



Louth County Development Plan 2027-2033: Pre-Draft Strategic Issues Paper

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly acknowledges the notification from Louth County Council and its intention to review the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 and prepare a new Louth County Development Plan 2027-2033, under Section 11 (1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000-2025¹. The Assembly sets out hereunder, recommendations and observations on behalf of the Assembly. This submission was prepared by the executive and approved by the members of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly at its meeting of 14th November 2025.

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 City and County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), management of EU Operational Programs, EU project participation and implementation of national economic policy. 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Assembly, including the scope of the RSES, as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, has been superseded by the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended. Chapters 1 to 4 of Part 3 of the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended, commenced on 2nd October 2025 with other provisions of the Act to commence on a staged basis in the coming months, including Chapter 5 pertaining to Development Plans.

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly has prepared this submission for the consideration of the Planning Authority and sets out the matters which, in the opinion of the Regional Assembly, should be considered by the Planning Authority in the preparation of the draft County Development Plan (CDP), and recommendations on the matters that are required to be included in the draft CDP to ensure that the draft CDP is materially consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).

2.0 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region 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,

¹ A Pre-Draft Strategic Issues Paper to assist with public consultation is available here:

<https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/publications/development-plans/louth-county-development-plan-2021-2027/issues%20paper.pdf>

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) and the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF), and alignment with the investment priorities of the National Development Plan (NDP) (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 thereby sets the context for local authorities within the Region to develop their City and County Development Plans (CDPs), and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) in a manner that will ensure alignment between national, regional and local plans.

3.0 Legislative Context

On 23rd September 2025, the Regional Assembly received notice from Louth County Council, of its intention to review its existing County Development Plan and to prepare a new County Development Plan for its area pursuant to Section 11 (1) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. In line with the provisions of Section 11 (1), the Planning Authority shall ensure, when making the City or County Development Plan, that it is consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region, thus ensuring full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy. Accordingly, this report contains the opinion of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly in relation to the above matters along with recommendations and observations.

The Council should be aware that Section 54 (8) of Chapter 5 of the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended, requires the Regional Assembly to prepare and submit to the planning authority a report which shall set out—

- (i) the matters which, in the opinion of the regional assembly, should be considered by the planning authority in the preparation of the draft development plan, and
- (ii) recommendations on the matters that are required to be included in the draft development plan to ensure that the draft development plan is materially consistent with the regional spatial and economic strategy of the region concerned.

The Council should be further aware that Section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended, requires that the Regional Assembly shall, not later than 6 months after the date of the coming into operation of subsection (6) of Section 21, commence a review of the regional spatial and economic strategy and, upon completion of a review of a regional spatial and economic strategy in accordance with paragraph (a) of subsection (1), make a new regional spatial and economic strategy in accordance with Section 32. Since subsection (6) of Section 21 came into force on 2nd October 2025,

the Regional Assembly is required to commence a review of the RSES within 6 months of that date. The review of the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region will be prepared in accordance with the new legislative requirements and demonstrate consistency with Project Ireland 2040 including the NPF 2025, NMPF 2021, NDP 2025, and other national policies.

4.0 Submission

The Assembly welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Issues Paper and acknowledges the work that the Local Authority has carried out to prepare the Pre-Draft Issues Paper.

4.1 Ensuring Consistency with the RSES - Key Areas

Notwithstanding the requirement of the Planning Authority to ensure, when making the CDP, that the Plan in its entirety is consistent with the RSES, the following are key areas that the Assembly would like to bring attention to, in order to inform the preparation of the Louth CDP 2027-2033.

Furthermore, the Council should be aware of Section 29 of the Planning and Development Act, 2024, as amended, which sets out the matters for which the RSES is required to make provision and with which the CDP will be required to be materially consistent.

4.1.1 The Vision

In determining the overall vision of the new Louth CDP, it is recommended that the Council consider the Vision, Key Principles and Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) of the RSES. The RSOs are aligned to the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF and it should be noted that the ability to demonstrate delivery of these may potentially be linked to future funding sources.

4.1.2 Ensuring Spatial Alignment

The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region 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 Navan, Maynooth, Swords, Bray, Naas, Wicklow, Longford, Mullingar, Tullamore, Portlaoise and Graiguecullen-Carlow) 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.

Furthermore, the cross-boundary Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) is a significant growth enabler within the Region, connecting Dundalk, Newry and Belfast and Dublin and Belfast air and seaports. This is complemented by an Eastern Corridor extending south to Rosslare Europort. The

DBEC represents an important economic and transport link and a key enabler for spatial and economic regional growth.

