

Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Docklands Master Plan

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Introduction

Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and Council on Strategic Environmental Assessment or SEA, which entered into force on 21 July 2001, requires Member States to assess the likely significant environmental effects of plans and programmes prior to their adoption, thus providing for the assessment of strategic environmental considerations at an early stage of the decision-making process. The Directive requires the carrying out of an environmental assessment of those plans and programmes which are likely to have significant environmental effects and which set the framework for future development consent of projects which are subject to EIA or where an assessment is necessary due to the likely effect on sites governed by the Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC). Each Member State had until July 2004 to transpose the Directive into national law. In Ireland, the Directive has been transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435 of 2004) and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436 of 2004). The Directive applies to certain plans/programmes whose preparation or review commences after 21 July 2004.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government approached the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (the Authority) in June 2002 as it considered the Docklands Area to be an appropriate area to pilot test SEA on a non-statutory basis in tandem with the review of the 1997 Master Plan. It was anticipated that the experience gained by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority in piloting SEA would provide an input to the proposed guidelines for planning authorities on SEA which the Department intended drawing up as part of the process of the general implementation of the Directive. The carrying out of the SEA proved to be an invaluable learning process for those involved and this paper seeks to share the lessons gained from the experience.

The Dublin Docklands Development Authority

The Authority was established in 1997, under the Dublin Docklands Authority Act of that year with the objectives of securing

- (i) the social and economic regeneration of the Dublin Docklands Area, on a sustainable basis
- (ii) improvement in the physical environment of the Dublin Docklands Area, and
- (iii) the continued development in the Custom House Docks area of services of, for, in support of, or ancillary to, the financial sector of the economy. (Dublin Docklands Authority Act, 1997, S.18(1))

The Dublin Docklands Master Plan 1997 provided the policy framework for the regeneration of the docklands area, an area which comprises 526 hectares, extending eastwards from Matt Talbot Bridge. Under the 1997 Act, the Authority is required to review and update the Master Plan at least once every 5 years. The Master Plan is adopted by the Council of the Authority after a public display period of not less than 1 month.

Dublin Docklands Area Master Plan Review 2003

The Dublin Docklands Area Master Plan Review 2003, prepared by the Authority following public consultation, outlines a strategy for 'the sustainable social and economic regeneration of the Area, with improvements to the physical area being a vital ingredient' (Dublin Docklands Development Authority, 2003a, 4). The Review represents an updating of the 1997 Master Plan and establishes the social and economic framework for the redevelopment of the area, identifying key strategic objectives and a range of policies.

Land use policies in the Review seek to achieve sustainable development objectives with the Authority "pursuing a policy of mixed-use development in the Docklands Area which would achieve a sustainable environment integrating living, working and leisure". The aims of the Master Plan 1997 and the 2003 Review are ambitious; it is an overall objective that the population of the Area increase by 23,000 by 2013 and the number of residential units increase by 6,500 - 9,500. The Master Plan Review seeks to promote the development of an integrated public transport system and imposes strict limitations on car parking for new development. The provision of cycleways and pedestrian routes is promoted. The Review sets out design criteria for new development, seeking to achieve high quality buildings and urban spaces. At the same time, the Review seeks to conserve essential elements of the built environment which contribute to the character of the area.

SEA Methodology

The SEA was carried out in conjunction with the Master Plan Review. The Authority engaged the consultancy services of the author to assist with the carrying out of the SEA. The SEA was carried out with two members of the planning division of the Authority, the Technical Director and Senior Planner. The latter had the responsibility for project management of the review of the Master Plan. The review of the 1997 Master Plan was conducted over a 15 month period from July 2002 to September 2003. The SEA exercise was carried out in tandem with the review. The baseline study carried out as part of the SEA fed into the preparation of the working papers and the content of Master Plan Review. The assessment of the objectives and selected policies allowed for a refocusing and refinement of the plan.

