

10. Strategic Environmental Assessment

10.1 Legal framework

On the 1st of July 2004, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC was transposed into Irish law through the *European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004* (S.I. 435 of 2004) and the *Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004* (S.I. 436 of 2004) and relevant Guidelines were subsequently issued by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in November 2004.

The objective of the Directive 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 and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that, in accordance with this Directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment”.

Having published its Draft Development Plan in May 2004, Sligo County Council was not required to carry out SEA of the Plan, but had to comply with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, which state that “a development plan shall contain information on the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan”.

However, in anticipation of the implementation of the SEA Directive and the publishing of SEA Guidelines, the Council undertook an assessment of the strategic environmental aims, principles and key policies contained in the Draft Development Plan, guided by the text of the Directive.

10.2 The SEA process

In order for the SEA process to work efficiently and coherently, it was necessary to define environmental protection objectives and formulate the criteria for assessing the Plan’s strategic aims, principles and key policies against each environmental protection objective. Six environmental aims were drawn up:

- protection of the environment and natural landscape
- efficient use of natural resources
- efficient use of energy
- sustainable transport
- minimisation of waste and pollution
- protection of cultural and built heritage

From the above-listed strategic environmental aims, fourteen environmental protection objectives, with corresponding assessment criteria, were established to test the key strategic policies of the Development Plan. This system, which affords the SEA process a certain degree of transparency, consistency and transferable uniformity, is set out in Table 10.2.

A matrix was drawn up for each section of the Plan and the key strategic policies of each section were assessed against the environmental aims, using the criteria for assessment. This process is set out in Matrices 1-6.

The matrices are followed by a simple summary of findings in Section 10.4.

Table 10.A **Strategic environmental aims, objectives and criteria for assessment of the key strategic policies contained in the Sligo County Development Plan 2005-2011**

Strategic environmental aims	Objectives	Criteria for assessment
1. Protection of the environment and natural landscape	To protect watercourses and groundwater resources	Is the policy likely to have a significant impact on:
	To conserve and enhance natural heritage and biodiversity	<input type="checkbox"/> the protection of water courses and their catchment areas and/or ground water resources?
	To maintain and enhance the conservation value of all proposed NHAs	<input type="checkbox"/> the protection of natural heritage and biodiversity?
	To protect and enhance natural amenity	<input type="checkbox"/> the maintenance and enhancement of the conservation value of proposed NHAs? <input type="checkbox"/> the protection and enhancement of natural amenity?
2. Efficient use of natural resources	To minimise the consumption of finite resources	Is the policy likely to have a significant impact on:
	To develop land in a sustainable manner	<input type="checkbox"/> the minimisation of consumption of finite resources? <input type="checkbox"/> the development of land in a sustainable manner?
3. Efficient use of energy	To reduce energy consumption	Is the policy likely to have a significant impact on:
	To create energy efficient development layouts utilising aspect and reducing exposure	<input type="checkbox"/> the reduction in energy consumption? <input type="checkbox"/> the creation of energy efficient development layouts utilising aspect and reducing exposure?
4. Sustainable transport	To promote the integration of transport and land use	Is the policy likely to have a significant impact on:
	To promote the provision of a reliable and efficient public transport system	<input type="checkbox"/> the integration of transport and land-use? <input type="checkbox"/> the provision of a reliable and efficient public transport system?
5. Minimisation of waste and pollution	To minimise pollution and waste generation	Is the policy likely to have a significant impact on:
	To reduce, reuse and recycle waste products	<input type="checkbox"/> the minimisation of pollution of soil, air and water? <input type="checkbox"/> The minimisation of waste generation? <input type="checkbox"/> the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste products?
6. Protection of cultural and built heritage	To protect and enhance unique cultural assets	Is the policy likely to have a significant impact on:
	To protect historic buildings and structures and their settings	<input type="checkbox"/> the protection and enhancement of unique cultural assets? <input type="checkbox"/> the protection of historic buildings and structures and their settings?

10.3 Strategic Environmental Assessment matrices

The likely significant impacts that the implementation of this Plan may have on the environment are assessed below, under each section heading. The criteria for assessment are those listed in Table 10.A.

