

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
SCREENING REPORT
for**

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
FOR COUNTY MEATH
2014- 2022**

MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL

January 2016



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Contents Amendment Record

This report has been issued and amended as follows:

Issue	Revision	Description	Date	Prepared by	Checked by
01	00	SEA Screening Report	15.01.2016	TB	TB
02	01	SEA Screening Report Final	21.01.2016	TB	TB



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1. INTRODUCTION TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR COUNTY MEATH

Meath County Council has prepared an economic development strategy for the county in order to ‘provide clear, concise, innovative and evidence-based measures aimed at accelerating the economic transformation, revitalisation and sustainable development of Meath.’ The strategy sets out a target for the creation of 7,500 jobs in Meath by 2022.

Meath’s overarching vision is for:

Meath to be a county that fosters sustainability, throughout its vibrant communities, dynamic economy and unique cultural and natural heritage.

The tenets of Meath’s economic vision are designed to support this overarching vision.

The strategy has been prepared under the framework of the national *Action Plan for Jobs*¹ and is aligned with the IDA’s strategy *Winning Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019*² and with Enterprise Ireland’s Strategy. In turn this strategy will form a critical component of the Regional Action Plan for jobs and a core component of the Meath Local Economic and Community Plan, which will give the strategy statutory effect.

The strategy is also framed with reference to Europe 2020 targets for employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate/energy to be reached by 2020.

The key outputs from the strategy include:

- An economic vision for the county – centred on evidence based approach to understanding and transforming the economic performance of the country.
- A roadmap - identifying sectoral opportunities for economic and employment growth.
- Key recommendations to enable the county to realise its economic potential and prosper.
- The integration of these recommendations with land use planning proposals.
- A marketing plan with key messages and channel policy to support the strategy.
- An action plan to implement the key recommendations and bring the vision to life.

Under Aligning the Economic and Spatial Strategies, the economic development strategy notes that the spatial plan which seeks to provide a framework for economic growth and job creation is the integration of the following 3 pillars:

¹ <https://www.djei.ie/en/What-We-Do/Jobs-Workplace-and-Skills/Action-Plan-for-Jobs/>

² http://www.idaireland.com/en/docs/publications/IDA_STRATEGY_FINAL.pdf

Spatial & Economic Structuring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking spatial and functional areas by aligning economic growth with the settlement/development hierarchy and continued focus on key employment locations as drivers for growth. • Recognising the important role of smaller economic settlements/rural economic development in County Meath
Access to Labour & Markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximising locational advantages of strategic growth centres based on the concept of economic corridors, including proximity to airports, multi modal transport corridors, and location within the metropolitan area/national gateway.
Promoting & Supporting Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote Meath as a location of choice for business and jobs by providing a range of high quality suitable sites and properties, examining initiatives for delivery of strategic employment areas/sites and ensuring the relevant audiences (foreign and domestic) know what we have to offer.

The economic development strategy also includes 3 main economic objectives and an action plan to the deliver the strategy. The 8 implementation objectives are:

Objective 1: Internal Engagement: Create and promote a culture that supports sustainable economic development practices within Meath County Council.

Objective 2: External Engagement: Engage and work with State Agencies, Regional Agencies, Higher Education Institutions and Local Enterprise Agencies to stimulate and grow economic development in Meath.

Objective 3: External Engagement: Collaborate with wealth creators and business innovators who have the capacity to assist in job creation and entrepreneurship.

Objective 4: Spatial Implementation: Promote our towns and strategic employment sites as the economic drivers for employment in Meath while acknowledging the role of the rural economy.

Objective 5: Spatial Implementation: Identify and support investment in infrastructure and services that enable and deliver economic development.

Objective 6: Fiscal Incentives: Examine financial incentives designed to aid the delivery of the employment generation.

Objective 7: Marketing: Develop a marketing plan and initiatives aimed at promoting the economic strategy.

Objective 8: Review and Monitoring: Review and monitor progress and trends in jobs.

2. BACKGROUND TO STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA)

The requirements for SEA in Ireland are transposed into Irish law through:

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

The Directive requires Member States of the EU to assess the likely significant³ environmental effects of plans and programmes prior to their adoption thus providing for the assessment of strategic environmental considerations at an early stage of the decision making process.

Article 1 of the SEA Directive states:

‘The objective of this directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that, in accordance with this directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.’

The Directive came into effect in an Irish context in July 2004. Since then SEA must be prepared for plans and programmes, including:

- Regional Planning Guidelines;
- City and County Development Plans;
- Planning Schemes for Strategic Development Zones;
- Development Plans made by Town Councils, where the population of the area is 10,000 or more; or
- Local Area Plans for towns with a target population of 5,000 persons, or where the area covered by the local area plan is greater than 50 square kilometres, or where a local area plan is being prepared for a town and its environs.

3. NEED FOR SEA AND SEA SCREENING

The Regulations state that SEA is mandatory for certain plans (as outlined above) while screening for SEA is required for other plans that fall below the specified thresholds. Where plans or programmes

³ “Significant Effects” – These effects include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects.

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 area.

Under the Regulations, SEA is required to be undertaken for, *inter alia*: plans and programmes which are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism and town and country planning or land use, and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive; or which are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site but, either individually or in combination with other plans, are likely to have a significant effect on any such site.