At the time of the commencement of the SEA exercise, little guidance was available for the carrying out of a SEA. Such guidance is available now from a number of sources (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2004; Environmental Protection Agency, 2003). In the absence of such guidance, the team was required to devise a methodology to carry out the process. The methodology adopted by the team reflected the requirements of the SEA Directive while drawing on UK experience of environmental appraisal of land use development plans. The Directive however provided the guiding framework for the carrying out of the exercise. The SEA Directive has adopted an EIA based model and the key steps in the process required under the Directive reflect this. The stages in the process are well established in EIA.

The main steps involved in the carrying out of a SEA of the Master Plan Review involved the following:

- screening
- scoping
- proofing
- the carrying out of a baseline study
- the consideration of alternatives
- the environmental assessment of the objectives and policies of the Master Plan Review
- the formulation of mitigation measures
- monitoring and
- public consultation

The key feature of SEA is that it is a process, and the steps outlined above provide an overall framework for the management of the process. The process and outcome of the SEA formed the basis of the report which went on public display (Dublin Docklands Development Authority, 2003b). The approach taken in the carrying out of the SEA for the Master Plan Review in respect of each of these steps is described below.

Screening

As a result of the request of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, it had already been determined that the Master Plan Review would undergo a SEA. Under the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, an environmental assessment will be required for any future review of the Master Plan.

Scoping

Scoping helps determine the direction and focus of the SEA. Scoping for the SEA exercise in respect of the Master Plan Review involved two stages as follows.

- (a) A number of government departments, statutory agencies and other relevant organisations were consulted in order to determine their opinions on the issues which it was considered the SEA should cover. Details were also sought on any information held by the relevant organisation which would be relevant in the assessment of such issues. Responses were received from 9 of the 25 departments/agencies/organisations contacted, with acknowledgements received from a further two. With a small number of exceptions, the responses dealt with issues which related more to the review of the Master Plan, rather than to the SEA exercise. This may have been a reflection on the limited knowledge of SEA at the time, a situation that will have since improved. It does indicate that for the scoping exercise to be meaningful, a more proactive approach by those carrying out a SEA may be required. The DOEHLG Guidance refers to this and suggests that the authorities consulted should be provided with information on the geographical area involved, the nature and lifespan of the plan, the likely scale, nature and location of development and the predicted significant environmental impacts.

- (b) The second part of the scoping process involved drawing upon the results of a public consultation exercise carried out as part of the Master Plan Review for the Authority. The outcome of the exercise formed an important input into the drawing up of the Sustainability Criteria which formed the basis of the SEA assessment process.

Proofing

The Master Plan Review was assessed for compatibility with relevant plans and guidance documents at national, regional and local level, with which it was found to be consistent. The DOEHLG in its guidance on SEA has drawn up a checklist of policy documents, strategies, directives, conventions etc. which will prove very useful for Irish SEA practitioners.

Baseline Study

The environmental assessment process in the SEA Directive is "baseline-led", with the baseline study providing the basis for the identification and analysis of impacts and subsequent monitoring of the impacts of a plan or programme. In the carrying out of the SEA of the Master Plan Review, a decision had to be taken as to the environmental categories under which the baseline data would be collected. As the exercise involved a piloting of the SEA Directive, it was decided to collect baseline data based on indicators described in the SEA Directive i.e. biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climate factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage and landscape. It was found necessary to combine some indicators in order to avoid unnecessary duplication. The characteristics of the existing environment were thus described under the following headings:

- Biodiversity/Flora and Fauna
- Population
- Soil
- Water
- Air
- Climate
- Material Assets/Cultural Heritage

One category outlined in the Directive, human health, was not dealt with separately but was considered to arise either directly or indirectly under a variety of categories. A decision was also taken that no new data collection would be undertaken in the compilation of the baseline data. Existing data sources in addition to data already gathered by the Authority was used. This is consistent with the approach suggested by the DOEHLG in its guidance on SEA.

