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# OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL AUTHORITY BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2025-2030

## Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

Prepared for:  
Offaly County Council



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# Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan SEA Screening Report for Offaly County Council

## REVISION CONTROL TABLE, CLIENT, KEYWORDS AND ABSTRACT

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**Abstract:** Fehily Timoney and Company is pleased to submit this SEA Screening Report to Offaly County Council for their Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Offaly County Council (OCC) is in the process of preparing a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan (LABAP) for its functional area (the Plan Area) for the years 2025-2030. The aim of the LABAP is to promote biodiversity conservation at local authority level.

OCC appointed Fehily Timoney and Company (FT) to conduct SEA and AA Screening of the LABAP.

This report documents the SEA Screening undertaken to identify the need for full SEA for the LABAP. This Screening Report should be read in conjunction with the corresponding AA Screening Report and the LABAP.

### 1.2 Background to Biodiversity Action Plans

LABAPs must be prepared in accordance with The Heritage Council's Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Guidelines (2024). These guidelines provide best practice guidance to local authorities on preparing and implementing biodiversity conservation actions within their functional area. These guidelines advise that LABAPs *'should aim to record, conserve, restore and promote biodiversity, and to increase awareness, understanding and appreciation of it among the people of the area.'*

LABAPs are designed to provide a structured approach to biodiversity conservation at local level. Local authorities are required to develop a compelling vision for their LABAP and a set of clear, measurable and achievable objectives for biodiversity conservation in their functional area. LABAPs are developed by local authority Biodiversity Officers with the support of a dedicated Biodiversity Working Group. Public engagement and consultation must be undertaken at the Pre-draft and Draft Plan stages of the Plan-making process. All submissions from stakeholders and members of the public should be considered during the development of a LABAP.

LABAPs should serve to define targeted and focussed action for promoting biodiversity conservation through the functions of a local authority in alignment with nature legislation and higher order policy such as the 4<sup>th</sup> National Biodiversity Action Plan and inter-related plans and programmes. LABAPs should be in harmony with and support the land use planning framework, including City and County Development Plans and Local Area Plans.

LABAPs - as non-statutory land use plans - should be screened for the need for SEA and AA.



## 2. SEA SCREENING METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Overview of SEA

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a process for the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme, before a decision is made to adopt the plan or programme.

SEA aims to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.

SEA of plans and programmes is required by European Directive 2001/42/EC ('the SEA Directive'). For a specific range of land-use plans, this Directive is transposed into Irish law by Statutory Instrument (S.I.) No. 436 of 2004 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

For all other relevant plans and programmes in Ireland (including other types of plans in the land-use planning sector), the SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law by S.I. No. 435 of 2004 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

### 2.2 Overview of the SEA Process

The SEA process comprises the following steps:

- Screening – the process whereby a decision is made on whether a particular plan or programme other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would require SEA. This report relates to this stage of the SEA process.

The following steps are necessary if a plan or programme requires SEA:

- Scoping – Scope and level of detail in the environmental assessment is decided upon, in consultation with the identified statutory bodies;
- Environmental Assessment - An assessment of the likely significant impacts on the environment as a result of the relevant plan or programme;
- Preparation of an Environmental Report;
- Consultation of the plan or programme and associated Environmental Report;
- Evaluation of the submission and observations made on the plan or programme and environmental report; and
- Provision of an SEA Statement, identifying how environmental considerations and consultation have been integrated into the final plan or programme



SEA is intended to provide the framework for influencing decision-making at an earlier stage when plans or programmes – which give rise to individual projects – are being developed. It is noted that SEA should result in more sustainable development through the systematic appraisal of policy options.

## 2.3 Legislative Context

LABAPs, as non-statutory land use plans, require to be screened for the need for SEA in accordance with the requirements of:

- The SEA Directive, particularly Articles 3(3), 3(4) and 3(5) in relation to 'screening'; and,
- The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No 435 of 2004), as amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 200 of 2011)(termed 'SEA Regulations' from this point onward), particularly Schedule 1, which sets out the '*Criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment.*'

## 2.4 Overview of the SEA Screening Process

The first step of the SEA process is to carry out SEA Screening to determine the need for SEA of a plan or programme

The first stage in determining whether a plan or programme requires SEA is the carrying out of a 'Pre-screening Check' (also known as a 'Stage 1 Applicability'). This allows rapid screening-out of a plan or programme that is clearly not going to have any environmental impact and screening-in of those that do require SEA. The second stage in determining whether a plan or programme requires SEA is known as 'Stage 2 Screening.' The purpose of this stage is to determine whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment and whether SEA must be carried out in conjunction with a plan or programme. The application of environmental significance criteria is important in determining whether an SEA is required. Annex II of Directive 2001/42/EC sets out the statutory criteria that should be addressed when undertaking this stage. This process is typically undertaken following a broad 8-step approach, as depicted in Figure 2-1.

The first environmental significance criterion relates to the characteristics of the plan or programme, having regard to: the degree to which the plan or programme sets out a framework for other projects and activities; the influence of the plan or programme on other projects, plans or activities; the role of the plan for integrating environmental considerations to promote sustainable development; environmental issues of relevance to the plan or programme and the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of EU legislation on the environment.

The second environmental significance criterion refers to the characteristics of the effects and area likely to be affected, having regard to; the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects; the cumulative nature of the effects; the transboundary nature of the effects; 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 or intensive use; the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European or international protection status.



Figure 2-1: SEA Screening steps as per the EPAs Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening

## 2.5 Relevant SEA Guidance

This SEA Screening has been carried out in accordance with and having appropriate regard to the following guidance documents primarily:

- Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening (EPA, 2021).
- Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (DHLGH, 2022)
- SEA of Local Authority Land-Use Plans - EPA Recommendations and Resources (EPA, 2024)

## 2.6 Appropriate Assessment and Relationship to SEA Screening

The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) requires an 'Appropriate Assessment' (AA) be carried out where a plan or project is likely to have a significant impact on a Natura 2000 Site. Nature 2000 Sites in Ireland include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Areas of Protection (SPAs).

The first step is to establish whether AA is required for the particular plan or project. This is referred to as Screening for AA and the purpose is to determine, on the basis of a preliminary assessment and objective criteria, whether a plan or project, alone and in combination with other plans or projects, could have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site in relation to the site's conservation objectives.





