

Meath County Development Plan (CDP) 2021-2027

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement



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1 SEA Statement for Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

1.1 Introduction

This is the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (the ‘Plan’). The Plan was adopted on the 20 September and is effective from the 3 November 2021. The SEA Statement has been prepared to accompany the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

The main purpose of the SEA Statement is to provide information on the decision-making process; to document how environmental considerations, the views of statutory consultees and other submissions and recommendations of the SEA Environmental Report have been integrated into Plan; the reasons for choosing the Plan in light of other reasonable alternatives; and measures for monitoring significant environmental effects.

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 was also screened for likely significant effects on European Sites listed in the EU Habitats Directive and for Flood Risk, and a Natura Impact Report (NIS) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) accompanied the preparation of the Plan.

1.2 SEA Definition

SEA is a process for evaluating, at the earliest appropriate stage, the environmental quality and consequences of Plans or Programmes (P/Ps). The purpose is to ensure that the environmental consequences of Plans or Programmes are assessed both during their preparation and prior to their adoption. The SEA process also gives specified environmental authorities, interested parties and the general public, an opportunity to comment on the environmental impacts of the proposed Plans or Programmes and to be kept informed during the decision-making process.

1.3 Legislative Context

SEA derives from European Communities Directive 2001/42/EC - *Assessment of Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment*¹ (commonly referred to as the ‘SEA Directive’). Article 1 of the Directive states that:

“The objective of this 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.”

¹ Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

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The SEA Directive has been transposed into national legislation through:

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

Given that the SEA relates to a development plan the latter provisions apply and the requirement to undertake SEA and prepare an environmental report for a draft / new development plan is provided for under Article 13C of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2021.

Article 13(I) requires that after the making of a Development Plan, the planning authority is required to make a Statement available to the public and the competent environmental authorities. The Statement is referred to as an SEA Statement (this report).

1.4 Content of the SEA Statement

This SEA Statement includes the following information:

- Summary of how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan (Section Two):
- Summary of the following elements have been taken into account during the Council's consideration of the draft Development Plan (Section Three):
 - The Environmental Report.
 - Submissions and observations made to the planning authority on the Development Plan and SEA Environmental Report.
 - Any transboundary consultations (*not applicable for this Plan*).
- Reasons for choosing the recommended development scenario, in the light of other reasonable alternatives considered (Section Four); and
- Measures that are to be undertaken to monitor the significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan (Section Five).

1.5 Implications of SEA for the Development Plan

Article 13B(a) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2021 requires that SEA is undertaken for the preparation of Development Plans, as for the Meath County Development Plan, where the population or the target population of the area is 10,000 persons or more.

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The findings of the SEA are expressed in an Environmental Report, which accompanied the Draft Development Plan on public display and which has been updated to take account of submissions received. The SEA Environmental Report has also been updated to take account of changes made to the Draft Development Plan on foot of Material Amendments to the Draft Plan and in the final adoption of the Plan.

The plan-making team of the planning authority and the Elected Representatives of Meath County Council have taken the findings of the SEA output into account during their consideration of the Draft Development Plan, the Material Alterations, and associated motions prior to its adoption.

This Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 was adopted on the 20 September 2021 and this SEA Statement has been prepared to accompany the Plan coming into effect on the 3 November 2021.

2 Environmental Considerations

2.1 Introduction

This section presents a summary of how environmental considerations and consultations have informed the Plan preparation process. Legislation and guidance relating to SEA recommends that the process of plan preparation, SEA, Appropriate Assessment (AA), and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) should be integrated and prepared in an iterative process to facilitate the on-going assessment and evaluation of environmental considerations during the preparation of the Plan.

Environmental considerations were integrated into the preparation of the Plan at all stages through:

- Consultations;
- Consultations with environmental authorities;
- Communication within the Development Plan team of environmental considerations and integration of these considerations into the Draft Development Plan and Final Plan;
- Detailing of the baseline situation and identification and mapping of environmental constraints and sensitivities; and
- Integration of environmental measures into the Plan.

As the Plan developed, environmental considerations were directly considered at a number of key stages in the SEA process as set out in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Outline of the SEA Process

Stage	Description	Status
1. Screening	<p>The requirement to undertake a SEA is mandatory for certain Plan / Programme (P / P). Where SEA is not a mandatory requirement, the P / Ps is subject to a 'Screening process', to consider if it is <i>likely to have significant effects</i> on the environment, and therefore, if SEA is required.</p> <p>In accordance with Article 13A(1) Screening of the Meath County Development Plan is not required as SEA is mandatory requirement based on a target population for the Plan being greater than 10,000 persons.</p>	Completed 
2. Scoping	<p>Preparation of a SEA Scoping Report highlighting that the Environmental Report is required to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ methods of assessment;▪ contents and level of detail in the Plan / Programme;▪ the stage in the Plan or Programme-making process; and▪ the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in the decision-making process in order to avoid duplication of environmental assessment. <p>Scoping provides for consultation with the Environmental Authorities specified in Article 13A(4) of Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2021, and the process allows for incorporation of the views of the environmental authorities within the P / P and the SEA Environmental Report.</p>	Completed 

