

# **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FINAL SCREENING REPORT**

Final SEA Screening Report  
Sixmilebridge Town Centre  
First Plan, Co. Clare

June 2023





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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The *National Planning Framework*<sup>1</sup> and *Our Rural Future*<sup>2</sup> set out a vision to develop thriving Irish Towns, which will be integral to the national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development. This vision is built on the interdependence of urban and rural areas and recognises the diversity of individual towns, the centrality of people and the importance of vibrant and lived-in places.

The Town Centre First (TCF) policy seeks to support the delivery of this vision through a collaborative framework for the central government, Local Authorities, public and private sector stakeholders and the wider community. The Town Centre First policy is aimed at creating town centres that function as viable, vibrant, and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

Clare County Council have prepared a non-statutory Plan for Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare which is funded through the Town Centre First Initiative under the Government's *Our Rural Future* Programme. The Sixmilebridge Town Centre First (TCF) Plan is centred around the vision of the town being a vibrant and attractive economic centre, which will be easy and safe to move and navigate around for everyone, in addition to offering a range of usable, attractive and green public spaces for the community to meet, gather and spend time.

The first step in the SEA process is to screen the proposed plan or programme (apart from those for which SEA is mandatory) for the potential of significant environmental effects and whether it would warrant SEA. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the requirement for SEA of the proposed Plan.

In doing so, the Council is required to determine whether the Plan would or would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment. In doing so, the relevant criteria set out in the SEA Directive as transposed into Irish Legislation in the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004, S.I. No. 436 of 2004 as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2011 S.I. No. 201 of 2011, must be considered during the assessment.

It should be noted that the Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, which was subject to full Strategic Environmental Assessment. The appropriate environmental authorities were consulted throughout the SEA process and therefore the objectives and changes arising from these plans and strategies placed above the Sixmilebridge TCF Plan in the planning hierarchy (See Section 2 of this report) have all been subject to full and complete assessments.

Clare County Council, in consultation with the specified statutory consultees listed in Section 3.2 of this report, must make a determination as to whether an SEA is required, taking account of the relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), and any submissions or observations received from the prescribed environmental authorities.

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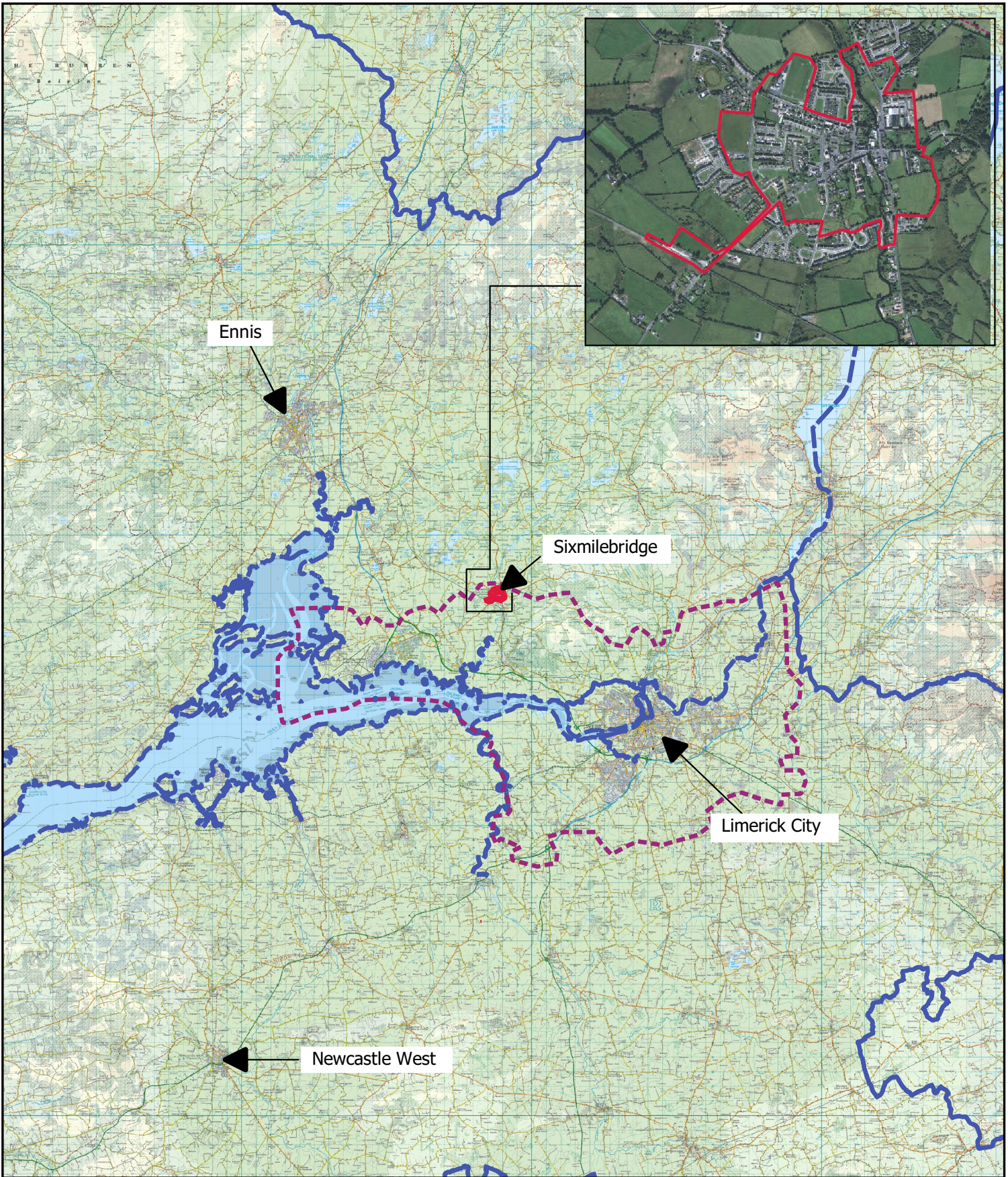
<sup>1</sup> *The National Planning Framework* <https://npf.ie/project-ireland-2040-national-planning-framework/#publications>

<sup>2</sup> *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025* <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c236-our-rural-future-vision-and-policy-context/>

1.1

## Location Context

Sixmilebridge has been designated a 'Small Town' in the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and performs an important role in terms of services and amenities within its local catchment. The town is situated within the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area and hosts a population of 2,625 (2016 Census). A location map of Sixmilebridge can be viewed in Figure 1-1.



**Map Legend**

-  Sixmilebridge TCF Plan Site Boundary
-  Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area
-  Local Authority / County Boundaries



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Drawing Title  
**Site Location Map**

Project Title Sixmilebridge TCF Plan SEA SR	
Drawn By SND	Checked By MW
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## 1.2

# Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, before a decision is made to adopt it. Under the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC), transposed onto Irish legislation by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 – 2011, certain plans or programmes are subject to SEA prior to their adoption and implementation. Screening is the process for determining whether a particular plan or programme, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and therefore warrants SEA.

The Screening Process is the first stage of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process and the purpose of this Screening Report is to determine whether the Plan will or will not have significant environmental effects on the Plan area, and if it will require a full Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The following Regulations transpose the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive into Irish law. Further detail on SEA legislation can be read in Section 1.2.1.

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

## 1.2.1

# SEA Legislation

The European Union Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) requires an environmental assessment to be carried out for all plans/programmes, or amendments to plans/programmes, which are prepared for certain specified sectors. For other plans/programmes that do not meet the requirement for mandatory SEA, the screening procedure is carried out to determine whether the plan/programme, or amendment to same, is likely to have significant environmental effects. If significant effects are identified, an SEA of the plan/programme or amendment to the plan/programme is required. The Directive requires an environmental assessment carried out for all plans or programmes that are prepared in one of the following eleven specified sectors as follows:

1. Agriculture
2. Forestry
3. Fisheries
4. Energy
5. Industry
6. Transport
7. Waste Management
8. Water Management
9. Telecommunications
10. Tourism
11. Town and Country Planning and Land-Use

In Ireland, the SEA Directive has been transposed into national legislation through:

- **S.I. No. 435 of 2004** (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European

- Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011); these Regulations set out the following:
- a) **Schedule 1:** Criteria for determining whether a Plan or Programme (or Modification thereto) is likely to have significant effects on the Environment and therefore require an SEA
  - b) **Schedule 2:** Information to be contained in an Environmental Report
  - c) **Articles 9-17** of these Regulations set out in the requirement to complete an Environmental Report, scoping, timing, consultation, transboundary effects and monitoring associated with the completion of the same
- **S.I. No. 436 of 2004** (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011<sup>3</sup>); these Regulations specifically relate to the requirement to carry out SEA for Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Regional Planning Guidelines

Article 3(4) of Directive 2001/42/EC requires that,

*“Member States shall determine whether plans and programmes other than those referred to in Paragraph 2, which set the framework for future development consents of projects, are likely to have significant environmental effects.”*

This process for determining whether a particular plan, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and therefore, would require SEA is known as ‘Screening’. The criteria for determining (or Screening) whether a particular plan is likely to have significant environmental effects are set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive. These criteria are reproduced in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011, and again in Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended. The relevant Schedule 2A criteria are presented in Section 1.2.2 below.

Following the appropriate notification and consultation period, Clare County Council will determine whether the implementation of the Plan would be likely to have significant effects on the environment. This final determination will take account of the Schedule 2A criteria of the SEA Regulations, and any submissions or observations received from prescribed environmental authorities (See Section 3.2 of this report).

It should be noted that if should the Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan is adopted into the current County Development Plan through a Variation, it would then be eligible for being screened out as the geographical extent and population of the plan area are significantly below the mandatory SEA thresholds of 5,000 persons or a plan area covering an area of greater than 50km<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to this SEA Screening Report, MKO have prepared the AA Screening for Sixmilebridge TCF Plan. The screening exercise concluded that there is no potential for negative effects on the conservation objectives of European Sites.

## 1.2.2 SEA Screening Criteria

The SEA Screening procedure is based on criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive and Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004, as presented below:

### 1. The characteristics of the plan, having regard, in particular to

<sup>3</sup> The 2011 amending SEA Regulations also reduced the mandatory SEA population thresholds for Local Area Plans from 10,000 to 5,000 persons. Local Area Plans covering an area greater than 50km<sup>2</sup> now require mandatory SEA. Below these thresholds, Local Area Plans are required to be screened for SEA.



- (i) The degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources
  - (ii) The degree to which the plan influences other plans including those in a hierarchy
  - (iii) The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development
  - (iv) Environmental problems relevant to the plan
  - (v) The relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste management or water protection)
- 2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular to:**
- (i) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects
  - (ii) The cumulative nature of the effects
  - (iii) The transboundary nature of the effects
  - (iv) The risks to human health or the environment (e.g., due to accidents)
  - (v) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)
  - (vi) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:
    - Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage
    - Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values
    - Intensive land-use
  - (vii) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status

This Screening Exercise has been presented in Table 4-1 in Section 4 of this report.

## 2. **PLANNING HIERARCHY AND THE PURPOSE OF THE SIXMILEBRIDGE TCF PLAN**

### 2.1 **National Planning Framework**

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the Irish Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of the country out to the year 2040 through a framework that aims to guide public and private investment, to create and promote and enhance the environment. The Framework was published in February 2018, which in tandem with the National Development Plan, forms 'Project Ireland 2040', the Government's vision for developing the country over the upcoming decades.

The delivery of the NPF is aimed to be in alignment with the policies, programmes and day-to-day activities of government departments and agencies, state bodies, the regional assemblies, local authorities and infrastructure providers, working in conjunction with communities, civic society, the private sector and neighbouring administrations.

