



**‘Pilot’ Rural Renewal Scheme for the Upper
Shannon Area**

**Submission to the Department of Finance –
Final Report**

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Executive Summary

1.0 Introduction

This report provides a detailed assessment of the impact that the 'Pilot' Rural Renewal Tax Scheme for the Upper Shannon Area has had on lands adjacent to the River Shannon and hence the heritage of the River Shannon Waterway Corridor; a 'waterway corridor area' of international significance.

The assessment focuses on the resulting impact of increased development pressures on the heritage within the River Shannon Corridor and the implications for the planning and development system within this area. Four detailed Case studies are provided (two case studies each for Counties Leitrim and Roscommon), in order to illustrate the long-term impact that the tax incentive scheme will have on the River Shannon Corridor Area.

2.0 Overview of the 'Pilot' Rural Renewal Scheme for the Upper Shannon Area 1998-2004

The Pilot Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme was introduced by the government in 1998, 'to help stimulate the development of the Upper Shannon Region'.

The Heritage Council highlighted at the time of the introduction of the pilot scheme in 1998, that the programme was introduced without a 'Baseline Audit' to inform the level and scale of development to be supported through the scheme and to ensure an effective and efficient monitoring and evaluation system.

In addition, the scheme was extended without the undertaking of any mid-programme evaluation. It is the Heritage Council's view that the lack of a baseline audit and a mid-term evaluation makes it almost impossible to undertake a robust efficiency test of public finance contributions to the scheme. In addition consideration of the true impact of the scheme on the national heritage¹ is compromised by the lack of this information

3.0 Planning and Development Policy Context

A review of the planning and development context in 1999 highlights the lack of available information to inform the scheme. The planning and development framework in the EU and Ireland has evolved substantially since the scheme was introduced, including the introduction of the Planning and Development Act 2000, and the Wildlife Amendment Act 2000 and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001.

¹ National Heritage is defined in Section 6 of *The Heritage Act (1995)*, as including monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, wrecks, geology, heritage gardens and parks and inland waterways.

4.0 Impact on Local Planning Authorities – Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils

The average number of planning application submitted to Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils per annum doubled during the scheme from 1,458 per annum during 1994-1998 to 3,089 per annum during 1999-2004. The number of planning appeals dealt with by An Bord Pleanála also increased substantially during the same period.

Consultation with the planning department and planning officers within Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils suggests that additional resources or funding were not made available either by the Council, the Department of Finance or by any other body, at the outset of the scheme. Allocation of such resources would have allowed more detailed consideration of applications compensating to some extent for the lack of an initial baseline audit

5.0 Population Growth in the River Shannon Corridor Area

Leitrim and Roscommon experienced a population increase during the late 1990's and early 2000's indicating that the scheme has met its objectives to stimulate rural renewal and development activity within the region.

However, a comparison of the number of total planning applications submitted during the period of the scheme and the resulting population increase suggests that a significant number of permitted residential developments are either currently unoccupied/vacant or cater specifically to the seasonal holiday market.

6.0 Case Studies

Four detailed Case studies are provided (two case studies each for Counties Leitrim and Roscommon), in order to illustrate the long-term impact that the tax incentive scheme will have on the River Shannon Corridor Area. The case studies are Shannon Cove (Dromod), Leitrim Marina (Leitrim Village), Corotober (Carrick-on-Shannon) and Lough Key Forest Park.

These case studies indicate that earlier schemes were not subjected to a full environmental impact assessment and included elements of unauthorised development. As the planning and development framework in the EU and Ireland has evolved, development proposals are now subjected to a stricter assessment and determination process.

7.0 Key and Further Recommendations

Five Key Recommendations are set out, as follows:

- *Preparation of in-depth baseline data and information to inform the pilot project including biodiversity and other heritage datasets relating to vulnerable and sensitive areas along the River Shannon corridor area;*

- *Design of targets and benchmarks (including population) to enable in-depth Evaluation and Efficiency Testing;*
- *Provision of adequate resources to be made available to ensure effective assessment and monitoring of planning applications and resulting developments within tax incentive scheme area;*
- *Design of numerous Village and Town Design Statements to provide a framework for development in small towns and villages within the pilot area; and*
- *Mid-term evaluation to inform any proposed extension in scheme.*

14 Further recommendations, are discussed under the following headings:

- *Design of Scheme (2);*
- *Planning and Development (7);*
- *Local Authority Resourcing (2); and*
- *Population and Statistics (3).*

8.0 Conclusion

The Heritage Council recommends that future programmes and tax incentive schemes are designed with the protection, preservation, enhancement and effective management of the national heritage as a ‘core’ principle.

The economic, environmental and social benefits of a vibrant heritage sector are wide-reaching and any future scheme should seek to consolidate and enhance the long-term viability and sustainability of this important sector.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Heritage Council was established under *The Heritage Act 1995*², with responsibility to propose policies and priorities for the identification, protection, preservation and enhancement of the national heritage, including monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, wrecks, geology, heritage gardens and parks and inland waterways.

The strategic aims of the Heritage Council in relation to inland waterways are set out in the Heritage Council publication (June 1999) entitled, *Policy Paper on the Future of Ireland's Inland Waterways*, which states that:

'The inland waterways and their corridors should be developed in an integrated broad-based way, conserving where possible, their built and archaeological heritage features and protecting their unique ecological systems, to enhance the enjoyment and appreciation of that heritage now and for future generations'.

