

Public participation and Performance Criteria in Strategic Environmental Assessment: The Way Forward to Advancing practice



Newsletter 1. September 2022

Project Background & Aims

This project is **co-funded by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Office of the Planning Regulator**. It started in April this year and will be completed by March 2024. It aims to provide good practice guidance on two key aspects of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) practice:

1. Public participation, including stakeholder consultation; and
2. Performance criteria, also referred to as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Public participation is a cornerstone of good plan-making and SEA. It allows local information and concerns to be captured, interested and affected parties to engage in the assessment and plan-making processes, and conflict with and opposition to plan implementation to be reduced.



Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are measurable values that demonstrate how effective and intervention, such as SEA, is in achieving its objectives. In SEA, KPIs can be used to measure inputs such as human and financial resources, activities such as SEA screening, scoping and public participation, outputs such as quality of SEA environmental reports and informed planning decisions, and outcomes such as environmental enhancement of more sustainable forms of development.

Public Participation in SEA and Plan-making

The initial phases of the research are focusing on public participation, and involve a review of international literature on good public engagement practice, national/international interviews with SEA, planners and participation experts, an international online survey, and the pilot testing of a novel participative approach at Local Area Plan level as part of an ongoing SEA process. These research components will inform the preparation of a **Public Participation Guidance Note** with the aim of enhancing public engagement in Irish SEA and planning practice.

Preliminary Research Findings (from the literature review)

- Public participation in European SEA practice tends to be limited to fulfilling legal requirements; commonly informing the public rather than enabling two-way communication and input into SEA. This is also the case for Ireland.
- Effective public participation involves inviting all affected and interested parties, using appropriate means for engaging them, giving them an opportunity to have a say in the SEA and plan-making processes, and integrating their views and concerns into these.
- There are a wide range of public participation methods and tools, effectively applied in other sectors (e.g. business) that can be tailored to the requirements of SEA to enhance existing approaches.



Please contact us if you have any questions about the project or if you want to share your participation experience.

Project Lead: Ainhoa González
(ainhoa.gonzalez@ucd.ie)

Main Researchers: Alejandro Lara
(alejandro.lara@ucd.ie)

Riki Therivel

(levett-therivel@phonecoop.coop)

Report of Findings

SEA Public Consultation

Dundalk Local Area Plan

This newsletter describes the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) public consultation held on June 13 2023, as part of the planning process for the drafting of the Dundalk Local Area Plan (LAP) 2024-2030. It compiles public input in regard to opinions, knowledge, and recommendations on environmental considerations and key aspects that should be taken into account for the sustainable development of the town.

This SEA consultation process included novel approaches to public engagement as part of the project 'Public Participation and Performance Criteria in Strategic Environmental Assessment: The Way Forward to Advancing Practice' (Ref: 2021-NE-1061) co-funded by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Office of the Planning Regulator.

The consultation event consisted of neighbourhood walks in which seven people participated and a community mapping workshop with four participants. The activities focused on four areas within the town which, due to their vulnerability or development potential, are essential for the plan, including Mount Avenue, Castletown River, Long Walk Quarter and St. Nicholas Quarter, and Inner Relief Road.

The findings of the event will be used, among other things, to inform and influence the drafting of the plan.

In this issue

About SEA

Neighbourhood Walks Findings

Community Mapping Workshop Findings

Next Steps

The Highlights

Key aspects for future development

- Walking & cycling infrastructure
- Town centre redevelopment
- Services and amenities provision
- Housing solutions
- River and coastal services and infrastructure
- Traffic & pedestrian safety

Key environmental considerations

- Flood risk
- Active transport
- Green parks & greenways
- River integration
- Water Quality
- Town's revitalization

About SEA

SEA is a process undertaken as part of the development of certain plans and programmes, such as the Dundalk Local Area Plan. It aims to minimise damage to the environment and to promote sustainable development.

Public consultation is an integral part of the SEA process, as it allows the **public to have a voice** in decision-making and plan-making.

The themes covered in the SEA are:

- Climate change
- Biodiversity
- Population and human health
- Soil and geology
- Water
- Air
- Material assets (public infrastructure)
- Cultural heritage
- Landscape

Learn more about SEA Consultation here:



<https://youtu.be/9nWTbZ7wdOE>

Neighbourhood Walks Findings

This activity allowed the public to walk through Long Walk and St. Nicholas Quarter, and Castletown River to identify and map positive and negative aspects of the areas.



Neighbourhood walk.



Mapping by participant of positive (green dot) and negative (red dot) aspects of the area.

The observations raised by participant are:

Active transport infrastructure

More walkways and cycleways are needed.

Town centre redevelopment

The Long Walk should be re-developed strategically before any additional building occurs in the outskirts of the town, which is what is happening at the moment

The regeneration of different neighbourhoods should be designed in conversation with the locals to ensure appropriate services are provided.

Housing

Housing needs to be supported by proper services. This is important to bring people back to the town centre.

