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# Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report Non-Technical Summary

## of the Draft Wexford Destination and Experience Development Plan

June 2025



**Strategic Environmental Assessment  
Environmental Report  
Non-Technical Summary  
of the Draft Wexford Destination and Experience Development Plan**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This document is the non-technical summary (NTS) of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) detailed in the Environmental Report (ER). It has been prepared by Roughan & O'Donovan (ROD) on behalf of Fáilte Ireland (FI) as part of the SEA process of the proposed Draft Wexford Destination and Experience Development Plan (DEDP), referred to hereafter as "the Draft Plan".

The purpose of this ER is to:

- Inform the development of the Draft Plan.
- Identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment resulting from the implementation of the Draft Plan and reasonable alternatives.
- Provide appropriate mitigation measures to prevent, reduce and offset any significant negative effects on the environment, if any, from implementing the Draft Plan insofar as possible.
- Consult with statutory authorities and the public to provide an opportunity for submissions on the Draft Plan and the SEA process.

This ER has been prepared in accordance with the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment and the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations S.I. 435 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No.200 of 2011. This non-technical summary (NTS) should be read in conjunction with the SEA ER and the Draft Plan.

## 2. CONTENTS OF THE PLAN

The Draft Plan is a five-year tourism strategy plan prepared for County Wexford, developed through a programme of research and consultation guided by the V.I.C.E. (Visitor, Industry, Community, Environment) model for sustainable tourism. The approach within the Draft Plan is based on the views of visitors, the tourism industry and local community stakeholders.

The Draft Plan incorporates existing and new projects across the county while also exploring the potential for new tourism development opportunities to grow the value of the tourism sector across Wexford. The approach focuses on the need for greater levels of connectivity between Wexford's coastal, rural and urban experiences and how the county can increase its appeal to international visitors. The county will play a key role in achieving Ireland's Ancient East regional tourism development goals over the next five years. Developing the tourism experience across the county will ensure Wexford will become a key contributor to disrupting future regional visitor flows and ensure the region retains visitors for longer.

The Draft Plan concentrates on developing three strategic destination development objectives namely: Wexford Coastal Experience, Tourism Axis Towns – Developing Tourism Hubs, and County Wexford – Rural and Outdoors (as illustrated in Figure 2-1) and how these each integrate with each other to enhance the Wexford Visitor Experience.



**Figure 2-1** Visitor Destination Experiences across Wexford County (Source: Fáilte Ireland Draft DEDP).

The key objectives of the Draft Plan are:

- Ensure the visitor experience in Wexford is brought to life through a mix of tourism products and experiences that will attract domestic and international visitors and retain them in the destination for longer.
- Unlock the economic potential of tourism by progressing key initiatives that will disperse tourists across the county.
- Strengthen the value of tourism to local communities by providing sustainable employment opportunities.
- Develop a sustainable basis for commercial tourism development by enhancing and creating compelling destination experiences that excite consumers and buyers alike.
- Create more reasons to attract leisure visitors on a year-round basis to Wexford and providing the opportunity for visitors to interact with local people as part of an authentic Wexford experience.
- Develop the role of Wexford as driver of regional tourism development and influence visitor flows across the South East.

The implementation of the Draft Plan is based on stakeholder commitment to project delivery over the course of the five-year plan. A steering group will be formed to implement the Draft Plan with key stakeholders responsible for project ownership and/or partnering in the delivery of the agreed actions identified within the Draft Plan.

### 3. SEA PROCESS


Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt a plan or programme, or in this case the Draft Plan. The stages of the SEA process are outline in Figure 3-1 below.



**Figure 3-1 Key Stages of the SEA Process**

The key stages of the SEA process are summarised in Table 3-1 below as it relates to the preparation of the Draft Plan.

**Table 3-1 Summary of the Key Stages of the SEA Process**

| SEA Stage  | Role within the SEA Process  | Status   |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Screening</b>   | Determines whether there would likely be significant environmental effects and if an SEA is required to be undertaken.<br><br>In accordance with the requirements of the SEA Directive and transposing Regulations S.I. 435/2004 (as amended), Fáilte Ireland undertook an SEA Screening having regard to the criteria in Schedule 1 “Criteria for determining whether a plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment”. | Fáilte Ireland undertook an SEA pre-screening in March 2024 and determined that an SEA is required and to proceed directly to Scoping stage. |
| <b>Scoping &amp; Consultation</b>                        | The purpose of Scoping is to scope the SEA environmental factors that will be assessed in the ER. It also provides any opportunity to consult with the relevant environmental authorities to draw an opinion on the scope and level of detail of the environmental information to be included in this ER. The scoping consultation feedback will inform the preparation of the ER and the Draft Plan, as appropriate.                    | The Scoping Report was issued in June 2024 for a period of 4 weeks to the statutory consultative bodies.                                     |
| <b>Environmental Assessment and Environmental Report</b> | The purpose of this stage is to identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment as a result of the implementation of the Draft Plan as well as the consideration of alternatives. The ER records this assessment and is published with the Draft Plan for public consultation.   | This Report is the output of this stage of the SEA process and is informed by the Scoping stage and in turn, informs the Draft Plan.         |
| <b>Consultation</b>                                      | The Draft Plan and the SEA ER are issued for public consultation for a period of no less than 4 weeks.   | Current stage in the process.                           |

| SEA Stage                  | Role within the SEA Process   | Status  |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| SEA Statement & Monitoring | The purpose of this stage is to identify how environmental considerations and consultation feedback has been taken into account in finalising the Draft Plan and the SEA process including finalisation of the monitoring programme. The output of this stage is the SEA Statement. | The SEA Statement will be published following the finalisation of the Plan. |



## 4. KEY RELEVANT PLANS AND PROGRAMMES

The development of the Draft Plan and this SEA is informed and carried out in the context of hierarchy of legislation, plans and programmes. Every effort has been made to ensure the SEA and in turn, the Draft Plan is aligned with and contributes to the achievement of the environmental protection objectives set in these key plans and programmes. The Draft Plan is a non-statutory plan and does not form a framework for development consent.

The review of key plans and programmes ensures the SEA and in turn, the Draft Plan, is aligned with and contributes to the achievement of the environmental protection objectives set in higher level plans and policies. Further detailed review of relevant legislation, plans and programmes are summarised in **Appendix A** of the ER. Appendix A is not intended to be an exhaustive list but is focused on plans, policy or programmes considered to be relevant to the Draft Plan and informing the Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) used to inform the assessment of the Draft Plan.

### 4.1 National Context

#### 4.1.1 National Planning Framework

The **National Planning Framework** (NPF) sets out Ireland's spatial planning policy direction up to 2040. The *NPF* is to be implemented through *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies* (RSEs) and lower tier county development plans and associated local area plans (LAPs) local area Plans. The development and implementation of the Draft Plan is required to be consistent with and conform with these higher-level plans, including provisions relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management that have been integrated into these plans. The First Revision of the *NPF* takes into account the changes that have occurred since the preparation of the first NPF in 2018. It focuses on accelerating compact sustainable development and housing delivery and balanced regional development. It acknowledges the clear link between climate action and the potential for investment generation, employment and jobs, including in connection with the offshore wind industry and green technology. It also continues to address changing demographics and digitalisation. The First Revision of the NPF is referred to as the 'NPF' hereafter.

The National Policy Objectives (NPOs) contained in the NPF inform the policy context for the future development of the tourism sector including coastal management, green and blue infrastructure development, circular economy, supporting the preservation of heritage and culture and enhancement of biodiversity, supported by an integrated into the planning and development system.

#### 4.1.2 Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030

The *Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* published by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in November 2024 provides a tourism policy framework for Irish tourism for the period to 2030. The policy sets out strategic objectives to ensure a resilient and flourishing tourism sector in 2030. It builds on the preceding policy by including measures on climate change and sustainability, along with strong set of proposals to support the sector to grow revenue. The policy aims to balance economic development with environmental and social considerations. The Policy Framework includes a total of 61 policy proposals, high level targets and will continue to provide strategic direction for the development of sustainable tourism sector.

## 4.2 Regional Context

### 4.2.1 Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region

At a regional level, the *Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region* sets out the strategic regional development framework for the southern region which includes County Wexford. The primary aim of the RSES is to implement the *National Planning Framework* at the regional tier and to support the achievement of balanced regional development. The *Planning and Development Act 2000* (as amended) requires that all city and county development plans and variations are consistent with the RSES and relevant national policy, with draft development plans or proposed variations to development plans referred by the relevant local authority to the Regional Assembly.

