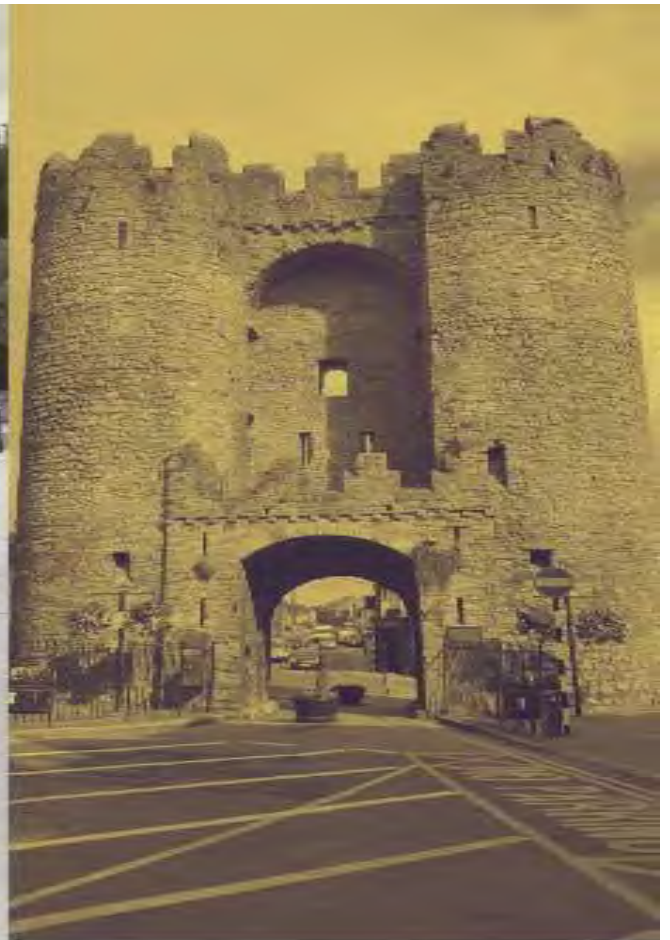
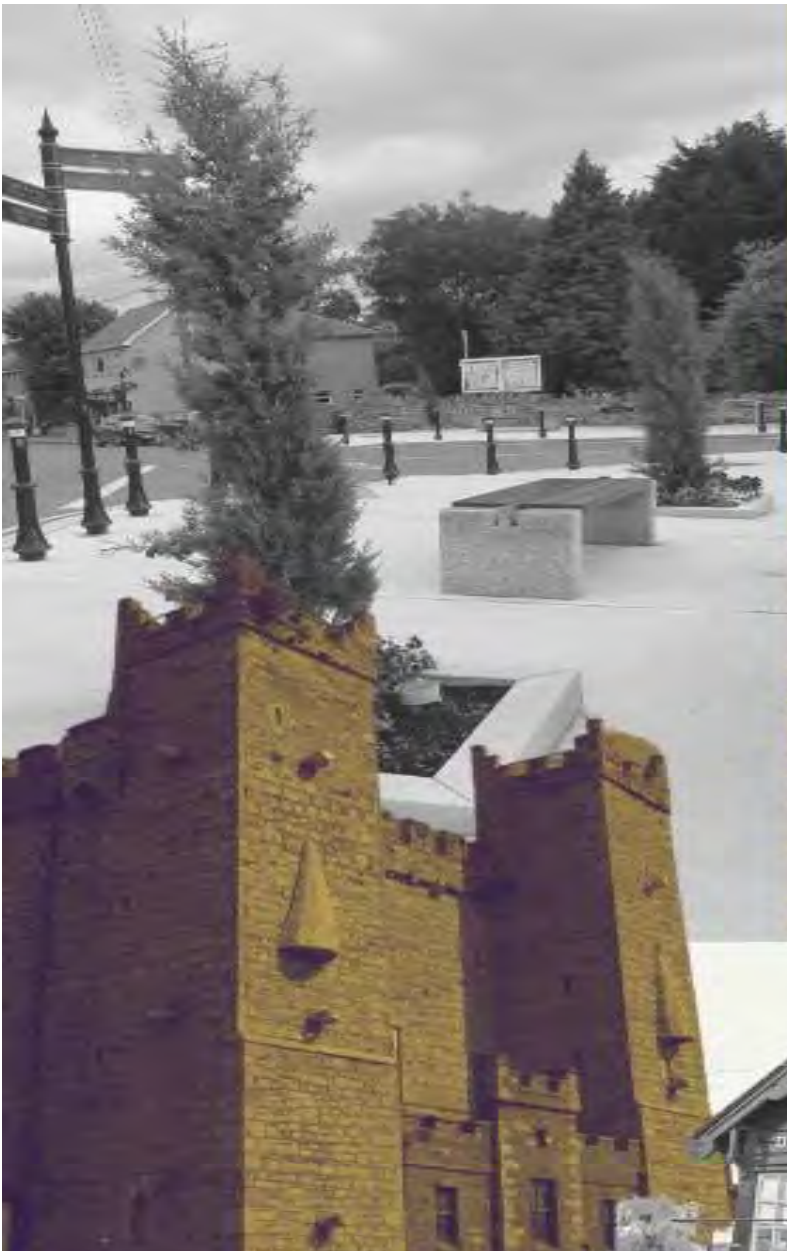




Chapter 1

Introduction

'The Draft Plan sits within a new hierarchy of national and regional plans which promote a departure from the 'business as usual' pattern of development.'

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN - A NEW APPROACH

The Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out the Council's overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of County Louth in accordance with the *Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)*. It is a blueprint for development in County Louth and is the over-arching strategic framework for sustainable development in spatial, economic, social and environmental terms. It offers clear guidance on sustainable development policies and objectives, over a range of issues including, but not limited to; settlement, sustainable communities, movement and transport, heritage and climate action.

This Draft Plan represents a step change from the current Louth County Development Plan 2015-2021, for a number of reasons, which relate primarily to changes enacted at national and regional level and legislative amendments. The cumulative impact of the principal changes has a major impact on this Draft County Development Plan and none so profoundly as to the recognition afforded to the towns of Drogheda and Dundalk therein.

The implementation of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 introduced legislative amendments, resulting in the abolition of Town and Borough Councils. Consequently, the Draft County Development Plan incorporates the functional area of the entire County including the areas formerly within Drogheda Borough Council, Dundalk Town Council and Ardee Town Council.