Stage	Description	Status
3. Environmental Report	<p>Preparation of a systemic identification and evaluation of alternatives and assessment of the <i>likely significant environmental effects</i> of implementing the P / P.</p> <p>The findings of the assessment, which is carried out at various stages in the P / P making (e.g. Draft, Material Amendments etc.), are provided in the SEA Environmental Report in accordance with Article 13E and 13G of Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2021. The output from this stage is an Environmental Report which accompanies the Draft P / P required on public display.</p>	 Completed
4. SEA Statement	<p>Completion / adoption of the Final Plan, taking account of <i>likely significant environmental effects</i>, any submissions or observations received from consultations and integration of mitigation and monitoring measures within the Plan.</p> <p>The Environmental Report is concluded and an SEA Statement is prepared in accordance with Article 13I of Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2021, summarising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan / Programme; ▪ how the environmental report, and any submissions or consultations have been taken into account in the preparation of the Plan / Programme; ▪ the reasons for choosing the Plan / Programme; and ▪ the measures decided for monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementation of the Plan / Programme. 	Current Stage

2.2 SEA Consultation

Three formal opportunities are integrated into the plan-making process for consultation with the Environmental Authorities on SEA:

- Scoping Stage (pre-draft);
- Draft Plan Stage; and
- Proposed Material Alterations to the Draft Plan Stage.

There have also been opportunities for public consultation. Observations and submissions made at each of these stages have been integrated into the preparation of the Plan and the SEA process as set out in Section 3 of this Statement.

2.3 Communication of Environmental Considerations and Integration into the Draft Plan

In accordance with SEA Regulations, the Draft Plan, together with the SEA Environmental Report, Natura Impact Report (NIR) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) were made available to the public and stakeholders for review and for making of observations or submissions.

The SEA Environmental Report included:

- **Baseline** - Information gathered during the SEA Scoping Stage was collated and expanded upon. This included a review of the findings of the consultation submissions received during the pre-draft and Scoping stage.
- **Policies, Plans & Programmes Review** - A review of relevant national and regional policies, plans and programmes was undertaken both to identify the key environmental issues, to ensure that the objectives set out in the Plan meet the requirements of all relevant plans and policies.
- **Strategic Environmental Assessment** - Using the strategic environmental objectives (SEOs), the assessment of the potential significant environmental effects of the Draft Plan (objectives, projects and alternatives to the Plan) was undertaken.
- **Mitigation Measures** - Based on this assessment, and the potential adverse or uncertain environmental impacts, recommendations in relation to mitigation have been proposed.

The Plan has been subject to “Stage 2 AA” as required by Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and a NIR was prepared to accompany the Draft Plan and SEA Environmental Report for Draft Plan on public display. Subsequently the NIR has been updated and finalised in line with the preparation and completion / adoption of the Plan.

The Plan has been subject to a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) in accordance with the requirements of *The Planning System and Flood Risk Assessment - Guidelines for Planning Authorities*². The SFRA addresses the assessment and management of flood risk and surface water in the Plan area and assisted MCC in making an informed strategic land-use planning decisions. The SFRA has also been updated and finalised in line with the preparation and completion / adoption of the Plan.

2.4 Integration of Environmental Measures into the Development Plan

SEA and making of the Plan is an iterative process that takes place over the period of the preparation of the Plan. As such environmental considerations have informed all stages of preparation of the Plan in order to appropriately identify and mitigate potential significant adverse effects arising from implementation of the Plan.

It is noted that it is the Plan considered as a whole, which contributes towards environmental protection and management, and towards sustainable development and that complies with the various legislative requirements. This is identified throughout the SEA documentation. The environmental assessment included

² Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009). *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management. Guidelines for Planning Authorities*.

recommendations for changes to policies and objectives for the mitigation of potential negative environment effects, and for the inclusion of protective environmental policies and objectives within the Plan.

Following consultation with the EPA, the Plan and Environmental Report recognises the EPA publications in relation to ‘The State of the Irish Environment’ and the 5 key environmental policy areas: **Climate, Air, Nature, Water, and Waste and Circular Economy**. The SEA Environmental Report highlights how the policies and objectives of the Plan responds to these key environmental areas.

2.4.1 Mitigation Measures

Article 5 of the *SEA Directive* requires that mitigation measures be proposed for all *significant adverse effects* on the environment as a result of the implementation of the Plan. The SEA is an iterative process prepared in tandem with the formulation of policies and objectives of the Plan. While not always possible to achieve, it is the aim of the process to ensure that sensitive environmental receptors are given adequate and appropriate consideration throughout.

