



# Good practice guidance on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Landscape





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## Abbreviations

<b>AA</b>	Appropriate Assessment
<b>AONB</b>	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<b>CDP</b>	County/City development plan
<b>CLC inventory</b>	CORINE Land Cover Inventory
<b>DAFM</b>	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
<b>DECC</b>	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
<b>EIA</b>	Environmental Impact Assessment
<b>ELC</b>	European Landscape Convention
<b>EPA</b>	Environmental Protection Agency
<b>EPO</b>	Environmental Protection Objective
<b>ESM tool</b>	Environmental Sensitivity Mapping tool
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic Information Systems
<b>HLC</b>	Historic Landscape Characterisation
<b>IIA</b>	Integrated Impact Assessment
<b>IP</b>	Implementation Programme
<b>LAP</b>	Local Area Plan
<b>LCA</b>	Landscape Character Assessment
<b>LCT</b>	Landscape Character Type
<b>LULUCF</b>	Land Use, Land Use Change & Forestry
<b>LVIA</b>	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
<b>MCA</b>	Marine Character Assessment
<b>MMO</b>	The Marine Management Organisation



<b>MMU</b>	Minimum Mapping Unit
<b>MWLP</b>	Minerals and Waste Local Plan
<b>NCA</b>	National Character Area
<b>NDP</b>	National Development Plan
<b>NLS</b>	National Landscape Strategy
<b>NMPF</b>	National Marine Planning Framework
<b>NPF</b>	National Planning Framework
<b>NPO</b>	National Policy Objective
<b>NRW</b>	Natural Resources Wales
<b>NSA</b>	National Scenic Area
<b>OESEA4</b>	Offshore Energy SEA 4
<b>OPW</b>	Office of Public Works
<b>P/P</b>	Plans and Programmes [should also be read to include the full range of policies, policy statements, studies, strategies, frameworks, etc.]
<b>RAG</b>	Red-Amber-Green
<b>RPO</b>	Regional Policy Objective
<b>RSES</b>	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
<b>SA</b>	Sustainability Appraisal
<b>SCT</b>	Seascape Character Type
<b>SEA</b>	Strategic Environmental Assessment
<b>SNH</b>	Scottish Natural Heritage
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>VRM</b>	Visual Resource Mapping
<b>WHS</b>	World Heritage Site

## Glossary

Term	Explanation
<b>Cumulative effects</b>	These result from a combination of two or more individual effects on a receptor. Such effects can occur as a result of plans, programmes, projects and other actions. They can result from impacts that may be individually insignificant, but collectively significant.
<b>Environmental Authorities</b>	Authorities defined in section 9(5) of the SEA Regulations, as amended, which are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Environmental Protection Agency</li> <li>■ Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage</li> <li>■ Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications</li> <li>■ Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental baseline</b>	Supporting evidence on the current state of the environment of the area relevant to the plan or programme
<b>Environmental Impact Assessment</b>	A process used to assess the significant effects of a project or development proposal on the environment
<b>Environmental Protection Objectives</b>	Objectives established at international, European Union or national level
<b>Forces for change</b>	A variety of changes including both natural processes and changes related to human influences (such as economic, societal, or political factors)
<b>Heritage Coast</b>	A strip of coastline (in England and Wales), the extent of which is defined by agreement between the relevant statutory national agency and the relevant local authority
<b>Historic landscape characterisation</b>	A process that seeks to identify the contribution of the past to the landscape today
<b>NatureScot</b>	NatureScot is the operating name for the body formally called Scottish Natural Heritage. It is an executive non-departmental public body of the Scottish Government responsible for Scotland's natural heritage
<b>Landscape and visual impact assessment</b>	A process typically undertaken as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment to identify the effects of a development proposal
<b>Landscape capacity</b>	The degree to which a landscape can accommodate change without undue negative effects on its local distinctiveness, character and qualities
<b>Landscape character</b>	The distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that makes one landscape different from another
<b>Landscape character area</b>	Unique areas that form the discrete geographical areas within a particular landscape type

Term	Explanation
<b>Landscape character assessment</b>	The process of identifying and describing variations in character across a landscape, explaining the unique combinations of features and characteristics that make different landscapes distinctive – drawing on physical features, visual influences and perceptual qualities
<b>Landscape character types</b>	Areas with broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical land use and settlement patterns.
<b>Landscape sensitivity</b>	This combines the judgements of the susceptibility of the landscape to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value attached to the landscape
<b>Landscape susceptibility</b>	The ability of a defined landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development or change without undue negative consequences
<b>Landscape value</b>	The value attributed to a landscape, which may include formal designations
<b>Receptors</b>	People or aspects of the environment, such as water, soil, air quality, that are affected by an environmental change
<b>Responsible authority</b>	The plan-making authority responsible for carrying out the SEA
<b>Scheduled Monument</b>	In the United Kingdom, a scheduled monument is a nationally important archaeological site or historic building given protection against unauthorised change
<b>Scoping</b>	A process undertaken to scope out the content of the Environmental Report
<b>Screening</b>	A process undertaken to decide if SEA is necessary
<b>SEA Environmental Report</b>	The documentation of the evidence, environmental assessment process and findings
<b>Seascape</b>	Landscapes with views of the coast or seas, and coasts and the adjacent marine environment with cultural, historical and archaeological links with each other
<b>Secondary effects</b>	Effects that occur indirectly as a consequence of other effects
<b>Strategic Environmental Assessment</b>	An environmental assessment process used at the plan-making stage to assess the likely effects of a plan or programme
<b>Synergistic effects</b>	These arise when effects interact to produce a total effect greater than the sum of the individual effects
<b>Transboundary effects</b>	Effects that occur beyond the territorial boundary of Ireland
<b>World Heritage Site</b>	A landmark or area with legal protection by an international convention administered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. World Heritage Sites are designated by UNESCO for having cultural, historical, scientific or other forms of significance

## Introduction

### What is the purpose of this guidance document?

This good practice guidance seeks to support the way in which landscape is addressed when carrying out Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of plans and programmes, in accordance with the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). It will help ensure that landscape management, conservation and the outcomes of development are properly assessed as part of the SEA of plans, policies and programmes in Ireland.

The guidance has been designed to provide SEA practitioners with an introduction to landscape analysis and an appreciation of the assessment process in order to evaluate landscape effects and impacts of development. It is also intended to introduce landscape professionals who specialise in landscape planning and management to the SEA process and how landscape can be considered within that process. The guidance will assist planners, designers/developers and practitioners in addressing landscape considerations when carrying out the SEA of plans and programmes.

This note is not stand-alone guidance; rather it supplements other EPA guidance on SEA, including:

- SEA Screening Good Practice 2021<sup>1</sup>
- Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)<sup>2</sup>
- Integrating Climatic Factors into Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland – A Guidance Note<sup>3</sup>
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Climate Change: Guidance for Practitioners<sup>4</sup>
- Good practice guidance note on SEA for the Forestry Sector<sup>5</sup>
- Good practice guidance note on SEA for the Waste Sector<sup>6</sup>
- Good practice note for SEA and the Tourism Sector<sup>7</sup>
- Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring<sup>8</sup>
- Good practice guidance on Cumulative Effects Assessment in SEA<sup>9</sup>
- GISEA Manual – Improving the Evidence Base in SEA<sup>10</sup>

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1 Environmental Protection Agency (2021), [SEA Screening Good Practice 2021](#).

2 Environmental Protection Agency (2015), [Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\)](#).

3 Environmental Protection Agency (2019), [Integrating Climatic Factors into Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland – A Guidance Note](#).

4 Environmental Protection Agency (2013), [Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\) And Climate Change: Guidance For Practitioners](#).

5 Environmental Protection Agency (2019), [Good Practice Note on SEA for the Forestry Sector](#).

6 Environmental Protection Agency (2019), [Good Practice Note on SEA for the Waste Sector](#).

7 Environmental Protection Agency (2023), [Good Practice Guidance on SEA for the Tourism Sector](#).

8 Environmental Protection Agency (2023), [Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring](#).

9 Environmental Protection Agency (2020), [Good Practice Guidance on Cumulative Effects Assessment in SEA](#).

10 Environmental Protection Agency (2017), [GISEA Manual – Improving the Evidence Base in SEA](#).

Other useful resources include the SEA Pack<sup>11</sup> and SEA Process Checklist<sup>12</sup>

As this guidance is focused on landscape analysis and assessment, the following documents form some of the key references:

- An approach to landscape character Assessment<sup>13</sup>
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition<sup>14</sup>
- Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of Proposed National Roads – Standard<sup>15</sup>
- Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of Specified Infrastructure Projects – Overarching Technical Document.<sup>16</sup>

LCAs are a critical tool for those undertaking SEA. It is important that identification of landscape character and/or sensitivity or capacity is evaluated prior to the SEA process starting. Impacts and effects cannot be fully understood without reference to the landscape character across the study area, and an understanding of the vulnerabilities and strengths of the landscape. More information about what constitutes landscape and its key components are provided in "[What is the landscape resource and how is it described?](#)".

### Requirements of landscape professionals

In terms of the skills required to undertake landscape assessment, Recital 33 of the Preamble to Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU, states that '*Experts involved in the preparation of environmental impact assessment reports should be qualified and competent.*' It is therefore reasonable to surmise that landscape professionals who carry out landscape character assessments or landscape capacity or sensitivity studies, or provide landscape judgements in relation to SEA, must be expert, qualified and competent. However, SEA is typically undertaken by a range of professionals who will draw on expert advice to inform the assessment process as appropriate. Where landscape issues are particularly complex, it may be necessary to seek input from landscape professionals.<sup>17</sup>

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11 Environmental Protection Agency (2022), [SEA Pack](#).

12 Environmental Protection Agency (2013), [SEA Process Checklist – Consultation Draft](#).

13 Tudor, C. (2014), [An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment](#). Natural England.

14 Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013), [Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition](#). Routledge.

15 Transport Infrastructure Ireland (2020), [Landscape Character Assessment \(LCA\) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment \(LVIA\) of Proposed National Roads – Standard](#).

16 Transport Infrastructure Ireland (2020), [Landscape Character Assessment \(LCA\) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment \(LVIA\) of Specified Infrastructure Projects – Overarching Technical Document](#).

17 The requirements of landscape professionals to undertake landscape and visual assessment are set out in Transport Infrastructure Ireland's [Landscape Character Assessment \(LCA\) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment \(LVIA\) of Specified Infrastructure Projects – Overarching Technical Document](#) and [Landscape Character Assessment \(LCA\) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment \(LVIA\) of Proposed National Roads – Standard](#).

## What is Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)?

SEA is a process for evaluating the environmental implications of a proposed plan or programme, and to seek ways to minimise significant negative effects or to enhance positive effects. The objective of SEA is to ensure that the environmental effects of a proposed plan or programme are identified during development, providing the opportunity for negative environmental effects to be avoided, mitigated or compensated for and for positive environmental effects to be enabled and enhanced, where opportunities arise. In this way, environmental considerations can be integrated into the preparation of specified plans and programmes. In landscape terms, this provides an opportunity to ensure that potential impacts on the character and quality of landscapes, townscapes (including historic urban landscapes) and seascapes are considered during the preparation of a plan, providing an opportunity to address adverse effects and enhance positive effects.

### Legislative background

The SEA Directive – [Directive 2001/42/EC](#) on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment – requires that an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

In Ireland, the SEA Directive has been transposed into national legislation through:

- [S.I. No. 435 of 2004](#) (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, as amended by [S.I. No. 200 of 2011](#) (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).
- [S.I. No. 436 of 2004](#) (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004, as amended by [S.I. No. 201 of 2011](#) (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) ('SEA Regulations').

The SEA Directive sets out that SEA shall be carried out for all plans which have been prepared for the following purposes:

- Agriculture
- Forestry
- Fisheries
- Energy
- Industry
- Transport
- Waste management
- Water management
- Telecommunications
- Tourism
- Town and country planning or land use.

It should be noted that SEA does not cover the 'project' level as this is covered by Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

### Benefits of SEA

The introduction of SEA to the process of developing plans can bring significant benefits where undertaken as an integral part of plan development. Key benefits include the following:

- Early, high-level assessment of policy options can enhance outcomes and ensure timely delivery by ensuring policies or proposals have positive environmental effects.
- SEA can help ensure that an environmental thread runs through the entire plan rather than being confined to a discrete part of the document. This can avoid unnecessary tensions and conflicts between, for example, policies focused on economic development and landscape, coastal or seascape protection.
- SEA can significantly enhance the process of plan development, particularly where there is an iterative relationship between the drafting, assessment and refinement of policies, objectives and priorities. It is found that by identifying areas of ambiguity or uncertainty, SEA can ensure that plans and proposals are clear and provide robust guidance, and assist in refining and clarifying policies and proposals while identifying ways in which negative effects can be reduced or positive effects included. For example, gap analysis can highlight where there is a need to include policies that provide protection for landscapes, townscapes or seascapes, or highlight opportunities for enhancement.

It is important to recognise that SEA – including the assessment of landscape effects – is strategic in nature. It does not remove the need to consider landscape and visual effects at the scale of individual project proposals.

### SEA process in Ireland

The SEA process is to be initiated at the outset of the preparation process of plans or programmes. SEA is an iterative process and, for best effect, must be included within the process of the preparation of plans and programmes. The analysis and review within the process assists in informing the components and scope of the plan or programme through the identification of key issues at the screening, scoping and environmental assessment stages.

Public participation and consultation is undertaken on the draft plan, programme or strategy and the SEA Environmental Report. This helps inform the direction and scope of the plan before it has been finalised. It also allows consultation responses to be considered and incorporated into the plan and SEA as necessary.

At each stage of the SEA process (as outlined below), consultation is undertaken with the Environmental Authorities. The Environmental Authorities defined in section 9(5) of the SEA Regulations,<sup>18</sup> as amended, are:

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18 A number of government departments have changed name and certain responsibilities have migrated between departments. The SEA legislation has not yet been updated to reflect these changes; however, for clarity the current relevant departments are listed.

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications
- Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

For plans and programmes that require SEA, **Table 1** below presents the requirements of the SEA Directive and shows where they are discussed in this guidance.

**Figure 1** illustrates the links between the SEA and the plan-making process.

**Table 1:** SEA Directive requirements and where they are discussed in this guidance

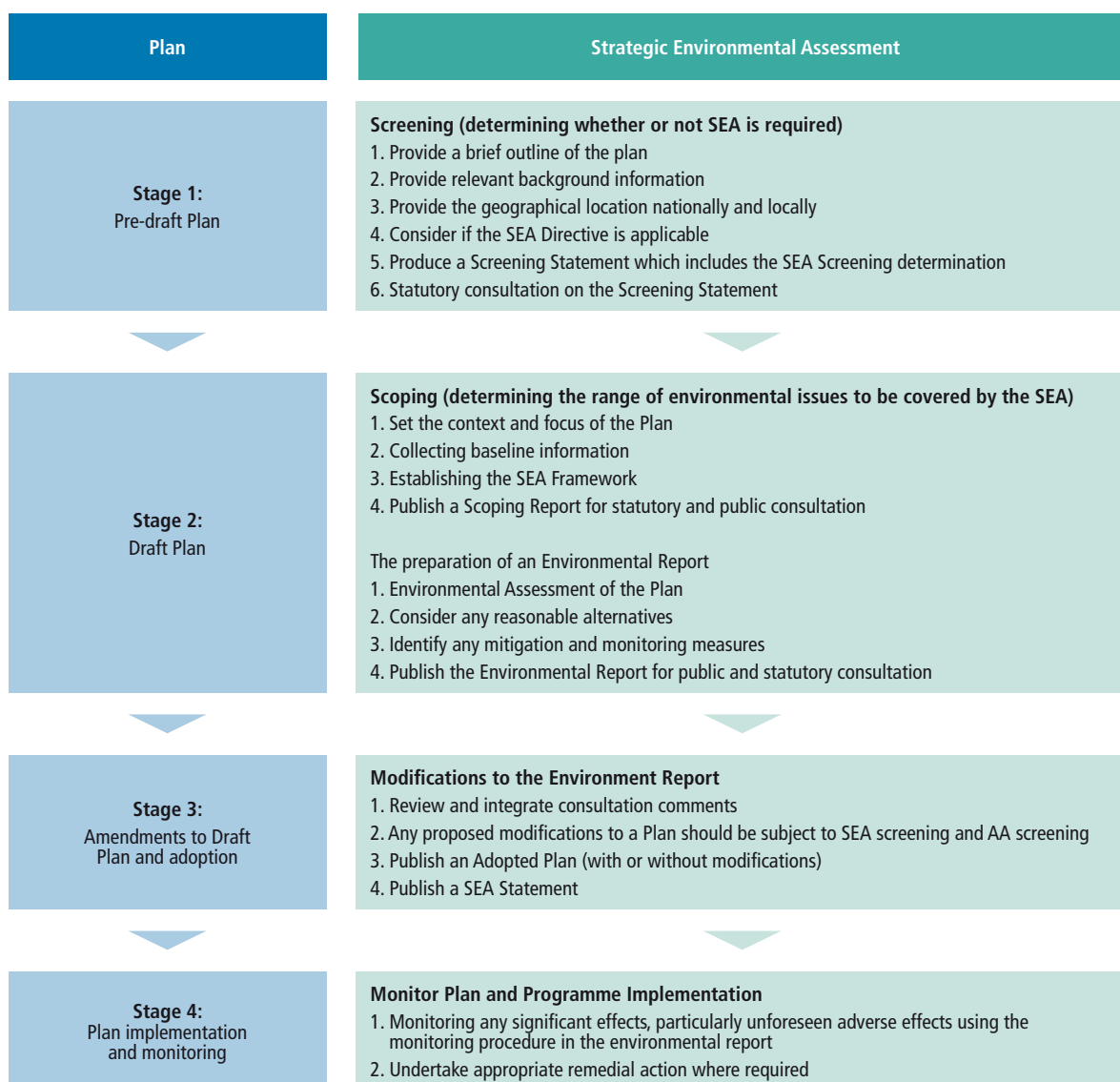
SEA Directive requirement	Discussed in
Preparing an environmental report in which the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan, and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan, are identified, described and evaluated. The information to be included is found in Article 5 and Annex I of the SEA Directive:	
<b>a.</b> An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	n/a
<b>b.</b> The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan;	<i>Scoping: Landscape baseline and Undertaking the SEA: Describing the environmental baseline</i>
<b>c.</b> The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	
<b>d.</b> Any existing environmental problems that are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;	
<b>e.</b> The Environmental Protection Objectives, established at international, community or national level, that are relevant to the plan and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	<i>What is the policy context relating to the landscape? and Appendix 1, and Scoping: Policy framework</i>
<b>f.</b> The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between these factors. (These effects should include secondary; cumulative; synergistic; short-, medium- and long-term; permanent and temporary; positive and negative effects);	<i>Undertaking the SEA: Reporting significant effects</i>



SEA Directive requirement	Discussed in
<p><b>g.</b> The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan;</p>	<p><i>Undertaking the SEA: Mitigation and enhancement opportunities</i></p>
<p><b>h.</b> An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;</p>	<p><i>Undertaking the SEA: Options and reasonable alternatives</i></p>
<p><b>i.</b> A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Article 10;</p>	<p><i>Undertaking the SEA: Monitoring and reporting</i></p>
<p><b>j.</b> A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>The report must include the information that may reasonably be required taking account of current knowledge and methods of assessment, the contents and level of detail in the plan, its stage in the decision-making process and the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process to avoid duplication of the assessment (Article 5.2).</p>	
<p><b>Consulting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The relevant authorities with environmental responsibilities, when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the environmental report (Article 5.4)</li> <li>■ Authorities with environmental responsibilities and the public, to give them an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the draft plan and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan (Article 6.1, 6.2)</li> <li>■ Other EU Member States, where the implementation of the plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment in these countries – transboundary effects (Article 7).</li> </ul>	<p><i>SEA Methodology: Consultation with Environmental Authorities</i></p>
<p><b>Taking the environmental report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making</b> (Article 8)</p>	
<p>Providing information on the decision:</p> <p>When the plan is adopted, the public and any countries consulted under Article 7 must be informed and the following made available to those so informed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the plan as adopted</li> </ul>	<p>n/a</p>

SEA Directive requirement	Discussed in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ a statement summarising how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan and how the environmental report of Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 have been taken into account in accordance with Article 8, and the reasons for choosing the plan as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and</li> <li>■ the measures decided concerning monitoring (Article 9).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Monitoring</b> the significant environmental effects of the plan's implementation (Article 10).</p>	n/a

**Figure 1:** The Strategic Environmental Assessment process in relation to the plan-making process



## Introducing landscape

### Key points

Landscape is considered through an ‘all landscapes approach’ which reflects the importance of all types of landscape.

Landscape is influenced by many factors including physical features, cultural and social factors and perceptual experience.

Landscape character is the distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that makes one landscape different from another.

### What do we mean by landscape?

The [European Landscape Convention](#) (ELC),<sup>19</sup> which was signed in Florence on 20 October 2000, provides a valuable starting point in considering what is meant by landscape and how it should be considered within the SEA process. Some suggested plans and policies are provided in Appendix 1 that may be useful to consider during the SEA process, where appropriate.

The Convention is significant in its adoption of an ‘*all landscapes*’ approach that recognises the importance of rural, urban, degraded and high-quality landscapes. Policy should therefore not be focused solely on special, protected or designated landscapes. It is also significant in highlighting the link between landscape, quality of life and well-being – both individually and collectively.

Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It provides the setting for our day-to-day lives. The term does not mean just special or designated landscapes and it does not only apply to the countryside. Landscape can mean a small patch of urban wasteland as much as a mountain range, and an urban park as much as an expanse of lowland plain. It results from the way that different components of our environment – both natural (the influences of geology, soils, climate, flora and fauna) and cultural (the historical and current impact of land use, settlement, enclosure and other human interventions) – interact and are perceived by us.

In this guidance, ‘landscape’ as a term is considered as all-encompassing and so includes rural landscapes, townscapes (urban) and seasapes (water). The National Landscape Strategy (NLS)<sup>20</sup> sets out that landscape covers ‘*natural, urban, peri-urban and rural areas, encompassing land, inland water, coastal and marine areas*’, noting that all landscapes are important, including everyday and degraded landscapes along with those that are considered to be outstanding (page 13). In addition, the NLS acknowledges the temporal importance of landscape, recognising ‘*the past, present and on-going influences on the landscape from a broad range of sectors*’ (page 12).

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19 Council of Europe (2016), [Council of Europe Landscape Convention \\* 1 as amended by the 2016 Protocol](#).

20 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2020), [National Landscape Strategy](#).

## What is the landscape resource and how is it described?

In the past, the qualitative and perceptual nature of landscape meant that it was often overlooked in policy development and policy appraisal, with only the most scenic areas protected by National Park or similar designations. In many cases, the consequence was development and other land-use changes that paid little or no attention to the wider landscape. This often resulted in a loss or weakening of the character and quality of the landscape – with implications for people’s sense of place and well-being.

Landscape character assessment is the process of identifying and describing variations in character across a landscape, explaining the unique combinations of features and characteristics that make different landscapes distinctive – drawing on physical features, visual influences and perceptual qualities.<sup>21</sup> It defines landscape character areas (based on shared characteristics) and key characteristics or special qualities (the aspects that are most important in shaping character).

