

4 CONSULTATION

4.1 Introduction

The need for extensive consultation throughout the Framework process was outlined in the consultant's brief as being a key component of the Framework Plan preparation. Consultation is one of the keys to the success of the Study as it ensures that the issues and objectives of all relevant parties from policy makers to employees and most importantly the residents of the Study Area are fully appreciated and incorporated in the Study recommendations. Clearly conflicts will arise between the requirements and visions of the various groups but consultation strives to achieve understanding and consensus between the disparate parties and produce solutions that achieve the widest possible acceptance within the best practice guidelines.

The consultations have been most informative and mutually beneficial for all concerned with significant outputs from the meetings being realised for inclusion in this report, ensuring a step-by-step acceptance of the Study's proposals.

Objectives of the Consultation Process

The objectives of the public consultation process can be summarised as follows:

- To raise awareness of the public of the Study being undertaken and to outline the opportunities for them to be involved.
- Provide the public and other stakeholders with adequate opportunity to be involved in and influence the Plan's preparation.
- To identify and establish a better understanding of local issues, needs and concerns.
- To promote active citizenship and local democracy.
- Facilitate an open, transparent and fair process where mutual trust can be developed.

Planned schedules of consultations were drawn up at the initial stages of the Study with the aim of engaging as many stakeholders as possible.

Participants in the process included the following:

- Public
- Statutory Bodies
- Transport Providers
- Elected Representatives
- Private Groups
- Client/Steering/Technical Groups

It must be noted that consultation has been carried out on an ongoing basis since Study inception and although the consultants have now reached draft report stage there is still a need for continuing engagement with all stakeholders in order to maintain the momentum and public support developed throughout the process.

4.2 Consultation Methodology

The details of the consultation process are outlined below, which indicates that the process was comprehensive and sought the views from as wide a cross-section of stakeholders as possible.

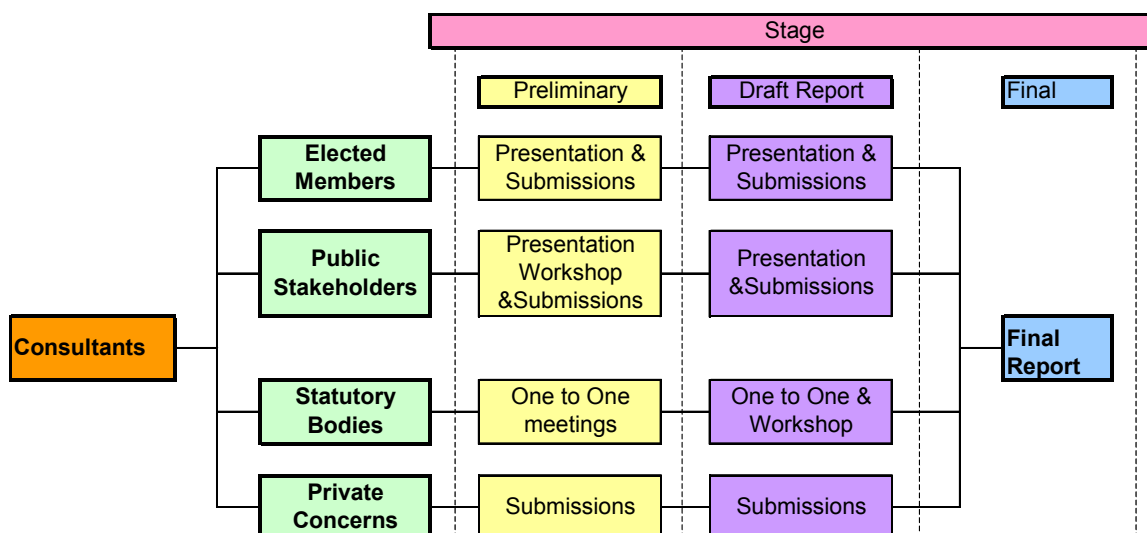


Figure 4.1 – Consultation Methodology

4.3 Timetable of Consultation

The sequence of consultation to date is as follows:

	Preliminary Stage	Draft Report Stage
• Public Consultation Workshops	March 2003	Sept 2003
• Client/Technical/Steering Group	Ongoing	Ongoing
• Briefing to Athy Town Council	Feb 2003	Sept 2003
• Briefing to Athy Area Councillors		Sept 2003
• Statutory Bodies, Transport Providers, Private Groups	Ongoing	Ongoing
• Briefing to Athy Forum		
• Briefing to Kildare County Council Strategic Policy Group	July 2003	Sept 2003