### 2.2 **Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025**

The vision of this policy is for a thriving rural Ireland, which is integral to national economic, social, cultural, and environmental wellbeing and development. An ambition of this policy is to support the regeneration, re-population and development of rural towns and villages to contribute to local and national economic recovery. It aims to enable people to live and work in a high-quality environment. Other aims of this policy document include enhancing public services in rural areas, transitioning to a climate-neutral society, optimising digital connectivity, supporting employment and careers in rural areas, and enhancing participation, leadership and resilience in rural communities.

### 2.3 **The Regional and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region**

Planning and development issues transcend local authority boundaries, and to ensure improved coordination in planning and development policy matters across boundaries, local authorities across the country are grouped into three regional assembly areas – Eastern and Midland, Northern and Western and Southern. These regional groupings of local authorities prepare Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (known as 'RSESs'), provided for under the Local Government Reform Act 2014, to take the high-level framework and principles of the NPF and work out at higher detail at regional and local authority levels.

The RSES provides a long-term, strategic development framework for the future physical, economic and social development of the Southern Region and includes the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) to guide the future development of the Region's three main cities and metropolitan areas (Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford). The Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area includes all built-up areas and suburbs, including Sixmilebridge, which hosts a population of 2,625 (Census 2016).

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that all City and County Development Plans and variations are consistent with the RSES and relevant national policy, with draft development

plans or proposed variations to development plans referred by the relevant local authority to the Regional Assembly.

## 2.4 **The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029**

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 was adopted by the Elected Members of the Clare County Council on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023, and came into effect on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2023. The CDP sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the functional area of Clare County Council over a period of six years.

### 2.4.1 **Volume 3b of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029: Shannon Municipal District Settlement Plans**

Volume 3b of the Clare County Development Plan (hereafter referred to as CDP) (2023-2029) includes the written statements and maps for the settlements and clusters within the Municipal District of Shannon, including one for Sixmilebridge.

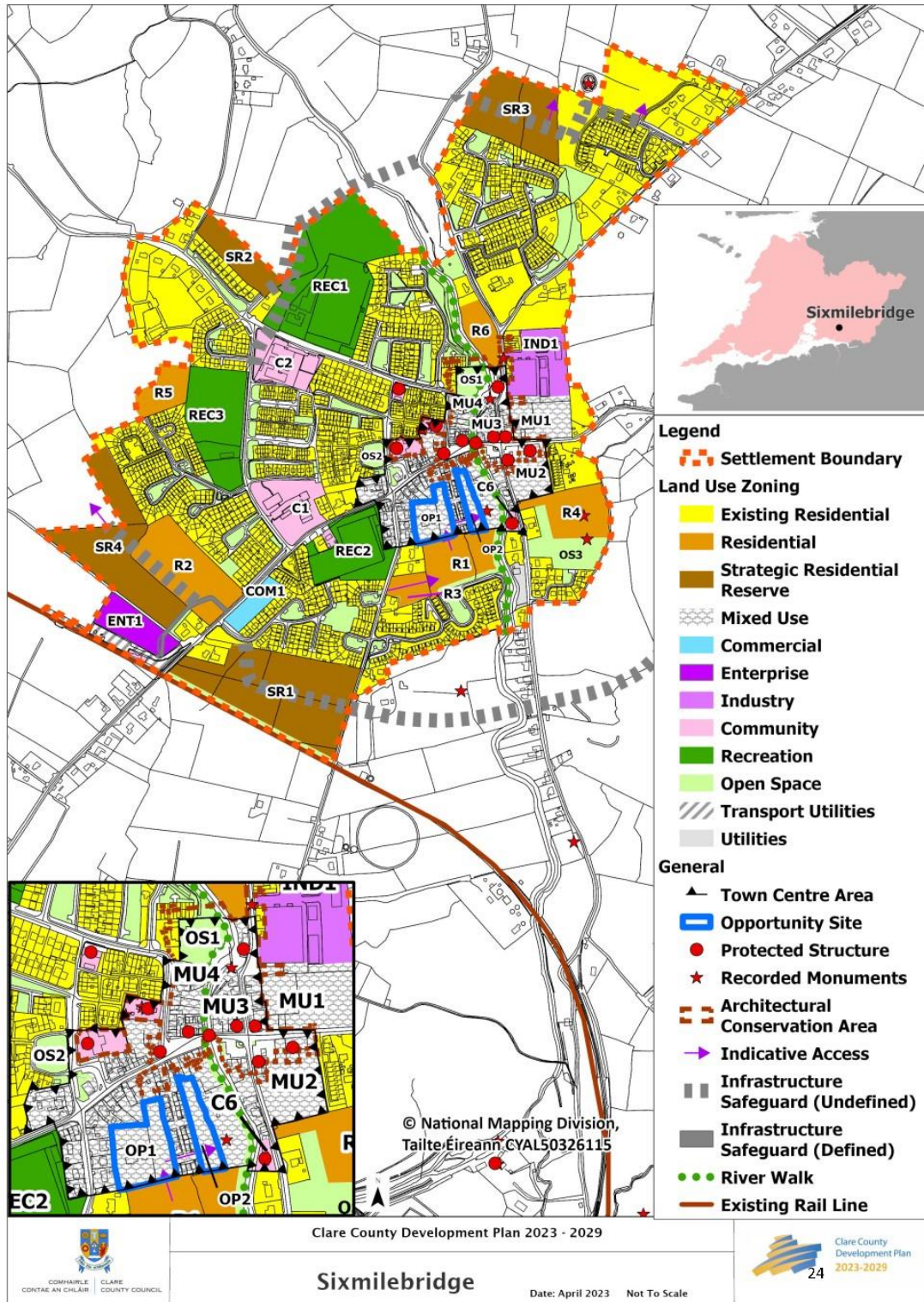
Sixmilebridge is situated within the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area, and is a strong Metropolitan Town with good services and facilities. Within the Metropolitan Area, Sixmilebridge is identified as a small town in the settlement hierarchy performing an important role in serving its local catchment, offering a range of retail, commercial and community facilities. The town additionally has the potential to expand its service offerings for the benefit of residents both in the town and wider rural hinterland.

The town has witnessed significant residential development in the recent years, particularly in the northeast and southern parts of the town. Water is supplied to the town from the Shannon/Sixmilebridge Regional Water Supply Scheme (RWSS) with a surface water source at Castle Lake. This scheme also supplies water to a number of settlements in the area. The existing Wastewater Treatment Plant serving the town has significant spare capacity available to service the needs of the target population.

Sixmilebridge has a compact town centre, and the pedestrian environment is of mixed quality and car dominated. The CDP pledges focus on improving the connection between the train station and the town centre. Streetscape improvements and infill developments with active frontage and improved connectivity for pedestrians across the river have been considered for the overall improvement of north-south connectivity.

The town is located approximately 4km upstream of the Lower River Shannon candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) and River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries Special Protection Area (SPA), and future development will need to ensure that there are no significant effects on the conservation objectives of these Natura 2000 Sites.

Figure 2-1 Zoning Objectives for Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare – Sourced from the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029



## Sixmilebridge TCF Plan

The Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan will be a non-statutory plan that is funded through the Town Centre First initiative under the Government’s *Our Rural Future* Programme. The Plan directly responds to and supports many of the General Objectives outlined in *Volume 3b Shannon Municipal District Settlement Plans* of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, particularly one relating to Place Making and Regeneration<sup>4</sup>:

*“The Town Centre First policy, launched in February 2022, is central to this vision. Town Centre First represents a new approach to the development of our towns where local communities and local businesses can be central to reimagining their own towns and planning their own futures. A pilot scheme to develop Town Centre Plans for selected towns across the country, including Sixmilebridge, has been initiated. The Town Centre First Plan is currently underway for Sixmilebridge and is due to be completed by June 2023.*

*It is an objective of Clare County Council to:*

- *To prepare and support the implementation of a Town Centre First Plan for Sixmilebridge”*

The Plan will have a strong focus on the public realm and regeneration of the town centre, and will address, with equal importance, the social, economic, cultural and environmental opportunities and challenges within Sixmilebridge and incorporate them into a comprehensive public realm enhancement and regeneration-focused strategy. The Plan, as intended by Clare County Council, will therefore realise a common vision for the future direction of the town centre and immediate surrounds through an accurate assessment of the challenges and present suitable responses to these challenges.

The enhancement of Sixmilebridge will respect the distinctive historic character of the town and be cognisant of existing Protected Structures and the designation of the town centre as an Architectural Conservation Area. Projects and improvements have been proposed though the Plan have been presented in Table 2-2. These will inform future planning applications and funding applications for the delivery of the proposals.

The Plan is structured into four overarching themes which are comprised of objectives. These are illustrated in Table 2-1 and Figure 2-2.

Table 2-1 Themes and Objectives of the Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan

Theme	Policy Objective
Sustainable Movement and Access	M1. Calm traffic on the town’s principal approach roads
	M2. Prioritise small scale improvements to promote the walkability of Sixmilebridge
	M3. Develop a high-level parking strategy for Sixmilebridge
Sustainable Public Realm & Environment	PR1. Improve access to and new routes across the river – Sixmilebridge’s principal natural asset
	PR2. Improve provision of community play spaces in the town

<sup>4</sup> Proposed Amendments to Volume 3b Shannon Municipal District Plans including Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area to the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, page 20.

Theme	Policy Objective
	<p><b>PR3.</b> Targeted public realm improvement projects for the town’s 3 key spaces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The Square – both sides</li> <li>b. The Green</li> <li>c. Frederick Square</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sustainable Growth and Investment</b></p>	<p><b>GI1.</b> Support Sixmilebridge’s all-day economy, in particular through an improved local convenience retail offer together with bring vacant central retail premises back into commercial use</p>
	<p><b>GI2.</b> Promote Sixmilebridge as a centre for rural innovation</p>
	<p><b>GI3.</b> A targeted programme to address vacancy and dereliction in Sixmilebridge</p>
	<p><b>GI4.</b> Improve links with Bunratty to help complement the area’s visitor economy – to develop the town’s role as a trail head for walkers and cyclists</p>
	<p><b>GI5.</b> Work with the local community to deliver improved community and youth facilities in Sixmilebridge</p>
<p><b>Sustainable Heritage, Image &amp; Identity</b></p>	<p><b>HCI1.</b> Develop a town heritage trail to celebrate and promote Sixmilebridge’s unique story</p>
	<p><b>HCI2.</b> Establish a regular programme of events, enabled through the town’s improved Square</p>
	<p><b>HCI3.</b> Develop a refurbishment programme to bring the town’s heritage assets back into use</p>

Figure 2-2 Sixmilebridge Plan Themes<sup>5</sup>



The Sixmilebridge TCF Plan comprises a list of Actions which are projects and improvements that have been identified for the plan area. All of these Actions and/or Programmes are compatible with and support the policy objectives of the Plan.

The Actions/Programmes are intended to be implemented over phases and will inform future planning applications and funding applications for the delivery of the proposals. The Action Plan of the Plan can be viewed in Table 2-2.

