

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT**

for

**PROPOSED VARIATION NO 3 OF THE MEATH COUNTY
DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013- 2019**

for

MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL

December 2015



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Contents Amendment Record

This report has been issued and amended as follows:

Issue	Revision	Description	Date	Prepared by	Checked by
01	00	SEA Screening Report Final	21.12.15	ST	TB

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1: INTRODUCTION.....	4
2: PROPOSED VARIATION NO. 3 TO THE MEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013-2019	6
3: ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS	13
4: DETERMINATION	16
5: CONSULTATION WITH ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORITIES	16
6: RECOMMENDATION	16
APPENDIX 1: SCHEDULE 1	17

1: INTRODUCTION

Meath County Council adopted the Meath County Development Plan 213 – 2019 on December 17th 2012 and it took effect from January 22nd 2013. The purpose of the Plan is to promote sustainable development by encouraging economic development, protecting the environment and enhancing the social fabric of the area. Since its adoption the Local Authority has decided to vary the Plan under Section 13 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2009.

The SEA Directive came into force in 2004 and was subsequently transposed into Irish law through:

- The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, (S.I. No. 435 of 2004) as amended in 2011 and;
- Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011, (S.I. No. 201 of 2011), amending the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No. 436 of 2004).

The Directive requires Member States of the EU to assess the likely significant¹ environmental effects of plans and programmes prior to their adoption thus providing for the assessment of strategic environmental considerations at an early stage of the decision making process.

Article 1 of the SEA Directive states:

“The objective of this directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that, in accordance with this directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.”

The Directive came into effect in an Irish context in July 2004. Since then SEA must be prepared for plans and programmes, including:

- Regional Planning Guidelines;
- City and County Development Plans;
- Development Plans made by Town Councils, where the population of the area is 10,000 or more; or
- Local Area Plans for towns with a population of 5,000 or more.

The Environmental Report, prepared for the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, concluded that the implementation of the Plan, including the various mitigation measures, would result, in general terms, in a neutral to positive impact on the environment as a whole.

¹ “Significant Effects” – These effects include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects.

Determination of the need for SEA and SEA Screening

The Regulations state that SEA is mandatory for certain plans (as outlined above) while screening for SEA is required for other plans that fall below the specified thresholds. Where plans or programmes fall below or outside of the specified thresholds, a screening report is required to be carried out to determine whether the making and implementation of a particular plan will or will not, lead to significant environmental consequences for the plan area.

Article 14A (2) of Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (as amended in 2011) states under Section 13 K “Where a planning authority proposes to make a variation of a development plan under section 13 of the Act, it shall, before giving notice under section 13(2) of the Act, consider whether or not the proposed variation would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking into account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A”. The criterion against which this is required to be measured and screened is set out in Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011.

Under the terms of the provisions of Article 13K of the Regulations and following the appropriate consultation period, the planning authority shall determine whether or not implementation of the proposed variations would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the Regulations and any submission or observation received from the environmental authority.

2: PROPOSED VARIATION NO. 3 TO THE MEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013-2019

The Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 was prepared by Meath County Council under the provisions of the Planning and Development Act, 2000. The Plan is the guiding statutory document for the proper planning and sustainable development of the Plan area for a period of six years from the date of its adoption. Since the adoption of the County Development Plan, 2 Variations have been proposed and adopted. A summary of the content of these variations is set out below:

Variation No. 1 referred to as an ‘enabling variation’ sought to amend existing provisions within the Meath County Development Plan and in particular a number of objectives within the Core Strategy in order to clarify the manner in which the process of introducing objectives and development frameworks for individual centres (which were at the time subject to existing Town Development Plans and Local Area Plans) were undertaken, in particular to meet housing and population allocations for each centre contained in the Core Strategy. Variation No. 1 was adopted on 4th November 2013.

Variation No. 2 to the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 collectively forms Volume 5 of the Meath County Development Plan 2013 – 2019 and is entitled “Written Statement & Development Objectives for Urban Centres”. Variation No. 2 had the following objectives; i) to introduce development objectives (including land use zoning objectives) into the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 for 29 no. existing centres which previously had Local Area Plans, ii) to introduce land use zoning objectives and an Order of Priority into the County Development Plan for the release of residential and employment zoned lands for 5 of the centres which retained their Local Area Plans (namely Ashbourne, Drogheda Southern Environs, Dunboyne/Clonee/Pace, Dunshaughlin and Ratoath), iii) to ensure that only the quantum of land required to meet the household projections as set out in Table 2.4 for each centre is identified for release during the lifetime of the County Development Plan 2013 – 2019.

