

Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027

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Sent: 23 December 2020 11:42

To: LouthCDP

Cc:

Dear sir or madam,

I wish to make a formal submission to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027.

In general planning terms and with regard to the significant expected population growth in the urban areas of the county, I believe Louth County Council should be focusing primarily on the consolidation of existing residential communities and providing adequate infrastructure to meet the expected and planned development over the life cycle of the next county development plan. Land zoned for future housing needs must be supported by adequate public transport links and investment policies and be as near as possible to schools, shops, employment, green zones and parks and other recreational facilities must be at the core of these policies.

The building of social housing significant distances from town centres should be particularly avoided. Housing for older people and persons with disabilities should also be considered as near as possible to town centres, shopping, churches, health centres etc. There should also be provision for independent living with appropriate and professional care facilities and supports § eg carers, nursing supports. Construction of apartments where essential should have adequate recreational space and safe secure visible playing areas with adequate children's play areas.

I have some concerns in relation to some of the proposals in Rural Policy Zone 1. While the overall plan may prioritise consolidation I believe this may be overly restrictive in terms of what local family members who live and work in their own rural areas want and need. Many wish to live in the areas in which they have been reared. It is important to ensure that priority is given to permanent workers who wish to live in their native town lands over holiday homes etc. There is a very strong view in rural areas about this issue and it needs to be addressed in Council policies. It should be a core policy of the plan to protect existing rural communities and amenities. Rural primary schools have lost teachers recently due to reduced enrolments. This must be avoided by allowing additional appropriate residential development for young families in the school catchment area to sustain the local school and parish.

The future development of South Louth and the Town of Drogheda needs appropriate additional locally based High Level administrative supports from Louth County Council. As the population of the CSO designated Drogheda urban area will exceed 50,000 in the next five years planning for this future population growth as Drogheda grows to city size needs the appointment of a city manager to plan, organise and oversee all this development. In addition this new manager when appointed will have to ensure ensure that is develop a Joint Urban Area Plan together with Meath County Council to ensure appropriate development of the settlement area of South Louth and East Meath.

The council must focus on delivering more recreational amenities that both young and old can avail of. We have seen the massive benefit of investing in our greenways as is apparent in both the upgrading of the Boyne Greenway (St Dominic's Park to Oldbridge) stretch and the plans that are advancing in regard to the Carlingford Lough Greenway. Whilst the Drogheda to Mornington Greenway will fall under Meath County Council as the lead authority I would ask that Louth County Council put their full weight behind the project as the benefit to the town of Drogheda will be enormous. With further regard to the Greenway strategy I believe we should be advancing discussions on suitable locations for a Greenway in Mid Louth.

The Lourdes Athletic club in Drogheda is a very fine example of what can be achieved from a council perspective, the stadium is being used by the community, local clubs and specific disability groups. In the wider discussion around the Stadium, as Ireland's largest town we must prioritise advancing a state of the art sports stadium in the town. I'm aware that the FAI sought financial assistance to design a new football stadium and training facility in Drogheda. Unfortunately, the project did not achieve a sufficiently high score following assessment under the LSSIF. I would hope that the council work closely with the FAI, Drogheda United and the Department of Sport to ready a new application for the next round of the LSSIF.

In terms of available playgrounds and parks in the town of Drogheda, I believe a full review must be undertaken to look at suitable locations for playgrounds on grounds within the council's current footprint. Huge numbers of homes have been built in the Drogheda area with very few playgrounds to facilitate young families. The Council should also ensure that a Green belt is a priority surrounding existing urban areas such as the town of Drogheda as they develop. The County Plan must as a priority ensure that such green belt zoning is a core part of this development plan. Significant parkland zoning is essential around the existing urban footprint of Drogheda.

In terms of public transport, the arrival of the DART to Drogheda in the coming years will improve commuter links to the capital including high frequency DART to and from Drogheda to Dublin every 5 mins at peak times. With this much improved accessibility to public transport the council should advance plans with Irish Rail to look at the viability of opening a Drogheda North station and the reopening of the Dunleer Train Station. New commuter services connecting North and mid Louth to Drogheda and onwards will transform transport options in our county and should assist in significant direct investment in job creation in County Louth.

Drogheda and Dundalk have both been identified as a Regional Growth Centres in the National Development Plan Project 2040. Local employment levels in the Louth County have continued to rise throughout the life cycle of the current development plan and the live register has dramatically fallen since the action plan for jobs was introduced in 2011.

However there is a major issue in the Drogheda area in terms of an available IDA Business Park that will attract the largescale investment we need to provide greater employment opportunities at a local level. Thankfully we have the fantastic news that Amazon Web Services have committed investment of 3-400million to develop a data centre in the IDA park in Drogheda which is advancing rapidly. This will open up major opportunities for Drogheda as we have seen in many other similar sites, advanced fintech companies look to set up in close proximity to data centres. I believe the Council should be taking a lead role in working with the IDA and Enterprise Ireland to identify available sites locally for an advanced technology park.

Whilst much of Drogheda's future housing and development rests on the Port Access Northern Cross Route application that has been applied for through the Urban Regeneration Development Fund, a project which I fully support. I also believe a detailed assessment report should be funded to examine and report on the economic viability and benefits of a new road bridge to be built on the East side of Drogheda.

Whilst the Vivian Geiran Drogheda Scoping report is due to be published imminently, I believe the council should in any case be prioritising the development of the Moneymore Community Centre Plan as developed by the Moneymore consortium. The Consortium launched a feasibility study in 2019, this was then followed up by the launch of their Business Plan earlier this year. Their collaboration with the CARL research Project clearly highlights the detrimental impact for young people growing up in a community where they are exposed to high criminality and gangland violence related to the ongoing drug-feud. The collateral consequences to their welfare can be profound, not only for young people but for the community as a whole and that is why the project must be supported going forward.

Supporting and driving the Ardee Bypass project will be vital for the people of mid Louth, traffic congestion in particular has become unbearable in the town itself, having a major impact on the traders of the town. The Bypass will certainly give the town the opportunity to develop, in particular it will rid the town of the unwanted congestion and HGV traffic that has plighted trade in the town over the last number of years. The council should be pre planning for when this bypass is completed and must look at how the town of Ardee can sustainably grow and offer more in attracting tourists with amazing attractions such as the historic Ardee Castle which we hope to see open to the public in coming years.

Thank you for your consideration of the above,

Fergus O'Dowd TD

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