



Chapter thirteen Evaluation of Environmental Impacts

13.1 Introduction

This report has been prepared in accordance with section 10 (5)(a) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, which states

'a Development Plan shall contain information on the likely and significant effects on the environment of implementing the Plan.'

The current assessment as prescribed under the Act is an integral and valuable part of the Development Plan process as it illustrates how environmental concerns have been fully integrated into the Plan making process.¹

The value and purpose in evaluating the environmental impact is to:

- Identify key policies and objectives that have the potential to conflict with one another and the environmental implications of those policies and objectives.
- Identify the positive environmental effects of the Plan, how it has addressed environmental issues and reinforces the strategy chosen.
- Demonstrate to users of the Development Plan, how the policies and objectives have regard to environmental matters.

This process is intended to appraise the Athy Town Development Plan 2006-2012. However, it is not a detailed assessment of the Plan as would be typically carried out for the purpose of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in relation to specific development proposals.

In this section the policies and objectives included in the Plan in a strategic form are assessed under the following headings:

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|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| • Human Beings | • Flora | • Fauna | • Soil |
| • Water | • Air | • Climate | • Landscape |
| • Material Assets | • Cultural Heritage | • Interaction between the foregoing | |

Section II briefly gives a strategic assessment of the main sections of the Development Plan which deals with the Plan's policies and objectives, and the resultant environmental ramifications.

¹ The first formal preparatory stage of the Athy Town Development Plan began before in April 2004, The "SEA Directive" came into effect in July 2004, therefore it was not a mandatory requirement to prepare an SEA for the current Athy Town Development Plan 2006-2012.

13.1.1 *Principles of Sustainability*

The recommended strategy is based on the strategy outlined in the Athy Integrated Framework Plan for Land Use and Transportation, which outlined four different options for addressing the future development of Athy. Following an evaluation of each scenario the preferred scenario was chosen. The preferred scenario focuses on the reinvigoration of the town centre and waterways. This Plan seeks to utilise key town centre sites which are currently not used to their full potential, in order to develop a compact urban form within Athy. A compact urban form promotes the efficient use of land and re-use of land, as well as the efficient use of existing infrastructure. It discourages urban sprawl at low densities, which consumes greenfield sites on the edge of the urban area, is expensive to develop due to infrastructure costs and is located away from existing communities and existing infrastructure.

The preferred scenario has been chosen for the following reasons:

- It promotes compact urban development,
- It consolidates growth within the Athy Urban Area allowing for natural increases in population in the study Hinterland Area,
- It develops a compact urban form within Athy,
- It creates opportunities for a range of housing types and densities,
- It develops safe slow mode linkages between residential areas and railway station,
- It consolidates commercial and retail development in the existing town centre,
- It locates high-density employment opportunities in appropriate locations with respect to residential areas and public transport nodes,
- It locates low-density employment opportunities adjacent to strategic internal distributor and road links,
- It creates opportunities for cultural, social community and passive and active leisure activities that maximise the potential of the existing heritage and amenity.

The Athy Town Development Plan also promotes Athy's role as a Moderate Growth Town in the Greater Dublin Area as outlined in the Regional Planning Guidelines 2004. At a regional level this is important in promoting balanced economic and population growth, addressing some of the unsustainable growth patterns experienced in the Greater Dublin Area. This is deemed to have a positive environmental and economic impact at a regional level.

13.1.2 *Human Beings*

The overall strategy will promote and provide for a mix of uses within Athy to cater for all aspects of regular daily activities such as living requirements/homes, working, shopping, the need for community facilities such as crèches, schools and recreational facilities. This shall be achieved through the development of a number of neighbourhood centres together with the concentration of retail/commercial development at the town centre in line with the sequential approach to retail development.

The cumulative effect of the policies included in the Plan pertaining to retail, transportation, employment, recreation, community facilities, open space, culture, and residential development inclusive of the creation of a network of neighbourhoods, aim to develop Athy as an attractive place in which to live, work and do business and provide an unparalleled quality of life for all its residents. This is reinforced by the Councils policy to request a community impact assessment for large developments in order to assess the developments potential impact on the local services.

The open space policy has been formulated having regard to the need to improve the provision of amenity areas in the town. Amenity and open space will be provided through a mixture of waterfront walks, marinas, public parks, urban squares and playing pitches together with open spaces in lower density residential areas.

