

1

Introduction, Vision and Strategic Overview

1.1 Introduction

In the 2016 Census Limerick was home to 194,899 people. Limerick City is the largest urban centre in Ireland's Mid-West and the country's third largest City, located 200km from the capital Dublin.

The Draft Limerick Development Plan 2022 – 2028 (hereafter referred to as the Draft Plan) envisages Limerick as the principal focus within the region, with the potential to generate and be the focus of significant employment and housing growth. Limerick City Centre is the prime employer for the Mid-West Region with 44,625 jobs in 2016. The strategic location of Limerick City in relation to the other regional cities and Dublin, and its location on the Atlantic Economic Corridor, presents tremendous potential for growth and investment across the county.

Some of the prime assets in Limerick include world-class infrastructure, a highly educated and skilled workforce and a high-quality lifestyle. Limerick has excellent global and national trade and tourism connectivity, with an international airport at Shannon, within the Metropolitan Area and a Tier 1 port located at Shannon Foynes. Limerick's third level institutes include the University of Limerick, Limerick Institute of Technology and Mary Immaculate College.

In 2014 Limerick City and County Council was formed through the amalgamation of the former City and County Councils. The Draft Plan is the first to be prepared for Limerick City and County and will replace both the Limerick City Development Plan 2010 – 2016 (as extended) and the Limerick County Development Plan 2010 – 2016 (as extended).

Preparation of the Plan has come at a challenging time during the Covid-19 pandemic. The recovery of our economy, rebuilding of our society, renewing of our communities and responding to the wide ranging challenges we face, will be crucial for the overall development of our City and County. Limerick previously set a successful example for recovery during the economic recession following the Celtic Tiger years. Limerick City and County Council will build on this experience in enabling and facilitating the recovery from the challenges we now face. One of the key assets in this respect is the collective approach of Limerick's stakeholders.

The preparation of the Plan is one of the most important functions of the Elected Members. The Plan sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the functional area of Limerick over a six year period between 2022 and 2028.

This chapter outlines the vision, strategic objectives and an overview of the Plan. The chapter also outlines the context of planning and environmental policy, legislation and local level strategies, in which the Plan has been prepared.

DRAFT

1.2 Strategic Vision for Limerick

The Plan is underpinned by a strategic vision intended to guide the sustainable future growth of Limerick.

At the core of the vision is cohesive and sustainable communities, where our cultural, natural and built environment is protected. The vision embraces inclusiveness and a high quality of life for all, through healthy place-making and social justice, including the ongoing development of the Regeneration Areas and disadvantaged communities. An integrated approach will align housing and public transport provision. Human and environment wellbeing including climate adaptation are at the core of the vision.

The strategic vision has been prepared having regard to the National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework, the Regional Strategic Outcomes of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the 8 Corporate Goals of the *Corporate Plan 2019 – 2024* and the aspirations of the people and stakeholders in Limerick.

The strategic vision of the Draft Plan reads as follows:

Limerick – A Green City Region on the Waterfront
By 2030, Limerick will become a green City region on the Shannon Estuary connected through people and places. This will be achieved through engagement, innovation and resilient urban development and self-sustaining rural communities.

1.2.1 Key Ambitions:

1 A Green Region

Limerick will develop as an environmentally sustainable and carbon neutral economy - a pioneer in sustainable growth. This will be underpinned by the promotion of active mobility for all, creating an attractive and distinctive place to live, work and visit.

2 Embracing the River Shannon

Limerick will provide room for people to enjoy the River Shannon/Estuary. The animation of the waterfront will increase public access and create new recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

3 Resilient, Connected and Inclusive Communities

The future development of Limerick will make it easier to live sustainably and be well prepared for the future, increasing opportunities for movement and connectivity between communities.

4 A Sustainable, Innovative and Competitive Economy

The Limerick region will be an inclusive, self-sustaining economy built on growth and innovation and which maximises its competitive edge. This will enhance local enterprises, attract international investment in a manner which guarantees quality of life.

DRAFT

1.3 Strategic Objectives

The Plan aims to form a coherent development strategy to 2028 and beyond. The strategic vision recognises the potential of Limerick to align with the key growth objectives set out in the higher order spatial plans and to take advantage of the strategic assets of the City and County.

The vision is underpinned by a number of interlinked strategic objectives that will be realised through the chapters of the Plan. The development of Limerick over the lifetime of this plan focuses on sustainable growth of the built environment, employment generation and the provision of community and social services, together in a low carbon, compact, consolidated and connected pattern of development. Delivering on these objectives will result in an enhanced quality of life for all citizens.