When adopted, the Draft County Development Plan will replace the Drogheda and Dundalk Development Plans, and Urban Area Plans / Local Area Plans will be prepared for these towns during the lifetime of this Plan, in addition to a Local Area Plan for both Ardee and Dunleer. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 also established the Municipal District system of local administration and within County Louth there are three such districts: the Municipal District of Drogheda, the Municipal District of Dundalk and the Municipal District of Ardee.

The principal national and regional changes which impact the Draft Plan are as presented below:

- The Draft Plan sits within a new hierarchy of national and regional plans which promote a departure from the 'business as usual' pattern of development;
- County Louth has moved from the Border Region to the Eastern and Midland Region;
- The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) designation of Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres in acknowledgement of their growth potential as drivers of regional development;
- A National objective seeking to strengthen Ireland's overall urban structure with particular reference to Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry on the Dublin-Belfast Corridor.

The new hierarchy, wherein the Draft Plan sits, promotes a new way forward for the pattern of development nationwide. While recognising the importance of Dublin City, the National Planning Framework (NPF) promotes a shift in population and employment growth to Irelands other cities and regions, including the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk in addition to other towns, villages and rural areas.

Future population growth targeted by the NPF for Drogheda and Dundalk does not seek to cap but rather build on their potential to develop as cities of scale and drivers of national and regional economic growth, investment and prosperity. Located on key strategic and public transport routes, their future growth will promote self-sustaining economic and employment based development opportunities.

This will be complemented by a focused approach on compact, sequential and sustainable development to ensure the creation of attractive, liveable urban places for communities to enjoy a high quality of life and well-being.

The significance of Drogheda and Dundalk in the context of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor as an important cross border network and key driver for regional development, economic growth and competitiveness is also recognised in the NPF.

Prior to 2015, Louth was part of the Border Region but with the establishment of the three new regional assemblies, the County was incorporated into the Eastern and Midland Region. This represents a shift from viewing Louth in the context of a border County to one more aligned and affiliated with Dublin and the Eastern & Midland Region; the region with the largest population and highest concentration of employment and associated employment opportunities in the country.

The designation of Drogheda and Dundalk as two of the three Regional Growth Centres in the Region is testament to their role as designated centres of growth, to further support and manage the growth of Dublin and critical to the implementation of effective regional development as set out in the NPF.

Growing Drogheda and Dundalk to cities of scale, where the majority of population growth is to be accommodated, supports the objective of the NPF to strengthen Ireland's overall urban structure.

1.2 REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRES

The RSES Settlement Hierarchy identifies Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres (RGCs), being towns with high level self-sustaining employment and services that act as regional economic drivers, while playing a significant role for a wide catchment area. It supports significant population and economic growth in these centres, which is critical to the implementation of effective regional development.

Recognition of the importance of Drogheda and Dundalk within the Draft Plan cannot therefore be understated.

The RSES sets out a strategic development framework for the future growth of Drogheda and Dundalk to allow them reach sufficient scale, to be drivers of regional growth, and in recognition of their critical role in successful regional development.

1.2.1 DROGHEDA



With regard to the RSES, a key priority of the Draft Plan is to promote the continued sustainable and compact growth of the town as a regional driver of city scale with a target population of 50,000 by 2031. This will be supported by objectives to regenerate the town centre, promote compact growth in the town's hinterlands and enhance the role of Drogheda as a self-sustaining strategic employment centre on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. The development of a joint Urban Area Plan (UAP) / Local Area Plan (LAP) between Louth County Council and Meath County Council will provide a coordinated planning framework to deliver strategic sites and regeneration areas.

Regeneration: Revitalising and redeveloping the town centre will be a priority. This includes the regeneration of opportunity sites. Integrated physical, economic and social regeneration will be

promoted to capitalise on existing infrastructure.

Areas identified include the Heritage Quarter and the Westgate Area, which received funding under the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF). Other opportunity sites include the Docklands. This approach is supported by the RSES over and above the development of greenfield sites.

Residential Development: The success of Drogheda as a self-sustaining Regional Growth Centre (RGC) will be dependent on the delivery of a minimum 30% compact growth, through regeneration and redevelopment of vacant, infill and/or brownfield sites in the town centre, which will contribute to place-making. Recent rapid residential development needs to be balanced with employment growth to reverse commuting patterns.

The sustainable development of lands in the northern and southern environs of the town will be supported.

Tourism: Drogheda is recognised as the gateway to the Boyne Valley Region and has significant tourism potential both within and beyond the town. The importance of the River Boyne is acknowledged as being central to any future strategy for the town and its regeneration. In conjunction with the adjoining parks and open spaces it provides a link to the Brú na Bóinne and beyond, as a recreational use.



Economic Development: Development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor with improved accessibility for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and indigenous business will enhance Drogheda's role as a key regional economic driver.

Cross-border collaboration is necessary for economic growth and to realise the potential of the Economic Corridor. The town has a broad employment base but there is a need to further grow this base and provide additional employment opportunities. The importance of start-up companies is recognised, as well as the strengthening of educational offerings from Drogheda Institute of Further Education (DIFE).



Retaining indigenous talent is recognised, as is the importance of the Lourdes Hospital as a significant employer in the area.

Enabling Infrastructure: The goal of achieving compact growth will require improved accessibility, sustainable mobility and the requisite infrastructure to enable Drogheda to grow as a Regional Growth Centre (RGC). The town will benefit from the extension of the DART service and improvements will be required to McBride station relating to accessibility. The importance of protecting the national rail and road infrastructure in supporting economic growth and competitiveness is acknowledged, as is the need for improvements to greenways, walking and cycling routes. The RSES supports the Drogheda Flood Relief Scheme, Drogheda Port and the proposed Port Access Northern Cross Route (PANCR).

Urban Area Plan (UAP) / Local Area Plan

(LAP): A statutory joint UAP / LAP will be prepared for Drogheda between Louth County Council and Meath County Council during the lifetime of this Plan which will facilitate its future development as a Regional Growth Centre and economic driver in the Region. Other Regional Objectives include:

- Support the Drogheda Docklands and Drogheda Port including the relocation of the port and Port Access Northern Cross Route provision;
- Promote cross border interactions to realise the growth potential of Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry as a cross border network for regional development;
- Promote self-sustaining economic and employment based development opportunities to reverse commuting patterns;
- Promote Drogheda as an urban tourism destination capitalising on its role as gateway to the Boyne Valley, Brú na Bóinne, Boyne River and Irelands Ancient East designation;
- Support varied social inclusion measures;
- Support the Drogheda Flood Relief Scheme;
- Enhance its role as a strategic employment centre on Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.

