interest for historical, artistic or other cultural reasons. Buildings constructed after 1700 are included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH). In all cases, consent must be obtained to carry out works on or near these sites and limitations may apply to the extent of retrofit possible for protected structures.</p> <p>Development within townlands may be constrained by designated Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) and the Zone of Architectural</p>

		<p>Potential surrounding recorded monuments. Where necessary, an Archaeological Assessment can be undertaken to determine the type and extent of impacts of a development on protected structures or monuments. The aim is to harness the renewable energy potential of the area while preserving the architectural and archaeological heritage.</p> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Finola Armstrong McGuire Seconded by Councillor Enda Stenson and resolved.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Renewable Energy Strategy which forms part of the Plan be amended as outlined above.</p>
15	<p>Ann Walshe * See CE's addendum in NOM report</p>	<p>Amend Appendix VI of the Draft Plan - Landscape <i>Capacity Study for Commercial Forestry – Co. Leitrim</i>, as inserted by proposed Material Alteration MA 67, to provide for updated baseline mapping and associated commentary referring to same in the Study report.</p> <p>Note: This may result in some modifications to the recommendations contained in the revised Forestry Section contained in the proposed Material Alterations (MA 67 refers). RPS Group Ltd will advise of any amendments to their assessment of capacity within individual Landscape Character Types. This would refer specifically to <i>Table 10.2: Landscape Sensitivity – Study Findings</i> in Section 10.6.4 <i>Afforestation and the Landscape</i>. It will also have a causal effect on the subsequent Section 10.6.5 <i>Forestry Policy Framework</i> which relies on such findings. Whilst some of the individual policies rely on these sections (FOR POL 3 and FOR POL 5 in particular), it is not expected that the above modifications will require any alteration to the policies or objectives at the end of Section 10.6 <i>Forestry</i>. As such, these modifications are considered minor in nature and therefore not likely to have significant effects on the environment or adversely affect the integrity of a European site.</p> <p>This was superseded by the subsequent Addendum included in the Chief Executive's report on Notices of Motion submitted by the Members.</p>
NOM 2	<p>Cllr. Enda McGloin</p>	<p>Regarding the proposed material alteration (no. 135) to extend the residential land use zoning beside the Ashdale Housing Estate, Drumshanbo, a significant portion of these lands are quite steep and not suitable for the development of housing. Equally, I would question the suitability of the elevated land for open space associated with housing. I would propose that the amount of land zoned be reduced to provide for an additional 4 or 5 houses only, in effect extending the existing housing along the northern boundary with the remainder of the land no longer identified for residential land use within this Development Plan. This would not preclude the lands being considered in a subsequent Development Plan.</p>

<p>Response of CE to NoM</p>	<p>The response contained in the Chief Executive’s report was summarised by the Senior Planner.</p> <p>To reduce the extent of lands zoned for residential purposes the subject of Material Alteration No. 135 in Drumshanbo to provide for 4-5 no. houses along the northern boundary with an adequate area of open space identified providing to serve same of similar depth to that provided along the existing access road in Ashdale housing development. The yield of housing from this site in Table 6 of the Core Strategy will reduce from 10 no. to 5 no.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>Ashdale - Disternaun Drumshanbo - Aerial Imagery</p>  </div> <p>On the Proposal of Councillor Enda McGloin Seconded by Councillor Paddy O’Rourke and resolved</p> <p>It was AGREED to amend MA 135 of the Plan as outlined above.</p>
-------------------------------------	--

Chief Executive’s Addendum on Forestry

Proposed Amendment MA 67 updated the Forestry Section of the Draft County Development Plan following the receipt of a number of detailed submissions to this section of the Draft Plan. It also incorporated the recommendations of the *Landscape Capacity Study for Commercial Forestry - Co. Leitrim (March 2022)* into the Draft Plan. The Planning Authority are in the process of reviewing this Landscape Capacity Study and in particular the base mapping which provides a significant element of the evidential basis of this study. The co-operation of both the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Coillte is acknowledged in this regard in providing the most up to date datasets (2021) for this exercise. It was hoped that this would be completed in time to

be incorporated into the final Plan, but this has not proven possible in the time available.

To avoid the need for the text (narrative) contained in Section 10.6.5 *Forestry Policy Framework* being updated and requiring a subsequent Variation of the Plan when adopted, the Planning Authority would request that the Members give consideration to modifications to the Proposed Amendment MA 67 as outlined in the pages overleaf. The Planning Department have removed the individual Landscape Character Type references in Section 10.6.5 *Forestry Policy Framework* so that this wouldn't need to be changed arising from the review underway or other reviews which may be undertaken during the life of the Plan. The Planning Department have amended the one policy (FOR POL 3) to reflect that the Landscape Capacity Assessment may be reviewed during the life of the Plan.

The manner in which modifications to the text have been dealt with are consistent to those of the Chief Executive's report, namely new text is shown in **green font** with deletions using a **blue font and strikethrough**. To highlight these changes further, all modifications have been highlighted in yellow. The Planning Authority has also used this opportunity to update any references to policy or assessment criteria and to clarify / correct some references in the narrative.

To amend Section 10.6 *Forestry* of the Draft Plan as follows and to include the report titled *Landscape Capacity Study for Commercial Forestry - Co. Leitrim (March 2022)* as Appendix VI of the final Draft Plan when adopted. This will require a renumbering of the remaining 6 no. appendices as they are numbered on the basis of their respective chapters.

10.6 Forestry

10.6.1 National Policy

The national policy and ambition on forestry (plantation forestry) is extremely clear as set out in the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 which is presently being reviewed **with a new Forest Programme being finalised in 2023**. The Forest Programme seeks *“to develop an internationally competitive and sustainable forest sector that provides a full range of economic, environmental and social benefits to society and which accords with the principles of sustainable forest management”*.

To realise this ambition, there are a series of financial supports in place of up to 100% set up grants for establishment and maintenance of new plantation forests and woodlands including fencing. The grant aid and premiums on offer depend on the species planted with higher rates available for deciduous trees.