Screening for AA is relevant to Screening for SEA where it is found that a plan may have an impact on the conservation status of a Natura 2000 Site, or where such an impact cannot be ruled out taking a precautionary approach, an appropriate assessment of the Plan must be carried out, and in any case where a SEA is not otherwise required.

Article 3(c) of the SEA Directive requires that an SEA is carried out on a plan or programme wherever such a plan or programme requires an AA under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

Therefore, where the LABAP requires an appropriate assessment, it will also require an SEA.

This SEA Screening Report and the LABAP is accompanied by an AA Screening Report which should be read in conjunction with this document. The AA Screening Report concluded *'beyond reasonable scientific doubt, in view of best scientific knowledge, on the basis of objective information, that the plan, individually or in combination with other plans and projects, is not likely to have a significant effect on European sites.'*



## 3. LOCAL AUTHORITY BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

### 3.1 Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan

The overarching aim of the LABAP is to record, conserve, restore and promote biodiversity, and to increase awareness, understanding and appreciation of it among the people of the area.

The following Strategic Objectives are defined in the LABAP:

- Surveys + Monitoring
- Action for Biodiversity
- Alien Invasive Species
- Building Resilience
- Awareness + Engagement

A series of Actions have been defined in the LABAP under each Strategic Objective. The higher-level Objectives are broader in scope, while the Actions underpinning the Objectives are more defined and measurable. These are presented in Table 3-1.



**Table 3-1: LABAP Strategic Objectives and Actions**

Objective	Action Code	Action
Surveys + Monitoring	1	Support Citizen Science Initiatives to encourage awareness and recording of species together with the National Biodiversity Data Centre.
	2	Commission a full county wetland survey.
	3	To conduct baseline surveys/assessments and develop a masterplan for management of biodiversity at/along new amenity infrastructure (i.e. greenways, bike trails)
	4	Create "Offaly Ecological Network" map + site list, of all sites of ecological importance in the county to include, Natura 2000 sites, NHA/pNHAs and locally important sites.
	5	Implement a process to monitor the changes resulting in the implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan actions at council level.
	6	Commission ecological surveys to help inform county policy and related projects.
	7	Work to enhance quarry habitats for biodiversity following the end of commercial extraction through the planning process.
Action for Biodiversity	8	Establish Offaly County Council Biodiversity Action Plan Implementation Group.
	9	Create an Offaly County Council flagship site managed for biodiversity in the Edenderry MD, akin to that of Tullamore Wetlands and Syngefield Demesne.
	10	Create Management Plans for Syngefield Demesne, Bludndell Park and Tullamore Wetlands.
	11	Formalise policy to ban glyphosate-based herbicide by OCC (except for specific circumstances - Invasive Species eradication).
	12	Enhance biodiversity potential of OCC parks (creating site specific plans where required).
	13	Create and agree 10-year plans for burial grounds to protect and improve species diversity.
	14	Support local communities with the creation + implementation of Biodiversity Action Plans.
	15	Work with faith communities to identify lands within respective dioceses suitable to implement biodiversity measures in collaboration with local parish and communities.
	16	Implement the recommendations of the Offaly Hedgerow Survey 2024.
	17	Implement the recommendations of the Offaly Tree Guidelines 2023 - 2028.
	18	Support ENGOs, landowners and local communities in the delivery of conservation initiatives for priority species.
	19	Support ENGOs, landowners and local communities in the conservation of existing wetlands and creation of new aquatic habitats.
	20	Implement actions of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan for Councils.
	21	Support initiatives under the Water Framework Directive that contribute to the restoration of ecology in water bodies, and the Blue Dot Catchments Programme.



Objective	Action Code	Action
	22	Protect existing and maximise nesting opportunities arising from new developments for Swift, House Sparrow, House Martin, Swallow, bats & insects.
Alien Invasive Species	23	Continue control of invasive flora and fauna species - Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam being the two main AIS plant species of concern in Offaly.
	24	Prioritise the assessment and management of new IAS discoveries in the county in collaboration with other counties + agencies.
	25	Support research and monitoring projects focusing on AIS in Offaly
	26	Upgrade the county alien invasive species management strategy/GIS Mapping
Building Resilience	27	Undertake review of Ecological Network Map (see Action 4) to identify important biodiversity corridors/stepping stones and gaps and pinch-points which may be addressed to create and enhance connectivity for biodiversity between sites.
	28	Work with relevant agencies annually to continue to assess wildfire risk to bogs and upland habitats and management of same.
	29	Consider provision being made for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for planning applications, to be included in the next County Development Plan.
	30	Include climate resilience and future proofing into new biodiversity projects, plans and policies.
	31	Undertake study to identify the habitats and species most at risk from climate change in the county.
	32	Explore funding models for carbon offsetting to fund local wetland and woodland development.
	33	Develop targeted county policies which will result in improved habitats and benefit biodiversity (e.g. Light and Nocturnal Species).
	34	Promote the use of Nature Based Solutions (NBS) in local authority projects.
Awareness + Engagement	35	Support the establishment and work of voluntary biodiversity groups carrying out citizen science projects in Offaly, such as an Offaly Bat Group.
	36	Create county policy on bat friendly lighting.
	37	Plan annual schedule of OCC staff biodiversity training.
	38	Plan an annual schedule of biodiversity training and awareness raising events for relevant community groups/public.
	39	Pilot a biodiversity initiatives in a social housing scheme which may include; green roofs, green walls, wetland & ponds SUDS, green carparking, nest boxes in facades, wildflower meadows and wildlife friendly shrubs and trees in open space.
	40	All Council housing, parks and infrastructure projects to include biodiversity enhancement proposals.
	41	Research + support the creation of a biodiversity demonstration garden with a community partner.
	42	Initiate a project in collaboration with farming groups to highlight and celebrate the importance of farmland for biodiversity.



Objective	Action Code	Action
	43	Promote and expand the delivery of the Green Schools Programme in the county.
	44	Promote and expand the delivery of the Heritage in Schools Programme in the county.
	45	Advocate for the protection + enhancement of nature and spaces for nature in Offaly through print, broadcast, social media and through other media such as podcasts, online video and short films.
	46	Work with Local Enterprise Office Offaly to promote biodiversity friendly initiatives as part of sustainable economic development.
	47	Work with OCC Culture and Creativity Team to promote biodiversity through creative projects, and with support from the Creative Ireland programme.
	48	Work with all OCC sections to make biodiversity enhancements where opportunities arise (e.g. Regeneration, Roads).
	49	Conduct awareness campaign on the importance of stone walls/structures for biodiversity
	50	Build links with sports clubs and promote adoption of biodiversity positive measures on club grounds (i.e. through the GAA Green Clubs Programme).



