

Leitrim County Development Plan

2015 – 2021

**Statement on the Strategic
Environmental Assessment**



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Leitrim County Council**

Statement on the Strategic Environmental Assessment

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SEA Statement

1. Introduction

The purpose of the Environmental Statement is to summarise, as outlined in Article 13 I (1) of the SEA Regulations 2004 -

- (a) how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan,
- (b) how
 - (i) the environmental report prepared pursuant to article 13C,
 - (ii) submissions and observations made to the planning authority in response to a notice under section 12(1) or (7) of the Act, and
 - (iii) any consultations under article 13F have been taken into account during the preparation of the plan.
- (c) the reasons for choosing the plan, as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with, and
- (d) the measures decided upon to monitor, in accordance with article 13J, the significant environmental effects of implementation of the plan.

The Environmental Authorities will be sent a copy of this Report and requirements in respect to public notices will be complied with. Article 13 I (2) (a) of the SEA Regulations.

1.1 Legislative Background

The Leitrim County Development Plan was made on 12th January 2015 and came into effect 9th February 2015. This report has been prepared in accordance with Article 13 (i) 1 of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 as amended. In the case of the Leitrim County Development Plan 2015 – 2021 a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a mandatory requirement under Section 13 B (a) of the SEA Regulations.

The Directive, which came into force in July 2001 was transposed into Irish legislation by the following legislation in 2004, both of which were amended in 2011:-

- European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations, 2004 S.I. No. 435 of 2004;
- Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations, 2004 S.I.No. 436 of 2004;
- European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations, 2011 S.I. No. 200 of 2011;
- Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations, 2011 S.I. No. 201 of 2011

2. *Integration of Environmental Considerations*

A decision was taken at the outset by the Executive and supported by the Elected Members, to prepare the Development Plan, Strategic Environmental Assessment and related documents in-house. The work involved was lead by a team of professionals who have a good working knowledge of planning and environmental matters within the County. It was considered that such an approach would lead to a more bespoke plan. Also, and importantly, it would lead to efficiencies whereby economic, social and environmental concerns would be transposed more directly into the Plan than would have happened had these documents been prepared through a combination of in-house and out-of-house workings.

As part of the Plan making process a significant level of consultation was undertaken in addition to the statutory requirements. This included; the preparation of Background Issues Paper, Area based Public meetings, Manned Public Information Displays, Radio and Newspaper advertising, Notices in local parish newsletters, Workshops/Meetings were held with the Elected Representatives and inter-Departmental Consultations were undertaken. A significant amount of information on the plan making process (including at different stages the Plan itself and the Strategic Environmental Report) was made available to the public on an ongoing basis on the Council website. Environmental issues featured strongly in the making of the Plan and whereas the individual issues raised were fully considered, most notably in the three Chief Executive's Reports, many have therefore not appeared in the Environmental Report. The 'Directions' given by the Strategic Planning Policy Committee and Elected Members highlighted the main issues to be address in the making of the Plan and included the preparation on an economic strategy for the County which was incorporated into the Plan. It can be said that the considerations of the environmental issues raised during the consultation period featured strongly in the making of the Plan and have had a significant influence on the outcome of the Plan. Of particular significance was the use of GIS environmental based data-sets in the formulation of policy eg in relation to one-off housing in the countryside, afforestation and visual amenity. A significant amount of data in relation to the environment has been generated as a result of the making of the Plan and ready access to this information will be of particular assistance in the implementation of the Plan.

As a result of complying with the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (43/92/EU) in respect to an Appropriate Assessment, a number of amendments were made to the Plan in order to clarify and strengthen policy on protecting sites of significant ecological importance

The consideration of environmental concerns cannot be exhaustive, generally the significant impact on the environment of implementing the plan have been given due consideration. Those environmental issues that may be more appropriately dealt with at a different level of assessment, have accordingly not been dealt with in detail in the SEA.