1.2.2 DUNDALK



In accordance with the RSES, a key priority of the Draft Plan is to promote the continued sustainable and compact growth of Dundalk as a regional driver of city scale with a target population of 50,000 by 2031. This will be supported by objectives to regenerate the town centre, promote compact growth in the town's hinterlands, and enhance the role of Dundalk as an employment centre on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. Capitalising on its proximity to Newry and strengthening cross border synergy in functions and services will also be promoted. The RSES identified a strategic development framework to help Dundalk reach sufficient scale to be a driver of economic growth under topics identified hereunder:

Regeneration: Revitalising Dundalk's town centre will be prioritised through regeneration of opportunity sites and underutilised areas. Integrated physical, economic and social regeneration will capitalise on existing infrastructure, help

combat social exclusion and improve permeability. Specific sites benefitting from regeneration will be identified throughout the town centre, building on the success of already completed regeneration schemes.

Residential Development: The success of Dundalk as a self-sustaining Regional Growth Centre will be dependent on the delivery of a minimum 30% compact growth, through regeneration and redevelopment of vacant, infill/brownfield sites in the town centre, other character areas and in Mount Avenue. Development of these lands will therefore be a central tenet of the Urban Area Plan (UAP) / Local Area Plan (LAP).

Economic Development: Development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor with improved accessibility for FDI and indigenous business will enhance Dundalk's role as a key regional economic driver, with a strong, modern economic and employment base located in high quality business parks, and supported by the Dundalk Institute of Technology serving as a driver for enterprise development in the Region.

Continued cross border collaboration is necessary for economic growth and to realise the potential of the Economic Corridor. Indigenous employment opportunities will retain talent in the locality.

Support for the expansion and development of the economic, employment and educational base will be provided for in the UAP / LAP.

Enabling Infrastructure: Compact growth will require improved accessibility, sustainable mobility and the requisite infrastructure to enable Dundalk grow as a Regional Growth Centre, all of which will be supported by the UAP / LAP. The importance of protecting the national rail and road infrastructure in supporting economic growth and competitiveness is acknowledged.

Urban Area Plan (UAP) / Local Area Plan (LAP): A statutory UAP / LAP will be prepared for Dundalk during the lifetime of this Plan and facilitate its future development as a RGC and economic driver in the Region. Other Regional Objectives include:

- Promote cross border interactions to realise the growth potential of Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry as a cross border network for regional development;

- Enhance its role as a strategic employment centre on Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor;
- Support the role of DKIT;
- Enhance potential for regeneration/redevelopment of the Port Harbour;
- Support varied social inclusion measures;
- Support the Dundalk Flood Relief Scheme.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF COUNTY LOUTH

Geographically, County Louth is located on the eastern seaboard mid-way between Ireland's two largest cities of Dublin and Belfast and strategically located on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.



It shares land borders with Counties Meath and Monaghan to the west and Counties Down and Armagh in Northern Ireland. The County has a population of 128,884 (Census 2016). This represents a 4.9% increase on the previous 2011 Census and notably higher than the national average growth rate of 3.8%.

Albeit the smallest County in the State with an area of 827 km² (Census 2016), it is the most densely populated County in Ireland, outside of Dublin, with a population density of 156 persons per km², compared to the national average of 70 persons per km². It is also home to two of the three largest towns in the country, namely, Drogheda and Dundalk.

The presence of two such substantial towns within a single County, both of which are primary centres of employment and targeted to grow to city scale, is very unique in the Country.

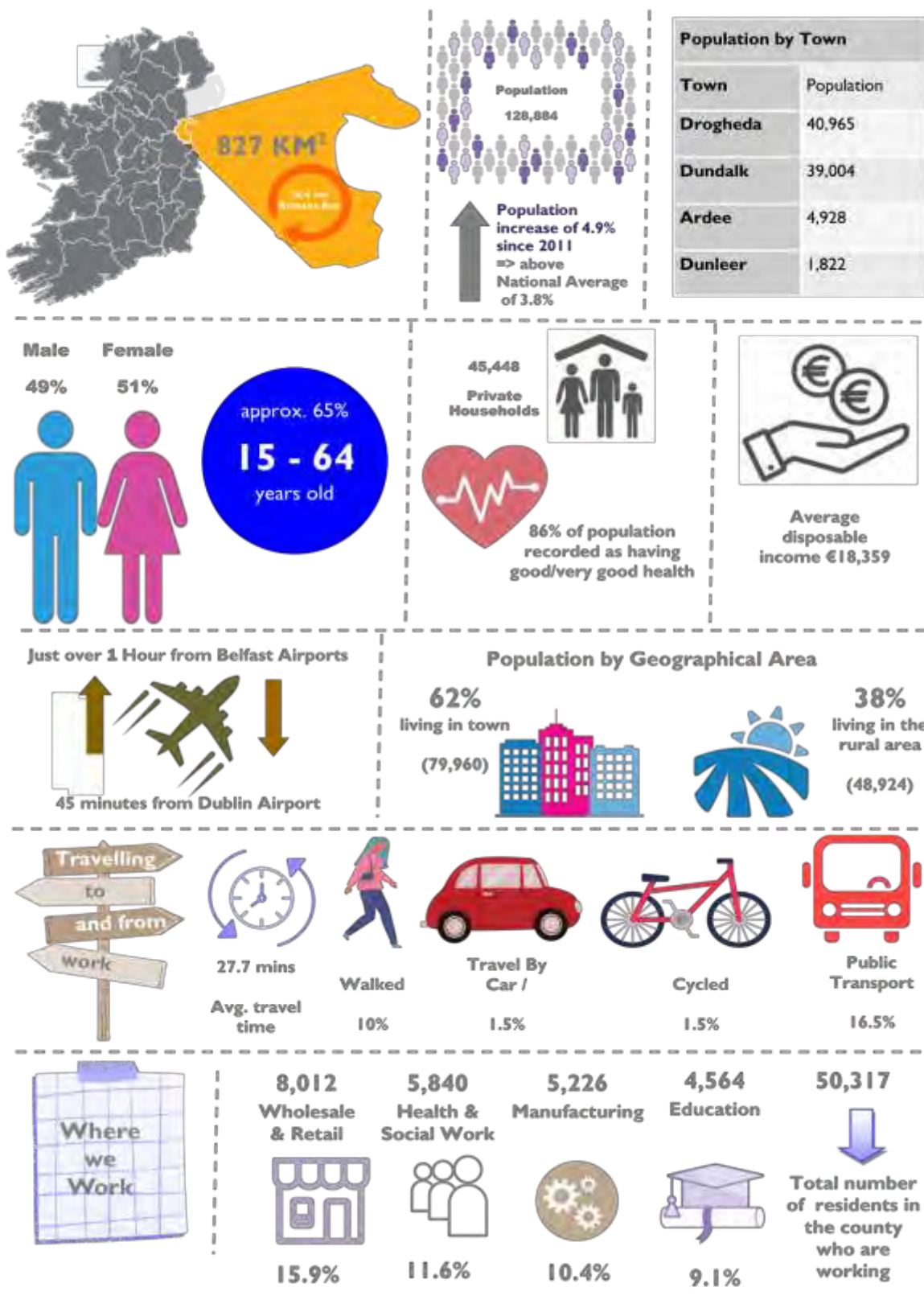
The scale of these towns combined with a number of additional substantial towns and villages dispersed throughout the County, results in the majority of the population living in urban areas - circa 62% (79,960).

