

Section 2

SEA Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This section details how the SEA for the Draft Development Plan has been undertaken alongside the preparation of the Draft Plan. The SEA process started in November 2009 and this report has been produced in June 2010. Figure 2.1 lays out the main stages in the Development Plan SEA process. The process is currently at the seventh stage in the process as highlighted in green in this Figure 2.1.

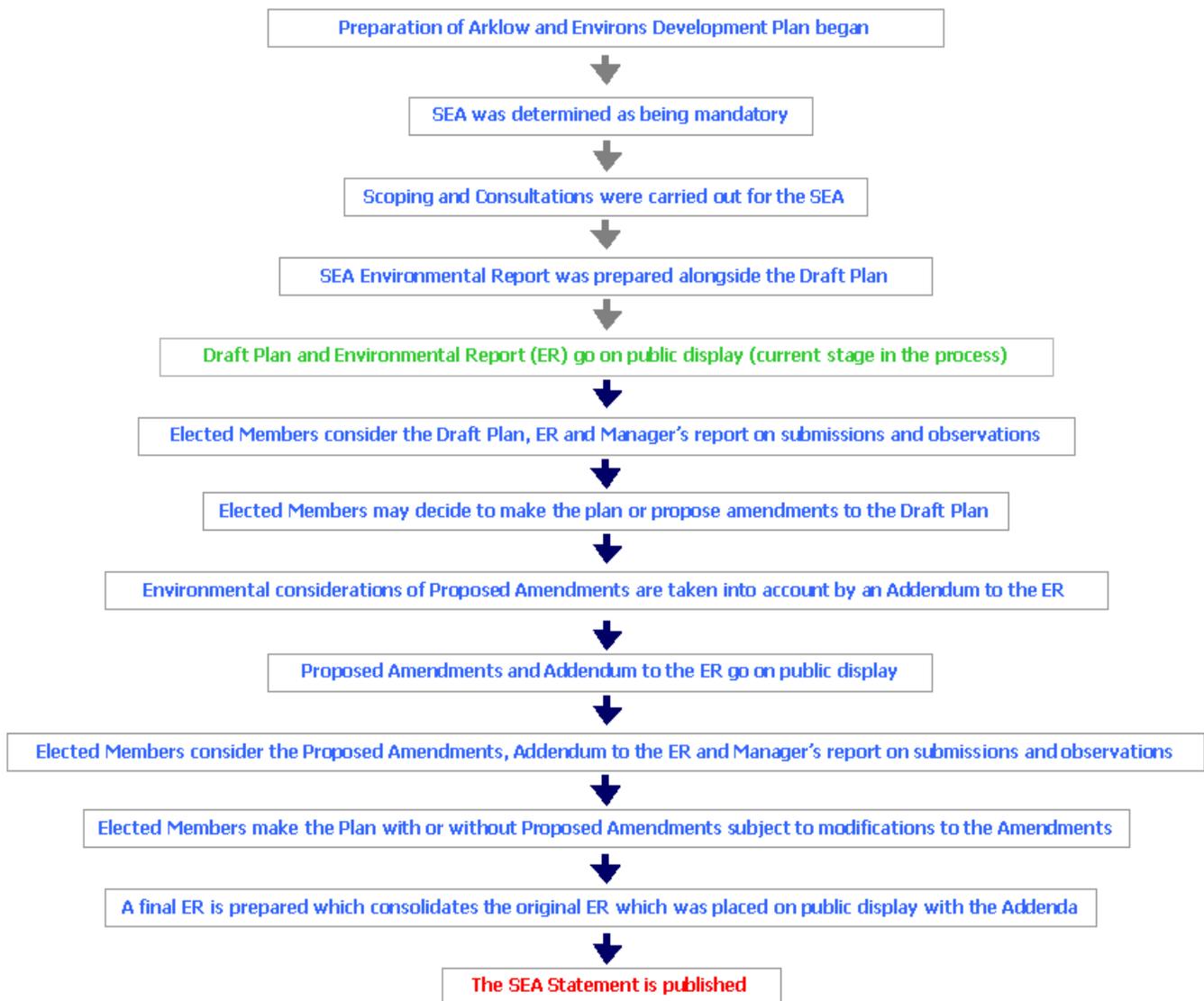


Figure 2.1 Development Plan and SEA stages

2.2 Scoping

In consultation with the relevant authorities, the scope of environmental issues to be dealt with by the SEA together with the level of detail to which they are to be addressed was broadly decided on after preliminary data collection. Scoping of the SEA was continuous with certain issues being selected for further examination after certain data was obtained. Scoping helped the SEA to become focused upon the important issues, such as those relating to existing and potential environmental issues and environmental problems¹, thereby avoiding resources being wasted on unnecessary data collection.

With regard to human health, impacts relevant to the SEA are those, which arise as a result of interactions with environmental vectors (i.e. environmental components such as air, water or soil through which contaminants or pollutants, which have the potential to cause harm, can be transported so that they come into contact with human beings). Impacts upon human beings arising as a result of social and economic conditions are not considered by SEA.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) were all sent SEA scoping notices indicating that submissions or observations in relation to the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the environmental report could be made in regard to the plan. Written submissions were received on the scope of the SEA from all of the above departments. Following receipt of these submissions a scoping meeting was held with the environmental authorities in order to discuss the most important issues facing the plan area.

In addition, the Council's intention to carry out SEA as part of the review of the Development Plan was indicated during the consultation process on the preparation of the new Development Plan where the public were invited to make submissions on environmental as well as planning issues.

