

Strategic Environmental Assessment – Screening

Waterford Local Economic & Community Plan 2015-2020



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1. Introduction

In 2012, the policy document 'Putting People First' was published and this sets out reforms to improve the delivery of services for the citizen, deliver greater efficiency and effectiveness and give local government a more central role in local and community development.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 gives legislative effect to the commitments in 'Putting People First' including:

1. The establishment of a Local Community Development Committee, as a subcommittee of the City and County Council, and
2. The preparation of a six year Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) by Waterford City and County Council.

The purpose of the Waterford Local Economic & Community Plan 2015-2020, as provided for in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, is to set out, for a six year period¹, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of Waterford City and County. It is intended that the LECP will facilitate both the expanding economic development role and the emerging local development role of Local Government and bring about better alignment of the work of Local Development Companies with that of the Local Authority and other providers of social, community and economic development, thereby achieving better returns for the communities they serve.

The LECP includes two elements:

- ◆ a local economic element and
- ◆ a community development element

and has been prepared in line with the guidelines issued by the Minister for the Environment, Community & Local Government².

The economic elements of the LECP will guide and support the economic development role of the local authority within a wider regional content. The purpose of the community elements of the LECP are to promote local and community development within the functional area of the LCDC and to ensure the co-ordination of relevant public funded local and community development actions in a way that reduces duplication, targets available resources where they are most needed and maximises benefits for communities.

2. Screening Statement

The requirements for SEA in Ireland are set out in the national regulations, S.I. No. 435 of 2004 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 and S.I. No. 436 of 2004 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) and S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) respectively.

The Regulations 2004-2011 require case by- case screening of individual plans and programmes based on the criteria in Schedule 2A to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. These criteria must be taken into account in determining whether or not significant effects on the environment would be likely to arise.

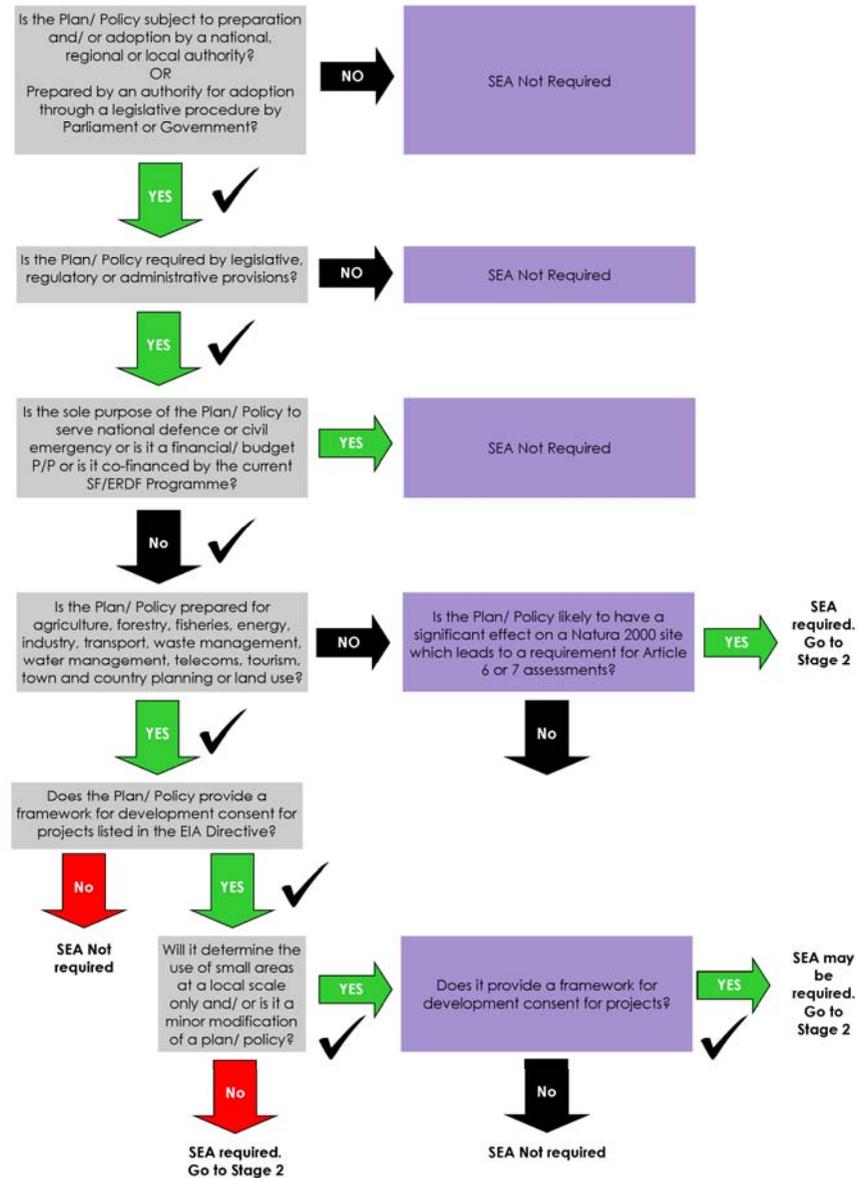
¹ The duration of the first LECPs may be extended or shortened as appropriate to synchronise with the respective six year Regional Spatial Economic Strategies, to be completed in 2016. Thereafter the LECP will be a six year plan.

