

Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement

Cork County Local Economic and Community Plan

April 2016

In accordance with Article 9 of Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council
on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment





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1 Introduction

1.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

1.1.1 The European Union Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) requires an environmental assessment be carried out for certain plans and programmes including the proposed Cork County Local Economic and Community Plan.

1.1.2 The following Regulations transposed this Directive into Irish law:

- The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435 of 2004),
- The Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436 of 2004) and further amended by: S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) and S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

1.1.3 The Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations, 2004 (as amended) state that SEA is mandatory for certain plans while screening for SEA is required for other plans that fall below the specified thresholds. Where plans fall below or outside of the specified thresholds a screening report is required to be carried out to determine whether the making and implementation of a particular plan will or will not, lead to significant environmental consequences for the Plan.

1.1.4 The purpose of report is to undertake a screening assessment to consider whether the LECP will require a Strategic Environment Assessment. This Screening Assessment is set out in Section 3 of the report.

1.2 Background to the LECP

1.2.1 The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provides a stronger and clearer role for local government in economic development and community development. This is key element in achieving the vision set out in the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First (DECLG, 2012) which states that '*local government will be the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level, leading economic, social and community development*'.

1.2.2 The LECP is prepared in accordance Section 44 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and consists of two elements: A local economic element (prepared and adopted by the local authority) and a community development element (prepared and adopted by the Local



Community Development Committee (LCDC) in place of the City and County Development Boards).

- 1.2.3 The purpose of the LECP is to identify objectives and implement actions to strengthen and develop the economic and community dimensions of Cork County over a six year period.
- 1.2.4 In this regard, the delivery of objectives and/or actions may be through partnership with economic and community stakeholders, via the programmes of other stakeholders as well as Cork County Council.

1.3 LECP – Legislative Context

- 1.3.1 The requirements of the scope and context of the LECP are set out in detail under Section 66B of the Act. A summary of the key requirements are set out in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1:1 Legislative Requirements of LECP

s. 66B (1)

Each Local Authority shall make, a 6 year plan for

- (a) the promotion of economic development in its functional area, and
- (b) the promotion of local and community development in its functional area.

s.66B (2): Promotion of Economic Development includes, but is not limited to:

- (a) Creating and sustaining jobs,
- (b) Promoting the interests of the community, including -
 - (i) enterprise and economic development across economic sectors,
 - (ii) foreign direct investment,
 - (iii) indigenous industry,
 - (iv) micro-enterprises and small and medium sized enterprises,
 - (v) tourism, and
 - (vi) agriculture, forestry and the marine sectors, and other natural resource sectors,
- (c) identifying local attributes that are essential to:
 - (i) enhancing local economic performance, such as the quality of the environment, qualities of cities, towns and rural areas, including;(I) accessibility, physical character, and infrastructure, (II) employment opportunities and quality of life, and the means by which these may be utilised to enhance competitiveness, and be supported by investment decisions relating to economic infrastructure (including transportation, water services, energy, communications and waste mgmt), with social and cultural facilities, and
 - (ii) promoting local economic activities,
- (d) supporting enhancement of local innovation capacity, including investment in research and development capacity, technology transfer, up-skilling and reskilling,
- (e) identifying, for existing and prospective businesses, opportunities to engage with local government on relevant matters in setting up and managing their businesses and to ensure speedy and coordinated access and response,
- (f) identifying local strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and deficiencies relevant to economic



performance and—

(i) in relation to such strengths and opportunities having regard to economic and employment trends, the means of maintaining and augmenting them, and (ii) in relation to such weaknesses and deficiencies, the means of addressing or rectifying them, and

(g) identifying economic potential and the requirements to realise it.

s.66B (3): Promotion of Local and Community Development includes, but is not limited to:

(a) promoting and supporting the interests of local communities, or any part of a community or group within a local community, including measures to enhance quality of life and well-being of communities and measures aimed at:

(i) tackling poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion through support for basic services and other initiatives,

(ii) supporting training and up-skilling, creating and sustaining employment and self-employment opportunities, and investing in local development through community-focused supports and services, and

(iii) the provision of infrastructure and community facilities and investment in physical regeneration and environmental improvements,

(b) supporting the capacity of local communities to improve their quality of life,

(c) supporting social enterprise, social capital, volunteering and active citizenship,

(d) developing integrated and evidenced based approaches to local service planning and delivery,

(e) identifying the needs and priorities of local communities to enhance their wellbeing, and developing sustainable solutions that make the best use of local assets, strengths and opportunities to address those needs and priorities,

(f) exploiting and co-ordinating funding sources from the public, private and community and voluntary sectors to stimulate and support local development and sustainability, and

(g) promoting, supporting and facilitating community involvement in policy development and decision-making processes related to the planning, development and delivery of services.



