



STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT



CHAPTER 15 : Strategic Environmental Assessment

Introduction

This report has been prepared in accordance with section 10 (5)(a) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, which states that ‘a development plan shall contain information on the likely and significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan’. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (S.E.A) is an integral and valuable part of the development plan process as it illustrates how environmental concerns have been fully integrated into the plan-making process.

The value and purpose of the Strategic Environmental Assessment is to:

- identify key policies and objectives that have the potential to conflict with one another and also the environmental implications of those policies.
- identify the positive environmental effects of the plan, how it has addressed environmental issues and reinforces the strategy chosen.
- demonstrate to users of the Development Plan, how the policies and objectives have regard to environmental matter.

This process is intended to appraise the Drogheda Draft Development Plan. However, it is not a detailed assessment of the Plan as would be typically carried out for the purpose of an Environmental Impact Assessment (E.I.A) in relation to specific development proposals. The general nature of the strategy and associated policies and objectives, allied to the large geographical area covered by the Drogheda Draft Development Plan, means that a detailed analysis cannot be applied. This will be subject to normal procedures for an E.I.A., where the scale and type of development so warrants it. The Department of the Environment & Local Government have yet to prepare guidelines as to the manner in which compliance with this section of the Planning & Development Act 2000 is to be achieved.

In this section the policies and objectives included in the Plan in a strategic form are assessed under the following headings:

1. Human Beings
2. Flora
3. Fauna
4. Soil
5. Water
6. Air
7. Climate
8. Cultural Heritage
9. Interaction between the foregoing

Section II, briefly gives a strategic assessment of the main sections of the Draft Development Plan, which deals with the plan’s policies and objectives, and the resultant environmental ramifications.



Section One

Principles of Sustainability

The strategy options for the future development of the plan were devised having regard to a number of sustainable principles. The recommended strategy is based on 3 different options for addressing future population expansion of the town, namely Concentric Development, Polycentric Development and Sectoral Development. Following an evaluation of the options and consideration of the most appropriate urban design, land use and transportation option, the chosen model, Concentric Development, was formulated around an integrated public transportation hub with the principle aim to consolidate the town as an urban centre.

This selected strategy of concentric development around a public transportation hub has been used to guide development in the Drogheda Draft Development Plan. It has been chosen for the following reasons:

- It protects key environmentally sensitive areas on a strategic level including the Rivers Boyne and Inner Quays Development Area and sites of archaeological importance and sites important for wildlife along the Boyne etc.
- It promotes compact densified urban development, served by good public transport access, providing key locations for employment, enterprise and commercial development.

Development, particularly retail, is encouraged to occur in a sequential manner from the town centre out, so as to protect the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre.

The strategy encourages the development of under utilised and brownfield sites in and around the town centre. The identification of a district centre in the south eastern portion of Drogheda coupled with the provision of a designated retail park in the north western corner of Drogheda recognises the critical population that the town now encompasses and the need to develop suitable and appropriate retail facilities commensurate with the towns population base. It further reduces lost expenditure to the town and promotes sustainable travel patterns for the town's population and ultimately prevents leakage of wealth from the town.

The strategy places future residential development within reasonable walking and cycling distance from the town centre and neighbourhood centres thus, minimising the demand for car generated trips.

The strategy minimises ribbon development and urban sprawl and as a result increases the opportunity to provide public transport, local services such as neighbourhood centres and minimising unnecessary development of greenfield development.

The strategy seeks to protect the countryside and agricultural land bank from urban generated development pressure by advocating higher densities within the Draft Development Plan area.

The Drogheda Draft Development Plan also promotes Drogheda's role as a Primary Development Centre in the Greater Dublin Area as outlined in 'The Strategic Planning Guidelines (1999)' and as a gateway town within the Border Midlands and Western



region. At a regional level this is important in promoting a more balanced economic and population growth-addressing some of the unsustainable growth patterns experienced in the Greater Dublin Area. This is deemed to have a positive environmental and economic impact at a regional scale. The town which lies between two regional authority areas has already reached a critical mass consistent with any of the designated Gateways towns identified under the National Spatial Strategy NSS and indeed is projected to grow further to a level equal to or exceeding that of the individual gateways when they actually reach their NSS year 2020 target population.

Human Beings

The overall strategy will promote and provide for a mix of uses within Drogheda to cater for all aspects of regular daily activities such as living requirements/homes, working, shopping, the need for community facilities such as crèches, schools and recreational facilities. This shall be achieved through the development of a number of neighbourhood centres together with the concentration of retail/commercial development at the town centre in line with the sequential approach to retail development.

