

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA) OF THE VARIATION TO THE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2006-2012, PORTLAOISE LAP 2006-2012, PORTARLINGTON LAP 2007-2013, MOUNTMELICK LAP 2007-2013, GRAIGUECULLEN LAP 2007-2013

1.0 Pre-screening Check:

There are no population implications with the proposed variation of the car parking standards. However the size of the plan area or the likely population envisaged alone should not be the sole determiners of whether the plan would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, and that the decision to require a SEA, will be influenced by the nature and extent of development likely to be proposed or permitted and the plan's location, i.e. close to or covered by nature designation, other designation, sensitive areas etc.

2.0 Purpose of Variation to the Plan:

Laois County Council, in accordance with Section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, wish to vary the following plans - **COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2006-2012, PORTLAOISE LAP 2006-2012, PORTARLINGTON LAP 2007-2013, MOUNTMELICK LAP 2007-2013, GRAIGUECULLEN LAP 2007-2013**. This variation to the plan is to reduce the car parking requirement for office uses to encourage the growth of the services and employment sectors in the town.

3.0 Screening Check for SEA -- Variation to COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2006-2012, PORTLAOISE LAP 2006-2012, PORTARLINGTON LAP 2007-2013, MOUNTMELICK LAP 2007-2013, GRAIGUECULLEN LAP 2007-2013.

The key to deciding if SEA will apply will be whether the Variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, having regard to size of the area, the nature and extent of the development likely to be accommodated by the plan, and the plan's location (i.e. close to or within statutory designations etc.).

Screening of the Variation will be carried out having regard to available baseline information and based on the criteria in Schedule 2A to the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations. 2004 (which are cited collectively with the Planning Development Regulations. 2001 to 2004).

3.1 Baseline Information

This is described briefly below having regard to the extent to which the relevant categories are applicable to the proposed plan area.

cSAC (Special Area Conservation):

Office development is normally permitted within zoned general business areas. There will be no impact on Special Areas of Conservation.

Demographic Data:

It is not likely that the population will increase as a result of the proposed variation to **COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2006-2012, PORTLAOISE LAP 2006-2012, PORTARLINGTON LAP 2007-2013, MOUNTMELICK LAP 2007-2013, GRAIGUECULLEN LAP 2007-2013**.

Water and Sewage Network:

The implications on the water and sewerage networks will be minimal.

Record of Protected Structures (RPS):

No impact on the Record of Protected structures

Record of Monuments and Places:

No impact on the Monuments and Places

3.2: 'Schedule 2A' - Characteristics of the plan:

The characteristics of the plan are hereunder assessed, having particular regard to:

The degree to which the variation of the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.

- the focus of the Variation of the Plan is to increase in the service and employment base for the town and reduce the need for car parking requirements in relation to office development.
- No additional zoning is proposed:
- while it is possible that projects of significant scale or environmental impacts may be put before the Council, the variation of the plan does not set a specific framework for these types or scale of development and such developments may be subject to EIA.

The degree to which the variation of the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy.

- The variation will have no impact on the other plans in the hierarchy of plans

The relevance of the variation of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.

- the variation proposed is intended to reduce the number of car parking spaces required for office developments which in turn will promote walking, cycling and other methods of public transport. This in turn will promote the sustainable development of the area.

Environmental Problems relevant to the variation

- The variation will have no impact on the other plans in the hierarchy of plans

The relevance of the variation of the plan for the implementation of the European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste management or water protection)

- The variation is not generated and will have no effect on the implementation of the European Union legislation.

3.3 'Schedule 2A' - Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected.

The characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected are hereunder assessed, having regard, in particular, to:

The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.

- It is considered that the variation of the plan does not set the framework for allowance of development proposals which would cause significant effects on the environment.

The cumulative nature of the effects.

- given that no significant environmental effects are envisaged, this section does not apply.

The transboundary nature of the effects.

- given that no significant environmental effects are envisaged, this section does not apply.

The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents).

- given that no significant environmental effects are envisaged, this section does not apply.

The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).

- Given that no significant environmental effects are envisaged, this section does not apply.

The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

- a) **Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,**
- b) **Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values**
- c) **Intensive land-use**

As regards (a) The variation of the plan will have no impact on the natural environment of the town, protected structures and sites listed in the SMR. In relation to (b) and (c), no zoning is being proposed as part of this variation and so, development proposals are assessed, as is normal planning practice, as regards the capacity of services to cater for them and would not be permitted unless adequate treatment can be assured.

The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status.

- None envisaged

4.0 The Notice Parties were notified on 1st and 3rd July 2008 respectively with a termination date of 22nd and 24th July. Only two acknowledgements were received from Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources, and Department of Environment Heritage & Local Government. The E.P.A responded on the 23rd July 2008 indicating that it is a matter for the competent Authority to determine whether or not the implementation of the proposed variations would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Accordingly it is incumbent on the Planning Authority to determine whether the proposed variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, having regard to the criteria laid down in the Act and Regulations, in particular, Schedule 2A.

The criteria for such an assessment/determination include the following:

- The characteristics of the plan with respect to five (5) bulletin points;
- The characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected having regard to seven (7) bulletin points;

In reviewing the Variation, one must take cognisance of the substance therein, viz;

Amend the car parking standards to decrease the number of spaces required

- from one space per 10sq.m. to one space per 20 sq.m. for car parking requirements for office development

which will positively contribute to the growth of the town centre and ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of the area by regulating development.

Significantly the proposed variation involves the reduction of car parking spaces required for office development. In other words, there are no implications on the land-use characteristics of all the towns and villages within the county. Consequently, the impact on the environment is an improvement on the continuation of the existing situation which does not impact negatively or significantly on the environment having regard to all the requisite criteria listed in Schedule 2A. For example:-

'reducing carparking standards for office development has no significant impact on human health as it authorises no additional or change in land-use zoning or authorises any development. Similarly this re applies to all the criteria'.

Therefore having regard to:

- the substance and impact of the Variation;
- the absence of any observation from the notice parties;
- the requisite statutory assessment criteria

I consider that the proposed variation of the development plan would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and recommend that the Planning Authority so determine.

5.0 Conclusion

Laois County Council considers at this stage of the process that, having regard to all of the above, the proposed variation to the **COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2006-2012, PORTLAOISE LAP 2006-2012, PORTARLINGTON LAP 2007-2013, MOUNTMELICK LAP 2007-2013, GRAIGUECULLEN LAP 2007-2013.** will not be likely to have significant effects on the environment, and hence that a SEA is not necessary.

Signed _____