2.1 Particular Environmental Issues Identified & Recommendations

The following is a list of particular Environmental Issues identified in the making of the Plan. This section provides, in part, an indication of how the SEA process has informed the making of the Plan

Issue 1 Creating of Sustainable Jobs

Considering the current economic circumstances and associated issues, it is anticipated that the retention and creation of sustainable jobs within the County will be a primary objective of the new Plan. Accordingly it is important to ensure that the Economic Strategy is founded on environmentally sound principles.

A significant review of the Economic Strategy has been undertaken with a view to enabling economic development and thereby a better quality of life for the people living and working in the County.

Issue 2 Local Authority Resources

An overriding concern is the pressure on the resources available to the Local Authority to drive the development of the County while maintaining a proper level of certain services and facilities, including the management of the environment. A shortfall in resources in terms of the Councils role in the management of the environment is likely to impact on the state of the environment.

In general terms, access to, and the deployment of, Local Authority resources is largely outside the remit of the Development Plan process. The Planning Authority will continue to seek to improve the delivery of services and facilities within its remit and as resources allow. The Council will prioritise the allocation of scarce resources and is not anticipated, at this juncture that any shortfall in resources will compromise the integrity of the environmentally sensitive areas or features within the County or beyond.

Issue 3 Flood Risk Management

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Report has been carried out as part of this report and appears as Appendix A to the SEA Report. The flood risk assessment has informed the making of the Plan.

The recommendations arising from the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Report should be suitably incorporated into the Plan.

Issue 4 Protection of Ecologically Sensitive Areas including Natura 2000 Sites

Having regard to the network of designated areas located in North Leitrim it is considered that the balance of the uplands above the 160 m contour and in the vicinity of these areas should receive particular attention in term of their protection.

A Natura Impact Report has been carried out as part of the Plan making process. The Assessment has made a number of recommendations which should be suitably incorporated into the Plan.

The recommendations arising from the Natura Impact Report should be suitably incorporated into the Plan.

It is recommended that the following policy is suitably incorporated into the Development Plan.

The uplands of North Leitrim located above the 160m contour, not already designated, shall be considered in planning terms, as an ecologically-sensitive entity.

Issue 5 Population Growth

Whereas the population increases during the last census period (2006 – 2011) indicated significant growth, is reasonable to assume, (given the downturn in the economy in more recent times, and generally more cautious predictions for the future), that these trends in increasing population may slow, However the growth indicated in the 2011 census occurred despite three years of economic adjustment. Any significant increase in population is likely to be accompanied by environmental impacts.

The aims, policies and objectives of the Plan have considered, and provided for, population growth and the Plan has been aligned with the requirements of the Border Regional Guidelines 2010 – 2022 in this regard.

Issue 6 Public Health

Human health encompasses an enormous area of study and includes, *inter alia*, everything from physical and mental disabilities, long-term illness, acute and chronic disease, mental health and ageing populations.

Sources of health problems arising from environmental conditions may arise from areas such as; Air , Water, Noise, Light, Geology and Biodiversity.

In order to strengthen the protection of human health, it is recommended that the following Statement and Policy should be included in the Plan.

‘Activities/Uses’ that have potential to cause harm to humans will need to undertake an appropriate level of environmental assessment considering the likely impact of this ‘activity’ or use directly and indirectly on humans.

It is the policy of the Council to protect public health by promoting and facilitating a proper level of health related services and facilities and avoiding the risk to human health arising from pollution (including light and noise pollution) associated with development.

Issue 7 Ensuring consistency with relevant Plans and Programmes

The relevant plans and programmes, (some of which have been mentioned in Section 19 of the Environmental Report), should be considered in the making of the Plan. In particular the Plan should be formulated in order to ensure consistency with National and Regional policy and Guidance.

It should be emphasised that Variation No 1 to the County Development Plan 2009 – 2015 (July 2011), included a comprehensive review of the existing Plan in order to ensure consistency with the current Regional Planning Guidelines and National policy and guidance. In this regard the review went beyond the consideration of housing land requirements and included updated policies and objectives in accordance with Regional and National policy and guidance.