2 Policy Context

2.1 Local Government Reform

2.1.1 The Act made legal provision for the reforms set out in the *Government's Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First* (Oct, 2012) and sets out a wide range of reforms for local government relating to; local authority functions, local authority structures, local authority funding, local authority performance and overall governance. The recommendations of the programme seek to position local authorities within a central coordinating role for local and community development, significantly strengthening and expanding local government's existing functions in this regard.

2.1.2 The changes relevant to Cork include the following:

- The dissolution of eight regional authorities and the establishment of three regional Assemblies include the southern regional assembly ;
- Cork County Council along with eight other counties, forms part of the new Southern Region.
- The amalgamation of Cork City and Cork County Councils recently announced in September 2015. (' The need to recognise and define an appropriate metropolitan area is also clearly evident in the case of Cork, having regard to the very significant spill over of suburban development and population in the environs of Cork City located in the administrative area of Cork County Council and adjacent towns' *Putting People First* p86).
- The dissolution of the 9 Town Councils and the establishment of 8 municipal districts.

2.1.3 Section 63 of the Act, which amended the Planning and Development Act, 2000 requires the Regional Assemblies to prepare new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. However, until such time as these new regional strategies are prepared and adopted by the Regional Assemblies the LECP must be consistent, in the first instance, with the existing Regional Planning Guidelines.

2.1.4 Therefore, the Cork County LECP must demonstrate consistency with the South-West Regional Planning Guidelines, 2010-2022.

2.2 The LECP and the Cork County Development Plan 2014

2.2.1 The LECP does not sit directly within the hierarchy of spatial planning policy but rather sits as an entity considerate of the spatial framework endorsed by the County Development Plan 2014 and as a strategy in its own right, the LECP '*must be consistent with the core strategy*



and the objectives of the development plan'. The Development Plan provide a framework for strategic land use planning framework while also addressing wider social, economic and environmental trends.

The Cork County Development Plan 2014 was subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment, which assessed all policies and objectives to establish if they '*are likely to have significant environmental effects*'. This process provided for the inclusion and integration of relevant and important environmental considerations in order to promote and encourage sustainable development.



3 SEA Screening

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 'Screening' is a process for deciding whether a particular plan, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would warrant SEA.
- 3.1.2 The criteria for determining whether a particular plan is likely to have significant environmental impacts, regard must be made to the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive. These criteria are reproduced in Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as inserted by Article 12 of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations, 2004.
- 3.1.3 Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 set out two main criteria for determining whether a plan would be likely to have significant environmental effects:
- Characteristics of a Plan;
 - Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected.
- 3.1.4 The LECP for Cork County has not been fully developed at this stage. Therefore baseline data, existing statutory plans relevant to the plan area together with the *Guidance on Local Economic and Community Plans* (2015) issued by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, have been relied upon to inform if the LECP would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.
- 3.1.5 Section 3.2 and Section 3.3 below presents the SEA Screening assessment by assessing the available information in relation to the proposed LECP against the criteria provided in Schedule 2a of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2001-2011.

3.2 The Characteristics of the Plan

- 3.2.1 Table 1.2 below provides an assessment as to whether, having regard to the characteristics of the plan, the proposed LECP for County Cork is likely to have significant impacts on the environment.