It is important to recognise that landscapes are diverse and dynamic, with characteristics and qualities that vary both spatially and temporally. These characteristics and qualities are found at varying degrees and in varying places across the landscape. Landscapes are dynamic and ever-changing, often as a result of natural processes such as vegetation growth, erosion, flooding and changes in climate. Landscape change also arises from human intervention, changes in land use and new development.

## Ireland’s landscape

Ireland is well known for its rolling hills of grassland and greenery, contributing to it being known as the ‘Emerald Isle’. Ireland’s coastlines and seascapes also form a major and distinctive part of the landscape. However, the Irish landscape is more than its green countryside and dramatic coastlines and islands – it also encompasses urban areas, mountainous areas (the Wicklow Mountains, Comeragh Mountains and Connemara Mountain Range, to name a few), lakes (e.g. Lough Corrib and Lough Derg), rivers (e.g. River Shannon) and the peat-rich midlands. As mentioned, Irish landscapes are also characterised by the built environment including towns, cities and villages, in which most people live. The built environment contributes to and/or detracts from the wider landscape, and due to the continued pressure urban spaces are under, they require greater emphasis on the landscape scale in forward planning (e.g. through development plan guidance and SEA).

The Irish landscape extends beyond the physical surroundings of Ireland: it is also an integral component in representing the cultural and natural heritage of the island, notably in relation to areas of peatlands, which provide a range of archaeological sites and links to the past working of these peatlands for centuries. Cultural elements such as *‘homesteads and settlements, field boundaries and field patterns, buildings and monuments, demesnes, planted woodlands, cut bogs, roads, quarries, mines and factories’* all provide evidence of people’s influence on the landscape in Ireland.

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21 Tudor, C. (2014) [An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment](#). Natural England.

The Plantation of Ireland played a key role in shaping Ireland's landscape and refers to the organised colonisation in the 16th and 17th centuries by colonists or 'planters' from Great Britain. The plantations led to the founding of many towns and changes to the landscape, which are still evident today through the ordered and geometric pattern of development and roads. These plantations, along with natural features such as hedgerows and streams, have helped define today's townland units and parish boundaries. These various cultural elements, when combined with the natural physical environment, help to give landscapes their distinctive character.

The names of places are often derived by the landscape and geography of the area they are in, and these place names link strongly to the cultural and linguistic heritage of the area. For example, 'Connemara' is derived from *Conmhaicne Mara*, which means 'descendants of Con Mhac [a mythical marine ancestor]'. The Conmhaicne Mara were a branch of the Conmhaicne, an early tribal grouping. They had several branches located in different parts of the region; as this branch lived by the sea ('muir', 'mara' – 'of the sea' in Irish) they became known as 'Conmhaicne Mara'.

The perceptual qualities of landscape are reinforced in areas such as the coast, where the smell and noise of the sea contribute to the experience of landscape. Likewise, sound and scent in agricultural areas are a key component in defining and characterising the rural landscapes of Ireland.

Ireland's landscape is intrinsic to livelihood, providing a setting for recreational activities such as walking and hiking, travelling and day-to-day living at home, whether in urban, suburban or rural environments.

## Factors influencing the landscape

Natural, cultural and perceptual factors combine to shape the different types of landscape found across Ireland. The 'landscape wheel' (**Figure 2**) illustrates the range of influences, helping us understand what makes landscapes different and distinctive.

**Figure 2:** Landscape character assessment wheel



Source: Tudor, C. (2014) *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*. Natural England

For a comprehensive treatment of LCA, the following key guidance documents should be reviewed:

- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment<sup>22</sup>
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition<sup>23</sup>
- Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of Proposed National Roads – Standard<sup>24</sup>
- Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of Specified Infrastructure Projects – Overarching Technical Document<sup>25</sup>.
- The REFRAME project, once completed in 2024, will also be a useful resource for undertaking and informing landscape character assessments.

22 Tudor, C. (2014), [An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment](#). Natural England.

23 Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013), *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition*. Routledge.

24 Transport Infrastructure Ireland (2020), [Landscape Character Assessment \(LCA\) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment \(LVIA\) of Proposed National Roads – Standard](#).

25 Transport Infrastructure Ireland (2020), [Landscape Character Assessment \(LCA\) and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment \(LVIA\) of Specified Infrastructure Projects – Overarching Technical Document](#).

Key landscape influences include the following.

### **Geology**

Ireland has a diverse geology for its land area, and geology typically has the strongest influence on landscape, profoundly affecting relief, drainage patterns and vegetation cover.<sup>26</sup> Where key features of the landscape are directly linked to bedrock, the character of the area can be very strong. For example, the hardness or softness of bedrock, and their juxtaposition, causes variations in topography, creating hills and low ground.

### **Soils**

The soil type found in landscapes can be greatly influenced by the underlying geology, and soils themselves can strongly influence the vegetation growing on land. For example, limestone bedrock can produce calcareous soils which support calcareous grassland.

### **Landform**

A landform is a natural geographic feature or shape that appears on the Earth's surface as part of the terrain. Landforms are formed over many millennia, including through tectonic plate movement and through the process of erosion. Landform is often one of the main influences on landscape character, especially in hill and upland areas.<sup>27</sup>

### **Hydrology**

The hydrological system, including rivers and streams, and the wider drainage systems have an important part to play in shaping the landscape. Over millions of years, watercourses erode the landscape, creating distinctive valleys, karst systems, river terraces and floodplains. Through the erosion and deposition of sediment, watercourses themselves migrate through the landscape, creating meanders and landscape features such as oxbow lakes. Aquatic environments also facilitate the development of water-dependent habitats that contribute to landscape character.

### **Air and climate**

Climate has a significant impact on landscapes, as temperature, precipitation and wind influence the types of vegetation that can grow in an area. Furthermore, precipitation, wave action, and wind can influence erosion: this is particularly relevant in coastal sand-dune settings. Precipitation can impact on river processes, with increased rainfall increasing waterflow within channels and facilitating greater rates of erosion. Evidence of glaciation and glacial erosion can be seen in many upland areas.

### **Land cover/flora and fauna**

The range and varying appearance of habitats and vegetation throughout an area – for example, peatland, woodland and trees, and hedgerows – influence the character of the landscape.

### **Land use and settlement pattern**

Human alteration and use of the Earth's surface helps define the character of the landscape. For example, agricultural and peatland landscapes are strongly influenced by human farming and working

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26 Natural Resources Wales (2016), [LANDMAP Methodology Geological Landscape](#).

27 Scottish Natural Heritage and The Countryside Agency (2002), [Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland](#).

of land both currently and in the past. Likewise, settlement location, form and arrangement have been largely influenced by historic settlement originating from churches, Norman fortifications and Georgian development based on a grid layout. The landscape, notably in urban areas, is a result of historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, as set out in the UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape recommendations.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, settlement in a landscape helps influence the overall character, whether by use of materials or through the pattern of development (e.g. along valleys).

### **Cultural heritage**

Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, historic buildings and sites (including World Heritage Sites<sup>29</sup>), which have a range of values including symbolic, historic, anthropological, scientific and social significance.<sup>30</sup> These heritage assets are intrinsically linked to the landscape, presenting historical and cultural signs of civilisation and providing an understanding of the landscape in the past – i.e. a living landscape. The working of peat landscapes historically is of great cultural significance in Ireland and is still present in the landscape today. Many of these peatland areas will be undergoing future transformation in the form of rehabilitation and restoration. Our urban centres typically contain a collection of culturally significant sites and infrastructure established over time and interrelated with settings, views and vistas that need careful consideration and management.

### **Visual character**

Many of the above factors combine to influence the way we experience the landscape, particularly in terms of its visual character.

The interaction of **scale** and **enclosure** created by landform or trees and woodland can be particularly important, for example creating large-scale landscapes with extensive views or finer grain and more intimate landscapes with more limited views.

Different types or combinations of land cover (for example, deciduous or coniferous woodland, bog or heath) can introduce different **textures** and **colours**, often changing with the season.

Patterns of land cover, land use and habitats can influence the **diversity** of the landscape, whether that is a patchwork of pasture, wetland and bog or a more uniform landscape of arable fields.

### **Other perceptual and aesthetic influences**

The way we experience the landscape is also influenced by a range of less tangible qualities including the following.

**Sound** and **smell** can shape our experience and understanding of the landscape. Some sounds, such as birdsong or the wind blowing through woodland, will reinforce a rural character, but the presence of traffic noise, for example, will suggest a more developed landscape, even if the road in question cannot be seen. Similarly, the smells of gorse, crops or even farm animals are likely to emphasise a rural character whereas odours from industry or traffic may suggest otherwise.

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28 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2011), [Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape](#).

29 World Heritage Ireland (2023), [Ireland's Tentative World Heritage](#).

30 UNESCO (2023), [Cultural Heritage](#).



**Season, weather, time of day and tide** can all influence the way people experience the landscape. The changing climate can also be a factor, whether through flooding, coastal erosion or drought.

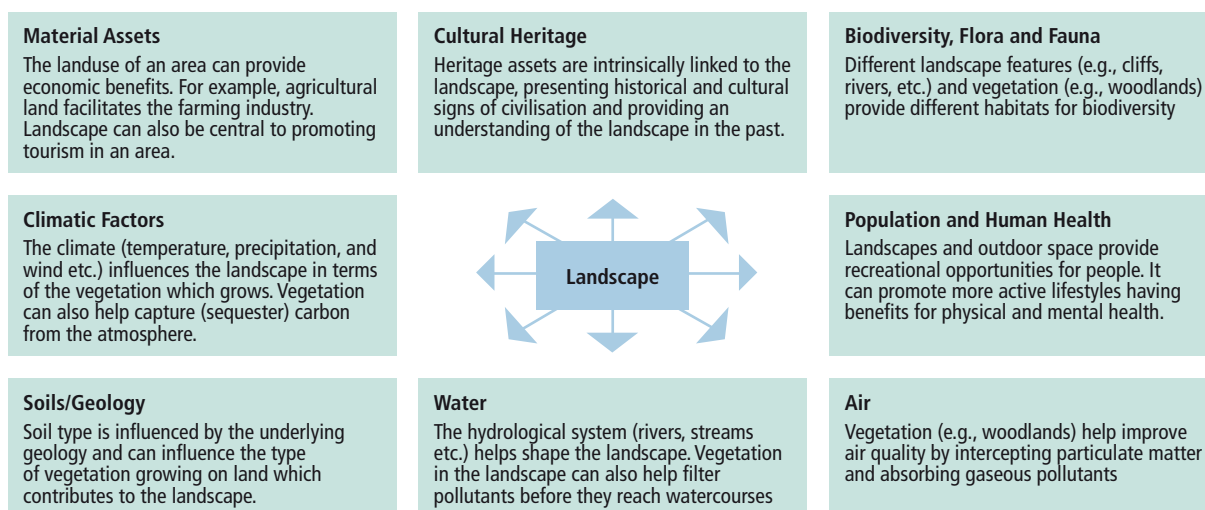
Landscapes can have important **associations** with artists, writers, poets and folklore, influencing the way they are perceived, understood and valued by the public. At an individual level, landscapes can provide a record of **memories** and experiences, something that can easily be overlooked in relation to local or more everyday landscapes.

Finally, the importance of the landscape can be reflected in **public preferences**, whether in the form of an archetypal Irish or regional landscape or in the places that people most frequently visit.

## Relationship with other SEA topics

The interrelationship between landscape and other SEA topics is illustrated in **Figure 3** below.

**Figure 3:** The relationship between landscape and other SEA topics



## Landscape character

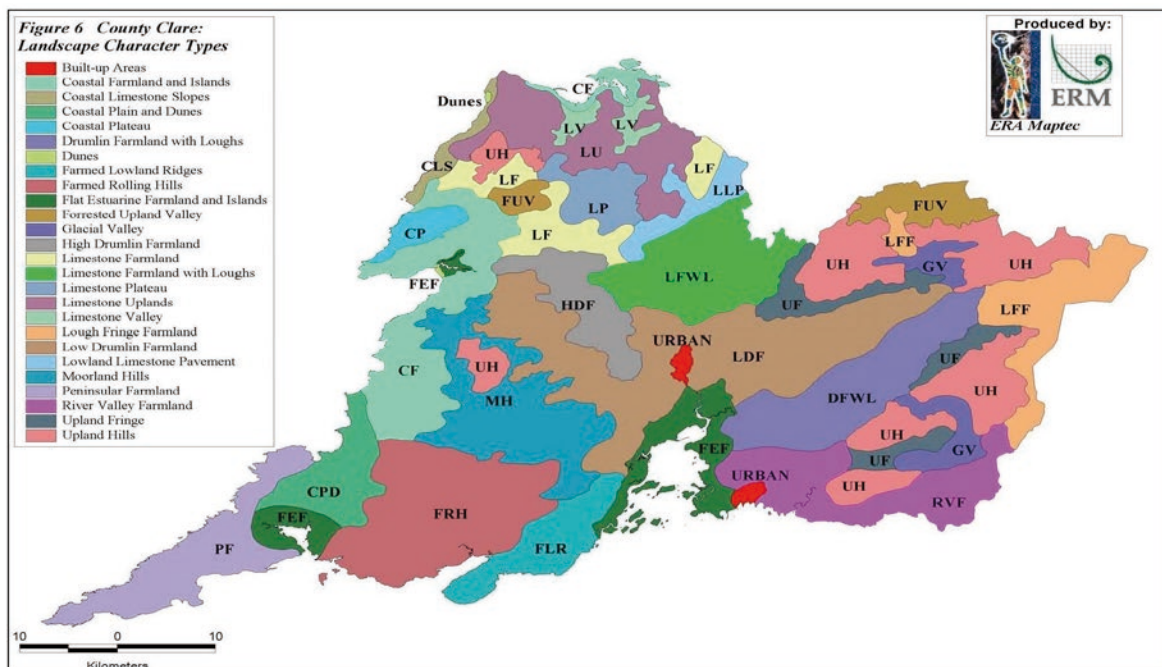
These influences (landscape and visual elements) combine to shape the character of the landscape.

**Landscape character** is defined<sup>31</sup> as the distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that makes one landscape different from another.

The process of landscape characterisation is designed to make sense of variations in character, dividing the landscape into areas with distinct character. It identifies:

- **landscape character types**, which are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical land use and settlement pattern. An example is the Lowland River Valley Landscape Character Type, which occurs in several locations across Ireland.
- **landscape character areas**, which are single, unique and discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. Examples include the Lower Shannon Valley, the Burren and Temple Bar in Dublin City Centre.
- **historic urban landscapes** are defined as ‘the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of “historic centre” or “ensemble” to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting’. Examples include Cashel, Carlingford and Birr.

**Figure 4:** County Clare landscape character types



Source: ERM on behalf of Heritage Council (2004), *Landscape Character Assessment of County Clare*

31 NatureScot (2023), [Landscape Character Assessment](#).

**Boundaries** between character types or areas are likely to be most precise at a local scale but may, in any case, reflect transitions from one landscape to another rather than hard and fast lines on the ground.

Descriptions of landscape character are most useful where they identify the **key characteristics** of the area in question, describe **past, present and future changes** affecting the landscape, and set out **guidance or objectives** for its future management. These types of information can be particularly useful in the SEA process.

## Landscape capacity

Landscape capacity is the ability of the receiving environment and/or receiving landscape to absorb a proposed development (e.g. housing, strategic development). Capacity depends on the scale and mass of the proposed development and also on the type and character of the landscape involved. Ireland has adopted the 'Living Landscape' concept, as set out in the National Landscape Strategy. This focuses on managing land at the ecosystem scale to benefit people, wildlife and the economy. Understanding the capacity of the landscape helps in the management of appropriate change.

## Landscape sensitivity and susceptibility

In some cases, information from landscape character assessments is used to analyse patterns of landscape sensitivity. However, due to varying techniques in the application and approach to landscape character assessment in Ireland, judgements on landscape sensitivity can also be variable.

NatureScot defines landscape sensitivity as a measure of the ability of a landscape to accommodate change arising from specified types of development or land management.<sup>32</sup> NatureScot guidance<sup>33</sup> sets out the methodology for assessing landscape sensitivity. *Sensitivity* combines the judgements of the susceptibility of the landscape to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value attached to the landscape, as per Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Third Edition.<sup>34</sup> Landscape sensitivity is not to be mistaken for landscape *capacity*, which is the degree to which a landscape can accommodate change without resulting in undue negative effects on its local distinctiveness, character and qualities, (Natural England, 2019).<sup>35</sup>

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32 NatureScot (2022), [Landscape Sensitivity Studies](#).

33 NatureScot (2023), [Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance \(Methodology\)](#).

34 LI and IEMA (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition.

35 Tudor, C. (2019), [An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment – to Inform Spatial Planning and Land Management](#). Natural England.

*Susceptibility* refers to the ability of a defined landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development or change without undue negative consequences. Key criteria used to help define susceptibility can relate to scale of the landscape, topographical variety, landscape pattern, settlement, skylines, inter-visibility with other landscapes and perceptual aspects.

- Higher susceptibility – Attributes that make up the character of the landscape offer very limited opportunities for the accommodation of change without key characteristics being fundamentally altered, leading to a different landscape character.
- Lower susceptibility – Attributes that make up the character of the landscape are resilient to being altered by change or proposed development.

## Landscape value

The European Landscape Convention advocates that all landscape is of value, whether it is the subject of defined landscape designation or not: *'The landscape is important as a component of the environment and of people's surroundings in both town and country and whether it is ordinary landscape or outstanding landscape.'*<sup>36</sup> The value of a landscape receptor is recognised as being a key contributing factor to the sensitivity of the landscape.

The value of landscape receptors is determined with reference to many factors, including:

- Review of relevant designations and the level of policy importance that they signify (such as landscapes designated at international, national or local level); and/or
- Application of criteria that indicate value (such as scenic quality, rarity, recreational value, representativeness, conservation interests, perceptual aspects and artistic associations).

Internationally and nationally designated landscapes would generally indicate landscape of higher value, whereas those without formal designation (such as a widespread or common landscape type without high scenic quality) are likely to be of lower value, bearing in mind that all landscapes are valued at some level.

## Landscape and seascape

The seascape is a key component that contributes to the character of an area, and should be considered alongside landscape. Seascape refers to *'landscapes with views of the coast or seas, and coastal areas and the adjacent marine environment with cultural, historical and archaeological links with each other'*.<sup>37</sup>

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36 Council of Europe, (2000). The European Landscape Convention – Council of Europe Treaty Series No. 176.

37 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2021), [National Marine Planning Framework](#).

Seascape can include visual elements as well as physical marine character. Visual elements include views of the sea and coast from land, and views from the sea to land or other parts of the sea. The marine character of an area is formed at the surface of the water, within the water and by the seabed.

The marine environment and associated seascape are an intrinsic and defining feature of Ireland's landscape, contributing to landscape character along the coast in terms of both the physical character and views experienced. The waters surrounding Ireland also provide strong links to the country's economic and cultural heritage, enabling fishing and seafood industries and commercial trade with other countries around the world.

The Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (2014/89/EU) established a framework for maritime spatial planning, promoting the sustainable development and use of marine areas and resources. The Maritime Spatial Planning Directive was transposed into national legislation in 2016 by S.I. No. 352/2016, now replaced by Part 5 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018.

### **Considering landscape impacts in offshore areas**

This case study illustrates some of the considerations for assessing landscape impacts in offshore areas.

The Planning Scotland's Seas SEA Environmental Report<sup>38</sup> considered the landscape impacts of large-scale renewable energy development in a number of offshore locations. The assessment considers the balance of the potential scale and type of offshore renewable energy development within different offshore areas. Some of the development will be closer to the shore and sensitive receptors, there are differing levels of wildness and population in the receiving coastlines, and some of the coastal areas are designated for their landscape value.

The assessment of impacts is also balanced against the current movements of commercial vessels, which provide an existing 'working seascape' and were considered to reduce sensitivity to change.

## **The impact of climate change on Ireland's future landscape**

The effects of climate change are expected to play an instrumental role in influencing and shaping the Irish landscape in the future. Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns are expected to alter soil composition and conditions, and result in changes to the vegetation growing on land. Furthermore, changes in weather patterns may alter the flow of waters in rivers and freshwater waterbodies and this could trigger landslides. Climate change is also expected to influence coastal waters and landscapes, by raising sea levels and increasing coastal erosion. This could lead to more coastal flooding, as well as fluvial and pluvial flooding inland associated with increased precipitation.

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38 Marine Scotland (2013), [Planning Scotland's Seas: SEA of Plans for Wind, Wave and Tidal Power in Scottish Marine Waters Environmental Report](#). Scottish Government.

In addition to natural features of the landscape, the built environment will be influenced by climate change.<sup>39</sup> Changes in the climate (e.g. hotter and drier summers, warmer and wetter winters) may result in structural damage to historic structures and buildings. Likewise, increased erosion and flooding may damage historic buildings and archaeological sites, which contribute to local landscape character.

The landscape of Ireland is also likely to be influenced by measures designed to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate risks. These could include further renewable energy development, the restoration of peatlands, woodland expansion, the development of green infrastructure and implementation of flood defence measures.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) is currently in the process of mapping vulnerability to climate change. This will include up-to-date coastal risk mapping.

#### **Fingal County Council Cultural Heritage and Climate Change Risk Assessment<sup>40</sup>**

The aim of the project was to undertake a desk-based assessment of the risk posed by natural hazards and climate change to Fingal's cultural heritage. It involved desk-based Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping of the risk to Fingal's cultural heritage from the following six natural hazards:

- Fluvial flooding
- Pluvial flooding
- Groundwater flooding
- Coastal flooding
- Coastal erosion
- Slope instability.

