

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCOPING REPORT

FOR THE

DRAFT

REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY

FOR THE

EASTERN AND MIDLAND REGION

for: **Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly**



by: **CAAS Ltd.**



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Section 1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction and Terms of Reference

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly has commenced a review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region. The RSES identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy direction on how to address them. At this strategic level it provides a policy framework for investment to meet current and future needs in the Eastern and Midland Region, which covers 12 local authorities: Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Fingal, South Dublin, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and Dublin City.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report helps to communicate and define the scope of the environmental issues, which are to be dealt with by the SEA together with the level of detail to which it is intended to address these issues.

1.2 Requirement to Undertake Environmental Assessments

The European Union (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2025, transposing the European SEA Directive (2001), require that SEA is undertaken for the review of a RSES. The SEA will be undertaken in compliance with the Directive, transposing Regulations and the SEA Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (DHLGH, 2022). The SEA will be informed by the suite of EPA resources and guidance¹.

In addition to SEA, the following environmental assessments will also be undertaken:

- Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA), and subsequent stages of AA as required,² in compliance with the Planning and Development Act, 2024, as amended, transposing requirements of the European Habitats Directive; and
- Regional Flood Risk Appraisal (RFRA), in compliance with The Planning System and Flood Risk Management - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009).

The SEA will be informed by the AA and the RFRA, and each of the assessments will inform the preparation of the Draft RSES as relevant and appropriate.

¹ Including: SEA process guidance and checklists; Inventory of spatial datasets relevant to SEA; Topic specific SEA guidance [including EPA/UCD Toolkit for the proportionate and consistent consideration of health in SEA (2026) EPA Good practice guidance on SEA for the Tourism Sector (2024), Good practice note on Cumulative Effects Assessment (EPA, 2020), Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring (2020)), Integrating climatic factors into SEA (2019), Developing and Assessing Alternatives in SEA (2015), Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment (2012), Good practice guidance on SEA and Landscape (2023) and Good Practice Guidance Note: SEA and Integration (2025)]; EPA WebGIS Tool; EPA WFD Application; and EPA AA GeoTool.

² referred to as "AA" in this report

Section 2 The Strategy³

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) has commenced a review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region, which will build on the progress made under the first RSES which was made in 2019. The RSES identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy direction on how to address them.

EMRA was established in January 2015 along with the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) and the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA). The Regional Assemblies are part of the local government structure in Ireland which comprises the 31 local authorities (city and county councils) and three Regional Assemblies.

In simple terms the Regional Assembly helps decide how the Eastern and Midland region grows, where money is invested, and how councils plan for the future, shaping policy, investment and regional development outcomes.

2.1 What is a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy?

A Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is a long-term plan for how the region will grow and develop. It sets out where new homes, jobs and services should be located, how transport and infrastructure should be planned, and how the region can support economic growth while protecting the environment. The strategy guides local authorities in preparing their development plans and local economic and community plans. It aligns regional enterprise activity through the Regional Enterprise Plans and helps ensure that investment across the region is coordinated, sustainable and benefits communities.

The Strategy incorporates a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) to provide an integrated land use and transportation strategy for the Dublin Metropolitan Area.

The objective of the RSES is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and investment framework for the region. The Planning and Development Act 2024 (as amended) also identifies areas that the RSES needs to make provision for, which includes, but is not limited to, housing, employment, retail, transport, onshore renewable energy, marine and coastal matters, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and protection of the environment.

The RSES is implemented by means of engagement with local authorities, government departments and relevant public bodies to align local development and economic plans with its core principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action, and Economic Opportunity. This alignment promotes the integration of regional priorities into national policy and the RSES performs a pivotal role in regional investment alignment, ensuring that strategic infrastructure delivery in transport, water, and housing is integrated with national funding streams, such as the NDP and enterprise funds, to drive the sustainable development of the region.

³ For further information, please refer to the accompanying Pre-Draft Public Consultation Strategic Issues Paper

2.2 Geographic and Temporal Scope

The RSES will cover the geographic area of the EMRA. The 12 local authorities in the EMRA region are Dublin City Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Fingal County Council, Kildare County Council, Laois County Council, Longford County Council, Louth County Council, Meath County Council, Offaly County Council, South Dublin County Council, Westmeath County Council and Wicklow County Council. These local authorities are divided into three subregional areas or Strategic Planning Areas (SPA) namely the Midland, Eastern and Dublin SPAs as shown on the map below.

The RSES aligns with the National Planning Framework and will make provisions out to the year 2040.



2.3 Current Vision and Key Principles of the RSES 2019-2031

The Vision of the RSES 2019-2031 seeks to: “create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all.”

Key Principles reflect the pillars of sustainable development and are about quality of life for citizens, a strong, stable economy and good standard of living supported by good environmental quality. The principles are ‘healthy placemaking’, ‘climate action’ and ‘economic opportunity’.

2.4 What will inform the RSES?

The RSES will be informed by EU and UN policy, national policy, a regional economic study, regional socio-economic analysis, consultation and engagement and environmental assessments (SEA/AA/RFRA).

The RSES will inform Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans at city and county level.

2.5 What Development and Activities will the RSES make provision for?

People and Places

- Identifying the location of housing, including provision to meet any NPF regional population growth and housing targets for each local authority housing development strategy;
- Identifying any key towns in the region, with the capacity to complement a Regional Growth Centre (Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk);
- Identifying settlements, or parts of settlements which straddle local authority boundaries where a coordinated area plan is required, based on the importance of the settlement for population or employment growth; and
- Identifying sustainable settlement patterns and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas; and prepare a metropolitan area strategic plan (MASP) for Dublin which is an integrated land use and transportation strategy (see section on Dublin MASP).

Quality of Life & Healthy Places

- Identifying facilities relating to third level education, healthcare and sports to serve the region; and
- Protecting the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht.

Connectivity & Infrastructure

- Identifying the provision of transportation (including public transportation), water services, energy and communications networks and waste management facilities;
- An indication of priorities for infrastructure of scale relating to transportation (including public transportation), water services, waste management, energy and communications networks and the provision of educational, healthcare, retail, cultural and recreational facilities; and
- Provision of information on potential sources of funding for infrastructure.

Environment and Climate

- **Climate action:** Adaptation and mitigation consistent with national policies and measures.
- **Renewable energy:** Meet national targets for onshore renewable energy to facilitate electricity grid infrastructure, make provision for energy security, and promote steps for coordination and cooperation between public bodies.
- **Landscape:** A strategy relating to landscape and landscape character that coordinates the categorisation of landscapes, in terms of their capacity to absorb particular types of development, across the region to ensure a consistent approach to the protection of the landscape.
- **Environment and Biodiversity:** Preservation and protection of the environment and its amenities, including integration of the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the archaeological, architectural and natural heritage of the region.
- **Marine & Coastal Matters:** Facilitate coordination of land-sea interactions and coastal zone management in response to sea-level change in a manner consistent with the National Marine Planning Framework.
- **Flooding:** A comprehensive regional flooding and flood management plan.

Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management

- A strategy relating to marine and coastal matters that facilitates the coordination of land-sea interactions for coastal planning authorities within the region;
- Coastal zone management as a consequence of sea level change, including the identification of strategic infrastructure; and
- The implementation of the National Marine Planning Framework, National Marine Planning Policy Statement and NPF.

Regional Renewable Energy

- A new Regional Renewable Energy Strategy will form part of the RSES. Its purpose is to meet national onshore wind and solar PV targets and identify these targets for county level; identify and facilitate electricity grid infrastructure for domestic use or export, including upgrade projects and support infrastructure; make provision for energy security; and promote steps for coordination and cooperation between public bodies.

Economic Development and Employment

- The RSES must make provision for an economic strategy that:
 - Identifies regional strengths and opportunities, having regard to economic and employment trends;
 - Identifies the regional attributes that are essential to enhancing regional economic performance, including the quality of the environment, urban and rural areas, physical infrastructure, and social, community and cultural facilities;
 - Sets out proposals to maintain or enhance key attributes delivered through public bodies, private investment and action; and
 - Identifies the means of maintaining and enhancing overall regional economic performance in accordance with national economic policy.
- The RSES must also make provision for:
 - the strategic location of employment-related development and industrial and commercial development; and
 - a strategy relating to retail matters, including consideration of the location of retail development.

Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan for Dublin

- An indication of priorities for infrastructure of scale relating to transportation (including public transportation), water services, waste management, energy and communications networks and the provision of educational, healthcare, retail, cultural and recreational facilities;
- An order of priority for infrastructure provision;
- Provide information on potential sources of funding for infrastructure;
- Investment and actions across different sectors needed to deliver planned growth and development;
- Coordination between constituent local authorities, and the cooperation of public bodies; and
- The monitoring and reporting arrangements required to measure and evaluate progress in implementing the MASP.

Implementation and Monitoring

- Investment and actions across different sectors needed to deliver planned growth and development;
- Consideration of the coordination between constituent local authorities, and the cooperation of public bodies; and
- The monitoring and reporting arrangements required to measure and evaluate progress in implementing the RSES and MASP.

Section 3 Strategy Review and Environmental Assessment Process

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the Strategy revision, SEA, AA and RFRA integrated processes.