² LG 1/2015 'Local Economic and Community Plans'.

Stage One - Pre-Screening

The first step in determining whether the proposed Local Economic and Community Plan would require an SEA involved a pre-screening check. It allows rapid screening-out of plans and policies that are clearly not going to have any environmental impact and screening-in of those that definitely do require SEA.

Following the pre-screening exercise (Figure opposite) it is apparent that it is necessary to conduct further screening to determine if a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Local Economic and Community Plan is required. The Local Economic and Community Plan will provide a framework for development therefore it was necessary to determine whether an SEA would be required by testing it against environmental significance screening criteria.



Stage Two - Environmental Significance Screening

The application of environmental significance criteria is important in determining whether an SEA is required for small Plans/Policies or modifications to Plans/Policies. Annex II (2) of Directive 2001/42/EC sets out the “statutory” criteria that should be addressed when undertaking this stage.

Criteria for Determining the Likely Significance of Environmental Effects

Characteristics of the Plan/Programme

- (i) The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;

It is the purpose of the Waterford Local Economic and Community Plan to set out for a six year period the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of Waterford City and County. It is intended that the LECP will facilitate both the expanding economic development role and the emerging local development role of Local Government and bring about better alignment of the work of Local Development Companies with that of the Local Authority and other providers of social, community and economic development thereby achieving better returns for the communities they serve.

- (ii) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;

The Local Economic and Community Plan is set within the context of the policy document Putting People First and the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The LECP is part of a series of plans and strategies that have, and are being developed at national, regional and local level. These include:

- ◆ EU 2020
- ◆ National Reform Programme
- ◆ National Spatial Strategy to be replaced by the National Planning Framework
- ◆ National Development Plan
- ◆ Medium Term Economic Strategy 2014-2020 (MTES)
- ◆ Making it Happen - Growing Enterprise in Ireland
- ◆ Local Government Sectoral Strategy to Promote Employment and Support Local Enterprise
- ◆ Rural Development Strategy and Plan
- ◆ Action Plan for Jobs 2014
- ◆ National Anti-Poverty Strategy
- ◆ Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022
- ◆ Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (to be prepared by the Regional Assembly in 2015/early 2016)
- ◆ City and County Development Plan
- ◆ WWETB Local Education & Training Strategy (to be prepared by ETB in 2015/2016)
- ◆ The Report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas

At a local level, the LECP provides a framework for all organisations to link their own strategies and plans and to combine investment and resource to achieve common agreed goals. Those preparing and implementing these operational plans will need to be conscious of the agreed priorities for the area

as set out in the Plan, and their roles in addressing these. The LECP is about solving problems, realising opportunities and collectively refocusing service provision. The LECP can only be achieved by all local agencies and organisations working in partnership.

While the LECP is a strongly action focused plan, it is not an operational plan nor a spatial land use plan. The priorities which will be implemented through operational plans have been identified based on an analysis of existing national, regional and local strategies, socio economic data and public consultations.

(iii) The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;

The LECP is being prepared under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and represents an opportunity to implement the Waterford City and County Development Plans' objectives in relation to sustainable development particularly in respect of sustainable transport, public health, community, cultural heritage and tourism and the green economy. The LECP will be an important element of the City and County Development Plans for ensuring the delivery of these objectives.

