

Draft Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 – 2022

Dréacht-Treoirlínte Réigiúnacha Pleanála Réigiún An Iarthair 2010 – 2022

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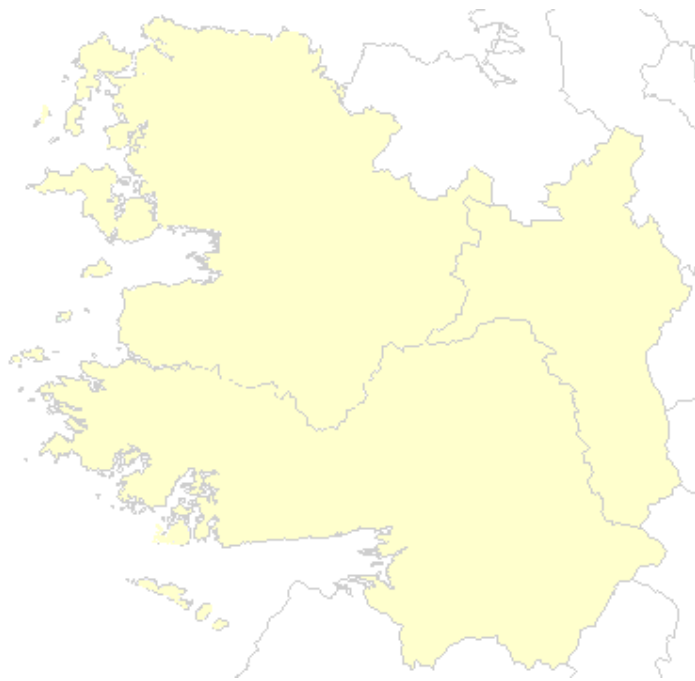


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Preamble

Under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2007 and the 2009 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 for their administrative areas.

Following initial public consultation and consideration of submissions or observations received, the West Regional Authority has prepared a **Draft Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022** document. This document will be **on public display** for a period of **10 weeks commencing from the 22nd January 2010 to 9th April 2010**.

All interested persons including any member of the public, public authorities, community organizations and public and private agencies are invited to make submissions or observations regarding the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 - 2022.

Following the close of submissions, a report on the submissions or observations received will be compiled and presented to the Members of the West Regional Authority.

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

A copy may be inspected 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, Mayo.
- Roscommon County Council, The Courthouse, Roscommon, County Roscommon.

Hard copies of the document will be available from the West Regional Authority for inspection when published. Further details on the document may be obtained from:

The Director,
West Regional Authority
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Woodquay Court,
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CHAPTER 1: Context

1.1 Introduction

The following document has been prepared by the West Regional Authority for the period 2010 – 2022. The document will be reviewed 6 years following its adoption by the Members of the West Regional Authority.

Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region

In accordance with Section 21-27 of the Planning and Development Act 2000-2006, Planning and Development (Regional Planning Guidelines) Regulations 2009 and Ministerial Direction¹ issued by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, each of the eight Regional Authorities are required to review existing Regional Planning Guidelines 2004 - 2016 and prepare new Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 - 2022. The aim of the Guidelines is to provide a framework for long term strategic development in 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 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) at the regional, county and local level.

A key aspect of the West Regional Authority Regional Planning Guidelines is to maintain a balance between protecting and enhancing the environment and sustainable economic development of the West Region. The Regional Planning Guidelines will be influenced by a wide range of international, national and regional level plans, programmes and legislation². The Regional Planning Guidelines will also set out a framework for other lower level plans and programmes.

The Guidelines set out the aims for the West Region through the formulation of strategic policies. The physical planning context of the region is set out with a number of 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 Regional Planning Guidelines close with a section in relation to the implementation of the guidelines.

The Regional Planning Guidelines 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 compliant 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 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 and Hub Towns of Tuam, Ballina-Castlebar will be

¹ 15th December 2008

² Please refer to Appendices for more details on International, National, Regional and local level policy documents and plans.

strengthened in accordance with the National Spatial Strategy. The following table indicates the position of the RPG's in a planning policy context.

Table 1: Planning Context



A Regional Economic Development Strategy has been prepared and incorporated into 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 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 goals for the region in relation to topics relevant to the region such as infrastructure, economic development, access, tourism, etc.

The new Regional Planning Guidelines are accompanied by and informed by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report which examines the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the new Regional Planning Guidelines, a Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA) Screening which examines the likely impacts on Natura 2000 sites of implementing the Guidelines and a Regional Flood Risk Appraisal which examines areas of potential flood risk and

includes strategic policies and measures to be implemented in lower level plans. The Draft Regional Planning Guidelines and subsequent lower level plans must take account of the requirements and mitigation measures outlined in the Draft SEA Environmental Report and Draft Habitats Directive Assessment Screening. 25 mitigation measures are listed in **Appendix 3** and policies and objectives of the Draft RPGs will be followed by the relevant **HDA Mitigation Measures Number**.

The new Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 will be in place by mid-2010.

1.2 The West Region in a National Context

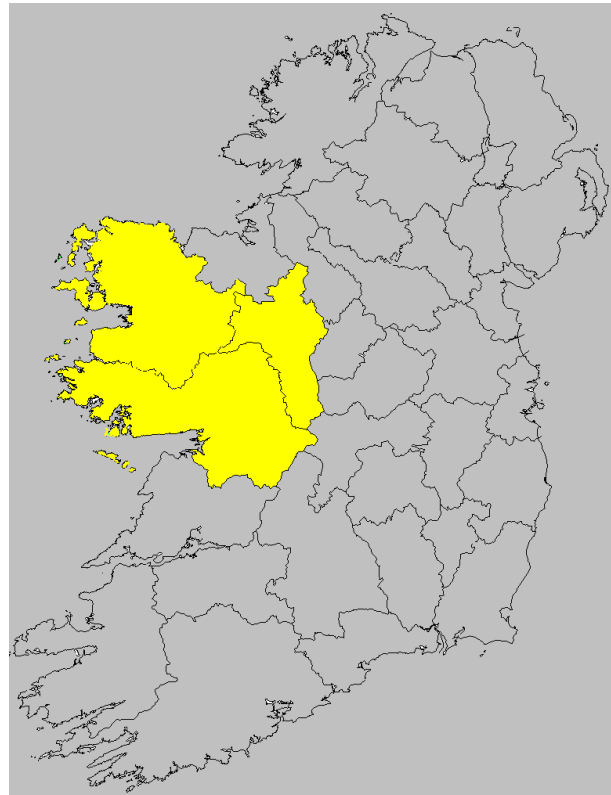
Fig. 1: Location of the West Regional Authority Area

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

The functional area of the West Regional Authority 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 Town Council (County Galway) and Ballina, Castlebar and Westport Town Councils (County Mayo).



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 west 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'³ (Galway) within the West Region as designated by the National Spatial Strategy³.

³ It should be noted that part of south County Roscommon (Monksland) is located in the 'Athlone Gateway'.

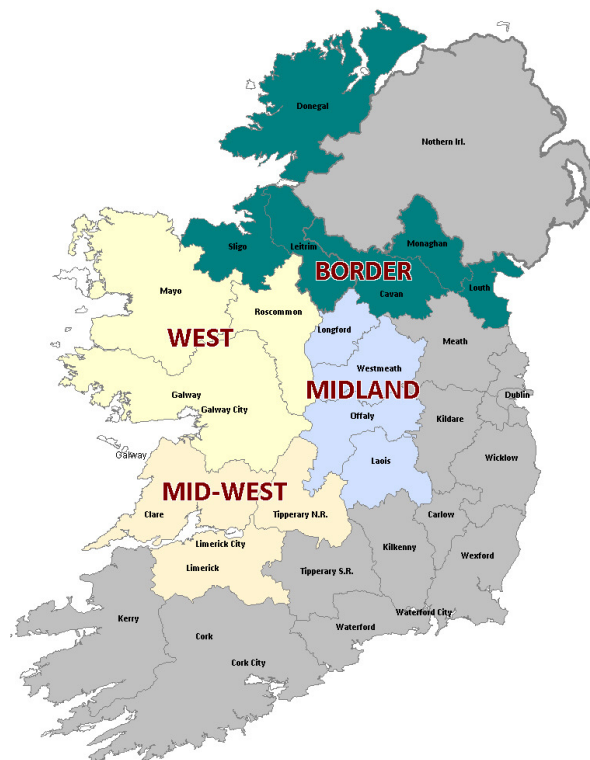
The Galway Gateway has the largest population concentration and is the main economic driver of the region. The population of the region is 414,277 (CSO: 2006), with a density of 30 persons per square kilometre. This accounts for 10.2% of the national population. The population of the West Region has increased by 33,086 persons from 2002 to 2006, (of which 72% accounted for net in-migration with the remainder accounting for natural increase).

1.3 The West Region in a Regional Context

The West Region has been traditionally dependent on the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector. County Roscommon is mainly rural in character with larger urban centres being 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 is located on the western seaboard and is part of the Atlantic rim of the European Union (EU.). Its principle towns are Ballina, Castlebar, Westport and Claremorris. County Galway covers the largest area. Galway city is a major regional centre and other larger towns including Tuam, Ballinasloe, Loughrea and Oranmore have the highest population. The West Region is also home to the largest Gaeltacht areas in the country. 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.

Figure 2: Map of West, Border, Midland & Mid-West Regional Authorities

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 nature along the Atlantic seaboard, but also as the furthest location west in the E.U. In order for the regions to develop, the NSS seeks to achieve critical mass in the Gateways and Hubs. Linked corridors are proposed in the NSS that will include the gateways of Sligo, Galway, Shannon, Limerick, Cork and Athlone.

This offers an alternative development corridor to the gravitational ‘pull’ of the east coast which increases the

competitiveness of the country as a whole. Strong communication links are required in order to achieve this through well developed road/rail/air links as they form the key stimulation of 'corridor' growth. The corridors promote the sharing of resources and services to enable the regions to attract new investments and benefit each other.

Policy

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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-25](#)

1.3.1 Interregional Issues

The following section indicates the most prevalent inter-regional issues for the West Region and adjacent regions.

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 gateways, Athlone has a significant influence on the economic development of south Roscommon through Monksland which is closely linked with the Athlone Gateway.

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 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 Initiative⁴. 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.

Regional Authorities and their constituent Local Authorities shall work together to ensure that these Guidelines are fully reflective of the thinking behind the Atlantic

⁴ 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.

Gateways concept to develop the concept to its potential and put forward practical proposals.

Border & West Inter-Regional Issues

County Sligo and Leitrim form part of the Border Regional Authority and 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.

Interregional Objectives – Border, Midlands & Mid-West Regions

BORDER REGION

- **Policy** - Support the linkages of the Gateways of Sligo and Galway through the extension of the Atlantic Gateways Initiative Corridor in the creation of critical mass and linkages between hub towns. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-25](#)
- **Objective** - Support the completion of the N17 from Galway to Sligo to dual carriageway status ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised and relevant environmental assessment is undertaken. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 25.](#)
- **Objective** - Support the upgrading of the N4 from Carrick-on-Shannon to Castlebaldwin (which is located in County Roscommon) ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised and relevant environmental assessment is undertaken. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 25.](#)

MIDLANDS REGION

Settlement Strategy

- **Objective** - Support the co-ordination of Local Authority services between Roscommon County Council and Westmeath County Council and Athlone Town Council.
- **Objective** - Support the co-operation between Mayo, Roscommon and the Midlands Authorities regarding the upgrading/improvement of the N5 ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised and relevant environmental assessment is undertaken. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 25.](#)
- **Objective** - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-6, 8-13, 16-25.](#)
- **Objective** - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-6, 8-13, 16-25.](#)

Retail Strategy

- **Objective** - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-6, 8-13, 16-25.](#)

Transport Infrastructure

- **Policy** - Support interregional road and rail connectivity between the regions ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised and relevant environmental assessment is undertaken. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 25.](#)
- **Objective** - Support the provision of 'Double Tracking' between Galway and Athenry to improve rail service provision and shorten commuting times.

Energy Infrastructure

- **Policy** - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 25.](#)
- **Objective** - Promote the creation of a Regional Energy Strategy in the West Region which would examine wind energy, landscape and environmental sensitivity. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 15, 25.](#)

MID-WEST REGION

- **Policy** - To facilitate the development of the Atlantic Gateways Initiative and support the objectives of the Atlantic Gateway Report. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-25.](#)
- **Policy** - Support the Atlantic Way Private Sector Initiative in association with the Mid-West Regional Authority. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-25.](#)
- **Policy** - Prioritise key Atlantic Gateways investments such as the Atlantic Road Corridor and the Western Rail Corridor. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 25.](#)

General Interregional Issues

The following are a list of general inter-regional objectives for the West Region and adjoining Regional Authorities.

Transport Infrastructure

- **Policy** - Support the inter-regional goals of 'Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 – 2020'. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 14](#)
- **Policy** - Improve economic competitiveness through maximising the efficiency of the transport system and alleviating congestion and infrastructural bottlenecks. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 14, 25.](#)
- **Policy** - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 25.](#)
- **Policy** - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 14, 25.](#)
- **Policy** - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-25.](#)
- **Policy** - Regional airport links shall be supported throughout the West region and across the Regional Authority area and sustainable travel links are the preferred option. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12-25.](#)
- **Objective** - Support the complete reopening of the Western Rail Corridor subject to relevant environmental assessment. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 14, 25.](#)
- **Objective** - Support the upgrading of junctions on relief roads.
- **Objective** - Support co-ordinated service timetabling of public transport services.
- **Objective** - Consideration should be given to formulating integrated land use and transport plans for urban areas to assess the capacity and effectiveness of relevant urban interchanges as stimuli for employment creation. This should take account of visual impacts and other environmental considerations. [HDA Mitigation Measures](#)

[Number 1-14, 16-25.](#)

- **Objective** - 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 & Access to National Roads – Proposed Development in Urban Areas and Designated Development Centres' in accordance with guidelines to be issued to by DOEHLG. Such development shall be subject to relevant environment/heritage/visual assessment as appropriate. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 13, 25.](#)

Tourism

The Midlands, West, Border and Mid-West Regional Authority have significant natural assets such as the River Shannon which descends through and/or along the regions. It is a major driver for water-based tourism and provides a significant resource potential. The Midlands Authority Region has branded itself as the 'Green Heart' of Ireland. The Mid-Shannon Corridor contains a variety of areas of major ecological significance including the Shannon Callows.

