

6. Strengthening Rural and Coastal Areas



6.1 Rural development and enterprise

County Sligo, like the Border Region, is predominantly rural. Therefore, spatial policies must take into account, on an ongoing basis, the developments in agriculture, as recommended in the RPGs, in conjunction with landscape management principles and natural resource development needs.

6.1.1 Land use in rural areas

The rural landscape is an invaluable resource for Sligo, providing for nature and biodiversity, in addition to economic activities such as agriculture, forestry, rural housing, recreation, tourism, mineral extraction, energy production (particularly wind farms), fishing and aquaculture. The interplay of these activities is important and it is the aim of the Council to ensure that:

- change in the landscape is managed, without detriment to its overall quality and character;
- key resources are protected and maintained for future generations;
- the potential negative impacts of one activity over another are carefully considered at planning application stage.

6.1.1.1 Objectives for land use in rural areas

- A. Protect designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes and Visually Vulnerable Areas from intrusive development (refer to Development Control Policy Map in Section 9)
- B. Protect high quality agricultural land.
- C. Ensure that physical development does not detract from the scenic quality of County Sligo's mountains, moorlands, coastline, lakeshores, and mature indigenous woodland landscapes. The Council acknowledges that some forms of development, such as wind farms, may create a conflict between these objectives and some otherwise sustainable development initiatives, and therefore careful siting and design criteria will apply.
- D. Require landscaping with appropriate species and the retention of existing trees and hedgerows, to screen and integrate new development in rural areas. A portion of the development costs may be allocated for complementary tree planting.
- E. Encourage the retention of existing landscape features, such as local stone walls, stiles, hedgerows, field patterns, archaeological features, traditional building groups, native woodlands and copses.
- F. Encourage sympathetically designed attractive and appropriately scaled developments, particularly in the vicinity of existing traditional buildings, farm clusters and rural villages or *clachans*.
- G. Preserve existing public rights of way in the County and seek, with the agreement of landowners, to develop new rights of way in coastal, upland and lake-land areas, as resources permit.

6.1.2 Rural development and enterprise



Irish produce – farmers' market
at Markree Game and Country Fair, July 2005

The reduction in public service provision and the declining agricultural sector are accelerating the population decline in some rural areas, thereby threatening the survival of rural communities. In recent years, rural areas have experienced a reduction of public services, such as sub-post offices, Garda Stations, primary schools and banks. Access to public services is therefore a priority for those living in rural areas.

In order to strengthen the provision of services, regenerate rural communities and promote the economic development of rural areas, there is a need to support rural and agricultural diversification through a

variety of initiatives, as outlined in Section 3.6.3 Sustaining Rural Communities. These include rural and agri-tourism initiatives; promoting rural transport; developing telecommunications to rural areas; and promoting the development of small incubator units as an adjunct to other rural activities, such as agriculture, horticulture, forestry, mariculture and alternative energy production. Both Sligo Leader Partnership and Sligo County Enterprise Board provide funding and technical assistance in the promotion of local employment and enterprise initiatives focused on the individual (i.e. individual business plans) and the project. Projects assisted by these bodies include farmers' markets, tourist attractions, rural incubator units promoting crafts, the arts, pottery, antiques, indigenous manufacturing and engineering, in addition to agri-businesses. The Council will work with these bodies, and others, to promote rural development and enterprise.

6.1.2.1 Objectives for rural development and enterprise

- A. Develop the potential for innovation and diversification in the rural economy, as a means of both retaining and attracting population into rural areas and supporting the retention of rural services.
- B. Support the active involvement of rural communities in the provision of local services and the development of resources – e.g. organic farming, equestrian activities, bird watching.
- C. Promote the continuance of the Rural Transport Initiative as an essential service to people in rural areas, who would otherwise be excluded because transport is not available, accessible or affordable to them locally.
- D. Facilitate the development of e-commerce, IT and broadband telecommunications, as enablers of rural enterprise, which can counteract the effects of distance and remoteness.
- E. Promote the development of appropriately-scaled second-home and holiday-home development as a contributor to a more diversified rural economy (see Sections 3 Settlement Strategy, 4.2 Rural Housing and 5.6 Tourism).