As a result of its location, combined with high quality road and rail infrastructure, accessibility to ports and airports both north and south of the border, high speed broadband and a skilled and educated workforce, County Louth is well placed to continue to grow and prosper in terms of population and economic terms, into the future.

County Louth possesses a network of attractive and inviting towns and villages, interspersed with a diverse range of landscapes and natural environment, home to its rich and varied natural and built heritage, which collectively contribute substantially to the County's character, identity and sense of place. These valuable resources must be carefully managed to develop our society, economy and people in a sustainable manner.



Key Facts and Figures



1.4 CHALLENGING/CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

When preparation of the Draft County Development Plan commenced in 2019, it was during a period of economic and social optimism. The economic downturn of 2008 and the resultant collapse of the economy for a period extending beyond 6 years had major implications for the Country. The construction industry, which had been experiencing unprecedented growth, suddenly experienced a dramatic contraction, a consequence of which was a collapse in the property market, evidenced in the almost complete stagnation in housing construction.

From approximately 2014 the Irish economy was beginning to experience a form of economic recovery, albeit at a much reduced rate to previously. The gradual but continued economic growth was evidenced by reduced unemployment rates, increased wages and improved consumer confidence. This growth was particularly evident in the construction sector which tends to serve as a barometer of economic activity.

In June 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union. This is commonly referred to as Brexit. The future partnership between the UK and the EU following the UK departure is uncertain at this time. It will undoubtedly impact not just nationally but also on those counties, including Louth located along the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland which are particularly exposed to these uncertainties.

Notwithstanding this period of flux and uncertainty, in 2018 the Government published the National Planning Framework (NPF) and National Development Plan (NDP), as a disruptive shift from the planning status quo.

Together they constitute Project Ireland 2040 the purpose of which is to guide development and investment in the Country through a shared set of national objectives and principles. The alignment of strategic planning documents with the capital investment plan is regarded as a radical break with the past. The NDP sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the implementation of the NPF through a total investment of approximately €116 billion. This level of capital spending will facilitate ongoing employment retention and creation with appropriate regional development while allowing the construction industry to provide the capacity and capability required to deliver the Government's long term investment plans.

Refining these two documents into more detailed plans is the responsibility of the three Regional Assemblies through the publication of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for each Region.

The first quarter of 2020 witnessed a global economic shock as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to manage this virus, countries throughout the world have responded in a manner which has had major implications from both an economic and social perspective. At this early stage, it is impossible to fully estimate or measure the implications or their timeframe.

However, the pandemic is undoubtedly the greatest threat to the Irish economy since the global financial crisis. Recovery is anticipated to be slow and opportunities for economic growth and investment will be limited.

1.5 A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

As a result of this extended period of flux with economic highs and lows and subsequent volatilities, Louth, like the rest of the Country has had to adapt and adjust to the changes experienced and future proof for those changes yet to materialise. But Louth is a resilient County, and whilst there will be challenges to be faced, there will conversely be opportunities available from which the County can benefit and grow. Located along the border with excellent connectivity to Dublin and Belfast, Louth is an attractive location for UK business that requires access to the EU market and simultaneously Irish, European and International business requiring access to the UK market.

The designation of the two Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk in the County demonstrates their important roles and status within the region, to better manage the growth of Dublin and as two towns targeted to be regional economic drivers of city scale.

This Draft County Development Plan is acutely aware of the importance of Louth within the Eastern and Midland Region, the designated Regional Growth Centres and their role in driving regional development in accordance with national and regional strategies.

The Draft County Development Plan is an opportunity to shape the future growth of Louth while planning for and supporting its sustainable long term development. In an ever evolving economic and social environment this Draft Plan will provide a positive vision for Louth. It will strive to create a prosperous and thriving County, where growth is prioritised in the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk, supported by the sustainable development of smaller towns and villages while meeting the needs of the entire County.

1.6 STRATEGIC VISION

The Strategic Vision for County Louth enshrined in the Draft County Development Plan seeks to deliver a prosperous and thriving County, and in particular, the RGCs of Drogheda and Dundalk where no individual or social group is excluded, which enshrines the three principles of environmental, social and economic sustainability including protection of the County's resources, heritage and the natural and built environment while transitioning to a low carbon society.

Strategic Vision

“Promote County Louth, in particularly the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk, as uniquely attractive places in which to live, work, visit, and do business and where the quality of employment and educational opportunities, natural and built environment, cultural experiences and provision of inclusive communities are to the highest standards. ”

1.6.1 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The vision for County Louth will be achieved through the realisation of the following Strategic Objectives:

Strategic Objective	
SO 1	Realise the potential and promote the development and growth of County Louth through harnessing the economic and employment potential of the competitive advantages of the County. This includes its strategic location, connectivity and accessibility to external markets and having regard in particular to the role of Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres located on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.
Strategic Objective	
SO 2	Support and promote the role of Drogheda and Dundalk as key designated Regional Growth Centres with high levels of self-sustaining employment and services, to act as regional economic drivers, playing a significant role for a wide catchment area and to help achieve a more coordinated and sustainable settlement and travel pattern across the region.
Strategic Objective	
SO 3	Direct new development in accordance with the Core and Settlement Strategies, which will provide for the sustainable development of the County for the period 2021-2027 and beyond and in accordance with the principles of compact growth, consolidation and regeneration.
Strategic Objective	
SO 4	Transition to a low carbon and climate resilient County supporting energy efficiency and reducing energy demand, through a combination of mitigation and adaptation responses to climate change. This includes for increased usage of renewable energy through developing indigenous energy resources, supporting the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050, and ensuring flood risk management.
Strategic Objective	
SO 5	Ensure a more sustainable and integrated concept of development with regard to land use, transportation, water services, energy supply and waste management over the lifetime of the Plan.
Strategic Objective	
SO 6	Conserve and enhance the County's Green Infrastructure and ecosystem services supporting the sustainable management of natural assets and the biodiversity of the County's protected habitats and species to provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits to communities.

