

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT

FOR THE

PROPOSED VARIATION No. 4

TO THE

KILDARE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011-2017

for: Kildare County Council

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Section 1 Introduction and Terms of Reference

1.1 Introduction

Kildare County Council has prepared Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017 under Section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

As the Council has not determined that the Proposed Variation would be likely to have significant environmental effects, the Proposed Variation has to be screened for the need to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Screening is the process for deciding whether a particular plan - or variation to a plan -, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would thus warrant SEA. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the requirement for SEA to be undertaken on Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017.

The Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017 was subject to full SEA and Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening. These processes, throughout which the environmental authorities were consulted, facilitated the mitigation of potential environmental effects and the AA identified that the Plan would not affect the integrity of any European Sites (except as provided for by the Habitats Directive).

1.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Legislative Requirements

SEA is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme, or variation to a plan or programme, before a decision is made to adopt it. The SEA Directive¹ requires, inter alia, that SEA is undertaken for certain plans, programmes or variations to these.

Under Article 7 (13K) of the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations 2004 (SI No. 436 of 2004) as amended by the Planning and Development (SEA) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (SI No. 201 of 2011)², Kildare County Council is required to determine whether the Proposed Variation needs to be subject to SEA. Screening is the process for determining whether a particular plan - or variation to a plan -, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would thus warrant SEA³.

Such a determination is required to take account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A '*Criteria for determining whether a plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment*' of the SEA Regulations, as amended, and submissions or observations from relevant environmental authorities.

¹ Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of Ministers, of 27th June 2001, on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment

² Both sets of Regulations are collectively referred to as 'the Regulations' in this report.

³ It is noted that the SEA Directive requires that SEA is undertaken where Stage 2 AA is being undertaken however the AA screening process undertaken on the Proposed Variation has found that Stage 2 AA is not necessary (see Section 2.2).

1.3 Reasons for the Proposed Variation

The reasons for the Proposed Variation are:

1. To provide clarity in relation to the specific intentions of Kildare County Council in relation to a Distributor Road for Athy.
2. To ensure consistency with the Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018 which the Council is also planning to vary⁴.

1.4 Consultations

As part of the screening process, environmental authorities⁵ were notified that a submission or observation in relation to whether or not implementation of the Proposed Variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment may be made to the Council (a period of 3 weeks was allowed for the reply). In order to help facilitate the environmental authorities' response to this notice an earlier version of this SEA Screening Report accompanied the notice.

One submission was made (by the Environmental Protection Agency) in response to this notice which is detailed and responded to at Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Response to EPA SEA Screening Submissions

Submission Text	Response
SEA Determination We note your position with regard to the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Proposed Variation No. 4 (the Variation) to the Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017 (the Plan). There is merit in including in an Appendix, some supporting background information on the selection of the preferred distributor route and related re-alignment considerations, in the context of further supporting the determination of no likely significant effects. It is also worth describing whether the route selection process for the distributor road, has taken into account the requirements of the EIA and Habitats Directives.	Noted. An Executive Summary of the Athy Distributor Road Route Selection Report has been included at Appendix I.
Future Amendments to the Draft Plan Kildare County Council should determine whether or not any future proposed Variations would be likely to have significant effects on the environment. This assessment should take account of the SEA Regulations Schedule 2A Criteria (S.I. No. 436 of 2004).	Noted.
Environmental Authorities Under the SEA Regulations (S.I. No. 436 of 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, notice should be given to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Minister for the Environment, Community & Local Government • Minister for Agriculture, Marine and Food, and the Minister for Communications Energy and Natural Resources, where it appears to the planning authority that the plan or programme, or modification of the plan or programme, might have significant effects on fisheries or the marine environment • where it appears to the competent authority that the plan or programme, or amendment to a plan or programme, might have significant effects in relation to the architectural heritage or to nature conservation, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs, and • any adjoining planning authority whose area is continuous to the area of a planning authority which prepared a draft plan, proposed variation or local area plan. 	Noted – notice has already been provided to these authorities.
A copy of your decision regarding the determination should be made available for public inspection at your offices, local authority website and should also be notified to any Environmental Authorities already consulted. Should you have any queries or require further information in relation to the above please contact the undersigned. I would also be grateful if an acknowledgement of receipt of this submission could be sent electronically to the following address: sea@epa.ie.	Noted, the SEA Screening Report and associated Determination is being placed on public display with the Proposed Variation. Environmental authorities already consulted will be notified.