This was to ensure consistency with the Core Strategy contained in the Meath County Development Plan, iv) to review the appropriateness of the nature, location and quantum of industrial and employment generating land use within each centre as part of the process, v) to apply the land use zoning objectives contained in the Core Strategy of the County Development Plan. Variation No.2 was adopted on 19th May 2014. Strategic Environmental Assessment was carried out for Variation 2.

Variation No 3 is the first in a suite of variations which will be required to align the County Development Plan with the key tenets of the Economic Strategy.

The key purpose of Variation No. 3 of the County Development Plan is to align the County Development Plan with the key tenets of the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014 – 2022 as they relate to statutory land use planning. The variation also updates the Development Plan in order to incorporate amendments to Volume 1 which arose from the adoption of Variation No. 2. The variation also identifies potential future changes to the settlement hierarchy of the County.

Variation No. 3 of the Meath County Development Plan comprises a number of elements as outlined under the following headings.

Part 1: Incorporation of the recommendations of the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022

A number of amendments to the County Development Plan are proposed in order to incorporate the recommendations of the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath. These are addressed as follows:

Policy wording changes to include reference to the Economic Development Strategy

A detailed review of the economic strategy contained in Chapter 4 of the existing Meath County Development Plan was undertaken as part of this variation. The policies and objectives as they relate to economic development within the County have been updated to include specific reference to the findings and recommendations set out within the Meath Economic Development Strategy 2014-2022.

Zoning of additional lands for Employment Generating Uses

As part of the preparation of the proposed Variation No. 3 of the County Development Plan a review was undertaken of the quantum of employment zoned lands within the County Development Plan. On the basis of this review, it is proposed to provide for additional employment zoned lands at the following locations:

Clonee/Portan

There is a need to provide additional E2/E3 employment zoned lands at Clonee in order to avail of the opportunities brought forward by the proposed data centre investment on the Portan lands. The strategic location of lands at Portan along the M3 transport corridor together with their location in the Dublin Metropolitan Area, adjoining significant employment lands in Fingal are key attributes of these lands. The lands at Portan represent the only significant employment zoned lands at this location and the proposed Facebook Data Centre will utilise almost the full extent of these lands.

In order to accommodate clustering of similar format developments at this location and to build on the significance of the committed investment at this location (and the probability that significant Facebook investment will stimulate further FDI and indigenous employment) it is proposed to zone additional lands for E2/E3 purposes adjacent to the Portan lands as part of this variation. In accordance with the existing zoning objectives pertaining to the lands, additional employment lands are envisaged to accommodate Logistics and product based investment.

Enfield

Lands zoned for White Land purposes within the Enfield Local Area Plan are proposed to be zoned for E1/E3 purposes in order to facilitate a choice of employment zoned lands within the town in accordance with the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath. This will also serve to reduce planning uncertainty in respect of the potential employment opportunities in the area, which otherwise might (inadvertently) act as a barrier to new jobs in the area.

Maynooth Environs

No additional lands are proposed to be zoned, however some lands currently with an E1 land use zoning objective are proposed to be zoned at Moygaddy for tourism related uses. It is considered that this area has potential to accommodate further tourism related development.

Removal of Phasing Objective pertaining to Employment Zoned lands and removal of employment lands due to flood mapping

One of the key findings of the Economic Development Strategy is the need to provide a choice of employment zoned lands within key settlements throughout the County. In this context the Strategy recommends the removal of the phasing objectives pertaining to employment zoned lands throughout the County. On this basis phasing objectives are removed from the following settlements:

- Athboy
- Baile Ghib (Gibbstown)
- Carlanstown
- Duleek
- Enfield
- Kentstown
- Kilcock
- Kilbride
- Maynooth Environs
- Oldcastle
- Slane
- Stamullin
- Summerhill
- Ashbourne
- Dunboyne/Clonee/Pace
- Dunshaughlin

Employment lands are proposed for removal to take account of revised flood mapping² in the following settlements:

- Ballivor
- Longwood
- Kilcock

Lands at North Dunboyne

As part of the preparation of this Variation consideration was given to mechanisms to ensure that the appropriate planning framework is put in place to facilitate the sustainable development of lands at North Dunboyne in accordance with the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy. These lands are identified as one of the five key strategic sites for employment generation in County Meath in the Strategy. The Meath County Development Plan 2013 – 2019 (Chapter 4 Economic Development Strategy) refers to an opportunity that may exist for a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) in the North Dunboyne area within the Metropolitan Area of the National Gateway. It is important to ensure that the identified exceptional economic development potential of this area is realised in the short to medium term.

