

Proposed Variation No.1 of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly notes the publication of proposed Variation No. 1 of the Westmeath 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 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 sixteen Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), that are aligned with National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and framed around the three 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 2021-2030 (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.

2.0 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 along with recommendations as required under Section 27C of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

3.0 Proposed Variation No. 1

Proposed amendment 1

Westmeath County Council has published proposed Variation No. 1 seeking to vary the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 to include a new Mullingar Settlement Area Plan and related maps into volume 9 of the County Development Plan.

Westmeath County Council states that the proposed Variation will provide a Settlement Area Plan for Mullingar. This will replace the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014-2020, to include a written statement and mapped objectives, to provide a coherent planning policy framework for Mullingar to guide the planning and sustainable development of the town. It is stated that the Settlement Area Plan will align with current National, Regional and County growth targets and policy objectives, including the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 Core Strategy targets.

Proposed amendment 2

Proposed amendment 2 is to incorporate guidance from the *Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2024)* into the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027. The report published as part of the proposed Variation sets out the proposed amendments to the text in Volume 1 (written statement) of the Westmeath CDP 2021-2027. There are a total of 22 no. amendments proposed in the Variation which are summarised below.

Chapter 3 Housing Proposed Amendment		
Section	Heading	Page No.
3.6	Apartment Development	Page 78
3.8	Community Facilities	Page 78-79
CPO 3.15	Housing Strategy Objectives	Page 80

Chapter 4 Sustainable Communities Proposed Amendment		
Section	Heading	Page No.
4.10	Sustainable Housing	Page 87 -88
4.12.2	Community Facilities	Page 91
CPO 4.54	Social Inclusion	Page 98

Chapter 7 Urban Centres & Placemaking Proposed Amendment		
Section	Heading	Page No.
CPO 7.31	Urban Regeneration and Sustainable Development in Urban Areas Policy Objectives	Page 178 - 179
CPO 7.38	Urban Regeneration and Sustainable Development in Urban Areas Policy Objectives	Page 182

Chapter 16 Development Management Proposed Amendment		
Section	Heading	Page No.
16.2.1	Urban Design Principles	Page 461
CPO 16.2	Urban Design Principles	Page 462
16.3	Residential Development	Page 464 – 429
CPO 16.10	Residential Design and Layout	Page 464
CPO 16.14	Overlooking	Page 466
CPO 16.19	New Apartment Schemes	Page 467
CPO 16.20	Private Open Space	Page 467 – 468
16.3.2	Residential Density	Page 469
CPO 16.24	Residential Density	Page 469
16.4.1	Parking Standards	Page 478
CPO 16.36	Car Parking Standards	Page 478 - 479
Table 16.2	Car Parking Standards	480
CPO 16.37	Cycle Storage	481
Table 16.3	Cycle Storage Standards	481

Source: Westmeath County Development Plan Proposed Variation No.1 2021-2027

4.0 Submission

4.1 Amendment 1

The Draft Mullingar Settlement Area Plan 2025-2031 provides a written statement and mapped objectives to provide a coherent planning policy framework for Mullingar to guide the planning and sustainable development of the town. The Assembly considers that the overall Draft Settlement Area Plan, is generally consistent with the RSES. The submission broadly follows the chapter headings of the Draft Settlement Area Plan, under the following headings:

1. Settlement Strategy & Housing
2. Climate Action
3. Sustainable communities
4. Town Centre & Regeneration
5. Economic Development & Tourism
6. Sustainable Transportation & Movement
7. Built Heritage, Archaeology & Cultural Heritage
8. Natural Heritage
9. Enabling Infrastructure and environmental services

Settlement Strategy & Housing

In the RSES settlement strategy, Mullingar is located in the Gateway Region and is identified as a Key Town. As set out in the RSES, Key Towns in the Gateway Region provide important connections with adjoining regions and have capacity and future growth potential to accommodate above average growth in tandem with the requisite investment in employment creation, services, amenities and sustainable transport. The Gateway Region contains a strong network of large economically active towns that have a good level of local employment, services and amenities, which serve not just their resident populations but a wider catchment area; these include Longford town, Mullingar, Tullamore, Portlaoise and Graiguecullen (Carlow).