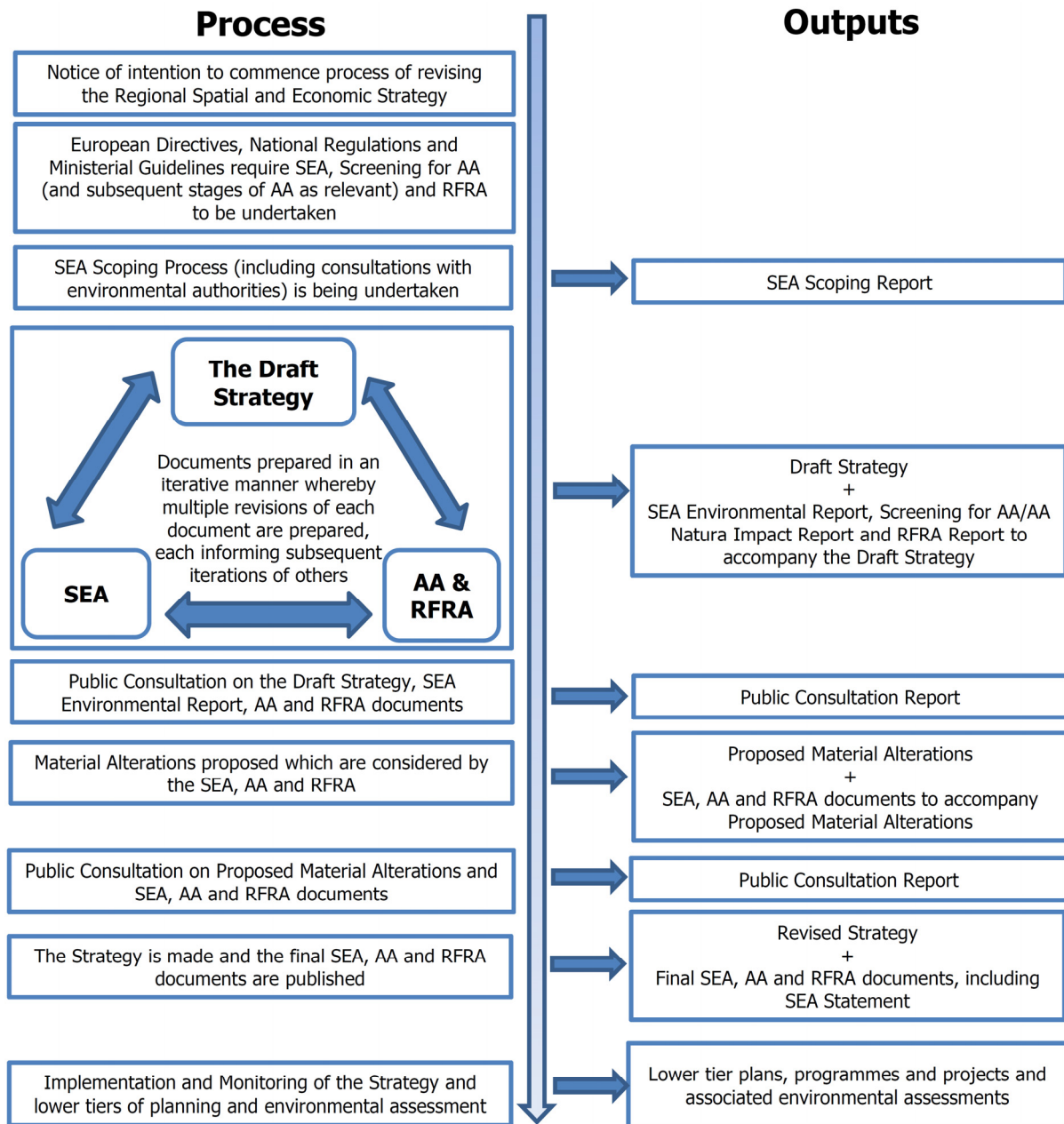


Figure 3.1 Overview of the Strategy Preparation/SEA/AA/RFRA Processes

The preparation of the SEA, AA and RFRA are taking place concurrently and the findings of the SEA, AA and RFRA will inform the Strategy. The environmental assessment processes will facilitate the integration of environmental considerations into the Strategy. It is intended that these considerations will include policies and objectives contributing towards environmental protection and management and the sustainable development of the Region.

The process is currently at a stage where this SEA Scoping Report has been prepared for circulation to environmental authorities. Environmental authorities will be invited to a Scoping Workshop. Any input from environmental authorities at the scoping workshop and any scoping submissions from environmental authorities will be taken into account alongside this report in the assessment and mitigation of effects. The findings of the assessment will be presented in an SEA Environmental Report which will accompany the Strategy on public display as part of the required statutory public consultation. The findings of both the AA and RFRA will be integrated into the SEA Environmental Report and AA and RFRA documents will also accompany the Strategy on public display.

Submissions on the Draft Strategy and associated SEA/AA/RFRA documents will be taken into account, with updates made to the SEA/AA/RFRA documentation where relevant. Proposed Material Alterations to the Draft Strategy will be considered by the SEA, AA and RFRA processes and will be accompanied on public display by SEA, AA and RFRA documents.

Submissions on the Proposed Material Alterations and associated SEA/AA/RFRA documents will be taken into account, with updates made to the SEA/AA/RFRA documentation where relevant. Further modifications to the Proposed Material Alterations will be considered by the SEA, AA and RFRA processes.

When the Strategy is made, the SEA/AA/RFRA documents will be finalised and an SEA Statement, which will include information on how environmental considerations were integrated into the Strategy, will be prepared. The Strategy will be implemented at lower tiers of decision making, accompanied by environmental assessments as relevant and appropriate. Environmental monitoring will be undertaken.

Section 4 Scoping consultations

As part of the SEA scoping process, the following environmental authorities are being notified that a submission or observation in relation to the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the environmental report can be made to the Assembly:

- Environmental authorities specified under the European Union (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2025:
 - Environmental Protection Agency;
 - Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment;
 - Department of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and the Marine; and
 - Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
- Constituent local authorities;
- Office of Public Works, due to their relevance to the RFRA due to their flood risk management activities; and
- Northern Ireland’s Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Any submission or observation received will be considered throughout the remainder of the SEA process, as relevant.

Submissions/parts of submissions on AA/RFRA made during the SEA Scoping process will be taken into account while undertaking the AA/RFRA as relevant.

To assist with consultation, the following scoping questions may be considered by environmental authorities when preparing any written submission or observation:

1. Do you have any comments on the emerging Draft Strategy (refer to Section 2 of this SEA Scoping Report or, for more detail, the accompanying Pre-Draft Public Consultation Strategic Issues Paper)?
2. Do you have any comments on the SEA process detailed at Section 3 of this SEA Scoping Report?
3. Do you have any suggestions for edits or additions to the initially list of legislation, policies, strategies, plans and programmes at Section 5?
4. Do you have any comments on the emerging SEA Framework provided at Section 6?
5. Do you have any comments on the scope of environmental baseline data identified (see Section 7 of this SEA Scoping Report)?
6. Do you have any comments on key scoping issues (see Section 8 of this SEA Scoping Report), including the selection of relevant of environmental components for assessment, the preliminary identification of likely significant effects and approach to alternatives?

Section 5 Other Plans and Programmes

The Strategy is nested in a hierarchy of legislation, policies, strategies, plans and programmes that relate to various sectors, including transport and land use planning. The SEA Environmental Report will provide details on the relationship between the Strategy and other plans and programmes. The Strategy must align with relevant higher-level strategic actions and may, in turn, inform lower-level strategic actions. The SEA and AA will take account of the Assembly's obligation to comply with all legislation, plans and programmes relating to environmental protection and management and sustainable development and align with and cumulatively contribute towards – in combination with other users and bodies – the achievement of the objectives of the regulatory framework for environmental protection and management.

In considering the relationship with legislation and other plans and programmes, the Strategy will be implemented within an area that has existing plans and programmes for a range of sectors (e.g. land use, transport, energy and water management) at a range of levels (e.g. national, river catchment, regional and county) that are already subject to SEA and AA. The SEA for the Strategy will take into account the fact that assessments are carried out at different levels of the hierarchy, including Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and AA at project level.

Relevant legislation, policies, strategies, plans and programmes will be used in order to inform the SEA's Framework of Strategic Environmental Objectives, indicators and targets, which will be used by the SEA in the assessment of likely significant environmental effects and in the development of a monitoring programme (see Section 6).

Table 5.1 provides an initial draft list of this existing legislation, policies, strategies, plans and programmes.

