

# **E** **nvironmental Impact Assessment**

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a useful tool to predict, assess and mitigate the possible impacts of a potential project so that environmental considerations can inform and be integrated into project decisions. An EIA can help to inform the best practicable location, layout, design, phasing, use of technology, and management of development activities, so that significant negative impacts may be avoided, minimized or restored.

The term EIA also describes a formal procedure that must be followed for certain types of project before they can be given development consent. The procedure is a means of drawing together, in a systematic way, an assessment of a project's likely significant environmental effects. This helps to ensure that the importance of the predicted effects, and the scope for reducing them, are properly understood by the public and the relevant competent authority before it makes its decision.

An EIA enables environmental factors to be given due weight, along with economic or social factors, when planning applications are being considered. It helps to promote a sustainable pattern of physical development and land and property use in cities, towns and the countryside. If properly carried out, it benefits all those involved in the planning process.

From the developer's point of view, the preparation of an environmental statement in parallel with project design provides a useful framework within which environmental considerations and design development can interact. The EIA may indicate ways in which the project can be modified to avoid possible adverse effects, for example through considering more environmentally friendly alternatives. Taking these steps is likely to make the formal planning approval stages run more smoothly.

For the planning authority and other public bodies with environmental responsibilities, An EIA provides a basis for better decision making. More thorough analysis of the implications of a new project before a planning application is made, and the provision of more comprehensive information with the application, should enable authorities to make swifter decisions.

The general public's interest in a major project is often expressed as concern about the possibility of unknown or unforeseen effects. By providing a full analysis of a project's effects, an EIA can help to allay fears created by lack of information. At the same time, early engagement with the public when plans are still fluid can enable developers to make adjustments which will help to secure a smoother passage for the proposed development and result in a better environmental outcome. The EIA can also help to inform the public on the substantive issues which the local planning authority will have to consider in reaching a decision.

*The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors has produced a guidance note on the use of Environmental Impact Assessments [www.rics.org](http://www.rics.org)*