



# Cork Beyond Visual Line of Sight UAS Geographical Zone

## Consultation Report

May 2026



# IRISH AVIATION AUTHORITY

Cork BVLOS UAS Geographical Zone

Consultation Report

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# Table of contents

## Contents

|                                                       |   |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Introduction .....                                 | 4 |
| 2. Role of the Irish Aviation Authority .....         | 4 |
| 3. Operational Context – Cork City Airspace.....      | 4 |
| 4. Nature and Purpose of UAS Geographical Zones ..... | 5 |
| 5. UAS Geographical Zone Implementation Process ..... | 5 |
| 6. Consultation Overview.....                         | 6 |
| 7. Key Themes and Outcomes .....                      | 6 |
| 8. National Policy Framework for UAS.....             | 7 |
| 9. Conclusion and Next Steps.....                     | 7 |

## 1. Introduction

The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) is the State body responsible for the regulation of civil aviation safety in Ireland. This includes responsibility for the regulation of airspace, oversight of air navigation services, and the implementation and enforcement of European Union aviation safety regulations, including those applicable to Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), commonly known as drones.

Cork City lies entirely within the Cork Airport Control Zone (CTR). This is one of the busiest and most complex operational airspace environments in the State, supporting a wide range of aviation activity. In such environments, European regulation requires additional safeguards when drone operations are conducted. The Cork Beyond Visual Line-Of-Sight (BVLOS) UAS Geographical Zone (UGZ) was established as an airspace safety measure in this regulatory and operational context.

## 2. Role of the Irish Aviation Authority

The IAA regulates civil aviation activity in Ireland across aviation safety, airspace management, and air navigation service oversight. In relation to drones, the IAA is the competent authority for:

- Implementation and enforcement of European Union (EU) drone regulations,
- Oversight of drone operators and remote UAS pilots,
- Regulation of drone operations, and
- Establishment, oversight, and review of UGZs.

The IAA's function is to ensure that all aircraft operations, whether manned or unmanned, are conducted safely and in compliance with applicable regulation.

## 3. Operational Context – Cork City Airspace

Cork City is located within the Cork Airport CTR, an airspace environment characterised by higher traffic density and operational complexity. This airspace is used daily by:

- Commercial passenger and cargo aircraft,
- Emergency service aircraft,
- General aviation and flight training operations, and
- Drone operators, both recreational and professional.

Within controlled airspace, aircraft movements are managed to maintain predictable traffic flows and safe separation standards. The integration of drones into this environment requires additional risk mitigations compared to operations in uncontrolled airspace. The temporary Cork UGZ provided a structured framework to manage these risks, particularly where BVLOS operations are conducted alongside manned aviation.

## 4. Nature and Purpose of UAS Geographical Zones

UGZ are provided for under European aviation regulation and enable the State to prohibit, restrict, or exempt drone operations within a defined volume of airspace for safety, security, privacy, or environmental reasons.

A UGZ:

- Is **not required** in order to fly a drone,
- Does **not rezone or alter ownership of airspace**,
- Is **not a commercial or planning decision**, and
- Does **not authorise or endorse any particular type of activity**.

Rather, a UGZ is an airspace safety tool, used where tailored arrangements are required to manage aviation risk in specific operating environments, such as controlled airspace around major aerodromes.

## 5. UAS Geographical Zone Implementation Process

### 5.1 Temporary UAS Geographical Zones (UGZ)

Temporary UGZ may be established for a limited period. The process typically involves:

- An application or request from a Department, State agency, or relevant entity,
- A safety assessment and multi-agency coordination,
- Implementation of a temporary UGZ,
- Operation of the zone for a fixed duration, and
- Automatic expiry unless further action is taken.

The Cork T2 UGZ was initially introduced as a temporary safety measure to manage the integration of BVLOS drone operations within the controlled airspace around Cork Airport.

## 5.2 Long-Term (Permanent) UAS Geographical Zones (UGZ)

Where a safety requirement persists beyond a short-term period, a temporary UGZ may be considered for transition to a longer-term arrangement. This process includes:

- A decision to consider a permanent zone,
- Review and updating of the safety assessment,
- Stakeholder engagement and public consultation, where required,
- Consideration of consultation feedback,
- Establishment of a long-term UGZ if approved, and
- Ongoing periodic review of the zone and its operating conditions.

Long-term UGZs are not fixed or irreversible and may be amended or withdrawn as operational, regulatory, or technological circumstances evolve.

## 6. Consultation Overview

The purpose and scope of the targeted consultation was to invite feedback from airspace users, on the transition from the temporary UGZ T2 structure to a permanent (longer term) UGZ. 662 submissions were received - approximately 95% of which originated from the Cork region. The majority of respondents identified as members of the general public, with a smaller proportion identifying as registered drone operators.

Less than 10% of submissions directly addressed the technical or regulatory function of the UGZ as an airspace safety measure.

Note – the appendix to this report contains the dis-identified consultation comments.

## 7. Key Themes and Outcomes

A significant number of submissions focused on broader concerns, outside the scope of the consultation, regarding drone activity in general, including drone delivery operations, privacy, noise, environmental impacts, and fairness of access to airspace.

A key theme emerging from the consultation was concern regarding the impact of the UGZ on recreational, volunteer, and small commercial drone operators, particularly the requirement for advance coordination for Visual Line-Of-Sight (VLOS) operations.

Following an updated safety review and consideration of consultation feedback, VLOS drone operators within the zone will retain responsibility for maintaining VLOS conditions and keep their drone at a safe distance from other drone operations. BVLOS operations would continue to require formal approval from the zone authority. This update reduces the procedural burden, improves operational flexibility for UAS operators, and conserves scarce air traffic management resources.

## 8. National Policy Framework for UAS

The Cork UGZ operates within the wider Department of Transport National Policy Framework for UAS, which sets out a coordinated national approach to the governance and integration of drone operations.

Key elements of this framework include:

- Establishment of a National Working Group on UAS Geographical Zones, supporting consistent national approaches and empowering local authorities,
- Development and implementation of U-space, providing digital traffic management services for drones in congested airspace,
- Integration of innovative and emerging aviation technologies into national, regional, and local policy, and
- Support for training and capacity-building for local authorities and planners.

Matters such as noise, privacy, environmental considerations, and land-use planning are being addressed through this broader policy framework and are distinct from the IAA's current role in airspace safety regulation. The Department of Transport [National Policy Framework on UAS](#) was launched in August 2025 and aims to guide high-level strategic planning and development of the UAS sector in Ireland over the next decade by supporting growth and innovation.

## 9. Conclusion and Next Steps

The Cork T2 UGZ is an airspace safety measure required for operations within controlled airspace.

Based on the consultation and updated safety arrangements, the IAA intends to:

- Establish the Cork T2 UGZ on a long-term basis, as an “Safety Information” UGZ with no specified restrictions for VLOS operators. This means:
  - T2 advance coordination will be removed for VLOS operations
  - UGZs U33, U45, U61\_A, and U61\_B, coordination procedures remain
  - BVLOS operations will continue to require prior authorisation,



- Administrative and coordination burdens on low risk operators are reduced.
- Act as the controlling authority for the Safety Information UGZ, and
- Conduct reviews of the arrangements on a periodic basis.

A revised Aeronautical Notice detailing the permanent Cork UGZ and associated operating conditions will be published separately, planned for no later than the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2026

End