The Draft Settlement Area Plan indicates that according to the 2022 Census, there are 22,667 persons living in Mullingar town. A key role of the Settlement Area Plan is the identification of sufficient land to accommodate population targets and housing demand, delivered in tandem with accessible social infrastructure. As the lifetime of this Settlement Area Plan goes beyond the current Westmeath CDP (2021-2027), the Plan provides projected population targets of 30,077 by 2035. The Assembly recommends that the population targets for Mullingar Town should clearly align with those in the Core Strategy table of the Westmeath CDP to ensure consistency.

For housing targets, as outlined in the Draft Settlement Area Plan, these align with the CDP Strategy Allocation up to 2027 with an allocation of 2,010 units to be delivered by 2027. The Draft Settlement

Area Plan provides housing projections beyond 2027 and indicates that 3,670 housing units need to be delivered by 2035 on the basis of recent construction activity, an 8-year housing forecast beyond 2027 and the strategic objectives of the Core Strategy of the Westmeath CDP. The Assembly recommends the housing targets for Mullingar Town should clearly align with those in the Core Strategy table of the Westmeath CDP to ensure consistency.

In relation to zoning of residential land, the Draft Settlement Area Plan identifies lands zoned for 'Established Residential' and Proposed Residential' which corresponds with the Westmeath CDP (2021-2027). It is envisaged that future residential development will predominantly be located on lands zoned for 'Proposed Residential' located in the areas of Ardmore North, Ardmore South, Ardmore Central, Petitswood, Malinstown East, and Lynn East. According to the Draft Plan, 110.97 ha is zoned for proposed residential use.

In addition, 24.09 hectares fall under other zoning categories such as 'Mixed Use', 'Neighbourhood Centre', and 'Strategic Regeneration Opportunity Site' and 46.80 ha is zoned for brownfield and infill lands. The Assembly notes alignment with the Westmeath CDP (2021–2027), which requires that at least 30% of new residential units be delivered on brownfield and infill lands. In support of this objective, the Draft Plan promotes compact growth by targeting the delivery of at least 30% of new residential development within the town's existing built-up footprint. This is welcomed by the Regional Assembly.

The Assembly welcomes the proposed framework plans for Ardmore, Marlinstown, Mullingar South and Robinstown which are designed to guide the compact and phased growth of Mullingar, focusing on these locations. These plans will provide detailed guidance on land use, access, open space, and infrastructure.

The housing targets in the Draft Settlement Area Plan are based on an average density of 35 no. units per hectare but will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The Assembly considers that the proposed Variation will help to provide for housing within Mullingar Town to be delivered in a manner consistent with the *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2024*. This requires that new residential development should be prioritised on brownfield and infill sites within the town's existing built-up footprint.

Climate Action

The Draft Settlement Area Plan sets out the policy framework for a place-based approach to Climate Action focused on action areas of transport, building upgrades, green infrastructure, land and environmental designations, air quality, waste management, integrated policy and community activation. The Draft Plan outlines localised policies aimed at transitioning Mullingar towards a 'low carbon economy' and developing climate resilience by implementing mitigation and adaptation

measures. Furthermore, Westmeath County Council aims to reduce existing levels of GHG emissions by improving sustainable mobility and focussing on the delivery of active travel projects, including a greenway from Mullingar to Athlone, and a greenway link from Mullingar to Lough Owel.

In 2021, Mullingar was designated a Decarbonising Zone (DZ) by Westmeath County Council, in line with national climate policy (CAP19). As a DZ, Mullingar serves as a local test bed for implementing and showcasing climate action strategies including mitigation, adaptation, and nature-based solutions to help meet national and regional climate goals. In this regard, the Regional Assembly draws the Local Authority's attention to the Regional Development Monitor which hosts a range of environmental indicators of relevance.

The Assembly further welcomes the policy approach to flood and water resource resilience and natural flood risk mitigation through the use of green infrastructure and nature-based solutions and which are further detailed within dedicated chapters of the Draft Settlement Area Plan.

