

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

ON THE

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

OF THE

MAYO COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2008-2014



for: Mayo County Council

Áras an Chontae
The Mall
Castlebar
County Mayo



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Table of Contents

1	Introduction and Terms of Reference	1
2	The Plan for the County	2
3	The Environment of the County	2
4	The Likely Environmental Effects	4
	Surface waters.....	4
	Groundwaters	5
	Ecological Sensitivities	6
	Cultural Heritage.....	7
	Landscape	8
5	Mitigation Measures	9
	Spatial Strategies	9
	General Mitigation Measures	9

1 Introduction and Terms of Reference

This is the Non-Technical Summary of the Environmental Report on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Mayo County Development Plan (the Plan). The purpose of the report is to provide a clear understanding of the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the future accommodation of growth in County Mayo.

The SEA has been carried out in order to comply with the provisions of the SEA Regulations and in order to provide an opportunity to help to improve planning and environmental management in County Mayo. This report should be read in conjunction with the Plan.

SEA is a systematic process of predicting and evaluating the likely environmental effects of implementing a proposed plan, or other strategic action, in order to ensure that these effects are appropriately addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of decision-making on a par with economic and social considerations.

The SEA process is led by the environmental baseline, the current state of the environment, to facilitate the identification, evaluation and subsequent monitoring of the effects of the plan and the alternatives.

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.

2 The Plan for the County



Settlement Strategy

The overall strategy of the CDP is to:

- To promote population growth towards a projected County population of 137,174 by 2013 by facilitating sustainable economic and social development with due regard to the complimentary role of both urban and rural areas in the overall development of the County.
- To define a strong sub-regional role for Mayo as a counter balance to the major urban areas of Galway city and Sligo having regard to the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Guidelines.
- To develop the Linked Hub of Castlebar/Ballina and Westport as its natural extension as the spine around which the sustainable development of County Mayo will be structured, and to promote this extended Hub in the future development of spatial policy, both Regionally and Nationally.
- To support the implementation of the hub status of Castlebar/Ballina and Westport as its natural extension and to strengthen and enhance the County's urban structure, in particular the targeted development of the Key towns as set out in the Regional Guidelines, and other towns identified by the Council.
- To promote sustainable vibrant rural communities
- To promote sustainability and vibrancy in rural communities including small towns and villages
- To promote the future growth and development needs of the County in a sustainable manner and to ensure that the benefits of economic growth and prosperity are spread to all parts of the County.
- To improve the quality of life and social well-being of all those living, working and visiting Mayo by ensuring high quality and sustainable residential, recreational, travel and working environments.
- To promote and facilitate the provision of a sound infrastructure base throughout the County and in particular critical infrastructure which will enhance intra/inter-regional linkages in order to improve the economic competitiveness of Mayo.
- To protect, conserve and manage in a prudent and sustainable manner the County's outstanding natural and built heritage, its cultural resources and to seek the enhancement of these resources where appropriate and feasible.
- To protect, promote and enhance the distinctiveness of the linguistic and cultural heritage of Gaeltacht Mhaigh Eo without compromising the linguistic heritage of these areas.



