



CHAPTER 7: ENVIRONMENT AND AMENITIES





7. ENVIRONMENT AND AMENITIES STRATEGY

7.1 Landscape

“Landscape” means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors²³. This is an aspect of environmental management that requires cross county and cross regional integration.

This need arises because there are a number of areas of landscape importance that cross Local Authority and regional boundaries. These areas require a common approach between authorities to ensure that they are managed in a consistent way. The areas in question include :

- The Burren areas of Clare and Galway;
- Lough Derg and Lough Gur;
- Ballyhoura/Galtees;
- Atlantic Coast;
- Shannon Estuary;
- Mountain area North of Scarriff;
- Slieve Felim;
- Slieve Aughty.

A common approach to landscape management should be adopted addressing the landscape character in those areas where they cross administrative boundaries.

This approach should, within such areas:

- Seek that a common process is adopted for the identification of areas of similar landscape character ;
- Seek the adoption of a common designation and description for areas of similar character and those that require protection;
- Adopt common policies to be applied to areas that are of similar character and that require protection.

Landscape protection policies should also take into account the protection of ecological sites, habitats and species of ecological value, and ecological corridors and networks to ensure the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network. These common approaches should be adopted, while recognising that the detailed management of individual landscape units will be a matter for the individual Planning Authorities and that local circumstances as well as shared approaches will inform specific decisions in that context.

Development Plan Implications (Landscape)

A common approach to landscape management should be adopted addressing the landscape character of those geographic units of landscape importance which cross administrative boundaries.

This approach should, within such areas:

- Seek that a common process is adopted for the identification of areas of similar landscape character ;



Lahinch, Co. Clare

²³ As defined in Article 1a of the European Landscape Convention



- Seek the adoption of a common designation and description for areas of similar character and those that require protection;
- Adopt common policies to be applied to areas that are of similar character and that require protection.

Landscape protection policies in Development Plans should take account of the need to manage the provision of forestry and renewable energy development and of the particular vulnerability of certain features such as bogs and mires. Landscape protection policies should also take into account the protection of ecological sites, habitats and species of ecological value, and ecological corridors and networks to ensure the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network.

Development Plans should include policies for the management of linear landscape features such as water-courses (rivers, streams, canals, ponds, drainage channels, etc), woodlands, hedgerows and railway margins, which provide pathways for the dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species, including Plan level mitigation to ensure that such networks are maintained and, where possible, enhanced.

Requirements Emerging from SEA/HDA

Areas that contain or are designated as Natura 2000 sites are also liable to be included in areas designated as

being of landscape importance. In considering the policies to apply in such areas, regard shall be had to the designation of the area as a Natura 2000 site.

7.2 Built Heritage

The urban landscape of the Region is an important element of its environmental quality and contributes significantly to its amenity value. Planning Authorities should include specific reference to their urban landscapes and to policies for the protection and enhancement of these landscapes in their Development Plans. Policies that address the enhancement of the quality of urban areas should include reference to the role of natural features, habitats and species and the importance of including ecological principles in the enhancement programmes.

7.2.1 Archaeology

There are no archaeological routes or landscapes that cross county or regional boundaries. The protection of the archaeological heritage of the Region should be addressed by the Planning Authorities, which should ensure that those sites that are of significance are retained. Archaeological routes and landscapes cross county or regional boundaries, with regard to certain types of historic landscapes.



Holycross Abbey, Co. Tipperary



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Policies under this heading should also include consideration of the importance of archaeological remains for bats and their roosts.

7.2.2 Architectural Heritage

There is little architectural heritage that is not subject to the control of the individual Planning Authorities and that requires regional intervention. Planning Authorities should ensure that architectural heritage is protected in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act.

A number of cross-county structures do require protection. The most important of these are the bridges at Killylloe, Plassey and O'Briensbridge. In addition, Holycross and Wellesley Bridges that cross regional boundaries require protection.

Development Plan Implications (Architectural Heritage)

The relevant Development Plans should include common approaches to the conservation of these structures and the implementation of the Protected Structure elements of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

Requirements Emerging from SEA/HDA

While the protection of the natural heritage is an important element of these Guidelines, it is also important that consideration is given to addressing problems that have occurred in the past and that have given rise to damage to the natural heritage. This is particularly relevant to issues of degraded habitats and invasive species. As noted above, in implementing these Guidelines, full regard must be had to the requirements of the Habitats Directive including the carrying out of an assessment of the implications for any Natura 2000 site that might be at risk from any proposed development.

While all Natura 2000 sites are of key importance, a number have particular importance as they contain species that are of particular relevance as indicators of environmental quality.

A key species in this regard is the Fresh Water Pearl Mussel and all Planning Authorities must take particular care that activities permitted within their areas do not pose a threat to species such as this, whether they lie within or without the Authority's functional area.

Where such an impact is identified the development must be mitigated or, where that is not possible, it must not be implemented unless the procedure relating to developments of Overriding National Importance has been completed.

This consideration applies to developments in the following areas:

- Those that involve discharges to the Roscrea River;
- Those that involve discharges to the River Suir;
- Those that involve discharges to the Cloon River, and;
- Those that involve discharges to the Blackwater River or its tributaries.

