Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region

Treoirlínte Réigiúnacha Pleanála
Réigiún An Iarthaír
Preamble

Under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 and the 2009 Regional Planning Guidelines Regulations, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government issued a direction to each Regional Authority to review existing Regional Planning Guidelines 2004 – 2016 and prepare new Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022 for their administrative areas.

Following initial public consultation and consideration of submissions received, the West Regional Authority prepared the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region which was placed on public display for a period of 10 weeks from the 22nd January 2010 to 9th April 2010.

Public authorities, community organisations, public and private agencies and the public generally were invited to make submissions regarding the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines and associated documents. Following the close of submissions, a report on the submissions received was compiled and presented to the Members of the West Regional Authority at their monthly meeting on the 24th June 2010.

At a meeting on the 19th October, 2010, the Members of the West Regional Authority made the Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 – 2022.

The Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 – 2022 and other related documents may be viewed at the following website:
http://www.wra.ie

A link to the website will also be found on the Local Authority websites:
http://www.galwaycoco.ie
http://www.mayococo.ie
http://www.roscommoncoco.ie
http://www.galwaycity.ie

A copy of the Regional Planning Guidelines is available for viewing at the following locations during office hours:
- Galway County Council, County Buildings, Prospect Hill, Galway.
- Galway City Council, City Hall, College Road, Galway.
- Mayo County Council, Áras an Chontae, the Mall, Castlebar, County Mayo.
- Roscommon County Council, the Courthouse, Roscommon, County Roscommon.

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Acknowledgements
The West Regional Authority wish to acknowledge the contributions made and extends our thanks to the following:

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Regional Planning Guidelines

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Table of Contents

Preamble .................................................................................................................. 2
Acknowledgements.................................................................................................. 4
Table of Contents .................................................................................................... 6
List of Figures .......................................................................................................... 9
List of Tables ........................................................................................................... 9

CHAPTER 1: Context ............................................................................................... 10
  1.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 10
  1.2 The West Region in a National Context ......................................................... 12
  1.3 The West Region in a Regional Context ......................................................... 14
  1.4 The Region Today .......................................................................................... 20
  1.5 The Region: Key Planning and Development Issues ...................................... 23
  1.6 Habitats Directive Assessment .................................................................... 24

CHAPTER 2: Strategic Vision for the West Region .................................................. 26
  2.1 Strategic Vision for the West Region .............................................................. 26
  2.2 Strategic Goals for the West Region ............................................................... 26
  2.3 Habitats Directive Assessment .................................................................... 28

CHAPTER 3: Economic Development Strategy ....................................................... 29
  3.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 29
  3.2 Economic Context .......................................................................................... 29
  3.3 Summary of Economic Strengths & Opportunities ....................................... 34
  3.4 Realising Future Economic Development Potential ...................................... 36
  3.5 Planning and Economic Development – Priority Policies and Objectives ... 36
  3.6 Rural Enterprise Development ...................................................................... 44
  3.7 Retail Strategy ............................................................................................... 51

CHAPTER 4: Settlement Strategy, Population & Housing ....................................... 53
  4.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 53
  4.2 Settlement Structure ...................................................................................... 53
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Cultural Facilities</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Social Inclusion</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>Social Infrastructure Policy</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>An Ghaeltacht &amp; The Islands</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Overall Implementation</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Monitoring and Indicators</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Future Review of Regional Planning Guidelines</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendices**

- Acronyms: 137

Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 -2022
List of Figures
Figure 1: Location of the West Regional Authority Area ........................................... 12
Figure 2: National Spatial Strategy (NSS) - Key Rural, Urban & Transport Routes within the West Region ................................................................. 13
Figure 3: Map of Bordering Regional Authorities ..................................................... 14
Figure 4: % Increase in Population of EDs 2002-06 ................................................ 55
Figure 5: Population Density of EDs in 2006 ............................................................. 55
Figure 6: % of Workers in Each ED who Travel 30 km and over to Work in 2006 .......... 81
Figure 7: River Basin Districts ................................................................................... 93
Figure 8: Waste Management Structure .................................................................. 99

List of Tables
Table 1: Planning Context & Other Relevant Plans or Strategies .......................... 11
Table 2: Gross Value Added Statistics for the West Region and the State ............... 30
Table 3: Population Trends in the West Region and the State ............................... 30
Table 4: Population of Principle Urban Centres in the West Region ..................... 31
Table 5: Age Profile in the West Region and Rest of State ................................... 31
Table 6: Numbers Employed in the West and Percentage Change 2004 - 2009 ....... 32
Table 7: Strengths & Opportunities for the West Region ...................................... 34
Table 8: CSO Population ......................................................................................... 57
Table 9: CSO Population - Main Urban Centres ..................................................... 57
Table 10: Summary of Census Towns ordered by Size within the West Region (Census 2006) ................................................................................................. 58
Table 11: Alternative Scenarios .............................................................................. 60
Table 12: State and West Region Population Growth Targets 2010 – 2022 ............. 70
Table 13: Minimum Population Target for the Galway Gateway, Hub & Linked Hub 2016 and 2022 (DoEHLG) ................................................................. 70
Table 14: Interval Increases in Population Targets for the Galway Gateway 2006-2022 .............................................................................................................. 71
Table 15: West Region Population Targets for 2010 .............................................. 72
Table 16: West Region Population Targets for 2016 & 2022 ................................. 73
Table 17: Remaining Share of Population Growth & Households for West Region 2010 – 2016 ........................................................................................................... 74
Table 18: Housing Demand & Residential Zoning for the Gateway, Hub, Joint Hub & County Town for period 2010 – 2016 .................................................. 74
Table 19: CSO Permanent housing units by occupancy status on Census Night (Vacancy rate includes holiday homes and second homes) ....................... 75
Table 20: Distance Travelled by Workforce in the West Region .............................. 82
Table 21: Mode of Travel used by Workforce in the West Region .......................... 82
Table 22: Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2012 ............................... 94
Table 23: Local Authority Water & Waste Water Assessment of Needs 2009 .......... 96
Table 24: 2006 Population of County Mayo and County Galway Islands ............. 130
Table 25-29: Indicators and Targets ....................................................................... 133-135
CHAPTER 1: Context

1.1 Introduction
The Regional Planning Guidelines have been prepared by the West Regional Authority for the period 2010 – 2022. The document will be reviewed six years following the date that it was made by the Members of the West Regional Authority.

1.1.1 Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region
In accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000-2010, Planning and Development (Regional Planning Guidelines) Regulations 2009 and Ministerial Direction¹ issued by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, each of the eight Regional Authorities has reviewed existing Regional Planning Guidelines 2004 - 2016 and prepared new Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 - 2022.

The aim of the Guidelines is to provide a framework for long term strategic development of the West Region for the period 2010 – 2022 which is consistent with the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002 – 2020 and which ensures the successful implementation of the NSS at regional, county and local level.

A key aspect of the West Regional Authority’s Regional Planning Guidelines is integrating sustainable economic development with the protection and enhancement of the environment. The Regional Planning Guidelines are influenced by a wide range of international, national and regional level plans, programmes and legislation². The Guidelines also establish a framework for other lower level plans and programmes.

The Guidelines set out the vision for the West Region through the formulation of strategic goals, policies and objectives. The physical planning context of the region is set out with a number of future development options explored. The development of the region will be measured against targets for population, housing, infrastructure, economic and social trends, large scale development, National Spatial Strategy (NSS) designations and the preservation of the environment. The Guidelines close with a section in relation to implementation.

The Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) will set out priorities for the West Region including those which fall under the Strategic Infrastructure Act, 2006. Local planning policy (namely county, city and town Development Plans) must be consistent with the new Regional Planning Guidelines to ensure that zoning corresponds with population targets as set out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the West Regional Authority. These targets provide for a sufficient supply of sustainable development to meet the needs of the regional population over the lifetime of the Guidelines. Policies for the rural and urban areas will be integrated and the Galway Gateway, the Hub Town of

¹ 15th December 2008
² Please refer to Appendices for more details on International, National, Regional and local level policy documents and plans.
Tuam and the Linked Hub of Ballina-Castlebar will be strengthened in accordance with the National Spatial Strategy. The following table indicates the position of the RPGs in a planning policy context.

Table 1: Planning Context & Other Relevant Plans or Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Hierarchy</th>
<th>Relevant Directives, Plans &amp; Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>European Spatial Development Perspective 1999</strong></td>
<td>European Directives; Conventions &amp; Agreements</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Spatial Strategy 2002</strong></td>
<td>Other National Strategies/ Plans/ Guidelines</td>
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<td>(e.g. National Development Plan, Policies and programmes of Government Departments, Capital Programmes, Planning Guidelines)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Planning Guidelines 2010</strong></td>
<td>Other Regional/ Local Level Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. Capital Programmes, Regional Waste Management Plan/Strategy, River Basin Management Plan)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>County, City &amp; Town Development Plans</strong></td>
<td>County Development Board Strategies, Corporate Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>(e.g. Galway City Development Plan, Roscommon County Development Plan)</td>
<td>(e.g. Mayo County Development Board Strategy)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Local Area Plans</strong></td>
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<td>(e.g. Tuam Local Area Plan)</td>
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A Regional Economic Development Strategy is found in Chapter 3 of this document. It has been developed in association with Forfás and is intended to take a strategic overview of development of the West Region, assessing its progress, identifying strategic policies and development priorities. The Strategy provides detail of

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national, regional and local policy, the profile of the region, trends, sustainability and development issues in the region. It sets out a number of strategic policies and objectives for the region on infrastructure, economic development, access and tourism, among others and highlights strengths and opportunities.

The new Regional Planning Guidelines have been informed by Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which examines the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the new RPGs. The RPGs are also informed by a Habitats Directive ‘Appropriate Assessment Screening Report’ & Natura Impact Statement’ which examines the likely impacts on the Natura 2000 network of implementing the RPGs, and the framework proposed first and foremost avoids adverse impacts on the environment or provides for appropriate mitigation of any adverse impacts. A Regional Flood Risk Appraisal also accompanies the RPGs. It examines areas of potential flood risk and includes strategic policies and measures to be implemented in lower level plans.

The Regional Planning Guidelines and subsequent lower level plans must take account of the requirements and mitigation measures outlined in the SEA ‘Environmental Report’ and Habitats Directive ‘Appropriate Assessment - Screening Report’ and ‘Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment - Natura Impact Statement’.

1.2 The West Region in a National Context

The West Region is located in the western periphery of Europe and along the Atlantic Ocean. The West Regional Authority (WRA) provides a regional tier of government in Ireland. The Region comprises of three of the five Connaught counties which are Galway, Mayo and Roscommon.

The functional area of the WRA extends some 13,801 square kilometres and incorporates four local authority functional areas:
- Galway County Council
- Galway City Council
- Mayo County Council
- Roscommon County Council

It also includes Ballinasloe, Loughrea and Tuam Town Councils (County Galway); Ballina, Castlebar and Westport Town Councils (County Mayo); and Boyle Town Council (County Roscommon).
The West Region is bound by the Border Region, Midlands Region and the Mid-West Region and the counties of Sligo, Leitrim, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Tipperary and Clare. The region spans from the western coastline of Mayo and Galway to the River Shannon and Lough Ree on the eastern side of Roscommon. Galway City is a key national economic location. Other main urban centres include Tuam, Ballinasloe, Loughrea (County Galway), Ballina, Westport, Castlebar (County Mayo) and Roscommon Town (County Roscommon).

There is one ‘Hub’ (Tuam), one ‘Linked Hub’ (Ballina - Castlebar) and one ‘Gateway’ (Galway) within the West Region as designated by the National Spatial Strategy; however Monksland in South Roscommon is located along part of the Midlands Gateway (Athlone). The Galway Gateway has the largest population concentration and is the main economic driver of the region. The population of the region was 414,277 in 2006 (CSO: 2006), with a density of 30 persons per square kilometre. This accounted for 10.2% of the national population. The population of the region increased by 33,086 persons from 2002 - 2006 (of which 72% accounted for net in-migration with the remainder accounting for natural increase).

**Figure 2: National Spatial Strategy (NSS) - Key Rural, Urban & Transport Routes within the West Region**

Source: National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020
1.3 The West Region in a Regional Context

The West Region is an evolving modern economy based on a diverse range of sectors such as tourism, the service sector, education and the public sectors. The primary industries are still important and they too are a part of the defining characteristics of the economy of the West Region. The region has also been traditionally dependent on the agriculture, fishing and forestry sectors. It is also home to the largest Gaeltacht areas in the country.

County Roscommon is mainly rural in character with larger urban centres namely Roscommon, Boyle and Monksland (Athlone). The River Shannon and its system of lakes form the eastern boundary of County Roscommon for 100 kilometres.

County Mayo and County Galway are located on the western seaboard and are part of the Atlantic rim of the European Union.

County Mayo’s principle towns are Ballina, Castlebar, Westport, Claremorris, Ballinrobe, Ballyhaunis, Swinford and Belmullet.

County Galway covers the largest landmass area. Galway City is a major regional centre and other larger towns in the county (based on their population size) include Tuam, Ballinasloe, Loughrea and Oranmore.

The West Region has a significant and valuable resource in its natural heritage environment with a wide variety of species and habitats of local, national and international importance. The extent of biodiversity, flora and fauna in the Region which enhances the quality of life, also represents a real challenge in achieving sustainable development.

As previously stated, the West Region is bound by the Border Region, the Midlands Region and the Mid-West Region. In order to achieve balanced regional development in line with the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) all regions must co-operate and build on their inter-regional strengths and overcome their weaknesses.

In the past, the West Region has experienced difficulties due to its peripheral location along the Atlantic seaboard and on the periphery of the European Union. In order for the regions to develop, the NSS seeks to achieve critical mass in the
Gateways, Hubs and Linked Hubs. Linked corridors are proposed in the NSS which will include the Gateways of Sligo, Galway, Shannon, Limerick, Cork and Athlone (see Figure 2). This offers an alternative development corridor to the east coast corridor which has a strong gravitational ‘pull’ and also seeks to increase the competitiveness of the country as a whole. Strong communication links are required in order to achieve this through well developed road, rail and air links as they are key stimuli for ‘corridor’ growth. The corridors promote the sharing of resources and services to enable the regions to attract new investments and benefit each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CP1:</strong> Support a framework which incorporates a network of growth nodes creating an Atlantic Development Corridor which will enhance economic, social and environmental opportunities and will enable the western seaboard to compete successfully with other economic corridors, thus benefiting the people of the whole region. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact and taking full account of the presence of the Natura 2000 sites within the Atlantic Development Corridor area and the requirement to protect these by subjecting all plans and projects to Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate.</td>
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### 1.3.1 Interregional Issues

The following sub-sections indicate the most prevalent inter-regional issues for the West Region and adjacent regions.

The West Region is bordered by three other Regional Authority areas. The regions have many similarities and linkages. The fostering of inter-regional opportunities is pivotal to the development of the success of the regions. The Border, Midlands and Mid-West share a range of issues pertaining to settlement structures, economic development (including labour flows, human resources and employment opportunities), travel (including travel patterns and the provision of infrastructure), protection and management of natural and cultural heritage, provision of energy and telecommunication networks and the development of education and tourism infrastructure.

#### 1.3.1.1 Midlands & West Inter-Regional Issues

County Roscommon has the largest boundary with the Midlands Region. The Midland Gateway of Athlone-Tullamore-Mullingar is of great importance to the West Region. Of the linked Gateway, Athlone has a significant influence on the economic development of south Roscommon through Monksland which is effectively part of the Athlone Gateway.

#### 1.3.1.2 Mid-West & West Inter-Regional Issues

The West Region is bound by the local authorities of County Clare and North Tipperary which form part of the Mid-West Regional Authority. The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) emphasises that a process of strengthening the critical mass of the existing gateways of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford both individually and collectively, to complement Dublin’s successful national spatial role, offers a way of establishing balanced patterns of development. The Atlantic Gateway concept is

Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 -2022
about taking decisive steps and actions to forge an alternative scenario where there will be a wider range of opportunities for economic opportunity with services and environmental quality of the highest standards. Growing the two regions could create potential for balanced regional development with potential to expand and include wider areas. The Regional Authorities have combined resources on a number of projects including the Atlantic Way and the Atlantic Gateways Initiative (see section 1.3.1.4 below).

Regional Authorities and their constituent Local Authorities shall work together to ensure that these Guidelines are fully reflective of the thinking behind the Atlantic Gateways concept to develop the concept to its potential and put forward practical proposals.

1.3.1.3 Border & West Inter-Regional Issues
County Sligo and Leitrim form part of the Border Regional Authority and also border the West Regional Authority area. The Regional Authorities are connected through a ‘linking corridor’ joining the Galway and Sligo Gateways. The Border and West Regions have faced similar issues pertaining to their predominately rural and peripheral nature. The regions are also linked through their educational institutions and these linkages should be fostered. Carrick-on-Shannon is located on the border of the two Regional Authority areas.

1.3.1.4 Atlantic Gateways Initiative
The Atlantic Gateways Initiative examines how Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway can perform as a national investment corridor to rival the most competitive city region corridors and accelerate regional growth in a sustainable manner. The Regional Planning Guidelines support the objectives of the Atlantic Gateways Initiative and in particular the recommendations and objectives set out for the Galway – Limerick/Shannon section of the corridor in the ‘Atlantic Gateways Corridor Development Frameworks Overview Report’ published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. In particular policies set out in the RPG’s such as:

- Implementation of the Galway Transportation & Population Study (GTPS);
- Improved transport links between Limerick/Shannon and Galway (e.g. N/M18 Road Network and the re-opening of rail connection); and
- The development of key settlements to support the Gateways which include Tuam, Gort, Athenry, Claremorris and Charlestown.

The West Regional Authority supports the redefinition of the Corridor to extend northwards to include Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo and Letterkenny-Derry.

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4 The Atlantic Way Project seeks to maximise the synergies of key public and private sector decision makers collaborating to create a region of greater international scale and significance and of proven excellence.

5 Prepared in association with the DoEHLG and the West, Mid-West, South-West and South-East Regional Authorities and the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly.
**BORDER REGION**

**Settlement Strategy Policies**

**CP2:** Support the linkages between the Gateways of Sligo and Galway through the extension of the Atlantic Gateways Initiative Corridor and support the linkages between hub towns in the creation of critical mass. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact and taking full account of the presence of Natura 2000 sites within the Atlantic Gateways Initiative Corridor area and the requirement to protect these by subjecting all plans and projects to Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate.

**CP3:** Promote the development of the ‘Atlantic Arc’ (which is an extension of the Atlantic Corridor) and Atlantic Gateways Initiative to facilitate tourism and infrastructure along the entire Western Seaboard (Section 1.6 applies).

**Transport Infrastructure Objectives**

**CO1:** Support the completion of the N17 from Galway to Sligo to dual carriageway status ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised and relevant environmental assessment, including Habitats Directive Assessment where appropriate, is undertaken.

**CO2:** Support the upgrading of the N4 from Carrick-on-Shannon to Castlebaldwin (i.e. section which is located in County Roscommon) ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised and relevant environmental assessment, including Habitats Directive Assessment where appropriate, is undertaken.

**MIDLANDS REGION**

**Settlement Strategy Policies**

**CO3:** Support the co-ordination of Local Authority services between Roscommon County Council, Westmeath County Council and Athlone Town Council.

**CO4:** Support the co-operation between Mayo and Roscommon Local Authorities and the Midlands Authorities regarding the upgrading/improvement of the N5 ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised and relevant environmental assessment, including Habitats Directive Assessment where appropriate, is undertaken.

**CO5:** Support the overall development of Monksland as an integral part of the Athlone Gateway and as a key growth area which requires phased infrastructure supports, services and facilities and good environmental quality and taking full account of the presence of the Natura 2000 sites associated with the River Shannon and the requirement to protect these by subjecting all plans and projects to Habitats Directive Assessment, where relevant.

**CO6:** Local Authority Development Plan policies and Local Area Plan policies in County Roscommon shall be prepared in consultation with Westmeath County Council and Athlone Town Council with regard to the Athlone Gateway and the development of Monksland. Co-ordination of policy and infrastructural priorities (including physical and social) shall be agreed between the three local authorities. Co-ordination of service provision and supported links will be required.

**Retail Strategy Objective**

**CO7:** Roscommon County Council shall explore the feasibility of a joint Retail Strategy for Monksland and the Athlone Gateway with Westmeath County Council and Athlone Town Council.

**Transport Infrastructure Objective**

**CO8:** Support the ‘Double Tracking’ of the railway line between Galway and Athenry as a first priority, then double track to Athlone and onto Portarlington in County Laois to improve rail service provision and shorten commuting times. All proposed works will be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate.
**General Interregional Issues**
The following are a list of general inter-regional objectives for the West Region and adjoining Regional Authorities.

### Transport Infrastructure Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CP</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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<tr>
<td>CP7</td>
<td>Support the inter-regional goals of ‘Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 – 2020’ (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
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<tr>
<td>CP8</td>
<td>Support interregional road and rail connectivity between the regions ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised and relevant environmental assessment is undertaken. This is of particular importance between the Gateways/Linked Gateways and Hubs/Linked Hubs (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP9</td>
<td>Improve economic competitiveness through maximising the efficiency of the transport system and alleviating congestion and infrastructural bottlenecks (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP10</td>
<td>Support the National Roads Authority in protecting the operational efficiency, capacity and the safety of the national road system ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised and relevant environmental assessment is undertaken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP11</td>
<td>Support the appropriate development of the public transport network and appropriate linkages in improving quality of life and minimise the negative impacts of air pollution on the environment (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP12</td>
<td>Support the practice of concentrating development in established urban areas and designated development centres. Consolidation and as appropriate, expansion of such locations should only be informed by sustainable development considerations and suitable environmental assessment (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP13</td>
<td>Regional airport links shall be supported throughout the West Region and across the Regional Authority area; and sustainable travel links are the preferred option (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
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<tr>
<td>CP14</td>
<td>Support the development of tourism related to the Shannon River including the Tourism Strategy for the Shannon Region (Shannon Development). Such development shall be subject to relevant environmental/heritage or visual assessment, including Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP15</td>
<td>Support the recommendations of Mid-Shannon Tourism Study (Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Local Authority) (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP16</td>
<td>Support the River Basin Management Plans for the Western River Basin District (RBD) and the Shannon International RBD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP17</td>
<td>Support the recommendations of the Roscommon Tourism Strategy 2010 – 2014 and subsequent versions focusing on areas of sustainable development in suitably assessed areas of low landscape and environmental sensitivity (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tourism Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CO</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CO12</td>
<td>Consideration should be given to formulating integrated land use and transport plans for urban areas to provide a clear strategic framework and policy context for future planning decisions which should examine areas which may be suitable for employment creation. This should take account of visual impacts and other environmental considerations (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO13</td>
<td>Developments of regional and strategic importance which are more appropriately located outside urban areas and where the locations concerned have specific characteristics shall be considered in accordance with section 3.2.6 of the NRA document, ‘Policy on Development Control &amp; Access to National Roads – Proposed Development in Urban Areas and Designated Development Centres’ in accordance with guidelines to be issued by DOEHLG. Such development shall be subject to relevant environment/heritage/visual assessment as appropriate (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tourism Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CP</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CP14</td>
<td>Support the development of tourism related to the River Shannon including the Tourism Strategy for the Shannon Region (Shannon Development). Such development shall be subject to relevant environmental/heritage or visual assessment, including Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP15</td>
<td>Support the recommendations of Mid-Shannon Tourism Study (Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Local Authority) (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP16</td>
<td>Support the River Basin Management Plans for the Western River Basin District (RBD) and the Shannon International RBD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP17</td>
<td>Support the recommendations of the Roscommon Tourism Strategy 2010 – 2014 and subsequent versions focusing on areas of sustainable development in suitably assessed areas of low landscape and environmental sensitivity (Section 1.6 applies).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Tourism Policies

| CP18: | Support and promote the Western Rail Corridor (fully reopened) as a significant driver of tourism (Section 1.6 applies). |
| CP19: | Support the strategic tourism initiative ‘Lakelands and Inland Waterways’ which is a joint initiative of Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Shannon Development, Northern Ireland Tourism Board, Find Fermanagh and Tourism Ireland. All developments should be supported by relevant environmental assessment where necessary and all tourism plans and projects should be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment, where relevant. |
| CP20: | Support an inter-regional network of walking and cycling routes. This should take account of visual impacts and other environmental considerations such as impacts on protected habitats and species (Section 1.6 applies). |
| CP21: | Support an all-Ireland network of marinas. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact and subject to Habitats Directive Assessment to ensure that no significant impacts occur in Natura 2000 sites and other designated sites. |

### Education & Knowledge

Galway contains two large Third-level institutions Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG). NUIG and the University of Limerick have formed an alliance and have a combined strategy for the delivery of third level education in the West and Mid-West and will create centres of excellence to benefit the region. There are strong links between the Institutes of Technology (IT) which are Galway-Mayo IT, Sligo IT, Athlone IT and Limerick IT in the Border-Midlands-West and Mid-West Regions.

### Education & Knowledge Policies

| CP22: | Support the development of outreach programmes throughout the region. |
| CP23: | Support inter-regional linkages between educational institutions; and between educational institutions and industry and commerce. |

### Common Local Authority Initiatives Policy

| CP24: | Common Local Authority Initiatives Policy |
| CP25: | Common Local Authority Initiatives Policy |
| CP26: | Common Local Authority Initiatives Policy |

### Common Local Authority Initiatives Policy

| CP27: | Promote the provision of sewage treatment facilities and investment required to meet the objectives of the River Basin Management Plans, EU compliance requirements and the needs of economic development (Section 1.6 applies). |
| CP28: | Support appropriate rural enterprise and diversification across the region (Section 1.6 applies). |
| CP29: | Support sustainable forestry across the region. Forestry should be assessed for its potential impacts on designated habitats and species including the potential for impacts on Natura 2000 sites through Habitats Directive Assessment, where relevant. |

### Rural Enterprise & Rural Development Policies

| CP28: | Support appropriate rural enterprise and diversification across the region (Section 1.6 applies). |
| CP29: | Support sustainable forestry across the region. Forestry should be assessed for its potential impacts on designated habitats and species including the potential for impacts on Natura 2000 sites through Habitats Directive Assessment, where relevant. |

### Energy Infrastructure & The Environment Policies

| CP29: | Energy Infrastructure & The Environment Policies |
| CP30: | The development of existing corridors between the regions is supported in order to acquire key infrastructure. The more appropriate corridors will be supported and chosen via examination of cumulative impacts on the environment. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact (Section 1.6 applies). |
| CP31: | Support wave and biomass projects to develop renewable energy sources in appropriate locations and subject to normal technical and environmental considerations. Assessment should examine potential impacts on Natura 2000 sites. |
| CP32: | Promote the extension of the gas-line and utilisation of this supply regionally and nationally subject to relevant environmental assessment in order to minimise environmental impacts (Section 1.6 applies). |
| CP33: | Support the development of wind energy developments in suitable locations subject to normal technical and environmental considerations including Habitats Directive Assessment, where relevant and including the cumulative impact of such developments (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54). |

### Energy Infrastructure & The Environment Objectives

| CP30: | Energy Infrastructure & The Environment Objectives |
| CP31: | Energy Infrastructure & The Environment Objectives |
| CP32: | Energy Infrastructure & The Environment Objectives |
| CP33: | Energy Infrastructure & The Environment Objectives |

| CO14: | Support the identification of suitable wind energy development locations through Habitats Directive Assessment, including consideration of cumulative and in combination effects, landscape character assessments or landscape management strategy and habitat designations (Please refer to CO15 & IO54). |
| CO15: | Initiate a Regional Energy Strategy for the West Region in order to identify suitable and unsuitable locations for new energy projects including networks. The strategy will be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment, landscape character assessments (or landscape management strategy) and other environmental assessment and will include consideration of potential cumulative and in combination environmental impacts (Please refer to CO14 & IO54). |
1.4 The Region Today
From 2004 - 2008 the economy of the West Region grew significantly year on year. However, an economic downturn is now being experienced.

1.4.1 Changes since 2004
Since 2004, there have been substantial changes in the strategic planning and development context for regional planning guidelines including:
- Publication of the National Development Plan 2007 – 2013 which is well aligned with the NSS;
- A challenging budgetary and fiscal policy outlook over the short to medium term that demands a highly prioritised and value for money based approach to future development and infrastructure requirements;
- The introduction of the Planning & Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations S.I. 436 of 2004 under the SEA Directive;
- Publication of The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities, November 2009;
- Adoption of the River Basin Management Plans for the Western and Shannon International River Basin Districts by local authorities in 2010;
- Publication of the National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012;
- Publication of the Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 – 2020; and
- Ministerial interventions in local development planning function highlighting the need for a more precise mechanism for population figures, settlement strategy and housing projections at national, regional and local levels;
- Population Targets issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government in 2009 for the Galway Gateway, Tuam Hub, Castlebar-Ballina Linked Hub and the West Region for the years 2010, 2016 and 2022;
- Connacht Regional Waste Management Plan 2006-2011;
- Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, 2009 and Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines, 2005;
- Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2004;
- The passing of the Planning & Development (Amendment) Act 2010; and
- Implementing the National Spatial Strategy: 2010 Update & Outlook.

1.4.2 Progress in Implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines 2004 – 2016

1.4.2.1 Population
Population growth in the region was broadly in line with the national average for the period 2002 – 2006. The population of Galway City and its environs increased above the national average. Only a few small rural areas experienced population decline.
Limited decentralisation of public organisations has taken place, and towns such as Loughrea, Claremorris, Ballina and Roscommon town have benefited from the initiative.

The region has one National Spatial Strategy (NSS) designated Gateway; Galway City which has performed above the national average on all population and economic measurements. It continues to be a preferred location of many Foreign Direct Investment projects and is the main centre for many services such as education and health.

The National Spatial Strategy Hubs in the region are Tuam and the Linked Hub of Castlebar-Ballina. Tuam, which lies within the commuter belt of the Galway Gateway has experienced above national average population growth. With improved infrastructure it is well positioned to play a greater role as a centre for jobs and services. The Linked Hub of Castlebar-Ballina has seen strong growth in some services such as retail and arts, among others. A significant portion of population growth has taken place in their catchment areas.

The remaining larger settlement centres in the region such as Westport, Loughrea, Clifden and Roscommon have mostly experienced economic growth. Some sectors have dramatically improved such as the retail and food services. Many of the smaller towns and villages have become more attractive places to live, though others are limited by a lack of basic infrastructure.

1.4.2.2 Transport Infrastructure
Progress is being made regarding access generally. The M6 Galway-Dublin route is now completed and open. The N/M18 is progressing from Ennis to Gort and planning is being advanced on the N17/N18 - Gort to Milltown, Galway City Outer By-Pass/ R336, and the N5. There are a number of bus corridors in Galway City and Galway County (Claregalway). Improvement works have been carried out on some national secondary and key regional roads, with limited improvement works on other roads.

The Western Rail Corridor is opened and work is progressing. The airports of Knock (Ireland West) and Galway Airports continue to be of regional importance.

1.4.2.3 Energy & Communications
Gas distribution networks have been constructed in many towns e.g. Ballinrobe, Claremorris, Athenry, Tuam, Craughwell and Gort. Works are continuing on bringing gas from the Corrib Field into the national gas grid. Investment in the electricity grid is continuing and some renewable energy projects have been finalised with more planned.

Telecommunication networks, in particular fibre broadband is advancing slowly, though a National Broadband Scheme (NBS) is now underway and may improve availability in rural areas significantly.
1.4.2.4 Water & Waste Water
Investment continues in water and waste water infrastructure but much more is required to eliminate the infrastructural deficit in the region.

1.4.2.5 Economic Development
Historically high rates of economic growth occurred during 2002 – 2008. This population and economic growth also supported historically high levels of housing demand and consequent house construction activity.

There was a significant growth in employment in the region over the past decade. From 1997 – 2007 an annual growth rate of 4.5% was experienced which was one of the highest regional growth rates in the country. The unemployment rate in the West Region was historically low during the period 2002 – 2007, lowering to 4.3% of the total workforce during 2003–2006. However, the standardised unemployment rate in September, 2010 was 13.7% (Source CSO (29 September, 2010) Live Register September 2010, QHNS6).

Trends in the West Region are as follows:
- Employment grew up to 2008;
- Construction and public services were the largest employment generating sectors;
- Manufacturing base still strong;
- Getting more difficult to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI);
- Galway City is a key location for FDI;
- Unemployment is continuing to rise.

The West Region has experienced some successes in the indigenous industrial sector including larger companies, spin-off companies and many new local indigenous industries. However, agricultural employment declined steadily until 2008 though this is now being stabilised. There has been some success in diversification, organic farming and new crops.

The tourism sector is experiencing a slow down as the world economies regress, though there have been major successes in the Region such as the Volvo Ocean Race Festival in 2009.

In the Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2004 – 2016 five large scale projects were identified as having a major contribution in realising the potential of the region. The following advances have been made:-
- The Corrib Gas Field Project is progressing and gas distribution networks have been constructed in many towns in the Region e.g. Ballinrobe and Craughwell;
- The Strategic Development Area located generally between Oranmore and Athenry is progressing;
- There has been no advancement with regard to a Large Tourism Development. While some significant tourism attractions have been developed in the past few years, a major iconic attraction has not being realised;
- The redevelopment of the commercial port at Ros a Mhíl is progressing slowly;
- Sections of the Western Rail Corridor have been reopened e.g. Ennis to Athenry.

6 Quarterly National Household Survey
1.5 The Region: Key Planning and Development Issues

The following section indicates the key planning and development issues for the West Region 2010 – 2022. They are identified under economic development, future development patterns, future investment priorities and conserving and enhancing environmental qualities.