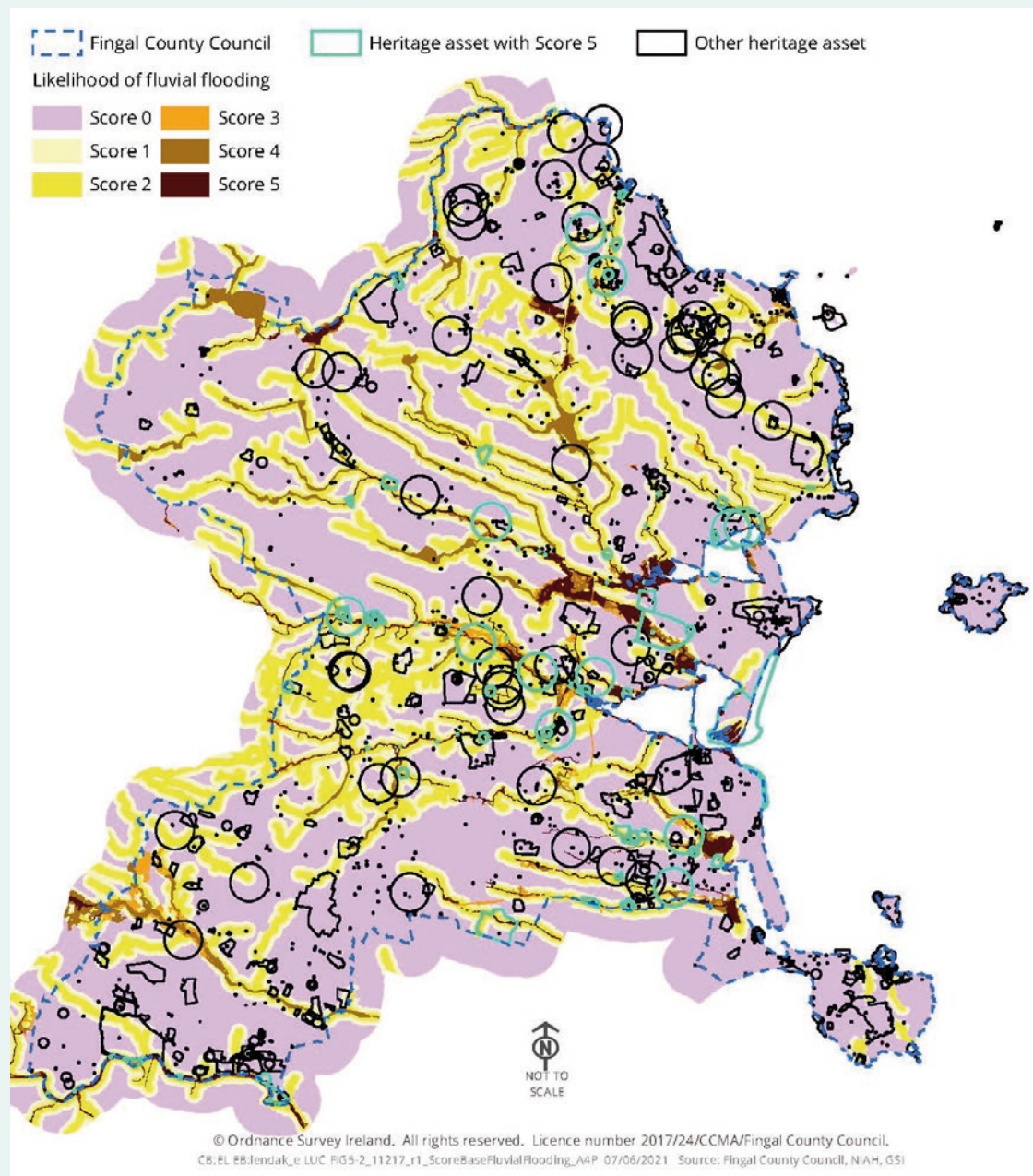
The study identified heritage assets most at risk, primarily those in the coastal region, which is often affected by coastal flooding, coastal erosion and slope instability. The study also allows better understanding of the spatial distribution of different natural hazards, and the anticipated impact of climate change. Although undertaken specifically in relation to cultural heritage assets, studies such as this can be used to inform understanding of areas of landscape change, particularly in relation to coastal change.

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39 National Adaptation Framework (2019), [Built & Archaeological Heritage Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan](#).

40 LUC (2021), [Fingal Cultural Heritage & Climate Change Risk Assessment](#).

**Figure 5:** Likelihood of fluvial flooding – scoring base layer



Source: Fingal County Council (2021), Fingal Cultural Heritage and Climate Change Risk Assessment

## What is the policy context relating to the landscape?

### Key points

The European Landscape Convention (2000) promotes landscape protection, management and planning.

The Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (NPF) and National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 recognise the value of landscape.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies set out key regional policy objectives relating to the landscape.

Local planning policy, such as County Development Plans (CDPs) and Local Area Plans (LAPs), provide policies relating to landscape protection and management.

This chapter summarises the policy context for landscape, and further detail is provided in Appendix 1. The legislative context for landscape considerations is discussed in Appendix 2. Some national-level policy documents that may be of relevance to landscape (depending on the scope of the plan or programme (P/P) and the SEA) are listed in Appendix 4.

### International and European policy

The European Landscape Convention (2000) promotes landscape protection, management and planning. The Convention is aimed at the protection, management and planning of all landscapes and raising awareness of the value of a living landscape. The Convention was adopted on 20 October 2000 and came into force on 1 March 2004. While the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>41</sup> do not specifically mention landscape, several of the 17 goals can be strongly linked to landscapes.

At the European Union (EU) level, several important directives focus on protecting and conserving the natural environment. While these do not specifically relate to the landscape, they are fundamentally linked to landscape whether through the protection of habitats and species or the protection of water quality/resources including in wetland landscapes.

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41 United Nations (2015), Sustainable Development Goals.



## National legislation and policy

The framework for national planning policy is derived from national legislation. The Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended)<sup>42</sup> forms the foundations for planning in Ireland. In relation to development plans, the draft Planning Bill 2022<sup>43</sup> requires the development of regional strategy for landscape capacity for particular types of development and for the conservation, protection, management and improvement of the landscape.

The Heritage Act 1995, as amended, sets out the legal definition for landscape in Ireland. Through legislation, Ireland's most important landscapes and areas of scientific or recreational interest are protected. The designation 'Areas of Special Amenity' is the strongest environmental protection for areas of outstanding natural beauty, scientific interest or recreational amenity value.

The Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (NPF)<sup>44</sup> and National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030<sup>45</sup> recognise the value of landscape, acknowledging the wealth of natural and cultural assets that the Irish landscape supports. The NPF identifies the importance of the landscape in forming part of Ireland's 'green persona' but notes environmental threats, including climate change, loss of important and vulnerable habitat and the diminishing wild countryside. The NDP sets out a commitment that '*As custodians of our natural landscape and of our historic and cultural assets, we will protect them for the next generation*' (page 119).

At the national level, a range of other policies and strategies highlight the importance of landscape. For instance, the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025<sup>46</sup> recognises that the landscape reflects cultural and natural heritage as well as contributing to the well-being of society, environment and economy. The overall vision seeks to promote the sustainable protection, management and planning of the landscape.

A number of other policy documents reflect on the role of landscape in relation to many topics including biodiversity, health, peatland, pollinators, people and place, design, heritage, Gaeltacht areas, climate change and the marine environment, and in the development of specific guidelines.

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42 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2000), [Planning and Development Act, 2000](#).

43 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2023), [Draft Planning and Development Bill 2022](#).

44 Government of Ireland (2018), [Project 2040 National Planning Framework](#).

45 Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (2021), [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#).

46 Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2015), [National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025](#).

## Regional policy

The importance of landscape is further recognised at the regional level through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) for the Northern and Western,<sup>47</sup> the Southern<sup>48</sup> and the Eastern and Midlands<sup>49</sup> Regional Assemblies, which set out key Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) relating to the landscape. The Planning and Development Bill requires preparation of a regional 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 regions so as to ensure a consistent approach to the protection of landscape,

## Local policy

Local planning policy, such as County/City Development Plans (CDPs) and Local Area Plans (LAPs) are spatial plans that guide the future development of a county or local area through a suite of policy objectives, land use zoning and development management guidance. These documents provide more nuanced policies relating to a variety of topics, including landscape protection and management.

Some CDPs and LAPs identify protected or listed views, which are recognised because of their important amenity, tourism, economic and cultural value for the area and its people. It is important to protect and conserve these views, with any development located and designed so as not to impact adversely on them.

## How can policies, plans and programmes affect the landscape?

The following screening table<sup>50</sup> sets out key landscape interactions associated with different types of development, and provides an overview of common issues.

**Table 2:** Screening table for landscape interactions

Topic	Types of development	Landscape implications
Issues common to many types of development	Introduction of new structures or buildings and linear features affecting the landscape, seascape and coastal character Impacts on scale, diversity, colour, sound, movement, naturalness, sense of place and sense of history Visual impact of development and effects on key characteristics, historic urban plans, formally planned streetscapes, squares and terraces; development impacting on views of landmark buildings, other views and vistas, and loss of setting or planned cultural landscapes	

47 Northern & Western Regional Assembly (2020), [Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032](#).

48 Southern Regional Assembly (2020), [Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region](#).

49 Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly (2019), [Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy](#).

50 Based on NatureScot (2010), [Landscape Considerations in Strategic Environmental Assessment](#).

Topic	Types of development	Landscape implications
Issues common to many types of land use change	Impacts on landform, land cover and land use Introduction of new features Impacts on scale, diversity, colour, sound, movement, naturalness, sense of place and sense of history	
Agriculture	Agricultural buildings and houses Changes in the type of methods of farming Changes in the extent of agriculture Changes in the intensification of agriculture Changes in the size of agricultural holdings Changes in field size and the balance of land cover	Loss of traditional rural buildings or features Loss of vegetation and field boundaries Impacts on perceptual qualities (e.g. remoteness)
Aquaculture and fisheries	New or expanding aquaculture installations New or modified land-based infrastructure and buildings	Changes to seascape and coastal character, or character around large waterbodies Introduction of features in waterscape
Climate mitigation and adaptation	Renewable and low-carbon energy development and infrastructure and energy efficiency measures Peatland conservation and restoration Woodland expansion Coastal, riparian and pluvial flood management schemes Urban greening	Impacts on building design Impacts of modification/adaptation on historic infrastructure, bridges, harbours, piers, quays and sea walls Changes to peatland landscapes including revegetation and wetland creation Views and enclosure from new woodland Impacts on character, naturalness and accessibility of coastal and riparian landscapes Impacts on urban character and views

Topic	Types of development	Landscape implications
Energy	<p>Domestic and residential renewable energy development including solar, air source heat pumps and district heating</p> <p>Renewable energy development (onshore and offshore wind, solar, hydro, biomass/biofuel, wave, tidal)</p> <p>Conventional energy generation (peat-, coal-, gas- and oil-fired power stations)</p> <p>Fossil fuel extraction, processing, storage and transport (peat cutting, coal mining, oil and gas extraction)</p> <p>Hydrogen production, storage and transport infrastructure</p> <p>Decommissioning of power stations and energy infrastructure</p> <p>New or upgraded energy distribution infrastructure (power lines, pipelines)</p> <p>Management of waste from energy generation</p>	<p>Changes to landscape/seascape character</p> <p>Effects on visual amenity</p> <p>Creation of 'energy' or 'wind farm' landscapes</p> <p>Cumulative effects on landscape and visual receptors from multiple developments</p> <p>Introduction of man-made structures</p> <p>Perceptual changes from noise and movement or glint and glare</p> <p>Changes to experience of views</p>
Flood risk management	<p>Coastal and riparian flood management infrastructure including engineered flood defences, flood storage, managed coastal realignment schemes, sustainable flood management measures and sustainable drainage infrastructure</p>	<p>Changes to accessibility and experience of areas following works</p> <p>Introduction of new structures (e.g. flood walls)</p> <p>Impacts on amenity and access</p>
Forestry	<p>New forestry planting</p> <p>Forestry harvesting</p> <p>Changes in forest design (e.g. balance of forest and open ground, diversity of species and age class)</p> <p>Changes in the management of woodland and forests (e.g. continuous cover forestry techniques)</p> <p>Expansion of energy crops (e.g. short rotation coppice)</p> <p>Forestry infrastructure (tracks, haul roads, stacking yards, borrow pits) and development (e.g. sawmills, buildings and dwellings)</p>	<p>Introduction of new structures or buildings (associated with energy crops)</p> <p>Changes in the character of the landscape</p> <p>Introduction/alteration of colours and textures in the landscape</p> <p>Reduction/increase in the sense of openness</p>

Topic	Types of development	Landscape implications
Green and blue infrastructure	<p>New or enhanced greenspace resources</p> <p>Habitat creation or enhancement</p> <p>Sustainable flood management measures</p> <p>Active travel and sustainable transport</p>	<p>Changes to the character of towns and villages including views, naturalness.</p> <p>Reconnection to natural and built heritage opportunities</p> <p>Changes to the experience of the landscape through new active travel links</p>
Habitat creation and restoration	<p>Conservation of existing habitats</p> <p>Restoration of degraded habitats</p> <p>Creation of new habitats and habitat networks</p>	<p>Changes in the character of the landscape due to changes in habitat</p> <p>Changes to the colours, textures and perceived naturalness of the area</p>
Industry	<p>New, extended or redeveloped industrial installations</p> <p>Decommissioning of industrial installations</p> <p>Industrial transport infrastructure (e.g. depots, railway yards, ports)</p> <p>Restoration and remediation of derelict or contaminated land</p>	<p>Introduction of new structures or buildings</p> <p>Changes to the composition of the landscape</p> <p>Changes to the perceived naturalness of the area</p>
Tele-communications	<p>New, expanded or upgraded telecommunications infrastructure including masts and dishes</p>	<p>Introduction of new linear structures (e.g. masts) in the landscape</p>
Tourism	<p>New, expanded or upgraded tourism, recreation, leisure and sporting facilities and buildings, car parks, interpretation infrastructure and access provision</p>	<p>Increased sound and movement in the landscape</p> <p>Introduction of new structures or buildings</p> <p>Changes in the character of the landscape</p>
Transport	<p>New or upgraded road infrastructure, including dual carriageways and motorways, junctions, bridges and tunnels</p> <p>New or upgraded rail infrastructure, including stations, freight facilities, bridges and tunnels</p> <p>New or upgraded canal or river navigation infrastructure, including canals, locks, reservoirs and tunnels</p> <p>New, expanded or upgraded airfields and airports</p> <p>New, expanded or upgraded ports, harbours, ferry or other maritime infrastructure</p>	<p>Introduction of linear features</p> <p>Changes to land use pattern</p> <p>Increased sound and movement in the landscape, reducing the perceived sense of naturalness</p>

Topic	Types of development	Landscape implications
Urban development	New or expanded urban development including settlement expansion, the redevelopment of brownfield land and creation of new settlements, including associated transport infrastructure	Introduction of buildings and structures into the landscape Introduction of linear features
Waste	New, expanded or upgraded waste infrastructure including waste transfer stations, recycling facilities, incineration, composting, energy from waste plants, land filling and land raising sites	Introduction of buildings and structures into the landscape Increased sound and movement Impact of odour and its effects on landscape perception
Water	New, expanded or upgraded water infrastructure including reservoirs, water treatment plants, pipelines, waste water treatment plants  Coastal and riparian flood management infrastructure including engineered flood defences, flood storage, managed coastal realignment schemes, sustainable flood management measures and sustainable drainage infrastructure	Introduction of structures into the landscape (e.g. wastewater treatment plants, flood walls)

## Landscape in the SEA process

### Key points

Landscape effects should be considered for inclusion at screening and scoping.

Developing the landscape baseline can draw on evidence from pre-existing landscape character assessments where available.

Alternative data sources on landscape include the National Land Cover Map for Ireland and habitat mapping.

SEA landscape objectives should reflect the landscape conservation objectives set out at international, national, regional and local policy levels.

SEA is the process of evaluating the environmental implications, including on landscape and seascape, of the implementation of a proposed P/P. The objective of SEA is to provide a high level of protection to the environment and contribute to integrating environmental considerations into the preparation, adoption and implementation of a P/P, and to promote sustainable development. The integration of environmental considerations is achieved through undertaking SEA as an iterative process, which has proved to be invaluable in helping the development of P/Ps.

At an early stage in the P/P development, SEA can help identify proposals or policies that would have unacceptable adverse environmental effects. The SEA process can also help to identify and rectify areas of ambiguity or uncertainty, and helps to shape policies and proposals in a way that reduces any adverse effects or enhances positive effects. Where significant adverse effects are identified, the SEA process identifies mitigation measures to reduce or offset these effects.

Landscape is often considered within an SEA, as most land use or development plans, or non-land use plans for sectors such as energy or transport, will have some form of impact on the surrounding landscape. The sections below outline how landscape should be considered at each of the key stages within the SEA process (screening, scoping, and assessment). Key elements of the SEA process are illustrated through case study examples.

### The Orkney Gateway Programme

This case study illustrates the value of area-specific landscape information when undertaking the SEA.

The Heart of Neolithic Orkney was designated as a World Heritage Site (WHS) in 1999. The site comprises a series of discrete, but related, Neolithic monuments that consist of two complexes, 6 km apart. These are: Skara Brae, Maeshowe, the Stones of Stenness, the Watch Stone, the Barnhouse Stone, the Ring of Brodgar and 13 burial mounds, and a stone setting, all of which are Scheduled Monuments.

The Orkney Gateway Programme sought to create a new tourism offer for the Brodgar/Stenness part of the WHS. The SEA of the programme assessed several options to inform the selection of a preferred option.

The SEA was able to make use of the landscape character assessment, *The Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site: Setting Report 2008*, which provides an objective description of the setting of the WHS, and also reflected the special qualities of the Hoy and West Mainland National Scenic Area (NSA), the only NSA in Orkney. The landscape element of the SEA was therefore based on comprehensive and detailed information which was used to inform the assessment of the importance of landscape considerations in the development of the new tourism offer.

## Screening

Stage 1 of the Screening process will have determined whether the SEA Directive applied to the P/P in question.

Where the requirement is confirmed, Stage 2 of the process considers the likelihood that the P/P would result in significant positive or adverse environmental effects, including on the landscape. Where such effects are considered likely, the P/P will be subject to SEA.

- The steps in identifying the potential for significant effects on the landscape are as follows:
  - Review and describe the characteristics of the P/P to understand the changes that will result from its implementation, including where it influences other policies or programmes.
- What type, scale and magnitude of changes are likely, over what geographic area and what timescale?
  - Describe the baseline nature of the landscape that could be directly or indirectly affected by the P/P.
  - What are the key landscape characteristics?
  - How sensitive is the landscape to the kinds of changes that the P/P could bring about?
  - Does the landscape reflect special values such as national or local designations?
  - Is it particularly valued for recreation and enjoyment?
  - Does it provide the setting for settlements?
  - What forces for change are affecting the landscape in question, including its key characteristics?
  - What landscape objectives have been defined for the area?



- What effect on the landscape is the P/P likely to have?
  - Is it likely to affect any of the landscape's key characteristics?
  - Will it help to address any of the identified forces for change, or could it accelerate or compound negative change?
  - Will it support defined landscape objectives?
- Is it likely to affect landscapes that are highly valued and visited or provide the setting for settlements?

The screening report template (see section 6.2 of the [Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Good Practice Guidance](#)) can act as a checklist when considering the SEA for a range of plans and programmes. It may also help to identify the types of landscape and visual effects that could be associated with different types of plan or programme. This matrix is not exhaustive, nor does it reflect the sensitivity of the receiving landscape.

Where the screening process confirms that significant positive or adverse effects on the landscape and people's enjoyment of it could result, an SEA should be carried out.

These steps for identifying potential for likely significant effects on landscapes are also provided in Appendix 5 as a standalone resource.

## Scoping

The scoping stage is designed to provide sufficient information about the P/P and the condition of the baseline environment for the statutory environmental consultees to determine whether the scope, detail and methodology proposed for the SEA is appropriate.

To ensure that landscape issues are addressed fully within the SEA, the following steps should be followed:

- Outline the existing international, national and regional **policy framework** relating to the landscape resource
- Establish the **landscape baseline** that could be affected directly or indirectly by implementation of the P/P
- Develop **Environmental Protection Objectives** relating to the landscape in question
- Set out a **methodology** to ensure landscape effects are appropriately assessed
- Describe ways in which potential positive landscape effects could be **enhanced** and negative effects **mitigated**.

### **Policy framework**

The scoping report should provide a summary of the existing policy framework relating to conservation and enhancement of the landscape. Depending on the level of the P/P, this should refer to international, national, regional and relevant local policies. These will help shape the development of Environmental Protection Objectives and indicate the weight that should be attached to landscape and visual issues in the process of developing and appraising the P/P. Environmental Protection Objectives will also help inform the monitoring phases of the SEA. Refer to the "[Monitoring and reporting](#)" section and Appendix 1 of this document, which provides a summary of current policy and guidance.

### **Landscape baseline**

The scoping report should expand the description of the relevant aspects of the existing landscape resource that informed the screening stage. It should outline the sources of information that have been used to describe the landscape and consider how it could continue to develop in the absence of the P/P based on the best information about current trends and forces for change. The following paragraphs provide an overview of potential baseline, with more detailed description included under the 'Undertaking the SEA' chapter, in the "[Describing the environmental baseline](#)" section..

### **Landscape character assessment**

Most local authorities have prepared county-level landscape character assessments (LCAs), as shown in Appendix 3. Where LCA has been undertaken for part or all of the area covered by the P/P, this can inform the baseline description. However, due to the variable techniques and approaches applied across Ireland for LCA, there is a lack of consistency and LCAs can be of varying quality, as identified in the Heritage Council LCA audit.<sup>51</sup> This variation is becoming increasingly apparent as more renewable energy developments are proposed. Developments such as large-scale wind turbines have a greater chance of impacting on landscape character over a wider area. Therefore, caution should be taken when using LCAs to inform landscape baseline in SEAs. An EPA Research Project, 'REFRAME', is currently developing a new LCA toolkit, based on best practice. It is due to be published in autumn 2023 and will be available through the EPA website: [epa.ie](http://epa.ie).

When using an LCA to inform the baseline, the following aspects should be considered.

#### **Scale**

It is important to try to match the scale of the assessment to the scale of the P/P. A county-wide landscape character assessment would describe the landscape at a scale relevant to a county development plan but would be too detailed for the assessment of a national policy document and too coarse for a town plan. A landscape architect may be able to add detail to assessments judged to be too coarse, or to aggregate information from more detailed assessments.

#### **Landscape character types and areas**

Published LCAs can be used to identify the landscape character types and areas that could be affected and their key characteristics. Descriptions of current or future forces for change can help to identify the environmental problems that will be relevant to the assessment. Similarly, if management objectives or guidance have been set, these can be used to judge the likely effects of the P/P.

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51 The Heritage Council (2009), [Landscape Character Assessment in Ireland. Update on Baseline Audit and Evaluation](#).

### Historic landscape characterisation

Recognising that all areas have some element of historic character, historic landscape characterisation (HLC) seeks to identify the contribution of the past to the landscape today. HLC is particularly important for urban areas, as most Irish towns and cities have very important time-depths, which are reflected in the tangible and intangible aspects of their characters. Therefore, where the SEA relates to urban areas, it is recommended that HLC is utilised to inform the landscape baseline gathering exercise.

The principles underpinning HLC as a process are:

- *Present not past: it looks at the time-depth of the existing landscape*
- *Landscape not sites: it applies to all areas, not just special ones or individual sites*
- *Cultural phenomenon: natural/semi-natural habitats contribute as well as human influences*
- *Interpretation not record: character is perceived by people*
- *People's views: local people's perspectives matter as well as those of experts*
- *Management of change: HLC is intended to inform change and not prevent it*
- *Transparency and accessibility: a clearly articulated process and easy for others to use*
- *Inter-operability: it should be capable of integrating with other records.*<sup>52</sup>

While HLC complements LCA, it is distinctly different in that it characterises the same area in a different way, with a focus on cultural past of the landscape using the above principles. Where completed, the HLC of different counties can be found on the respective county websites, often as part of the County Development Plan.

### Landscape sensitivity

LCA can also be used to inform the assessment of a landscape's sensitivity to a particular type of change. These landscape sensitivity studies are carried out for developments that, by virtue of their characteristics or scale, could have an impact on the landscape: for example, residential development, wind farms, solar energy and forestry expansion. It can be appropriate to undertake this kind of study for particularly sensitive landscapes, for example National Parks. Landscape Sensitivity Studies – either forming part of an LCA or standalone – can provide particularly valuable input to the SEA process. Where an LCA is being produced or updated to support the SEA process, it is recommended that a sensitivity assessment is included within it.