(Heritage Council of Ireland Policy Paper on the Future of Ireland's Inland Waterways, April 1999, page 5.)

Since publication of its policy paper, Council has maintained this strategic approach in partnership with many key organisations, agencies and individuals and has in particular pioneered the concept of waterway corridor studies along the River Shannon.

1.1 Purpose of Report

This report provides a detailed assessment of the impact that the 'Pilot' Rural Renewal Tax Scheme for the Upper Shannon Area has had on lands adjacent to the River Shannon and hence the heritage of the River Shannon Waterway Corridor; a 'waterway corridor area' of international significance³. For the purposes of this report, the assessment focuses on the resulting impact of increased development pressures on the heritage within the River Shannon Corridor and the implications for the planning and development system within this area. Four detailed Case studies are provided (two case studies each for Counties Leitrim and Roscommon), in order to illustrate the long-term impact that the tax incentive scheme will have on the River Shannon Corridor Area.

Ultimately, the report aims to provide practicable information for policy makers to ensure that any future tax incentive schemes take full account of all aspects of our national heritage and are designed in accordance with 'Best Practice' public finance efficiency procedures and planning and environmental management standards, as currently required under the provisions of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). The SEA Directive has recently been enacted into Irish legislation under the following regulations and guidelines:

² The Waterways Committee is one of four statutory committees established within the Heritage Council under the provisions of the 1995 Act.

³ *River Shannon Waterways Corridor Study*, The Heritage Council, 2005.

- Provisions of the *European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 S.I. No. 435 of 2004*;
- *Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004, S.I. NO 436 of 2004*; and
- Implementation of *SEA Directive (2001/42/EC)*: Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment – Guidelines for Regional and Planning Authorities.

1.2 Methodology

This submission has been informed by desk-top research, two site visits along the River Shannon Corridor Area undertaken in February and March 2005, a review of relevant planning files and in-depth consultation with local authority officials and a private developer operating within the area covered by the pilot scheme.

The submission has also been informed by the various studies, including waterway corridor studies undertaken by the Heritage Council in partnership with local authorities within the ‘Pilot’ area, for example, Pilot Waterways Corridor Study along the Grand Canal and Shannon Navigation from Shannonbridge to Meelick (2002); Waterways Corridor Study from Roosky to Lanesborough and along the Royal Canal from Tarmonbarry to Thomastown, County Westmeath, and the Longford Branch of the Royal Canal (2004); and Waterways Corridors Study from Lanesborough to Shannonbridge, including all of Lough Ree (2004).

It should be noted that a desk study review was undertaken by the Heritage Council in 2001 to assess the likely heritage impacts, which would result from the implementation of the ‘Pilot’ Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme for the Upper Shannon Area (RRS). This assessment report recommended the formulation of a monitoring programme. A series of meetings followed with the five relevant Local Authorities and the three Government Departments involved in order to agree the terms and details of a monitoring programme. This monitoring programme was never implemented.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF THE ‘PILOT’ RURAL RENEWAL SCHEME FOR THE UPPER SHANNON 1998-2004

The Pilot Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme was introduced by the government in 1998⁴, ‘to help stimulate the development of the Upper Shannon Region’. The five counties covered by the pilot tax incentive scheme are illustrated in Figure 2.1 overleaf. Figure 2.1 also shows the strategic location of the River Shannon Corridor Area within the wider scheme area.

⁴ Rented Residential Tax Relief was introduced in 1st June 1998, the Owner Occupied Residential Relief took effect on the 6th April 1999 and the Commercial/Industrial Relief was introduced on 1st July 1999.

Tax Exempt Period	10 years – if the dwelling is sold within 10 years of first letting, any relief granted is withdrawn. However, a subsequent purchaser of the house is entitled to the relief during this period. The relief is in addition to mortgage interest relief and other tax deductions and allowances usually available against rental income.
Design Materials & Energy Efficiency Ratings	None specified
Environmental Impact Assessment including Visual Impact	As required by the <i>Local Government (Planning and Development Regulations) 1994</i> and <i>European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations of 1989</i> , subsequently amended in 1994, 1996 and 1998.
Penalty Clause(s) for Unauthorised Development	None specified
<i>3. Commercial/Industrial:</i>	
Qualifying Criteria	Any property used for a trade or profession or for manufacturing trades or any property let to a tenant on commercial terms – for example shops, pubs, offices, factories, warehouses, etc.
Commercial Properties	Year 1: 50% of allowable cost (construction costs but excluding site cost) Subsequent Years: 4% of allowable costs until all expenditure has been allowed.
Tax Exempt Period	14 years in total. If qualifying commercial or industrial properties are sold during the 13 years after the expenditure is incurred, a clawback of the relief will apply.
Design Materials & Energy Efficiency Ratings	None specified
Environmental Impact Assessment including Visual Impact	As required by the <i>Local Government (Planning and Development Regulations) 1994</i> and <i>European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations of 1989</i> , subsequently amended in 1994, 1996 and 1998.
Penalty Clause(s) for Unauthorised Development	None specified
Programme Deadline	31 st December 2004 (original deadline for ‘Pilot’ of 31 st December 2002 extended in the December 2001 Budget)
Evaluation and Monitoring	None specified

In earlier discussions with the local authorities following introduction of the scheme in 1998, Council expressed concern that lack of baseline data and information would make evaluation of its impact all but impossible. Council recommended that the following ‘core’ principles be adopted at the conceptualisation and design stage of any scheme of this type:

- Preparation of a Baseline Audit;
- In-depth Environmental Impact Assessment beyond designated thresholds to ensure protection, preservation and enhancement of our national heritage;
- Design of targets and benchmarks (including population targets) to enable in-depth Evaluation and Efficiency Testing;
- Mid-term evaluation to inform any proposed extension in scheme; and
- Design of Innovative sustainable design and energy efficient guidelines.