Sustainable Communities

The Assembly notes that a Social Infrastructure Audit (SIA) was undertaken to advise this settlement area plan to identify the availability and capacity of Mullingar's current social infrastructure, evaluate future service needs, and identify priority investment areas in line with the town's projected growth. The Draft Settlement Area Plan outlines that social infrastructure will be delivered in line with new residential and economic development ensuring sustainable communities and compact growth are delivered. The above aligns with Mullingar Key Town Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 4.66 in the RSES which aims to support the development and expansion of the Midlands Regional Hospital including necessary supporting infrastructure.

The Draft Plan also outlines support for increased safe permeability through placemaking and supports the '10-minute town' concept, which 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.

Town Centre & Regeneration

As outlined in the RSES, the consolidation and regeneration of Mullingar is a key priority to support the overall role and function of the town therefore attention is drawn to the regeneration RPOs in the RSES, listed as RPOs 9.7 - 9.9. The Draft Plan acknowledges the potential for higher densities,

particularly on brownfield town centre sites, including designated opportunity sites, to support the objective of compact growth in Mullingar.

In line with the RSES, St Loman's Hospital and Columb Barracks are identified in the Draft Settlement Area Plan as two strategic regeneration sites. The Assembly welcomes the preparation of regeneration plans for both Columb Barracks complex and St. Loman's Hospital. The Draft Plan further identifies opportunity sites such as Grove Street and Blackhall which are also identified in the RSES as major opportunity sites. Further opportunity sites are identified such as Lynn Road, Railway Terrace, Clonmare and Canal Avenue. The promotion of town centre enhancements and public realm improvements will contribute to the sustainability of the town centre and improve opportunities for sustainable transport choices. The Assembly welcomes urban regeneration and public realm improvement measures that enhance the economic and tourism potential of Mullingar. These measures will also align with Mullingar Key Town RPO 4.65 of the RSES which aims to promote the plan-led development and regeneration of publicly-owned land banks in the town for employment, education, community, cultural and recreational opportunities and to support the economic development and regeneration of the town centre.

Economic Development and Tourism

The Draft Settlement Area Plan notes that Mullingar's labour force participation rate of 62.1% is closely aligned with the regional average (63.8%) but still below the national rate (66.6%). The town supports approximately 9,828 local jobs with manufacturing identified as a key sector. The professional services sector is the largest sector, accounting for 27.52% of employment. Commerce and trade are Mullingar's second-largest sector (23.57%). Mullingar is classified as a 'Level 2 – Major Town Centre & County (Principal) Town Centre' in the RSES retail hierarchy.

Mullingar's employment profile largely comprises professional services, manufacturing and commerce and trade sectors with construction and tourism representing the town's other key industries. Significant growth has also been seen in sectoral specialisms such as Engineering, ICT, FinTech, Robotics, Advanced Manufacturing and Research and Development, together with new and emerging businesses such as the film industry. The Draft Plan also refers to strategic landholdings in the National Science Park, IDA Park and Forest Park Business Campus which offer opportunities to drive enterprise.

The RSES states that the economic role of Mullingar can be supported through mechanisms such as realising the potential of the existing IDA presence and property, advance development of high-quality enterprise and employment zones including existing business parks; and support and promotion within sectors such as engineering and ICT, consumer products, financial services, shared services (multi-lingual), Research and Development, robotics and advanced manufacturing.

The Draft Settlement Area Plan highlights the growing importance of smart specialisation, noting that Mullingar's industrial base has made significant progress in this area in recent years. The RSES outlines a growth enabler for the Gateway Region area in relation to the diversification and growth of smart specialisation of local economies with a strong focus on clustering including sustainable farming and food production, tourism, marine, energy and renewables, bioeconomy and the circular economy. Specifically relating to economic development, the Regional Assembly draws attention to RPO 4.67 which supports Mullingar's role as an important employment hub by promoting economic development and clustering of related enterprises and RPO 4.27 which outlines that Key Towns shall act as economic drivers and provide for strategic employment locations to improve their economic base by increasing the ratio of jobs to workers.