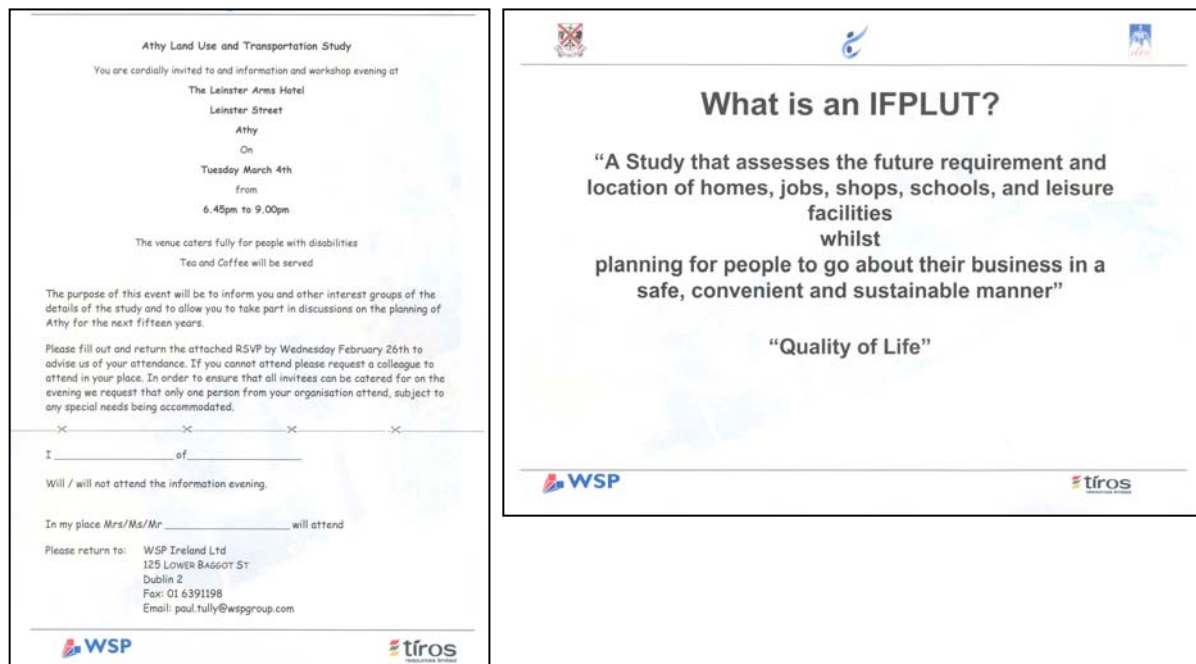


Figure 4.2 Public Consultation Workshop Invitation & Study outline

4.4 Client, Steering and Technical Working Group

Client Group meetings including representatives from Kildare County Council and the DTO and Technical Group meetings including the County Manager, representatives from the planning, transportation and sanitary services divisions of Kildare County Council were held on a regular basis throughout the Study period.

4.5 Public Consultation

Preliminary public consultation was held in the Leinster Arms Hotel on the 5th of March 2003. Approximately 80 organisations were invited to this evening, and information regarding the aims of the Study and the main issues for discussion on the evening was issued to these organisations in advance. The format for each workshop consisted of a Power Point presentation by the consultant team incorporating an explanation of the Study and the aims thereof, followed by round table group discussions of the relevant issues.

The workshop attracted a high level of participation from the public and was successful in terms of raising awareness of the Study and identifying issues in relation to the future growth of Athy. For those who were unable to attend the first round consultation workshop there was an opportunity to submit written submissions.

In order to establish a firm understanding of the issues and views of the public it was important that responses were not prejudged or influenced in any way. The written submissions together with issues raised at the workshop are summarised as follows:

- A strong emphasis was placed on enhancing the existing amenities and historical character of the town, outlining the potential for the development of a vibrant tourism industry.
- Significant issues were raised in relation to traffic impacts in the town, which were perceived as posing a significant threat to the quality of life and in particular the commercial development of the town. The single bridge crossing was clearly highlighted as the source of traffic congestion.
- Divided opinion arose regarding the proposed Inner Relief Street and the southern bypass with opposing advantages and disadvantages highlighted for each.

- Opinion varied on the provision of a bypass regarding options in relation to the southern bypass as per the Development Plan option either to the north or south of the town, on the fringes of the future expanded urban area.
- Lack of employment within the town was highlighted stressing the need for a more diverse local employment base.
- Many expressed concern in relation to the increasing anti social behaviour in the town emphasising the need to improve and develop more varied social, cultural and sporting facilities especially in terms of evening time activities.
- Many outlined the lack of retail choice within the town emphasising the need for more varied outlets incorporating large retail chains.
- It was expressed that a planned approach should be taken towards school safety with concerns arising in relation to traffic volumes at school opening and closing times in addition to the dangers associated with bus drop-off locations.
- Pedestrian safety in the town was also highlighted especially in the context of the high traffic volumes with a call for improved footpaths and an increased number of pedestrian crossings.
- Opinion varied on the quantum of car parking and parking control measures in the town.
- Many highlighted the need for improved rail facilities and services to Dublin.

4.6 Other Stakeholders

One-to-one consultations have been held to date with a range of stakeholders including the following:

National Roads Authority (NRA)	IDA Ireland
Iarnród Éireann	Garda Síochána
Bus Eireann	Enterprise Ireland
Department of Education and Science	Major Landowners
Office of Strategic Planning Guidelines	RAPID
Athy Forum	Action South Kildare

These meetings provided an opportunity for each stakeholder body to outline their long term ideas or proposals, which they have for the Study Area.

Much of the information obtained through the above consultations has been used to provide detail as to the existing profile of the Study Area as outlined in Section 3.

4.7 Elected Representatives of Kildare County Council / Athy Town Council

To ensure that the Framework Plan abides by and accommodates the statutory functions of local authorities the consultant team consulted with elected representatives from Kildare County Council. Formal briefings have been held thus far, to inform members as to the aims of the Study and to solicit views in relation to the Study's progression.

4.8 Summary

The public consultation process had a significant influence on the formulation of the Study with written submissions, telephone feedback and detailed information received through workshops, individual and group meetings all providing the consultants with a substantial list of concerns and issues. The consultation input resulted in issues being included and taken forward that had not been fully appreciated by the consultant team at the outset of the Study. Combined with the broader strategic issues identified in Section 2 and the existing Study Area profile in Section 3 the consultation feedback was used to define the principles and objectives of the Framework, detailed in Section 5, that form the basis of the development scenarios.