Wexford Town is identified as a key town with a significant population to be a self-sustaining regional growth driver. Key infrastructural requirements have been identified for Wexford Town which align with the DEDP and support the development of tourism in the area, including improving road infrastructure links in Wexford and investment in Rosslare Europort to improve capacity and services for passengers. This is supported by Regional Policy Objective 16 which focuses on developing the strategic location and supporting infrastructure to improve capacity, transport and attractiveness of the town. These actions are consistent with the Draft Plan and

### 4.2.2 Ireland Ancient East Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023-2027

The *Ireland's Ancient East Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023 – 2027* (IAETDS) is a roadmap for the industry and all stakeholders involved in tourism in the region to navigate the challenges and steer a course towards recovery and continued success. The IAETDS provides a 10-year vision for the region and a five-year action plan for development which also supports the preparation of the Wexford DEDP.

Strategic Objective 3 of the IAETDS is to “Ensure the region is easy to access, navigate and consume” with a strategic initiative to support development of coastal tourism experiences in coastal areas such as Wexford.

## 4.3 County Context

### 4.3.1 Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028

At county level, the *Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028* sets out the strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of County Wexford. The Plan includes a variety of policy objectives for various sectors including supporting the development of tourism together with environmental protection and achieving sustainable development.

The preparation of the DEPD is directly supported in the plan namely through **Policy Objective TM07** relating to the development and implementation of *Destination Experience Development Plans* and continued collaboration with Fáilte Ireland and tourism stakeholders. The preparation of the Draft Plan supports the implementation of these higher-level plans and policies.

## 5. RELEVANT ASPECTS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

This section of the ER examines the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment or the baseline environment. Establishing the environmental baseline assists with the identification, evaluation, and monitoring of the likely significant effects of the Draft Plan on the environment. Much of the baseline has been compiled using the latest (2024) iteration of the EPA report *'Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024'*, as well as other up-to-date resources, datasets and indicators.

### 5.1 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

Within County Wexford there are a number of areas designated for protection under the Natura 2000 network. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are legally protected under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and are selected for the conservation of Annex I habitats and Annex II species. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are protected under the European Union Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds 2009/147/EC. There are 10 SPAs and 17 SACs within the County. The Nationally Designated Sites in Wexford include one NHA and 33 Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) which are detailed in the SEA ER.

A number of protected areas, under the requirements of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) are present in Wexford, such as

- WFD Nutrient Sensitive Areas (Lake, Coastal & Transitional waterbodies) – The Barrow Estuary (SE\_100\_0300), Barrow Estuary Lower (SE\_100\_0250), the Slaney Estuary Upper (IE\_SE\_040\_0300), Slaney Estuary Lower (IE\_SE\_040\_0200), and Wexford Harbour (IE\_SE\_040\_0000).
- Salmonid River - the River Slaney (IE\_SE\_040\_0300).
- WFD Shellfish Areas - Waterford Harbour (IE\_SE\_100\_0100), Wexford Harbour Outer (IE\_SE\_040\_0000), Wexford Harbour Inner (IE\_SE\_040\_0200), Bannow Bay (Bannow Bay) and Waterford Harbour (IE\_SE\_100\_0100).

Under the EU Habitats Directive, there is one freshwater Pear Mussel (*Margaritifera*) Sensitive Areas within County Wexford: Slaney-Dereen. *Margaritifera* Sensitive Areas are protected under Annex II and Annex V of the EU Habitats Directive.

#### 5.1.1 Existing Pressures and Threats

The key pressures and threats in relation to biodiversity are as follows:

- Tourism based infrastructure can impact designated sites during both construction and operation. The development of the infrastructure required to increase visitor numbers to Wexford and to promote outdoor activities linked to natural heritage areas could lead to the loss of habitat, including habitats that are Qualifying Interests of European Sites, and also habitats that support Qualifying Interest habitats and species.
- Direct species mortality is possible as a result of site clearance, tree felling and vegetation removal as part of any infrastructure construction required to promote visitors to Wexford.
- Disturbance can occur during construction and operation of infrastructure as a result of noise, both within and outside the footprint of the development. Increased visitor numbers and events can result in disturbance to wildlife.
- Water quality impacts arising from both the construction and the operation of the required infrastructure have the potential to directly and indirectly affect a wide

range of habitats and species. Accidental pollution events can result in sediment and pollutants entering sensitive watercourses, resulting in a deterioration in water quality.

- Invasive species pose a threat to biodiversity and ecosystem functioning and could inadvertently be introduced or spread through increased visitor numbers or construction plant and vehicles during construction works.

## 5.2 Population and Human Health

The 2022 Census recorded a population of 163,527 in Wexford. Between Census 2016 and 2022, the population of County Wexford experienced a growth rate of 9%, which is above the national average of 8%.

Population distribution and growth forecasts are important indicators of potential pressure on resources and infrastructure as well as potential exposure to pollution and risk.

Human health is linked to several environmental factors including water, air, noise and soil through which there is potential for negative interactions. Hazards and impacts that can arise from these factors have been considered separately in their respective sections of the Environmental Report, with regard to their current baseline and any likely effect or change given the implementation of the Draft Plan.

### 5.2.1 Existing Pressures and Threats

Existing pressures and threats to population and human health include:

- Effects to residential accommodation (availability and affordability);
- Effects to populations in high radon areas;
- Effects due to flood events and landslide events (refer to Section 5.7 of the ER);
- Pressure on critical infrastructure if not planned and managed appropriately (refer to Section 5.8 Material Assets);
- Exacerbating effects of climate change (refer to Section 5.6 Climate);
- Effects on all other environmental factors depending on the nature of the tourism activity e.g. water environment, air quality, land use change, etc.

## 5.3 Water

The Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EU (WFD) outlines the standards and practices for monitoring the health of waterbodies within the EU. The objective of the WFD national monitoring programme is to provide a national picture of the water status in accordance with the WFD criteria and identify water bodies at risk of failing to achieve the objectives of the WFD.

Water quality that meets the requirements set by the WFD is an important standard to keep if the Draft Plan is to succeed in drawing tourists. At the same time, the increased pressure from the tourist industry and the associated development to support it could threaten to diminish this quality, if unmanaged.

County Wexford is underlain by five water catchments, (1) Owenavorragh, (2) Ovoca-Vartry, (3) Barrow, (4) Ballyteigue-Bannow, and (5) Slaney & Wexford Harbour. Within these catchments are 24 smaller sub catchments in the county.

Most ground waterbodies underlying County Wexford have 'Good' quality status. Small areas underlying Wexford town, Enniscorthy and Castlebridge North have 'poor' groundwater quality.

Bathing waters in County Wexford are of particular importance as a tourism asset and thus, their quality and maintenance are of significance to the Draft Plan. The most recent EPA report on bathing water quality indicates that all bathing water areas in Wexford met the minimum requirements to be considered 'sufficient', while the majority were of 'good' or 'excellent' quality.

County Wexford has records of historic flooding of the River Slaney and River Nore, as well as in coastal settlements of Courtown, Rosslare, and Wexford town. Flooding events are expected to become more frequent and intense due to climate change related factors including:

- New rainfall patterns;
- Rising sea levels; and
- Erosion.

### 5.3.1 Existing Pressures and Threats

Changes in land use and development is putting pressure on water quality, which can include tourism activities. Significant pressures to water bodies have been identified for water bodies 'At Risk' of not meeting the water quality objectives under the WFD. Significant pressures on the aquatic environment (in terms of number of bodies at risk of not achieving 'good' status) is from agriculture, hydro-morphology, urban wastewater, forestry, urban runoff, anthropogenic activities. The tourism sector interacts with many different sectors and therefore, can influence water quality and quantity particularly during peak periods.

## 5.4 Air Quality

Air quality regulations in Ireland are based on EU legislation and *S.I. No. 739/2022-Ambient Air Quality Standards Regulation 2022*, which incorporate the ambient air quality limits set out in *Directive 2008/50/EC*. Nationally, emissions for all air pollutants, except ammonia, have been decreasing. The EPA's *Air Quality in Ireland Report 2023* identifies that the two largest pollutants in Ireland are particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide, arising from domestic use of solid fuel and petrol or diesel vehicles, respectively. The ability to further reduce these emissions is threatened by the continued growth of industry, particularly in the areas of agriculture and transport.