Table 2-2 Sixmilebridge TCF Plan Action Plan

	Action/Programme	Term	Priority
1.	Traffic Calming	Short	Medium
2.	Street Improvement Programme	Medium	Medium
3.	Pavement Improvements	Short	Medium
4.	Links to the railway station	Short	Lower
5.	New parking controls	Short	Medium

<sup>5</sup> Sourced from the 'Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan Internal Stakeholder Session' Document (April 2023), prepared by Allies and Morrison

	Action/Programme	Term	Priority
6.	New river crossings	Medium	High
7.	New riverside 'blueway'	Long	Medium
8.	New town park	Medium	Medium
9.	Public realm improvement scheme for The Square	Medium	High
10.	Public realm improvement scheme for The Green	Medium	High
11.	Public realm improvement scheme for Frederick Square	Medium	Medium
12.	A new town centre supermarket	Short	Medium
13.	Reinvigoration of the central area with new town centre uses	Medium	Medium
14.	Promote Sixmilebridge as a Centre for Rural Innovation	Long	Medium
15.	Sixmilebridge Market	Short	Medium
16.	Develop Sixmilebridge as a trail head for walkers and cyclists	Medium	Medium
17.	Targeting vacancy and dereliction	Medium	Medium
18.	Improved community and local youth facilities	Medium	High
19.	Town centre living	Long	High
20.	Sixmilebridge heritage trail	Short	Lower
21.	Programme of events	Medium	Medium
22.	Investing in heritage	Long	High

Key: -

**Term**

Short term: 0-3 years  
Medium term: 3-5 years  
Long term: 5+ years

**Priority**

Lower priority: desirable but not critical  
Medium priority: an important local project for Sixmilebridge  
High priority: a project of strategic importance to the town and wider region



3.

## THE PLAN AND SCREENING REQUIREMENTS FOR STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan is a non-statutory document aimed at guiding development in the town centre lands and is being screened for the requirement for SEA, in accordance with the requirements of:

- Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive) and particularly Articles 3(3), 3(4), and 3(5), which relate to ‘Screening’ for the requirement for SEA
- S.I. 435 of 2004 European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 – European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, which sets out the criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment

This report constitutes the Screening of the proposed Plan for the requirement in accordance with the legislation mentioned. The report has been prepared for consultation with the Environmental Authorities specified in Paragraph 9(5) of S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No 200 of 2011. These specific Environmental Authorities are listed in Section 3.2 of this report.

3.1

### Appropriate Assessment and relationship to Screening for SEA

As part of the overall process of environmental assessment, an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening was undertaken in accordance with the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and S.I. No. 477/2011 (the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011.) Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive establishes the requirement for AA:

*“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”*

The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) requires an Appropriate Assessment to be undertaken when a plan or project is “likely to have a significant impact on a European site”. European Sites or Natura 2000 Sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The first step in the AA process is to determine whether an AA is required for the plan or project being screened. This step is referred to as an “AA Screening” and the purpose is to establish, on the basis of a preliminary assessment and objectives criteria, whether a plan or project, alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, could have significant effects on a European Site in view of the site’s conservation objectives.

As outlined in the Department<sup>6</sup> Circular Letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/08, AA Screening is of relevance to SEA Screening in that

*“Where following screening, it is found that the plan or the amendment may have an impact on the conservation status of a Natura 2000 Site or that such an impact cannot be ruled out, adopting the precautionary approach,*

- *An Appropriate Assessment of the plan must be carried out and*
- *In any case where a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) would not otherwise be required, it must also be carried out.”*

Therefore, where a Plan requires a full AA, it shall also require a full SEA.

However, it should be noted that this Plan does not constitute a statutory document. It is intended as a guide to the future development in the town centre of Sixmilebridge, and does not provide for the re-zoning or de-zoning of lands and will not specify any spatial or locational requirements. Any and all future projects and developments that are proposed from this Plan will be subject to the Appropriate Assessment process at the planning stage to ensure that they will not adversely affect the integrity of European Sites.

### 3.2

## Consultation with Statutory Consultees

In accordance with Article 9(5) of S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011, Clare County Council provided notice to the specified environmental authorities as listed below, stating that the implementation of the Sixmilebridge TCF Plan would *not be likely to have significant effects on the environment* and seeking observations and submissions prior to finalising this Draft SEA Screening.

The preliminary SEA Screening was issued to the following to the following specified environmental authorities:

- > The Environmental Protection Agency
- > Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- > Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
- > Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- > Any adjoining planning authority, whose area is contiguous to the area of the planning authority

Responses were received from the EPA, the Manager of the Development Applications Unit (on behalf of the Minister for Housing) and the Geological Survey Ireland (on behalf of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications). The recommendations pertaining to the management of the Owengarney River and refurbishment of derelict buildings from the DAU’s scoping response were integrated into the Final Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan. This can be viewed in Appendix 2 of this Final Screening Report.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (15<sup>th</sup> February 2008)  
<https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/circular-sea-01-08.pdf>

4.

## SCREENING FOR THE REQUIREMENT FOR STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA)

Table 4-1 below presents the SEA Screening Assessment of the Draft Sixmilebridge TCF Plan against the criteria provided in Schedule 2A of SEA Regulations (S.I. 436 of 2004) as amended by the Planning and Development (SEA) Amendment Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 201 of 2011), which details the criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

This Screening Assessment should be read in conjunction with the Screening Statement for Appropriate Assessment and the Plan.

Table 4-1 Assessment Criteria for determining whether the Plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment

1. The Characteristics of the Plan, having regard to:	
(i)	<b>The degree to which the Plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regards to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources</b>
<p>The land-use objectives and activities for the lands at Sixmilebridge are set out in the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029; a map of the same can be viewed in Figure 2-1 of this Screening Report.</p> <p>The preparation of the Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan aligns with the Objectives laid out in <i>Volume 3b Shannon Municipal District Settlement Plans</i> of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029. The key objectives of the Core Strategy of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 include, but are not limited, to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Demonstrate how the development plan is consistent with the National Planning framework and the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (Southern Region),</li> <li>➤ Provide a policy framework for settlement plans and local area plans, particularly in relation to land-use zoning and ensure a strategic approach to zoning that allows for an appropriate level of development throughout the plan area,</li> <li>➤ Provide a framework within which the provision of sustainable infrastructure, amenities, economic investment and development can take place to maximise the use of resources in the County for current and future generations, and</li> <li>➤ Comply with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended).</li> </ul> <p>In compliance with the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 will govern the overall land-use objectives for the County and prepare Settlement Plans for all settlements within the county (See Section 2.3.1 of this Screening Assessment).</p> <p><i>Volume 3b Shannon Municipal District Settlement Plans</i> of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 includes written statements and maps for the settlements and clusters in Co. Clare, including Sixmilebridge. The documents states the following in relation to Place Making and Regeneration<sup>7</sup>:</p>	

<sup>7</sup> Proposed Amendments to Volume 3b Shannon Municipal District Plans including Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area to the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, page 20.

*“The Town Centre First policy, launched in February 2022, is central to this vision. Town Centre First represents a new approach to the development of our towns where local communities and local businesses can be central to reimagining their own towns and planning their own futures. A pilot scheme to develop Town Centre Plans for selected towns across the country, including Sixmilebridge, has been initiated. The Town Centre First Plan is currently underway for Sixmilebridge and is due to be completed by June 2023.*

*It is an objective of Clare County Council to:*

- *To prepare and support the implementation of a Town Centre First Plan for Sixmilebridge”*

While the Plan does set out a guide to the spatial framework for future development in terms of the town centre in Sixmilebridge, it does not provide for the re-zoning or de-zoning of lands and will not specify any spatial or locational requirements. The Clare CDP 2023-2029, however, sets out the spatial framework for development locations and land-use in the County and any future planning applications will be assessed against the requirements and objectives of the CDP as opposed to the requirements and objectives of the Sixmilebridge TCF Plan.

The Clare CDP 2023-2029 was subject to both SEA and AA, and any changes to the use or zoning of these lands would need to form part of a Variation to the CDP. However, it is reiterated that the Sixmilebridge TCF Plan does not provide for any change of zoning at this juncture.

While the Plan sets out local policy objectives it is not setting out a detailed framework for projects that would be of a scale or nature which would warrant a full SEA. The underlying CDP has been subject to full SEA and the additional detail in the proposed Plan is not considered likely to lead to significant environmental effects associated with the location, nature, size and operating conditions nor will it impact on the allocating of resources.

**(ii) The degree to which the Plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy**

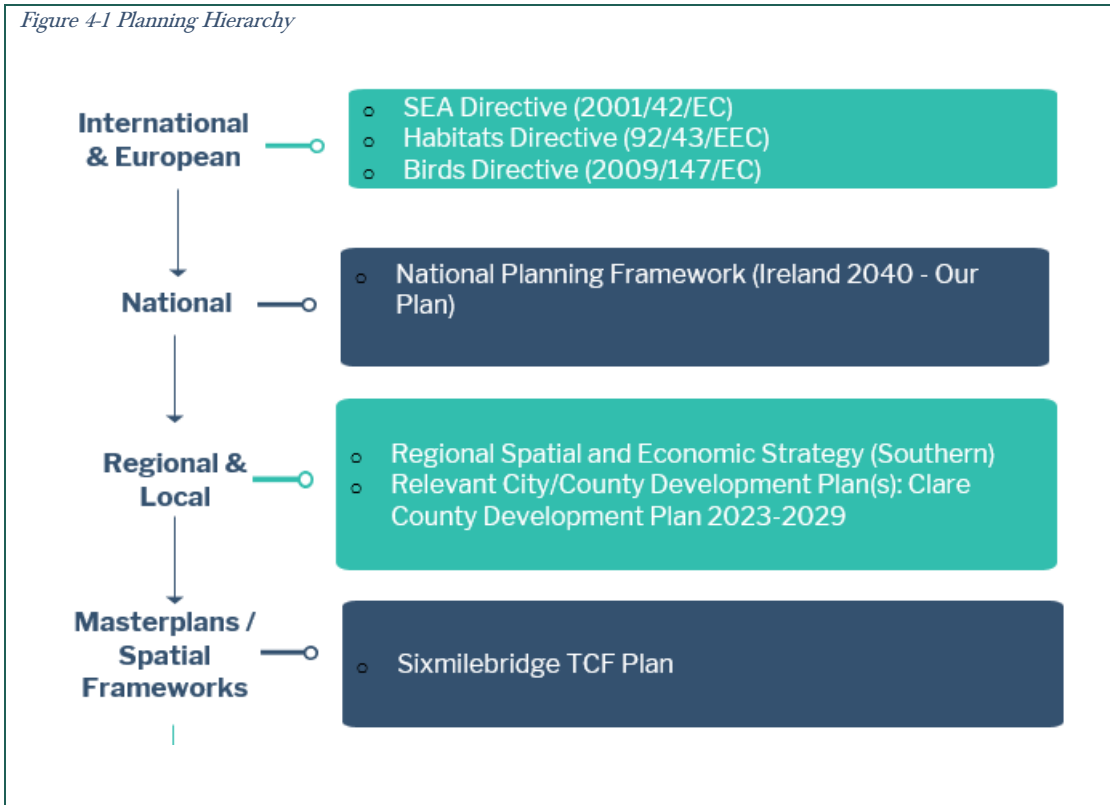
The Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan is a **non-statutory** plan that is funded through the Town Centre First initiative under the Government’s *Our Rural Future* Programme. The Plan directly responds to and supports many of the General Objectives outlined in *Volume 3b Shannon Municipal District Settlement Plans* of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.

In terms of a positioning the Sixmilebridge TCF Plan, the Plan sits at the lowest level of the hierarchy, where it is preceded by the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region at the Local and Regional Government levels. This hierarchy has been illustrated in Figure 4-1 Planning Hierarchy.

The primary purpose of the Plan is to provide further detail and clarity regarding the intentions of the Planning Authority to achieve the objectives, as outlined in the Clare CDP 2023-2029, for these lands. The Plan is set within the context of the current Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and will not have any significant influence on other plans in the planning hierarchy, either above or below it in the hierarchy. It has instead been led by and designed in compliance with by the plans higher up in the process.

