



# Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment

**Vision Statement:** To ensure that the implementation of the various policies, objectives, projects and actions embedded in the County Development Plan will have no likely significant effect on the environment nor will they adversely effect the integrity of any Natura 2000 site.

# 10.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

## 10.1.1 What is SEA

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a statutory process, involving the systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the new County Development Plan before a final decision has been made to adopt it. It is carried out in parallel to the County Development Plan making process.

Environmental assessment is a procedure that seeks to ensure that the environmental implications of decisions are taken into account before the decisions are made. Environmental Impact Assessment, or EIA, is generally used for describing the process of environmental assessment which is limited to individual projects such as waste incinerators, housing developments or roads while Strategic Environmental Assessment, or SEA, is the term which has been given to the environmental assessment of Plans, and other strategic actions, which help influence and frame what kind of individual projects eventually take place.

SEA is a valuable tool that can:

- Influence decision-making at each stage in the County Development Plan review process.
- Improve the overall environmental sustainability of the new Plan.
- Raise awareness of the potential environmental consequences of its implementation so that the consequences may be mitigated or avoided altogether.
- Increase public participation by giving the public and other interested parties an opportunity to comment and to be kept informed.

The SEA Directive requires that reasonable alternatives, taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the Plan or programme, are identified, described and evaluated for their likely significant effects on the environment. Taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the County Development Plan, a limited number of alternative scenarios were formulated for comparative assessment through the SEA process.



## 10.1.2 Policy Context

The assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment is required by Directive 2001/42/EEC of the European Parliament and Council of 27th June 2001 (commonly known as the SEA Directive). The SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law by the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations (S.I. 436 of 2004) as amended by (S.I. 201 of 2011).

In addition, the Department of the Environment and Local Government Circular (PSSP 6/2011) 'Further Transposition of the EU Directive 2001/41/EC on SEA' outlines the updated requirements as a result of the 2011 Regulations.

## 10.1.3 SEA Process

As a result of the above legislation, certain plans and programmes which are prepared by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council - including County Development Plans - are required to undergo SEA. An SEA was previously carried out on the existing 2010-2016 Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Development Plan and that Plan already contains a robust, strong set of policies relating to the protection of the environment. There is an opportunity in the new Plan to further develop and strengthen the environmental strategy for the County through the SEA process. There is also an opportunity to allow the existing knowledge inform the preparation of the SEA and consequently the new County Development Plan. SEA should function as an iterative process constantly feeding into and informing the County Development Plan making process with the end product being a robust set of environmental policies and objectives.

The findings of the SEA are expressed in the SEA Environmental Report submitted to the Elected Members alongside this County Development Plan. The Elected Members took into account the SEA Environmental Report before the adoption of the Plan. The SEA Environmental Report, Non Technical Summary

When the Plan is adopted an SEA statement must be made public, summarising, inter alia: how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan, and the reasons for choosing the Plan as adopted over other alternatives detailed in the SEA Environmental Report.

The SEA Environmental Report, and opinions expressed by the Environmental Authorities and/or the public, were taken into account during the preparation of the Plan before its adoption. Once the submissions were reviewed, a decision was made on whether any of the predictions regarding significant environmental effects needed to be revised, and whether any of the proposed policies and objectives required amendment.

The required contents of an Environmental Report are set out in Appendix 2B of the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations, 2004 and include:

- The contents and main objectives of the Plan and an assessment of alternatives.
- Environmental baseline data detailing the current state of the environment.
- The significant environmental issues and vulnerabilities facing the County.
- Environmental Protection Objectives.
- The likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the Plan (based on an assessment of the policies against whether or not they are likely to meet our environmental protection objectives).
- Measures to prevent or reduce any significant adverse effects.
- Measures for monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan, including appropriate indicators to be used.
- A non-technical summary.

## 10.1.4 Monitoring and Review

The SEA Directive requires that the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes be monitored. The SEA Environmental Report puts forward proposals for monitoring the County Development Plan, which will be adopted alongside the Plan. Monitoring enables, at an early stage, the identification of unforeseen adverse effects and the undertaking of appropriate remedial action. In addition, monitoring can also play an important role in assessing whether the Plan is achieving its environmental objectives and targets, whether these need to be re-examined and whether the proposed mitigation measures are being implemented and are effective.

Monitoring is based around the indicators which were chosen earlier in the process. These indicators allow for quantitative measurement of trends and progress over time relating to the Strategic Environmental Objectives used in the evaluation.

## 10.2 Appropriate Assessment (AA)

### 10.2.1 What is AA

The EU Directive on Habitats (92/43/EEC) aims to create a network of protected wildlife sites in Europe through the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) - collectively known as Natura 2000 sites. It is a requirement of the Directive and legislation to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (Natura Impact Report) on any plan or project that is likely to have a significant effect on the conservation status of a site. There is a statutory requirement for the County Development Plan to be screened to ascertain whether it has any significant impact on any Natura 2000 site.

### 10.2.2 Policy Context

The EU Directive on Habitats (92/43/EEC) as transposed into Irish law through the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011) requires the assessment as to whether the implementation of a plan is likely to have significant effects on any Natura 2000 site(s).

### 10.2.3 AA Process

The completion of the AA process can involve four interlinked stages, which are set out as follows:

- Stage 1: Screening for AA.
- Stage 2: AA.
- Stage 3: Alternative Solutions.

- Stage 4: Imperative Reasons for Overriding Public Interest (IROPI).

An important aspect of the AA process is that the outcome at each successive stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required. The results at each stage must be documented and recorded carefully so there is full traceability and transparency of the decisions made. Further details in terms of what each stage encapsulates can be found in 'Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) 2010).

It should be noted that whilst the AA is a statutorily separate process to the SEA, it is, in fact, a parallel process and as such the outcomes of the AA fed into and informed the SEA process outlined above.

### 10.2.4 Monitoring and Review

While there is at present no explicit requirement for monitoring the ongoing impact of the implementation of a County Development Plan on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites, it is best practice to do so. This may include a review of what has arisen in terms of impacts in the life of the preceding plan, e.g. deterioration or loss of habitats or species in a SAC or SPA, as a consequence of development and altered land use, increase in population, encroachment, disturbance, etc.