The European Union Water Framework Directive will impose significant requirements for the protection of water bodies. This will require a considerable amount of coordination of the activities of local Planning Authorities. The Region is covered by three of these strategies. The Shannon River Basin is by far the largest but part of North Tipperary is covered by the Suir RBD while a small part of North Clare is covered by the Western RBD.

In addition, in considering the impact of any proposed policy or project that is liable to give rise to a wastewater treatment demand, the Planning Authority shall consider the likely cumulative impact of such demands that are liable to arise from any source and shall not adopt any policy or permit any development that would result in the capacity of the area's wastewater treatment system to be exceeded by the cumulative demands of successive developments. Finally, in considering the impact of any proposed policy or project that is liable to give rise to impacts on a Natura 2000 site, the Planning Authority shall consider the likely cumulative effect of such impacts that are liable to arise from any source and shall not adopt any policy or permit any development that would result in the deterioration of the site's habitat status either by itself or cumulatively with other developments or activities.

Development Plan Implications

Development Plans should include objectives for the maintenance of the conservation value of Natura 2000 sites within the area of the Plan or those areas affected by the Plan, and require assessment of all plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on those sites.

Development Plans should consider how degraded habitats can be re-instated and should include policies to facilitate such re-instatement wherever possible. Prior to the introduction of structures for the management of water bodies within the Region, Local Authorities should ensure that common approaches are taken to the protection of surface and underground water bodies. These approaches should, *inter alia*, ensure that:

- The impact of developments on water bodies outside the jurisdiction of the individual authorities are considered when decisions on discharges and water

²⁴ Groundwater Protection Schemes are county-based projects that are undertaken jointly between the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) and the respective Local Authorities.



extraction are being made;

- Developments do not interfere with the attainment of the standards required by the Water Framework Directive;
- Joint actions are taken to positively address the attainment of the standards required by the Water Framework Directive, and;
- Common approaches to the management of the impacts of land drainage are adopted.

When the RBDMPs are operational, the requirements of those plans shall be deemed to be the requirements of the RPGs. Development Plans should include consideration of the adoption of a framework for the management of invasive species within the Region

7.3 Protection of Aquifers

Aquifers provide another major source of water within the Region. This resource is and has been demonstrated to be vulnerable to pollution and excessive abstraction. It is important that aquifers are protected against these threats and that a common approach to this protection is developed within the Region. In addition, as some major aquifers cross county and regional boundaries, it is important that impacts of developments in one county or region have regard to the impacts on the aquifer in other counties or regions. Local Authorities should, therefore, develop agreed protocols for the protection of aquifers and should develop common aquifer protection policies for cross-boundary aquifers. There are a number of Ground Water Protection Plans²⁴ in existence.

Development Plan Implications (Protection of Aquifers)

Development Plans should include policies deriving from the agreed protocols regarding the protection of aquifers in general, and should undertake to consider the impacts on aquifers outside their functional areas of developments that may occur within those areas having regard to the European Communities Environmental Objectives (Groundwater) Regulations 2010.

Development Plans should also include the specific policies regarding to the protection of groundwater in the sections regarding various forms of development as outlined above. When the RBDMPs are operational the requirements of those plans shall be deemed to be the requirements of the RPGs.

7.4 Open Spaces and Recreation

The Region is well served with recreational and amenity facilities. However, there are a number of regional scale facilities that might be provided, such as a regional theatre, either by the expansion of existing facilities or the development of new greenfield site facilities. A Joint Regional Recreation Strategy is being developed. When this strategy is adopted its policies and strategies should form the basis of the approach to provision of such facilities. Pending the adoption of this strategy, major new facilities should generally be provided within the Gateway/Hub area and specific sites should be reserved for them through the coordinated development processes mentioned above and below.



Watersports on Lough Derg

²⁴ Groundwater Protection Schemes are county-based projects that are undertaken jointly between the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) and the respective Local Authorities.



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Other areas have the resources to provide region-scale facilities of a specific type, including the following and Development Plans should also make provision for such developments:

- Water-based activities on Lough Derg, the Shannon Estuary and the Atlantic Coast including fishing and boat hire;
- Walking activities using designated routes. The Region contains a number of long-distance walking routes that cross county and regional boundaries as well as loop walks, lakeside walks, shore walks and local walks, and;
- Camping, equestrian, cycling, hill-walking & other similar activities in the Burren, Galtees/Ballyhoura area & Slieve Aughty.

Development Plan Implications (Open Spaces and Recreation)

When the Joint Regional Recreational Strategy is adopted its policies and objectives should be incorporated into Development Plans. However, it should be subject to a Habitats Directive Assessment, if its policies and objectives are to be incorporated directly into these plans. Regional possibilities for recreation and leisure should be addressed when the coordinated plans for these areas are being developed.

In addition, the area of the Clare Glen should be managed in a coordinated way between North Tipperary and Limerick County Councils, taking into account its conservation value.