1.5.1 Economic Development

The key economic development priorities are:

- Retain existing levels of employment in the Region especially those Small – Medium – Enterprises (SMEs) in the manufacturing and services sectors, local and multi-nationals which are currently engaged in the medical devices, pharmaceuticals, design-led and technology sectors.
- Provide appropriate zoned land with adequate infrastructural services to accommodate enterprise e.g. Economic Corridor from Oranmore to Athenry.
- Provide the infrastructure required to attract investment into the region.
- Create stronger linkages between third level colleges, research & development in the private sector and enterprise development.
- Develop the tourism potential of the region while protecting the natural resources on which it relies.
- Facilitate the appropriate development of enterprise in rural areas.
- Develop regional competitiveness by improving access, water services, communications, energy and a skilled workforce.
- Support all indigenous industry and promote linkages with multi-nationals.
- Facilitate the further education and up-skilling of the work force and promote cooperation between various intra-regional educational institutes and industry.
- Preserve and enhance the quality of life in the Region.

1.5.2 Future Development Patterns

The key issues associated with future development patterns are:

- Ensure the development of the Galway Gateway, the Tuam Hub and Linked Hub of Castlebar-Ballina to fulfil roles identified in the National Spatial Strategy.
- Ensure the development of other urban centres so that they can act as adequate service and employment centres for the surrounding hinterland.
- Manage development outside large settlements in a way that ensures the viability of rural communities but does not give rise to long-term problems and that is consistent with the need to address issues of climate change and water quality.
- Maximise the benefit of public transport investments, road infrastructure improvements and “smarter travel” solutions.

1.5.3 Future Investment Priorities

The key investment priorities required to support the sustainable development of the region are as follows:

- Completion of the N/M17 and N/M/18 Gort to Claremorris dual carriageway.
- Construction of the Galway City Outer Bypass.
- Construction of the new N5 Bohola to Westport dual carriageway and improvement of the N5 Charlestown to the Roscommon /Longford borders inclusive of the Ballaghderreen bypass.
- Construction of the R336 Galway to Ros a Mhíl Road and the N26 Ballina to Bohola Road Phase II.
1.5.4 Conserving & Enhancing Environmental Qualities
The region is well supplied with areas of high amenity. The principal issues regarding the conserving and enhancing of environmental qualities from a regional perspective include:

- The development of well-based collaborative processes for managing natural resources that cross county and regional boundaries.
- Developing common approaches to managing and enhancing key environmental assets.
- Maintenance of a safe and secure drinking water supply.
- Maintaining the architectural and archaeological heritage and improving the design quality of new developments.

All proposed investments are subject to the availability of resources with specific projects being subject to assessment in accordance with the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations, the Habitats Directive Assessment process, the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Public Authorities (November 2009), the Water Framework Directive River Basin Management Plans and other relevant legislation as appropriate.

1.6 Habitats Directive Assessment
The Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment has identified a number of key planning and development issues including priorities in this Chapter of the Guidelines which, when implemented, have the potential to result in negative impacts on one or more Natura 2000 site and issues may therefore arise under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive which will require Appropriate Assessment at ‘lower plan’ or project level. Where such ‘lower plan’ or project level Appropriate Assessment concludes significant negative impacts, alternative solutions which comply fully with Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive may need to be considered. Please also refer to Appendix 4.
CHAPTER 2: Strategic Vision for the West Region

2.1 Strategic Vision for the West Region
The RPGs aim to ensure that the National Spatial Strategy will be successfully implemented at regional, county and local level. The Strategic Vision for the West Region is as follows:

By 2022 the West Region will be an innovative and highly competitive region with sustainable settlements located in an outstanding environment with excellent opportunities and quality of life for its citizens.

2.2 Strategic Goals for the West Region
The following eight goals take account of the context of the West Region. The achievement of the goals will be assessed through implementation of the Guidelines over their lifetime 2010 – 2022.

Spatial Structure

SG1: To identify, formulate and implement policies that will promote the Gateway of Galway, the Hub town of Tuam and Linked Hub of Castlebar-Ballina into achieving their targets and fulfil their role as set out in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS), coupled with supporting a settlement strategy that will help to encourage the growth of towns and villages thereby enabling them to service their rural hinterlands. The process will take full account of the presence of the Natura 2000 sites in these areas and the requirement to protect these by subjecting all plans and projects to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment (where relevant).

Access

SG2: To put in place an integrated sustainable transport and access infrastructure that:

a. Facilitates access by all at a reasonable cost and with reasonable travel times to educational, work, leisure, health and other services.
b. Promotes appropriate public transport services – rail or bus transport and other sustainable modes of travel such as walking and cycling.
c. Provides a high level of service on major roads that minimises travel times and maximises safety and facilitates public transport by upgrading the network of national roads in the region in line with Transport 21 and NDP objectives.
d. Facilitates the movement of goods in and out of the region in a way that promotes competitiveness.
e. Minimises the need for car based travel where practical and viable (Section 2.3 applies).

Service Infrastructure

SG3: To ensure that a framework is devised to meet the service infrastructural requirements of the Region for both now and into the future. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact and subject to the requirements of the Habitats Directive through the process of Appropriate Assessment (where relevant); as follows:

a. Continue upgrading and improving the regions roads, water supplies, waste water...
facilities, waste facilities in order to improve the regions competitiveness and compliance.

b. Ensuring that the telecommunications network in the region is upgraded extensively to international standards.

c. Improving and addressing the present deficits that exist in the energy sector.

d. Encourage, where appropriate projects for the production of renewable energy sources.

e. Utilising the valuable resource available in the Corrib Gas field to directly benefit the region and provide an additional energy source for the country as a whole.

f. To identify and support deficiencies which exist in the provision of services and access to services in the education and healthcare sectors. Acknowledge these sectors as major employers and promote new innovative means to provide education and health services including outreach.

Economic Development

SG4: To generate conditions that create good service infrastructure, access and innovation promoting the ethos of advanced education and life-long learning which combined, enhances the regions competitiveness in order to attract Foreign Direct Investment and promote and sustain local indigenous based industry. Such development and opportunities should be encouraged in appropriate locations and minimise the dependency on private modes of transport (Section 2.3 applies).

The Environment, Sustainability & Quality of Life Issues

SG5: Improve the quality of life and accessibility for the people of the West Region as a uniquely attractive place in which to live, work and visit and ensure that the cultural and natural environment of the Region such as built heritage, community facilities and water quality and biodiversity are maintained and enhanced.

Agriculture & Rural Development

SG6: To promote a balanced economic and social development of the region by supporting vibrant rural communities, promoting efficient competitive enterprises and improving the quality of life while also respecting and enhancing the physical environment.

Tourism

SG7: To expand the tourism sector in the West Region by creating an integrated approach to facilitate the promotion of all areas in a sustainable and planned manner with particular emphasis on the less developed areas, extend the tourist season and promote ‘flagship projects’ in order to create a quality competitive product to be marketed internationally. It is also essential to develop new products, services and facilities and maintain and increase the regions’ share of the market subject to relevant environmental assessment including Habitats Directive Assessment (where necessary) of all tourism plans and projects, to minimise environmental impact.

Interregional Issues

SG8: To co-operate with and promote co-operation with other regions in order to develop economic corridors that rival the most competitive city region corridors and accelerate overall regional growth (Section 2.3 applies).
2.3 Habitats Directive Assessment

The Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment has identified a number of Goals in this Chapter of the Guidelines which, when implemented, have the potential to result in negative impacts on one or more Natura 2000 site and issues may therefore arise under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive which will require Appropriate Assessment at ‘lower plan’ or project level. Where such ‘lower plan’ or project level Appropriate Assessment concludes significant negative impacts, alternative solutions which comply fully with Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive may need to be considered. Please also refer to Appendix 4.
CHAPTER 3: Economic Development Strategy

3.1 Introduction
The Economic Development Strategy for the West Region examines the regional economic context, trends, key growth settlements and acknowledges the current economic climate. It also examines the future potential of the Region.

3.1.1 Habitats Directive Assessment
The Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment has identified a number of Objectives and Policies in this Chapter of the Guidelines which, when implemented, have the potential to result in negative impacts on one or more Natura 2000 site and issues may therefore arise under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive which will require Appropriate Assessment at ‘lower plan’ or project level. Where such ‘lower plan’ or project level Appropriate Assessment concludes significant negative impacts, alternative solutions which comply fully with Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive may need to be considered. Please also refer to Appendix 4.

3.2 Economic Context
The Irish economy in 2010 is in the midst of extremely challenging economic and financial circumstances. Economic growth is contracting sharply, unemployment is rising and the public finances are in a difficult position.

Following average annual growth rates of 7.2% in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 1997 and 2007 and annual average growth of 6.3% in Gross National Product (GNP), economic activity slowed down sharply in 2008-2010. Developments in the housing market and difficulties in the external economic environment have impacted on economic activity in the West Region similar to the impact on the national economy.

The following sections give an economic profile of the region by setting out relevant data for disposable income (measure of living standard), output per capita (productivity) and demographic factors.

3.2.1 Disposable Income
The level of disposable income per head for the West Region has consistently remained at about 93% of the national average from 2000 to 2006. Within the region, County Galway (including Galway City) has a higher level of disposable income than the rest of the region, which reflects the positive influence of Galway City.

3.2.2 Overall Economic Performance
Measurement of overall economic performance by Gross Value Added (GVA) can give some understanding of the output or value-creation performance of a regional economy.
Table 2: Gross Value Added Statistics for the West Region and the State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of Total GVA</th>
<th>2006 GVA per Person Basic Prices</th>
<th>% of GVA per person EU= 100</th>
<th>% Change GVA per person 2000-2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>€27,451 (75%)</td>
<td>111%</td>
<td>+40.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>€36,608 (100%)</td>
<td>147%</td>
<td>+48.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In terms of GVA across broad sectors, about 62% of output is attributable to services with manufacturing and construction accounting for circa 35%. The services sector performed most strongly between 2000 and 2005.

Any extraction of productivity levels from Gross Value Added (GVA) data must take into account:
- “Transfer Pricing” by multinationals which may be more pronounced in other regions of the country than in the West.
- Relatively high level of employment in agriculture where output achieves a low value.

Despite the imperfections of GVA, it is the best available indicator of regional output. It shows for 2006 that the West Region accounted for 7.3% of national GVA and in terms of per capita average, the region is in the middle rank of the eight regions. The percentage change from 2000 to 2006 in GVA per person at 41% places the region in the middle rank of the eight regions. Higher performing regions include Dublin and South West and lower performing regions include the South East and the Midlands.

The growth sectors in agency assisted employment since 1998 have been medical devices sector, ICT and financial sectors.

3.2.3 Demographic Trends

The population of the West Region grew by about the national average between 2002 – 2006. Galway City increased its population at a higher rate than most of the rest of the region, with Tuam also experiencing high population growth, with Castlebar and Ballina somewhat below the national average.

Table 3: Population Trends in the West Region and the State

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>4,239,848</td>
<td>+8.0</td>
<td>+8.2</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>414,277</td>
<td>+7.9</td>
<td>+8.9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway County</td>
<td>159,256</td>
<td>+8.8</td>
<td>+11.2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway City</td>
<td>72,414</td>
<td>+15.0</td>
<td>+10.0</td>
<td>1419</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mayo County</td>
<td>123,839</td>
<td>+5.3</td>
<td>+5.4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon County</td>
<td>58,768</td>
<td>+3.5</td>
<td>+9.3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 This describes a process by which members of a group of companies set the prices at which they pass goods, services, finance and assets between each other.
8 For example, companies which are assisted by IDA or Enterprise Ireland.
Population growth from 2002 – 2006 was widespread throughout the region; however, higher growth was evident within the commuting area of Galway city. Those few Electoral Divisions (EDs) with population decline were generally remote from the major urban centres (see Figure no. 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Population of Principle Urban Centres in the West Region</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway Gateway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlebar &amp; Environs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballina &amp; Environs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuam &amp; Environs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballinasloe &amp; Environs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon &amp; Environs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westport &amp; Environs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The age profile of the West Region aligns with that of the State overall. An analysis of the 1996, 2002 and 2006 census shows that the West managed to maintain nearly all its 15 – 19 year cohort over this period which is positive for the region and can be attributed to the presence of Galway City, a large industrial base, third-level education facilities and an attractive quality of life.

In the 2006 Census, there were just over 40,000 non-nationals residents in the West Region. This is 9.6% approximately of non-national population of the State, with the majority born in UK followed by a large percentage of Polish origin.

3.2.4 Labour Market

According to the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey, there were 188,800 persons at work in the West based on CSO QNHS Quarter 3, 2009 (see Table No. 6). There were 182,800 persons employed at the end of Quarter 2, 2010 (CSO QNHS). Unemployment in the region stands at 12%. The regional labour force participation rate closely resembles the national rate of 63%.

In terms of absolute employment levels, the largest employer in the West is the public sector, which accounts for around 50,000 jobs (or 26% of all employment in the region). Of the larger employers, manufacturing (productive industries) employs over 25,000 workers. The construction sector is much reduced from the middle of 2000 but still employs over 16,000 people. Wholesale and retail trade in the region provides employment to over 26,000 people, or 14% of those employed. Unlike
many other regions, agriculture remains a very significant employer in the region, with 9% of those employed engaged in the sector (see table 6 below). However this represents a dramatic reduction from the 19% of regional employment represented by the sector in 1998.

Employment grew by 48% in the West between 1998 and 2007, ahead of the national rate of 40% over the same period. However the general economic downturn that commenced in 2008 has resulted in lower employment levels particularly in the construction sector, though industrial employment is remaining strong.

Table 6: Numbers Employed in the West and Percentage Change 2004 - 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>West - Employment – Q3 2009</th>
<th>West - % Change Q3 2004 – Q3 2009</th>
<th>State - % Change Q3 2004 – Q3 2009</th>
<th>West - % Contribution to Total Employment Gain/Loss*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry &amp; Fishing</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>-18%</td>
<td>-16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>-10%</td>
<td>-16%</td>
<td>-16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>-39%</td>
<td>-29%</td>
<td>-61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale &amp; Retail Trade: Repair of motor vehicles &amp; motorcycles</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation &amp; Storage</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation &amp; Food Service Activities</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information &amp; Communication</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial, Insurance &amp; Real Estate Activities</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Scientific &amp; Technical Activities</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative &amp; Support Service Activities</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>-25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration &amp; Defence; Compulsory Social Security</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Health &amp; Social Work Activities</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other NACE Activities</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>188.8</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*i.e. Net job losses in ‘Construction’ represent 61% of total jobs lost in the region over the period 2004-2009, while net gains in ‘accommodation and food service activities’ account for 7% of all employment gains in the region over the period.

Source: CSO, QNHS (2009-2010).
3.2.5 Agency Assisted Employment

Agency supported employment represents the majority of employment in internationally trading (exporting) sectors, and is therefore a good base from which to analyse this aspect of the region’s economy. In 2009, agency supported full time employment in the West stood at 25,735 representing approximately 13% of total employment in the region (this compares to a national average of approximately 14%). Of this agency supported employment, 52% was provided by foreign owned firms, matching the proportion of agency supported employment provided by foreign firms nationally.

Overall, there was a net employment decrease in agency supported employment in the region of 1% between 1998 and 2009. The Medical devices sector was by far the largest agency supported sector in the West in 2008. This sector has experienced strong growth in the region over the past decade, with an increase in employment levels of approximately 70% since 1998.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services and food sectors are the next most significant agency supported employers in the region, each employing more than 3,300 people. The ICT services sector has, like the medical device industry, grown strongly in the region over the past decade, while the food industry has experienced a slight decline, as represented by falling employment levels.

A breakdown of agency assisted employment between foreign and indigenous firms in 2008 shows that almost all employment in the important medical devices industry is provided by foreign owned firms. Foreign firms also provide the majority of employment in the ICT services, chemicals and electrical equipment sectors. Indigenous companies provide the majority in all remaining sectors, and are well represented in the ICT services sector, providing approximately 44% of employment in this important growth industry. The food sector is the largest indigenous industry in the West at present. Overall, 49% of agency supported employment in the West is in indigenous firms, as is the case nationally.

The medical devices and ICT services industries provide interesting contrasts. Both are significant growth areas for the region, and both are significant employers. The former, however, depends on a small number of large firms to provide most employment; while the latter is characterised by a large number of smaller scale firms. While the West is characterised by emergent clusters in these two areas, it is clear that the nature of these nascent clusters is quite different.

3.2.6 Unemployment

Between 1998 and 2007 unemployment trends in the region were positive, falling from an unemployment rate of 6.9% in 1998 to a low of 3.9% in 2001 and then stabilising at 4.5% for the next six years. Nationally, the standardised unemployment rate was 13.7% in September, 2010. 9% of the total unemployed workforce were located in the West Region (Source CSO (29 September, 2010) Live Register September 2010).
3.3 Summary of Economic Strengths & Opportunities

Balanced Regional Development is a goal of the National Spatial Strategy (2002), the National Development Plan (2007) and the Regional Planning Guidelines and is defined in the National Spatial Strategy as “developing the full potential of each area to contribute to the optimal performance of the state as a whole – economically, socially and environmentally”. This section looks at the strengths of the West Region and the opportunities that these present for the future.

Table 7: Strengths & Opportunities for the West Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Good existing base of multi-nationals particularly in Galway City but also in County Mayo | • Develop Multi-national location clusters.  
• Develop spin off enterprises in Regional Towns |
| • Improving road transport links e.g. M6 Galway – Dublin M/N17, M/N18 Atlantic Road Corridor and N26 Ballina-Bohola | • Improve competitiveness by reducing transport costs  
• Improve regions attractiveness for many sectors, e.g. Tourism |
| • Relative stable fixed costs and with reliable supply and availability of, for e.g. water supply, waste management etc. | • Develop cheaper access for companies and tourists  
• Develop Hubs for industry and commerce adjacent to the region’s airports |
| • Good and improving rail system to Dublin and North/ South | • Provides alternative public transport option  
• Provides opportunities for rail freight transit choices |
| • One substantial port and one designated fishing port with many other smaller ports/ harbours/ piers along the coastline | • Direct export or import of goods  
• Expand fishing sector generally  
• Existing infrastructure to be utilised for leisure and tourism activities |
| • A long varied and interesting coastline which offers many opportunities e.g. fishing, surfing, boating | • Marinas  
• Develop leisure and tourism enterprises  
• Develop the marine leisure tourism sector |
| • Good agriculture industry with good reputation and family oriented structure of ownership | • Production of high value meats and foods  
• Promote organic farming  
• Establish network of farmers markets.  
• Diversify products  
• Can promote a sustainable attractive environment |
| • A network of thriving towns and villages | • Will facilitate and promote the concept of “place making”  
• Greater role in employment creation and developing local/rural catchment areas |
| • A dynamic regional capital in Galway Gateway  
• Part of the region (Co. Roscommon) adjoining the Gateway of Athlone | • Develop its role as a location for FDIs, employment generally and as a location of a full range of regional services  
• Benefit from the economic driver of a nearby gateway |
| • One Hub town in Tuam and a Linked Hub in Castlebar – Ballina | • Develop their role to provide employment, retail and services to a wide catchment area |

* Source: Richard Florida. Place-making incorporates the ‘mix of land uses to make a place’....

Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 -2022
| ▪ A high level of education attainment | ▪ Promote/market available skilled / educate workforce  
  ▪ Develop and entrepreneurial drive in this cohort |
| ▪ Excellent third/fourth level Institutions | ▪ Continue to output students with relevant skills required in workplace  
  ▪ Increase role in R&D support to enterprises and increase the level of transfer of research ideas to viable enterprises in the region |
| ▪ A unique landscape | ▪ Develop a unique tourism product  
  ▪ Derive an economic return in a sustainable manner to the region from this resource |
| ▪ Natural assets for renewable energy productions | ▪ Promote sustainable renewable energy developments in appropriate locations  
  ▪ Develop associated “Green Enterprise”  
  ▪ Pilot other forms of renewable energy production  
  ▪ West Region to become a leader in sustainable renewable energy and spin-off green industries and green economy |
| ▪ Off-shore supply of natural gas  
  ▪ Distribution network for the extension of natural gas into the majority of towns in the region | ▪ Promote enterprises/industries around this key energy resource  
  ▪ Use to improve competitiveness  
  ▪ Build distribution network to offer gas to all consumers in the region |
| ▪ A high quality of life | ▪ Attractive to entrepreneurs, FDI and highly skilled individuals |
| ▪ Built Heritage | ▪ Promote unique built heritage through our well known architectural and archaeological assets |
| ▪ World renowned attractions – physical and others e.g. Croagh Patrick, Lough Key, Rathcroghan, River Moy, Galway Races, Galway Arts Festival, Country Life Museum, Knock Shrine and the Céide Fields | ▪ Market and develop these iconic attractions  
  ▪ Increase the number of these high grade attractions, with the emphasis on quality rather than quantity |
| ▪ Dynamic responsive and supportive Local Government, regulatory and support agencies enabling enterprises to set up and continue in the region | ▪ Increase the level of FDI in the region  
  ▪ Create valuable spin-off from FDI  
  ▪ Develop an extensive indigenous enterprise base in all parts of the region |
| ▪ A number of airports in the region with adjacent industrial lands e.g. Ireland West Airport Knock, Galway Airport and close to other airports nationally e.g. Shannon Airport | ▪ Facilitate new enterprises |
| ▪ Defined strategic economic links and urban networks with a clear direction | ▪ Will enable beneficial clustering and location agglomeration economies |
| ▪ Gaeltacht areas which are a valuable cultural resource | ▪ Special linguistic and cultural identity  
  ▪ Protection of the Gaeltacht as part of the cultural heritage of the region |
3.4 Realising Future Economic Development Potential

During 2009 and 2010 the world in general and Ireland in particular experienced an unprecedented downturn in economic activity caused by a global financial and banking crisis. In Ireland’s case the crisis is exacerbated by a severe correction in property values and a resultant decline in the construction sector.

Notwithstanding these difficult economic circumstances, future economic growth will depend on re-orientating the economy towards exporting goods and services and supporting growth in indigenous enterprise. Improving the competitiveness of the economy is essential if the economy is to return to full employment within a reasonable time scale. In preparing for a recovery, the economy would also benefit from increased policy attention to measures to enhance productivity and innovation in the tradable sector of the economy. To achieve this there is a need to stimulate the growth of enterprise and take advantage of the significant potential from the development of the green economy. We must reduce the relative cost of doing business by continuing to invest in both labour and productive infrastructure thus increasing competition across the economy. We must attract high value added employment and guide the construction sector to a more sustainable growth path while addressing issues such as the cost and security of energy supply.

In response to these pressing needs, Government policy is focused on supporting the ‘Smart-Economy’ which is defined as an economy that combines the successful elements of the enterprise economy and the innovation or ‘ideas’ economy while promoting a high quality environment, improving energy security and promoting social cohesion. A key feature of the ‘Smart Economy’ is building the innovation component of the economy through the utilisation of human capital - the knowledge, skills and creativity of people - and its ability and effectiveness in translating ideas into valuable processes, products and services. A second important aspect is the greening of the economy and the development of green enterprise. More fundamentally, to keep talented Irish people working in Ireland, as well as attracting the most talented people from around the world, there is a necessity to offer a high quality living environment.

3.5 Planning and Economic Development – Priority Policies and Objectives

3.5.1 Business Environment Requirements

In setting out a strategy to 2022 and in identifying priority actions to achieve the overall goal of increasing sustainable economic growth, two considerations are deemed paramount:

1. Productivity and Competitiveness
2. Role of Cities/Urban Areas
(a) Productivity and Competitiveness
Two key determinants of sustainable long-run economic growth are productivity and competitiveness. Certainly in an open economy like Ireland’s, a region’s productivity and competitiveness relative to other regions will be a major factor in its ability to retain and create sustainable employment.

The factors that underpin these drivers of economic growth are:-

- The quality of the regions human capital such as its education level, skills and training.
- The quality and quantity of physical capital investment such as infrastructure, research facilities, access and connectivity.
- The level of business innovation and creativity generally e.g. transfer of idea from research institutions to the marketplace. R&D generally support new creative thinkers and doers.
- The quality and quantity of the regions entrepreneurs e.g. availability of risk capital to support new and expanding enterprises.
- The quality of life generally in the region e.g. school, leisure facilities and local services.

Continuous improvements on all these factors are needed to ensure the region reaches its full potential contribution to the national economy.

(b) Role of Cities & Urban Areas
Successful countries and regions have thriving cities at their core. The evidence clearly demonstrates that cities and urban areas drive economic growth and living standards with significant benefits for national living standards. It is critical that regional strategies and policies support the continued development of our main city, Galway and the other major urban areas, particularly the Hub of Tuam and the Linked Hub of Ballina-Castlebar.

Enhanced Gateway, Hub and Linked Hub performance will have positive spill-over effects on the surrounding areas and ultimately on the region as a whole. For parts of Roscommon the appropriate Gateway/Joint Gateway is Athlone, of which Monksland effectively forms a part.

We must develop the potential of these Gateways, Hub and Linked Hub by enhancing their competitiveness through policy actions that deliver the cornerstones of competitive urban areas i.e. enterprise, connectivity, sustainability, attractiveness and inclusivity.

Given these strategic considerations the strengths and the opportunities presented are reviewed (see section 3.3).

3.5.2 Actions to Achieve Regional Competitiveness
Given this context and government policy, the following priorities offer the greatest potential for growth in the West Region:-
(a) Retention of Existing Jobs
Excluding the construction sector, there are no reasons why with some key initiatives, existing jobs cannot be retained. To do this requires progress on the following:

- Employment supports for exporting and indigenous industries;
- Reduction in fixed costs by:-
  - Reduction in energy costs,
  - Improved and lower cost communications infrastructure,
  - Reduced transport costs by improving the road networks particularly the M6 and Galway Outer Bypass, the N5 Westport to Roscommon/ Longford borders and the N/M17 and M/N18 Charlestown to Gort roads and N26 Ballina-Bohola Phase II;
- Increased marketing drives to promote sectors such as tourism in the region;
- Improved consumer confidence in local products.

(b) Foreign Direct Investment
Overseas companies locating in the West of Ireland are and will continue to be a major element of the economy. Two sectors in particular have grown substantially in recent years, namely the medical devices and the ICT sectors. It is vital to continue to develop and seek to promote cluster location benefits to attract more companies of a similar type to the region.

New developments should capitalise on the economies of scale associated with the existing established clustering of medical devices and similar industrial enterprises in the Hub/Linked Hub and other smaller towns throughout the Region.

Economic corridors particularly industrial corridors such as the Oranmore – Athenry Strategic corridor must be developed/promoted and serviced to high international standards to attract further Foreign Direct Investment, building on strategic location and infrastructure. This corridor should be promoted in a sustainable manner as a centre for major national and international enterprises.

The availability of a skilled workforce is critical and all third level institutions have a key role in producing graduates with the modern/required qualifications and skills that will attract such enterprises.

Some of the key actions required in the next few years will be to:-
- Ensure key infrastructures such as water, waste, waste-water services, broadband and access are available in zoned serviced industrial sites/corridors in or adjacent to main urban areas in the region, particularly the Galway Gateway, Castlebar, Ballina, Tuam, Westport, West Athlone, Roscommon, Claremorris and Athenry.
- Make progress on reducing fixed costs and competitive factors as previously mentioned above.
(c) Indigenous Industry
The work of Enterprise Ireland and the County/City Enterprise Boards in cooperation with Údarás, Leader and the Local Authorities must continue to work together to stimulate and foster local entrepreneurs and support Irish owned industrial, food and marine businesses. This is attainable through the 4 pillars of:
- Entrepreneurship,
- Expansions,
- Sustainability and
- Customer care.

Enterprise Ireland’s vision for regional development can be defined as:
‘the creation of an environment for business regionally in which competitive capability is developed and sustained within companies, high growth start-up business is encouraged and innovation flourishes’.

This will require a socially, culturally and economically vibrant region where people have access to employment opportunities, where innovation and ideas leads to the creation of new companies and the sustaining of existing companies and where people can live and participate in economic success. To achieve this, the region will need to be self-sustaining and competitive within an overall national and international regional system. Indigenous industry is central to such a vision of self-sustaining competitive regions. For industry to be competitive, it must, in all locations, have proper access and infrastructure at competitive prices (versus competitors in other locations at home and overseas).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP1:</strong> Support widespread standard access to broadband in all areas subject to relevant environmental assessment in order to minimise environmental impact (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP2:</strong> Support reliable energy supplies in the region which are adequate and ensure low brownout risks (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP3:</strong> Support rail service which suits business travel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP4:</strong> Support the improvement to all critical roads infrastructure which includes national routes and strategic regional routes in the Region. All such road development will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP5:</strong> Support innovation and Research &amp; Development (R &amp; D) capability appropriate to specific sectors (third level research, commercialisation of third level research, industry-third level collaboration and industry R &amp; D).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP6:</strong> Support the provision of business education &amp; training facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP7:</strong> Support the development of social and cultural factors as an important factor in economic and education sphere development, which determine what makes areas attractive to live and work in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP8:</strong> Ensure there is adequate emphasis on secondary roads with links to Gateways/Hubs/motorways, thereby addressing physical access issues for dispersed industry (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP9:</strong> Facilitate Outreach/on-line skill training facilities, for supporting businesses in areas outside of the major settlement centres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP10:</strong> Develop new technology sectors and entrepreneurship in the region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Facilitate new sectors to utilise research and knowledge emanating from third level colleges.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b) Ensure the West Region is a location for new sectors driven by entrepreneurs from within the region or returning from abroad.

c) Balance decline in traditional sectors through the development of new niches.

d) Increase the attractiveness of a region.

**Objectives**

**EDO1:** Support the provision of adequate water, wastewater and other infrastructure in all areas but particularly in urban areas to support economic development and to comply with EU and national directives. All water abstraction projects or plans should be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate or other relevant environmental assessment and should be guided by the DoEHLG Circular L8 / 08 ‘Water Services Investment and Rural Water Programmes – Protection of Natural Heritage and National Monuments’.

**EDO2:** Subject to Habitats Directive Assessment (where appropriate) and/or other relevant environmental assessment, support the development of large scale employment generating enterprises within the serviced areas of the Region.

Enterprise Ireland’s strategic approach to regional enterprise in the West is centred on:
- driving the creation of innovation based start-ups;
- proactively developing existing clients in all regional locations; and
- facilitating entrepreneurship and the enterprise environment in local and rural communities.

(d) The Food Sector

The West Region has the potential and capacity to produce high quality foods from meats to vegetables and fruits. As consumers become more aware of the benefits of locally produced food, the farming/agricultural sectors must respond and grasp the opportunity to produce the products desired by the local, national and international consumers.

There has been an upsurge in local and/or farmers markets in the past few years, but there is a necessity to maintain this impetus. The return from the construction sector of many part-time farmers means that there is now time and opportunity for a renewed farming/food sector. Some priority sections include:-

**Policies**

**EDP11:** Support for selected but better and reliable local markets.

**EDP12:** Support for co-operative type marketing of new produce.

**EDP13:** Increasing consumer awareness of benefits of local produce and the quality of the products.

**Objective**

**EDO3:** Facilitate appropriate farm/rural enterprises and diversification (such as vegetables/fruit) (**Section 3.1.1 applies**).
(e) Tourism
The tourism sector will continue to be a key part of the economy of the West Region. The sector and its supporting agencies should develop the potential of the key strengths of the unique tourist products available in the region. The development in the long-term of a major tourist attraction would greatly benefit the region. The strategic role of Galway City is recognised in the development of the regional tourism economy. All other towns throughout the region play an important role in developing tourism through their attractive settings and wealth of cultural and natural heritage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDO4:</strong> Support and promote the regions iconic attractions and sustainably market them. Such attractions include natural heritage, cultural events and cultural heritage attractions such as Croagh Patrick, Knock Shrine, Lough Key Forest Park, Connemara &amp; Connemara National Park, Country Life Museum, the Ceide Fields, Galway Arts Festival, Boyle Cistercian Abbey, Westport House &amp; Demesne and Horse Racing in Galway, Roscommon and Ballinrobe <em>(Section 3.1.1 applies).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDO5:</strong> Support the appropriate development and marketing of historical and archaeological sites such as Rathcroghan and Tulsk in County Roscommon, as well as ecclesiastical heritage and walled towns such as Rinn Dúin in County Roscommon and Athenry in County Galway <em>(Section 3.1.1 applies).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDO6:</strong> Support the continued development of the urban centres within the region as premier tourist locations and support existing high performing tourism destinations particularly Galway City, Connemara, Westport, Lough Key and the islands <em>(Section 3.1.1 applies).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDO7:</strong> Promote and support the Gaeltacht areas of the West Region.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP14:</strong> Support a shared tourism approach between the Gateway/Hub and Linked Hub, other urban areas and the surrounding region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP15:</strong> Support the development of sustainable large scale tourist attractions in an integrated manner to enhance the tourism sector in the West Region. All such tourism development and tourism plans will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment where appropriate and/or other relevant environmental assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP16:</strong> Support and promote innovative development, marketing and support all types of activity holidays and activity events in the West Region including walking routes development, cycling routes development and water based activities subject to relevant environmental assessment including Habitats Directive Assessment (where appropriate) of all tourism plans and projects, in order to minimise environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP17:</strong> Support the development of cultural and arts tourism in the West Region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP18:</strong> Support the development of access routes directly into the region from potential tourist regions subject to relevant environmental assessment, including Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate, in order to minimise environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **EDP19:** Support the marketing of the landscape, archaeological and architectural heritage, biodiversity and environmental resources of the West Region.
(f) Fishing & Marine Sector
The West Region has an extensive Atlantic coastline as well as numerous inland surface water bodies such as the River Shannon and many other lakes and rivers. To achieve increased economic value from this natural resource in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner is a challenge but has great potential for the Region. Research continues with the Marine Institute undertaking valuable projects such as the “Smart Bay” projects.