Effectively, Council was concerned that the tax scheme designation was a ‘blanket zoning’ of land within the qualifying/designated area. The programme did not identify ‘priority areas suitable for development’, nor did it provide any strategic protection for designated areas including the corridor of the River Shannon. This issue will be discussed again when reviewing and assessing the specific planning and development framework and policies, which were in place during the introduction and period of the scheme.

In addition, it should be noted that the original scheme did not make any provision in the qualifying criteria for strategic environmental assessment or impact. Any subsequent programme will require a full SEA under the provisions of the SEA Directive 2001 and SEA Regulations 2004 and enacted through the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment Guidelines for Regional and Planning Authorities, published in November 2004.

The programme did not exploit an opportunity to promote the use of sustainable design and building materials in any new build or refurbishment project supported by the scheme. Any subsequent scheme should be designed to promote excellence in energy efficiency buildings (design and build) along with the implementation of regular and detailed building inspections.

This potential element of the scheme could have links to skills and training courses, in order to ensure that any future scheme provides as many direct and indirect benefits through the ‘multiplier effect’ within local communities, as part of the wider rural development programme.

In essence, Council highlighted at the time of the introduction of the pilot scheme in 1998, that the programme was introduced without a ‘Baseline Audit’ to inform the level and scale of development to be supported through the scheme and to ensure an effective and efficient monitoring and evaluation system. In addition, the scheme was extended without the undertaking of any mid-programme evaluation. The lack of a baseline audit and a mid-term evaluation makes it almost impossible to undertake a robust *efficiency test* of public finance contributions to the scheme.

3.0 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY CONTEXT

As shown in Table 3.1, an examination of the planning and development context in 1999 highlights the lack of available information to inform the scheme. An overview of European, national, regional, county and local planning policy (statutory and non-statutory) in place for the designated area River Shannon Corridor Area, i.e. within Counties Leitrim and Roscommon, at the time of the introduction of the scheme in 1999 is provided in this table.

Table 3.1: Planning and Development Policy Context, as of 1999

Level	Existing Directive/Plans	Policy Area
European	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-National Biodiversity Plan 2002 (Ireland ratified the UN Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1996) • Pre-EU SEA Directive introduced in 2004 • EU Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) • EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)
National	NDP - - -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Development Plan (NDP) in place • Pre- National Spatial Strategy (NSS) • No National Sustainable Design Guidelines in place • Pre-<i>Draft</i> Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) Guidelines • Pre-Development Contribution Schemes, introduced under Section 48 of the <i>Planning and Development Act 2000</i> • <i>Pre-Retail Planning Guidelines 2000 (Amended 2005)</i>
Regional	- -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-provision for regional planning guidelines under Sections 21-27 of the <i>Planning and Development Act 2000</i> • No waterway study undertaken for the River Shannon Corridor Area • No transportation strategy for the region
County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Leitrim County Development Plan 1997-2002</i> • <i>Roscommon County Development Plan 1993</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in place for Counties Leitrim and Roscommon • No Historical Landscape Assessment (HLC) in place for Counties Leitrim and Roscommon • Weak Rural Housing policy in both Counties Leitrim and Roscommon • Weak policies for the protection and conservation of the River Shannon Corridor Area • No design guidance at a county level • No detailed housing strategies in place • No retail planning guidelines in place at county level • No land-use transportation strategy (LUTS) for the area • No County Biodiversity Plan for Counties Leitrim or Roscommon • No Local Authority development contribution schemes in place
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Development Plan for the Scheduled Town of Carrick-on-Shannon</i> - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan zoned land for 'general development' adjacent to River Shannon • Zone of archaeological importance includes town centre and parts of the Shannon. • No land-use transportation strategy (LUTS) for the town • No Village Design Statements (VDS's) or Local Area Plans for small settlements within Counties Leitrim and Roscommon • No Land Use Objectives for Cortober • Pre- Local Area Plan for Carrick-on-Shannon 2004-2010

Recent Progress in Planning and Development Framework

The planning and development framework in the EU and Ireland has evolved substantially since the scheme was introduced in the late 1990's. The current planning and development regime within Ireland includes the following:

Table 3.1: Planning and Development Policy Context, as of 2005 (March)