Table 5.1 Initial Draft List of Existing legislation, policies, strategies, plans and programmes

Legislation, Policy, Strategy, Plan, Programme, etc.
International, including European
SEA Directive (2001/42/EC)
EIA Directive (2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU)
Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)
Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)
Directive on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe 2024/EC - recast: Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe Directive 2008/50/EC and Fourth Daughter Directive 2004/107/EC
Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)
Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC)
Drinking Water Directive - Directive (EU) 2020/2184 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on the quality of water intended for human consumption (recast)
Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive - Directive (EU) 2024/3019 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2024 concerning urban wastewater treatment (recast)
UN Sustainable Development Goals
European Green Deal (2019) and "Fit for 55" legislation (2021)
Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - Bringing nature back into our lives (European Commission, 2020)
EU Nature Restoration Regulation
National Level
The National Planning Framework (first revision 2025) and associated National Development Plan Review (2025)
Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines (2024)
Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines (2018)
Housing Action Plan 'Delivering Homes, Building Communities' (2025)
Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)
Planning and Development Act 2024 (as amended)
European Union (Land Use Planning – Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2025

Legislation, Policy, Strategy, Plan, Programme, etc.
European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011), as amended
European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations of 2003 (S.I. 722 of 2003), European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations of 2003 (S.I. 350 of 2014), European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface waters) Regulations of 2009 (S.I. 272 of 2009)
Water Pollution Acts 1977 to 1990
Water Services Act 2007 (No. 30 of 2007), Water Services Act 2013 (No. 6 of 2013), Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (No. 50 of 2013), Water Services Act 2017 (No. 29 of 2017), and Water Services (Amendment) Act 2022 (No. 39 of 2022)
Water Action Plan 2024: River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027 (3rd Cycle) (2024)
Wildlife Act of 1976, Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000, Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2023
Ireland's 4 th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030
All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025
Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (as amended)
National Climate Action Plan 2025
National Adaptation Framework 2024 and associated regional, local and sectoral adaptation plans
Climate Adaptation Sectoral Adaptation Plans
Accelerating Infrastructure - Report and Action Plan
National Sustainable Mobility Policy (SMP) (2022)
Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) 2021-2030 (updated 2024)
National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI) (2021)
All-Island Strategic Rail Review
Shaping Our Electricity Future 1.1 (EirGrid)
National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025 and National Landscape Character Assessment and State of Landscape Reporting (pending preparation)
National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy (2024)
National Clean Air Strategy 2023
National Nature Restoration Plan (under development – Coordinated by NPWS)
Regional/ County/Local Level
Existing and other Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, including MASPs
EMRA's 15-minute city implementation pathway (developed under the Dublin REP)
Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) for Dublin, the Mid-East, the Midlands and the North-East
Transport Strategies for Cities and Metropolitan Areas (National Transport Authority, Various)
EirGrid's Strategic Framework for Grid Development in the Eastern & Midland Region
Local Transport Plans
Regional EV Strategies
NPWS Conservation Plans and/or Conservation Objectives for SACs and SPAs
Local Economic and Community Plans
Land Use Plans, including Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Planning Schemes
Local Authorities Biodiversity and Heritage Action Plans
Local Authority Climate Action Plans
Local Authorities Landscape Character Assessments
Local Authorities Noise Action Plans
Town Centre First Plans
Fáilte Ireland Tourism plans and strategies, including those relating to the "Wild Atlantic Way", "Dublin", "Ireland's Hidden Heartlands" and "Ireland's Ancient East"
Various existing, planned and emerging projects provided for by the above plans and programmes

Section 6 SEA Framework

The SEA's Framework of Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs), indicators and targets will be informed by existing legislation, policies, strategies, plans and programmes (see Section 5), and will be used by the SEA in the assessment of likely significant environmental effects and in the development of a monitoring programme. The SEOs included on Table 6.1 are aligned to those used by the SEA of the First Revision to the National Planning Framework.

SEOs are methodological measures developed from policies that generally govern environmental protection objectives established at international, Community, Member State or national level e.g. the environmental protection objectives of various European Directives that have been transposed into Irish law and which are required to be implemented. The SEOs are set out under a range of topics and will be used as standards against which the provisions of the revised RSES and the alternatives are evaluated for likely significant environmental effects. Table 6.1 provides an initial draft list of SEOs.

The SEOs will be linked to indicators which can facilitate monitoring the environmental effects of implementing the RSES as revised⁴, as well as targets which the Strategy, as revised, can help work towards. The SEA Framework will seek to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of future monitoring across the hierarchy of land use plans.

Table 6.1 Initial Draft List of SEOs

Component	SEOs
Population and Human Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) To create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a more healthy, sustainable and climate-neutral Region. (ii) Ensure a just transition for workers and communities, in terms of jobs and opportunities in the transformation toward a sustainable and climate-neutral Region. (iii) Ensure access to suitable housing which includes a mix of tenures to support all sectors in society. (iv) Provide sufficient capacity in healthcare and education to support all sectors in society. (v) Ensure that wastewater treatment is adequate for the populations proposed, including seasonal fluctuations and is compliant with relevant EU standards (Note: also relevant in the context of Material Assets).
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Preserve, protect, maintain and where appropriate restore the terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity, particularly EU designated sites and protected species (including transboundary considerations). (ii) Protect biodiversity from the impacts of climate change and recognise the role of ecosystems and ecosystem services to increase the adaptive capacity of people and biodiversity, while also contributing to climate change mitigation. (iii) Protect and enhance ecological corridors/linkages for the benefit of biodiversity, and also locally act as carbon sinks. (iv) Create/protect ecologically resilient and varied landscapes to help support a wide range of species.
Soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Prevent pollution which could impact soil quality and lead to degradation of the soil resource. (ii) Minimise land use changes that result in increased carbon emissions from soils. (iii) Maximise opportunities for soil carbon sequestration. (iv) Minimise use of greenfield sites for development.

⁴ Monitoring provides information on the actual impacts of the Strategy's implementation. This allows refinement of the Strategy in response to any unforeseen problems. It also provides valuable information for any future Strategy revision. As assessment is a predictive tool, the monitoring is a means of verification that the anticipated environmental effects are what happened in reality.

The SEA Environmental Report will include information on the nature and frequency of monitoring of environmental effects to be carried out. The Assembly is responsible for carrying out the SEA monitoring of RSES implementation.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the monitoring programme, threshold limits and remedial actions to address any exceedances recorded will be identified, as relevant, alongside organisational procedures for taking action. This will help to facilitate the resolution of all exceedances or issues in an efficient and controlled manner.

The SEA Environmental Report will include information on the nature and frequency of monitoring of environmental effects to be carried out.

Component	SEOs
Water	(i) Ensure forward planning and development management achieves compliance with the objectives of the WFD and MSFD for surface waters, groundwaters and marine waters.
Air Quality	(i) Avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment as a whole resulting from emissions to air, including transboundary considerations. (ii) Maintain and promote continuing improvement in air quality through the reduction of emissions and promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency.
Climatic Factors	(i) Minimise existing and avoid new emissions of greenhouse gases across the land use sector and through integrated transport and land use planning (ii) Decrease the usage of fossil fuels and increase renewable energy usage. (iii) Preserve, protect and maintain natural carbon sinks (e.g., peatlands/ wetlands/ forests). (iv) Increase resilience of communities to flood risk resulting from climate change. (v) Contribute to achieving the national climate objective to transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.
Material Assets	(i) Consolidate growth and limit urban sprawl through integrated transport and land use planning (ii) Optimise use of existing infrastructure/ built environment, raw materials and energy (including energy efficiency). (iii) Contribute to circular economy principles, including supporting and promoting the use of waste as a resource. (iv) Contribute to climate change adaptation through ensuring the robustness and resiliency of new infrastructure to the effects of climate change. See also PHH for Wastewater Treatment
Cultural Heritage	(i) Protect and plan for the management of places, features, buildings and landscapes of cultural, historical archaeological or architectural heritage.
Landscape	(i) Protect and maintain landscape character and visual amenity, including designated and unique landscapes. (ii) Recognise and respect the value of wider (non-designated) landscapes and seascapes.

Section 7 The Current State of the Environment

7.1 Introduction

The description of the current state of the environment is a key part of SEA, as it sets a baseline against which the draft Strategy's impacts can be assessed and monitored and helps to identify existing environmental problems. Annex I (b) of the SEA Directive requires the SEA Environmental Report that will accompany the Draft RSES on public display to include a description of:

- the 'relevant aspects' of the current state of the environment;
- a likely evolution of the environment without implementation of the Strategy;
- any existing environmental problems relevant to the Strategy.

Only 'relevant aspects' of the current state of the environment need to be included in the environmental report, and more generally the environmental report only needs to include 'information that may reasonably be required taking into account':

- current knowledge and methods of assessment;
- the contents and level of detail in the Strategy;
- the stage of the Strategy in the decision-making process;
- the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in the decision-making process to avoid duplication of assessment.

The SEA will provide a description of the current state of the environment as it relates to each environmental component that is proportionate to the geographical scope and objectives of the RSES.

The SEA Environmental Report that will accompany the Draft Strategy on public display will include information on state of the environment, encompassing the environmental components set out in the SEA Directive and transposing Regulations (biodiversity and flora and fauna, population and human health, soil, water, air and climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between these components). Mapping of various environmental sensitivities is currently being prepared and will inform the SEA. The EPA maintain a Spatial Information Sources Inventory that will be considered when gathering baseline information for the SEA.

The EPA's *"Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024"* provides an integrated assessment of the overall quality of Ireland's environment, the pressures being placed on it and the societal responses to current and emerging environmental issues. This report has informed various parts of the environmental baseline provided below. The five key environmental priorities identified by the report are:

- Delivering a national policy position on the environment - we urgently need to have a national policy position on the environment to address the complex interactions, synergies and trade-offs across environmental policy areas and to deal with its interactions with other policy domains.
- Driving policy implementation - we must rigorously implement existing environmental plans and programmes to achieve the benefits that they were developed to deliver.
- Transforming our systems - transformation of our energy, transport, food and industrial sectors is critical to achieving a sustainable future.
- Scaling up investment in infrastructure - investment in water, energy, transport and waste management infrastructure is essential to protect the environment now and into the future.
- Protecting the environment to protect our health - protecting the environment is key to protecting our health and we must act to reduce the modifiable risks to our health from environmental exposures.