13.1.3 *Flora & Fauna*

Chapter 10, Part A discussed the Natural Heritage of Athy and outlined the various habitats and significant environmental elements to be found in the town. This chapter outlines designated conservation sites, ecologically sensitive sites, views, prospects and trees to be protected in Athy. The Planning Authority acknowledges that the future development of Athy has the potential to lead to some negative environmental impacts. Therefore a reasonable balance between conservation measures and development measures in the interests of promoting the orderly and sustainable development of Athy, will therefore be promoted. It is also the policy of the Council to have regard to the condition, location and accessibility of heritage items in the planning and provision of services.

The Council will in all cases seek to mitigate any potential impact on the natural heritage in co-operation with the relevant statutory authorities and ensure that any substantial developments are submitted with accompanying, Environmental Impact Statements. It is anticipated that the realisation of the IFPLUTs Strategy, upon which this Plan has been developed, will not result in significant adverse environmental impacts being experienced.

13.1.4 Water

It is accepted that all future development has the potential to increase the rate of surface water run-off and thus increase the potential for flooding. Surface run-off from urban areas gathers pollution from streets, footpaths and buildings (e.g. rubbish and oil residue from cars) and deposits them in rivers and streams as it journeys back to the water table. The Athy Development Plan aims to promote water quality in the rivers and canals in Athy. Furthermore developments are required to provide adequate setbacks from the River and Canal.

To encourage water conservation, it is the Council's policy to promote the installation of water meters in all new residential units and in units where planning permission is required for an extension as well as the implementation of the Polluter Pays Principle for non-domestic users. The Athy Town Council Development Plan strives to ensure that an appropriate level of water supply is available for domestic, commercial and industrial use over the period of this Plan.

13.1.5 Air

Higher residential densities (particularly in the town centre), increased accessibility to public transport, a cycle and pedestrian network and improved provision of local employment, services and facilities can help reduce the need to travel and promote the use of alternative modes of transport to that of the car, thus reducing transport related emissions such as carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides and air particles.

The Development Plan highlights a number of significant tree groups, which will be protected from development. The Council advocates careful consideration when selecting plant species for landscaping. Selected species should reflect the proposed location of the site and issues such as, soil conditions, pollution, safety, maintenance requirements, the possibility of vandalism of the site, and aesthetic potential. The variety and type of indigenous shrubs and trees are contained in Appendix 2 of this Plan. These along with future planting policies will assist in air purification and help achieve the appropriate carbon balance.

13.1.6 Climate

The zoning of lands for most purposes results in unavoidable increased air pollution, this in turn contributes, albeit insignificantly, to global climate change. More intensive development areas, particularly associated with some areas of higher density development are likely to affect the microclimate of the sites within which they are situated. This however, will be offset by the advantages of higher densities. In considering the policies and objectives for this Plan significant regard was given to the requirements of the Environmental Protection Agency and EU policy pertaining to same.

13.1.7 Landscape

The Development Plan strategy involves the urbanisation of lands that were by and large previously used for agricultural purposes. This will inevitably result in the depletion of agricultural land. However, this is deemed to be acceptable in order to accommodate the estimated increase in population, bearing in mind that existing zoned residential lands have not and may not be released for development over the period of the Plan. Correspondingly, economic growth and development is primarily linked to a growth in population and employment and the Council must ensure that sufficient lands are zoned to facilitate expansion in the employment and services sectors. Those lands and areas that represent the most important ecological habitats and landscape features have been reserved in the interest of biodiversity, visual amenity and public open space so as to reduce the overall visual impact. It is the aim of the Council to protect the town's architectural heritage and to encourage sensitive sustainable development so as to ensure its survival and maintenance for the future.

13.1.8 Material Assets

This includes both natural and man-made assets. Natural assets are discussed in detail in Section Two while some of the material assets that relate to heritage are addressed below in the section on Cultural Heritage. Other material assets might include the existing infrastructure in the area including services such as water, roads, sewerage infrastructure and the built environment. No significant impacts are expected to material assets and

improvements to the existing infrastructure and road network are planned for the area. The strategy aims to maximise the development potential of existing material assets such as roads and infrastructure by concentrating development where these services exist.