## 3.2 Relationship with other relevant Plans and Programmes

The LABAP sits within a hierarchy of plans and has been informed by and is consistent with the aims and objectives of other plans, programmes and strategies developed at national, regional and local levels. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

### National Level

- Project Ireland 2040 : National Planning Framework (2018).
- Heritage Ireland 2030: A Framework for Heritage (2022).
- Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023-2028 (2023).
- The 4th National Biodiversity Plan 2023 - 2030 (2024) (discussed further in Section 3.1.1 below).
- Climate Action Plan (2024).

### Regional and Local Level

- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the region.
- The County Development Plan for the local authority functional area.
- The Local Authority Climate Action Plan for the local authority functional area.
- The Heritage Plan for the local authority functional area.

#### 3.2.1 The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) sets the national biodiversity agenda for the period 2023-2030 and aims to deliver the transformative changes required to protect and value nature. The aim is to ensure that every citizen, community, business, local authority, semi-state and state agency has an awareness of biodiversity and its importance, and of the implications of its loss, while also understanding how they can act to address the biodiversity emergency as part of a renewed national effort to 'act for nature.' This plan provides the overarching arching framework for delivering biodiversity conservation through LABAPs.

This National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 builds upon the achievements of the previous Plan. The five overarching objectives to address new and emerging issues include the following:

- Objective 1 - Adopt a Whole of Government, Whole of Society Approach to Biodiversity
- Objective 2 - Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs
- Objective 3 - Secure Nature's Contribution to People
- Objective 4 - Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity
- Objective 5 - Strengthen Ireland's Contribution to International Biodiversity Initiatives



The NBAP contains actions pertaining to the preparation to LABAPs under *Objective One: Adopt a Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society Approach to Biodiversity* and *Objective Three: Secure Nature's Contribution to People*, including the following:

**Table 3-2: NBAP Actions pertaining to the preparation to Local Biodiversity Plans**

Action Number	Action
1C5	The Heritage Council will publish updated guidelines for the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans and their integration with City and County Development Plans
1C6	All Local Authorities will have a Biodiversity Action Plan adopted by the end of 2026 which is subject to regular review and revision processes in line with relevant guideline standards
3A3	Local Authorities will work to identify and respond to opportunities for enhancing the biocultural value of GBUE through appropriate design strategies, the use of visual and performing arts, and enhancing equity of access and promoting use of GBUE by community groups, and integrating cultural services in local biodiversity action plans

Local Authorities are expected to align their LABAPs with national commitments defined in the NBAP to ensure a cohesive approach to biodiversity conservation across the country.



## 4. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCREENING

This section of the report documents the SEA Screening undertaken.

Stage 1 Applicability Analysis was undertaken initially. This analysis is detailed in Section 4.1 of this report (Table 4-1 and Table 4-2).

Stage 2 Screening Analysis was then undertaken. This analysis is detailed in Section 4.2 of this report (Table 4-3, Table 4-4 and Table 4-5).

### 4.1 Stage 1 - SEA Applicability Analysis

**Table 4-1: SEA Applicability Analysis**

SEA Applicability Analysis	
Status of Plan/Programme (P/P) Maker	
Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?	The LABAP has been prepared by a local authority.
Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?	The LABAP is required by administrative provisions. The local authority is required to prepare the LABAP by the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 - 2030. The NBAP has been prepared by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The NPWS is an executive agency within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) of the Government of Ireland.
Nature of the Plan/Programme	
Is the P/P prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use?	LABAPs are non-statutory land use plans.
Does the P/P provide a framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive?	No.
Is the P/P likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site which leads to a requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments?	No.





SEA Applicability Analysis	
Exemptions	
Is the sole purpose of the P/P to serve national defence or civil emergency or is it a financial/budget P/P or is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme?	No.

**Table 4-2: Summary of SEA Applicability Analysis**

Summary of SEA Applicability Analysis	
Applicability Analysis Criterion	Outcome (Yes or No)
Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?	Yes
Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?	Yes
Is the P/P prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use?	Yes
Does the P/P provide a framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive?	No
Is the P/P likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site which leads to a requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments?	No
Is the sole purpose of the P/P to serve national defence or civil emergency or is it a financial/budget P/P or is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme?	No
Conclusion	
Having regard to the SEA Screening Process defined in Section 2,4, it has been concluded that Stage 2 SEA Screening Analysis is required to determine whether the plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment, and whether a full SEA of the plan is needed.	



## 4.2 Stage 2 - SEA Screening Analysis

To inform the Stage 2 SEA Screening Analysis, an evaluation of the potential environmental effects of LABAP Actions has been undertaken. This evaluation is presented in Table 4-3.

**Table 4-3: Evaluation of Potential Environmental Effects of LABAP Actions**

Objective	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
Surveys + Monitoring	1	Support Citizen Science Initiatives to encourage awareness and recording of species together with the National Biodiversity Data Centre.	Citizen science initiatives enable data collection by members of the public to contribute to research and add to the national dataset on Ireland's biodiversity and biological data. Such research can help identify trends in biodiversity and improve understanding of the ecological baseline in the Plan Area. The action has the potential to improve awareness and knowledge of local biodiversity in County Offaly, which will underpin and support improvements in the area. In isolation, the action, in and of itself, does not have the potential to generate any significant, adverse environmental effects.
	2	Commission a full county wetland survey.	The action proposes the carrying out of surveys for wetland habitats in the Plan Area, which will underpin and support the effective implementation of the BAP and potentially lead to focussed and targeted biodiversity improvements. The action, in and of itself, will not result in any significant, adverse environmental effects.
	3	To conduct baseline surveys/assessments and develop a masterplan for management of biodiversity at/along new amenity infrastructure (i.e. greenways, bike trails)	The action proposes the carrying out of baseline surveys and assessments for the management of biodiversity situated within proximity of amenity infrastructure in the Plan Area. This will underpin and support the effective implementation of the BAP and potentially lead to focussed and targeted biodiversity improvements. The action, in and of itself, will not result in any significant, adverse environmental effects.
	4	Create "Offaly Ecological Network" map + site list, of all sites of ecological importance in the county to include, Natura 2000 sites, NHA/pNHAs and locally important sites.	The creation of 'Offaly Ecological Network' will define and highlight the extents of the ecological assets within County Offaly. The action will enable the local authority in decision-making through augmented knowledge of the baseline in the Plan Area, and can underpin and support the effective implementation of the Plan. This can then potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity initiatives and improvements. The action will not result in the occurrence of any significant, adverse environmental effects in and of itself.
	5	Implement a process to monitor the changes resulting in the implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan actions at council level.	The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan is a cross-sectoral framework to create landscapes and environmental conditions where pollinator species can survive and thrive. The action is centred around the development of a process to monitor the progress of the implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, which will then inform and support focused and target pollinator-friendly biodiversity initiatives in County Offaly. The action, being research/review-based, will not result in the occurrence of any significant, adverse environmental effects in and of itself.