Implementation of the Strategy will contribute towards efforts to achieve a number of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which were adopted by world leaders in 2015 at a United Nations Summit and came into force in 2016. These Goals include:

- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

7.2 Biodiversity and Flora and Fauna

The SEA will consider relevant information on sites designated for nature conservation purposes at international, European⁵ and national levels, protected species⁶, ecological connectivity (including stepping stones and corridors) and non-designated habitats. The SEA will also identify data sources which may be appropriate to local, project level development and assessments.

Information to be considered by the SEA under this topic include:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)⁷ and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)⁸;
- Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs)⁹;
- UNESCO World Heritage and UNESCO Biosphere sites¹⁰;
- National Parks¹¹;
- Shellfish Areas¹²;
- Ramsar Sites¹³;

⁵ Including Article 17 (Habitats Directive) and 12 (Birds Directive) reporting prepared by the DHLGH

⁶ Protected species including: Annex IV (Habitats Directive) species of flora and fauna, and their key habitats (i.e. breeding sites and resting places), which are strictly protected, whether inside or outside the above sites, e.g. Otter and bats; Other species of flora and fauna and their key habitats which are protected under the Wildlife Acts, 1976-2000; 'Protected species and natural habitats' as defined in the European Liability Directive (2004/35/EC) and European Communities (Environmental Liability) Regulations, 2008, including: Birds Directive – Annex I species and other regularly occurring migratory species, and their habitats and Habitats Directive – Annex I habitats, Annex II species and their habitats, and Annex IV species and their breeding sites and resting places.

⁷ designated under the Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora).

⁸ designated under the Birds Directive (EC Directive 200/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds).

⁹ NHAs are designated due to their national conservation value for ecological and/or geological/geomorphological heritage. They cover nationally important semi-natural and natural habitats, landforms or geomorphological features, wildlife plant and animal species or a diversity of these natural attributes. NHAs are designated under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000. Proposed NHAs were published on a non-statutory basis in 1995, but have not since been statutorily proposed or designated. These sites are of significance for wildlife and habitats.

¹⁰ World Heritage Sites are landmarks or areas with legal protection by an international convention administered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). World Heritage Sites are designated by UNESCO for having cultural, historical, scientific or other form of significance.

¹¹ National Parks are specially designated protected areas of unspoilt beauty and there are eight located in Ireland. The primary purpose of the National Parks is the conservation of biodiversity and landscape, however they also provide for recreational space for locals and visitors.

¹² Shellfish production areas listed in the Irish Shellfish Regulations (S.I. 200/1994) and European Communities (Quality of Shellfish Waters) (Amendment) Regulations 2009.

¹³ The Convention of Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Water Fowl Habitat, was established at Ramsar in 1971 and ratified by Ireland in 1984. The main aim of the Convention is to secure the designation by each contracting state of wetlands

- Nature Reserves¹⁴;
- Freshwater Pearl Mussel catchments¹⁵;
- Tree Preservation Orders¹⁶;
- Wildfowl Sanctuaries¹⁷;
- Certain entries to the Water Framework Directive Register of Protected Areas¹⁸;
- Salmonid River Regs (S.I. 293 only)¹⁹; and
- Flora Protection Order sites.

The following information is relevant to ecological networks and connectivity and non-designated habitats:

- Landcover²⁰;
- Watercourses and wetlands;
- Other relevant County Development Plan designations;
- The EPA's Framework National Ecological Network for Ireland²¹, e.g. BirdWatch Ireland's 'Important Bird Areas' (Crowe *et al.*, 2009).

Ireland's Article 17 report on the Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland (DHLGH, 2025) identifies various Irish, EU-protected habitats and species to be of unfavourable status and many to be still declining, although it also identifies that a range of positive actions are underway. The SEA Environmental Report will identify categories for pressures and threats on Ireland's habitats and species identified by the report. The SEA will identify available data sources including those from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and CORINE land cover mapping.

The EPA's "*Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024*" report provides an integrated assessment of the overall quality of Ireland's environment, the pressures being placed on it and the societal responses to current and emerging environmental issues. The key messages in "Chapter 7: Nature" in the report are:

- The Irish landscape is heavily modified by humans. Many of the few remaining natural and semi-natural habitats are in a poor or bad state. Research in Ireland highlights that 85% of our protected habitats and almost one third of our protected species of flora and fauna are in unfavourable status, over half our native plant species are in decline and more than 50 bird species are of high conservation concern. The leading causes of these declines are changes in agricultural practices, including intensification; pollution; the increasing spread of invasive species; and our changing climate.
- Our natural habitats and biodiversity have been squeezed to the margins of our landscape and policies, while food production and economic development have been prioritised. However, nature underpins our food production, food security and economic development. We risk our future if we continue to

in its territory for inclusion in a list of wetlands of international importance for waterfowl. This entails the commitment of each contracting state to a policy of protection and management of the designated wetlands, and of formulating and implementing planning so as to promote the conservation of designated wetlands and, as far as possible, the wise use of wetlands in its territory. Ireland presently has 45 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance, with surface areas of 66,994 hectares.

¹⁴ Nature Reserves are areas of importance to wildlife, protected under Ministerial order. There are currently 78 Statutory Nature Reserves in Ireland. Most are owned by the State but some are owned by organisations or private landowners.

¹⁵ Freshwater pearl mussel is a globally threatened, long-lived and extremely sensitive species that can be impacted by many forms of pollution, particularly sediment and nutrient pollution and by hydrological and morphological changes, which may arise from developments, activities or changes in any part of the catchment. There are two species of freshwater pearl mussel in Ireland (*Margaritifera margaritifera* and *Margaritifera durrovensis*) and both are protected under Annex II and Annex V of the EU Habitats Directive.

¹⁶ A planning mechanism whereby individual trees or groups of trees can be identified as important and protected by local authorities.

¹⁷ Areas that have been excluded from the 'Open Season Order' so that game birds can rest and feed undisturbed.

¹⁸ These areas are those identified as those requiring special protection under existing national or European legislation, either to protect their surface water or groundwater, or to conserve habitats or species that directly depend on those waters.

¹⁹ Waterbodies protected under the European Communities (Quality of Salmonid Waters) Regulations, 1988.

²⁰ Land cover is the observed physical cover, as seen from the ground or through remote sensing, including for example natural or planted vegetation, water and human constructions which cover the earth's surface.

²¹ The EPA's Framework National Ecological Network provides a classification of the relative importance of areas by virtue of the biodiversity and flora that they contain and the connectivity they provide. Many of the areas identified are corridors.

marginalise nature, and its protection, and fail to deliver adequate, achievable, impactful, evidence-based and coordinated action to protect and restore it.

- Biodiversity loss affects everyone. It is essential that nature protection, enforcement, management and restoration are mainstreamed across government, social and economic sectors and are fully considered at all levels of national, regional and local decision-making. Nature can recover if given the opportunity. For example, Ireland's corncrake population has risen by more than 35% in recent years, reflecting the outcome of a multi-million euro conservation investment that began in 2019. Positive actions to halt declines and to restore the key elements of our natural world must be implemented.

For biodiversity and flora and fauna, the SEA will identify available data sources including those from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (ecological designations), the EPA (water related designations and land cover mapping) and Tailte Éireann (land cover mapping). These data sources may be mapped and/or described in the SEA Environmental Report.

The SEA will be informed by the findings of the AA and will follow elements of Integrated Biodiversity Assessment with reference made to EPA guidance on SEA.

Other plans and programmes to be identified in the SEA Environmental Report include the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030, the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and conservation management plans for species (e.g. otter, swifts, bats, invasives).

As set out in the Pre-Draft Consultation Issues Paper, in line with the NPF, the RSES will align with the National Biodiversity Action Plan to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and will support the implementation of the National Restoration Plan, and will support Green and Blue Infrastructure in urban and rural areas to protect ecosystems and manage flood risk using Nature-Based Solutions and Sustainable Drainage Systems.

7.3 Population and Human Health

The SEA Environmental Report will consider information on population trends and density across the Region.

Population has the potential to interact with various environmental components. Potential interactions include:

- Recreational and development pressure on habitats and landscapes;
- Contribution towards increase in demand for wastewater treatment at the municipal level;
- Contribution towards increase in demand for water supply and associated potential impact of water abstraction;
- Potential interactions in flood-sensitive areas; and
- Potential effects on water quality.

With regard to human health, the recently-published Toolkit for the proportionate and consistent consideration of health in SEA (EPA, 2026) will be taken into account by the assessment. 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). Hazards or nuisances to human health can arise as a result of exposure to these vectors arising from incompatible adjacent land uses or in urban locations that experience high levels of traffic congestion and associated particulate matter and noise emissions to air.