13.1.9 Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage encompasses the combined disciplines of archaeology, architecture, urban design, monuments and decorative features. It enables links to be made with the past, which enrich the understanding of culture and places current times in an historical context. In Chapter 10, the Council identifies an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) for the historic centre of the town and provides policies for the protection and enhancement of the area's heritage. An archaeological zone and key sites under the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) are also identified on the Archaeological & Natural Heritage Maps, including views to be preserved. The policies contained throughout this chapter will ensure that the natural, built and cultural heritage of Athy is preserved and protected for the future generations of the town to appreciate and enjoy. The Record of Protected Structures (RPS) can be found in Appendix 1.

13.1.10 Interaction of the Foregoing

Many of the elements listed above are inter-linked and in some cases are reliant on each other. No significant and likely impacts have been identified.

Section Two

13.2 Key Section Elements: Assessed in terms of their Strategic Environmental Impact

13.2.1 Economic Development

Sustainable economic development seeks to achieve the balance of optimising the output from available resources to achieve current objectives in a way that enables future generations meet their own needs and objectives in due course. The cumulative effect of the policies in this section aim to provide sustainable economic development and local employment in the long term. The 'Future Employment, Enterprise and Economic Strategy' is integral to the overall development for the town and has been promoted in areas with minimum environmental cost through effective and efficient deployment of resources in locations that will attract and sustain indigenous and foreign direct job creating investment.

13.2.2 Infrastructure

This section outlines the capacity of the existing water and wastewater treatment facilities in the town, as well as future plans to accommodate the projected growth in population in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive manner. Policies and objectives on waste management and water quality/conservation and other issues are included in order to ensure that potentially negative impacts on the environment are minimised. The Council will also encourage the co-location of telecommunications facilities (e.g. broadband, cable etc) and ensure that all telecommunications infrastructure is adequately screened to minimise any adverse visual impacts on the environment.

13.2.3 Transportation

The transportation policy was developed on the basis of the Athy IFPLUT Study. The vision promoted in the Plan is of a sustainable and efficient town, which provides an integrated land use and transportation strategy in Athy up to 2020. The transportation policy reflects the general policy to reduce the number of car-generated trips through integrating land use and transportation, facilitating infrastructure and encouraging alternative modes of transport such as walking and cycling. It also aims to improve general circulation and transport links locally within the town and on a more strategic level within the Greater Dublin Area.

13.2.4 Retail

As a Level 3 Sub County Town Centre in the GDA and County retail hierarchy there is a need for Athy to grow into a centre of greater regional importance in order for the County to have a greater retention of spending and in parallel, to significantly improve the town's attraction for visitor and tourism expenditure.

A retail strategy for Athy inclusive of town centre improvements was formulated upon the basis of the 'Draft County Kildare Retail Strategy 2005'. In general, the sequential approach is encouraged favouring the town centre and edge of centre sites over out of town or greenfield sites. In depth surveys have been conducted in order to

assess the retail floorspace provision in Athy, consumer retail patterns and consumer satisfaction with the retail provision in the town. The Council will review and monitor retail trends that could have an influence on the performance of the retailing in Athy and will pursue new concepts and formats that are in accordance with the framework provided by the Retail Planning Guidelines, the GDA Strategy and the Draft County Retail Strategy. This chapter aims to enhance the image of the town and the quality of life of its inhabitants. In improving the attractiveness of the physical environment, the economic and social environment will be enhanced, possibly generating inward investment with positive benefits in terms of employment.

13.2.5 Town Centre, Urban Renewal & Regeneration

The cumulative strength of the policies in this section will safeguard the long-term viability and vitality of the town centre. Policies are aimed at improving the visual appearance and public realm of the town centre and strengthening the town core.

The town centre displays some significant areas of under utilised, vacant and brownfield sites in addition to some derelict and vacant buildings. There are also many sites in the vicinity of Stanhope Street, Edmund Rice Square and the Marina site that have significant potential for redevelopment and rejuvenation. This Plan promotes the appropriate development of these areas, so as to support the existing infrastructure of the town centre and maintain its vibrancy and vitality. This is deemed to be more appropriate and environmentally sustainable over the period of the Plan.