The Climate Action Plan 2019~~21~~ states that under the current National Forestry Programme, 2014-2020, afforestation rates have been recorded at an average of 5,500 ha per year. This is below the target rate and at these rates, Ireland will not achieve its 18% land cover target by 2046. The Climate Action Plan seeks to increase afforestation rates from their current levels to an average of 8,000 ha per year, in order to reach our forestry land cover target of 18% by the second half of this century. This will be achieved through engaging with a range of landowners, from farmers through to State Bodies and Local Authorities. While this will mostly yield benefits in the longer term, it will also contribute to our 2030 target through carbon sequestration and displacing other high carbon uses of land. It is also proposed to supplement the attractive financial incentives already in place (for faster afforestation, sustainable forest management, and wood mobilisation). **provides for a**

number of actions relating to forestry development and recognises the important role forestry provides as the single largest land-based climate change mitigation measure available to Ireland. In addition, the Plan recognises the increasing potential of forestry in providing sustainable substitute products for conventional carbon-heavy construction materials such as concrete, brick and steel. Relevant actions provided in the Climate Action Plan 2021 relating to forestry development include:

- the implementation of ‘Project Woodland’, the government initiative to develop a shared approach for trees, woods and forests and to inform the preparation of the new Forestry Strategy and new Forestry Programme for publication in 2023 (Actions 364 and 365);
- Implement Forestry Programme 2014-2022 (includes 2-year extension) (Action 366);
- Increase the level of afforestation to meet targets (Action 367); and
- Increase output of forestry licences to meet demand (Action 368).

It is notable that, aside from Action 367 which identifies the planting of 1,500ha of native woodland on Bord na Móna cut-over-bogs and unlike the previous Climate Action Plan 2019, no other planting target is provided in the Climate Action Plan 2021, with the presumption that the new Forestry Programme to be published in 2023 will identify such targets.

Forestry **can** play an important role in helping with climate change mitigation, through carbon sequestration and the provision of renewable fuels and raw materials. Forestry is a major carbon sink and afforestation is the most significant mitigation option that is available to Ireland’s land use sector.

Ireland is committed to the practice of Sustainable Forest Management, which, under the Helsinki and Lisbon Agreements, means *‘the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way and at a rate that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regenerative capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions as local, national and global levels and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems’*. A key objective of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine’s ‘Growing for the Future – A Strategic Plan for the Development of the Forestry Sector in Ireland’ (1996) has remained *‘to develop forestry to a scale and in a manner which maximizes its contribution to national economic and social well-being on a sustainable basis and which is compatible with the protection of the environment’*.

10.6.2 Forestry in Leitrim

Co. Leitrim has the highest ratio of forestry planted of any county in the State at 18.9% in 2017 compared to the national average level of 11%. Preliminary results from the 4th National Forestry Inventory (NFI), completed in 2022, indicates that the extent of forest cover in the county in 2021 has increased to 20.1% (32,039ha), with Leitrim remaining the county with the highest percentage of forest cover, compared to a national average level of 11.6%¹. Notwithstanding these preliminary results, it should be noted that at the time of writing the 3rd edition of the NFI, conducted in 2017, remained the most comprehensive dataset on national forest cover.

The soils in Co. Leitrim are generally well-suited to commercial forestry plantation development as they are rich in mineral gley, surface water gley, peaty gley and brown poolzolic soils. The favourable soil and climatic conditions result in relatively rapid growth rates of coniferous species where the timber generally achieves a minimum C16 structural rating and is used extensively in construction strength and quality of the wood is less than where it grows at a slower rate. However, Furthermore, poor root penetration can often lead to windthrow (dependent on

elevation aspect and exposure) with its associated environmental consequences including aquatic issues arising.

Private plantation forests accounted for just over half (51.3%) of the forest area in the county in 2017 with the remaining (48.7%) consisting of publicly owned forestry managed for the State by Coillte. The extent of these lands are shown in Figure 10.2. This is qualified by noting that an additional 846 hectares of lands have been planted since 2017 up to and including 2021 based on the *Forest Statistics Ireland 2022* report from DAFM.

1

¹ *'Forest Statistics Ireland 2022'*, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (2022)