The Economic Development Strategy is not a development or town plan and likewise does not set the framework for future development consent of projects. In addition the Economic Development Strategy will not have a likely significant effect, either individually or in combination with other plans, on any European Site. Therefore, SEA is not a mandatory requirement for the Economic Development Strategy.

The Regulations also require, *inter alia*, a determination to be made as to whether plans and programmes other than those referred to in the paragraph above, which set the framework for future development consent of projects, are likely to have significant effects on the environment. While, it is considered that the Economic Development Strategy does not set a framework for future development consent of projects, such a determination is required to take account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 1 ('Criteria for determining whether a Plan or Programme is likely to have significant effects on the Environment') of the Regulations and submissions or observations from relevant environmental authorities.

4. ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

The following assessment (Table 4.1) has been conducted in accordance with the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (SI No. 436 of 2004). Thus the Screening utilises specified criteria for determining the likely significant environmental impacts of the proposed variations as set out in Schedule 1 of SEA Regulations 2004 (see Appendix 1).

Table 4.1

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLAN / PROGRAMME HAVING REGARD IN PARTICULAR TO:	
(i)	The degree to which the plan/programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions, or by allocating resources
	It is the purpose of the Economic Development Strategy to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLAN / PROGRAMME HAVING REGARD IN PARTICULAR TO:

development of County Meath. It is intended that the strategy will facilitate both the expanding economic development role and the emerging local development role of Local Government and bring about better alignment of the work of the Local Authority and other providers of social, community and economic development thereby achieving better returns for the communities they serve.

In itself the strategy does not set a framework for projects or development. Such a framework continues to be delivered via the statutory County Development Plan. In this regard specific actions and objectives of the Economic Development Strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Appropriate Assessment).

(ii) The degree to which the plan / programme influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy.

While the Economic Development Strategy is an action focused plan, it is not an operational plan nor a spatial land use plan. The priorities which will be implemented through operational plans have been identified based on an analysis of existing national, regional and local strategies, socio economic data and public consultations.

Specific actions and objectives of the Economic Development Strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Appropriate Assessment).

(iii) The relevance of the plan/programme for the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.

The Economic Development Strategy represents an opportunity to implement Meath County Development Plans' objectives in relation to sustainable development particularly in respect of sustainable transport, public health, community, cultural heritage and tourism and the green economy. The strategy will be an important element of County Development Plan for ensuring the delivery of these objectives. However, these specific actions and objectives of the Economic Development Strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Appropriate Assessment).

(iv) Environmental problems relevant to the plan / programme.

It is not considered that environmental problems are specific to the Economic Development Strategy. Specific actions and objectives of the strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Appropriate Assessment).

(v) The relevance of the plan / programme for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste management or water protection).

The Economic Development Strategy is not a spatial land use plan and specific actions and

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLAN / PROGRAMME HAVING REGARD IN PARTICULAR TO:

objectives of the strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Appropriate Assessment).

Where the Economic Development Strategy leads to further strategies and plans provide a framework for development consent for projects these projects will be subject to EIA and AA Screening at project inception stage.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EFFECTS AND OF THE AREA LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED HAVING REGARD IN PARTICULAR TO:

(i) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects:

It is anticipated that the key objectives and principles to be adopted as part of the Economic Development Strategy will ensure that the effects of the resulting changes to the existing operating environment will not be significant. The probability that these effects will be environmentally significant in negative terms is low.

Key actions and objectives of the strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Appropriate Assessment).

(ii) The cumulative nature of the effects:

It is considered that there will be no significant cumulative effects on the environment arising from the implementation of the proposed variation which have not been previously assessed for SEA.

Cumulative negative environmental effects as a result of the Economic Development Strategy are not expected. A key objective of the strategy is to attain a balance between economic growth and the need to provide sustainable development.

In addition key actions and objectives of the strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Appropriate Assessment).

(iii) The trans-boundary nature of the effects:

It is considered that there will be no trans-boundary effect on the environment arising from the Economic Development Strategy.

(iv) The risks to human health or the environment (*e.g.* due to accidents):

No risks to human health or the environment have been identified.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EFFECTS AND OF THE AREA LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED HAVING REGARD IN PARTICULAR TO:

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

No particular environmental effects have been identified as a result of the Economic Development Strategy. Key actions and objectives of the strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Appropriate Assessment).

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

a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;

No effects have been identified.

b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, and;

No effects have been identified.

c) Intensive land-use.

No effects have been identified.

In addition key actions and objectives of the Economic Development Strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Appropriate Assessment).

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

Under the Habitats Directive an Appropriate Assessment Screening has been undertaken on the Economic Development Strategy and it has found that significant adverse impacts would not be likely. In addition key actions and objectives of the Economic Development Strategy have led to a variation of the County Development Plan (*i.e.* Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.

5. DETERMINATION

Following review and consideration of the issues pertaining to the Economic Development Strategy, it is concluded that the strategy in itself will not result in a significant adverse environmental effect and will therefore not require a detailed assessment of effects through the SEA process.

This conclusion has been drawn through consideration of the following factors:

- The Strategy does not set a framework for consent of future projects;
 - Key actions and objectives of the Economic Development Strategy have led to a variation of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 (Variation No.3), which is subject to separate Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment;
- and
- The existing and adopted safeguarding policies on environmental protection within the existing and adopted County Development Plan SEA Environmental Report and Appropriate Assessment.