13.2.6 Housing

The Council has statutory obligations to ensure that sufficient land is zoned for all types of housing to meet the town's projected housing requirements over the plan period. The aim of the Plan is to ensure that there is adequate land available in appropriate locations for housing and to have clear policies regarding proposals to build new houses, whether individual units or schemes. Policies in this chapter echo the requirements of the overall development strategy for the town as they encourage higher densities adjacent to the town centre, neighbourhood centres and adjacent to proposed transportation nodes and strategic corridor. The Development Plan also includes the Kildare Housing Strategy (Appendix 4), which aims to reduce the incidence of social segregation and promote social and affordable housing thereby contributing to an overall positive impact on the environment-socially, physically and economically.

13.2.7 Community Facilities

Building strong, inclusive communities is a key element in achieving sustainable development objectives. Sustainable communities require, not only economic development, but also provision of and access to education, health and community support services, amenities and leisure services and a good quality built environment.

This section seeks to expand social development in Athy through;
Social Inclusion – creating inclusive, equitable communities
Social Capital – creating opportunities for interaction
Social Wealth – providing services, facilities and an attractive place to live

The strategic goal over the period of the Plan is to make Athy an attractive place to live and work by building strong, inclusive communities that have a sense of place and belonging, with adequate provision of and access to services and facilities to meet the needs of the town's growing population.

13.2.8 Land Use Zonings

This chapter outlines the main zoning objectives and policies for the existing and future land use zonings over the period of this Plan. All of the zonings have been assessed in accordance with those key factors as set out in Chapter 11. The purpose of land use zoning is to indicate to property owners and to the general public the types of development that the Council considers most appropriate in each zone. In the promotion of redevelopment and urban renewal, this allows the developer to plan investment with some certainty. In the control of development, zoning seeks to demarcate competing and incompatible uses in order to promote greater environmental quality. In order to consolidate the town and encourage the efficient use of the infrastructure, many zonings are proposed within the proposed distributor roads. This reinforces the IFPLUT vision as Athy develops into a self sustaining town within the wider context of the GDA. The Council has also proposed a number of Master Plans at various locations.

13.2.9 Heritage, Tourism & Environment

Policies in this section are mainly concerned with the safeguarding of the built, natural, archaeological and cultural heritage of Athy town and afford identified sites, species, monuments, artefacts and particular areas relevant statutory protection. Buildings and features of architectural and archaeological importance are registered in the Record of Protected Structures and Record of Monuments and Places. Policies also ensure that future development is sympathetic to the historic and existing development pattern through the establishment of an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) of the historical town core. Overall the policies and objectives seek to ensure that modern development sensitively integrates with the past form and enhances the built environment.

13.2.10 Recreation & Amenity

The Development Plan aims to expand on the existing provision of recreational and amenity facilities in Athy through the identification of a number of areas to be developed for such purposes. A number of areas are zoned for open space purposes in order to protect this functional amenity space.

A large amount of public space exists in the town, concentrated in three specific areas, namely the People's Park located to the east of the town centre, the Town Council owned land to the north of the town centre and thirdly the banks of the River Barrow. It is proposed to intensify the use of the open space to the north of Duke Street by developing sports and community facilities. The river and canal system in Athy offers an obvious opportunity for providing a walking route primarily for recreational purposes. This will involve the reinstatement of existing neglected and overgrown walkways, the development of additional routes, the continuation of the amenity development of the Peoples Park, and the retention of the enclosed urban park character.

These areas provide important opportunities for recreation but also have visual, social and ecological qualities. It is considered desirable to protect and enhance these areas and to retain public access where possible.

13.2.11 Conclusions

The evaluation of the likely environmental impact outlined above provides an explicit and systematic review of the Athy Development Plan's policies and objectives and their individual and combined impacts on the environment.

The Development Plan's policies and objectives address issues concerning the quality of the local environment. Most policies have positive implications for the landscape, the townscape and overall quality of life for the residents and visitors of Athy. Policies concerned with a concentrated settlement structure and the provision of alternatives to car-based journeys show awareness to global issues and make vital contributions towards the achievement of transport, energy efficiency and the conservation of natural resources. There are very few policies that show a significant negative impact and those that do were weighed up against alternatives that cause more significant environmental degradation.

The overall conclusion to be drawn is that the Athy Town Development Plan 2006-2012 provides a balance in terms of resolving likely adverse environmental impacts of development and economic growth, with the need to ensure a good level of protection and safeguarding of the natural landscape and environment.