A number of long-distance walking routes run through the Region. These as well as loop and local walks are an important recreational resource and should be protected. In addition, where potential routes exist they should be protected and enhanced, where sustainable. Development Plans should include policies to protect the integrity of these routes, and should take the impact of any proposed development on these routes into account when considering applications for permission for developments in their vicinity.

Requirements Emerging from SEA/HDA

Such development may require the provision of wastewater facilities that discharge to river systems. Many of these systems contain Natura 2000 Sites that would be vulnerable to inadequately treated wastewater discharges. Therefore, policies for the development of recreational facilities in such areas must be contingent on, and be stated to be contingent on, the provision of wastewater treatment systems with a capacity to pro-

duce wastewater discharges of a standard that will not impact negatively on downstream Natura 2000 Sites.

Even where Natura 2000 sites are not impacted on, any recreational development will be contingent on effluent arising from it being such that it will not impact on any wastewater treatment system whether private or public, that will prevent that system discharging a final effluent that meets the requirements of the appropriate RBDMP.

Recreational developments may be proposed in areas without a piped wastewater collection and treatment system and this has implications for the quality of groundwater in the Region.

The RBD analyses have identified areas within the Region where the quality of the groundwater is not adequate. Any development that requires the provision of a private treatment system should be considered in the context of the following:

- The quality of the groundwater into which the effluent will discharge and the need to preserve or improve that quality;
- The quality of the effluent proposed to be discharged from the wastewater treatment process;
- The quantity of the effluent proposed to be discharged;
- The capacity of the ground to enhance the quality of the final effluent;
- Proposals for the management and maintenance of the treatment system, and;
- The capacity of the Local Authority to monitor the quality of the discharge.

Permission should not be granted unless the Planning Authority is satisfied that the quality of the groundwater will not be impaired and policies to this effect should be included in Development Plans.

In addition to the impact from wastewater, recreational developments may have other negative implications for Natura 2000 sites. These implications may be related to the physical destruction of a habitat, the impact of air emissions, the impact of traffic, noise and other general activities and light pollution. No commercial policy shall be adopted or development permitted in or in proximity to a Natura 2000 site unless it can be demonstrated through the carrying out of an EHDA that the development will not impact negatively on a Natura 2000 site or that where such an impact is likely it can be mitigated satisfactorily.

7.4.1 Framework Plan

The provision of a framework plan to coordinate devel-



opment in the vicinity of the Greater Limerick City Area is a matter that should be considered. The coordination of the development of the Zone One area should be considered by the relevant Planning Authorities for that area so that the necessary coordination of policies and decisions can take place in a coherent and integrated way.

Development Plan Implications

The coordinating body/group for the strategic development of the Zone One area should consider this matter and where a framework plan area is identified it should be incorporated as a policy objective in relevant Development Plans.

7.5 Flood Risk Assessment

The activities of many bodies and the application of many laws and regulations impact on flood regimes and flooding events. These bodies include those such as the ESB who provide hydro-electric power, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries, the Office of Public Works (OPW), Local Authorities and the River Basin District Boards. Legislation includes that associated with fisheries protection, navigation, conservation, flood relief, flood risk management and water quality. In this complex of agencies and legislative instruments there is no clear pattern of responsibility for maintaining water bodies including river channels in a manner that does not impact negatively on the lives of those that live nearby. Nevertheless, this is a critical issue as was demonstrated by the flooding in late 2009 which had such major impacts over such a wide area of land. It is hoped that this fragmented responsibility will be addressed in the near future and that a more integrated approach to the management of these water resources and the flood threat that they pose will be put in place.

In the meantime, these RPGs outline the role of the Planning Authorities in addressing these issues in the context of land use planning and its associated activities.

7.5.1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

Within the Mid-West Region, flooding can be divided into four main categories. The category of flooding that affects Limerick and perhaps other coastal and estuarial cities when a high tide and weather conditions cause

exceptional but almost predictable flood events. In Limerick a west wind, rain in the midlands and a high tide, are the key parameters. Some of the side effects are a backup in the drainage system as well as water actually overtopping the channel edges and spilling into the streets. These events affect built up areas and their maximum height is generally predictable. Some mitigation measures can be put in place such as walls, storage capacity for runoff etc. These events are not really preventable, however, and the impact of global warming may add significantly to current high tide levels. This is a matter that should be considered in terms of mitigation and protection.

The second category of event occurs away from the tidal channels and is related to a sudden build-up of water in a particular river catchment. Other catchments may be completely unaffected depending on local rainfall intensity. The recent event in Newcastlewest in 2008 for example falls into this category. Such events are very hard to predict and their intensity may depend on changes to landcover arising from development or silvicultural or even farming practices in the greater catchment which may be a considerable distance from the areas affected.

The third category is related to extended periods of rain, leading to a rise in groundwater which emerges on the land surface as temporary lakes or turloughs. This particularly affects County Clare due to its peculiar geology. Sometimes the probable locus of such events is retained in the local knowledge; their formal recording and retention in a central repository is a matter of urgency.

A fourth category of event may be considered when intense local rainfall overwhelms the natural or artificial drainage systems causing local spot flooding which can block roads and cause damage to property. Such events can be random or regular and particularly affect the fluvial plains surrounding the Shannon estuary where land has been protected by extensive embankments and artificial drainage systems intended to protect agricultural land only.