The EPA's "*Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024*" report provides an integrated assessment of the overall quality of Ireland's environment, the pressures being placed on it

and the societal responses to current and emerging environmental issues. The key messages in “Chapter 14: Environment, Health and Wellbeing” in the report are:

- Our health and wellbeing is inextricably linked to our surrounding environment. The health benefits of a vibrant natural world are countless, providing us with breathable air, drinkable water, productive soils and spaces for us to spend time in and enjoy, enhancing both our physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- The harmful environmental exposures causing disease and early death are modifiable. Reducing pollution, adapting to and mitigating climate impacts, and restoring ecosystems can have enormous benefits for our health and wellbeing. Solutions that can help tackle one issue can have multiple co-benefits for others. Implementation of solutions that can maximise benefits across multiple domains should be prioritised.
- The impacts of environmental hazards and exposures are not equal across society. More efforts are required to assess inequalities in both levels of exposure and impact at a finer geographical scale to determine whether measures implemented are helping to bridge the gap.

7.4 Soil

Recently, the European Union has adopted the Directive on soil monitoring and resilience (Soil Monitoring Law)²² legislation, which is specific to the protection of soil resources. Under Article 12, Member States shall ensure that Land take mitigation principles are taken into consideration at the appropriate spatial level. Under Article 12(a)(i) of the Directive, this includes:

*“(a) avoiding or reducing as much as possible the loss of the capacity of the soil to provide multiple ecosystem services, including food production, by:
(i) reducing, as much as possible, the area of soil affected by soil sealing and soil removal, in particular by encouraging the reuse and repurposing of sealed soils, such as existing buildings;...”*

In addition, the *EU Soil Strategy for 2030* sets out a framework and concrete measures to protect and restore soils, and ensure that they are used sustainably. It sets a vision and objectives to achieve healthy soils by 2050, with concrete actions by 2030.

The SEA will examine issues including the loss of soils/soil sealing, as a result of any proposed greenfield development, and any significant interactions with biodiversity.

Soil types, relevant geological heritage (including County Geological Sites), previous landslide events and landslide susceptibility and aggregate potential mapping sources will be taken into account and will be considered by the SEA. The SEA will reference datasets available from GSI that may be useful to lower-tier project planning, including those relating to Bedrock Geology, Quaternary Geology, Mineral Deposits and Aggregate Potential.

7.5 Water

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) requires that all Member States implement the necessary measures to prevent deterioration of the status of all waters - surface, ground, estuarine and coastal - and protect, enhance and restore all waters with the aim of achieving *good status*. All public bodies are required to coordinate their policies and operations so as to maintain the *good status* of water bodies which are currently unpolluted and improve polluted water bodies to *good status*.

The Water Action Plan 2024: A River Basin Management Plan for Ireland (DHLGH) sets out the measures that are necessary to protect and restore water quality in Ireland. The overall

²² Directive (EU) 2025/2360 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 November 2025 on soil monitoring and resilience (Soil Monitoring Law).

aim of the plan is to ensure that our natural waters are sustainably managed and that freshwater resources are protected so as to maintain and improve Ireland's water environment.

An overview of the WFD status of surface and groundwater water bodies and associated pressures and trends within the region will be identified by the SEA, as well as information/data sources on aquifer vulnerability, aquifer productivity, flooding and entries to the WFD's Registers of Protected Areas.

Regional Flood Risk Appraisal (RFRA) is being undertaken, taking into account the Ministerial Guidelines for Flood Risk Management. The RFRA will inform the SEA.

The EPA's "*Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024*" report provides an integrated assessment of the overall quality of Ireland's environment, the pressures being placed on it and the societal responses to current and emerging environmental issues. The key messages in "Chapter 8: Water" in the report are:

- There needs to be immediate, substantial and sustained reductions in nitrogen pollution, especially in catchments of concern in the south and south-east, to prevent any further deterioration in the quality of our estuaries and coastal waters. Targeted measures to reduce phosphate run-off could deliver significant improvements in inland waters and offer multiple benefits for climate and biodiversity
- We need to see full implementation of existing environmental legislation and high compliance rates across all regulated activities. A regulatory regime to address activities that impact hydromorphology is also required. All measures must be sufficiently targeted to the water quality issue and location to ensure that they deliver improvements.
- Water governance structures need to be reviewed to ensure that they operate effectively. Detailed tracking and reporting of measures in Ireland's Water Action Plan 2024 is required to improve accountability among implementing bodies, public access to information and, ultimately, Ireland's water quality.
- It is essential to build climate resilience into water quality management and into water services. Plans - such as the Water Action Plan, the Water Quality and Water Services Climate Adaptation Plan, and Uisce Éireann's National Water Resources Plan - are key to identifying risks and adaptation measures.

Maintaining water quality is critical, as agriculture and urban wastewater discharges remain significant pollution sources.

7.6 Air and Climatic Factors

7.6.1 Air Quality

In order to comply with European Directives relating to air quality, the EPA manages the National Ambient Air Quality Network and measures the levels of a number of atmospheric pollutants at locations across the country.²³ The pollutants of most concern are those whose main source is traffic such as particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide will be taken into account by the SEA.

The EPA's (2025) *Air Quality in Ireland 2024 Report* is based on data from Ireland's extensive air monitoring network of 115 stations. Key messages from this report are as follows:

1. Air Pollution Puts Our Health at Risk
Around 1,700 premature deaths occur in Ireland each year because of poor air quality.
2. Ireland is Compliant with 2024 Air Quality Standards
Air Quality in Ireland is generally good and met all legal requirements.
3. New Limits will be More Stringent from 2030

²³ For more detail on current daily air quality data for the Region refer to: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/>.

A new law was adopted by Europe in October 2024. Meeting the new requirements will be challenging for Ireland.

4. Clean Air is Good for Our Health
We need to do more to protect clean air in towns, villages and cities around the country.
5. Cleaner Air Requires a Plan
Implement control measures to tackle pollution from traffic and heating.

The EPA's "*Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024*" report provides an integrated assessment of the overall quality of Ireland's environment, the pressures being placed on it and the societal responses to current and emerging environmental issues. The key messages in "Chapter 2: Air" in the report are:

- While air pollution has reduced over recent decades, our understanding of the level at which it impacts health has grown. The World Health Organization (WHO) says that there is no safe level of air pollution.
- Currently, Ireland is not meeting the guidelines set by WHO for multiple pollutants including fine particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide. We can actively improve our local air quality by changing to more sustainable forms of transport and heating.
- Achieving Ireland's ambition, set out in the Clean Air Strategy, to move towards meeting the health-based WHO air quality guideline limits will be challenging, but will have a significant and positive impact on health. A road map of actions is required to deliver on the overall ambition and the 2026 and 2030 interim targets.
- Ireland is non-compliant with the EU reduction target for ammonia and will remain so in the short term. Meeting the 2030 emission reduction commitment is dependent on fully executing all known ammonia abatement measures at the farm level.

7.6.2 Climatic Factors

The First Revision to the National Planning Framework seeks to create a single vision, a shared set of goals, for every community across the country. These goals are expressed in the Framework as National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs). NSO 8 is "Transition to a Carbon Neutral and Climate Resilient Society". The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act was enacted in 2021 with a commitment to a legally binding target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% and increase the share of electricity generated from renewable sources to 80% over the decade (2021-2030), and to achieve net zero emissions no later than 2050²⁴. This objective will shape investment choices over the coming decades in line with National Climate Action Plans and the National Adaptation Framework.

At Chapter 9 "Climate Transition and Our Environment", the Framework details provisions including overarching aims of:

- Sustainable Land Management and Resource Efficiency, adopting the principles of the circular economy to enable more sustainable planning and land use management of natural resources and assets; and
- Climate Neutral Economy, the need to accelerate action on climate change.

National Policy Objectives include:

- National Policy Objective 66 The planning system will be responsive to our national environmental challenges and ensure that development occurs within environmental limits, having regard to the medium and longer-term requirements of all relevant environmental and climate legislation and the sustainable management of our natural capital
- National Policy Objective 69 Reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions as expressed in the most recently adopted carbon budgets.

²⁴ Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021

The Government's Climate Action Plan (CAP), last published in 2025, provides a roadmap for transitioning to a climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich, and climate-neutral economy by no later than 2050. The CAP states that the NPF provides an established means through which to implement and integrate climate change objectives, including adaptation, at national, regional, and local levels, and the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. The NPF includes policy measures that support national high-level climate policy, consistent with CAP and Ireland's national climate objectives.

The CAP also recognises that spatial and land use planning plays a key role in addressing climate change. The consolidation of our urban areas will reduce the need for urban expansion and travel demand, helping to mitigate the potential impacts of a growing population on our environment. Compact growth will also support more efficient energy use and a transition to lower carbon economy, particularly in the transport and built environment sectors.

The National Adaptation Framework (2024) aims to create a unified approach involving both government and society to adapt to climate change. It outlines how various sectors and local authorities can implement adaptation measures to minimise Ireland's vulnerability to climate change's adverse effects while taking advantage of any beneficial impacts. The Framework emphasises the importance of integrating adaptation strategies into all levels of policy making, infrastructure development, and local planning.

In 2023, Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions are estimated to be 55.01 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂eq), which is 6.8% lower (or 4.00 Mt CO₂eq) than emissions in 2022 (59.00 Mt CO₂eq) and follows a 2.0% decrease in emissions reported for 2022. Emissions are 1.2% below the historical 1990 baseline for the first time in 33 years.

