

Section 6 Description of Alternatives

6.1 Introduction

As per the requirements of the SEA Directive, this SEA considers reasonable alternatives for the County Development Plan taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the Plan.

This section identifies and describes three different alternatives.

The alternatives are evaluated in Section 7 resulting in the identification of potential effects and informing the selection of a preferred alternative for the Plan. The policies and objectives which are required to realise the preferred alternative are evaluated in Section 8.

6.2 Rational

The following summarises a series of 'Scenarios' which describe alternative visions of how the future development of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown could occur. These scenarios were identified early in the Plan-preparation/SEA process and developed further with various iterations passing to and from the Planning and SEA teams.

The RPGs provide for a further allocation from 2016-2022 of c. 19,850 units. This equates to a housing target of c. 3,300 residential units per annum over the six year period to 2022. Each alternative accounts for the required provision of housing and, to varying extents, for the delivery of services such as drainage and water supply. They also take account of relevant non-residential requirements, including retail cores and employment as well as recreation and, to varying extents, green corridors and sustainable mobility.

The alternatives seek to respond to the relevant National/Regional planning strategies including the National Spatial Strategy, the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) and the RPGs Retail Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2008-2016 and follow on from a number of strategies carried out within the County including the Housing Strategy and Land Availability studies.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown sustains an important network of green corridors that is of ecological importance and is also attractive to people for lifestyle choices and recreation. This network of green infrastructure has a range of environmental sensitivities that require careful consideration on a strategic level.

The alternatives provide the basis for the comparative evaluation of the likely environmental effects of each plan, which in turn serves the purpose of identifying which features of plans and policies are likely to be sensitive or robust over the widest range of circumstances. For the purpose of this assessment no particular alternative is preferred over the other, indeed the chosen strategy combines elements from each alternative considered.

6.3 Alternative Descriptions

6.3.1 Scenario A

Restructuring the Current Housing Pattern

Scenario A includes some 'densification' by restructuring the utilisation of current housing stock as well as the provision of new higher density units on extensive and smaller 'pocket' greenfield sites. This aims to make the current housing stock use land and services more efficiently by increasing the occupancy of units. The approach seeks to influence and manage population densities in existing units through incentives to increase household occupancy in the County therefore reducing the need for housing growth. According to the 2011 census, 23% of the current housing stock is occupied by one inhabitant; often these units have the capacity to facilitate a greater number of inhabitants. The Housing Agency forecast that by 2018 in the Dublin Region that 57% of all households are likely to be for one and two person households.

Scenario A would facilitate opportunities to rehouse the population within the planned higher density areas of the County [such as Cherrywood] as well as by using incentives e.g. such as encouraging small apartment

buildings within or near mature residential enclaves, or more suitable types of 'empty-nester' developments, thus freeing up other existing underutilised housing stock with the capacity for higher population density. The policy would aim to achieve one quarter of new housing through incentives to facilitate densification of existing areas combined with achieving the remainder in greenfield areas such as Cherrywood.

The scenario would focus on urban hubs within the County and along existing or planned public transport corridors. Priorities would be placed on protecting the residential amenity and character of established residential areas by providing opportunities to rehouse the current population in the same community. This would ensure a sustainable mix of population and employment and increase the critical mass of activity required to sustain an integrated public transport network for the County. The method also facilitates a more sustainable approach to the current housing pattern by using the existing housing stock and associated existing social and physical services more efficiently.

6.3.2 Scenario B

Demographic Alternative - Phased Zoning

Scenario B seeks to focus development on demographic growth within the County over the lifetime of the Plan. Using this approach, additional lands would be prioritised and zoned on a phased basis over the lifetime of the Development Plan using demographic alternatives based on high, medium and low growth. The development would also take into account factors including demand, economic growth and availability of funding and priorities for infrastructure and service provision.

There is an emerging pattern where the population are increasingly choosing to live within the M50 in areas like Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown that have a high amenity and recreational value. However, the development of additional lands increases the risk to amenities and environmental sensitivities. By employing the method of phased zoning, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will be able to incrementally facilitate different levels of demographic growth while ensuring the protection of environmental sensitivities -

including green corridors and areas of high amenity and recreational value.

The scenario would ensure that areas currently zoned and serviced by foul water and water supply schemes are prioritised and developed/redeveloped initially - including Cherrywood which is designated as a 'Strategic Development Zone' and smaller sites throughout the County that are presently available and serviced with infrastructure, followed by zoned areas south of the County that are waiting for funding to be made available for provision of foul drainage or water supply.

By selecting zones on a phased basis for development/redevelopment to accommodate growth as it occurs, this scenario allows for a greater degree of coordination of development through a plan-led approach in sync with the relevant planning strategies. This scenario needs to be viewed as requiring alternative scenarios of phasing/sequencing to take account of the reality that implementation will be determined by the priorities and budgets of external factors such as Irish Water.

6.3.3 Scenario C

Market-Led Growth

Alternative Scenario C facilitates an evaluation of the consequences of allowing the location and nature of development to respond to likely market demand or land availability with applications being evaluated on a case by case basis – especially where developments are proposed on green belt/sports areas or rural areas.

For evaluation purposes, it assumes that the areas proposed for development would occur on lands at the edge of currently developed areas – which have poor public transport links, and little or no current infrastructure capacity – such a water supply or foul drainage.

A pattern of opportunistic, but potential non-conforming, applications – of this type – are an historically persistent feature of development during periods of economic recovery or expansion and, as such, constitute a realistic alternative that needs to be assessed. This is particularly relevant during a period of rapidly changing demand – such as is currently emerging – where developments for specialist residential accommodation –

such as units for single persons, student housing and housing for 'down-sizing, empty-nesters' may give rise to un-met needs that have not been adequately anticipated by current housing policies.

This scenario needs to be given equal evaluation to determine whether – notwithstanding potential non-conformity with national and regional planning policies – it could produce options that are environmentally advantageous.