Having regard to the need to urgently bring forward and implement the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy it is considered that this variation and the subsequent preparation of a Master Plan for the North Dunboyne Area offers a realistic and proportionate mechanism to deliver an appropriate planning framework in a reasonable timescale to ensure that the maximisation of the exceptional economic development opportunities arising from the strategic infrastructural investment made within the area. The suggestion of suitability of the lands for an SDZ is thus no longer considered to be applicable or desirable.

A review of the planning policy framework pertaining to the North Dunboyne Area identified that the current Level 2 retail designation of the lands at North Dunboyne needs to be reconsidered in light of the need to bring forward the lands for employment and related support facilities including a neighbourhood centre, housing, community & amenity facilities to ensure that future land uses are in accordance with the policies and objectives of the Economic Development Strategy and are consistent with the Meath County Retail Strategy.

The 2 Year Progress report indicates in the revised Table 2.5 that there are now 641 multiple housing units less committed in the county than when the Table was originally prepared for the adopted plan. It is the Council's intention to now reallocate 500 available housing units in the Core Strategy of the County Development Plan to North Dunboyne (Large Growth Town II in the county settlement hierarchy). The new land use zoning objectives map for this area shall form part of Volume 5 of the County Development Plan (Book of Maps for Urban Centres).

² Draft mapping currently on public display

The preparation of a developer led Master Plan for the North Dunboyne Area to be agreed in writing with the Executive of Meath County Council is considered to provide the most expedient method/mechanism for the Planning Authority to implement a planning framework for this area. This Master Plan will be required to be compliant with the Meath County Development Plan as varied.

A non-statutory Strategic Framework Guidance Review for the entire Dunboyne Clonee area has been prepared by Meath County Council in conjunction with John Spain and Associates. It is intended that this document will provide long term strategic guidance for overall development of the area. This Framework Plan proposes an overall development model which establishes the principal of integrated and sustainable work and living communities on the triangulated nodes of:

- Dunboyne Town Centre,
- Dunboyne Rail Station and;
- The M3 Parkway.

The Strategic Framework Guidance Review omits the Level 2 Retail Centre objective pertaining to the North Dunboyne Area and replaces it with an objective for the creation of a sustainable live work community model centred on a range of uses including high end employment, mixed use neighbourhood centre, community, recreational and residential development.

Overall the North Dunboyne site represents a key opportunity for the provision of E1/E3 employment zoned land within the Metropolitan Area of Meath. It benefits from both strong public transport connections together with direct access to the M3 and has the potential to play a significant role in accommodating employment generating development within the County.

The wording of specific objectives PACE OBJ 1 and PACE OBJ 2 are updated within the Plan and revisions to the zoning objectives pertaining to these lands are proposed. All references to the preparation of an SDZ for the North Dunboyne area are to be removed from the County Development Plan. These will be replaced with the requirement to prepare a developer led Master Plan for the North Dunboyne lands which will be required to be agreed in writing with the Executive of the Planning Authority in advance of the lodging of any planning application. Phase one of any development of these lands will be required to comprise the submission of a planning application for an agreed quantum of employment uses.

Review of the Zoning Objectives set out within the County Development Plan

A review of the zoning objectives set out within the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 was also undertaken as part of the proposed variation in order to provide more flexibility

for employment generating uses at appropriate locations within the County. It is intended that this review will add clarity and will result in a more user friendly Development Plan.

Three employment based land use categories are identified within the County Development Plan. These categories include the following:

- E1 Strategic Employment Zones (High Technology Uses): ‘To facilitate opportunities for high technology and major campus style office based employment within high quality and accessible locations.’
- E2 General Enterprise & Employment: ‘To provide for the creation of enterprise and facilitate opportunities for employment through industrial, manufacturing, distribution, warehousing and other general employment / enterprise uses in a good quality physical environment.’
- E3 Warehousing & Distribution: ‘To facilitate logistics, warehousing, distribution and supply chain management inclusive of related industry facilities which require good access to the major road network.’

3 Separate categories of development are identified within the E2 zoned lands which distinguish the format of development which is appropriate at each level of the settlement hierarchy. This variation proposes the removal of the sub categories within the E2 zoning objective in order to facilitate a consistent approach to the development of E2 zoned lands throughout the County. Such sub categories are considered overly prescriptive. The different characteristics of employment zoning in settlements of varying sizes is however still recognised. Any application for appropriate employment uses on these lands can be positively considered on their merits by the Planning Authority.