Strategic Objective

SO 7	Protect and enhance the built, cultural and natural heritage assets of Louth, the intrinsic value of which helps to define the character of both urban and rural areas, contributes to the attractiveness, vibrancy and sense of place for residents, tourists and visitors, including improved access to the countryside through the development of greenways, walking trails and blueways in support of and advancing sustainable communities.
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Strategic Objective

SO 8	Develop and support vibrant, inclusive, sustainable and healthy communities in Louth where people can live, work, invest and visit, enjoying access to a wide range of community, health and educational facilities and amenities, suitable for all ages and needs, in both urban and rural areas, thereby supporting a high quality of life for all to enjoy.
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Strategic Objective

SO 9	Protect and enhance the unique character and identity of Louth's towns and villages and improve quality of life and well-being through the application of Healthy Placemaking, underpinned by good urban design with the creation of attractive public spaces that are vibrant, distinctive, safe and accessible and which promote and facilitate positive social interaction.
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Strategic Objective

SO 10	Support implementation of the objectives and actions for strengthening economic and community development in the County in accordance with the Louth Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP).
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Strategic Objective

SO 11	Support the further development of a resilient economic base in Louth and promote both enterprise and entrepreneurship, underpinned by innovation and talent resulting in the delivery of sustainable jobs and economic growth.
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Strategic Objective

SO 12	Support improvements in and access to education and training as central to skills, knowledge, innovation and quality job creation which will underpin future prosperity for all and aid in achieving a more sustainable, balanced and inclusive society.
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Strategic Objective

SO 13	Support the sustainable development of rural areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.
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Strategic Objective

SO 14	Reverse rural decline in small towns and villages through sustainable, targeted measures addressing vacancy and delivering sustainable reuse and regeneration outcomes.
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Strategic Objective

SO 15	Ensure the proper integration of transportation and land use planning through the increased use of sustainable transport modes and the minimisation of travel demand to achieve a sustainable, integrated and low carbon transport system with excellent connectivity both within and beyond the County.
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Strategic Objective

SO 16	Ensure the efficient and sustainable use and development of water and waste water service infrastructure throughout the County in a manner that supports a healthy society, economic development and a cleaner environment.
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Strategic Objective

SO 17	Facilitate the development of infrastructural projects, which will underpin sustainable development throughout the County during the period of the Plan.
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Strategic Objective

SO 18	Afford suitable protection to the environment and natural resources of the County and ensure the fulfillment of environmental responsibilities.
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Strategic Objective

SO 19	Provide a framework for the management and regulation of development and use of land that will guide day to day planning decisions, thus ensuring a more sustainable and integrated concept of development with regard to all forms of land use.
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1.7 THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW PROCESS

The formal review process of the Louth County Development Plan 2015-2021 commenced on 27th September 2019 with a pre-draft consultation phase. In accordance with best practice, a Strategic Issues Paper was published.



The purpose of this was to encourage dialogue on the key topics important to the County and to promote and support the involvement of the public at the early stages in the preparation of the Draft Development Plan. The function of this stage was to determine the objectives and policies to deliver an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the Development Plan area.

The pre-draft consultation process was undertaken from Friday 27th September to Tuesday 26th November 2019, wherein a total of 244 submissions were received. In addition to consultations with stakeholders and the use of social media etc., the Council engaged in five public consultation events throughout the County.

The Chief Executives Report was prepared in accordance with Section 11(4) of the *Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)* and presented to the Elected Members for consideration. On the 23rd March 2020, direction was given by the Elected Members to proceed with the preparation of the Draft Development Plan 2021-2027. However, shortly thereafter, the statutory timeframe for drafting the Development Plan as specified in the *Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)* was interrupted by Covid-19.

An Order under Section 251A of the Act resulted in an extension to the statutory timelines within which the Draft Development Plan was to be prepared.

It is important to note that the opinions, views and ideas set out in the written submissions and of those expressed and recorded at the public consultation events, were considered during the drafting of this Plan.

1.7.1 Legislative Background

This Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the *Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)* which requires that a Development Plan set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in addition to the inclusion of mandatory objectives. These consist of *inter alia*, objectives for the zoning of land, the provision of infrastructure, the conservation and protection of the environment, and the integration of the planning and sustainable development with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population.

It also includes the requirement to prepare a “Core Strategy” for the County, which must be consistent, as far as practicable, with the National and Regional development objectives set out in the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. A full list of mandatory objectives required for inclusion in a Development Plan as specified in the *Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)* is detailed in Appendix 1, Volume 3.

In addition to compliance with the *Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)*, the Draft Louth County Development Plan is informed by other legislation, in particular the requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA).

1.7.2 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), as required under the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004, was carried out as part of the preparation of this Draft Plan. SEA is the process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes and in this case the preparation of the Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027. Article 1 of the EU Directive 2001/42/EC states *“The objective of the SEA process is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of specified plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development,*

by ensuring that, in accordance with this Directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment”. The results of the SEA process were fully considered and integrated into the preparation and making of this Draft Plan. The resulting Environmental Report has been published as a separate document in conjunction with this Draft Plan and is included in Volume 5.

1.7.3 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

The EU Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora, otherwise known as The Habitats Directive, in combination with the Directive on the conservation of wild birds (79/409/EEC as amended by 2009/147/EC), otherwise known as the Birds Directive, provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance, through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of sites known as the Natura 2000 Network of European Sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment (AA) of plans and projects likely to affect European Sites.

Appropriate Assessment is an evaluation of the potential impacts of a plan on the conservation objectives of a European site, and the development, where necessary, of mitigation or avoidance measures to preclude negative effects. An Appropriate Assessment was conducted as part of the preparation of this Draft Plan.

A Natura Impact Report (NIR) has been published as a separate document in conjunction with this Draft Plan and is included in Volume 5.