Activities such as aquaculture, leisure enterprises, educational enterprises and tourist facilities generally can be developed in an environmentally sustainable manner. Success may depend on their integration into national coastline activities. It is imperative to ensure that developments do not diminish the natural advantage, but obtaining economic benefit from this resource can be done in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Environmental problems such as invasive species and water pollution, from whatever sources must be remedied in accordance with the River Basin Management Plans in order to safeguard fisheries, water habitats and species. There is potential for ocean energy, water based tourism, marine food, transport and shipping activities. Other important indigenous sectors such as the food sector and tourism are referred to in other sections of the document.

(g) Renewable Energy
There is a major transformation under way in energy markets and energy supply that will give rise to opportunities and challenges for Irish enterprises over the coming years. The fundamental impetus for this transformation derives from resource depletion in hydrocarbons and the concerted global approaches being taken to address climate change. The global energy goods and services sector is forecast to grow significantly in the coming years. Potential activities range from the design, manufacture and installation of advanced equipment and infrastructures, project management and engineering services and solutions and operational management of energy assets and infrastructures.

Given the location of the West Region, its natural resources and the existence of the Corrib Gas Field, it has the potential to harness opportunities in wind and wood energy and related technologies in the more immediate term and has longer term potential in wave energy.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP20:</strong> Support the region as a leader in research and development of sustainable renewable energy (<a href="#">Section 3.1.1 applies</a>). (Please refer to CO14, CO15 &amp; IO54).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP21:</strong> Support the development of the electricity grid network to facilitate the roll out of renewable energy infrastructure (<a href="#">Section 3.1.1 applies</a>). (Please refer to CO14, CO15 &amp; IO54).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP22:</strong> Facilitate entrepreneurs in the renewable energy sector supported by Enterprise Ireland and the County/City Enterprise Boards to locate and develop in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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10 The objective is to advance opportunities associated with marine resource development and to enhance our ability to monitor and manage our marine resources.
the region (Section 3.1.1 applies). (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

**Objectives**

**EDO8:** Subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment, support the deployment of renewable energy infrastructure in appropriate locations (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

**EDO9:** Support wave energy pilot actions in appropriate locations. Site selection should be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate and/or other relevant environmental assessment. (Please refer to CO15).

**EDO10:** Support biomass and wood energy production as appropriate in the region which is subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment where appropriate (e.g. energy plant development). (Please refer to CO15).

**Smart Economy**

‘Building Ireland’s Smart Economy – A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal’, 2008 sets out ambitious actions to reorganise the economy over the next five years and to secure the prosperity of current and future generations. It sets out a framework to address the current economic challenges and to build a ‘Smart Economy’ with a thriving enterprise sector, high-quality employment, secure energy supplies, an attractive environment and first-class infrastructure.

**Policies**

**EDP23:** Support the incentivisation of multinational companies to locate more Research and Development (R&D) capacity in the West Region, and support the commercialisation and retention of ideas that flow from these companies (Section 3.1.1 applies).

**EDP24:** Support a highly attractive incubation environment for entrepreneurs in the region.

**EDP25:** Promote the transition to a “low-carbon economy” and the opportunities for investment in jobs in the clean industry.

**Information Communication Technology (ICT)**

These sectors incorporate a range of interconnected activities and technologies including internet software, digital media, video, film, music, etc. The West Region with its unique landscape, remoteness and lighting provide attractive locations for these sectors. The region is also closely linked into the global ICT market with Galway being the area strongest in terms of hardware production, including office machinery, computers, radio, TV and communications.

**Policies**

**EDP26:** Facilitate ICT sector development in the region.

**EDP27:** Promote beneficial clustering to achieve competitive advantage.

**EDP28:** Ensure the retention and growth of ICT employment in the region.
(j) Other Opportunities
Other opportunities lie in the creative sector which relates to design, digital media, fashion, crafts and visual arts and the social services sector with potential for caring given the high share of population in the older age category.

3.6 Rural Enterprise Development

3.6.1 Recent Trends
The West Region has a dispersed rural population spread throughout its rich and diverse landscape. Historically the western seaboard has faced challenges due to its topography and peripheral location along the Atlantic Ocean. Increased mobility, accessibility and funding brought about in recent years allowed rural areas of the west to become re-populated and re-established, while some others face depopulation. The use and layout of rural land and the landscape has changed dramatically.

A network of towns and villages serve large rural hinterlands. There is a low density population pattern across the region and as most employment opportunities are based in urban areas, commuting from rural to urban areas is a common occurrence. There is a strong and continued desire for people to live in the countryside which has positive effects but also presents significant challenges related to the ability to sustain a large rural population on a limited economic, physical and social infrastructural base. Access to lands in farm-family ownership, changes in agricultural practice, spatial factors and economic factors such as lower construction costs and the ability to obtain planning permission has made rural dwelling an attractive alternative to living in traditional settlements. Rural areas surrounding or immediately adjoining larger settlements with employment, retail and service functions face continued pressure for housing development.

3.6.2 Rural Areas in the West Region
The National Spatial Strategy 2002 aims to see vibrant and diversified rural areas which benefit from local employment options and from the development of their resource potential. It identifies rural area types and policy responses. The West Region is identified in ‘areas that are changing’; ‘areas that are weak’; ‘areas that are remote’; and ‘areas that are culturally distinct’. In order to sustain rural areas, it is necessary to ensure there is appropriate community infrastructure, economic opportunities, leisure and cultural facilities.

3.6.3 Community Development
Community Development is an essential component of regional competitiveness. Rural restructuring and a trend of low density population has created difficulties in relation to social inclusion and community development. To maintain and re-establish the vitality of our rural areas there is a continuous need for local transport

service provision which is frequent and reliable\textsuperscript{12}, community services and educational outreach programmes for training and up-skilling. Local job creation is required to discourage unsustainable commuting patterns (in line with Smarter Travel\textsuperscript{13}), reduce ecological footprints and create a better quality of life for rural based communities thereby facilitating social inclusion. Rural areas are also heavy reliant on the voluntary work of community groups. There are a number of key programmes which contribute to rural development in the West Region including Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais (CLÁR), Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development (RAPID) and the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013. The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme 2007-2013 supports locally-based social inclusion interventions with emphasis on supporting people and communities suffering disadvantage and exclusion through a wide spectrum of locally-promoted actions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP29</strong>: Support the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 - 2016\textsuperscript{14}.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP30</strong>: Support the initiatives of CLÁR, RAPID, Local Development Social Inclusion Programme 2007-2013, Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 and other investment in rural areas of the West Region (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP31</strong>: Support the Community Development Programme which supports local people to improve their own communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP32</strong>: Support the collaboration of stakeholders including the community, local and central government and business in rural development projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDO11</strong>: Support complimentary rural based economic activities where appropriate infrastructure exists (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.6.4 Employment Sectors

An over-reliance on the sectors such as construction poses problems for sustainable rural development especially in the current economic climate. In order to ensure the vibrancy of local communities in the downturn and in more economically buoyant times it is necessary to ensure initiatives and enterprises continue to survive and diversify to ensure rural dwellers maintain high quality of life standards. The provision of high quality broadband infrastructure in rural areas is critical to their economic development and facilitates access to distance learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP33</strong>: Support continued investment in farming/agriculture to sustain the rural population and support part-time farming in the Region (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP34</strong>: Support the diversification of the rural economy to concentrate on the production of high quality products to meet market/consumer demand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDP35</strong>: Support the role of education and opportunities for training, up-skilling rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{12} The Rural Transport Programme supports rural communities, though many rural areas need further investment to maximise their growth potential.

\textsuperscript{13} DoEHLG (2009) \textit{Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 – 2020}.

\textsuperscript{14} \url{http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPinclusionReportPDF.pdf}
dwellers and outreach third-level programmes through Institutes of Technology, Universities, fourth-level education and other education providers.

**EDP36:** Promote innovative strategies in the natural resource sectors such as tourism, agri-food, forestry, fisheries and marine industry, which are guided by relevant environmental assessment and ensuring the protection of Natura 2000 sites through Habitats Directive Assessment of plans and projects where relevant and in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive.

**EDP37:** Promote ICT uptake and broadband usage in rural communities and promote ICT and broadband as methods of removing peripherality and supporting high-value-added niche services based enterprise (Section 3.1.1 applies).

**EDP38:** Support the creation of new rural micro-enterprises and development of existing initiatives recognising the benefit to the sustainable development of wider rural areas (Section 3.1.1 applies).

### Objectives

**EDO12:** Support the development of complementary rural enterprise particularly where appropriate infrastructure exists (Section 3.1.1 applies).

**EDO13:** Support appropriate and sustainable rural development outside of the larger urban centres subject to normal technical and environmental considerations in order to sustain the rural economy and which utilise the potential of rural areas (Section 3.1.1 applies).

### 3.6.5 Natural Resource Sectors

The Natural Resource sector includes agriculture, agri-food sector, forestry, extractive industry, mariculture and aquaculture.

**Agriculture**

While rural development was traditionally associated with agriculture and rural communities, much of the rural population or rural dwellers are unconnected with the sector. The sector is witnessing fundamental changes with restructuring, agricultural diversification and the growth of the non-farm rural economy. Farm sizes are on average 15-30 hectares and have low incomes. Farmers, while highly dependent on direct payments, area payments and the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS IV) continue to contribute substantially to the rural economy and they continue to play an important role in rural development and environmental management.

Part-time farming represents the largest share of farmers in the West Region with limited numbers wholly dependent on traditional farming. Those likely to be dependent are older farmers who are less likely to seek other sources of income. The REPS scheme enabled farmers, particularly those with small farm holdings to increase farm viability, promote conservation, improve the quality of life in local communities and provide resources for local economic diversification. The uncertain future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform pose serious challenges for

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15 Initiatives may include artisan foods, forestry, marine, rural/agri tourism, cultural heritage and community promoted enterprises – promotion of research/analysis and development of rural-sourced products and innovative community services.

Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 -2022
the rural agricultural economy and its continued survival. Innovation is the key in this sector given the additional challenges posed by climate change, energy supply, water, waste and nutrient management.

**Policies**

**EDP39:** Promote the competitiveness of farm enterprises and environmentally sustainable farming which sustains a rich biodiversity in the local environment (*Section 3.1.1 applies*).

**EDP40:** Support off-farm related employment close to the farming workforce (*Section 3.1.1 applies*).

**EDP41:** Support rural tourism initiatives including the provision of infrastructure and the sustainable development of local heritage activities (*Section 3.1.1 applies*).

**Objectives**

**EDO14:** Support diversification in farm production and supplementary activities ancillary to existing enterprises which are appropriate to rural locations (*Section 3.1.1 applies*).

**Agri-Food**

The agri-food sector is hugely important in the rural economy. Most companies are in the small to medium sized category and the organic sector is small when compared with other European countries.

**Policies**

**EDP42:** Support the agri-food sector and its role in the West, and support the dynamic indigenous manufacturing sector, promoting a growing interest in 'local food'.

**EDP43:** Promote the organic farming sector (horticultural crops) and the development of niche markets.

**EDP44:** Promote bio-regions and micro regions in the context of co-operative and complementary rural agriculture (*Section 3.1.1 applies*).

**EDP45:** Support communities in agricultural diversification in enterprise, local services and tourism.

**Forestry**

The forestry sector creates opportunities for a variety of employment in rural economies such as nurseries, consultants, contractors, processing in sawmills, wood recycling and wood waste enterprises. This product feeds into the construction industry and manufacturing. Sustainable Forest Management (SFM), the Code of Best Forest Practice and environmental guidelines contribute positively to local biodiversity and forestry is crucial for carbon sequestration.

**Policies**

**EDP46:** Encourage sustainable forestry practices and forestry development in appropriate locations in accordance with Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Guidelines and Strategies and through Sustainable Forest Management subject to Habitats Directive Assessment of forestry plans and projects, where relevant and
in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive. This should be carried out in consultation with the Forest Service & NPWS.

**EDP47:** To pursue the development of a regional policy in relation to the cumulative assessment of forestry and its impact on Natura 2000 sites and protected species in association with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

**EDP48:** Expand on the potential of sustainable forestry potential for carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change including promoting forestry as a renewable energy source and supporting wood energy initiatives (Section 3.1.1 applies) (Please refer to EDP72).

**EDP49:** Support sustainable forestry and timber enterprises in the West Region, subject to Habitats Directive Assessment, where relevant and in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive.

**EDP50:** Support sustainable forestry related tourism initiatives based on the outcomes of suitable environmental assessment including Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate (Section 3.1.1 applies).

**Objectives**

**EDO15:** The cumulative impact of forestry on landscape and biodiversity should be considered and measures taken which ensure forestry proposals do not impact on established communities.

**EDO16:** Monoculture forestry in peat uplands should be discouraged and ensure adequate assessment of the impact of any forestry on water quality.

**Extractive Industry**

Extractive industry represents a valuable resource in the provision of raw material for the construction industry and is also an important source of employment. The products provide building materials for the provision of housing and infrastructure. The industry can however have significant impacts on the landscape, habitats and rural amenity, the road network and has the potential for water pollution or intrusion of groundwater supplies. Local production of aggregate which is suitable for local use can lessen the impact on road infrastructure.

**Policy**

**EDP51:** Support the sustainable development of the extractive industry in the West Region as a rural enterprise. Developments of this nature must follow EIA and Habitats Directive Assessment procedures, minimise all environmental impacts and be rehabilitated to an appropriate land use which ensures positive impacts for biodiversity. Developments shall be assessed and/or carried out in accordance with relevant national legislation and DoEHLG, NPWS and EPA Guidelines.

**Objective**

**EDO17:** GSI Aggregate Potential Mapping should be included in relevant County Development Plan documents, where available.

**Aquaculture & Mariculture**
The West Region has a long tradition associated with the marine environment and marine resources which support fishing, aquaculture, fish processing and seaweed harvesting. It also supports recreational activities and transport to the islands.

### Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDP52</th>
<th>Promote the sustainable development of infrastructure to enhance the value of the shellfish industry, fishing, seaweed and other mari-culture based industry products (Section 3.1.1 applies).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDP53</td>
<td>Support local harbour management and small scale improvements to offer improved tourism, leisure and fishing facilities (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP54</td>
<td>Support the sustainable development of piers, harbours and marinas throughout the region which avoid or minimise disturbance to habitats or otherwise impact negatively on the land/seascape/heritage (e.g. protected structures). All such developments will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment, where necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP55</td>
<td>Promote co-ordinated service delivery and delivery of facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP56</td>
<td>Support the work of the N.U.I.G Marine Research programme and the Marine Institute’s programmes (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP57</td>
<td>Facilitate the sustainable development of strategic piers and piers identified in ‘Assessment of Piers, Harbours and Landing Places’. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development and through relevant environmental assessment including Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate ensuring minimal environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP58</td>
<td>Support the Fisheries Harbours Programme of Galway and Mayo County Councils and the Department of Communications, Energy &amp; Natural Resources (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP59</td>
<td>Promote marine and natural resources based development and appropriate communications infrastructure (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP60</td>
<td>Support the creation of a Centre of Excellence in Marine Research &amp; Development to establish the region as a centre for innovation and specialist marine technologies (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.6.6 Rural Tourism

The Western Regional Tourism Development Board has a number of functions, which have been delegated through Fáilte Ireland, bringing a regional strategic development focus to tourism development strategies, examining product, enterprise support, training, marketing, infrastructure and environmental management needs of tourism in the region.

As the popularity of short breaks in larger urban areas grows, significant challenges lie ahead for rural tourism and its survival. Key transport and communications infrastructure and a wider range of products are required to ensure they remain competitive.

The rural tourism sector provides both full-time and seasonal employment in the West Region and though areas of the region are popular tourist destinations, it is necessary to sustain and promote the sector while encouraging other areas for development.
Rural tourism must adapt to changing consumer trends, networking to provide a greater variety of tourism products and experiences. Potential areas of development include ‘cultural resources’ as they are a largely untapped dimension in rural development. Eco-tourism and geo-tourism are areas for potential development within the region given the landscape and its geomorphology.

**Policies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDP61</td>
<td>Promote rural tourism through the National Tourism Development Authority, Western Regional Tourism Development Board (Fáilte Ireland), Ireland West Tourism, Gaelsaoire (Údarás Na Gaeltachta) and other tourism agencies (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP62</td>
<td>Support the sustainable development of rural tourism trails through joint marketing co-operation with emphasis on the marine, landscape, heritage and leisure (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP63</td>
<td>Support the development of niche tourism including eco, green and geo-tourism, the extension of the tourist season through ‘flagship projects’ in order to create a quality competitive product to be marketed internationally utilising natural resources in a sustainable manner, ensuring tourism plans and projects are guided by relevant environmental assessment including Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP64</td>
<td>Support regional airport networking, local transport provision (as per Smarter Travel) and communications infrastructure (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP65</td>
<td>Support the sustainable development of the Inland Fisheries resource in the Region (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP66</td>
<td>Support the sustainable development of rural tourism resources such as inland waterways (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP67</td>
<td>Support language, cultural and educational tourism (e.g. Gaeltacht Colleges).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP68</td>
<td>Place emphasis on safeguarding the environment for future generations, with sustainable development opportunities which do not adversely impact on the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP69</td>
<td>Promote a clean and green image of the West Region, promoting heritage and natural resources (which are of significant value), image and the aesthetic quality of the living environment in terms of landscape, architecture, archaeology, town, village and countryside planning and amenities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDP70</td>
<td>Support rural tourism initiatives which support sporting events; village enhancement; heritage management and energy conservation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objectives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDO18</td>
<td>Promote sustainably planned tourism (enhancing existing or newly planned resources) with particular emphasis on less developed areas to maintain the region’s share of the market, developing new products, services and facilities (Section 3.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDO19</td>
<td>Promote special interest tourism activities such as adventure sports, sports events, out-door pursuit tourism holidays, marine based tourism, water sports; horse riding, hill walking, angling &amp; fishing and golf, and the establishment of walking and cycling routes within the region and place emphasis on their contribution to healthy and active lifestyles subject to relevant environmental assessment including Habitats...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Directive Assessment (where appropriate) of all tourism plans and projects, in order to minimise environmental impact.

**EDO20**: Support the protection of key ancient structures and habitations and support the use of protection plans for areas of high natural amenity, locally important ecological or geological features in conjunction with local tourism products.

**EDO21**: Support further diversification into non-farming activities by farm families, expansion of rural tourism initiatives to include provision of appropriate infrastructure and a clearer focus on the sustainable development of local heritage activities (*Section 3.1.1 applies*).

**EDO22**: Ensure agricultural structures are assessed appropriately in high amenity areas (in line with the Planning & Development Regulations).

### 3.6.7 Alternative employment opportunities

Rural areas provide opportunities for alternative employment sources. These include energy generation which can be sustainably managed and which will not cause adverse impacts on the landscape or designated habitats.

**Policy**

**EDP71**: Promote a green economy in the West Region through the sustainable development of renewable energy resources; explore the capacity to develop community-based renewable energy and other measures to protect the high natural value of the local rural landscape (*Section 3.1.1 applies*) (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

**EDP72**: Support the sustainable cultivation of biomass and wood for energy production through the development of a Regional Strategy. The Strategy will be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment and by other environmental assessment and will aim to ensure that any incentivisation of the cultivation of biofuels is conducted in a sustainable manner that is coordinated on a Region-wide basis, and that locations for biofuel production are suitable in terms of environmental sensitivity including consideration of Natura 2000 sites and potential cumulative impacts.

**Objectives**

**EDO23**: Support eco-projects, renewable energy and green business development in appropriate locations which are subject to relevant environmental assessment including Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate. (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

**EDO24**: Promote adaptation of alternative sustainable energy sources appropriate to the specific needs of local rural communities (*Section 3.1.1 applies*) (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

### 3.7 Retail Strategy

Retail Strategies in the West Region have been prepared in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and having regard to the requirements of the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2005). Galway City dominates the retail hierarchy, as the primary retail centre within the

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Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 -2022

51
Region. Galway City’s dominant position must be protected and enhanced, particularly in higher-order comparison goods. A similar policy approach should be adopted in the Linked Hub of Castlebar-Ballina and Hub of Tuam and the County town of Roscommon. Monksland’s retail role should be planned as part of a joint Retail Strategy with the Midlands (Athlone) Gateway in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines 2005 (or as amended)\textsuperscript{16}. A suitable range of retailing is required in the Gateway, Hub and Linked Hub towns to develop critical mass.

The central key objective should be to support the “town centre first” approach in the context of the retail hierarchy, and to promote the vitality and viability of existing centres. This would support the objective of providing sustainable transport and travel patterns into the future, an objective less well supported by large out-of-town retail centres.

### Policies

**EDP73:** Implement the principles established in the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2005) or future guidance as the primary basis for the control of future retail development.

**EDP74:** Support, promote and protect the retail role and attractiveness of all towns in the West Region.

**EDP75:** Protect the vitality and viability of ‘town centres’ and retain the capacity for retail development in town centre areas.

**EDP76:** Support the role of retailing as a key contributor to a vital and viable town centre by identifying and facilitating the provision of retailing in “Core Retail Areas”.

**EDP77:** Support retail development in towns, villages and population centres across the West Region, acknowledging the role of the retail sector in providing lasting employment and in anchoring communities (Section 3.1.1 applies).

### Objectives

**EDO25:** Ensure that there are sufficient lands zoned for retail floorspace in an efficient, equitable and sustainable manner, with a particular emphasis on improved public transport access (Section 3.1.1 applies).

**EDO26:** Assess the impact of significant proposed expansions of retail floor space on movement taking into account impact on road capacity and access to public transport.

**EDO27:** Improve access to town centres by facilitating opportunities for public transport, cycling and walking whilst also ensuring sufficient short term parking is available to meet the needs of car borne shoppers (Section 3.1.1 applies).

\textsuperscript{16} Refer to Inter-regional (Midlands) objective CO7.
CHAPTER 4: Settlement Strategy, Population & Housing

4.1 Introduction
The following section is intended to provide spatial guidance on population distribution, settlement hierarchy, settlement role, settlement size and housing requirements within the West Region for the local authority areas of Galway City, Galway County, Mayo County and Roscommon County. It will also guide future direction of growth and investment. It is a goal of the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 - 2022 not only to promote the Gateway and Hub/Linked Hub but to support a settlement strategy that will encourage the sustainable growth of towns, villages and rural areas.

4.1.1 Habitats Directive Assessment
The Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment has identified a number of Goals, Objectives and Policies in this Chapter of the Guidelines which, when implemented, have the potential to result in negative impacts on one or more Natura 2000 site and issues may therefore arise under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive which will require Appropriate Assessment at ‘lower plan’ or project level. Where such ‘lower plan’ or project level Appropriate Assessment concludes significant negative impacts, alternative solutions which comply fully with Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive may need to be considered. Please also refer to Appendix 4.

4.2 Settlement Structure
The settlement structure stems from the National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020. It includes the Gateway, Hub, Linked Hub, Key Towns, County Towns, other settlement centres and rural population distribution. Population targets for the Gateway and Hubs are aimed at growing these strategic locations at a level that can deliver the conditions of critical mass to drive overall regional development even in the current challenging fiscal situation.
4.3 Trends in the West Region

Within the National Spatial Strategy (2002), it is expected that Galway City with its population catchment, quality of life attractions, transport connections and capacity to innovate with the support of its third-level institutions, will continue to play a critical role which is essential in activating the potential of the region. It is stated that this role must be sustained and broadened to strengthen other areas. The NSS states that other towns and rural areas require strengthening to harness local resources taking account of the peripherality of the West so the wider area will benefit from the presence of critical mass in the region.

Figure 5: Population Density of EDs in 2006
The Castlebar – Ballina ‘Linked Hub’ is considered to have a complementary function and capabilities that point towards a capacity to develop and energise wider areas. With enhanced physical links between these centres in terms of transport and communications, Castlebar – Ballina is expected to perform an important spatial function in the NSS context. The Linked Hub is also closely associated with Westport, which is considered to be a local extension of the Linked Hub.

In County Galway, the Tuam Hub is expected to assist in building links and interactions between the exiting Gateway of Galway City and the Gateway at Sligo and energise its own substantial catchment in County Galway.

Source (Figure 4&5): OSI and CSO Census 2006

The Gateway of Galway is the largest population centre in the Region, attracting significant investment. However, pressure on the rural hinterland of the City continues. Growth has been experienced in the Hub, Linked Hub and major county towns as identified in the NSS 2002 – 2020. Tuam had the highest percentage growth in population; however service provision has lagged behind. The West Region has a large rural population and there is a predominance of individual rural dwellings. There are a significant number of smaller populated towns and villages and a demand for urban generated housing around main settlements. Smaller towns have not grown to sufficient population levels as there has been a preference for single houses in the countryside. The physical topography of the West Region has also given rise to an uneven distribution of development throughout the region. The population in the more peripheral areas of the region has not seen significant increases. In the years 2002 – 2006 the population decreased in parts of north-west and south-west Mayo and west Galway. Nevertheless, some smaller towns within the Region (including Moycullen, Claremorris, and Roscommon) have developed positively both economically and socially in recent years.

Significant development has taken place in the newer suburbs of Galway City. The rising population of Galway City has implications for future land requirements for housing, industry, commerce, education, recreation and amenity and higher density developments are required to sustain an efficient public transport system.

4.3.1 Current Population

The following tables indicate the population in the West Region and in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) in 2002 and 2006 Census years.

**Table 8: CSO Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>% Change ‘02 – ‘06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>209,077</td>
<td>231,670</td>
<td>+10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>117,446</td>
<td>123,839</td>
<td>+5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>53,774</td>
<td>58,768</td>
<td>+9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Region</td>
<td>380,297</td>
<td>414,277</td>
<td>+8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.O.I.</td>
<td>3,917,203</td>
<td>4,239,848</td>
<td>+8.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 9: CSO Population - Main Urban Centres**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban Centre</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>% Change ‘02 – ‘06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galway City</td>
<td>65,832</td>
<td>72,414</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlebar</td>
<td>10,287</td>
<td>10,665</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballina</td>
<td>9,478</td>
<td>10,056</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuam</td>
<td>5,947</td>
<td>6,885</td>
<td>+16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballinasloe</td>
<td>6,219</td>
<td>6,303</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westport</td>
<td>5,634</td>
<td>5,475</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>4,489</td>
<td>5,017</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The following table indicates varying sizes of towns within the West Region.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pop.</th>
<th>County Galway</th>
<th>County Mayo</th>
<th>County Roscommon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City (72414)</td>
<td>Galway City (Gateway)</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10000+</td>
<td>Castlebar (Linked Hub)</td>
<td>Ballina (Linked Hub)</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7000</td>
<td>Tuam (Hub)</td>
<td>Ballinasloe</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6000</td>
<td>Westport</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>Roscommon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5000</td>
<td>Loughrea</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-4000</td>
<td>Oranmore</td>
<td>Athenry</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-3000</td>
<td>Gort</td>
<td>Claremorris</td>
<td>Ballinrobe</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2000</td>
<td>Clifden; Meycullen;</td>
<td>Portumna; Oughterard</td>
<td>Boyle</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Clifden; Mountbellew;</td>
<td>Ballyhaunis; Belmullet;</td>
<td>Athlone West (Environ) - Monksland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glenamaddy; Ballygar;</td>
<td>Knock; Charlestown-Bellahy;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Claregalway;</td>
<td>Swinford; Kiltimagh</td>
<td>Castlerea</td>
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<tr>
<td>500-1000</td>
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<td>Dunmore; Carraroe;</td>
<td>Ballaghaderreen</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Glenamaddy; Ballygar;</td>
<td>Kinvara; Glenamaddy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Claregalway;</td>
<td>Crossmolina; Knock;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Charlestown-Bellahy;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt; 500</td>
<td>Lackaghbeg; Craughwell;</td>
<td>Shrule; Kilkelly;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corrofin; Meylough;</td>
<td>Louisburgh; Gob an Choire (Achill Sound);</td>
<td>Frenchpark; Roosky; Ballinlough; Keade; Cloonfad; Loughglinn;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monivea; Killimore;</td>
<td>Bangor Erris;</td>
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<td>Cluain Bú; Woodford;</td>
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<td>Eyrecourt;</td>
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4.4 Developing the West in a Sustainable Way

In order to sustain the population of the West Region, each Local Authority within the Region has its own Development Plan(s) and Local Area Plan(s) to ensure that there is sufficient land zoned to accommodate increasing population in urban areas where there is water and waste water capacity, a broad mix of uses to encourage employment opportunities and sustainable work and travel patterns. Proposals, plans and zonings (including re-zoning or removal of zoning) for development, including reservation of land for development/supporting infrastructure should be informed and guided by ‘constraints’ or ‘option selection’ type studies or relevant environmental assessment which involves an examination of the full range of environmental topics.

4.5 Summary of Strategic Development Option for the West Region

A number of alternative scenarios were examined based on the potential development of the West Region through the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines over a twelve year timescale 2010 - 2022. The Regional Planning Guidelines are influenced by a wide range of international, national and regional level plans, programmes and legislation. The RPGs will set out a framework for other lower level plans and programmes such as County, City and Town Development Plans.

The 2004-2016 Regional Planning Guidelines and new RPGs stem from the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 and provide a more regional focus. The NSS sets out a settlement structure which focuses on growing urban centres such as the Gateways, Hub and Linked Hub and larger towns so that they reach a sufficient size or ‘critical mass’ in order to enhance economic competitiveness within the region. The Planning and Development (Regional Planning Guidelines) Regulations 2009 require population targets issued from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to be included in the Regional Planning Guidelines. The targets have been set for the key growth areas namely the Gateway (Galway City), the Hub and Linked Hub (Tuam and Ballina-Castlebar) and for the West Region for the years 2010, 2016 and 2022.

The Atlantic Gateways Initiative Report issued in 2006 promotes balanced regional development. It outlines how an integrated approach to the development of the cities of Cork, Limerick-Shannon, Galway and Waterford as a national investment corridor can rival the most competitive city region. The Atlantic Gateways Initiative aims to create a wider range of opportunities for economic opportunity with services and environmental quality of the highest standards. Growing the region could create the potential for balanced regional development with further potential to expand and include wider areas.

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18 Please refer to Appendix 1 & 2 of this document for more details on International, National, Regional and local level policy documents and plans.
19 Please refer to Section 4.6 of the Regional Planning Guidelines.
Existing development patterns, historic trends, strategic development areas and areas of environmental pressure are examined to provide a scenario which is considered to have the least impact on the environment and which will ensure the sustainable development of the Region 2010 – 2022. A key aspect of the West Regional Authority’s RPGs is to maintain a balance between protecting and enhancing the environment and achieving sustainable economic development of the West Region. In the development of alternative scenarios, cognisance has been taken of the geographical scope of the West Region, the level of the RPGs within the planning hierarchy (please refer to table 1), that is, the plans and policy documents which directly influence the RPGs and which has led to the selection of the final alternative scenario (number 4).

The following are the alternative scenarios which were explored for the RPGs for the West Region 2010 – 2022 and were developed from previous alternative scenarios explored in the 2004 – 2016 Guidelines. Please refer to the SEA Environmental Report for further details.

Table 11: Alternative Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative Scenario 1:</th>
<th>Concentration of Growth in the Galway Gateway (only)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Scenario 2:</td>
<td>Dispersal of Developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Scenario 3:</td>
<td>Concentration of Growth in all Urban Areas and Settlements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Scenario 4:</td>
<td>Development of the Galway Gateway, Tuam Hub and Castlebar-Ballina Linked Hub supported by the development of the Athlone (Midlands) Gateway and Key Towns, encouraging the development of other settlement centres and appropriate development in the rural areas of the region</td>
</tr>
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</table>

4.5.1 Preferred Strategic Option

The following is the preferred strategic option for the West Region 2010 – 2022:

**Development of the Galway Gateway, Tuam Hub and Castlebar-Ballina Linked Hub supported by the development of the Athlone (Midlands) Gateway and Key Towns, encouraging the development of other settlement centres and appropriate development in the rural areas of the region**

This type of scenario is a structured approach to the development of the region and reflects the scenario established in the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 and the Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2004 - 2016. This scenario promotes the development of the Gateway, Hub, Linked Hub, Key Towns, encourages development in other settlement centres and supports sustainable development in the rural areas of the region. Features and consequences of this scenario are as follows:

- This scenario would provide some of the benefits and some of the difficulties of the other options explored.
It would mean the development of a growing and attractive Gateway, Hub and Linked Hub. This would ensure the West Region is competitive at national and international level and would facilitate the spill-over effect from this area to the other parts of the region. This would create a strong pull for foreign direct investment and support for indigenous industry with opportunities for education, enterprise and economic development.

In addition, it would create smaller key centres that would themselves be significant providers of services within their areas and generate spill-over effects.

With a stronger urban network, this would allow a greater distribution of employment opportunities throughout the region which may reduce commuting trends in the Region (in line with Smarter Travel).

It would also allow the development of strong transport links between Galway, Tuam and Castlebar/Ballina and the strategic centre of Westport together with the more peripheral areas of the region, facilitating shared benefits.

This scenario aims to sustainably develop the rural areas of the region of the West Region as identified in the National Spatial Strategy, namely those areas with strong potential for diversification, areas that are diversifying, areas that require village strengthening and have rural areas opportunities and protection of the rural areas surrounding the Gateway which have strategic assets. This will benefit those areas of the region which have suffered from depopulation.

The development of the Gateway, Hub, Linked-Hub, Key towns, smaller settlements and rural areas would aid the development of the Atlantic Gateways Initiative ‘economic corridor’ to enhance the competitiveness of the West Region.