(iv) Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme;

There are six key economic goals of the LECP as follows:

Economy

- ◆ Attract and retain inward investment
- ◆ Create opportunities and support entrepreneurship
- ◆ Develop vibrant urban centres (Waterford City, Dungarvan & Tramore)
- ◆ Accelerate the growth of the tourism economy
- ◆ Expand the contribution of the natural resources sector
- ◆ Support pathways to economic participation and opportunity

The actions of the LECP will be implemented within the framework of appropriately zoned areas and environmental and heritage policy within the City and County Development Plans and Local Area Plans and thus should not give rise to significant strategic environmental issues. A number of actions in the plan are qualified by the need to comply with sustainable development whereby sustainable development includes compliance with EU environmental and habitats legislation.

There are two key objectives for the Waterford Community Plan:

1. Develop Community of Place Plans- specific focus given to communities of place (area-based)

Actions proposed are:

- ◆ To develop overall community of place plans for the 3 Municipal Districts of Waterford, Comeragh and Dungarvan and Lismore areas;
- ◆ To develop sub-municipal communities of place plans for the following areas- Waterford Metropolitan area, Waterford Estuary, Tramore & Environs, Comeragh Uplands, Copper Coast, Dungarvan and Environs, West Waterford, Urban Neighbourhood and Town and Village Plans.

2. Coherent Services to Communities- bringing coherence to the different community structures and strategies at a local level working with communities of interest.

Action proposed is to engage with structures and provide guidance towards their contribution to the Waterford Community Plan and develop service level agreements with LCDC.

No strategically significant environmental problems can be identified in relation to the Community Plan. The provision of a LECP is expected to provide a strategic framework to improve sustainable development for the economy and community. Preparation of the various Community of Place plans will also be subject to SEA Screening in their own right.

- (v) The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).

The LECP is not a spatial land use plan but rather provides a framework for all organisations to link their own strategies and plans and to combine investment and resource to achieve common agreed goals for the Economy and Community in Waterford. Where such plans provide a framework for development consent for projects these projects will be subject to EIA and AA Screening at project inception stage.

Characteristics of the Effects and of the Area Likely to be Affected

- (i) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects

It is anticipated that the key objectives and principles to be adopted as part of the LECP will ensure that the effects of the resulting changes to the existing operating environment will not be significant.

The probability that these effects will be environmentally significant in negative terms is low.

- (ii) The cumulative nature of the effects

Cumulative negative environmental effects are not expected. A key objective of the LECP will be to attain a balance between economic growth and the need to provide sustainable development. The effects will be of a positive nature, in particular regarding improvements in employment and community development, social and urban regeneration, public realm, sustainable transport and the green economy.

- (iii) The transboundary nature of the effects

The plan will have positive regional and inter-county transboundary effects.

- (iv) The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)

None. The effects will be of a positive nature, in particular regarding improvements in employment and community development, social and urban regeneration, public realm, sustainable transport and the green economy.

(v) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)

The area that will be affected is the entire area of Waterford City and County. The population of this area is approximately 115,000

(vi) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to

- special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;

Waterford City Development Plan 2013-2019 and Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 identify the following protected areas/elements of the natural/cultural heritage:

- Protected Structures
- Sites of Archaeological Significance
- Areas with natural heritage designations

A key objective of the County and City Development Plans and Local Area Plans which provide the planning and development framework for implementation of the LECP is to protect and enhance Waterford's heritage and key characteristics, both natural and man-made. This would mean that activities resulting from the implementation of the LECP would have to comply with these policies. An AA Screening has been carried on the plan and concluded a finding of no significant effects on the Natura 2000 network from the proposed plan.

- exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;

It is not expected that any environmental quality standards will be exceeded or that the value of vulnerable areas limited as a result of the LECP.

- intensive land-use;

The Waterford LECP is not a spatial land-use plan. Any projects arising from the LECP that require development consent under planning legislation will be required to comply with land use and environmental policy of the Waterford City and Waterford County Development Plans.

(vii) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, community or international protection status.

It is not anticipated that the actions within the LECP will have a significant environmental impact on sites, conforming as they will be required to do with policies protecting such sites in relevant Local Area Plans and the City and County Development Plans. Mount Congreve Gardens are designated as rural tourism lands in the Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 which was subject to SEA and AA Screening.

Stage Three - Conclusions & Recommendation

Following the screening process, whereby the specific context of the LECP has been assessed against the environmental significance criteria as contained in Annex II (2) of the SEA Directive, **it is concluded that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required for the Waterford LECP 2015-2020.**