Figure 10.2: Extent of Forest Cover in Co. Leitrim 2017

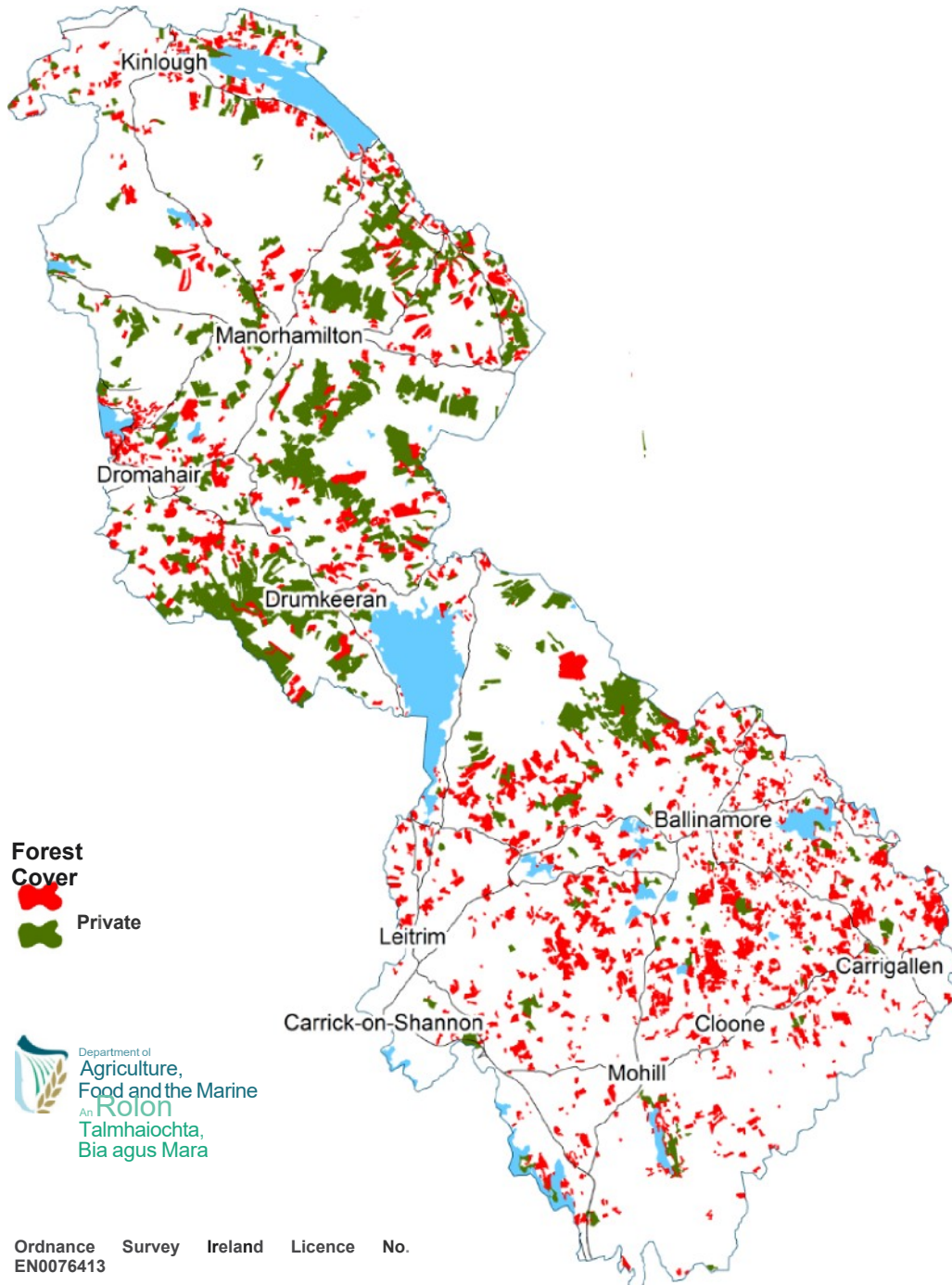
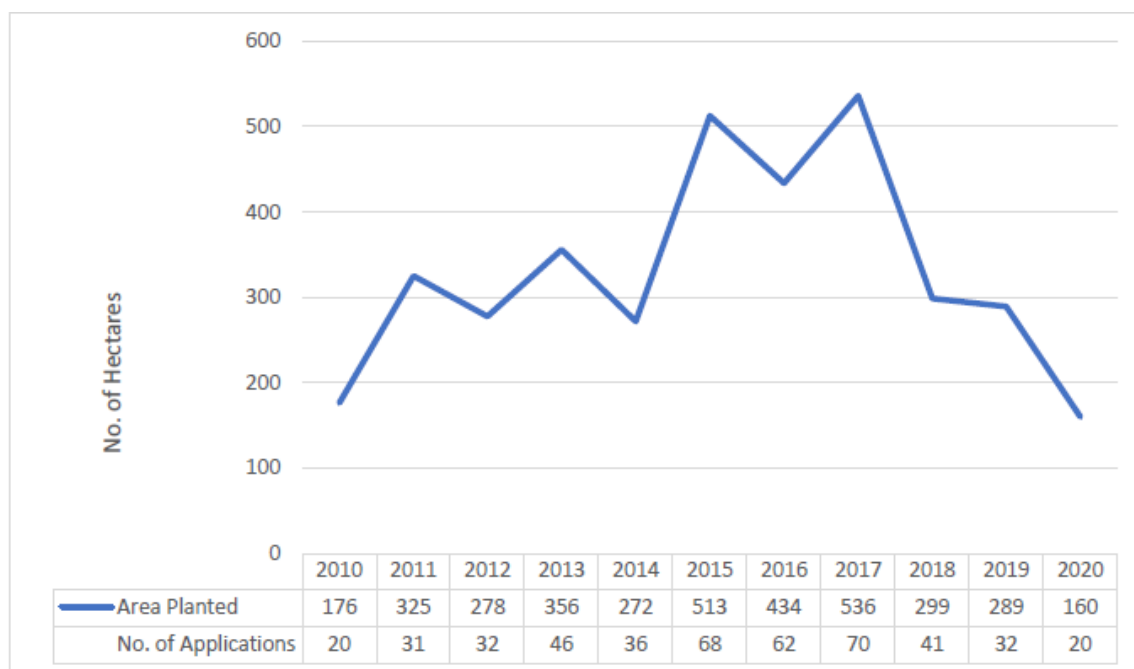
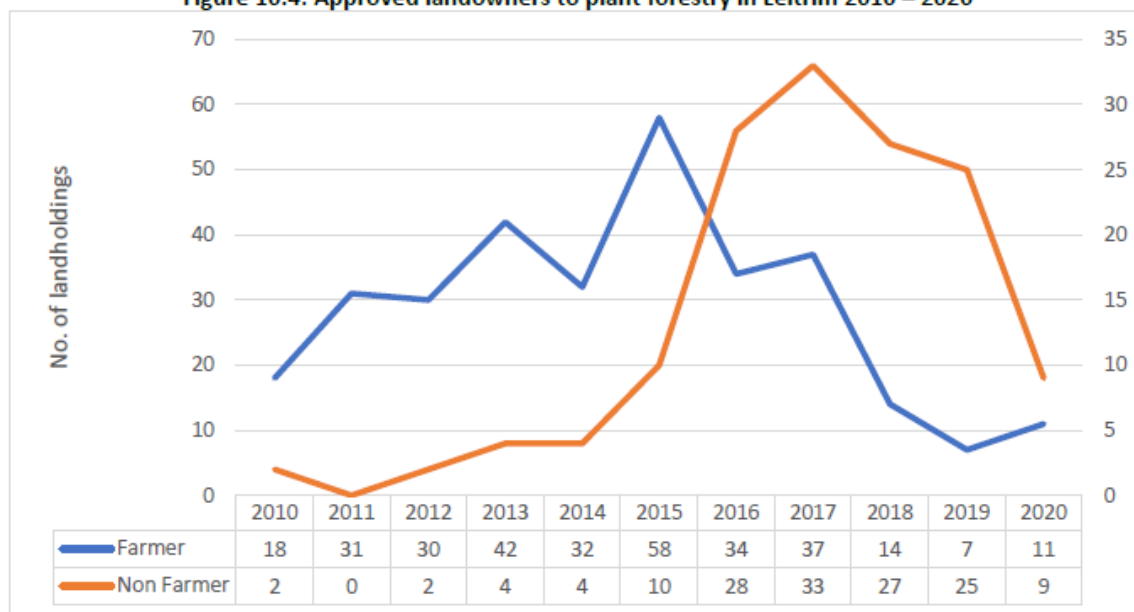


