



Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly notes the publication of Proposed Variation No. 3 of the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 and sets out hereunder observations on behalf of the Assembly. This submission has been prepared by the Executive and approved by the Cathaoirleach of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

1.0 Overall Context

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is part of the regional tier of governance in Ireland. It is primarily focused on driving regional development through the formulation, adoption and implementation of the Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), oversight and coordination of County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans, management of EU Operational Programs, EU project participation, implementation of national economic policy, and additional functions working with the National Oversight and Audit Commission. As a strategic policy body, EMRA also participates in the consultation processes of other relevant strategic plans and policies.

The role and function of the Regional Assembly, including the scope of the RSES, is currently provided for in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. It should be noted that this legislation has been superseded by the Planning and Development Act 2024, which was signed into law on 17th October 2024. However, the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2024 have not commenced to date, and they will commence on a staged basis in the coming months. Until then, the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, remain in force.

Under Section 27C of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, is obliged to prepare submissions/observations to be submitted to the relevant planning authority and copied to the Office of the Planning Regulator.

A submission shall contain a report which shall state whether, in the opinion of the Regional Assembly, the draft Variation of the Development Plan, and its Core Strategy, is consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. If, in the opinion of the Regional Assembly the proposed draft Variation of the Development Plan and its Core Strategy is not consistent with the RSES, the submission/observations and report shall include recommendations as to what amendments, in the opinion of the Regional Assembly, are required to ensure that it is consistent.

This report contains the opinion of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly in relation to the above matter as required under Section 27C of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

2.0 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The Council will be aware of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region which was made by the Members of the Assembly in June 2019, and it is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape future growth throughout the Region. The overall vision of the Strategy is to create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of people and places in the Region, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunity for all. The vision of the RSES is supported by 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), that are aligned with National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and framed around the 3 key principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity.

A primary statutory objective of the RSES is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF), alignment with the investment priorities of the National Development Plan (and thus Project Ireland 2040), by coupling new development with the requisite investment in services and infrastructure. The RSES, as the succeeding tier of policy delivery in Ireland, is of critical importance for the delivery of Project Ireland 2040.

The RSES presents a Spatial Strategy, devised and informed by a complementary Economic Strategy, which provides a framework for future growth, ensuring the delivery of effective regional development through the realisation of viable and vital places. This includes championing the capital city of Dublin as a smart, climate resilient and global city region; securing Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres, acting as regional economic drivers and supports for their wider catchment areas; and promoting a network of large economically active Key Towns (which include Swords, Maynooth, Bray, Navan, Naas, Wicklow, Longford, Mullingar, Tullamore and Portlaoise) that provide employment and services to their surrounding areas. All of this is supported by Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns and a network of multifaceted Rural Places.

In line with the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the planning authority shall ensure, when making a Variation to the Development Plan, that it is consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region, thus ensuring full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy. In this regard, the Regional Assembly welcomes the Proposed Variation to the Development Plan.

3.0 Proposed Variation No. 3

Louth County Council has published Proposed Variation No. 3 seeking to vary the Louth County Development Plan (CDP) 2021-2027 to ensure alignment and consistency between the County Development Plan and Dundalk Local Area Plan 2025-2031. The Dundalk Local Area Plan (LAP) was adopted by the Elected Members of Louth County Council on 6th March 2025. The Proposed Variation will include amendments to the following elements of the County Development Plan:

- Volume 1 - Written Statement
- Volume 1A - Zoning and Flood Zones and Composite Maps for Dundalk
- Volume 3 - Appendices
- Volume 5 - Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

Section 2.0 of the report published as part of the Proposed Variation sets out the proposed amendments to the Louth CDP 2021-2027. The main amendments proposed in the Variation are summarised below.

- Amend Table 2.15 in the Core Strategy with updated figures.
- Omit Strategic Settlement Policy Objectives SS26 and SS33.
- Sections 3.2.1 and 3.4 refers to document '*Housing for All - A New Housing Plan for Ireland*'.
- Section 3.14, insert text and policy objective supporting the 10-Minute Neighbourhood.
- Section 3.5.3, insert policy objectives on the implementation of the Vacant Site Levy.
- Section 5.9, insert policy objective on Co-Working Facilities and Home-Based Activities.
- Sections 5.13.2 and 5.13.6, omit Mullagharlin Framework Plan and reference Mullagharlin Masterplan.
- Update Table 5.6 to take account of Additional Retail Floorspace.
- Amend Policy Objective 'EE 41' to support DkIT in achieving Technological University status.
- Sections 7.5.1 and 7.6.11, insert policy objectives for Local Transport Plans and Cycling and Walking Infrastructure.
- Omit reference to Irish Water and replace with 'Uisce Éireann'.
- Update Table 13.1 with Masterplan Areas.

All amendments proposed as part of the Variation, including amendments to the maps, can be accessed through the following link: [Proposed Variation No. 3 of the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 | Louth County Council's Online Consultation Portal](#)

4.0 Submission

Dundalk is identified as a Regional Growth Centre in the RSES growth strategy, being located in the Gateway Region and on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. The RSES outlines how the Regional Growth Centres, Athlone, Dundalk and Drogheda, drive effective regional development through significant population and economic growth. Regional Growth Centres serve as important self-sustaining centres, capitalising on their strategic location and high-quality connections to Dublin. The RSES states that Dundalk in particular, due to its proximity to Newry, provides for enhanced cross border interactions which, if promoted, can help to realise the growth potential of Drogheda-Dundalk Newry as an important cross-border network for regional development.