1.7.4 STRATEGIC FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT (SFRA)

In meeting the requirements of both the Strategic Environmental Assessment process and *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management - Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2009), the Council has conducted a County wide Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the Plan area. This provides a broad assessment of flood risk within the County and will inform strategic land-use planning decisions in this and other plans.

The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has been published as a separate document in conjunction with this Draft Plan and is available in Volume 5.

1.7.5 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION

The development objectives in the Draft County Development Plan are consistent, as far as practicable, with the conservation and protection of the environment. The accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) processes have informed the preparation of the Draft Plan (Volume 5 of the Draft plan provides associated documents detailing the findings). All recommendations made by these processes have been integrated into this Draft Plan and this will contribute towards environmental conservation and protection within the County and beyond.

1.7.5.1 Ecosystems Services Approach and Natural Capital

In preparing the Draft Plan and developing policy objectives, the Council have followed these Ecosystem Services ¹ Approach principles:

- a) Consideration of natural systems - by using knowledge of interactions in nature and how ecosystems function (including in Draft Plan Chapters 8 and 11)
- b) Taking into account the services that ecosystems provide - including those that underpin social and economic wellbeing, such as flood and climate regulation (including in Draft Plan Chapters 8, 10 and 12), resources for food, fibre or fuel (including at Chapters 5 and 11), or for recreation, culture and quality of life (including at Draft Plan Chapters 4, 6, 9 and 11).
- c) Involving people - those who benefit from the ecosystem services and those managing them need to be involved in decisions that affect them. Public consultation has informed the preparation of the Draft Plan which will be further refined before adoption, taking into account submissions and observations made on the Draft Plan during public display.

The Council shall promote an Ecosystem Services Approach, following the above principles, in its decision-making processes, including those relating to the preparation of statutory land use plans.

¹ Ecosystems are multifunctional communities of living organisms interacting with each other and their environment. Ecosystems provide a series of services for human well-being (ecosystem services) either directly or indirectly contributing towards human wellbeing.

In recognition of the need to manage natural capital², provisions have been integrated into the Draft Plan that will contribute towards management of air quality, noise pollution, light pollution, water quality and integrated catchment management.

1.7.6 POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The *Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)* requires that a Development Plan shall, so far as is practicable, be consistent with National and Regional Plans, Policies and Strategies relating to proper planning and sustainable development, have regard to Ministerial Guidelines (DHPLG), the Development Plans of adjoining authorities and the requirements of the *Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)*. This Draft Development Plan is therefore required to comply with the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly).

In preparing the Draft Plan, regard has been had to International, National, Regional and Local policy documents. These have been instrumental in formulating the Draft Plan's overall aims and strategic direction, including but not limited to integrating transportation and land use, a settlement strategy centred upon consolidated and compact development, maximising efficient use of land, and protecting both the natural and built environment etc.

1.7.7 NATIONAL POLICY

Project Ireland 2040 is the government's long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for its entire people. It is predicated on the proper alignment of investment priorities and

capital expenditure with a carefully considered and defined strategy.

Alongside the development of physical infrastructure, Project Ireland 2040 supports business and communities across all of Ireland in realising their potential. The two documents constituting Project Ireland 2040 are detailed below.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is a strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of the Country for the next 20 years. The ambition of the NPF is to establish a single vision for all communities throughout the Country in accordance with shared goals identified as National Strategic Outcomes (NSO) and of which there are 10 identified. From a planning perspective, Ireland is divided into three regions and of these, County Louth sits in the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) area.



In accordance with its vision of regional parity, and to address the disproportionate growth in the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly area to date, the NPF targets a level of growth in the Country's Southern and Northern and Western Regions combined, to at least match that projected in the Eastern and Midland Region.

The population target for the Eastern and Midland Region is for an additional 490,000-540,000 people to be living in the region by 2040.

² Renewable and non-renewable resources (e.g. plants, animals, air, water, soils, minerals)

In addition to targeting the existing five cities in the country for 50% of Ireland's growth the NPF, in recognition of the role of cross-border networks and the need to strengthen Ireland's urban structure, identifies Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry on the Dublin-Belfast corridor as playing an important lead role in future growth and development with Drogheda and Dundalk identified as Regional Growth Centres.

The NPF promotes regional concentration toward cities and larger urban areas, with a focus on compact urban growth in existing built up areas and provision of enabling infrastructure to promote investment.

In accordance with the NPF, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly prepared its Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy in 2019. Local Authorities were then tasked with preparing city and/or County Development Plans to correspond with the respective regional strategy to ensure that a shared vision is applied locally and to ensure alignment at national, regional and local level.

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 is intended to act as the investment plan, which will underpin and ensure the success of the National Planning Framework (NPF) wherein planning objectives are supported by investment priorities. This represents a very substantial commitment of resources through a total investment of approximately €116bn. Its stated aim is to act as a driver for *"Ireland's long-term economic, environmental and social progress across all parts of the country over the next decade"*.

This, in essence, will facilitate proactive rather than the heretofore, reactive intervention, in an attempt *"to rebalance national planning and counter the gravitational pull of regions of socio-economic advantage"*. (Eolas magazine-online March 2018).

1.8 REGIONAL POLICY

1.8.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), comprising of nine counties and 12 local authorities is divided into three sub-regions or Strategic Planning Areas (SPA's) namely; the Dublin SPA, the Eastern SPA and the Western SPA.

Louth sits in the Eastern SPA alongside Meath, Kildare and Wicklow.

EMRA published its first Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy in 2019, the primary objective of which is to support implementation of Project Ireland 2040 alongside the economic and climate policies of the Government, by providing a long term strategic planning and economic framework. It identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides corresponding policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs). The Strategic Vision of the RSES is:

"To create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and well-being of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all".

The growth strategy for the region seeks to align population, economic growth and services, making the best use of infrastructure, including public transport to reduce emissions and to strengthen the region's strategic connectivity as part of an integrated land use and transportation strategy.

1.9 NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ALIGNMENT

The RSES is underpinned by key cross-cutting principles reflecting the three pillars of sustainability; Social, Environmental and Economic. Reflecting the challenges and opportunities of the region these are expressed in the RSES as the following Three Key Principles:

- Healthy Placemaking
- Climate Action and;
- Economic Opportunity.

Falling out of these three key principles are 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), which align with the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 in its policies and objectives has sought co-ordination with and guidance from the aforementioned 'Three Key Principles' and associated 'RSOs', in order to create a coherent policy alignment and hierarchy between national, regional and local level.