⁴ Proposed Variation No. 1 to the Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018 is also being subjected to SEA Screening and the findings of that screening have informed this SEA Screening for Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017

⁵ The following authorities are being notified: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources; Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government; Environmental Protection Agency; Meath County Council; Offaly County Council; Laois County Council; Carlow County Council; Wicklow County Council; South Dublin County Council; and Fingal County Council.

Section 2 SEA Screening

2.1 Introduction

The section examines whether each part of the Proposed Variation would be likely to have significant environmental effects (and thus would warrant the undertaking of Strategic Environmental Assessment).

This examination takes account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A '*Criteria for determining whether a plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment*' of the SEA Regulations, as amended, (see Section 2.4) and has been updated to take account of a submission made by an environmental authority during the SEA screening consultation process.

2.2 Appropriate Assessment

Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening is being undertaken on the Proposed Variation. AA is an impact assessment process concerning *Natura 2000*, or *European*, sites - these sites have been designated or proposed for designation by virtue of their ecological importance.

The Habitats Directive⁶ requires, inter alia, that variations to plans undergo an AA process to establish the likely or potential effects arising from implementation of the Variation. If the effects are deemed to be *significant, potentially significant or uncertain* then the Variation must undergo Stage 2 AA.

The AA screening process undertaken on the Proposed Variation has found that Stage 2 AA is not necessary.

2.3 SEA Screening Analysis

Table 2.1 examines whether each part of the Proposed Variation would be likely to have significant environmental effects (and thus would warrant the undertaking of Strategic Environmental Assessment) and is supplemented by Table 2.2 which provides details on the potential environmental effects (if unmitigated), mitigating measures from the Plan.

The examination takes account relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A '*Criteria for determining whether a plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment*' of the SEA Regulations, as amended, (see Section 2.4) and has been updated to take account of a submission made by an environmental authority during the SEA screening consultation process.

The full range of environmental effects⁷, including cumulative effects are considered by this assessment.

⁶ Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

⁷ These include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects

Table 2.1 SEA Screening

Amendment Number	Chapter of Plan	Section of Plan	Existing Plan Content	Proposed Amendment	SEA Screening Determination	SEA Screening Determination Explanation
1	Chapter 6 Movement and Transport	6.5.3 Roads Programme	Text - Objective RP 9: To build the Athy Southern Distributor Road. This road will be linked to the M9 link road.	Objective RP 9: To build the Athy Distributor Road. This road will be linked to the M9 link road.	SEA is not required.	This amendment changes a title from 'Southern Distributor Road' to 'Athy Distributor Road'. This amendment would not be likely to result in significant adverse environmental effects. Refer also the SEA Screening Determination Explanation provided at Amendment No. 2.
2	Chapter 6 Movement and Transport	6.5.3 Roads Programme	Text - Objective RP 10: To identify a route for the Athy Northern Distributor Road and preserve the route free from development.	Delete Objective	SEA is not required.	<p>Following a feasibility study and public consultation a preferred route option for the Athy Distributor Road has emerged. The New Town Centre Street and Northern Distributor Road are being removed from the Plan to provide clarity in relation to the specific intentions of Kildare County Council in relation to a Distributor Road for Athy. Some proposed town centre streets will be retained where deemed appropriate to open up backland areas in the southern town centre area for future development. No canal or river crossings are proposed. The selected route option was identified through the constraints and route selection studies as having a higher preference in terms of environment, economy and safety.</p> <p>The deletion of this objective relates to the removal of a provision that was previously identified as having the potential result in significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated. The SEA and AA processes undertaken alongside the preparation of current Plan have ensured that such effects would be mitigated by various provisions integrated into the Plan, including those referenced on Table 2.2. The removal of potential adverse effects, if unmitigated, would not result in likely significant environmental effects.</p> <p>The provisions of the current Plan – including those relating to land use and transportation e.g. various provisions relating to rail, walking and cycling, buses – were identified by the SEA of the current Plan as, inter alia, contributing towards sustainable mobility and associated effects (including reducing emissions to air such as noise and greenhouse gas emissions).</p> <p>The 'Athy Distributor Road Route Selection Report' identifies that the construction of the Distributor Road to the south of Athy town centre would significantly reduce traffic flows on the N78 through the town. This would result in associated benefits, reducing emissions to air such as noise and greenhouse gas emissions. The Route Selection Report also identifies that if the Northern Distributor Road was also constructed (in addition to the preferred Distributor Road to the South of Athy), there would be an additional reduction in traffic flows on the N78 through the town, however the level of the additional reduction in traffic volumes would not justify the construction of a distributor road to the north. Consequently the removal of the Northern Distributor Road would not be likely to result in significant adverse environmental effects, including effects</p>