However, landscape and water resources would need to be protected from inappropriate development. The cumulative impact of rural developments must also be considered.

Water and wastewater infrastructure must be prioritised to meet the needs of current population and future demand in order to prevent impacts on the environment including Natura 2000 sites. The current economic climate and finance available in the ‘Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2012’ and additional requirements highlighted by the ‘Local Authority Water & Waste Water Assessment of Needs 2009’ identify the issues to be overcome in order to achieve compact and sustainable towns in the Region. The effects of water abstraction and security of supply must be examined for the long term growth of settlements.

The River Basin Management Plans would need to be implemented throughout the region in order to meet Water Framework Directive objectives. Existing environmental pollution sources would need to be tackled and provisions put in place to prevent reoccurrence.

Urban areas would need to be sustainably planned and well designed in order to make them attractive, have sufficient densities, amenities and available sustainable travel options to ensure a high quality of life. Sustainable transport would be supported where its provision is feasible. Pressures for development around urban areas would need to be controlled. It would be necessary to have clear urban settlement and rural area delineation to prevent sprawl into the surrounding areas. Targets for growth would be set and local area plans would set out appropriate zonings which would sustainably develop these areas.
The cumulative impact on biodiversity including Natura 2000 sites from rural development (of all types) would need to be closely examined and monitored to ensure that habitats and species are protected; conservation objectives and the integrity of sites are maintained. Development would need to contribute to environmental enhancement and assimilation.

- Strategic Flood Risk Assessments would be required to protect the urban settlements, existing residential areas, ensure safe drinking water supplies and minimise environmental damage.
- A key element of this scenario is to ensure that citizens are aware of environmental matters in relation to waste, water conservation, energy conservation and use of sustainable modes of travel.
- There are opportunities for sustainable energy generation within the region, though cumulative assessment and strong policies are required in order to prevent impacts on the environment.

This option reflects the ethos of the NSS and Atlantic Gateways Initiative and seeks to minimise potential environmental impacts.

This scenario was chosen given that it takes account of the existing settlement structure and development within the Region, the geographical scope of the RPGs, the National Spatial Strategy aims and objectives as set out in 2002, the existing Regional Planning Guidelines 2004 – 2016 and other plans and policy documents. However, in order to maintain this structured development approach which facilitates sustainable development in rural areas, mitigation is required with regard to policy development. The mitigation is set out in the SEA Environmental Report (and Habitats Directive – Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment & Natura Impact Statement) and is contained in the goals, policies and objectives of the Regional Planning Guidelines to ensure that impacts on the environment are minimised.

### 4.6 Core Settlement Strategy

The Core Settlement Strategy for the West Region is based on the NSS and Strategic Development Option which aims to develop the Galway Gateway, Tuam Hub and Castlebar-Ballina Linked Hub supported by the development of the Athlone Gateway and Key Towns, encouraging the development of other settlement centres and appropriate development in the rural areas of the region. This will be achieved through the Settlement Strategy Goals, the Strategy for the Gateway, Hub and Linked Hub Towns, Key Towns, Other Settlements & Rural Areas, Population Targets and subsequent Housing Land Requirements. It will be guided by Flood Risk Assessment and other relevant environmental assessments.

#### 4.6.1 Overall Settlement Strategy Goals

The Settlement Strategy seeks to achieve a vision for the West Region through a number of policies and recommendations which are contained within this chapter. The Strategy focuses on the following:

- **SPG1:** Building on the dynamic role of Galway as a gateway and expanding its influence in promoting economic activity in the West Region achieving a critical mass of 98,700 over the next 12 years. Support the Gateway through...
investment in critical infrastructure of road, rail, water, waste water, electricity and gas investment. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact, and taking full account of the presence of Natura 2000 sites in the Galway area and the requirement to protect these by subjecting all plans and projects to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment, where necessary.

**SPG2:** Supporting the potential of the Linked Hub of Castlebar-Ballina and Tuam Hub by putting policies in place to encourage a minimum population target of 9,500 in Tuam and 28,700 in Castlebar-Ballina. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact and taking full account of the presence of Natura 2000 sites in these areas and the requirement to protect these by subjecting all plans and projects to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment, where appropriate.

**SPG3:** To develop the strategic roles for the Key Towns (as identified in section 4.6.2.4) and support sustainable towns through County Development Plans and Local Area Plans which take account of employment, community, infrastructure and environmental requirements in serving the urban and rural hinterland areas. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact and taking full account of the presence of the Natura 2000 sites that are situated in the vicinity of most of the Key Towns and the requirement to protect these by subjecting all plans and projects to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment.

**SPG4:** Encourage appropriate growth in rural towns and villages and promote villages as an attractive alternative to rural one-off housing. Provide for polices that will encourage the creation of a minimum service level in smaller settlements depending on their location and proximity to either the Gateway, Hub, Linked Hub or larger towns. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact (Section 4.1.1 applies).

**SPG5:** Support a high quality public transport system in line with Transport 21 and Smarter Travel documents and strategies (Section 4.1.1 applies).

**SPG6:** Support an emphasis on quality of life through sustainable urban design, diversity and quality of housing stock, employment and recreational facilities.

**SPG7:** The protection and management of the areas and assets of the Region that contribute to the unique visual and environmental character and sense of identity of the Region and which underpin tourism, heritage and quality of life.

**SPG8:** Strengthen and protect the linguistic and cultural heritage and identity of the Gaeltacht through accessibility and through the strengthening of existing settlements.
SPG9: Consolidate the existing urban footprint of towns and the city region through supporting the sustainable re-use of brownfield lands and redevelopment/regeneration opportunities in order to increase densities (Section 4.1.1 applies).

SPG10: Ensure a sustainable town approach: to ensure that towns are centres of economic growth to attract and support a wide range of services and deliver a high quality of life, thereby making such areas attractive as places to work and live and attract visitors.

SPG11: New development should be located on land which will make the best use of existing and planned resources, with housing located close to existing or planned public transport locations with emphasis on supporting Transport 21 projects in the short and medium term and Transport 21 successor in the long term. The development of any elements of the Western Rail Corridor and new commuter services, together with significant road network improvement will have a major impact on development and settlement patterns. The sustainable development of new growth shall be coordinated within the existing urban centres along the transportation and strategic links through the Region with particular emphasis on those along the Western Rail Corridor. This will foster sustainable development and travel patterns and optimise public and private investment in existing linkages (Section 4.1.1 applies).

SPG12: Encourage high quality housing stock, with low energy costs, good local leisure provisions, local educational facilities, amenity spaces, health facilities, cultural facilities and green spaces to minimise travel distances to provide a good quality of life.

SPG13: Ensure sustainable rural development including rural housing by ensuring that rural settlement planning at the county level is informed by Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessments, having regard to landscape and environmental sensitivities, DoEHLG guidelines and EU Directives20. In areas with high surface water or groundwater sensitivity Local Authorities should develop mechanisms for assessing the potential for rural housing to result in in-combination impacts on Natura 2000 sites.

4.6.2 Strategy for the Gateway, Hub Town, Linked Hub, Key Towns, Other Settlements & Rural Areas

The Gateways, as priority growth areas should be growing at faster rates than the regions, though the Hub and Linked Hub are also expected to grow and build on critical mass at a higher rate than recent trends, while the rest of the region grows at a steadier rate in line with the NSS principles. The DoEHLG set out high and low targets for 2022. Given the uncertain economic outlook in the short to medium term and associated migration impacts, the DoEHLG advised that the lower targets for 2022 (namely 521,400) should be included in the new RPG and be the basis for the Gateway/Hub targets. Population targets take into account anticipated trends as

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20 This shall take account of landscape character, landscape sensitivity, design and capacity to absorb development and habitat areas as designated under the Habitat Directive etc.
well as policy and related factors which will shape growth patterns in the future. The figures set out are targets for 2010, 2016 and 2022 and while some are aspirational, they aim to guide policies and ongoing decision making in order to distribute future development land in seeking better alignment of national, regional and local plans.

Estimates of need for future development land will address the Regional, Gateway, Hub Town and Linked Hub population targets and the allocation for the rest of the each county, working within the overall regional population target. Estimates of residential land requirements are based on Planning Guidelines on Development Plans, Housing Land Availability Returns Studies, Population Targets and design periods for roads, water and waste water infrastructure.

Minimum DoEHLG population targets for the Gateway, Hub, Linked Hub and Roscommon (County Town) are factored into Regional Planning Guidelines estimates of future development land requirements over its lifetime, setting the context for City and County Development Plans and Local Area Plans. It will be the subsequent function of the Local Authorities through their City/County Development Plans and their housing strategies to set figures for other towns and planning authorities within their functional areas. It should be noted that any future closure of industry in these towns may have a major impact on population in the West Region.

4.6.2.1 Galway Gateway

The geographical area of the Gateways, Hub and Linked Hub is defined by the DoEHLG as the city and suburbs or town and environs as determined by the CSO in the 2006 census. The Regional Planning Guidelines includes the population targets as set out by the DoEHLG. However as the population of the CSO suburbs of Galway is small (at 315 persons), the population projections for the Galway Gateway is assigned to the administrative area of Galway City Council. Therefore the Galway Gateway is the administrative area of Galway City Council.

Recognising that a number of Electoral Divisions (ED) adjacent to the City area are inextricably linked to, and function as part of a greater Galway City then a Galway Metropolitan Area can be identified as Galway City plus the EDs of Oranmore, Barna, Galway Rural and Ballintemple which are serviced by Galway City Council and Galway County Council. In this Galway Metropolitan Area, a number of large developments have taken place in recent years. This area is economically and socially integrated and is supported by coordinated investment in critical infrastructure such as transport, rail, water, wastewater, electricity and gas. Sustainable dynamic development of this Galway Gateway and Galway Metropolitan Area is critical for the economic growth of the region.

The Galway Transportation and Planning Study 2003 (GTPS) was adopted by Galway City and County Councils and aimed to establish a development framework for land-use and transport within Galway City and its environs in County Galway. The Study highlighted the need for more sustainable forms of development in Galway with an emphasis on public transport. Emanating from the Study are two key elements with a focus on consolidating development within Galway City and County within a new corridor for expansion to the east generally known as the Ardaun and Garraun area and a focus on developing the main county towns within Galway’s catchment which
would be linked to Galway City via a county-based fixed route radial network. The Study identified strategic road priorities to remove through-traffic within the city, improve road access from outside the GTPS area and open up development opportunities in the Ardaun Development Area.

4.6.2.2 Athlone Gateway
The West Regional Authority takes cognisance of the Athlone (Midlands) Gateway and the contribution of the West Region to its growth and development. An area of South Roscommon called ‘Monksland’ is contained within the Athlone Gateway area and is an important employment generating area for the Midlands and West Region. An emphasis on shared services and local authority co-operation for the sustainable growth of this area will be encouraged and fostered over the lifetime of the Regional Planning Guidelines. Joint plans such as a joint Retail Strategy should be encouraged and undertaken. These Guidelines recognise Monksland as an integral part of the Athlone Gateway.

4.6.2.3 Hub & Linked Hub
In the West Region there is one Hub – Tuam and another Linked Hub of Ballina-Castlebar. The town of Westport is considered to be an extension of the Linked Hub towns in County Mayo by virtue of its size and role in the existing settlement structure of the county. The Hubs should provide for balanced patterns of growth supporting the role of the Gateway. The provision of key services is linked to the growth of these towns.

4.6.2.4 Key Towns
The key towns are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Roscommon (County Town), Boyle, Ballaghderreen, Castlerea and Strokestown</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County Mayo</td>
<td>Westport, Ballinrobe, Claremorris, Swinford, Ballyhaunis, Charlestown, Belmullet and Louisburgh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Galway</td>
<td>Ballinasloe, Loughrea, Gort, Athenry, Clifden, Oranmore, Portumna, Carraroe and Mountbellew</td>
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</table>

Of the Key Towns listed, Westport, Ballinasloe and Roscommon have important administrative, service and industrial roles and functions. Westport has been identified in the NSS as having an important function in relation to tourism.

4.6.2.5 Other Settlements and Rural Areas
A strong network of smaller towns can play a significant role within the peripheral and remote rural areas of the West Region and can sustain local services, amenities and businesses. They have the potential to attract investment and local authorities must anticipate future needs for growth and improved quality of life.

4.6.2.6 Sustainable Development of the Urban Areas
Urban areas which are growing will require the following:
- An adequate supply of land in line with assessments of housing land needs, through the Development Plan system. Such provision will require strategic reservation of land through the Development Plan process, coupled with
ensuring timely and sequential release of land, to avoid delays in the availability and servicing of land on the one hand and premature release of zoned land on the other.

- Ensure sustainable mixed-use and well-designed higher density development, particularly near town centres and public transport nodes such as railway stations.
- Maximise the efficient use of land by consolidating existing settlements, focusing in particular on the development capacity within central urban areas through reuse of under-utilised land and buildings as a priority, rather than extending green field development.

Guidance from the DoEHLG is available for Local Authorities and housing developers to plan and design for residential and mixed use developments. The principle guidelines are the Best Practice Urban Design Manual Part 1 & 2; Design Standard for new Apartments; Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas; and Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities.

Each Local Authority within the West Region will be required to take into account the figures for their local authority areas, taking cognisance of the current level of growth in each town and National Spatial Strategy (NSS) objectives when formulating a suitable and sustainable settlement structure. Given the infrastructure requirements and constraints, it will be necessary to consider the phasing of housing land (including existing zoned lands) to ensure that towns grow at a sustainable rate within the population targets described. The distribution of future population will be focused on the Gateway, Linked Hub and Hub and any revisions to housing and population targets must be targeted towards these towns. Allocated population growth for the lower level remaining towns should be in line with what is described within this document.

4.6.2.7 Rural Housing
The capacity of the countryside to absorb the current trend in single rural house building is becoming increasingly diminished given the vulnerability of the groundwater system in the West Region. There is an increasing need for construction practices to move towards lower carbon or carbon neutral emissions. Given the extent of Natura 2000 sites in the West Region and the requirements of the Water Framework Directive 2000 and National Climate Change Strategy 2007 rural development decisions regarding housing and other types of development in the countryside will be more focussed in relation to location and a hierarchy of plans must be adhered to by local authorities. Further residential growth must be deployed in a manner consistent with sustainable principles and the balanced development of the region.

<table>
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<th>Policies</th>
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| **SPP1**: Taking account of sustainable development, public investment, sustainable travel and the support of strong rural communities beyond the Gateways, Hubs and Linked Hub the distribution of future development in relation to housing, employment and retailing will be based on the following principles:
  a) Achievement of compact sustainable urban development in line with the Guidelines on Sustainable Urban Residential Development (DoEHLG, 2009); |
b) Integration of future housing, employment, retailing and other community services avoiding excessive levels of commuting and promoting quality of life;
c) Implementation of the planning guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing (DoEHLG, 2005) including recommendations at the regional level as to the boundaries of the various rural area types\(^{21}\) and how urban generated growth in the environs of the Gateways, Hub and Linked Hub towns will be managed to support the achievement of the minimum population targets for these centres;
d) Promotion of development at locations both along existing or future planned public transport corridors and or which have been serviced or have good prospects of being serviced by water services infrastructure and in line with the availability of public resources.

**SPP2:** Designation of the Ardaun and Garraun Development Area as a self sufficient, public transport served corridor for the east of Galway City.

**SPP3:** Support co-operation between Galway City and County Councils on all infrastructural initiatives (*Section 4.1.1 applies*).

**SPP4:** To carefully manage the growth in the commuter areas of the Gateway, Hub and Linked Hub, and to ensure the protection of the Natura 2000 sites and other environmental receptors in these areas through the process of Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessments, where appropriate.

**SPP5:** Support the sustainable development of South Roscommon (Monksland area) as part of the Athlone Gateway and inter-regional co-operation of service requirements (*Section 4.1.1 applies*).

**SPP6:** Support the role of Galway City and metropolitan area as a catalyst for growth in the Region.

**SPP7:** To implement policies to achieve balanced regional development including integration of economic, social and cultural developments.

**SPP8:** To address infrastructural deficits in the towns and villages outside the Gateway and Hub/Linked Hub in order for such a settlement strategy to sustain the rural way of life (*Section 4.1.1 applies*).

**SPP9:** To ensure overall sustainable development in towns/villages throughout the region

**SPP10:** Support the goals of the Department of Transport’s policy document “Smarter Travel - A Sustainable Transport Future” (*Section 4.1.1 applies*).

<table>
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<th>Objectives</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SPO1:</strong> To drive the sustainable, strategic and compact development of Galway city in line with the Galway Transportation and Planning Strategy (GTPS), subject to prioritising the development of the Ardaun and Garraun area to the east of the City (<em>Section 4.1.1 applies</em>).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SPO2:</strong> To focus in the City on consolidating existing suburban areas and the regeneration of significant brownfield sites to ensure a compact urban form (<em>Section 4.1.1 applies</em>).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SPO3:</strong> Support the preparation of masterplans and/or Local Area Plans for Briarhill, Ardaun and Garraun as a priority to be brought forward for adoption by Galway County &amp; Galway City Councils. Masterplans and / or Local Areas Plans will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental</td>
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\(^{21}\) The boundaries of areas under urban pressure should be consistent with the approach recommended in the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines 2005.
assessment to ensure the protection of the environment and Natura 2000 sites in this area.

**SPO4:** Support the review in full of the GTPS during the lifetime of the Guidelines to take account of Transport 21 and Smarter Travel and identify suitable areas for sustainable development which could facilitate future sustainable transport provision ([Section 4.1.1 applies](#)).

**SPO5:** To support the development of a Unitary Spatial Plan for Athlone and its environs including Monksland which is guided by relevant environmental assessment. The Unitary Spatial Plan will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and other relevant environmental assessment to ensure the protection of the Natura 2000 sites in this area.

**SPO6:** Local authorities shall ensure that rural housing development is appropriately controlled in areas of urban influence throughout the Region. Rural housing policy should accommodate genuine rural housing need and urban generated demand should be accommodated in towns and villages.

**SPO7:** Local Authorities shall implement the following Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government documents or other documents produced by the Department which include:

- Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2005);
- EPA Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Systems Serving Single Houses (p.e. ≤ 10) (2009);
- Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2005);
- Quality Planning for Sustainable Communities (2007);
- Delivering Homes – Sustaining Communities (2007);
- Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (Cities, Towns & Villages) (May 2009);
- Urban Design Manual – A Best Practice Guide (May, 2009);
- Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines (2004);
- Site Development Works for Housing Areas (1998);

**SPO8:** To formulate and implement a settlement strategy for the region that builds up ‘critical mass’ in the nominated Galway Gateway, the Hub of Tuam and the Linked Hub of Castlebar-Ballina and the Monksland area as part of the Athlone Linked Gateway whilst creating a network of key towns and smaller settlements which will develop into vibrant communities finding support to/from the Gateway and Hub/Linked Hub ([Section 4.1.1 applies](#)).

**SPO9:** To support sustainable development in the towns and villages in the region that is sympathetic to the existing built environment and ensures that any approved developments are in keeping with the town/village ethos which may be unique to each town/village ([Section 4.1.1 applies](#)).

**SPO10:** Minimise sprawling development of towns/villages so as to create consolidated town/village form.

**SPO11:** Sustain the population in the areas of the region which have experienced population decline in recent years and encourage sustainable development where appropriate in these localities and where the landscape has capacity to absorb such developments ([Section 4.1.1 applies](#)).

**SPO12:** To implement the provisions of the housing strategies in accordance with the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act, 2000-2010 (or as
amended).

**SPO13:** Holiday homes and second homes to be restricted to identified areas preferably located in or adjacent to existing settlement centres (Section 4.1.1 applies).

**SPO14:** Planning authorities, when reviewing Development Plans and in the performance of their development management functions shall have regard to the NRA “Policy Statement on Development Management & Access to National Roads (May 2006)”, as revised or replaced by NRA Policy Statements or DoEHLG Spatial Planning & National Roads Guidelines.

**SPO15:** To ensure that access to national roads, outside the 50 or 60 kph speed limits, is restricted in order to protect the substantial investment in the network, to maintain carrying capacity, safety and to prevent the premature obsolescence of the network.

**SPO16:** To protect areas identified as key ‘source protection areas’ for drinking water supplies and protect groundwater quality. Support the use of Ground Water Protection Schemes (where available) in the development management process.

**SPO17:** Protect and enhance biodiversity in the West Region examining the cumulative impacts of development or their ability to increase biodiversity.

**SPO18:** Promote the conservation of hedgerows as ecological networks/wildlife corridors.

### 4.6.3 Population Targets

The following are Gateway and Hub Population Targets produced by the DoEHLG for the purposes of the Regional Planning Guidelines Review. The current population of the West Region is estimated at 426,100 and the target population for 2022 is 521,400.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12: State and West Region Population Growth Targets 2010 – 2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Actual CSO Figures

Source: DoEHLG, 2009

These population targets have been broken down to Gateway and Hub level for the region, as set out below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13: Minimum Population Target for the Galway Gateway, Hub &amp; Linked Hub 2016 and 2022 (DoEHLG)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14: Interval Increases in Population Targets for the Galway Gateway 2006-2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>6,566</td>
<td>5,671</td>
<td>10,100</td>
<td>10,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Growth during</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuam</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Growth during</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlebar-Ballina</td>
<td>1,282</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Growth during</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on % of DoEHLG Regional Population Target for the West Region;

Source: DoEHLG, 2009
The following tables represent the population targets for the West Region over the years 2010, 2016 and 2022. The distribution is as follows:

**Table 15: West Region Population Targets for 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GATEWAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOINT HUB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTY TOWN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16: West Region Population Targets for 2016 & 2022

WEST REGION
484,700 (2016)
521,400 (2022)

GATEWAY

GALWAY CITY
88,500 (2016)
98,700 (2022)

CO. GALWAY
185,860 (2016)
198,500 (2022)

CO. MAYO
143,640 (2016)
150,800 (2022)

CO. ROSCOMMON
66,700 (2016)
73,400 (2022)

HUB

TUAM
8,600 (2016)
9,500 (2022)

CASTLEBAR/BALLINA
26,000 (2016)
28,700 (2022)

REMAINDER
117,640 (2016)
122,100 (2022)

COUNTY TOWN

TUAM
8,600 (2016)
9,500 (2022)

CASTLEBAR/BALLINA
26,000 (2016)
28,700 (2022)

REMAINDER
60,485 (2016)
66,564 (2022)
4.7 Housing & Housing Land Requirements for 2016

Utilising the remaining share of population for each local authority area, the following indicates the projected housing demand and the consequential housing land requirements or residential zoning to accommodate the population targets identified above. Given the current economic climate and its likely continuance in the short to medium term, housing targets and residential zoning has been calculated for the period of 2010 – 2016 and will be reviewed by 2016, for the period of 2016 - 2022.

The following table outlines figures for the remainder of population for County Galway, Mayo and Roscommon Local Authority areas and the minimum targets for the Gateway, Hub/Linked Hub and Roscommon Town which are the main settlements in the Core Settlement Strategy in the RPGs.

Table 17: Remaining Share of Population Growth & Households for West Region 2010 – 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Remaining Share of Population Growth 2010 - 2016</th>
<th>Projected Housing Demand (Projected Av. Household Size)*</th>
<th>HLR Based On C.12 Units Per Ha +.50%*</th>
<th>HLR Based On C.15 Units Per Ha +.50%</th>
<th>HLR Based On C.20 Units Per Ha +.50%*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>14,760</td>
<td>5,700 (2.6)</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>8,840</td>
<td>3,600 (2.5)</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>4,485</td>
<td>1,800 (2.5)</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note these figures have been rounded up.

Table 18: Housing Demand & Residential Zoning for the Gateway, Hub, Joint Hub & County Town for period 2010 – 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SETTLEMENT</th>
<th>POPULATION 2010-2016 (Based on Minimum Population Targets)</th>
<th>Consequential No. of Residential Units Required Over Period 2010-2016 (Projected Av. Household Size)</th>
<th>Consequential Zoned Housing Land Required Over Period 2010-2016 (incorporating 50% over zoning)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galway City</td>
<td>10,100*</td>
<td>4,200 (2.4)</td>
<td>210 Ha (30 Units Per Ha.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuam</td>
<td>1,000*</td>
<td>420 (2.4)</td>
<td>26 Ha (25 Units Per Ha.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlebar/Ballina</td>
<td>2,600*</td>
<td>1,100 (2.4)</td>
<td>66 Ha (25 Units Per Ha.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon Town</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>300 (2.4)</td>
<td>18 Ha. (25 Units Per Ha.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* As set out in DoEHLG Minimum Population Targets October 2009; ha = hectares. Please note 'consequential' column figures have been rounded up.

Note: All town figures are CSO based and maps are included in the Appendix 5.

It will be a subsequent function of the City and County Development Plans, through their Housing Strategies to set out more specific figures for other towns and Planning Authorities within their functional areas, working within the overall Regional Planning Guidelines Targets.

It is recognised that there will be locally generated growth in rural areas over the period of the RPGs and it is acknowledged that consideration must be given at local level to assessing such local needs and applying the principles of the DoEHLG’s 2005 Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines. The consideration and provision of such one-off housing will normally occur on unzoned lands in rural areas and so will be assessed separately to the extent of zoned and serviced lands in the towns and villages.

Each Local Authority will be responsible to ensure that the figures set out in their Core Settlement Strategy reflect the figures set out in the RPGs. Rural and urban population figures will be combined to reach each Local Authority population target.

4.7.1 Vacancy Rates

Of the total housing stock in the West Region in 2006 which stood at 184,022, the average regional vacancy rate was 19.8% with highest vacancy rates found in County Mayo. The vacancy rate of each local authority area should be monitored and factored into each Local Authority Development Plan and subsequent Local Area Plans.

Table 19: CSO Permanent housing units by occupancy status on Census Night (Vacancy rate includes holiday homes and second homes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority Area</th>
<th>Total Housing Stock (No.)</th>
<th>Vacancy Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galway City</td>
<td>30,589</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway County</td>
<td>67,737</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway City &amp; County</td>
<td>98,326</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo County</td>
<td>58,717</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon County</td>
<td>26,979</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO, 2006

Objectives

SPO19: To support the compact sustainable development of towns and villages in the West Region (Section 4.1.1 applies).

SPO20: Each local authority shall have regard to existing building stock numbers within their functional area. Each Local Authority Development Plan shall have regard to vacancy rates in the preparation of Development Plans and Local Area Plans.
Plans. Vacancy levels shall be monitored aiming to utilise existing housing stock.

SPO21: Development Plan Guidance\(^\text{22}\) for Population and Settlement;

1) In considering proposed residential land for development, the following considerations should be used:

- a) Land should be zoned on the basis of the population targets that are set for the settlement in question.
- b) Any excess in zoned land over the amount needed should have regard to the history of population development in the area; the likelihood of any major development taking place that would increase the demand for housing; land ownership patterns in the area; the possibility of creating a coherent development pattern. The excess should normally be 50% of the land required.
- c) Land that is zoned should, generally, either be serviced, about to be serviced or have a strategy for the delivery of water, wastewater facilities and road infrastructure.
- d) Zoned land should be assigned to different phases of development with the proviso that, generally a later phase should not commence until a given percentage of an earlier phase has been granted permission and that another percentage has been or is being developed. Each development phase should be outlined on a map.
- e) Zoned land should be reviewed from time to time and alterations made to the phasings if considered necessary.
- f) In assessing the adequacy of existing water supply/wastewater treatment facilities and associated networks, the capacity, performance, potential health risks, water quality, water quantity and other impacts should be addressed as appropriate.

2) Development Plans should be consistent with these approaches to population distribution. In addition, the amount of zoned land for development within each settlement should reflect the population assigned and should be in accordance with the phasing approach outlined above.

3) Approaches to zoning that incorporate development land coming on stream on a phased basis should be adopted, as they would facilitate a flexible response to population movements. Variations from this distribution will be regularly considered by the Monitoring and Review Committee of the Regional Authority and adjusted as necessary to respond to changing population trends.

4) Housing Strategies should be used to target development and to ensure appropriate development densities. In addition, in drawing up a housing strategy, adjoining Planning Authorities should co-ordinate the objectives of their housing strategies.

5) Development of Housing Strategies and Zonings should include consideration of the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive & SEA Directive and should be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or SEA to ensure that impacts on the environment and Natura 2000 sites are avoided.

SPO22: In the allocation of population targets for the Galway Gateway, Castlebar-

\(^{22}\) This is in accordance with DoEHLG Development Plan Guidelines, 2007. Local Authorities should refer to the DoEHLG Guidance Note on Core Strategies, 2010.
Ballina, Tuam and Roscommon Town, each local authority shall seek to ensure that population growth is planned sustainably ensuring adequate provision of necessary infrastructure (social, physical and environmental) and services guided through best environmental practice and relevant environmental assessment (including Habitats Directive, SEA Directive and Environmental Impact Assessment Directive where relevant). Local authorities in outlining future population targets for urban centres in each local authority area shall follow the same principle.

4.8 Regional Flood Risk Appraisal

Many of the settlements in the West Region are associated with or developed around water bodies, whether it is a river or a coastal area. Towns grew in size due at crossing points in rivers, headwaters of estuaries and transport abilities of the water course in some cases. Today we are still highly dependent on this resource. In our towns however, development patterns (particularly in flood plains) have placed pressure on natural drainage systems. While flooding is a natural occurrence that can happen at any time in a wide variety of locations and plays a role in shaping the natural environment, it has become a significant issue as it may impact on the economy, social well-being, public health and the environment. It can impact on individuals and communities resulting in personal suffering and financial loss and damaging effects on the environment.

It is important therefore that this issue is addressed within the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022 (RPGs) as decisions on the direction of future growth within the West Region can impact on flood risk. It is important also that the RPGs highlight the need for developing policy and actions, and encourage co-operation across Local Authorities and other agencies as the impact of flood and water movement in many places crosses local authority boundaries, national and agency boundaries.

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Office of Public Works (OPW) published Guidelines ‘The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (November 2009)’, which recommend a clear and transparent assessment of flood risk at all stages in the planning process. The Guidelines state that a regional flood risk appraisal and management policy recommendations are necessary to set a policy framework for Development and Local Area Plans at the local level.

In 2003 the Office of Public Works (OPW) published a report from the ‘Flood Policy Review Group’. It sets out policy, funding, structural and organisational difficulties that currently exist and makes recommendations to address these. Many of the elements and conclusions of this report remain relevant. The European Communities (Assessment and Management of Flood Risks) Regulations 2010 (S.I. No. 122) identifies the Commissioners of Public Works as the ‘competent authority’ with overall responsibility for implementation of the Floods Directive 2007/60/EC.

An Irish Coastal Protection Strategy Study began in 2002 by the DCENR is progressing. Phase 5 of the Study has a focus on the West and North West Coast. It
is expected that information on flood and erosion risk, incorporating climate change impacts will be made available to Local Authorities. It is also expected that coastal flood warning systems will be developed.

The precautionary approach should be adopted in carrying out Flood Risk Assessments and the following key guiding principles should be followed in all instances:

- Avoidance of development in areas at risk of flooding by not permitting development in flood risk areas unless fully justified and capability exists to manage risk without impacting elsewhere;
- Application of a sequential approach to flood risk management based on
  - avoidance
  - reduction
  - mitigation of flood risk
  in assessing the suitability of locations for development;
- The incorporation of flood risk assessment into the process of making decisions on planning applications and planning appeals.

A Regional Flood Risk Appraisal accompanies the RPGs and local authorities should take cognisance of the information contained within this document in the preparation of Development Plans and Local Area Plans.

The focus of the Flood Risk Appraisal is on the main settlements identified in the Settlement Strategy which are Galway City, Tuam, Ballina-Castlebar and Roscommon Town. Other settlements within the Region are known to be at risk from various types of flooding but they, along with the key urban settlements, will be subject to a more detailed Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which will be carried out during future reviews and preparation of County Development Plans & Local Area Plans within the Region. It is acknowledged that through consolidation of development in the existing urban structure and following DoEHLG/OPW Guidelines on Flood Risk Management, these towns may grow sustainably while at the same time managing flood risk appropriately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPP11:</strong> Development Plans and Local Area Plans should adopt a strategic, integrated, sustainable and proactive approach to catchment management to reduce flood risk within the Region, managing the risk from:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o tidal effects around estuaries and along the coast including the implications of the latest predictions for sea level rise;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o fluvial flooding along river corridors and other significant watercourses resulting from catchments within and beyond the Region and other sources of flooding;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o flooding resulting from surface water runoff and capacity constraints in surface water drainage systems; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Development of catchment management strategies and design of flood management works will be informed by the Habitats Directive Assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
process and/or other relevant environmental assessment.

**SPP12:** Support the implementation of Catchment-based Flood Risk Assessment and Management Studies (CFRAMs) flood risk management measures, when available.

### Objectives

**SPO23:** New development should be avoided in areas at risk of flooding. However, it is recognised and acknowledged that the main urban settlements are at risk from coastal and fluvial flooding, but their continued growth and expansion can be facilitated through the careful expansion of the urban core and the implementation of appropriate land uses in areas at risk (Section 4.1.1 applies).  

**SPO24:** Development Plans and Local Area Plans shall include a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Existing and proposed zoning of lands for development in areas at risk of flooding (flood plains) should follow the sequential approach and justification test set out in the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government’s Guidance on the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (November 2009).  

**SPO25:** SUDS\(^23\) based drainage plans should be prepared in conjunction with Local Area Plans to optimise flood/runoff management potential of the areas.

**SPO26:** Through flood plain protection and SUDS, Local Authorities should incorporate improvements in biodiversity and amenity for existing and future developments, provided these are compatible with the Conservation Objectives of any relevant Natura 2000 sites.