### Updating the evidence base

There is no prescribed timeframe for when an LCA is considered to be out of date and requires updating. However, depending on the date that an assessment was undertaken, it may be necessary to describe more recent changes such as urban development, new transport infrastructure, woodland expansion or the development of renewable energy. This may involve preparing a complete update to the existing LCA.

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52 The Heritage Council (2013), [Historic Landscape Characterisation in Ireland: Best Practice Guidance](#).

**Appendix 3** sets out which counties in Ireland have produced an LCA (at the time of preparing this guidance).

### **Seascape Character Assessment**

Where a plan or programme is likely to interact with the sea or coastal areas, it is beneficial to use the Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland<sup>53</sup> to help inform the baseline description. The Marine Institute also hold a wealth of other marine data which may be useful in informing the baseline during the SEA process. Data requests to the Marine Institute can be submitted via this website: <https://www.marine.ie/marine-institute-request-digital-data>.

#### **Seascape Character Assessments in Ireland, Scotland and Wales**

##### **Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland**

The Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland<sup>54</sup> was undertaken to identify, classify and describe seascape character at a regional scale. 13 seascape character types (SCTs) were identified across 17 seascape character areas. An overview of the principal drivers and key characteristics is provided for each SCT, with examples of where that SCT can be found. For each seascape character area, commentary is provided in relation to the following themes: summary description, key characteristics, natural influences, cultural and social influences, contemporary art and folklore, views and vistas, lighting, sense of place, and sounds and smells. The Seascape Character Assessment can be viewed in Storymap format at this website: <https://storymaps-marineinstitute.hub.arcgis.com/>

##### **Coastal character assessment in Scotland**

Similarly, NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage) has produced a coastal character assessment for Scotland.<sup>55</sup> This identifies 13 coastal character types. The Guidance Note sets out the method used, which included an initial desk study followed by fieldwork and classification and description. However, detailed coastal character assessments are provided on a regional basis: for example, the Shetland Coastal Character Assessment.<sup>56</sup> In this example, each coastal character area has a summary description and key characteristics are identified. The supporting text also explores the historic context of the area, character types and features of the area, sensitivities and forces for change.

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53 The Marine Institute (2020), [Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland 2020](#).

54 The Marine Institute (2020), [Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland 2020](#).

55 NatureScot (2023), [Coastal Character Assessment](#).

56 University of the Highlands and Islands Shetland (2021), [Shetland Coastal Character Assessment](#).

### National Seascape Assessment for Wales

The National Seascape Assessment<sup>57</sup> provides a strategic evidence base for seascapes to inform the Welsh National Marine Plan. The result was the identification of 29 National Marine Character Areas. The assessment comprises two complementary and linked elements: a Marine Character Assessment (MCA) and visual resource mapping (VRM). The National Seascape Assessment describes VRM as recognising the importance of understanding how seascapes can be seen, in line with the UK Marine Policy Statement, which describes seascapes as ‘landscapes with views of the coast or seas, and coasts and the adjacent marine environment with cultural, historical and archaeological links with each other’.

### Where no landscape character information is available

Where no LCA has been undertaken, or where an LCA is at an inappropriate scale or is out of date, it will be necessary to consider alternative approaches.

In the absence of an LCA, a brief systematic analysis of the study area should be undertaken with the aim of identifying key landscape characteristics, features and qualities, together with information about the way the landscape is experienced and enjoyed. This could describe, for example, key variations in geology, topography and land cover to identify broad variations in the landscape (e.g. moorland hills, pastoral valleys, rocky coast, peaty lowland basin). Habitat mapping by local authorities will also help inform the landscape baseline. This will be produced at very detailed ‘land parcel scale’ resolution. In addition, review of the National Inventory of Architecture of Ireland Garden Survey<sup>58</sup> could be used to inform the baseline. The National Land Cover Map for Ireland<sup>59</sup> also maps out different land surface types at a high resolution.

The baseline analysis should also draw on information about landscape and other natural or cultural heritage designations, the range of opportunities for people to experience and enjoy the landscape and the role of particular areas in providing the setting for settlements, historic sites and transport corridors, where practical.

In the absence of any landscape baseline information or where LCA is not representative of current landscape, in rare circumstances, the potential to undertake a new LCA should be considered, recognising the value of such information across a wide range of policy and environmental management applications. In such cases, it is recommended that a landscape architect is involved in the drafting of a new LCA in accordance with best practice guidance on landscape character assessment.<sup>60</sup>

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57 Natural Resources Wales (2022), [Marine Character Areas](#).

58 The Survey of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes includes over 6,000 records of historic gardens and designed landscapes. These are principally demesnes but also included are garden cemeteries and urban parks. <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/>

59 EPA/Tailte Éireann (2023), [National Land Cover Map](#).

60 The Heritage Council (2006), [Landscape Character Assessment \(LCA\) in Ireland: Baseline Audit and Evaluation](#).

In an area that is known to have sensitive or highly valued landscapes (e.g. C18th and C19th planned landscapes, National Parks, popular tourism or recreation areas, historic or wilder and more natural landscapes), the existence of other strategy or policy documents that explore the special character of the landscape may also be used to inform the assessment.

### **The likely evolution of the landscape in the absence of the P/P**

It is important to consider how the landscape will continue to change in the absence of the P/P: this provides the true 'business as usual' baseline against which the impact of the policy should be judged. Some information on this may be included within published LCAs, but it can also be helpful to review recent land use trends (e.g. development, woodland planting, agricultural change, peatland restoration) and proposals contained in other plans, policies and programmes.

#### **Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan**

This case study<sup>61</sup> provides an example of an SEA that has a strong cultural heritage focus, including how cultural heritage influences and contributes to landscape character.

Inis Cealtra is included on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List. The site comprises a 20-hectare island located in Scariff Bay between County Clare and County Galway. The island has a rich history and is associated with a number of early saints, the site having been founded in the 6th or 7th century.

The Plan sought to provide a series of recommendations and objectives relating to the sustainable management and protection of the island, the provision of tourism facilities, access, marketing and promotion, etc.

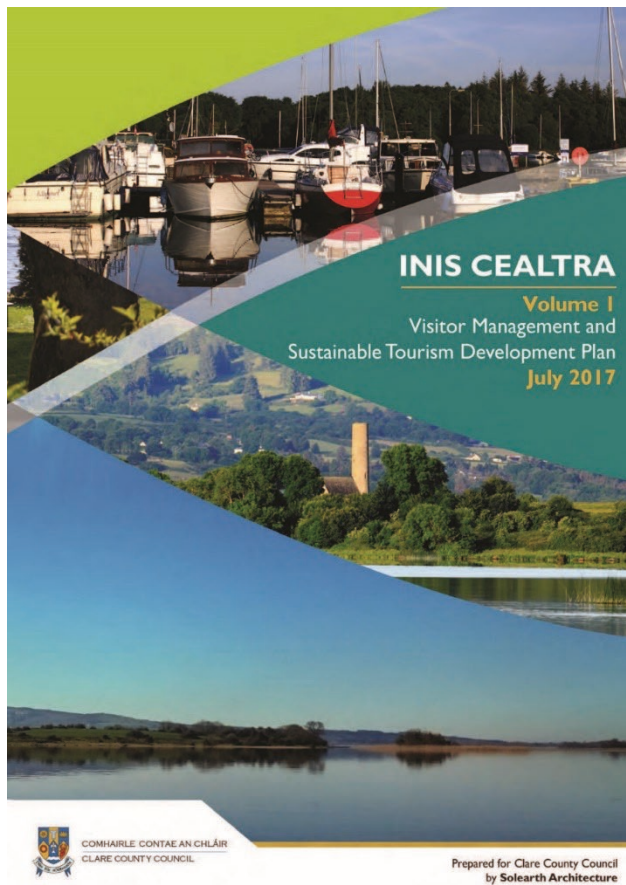
The cultural importance of the island is reflected in the environmental objectives for landscape, which aim to ensure '*no significant disruption of historic/cultural landscapes and features through the implementation of the Inis Cealtra Plan*'.

In terms of landscape, the baseline provided detail on the landscape character including the historical and human influence, key landmarks, and landscape condition and sensitivity. It also noted key views to and from recreational routes, and considered the landscape value of tourism.

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61 Solearth Architecture (n.d.), [Inis Cealtra, Volume 2 Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\) Environmental Report](#).

**Figure 6:** Inis Cealtra Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan Front Cover



Source: Clare County Council (2017)

## Describe the SEA methodology at the scoping stage of the process

The scoping report should include sufficient detail on the methodology that will be used to assess the likely effects of the P/P on the landscape. This should include the setting of Environmental Protection Objectives and the way these will be used to determine the nature and significance of positive and adverse effects on the landscape.

It is imperative that the SEA methodology is tailored to a level suitable to reflect significant effects of the specific plan or programme. For example, P/Ps that are not spatially specific will likely require a methodology that allows for a higher-level assessment compared to P/Ps that relate to a specific locality or area. The latter may require a methodology that facilitates a more detailed assessment against landscape matters. A far more specific approach may be most appropriate for P/Ps that require the consideration of a handful of individual sites, whereas P/Ps with a large number of sites (e.g. site allocations in a County Development Plan) needing consideration should be higher-level and/or more automated, making use of software such as GIS.

## Environmental Protection Objectives

SEA uses Environmental Protection Objectives (EPOs) to assess and test policies and related objectives. Landscape conservation objectives set out in international, national, regional and local policy should inform the development of landscape-related EPOs.

The following objectives provide a starting point for the development of landscape-related EPOs tailored to the plan and assessment in question. More detailed plans may require more specific criteria to test the plan or programme effectively. Where landscape is identified as a particularly sensitive receptor, the objectives should reflect this.

SEA topic	Primary EPO	Secondary EPO
Landscape	Protect landscape character and the quality of Ireland's landscapes and seascapes	<p>Conserve and enhance the character of the landscape and/or seascape</p> <p>Protect designated landscapes and/or seascapes</p> <p>Restore damaged or degraded landscapes and/or seascapes</p> <p>Protect people's experience and enjoyment of landscapes and/or seascapes</p>

Depending on the context, it may be appropriate to tailor objectives to reflect the importance of publicly accessible open space, greenways or other access routes etc., which are often strongly linked to landscape. Examples of SEA landscape objectives are provided in the case study examples below, and further detail is provided in "[Undertaking the SEA](#)"

### SEA landscape objectives

The examples below illustrate some of the landscape SEA objectives that have been used from a review of a sample of Irish SEAs, which identified common and more tailored examples.

This review identified the use of the following Strategic Environmental Assessment Objective at a number of assessment scales:

*'To implement the identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes having regard to the European Landscape Convention'*

A more detailed example of an SEA objective is in the Galway Transport Strategy SEA,<sup>62</sup> which includes:

- *Conserve and enhance the built heritage and landscape features of the city and its environs;*
- *Avoid adverse effects on the integrity of designated sites and landscape character due to land take for new or improved transport infrastructure;*
- *Promote the potential beneficial effects on landscape and amenity arising from reductions in the presence of heavy traffic flows;*

62 Galway Transport Strategy (2016), [Strategic Environmental Assessment: SEA Statement & SEA Environmental Report](#).



- Promote potential beneficial effects through landscape enhancement interventions along new and existing transport corridors (these measures can be combined with ecological enhancement measures); and
- Avoid potential negative effects on landscape due to changes in land use policy arising from initiatives.

An SEA objective tailored to the specific baseline of landscape constraints mapping in the Grid25 Implementation Programme (IP) 2011-2016 SEA<sup>63</sup> includes:

*‘to avoid significant adverse impacts on the landscape, especially with regard to those arising from impacts on the factors which comprise the Landscape Constraints Rating Map’.*

The success of the IP in relation to this SEA objective is measured using the following indicator for landscape character and designations, and residential receptors separately: *‘Number of significant impacts post establishment of mitigation from development provided for by the Grid IP’.* The target is to have no avoidable impacts on the landscape. The SEA monitoring report<sup>64</sup> notes that four new overhead line projects were identified in the IP, and while all would result in significant residual visual impacts, only one would have significant effects on designated landscape features.

### Assessment methodology

The assessment methodology is also likely to vary according to the nature and scale of the P/P and the landscape that could be affected. The methodology should allow the assessment of each part of the P/P against the EPOs. It can be helpful to define a series of categories that can be used to describe the nature and scale of effects, as illustrated in Table 3 below.

**Table 3:** Key to symbols and colour coding

++	The P/P is likely to have a <b>significant positive</b> effect on the landscape EPO(s).
++/-	The P/P is likely to have a mixed effect ( <b>significant positive and minor negative</b> ) on the landscape EPO(s).
+	The P/P is likely to have a <b>minor positive</b> effect on the landscape EPO(s).
0	The P/P is likely to have a <b>negligible</b> or no effect on the landscape EPO(s).
-	The P/P is likely to have a <b>minor negative</b> effect on the landscape EPO(s).
--/+	The P/P is likely to have a mixed effect ( <b>significant negative and minor positive</b> ) on the landscape EPO(s).
--	The P/P is likely to have a <b>significant negative</b> effect on the landscape EPO(s).
?	It is <b>uncertain</b> what effect the P/P will have on the landscape EPO(s), due to a lack of data.
+/-	The P/P is likely to have a <b>mixture of positive and negative</b> effects on the landscape EPO(s).

63 EirGrid (2011), [Environmental Report for the Grid25 Implementation Programme 2011-2016](#).

64 EirGrid (2022), [Grid Implementation Plan 2017-2022](#).

While the above approach to scoring is well used in SEA, it is worth noting that more narrative approaches can also be used in the assessment providing it follows a clear methodology and can clearly differentiate between the policy/proposal options that perform better and worse in the SEA. The methodology should describe how the assessment will consider the full range of effects on the landscape, over the short, medium and longer term. It should also describe the approach to cumulative and synergistic effects. Cumulative effects are effects that result from incremental changes caused by other past, present or reasonably foreseeable actions together with the P/P. Synergistic effects arise when effects interact to produce a total effect greater than the sum of the individual effects. These types of effects are described in more detail below.

Ways of assessing the effects of P/P on the landscape, and people's experience and enjoyment of it, may include:

- Analysis of the number of landscape character areas that could be affected – is the effect localised or widespread?
- The likely effects on landscape character types'/areas' key characteristics
- The likely effects on existing landscape issues – will the P/P make existing problems better or worse?
- The relationship between the P/P and any objectives or guidelines that have been set for the landscape – will the P/P support such objectives or make them more difficult to achieve?
- The likely effects on designated landscapes areas, taking account of the reasons for designation. Will the P/P support the conservation of designated landscapes or could it conflict with their purpose or their landscape character and quality?
- The likely effects on people's experience of the landscape, including views from publicly accessible open space, from walking and cycling trails and from transport corridors or where a landscape provides the setting for settlement. What will the effects be on areas that are visited because of their landscape or seascape character?

Further information on the assessment methodology is provided in "[Assessing the effects of the plan on the landscape resource](#)".

### **Consultation with environmental authorities**

As part of the scoping process, it is required to consult with the Environmental Authorities see Section on "[SEA process in Ireland](#)" for more information on the process involved. This consultation is to help ensure that the scope and level of detail to be provided in the Environmental Report is sufficient and appropriate to the proposed P/P.

The consultation process provides benefits for both parties: the Environmental Authority in terms of outlining the background and scope of the assessment, but also the P/P maker and SEA practitioners in terms of highlighting additional sources of baseline information and/or plans or policies that are of relevance to the P/P. SEA is an iterative process and the discussions arising from consultation can help shape the scope and assessment of the SEA.

The relevant Environmental Authority will use the SEA Scoping report to understand:

- The justification for scoping landscape in or out of the SEA;
- The landscape baseline for the P/P, how the P/P may influence the landscape, and the changes to the landscape in the absence of the P/P;
- Which other plans and policies may be relevant to the proposed P/P;
- How landscape effects will be assessed in the SEA, including the relevant Environmental Protection Objective(s) and criteria to inform these. Example criteria for policy assessments and site assessments are provided in the section on "[Assessing the effects of the plan on the landscape resource](#)";
- The level of detail that will be provided in the SEA and how this is appropriate to the scale of the P/P; and
- The likely significant effects (positive and negative) on the landscape.

## Undertaking the SEA

### Key points

- Landscape character assessment can help to identify a landscape's sensitivity to a particular type of change or development.
- Landscape classification tools can make assessments of landscape baseline and landscape designations easier.
- Where landscape is an important component of the SEA, it may be appropriate to develop a specific approach to gather and consider a landscape baseline to help inform the SEA process.

## Describing the environmental baseline

### How can I use landscape character assessments?

Landscape character assessment (LCA) was developed to provide a descriptive framework that could be used to inform policy and land management.

LCAs identify and describe variations in character across a landscape, identifying the unique features and characteristics that make a landscape distinctive from the rest. LCAs define landscape character areas and the key characteristics or special qualities of those areas, and can identify forces for change and management guidelines that may be of relevance to the plan or programme.

LCAs can be produced at any scale – from an individual development site (e.g. as part of environmental impact assessment) to an entire country (e.g. the National Character Areas defined across the whole of England). By defining character in a structured and spatially specific way, LCA can provide the baseline against which the effects of a development proposal (EIA) or plan (SEA) can be assessed. The approach has also been applied to marine areas (e.g. seascape assessment in Ireland) and the coastal interface (e.g. coastal character assessment in Scotland).

### Landscape character assessments

#### Natural England's National Character Area Profiles

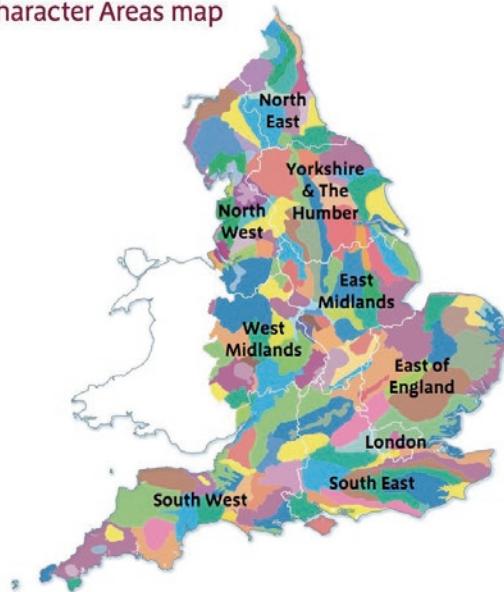
Natural England have defined 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs)<sup>65</sup> across the country (see map below). Each of the NCAs has a detailed profile to accompany it which includes an introduction and summary of the NCA and a detailed description, and identifies opportunities for the area. Each profile characterises the landscape character based on the following attributes: experiential and cultural values, cultural heritage, land use, biodiversity, and geology, soils and water. In addition, each NCA profile is supported by documents including detailed key facts and data, landscape change and analysis.

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65 Natural England (2014), [National Character Area Profiles](#).

**Figure 7:** Natural England's Natural Character Areas map

**National Character Areas map**



Source: Natural England

**Approaches to considering seascape**

**Environmental Assessment of Plan for Thor Offshore Wind Farm report, Denmark<sup>66</sup>**

The Thor Offshore Wind Farm will consist of offshore development (offshore wind turbines, transformer platform and cables to landfall) and onshore development. The study area for the offshore wind farm is 440 km<sup>2</sup>, located at least 20 km from the coast.

The following were considered when addressing seascape through the SEA:

- Visual impacts
- does it affect the perception of the coastal landscape?
- Would the offshore wind turbines be visible from various routes and views?
- Is the coastline vulnerable to visual changes?
- Considering how will the wind farm be visible in clear weather? Are there lots of days of clear weather?
- Are there any landmarks vulnerable to visual impacts?
- Consider the local terrain and how it will affect visual impacts.
- Are there any cumulative visual impacts?
- Will there be any temporary visual or landscape effects?
- Consider the impact on designated landscapes

66 Energistyrelsen (2021), [Environmental Assessment of Plan for Thor Offshore Wind Farm](#).

### Offshore Energy SEA 4: Environmental Report<sup>67</sup>

OESEA4 covers a very large marine area comprising all UK waters with water depths ranging from the intertidal to more than 2,400 m. The document sets out three principal considerations for an assessment of the likely impacts of offshore energy activity on the seascape/landscape of UK waters and coastlines:

- the limit of visual perception from the coast (i.e. are the devices or installations visible and what influences their visibility?)
- the individual characteristics of the coast that affect its capacity to contain a given development
- how people perceive and interact with the seascape, and what changes in character may be introduced by certain developments, including in a nonvisual way.

Assuming that a development is visible from the coast, a number of factors can be considered to determine the overall significance of the effect, including the sensitivity of the receptor or seascape and the magnitude of change. Aspects of landscape/seascape 'value' are of relevance that can be informed by the location of designated areas (landscapes such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), National Scenic Areas, National Parks or other conservation features such as World Heritage Sites, scheduled monuments or landscapes of historic interest), but a wider range of sites may help to identify valued landscapes, including recreation value and conservation interests. Value is locally variable, with stakeholders having differing views on what may be valued.

The degree to which a given landscape/seascape may accommodate an offshore development is largely determined by sensitivity. Key considerations include how the form and scale of the development interacts with coastal morphology and the level of development experienced from coastal positions within viewable distance of the development. These characteristics are highly variable at the regional and local scale and are difficult to account for in a comprehensive manner at a strategic level, particularly without any spatially explicit consideration of where future leasing will take place.

### Seascape and visual sensitivity to offshore wind farms in Wales: Strategic assessment and guidance

Strategic assessment and guidance was prepared for seascape and visual sensitivity to offshore wind farms in Wales's draft Marine Plan areas. The overall study focuses primarily on potential recommended buffers for National Parks and AONBs. However, other sensitive receptors are considered in this part of the study as they contribute to seascape character and perception. These include Heritage Coasts, World Heritage Sites and point features such as scheduled monuments.

The seascape is divided into 15 zones on the basis of:

- The extent of visual buffers relating to designated landscape areas – these inform the distances of the zones away from the coast
- The presence or otherwise of existing wind farms, which affects seascape character
- The geometry of the Welsh coastline, taking account of major headlands, major bays and the character of the coast.

The sensitivity of a zone to offshore wind farms is based on a series of criteria. The criteria group factors in value, seascape susceptibility and visual susceptibility. A summary of the sensitivity of each zone is provided in relation to offshore wind farm development, and includes recommendations to minimise their visual effects.

67 Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2022), [UK Offshore Energy Strategic Environmental Assessment](#).

LCA can help to identify a landscape's sensitivity to a particular type of change (e.g. residential development, wind farms, solar energy, forestry expansion and felling). This can also be set out in standalone landscape sensitivity or capacity studies. Where available, such studies should be used to help understand the potential effects of proposals set out in a P/P on the landscape resource. Development in areas of high landscape sensitivity or low landscape capacity (in relation to a specific type of development) will be more likely to result in adverse effects on the landscape.