The Draft Settlement Area Plan has a specific policy objective to work closely with Fáilte Ireland to further advance Mullingar as a destination town for the Region. Furthermore, the RSES identifies the promotion of the Gateway Region as a key destination for tourism, leisure and recreation activities and support the development of an integrated network of greenways, blueways and peatways as a key growth enabler, while ensuring that high value assets and amenities are protected and enhanced. Mullingar Key Town RPO 4.64 in the RSES aims to support Mullingar's role as a tourism hub having regard to its accessibility to key tourist destinations in the Region including proximity to natural amenities and recreational opportunities including the Galway to Dublin Greenway. Also, RPO 6.19 in the RSES supports the local strategies that are already in place to link the River Shannon Blueway, the Royal and Grand Canal Greenways and the proposed Barrow Blueway across the Midlands, incorporating the town of Mullingar. Another visitor attraction in proximity to Mullingar that can be developed further includes Belvedere House and Gardens.

Sustainable Transportation & Movement

Mullingar is strategically located on the N4/M4 from Dublin to Sligo, with a national road/N55 to Athlone in close proximity, and an enhanced rail service on the Sligo rail line. The Mullingar Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2024, was developed in collaboration with the NTA and TII which guided the development of the Draft Settlement Area Plan. The Draft Plan prioritises sustainable travel modes—walking and cycling, followed by public transport and then private vehicles. It outlines short, medium, and long-term policy actions to support Mullingar's sustainable growth and ensure the transport network can accommodate future population increases. The Assembly notes the baseline assessment of current travel patterns identified the need for public transport improvements, including the introduction of a town bus service.

The Mullingar Local Transport Plan (LTP) outlines a range of active travel measures aimed at creating a connected and accessible walking and cycling network throughout the town such as Town Core Active Travel Link which includes a travel link bridge, the development 'Permeability links' and 'Quietways', safe routes to school and Park and Stride. 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 Assembly notes Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) have been appointed to project manage the planning, design and delivery of the N4 Mullingar to Longford (Roosky) road project as listed in Table 8.4 of the RSES.

Built Heritage, Archaeology & Cultural Heritage

The Draft Settlement Area Plan acknowledges that Mullingar has significant Protected Structures and six Architectural Conservation Areas which contribute to the town's character. The RSES notes that Mullingar has a rich built heritage in keeping with its historic commercial importance as a market town. Many of the buildings in the centre of Mullingar date from the eighteenth and nineteenth century. These are set in a typical Irish town layout which contributes significantly to the town's character, of note are the protected complexes of Columb Barracks and St. Loman's Hospital.

The Assembly welcomes policies and objectives set out in the Draft Plan to enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, social, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets and ensure their preservation into the future.

The Draft Settlement Area Plan refers to Culture and the Arts, in particular musical heritage which has been identified as a unique selling point for the town which has hosted 'Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann'. One of the Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSO) of the RSES, RSO 5, is to enhance, integrate and protect our arts, culture and heritage assets to promote creative places and heritage led regeneration.

Natural heritage

The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of a dedicated chapter on Natural Heritage, and the recognition that parks and open space promote health and well-being, and green infrastructure enhances opportunities for recreation and tourism. The Draft Plan outlines that together with Mullingar's lakes and the Royal Canal Blueway, other noteworthy wildlife habitat corridors in the vicinity include Lacy's Canal, the River Brosna, the Old Rail Trail / Dublin-Galway Cycleway and the Town Park.

The Assembly welcomes the Mullingar Green-Blue Infrastructure Strategy which informed the development of the Draft Settlement Area Plan and the specific policy which has been developed to protect, promote and extend Mullingar's green and blue infrastructure. RPOs 7.22 and 7.23 of the RSES note the importance of the identification, protection, enhancement and management of green infrastructure in an integrated and coherent manner and the further development of green infrastructure policies.