Objective	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	6	Commission ecological surveys to help inform county policy and related projects.	The action proposes the carrying out of surveys for the management of biodiversity situated within proximity of amenity infrastructure in the Plan Area, which will underpin and support the effective implementation of the BAP and potentially lead to focussed and targeted biodiversity improvements. The action, in and of itself, will not result in any significant, adverse environmental effects.
	7	Work to enhance quarry habitats for biodiversity following the end of commercial extraction through the planning process.	Quarries can provide important roosting and nesting sites for bird species. They can also serve as habitats for bees and other invertebrates. Quarries with shallow and temporary ponds can host amphibians, and dry grassland surrounding such sites can support a wide variety of broad-leaved herbs and grasses. The action supports collaboration with quarry operators through the planning process to enhance the biodiversity potential in such sites at the end of extraction operations. This will contribute to the rehabilitation of disturbed habitats and augmentation of flora and fauna, and also generate positive effects for population and human health, air and climate, and the water and soils environments. The action does not hold potential for generating any negative environmental effects.
Action for Biodiversity	8	Establish Offaly County Council Biodiversity Action Plan Implementation Group.	The formation of an Implementation Group with the relevant authority and credibility for the County Council's Biodiversity Action Plan will underpin and support biodiversity improvements within the Plan Area, which has positive implications for biodiversity and other interacting environmental components, such as population and human health, the water and soils environments, and air and climate. In isolation, the action does not have the potential to lead to the occurrence of a any significant, adverse environmental effects.
	9	Create an Offaly County Council flagship site managed for biodiversity in the Edenderry MD, akin to that of Tullamore Wetlands and Syngesfield Demesne.	Edenderry has an abundant stock of natural assets which, upon management, can serve as ecosystem services for residents and visitors. The action has the potential to result in an improvement in baseline conditions through enhancement measures, which will generate positive effects on habitats and key species at the site and its environs. This will result in additional co-benefits for other environmental components, without the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	10	Create Management Plans for Syngesfield Demesne, Bludndell Park and Tullamore Wetlands.	Management Plans for council-owned sites, including Syngesfield Demesne, Bludnell Park and Tullamore Wetlands, will ensure appropriate protection and conservation of these sites while also opening up access for people to enjoy and experience their natural and ecological heritage. The action has the potential to result in positive effects on biodiversity (through ongoing management of these sites and increased awareness within the general community) and population and human health (through access to these sites for educational and recreational purposes). In isolation, the action does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	11	Formalise policy to ban glyphosate-based herbicide by OCC (except for specific circumstances - Invasive Species eradication).	Glyphosate is a commonly-used pesticide, which has been documented to be carcinogenic for human health. Glyphosate-based herbicides/pesticides can impact wildlife through exposure to non-target organism, with aquatic and marine ecology being affected particularly. The action has the potential to result in direct positive effects for biodiversity and population and human health, and indirect positive effects for the water and soils environments, without affecting any environmental receptor in a negative fashion.



Objective	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	12	Enhance biodiversity potential of OCC parks (creating site specific plans where required).	The action pertains to the augmentation of biodiversity potential in the parks and green spaces in County Offaly, preparing site-specific plans where required. This has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats and key species, and additional co-benefits for other environmental receptors. The action in and of itself will not create any negative environmental effects.
	13	Create and agree 10-year plans for burial grounds to protect and improve species diversity.	Faith communities often own large areas of land, such as churchyards and burial grounds, which provide an opportunity to enhance biodiversity at these sites through a suite of management measures. The action is in support of biodiversity conservation, particularly key species that may exist at these sites. The action has the potential to result in co-benefits for other environmental receptors, such as population and human health and soils. The action does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	14	Support local communities with the creation + implementation of Biodiversity Action Plans.	This action will create and foster a collaborative approach to forming and implementing the Biodiversity Action Plan in County Offaly, which in turn contributes to the effective and targeted delivery of the Plan and biodiversity improvements in general. The action will not result in the occurrence of any significant, adverse environmental effects, in and of itself.
	15	Work with faith communities to identify lands within respective dioceses suitable to implement biodiversity measures in collaboration with local parish and communities.	Faith communities often own large areas of land, such as churchyards and burial grounds, which provide an opportunity to enhance biodiversity at these sites through a suite of management measures. The action is in support of biodiversity conservation, particularly key species that may exist at these sites. The action has the potential to result in co-benefits for other environmental receptors, such as population and human health and soils. The action does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	16	Implement the recommendations of the Offaly Hedgerow Survey 2024.	The County Council has commissioned a hedgerow survey to understand the unique significance that these habitats offer, and monitor trends and changes within them. Hedgerows hold features of archaeological, geological, social and natural heritage, and are important wildlife corridors and habitats, serving as refuges for biodiversity. The findings and recommendations of the Offaly Hedgerow Survey 2024 will underpin and support the effective implementation of the Plan and potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity improvements. The action in and of itself is not expected to result in any significant, adverse environmental effects.
	17	Implement the recommendations of the Offaly Tree Guidelines 2023 - 2028.	The Offaly Tree Guidelines are centred around the management of trees within the Plan Area by defining the appropriate guidance and policy to ensure environmental benefits, and minimise intrusion and risks to members of public. This action is in support of protecting and enhancing biodiversity in the Plan Area, with the potential to generate co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.