Mitigation measures are measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and, as fully as possible, offset any significant adverse impacts on the environment of implementing the development objectives. Mitigation has taken place throughout the plan-making process.

Mitigation took place through the consideration of alternatives, as environmental considerations communicated to the Planning team allowed them to make an informed choice as to which alternative to put before the Members of the Council. Mitigation also took place in the detailed assessment of the policies and objectives of the Plan and the identification, amendment or drafting of policies and / or objectives required to mitigate any uncertain and / or potentially negative aspects.

3 Environmental Report and Submissions & Observations

3.1 Introduction

This section details how both the SEA Environmental Report and submissions and observations made to the planning authority on the Environmental Report and SEA process have been taken into account during the preparation of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

3.2 SEA Scoping Consultation

Scoping ensures that the SEA process is focused on the relevant environmental issues and examines issues at the appropriate level of detail. Scoping also includes consultation with the Environmental Authorities, and allows for the incorporation of the views of the Environmental Authorities within the Draft Plan and the SEA Environmental Report.

In accordance with *Article 13D of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 as amended*, the SEA Environmental Authorities³ were notified in June 2017, and again in June 2019 (due to a suspension of the process (May 2018 to May 2019) pending finalisation of the Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region), that a submission or observation in relation to the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the SEA Environmental Report could be made to Meath County Council.

Four scoping submissions were received from the Environmental Authorities on the SEA Scoping Report. The submissions provided information on sources of guidance and useful resources and aspects for consideration in the Draft Plan and SEA Environmental Report. Scoping submissions were received from the following:

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- Louth County Council (LCC);
- Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM); and
- Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) under the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment (DCCAE).

A summary of the submissions is outlined in the Table 3.1. These submissions were incorporated within the SEA Environmental Report and informed the preparation of the Draft Plan.

³ The following environmental authorities were notified for the purposes of SEA Scoping: Environmental Protection Agency; Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine; Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment; Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government; Louth County Council; Monaghan County Council; Cavan County Council; Westmeath County Council; Offaly County Council; Kildare County Council; Fingal County Council.

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Table 3.1: SEA Scoping Submissions and Reponses

No.	Stakeholder	Summary of Submission	Comment
1	EPA	<p>Recommended Guidance & Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SEA process guidance and checklists. ▪ Inventory of spatial datasets relevant to SEA. ▪ Topic specific SEA guidance (including '<i>Developing and Assessing Alternatives in SEA</i>', '<i>Integrating Climate Change into SEA</i>' and '<i>Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment</i>'). ▪ EPA SEA Web GIS Tool ▪ EPA WFD Application ▪ EPA AA Geo Tool <p><i>'State of the Environment Report - Ireland's Environment 2016'</i>. Consider the recommendations, key issues and challenges described within this report.</p> <p>Aligning the Plan with the national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as relevant sectoral, regional and local adaptation plans.</p>	<p>Plan-making team to have regard.</p> <p>Guidelines & resources will be considered within the assessment, where appropriate.</p> <p>These aspects will be considered and incorporated into the Plan.</p>
2	Louth County Council (LCC)	No observations on the SEA Scoping report.	N/A
3	Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM)	<p>Legislation, Plans & Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foreshore Act 1933-2011 ▪ Aquaculture Act 1997-2006 ▪ SEA Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006 & Sea Fisheries Regulations ▪ Fisheries Natura Plans & Declarations ▪ National Seafood Operational Programme & National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture 2014-2020 ▪ Food Harvest 2020 ▪ Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth ▪ Shellfish Waters Directive 2006/113/EC ▪ Classified Shellfish Production areas ▪ National Climate Change Adaption Framework <p>Issues for Consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential impacts on the marine environmental quality. ▪ Potential impacts on the microbiological quality of shellfish. ▪ Potential impacts on human health. ▪ Potential impacts on commercially important fish and shellfish stocks and licenced aquaculture sites. ▪ Potential impacts on freshwater aquaculture operations. ▪ Future designations of areas of importance to the aquaculture and fisheries sectors. ▪ Relevant EU and national legislations. <p>Potential Impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Major land-use changes - can impact marine life. ▪ Safe high quality water standards should be met. ▪ Seafood processing sector - requires reliable water supply. ▪ Protect designated shellfish waters. <p>Marine Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Designated shellfish waters. ▪ Classified shellfish production areas. ▪ Marine Institute website. ▪ Marine Strategy Framework Directive. 	<p>Plan-making team to have regard.</p> <p>Legislation, Plans and Policies will be considered within the assessment, where appropriate.</p> <p>These aspects will be considered and incorporated into the Plan.</p>