Enabling Infrastructure and environmental services

As highlighted in the Draft Settlement Area Plan, Uisce Éireann, in partnership with Westmeath County Council, completed the upgrade to Portloman Water Treatment Plant in 2022, a key facility serving Mullingar and surrounding areas. As a result of the upgrade, Mullingar's water supply was removed from the EPA's Remedial Action List, positively impacting over 63,000 customers.

The Draft Settlement Area Plan acknowledges constraints associated with Lough Owel as the primary source to meet Mullingar's long-term potable water demand and outlines the importance of the Eastern Midlands Region Water Supply Project. The project will pipe water from the River Shannon to Dublin, with a line to serve regional settlements including Mullingar. The delivery of this infrastructure is essential to securing Mullingar's long-term water supply and supporting sustainable population and economic growth over the next 30 years and beyond. The RSES promotes maximising return on existing and planned infrastructural investments in keeping with Mullingar's role as a Key Town and County Town for Westmeath.

Regarding wastewater, Mullingar's wastewater treatment plant was upgraded as part of the Mullingar Main Drainage Scheme and it is noted that the additional demand anticipated under this Draft Plan can be accommodated within this wastewater treatment plant. The Assembly further notes Uisce Éireann is currently preparing a Drainage Area Plan for Mullingar which is welcomed by the Assembly. The purpose of the drainage plan is to identify the town's existing foul sewer network, highlighting key limitations and prioritising areas for future investment.

The Draft Settlement Area Plan outlines access to reliable broadband as an essential requirement for economic growth and developing a knowledge-based economy in Mullingar. According to Census 2022, 81.2% of Mullingar households have broadband access which is an improvement, however this is below the national average of 88%. The Assembly supports the strengthening of digital connectivity which is critical to attracting investment and sustaining business in Mullingar. This aligns with RPOs 6.5 and 8.25 in the RSES in relation to the promotion of ICT-based industries and a high-quality ICT network throughout the Region.

Implementation and Monitoring

The Assembly notes the inclusion of a separate chapter dealing with the implementation of the Draft Settlement Area Plan, detailing objectives and the provision of an effective monitoring and evaluation system. The monitoring framework identifies the relevant department and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the plan and the timeline. The Assembly welcomes the commitment given in Chapter 11 that Westmeath County Council will put in place an effective monitoring system to ensure that progress on key objectives in the plan is evaluated.

4.2 Amendment 2

The Regional Assembly acknowledges Amendment 2 of Proposed Variation No. 1 of the Westmeath County Development Plan (CDP) 2021–2027 which seeks to vary the Development Plan having regard to the publication of the *‘Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2024.’* published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in January 2024.

The proposed Variation will update the Westmeath CDP 2021-2027 whereby current references to the now revoked *‘Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009)’* will be omitted and replaced with the latest ministerial guidance for new residential development as set out in the *‘Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2024)’* and associated appendices. Arising from same, the proposed Variation provides updates across a number of chapters within the County Development Plan where the previous guidelines are referenced including notable updates to development management standards to be applied for new residential developments in the county (e.g. housing densities, public open space, private open space, car parking standards, etc.).

It is considered that the proposed Variation is consistent with the RSES by bringing the content of the Westmeath CDP 2021-2027 into line with the updated Guidelines issued in 2024 on this matter, and, in this regard, the Regional Assembly supports in principle the proposed amendments to the Westmeath CDP 2021-2027.

In addition, the RSES sets out 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) which are aligned with national policy, specifically the 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.

The proposed Variation will align with RSO 2 of the RSES, and 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 amendments 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. 1 amendment 2 of the Westmeath 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 Recommendation

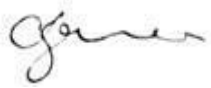
1. Having regard to the projected population and housing targets proposed in the Draft Mullingar Settlement Area Plan 2025-2031, the Planning Authority should ensure that the population and housing targets for Mullingar Town should clearly align with those in the Core Strategy table of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

Reason: To ensure the core strategy population and housing targets are aligned with the RSES and the Core Strategy of the County Development Plan.

7.0 Conclusion

It is considered that proposed Variation No. 1 to the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027, is consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031, having regard to the recommendation outlined above.

Regards,



Clare Bannon
A/Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
5th August 2025