The Environmental Impact Statements carried out on behalf of the Authority for the Grand Canal Dock Area and Docklands North Lotts Area Planning Schemes formed important data sources. Data on South Dublin Bay was provided by Duchas and in a consultant's report prepared by Natural Environment Consultants Ltd., for the Authority in relation to the Poolbeg Peninsula. EPA monitoring data was used in respect of air and water quality in the Area. An ESRI report provided, in the absence of up-to-date Census figures, the most up-to-date data on the socio-economic characteristics of the population of the Area (ESRI, 2000). The Authority

had also been in the process of preparing Area Action Plans for some parts of the Docklands Area which broadened the Authority's knowledge of the Area. In addition the Dublin City Development Plan had been updated in 1999 and provided important information particularly in respect of material assets and the cultural heritage. Deficiencies in data were also identified, particularly in respect of contaminated land, groundwater quality and noise levels.

Non-implementation of Master Plan Review

As required by the SEA Directive, the SEA report also comments on the likely evolution of the area in the absence of the implementation of the Master Plan Review. It was found that were the Master Plan Review not implemented, the redevelopment of the Docklands Area would take place at a slower pace than that envisaged in the 1997 Master Plan and 2003 Review. The population of the Docklands Area would naturally decline over time, with the profile of the population (particularly in the traditional village communities) gradually becoming older. The decline in population and the older age profile would have implications in terms of the provision of infrastructure and services in the Area. Existing contaminated sites would remain contaminated pending redevelopment. The current situation regarding the waterbodies, water supply and groundwater would remain largely unchanged. Existing trends regarding air quality and noise levels would be likely to continue. The status quo would be likely to prevail in respect of Protected Structures, Conservation Areas and sites/artefacts of archaeological interest. The improvement of public access to the waterbodies, the redevelopment of the Campshires, the provision of additional amenity/open spaces, including the redevelopment of areas adjoining the waterbodies, and river regeneration would stall.

Consideration of Alternatives

One of the main roles envisaged for the SEA of development plans is the consideration of alternatives (Thevivel, et. al. 1992, Therivel and Partidario, 1996). The consideration of development alternatives for the regeneration of the Dublin Docklands Area did not arise in the carrying out of the Master Plan Review and this was reflected in the SEA. The Docklands Master Plan 1997 was not a conventional land use development plan. Instead it represented a strategic, integrated framework for the redevelopment of the Docklands Area over a 15 year period from 1997. The plan had a broad degree of acceptance among the local communities in the Area and local business interests. Thus, in carrying the Master Plan Review, the consideration of development alternatives was not an option. The alternatives for the regeneration of the Area had already been assessed and determined in 1997. The Master Plan 1997 featured some innovative policies and it is considered that the carrying out of a SEA exercise on the alternative development options for the Area would have been a valuable exercise at the time. To carry out that exercise 5 years into the life of a 15 year strategy would have been inappropriate.

Nevertheless, two alternative options were discussed in the report on the SEA:

- The "do nothing" option, and
- The option of not reviewing the 1997 Master Plan

Under the "do nothing" option, the Area would maintain its current physical and socio-economic characteristics. Development would be market dependant and would occur at a slower pace and in a less co-ordinated manner. Investment by the Authority would be absent. Adopting the "do.nothing" option would mean that parts of the Area would remain derelict and

under-utilised with little physical, social or economic enhancement. This alternative was not considered viable. It is noted that the DOEHLG in its guidance does not consider the “do nothing” scenario to be a realistic alternative. The second alternative was not to review the Master Plan 1997. Whereas the broad thrust of the Master Plan 1997 was still valid, background circumstances had in some instances changed. It was considered necessary to reflect these changing circumstances, some of which resulted in a shift in policy focus or emphasis. Thus the alternative of not reviewing the 1997 Master Plan was likewise not considered viable.