Figure 10.3: Area approved for planting in Additional Area Planted in Co. Leitrim 2010 – 2020



Source: Forest Service, Department of Agriculture

Figure 10.4: Approved landowners to plant forestry in Leitrim 2010 – 2020



Source: Forest Service, Department of Agriculture

In terms of species, conifers account for 70% of the total forest area in the county. Sitka spruce is the dominant species accounting for 61.3% of the total forest area which is higher than the national figure of 51%. The growth rates of trees in the county for conifers is high – for Sitka spruce in private stands, growth rates are estimated to be 20% higher than the national average. Native species account for 30.7% of the forest area in the county which is slightly higher

than the national figure of 26.6%. Birch is the dominant native species accounting for 10.7% with alder accounting for 4.8%. The figures in this paragraph are extracted from the report 'The Socio-Economic Impact of Forestry in Co. Leitrim', Dr. Áine Ní Dhubháin *et al*, (2019) School of Agriculture and Food Science, University College Dublin.

Figure 10.3 indicates a steady rise in the extent of land approved for planting planted in Co. Leitrim by the Forest Service from 176 hectares of land in 2010 to 536 hectares in 2017. The number of landholdings in 2017 was 70 and the average holding approved for planting planted was 7.7 hectares/19 acres (Figure 10.4). It is also noted that there has been a marked reduction in the number of applications approved for planting since 2018, primarily as a result of the number of appeals brought against decisions. It should be qualified that Figure 10.3 relates to lands actually planted and should not be confused with the extent of lands licensed for afforestation by the Forest Service. For instance in 2021, 98 hectares of lands were planted for commercial forestry whilst 236 hectares of lands was licensed for planting. The license holder has 3 years from the date of a license to plant.

Of particular note from Figure 10.4 is that in 2015 marked a milestone in which the number of investors or non farmers who were approved to plant commercial forestry in Co. Leitrim exceeded the number of farmers who were approved to plant part of their own lands. This resulted from changes in the grant aid provided by the Department of Agriculture which now encouraged investors into the sector to assist in reaching the national target set out in the Forestry Programme. In each subsequent year since 2015, the number of investors or non farmers approved for planting has exceeded the number of farmers approved to plant their own lands. This may have included farmers from outside the county who have acquired lands in this county as an investment or as a means of offsetting carbon from their main farming activities. This level of information was not available to the Local Authority.

Notwithstanding the thrust of Government policy, the extensive volume of afforestation in Co. Leitrim raises some concerns. Once planted for forestry, land is unlikely ever to revert to alternative agricultural use, reducing the possibility of expanding or consolidating neighbouring farms. Extensive and dense tree planting can lead to an oppressive and featureless landscape, increasing the sense of isolation of remaining residents, while clear-felled forests leave an ugly scar on the landscape. The harvesting of timber which often necessitates the construction of extensive lengths of forest access roads can put great stress on the road network, with minor roads bearing loads far beyond their design capacity. It is argued by the haulage sector that the creation of forest access roads can have a far greater impact on the surface of local roads than the extraction of timber. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine have indicated in their Forest Statistics Report (July 2022) that between 2011 -2021, the construction of 42.8km of private forest roads were grant aided in Co. Leitrim². The Local Authority is left to rely on the provisions of the Roads Act 1993, as amended, to seek to recover the cost of damage to local roads but with very limited success.

However, it is important to recognise the value of forestry related employment with 560 jobs³ associated directly and indirectly with forestry/wood processing in Leitrim (2018). All elements of the commercial plantation forestry value chain are present in Co. Leitrim – forestry contractors and management companies, forest harvesting and haulage (McMorrows Haulage Ltd., Dowra), saw mills and manufacturing (Crowes, Mohill), firewood (McMorrows, Dowra) and manufacturing (Masonite, Drumsna and Merenda, Manorhamilton). It is also acknowledged that the lands planted with commercial plantations often replaces land that was previously farmed and that there is a potential displacement employment effect as a result of lands being planted. In addition to the socio economic costs, the impact of the loss of agricultural land on sustaining a rural farming population does need careful consideration at a national policy level. The results of

the Census of Agriculture 2020 were not available to inform the preparation of the Draft Plan.

² 'Forest Statistics Ireland 2022', Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (2022)

³ This figure was provided to the Local Authority by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

The Good Energy Alliance Ireland produced a Greenhouse Gas Emissions Baseline Report for Co. Leitrim in December 2019. It is estimated that forestland removes over 190,000 tonnes of CO² equivalent from Leitrim in effect offsetting 44% of the CO² produced by our population. This has a monetary equivalent of just under €5m. Forests and forest products therefore play an important role in mitigating climate change by sequestering and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO²). Fast growing Sitka Spruces perform better when it comes to removing carbon from the atmosphere, as opposed to native woodland, hence their utilization as a quick return climate mitigation policy tool. The carbon sequestration rate per hectare by forests in Co. Leitrim is deemed to be 12% higher than the national rate. About 45-50 hectares of forest are clear felled each year;

Of the total amount of commercial forestry that is clear felled each year (979 hectares licensed to be clear felled in 2021), 30% of the total tree volume is left on the forest floor after logging with the remaining 10% used for wood fuel. The remainder, 60% is processed, mainly for the construction industry. the CO² captured during the tree life remains locked in the wood until the product decays or is burnt. This excludes consideration of the CO² expended in the clear felling and thinning of commercial forestry, transporting and processing the timber product and the burning of wood products for energy all of which causes emissions of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere whilst clear felling may potentially results in significant carbon losses from the soil.

The nature of commercial plantation forestry in Co. Leitrim is such that until a more detailed study is undertaken of the previous use of the lands planted / licensed to be planted regarding their former carbon sequestration function to include peatlands and the environmental cost of harvesting to include creation of extensive forest access roads that the true climate change mitigation impact is unquantified. Equally, there has to be an acknowledgement of the addition of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere from the burning of wood products.