The *Clean Air Strategy for Ireland First Progress Report 2024* indicates that transport is a key sector which requires additional focus to ensure continued improvement in air quality. Transport related air emissions are the most likely interaction between tourism and air quality. There are currently two active national air quality monitoring stations in Wexford. The Plan supports sustainable transport options including walking, cycling and public transport that have lower emissions than private car travel.

### 5.4.1 Existing Pressures and Threats

Poor air quality can lead to health problems for the population such as respiratory and cardiovascular system diseases, which can lead to other major long-lasting health problems. It also negatively affects biodiversity, aquatic environments, and ecosystems as atmospheric NO<sub>x</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub> can change the characteristics of water bodies and harm aquatic life.

## 5.5 Climate

The *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021* builds on the 2015 Climate Act and commits Ireland, in law, to transition to a climate resilient and climate neutral economy by 2050 in alignment with the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal. The first Climate Action Plan (CAP) was published in 2019 and is updated annually. The Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP25) is the third Climate Action Plan to be prepared under the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021*, thus making CAP25 the fifth iteration, building upon actions taken over previous years since Ireland committed to reducing GHG emissions by 51% by 2030 (compared to 2018 levels) and achieving climate neutrality.

CAP25 outlines what Ireland needs to achieve in 2025, so the nation is prepared to take on the challenges of the second carbon budget period 2026-2030. CAP25 “reaffirms Ireland’s position as a leader when it comes to addressing the challenges posed by climate change and reinforces the Government’s commitment to delivering on ambitious emission reduction targets.” According to the EPA’s latest data, Ireland’s emissions fell to a level below the 1990 baseline for the first time in 2023, this milestone was reached with a 50% increase in population levels, compared to 1990 population statistics.

A new *Tourism Policy Framework* was published by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in November 2024. In relation to the climate related high-level targets to 2030, these include:

- Fáilte Ireland will establish a baseline figure for tourism associated emissions and subsequent shorter term Tourism Action Plans will contain tourism specific emission reduction and biodiversity targets.
- Measures will be put in place to ensure that the average carbon emissions associated with each visitor bed night is reduced by 60% by 2030.
- In relation to overseas visitors, the focus will be on those markets generating greatest revenue for lowest carbon footprint. The target will be to achieve an average annual 5.6% year-on-year growth in the revenue generated by overseas visitors in the period to 2030.

As a result of the Climate Action and Low Carbon (Amendment) Act 2021, every Local Authority (LA) in the country is required to develop a Local Authority Climate Action Plan (LACAP) that will be in effect for five years. The LACAP will ensure a coordinated local response to climate change and bring together critical stakeholders across local government, communities, and businesses to build a vision for a climate neutral and resilient future. The Wexford County Council *Climate Action Plan 2024-2029* sets out how the Council will work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from their operations and in the services that they provide to the people of Wexford. The plan includes a number of actions including:

- Actively translate national climate policy to local circumstances with the prioritisation and acceleration of evidence-based measures.
- Assist in the delivery of the climate neutrality objective at local and community levels.
- Identify and deliver a Decarbonising Zone (DZ) within the local authority area to function as a test bed for a range of climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity measures.

In order to align the activity of businesses in the tourism industry with government emissions targets, Fáilte Ireland have developed a Climate Action Programme. The

programme provides businesses with expert mentoring and guidance in reducing carbon emissions energy and water usage, and waste production. The tourism sector is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and as such, the programme aims to drive change in business in line with Ireland's commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

### 5.5.1 Existing Pressures and Threats

Tourism is a cross-cutting sector that depends on all other sectors (e.g. biodiversity, water, agriculture, transport, energy, waste, etc.). Tourism plays a vital role in the global economy, generating employment, driving economic growth, supporting local communities, and improving the quality of life in many destinations. However, it is also a significant source of GHG emissions this dual role makes tourism both a contributor to and a casualty of the climate crisis. Climate change poses a serious threat Wexford's status as a leading domestic and international travel destination, as increasingly extreme weather events, coastal erosion endanger its extensive beaches and coastal communities, as well as its extensive cultural and natural heritage. It is generally accepted that without meaningful action to curb emissions, the long-term sustainability of tourism itself is at risk. The implementation of adaptation and resilience measures across all sectors will require significant collaboration. The current pace of delivery of actions detailed in the Governments CAP25 is slow.

Climate change poses serious risks to tourism, including coastal erosion, flooding, and extreme weather—especially in vulnerable areas like Wexford. These impacts can damage attractions, infrastructure, and agriculture, disrupting the visitor experience. Since many tourism sites are tied to natural landscapes, protecting nature will be essential for adaptation. While some regions may benefit from longer seasons or shifts in visitor preferences toward cooler climates, this could also strain local resources. Overall, climate change will significantly affect tourism, requiring coordinated action across sectors and stakeholders.

### 5.6 Land and Soils

Consideration of land and soil management is essential to sustainable development as these resources support the built environment, food production processes, water, resources for development and other ecosystem services.

The CORINE 2018 land cover survey identifies Wexford's land cover predominately composed of Pastures and Arable Lands. Other common land cover type in the county includes beaches, dunes and sand along coastal areas, inland wetlands, mixed forests, coniferous forests, moors and heathlands, peat bogs, complex cultivation patterns, discontinuous urban fabric and non-irrigated arable land.

Within Ireland, much of the east coast is vulnerable to coastal erosion, and this has put many coastal communities and settlements at risk. The following areas have been identified within the *Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028* as prone to erosion: Kilpatrick, Ardamine, Glascarrig, Killincooly to Ballinesker, Rosslare, Tacumshin to Kilmore Quay, Ballyteige Burrow to Cullenstown and Fethard.

There are several geological heritage sites in County Wexford including Wexford Harbour (WX043), the Screen Hills (WX036), the Blackstairs Mountains (WX006), Curracloe Beach and The Raven Point (WX016), Hook Head (WX023) and several other along the southern coastline. These sites are sensitive to human interaction and are protected under the *Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028* for conservation.

### 5.6.1 Existing Pressures and Threats

The dominant pressures on land and soils include soil sealing, erosion, organic matter decline, compaction, salination and landslides. Tourism can create pressure on land and soils due to direct land use change, creating soil sealing and/or impacting geological heritage sites.

## 5.7 Material Assets

Material assets, encompassing both human-made infrastructure and natural resources, play a pivotal role in supporting tourism and broader economic development. These assets include essential utilities such as water supply, wastewater treatment, drainage systems, transportation networks, and coastal defences, as well as land and marine resources that underpin agriculture, aquaculture, energy, and tourism.

Tourism is a strong economic driver in the county, bringing an estimated €157 million from domestic tourists and €104 million from international tourism in 2018, with significant benefit to businesses, the community and residents (*Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028*). In tourism-intensive regions, such as those in County Wexford, the sector can exert considerable pressure on existing infrastructure, particularly water, waste management, and road systems. This pressure highlights the need for sustainable planning and investment in resilient infrastructure to accommodate seasonal population surges.

Natural material assets, especially the coastline, are central to the county's tourism appeal. Coastal towns like Rosslare, Wexford Town, Kilmore Quay, and Courtown benefit economically from marine and coastal tourism, which is the largest employer in Ireland's ocean industries. However, increased tourism can threaten ecological integrity through overdevelopment and infrastructure expansion. Balancing tourism growth with the protection of these natural assets is essential. The continued maintenance and protection of coastal and marine environments not only preserve their ecological value but also sustain the tourism and fishing industries that rely on them. Strategic planning and investment in material assets are therefore critical to ensuring the long-term viability and sustainability of tourism in the region.

The Tourism sector has historically been an important sector of the Wexford economy. The WCDP 2022-2028 identifies that in 2018, Wexford accounted for approximately 7% of all domestic trips, and 3% of overseas visits. The Draft Plan seeks to increase tourism from domestic and overseas visitors particularly through the Europort which provides connectivity with mainland Europe. Wexford's diverse natural landscape, including mountains, rivers, and an extensive coastline enhances its appeal. It's coastal towns and long sandy beaches draw large numbers of visitors, particularly during the summer peak.

The Draft Plan seeks to engage with key tourism assets to help promote sustainable tourism practices at each destination. The tourism industry offers potential positive opportunities to provide for social and economic benefits, including supporting and diversifying the rural economy and ecosystem services.