In addition to these four categories, it has been noted that the presence of the Shannon Hydro-Electric scheme has led to flood events on the Shannon. These events have been well documented and studied for an extended period of time. Likewise, events affecting urban areas tend to be well studied and recorded.

7.5.2 Flood Risk in the Gateway and Hub

Limerick City

Since the Gateway and Hub are the engines of econom-



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ic growth containing more than 50% of the Region's economy, particular attention needs to be focused on these areas. Limerick City and particularly the City Centre sits astride the Shannon Estuary and is consequently subject to periodic flooding related to combinations of tidal/river/fluvial and weather events. The City Centre and dockland area is host to nearly 16,000 jobs or roughly 16% of the Region's employment. UL and Plassey Technological Park adjoin the old course of the Shannon and therefore lie within an area potentially at risk which also extends along the Groody Valley to the Ballysimon Road. There are more than 5,000 jobs located in this area. All told, some 21,000 jobs are located in areas potentially at risk of flooding.

Works have been undertaken to protect existing developments and policies have been incorporated in Development Plans to protect future developments by setting minimum floor levels for development. Although not intended as a prophylactic against flooding, the designation of lands adjoining the Shannon as SAC has a potentially beneficial effect of preventing development in some of the most vulnerable areas.

Shannon

OPW data suggests that a very large section of Shannon including the airport runway and parts of the industrial estate are located in areas protected from flooding by artificial embankments and drainage systems. The area has a total employment of over 10,000 jobs or roughly 10% of the Mid-West economy. In the context of rising tide levels associated with Global Warming, these defences will require a review by the Planning and other responsible authorities.

Ennis

The Hub town of Ennis has been subject to extensive flood events which have severed rail links for an extended period. Ennis also hosts about 10,000 jobs or a further 10% of the Region's economy. The flooding problem in Ennis has been studied and a combination of preventative policies and mitigation measures has been and are being put in place. However, the situation must be kept under review by the Planning and other responsible authorities.

Sub-Regional Zones

Within each of the other sub-zones of the Region, each of the selected service towns have been subject to occasional flood events, the most serious having been Newcastlewest in 2008. The only service towns for which the OPW reports no flood events at this time are Roscrea and Ennistimon. Along the Estuary, Foynes in

County Limerick has been noted by the OPW as being particularly prone to flooding and would, like Shannon, be under threat from rising tide levels associated with global warming. Since Foynes, as a shipping port, is an essential part of the economy of the Region, particular attention requires to be afforded to it by the Planning and other authorities.

7.5.3 Strategic Flood Risk Issues

The following are the strategic issues within the Mid-West Region:

1. The management of flooding in the Gateway and Hub;
2. The management of flooding in the regional sub-centres;
3. The management of flooding in other areas;
4. The impact of global warming on the protection afforded by current flood defences;
5. The return periods to be used for flood events;
6. The recording of intermittent flood events of local importance, and;
7. The management of development to respond to current and future flooding patterns and to minimise such events occurring.

In addressing all of these issues it is critical that Planning Authorities work together where necessary. Many flood and water management regimes cross county boundaries, and it is not possible for one Planning Authority to address such flood regimes purely within its own area of jurisdiction.

7.5.4 The Management of Flooding in the Gateway and Hub

As noted above, significant areas of the Gateway and Hub are liable to flooding. Within the Gateway, this flooding is normally related to tidal and rainfall factors. It is also generally the primary cause in the Hub Town, though exacerbated to some extent by groundwater flooding in that area.

The management of flooding in these areas is dependent on mitigation measures and on the identification of sacrificial land for flood-water retention.

Mitigation measures include:

- Retaining walls;
- Attenuation measures;
- Surface water retention in the pipe networks;
- Non-return valves to remove the danger of backwash, and;
- Minimisation of hard surfaces to facilitate the slower concentration of rainfall.

Each Planning Authority should examine and assess its current flood management status in the context of



these measures.

In addition, sacrificial flood plains to act as flood water storage should be identified and reserved for such purposes. Finally, the use of land for different purposes should have regard to its vulnerability to flooding and use the sequential approach, the key principles of which are as follows:

1. Avoid development in areas at risk of flooding;
2. If this is not possible, consider substituting a land use that is less vulnerable to flooding, and;
3. Only when both avoidance and substitution cannot take place should consideration be given to mitigation and management of risks.

Inappropriate types of development that would create unacceptable risks from flooding should not be planned for or permitted.

In considering such matters the Planning Authorities should have regard to the impact of global warming on existing defences and, where sacrificial land is identified that is or contains Natura 2000 sites, should carry out an EHDA on the impact of such designation before a decision to reserve the land for that purpose is made.

7.5.5 Management of Flooding in Sub Regional Centres

The same approaches should be adopted for the sub-regional centres as for the Gateway and Hub, while taking account of the specific flood-risk categories applicable in each centre.