The following are the interlinked strategic objectives of the Draft Plan:

1. Grow Limerick's economy and create opportunity through maximising the potential for development through the promotion and enhancement of the **competitive advantages of Limerick**, including its strategic location, connectivity and accessibility to international markets, a skilled workforce and a high quality of life.
2. Transition to an environmentally sustainable **carbon neutral economy**.
3. Ensure new residential development is of the highest quality, enabling life cycle choices and physical, community, recreation and amenity infrastructure are provided in tandem, to **create sustainable, healthy, inclusive and resilient communities**.
4. Protect the unique character of Limerick. Support and facilitate **revitalisation** and consolidation of the City, towns and villages, through public realm and place-making initiatives. Address vacancy and dereliction to create compact attractive, vibrant and safe environments in which to live, work, visit and invest. Ensure the highest quality of public realm and urban design principles are applied to all new developments, including the construction of landmark buildings in appropriate locations.
5. Create a competitive environment in which to do business. Promote, support and enable **sustainable and economic development**, enterprise and employment generation. Focus in particular on areas which are accessible by public and sustainable modes of transport. Enable settlements and rural areas to become self-sustaining through innovation and diversification of the rural economy.
6. Reduce car dependency and promote and facilitate sustainable modes of transport. Prioritise walking, cycling and public transport. Provide an appropriate level of road infrastructure, road capacity and traffic management, to support existing and future development and **enhance connectivity**.
7. Protect, enhance and ensure the sustainable use of Limerick's key **infrastructure**, including water supplies and wastewater treatment facilities, energy supply including renewables, broadband and transportation.
8. Protect, enhance and connect areas of **natural heritage, green infrastructure and open space** for the benefits of quality of life, biodiversity, protected species and habitats, while having the potential to facilitate climate change adaptation and flood risk measures.
9. Protect, conserve and enhance the **built and cultural heritage** of Limerick, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and ensuring good quality urban design principles are applied to all new developments. The principle that well planned and integrated development enhances the sustainability, attractiveness and quality of an area should be at the centre of any proposal.
10. Support growth in the **tourism** sector in Limerick and capture key opportunities to grow the sector based around four key drivers - Waterways, Activities, Heritage, Arts and Culture, in an urban and a rural environment.

DRAFT

1.4 Plan Overview

The Draft Plan is set out as follows:

- **Volume 1 - Written Statement:** The Written Statement is the main document of the Draft Plan, setting out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Limerick over a 6 year period to 2028. This volume comprises thirteen chapters of text, policies and objectives for development.
- **Volume 2 - Settlements:** This volume includes the following:
 - Limerick City Metro Area zoning and development objectives;
 - Level 4 Settlements zoning and development objectives;
 - Level 5 Settlements text and boundary maps;
 - Level 6 Settlements text and maps.
- **Volume 3 - Record of Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas:** This volume includes the Record of Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas in Limerick.
- **Volume 4 - Environmental Reports:** This volume includes the documents informing the preparation of the Draft Plan in accordance with environmental legislation, including a Strategic Environmental Assessment, Natura Impact Report and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.
- **Volume 5 - Designated Sites, Recorded Monuments and Places:** This volume includes maps of designated Natura 2000 sites, Recorded Monuments and Places and other accompanying maps.
- **Volume 6 - Accompanying Strategies:** This volume includes the accompanying strategies of the Draft Housing Strategy, including Housing Need Demand Assessment, Draft Retail Strategy for the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area and County Limerick, Draft Building Height Strategy for Limerick, Strategic Integrated Framework Plan for the Shannon Estuary and the Limerick 2030 An Economic and Spatial Plan.

In the event that any conflict or ambiguity arises between the Written Statement and supporting maps, the Written Statement shall take precedence.

1.5 Plan Making Process and Requirements

The Draft Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), higher tier international, national and regional level plans, ministerial guidelines and with regard to local level strategies and plans.

The preparation of the new Plan involves a 3 stage process as set out in Figure 1 below. The formal process for the preparation of this Draft Plan commenced on 15th of August 2020, with the publication of the First Issues Paper entitled '*Limerick Development Plan 2022 – 2028, What is your Vision for Limerick?*'. During the public consultation period 248 no. written submissions were received and considered in the Chief Executive's Report issued to Elected Members on the 20th of November 2020.

Preparation of the Draft Plan has been informed by the Chief Executive's Report on written submissions, consultations with members of the public, stakeholders, service providers, Elected Members, Strategic Policy Committees, Statutory Bodies, Government Departments and with the various Directorates of Limerick City and County Council.

Following consideration of this Draft by the Elected Members, stage 2 of the process will commence with a public consultation phase between 26th June and 6th September 2021. During this time written submissions will be invited and considered in a second Chief Executive's Report to be issued to Members. The Planning Authority envisages that the final Plan will be adopted in May 2022.

The following sections set out the context of policy documents, local level strategies and environmental legislation requirements, which have underpinned the preparation of the Draft Plan.