The EPA's *"Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024"* report provides an integrated assessment of the overall quality of Ireland's environment, the pressures being placed on it and the societal responses to current and emerging environmental issues. The key messages in "Chapter 4: Climate" in the report are:

- Climate change is already having an impact on people, animals and plants in Ireland. The evidence is unequivocal, Ireland is being affected by climate change now, and the severity of the impacts is likely to increase significantly in the coming years.
- Ireland needs to be resilient to ongoing and future climate change impacts. The implementation of climate adaptation measures is currently too slow and fragmented. More cross-sectoral and integrated adaptation actions can deliver multiple benefits. Doing better requires more financing, working with people and nature, monitoring and evaluating outcomes and increasing public and private sector involvement.
- Ireland is not currently projected to achieve its 2030 emissions reduction targets or to meet national or EU reduction targets. Despite Irish climate action ambitions, significantly faster progress is needed to decarbonise all sectors of Ireland's economy and implement adaptation actions to deliver a resilient and sustainable future for the benefit of all society.
- It is critical that people and communities are supported to achieve the changes required to address climate change. To overcome the practical barriers to climate action, and to ensure that objectives are both achievable and equitable, understanding the beliefs, attitudes and challenges facing people in Ireland is crucial. Policy should be designed and implemented so that the desirable action becomes the default action.

7.6.3 Energy Use

The EPA's *"Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024"* report provides an integrated assessment of the overall quality of Ireland's environment, the pressures being placed on it and the societal responses to current and emerging environmental issues. The key messages in "Chapter 12: Environment and Energy" in the report are:

- Established technologies, such as wind energy, solar photovoltaics and bioenergy, will be key in meeting short-term emission reduction targets (i.e. 2030), whereas significant growth in offshore wind infrastructure is expected to be the key essential element of future energy systems. Enhanced regulatory and planning frameworks, and support schemes, are required to accelerate the deployment of renewables, realise co-benefits and manage trade-offs. Growing demand for electricity is an anticipated by-product of the expected electrification of the heat and transport sectors. However, additional and rapidly increasing electricity demand growth from large energy users is putting pressure on energy systems.
- World class infrastructure takes significant time and investment from conception to implementation. The time horizon for achieving national and EU commitments is getting ever shorter. Planning in the broadest sense needs to be fast tracked to achieve the ambitious national renewable energy targets.
- Substantial challenges remain for high-intensity hard-to-decarbonise sectors, e.g. high temperature users, and the development of low or zero carbon fuels to meet these applications are needed. Negative emissions technologies and solutions will also be required to deliver a climate-neutral Ireland.

Land use development has the potential to interact with energy use by influencing whether or not sprawl, including increased demand for use of energy by transport, occurs. The RSES must make provision for identifying sustainable settlement patterns and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas; and prepare a metropolitan area strategic plan for Dublin, which is an integrated land use and transportation strategy.

A new Regional Renewable Energy Strategy will form part of the RSES. Its purpose is to meet national onshore wind and solar PV targets and identify these targets for county level; identify and facilitate electricity grid infrastructure for domestic use or export, including upgrade projects and support infrastructure; make provision for energy security; and promote steps for coordination and cooperation between public bodies. The NPF also states that a coordinated approach to the development and expansion of the electricity grid is necessary.

7.7 Material Assets²⁵

The provisions of infrastructure and supporting services for development is critical. Connectivity and infrastructure are essential for sustainable growth and strong communities. Good transport links, utilities, and digital networks boost economic development while helping create strong communities. Regional infrastructure shapes patterns of accessibility, trade and mobility across the region and connectivity and infrastructure are essential for sustainable growth and strong communities. Good transport links, utilities, and digital networks boost economic development while helping create attractive, well-connected places, where people wish to work and live. They also support communities by providing access to essential services such as schools, healthcare, public transport, and housing.

The SEA will seek to ensure that the Strategy allows for use of existing and/or planned infrastructure including that related to water services, transport and waste management. Other material assets covered by the SEA include archaeological and architectural heritage and natural resources of economic value, such as air, water, mineral resources and aggregates, County Geological Sites and fisheries.

7.7.1 Dublin Airport and Dublin Port

Dublin Airport is the gateway for the country to the rest of the world and its main hub for air traffic in and out of the State. In 2025, Dublin Airport contributed 2.9% of the national GDP and handled 36.43 million passengers, accounting for 81% of the national total. It also manages 91% of the State's air freight, highlighting its strategic role in both passenger and freight transport. Dublin Port is the largest in the country and handles 80% of all cargo freight

²⁵ This section is informed by the Pre-Draft Public Consultation Strategic Issues Paper.

in the State. Both international gateways are key for economic competitiveness in the Trans-European (TEN-T) road, rail and port network.

In line with the NPF, the RSES will support the strategic roles of Dublin Airport and Dublin Port and safeguard these assets as the State's primary international gateways. In addition to recognising the strategic importance of major gateways such as Dublin Airport and Dublin Port, the review of the RSES provides an opportunity to reflect on how the wider system of national and international connectivity operates across different transport modes. It is also recognised that national and international climate targets will require sector appropriate just transition in the context of a carbon-constrained global economy.

7.7.2 Public Transport and Active Mobility Infrastructure

Integrating land use and transport planning is essential for economic growth, environmental protection, and quality of life. This means managing travel demand, investing where it has the most impact, and reducing commuting pressures by promoting walking, cycling, and public transport. National policies support Transport-Orientated Development and emphasise that future communities must rely less on car ownership to meet sustainability and climate goals.

In line with the NPF, the RSES will support the delivery of key public transport projects such as BusConnects, DART expansion and LUAS extension programmes, Metro Link and the Greater Dublin Metropolitan Cycle Network, along with the provision of regional park and ride facilities and improved interchanges to provide a fully integrated public transport network to ensure the continued success and competitiveness of the region. Furthermore, the recommendations of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review, as highlighted in the NPF, will be supported by the RSES. The RSES will also continue to support the Rural Transport Programme to deliver enhanced regional accessibility, strengthening our rural economies and communities.

However, one of the key challenges facing the region is the need for better alignment between population and employment growth and the delivery of enabling transport and infrastructure. In line with the NPF, the RSES will seek to ensure that infrastructure delivery is targeted in the right locations within the existing built-up area of cities, towns and villages.

The consideration of transport-related issues as part of the SEA provide a focus to interactions with air and climatic factors (see Section 7.6) and other environmental interactions that may arise from reference to transport infrastructure or services.

7.7.3 Roads

The road network in the region is critical to assist economic growth and regional connectivity. There is significant development along key transport corridors outside Dublin, but there continues to be limited north to south connectivity, placing additional demand on the M50 and contributing to traffic congestion.

The RSES will continue to support investment in strategic road projects, particularly those that strengthen north-south and intra-regional links, which are essential to support economic development, and improve accessibility across the region, noting that improvements to public transport and active travel, as well as traffic management measures, are the key to addressing traffic congestion.

In line with the NDP 2025, there will be continued support around the protection and maintenance of the existing road network to ensure the safe and efficient travel of all road users across the region, as well as targeted new road investment. In particular, the RSES will address the need for multi-modal transport management, and the role of roads in enhancing public transport services and efficient freight delivery.

7.7.4 Water Services

Water and wastewater systems underpin compact growth, protect public health and environmental quality, and enable the delivery of housing, employment and enterprise development across the region. Resilient and climate aligned water infrastructure is critical to achieving the objectives of the NPF and the NDP 2025.

The RSES will support key regional water and wastewater projects identified in the NPF and by Uisce Éireann.

The RSES will address adequacy of water supply and wastewater capacity to support urban growth targets.

Key projects include the Greater Dublin Drainage Project, the Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade and Expansion, and the Eastern and Midlands Region Water Supply Project. Together, these will deliver strong, reliable infrastructure and support future growth across the region.

Available information on drinking and waste water services demand, capacity and quality/performance will be considered by the SEA.

7.7.5 Waste and Circular Economy

The National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy (Regional Waste Management Planning Offices, 2024) sets out a framework for the prevention and management of waste in Ireland for the period 2024 to 2030.

The region must sustainably manage waste, becoming more resource efficient, reduce resource consumption, create less waste and divert material (once considered waste) to beneficial reuse.

The RSES will support the application of circular economy principles whereby waste is designed out and support behavioural change across sectors to encourage meaningful reuse. It will also support the circular bio economy so that renewable biological and biodegradable resources are kept in use.

7.7.6 Communications & Energy

High-quality communications help attract high-value, knowledge-based jobs to the region. Digital connectivity supports regional development, business growth, access to public services, and social inclusion. Although progress has been made, gaps still exist, especially in rural and remote areas. In line with the NPF, the RSES will support the National Broadband Plan to keep the region competitive.

Moving to a carbon neutral, secure, and balanced energy system is a major challenge for the region. Issues like grid congestion and long connection times threaten climate and housing

goals. However, the region has potential to support national energy targets through renewable energy, grid-enabled housing, community energy projects, and new energy connections to Europe and the UK. In line with the NPF, the RSES will support key electricity grid projects to meet growing demand and support future growth.