### **Landscape sensitivity and capacity**

The Landscape Sensitivity Study for Selby<sup>68</sup> focused on sensitivity to residential development, commercial development and wind energy development. This study sets out the assessment criteria for determining landscape sensitivity, including on physical character, natural character, historic landscape character, views, access and recreation, perceptual and experiential qualities and existing settlement. For each landscape assessment parcel identified in the study, commentary is provided against each of the assessment criteria, and an overall score of sensitivity is provided in relation to each type of development.

LCAs are a vital resource for helping to understand the environmental baseline of a P/P study area. They may highlight forces for change and management practices for each landscape character type (LCT), which may help inform the likely effects arising from the P/P and evolution of the baseline in the absence of the P/P. Likewise, landscape capacity and sensitivity studies identify and map areas of high, medium and low capacity or sensitivity and provide a justification for this. Understanding the sensitivity and capacity of a specific area in relation to new development or proposals will help us to better understand the potential effects on landscape.

It should be noted that LCAs and capacity and sensitivity studies may be out of date, and the baseline description or justification for sensitivity or capacity may not be an accurate representation of the landscape currently. Desk-based reviews of the current landscape character (e.g. using aerial photography and street view) are useful in helping to determine whether landscape character, as described in an older LCA, is still accurate or needs updating to reflect changes in land use, vegetation and/or types of development. Supplementary site surveys can also be useful in confirming landscape character baseline, alongside the use of the national land cover map. Information on this is available at <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/mapping/national-land-cover-map/>

Although most Irish counties have completed LCAs for their local authority area, there remain gaps and variations in the approach to the LCAs. The current LCAs are available directly through the respective Local Authority websites within the planning policy/guidance section or often as an appendix to the County Development Plan. Links to county-level LCAs are provided in **Appendix 3**.

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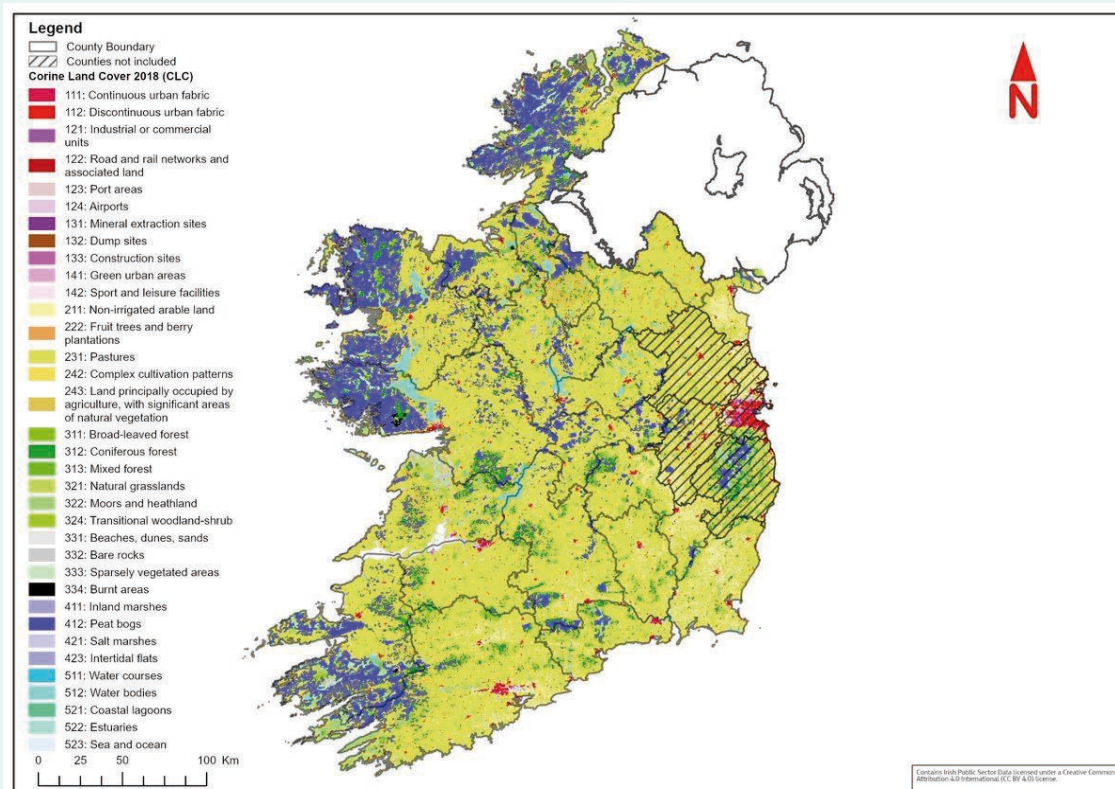
68 LUC (2019), Selby District [Landscape Sensitivity Study](#).

### Comparing and collating national landscape data

The National Transport Authority CycleConnects SEA Scoping Report<sup>69</sup> lists the landscape character area (LCA) data sources for the 22 counties within CycleConnects. The list identifies whether values and sensitivity are included in the LCA, and the more limited examples of where there is also a description of quality and condition (e.g. Leitrim County Landscape Character Assessment<sup>70</sup>).

This report illustrates the approach of clearly setting out the available landscape baseline at the Scoping stage, but also highlights the potential inconsistencies in baseline data availability, and the need to develop an approach to overcome the challenges of a variable baseline for national-level SEA.

**Figure 8:** Corine land cover map



Source: National Transport Authority (2022), CycleConnects Scoping Report

69 Jacobs (2022), SEA Scoping Report Cycle Connects: Ireland's Cycle Network. National Transport Authority.

70 RPS (2020), [County Leitrim Landscape Character Assessment](#).



### **Developing a bespoke landscape baseline**

Where landscape is an important component of the SEA, it may be appropriate to develop a specific landscape baseline.

The Wild Atlantic Way SEA<sup>71</sup> prepared a regional spatial assessment of landscape as part of the SEA. This regional assessment was undertaken at a high level and identified five landscape zones, and the relative sensitivity to change within these zones, to inform the assessment.

### **Using landscape character assessment to help inform and assess options**

The A96 Dualling, Scotland SEA<sup>72,73</sup> made use of existing LCA to explore potential route options. As part of the SEA process, a specific landscape review of each relevant landscape character type was undertaken to better understand landscape character and sensitivity. For each potential option, commentary on landscape character and sensitivity were provided, and the potential for significant effects on landscape and visual receptors identified. This review was supplemented by mapped data (GIS) and site visits.

The detailed landscape review was provided in an appendix to the Environmental Report.<sup>74</sup> This sets out, in a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) rating format, the criteria for landscape sensitivity and risk of effect. In terms of landscape character and sensitivity, the review provided commentary in relation to landscape character overview and landscape character types, designations, settlements, infrastructure, terrain and natural environment features (e.g. rivers and woodland). RAG ratings for landscape sensitivity and risk of effect were provided. An example of the mapped GIS figures, RAG rating and commentary provided in relation to landscape character is provided below.

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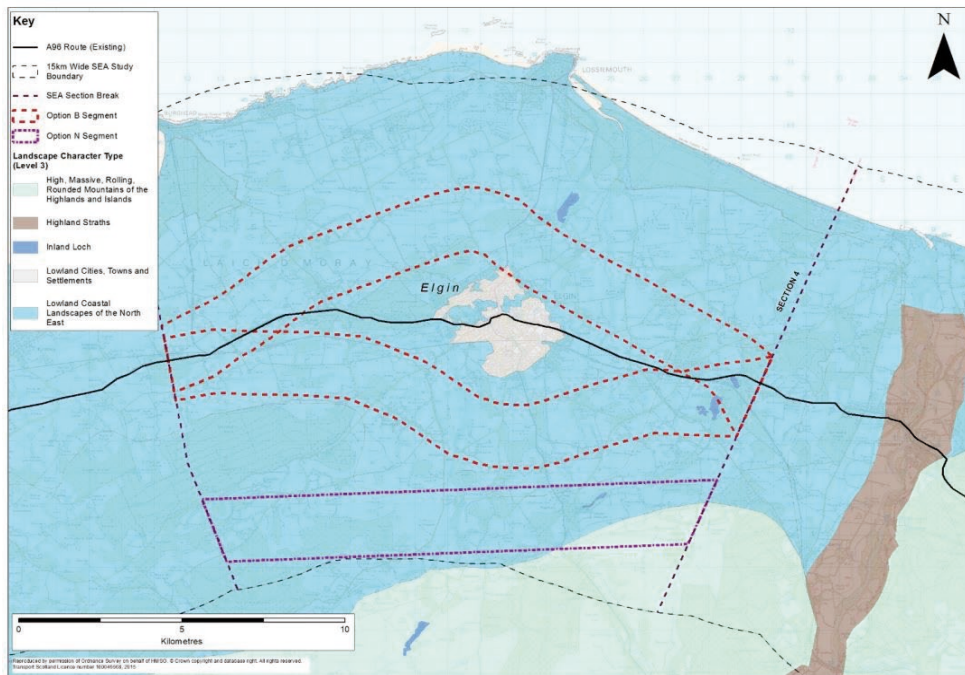
71 Fáilte Ireland (2015), [Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme](#).

72 Transport Scotland (2014), [A96 Dualling Programme](#).

73 Transport Scotland (2015), [A96 Dualling Programme](#).

74 Transport Scotland (2015), [Appendix G – A96 Dualling Landscape Review](#).

Figure 9: GIS/RAG sensitivity



**FORRES OPTION B NORTH**

**SECTION 3: Hardmuir Wood to Alves**

Forres Option B North- approximately 2550Ha.

Landscape Character Types (Level 3)	Landscape Designations	Woodland Character
-Highland Straths -Lowland Coastal Landscapes of the North East	None	The landscape within this segment is very open and flat. There are small patches of woodland scattered throughout the segment, however Alves Wood, a large area of coniferous woodland, spans more than half the breadth of the segment in the east.

Commentary on Landscape Character and Sensitivity:

**Landscape Character Overview**

The landscape character consists mainly of flat lowland agricultural land. There are a small patches of woodland throughout the segment and Alves Wood spans more than half the breadth of the segment in the east.

To the east of Forres, the River Findhorn winds its way through the segment from the south to the north, heading towards Findhorn Bay.

**Landscape Character Types**

There are two Landscape Character Areas within the segment; mainly the *Lowland coast landscapes of the north-east* character type, and a small area of the *Highland Straths* at the south-west corner of the segment. The gentle landscape of the coastal lowlands provides long open views with shelter being defined by narrow belts of woodland. Farmland with evenly sized fields are prevalent within this area.

**Other Designations**

The segment contains part of the Long Distance Path, The Moray Coastal Trail. The coastline and settlements of Moray are linked by a waymarked coastal trail of approximately 50 miles from Findhorn to Cullen. The path is extended from Findhorn to Forres along a section of cycle route which crosses the segment and access, as well as visual amenity, may be a constraint to dualling.

**Settlements**

The northern suburbs of Forres, the Village of Broom of Moy, and the southern part of Kinloss, including Kinloss Abbey, are located within the segment. These small communities contribute positively to the character of the area, and may be sensitive receptors to dualling.

**Railway**

The railway line runs directly through the segment, and any new crossing point may have a visual impact on the flat lowland landscape. Any new structures would need to be carefully designed to be in-keeping with the local landscape character.

**Rivers**

The River Findhorn crosses the segment and any new raised structure within this mainly flat landscape, could have a visual impact. The River Findhorn in this location is not designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV).

Indicative Landscape Sensitivity - Low/Medium

• **Landscapes which by nature of their character would be able to partly accommodate change; comprised of commonplace elements and features creating generally unremarkable character but with some sense of place.**

There are no national landscape designations within the segment.

The landscape character consists mainly of flat lowland agricultural land. There are a few small patches of woodland throughout the segment and Alves wood is located in the eastern part of the segment.

The northern suburbs of Forres, the Village of Broom of Moy, and the southern part of Kinloss, including Kinloss Abbey, are located within the segment and are sensitive receptors.

The landscape in this area is quite flat and it would be sensitive to any new elevated structures required to cross the railway and the River Findhorn.

The landscape can absorb the inclusion of a dualled route without significant impact to its quality and character.

Risk of Effect - Moderate

• **Loss of, or alteration to key features of the baseline resource such that post development characteristics or quality would be partially changed**

The character is of open fields with some wooded areas, which could generally be maintained, and absorb a dualled route with a potential moderate effect.

It is predicted that small population centres could be avoided through route alignment, however a dualled route could have an adverse visual effect on properties.

Crossing the railway and river is unavoidable and new infrastructure would be required and this could have a permanent adverse visual effect on the landscape. Screening may be appropriate to provide longer term mitigation, however any new structures would need to be carefully designed to be in-keeping with the local landscape character.

Source: Transport Scotland (2015) A96 Dualling Programme SEA Tier 2 Environmental Report – Appendix G

### **What landscape designations should be considered?**

When taking landscape designations into account, the following should be recognised:

- UNESCO World Heritage Sites<sup>75</sup>
- UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (Dublin Bay Biosphere Reserve and Kerry Biosphere Reserve)
- UNESCO Geoparks (the Cuilcagh Lakelands Global Geopark, the Copper Coast Global Geopark, and the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Global Geopark)
- Special Amenity Areas (as designated through Special Amenity Area Orders)
- National Parks and Nature Reserves
- Natura 2000 Sites
- Natural Heritage Areas
- Local landscape designations (e.g. small areas valued by communities for their character or visual aspect).

### **How should landscape designations be considered?**

Although all landscapes have some form of value attached to them, landscapes that have been formally designated at either a local, regional or a national scale generally have higher value than non-designated landscapes. Natural and cultural heritage designations may reflect specific qualities that contribute to an area's overall landscape character and sensitivity.

Reports and guidance documents for nationally or locally designated landscapes, such as National Parks and some World Heritage Sites, may hold additional information that can be useful to describe the landscape baseline. This may include the special qualities, characteristics and features for which the landscape has been designated as well as key forces for change. Where available, these documents should be referred to when describing the environmental baseline.

### **Other landscape resources**

In addition to considering designated landscapes, the landscape baseline should include information on how people experience the landscape. For example, this could include descriptions of important outdoor recreational resources (such as long-distance trails and parks), areas that are particularly valued or recognised for their historic or wild qualities, promoted scenic viewpoints, areas that contribute to the setting or identity of settlements, important greenspaces, green corridors or wedges. If data is available on the popularity and use of these resources (e.g. visitor numbers at parks, number of people travelling along trails.) this could help identify the number of receptors enjoying the landscape and who could be affected by proposals within the P/P. It could also be an indication of how the landscape is being altered by human activity. For example, Fáilte Ireland undertakes macro monitoring and visitor observation<sup>76</sup> in relation to the Wild Atlantic Way. This helps understand the impacts that coastal tourism is having on the coastal landscape and natural environment, as well as specific monitoring of the condition of key visitor sites along the route. Likewise, the Atlantic Technological University is using

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75 World Heritage Ireland (2023), [Ireland's Tentative World Heritage](#).

76 Fáilte Ireland (2023), [Environmental Surveying and Monitoring Programme](#).

monitoring indicators<sup>77</sup> agreed at EU level to monitor sustainable tourism, including environmental impact, in the Aran Islands off the coast of Galway.

Other landscape resources can be linked to literary pieces that detail the landscape character, e.g. poetry, novels, music and film. The best known include William Butler Yeats's poems, which were a product of the surrounding Irish landscape, and James Joyce's literary recreation of Dublin's urban landscape.

### **What data sources are there for landscape?**

Where LCA has not yet been completed, or it is out of date or at a scale that does not match the P/P being assessed, it is likely to be necessary to draw on other data sources to build a picture of the landscape baseline. Some key sources relevant to landscape are outlined below.

### **Environmental sensitivity mapping**

The [Environmental Sensitivity Mapping \(ESM\) tool](#) is a webtool developed to support SEA and planning processes in Ireland, by allowing environmental sensitivity maps to be created in relation to specific areas.

The ESM Webtool contains datasets across all of the environmental topics that should be included in SEA (unless scoped out), including landscape.

The ESM Webtool provides data on administrative boundaries from townlands to local authority and regional assembly level.

For those not familiar with the ESM Webtool, different data sets can be shown by opening layers and selecting 'landscape' from the Layer List to the left of the selected map area. Datasets are stored under each of the main SEA topic headings. For example, under landscape, landscape character areas, seascape character areas, karst landforms and physiographic units (low and high detail) can be selected.

Other datasets of relevance to the landscape include:

- Soils and Peat Bogs
- Ancient Woodlands, Annex 1 Habitats, Coastal Habitats-Saltmarshes, Forest Inventory, Woodland Habitats
- World Heritage Sites
- Current Wind Farms, Active Quarries, Settlements
- Bedrock, CORINE Land Cover Type, Geoparks, Outcrops
- Wetlands
- River Water Bodies, River Status.

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77 Atlantic Technological University (2022), [Islands Use Smart Technology to Monitor Sustainable Tourism](#).

The ESM Webtool provides a high-level overview of the data, but no detailed description of the data is available through this tool. It therefore does not include detailed landscape character descriptions but does show a high-level sensitivity rating. Where available, direct links to the data are provided within the description. Any person seeking greater detail, for example in relation to landscape character areas, would need to revert to the original LCA for the local authority (where available) to see the description.

The ESM Webtool can be accessed here: <https://enviromap.ie/>

### **CORINE land cover**

The CORINE land cover (CLC) inventory is an inventory of land cover across 44 classes. The CLC uses a minimum mapping unit (MMU) of 25 hectares (ha) for areal phenomena and a minimum width of 100 m for linear phenomena<sup>78</sup>. Since 2000 it has been updated every 6 years and includes change layers to document how land cover is changing at a MMU scale of 5 ha between each update. The CLC is available for all of Ireland and can help to inform the landscape baseline by identifying the land cover found within the area.

The CORINE land cover data can be accessed via the Environmental Protection Agency online mapping tool available here: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/>

### **Land use evidence review**

In 2022, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) commenced a Land Use Evidence review. Phase I of the review assembled the evidence base to determine the environmental, ecological and economic characteristics of land types across Ireland. This helped to understand:

- The impact of current land use on the environment and society
- The indicators that can be used to measure land use impacts on the environment and society
- Environmental and societal trends that will impact on land use
- Ireland's land use stakeholders
- Commitments and targets in existing policy that impact on land use decisions
- Land use practices that have proved beneficial to the environment and society.

Phase I of the review was completed in March 2023 and the associated reports and resources are now published.<sup>79</sup> The framework to deliver Phase II of the review has been agreed by the relevant stakeholders, and work will be commencing on considering the policies, measures and actions that will need to be taken, in the context of the government's wider economic, social and climate objectives.

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78 Copernicus (2023), [CORINE Land Cover – Copernicus Land Monitoring Service](#).

79 Government of Ireland (2023), [Land Use Review – Phase 1](#).

## National land cover map

Until recently, Ireland was one of the few countries in Europe that did not have a dedicated programme for mapping the national land cover or habitats.<sup>80</sup> The data available was insufficient to allow for the effective monitoring, assessment and management of the environment.<sup>81</sup>

The EPA in association with Tailte Éireann has developed a national land cover map<sup>82</sup> for Land Use, Land Use Change & Forestry (LULUCF), to be used in reporting under the LULUCF Regulations (Regulation (EU) 841/2018) and the National Inventory Report that covers climate emission reporting.

The National Land Cover Map, released in March 2023, delivers a new high-resolution (0.1 ha) national baseline land cover and habitat mapping dataset and will aim to track the changes over time. The National Land Cover Map is based on the existing Level 2 of the Fossitt 2000 habitat classification system and was published with the first iteration of the National Land Cover dataset.<sup>83</sup> A list of the classifications is provided in **Figure 10**.

**Figure 10:** National Land Cover Map classifications

Code	Level 1	Code	Level 2
100	ARTIFICIAL SURFACES	110	Buildings
		120	Ways
		130	Other Artificial Surfaces
200	EXPOSED SURFACES	210	Exposed Rock and Sediments
		220	Coastal Sediments
		230	Mudflats
		240	Bare Soil and Disturbed Ground
		250	Burnt Areas
300	CULTIVATED LAND	310	Cultivated Land
400	FOREST, WOODLAND AND SCRUB	410	Coniferous Forest
		420	Mixed Forest
		430	Transitional Forest
		440	Broadleaved Forest and Woodland
		450	Scrub
		460	Hedgerows
		470	Treelines
500	GRASSLAND, SALTMARSH and SWAMP	510	Improved Grassland
		520	Amenity Grassland
		530	Dry Grassland
		540	Wet Grassland
		550	Saltmarsh
		560	Sand Dunes
		570	Swamp
600	PEATLAND	610	Raised Bog
		620	Blanket Bog
		630	Cutover Bog
		640	Bare Peat
		650	Fens

80 NPWS (n.d.), [NLCHM Newsletter May 2017.pdf](#).

81 NPWS (n.d.), [NLCHM Newsletter May 2017.pdf](#).

82 Environmental Protection Agency (2023), [National Land Cover Map](#).

83 Tailte Éireann (2023), [National Land Cover Map](#).

Code	Level 1	Code	Level 2
700	HEATH and BRACKEN	710	Bracken
		720	Dry Heath
		730	Wet Heath
800	WATERBODIES	810	Rivers and Streams
		820	Lakes and Ponds
		830	Artificial Waterbodies
		840	Transitional Waterbodies
		850	Marine Water

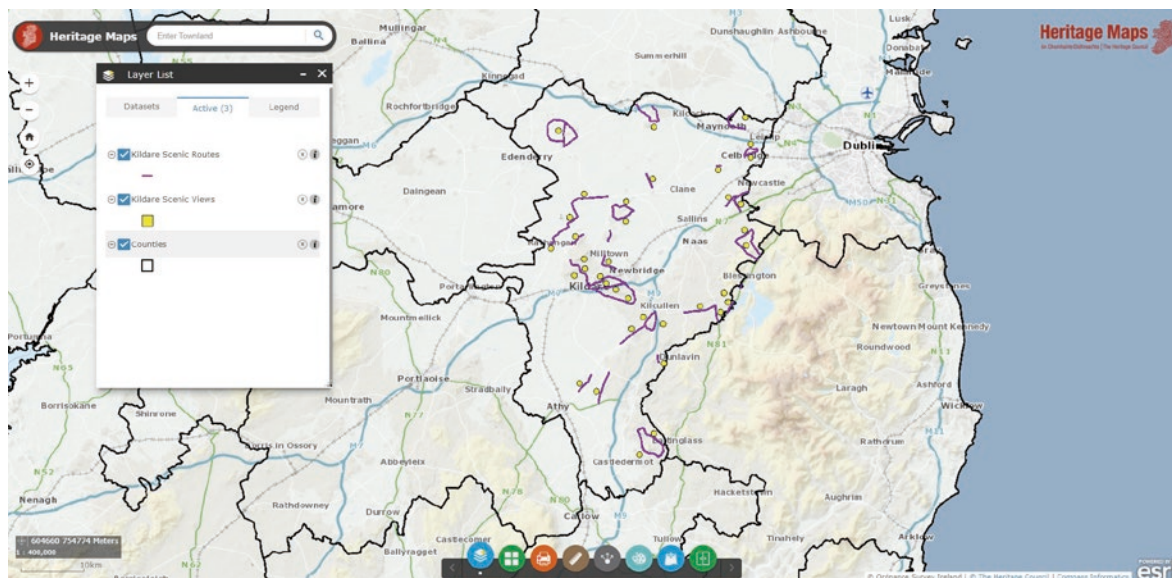
The land cover classification can be used to understand the character and complexity of a landscape area, and in combination with other data sources to infer sensitivity to change. The land cover classification and sensitivity can be used to inform the environmental baseline of the SEA by describing the vegetation types and patterns across the P/P area. The classification can also be helpful in identifying the likely effects of the proposals within the P/P on the landscape (e.g. through loss of forestry).