To illustrate the alignment of local and regional goals, each chapter of the Draft Plan has in broad terms, been assigned to one of the three aforementioned key principles to which it is most closely aligned (there may be cross over with the two remaining key principles).

The subsequent alignment with RSOs detailed in Table 1.1 illustrates how the Draft Plan is in accordance with the identified framework for preparing County Development Plans as referenced in the RSES.

Healthy Placemaking

- Promoting people's quality of life by creating attractive and healthy places where people can live, work, invest, study and visit

Climate Action

- Enhancing climate resilience to accelerate transitioning to a low carbon society, whilst recognising the role of natural capital and ecosystem services in so doing

Economic Opportunity

- Creating conditions and opportunities so make certain sustainable economic growth and quality jobs occur and ensuring a good standard of living for all.

Table 1.1: Alignment of LCDP with Three Key Principles and Regional Strategic Outcomes

Three Key Principles	Draft Louth County Development Plan Chapters	Alignment with Regional Strategic Outcomes 1-16
Healthy Placemaking	Core Strategy & Settlement Strategy Housing Social & Community Heritage (Natural and Built)	1, 2, 3, 9 2, 3, 4, 6, 9 4, 5, 6, 9, 13 4, 5, 9, 10, 11
Climate Action	Movement Infrastructure & Utilities Environment, Rural Resources & the Coast Climate	4, 6, 9, 15, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14 3, 7, 8, 9, 1-16
Economic Opportunity	Introduction Economy & Employment Tourism	14 3, 12, 13, 15 3, 15

1.10 LOCAL POLICY

1.10.1 Louth Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2022

The Local Government Act 2014 required that all local authorities develop a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). The Louth LECP includes a series of high level goals, objectives and actions to promote and support the economic and community development of the County both by itself directly, and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders. The two required elements of a LECP are:

- A local economic element prepared and adopted by the Local Authority via the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC), and
- A community development element prepared and adopted by the Local Community Development Committee. (LCDC).

The Vision of the Louth LECP 2016-2022 is that *“Louth will be a prosperous, proud, safe, and inclusive County where people want to live, work, visit and invest, and where there is equal opportunity for all”*.

To this end, the Louth LECP has identified eight economic and eight community goals to be achieved through a series of identified objectives and actions, which collectively will deliver and realise the stated vision. These are as indicated on Table 1.2.

The LECP is required to be consistent with the County Development Plan and the RSES, meaning it is closely aligned with planning policy at a local, regional and national level. Both the Economic and Community high level goals and objectives identified in the LECP have been incorporated and intrinsically linked with the policy objectives of this Draft Plan.

Whilst the linkage and compatability between the two documents is most obvious in Chapter 4 - ‘Social and Community’ and Chapter 5 - ‘Economy and Employment’, it is, in fact, peppered throughout and underlies the key principles and policy objectives of the entire Draft Plan.

Table 1.2: Economic and Community Goals of the LECF

Economic Goals		Community Goals	
Foreign Direct Investment	Promote and develop Louth as a key investment location on the Eastern Economic Corridor	Strong, Safe & Flourishing Communities	Enable well being and quality of life to support safe, resilient , independent and engaged communities
Sustainable Development	Promote the growth of new and existing business in communities in Louth, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.	Access to Education	Ensure that everyone can access and participate in education, skills development and life long learning.
Education & Training	Advance economic and social development by providing a targeted continuum of lifelong learning and skills development.	Prosperous, Inclusive Communities & Places	Create equality of opportunity for those experiencing poverty, isolation and social exclusion.
Future – Focused Innovation	Ensure that Louth will be a leader in business development, creating new models of flexible value and enterprise.	Health & Wellbeing	Provide environments and conditions that support healthy, self-directed, fulfilled and purposeful lives.
Business & Indigenous Industry	Deliver viable local economies underpinned by innovation and entrepreneurship	Nurturing Children & Young People	Nurture and develop our children and young people from early childhood to young adulthood.
Tourism & Heritage	Ensure that Louth's unique Tourism offering positions it as a market leader of national significance.	An Age Friendly Society	Embrace and foster the rich contribution older people make to our communities.
Agriculture, Food & Fisheries	Establish Louth as a premier producer in the Agri-Farming, Food and Fisheries sector.	Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Enterprise	Empower community innovation, entrepreneurship and enterprise to support urban and rural development.
Broadband Connectivity & Transport	Ensure availability of high speed broadband connectivity County-wide to develop and sustain business and connect our communities.	A Valued Environment	Value and sustain our built heritage and natural environment to enhance the lives of those who live, work and visit in our County.

1.10.2 Louth Corporate Plan 2019-2024

The Council's mission statement as outlined in the Louth County Council Corporate Development Plan 2019-2024 is to '*provide leadership and to deliver high-quality, citizen-focused, responsive and effective services*'. The Council stands for democracy, integrity, openness and accountability, and input from the people who live, work and do business in Louth is important to ensure the development of a shared vision for the County.

The Plan highlights seven organisational strategic objectives, which guide and shape the direction of the functions of Louth County Council over the plans five year period, as follows:

- Housing;
- Drogheda and Dundalk - Regional Growth Centres;
- Climate Change;
- Key Infrastructure Projects;
- Economic Development and Job Creation;
- Key Plans and Strategies;
- Quality of Life.

These Corporate Plan objectives have contributed to the formulation of the vision and strategic objectives intrinsic to the Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027.

1.10.3 Louth Climate Adaptation Strategy

In response to the impact of climate change both now and into the future on County Louth and its citizens, Louth County Council developed a Climate Adaptation Strategy, which will allow the Council to plan for severe weather events (which are becoming more prevalent) and to make the organisation and its communities more sustainable and climate resilient.

It forms part of the National Adaptation Framework (NAF), which was published in response to the provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. The Council is uniquely placed to effect real positive change with respect to the national transition objective to a low carbon and climate resilient future and the actions set out in the Climate Action Plan 2019.

The role of the Louth Climate Adaptation Strategy at local level is to:

- Ensure comprehension of risks and vulnerabilities of climate change;
- Advance the implementation of climate resilient actions in a planned and proactive manner and
- Ensure climate adaptation considerations are main-streamed into all plans and policies and into all operations and functions of the local authority.

