



65. An example of sustainable—energy efficient housing at Brookview, Tallaght. Developments incorporating sustainable initiatives will be encouraged in the master-plan area.

13. Sustainability and Strategic Environmental Assessment

13.1 Introduction

Section 19 (4)(a) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 states that a local area plan shall contain information on the likely and significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan. This legislative requirement pre-empted a EU Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment for plans and policies.

13.2 Principles of Sustainability

In general terms the development concept and the process of developing the framework for the future development of the masterplan area has incorporated the principle of sustainability as a central theme. This overall sustainable structure is outlined in the Executive Summary (section 1.3, which also gives an overall description of the project). The protection of the environment has been integral to the plans preparation. Before developing the future framework for development, the plan examined all relevant plans, policies and government guidelines that relate to planning, development and heritage in general and specifically to the area. This process was strengthened through the consultation process whereby Dúchas was consulted in relation to both the natural environment and the archaeological heritage.

The masterplan has taken cognisance of the Government's 'Sustainable Development - A Strategy for Ireland' (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1997) and the document 'Ireland's Environment - A Millennium Report' (Environmental Protection Agency, April 2000).

13.3 Assessment of Likely and Significant Effects on the Environment of Implementing the Plan.

Scoping:

The most important environmental issues that arise from the scoping process include:

- The candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) and in particular the alluvial woodland habitat.
- Archaeology and the numerous raths, ringforts, earthworks and/or enclosures.
- Water run-off and particularly the need to maintain water levels in the alluvial woodland and to protect the Lough Gill/Garvoige River catchment from pollutants and nutrient input.
- The landscape and topography and in particular the protection of key landscape areas, woodlands and visually vulnerable areas.

These issues have been covered within the following sections.

13.3.1 Human Beings

The existing population living in the area is not significant nor is the length of time most of those residents being living there. On this basis it is assumed that there are no direct negative impacts on human beings from the implementation of the plan.

The development of the masterplan will provide a mix of land uses to cater for the future population growth of Sligo and its environs. These uses cater for all aspects of regular daily activities such as living requirements/homes, working, shopping, the need for community facilities (including aspects such as the need for crèches, day care facilities, schools, places of worship, etc.) and recreation needs.

By providing an attractive place in which to live, work and recreate, the masterplan can provide a positive impact on the future of those using the area. By opening up limited areas of the woodland for public access, including waterfront access, there is the potential to promote limited tourism and also to provide an educational role through nature interpretative displays/notices at appropriate locations. The opening up of some of these areas for public access can also promote enjoyment and appreciation of nature.

13.3.2 Flora

Section 4.3 of the masterplan outlines the most important habitats found within the study area. A description of the dominant species for each of the habitats classifications is given in Appendix A. The residual alluvial woodland is considered to be priority habitat.



66. The plan acknowledges the importance of biodiversity and seeks to protect those areas that are of highest amenity value.

Two rare species and one protected species associated with the cSAC may be found within the alluvial woodland or adjacent areas. These species are identified in section 4.3. As the most important habitats are maintained free from development, it is unlikely that there will be any likely significant impacts on the general flora of the area. Those areas that have been identified for development consist almost exclusively of agricultural grassland areas which had been previously used for sheep and cattle grazing and are considered to be of least importance in terms of habitat.

While the future development of the area has the potential to lead to some negative environmental impacts such as human impacts resulting in some deterioration or destruction of habitats, or alternatively as a result of the impact of development (i.e., pollution or sediment run-off into adjacent streams thereby impacting flora) it is anticipated that through the recommendations outlined under section 4.3, that these impacts will be reduced to an absolute minimum. The wetland nature of the cSAC woodlands is likely to act as a deterrent to any significant human access and thereby minimize any deterioration resulting from this.

The proposals to provide reconstructed wetland areas in an open space buffer zone between the future developed areas and the cSAC could lead to an enhanced habitat with a net increase in those species of general importance.

13.3.3 Fauna

This is closely related to flora and the habitats as described in section 13.3.2 and has been assessed in Section 4.4 of the masterplan.

13.3.4 Soil

No special or noteworthy soil conditions have been noted on the site with the exception of the alluvial soils connected with the cSAC, an area which has been reserved free from development.

13.3.5 Water

While the rate of runoff has the potential to increase with the urban development of the area, this will be maintained by the adoption of the policy on Stormwater Source Control (Best Management Practices), including the requirement for stormwater retention ponds and reconstructed wetlands (see Section 12.3). It is important that there is no net increase in the run-off onto the alluvial wetlands and for this reason it will be a requirement that all future developments will need to demonstrate how this will be addressed. Larger developments in particular will be required to prepare a hydrological impact study to ensure that the water levels in the alluvial wetlands are maintained so as to maintain this important habitat.

13.3.6 Air

Increases in residential density (particularly in the vicinity of neighbourhood centres), accessibility to public transport, the provision of a cycle and pedestrian network along desire lines and the provision of local employment, services and facilities can help reduce the need to travel and promote the use of alternative modes to the car, thus reducing emissions from transport (i.e., carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides and air particulates). The plan's proposals for extensive tree planting should also assist in air purification.

13.3.5 Climate

There are no likely or significant impacts on climate anticipated from the masterplan.

13.3.6 Landscape

The masterplan involves the urbanisation of land that was previously used for agricultural purposes. This will result in a depletion of agricultural land. However, in line with population projections this is deemed to be acceptable as the future population growth needs to be accommodated and the land is immediately adjoining the existing built environment of Sligo town.

Those lands and areas that represented the most important ecological habitats and landscape features have been reserved in the interests of bio-diversity, visual amenity and public open space.

Careful consideration was given to those lands that have the highest contour levels so as to either maintain them free from development or to introduce a Skyline Enhancement Zone (see Figure 7 and also Section 10.3).

13.3.7 Material Assets

This includes both natural and manmade assets. Natural assets have been addressed in the foregoing sections and some of the material assets that relate to heritage are covered in the section on cultural heritage. Other material assets might include the existing infrastructure in the area, including services such as roads, water supply, sewerage infrastructure and the built fabric. No significant impacts are anticipated to affect material assets and improvements to the existing infrastructure and road network are planned for the area.



67. Landscape elements that are to be retained in the open space framework.

13.3.8 Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is the term used to describe the combined disciplines of archaeology, architecture, urban design, monuments and decorative features. It also includes sites or topics of religious or folklore interest, including aspects such as traditions and place-names.

Section 5 of the masterplan addresses in detail the nature and extent of possible archaeological features on the site which have been incorporated into the overall open space network. Recommendations in relation to archaeology have also been addressed.

In relation to architecture, there is only one building of interest in the masterplan study area, a building of Edwardian architectural style (referred to as 'Ellenwood' on earlier O.S Maps RPS No. 1012-08-49) situated in the vicinity of Rathquarter. The masterplan does not propose any developments that are likely to affect this structure.

Part of the masterplan was originally part of the Hazelwood Demesne. A review of historical maps (Ordnance Survey 1837 and 1887) show the layout of the demesne, however the original informal layout has been altered over years through landownership changes and associated agricultural practices. The core of the demesne centred on Hazelwood House which is situated off the masterplan and thus any impacts are not likely to be significant.

There are no other features of particular interest for reasons of cultural heritage, however efforts have been made in the plan to address the issue of placenames so as to retain a link or historic connection with the morphology of the area (see Section 11).