Matrix 1. Assessment of strategic settlement policies (Section 3)

Key strategic policies	Strategic environmental aims					
	Environment and natural landscape	Natural resources	Energy	Sustainable transport	Minimisation of waste and pollution	Cultural and built heritage
Ensure that Sligo provides a strong settlement strategy that maintains its attractive landscape context.	✓	✓	∅	✓	?	✓
Create a balanced and robust settlement pattern promoting sustainable development, according to social, economic and environmental considerations.	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓
For the Sub-Region, encourage a mix of land uses in towns and villages with connections to efficient public transportation systems, with the intention of reducing growth in commuting patterns, reducing inefficient use of energy and resources, encouraging social inclusion, and hence promoting sustainability.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅
Counteract the current trend toward urban generated housing in rural areas, particularly in the Sub-Region.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅
Protect, strengthen and sustain existing rural communities by facilitating housing needs and promoting local economic development initiatives.	?	∅	✓	✓	?	∅
✓ = positive, ∅ = neutral, ✗ = negative, ? = uncertain						

Matrix 2. Assessment of strategic housing and community facilities policies (Section 4)

Key strategic policies	Strategic environmental aims					
	Environment and natural landscape	Natural resources	Energy	Sustainable transport	Minimisation of waste and pollution	Cultural and built heritage
Promote social inclusion by ensuring the adequate supply and distribution of social & affordable housing within the County.	∅	∅	∅	?	∅	∅
Ensure the provision of a suitable range of housing types and sizes to facilitate the changing demographic structure of modern society.	∅	✓	✓	✓	∅	∅
Promote higher density development, encouraging compact development forms	∅	✓	✓	✓	∅	∅
Assist with the provision of community facilities by ensuring that all new facilities are appropriately located where they can best meet the needs of the community that they are intended to serve.	∅	✓	✓	✓	∅	∅
Ensure ease of access to all community facilities within the county especially having regard for children, the elderly and those with disabilities.	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅
Support the implementation of the "County Child-care Strategy".	∅	✓	∅	✓	∅	∅
Generally resist the loss of existing public or private recreational areas unless alternative recreational facilities are provided for in a suitable location, or it can be demonstrated that there is no longer sufficient demand to sustain the facility.	✓	✓	∅	∅	∅	∅
<p>✓ = positive, ∅ = neutral, ✗ = negative, ? = uncertain</p>						

Matrix 3. Assessment of strategic principles for economic development (Section 5)

Key strategic policies	Strategic environmental aims					
	Environment and natural landscape	Natural resources	Energy	Sustainable transport	Minimisation of waste and pollution	Cultural and built heritage
Facilitate and encourage the development of Sligo as a Gateway City and economic growth driver for the North-West	?	×	×	✓	×	∅
Promote economic development and the provision of industry/enterprise at the Key Support Towns	?	∅	?	✓	?	∅
Promote rural/agricultural diversification, through the sustainable use of natural resources, i.e. tourism, forestry, energy production etc.	∅	?	?	?	?	∅
Involve Sligo Institute of Technology in the promotion of Sligo as a centre of third level education and hence an attractive place for investment	?	?	?	✓	?	∅
Work with the providers of infrastructure to ensure adequate provisions in terms of road, rail, air travel, energy and telecommunications.	?	∅	?	?	?	?
Encourage and promote tourism development in a sustainable manner and encourage the provision of a full range of tourism facilities subject to appropriate planning considerations	✓	✓	?	✓	×	✓
Ensure the on-going availability of an adequate supply of aggregates for the construction industry at the best balance of social, economic and environmental cost, whilst ensuring that extraction and development are consistent with the principles of sustainable development.	?	?	?	?	?	?