Therefore, the Sixmilebridge TCF Plan is compatible and complementary with the vision and objectives of the Clare CDP 2023-2029 and will follow the higher-level plans such as the RSES for the Southern Region and the National Planning Framework. The implementation of the proposed Plan will not lead to any potential for significant environmental effects associated with its interactions with other plans.

Figure 4-1 Planning Hierarchy



**(iii) The relevance of the Plan in the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development**

The Plan outlines the potential future arrangements for Sixmilebridge, in a manner that conforms and complies with the land-use zoning objectives of the lands as established by the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, which was subject to a full SEA and AA.

Furthermore, the Plan takes account of the existing requirements of the Clare CDP 2023-2029 to avoid effects on European Sites through the following steps:

- The Plan has been subject to Screenings for Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment
- The Plan focuses on and integrates sustainability into all themes: transport and movement (promotion and facilitation of sustainable modes of transport), public realm (energy efficiency, greening and biodiversity, sustainable drainage systems), economic investment (infill and backland development) and growth, and heritage and identity (highlighting and promotion of environmental assets and features, repair and restoration of heritage assets)

The Plan will not lead to any alterations in the existing protective objectives in the Clare County Development Plan, and will subject to the high-level protective objectives as stated in the CDP. The Plan will comply with the Strategic Environmental Objectives listed in the *Chapter Six – Environmental Assessment and Strategic Environmental Objectives* of the SEA ER of the CDP.

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 has defined a common vision which seeks to develop and improve the social, economic, cultural, environmental assets and quality of life of the county,

*“That County Clare would develop as a place to be part of and proud of, where urban and rural communities enjoy a high quality of life, work practice choice, inclusivity and service access and so that the county is a dynamic, resilient, connected and internationally*

*competitive location for innovation and investment and is a national leader in climate action, creativity, culture, heritage, tourism and environmental management.”*

The CDP has outlined goals through it aims to deliver this vision. The following goals are of relevance to the Plan,

- **Goal I:** *A county that is resilient to climate change, plans for and adapts to climate change and flood risk, is the national leader in renewable energy generation, facilitates a low carbon future, supports energy efficiency and conservation and enables the decarbonisation of our lifestyles and economy.*
- **Goal II:** *A county that drives and regional sustainable growth by harnessing the potential of its unique location, quality of life, natural resources and other competitive advantages.*
- **Goal III:** *A county with strong and balanced urban and rural areas providing key services and a good quality of life and where people with social or economic requirements to live in the countryside are accommodated.*
- **Goal VI:** *A county with viable and vibrant town and village centres that have shopping areas and markets at appropriate scales and locations that is compatibility with the fragility of rural areas and the existing quality of life.*
- **Goal IX:** *A county where healthy and sustainable communities are developed and integrated with the timely delivery of a wide range of community, educational and cultural facilities and where, through a commitment to equality, participation, accessibility and social inclusion, the county develops as a unique location with an enhanced quality of life for its citizens and visitors.*
- **Goal XIV:** *A county that protects and enhances its unique natural heritage and biodiversity and recognises the potential for sustainable green infrastructure development, while promoting and developing its cultural, educational and eco-tourism potential in a sustainable manner.*
- **Goal XV:** *A county that affords protection and conservation to buildings, areas, structures, sites and features of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest and recognises them as a social, cultural and economic asset to the county.*
- **Goal XVI:** *A county with a strong and vibrant network of towns and villages that provide a wide range of services and a high quality of life for residents of the county.*
- **Goal XVIII:** *A county where the overall strategic objectives of the County Development Plan are translated into settlement plans and local area plans containing detailed land-use zonings and master-planning of neighbourhoods in an evidence-based, plan-led approach with a focus on ensuring a high quality of life.*
- **Goal XIX:** *A county that manages and monitors the county level implementation of the National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial Economic Strategy, national plans and guidelines to ensure that quality of life, sustainability, climate action, resilience and inclusivity are the fundamental principles of the future sustainable development of the county.*

In addition to the Goals, the CDP also includes give Strategic County Outcomes which are entirely interrelated and will aid in the delivery of the overall CDP.

- **Quality of Life:** *Mental and physical health is affected by the environment in which we live. Access to sustainable transport, housing, quality places, green space and community infrastructure can have a significant influence on the quality of life, health and wellbeing of all.*
- **Sustainability:** *The concept of sustainable development can be defined as “development which meets the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Sustainable development is one of the major challenges facing society. How and where we live, work and visit makes demands on the earth’s resources. This Plan adopts the principle of sustainability by promoting and encouraging the integration of economic, environmental, social and cultural considerations into policies and objectives to ensure that the needs of urban and rural communities are met. Any reference to development in this plan should be considered to refer to sustainable development.*
- **Climate Action:** *It is recognised that the County Development Plan has a key role in supporting the delivery of meaningful action on climate change through the implementation of the National Planning Framework compact growth agenda at the local level. The integration of land-use and*

transportation and the sustainable management of environmental resources including biodiversity are critical. Climate action is thus an important strategic objective of the County Development Plan which is reflected by the introduction of a new stand-alone Chapter relating to Climate Action (see Chapter 2) in addition to other climate action-related objectives which permeate the Plan. The County Development Plan in conjunction with the Clare County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 in effect provides a framework for the transition towards a low carbon and more climate resilient County.

- **Resilience:** The Covid-19 Pandemic has most recently shown the importance of resilience and adaptability. Resilience is a principle that also underpins the Plan and is described as ‘the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions’. (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), 2009). It is built into the strategic policies and recommendations of each of the cross-cutting themes: quality of life, sustainability, climate action, and inclusivity.
- **Inclusivity:** Inclusivity affects the wellbeing of individuals, families, social groups and communities. Creating a more socially inclusive society by alleviating social exclusion, poverty and deprivation is a major challenge. Steps towards achieving a more socially inclusive society include the provision of good quality affordable housing, community infrastructure and improving access to information and resources.

In addition to these Goals and Strategic County Outcomes, the CDP contains a particular objective **Development Plan Objective 3.1: Appropriate Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment** (See section on Environmental problems relevant to the Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan below), which requires all future planning applications within the county to be subject to appropriate environmental assessments and will need to comply with the protective objectives as outlined in the CDP. Furthermore, the CDP has various objectives that pertain to enabling the County to transition to a low carbon and climate resilient County.

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 has undergone full SEA and AA processes, integrated environmental considerations into the Plan and concluded that the Plan is based on the principles of sustainable development. The Proposed Plan conforms with these and in fact includes a number of objectives related to the promotion of sustainable development. Its implementation is not considered likely to have significant environmental effects.

**(iv) Environmental problems relevant to the Plan**

The Plan will be a non-statutory plan outlining the potential development arrangements for Sixmilebridge in a manner that is consistent with the land-use zoning objectives outlined for these lands in the Clare CDP 2023-2029, which was subject to a full Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The SEA ER of the CDP concluded that the contents of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 discussed the various issues of concern in its plan area (County Clare), and provided various mitigating measures to decrease impacts that were considered severe or significant.

The County has numerous environmentally sensitive areas that are already designated under legislative framework such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), Proposed National Heritage Areas (pNHAs), views and prospects, Architectural and Archaeological Conservation Areas, Protected Structures, Recorded Monuments and Structures, and Recreational and Amenity Areas. Details of these areas and objectives and policies aimed at their protection have been outlined in the Clare CDP 2023-2029, along with its SEA ER and AA NIR.

As stated previously, the Plan does not intend to change any zoning objectives and already complies with the CDP that sets out the framework for development and land-use in the plan area. Any future

developments will be subject to the planning process, which will assess each case against the policy objectives contained within the CDP. This is stated specifically in,

**Development Plan Objective 3.1: Appropriate Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment:** *It is an objective of Clare County Council:*

- a) *To require compliance with the objectives and requirements of the Habitats Directive, specifically Article 6(3) and where necessary 6(4), Birds, Water Framework, and all other relevant EU Directives and all relevant transposing national legislation*
- b) *To require project planning to be fully informed by ecological and environmental constraints at the earliest stage of project development and any necessary assessment to be undertaken, including assessments of disturbance to the species, where required;*
- c) *To protect, manage and enhance ecological connectivity and improve the coherence of the Natura 2000 Network;*
- d) *To ensure that European Sites and Natural Heritage Areas (designated proposed NHAs) are appropriately protected;*
- e) *To require the preparation and assessment of all planning applications in the plan area to have regard to the information, data and requirements of the Appropriate Assessment Natura Impact Report, SEA Environmental Report and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Report contained in Volume 10 of this Development Plan; and*
- f) *To require compliance with the objectives of the Water Framework Directive and support the implementation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle River Basin Management Plan (and any other iteration during the lifetime of the CDP).*

The implementation of the proposed Plan will not lead to additional likely significant environmental effects which have not been considered in the development of the underlying CDP.

**(v) The relevance of the Plan in the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste management or water protection)**

There is a range of EU legislation pertaining to environmental issues such as climate change, sustainable development, waste management, air pollution, water protection, nature and biodiversity, protection of soils and noise pollution. Directives that relate to the different environmental receptors are specifically mentioned in the Clare CDP 2023-2029. The contents of the CDP have been prepared and developed in compliance with several key European and national legislation aimed particularly at the protection of the environment. These include but are not limited to:

- > EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)
- > EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)
- > Environmental Liability Directive (2004/25/EEC)
- > European Communities (Environmental Liability) Regulation 2008
- > The Water Framework Directive
- > EU Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC)
- > Clean Air for Europe (CAFÉ) Directive (2008/50/EC)
- > The Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000
- > Waste Management Act 1996 (as amended)
- > Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2001

Given that the Sixmilebridge TCF Plan has been based on policy objectives of the Clare CDP 2023-2029, it will be consistent with the legislation mentioned above in addition to the existing national and regional policy documents pertaining to the protection of all environmental receptors.

The Plan is a **non-statutory** plan outlining the potential development arrangements for the town of Sixmilebridge in a manner consistent with the land-use zoning objectives as established in the Clare CDP 2023-2029. The Plan does not relate to the direct implementation of any of these Directives. **The plan's non-statutory nature implies that the plan does not have to be adopted by the members**



**of a local authority.** However, it may be used for advising and informing design and development purposes.

While the Plan does not relate to the direct implementation of these Directives, it does **aid** their implementation through its support for the policies contained within the Clare CDP 2023-2029, which are derived from these Directives.

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

**(i) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects**

The Plan focuses on realising a vision for transforming Sixmilebridge into a vibrant and economic centre, with a range of usable, attractive and green public spaces for the community to meet, gather and spend time through enhanced safety and navigation measures. It will demonstrate how the town centre can create an attractive, vibrant urban environment that incorporates the principles of sustainable development and compact growth.

Typical effects arising from the development of the lands for primarily retail, commercial, office and innovation space will be in line with the zoning as outlined in the Clare CDP 2023-2029 and considered as part of the SEA process for the development of the CDP. It is considered that the characteristics of the effects arising from the implementation of the Plan will not be significant and will be, overall, a net positive.

The Plan does not diverge from or proposes any alterations to the zoning objectives of the Clare CDP 2023-2029. It only serves to outline a comprehensive public-realm and regeneration-focused framework, shaped through stakeholder engagement and incorporation of sustainable development elements, to guide future developments in the town of Sixmilebridge. Furthermore, the implementation of the Plan will not conflict with or lead to any cumulative effects with the current CDP.

