

Waterford Draft Renewable Energy Strategy

2016-2030

Strategic Environmental Assessment – Screening

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1. INTRODUCTION

As set out in the National Renewable Energy Action Plan 2010 and the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2014, Ireland has legally binding targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency which must be met by 2020. The NREAP 2010 sets out how Ireland intends to achieve the target of 16% renewable energy share of national energy consumption by 2020 in the following sectors:

Sector	Target for 2020
Electricity	40%
Heating & Cooling	12%
Transport	10%
Overall Target	16%

The EU 2030 Framework for Climate and Energy was adopted by EU leaders in October 2014 and sets a 40% GHG reduction on 1990 GHG levels, and an EU-wide target of 27% for renewable energy and energy savings by 2030.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 provides for the making of five-yearly National Mitigation Plans to specify the policy measures required to reduce greenhouse gas emission and a National Adaptation Framework to specify measures required in different sectors and by local authorities to mitigate against the negative effects of climate change.

In the context of European and national policy a Draft Renewable Energy Strategy has been developed to support the policies and objectives of the Waterford City Development Plan 2012-2018, Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 and Dungarvan Town Plan 2012-2018. The Draft Renewable Energy Strategy aims to ensure that Waterford is at the forefront of renewable energy production whilst equally promoting energy efficiency and conservation in all sectors of the economy.

The vision of the strategy is to maximise Waterford's renewable energy potential and its transition to becoming a more energy secure, low carbon county in line with national energy targets whilst balancing the need to protect the environmental, social and heritage assets of the city and county.

The strategic aims of the Renewable Energy Strategy are;

- To ensure that between now and 2030, there is a steady, progressive and measurable increase in the amount of renewable energy used in the electricity, heat and transport sectors in Waterford, commensurate with the achievement of the national target.
- To identify opportunities for various renewable energy technologies and resources applicable to Waterford.

- To maximise the opportunities for renewable energy development whilst safeguarding the environment and other amenities, subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Directive Assessment requirements.

Section 13 of the Strategy sets out the local authority's policy arising from consideration of the legislative policy context, the existing energy profile of Waterford and the range of renewable energy technologies;

It is the policy of Waterford City and County Council to promote and support the development of renewable energy technologies most suited to Waterford, to seek to reduce dependency on fossil fuels thereby enhancing the environmental, social and economic benefits to Waterford City and County.

2. SCREENING STATEMENT

The requirements for SEA in Ireland are set out in the national regulations, S.I. No. 435 of 2004 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 and S.I. No. 436 of 2004 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) and S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) respectively.