Rural Type Areas

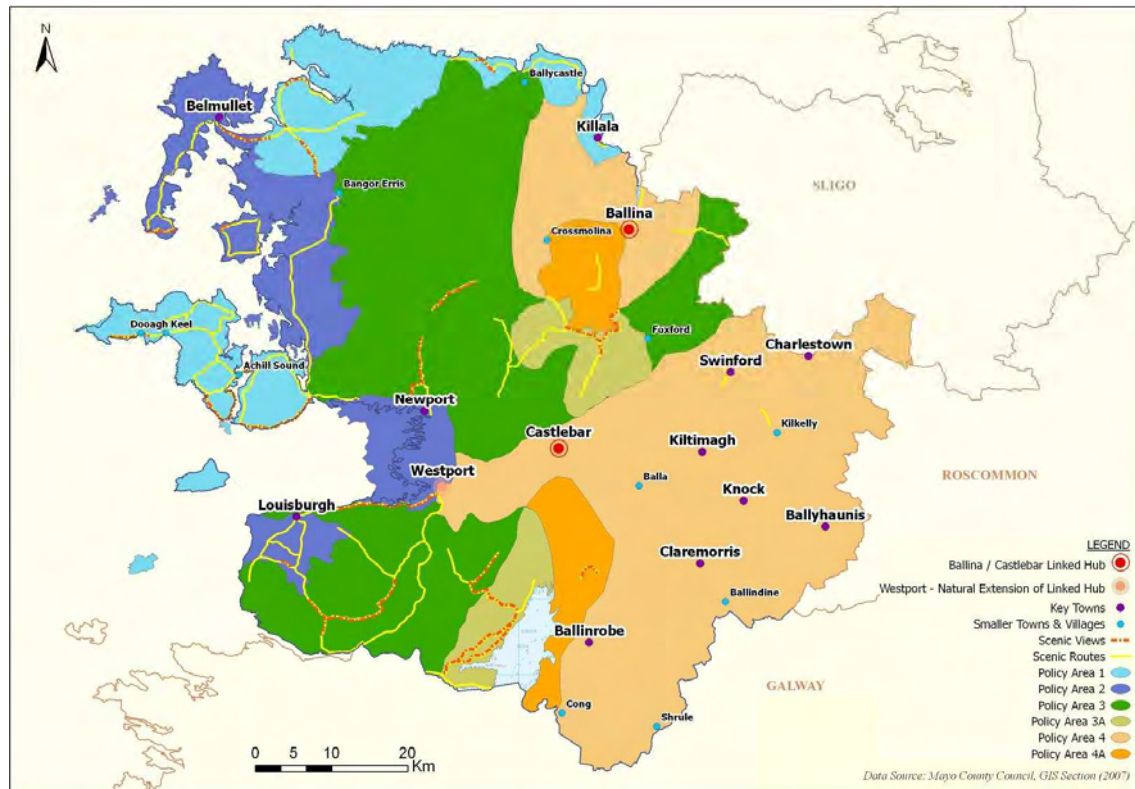
Rural Areas Under Strong Urban Influence from the Plan are shown on the above map surrounding the Westport, Castlebar and Ballina Town Council Areas [shaded light grey].

Urban generated housing in these areas will be controlled by certain policies within the Plan. These controls would have beneficial effects with regard to the protection of the environment in these areas.