**County development plans and local area plans**

Some CDPs and LAPs identify protected or listed views, which are important for the area and its people. These views can be assessed by defining a zone of influence around a development, and should be treated as a constraint. Such views may also influence the potential appraisal of reasonable alternatives. However, a cautionary approach should be taken as CDPs and LAPs, and the protected views identified within them, can be out of date. Where this is the case, it is recommended that an updated LCA is prepared. The need to update an LCA depends on the rate and type of development or land use change within an area.

Scenic views and routes identified in counties can be viewed at: [heritagemaps.ie](http://heritagemaps.ie). **Figure 11** illustrates the scenic viewpoints and routes identified for County Kildare.

**Figure 11:** Scenic viewpoints and routes, County Kildare

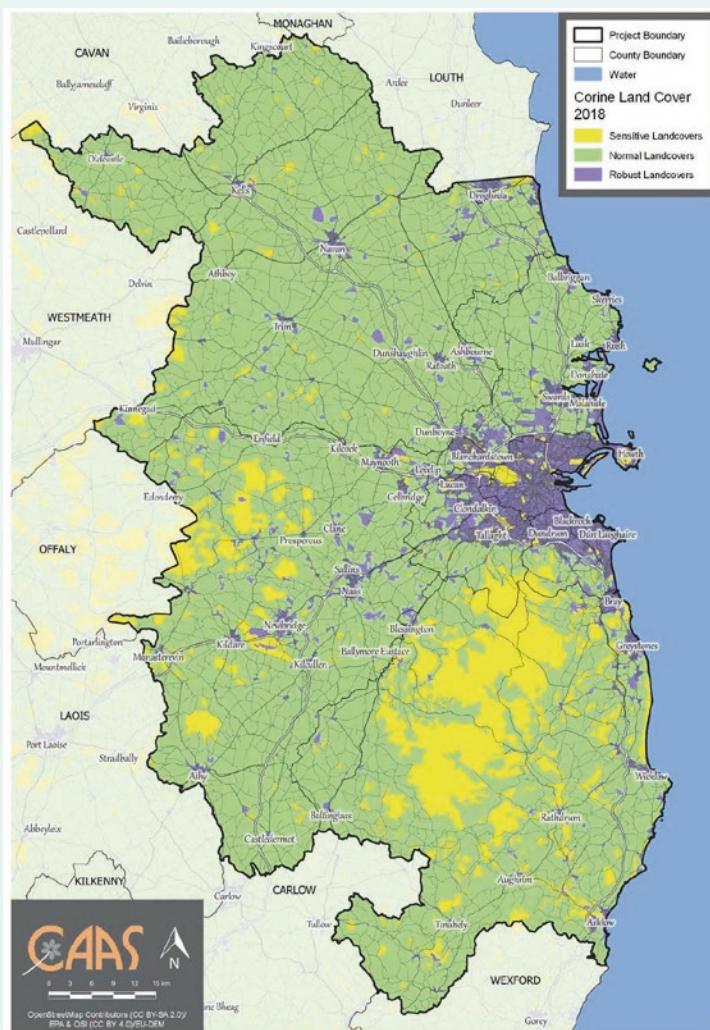


**Source:** Data from the Kildare Scenic Routes and Kildare Scenic Viewpoints Survey (2003) accessed through the Heritage Maps Viewer at [www.heritage-maps.ie](http://www.heritage-maps.ie), 29 June 2023

### Use of alternative data in a location without landscape character assessment

Where no landscape character assessment information is available for an area, other information sources can be used. The SEA Environmental Report for the Draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042<sup>84</sup> used the CORINE land-cover mapping to identify three categories of potential land-cover sensitivity, and related these areas to specific geographic locations. The three categories were robust land cover (reflecting areas of development and land disturbance), normal land cover (including commercial woodland and farmland) and sensitive land cover (including semi-natural habitats and urban greenspaces), as illustrated in **Figure 12**.

**Figure 12:** Corine Land Cover Map 2018, Greater Dublin



Source: SEA Environmental Report for the Draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042

84 National Transport Authority (2021), [Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report](#).



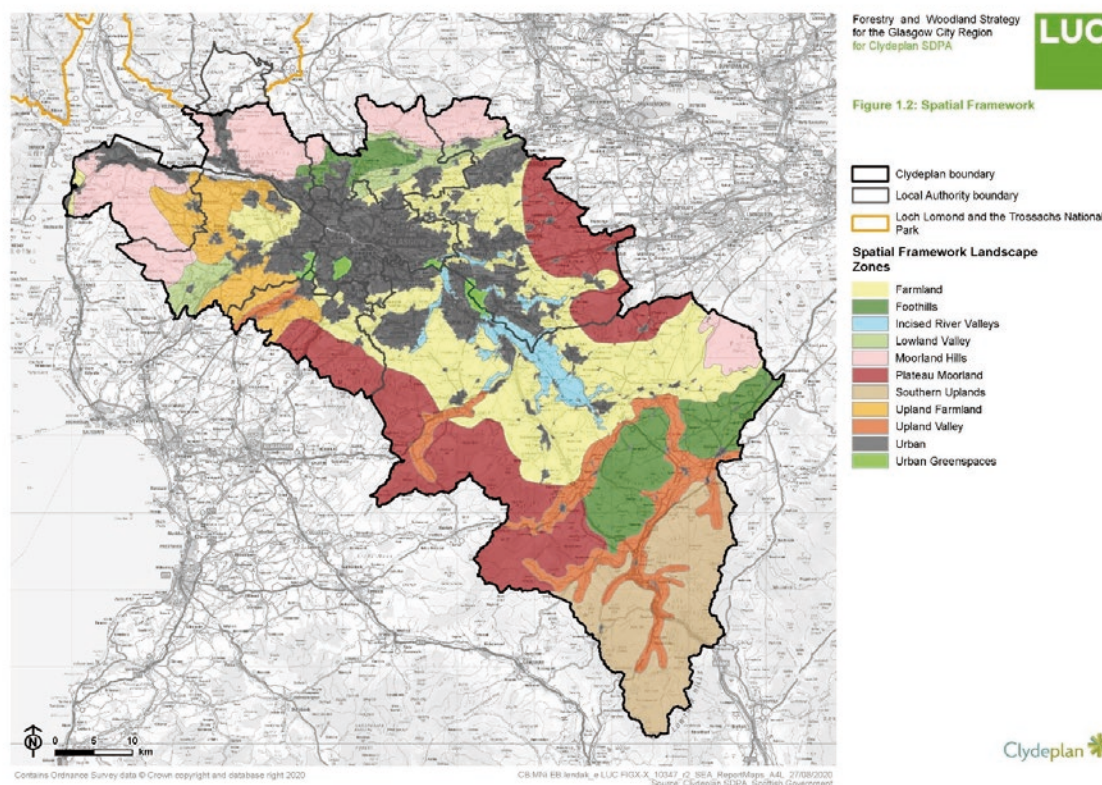
### Use of spatial data to inform assessments

The Clydeplan Forestry and Woodland Strategy<sup>85</sup> sets out a range of spatially specific policy recommendations for the location of new forestry and woodland planting.

The SEA<sup>86</sup> for this strategy followed an assessment methodology that has a stronger focus on the spatial component of the strategy, assessing the spatial framework based on 11 landscape types or 'zones' across the plan area (e.g. farmland, lowland valley, plateau moorland, upland valley, urban), as illustrated in **Figure 13**. These 'zones' were informed by regional landscape character types and the Wind Energy Capacity Study for the area.

The potential and preferred amount of land for forestry and woodland expansion are identified and used to help determine the effects expected in relation to each SEA objective for each of the 11 landscape types found within the plan area, along with the effects for the strategy aims and objectives. Reasonable alternatives focused on varying levels of woodland and forestry expansion (e.g. low-level expansion, moderate expansion, high-level expansion and notional capacity).

**Figure 13:** Spatial Framework Landscape Zones



**Source:** Clydeplan SDPA (2020) SEA Environmental Report – Forestry and Woodland Strategy for the Glasgow City Region. © Crown copyright and database right 2020. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100032510

85 LUC (2020), [Forestry and Woodland Strategy for the Glasgow City Region](#).

86 LUC (2020), [Forestry and Woodland Strategy for the Glasgow City Region](#).

## Future data sources

### **National landscape character assessment**

Once available, the National Landscape Character Assessment will be a key starting point for describing the landscape baseline and will be of relevance to the assessment of national policy documents. The National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025<sup>87</sup> commits to producing a National Landscape Character Assessment that will contain two main elements:

- A data framework on a national GIS platform to provide the structure for ongoing collection, monitoring and review of the landscape's physical (including soils and water catchment), scientific, ecological, biodiversity and cultural data
- A National Landscape Character Map will be prepared using the evidence base to describe and assess distinct landscape character areas at the national scale, ensuring consistency within and between public authority areas and functions.

### **Regional landscape character assessments**

In their respective Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, the three regional assemblies have committed to producing LCAs for their region, following the publication of the National LCA.

Once published, regional-level LCAs will be a useful tool for describing the landscape baseline of the SEA study area, with the LCA describing the landscape of the region in greater detail than the broader, national-level LCA. These assessments will be particularly relevant to the assessment of regional policy documents.

### **Local landscape character assessments**

Some counties have yet to produce LCAs for their local authority areas. However, where they are present, local-level LCAs are a valuable resource for producing a detailed, fine-grained landscape baseline at a local scale. County-level LCAs will be of particular importance for plans and strategies at more local scales such as county, town or neighbourhood level. There is no set time period for determining when an LCA should be updated or replaced. Desk-based reviews of the current landscape character (e.g. using aerial photography and street view and national land-cover map) and site surveys are useful in helping to determine if landscape character as described in an older LCA is still accurate or if it needs updating to reflect changes in land use, vegetation and/or types of development.

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87 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2020), [National Landscape Strategy](#).

## Assessing the effects of the plan on the landscape resource

### Policy assessment

In assessing the effects of policies within a P/P on the landscape, it is useful to develop a set of questions or criteria that can be used to test the effectiveness and alignment of a policy against other higher-tier landscape policies. This could include alignment with the European Landscape Convention and national planning policies within the National Planning Framework. Examples of some general prompt questions that could be applicable to both a nationally, non-spatially specific P/P and more local and spatially specific P/Ps are provided below.

- Does the P/P promote the protection, management and sustainable planning of landscapes (in line with the European Landscape Convention)?
- Does the P/P seek to conserve and protect the landscape in terms of quality and character?
- Does the P/P seek to incorporate green infrastructure and promote the enhancement of ecosystem services?
- Does the P/P seek to protect and enhance biodiversity?
- Does the P/P seek to promote the strengthening and improved connectivity of green space?
- Does the P/P seek to promote the sense of place, culture and distinctiveness of Ireland's landscapes?
- Are there ways in which the P/P could more closely reflect the objectives of higher tier landscape policies, for example by modifying policies to include reference to landscape objectives, or including additional policies?

In addition, the following questions could be used to inform the policy assessment for a local, spatially specific P/P. The Wild Atlantic Way SEA has been used as an example in helping to inform the questions below.

- Does the P/P seek to protect the landscape of the six National Parks (The Burren, Ballycroy, Connemara, Glenveagh, Killarney and the Boyne Valley (Brú na Bóinne) National Park) in the counties that the route passes through?
- Does the P/P seek to protect the views experienced at the promoted scenic viewpoints along the route?

### Options and reasonable alternatives

At the heart of the SEA process is the assessment of the proposed and alternative policies or proposals against the EPOs defined through the scoping process. In determining whether a policy supports or conflicts with each EPO, it may be helpful to explore the following questions.

- Would the effects of implementing the proposed policy protect, enhance or restore the landscape character (including key characteristics) and local distinctiveness of the area in question?
  - Will the policy or proposal have a significant effect on the key characteristics of the landscape types or areas within the plan area?
  - Will the policy or proposal help address known forces for change affecting this landscape, or could it exacerbate existing trends?

- Is the policy or proposal consistent with any guidelines or objectives that have been set for the landscape?
- Would implementation of the policy support the protection, conservation and management of designated landscapes, including National Parks and World Heritage Sites and their landscape setting?
- Would implementation of the policy enhance people's understanding and enjoyment of the landscape?

The assessment should use these types of criteria to decide the nature of landscape effects (positive/neutral/negative/mixed), their magnitude (minor/moderate/major) and any areas of particular doubt or uncertainty. This kind of approach often makes use of matrices to record the effect of each policy against each EPO. It is however also possible to adopt a narrative approach structured around these types of questions. This can be appropriate for higher-level P/Ps where policies are broadly based and outcomes less clear. An example of matrices used to record the effect of each policy/site against each EPO is provided in "[Undertaking the SEA: Reporting significant effects](#)".

## Site assessments

The SEA of some types of P/P may require the assessment of individual site options (e.g. for housing or employment development). The number of sites requiring assessment will depend on the contents of the P/P; however, the number of site options should inform the approach to assessment. For a P/P with many site options, a higher-level approach to assessment may be most suitable, whereas a P/P with fewer sites may warrant a more detailed assessment. Potential approaches to the assessment of site options are set out below.

### GIS

GIS-led assessment approaches may be suitable for a P/P with a large number of site options (e.g. a County Development Plan). Using GIS, a range of landscape-related information can be mapped across the study area of the P/P. This can include landscape designations and spatial mapping of landscape sensitivity and/or landscape capacity studies etc.

Scoring criteria should be developed to enable easy identification of effects based on a site's location relative to these landscape sensitivities (e.g. distance from or location within/outwith). Some examples of GIS-based criteria are provided below, but it should be noted that criteria should be tailored to each SEA, depending on the nature of the P/P, and that criteria may need to be altered depending on the type of development proposed.

Example GIS-based criteria for site appraisals:

- Site is located within a nationally/locally designated landscape
  - Sites within landscape designations may have significant negative effects, whereas those beyond designation boundaries may have minor negative effects

- Site is within 1 km of a nationally/locally designated landscape
  - Sites within 1 km of landscape designations may have significant negative effects, whereas those beyond 1 km may have minor negative effects.
- Site (or at least part of it) is within an area identified as having low/medium/high capacity for development (where this information has been identified as part of a landscape capacity or sensitivity study)
  - Low and medium capacity could result in significant negative effects, whereas high capacity may result in minor negative effects
- Site (or at least part of it) is within an area identified as having low/medium/high sensitivity
  - High sensitivity could result in significant negative effects, whereas medium sensitivity may result in minor negative effects, and low in negligible effects
- Site (or at least part of it) is within an area identified as brownfield land
  - Site located on brownfield land could result in a positive effect on landscape as a result of reusing derelict land. If the site is not located on brownfield land this could result in a negligible or negative effect on landscape.

#### **Winchester Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)<sup>88</sup> – Site Assessments**

The Winchester IIA utilised GIS mapping and proformas to assess the likely effects of individual sites within the Local Plan.

In relation to the landscape IIA objective (10: To conserve and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the district's landscapes), the following GIS criteria were used:

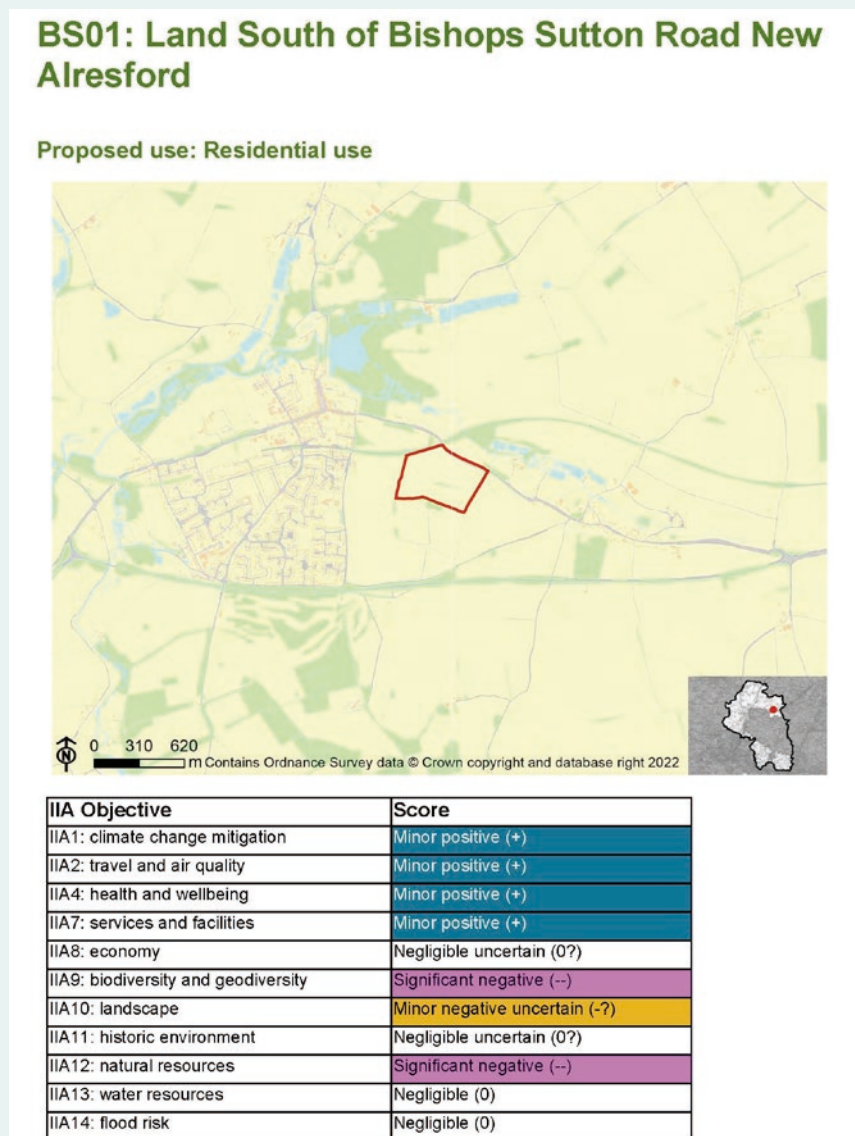
- If a site is within an area identified as 'low' overall landscape sensitivity, a negligible effect was noted.
- If a site is within an area identified as 'medium or higher' overall landscape sensitivity, a minor negative effect was noted.

An example of the proforma used is provided in **Figure 14**.

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88 Winchester District Local Plan (2022), [Integrated Impact Assessment \(IIA\)](#).

**Figure 14:** Winchester IIA Proforma



Source: LUC (2022) Winchester Local Plan IIA – Appendix F

In this example, only two effects could be identified (negligible or minor negative) based on the criteria used. Depending on the plan area for other plans, it could be more appropriate to have a greater range of effects identified (e.g. significant positive through to significant negative), but there would need to be distinct criteria to distinguish these.

While GIS can be a useful tool for assessing the effects of numerous sites, landscapes are dynamic and varied, and effects on them can be very subjective based on a person’s use and experience of the landscape. Therefore, while this approach may be appropriate for very high-level assessments, it will not capture the finer details of the landscape at each site and the effects should be noted with caution.

The above approach could be supplemented by site-specific knowledge that could help authenticate the scores identified during the GIS-led assessment process. An example of this is provided below under **Reporting Significant Effects**.

#### **Landscape character, capacity and sensitivity studies**

Landscape character studies may highlight 'forces for change' (natural changes such as erosion, land-cover changes associated with climate change (sea level rise, drying out of wetlands, etc.), as well as human-based forces such as urbanisation, agricultural intensification, land abandonment, expansion of renewable energy development) and management practices for each LCT that may help inform the likely effects of a P/P proposal. For example, if a force for change for a certain LCT is the proliferation of isolated properties in a countryside setting, then the development of more properties may adversely affect the landscape of the area.

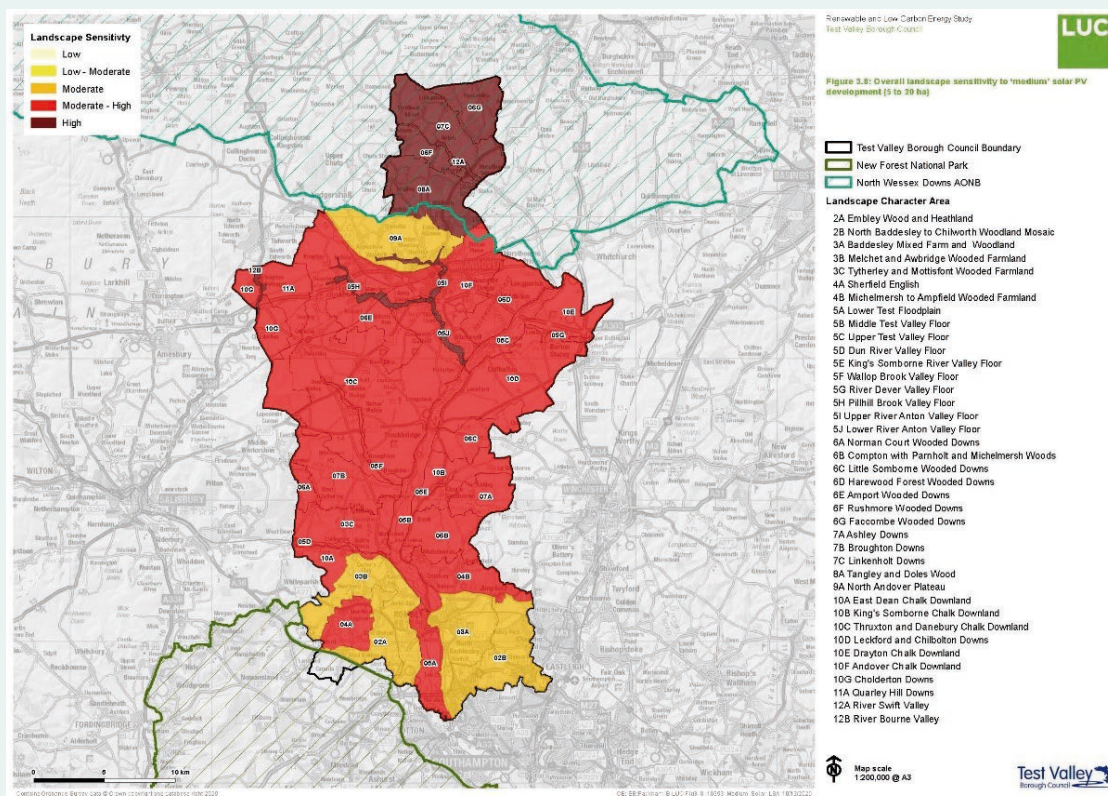
Likewise, landscape capacity and sensitivity studies often map areas of high, medium and low capacity/sensitivity and give reasoning for this. Understanding why certain areas are particularly sensitive to certain types of new development, or the capacity the landscape has for certain development, will aid understanding of the potential effects on landscape. Sensitivity and capacity studies are of particular relevance to plans or programmes relating to energy and renewable energy. Landscape character assessments may be relevant for land use changes such as those resulting from the implementation of forestry plans.