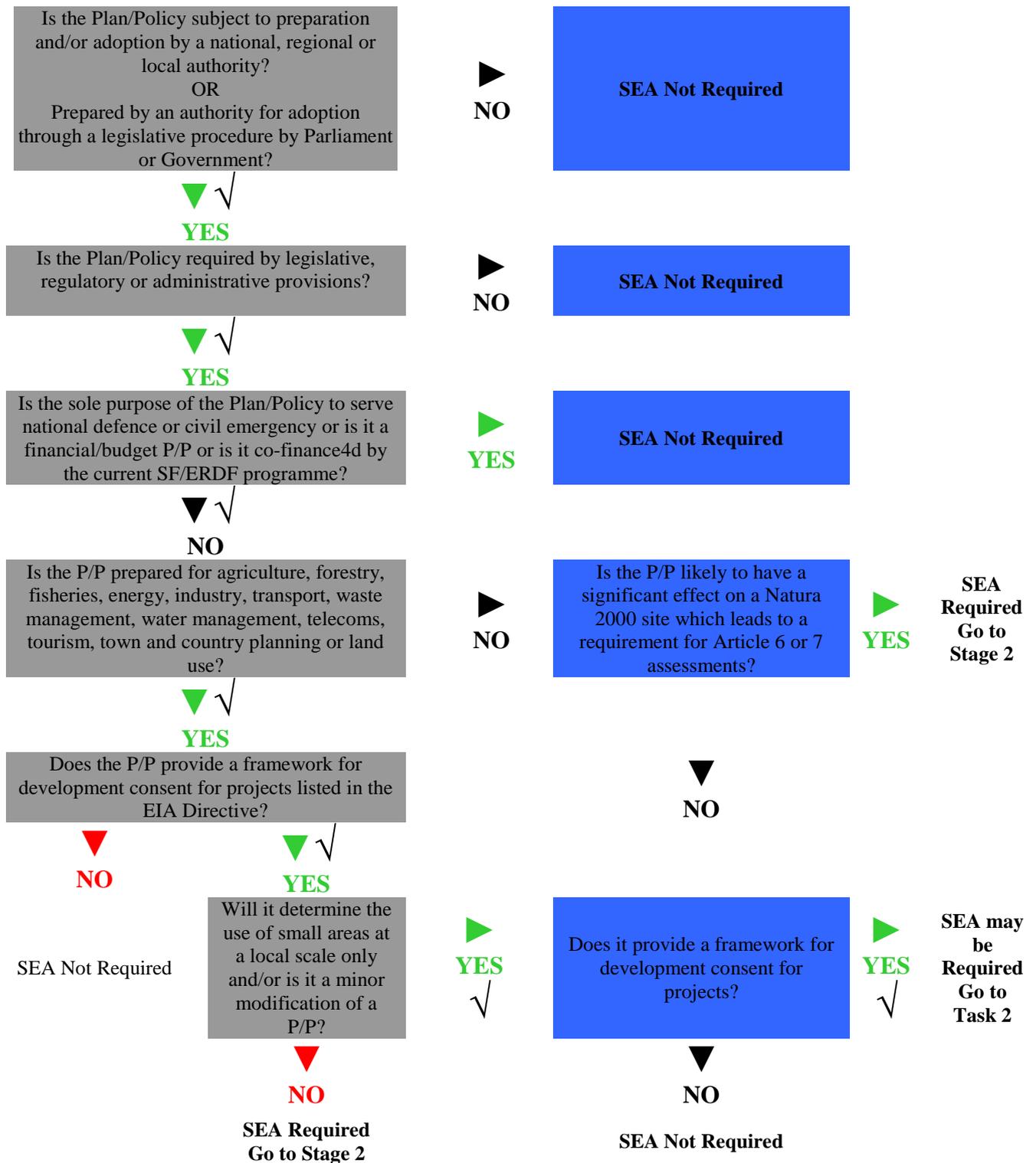
The Regulations 2004-2011 require case by- case screening of individual plans and programmes based on the criteria in Schedule 2A to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. These criteria must be taken into account in determining whether or not significant effects on the environment would be likely to arise.

Stage One - Pre-Screening

The first step in determining whether the Draft Waterford Renewable Energy Strategy would require an SEA involved a pre-screening check. It allows rapid screening-out of plans and policies that are clearly not going to have any environmental impact and screening-in of those that definitely do require SEA.

Following the pre-screening exercise (Figure 1) it is apparent that it is necessary to conduct further screening to determine if a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Draft Waterford Renewable Energy Strategy is required. The Draft Waterford Renewable Energy Strategy will provide a framework for development of renewable energy therefore it was necessary to determine whether an SEA would be required by testing it against environmental significance screening criteria.

Figure 1. Pre-Screening Decision Tree



Stage Two - Environmental Significance Screening

The application of environmental significance criteria is important in determining whether an SEA is required for small Plans/Policies or modifications to Plans/Policies. Annex II (2) of Directive 2001/42/EC sets out the “statutory” criteria that should be addressed when undertaking this stage.

Criteria for Determining the Likely Significance of Environmental Effects

Characteristics of the Plan/Programme

- i. the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;*

It is the purpose of the Draft Waterford Renewable Energy Strategy to maximise Waterford’s renewable energy potential and its transition to becoming a more energy secure, low carbon county in line with national energy targets whilst balancing the need to protect the environmental, social and heritage assets of the city and county. The County Development Plan contains a Wind Energy Strategy which was subject to SEA in 2008.

- ii. the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;*

The Draft Renewable Energy Strategy has been prepared for Waterford City and County in the context of EU and national renewable energy targets. Waterford has varied renewable energy resources with objectives to support the development of renewable energy contained in the Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 & Waterford City Development Plan 2013-2018. The purpose of the Renewable Energy Strategy is to provide a strategic document which will underpin these Plans and inform their future review.