The revised NPF 2025 reflects changes to government policy that have taken place since its initial publication, such as climate transition, regional development, demographics, digitalisation and investment and prioritisation. In doing so, it reflects this Spatial Strategy, and the settlement hierarchy presented, to allow managed and sustainable growth that enables each place to fulfil its ambition and potential. In turn, the Regional Assembly considers that a new Louth CDP should be fully aligned with this settlement hierarchy to ensure that public capital investment is most effectively directed to achieve the ambitious objective of Project Ireland 2040.

4.1.3 Growth Strategy of the RSES

In preparing the draft CDP, it should be noted that Growth Enablers have been specified in Section 3.2 of the RSES to facilitate growth across the Region. Growth Enablers are underpinned by the spatial mapping of Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) within the Region. The FUAs for the Eastern and Midland Region are the Dublin Metropolitan Area, the Core Region and the Gateway Region. In this regard, the attention of the Council is brought to the appropriate general Growth Enablers for the Region, the Growth Enablers of the FUAs, along with the Growth Enablers of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, all of which are relevant to Co. Louth.

4.1.4 Sustainable Compact Growth

The RSES sets the spatial framework for future population growth and economic development in the Region based on consideration of land, resources, infrastructure and environmental capacity of settlements, to inform the preparation of new CDPs. The delivery of compact growth will play a key role in achieving sustainable development in the Region, by targeting the delivery of new homes within the footprint of existing settlements close to existing services and infrastructure, in line with National Strategic Outcome (NSO 1) of the NPF and Regional Strategic Outcome (RSO 2) of the RSES.

In this regard the Council's attention is brought to RPO 3.7 which outlines the need to ensure sustainable growth and the future CDP should ensure consistency with RPOs 3.2 and 3.3, aimed at securing compact growth in line with the NPF. Relevant to County Louth, RPO 3.2 requires that local authorities set out measures to achieve compact development targets of at least 30% of new homes within the existing built-up footprint of settlements (in line with NPO 9 of the NPF). To support achievement of these targets, the RSES sets out Guiding Principles for infill and brownfield development in Chapter 3 – Growth Strategy, which includes the creation of a brownfield database at the local level and the inclusion of focused active land management measures in the CDP. RPO 3.3 also determines that regeneration lands are identified in Core Strategies and that specific objectives are set out to develop these lands. The Assembly welcomes reference to the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2024) in the Issues Paper which set national planning policy and guidance in relation to the planning and development of urban

and rural settlements, with a focus on sustainable residential development and the creation of compact settlements.

In order to further assist the Council in developing its evidence based reporting and supporting maps in the preparation of the draft CDP, the Assembly draws attention to the [Regional Development Monitor](#) (RDM), which is a collaborative project between the three Regional Assemblies, the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) at Maynooth University and spatial infrastructure partners, Tailte Éireann (TÉ) via the GeoHive platform. The RDM collates and visualises a range of relevant socio-economic and environmental indicators and provides a series of new national mapping and visualisation infrastructures to assist planners and policy makers in gaining a greater insight into social, economic and environmental trends to aid better policy formation and decision making.

4.1.5 Settlement Strategy of the RSES

In formulating the Core Strategy of the CDP, the attention of the Council is brought to Chapter 4 of the RSES, including Settlement Strategy RPOs 4.1 and 4.2 which require that the hierarchy of settlements in Development Plans shall be determined in accordance with the settlement hierarchy, guiding principles and typology of settlements in the RSES, and that future development should also be coordinated with the delivery of key enabling infrastructure. Table 4.2 of the RSES outlines the Settlement Typologies to be included as part of the Settlement Hierarchy. This includes Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns (identified in the RSES), and Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns, Towns, Villages and Rural areas (to be defined by the CDP). The Assembly welcomes inclusion of the ‘Settlement Hierarchy’ of Co. Louth graphic in the Issues Paper which allocates each relevant town and settlement in the County to its respective typology, including Dundalk and Drogheda as Regional Growth Centres (as designated by the NPF).

The RSES defines Drogheda as a Regional Growth Centre in the Core Region; and Dundalk as a Regional Growth Centre in the Gateway Region. Thus, the Settlement Hierarchy of the CDP is required to reflect this. Section 4.5 of the RSES sets out the strategic development framework for Drogheda, supported by RPOs 4.11-4.18, addressing its role as an important self-sustaining centre, that acts as an economic driver for the Region, capitalising on its strategic location and high-quality connections to Dublin while also servicing and supporting a wider local economy. Similarly, Section 4.5, establishes the framework for Dundalk, supported by RPOs 4.19–4.25, with its position on the Dublin-Belfast rail corridor, M1 and proximity to Dublin and Belfast metropolitan centres, its links to Newry and opportunity to capitalise on its location within the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC).