The review included a major reduction in the area of lands zoned for residential development; from a total of 382 Ha to 49 Ha. The strategy is founded on the population targets as set out in the Regional Planning Guidance 2010 – 2022 and took into consideration the existing housing stock of vacant residential units and units under construction.

The Plan has been revised so as to ensure consistency with relevant National Plans and Programmes. In particular a comprehensive review has been undertaken in respect to the economic development of the County, the outcome of which has been the incorporation of a new Economic Strategy into the Plan. The County Profile and Core Strategy has been revised. The settlement structure has been revised in order to reflect the introduction of Municipal Areas. In this regard Carrick on Shannon, Ballinamore and Manorhamilton have been identified as key settlements with their respective Electoral Areas. Capacity Mapping in respect to; Rural Housing, Windfarms and Forestry, has been revised. Policies and objectives in relation to all sectors including the protection of the Environment/Natural and Cultural Heritage have been reviewed and updated as appropriate.

Issue 8 High Residential Vacancy Rates and Unfinished Housing Schemes

It is acknowledged that there are in general terms an oversupply of housing within the County in both urban and rural areas. This vacancy rate is spread throughout the County; however some urban areas have a significant oversupply of residential units. There are a significant number of unfinished estates within the County. Good progress has been made by the dedicated team, notwithstanding the difficulties involved. The Council is committed to resolving this issue. It is acknowledged that a significant portion of the vacant housing stock does not meet the market demand in terms of location and house design.

Reducing the vacancy rate and addressing the issue of unfinished Housing Schemes, presents a significant challenge to the Planning Authority.

Considering the economic, social and environmental issues associated with such a high vacancy rate, it is recommended that the commitment to reducing this rate is continued.

Issue 9 Rural Communities under Pressure

Traditional local outlets such as small shops, post offices and local banks are under threat of closure and these local centres play an important part in sustaining rural communities and are of particular importance in the case of those that are disadvantaged and those without ready access to transportation.

Certain rural areas are experiencing significant population decline with consequent impacts on the vitality of the community concerned.

It is recommended that the following statement should be suitably included in the Strategic Framework;

Support community related initiatives aimed at the economic, social and cultural development of the County and wider area.

Issue 10 Changes in the delivery of certain key services by the Local Authority

During the lifetime of the new Plan, in accordance with Government policy, there will be a transition in relation to the provision of water and wastewater services from Local Authorities to Irish Water.

This change may have implications for the delivery and management and development of such essential services.

Issue 11 Management of Wastewater Treatment Systems Serving Single Houses

Considering the poor ground conditions within the County and the likely condition of older wastewater treatment systems; careful management of the environment is required in order to avoid the risk of pollution and risk to public health. This is of particular importance where such older systems are located within environmentally sensitive areas. Having regard to the current economic circumstances, the high level of residential vacancy and coupled with the requirements of the EPA Code of Practice and related issues, it is reasonable to assume that the demand for additional one-off housing in the Countryside will remain low for the period of the Plan. Accordingly any adverse impact on the environment arising from additional one-off housing is likely to be low.

Issue 12 Accommodation of Single Houses in the Countryside

Whereas the reasonable expectations of persons to live in the countryside and the need to ensure that the social and cultural capital of the countryside must be protected and whereas the countryside has a capacity to suitably absorb development; there is a need to ensure that those items of acknowledged importance, such as; sustaining rural communities, road safety, preserving the rural character, ecology, and visual amenities, are properly dealt with by aims policies and objectives of the County Development Plan.

In terms of the accommodation of one-off housing in the Countryside, it is recommended that Areas of High, Medium and Low capacity are included in the new Plan in order to properly manage residential development and protect the environment.

It is recommended that the 'Justification' requirement in terms of proposals for new residential schemes within the Centres identified in the settlement strategy should remain as set out in the current Plan.

Issue 13 Compliance with the requirement of the Water Framework Directive and Climate Change Strategy.