✓ = positive, ∅ = neutral, × = negative, ? = uncertain

Matrix 4. Assessment of strategic principles for rural areas and coastal policy (Section 6)

Key strategic policies	Strategic environmental aims					
	Environment and natural landscape	Natural resources	Energy	Sustainable transport	Minimisation of waste and pollution	Cultural and built heritage
Protect scenic and visually vulnerable areas from sporadic development.	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓
Conserve the rural attractions of the County for the enjoyment of its inhabitants and for the development of rural economic activities.	?	?	?	?	?	?
Encourage an active role for communities so as to develop their rural resources including the potential for innovation and diversification in the rural economy.	?	?	?	?	?	?
Promote agriculture and agricultural diversification, while seeking to protect and maintain bio-diversity, wildlife habitats, water quality and other natural assets.	✓	✓	?	?	?	?
Encourage aquaculture development, in association with job creation, in a manner compatible with the range of other uses of the Sligo coast.	✗	?	?	?	?	?
Generally restrict development in the coastal zone – specifically between coastal roads and the sea – except where it can be demonstrated that it does not detract from the views of the area, nor impact on environmentally sensitive areas.	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓
<p>✓ = positive, ∅ = neutral, ✗ = negative, ? = uncertain</p>						

Matrix 5. Assessment of strategic environment and heritage policies (Section 7)

Key strategic policies	Strategic environmental aims					
	Environment and natural landscape	Natural resources	Energy	Sustainable transport	Minimisation of waste and pollution	Cultural and built heritage
Consider all environmental, geological and landscape features in the initial stages of development proposals.	✓	✓	∅	∅	∅	∅
Conserve and protect the environmental diversity of County Sligo, including the character of the landscape, views and prospects, and the environmental quality of designated sites such as NHAs, SPAs and SACs.	✓	✓	∅	∅	∅	✓
Protect and, where possible, enhance biodiversity and habitats by utilising appropriate conservation and management techniques.	✓	✓	∅	∅	∅	∅
Assist County Sligo Heritage Forum with the development and implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.	✓	✓	∅	∅	∅	∅
Safeguard the archaeological value of existing recorded archaeological sites and protect and preserve the setting of newly discovered sites.	✓	✓	∅	∅	∅	✓
Protect structures within the County that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest by way of maintaining a Record of Protected Structures for the County.	∅	✓	∅	∅	∅	✓
Protect and, where possible, improve the water quality of Sligo's rivers, lakes and coastal waters.	✓	✓	∅	∅	∅	∅
✓ = positive, ∅ = neutral, ✗ = negative, ? = uncertain						

Matrix 6. Assessment of strategic principles for infrastructure (Section 8)

Key strategic policies	Strategic environmental aims					
	Environment and natural landscape	Natural resources	Energy	Sustainable transport	Minimisation of waste and pollution	Cultural and built heritage
Promote the integration of transport and land use, by directing development into areas with existing community services and facilities.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅
Promote forms of development that reduce levels of dependence on private car transport.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅
Promote community and public transport services.	∅	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅
Promote cycling and walking as sustainable modes of transport and recreational activities.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Promote and support the use of Sligo Regional and Knock International Airports to improve Sligo's accessibility, particularly for tourists and the business community.	✗	✗	✗	✓	?	∅
Ensure adequate water supply and sewerage capacity to accommodate the needs of the projected population.	✓	?	∅	∅	?	∅
Optimise the use of existing water, sewerage, electricity and telecommunications networks.	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅	∅
Promote the development of alternative energy forms in County Sligo.	✓	✓	✓	∅	✓	∅
Promote energy efficiency and minimise air pollution.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅
Implement the Connaught Waste Management Plan.	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	∅
Encourage waste minimisation by promoting reduction, reuse and recycling of waste materials.	✓	✓	✓	∅	✓	∅
<p>✓ = positive, ∅ = neutral, ✗ = negative, ? = uncertain</p>						

10.4 SEA findings

The assessment of the the Development Plan's key policies indicates that, overall, the implementation of the Plan would have a positive impact on the environment. It is considered that only 3% of the policies assessed could have a negative impact (often marginal), while the majority of key policies, i.e. 74%, would have positive effects or would not affect the environment in any manner, should the Plan be implemented. In relation to those policies whose potential effect is uncertain, their implementation should be careful monitored, with a view to adjusting/amending the Plan if deemed necessary.

Impact type	Percent of total assessments
✓	42%
∅	32%
?	22%
✗	3%
Total	100% (258 actual assessments)

