

# MILLTOWN TOWN CENTRE FIRST MASTERPLAN

## STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

### Applicability Screening Report

SEPTEMBER 2025



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction .....	3
1.1	Overview.....	3
2.0	Guidance and Legislation .....	4
2.2.1	Overview of Legislation .....	4
2.2.2	Guidance Documents .....	4
3.0	Applicability to the Masterplan .....	5
3.1	Town Centre First Policy 2022 .....	5
3.2	Project Ireland 2040.....	5
3.3	National Planning Framework (First Revision) 2025 .....	6
3.4	The National Development Plan 2021 – 2030 .....	6
3.5	Climate Action Plan 2025 .....	6
3.6	Housing for All 2021.....	6
3.7	Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 .....	7
4.0	Milltown Town Centre First Masterplan .....	7
5.0	SEA Screening.....	8
5.1	Methodology.....	8
5.2	Applicability – Stage 1 .....	9
5.2	Screening – Stage 2 .....	10
5.3	Determination – Stage 3 .....	12
6.0	SEA Applicability Screening.....	12
6.1	Outcome.....	13
7.0	Conclusion.....	13
	References.....	14

## 1.0 Introduction

The Milltown Town Centre First (TCF) Masterplan, hereinafter referred to as ‘the Masterplan’, is a non-statutory community-led plan produced by the Masterplan Design Team and Milltown Town Team, a group of residents, business owners, community representatives and other stakeholders who represent the town as ‘local experts’ on their area and take a lead in the development of positive change in their town.

The Masterplan was led by DOWNEY working in conjunction with the Town Team and Town Regeneration Officer and created by a multidisciplinary Design team.

DOWNEY has been commissioned by Kerry County Council to conduct a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Applicability Screening of the Milltown Town Centre First Masterplan. The purpose of the Applicability Screening is *‘to determine if the Plan/Programme (P/P) falls within the scope of the SEA Directive and transposing legislation, and to confirm if it constitutes a P/P that requires mandatory SEA’* while the full Screening is defined as *“the process for deciding whether a particular plan, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would thus warrant SEA.”*

As such, DOWNEY is conducting this Screening to determine if the Masterplan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (“SEA Directive”) as transposed by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435 of 2004), as amended.

Hereunder contains the SEA Applicability screening with the findings and the SEA screening process for the Masterplan.

### 1.1 Overview

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is defined as ‘the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt that plan or programme.’ (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2004).

The SEA process is comprised of the following steps:

- Screening:
  - Decision on whether SEA of a Plan or Programme is required.

The current stage of the SEA process contained in this report relate to this step. If it is determined that the SEA Directive applies, then a SEA Screening shall be completed.

If SEA is required following Screening, the following steps will be required:

- Scoping:
  - Consultation with the defined statutory bodies on the scope and level of detail to be considered in the assessment,

- Environmental Assessment:
  - An assessment of the likely significant impacts on the environment as a result of the Plan or Programme.
- Preparation of an Environmental Report.
- Consultation on the Plan or Programme and associated Environmental Report.
- Evaluation of the submissions and observations made on the Plan or Programme and Environmental Report and
- Issuance of a 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 and programmes - which give rise to individual projects - are being developed. SEA should result in more sustainable development through the systematic appraisal of policy options.

## 2.0 Guidance and Legislation

### 2.2.1 Overview of Legislation

As detailed under Directive 2001/42/EC on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment, the SEA Directive requires that an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Under Article 1 of SEA Directive 2001, the objective is *'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'*.

Within Ireland, the SEA Directive was adopted into Irish law in 2004 through S.I. 436/2004 related to specific listed land use plans and S.I. 435/2004 related to all other plans. The regulations regarding these are European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations (S.I. 435/2004), and Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations (S.I. 436/2004).

Subsequent amendments were made in 2011 and are listed as European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Amendment Regulations (S.I. 200/2011), and Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Amendment Regulations (S.I. 201/2011).

Having been started and planned for completion within the span of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended), the Masterplan is subject to this Act. Under this Act, it is specified that SEA is conducted facilitated alongside the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

### 2.2.2 Guidance Documents

A list of national guidance documents on SEA has been collated and the documents reviewed in the preparation of this SEA Screening Report, including:

- Good Practice Guidance on Screening (EPA, Good Practice Guidance on Screening, 2021).

- Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland (EPA, Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland, 2013).
- Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment- Guidelines for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2004).
- Implementation of Directive 2001/42 on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (European Commission, date unspecified)
- SEA Resource Manual for Local and Regional Planning Authorities (EPA, SEA Resource Manual for Local and Regional Planning Authorities, 2013).
- Integrating Climatic Factors into Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland - A Guidance Note (EPA, 2019).
- Synthesis Report on Developing A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes In Ireland (EPA, 2019).

### **3.0 Applicability to the Masterplan**

As the Masterplan is a community-led plan that has been guided and informed by the Town Team and wider community consultation, supported by the Town Regeneration Officer and designed by a multi-disciplinary technical Design Team, the key to its success has been the collaboration between multiple stakeholders and the community.

Within the context of the legislative background given by EU, National, Regional and Local development plans and policies, the Masterplan aims to deliver a regeneration plan for the town centre of Milltown, and the process is underpinned by an assessment of the current position of the town and guided by the residents' vision for its future.

Although the Masterplan is a non-statutory plan, it is still subject to a plan-led process and the relevant legislative requirements of the plans within national policy guidance.

#### **3.1 Town Centre First Policy 2022**

A Town Centre First Policy was published 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and provides a multi-faceted approach to address the decline of rural towns across Ireland and support regeneration within the centres. In combination with the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and supported by the overarching goals of Project Ireland 2040, the Policy furthers specific policies on combating dereliction, providing housing, seeking compact settlement and reduction of emissions through effective use of existing buildings.

#### **3.2 Project Ireland 2040**

Project Ireland 2040 frames the overarching policy and planning guidance for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland and establishes the high-level strategic objectives for spatial planning for Ireland until 2040. The delivery of these objectives is supported by National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 and the 20-year National Planning Framework (NPF) which has been revised in 2025. In relation to the Town Centre First Policy, Project Ireland 2040 recognises that quality urban

environments and consolidation of town centres as mixed-use environments are essential in driving economic activity and providing a cultural/social core to settlements.

### **3.3 National Planning Framework (First Revision) 2025**

The National Planning Framework (NPF) First Revision is the high-level strategic plan to shape the future growth and development of Ireland until 2040. The NPF guides the development and implementation of regional spatial and economic strategies, county and city development plans and local area plans across the country over the coming decade. The objectives it contains detail the population targets and National Strategic Outcomes, which include concepts of compact growth, sustainable mobility, strengthened rural economies and the energy transition to a low-carbon economy. These objectives align with a focus on increased population, employment growth, sustainable mobility and compact settlements in the future. These objectives guide the regional policies and development plans to formulate their local policies, initiatives and programmes. To this regard, the Masterplan has also given due regard to the available hierarchy of objectives including those contained in the National Planning Framework.

### **3.4 The National Development Plan 2021 – 2030**

The National Development Plan (NDP) provides specific funding measures to support the national strategic objectives of the NPF. It supports the compact growth agenda, strengthened rural economies and communities, and sustainable mobility action plan. The NDP identifies specific funding pathways to support the Town Centre First Policy and subsequent plans.

### **3.5 Climate Action Plan 2025**

As required under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, the Climate Action Plan 2025 is the third annual update to the Climate Action Plan for Ireland. This plan outlines actions taken to halve Ireland's emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050. As required by law, it aligns with the carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings which Ireland committed to in July 2022.

The actions align and support the regeneration and revitalisation of towns, including enhanced sustainable transport, increasing local-based economies, employment and amenities, as well as adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

### **3.6 Housing for All 2021**

*Housing for All* advances the overall housing growth required each year in the next decade increasing from an estimated 24,600 new dwellings in 2022 to around 40,500 by 2030. *Housing for All* proposes ways to address the vacancy and efficient use of existing housing stock and also the provision of a Town Centre First policy that aligns with the objectives of the NPF. Both *Our Rural Future* and *Housing for All* have reflected the concept of Town Centre First which gives an operational focus to the ambition flowing from the NPF in relation to Ireland's towns and villages.