Compliance with the requirement of the Water Framework Directive is considered to be of particular importance in the making of the Plan. In particular there is a need to ensure the protection of areas under pressure from development and conserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas, including designated sites. Likewise the issue of Climate change is a significant planning issue to be addressed.

The following Key Strategic Goal should be suitably incorporated into the Plan;

To coordinate and encourage energy conservation and preservation of finite natural resources in accordance with the National Climate Strategy and Water Framework Directive.

And the following policy should be suitably incorporated;

It is the policy of the Council to establish source protection zones for all drinking water sources serving more than 50 people. In these zones development shall be strictly controlled.

The planning authority should identify public Pumping station sites to maximise the area serviced. This should be carried out well in advance of need and not constructed until areas that can be served by gravity have been developed. (This will facilitate; a reduction in the number of overflows, enable better maintenance programme, more sophisticated alarm systems and pollution control).

Where appropriate development works should require a contoured site drainage plan - identifying cut-off drains, the dimensions and locations of silt traps and discharge arrangements, at the Planning Application stage.

Consideration should be given to amending the development contribution scheme in order to encouraging low density serviced residential development on the periphery of towns/villages so as to discourage dispersed settlement patterns. This will bring many other environmental and social benefits also – less travel, improved local businesses and clubs, more efficient service delivery.

Issue 14 Commercial Vacancy

The issue of commercial vacancy presents a significant challenge in terms of the development of the County. A Retail Strategy is being prepared in parallel with the making of the Plan.

The Retail Strategy highlights the key planning issues arising and has informed the making of the Plan.

Issue 15 Hydrocarbon exploration and extraction

The issue of hydrocarbon exploration and extraction by unconventional means has been raised as a significant concern during the public consultation process and by the Elected Members. Considering the likely scale and the nature of the development involved, it has the potential for significant environmental impacts.

In the absence of the outcome of the EPA led research, (refer to Environmental Report), it is recommended that such development should be considered as premature and therefore not permitted. Should uncertainty in respect to the potential significant environmental impacts remain following this research and the making of an application for permission, consideration should be given to evoking the 'precautionary principle'.

In order to develop a coherent policy in respect to Energy Supply a Strategic Energy Policy should be developed and the outcome incorporated into the Plan. This policy should include the consideration of a range of energy supplies with particular emphasis on the development of non-renewable sources of energy. In the event that such a strategy is not undertaken/completed prior to the adoption of the Plan, an objective should be included in the Plan to undertake such a Strategic Policy.

Considerable effort has been undertaken in order to formulate policy in respect to UGEE projects and programs. It should be noted that the approach formulated following a number of meetings between the Executive and the Members (and the consideration of legal advice by the Executive) was not accepted by the Members. The Members adopted an alternative policy which was put forward by one of the Members at a Council meeting prior to the issue of the Plan.

Whereas the adopted approach places a prohibition on UGEE projects and programs, the Executive raised concerns in respect to the legal standing of the approach taken. It is of significant importance that the policies of the Plan are robust, particularly in respect to their legal standing; otherwise such policies may be subject to legal challenge.

The concerns raised by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in their submissions in respect to the Plan and the proposed Material Amendments relation to policy approach towards UGEE. The responses as set out in the Chief Executive's Reports (June and Nov) have also been noted.

Having regard to the foregoing it is recommended that the issue in respect to UGEE projects and programs be revisited with a view to ensuring that a robust approach is incorporated into the Plan when adopted

Issue 16 Protection of Geological Sites

It is recommended that an audit of County Geological Sites should be undertaken in partnership with the Geological Survey of Ireland and the Heritage Council, as per the National Heritage Plan; subject to the necessary resources becoming available.

It is considered that Appendix C 'County Geological Sites' to the County Development Plan is of interest and should be updated by the record of 28 sites identified by the GSI.

Issue 17 Biodiversity

It is recommended that the following statement/policy should be suitably incorporated into the Plan:

The Council will co-operate with National, Regional and Local agencies and interested parties in the control of invasive species.