10.6.3 Afforestation and the Planning System

Afforestation as a land use is, in the main, outside the control of the Planning Authority with the exception of the creation and material widening of accesses onto the national road system or when an Environmental Impact Assessment Report is required for planting of more than 50 hectares. Initial afforestation of lands is classified as exempted development which does not require planning permission. To date, no planning application has been lodged to this Authority for the planting of trees. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is the competent authority for planting and felling of forestry, creation and widening of access to forestry on non national roads and creation of forest roads. Certain categories of consent applications to the Forestry Service, being part of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, for planting or felling along with forest access roads and accesses to forestry are referred to the Planning Authority for its observations but it is the Forest Service, as competent authority, who ultimately decides upon the submitted consent application and how much weight to attribute to the Planning Authority's comments. This Council would welcome a revision of the Planning legislative provisions that would bring forestry plantations under the control of the planning system.

10.6.4 Afforestation and the Landscape

The Landscape Character Assessment (refer to Section 11.15) has identified forestry along with wind turbines as the greatest forces of change in altering the character of our landscape. Commercial forestry plantations tend to be a dominating landcover and have an eroding impact in scenic areas of the county including Lough Melvin. The original lakeside landscape character is much eroded as a result. The review [of the Landscape Character Assessment](#) noted an increase in commercial coniferous forestry especially apparent in the farmed lowlands south of Slieve Anierin and similar plantations of smaller scale occurring in the uplands in particular the lower slopes of Dough Mountain. The [Landscape Character Assessment](#) states that the extent of additional forestry land use *“is controversial due to the resultant change and negative impact on the County’s landscapes”*. In Landscape Character Type 3 ‘Wooded Lakeside Farmland’, the extent of the woody vegetation cover is such that the landscape is quite visually enclosed in many places. In Landscape Character Type 5 ‘Moorland Plateaus’, patches of commercial coniferous forestry feature in this landscape and in some locations, these plantations dominate and have eroded the moorland landscape character. The plantation of commercial coniferous forestry also tends to be highly visible at higher elevations. In Landscape Character Type 9 ‘Drumlin Farmland’, patches of commercial coniferous forestry are dispersed throughout this landscape, some areas being fairly extensive in size. The plantation of coniferous forest is indicated as being a frequent feature and has become influential in the local landscape character.

It is noted that there is an area of deciduous woodland at O’Donnell’s Rock which is one of only a few naturally developing woodlands on the Leitrim limestone mountains. This is of particular interest as it demonstrates the natural succession of this woodland type on steep ground.

In relation to landscape quality, condition and sensitivity, the Landscape Character Assessment indicates that the condition of the landscape is adversely affected in places by commercial coniferous forestry. Extensive areas of commercial coniferous forestry have resulted in the loss of hedgerows, pasture and field patterns and thus, key landscape characteristics have become eroded. Plantation of coniferous forestry also obscures stretches of the Black Pig’s Dyke and tree roots [may](#) threaten delicate archaeological remains. Where large forestry blocks exist on undulating landform, large scale felling, leaves significant areas of the landscape scarred. In comparison, in areas where commercial coniferous forestry is absent, the landscape is in relatively good condition as evidenced by the strong field patterns defined by a dense hedgerow structure.

[Following the completion of the review of the Landscape Character Assessment, of designated landscapes and of protected views and prospects, Leitrim County Council commissioned RPS to then undertake a landscape capacity assessment for future commercial forestry planting in Co. Leitrim. The purpose of the landscape capacity assessment is to inform the policy framework for forestry which will be contained in the Draft County Development Plan 2023-2029. The objective of the study is to determine the suitability or capacity of landscapes to accommodate further commercial forestry plantations. The assessment has been undertaken in order to provide clear guidance in the light of recent debate on the issue of commercial forestry in Co. Leitrim and the need to achieve a balance between the national policy arena, the demands for commercial forestry plantations and conservation of landscape character and visual amenity including residential visual amenity. This report titled ‘Landscape Capacity Study for Commercial Forestry - Co. Leitrim \(March 2022\) will form Appendix VI of the final Draft Plan when adopted.](#)

[The report primarily outlines a baseline for each Landscape Character Type \(LCT\) followed by a sensitivity assessment of each to commercial forestry. The capacity of each LCT to accommodate commercial forestry is outlined, along with design guidance.](#)

The following table is extracted from the report and is considered the conclusion of the Capacity Study.

Table 10.2: Landscape Sensitivity - Study Findings

ID	LCT Name	Sensitivity	Capacity
LCT 1	Coastal Plain	Very High	None
LCT 2	Coastal Drumlin Farmland	High	Limited
LCT 3	Wooded Lakeside Farmland	High	Limited
LCT 4	Cliffed Uplands and Landslips	Very High	None
LCT 5	Moorland Plateau	Very High	None
LCT 6	Moorland Hills	High	Very limited capacity at higher elevations and on steep sided mountain slopes.
LCT 7	Upland Farmland and Foothills	Medium to High	Yes
LCT 8	Valley Farmland	Low	Yes
LCT 9	Drumlin Farmland	Low	Yes
LCT 10	Major Loughs	N/A	N/A
LCT 11	Drumlin Loughs and Stream Margins	Very High	None
LCT 12	River Floodplain	Very High	None
LCT 13	Low Limestone Outcrops	Very High	None
LCT 14	Drumlin Farmland with Peat Bogs	Low	Yes
LCT 15	Undulating Hill Farmland	Low	Yes
LCT 16	Steep Mountain Peaks	Very High	None
LCT 17	Tabular Hills	Very High	None

Note: Leitrim County Council are presently undertaking a landscape capacity assessment of the ability of the landscape to absorb further commercial forestry plantations. This may be finalised in time to inform the final County Development Plan before it is finalized.

At the time of making this Plan, a further review of the base mapping which informed the “*Landscape Capacity Assessment for Commercial Forestry – Co. Leitrim*” is underway in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and with Coillte whose assistance is acknowledged. This may alter the capacity of certain Landscape Character Types to accommodate further commercial forestry planting as summarised in Table 10.2. The definitive capacity will be that stated in the most recent update of the “*Landscape Capacity Assessment for Commercial Forestry – Co. Leitrim*”.

10.6.5 Forestry Policy Framework

Leitrim County Council supports a transition away from the current monoculture coniferous forestry model dependent on clear felling to one that is consistent with climate change, biodiversity, enhances community life and supports the local economy. The Draft Plan aims to support the sustainable growth of forestry as an economic activity and as an effective acknowledges its potential role as a climate mitigation measure whilst affording maximum

protection to the rural environment, residential amenity and to the receiving landscape. The Draft Plan will seek to maximise the employment creation potential of timber grown locally and also recognise the importance of the forestry value chain to our local economy. The development of woodchip production from thinnings, for alternative energy provision, will be encouraged as an on-farm scale activity.