### 3.7 Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

*Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025* represents the blueprint for the post-COVID recovery and development of rural Ireland over the next five years. It provides the framework and commitments to support the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages. The framework outlines how these measures contribute to local and national economic recovery and enable people to live and work in a high-quality environment.

## 4.0 Milltown Town Centre First Masterplan

The Masterplan is a non-statutory community-led plan produced for Milltown, County Kerry. Its guiding principle is the incorporation of Town Centre First Policy objectives with the local community and stakeholders who have come together to help shape the regeneration of the town centre. This process and plan have been facilitated by a multi-disciplinary team and community appointed Town Team together with the Town Regeneration Officer from Kerry County Council.

First, a baseline analysis of the town was undertaken collating demographics on population, housing market, and planning permissions. The parameters of the study area were defined within the below map illustrating the defined extent of the study area.

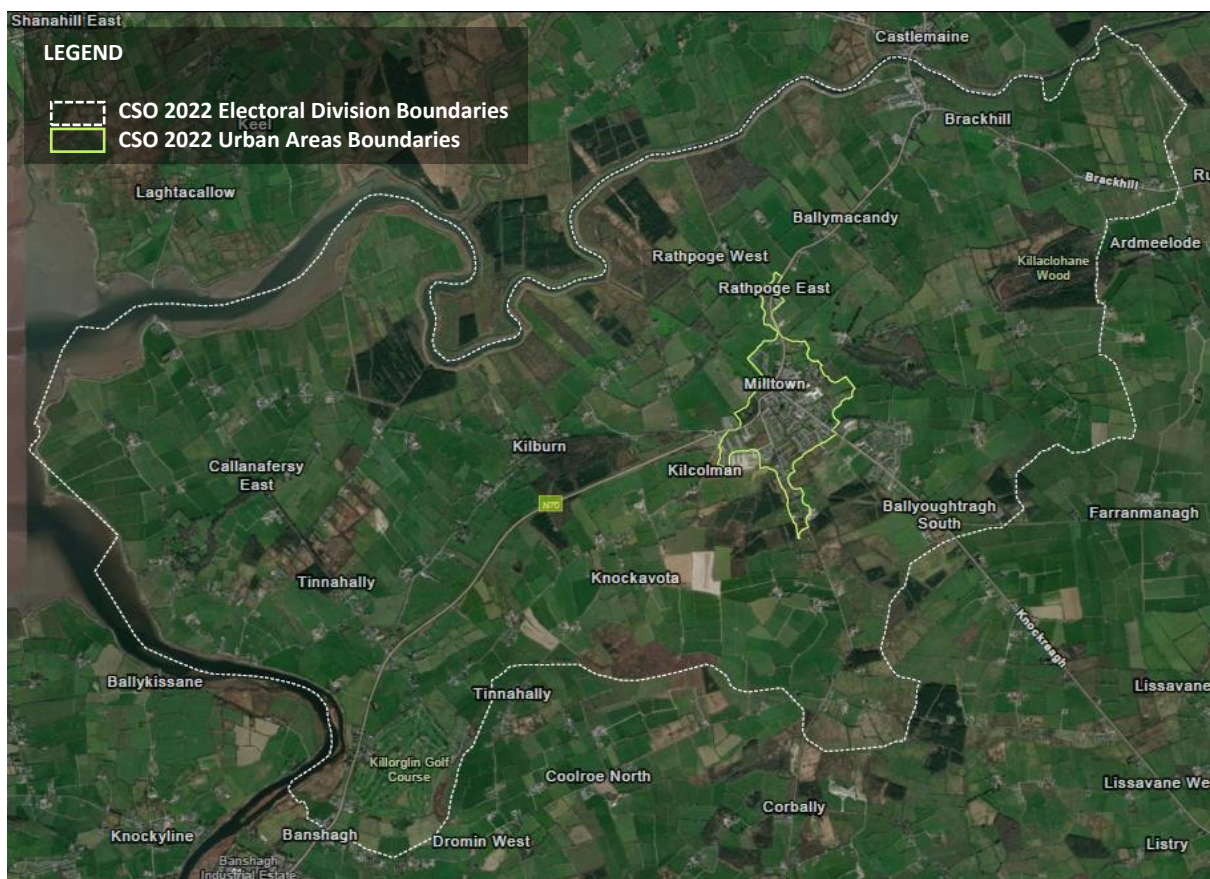


Figure 1. Spatial scope of the demographic assessment carried out as part of the Baseline Report, entailing the urban area boundaries and the ED boundaries as defined by Census 2022 (map produced by DOWNEY).