**SPO27:** Direct strategically significant growth to low risk areas.

**SPO28:** An evidence based methodology should be adopted to the application of the sequential approach and justification test in zoning of flood susceptible lands for development. This should be transparent and use objective criteria appropriate to the proposed zoning.

**SPO29:** Founded on the precautionary approach to dealing with flood risk, measures such as flood compensation storage works or new hard-engineered flood defences will not be acceptable as justification for development in a flood plain.

**SPO30:** Recognising the concept of coastal evolution and fluvial flooding as part of our dynamic physical environment, an adaptive approach to working with these natural processes shall be adopted (Section 4.1.1 applies).

**SPO31:** To ensure that where flood alleviation works take place the natural heritage and landscape character of rivers, streams and watercourses are protected and enhanced to the greatest extent possible, and that there are no negative impacts on the Conservation Objectives of Natura 2000 sites through Habitats Directive Assessment.

### 4.9 Implementation

Following the making of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region, each planning authority shall review the existing Development Plan and consider whether any variation of the Development Plan is necessary in order to achieve the objectives of the Regional Planning Guidelines.

\(^{23}\) Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS)
**Policy**

**SPP13:** Each Development Plan shall be consistent with the new Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 – 2022 prepared under the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 – 2010 and Planning and Development (Regional Planning Guidelines) Regulations 2009. When preparing or varying a Development Plan or Local Area Plan, the Planning Authority shall ensure that the development objectives are consistent, as far as practicable with national and regional development objectives as set out in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines. Any forthcoming reviews shall be subject to the provisions of:

- Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004;
- Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines (2004);
- Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (November 2009);

(Please refer to Appendix 2 for a more comprehensive list of legislation, guidelines and strategies).
CHAPTER 5: Infrastructure Strategy

5.1 Transport Infrastructure

For a peripheral region such as the West Region, good transport infrastructure is vital to promote economic and social well-being. The road network is by far the most used for inter-regional and intra-regional transport movement of goods and people. The need to upgrade the national road network has been recognised by the inclusion in Transport 21 of projects to upgrade the N5 Dublin Mayo route, the N17 and N/M18 (sections of the Atlantic Road Corridor), extending through Sligo, Claremorris, Tuam, Galway, Gort to Limerick.

With the development of the Western Rail Corridor, rail will play an increased transport role within the region. It should result in improved services and greater use of rail freight. The region has two airports which are Ireland West at Knock and Galway and there are airstrips serving islands off the County Galway coast. Galway Port is the only commercial port catering to cargo traffic in the region with Ros a Mhíl a designated fishing port also catering for passenger traffic to the Islands.

Works are presently underway on major national routes such as the N/M18 Crusheen – Gort and the Western Rail Corridor opening from Ennis to Athenry and Tuam which will have significant positive impacts on the region.

The Rural Transport Programme (RTP) which is managed by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Transport is designed to address social exclusion in rural areas arising from unmet transport needs and is very important in the context of the West Region.

Figure 6: % of Workers in Each ED who Travel 30 km and over to Work in 2006

There has been a shift towards longer journeys to work and an increased use of car-based travel with a steady but strong increase in travel-to-work distances over the years from 1986 to 2006. In 1986 the average travel-to-work distance was 9.9km but by 2006 this was 16.7 km in the West Region. The percentages for various distance brackets are as follows:

Table 20: Distance Travelled by Workforce in the West Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>% of Workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 9.9 Km</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 24.9 Km</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 49.9 Km</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 + Km</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO (2006)

These travel-to-work patterns are broadly in line with patterns for other regions excluding Dublin and the Mid East. The car is the dominant mode of travel used by the workforce of the West Region.

However bus and rail are critical in achieving modal shift and Transport 21 goals. For example, improvements in journey times are evident from recently constructed bus lanes through Claregalway on the approaches to Galway City which makes these forms of travel more attractive and a realistic alternative to the private vehicle. Other examples include the provision of adequate and suitable car parking at existing train stations and bus lanes in Galway City.

Table 21: Mode of Travel used by Workforce in the West Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>% of Workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work from home</td>
<td>7.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foot/Bicycle</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car/Van</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Transport</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO (2006)

The goals, targets and actions of ‘Smarter Travel’ can be achieved and must be an integral part of new development in the Gateway, Hub, Linked Hub and larger urban areas. Framework Plans or Local Area Plans for new development such as the east of Galway City should dynamically support these objectives by ensuring such areas are served and support commuter rail (if applicable), bus routes, good and extensive walking and cycling routes. Residential and commercial design layouts should ensure sustainable public transport routes are fully integrated.
Policy

**IP1:** To support sustainable travel in the West Region. In order to achieve this, future population and employment growth will have to predominantly take place in sustainable compact urban areas, which discourages dispersed development and long commuting.

Objectives

**IO1:** Seek the implementation of key goals, targets and actions of the Department of Transport ‘Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 – 2020’ through:

- Consolidation of population growth in existing built up areas in a way which best facilitates travel by sustainable modes i.e. walking, cycling and public transport;
- To locate trip-intensive developments in areas well served, or planned to be well served by public transport;
- Promotion and implementation of policies in relation to residential density and urban form which support public transport, cycling and walking;
- Ensuring that the scale and density of new land use development is consistent with the available transport capacity (particularly public transport capacity) with public transport accessibility;
- Pursuing land use policies which minimise the need to travel and reduce the environmental impact of that travel, particularly in terms of greenhouse gas emissions (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IO2:** Support broadly based targets for shifts to sustainable travel modes to be achieved, particularly at Gateway level, over the lifetime of the Guidelines.

**IO3:** Promote the integration of land use and transportation policies into County Development Plans and Local Area Plans within the West Region to reduce reliance on the car.

**IO4:** Support Mobility management (work place travel plans, car sharing arrangements) as a useful tool to achieve higher levels of sustainable travel behaviour.

5.1.1  Habitats Directive Assessment

The Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment has identified a number of Objectives and Policies in this Chapter of the Guidelines which, when implemented, have the potential to result in negative impacts on one or more Natura 2000 site and issues may therefore arise under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive which will require Appropriate Assessment at ‘lower plan’ or project level. Where such ‘lower plan’ or project level Appropriate Assessment concludes significant negative impacts, alternative solutions which comply fully with Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive may need to be considered. Please also refer to Appendix 4.
5.2 Priority Access Infrastructure

The following policies and objectives are considered to be the priority access, travel and transport related infrastructure for the region with regard to roads, rail and bus, ports and harbours, airports and surrounding industrial areas and cycling and walking.

5.2.1 Roads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP2:</strong> Support the National Roads Authority investment to remedy deficiencies generally in the roads network minimising environmental impact <em>(Section 5.1.1 applies).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP3:</strong> Implement transport policy objectives of the NDP and of Transport 21 by supporting the NRA programme of works on national routes, minimising environmental impact <em>(Section 5.1.1 applies).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP4:</strong> National Roads and strategic Regional Roads should be protected from inappropriate development to ensure that they are not overloaded with local traffic more appropriately served by the local road network and which would undermine the strategic transport function of national roads, including interchanges and minimising environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP5:</strong> Upgrade and improve all roads in the Gateway, Hub and Linked Hub including Monksland, part of the Athlone Gateway. Road developments will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment or other environmental assessment where relevant and in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive or other legislation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP6:</strong> Support co-ordinated strategic land use and transportation in areas where significant growth is directed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IO5:</strong> Identify the following works for priority completion in order to promote a balanced regional development. The following projects must be assessed as to their environmental impact, through relevant assessment, where necessary, including Habitats Directive Assessment in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive, with preferred route options ensuring minimal impact, on the natural and built environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Atlantic Road Corridor - M18 and M17 and N17 from Gort to Charlestown minimising environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Galway City Outer By-Pass minimising environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) N5 Westport to Roscommon/Longford borders minimising environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) N26 Ballina – Bohola Phase II minimising environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Critical By-passes on National Secondary routes such as N59 Moycullen, N59 Ballina Relief Road, N84 Ballinrobe Relief Road, N83 Ballyhaunis Relief Road and N17 Claregalway By-pass minimising environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Provision of an R336 along a new alignment between Galway and Scriob via Ros a Mhil minimising environmental impact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7) Reclassify and upgrade the N60/N61 as a National Primary route, Athlone to Castlebar via Roscommon and the upgrading of the N61 Roscommon to Boyle minimising environmental impact.

8) Upgrade and improve all National Secondary Roads in particular:
   a) N59 Galway to Ballina route serving the west of the Region; minimising environmental impact.
   b) N84 Galway to Castlebar connecting the Gateway to the Linked Hub towns; minimising environmental impact.
   c) N63 Galway to Roscommon connecting the Gateway to the County town of Roscommon; minimising environmental impact.
   d) N67 Kilcolgan to North Clare; minimising environmental impact.

9) Upgrade the following Regional Roads:
   a) R312 Castlebar to Bellacorrick; minimising environmental impact.
   b) R313 Bangor to Belmullet; minimising environmental impact.
   c) R321/R323 Bohola to Knock (including the bypass of Kiltimagh) linking the N5 to the N17 minimising environmental impact.

IO6: Support the use of ecological assessment of strategic roads infrastructure projects including reservation of land and upgrading of routes to ensure route options have sufficient flexibility to avoid or mitigate significant environmental impacts. Mitigation measures for the protection of habitats or movement of species should be provided where feasible and appropriate.

IO7: Protect the strategic role of the national roads throughout the region, including the route corridors of planned national roads, and particularly the motorway network to ensure that they continue to function as conduits of traffic in a safe and efficient manner. As a general policy, the location of new means of access to the National Primary Road and National Secondary Road network, for residential, commercial, industrial or other development dependent on such means of access, should not be permitted except in areas where a speed limit of 50 or 60 kph applies, or in the case of infilling in the existing built-up areas. The Planning Authority shall in the first instance, seek to channel traffic from new development onto existing local roads and in this way use established access points to gain entry onto national roads. The only exemptions to this general restriction that may be considered would be developments of national or regional importance or other developments of strategic importance which by their nature are most appropriately located outside urban centres and where the developments proposed have specific locational requirements or are dependent on fixed physical characteristics. The DoEHLG Spatial Planning & National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities should be followed.

IO8: Support the review and implementation of the Galway Transport and Population Study (GTPS) (Section 5.1.1 applies).

IO9: Support the sustainable development of an integrated transportation system for Galway City and County areas (Section 5.1.1 applies).

IO10: Support the preparation of Strategic Transport Assessments (STA) to be undertaken as part of the Development Plan process for areas planned for significant growth (Section 5.1.1 applies).
## 5.2.2 Rail & Bus Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP7:</strong> Support the opening of the entire Western Rail Corridor route from Athenry to Collooney subject to Habitats Directive Assessment where appropriate and/or other relevant environmental assessment of the route.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP8:</strong> Support the development of commuter services on the Galway and Mayo Railway Lines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP9:</strong> Support the Rural Transport Programme and seek to support its extension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP10:</strong> To investigate the potential for development of integrated transportation hubs in the Gateway, Hub, Linked Hub and other appropriate urban locations (<a href="#">Section 5.1.1 applies</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP11:</strong> Support the extension of the public transportation options available to the travelling public throughout the Region (<a href="#">Section 5.1.1 applies</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP12:</strong> Reduce the congestion on public roads caused by the existing commuting movements to and from the major urban centres, by consolidating existing towns and villages and thus facilitating a more rational and better quality public transport system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP13:</strong> Promote on-going Traffic Management policies and plans in the Gateway and Hub and Linked Hub with particular emphasis on measures to facilitate public transport, walking and cycling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IO11:</strong> Support the construction of new Railway Stations to facilitate commuter and freight services subject to a feasibility study being undertaken (<a href="#">Section 5.1.1 applies</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IO12:</strong> Subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other environmental assessment (where appropriate) support the proposals for the laying of dual track between Galway and Athenry and the sustainable development of new commuter stations along the new Western Rail Corridor as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IO13:</strong> Support the redevelopment of Ceannt Station and adjacent lands, subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other environmental assessment, where appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IO14:</strong> Support the installation of freight handling equipment and extended passing loops at key rail stations to facilitate the greater usage of rail to transport freight generally subject to a feasibility study being undertaken (<a href="#">Section 5.1.1 applies</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IO15:</strong> Promote and encourage appropriate and sustainable development patterns and densities that will support the provision and improvement of public transport services. In this regard, it should be the policy of all Local Authorities to promote development on serviced land in towns and villages, particularly those located along public transport corridors, in accordance with the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas Guidelines, having regard to existing settlement patterns and form, adequacy of existing/planned facilities and services to facilitate the development of viable and effective public transport networks (<a href="#">Section 5.1.1 applies</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IO16:</strong> Support the provision of rural bus shelters as a necessary component of a good rural public transport system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IO17: Support the extension of the public transportation options available to the travelling public throughout the region through the pursuit of a variety of options, including new/additional Quality Bus Corridors, commuter rail service, and appropriately located park and ride facilities, particularly in relation to the Gateway, the Tuam Hub, the Linked Hub Castlebar/Ballina and other towns such as Ballinasloe, Gort and Claremorris. Consideration should also be given, where appropriate, to the creation of additional lanes or alteration to existing lanes for Quality Bus Corridors on the main commuter routes into the Gateway, Hub and Linked Hub (Section 5.1.1 applies).

IO18: Facilitate the development of appropriate settlement patterns and sustainable higher densities around rail stations that support the existing and proposed rail corridors, including intensification of development around rail stations where appropriate in accordance with the DoEHLG Sustainable Residential Guidelines for Urban Areas ensuring a plan-led approach (Section 5.1.1 applies).

IO19: Support the preparation of Integrated Land Use and Transportation Studies for Hub towns within the West Region and which form part and guide Development Plan and Local Area Plan zoning objectives (Section 5.1.1 applies).

IO20: Support measures to improve bus services and accessibility to bus services within the Galway Gateway, to link the region’s main urban centres and to improve rural public transport services.

5.2.3 Ports & Harbours

Ports and Harbours contribute to economic development and are important transportation links to facilitate the growth and connectivity of the Region. Galway Sea Port is of strategic importance to the West Region and Ros a Mhíl not only serves as an important amenity but is now one of the largest fishing ports in the country. The plans for the relocation and extension of Galway Harbour area which includes deepwater port facilities has the potential to contribute to both tourism and enterprise in the local economy and is considered critical for growth in the region. Adequate infrastructure must be in place to facilitate the sustainable development of the aqua-culture industry, marine tourism industry and to facilitate water based leisure activities/sports in the West Region. Major capital works have taken place on the offshore islands to improve their transport needs. These include large port developments at Clare Island, Inishbofin, Inishmore, Inishmaan and significant capital investment in piers and harbours. There has also been significant investment in ferry boats facilitating the islands.

**Policies**

**IP14:** Existing harbour, port, slipways, marinas and mooring infrastructure and associated shore facilities need to be sustainably developed incorporating facilities for the production of higher value fish products, aquaculture and tourism. Appropriate and sustainable developments at these locations which support this objective are to be welcomed with the regions ports being integrated with the road networks (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP15:** Seek to derive greater economic benefit from continued harbour investments on all Islands (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP16:** Support the improvement of accessibility to international gateways in the
neighbouring Mid-West Region (Shannon Airport, Shannon/Foynes ports) as well as more distant ports in the South East and the Greater Dublin Area (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**Objectives**

**IO21:** Support the sustainable redevelopment and expansion of Galway Harbour which is critical for the continued important role in the growth of the West Region. Galway Harbour is also supported in its role to serve and promote water-based tourism. Facilities/ infrastructure could include a secure berthing area for the marine leisure industry\(^24\). All proposals will be subject to assessment on environmental sustainability, including impacts on the Natura 2000 network through Habitats Directive Assessment, visual, travel and transport impacts. Any proposals should support enhanced integration with the rail and road network.

**IO22:** Continue the sustainable development subject to Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate and/or other relevant environmental assessment of Ros a Mhíl Port for fishing, amenity and island transport facilities and assess the opportunity for the development of port related activities.

**IO23:** Examine the potential for developing Ballina, Westport, Ballyglass/ Black Sod Harbours for increased usage and greater economic benefit. The examinations will include Habitats Directive Assessments and/or other relevant environmental assessment.

**IO24:** Support the sustainable development of the ports and harbours listed ensuring environmental effects are avoided and/ or adequately mitigated with minimal disruption to designated sites and avoiding negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites through Habitats Directive Assessment.

**5.2.4 Airports & Surrounding Industrial Areas**

The Regional Authority recognises the strategic importance of Ireland West Airport Knock and Galway Airports as an amenity and important transportation link to facilitate the growth and connectivity of the West region.

The expansion of both airports and associated facilities and ancillary and complementary activities is supported. The preparation and implementation of Public Safety Zones in the vicinity of the both Airports may have to undertaken in the event of same being recommended by the Department of Transport and/or the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The recommendations of the Irish Aviation Authority should be taken into account in the control of inappropriate development in the vicinity of the Airport which may have technical or other implications for safety or the normal operation of the airport.

**Policies**

**IP17:** The up-grading of air transportation infrastructure, including the air services between the mainland and the islands is supported subject to Habitats Directive

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\(^24\) For example Cruise liner visits to Galway; national and international events, such as the Tall Ships, the Volvo Ocean Race and the World Speed Boat Championships.
Assessment of all projects and/or other relevant environmental assessment, where appropriate.
IP18: Support the implementation of Public Safety Zones in the vicinity of airports.
IP19: Support improved access to all airports to include public transport (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**Objectives**

IO25: In the preparation of Development Plans and Local Area Plans, Local Authorities shall ensure appropriate consultation with the Department of Transport in relation to ‘public safety zones’ where an airport/airstrip is located or proposed in the plan’s functional area or within close proximity to the plan’s functional area.

IO26: Support designation of a Strategic Development Zone at Ireland West Airport Knock (Section 5.1.1 applies).

IO27: Facilitate the appropriate and sustainable development of industrial/commercial lands and structure adjacent or close to the airports (Section 5.1.1 applies).

IO28: Examine the feasibility of an airstrip/port in East Roscommon. A feasibility study must incorporate the requirements of SEA (e.g. Local Area Plan level)/EIS as necessary examining the impact on environmental receptors and the impact on Natura 2000 sites must be examined through Habitats Directive Assessment. The feasibility must be carried out in consultation with the Department of Transport.

**5.2.5 Cycling and Walking**

Cycling and walking contribute to improved quality of life, a stronger economy and business environment and an enhanced environment. Economic benefits arise from the lower external costs of providing for cyclists and pedestrians compared to those associated with a more car dependant society. There is also an increased use of local services/ decreased leakage from local economies when people cycle or walk to the local shop and other amenities. Mayo County Council aims to promote the county as the ‘Walking Capital of Ireland’ and will benefit from the sustainable development and marketing of walking routes.

**Policies**

IP20: Promote the Region as a premier destination for cycling and walking. This should take account of visual impacts and other environmental considerations (Section 5.1.1 applies).

IP21: Promote a better environment for pedestrians, cyclists and persons with disabilities in the city, towns, villages and rural areas so as to facilitate increased mobility and access for citizens.

IP22: Support the establishment of a network of interlinked cycle ways within the context of a West Regional Trails Strategy. This should take account of visual impacts and other environmental considerations (Section 5.1.1 applies).

IP23: Pedestrian and cycling routes must be designed to minimise impact on habitats and species and should not adversely impact on the conservation objectives or site

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25 Further Guidance may be found on Department of Transport website: [http://www.transport.ie/upload/general/6458-0.pdf](http://www.transport.ie/upload/general/6458-0.pdf)
integrity of SAC, SPA or other ecologically sensitive sites. Impacts on the conservation objectives or site integrity of Natura 2000 sites will be avoided through Habitats Directive Assessment of all proposed routes including those established within the context of the West Regional Trails Strategy.

**IP24:** Support measures to identify the potential for sustainable cycling tourism and the need for support measures to develop this niche market.

### Objectives

- **IO29:** Promote a strong cycling culture in the West Region by providing a sustainable and useable cycling network in the city, towns and villages across the West Region. This should take account of visual impacts and other environmental considerations (Section 5.1.1 applies).
- **IO30:** Support the sustainable planning, development and design of towns and cities in a cycling and pedestrian friendly way with increased mobility for citizens and visitors.
- **IO31:** Ensure urban road infrastructure (with the exception of motorways) is designed/retrofitted so as to be pedestrian and cyclist friendly (Section 5.1.1 applies).
- **IO32:** Promote the development of safe and convenient pedestrian and cycling facilities in Galway City, towns and villages of the Region to minimise the dependence on private motor vehicles and to encourage an active and healthy lifestyle.
- **IO33:** Support the provision of designated rural cycle networks especially for visitors and recreational cycling and develop a network of walkway/cycleway through the region which includes green routes. This must take account of potential impacts on the environment and be guided by Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate.
- **IO34:** Ensure that all designated cycle paths are maintained to a high standard.
- **IO35:** Ensure that cycling facilities are provided in accordance with the National Cycle Framework, in particular with the hierarchy of solutions outlined in the Policy Document (Section 5.1.1 applies).

## 5.3 Water & Waste Water Services

Investment in the key economic infrastructures of water and wastewater services, waste, energy and telecommunications is a key element in the promotion of competitiveness and the generation of economic growth and employment. It also contributes to balanced spatial development and assists environmental sustainability. Notwithstanding the progress made in the last decade, a continued high level of investment is necessary to bridge the deficit which still exists in the region. It will be necessary to implement the current and future Water Service Investment Programmes.

A high standard of water and sewerage infrastructure is fundamental to achieving orderly sustainable development. The following policies and objectives are resource dependent and require significant investment:
Policies

**IP25:** To ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place to meet demands from continuing growth and development of the economy and to cater for existing and increased population levels (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP26:** Good quality drinking water which is ‘safe and secure’ should be available to all consumers of public and group water schemes (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP27:** To support the Rural Water Programme; which must be continued and enhanced (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP28:** To enhance and remedy water services needs of the Gateway, Hub and Linked Hub together with other urban areas where services are required (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP29:** Key specific environmental issues identified in the River Basin District Management Plans for the Western and the Shannon International Regions should be addressed in accordance with the Water Framework Directive.

**IP30:** Support investment for the water and wastewater services of many small towns and villages in the region where there is an urgent need for these services (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP31:** Prepare where appropriate Ground Water Protection Schemes in conjunction with GSI identifying aquifers at risk (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP32:** To implement the Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations (Section 5.1.1 applies).

Objectives

**IO36:** Water conservation measures should be expanded particularly by rehabilitation and reinforcement of existing water networks (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IO37:** Subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment, continue, where appropriate, the development of Regional Water Supply Schemes in the region.

**IO38:** Provide quality water and waste water services necessary for environmental purposes and for urban and rural economic development purposes (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IO39:** Drinking water supply sources should be protected and managed appropriately (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IO40:** All unserviced properties in the catchment area of a public wastewater scheme should be connected to the public network where sufficient capacity exists and where impacts on Natura 2000 sites will not occur, as determined by Habitats Directive Assessment (where relevant).

**IO41:** Water quality in private group, semi-private and public water schemes shall continue to be monitored in accordance with the European Communities (Drinking Water)(No.2) Regulations 2007.

**IO42:** GSI Ground Water Protection Studies shall be utilised in the Local Authority Development Management process.

**IO43:** Support the provision of a secure potable water supply to communities and families which presently do not have such a supply (Section 5.1.1 applies).
5.3.1 River Basin Management, Water Framework Directive & Associated Directives

The European Union Water Framework Directive (WFD) 2000 encompasses previous EU Directives aimed at reducing pollution\(^{26}\) as transposed by the European Communities Water Policy Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722). It aims to provide a strengthened system for the protection and improvement of all internal and coastal waters and to achieve at least 'good status' by 2015. In order to achieve this, Ireland has been divided into eight River Basin Districts based on a catchment approach. The River Basin Districts serve as administrative areas in which the responsible authorities coordinate their water management actions for their region and identify effective measures to protect and ensure improved water quality. Particular environmental issues identified in the River Basin Management Plans need to be addressed. River Basin Management Plans for the Western and Shannon International River Basin Districts (which fall within the West Regional Authority area) will be in place in 2010. It is acknowledged that the implementation of measures in the RBMPs will require significant financial investment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP33</strong>: To ensure the protection and improvement of all waters - rivers, lakes, groundwater, estuaries (transitional waters), coastal waters and their associated habitats and species throughout the Region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP34</strong>: To implement the EC Environmental Objectives (Groundwater) Regulations, 2010 (S.I. No. 9); the EC (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations, 2009 (S.I. No. 101), the Bathing Water Quality Regulations, 2008 (S.I.79) and EC (Quality of Shellfish Waters) Regulations 2006 and amendment Regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IP35</strong>: To implement the Water Services Act, 2007 and all water and wastewater regulations.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IO44</strong>: To participate in the implementation and promote compliance with the requirements of the ‘Water Framework Directive’ through the River Basin Management Plans for the Shannon and Western River Basin Districts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.2 Priority Water & Waste Water Requirements for the Region

Local Authorities should ensure compliance with Drinking Water Standards and compliance with Waste Water Effluent Standards. There is a need for emphasis on water conservation and reducing levels of unaccounted for water through mains

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\(^{26}\) These include Urban Waste Water Treatment, Nitrates, Bathing Waters, Shellfish, Habitats and Dangerous Substances Directives.
rehabilitation, building on the work that has already been undertaken in developing water management systems and active leakage control recognising the need for adequate financing being available.

5.3.2.1 Water Services Investment Programme

The DoEHLG Water Services Investment Programme (WSIP) for 2010 - 2012 published in April 2010 is a three-year rolling funding plan for the provision of major water supply and wastewater infrastructure. Together with the Rural Water Programme, it is the commitment to the needs assessment (see Table no. 23). This funding programme has been co-ordinated with the River Basin Management Plans which are required under the Water Framework Directive. The Programme also provides for an annual review which will allow a detailed assessment to be undertaken as to the need for additional investment in essential development-related water supply or wastewater-related investment in key villages and smaller towns arising from the implementation of Local Authority Development Plan “Core Strategies” as provided for under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010.

Investment in rural areas will be supplemented by annual allocations under the Rural Water Programme.

In preparing the WSIP, local authorities compiled ‘Water & Wastewater Assessment of Needs’ in October, 2009. The infrastructural requirements identified are considered to be a priority for the region when funding becomes available. Local Authorities must comply with Article 6 of Habitats Directive, E.C. Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations and Departmental Circular L8/08 (02/09/08) ‘Water Services Investment & Rural Water Programmes – Protection of Natural Heritage & National Monuments”. All projects are subject to relevant environmental legislation and the availability of funding.

For the West Region, the major elements set out in this programme are:-

Table 22: Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHANNON INTERNATIONAL RIVER BASIN DISTRICT</th>
<th>WESTERN RIVER BASIN DISTRICT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contracts At Construction</td>
<td>Contracts At Construction</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CO. ROSCOMMON</strong></td>
<td><strong>GALWAY CITY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arigna, Boyle/Ardcarne Phase 2, Roscommon Central and South Roscommon RWSS 27</td>
<td>Galway City Water Supply Scheme(G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon Towns &amp; Villages Sewerage Scheme Water Conservation Stages 1 &amp; 2 Works</td>
<td>Water Conservation Stages 1 &amp; 2 Works(G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CO. GALWAY</strong></td>
<td><strong>CO. GALWAY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountbellew Sewerage Scheme</td>
<td>Barna Sewerage Scheme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 RWSS - Rural Water Supply Scheme
### SHANNON INTERNATIONAL RIVER BASIN DISTRICT

- Gort Water Supply Scheme
- Inis Mór Water Supply Scheme
- Mountbellew Water Supply Scheme
- Water Conservation Stages 1 & 2 Works

### WESTERN RIVER BASIN DISTRICT

#### CO. MAYO
- Achill Sound Sewerage Scheme
- Ballina Sewerage Scheme Phase 2 (H)
- Castlebar Environ Sewerage Scheme (H)
- Kiltimagh Sewerage Scheme
- Water Conservation Stages 1 & 2 Works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHANNON INTERNATIONAL RIVER BASIN DISTRICT</th>
<th>WESTERN RIVER BASIN DISTRICT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contracts to Start 2010 - 2022</td>
<td>Contracts to Start 2010 - 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CO. ROSCOMMON</strong></td>
<td><strong>GALWAY CITY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arigna RWSS</td>
<td>Galway Sewerage Scheme Phase 3 (G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyle/Ardcarne RWSS</td>
<td>Water Conservation Stage 3 Works (G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE Roscommon &amp; Ballyleague RWSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roscommon Central RWSS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Roscommon Towns &amp; Villages Sewerage Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Roscommon RWSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water Conservation Stage 3 Works</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>West Roscommon RWSS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CO. GALWAY</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Athenry Sewerage Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ballinasloe RWSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claregalway &amp; Milltown Sewerage Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clifden Sewerage Scheme Phase 1</td>
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<td>Clifden Water Supply Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Costello RWSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dunmore/Glenamaddy Water Supply Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galway City Western Environ Water Supply Scheme Phase 1 (G)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inishbofin Water Supply Scheme</td>
<td>Kinvara Sewerage Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oughterard Sewerage Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuam Water and Sewerage Scheme (H)</td>
<td>Water Conservation Stage 3 Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CO. MAYO</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belmullet, Foxford &amp; Charlestown Sewerage Scheme</td>
<td>Cong Water Supply Scheme</td>
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</table>
The Water and Waste Water Assessment of Needs was compiled by the four Local Authorities of the West Region in respect of water and waste water infrastructural requirements. It was developing under four headings as set out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. All projects are subject to relevant environmental legislation and the availability of funding. A summary of these assessments is compiled in Table No. 23 below.

Table 23: Local Authority Water & Waste Water Assessment of Needs 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Roscommon</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water Conservation</strong></td>
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</table>
### County Mayo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water Conservation</th>
<th>ECJ Judgements</th>
<th>Environmental &amp; Public Health</th>
<th>Sustainable Development of Gateways &amp; Creation of Jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Mayo Countywide Phase II</td>
<td>▪ Castlebar Environ SS</td>
<td>▪ Ballina Main Drainage Scheme</td>
<td>▪ L. Mask Ext Srah to Westport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Water Cons. Stage 3 Rehab. Works (3 No. Contracts)</td>
<td>▪ L. Mask Ext to Westport</td>
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<td>▪ Kilmaine/Shrule water supply</td>
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### County Galway

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<th>Water Conservation</th>
<th>ECJ Judgements</th>
<th>Environmental &amp; Public Health</th>
<th>Sustainable Development of Gateways &amp; Creation of Jobs</th>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Galway Countywide Water Conservation Contracts</td>
<td>▪ None</td>
<td>▪ Gort RWSS</td>
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Rehabilitation:
Ballinasloe, Oranmore & Carraroe

- Mains
Rehabilitation:
Corofin, Headford & Loughrea

Galway City Western Environments WS
Claregalway & Milltown SS Bundle
Kinvara SS
Glenamaddy SS
Mountbellow SS
Craughwell & Carraroe SS Bundle

39 further contracts in Planning Phase 2010-2012 including Sludge Management & treatment plants for offshore islands

Galway City

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<tr>
<th>Water Conservation</th>
<th>ECJ Judgements</th>
<th>Environmental &amp; Public Health</th>
<th>Sustainable Development of Gateways &amp; Creation of Jobs</th>
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<td>Galway City Conservation Phase 2: Stages 1-3</td>
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<td>Galway Sewerage Scheme</td>
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Bundle
Loughrea SS & RWSS
Clifden SS
Oughterard SS
Kinvara SS
Glenamaddy SS
Mountbellow SS
Craughwell & Carraroe SS Bundle

14 further contracts in the Planning Phase
5.4 Waste Management

Figure 8: Waste Management Structure

Waste management policies and objectives for the West Region are set out in the Replacement Connacht Waste Management Plan 2006 with particular emphasis on waste reduction, and the sustainable development of infrastructure for the reuse, recycling and disposal of residual waste in the most appropriate manner.

The National Hazardous Waste Management Plan sets out the priorities to improve the management of hazardous waste in Ireland.

The ‘Major Accidents’ (Seveso II) Directive (96/082/EEC) seeks to prevent major accidents involving dangerous substances and to limit the consequences of accidents on people and the environment.

Waste management is an inter-regional issue. The actions outlined in the policies and objectives below need to be progressed:-

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Policies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IP36: To support the formulation of a national policy on energy recovery/thermal treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP37: To support the development of biological treatment facilities in the Region to treat source-separated organic waste (Section 5.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP38: To support the development of regional synergies in the area of sludge management planning and solutions delivery.</td>
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<th>Objectives</th>
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<tr>
<td>IO45: To ensure there is sufficient landfill capacity available within or in proximity to the region so as not to impair economic development. To avoid negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites, all new landfill developments or extensions to existing landfills will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and other relevant environmental assessment, where appropriate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>IO46: To comply with the pre-treatment aspect of various EU and national government directives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IO47: To support a co-ordinated approach to the provision of waste management infrastructure which is guided by suitable environmental assessment where necessary (Section 5.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IO48: To ensure that Development Plans comply with the requirements of the Major Accidents (Seveso II) Directive and local authorities consult the Health &amp; Safety</td>
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Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 -2022
5.5 Energy & Utilities

5.5.1 Energy Network
Electricity is a fundamental component of life in the modern world. For any region to develop economically and socially, it must have available a reliable, cost competitive and sustainable electricity services. There is a well-established correlation between economic growth and increasing electricity consumption.

Ireland is highly dependent on imported energy. The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources aims to increase the use of renewable energy technologies in electricity production. It is expected that electricity production from renewable sources will increase from 5.2% in 2004 to 13.2% by 2010 to be facilitated by the development, reinforcement and strengthening of the Grid.