Environmental Assessment of the Master Plan Review

The methodology used in the carrying out of the assessment of the environmental impacts of the Master Plan Review involved an assessment of the objectives and selected policies of the Master Plan Review. The SEA team drew upon work being carried out in the UK on the environmental assessment of development plans, where such plans have been assessed against a set of criteria or indicators. The strategic objectives and selected policies of the Master Plan Review were assessed against a set of 20 Sustainability Criteria. The Sustainability Criteria, which have a strong environmental/sustainable focus, are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1 . Sustainability Criteria

Bio diversity/Flora and Fauna	
B1	safeguard designated areas/ areas of nature conservation importance while increasing potential for wildlife/flora and fauna, where appropriate
Population	
P1	promote the creation of a safe, healthy and high quality environment in which to live and work.
P2	promote the strengthening and diversification of the local economy.
P3	promote local employment opportunities.
P4	promote access to education and training
P5	promote the meeting of local housing needs
P6	involve local communities in the redevelopment/renewal of the Area
P7	promote community cohesion.
Soil	
S1	promote decontamination to international standards of contaminated soil.
Water	
W1	ensure adequate good quality water supply
W2	maintain/improve water quality of waterbodies.
Air/Climate/ Noise	
C1	maintain/promote improvement of air quality
C2	promote minimisation of greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere
C3	reduce trip generation, trip length and the need for motorised transport
C4	promote public transport and attraction of walking/cycling
C5	promote sustainable energy use/generation
C6	minimise noise pollution
Cultural Heritage/Material Assets	
H1	safeguard Protected Structures and sites of archaeological value and maintain environmental quality of Conservation Areas
H2	enhance townscape and general landscape/environmental quality
H3	ensure adequate provision of open space/maintain and improve access to open space areas.

Source: Dublin Docklands Development Authority (2003b)

The Sustainability Criteria were devised taking into consideration the scoping exercise carried out as part of the SEA process, in particular the findings of the community consultation process carried out as part of the Master Plan Review. This is reflected in the inclusion of criteria with a socio-economic, rather than strictly environmental, focus, reflecting the unique role and objectives of the Authority. The criteria were categorised on the basis of the environmental categories covered in the baseline study. The results of the exercise were illustrated in a series of matrices, the filling in of which led to a refinement and refocusing of the objectives and policies of the Master Plan Review.

In the filling out of the matrices, the impact, if any, of a Strategic Objectives or of a selected policy of the Review, was recorded. The matrices recorded the following, depending on the nature of the matrix:

- no significant effect,
- beneficial effect/likely beneficial effect,
- deterioration of environmental quality/conflict or
- uncertain effect

As part of the assessment the following were tested:

- (1) The internal compatibility of the Strategic Objectives of the Master Plan Review were tested against each other, in order to ensure that no tensions existed between the objectives that could give rise to conflict. The assessment indicated no conflicting objectives. The tension evident in the Area arising from demand to redevelop existing low intensity, long established industrial land to residential use came through in the exercise (Figure 2).
- (2) The Strategic Objectives of the Master Plan Review were tested against the Sustainability Criteria, with which they were found to be largely compatible. The filling in of the matrices indicated that
 - (a) Additional noise will inevitable be a short term consequence of the redevelopment of the Area.
 - (b) New developments the Area will impact in some small way to greenhouse gas emissions. This is more than counterbalanced by the fact that the Area being developed is a brownfield, former dockland area.
 - (c) The development of increased opportunities for local employment in existing enterprises may result in a conflict with some of the Sustainability Criteria (Figure 3). This is considered inevitable.
- (3) Selected policies of the Master Plan Review were tested against the Sustainability Criteria. Not every policy was tested. The SEA team selected what were considered to be the key policies relevant to each section of the Review for assessment. The filling in of the matrices indicated
 - (a) That with a Plan of this nature, which covers a centrally located, former dockland area with a wide variety of uses and amenity areas, tensions are thrown up by some of the proposed policies. In particular these tensions arise in relation to policies which seek to consolidate/ expand existing industrial or port

