



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

3ú Urlár ó Thuaidh | Ionad Cathartha | An tSráid Mhór | Baile Munna | Baile Átha Cliath 9
3rd Floor North | Ballymun Civic Centre | Main Street | Ballymun | Dublin 9



Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly notes the publication of the Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028 and sets out hereunder observations on behalf of the Assembly. The submission has been prepared by the executive and approved by the members of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly at the meeting of 10th September 2021.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

As indicated in the Assembly's previous submission to the County Development Plan review process, The Council will be aware of the finalisation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region which was made on 28th June 2019. The RSES, prepared in accordance with the National Planning Framework, sets the context for each local authority within our Region to develop their county and city development plans in a manner that will ensure national, regional and local plans align. The RSES identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives. At this strategic level it provides a framework for investment to better manage spatial planning and economic development throughout the Region.

In this regard, The Assembly welcomes the publication of the Draft Carlow Plan which enables the coordinated and timely incorporation of Project Ireland 2040 - the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), thus ensuring full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy.

Legislative Context

As required by Section 11(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the Regional Assembly received notice from the Council on July 16th 2021, of the preparation of the Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028.

Whilst the various themes that are addressed within the draft county development plan are fully noted, the scope of this submission mainly focuses on issues directly linked to the Eastern and Midland Region.

Submission

1.0 Consistency and Alignment with Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies

The Regional Assembly note the inclusion of Section 1.4 which details the strategic context of the draft plan. This includes Figure 1.1 which demonstrates the spatial planning hierarchy and outlines that the County Development Plan seeks to combine the overarching 'top-down' policy framework at the national and regional level with a 'bottom-up' approach to policy development at the local level. Sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.2 which document the NPF and RSES respectively, also provide an important

reference point for the Draft Plan and the requirement to demonstrate consistency with the overarching policy frameworks of the NPF and RSES for the Southern Region.

As part of this, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly particularly welcome the inclusion of a number of key strategic issues for Carlow Town that includes, the acknowledgement of its interregional role given its location to the north of the Southern Region and adjacent to the Eastern and Midland Region, and supporting the preparation for a Joint Urban Area Plan with Laois County Council for the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area. This is also reiterated at Section 1.5.1

Maintaining consistency with the RSES is further referenced as part of the Core Strategy Chapter, and the Assembly particularly welcomes Sections 2.2.2 and 2.3 in this regard, which details RSES principles for the Core Strategy.

Given that County Carlow borders the Eastern and Midland Region, and shares the Key Town of Carlow Graiguecullen, it is considered that the inclusion of a statement that the Plan be cognizant of the long-term strategic planning and economic framework of the adjoining Eastern and Midland Region as it is expressed in the EMRA RSES, would be a positive addition to Plan.

2.0 Inter-Regional Matters

2.1 Carlow Graiguecullen Key Town

The EMRA welcome the inclusion of content and policy objectives that support Carlow as a Key Town. This includes policy CSP 1, to support the continued growth and sustainable development of Carlow Town to act as a regional and inter-regional growth driver in the region and to fulfil its role as a Key Town, focused on sustainable development, quality of life and economic investment, and, policy CSP 3, to prepare a statutory Joint Urban Area Plan (UAP) for the Greater Carlow Urban Area with Laois County Council which will be informed by the preparation of a local transport plan prepared in consultation with NTA and TII. It is noted that this policy goes on to state that the UAP will align with the aims of this Core Strategy while having regard to the regional policy objectives as contained in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RPO 11 and 14) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (RPO 4.75). The reference to RPO 4.75 of the EMRA RSES is considered an extremely positive addition.

In addition, the Assembly consider that this is positively reinforced by the inclusion of Section 2.23.1 which outlines that the joint Plan will be prioritised following the adoption of the county development plan and will be prepared in partnership with Laois County Council. It is indicated that a single overall planning framework for the Key Town of Carlow will seek to deliver on the key strategic objectives as contained in the RSES for the Southern Region and the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly so as to function as an economic self-sustaining regional driver and focus of sustainable growth. Preparation of the plan will also be informed by a local transport plan, in accordance with the requirements of the regional policy objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

2.2 Strategic Connections

2.2.1 The Barrow

The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region identifies the potential of strategic connections to the Southern Region including potential to promote links between the Grand Canal, the Barrow Line and to further develop the Barrow Blueway connecting Carlow-Graiguecullen on the boundary with the Southern Region and extending south to Waterford. In addition to enabling strategic connections, this also supports linked tourism and economic opportunities, and is identified as a flagship blueway within the Region, and supported at RPO 4.76 of the EMRA RSES.

Having regard to this, EMRA welcome the many policies included within the Draft Plan which support this. This includes policy ED. P16, to support development of the tourism industry and maximise direct and indirect opportunities afforded by the River Barrow, built heritage characteristics and significant beverage industries located within the town, and, other similar policies including CT. 05, MB. 04, MB. 07, WC. 07, HT. P11, HT. P12, HT. P13, and GB. P3 to name a few.

2.2.2 Transport Connections

The EMRA RSES recognises the importance of inter-regional national routes such as the N80. The N80 route is identified as a strategic connection for Portlaoise providing an essential link accessing Carlow, Waterford and Rosslare to the southeast and Tullamore, Mullingar and Athlone to the northwest.

Accordingly, the Assembly welcome the inclusion of policy RR. 01 to support and facilitate the planning, design and completion of the Southern Relief Route N80-R448 including a new bridging point over the River Barrow, to improve connectivity between the Midlands Region and the South-East Region and to address local traffic management considerations thereby contributing to the local economy of the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area.

2.2.3 Education Institutions

The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region recognises that Carlow is home to two well established education institutions, the Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC) and Carlow College (St. Patrick's), both of which have substantial links with the surrounding regions, including Laois- Offaly ETB, with the RSES also outlining specific support for the provision of tertiary educational facilities at the Wicklow County Campus at Rathnew, in conjunction with Carlow IT (RPO 4.55).

The Assembly welcome that the importance of these education facilities is reflected at Section 8.10.2 of the Draft Plan, including policy EF. 03 which aims to strengthen and reinforce Carlow's regional and inter-regional role in education, research, and innovation capacity.

Conclusion

The Regional Assembly welcomes the Draft County Development Plan 2022-2028, which marks the beginning of the alignment of planning policy at county and local levels with Regional and National Policy. It should be noted that the officials of the Regional Assembly are available to discuss the matters raised above and the Assembly welcome further opportunities to engage in the statutory process of the making of the Carlow County Development Plan.

Regards,



Jim Conway
Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
10th September 2021