**(ii) The cumulative nature of the effects**

The Plan will not give rise to any significant cumulative effects. There are no specific development proposals arising from the Plan that conflict with the Core Strategy of the Clare CDP 2023-2029 or could potentially lead to significant cumulative effects in conjunction with the current County Development Plan. The Sixmilebridge TCF Plan forms part of the development strategy intended by Clare County Council, as set out in Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, which was subject to a full SEA.

**(iii) The transboundary nature of the effects**

The geographic location and extent of the Plan is restricted to Sixmilebridge town and therefore there will be no transboundary effects.

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

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 contains protective objectives for population and human health and other environmental receptors that may be interacting with the former. No risks to human health or other environmental receptors, with particular regard to the potential of accidents, from the Plan have been identified.

**(v) Magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)**

The geographic area and size of population likely to be affected is small which mitigates the potential for any likely significant effects to occur. Mandatory SEA is required for Local Area Plans with a 5,000 persons threshold and a 50km geographic area threshold. The area of the Plan is significantly below these thresholds and cannot be considered large in the context of the requirements of a full SEA.

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 contains objectives for the facilitation of population and economic growth. The purpose of the Sixmilebridge TCF Plan is to present a strategy for the town centre of Sixmilebridge for the enhancement of the public realm with sustainable development elements and is not intended to impact on population levels.

The geographical area of the Plan extends to the town centre of Sixmilebridge, covering an approximate area of 50.5 hectares and proposes part of a green/blueway for walking and cycling that extends into a connection to Bunnratty. The Plan, however, is not envisaged to lead to any negative effects beyond the scope of the objectives of the current Clare CDP 2023-2029.

**(vi) Value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to**

- **Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage**
- **Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values**
- **Intensive land-use**

**Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage**

The existing settlement of Sixmilebridge is not considered a uniquely or special environmentally sensitive location. It is a small scale built environment and therefore its sensitivity to changes, as envisaged in the Plan is low.

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 contains protective objectives in relation to the special natural characteristics and cultural heritage of Sixmilebridge, such as the following stated under General Objectives:

- *To maintain and enhance existing squares, green areas and the riverside and to fully recognise the vital role these have in contributing to a sense of place enhancing amenity, public realm, biodiversity and the green infrastructure network*

And, in relation to cultural heritage, “*The centre of the town has been designated as an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). ACAs are places, areas, groups of structures or a townscape, which are of special interest or contribute to the appreciation of a protection structure. The aim is to retain the overall special historic or architectural character of an area or place.*”

There are no European Sites or Natural Heritage Areas within the geographical extent of the Plan or immediately adjacent the Plan area. The nearest European Sites are the Lower River Shannon cSAC and River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA however there is no potential for negative effects on the qualifying interests of these sites as set out in the Appropriate Assessment report.

**Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values**

Given that the Plan must be consistent and compliant with the Clare CDP 2023-2029, including specific provisions regarding environmental quality standards such as those derived from the Water Framework Directive, it is not anticipated any environmental quality standards will be exceeded. The nature and scale of the projects that may be developed as a result of the implementation of the Plan are not recognised sources of pollution and are such that they are unlikely to have significant effects on environmental receptors.

<p><b><u>Intensive land-use</u></b></p> <p>The Plan does not represent a change in land-use or potentially permitted activities or any intensification of land-use within Sixmilebridge.</p>	
(vii)	<p><b>Effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, EU or international protection status</b></p>
<p>The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 recognises the importance of sites with National and European Site(s) designations and outlines clear objectives for their protection, as already noted in this assessment.</p> <p>The proposed Plan does not envisage projects of a scale likely to have significant landscape or visual effects.</p> <p>A separate Screening for Appropriate Assessment has been carried out in tandem with the SEA Screening of the Plan, in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive to assess the likely significant effects in relation to the conservation management objectives of European Sites and the Plan.</p> <p>The AA Screening has concluded that the Plan, in view of the best scientific knowledge and on the basis of objective information, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is <b>not likely</b> to have significant effects on the conservation objectives of any European Sites.</p>	

It should be noted that the Screening outlined above in Table 4-1 was undertaken originally for the Draft Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan is unchanged following the consultation process and recommendations incorporated into the Final Plan. The changes that were made to the Plan, in terms of Themes and Objectives and Projects, have been screened out for the potential of significant effects on the environment and can be viewed in Appendix 2 of this Final Screening Report.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The proposed Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan has been screened against the relevant environmental criteria, as set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive and Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004.

It is considered that, following the initial screening and the subsequent screening of the Final Plan, that the Plan is not likely to give rise to significant environmental effects, primarily due to the low environmental sensitivity of the Plan area location, its small geographic area, the nature of the projects envisaged (which are modest in scale) and the lack of influence of the Plan on other Plans or Programmes. It is considered that the Plan is consistent with the policy objectives and environmental protective objectives contained within the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and associated environmental assessments including the full SEA and the mitigation measures outlined. On balance, it is considered that a full SEA of the proposed Plan is not required.

It is to be reiterated that the Plan does not constitute a statutory document and is intended as a guide to the future development in the town centre of Sixmilebridge. Any and all future projects and developments with land-use implications that are proposed from this Plan will be subject to relevant Environmental Assessments, including the Appropriate Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment processes (if required) at the planning stage. It is also to be noted that if the Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan is adopted into the current County Development Plan through a Variation, the geographical extent and population of the plan area are significantly below the mandatory SEA thresholds of 5,000 persons or a plan area covering an area greater than 50km<sup>2</sup>.

Following the statutory consultation process which did not flag any existing significant environmental issues (Refer to Appendix 1) and the screening of the proposed changes (See Appendix 2) to the initial Draft Plan, this final Screening Statement concludes that, on balance, the Final Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan will not give rise to any significant environmental effects. The nature of the Final Plan, as well as the scale of the projects envisaged within it, does not warrant a full SEA.

The Final SEA Screening Report and Final Sixmilebridge TCF Plan will be issued to the prescribed Environmental Authorities.



## **APPENDIX 1**

### **PRESCRIBED ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORITIES CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

## **Appendix 1 Prescribed Environmental Authorities Consultation Responses**

Final SEA Screening Report  
Sixmilebridge Town Centre  
First Plan, Co. Clare





## DOCUMENT DETAILS

Client: **Clare County Council**

Project Title: **Final SEA Screening Report Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan, Co. Clare**

Project Number: **230311**

Document Title: **Appendix 1 Prescribed Environmental Authorities Consultation Responses**

Document File Name: **Appendix 1 SR Responses Table F - 2023.06.22 - 230311**

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Rev	Status	Date	Author(s)	Approved By
01	Final SEA SR	22/06/2023	SND	MW



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1.

# RESPONSES TO SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY CONSULTTEES FOR THE SIXMILEBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE FIRST PLAN

Table 1-1 Consultation Responses

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
1.	<b>Environmental Protection Agency; Received 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023</b>		
1a.	<p>We acknowledge your notice, dated 02nd May 2023, in relation to the Draft Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening.</p> <p>The EPA is one of the statutory environmental authorities under the SEA Regulations. In our role as an SEA environmental authority, we focus on promoting the full and transparent integration of the findings of the Environmental Assessment into plans and programmes and advocating that the key environmental challenges for Ireland are addressed as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme. Our functions as an SEA environmental authority do not include approving or enforcing SEAs or plans or programmes.</p>	Noted.	None.
1b.	<p>As a priority, we focus our efforts on reviewing and commenting on key sector plans. For land use plans at county and local level, we provide a ‘self-service approach’ via our guidance document ‘SEA of Local Authority Land Use Plans – EPA Recommendations and Resources’. This document is updated regularly and sets out our key recommendations for integrating environmental considerations into Local Authority land use plans. In finalising your SEA screening determination, we suggest that you take this guidance document into account and incorporate the relevant recommendations as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme.</p>	Noted.	None.

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
1c.	<p><b><u>SEA Determination</u></b></p> <p>If a proposed SEA determination hasn't been made regarding the plan or programme, you should determine whether implementing the plan or programme would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.</p> <p>The SEA Regulations, Schedule 2A (S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended) or Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended), as appropriate, set out the 'Criteria for determining whether a Plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment' to use to determine whether the plan or programme would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.</p> <p>Guidance on the SEA process, including an SEA pack and checklist, is available on our website at: <a href="https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring-assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-resources-andguidance/">https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring-assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-resources-andguidance/</a>.</p> <p>We recommend that you take the available guidance into account in making your SEA Screening Determination and incorporate the relevant recommendations as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>EPA guidance was followed in the preparation of the Draft and Final SEA Screening Reports.</p>	<p>None.</p>
1d.	<p><b><u>EPA Screening Guidance</u></b></p> <p>Our Good Practice Guidance for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening (EPA, 2021) provides specific stand-alone guidance to assist plan or programme makers and SEA practitioners. It focuses primarily on plans/programmes in the non-land use sector in Ireland and includes an elaboration of the steps needed for screening, the legislative landscape underpinning SEA screening, and step-by-step process and templates to assist in preparing the required documentation.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>	<p>None.</p>

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
1e.	<p><b><u>Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</u></b></p> <p>The Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (DHLGH, 2022) provides advice on carrying out SEA in the land-use planning sector for those plans listed in S.I. No.436 of 2004, as amended. These plans comprise regional, county and local plans, including Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, County or City Development Plans, variations of Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Planning Schemes for Strategic Development Zones. The Guidelines replace previous guidance for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities published in 2004.</p>	Noted.	None.
1f.	<p><b><u>Sustainable Development</u></b></p> <p>In proposing and in implementing the plan or programme, you should ensure that the plan or programme is consistent with the need for proper planning and sustainable development. Adequate and appropriate critical service infrastructure should be in place, or required to be put in place, to service any development proposed and authorised during the lifetime of the plan or programme.</p> <p>In considering the plan or programme, you should take into account the need to align with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as incorporating any relevant recommendations in sectoral, regional and local climate adaptation plans.</p> <p>You should also ensure that the plan or programme aligns with any key relevant higher-level plans and programmes and is consistent with the</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan is consistent with Objectives outlined in <i>Volume 3b Shannon Municipal District Settlement Plans</i> of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, which was subject to a full Strategic Environmental Assessment.</p>	None.

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
	relevant objectives and policy commitments of the National Planning Framework and the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.		
1g.	<p><b><u>State of the Environment Report – Ireland’s Environment 2020</u></b></p> <p>In preparing the plan or programme and associated SEA screening, the recommendations, key issues and challenges described in our published State of the Environment Report Ireland’s Environment – An Integrated Assessment 2020 (EPA, 2020) should be considered, as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme.</p>	Noted.	None.
1h.	<p><b><u>Available Guidance &amp; Resources</u></b></p> <p>Our website contains various SEA resources and guidance, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ SEA process guidance and checklists</li> <li>➤ SEA Spatial Information Sources Inventory</li> <li>➤ Topic specific SEA guidance (including <i>Good practice note on Cumulative Effects Assessment</i> (EPA, 2020), <i>Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring</i> (EPA, 2020), <i>Integrating climatic factors into SEA</i> (EPA, 2019), <i>Developing and Assessing Alternatives in SEA</i> (EPA, 2015), and <i>Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment</i> (EPA, 2012))</li> </ul> <p>You can access these guidance notes and other resources at:  <a href="https://www.epa.ie/ourservices/monitoring-assessment/assessment/strategic-environmentalassessment/sea-topic-and-sector-specific-guidance/">https://www.epa.ie/ourservices/monitoring-assessment/assessment/strategic-environmentalassessment/sea-topic-and-sector-specific-guidance/</a></p>	Noted.	None.
1i.	<b><u>Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) WebTool</u></b>	Noted.	None.