- **Policy** - 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 environment/heritage/visual assessment. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- **Policy** - Support the recommendations of Mid-Shannon Tourism Study (Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Local Authority). [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- **Policy** - Support River Basin Management Plans for the Western River Basin District (RBD) and the Shannon International RBD.
- **Policy** - Support sustainable tourism development in association with Lough Key in Co. Roscommon focussing on areas of low landscape and environmental sensitivity for development. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)

- **Policy** - Support the recommended actions of the Waterways Corridor Study 2006 (as amended) and the recommendations of the South Shannon Waterway Corridor Study as well as the Upper Shannon and Lough Ree Waterways study which covers the northern part of Roscommon.
- **Policy** - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 25.](#)
- **Policy** - Support an all-Ireland network of marinas. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 25.](#)

Education & Knowledge

Galway contains two of the largest 3rd level institutions in the West Region. The National University of Ireland Galway and the University of Limerick are linked with Institutes of Technology – Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Sligo Institute of Technology and Limerick Institute of Technology in the Border-Midlands-West and Mid-West Regions.

- **Policy** - Support the development of outreach programmes throughout the regions.
- **Policy** - Support inter-regional linkages between educational institutions; and between educational institutions and industry and commerce.

Common Local Authority Initiatives

- **Policy** - Promote the provision of inter-regional infrastructure and investment in broadband subject to relevant environmental assessment to minimise environmental impacts. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12, 25.](#)
- **Policy** - Promote the provision of sewage treatment facilities and investment required to meet the Water Framework Directive objectives of the River Basin Management Plans, EU compliance requirements and the need for economic development. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1, 16, 17, 23, 24.](#)

Rural Enterprise/ Development

- **Policy** - Support appropriate rural enterprise and diversification across the regions. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6, 11, 15, 18-21, 25.](#)
- **Policy** - Support sustainable forestry across the region. Forestry should be assessed for its potential impacts on designated habitats and species. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 17, 23, 25.](#)

Energy Infrastructure & the Environment

- **Policy** – The development of existing corridors between the regions are supported in order to acquire key infrastructure. The more appropriate corridors will be supported and chosen via an examination of cumulative impacts on the environment. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 25.](#)
- **Policy** - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 15, 25.](#)
- **Policy** - Support the development of wind energy developments in suitable locations subject to normal technical and environmental considerations including the cumulative impact of such developments. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 15, 25.](#)
- **Objective** - Support the identification of suitable wind energy development locations through landscape character assessments or landscape management strategy and habitat designations. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 15, 25.](#)

1.4 The Region Today

From 2004 - 2008 the economy of the West Region grew significantly year on year. However, an economic downturn during 2008 and 2009 is now being experienced.

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; Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities on the Habitats Directive Assessment Article 6; The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (November 2009); Draft Water Framework Directive River Basin Management Plans 2008; National Climate Change Strategy 2007;
- 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.

Progress in Implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines 2004 – 2016

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 Multi-National Investment/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 joint 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 joint hub of Castlebar-Ballina have seen strong growth in some services

e.g. retail, arts etc. 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 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.

Transport Infrastructure

Progress is being made regarding access generally. The National Route (N6) Galway – Dublin motorway is nearing completion. The N18 is progressing from Ennis to Gort and planning is being advanced on the N17/N18 - Gort to Milltown, Galway Outer By-Pass/ R336, and the N5. There are some limited 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 opening and work is progressing. The airports of Knock and Galway Airports continue to be of regional importance.

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 national gas grid. Investment in 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.

Water and Waste Water

Investment continues in water and waste water infrastructure but much more is required to eliminate the infrastructural deficit in the region.

Economic Development

Historically high rates of economic growth have occurred during 2002 – 2008. This population and economic growth have 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 between 2003 –2006. During 2009, it has increased.

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 now rising

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.
- Strategic Development Area is progressing at Ardaun and Garraun through the planning process.
- There has been no advancement with regard to 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 commercial port at Ros a Mhíl is progressing slowly
- Sections of the Western Rail Corridor have been reopened e.g. Ennis to Athenry

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.

Economic Development

The key economic development priorities are:

- Retain existing levels of employment in the Region especially those Small – Medium – Enterprises (SMEs) 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, R&D 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 throughout the Region 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 co-operation between various intra-regional educational institutes and industry.
- Preserve and enhance the Quality of Life in the Region.

Future development patterns

The key issues associated with future development patterns are related to the sub-regional approach adopted in these guidelines and in particular to:

- Ensure the development of the Galway Gateway, the Hub and linked Hub of Tuam and 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.

Future investment priorities

The key investment priorities required to support the 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.
- Reclassify the N60/N61 Athlone to Castlebar via Roscommon to a National Primary Road and upgrade.
- Provision of adequate water supplies and waste water treatment facilities in the Gateway and hub towns.
- Provision of adequate water and waste water facilities for all areas.
- Complete re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor with extra stations.
- Double track the Galway to Athenry railway line.
- Continued investment in Galway and Knock airports.
- Upgrade the energy supply and energy network infrastructure and support Renewable Energy development.
- Continue investment in the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) and roll out of the National Broadband Scheme (NBS).
- Obtain maximum benefits from regional natural gas sources.
- Support the roll out of the Smarter Travel initiative in an integrated manner.

Conserving and 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 key environmental assets.
- The protection and enhancement of water quality in line with the Water Framework Directive.
- 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 WFD River Basin Management Plans and other relevant legislation as appropriate.

CHAPTER 2: Strategic Vision for the West Region

2.1 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

1. To identify, formulate and implement policies that will promote the gateway of Galway and the hub 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)

Access

2. 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.
 - d. Facilitates the movement of goods in and out of the region in a way that promotes competitiveness.
 - e. Minimise the need for car based travel. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 14, 25.](#)

Service Infrastructure

3. To ensure that a framework is devised to meet the service infrastructural requirements of the Region for both now and into the future 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. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact.
 - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)

Economic Development

4. 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)

The Environment, Sustainability and Quality of Life Issues

5. 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 natural environment of the Region such as water quality and biodiversity are maintained and enhanced.

Agriculture and Rural Development

6. 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)

Tourism

7. 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 to minimise environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)

Interregional Issues

8. 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)

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 future potential of the Region.

3.2 Economic Context

The Irish economy in 2009 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 2008/2009. Developments in the housing market and difficulties in the external economic environment have impacted on economic activity in the West Region similarly 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.

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.

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

	% of Total GVA	2006 GVA per Person Basic Prices	% of GVA per person EU= 100	% Change GVA per person 2000-2006
West	7.3%	€27,451 (75%)	111%	+40.8%
State	100%	€36,608 (100%)	147%	+48.7%

Source: CSO (2009)

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 % 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.

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

	2006	% Δ 1996 – 2002	% Δ 2002 – 2006	2006 Pop. Density Persons per Km ²
State	4,239,848	+8.0	+8.2	62
West	414,277	+7.9	+8.9	30
Galway County	159,256	+8.8	+11.2	26
Galway City	72,414	+15.0	+10.0	1419
Mayo	123,839	+5.3	+5.4	22
Roscommon	58,768	+3.5	+9.3	23

Source: CSO (2009)

Population growth from 2002 – 2006 was widespread throughout the region; however, higher growth was evident within the commuting area of Galway city. Those few District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) with population decline were generally remote from the major urban centres.

Table 4: Population of Principle Urban Centres in the West Region

	2006	% Δ 2002 – 2006
Galway Gateway	72,729	+9.9
Castlebar & Environs	11,891	+ 4.6
Ballina & Environs	10,409	+ 7.9
Tuam & Environs	6,885	+15.8
Ballinasloe & Environs	6,303	+1.4
Roscommon & Environs	5,017	+ 11.8
Westport & Environs	5,475	-2.8

Source: CSO (2009)

Table 5: Age Profile in the West Region and Rest of State

	≤ 14	14 – 24	25 – 44	45 – 64	≥ 65
West	20.1	14.9	29.5	22.8	12.6
State	20.4	14.9	31.7	21.9	11.00

Source: CSO (2009)

The age profile of the West Region aligns with that of the State overall. An analysis of the 1996, 2002 and 2006 census show that the West manages 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.

Labour Market

According to most recent data from the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey, there were 214,500 persons at work in the West (CSO QNHS Q3, 2008). Unemployment in the region stands at 8.9%. The regional participation rate, at 62.7%, closely resembles the national rate of 62.8%.

In terms of absolute employment levels, the largest employer in the West is the public sector, which accounts for over 50,000 jobs (or 25% of all employment in the region). Next, the larger employers comprise of the manufacturing (productive industries) and construction sectors, which each employ approximately 30,000 workers. Wholesale and retail trade in the region provides employment to over 28,500 people, or 14% of those employed, and is the fourth largest sector in the region. 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 48.2% in the West between 1998 and 2007, ahead of the national rate of 40% over the same period. Agriculture was the only sector in which employment contracted in the region over the period, with employment down by

almost 32%. In all other sectors (with the exception of transport, storage and communication in which employment levels remained unchanged), employment increased, with the lowest increase (3.7%) occurring in the 'other services' sector and the highest in construction (130.8%).

Table 6: Numbers Employed in the West and Percentage Change, 1998 & 2007

	2007 Q2 (‘000)	% Change Q2 1998- Q2 2007	% Change Q2 1998- Q2 2007	% Of Total Employment Growth Accounted for 1998-2007	% Of Total Employment Growth Accounted for 1998-2007
	West	West	National	West	National
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	17.7	-31.9%	-15.7%	-12.7%	-3.5%
Other Production Industries	30.2	16.6%	-3.6%	6.6%	-1.8%
Construction	30	130.8%	122.3%	25.9%	25.6%
Wholesale & Retail Trade	28.5	77.0%	39.0%	18.9%	13.7%
Hotels & Restaurants	14.4	56.5%	27.6%	7.9%	4.5%
Transport, Storage & Communication	5.6	0.0%	40.7%	0.0%	5.9%
Financial & Other Business Services	15.8	81.6%	68.1%	10.8%	19.4%
Public Sector (Includes, Administration, Education & Health)	50.6	100.8%	65.1%	38.7%	30.1%
Other Services	9.1	35.8%	43.9%	3.7%	6.2%
Total	201.8	48.2%	40.3%	100%	100%

Source: CSO, QNHS (2007).

Wholesale and retail trade also expanded significantly over the period, and accounted for proportionately more new jobs in the West (19%).

Manufacturing employment expanded by 16.6% in the West between 1998 and 2007, despite contracting by 3.6% at State level, while growth in the financial and other business services, at 81.6% was also ahead of the national rate of 68.1%, albeit from a low base.

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 2008, agency supported employment in the West stood at 28,025 representing approximately 13.6% of total employment in the region (this compares to a national average of approximately 14%). Of this agency supported employment, 51% was provided by foreign owned firms, matching the proportion of agency supported employment provided by foreign firms nationally.

Overall, there was a net employment increase in agency supported employment in the region of 7% between 1998 and 2008. 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 Technologies (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.

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. As has been the case nationally unemployment levels have increased to around 10% in 2009.

3.3 Summary of Economic Strengths and Opportunities

Balanced Regional Development is a goal of the National Spatial Strategy, the National Development Plan 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

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good existing base of multi-nationals particularly in Galway City but also in Co. Mayo. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop Multi-national location clusters. ▪ Develop spin off enterprises in Regional Towns.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving road transport links e.g. M6 Galway – Dublin M/N17/M/N18 North South Corridor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve competitiveness by reducing transport costs. ▪ Improve regions attractiveness for many sectors e.g. Tourism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relative stable fixed costs and with reliable supply and availability e.g. water supply, waste management et. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop cheaper access for companies and tourists. ▪ Develop hubs for industry/commerce adjacent to the regions airports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good and improving rail system to Dublin and North/South. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides alternative public transport option. ▪ Provides opportunities for rail freight transit choices.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One substantial port and one designated fishing port with many other smaller ports/harbours/piers along the coastline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct export/import of goods. ▪ Expand fishing sector generally.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A long varied and interesting coastline which offers many opportunities e.g. fishing, surfing, boating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marinas. ▪ Develop leisure and tourism enterprises ▪ Develop the marine leisure tourism sector.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good agriculture industry with good reputation and family oriented structure of ownership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Production of high value meats/foods. ▪ Promote organic farming. ▪ Establish network of farmers markets. ▪ Diversify products. ▪ Can promote a sustainable attractive environment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A network of thriving towns and villages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Will facilitate and promote the concept of “place making⁵”. ▪ Greater role in employment creation and developing local/rural catchment areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A dynamic regional capital in Galway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop its role as a location for FDIs,

⁵ Source: Richard Florida. Place-making incorporates the ‘mix of land uses to make a place’.....

