

## **Draft Louth County Development Plan Submission**

Firstly, I believe that this plan should be stalled. It is a controversial document that has far reaching impact for our community. The fact that this Council which has in my opinion a responsibility to respect its residents to put this vast document to them during a level 5 lockdown is wrong. The residents of Louth should have had an opportunity to read this, discuss this in a group setting. Household visits were banned, and it is suggested by the Council that a few online meetings are acceptable. It is not acceptable and has been greatly upsetting to the people of Louth.

Secondly, I welcome many aspects of the plan. There are many positives. I welcome the areas included for regeneration areas in Dundalk and the heritage quarter in Drogheda. I hope this comes to fruition as the Drogheda plan was published in 2013.

The chapter on Housing- whilst there are many positive aspirations in making sustainable more attractive towns is to be welcomed. Aspirational and not at all definitive it relies on so many external factors the Council cannot guarantee that it will occur.

An area where the Council have come down with the iron hand is somewhere where the officials have incredible power to make or break a community, a family, a future a chance for a home is in the area of one-off housing.

An issue I have is that there is no societal or economic impact study on the consequences. Rural communities are not a tourist attraction. They are beautiful, they are sacred. They belong to the people who live here. The community and the State have invested in rural areas. Rural schools have been a positive aspect of our Irish education system for generations. The consequence of this plan is to displace a young population and depopulate an area, if there are no young people the rural schools will be forced to close.

Have the Council looked at the possibility of more schools in urban area to deal with this displacement?

Have the Council looked at the consequences of people requiring more social housing as they cannot afford to purchase their own homes due to the increase in house prices?

One off rural housing provides a cheaper, higher quality build than other options. The emphasis on self-sustaining growth for small towns and villages is very welcome however this plan puts power in the hands a few landowners who are privileged enough to own land within settlement areas. The cost of housing in North Louth is going to increase dramatically because of this plan. The council states that

The Regional and Economic Strategy states in RPO 4.80 that there must be an economic or social need to live in a rural area. This draft plan does not provide for either.

Below are two points that are in the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities April 2005. In my opinion the Draft plan has the most stringent interpretation of what this means. There is no requirement in any national or regional plan to put in as heavy restrictions as the Louth Draft Plan does.

- Persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community
- Persons working full-time or part-time in rural areas<sup>i</sup>

There is no provision to permit a build if you are a carer for a family member and require housing. If this plan gets its way the locals will be living in towns away from family and then putting more pressure on the state to provide home care packages. Zone 2 allows for social need however do residents of zone 1 not deserve the same consideration.

Another issue is that “specialist” housing seems only to be provided for in an urban setting. The plan states when it comes to housing for people with disabilities ‘that location is key’ however it seems again only in a urban setting. Do people with disabilities in a rural setting do not deserve the right to live where they know and where they are loved. They should have the right to chose. Again, are the Council going to provide housing for this displaced section of the population?

The draft plan discusses housing for older people and that the Council has an age friendly Strategy “that seeks to strengthen the wellbeing of older people within their communities”. I do not see how Louth County Council is planning on doing this in North Louth with this plan. Or does this plan push to depopulate the rural elderly from their homes to an urban setting Will the Council be providing for this type of housing?

“In particular, planning authorities should recognise that exceptional health circumstances – supported by relevant documentation from a registered medical practitioner and a disability organisation –may require a person to live in a particular environment or close to family support”.<sup>ii</sup> This is a quote is an important part of any housing need requirements and should be facilitated for.

The National Planning Framework is out of date due to the pandemic. Our lives have changed dramtically. It must be recognised that in the midst of the crisis we have had, there have been huge advantages for people living in rural areas both for themselves and their families and also for the rural communities. Remote working from home has been on of the biggest changes; but this plan must be fit for purpose and take into consideration our new work practices. Therefore we must change how planning regulations are implemented – otherwise the people of Co. Louth will be denied the possibility of the new innovative solutions to work and live in your own community.

In 3.17.7 the draft plan discusses the capacity of an area to absorb further development *“if it is considered that an area is becoming over developed..... and the local infrastructure does not have the capacity to accommodate further development, it is unlikely that planning permission will be granted”*.

The lack of clarity on statements like that is far too interpretative. What does the Council class as infrastructure is it roads or other services? This should be clarified.

Rural dwellers only have roads as infrastructure, most have no public lighting, rarely public water or sewerage. Most don’t expect these services either. This statement is open ended and if one planner ‘considers’ an area over developed with only opinion and not fact. This is too objective and relies on opinion far too much.

The rural communities need to be protected the rural way of life needs to be protected and this plan does not do it.

I urge you to amend and take cognisance to the requirement to live in your own community.

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<sup>i</sup> Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities April 2005

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