A priority policy mechanism for the future co-ordinated development of Drogheda was the preparation of a cross boundary statutory Joint Urban Area Plan (UAP) for Drogheda by Louth and Meath County Councils in a manner consistent with the RSES. Section 4.5 of the RSES sets out the framework for the Joint UAP. It should be noted that the Planning and Development Act 2024 makes provision for the making of Coordinated Area Plans where a settlement or part of a settlement

straddles the functional area of two or more planning authorities, replacing the previous regime (under the Planning and Development Act, 2000) that provided for Joint Urban Area Plans in such circumstances.

Table 4.3 of the RSES provides further guidance and details policy responses for the different settlement typologies including the lower tier settlements; self-sustaining growth towns; self-sustaining towns; towns and villages; and rural areas. CDP policy and terminology should ensure consistency in this regard, as provided for in the RSES.

Should the Council decide to revisit the categorisation and tiering of lower-tier settlements in developing the County's Settlement Hierarchy, the Assembly directs it to Section 3.1 and Appendix A of the RSES which provides detail on the Asset-Based Approach to spatial development. It is considered that the Council may find this useful in finalising a Settlement Strategy for the CDP that secures the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

The Assembly also refers the Council to the [15-Minute City Implementation Pathway](#) report recently published by the Assembly, which identifies public policy support, ongoing actions, good practice examples and funding opportunities for '15-Minute City' and '10 Minute Town' concepts.

4.1.6 Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC)

As set out in the NPF, there are significant interactions between Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry within the DBEC with important cross-border networks for regional development, economic growth and competitiveness. DBEC links the two largest cities on the island and several of the largest towns and comprises the largest economic agglomeration on the island. It has a population of 2 million people, excluding their hinterlands and is underpinned by high-capacity road and rail links, national air and seaport entry points to the island. The airports manage c.39.5 million passengers annually with projected growth.

In this regard, the CDP should support DBEC and the East Border Region Councils' aim of positioning the East Border Region as a "*smart, competitive, sustainable and inclusive cross-border region*" as set out in its Charter of regional priorities for cooperation and which aligns with the NPF's NPO 57 - to further support and develop DBEC's economic potential, particularly the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network and to promote and enhance its international visibility. NPO 15 focuses on strengthening the urban structure of Drogheda and Dundalk to gain critical mass to compete with other large cities. As per Section 3.2 of the NPF this can be achieved through a focused approach to compact, sequential and sustainable development. Such settlements are also targeted with Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, funding.

As set out in Section 8.3 of the NPF, key transport corridors should be protected and improved, particularly from development sprawl. Opportunities to improve rail services should be explored under the PEACEPLUS programme and in the context of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review. The NPF identifies the need to protect distinctive landscapes and rural activities in the rural environment as

food producing areas and key green space between settlements. It supports the development of a landmark Narrow Water Bridge to link the Mourne Mountains and Cooley peninsula, providing tourism, boosting connectivity in the Region, and enabling improved cross-border active travel including greenways, walking trails and park amenities.

Additionally, the NPF supports investment in Co-Centres for Research to bring research and industry together in areas of mutual economic, societal, health and environmental importance, supporting all-island research partnerships. The CDP and LECP should support the expansion of higher education provision and cooperation between further education institutions including the development of cross-border apprenticeship programmes, research exchange programmes, support the work of InterTrade Ireland on common enterprise objectives including female entrepreneurship, clustering and innovation and sustainability investment, attract investment; and all-island opportunities to promote sustainable development of the agri-food sector. A coordinated approach to branding of sectoral strengths within DBEC and collection of data sets should also be emphasised.

The Assembly further notes the publication of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review (2024), which sets out a long-term vision for an electrified and integrated rail network across the island. Of particular relevance to County Louth is the identification of the Dublin–Belfast rail corridor as a strategic intercity spine forming a key component of the decarbonised transport network, a driver of balanced regional development and supporting sustainable cities. The CDP should acknowledge this strategic importance and ensure that land use and infrastructure policy align with the opportunities arising from this enhanced connectivity, particularly along the DBEC.

4.2 Issues Paper

This section broadly follows the content of the Pre-Draft Strategic Issues Paper, under the following headings:

1. Sustainable Communities
2. Core Strategy
3. People & Place
4. Employment & Economic Development
5. Retailing and Town Centre First
6. Rural Development & Natural Resources
7. Transport, Connectivity & Movement
8. Water, Energy & Communications
9. Climate Change
10. Flooding
11. Green Infrastructure
12. Natural & Built Heritage
13. Tourism, Culture & Art
14. Community, Recreation, Amenity & Social Inclusion
15. Environmental Assessment

The Issues Paper sets out the purpose of a CDP and what it contains, new planning legislation, the stages of a CDP and the purpose of the Issues Paper. The Planning Authority seeks input from the public and references a range of key themes and issues to be considered including the key challenges

faced by Louth County Council, which the Plan must address. They are considered to provide a robust basis for scoping and developing the Plan.