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No.	Stakeholder	Summary of Submission	Comment
		<p>Consult with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DAFM - policies and plans. ▪ Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA). ▪ Marine Institute - Fisheries & Marine Environment. ▪ BIM (Bord Iascaigh Mhara) - Seafood Development Agency. ▪ Regional & local action groups. 	
4	Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) under Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment (DCCAE)	<p>Geoheritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IGH sites. ▪ County Geological Sites on the Geological Survey Public Data Online Viewer. ▪ Audit for County Meath was carried out in 2007 and later revised in 2009. <p>Groundwater</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Groundwater Programme provides advice and maps about groundwater quality, quantity and distribution. ▪ GSI monitors groundwater nationwide. ▪ Flood Risk Management - need to identify areas for integrated constructed wetlands. ▪ Recommends using the GSI's National Aquifer and Recharge maps on our Map viewer to this end. <p>Geohazards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GSI has information available on past landslides, for viewing on our website and as a layer on our Map Viewer. ▪ Landslide Susceptibility Mapping and GW Flood Groundwater Flooding. <p>Geothermal Energy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ireland has widespread shallow geothermal resources for small and medium-scale heating applications, which can be explored online through GSI's Geothermal Suitability maps for both domestic and commercial use. <p>Natural Resources (Minerals / Aggregates)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GSI highlights the consideration of mineral resources and potential resources as a material asset which should be explicitly recognised within the environmental assessment process. ▪ Government of Ireland "<i>Building Ireland 2040</i>" plan, understanding of aggregate source and supply will be important. ▪ GSI encourage reference to aggregate quality and quantity in the Plan. Meath has one of the largest Zinc mines in Europe and it contributes significantly to the local economy of Navan, the role of mining and natural resource extraction should be included. ▪ GSI provides data, maps, interpretations and advice on matters related to minerals, their use and their development in our Minerals section of the website. <p>Other Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GSI is the national earth science agency and has datasets on Bedrock Geology, Quaternary Geology, Geological Heritage Sites, Mineral deposits, Groundwater Resources and the Irish Seabed. 	<p>Plan-making team to have regard.</p> <p>Resources will be considered within the assessment, where appropriate.</p> <p>These aspects will be considered and incorporated into the Plan.</p>

3.3 Pre-Draft Stage Consultations

A pre-draft (of the Plan) consultation stage was held from 14 December 2016 until 17 February 2017. During this time, a *Strategic Issues Paper* was published and six consultation events were held around the County. These consultations aimed to encourage discussion before a draft of the new Plan is prepared and to stimulate debate around the important strategic planning issues that the Plan should address.

The consultation comprised the following elements:

- Public Information Evenings at Kells, Ashbourne, Trim, Duleek, Dunshaughlin and Navan.
- Stakeholder Meetings with Fingal County Council, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Department of Education and Skills, Louth Meath Education Board, Regional Assembly, Inland Fisheries, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Department of Housing Planning Community and Local Government, Irish Water and the National Transport Authority.
- Publication of commencement or review of Plan in the Meath Chronicle and the Drogheda Independent.
- A dedicated website was set up for the review of the new Meath County Development Plan www.countydevelopmnetplanreview.meath.ie

A total of 282 no. submissions were received from the public and statutory bodies in relation to the Plan at that time. These submissions were summarised in the Chief Executive's Report and informed this scoping process. This stage was subject to 383 Notices of Motion. The issues raised during this stage informed the preparation of the Draft Plan and SEA Environmental Report.

3.4 Draft Plan Consultation

The Draft Plan consultation stage was undertaken from 18 December 2019 until 06 March 2020. The Draft Plan was accompanied by the SEA Environmental Report, assessed reasonable alternatives for the Plan; assessed the environmental impact of the Plan; and provided mitigation and a structure for proposed monitoring of the Plan. The Draft Plan was also accompanied by the Natura Impact Report (NIR) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Environmental Report. Some 2542 submissions were received during this Draft Plan consultation period, with three submissions subsequently withdrawn. This stage was subject to 299 Notices of Motion. The extent and detail of the submissions and observations received highlighted the significant level of public interest in the plan-making and assessment process.

3.5 Proposed Material Alterations Consultations

Consultation on the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 together with associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA)

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Determinations and Reports was carried out for a period of 4 weeks from 31 May 2021 to 29 June 2021 inclusive.

A total of 308 no. submissions were received within the consultation period.

3.6 Adoption of the Plan

Further modifications on the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Plan were proposed by the Elected Representatives and these were screened for SEA. The new Plan was adopted by the Elected Representatives on the 20 September 2021.

The Plan as adopted includes nine proposed material amendments, which the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) and the Chief Executive of Meath County Council had recommended not including in the Plan. It is noted that the OPR has written to the Minister for Local Government and Planning (2 November 2021) seeking a direction to omit the following Material Amendment zonings from the adopted Plan, three of which the SEA Screening had also recommended not including in the Plan:

- Athboy MA 03;
- Moynalty MA 01;
- Slane MA 04;
- Ashbourne MA08; and
- East Meath MA05.