Level	Existing Directive/Plans	Policy Area
European	UN CBD SEA WFD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Biodiversity Plan 2002 (Ireland ratified the UN Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1996) • EU SEA Directive introduced in 2004 • EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) – Integrated River Basin Management for Europe (2000/60/EC) • EU Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) • EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)
National	P& D Act 2000 Wildlife Amendment Act 2000 P&D Regs 2001 NDP NSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Planning and Development Act 2000</i> • <i>Wildlife Amendment Act 2000</i> • <i>Planning and Development Regulations 2001</i> • National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006 • National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020 • No National Sustainable Design Guidelines in place • <i>Draft Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) Guidelines</i> • Development Contribution Schemes, introduced under Section 48 of the <i>Planning and Development Act 2000</i> • <i>Retail Planning Guidelines 2000 (Amended 2005)</i>
Regional	RPG's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional planning guidelines introduced under Sections 21-27 of the <i>Planning and Development Act 2000</i> • Waterway study undertaken for the River Shannon Corridor Area • Transportation strategy for the region set out in the <i>Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border Region</i>
County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Leitrim County Development Plan 2003-2009</i> • <i>Roscommon County Development Plan 2002 (including Lough Key Study 2002)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in place for County Leitrim • No LCA in place for County Roscommon • No Historical Landscape Assessment (HLC) in place for Counties Leitrim and Roscommon • Stricter Rural Housing policy in both Counties Leitrim and Roscommon • Stricter policies for the protection and conservation of the River Shannon Corridor Area • No design guidance at a county level • Housing Strategies in place for both counties Leitrim and Roscommon • Retail planning guidelines in place at county level • No land-use transportation strategy (LUTS) for the area • No County Biodiversity Plan for Counties Leitrim or Roscommon • Local Authority development contribution schemes in place • Land Use Objectives established for Cortober • Land Use Objectives established for Lough Key
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Carrick-on-Shannon Local Area Plan 2004-2010</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Area Plan for Carrick-on-Shannon 2004-2010 • Zone of archaeological importance includes town centre and parts of the Shannon. • No Village Design Statements (VDS's) or Local Area Plans for small settlements within Counties Leitrim and Roscommon

Recent Progress in Baseline Information and Studies

It is recommended that in-depth baseline and capacity studies (i.e. in relation infrastructure and utilities) are undertaken for any new renewal scheme. A capacity and baseline study will inform planning decisions in relation to the likely impact (direct and cumulative) of all types of development, particularly rural housing, identify suitable growth poles and centres (using various growth scenarios and assumptions). It would also provide a broad assessment of the likely visual and ecological impacts of widespread development on sensitive rural areas including the River Shannon Corridor Area. The baseline could build on existing research and analysis studies undertaken by the Heritage Council and other organisations.

It should be noted that significant progress has been made by both local authorities and the Heritage Council in recent years to undertake related baseline studies, which assesses and determines the ‘carrying capacity’ of land within the designated area and along the sensitive River Shannon Corridor area.

For example, Leitrim County Council in partnership with the Heritage Council prepared the pilot landscape character assessment (LCA) of County Leitrim in 2002 and the Heritage Council along with Waterways Ireland, Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils, are currently finalising the *Waterways Study for the Upper Shannon Corridor Area*.

Both these reports have been prepared within the wider national and regional planning framework. The reports detail policies and priorities for the national heritage, which aim to provide a robust, strategic framework to guide development (and developers) within the area in conjunction with the statutory strategic development plans for the area. It should be noted that both these studies are GIS-based and aim to embrace IT advances, as they relate to planning and spatial development at a national, regional, county and local level.

3.1 Recommendations

Research reveals that the following studies are required to inform the day-to-day strategic management of the project:

- Integration with the EU Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and *Wildlife Act 1976* (Amended 2000);
- In-depth baseline data and information to inform the pilot project including biodiversity and other heritage datasets relating to vulnerable and sensitive areas along the Shannon corridor area.
- Environmental assessment to ensure the protection of the unique heritage within the scheme area and the Shannon Corridor Area, e.g. landscape, ecological, etc.
- Landscape and historical character assessment to guide development supported by the scheme;
- In-depth capacity studies relating to infrastructure and utilities;

- Land use transportation studies to assess the overall capacity of development lands and to identify transport corridors and related phasing of development;
- Identification of key development/opportunities sites within towns and large villages suitable for medium and high-density development and preparation of development frameworks and briefs for same;
- Design guidance for new build and refurbishment schemes; and
- Design of numerous Village and Town Design Statements to provide a framework for development in small villages within the pilot area.

4.0 IMPACT ON LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES – LEITRIM AND ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCILS

4.1 Trends in the Number of Planning Applications and Appeals

The total number of planning applications received by Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils during 1994-2004 is provided in *Table 4.1* overleaf. This useful time-series shows the impact of the scheme on the total number of applications within the area.

Table 4.1: Total Planning Applications in Counties Leitrim and Roscommon 1994-2004

County	1994-1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Totals 1999-2004
Leitrim	2,635	922	1,246	1,024	719	1,414	2,147	7,472
Roscommon	4,659	1,482	2,026	1,778	1,403	1,755	2,622	11,066
Total	7,294	4,403	5,272	4,803	4,124	5,172	6,773	18,538
Total 99-04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Av Per Annum 99-04	18,538/6= 3,089							
Av Per Annum 94-98	7,295/5 =1,458							

(Source: Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils, March 2005.)

The number of applications that were decided by An Bord Pleanála (ABP) during this period is set out in *Table 4.2* below.

Table 4.2: ABP Cases in Counties Leitrim and Roscommon 1994-2004

County	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Leitrim	13	10	12	19	32	35	33	39	52	39	N/a
Roscommon	19	31	35	45	53	56	63	100	74	43	N/a
Total	32	41	47	64	85	91	96	139	126	82	N/a

(Source: An Bord Pleanála, March 2005.)

