

APPENDIX TWO — SCOPING REPORT

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Appendix Two: Scoping Report

21. Introduction

Scoping can be defined as “the procedure whereby the range of environmental issues and the level of detail to be included in the Environmental Report are decided upon, in consultation with the prescribed environmental authorities”.

The purpose of scoping is to identify the likely extent (geographic, temporal and thematic) and level of detail for the assessment and the information to be included in the SEA and Environmental Report. Scoping, in particular should identify those issues that are of most importance so that these can be addressed in most detail. Scoping should ensure that all relevant issues are identified and addressed in an appropriate manner. The scoping process identifies the issues that are likely to be important during the SEA process and eliminates those that are not of significance.

While scoping is primarily focused on identifying the impacts to be assessed and which of these are the most important, scoping should also address other issues including:

- Types of reasonable alternatives which ought to be considered
- Information and studies needed to characterise the existing environment
- Methods used to predict the magnitude of environmental effects
- Criteria against which the significance of effects should be evaluated
- Any further consultations to be carried out
- Environmental objectives and targets

2.2 Responses from Environmental Authorities re Scoping for SEA of Draft CDP

DoEHLG

Regard must be had to national and international policy and guidance in assessing impacts to archaeological and architectural heritage.

Identify Preservation Orders, National Monuments in State Care and Recorded Monuments.

Identify areas of high archaeological potential or subsurface archaeology and consider records of excavations and chance finds of objects for this purpose.

In terms of architecture, the scale, type and location of significant development proposed in the vicinity of structures of architectural merit, including demesne lands.

Information relating to the architectural heritage should inform the Development Plan Review from the outset.

Have regard to the existing Record of Protected Structures and also the NIAH survey results when available.

Any significant change proposed by the Development Plan, even if appropriate, will bring about impacts to the architectural heritage. However, this change may be positive, since the do-nothing scenario may state that buildings may deteriorate from lack of use etc. Incorporating the architectural heritage in plans will enhance it.

Qualitative indicators rather than quantitative indicators are more appropriate in monitoring the significant effects of implementing the plan.

Where data gaps exist, this can simply be acknowledged in the Environmental Report.

EPA

Water Quality and Supply

The biggest environmental concern for Westmeath is surface and ground water pollution. It is important to adequately describe the current status of surface and groundwater quality and identify where issues arise and what are the pressure areas. The Water Framework Directive requires that we achieve good water quality by 2015 (the new CDP will run to 2014).

It will be necessary to identify protected species of fish and where they are located in the County, fish farming etc. Eels can be found in Lough Derravarragh. Salmonoid watercourses and other watercourses of value must be identified. It will be very important to make contact with the Fisheries Board in particular.

The use of jet-skis have resulted in pressure in terms of water pollution, noise disturbance etc. They can also be considered as safety and human health issues. Policies to restrict their use in particular areas may result in increased pressure in other areas and lakes.

Interrelationships exist in many areas, e.g. between water quality, tourism resources and provision for tourism, leisure, human health (e.g. noise disturbance from jet ski use), walking and cycling routes (positive in terms of human health).

Levels of eutrophication in water bodies should be established. Impacts of agriculture, piggeries etc on water quality should be considered. Identify where such land-uses are located? IPPC licences in the county can be used for an indication of where high-risk activities are concentrated.

Wastewater treatment – capacity problems exist due to storm water runoff into the system in towns. There is a need to upgrade the drainage system, especially in Moate to take the surface water away from the wastewater treatment facilities. Small-scale settlement policies will result in pressures on the provision of wastewater services. Growth of Mullingar is required by national policy but it is questionable whether the wastewater treatment capacity can support this growth.

Policies relating to water conservation, energy conservation and the achievement of quality water services will have positive impacts, which should be identified and highlighted.

Flooding issues are particularly relevant to Athlone from the AI River. Potential for development policies to increase flood risk should be assessed.

Natural Heritage

The designated natural heritage sites should be set out by habitat type, e.g. wetlands, woodlands etc. Also we should identify what we have that is unique to the County, e.g. Scragh Bog, the Shannon Callows.