The Council also recognises that forests and woodlands can have a significant recreational and amenity value in the local community such as Coillte's Glenfarne Demesne and Derrycarne forests. While walking is the most popular activity, forest recreation embraces other specialised activities including orienteering, mountain biking, horse riding and fishing. The Council are keen to further exploit opportunities in this area. In line with Forest Service Guidelines, the Council will support the development of roads, tracks, rides, and purpose-built trail and cycle tracks in selected locations. The Council will also support and encourage the carbon neutral harvesting of forestry.

Equally, the protection of rural communities is also an integral part of the policy framework of this Plan including the protection of agriculture and of farming practices and livelihoods. The introduction of large-scale forestry into an area can have potentially negative impacts on visual, social and environmental grounds and thus must be appropriate in terms of their scale and location.

This Draft Plan cannot seek to remove a statutory entitlement, i.e. exempted development status of afforestation as it is beyond the ability of the a development plan to do so. The Draft Plan can however provide the evidential basis for the Planning Authority to contribute to the forest consent process of the Forest Service through comment on forest consent applications that are referred by the Forest Service to the Council for comment and also give a commitment that the Local Authority intends to take a more proactive role over the life of the Draft Plan where a proposed forestry plantation is at variance with the policy framework contained therein.

Landscape capacity to accommodate further commercial plantations is a key consideration for Leitrim County Council in deciding whether or where forestry expansion occurs. The Council generally favours deciduous over coniferous planting on the basis that native species of deciduous trees sit more comfortably in the Co. Leitrim landscape and also have more benefits for biodiversity.

The Local Authority position will be informed by the recommendations contained in the Landscape Capacity Study for Commercial Forestry (March 2022) or as updated during the life of this Development Plan in our responses to all applications for Tree Planting and Tree Felling referred to the Local Authority by the Forest Service.

Responses from Leitrim County Council on Applications Submitted to the Forest Service for Tree Planting Applications

The following stated responses to consent applications to the Forest Service for Tree Planting by the Local Authority is qualified on the basis of such commercial plantations comprising primarily of coniferous plantations although it should not be assumed that no such concerns would arise for an exclusive broadleaf plantation.

In the Landscape Character Types which have been determined as having a very high or high sensitivity to further commercial forestry plantations and no capacity or very limited capacity for

further plantations (~~LCT 1 Coastal Plain, LCT 4 Clifed Uplands and Landslips, LCT 5 Moorland Plateau, LCT 6 Moorland Hills, LCT 8 Valley Farmland, LCT 11 Drumlin Loughs and Stream Margins, LCT 12 River Floodplain, LCT 13 Low Limestone Outcrops, LCT 16 Steep Mountain Peaks and LCT 17 Tabular Hills refers~~), the Local Authority will object to all further Tree Planting applications on the basis of potential adverse and cumulative impacts to the sensitive receiving landscape. _____

In the Landscape Character Types which have been determined as having a 'high' or 'medium to high' sensitivity to further commercial forestry plantations and very limited or limited capacity for further plantations (~~LCT 2 Coastal Drumlin Farmland and LCT 3 Wooded Lakeside Farmland refers~~), the Local Authority will object to such applications where the siting of such plantations is recommended for exclusion in ~~Section 4.2.1.3~~ of the Landscape Capacity Study for Commercial Forestry on the basis of the determinantal impact to the sensitive receiving landscape.

For the remaining Landscape Character Types (~~LCT 7 Upland Farmland and Foothills, LCT 9 Drumlin Farmland, LCT 14 Drumlin Farmland with Peat Bogs and LCT 15 Undulating Hill Farmland refers~~) which have been determined as having a medium to low sensitivity to further commercial forestry plantations and capacity for further plantations, the Local Authority will object only to those limited areas therein where the siting of such plantations is recommended for avoidance in ~~Section 4.2.1.3~~ in the Landscape Capacity Study for Commercial Forestry.

In all instances, regard will be given to the siting and design guidance for each Landscape Character Type which have been determined as having some level of capacity for further commercial plantations. Furthermore, any proposed commercial forestry plantation must not have a detrimental impact on a designated Protected View or Prospect identified in this Draft Plan.

Afforestation should be avoided on lands containing deep peat soils and where the land slope is steep, especially where the latter slopes towards a water body.

Policy **AGR POL 4** seeks to identify and protect from inappropriate forms of development areas of High Nature Value agricultural land in the county to include consideration of future climate scenarios and water quality and availability for agricultural purposes. The impact of forestry plantations on such identified areas of High Nature Value farmlands needs to be carefully considered.

The Council will also give consideration to the designation of North Leitrim, Sliabh an Iarainn and its hinterland as a Landscape Conservation Area in conjunction with **TOUR OBJ 3** which seeks to investigate the feasibility and potential of this area as a National Park/Recreational Area designation. The designation of this area as a Landscape Conservation Area may allow for exempted development to be brought under the control of the Local Authority subject to the prescription of the Minister of such development.

~~In certain Protected Landscapes, it would be the preference of this Local Authority if commercial planting was restricted or prohibited altogether. As such commercial forestry is exempted development, there is frustration within the Local Authority that this express objective cannot be realised.~~

This will be on the following basis:

~~On steep slopes above the 300m contour line, new afforestation will be strongly discouraged in the response of the Local Authority to any application to the Forest~~

~~Service for tree planting and tree felling and it would be the objective of this Local Authority if the existing area under forestry was reduced, restructured and/or redesigned following clearance. This is considered particularly important around the flanks of Dough, Boleybrack and Sliabh an Iarainn, where forestry is most intrusive.~~

~~Elsewhere, particular attention will be paid to retaining (or restoring) views to the water and valley approaches to the hills. This applies particularly to the following areas:~~

- ~~• around the shores of Lough Melvin, Lough Gill, Lough Allen & the smaller loughs around Ballinamore.~~
- ~~• within the distinctive river corridor landscapes of the Shannon and the Cullies rivers, where open wetland areas and views to the water are key landscape characteristics.~~
- ~~• in Glenaniff, the Scardan and Owennayle valleys on the north and east of the Boleybrack uplands, and the Yellow River valleys north and south of Sliabh an Iarainn.~~