Springboard housing (e.g. for couples) is missing.

River and coastal services and infrastructure

All land up to 5m of bank and all land to be in public ownership for the purpose of recreation, amenity and nature tourism.

Improve access to and use of the river and sea.

Upgrade riverbanks for improved access and use.

Slipways should be clear of silt, and maintained for usage.

There could be an expansion of port activities.

In addition, participants identified positive and negative aspects of the Long Walk Quarter and St. Nicholas Quarter area:

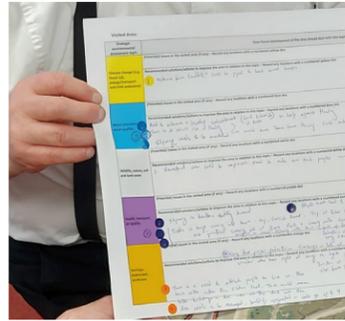
Area	Issues	Proposed solution
Clanbrassil Street	Cleanliness of the pedestrian paths.	Regular cleaning, fines for throwing gum.
	Lack of bins in Clanbrassil St. (taken away and not put back yet).	Place bins at regular intervals and ensure these have segregated rubbish options to encourage recycling.
	There are no bus stops on Clanbrassil St., and this is a street used by different age cohorts.	Make it age-friendly and provide at least a bus stop midway.
	No opportunities for cycling through Clanbrassil St., it is very narrow.	Provide cycle lanes or close the street fully to traffic.
	Connecting alleyways between Long Rd. and Clanbrassil St. are an issue deterring people from using them.	Make these more appealing/safe and put sensor lights or similar.
St. Nicholas Quarter	There are derelict upper floors and buildings.	Propose new use (e.g. housing).
	Traffic feeling.	Extent paving across road (e.g. area in front of church).
	Appearance of the area.	Improve the footpaths and the derelict buildings.
Green area by the river at the end of St Nicholas Quarter	Underused open area.	Bring events / concerts and expand so people start using it.
		Place future-proof street furniture and, possibly, a playground.
		Provide traffic amelioration as the area is currently very noisy.
Castletown River and Riverfront	There is an opportunity to improve the area.	Propose shops/businesses that activate the area (e.g. coffee shop).
		Add more vegetation for habitat enhancement and for visual/landscape enhancement.
The Long Walk	Cinema is an eyesore as it is painted black.	Screen it with trees and improve the signage.
		Develop a planting connection in the cinema.
Linenhall Street	Traffic noise, harsh corridor feeling.	Revamp and upgrade the area and buildings.
	Some buildings are a public hazard.	
St. Helena's Park	State of facilities adjacent to the port.	Properly manage and maintain the facilities adjacent to the port.

Community Mapping Workshop Findings

For this activity, the participants were organized around large-scale maps with the current land use zoning of the four areas with the aim of identifying possible problems and solutions related to future development and SEA themes. The observations raised during the exercise are reflected in the following actionable recommendations:



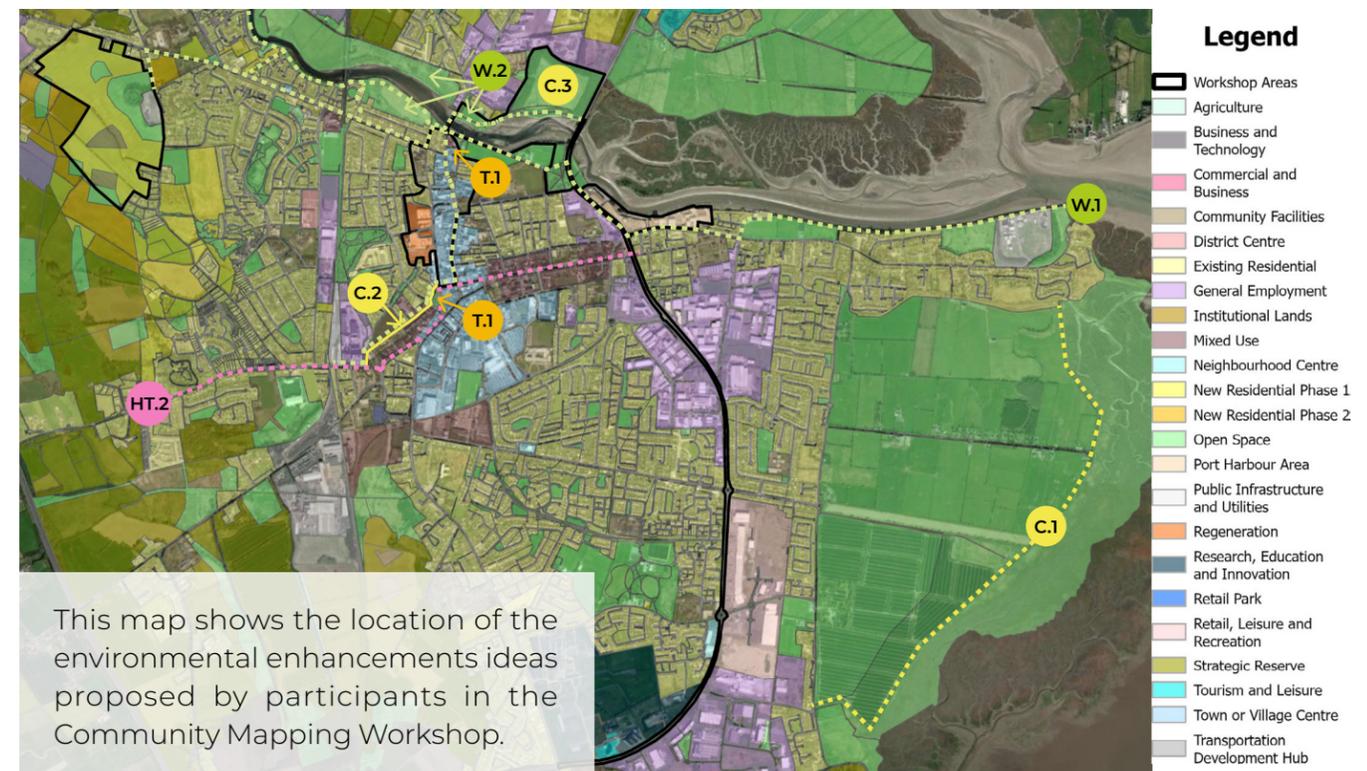
Community Mapping Workshop.