The draft Direction is also seeking to amend four (4) Material Amendment zonings to exclude part of the lands which are located within flood zones. The SEA Screening also recommended same;

- Dunshaughlin MA02 (amend zoning objective to rezone flood zone to RA Rural rea);
- Summerhill MA02 (amend zoning objective to rezone flood zone to RA Rural area);
- Trim MA06 (amend zoning objective to rezone flood zone to RA Rural area); and
- Ratoath MA03 (amend zoning objective to rezone flood zone to F1 Open Space).

4 Consideration of Alternatives and the Development Plan

4.1 Introduction

One of the critical roles of the SEA was to facilitate an evaluation of the likely environmental consequences of a range of alternative scenarios for accommodating future growth in County Meath as a result of the Development Plan. Article 5 of the SEA Directive requires the consideration of reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme and the significant environmental effects of the alternatives proposed.

In accordance with SEA guidelines the alternatives put forward should be reasonable, realistic and capable of implementation. They should also be in line with the appropriate strategic level at which the plan will be implemented within the national planning hierarchy.

The alternatives strategies considered are broadly defined as:

- Scenario 1: *Demand-led Growth (County-wide - Urban and Rural)*.
- Scenario 2: *Centred Development Strategy (Settlements)*.
- Scenario 3: *Structured Development Strategy (Strong Urban Centres with Rural Protection)*.

4.2 Description of Alternative Plan Scenarios

4.2.1 Alternatives Scenario 1: Demand-led Growth (County-wide - Urban & Rural)

This scenario is one which places limited restrictions on development throughout County. The development of critical mass in certain locations is not taken into consideration and no specific targets or limitations on growth are set in the settlement or core strategies of the Plan. This strategy would still require careful consideration of the environmental impacts of development, either individually or cumulatively.

In order to develop under this scenario, the Planning Authority would allow for development to proceed in a demand-led manner at any given urban or rural location within its functional area. This scenario would likely result in increased development pressure both on the fringes of the towns and settlements as well as in the open countryside. Consequently development pressure could take place in poorly or insufficiently serviced areas, particularly in the areas close to the county border with Dublin.

The environmental consequences of this alternative are potentially severe. Aspects of the environment such as surface water and groundwater quality, ecology, cultural heritage and landscape could be negatively affected. The dispersal of rural housing and other non-agriculture related development in the countryside would lead to a deterioration in ground water quality through the proliferation of septic tanks; surface water quality would be affected through contaminated ground water and its implications on river base flows; habitats and areas of natural interest would be lost or fragmented; archaeology would be impacted through

insensitive design and location of development; and finally a deterioration in landscape quality would inevitably ensue especially in the more vulnerable parts of the County.

In summary this '*Dispersed Growth around Existing Settlements*' approach would have the following results:

- A demand led highly responsive development approach;
- Domination of market forces resulting in piecemeal development;
- No clearly definable settlement strategy;
- Increased traffic congestion and disruption to existing residents in settlements;
- Increased pressure on infrastructural services;
- A deterioration in the rural landscape and natural environment; and
- Challenges for environmental protection, leading to a sub-standard environmental quality.

4.2.2 Alternatives Scenario 2: Centred Development Strategy (Settlements)

The second alternative '*Centred Development Strategy*' comprises a strong yet flexible approach to development, with development focused equally on all settlements supported by strongly protected rural areas.

This alternative would be based around the planned growth and a sustainable settlement structure based on the Core Strategy which creates equal development opportunity across all settlements in the county. In this scenario the council would facilitate development equally in all settlements in the county irrespective of their hierarchy or their current absorption capacity. Strong protection would be afforded to the rural environment preventing further rural housing.

This development scenario would have negative impacts on the viability of smaller settlements and rural areas within Meath. Such areas would experience a decline in population and as a consequence rural based enterprise would be affected.

Under this scenario the following results are envisaged:

- Equal growth opportunity across all Settlements;
- Prohibition against further rural development - which could lead to a decline in rural populations;
- Enhanced protection for landscape and cultural heritage (outside of settlements);
- Increased pressure on smaller settlements in terms of provision of adequate social and services infrastructure; and
- Increased challenges for sustainable transport.

4.2.3 Alternatives Scenario 3: Structured Development Strategy (Strong Urban Centres with Rural Protection)

The third alternative Structured Development Strategy focuses on a balanced approach to building strong urban centres and generating critical mass in the key settlements. These larger towns would act as focal points for their rural catchments. Development outside of these key centres would be subjected to a balanced growth and a robust rural protection policy.

Under this scenario the following results are envisaged:

- Lead to a balanced approach to future development;
- Consistent with NPF and RSES;
- Key areas for growth are identified and promoted;
- Supports sustainable delivery of services and transport options;
- Provides for a high level of environmental protection across all areas; and
- Rural populations would be supported.

4.3 Assessment of Alternative Plan Scenarios

This section provides a comparative evaluation and assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing available alternatives in Table 4.1. The process sought to understand whether each alternative was likely to improve (positive impact), conflict (negative impact) with, or have a neutral interaction (neutral impact) with the receiving environment.