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
	<p>This tool is a decision support tool to assist SEA and planning processes in Ireland. It is available at <a href="http://www.enviromap.ie">www.enviromap.ie</a>. The tool brings together over 100 datasets and allows users to create plan-specific environmental sensitivity maps. These maps can help planners examine environmental considerations, anticipate potential land-use conflicts, and help identify suitable development locations while also protecting the environment.</p>		
1j.	<p><b><u>EPA SEA WebGIS Tool</u></b></p> <p>Our SEA WebGIS Tool has been updated recently and is now publicly available at <a href="https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA">https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA</a>. It allows public authorities to produce an indicative report on key aspects of the environment in a specific geographic area. It is intended to assist public authorities in SEA screening and scoping exercises.</p>	Noted.	None.
1k.	<p><b><u>EPA WFD Application</u></b></p> <p>Our WFD Application provides access to water quality and catchment data from the national WFD monitoring programme. The Application can be accessed via the <a href="http://www.catchments.ie">www.catchments.ie</a> website</p>	Noted.	None.
1l.	<p><b><u>Future amendments to the plan or programme</u></b></p> <p>Where changes to the plan or programme are made prior to finalisation, or where modifications to the plan or programme are proposed following its adoption, these should be screened for potential for likely significant effects in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 2A (S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended) or Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended) of the SEA Regulations, as appropriate.</p>	<p>Appendix 2 of the Final Screening Report accounts for these changes, which have been screened against the criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the SEA Regulations for the potential of likely significant environments.</p> <p>On balance, the conclusion stands that the Plan does not require a full SEA the nature and scale of the projects proposed within it</p>	Final SEA Screening Report

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
		<p>does not warrant a full SEA. The Plan is consistent with the objectives outlined for the area of Sixmilebridge in the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and does not present any conflicts with regards to land-use zoning objectives.</p>	
1m.	<p><b><u>Appropriate Assessment</u></b></p> <p>You should ensure that the plan or programme complies with the requirements of the Habitats Directive where relevant. Where an Appropriate Assessment is required, the key findings and recommendations should be incorporated into the SEA and the plan or programme.</p>	<p>Noted. The Appropriate Assessment Screening Report noted that there was no potential for any significant effects on the receiving environment.</p>	<p>None.</p>
1n.	<p><b><u>EPA AA GeoTool</u></b></p> <p>Our AA GeoTool application has been developed in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It allows users to a select a location, specify a search area and gather available information for each European Site within the area. It is available at: <a href="https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool">https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool</a>.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>	<p>None.</p>
1o.	<p><b><u>Environmental Authorities</u></b></p> <p>Under the SEA Regulations, prior to making your SEA determination you should consult with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Environmental Protection Agency;</li> <li>➤ Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage,</li> <li>➤ Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications; and,</li> <li>➤ Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.</li> </ul>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The prescribed Environmental Authorities were notified of the Sixmilebridge TCF Plan and were sent copies of Appropriate Assessment Screening Report, Strategic Environmental Assessment Report and the Draft Sixmilebridge TCF Plan.</p>	<p>Final Sixmilebridge TCF Plan</p> <p>Final SEA Screening Report</p>

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
	<p>For land use plans covered under S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended, you should also consult with:</p> <p>➤ Any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous to the area of a planning authority which prepared a draft plan, proposed variation or local area plan.</p>	<p>Responses were screened and recommendations were incorporated into the relevant Environmental Assessments and the Final Sixmilebridge TCF Plan.</p>	
1p.	<p><b><u>SEA Determination</u></b></p> <p>As soon as practicable after making your determination as to whether SEA is required or not, you should make a copy of your decision, including, if appropriate, the reasons for not requiring an environmental assessment, available for public inspection in your offices and on your website. You should also send a copy of your determination to the relevant environmental authorities consulted.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The Final Screening Statement and Plan will be circulated to the prescribed Environmental Authorities.</p>	<p>Final SEA Screening Report</p>
<p><b>2. The Manager (Development Applications Unit; Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage); Received 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023</b></p>			
2a.	<p><b><u>Nature Conservation</u></b></p> <p>These observations are intended to assist you in relation to identifying potential impacts on European sites, other nature conservation sites, and biodiversity and environmental protection in general, in the context of the current proposal. The observations here are not exhaustive, and are made without prejudice to any recommendation that may be made by this Department in the future.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>	<p>None.</p>
2b.	<p>The Department agrees with the conclusions of the draft SEA and AA screening reports. All future projects and developments arising from the implementation of the Plan will be subject to the Appropriate Assessment</p>	<p>Noted.</p>	<p>Final SEA Screening Report.</p>

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
	<p>process to ensure they will not adversely affect the integrity of European Sites. In particular (but not limited to) Action point 6 – ‘new river crossings’ and Action point 7 – ‘new riverside blueway’.</p>	<p>The SEA Screening Report has been updated to reflect that projects and developments that may arise from the Plan will be subject to the Appropriate Assessment process at the planning stage to ensure that they will not adversely affect the integrity of European Sites.</p>	
2c.	<p>Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) will also be required with such future projects to assess potential impacts on certain species of flora and fauna, and their key habitats (i.e. breeding sites and resting places), which are strictly protected under national wildlife legislation wherever they occur. This should also address “stepping stones and ecological corridors” including habitat areas and species locations covered by Article 101 of the Habitats Directive.</p> <p>The Owenogarney River provides a vital wildlife corridor through the town and to the local environment. Tree lines and existing hedgerow along the river should be retained.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The Plan document (Sections 8, 11, and 16) has been updated to include the significance of the Owenogarney River, and that trees and existing hedgerows along the river will be retained.</p>	<p>Final Sixmilebridge TCF Plan.</p> <p>Appendix 2 of the Final SEA Screening Report.</p>
2d.	<p>Finally, any refurbishment of derelict buildings should take the potential for nesting swifts into account and that provision of Swift bricks/boxes should be included in any such plans.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The Plan (Sections 7 and 17) document has been updated to state that refurbishments of any derelict buildings will account for the potential of nesting swifts and Swift bricks and boxes will be incorporated into any such plans.</p>	<p>Final Sixmilebridge TCF Plan</p> <p>Appendix 2 of the Final SEA Screening Report</p>
<p><b>3. Geological Survey Ireland (Received 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023)</b></p>			



No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
3a.	<p>Geological Survey Ireland is the national earth science agency and is a division of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. We provide independent geological information and gather various data for that purpose. Please see our website for data availability. We recommend using these various data sets, when conducting the EIAR, SEA, planning and scoping processes. Use of our data or maps should be attributed correctly to 'Geological Survey Ireland'.</p>	Noted.	None.
3b.	<p>With reference to your email received on the 08 May 2023, concerning the Draft Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan, Geological Survey Ireland would encourage use of and reference to our datasets. This data can add to the content and robustness of the SEA process. With this in mind please find attached a list of our publicly available datasets that may be useful to the environmental assessment and planning process. We recommend that you review this list and refer to any datasets you consider relevant to your assessment. The remainder of this letter and following sections provide more detail on some of these datasets.</p>	Noted.	None.
3c.	<p>A national inventory of geoheritage sites known as County Geological Sites (CGSs) is managed by the Geoheritage Programme of Geological Survey Ireland. CGSs, as adopted under the National Heritage Plan, include sites that are of national importance which have been selected as the very best examples for NHA (Natural Heritage Areas) designation.</p> <p>NHA designation will be completed in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). CGSs are now routinely included in County Development Plans and in the GIS of planning departments, to ensure the recognition and appropriate protection of geological heritage within the planning system. CGSs can be viewed online under the Geological Heritage tab on the online Map Viewer.</p>	Noted.	None.

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
3d.	<p>The audit for Co. Clare was completed in 2005. The full report details can be found here. Our records show that there are no CGSs in the vicinity of the Town Centre Plan.</p>	Noted	None.
3e.	<p><b><u>Groundwater</u></b></p> <p>Geological Survey Ireland’s Groundwater and Geothermal Unit, provides advice, data and maps relating to groundwater distribution, quality and use, which is especially relevant for safe and secure drinking water supplies and healthy ecosystems</p> <p>Proposed developments need to consider any potential impact on specific groundwater abstractions and on groundwater resources in general. We recommend using the groundwater maps on or Map viewer which should include: wells; drinking water source protection areas; the national map suite - aquifer, groundwater vulnerability, groundwater recharge and subsoil permeability maps. For areas underlain by limestone, please refer to the karst specific data layers (karst features, tracer test database; turlough water levels (gwlevel.ie). Background information is also provided in the Groundwater Body Descriptions. Please read all disclaimers carefully when using Geological Survey Ireland data.</p> <p><b>The Groundwater Data Viewer indicates an aquifer classed as a ‘Locally Important Aquifer - Bedrock which is Moderately Productive only in Local Zones’ underlies the proposed Town Centre Plan.</b></p> <p>The Groundwater Vulnerability map indicates the range of groundwater vulnerabilities within the area covered is variable. We would therefore recommend use of the Groundwater Viewer to identify areas of High to Extreme Vulnerability and ‘Rock at or near surface’ in your assessments, as</p>	Noted.	None.

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
	<p>any groundwater-surface water interactions that might occur would be greatest in these areas.</p> <p>GWClimate is a groundwater monitoring and modelling project that aims to investigate the impact of climate change on groundwater in Ireland. This is a follow on from a previous project (GWFlood) and the data may be useful in relation to Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and management plans. Maps and data are available on the Map viewer.</p> <p>Geological Survey Ireland has completed Groundwater Protection Schemes (GWPSs) in partnership with Local Authorities, and there is now national coverage of GWPS mapping. A Groundwater Protection Scheme provides guidelines for the planning and licensing authorities in carrying out their functions, and a framework to assist in decision-making on the location, nature and control of developments and activities in order to protect groundwater.</p> <p>The Groundwater Protection Response overview and link to the main reports is here: <a href="https://www.gsi.ie/enie/programmes-and-projects/groundwater/projects/protecting-drinking-water/what-is-drinking-waterprotection/county-groundwater-protection-schemes/Pages/default.aspx">https://www.gsi.ie/enie/programmes-and-projects/groundwater/projects/protecting-drinking-water/what-is-drinking-waterprotection/county-groundwater-protection-schemes/Pages/default.aspx</a></p>		
	<p><b><u>Geotechnical Database Resources</u></b></p> <p>Geological Survey Ireland continues to populate and develop our national geotechnical database and viewer with site investigation data submitted voluntarily by industry. The current database holding is over 7500 reports with 134,000 boreholes; 31,000 of which are digitised which can be accessed through downloads from our Geotechnical Map Viewer. We would encourage the use of this database as part of any baseline geological assessment of the proposed development as it can provide invaluable</p>	Noted.	None.

