

Strategic Environmental Assessment

SEA Screening Report **on the Core Strategy Variation** **of the Sligo and Environs Development Plan** **2010-2016**

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16 June 2011

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1. Introduction

Sligo Borough Council and Sligo County Council intend to vary the **Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016** by introducing a **Core Strategy** into this plan. The proposed variation involves the insertion of a new Section (5.4), amendments to Chapter 17 and amendments to the Zoning Map. The variation procedure will be carried out in accordance with Section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Article 13K(1) of the Planning and Development Regulations (Strategic Environmental Assessment) 2004 (SEA Regulations) indicates the following:

Where a planning authority proposes to make a variation of a development plan under section 13 of the Act, it shall, before giving notice under section 13(2) of the Act, consider whether or not the proposed variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking into account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A.

This **SEA Screening Report** has been carried out in accordance with the requirements of the SEA Regulations and should be read in conjunction with the Environmental Report prepared in relation to the Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016.

The contents of the proposed variation are laid out in the accompanying documents **Core Strategy – proposed changes to the text of the SEDP 2010-2016** and in the **Amended Zoning Map (Map 1) showing the Strategic Land Reserve**.

Additional information on the proposed variation is contained in the **Explanatory Note** and **Explanatory Map** that accompany this SEA Screening Report.

2. Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016

Sligo and Environs Development Plan, jointly adopted by Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, came into force on 30 November 2009. It will remain operational for a period of maximum six years. The Plan sets out the Councils' policies and objectives for the proper planning and sustainable development of the Sligo and Environs area.

The undertaking of a "full SEA", i.e. the preparation of an Environmental Report, is mandatory in the case of development plans. The SEA of the SEDP 2010-2016 has been undertaken by environmental consultants CAAS on behalf of Sligo Borough and County Councils. The resultant Environmental Report (ER) and its Addenda were published alongside the SEDP 2010-2016.

Strategic environmental assessment has informed the policies and objectives of the Plan and has also suggested appropriate mitigation measures, which were incorporated in the relevant chapters of the Plan upon its adoption in November 2009.

This SEA Screening Report should be read in conjunction with the SEDP 2010-2016 and its Environmental Report. Both documents are available from the websites of Sligo local authorities at www.sligoborough.ie/sedp and www.sligococo.ie/sedp

3. Description of the proposed Core Strategy Variation

As indicated in the Explanatory Note, the Proposed Core Strategy Variation consists of the following:

- Proposed amendments to Chapter 5 Spatial Strategy – **new Section 5.4 Core Strategy**
- Proposed amendments to Chapter 17 Implementation – **changes to Sections 17.2 Local Area Plans, 17.3 Prioritising development and 17.4 North Fringe LAP.**
- Proposed amendments to the Zoning Map (Map 1 and corresponding figures in the SEDP document) – **graphic indication of the Strategic Land Reserve.**

Under Section 7 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, each Planning Authority is required to introduce a Core Strategy as part of its development plan. The purpose of the Core Strategy is to articulate a medium- to longer-term quantitatively-based strategy for the spatial development of the area of the planning authority.

The Core Strategy must demonstrate that the development plan and its objectives are consistent with national and regional development objectives set out in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs), especially with regard to the settlement hierarchy and the role of Gateways. The Strategy must give effect to the hierarchy by setting population targets in accordance with regional targets along with associated requirements for housing land.

In the case of existing development plans, the planning authorities are required to incorporate the Core Strategy through the variation procedure set out in section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). The deadline for planning authorities in the Border Region is 29 September 2011. This is the reason for the proposed Core Strategy Variation of the Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016.

On assessment of the zoned land in the SEDP 2010-2016, it has been calculated that there is a total of 582 hectares of greenfield land capable of accommodating residential development – this includes land zoned for mixed uses, commercial/mixed-uses and neighbourhood centres.

In order to reduce the extent of land zoned for residential uses (or a mix of residential and other uses) to a level that is consistent with the RPGs allocations, it is proposed to adopt a **prioritising/phasing approach**, whereby the lands surplus to requirements in the short term will be regarded as a **strategic reserve**. Any proposals for housing developments on such lands will not be considered during the remaining lifetime of the current SEDP.

Consistent with the RPGs allocations, a total of **68 hectares of land zoned for housing and mixed uses, equivalent to 43 hectares of residential land**, have been retained as suitable for development during the plan period. The breakdown of these lands within various zoning objectives and the assumptions regarding residential development on mixed use lands are outlined in the Explanatory Note that accompanies this Report

The remaining **514 hectares** of residential and mixed-use lands will be included in the Strategic Land Reserve and will be reviewed for housing development suitability in the next plan period.

