

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Variation of the Westport Town & Environs Development Plan 2010-2016

SEA Statement

November 2011



Aquila in Umbra
(in the shadow of the eagle)

Westport Town Council



Dia is Maise Uath

Mayo County Council

Introduction

This is the Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) Statement of the Variation of the Westport Town & Environs Development Plan 2010-2016.

SEA is the systematic, ongoing process of evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme in order to ensure that these effects are appropriately addressed before a decision is made to adopt it. It also gives the public and other interested parties an opportunity to comment and to be kept informed on decisions that may impact on the environment and how they were made.

The SEA is being carried out in order to comply with EU SEA Directive 2001/42/EC which was transposed into Irish law through the SEA Regulations. In order to determine if the proposed variation has any adverse impacts on any of Mayo's designated conservation sites, the Natura 2000 network, a separate assessment called a Habitat Directive Assessment was also carried out.

The SEA Statement is required to include information summarising:

1. How environmental considerations have been integrated into the variation
 2. How the environmental report, the submissions/observations made to the planning authority on the proposed variation and Environmental Report have been taken into account during the preparation of the variation
 3. The reasons for choosing the variation, as adopted, in light of the other reasonable alternatives
- and
4. The measures decided upon to monitor the significant effects of implementing the variation.

Context

Westport Town Council and Mayo County Council (hereon in referred to as 'the planning authorities') jointly commenced the variation process in May 2011 by proposing to vary the Westport Town & Development Plan 2010-2016 (hereon in referred to as 'the Plan') to include the following into the plan:

- A Core Strategy
- Area Plan for Colonel's Wood
- Area Plan for Westport House & Demesne
- Miscellaneous amendments

The proposed variation was subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA). The SEA Screening Report concluded that having had regard to Schedule 2A of the Planning & Development (SEA) Regulations, the proposed method of preparing the Core Strategy and the submissions/observations received from the Environmental Authorities, the proposed variation would not be likely to have any significant adverse impacts on the environment. The HDA Screening concluded that it was not necessary to proceed to Stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment). It was stated in the SEA determination that any modifications to the proposed variation to the Westport Town & Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 arising from the variation process will be screened for the need for an environmental assessment.

The proposed variation was put on display during the period 24th May 2011 to 22nd June 2011 and written submissions/observations were invited on the proposed variation. Following the display period a Manager's Report was prepared on the submissions/observations received.

The members considered the proposed variation and the Manager's Report at meetings held on 28th July 2011 and decided to make modifications to the proposed variation.

The proposed modifications were considered to be a material alteration of the proposed variation to the plan and may be summarised as follows:

- The omission of the Core Strategy and associated amendments;
- Modifications to the proposed Area Plan for Colonel's Wood to exclude the proposed commercial site;
- Modifications to the proposed Area Plan for Westport House & Demesne to remove phasing of development on the demesne and to include additional areas for development; and
- Rezoning of land at Drumindoo from Community Facility to Agriculture/High Amenity.

SEA Screening of the modifications determined that an environmental report was required on the proposed modifications. Given that the proposed modifications effectively mirrored the existing Plan it was decided to resume with the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the existing Plan in order to avoid duplication of environmental assessment.

A fourth addendum of the Environmental Report on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Westport Town & Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 was prepared.

The purpose of Addendum IV was to provide a clear understanding of the likely environmental consequences of making the proposed modifications to the variation. The proposed modifications, SEA Addendum IV and Appropriate Assessment were put on public display in August/September 2011. A Manager's Report was prepared on the submissions. The Manager's Report, SEA and HDA documents were circulated to the members of the planning authorities.

The proposed variation with modifications was made by the elected members on 10th November 2011 (Westport Town Council) and 14th November 2011 (Mayo County Council). The variation made may be summarised as:

- The inclusion an Area Plan for Westport House & Demesne into the Plan;
- The inclusion of Area Plan for Colonel's Wood into the Plan; and
- Minor text amendments to the Plan.

The proposed Core Strategy was omitted from the variation.