SEA Screening Report for Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017

Amendment Number	Chapter of Plan	Section of Plan	Existing Plan Content	Proposed Amendment	SEA Screening Determination	SEA Screening Determination Explanation
						relating to sustainable mobility (and associated interactions with noise and greenhouse gas emissions). An Executive Summary to the Athy Distributor Road Route Selection Report is provided at Appendix I. The change referred to by this amendment is not likely to result in significant adverse environmental effects.
3	Chapter 18 Environs Plan	18.7 Athy Environs	Text - No development shall be permitted within this zoning in advance of the necessary physical infrastructure, including the provision of a section of the Southern Distributor Road (Map 18.8).	No development shall be permitted within this zoning in advance of the necessary physical infrastructure, including the provision of a section of the Athy Distributor Road (Map 18.8).	SEA is not required.	This amendment changes a title from 'Southern Distributor Road' to 'Athy Distributor Road'. This amendment would not be likely to result in significant adverse environmental effects. Refer also the SEA Screening Determination Explanation provided at Amendment No. 2.
4	Chapter 18 Environs Plan	Map 18.8 Athy Environs	Map - Map 18.8 Athy Environs	The map should be adjusted. 1. The line has to move to make space to accommodate the roundabout without impacting on the adjacent property. 2. Change Legend to read "Indicative New Roads Objective.	SEA is not required.	The line on the map being referred to is an indicative line. The adjustment of this line would not have environmental consequences The insertion of the word "indicative" ahead of this legend entry clarifies the status of the Plan objective and any applications for development arising, which, as is the case with applications for development arising from all Plan objectives, would need to be further defined and detailed at project level, informed by a variety of planning and environmental requirements.

Table 2.2 Summary of current Plan potential environmental effects, if unmitigated, and associated mitigation measures