Framework Plan Requirements

In accordance with the recommendations of the Economic Development Strategy a review of Framework Plan requirements was undertaken. All framework plan referenced within the development plan were reviewed and where such references were considered to be overly prescriptive in terms of the specific nature or format of future development on these lands revisions are proposed. In the interests of consistency the term Framework Plan is being replaced with the term Master Plan.

Review of Development Management Objectives

Some minor revisions to the Development Management Standards as set out within Chapter 11 of the County Development Plan are proposed in respect of commercial developments in accordance with the recommendations of the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath.

Part 2: Revisions to Volume 1 of the County Development Plan in order to incorporate Variation no. 2 of the County Development Plan 2013-2019

This variation also updates Volume 1 of the County Development in order to reflect the revisions to the County Plan introduced by the adopted Variation no. 2 of the County Development Plan.

Potential Future Revisions to the Settlement Strategy of the County Development Plan

Variation no. 3 of the County Development Plan also identifies potential changes to the settlement hierarchy of the County Development Plan. This section of the variation identifies potential for the growth of Stamullen and Enfield from small towns to moderate sustainable growth towns within the County Settlement Hierarchy in line with the strategic locations of these centres along the M1 and M4.

In this regard this variation seeks to include reference to the small towns of Stamullen and Enfield having the potential to grow to Moderate Sustainable Growth towns over the lifetime of this Development Plan and subsequent plans. Any change in the status of these towns within the settlement hierarchy will be advanced in accordance with relevant RPG's/RSES³

³ Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies

3: ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

The following assessment (Table 3.1) has been conducted in accordance with the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (SI No. 436 of 2004). Thus the Screening of the Masterplan utilises specified criteria for determining the likely significant environmental impacts of the proposed variations as set out in Schedule 1 of SEA Regulations 2004 (see Appendix 1).

1.0 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLAN HAVING REGARD IN PARTICULAR TO:	
<p>1.1 The degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions, or by allocating resources;</p> <p>The proposed Variation is consistent with the objectives of the County Development Plan which has undergone full Strategic Environmental Assessment. In addition it amends and clarifies Variation 2, to be consistent with the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014 – 2022. Variation 2 was subject to full Strategic Environment Assessment.</p> <p>The Development Plan is being varied to clearly define the manner in which the process regarding the existing land use zoning objective were envisaged and presented in the adopted County Development Plan. The primary purpose is to provide clarity with regard to the intentions of the Planning Authority in their subsequent work programme to give effect to the new County Development Plan.</p> <p>The proposed Variation to the County Development Plan is primarily intended to amend and provide clarification where required. The proposed amendments do not materially alter the overall framework for development of the County as set out in the Development Plan.</p>	
<p>1.2 The degree to which the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy.</p> <p>The proposed Variation is consistent with the objectives of the County Development Plan which has undergone full Strategic Environmental Assessment. In addition further assessment and protection was provided for in the SEA of Variation No. 2 and the recent Amendments to LAPs for settlements subject to this Variation.</p> <p>The Development Plan is being varied to clearly define the manner in which the process regarding the existing land use zoning objective were envisaged and presented in the adopted County Development Plan. The primary purpose is to provide clarity with regard to the intentions of the Planning Authority in their subsequent work programme to give effect to the County Development Plan.</p> <p>Any future amendments or variations to the development plan, local area plans or the preparation of framework and master plans are subject to the requirements relating to SEA as provided for by the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations, as amended.</p>	

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

The preparation of the County Development Plan, which underwent full SEA, integrated environmental considerations into the Plan and concluded that the Plan is based on the principles of sustainable development. The proposed variation does not in itself propose changes to environmental considerations and seeks to clarify and define intentions and process in relation to the subsequent work programme of Planning Authority and the likely order of development in giving effect to the County Development Plan.

- 1.4 Environmental problems relevant to the plan.

The proposed variation is wholly consistent with the objectives of the County Development Plan and will incorporate into the County Development Plan which has undergone full SEA. The Environmental Report, prepared for the Meath County Development Plan, concluded that the implementation of the Plan, including the various mitigation measures, would result, in general terms, in a neutral to positive impact on the environment as a whole. No significant environmental problems are identified in relation to the proposed Variation, which haven't been considered in either the SEA for the County Plan, Variation No. 2 and the recent Amendments to LAPs for settlements subject to this Variation.

