

Development Perspectives (DP)

submission on the draft Louth County Development Plan (2021 – 2027)

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Development Perspectives (DP) is a Louth based Development Education NGO whose mission is to “contribute to lessening poverty, inequality and climate change through transformative education and active global citizenship.

Introduction

DP welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Louth County Development Plan (2021 – 2027), whilst expressing concern at the content and direction of the plan published by Louth County Council . Many of the concerns we have, were previously raised in our response to the issues paper in Nov 19 hence our disappointment that our evidence based knowledge and subject matter expertise was not reflected more in this draft plan. Aside from commenting on particular sections, we have made 5 recommendations that the end, which we feel should be reflected more thoroughly in the new county development plan.

Overall Comments

Development is a contested concept however it is clear that contained within the draft plan itself there are many assumptions, which have little or no evidential backing. The idea that economic growth in and of itself delivers many positives for individuals and communities is misplaced. The draft plan paper is adhering generally to only one theory and view of development, “Modernism”. This needs to be challenged. Co Louth and Ireland more generally is facing many issues and challenges that require us to respond by tackling the root causes rather than the effects of the difficulties facing our county. With this in mind, a sustainable development approach is required.

People and places

- The housing needs of the population should not be addressed in isolation to the services and amenities needed for healthy and thriving communities.

- We need to build functioning communities and at the centre of that is the provision of affordable housing. For too long, the market has dictated the direction of the housing sector. In the long run, the “Right to housing” needs to be introduced into the constitution and in the meantime, the strength of private property rights needs to be weakened.
- The amount of dereliction in the county is a shame. A use it or lose it policy should be in place incentivised through punitive taxation for those who own property who are not using it.

Economic development and employment

- County Louth could examine and explore the possibility of social enterprise in much more detail. As an example, DP now employs 11 people and is based in Drogheda. With some support from Louth County Council this figure could easily double, however no support has been received from Louth Co Council for this expansion to happen.
- Louth is too reliant on FDI and needs to move away from this model for a number of reasons. The international taxation landscape is changing and in the next few years this will impact on many foreign companies based in Ireland. Louth has a distinct geographical advantage over many other locations. Its proximity to Dublin and Belfast, its location on the main train line and its location in terms of the ports/airports is an advantage.
- Tourism, micro energy production and educational provision are areas that Louth could focus on much more.
- Goal 12 of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals is “Responsible production and production”. With this in mind, Louth County Council should encourage people to buy locally – a “green Friday” approach in conjunction with local chambers of commerce.
- Remote working is something to be embraced. Dublin in particular is very expensive to live in so many people are moving to areas outside of Dublin. Drogheda in particular could evolve one or two centres that would allow people to hot desk from at affordable rates. This would have a very positive knock on effect for the town of Drogheda.
- As mentioned earlier, the support of entities such as Development Perspectives would be advantageous for all parties. DP wants to bring more people to Louth but the lack of support from Louth County Council allied the lack of affordable accommodation in the shape of a hostel locally is hindering our efforts. Instead, we currently bring groups to Cavan, Sligo, Wicklow etc

Rural Development and natural resources

- The environment isn’t a resource for humans to utilise. Its the platform that life needs to exist. The environment is much more than a way of getting an economy to

flourish. Economies need to serve communities. The **UN Sustainable Development Goals** provides a path and policy direction for this to be achieved.

- The model of industrial agriculture needs to change. Too much of the agricultural sector relies on subsidies to survive. By definition, it isn't sustainable especially when we take into account the carbon emissions that the agricultural sector is responsible for. Supporting small and local farmers who are engaged in organic farming or permaculture is a better option. Growing food to export at the rate we are currently doing it isn't sustainable. The world needs less food, not more if it.
- Planting native forests to enhance bio diversity and clean air is a win win in terms of capturing carbon, encouraging healthy lifestyles and enhancing the natural landscape. Woodland areas could also be used for honey production and free range poultry farming and be an asset for green tourism initiatives. Outdoor education in the form of forest schools, which is very popular across Nordic countries could improve and augment educational standards while it is well known that public engagement with the natural world has many benefits for individual and collective mental health.
- Renewable energy is something that certainly needs to be encouraged throughout the next county development plan. Enabling the energy grid for citizens to supply energy through micro generation should be looked at. Dundalk could serve as a test case for the SEAI.
- Organic farming, permaculture and entrepreneurship should be encouraged.
- Rural public transport is required to ensure the continuation of rural communities. Embracing the natural world and micro generation of renewable energy also provide sustainable long term solutions to rural development.