### 5.7.1 Existing Pressures and Threats

- Access to and management of natural assets, such as forests, mountain areas and beaches;
- Inadequate provision and access to sustainable transport infrastructure continuing to result in dependency on road-based transport infrastructure;



- Increased tourists can put pressure on water and waste management systems, including water supply and wastewater treatment facilities, particularly during peak period;
- Climate change, rising sea levels, and increased natural disasters will put pressure on all material assets, both natural and man-made, particularly in coastal and sensitive ecological areas.

## 5.8 Architectural, Archaeological and Cultural Heritage

Ireland is rich in architectural, archaeological, and cultural heritage with an abundance of heritage sites located throughout the country. Heritage sites by nature are usually invaluable and irreplaceable. These assets are under pressure from competing land uses across all sectors. Cultural heritage encompasses the ways in which communities developed and how customs, practices, places, objects, traditions, and values were passed on from generation to generation. Ireland's heritage policy legislation sits within a broad sweep of international and EU conventions, policy, programmes and legislation.

Heritage is a critical consideration of the planning and development process including tourism development. Statutory provision is made in the county development plan and development consent processes to address potential heritage impacts.

Sites of archaeological or architectural significance are both invaluable and irreplaceable and can define the fabric of settlements. Heritage assets are a major driver of tourism within Ireland and is likely to continue to attract tourists.

The *Architectural Heritage and Historic Monuments Act 1999 (as amended)* provides protection status to buildings and monuments which are of historical or cultural significance, which are listed on the Record of Protected Structures (RPSs). Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) denote zones or groups of structures of cultural or historical significance which contribute to the appreciation of protected structures. There are approximately 1,700 monuments on the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) within County Wexford.

A significant number of the RPSs within County Wexford are centralised within the large settlements of the region adding to the uniqueness of the areas and contributing to the attractions of these places. However, the protected status of these buildings/structures can often lead to higher costs for maintenance or redevelopment for owners.

### 5.8.1 Existing Pressures and Threats

Development is the greatest threat to archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage. Sites and features of historical and cultural significance can be lost either directly through development or indirectly due to development on or adjacent to sites affecting their setting. Climate change also poses a direct and indirect threat to these historic sites. The increased frequency and severity of flooding and rising sea levels have the potential to damage or destroy sites, particularly in coastal areas or along watercourses. Increased levels of tourists can also lead to damage to sensitive structures or sites. The *Built & Archaeological Heritage Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan* identifies that predicted hotter, drier summers will lead to an increase in tourism numbers at these sites, which could intensify the threat of recreational damage to heritage sites.

## 5.9 Landscape

Article 1 (a) of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) (Council of Europe, 2000) states that a landscape is “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. The ELC addresses natural, urban, peri-urban and rural areas, encompassing land, inland water, coastal and marine areas of all types, not just those that are considered for scenic or amenity value.

The *National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025* ensures compliance with the ELC and provides a framework for the State, public authorities, stakeholders, and communities to work together for the protection of the many cultural, social, economic, and environmental values embedded in the landscape.

Wexford County Council has prepared a Landscape & Seascape Character Assessment as part of the *Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028* that details scenic routes and protected views across the county. The plan area, while largely consisting of lowlands, is most known for its southern and eastern coastline. The lowlands are divided by the course of the Slaney, which originates from Mount Leinster in the uplands to the north-west. The Landscape & Seascape character assessment identifies 4 types of landscapes within the plan area: coastal, lowlands, river valleys, uplands. County Wexford encompasses many areas which hold a natural beauty and attractive views of these landscapes. Natural beauty has historically been a source of tourism throughout the south and west of the country. However, the changing land use within these areas threaten the continued beauty and value of such regions.

### 5.9.1 Existing Pressures and Threats

Development, including tourism development, has the potential to change the landscape character of County's distinct landscapes. Developments, in a manner which is inconsistent with the landscape character or type, can impact its sensitivity and in turn, impact tourism. Impacts to landscapes can come in many forms such as housing development, industry such as quarrying, wind farms (onshore and off-shore), or any land use changes. Balancing the pressure for development in unique landscapes, including in areas containing features of note (such as heritage sites), will remain a challenge.

### 5.10 Interactions

Due to the breadth of activities associated with tourism, there is potential for all environmental factors to interact with each other, either positively or negatively. Key interactions identified associated with the implementation of the Draft Plan are likely to be between tourism/visitors interacting with the local population, biodiversity, climate, architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage, landscape, and material assets. For example, the increase in tourism numbers particularly from international tourists is likely to lead to increase in GHG emissions impacting climate targets, increased visitors to sites have the interact with biodiversity, architectural heritage, etc. The likely interactions between environmental factors, given the implementation of the Plan, are set out in Table 5-1. The table below indicates with a tick (✓), the interactions across the environmental factors.

**Table 5-1 Interactions between Environmental Factors**

| Environmental Factor                               | Biodiversity | Population & Human Health | Water | Air Quality | Climate | Land & Soil | Material Assets | Architectural, Archaeological, and Cultural Heritage | Landscape |
|--|--------------|---------------------------|-------|-------------|---------|-------------|-----------------|--|-----------|
| Biodiversity                                       |              | ✓                         | ✓     | ✓           | ✓       | ✓           |                 |  | ✓         |
| Population & Human Health                          | ✓            | ✓                         | ✓     |             | ✓       |             | ✓               | ✓  | ✓         |
| Water  | ✓            | ✓                         |       |             | ✓       | ✓           | ✓               | ✓  | ✓         |
| Air Quality  | ✓            | ✓                         |       |             | ✓       |             |                 |  |           |
| Climate  | ✓            | ✓                         |       | ✓           |         | ✓           |                 | ✓  |           |
| Land & Soil  | ✓            | ✓                         | ✓     |             | ✓       |             | ✓               |  | ✓         |
| Material Assets                                    | ✓            | ✓                         | ✓     | ✓           | ✓       | ✓           |                 |  | ✓         |
| Architectural, Archaeological, & Cultural Heritage | ✓            | ✓                         |       |             |         |             | ✓               |  | ✓         |
| Landscape  | ✓            | ✓                         |       |             |         | ✓           | ✓               | ✓  |           |

### 5.11 Likely Evolution in the Absence of the Plan

The SEA Directive requires that the ER includes a description of the likely evolution of the environment in the absence of the Plan. The current situation presented in the Do-nothing alternative presented in Section 7 is likely to continue. In the absence of the Plan, development in the county is likely to follow the policies and objectives detailed in the *Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028*, and more broadly guided by higher level EU Directives and Irish Regulations.

However, in the absence of a coordinated tourism strategy such as the DEDP, tourism growth is likely to occur in an ad-hoc and unstructured manner.

This uncoordinated growth would likely result in:

- **Increased pressure on popular destinations**, particularly during peak tourist seasons, leading to overcrowding and strain on local infrastructure and services.
- **Environmental degradation** in sensitive areas, such as coastal zones, Natura 2000 sites, and protected landscapes, due to unmanaged visitor numbers and lack of targeted mitigation measures.
- **Loss of biodiversity**, as habitats may be disturbed or fragmented by unregulated development or increased human activity in ecologically sensitive areas.
- **Deterioration of built heritage**, where historic sites may suffer from overuse, lack of maintenance, or inappropriate development in their vicinity.
- **Water and air quality issues**, particularly in areas with limited capacity to absorb increased waste, emissions, or traffic associated with tourism.
- **Reduced opportunities for sustainable tourism**, as the absence of a strategic framework may hinder the development of eco-tourism, green infrastructure, and community-led initiatives.

While existing statutory planning and consent frameworks would continue to provide some level of environmental protection, the absence of a local comprehensive tourism plan may result in missed opportunities for positive environmental outcomes. Conversely, the risk of negative impacts such as cumulative environmental degradation and loss of cultural assets, would likely increase.

## 6. ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The assessment of the Draft Plan is undertaken using the environmental factors contained within the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC namely: biodiversity, flora and fauna, population and human health, water, air quality, climate, land and soils, material assets, architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage, landscape, and the interaction between the above factors, considering the geographical area to which the Plan relates. Each project or action contained within the Draft Plan has been assessed against Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) based on the environmental factors named above. A full description of the SEOs is provided in Section 6 of the main SEA ER.