It is considered that the Proposed Variation is consistent with the RSES by aligning the Louth CDP and Dundalk Local Area Plan, and in this regard, the Regional Assembly supports in principle the proposed amendments to the Louth CDP 2021-2027.

In support of RPO 4.19 of the RSES, the Proposed Variation promotes the development of 'Key Development Areas' in Dundalk including: St. Nicholas Quarter, Park Street/Francis Street and St. Patrick's Church, and Dundalk Port. In line with the RSES, land at Mount Avenue is identified as a strategic area for sustainable urban expansion. The Assembly welcomes the preparation of a masterplan for Mount Avenue which will help guide future development in a coordinated, sustainable manner.

This approach aligns closely with the '10-minute town' concept which the Proposed Variation supports. This concept seeks to have infrastructure and facilities within a ten-minute walk or cycle from homes. This concept is also outlined in the guiding principles in the RSES for statutory land use plans, relating to the integration of land use and transport in order to support the '10-minute' settlement concept whereby services are accessible in short walking and cycling timeframes or accessible by high quality public transport to these services in larger settlements. The Assembly draws the Council's attention to the recently published [15-minute city pathway document](#) published by the Assembly which identifies public policy support, ongoing actions, good practice examples, and funding opportunities to support '15-minute city' and '10 Minute Town' concepts.

The Assembly notes and welcomes policy objective 'EEXX' which encourages on-site renewable energy projects and other business-led initiatives aimed at reducing carbon emission. This aligns with RPOs 6.23 and 7.40 of the RSES which aims to accelerate the shift towards a low-carbon economy and a circular economy and the promotion of energy conservation, efficiency, and the use of renewable energy in existing buildings.

The Proposed Variation provides for the preparation of a masterplan for Mullagharlin, which has been identified as a strategic location for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The site is situated to the south of Dundalk Town Centre, and the Dublin-Belfast rail line passes through the site. This aligns with RPO 4.21 of the RSES which seeks to identify suitable lands for new industries including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) enhancing Dundalk's role as a strategic employment centre on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.

In this context the Assembly would also like to highlight to the Council the enhanced intercity rail connectivity, as proposed in the All-Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR), that has the potential to strengthen Dundalk's competitiveness by supporting improved business access, investment attraction, and a reduced reliance on private car use for economic and commuting purposes.

In addition, the Proposed Variation includes a policy objective for supporting Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) as a centre of excellence for education, innovation and research and its aim to achieve a technological university status. This aligns with RPO 4.22 of the RSES which supports the role of DkIT as a centre of excellence for education.

The Assembly notes and welcomes the inclusion of a policy objective supporting the Dundalk Local Transport Plan. This is welcomed by the Assembly and the Council's attention is drawn to the [Sustainable Mobility Academy](#) which is a repository of knowledge, showcasing case studies, project outcomes, and ongoing advancements across all local authorities for active travel and sustainable mobility. This repository is a key output of the Pathfinder 27 Project, the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator Programme (SSMA), which is being delivered by the Assembly for the Eastern and Midland Region.

The above aligns with Section 8.3 of the RSES and RPO 8.6 that there is a requirement to prepare a Local Transport Plan for selected settlements in the Region which should include the transport priorities for the settlement in terms of public transport infrastructure and services, cycle investment, improvements to the pedestrian environment and road enhancements.

The Proposed Variation puts emphasis on environmental protection and biodiversity with specific reference to the Nature Restoration Law which the Assembly welcomes. The Assembly is pleased to see a clear commitment to considering the recommendations of the National Restoration Plan 2026 once adopted.

In relation to coastal protection and flooding, the Assembly notes policy objective 'ENV50' which requires a Coastal Erosion Assessment Report for any development within 100 metres of the coastline. The Assembly welcomes an evidence-based approach to coastal planning, which is consistent with RPO 7.4 of the RSES, which emphasises the importance of ensuring land use planning fully considers the risks associated with coastal erosion.

In addition, the RSES sets out 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) which are aligned with national policy, specifically the Revised National Planning Framework. These are cross referenced and aligned with the three key principles of the RSES; Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity. The most relevant RSO which supports the proposed Variation is RSO 2, 'Compact Growth and Urban Regeneration', which is to 'promote the regeneration of our cities, towns and villages by making better use of under-used land and buildings within the existing built -up urban footprint and to drive the delivery of quality housing and employment choices for the Region's citizens'. This aligns with National Strategic Outcome 1 of the Revised National Planning Framework.

In terms of residential development, the Variation aligns with RPOs 3.3 and 9.10 that relate to national standards for residential development. In addition, the proposed Variation is considered complementary to the Guiding Principles for Healthy Placemaking as set out in Section 9.4 of the RSES.

The Proposed Variation also indirectly supports Regional Policy Objectives 4.19, 4.20, 4.21, 4.22, 4.23, 4.24 and 4.25 of the RSES that relate to Dundalk. The Assembly considers that the amendments set out in the proposed Variation do not impact on the Core Strategy chapter of the Development Plan. Accordingly, the Regional Assembly does not have any objection to the Proposed Variation No. 3 of the Louth CDP 2021-2027 as placed on public display and consider it consistent with the RSES.

5.0 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA)

The Proposed Variation underwent a screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and concluded that the proposal does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment as it would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects, taking account of the relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

Furthermore, a screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) was also carried out and concluded that the Proposed Variation will not have any likelihood for significant effects on any European sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. The AA screening therefore concluded that it is not considered necessary to undertake any further stages of the Appropriate Assessment process. The Proposed Variation does not therefore require an Appropriate Assessment or the preparation of a Natura Impact Report (NIR).

6.0 Conclusion

It is considered that Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027, is consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031.

Regards,



Clare Bannon
A/Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
27th August 2025