<p>Gateway.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of the region (Co. Roscommon) adjoining the gateway of Athlone. 	<p>employment generally and as a location of a full range of regional services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefit from the economic driver of a nearby gateway.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One hub town in Tuam and a joint hub in Castlebar – Ballina. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop their role to provide employment, retail and services to a wide catchment area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A high level of education attainment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote/market available skilled / educate workforce. Develop and entrepreneurial drive in this cohort.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excellent third/fourth level Institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A unique landscape. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a unique tourism product. Derive an economic return in a sustainable manner to the region from this resource.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural assets for renewable energy productions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote sustainable renewable energy developments in appropriate locations. Develop associated “Green Enterprise” Pilot other forms of renewable energy production.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Off-shore supply of natural gas Distribution network for the extension of natural gas into the majority of towns in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote enterprises/industries around this key energy resource. Use to improve competitiveness. Build distribution network to offer gas to all consumers in the region.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A high quality of life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attractive to entrepreneurs, FDI and highly skilled individuals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World renowned attractions – physical and others e.g. Croagh Patrick, Lough Key, River Moy, Galway Races, Galway Arts Festival, Countrylife Museum and the Ceide Fields 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market and develop these iconic attractions. Increase the number of these high grade attractions, with the emphasis on quality rather than quantity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dynamic responsive and supportive Local Government, regulatory and support agencies enabling enterprises to set up and continue in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of airports in the region with adjacent industrial lands e.g. Knock, Galway and close to other airports nationally e.g. Shannon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate new enterprises.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defined strategic economic links and urban networks with a clear direction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will enable beneficial clustering and location agglomeration economies.

3.4 Realising Future Economic Development Potential

During 2009 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 this bleak economic picture, 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

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, 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 region's human capital e.g. its education level, skills and training.
- The quality and quantity of physical capital investment e.g. infrastructure, research facilities, access and connectivity.
- The level of business innovation and creativity generally e.g. transfer of ideas from research institutions to the marketplace. R&D generally support new creative thinkers and doers.
- The quantity and quality of the region's 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/urban areas drive economic growth and living standards with significant benefits for national living standards. It is critical that regional strategies/policies support the continued development of our main city, Galway and the other major urban areas, particularly the hubs of Tuam and the linked hub of Ballina-Castlebar.

Enhanced Gateway and hubs performance will have positive spill-over effects on the surrounding areas and ultimately on the region as a whole. For parts of East Roscommon the appropriate Gateway is Athlone. We must develop the potential of these Gateways and Hubs 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).

Actions

Given this context and government policy, the following priorities offer the greatest potential for growth in the West Region:-

Retention of Existing Jobs

Excluding the construction section, 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 N17/N18 Charlestown to Gort roads.
- Increased marketing drives to promote sectors such as tourism in the region.
- Improve consumer confidence in local products.

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 growth substantially in recent years, namely the medical devices and the ICT sectors. It is vital to continue to develop and seek to promote the cluster location benefits to attract more such companies to 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 more FDI.

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:-

- 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 Galway Gateway, Castlebar, Ballina, Tuam, Westport, West Athlone and Roscommon.
- Make progress on reducing fixed costs and competitive factors as previously mentioned above.

Indigenous Industry

The work of Enterprise Ireland and the County/City Enterprise Boards in cooperation with Udaras, 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).

Actions to Achieve Regional Competitiveness

Policies

- Support widespread standard access to broadband in all areas subject to relevant environmental assessment in order to minimise environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 25.](#)
- Support reliable energy supplies in the region which are adequate and ensure low brownout risks. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 15, 25.](#)
- Support rail service which suit business travel.
- Support innovation and Research & Development (R & D) capability appropriate to specific sectors (third level research, commercialisation of third level research, industry-third level collaboration and industry R & D).
- Support the provision of business education & training facilities.
- 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.
- Ensure there is adequate emphasis on secondary roads with links to gateways/hubs/motorways, thereby addressing physical access issues for dispersed industry. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 3, 4, 5, and 12-13, 25.](#)
- Facilitate Outreach/on-line skill training facilities, for supporting businesses in areas outside of the major settlement centres.
- Develop new technology sectors and entrepreneurship in the region.
 - Facilitate new sectors to utilise research and knowledge emanating from third level colleges.
 - Ensure the West Region is a location for new sectors driven by entrepreneurs from within the region or returning from abroad.
 - Balance decline in traditional sectors through the development of new niches.
 - Increase the attractiveness of a region.

Objective

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1, 16, 17, 23, 24.](#)

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

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/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

- Support for selected but better and reliable local markets.
- Support for co-operative type marketing of new produce.
- Increasing consumer awareness of benefits of local produce and the quality of the products.

Objective

- Facilitate appropriate farm/rural enterprises and diversification (such as vegetables/fruit).

Tourism

The tourism sector will continue to be a key part of the economy of all the West Region. The sector and its supporting agencies should develop the potential of the key strengths of the unique tourist product available in the region. The development in the long-term of a major tourist attraction would greatly benefit the region.

Policies

- Support and promote innovative development, marketing and support for all types of activity holidays in the West Region including walking routes development, cycling routes development and water based activities subject to relevant environmental assessment in order to minimise environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6, 18-21, 25.](#)
- Support the development of cultural/arts tourism in the West Region. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6, 18-21, 25.](#)
- Support the development of access routes directly into the region from potential tourist regions subject to relevant environmental assessment in order to minimise environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12-13, 25.](#)
- Support the marketing of the landscape, archaeological and architectural heritage, biodiversity and environmental resources of the West Region.

Objectives

- Support and promote the regions iconic attractions and sustainably market them. Including natural heritage, cultural heritage attractions and cultural events such as Croagh Patrick, Knock Shrine, Lough Key Forest Park, Connemara & Connemara National Park, Country Life Museum, the Ceide Fields, Galway Arts Festival and Horse Racing in Galway, Roscommon and Ballinrobe.
- Support the development and marketing of historical and archaeological sites; Rathcroghan in Co. Roscommon, ecclesiastical heritage and walled towns such as Athenry.
- Support the continued development of the urban centres within the region as tourist destinations particularly Galway and Westport as premier tourist locations.

Marine Sector

The West Region has an extensive Atlantic coastline as well as many lakes, rivers and surface waters including the River Shannon. To get increased economic value from this natural resource, in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner offers a challenge but great potential. Research continues with the Martine 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 in particular invasive species and water pollution from whatever sources must be remedied.

Other important indigenous sectors such as the agri-food sector, tourism are referred to in the preceding section.

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, operational management of energy assets and infrastructures.

Given the location of the West Region and its natural resources and the existence of the Corrib gas fields, 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.

Policies

- Support the development of the grid network to facilitate the roll out of renewable energy infrastructure. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 15, 25.](#)
- Facilitate entrepreneurs in the renewable energy sector supported by Enterprise Ireland and the County/City Enterprise Boards to locate and develop in the region [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 15, 25.](#)

Objectives

- Support deployment of renewable energy infrastructure in appropriate locations. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 15, 25.](#)
- Support wave energy pilot actions in appropriate locations. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 25.](#)
- Support biomass, wood energy production as appropriate in the region. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 17, 25.](#)

Smart Economy

Building Ireland's Smart Economy sets out an ambitious set of 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

- 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.
- Support a highly attractive incubation environment for entrepreneurs in the region.
- Promote the transition to a "low-carbon economy" and the opportunities for investment in jobs in clean industry.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

These sectors incorporate a range of interconnected activities and technologies including internet software, digital media, video, film, music. 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

- Facilitate ICT sector development in the region.
- Promote beneficial clustering to achieve competitive advantage.
- Ensure the retention and growth of ICT employment in the region.

3.6 Rural Enterprise Development

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 seaboard. 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.⁶ 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.

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'; '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.

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 reliable⁷, 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

⁶ Creamer, C., Blair, N., Keaveney, K., et al (2009) Rural Restructuring: Local Sustainable Solutions to the Rural Challenge.

⁷ The Rural Transport Programme supports rural communities, though many rural areas need further investment to maximise their growth potential.

Travel⁸), 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.

Policies

- Support the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 - 2016⁹.
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)
- Support the Community Development Programme which supports local people to improve their own communities.
- Support the collaboration of stakeholders including the community, local and central government and business in rural development projects.

Objective

- Support complimentary rural based economic activities where appropriate infrastructure exists. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)

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.

Policies

- Support continued investment in farming/agriculture to sustain the rural population and support part-time farming in the Region.
- Support the diversification of the rural economy to concentrate on producing high quality products to meet market/consumer demand.
- Support the role of education and opportunities for training, up-skilling rural dwellers and outreach third-level programmes through Institutes of Technology, Universities, 4th level education and other education providers.
- Promote innovative strategies in the natural resource sectors such as tourism, agri-food, forestry, fisheries and marine industry. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 5-7, 12, 15, 17-21, 24-25.](#)

⁸ DoEHLG (2009) *Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 – 2020.*

⁹ <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPinclusionReportPDF.pdf>

- Promote ICT uptake and broadband usage in rural communities - Promote ICT and broadband as ways of removing peripherality and supporting high-value-added niche services based enterprise. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 25.](#)
- Support the creation of new rural micro-enterprises and development of existing initiatives¹⁰. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)
- Recognise the benefit of micro-regions to the development of wider rural areas.

Objective

- Support the development of complementary rural enterprise particularly where appropriate infrastructure exists. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)
- Support appropriate 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)

Natural Resource Sectors

The Natural Resource sector includes agriculture, agri-food sector, forestry, 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) 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 a 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 REPS Scheme and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform pose serious challenges for 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.

¹⁰ (including artisan foods, forestry, marine, rural/agri tourism, cultural heritage and community promoted enterprises – promotion of research/analysis and development of rural-sources products and innovative community services)

Policies

- Promote the competitiveness of farm enterprises and environmentally sustainable farming which sustains a rich biodiversity in the local environment.
- Support off-farm related employment close to the farming workforce. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)
- Support rural tourism initiatives including the provision of infrastructure and the development of local heritage activities. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)

Objective

- Support diversification in farm production and supplementary activities ancillary to existing enterprise that are appropriate to rural locations. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)

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

- Support the agri-food sector and its role in the West, and support the dynamic indigenous manufacturing sector, promoting growing interest in 'local food'. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)
- Promote organic farming sector (horticultural crops) and the development of niche markets. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)
- Promote bio-regions and micro regions (co-operative and complementary rural agriculture).
- Support communities in agricultural diversification in enterprise, local services and tourism. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6-12, 15-25.](#)

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) contributes positively to local biodiversity and forestry is crucial for carbon sequestration.

Policies

- Encourage sustainable forestry practices and forestry development in appropriate locations in accordance with Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Guidelines and Strategies, Rural Environmental Management and in consultation with the Forest Service. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 17.](#)
- Promote the conservation of hedgerows as ecological networks/wildlife corridors.
- Expand on the potential of sustainable forestry potential for carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change including promoting forestry as a renewable energy source and support wood energy initiatives. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 17.](#)

- Support sustainable forestry and timber enterprises in the West Region. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 17.](#)

Objectives

- The cumulative impact of forestry on an area should be considered and measures taken which ensure forestry proposals do not impact on established communities. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 17.](#)
- Promote urban planting and support community planting schemes.
- Monoculture forestry in peat uplands should be discouraged and assess the impact of any forestry on water quality. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 17.](#)

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. According to the 2006 census, there were 353 inhabitants on the islands of the West Region.

Policies

- Promote the development of infrastructure to enhance the value of the shellfish industry, fishing, seaweed and other mari-culture based industry products. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 8, 9, 10, 12, 23, 25.](#)
- Support local harbour management and small scale improvements to offer improved tourism, leisure and fishing facilities. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 8, 9, 10, 12, 23, 25.](#)
- Support the development of piers, harbours, marinas throughout the region which avoid or minimise disturbance to habitats or otherwise impact on the land/seascape/heritage (e.g. protected structures). [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 8, 9, 10, 12, 23, 25.](#)
- Promote co-ordinated service delivery and delivery of facilities.
- Support the work of the N.U.I.G Marine Research programme and the Marine Institute's programmes.
- 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, ensuring minimal environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 8, 9, 10, 12, 23, 25.](#)
- Support the Fisheries Harbours Programme of the Galway and Mayo County Councils and the DCENR. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 8, 9, 10, 12, 23, 25.](#)
- Support the development of rural tourism resources such as inland waterways. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- Promote marine and natural resources based development and appropriate communications infrastructure. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 8, 9, 10, 12, 23, 25.](#)

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

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 2-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- Support the development of rural tourism trails through joint marketing co-operation with emphasis on the marine, landscape, heritage and leisure. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 2-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 2-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- Support regional airport networking, local transport provision (as per Smarter Travel) and communications infrastructure. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 12 and 25.](#)
- Support the development of the Inland Fisheries resource in the Region. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 1-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- Support language, cultural and educational tourism e.g. Gaeltacht Colleges.
- Place emphasis on safeguarding the environment for future generations, with development opportunities which do not adversely impact on the environment.
- Promote a clean and green image of the West Region, promoting heritage and natural resources which have a significant value image and aesthetic quality of the living environment in terms of landscape, architecture, archaeology, town, village and countryside planning and amenities.
- Support rural tourism initiatives which support sporting events; village enhancement; heritage management and energy conservation.

Objectives

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 2-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- 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 & 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 in order to minimise environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 2-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- Support the protection of key ancient structures, habitations and protection plans for areas of high natural amenity, locally important ecological or geological features in conjunction with local tourism products.
- 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 development of local heritage activities. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 2-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)
- Ensure agricultural structures are assessed appropriately in high amenity areas. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 6, 17, 23, 25.](#)

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.

Policies

- Promote a green economy in the West Region through the development of renewable energy resources; explore the capacity to develop community-based renewable energy and other measures to protect the high nature value of the local rural landscape. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 15, 25.](#)

Objectives

- Support eco-projects, renewable energy and green business development in appropriate locations. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 5, 6, 8-10, 12, 15, 25.](#)
- Promote adaptation of alternative sustainable energy sources appropriate to the specific needs of local rural communities.

3.7 Retail Strategy

Retail Strategies in the West Region have been prepared in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 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 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 joint hub of Castlebar-Ballina and hub of Tuam and the county town of Roscommon. A suitable range of retailing is required in the Gateway and 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

- 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.
- Protect the retail role of larger towns in the West Region.
- Protect the vitality and viability of 'town centres' and retain the capacity for retail development in town centre areas.
- 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".