This submission has detailed each of the themes and issues in turn and consideration should be given to the recommendations set out below, to ensure consistency with the RSES.

4.2.1 Vision

The Assembly notes the current Vision for the County which is welcomed. Noting the ambitious Vision set out in the Council’s Climate Action Plan, namely that ‘*Louth to be a new zero County by 2050*’, it is recommended that this is integrated into the new CDP Vision.

4.2.2 Core Strategy

The Pre-Draft Strategic Issues Paper recognises the Core Strategy as a medium- to long-term strategy for the spatial development of the County, which must demonstrate how the development objectives of the Plan align with national and regional policy. The Core Strategy has a central focus on residential development, and ensuring there is a sufficient supply of zoned, serviced lands to meet housing needs over the lifetime of the Plan. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) published Guidelines in 2025 (under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended) which set housing growth targets (as per Table 1) and provides guidance to local authorities to ensure enough residential lands are zoned to meet the needs of the settlement.

Table 1: Housing Growth Targets

Local Authority	Adopted Development Plan Annual Housing Requirement (Housing Supply Target)	New Annual New Housing Growth Requirement to 2034	New Annual New Housing Growth Requirement 2035 to 2040
Louth County Council	1,380	1,677	1,195

Source: DHLGH (2025) NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines.

The Guidelines request Planning Authorities to consider an additional scope of 50% ‘additional provision’ over the baseline requirement. The justification for the overprovision must conform with 2022 Development Plan Guidelines (Section 4.4.3). Planning Authorities must assess their current CDP, its Core Strategy and settlement strategy and identify further development needs with updated zoning objectives where necessary, to reflect the housing growth requirements. Planning Authorities are also required to prioritise the preparation of Settlement Capacity Audits (SCAs) to identify zoned serviced/serviceable lands and to highlight infrastructural requirements.

The Core Strategy options listed in the Issues Paper are noted; and it is recommended that the Planning Authority focuses on a mixture of:

- Option 02 - review existing population and housing growth in each settlement over 2016-2022 Census periods, determine growth rates and use these as a baseline for projected growth from 2027-2033; and
- Option 03 - increasing the allocation of population and housing growth to Regional Growth Centres, Self-Sustaining Towns, and Small Towns and Villages in the current settlement strategy.

The approach taken must be consistent with the NPF, RSES 2019-2031 (note the preparation of a new RSES will commence in 2026), Section 28 Guidelines for Housing Growth 2025, the 2022 Development Plan Guidelines including SCAs, alternative options explored through the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment processes, etc.

The Issues Paper notes that the population of Dundalk and Drogheda grew by 10.5% and 7.8% respectively, with housing stock growing by c.7% in both settlements. Dundalk experienced a 23% decrease in vacant properties while Drogheda experienced a slight decrease. Most of the residential units constructed in the County were in the two Regional Growth Centres with 29% (1,108) completed in Dundalk between the end of 2021 and Q2 2025 and 48% (1,837) in Drogheda. Both towns have a similar daytime working population of over 14,000 workers, with close to 500 commuting from Dundalk to work elsewhere and c. 1000 leaving Drogheda for work elsewhere. Both settlements have witnessed a decrease in job ratio.

The RSES Settlement Strategy supports the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk to reach a target population in the Region of 50,000 by 2031 to reach city scale, by focusing on regeneration of the town centre including infill and brownfield site, and compact planned urban growth and co-ordinated growth of the towns (see RPOs 3.2 and 3.3 of the RSES).

4.2.3 People and Place

The Issues Paper notes the existing settlement hierarchy/structure in Co. Louth which consists of different categories of settlement ranging from small rural villages to large urban towns and that the growing population of the County demonstrates a constant and growing need for housing. Section 9.3 of the RSES deals specifically with 'Housing and Regeneration', whereas Section 4.8 of the RSES deals with housing in rural places. The Planning Authority is also directed towards Section 9.4 focusing on healthy placemaking which is one of the three key principles of the RSES. These sections and related Guiding Principles will provide further direction to assist in formulating related policy for the CDP.

The Issues Paper states that the distribution of population growth throughout the County will be influenced by the settlement strategy and that the new CDP will provide a future pipeline of well-located serviced land to meet the housing needs of all Louth's residents. Such a framework for the development of the urban centres in the County and the distribution of future growth will be an essential part of the CDP. Points outlined above, under the heading 'Ensuring Consistency with the RSES – Key Areas' should be considered in this regard. The role of Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional

Growth Centres at the top of the Settlement Hierarchy is recognised and ensures that they will drive regional growth, as per RSO 1 of the RSES.