Features and habitats of national significance should be identified, e.g. the Corncrake, Callows etc. Policies for Big Meadow, Athlone will have to consider impacts to the Corncrake.

Landuse

Corine mapping shows land uses for areas so this will be useful for the description of the environmental baseline.

Soil, Geology

The geology and geomorphology should be considered as part of the process

Air, Noise and Human Health

Air quality and human health will be affected by traffic congestion and traffic management policies. Traffic management plans/studies should be carried out. See Traffic Management plan for Mullingar.

An objective to re-open the Athlone to Mullingar rail line will have positive impacts (e.g. reduction in car traffic and consequently air pollution etc).

Quarries – impacts include dust and noise pollution, especially where blasting occurs. Impacts on human health and residential amenity. Road construction projects may have similar impacts.

Walking routes can impact positively on human health as access to the countryside is opened up to urban dwellers. Human health impacts may be assessed on data available such as air and water quality etc but a full health impact assessment is not necessary for SEA of Development Plans.

Waste management

Litter control policies will have potentially positive impacts, e.g. increased litter wardens etc. Policies to introduce waste charges have resulted in increased dumping.

Landscape Character

Landscape character policies are mandatory in the plans. Landscape character assessment is needed in Westmeath, as the landscape is very unique.

Lake management plans, would determine where on lakeshores that development may be allowed – should lakeshore development be entertained at all? E.g. at Lough Derravarragh, development proposed would be in NHA and adjacent to SPA. Lakes are considered 'primary products' when in pristine condition in the opinion of an Bord Fáilte. Should the focus be on maximising tourism potential or ensuring that such resources remain valuable (unspoilt, unpolluted etc).

Promotion of tourism product, e.g. promotion of cruising on the Shannon by Waterways Ireland will result in issues re protection of the landscape along the routes.

Renewable energy

Renewable energy policies, e.g. windfarm development, see wind energy framework draft document produced by Forward Planning, 2004. Policies for exclusion areas and priority locations for windfarms –consider the landscape impacts, positive impacts? Visual impacts, impacts on bird populations should be considered. What areas are of greater efficiency for wind energy generation?

Zoning

The present zoning for industrial development is for light industrial / technological and does not allow for more intensive industries such as car scrappage, mushroom composting. Policies may be needed to accommodate more than just light industrial activities. This will raise an issue re health impacts. All zoning will be part of the new CDP, how will this be dealt with in SEA?

Monitoring

For monitoring it will be useful to link to existing monitoring programmes, e.g. using habitat info and loss of greenfield sites for landscape indicators in the absence of appropriate indicators. Quantitative indicators should be used where possible; they are more measurable. However, in scoping the DoEHLG suggested that qualitative indicators be used for the architectural heritage.

Conclusion

In summary, environmental pressures on the County and Athlone town relate to surface water quality, lakes, salmonoid waters etc; groundwaters and pollution from septic tanks; wastewater treatment provision for increasing development; landscape impacts from development; tourism related development and tourist activity; biodiversity protection; rural housing and impacts of policies – restrictive/ facilitative; renewable energy; and maybe forestry in the future.

A challenge will be to find alternatives to conflicting policies, e.g. zoning elsewhere or don't include the policy at all.

Where we can't avoid the negative impacts, we must have mitigation measures, e.g. certification, introduction of by-laws on septic tanks for example. The Steering Group will be very useful in deciding on reasonable alternatives and realistic mitigation measures.

DCMNR

Cognisance should be taken of the Departments generic guidelines as to what should be contained in the Environmental Report at :

<http://www.dcmnr.gov.ie/Marine/Environmental+Assessment/Environmental+Assessment.htm>

"Fishery Guidelines for Local Authority Works", DCMNR may be of some general help in drafting flood alleviation options sympathetic to fisheries concerns.

It is imperative that sufficient sanitary services infrastructure in terms of Sewage Treatment Plant facilities is in place in advance of permitting any further development where existing facilities are at or over capacity'.