Environmental Components	Likely Significant Effect, if unmitigated	Mitigation Measure Reference(s) from the Plan, including
Biodiversity and Flora and Fauna	Loss of biodiversity with regard to Natura 2000 Sites	Policies: HB 1, NT 5, WS 8, DS 1, DS 2, DS 3, DS 4, DS 5, DS 6 and DS 7 Objective: NHO 5
	Loss of biodiversity with regard to ecological connectivity and stepping stones	Policies: HB 1, NT 1, NT 2, NT 3, NT 4, NT 5, TW 1, TW 2, TW 3, TW 4, TW 5, TW 6, IS 1, IW 1, IW 2, IW 3, IW 4, IW 5, IW 6, IW 7, IW 8 and IW 9 Objectives: NHO 1, NHO 2, NHO 3, NHO 4, NHO 5, NHO 6 NHO 7, NHO 8 and NHO 9
Population and Human Health	Loss of rural management practices	Policy NHO5 and Various provisions of the Core Strategy, Economic Development Strategy and Housing Chapter
	Spatially concentrated deterioration in human health arising from exposure to incompatible land uses	Policies: WS 1, WS 2, WS 3, WS 4, WS 5, WS 6, WS 7, WW 1, WW 2, WW 3, WW 4, WW 5, WW 6 AG 3, RH 5, ECD 16, ECD17, WQ 1, WQ 2, WQ 3, WQ 4, WQ 5, WS 6, PC 1, PC 2, PC 3, PC 4, PC 5, PC 6 and NR 4 Objectives: WDO 1, WDO 2, WDO 3, WDO 4, WDO 5, WDO 6, WDO 7, WDO 12, WDO 13, WDO 14, ENO 4, EN 4, EN 6, EN 7, EN 8 and EN 9
Soil	Pollution and/or contamination of soils.	Policies: AG 3, RH 5, ECD 16, ECD17, WQ 1, WQ 2, WQ 3, WQ 4, WQ 5 and WS 6 Objectives: WDO 4, ENO 4, EN 7, EN 8 and EN 9
Water	Adverse impacts upon the quality of surface waters	Policies: WQ 1, WQ 2, WQ 3, WQ 4 and WQ 5 Objective: WDO 4
	Adverse impacts upon ground water quality	Policies: WQ 1, WQ 2, WQ 3, WQ 4 and WQ 5 Objective: WDO 4
	Flooding	Policies: SW 1, SW 2, SW 3, SW 4, SW 5, SW 6, SW 7, SW 8, SW 9, SW 10, SW 11, SW 12, SW 13, SW 14, SW 15, SW 16, SW 17, SW 18, SW 19 and SW 20 Objectives: WDO 9, WDO 10, WDO 11 and WDO 14
Material Assets	Inadequate waste water treatment for new populations	Policies: WS 1, WW 1, WW 2, WW 3, WW 4, WW 5, WW 6, WW 7, WW 8, WW 9 and WW 10. Objectives: WDO 1, WDO 2 and WDO 14
	Inadequate drinking water supply for new populations	Policies: WS 1, WS 2, WS 3, WS 4, WS 5, WS 6, WS 7 and WS 9. Objectives: WDO 1, WDO 3, WDO 5, WDO 6, WDO 7, WDO 12 and WDO 13
Air and Climatic Factors	Increases in greenhouse gas emissions and increases in car dependency	Policies: TL 2, TL 4 and TL 5 Objectives: ST1, ST 2, ST 3, ST 4, ST 5, ST 6, ST 7, ST 8, ST 9, ST 10, ST 11, ST 12, ST 13, ST 14, ST 16 and ST 15
Cultural Heritage	Effects on entries to the Record of Monuments and Places	Policies: AH 1, AH 2, AH 3, AH 4, AH 5, AH 6, AH 7 and AH 8 Objective: AAO 14
	Effects on entries to the Record of Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas	Policies: AH 1, AH 2, AH 3, AH 4, AH 5, AH 6, AH 7, AH 8, PS 1, PS 2, PS 3, PS 4, PS 5, PS 6, PS 7, PS 8, PS 9, PS 10, PS 11, PS 12, PS 13, PS 14, PS 15, PS 16, PS 17, VA 1, VA 2, VA 3, VA 4, VA 5, VA 6, VA 7, ACA 1 and ACA 2 Objectives: AAO 1, AAO 2, AAO 5, AAO 6, AAO 7, AAO 8 and AAO 11
Landscape	Visual impacts on the landscape or on 'views and prospects to be preserved'	Policies: LA 1, LA 2, LA 3, LA 4, LA 5 and SR 1 Objectives: LO 1, LO 2, LO 3, LO 4, LO 5, LO 6 and LO 8

2.4 Schedule 2A

PART 1

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

Following a feasibility study and public consultation a preferred route option for the Athy Distributor Road has emerged.

The reasons for the Proposed Variation are:

- To provide clarity in relation to the specific intentions of Kildare County Council in relation to a Distributor Road for Athy; and
- To ensure consistency with the Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018 which the Council is also planning to vary⁸.

The New Town Centre Street and Northern Distributor Road are being removed from the Plan. Some proposed town centre streets will be retained where deemed appropriate to open up backland areas in the southern town centre area for future development. No canal or river crossings are proposed. The selected route option was identified through the constraints and route selection studies as having a higher preference in terms of environment, economy and safety.