As noted under the Core Strategy section above, the Planning Authority has been assigned a housing growth target under Section 28 Guidelines and Section 4.3 of the NPF states that in order to achieve more balanced and sustainable development, settlements will need to attract increased population (of varying amounts), whereas others will need more jobs, amenities or better transport links – or a combination of these. It notes that a tailored approach is required, applying Compact Growth objectives and Town Centre First policy which can be linked to National Development Plan investment and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) and the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF). NPO 20 also requires Planning Authorities to focus on urban infill/brownfield development.

As set out in NPF - NPO 15, and related text, there is a need to:

- encourage population growth supported by employment growth;
- reverse the stagnation or decline of many smaller urban centres, that may include the identification and establishment of new roles and functions and enhancement of local infrastructure and amenities;
- address the legacy of rapid unplanned growth in expanded commuter settlements of all sizes, by facilitating amenities and services catch-up, jobs growth and/or improved sustainable transport links to the cities, together with a much slower, more sustainable rate of population growth than in recent decades; and
- in more self-contained settlements of all sizes, with a good balance of people and jobs, there is a need to continue balanced population and employment growth.

The Planning Authority is also directed to the growth enablers identified in the RSES in this regard. There is also an obligation under the NPF to prepare/update a Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) to align with updated data sources, to support the preparation of housing strategies and all related housing policy outputs, including the CDP. RPO 9.5 of the RSES outlines the commitment of the Regional Assemblies to support local authorities in the provision of a HNDA. This is in keeping with NPO 47 of the NPF. It is also noted that the DHLGH published Guidance on the Preparation of a Housing Need and Demand Assessment in April 2021 and an Excel based HNDA Tool and associated instructions. The Tool can be used to run several different scenarios to estimate the future number of additional homes required in the local authority area to meet existing and future housing need and demand, broken down by tenure type.

4.2.4 Employment and Economic Development

The Issues Paper highlights the strategic location of Louth on the DBEC, its connectivity (road, rail, ports, proximity to airports), availability of a talented and educated workforce including Drogheda and

Dundalk as primary locations for economic delivery and employment, a network of smaller towns, villages, that provide more localised employment and services. It also notes the presence of a significant land bank of lands zoned for employment generating uses in Dundalk and Drogheda including IDA owned lands in the Mullagharlin area of Dundalk and in the north Drogheda area and presence of Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT).

The NPF emphasises the need to achieve the strategic priorities of economic resilience for this area. Furthermore, it states that the maintenance of seamless cross-border movement for people, goods and services, together with improvements in digital and physical infrastructure will create new opportunities to leverage employment and for sustainable population growth, focused on the county towns. Enhanced connectivity would result in this area being strategically located almost equidistant between the Dublin, Belfast and Derry City regions in terms of time, as well as distance.

Economic Opportunity is one of the three key principles of the RSES, supported by RSOs 12-16. The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of a section on Employment and Economic Development as part of the Issues Paper. Section 4.5 of the RSES sets out key issues and opportunities for the Regional Growth Centres and specific RPOs 4.11-4.18 (Drogheda) and RPOs 4.19-4.25 (Dundalk) including the need to prepare an Urban Area Plan/Coordinated Area Plan for Drogheda.

Chapter 6 of the RSES deals specifically with Economy and Employment and information contained as part of this chapter will assist the Planning Authority in developing related policy. The role of the DBEC is set out at Section 6.4 of the RSES. RPO 6.3 specifically requires the support of effective planning and development of large centres of population and employment along the main economic corridor. The Planning Authority is also directed to the RPOs related to town centre renewal RPOs 6.12-6.14 which will be particularly relevant to supporting regeneration and addressing vacancy in town centres throughout the County. NPO 19 of the NPF requires Planning Authorities to identify and quantify locations for strategic employment development, where suitable, in urban and rural areas generally.

Section 6.6 of the RSES focuses on the drivers for resilient, sustainable and inclusive economic growth with further opportunities for foreign direct investment (FDI), clustering and smart specialisation, and the development of a smart city programme to be supported in Drogheda and Dundalk (RPO 6.30) in the development of local distinctiveness and regional strengths, aligning with Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs), the RSES, and national enterprise and innovation policy, as stated in the NPF. The Council is referred to the RSES Growth Enablers and the role of place making and urban regeneration to create the quality of life to attract FDI and indigenous investment and increase high value knowledge-based employment including second site and relocation opportunities. The Planning Authority is requested to support digital transition for enterprise and the Institutes of Technology (IoTs)/ Technological Universities (TUs) as key drivers of enterprise activity, in conjunction with enterprise agencies and support areas of strength in the County, such as technology, services, life-science sectors and tourism.