Criteria define the relationship between categories of capacity or sensitivity and the scale of effect considered in the SEA. Again, the assessment should note that it may not capture the finer landscape characteristics and sensitivities of each site.

### Landscape sensitivity mapping

The Test Valley Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Wind and Solar Developments<sup>89</sup> provides spatial assessment of landscape sensitivity to different types and scales of development. This provides a clear environmental baseline against which to assess the landscape effects of these development types. **Figure 15** shows landscape sensitivity to medium-scale solar PV development (5 to 20 ha).

**Figure 15:** Test Valley Landscape Sensitivity Assessment – overall landscape sensitivity to ‘medium’ solar PV development (5 to 20 ha)



Source: Test Valley Borough Council (2020) Test Valley Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Wind and Solar Developments

### Landscape specialist advice

If there are particular concerns over landscape sensitivity or effects on the landscape, advice should be sought from landscape specialists (for example, landscape architects or landscape planners who are corporate members of the Irish Landscape Institute or equivalent body) who have a good knowledge of the landscape in the study area, and a good understanding of the potential changes proposed within the P/P. It is recognised that this approach can be resource-intensive and may be a suitable option only when there are fewer site options or for specific sites where there are particular concerns or issues.

89 LUC (2020), [Test Valley Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Wind and Solar Developments](#).



### Understanding transboundary effects

Landscape impacts can easily extend across local/regional authority boundaries, or the border of Ireland. Transboundary effects<sup>90</sup> affect other territories, most commonly Northern Ireland, but marine sector plans could also have transboundary effects. These effects must be considered at the SEA Scoping stage and through the assessment stage. Where significant adverse effects are identified for landscape, these must be considered in the context of neighbouring authorities or territories.

As previously mentioned, care should be taken when drawing from information in LCAs from different local authorities as there may have been differences in the terminology and approach used for the assessment. This may also be the case when looking at assessments from different countries (e.g. Ireland and Northern Ireland). Inconsistencies in the baseline may result in issues/irregularities in identifying transboundary effects as part of the SEA process.

#### Cross-boundary effects and consultation

The Scoping Report for the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland<sup>91</sup> includes text reflecting that the statutory consultees for SEA in the Republic of Ireland will be consulted on the draft Plan and SA report. In addition to the Republic of Ireland, the bounded UK administrations (Marine Management Organisation, Marine Scotland, Welsh Government and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)) will be consulted on the draft Plan and SA report.

The Sustainability Appraisal<sup>92</sup> concluded that the effects within the Marine Plan area are predicted to be negligible and the effects on other jurisdictions are also predicted to be negligible.

### Timescales

In judging the likely impacts of proposed P/Ps, the assessment should include consideration of the timescale over which impacts on the landscape are likely to occur. The assessment will normally place most weight on permanent or long-term landscape impacts, though temporary or short-term effects may also be a concern where these are of a large magnitude or affect particularly sensitive or valued landscapes.

There is no prescriptive definition of what constitutes a short-, medium- and long-term effect for the purposes of SEA, as timescales will largely depend on the timescales of the plan being proposed. In some cases (e.g. short-term plans), a 2-year period may be sufficient for short-term effects, 5 years for medium term and 10 years for longer term. In other cases, such as the Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework SEA<sup>93</sup> published in 2017, timescales can extend over longer periods. In this example, short term was a 5-year period (up to 2022), medium term was 11 years (up to 2028) and longer term 23 years (up to 2040).

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90 Article 7 of the SEA Directive and Article 10 of the SEA Protocol provide more information on transboundary consultation. Both require that, if the country in which a plan is being developed (the 'plan country') considers that implementation of the plan is likely to have a significant transboundary impact on another country (the 'other country'), or if the other country so requests, the plan country will send the draft plan and environmental report to the other country, and the other country can request consultations with the plan country.

91 Aecom and ABPmer (2014), [Marine Plan for Northern Ireland – Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report](#).

92 Aecom and ABPmer (2018), [Marine Plan for Northern Ireland – Sustainability Appraisal Volume 1: Non-technical Summary of Sustainability Appraisal](#).

93 RPS (2016), [Environmental Report – Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework](#).

### **Cumulative, secondary and synergistic effects**

SEA is required to consider the likely cumulative, secondary and synergistic effects of a plan or proposal on the landscape.

- Cumulative effects may result where several plan policies result in landscape changes in a particular landscape character type or area. For example, if a plan includes policies that result in a combination of new residential development, new recreation provision and renewable energy development in the same area, the landscape change will be greater than that resulting from any one policy. Cumulative effects can also occur where adjoining plans result in combined landscape effects that are greater than for one plan alone. Cumulative effects are particularly relevant to the assessment of plans' effects on the landscape.
- Secondary landscape effects are where a policy (for example to improve public transport infrastructure) results in associated pressure for development or other change that could result in landscape change (for example, a reduction in travel times increasing pressure for residential development).
- Synergistic effects occur where effects of two or more policies combine to create proportionately more significant impacts than each of the policies individually or cumulatively. An example of this type of effect might be where a number of relatively minor landscape and visual effects (e.g. the presence of wastewater treatment plants and dual carriageway roads) combine with changes in agricultural land use and occasional examples of fly-tipping to alter perceptions of a landscape from rural to urban fringe. Good Practice Guidance on Cumulative Effects Assessment in Strategic Environmental Assessment,<sup>94</sup> published by the EPA, provides additional information and advice for considering cumulative effects in SEA.

### **Mitigation and enhancement opportunities**

The SEA process is designed to inform and refine the plan-making process by identifying ways in which the P/P can be improved. An iterative approach allows policies to be modified or reworded, or additional policies added to avoid, reduce or compensate for identified landscape issues.

This iterative process is particularly important where potentially negative effects on the landscape have been identified by the SEA. It may be possible to propose revised wording (for example, designed to ensure protection of a national park and its setting), the addition of a new policy requiring implementation of the plan to protect and enhance landscape character or to identify strategic landscape enhancements, such as structural planting, which could help accommodate development in a particular landscape. Mitigation measures will often reduce but not eliminate an impact, so residual landscape effects should also be considered.

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94 Environmental Protection Agency (2020), [Good Practice Guidance on Cumulative Effects Assessment in Strategic Environmental Assessment](#).

SEA should also explore ways in which a P/P can deliver positive landscape effects. It could, for example, recommend enhancements in areas where the landscape has been damaged or degraded in the past, for example through the development of a Landscape Enhancement Strategy for the plan area, or define the landscape requirements that new developments will be expected to meet. It could also ensure that implementation of the P/P results in improvements in public access to the landscape or otherwise enhances people's enjoyment and understanding of the landscape.

Policy refinements should be reassessed to ensure there are no unforeseen direct, indirect, cumulative or synergistic environmental effects, including on other SEA topic areas.

### Reporting significant effects

The most common way of reporting effects is through assessment matrices or tables. Their simple and standardised format enables easy interpretation, setting out the overall effect in relation to landscape and the justification for that effect. Combining the effects for all proposals within the P/P into one large matrix table allows for easy comparison across all proposals.

Examples of a sustainability appraisal of site options for the landscape objective are provided below.

#### Example 1: Oxford Spatial Options Assessment<sup>95</sup> Sustainability Appraisal site assessment

##### Landscape

#### 25. Will the spatial option have adverse landscape and/or visual impacts?

- 0 Development at this site would be very unlikely to give rise to significant adverse landscape and/or visual effects, as it is assessed as having low overall landscape sensitivity; therefore a negligible effect is likely. The site is well-contained with limited views in and out; it can only be occasionally glimpsed from surrounding land and is not prominent. Tranquillity on the site is also eroded due to the nearby main roads and railway. Although the site is close to sensitive receptors including two Conservation Areas, the existing woodland and steep topography can be used to screen any potential visual impacts.

##### Landscape

#### 25. Will the spatial option have adverse landscape and/or visual impacts?

- ? Development at this site would be very likely to give rise to adverse landscape and/or visual effects, and there is some potential for these to be significant; therefore a potential but uncertain significant negative effect is identified. The site is assessed as having medium-high landscape sensitivity; despite its flat landform and strong association with existing settlement at Woodstock, it has high levels of intervisibility with Blenheim Palace Park and Gardens which is a World Heritage Site.

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95 LUC (2016), [Oxford Spatial Options Assessment](#).

**Example 2:** Publication Draft Herefordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (MWLP) 2021 Sustainability Appraisal policy assessment<sup>96</sup>

The policy being assessed in the example below (Policy W7 of the MWLP) is about waste management operations and sets out that satisfactory proposals for reclamation and after-use of the site should be provided.

SA Objective	SA Score	Justification
13. Value, protect, enhance and restore the landscape quality of Herefordshire, including its rural areas and open spaces.	+?	This policy will have a minor positive effect on this objective as it provides the opportunity for site restoration by means of landfill, which could have positive effects for enhancing landscape character and providing open space, although this is not known at this stage. The policy also supports waste developments that do not necessarily meet all the requirements of the policy, but that result in a local benefit and avoidance of adverse impacts. This is assumed to mean the protection, enhancement or restoration of the landscape.

The policy being assessed in the example below (Policy W6 of the MWLP) relates to the preferred locations for construction, demolition and excavation of waste management facilities. This includes a hierarchy of where such development should be delivered, including existing and former mineral extraction sites, and strategic employment areas and industrial estates.

SA Objective	SA Score	Justification
13. Value, protect, enhance and restore the landscape quality of Herefordshire, including its rural areas and open spaces.	-?	The continued operation of existing waste facilities and the development of new waste facilities at existing and former minerals sites and strategic employment areas and industrial estates may adversely impact landscape if located in proximity to designated landscapes, within areas of high sensitivity to change, within green infrastructure corridors or in areas containing open space parks or gardens.  Effects are uncertain, dependent on the location, design and operation of waste treatment activities and if these are likely to have already been addressed through conditions relating to the existing planning permission of operational sites.

<sup>96</sup> LUC (2020), [Sustainability Appraisal of the Publication Draft Herefordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Appendices](#). Herefordshire Council.

### Monitoring and reporting

Section 17 of [S.I. No. 435/2004](#) (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, as amended, and [S.I. No. 436/2004](#) – Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004, as amended, require the competent authority to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the P/P. This is an important element of plan implementation. Monitoring should help identify any unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage, and to undertake appropriate remedial action. Ideally, any monitoring reports should be provided to the relevant environmental authorities.

Monitoring landscape effects is challenging due to the qualitative nature of landscape, particularly where there is a lack of baseline landscape information. Furthermore, it is important that the monitoring of the landscape focuses on changes brought about by the implementation of the P/P only. Landscapes are dynamic and ever-changing, and monitoring should not include changes that occur naturally in the landscape due to other factors. For example, monitoring the implementation of a P/P could include focusing on changes due to new development proposed in the P/P (e.g. in a County Development Plan) or changes to land cover or land use (e.g. forestry or agricultural plans/strategies), recorded through future updates to the [National Land Cover Map](#).

Monitoring indicators should be linked to the landscape EPO(s) and criteria set out in the SEA. This will help ensure that the monitoring focuses on effects brought about by the P/P as opposed to other external factors.

Examples of monitoring indicators for landscape could include:

- Total or percentage increase/decrease of woodland or forest cover
- Total amount of land take for development projects (e.g. infrastructure, housing, renewable energy)
- Number of applications for development that are approved contrary to landscape policy or refused but approved at appeal
- Net loss or gain of green infrastructure or open space
- Area and condition of ancient semi-natural woodland, other locally native broadleaf woodland and hedgerows
- Number and status of ancient trees and trees of landscape/amenity value
- Net gains or losses in quality and area of trees, woodland and or existing vegetation.

### **Monitoring landscape change at a national level**

NatureScot, Scotland's Nature Agency, has established a national programme to monitor landscape change.

National landscape monitoring is based around a number of landscape indicators grouped into four themes. These illustrate some of the aspects of landscape that can be monitored. The indicators are set out in *Scotland's Landscape Monitoring Programme: an introduction*<sup>97</sup> and include:

#### **Landscape qualities:**

- Area of national landscape designations
- Perceived naturalness of land cover in the Central Scotland Green Network area
- Area of local landscape designations
- Fixed point photography in National Scenic Areas
- Fixed point photography of landscape features from selected viewpoints

#### **Public perception:**

- Public perception of Scotland's landscape
- Public perception of local landscape
- Engagement in landscape change

#### **Land cover**

- Land cover
- Area of accessible green space within 5 minutes of where people live
- Area of vacant and derelict land
- National Scenic Area land cover
- Approved forest design plans in designated landscapes

#### **Built development:**

- Extent of built development
- Visual influence of built development
- Design quality (based on local and regional studies)
- Key development types (based on local and regional studies)

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97 SNH (2016), [Scotland's Landscape Monitoring Programme: An Introduction](#).

### Examples of monitoring for landscape effects

The two examples below illustrate some of the monitoring included for landscape at two different scales of SEA. The examples highlight the challenges of monitoring for landscape effects in terms of how the information will be collected. For example, will the developments noted in relation to the Draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area be subject to EIA (which would record landscape impacts)? If EIA is not undertaken, another mechanism needs to record the 'avoidable adverse landscape and visual impacts'.

- *Number of developments permitted that result in avoidable adverse visual impacts on the landscape, especially with regard to landscape and amenity designations included in Land Use Plans, resulting from development that is granted permission under the Strategy (SEA of Draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area)*
- *Number of unmitigated conflicts with the appropriate protection of statutory designations relating to the landscape, including those included in the land use plans of local authorities (SEA Environmental report for the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme)*

Advice on monitoring is provided in the EPA [Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring](#), 2023.

## Appendix 1: Policy context for landscape

### International and European

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) (2000) promotes landscape protection, management and planning. The Convention is aimed at the protection, management and planning of all landscapes and raising awareness of the value of a living landscape. The Convention was adopted on 20 October 2000 and came into force on 1 March 2004.

The ELC defines landscape as *an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*. It defines landscape protection as *actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity*. This definition is also recognised in Irish legislation, where Section 2 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, identifies 'landscape' as having the same meaning as it has in Article 1 of the ELC.

The Convention was ratified by Ireland in 2002 and established the general landscape principles by which national policies on landscape must be guided. The requirements of the ELC have been transposed into Irish legislation via the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, which seeks the *protection, management and planning of landscapes... having regard to the European Landscape Convention*. The National Landscape Strategy<sup>98</sup> was prepared as a result of Ireland signing up to the ELC.

While the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>99</sup> do not specifically mention landscape, several of the 17 goals can be strongly linked to landscapes. These include 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, 13: Climate Action and 15: Life on Land.

At the EU level, several important directives focus on protecting and conserving the natural environment. While these do not specifically relate to the landscape, they are fundamentally linked to landscape, whether through the protection of habitats and species or through the protection of water quality/resources including in wetland landscapes. These directives include the EU Water Framework Directive ([WFD](#)),<sup>100</sup> the Birds Directive,<sup>101</sup> the Habitats Directive<sup>102</sup> and the European Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention).<sup>103</sup>

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98 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2020), [National Landscape Strategy](#).

99 United Nations (2015), Sustainable Development Goals.

100 European Commission (2000), Water Framework Directive.

101 European Commission (2009), The Birds Directive.

102 European Commission (1992), The Habitats Directive.

103 Council of Europe (1979), European Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention).



The New European Bauhaus: Beautiful, Sustainable, Together<sup>104</sup> expresses the EU's ambition of creating beautiful, sustainable and inclusive places that support the regeneration of nature and protection of biodiversity. It recognises that cultural, social and natural assets, including landscape, make a place unique. The European Council's conclusions of the New European Bauhaus<sup>105</sup> highlight the importance of landscape and the relationships with cultural heritage and contemporary creation.

The United Nations Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the 'Aarhus Convention') (1998)<sup>106</sup> establishes a number of rights of the public with regard to the environment, including landscape. It recognises the connection between human well-being and proper protection of the environment, and sustainable development for the sake of present and future generations (preamble and Article 1 of the Aarhus Convention). The Parties to the Convention are required to make the necessary provisions so that public authorities (at national, regional or local level) will contribute to making these rights effective.

## National Legislation and Policy

While **Appendix 4** provides a list of suggested national-level policy documents that may be of relevance in considering the landscape (depending on the scope of the P/P and SEA), some of the more relevant ones are discussed below in more detail.

The framework for national planning policy is derived from national legislation. The Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended)<sup>107</sup> forms the foundations for planning in Ireland. In relation to development plans, Section 10(c) of the Planning and Development Act states that plans should include objectives for the conservation and protection of the environment. Section 10(e) requires objectives for the preservation of the character of the landscape. Section 10(p) also sets out the requirement for development plans to provide a framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes and developed having regard to the European Landscape Convention. Section 2 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, identifies 'landscape' as having the same meaning as it has in Article 1 of the European Landscape Convention, Florence, 20 October 2000: *'Landscape' means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.*

The draft Planning Bill 2022<sup>108</sup> requires Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) to make provision for 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 so as to ensure a consistent approach to the protection of the landscape'*

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104 European Commission (2021), [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions](#).

105 Council of the European Union (2021), [Council Conclusions on Culture, High-Quality Architecture and Built Environment as Key Elements of the New European Bauhaus Initiative](#).

106 [Aarhus Convention](#).

107 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2000), [Planning and Development Act, 2000](#).

108 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2023), [Draft Planning and Development Bill 2022](#).

(Section 28(1)(l)). Likewise, Section 50(1) requires planning authorities to *'prepare a strategy for the conservation, protection, management and improvement of the natural and built heritage and landscape.'*

The Heritage Act 1995, as amended, sets out the legal definition for landscape in Ireland. Landscape is defined as *'areas, sites, vistas and features of significant scenic, archaeological, geological, historical, ecological or other scientific interest'*. Through legislation, Ireland's most important landscapes and areas of scientific or recreational interest are protected. Areas of Special Amenity are the strongest environmental protection for areas of outstanding natural beauty, scientific interest, or recreational amenity value. Areas of Special Amenity are legal designations that are implemented through Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended).

The Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (NPF)<sup>109</sup> and National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030<sup>110</sup> recognise the value of landscape, acknowledging the wealth of natural and cultural assets that the Irish landscape supports. The NPF identifies the importance of the landscape in forming part of Ireland's 'green persona' but notes environmental threats, including climate change, loss of important and vulnerable habitat and the diminishing wild countryside. The NDP sets out a commitment that *As custodians of our natural landscape and of our historic and cultural assets, we will protect them for the next generation* (NDP, page 119).

National Policy Objective (NPO) 61 of the NPF specifically relates to landscape protection and management. It seeks to *Facilitate landscape protection, management and change through the preparation of a National Landscape Character Map and development of guidance on local landscape character assessments, (including historic landscape characterisation) to ensure a consistent approach to landscape character assessment, particularly across planning and administrative boundaries*. Other relevant NPOs linked to the landscape include:

1. *Protect and promote the sense of place and culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of the Irish rural landscape that make Ireland's rural areas authentic and attractive as places to live, work and visit.* (NPO 14)
2. *Integrated planning for Green Infrastructure and ecosystem services will be incorporated into the preparation of statutory land use plans.* (NPO 58)
3. *Protecting and enhancing biodiversity, including enhancing the conservation status and improving the management of protected areas and protected species.* (NPO 59)
4. *Conserving and enhancing the rich qualities of natural and cultural heritage in a manner appropriate to their significance.* (NPO 60)
5. *Identifying and strengthening the value of greenbelts and green spaces at a regional and city scale that enhance connectivity to wider strategic networks, prevent coalescence of settlements and to allow for the long-term strategic expansion of urban areas.* (NPO 62).

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109 Government of Ireland (n.d.) [National Planning Framework](#).

110 Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (2021), [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#).

At the national level, a range of other policies and strategies highlight the importance of landscape. For instance, the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025<sup>111</sup> recognises that the landscape reflects cultural and natural heritage as well as contributing to the well-being of society, environment and economy. The overall vision seeks to promote the sustainable protection, management and planning of the landscape. The Strategy sets out four key objectives:

- *implement the European Landscape Convention by integrating landscape into our approach to sustainable development*
- *establish and embed a public process of gathering, sharing and interpreting scientific, technical and cultural information in order to carry out evidence-based identification and description of the character, resources and processes of the landscape*
- *provide a policy framework, which will put in place measures at national, sectoral – including agriculture, tourism, energy, transport and marine – and local level, together with civil society, to protect, manage and properly plan through high quality design for the sustainable stewardship of our landscape*
- *ensure that we take advantage of opportunities to implement policies relating to landscape use that are complementary and mutually reinforcing and that conflicting policy objectives are avoided in as far as possible.*

Specifically, in terms of the natural environment, Ireland's 4th [National Biodiversity Action Plan \(draft for consultation 2022\)](#) highlights the role of habitats in storing carbon and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is supported by the [Climate Action Plan 2023](#), which highlights that land use, land use change and forestry play crucial roles in reducing Ireland's emissions through carbon sequestration, notably in Ireland's peatlands.

Health Benefits from Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure<sup>112</sup> concludes that human health and wellbeing are largely influenced by a healthy environment and that the natural environment and resources contribute significantly to the Irish economy. This is further reflected in [Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025](#),<sup>113</sup> which notes a close relationship between physical and mental health and the environment.

The [National Peatland's Strategy](#)<sup>114</sup> recognises that peatlands form distinctive landscapes in many parts of the country, and seeks the responsible management of these peatlands to maximise their environmental contribution, including on the landscape. Likewise, the proposed new [Forestry Programme for Ireland 2023-2027](#) recognises the potential that forestry has in connecting natural and semi-natural habitats and its role in contributing to landscape character.

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111 Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2015), [National Landscape Strategy for Ireland](#).

112 Environmental Protection Agency (2016), [Research 195: Health Benefits from Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure](#).

113 Healthy Ireland (2013), [A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing](#).

114 National Parks & Wildlife Service (n.d.), [National Peatlands Strategy](#).

The [All Ireland Pollinator Plan](#) 2021-2025<sup>115</sup> seeks to promote and encourage landscapes where pollinators can flourish, recognising that much of their decline is due to loss of natural and semi-natural habitats. It also acknowledges the importance of pollinators in terms of facilitating microclimate regulation, prevention of soil erosion and creating windbreaks.

[Heritage Ireland 2030](#)<sup>116</sup> recognises the fundamental importance of heritage to Ireland's society, well-being and economy. It sets the framework for the protection, conservation, promotion and management of Ireland's heritage, noting that 'heritage' includes natural heritage (e.g. landscape) and biodiversity as well as built and archaeological heritage. A key aim is to strengthen bonds with Ireland's heritage, *ensuring that important aspects of identity do not lose their connection to the landscape and people from which they have evolved*<sup>117</sup>. The future development of a National Landscape Character Assessment and advance of the National Landscape Strategy are identified as an action for implementation. This is reflected in the NPF, which commits to developing guidance for local LCAs and that these should include historic landscape characterisation, which identifies the contribution of the past to the landscape. This is of particular importance as many heritage and archaeological features are landscape-based.