Following this, feedback was compiled from residents. This analysis and feedback were then developed in alignment with the Town Centre First policy objectives into a series of ideas, actions and strategies for the Masterplan. The main themes were established as:

- Mobility & Sustainable Transport
- Public Realm/Placemaking
- The Community
- Heritage, Identity & Visitor Experience
- Green Infrastructure
- Enterprise & Sustainable Growth

The main objectives of the Masterplan were developed in response to the consultation with the community as:

- Promoting Active Travel
- Traffic Calming of the Town Centre & Promoting Road Safety for all Road Users
- Car Parking Management
- Enhancing the Townscape of Milltown
- Developing a Street Furniture Plan for Milltown
- Developing Zones of Intervention
- RE-generation of Milltown (Providing for a Town Centre Responsive to all Age Groups)
- Celebrate and Utilise the Rich Heritage Assets of the Town
- Reintroducing Green Infrastructure to Milltown
- Enhancing the Town Centre Dynamic & Local Economy

A draft Masterplan for Milltown was then published and submissions received. From the submissions, some minor amendments were made to plan. The themes identified the communities' needs and desires for the future and set in motion the long-term vision for the town centre of Milltown.

## **5.0 SEA Screening**

### **5.1 Methodology**

The methodology for an SEA screening is the basic function any plan in Ireland must follow in order to determine if a full SEA is needed following the development of a plan. The screening process is outlined in the Environmental Protection Agency in three principal stages:

1. Applicability
2. Screening
3. Determination

The guidance states that the overall characteristics of the plan should first be considered by means of 'Applicability' to verify it falls within the requirements of the SEA Directive. If applicable, the 'Screening' of potential environmental impacts of implementing the proposed plan should then be considered against the significance criteria outlined in Annex II (2) of the SEA Directive.

This is detailed in the flowchart below:

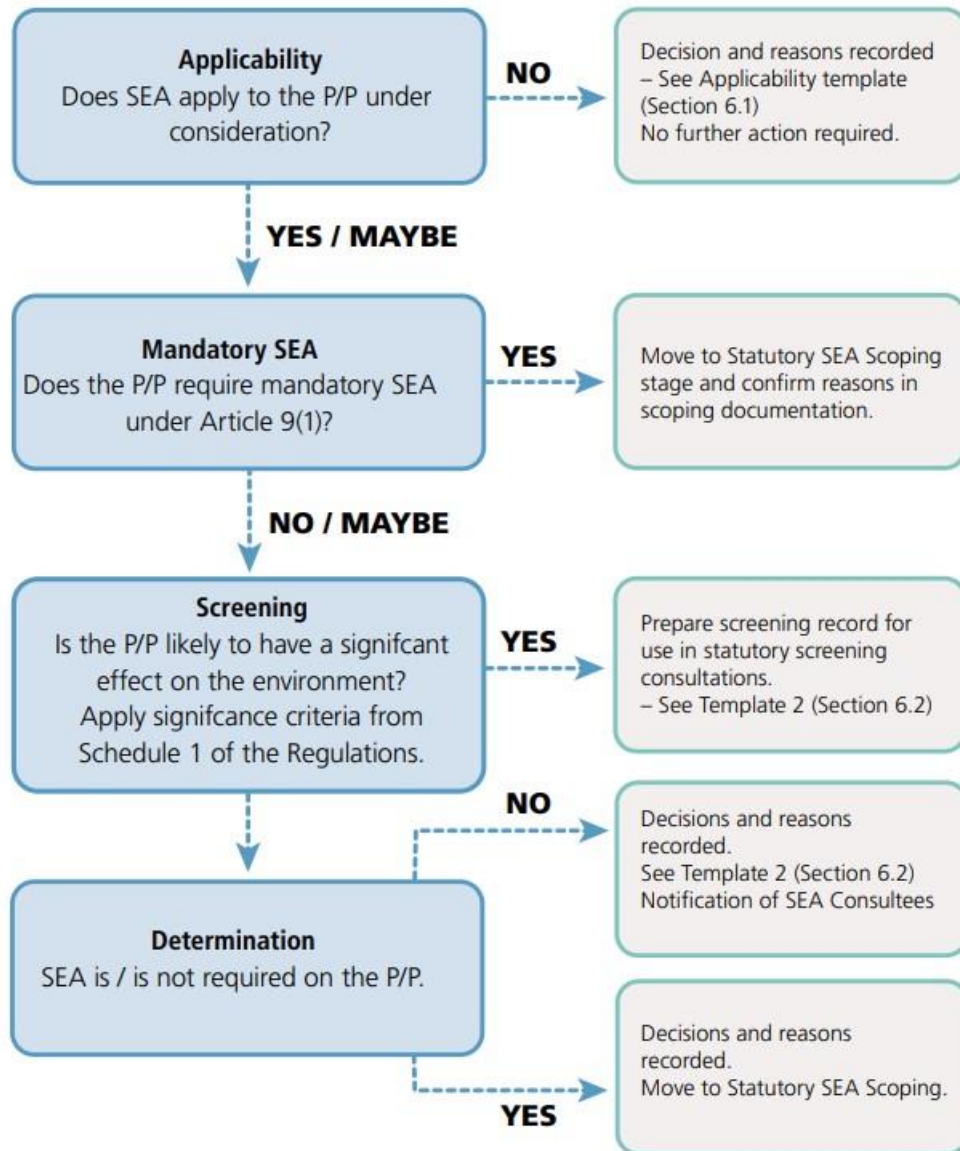


Figure 2. SEA Screening Process under S.I. 435/2004, as amended Source: (EPA, Good Practice Guidance on Screening, 2021)

This flowchart was adapted from the research report Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes (P/P) in Ireland (Scott and Marsden, 2001) which has been included in References.

## 5.2 Applicability – Stage 1

The applicability stage consists of a four-step process as follows:

1. Establish the status of the plan or programme-making body  
Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by national, regional or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?
2. Establish the nature of the plan or programme

Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?

3. Check the plan or programme is not exempt  
Is the sole purpose of the P/P for national defence, civil emergency or finance / budget?
4. Check if the plan or programme requires mandatory SEA  
Is the P/P prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecoms, tourism, town and country planning or land use and does the P/P set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the Annexes of the EIA Directive;  
**OR**  
Will the P/P require assessment under Art. 6 or 7 of the EU Habitats Directive?

Three possible outcomes following Stage 1 Applicability Screening are possible:

- **The SEA Directive does not apply**
  - The P/P is not of a type which falls within the remit of the SEA Directive / SEA Regulations.
  - It is recommended as good practice to keep a note of the deliberations alongside the P/P on the relevant website, alongside the AA screening determination.
  - There is no requirement to notify the environmental authorities.
- **The SEA Directive does apply**
  - The P/P is of a type which falls within the remit of the SEA Directive / SEA Regulations and requires mandatory SEA.
  - Proceed to SEA Scoping and statutory consultation with the designated environmental authorities.
  - The Screening outcome should be confirmed within the SEA Scoping Report.
- **The SEA Directive may apply**
  - The P/P may be within the remit of the SEA Directive as either it relates to use of a small area at local level or minor modifications to a relevant P/P, it is a P/P which may set the framework for future development consent even though not listed as a P/P type, or there is uncertainty in relation to any of the provisions considered at the Applicability Stage, and so a case-by-case determination will be required.
  - Proceed to Stage 2 Screening.

Enclosed within the Report is the Applicability Screening Template, 'Template 1' provided in the EPA guidance document.

## 5.2 Screening – Stage 2

The Screening stage consists of a further determination on a case-by-case basis if SEA is required for a Plan or Programme which has characteristics that may give rise to potential impacts on the environment. Although an SEA screening Report is not a mandatory requirement in the legislation, it is recommended to include this as part of good planning practice.

This stage involves a further four-step process which is detailed in Good Practice Guidance on EPA Screening Report 2021:

5. Describe the characteristics of the P/P and the receiving environment including any environmental problems.
6. Identify the potential for significant environmental effects.
7. Engage in statutory consultation with Designated Environmental Authorities
8. Draft Determination

A Plan or Programme which has not been screen out by the 'Applicability Stage' may undergo an environmental significance screening to assess if it is likely to result in significant environmental effects and thus should be taken forward for SEA. The SEA Screening template, 'Template 2', is provided in the EPA's Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening Report.