6.1.3 The CLÁR Programme and other rural revitalisation initiatives

CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Ard-Riachtanais) is a programme managed by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, aimed at revitalising rural areas. It is designed to tackle the problem of deprivation, decline and lack of services in rural areas and it provides rural communities with funding for infrastructure, and social and community services. The areas originally selected for inclusion in the CLÁR Programme were those that suffered the greatest population decline from 1926 to 1996. Following an analysis of the 2002 Census data, the CLÁR areas were reviewed and extended. The initial and additional EDs covered by CLÁR designation are shown in Figure 6.a as old and new CLÁR areas.

The PEACE II Programme is an EU (Structural Funds) Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. It aims to help border counties to develop a peaceful and stable society. It offers funding for projects that make the most of opportunities for community and economic development arising from peace, and includes initiatives such as economic renewal, cross-border co-operation and locally-based regeneration and development strategies.

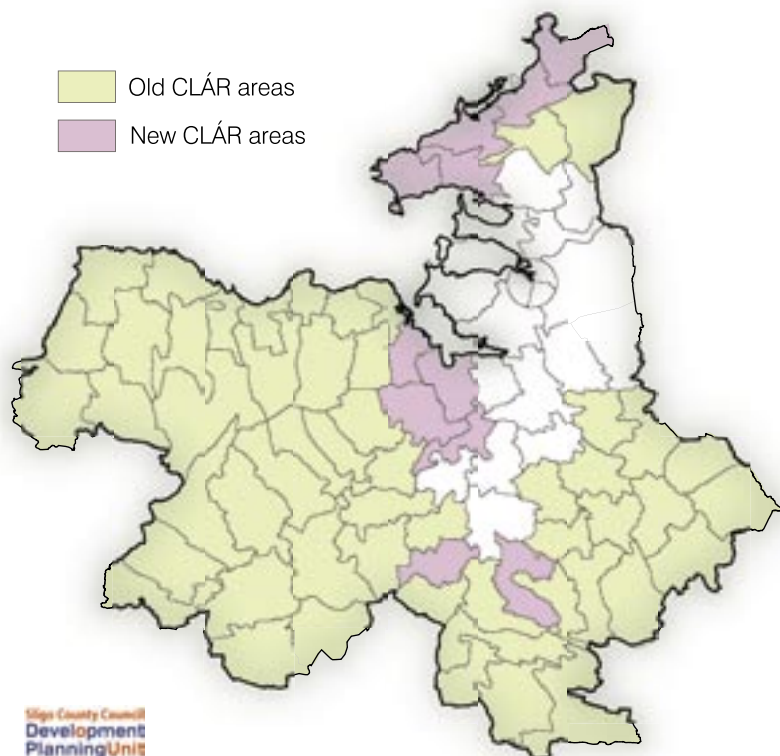


Fig. 6.a
Electoral divisions
(EDs) in Co. Sligo
covered by the
CLÁR Programme

6.1.3.1 Objectives for rural revitalisation programmes

- A. Facilitate individual one-off housing in the CLÁR areas, where it is likely to sustain rural communities and result in net community benefit. Such proposals will be subject to appropriate location, siting and design criteria.
- B. Promote awareness of funding opportunities for locally generated enterprises in rural areas, such as the PEACE II Programme and County Enterprise Board support.

6.1.4 Forestry

Sligo County Council recognises the importance of forestry development, as set out in government policy, and acknowledges the potential for further afforestation in County Sligo. The Council intends to prepare an Indicative Forestry Strategy for the County, which will indicate opportunity and constraint areas for future forestry development. When completed, this strategy will be incorporated into the *County Development Plan 2005-2011*. In the interim, it is considered that new coniferous forestry development is unlikely to be sustainable in SPAs, pNHAs and cSACs. Coniferous forestry plantations will also be discouraged in water quality-sensitive areas and also in designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes and Visually Vulnerable Areas, and along Designated Scenic Routes, as indicated on the Development Control Policy Map in Section 9.