The assessment of likely significant effects on the environment is carried out using the assessment criteria in Table 6-1 below, which are measured against the SEOs for the Draft Plan. Where likely significant effects are identified, additional mitigation measures are recommended to the plan team and incorporated into the Draft Plan, where appropriate.

**Table 6-1 Assessment Criteria**

| Symbol | Description of potential environmental effect                             |
|--------|---|
| +      | Potential positive environmental effect                                   |
| -      | Potential negative environmental effect                                   |
| +/-    | Potential positive and negative environmental effects                     |
| 0      | Neutral or no significant environmental effect                            |
| ?      | Uncertain environmental effects (depending on development of the project) |

## 7. ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

### 7.1 Assessment Methodology

The assessment of the alternatives described in Section 7-1 was done with regard to the SEOs from Section 6 and the baseline established in Section 5. The environmental assessment accounts for all potential significant effects across all environmental factors. The overall aim of the environmental assessment of the alternatives considered is to identify and compare the likely significant effects on the environment and identify which alternative has the greatest potential to maximise the achievements of the plan objectives.

### 7.2 Description of Alternatives

Reasonable alternatives were considered by taking into account the objectives and geographic scope of the Draft Plan. The alternatives considered by Fáilte Ireland are:

1. Alternative 1: Do-nothing – Continue without the development of a plan.
2. Alternative 2A: Do-something – Prepare a plan **without** environmental consideration.
3. Alternative 2B: Do-something – Prepare a plan **with** environmental consideration.

### 7.3 Assessment of Alternatives

The target outputs from the Draft Plan are to grow the value of tourism as a key economic sector in Wexford, growing tourism employment, disperse visitors across the destination and increase the length of stay. The key target is to achieve sustained revenue growth and return to 2019 levels of tourism income by 2026. Equally, the development focus within the Draft Plan is to ensure Wexford as a destination plays an integral role in growing the regional share of the market.

When comparing the alternatives, Alternative 1 is likely to have a blend of some positive and negative environmental impacts. However, as there is no plan, it is assumed tourism growth will continue in the current ad-hoc pattern and expand primarily in areas of high tourism. This growth will increase pressure in existing tourism sites and pressure on supporting infrastructure in these areas, leading to the potential for negative impacts on the environment.

The development of a tourism plan presented by Alternatives 2A and 2B will result in a more co-ordinated approach to tourism development. Alternative 2A, without the additional environmental mitigation and management, is likely to deliver on the Draft Plan objectives by promoting tourism development and economic growth. However, as it does not explicitly consider environmental protection or management, it has the potential to result in more significant negative effects on the environment compared to the other alternatives and/or lead to delays in the implementation phase or the delivery of the plan itself at planning stage.

Alternative 2B is likely to deliver a more effective and sustainable tourism development approach in County Wexford, providing both the necessary economic growth and environmental protection. On that basis, Alternative 2B has been selected as the preferred option. Alternative 2B meets the Draft Plan objectives, contains the most environmental mitigation opportunities and is likely to result in more significant positive effects and fewer negative effects than Alternatives 1 and 2A.

**Table 7-1 Assessment of Alternatives**

| Alternative  | Description  | Environmental Assessment of All SEOs | Environmental Evaluation   |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Alternative 1: Do-nothing</b>   | No plan is developed, tourism development would continue business as usual. Tourism development would follow the WCC Development Plan. | <b>+/- ?</b>                         | <p>This alternative would lead to uncoordinated tourism development across the county. With no plan, the objectives of the Draft Plan and the full economic potential for tourism across the county, and throughout the year, would likely not be realised.</p> <p>Furthermore, the potential environmental effects of this alternative are expected to result in more negative environmental effects than positive.</p>   |
| <b>Alternative 2A: Prepare a plan without Environmental Considerations</b> | Tourism in County Wexford will be actioned through the preparation of a plan, without environmental considerations.                    | <b>+/- ?</b>                         | <p>Alternative 2A will deliver on many aspects of the Draft Plan objectives, especially those related to expanding regional tourism, creating new experiences and opportunities for visitors, and encouraging longer stays.</p> <p>This alternative may also give rise to unexpected environmental effects, uncertainty, positive or negative effects from a lack of consideration to the environmental effects.</p> <p>It is likely there will be more negative effects on the environment than the other alternatives and/or result in delays to new proposals in areas that may not be suitable or prepared for development without mitigation.</p> |
| <b>Alternative 2B: Prepare a plan with Environmental Considerations</b>    | Tourism in County Wexford will be actioned through the preparation of a plan, with environmental considerations.                       | <b>+/-</b>                           | <p>Alternative 2B supports the objectives of the Draft Plan by encouraging the sustainable growth of tourism and economic potential of Wexford.</p> <p>It is anticipated that Alternative 2B will result in more positive than negative environmental effects. This is due to the considerations of environmental effects as part of the preparation of the Draft Plan and opportunity for mitigation and monitoring of any negative effects. Alternative 2B is the preferred option from an environmental perspective and delivery of the Draft Plan objectives.</p>  |

## **8. ASSESSMENT OF THE DRAFT WEXFORD DEDP**

Section 8 of the ER evaluates the potential significant environmental effects as a result of implementing the Draft Plan on the SEOs. The likely significant positive, negative, neutral or unknown effects is defined in Table 6-2 of the ER. Following an assessment of the projects and Actions in the Draft Plan, the SEA team recommended text amendments. The plan team reviewed these recommendations, proposed edits, and decided whether to incorporate them into the Draft Plan. These changes, known as embedded mitigation, were reassessed, and the assessment was updated accordingly. A summary of the assessment is provided in Table 8-1 below. Where likely significant effects remain, Section 9 includes the proposed mitigation. Section 10 identifies the proposed environmental monitoring measures.



**Table 8-1 Summary of Likely Significant Effects of the Draft Plan**

| Environmental factor                 | Potential Positive   | Potential negative  | Unknown Effects  |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| <b>Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New ecological corridors due to development of greenways, trails, etc.</li> <li>The redevelopment of brownfield sites with biodiversity considerations and nature-based solutions.</li> <li>Development of ecosystem services.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss, damage, disturbance or fragmentation of ecological resources in designated and non-designated sites.</li> <li>Tourism development along river and coastal areas affecting water quality and/or effects on aquatic species.</li> <li>Disturbance of sensitive habitats and species from increased visitors.</li> <li>Loss of biodiversity including native species due to development of new projects and the spread of invasive species, diseases, and pathogens.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes in climate influencing tourism behaviour and visitor numbers and in turn, affecting biodiversity.</li> <li>Unknown effects to ecologically sensitive sites due to year-round tourism activity.</li> <li>Unknown effects to ecosystems.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Population and Human Health</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism development supports the social and economic development of the county and local communities.</li> <li>Opportunity to regenerate and diversify rural economies.</li> <li>The promotion of outdoor activities supports healthy lifestyles.</li> <li>Improvements to infrastructure including development and access to greenways supports wider sustainable transport options and quality of life factors for tourists and residents alike.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased tourism could increase demand for accommodation and reduce long-term housing availability for local communities.</li> <li>The current housing shortage reduces availability of tourist and local accommodation and also affect affordability.</li> <li>Tourism can increase traffic congestion in certain areas, particularly during peak (seasonal) periods.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism may increase road traffic and congestion levels, especially in smaller settlements</li> <li>Future tourism development impacting capacity critical infrastructure which may affect human health.</li> </ul>                                       |
| <b>Water</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintenance or improvement in bathing water quality due to the focus on blue flag beach status and co-ordinated management of tourism activities across water bodies.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased eutrophication from urban development and agriculture which can be associated with the tourism sector/expansion.</li> <li>Increasing flood risk from inappropriately sited existing tourism</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change in bathing water quality from increased year-round visitor numbers.</li> <li>Cumulative impacts from additional pressure on waterbodies.</li> <li>Effects due to coastal erosion affecting water resources and amenities.</li> </ul>               |