Taking the above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3 into account, arising from the degree to which the Plan and associated Proposed Variation sets a framework for projects and other activities, the Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects.

2. *The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the degree to which the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy*

One of the reasons for the Proposed Variation is to ensure consistency with the Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018 which the Council is also planning to vary.

Proposed Variation No. 1 to the Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018 is also being subjected to SEA Screening and the findings of that screening have informed this SEA Screening for Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017.

The findings of the SEA Screening of Proposed Variation No. 1 to the Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018 is that Proposed Variation No. 1 would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects and consequently SEA is not required.

Taking the above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3 into account, arising from the degree to which the Plan and Proposed Variation influence other plans, the Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects.

⁸ Proposed Variation No. 1 to the Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018 is also being subjected to SEA Screening and the findings of that screening have informed this SEA Screening for Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017

3. *The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development*

The Kildare County Development Plan - to which the Proposed Variation relates - has undergone SEA. This process integrated environmental considerations into the Plan and found that the Plan contributes to environmental protection and management and sustainable development.

Taking the above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3 into account, arising from the relevance of the Plan and Proposed Variation for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development, the Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects.

4. *The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: environmental problems relevant to the plan*

Environmental problems arise where there is a conflict between current environmental conditions and legislative targets.

Through its provisions relating to environmental protection and management, the existing Plan contributes towards ensuring that environmental conditions do not get worse and, where possible, it contributes towards its amelioration.

Taking the above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3 into account, arising from environmental problems relevant to the Plan and Proposed Variation, the Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects.

5. *The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: 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)*

The Plan relates to the land use sector and has undergone SEA. This process integrated considerations with regard to EU and national legislation on the environment into the Plan, including those relating to the waste management and the Water Framework Directive.

Taking the above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3 into account, arising from the relevance of the Plan and Proposed Variation for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment, the Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects.

PART 2

1. *Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects*

The Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects (see responses under Schedule 2A Part 1 above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3).

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

The Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects (see responses under Schedule 2A Part 1 above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3).

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

The Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects (see responses under Schedule 2A Part 1 above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3).

4. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)

The Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects (see responses under Schedule 2A Part 1 above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3).

5. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)

The Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects (see responses under Schedule 2A Part 1 above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3).

6. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;

The Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects (see responses under Schedule 2A Part 1 above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3).

b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, and;

The Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects (see responses under Schedule 2A Part 1 above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3).

c) intensive land-use.

The Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects (see responses under Schedule 2A Part 1 above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3).

7. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status

The Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects (see responses under Schedule 2A Part 1 above and the examination of the various parts of the Proposed Variation provided under Section 2.3).

Section 3 Conclusion

Screening is the process for deciding whether a particular plan - or variation to a plan -, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would thus warrant SEA. The purpose of the report is to evaluate the requirement for SEA to be undertaken on Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017.

The SEA screening process that has been undertaken and documented in this report has found that the Proposed Variation would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects.

An earlier, draft version of this SEA Screening Report has been updated to take account of a submission made by an environmental authority during the SEA screening consultation process.

This report is accompanied by an SEA Screening Determination.

Appendix I: Athy Distributor Road Route Selection Report Executive Summary

0. Executive Summary

0.1 Introduction

The town of Athy is located in south Co. Kildare, adjacent to the Co. Laois border. The town of Athy is situated on the N78 National Secondary Road (Kilkenny Road) and is intersected by the R428 (Stradbally Road), the R417 (Monasterevin / Carlow Road) and the R418 (Kilcullen / Castledermot Road) regional roads.

The River Barrow, Grand Canal and Dublin to Waterford railway traverse Athy in a north/south direction, all providing a linear constraints restricting development of Athy.

The single crossings of these constraints require the majority of traffic to travel through Athy town centre. Existing alternative routes crossing these constraints are available only on the local road network 4km north and 6km south of Athy. The N78 Main Street has a 6m wide carriageway, narrowing locally to 5m in places, with generally narrow footpaths and no provision for cyclists. Traffic volumes reach 15400 vehicles per day at the single crossing of the River Barrow, which is a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC). This concentration of traffic results in journey times in excess of 50% above freeflow conditions, resulting in traffic taking long diversions along poor quality local rural roads to utilise the next available river crossing. Road safety is a particular concern with a total of 80 accidents in the Athy area in the period 2005-2012, resulting in 116 casualties. Of these a high proportion are pedestrian related.