7.5.6 Management of Flooding in Other Areas

The management of flooding in other areas should take a similar approach. The approach should be in accordance with the DoEHLG Flood Risk Management Guidelines and should minimise risk through a variety of measures using the sequential approach.

7.5.7 The Impact of Global Warming

In predicting future flood events and the areas likely to be impacted on, Planning Authorities should have regard to the impacts of global warming on the nature and severity of weather events. Planning Authorities should also have regard to the impact of such events on the land and water regimes within their jurisdictions. The extent of such impact should take into account the guidance of the OPW and the Meteorological services.

7.5.8 Return Periods

The sequential test suggests that lands which are at

significant risk of flooding should be developed only where there are compelling social, economic or environmental reasons to do so. One of the parameters to be used in the assessment of risk level is the flood return period. Where a return period is being used this should be determined for each specific location in consultation with the OPW but should, generally, be not less than 100 years.

7.5.9 Recording of Intermittent Flood Events

While, as noted above, some flood events are relatively predictable, others are less so. At present there is no mechanism in place for recording intermittent and unexpected flood events. Such a system should be developed between the four Planning Authorities in the Region and requires implementation.

Another aspect of the management of water bodies is the impact that certain types of development can have on the flood regimes of rivers, lakes and, indeed, groundwater. Since water bodies cross both counties, towns and regions, it is important that Local Authorities have regard to the possible effects of development in their area on the flood regime in other Local Authorities' areas. Given the amount of water in the Region, this is a matter of particular importance. With global warming and other weather changes influencing the overall context in which we must make decisions, it is also important that some common parameters are adopted by Local Authorities when dealing with these matters in the context of flood plains, coastal zones, estuarine areas and riverside land.

Development Plan Implications (Flooding)

Development Plans should include policies and management processes that are based on the discussion set out above. In particular Development Plans shall:

- Adopt and implement sustainable strategies for the protection of areas at risk from flooding at present. These strategies should include plans for the management and protection of all utility services during flood events including those utilities that cross administrative boundaries;
- Adopt and implement sustainable strategies for areas likely to be at risk of flooding in the future in the context of climate change and changing weather patterns. These strategies should include plans for the management and protection of all utility services during flood events including those utilities that cross administrative boundaries;
- Adopt and implement a sustainable strategy for



managing water collection and discharge based on the SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) model;

- Adopt and implement a sustainable strategy for addressing potential river over-bank flows;
- Evaluate the capacity of existing flood defences to deal with future flood events;
- Use the sequential approach to the zoning of land for development;
- Identify if necessary and sustainable, sacrificial areas that can be used for flood-water retention. No area should be used for any such purpose if it would pose a threat to any utility service, and;
- Agree and use common parameters regarding future global warming, flood return periods and climatic change.

Requirements Emerging from SEA/HDA

In considering the management of flood risk, the Planning Authorities should have regard to current flooding risks and the impact of global warming on existing defences and on the flood risk of any proposed development.

Where sacrificial land is identified that is or contains a Natura 2000 site, the Planning Authority should carry out an EHDA on the impact of such designation before a decision to reserve the land for that purpose is made.

7.6 Social, Community and Cultural Infrastructure

The provision of these facilities requires a coordinated approach by a wide range of authorities. The ways in which these provisions are made are often within the preserve of national and regional organisations that are following their own individual strategies. The following are some of the principal areas with land use and/or planning implications regarding the provision of facilities at a regional level.

7.6.1 Health

Different levels of healthcare facilities will be available at different locations throughout the Region. It is critical that a balance be found between the provision of access to these facilities and the availability of a population of a size adequate to support the more specialised services. This does have implications, particularly for those parts of the Region more remote from the larger centres of population and makes the provision of good access to the available facilities of the utmost importance. This further highlights the need for high-quality transport corridors from the principal parts of the Region to the Limerick/Ennis/Shannon area.

Development Plan Implications (Health)

Where considered appropriate within the context of healthcare structures, provision should be made and land reserved for medical centres within the principal development zone service centres as outlined earlier in the Guidelines. Such provision should be made only after consultation with the relevant Health Authority and if suitable as a mechanism for supporting the delivery of primary healthcare. The need for the provision of landing facilities for helicopters that will enable swift access to the main treatment centres should be part of this consideration and, where considered necessary, should be provided for. In addition, the land needs of the regional and county facilities should be taken into account when land use allocations are being considered in its vicinity.

7.6.2 Cultural Facilities

The provision of Regional scale cultural facilities should be made in accordance with a strategy for such provision. Such a strategy should recognise the importance of the Gateway and Hub but should also identify the criteria through which the location of such facilities would be decided.

7.6.3 Education

The principal issues for education at regional level relate to third-level institutes and their educational and research roles. In this regard, the principal issues relate to the availability of land and services for the further development of these institutes and the provision of access to them. Zoning and land allocation for Education and Community use at Local Area Plan (LAP) level should ensure that sufficient land exists for future expansion of these facilities. Primary and second-level education should also be provided in a way that supports the social sustainability of individual communities. There is a need for City and County Planning Authorities to cooperate in order to seek to situate new schools within the existing/proposed catchments in a manner that aids ease of access from surrounding areas and encourages sustainable mobility by walking cycling and public transport. The direct linkage of UL with the Clare road system would enhance the University's integration in the Region and add to the capacity of the western part of the Region to access its facilities. The Region is well served with Higher Education Institutions (HEI) including UL, LIT, Mary Immaculate College, Shannon Catering College, The Ennis Outreach Centre, Palliskenry Agricultur-



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al College, Tipperary Institute, Gurteen Agricultural College, the Garda College in Templemore and St. Patrick's College in Thurles. It is important that this significant provision is enhanced and protected and that the resource is used to contribute to the social and economic development of the Region.