Alternative 1 Demand-led Growth which involves minimal intervention would likely result in negative impacts across all environmental receptors throughout the county. The option of developing a pattern of dispersed demand or market-led growth would see development in all areas, presenting significant challenges for provision of required infrastructure, sustainable land use and transport and for environmental protection. This option would not allow for orderly and sustainable development and is therefore not considered as a desirable option for the Plan.

Alternative 2 Centred Development Strategy positively promotes development in settlements. However, while this approach would be appropriate in larger settlements, it would present challenges for smaller settlements in meeting the demand for provision of required social and services infrastructure and sustainable transport. Bias against all rural development would also have a negative effect for those who require a rural location (e.g. agriculture) and would have a negative impact on social and economic development generally.

Alternative 3 Structured Development Strategy represents a balanced recognition of established patterns of development in the county but with regard to the requirements of the NPF and RSES. The approach provides

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the need for rural protection while allowing an appropriate level of growth within settlements. This approach works with existing and planned delivery of services infrastructure and presents the best option towards sustainable transport.

4.3.1 Preferred Option

Following the above evaluation and assessment, the preferred strategic alternative for the approach to the Plan is **Alternative 3: Structured Development Strategy**. This is based on the following:

- consistency with the requirements of the NPF and RSES;
- promotes rural protection while allowing an appropriate level of growth within settlements; and
- promotes sustainable delivery of services, infrastructure and transport options.

Alternative 3 was selected as the preferred scenario with the least potential for adverse environmental effects, and as such formed the basis of the preparation of the Meath Plan 2021-2027.

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Table 4.1: Assessment Matrix of Alternative Scenarios against Environmental Receptors

Alternative	Biodiversity (Flora & Fauna)	Population & Human Health	Soils & Geology	Water Quality			Air Quality	Climate Change	Noise	Material Assets			Cultural Heritage	Landscape & Visual
	Surface Water	Groundwater	Flooding				Water Supply	Wastewater Treatment	Waste Management	Transport				
Alternative 1: Demand-led Growth														
Alternative 2: Centred Development Strategy	Positive		Positive		Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive					Positive
Alternative 3: Structured Development Strategy	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative	Negative	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative	Positive

Key:

Positive	Positive
Negative	Negative

5 Monitoring Measures and Reporting

5.1 Introduction

In accordance with Article 10 of the SEA Directive, monitoring must be carried out of the significant environmental effects directly related to the implementation of the Plan “*in order to, inter alia, identify at an early stage unforeseen adverse effects and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial action.*” Departmental Guidelines on SEA⁴ recommends that monitoring does not necessarily require new research activity, but that existing sources of information can be used and the task of data collection can be shared.

Monitoring enables, at an early stage, the identification of unforeseen adverse effects and the undertaking of appropriate remedial action. In addition to this, monitoring can also play an important role in assessing whether the Development Plan is achieving its environmental objectives and targets - measures which the Plan can help work towards - whether these need to be re-examined and whether the proposed mitigation measures are being implemented.

5.2 Monitoring Indicators and Targets

Monitoring is based around indicators which allow quantitative measures of trends and progress over time relating to the Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEO) identified in the SEA Environmental Report and used in the assessment. Each indicator to be monitored is accompanied by the target(s) which were identified with regard to the relevant strategic actions.

Table 5.1 shows the targets which have been selected for monitoring the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan, if unmitigated. The monitoring programme may be updated to deal with specific environmental issues - including unforeseen effects - as they arise. Such issues may be identified by MCC or identified to the MCC by other agencies.

5.3 Sources and Frequency

Measurements for indicators generally come from existing monitoring sources. Existing monitoring sources include those maintained by Meath County Council and the relevant authorities e.g. Government Departments, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

It is envisaged that reporting on environmental monitoring will at two year intervals.

⁴ Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment Guidelines for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities, 2004.

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Table 5.1: Environmental Monitoring Programme