RPOs 6.4-6.8 relate to the rural economy and Section 6.5 also details specific sectors, such as Retail, Tourism, Marine, Low Carbon Economy and Agriculture which should be consulted in developing related plan policy.

Section 4.4 Planning for Urban Employment Growth in the NPF provides guidance which will be relevant to this section of the CDP and the OPR Practice Note PN04 - Planning for Employment Growth - The Development Plan and Employment Lands. The NPF notes that CDP policies should be sufficiently agile to account for enterprise development that may arise for locational reasons.

4.2.5 Retailing and Town Centre First

The Assembly acknowledges the impacts of digital retailing on town and village centres and the retail sector with knock on effects of vacancy and dereliction. The reference to the CDP supporting vibrant settlements as destinations to live, work and visit is supported by the Regional Assembly and is consistent with the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012). Proposals to facilitate improved public realm/ urban design outcomes (e.g. through dedicated Public Realm Plans), increased residential options, diversity of businesses, local identity, enhanced public transport and connectivity including active travel and green infrastructure are supported.

Continued promotion of and support for local communities to live over the shop by accessing 'vacant homes', 'shop front' and 'conservation' and 'energy efficiency' grants, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, URDF and RRDF, Town Centre First Plans and healthy place-making is supported, to encourage more people to live in the town centre, support more retail and service outlets within the settlement to serve the needs of the community. This requires a concerted effort from the Planning Authority in conjunction with other agencies. Town Centre Renewal is supported in the RSES (Section 6.5) through RPOs 6.12 – 6.14 and the Town Centre First policy should guide the preparation of this section of the CDP.

In addition to retail, town centre uses should remain the focus in the next CDP with positive community services and entertainment offerings such as health care facilities, cafés and restaurants, theatres/ comedy clubs, gyms/ climbing walls, alternative tourism offerings, some short-term tourist-let accommodation and public art murals are appropriate to the Town Centre.

The night-time economy requires dedicated actions/ an action plan and sustained and dedicated resourcing with the support of:

- Tourism agencies (e.g. marketing and packaging, entertainment guides, festivals and events funding, food trails/ passports, coordination among business offerings),

- The Council (e.g. dedicated night-time economy personnel, tourism officer, public realm enhancement, support of the arts/ theatre office, Business Incentive Scheme, Age-Friendly Business, Rates Waiver public lighting upgrade, waste management services, etc.),
- An Garda Síochána (e.g. public safety coordination); and
- Local communities.

The RSES (Table 6.1, Section 6.5) sets out the Retail Hierarchy for the Region with:

- Level 2 Major Town Centres & County (Principal) Town Centres identified as Drogheda and Dundalk;
- Level 3 Town and/or District Centres & Sub-County Town Centres (Key Service Centres) identified as Ardee, Drogheda District Centre (Matthews' Lane) and Dundalk District Centres (Dublin Road and Ard Easmuinn);
- Level 4 centres include Neighbourhood Centres, Local Centres-Small Towns and Villages in Co. Louth; and
- Level 5 are Corner Shops/Small Villages.

The new CDP Retail Strategy should align with the Retail Hierarchy in the RSES (and any future RSES that may be published during the CDP review process) and associated RPOs 6.10-6.11.

4.2.6 Rural Development and Natural Resources

The Issues Paper identifies that 27% of Louth's population is residing in the rural area, yet the land use in the County is predominantly rural and is home to a diverse range of uses and as stated within the Issues Paper - picturesque seascapes and landscapes, mountains ranges, wetlands, estuaries, loughs, and extensive high-quality farmland. The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of the OECD Principles on Rural Policy as guiding principles for the new CDP.

Ensuring the continued vitality and viability of the rural area remains a challenge for rural counties, particularly in terms of how best to manage competing social, economic and environmental considerations. Section 6.5 of the RSES highlights the importance of the value of agricultural land, particularly in areas that are experiencing strong urbanisation pressures. The agri-food sector remains of significant importance and requires protection, with a focus on sustainability, food security and health. It is highly exposed to the effects of climate change and contributor to national emissions. RPO 6.24 is relevant in this regard.

RPOs for Rural Places are contained under Section 4.8 of the RSES and are relevant for formulating CDP policy. The Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines (2005) and Circular PL 2/2017 remain relevant to the formulation of policy. In addition, the RSES recognises that smaller towns and the rural economy are an important part of the social fabric of the Region. There is a need for promotion of new economic opportunities arising from digital connectivity and indigenous innovation and enterprise as well as

more traditional natural and resource assets (e.g. food energy, tourism), underpinned by a quality of life offering. The Planning Authority is also directed to RPOs 6.4-6.8 which support the enhancement and diversification of rural economic development.