Clearly, the scheme had a significant impact on the level of applications being submitted to the relevant planning authorities along the River Shannon. The increase in total applications received was also reflected in the number of cases (First and Third Party Appeals), which were dealt with by An Bord Pleanála during the same period.

It should be noted that the refusal rate during this period in Counties Leitrim and Roscommon was relatively low.

Table 4.3: Refusal Rates in Counties Leitrim and Roscommon, 1999-2004

County	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Leitrim	7.2%	8.5%	9.5%	13.5%	11.5%	N/a
Roscommon	9%	10.8%	15%	4.2%	5.9%	N/a
National Average	13.3%	16.6%	16.9%	15.9%	16.9%	N/a

(Source: DoE, March 2005)

4.2 Planning Resources within Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils

Consultation with the planning department and planning officers within Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils suggests that additional resources or funding were not made available either by the Council, the Department of Finance or by any other body, at the outset of the scheme, in order to deal with the impact and resulting increase in planning and development activity at both a development control (DC) and development plan/forward plan (DP) level. For example, no additional resources were made available to Leitrim or Roscommon County Councils to provide dedicated enforcement officers to ensure that tax incentive development backed schemes were constructed, in accordance with their planning permissions. Planning enforcement and tax incentive development schemes will be explored in further detail in the Case Studies in Section 6.

4.3 Recommendations

The following measures are recommended in relation to the management and staffing of the planning and development process in future tax incentive scheme areas:

- Provision of adequate resources to be made available to ensure effective assessment and monitoring of planning applications and resulting developments within tax incentive scheme area;
- Provision of adequate resources to ensure effective enforcement procedures relating to tax incentive supported development;
- Appointment of qualified inspector to review and monitor building and environmental management practices within the scheme area.

5.0 POPULATION GROWTH IN THE RIVER SHANNON CORRIDOR AREA

Population growth in the River Shannon Corridor Area during the period 1996-2002 is illustrated in Figures 5.1 and 5.2 overleaf. The maps clearly show that there has been a substantial population increase in District Electoral Divisions (DED's) located along the River Shannon, in particular Carrick-on-Shannon.

Figure 5.1: Population Density Change in Counties Leitrim and Roscommon (%) 1996-2002

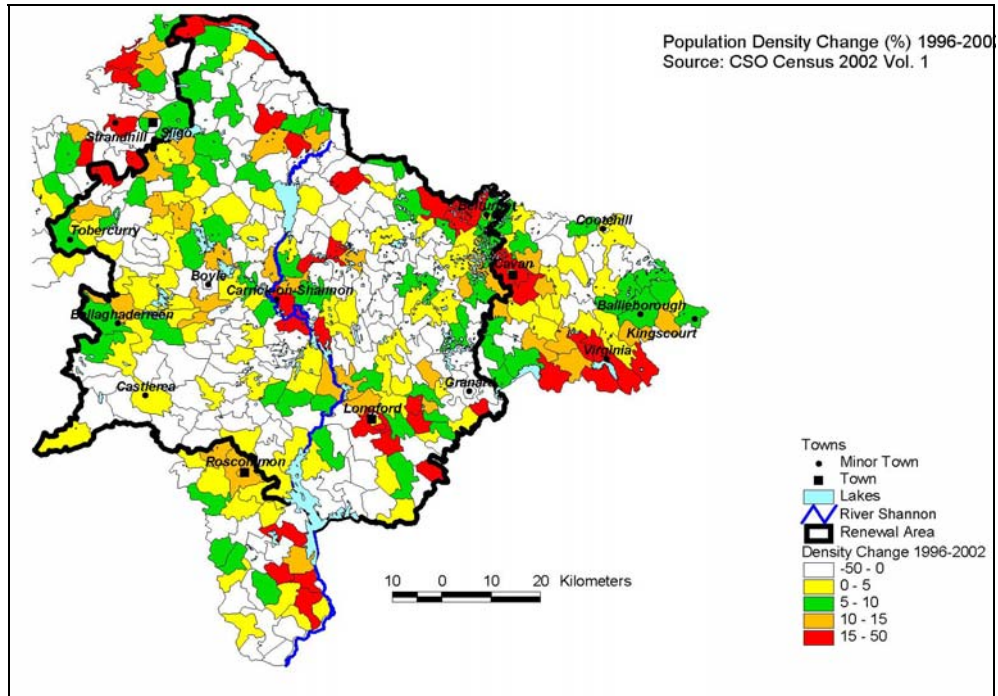
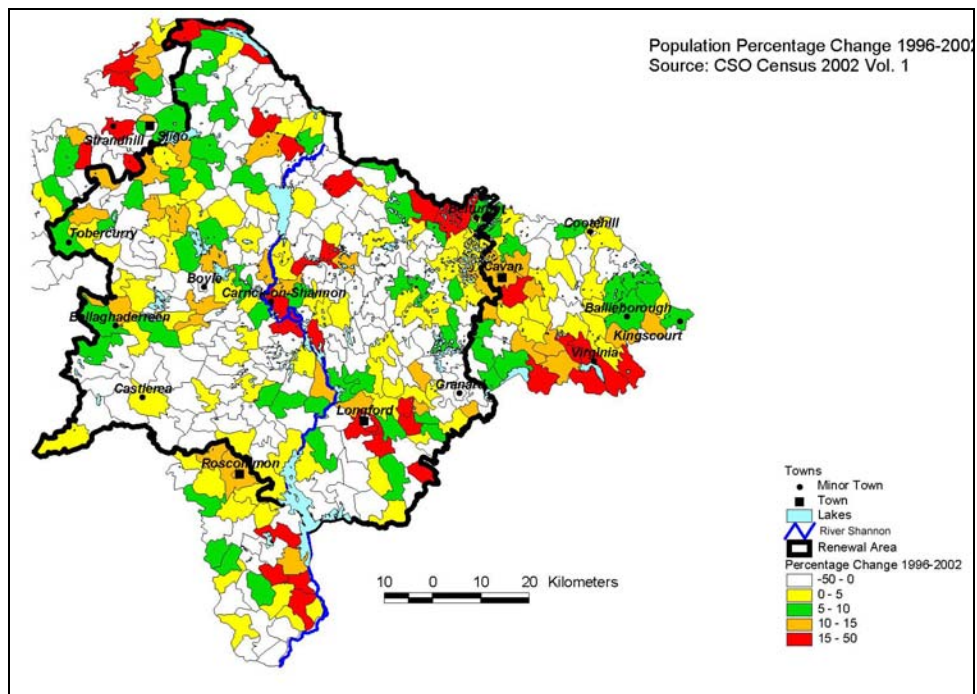