The cumulative effect of the policies included in the Plan pertaining to retail, transportation, employment, recreation and community facilities, open space, culture, and residential development inclusive of the creation of a network of neighbourhoods, aim to develop Drogheda as an attractive place in which to live and work. In particular, the open space policy has been formulated having regard to the need to improve the provision of amenity areas in the town through the development of a network of waterfront walks, pocket parks and a major active and passive recreation space, the Town Park. Such provisions have a positive impact on society as they can significantly improve people's quality of life.

Flora and Fauna

The Objectives Map & Archaeology & Natural Heritage map including Views to be Preserved outlines significant stands and individual trees, woodlands and ecologically sensitive sites in Drogheda. The Draft Drogheda Development Plan endeavours to protect these areas where possible and encourage their incorporation into open spaces and amenity area layouts. The Planning Authorities acknowledge that the future development of Drogheda has the potential to lead to some negative environmental impacts resulting in the deterioration and destruction of habitats, i.e. pollution or sediment run off into adjacent streams thereby impacting on flora and fauna. To respond to these potentially damaging connotations, through the ameliorating actions advocated in this Draft Plan, it is anticipated that the realisation of the Strategy upon which this Draft Plan has been developed, will not result in significant adverse environmental impacts being experienced.

Soil

The geology type in the Plan area is comprised of principally shale and limestone foundations of which no special or noteworthy conditions have been noted. With urban development, the soil will be affected, though as the area is not noted for tillage and intensive agriculture, the impact is considered to be minimal.



Water

It is accepted that all future development has the potential to increase the rate of surface water run-off and thus increase the potential for flooding. Surface run-off from urban areas gathers pollution from streets, footpaths and buildings (e.g. rubbish and oil residue from cars) and deposits them in rivers and streams as it journeys back to the water table. The Drogheda Draft Development Plan aims to promote water quality in the rivers and watercourses in the Drogheda in accordance with 'The Water Quality Management Plan' and the 'Tree Rivers Project' both of which have positive connotations for the protection of this valuable resource. It is a policy of this Draft Development Plan to encourage the treatment of storm water run off at its source through storm water retention facilities and other such measures to minimise pollution and maintain the natural rates of run off. This minimises the need for culverts and piped systems. Developments are furthermore required to provide adequate setbacks from streams and watercourses, a number of which have been incorporated into linear park systems.

The Drogheda Draft Development Plan strives to ensure that an appropriate level of water supply is available for both domestic and industrial use. To encourage water conservation, the Plan also promotes the implementation of the Water Conservation Scheme as well as the implementation of the Polluter Pays Principle for non-domestic users.

Air

Higher residential densities (particularly in the town centre and around neighbourhood centres), increased accessibility to public transport, a cycle and pedestrian network and improved provision of local employment, services and facilities can help reduce the need to travel and promote the use of alternative modes of transport to that of the car, thus reducing transport related emissions such as carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides and air particles. The Objectives Map highlights a number of significant tree groups, which will be protected from development. These along with future planting policies will assist in air purification and help achieve the carbon balance.

Climate

The zoning of lands for most purposes unavoidable results in increased air pollution, which in turn contributes, albeit insignificantly, to global climate change. More intensive development areas, particularly associated with some areas of higher density development are likely to affect the microclimate of the sites within which they are situated. This however, will be offset by the advantages of higher densities. In considering the policies and objectives for this plan significant regard was given to the requirements of the Environmental Protection Agency and EU policy pertaining to same.

Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage encompasses the combined disciplines of archaeology, architecture, urban design, monuments and decorative features. It enables links to be made with the past, which enrich the understanding of culture and places current times in an historical context. Chapters 1 & 11 Built Heritage of the Draft Development Plan addresses in detail the historic development of the town, identifies an architectural conservation area, and provides policies for the protection and enhancement of the area's heritage - architectural



and archaeological. Key archaeological zones and sites are also identified on the Archaeological & Natural Heritage Map, including Views to be Preserved and listed in Appendix II. A Record of Protected Structures can also be found in Appendix I. The policies contained in Chapter 11 & Architectural Conservation Areas booklet will ensure that the architectural and cultural heritage of Drogheda is preserved and protected for the future generations of the town to appreciate and enjoy.

Interaction of the Foregoing

Many of the elements listed above are inter-linked and in some cases are reliant on each other. No significant and likely impacts have been identified.

Chapters 13 Development Control Parameters & 14 Land use Zoning: Assessed From a Strategic Environmental Impact:

Future Land Use Structure

These chapters aim to enhance the image of the town and the quality of life of its inhabitants. In improving the attractiveness of the physical environment, the economic and social environment will be enhanced, possibly generating inward investment, with positive benefits in terms of employment.

Economic Development

The cumulative effects of the policies in these chapters aim to provide sustainable economic development and local employment in the long term. The industrial land use policy is integral to the overall development strategy for the town and has been promoted in areas of minimum environmental cost.