The Council's attention is drawn to the [Interreg Europe ORIGINN](#) project. As a partner on this project, the Assembly is working to promote the economic and social transformation of rural areas through innovation, with a particular focus on the agri-food sector. Areas of thematic focus are digitalisation, green economy, industrial sustainability, social innovation, and soft innovation. Insights drawn from the project will inform the review of the RSES, to ensure that policies for innovative social and economic transformation in rural areas reflect the needs and the potential of the Region.

4.2.7 Transport, Connectivity and Movement

The Assembly acknowledges the key challenges listed in the Issues Paper including transport/ mobility infrastructure. It highlights the excellent transport links to Dublin and Belfast via the motorway (M1), national roads (N2, N51, N52) and inter-city rail line along the DBEC; and the strong network of regional and local roads. EMRA supports the Council's statement that there is a high level of correlation and integration between land use and transport planning, both to support a growing population and to maintain its attractiveness as a location for economic investment and employment-related development. Continued investment is required in this area and connectivity between settlements must be maintained.

The Assembly also acknowledges the major projects referenced (Phase 1 of Port Access Northern Cross Route in Drogheda and the Mount Avenue Link Road in Dundalk); and planning consent for DART+ Coastal North, subject to Judicial Review and improvement in rail services. It also supports the Council's continued rollout of Active Travel projects in association with the NTA, which are improving walking and cycling infrastructure and access to sustainable travel. The RSES supports a feasibility study for high-speed rail between Dublin and Belfast and enhanced rail services.

Public transport and the offering of alternatives to the private car are crucial to supporting sustainable transport and active travel objectives in a new CDP with the need to reduce the reliance on and negative impacts of car usage (e.g. congestion, health and wellbeing effects, commuter stress, GHG and noise emissions, etc.) in tandem with appropriate land use policies (particularly compact growth), which promote and facilitate access to alternative sustainable/ active travel options (e.g. public transport, greenways and cycleways) can enhance areas by contributing to liveable places (by creating opportunities to be physically active), efficient movement of goods and services and transition to a low carbon society and meet Climate Action Plan 2025 targets. Walking and Cycling Strategies are supported in the RSES.

The NPF places an emphasis on delivering large-scale Transport Orientated Development (TOD) at brownfield and greenfield sites close to major public transport hubs in the cities and towns. It

promotes the 'Avoid-Shift-Improve' model of transportation infrastructure development, emphasises the need for enhanced permeability in our settlements and the promotion of active travel in reducing transport emissions. This is in tandem with the deployment of an EV Charging Network Plan and advanced availability of shared sustainable travel modes. It also signals the need for freight transport to transition to zero emissions.

The Assembly recommends that the CDP supports relevant recommendations of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review (2024) and the application of TOD principles at existing and potential rail nodes. The need for additional public transport infrastructure and associated land use and development potential to support compact and sustainable growth should be considered. It is noted that the NPF and RSES are relevant planning policy framework documents for Co. Louth, which differs from neighbouring Co. Meath which is also guided by the requirements of the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy. Therefore, a greater level of coordination may be required with the NTA and TII to ensure consistency across the Region.

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 in the area of 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 Assembly emphasises the importance of permeability and community connectivity within and between settlements, consistent with the Guiding Principles for Healthy Placemaking and Compact Growth as set out in the RSES. The CDP should support the creation of walkable neighbourhoods and connected street networks that enable direct, safe, and convenient access to schools, workplaces, local services, and transport nodes. The Assembly recommends inclusion of objectives to:

- Prioritise pedestrian and cycle infrastructure consistent with the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022);
- Conduct permeability audits for major development areas ensuring walkable neighbourhoods, connected street networks;
- Integrate active travel infrastructure and facilities with public transport; and
- Incorporate road safety measures in active travel design, in line with the National Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030.

Guiding Principles (Section 8.3) and related RPOs of the RSES, provides the basis for the integration of land use and transport planning for urban and rural areas. Further to this, RPO 8.6 of the RSES requires the preparation of Local Transport Plans (LPTs), in conjunction with the NTA, for Drogheda and Dundalk. LPTs should be based on a clear set of objectives and the most recent demographic and travel information considering the policies and objectives of the local authorities, insofar as they align

with those of national and regional policy. LTPs will include the transport priorities for each settlement in terms of public transport infrastructure and services; cycle investment; improvements to the pedestrian environment; and road enhancements. The NTA/ TII Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) Advice Notes (2018 and 2024) are relevant to the CDP and future Area Based Plans in Co. Louth.