Objectives

- Identify a range of suitable sites on which the demand for development might be achieved, with particular emphasis on improved public transport links. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 8-10, 25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 8-10, 25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 8-10, 12-14, 25.](#)

CHAPTER 4: Settlement Strategy, Population & Housing

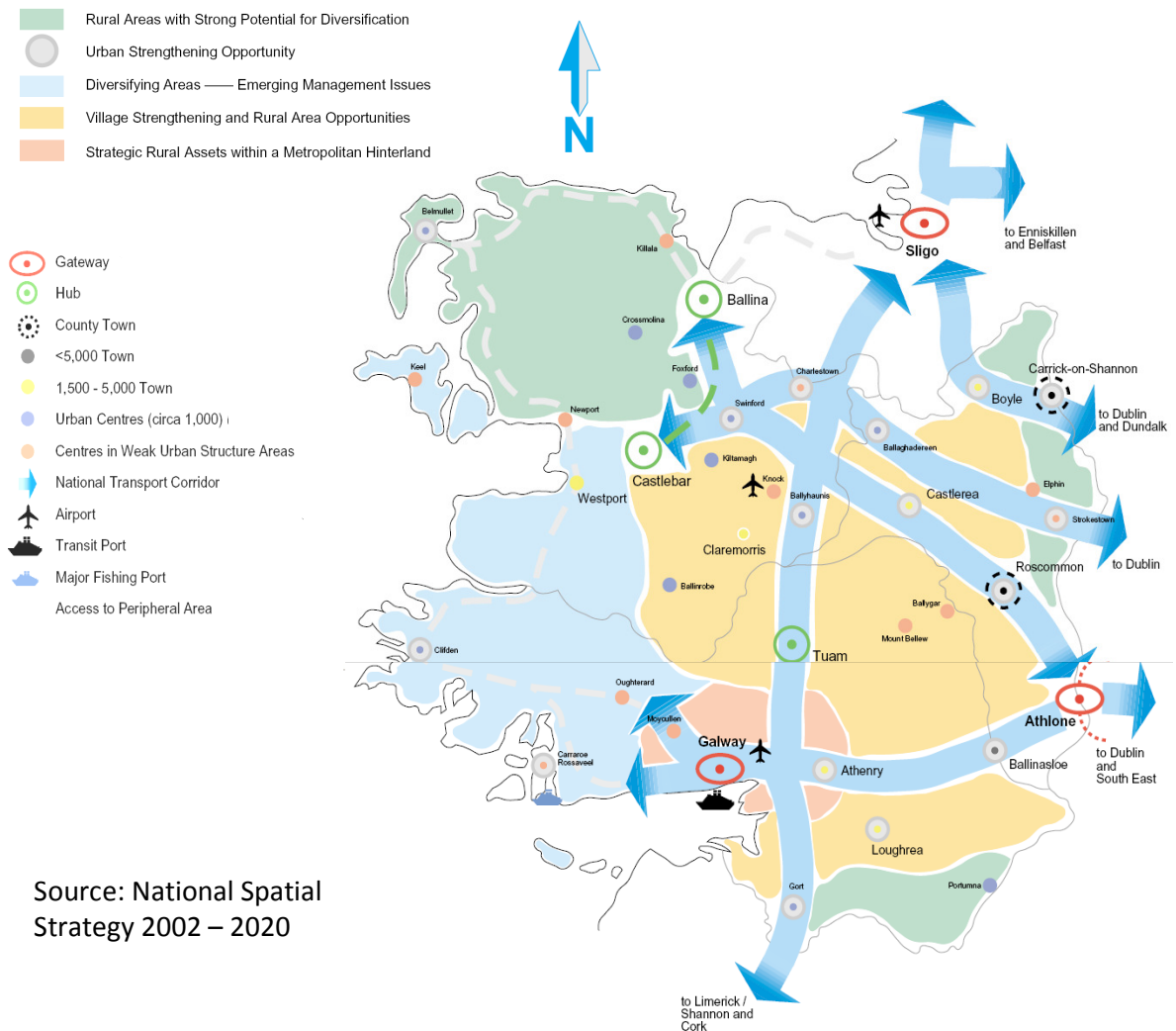
4.1 Population and Housing trends

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 Hubs/linked Hubs but to support a settlement strategy that will encourage the growth of towns and villages.

4.2 Settlement Structure

The settlement structure stems from the National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020. It includes the Gateway, Hubs, County Towns, larger and smaller towns and the rural population distribution. 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.

Figure 3: National Spatial Strategy (NSS) - Key Rural, Urban & Transport Routes within the West Region



Source: National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020

4.3 Trends in the West Region

Within the National Spatial Strategy, it is expected that Galway 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 the 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.

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

The gateway of Galway is the largest population centre, attracting significant investment. Pressure on the rural hinterland of the City continues. Growth has been experienced in the Hubs 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. Nevertheless, some smaller towns (Moycullen, Claremorris, and Roscommon) within the region have developed positively both economically and socially in recent years.

Significant development has taken place in the newer suburbs of Galway City.¹¹ The rising population of Galway City has implications for future land requirements for housing, industry, commerce, education, recreation and amenity and higher density populations required to sustain an efficient public transport system.

4.4 Current Population

The following tables indicated the Population in the West Region in 2002 and 2006 Census years.

¹¹ These suburbs include Knocknacarra, Ballybrit and Doughiska. The city has retained a number of village settlements within the city which include Menlough, Castlegar, Coolagh-Briarhill and Coolagh-Menlough.

Table 8: CSO National Population

	2002	2006	% Change '02 – '06
National Population	3,917,203	4,239,848	8.2

Table 9: CSO Population - Counties in the West Region

	2002	2006	% Change '02 – '06
Galway	209,077	231,670	10.8
Roscommon	53,774	58,768	9.3
Mayo	117,446	123,839	5.4

Table 10: CSO Population - Main Urban Centres

Urban Centre	2002	2006	% Change '02 – '06
Galway City	65,832	72,414	10
Roscommon	4,489	5,017	12
Ballinasloe	6,219	6,303	1
Ballina	9,478	10,056	6
Westport	5,634	5,475	-2
Tuam	5,947	6,885	16
Castlebar	10,287	10,665	4

Source: CSO Volume 1 Population Classified by Area 2006.

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. The following table indicates the larger number of smaller towns within the West Region.

**Table 11: Summary of Census Towns ordered by Size within the West Region
(Census 2006)**

Population	Galway	Mayo	Roscommon
City (72414)	Galway City (Gateway)	-----	-----
10000+	-----	Castlebar (Linked Hub) Ballina (Linked Hub)	-----
6-7000	Tuam (Hub) Ballinasloe	-----	-----
5-6000		Westport	Roscommon
4-5000	Loughrea	-----	-----
3-4000	Oranmore Athenry	-----	-----
2-3000	Gort	Claremorris Ballinrobe	Boyle Athlone West (Environs) - Monksland
1-2000	Clifden; Portumna; Moycullen; Oughterard	Ballyhaunis; Swinford; Belmullet; Kiltimagh Foxford;	Castlereah Ballaghaderreen
500-1000	Headford; Dunmore; Mountbellew; Carraroe; Glenamaddy; Kinvara; Ballygar; Glenamaddy Claregalway;	Crossmolina; Newport; Knock; Balla; Charlestown- Killala; Bellahy; Keel- Dooagh;	Strokestown; Carrick-on- Elphin; Shannon (part); Lanesborough
< 500	Lackaghbeg; Cill Rónáin; Craughwell; Clarinbridge; Corrofin; An Spidéal; Moylough; Rosscahill; Monivea; Annaghdown; Killimore; Ahascragh; Cluain Bú; Roundstone; Woodford; Na Forbacha; Eyrecourt; Cong (part)	Shrule; Ballindine; Kilkelly; Ballycastle; Louisburgh; Bunnyconne Gob an Choire lan; (Achill Bellavary; Sound); Kilmaine; Bangor Erris; Cong (part)	Frenchpark; Clontuskert; Roosky; Ballyfarnan; Ballinlough; Environs of Keadew; Ballinasloe; Cloonfad; Bellanagare Loughglinn;

Source: Based on Census Figures 2006

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 Draft 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 legislation¹². The RPGs will set out a framework for other lower level plans and programmes such as county, city and town development plans.

The existing Regional Planning Guidelines and new Draft 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, Hubs 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 2022¹³.

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 potential for balanced regional development with potential to expand and include wider areas.

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 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 (see page 2), that is those plans and policy documents which directly influence the Draft RPGs and which has led to the selection of the final alternative scenario (number 4).

¹² Please refer to Appendix 1 of this document for more details on International, National, Regional and local level policy documents and plans.

¹³ Please refer to Section 4.6 of the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines.

The following are the alternative scenarios which were explored for the Draft RPGs for the West Region 2010 – 2022 and were developed from previous alternative scenarios explored in the 2004 – 2016 Guidelines.

Table 12: Alternative Scenarios

Alternative Scenario 1:	Concentration of Growth in the Galway Gateway
Alternative Scenario 2:	Dispersal of Developments
Alternative Scenario 3:	Concentration of Growth in all Urban Areas and Settlements
Alternative Scenario 4:	Development of 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

Preferred Strategic Option (from Strategic Environmental Assessment)

The following is the preferred strategic option for the West Region 2010 – 2016.

Development of 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 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:

1. This scenario would provide some of the benefits and some of the difficulties of the other options explored.
2. 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.
3. In addition, it would create smaller key centres that would themselves be significant providers of services within their areas and generate spill-over effects.
4. 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.
5. 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, allowing each to bring its benefits to the other.

6. 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.
7. 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.
8. However, landscape and water resources would need to be protected from inappropriate development. The cumulative impact of rural developments must also be considered.
9. 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 effects of water abstraction and security of supply must be examined for the long term growth of settlements.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. The cumulative impact on biodiversity including Natura 2000 sites from rural development would need to be closely examined and monitored to ensure that habitats and species are protected; conservation objectives and integrity of sites are maintained. Development would need to contribute to environmental enhancement and assimilation.
13. Strategic Flood Risk Assessments would be required to protect the urban settlements, existing residential areas, ensure safe drinking water supplies and minimise environmental damage.
14. Environmental awareness for citizens is key to this scenario in matters of waste, water conservation, energy conservation and use of sustainable modes of travel.
15. There are opportunities for sustainable energy generation within the region, though cumulative assessment and strong policies are required in order to prevent damage to the environment.

This option reflects the ethos of the NSS and Atlantic Gateways Initiative.

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 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 following chapter and this must be contained within the Development Plans of the West Regional Authority to ensure that impacts on the environment are minimised.

4.6 Core Settlement Strategy

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:

1. 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-14, 16-25.](#)

2. 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-14, 16-25.](#)

3. To identify strategic roles for the larger towns and support towns of Roscommon, Monksland, Boyle, Castlerea and Ballaghderreen and in Co. Roscommon, Westport, Ballinrobe, Claremorris, Swinford and Ballyhaunis in Co. Mayo and Ballinasloe, Loughrea, Gort , Athenry, Clifden and Portumna in Co. Galway through Development Plans. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-14, 16-25.](#)

4. Encourage appropriate growth in rural towns and villages and promote villages as an attractive alternative to rural one-off housing. Provide for policies that will encourage the creation of a minimum service level in smaller settlements depending on their location and proximity to either the gateway, hubs or larger towns. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development, ensuring minimal environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 2-25.](#)

5. Support a high quality public transport system in line with Transport 21 and Smarter Travel documents and strategies. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 14.](#)

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

7. 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.

8. Strengthen and protect the linguistic and cultural heritage and identity of the Gaeltacht through accessibility and through the strengthening of existing settlements.

9. Consolidation of existing urban footprint of towns and city region through supporting the re-use of brownfield lands and redevelopment/regeneration opportunities in order to increase densities. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)

10. 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.

11. 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. New growth shall be coordinated within the urban centres along the transportation and strategic links through the Region. This is to foster sustainable development patterns and optimise public and private investment in existing linkages. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 2, 3, 12-14.](#)

12. 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.

13. Support rural development including rural housing having regard to landscape and environmental sensitivities, DoEHLG guidelines and EU Directives.¹⁴ [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 11, 24, 25.](#)

Strategy for the Gateway, Hub Towns and Primary Towns

The gateways, as priority growth areas should be growing at faster rates than the regions, though the hubs 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

¹⁴ 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.

migration impacts, the DoEHLG advises 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 well as policy and related factors which will shape growth patterns in the future. The figures set out are minimum targets by 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 and hub town population targets and the rest of the 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 and Population Targets and design periods for roads, water and waste water infrastructure.

Minimum population targets for Gateways and Hubs (DoEHLG) are factored into RPG 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 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 will have a major impact on population in the West Region.

Galway Gateway

The geographical area of the Gateways and Hubs is defined by the DoEHLG as the city and suburbs or town and environs as determined by the CSO in the 2006 census. The Draft 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 (315), the population projections for the Galway gateway are being 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 DED's 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 DED's 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 **Draft Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010 -2022**

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.

Athlone Gateway

The West Regional Authority will take cognisance of the Athlone Gateway and the contribution of the West Region to its growth and development. An area of South Roscommon 'Monksland' is contained within the Athlone Gateway area and is an important employment generating area for the Midlands and Western 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 (RPG's). 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.

Linked Hubs & 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 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.

Key Towns

The key towns are: Belmullet, Westport, Swinford, Boyle, Castlerea, Strokestown, Ballaghderreen, Charlestown, Carraroe, Clifden, Louisburgh, Ballinrobe, Roscommon (County town), Ballyhaunis, Ballinasloe, Mountbellow, Portumna, Loughrea and Gort. 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 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 re-use 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: 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.