Gaeltacht areas are culturally important in Ireland. They are areas where the Irish language is the main language spoken, and traditional cultures still thrive. Gaeltacht areas are found in eight counties across all four provinces of Ireland. The [20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030](#)<sup>118</sup> is to support Gaeltacht areas, increase the number of Irish speakers and make the Irish language more visible in society through signage and literature.

It is recognised that the marine environment, and seascape, contribute strongly to the landscape character of coastal areas. The [National Marine Planning Framework](#) (NMPF)<sup>119</sup> sets out the Government's commitment to sustainable marine development. The NMPF recognises the importance of protecting seascape and landscape, and sets out that the policy relating to seascape and landscape should be included as part of statutory environmental assessments. Regional Seascape Character Assessment has been completed and a dataset of seascape character areas is available.<sup>120</sup>

The [Climate Action Plan 2023](#)<sup>121</sup> sets out the roadmap to reducing Ireland's carbon emissions, recognising the importance of the land use, land use change and forestry sector in contributing to emissions and helping act as a carbon store. Actions include increasing afforestation, forest and grassland management, increasing rates of peatland restoration and restoration of habitat sites such as Natura 2000 and Natural Heritage Areas. Such actions have the potential to improve the quality and character of the landscape.

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115 National Biodiversity Data Centre (2021), [All-Ireland Pollinator Plan](#).

116 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2020), [Heritage Ireland 2030](#).

117 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2020), [Heritage Ireland 2030](#).

118 Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (2020), [20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language](#).

119 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2021), [National Marine Planning Framework](#).

120 [https://emff.marine.ie/sites/default/files/bluegrowth/PDFs/final\\_seascape\\_character\\_assessment\\_report\\_with\\_annexes.pdf](https://emff.marine.ie/sites/default/files/bluegrowth/PDFs/final_seascape_character_assessment_report_with_annexes.pdf)

121 Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (2022), [Climate Action Plan 2023](#).

[Places for People – the National Policy on Architecture](#)<sup>122</sup> identifies the importance of ensuring that design complements the landscape and the cultural and natural environment, and sets out that design should avoid unintended adverse effects on built environment quality, cultural landscapes and the natural environment.

In addition to planning policy, guidelines relating to wind energy development and rural housing will be of relevance to the landscape. The [Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines](#)<sup>123</sup> acknowledges that a balance needs to be struck to ensure wind development does not adversely affect the natural and built environment. It includes details on the purpose and process of LCA, landscape sensitivity and landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA). It also provides guidance on the siting and design of wind farms with consideration to the landscape. The [Sustainable Rural Housing Development Guidelines](#),<sup>124</sup> which are currently being updated, set a framework for the provision of housing in the countryside, with an aim of conserving the rural character of the landscape and other defining characteristics. The guidelines set out that rural areas should be mapped based on land use and urban influence and identify six different types of ‘zone’. For each zone, the guidelines set out social and economic needs criteria that must be met to allow development of new rural housing. The [Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines](#)<sup>125</sup> provides guidelines for planning authorities on urban development and building heights. It sets out development management criteria for new proposals at the scale of the relevant city/town (landscape scale), scale of the district/neighbourhood/street and scale of site/building.

## Regional policy

The importance of landscape is further recognised at the regional level through Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) for the Northern and Western,<sup>126</sup> Southern<sup>127</sup> and Eastern and Midlands<sup>128</sup> Regional Assemblies. Key Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) relating to the landscape include the following.

- RPO 5.3 of the Northern and Western RSES seeks the protection, management and conservation of Ireland’s landscapes and seascapes. It also seeks coordination and cooperation between Local Authorities in determining landscape character along borders, and promotes the development of regional landscape character assessments.
- RPO 7.27 of the Eastern and Midlands RSES seeks the development of a Regional Landscape Character Assessment; RPO 7.28 promotes sustainable farming and seeks to maintain the quality of the natural environment, protect farm landscapes and support the achievement of climate targets. RPO 7.29 supports the development of integrated peatland management.

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122 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2022), [Places for People – the National Policy on Architecture](#).

123 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2019), [Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines](#).

124 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2020), [Sustainable Rural Housing Development Guidelines](#).

125 Government of Ireland (2018), [Urban Development and Building Heights](#).

126 Northern & Western Regional Assembly (2020), [Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032](#).

127 Southern Regional Assembly (2020), [Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy](#).

128 Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly (2019), [Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy](#).

- RPO 129 of the Southern RSES seeks to develop a Regional Landscape Strategy to facilitate landscape protection, management and change through undertaking a Regional Landscape Assessment and Landscape Character Map and development of guidance on local landscape character assessments.

## Local policy

Local planning policy, such as County Development Plans (CDPs) and Local Area Plans (LAPs), are spatial plans that guide the future development of a county or local area through a suite of policy objectives, land use zoning and development management guidance. These documents provide plan-specific policies relating to a variety of topics, including landscape protection and management.

Some CDPs and LAPs identify protected or listed views, which are recognised because of their important amenity, tourism, economic and cultural value for the area and its people. It is important to protect and conserve these views, with any development located and designed in a manner so as not to adversely impact on the view.

## Appendix 2: Legislative context for landscape

This appendix summarises the legislative context for landscape designations in Ireland. The key relevant pieces of legislation are the Heritage Act 1995 and the Planning and Development Act 2000.

### The Heritage Act 1995<sup>129</sup>

The Heritage Act 1995 makes specific reference to archaeology, in relation to landscapes and seascapes. It also makes reference to the setting of other features of heritage value, including architectural heritage, heritage buildings and heritage gardens and parks.

*Archaeology means the study of past human societies, either as a whole or of various aspects of them, through the material remains left by those societies and the evidence of their environment, and includes the study of, searching and prospecting for:*

*(a) archaeological objects,*

*(b) monuments,*

*(c) buildings, or parts of any buildings, habitually used for ecclesiastical purposes,*

**(d) landscapes,**

**(e) seascapes,**

*(f) wrecks,*

*(g) climatological, ecological, geological or pedological factors that may be relevant to the understanding of past human societies or the distribution or nature of any of the foregoing;*

'landscape' includes areas, sites, vistas and features of significant scenic, archaeological, geological, historical, ecological or other scientific interest;

'architectural heritage' includes all structures, buildings, traditional and designed, and groups of buildings including **street-scapes and urban vistas**, which are of historical, archaeological, artistic, engineering, scientific, social or technical interest, together with their **setting**, attendant grounds, fixtures, fittings and contents;

'heritage building' includes any building, or part thereof, which is of significance because of its intrinsic architectural or artistic quality or its **setting** or because of its association with the commercial, cultural, economic, industrial, military, political, social or religious history of the place where it is situated or of the country or generally, and includes the amenities of any such building;

129 Irish Statute Book (1995), [Heritage Act, 1995](#).

'heritage gardens and parks' includes areas of natural heritage, and gardens and parks whose plant collections, design, design features, buildings, **setting**, style or association are of significant scientific, botanical, aesthetic or historical interest or that illustrate some aspect of the development of gardening or of gardens and parks.

## Planning and Development Act 2000<sup>130</sup>

The Planning and Development Act 2000 covers a huge range of planning-related issues and combines a wide range of legislation into one place. In relation to landscape it sets out information on the process and content of development plans, Local Area Plans, regional planning guidelines and control of development.

It sets out the following in relation to development plans:

PART II, Plans and Guidelines, Chapter I, Development Plans,

10 (e) the preservation of the character of the landscape where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the planning authority, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest;

In relation to Environment and amenities, it references landscape character:

First Schedule, Part IV, Environment and Amenities

*7. Preserving the character of the **landscape**, including views **and prospects**, and the amenities **of places and features of natural beauty or interest.***

It sets out the process of identifying areas of special amenity, landscape conservation areas and areas, architectural conservation areas and areas of special planning control:

Part XIII, Amenities identifies the following:

Area of Special Amenity – can reflect outstanding natural beauty or special recreational value

Landscape Conservation Areas – for the purpose of preservation of the landscape

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130 Irish Statute Book (2000), [Planning and Development Act, 2000](#).



Part IV Architectural Heritage Chapter I, Protected Structures

Part IV Architectural Heritage Chapter II, Architectural Conservation Areas and Areas of Special Planning Control

81.- (1) A development plan shall include an objective to preserve the **character** of a place, area, group of structures or townscape, taking account of building lines and heights, that:

(a) is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value, or

(b) contributes to the appreciation of protected structures.

Fourth Schedule Section 191. Reasons for refusal of planning permission that exclude compensation:

*8. The proposed development would interfere with the **character of the landscape** or with a **view or prospect of special amenity value or natural interest or beauty**, any of which it is necessary to preserve.*

## Appendix 3: County Landscape Character Assessments

County	LCA available	Link to LCA (if applicable) [Links correct at time of publication]
Carlow	Yes	<a href="https://www.carlow.ie/wp-content/documents/uploads/carlow-county-development-plan-appendix-6-landscape-character-assessment.pdf">https://www.carlow.ie/wp-content/documents/uploads/carlow-county-development-plan-appendix-6-landscape-character-assessment.pdf</a>
Cavan	No	The Draft County Development Plan 2022-2028 includes a commitment to commence a comprehensive LCA within 6 months of adoption of the Plan. Landscape aspects are however addressed in the Written Statement and <a href="#">Appendices</a> .
Clare	Yes	<a href="https://www.clarecoco.ie/services/planning/publications/landscape-character-assessment-of-co-clare-2004-26526.pdf">https://www.clarecoco.ie/services/planning/publications/landscape-character-assessment-of-co-clare-2004-26526.pdf</a>
Cork	Yes, draft	<a href="http://corkcocoplans.ie/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2016/07/Draft-Landscape-Strategy-2007.pdf">http://corkcocoplans.ie/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2016/07/Draft-Landscape-Strategy-2007.pdf</a>
Donegal	Yes	<a href="https://www.donegalcoco.ie/services/planning/developmentplansbuilttheheritageincludinggrants/landscape%20character%20assessment%20of%20county%20donegal/">https://www.donegalcoco.ie/services/planning/developmentplansbuilttheheritageincludinggrants/landscape%20character%20assessment%20of%20county%20donegal/</a>
Dublin	Yes	<a href="https://www.sdcc.ie/en/devplan2022/stage-2-draft-plan/appendices/appendix-9-draft-landscape-character-assessment.pdf">https://www.sdcc.ie/en/devplan2022/stage-2-draft-plan/appendices/appendix-9-draft-landscape-character-assessment.pdf</a>
Galway	Yes	<a href="https://consult.galway.ie/en/consultation/draft-galway-county-development-plan-2022-2028/chapter/appendix-4-landscape-character-assessment">https://consult.galway.ie/en/consultation/draft-galway-county-development-plan-2022-2028/chapter/appendix-4-landscape-character-assessment</a>
Kerry	Yes	<a href="https://consult.kerrycoco.ie/sites/default/files/Appendix%207.pdf">https://consult.kerrycoco.ie/sites/default/files/Appendix%207.pdf</a>
Kildare	Yes	<a href="https://kildarecoco.ie/AllServices/Planning/DevelopmentPlans/KildareCountyDevelopmentPlan2011-2017/Appendix3.pdf">https://kildarecoco.ie/AllServices/Planning/DevelopmentPlans/KildareCountyDevelopmentPlan2011-2017/Appendix3.pdf</a>
		<a href="https://kildarecoco.ie/AllServices/Planning/DevelopmentPlans/KildareCountyDevelopmentPlan2005-2011/">https://kildarecoco.ie/AllServices/Planning/DevelopmentPlans/KildareCountyDevelopmentPlan2005-2011/</a>
Kilkenny	Yes	<a href="https://www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/services/planning/development-plans/city-and-county-development-plan/expired-development-plans/development_plans_2008-2014/kilkenny%20county%20development%20plan%202008-2014/appendix_c_landscape_character_assessment.pdf">https://www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/services/planning/development-plans/city-and-county-development-plan/expired-development-plans/development_plans_2008-2014/kilkenny%20county%20development%20plan%202008-2014/appendix_c_landscape_character_assessment.pdf</a>
Laois	Yes	<a href="https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/Appendix-6-LCA-of-Adopted-LCDP-2021-2027.pdf">https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/Appendix-6-LCA-of-Adopted-LCDP-2021-2027.pdf</a>

County	LCA available	Link to LCA (if applicable) [Links correct at time of publication]
Leitrim	Yes, draft	<a href="http://www.leitrimcoco.ie/eng/services_a-z/planning-and-development/development-plans/leitrim-county-development-plan-2023-2029/appendix-vi-leitrim-landscape-character-assessment-review.pdf">http://www.leitrimcoco.ie/eng/services_a-z/planning-and-development/development-plans/leitrim-county-development-plan-2023-2029/appendix-vi-leitrim-landscape-character-assessment-review.pdf</a>
Limerick	Yes	<a href="https://www.limerick.ie/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-04/Limerick%20County%20Development%20Plan%202010-2016%20%28with%20variation%201-3%2C%205%266%29_0.pdf">https://www.limerick.ie/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-04/Limerick%20County%20Development%20Plan%202010-2016%20%28with%20variation%201-3%2C%205%266%29_0.pdf</a>
Longford	Yes	<a href="https://www.longfordcoco.ie/uploadedfiles/longfordcoco/our_departments/planning/documents/draft_county_development_plan/annex%204%20landscape%20character%20assessment.pdf">https://www.longfordcoco.ie/uploadedfiles/longfordcoco/our_departments/planning/documents/draft_county_development_plan/annex%204%20landscape%20character%20assessment.pdf</a>
Louth	Yes	<a href="https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/services/heritage/resource_centre/heritage-designation-advice/landscape-and-amenity/louth-landscape-character-assessment-2002.pdf">https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/services/heritage/resource_centre/heritage-designation-advice/landscape-and-amenity/louth-landscape-character-assessment-2002.pdf</a>
Mayo	Yes	<a href="https://www.mayo.ie/getmedia/d64fadfc-f8b5-4f1c-971d-624fd9527e04/Landscape-Appraisal-of-County-Mayo.pdf">https://www.mayo.ie/getmedia/d64fadfc-f8b5-4f1c-971d-624fd9527e04/Landscape-Appraisal-of-County-Mayo.pdf</a>
Meath	Yes	<a href="https://meathcountydevelopmentplan.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/appendix-7-landscape-character-assessment1.pdf">https://meathcountydevelopmentplan.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/appendix-7-landscape-character-assessment1.pdf</a>
Monaghan	Yes	<a href="https://monaghan.ie/planning/landscape-character-assessment/">https://monaghan.ie/planning/landscape-character-assessment/</a>
Offaly	No	The Draft <a href="#">Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027</a> commits to carrying out a comprehensive LCA once the necessary national and regional LCAs and maps are in place. County-level landscape considerations are however discussed in <a href="#">Chapter 4 – Biodiversity and Landscape</a> .
Roscommon	Yes	<a href="https://www.roscommoncoco.ie/en/services/planning/roscommon-county-council-planning-publications/roscommon-county-council-planning-publications/county_development_plan_2014_-_2020/county-development-plan-2014-2020/11-landscape-character-assessment.pdf">https://www.roscommoncoco.ie/en/services/planning/roscommon-county-council-planning-publications/roscommon-county-council-planning-publications/county_development_plan_2014_-_2020/county-development-plan-2014-2020/11-landscape-character-assessment.pdf</a>
Sligo	Yes, but limited information (map only)	<a href="https://www.sligococo.ie/cdp/DraftCDP2017-2023LandscapeCharacterisationMap.pdf">https://www.sligococo.ie/cdp/DraftCDP2017-2023LandscapeCharacterisationMap.pdf</a>
Tipperary	Yes	<a href="https://www.tipperarycoco.ie/sites/default/files/Draft%20Tipperary%20Landscape%20Character%20Assessment%202016_0.pdf">https://www.tipperarycoco.ie/sites/default/files/Draft%20Tipperary%20Landscape%20Character%20Assessment%202016_0.pdf</a>

County	LCA available	Link to LCA (if applicable) [Links correct at time of publication]
Waterford	Yes, draft	<a href="https://consult.waterfordcouncil.ie/en/system/files/materials/805/Appendix%208%20Landscape%20%20Seascape%20Characterisation%20Assessment%2018.06.21.pdf">https://consult.waterfordcouncil.ie/en/system/files/materials/805/Appendix%208%20Landscape%20%20Seascape%20Characterisation%20Assessment%2018.06.21.pdf</a>
Westmeath	Yes, draft	<a href="https://consult.westmeathcoco.ie/ga/consultation/draft-westmeath-county-development-plan-2021-2027/chapter/13-landscape-and-lake-amenities#:~:text=13.6%20Westmeath%20Landscape%20Character%20Assessment&amp;text=The%20LCA%20is%20a%20tool,relating%20to%20each%20landscape%20type.">https://consult.westmeathcoco.ie/ga/consultation/draft-westmeath-county-development-plan-2021-2027/chapter/13-landscape-and-lake-amenities#:~:text=13.6%20Westmeath%20Landscape%20Character%20Assessment&amp;text=The%20LCA%20is%20a%20tool,relating%20to%20each%20landscape%20type.</a>
Wexford	Yes, draft	<a href="https://consult.wexfordcoco.ie/sites/default/files/Volume%207%20Landscape%20Character%20Assessment.pdf">https://consult.wexfordcoco.ie/sites/default/files/Volume%207%20Landscape%20Character%20Assessment.pdf</a>
Wicklow	Yes	<a href="https://www.wicklow.ie/Portals/0/Documents/Planning/Development-Plans-Strategies/Nat%20Reg%20County%20Plans/Wicklow%20County%20Dev%20Plan/CDP%202016%202022/v3/Volume_3_-_Appendix_5_-_Landscape_Assessment.pdf">https://www.wicklow.ie/Portals/0/Documents/Planning/Development-Plans-Strategies/Nat%20Reg%20County%20Plans/Wicklow%20County%20Dev%20Plan/CDP%202016%202022/v3/Volume_3_-_Appendix_5_-_Landscape_Assessment.pdf</a>

## Appendix 4: Resources

### National policy context

The list below includes some policy documents that may be of relevance to landscape in SEA, depending on the scope and contents of the P/P.

<b>National Policy Documents</b>	
<b>Agriculture</b>	
CAP Strategic Plan	Food Vision 2030
Ag Climatise – A draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector to 2030 and beyond	
<b>Biodiversity</b>	
S.I. No. 477/2011 – European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011	S.I. No. 293/2021 – European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Amendment) Regulations 2021
National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) Management Plan 2017-2022	Draft 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2027
Flora Protection Order 1999	Wildlife Act 1976
National Peatlands Strategy 2015	All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025
<b>Climate Adaptation/Climate Action</b>	
Climate Action Plan 2023	Built & Archaeological Heritage: Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan under the National Adaptation Framework
Tourism Development and Innovation: A Strategy for Investment 2016-2022	Water Quality and Water Services Infrastructure: Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan under the National Adaptation Framework
Agriculture, Forestry and Seafood: Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan under the National Adaptation Framework	National Policy on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development
Biodiversity: Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan under the National Adaptation Framework	National Adaptation Framework: Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland
Climate Action Plan 2023	Built & Archaeological Heritage: Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan under the National Adaptation Framework

<b>Energy</b>	
National Bioenergy Plan 2014-2020	Grid Implementation Plan 2017-2022 for the Electricity Transmission System in Ireland
Electricity & Gas Networks Sector: Climate Change Adaptation Plan, under the National Adaptation Framework	Draft Grid Implementation Plan 2023-2028 for the Electricity Transmission System in Ireland
Shaping our Electricity Future (consultation document)	National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030
Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2014	Government Policy Statement on Strategic Importance of Transmission & Other Energy Infrastructure
National Bioenergy Plan 2014-2020	
<b>Forestry</b>	
National Forestry Programme 2023-2027	Draft Forest Strategy Implementation Plan
<b>Health</b>	
Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2021-2025	
<b>Heritage</b>	
Heritage Ireland 2030	Waterways Ireland Heritage Plan 2016-2020
The Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) and Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1999	National Monuments Act 1930 with subsequent amendments
Places for People – the national policy on architecture	
<b>Land Use Planning</b>	
Action Plan for Rural Development	S.I. No. 422/2021 – Planning and Development Act 2000 (Section 254 – Overground Telecommunication Cables) Regulations 2021
The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009	The Foreshore Acts 1933 to 2005
Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).	Planning and Development, Heritage and Broadcasting (Amendment) Act 2021
Land Development Agency Act 2021	Planning and Development Act 2000. Revised in 2016 and amended in 2021
Project Ireland 2040 National Development Plan 2018-2027	National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

<b>Land Use Planning</b>	
Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025	National Planning Framework Ireland 2040 and National Development Plan 2018-2027
National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025	Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021
Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines	Sustainable Rural Housing Development Guidelines
Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines	
<b>Marine</b>	
S.I. No. 145/2021 – European Union (Foreshore Act 1933) (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2021	Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth
National Strategy for Angling Development	National Maritime Planning Framework
National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development	
<b>Transport</b>	
Transport Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan under the National Adaptation Framework (DTTAS) 2019	National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy
National Policy Framework for Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport 2017-2030	Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future, A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020
Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways	National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland
<b>Water</b>	
National Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Studies Programme	National Water Resources Framework Plan 2021 (and associated Regional Water Resource Management Plans)
Local Government (Water Pollution) Act, 1977 (Water Quality Standards for Phosphorus) Regulations 1998 (SI 258 of 1998);	Irish Water Services Strategic Plan
Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995	Inland Fisheries Ireland National Strategy for Angling Development
Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive	
<b>Waste</b>	
The Waste Management Act 1996 and amendments	Circular Economy Programme 2021-2027
National Hazardous Waste Management Plan 2021-2027	

## Appendix 5: Steps in identifying the potential for significant effects on the landscape

### Screening

Stage 1 of the Screening process will have determined whether the SEA Directive applied to the P/P in question.

Where the requirement is confirmed, Stage 2 of the process considers the likelihood that the P/P would result in significant positive or adverse environmental effects, including on the landscape. Where such effects are considered likely, the P/P will be subject to SEA.

- The steps in identifying the potential for significant effects on the landscape are as follows:
  - Review and describe the characteristics of the P/P to understand the changes that will result from its implementation, including where it influences other policies or programmes.
- What type, scale and magnitude of changes are likely, over what geographic area and what timescale?
  - Describe the baseline nature of the landscape that could be directly or indirectly affected by the P/P.
  - What are the key landscape characteristics?
  - How sensitive is the landscape to the kinds of changes that the P/P could bring about?
  - Does the landscape reflect special values such as national or local designations?
  - Is it particularly valued for recreation and enjoyment?
  - Does it provide the setting for settlements?
  - What forces for change are affecting the landscape in question, including its key characteristics?
  - What landscape objectives have been defined for the area?
- What effect on the landscape is the P/P likely to have?
  - Is it likely to affect any of the landscape's key characteristics?
  - Will it help to address any of the identified forces for change, or could it accelerate or compound negative change?
  - Will it support defined landscape objectives?
- Is it likely to affect landscapes that are highly valued and visited or provide the setting for settlements?

The screening report template (see section 6.2 of the [Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Good Practice Guidance](#)) can act as a checklist when considering the SEA for a range of plans and programmes. It may also help to identify the types of landscape and visual effects that could be associated with different types of plan or programme. This matrix is not exhaustive, nor does it reflect the sensitivity of the receiving landscape.







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