It is recognised in the Government’s White Paper on “Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland” that wind energy will play a pivotal contribution in meeting that goal. Ocean technologies and biomass, solar, geothermal and hydro are also expected to contribute.

Many of the locations suitable for renewable energy generation schemes are in areas where there have been little or no generation developments heretofore but are sensitive landscape locations. The aggregate of renewable generation capacity in some areas is equivalent to large conventional generation stations and in many cases the existing network is not capable of carrying the power from these generation sources. Significant reinforcement of the Grid will therefore be required to cater for the new power flows from renewable generation. One possible example of energy infrastructure is the extension of a 220/440 kV line from the South and East to the Bellacorrick area in North Mayo. Inter-agency co-operation with regard to the design and suitable location of key infrastructure should be fostered.
Wood fuel has a significant contribution to make towards this target through CHP (Combined Heat and Power) plants. Perhaps the biggest contribution of wood fuel will be in the area of heat provision. The availability of a high quality off and onshore renewable and marine energies in the West Region allows for considerable future sustainable development potential for the direct utilisation of these energy sources and the development of an Industry Sector i.e. manufacturing and technology for wind and marine energy generation etc. associated with it.

As previously mentioned, however, it will not be possible to utilise Ireland’s natural resources of renewable energy without the essential upgrades outlined in the EirGrid “Strategy for the development of Ireland’s Electricity for a sustainable and Competitive Future - GRID25”. EirGrid are the independent Transmission System Operator (TSO). The power flow analysis underpinning this Strategy considered the impact on grid development requirements of a distinct level of renewable generation, i.e. meeting 40% of consumption from renewable sources.

In principle, Planning Authorities through their Development Plans should consider and support where appropriate the provision of energy networks, provided that it can be demonstrated that:

- The development is required in order to facilitate the provision or retention of significant economic or social infrastructure;
- The route proposed has been identified with due consideration for social, economic, environmental and cultural impacts through relevant environmental assessment;
- The design is such that will achieve least environmental impact consistent with not incurring excessive cost;
- Where impacts are identified mitigation features have been included;
- Where it can be shown the proposed development is consistent with international best practice with regard to the materials and technologies that will ensure a safe, secure, reliable, economic and efficient, high quality network.

In considering facilities which traverse a number of counties or that traverse one county in order to serve another, Planning Authorities should consider the proposal based on the criteria outlined above.

It is important that Eirgrid engage in early consultation and discussion with Planning Authorities in the case of strategic infrastructure development or other relevant planned bulk transmission projects and relevant infrastructure projects.

Some of the key requirements for the West Region can be summarised as follows:

- Grid investment for the West Region must be guided by the need to remedy immediate deficiencies and also by an expected long-term moderate growth in population and economic development;
- Energy efficiency must be improved and energy reduction measures promoted. Energy efficiency in new developments must be encouraged.
- The roll-out of ‘smart metering’ must be continued;
• The Government’s White Paper Document ‘Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland, Energy Policy Framework 2007-2012’ should be adhered to; and
• Renewable energy generation should be promoted - generation from renewable energy sources is a key element in the Strategy to reduce carbon emissions and to maintain a sustainable energy supply. The Government has an increased target of meeting at least 40% of electricity demand from renewable generation by 2020. It also intends setting further targets jointly with the relevant Northern Ireland authorities.

**Policies**

**IP40:** Support the additional investment in the West Region as proposed in GRID 25 (Section 5.1.1 applies).
**IP41:** Support the investment required to facilitate renewable energy projects and conventional generating station deployment. All energy generation plans and projects will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment. (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).
**IP42:** Support investment to upgrade the existing transmission and distribution network and to build new circuits as required (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**Objectives**

**IO49:** Support the construction of new 110kV and higher lines across the region but particularly to the West Galway and North Mayo areas. Such proposals must take account of various EU designations and relevant environmental assessment in its design and construction and significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites must be avoided through the Habitats Directive ‘Appropriate Assessment’ process.
**IO50:** Support the GRID 25 Proposals to upgrade approximately 700km of the existing transmission network and built new circuits across the region (Section 5.1.1 applies).

### 5.5.2 Gas

The Corrib Gas Field is a 230 million year old reservoir, situated approximately 70 kilometres off the Mullet peninsula in Co. Mayo. It was located in 1996. The reservoir is 3,505 metres (11,500 ft.) beneath the seabed and the gas field, if developed, has the potential to produce gas for 15 and 20 years. The discovery of the Corrib Gas Field represents a major opportunity for the West Region. The development of the necessary on shore facilities to enable the potential of the gas field to be utilised in the region and national context is supported. Into the future, the potential of this very important natural resource can be of enormous benefit to the region as a whole and is seen as a project of large scale potential development for the region.

To enable the region to extract the full benefit of this natural resource, a major distribution network serving all major urban centres in the region must be constructed. This will enable a competitive choice of energy sources to potential entrepreneurs as well as providing a cheap clean residential energy supply.

**Objectives**

**IO51:** Support the construction of distribution networks serving all urban centres in the region and national context is supported. Into the future, the potential of this very important natural resource can be of enormous benefit to the region as a whole and is seen as a project of large scale potential development for the region.
5.5.3 Renewable Energy

Securing indigenous renewable energy supplies will generate a more sustainable economy, lower carbon emissions, combat climate change and meet national government and EU renewable targets. It is acknowledged that the West Region can play a significant role in delivering these targets but is reliant on the facilitation, development, reinforcement and strengthening of the Grid to be able to connect, distribute, import and export the indigenous land and marine renewable energy that will in future be generated. This is recognised in particular for the West Region through the planning hierarchy of the National Development Plan and the National Spatial Strategy: “A particular emphasis is being placed on the reinforcement of the grid in western counties. Accelerated growth in the Border, Midlands and West (BMW) region also suggests that in addition to the above programme, power corridors will need to be considered to augment the capacity of the grid in Galway/Mayo/Sligo and along a corridor from Dublin to Dundalk)” (NSS, 2002 p.65).

The National Development Plan further recognises the Transmission System Operator’s role in delivering the Economic Infrastructure Priority, including the Strategic Energy Infrastructure Sub-programme, to which €1.2 billion is being targeted.

In this regard the TSO (EirGrid) is following a best practice approach of undertaking a hierarchy of environmental studies prior to and during transmission project planning i.e. National SEA, Regional Environmental Constraint Studies, project specific constraint studies, project specific route selection and EIS’s to maintain a sensitive approach to the environment.

Ireland and the West Region have the potential to become net energy exporters through harnessing our renewable energy resources. An Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan is being prepared by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) and a National Renewable Energy Action Plan was published by the DCENR in 2010.

5.5.4 Wind Energy

The West Region contains Ireland’s premier wind resource and holds the potential for this region to become a sustainable exporter of renewable energy.

Areas identified for wind farms must have regard to the level of the resource, the nature of the landscape, the status of surrounding lands and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government’s ‘Wind Energy Development
Objectives

**IO53:** Support the use of the existing and necessary upgrades of the electricity grid to facilitate the production of electricity in the region from renewable sources. In particular the grid extending to the areas with high potential for wind energy, should be sufficient to cater for consumer demand and the supply of renewable energy to the national grid ([Section 5.1.1 applies](#)) (Please refer to CO14, CO15 and IO54).

**IO54:** Support the sustainable development of wind energy developments through the initiation of a Regional policy on windfarm location. The policy will be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment and by other environmental assessment including landscape character assessment and will follow DoEHLG’s Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006) in identifying areas suitable for wind energy developments. Natura 2000 sites, and other ecological sites, should be placed in the ‘not normally permissible’ category unless project level HDA and/ or other relevant environmental assessment determines otherwise (Please refer to CO14, CO15).

5.5.5 Wave, Tidal, Hydro and Bio Energy

The West Region’s location provides it with ample resources for Wave, Tidal, Hydro and Bio Energy. The national test site for wave energy is located near Belmullet in County Mayo. This will play a significant role in the development of technology and the promotion of this type of renewable energy.

Policies

**IP43:** To facilitate the delivery of wave, tidal, hydro and bio-energy. All new wave, tidal, hydro and bio-energy energy generation plans and projects will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment, where appropriate.

**IP44:** Support the sustainable development of wave and tide power through the development of a Regional Strategy. The Strategy will be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment and/or by other environmental assessment including landscape character assessment and will aim to identify locations that are suitable for wave and tide power developments and to assess potential negative environmental impacts including cumulative and in combination impacts in a coordinated manner. It should be a working assumption that Natura 2000 sites, and other ecological sites, are unsuitable unless project-level HDA and/ or other relevant environmental assessment determines otherwise.

**IP45:** Support the implementation of the Bioenergy Action Plan for Ireland ([Section 5.1.1 applies](#)).

Objectives

**IO55:** Promote and support the sustainable development of wave and tidal energy in appropriate locations provided they are compliant with the appropriate planning and environmental criteria and international directives. All wave and tide energy...
development will be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment, where appropriate.

**IO56:** Support the sustainable development of hydro energy in appropriate streams and rivers provided they are compliant with the appropriate planning and environment criteria and International Directives. All hydro energy development will be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment.

### 5.5.6 Renewable Energy Technology for Thermal Heat Generation & Micro Renewable Energy Technology

The use of renewable energy technology such as solar water heating, heat pumps and biomass for the generation of thermal energy and for use in heating systems, will generate more sustainable development throughout the region.

The sustainable development of Micro Renewable electrical generation technology such as wind turbines, photo voltaic, micro combined heat and power plants should be encouraged. The ESB and Commission for Energy Regulation have developed standards and a process for electrical generating micro renewables to sell electricity to the national grid. The Planning & Development Regulations (S.I. No 235 of 2008 and S.I. No 83 of 2007) provide guidance on planning exemptions for micro renewable energy projects.

**Policy**

**IP46:** Support and enforce current and future Building Regulations Standards, which should lead to the installation of renewable energy technology in houses and other building developments.

### 5.5.7 Energy Efficiency and Conservation

Improving Ireland’s energy efficiency, reducing emissions and reducing energy consumption is an essential part of Ireland’s sustainable energy policy. In recent years Building Regulations for example have required improved conservation of fuel and energy for new dwellings. There is significant potential at the design stage of new buildings to improve the energy efficiency of the building over its lifetime.

**Policy**

**IP47:** Promote energy conservation through reduced consumption and increased efficiency.

**IP48:** To support the implementation of aspects of the Building Energy Directive and Energy Labelling where applicable within the local authority building portfolio, and through obligations under Planning and Building Control Acts.

**IP49:** Support the implementation of aspects of the ‘National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009-2020’ where applicable and take action to reduce energy consumption by 33% for 2020 (Section 5.1.1 applies) (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

**IP50:** To support the work of the Local/ Regional Energy Agencies in ensuring the development and delivery of sustainable energy production is informed by Habitats
Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment, where appropriate. (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

Objectives

**IO57:** Support carbon emission reduction methods in new residential, commercial and industrial developments through reduced energy consumption, the use of renewable technologies, energy efficient and low carbon technologies. These methods must be developed to minimise significant environmental and/or visual impacts (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IO58:** Support the use of ‘rainwater harvesting facilities’ on new developments where appropriate (Section 5.1.1 applies).

5.6 Telecommunications

A key factor in the determination of social and economic progress in the Region is the development of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) network. This is particularly important if locations remote from Galway City are to attract investment and jobs and give local people quality access to information, education and entertainment. Telecommunications masts are an essential element in providing a communication network for the Region. As with most technology they provide benefits, which must be balanced against associated dis-amenities and structures, as they become redundant, should be removed.

Policies

**IP51:** To support ‘Building Ireland’s Smart Economy: A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal’ to ensure competitive ICT services and facilitate an evolutionary, globally competitive, efficient and sustainable society and economy (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP52:** Support the delivery of a high capacity ICT infrastructure, broadband networks and digital broadcasting subject to environmental assessment, particularly with regard to landscape and ecological considerations (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP53:** Support the extension of the fibre network to all areas of the West Region (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP54:** Support and implement the Department of the Environment and Local Government publication ‘Telecommunications Antennae and support structures – Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP55:** Promote the development and installation of high grade optical fibre to the key towns in the region. This will facilitate the promotion/attraction of indigenous and FDI companies (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP56:** Promote e-commerce and e-business in the region generally. A minimum standard e.g. 1 megabit per second up and down should be available to all consumers regardless of location in the West Region (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IP57:** Public Authorities and developers should consider the installation of open access communication ducting in all major developments.

Objectives

**IO59:** To support the installation and use of cable broadband and ducting to
maximise the potential of the ICT sector and provide reasonable broadband speed and access to each citizen and business in the West Region. This can be achieved through:

a) The use of chambered telecommunications ducts and subducts to each new multiple unit development;
b) The use of a single subduct from a single unit development to the outer curtilage of a public road;
c) The installation of carrier neutral ducting during significant public infrastructure works (e.g. roads, water, sewerage);
d) Mapping and recording of all ductings;
e) Providing backhaul connections where possible through existing ducting along publicly owned infrastructure; (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IO60:** Co-location of telecommunication masts and antennae should be promoted if practicable and technically feasible, having regard to the cumulative effects on the landscape and DoEHLG Guidelines (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IO61:** Promote adaptation of alternative sustainable energy sources appropriate to the specific needs of local rural communities (Section 5.1.1 applies).

**IO62:** Support tele-working to reduce trip generation.

**IO63:** Support the co-operation of service providers.
CHAPTER 6: Environment & Amenities Strategy

6.1 Landscape
The West Region is comprised of some of the most dramatic and varied landscapes which have been forged over many centuries through seasonal weathering, ice movements and fluvial erosion. The landscape contains a broad range of natural resources such as water bodies, agricultural land, forestry, bogs, mineral deposits, flora and fauna. It also contains a range of cultural resources such as settlements, archaeological monuments and built heritage (e.g. heritage towns of Roscommon, Boyle and Elphin or walled towns of Galway, Athenry and Loughrea).

The landmass of the West Region extends over 1,428,687 hectares. Landscape is defined by the Heritage Act (1995) as including ‘areas, sites, vistas and features of significant scenic, archaeological, geological, historical, ecological or other scientific interest’. It is perceived in terms of its geological makeup, landcover such as vegetation or settlements; and the human values attached to the landscape for historical, cultural or religious reasons. The landscape of the West Region has influenced where settlements have evolved.

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) was signed and ratified by Ireland in March, 2002 and came into force in Ireland in March, 2004. It refers to natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas and includes land, inland water and marine areas and it applies to landscapes that may be considered outstanding, everyday or degraded. The aim of the ELC is to promote landscape protection, management and planning.

- **Landscape protection** means 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;
- **Landscape management** means action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes;
- **Landscape planning** means strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.

It 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’. ‘Guidelines for the Implementation of the European Landscape Convention’ were introduced by the Council of Europe - Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage in 2008 & 2009. The DoEHLG intends to publish a National Landscape Strategy for Ireland. Currently each county in the West Region has their own Landscape

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Character Assessment or Landscape Appraisal which identify the landscape types within their functional area.

There are a number of areas of landscape importance which require a common approach between the counties of the West Region to ensure that they are managed in a consistent way, which include:

- The Atlantic Coast
- The Burren Areas of Galway & Clare
- The Shannon Catchment area
- The Upland Areas of Galway & Mayo

The Burren landscape crosses the border between Counties Galway and Clare and is a key interface between the West and Mid-West Regional Authority areas. It is a unique archaeological landscape which is recognised internationally. The archaeology is intrinsically linked with issues affecting biodiversity, agriculture and tourism. Approaches or policies in relation to the Burren should be guided by national legislation and through consultation with the National Monuments Service and NPWS.

The protection and management of the rural landscape throughout the region requires a co-ordinated effort. In so far as possible, new developments should assimilate into the landscape especially in areas of high scenic amenity.

The West Region experiences high levels of annual rainfall. The presence of peat soils and bog in some areas of the region can result in unstable ground and landslides. However, certain development or land use has the capacity to heighten the risk of such effects and the cumulative impact of such developments must be assessed.

Climate change will impact on the landscape of the West Region through rising sea levels, coastal erosion, increased rainfall and flooding. Soil is recognised as a significant carbon reservoir by the Kyoto protocol and the proposed EU Soil Directive. Depending on its chemistry, mineralogy and the climatic environment, it can act as a carbon sink (EPA, 2009). The peatlands and forested areas of the West Region also act as carbon sinks, preventing its release into the atmosphere.

### 6.1.1 Habitats Directive Assessment

The Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment has identified a number of Objectives and Policies in this Chapter of the Guidelines which, when implemented, have the potential to result in negative impacts on one or more Natura 2000 site and issues may therefore arise under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive which will require Appropriate Assessment at ‘lower plan’ or project level. Where such ‘lower plan’ or project level Appropriate Assessment concludes significant negative impacts, alternative solutions which comply fully with Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive may need to be considered. Please also refer to Appendix 4.

**Policies**

**EAP1:** Support a common approach to landscape management throughout the
region. It should be in accordance with the Landscape & Landscape Assessment Guidelines 2000 and follow the National Landscape Strategy (when published) by the DoEHLG. This approach should:

- Ensure that the quality and character of landscape areas are identified;
- Ensure a common designation and description for areas that require protection;
- Ensure that common policies are applied to areas that require protection.

**EAP2:** This approach should also identify the nature and scale of development that would be permitted within areas of different designations.

**EAP3:** Landscape protection policies should also take account of the need to manage the provision of forestry and renewable energy development and of the particular vulnerability of certain features such as bogs and mires, designated sites and important archaeological landscapes. The potential for impacts on Natura 2000 sites should be assessed through Habitats Directive Assessment.

### Objectives

**EAO1:** Landscape protection policies should also take account of the protection of Natura 2000 and ecological sites, of habitats and species of ecological value, and of ecological corridors to ensure the coherence of the Natura 2000 network.

**EAO2:** To promote the use of visual impact assessments where proposed development may have significant impact on important landscape/seascape features.

**EAO3:** Support the inclusion of policies in Development Plans/Local Area Plans to protect important views and prospects in the rural landscape and visual linkages between established landmarks, landscape features and views in urban areas.

### 6.2 Cultural Heritage & The Built Environment

The core objective of the National Heritage Plan, 2002 is to protect our heritage. Cultural and built heritage consists not only of great artistic achievements but also of the everyday work of local crafts people of the past. Alterations to the rural and urban landscapes embody our cultural identity through time. The West Region contains a wealth of historic architecture and archaeological monuments. Our cultural heritage serves as an educational tool and significant tourism resource which is a vital part of the economy of the West Region.

**Archaeological Heritage**

The European Convention on Protection of the Archaeological Heritage known as the Valletta Convention, 1992 requires that appropriate consideration be given to archaeological issues at all stages of the planning and development process. The Region’s archaeological monuments are identified in the ‘Record of Monuments and Places’ and in the National Monuments Service’s monuments data. Development pressure and associated impacts on archaeological heritage can be avoided or lessened by the criteria, archaeological policies and principles set out in the ‘Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, 1999’ and should be applied in the planning and development process.
The Minister for the DoEHLG is responsible for the protection of archaeological heritage, including the licensing of archaeological excavations and the designation of National Monuments through the Archaeological Survey of Ireland. The National Monuments Service also provides advice to the planning authorities in respect of individual planning applications, projects and plans that may affect archaeological heritage.

A monument can be defined as a man-made structure or group of structures or a natural structure altered by man. They may consist of sites where there are no visible features, but archaeological remains are known or expected to exist beneath the surface.

There are a number of categories of monuments under the National Monuments Acts 1930 -2004:

- National Monuments in the ownership or guardianship of the Minister or a local authority or National Monuments which are subject to a preservation order.
- Historic monuments or archaeological areas recorded in the Register of Historic Monuments.
- Monuments recorded in the Record of Monuments and Places.

The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) is an inventory (which has a statutory basis due to an amendment to the National Monuments Act 1994), of sites and areas of archaeological significance which are numbered and mapped. The RMP includes all known monuments and sites of archaeological importance dating to before 1700 AD and some sites which date from after 1700 AD.

A number of iconic attractions in the West Region are proposed for designation as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. They include the Western Stone Forts (e.g. Dún Aonghasa on Inishmore), the Céide Fields and the North West Mayo Boglands; the Burren and Rathcroghan in County Roscommon. These sites are of both national and international importance and embody the wealth of heritage resources to be found in the Region. Such sites serve to increase the popularity of the West Region as a tourist destination. There are numerous other heritage sites found throughout the region which are considered to hold similar importance. Local Authorities should continue to identify them in Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Heritage Plans throughout the region.

**Architectural Heritage**

The Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (The Granada Convention) was ratified by Ireland in 1997. Legislative provision for the protection of architectural heritage is implemented through the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. Architectural Heritage is defined in the Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) & Historic Monuments Act, 1999 as all:

- Structures and buildings together with their settings and attendant grounds, fixtures and fittings;
- Groups of such structures and buildings; and
c) Sites, which are of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.

The protection of the architectural heritage of the region should be addressed by each planning authority in line with DoEHLG Guidelines ‘Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2004’ and the Planning Act 2000-2010.

One of the main mechanisms for the protection of built heritage is afforded through the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) (Planning and Development Act 2000-2010). It aims to protect structures or parts of structures that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. Each owner and occupier of a Protected Structure is legally obliged to ensure that the structure is preserved. The structures are defined as:

‘any building, structure, excavation, or other thing constructed or made on, in or under any land, or any part of a structure so defined and includes the interior of the structure; the land lying within the curtilage of the structure; any other structures lying within that curtilage and their interiors; and all fixtures and features which form part of the interior or exterior of any structure or structures’

A regional approach to the compilation of an Inventory of the Architectural Heritage/Record of Protected Structures will be explored over the lifetime of the Regional Planning Guidelines. This is currently undertaken at county level and by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH). An additional protection associated with the RPS is the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). An ACA is defined as:

‘a place, area, group of structures or townscape, taking account of building lines and heights, that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or that contributes to the appreciation of a Protected Structure, and whose character it is an objective of a development plan to preserve’


The aim of ACAs is to retain the overall special architectural or historic character of an area or place. Planning Authorities may also designate all or part of an ACA as an ‘Area of Special Planning Control’, where it considers, it is of special importance and in such a case the Planning Authority may prepare a scheme setting out development objectives for the preservation and enhancement of that area.

The West Region also contains a rich heritage of gardens and designed landscapes. Many are associated with demesnes including the geometric layouts of the 18th and 19th centuries and more natural layouts in the later period. This was also the period when many of our town squares and public gardens were developed. The designs and subsequent changes reflect the aesthetic, cultural and social aspirations of their owners and users.

The vernacular architecture of the rural and urban areas of the West Region includes structures of distinctive construction using local materials and labour. The built heritage will change over time but the elements of special character such as vernacular structures and street patterns should be retained and townscape should
be enhanced by new development which integrates with the context into which it is placed and respects its surroundings. Local Authority rural housing design guidelines should draw on vernacular building traditions while providing for contemporary innovation which minimises energy consumption.

### Policies

| EAP4: | To promote public awareness of the rich architectural and archaeological heritage in the area. |
| EAP5: | To secure the preservation of sites and features of archaeological and architectural interest. |
| EAP6: | To protect and enhance archaeological monuments, their settings and zones of archaeological potential. |
| EAP7: | To protect historical architecture which includes conservation, preservation and improvement which is compatible with maintaining the character and interest of the structure as set out in the NIAH. |
| EAP8: | To protect and enhance architectural structures of special interest, and their settings including associated gardens. |
| EAP9: | To support the use of traditional building skills, and materials and to encourage training in these skills. |
| EAP10: | To promote a high quality built environment and encourage good architecture and urban design. |
| EAP11: | Support the protection of native (protected) species that inhabit built heritage. |

### Objectives

| EAO4: | To seek to conserve the integrity of existing archaeological monuments and their settings. |
| EAO5: | Support the regeneration and continued reuse of our older structures in the West Region ([Section 6.1.1 applies](#)). |
| EAO6: | To adopt an integrated multi disciplinary conservation approach in the operation of development management affecting architectural and archaeological heritage, inclusive of their contextual setting and interpretation. |
| EAO7: | To raise awareness amongst the public of the wealth of architectural heritage that has been inherited through dissemination of information. |
| EAO8: | To support the use of Village Design Statements (VDSs) which represent a useful tool in promoting conservation and optimising the development potential of local built and natural heritage. |
| EAO9: | Local Authorities should seek to designate zones of visual amenity in the immediate area around National Monuments in state ownership or guardianship and monuments subject to Preservation Orders, where possible. |
| EAO10: | Areas of high archaeological potential including subsurface archaeology should be identified, where information becomes available. |

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29 Please refer to the Heritage Council.

30 Sources include the Database of Irish Excavation Reports [http://www.excavations.ie](http://www.excavations.ie), National and Local Museums.
6.3 Natural Heritage & Ecological Integrity

The natural environment refers to our landscape, inland water bodies and coastal areas, geological heritage, forestry, soils, biological diversity including designated sites of nature conservation and the flora and fauna found in the wider environment. Biological Diversity or Biodiversity describes the variety of living organisms found on earth. It incorporates the flora and fauna and the habitats where they live.

We depend on the natural environment to provide the citizens of the West Region with a high quality of life and it is a resource which must be maintained for future generations through sustainable development. The natural environment provides us with food, water, air, medicine, nutrient recycling, treatment of waste, etc.

The habitats of the West Region have been altered by human beings over time. A number of EU Directives have helped to conserve biodiversity and Ireland has signed a number of Conventions including the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. The role of Local Authorities in protecting natural heritage is supported by the National Heritage Plan, the National Biodiversity Plan and the National Climate Change Strategy including other environmental legislation on environmental quality standards. At a local level, Local Authorities have prepared ‘Local Biodiversity Plans’ and ‘County/City Heritage Plans’. Development Plans and Local Area Plans also promote the protection of the environment, habitats and species. Our natural heritage is an important educational resource.

Certain habitats and wildlife are legally protected and designated. Habitats protected by the Irish Government include Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and National Parks, Nature Reserves, Refuges for Flora and Fauna and Wildfowl Sanctuaries. The West Region has two National Parks - Ballycroy in Co. Mayo and Connemara in Co. Galway and a further 9 Nature Reserves. There are 9 Wetlands in the West Region which include Lough Corrib (Co. Galway), Killala Bay/Moy Estuary (Co. Mayo) and Lough Gara (Co. Roscommon) that are protected internationally by the ‘Ramsar Convention’.

NHAs are protected under the Wildlife Acts 1976-2000. Other species are protected under the Flora Protection Order 1999 and rare or threatened species are listed in the Red Data Books and on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI) Red and Amber List.

The Irish Geological Heritage (IGH) Programme run through the Geological Survey of Ireland and the Natural Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) aims to identify, document, protect and conserve geological heritage in Ireland, promoting its value with landowners and the public.

The Natura 2000 network which consists of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are protected by the EU and Irish Government. Special Conservation Areas are protected under the E.U. Habitats Directive, and the EU (Natural Habitats) Regulations 2007. Both habitats and species protected include turloughs, limestone pavement, raised and blanket bogs, sand dunes, lakes, rivers,
bats, otters, grey seals, lamprey, fresh water salmon etc. Special Protection Areas are protected under the EU Birds Directive due to their importance for wild birds. SPAs have been designated for listed rare and vulnerable species, regularly occurring migratory species and wetlands which attract large numbers of migratory birds. Many Natural Heritage Areas overlap with SACs and SPAs. The protection of such sites, biosphere reserves and other designations represent a positive framework for the conservation of species. For further information please refer to the Habitats Directive Assessment – Appropriate Assessment Screening & Natura Impact Statement.

While there are a large number of designated sites found in the West Region, there is a significant amount of biodiversity, flora and fauna found in the wider countryside in particular in the wildlife corridors that connect Natura 2000 sites. Many linear landscape features play an important role as wildlife and nature corridors and allow for the genetic exchange of wild species. They include watercourses, woodlands, hedgerows and railway margins. It is important to ensure that connections between Natura 2000 sites are maintained and enhanced, where possible.

The Freshwater Pearl Mussel is found in four locations in the West Region. Rivers and lakes include the Newport, Bundorragha, Dawros and Owenriff (Corrib). Regulations were introduced in 2009 to support the achievement of favourable conservation status for the species.

The EU Environmental Liabilities Directive 2004 establishes a framework for environmental liability based on the ‘polluter pays’ principle with a view to preventing and remediying environmental damage. Species and habitats protected under the Habitats & Birds Directives are also protected under this Directive.

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<th>Policies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EAP12:</strong> To implement the EU Directives with regard to the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EAP13:</strong> To support the protection of Natural Heritage Areas, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Nature Reserves, Ramsar Sites (Wetlands), Wildfowl Sanctuaries, National Parks, Nature Reserves and the biodiversity designated under the Habitats Directive, Birds Directive, Wildlife Act, Flora Protection Order and other designated or future designated sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EAP14:</strong> Promote awareness of non-native invasive species and, in consultation with NPWS support control and eradication programmes. Any such eradication programmes proposed close to Natura 2000 sites must be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EAP15:</strong> All Strategies, Plans, Studies, etc. that are proposed for preparation or otherwise promoted in any Goal, Objective or Policy of the RPG must be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment, where relevant, and in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive. Where appropriate, this should be conducted concurrently with the preparation of the Strategies, Plans, Studies by the relevant authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EAP16:</strong> All Strategies, Studies, Initiatives, Plans, Programmes, etc. that are proposed...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for implementation or otherwise promoted in any Goal, Objective or Policy of the RPG must be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment, where relevant and in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive, prior to their adoption by the relevant authorities.

**EAP17:** To support the maintenance and, as appropriate, the achievement of favourable conservation status for the habitats and species in the West Region to which the Habitats Directive applies. Local Authorities shall take full account of the requirements of the Habitats and Birds Directives, as these apply both within and without Natura 2000 sites in the performance of their functions.

**EAP18:** To protect the integrity of Natura 2000 sites in the West Region by ensuring that all Development Plans, Local Area Plans, other plans, frameworks, strategies and all other documents that are prepared or adopted during the lifetime of the RPG by either the Authority or by the relevant Local Authorities, are subject to relevant environmental assessment including Habitats Directive Assessment where appropriate and in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive. Consideration should be given to the need to undertake Habitats Directive Assessment or other relevant environmental assessment for projects which are progressed during the lifetime of the RPGs.

### Objectives

**EAO11:** Local authorities should set policies in their Development Plans to implement the actions as set out in the National Biodiversity Plan, as the conservation of biodiversity is an essential component of sustainable development.

**EAO12:** Local Authorities should ensure consistency in emphasis and approach to County/City Heritage Plans and Local Biodiversity Plans. Actions and goals should inform the preparation of Development Plans and Local Area Plans.

**EAO13:** Local Authorities shall support the protection of designated sites of international and national importance, and sites proposed for designation, including Ramsar Sites, Natura 2000 Sites (SPAs & SACs), NHAs, National Parks and statutory Nature Reserves and protected habitats and species.

**EAO14:** Development Plans should include policies to protect natural heritage sites designated in national and European legislation, and in other relevant international conventions, agreements and processes.

**EAO15:** Support the achievement of favourable conservation status for freshwater pearl mussels through implementation of S.I. No. 296 of 2009 ‘The European Communities Environmental Objectives (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) Regulations 2009’ and Freshwater Pearl Mussel Sub Basin Management Plans.

**EAO16:** To encourage and promote sustainable access to natural heritage, geological and geomorphological systems, sites and systems, where appropriate and ensuring the site remains protected. In the case of Natura 2000 sites, proposals for increased public access will be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment.

**EAO17:** Support the protection of Wetlands in the Region.

**EAO18:** Support the achievement of favourable conservation status of Annex I habitats, Annex II species, Annex I bird species and other regularly occurring...
migratory bird species and their habitats in the region.

**EAO19:** Support the protection of fisheries and shellfisheries and implementation of Pollution Reduction Programmes.

**EAO20:** To monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines through the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436) and Appropriate Assessment DoEHLG Guidelines.

**EAO21:** Promote the protection of non-designated habitats, species and local biodiversity features including rivers, wetlands, hedgerows, individual trees, streams, grassland, coastal areas, where appropriate through Development Plans.

**EAO22:** To support the protection of soils through the use of best practice techniques.

### 6.4 Protection of Aquifers

Aquifers are the saturated layers found beneath the surface of the ground. The West Region is supplied with this significant resource, with County Roscommon in particular highly dependent on groundwater as its drinking water supply source. Given the geology of the region, it is clear that this resource is vulnerable to pollution. The River Basin Management Plans for the Western and Shannon Regions provide a mechanism for the protection of aquifers from a combination of threats and seek to ensure that a common approach to protection is developed regionally and inter-regionally, given that our larger aquifers cross county and regional boundaries. The impact of developments in a single county or region must be examined in combination with total potential impacts. Local Authorities should develop agreed protocols for the protection of aquifers and develop common aquifer protection policies for cross-boundary aquifers.

**Objective**

**EAO23:** Implement agreed protocols regarding the protection of aquifers in the West Region through Development Plans and Local Area Plans ensuring that impacts on aquifers outside local authority functional areas are considered. This shall be undertaken in accordance with the objectives of the River Basin Management Plans.

### 6.5 Open Spaces & Recreation

The region is well served with recreational and amenity resources. Other opportunities exist such as the potential development of a regional theatre, either by the expansion of existing facilities, development on a brownfield site or suitably serviced greenfield site within a defined settlement centre.

Other areas have the resources to provide regional-scale facilities of a specific type, including those listed below. Development Plans should also make provision for such sustainable developments as:

- Water based activities on Lough Corrib, Lough Mask, Lough Conn, Lough Ree and other lakes.