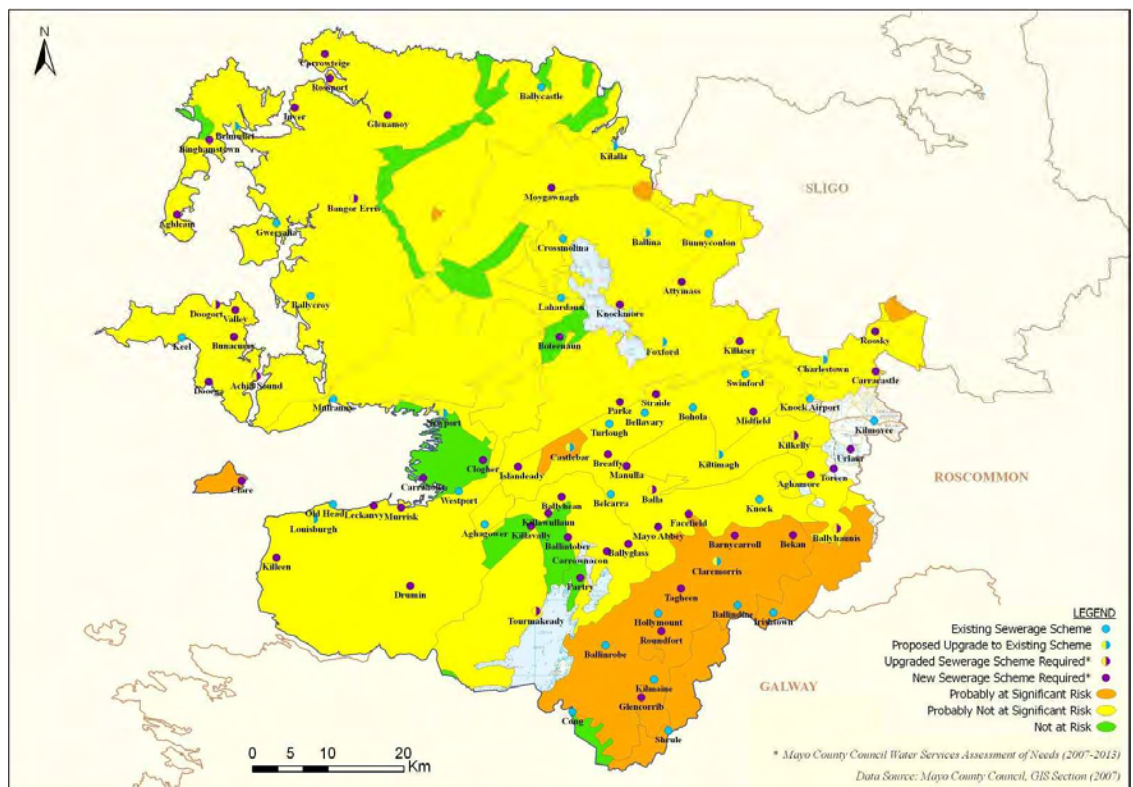
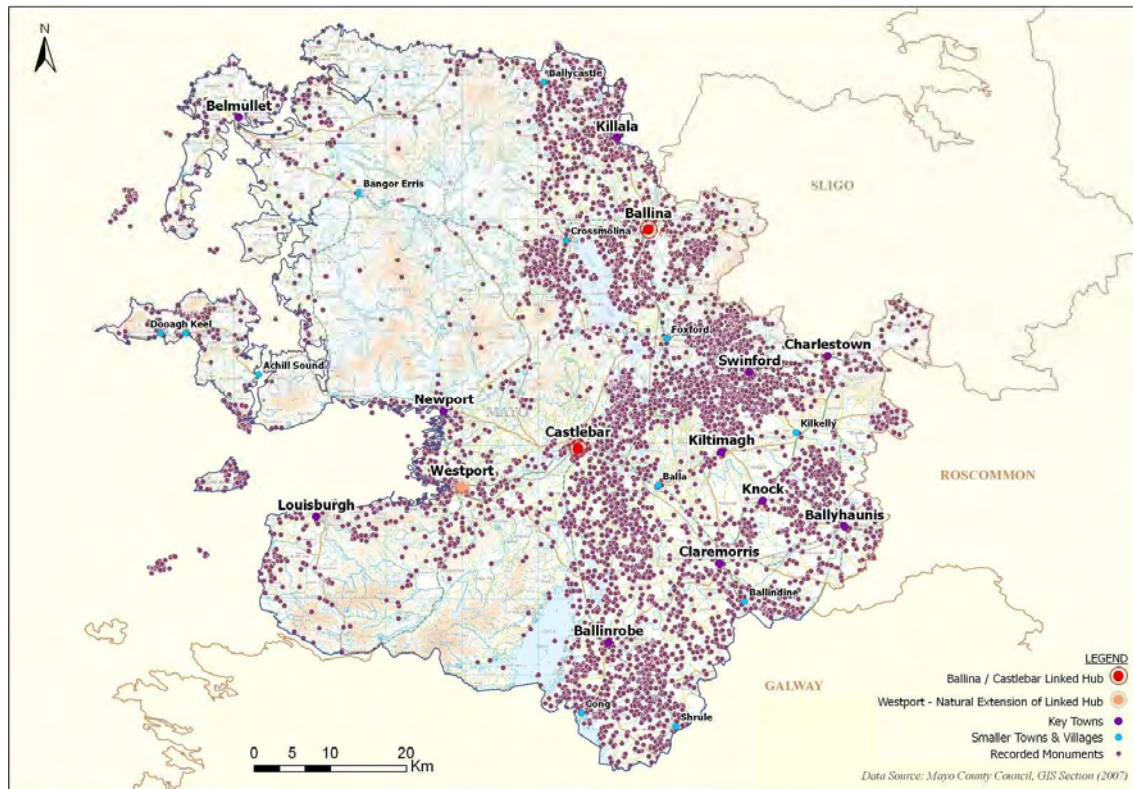
Structurally Weak Areas occur in all areas outside of the *Rural Areas Under Strong Urban Influence*.