The Draft Renewable Energy Strategy examines the renewable energy potential for the city and county and considers the strategic planning factors contributing towards the deployment of renewable energy. It highlights the importance of integrating renewable energy and landuse planning. Developing a spatial understanding of existing and future energy demand allows the necessary policy decisions regarding the integration of renewable energy technologies into the built environment and the landscape, to be made in a robust, informed and evidenced based manner. The Strategy recognises that there is a need to strengthen links between renewable energy and landuse planning through County Development Plans, Strategic Development Zones and other local plans. The Strategy will form part of the Waterford City Development Plan 2012-2018, Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 and Dungarvan Town Plan 2012-2018, and will be adopted by way of variation to these plans.

iii. *the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;*

The Draft Renewable Energy Strategy considers the resource potential of various renewable technologies for Waterford and recognises the considerations of an environmental and planning nature on the development of such renewable energy. These considerations include the natural environment; landscape; the built and cultural heritage; socio-economic impacts; the better integration of spatial planning and energy planning. Also, the issue of community consultation, community benefit and community involvement in renewable energy production are recognised as issues that must be considered from a proper planning perspective.

As per the County Development Plan, the Council will assess all proposals for renewable energy development based on sustainable development principles. The Council will seek to protect the conservation status of Natura 2000 sites and in this regard all renewable energy proposals which require planning permission will be screened for Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Articles 6(3) & 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, and where judged necessary a Natura Impact Statement shall be submitted.

The council shall have regard to Section 5 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) in determining whether a renewable energy project should be subject to EIA. The Strategy highlights that EIA may be required for renewable energy proposals below statutory thresholds at the discretion of the Council. This principle also applies for renewable energy proposals not specifically listed in the development classes of EIA, e.g. Solar Farms. In this regard, the Council shall have regard to Schedule 7 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) in deciding whether a renewable energy project is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

iv. *environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme;*

The development of renewable energy can give rise to a variety of issues which have to be considered as part of the planning and development of renewable energy technologies. Section 13 - Strategic Planning Considerations clearly sets out the breadth of environmental criteria that are required to inform consideration of renewable energy development proposals.

The Strategy states regard should be had to certain plans and guidelines, e.g.

- Water Framework Directive and River Basin District Management Plans.
- Fisheries Ireland with particular reference to “*Guidelines on the Planning, Designing, Construction and Operation of small scale Hydro-Electric Schemes and Fisheries*”. This document provides guidance on the development of hydro-electrical projects and associated impacts on fisheries;
- Rights of Way – land ownership rights. Renewable energy development can require agreements from neighbouring landowners in respect of supporting infrastructure, power lines etc.

The Strategy lists Environmental Considerations as follows;

- Drainage, surface water run-off and hydrology issues.
- Fish spawning and nursery areas as well as adult fish habitat – Construction and operational phases of renewable energy developments can have impacts on the fisheries resource and associated habitats if such developments are not undertaken in an environmentally sensitive manner;
- The management and control of invasive species;
- The maintenance of biodiversity not just in rivers, streams and lakes but also in the associated riparian zones and wetland areas;
- The impact of renewable energy on the conservation status of Natura 2000 sites.

Infrastructure Considerations

- Availability of grid infrastructure – proximity to grid and capacity of grid. If site is too far from a suitable grid connection, then the cost and impact of cabling may make the project unviable.
- General access during construction/ongoing maintenance etc.
- Licence to generate electricity.
- Power purchase agreements.

Socio-Economic Considerations

- Balancing with other land uses, e.g. Agriculture, Aquaculture, Tourism and Leisure, Fishing sites, Navigation routes;
- Impact on sensitive receptors including local residents, areas of tourism and landscape amenity value, material assets including the architectural and archaeological heritage, and the cultural heritage.

Proposals for renewable energy development will be subject to EIA and AA Screening as per policies and objectives in the Waterford City Development Plan 2012-2018, Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 and Dungarvan Town Plan 2012-2018.

- v. *the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).*

The Draft Renewable Energy Strategy is not a spatial land use plan but rather provides a framework to support objectives in the Waterford City Development Plan 2012-2018, Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 and Dungarvan Town Plan 2012-2018 and inform their future review. Where such plans provide a framework for development consent for projects these projects will be subject to EIA and AA Screening at project inception stage.