6.1.4.1 Forestry objectives

- A. Prepare an Indicative Forestry Strategy for County Sligo and incorporate it into the *County Development Plan 2005-2011*.
- B. Support and promote forestry development in County Sligo, subject to the protection of, inter alia, scenic landscapes and views, water quality, heritage features, residential amenity and public safety.
- C. Discourage new forestry development, except for broadleaf, in proposed/candidate and adopted NHAs, SACs and SPAs, in designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes and Visually Vulnerable Areas, along designated Scenic Routes and in water quality-sensitive areas. (Broadleaf forestry will be open to consideration in these areas and in all proposed and adopted NHAs, SPAs and SACs, will be subject to consultation with the DoEHLG and shall have regard to any management plans prepared by the Department.)
- D. Adopt a proactive approach in conjunction with the Forest Service and Coillte to ensure sustainable forestry development.



Forestry in the Ox Mountains

6.1.5 Aquaculture

Aquaculture relates to the commercial production of fish and shellfish species. The term is generally used to describe fish farming operations both on inland and coastal (marine) waters. For the purposes of this Plan, aquaculture relates to fish farming on inland water bodies, such as lakes, rivers and land-based artificial ponds and tanks. Because of environmental concerns and the very limited capacity for aquaculture on Sligo's inland lakes, major aquaculture projects will be discouraged, unless the Council is satisfied that such proposals will be environmentally sustainable and have a limited impact on the visual amenity of the area. (Refer also to Section 6.2.3 Mariculture). Such environmental concerns associated with finfish aquaculture include:

- protection of the aquatic environment;
- the need to guard against escapees;
- the avoidance of any genetic threats, potential disease and parasitic implications to local fish stocks (there is a need to source seed from certified disease-free stock);
- potential conflicts in relation to water supply, which can become critical during low-flow summer periods..

6.1.6 Diversification of agricultural activity

The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector engages just 8% of the labour force in County Sligo. This is a decline from 20% in 1991.

In the period 1991-2001, there was a 46% reduction in the number of persons employed in agriculture and nearly half of the 4,504 agricultural holdings in the County were part-time ventures in 2000.

Compounding this decline is the fact that farm sizes are significantly smaller than the national average: for example, only 4% of farms in County Sligo are above 50 hectares, compared to 12% nationally. Furthermore, a high percentage of farming families are dependent on social welfare or alternative enterprises for family income. These factors contribute to a high level of rural deprivation and a strong need for rural diversification in County Sligo.

Sligo County Council does not support the development of genetically modified crops within its administrative area. The Council will endeavour to support the development of organic and traditional methods of farming.