7.7.7 Coastal Zone Management

With more than 270km of coastline from Carlingford Lough in County Louth to Kilmichael Point on the Wicklow-Wexford border; and extending into the Irish Sea, the region has a thriving and bustling coastal and maritime area along the coastal planning authorities of Louth, Meath, Dublin and Wicklow.

The RSES must make provision for:

- A strategy relating to marine and coastal matters that facilitates the coordination of land-sea interactions for coastal planning authorities within the region, and
- Coastal zone management as a consequence of sea level change, including the identification of strategic infrastructure.

The RSES will support the implementation of the National Marine Planning Framework, National Marine Planning Policy Statement and NPF.

As identified in the Pre-Draft Consultation Strategic Issues Paper, coastal management must proactively address sea-level rise, and coastal flooding and erosion through plan-led adaptation responses, especially in areas most at risk (see section on Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management).

Key Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management provisions for the Region identified are as follows:

- **Sustainable Use and Management of Coastal and Maritime Areas**
The RSES will set a framework for sustainable long-term use and management of coastal and maritime areas, policies of regional significance and regional priorities.
- **Climate Resilience**
The RSES will need to incorporate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures to account for a one metre sea level rise this century, the impacts of storm surges and coastal flooding on communities, the economy, the environment and infrastructure. To align with the NPF, the RSES will support a new National Coastal Change Strategy and Management Plans and promote nature-based solutions to manage coastal change and identify communities, habitats, heritage and assets in coastal areas at potentially significant risk.
- **Designated Maritime Area Plans**
The RSES will align with the National DMAP and support the preparation of other DMAPs as required by the NPF; and the designation of 30% of Ireland's marine areas within Marine Protected Areas by 2030 for healthy and resilient marine ecosystems.
- **Sustaining Coastal Communities and Economies**
The RSES will support coastal communities and necessary infrastructure, the maritime economy, and smart specialisation by focusing on the strengths of the maritime economy in the region.
- **Ports and Port Infrastructure**
The RSES will promote the role, function and long-term infrastructural requirements of strategic ports particularly Tier 1 & 2 ports (as per the National Ports Policy) linked with the effective growth and sustainable development of the Dublin City region. The RSES will emphasise the role of ports and port infrastructure in facilitating Offshore Renewable Energy, its development, maintenance and operation, while ensuring protection of biodiversity.

- **Electricity Transmission Grid**
To facilitate Offshore Renewable Energy, onshore, offshore and non-grid infrastructure will need to be upgraded and extended to enable domestic or international electricity grid connections, bringing the energy ashore and connecting to major sources of demand. The RSES will support the development of a national sub-sea interconnector around Ireland to connect Ireland to the European transmission grid.
- **Interjurisdictional Coordination and Cooperation**
The RSES will support co-operation and a coordinated approach to terrestrial and maritime area planning within the region, on the island, transboundary or relating to jurisdictional issues with the UK and EU, to support coherent planning of the shared sea basin.
- **Implementing an Integrated Land and Marine Planning Approach**
The RSES will support implementation and monitoring of integrated land and maritime planning.
- **Protecting the Marine Environment**
The NMPF emphasises the importance of avoiding, minimising or mitigating significant adverse impacts on the environment and sets overarching marine planning policies and specific planning policies in the areas of environmental ocean health, thriving maritime economy and engagement with the seas, setting out key sectoral and activity policies for a range of areas, relevant to the RSES.

7.8 Cultural Heritage

7.8.1 Archaeological Heritage

Archaeological heritage to be considered by the assessment includes that protected under the National Monuments Acts (1930-2004), Natural Cultural Institutions Act 1997 and the Planning and Development Act 2024 (as amended). The Record of Monuments and Places is an inventory, put on a statutory basis by amendment to the National Monuments Act 1994, of sites and areas of archaeological significance, numbered and mapped.

The term monument includes all man-made structures of whatever form or date except buildings habitually used for ecclesiastical purposes. All monuments in existence before 1700 A.D. are automatically considered to be historic monuments within the meaning of the Acts. Monuments of architectural and historical interest also come within the scope of the Acts.

The SEA Environmental Report will include information on the archaeological heritage of the Region, including that relating to designations such as the Recorded Monuments.

7.8.2 Architectural Heritage

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) is a State initiative under the administration of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and was established on a statutory basis under the provisions of the Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) and Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1999. The purpose of the NIAH is to identify, record, and evaluate the post-1700 architectural heritage of Ireland, uniformly and consistently as an aid in the protection and conservation of the built heritage. NIAH surveys provide the basis for the recommendations of the Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to the local authorities for the inclusion of particular structures in their Record of Protected Structures.

The Record of Protected Structures is legislated for under the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended). Protected Structures are defined as structures, or parts of structures that are of special interest from an architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical point of view.

An Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape, which is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or contributes to the appreciation of a Protected Structure. An ACA may or may not include Protected Structures. In an ACA, protection is placed on the external appearance of such areas or structures.

The SEA Environmental Report will include information on the architectural heritage of the Region, including that relating to the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.

7.9 Landscape

The importance of landscape and visual amenity and the role of its protection are recognised in the Planning and Development Act 2024 as amended.

The SEA will refer to landscape designations and sensitivities identified by the Development Plans of planning authorities.

The SEA will take into account available information from the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025 and any emerging information from the National Landscape Character Assessment and State of Landscape Reporting.

The SEA will be informed by the findings of the *EPA's 2023 Good practice guidance on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Landscape*.

The RSES is required to include a strategy relating to landscape and landscape character that coordinates the categorisation of landscapes, in terms of their capacity to absorb particular types of development, across the region to ensure a consistent approach to the protection of the landscape.

Section 8 Identifying Potential Effects and Mitigation

8.1 Scoping of Environmental Components and Initial List of Effects

With reference to the SEA Framework and existing baseline, likely significant effects on environmental components, and any relevant interrelationships, will be identified by the SEA.

Each environmental component has been reviewed for their relevance to the Strategy in terms of the nature, scale and objectives of the Strategy, the sensitivity of the receiving environment, and the likelihood and significance of potential effects. All components have been scoped in for detailed assessment.

Table 8.1 provides an initial assessment of the relevance of environmental components relating to the Strategy as well as an initial list of the types of overarching likely significant environmental effects that will be considered by the SEA. Components will be addressed in the description of the environmental baseline, in Strategic Environmental Objectives, indicators and targets and in the identification of likely significant environmental effects.

Table 4.1 Relevance of Environmental Components and Initial list of Effects

Environmental Components	Scoped In or Out	Rational – Relevance to RSES Themes	Initial List of the types of overarching likely significant environmental effects that will be considered by the SEA	
			Positive	Potentially Negative, if unmitigated
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	Scoped in	Core relevance to the RSES themes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environment and Climate Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution towards the protection of ecology (including designated sites, ecological connectivity, habitats) by providing for compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development. Contribution towards the maintenance and enhancement of green infrastructure and associated ecosystem services, listed species, ecological connectivity and non-designated habitats. 	Arising from both construction and operation (including visitors to sensitive ecological areas) of development and associated infrastructure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of/damage to biodiversity in designated sites (including European Sites and Wildlife Sites) and Annexed habitats and species, listed species, ecological connectivity and non-designated habitats; and disturbance to biodiversity and flora and fauna; Habitat loss, fragmentation and deterioration, including patch size and edge effects; and Disturbance and displacement of protected species. This includes potential impacts from: noise and lighting along transport corridors, which can impact upon, for example, bats; and recreational disturbance that can lead to the avoidance of certain areas by birds (including ground-nesting species), which can then impact on breeding success and survival.
Population and Human Health	Scoped in	Population is of core relevance to the RSES themes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People and Places Quality of Life & Healthy Places Connectivity & Infrastructure Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management Economic Development and Employment Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan for Dublin <p>Human health is of core relevance to the RSES theme of Quality of Life & Healthy Places, with potential for significant interactions with most other themes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution towards appropriate provision of infrastructure and services to existing population and planned growth. Contribution towards housing delivery for diverse household types, with associated contributions towards reducing homelessness and overcrowding and protecting mental health and wellbeing. Contribution towards economic prosperity, with associated contributions towards jobs for populations and funding of sustainable development and environmental protection and management. Contribution towards protection of coastal communities, including through flood risk management. Contribution towards protection of human health by providing for compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development, with associated positive effects on both the protection and management of natural capital (including environmental vectors, such as air and water) and commuting times, which can adversely impact upon people's health and wellbeing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential interactions with human health if effects arise from environmental vectors. Potential adverse effects arising from flood events.
Soil	Scoped in	Core relevance to the RSES themes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environment and Climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution towards the protection of soils and designated sites of geological heritage by providing for compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl. Contribution avoiding unnecessary land take and associated sealing of soils by providing for compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land take and associated sealing of soils that would arise from greenfield development. Potential adverse effects on the hydrogeological and ecological function of the soil resource. Potential for coastal and riverbank erosion. Use of finite soil resources in construction.
Water	Scoped in	Core relevance to the RSES themes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connectivity & Infrastructure Environment and Climate Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution towards the protection of water resources, including the status of surface and groundwaters, by facilitating development that can be better served by waste water treatment and sustainable drainage infrastructure (including Nature-Based Solutions and Sustainable Drainage Systems). Contribution towards flood risk management, including in coastal areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential adverse effects upon the status of water bodies and entries to the WFD Register of Protected Areas (ecological and human value), arising from changes in quality (as a result of development including housing, employment, agricultural and forestry – loadings and abstractions development not