Table 3:1 SEA Screening Assessment: Characteristics of the LECP

<p>The characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected</p>
<p><i>a) The degree to which the LECP sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources</i></p>
<p>The LECP aims to provide a framework for the future economic development and local community development of County Cork over a six year period. It must set high level goals for the integrated plan of the County, supported by specific objectives. Each objective will be achieved through the implementation of specific, time-bound and measureable actions to promote and support this development at local level.</p> <p>Cork has established economic and local/community development sectors across the county. These vary in nature, size and operating conditions and it is envisaged that the objectives as part of the LECP will identify and further strengthen these areas by creating a coherent framework for projects and activities across the county.</p> <p>The LECP is required to complement and demonstrate consistency with existing statutory policies including the South-West Regional Planning Guidelines, 2010-2022 and the Cork County Development Plan 2014 - 2020. These plans have been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Directive Assessment.</p> <p>To ensure consistency and in recognition of the SEA process previously undertaken, the LECP will at all times refer and direct towards the Development Plan, with particular regard to the any matter relating to development location and land uses. The LECP will also be consistent with the Core Strategy which provide the framework for the future population growth of the County.</p> <p>The LECP will complement the planning policy framework and will be consistent with the provisions of the relevant county development plan and planning guidelines.</p>
<p><i>(b) The degree to which the LECP influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy</i></p>
<p>The LECP represents a statutory, participatory local level plan which must be consistent in the first instance with the South-West Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 (RPGs). The LECP will be reviewed as necessary in order to ensure consistency with a new National Planning Framework which, it is envisaged once developed, will replace the National Spatial Strategy as well as the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) which are intended to replace the current RPGs. The LECP must also be consistent with the County Development Plan.</p> <p>In addition the LECP will have regard to the Regional Action Plan for Jobs and other strategies (a full list is attached at Appendix 1).</p> <p>An important part of the rationale for enhanced local government role in economic development is to forge a stronger link between spatial planning and economic development. Therefore, the LECP will extend and compliment plans from a local level right up to national level and across economic and social planning.</p>



(c) The relevance of the LECP in the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development

The Cork County Development Plan was subject to SEA. This process allowed for the consideration of the environmental implications of implementing this plan. The integration of SEA assessment led, in response, to a variety of environmental protection policies and objectives which were incorporated within the plan. The LECP will be consistent with the policies and objectives of the Cork County Development Plan.

Further, the integration of sustainable development considerations into the actions of the LECP and subsequent implementation will be an important component in developing, supporting and maintaining vibrant communities.

(d) Environmental problems relevant to the proposed LECP

The environmental report conducted as part of the SEA process in respect of the Cork County Development Plan, discussed various issues of concern in the plan area and provided various mitigating measures to decrease impacts considered to be significant.

As stated above the LECP must ensure consistency with the County Development Plan which sets out the framework for development and land use. It should be noted that the County Development Plans set out economic strategies (Chapter 6 Economy and Employment) and addresses Community and Social development (in Chapter 5 Social and Community), and Cultural development (Chapters 12 Heritage & Chapter 8 Tourism). These Chapters provide a framework for actions that will be brought forward under the LECP.

The LECP will be consistent with the policies or objectives of the Development Plan. Accordingly, the Development Plan provides a framework under which the LECP will be developed and, the policies and objectives seeking to protect and conserve environmental sensitive areas will not be altered or affected by the LECP.

(e) The relevance of the LECP in the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste-management or water protection).

The LECP must be consistent with existing national and regional policy documents which includes policies relating to environmental protection, water supply, water quality, ground water, waste management, landscape and cultural heritage in compliance with EU legislation.

These include the following EU Directives:

Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC)
Groundwater Directive (Directive 2006/118/EC),
Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC),
Birds Directive (Directive 79/409/EEC),
and Flood Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC)

3.3 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EFFECTS AND OF THE AREA LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED

3.3.1 Table 1.3 below provides an assessment as to whether, having regard to the characteristics of the effect and of the area likely to be affected that the proposed LECP for County Cork is likely to have significant impacts on the environment.

Table 3:2 SEA Screening Assessment: Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected

a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects

The LECP is for a six year period, and as stated above must be compliant and consistent with the statutory planning framework. Therefore it is considered that effects arising from the LECP will be addressed under the existing statutory planning framework and probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects are not assessed as being significant.

b) The cumulative nature of the effects

There are two key aspects to the LECP which are to:

- (a) promote economic development and
- (b) promote local and community development.

The LECP in the interest of consistency will promote both of these within the framework and the policies and objectives set out by the Development Plans.

Ultimately the cumulative effects of the LECP will be positive in terms of generating economic activity and required community development in County Cork. Once the environmental protection measures within the County Development Plan are followed, adhered to and implemented, it is predicted that the LECP will not compromise the quality of the receiving environment.

In addition to the five National Reform Programme themes, Receiving Environment has been added as a sixth High Level Goal.

c) The trans-boundary nature of the effects

The LECP will be consistent with National and Regional strategies and guidelines and will be subject to environmental protection policies set out and objectives contained in the adopted County Development Plan 2014.