6.1.6.1 Objectives for agricultural diversification

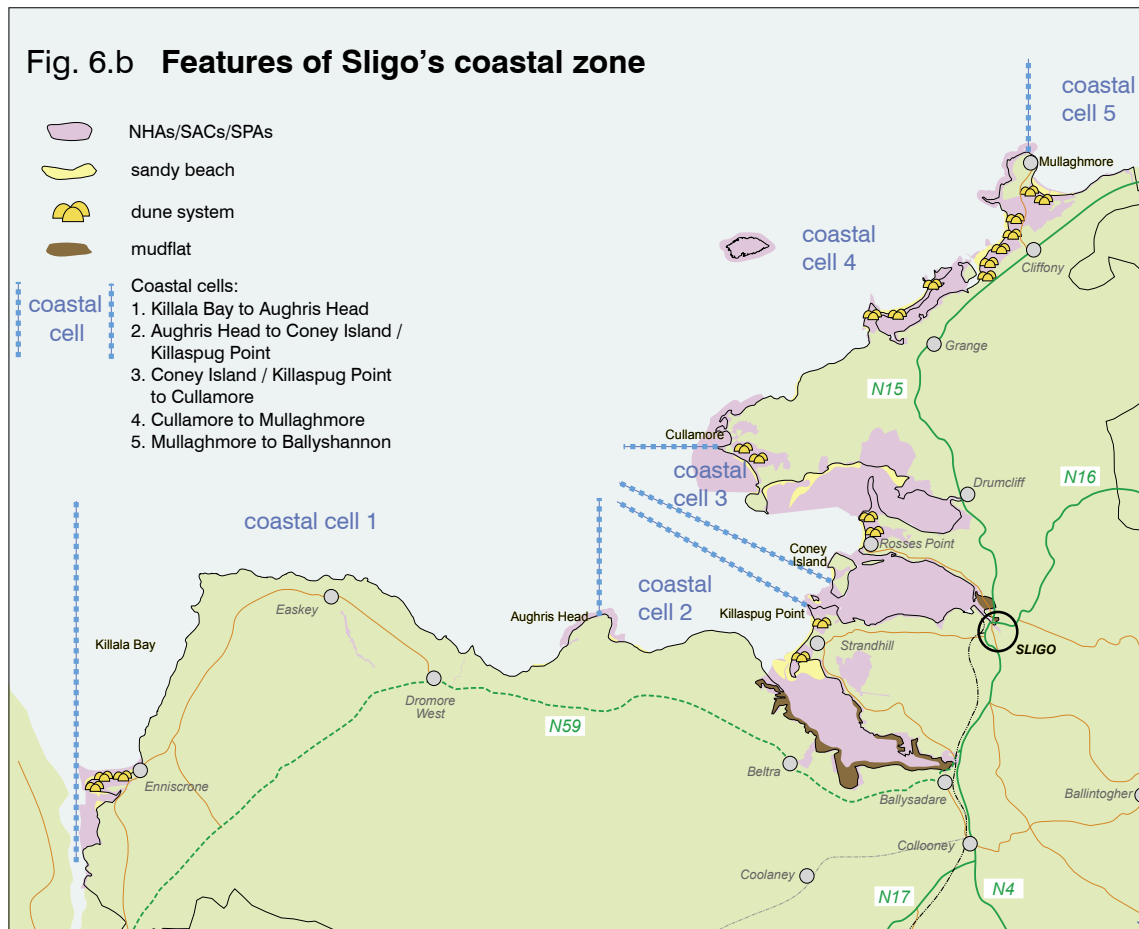
- A. Promote agriculture and agricultural diversification, while seeking to protect and maintain bio-diversity, wildlife habitats, water quality and nature conservation.
- B. Provide infrastructure to serve the needs of agriculture, in-cooperation with the appropriate agencies.
- C. Support mechanisms to reduce agricultural pollution and the eutrophication of rivers and lakes.
- D. Promote and support secondary and tertiary economic activities associated with the primary activities of agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, fishing, aquaculture and mariculture.
- E. Promote farm diversification and possible spin-offs (e.g. biomass and energy production, poultry, mushroom growing, flower growing, equestrian facilities), in association with vigorous and adequate environmental controls upon their development.
- F. Support farm families seeking to establish alternative and/or complementary economic enterprises to supplement their income from farming, subject to appropriate scale and intensity of development, having regard to traffic, environmental, landscape and residential amenity considerations. Where the enterprise is not dependent on a rural location, and the scale and intensity grow beyond family income needs, it may be encouraged, where appropriate, to relocate to a nearby town or village.
- G. Promote the development of niche activities, such as those relating to food (particularly value-added products), forestry (e.g. wood products), crafts, eco-tourism and agri-tourism – e.g. farmhouse accommodation, pet farms, farm holidays, health farms, equestrian activities, bird-watching holidays; painting/photography tuition, angling tourism, field studies and hill-walking (with the co-operation of the landowners).

Other aspects of rural policy are covered elsewhere in this Development Plan, including Sections 5.6 Tourism, 5.7 Mineral extraction and 6.2.3 Mariculture.



Sligo Folk Park, Riverstown

6.2 Coastal zone management



6.2.1 Overview

From sheltered bays, unspoilt beaches, small islands and wild Atlantic surf, Sligo possesses a varied and spectacular coastline. The coastline, however, is a finite resource that provides environmental, economic, recreational and aesthetic benefits and access to marine resources such as fisheries and aquaculture. It also contains many sensitive ecosystems – ranging from sand dune systems to salt marshes and estuaries rich in marine and bird life – and is significant in terms of cultural and archaeological heritage.

