



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

3ú Uirlár 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 Roscommon County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly notes the publication of the Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2021-2027 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 11th June 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 Roscommon 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 April 21st 2021, of the preparation of the Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2021-2027.

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 1.1 which provides an introduction and legislative basis to the County Development Plan. This includes a statement outlining that the County Development Plan is set within the framework of Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (NPF) at national level, and at regional level by the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) (2020) for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) area. This is further supported in

greater detail at Section 1.2 of the Plan. Maintaining consistency with the RSES is further referenced as part of the Core Strategy Chapter, including Core Strategy Policy Objective CS 2.1, which outlines that the Plan must ensure that the future development of Roscommon is in accordance with the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032 for the Northern and Western Region (NWR).

Given that County Roscommon borders the Eastern and Midland Region, and shares the Regional Growth Centre of Athlone, 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 Athlone

The EMRA welcome the inclusion of content and policy objectives that support Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre. This includes policy objective CS 2.7 to prepare a statutory Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone with Westmeath County Council, in collaboration with NWRA and EMRA. This is in keeping with RPO 4.4 of the Eastern and Midland RSES which outlines that a cross boundary statutory Joint Urban Area Plan (UAP) for the Regional Growth Centre of Athlone shall be jointly prepared by Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils in collaboration with EMRA and NWRA, and that the UAP will support the development of Athlone as an attractive, vibrant and highly accessible Regional Centre and economic driver for the centre of the Country.

2.1.1 Population Allocation; Athlone

The Assembly note the allocation of population to Athlone as part of the Draft Plan. This includes an allocation to both the geographical area of Athlone located in County Roscommon, as per the Core Strategy Table, and an allocation to the entire settlement as per core strategy policy objective CS 2.6.

Policy Objective CS 2.6 of the Draft Plan states that the Plan will *'Support the continued growth of Athlone, with a focus on quality of life and securing the investment to fulfil its role as a key Regional Growth Centre and economic driver in the centre of Ireland, with a target population of 30,000 up to 2040'*.

It is noted that this policy objective relates to the entirety of Athlone, including the area beyond the administrative boundary of the Council which is located in County Westmeath and the administrative area of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The Local Authority are advised that this Core Strategy Policy Objective is contrary to the policy of the EMRA RSES and the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027, which envisage a population target of 30,000 for the entire settlement of Athlone up to 2031. Furthermore, The RSES for the NWRA (Section 3.7(a)) states that *'The RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region envisages a population target of 30,000 for the entire settlement of Athlone up to 2031'*. It is therefore recommended that the aforementioned policy objective CS 2.6 is omitted from the Plan or altered to be consistent with the population target for Athlone as per the EMRA RSES and Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

The Assembly note the population allocation to Monksland/Bellanamullia areas of Athlone, located in County Roscommon, as per the Core Strategy Table (Table 2.2) of the Draft Plan. This Table indicates a population growth of 1,763 for the Monksland/ Bellanamullia areas for the years 2021-2027. It is noted that this exceeds the population allocations set out in the RSES of the NWRA, which indicates population targets of 1,500 by 2031 and 1,800 by 2040 for the areas in the NW Region.

Given the inconsistency between the Core Strategy Allocation and the NWRA RSES, the Assembly consider that this proposed level of population growth could undermine the coordinated and holistic growth of Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre. In particular, this may undermine the national strategic outcome of compact growth by providing an excessive level of population growth at the edge of the settlement, beyond the urban core. Accordingly, it is recommended that the population allocation be revised to be in keeping with both the RSES for the NWRA and the EMRA, which state that the distribution of population should be generally in proportion to existing population levels in each local authority area.

Having regard to the location of Athlone and the recently adopted Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027, the EMRA consider that this is an apt moment to engage with Westmeath County Council on determining the future growth of Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre.

2.1.2 Transport

The Regional Assembly welcome the inclusion of policy objective ITC 7.4, to prepare, in conjunction with Westmeath County Council and relevant agencies, an Area Based Transport Plan for Athlone, to facilitate the growth of Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre. This is reflective of RPO 8.6 of the EMRA RSES, which outlines that in order to give local expression to the regional level Transport Strategy within the Region in conjunction with the NTA, Local Transport Plans (LTP) will be prepared for selected settlements in the Region, including Athlone. RPO 4.10 of the RSES also supports the development of joint economic, transport and retail plans by Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils in collaboration with, and where appropriate, relevant local authorities and relevant agencies, to facilitate the growth of Athlone as a regional economic driver.

2.2 Just Transition

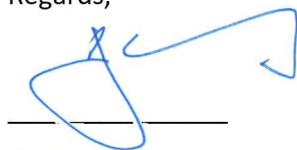
In keeping with the RSES, including RPOs 6.38 and 7.29, the Regional Assembly welcome the inclusion of policy objective ED 6.19 to engage with all relevant government stakeholders, sectoral representatives, ESB and Bord na Móna in developing and supporting sustainable alternative economic development, guided by the principles of 'Just Transition', for those employees and communities affected by the closure of the ESB Lough Ree Power Station and associated Bord na Móna peat harvesting practices.

Conclusion

It is considered that the Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2021-2027 can achieve consistency with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031 by addressing the recommendations and observations set out above.

The Regional Assembly welcomes the Draft County Development Plan 2021-2027, 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 Roscommon County Development Plan.

Regards,



Jim Conway
Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
16th June 2021