Objective	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	18	Support ENGOS, landowners and local communities in the delivery of conservation initiatives for priority species.	The action is centred around supporting the delivery of biodiversity initiatives being undertaken by other stakeholders such as environmental NGOs, landowners and local communities. The action has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, including sensitive habitats and priority species. This will additionally have co-benefits for other environmental receptors such as population and human health, the water and soils environments, and air and climate. The action will not lead to negative environmental effects.
	19	Support ENGOS, landowners and local communities in the conservation of existing wetlands and creation of new aquatic habitats.	The action is centred around supporting the delivery of biodiversity initiatives being undertaken by other stakeholders such as environmental NGOs, landowners and local communities. The action has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, including sensitive habitats and priority species. This will additionally have co-benefits for other environmental receptors such as population and human health, the water and soils environments, and air and climate. The action will not lead to negative environmental effects.
	20	Implement actions of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan for Councils.	The National Biodiversity Data Centre coordinates the implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, which has a sub-document (Councils: Actions to Help Pollinators. All Ireland Pollinator Plan, Guidelines 4) aimed at Councils containing focused actions that can aid local authorities in carrying out pollinator-friendly actions in the context of their Plan Areas. The implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan will create an environment where pollinators can thrive, which creates co-benefits for species diversity in the wider ecosystem.  This action has the potential to generate positive effects for biodiversity. It will not, in and of itself, result in a real significant environmental effect.
	21	Support initiatives under the Water Framework Directive that contribute to the restoration of ecology in water bodies, and the Blue Dot Catchments Programme.	The Water Framework Directive is a framework for ensuring the good qualitative and quantitative health of all water bodies. Blue Dot Catchments Programme is a collaborative programme focused on directing resources towards the protection and restoration of sensitive, high-status objective water bodies. This action will support these frameworks to maintain, and where required, restore water bodies to 'Good Status' (both chemically and ecologically). The action, therefore, has the potential to generate direct positive effects on biodiversity, the water environment, and population and human health, and by way of interaction, indirect positive effects on the soils environment.  The action does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	22	Protect existing and maximise nesting opportunities arising from new developments for Swift, House Sparrow, House Martin, Swallow, bats & insects.	Nesting opportunities for volant species can be constrained by modern building practices and reduced through the destruction or removal of natural nesting structures. The action will protect existing structures and encourage new development to include suitable artificial alternatives such as nest boxes and insect hotels. The action has the potential to result in positive effects on biodiversity. It does not, in and of itself, have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.



Objective	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
Alien Invasive Species	23	Continue control of invasive flora and fauna species - Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam being the two main AIS plant species of concern in Offaly.	The action will prevent and control the spread of invasive species, namely Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam, in the Plan Area. The action has the potential to preserve ecosystems with native flora and fauna by preventing disturbances to native habitats and/or undue ecological competition for native species. The action does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	24	Prioritise the assessment and management of new IAS discoveries in the county in collaboration with other counties + agencies.	The action is centred around investigating, in collaboration with other relevant agencies and stakeholders, whether previously undiscovered invasive species exist in the Plan Area. The action will assist in the management of such invasive species if identified, which will then enable the control of their spread. The action has the potential to benefit local flora and fauna by potentially preventing disturbances to native habitats and undue competition for native species for resources. The action does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	25	Support research and monitoring projects focusing on AIS in Offaly	The action pertains to supporting projects focused on the research and monitoring of invasive species in County Offaly, with the intention to prevent and control their spread. The action will have positive effects on biodiversity, flora and fauna by potentially preventing disturbances to native habitats and undue competition for native species for resources. The action, in and of itself, does not have the potential to generate any negative effects.
	26	Upgrade the county alien invasive species management strategy/GIS Mapping	The action pertains to process improvement for invasive species management, which includes strategy design and mapping. The action has the potential to result in positive effects on local flora and fauna through the prevention of invasive species spread. The action, in and of itself, does not have the potential to result in negative environmental effects.
Building Resilience	27	Undertake review of Ecological Network Map (see Action 4) to identify important biodiversity corridors/stepping stones and gaps and pinch-points which may be addressed to create and enhance connectivity for biodiversity between sites.	The creation of 'Offaly Ecological Network' will define and highlight the extents of the ecological assets within County Offaly. The action will enable the local authority in decision-making through augmented knowledge of the baseline in the Plan Area, and can underpin and support the effective implementation of the Plan. This can then potentially lead to more focused and targeted biodiversity initiatives and improvements. Being reviewed-based, the action will not result in the occurrence of any significant, adverse environmental effects, in and of itself.
	28	Work with relevant agencies annually to continue to assess wildfire risk to bogs and upland habitats and management of same.	Bogs in poor conditions (i.e., low moisture content) have a higher risk of wildfires, which can result in significant financial, anthropological, environmental and ecological losses. Drier areas of bog are generally dominated by heather (a highly flammable species in dry weather), which provides cover for protected bird species such as Red Grouse, Snipe and Curlew. The management of such habitats to minimise wildfire risk is therefore crucial. The action has positive implications for a range of environmental receptors, including biodiversity, flora and fauna, population and human health, air and climate, and material assets. No negative effects have been identified in relation to the implementation of this action.



Objective	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	29	Consider provision being made for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for planning applications, to be included in the next County Development Plan.	<p>Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development which centres around improving biodiversity at a site by encouraging developers to provide an increase in appropriate natural habitat and ecological features and therefore arrest the loss of biodiversity and restore ecological networks.</p> <p>The action supports the integration of biodiversity considerations and improvements within the land-use framework and development planning process. The action has the potential to contribute to realisation of positive effects on biodiversity and generate co-benefits for other environmental components. It does not have potential to generate any negative environmental effects.</p>
	30	Include climate resilience and future proofing into new biodiversity projects, plans and policies.	The inclusion of climate resilience and future-proofing into biodiversity projects, plans and policies is particularly important to slow down the decline of biodiversity and minimise loss of habitat and species diversity. The action is in support of biodiversity conservation and enhancement in the Plan Area, and has the potential to generate co-benefits for population and human health and air and climate. The action does not have the potential to result in any negative environmental effects.
	31	Undertake study to identify the habitats and species most at risk from climate change in the county.	The action is research/review-based to identify sensitive habitats and species in the Plan Area that may be disproportionately affected from climate change. The action will underpin and support effective implementation of the Plan, potentially leading to focused and targeted biodiversity measures. However, in isolation, the action does not have the potential to result in the occurrence of a real, significant adverse environmental impact.
	32	Explore funding models for carbon offsetting to fund local wetland and woodland development.	The action is review-based to explore funding models for the development of local wetlands and woodlands. While the action is in support of biodiversity conservation and enhancement within the Plan Area, in isolation, it does not have the potential to result in any significant, adverse environmental effects.
	33	Develop targeted county policies which will result in improved habitats and benefit biodiversity (e.g. Light and Nocturnal Species).	The action supports the integration of biodiversity considerations and enhancement opportunities within county policies. The action has the potential to contribute to the realisation of positive effects on biodiversity and result in co-benefits for other environmental receptors. It does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	34	Promote the use of Nature Based Solutions (NBS) in local authority projects.	Nature Based Solutions (NBS) involve assimilating nature into addressing societal issues to support human and biodiversity wellbeing. The integration of NBS into local authority projects will underpin and support biodiversity improvements within the Plan Area. The action will not generate any negative environmental effects. The development of any NBS infrastructure will be undertaken under the land use planning framework and will require appropriate planning consent. Statutory land use plans are subject to their own SEA and AA.