Annex II of the SEA Directive outlines the "statutory" criteria that should be addressed when undertaking the 'Screening Stage'. Annex II of the SEA Directive is transposed into national legislation as Schedule 1 'Criteria for determining whether a Plan or Programme (or Modification thereto) is likely to have significant effects on the Environment' of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, as amended.

The 'Significance Criteria' for determining whether a Plan or Programme is likely to have significant effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European or international protection status are detailed as follows:

*"The characteristics of the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, having regard, in particular, to:*

- *the degree to which the plan or programme, or modification to a 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;*
- *the degree to which the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, influences other plans including those in a hierarchy;*
- *the relevance of the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;*
- *environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme;*
- *the relevance of the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)."*

**AND**

*“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 cumulative nature of the effects;*
- *the transboundary nature of the effects;*
- *the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents);*
- *the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);*
- *the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:*
  - *special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;*
  - *exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;*
  - *intensive land-use.”*

### 5.3 Determination – Stage 3

As soon as practicable after the final determination as to whether SEA is required or not, the plan maker should make a copy of the decision available for public inspection at the P/P offices and online including, as appropriate, the reasons for requiring or not requiring an environmental assessment.

The plan maker should also send a copy of the final determination to any relevant SEA environmental authorities notified during screening. This determination should stay linked to the P/P or modification on the website to ensure transparency and provide important information on decision making during the lifetime of the P/P or if any modifications are made.

## 6.0 SEA Applicability Screening

As outlined above, the Stage 1 ‘Applicability’ of the SEA Screening methodology constitutes the use of Template 1 and has been replicated in the Table below.

*Table 1. Stage 1: Applicability of SEA Screening as taken from Good Practice Guidance on Screening (EPA, 2021).*

General Details	Type and Title of P/P:	Milltown Town Centre First Masterplan
	Name of the P/P maker:	Kerry County Council
	Date:	2025
<b>Step 1 - Applicability Screening</b>		
Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption	Yes.	

<p>through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?</p>	<p>The Milltown Town Centre First Masterplan has been drafted for Kerry County Council working alongside the Town Team.</p> <p>A competent authority for the purposes of the SEA is defined under SI 435 of 2004 as <i>‘the authority which is, or the authorities which are jointly, responsible for the preparation of a plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme’</i>.</p> <p>Therefore, the Masterplan can be considered a document prepared and/or adopted by ‘an authority’ at a local level.</p>
<p>Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>According to the EPA Guidance, the term <i>“required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions”</i> means that <i>“there is something by way of formal provision which could be said to govern or regulate the production of the P/P”</i>. The requirement for SEA covers P/P that are subject to formal approval procedures, not only those where there is a specific legal requirement for these to be developed and adopted.</p>

## 6.1 Outcome

Following the above procedure of the Applicability Screening for SEA, it was determined that the SEA Directive does not apply to the Milltown Town Centre First Masterplan.

## 7.0 Conclusion

The Milltown Town Centre First (TCF) Masterplan is a non-statutory community-led plan produced for Kerry County Council by the Masterplan Design Team in consultation with the Milltown Town Team (who are a group of residents, business owners, community representatives and other stakeholders who represent the town as ‘local experts’ on their area and take a lead in the development of positive changes in their town).

As outlined in Section 6.0 and 6.1 of this report, it has been determined that while the plan is prepared for a local authority, the Masterplan is not required to include an SEA within the existing legislative, regulatory or administrative context.

## References

- EPA. (2003). Synthesis Report on Developing A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes In Ireland. EPA.
- EPA. (2013). Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland. EPA.
- EPA. (2013). SEA Resource Manual for Local and Regional Planning Authorities. EPA.
- EPA. (2021). Good Practice Guidance on Screening. Environmental Protection Agency, Ireland.
- EPA. (2021). Good Practice Guidance on Screening. Environmental Protection Agency, Ireland.
- EPA. (2021). Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening. The EPA.
- Scott, P. M. (2001). Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland. EPA.