Policies

- Taking account of sustainable development, public investment, sustainable travel and the support of strong rural communities beyond the gateways and hubs, the distribution of future development in relation to housing, employment and retailing will be based on the following principles:
 - Achievement of compact sustainable urban development in line with the Guidelines on Sustainable Urban Residential Development (DoEHLG, 2009);
 - Integration of future housing, employment, retailing and other community services avoiding excessive levels of commuting and promoting quality of life;
 - Implementation of the planning guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing (DEHLG, 2005) including recommendations at the regional level as to the boundaries of the various rural area types¹⁵ and how urban generated growth in the environs of the Gateways and Hub towns will be managed to support the achievement of the estimates of future population for these centres;
 - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Designation of the Ardaun and Garraun development area as a self sufficient, public transport served corridor for the east of Galway City. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support co-operation between the Galway City and County Councils Public Transport Infrastructural initiatives.
- To carefully manage the growth in the commuter areas of the Gateway and Hub and Joint Hub. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support for the development of South Roscommon (Monksland area) as part of the Athlone Gateway and inter-regional co-operation of service requirements. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)

Objectives

- To drive the strategic and compact development of the 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- To focus in the City on consolidating existing suburban areas and the regeneration of significant brownfield sites to ensure a compact urban form. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support the objective set out in the Galway County Council County Development Plan 2009 – 2015 that masterplans and/or Local Area Plans for Briarhill, Ardaun and Garraun be developed as a priority and brought forward for adoption by Galway County Council. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support the review in full of 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 14.](#)

¹⁵ The boundaries of areas under urban pressure should be consistent with the approach recommended in the Guidelines.

Strategy for 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.

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 and Hubs 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.

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.

Policies

- To implement policies to achieve balanced regional development including integration of economic, social and cultural developments.
- Prioritise 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- To ensure overall sustainable development in towns/villages throughout the region [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support the goals of Department of Transport: Smarter Travel - A Sustainable Transport Future. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 14.](#)

Objectives

- Local authorities shall ensure that rural housing development is appropriately controlled in areas of urban influence. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 11, 24-25.](#)
- 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);
 - Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2005);

- Quality Housing 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);
 - Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009).
 - Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines (2004);
 - Site Development Works for Housing Areas (1998); [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 11, 24-25.](#)
- 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 whilst creating a network of smaller settlements which will develop into vibrant communities finding support to/from the gateway and hub/linked hub. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-14, 16-25.](#)
 - To support development in the towns and villages in the region that is in sympathy with 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.
 - Minimise sprawling development of towns/villages so as to create consolidated town/village form.
 - Sustain the population in the areas of the region which have experienced population decline in recent years and encouraging development where appropriate in these localities and where the landscape has capacity to absorb such developments. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 11, 24-25.](#)
 - To implement the provisions of the housing strategies in accordance with the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended.
 - Holiday homes and Second homes to be restricted to identified areas preferably located in or adjacent to existing settlement centres. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 11, 24-25.](#)
 - To ensure that access to national roads, outside the 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.
 - Protect areas identified as key for source protection areas for drinking water supplies and ensure that groundwater quality is not adversely affected by developments.
 - Protect and enhance biodiversity in the West Region examining the cumulative impacts of development or their ability to increase biodiversity.

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 proposed targeted population for 2022 is 521,400.

Table 13: State and West Region Population Growth Targets 2010 – 2022

	2006*	2008 (est.)	2010	2016	2022
State	4,239,848	4,422,000	4,584,900	4,997,000	5,375,200
West Region	414,277	426,100	442,200	484,700	521,400
WRA % Share of State	9.77%	9.64%	9.64%	9.70%	9.70%

* Actual Figures

Source: DoEHLG, 2009

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

Table 14: Minimum Population Target for the Galway Gateway 2016 and 2022 (DoEHLG)

Gateway	Population				
	2002	2006	2010	2016	2022
Galway City	66,163	72,414 (17.48%)	78,400 (17.73% *)	88,500 (18.26% *)	98,700 (18.92% *)

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

Source: DoEHLG, 2009

Table 15: Minimum Population Targets for Hub & Linked Hub 2016 and 2022 (DoEHLG)

Hub & Linked Hub	2002	2006	2010	2016	2022
Tuam	5,947	6,885 (1.67%)	7,600 (1.72% *)	8,600 (1.77% *)	9,500 (1.82% *)
Castlebar-Ballina	21,018	22,300 (5.4%)	23,400 (5.29% *)	26,000 (5.36% *)	28,700 (5.5% *)

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

Source: DoEHLG, 2009

Table 16: Interval Increases in Population Targets for the Galway Gateway 2006-2022

	2002-2006	2006-2010	2010-2016	2016-2022
Galway	6,566	5,671	10,100	10,200
% Growth during interval	9.92%	7.8%	12.88%	11.53%

Table 17: Interval Increases in Population Targets for Hubs 2006-2022

	2002-2006	2006-2010	2010-2016	2016-2022
Tuam	938	715	1,000	900
% Growth during interval	15.77%	10.38%	13.2%	10.5%
Castlebar-Ballina	1,282	1,100	2,600	2,700
% Growth during interval	6.1%	4.9%	11.1%	10.38%

Distribution of the West Region's population:

Table 18: Distribution of the West Region's Population 2010 - 2022

Local Authority Areas					
	2006	2010	2016	2022	Actual Growth 06 - 22
Galway City	72,414	78,400	88,500	98,700	26,286
Galway County	159,256	170,100	186,860	198,500	39,244
Mayo County	123,839	132,200	144,640	150,800	26,961
Roscommon County	58,768	61,500	64,700	73,400	14,632
West Region (Total)	414,277	442,200	484,700	521,400	107,123

Table 19: Distribution of the West Region's Population 2010 – 2022 by L.A. Area¹⁶

Local Authority Areas (Breakdown)					
	2006	2010	2016	2022	Actual Growth 06 - 22
Galway City					
Galway City	72,414	78,400	88,500	98,700	26,286
County Galway					
Tuam	6,885	7,600	8,600	9,500	2,615
Rest of County	152,371	162,500	178,260	189,000	36,629
Total County Allocation	159,256	170,100	186,860	198,500	39,244
Mayo County					
Castlebar-Ballina	22,300	23,400	26,000	28,700	6,400
Rest of County	101,539	108,800	118,640	122,100	20,561
Total County Allocation	123,839	132,200	144,640	150,800	26,961
Roscommon County					
Roscommon Town	5,017	5,800	6,850	7,800	2,783
Monksland	2,489	2,900	3,890	4,600	2,111
Rest of County	51,262	52,800	53,960	61,000	9,738
Total County Allocation	58,768	61,500	64,700	73,400	14,632

¹⁶ The towns listed are based on CSO boundary definitions

4.7 Housing and Housing Land Requirements for 2016

The following section indicates **minimum** housing and housing land requirements for 2016 for each of the constituent city and county level planning authorities. It outlines the housing demand and required 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.

The following table outlines the residential housing demand and required residential zoning for Gateways, Hubs/linked hubs, towns of Roscommon and Monksland. These settlements form the basis of the Core Settlement Strategy in the revised RPGs.

It will be a subsequent function of the City/County Development Plans and 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 and Estimates.

Table 20: Housing Demand & Residential Zoning Required for Gateways, Hubs, PDC and RST for period 2010 – 2016

Settlement	Population 2010-2016 (Based on Minimum Pop Targets)	Total No. of Residential Units required over period 2010-2016	Total zoned housing land required over period 2010-2016 (incorporating 75% over zoning)
Galway City	10,100*	4,200 based on 2.4 persons average household size	240 ha based on housing density of >30 units per ha
Tuam	1,000*	385 units based on 2.6 persons average household size	27 ha based on average housing density of 25 units per ha
Castlebar-Ballina	2,600*	1000 units based on 2.6 persons average household size	70 ha based on average housing density of 25 units per ha
Roscommon Town	1,050	375 units based on 2.8 persons average household size	26 ha based on average housing density of 25 units per ha
Monksland	990	354 units based on 2.8 average household size	25 ha based on average housing density of 25 units per ha
Rest of West Region	26,760	9600 Units based on 2.8 persons per household	

* As set out in DEHLG Minimum Population Targets August 2009
ha = Hectares.

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 plan.

Table 21: CSO Permanent housing units by occupancy status on Census Night (Vacancy rate includes holiday homes and second homes)

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

Source: CSO Volume 6 – Housing p.111

Objectives

- 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. Vacancy levels shall be monitored aiming to utilise existing housing stock.
- Development Plans Guidance for Population and Settlement:
 - In considering proposed residential land for development, the following considerations should be used:
 1. Land should be zoned on the basis of the population targets that are set for the settlement in question.
 2. 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 lie between 50% and 100% of the land required.
 3. Land that is zoned should, generally, either be serviced or about to be serviced with water, wastewater facilities and road infrastructure.
 4. 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.
 5. Zoned land should be reviewed from time to time and alterations made to the phasings if considered necessary.
 - 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.
 - 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 the changing population trends.

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)

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 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 have placed pressure on the 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 Draft 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 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 Draft Planning Guidelines *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (November 2009)*. The Guidelines recommend a clear and transparent assessment of flood risk at all stages in the planning process and set out that 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.

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 riskin 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 Draft 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 assessment will be based on the key settlements identified in the Settlement Strategy which are Galway City, the Hub town of Tuam, the linked hub of Ballina-Castlebar, Roscommon Town and Monksland. 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 Guidelines on Flood Risk Management, these towns may grow sustainably while at the same time managing flood risk appropriately.

Policy

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:

- tidal effects around estuaries and along the coast including the implications of the latest predictions for sea level rise;
- fluvial flooding along river corridors and other significant watercourses resulting from catchments within and beyond the Region and other sources of flooding; and
- flooding resulting from surface water runoff and capacity constraints in surface water drainage systems. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#)

Objectives

- New development should be avoided in areas at risk of flooding. However, it is recognised and acknowledged that the key 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#)
- County 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 plains¹⁷) 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). [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#)
- SUDS¹⁸ based drainage plans should be prepared in conjunction with Local Area Plans to optimise flood/runoff management potential of the areas. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#)

¹⁷ Flood plain is defined as follows Rivers – the extent of a flood event with a 1% annual probability of exceeding the peak floodwater level. The Coast – the extent of a flood event with a 0.5% annual probability of exceeding the peak floodwater level

¹⁸ Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS)

- Through flood plain protection and SUDS, Local Authorities should incorporate improvements in biodiversity and amenity for existing and future developments. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#)
- Direct strategically significant growth to low risk areas. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#)
- An evidence based methodology should be adapted to the application of sequential approach and justification test in zoning of flood susceptible lands for development. This should be transparent and use objective criteria appropriate to proposed zoning. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#) [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 22, 25.](#)

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.

Policy

- 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 as amended, Planning and Development (Regional Planning Guidelines) Regulations 2009 and any new planning Acts when preparing and making a Development Plan and shall ensure that an existing Development Plan is consistent with the Draft 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);
 - Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities (December 2009).

CHAPTER 5: Transport & 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. 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 which also caters for passenger traffic to the Islands.

Works are presently underway on major national routes such as the M6 – Ballinasloe to Galway and N18 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 and is designated to address social exclusion in rural areas arising from unmet transport needs.

Figure 4: % of workers in each Electoral Division who travel 30 km and over to work (CSO, 2006)

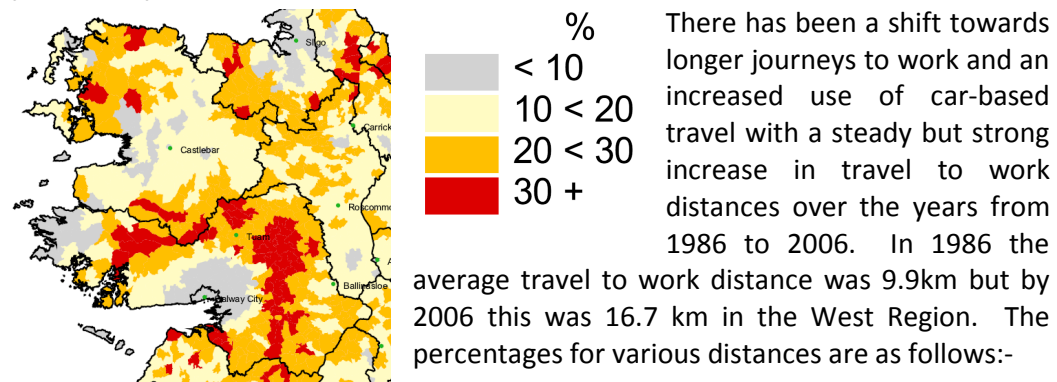


Table 22: Distance travelled by workforce in the West Region

Distance	% of Workforce
0 - 9.9 Km	47.7
10 – 24.9 Km	28.6
25 – 49.9 Km	15.6
50 + Km	8.1
	100

Source: CSO (2009)

The average distance travelled is 16.7 km. 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.

Table 23: Mode of travel used by workforce in the West Region

Mode	% of Workforce
Work from home	7.2 %
Foot/Bicycle	11.3%
Car/Van	78.2%
Public Transport	2.5%
Other	0.8%
Total	100

Source: CSO (2009)

Policy

- 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 discourage dispersed development and long commuting. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)

Objectives

- Seek the implementation of key goals, targets and action of the Department of Transport ‘Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 – 2020’ through:
 - Consolidation 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 of policies in relation to residential density and urban form which support public transport, cycling and walking;
 - Implementing 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support broadly based targets for shifts to sustainable travel modes to be achieved, particularly at Gateway level, over the lifetime of the Guidelines.
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support Mobility management (work place travel plans, car sharing arrangements) as a useful tool to achieve higher levels of sustainable travel behaviour.

5.2. Priority Infrastructure

Roads

Policies

- Support the National Roads Authority investment to remedy deficiencies generally in the roads network minimising environmental impact.
- Support the NRA programme of works on the national routes throughout the region minimising environmental impact.
- 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 minimising environmental impact.