0.2 Scheme Background

The focus of traffic onto the narrow N78 Main Street through the town centre has been the subject of a number of proposals to relieve traffic congestion since the mid 1970's. These various proposals are all reflected in the current Athy Town Development Plan and Kildare County Development Plan. The need to address urban congestion is an objective of all Regional and National planning policy. Recognising the constrained economic environment and the potential for the cumulative impacts, if unmitigated, of multiple crossings of the River Barrow cSAC, Roughan & O'Donovan – AECOM Alliance were appointed in 2015 to undertake studies with an objective to identify a cost effective solution that would provide the necessary relief to congestion on the main street, whilst obviating the need for more than one new crossing of the River Barrow cSAC.

0.3 Traffic Studies

Extensive traffic surveys were undertaken to inform the development of a robust local area traffic model of the town and its connections into Transport Infrastructure Ireland's (TII) National Traffic Model. This demonstrated that while the N78 carries a proportion of through traffic, a large proportion of the traffic in Athy is associated with local movements into and around the town. The model provided a tool with which to test the traffic and economic benefits of potential solutions.

0.4 Constraints Study and Route Options

A Constraints Study of the full extents of the Athy Town Development Plan was undertaken to inform the development of numerous potentially feasible route options. These options included all of the previous proposals contained in the development plans, with the exception of the Inner Relief Street. The Inner Relief Street was rejected by An Bord Pleanála in 2004 on the basis that *"...it is considered that the*

proposed inner relief route would fail both as a street and a relief road because it would continue to bring traffic, including heavy commercial vehicles through the town centre” and was therefore excluded as being unable to meet the required objective. In addition the do-nothing and a do-minimum option were assessed, but it was found that without the provision of a new crossing of the river it is not possible to address the congestion and associated safety issues inherent in the existing road network.

0.5 Stage 1 Route Selection

The potentially feasible route options were assessed by applying the two stage route selection processes set out in the TII Project Management Guidelines. At the first stage all options were compared under the headings of Engineering, Economy and Environment. Unsurprisingly the options that emerged as performing best were those that followed, or were variations of the Southern Distributor Road and Northern Distributor Road contained in the Development Plans, as had emerged from previous studies. A public consultation exercise was undertaken in November 2015 at which the findings of the Stage 1 assessment were presented and public input was sought to inform the Stage 2 route selection studies. Strong objection was made to the line of the Southern Distributor Road as contained in the Development Plans, due to its impact on the Rugby and GAA grounds. In response a further variation of this option was developed to reduce this impact.

0.6 Stage 2 Route Selection

The four route options that were taken forward to the Stage 2 assessment are illustrated in Figure 0.1 below.