Therefore, no negative trans-boundary environmental effects are predicted.

d) The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)

The Seveso II Directive 96/082/EC (as amended by Directive 105/2003/EC) is an EU Directive to prevent major accidents involving dangerous substances and to limit the consequences of such accidents for human beings and the environment. At present there are 25 industries affected by the Seveso II Directive in Cork County – see Table 14.1 of the CCDP 2014 (figure includes some industries within Cork City Council Boundary) and to which the Directive applies. In this regard the Cork County Development Plan 2014 - 2020 contains the following policies in respect of proposals in proximity to SEVESO sites:



ZU 5-1 Control of Major Accidents Hazards
 ZU 5-2 Proposals for New Establishments
 ZU5-3 Proposed Development Adjacent to Existing Establishments

The LECP will be consistent with Policy ZU 5-1, ZU 5-2, ZU 5-3 of the Cork County Development Plan 2014 and will therefore not result in any risks to human health.

e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)

The County has a total population of 399,802 (CSO Census 2011) and geographical area of 7,459sq km (2,800 square miles).
 The Core Strategy of the Cork County Development Plan, provides a framework for the spatial development of land uses. The strategy includes settlement hierarchies whereby lands have been zoned to accommodate sustainable growth in line with national and regional population targets. The LECP will be consistent with the core strategy of the Development Plan and in this regard will not result in environmental impacts by virtue of magnitude or spatial effect of the strategy.

f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

(i) Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage

There are approximately 250 sites designated or proposed for designation in County Cork.

County Cork contains a significant number of The European protected sites in County Cork include 30 Special Areas of Conservations (SACs) and 18 Special Protection Areas. In addition there are 8 Natural Heritage Areas (NHA's) protected under the Wildlife Protection Act 1976 (as amended) and 103 proposed NHAs.

County Cork has a long history of human settlement much of which was based around economic activity and community development. These can be seen through the historic buildings and structures present in the County along with its archaeological resources.

The Development Plan contain comprehensive objectives and policies to ensure the protection of the natural, built and cultural heritage. The LECP will not conflict with the policies and objectives of the Development Plans.

ii) Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values

It is anticipated that environmental quality standards will not be exceeded by the LECP. The LECP will be consistent and will comply with the Development Plan's environmental protection policies and objectives.

(iii) intensive land-use

A high percentage of County Cork is rural in character and there are land use practices which could result in intensification of use and impacts on the environment such as agricultural practices, industry and one-off housing development. Again these are addressed through the statutory planning framework and not the LECP, therefore such effects are not identified.

(iv) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status

The Cork County Development Plan recognise the importance of sites with National and European

designations and sets out policies and objectives for their protection.

Therefore, it is not considered the implementation of the LECP will have significant negative effects on areas or landscapes which have recognised national, European Union or international protection status.

Development which may arise from the LECP will be subject to an appropriate project level environmental assessment and Habitats Directive Assessment (where necessary). This, along with the continued implementation of the Cork County Development Plan environmental policies and objectives, will ensure that that development will not have an adverse impact on the receiving environment, including areas or landscapes which have recognised national, European Union or international protection status.



4 Statutory Consultation

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 In accordance with Article 9(5) of the Regulations (S.I. No. 200 of 2011), the Council has consulted the specified environmental authorities. These comprise: The Environmental Protection Agency, The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs, Minister for Agriculture, Marine and Food and the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

4.2 Response and Comments

4.2.1 Submission was received from one of the agencies and this submission is summarised below:

Table 4:1 Summary of Submission

Authority	Response Received, Summary and Key Recommendations	Consideration of the Environmental Authorities Submission
Environmental Protection Agency	<p>(EPA) acknowledges the opportunities to promote and encourage local community and local enterprise activities which may arise out of implementation of the LECP, the opportunities to support the ongoing development of the green economy, promote the benefits of ecosystems services and encourage the protection and value of management of local/regional/national environmental resources.</p> <p>Welcomes the inclusion of the high level goal relating to the protection of the receiving environment.</p> <p>Ensure consistency with the Core Strategy, the County Development Plan (CDP) objectives, any regional ‘spatial and economic strategy’.</p> <p>Welcome that the policies and objectives of the CDP responsible for the protection and conservation of environmentally sensitive areas will be complied with in implementing the LECP.</p> <p>Submission indicates that it would be useful to consider encouraging community level activities such as energy conservation, water conservation, river clean-ups, riparian zone protection measures which would be beneficial for both local communities as well as the environment.</p> <p>Supporting measures which promote and encourage local eco-tourism ventures, fishing/angling, bird watching, agri-tourism,</p>	<p>The Council welcomes the submission and recommendations of the Environmental Protection Agency and the intention of the Advisory Steering Group is to consider in the appropriate strategy /plan.</p> <p>The LECP must conform with the CDPs and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and therefore monitoring undertaken at CDP level will impact and inform any requirement of the LECP, where this is appropriate and necessary.</p>