Objectives

- Identify the following works for short-term completion in order to promote a balanced regional development. The following project must be assessed as to their environmental impact with preferred route options ensuring minimal impact on the natural and built environment.
 - Western Road Corridor, i.e. N18 and N17 from Gort to Charlestown minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - Galway Outer City By-Pass minimising environmental impact.
 - N5 Westport to Roscommon/Longford borders minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - N26 Ballina – Bohola Phase II minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - Provision of an R336 along a new alignment between Galway and Scríob via Ros a Mhil minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - Reclassify and upgrade the N60/N61 as a National Primary route, Athlone to Castlebar via Roscommon and the upgrading of N61 Roscommon to Boyle minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - Upgrade and improve all National secondary Roads in particular:
 - N59 Galway to Ballina route serving the west of the Region; minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - N84 Galway to Castlebar connecting the Gateway to linked hubs; minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - N63 Galway to Roscommon connecting the Gateway to the County town of Roscommon; minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - N67 Kilcolgan to North Clare; minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
 - Upgrade the following Regional Roads:

- R312 Castlebar to Ballacorrick; minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
- R313 Bangor to Belmullet; minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
- R321/R323 Bohola to Knock linking the N5 to the N17 minimising environmental impact. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
- 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. There shall be a general presumption against direct access to national routes from new housing developments in compliance with the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines and against inappropriate retail development adjacent to existing/planned national routes and interchanges as set out in the DOEHLG Retail Planning Guidelines. In exceptional circumstances, direct access should be considered, in consultation with the NRA on a case by case basis, onto national routes (non-motorways) to accommodate strategic infrastructure or regional significant development. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support the review and implementation of the Galway Transport and Population Study (GTPS). [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support the development of an integrated transportation system for Galway City and County areas.

Rail & Bus Services

Policies

- Support the opening of the entire Western Rail Corridor route. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 14, 25.](#)
- Support the development of commuter services on the Galway and Mayo Railway Lines.
- Support the Rural Transport Programme and seek to support its extension.
- To investigate the potential for development of integrated transportation hubs in the Gateway, Hubs and other appropriate urban locations.
- 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 Quality Bus corridors, commuter rail services and appropriately located park and ride facilities. 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 and hubs. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-14, 16-25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Number 25.](#)

Objectives

- Support the construction of new Railway Stations to facilitate commuter and freight services e.g. Oranmore. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12-14, 25.](#)
- Support the proposals for the laying of dual track between Galway and Athenry and the development of new commuter stations along the new Western Rail Corridor as appropriate. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12-14, 25.](#)
- Support the redevelopment of Ceannt Station and adjacent lands. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12-14, 25.](#)
- Support the installation of freight handling equipment at key rail stations to facilitate the greater usage of rail to transport freight generally.
- Promote and encourage appropriate 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Support the provision of rural bus shelters as a necessary component of a good rural public transport system.
- To consider the development of a strategy for the provision of appropriate park & ride in the Galway Gateway and investigate locations for Park & Ride in the satellite towns such as Ballinasloe, Gort and Claremorris and other main urban centres across the region. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, 13, 25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 1-14, 16-25.](#)

Ports & Harbours

Galway Sea Port is of strategic importance to the West Region and Ros a Mhíl serves as an important amenity. Ports and Harbours contribute to the economic development and are important transportation links to facilitate the growth and connectivity of the Region. Adequate infrastructure must be in place to facilitate the development of the aqua-culture industry, marine tourism industry and to facilitate water based leisure activities/sports in the West Region.

Policies

- 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 developments at these locations which support this objective are to be welcomed with the regions ports integrated with the road networks. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 8-10, 12, 23, 25.](#)

- Derive greater economic benefit from continued harbour investments in all Islands.

Objectives

- Support the redevelopment and expansion of Galway Port which is critical for its continued important role in the growth of the region and support enhanced integration with the rail and road network. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 8, 9, 10, 12, 23, 25.](#)
- Continue the development of Ros a Mhíl Port for fishing and Island transport facilities and assess the opportunity for the development of port related activities. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 8, 9, 10, 12, 23, 25.](#)
- Examine the potential for developing Ballina, Westport, Ballyglass/ Black Sod Harbours for increased usage and greater economic benefit. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 8, 9, 10, 12, 23, 25.](#)

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

- The up-grading of air transportation infrastructure, including the air services between the mainland and the islands is supported. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12, and 25.](#)
- Support the implementation of Public Safety Zones in the vicinity of airports.
- Support improved access to Shannon as a key international airport for the Region. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 12-14, and 25.](#)

Objectives

- Support designation of Strategic Development Zone at Knock Airport. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 3-6, 8-14, 18-25.](#)
- Facilitate the appropriate development of industrial/commercial lands and structure adjacent or close to the airports. [HDA Mitigation Measures Numbers 3-6, 8-14, 18-25.](#)

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.

Policies

- Promote the Region as a premier destination for cycling and walking. This should take account of visual impacts and other environmental considerations. [HDA Mitigation Measure Number 25.](#)
- Promote a better environment for pedestrians, cyclists and persons with disabilities in the city, towns and villages so as to facilitate increased mobility and access for citizens.
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Number 25.](#)

Objectives

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Number 25.](#)
- Support the planning, development and design of towns and cities in a cycling and pedestrian friendly way with increased mobility for citizens and visitors.
- Ensure urban road infrastructure (with the exception of motorways) is designed/retrofitted so as to be pedestrian and cyclist friendly.
- 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.
- Support the provision of designated rural cycle networks especially for visitors and recreational cycling taking account of potential impacts on the environment and develop a network of walkway/cycleway through the region including green routes. [HDA Mitigation Measure Number 25.](#)
- Ensure that all designated cycle paths are maintained to a high standard.

5.3 Water & Waste Water Services

Investment in the key economic infrastructures of water 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.

A high standard of water and sewerage infrastructure is fundamental to achieving orderly sustainable development.

Policies

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Good quality drinking water which is 'safe and secure' should be available to all consumers of public and group water schemes. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)
- To support the Rural Water Programme; which must be continued and enhanced. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)
- To enhance and remedy water services needs of the Gateway, Hub and Joint Hub together with other urban areas where services are required. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Particular environmental issues identified in the River Basin District Management Plans need to be addressed in accordance with the Water Framework Directive.
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 2-25.](#)
- Prepare where appropriate Ground Water Protection Schemes in conjunction with GSI identifying aquifers at risk.

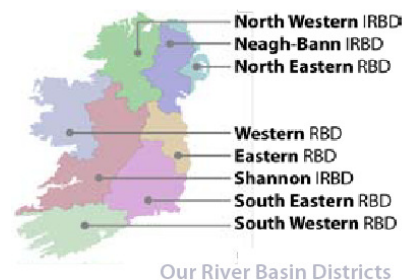
Objectives

- Water conservation measures should be expanded particularly by rehabilitation and reinforcement of existing water networks. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Continue the development of Regional Water Supply Schemes in the region. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Provide quality water and waste water services necessary for environmental purposes and for urban and rural economic development purposes. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Drinking water supply sources should be protected and managed appropriately. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)
- All unserved properties in the catchment area of a public wastewater scheme should be connected to the public network. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 2-11, 16-25.](#)

River Basin Management (Water Framework Directive)

The European Union Water Framework Directive (WFD) 2000 encompasses previous EU Directives aimed at reducing pollution¹⁹ 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.

Figure 5: River Basin Districts



¹⁹ These include Urban Waste Water Treatment, Nitrates, Bathing Waters, Shellfish, Habitats and Dangerous Substances Directives.

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) will be finalised in 2009.

Policy

- To ensure the protection and improvement of all waters, inland throughout the Region.

Objective

- 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.

Draft Water & Waste Water Assessment of Needs 2009

An assessment of needs has been compiled by the four Local Authorities in October 2009 in respect of water and waste water infrastructural requirements 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 the following table:

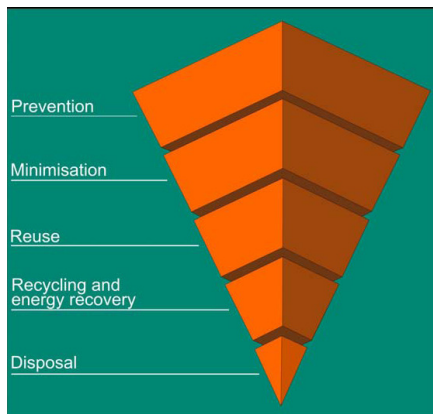
Table 24: Draft Water & Waste Water Assessment of Needs 2009

Local Authorities	Water Conservation	ECJ Judgements	Environmental & Public Health	Sustainable Development of Gateways & Creation of Jobs
Roscommon	1. Roscommon Countywide Phase 1-11	1. Sth. Rosc. RWSS 2. Boyle/Ardcarne RWSS 3. Rosc. Central RWSS 4. Arigna RWSS 5. North East RWSS and 6. Ballyleague RWSS 7. West Roscommon RWSS	1. Roscommon Towns & Villages SS 2. Rosc. Town SS upgrade 3. Sth Rosc. RWSS 4. Boyle/Ardcarne RWSS 5. Rosc Central RWSS 6. Arigna RWSS 7. North East RWSS and 8. Ballyleague RWSS 9. West Roscommon RWSS 10. Monksland SS upgrade 11. Mount Talbot /Four Roads RWSS 12. Rosc. Sludge Management	1. Sth. Rosc RWSS 2. Monksland SS Upgrade
Mayo	1. Mayo Countywide Phase II 2. Water Cons. Stage 3 Rehab. Works (3 No. Contracts)	1. Castlebar Environs SS 2. L.Mask Ext Srah to Westport 3. L.Mask Ext to Kiltimagh	1. Ballina Main Drainage Scheme 2. Achill Sound Sewerage 3. Kiltimagh SS 4. L. Mask Ext Srah to Westport 5. Cong Water Supply 6. L. Mask Ext to Louisburgh 7. L. Mask Ext to Kiltimagh 8. Belmullet SS 9. Killala SS 10. Sludge Hub Centre 11. Newport SS 12. Kilmaine/Shrule water supply	1. L. Mask Ext Srah to Westport

Local Authorities	Water Conservation	ECJ Judgements	Environmental & Public Health	Sustainable Development of Gateways & Creation of Jobs
Galway County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Galway Countywide Water Conservation Contracts 2. Mains Rehabilitation: Ballinasloe, Oranmore & Carraroe 3. Mains Rehabilitation: Corofin, Headford & Loughrea 	None	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gort RWSS 2. Clifden SS 3. Athenry SS 4. Loughrea SS 5. Oughterard SS 6. Loughrea RWSS 7. Galway City Western Environs WS 8. Claregalway & Milltown SS Bundle 9. Kinvara SS 10. Glenamaddy SS 11. Mountbellow SS 12. Craughwell & Carraroe SS Bundle 13. 39 further contracts in Planning Phase 2010-2012 including Sludge Management & treatment plants for off shore islands 	<p>Sustainable & Strategic Development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Galway City Western Environs RWSS 2. Athenry SS 3. Claregalway & Milltown SS Bundle 4. Loughrea SS & RWSS 5. Clifden SS 6. Oughterard SS 7. Kinvara SS 8. Glenamaddy SS 9. Craughwell & Carraroe SS Bundle 10. Mountbellow SS 11. 14 further contracts in the Planning Phase
Galway City	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Galway City Conservation Phase 2: Stages 1-3 2. Lead Distribution Watermains Replacement 	None	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Galway SS, Stage 3 Volume B, Mutton Island WWTW Upgrade 2. Galway SS Stage 3, Volume C, Advance Works 3. Galway Harbour Area 4. Galway SS, Stage 3, Volume D, Rehab/Upgrade 5. Galway SS, Galway East 6. Menlo Water Supply Extension 7. Galway City Water Supply 8. Terryland Works Upgrade 9. Galway Sewerage Scheme 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Galway City Water Supply Scheme 2. Galway SS, Stage 3, Volume A 3. Galway SS, Stage 3, Volume B, Mutton Island 4. Galway SS Volume D, Rehab/Upgrade 5. Galway SS Stage 3, Galway East Wastewater Infrastructure

5.4 Waste Management

Figure 6: 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 development of infrastructure for the reuse, recycling and disposal of residual waste in the most appropriate manner.

Waste management is an inter-regional issue. The following actions in particular need to be progressed:-

Policies

- Support the formulation of a national policy on energy recovery/thermal treatment. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, and 25.](#)
- Biological treatment facilities should be developed in the Region to treat source-separated organic waste. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, and 25.](#)
- Regional synergies should be developed in the area of sludge management planning and solutions delivery. [HDA Mitigation Measure Number 12.](#)

Objectives

- Sufficient landfill capacity must be available within or in proximity to the region so as not to impair economic development. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, and 25.](#)
- To comply with the pre-treatment aspect of various EU and national government directives. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, and 25.](#)

5.5 Energy & Utilities

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.

- 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.
 - Improve energy efficiency and promote energy reduction measures.
 - The continued roll-out of “smart metering”.
 - Adherence to the Government’s White Paper Document “*Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland, Energy Policy Framework 2007-2012*”.
 - Encourage energy efficiency in new developments.

- Renewable generation: 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.

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 to 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 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. It will not be possible to utilise Ireland’s natural resources of renewable energy without the essential upgrades outlined in the “Strategy for the development of Ireland’s Electricity for a sustainable and Competitive Future” - GRID25 published by EirGrid 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:

- Meeting 40% of consumption from renewables.

