

To whom it may concern,

I am strongly opposed to the proposed changes in the qualifying criteria for Rural Policy Zones 1 and 2 as set out in the Draft Louth County Development Plan 2020-2027. These changes in rural planning policy in the County will have a very negative effect on the inhabitants of these zones and deprives many of them, and their future generations, the fundamental right to live and raise families within these areas.

This new policy, if adopted, will force many of these rural people to settle within more urban areas, something that I am sure many of them would be unwilling to do given their rural heritage and their families contribution to their rural communities. It should be argued that many rural inhabitants would be unsuited to urban life and to force them to do so is grossly unfair.

Although I agree that housing within rural towns and villages should be explored, I do not see it as being a viable alternative to one off rural housing. Housing development within small villages and towns has been tried in the past, and in a number of cases to the detriment of these rural villages. Many rural towns and villages in the County have suffered an identity crisis arising from poor planning policy and implementation during the “Celtic Tiger” period, further exacerbated by greedy developers and poorly designed and constructed developments. Many rural towns and villages still bear visible scars of this period in the form of ghost / half-finished housing estates.

Many of the smaller rural villages are already overly developed, Termonfeckin being a notable example, where there is very little scope for further development within the settlement boundary set out in this Plan. Many families from these already overburdened smaller villages have little or no real prospect of ever owning a house in these villages and it would seem that there is a greater influx of people coming from the regional growth centres (Drogheda and Dundalk) to settle there. Inadequate water and wastewater networks exist in many of these rural towns and villages and this is evident in the fact that many of these places have low water pressure and have wastewater treatment facilities already at the very limit of their capacity.

The promotion of further housing development in rural towns and villages, as set out in The Plan, also seems like it is more suited for large development contractors and developers. Many smaller building contractors rely heavily on the construction of one-off rural housing and the change in planning policy that is proposed will see many of these smaller firms experience increased pressure and may see many of these businesses cease to exist.

I strongly urge that the council does not adopt these very harsh rural planning policy changes so as to further preserve the rural way of life for the many people who have lived in Rural Policy Zones 1 and 2 and afford them their right to carry on doing so throughout the lifetime of this Plan. To adopt the proposed changes to the planning policy within these zones is inherently immoral particularly when there has been a lack of a proper public consultation process as a result of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic.

Your consideration of the above would be most welcomed.

Yours Sincerely,

Conor Phillips