Objective	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
Awareness + Engagement	35	Support the establishment and work of voluntary biodiversity groups carrying out citizen science projects in Offaly, such as an Offaly Bat Group.	Citizen science enables data collection by members of the public to contribute to research and add to the national dataset on Ireland's biodiversity and biological data. Such research can help identify trends in biodiversity and improve understanding of ecological systems, therefore fostering interest within members of the public. Public engagement will also be boosted and lead to an improvement in general awareness and knowledge of local biodiversity. The action has positive effects on biodiversity and additionally population and human health. The action will not result in the occurrence of any significant, adverse environmental effects, in and of itself.
	36	Create county policy on bat friendly lighting.	This action supports the control and management of lighting in the plan area. It will contribute to preventing and reducing the impact of lighting on light sensitive species, particularly bat species. This action has the potential to have positive effects for biodiversity. It does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	37	Plan annual schedule of OCC staff biodiversity training.	This action promotes biodiversity related training within the Local Authority's staff members. It has the potential to improve biodiversity related expertise and underpin and support biodiversity improvements within the plan area by improving knowledge and awareness across different functions of the local authority. This action will not result in the occurrence of any significant, adverse environmental effects.
	38	Plan an annual schedule of biodiversity training and awareness raising events for relevant community groups/public.	This action promotes biodiversity related training. It has the potential to improve biodiversity related expertise and underpin and support biodiversity improvements within the plan area. This action will not result in the occurrence of a any significant, adverse environmental effects, in and of itself.
	39	Pilot a biodiversity initiatives in a social housing scheme which may include; green roofs, green walls, wetland & ponds SUDS, green carparking, nest boxes in facades, wildflower meadows and wildlife friendly shrubs and trees in open space.	Council development projects, including social housing schemes, provide an opportunity to enhance biodiversity by integrating enhancement measures into the design of the proposed development. The action supports the integration of biodiversity improvements into the planning process, which will potentially contribute to the realisation of positive effects on biodiversity and co-benefits for other environmental components. The action, in and of itself, will not generate any negative environmental effects. The development of any green infrastructure will be undertaken under the land use planning framework and will require appropriate planning consent. Statutory land use plans are subject to their own SEA and AA.
	40	All Council housing, parks and infrastructure projects to include biodiversity enhancement proposals.	Any council development project provides an opportunity to enhance biodiversity by integrating enhancement measures into proposed development design. The action supports integration of biodiversity improvements into the planning process, which will potentially contribute to the realisation of positive effects on biodiversity and co-benefits for other environmental components. The action, in and of itself, will not result in any negative environmental effects.





Objective	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	41	Research + support the creation of a biodiversity demonstration garden with a community partner.	Accessible community gardens can provide a range of benefits to individuals and communities, including improved health and wellbeing and access to healthy food. Community gardens also provide opportunities for enhancing biodiversity by creating habitats for pollinators and other wildlife. The action has the potential to result in positive effects for biodiversity, population and human health, the water and soils environments, and to an extent, air and climate. The action, in and of itself, will not generate any environmental negative effects.
	42	Initiate a project in collaboration with farming groups to highlight and celebrate the importance of farmland for biodiversity.	The action is centred around a collaborative approach to acknowledging and featuring the significance of farmlands for supporting biodiversity. The action is awareness-oriented and has the potential to improve biodiversity-related expertise and underpin and support biodiversity improvements within County Offaly. The action, in and of itself, will not result in the occurrence of any significant, adverse environmental effects on any receptor.
	43	Promote and expand the delivery of the Green Schools Programme in the county.	The Green Schools Programme is a student-led programme for environmental engagement, education and advocacy. The programme aims to equip students and teachers with the knowledge and skills for environmental sustainability through various projects and initiatives. The action has the potential to foster biodiversity protection and enhancement through these projects, leading to positive effects for both biodiversity and population and human health. The action does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	44	Promote and expand the delivery of the Heritage in Schools Programme in the county.	The Heritage in Schools Scheme provides for a panel of Heritage Specialists who interact with school students on a range of natural and cultural heritage subjects. The scheme is in support of the aims and objectives of the Social, Scientific and Environmental Education curriculum, providing an additional educational tool and resource for educators and students.  The action has the potential to promote biodiversity-related knowledge and awareness, which can underpin and support biodiversity improvements within the Plan Area. In and of itself, the action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant, adverse environmental effect.
	45	Advocate for the protection + enhancement of nature and spaces for nature in Offaly through print, broadcast, social media and through other media such as podcasts, online video and short films.	This action will promote awareness of biodiversity and biodiversity related initiatives through media engagement and disseminate nature-oriented communications to various audiences. It has the potential to foster further interest in biodiversity protection and enhancement throughout the local authority as an organisation and the wider community. The action, in and of itself, will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant, adverse environmental effect.



