

TABLE OF CONTENT

		PAGE NO.
PREFACE	SEA STATEMENT	I—IV
ONE	ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT	1-95
TWO	APPENDIX ONE— MATRIX	96-149
THREE	APPENDIX TWO—SCOPING REPORT	150-155
FOUR	APPENDIX THREE—IPPC & WASTE LICENCES	156-163
FIVE	APPENDIX FOUR—EUROPEAN DESIGNATED SITES	164-197
SIX	APPENDIX FIVE—TREES	198-199
SEVEN	SEA MAPS	
EIGHT	GLOSSARY	200-204

SEA Statement of Westmeath County Development Plan 2008-2014

The Planning Authority is required under section 12 of the Planning & Development Acts 2000 – 2006 and the Planning & Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 Article 7, that a statement is produced (the SEA Statement) summarising how environmental considerations, etc., through the strategic environmental assessment of the Plan, have been integrated into the Plan making.

A) How environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan

Influence of the SEA Process during draft Plan Preparation

The process has led to an increased awareness within the Forward Planning Section of the potential environmental impacts (both positive and negative) associated with stages of the Development Plan. The establishment of the Environmental Baseline in particular has resulted in a useful pool of information being created which will be valuable in carrying out environmental assessments for future plans and will be useful in identifying trends and monitoring change effectively. Since the SEA process was intended to inform policy as it is created, the Draft Plan policies were formulated in accordance with the findings of the SEA process, therefore improving the Draft Plan before it was finalised.

Influence of the Environmental Report

The recommendations made in the Environmental Report that was published with the Draft County Development Plan were assessed to determine their level of significance and the majority of the issues raised were already taken into account in the Draft Plan.

A selection of key recommendations that were taken into account that directly influenced the drafting of policy in the development plan include;

- Service Areas for N6
- Settlement Strategy
- Development along National Routes
- Wastewater Treatment Capacity Issues

Three issues in particular were raised and determined to be of a significant nature through the SEA Steering Group but were not incorporated into the draft Plan;

1 Zoning of excess land for residential use in Delvin and Clonmellon

The Environmental Report on the draft County Development Plan identified an excess zoning of residential lands in Delvin & Clonmellon.

Following public consultation, it is a proposed amendment that the release of residential zoned land in four specific towns, one of which is Delvin, is managed to secure a sustainable co-ordinated growth. There is limited additional residential lands proposed in any of the other settlements.

2 Unserved Settlements

The Unserved Settlement policy or the designation of any particular settlements was not altered through the review and adoption process, it is recommended that when ground water vulnerability is determined following the completion of a Groundwater Protection Scheme for the County, the Unserved Settlement policy and identification of settlements should be reviewed to protect vulnerable ground waters from pollution.

3 Rural Housing Policy

It is a recommendation of the Environmental Report that the final category of persons satisfying policies to develop in a rural area, ie. persons who have close personal, family or

economic ties within the area, including returning emigrants is more clearly defined, to conform with the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines. It was a subsequent recommendation by the Manager in the proposed amendments on display that the final category of rural housing is amended to reflect the recommendation of the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines.

B) How, (i) the environmental report (of February 2007), (ii) submissions and observations made to the planning authority in response to the display of the draft Development Plan and the display of proposed amendments to the development plan and (iii) any consultation with EU Member States, have been taken into account during the preparation of the plan,

On February 24th 2007, the draft County Development Plan and the Environmental Report undertaken in accordance with SEA requirements were placed on public display. Over a period of 10 weeks, 792 submissions and observations were received on the draft Plan and the Environmental Report.

A Managers Report on all submissions and observations received was prepared and issued to Members for their consideration.

The Managers Report summarised the issues raised and made a recommendation to Members on whether the draft Plan should be amended in response to the submissions and observations received on the Plan and the Environmental Report. Submissions from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government stated that the Environmental Report gave due recognition to the benign effect which the content of the Plan will have on the environment.

Having considered the draft County Development Plan and the Managers Report on submissions received at public meetings on the 08th and 15th October 2007, Members of the County Council resolved to accept the Managers Report and proposed additional amendments to the draft Plan. The amendments were subject to subsequent environmental appraisal in accordance with the methodology established in the Environmental Report and put on public display.

Notable recommendations of the Managers Report incorporated into the proposed Amendments on display include the proposal to manage the release of residentially zoned lands in some towns, as referred to above.

C) The reasons for choosing the Plan, as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with,

Consideration of Alternatives

It is required in the legislation that the Environmental Report must consider "reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme" and the significant environmental effects of the alternatives selected. Section 3.14 of the DEHLG SEA Guidelines indicate that certain strategic issues in County Development Plans may have already been determined at national or regional level. Furthermore, lower tier plans such as Local Area Plans, will be framed in a policy context set by levels above them (such as National Spatial Strategy, Regional Planning Guidelines and by the County Development Plan itself). The preparation of Development Plans must demonstrate consistency with national and regional policy and guidelines. As a result, alternative strategic options available for consideration in the preparation of the Draft County Development Plan were quite limited.