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32 Please refer to Section 7.4 and 7.5.
- Walking & cycling activities using designated routes (e.g. Slí na Sláinte and National Trails Network). The region contains a number of long-distance walking routes that cross county and regional boundaries as well as loop and local walks including the Western Way, the Suck Valley Way, the Miners Way & Historical Trail and the Foxford Way.
- Camping and other similar activities in West Connemara and West Mayo.

**Policy**

**EAP19:** Support the sustainable development of leisure areas (described above) in a co-ordinated way between Mayo and Roscommon County Councils and Galway City and County Councils. Such cooperation should include the assessment of potential cumulative impacts on Natura 2000 sites through Habitats Directive Assessment.

**Objectives**

**EAO24:** Support the sustainable development and protect the integrity of long-distance walking routes and existing rights-of-way in the West Region as well as loop and local walks as an important recreational resource. This should take account of visual impacts and other environmental considerations (Section 6.1.1 applies).

**EAO25:** Support the protection and improvement of the environment where necessary in areas identified for increased development and transport related development. This shall be achieved through tree-planting regimes, landscaping and implementation of Smarter Travel objectives. Tree planting regimes and landscaping in the vicinity of Natura 2000 sites should be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment.

**EAO26:** To encourage high quality recreational and passive amenity areas in new developments in urban areas (Section 6.1.1 applies).

**EAO27:** Promote linear parks/walks (e.g. along rivers and streams) in urban areas through assessment of potential environmental impacts including Habitats Directive Assessment (where relevant) and which can be sustainably developed for local communities.

**EAO28:** Support the creation of amenity areas in appropriate locations that alleviate pressure on sensitive habitats (Section 6.1.1 applies).

**EAO29:** Promote suitable urban planting and support community planting schemes which are sensitive to urban/community needs but which are also sensitive to existing habitats and native species. Opportunities should be taken to create native habitats where possible and which is informed by ecological advice. The introduction of alien species in the vicinity of Natura 2000 sites and other ecologically sensitive ecological sites must however be avoided and such schemes must be pursued only following ecological advice and consultation with NPWS.

Refer also to ‘Section 5.2.5 Cycling & Walking’.

### 6.6 Marine Spatial Planning

Coastal areas are highly productive ecosystems, support rich biological diversity and fish resources. The Atlantic coastline supports the fishing industry, aquaculture and
mari-culture, tourism, shipping, oil and gas industries\textsuperscript{33}. Pressure on this finite resource includes over-fishing, pollution from land-based activities and hard structural development along the coastline including growing urban areas and tourism.

Coastal Erosion is likely to become more severe given the changes in weather patterns, increased precipitation and storm occurrence and sea level rises, thereby resulting in coastal flooding and erosion problems in vulnerable coastline areas.

The NSS (2002) identified nine gateways, eight of which have a coastal location. New proposals on Marine Spatial Planning will be forthcoming in the years ahead.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG), in association with local authorities are responsible for the management, use, activity and development of the physical environment up to Mean High Water Mark (MHWM). Powers introduced under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010, give Local Authorities jurisdiction as Planning Authorities over development on the foreshore that adjoins its functional area. The DCENR is responsible for all developments seaward of the MHWM and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has functions that extend across the landward-seaward divide.

The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive is closely aligned with the Water Framework Directive and was adopted in 2008. It promotes an ecosystem based approach to ensure the sustainable management of our marine environment. It aims to achieve good environmental status of the EU’s marine waters by 2020 and to protect the resource based upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend. It is designed to achieve the full economic potential of oceans and seas, in harmony with the marine environment and establishes Marine Regions on the basis of geographical and environmental criteria. Each region will develop a strategy.

A regional approach to coastal zone management or marine spatial planning is supported by the NSS. There are on-going activities that are exploring mechanisms to implement the principles in Ireland. The Regional Planning Authority promotes a co-ordinated approach to marine spatial planning and the River Basin Management Plans for the Western and Shannon River Basin Districts.

The Marine Institute which is located in Oranmore, Co. Galway is the national agency responsible for marine research, technology development and innovation (RTDI) established under the Marine Institute Act 1991. They seek to develop a thriving maritime economy in harmony with the ecosystem. In 2006 ‘Sea Change’ Strategy (2007 – 2013) was published to drive the development of the marine sector as a dynamic element of Ireland’s knowledge economy. In this, it seeks to accelerate the transformation of the marine sector into one that is able to exploit market led opportunities, create high value-added outputs and contribute to key national

\textsuperscript{33} Source: Heritage Council, 2003 \textit{Review of Integrated Coastal Zone Management & Principals of Best Practice.}
strategic objectives in an environmentally sustainable manner embracing technological opportunities.

Some of the West’s best known designated seawater bathing areas include its ‘Blue Flag’ and ‘Green Coast’ awarded locations.

Coastal tourism and industry development including port expansion and maintenance works such as dredging disturbs species and may result in a localised loss of habitat. Development in aquaculture must be balanced with requirements for coastal and environmental protection.

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<tr>
<td><strong>EAP20</strong>: Support the sustainable use of coastal resources (<strong>Section 6.1.1 applies</strong>).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EAP21</strong>: Promote and support a dynamic and sustainable coastal economy (<strong>Section 6.1.1 applies</strong>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EAP22</strong>: Support the implementation of ‘Sea Change – A Marine Knowledge, Research &amp; Innovation Strategy for Ireland 2007 – 2013’ and ensure that all proposals for aquaculture development in the Region are informed by Habitats Directive Assessment and other relevant environmental assessment, where appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EAP23</strong>: Promote and support the development of marine spatial planning in its role to protect and support the rural coastal communities of the West Region while protecting the environment (<strong>Section 6.1.1 applies</strong>).</td>
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<th>Objectives</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EAO30</strong>: The development of off-shore resources shall be carefully managed to ensure pollution or impact on landscape does not occur. Habitats Directive Assessment and other environmental assessment should inform the decision making process for the location of off-shore energy generating sites and must include consideration, through the process of Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment, of the qualifying features of Natura 2000 sites such as seabirds, which often occur some distance outside the site boundary (Please refer to CO14, CO15 &amp; IO54).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EAO31</strong>: Support the role of the Marine Institute in harnessing employment opportunities in the marine sector (<strong>Section 6.1.1 applies</strong>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EAO32</strong>: Support co-ordination of coastal zone management/ marine spatial planning issues between local authorities (<strong>Section 6.1.1 applies</strong>).</td>
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6.7 Climate Change & Air Quality

Climate Change refers to changes in climatic conditions whether through natural variations or as a result of anthropogenic influences. As a member of the European Union, Ireland is committed to a concerted response to the challenge represented by climate change. The aim is to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Under the Kyoto Protocol, we must limit the growth in our emissions to 13% above the 1990 levels in the 2008-2012 period and the EU has adopted a much more challenging reduction target for 2020. There are two binding targets for Ireland:
1) To deliver a 20% reduction, relative to 2005 levels, in greenhouse gas emissions, this target is to be reached by 2020 and excludes the sectors covered by the Emissions Trading Scheme; and
2) To increase the use of renewable energy sources, such as wind and wave power to 16%

The National Climate Change Strategy 2007 – 2012 provides a framework for achieving emissions reduction. The Climate Change response Bill was published in 2010 which sets out a range of measures to make a transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy.

There are many predicted medium to long term impacts of climate change which include changing weather patterns with temperature variations across all seasons, increased precipitation in the winter months and reductions in the summer months, changes in intensity and the impacts on water resources, levels of flooding and infrastructure storage capacities etc. It is expected that sea levels will rise. These factors may impact on the economy of the West Region and natural resource sectors such as agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries. There are other expected impacts on the natural landscape, flooding etc. The potential effects of climate change should be explored through the Development Plan (& SEA process) and appropriately control development in areas at risk of flooding.

### 6.7.1 Air Quality in the West Region

The West Region’s air quality remains generally good. In this regard we are fortunate to be located on the fringe of Western Europe, with a relatively mild climate and to have an almost continuous movement of clean air over the country. Localised areas of air and noise pollution may occur in areas of traffic congestion (including on roads and at ports, etc) and where demolition, construction or quarrying is taking place.

Radon is a colourless, odourless and tasteless gas that is naturally produced in the ground from the uranium present in small quantities in all rocks and soils. It is gradually released into the atmosphere, though it also moves into cavities beneath and within buildings. Where there is no radon barrier present, tiny radioactive particles can cause damage to lung tissue and this can lead to cancer.

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<tr>
<td><strong>EAP24</strong>: Support the implementation of the National Climate Change Strategy 2007 – 2012, Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 (S.I. 140) and Air Quality Regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EAP25</strong>: Support the dissemination of information for radon prevention in new buildings and mitigation in existing buildings through the advice of the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland.</td>
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CHAPTER 7: Social Infrastructure & Community Development Strategy

7.1 Introduction

The West Region has witnessed considerable social change in the past half century with membership of the European Union, periods of economic decline and growth, significant improvements in the provision of educational facilities and the development of a multi cultural society. In order to sustain the quality of life in the West Region, key social, cultural, community and recreational infrastructure are required.

Our social infrastructure includes health care services, educational facilities, childcare facilities, leisure, recreational and cultural facilities. The West Regional Authority will continue to promote community development throughout the region and foster social inclusion across local authority services. Much of our social infrastructure and community services are provided through local agencies and Government Departments.

7.1.1 Habitats Directive Assessment

The Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment has identified a number of Objectives and Policies in this Chapter of the Guidelines which, when implemented, have the potential to result in negative impacts on one or more Natura 2000 site and issues may therefore arise under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive which will require Appropriate Assessment at ‘lower plan’ or project level. Where such ‘lower plan’ or project level Appropriate Assessment concludes significant negative impacts, alternative solutions which comply fully with Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive may need to be considered. Please also refer to Appendix 4.

7.2 Healthcare

Good accessibility to health, medical care and community services will improve the quality of life for citizens in the West Region. Local authorities of the West Region will support the needs of existing and growing communities with regard to primary and community care. This includes both the mainland and island areas of the West Region.

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<tr>
<td>SCP1: Support the improvement and expansion of health and medical care services throughout the region in a planned and co-ordinated manner, including the hospital facilities, healthcare facilities, ambulance bases and ancillary support services and infrastructural requirements. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development (Section 7.1.1 applies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCP2: Support co-operation between the Local Authorities of the West Region and the Health Service Executive in order to identify suitable areas for primary healthcare facility provision. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Objectives

SCO1: Local Authorities shall encourage the development of surgeries and local health care centres in suitable locations subject to normal technical and environmental planning considerations (Section 7.1.1 applies).

SCO2: Support the location of nursing homes and other similar type multi occupancy residential facilities, within or located adjacent to existing settlement centres and services. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development (Section 7.1.1 applies).

SCO3: Support projects which integrate service provision for the elderly and young in the West Region, including off-shore islands of the West Region. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development (Section 7.1.1 applies).

SCO4: Support the development of high quality, multi-purpose centres providing a range of services, including childcare services. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development (Section 7.1.1 applies).

7.3 Education

Education is a key component in achieving a highly competitive West Region, both nationally and internationally. The West Region has benefited from good accessibility to educational facilities including primary, secondary, third-level, fourth-level, community college, post-leaving certificate, outreach programmes, apprenticeship programmes, FETAC and VTOS qualifications. The educational field is closely linked to the industrial and enterprise sectors throughout the region and has provided and will continue to provide significant opportunities for employment creation. Opportunities for up-skilling, training or re-training and initiatives for those unemployed are required in order to sustain the region in the economic downturn and allow re-employment when jobs become available.

Within the West Region, childcare is primarily provided by private and community sectors. The provision of such services shall be accordance with Planning and Development Acts and Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Guidance.

Policies – Third, Fourth Level & Outreach

SCP3: Support the development and expansion of all 3rd and 4th level facilities in the Region (Section 7.1.1 applies).

SCP4: Support accessibility to educational facilities, e-learning and ICT throughout the region and inter-regional links in the provision of such services.

SCP5: Support the fostering of strong links between educational institutions and industry and enterprise in the region.

SCP6: Support educational services and initiatives for unemployed, training and re-training and skills development.

Policies – Primary, Secondary Level & Childcare
SCP7: Support co-operation between the Local Authorities of the West Region and the Department of Education and Science and Office of Public Works to ensure co-ordinated provision of new primary and post primary educational facilities at suitable locations. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development (Section 7.1.1 applies).

SCP8: Support multi-campus school arrangements with primary and post primary adjoining providing more sustainable use of sites. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development (Section 7.1.1 applies).

SCP9: Support co-operation between local authorities and relevant development agencies in the provision of current and future educational and skills needs within the region.

SCP10: Promote the provision of day care and childcare facilities by both the public and private sectors in settlements and communities (Section 7.1.1 applies).

Objectives

SCO5: Each local authority shall consult the Department of Education and Science in the preparation of local area plans and shall be in accordance with Dept. of Education and Science and DoEHLG Guidelines.

SCO6: Support the reservation of sites for appropriate primary and secondary educational facilities close to existing or proposed community facilities such as libraries and sports facilities to benefit schools and local communities. This will be achieved through careful selection to ensure proper planning and sustainable development (Section 7.1.1 applies).

SCO7: Support the development of suitably located small childcare facilities subject to normal technical and environmental planning considerations.

SCO8: Support the provision of crèche facilities in mixed use/residential developments in existing settlements where linkages can be fostered with existing community facilities in accordance with DoEHLG Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Childcare Facilities (2001).

SCO9: Support a broad range of childcare facilities including part-time, full-day care, after school, etc. close to employment areas and where users of childcare facilities reside.

SCO10: Childcare facilities in areas outside of established settlements should only be considered in close proximity to existing educational or social facilities. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development (Section 7.1.1 applies).

7.4 Leisure Facilities

Recreational and leisure activities are major contributors to good health and a high quality of life. The West Region boasts many opportunities for its residents and visitors alike. The availability of leisure and recreational facilities provide

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34 This should be in accordance with Department of Education and Science & Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government publication 'The Provision of Schools and the Planning System – A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities’ and Technical Guidance Document 025 – Identification & Suitability of Sites for Primary School (DoES) and Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (DoEHLG, 2008).

35 This would include post offices; existing rural shops; national schools, etc.
employment opportunities and people are attracted to communities where there is a good social and cultural life and access to entertainment and amenity facilities.

The West Region will continue to develop leisure and recreation activities and provide accessible facilities for all sectors of the community which fosters social inclusion within marginalised groups such as the elderly, the young, people with intellectual learning disabilities, travellers and ethnic minorities.

### Policies

| SCP11 | Support good transport linkages from the more remote areas of the West Region to larger urban centres to foster wider use of sports and recreational facilities. Sustainable travel is the preferred option ([Section 7.1.1 applies](#)). |
| SCP12 | Foster co-operation between local authorities and relevant agencies in promoting and developing the recreational potential of the region and support appropriate and sustainable development when resources permit. Such co-operation should include the assessment of potential cumulative impacts on Natura 2000 sites through Habitats Directive Assessment, where relevant. |
| SCP13 | Support and assist in promoting national programmes to develop walking and cycle routes including the ‘Irish Trails Strategy’ and the ‘Cycle Strategy for the Western Region’. Plans proposing the development of such routes must be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment, where appropriate. |
| SCP14 | Protect the amenity of scenic and environmentally sensitive areas and promote the knowledge and appreciation of the natural amenities of the West Region. |
| SCP15 | Support a co-ordinated approach to the development and promotion of sustainable tourism on the Shannon River Corridor which is complementary to the natural environment and which is informed by relevant environmental assessment. The process must be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment including assessment of potential cumulative impacts on Natura 2000 sites. |

### Objectives

| SCO11 | Support local authority consultations with developers and local communities in the provision and improvement of recreational facilities. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development and will be subject to Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment Screening and/or other relevant environmental assessment, where appropriate. |
| SCO12 | All Development Plans and Local Area Plans shall encompass the principles of ‘Smarter Travel - A Sustainable Transport Future, A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020’ and ‘Ireland's First National Cycle Policy Framework’. All land use plans shall contain objectives to encourage cycling and sustainable modes of travel to ensure a good quality of life for all. |
| SCO13 | Seek to protect public walking routes and public rights of way, particularly in scenic areas, along inland waterways and the sea coast from development. |
| SCO14 | Facilitate the sustainable development of sports fields with ancillary facilities subject to normal planning and development assessment ([Section 7.1.1 applies](#)). |
| SCO15 | Support the enhancement of the quality of bathing water in accordance with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive and provision of swimming facilities throughout the West Region, subject to Habitats Directive Assessment |
7.5 Cultural Facilities
Our cultural facilities and cultural heritage enriches the quality of life of communities. It promotes and sustains cultural development in all its forms. Cultural development is a vital tourism asset for the West Region. Effective management and sustainable development of this resource is important for the region as a whole.

The West Region has a variety of cultural activities which are aimed at the local population and also at visitors from outside and within Ireland. The Ballina Street Festival & Arts Festival, Galway Arts Festival, and Boyle Arts Festival, are just some of the festivals which take place within the West Region.

Policies
SCP16: Support the development of cultural facilities such as theatres, exhibitions spaces and workshops. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development (Section 7.1.1 applies).
SCP17: Support co-ordination of local authorities and the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport for regional cultural facilities and cultural events.

Objective
SCO16: Support the work of the Heritage Office and Arts Office in each Local Authority including the preparation and implementation of Heritage Plans and Arts Plans.

7.6 Social Inclusion
Considerable social problems are still to be found in Irish society today. Social exclusion is experienced when individuals cannot access employment, live in poverty and have no input into decisions or policy that affects their lives. Social exclusion can therefore undermine families, individuals and communities.

‘Social Inclusion’ is a term that is used to describe the process by which efforts are made to ensure that people of all backgrounds, circumstances and experiences can achieve access to the facilities and services needed to achieve their own potential in life. Social Inclusion strives to create an inclusive society, reduced inequality and an increase in social unity.

In 2002 ‘The National Anti-Poverty Strategy’ was reviewed and it now seeks to counteract social exclusion within the community and provide high-quality public services to all. Local Authorities of the West Region shall have regard to the policies and recommendations of the ‘National Anti-Poverty Strategy’ and the ‘National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016’ in order to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable in the West Region.

Policies
SCP18: Seek to improve the quality of life for individuals and groups in
disadvantaged communities including people with disabilities, lone parent families, young people, the elderly, Travellers and other disadvantaged groups.

SCP19: Support the ‘Local Development Social Inclusion Programme 2007-2013’, including RAPID and CLÁR which support locally-based social inclusion interventions with emphasis on supporting people and communities suffering disadvantage and exclusion through a wide spectrum of locally-promoted actions (Section 7.1.1 applies).

SCP20: Support the Rural Transport Programme and its extension to serve a wider area (Section 7.1.1 applies).

### 7.7 Social Infrastructure Policy

Community facilities such as childcare facilities, sports/leisure centres, libraries, local shops, post offices, places of worship, arts and cultural centres etc. and the maintenance of key services are necessary to sustain local areas. They make communities vibrant and attractive places to live. These facilities should be integrated into existing settlement centres through a proactive approach in Development Plans and Local Area Plan processes and where funding permits. In the absence of such services, rural communities can become weak and suitable polices should be implemented to ensure that services are sustained.

The community and cultural needs of new communities should be recognised and diverse cultural, religious and social facilities should be developed in towns and villages within the West Region. This can also be achieved through close cooperation with local community groups who can outline their needs and can then participate in innovative delivery solutions.

### Policy

SCP21: Support the strengthening of the community and voluntary sectors throughout the West Region.

### Objectives

SCO18: Promote the use of library services and develop libraries as a community gathering place.

SCO19: Support the clustering of community facilities where it reduces maintenance and operational costs, improves security and where possible can be accessed by sustainable modes of travel. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development.
7.8 An Ghaeltacht & The Islands

The West Region has a significant strength in its Gaeltacht and islands communities which have a distinctive culture situated in a unique natural landscape of outstanding beauty. Many of the Gaeltacht and island areas of the West Region are home to an abundance of biodiversity (flora and fauna) which is protected at national and European level. These locations, which are generally peripheral, continue to face significant challenges. These challenges relate to connectivity and the sustainable development of infrastructural, economic and social needs which are mindful of the need to protect the landscape (this includes the legal requirements to protect Natura 2000 sites/network, designated species and their habitats).

Gaeltacht areas are found in County Galway, Galway City and County Mayo. Based on the 2006 Census of Population, the Gaeltacht of County Galway had a population of 40,052 which represented 47% of the total Gaeltacht population and 26% of total Gaeltacht land area.

The largest settlement areas are An Spidéal and An Cheathrú Rua. In 2008 there were 2,963 people employed in a full-time capacity in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in the Galway Gaeltacht. The Gaeltacht in Mayo had a total population of 10,868 (Census 2006) which represents 11.5 per cent of the total Gaeltacht population and 19% of the total Gaeltacht area. Belmullet is the largest town in the Mayo Gaeltacht and in 2008 there were 864 people employed in a full-time capacity in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in the Mayo Gaeltacht (Source: Údarás na Gaeltachta, 2009). Part of Galway City has Gaeltacht status which includes Knocknacarra and Menlo.

The sustainable growth and development of the Gaeltacht areas has significant potential for the Irish language, cultural heritage, enterprise and employment, recreation, leisure and tourism within the West Region. In 2003, the Official Languages Act was enacted seeking better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish.

Coastal communities found particularly on the islands of the West Region have a unique way of life and culture which should be maintained and protected. The islands are synonymous with a patchwork of stonewalls. 7 of the 16 inhabited islands of the West Region are also Gaeltacht islands. According to the 2006 census (CSO, 2006) there were 353 inhabitants on the islands of the West Region. The isolation of island life has created close-knit communities which are deeply rooted in traditions with many dependent on fishing and farming. Some of the islands have regular boat services which connect them to the mainland.

The Gaeltacht and Islands Programme invested significant funding in infrastructure and enterprise development in the Gaeltacht and island communities of the West Region. This investment provides tangible benefits across a range of projects and activities, which include better community access and related economic spin-offs from road and pier improvements, higher quality and more sustainable job opportunities arising from investment in building and upgrading office and factory
space, improved standards of living by provision of enhanced community facilities and services and preservation of the national language and culture.

Table 24: 2006 Population of County Mayo and County Galway Islands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Island Name</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County Mayo</td>
<td>Clare Island</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inis Bigil*</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inishcottle</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inishlyre</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inisturk</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clynish</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insegort</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Islandmore</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Galway</td>
<td>Inishbofin</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Árainn* (Inis Mór)</td>
<td>824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inis Oírr*</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inis Meáin*</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inis Bearacháin*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inis Treabhair*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inse Ghainimh*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Omey</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Gaeltacht Islands


Policies

SCP22: Support the coastal communities and island communities of the West Region.
SCP23: Protect the linguistic and cultural identity of the islands and Gaeltacht areas.
SCP24: Promote the linguistic, cultural and heritage tourism of the Gaeltacht and island areas.
SCP26: Promote sustainable social, physical and economic development of the Gaeltacht and the island areas of the West Region which ensure protection of landscape character and values and which are guided by impact assessments to minimise the potential effects of development on the environment including legally protected habitats and species. The potential for impacts on Natura 2000 sites must be determined through Habitats Directive Assessment, where necessary.

Objectives

SCO20: Support accessibility to Gaeltacht and island areas to facilitate the tourism sector and all sectors (Section 7.1.1 applies).
SCO21: Seek measures to promote the clear cultural identity of the Gaeltacht in the West Region.
CHAPTER 8: Next Steps & Implementation Strategy

8.1 Overview
Implementation of the spatial development vision for the West Region as set out in these Regional Planning Guidelines will be achieved by:
(1) Putting in place measures to support growth of the Gateways, Hub, Linked Hub and Key Towns in order of priority.
(2) Putting in place the types of investment needed to underpin the strategic development of the Region;
(3) Putting in place the type of structures that will implement the planning, local development, transport, rural development and other policies at local level that make the best use of investment.
(4) Monitoring the implementation process and identifying any needs for adjustment of policies in future reviews of the Guidelines.

8.1.1 Investment Priorities
The Regional Planning Guidelines represent an important spatial framework for the West Region, for local authorities, government departments and their agencies, as well as an opportunity for the private sector to co-ordinate and pool their investments to gain greater synergies and spin-offs for themselves and the region. For example, a concerted and integrated approach to matters such as access, servicing of land for housing and commercial purposes, urban renewal in a targeted set of locations can have dramatic effects in boosting local economic activity and wider regional benefits.

A key step in the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines will therefore be represented by various public bodies and private interests working together to support progress on investment priorities defined in the Guidelines.

The investment priorities referred to above can be divided into two main groups:
- Critical enabling investment priorities: these types of limited, key interventions necessary to underpin central elements of the approach of the Guidelines.
- Matching regional and local level priorities; this refers to prioritisation by the local authorities in the region, to match the critical national level investments.

The key short term regional strategic priorities are set out in section 1.5.

8.2 Overall Implementation
The overall implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines can be performed by the following existing structures that are in place at present:
- The Regional Authority and its Committees
- Local Authorities
- County and City Development Boards
- Other standing and ad hoc Committees
The Regional Authority will put in place a structure that allows for careful monitoring of the Regional Planning Guidelines. It is recommended that the Steering Group set up for the purpose of making of the Regional Planning Guidelines take on this monitoring role.

It is also recommended that a supplementary document be produced outlining the implementation implications of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Development Plans in the region. This document will be produced in co-ordination with the existing Steering Group.

8.2.1 Cross County Policies

Special attention should be given to cross county co-operating and co-coordinating policies on the following sectors:

- Water Quality
- Landscape management
  - Renewable energy and afforestation
  - Overhead structures for electricity and communications
- Natura 2000 sites
- Transport integration
- Waste Management

8.2.2 Cross-Regional Implementation

The integration of work in the region with that in other regions is a core focus of the National Spatial Strategy. Co-operation with bodies and agencies in the Border, Midlands and Mid-West Regions / adjoining Regional Authorities in particular must be on-going.

8.2.3 Environmental Assessment

Certain plans and projects that may arise from the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022 may require Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Habitats Directive or Appropriate Assessment (HDA/AA) or an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). In this regard national regulations and guidelines should be followed. Further information on SEA and HDA/AA can be found in the RPG supporting documents. The EIA Directive (85/337/EEC as amended) requires that certain developments be assessed for likely environmental effects before planning permission can be granted.

In reviewing development plans and drafting policy, planning authorities should be aware of the requirements of the Environmental Liability Directive (2004/35/CE), which enforces the ‘Polluter Pays Principle’. Where local authorities are considered “operators” under the legislation, they are now liable for environmental damage which they may commit (i.e. damage to water, soil, and species and habitats as defined in the legislation). The EPA has been designated as the ‘competent authority’ for the implementation of this Directive and should be consulted to ensure compliance.
8.3 Monitoring and Indicators

Monitoring is an important element of an implementation programme. Monitoring of the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines is supported through the targets and indicators set out in the following tables which can be reported on as necessary. Please also refer to the Strategic Environmental Assessment monitoring.

Table 25: Indicators and Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 3: Economic Development</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives set out in Chapter 3.</td>
<td>Level of employment</td>
<td>Retain Existing Jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GVA Data</td>
<td>Increase employment in both FDI and indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agency Assisted Employment data</td>
<td>Capitalise on the regions’ strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism Numbers</td>
<td>Seek to improve competitiveness of industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of competitiveness relative to other regions</td>
<td>Improve productivity by increasing skills base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of employment in key sectors such as food, renewables etc.</td>
<td>Promote rural enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment levels in key towns</td>
<td>Increase Spin-off enterprises from Gateway’s industrial base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Rural enterprises grant aided</td>
<td>Increased rural non-agriculture activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment in Retail/Services sector</td>
<td>Increase retail sector in all towns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased employment in Retail/Services sector</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26: Indicators and Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4: Settlement Strategy Population &amp; Housing</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives set out in Chapter 4.</td>
<td>Population of Galway Gateway</td>
<td>Increase the dynamic national and regional role of the Gateway and Hubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population of Hub/ Linked Hub</td>
<td>Promote balanced intra-regional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population of Key Towns</td>
<td>Integrate land use and transport/employment resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of new FDI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Transport &amp; Infrastructure</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives set out in Chapter 5</td>
<td>Numbers using public transport</td>
<td>Increase non-car modes of transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Levels using Car/Van to travel to work</td>
<td>Implement “Smarter Travel” aims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lengths of bus corridors</td>
<td>Improve/Upgrade remainder of National Primary Routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lengths of walking/cycle routes</td>
<td>Improve National Secondary Routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kilometres of N5/ N/M18 / N/M17 &amp; N26 upgraded and Galway Outer By-Pass progress</td>
<td>Reduce travel times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kilometres of National Secondary upgraded</td>
<td>Increase rail usage and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of service on Western Rail Corridor</td>
<td>Increase usage of Ports/Harbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Numbers of new stations completed</td>
<td>Increase airport usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion of double tracking projects</td>
<td>Improve water and waste water infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of commuter usage</td>
<td>Upgrade electricity network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase input from renewable energy sources to the grid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase availability of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 28: Indicators and Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 6: Environment &amp; Amenities</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives set out in Chapter 6</td>
<td>Numbers of nationally important sites open to public</td>
<td>Derive economic returns from archaeological Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General health of Pearl Mussels</td>
<td>Protect endangered native species e.g. pearl mussel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of employment in coastal areas</td>
<td>Increase economic activity in coastal areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of attainment of River Basin Management Plan objectives</td>
<td>Meet River Basin Management Plan objectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Length of additional track re-opened along the Western Rail Corridor
- Passenger numbers at airports and industrial/commercial activity nearby
- Level of investment in water and waste-water infrastructure
- Level of Unaccounted for Water on Public Water Supply Schemes
- Level of Compliance with Drinking Water Standards (as per EPA Annual Reports)
- Level of Compliance with Waste Water Works Effluent Standards (as per EPA Biannual Reports)
- “Grid 25” investments completed
- Level of output from renewable sources
- Level, cost and availability of broadband

- high grade competitively priced broadband
Table 29: Indicators and Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 7: Social Infrastructure &amp; Community Development</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives set out in Chapter 7</td>
<td>- Level of public transport/roads investment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Numbers with Third Level education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Kilometres of new cycle ways/ walkways (see Chapter 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Numbers of new swimming pools pitches etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Level of employment in Gaeltacht and islands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Improve healthcare infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Improve access to Higher Level education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Improve leisure facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Improve economic activity in Gaeltacht and island communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.4 Future Review of Regional Planning Guidelines

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000 - 2010, the Core Strategy of Local Authority Development Plans must show that development objectives are consistent, as far as practicable with national and regional development objectives as set out in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines. The process of monitoring the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines will also include an evaluation of indicators and targets by the Regional Authority, such as the ones above, to determine:

(1) The degree to which overall goals and aims of the guidelines are being achieved;

(2) The degree to which implementation of the NSS is being achieved;

(3) The degree of fit between local planning policies and the regional guidelines and the need for any adjustment that will also support implementation of the NSS.

The review process will be conducted by the Regional Authority on an annual basis, where possible, though it should be noted that not all data for indicators listed may be available annually. These guidelines therefore have an inbuilt review mechanism which will closely monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Guidelines over the next six years. Data gathering and regular reporting on review issues is aimed at preparing the way for a full review of the Guidelines by 2016.
Appendices
APPENDIX 1: The RPGs in a Planning Context

European Spatial Development Perspective, National Spatial Strategy & Regional Planning Guidelines

To address the social, economic and spatial differences across the E.U., the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) was agreed and published by the European Commission in 1999 with three fundamental goals of economic and social cohesion; conservation and management of natural resources and cultural heritage; and more balanced competitiveness of the European territory. Following on from this, the National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020 (NSS) was published to achieve a balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth. Subsequently RPGs were prepared for each of the eight Regional Authority Areas in order to establish a regional focus of the NSS and which would translate into lower level policy plans and documents.

The RPGs for the West Region 2004 – 2016 were informed and guided by a wide range of EU Directives transposed into Irish law. Other conventions, programmes and strategies which Ireland have agreed or signed were also informative in the process. A number of EU Directives have evolved since 2004 which were of particular importance in the preparation of the new RPGs. They include the SEA Directive which requires plan makers to assess the likely significant effects on the environment due to implementation of a plan or programme; the Floods Directive 2007 which aims to reduce and manage flood risk to human health, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity through assessment of the risk and a co-ordinated programme of measures; Groundwater Directive 2006 on the protection of groundwater against pollution and deterioration; Draft Soils Directive 2006 for the protection and sustainable use of soils and to address areas of degradation; Energy Performance in Buildings Directive 2005 providing for minimum building standards; and the Freshwater Fish Directive 2006 aimed at improving water quality to support freshwater fish.

The new Regional Planning Guidelines are accompanied by, and informed by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report, a Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA) Appropriate Assessment Screening & Natura Impact Statement which examines the likely impacts on the environment of implementing the RPG and the likely impact on Natura 2000 sites; and a Regional Flood Risk

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37 Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation.
Appraisal which examines areas of potential flood risk and includes strategic policies and measures to be implemented in lower level plans.

The review and update of the Regional Planning Guidelines has been affected by, and will affect a range of plans and programmes.

**Planning Act Framework**

The Planning and Development Act (PDA) 2000-2010, Part II, Chapter III provides the impetus for the creation of Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs). In accordance with section 26(1), the Ministerial Direction (15th December, 2008) and the Planning and Development (Regional Planning Guidelines) Regulations 2009, the 2004 – 2016 RPGs have been reviewed. The following is a brief summary of the requirements and recent amendments in the Planning Act framework.