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
	<p>baseline data for the region or vicinity of proposed development areas. This information may be beneficial and cost saving for any site-specific investigations that may be designed as part of the project.</p>		
	<p><b><u>Geohazards</u></b></p> <p>Geohazards can cause widespread damage to landscapes, wildlife, human property and human life. In Ireland, landslides, flooding and coastal erosion are the most prevalent of these hazards. We recommend that geohazards be taken into consideration, especially when developing areas where these risks are prevalent, and we encourage the use of our data when doing so.</p> <p>Geological Survey Ireland has information available on landslides in Ireland via the National Landslide Database and Landslide Susceptibility Map both of which are available for viewing on our dedicated Map Viewer. Associated guidance documentation relating to the National Landslide Susceptibility Map is also available.</p> <p>Geological Survey Ireland also engaged in a national project on Groundwater Flooding. The data from this project may be useful in relation to Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and management plans, and is described in more detail under ‘Groundwater’ above.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>	<p>None.</p>
	<p><b><u>Geothermal Energy</u></b></p> <p>Geothermal energy harnesses the heat beneath the surface of the Earth for heating applications and electricity generation, and has proven to be secure, environmentally sustainable and cost effective over long time periods. Geothermal applications can range in depth from a few metres below the surface to several kilometres. Ireland has widespread shallow geothermal resources for small and medium-scale heating applications, which can be</p>	<p>Noted.</p>	<p>None.</p>

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
	<p>explored online through Geological Survey Ireland’s Geothermal Suitability maps for both domestic and commercial use. We recommend use of our Geothermal Suitability maps to determine the most suitable type of ground source heat collector for use with heat pump technologies. Ireland also has recognised potential for deep geothermal resources.</p> <p>The Roadmap for a Policy and Regulatory Framework for Geothermal Energy was launched at the Geoscience 2020 Conference in November 2020. The Assessment of Geothermal Resources for District heating in Ireland and the Roadmap for a Policy and Regulatory framework for Geothermal Energy in Ireland documents have been developed to support the Government's commitments under the Climate Action Plan 2019 and the Programme for Government.</p> <p>For further information please see our Geoenergy pages on our website or contact the Groundwater and Geothermal Unit of the Geological Survey Ireland directly</p>		
	<p><b><u>Natural Resources (Minerals/Aggregates)</u></b></p> <p>Geological Survey Ireland is of the view that the sustainable development of our natural resources should be an integral part of all development plans from a national to regional to local level to ensure that the materials required for our society are available when required. Geological Survey Ireland highlights the consideration of mineral resources and potential resources as a material asset which should be explicitly recognised within the environmental assessment process.</p> <p>Geological Survey Ireland provides data, maps, interpretations and advice on matters related to minerals, their use and their development in our</p>	<p>Noted.</p>	<p>None.</p>

No.	Issue Raised	SEA Response	Updates to document(s)
	<p>Minerals section of the website. The Active Quarries, Mineral Localities and the Aggregate Potential maps are available on our Map Viewer.</p> <p>We would recommend use of the Aggregate Potential Mapping viewer to identify areas of High to Very High source aggregate potential within the area. In keeping with a sustainable approach we would recommend use of our data and mapping viewers to identify and ensure that natural resources used in any proposed town centre developments are sustainably sourced from properly recognised and licensed facilities, and that consideration of future resource sterilization is considered.</p>		
	<p><b><u>Other Comments</u></b></p> <p>Should development go ahead, all other factors considered, Geological Survey Ireland would much appreciate a copy of reports detailing any site investigations carried out. The data would be added to Geological Survey Ireland's national database of site investigation boreholes, implemented to provide a better service to the civil engineering sector. Data can be sent to the Geological Mapping Unit, at <a href="mailto:GeologicalMappingInfo@gsi.ie">mailto:GeologicalMappingInfo@gsi.ie</a> , 01-678 2795.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>All prescribed Environmental Authorities will be notified of the Final Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan and updated Environmental Assessment reports.</p>	<p>None.</p>



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **CHANGES TO THE DRAFT SIXMILEBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE FIRST PLAN**

## **Appendix 2 Changes to the Draft Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Masterplan**

Final SEA Screening Report  
Sixmilebridge Town Centre  
First Plan, Co. Clare







## DOCUMENT DETAILS

Client: **Clare County Council**

Project Title: **Final SEA Screening Report Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Plan, Co. Clare**

Project Number: **230311**

Document Title: **Appendix 2 Changes to the Draft Sixmilebridge Town Centre First Masterplan**

Document File Name: **Appendix 2 SEA SR F- 2023.06.22 - 230311**

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Planning and  
Environmental  
Consultants

Rev	Status	Date	Author(s)	Approved By
01	Final SEA SR	22/06/2023	SND	MW



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1.

# SCREENING OF CHANGES TO THE DRAFT PLAN

The Plan underwent further refinement since its first draft which was circulated for consultation to the statutory consultees. The changes have predominantly been in the ordering of the Themes and Objectives and Projects, with the addition of a few new ones. The original Themes, Objectives, and Projects can be viewed in Section 2.5 Sixmilebridge TCF Plan of the Screening Report. The changes can be viewed in the following Tables 1-1 and 1-2. New additions have been highlighted.

Table 1-1 Changes in Themes and Objectives

Former Reference	Current Reference	Current Revised Themes and Objectives
<b>Sustainable Environment &amp; Movement</b>		
PR1, PR2	EM1	Improve access to, access across, and the environmental quality along the O'Garney River
PR3	EM2	Targeted public realm improvement projects for the town's key spaces
M1, M2	EM3	Calm traffic on the town's principal approach roads and improve the town's 'walkability'
	EM4	Improving public transport services and facilities
M3	EM5	Balance the need to manage car parking alongside other priorities for the historic centre
<b>Sustainable Heritage, Identity &amp; Visitor Experience</b>		
HCI2	HIVE1	Improved promotion of the town
GI3, HCI1, HCI3	HIVE2	Develop a refurbishment programme to bring the town's heritage assets back into use
GI4	HIVE3	Improve leisure access to the river and links with Bunratty to help complement the area's visitor economy

Original 4 themes combined into three, with (i) Movement and Access and (ii) Public Realm and Environment merging

PR2	HIVE4	Deliver dedicated spaces for cultural and community events	
GI3	HIVE5	A targeted programme to address vacancy and dereliction in Sixmilebridge	
Enterprise and Sustainable Growth			
GI1	ESG1	Support Sixmilebridge's all-day retail economy with a new supermarket and new evening uses	
New	ESG2	Increase Awareness of the Sixmilebridge Digihub and expand usage to support local businesses and their training needs	
New	ESG3	Supporting existing and provide new flexible and affordable workspaces for new, small and growing businesses, potentially supporting Sixmilebridge as a centre for rural innovation	
GI2	ESG4	Address vacancy within the Industrial Estate and assess feasibility to develop into a Rural Innovation Hub building on the strengths of the town.	
Youth and The Local Community			
GI5	YLC1	Provide more dedicated flexible built spaces for local community activities	
New	YLC2	Provide new and improved outdoor spaces and facilities for local young people and the wider community	
GI5	YLC3	Ensure growth in the town's population is supported by necessary community health, education, and other infrastructure	New Themes and Objectives
New	YLC4	Take a pro-active multi-agency approach to tackling anti-social behaviour	
New	YLC5	Ensure through-life local housing needs are met	

The following table 1-2 presents the list of projects originally proposed under the Draft Plan, with new additions under each theme.

Table 1-2 Changes in proposed Projects List

Former Reference	Current Reference	Project List from the Original Draft Plan and New Projects
Sustainable Environment and Movement		
5	1	Improve local car parking
2, 3	2	Footpath improvements and 'walkability' improvements
1	3	Traffic calming
9	4	Improvements at Town Square
10	5	Improvements at The Green
11	6	Improvements at Frederick Square
17, 22	7	Façade and shopfront improvements
6	8	Town centre footbridge
6	9	Wider pedestrian and cycle network improvements
New	10	Strategic movement study for Sixmilebridge
New	11	River management
4	12	Public transport enhancements

Sustainable Heritage, Identity and Visitor Experience		
New	13	New Sixmilebridge 'place-brand', promotion and marketing
20	14	Heritage trail
7	15	Greenway
18	16	River-based activities for young people and visitors
17, 22	17	Targeting programme to address vacancy & dereliction
New	18	Explore potential for culture and events centre
16	19	Sixmilebridge as a trailhead
Enterprise and Sustainable Growth		
New	20	Digihub investment
14	21	Rural enterprise and innovation centre
New	22	Business support and training
New	23	Industrial Park investment
New	24	Explore Sixmilebridge 'Bike Hub' concept
12, 13	25	Improved local convenience retailing and Shop Local campaign
15	26	Sixmilebridge Market

13, 19	27	Promote compact town centre development
Youth and the Local Community		
18	28	Youth café
18	29	Scout Riverbase
18	30	Multi-use community facility
New	31	Develop a Social Community Plan
New	32	Feasibility studies for community infrastructure
21	33	Programme of events
8	34	Town Park and Community Garden
18	35	Multi-functional Community Sports Facility
19	36	Development opportunities and new 'step down' housing
New	37	Sustainable Energy Plan
New	38	Refurbishment or reprovision of playground

An additional assessment of the changes to the initial draft Plan, in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations 2004 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004) was undertaken and is presented in the table below.

Table 1-3 Assessment of Changes to the Plan

	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
New Objectives and Themes	Enterprise and Sustainable Growth		
	ESG2 Increase awareness of the Sixmilebridge Digihub and expand usage to support local business and their training needs	<p>This objective pertains to the augmentation of the existing Digital Hub, which was first established under the Rural Development Strategy with the aim of supporting rural communities by providing flexible, affordable and local office facilities and high-speed broadband connectivity in rural locations across County Clare.</p> <p>The actions proposed under this objective (See 20 Digihub Investment also) will not result in any land-use changes and/or present any conflicts to the zoning objectives of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.</p>	No potential for significant effects to arise
	ESG3 Support existing and provide new flexible and affordable workspaces for new, small and growing businesses, potentially supporting Sixmilebridge as a centre for rural innovation	<p>This objective pertains to upgrading the existing workplaces and the provision of new flexible and affordable workspaces for the local community in Sixmilebridge to promote the town as an attractive location to live and work.</p> <p>This objective is in line with the General Objectives “To ensure that Sixmilebridge continues to act as an important local service centre that maintains a sustainable community, a good quality environment,</p>	No potential for significant effects to arise



	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
		<p><i>providing public transport to key centres and a high quality of life for those who live in the town and its hinterland</i>, and “<i>To promote the consolidation of the town through brownfield reuse/redevelopment and to address vacancy and the underutilisation of the existing building stock while also promoting compact growth within the identified land use zoning to support existing services and encourage the development of new services, whilst retaining its existing character and its historic core area</i>”, of the Sixmilebridge excerpt (hereafter referred to as the Sixmilebridge Area Settlement Plan) of the Volume 3b of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029: Shannon Municipal District Settlement Plan.</p> <p>As such, no conflicts with the objectives of the County Development Plan were identified.</p>	
	<b>Youth and the Local Community</b>		
	<p>YLC2 Provide new and improve improved outdoor spaces and facilitates for local young people and the wider community</p>	<p>This objective is in support of the General Objective (as contained within the objectives for the Sixmilebridge Area in Volume 3b Shannon Municipal District Settlement Plans) “<i>To maintain and enhance existing squares, green areas and the riverside and to fully recognise the vital role these have in contributing to a sense of place enhancing amenity, public realm, biodiversity and the green infrastructure network</i>”. No</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>

	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
		conflicts with the objectives of the Clare CDP 2023-2029 were identified.	
	YLC4 Take a pro-active multi-agency approach to tackling anti-social behaviour	This objective pertains to intervention measures as an effective means of responding to and reducing youth anti-social behaviour and will involve preventative and responsive intervention measures. No land-use changes are proposed under this theme, and therefore no conflicts with the objectives of the Clare CDP 2023-2029 have been identified.	No potential for significant effects to arise
	YLC5 Ensure through-life local housing needs are met	The Sixmilebridge Area Settlement Plan notes that housing demand in the town over the recent years has been generated from the local population as well as commuters. The potential for future development of housing in the town shall be closely aligned with adequate provision of local facilities and services. Any housing developments will be sited on lands specifically zoned for residential development as outlined in the Settlement Plan.  No conflicts with the objectives of the Clare CDP 2023-2029 have been identified.	No potential for significant effects to arise
New Projects	Sustainable Environment and Movement		
	<b><u>10 Strategic Movement Study for Sixmilebridge</u></b>  With the town earmarked for continued growth and with transport issues having been identified as the priority issue for the town, a strategic movement study should be	This project pertains to commissioning studies for assessing Sixmilebridge's potential of expanding its transport infrastructure in a sustainable manner. There are no land-use changes proposed as part of this	No potential for significant effects to arise