The primary attraction of the Sligo coast is its relatively unspoilt character. Increasingly, the coastal zone is coming under pressure from, for example:

- holiday makers and/or surfers looking for unspoilt coastlines;
- tourism providers who may seek to exploit scenic views in the provision of accommodation or other facilities;
- individual homeowners;
- maricultural developments;
- wind farm operators who wish to avail of coastal locations with high wind speeds.

The coastal zone shall generally refer to the area between the nearest continuous road and the High Water Mark. However, it may extend beyond such roads and therefore, for coastal zone management purposes “it extends as far inland and seawards as is required by management objectives” (*The European Workshop on Coastal Zone Management*, Dorset, 1991). Accordingly, this matter will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the planning authority when considering planning applications or development proposals.

Pressure for development needs to be examined in the context of a coastal environment undergoing fairly rapid change, as the coastal zone is subject to constant pressures from various agents of erosion, potential pollutants and conflicting user groups. It is estimated that coastal zone erosion results in a loss of land area of up to 300 hectares per year around the Irish coast.

Coastal Zone Management aims to achieve a more efficient and sustainable use of the coastal resource. The impacts arising from climate change, including changing weather patterns and rising sea levels, will be most readily discernible at the coast. Flooding of low-lying coastal areas is likely to become more frequent as a result of increased intensity and frequency of oceanic storms. This may also cause or exacerbate coastal erosion, which can have a devastating effect on existing development and infrastructure. The Government's discussion document on the subject, entitled *Coastal Zone Management - A Draft Policy for Ireland (1997)*, states that "policies of limitation and curtailment on tourism and leisure development and use are, therefore, necessary to deal with the increasing pressure".

6.2.2 Fishing

The fishing industry in Sligo is less well-developed than in nearby Donegal and Mayo. However, there are some localised areas where fishing is important. The resort town of Enniscrone supports good beach and rock fishing. Commercial fishing boats operate at Raghly, Mullaghmore, Pollnadviva, Pullaheeney, Rosses Point, Aughris and Easkey. The present small scale fisheries support some sport fishing, which has potential for expansion as a tourist activity.

6.2.2.1 Objectives for fishing

- A. Support and facilitate the development of the existing fishing industry.
- B. Encourage the expansion of sport fishing.

6.2.3 Mariculture

Mariculture is the cultivation of marine organisms in their natural environment. As along the rest of the west coast, mariculture in County Sligo is expanding rapidly, with the commercial production of mussels, clams and oysters. Mariculture developments are concentrated in Drumcliff Bay, off Lissadell, Cummeen Strand, in Sligo Harbour and at Culleenamore, in Ballysadare Bay. These developments are subject to a licence from the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (DCMNR). In practice, the Council is consulted prior to issuing of licences. The aquaculture industry faces many challenges on the environmental front, and the County Council, in its limited capacity, will seek to promote sustainability and waste management programmes within the sector. Refer also to Section 6.1.5 Aquaculture and specifically to environmental concerns outlined in that section.

6.2.3.1 Objectives for mariculture

- A. Encourage and facilitate mariculture development associated with job creation, in a manner that is compatible with other uses of the Sligo coast.
- B. Work with the mariculture industry to increase environmental sustainability.

6.2.4 Marine/coastal mineral extraction

Aggregate extraction from the coastal zone, particularly from beaches, estuaries and cobble storm berms, has created many problems in the past, resulting in increased levels of erosion and flooding in coastal areas. The Sligo coastline is vulnerable to further similar activities, which have the potential to interfere with natural coastal processes and particularly the softer shoreline areas such as dune systems, which tend to be ecologically rich. Any proposals for future coastal/marine aggregate

extraction along the Sligo coast shall only be considered following detailed environmental impact assessment and consultation with the DCMNR, if appropriate. (See also Section 5.7 Mineral extraction).

The GSI, in association with the Marine Institute, has been conducting a National Seabed Survey, since 2000. This, in conjunction with Objective B of subsection 5.7.1 Objectives for minerals, mineral extraction and quarrying activity, will facilitate the identification of marine and terrestrial aggregate deposits, if any, within the coastal zone.