Less controls on new housing development are contained in the Plan for *Structurally Weak Areas* e.g. *Policy P/RH-4: To accommodate any demand for residential housing development - (urban or rural generated) - as it arises in the Structurally Weak Areas as defined in Map 5. No residency or sterilisation conditions as described in the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines shall apply for any planning decision for such developments.* This lack of control is likely to lead to conflicts between development and the environment.

3 The Environment of the County



The environment of County Mayo contains a striking range of environmental conditions – as is evidenced by these two maps of very different environmental factors – the Landscape Character Areas (above) and the Ecological Designations (below). At a strategic level it illustrates that there is a general difference between the East and the West of the County. The latter having much greater variety and a much greater dominance of natural habitats.

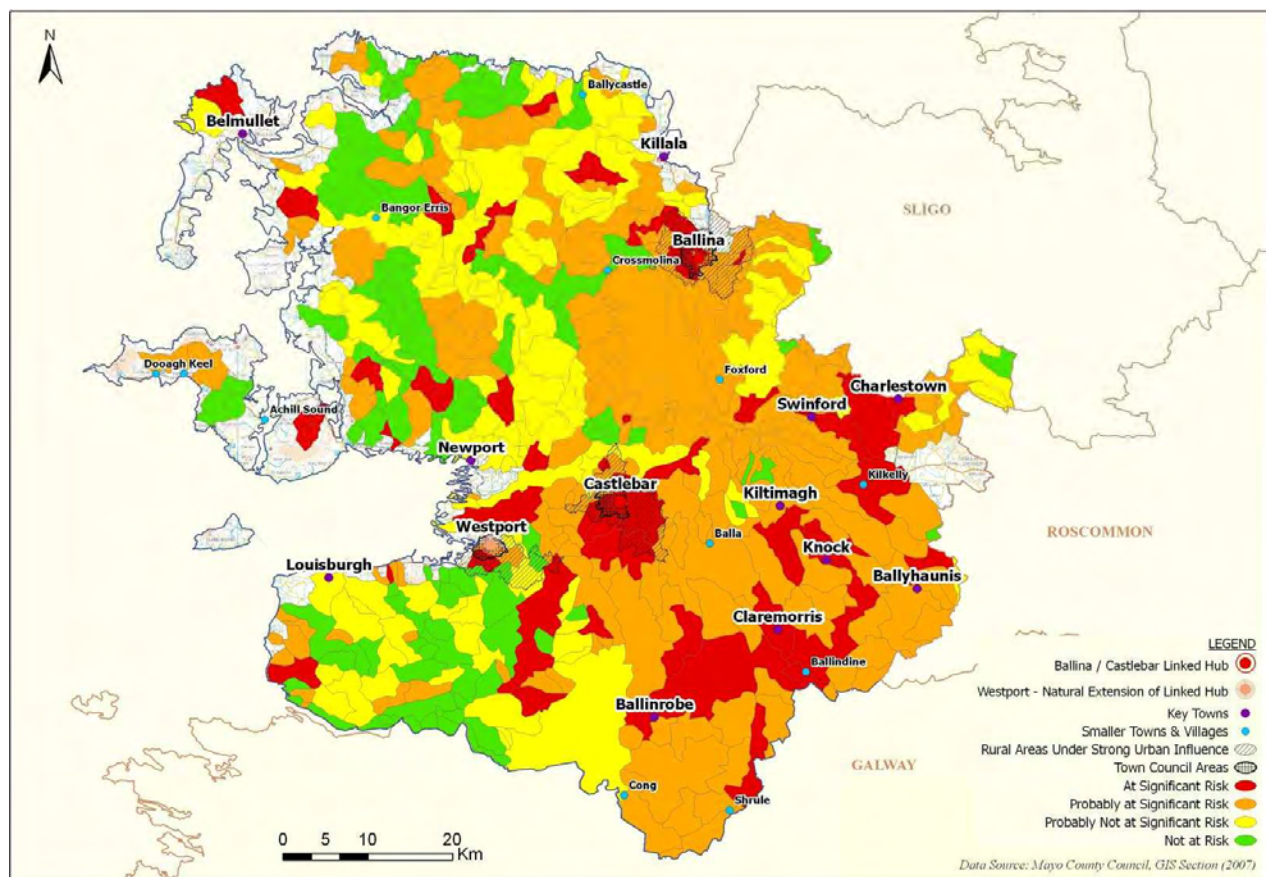


The environment of County Mayo also shows strong differences between East and West. The Landscape Character Areas map on the previous page shows scenic routes and views; the locations of archaeological monuments are shown on the top map on this page; and the risk of pollution to groundwaters is below it. The scenery is most concentrated in the West; the monuments in the centre and East – showing that most people have always lived in the same parts of Mayo as they do today – while the risk to groundwater is most significant in the South East.

4 The Likely Environmental Effects

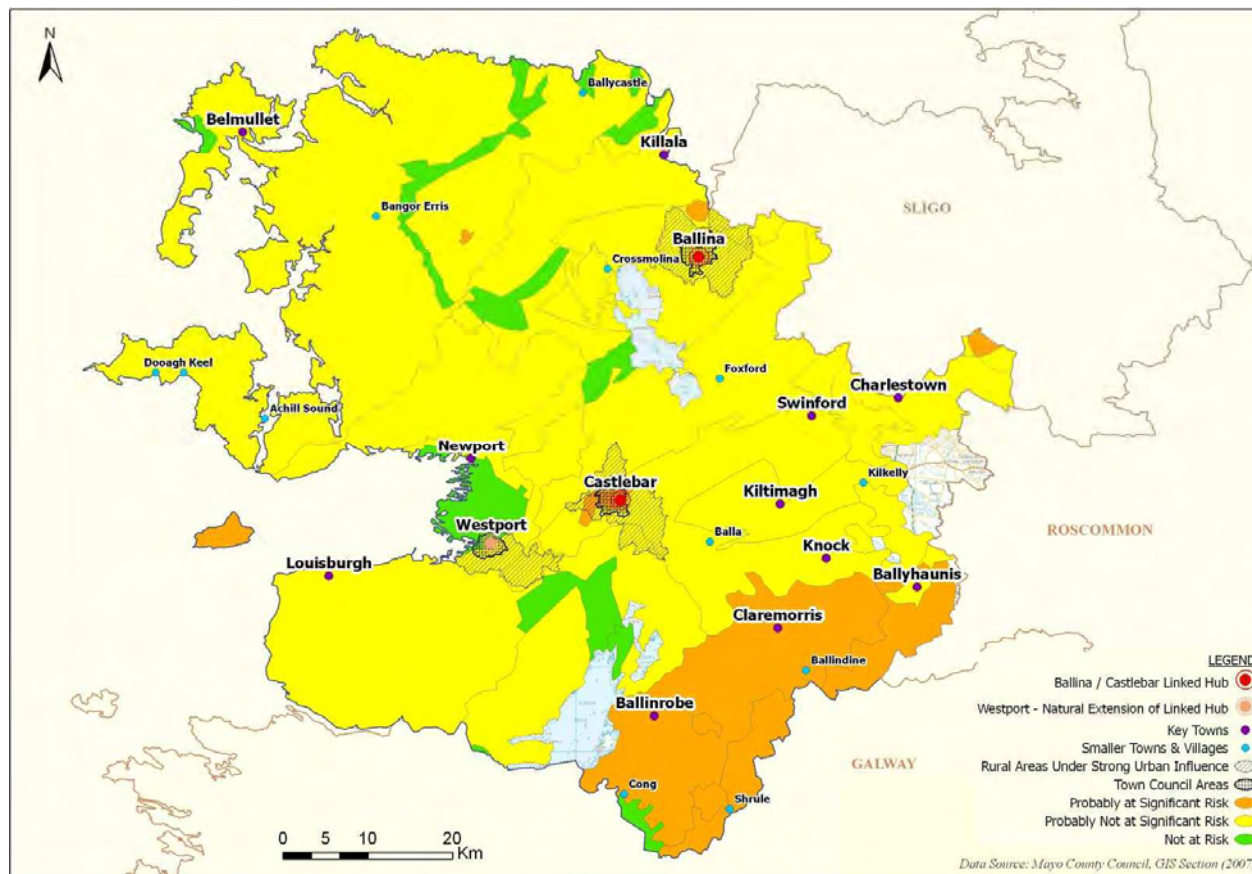
The maps below summarise how the principal environmental assets of the County have the potential to be affected by developments in the rural areas that surround the principal settlements. With the exception of more concentrated developments – such as windfarms, quarries, tourism projects and some infrastructure – most of the development arising from this plan will occur within these areas.