Retail

A retail strategy for Drogheda inclusive of town centre improvements was formulated upon the basis of the 'County Louth Retail Strategy'. In general, the sequential approach is encouraged favouring town centre and edge of centre sites over out of town greenfield sites. Forecasts are included regarding the future retail requirements of Drogheda and safeguards are also put in place to ensure that future retail development and growth is managed appropriately and that expansion of Drogheda's retail core is not realised at the expense of established retailers.



Housing

Policies in this section echo the requirements of the overall development strategy for the town as they encourage higher densities adjacent to town centre, neighbourhood centres and adjacent to proposed transportation nodes. The Draft Development Plan ensures that there is significant land to cater for market needs, projected population increases and the accommodation of any future growth associated with the designation of Drogheda as a Primary Development Centre. The Draft Development Plan also includes a Housing Strategy element, aiming to reduce the incidence of social segregation and promote social and affordable housing thus contributing to an overall positive impact on the environment-socially, physically and economically.

Arts, Culture and Community Facilities

Chapter 12 seeks to expand the arts and culture in Drogheda through the promotion and development of the role of arts within the town. It demonstrates Drogheda Town Council's belief in the importance of arts to individuals and to the community and its provision as an important element of Local Governments contribution to the community.

Recreation and Amenity

The Draft Development Plan aims to expand on the existing provision of recreational and amenity facilities in Drogheda through the identification of a number of areas to be developed for such purposes. A number of areas will be zoned for open space purposes in order to protect this functional amenity space. These areas provide important opportunities for recreation but also have visual and ecological qualities. It is considered desirable to protect and enhance these areas and to retain public access where possible.

Transportation

A land use Transportation study is currently being prepared for Drogheda, which will provide an integrated land use, transportation and urban design framework for the future development of Drogheda and its environs for the next twenty – thirty years or more. The transportation policy will aim to reflect the general policy of reducing the number of car generated trips through integrating land use and transportation, facilitating infrastructure and encouraging alternative modes of transport such as walking and cycling. It also aims to improve general circulation and transport links to and from the town.

Infrastructure

Chapter 8 – Public Utilities outlines the capacity of the existing water and wastewater treatment facilities in the town, as well as future plans to accommodate the projected growth in population in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive manner. Policies and objectives on waste management and water quality and other issues are included in order to ensure that potentially negative impacts on the environment are minimised. Flood minimisation and attenuation is also a focus in this section of the Draft Development Plan.



Heritage and Conservation

Chapter 11 Built Heritage are mainly concerned with the safeguarding of buildings and features of architectural and archaeological importance registered in the Record of Protected Structures. Policies also ensure that future development is sympathetic to the historic and existing development pattern through the establishment of an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) of the medieval town core. Overall the policies and objectives seek to ensure that modern development sensitively integrates with the past form and enhance the built environment.

Town Centre

The cumulative strength of the policies in Chapter 10 – Town Centre will safeguard the long-term viability and vitality of the town centre. Policies are aimed at improving the visual appearance and public realm of the town centre and to strengthening of the town core, thus safeguarding Drogheda's role as a Primary Development Centre and providing for economic sustainability.

Urban Renewal and Regeneration

The town centre displays some significant areas of under utilised, vacant and brownfield sites in addition to some derelict and vacant buildings. There are also many sites in the vicinity of the town Centre and newly designated Inner Quays Development Area and other backland sites within the central core of the town, which have significant potential for redevelopment and rejuvenation. The Draft Development Plan promotes the appropriate development of these areas, so as to support the existing infrastructure of the town centre and maintain its vibrancy and vitality. This is deemed to be more appropriate and environmentally sustainable than the development of additional greenfield sites.

Conclusions

The Strategic Environmental Assessment outlined above provides an explicit, systematic and iterative review of the Drogheda Draft Development Plan's policies and objectives and their individual and combined impacts on the environment.

The Draft Development Plan policies and objectives are successful in addressing issues concerning the quality of the local environment. Most policies have positive implications for the landscape, the townscape and overall quality of life for the residents and visitors of Drogheda. Policies concerned with a concentrated settlement structure and the provision of alternatives to car-based journeys show awareness to global issues and make vital contributions towards the achievement of transport, energy efficiency and the conservation of natural resources. There are very few policies that show a significant negative impact and those that do were weighed up against alternatives that cause more significant environmental degradation. The policies chosen therefore were the optimum ones.

The overall conclusion to be drawn is that the Drogheda Draft Development Plan provides a balance in terms of resolving likely adverse environmental impacts of development and economic growth, with the need to ensure a good level of protection and safeguarding of the natural landscape and environment.