Direction should be provided in the Plan in relation to roadside hedgerow planting by reference to a range of suitable species.

3. *How the Environmental Report was prepared*

3.1 Introduction

The SEA process was carried out as an iterative process. For the most part the team charged with preparing the Environmental Report met on a regular basis to discuss progress and consider policy. Following consultation with the Strategic Planning Policy Committee and the Elected Members the main issues to be address in the Plan were highlighted in the form of Directions under Section 11 4 (d) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2014. An outline of the approach to the preparation of the SEA Report is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Action	Comments
1. Screening	An Environmental Report is mandatory for a County Development Plan, therefore no Screening was undertaken
2. Scoping Report	Scoping Report was prepared setting out the policy context and baseline environmental data
3. Consultation with the Environmental Authorities	The Environmental Authorities were consulted in respect to the Scoping Report and the Strategic Environmental Report.
4. Preparation of Environmental Report and County Development Plan	The existing development plan and relevant International, National, Regional and Local Plans and Guidelines were considered as appropriate. A key part of the plan making process was the consideration of the outcome of meetings/workshops held with the elected members, the pre draft submissions and inter-departmental consultations.
5. Formulation and Assessment of Alternatives	Alternative approaches to the making of the Plan were considered and the most appropriate option selected.
6. Mitigation	Mitigation was considered and suitable measures were formulated
7. Monitoring	Environmental objectives, Indicators and targets were formulated against which the implementation of the Plan could be assessed.
8. Ongoing consideration of the Plan making process	The submissions from notified bodies, the public and other interested parties were considered as well as the outcomes from the public meetings and meetings/workshops held with the elected representatives. Also the plan making process was informed by internal consultations and generally by unfolding considerations. All of the foregoing considerations gave rise to significant proposal in terms of formulating and thereafter amending the Plan. During each stage of the plan making process environmental issues featured strongly.
9. Assessment of aims, policies and objectives including amendments to Plan.	Strategic Environmental Objectives were developed against which the environmental impacts of each of the strategic aims, policies and objectives of the Plan were assessed

3.2 Consultations and Submissions

The Public, the Minister, the Prescribed Bodies, the Environmental Authorities and other interested bodies (including internal departments within the Council), were consulted at all stages on the making of the Plan in accordance with legislative requirements. The submissions received were considered by the Elected Members and the Plan amended.

A wide range of issues have been raised during all stages of the making of the Plan, and the issues are dealt with in a comprehensive manner in the following reports:

- Manager's Report June 2013 (Pre Draft Stage),
- Manager's Report June 2014 (Draft Stage)
- Chief Executive' Report Nov 2014 (proposed Material Alteration)

A Natura Impact Report was prepared as part of the Plan making process and the outcome of the report was incorporated into the Plan.

It should also be noted that a revised SEA/AA Determination (Dec 2014) was made in respect to the proposed Material Alteration to the Plan.

The above reports are available for inspection on the Council website at: www.leitrimcoco.ie (the earlier reports may be viewed under 'Planning Archive').

This Environmental Statement should be read in conjunction with the forgoing reports. The recommendations from the foregoing reports were incorporated into the Plan.

3.3 List of Environmental Authorities consulted

The following environmental authorities were consulted in accordance with the requirements Article 13D (1) of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 as amended:

- The Environmental Protection Agency,
- Spatial Policy Section Department of the Environment, Community & Local Gov
- The Minister, Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine,
- The Minister, Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources,
- The Minister Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs

Other Authorities consulted

Cavan County Council
Donegal County Council,
Fermanagh District Council
Longford County Council
Roscommon County Council
Sligo County Council

3.4 Submissions from Environmental Authorities on SEA Scoping Report

3.4.1 Summary of Submission from EPA

The submission from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) refers to its earlier submission in respect to the Pre-Draft Consultation Stage, dated 30th April 2013. The submission provides further comment in relation to ensuring consistency with other Plans and Guidance. The EPA also provides further information in relation to sources of environmental information.