	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
	<p>commissioned for the town. Issues to be addressed include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Public transport provision (see Action 12)</li> <li>➤ The potential development of a new ring road to the south of the town</li> <li>➤ Key junctions on the main approaches to The Square</li> <li>➤ General traffic management issues including speed limits</li> <li>➤ Car parking provision and management</li> </ul>	<p>project. The actions listed within this project are in direct support of the Transport Objectives listed in the Sixmilebridge Area Settlement Plan.</p>	
	<p><b><u>11 River Management</u></b></p> <p>Sixmilebridge has a history of flood events. Community feedback has highlighted that there may be water management issues associated with the management of the waters of the O'Garney River, including issues with management and maintenance of the weir north of the road bridge. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Liaise with relevant water and environmental authorities and stakeholders</li> <li>➤ Carry out a feasibility study to examine existing flood risk</li> <li>➤ Consider opportunities for further measures associated with a flood relief scheme</li> <li>➤ Consider implications of future housing developments in the vicinity of the river</li> <li>➤ Consider ongoing river maintenance and dredging to reduce the risk of flooding</li> </ul>	<p>This project is proposing consultation exercises with relevant stakeholders and flood risk assessment studies to determine the flood risk the Owengarney River presents. It is noted that the river provides a vital wildlife corridor within the area, and the retention of the existing treeline and hedgerows will be integrated into any river maintenance works to prevent flooding.</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>

	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Owenogarney River provides a vital wildlife corridor through the town and to the local environment. Tree lines and existing hedgerow along the river should be retained</li> </ul>		
Sustainable Heritage, Identity and Visitor Experience			
	<p><b><u>13 New Sixmilebridge ‘Place-Brand’, Promotion and Marketing</u></b></p> <p>The town is considered something of a hidden gem. Much more could be done to promote the town and its assets and attractions through devising a co-ordinated ‘place-brand’ approach. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Town Team would be best placed to lead the initiative through the establishment of a marketing and communications working group</li> <li>➤ Establishment, design and ongoing management of a dedicated website and social media channels</li> <li>➤ Run regular branding and event campaigns via social media, web and print, including music festival, heritage week etc</li> </ul> <p>Management of regular events, exhibitions and festivals (see Action 33)</p>	<p>This proposal pertains to the promotion of Sixmilebridge as an attractive place to visit, live, and work. There are no changes proposed in terms of land-use and does not present a conflict with the zoning objectives of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>
	<p><b><u>18 Explore potential for culture and events centre</u></b></p> <p>Potentially related to Action 17, a feasibility study to explore the potential for a new culture and events centre in the town. With so many heritage assets and with its strategic location close to Ennis, Limerick and Bunratty,</p>	<p>This proposal is putting forth the need for feasibility studies to explore the potential for a new culture and events centre in the town. The actions proposed under this pertain to promoting leisure and tourism and raising funding, in addition to the sensitive</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>

	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
	<p>and with links between these centres being improved, the business case for a new cultural and events centre should be explored. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Working alongside relevant Council services and departments, including leisure and tourism and economic development</li> <li>➤ Exploring scope for specific heritage buildings to be refurbished</li> <li>➤ Liaising with relevant funding agencies to explore how public sector financial support might be found to support the project</li> </ul>	<p>refurbishment of existing heritage buildings, which supports the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) Objective, “<i>The aim is to retain the overall special historic or architectural character of an area or place</i>”. No conflicts with the objectives of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 were identified in relation to this project.</p>	
Enterprise and Sustainable Growth			
	<p><b><u>20 Dighub Investment</u></b></p> <p>The Sixmilebridge Digital Hub was recently established in the Credit Union building in the Market Square. In view of the findings of the Digital Blueprint report, further investment is needed to promote this facility. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improve signage outside Dighub and create awareness of it as a ‘Business Centre’ for start up/entrepreneurs/remote workers.</li> <li>➤ Repurpose some of the space to create meeting and training room spaces.</li> <li>➤ Use the facility as a base for Open Day for Local Businesses promotion sessions</li> </ul>	<p>This proposal pertains to the augmentation of the existing Digital Hub, which was first established under the Rural Development Strategy with the objective of supporting rural communities by providing flexible, affordable and local office facilities and high-speed broadband connectivity in rural locations across County Clare.</p> <p>The actions proposed under this project will not result in any land-use changes and/or present any conflicts to the zoning objectives of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>

	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Use the facility (and other suitable venues) to host youth digital skills training sessions such as Coderdojo</li> </ul>		
	<p><b><u>22 Business Support and Training</u></b></p> <p>Through liaison with local businesses, a tailored training programme could be devised to meet local training needs and business support. This will help support new businesses in the town find their feet and build a business network. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Liaison with existing local businesses to better understand their business support and training needs</li> <li>➤ A review of wider business support and training programmes across County Clare with a view to incorporating Sixmilebridge into existing programmes</li> <li>➤ Investment in local business premises to ensure training spaces are fit for purposes (see Action 20 and 21)</li> </ul>	<p>The actions proposed under this project pertain to training and building capability in the local economy. No land-use changes have been proposed, and therefore no conflicts with the objectives of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 were identified.</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>
	<p><b><u>23 Industrial Park Investment</u></b></p> <p>The existing Industrial Park at Frederick Square is the town's largest concentration of business space and the source of much local employment. The estate is however in need of investment and improvement. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review and improve business signage across the estate and on individual premises</li> </ul>	<p>The action proposed under this project reflects upgrading of existing built environment through sensitive refurbishment of frontage properties and improvement of the public realm in conjunction with the proposed actions under Action 6 Improvement at Frederick Square.</p> <p>The Sixmilebridge Area Settlement Plan notes the requirement of a strategy for Frederick Square and design scheme that makes more efficient use of the open space and realises the amenity potential of the</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>

	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review the integral road infrastructure and access and make improvements to support business operation, safety and security</li> <li>➤ Any improvements should be made in conjunction with those progressed under Action 6</li> </ul>	<p>area. Furthermore, it states that any public or private developments will be subject to the findings of the ‘Survey of Trees in Towns and Villages of County Clare’ which details and raises awareness of the local biodiversity and how this contributes to Placemaking. Therefore, any improvements to the existing built environment will be carried out without giving rise to the potential of any significant effects on any environmental receptor.</p>	
	<p><b><u>24 Explore Sixmilebridge ‘Bike Hub’ Concept</u></b></p> <p>Owing to Sixmilebridge’s location on the Greenway connecting Bunratty and Limerick and with the town already attracting large number of cycling groups, there may be an opportunity to capitalise on the town’s growing profile as a hub for cyclists and walkers. A purpose built or refurbished hub facility could support these visitors and attract new business to the town. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Learn from successful locations which have established themselves as hub locations for visiting cyclists and walkers</li> <li>➤ Examples locations include Staveley Mill Yard in Cumbria and Kilmacthomas Workhouse on the Waterford Greenway.</li> <li>➤ Liaise with local cycling groups and business owners to explore the potential opportunities.</li> <li>➤ Approach retailers and operators to raise awareness and attract investment</li> </ul>	<p>The actions proposed within this project are feasibility and case studies to learn from locations which have successfully executed sustainability transport strategies and established themselves as hub locations for visiting cyclists and walkers.</p> <p>This will be a consultation exercise and does not propose any land-use changes at this stage.</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>

	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
Youth and Local Community			
	<p><b><u>31 Develop a Social Community Plan</u></b></p> <p>Anti-social behaviour is an issue across the town. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this may be a result of the capacity and provision of community infrastructure, leisure and sport facilities failing to keep pace with the ongoing housing growth in the town. Building on the ‘Healthy Families Healthy Communities Report (2021) – Supporting Children and Families in South Clare who are Affected by Familial Drug and Alcohol Use’, a Social Community Plan should be produced to help address some of the associated issues.</p>	<p>This objective pertains to the preparation of a framework that will aid the community in reducing anti-social behaviour in the area. This will involve preventative and responsive intervention measures. No land-use changes are proposed under this project, and therefore no conflicts with the objectives of the Clare CDP 2023-2029 have been identified.</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>
	<p><b><u>32 Feasibility Studies for Community Infrastructure</u></b></p> <p>The town has grown significant in recent years and is earmarked for further phases of growth. It is essential that the provision of the of community infrastructure keeps pace with this residential population growth. There is no secondary school in the town. Many separate journeys across the region are therefore made to access nearby secondary schools by local children and their families.</p> <p>Feasibility studies should be undertaken to assess local provision and future needs, particularly in relation to education and community health services. Working with partners and service providers, any existing or anticipated gaps in service provision should be addressed, through</p>	<p>The actions proposed within this project are feasibility studies to assess the existing local provisions and the potential for growth in relation to the projected requirements, particularly pertaining to education and community health services. This will be undertaken to identify the weaknesses and gaps in the current service provision for future upgrades to existing infrastructure and/or the delivery of new services and facilities.</p> <p>There are no land-use changes proposed with this project at this stage, and therefore does not conflict with the objectives of the Clare CDP 2023-2029.</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise</p>



	Changes to the Draft Plan	SEA Screening Assessment	Conclusion
	improvements and investments in existing, or the delivery of new, services and facilities.		
	<p><b><u>37 Sustainable Energy Plan</u></b></p> <p>Develop a Sustainable Energy Plan for Sixmilebridge to create low energy and low carbon communities and set up a local retrofit programme. As council housing stock is refurbished, opportunities for the establishment of district or community heat networks should be explored. This will require liaison with energy providers and potentially the establishment of a Sixmilebridge Energy Service Company (ESCo).</p>	<p>The actions proposed within this project pertain to the sustainable energy transition of Sixmilebridge Town to lower carbon emissions through the integration of a local retrofit programme in refurbishment of council housing stock. This is overall a net positive across all environmental receptors, particularly for Air and Climate and Population and Human Health, and does not represent any land-use changes or conflict with the zoning objectives of the current Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise.</p>
	<p><b><u>38 Refurbishment or Reprovision of Playground</u></b></p> <p>A key theme which reoccurred throughout the engagement process raised by adults and children was the need for a new or refurbished playground. The existing playground is in a poor state of repair and is often the focus for anti-social behaviour. A newly refurbished or re-provided playground which builds in features to lower the risk of antisocial behaviour and the subsequent impact this can have on the space and the young people who use it, would be highly beneficial to the town. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Redesign of space to include more modern, durable and inclusive play equipment</li> <li>➤ Consider options for the ongoing management and maintenance of the space</li> </ul>	<p>The actions proposed within this project account for the refurbishment of the existing playground which is in a state of disrepair. The design considerations are limited to the playground and does propose any land-use changes or conflict with the zoning objectives of the current Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.</p>	<p>No potential for significant effects to arise.</p>

	<b>Changes to the Draft Plan</b>	<b>SEA Screening Assessment</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Consider features which could help deter or reduce antisocial behaviour. See also Action 31</li> <li>➤ Consider opportunities for overlooking</li> </ul>		