Section 1 How Environmental Considerations were Integrated into the Variation of the Westport Town & Environs Plan 2010-2016

The variation made consists of:

- The inclusion an Area Plan for Westport House & Demesne into the Plan;
- The inclusion of Area Plan for Colonel's Wood into the Plan; and
- Minor text amendments to the Plan.

The proposed Core Strategy was omitted from the variation.

The Area Plan for Westport House & Demesne

In preparing the area plan for Westport House and Demesne it was recognised that the estate requires additional development to ensure the viability of the estate for future generations. However it was also considered that that the very essence of the estate – the historic core – also required carefully planned maintenance, conservation and appropriate development to ensure that this is not jeopardised resulting in a negative impact on the overall estate.

Having regard to the above, key areas within the estate were identified which could be further developed over a short to long term period. In identifying these areas environmental and planning considerations (e.g. proximity to Natura 2000 sites, protected structures, listed views, visual amenity etc) were considered. The final area plan gives a realistic picture of where development could occur in the future without having adverse environmental impacts.

In addition Objective WHO-01 in the Plan was varied which provides additional protection to the estate and to the Natura 2000 site – the Clew Bay Complex:

It is an objective of the Council to protect the natural and built environment and cultural heritage of Westport House and Demesne, permitting appropriate development in accordance with Section 6 of this plan to ensure the preservation, conservation and future of the estate. Emphasis shall be placed on preserving and re-enforcing the historic core of the estate, planned management of the Demesne woodlands, enhancement of links between the House and the town, and retaining the vistas to and from the House. Any plan/project in the areas will require screening to determine the need to undertake Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.

The Area Plan for Colonels Wood

The Area Plan for Colonel's Wood allows for woodland management protecting and enhancing all broadleaf species; phased felling of coniferous species and replacement with broadleaf indigenous species; and recreational use (e.g. play ground/scouts den).

Multi-usage trails and any pedestrian bridges permitted will be subject to best ecological practice, ecological assessment and/or consultation with Inland Fisheries Ireland.

Minor Text Amendments

The text amendments to the plan up date the current plan to take into consideration new legislation, new guidance documents and up-to-date population figures. In general, any new legislation/guidance should have a positive environmental impact on the plan area.

Omitted Core Strategy

During the variation process the elected members of the planning authorities were advised not to omit the Core Strategy element of the proposed variation. This was iterated by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government who suggested a meeting with the planning authorities to discuss the variation. A meeting was held on 21st October 2011 between representations from both Councils (elected members and officials) and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government it was decided not to include the proposed Core Strategy into the Plan on the provision that a revised Core Strategy (which required the commencement of a new variation) would be incorporated into the Plan by way of a second variation.

The revised Core Strategy is to be based on a zoning map agreed at the meeting held on 21st October 2011 and the new variation is to commence by the end of 2011. The revised Core Strategy as agreed will not have a significant effect on the environment.

Section 2 How the Environmental Report, Submissions & Observations in relation to the variation process, and any consultations with Member States have been taken into account during the preparation of the variation

Environmental Report

An Environmental Report was prepared for the Plan in 2008/2009 and as the proposed modifications effectively mirrored the existing Plan it was decided to resume with the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the existing Plan in order to avoid duplication of environmental assessment. Addendum IV of the Environmental Report was prepared. Addendum IV updated the relevant information contained in the Environmental Report in light of the variation. Addendum IV was circulated to the elected members to inform them of the environmental consequences of the decision taken during the variation process.

Submissions and Observations

There were two opportunities for the public, prescribed bodies and interested parties to make submissions/observations to the proposed variation:

1. Submissions/observations on the proposed variation were invited during the period 24th May – 22nd June 2011 (91 submissions/observations received)
2. Submissions/observations on the proposed modifications were invited during the period 16th August 2011 – 14th September 2011 (37 submission/observations received)

A Manager's Report was prepared after each submission period. The Manager's Report summarised the submissions/observations made and set out the manager's response and recommendation(s) to each submission/observation made. The elected members made the variation having regard to the proposed variation, the proposed modifications to the variation, the Manager's Reports prepared on the submissions/observations, the SEA Addendum IV (on the proposed modifications) and the Habitat's Directive Assessment (on the proposed modifications).