The amalgamation of LIT and Tipperary Institute is a step in the process of enhancing third-level education in the Region as are other arrangements that are being progressed between other HEIs.

Development Plan Implications (Education)

Development Plans should include policies to ensure that adequate land is available for the provision of additional research and education facilities in the vicinity of the principal third-level institutes, that the infrastructure necessary to serve such developments are facilitated, where sustainable, and that access by both public and private transport is facilitated. Provision for the linking of the UL Campus with County Clare should be considered, while avoiding adverse impacts on the River Shannon.

7.6.4 Childcare

Childcare facilities are a crucial element of the social service structure that underpins sustainable social and economic development. The provision of childcare facilities is a matter for a range of providers including communities, businesses and private providers. There is a role for the Planning Authority, however, in ensuring that land use and planning policies facilitate the provision of such facilities.

Development Plan Implications (Childcare)

Development Plans are obliged to include policies for making available locations for childcare facilities and for incorporating such facilities in major enterprise and other employment generating developments.

7.6.5 Development Plans and Social Inclusion

The Local Authorities have been identified as having a role in social inclusion and, in particular, in the delivery of the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS). These need to be considered when Development Plan policies are being devised. In particular, regard should be had to the impacts of Development Plan policies on vulnerable groups in society.

This is of particular relevance with respect to the Limerick Regeneration Project where a key purpose of the project is the improvement in the social conditions of the occupants of the regeneration areas of Limerick City.

Development Plan Implications (Social Inclusion)

When Development Plans are being prepared, they should be proofed for their impact on poverty in both urban and rural areas and for their impact on the quality of life of other marginalised groups in society. Where significant negative impacts are identified, policies should be amended or mitigation measures identified and included.

Specific provision should be made in the Limerick City Development Plan for the Regeneration Project. The Planning Authority and the Regeneration Company should work closely together to facilitate the project. Local Authorities should develop and implement Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategies that address the needs of communities in both urban and rural areas.





8. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING & INDICATORS

The previous RPGs contained a comprehensive structure for implementation. This structure was only partially successful but that does not mean that the principles were incorrect. Any project that requires collaboration can only be effective if the participants are willing to engage in collaborative dialogue. To the extent that was undertaken in the context of the previous RPGs, that approach was successful. However, the collaborative dialogue was too limited to be truly effective.

A similar approach to implementation structures is proposed for these RPGs and is set out below.

8.1 Implementation Structures

The implementation of this strategy and these RPGs will require the coordinated effort of a wide range of participants. Much of the implementation will lie within the remit of the various public and semi-state bodies, charged with the provision of social, economic and physical infrastructure and the protection and enhancement of our natural and human resources. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Mid Term Evaluation of the last NDP²⁵ noted that management of the implementation of the NDP was a considerable issue in ensuring its effectiveness. It stated that:

- The lack of progress and reporting across some of the Measures in all of the Operational Programmes (OPs) demonstrates that the roles of the Management Authorities and Monitoring Committees as defined in terms of fulfilling their Administration and Management tasks may not be sufficient for effective management of the programmes;
- Opportunities exist to enhance the management structures through the creation of smaller working groups or smaller committees to deal with specific issues with identifiable tasks and actions to be achieved;
- Generally, for an investment plan of this magnitude the resources available for management are very limited. Serious consideration needs to be given to substantially increasing the resources available to the managers of the OPs, including the Department of Finance. In any commercial organisation significantly greater resources would be devoted to the management of much smaller investment programmes. To try and remedy the limitations of in-house resources, considerable resort has been made to consultancy services. However, such an approach loses much of the human capital developed by the consultants, human capital that the managing authorities could benefit significantly from. Greater

reliance on in-house expertise, supplemented by necessary consultancy services could provide a better balance of resources to management;

- Given their very limited resources, the Managing Authorities have performed very satisfactorily. However, if many of the shortcomings identified by the evaluations of the OPs are to be addressed there will have to be significantly greater resourcing of central management.

These comments also apply to the implementation of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and Planning Guidelines. They indicate that their successful implementation will require that resources be devoted to the process, the value of small, focused task groups and the need for adequate in-house expertise. All the bodies involved with the Regional Authority should consider these matters and where such resources can be obtained.

The following structures through which this strategy and these RPGs might be implemented, are proposed in light of the ESRI observations and the nature of the issues involved.

8.1.1 Strategic Implementation

This can be supervised by existing structures that bring together a large range of actors in the areas of social, economic and infrastructure provision. These include -

- The Regional Authority and its Operational Committees;
- Local Authorities;
- County and City Development Boards, and;
- Other standing and *ad hoc* Committees.