Energy & Climate Targets – National & International Commitments

Kyoto Protocol

- Limit the increase in Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions to 13% above 1990 levels by 2012
- Copenhagen Accord December 2009

EU Commission Post-Kyoto Targets for 2020

- Reduce emissions in the non-trading sectors (agriculture, transport, residential, commerce, waste) by 20% from 2005 base
- Reduce emissions in the ETS sector by 21% from 2005 base

National & EU Targets

- Renewable sources to contribute 16% of final energy consumption (electricity, heat and transport) in 2020
- 15% of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2010; 40% by 2020

Related National Targets (by 2020)

- 20% increase in energy efficiency
- 30% biomass co-firing at peat plants in Ireland
- 10% renewable energy in transport

Policies

- Support the additional investment in the West Region as proposed in GRID 25. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)
- Support the investment required to facilitate renewable energy projects and conventional generating station deployment. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)
- Support investment to upgrade the existing transmission and distribution network and to build new circuits as required. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)

Objectives

- Support the construction of new 110KV and higher lines across the region but particularly to the West Galway area and such construction to take account of various EU designations. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)
- Support the GRID 25 Proposals to upgrade approximately 700Km of the existing transmission network and built new circuits across the region. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)

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. 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. 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 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.

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

- Support the construction of distribution networks serving all urban centres in the region with the bundling of towns as necessary to achieve implementation. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)
- The construction of a small number of gas fired electricity generating stations in the West Region should be facilitated at appropriate locations having regard to the proper planning and sustainable development. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)

Renewable Energy

Securing indigenous renewable energy supplies will generate a more sustainable economy, lower carbon emissions, combat climate change and help meet national government and EU renewable targets. This overall target 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, 3.7.2, pg 65).

While the NDP further recognises the TSO’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.

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 Guidelines, 2006”.

Objectives

- Support the upgrade of the electricity grid to facilitate the production of electricity in the region from renewable source. In particular the grid to the high potential wind farm areas should be sufficient to cater for consumer demand and supply renewable production to the national grid. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)
- Support the facilitation of wind farm developments in suitable locations, having regard to any designations and government guidelines including the DoEHLG Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Wind Energy Development 2006. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)

Wave, Tidal, Hydro and Bio Energy

The West Region's location provides it with ample resources for Wave, Tidal, Hydro and Bio Energy.

Policies

- To facilitate the delivery of wave, tidal, hydro and bio-energy. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12 and 25.](#)
- Support the implementation of the Bioenergy Action Plan for Ireland. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)

Objectives

- Promote and support the development of wave and tidal energy in appropriate locations provided they are compliant with the appropriate planning and environmental criteria and international directives [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12 and 25.](#)
- Support the development of hydro energy in appropriate streams and rivers provided they are compliant with the appropriate planning and environment criteria and international directives. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12 and 25.](#)

Renewable Energy Technology for Thermal Heat Generation

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 through out the region.

Policy

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

Micro Renewable Energy Technology

The 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 (Planning and Development Regulations, S.I. No 235 of 2008 and S.I. No 83 of 2007, provides guidance on planning exemptions for micro renewable energy projects).

Building Energy Directive

Policy

- To support the implementation of aspects of the Building Energy Directive and Energy Labelling where applicable within their own building portfolio and through obligations under Planning and Building Control.

National Energy Efficiency Action Plan

Policy

- 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.

Energy Agencies

Policy

- To support the work of the Local/Regional Energy Agencies. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)

5.6 Telecommunications

A key factor in the determination of social and economic progress in the County 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 county. As with most technology they provide benefits, which must be balanced against associated dis-amenities.

Policies

- Support the delivery of a high capacity ICT infrastructure, broadband networks and digital broadcasting.
- Support the extension of the fibre network to all areas of the West Region. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12 and 25.](#)
- Support and implement the Department of the Environment and Local Government publication "Telecommunications Antennae and support structures – Guidelines for Planning Authorities". [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12 and 25.](#)
- Promote the development of high grade optical fibre to the key towns in the region. This will facilitate the promotion/attraction of indigenous and FDI companies. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12 and 25.](#)
- Promote ecommerce 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.
- Public Authorities and developers should consider the installation of open access communication ducting in all major developments.

Objectives

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12 and 25.](#)
- Promote adaptation of alternative sustainable energy sources appropriate to the specific needs of local rural communities. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, and 25.](#)
- Support tele-working to reduce trip generation.
- Support the co-operation of service providers.

CHAPTER 6: Environment & Amenities Strategy

6.1 Landscape

The West Region comprises 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 comprises of 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, religious reasons. The landscape of the West Region has dictated 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 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'. The DoEHLG intends to publish a National Landscape Strategy (NLS) for Ireland. Currently each county in the West Region has their own Landscape 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 and Clare.
- The Shannon Catchment area.
- The Upland Areas of Galway and Mayo.

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 results in landslides. However, certain development or land use has the capacity to heighten the risk of such effects and the cumulative impact of such development 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.

Policies

- A common approach to landscape management should be adopted throughout the region. 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.
- This approach should also identify the nature and scale of development that would be permitted within areas of different designations. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25](#).
- 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.

6.2 Built Heritage

The built heritage consists not only of great artistic achievements, but also of the everyday work of craftsmen of the past. The West Region contains a wealth of historical architecture, archaeological monuments, our townscapes and rural structures which represent our cultural identity through time. This resource is also an important element in attracting tourists to the region. The term “architectural heritage” is defined in the Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) & Historic Monuments Act, 1999²⁰.

The protection of the architectural and archaeological heritage of the region should be addressed by each planning authority in line with DoEHLG Guidelines for architectural heritage protection and the Planning Act 2000 as amended and the National Monument Acts (1930 -2004). A regional approach to the compilation of an inventory of the Architectural Heritage / Record of Protected Structures (which is currently undertaken at county level) 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).

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

²⁰ It is defined as “all (a) structures and buildings together with their settings and attendant grounds, fixtures and fittings, (b) groups of such structures and buildings, and (c) sites, which are of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or of technical interest”.

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 townscapes should be enhanced by new development.

Policies

- To promote public awareness of the rich architectural and archaeological heritage in the area.
- To secure the preservation of sites and features of archaeological and architectural interest.
- To protect and enhance archaeological monuments, their settings and zones of archaeological potential.
- To protect historical architecture which includes most conservation, preservation and improvement which is compatible with maintaining the character and interest of the structure as set out in the NIAH.
- To protect and enhance architectural structures of special interest, and their settings including associated gardens.
- To support the use of traditional building skills, and materials and to encourage training in these skills.

Objectives

- To seek to conserve the integrity of existing archaeological monuments and their settings.
- Support the regeneration and continued reuse of our older structures in the West Region. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 9, 11, 16, 17-25.](#)
- 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.
- To raise awareness amongst the public of the architectural heritage wealth that has been inherited through dissemination of information.

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 up to the Bern Convention (1979) 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.

Habitats protected by the Irish Government include Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and National Parks. Natura 2000 sites which consist of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are protected by the EU and Irish Government. The protection of such sites, biosphere reserves and other designations represent a positive framework for the conservation of species. While there are a larger 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.

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 have been introduced in 2009 to support the achievement of favourable conservation status for the species.

Policies

- To implement the EU Directives with regard to the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.
- To support the protection of Nature 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.

Objectives

- 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.
- Local Authorities should ensure consistency in emphasis and approach to County/City Heritage Plans and Local Biodiversity Plans which is integrated into Development Plans and Local Area Plans.
- The 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.
- 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.
- Support the achievement of favourable conservation status for freshwater pearl mussels S.I. No. 296 of 2009 'The European Communities Environmental Objectives (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) Regulations 2009'.

- To encourage and promote access to natural heritage, geological and geomorphological systems, sites and systems.

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 depending 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 and the Water Framework Directive provide a mechanism for the protection of aquifers from a combination of threats and 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 one 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

- 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 Water Framework Directive and 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 region-scale facilities of a specific type, including the following and development plans should also make provision for such sustainable developments:

- Water based activities on Lough Corrib, Lough Mask, Lough Conn, Lough Ree and other lakes.
- Walking & cycling activities using designated routes. 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

- Support the development of leisure areas (described above) in a co-ordinated way between Mayo and Roscommon County Councils and Galway City and County Councils. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-6, 8-12, 16-25.](#)

Objectives

- Support the development and protect the integrity of long-distance walking routes 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Number 25](#).
- 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.
- To encourage high quality recreational and passive amenity areas in new developments in urban areas.

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 industries²¹. 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 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 Act 2000, 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. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has functions that extend across the landward-seaward divide. A proposed EU Marine Strategy Directive will require an ecosystem based approach to ensure the sustainable management of our marine environment.

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.

Coastal tourism and industry development including port expansion and maintenance works such as dredging disturbs species may result in a localised loss of

²¹ Source: Heritage Council, 2003 *Review of Integrated Coastal Zone Management & Principals of Best Practice*.

habitat. Development in aquaculture must be balanced with requirements for coastal and environmental protection.

Policies

- Support the sustainable use of coastal resources. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)
- Promote and support a dynamic and sustainable coastal economy. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-25.](#)

Objective

- The development of off-shore resources shall be carefully managed to ensure pollution does not occur or impact on landscape. The location of coastal wind farm sites should be assessed for impact on migratory species of birds and other environmental impacts. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12, 15, 23-25.](#)

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.

7.2 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.

Policies

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)
- 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 development. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)

Objectives

- Local Authorities shall encourage the development of surgeries and local health care centres in suitable locations subject to normal technical and environmental planning considerations. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)

- 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. **HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.**
- 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. **HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.**

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 VETOS 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 in accordance with Planning and Development Acts and Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Guidance.

3rd Level, 4th Level and Outreach

Policies

- Support the development and expansion of all 3rd and 4th level facilities in the Region.
- Support accessibility to educational facilities, e-learning and ICT throughout the region and inter-regional links in the provision of such services.
- Support the fostering of strong links between educational institutions and industry and enterprise in the region.
- Support educational services and initiatives for unemployed, training and re-training and skills development.

Primary & Secondary Level

Policies

- Support co-operation between the Local Authorities of the West Region and the Department of Education²² and Science and Office of Public Works to ensure co-ordinated provision of new primary and post primary educational facilities at

²² 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'.

suitable locations. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)

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

Objectives

- 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.
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)

Childcare

Policy

- Promote the provision of day care and childcare facilities by both the public and private sectors in settlements and communities. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 6, 24, 25.](#)

Objectives

- Support the development of suitably located small childcare facilities subject to normal technical and environmental planning considerations. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 6, 24, 25.](#)
- 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).
- 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.
- Childcare facilities in areas outside of established settlements should only be considered in close proximity to existing educational or social facilities²³. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 6, 24, 25.](#)

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 with leisure activities and facilities. The availability of leisure and recreational facilities provide employment opportunities and people are attracted to

²³ This would include post offices; existing rural shops; national schools, etc.

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

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 12-13.](#)
- Foster co-operation between local authorities and relevant agencies in promoting and developing the recreational potential of the region and support appropriate development when resources permit.
- 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'. [HDA Mitigation Measure Number 25.](#)
- Protect the amenity of scenic and environmentally sensitive areas and promote the knowledge and appreciation of the natural amenities of the West Region.
- Support the Official Languages Act 2003.

Objectives

- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)
- 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.
- Seek to protect public walking routes and public rights of way, particularly in scenic areas, along inland waterways and the sea coast from development.
- Facilitate the development of sports fields with ancillary facilities subject to normal planning and development assessment. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)
- Support the enhancement of the quality of bathing water and provision of swimming facilities throughout the West Region in accordance with the requirements of the WFD.

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

- Support the development of cultural facilities such as theatres, exhibitions spaces and workshops. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)
- Support co-ordination of local authorities and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism for regional cultural facilities and cultural events.

Objective

- Support the work of the Heritage Office and Arts Office in each Local Authority including 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 decision/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* in order to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable in the West Region.

Policies

- Improve quality of life for individuals and groups in disadvantaged communities. - People with disabilities, lone parent families, young people, the elderly, Travellers and other disadvantaged groups.
- Support the *Local Development Social Inclusion Programme 2007-2013*, including RAPID and CLÁR which 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)
- Support the Rural Transport Programme and its extension to serve a wider area.

Objective

- Support the implementation of the requirements and provisions as set out in the Disability Act 2005.

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 policies 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 co-operation with local community groups who can outline their needs and can then participate in innovative delivery solutions.

Policy

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

Objectives

- Promote the use of library services and develop libraries as a community gathering place.
- 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. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 24, 25.](#)

7.8 An Ghaeltacht & The Islands

Gaeltacht areas are found in County Galway and County Mayo. Based on the 2006 Census of Population, the Gaeltacht of County Galway has a population of 40,052 which represents 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 has 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 growth and development of the Gaeltacht areas has significant potential of the Irish language, cultural heritage, enterprise and employment, recreation, leisure and tourism within the West Region. In 2003, the Official Languages Act was enacted.

Coastal communities found especially on the islands of the West Region have a unique way of life and culture which should be maintained and protected. 7 of the 16 inhabited islands of the West Region are also Gaeltacht islands. The islands are synonymous with a patchwork of stonewalls. 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 25: 2006 Population of County Mayo and County Galway Islands (Census)

County	Island Name	Population
Co. Mayo	Clare Island	136
	Inis Bigil*	24
	Inishcottle	3
	Inishlyre	7
	Inisturk	58
	Clynish	5
	Insegort	1
	Islandmore	1
	Co. Galway	Inishbofin
Árainn* (Inis Mór)		824
Inis Oírr*		247
Inis Meáin*		154
Inis Bearacháin*		1
Inis Treabhair*		1
Inse Ghainimh*		2
Omey		2

*Gaeltacht Islands

Policies

- Support the coastal communities and island communities of the West Region.
- Protect the linguistic and cultural identity of the islands and Gaeltacht areas.
- Promote linguistic, cultural and heritage tourism of the Gaeltacht and island areas.

Objectives

- Support accessibility to Gaeltacht and island areas to facilitate the tourism sector and all sectors. [HDA Mitigation Measure Numbers 1-6, 8-12, 16- 25.](#)
- Seek measures to promote the clear cultural identity of the Gaeltacht and promote bi-lingual facilities in the public realm.

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 County 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.

Investment Priorities

The regional planning guidelines represent an important spatial or locational 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 1.5.1 section.