Objective	Indicators	Targets	Data Sources, Responsibility and Frequency
Biodiversity (Flora & Fauna) (B)			
<p>Preserve, protect, maintain and where appropriate, restore the terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity, of international, EU and nationally designated sites, protected species and habitats.</p> <p>Maintain and where appropriate, enhance the biodiversity value of local designated and non-designated ecological and heritage areas, which function as stepping stones for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.</p> <p>Enhance biodiversity in line with the National Biodiversity Strategy and its targets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Condition of European Sites ▪ Changes in number and extent of Protected Sites. ▪ Number of sites containing rare or threatened species. ▪ Number of rare or threatened species. ▪ Incidences of major fish kills. ▪ Achievement of the Objectives of Biodiversity Plans. ▪ Net area of new green infrastructure established. ▪ Invasive species control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ That biodiversity is integrated into all decision-making across the Plan. ▪ Submission of Screening Report or Natura Impact Statement for proposed developments with planning applications in / and / or near European Sites. ▪ No loss of protected habitats and species during the lifetime of the Plan. ▪ Prevent the introduction or spread of invasive or alien species. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht report of the implementation of the measures contained in the Habitats Directive - as required by Article 17 of the Directive (2 years). ▪ Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht National Monitoring Report for the Birds Directive under Article 12 (2 years). ▪ MCC monitoring of preparation of local land use plans (2 years). ▪ MCC monitoring of likely significant environmental effects of grants of permission (2 years). ▪ Consultations with the NPWS (2 years). ▪ Consultation with Inland Fisheries (every 2 years)
Population and Human Health (PHH)			
<p>Provide high quality residential, community, working and recreational environments with access to sustainable transport options.</p> <p>Protect human health and well-being from environment-related pressures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in new public open space / sport facilities ▪ Number of mobility statements submitted with applications. ▪ Changes in modal shift to public transport. ▪ Changes in air quality monitoring. ▪ Changes in water quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in the number of green spaces and amenities available to the public. ▪ Improved trends in quality of life related to these matters. ▪ No significant deterioration in human health as a result of environmental factors. ▪ Increase the number of active travel routes available to the population. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MCC review of progress on implementing Plan objectives (every 2 years). ▪ Consultations with the Health Service Executive (every 2 years). ▪ Consultations with the EPA (every 2 years). ▪ Consultations with Department of Transport & Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (every 2 years). ▪ CSO data (as updated).

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Objective	Indicators	Targets	Data Sources, Responsibility and Frequency
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MCC monitoring of preparation of local land use plans (every two years).
Soils and Geology (SG)			
Safeguard sensitive soil, resources and geological heritage sites. Promote the sustainable use of infill and brownfield sites over the use of greenfield within the County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rates of re-use / recycling of construction waste. ▪ Number / severity of recorded soil-based pollution incidences. ▪ Area of land lost through greenfield development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce the use of greenfield land by encouraging the reuse of brownfield sites. ▪ Achieve target for growth on infill as per NPF. ▪ Ensure sustainable extraction of non-renewable sand, gravel and rock deposits and the reuse and recycling of construction and demolition waste. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consultations with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). ▪ MCC monitoring of likely significant environmental effects of grants of permission (every 2 years). ▪ Consultations with Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (every 2 years).
Water Quality (W)			
Protect and where necessary improve and maintain water quality and the management of watercourses and groundwater in compliance with the requirements of the WFD objectives and measures. Avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding and areas that are vulnerable to current and future erosion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achievement of the objectives of the River Basin Management Plans. ▪ Percentage increase in the overall quality of surface waters. ▪ Amount of new developments within flood plains. ▪ Annual costs of damage related to flood events. ▪ Compliance with discharge parameters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not to permit development where it would result in a WWTP exceeding the terms of its discharge license. ▪ Encourage future population growth in areas served by Urban WWTP and public water supplies. ▪ All waters within the plan area to achieve the requirements of the WFD and the relevant River Basin Management Plan by 2027. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EPA Monitoring Programme for WFD compliance (as updated). ▪ EPA Remedial action list (as updated). ▪ Consultations with Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (every 2 years). ▪ MCC monitoring of likely significant environmental effects of grants of permission (every two years).
Air Quality and Noise (AN)			
To avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment as a whole resulting from emissions to air from all sectors with particular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traffic, Transport and Vehicular survey data. ▪ Measurable reductions in concentrations of air pollutants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide for increased use of public transport. ▪ Increase number of cycle lanes and pedestrian routes in the plan area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CSO data (as updated). ▪ Data from the National Travel Survey (as updated). ▪ EPA Air Quality Monitoring (as updated).

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Objective	Indicators	Targets	Data Sources, Responsibility and Frequency
<p>reference to emissions from transport, residential heating, industry and agriculture.</p> <p>Minimise travel related emissions and encourage a modal change from car to more sustainable forms of transport.</p> <p>Minimise noise emissions associated with traffic and transport and other noise and wind related industry etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compliance with national air quality standards. ▪ Measures take to improve air quality / noise reduction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve ambient air quality trends, particularly in relation to transport-related emissions of NOx and particulate matter through reduction of private vehicle usage. ▪ An increase in the percentage of the population travelling to work or school by public transport or non-mechanical means. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consultations with Department of Transport & Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (every 2 years). ▪ Consultations with Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (every 2 years). ▪ MCC monitoring of likely significant environmental effects of grants of permission (every 2 years).
Climate Change (CC)			
<p>Minimise contribution to Climate Change by adopting mitigation and adaptation measures.</p> <p>Integrate sustainable design solutions into the County's infrastructure (e.g. energy efficient buildings; green infrastructure).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rates of energy / renewable energy consumption. ▪ Reduction in GHG emissions. ▪ Percentage of new housing developments within specified distance to transport hubs. ▪ Increase in renewable energy developments – both strategic and micro-production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achieve transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. ▪ Increase in the proportion of people resident in the County reporting regular cycling / walking to school and work above 2016 CSO figures. ▪ Increase in modal shift from private fossil fuel-based car to public transport compared to 2016 levels. ▪ Contribute towards the target of aggregate reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions of at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EPA Annual National Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory reporting (every 2 years). ▪ Consultations with Climate Action Regional Office (every 2 years). ▪ Consultations with Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (every 2 years). ▪ CSO data Consultations (as available). ▪ MCC monitoring of likely significant environmental effects of grants of permission (every 2 years).