6.2.4.1 Objectives for marine/coastal mineral extraction

- A. Identify the location of marine aggregate deposits, if any, along and off the coast of County Sligo, with the assistance for the GSI/Marine Insitute, based on the National Seabed Survey.
- B. Ensure that any future proposals for extraction of marine/coastal aggregates along or off the Sligo coast are subject to detailed environmental impact assessment. This shall include an assessment of the impact(s), if any, of the natural coastal processes.
- C. The processing and storage of extracted aggregates on lands within the coastal zone shall be carried out in a manner that minimises the impact on natural and residential amenities.

6.2.5 Coastal protection



Mullaghmore breakwater improvement

Coastal protection works aim to reduce land loss and the frequency of flooding. In the past, engineering works tended to impose armoured defences along the shoreline, whereas in recent times, there has been a preference for a 'softer' approach, i.e. working with natural processes rather than opposing them, where possible. The coastline is subject to a continuous natural process of erosion and deposition within specific coastal cells - these cells consist of a source area (where erosion is the dominant process) and a sink area (where accretion is the dominant process). This interlinked system requires any intervention, e.g. in the form of a breakwater, seawall, pier or groyne, to be restricted to the cell and sub-cell boundaries within which the intervention occurs.

Initial studies¹ suggest that there may be five coastal cells along the Sligo coastline (see Fig. 6.b).

As the cost of hard engineering structures and their maintenance is high, such solutions are normally confined to densely-populated coastal villages or locations where it is considered necessary to protect significant public infrastructure (i.e. harbours, piers and public roadways). The planning and design of such control works must also have regard to the existing coastal cell systems. In light of such costs, there is a case for restricting and containing development near the coast, so as to minimise the demand for costly protection measures.

Recent coastal protection works carried out by the Council include the Strandhill Coast Protection Scheme and Mullaghmore Harbour Breakwater Improvement Works. Dune management schemes involving 'softer' methods have been carried out at Enniscrone, Strandhill and Mullaghmore, on a phased basis. Other proposed projects are set out in Table 6.A. The DCMNR provides the bulk of funding for these works, without which the Council cannot proceed.

Table 6.A Proposed coastal protection works in County Sligo

Location and type of works
Dunmorán - Ardnaglas - river outfall structure
Lislary - retaining wall repair
Enniscrone Strand - protection of riverbank, pumping station and lifeguard building; dune management
Mullaghmore - dune management
Strandhill Effluent Treatment Plant - protection works

6.2.5.1 Objectives for coastal protection

- A. Carry out the coastal zone management and protection works outlined in Table 6.A.
- B. Identify, prioritise and implement additional coastal protection works within the coastal zone that are considered necessary, subject to the availability of resources.
- C. Monitor existing dune management schemes on an ongoing basis and secure appropriate repairs, improvements and extensions, subject to the availability of resources.
- D. Examine existing beach bye-laws and make appropriate amendments, in the interest of protecting sand dunes from encroachment and damage.
- E. Continue to employ soft engineering techniques (i.e. dune stabilisation and planting) as an alternative to hard coastal defence works, where appropriate.
- F. Ensure that regard is paid to visual and environmental considerations in the design of coastal defence works.
- G. Ensure that any developments permitted within the coastal zone are appropriately sited, having regard to coastal flooding and the predicted rise in sea levels.
- H. Establish development limits and natural buffers at the coast, particularly in conjunction with the preparation of local area plans and other land use plans.
- I. Strictly control the nature and pattern of development on all promontories and headlands, and ensure that, if development is permitted, it is designed and landscaped to the highest standards. Landscaping will be of a type that is predominantly native to the area and sea-salt spray-resistant.

¹Sligo Coastal Zone Management Plan 1995 (Draft), H.A. Saunders 1995



Strandhill Dune Management Scheme: buried sand fences and marram grass regeneration at Shelly Valley

6.2.6 Nature conservation in coastal areas

Within the County there are eighteen coastal pNHAs, including areas designated as either SPAs or cSACs. The boundaries of such areas do not, however, define the limits of actual or potential conservation interest within the coastal zone. Some sites without formal recognition are locally important and will be taken into consideration in the assessment of development proposals. (See also Section 7 Conserving Environmental Quality.)