- **Planning and Development Act 2000 - 2010**
  Under the PDA 2000-2010, the RPGs are required to address projected population trends and settlement and housing strategies; economic and employment trends; the location of industrial and commercial development; transportation (including public transportation); water supply and waste water facilities; waste disposal; energy and communications networks; provision of education, health care, retail and other community facilities; preservation and protection of the environment and its amenities, including archaeological, architectural and natural heritage; protection and management of the landscape, consideration of the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing RPGs\(^{38}\), the promotion of sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas and the promotion of measures to reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and address the necessity of adaptation to climate change.

A key element of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 is the requirement for an evidence based core strategy in Development Plans which shows how the housing strategy is consistent with the Regional Planning Guidelines and the National Spatial Strategy. Development Plans will be required to be consistent with the RPGs in force for the area to help achieve coherence between national, regional and local planning.

- **Planning and Development (Regional Planning Guidelines) Regulations 2009**
  The Regulations include the requirement to use National and Regional Population Targets prepared by the DoEHLG to inform settlement and housing strategies in the preparation of the new RPGs. The RPGs 2010 – 2022 must take account of appropriate assessment, if required, under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC\(^{39}\), be

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\(^{38}\) In accordance with SEA 2004 Regulations S.I. No. 435 and S.I. 436.

\(^{39}\) Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC & DoEHLG Circular Letter SEA & NPWS 1/08 - The directive indicates the need for plans and projects to be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment if the plan or project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site, but is likely to have a significant effect either individually or in combination with other plans or projects on a site.
consistent with any guidelines on the planning system and flood risk management\textsuperscript{40} in addressing the issue of flood risk and undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment in accordance with SEA Regulations\textsuperscript{41} to determine the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the guidelines.

\textbf{Strategic Infrastructure Act 2006}

The Strategic Infrastructure Act 2006 introduced a number of changes relating to developments of strategic importance such as energy infrastructure, transport infrastructure and environmental infrastructure. These applications are now determined by An Bord Pleanála if the development would be of strategic, economic or social importance to the State or the region where it would be situated, the development would contribute significantly to the achievement of any of the objectives in the National Spatial Strategy or in Regional Planning Guidelines in force in respect of the area where it would be located; or the development would have a significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority.

The decisions of the Board will be based on Regional Planning Guidelines which are reflective of current policy and data.

\textbf{Implementing the National Spatial Strategy: 2010 Update and Outlook}

The DoEHLG have produced the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) Update & Outlook Report (October, 2010) to re-affirm the commitment to implementing long-term planning frameworks such as the NSS. It contains a statement of new priorities and objectives, taking account of experience since 2002 and the new environmental, budgetary and economic challenges. It discusses why the NSS is relevant and important, what has worked well so far, implementation challenges remaining, spatial trends since 2002, pointers for future action and recommended implementation priorities with regard to planning and investment, co-ordination of regional investment, vision and leadership and encouraging more sustainable patterns of urban and rural development.

\textbf{National Development Plan 2007 - 2013}

The National Development Plan is closely linked with the NSS, aligning with the NSS objectives and prioritised capital investment to deliver more balanced social, economic and physical development between the regions. It focuses on Gateways and Hubs to achieve economic growth and provides for major investment in the rural economy. Given the current challenging economic climate, it is likely that much of NDP indicative investment will be constrained.

\textsuperscript{40} DoEHLG (2009) The Planning System & Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities

\textsuperscript{41} European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations S.I. No. 435 of 2004 and Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations S.I. No. 436 of 2004.
Transport Plans – Transport 21
Transport 21 forms part of the National Development Plan and comprises of a ten year investment mechanism for the development of the national road network, public transport and airports. It seeks to promote balanced development, to connect communities and promote prosperity, to meet transport needs and underpin regional and national competitiveness. It recognises that a quality, integrated transport system is critical for competitiveness, return on investment and regional development.

The NDP outlines the need for a road network with completed major inter-urban routes, upgraded links between the NSS Gateways, an improved non-national road network and delivery of an upgraded public transport system in line with Transport 21. In the West this includes work on the Western Rail Corridor which is a key public transport infrastructure, upgrading the rail network, rail safety, quality bus corridor and other bus priorities and improving public accessibility, public bus and transport for the mobility impaired.

Smarter Travel – Sustainable Transport
This is a policy document which sets out a broad vision for the future and establishes objectives and targets for transportation, how the integration of landuse and transportation planning can be achieved. The Regional Planning Guidelines includes policies which focus population growth in compact urban areas, namely the Gateway, Hub, Linked Hub and other towns with good public transport connections. The main objectives are to reduce dependency on car travel and long distance commuting, increase public transport modal share and encourage walking and cycling, improve quality of life and accessibility for all, improve economic competitiveness through maximising the efficiency of the transport system, alleviating congestion and infrastructural bottlenecks, minimising the environmental impact by reducing localised air pollutants and greenhouse gases and improving security of energy supply by reducing dependency on imported fossil fuels.

Climate Change Policy
The National Climate Change Strategy 2007 – 2012 aims to ensure that Ireland reaches its targets under the Kyoto Protocol (which was ratified by Ireland in 2002). The Strategy provides a framework for reducing Ireland’s greenhouse gases and builds on a commitment to sustainable development, addressing climate change and energy issues. Ireland agreed to a target of limiting its greenhouse gases to 13% above 1990 levels by the first commitment period 2008 – 2012 and is legally bound to meet this target. It is likely however that Ireland will exceed this target due to a high dependence on fossil fuels and increases in energy usage. Significant increases in energy efficiency and the use of alternative energy sources such as wind, ocean and biomass are required. Efforts are also required to protect native species and vulnerable ecosystems from the effects of climate change.

The DoEHLG & OPW Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines require assessments of the impacts of climate change and its implications on development patterns ensuring there is a program of measures to avoid flooding. The River Basin

Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 -2022 141
Management Plans for the Western and Shannon Regions provide information on climate change trends and impacts, paving the way for future action in later River Basin Management cycles.

**Development Plans & Local Area Plans**
The Regional Planning Guidelines are intended to provide a regional focus of the objectives of the NSS which will guide Development Plans and lower level plans. The Development Plan is a key instrument in the development of a county, city or town over a 6 year period. It sets an agenda and guides the sustainable development of homes, industry, commercial activity, transport, amenity areas, telecommunications, energy, water and water facilities, housing, the protection of the environment and heritage and translates the key elements of strategic level policies to every-day development management decisions, driving the economy and improving the quality of life for the residents and visitors to each county within the West Region.

**River Basin Management Plans for the Shannon & Western River Basin Districts**
The European Union (EU) Water Framework Directive 2000 encompasses previous EU Directives aimed at reducing pollution and is transposed into Irish legislation by the European Communities Water Policy Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722). It aims to provide a strengthened system for the protection and improvement of all internal and coastal or estuarine waters and to achieve at least ‘good status’ by 2015. In order to achieve this, Ireland has been divided into eight River Basin Districts based on a catchment approach.

The River Basin Districts serve as administrative areas in which the responsible authorities coordinate their water management actions for their region and identify effective measures to protect and ensure improved water quality. River Basin Management Plans for the Western and Shannon International River Basin Districts (which fall within the West Regional Authority area) have been adopted in 2010. Programmes of Measures are being put in place to resolve water quality issues over a set period of time and the works necessary to bring water bodies to the required standard.

**Connaught Regional Waste Management Plan 2006 – 2011**
Prepared under the 1996 Waste Management Act (as amended), the fundament strategy is grounded in integrated waste management and the EU and National waste hierarchy with an emphasis on waste prevention and minimisation. The statutory objectives are:
- To prevent or minimise the production and harmful nature of waste;
- Encourage and support the recovery of waste;
- Ensure that such waste as cannot be prevented or recovered is safely disposed of; and
- Address the need to give effect to the polluter pays principle, in relation to waste disposal.
Atlantic Gateways Initiative
The National Spatial Strategy, 2002 recognised the combined development potential of the four Gateway Cities of Cork, Limerick-Shannon, Galway and Waterford (Atlantic Gateways) in establishing a liked metropolitan region in the western and southern parts of Ireland with the critical mass of population, infrastructure, connectivity and competitiveness which would be capable of acting at the international level in development terms. The NSS envisaged that the Atlantic Gateways would complement the metropolitan corridor on the eastern side of the island of Ireland and encompassing the cities of Dublin and Belfast. The ‘Atlantic Gateways Corridor Development Frameworks Overview Report’ indicates that the RPGs 2010 – 2022 must set clear growth management objectives between them for each of the four Atlantic Gateway Corridors for subsequent application within new City and County Development Plans and Local Area Plans, addressing the issue of over-zoning, the trend towards decline of central city areas and rapid growth of dormitory-type settlements in recent years which developed along the main commuting corridors.
APPENDIX 2: Relevant Plans & Policy Documents

International/EU Level
- UN Convention of Biological Diversity 1992
- European Landscape Convention 2000
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) 1971
- European Convention on the Protection of Archaeological Heritage (Valletta Convention) 1992
- Granada Convention for the Protection of Architectural Heritage of Europe 1985
- European Network of Biogenetic Reserves 1976
- Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) 1979
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention) 1979
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992
- Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe (Bonn Convention) 1993
- Local Agenda 21
- Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR) 1997
- EU Climate Change Programme (ECCP II);
- Kyoto Protocol 1997
- MARPOL Convention 1973
- Gothenburg Strategy 2001
- European Biodiversity Strategy 1998
- European Spatial Development Perspective 1999
- EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive 2001
- EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive 1985
- EU Floods Directive 2007
- EU Groundwater Directive 2006
- EU Surface Water Directive 1975
- EU Drinking Water Directive 1998
- EU Bathing Water Directive 1976
- EU Habitats Directive 1992
- EU Wild Birds Directive 1979
- EU Freshwater Fish Directive 1978 & 2006
- EU Shellfish Waters Directive 1979
- EU Dangerous Substances Directive 1970
- EU Sewage Sludge Directive 1986
- EU Nitrates Directive 1991
- EU Integrated Pollution Prevention Control Directive 2008
- EU Air Quality Framework Directive 1996
- COMAH (Seveso II) Directive – European Communities (Control of Major Accident Hazards involving Dangerous Substances) Regulations 2000

**National Level Plans and Programmes (including Investment Programmes), Policy & Strategy**
- National Development Plan 2007 - 2013
- National Spatial Strategy 2002 - 2020
- National Climate Change Strategy 2007 – 2012
- Sustainable Development – A Strategy for Ireland 1997
- National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)
- Transport 21
- National Disability Strategy 2004
- National Biodiversity Plan 2002
- National Heritage Plan 2002
- Irish National Forest Standard 2000
- Indicative Forest Statement 2008
- Smarter Travel – Sustainable Transport 2009 - 2020
- National Cycle Policy Framework – Smarter Travel
- Strategic Rail Review 2003 (Buzz Hamilton)

**National Level Guidelines**
- Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines 2004
- Architectural Heritage Protection for Places of Worship 2003
- Best Practice Urban Design Manual 2008
- Childcare Facilities Guidelines 2001
- Design Standards for New Apartments 2007
- Development Contribution Scheme for Planning Authorities 2003
- Development Management Guidelines 2007
- Development Plans Guidelines 2007
- Implementation of Regional Planning Guidelines - Best Practice Guidance 2010
- Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines 2000
- Provision of Schools and the Planning System 2008
- Quarries and Ancillary Activities 2004
- Retail Planning Guidelines 2005
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) 2004
- Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines 2005
- Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas 2009
- Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures 1996
- Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006
- The Planning System and Flood Risk Management - Guidelines 2009
- Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities - Best Practice Guidelines for Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities 2007
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009
Regional Planning Guidelines

Regional Level Plans

- River Basin Management Plan for the Western River Basin District 2010
- River Basin Management Plan for the Shannon River Basin District 2010
- Connaught Regional Waste Management Plan 2006 – 2011
- Atlantic Gateways Initiative
- Border Midlands Western Regional Operational Programme 2007 – 2013

Local Level Plans/ Documents which may be indirectly influenced by the Guidelines:

- County & City Council Corporate Plans
- Galway Transportation and Planning Study 2003
- County & City Council Heritage Plans
- County & City Council Biodiversity Action Plans
- County & City Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development
- County & City Council Housing Strategies
- County Landscape Character Assessments & Appraisals

EPA Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Systems Serving Single Houses (p.e. ≤ 10) 2009
Guidance Note on Core Strategies 2010
APPENDIX 3: How Strategic Environmental Assessment & Habitats Directive Assessment informed the RPGs 2010 - 2022

Introduction
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA) Appropriate Assessment are intrinsically linked. The SEA looks at a wide range of potential environmental effects from implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines. The HDA looks specifically at the likely effects from the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines on Natura 2000 sites (European designated sites - Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas) and species protected under the Habitats Directive and the Wild Birds Directive. The HDA reports (Screening & Natura Impact Statement) are therefore an important component in examining the overall potential significant environmental effects (in the SEA) of implementing the RPGs.

Strategic Environmental Assessment
Under the Planning & Development (SEA) Regulations 2004 S.I. 436, the Regional Planning Guidelines incorporate the requirement to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The following headings represent the key steps in the SEA process.

- **SEA Scoping Issues Paper 2009 (August, 2009)**
  This document was used for consultation purposes with Local Authorities and the EPA; The Issues Paper and submissions received in accordance with the Planning & Development Act 2000-2010 at the pre-Draft RPG stage were incorporated into the Environmental Report.

- **SEA Environmental Report of the RPGs (January 2010) (incorporating the Scoping & Submissions received during consultation)**
  The SEA Environmental Report consists of a baseline information on the environment of the West Region focusing on biodiversity, flora and fauna; population and human health; landscape and soil; water; air and climate; material assets; cultural heritage and the interrelationship between these factors. The HDA report feeds into the biodiversity, flora and fauna section and has interrelationships with water, landscape, cultural heritage, etc.

  Following on from the baseline of environmental information, a summary of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Regional Planning Guidelines emerged. Alternative scenarios for the development of the West Region were explored and environmental protection objectives were proposed based on international and national best practice objectives and which would reflect the need to protect the environment from significant environmental effects of implementing the Regional Planning Guidelines.
The environmental protection objectives were assessed alongside the goals, policies and objectives outlined in the Regional Planning Guidelines and where necessary, mitigation measures were proposed to remove, offset, reduce or mitigate significant environmental effects. Goals, policies or objectives were adjusted or removed from the Regional Planning Guidelines based on the ‘matrix assessment’ and ‘mitigation’ sections.

Please refer to the Mitigation Chapter and Appendix 1 of the SEA Environmental Report for further details. In general, however, the main amendments included rewording of policy/objectives and caveat approach with additional text, e.g. where ‘other relevant environmental assessment may be required’ at Development Plan stage, etc. Some policies negated the potential impact of other policies and these are identified in the ‘Mitigation Chapter’. Mitigation from the Habitats Directive Assessment fed directly into this section and amendments were made to the RPG document.

Monitoring measures for the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Regional Planning Guidelines were proposed which will develop into an iterative process as information becomes available; and a system of monitoring develops.

- **SEA Screening of Draft RPGs & ‘Director’s Report on Submissions’ (June, 2010)**
  The ‘Director’s Report’ contained a summary of the submissions received during the second phase of public consultation. The Screening examined all proposed alterations to the Draft RPGs based on the ‘Director’s Report’ and included alterations based on submissions received from the designated Environmental Authorities (EPA, DoEHLG, DCENR).

- **Amended SEA Environmental Report based on amendments to Draft RPGs following on from the ‘Director’s Report on submissions’**
  The Environmental Report was updated or amended taking into account recommended modifications to the Draft RPGs, and incorporated the SEA Screening of the ‘Director’s Report on submissions’. This document considered the proposed alterations in combination with existing Draft RPGs.

- **SEA Statement**
  This document summarises how environmental considerations and the Environmental Report were factored into the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022, summarises how submissions and consultations were taken into account, reasons for choosing the Guidelines as adopted in light of other reasonable alternatives considered and monitoring measures and arrangements over the lifetime of the Regional Planning Guidelines.

- **Monitoring**
  Following the adoption of the reviewed Planning Guidelines for the West Region a system of Monitoring will commence. It will monitor the significant environmental effects due to the implementation of the Guidelines and seeks to identify any unforeseen adverse effects which may arise so that remedial action can be taken if
necessary. Existing monitoring (e.g. water quality analysis) will be utilised. The Guidelines will be reviewed again in 6 years and monitoring will contribute to this next review.

**Habitats Directive ‘Appropriate Assessment’**
The requirement for Habitats Directive Assessment which is also known as ‘Appropriate Assessment’ arises out of Article 6 of the European Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Regional Planning Guidelines are deemed (under this Directive) to have the potential to have implications on the conservation objectives of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or a Special Protection Area (SPA) or they may have significant effects either individually or in combination with other plans or programmes. Accordingly the following reports were undertaken:

  This document examines the conservation objectives and qualifying interests of the Natura 2000 sites, goals, policies and objectives of the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines and proposes mitigation measures which were incorporated into the Draft RPGs.

- **Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment Screening Report of Draft RPGs & ‘Director’s Report on Submissions’**
  This examines the Draft RPGs and proposed alterations to the Draft RPGs based on the ‘Director’s Report on Submissions’\(^{42}\). It also takes a holistic view and re-examines all Natura 2000 sites in the West Region. The sites to be included in a further assessment ‘Natura Impact Statement’ are outlined.

- **Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment: Natura Impact Statement (NIS) on the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines**
  This document examines those sites which are potentially affected by goals, policies and objectives of the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines incorporating the alterations arising out of the ‘Director’s Report on Submissions received’. This document is an extended ‘Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment’ and primarily produced the following outcome:
  - Re-wording of policy and caveat approach to certain policies
  - Suggested new objectives and policies, specific objectives
  - Suggested additional text to be included in the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines

  It also identifies 21 categories of potential threat to Natura 2000 sites and links the relevant threat to the goals, policies and objectives being analysed.

- **Natura Impact Conclusion Statement**
  This document summarises how considerations of the potential impact on Natura 2000 sites from implementing the Regional Planning Guidelines was taken into account prior to the adoption of the RPGs.

- **Monitoring**

\(^{42}\) That is, submission received during public consultation on the Draft RPGs.
Monitoring will be integrated into the SEA Monitoring process through a series of objectives, indicators and targets.
APPENDIX 4: RPG Habitats Directive (Art. 6) Requirements - Additional Notes

Local Authority Development Plans and Local Area Plans shall outline the requirements of the Habitats Directive Assessment process in accordance with DoEHLG/NPWS Guidelines. Development shall not be permitted or specific policy adopted unless the Habitats Directive Assessment process has been carried out (where relevant) and it concludes that there is no threat to a Natura 2000 site habitat or that which might be mitigated to maintain the integrity and conservation objectives of the site.

Local Authority Habitats Directive Assessments should also:

- Ensure that identified threats are examined holistically and in combination with other threats listed in this appendix or otherwise as set out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

- Where mitigation measures are possible, the amount of land occupied by a development and indirect impacts should be minimal taking account of habitat size, location, season, spatial patterns of habitats and species, etc.

- No effluent discharge that would be liable to have a negative impact on a habitat shall be permitted unless and until it has been concluded either that no negative impact would arise or that any such impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated.

1. Major population growth and housing development will require the provision of wastewater facilities. The major centres identified for growth (i.e. Galway, Castlebar-Ballina, Tuam and Roscommon) have or will require waste-water treatment systems expansion that discharge to river systems. Many of these systems contain are Natura 2000 sites and contain habitats and species which would be vulnerable to inadequately treated wastewater discharges. The development of housing in such areas must be contingent on, and be stated to be contingent on, the provision of waste-water treatment systems with a capacity to produce waste water discharges of a standard that will not impact negatively on downstream Natura 2000 sites.

2. Major residential developments have the potential to fragment or erode habitat. Emissions generated from traffic, noise, light etc. all have potential disruptive impacts. Proposed residential development located in or in close proximity to a Natura 2000 site shall be accompanied by a Habitats Directive Assessment which will examine if the development will have a negative impact (including in-combination effects) on a Natura 2000 site or that where such an impact is likely it can be mitigated satisfactorily.

3. Major residential developments, enterprises developments and specific industrial developments (ex-situ Natura 2000 Sites) may produce effluent which may impact on a Natura 2000 site and this must be examined. Discharges shall be in accordance with discharge regulations in order to achieve the objectives of the River Basin...
Management Plans. Many of the water systems which are the subject of discharges contain Natura 2000 sites that would be vulnerable to nutrient enrichment. It must be shown that the development will not have an adverse impact on downstream sites unless in rare circumstances where there are ‘Imperative Reasons of Overriding National Interest’ (IROPI) involved and must be decided by the European Commission.

4. In addition to the impact from wastewater, industrial and enterprise developments and tourism developments may have other negative implications for Natura 2000 sites. These implications may be related to the physical destruction of a habitat, air pollution from traffic, noise and other general activities and light pollution. No industrial or enterprise policies or objectives shall be adopted or development permitted unless it can be demonstrated through the carrying out of the Habitats Directive Assessment process that the development will not impact negatively on a Natura 2000 site or that where such an impact is likely it can be mitigated satisfactorily.

5. Where Natura 2000 sites are not impacted on, any development of enterprise, industry and tourism development will be contingent on the effluent arising from it being such that it will not impact on any waste-water treatment system whether private or public, that will prevent that system discharging a final effluent that meets the requirements of discharge regulation in order to achieve the objectives of the River Basin Management Plans nor should any development of this nature impact negatively on the natural environment unless demonstrated that appropriate mitigation measures can address the impacts.

6. Tourism and rural enterprise developments may be proposed in areas without a piped waste-water collection and treatment system and this has implications for the quality of groundwater in the region. Development which requires the provision of a private treatment system should be considered in the context of the following:
   - The quality of the groundwater into which the effluent will discharge and the need to preserve or improve that quality
   - The quality of the effluent proposed to be discharged from the waste-water treatment process
   - The quantity of the effluent proposed to be discharged
   - The capacity of the ground to enhance the quality of the final effluent and ability of treated effluent to percolate to, or reach groundwater
   - Proposals for the management and maintenance of the treatment system
   - The capacity of the Local Authority to monitor the quality of the discharge
   - Direct, indirect and cumulative effects on Natura 2000 sites and their conservation objectives
   - Potential flood risk to any part of the wastewater treatment system

Permission should not be granted unless the Planning Authority is satisfied that the quality of the groundwater will not be impaired and policies to this effect should be included in Development Plans.

7. Policies for the development of mineral extraction sites must be contingent on, and be stated to be contingent on it being demonstrated that the development will not impact negatively on a Natura 2000 site. Where a development cannot be shown not to have a negative impact even with mitigation measures being adopted, then the development cannot be permitted except in the very rare circumstances of IROPI
arising. Even where Natura 2000 sites are not impacted on, any mineral extraction development will be contingent on effluent arising from it being such that it will not impact on any wastewater treatment system whether private or public, that will prevent that system discharging a final effluent that meets the discharge regulation requirements and which would meet the objectives of the River Basin Management Plans.

8. Major commercial development may require the provision of wastewater facilities. The major centres identified for commercial growth have or will require wastewater treatment systems that discharge to river systems. Many of these systems contain Natura 2000 Sites that would be vulnerable to inadequately treated wastewater discharges. Therefore, policies for the development of commercial activities in such areas must be contingent on, and be stated to be contingent on, the provision of wastewater treatment systems with a capacity to produce wastewater discharges of a standard that will not impact negatively on downstream Natura 2000 Sites. Where a development cannot be shown not to have a negative impact even with mitigation measures being adopted, then the development cannot be permitted except in the very rare instances of IROPI.

9. In addition to the impact from wastewater, commercial developments may have other negative implications on Natura 2000 sites. These implications may be related to the physical destruction of a habitat, the impact of air emissions, the impact of traffic, noise and other general activities and light pollution. No commercial policy shall be adopted or development permitted in or in proximity to a Natura 2000 site unless it can be demonstrated through the carrying out of the HDA process that the development will not impact negatively on a Natura 2000 site or that where such an impact is likely it can be mitigated satisfactorily.

10. Where Natura 2000 sites are not impacted on, any commercial development will be contingent on effluent arising from it being such that it will not impact on any wastewater treatment system whether private or public, that will prevent that system discharging a final effluent that meets the requirements of the appropriate River Basin District Management Plan.

11. Distributed population growth in areas without a piped wastewater collection and treatment system has implications for the quality of groundwater in the area. The RBD analyses have identified areas within the region where the quality of the ground-water is not adequate. Any development that requires the provision of a private treatment system should be considered in the context of the following –

- The quality of the groundwater into which the effluent will discharge and the need to preserve or improve that quality
- The quality of the effluent proposed to be discharged from the wastewater treatment process
- The quantity of the effluent proposed to be discharged
- The capacity of the ground to enhance the quality of the final effluent and ability of treated effluent to percolate to, or reach groundwater
- Proposals for the management and maintenance of the treatment system
- The capacity of the Local Authority to monitor the quality of the discharge
- Direct, indirect and cumulative effects on Natura 2000 sites and their conservation objectives
- Potential flood risk to any part of the wastewater treatment system
Permission should not be granted unless the Planning Authority is satisfied that the quality of the groundwater will not be impaired and policies to this effect should be included in Development Plans.

12. In considering all transport and other infrastructure proposals, regard must be had to the requirements of the Habitats Directive including the carrying out of an assessment of the implications for any Natura 2000 site that might be at risk from the proposed development.

13. Where a specific road proposal is being considered that is liable to impact negatively on a Natura 2000 site, such a proposal must be assessed in accordance with the requirements of HDA process. If such assessment demonstrates that such a development cannot take place without impacting negatively on any Natura 2000 site, then the development cannot proceed unless the rare circumstance of IROPI.

14. Where a specific rail proposal is being considered that is liable to impact negatively on a Natura 2000 site, such a proposal must be assessed in accordance with the requirements of the HDA process. If such assessment demonstrates that such a development cannot take place without impacting negatively on any Natura 2000 site, then the development cannot proceed unless the rare circumstance of IROPI.

15. Areas that contain or are designated as Natura 2000 or other ecological sites may also coincide with areas suitable for wind energy development. DoEHLG Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006) should be followed when identifying areas suitable for wind energy. When exploring areas of suitability, Natura 2000 sites and other ecological sites should be placed in the ‘not normally permissible’ category. The HDA process must be undertaken at plan level and where mitigation is satisfactory, an individual development may be permitted in an ‘open for consideration’ category, which has undergone the HDA process and which has concluded that the proposed development would not have a negative impact on such a site or that mitigation measures which would eliminate such impacts can be identified and applied.

16. Where the river system to which the final effluent from waste-water treatment plants installed to service smaller towns and villages discharges, contain Natura 2000 sites that would be vulnerable to inadequately treated waste-water discharges the installation of a waste water treatment system and the amount and nature of effluent it proposes to treat must be contingent on, and be stated to be contingent on, the production of wastewater discharges of a standard that will not impact negatively on downstream Natura 2000 sites.

   Even where Natura 2000 sites are not impacted on, the installation of any wastewater treatment system will be contingent on the effluent arising from it being such that it will give rise to a final effluent that meets the discharge requirements and would not compromise the objectives of the River Basin Management Plans.

17. Many areas that contain or are designated as Natura 2000 sites are also liable to be included in areas designated as being of landscape importance. In considering the policies to apply in such areas regard shall be had to the designation of the area as a Natura 2000 site. As noted above, in implementing these guidelines, full regard must be had to the requirements of the Habitats Directive including the carrying out
of an assessment of the implications for any Natura 2000 site that might be at risk from any proposed development.

While all Natura 2000 sites are of key importance, a number have particular importance as they contain species that are of particular relevance as indicators of environmental quality. A key species in this regard is the Fresh Water Pearl Mussel and all Planning Authorities must take particular care that activities permitted within their areas do not pose a threat to species such as this, whether they lie within or without the Authority’s functional area. Where such an impact is identified the development must be mitigated or, where that is not possible must not be implemented unless the procedure relating to developments of IROPI has been completed.

18. Recreational development may require the provision of waste-water facilities that discharge to river systems. Many of these systems contain Natura 2000 sites that would be vulnerable to inadequately treated wastewater discharges. Therefore, policies for the development of recreational facilities in such areas must be contingent on, and be stated to be contingent on, the provision of waste-water treatment systems with a capacity to produce waste water discharges of a standard that will not impact negatively on downstream (ex-situ) Natura 2000 sites.

19. Even where Natura 2000 sites are not impacted on, any recreational development will be contingent on effluent arising from it being such that it will not impact on any waste-water treatment system whether private or public, that will prevent that system discharging a final effluent that meets discharge requirements and which would meet the requirements of the River Basin Management Plans.

20. Recreational developments may be proposed in areas without a piped waste-water collection and treatment system and this has implications for the quality of groundwater in the region. Any development that requires the provision of a private treatment system should be considered in the context of the following –

- The quality of the groundwater into which the effluent will discharge and the need to preserve or improve that quality
- The quality of the effluent proposed to be discharged from the waste-water treatment process
- The quantity of the effluent proposed to be discharged
- The capacity of the ground to enhance the quality of the final effluent and ability of treated effluent to percolate to, or reach groundwater
- Proposals for the management and maintenance of the treatment system
- The capacity of the ground to enhance the quality of the final effluent
- Proposals for the management and maintenance of the treatment system
- The capacity of the Local Authority to monitor the quality of the discharge
- Direct, indirect and cumulative effects on Natura 2000 sites and their conservation objectives
- Potential flood risk to any part of the wastewater treatment system

Permission should not be granted unless the Planning Authority is satisfied that the quality of the groundwater will not be impaired and policies to this effect should be included in Development Plans.

21. In addition to the impact from waste-water, recreational developments may have other negative implications for Natura 2000 sites. These implications may be related to the physical destruction of a habitat, the impact of air emissions, the impact of
traffic, noise and other general activities and light pollution. No policy regarding commercial development shall be adopted or development permitted in or in proximity to a Natura 2000 site unless it can be demonstrated through the carrying out of HDA process that the policy or development will not impact negatively on a Natura 2000 site or that where such an impact is likely it can be mitigated satisfactorily.

22. In considering the management of flood risk the Planning Authorities should have regard to current flooding risks and the impact of climate change, sea level rise and extreme weather events on existing defences and on the flood risk of any proposed development.
   ▪ Where land is identified for flooding that is or contains a Natura 2000 site, the Planning Authority should carry out the HDA process to assess the impact of such a designation before a decision to reserve the land for that purpose is made.

23. The European Union Water Framework Directive imposes significant requirements for the protection of water bodies. Local authorities will be required to continue to co-ordinate activities to achieve objectives through the River Basin Management Plans for the Shannon and Western River Basin Districts.

24. In considering the impact of any proposed policy or project that is liable to give rise to a waste-water treatment demand, the Planning Authority shall consider the likely cumulative impact of such demands that are liable to arise from any source and shall not adopt any policy or permit any development that would result in the capacity of the area’s waste water treatment system to be exceeded by the cumulative demands of successive developments.

25. In considering the impact of any proposed policy or project that is liable to give rise to impacts on a Natura 2000 site, the Planning Authority shall consider the likely cumulative effect of such impacts that are liable to arise from any source and shall not adopt any policy or permit any development that would result in the deterioration of the site’s habitat status either by itself or cumulatively with other developments or activities.

Note: IROPI – Under the Habitats Directive the only justification for damaging a qualifying ‘priority’ sites are considerations relating to human health and public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance of the environment, or further to an opinion from the European Commission on ‘imperative reasons of over-riding public interest’ (IROPI). However IROPI can only be permitted after an assessment is made in line with Habitats Directive Article 6 procedures and where there are no other alternatives and an agreement has been reached with the European Commission.
APPENDIX 5 – CSO Boundaries for the Gateway City, Linked Hub Towns, Hub Town and County Town listed in Chapter 4, Tables 15 – 16 (CSO Census, 2006)
Galway City

Legend

[CSO Boundary]
Tuam Town
Roscommon Town

Legend

CSO Boundary

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## Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Appropriate Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACA</td>
<td>Architectural Conservation Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMW</td>
<td>Border, Midland &amp; Western</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Common Agricultural Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFRAMs</td>
<td>Catchment based Flood Risk Assessment &amp; Management Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>Combined Heat and Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLÁR</td>
<td>Ceantair Laga Árd Riachtanais</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Central Statistics Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAFF</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture, Fisheries &amp; Food</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCENR</td>
<td>Department of Communications, Energy &amp; Natural Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoEHLG</td>
<td>Department of Environment, Heritage &amp; Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECJ</td>
<td>European Court of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>Electoral Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIS</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPA</td>
<td>Environmental Protection Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESB</td>
<td>Electricity Supply Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESDP</td>
<td>European Spatial Development Perspective</td>
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<td>ETS</td>
<td>Emissions Trading Scheme</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
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<td>FETAC</td>
<td>Further Education &amp; Training Award Council</td>
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<td>FRMPs</td>
<td>Flood Risk Management Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>GHG</td>
<td>Green House Gas</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNP</td>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSI</td>
<td>Geological Survey Ireland</td>
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<td>GTPS</td>
<td>Galway Transportation &amp; Population Study</td>
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<td>GVA</td>
<td>Gross Value Added</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDA</td>
<td>Habitats Directive Assessment (see AA)</td>
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<td>Health Service Executive</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information &amp; Communications Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGH</td>
<td>Irish Geological Heritage (IGH Programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IoT</td>
<td>Institute of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>IROPI</td>
<td>Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest</td>
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<td>IT</td>
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<td>kV</td>
<td>Kilovolt</td>
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<td>MHWM</td>
<td>Mean High Water Mark</td>
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<td>National Parks &amp; Wildlife Service (DoEHLG)</td>
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<td>R &amp; D</td>
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<td>RAPID</td>
<td>Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment &amp; Development</td>
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<td>Record of Monuments &amp; Places</td>
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<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific &amp; Cultural Organisation</td>
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