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Objective	Indicators	Targets	Data Sources, Responsibility and Frequency
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To promote reduced energy consumption and support the uptake of renewable options and a move away from solid fuels for residential heating. 	
Cultural Heritage (CH)			
Protect places, features, buildings and landscapes of cultural, archaeological and/or architectural heritage from impact as a result of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of recorded features lost. ▪ Condition of ACAs. ▪ Number of protected structures impacted by new development. ▪ Number of additions and deletions to the RPS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No permitted development which involves loss of cultural heritage, including protected structures, archaeological sites, Architectural Conservations Areas and landscape features. ▪ To increase the number of uninhabited and derelict structures that are restored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MCC monitoring of likely significant environmental effects of grants of permission (every 2 years). ▪ Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (every 2 years).
Landscape & Visual (LV)			
Protect and maintain the special qualities of the landscape character, especially with regard to areas of high landscape sensitivity and value.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of developments permitted within landscapes of exceptional value and high sensitivity as per the LCA. ▪ Number of views or prospects impacted by new development. ▪ Number of recommendations of LCA for County Meath implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure no significant disruption of significant natural or historic / cultural landscapes and features through objectives of the County Development Plan. ▪ Ensure that proposed development does not detract from the visual amenity of protected views. ▪ Implement in full the recommendations of the Landscape Character Assessment for County Meath. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MCC monitoring of likely significant environmental effects of grants of permission (every 2 years).
Material Assets (MA)			
Make best use of existing infrastructure, promote the sustainable development of new infrastructure and protect existing assets, to meet the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tonnage of waste produced and recycled. ▪ Range and extent of recycling facilities and services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction in the quantities of waste sent to landfill. Increase in the quantities of waste sent for recycling. ▪ Compliance with Regional Waste Management Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MCC monitoring of likely significant environmental effects of grants of permission (every 2 years). ▪ CSO data (as updated). ▪ Consultations with Irish Water.

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Objective	Indicators	Targets	Data Sources, Responsibility and Frequency
needs of the county and South Dublin's population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Total area of prime agricultural land developed as per the Development Plan process. ▪ Ratio of brownfield site development to greenfield sites. ▪ Percentage of unaccounted water loss. ▪ Compliance with discharge limits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvements to existing water and wastewater infrastructure. ▪ An increase in provision of cycle lanes and pedestrian routes. ▪ Increase re-use of brownfield sites for development in preference to greenfield sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in conjunction with regional local authorities (every 2 years). ▪ Consultations with Regional Waste Authority (every 2 years). Consultations with Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (every 2 years). ▪ MCC monitoring of likely significant environmental effects of grants of permission (every 2 years).

5.4 Reporting and Remedial Action

Meath County Council is responsible for monitoring and the preparation of monitoring evaluation report(s), the publication of these reports and, if necessary, the carrying out of corrective action. The Chief Executive's (CE's) Report on the implementation of the Development Plan, which must be carried out within two years of the making of the Plan, will include detail on the monitoring of the indicators.

The SEA Guidelines state that monitoring must be linked to earlier stages in the SEA process, in particular to the environmental objectives and issues identified during the preparation of the Environmental Report. It is proposed to base monitoring on a series of indicators which measure changes in the environment, especially changes which are critical in terms of environmental quality, for example water or air pollution levels.

The indicators aim to simplify complex interrelationships and provide information about environmental issues which is easy to understand. A list of environmental targets is provided in Table 5.1. The targets are based on the Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) presented in Chapter 6 of the SEA Environmental Report. While considerable environmental data is directly available to the MCC, other sources of information may need to be accessed to provide a comprehensive view of the impact of the Plan. The sources of information are also identified in Table 5.1.

Environmental indicator assessment during monitoring can show positive / neutral impacts or negative impacts on the environment. Where an indicator value highlights a positive / neutral impact on the environment, it is likely that the objectives of the Plan are well-defined with regard to the environment. Conversely where the objectives of the Plan have a negative impact on the environment, it may be necessary to review the objectives of the Plan or to take some other form of intervention or remedial action. For example, if an objective is having a significant adverse impact, a variation to address the issue may be considered during the lifetime of the Plan.

The Chief Executive's Report on monitoring of the implementation of the Development Plan will include a review of the indicators and these may be amended or updated as required during the Plan period.

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