From DCMNR Website:

In determining the likely significant effects of the plan or programme regard should be had to the need for the sustainable development of the inland and marine fisheries resource (including the conservation of fish and other species of fauna and flora, habitats and the biodiversity of inland and marine water ecosystems).

Consideration should be given to potential significant impacts on:

- Water quality
- Surface water hydrology
- Fish spawning and nursery areas
- Passage of migratory fish
- Areas of natural heritage importance including geological heritage sites
- Designated marine protected areas
- Biological Diversity
- Ecosystem structure and functioning
- Seabirds and marine mammals
- Fish and shellfish cultivation
- Sport and commercial fishing and angling
- Amenity and recreational areas
- Mineral and aggregate resources
- Sediment transport and coastal erosion
- Navigation
- Other legitimate use of the sea

Eastern Fisheries Board

Consultation with Fisheries Boards as Recommended by DCMNR - Summary of the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board's General Requirements:

The main channel of the River Boyne and its tributaries including the Riverstown, Deel, Milltownpass, Stonyford, Kinnegad, etc. and Loughs Lene, Adeel, Bane and White can be considered salmonid and should be afforded the maximum protection possible.

All municipal wastewater treatment plants should not be overloaded. If the treatment plants are approaching capacity please ensure that there will be a moratorium on any new development until the plant is upgraded.

No culverting of waters should be allowed without prior clearance of the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board.

Westmeath County Council should require the zoning of buffer zones around watercourses based on based on national biological diversity strategy (protect, maintain and where possible enhance) particularly in relation to salmonid systems, which act as a 'barometer' of aquatic environmental quality (thus reflecting biological diversity importance).

Shannon Fisheries Board

Consultation with Shannon Fisheries Board as recommended by DCMNR - Any future Development Plan should incorporate a cognisance of Water Framework Directive objectives and how these might be achieved in the context of sustainable development. This would include the need to maintain or reinstate water quality in the region's lakes to meet water framework directive targets and other targets associated with water quality e.g. blue flag status for Lough Ennell.

There is a need for sewage treatment plants with adequate capacity to be in place in advance of planning being granted in villages. Concerns over on-going maintenance of numerous privately run sewage treatment plants. The County Westmeath Environmental Report should consider, in particular the effects of the treatment plant in Mullingar town and its storm overflows should be considered in relation to water quality in the River Brosna and Lough Ennell.

Planning applications should be taking account of the EPA guidelines on wastewater treatment for small communities and for single houses, the reference in the Draft development plan refers to the standard SR6. of 1991, which has largely been superseded by the EPA guidelines (2.5.14. (vi)).

Building on flood plains is not sustainable and should not be permitted, the flood plain is an essential component of the aquatic ecosystem. Development on flood plains is particularly pertinent to the Athlone area.

Flood alleviation and drainage works have the potential to destroy fisheries habitat, but can be performed in a fisheries sensitive manner. This has particular relevance to the River Brosna and River AI.

The principles of Sustainable Urban Drainage should be utilised where possible.

The Board should be consulted about proposals in relation to culverting of watercourses.

The River Shannon is an integral part of the natural environment, which must be protected.

The environmental report should examine the effects of peat harvesting on water quality and fisheries habitat and consider ways to regulate such developments which sometimes falls outside of the Planning and Development Act due to the nature of multiple small scale developments.

An analysis of the need for education and promotional initiatives to limit the spread of zebra mussels is required to protect the heritage of Westmeath's lakes and a description of the current status of the distribution and spread of zebra mussels within Westmeath.

A review of the ban on jet skis and personal watercraft and a considered view on the effect that powerboats have on aquatic flora and fauna, water quality and fish stocks should be considered.

A report on IPPC licences in the region and compliance with these licences.

2.3 Conclusion

Scoping for Strategic Environmental Assessment has been carried out as prescribed in the legislation and has ensured that the most appropriate scope and level of detail was included in the Environmental Report. All of the issues raised as part of scoping have been taken into account in carrying out the SEA and in preparing the Draft County Development Plan, making the entire process a more meaningful and effective one. This is reflected throughout the Environmental Report.