The EPA refer to the mention of hydrocarbon extraction and exploration in the Scoping Report and in this regard submit that there would be merit in considering a commitment to establish a “Non Renewable Energy Strategy” under which such an activity could be considered in an integrated way.

3.4.2 Summary of Submission from Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs

This submission considers that the Scoping Report is comprehensive and gives due recognition to Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation and Natural Heritage Area within the County. The Department notes that there is no reference or acknowledgement of proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHA's) within the report.

The submission refers to a number of environmental legislative type requirements and also to sources of environmental information/guidance. It makes recommendations/ comments on what should be considered in; the Development Plan, The Strategic Environmental Report and the Habitats Impact Assessment.

The Department recommends that the following recommendation in respect to making of the Plan;

- *The County Development Plan fully adheres to the Border Regional Authority Regional Planning Guidelines;*
- *Policies and objectives in the Plan fully reflect the obligations to conserve and protect natural heritage and designated sites (It is the view of the Department that the Wind Capacity Areas outlined in the plan fail in this regard);*
- *Any development resulting from the County Development Plan complies with proper planning and sustainable development;*
- *The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is fully consulted regarding assessments to address possible environmental impacts and especially impacts in relation to designated sites resulting from the CDP (e.g. marinas, walking trails, etc.).*
- *Maps and site synopses of the designated and proposed sites are included in the appendices to the plan.*

3.4.3 Consultations and Submission on the Plan

Submissions were received from the following Environmental Authorities;

1. Department of the Environment, Community, Department of Communications (sub No 65),
2. Department of Energy and Natural Resources and Local Government (sub 65) and
3. The Environmental Protection Agency (sub 108)

These submissions were considered and dealt with in the Manager's Report, June 2014.

Likewise, submissions from other 'notified bodies', including the Border Regional Authority (sub 13), Taisce (sub 32), Office of Public Works (sub 108), Inland Fisheries Ireland (sub 124), and Irish Water (sub 96), the ESB (sub 140), Irish Peatland Conservation Council (sub 144), Eirgrid (sub 145) and an have been considered in the Manager's Report.

In addition to the issues mentioned above, a wide range of environmental issues were raised during the consideration of the Plan which were dealt with in the Manager's Report (June 2014). In particular a high level of concern was expressed in the submissions received and also by the Elected Members in relation to Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction (UGEE) . Also, a significant level of public was raised in respect of windfarms. Both of these issues have been dealt with under a separate section within the Manager's Report on the Draft Plan.

3.5 Consultations and Submissions on the proposed Material Amendments

There were a significant number of proposed amendments (circa 40) arising from the consultation on the Draft Plan and the subsequent consideration by the Elected Members of the Manager's, June 2014. These amendments were primarily aimed at updating, clarifying and reinforcing the policies and objectives. As such most are not considered Material Alterations in terms of Section 12 (7) of the Acts. However, because of their nature and extent there were 6 proposed Amendments that were considered as Material Amendments under the aforementioned Acts.

Details in respect to the proposed Material Amendments are set out in the a document entitled; *Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft County Development Plan 2015 – 2021 (September 2014)*.

The proposed Material Alterations were placed on public display alongside the proposed Material Alteration to the Draft Plan. The Minister, the prescribed bodies and other relevant bodies were notified and submissions invited.

The consideration of the submission received is dealt with in the aforementioned Manager's Report.

The proposed Material Amendments referred to the following items:

1. Telecommunication Masts
2. Zoning of Lands at Ballinamore,
3. Windfarms
4. Retailing
5. Regionally and Locally Important Roads
6. Water Services

Submissions in respect to the SEA/AA Determination were received from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and the Development Application Unit. All of the submissions received were dealt with in the *Chief Executive's Report on Submissions on Proposed Material Alteration to the Draft Plan, Nov 2014*. The report may be viewed on the Councils website at www.leitrimcoco.ie.

It is considered that the revised SEA/AA Determination addresses the issues raised by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (submission No 7) and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (submission No 8).