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Environmental Components	Scoped In or Out	Rational – Relevance to RSES Themes	Initial List of the types of overarching likely significant environmental effects that will be considered by the SEA	
			Positive	Potentially Negative, if unmitigated
				accompanied by wastewater infrastructure capacity), flow and/or morphology. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in flood risk and associated effects associated with flood events.
Air and Climatic Factors	Scoped in	Core relevance to the RSES themes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People and Places • Quality of Life & Healthy Places • Connectivity & Infrastructure • Environment and Climate • Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management • Regional Renewable Energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution towards climate mitigation and adaptation by providing for: coastal zone management; flood risk management; public transport and active travel infrastructure; renewable energy development; and compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development, including associated unnecessary emissions from transport. • Contribution towards maintaining and improving air quality and managing noise levels by providing for compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development. • Contribution towards efficient transport-related energy use by providing for compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential conflict between emissions from construction and operation of development and aiming to reduce carbon emissions in line with local, national and European environmental objectives. • Potential conflict between transport emissions and air quality. • Potential conflict between noise emissions and protection of sensitive receptors. • Potential conflicts with climate adaptation measures including those relating to flood risk management. • Potential conflicts with energy security by contributing towards overall energy usage.
Material Assets	Scoped in	Core relevance to the RSES themes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People and Places • Quality of Life & Healthy Places • Connectivity & Infrastructure • Environment and Climate • Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management • Economic Development and Employment • Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan for Dublin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution towards appropriate provision of infrastructure and services to existing populations and planned growth by providing for compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development. • Contribution towards consolidation of infrastructure, including wastewater, transport and water supply networks, improving efficiency and reducing costs, by providing for compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development. • Contribution towards energy security by providing for: renewable energy generation; and compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development, helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development. • Contributions towards the protection of infrastructure and built and amenity assets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to provide adequate and appropriate waste water treatment. • Failure to adequately treat surface water run-off that is discharged to water bodies. • Failure to comply with drinking water regulations and serve new development with adequate drinking water. • Increases in waste levels. • Potential impacts upon public assets and infrastructure. • Increase in traffic levels.
Cultural Heritage (including Archaeological and Architectural)	Scoped in	Core relevance to the RSES themes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment and Climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution towards protection of cultural heritage by providing for compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential effects on protected and unknown archaeology and protected architecture arising from construction, including town centre regeneration.
Landscape	Scoped in	Core relevance to the RSES themes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment and Climate • Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution towards protection of landscape designations by providing for: a strategy relating to landscape and landscape character; coastal zone management; and compact, infrastructure-led, transport-orientated development and helping to avoid sprawl and unnecessary greenfield development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurrence of adverse visual impacts and conflicts with the appropriate protection of designations relating to the landscape.
Interrelationship between Topics	Scoped in	Interrelationship between environmental components and effects to be identified		

8.2 Alternatives

The Regional Assembly has recently commenced the review of the RSES. Over the coming months, reasonable alternatives for the RSES will be identified by the Planning Team taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the Strategy. Alternatives will be considered systematically by the SEA, early enough to influence the RSES and proportionate to the Strategy's scale and scope.

The RSES is being formulated in the context of: regional parity for each of Ireland's three regions; regional concentration toward cities and some regionally important larger settlements; a focus on contained growth and reduced sprawl by targeting infill and brownfield lands in existing built-up areas; and sequential provision of infrastructure with some critical infrastructure in place to promote investment. This high level direction is presented in the NPF as the most sustainable approach to growth patterns.

The RSES is a long-term plan for how the region will grow and develop. It sets out where new homes, jobs and services should be located, how transport and infrastructure should be planned, and how the region can support economic growth while protecting the environment. The RSES will guide local authorities in preparing their development plans and local economic and community plans. It will align regional enterprise activity through the Regional Enterprise Plans and will help ensure that investment across the region is coordinated, sustainable and benefits communities.

The objective of the RSES is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and investment framework for the region. The RSES is required to be consistent with the National Planning Framework, the National Marine Planning Framework, National Planning Policies and Measures, and to take account of National Planning Policy Guidance, proper planning and sustainable development, National Transport Authority strategies, the Marine Planning Policy Statement and the need to protect linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht.

The Planning and Development Act 2024 (as amended) identifies areas that the RSES needs to make provision for, including housing, employment, retail, transport, onshore renewable energy, marine and coastal matters, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and protection of the environment.

The EPA's Guidance sets out criteria for the development of alternatives (see Figure 8.1) that will be given due account in the identification of alternative:

- **Realistic:** For all alternatives considered, their capacity to achieve the Strategy objectives, as well as those of higher-level plans and programmes will be demonstrated.
- **Reasonable:** Alternatives considered will reflect environmental and socio-economic baseline and trends, as well as legal requirements, including those of the Habitats Directive. All alternatives will be robust, climate proof (achievable under various climate scenarios) and as environmentally proofed as possible (i.e. not in unmitigable conflict with other environmental protection objectives such as those established under the Water Framework or Flood Risk Directives).

- **Viable:** Alternatives will be technically possible and institutionally feasible.
- **Implementable:** Alternatives will be capable of being put into action or operation within the lifetime/2040 horizon of the Strategy with the available resources.

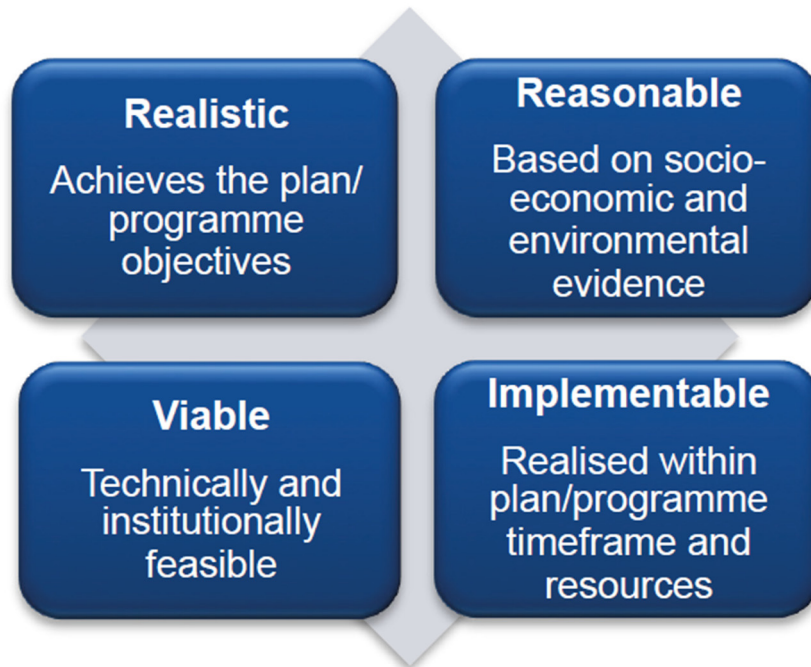


Figure 8.1 Criteria for the Selection of Alternatives (EPA, 2015)

It is important the main decisions to be made by the RSES and any available reasonable alternatives (taking into account the above criteria) for these decisions are identified.

Types of alternatives that might be considered include those relating to:

- Spatial alternatives (monocentric compared to polycentric approach, for example);
- Settlement designation alternatives (asset based compared to growth potential based, for example);
- Climate alternatives (including green infrastructure/ecosystem services and flood risk management approaches);
- Economic alternatives (comparing the focus and support to be allocated across sectors); and
- Policy alternatives (such as in the areas of resource efficiency/circular economy, infrastructure, natural capital, energy, and transport).

8.3 Mitigation of Likely Significant Adverse Environmental Effects

Measures to contribute towards environmental protection and sustainable development will be recommended by the SEA for integration into the Draft Strategy where necessary. These measures will include those already in force existing land use plans and other legislation, plans and programmes relating to environmental protection and management and sustainable development.

Measures to contribute towards environmental protection and sustainable development will be recommended by the SEA for integration into the Draft RSES where necessary. These measures may include those already in force through the National Planning Framework and sector plans and programmes relating to environmental protection and management and sustainable development such as the Water Action Plan and the Climate Action Plan. Such measures must be feasible to carry out and monitor.

The SEA Environmental Report will document what mitigation measures have been recommended, and where relevant whether they have been incorporated into the draft Strategy.

Section 9 What happens next?

The process is currently at a stage where this SEA Scoping Report has been prepared and circulated to environmental authorities.

Environmental authorities are being invited to a SEA scoping workshop. Any input from those attending the workshop and any SEA scoping submissions received will be taken into account alongside this report throughout the SEA process.

The SEA will be informed by the AA and the RFRA, and each of the assessments will inform the preparation of the Draft RSES as relevant and appropriate.

The findings of the assessment will be presented in an SEA Environmental Report which will accompany the Draft Strategy on public display as part of the required statutory public consultation. AA and RFRA documents will also accompany the Draft Strategy on public display as part of the required statutory public consultation.