Recommendations proposed by participants in the activity.

Climate change	
C1. Flood Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance and develop Lord Limerick embankment to help against flooding.
C2. Active Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide good cycling and pedestrian infrastructure throughout the town including cycle lanes on main streets such as Clanbrassil Street. Consider informal popular cycling routes such as the one between St. Malachy's Infants' School and Market Square. Consider creating a walkway/cycleway between Dundalk and Blackrock to benefit the town.
C.3. Former landfill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pipe methane from the landfill to heat houses.
C.4. Recycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide more recycling bins on Clanbrassil Street. Separate different types of waste such as metal, plastic, and general waste.
Wildlife, nature, soil and land cover	
W1. Green Parks and greenways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a park/nature reserve with pedestrian access from the existing riverwalk and residential areas off Castletown Road. Create a greenway/linear park from Point Road to Cú Chulainn's Castle. Create a greenway/linear park across the 'Fairgreen' within the pedestrian access on the road. Develop a safe walkway on both sides of the river. Create a linked walkway to integrate walks along the banks, Market Square and the train station.
W2. Uses and public domain associated with the river and sea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasize the river as an asset of the town. There seems to be resistance to going down to the river. Improve/provide recreational areas around the river and existing walking paths. Provide recreational facilities including water sports (e.g. canoeing). Consider regenerating/reviving the other side of the river through a public-private partnership. Consider the expansion of port activities.

Water provision and water supply	
WQ1. Water Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate and address the reason why tap water sometimes turns grey/brown in colour.
WQ2. Slipways conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide maintenance to the slipway as it is currently a safety hazard.
Heritage, townscape, and landscape	
T1. Town's revitalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a more attractive place to live by ensuring a variety of services (e.g. playgrounds). Focus on attracting people to live in the town centre rather than having ribbon development. Consider developing four-storey residential buildings. Revitalise underused green areas and open areas (e.g. The Demesne; former landfill, which could be used for sports pitches).
Health, transport, and air quality	
HT1. Traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address traffic coming into town as it is heavy and getting worse, especially on Carrick Road.
HT2. Risk to pedestrian safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide proper, clear pedestrian crossings as there are very few. There are lots of 'hybrid' crossings where it's not clear who has the right of way. The crossing over Park Street from the car park is dangerous, as is the junction of Eccle Road and Carrick Road. Consider pedestrianisation of the town centre or short-term parking near essential services.



Next Steps

Submissions to the Pre-Draft Issues Paper and respective SEA Consultation are closed. As the plan-making process progresses, there will be a further opportunity to make submissions/observations on the Dundalk Local Area Plan. Public notices will be published by Louth County Council as these consultation stages arise.

If you have general queries in relation to the Dundalk Local Area Plan you can contact the Forward Planning Team: DundalkLAP@louthcoco.ie

Acknowledgements

This project is funded under the EPA Research Programme 2021-2030 and co-funded by the Office of the Planning Regulator. The EPA Research Programme is a Government of Ireland initiative funded by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

Project co-funded by:



Project partners:



Levett-Therivel



SEA public participation event held in collaboration with:



Disclaimer

Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the material contained in this Newsletter, complete accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Neither the Environmental Protection Agency nor the authors accept any responsibility whatsoever for loss or damage occasioned or claimed to have been occasioned, in part or in full, as a consequence of any person acting or refraining from acting, as a result of a matter contained in this Newsletter.