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

Issues relating to European Union Legislation on the environment are provided for in the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019. This proposed Variation is consistent with the policies and objectives of the Plan which itself was the subject of an SEA. This proposed Variation will therefore be guided and informed by the relevant European legislation on the environment including; waste management and water protection policies and objectives as set out in the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019.

2.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EFFECTS AND OF THE AREA LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED HAVING REGARD IN PARTICULAR TO:

- 2.1 The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects:

The Development Plan is being varied to clearly define the manner in which the process regarding the review of the existing land use zoning objectives was envisaged and presented in the adopted County Development Plan, and subsequently varied. The primary purpose is to provide clarity with regard to the intentions of the Planning Authority in their subsequent work programme to give effect to the County Development Plan.

The Environmental Report, carried out on the County Development Plan, outlined the characteristics of the effects likely to be affected by the Plan's implementation. This was subsequently amended by Variation No.2 and the recent Amendments to LAPs for settlements subject to this Variation, which were consistent with the Development Plan. The proposed variation will not alter the assessment including the characteristics of the effects on the receiving environment.

2.2	The cumulative nature of the effects:
	It is considered that there will be no significant cumulative effects on the environment arising from the implementation of the proposed variation which have not been previously assessed for SEA.
2.3	The trans-boundary nature of the effects:
	It is considered that there will be no trans-boundary effect on the environment arising from the implementation of the proposed amendments.
2.4	The risks to human health or the environment (<i>e.g.</i> due to accidents):
	No risks to human health or the environment due to accidents have been identified.
2.5	The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected):
	The proposed variation will not result in any increase in the magnitude or spatial extent of the effects which have been addressed in the SEA of the adopted County Development Plan or subsequently in Variation No. 2.
2.6	The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:
	<p>a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;</p> <p>No effects have been identified.</p> <p>b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, and;</p> <p>No effects have been identified.</p> <p>c) Intensive land-use.</p> <p>No effects have been identified.</p>
2.7	The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status:
	Under the Habitats Directive an Appropriate Assessment Screening has been undertaken on the proposed Variation and it has found that significant adverse impacts would not be likely due to the Variation and the protective policies engrained within Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019.

4: DETERMINATION

Following careful review and consideration of the issues concerning the variation, it is concluded that the proposed Variation No.3 to the adopted Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 will not in themselves result in a significant adverse environmental effect and will therefore not require a detailed assessment of their effect upon implementation through the SEA process.

This conclusion has been drawn through consideration of the following factors:

- The proposed variation as presented;
- The existing and adopted safeguarding policies on environmental protection; and
- The existing and adopted County Development Plan SEA Environmental Report and Appropriate Assessment.
- The Strategic Environmental Assessments carried out for the Development Plan Variation No. 2 and the recent amendments to the various LAPs.

It is considered the proposed variation will be a further level of control over the implementation of the adopted Plan as it seeks to provide further clarity and definition of processes in the management of development and zoning generally.

5: CONSULTATION WITH ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORITIES

An important and significant element to the Screening process is consultation with the Environmental Authorities. In accordance with SI No. 436 of 2004, the Local Authority will enter into a consultation period and will invite comment/submissions from the relevant environmental authorities namely;

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); and
- The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DoECLG);

Any observations/comments received from these agencies will be considered in the Final Screening Report.

6: RECOMMENDATION

The screening process has determined that there will not be any significant environmental effects due to the adoption of the proposed amendments. As a result, there is no requirement to proceed beyond Stage 1 of the SEA process.

It is considered that proposed Variation No. 3 as detailed above is not likely to have significant or strategic effects on the environment.

In view of the above it is currently considered that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required in respect of proposed Variation No. 3 of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019.

Pursuant to Article 13 K of the Regulations notice will be issued to the Environmental Authorities listed in Section 5 of this report of the Planning Authority's determination in this matter.

Appendix 1: Schedule 1

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT (STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2004

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING WHETHER A PLAN OR PROGRAMME (OR MODIFICATION THERETO) IS LIKELY TO HAVE SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

1. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to

- *the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources,*
- *the degree to which the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy,*
- *the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,*
- *environmental problems relevant to the plan,*
- *the relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste-management or water protection).*

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to

- *the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,*
- *the cumulative nature of the effects,*
- *the transboundary nature of the effects,*
- *the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents),*
 - *the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),*
- *the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:*
 - (a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,*
 - (b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values,*
 - (c) intensive land-use,*
- *the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status.*