The Regional Authority will establish a special committee to oversee the implementation of the actions in this document as a central part of its ongoing work.

In addition, a number of other strategic implementation arrangements will need to be put in place that will facilitate co-operative integrated actions that the Strategy and RPGs require. While the arrangements put in place in this context are unlikely to include new structures with executive responsibility, they will have a statutory basis provided by their identification in this document.

The Mid-West Regional Authority will take responsibility for the establishment, management and facilitation of these arrangements. They will need to include the following.

8.1.2 Coordination Groups for the Special Areas

Those which are identified in this document as requiring particular coordination, include:

- The area of Zone One;

²⁵ The Mid-Term Evaluation of the National Development Plan and Community Support Framework for Ireland, 2000 to 2006, The Economic and Social Research Institute



- The Burren area;
- The Slieve Aughty area;
- The Ballyhoura/Galtees area;
- The Shannon Estuary;
- Lough Derg;
- The Atlantic Coast;
- The Slieve Felim area.

These groups should set the criteria and parameters for the Local Authorities and other bodies that will be charged with the operational implementation of the policies and procedures of this document. They would, for example, be responsible for:

- Preparing a report on the planning and development issues, including achieving consistency in policies across administrative boundaries that arise in these special areas;
- Including in the report referred to above recommendations for any necessary adjustments to existing Local Authority or other relevant policies or the development of new policies, and;
- Bringing forward recommendations within the context of consultation and consensus development between the relevant Local or other authorities.

8.1.3 Coordination Groups for the Cross-County Policies

Those which are identified in this part of the document, including those relating to:

- Renewable energy and afforestation;
- Overhead structures for electricity and communications;
- Landscape management, and;
- Transport integration.

These groups would have a similar role to the Special Area groups with regard to issues that relate to the Region as a whole rather than to specific geographic areas.

8.1.4 Cross-Regional Implementation

The integration of work in the Region with that in other regions is a core focus of this document and, indeed, of the NSS. Some cross-regional issues will be addressed by the structures that address the special areas that require coordinated development, but there are other sectoral issues that will require a different form of coordination. For example, the coordination of third-level education and research, rail development and tourism will require other structures. It is proposed that the Regional Authority will take responsibility for this coordination and, in consultation with other bodies that already support a considerable amount of this activity, establish working groups to address these matters. Support is given to the inter-regional strategic tourism initiative “Lake-

lands and Inland Waterways”, which is a joint initiative of Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Shannon Development, Northern Ireland Tourism Board, Find Fermanagh and Tourism Ireland.

8.1.5 Operational Implementation

The operational implementation of the Strategy and RPGs will require the co-operation of a range of executive agencies throughout the Region. These include:

- Local Authorities;
- Shannon Development;
- IDA;
- Bus Éireann;
- Iarnród Éireann;
- HSE;
- Aer Rianta Shannon;
- Shannon Airport Authority;
- Shannon-Foynes Port Company;
- Fáilte Ireland;
- Education Institutions;
- Enterprise Ireland;
- Tourism Ireland;
- County/City Enterprise Boards (CEBs);
- Chambers of Commerce.

The operational implementation will also require the co-operation of more nationally based organisations such as the NRA, a range of Government Departments responsible for funding and other bodies responsible for national investment decisions.

While the Local Authorities will be constrained to ensure that their Development Plans are in accordance with these RPGs, most of the other bodies do not fall within the control of any of the structures that might be used to oversee the implementation of this Strategy and these Guidelines. However, given that this document represents the considered views of the main actors responsible for the Region’s continued sustainable development, it is hoped that they would be given due weight when decisions are being made by such bodies.

8.2 Monitoring, Evaluation & Review

The monitoring of the implementation of this document can be carried out at a number of levels. The following are proposed as the principal mechanisms that would be used for this purpose:

- The monitoring of inputs or actions;
- The monitoring of outputs or achievements, and;
- The monitoring of outcomes or the extent to which actions, policies and programmes are effective.



8.2.1 Targets and Indicators

Monitoring the implementation of the Strategy and Guidelines requires the setting of targets and indicators. Targets are precise quantitative achievements that are sought, while indicators are proxy measures of the extent to which goals or objectives are being met.

This document sets few quantitative targets. In a complex environment, it is difficult to set precise targets with a reasonable expectation of them being achieved. However, the more qualitative objectives that have been set will provide a mechanism through which the achievements that are being sought can be measured. With regard to the objectives for which targets have not been set in this document, it is suggested that such targets would be set by the various implementation structures that are outlined above.

Targets and indicators can be of three types:

- Input targets that refer to the extent that the actions identified in this document have been implemented;
- Output targets or the extent to which the direct intended effects of actions have been achieved;
- Outcome targets or the extent to which the goals of the actions are being achieved, and;
- The status of environmental indicators including habitat quality and protected species populations (especially in Natura 2000 sites).

8.2.2 Input Targets

These refer to the extent that the actions that are outlined in this document have been implemented. These input targets include the establishment of mechanisms for coordinated action, the adoption of appropriate policies in Development Plans of Local Authorities, and the recognition of the approach of the Regional Economic Strategy and Planning Guidelines in the plans and programmes of other agencies and organisations.