6.2.6.1 Objectives for nature conservation in coastal areas

- A. Support the management of sites of conservation importance, including pNHAs, cSACs and SPAs.
- B. Take into account the potential conservation of all sites of interest within the coastal zone when assessing development proposals.
- C. Promote the natural interest of the Sligo Coast as a sustainable tourism, conservation and educational asset.

6.2.7 Recreation and tourism

Intensive recreational use of the Sligo coast is concentrated at the traditional seaside resorts of Mullaghmore, Rosses Point, Strandhill, Easkey and Enniscrone, where public access is good. There has been an increase in 'health tourism' nationally, and throughout Europe, particularly an increase in thalassotherapy (e.g. hot seaweed baths). There are two such facilities in County Sligo, at Enniscrone and Strandhill.

A yacht haven is proposed at Rosses Point, to include 27 berths, dredging of the basin and the provision of an access bridge. The facility is intended to be managed by representatives of the local community, the Rosses Point Yacht Club and the County Council. It is expected to be a significant boost to local recreation and tourism.

6.2.7.1 Objectives for recreation and tourism

- A. Ensure that future caravan, camping and parking facilities in coastal areas will not be visually intrusive or impact on sensitive coastal environments (e.g. sand dune systems), by requiring, inter alia, appropriate siting, layout, design and natural screening.
- B. Manage and control car parking and vehicular and pedestrian movements on beaches and within dunes and other vulnerable areas.
- C. Develop green parking areas in appropriate coastal locations, i.e. soft areas that can be left in their natural state during out-of-season months and used to provide overflow facilities during peak periods.
- D. Exclude unauthorised land-based and marine-based motor sports activities from beaches.
- E. Seek continued compliance with EU Directives on water quality for all bathing beaches.
- F. Provide a number of designated facilities and access points for controlled water-sports activities, in a manner that avoids conflict with nature conservation and activities such as swimming, sailing, fishing and mariculture.
- G. Maintain and develop small piers and harbours along the Sligo Coast, subject to funding.
- H. Ensure that golf course development does not damage or encroach upon vulnerable dune systems.
- I. Give priority to coastal areas within County-wide programmes to signpost and improve public rights of way.
- J. Promote awareness of the sensitivity of the coastal environment, amongst visitors and residents alike, through the provision of educational/heritage appreciation programmes, public information boards and other appropriate means.
- K. The Council will liaise with the National Waymarked Ways Advisory Committee to investigate the possibility of providing a coastal path along the coastline of County Sligo.



6.2.8 Wind and wave energy

The Sligo coast is endowed with strong winds and is therefore economically suitable for wind farm development. Most of the coastal zone, particularly in the west of the County, is relatively flat, providing long open views. Development proposals should therefore avoid locations that are immediately adjacent to coastal settlements or significant tourist attractions.

There is also potential for the development of offshore wind farms and energy generated from the movement of waves. While proposals below the High Water Mark are outside the Council's jurisdiction, on-shore ancillary plant, buildings and power lines will require assessment and all on-shore impacts must be mitigated to the greatest extent possible. Detailed visual, ecological, archaeological, heritage and social impacts of such proposals will be assessed in determining their acceptability.

6.2.9 Objectives for development in coastal areas

- A. Restrict the location of industrial development within the coastal zone to resource-based activities that have a clear and demonstrable need, i.e. those dependent on resources offered at the sea or coast (e.g. maritime industries, mariculture). All such proposals will be subject to the strict application of location, siting and design criteria.
- B. Control and minimise sources of water and land pollution.
- C. Maintain and update the Marine Emergency Response Plan for the Sligo Coast.
- D. 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 views or impact on environmentally sensitive areas. Exceptions will be considered for sustainable tourism development, public infrastructural works and development that is contiguous with existing towns and villages.
- E. Promote existing degraded coastal areas, i.e. those where quarrying or other deleterious activities have taken place, as significant brownfield development sites, subject to appropriate environmental mitigation measures and the strict application of location, siting and design criteria.
- F. Consider the establishment of a local forum for each of the coastal cells along the County's coastline, involving landowners, local communities and relevant interest groups, to explore and resolve coastal zone management issues that are specific to each area.