Figure 2. SEA and Strategic Appraisal of Dublin Docklands Master Plan

Strategic Objectives	Sustainability Criteria																			
	B 1	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	S 1	W 1	W 2	C 1	C 2	C 3	C 4	C 5	C 6	H 1	H 2	H 3
A. The development of a wide range of sustainable employment opportunities in the Area.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	0
B. The development of increased opportunities for local employment in existing and new enterprises in the Area.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	X	✓	✓	?	?	0	0	0
C. The development of an environment which will attract increased investment and employment into the Area.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
D. The continued development and expansion of the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in Docklands.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	?	✓	0	✓	✓
E. The development of sustainable neighbourhoods with sufficient 'critical mass' which will support services such as quality public transport, improved retail facilities and other new amenities.	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓
F. The provision of a wide range of new housing in the Area in order to achieve a good social mix.	0	✓	✓	0	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	✓	0	0	0	0	0	0
G. The integration of new residential communities with existing local communities in the Area.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	0	✓	0	0	0	0	✓
H. The development of sustainable transportation for the Area, the promotion of public transport, walking and cycling (as alternatives to the private car) and improved circulation within the Area.	0	✓	✓	✓	0	0	✓	0	0	0	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	0	0
I. The improvement of the infrastructure and amenities in the Area concurrently with or in advance of residential, commercial and industrial development.	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
J. The development of the amenity, tourism and employment potential of the water bodies in the Area.	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	0	✓	✓	0	0	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	✓	✓	✓
K. The identification and development of anchor activities and landmark developments which would assist in the regeneration of the Area over the period of the Master Plan.	0	✓	✓	✓	0	0	✓	✓	0	0	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	✓
L. The promotion of increased access to education and training for all residents in the Area.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
M. The realisation of the potential of Docklands youth.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	✓
N. The renewal of Dublin city as a whole by linking the city centre to Dublin Bay and, in turn, connecting the Docklands Area to the life of the city.	0	✓	✓	✓	0	0	0	✓	0	0	✓	0	0	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0

KEY 0 No Significant Effect

✓ Beneficial Effect/Likely Beneficial Effect

? Uncertainty of prediction or knowledge

X Some deterioration in environmental quality

Figure 3. SEA and Policy Appraisal of Dublin Docklands Master Plan

	Sustainability Criteria																				
	B 1	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	S 1	W 1	W 2	C 1	C 2	C 3	C 4	C 5	C 6	H 1	H 2	H 3	
Part 4.4 Education and Training																					
1. Promote the consolidation and renewal of existing primary and secondary level schools in the Area.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Part 4.5 Commercial Offices and IFSC																					
1. Provide for the expansion initially of high-quality office building zones from the existing central business district and locate new office areas around major transport nodes.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	0	✓	0	0	0	?	?	✓	✓	?	0	0	✓	✓	0
2. Seek the provision of offices in the Area of different specifications in order to meet market demand.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	0	✓	0	0	0	?	?	✓	✓	0	0	0	✓	0	0
Part 4.6 Enterprise, Industry and Utilities																					
1. Encourage the consolidation and expansion of existing small, medium and large businesses where such businesses wish to remain within the Area and are appropriate to the Area.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Retain suitable areas for small industry and workshop use whilst applying strong environmental management policies to alleviate any disamenity to neighbouring residential uses.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	✓	✓	0	?	0	0	0	0
3. Encourage the development of emerging new facilities which straddle the description of offices or industry in the Docklands and; through its land use strategy; target appropriate lands for such development.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	0	✓	0	0	0	?	?	✓	✓	?	✓	0	✓	0	0
4. Seek the development of light industry in place of heavy or general industry in appropriate locations, particularly close to residential and commercial areas.	0	✓	✓	✓	0	0	0	✓	0	0	0	✓	0	✓	✓	0	✓	0	0	0	0
6. Facilitate the consolidation of Dublin Port as a major economic and employment force affecting the Area.	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	0	0	0	?	?	?	?	0	0	X	0	?	0	0
7. Seek to ensure that all future major projects for heavy industry in the Poolbeg Peninsula are carefully assessed for environmental impacts, particularly as regards emissions and traffic.	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	0	✓	0	0

KEY 0 No Significant Effect

✓ Beneficial Effect/Likely Beneficial Effect

? Uncertainty of prediction or knowledge

X Some deterioration in environmental quality

use. There are however valid socio-economic reasons for the inclusion of such policies. Such tensions cannot be avoided and are mitigated by the requirement to avoid any adverse environmental impacts.