| Environmental factor   | Potential Positive   | Potential negative   | Unknown Effects  |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
|                        |  | development in flood plains and/or flood risk zones.   |  |
| <b>Air Quality</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development and promotion of sustainable transport infrastructure and modes across the county will indirectly improve/maintain air quality.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased flights, road-based traffic and congestion from higher tourist numbers.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unknown effects due to changes in technology influencing the tourism sector.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Climate</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribution towards climate adaptation and mitigation through measures relating to public transport, walking and cycling.</li> <li>The protection and preservation of natural/scenic areas can contribute to climate resilience as these areas are often biodiverse and contribute to natural carbon sequestration.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of international and domestic tourists is likely to increase GHG emissions associated with aviation, maritime and road-based transport potentially affecting climate reduction targets.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unknown effects to areas in the plan experiencing coastal erosion, flooding and increase in extreme weather events which is also likely to influence tourism behaviour overtime creating new impacts in different areas.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Land and Soils</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential for the reuse/regeneration of brownfield sites and soil materials.</li> <li>Regeneration of natural areas such as woodlands for tourism and recreational purposes.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development for tourism in County Wexford that is spread across the region and may contradict EU Soil Strategy land take targets.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential discovery of contaminated land as part of the plan projects.</li> <li>The <i>NPF Strategy</i> and <i>EPA State of the Environment</i> note the need for compact development planning to limit soil sealing from sprawling developments.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Material Assets</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Draft Plan supports the continued investment in infrastructure, services and facilities that support the tourism industry.</li> <li>Continued promotion of the tourism industry supports economic development of the county.</li> <li>The Draft Plan supports the development of infrastructure such as walking, cycling, public realm enhancements and museum, festivals,</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased number of visitors have the potential to increase traffic levels.</li> <li>Pressure on existing utilities, wastewater systems, energy and drinking water capacity.</li> <li>Increases in waste levels and residual wastes from increased visitors.</li> <li>Potential impacts upon public assets and infrastructure.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pressure on utilities and services if numbers during peak season increases unexpectedly, and through year-round tourism expansion.</li> <li>Exceedance of capacity in critical infrastructure risks remain due to uncertainty with regard to climate. It is expected that such risks will be mitigated through the regulatory and planning system.</li> </ul> |

| Environmental factor  | Potential Positive  | Potential negative   | Unknown Effects   |
|---|---|--|---|
|   | etc., that support the economic development of the area.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The promotion of sustainable transportation and travel options may cause overcrowding on public transport and greenways, if not managed appropriately during peak and through year-round tourism.</li> </ul>                                |   |
| <b>Architectural, Archaeological, and Cultural Heritage</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased connectivity to cultural heritage and historical destinations in Wexford via public transportation and/or active travel.</li> <li>Preservation and restoration works of sites and monuments.</li> <li>Potential to discover unknown artifacts and sites of significant archaeological, architectural or cultural value.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential damage to unknown archaeological, architectural or cultural heritage sites and monuments, as items may be lost or damaged during development.</li> <li>Growth of visitor numbers can degrade sensitive historic sites.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential loss and/or discovery of previously unknown archaeological or cultural heritage artefacts as part of project development.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Landscape</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development including greenways, public realm improvements, etc., have potential to improve access and appreciation of landscape.</li> <li>New development can offer new viewpoints to appreciate landscape and visual amenities.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New development and supporting infrastructure at existing sites can change the existing landscape and visual amenity and negatively impact sensitive sites during both construction and operational phase.</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential changes to the landscape of the area and impacts on landmark sites or the experience/perception at landmark sites.</li> </ul>        |

## 9. MITIGATION

Mitigation measures are measures to prevent, reduce and, as fully as possible, offset any potentially significant negative effects of implementing the Draft Plan on the environment.

### 9.1 Embedded Mitigation

Changes to the Plan made during the SEA process are known as embedded mitigation - mitigation that is incorporated into the text of the plan to prevent, reduce, offset and monitor any significant environmental effects. The Draft Plan has benefitted from iterative feedback with stakeholders and the SEA team providing feedback to inform the draft as presented for public consultation. It is acknowledged that further changes to the text in the Final Plan and integration of mitigation will continue during the statutory consultation period as stakeholder feedback is received.

### 9.2 Integration of Environmental Protection

The Wexford DEDP is a non-statutory plan, it does not provide consent, establish a framework for granting consent or contribute towards a framework for granting consent. Projects stemming from the Plan are required to be consistent and conform with higher-level plans and policies including land use plans, such as NPF, RSES and county-level land use plans, and the provisions relating to sustainable development, environmental protection, and environmental management that have been integrated into these documents.

In order to be realised, projects included in the Plan (in a similar way to other projects from any other sector) will have to comply, as relevant, with appropriate legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for project level assessments including Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form part of the statutory decision-making and consent framework.

A review of the key mitigation measures contained in the *Wexford County Council Development Plan 2022-2028*. The SEA team are satisfied that it contains the necessary policies and objectives that can be relied upon to ensure environmental protection and a sustainable tourism approach is adopted as part of the planning process.

### 9.3 Recommended Mitigation Measures

Following the assessment of the Draft Plan, several potentially significant negative effects have been identified that require further mitigation. These include:

- **Housing Pressure:** Ongoing tourism development may exacerbate the already limited availability of long-term residential accommodation, negatively impacting local residents and seasonal workers. The existing shortage of both residential and tourist accommodation is also likely to continue affecting affordability and limiting options for visitors and growth in the sector.
- **Climate Impact:** An increase in both international and domestic tourist numbers is expected to result in higher greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This could contribute to climate change and pose challenges to meeting national and regional climate targets.
- **Sustainable Travel:** There is currently inadequate access to, and availability of, sustainable modes of transport—particularly in rural and remote areas—limiting environmentally friendly travel options to key destinations and sites.

- **Sustainable Festivals:** There is a need to increase the adoption and implementation of Fáilte Ireland's *Sustainable Festival Guidelines* to ensure that festivals and events are planned and delivered in a more environmentally responsible manner.

Fáilte Ireland and the plan team will concurrently address the proposed additional mitigation measures raised by the SEA team during the statutory consultation period. The proposed mitigation measures to address the likely significant effects are detailed in Table 9-1. The mitigation measures will require a coordinated and collaborative approach involving stakeholders at all levels, from national policy-makers to local project implementers.

While existing legislation, policies, and plans incorporated into the Development Plan address many of the likely and significant environmental effects at the project level, it is essential that both the Plan and its associated projects/actions proactively consider the broader implications of increased tourism activity. This includes addressing the cumulative impacts of sectoral growth on local communities and the environment.

**Table 9-1 Proposed mitigation measures**

| Negative effects  | Proposed Mitigation   | Lead & Stakeholders  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Housing Pressure:</b><br>Tourist accommodation is reducing the availability of, and affordability of long-term housing, adversely affecting both local residents and seasonal workers, as well as limiting accommodation options for visitors. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implement and review Fáilte Ireland's Short Term Tourist Letting (STTL) Register for all short term tourist accommodation in Ireland, which will align with the EU regulation for STTL.</li> <li>2. Implement <i>Housing Policy Objective 20</i> of The <i>Housing for All – a new Housing Plan for Ireland</i></li> </ol> <p><b>Background:</b> The national online registration system will require all proprietors who offer Short Term Tourist Lettings to register their property/properties annually. Fáilte Ireland will be able to provide a picture of all short term tourist accommodation providers across the country, with a view to ensuring that adequate housing accommodation for tourists is balanced with the availability for residential accommodation for the general population.</p>   | Fáilte Ireland, local authority and the Department.                                |
| <b>Climate Impact:</b><br>Increasing international and domestic tourists resulting in an increase in GHG emissions, affecting climate change and the ability to meet climate targets.   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Implement the actions in the Climate Action Plan 2025 and the Local Authority CAP and subsequent updates.</li> <li>4. Work with partners to improve access and availability of sustainable modes of transport and travel to key destinations.</li> <li>5. Work with partners to reduce carbon emissions from their operations.</li> <li>6. Work with partners to implement the relevant actions in the <i>National Adaptation Framework</i>.</li> <li>7. Implement the relevant actions in the <i>Sectoral Adaptation Plan for the Tourism Sector</i> (once developed).</li> <li>8. Work with partners to implement relevant targets contained in the <i>Tourism Policy Framework</i> including to include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) establishing a baseline figure for tourism associated emissions and subsequent shorter term Tourism Action Plans will contain tourism specific emission reduction and biodiversity targets.</li> <li>b) Work with partners to ensure that the average carbon emissions associated with each visitor bed night is reduced by 60% by 2030.</li> <li>c) Focus on overseas markets that generate greatest revenue for lowest carbon footprint. Supporting the Government's target to achieve an average annual 5.6% year-on-year growth in the revenue generated by overseas visitors in the period to 2030.</li> </ol> </li> </ol> | Fáilte Ireland, project promoters, as appropriate.                                 |
| <b>Sustainable travel:</b><br>Inadequate access and availability to sustainable modes of transport to access key destinations/ sites  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Develop of a tourist transport strategy/plan containing an inventory of the key destination sites in the county together with a plan to increase the availability of sustainable transport options/infrastructure and services, where appropriate.</li> </ol>   | Project promoter(s) including Fáilte Ireland, and local authority, as appropriate. |

| Negative effects  | Proposed Mitigation   | Lead & Stakeholders  |
|---|---|--|
| particularly in rural or in remote areas.   | 10. Develop sustainable travel promotional material for each key destination site and work with stakeholders and partners to provide sustainable modes of infrastructure and transport to the site(s).                    |  |
| <b>Sustainable Festivals:</b> Potential for festivals & events to impact the environment. | 11. All project promoters receiving funding from Fáilte Ireland to demonstrate compliance with <i>The Sustainable Festival Guidelines</i> , developed by Fáilte Ireland (2023), when planning festivals and large events. | Project promoters working in collaboration with local authority. |