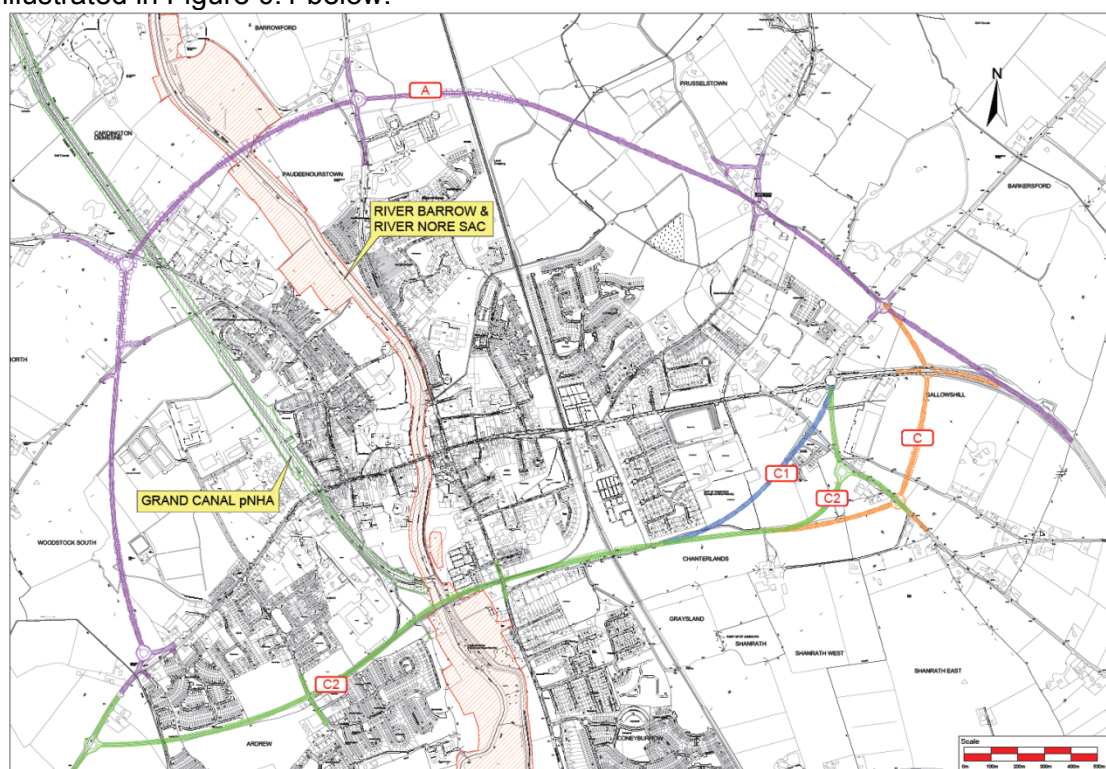


Figure 0.1 – Stage 2 Route Options

In accordance with the TII Project Management Guidelines, preliminary horizontal and vertical alignments, junction configurations and estimation of earthworks and bridge requirements were undertaken for each of these options to fully inform more detailed comparative assessments under the Department Transport, Tourism and Sport's Common Appraisal Framework. The results of these assessments under the five headings are summarised in Table 0.1 below.

	Option A	Option C	Option C1	Option C2
Economy	Least Preferred	Intermediate	Preferred	Preferred
Safety	Intermediate	Intermediate	Preferred	Preferred
Environment	Least Preferred	Intermediate	Intermediate	Preferred
Integration	Intermediate	Preferred	Preferred	Preferred
Accessibility & Social Inclusion	Intermediate	Preferred	Preferred	Preferred
Overall Ranking	4	3	2	1

Table 0.1 – Project Appraisal Matrix Summary

From this assessment, it is recommended that Route Option C2 is taken forward as the Preferred Route for the Athy Distributor Road.

0.7 Assessment of Implementing Multiple Routes

An assessment has been carried out to determine if Route C2 were constructed, what the benefit of the provision of a Route A would bring in terms of additional traffic reduction on the N78 through Athy town centre. Traffic modelling of this scenario demonstrated that the addition of a northern distributor would increase the traffic reduction on the N78 through the centre of Athy from 48% to 54%.

This additional 6% reduction in traffic indicates that the construction of Route A in addition to Route C2 would provide additional benefits to Athy, however the cost of construction and potential for cumulative environmental impacts, if unmitigated, could not be justified by the additional benefits. The addition of a northern distributor road is not considered justified in the medium term, but may be considered a long term objective to connect the regional roads north of the town to the N78 and thereby fully eliminate the need for HGV's to use the existing N78 through the town centre.

0.8 Emerging Preferred Route Public Consultation

A further Public Consultation was held in February 2016 to present the Emerging Preferred Route and seek public input to inform its further development. Of the 49 submissions received, 34 were in favour of the proposal, a number highlighting the urgent need to progress the distributor road to alleviate the town centre. Particular concerns of those most directly affected by the proposals were noted for careful attention in the design stage.

0.9 Conclusion

The route selection undertaken has determined that the preferred route option is Route C2. It is recommended that detailed topographic surveys and geotechnical investigations should be undertaken to inform the further development of the design of this preferred route, sufficient to inform a full Environmental Impact Assessment.