Figure 5.2: Population Percentage Change in Counties Leitrim and Roscommon (%) 1996-2002



Leitrim and Roscommon experienced a population increase during the late 1990's and early 2000's indicating that the scheme has met its objectives to stimulate rural renewal and development activity within the region. Population statistics for the period 1986-2002 are set out in the table below. Consultation with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) reveals that mid-year estimates for 2003/4 are not available at a county or DED level.

Table 5.1: Population in Counties Leitrim and Roscommon 1986-2002

County	Pop 1986	Pop 1991	Pop 1996	Pop 2002
Leitrim	27,035	25,301	25,057	25,799
Roscommon	54,592	51,897	51,975	53,774

(Source: CSO, March 2005.)

N.B. The population statistics do not provide an insight into the seasonal population within the area, i.e. visitors and persons with holiday homes within Counties Leitrim and Roscommon.

However, a comparison of the number of planning applications submitted during the period of the scheme and the resulting population increase suggests that a significant number of permitted residential developments are either currently unoccupied/vacant or cater specifically to the seasonal holiday market, i.e. the population increase is not as large as would be expected, given the increased level of development activity in the area.

5.1 Recommendations

It is recommended that the following data collection requirements be introduced for future tax incentive schemes:

- Population targets to be established at the outset of any scheme;
- Annual mid-year estimates to be prepared for tax incentive scheme areas at DED level, in order to assist in overall monitoring and evaluation; and
- Statistics to be prepared showing trends in the resident and visitor population within the scheme area.

6.0 CASE STUDIES

In order to assess the impact of the scheme on the River Shannon Corridor area, four case studies are examined below. Two case studies are provided for each county, as follows:

County/Applicant	Address	Description of Development
<i>Leitrim:</i>		
1. Shannon Cove	Dromod Village	Residential marina development comprising 33 no. detached units (4 & 5 bed), 32 no. apartments (2/3 bed) and 61 no. berths. Located at a prominent elevated site within an area of High Amenity Value (HAV) on the banks of Lough Bofin on the River Shannon.

2. Leitrim Marina	Leitrim Village	Residential marina and hotel development located on the site of the old Village Fair Green fronting the River Shannon (300m frontage) comprising 68 no. apartments, a hotel (10 no. bedrooms) with licensed bar, lounge, restaurant and leisure suite in five blocks (hotel plus Blocks A-D), 34 no. berths, tennis court and children's play area.
<i>Roscommon:</i>		
3. Capercross Development Ltd.	Cortober, Carrick-on-Shannon	Large-scale mixed-use development consisting of townhouses, apartments, private marina, medical centre, travel lodge, petrol filling station, cinema/leisure complex, retail space and office space at prominent site on bend of River Shannon.
4. Newfound Consortium (Canadian)	Lough Key Forest Park	Large-scale leisure development/eco-tourism resort at Lough Key Forest Park in Co. Roscommon. The Consortium proposes to build a five star, 100 bedroom hotel and spa, 293 luxury golf and forest lodges/holiday cottages, an 18-hole championship golf course, equestrian facilities, a water-based activity centre, and a range of bars, cafes restaurants, a retail centre.

(Source Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils and DNG Farrell, March 2005.)

Case Study No.1 Shannon Cove, Dromod Village

Planning History

Planning Reference Nos. 99/15179, 03/1336, 04/1212 and 04/1730 – ‘Parent’ application submitted to Leitrim County Council in November 1999.

Statutory Plan at time of Application (Parent)

Leitrim County Development Plan 1997-2002
No Local Area Plan for Dromod

Heritage Designations

Designated Area of High Visual Amenity (HVA) under the 1997-2002 plan.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Residential marina development on prominent, elevated site on shores of Lough Bofin on River Shannon. *Leitrim County Development Plan 1997-2002* did not protect the riverside site and no local area plan existed for Dromod at the time of the parent application in 1999. Proposed development was below the threshold for EIS in 1999. No visual impact assessment or traffic impact assessment was undertaken for the proposal. Proposal did not include a detailed Landscaping masterplan.