## 10. MONITORING

Article 10 of the SEA Directive requires monitoring to be carried out for significant effects directly related to the implementation of the Plan “*in order to, inter alia, identify at an early stage unforeseen adverse effects and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial action.*” It is a key part to ensuring the Plan does not negatively impact the receiving environment, and to assess whether current mitigation measures are appropriately compensating any anticipated environmental impacts.

### 10.1 Indicators and Targets

As far as practicable, monitoring is based on existing quantitative measures or indicators that can be recorded over time relating to the various SEOs. Each indicator that is monitored has an accompanying target.

While not a statutory document, the Plan has been prepared to compliment and be consistent with other national, regional and local planning and development plans including, but not limited, to the NPF, the RSES, the Wexford County Council Development Plan and Ireland's Ancient East Regional Tourism Development Strategy, all of which have been subject to SEA. Consequently, the SEA monitoring measures identified in those plans have been used as a guide in the development of this monitoring programme, with some being the same or have been modified to reflect the needs of this plan. This consistency across the hierarchy of planning documents will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of future monitoring.

Table 10-1 identifies the indicators and targets that have been selected for monitoring the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan.

### 10.2 Reporting and Responsibility

The monitoring process will be undertaken by Fáilte Ireland including preparation of evaluation reports and corrective actions, if required. The steering group that will be formed to implement the Plan (that includes key stakeholders responsible for project ownership and/or partnering in the delivery of the Plan) will be a key source of monitoring data and any remedial measures, as appropriate.



**Table 10-1 Draft Environmental Monitoring Programme**

| Environmental Factor and SEO  | Indicator   | Target   | Source and Frequency  | Remedial Measures  |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna (BFF)</b><br>Protect, actively conserve, prevent damage and, where possible, restore biodiversity, particularly European designated sites, other nature conservation sites, protected and threatened habitats and species (including transboundary priority habitats and species), and support ecological corridors (including riparian zones and coastal areas), green and blue infrastructure. | <b>BFF1:</b> Compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives with regard to the protection of Natura 2000 sites and Annex I habitats and species and no adverse effects on the integrity of any European site, with regard to its qualifying interests, associated conservation status, structure and function. | <b>BFF1:</b> Maintenance of favourable conservation status for all habitats and species protected under National and International legislation to be unaffected by implementation of the Plan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage report of the implementation of the measures contained in the Habitats Directive - as required by Article 17 of the Directive (every six years)</li> <li>DHLGH National Monitoring Report for the Birds Directive under Article 12 (every three years).</li> <li>Local authority/ An Bord Pleanála planning application project decisions relating to projects under the plan.</li> <li>Data from any relevant Fáilte Ireland monitoring programme relevant to the project/area.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review internal systems or the Plan and make changes, as necessary.</li> <li>Where adverse effects are identified undertake investigation as per the Fáilte Ireland Tourism Related Environmental Damage Resolution Procedure and act on recommendations based on the profiling of the environmental damage.</li> <li>Review or update the visitor management plan to address any ecological loss or degradation caused by tourism activities.</li> </ul> |
|   | <b>BFF2:</b> Decline in habitat (quantity or quality) and/or loss of functional connectivity without remediation resulting from projects arising from the Plan.   | <b>BFF2:</b> No habitats or ecological networks, or parts thereof to be impacted/ lost without remediation resulting from projects arising from the Plan.                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data from beneficiaries provided in funding applications as required under Mitigation Section 9 of the SEA ER. (Frequency: ongoing - project specific).</li> <li>CORINE mapping resurvey (every five years).</li> <li>Local authority (LA) or An Bord Pleanála (ABP) planning application project environmental assessments &amp; decisions.</li> <li>Data from any relevant Fáilte Ireland monitoring programme relevant to the project/area.</li> <li>Visitor management plan relating to project(s).</li> <li>National Biodiversity Data Centre, The Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS).</li> </ul> |  |

| Environmental Factor and SEO  | Indicator   | Target   | Source and Frequency   | Remedial Measures   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Population and Human Health (PHH)</b><br>Protect, support and sustainably manage resources and tourism development, for the benefit of the society and the environment, and contribute towards the economic development of the population supporting positive health outcomes. | <b>PHH1(a):</b> Percentage increase in visitor number to the site/ area over time.<br><br><b>PHH1(b):</b> Development and implementation of visitor management plan from projects arising from the Plan.<br><br><b>PHH1(c):</b> Reduction in safety incidences at sites under the Plan. | <b>PHH1:</b> Sustainably manage visitors to the area.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data from beneficiaries provided in funding applications as required under Section 9 of the SEA ER. (Frequency: ongoing).</li> <li>Visitor management plan relating to projects.</li> <li>Fáilte Ireland (annual review): Tourism performance reports, visitor surveys, monitoring programmes, tourism research &amp; reports.</li> <li>Central Statistics Office.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review internal systems and, if necessary, the Plan.</li> <li>Promote sustainable tourism practices, at the site through the preparation of site-specific campaigns to assist in remedial action, if necessary.</li> </ul> |
|   | <b>PHH2:</b> Improved accessibility to recreational areas and public health amenities (e.g., parks, coastal areas, greenways, blueways, other trails).  | <b>PHH2:</b> Ensure that visitors have appropriate access to recreational areas and public health amenities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data from beneficiaries provided in funding applications as required under Section 9 of the SEA ER. (Frequency: ongoing).</li> <li>Visitor management plan relating to project(s)</li> <li>Local authority/ ABP planning application decisions relating to projects developed under the plan.</li> <li>Local Authority reports (annual review).</li> </ul>                    |   |

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| <b>Water (W)</b><br>Protect, maintain and, where possible, improve water quality including surface water, groundwater, transitional and coastal waters and any wetlands, while preventing deterioration, supporting the achievement of good water quality status of all water bodies as required by the EU and national legislation, and increasing the resilience and adaptation of tourism sites/ activities to the effects of climate change including flood risk and coastal erosion. | <b>W1:</b> The change in water quality status of surface water, groundwater, transitional, and coastal waters (i.e. Water Framework Directive (WFD) water quality status). | <b>W1:</b> Objectives of WFD are met for all waterbodies in accordance with the latest River Basin Management Plan and Programme of Measures (POM).   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WFD monitoring data on ecological and chemical status of water bodies (RBMP) (every six years).</li> <li>Irish Water (annual review): Drinking water quality reports.</li> <li>Local Authority (annual review): Monitoring of local water bodies.</li> <li>EPA Remedial Action List (regarding drinking water quality).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review internal systems and, if necessary, the Plan.</li> <li>Promote environmentally responsible tourism practices, and have campaigns prepared to assist remedial action, if necessary.</li> </ul> |
|   | <b>W2:</b> Overall trend in the mandatory and guide values as set by the EU Bathing Water Directive and transposing Bathing Water Quality Regulations (SI No. 79 of 2008). | <b>W2:</b> No deterioration in the value of bathing waters or adverse effect upon the ability of any bathing water to achieve mandatory values and, where possible, guide values as a result of the Plan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EPA through Local Authority (annual review): Monitoring of local water bodies.</li> <li>EPA Water Quality in Ireland report (annual).</li> </ul>   |   |
|   | <b>W3:</b> Compliance with regards to Flood Risk Management Guidelines.  | <b>W3:</b> Compliance with statutory plans and decision-making process relating to developments in flood risk zones.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local authority/ ABP planning application decisions relating to projects developed under the Plan.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>  |
| <b>Air Quality (AQ)</b><br>Contribute to the reduction of air pollution and improvement in air quality resulting from the effective operation and management of sustainable tourism activities.   | <b>AQ:</b> Trends in emissions from ambient air quality monitoring (NO <sub>x</sub> , SO <sub>x</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> and PM <sub>2.5</sub> ).                          | <b>AQ:</b> Maintain air quality.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EPA air quality monitoring.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote environmentally responsible tourism practices, and have campaigns prepared to assist remedial action, if necessary.</li> </ul>   |