Objective	Action Code	Action	Potential Environmental Effects
	46	Work with Local Enterprise Office Offaly to promote biodiversity friendly initiatives as part of sustainable economic development.	The action proposes to integrate biodiversity initiatives into the sustainable economic development of County Offaly, through the operations of the Local Enterprise Office. The action has the potential to foster a collaborative approach to implementing biodiversity initiatives and improving biodiversity and sustainable development in the Plan Area, contributing to the effective implementation of the Plan. This is positive for both biodiversity and population and human health. The action does not have the potential to generate negative environmental effects.
	47	Work with OCC Culture and Creativity Team to promote biodiversity through creative projects, and with support from the Creative Ireland programme.	The Offaly Creative Ireland programme is aimed at supporting communities and artists to present aspects of Offaly's heritage through various art forms. The action proposes integrating biodiversity into creative and interpretive expression of the art funded by the programme. The action has the potential to promote biodiversity-related initiatives and awareness and boost community engagement, therefore creating positive benefits for biodiversity, population and human health and cultural heritage. It will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant, adverse environmental impact in and of itself.
	48	Work with all OCC sections to make biodiversity enhancements where opportunities arise (e.g. Regeneration, Roads).	The action is aimed at identifying opportunities for integrating biodiversity considerations into all functions of the local authority, particularly where there is new development being carried out. The action has the potential to generate positive effects on biodiversity components, such as habitats and key species, in addition to creating co-benefits for other environmental components. In isolation, the action does not have the potential to generate any negative environmental effects.
	49	Conduct awareness campaign on the importance of stone walls/structures for biodiversity	Stonewalls and stone structures can host a number of fungi, lichens and bryophytes. Due to their sensitivity to environmental changes in their microhabitat characteristics and conditions, these cryptogam species are considered effective indicators of ecological health. Cryptogams play important roles in the ecosystem, such as the formation of soils, breakdown of organic matter and nutrient cycling.  This action will promote awareness of biodiversity and biodiversity-related initiatives. It has the potential to foster further interest in biodiversity protection and enhancement throughout the local authority as an organisation and the wider community. This action will not result in the occurrence of a real, significant, adverse environmental impact in and of itself.
	50	Build links with sports clubs and promote adoption of biodiversity positive measures on club grounds (i.e. through the GAA Green Clubs Programme).	The action proposes to integrate biodiversity considerations on sports grounds to enhance the current baseline. The action will promote awareness and engagement pertaining to biodiversity-related initiatives, and foster further interest in protection and enhancement through collaboration between the local authority and the wider community. In isolation, the action will not generate any negative environmental effects on any environmental receptor.



**Table 4-4: Criteria for Determining the Likely Significance of Environmental Effects - Characteristics of the Plan**

Potential Significant Effects	
Characteristics of the plan or programme having regard, in particular to:	
<p>The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources</p>	<p>The LABAP provides a general framework for biodiversity protection and enhancement on lands in the plan area, including local authority controlled lands. The LABAP defines a vision for biodiversity in the plan area, and strategic objectives, aims and targets for achieving this vision. The LABAP proposes a number of biodiversity management related projects and activities, including projects and activities at specific areas. These projects and activities all relate to biodiversity protection and enhancement, however.</p> <p>The LABAP does not propose or support any intensive land use or development projects outside the land use planning framework and will not in and of itself set the context for future development consent.</p> <p>Considering the Precautionary Principle enshrined in European Union (EU) environmental law, the Objectives and Actions in the LABAP should be assessed having regard to criteria defined in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations.</p>
<p>The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy</p>	<p>The LABAP is defined as a Tier 2 Local Action Plan under The Heritage Council's Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Guidelines (2024). The LABAP is therefore a lower order plan in the context of the European, national, regional and local plan hierarchy.</p> <p>Local Action Plans set out specific objectives and actions for managing and protecting heritage in a particular area, such as biodiversity, archives, archaeology, heritage engagement, education etc., within the context of a higher order heritage related plan, for example. Each Local Action Plan is developed by a Working Group that includes representatives from relevant stakeholders and is led by heritage professionals within the local authority. The LABAP fits into this tier of plans.</p> <p>The LABAP supports the development of lower order area specific biodiversity management plans and supports the implementation of biodiversity related measures defined in inter-related plans, including the County Development Plan.</p>
<p>The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development</p>	<p>The LABAP supports and promotes the integration of biodiversity protection and enhancement measures into development and activities occurring in the plan area and supports ecological sustainability. The LABAP does not, however, stipulate specific development planning requirements and will not in and of itself set the context for future development consent.</p>



## Potential Significant Effects

### Characteristics of the plan or programme having regard, in particular to:

<p>Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme</p>	<p>Biodiversity in the plan area faces a number of known threats and pressures, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development (residential, commercial, infrastructural and agricultural),</li> <li>• Agricultural activity and expansion,</li> <li>• Urbanization,</li> <li>• The spread of invasive species,</li> <li>• Pollution (e.g., air, noise, water, light pollution),</li> <li>• Climate change,</li> <li>• Recreational activity,</li> <li>• Land abandonment,</li> <li>• Urban wastewater,</li> <li>• Changes in the hydrological environment.</li> </ul> <p>These threats and pressures may cause a range of negative impacts on biodiversity, including habitat loss , reduction and fragmentation; disturbance to key species; reduction in species density, impacts on designated sites and locally important non-designated sites present or connected to the plan area, or changes to indicators of conservation value (i.e. water quality, air quality, habitat quality).</p> <p>The LABAP defines a variety of actions to address these threats and pressures.</p>
<p>The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g., plans linked to waste-management or water protection)</p>	<p>The LABAP is a non-statutory land use plan. It does however support the achievement aims of EU nature-related legislation at a local level, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030,</li> <li>• Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2024 on nature restoration and amending Regulation (EU) 2022/869 (the 'Nature Restoration Law'),</li> <li>• Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds ('the Birds Directive'),</li> </ul>



## Potential Significant Effects

### Characteristics of the plan or programme having regard, in particular to:

- Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora ('the Habitats Directive'),
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), as amended,
- Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy ('the Water Framework Directive'),
- European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722/2003), as amended ,
- Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy ('the Marine Strategy Framework Directive'),
- European Communities (Marine Strategy Framework) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 249/2011), as amended,
- Directive 2007/60/EC on the assessment and management of flood risks ('the Floods Directive'),
- European Communities (Assessment and Management of Flood Risks) Regulations 2010 (S.I. No. 122/2010), as amended,
- Directive 2006/113/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on the quality required of shellfish waters ('the Shellfish Waters Directive'),
- European Communities (Quality of Shellfish Waters) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 268/2006), as amended.



