



Garvogue River, Sligo

2.8 Sligo and the Natural Environment

2.8.1 Analysis – The Natural Environment

The City of Sligo is set within a wider landscape of outstanding beauty, however, the urban centre has a unique environmental context juxtaposed between Lough Gill and Sligo Harbour, which are both connected by the Garvogue River running through the city. This provides an attractive environmental focus to the city centre.

This landscape setting is one of the city and environs' greatest assets, which in addition to the river, lake and sea, also comprises an undulating landscape, giving scenic views of Lough Gill (particularly from Green Road), of seascapes (particularly at Gibraltar Point) and distant views of the surrounding hills and mountains (most notable of which are Benbulbin and Knocknarea). Throughout the city, particularly in the east adjoining the watercourses, there are extensive woodland areas, most notably Hazelwood, Cleveragh, Doorly Park and Cairns. These features, in addition to other key landscape elements, (as identified on the Environmental Parameters Map 6), provide an attractive context for development. They also offer riverside, sea-shore and woodland walks, in addition to a variety of other recreational amenities which significantly add to the quality of life offered to inhabitants. Directly to the north of the city centre the topography rises sharply to incorporate the Green Fort. There is also an area of significant high ground to the south east of the city near Cairns and Tonaphubble; this area is clearly visible from the city, with significant views over Lough Gill, Hazelwood Demesne and the city itself. Cleveragh Drive forms a scenic route along the west of Lough Gill, with viewing points along this road and also along The Green Road. Aghamore Bay is another important viewing point for Lough Gill, which needs to be protected. (see Appendix F)

With a landscape context unequalled by few other urban centres in Ireland, it is important that the City remains as attractive and 'green' as possible. It is a key objective of this development plan to protect, conserve and manage these natural resources in a sustainable manner to ensure that economic growth complements this unique environmental setting.

2.8.2 Environmental Features and Designations

Are as that are worthy of preserving and protecting are identified on the Environmental Parameters Map. This includes visually sensitive areas, significant woodland and tree groups, wetlands, scrubland, and significant hedgerows. The local authority will encourage the retention and protection of such features in the planning and layout of future developments.

Throughout the plan area there are a number of national environmental designations identified by Duchas - The Heritage Service, both proposed and adopted. These include National Heritage Areas, Special Protection Areas and candidate Special Areas of Conservation.²⁹ There is an obligation on local authorities to protect such European sites. They include Lough Gill, the Garvogue River, including some shore lands; woodland areas at Hazelwood, Cleveragh, Doorly and Aghamore; wetlands at Drumaskibbole and Cummeen, and the Sligo Harbour area.

These areas are important in terms of the habitats and species they accommodate. In addition to protecting these areas, the local authority seeks to ensure that future development does not adversely affect the character of the wider area or the biodiversity of the existing natural environment. Full regard will be had for the National Biodiversity Plan 2002.

²⁹ NHAs comprise an important network of designations aimed at identifying and protecting areas of outstanding conservation value, noted for flora, fauna, geology and/or topography. SPAs and SACs are selected from NHAs. SPAs are specifically designated for the protection and conservation of birds, in particular those species listed as rare, vulnerable or migratory. SACs are areas of interest containing habitats or species of European significance.



2.8.3 Natural Resources

Mineral extraction is an important sector in Sligo, with a significant number of quarries in operation. The aggregates (stone, sand and gravel) and concrete products industry contribute significantly to economic development, providing the necessary materials for the building of houses, offices, factories, roads and other infrastructural projects. It is therefore important that the local authority strive to ensure a continued supply of aggregates and concrete products, by safeguarding valuable and unworked deposits for future extraction.

As the extractive industry plays a sensitive role in relation to the environment, associated development in this area will be required to minimise any adverse effects upon the environment and local community. To ensure this, all such industries will be required to follow an environmental code of practice and include in the plans for such sites rehabilitation programmes for worked-out quarries. It is necessary to view the continued development of these quarries in the context of achieving a balance of social, economic and environmental costs, ensuring that extraction and development are consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

As 2.6 million tonnes of construction/demolition waste is produced annually in Ireland, with only an estimated 43% recycled, the local authority will seek to promote the recycling and reuse of construction/demolition waste, which will help reduce the demands of the construction industry for aggregates. The local authority will examine the scope for recovery of construction and demolition waste from local authority projects, as well as the use of recycled construction materials in site development, road building and other infrastructural projects.

2.8.4 Policies for the Natural Environment

It is the policy of the local authorities to:

- Protect and enhance the unique environmental setting of the city, particularly its relationship with the river, Lough Gill and the coastal areas, and promote their sustainable development for recreation and amenity purposes.
- Protect existing natural amenity areas and preserve the character of the landscape outside the development boundary, including views, prospects, the amenities of places, and features of natural beauty or interest.
- Encourage developers to incorporate features of the natural environment, such as rivers, streams, existing flora and fauna, and significant tree groups, within open space layouts and/or in the planning of future developments
- Encourage wildlife refuges and corridors to protect significant wildlife routes.
- Encourage the creation of new habitats through providing parks, planting trees, hedgerows, etc.
- Develop suitable programmes under the NeighbourWood funding programme.
- Protect the natural course of the Garvogue River, the Bonet River and Lough Gill, including their riparian corridors and associated habitats and species (in particular the noteworthy salmonid habitats).
- Protect the water quality and salmonoid habitat of river courses throughout the plan area.
- Generally protect existing wetlands from fill.
- Establish strong links between open spaces within the built environment and the natural landscape.

2.8.5 Policies in relation to Natural Resources

It is the policy of the local authorities to:

- Ensure that the extraction of natural resources is consistent with the principles of sustainable development.
- Seek to safeguard valuable, unworked deposits for future extraction.
- Ensure that on completion of quarrying operations, sites are left in a satisfactory state to be of beneficial after-use, be this for recreational purposes, environmental enhancement (nature reserve) and/or appropriate industrial use, etc.
- Ensure that aggregate extraction, processing, delivery, and associated concrete production are carried out in a manner, which minimises adverse effects upon the environment and the local community.
- Encourage the recycling of construction/demolition waste, particularly from local authority projects, as an additional source of aggregates for future developments.

2.8.6 Objectives

It is an objective of the local authorities to:

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| NE1 | Protect the scenic route along Cleveragh Drive and the Green Road overlooking Lough Gill. |
| NE2 | Restrict development on all designated or proposed Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Development infringements of these areas will only be considered where there is an over-riding public interest in doing so, associated with significant public infrastructure, where the development would not detract from the main attributes of the site and where adequate mitigation measures are put in place. |
| NE3 | Generally, restrict developments which are not related to the extractive industry in the vicinity of the existing quarrying operations at Aghamore and Carrownamadoo, so as to protect the natural resources in this area. |
| NE4 | Consider tree preservation orders, subject to detailed site surveys (at the planning application stage) for the trees and tree groups identified on the Environmental Parameters Map |

Further policies and objectives on the Natural Environment, as it relates to Open Space are to be found in Section 2.9 Open Space and Public Amenity.