This Strategy is based around six thematic areas developed as High Level Goals which identify the desired outcomes anticipated through the effective implementation of the climate change adaption strategy:

- **Theme 1:** Local Adaptation Governance and Business Operations;
- **Theme 2:** Infrastructure and Built Environment;
- **Theme 3:** Land use and Development;
- **Theme 4:** Drainage and Flood Management;
- **Theme 5:** Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure;
- **Theme 6:** Community Health and Wellbeing.

The Draft Development Plan will integrate these high level goals and outcomes as Development Plan objectives in order to deliver on the Government's objectives on climate action as set out in the Climate Action Plan 2019.

1.11 FORMAT OF THE PLAN

The Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 comprises 5 inter-related volumes, which must be interpreted as a whole when reading the Draft Plan.

These are as follows:

Volume One:	The Written Statement which sets out the overall strategy alongside the policies and objectives of the Draft Plan to ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of the County.
Volume One -A	Strategic maps and zoning maps providing a graphic representation of the proposals of the Draft Plan indicating land use and other objectives of the Council including for the County, the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk, and the Self-Sustaining Growth Towns of Ardee and Dunleer.
Volume Two:	Strategic maps and zoning maps providing a graphic representation of the proposals of the Draft Plan indicating land use and other objectives of the Council for the Level 3 - Self-Sustaining Towns, Level 4 -Small Towns and Villages and Level 5 - Rural Villages.
Volume Three:	The Appendices which include the Housing and Retail Strategies, Green Infrastructure Strategy, ACA's, ZAP's etc.
Volume Four:	The Record of Protected Structures.
Volume Five:	The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report, the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Natura Impact Report and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Report.

The Written Statement of Volume One is comprised of 14 Chapters the contents of which are presented in summary below:

Chapter Summary

Chapter Heading	Chapter Summary
Introduction	This provides an introduction to the Draft Louth County Development Plan setting out changes that have occurred and impacted the County since the last Development Plan with particular reference to Drogheda and Dundalk. It details the legislative background and requirements in addition to the steps taken in the preparation of the Draft Plan. It provides a vision for the County, which is supported by a set of strategic objectives.
Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy	This establishes a quantitatively based strategy for the spatial development of the County consistent with the NPF and RSES objectives and includes a settlement hierarchy, gives effect to the hierarchy by setting population targets and housing requirements for residential land, provides an evidence based rationale for lands to be zoned. Details of the settlement structure in the County and the range of services available within each category of settlement are provided in this chapter. It also sets out how the policy framework established in the Core Strategy will be implemented in the towns and villages in the County.
Housing	The Housing chapter sets out the strategy for the provision of housing in the urban and rural parts of the County. It supports the creation of sustainable communities and quality, adaptable housing that is resilient to the potential impacts of climate change and will meet the changing needs of residents.
Social and Community	The Social and Community chapter provides a strategy to ensure the development of sustainable, inclusive, communities through policy objectives to ensure the provision of community, social, recreational, educational and cultural facilities accessible to and meeting the needs of all individuals and community groups
Economy and Employment	The strategy for economic development in the County is set out in this chapter. An overview of the economic profile of the County is provided with opportunities as to how the County can strengthen its employment base identified. The importance of the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk fulfilling their potential and developing into centres of scale in the economic development of the County is emphasised.

Chapter Heading	Chapter Summary
Tourism	The overall strategy for Tourism within the County is detailed in this chapter. The principal tourism initiatives, strategies and locations are identified and supporting policy is set out for each. The chapter emphasises the importance of the County's natural environment, rich and varied heritage and numerous cultural attractions as key drivers for the sector.
Movement	The strategy for the provision of transport infrastructure and investment is set out in the Movement chapter. The links between land use and transport planning are identified with the importance of an efficient and functional transport system in providing connectivity and supporting economic investment acknowledged. The strategy supports a shift towards more sustainable modes of travel including walking, cycling, and public transport.
Natural Heritage, Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure	A contextual overview and strategic context in relation to the natural heritage and green infrastructure of the County is provided in this chapter. Policy objectives for the protection, conservation and management of the natural environment are provided and include for sites designated at EU and national level, protected species and habitats outside of designated sites, green infrastructure, landscapes, scenic routes and views and prospects etc.
Built Heritage and Culture	A contextual overview and strategic context in relation to the built heritage and culture of the County, which seeks to ensure its protection and enhancement for future generations. Policy objectives for the protection, conservation and management of the built heritage and cultural aspects are provided and include archaeology, architecture and vernacular heritage, battlefield sites, historic gardens and designed landscapes.
Infrastructure and Public Utilities	The sustainable growth of County Louth is dependent on the provision of adequate water and waste water services and infrastructure. This chapter acknowledges the working relationship between Louth County Council (LCC) and Irish Water (IW) in ensuring adequate capacity to support future development and progressing and implementing IW projects throughout the County, which includes for water conservation. The importance of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and Flood Risk Management is acknowledged through inclusion of appropriate policy objectives and a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). High quality, appropriately located, ICT infrastructure is recognised as critical infrastructure to achieve balanced social and economic development. The chapter also supports the development of renewable energy sources in the interest of delivering on identified targets and on the National Climate Change Strategy and in providing security of energy supply throughout the County. The policy objectives contained herein support this approach.

Chapter Heading	Chapter Summary
Environment, Natural Resources, and the Coast	This chapter sets out the strategy with regards to the Environment, Natural Resources and the Coast and details policies relating to the conservation and enhancement of the County's environment. A balanced approach is promoted with appropriate policies for the growth and development of the County's natural resources while ensuring that adverse environmental impacts are minimised. The chapter also addresses the changing coast and coastal protection in the context of a changing marine planning process.
Climate Action	This chapter outlines the approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation, as required by the Planning and Development Act 2000, (as amended). The chapter examines how mitigation and adaptation strategies have been integrated throughout the Draft County Development Plan. The chapter identifies policies, which contribute towards achieving the targets set down in the Climate Action Plan 2019.
Development Management Guidelines	This chapter provides guidance on a range of different development types for prospective applicants having regard to the national planning and local policies provisions within each of the chapters of the Draft Development Plan. Reference and links are provided to relevant national policy documents and prospective applicants are encouraged to engage in pre-planning discussions.
Implementation and Monitoring	This chapter recognises that the policies and objectives of the Draft Plan cover the broad range of functions of the Council and that the full realisation of these will be dependent on many factors including funding. It details that a 2 year review of the Plan will be completed in accordance with the <i>Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)</i> .

Note: Should any conflict arise between the written statement and accompanying maps, the written statement shall take precedence.