Surface waters



Almost all of the main urban centres (shown as red, orange and purple dots) can be seen to be located within the catchments of rivers and streams that are shown in red (i.e. classed as being at significant risk). Virtually all of the associated pressure in adjacent rural areas can also be seen to occur in orange or red areas. This means that developments within these areas that are not connected with adequately sized and effectively operated waste water treatment plants will almost certainly cause significant deterioration in the quality of surface waters. This is a significant risk that must be mitigated against by the timely provision of waste water infrastructure in line with new developments.

Groundwaters



The soils and geology of County Mayo create conditions which mean that any pollution potentially presents significant risks to groundwater throughout the south-eastern portion of the County. This means rural developments in the environs of Ballinrobe, Claremorris and Ballyhaunis will to be very carefully prepared and scrutinised in order to anticipate and avoid impacts.

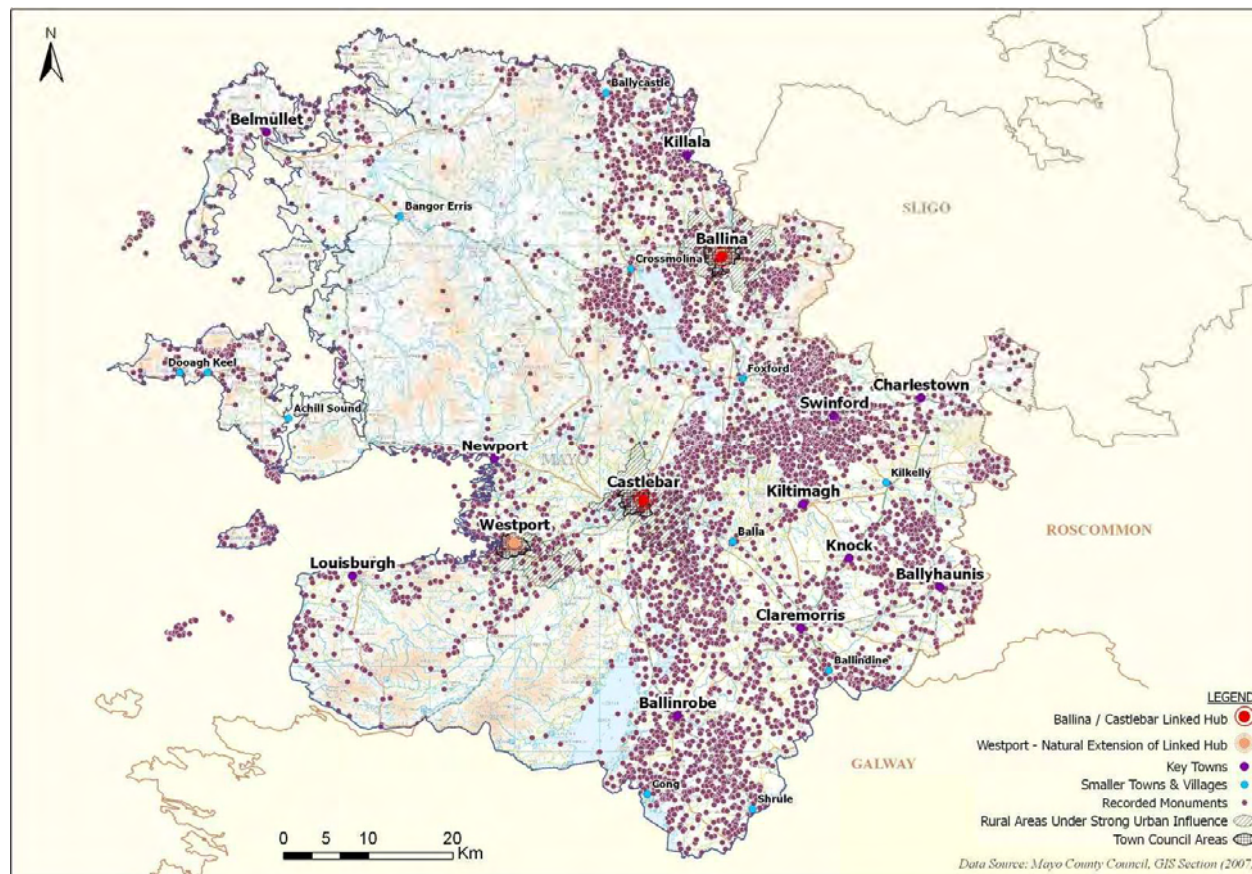
Ecological Sensitivities



This map illustrates that – with the exception of areas beside lakes, coasts and salmonid waters – there is a relatively low potential for development and settlement to conflict with nature in most of Mayo.