8.2.3 Output Targets

These refer to the extent to which infrastructure is being put in place in accordance with the needs identified in this document, the extent to which facilities are being developed and the extent to which cross-regional networks, marketing, special supports and other softer development elements are being established.

8.2.4 Results Targets

These refer to the degree to which the objectives that are the focus of the actions are being achieved. These

outcomes include the following, which might be used as indicators of the success of the Strategy and Guidelines:

- The extent of enterprise establishment within the Region, e.g. net number of new enterprises;
- The extent of the establishment of FDI companies;
- The stability of the rural population;
- The distribution of enterprise throughout the Region;
- The level of population growth in the Region;
- The distribution of population growth;
- The extent of housing development in the Region;
- The distribution of such development;
- The amount of research resources attracted by the Region's third-level institutes;
- The use of public transport;
- The passenger movements through Shannon Airport;
- The extent of freight through Shannon Airport;
- Freight tonnage through Foynes and Limerick Docks;
- Average access time to Shannon Airport;
- Use of the rail service;
- Average travel time through the Gateway;
- Average travel time from the Gateway to Galway and Cork;
- The availability of serviced enterprise development land;
- The extent of the development of renewable energy projects;
- The number of tourism visitors and visitor bed-nights;
- The changes in social deprivation indices in the Region;
- The status of environmental indicators including habitat quality, surface water and groundwater quality.

These indicators are suggested as examples only and are not intended to be exhaustive. They do have the advantages of being directly associated with the goals outlined in the earlier parts of this document, of being based on data that is capable of being collected without undue difficulty and of providing overall guidance to the various bodies that will be charged with the operational implementation of the strategy.

8.3 Evaluation

Evaluation is the assessment of the implications of the monitoring of indicators and targets. This evaluation should be carried out by a range of bodies at local and regional level, but the overall evaluation will be carried out by the suggested specially focused sub-committee of the Regional Authority that regularly reports to the Regional Authority.



8.4 Review

The review of the Regional Strategy and Planning Guidelines will be carried out on an ongoing basis. The review will include amendments of the actions and objectives if required in light of the achievement of the goals of the strategy, changing national and international circumstances and changes in Government policies and programmes.

Where it is concluded that changes are necessary, these will be evaluated through a consultative process that includes the main stakeholders.

8.5 Implementation Priorities

No action has been identified in this document that is not important to the long-term sustainable future of the Region. However, some actions are critical in the short-term and any delay in their implementation would seriously compromise the Region's development.

These include:

- the provision of road and other forms of access;
- the provision of broadband infrastructure;
- the development of the role of Shannon Airport;
- the provision of key water and wastewater infrastructure;
- the development of key enterprise locations;
- the development of the Region's renewable energy resources;
- the development of Limerick City and particularly the City Centre as a hub of enterprise and commercial activity, and;
- the implementation of the Limerick Regeneration Project.

Access has been identified as a key driver within the Region, as has the linkage of the Region to other key regional centres. The provision of access infrastructure is, therefore, of immediate priority. This includes the Shannon river crossing and associated road works in Limerick, the upgrading of the Cork-Limerick Road, and the Ennis-Galway route. In addition, the continued upgrading of the roads between the development zone service centres and the Limerick/Ennis/Shannon area to an appropriate standard are of high priority, if the vision of a truly accessible region is to be realised.

The development and roll-out of rural transport initiatives and the support of these initiatives are also fundamental to the philosophy of the Region's strategic approach. If the vision of a holistic, integrated, accessible region is to be achieved, then services that allow for this integration and enable this access must be developed and supported. This will also require the early provision of the transport centres identified as being necessary

for the Region's main service towns.

With regard to international access, the continuing development, improvement and enhancement of the role of Shannon Airport is critical. Nothing should be done that might inhibit its functioning and its key social and economic role in the Region should be recognised. Therefore, improving services and access to it from a wider hinterland is critical. The continued development of industrial, service and commercial activities associated with the airport is also a primary focus for the Region.

The provision of high quality, distributed, affordable broadband access has also been identified as being a critical short-term issue if the capacity of the Region to attract and retain a knowledge and digital content based sector, as well as its potential as a logistics hub, are to be realised. The wide distribution of this infrastructure is crucial if the balanced development of the Region is to be promoted.

While there is considerable water and wastewater capacity in some areas, and while some areas will not need upgrading in the immediate future, others areas need improvement now.

These are indicated in the Water Priorities section of these RPGs. In the area of enterprise development, the initiatives referred to in the economic development section of the RPGs are all of importance, though the development of the renewable energy potential of the Region is a particular priority.

A number of priority non-infrastructure implementation actions can also be identified. These include, in particular, the development of the coordinated strategies for Zone One, the Shannon Estuary and Lough Derg, and of a common approach to the creation of an identity for and the marketing of the Atlantic Gateway cities and towns.

Finally, the development of a strong research and third-level education base within the Region and the networking of educational institutes to this end must be another regional priority.