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| <b>Climate (C)</b><br>Support and promote the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from tourism activities and the development of a climate resilient and adaptive tourism sector. | <b>C1(a):</b> Demonstrate compliance with provisions relating to climate resilience, mitigation and adaptation have been integrated into the plan/project, as appropriate.<br><br><b>C1(b):</b> Evidence that beneficiaries of funding are working to reduce emissions e.g. promoting energy efficiency, water conservation, sustainable travel options to customers through marketing/promotional material. | <b>C1:</b> Monitor and reduce emissions associated with tourism activities.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data from beneficiaries provided in funding applications as required under Section 9 of the SEA ER. (Frequency: ongoing - project specific).</li> <li>EPA - GHG emissions data and projections.</li> <li>Government Climate Action Plan (annual review).</li> <li>Met Eireann (annual statistics).</li> <li>Transport for Ireland - Local Link network statistics.</li> <li>Local authority/ ABP planning application decisions relating to projects developed under the Plan.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review internal systems and, if necessary, the Plan.</li> <li>Promote environmentally responsible tourism practices, and have campaigns prepared to assist remedial action, if necessary.</li> </ul> |
|   | <b>C2:</b> Number of projects participating in Fáilte Ireland Climate Action Programme (FI CAP) or similar under the Plan.   | <b>C2:</b> All tourism activities/promoters to have a link to FI CAP (or similar) to demonstrate climate change resilience and adaptation.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FI CAP accreditation (annual review).</li> <li>Wexford County Council Climate Action Plan 2024-2029.</li> <li>FI Sustainable tourism programmes (annual reviews).</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review internal systems and, if necessary, the Plan.</li> </ul>  |
|   | <b>C3:</b> Improve provision of public transport links in the region and 'last mile' transport links in partnership with National Transport Authority together with improved e-car charging infrastructure. <sup>1</sup>   | <b>C3:</b> Reduction in transport emissions emanating from the tourism sector.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fáilte Ireland – Ireland's Ancient East KPI 5. (Data from National Transport Authority &amp; Local Link a strategic part of visitor orientation)</li> <li>Wexford County Council Climate Action Plan 2024-2029.</li> <li>National Transport Authority</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review internal systems and, if necessary, the Plan.</li> <li>Promote environmentally responsible tourism practices, and have campaigns prepared to assist remedial action, if necessary.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Land and Soils (S)</b><br>Safeguard existing land and soil resources, protect and improve soil quality, conserve soil, and prevent soil  | <b>S1:</b> The area of soil that is sealed or artificialised in square km. <sup>2</sup>  | <b>S1:</b> Contribute to NPF target to limit the rate of increase of land that is sealed or artificialised and promote the reversal of this in suitable areas e.g., flood zones, high density areas. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CORINE land cover mapping (CORINE every 6 years (due 2024).</li> <li>Land use national land cover map (Fáilte Éireann - every five years).</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of the site selection process/ assessment of alternatives (if undertaken) where projects occur in greenfield sites in favour of infill/ brownfield sites.</li> </ul>                          |

<sup>1</sup> Note: C3 monitoring indicator is taken from (KPI 5 from Ireland's Ancient East RDS 2023-2027).

<sup>2</sup> Note S1 indicator and target stems from the Revised & updated National Planning Framework SEA ER Monitoring.

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| contamination and erosion.  | <b>S2:</b> Soil erosion/ degradation, landslides without remediation resulting from projects developed under the plan.  | <b>S2:</b> No projects contributing to soil erosion, degradation or landslides.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data from beneficiaries provided in funding applications as required under Section 9 of the SEA ER. (Frequency: ongoing - project specific).</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review internal systems and, if necessary, the Plan.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Material Assets (M)</b><br>Sustainably manage, maintain and develop the necessary tourism supporting infrastructure (including water, wastewater, energy supplies, transportation, internet connectivity and associated capacities) and support the development of the circular economy. | <b>M1:</b> Locations where additional tourists are directed by beneficiaries of funding towards areas where critical infrastructure is adequate to sustainably provide for visitors (e.g. water, wastewater capacity, electricity, transport, carparking, etc.) resulting from projects developed under the Plan. | <b>M1:</b> Locations have adequate critical infrastructure available to sustainably provide for tourists.                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data from beneficiaries provided in funding applications as required under Section 9 of the SEA ER. (Frequency: ongoing - project specific).</li> <li>Local authority/ ABP planning application decisions relating to projects developed under the Plan.</li> <li>Visitor management plan relating to projects.</li> <li>Fáilte Ireland (annual review): Tourism performance reports, visitor surveys, any relevant monitoring programme.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review internal systems and, if necessary, the Plan.</li> <li>Consult with Irish Water or the local authority regarding water and WWtF.</li> <li>Consult with TII local authority or transport providers regarding sustainable transport infrastructure.</li> <li>Consult utility and energy providers as appropriate.</li> </ul>   |
|   | <b>M2:</b> Incidences of significant negative effects on the use of, or access to, public assets and infrastructure from projects developed under the Plan.   | <b>M2:</b> No significant negative effects on the use of or access to public assets and infrastructure from projects developed under the plan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fáilte Ireland (annual review): Tourism performance reports, visitor surveys, any relevant monitoring programme.</li> <li>Local authority reports (annual review).</li> </ul>  |  |
| <b>Archaeology, Architecture and Cultural Heritage (AACH)</b><br>Avoid, protect and/ or minimise impacts to designated archaeological, architectural, and cultural heritage resources, including their setting and enhance and conserve heritage assets.                                    | <b>AACH:</b> Changes to Record of Protected Structures (RPS), and Record of Monuments and Places (RMPs) being protected and/ or negatively impacted resulting from projects developed under the Plan.   | <b>AACH:</b> No negative or unauthorised effects on any entities listed on the RPS and RMPs from any projects developed under the Plan.        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local authority/ ABP planning application decisions relating to projects developed under the Plan.</li> <li>Visitor management plan relating to projects.</li> <li>Fáilte Ireland (annual review): Tourism performance reports, visitor surveys, any relevant monitoring programme.</li> <li>Local Authority Development Plans record of protected structures (RPS) (updated every six years).</li> <li>Record of Monuments and Places.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review internal systems and, if necessary, the Plan.</li> <li>Promote environmentally responsible tourism practices, and have campaigns prepared to assist remedial action, if necessary</li> <li>Project promoter to consult with the Conservation Officer or Heritage Officer for Wexford County Council, if required.</li> </ul> |

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| <p><b>Landscape (L)</b></p> <p>Avoid conflicts with the protection of designated and sensitive features of note in landscapes and sensitively manage landscape change through sustainable planning.</p> | <p><b>L:</b> Number of negative landscape or visual impacts resulting from projects developed under the Plan.</p> | <p><b>L:</b> Avoid negative landscape and visual impacts on the environment, particularly protected landscapes or protected views.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor management plan relating to projects.</li> <li>• Fáilte Ireland (annual review): Tourism performance reports, visitor surveys, any relevant monitoring programme.</li> <li>• Local authority/ ABP planning application decisions relating to projects developed under the Plan.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review internal systems and, if necessary, the Plan.</li> <li>• Promote environmentally responsible tourism practices, and have campaigns prepared to assist remedial action, if necessary.</li> </ul> |
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## **11. NEXT STEPS**

The SEA ER, Appropriate Assessment Screening and Natura Impact Statement will be published alongside the Draft Plan. These reports will be made publicly available for a consultation period of no less than four weeks. Feedback received from the public consultation will be reviewed and incorporated into the Final Plan as appropriate. The Final Plan will then be published along with the SEA Statement which will include the final monitoring programme. The Plan will then enter the monitoring phase of the SEA process.