

Submission to Louth County Development Plan 2021

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As the Draft Development Plan acknowledges, The National Planning Framework (NPF) acknowledges the contribution of rural areas to the economic, social and cultural development of the country. Rural areas in Louth are at risk of overdevelopment, and thus compromising the natural resources and the outstanding natural beauty of our county. While I acknowledge that there is an imbalance created by one-off housing and there is a need to strengthen rural communities, the drastic measures outlined in the Draft Development Plan, if applied in the short term, would cause irreparable damage to the extant rural communities in certain areas of County Louth.

To this end, I am suggesting several minor changes to the Draft based on consultation with local residents in the areas of Glenmore, Beletra, Mullaghbuoy and Corrakitt.

Amendment 1:

Consider a density exemption to the Qualifying Criteria in Rural Policy Zones 1 & 2

Rationale:

The intention of restrictive policies in rural areas is clear, and the examples of what this policy recommendation seeks to prevent are evident throughout the county, and indeed the country. However, there remain large tracts of rural County Louth that are underpopulated and underdeveloped, despite other planning criteria such as road frontage and access to resources being readily available. Therefore, where an area is no more than a reasonable density – based on either population per square kilometre or dwellings per square kilometre – planning policy need not be as strict or restrictive.

Amendment 2:

Remove reference to first-time ownership and applicants not having owned/sold a dwelling in the county in the last ten years

Rationale:

This clause does not reflect the reality of the housing situation in Ireland. Rents are skyrocketing and for many people with the good fortune to have been able to pay a deposit, a mortgage will have been far more economical than renting over the last decade or more. This clause unfairly favours those who have bought properties outside County Louth over those who have, for example, bought a readily available property in Dundalk or Drogheda with a desire to eventually sell and return to their rural place of origin. We should not be punishing those who bought in Dundalk or Drogheda, while favouring those who bought in Newry or Dublin. As applicants will need to demonstrate a family connection to the landowner, the clause is needlessly restrictive.

Amendment 3:

Clarify clauses relating to sons/daughters of landowners

Rationale:

It is unclear in the language used in the draft plan whether the clause above relates to the totality of land owned by the landowner in question, or if it is to be applied per tranche or plot of land. If the former, it is unfair to allow the same level of development on 30 hectares and on 3 hectares. Where a landowner has several discrete plots of land, it is again unfair to restrict their family from building should all other planning criteria apply.

Amendment 4:

Allow extended family/neighbours who demonstrate a connection to the area to forego the 10-year ownership minimum

Rationale:

The nature of land ownership in Ireland is largely unchanged since the Penal Laws, with land being subdivided each generation to all children in many cases. In these instances, it is normal for the children of siblings who inherit discrete plots of land to exchange or purchase said plots in order to rearrange land holdings to allow them to live close to immediate family. Should this draft plan pass unamended, only the relationship between a parent and child will be counted. This does not reflect reality.

Amendment 5:

Remove the 10-year ownership minimum for applicants who were raised in the area and whose land has been in family ownership for the required period

Rationale:

This is an omission in the draft plan that negatively affects those who were born and raised in rural areas and who bought, inherited or were gifted land with the intention of building a dwelling, but who have not held the land for 10 years. Acknowledging family ownership of said land, where all other planning conditions apply, would be more reflective of the reality of rural land ownership.