Consultation with Member States

As the proposed variation would not be likely to have an impact on a member state, consultation with a member state was not required during the preparation of the variation.

Section 3 Reason for choosing the variation in light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with

Area Plan for Westport House

The reason for choosing the Area Plan for Westport House over the alternative proposals was to ensure the viability of the estate for future generations and that that the very essence of the estate – the historic core – is carefully planned, maintained, conserved and appropriately developed.

Alternatives dealt with included:

- Not including an Area Plan; or
- Choosing the Area Plan for Westport House as original proposed in the variation.

Area Plan for Colonel's Wood

The reason for choosing the Area Plan for Colonel's Wood over the alternative proposals was to ensure the protection of Colonel's Wood as an amenity area for the town and to ensure planned woodland management within Colonel's Wood.

Alternatives dealt with included:

- Not including an Area Plan; or
- Choosing the Area Plan for Colonel's as original proposed in the variation.

Omission of Core Strategy

The reason for not incorporating the Core Strategy into the plan over the alternative proposals was to allow for a revised Core Strategy to be prepared, following consensus amongst the planning authorities and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, based on a revised zoning map that was agreed at a meeting held on the 21st October 2011. A new variation is required as due to legislative requirements the revised Core Strategy could not be introduced into the variation process at that stage.

A number of Core Strategy Options were presented to the members prior to the variation going on display in May 2011.

Section 4 Measures decided upon to monitor the significant environmental effects of implementing the variation

The SEA Directive requires that the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes are monitored.

Monitoring enables, at an early stage, the identification of unforeseen adverse effects and the undertaking of appropriate remedial action. In addition to this, monitoring can also play an important role in assessing whether the Plan as varied is achieving its environmental

objectives and targets, whether these need to be re-examined and whether the proposed mitigation measures are being implemented. The monitoring programme will consist of an assessment of the relevant indicators and targets against the data relating to each environmental component.

The environmental report carried out on the Plan in 2008/2009 puts forward proposals for monitoring the implementation of the Plan, and these will continue to apply to the variation that was made to the Plan.

Indicators and Targets

Monitoring is based around the indicators which were chosen earlier in the SEA process as set out in the SEA Environmental Report for the purpose of measuring changes to the various environmental components. They allow quantitative measures of trends and progress over time relating to the Strategic Environmental Objectives used in the evaluation process. Focus will be given to indicators which are relevant to the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan as varied and existing monitoring arrangements will be used in order to monitor the selected indicators. Each indicator to be monitored is accompanied by targets which are derived from the relevant legislation.

Sources

Measurements for indicators should come from existing monitoring sources and no new monitoring should be required to take place. Existing monitoring sources exist for each of the indicators and include those maintained by Mayo County Council and the relevant authorities e.g. the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Central Statistics Office.

The Development Management Process in Mayo County Council and Westport Town Council will provide passive monitoring of various indicators and targets on an application-by-application basis. Where significant adverse effects are likely to occur upon, for example, entries to the RMP, entries to the RPS or ecological networks as a result of the undertaking of individual renewable energy projects or multiple individual renewable energy projects, such instances should be identified and recorded and should feed into the monitoring evaluation.

Reporting and Monitoring

Westport Town Council will be responsible for collating existing relevant monitored data, the preparation of a monitoring report and, if necessary, the carrying out of corrective action. It is recommended that a multi-disciplinary committee of suitably qualified persons (Monitoring Committee) be established within two months of the making of this variation to oversee the monitoring process, determine the frequency of monitoring and input into the preparation of the Monitoring Report. It is recommended also that the monitoring reporting should go parallel with the review of the Plan with a Monitoring Report at least every two years or more frequently if determined by the Monitoring Committee.

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