~~New woodland planting may be considered acceptable in:~~

- ~~1. Areas of marginal agricultural land on the fringes of the uplands below the 300m contour. These areas already have a distinctive wooded character, provided by strong hedgerows and natural woodland regeneration. They provide relatively good growing conditions for broadleaves. Such areas occur in all the northern glens and the lower hill slopes below the 300m contour line.~~
- ~~2. The drumlin landscapes of the central and southern lowlands, which have considerable further capacity to accommodate woodland expansion, provided that the underlying topography is not obscured by blanket planting over wide areas.~~
- ~~3. Other areas where there is scope to restore or enhance the landscape's distinctive character. These include abandoned farmland, amenity landscapes, the landscape settings to settlements and areas degraded by urban, industrial or infrastructural development.~~

Areas of Low Capacity:

~~These include the county's mountain and moorland landscapes and steep slopes above and around 300m AOD. These are characteristically open landscapes. New woodlands are highly visible and seldom in keeping with moorlands character. Further afforestation in these areas will be strongly discouraged.~~

Policies

FOR POL 1 ~~To encourage the development of sustainable forestry to a scale and in a manner which maximises its contribution to the economic and social wellbeing of the county, and which is compatible with the protection of the environment including the avoidance of likely significant effects on European Sites (SACs and SPAs) and other designated and non-designated habitats and sensitive landscapes~~ **To seek the sustainable development of the forestry sector in Co. Leitrim**

FOR POL 2 ~~To encourage sustainable forestry development, which is planted, managed and harvested in accordance with national and European law and~~ **established**

standards set by the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Guidelines for landscape, forest harvesting, archaeology, biodiversity and water quality and in particular by the 'Environmental Requirement for Afforestation, Felling and Reforestation Standards'.

FOR POL 3 To ensure forestry development is of appropriate scale and character whilst ensuring that the development does not have a negative visual impact on the countryside or cause pollution or degradation to wildlife habitats, natural waters or areas of ecological importance. To have regard to the recommendations contained in the Landscape Capacity Study for Commercial Forestry (March 2022) or as

updated during the life of this Development Plan which forms Appendix VI to this Draft Plan in informing the responses submitted by the Local Authority to all relevant applications for Tree Planting and Tree Felling licenses to the Forest Service or subsequent appeals to the Forestry Appeals Committee. This will be in line with the content of Section 10.6.5.

FOR POL 4 To encourage the provision of public access in conjunction with relevant stakeholders to new and existing forests through walking and bridle paths, recreational areas and other similar facilities.

~~**FOR POL 5** To reply to referrals from the Forest Service (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) seeking to plant additional land for afforestation on the basis of the guidance provided Section 10.6.5 of the Draft Plan.~~

FOR POL 5 To actively participate in the consenting process by the Forest Service on applications seeking to plant additional land for afforestation or tree felling which mandates replanting in landscapes sensitive to commercial plantations or other environmental grounds to ensure that the policies and objectives contained in this Draft Plan are secured.

Objectives

FOR OBJ 1 To work in conjunction with the relevant key stakeholders to develop and expand suitable industries dependent on the considerable timber resource of the county such as fuel-wood production, sawmills and stake producing facilities.

FOR OBJ 2 To co-operate with the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to encourage and promote the preparation and implementation of an Indicative Forest Strategy for the county consistent with the policy framework of this Draft Plan.

~~**FOR OBJ 3** To undertake and adopt a landscape capacity assessment of the county to determine the suitability of landscapes to accommodate further commercial forestry plantations. To give consideration to the designation of North Leitrim, Sliabh an Iarainn and its hinterland as a Landscape Conservation Area in conjunction with TOUR OBJ 3 which seeks to investigate the feasibility and potential of this area as a National Park/Recreational Area designation.~~

FOR OBJ 4 To actively participate in any Regional Fora established by the North West

Regional Assembly to ensure sustainable afforestation land management of the forested area of across the region.

FOR OBJ 5 To actively make representations to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the review of the Irish Forestry regime and the any subsequent development of a new national Forestry Strategy.

A discussion took place amongst the members in relation to the proliferation of forestry in County Leitrim.

Councillor Justin Warnock proposed that the sentence in section 10.6.2 of the plan entitled “Forestry in Leitrim” relating to “the timber generally achieves a minimum C16 structural rating and is used extensively in construction” be removed as he believed this not to be factually correct. The Executive had no objection to reverting back to the text contained in the material alteration regarding the structural rating of forestry.

On the **Proposal** of Councillor Justin Warnock
Seconded by Councillor Mary Bohan and **resolved**.

It was **AGREED** that the Plan be amended to remove the wording as outlined.

Councillor Justin Warnock said the growing of Sitka Spruce on peat land should be discontinued. Councillor Mary Bohan supported this and referred to the Shass Mountain landslide. Councillor Enda Stenson also supported this.

On the **Proposal** of Councillor Enda Stenson
Seconded by Councillor Mary Bohan and **resolved**.

It was **AGREED** that the Local Authority discourage and oppose the planting and replacement of commercial forestry on peat lands.

The Executive had no objection to this modification as it relates to the narrative of the Draft Plan rather than pertaining to a policy or objective.

Councillor Pádraig Fallon proposed that the word “competent” be removed from the section on Afforestation and the Planning System and he proposed that the following wording be inserted “The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is the authority responsible for planting and felling of forestry, creation and widening of access to forestry on non-national roads and creation of forest roads. Councillor Gerry Dolan seconded this.

On the **Proposal** of Councillor Pádraig Fallon
Seconded by Councillor Justin Warnock and **resolved**.

It was **AGREED** that the Plan be amended to reflect the change in wording as outlined.

The Executive had no objection to this modification as it relates to the narrative of the Draft Plan rather than pertaining to a policy or objective.

Councillor Mary Bohan expressed her disappointment on how the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine refer applications for planting or felling to the Planning Authority for its observations, but it is the Forestry Service, who ultimately decides on the applications they receive and how much weight to attribute to the Planning Authority's observations. Councillor Bohan said that this Council would welcome a revision of the Planning Legislation provisions that would bring forestry plantations under the control of the planning system.