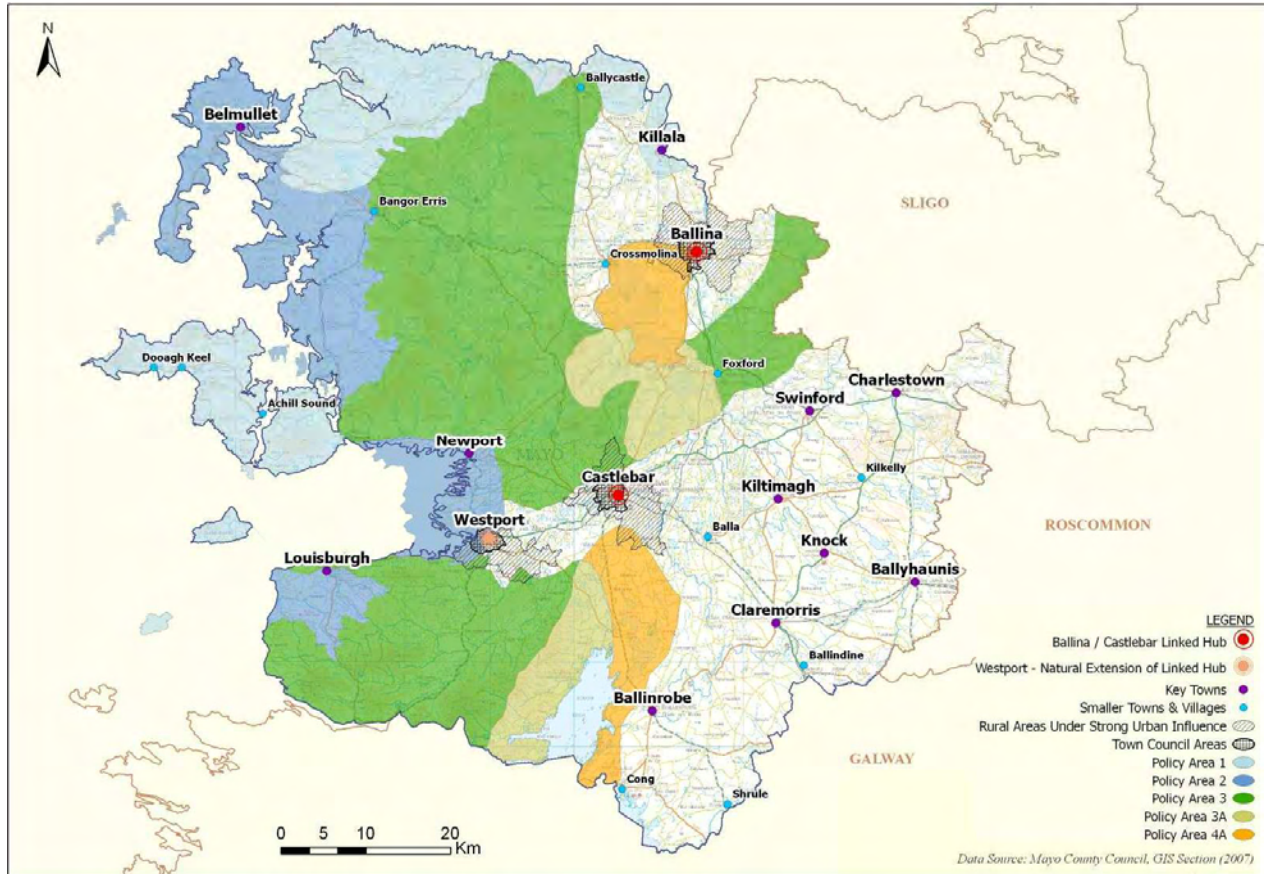
It does also illustrate that developments in the highlands and coastal areas have to be very carefully prepared and scrutinised in order to anticipate and avoid impacts on these resources.

Cultural Heritage



This map clearly shows that development pressure areas strongly coincide with concentrations of archaeology and monuments. This is to be expected – because Mayo has been settled by people for over 6,000 years. The map does, however, emphasise the richness of Mayo's heritage and the need to put in place systematic ways of anticipating and avoiding potential archaeological impacts during the development stage.

Landscape



This map shows how the majority of the development pressure areas are generally located with the robust landscape of the east of the County. The only significant exceptions to this observation occur around the edges of the major lakes in the County, and along the southern shore of Clew Bay and its hinterland – which are very sensitive landscape features. Otherwise the Plan is likely to result in a continuation of the change of the character in coastal areas due to tourism pressure – though at a reduced rate compared to recent years. With the exception of new windfarm developments in the east of the county the effects of the Plan on the landscapes of the County will be a continuation of the patterns observed over the period of the previous Plan.

5 Mitigation Measures

Spatial Strategies

Four areas have been identified where likely development has a significant potential to conflict with elevated densities of environmental sensitivities. These strategies will identify the location, significance and sensitivity of the range of environmental assets and constraints that occur within these particularly sensitive areas that are likely to comprise higher than average intensities of development.

- The North West coast (from Benwee head to Achill)
- South Clew Bay (between Westport and Louisburgh)
- North Lough Conn and the South-Eastern environs of Ballina
- East Lough Mask/Lough Carra

In addition to these specific areas the County will need to prepare and separately assess Thematic Spatial Strategies for both Rural Development & Agricultural Restructuring and Enterprise & Industry.

General Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures are also set out for specific environmental topics

- Designated Ecological Sites
- Designated Wetland/peatland Ecological Sites
- Ecological Networks
- Water Quality protection
- Archaeological Heritage
- Architectural Heritage
- Landscape Heritage
- Coastal protection