DRAFT

1.5.1 Planning Legislation

The Draft Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended). Section 10(1) provides that the Draft Plan shall set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and shall consist of a written statement and a plan or plans indicating the development objectives for the area. The Act sets out mandatory requirements with respect to the content of the Plan, including objectives for the zoning of land, the provision of infrastructure, the conservation and protection of the environment and the integration of planning and sustainable development with the social, community and cultural requirements of the population.

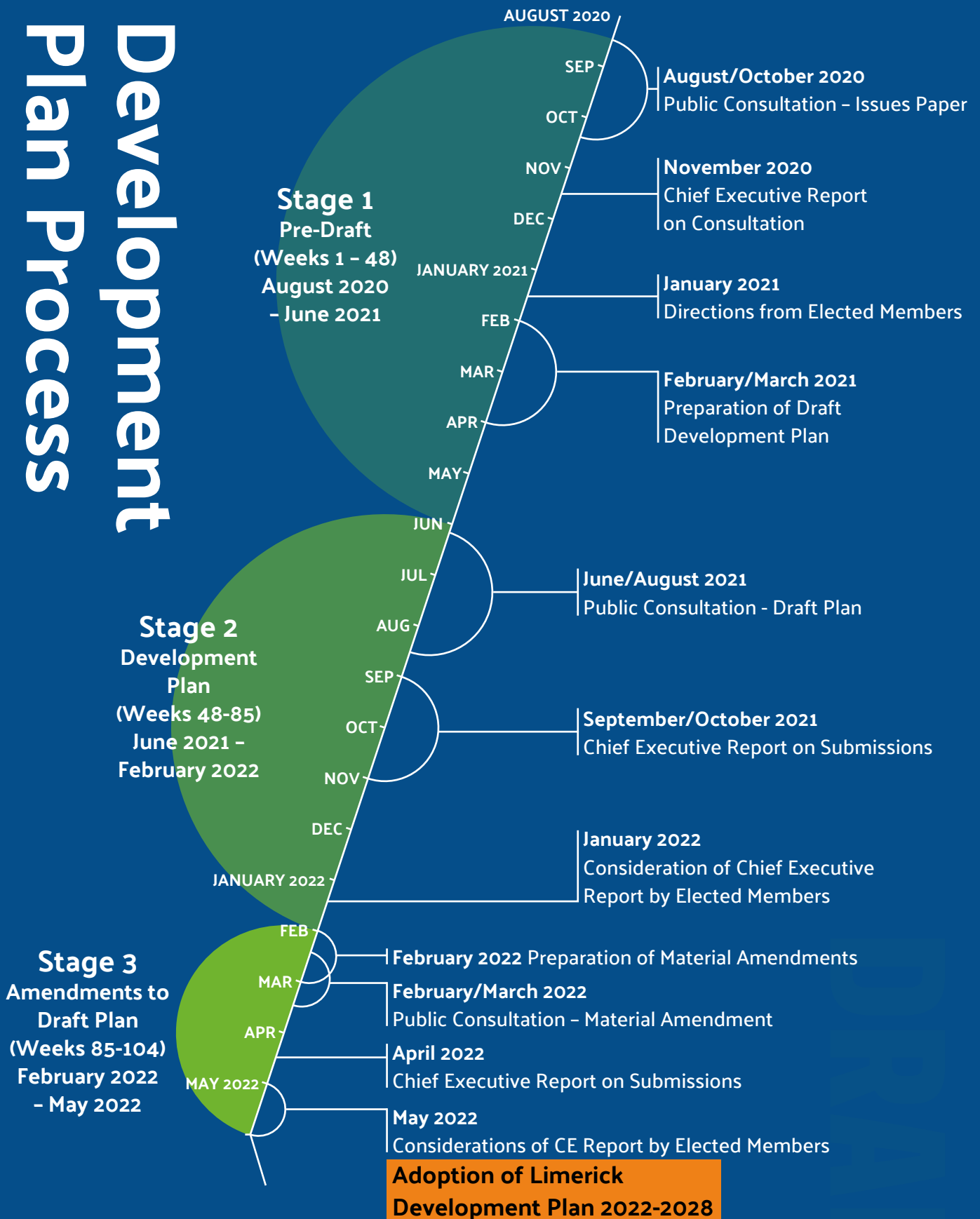
The Act requires the preparation of a 'Core Strategy' for Limerick, which must be consistent, as far as practicable, with the higher tier National and Regional growth objectives, set out under the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region.

In making the Draft Plan, Section 12(11) of the Act states that members shall be restricted to considering the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, the statutory obligations of any Local Authority in the area, and any relevant policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or any Minister of the Government.

1.5.2 Ministerial Guidelines

In accordance with Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), all Ministerial Guidelines issued to Planning Authorities regarding their functions under the Planning Acts, have been fully considered in the preparation of the Draft Plan. A statement of consistency with these Guidelines is included in Volume 1 Appendix 1.

