



19 Strategic Environmental Assessment

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19.1 What is SEA?

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a new process which was introduced in 2004 and assesses the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, and documents any effects that may arise as a result of the implementation of the plan or programme. In tandem with the preparation of this Plan, an Environmental Report was prepared as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment. The SEA process effectively ran in parallel with the County Development Plan Review process and submissions on the Draft Environmental Report were also invited as part of the public consultation process.

Environmental assessment is a procedure that seeks to ensure that the environmental implications of decisions are taken into account before the decisions are made. Environmental Impact Assessment, or EIA, is generally used for describing the process of environmental assessment which is limited to individual projects such as waste incinerators, housing developments or roads while Strategic Environmental Assessment, or SEA, is the term which has been given to the environmental assessment of Plans, and other strategic actions, which help influence and frame what kind of individual projects eventually take place.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a formal process, involving the systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the new County Development Plan before a decision has been made to adopt it.

SEA is a valuable tool that influenced decision-making at each stage in the County Development Plan Review process, improved the overall environmental sustainability of the new Plan and raised awareness of the potential environmental consequences of its implementation so that the consequences may be mitigated or avoided altogether. It also gave the public and other interested parties an opportunity to comment and to be kept informed.

The SEA Directive requires that reasonable alternatives, taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the Plan or programme, are identified, described and evaluated for their likely significant effects on the environment. Taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the County Development Plan, a limited number of alternative scenarios were formulated for comparative assessment through the SEA process.

19.2 Policy Context

The assessment of the effects of certain Plans and programmes on the environment is required by Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and Council of 27th June 2001 (commonly known as the SEA Directive). The SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law by

- > European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435 of 2004), and
- > Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436 of 2004).

19.3 SEA Process

As a result of the above legislation, certain Plans and programmes which are prepared by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council - including County Development Plans - are required to undergo SEA. The findings of the SEA were expressed in the Environmental Report submitted to the Elected Members alongside the County Development Plan. The Elected Members had to take account of the Environmental Report before the adoption of the Plan. When a Plan is adopted a statement must be made public, summarising, inter alia: how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan, and the reasons for choosing the Plan as adopted over other alternatives detailed in the Environmental Report.

The Environmental Report, and opinions expressed by the Environmental Authorities and/or the public, were taken into account during the preparation of the Plan before its adoption. Once submissions were reviewed, a decision had to be made on whether any of the predictions regarding significant environmental effects needed to be revised, and whether any of the proposed policies and objectives required amendment.

The required contents of an Environmental Report are set out in Appendix 2B of the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations, 2004 and include:

- > The contents and main objectives of the Draft Plan and an assessment of alternatives.
- > Environmental baseline data detailing the current state of the environment.
- > The significant environmental issues and vulnerabilities facing the County.
- > Environmental Protection Objectives.
- > The likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the Draft Plan (based on an assessment of the policies against whether or not they are likely to meet our environmental protection objectives).

- Measures to prevent or reduce any significant adverse effects.
- Measures for monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan, including appropriate indicators to be used.
- A non-technical summary.

19.4 Monitoring and Review

The SEA Directive requires that the significant environmental effects of the implementation of Plans and programmes be monitored. The Environmental Report puts forward proposals for monitoring the County Development Plan, which are adopted alongside the Plan. Monitoring enables, at an early stage, the identification of unforeseen adverse effects and the undertaking of appropriate remedial action. In addition, monitoring can also play an important role in assessing whether the Plan is achieving its environmental objectives and targets, whether these need to be re-examined and whether the proposed mitigation measures are being implemented and are effective.

Monitoring is based around the indicators which were chosen earlier in the process. These indicators allow quantitative measures of trends and progress over time relating to the Strategic Environmental Objectives used in the evaluation.



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