Unauthorised Development

Leitrim County Council is currently determining two applications for retention of unauthorised development at the Shannon Cove site with the developer – Shannon Cove Developments, Carrick-on-Shannon:

- Retention of alterations to the layout and enlargement of the marina (04/1212); and
- Retain and complete dwelling house on site nos 1-7 and dwelling house on site no. 21, previously known as no. 69 all on development granted in planning reference no. 03/1336.

Photograph 6.1: Residential marina development at Shannon Cove, Dromod



Photograph 6.2: Holiday Home development adjacent to Shannon Cove, Dromod



Case Study No.2 Leitrim Marina, Leitrim Village

Planning History

Planning Reference Nos. 99/15032, 98/14281 and 04/1321 – ‘Parent’ application submitted to Leitrim County Council in October 1999 under the Rural Renewal Tax Incentive scheme. Previous permission 98/14281 for hotel (28 no. bedrooms and 36 no. apartment development approved in April 1999.) was approved in April 1999. Application 04/1321 was refused in January 2005 erection of additional three storey block of apartments to consist of 10 apartments of similar design to Block E as approved under planning ref no. 99/15032.

Statutory Plan at time of Application (Parent)

Leitrim County Development Plan 1997-2002

No Local Area Plan for Leitrim Village

Heritage Designations

Adjacent to former Scans Fort

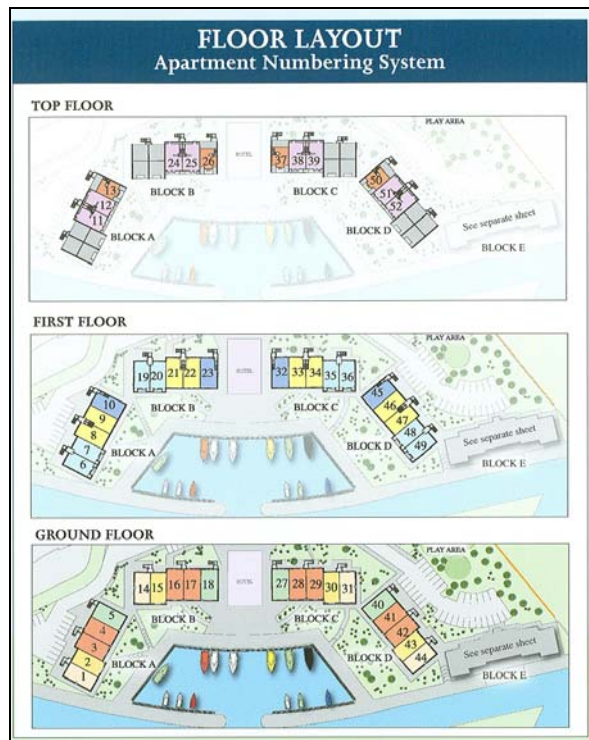
Environmental Impact Assessment

Residential marina development on prominent site adjacent to the River Shannon. *Leitrim County Development Plan 1997-2002* did not protect the riverside site and no local area plan existed for Leitrim Village at the time of the parent application under the scheme in 1999. Proposed development was below the threshold for EIS in 1999. No visual impact assessment, traffic impact assessment or Conservation Report was undertaken for the proposal. Proposal did not include a detailed Landscaping masterplan.

Unauthorised Development

No unauthorised development associated with the site.

Figure 6.1: Leitrim Marina Site Layout



(Source: DNG Farrell, March 2005.)

Case Study No.3 Cortober, Carrick-on-Shannon

Planning History

Complex planning history – Planning Reference Nos. 99/1451 ('Parent'), ABP P Ref: 20.123743 (Appeal Withdrawn), 02/46, 02/108, 02/1271, 02/1248, 03/597, 03/1046, 04/181 and 04/785.

Statutory Plan at time of Application (Parent)

Roscommon County Development Plan 1993

No Local Area Plan or Land Use Objectives for Cortober

Heritage Designations

No cSAC or NHA designations at time of parent application

Environmental Impact Assessment

Large-scale mixed-use development located on prominent site at a bend in the River Shannon. *Roscommon County Development Plan 1993* did not protect the riverside site and no local area plan or land use objectives existed for the area at the time of the parent application in 1999. Proposed development was below the threshold for EIS in 1999. No visual impact assessment or traffic impact assessment was undertaken for the proposal which originally consisted of 5 no. five storey blocks – subsequently reduced to three storeys (see below). Proposal did not include a detailed Landscaping masterplan or photomontages showing finishing materials for residential blocks adjacent to the River Shannon.

Unauthorised Development

Roscommon County Council determined one application for retention of unauthorised development at the site following enforcement action with the developer – Capercross Investments Ltd:

- Retention of 3 no. three storey townhouses from planning permission 99/1451 at Boyle Road, Cortober, Carrick-on-Shannon (01/1420).

Photograph 6.3: Carotober, Carrick-on-Shannon from the marina



Photograph 6.4: Carotober, Carrick-on-Shannon from the Leitrim side



Case Study No.4 Lough Key Forest Park

Planning History

99/1293 – Permission granted for tourism and recreation development to include lakeside visitor centre, café, bar, shops, toilets, leisure/fitness centre, hostel, games, reception and offices, etc. (Applicant: Coillte Teoranta).