Figure 1:
Development Plan Process



1.5.3 Policy Context

The Draft Plan has been prepared in accordance with Project Ireland 2040 and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region.

As set out in the NPF, sustainability is at the centre of long term planning. In this regard, Ireland is a signatory to the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 'Transforming our World'. The seventeen SDGs reflect economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and set a framework for national level policies and agendas to 2030.

There is significant alignment between the SDGs and the NPF's National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs), in areas including climate action, clean energy, sustainable cities and communities, economic growth, reduced inequalities and innovation and infrastructure, education and health. A summary of how the policies and objectives align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals is set out in Volume 1 Appendix 2.

1.5.4 Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 comprises the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP). The NPF sets out an overarching strategy and policy context to shape the sustainable development of Ireland to 2040. The NPF comprises 10 no. National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) and 75 no. National Policy Objectives (NPOs). The NSOs and NPOs guide Ireland's economic, environmental and social development at national, regional and local level, including the preparation of the policies and objectives of the Draft Plan. The NPF envisages Limerick as the principal centre of development within the region, with the potential to generate and be the focus of significant employment and housing growth.

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 provides the accompanying investment strategy which aligns with the strategic objectives of the NPF.

Figure 2: UN Sustainable Development Goals



Figure 3: National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF



1.5.5 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework at a regional level. The development of Limerick will be shaped by the Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) which provide a framework for the spatial and economic development of the Southern Region.

The Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) sets out the framework for the Local Authorities of Limerick City and County Council and Clare County Council and the various stakeholders to implement the National Planning Framework. The MASP provides a strategic focus on the development of Limerick City and the metropolitan settlement of Shannon. The MASP supports Limerick City in becoming a major economic force in the Irish and international economy.

1.5.6 Draft Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS)

The Draft Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS) has been prepared by the National Transport Authority (NTA), in collaboration with Limerick City and County Council, Clare County Council and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII). The strategy provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area over the medium to long term. The Strategy will deliver a high-quality, accessible, integrated and more sustainable transport network that supports the role of the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area as the major growth engine of the Mid-West Region, an internationally competitive European city region and main international entry to the Atlantic Corridor. The Planning Authority must ensure that the Draft Plan is consistent with the Transport Strategy of the NTA.

DRAFT

1.5.7 Limerick 2030 An Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick

The Limerick 2030 An Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick is a once in a generation plan, designed to guide the economic, social and physical renaissance of Limerick City Centre and the wider County. The plan sets out a framework for the integration of economic development with spatial planning. The plan is currently under review and when completed will complement the Draft Plan.

1.5.8 Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019 – 2024

The Climate Change Adaptation Strategy is a high level document designed to bring the issue of climate change to the mainstream in Limerick City and County Council's plans, policies and operations. Our planning system must be responsive to our national environmental challenges and development must occur within environmental limits. The key role that land use planning plays in progressing climate change mitigation and adaption is to the forefront of the Draft Plan. Part of this commitment includes sustainable land management and resource efficiency, in order to support the transition towards a low carbon society.

1.5.9 Environmental Requirements

In accordance with European and National legislation, Limerick City and County Council has carried out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), an Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), which have informed the preparation of the Draft Plan.

1.5.9.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Draft Plan is required in accordance with the SEA Directive (DIR 2001/42/EC). SEA is a formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan, policy or programme. The SEA process seeks to 'provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development'.

SEA has been carried out to inform the likely environmental impacts of implementing the policies and objectives and integrating relevant environmental considerations into the Draft Plan. Both the Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment have informed preparation of the SEA. The SEA Environmental Report (SEA ER) and SEA Statement accompany the Draft Plan. This report sets out the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the location and type of developments within the plan area, mitigation measures to offset potential adverse effects of the plan and monitoring proposals. Mitigation measures recommended in the SEA ER have been incorporated into the Draft Plan.

DRAFT

1.5.9.2 Appropriate Assessment

The Habitats Directive provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance, through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of Natura 2000 sites. These are candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC), designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), designated under the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (2009/147/EC).

Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required in accordance with Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive (DIR 92/43/EEC). AA is a focused and detailed impact assessment of the implications of the plan or project, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives.

Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment (AA) of plans and projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites. A Natura Impact Report has been prepared for and accompanies the Draft Plan. The mitigation measures identified in the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (Natura Impact Report) have been incorporated into the Draft Plan.

1.5.9.3 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) is required in accordance with *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities* as amended by Circular PL2/2014. The primary purpose of the SFRA is to determine flood risk within a particular geographical area and to support planning decisions in relation to land use during development of the plan. The SFRA has been integrated into the SEA and accompanies the Draft Plan