It is evident that the proposed variation does not involve the zoning of any additional land for development. Conversely, it actually proposes to decrease the potential for development over a significant extent of the Plan area.

4. Assessment

4.1 Assessment criteria

The screening exercise outlined below has been carried out in accordance with Article 13K (1) of the SEA Regulations, taking into account the relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the Regulations.

4.2 Characteristics of the proposed variation

- a) *“the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources”*

The SEDP 2010-2016 sets out the Councils’ policies and objectives for the proper planning and sustainable development of the Sligo and Environs area. Through the zoning of land for particular uses it also sets out the framework for projects and other activities in the area.

However, as outlined above, the proposed variation does not involve the zoning of any additional land for development. Conversely, it proposes to decrease the potential for development over a significant extent (514 hectares) of the Plan area.

Therefore, given the decreased scope for development, it is considered that the proposed variation would result in a decreased impact of the Plan with regard to the location, nature and scale of future development.

- b) *“the degree to which the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy”*

The proposed variation must be viewed in the overall context of the SEDP 2010-2016 which influences a number of other plans. Existing land-use plans include the following:

- North Fringe Local Area Plan
- Hazelwood-Ballinode Local Area Plan

Furthermore, the SEDP outlines intentions to complete a number of other Local Area Plans as follows:

- Cranmore-Cleaveragh Local Area Plan
- Docklands Local Area Plan (pre-Draft consultation has commenced on this LAP)
- Caltragh-Carrowroe Local Area Plan.

The proposed variation will influence these LAPs when they are being reviewed (in the case of existing LAPs) or prepared (in the case of proposed LAPs). In particular, the extent of residential zoning will be decreased in accordance with the provisions of the proposed variation.

The consequence will be a decreased impact of each LAP with regard to the location, nature and scale of future development.

The proposed variation will also influence other (non-land-use) plans relating to the location and provision of infrastructural facilities and services, by reducing demands in this regard.

- c) *“the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development”*

The concept of sustainable development underpins the approach and aims of the SEDP 2010-2016, whose spatial strategy seeks to integrate land use and transport by co-locating trip-generating activities and promoting the establishment of mixed-use areas to accommodate complementary activities. The Plan seeks to create a ‘compact city’ with strong emphasis on the consolidation/regeneration of existing built-up area, thereby involving the smallest number and least extent of potential environmental effects. Through Strategic Environmental Assessment, the SEDP has incorporated environmental considerations that resulted in appropriate mitigation measures.

The proposed variation strengthens the ‘compact city’ approach by including the outer-lying areas within the Strategic Land Reserve, thereby directing new residential development closer to the city centre.

Given that the proposed variation will decrease the scope for development over a significant extent of the Plan area, it is considered that the mitigation measures already incorporated into the SEDP are sufficient.

d) *“environmental problems relevant to the plan”*

There are numerous areas of environmental sensitivity within and contiguous to the SEDP area. These include designated nature conservation sites, views and prospects, Conservation Areas, Protected Structures and Recorded Monuments. Details of these are set out in the SEDP and the Environmental Report.

Given that the proposed variation will decrease the scope for development over a significant extent of the Plan area, it is considered that these environmentally-sensitive areas will not be further affected.

e) *“the relevance of the plan for the implementation of European legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste management or water protection)”*

The proposed variation must be seen in the context of the SEDP 2010-2016 and the Border Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022, both of which have already been prepared in accordance with the relevant requirements of European legislation. This includes issues such as flood risk assessment, habitats protection, water quality, waste management etc.

It should be noted that the proposed variation complies with the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report is currently under preparation and will be available at public consultation stage.

Given that the proposed variation will decrease the scope for development over a significant extent of the Plan area, it is considered that the implementation of European legislation on the environment will not be affected.

4.3 Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected

As outlined above, the proposed variation will decrease the potential for development over a significant extent of the Plan area. It is therefore considered that the implementation of the proposed variation will not result in any additional effects on the environment.

5. Conclusion

The proposal to incorporate a Core Strategy into the SEDP 2010-2016 would have the effect of decreasing the potential for development over a significant extent (514 hectares) of the Plan area. It is considered that this would have a positive effect on the environment.

Environmental considerations were duly taken into account when preparing the SEDP 2010-2016, which already incorporates appropriate mitigation measures. These measures are not affected by the proposed variation.

On the basis of the above assessment based on the criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the SEA Regulations, it is the opinion of the planning authority that the proposed Core Strategy Variation is not likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Accordingly, a full Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.