3.6 Transboundary Environmental Effects

Under section 13 F(1) requires that a copy of the development plan and associated environmental report be forwarded to a member state where the Planning Authority considers that implementation of the plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment of a member state. In terms of transboundary environmental effects, it was considered that the implementation of the Plan would not have a significant effect on Northern Ireland. The requirement to notify the Northern Ireland State Authority under the section 13 F (1) does not therefore arise. Nevertheless, Fermanagh District Council was notified at all stages of the process, together with other adjoining Counties and interested bodies.

4. Selecting Alternative Approaches to the making of the Plan

4.1 Introduction

Article 5 of the SEA Directive requires the Environmental Report to consider “Reasonable alternatives”. The following five alternatives were formulated and assessed as part of the making of the Plan.

Alternative approaches to the preparation of the Plan were formulated and considered at an early stage of the process. The “Sustainable Development Plan Led Approach” was selected as the preferred alternative as this approach takes full account of the three central tenants of sustainable development which are based on social, economic and environmental considerations. This approach is best placed to achieve a proper balance between economic, environmental and social considerations. Leitrim is predominantly a rural County and it is the primary aim of the council to protect and reinforce the population base that underpins the important social, cultural and economic fabric that defines the County.

4.2 Description of Alternatives

(a) Market Lead Approach – Reactive Planning.

This approach would involve minimal intervention in terms of strategic planning. It would involve allowing development to follow market forces to a greater extent and would take more of a short term planning approach. It would most likely lead to a highly dispersed settlement pattern and would lead to a weakening of towns and villages. Development would not be directed towards properly serviced, robust receiving environments; rather development would be dealt with as it arises on an *ad-hoc* basis.

(b) Economic Lead Planning Approach

This approach would involve the implementation of a long-term strategic planning approach, marked by a strong role for the larger towns (Tier 1 and 2) with the containment of development in areas outside serviced centres and within environmentally sensitive areas. In particular it would have a strong focus on the development of Carrick on Shannon and Manorhamilton as engines for economic growth. This approach would be marked by focusing on the provision of improved and increased infrastructural services and facilities in and between the larger towns and directing development towards these centres.

(c) Environmental Lead Planning Approach

This approach would offer strong protection to those items of the natural environment, which is of acknowledged importance, such as visually sensitive areas, areas of ecological interest and other vulnerable receptors. It would have the effect that environmentally sensitive areas would be managed in the main in terms of their intrinsic value and would in the main be reserved for their amenity value. The risk of pollution to water quality and avoiding the use of the car or interference with the ecology would be of primary importance, placing very heavy constraints on development outside of serviced areas and in particular on one-off housing in the countryside. Similar to the economic plan lead approach it would have the effect of

focusing development on the larger centres with a consequent decline in the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of rural areas. This approach would have similar impacts to those outlined in (b) above, however the degree of the protection offered to the environment would be greater and the level of economic growth less.

(d) Sustainable Development Lead Planning Approach

This approach would involve the implementation of a long-term strategic planning approach, marked by a strong role for the towns, villages and other centres; Tier 1, 2, 3, 4 centres and other established settlements referred in the plan as Graigs. This approach would be in accordance with the key principles associated with sustainable development, i.e. having due regard to economic, environmental and social considerations. It would provide for a more balanced development pattern throughout the county with a strong emphasis on supporting the social and cultural fabric of the smaller settlements and rural communities.

(e) Do Nothing Approach

The “do-nothing” approach represents a continuation of present trends, without any significant policy changes or infrastructural improvements or consideration of new standards in terms of development management or the views of the public or other interested parties - which might be included in the Development Plan. This approach has therefore been dismissed as a viable option.

4.3 Assessment of Alternatives

Having regard to the overall principles which underpin the concept of Sustainable Development the “Sustainable Development Plan Lead Approach” was considered to be the preferred option. This approach is best placed to achieve a proper balance between economic, environmental and social considerations. Leitrim is predominantly a rural county and it is the primary aim of the council to protect and reinforce the population base that underpins the important social, cultural and economic fabric that defines the county.