Three planning applications submitted to Roscommon County Council in December 2004 (04/2030, 04/2031, 04/2032).

04/2030 proposal consists of an eco-tourism development comprising 78 no. 2 storey holiday cottages (11,336 sq m) for letting purposes;

04/2031 proposal consists of an eco-tourism development comprising of 100 bedroom, 3 storey hotel over lower ground level storey (13,329 sq m);

04/2032 proposal consists of an eco-tourism development comprising 199 two storey holiday cottages 199 no. 2 storey holiday cottages (29,032 sqm) as commercial development for letting purposes including car parking consisting of 226 spaces, 18 hole, 72 par Championship golf course and 2 storey clubhouse over lower ground floor level (1755 sqm), including car parking consisting of 138 spaces, etc.

The Local Planning Authority (LPA) is currently considering these applications. A Request for ‘Further Information’ was issued to the Applicant in February 2005. The LPA is awaiting a response.

Statutory Plan at time of Application

Roscommon County Development Plan 2002

Lough Key Study 2002

Heritage Designations

Several NHA’s in immediate surrounding area

No SAC’s or SPA’s

Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIS (Volumes 1 and 2, and Non-Technical Executive Summary) prepared by Pat Byrne, Environmental Planning Consultants (Cavan) in support of the proposed scheme i.e. the proposal is within the EIA Thresholds, as stated in Schedule 5 of the *Planning and Development Regulations 2001*. Conservation Report prepared by TBK & Associates Conservation.

Unauthorised Development

Not relevant/not applicable

Photograph 6.5: Aerial Photograph of Lough Key



7.0 KEY AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

A summary of the key recommendations set out in the previous sections is provided below. Further recommendations are also provided.

Key Recommendations (5 in total)

The Heritage Council recommends that the following Key Recommendations be considered in the design of any future tax incentive scheme(s):

- Preparation of in-depth baseline data and information to inform the pilot project including biodiversity and other heritage datasets relating to vulnerable and sensitive areas along the Shannon corridor area;
- Design of targets and benchmarks (including population) to enable in-depth Evaluation and Efficiency Testing;
- Provision of adequate resources to be made available to ensure effective assessment and monitoring of planning applications and resulting developments within tax incentive scheme area;
- Design of numerous Village and Town Design Statements to provide a framework for development in small towns and villages within the pilot area; and
- Mid-term evaluation to inform any proposed extension in scheme.

Further Recommendations (14 in total)

Further recommendations are provided below under the following headings:

- *Design of Scheme (2);*
- *Planning and Development (7);*
- *Local Authority Resourcing (2); and*
- *Population and Statistics (3).*

Design of Scheme

It is recommended that the following ‘core’ principles be adopted at the conceptualisation and design stage of any future scheme:

- In-depth Environmental Impact Assessment beyond designated thresholds to ensure protection and enhancement of our national heritage; and
- Design of Innovative sustainable design and energy efficient guidelines.

Planning and Development

Any scheme of this type, to conform to current Best Practice and to ensure effective ongoing and evaluation of impact, must be based on:

- Integration with the EU Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and *Wildlife Act 1976 (Amended 2000)*;

- Environmental assessment to ensure the protection of the unique heritage within the scheme area and the Shannon Corridor Area, e.g. landscape, ecological, etc;
- Landscape and historical character assessment to guide development supported by the scheme;
- In-depth capacity studies relating to infrastructure and utilities;
- Land use transportation studies to assess the overall capacity of development lands and to identify transport corridors and related phasing of development;
- Identification of key development/opportunities sites within towns and large villages suitable for medium and high-density development and preparation of development frameworks and briefs for same; and
- Design guidance for new build and refurbishment schemes.

Local Authority Resourcing

The following measures are recommended in relation to the management and staffing of the planning and development process in future tax incentive scheme areas:

- Provision of adequate resources to ensure effective enforcement procedures relating to tax incentive supported development; and
- Appointment of qualified inspector to review and monitor building and environmental management practices within the scheme area.

Population and Statistics

It is recommended that the following data collection requirements be introduced for future tax incentive schemes:

- Population targets to be established at the outset of any scheme;
- Annual mid-year estimates to be prepared for tax incentive scheme areas at DED level, in order to assist in overall monitoring and evaluation; and
- Statistics to be prepared showing trends in the resident and visitor population within the scheme area.

8.0 CONCLUSION

The Pilot Rural Renewal Scheme for the Upper Shannon Area has clearly met its key objective to help stimulate development activity within the region. However, developments promoted in the early years of the scheme were not assessed in detail in terms of the long-term impact (visual, cumulative or otherwise) on the environment and national and local heritage, and particularly the very real impact of large-scale schemes on the River Shannon Corridor Area.

In line with its earlier submission on the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2000, the Heritage Council welcomes programmes to support balanced economic development and targeted development of the regions beyond the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

Council recommends that future programmes and tax incentive schemes are designed with the protection, preservation, enhancement and effective management of our national heritage as a 'core' principle. The economic, environmental and social benefits of a vibrant heritage sector are wide-reaching and any future scheme(s) should seek to consolidate and enhance the long-term viability and sustainability of this important sector.

If you require further copies of this report, please contact Alison Harvey (Planning and Development Officer), Tel 056 7770777 or alison@heritagecouncil.com.