Community, recreation, amenity and social inclusion

- Louth County Council needs to address inequality. Income and wealth inequality and gender inequality are just two examples of where the council needs to act. There are many groups across the county that don't have the same opportunity to participate educationally, politically, socially or culturally in the range of activities that are provided and available. This needs to be addressed by taking inequality and power dynamics seriously.
- Louth needs to build the capacity of the community development and adult and community education practitioners. Investment in training, mentoring and support is needed as is addressing the core costs of staffing. Community Development needs professional staff working with active citizens in communities across the county. This need is most acute in areas of significant disadvantage.
- Are there adequate healthcare facilities accessible to those in need? Simply, NO. There needs to be a far longer term focus on health and wellbeing, which is Goal 3 of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**. This could be encouraged through the provision of quality education in the non formal learning

arena. Aside from facilities, we need staff to work in them. Addressing trauma of particular populations would also reap long term benefits.

- Outside of formal education, the area of non formal and in particular adult and community education needs to be focussed on. There are organisations willing (DP is one) to work with the council to addressing the learning and development needs of the citizens. Development of any community needs active citizens and this is what DP specialises in. We are based in Drogheda but work across the country with partners. A partnership with Louth County Council in relation to this plan would be welcome.
- By building social capital, which can be broken down into Bridging, Bonding and Linking capital. By raising public awareness of what causes exclusion and inequality and then developing the skills to lessen these challenges. This can be achieved by implementing high quality educational initiatives in the non formal learning space as well as with service providers.

Climate and environment

- We need to start with education. We need to publicly engage adults and young people on the importance of the environment and the climate. Awareness rates of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** in Louth is low as it is across Ireland so lets address this limited understanding and then move from there. Louth will need to lessen its carbon emissions so having a robust baseline established in order to measure progress off year on year is critically important. Aside from carbon emission, having clean water is crucial as is forestry that will help maintain clean air. As a coastal county, Louth should establish a project that will lessen plastic waste in the Irish sea. This again, will have numerous benefits.
- We need to respect environment and value it differently. This will stem from an understanding of what it does beyond seeing it as a resource for humans to utilise. It is not a commodity. Louth wont have a sustainable future never mind economy if we continue on the destructive path we are on. We need to change business as usual and live differently.
- Louth County Council should act to prevent and lessen the carbon emissions that are causing climate change and we need to mitigate the damage caused by climate change. Priority in investment to prevention rather than mitigation is of paramount importance.
- Use renewable energy and move away from fossil fuels / More public transport / Cycling infrastructure / Invest in tree planting on a large scale / Encourage micro generation of energy to sell back to the grid / Educational awareness of the causes of climate change within Louth / Address responsible consumption and production / Ban single use plastic.

- The awareness of climate change, both in terms of its causes and impact can be done through education. Engaging and effective education can not only inform but help to change behaviours. This education needs to be in non formal education as well as formal settings in order to reach a majority of people.
- Louth needs to stop producing the current levels of carbon that as an area we are collectively responsible for. Research and measurement are both important if we are to lessen the impact of climate change in Louth.

Recommendations from Development Perspectives

- Move to a Sustainable Development model (Recognises the interdependence between economic, environmental and social/political pillars) and away from modernism. This could be done by integrating the **“UN Sustainable Development Goals” (2015- 2030)** as a red thread to the new plan.
- Calculate and then create a reduction roadmap for the carbon emissions that Louth is responsible for. Place renewable energy at the heart of the next county development plan.
- Value education as a key way to achieving the vision espoused in the issues paper. This could be done through the provision of high quality education in non formal learning spaces and by capacity building through training and facilitation. Development needs active citizens and education is an important way of building active citizenship. This new plan should feed into the new **Education for Sustainable Development Policy**, which the Dept of Education will be consulting the public on in 2021.
- Comprehensively address inequality and poverty in the county. Lessening income and wealth inequality will have far reaching benefits for the county in terms of educational attainment, health outcomes, crime, increase levels of trust and improve longevity and wellbeing.
- Invest in and prioritise public health on the preventative side of things – try to embrace healthy and active lifestyles.

This document was put together by Bobby McCormack on behalf of Development