The selected approach is consistent with national policy, as set out in the National Spatial Strategy and also in the Border Regional Guidelines 2010 – 2022. The ‘Sustainable Development Plan Led Approach’ seeks to direct an appropriate level of development and investment to existing urban centres where particular services and facilities exist or can be provided on a ‘cost benefit’ basis. It priorities the development of strategic infrastructure, including the development of a strategic road network between the key towns. These towns would then act as key drivers for the County, whilst providing services and functions for the smaller settlements and rural hinterland. A sustainable relationship between urban and rural areas would then support the future vitality and viability of rural communities, whilst protecting the key environmental sensitive and vulnerable areas within the County.

5. Monitoring

5.1 Introduction

Monitoring and review were considered to be key elements in the effective implementation of the County Development Plan. It ensures that social, economic and physical objectives are fulfilled and that quality of life issues can be assessed.

In order to facilitate the identification, evaluation and monitoring of the impacts of the Plan, baseline data focused on relevant aspects of the environment that are likely to be significantly affected, is presented in the Environmental Report.

There is a statutory requirement under Section 15 (2) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 20014 to prepare a Chief Executive's Progress Report two years after the adoption of the County Development Plan. The Progress Report 'shall include information in relation to progress on, and the results of monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementation of the development plan.' In this regard the environmental indicators and targets presented below may be used to monitor the predicted environmental impacts of implementing the Plan.

5.2 Objectives, Indicators and Targets

Monitoring of the Plan will be based around the objectives, indicators and targets outlined in the Environmental Report. Monitoring at an early stage will help identify unforeseen adverse effects and the undertaking of appropriate remedial action.

Monitoring measures over the Development Plan period can be geared towards addressing any gaps (where practicable) which are identified in the Environmental Report. It will also enable an assessment of whether the Development Plan is achieving its environmental objectives and targets and identify issues that be need to be revisited.

The list of environmental objectives is indicated in Table 14 of the Environmental Report. The table is based on Table 4B of the DOEHLG Guidelines (2004). The list includes: biodiversity, population, human health, geology/soil, water, air/ climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage/ landscape and the interrelationship between these factors.

5.3 Sources of Information

Existing environmental monitoring is currently undertaken throughout the County by Leitrim County Council and other agencies. Examples of existing sources of environmental data/information include: the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Central Statistics Office, Marine Institute, BirdWatch Ireland, Geological Survey Ireland, All-Ireland Research Observatory (AIRO), Research / Leitrim County Council Environment Section, Leitrim County Council Heritage Officer, Health Service Executive (HSE), CFRAMS, WRBD / WFD reports and websites, Control of Aquatic Invasive Species in Ireland, (CAISIE), Office of Public Works (OPW), Heritage Service, , Environmental NGO's and National Museum of Ireland.

6. *Conclusion*

The Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Plan has ensured that: the status of the environment was established, environmental issues were identified, and an appropriate Planning framework for the protection and conservation of the environment was formulated during the making of the Plan. The SEA process therefore ensured that environmental considerations were suitably incorporated into the Plan as adopted.

A significant level of consultation, policy formulation and assessment was undertaken as part of the process. In this regard it is considered that the implementation of the Plan, working in concert with other Planning related Plans and Programmes will ensure the sustainable development of the County during the period of the Plan and beyond.

The SEA process will continue with the monitoring of environmental impacts of the implementation of the Plan. This will include ongoing monitoring and the carrying out of a progress report on the implementation of the Plan.

ⁱ The precautionary principle enables rapid response in the face of a possible danger to human, animal or plant health, or to protect the environment. In particular, where scientific data do not permit a complete evaluation of the risk, recourse to this principle may, for example, be used to stop distribution or order withdrawal from the market of products likely to be hazardous. For further details see;

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/consumers/consumer_safety/l32042_en.htm