The findings of the SEA were communicated to the plan making team on an ongoing basis from the outset in order to allow for their integration into the Development Plan thus

¹ Annex I of the SEA Directive requires that information is provided on 'any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme', thus, helping to ensure that the proposed strategic action does not make existing environmental problems worse. Environmental problems arise where there is a conflict between current environmental conditions and ideal targets. If environmental problems are identified at the offset they can help focus attention on important issues and geographical areas where environmental effects of the plan or programme may be likely.

minimising the potential for significant negative environmental effects arising from implementation of the Plan.

2.3 Most Important Strategic Environmental Issues

The principal environmental issues centre on water and water-related issues. This is because of the emergence of specific requirements from the Eastern River Basin Management Plans (ERBMP's) and the challenges of meeting those requirements on account of the existing condition and trends in both the surface and ground waters within and surrounding Arklow Town and its Environs. The following issues were among those identified during the SEA scoping process.

- ⇒ The timely availability of waste water treatment capacity;
- ⇒ The protection of designated ecological sites and corridors,
- ⇒ The protection and improvement of water bodies.
- ⇒ Flooding - The Avoca River catchment area and Arklow Town have been subject to periodic flooding over a number of years. Heavy storms in 2000 & 2010 caused severe flooding in Lower Main Street, South Quay and Ferrybank. In order to comply with the DEHLG's Guidelines on the Planning System and Flood Risk Management the Development Plan will need to ensure that appropriate zoning of lands and restriction of use will be applied in areas liable to flooding in order to avoid increased risk of flooding of the lands within or upstream or downstream of the zoned areas.

2.4 Environmental Baseline Data and other Strategic Actions

The SEA process is led by the environmental baseline (i.e. the current state of the environment - flora and fauna, soil, water, cultural heritage etc.) to facilitate the identification, evaluation and subsequent monitoring of the effects of the Development Plan. Data was collected to describe the environmental baseline and its likely evolution without implementation of the Development Plan.

The SEA Directive (Annex I) requires that information be provided on 'any existing environmental problems, which are relevant to the plan or programme'. Information is therefore provided on existing environmental problems, which are relevant to the

Development Plan, thus, helping to ensure that the Development Plan does not make any existing environmental problems worse.

The SEA Directive requires that information on the baseline environment be focused upon the relevant aspects of the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected and the likely evolution of the current environment in the absence of the strategic action i.e. the Development Plan. Any information that does not focus upon this is surplus to requirements; therefore, the SEA of the Development Plan focuses on the significant issues, disregarding the less significant ones. In addition, the SEA Directive aims to avoid duplication of the assessment whereby a strategic action forms part of a hierarchy. Furthermore, if certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels of the hierarchy in which the Development Plan is positioned, or, if certain matters have already been assessed by a different level of the hierarchy then additional assessment is not needed.

In order to describe the baseline - the current state of the environment - data was collated from currently available, relevant environmental sources.

2.5 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. Taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the Plan, alternatives were formulated alongside the plan-making team.

2.6 The Environmental Report

In this Environmental Report, which has been prepared alongside the Development Plan, the likely environmental effects of the Development Plan and the alternatives are predicted and their significance evaluated while having regard to the environmental baseline. The Environmental Report provides the decision-makers, who decide to adopt the Development Plan, with a clear understanding of the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the future development of Arklow Town and its Environs. Mitigation measures to prevent or reduce significant adverse effects posed by the DP, or to maximise any benefits arising, as well as measures concerning monitoring were proposed.

The Environmental Report will be required to be altered should amendments be proposed to the Draft Plan or should a Plan, which includes elements which have not been evaluated by the SEA and which may be likely to have significant environmental effects be adopted.

2.7 The SEA Statement

When the Plan is adopted a document referred to as the SEA Statement must be made public. This is required to include information on: how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan - highlighting the main changes to the Plan which resulted from the SEA process; how the Environmental Report and consultations have been taken into account - summarising the key issues raised in consultations and in the Environmental Report indicating what action, if any, was taken in response; and the reasons for choosing the Plan in the light of the other alternatives, identifying the other alternatives considered, commenting on their potential effects and explaining why the Plan was selected.

2.8 Legislative Conformance

This report complies with the provisions of the SEA Regulations and is written in accordance with Schedule 2B of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (SI No. 436 of 2004).

Table 2.1² (below) is a reproduction of the checklist of information to be contained in the Environmental Report (DEHLG, 2004) and includes the relevant sections of this report, which deal with these requirements.

2.9 Difficulties Encountered

The lack of a centralised data source that could make all environmental baseline data for the County both readily available and in a consistent format posed a challenge to the SEA process.

This difficulty is one, which is encountered at local authorities across the Country and was overcome by investing time in the collection of data from various sources and through the use of Geographical Information Systems.

² DEHLG (2004) Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Guidelines for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities Dublin: Government of Ireland

Table 2.1 checklist of information included in this environmental report.

Information Required to be included in the Environmental Report	Corresponding Section of this Report
(A) Outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan, and of its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes	Sections 4 and 5
(B) Description of relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the evolution of that environment without implementation of the plan	Section 3
(C) Description of the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	Sections 3, 7 and 8
(D) Identification of any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan, particularly those relating to European protected sites	Section 3
(E) List environmental protection objectives, established at international, EU or national level, which are relevant to the plan and describe how those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account when preparing the plan	Sections 4, 7 and 8
(F) Describe the likely significant effects on the environment	Section 7 and 8
(G) Describe any measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse environmental effects of implementing the plan	Section 9
(H) Give an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives considered, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken (including any difficulties)	Sections 2 and 6
(I) A description of proposed monitoring measures	Section 10
(J) A non-technical summary of the above information	Appendix I
(K) Interrelationships between each environmental topic	Addressed as it arises within each Section