Characteristics of the Effects and of the Area Likely to be Affected

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

It is anticipated that the strategic aims and policy to be adopted as part of the Draft Renewable Energy Strategy will ensure that the effects of the resulting changes to the existing operating environment will not be significant. The probability that these effects will be environmentally significant in negative terms is low.

ii. the cumulative nature of the effects

Cumulative negative environmental effects are not expected. As per the County Development Plan, the Council will assess all proposals for renewable energy development based on sustainable development principles. The Council will seek to protect the conservation status of Natura 2000 sites and in this regard all renewable energy proposals which require planning permission will be screened for Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Articles 6(3) & 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, and where judged necessary a Natura Impact Statement shall be submitted. The Wind Energy Strategy was subject to SEA in 2008 and sensitivity classes amended on the basis of the SEA. Whilst Solar Power is a new land use and energy form in the county there are anticipated benefits for biodiversity with a move from intensive agricultural practice to semi-natural type grassland which can be managed for enhanced biodiversity value.

iii. the transboundary nature of the effects

The Draft Renewable Energy Strategy relates to Waterford City and County and thus will not incur transboundary effects. Renewable Energy developments will be screened for EIA and AA and transboundary effects where required.

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

The Draft Renewable Energy Strategy recognises the potential for impact on sensitive receptors including local residents. There is no statutory requirement for a developer to consult with the local community in respect of any renewable energy development proposal over and above the statutory requirements set out in the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended), i.e. a site notice, newspaper notice, public submission period and third party right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

However, the Strategy states the Planning Authority strongly encourages both developers and local communities to engage in meaningful consultation at the very early stages of the pre-planning process and ongoing throughout the planning process. Community engagement which continues through the construction and operation stages is highly recommended and will improve the likelihood of community acceptance of proposed renewable energy projects.

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

The area subject of the Strategy is the entire area of Waterford City and County. The population of this area is approximately 115,000

vi. *the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to*

- *special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;*

Waterford City Development Plan 2013-2019 and Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 identify the following protected areas/elements of the natural/cultural heritage:

- Protected Structures
- Sites of Archaeological Significance
- Areas with natural heritage designations

The Draft Renewable Energy Strategy recognises the potential for impact on sensitive receptors including areas of tourism and landscape amenity value, material assets including biodiversity not just in rivers, streams and lakes but also in the associated riparian zones and wetland areas, the conservation status of Natura 2000 sites, the architectural and archaeological heritage, and the cultural heritage.

The Council will assess all proposals for renewable energy development based on sustainable development principles and will seek to protect the conservation status of Natura 2000 sites and in this regard all renewable energy proposals which require planning permission will be screened for Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Articles 6(3) & 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, and where judged necessary a Natura Impact Statement shall be submitted.

The Strategy states regard should be had to the Water Framework Directive and River Basin District Management Plans and Fisheries Ireland “*Guidelines on the Planning, Designing, Construction and Operation of small scale Hydro-Electric Schemes and Fisheries*”.

- *exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;*

It is not expected that any environmental quality standards will be exceeded or that the value of vulnerable areas limited as a result of the Waterford Draft Renewable Energy Strategy.

- *intensive land-use;*

The Draft Renewable Energy Strategy is not a spatial land-use plan. Any projects arising within the framework of the Draft Renewable Energy Strategy that require development

consent under planning legislation will be required to comply with land use and environmental policy of the Waterford City and Waterford County Development Plans.

- vii. *the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, community or international protection status.*

The Strategy recognises the importance of undertaking a Landscape Character Assessment for Waterford in accordance with national landscape guidelines [Objective ENV 1 of Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017]. Any projects arising from the Draft Renewable Energy Strategy that require development consent under planning legislation will be required to comply with land use and environmental policy of the Waterford City and Waterford County Development Plans.

Stage Three - Conclusions + Recommendation

Following the screening process, whereby the strategic aims, policy and strategic planning considerations (section 13) of the Draft Renewable Energy Strategy have been assessed against the environmental significance criteria as contained in Annex II (2) of the SEA Directive, **it is concluded that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required for the Waterford Draft Renewable Energy Strategy.**