Mr Bernard Greene, Senior Planner said the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is the Authority responsible for planting and felling applications. An internal working group is being set up within Leitrim County Council with representatives from Environment Section, Areas Engineers Office, Roads and Planning etc. with input from these units forming the observation made to the Dept. on planting and felling applications. It was accepted that under the current arrangements it is clear that the Planning Authority is having limited effect currently.

Councillor Justin Warnock paid tribute to all the reporting work carried out by RPS in relation to forestry in the County and he asked that the full review be carried out as quickly as possible. He said the proliferation of Sitka Spruce is dangerous to the social and economic status of the county.

On the **Proposal** of Councillor Enda Stenson

Seconded by Councillor Justin Warnock and **resolved**

It was **AGREED** to amend the Draft plan to include the Chief Executive's addendum on forestry, MA67, as amended and as outlined above.

Appropriate Assessment Determination

On the **Proposal** of Councillor Enda Stenson

Seconded by Councillor Paddy O'Rourke and **resolved**

It was **AGREED** that the Chief Executive sign an Order to give effect to an Appropriate Assessment Determination under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive for the Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029.

A copy of the Determination was given to the each of the Members in attendance and it was read out for the benefit of Cllr. Barry who was attending remotely.

In order to comply with the requirements of Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive as to whether or not a plan or project would affect the integrity of any European site(s), this Appropriate Assessment determination is being made by Leitrim County Council relating to the potential for the Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029 that is being adopted to have effects on the integrity of European sites.

In carrying out this Appropriate Assessment (AA), the Council is taking into account the matters specified under Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), including the following :

- The Natura Impact Report for the Proposed Material Alterations;
- The Natura Impact Report prepared for the Draft Plan;

- Written submissions made during the Plan preparation process; and
- Ongoing advice on AA from the Council’s environmental consultants (CAAS).

As part of the AA, it was identified that the Plan may, if unmitigated, have significant effects on 24 (no.) European sites. Factors that could potentially affect the integrity of European sites include:

- Provisions (such as those relating to: housing, economic development, tourism, urban settlements, sustainable communities, transportation, infrastructure and energy, rural development, heritage and climate action and renewable energy) that introduce sources for effects through construction phase such as habitat destruction, light pollution, hydrological interactions and disturbance effects;
- Loading pressures from the operational phase of developments – these sources could result in habitat loss, disturbance effects, interactions with water quality and habitat fragmentation; and
- Increasing visitors to sensitive areas during the operational phase of, for example, recreational developments.
- The undersigned, having carefully considered the information referred to above agrees with and adopts the reasoning and conclusions presented and determines that:
 - Implementation of the Plan would have had the potential to result in effects to the integrity of European sites, if unmitigated.
 - The risks to the safeguarding and integrity of the qualifying interests, special conservation interests and conservation objectives of the European sites have been addressed by the inclusion of mitigation measures that will prioritise the avoidance of effects in the first place and reliably mitigate effects where these cannot be avoided. In addition, any lower-level plans and projects arising through the implementation of the Plan will themselves be subject to AA when further details of design and location are known.
 - In-combination effects from interactions with other plans and projects have been considered in this assessment and the mitigation measures have been incorporated into the Plan – these measures are robust and will ensure there will be no effects on the integrity of European sites as a result of the implementation of the Plan either alone or in-combination with other plans/projects.
 - Having incorporated mitigation measures, the Plan is not foreseen to give rise to any effect on the integrity of any European site, alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This evaluation is made in view of the conservation objectives of the habitats or species, for which these sites have been designated.

Councillor Paddy O’Rourke sought clarification once the study is complete if applicants who apply for Planning Permission will have access to all the information.

Mr Greene confirmed all the information is already available.

Final Resolution to Adopt the County Development Plan 2023-2029

Having considered the Draft Plan, the Proposed Material Alterations, the CE Reports on both Consultations and

- The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report for the Draft Plan
- The Appropriate Assessment (AA) Natura Impact Report for the Draft Plan
- The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) for the Draft Plan
- The SEA Environmental Report for the Proposed Material Alterations

- The Natura Impact Report for the Proposed Material Alterations
- Written submissions relating to SEA, AA and SFRA made during the Plan preparation process
- Ongoing advice on SEA, AA and SFRA from the Council’s agents (CAAS)
- The final, consolidated Natura Impact Report
- The final AA Determination

On the **Proposal** of Councillor Paddy O’Rourke

Seconded by Councillor Sean McDermott and **resolved**.

It was **AGREED** in accordance with the provisions of Section 12(10) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), that the members agree, by resolution, to make the Plan, as recommended by the Chief Executive and as further modified by way of motions and resolutions at the Special Council Meeting on Tuesday 7th February 2023 and to proceed in accordance with Section 12(12) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) to publish notice of the making of the Plan.

Councillor Des Guckian said he opposed the adoption of the Plan as inputs from Councillors were ignored and the plan left open a gap for speculators to take over the county. He stated that Leitrim County Council may not have long to exist, with legislation such as the Planning & Development Bill, currently before the Dáil, strengthening the role of ministerial guidelines. At this point in the meeting Councillor Des Guckian left the meeting in protest to the adoption of the Draft County Development Plan. Councillor Guckian did not propose a counter motion before he left the meeting when prompted by Councillor Mary Bohan.

Councillor Mary Bohan thanked Bernard Greene and his staff for all the time and advice given to members and for the open discussions that took place in the preparation of the Plan. Councillors Frank Dolan and Enda Stenson concurred with Councillor Mary Bohan’s comments.

Mr Lar Power, Chief Executive thanked Joseph Gilhooly, Bernard Greene, Pio Byrnes and Liam Flynn for their extensive work, time and engagement in the formalisation of the plan, which is fit for purpose to progress the development of the county.

Mr Bernard Greene said due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the process was extended. He said the elected members have had a significant role in the development of the plan; it has not been dictated, as all the OPR recommendations have not been accepted. He concluded by thanking the staff of the Planning Office, the IT Department, Joseph Gilhooly and Lar Power for their help and assistance.

This concluded the business of the meeting at 12.37 pm

Signed:

Councillor Ita Reynolds Flynn
Cathaoirleach

Kieran Brett
Meetings Administrator

Dated: Monday, 6 March 2023