8.2 Overall Implementation

The overall implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines can be preformed 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

It may be necessary that the Regional Authority 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.

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

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 and Mid-West regions in particular must be on-going.

8.3 Monitoring and Indicators

Monitoring is an important element of an implementation programme. Monitoring of the implementation of the strategy and guidelines will be supported by the setting of targets and indicators.

The following tables set out for a Draft Schedule of indicators and targets that can be reported on as necessary.

Table 26: Indicators and Targets

Chapter 3: Economic Development	Indicators	Targets
Objectives set out in Chapter 3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Level of employment ▪ GVA Data ▪ Agency Assisted Employment data ▪ Tourism Numbers ▪ Level of competitiveness relative to other regions ▪ Level of employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Retain Existing Jobs. ▪ Increase employment in both FDI and indigenous. ▪ Capitalise on the regions' strengths. ▪ Seek to improve competitiveness of industry. ▪ Improve productivity by increasing skills base.

	<p>in key sectors such as food, renewables etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment levels in key towns. ▪ Employment levels in key towns. ▪ Number of Rural enterprises grant aided. ▪ Employment in Retail/Services sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote rural enterprises. ▪ Increase Spin-off enterprises from Gateway's industrial base. ▪ Increased rural non-agriculture activity. ▪ Increase retail sector in all towns. ▪ Increased employment in Retail/Services sector.
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Table 27: Indicators and Targets

Chapter 4: Settlement Strategy Population & Housing	Indicators	Targets
Objectives set out in Chapter 4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Population of Galway Gateway. ▪ Population of Hub/ Joint Hub. ▪ Level of new FDI investment. ▪ Population in all DED's of the region. ▪ Employment in towns along main Transport routes. ▪ Commuting distances and times. ▪ Area of zoned lands in major urban areas. ▪ Level of out-of-town retail planning permissions. ▪ Review for consistency of all Development Plans. ▪ Strategic Flood Risk Assessments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase the dynamic national and regional role of the Gateway and Hubs. ▪ Promote balanced intra-regional development. ▪ Integrate land use and transport/employment resources. ▪ Achieve targeted critical mass in Gateway, Hub and joint Hub. ▪ Ensure adequate zoned lands in main urban areas. ▪ Aim to promote core urban centres. ▪ Have all Development Plans from NSS/Regional to County and local consistent. ▪ Complete Flood Risk Assessments as appropriate. ▪ As set out in Section 1.5.2 of the Regional

Table 28: Indicators and Targets

Chapter 5: Transport & Infrastructure	Indicators	Targets
Objectives set out in Chapter 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numbers using public transport ▪ Levels using Car/Van to travel to work. ▪ Lengths of bus corridors. ▪ Lengths of walking/cycle routes. ▪ Kilometres of N5/N18/N17 and Galway Outer By-Pass upgraded. ▪ Kilometres of National Sec.upgraded ▪ Level of service on Western Rail Corridor ▪ Numbers of new stations completed. ▪ Completion of double tracking projects ▪ Level of commuter usage of train-services ▪ Passenger numbers at airports and ▪ Industrial activity nearby. ▪ Level of investment in water and waste-water infrastructure. ▪ “Grid 25” investments completed. ▪ Level of output from renewable sources ▪ Level, cost and availability of broadband. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase non-car modes of transport. ▪ Implement “Smarter Travel” aims. ▪ Improve/Upgrade remainder of National Primary Routes ▪ Improve National Secondary Routes. ▪ Reduce travel times. ▪ Increase rail usage and services. ▪ Increase usage of Ports/Harbours. ▪ Increase airport usage. ▪ Improve water and waste water infrastructure. ▪ Upgrade electricity network. ▪ Increase input from renewable energy sources to the grid. ▪ Increase availability of high grade competitively priced broadband.

Table 29: Indicators and Targets

Chapter 6: Environment & Amenities	Indicators	Targets
Objectives set out in Chapter 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numbers of nationally important sites open to public ▪ General health of Pearl Mussels. ▪ Level of employment in coastal areas. ▪ Level of attainment of Water Framework Directive objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Derive economic returns from archaeological Heritage. ▪ Protect endangered native species e.g. pearl mussel. ▪ Increase economic activity in coastal areas. ▪ Meet Water Framework Directive objectives.

Table 30: Indicators and Targets

Chapter 7: Social Infrastructure & Community Development	Indicators	Targets
Objectives set out in Chapter 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Level of public transport/roads investment. ▪ Numbers with Third Level education. ▪ Kilometres of new cycle ways/ walkways ▪ Numbers of new swimming pools pitches etc. ▪ Level of employment in Gaeltacht and islands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve healthcare infrastructure. ▪ Improve access to Higher Level education. ▪ Improve leisure facilities. ▪ Improve economic activity in Gaeltacht and island communities.

Please note: Data for all these indicators will not be available on an annual basis. It will be compiled at appropriate intervals when available.

8.4 Future Review of Regional Planning Guidelines

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000 - 2009, planning authorities are obliged to have regard to regional planning guidelines for a period of six years after their adoption, when preparing their statutory Development Plans. 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.

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

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 process²⁴. A number of EU Directives have evolved since 2004 which are 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 will be accompanied by and informed by an SEA, a Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA) which will examine the likely impacts of the Guidelines on Natura 2000 sites²⁵ and a Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal which will examine areas of potential flood risk and include strategic policies and measures to be implemented in lower level plans.

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

²⁴ Some of these include: UN Convention on Biological Diversity 1992, European Landscape Convention 2000; UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992; Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar) 1971; European Biodiversity Strategy 1998; E.U. Water Framework Directive 2000; Kyoto Protocol 1997; EU Drinking Water Directive 1998; Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive 1991; Integrated Pollution Prevention Control Directive 2008; Habitats Directive 1992; Wild Birds Directive 1979; Freshwater Fish Directive 1978; Nitrates Directive 1991; Seveso II Directive on the control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances; Environmental Impact Assessment Directive 1985; Valletta Convention on the Protection of Archaeological Heritage 1992.

²⁵ Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation.

Planning Act Framework

The Planning and Development Act (PDA), 2000 (as amended) 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 current 2004 – 2016 Guidelines are being reviewed. The following is a brief summary of the requirements and recent amendments in the Planning Act framework.

Planning and Development Act 2000 - 2007

Under the PDA 2000, 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; consideration of the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing RPGs²⁶.

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/EEC²⁷, be consistent with any guidelines on the planning system and flood risk management²⁸ in addressing the issue of flood risk and undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment in accordance with SEA Regulations²⁹ to determine the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the guidelines.

Strategic Infrastructure Act 2006

The Strategic Infrastructure Act 2006 introduced a number of changes related to strategic, electricity, transmission and gas infrastructure. These applications are now determined by An Bord Pleanála. The decisions of the Bord are based on up-to-date RPG's reflective of latest policy and data.

National Spatial Strategy (NSS) Update and Outlook (Refresh)

The DoEHLG are undertaking an NSS Update and Outlook comprising of a detailed analysis of NSS, implementation to date and ongoing challenges, effectiveness of

²⁶ In accordance with SEA 2004 Regulations S.I. No. 435 and S.I. 436

²⁷ 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. Plans or projects outside (ex-situ) as well as inside (in-situ) Natura 2000 sites can potentially have an impact on the integrity of these sites.

²⁸ DoEHLG (2009) The Planning System & Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities

²⁹ 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.

planning and delivery mechanisms at central, regional and local levels and identification of critical investments necessary to grow the economic performance and competitiveness of the Gateways and Regions. Given the current economic climate, and planning for the medium to long term, the focus is on how the NSS can contribute to economic renewal and competitiveness, through:

- enhanced prioritisation of infrastructure investment;
- strengthening governance arrangements in Gateways; and
- improved integration of environmental considerations within the planning process.

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.

Transport Plans – Transport 21

Transport 21 is another an infrastructure investment mechanism for promoting balanced development, to connect communities and promote prosperity, meeting transport needs and underpinning 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, upgrade links between 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 – A Sustainable Transport

This is a policy document which sets out how the integration of landuse and transportation planning can be achieved and sets targets. The Regional Planning Guidelines shall include policies which focus on housing in the gateway, hubs and towns with good public transport connections.

Climate Change Policy

The National Climate Change Strategy 2007 – 2012 aims to ensure that Ireland reaches its targets under the Kyoto Protocol (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.

The Draft Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines and the Draft River Basin Management Plans for the Western and Shannon Region require assessments of the impacts of climate change and its implications on human health and development patterns and a program of measures to avoid flooding. Efforts are also required to protect native species and vulnerable ecosystems from the effects of climate change.

Development Plans & Local Area Plans

The Regional Planning Guidelines are intended to provide a regional focus of the objectives of the NSS and leading into the County 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 and 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.

Appendix 2 – Relevant Plans & Policy Documents

International/EU Level

- ✦ EU 6th Environmental Action Programme 1998
- ✦ 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 International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) 1973
- ✦ 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
- ✦ Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and Council of 27th June, 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive)
- ✦ Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive 1991
- ✦ EU Floods Directive 2007
- ✦ EU Groundwater Directive 2006
- ✦ EU Surface Water Directive 1975
- ✦ EU Habitats Directive 1992
- ✦ EU Wild Birds Directive 1979
- ✦ EU Freshwater Fish Directive 1978
- ✦ EU Shellfish Waters Directive 1979
- ✦ EU Drinking Water Directive 1998
- ✦ EU Bathing Water Directive 1976
- ✦ EU Dangerous Substances Directive 1970
- ✦ EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive 1985
- ✦ EU Sewage Sludge Directive 1986
- ✦ EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive 1991
- ✦ EU Nitrates Directive 1991
- ✦ Integrated Pollution Prevention Control Directive 2008
- ✦ EU Plant Protection (Products) Directive 1991

- ✦ EU White Paper on Renewable Energy 1997
- ✦ EU Water Framework Directive 2000 & associated Directives;
- ✦ 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
- ✦ Making Ireland’s Development Sustainable – Review, Assessment and Future Action 2002
- ✦ Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland - The Energy Policy Framework 2007-2020
- ✦ Irish National Forest Standard 2000
- ✦ Draft Indicative Forest Strategy
- ✦ Growing for the Future: A Strategic Plan for the Development of the Forestry Sector in Ireland 1996
- ✦ National Heritage Plan 2002
- ✦ 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
- ✦ Implementing Regional Planning Guidelines - Best Practice Guidance 2005
- ✦ 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 2008
- ✦ 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
- ✦ New Guidelines on Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment currently being prepared by the DoEHLG.

Other Regional Level Plans

- ✦ Draft River Basin Management Plan for the Western River Basin District
- ✦ Draft River Basin Management Plan for the Shannon River Basin District
- ✦ Regional Strategy for the West Region 2004
- ✦ Connaught Regional Waste Management Plan 2006 – 2011
- ✦ Atlantic Gateways Initiative
- ✦ Border Midlands Western Operations Programmes 2000 – 2006
- ✦ Galway Transportation and Planning Study 2003

Other Local Level Plans/ Documents which may be indirectly influenced by the Guidelines:

- ✦ Galway County Council Corporate Plan 2005 – 2009
- ✦ Mayo County Council Corporate Plan 2005 – 2009
- ✦ Roscommon County Council Corporate Plan 2005 – 2009
- ✦ Galway County Council Corporate Plan 2004 – 2009
- ✦ Galway Transportation and Planning Study 2003
- ✦ Galway County Heritage Plan 2004 – 2008
- ✦ County Mayo Heritage Plan 2006 – 2011
- ✦ County Roscommon Heritage Plan 2004 – 2008
- ✦ Biodiversity Action Plan for County Galway 2008 – 2013
- ✦ Draft Mayo County Biodiversity Action Plan
- ✦ Draft Biodiversity Action Plan for County Roscommon
- ✦ Galway County Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development 2002 – 2012
- ✦ Mayo 10 Year Integrated Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development 2002 – 2012
- ✦ Roscommon's 10 Year Economic, Social and Cultural Strategy 2002 - 2012
- ✦ Housing Strategy for County Galway, Mayo, Roscommon and Galway City Councils
- ✦ Mayo Wind Energy Strategy

Appendix 3 – Habitats Directive Assessment Screening of the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines - Mitigation Measures

Local Authorities development plans and local area plans shall outline the requirements of the Habitats Directive Assessment process in accordance with DoEHLG Guidelines. Development shall not be permitted or specific policy adopted unless the Habitats Directive Assessment process has been carried out 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.

The Habitats Directive Assessments should also:

- Ensure that identified threats are examined holistically and in combination with other threats listed in this table, Appendix Two of this document 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, Roscommon and Monksland) 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 Water Framework Directive. 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 Water Framework Directive 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. Developments 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
 - Proposals for the management and maintenance of the treatment system
 - The capacity of the Local Authority to monitor the quality of the dischargePermission 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 Water Framework Directive.

8. Major commercial development may require the provision of waste-water facilities. The major centres identified for commercial growth have or will require waste-water treatment systems that discharge to river systems. Many of these systems contain Natura 2000 Sites that would be vulnerable to inadequately treated waste-water 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 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. 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 waste-water, 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 waste-water 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 waste-water 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 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
 - Proposals for the management and maintenance of the treatment system
 - The capacity of the Local Authority to monitor the quality of the dischargePermission 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. However it is unlikely that any major road proposal that is not already in progress will fall into such a category.
- 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. However, that any major rail proposal that is not already in progress will fall into such a category.
- 15.** Areas that contain or are designated as Natura 2000 sites are also liable to be suitable for the generation of wind energy development. No policies should be adopted or permission granted for developments liable to impact on a Natura 2000 site unless and until the HDA process has been undertaken and it 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 Water Framework Directive.
- 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 Water Framework Directive.
- 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
 - Proposals for the management and maintenance of the treatment system

The capacity of the Local Authority to monitor the quality of the discharge 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 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 will impose 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.