**Table 4-5: Criteria for Determining Potential for Significant Effects - Characteristics of the Effects**

Potential for Significant Effects	
Characteristics of the Effects and the Area likely to be affected, having regard in particular to:	
<p>The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects</p>	<p>The LABAP provides a general framework for biodiversity protection and enhancement on lands in the plan area. It defines the biodiversity actions that support and promote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best practice biodiversity management and improvement,</li> <li>• Local authority biodiversity protection and enhancement initiatives,</li> <li>• The improvement of biodiversity on local authority controlled lands,</li> <li>• Biodiversity training and awareness events,</li> <li>• Biodiversity education and training,</li> <li>• Planting of native species (i.e. trees, shrubs, plants etc.)</li> <li>• Ecological surveying and mapping to identify areas of risk from threats and pressure and areas for targeted biodiversity protection/enhancement action,</li> <li>• Collaborating with key stakeholders and the public to achieve biodiversity aims.</li> </ul> <p>The range of actions defined in the LAPAP have the potential to have a range of likely, slight to very significant, temporary to long-term, positive environmental effects, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive effects on biodiversity, including habitats, key species, designated sites and locally important non-designated sites.</li> <li>• Indirect positive effects on water quality and hydrology - e.g., through the promotion of the use Nature Based Solutions in drainage management and the protection of the aquatic environment.</li> <li>• Positive effects on population and human health - e.g., - through the protection and enhancement of areas of biodiversity that provide amenity value, and support public health and well-being.</li> <li>• Positive effects on the soils environment - e.g., biodiversity has the potential to improve soil quality, structure and function.</li> <li>• Positive effects on Climate - e.g., through the promotion of areas of enhanced biodiversity that can contribute to Greenhouse Gas (GHG) sequestration levels, and protect against the effects of climate change related events (i.e. floods, erosion etc.).</li> </ul>



## Potential for Significant Effects

### Characteristics of the Effects and the Area likely to be affected, having regard in particular to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive effects on landscape and visual amenity - e.g., through the promotion of natural heritage that contributes to scenic value and visual amenity.</li> </ul> <p>All actions in the LABAP are aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity. They have been carefully reviewed and it has been concluded that these actions do not have the potential to have unintended negative effects on the receiving environment.</p> <p>The actions in the LABAP do not support intensive land use or development projects sitting outside the land use planning framework that can cause significant negative environmental effects. The LABAP will not in and of itself set the context for future development consent. There is no real likelihood of significant negative environmental effects occurring as result of the implementation of the LABAP.</p>
The cumulative nature of the effects	<p>The LABAP is in harmony and consistent with inter-related plans, including land use plans relevant to the plan area, higher order heritage related plans, the Local Authority Climate Action Plan, the national Climate Action Plan and the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan. The range of positive effects that may be realised by the implementation of the LABCAP have the potential to interact and combine with positive effects associated with biodiversity measures defined in these inter-related plans to create larger, more significant positive effects.</p> <p>All actions in the LABAP are aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity. The implementation of the LABAP will not give rise to likely significant negative effects on the environment that have the potential to interact and combine with negative effects associated with measures defined in these inter-related plans or projects to create larger, more significant negative effects.</p>
The transboundary nature of the effects	<p>The LABAP has the potential to generate positive effects on the receiving environment present in or connected to the plan area. These effects will be relatively localised however given that the LABCAP is local action plan. These effects have the potential to be transmitted to areas surrounding and outside the local authority functional area via environmental pathways. It is unlikely most of these effects will be transmitted Northern Ireland or any other country outside of Ireland however given the distance from the local authority functional area to these other countries and the lack of direct environmental pathways from the functional area to these countries. Actions in the LAPAB that may benefit migratory birds have some degree of potential to create positive effects beyond the national boundary of Ireland, however.</p>



## Potential for Significant Effects

### Characteristics of the Effects and the Area likely to be affected, having regard in particular to:

	The implementation of the LABAP will not give rise to likely significant negative effects on the environment that have the ability to be transmitted beyond the national boundary of Ireland.
The risks to human health or the environment (e.g., due to accidents)	The implementation of the LABAP will not give rise to likely significant negative effects on the environment that have the potential to create risks to human health or the environment.
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The LABAP has the potential to generate positive effects on the receiving environment present in the plan area or connected to the plan area via environmental pathways, including elements that may up the receiving biodiversity environment such as habitats, key species, designated sites and non-designated locally important sites.
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:	The LABAP has the potential to generate positive effects that contribute to enhanced biodiversity and natural heritage; enhanced water, soil or air quality in the plan area, and more sustainable, ecologically diverse land use.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;</li> </ul>	The implementation of the LABAP will not give rise to likely significant negative effects on the environment that may affect special natural characteristics or cultural heritage (including built or archaeological heritage), or contribute to the exceedance of environmental quality standards, in the plan area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;</li> </ul>	The LABAP does not support or promote intensive land use or development projects that may create negative environmental effects.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensive land-use</li> </ul>	
The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognized national, community or international protection status	<p>There are a variety of sites designated for their ecological value (e.g., Special protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, proposed Natural Heritage Areas) present in and connected to the plan area. The actions in the LABAP have been carefully designed to support the protection and enhancement of these designated sites.</p> <p>There are sites in the plan area that are designated for their landscape and visual amenity value. The implementation of the LABAP has the potential to have positive effects on landscape and visual amenity generally and such designated sites - e.g., through the promotion of natural heritage settings that contributes to landscape character, scenic value and visual amenity.</p>





**Table 4-6: Summary of SEA Screening Analysis**

#### Summary of SEA Screening Analysis

Having regard to the evaluation undertaken in Table 4-3 and the Stage 2 Screening Analysis undertaken in Table 4-4 and Table 4-5, it is concluded that there is no real likelihood of significant negative environmental effects occurring as result of the implementation of the LABAP.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

An SEA Screening Assessment was undertaken to determine the need for an SEA for the Offaly County Council LABAP. It has been concluded that there is no real likelihood of significant negative environmental effects occurring as result of the implementation of the LABAP. The principal reasons for this are as follows:

- The LABAP does not introduce any source of negative environmental effect.
- All actions in the LABAP are aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity. There is no requirement to integrate further environmental considerations into the LABAP given its intrinsic nature, its stated aims and objectives, and the potential positive effects associated with its actions.
- The LABAP is in alignment with nature legislation and higher order policy such as the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan and inter-related plans and programmes.
- The actions in the LABAP do not support intensive land use or development projects sitting outside the land use planning framework that can cause significant negative environmental effects.
- The LABAP is not a statutory land use plan. The LABAP will not in and of itself set the context for future development consent.

Therefore, a full SEA of the LABAP is not required.

The local authority is now required to consult with the Environmental Authorities on the above conclusion.



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