Alternative strategies that were considered are outlined below. These were mainly based around the settlement strategy and strategic direction. The 'Do-Nothing Scenario', which is that which would occur in the event of non-implementation of a new plan and the continuation with the existing plan is outlined in terms of environmental implications within the environmental baseline sections of the Environmental Report of the Draft Plan.

Alternative strategy option 1

- Relaxed policies for rural housing, particularly in Clár areas resulting in pressure for one-off housing in rural areas including those with extreme groundwater vulnerability and sensitive landscape. Ribbon development occurring, resulting in unsustainable transport patterns. Unsustainable rural development resulting in negative impacts to water quality, landscape and visual amenity. A deterioration of valuable 'tourism products', such as the lakes and landscapes would occur, resulting in declining value of the county as a tourist attraction
- Settlement strategy allowing only for higher levels of growth and service provision in principle towns in tier 1 (ie Mullingar, Athlone) and in tier 2. All other 'priority settlements' considered as having equal growth potential. The impact of this simplified settlement strategy would be that towns without adequate supporting infrastructure, eg Rochfortbridge, Ballymore etc would be allowed to grow as much as Kilbeggan for example or Delvin as much as Castlepollard. Roles of settlements would not be complementary and critical mass would not be attracted into any one centre to support district level services and facilities.
- Failure to consider impact of major infrastructural development such as the N6 and new development pressures in towns such as Rochfortbridge, Milltownpass, Kilbeggan.

Alternative strategy option 2

- Avoidance of all development in or close to sensitive areas and landscapes, highly restrictive attitude to one off rural housing
- Channel all growth and development into existing urban areas without established settlement hierarchy and provision for employment centres to serve residential development appropriately. Unsustainable transport patterns encouraged as a result
- Lack of provision for rapid growth in the County – towns coming under immense pressure for rapid housing development without comprehensive masterplanning of new residential areas - housing needs being met through low density suburban type residential development
- No provision for rural development of any kind, resulting in rural population decline and breakdown of rural communities. Lack of strategy to address the decline in agriculture with rural diversification. Failure to realise potential of tourism.

Alternative strategy option 3

- Restrictive attitude to rural housing in vulnerable areas but facilitation of housing subject to good siting and design principles, where local need exists, to encourage the strengthening of rural communities
- Provide for rapid increase in growth levels through additional zoning, resulting in an oversupply of zoned land for development. This would mean the expansion of town boundaries of Athlone, Mullingar, Moate, Kilbeggan and Castlepollard. A situation whereby priorities for development are unclear and piecemeal or disorderly development would be encouraged would arise and existing infrastructure would not be used in a sustainable manner. Insufficient wastewater treatment capacity would be provided for to deal with rapid pace of development in Mullingar and Moate, which would result in a continued deterioration of water quality in Lough Ennell and the River Brosna
- Lack of strategy for North Westmeath, resulting in disadvantage in terms of employment and services in this area as well as village decline and deterioration. Unsustainable transport patterns would be encouraged due to lack of employment and services in this part of the county, coupled with a lack of public transport facilities.

Preferred Option

The three alternative strategies as outlined above were considered in light of the significant environmental issues for the County as concluded in the Environmental Report. As a result of these considerations, a 'preferred strategy' was determined which incorporated a combination of features from the alternative strategies and also best practice and good planning principles. The main features of the 'preferred option' are as follows:

- Provide for existing level of growth plus any increase projected, through a review of zoning and projected future need provided for. The provision for physical and social infrastructure in accordance with projections and provision for phasing to ensure service provision in line with development
- Settlement hierarchy that reflects the need for centres with different roles and development potential. Employment and major service centres on first tier, towns with capacity for growth and services, centres for some growth and limited services and employment, and centres with limited growth potential identified.
- Consolidate existing settlements by improving urban environments, encouraging brownfield and infill development and strengthening physical and social infrastructure.
- Support the role of the Midlands Linked Gateways as regionally important employment, retail and service centres through enhancing infrastructure in Athlone and Mullingar and linkages between them. Channelling new development into these towns focusing on key infrastructure nodes and maximising the use of serviced land at key locations.
- Protect valued rural environments while strengthening the rural economy through supporting its diversification and strengthening rural communities in a sustainable and strategy-led manner.
- Comprehensive strategy prepared for North Westmeath to be implemented to strengthen this region and provide for sustainable development within the overall settlement strategy.
- Realisation of the potential of tourism, through providing for tourism related development in a sustainable manner while protecting the tourism product.
- Encourage a mix of landuses where appropriate through landuse zoning and support for sustainable transport modes to reduce unsustainable forms of travel.
- Use of a Landscape Character Assessment to inform policies for development such as rural housing, wind energy and other development.

D) The measures decided upon to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan.

Measures were proposed as part of this SEA process to monitor the effects on the environment of implementing the Draft Plan and these are presented in the Environmental Report in terms of the achievement of the environmental protection objectives and the impact on the environmental factors that the SEA legislation requires to be considered. Measurable indicators are included and targets are set.

Monitoring for SEA will be carried out as part of the overall monitoring of implementation of the County Development Plan, as required two years after adoption of the Plan.