- (b) The need to incorporate sustainable design into modern office developments, in order to reduce energy demand and also make a contribution to meeting Ireland's obligations to greenhouse gas emissions under the Kyoto Protocol, was also evident from the assessment. This is a wider issue, with market forces playing a dominant role, but is one which the Authority may bear in mind in assessing proposals for development.

Each matrix was accompanied with explanatory text, outlining the key findings from the exercise. The importance of such text, in conjunction with a good non-technical summary is stressed, as matrices presented on their own can be difficult to comprehend and can lead to confusion. The use of matrices was considered by the team to be a very useful device at highlighting tensions in the Review and impacts (negative and positive) of objectives and policies. They are however an insufficient device in themselves to adequately describe the impacts of a plan. In hindsight, the SEA exercise would have benefited if it had been taken a stage further and an attempt made to quantify the impacts identified by the assessment exercise.

Mitigation Measures

The mitigation measures or key recommendations arising from the SEA exercise comprise the inclusion in the Master Plan Review of one additional overarching Strategic Objective, making good policy omissions and the refinement, combining, refocusing or simply the shifting of policies from one section or another.

Public Display

The report prepared describing the SEA exercise and findings was put on public display concurrently with the Master Plan Review. The public display extended over a period of one month. No submissions were made in respect of the SEA Report.

Monitoring

As part of the monitoring process, the Authority will be able to prepare an annual monitoring report on the implementation of the Master Plan Review. As indicated in the Review, some indicators do not lend themselves to annual monitoring. These will be more appropriately dealt with on a five yearly basis. The Authority will also co-operate with the relevant agencies (the EPA, Dublin City Council) in monitoring the environmental impacts of the Master Plan. The Review incorporates two additional policies in respect of monitoring. The Authority is committed to the monitoring of the impacts of the plan in a more formal manner than has existed hitherto.

Master Plan Review: Overall Findings

It became clear from the assessment of the strategic objectives and policies of the Master Plan Review that the Review has a strong sustainable thrust and focus. Almost all objectives and policies were found to be either compatible or not in conflict with the Sustainability Criteria devised for the assessment exercise. No conflicting objectives or policies were evident. The mitigation measures arising from the exercise could only be described as minor in nature and essentially remove some duplication, clarify a number of policies and make good a few policy omissions. The exercise confirmed that the Master Plan Review is a robust, focussed

and clearly thought-out document that continues to provide a positive strategic framework for the development of the Docklands Area. -

SEA Process: Overall Findings

It should be acknowledged that the SEA team commenced the SEA exercise with a degree of trepidation. There was little experience of SEA in the Irish context, there were no guidelines or recommended methodologies, and the cost and time factors were unknown. Having carried out the exercise, the members of the SEA team view the exercise as very worthwhile and consider the plan process to have benefited and the Master Plan Review to be a better document as a result. To benefit from SEA it is critical to commence the SEA exercise in tandem with the review of the plan. In addition, the exercise needs to be iterative, with the SEA feeding directly into the plan as it is being drawn up and adopted. Of concern in the Irish context will be the already tight time factor involved for the review of development plans.

The Senior Planner with the Authority who was involved in the project management of the Master Plan Review estimates that the SEA took c. 10%- 15 % of his total time involved in the preparation of the Review. The fact that the consultant employed by that Authority had previously worked in the organisation and was familiar with the philosophy of the organisation and the data sources, was beneficial, and speeded up the process .

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