	<p>supporting and encouraging citizen science activities such as local heritage mapping, supporting habitat restoration would also be beneficial in forming a closer link between social participation and involvement in and environmental protection at a local level.</p> <p>EU LIFE Programmes such as IRD Dunhallow have played a significant role in protecting environmental sensitivities while supporting local communities and would be a very useful model to consider promoting in the LECP. The submission continues to make points in relation to SEA Screening of the Draft Plan, Infrastructure Planning and Appropriate Assessment.</p>	
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4.3 Determination in Terms of Article 9 (2)

4.3.1 The Council, in accordance with Article 9(2) of the SEA Regulations, and having considered the criteria set out Annex II of the Directive, is satisfied that the LECP will be unlikely to have a significant impact on the environment. This determination is made taking into consideration the following:

- The LECP will be implemented in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and with the commitment to the enhancement and protection of the environment. The LECP will be consistent with the strategic planning frameworks and policies and objectives of the Cork County Development Plan 2014-2020, which have been subject to Strategic Environmental and Habitats Directive Assessment.
- The submissions received from the Environmental Authorities.
- The LECP is required to be consistent with the CDP 2015 and the current Regional Planning Guidelines, both of which have been the subject of SEA. However, the first draft of the LECP is also being developed in advance of the expected National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. As a result, the first iteration of the LECP will be reviewed on publication of the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the south-west region. This review will again include SEA screening and, possibly, full SEA if required. In socio-economic and spatial planning terms, we are clearly in a transition phase that will require the alignment and integrating of the National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, LECP, County Development Plan and Local Area Plans. Initially, the LECP seeks to reflect existing policy content but will also seek to pose long-term questions for Cork that will need to be addressed in the future National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the south-west region. Thereafter, its future reviews will absorb – with full SEA, if required – the outcome of the strategies currently being developed at national and regional levels. As a strategic framework document, the LECP will identify areas where further investigation and consideration will be required within the socio-economic and spatial sectors. Any additional plans or policies arising from the LECP will, again, be considered under SEA for their potential environmental impacts.

4.3.2 Having regard to the above, it is not considered necessary to prepare an Environmental Assessment of the LECP.



Appendix 1

Economic aspect	Community aspect
Action Plan for Jobs 2015	OECD Report on Local Development
Food Harvest 2020	Our Sustainable Future: A Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland (2012)
Making it Happen – Growing Enterprise for Ireland	National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016
Delivering our Green Potential – Government Policy statement on Growth and Employment in the Green Economy	Better outcomes, brighter futures – The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020
Developing a Green Enterprise	Energising Irelands rural economy – CEDRA
Energising Irelands rural economy – CEDRA	Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019
Local Government Sectoral Strategy to promote Employment and Support Local Enterprise – Supporting Economic Recovery and Jobs – locally.	Corporate Social Responsibility Plan, Good for Business, Good for Community 2014-2016 Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved
Supporting Enterprise, Local Development and Economic Growth	Heath and Well Being 2013-2015
Cost of doing business in Ireland 2014	National Strategy for Traveller/Roma Integration
Evaluation of Enterprise Supports for Startups and Entrepreneurship	Report on High Level Group on Traveller Issues 2006
Irelands competitiveness Scorecard 2014 Construction 2020 – A Strategy for a renewed Construction sector	20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030
Harnessing our Ocean Wealth National Reform Programme for Ireland	Supporting Enterprise, Local Development and Economic Growth
Social Housing Strategy 2020	National Reform Programme for Ireland
Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland	National Action Plan for Social Inclusion
Regional Planning Guidelines	
Regional Operation Programmes 2014-2020	
Forfas Regional Competiveness Agendas	
Cork County Development Plan 2014 - 2020	