The strategic function of the DBEC as a driver for regional economic development within the Region is promoted in the RSES. The Planning Authority is directed to RPOs 8.11 and 8.12 which support the improvement and protection of the EU TEN-T network and the strategic function of this Corridor. Section 8.5 of the RSES sets out RPOs (8.22 – 8.24) addressing international connectivity and access to Ireland’s air and seaports, including ports of regional significance at Drogheda and Dundalk.

The NPF (Section 7.3) also references Drogheda Port and the role of regional ports in supporting regional employment and services, commercial freight, marine sector (fisheries, marine renewable energy, tourism). The need to increase renewable energy generation is a key driver for the NPF to reducing carbon emissions and complying with the EU Renewable Energy Directive (RED III). Co. Louth (e.g. Drogheda port) is located close to potential offshore renewable energy projects and will play a critical role in facilitating such development, maintenance and operation of the sector through the accommodation of supporting infrastructure. NPOs 50-51 of the NPF are relevant in this regard.

The Assembly welcomes the opportunity for the Louth CDP 2027–2033 to demonstrate alignment not only with the RSES but also with wider national and all-island transport and mobility frameworks, including the All-Island Strategic Rail Review (2024), the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022), and the National Road Safety Strategy (2021–2030). Embedding these policy linkages in the CDP will strengthen County Louth’s position within the DBEC and advance its transition toward a sustainable, low-carbon, and well-connected regional economy.

4.2.8 Water, Energy and Communications

Water

Uisce Éireann (UÉ) released its 10-Year Water Supply Capacity Register and Wastewater Treatment Capacity Register in August 2025. The registers identify where there is estimated spare, potential or no wastewater treatment capacity and whether an adequate water supply would be available to meet the needs of 2034 population target. It also indicates whether a level of service improvement or capital investment would be required. It is noted that 18 no. settlements are listed in Co. Louth. In the context of wastewater, 3 settlements are identified as ‘red’, 3 ‘amber’ and remainder ‘green’ within its traffic light system, highlighting where investment is required.

The NPF emphasises the need to prioritise development in areas with existing and planned infrastructure capacity, focus on demand management, and maximise existing water services infrastructure capacity through nature-based solutions and the use of Sustainable urban Drainage

Systems (SuDS). It contains a new NPO on Integrated Wastewater and Drainage Management Plans and the protection and restoration of biodiversity. It emphasises that liveability of urban spaces includes both green and blue infrastructure. Section 10.2 of the RSES sets out the RPOs relevant to this section of the CDP.

A new National Maritime Area Plan is in the early stages of preparation, which will be relevant to the management of Louth's coastal waters and the NPF has identified the need for an Irish Coastal Change Strategy and Coastal Change Management Plans. The Planning Authority is also advised that there are new NPOs regarding the effects of sea level change and coastal erosion and adaptation responses, which should be considered by the Planning Authority in the preparation of the new CDP.

Energy

The NPF (Chapter 9) seeks to develop renewable energy (RE) in the Region, at an accelerated rate, via wind, solar, biomass and wave energy. It has a greater emphasis on climate action and a transition to a carbon neutral and resilient society. There is a commitment to achieving climate neutrality no later than 2050 with a 51% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030 and meeting the legally binding objectives in Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.

There is a target of at least 5GW of installed offshore wind capacity by 2030, and the longer-term ambition for over 37GW of offshore renewable energy (ORE) to be delivered before 2050. As noted above, there is a role identified for ports for renewable energy, particularly related ORE projects. The NPF also recognises that renewable hydrogen may have a role in Ireland's future energy system, particularly, in line with the National Hydrogen Policy 2023, in hard-to-decarbonise sectors; however, it is an emerging technology with further research required to inform policy making. Therefore, it is a potential supplementary vector, though at present it is relatively inefficient compared with direct electrification and there are technical and cost challenges associated with production, storage and combustion.

The Council should further note that NPO 74 of the NPF requires that each Regional Assembly must plan, through the review of their RSES, for the delivery of the regional renewable energy capacity allocations indicated for onshore wind and solar reflected in Table 9.1 of the NPF. The Regional Assemblies must identify allocations for each local authority, based on the best available scientific evidence and in accordance with legislative requirements, to meet the overall national target. Such allocations are intended to facilitate the accelerated roll-out and delivery of renewable energy infrastructure for onshore wind and solar energy generation development and support the achievement of 2030 targets in the Climate Action Plan. The NPF outlines that EMRA must achieve 25% of the national share of onshore wind and 45% share of solar PV by 2030. Further to this, NPO 75 requires local authorities to plan for the delivery of Target Power Capacity (MW) allocations consistent with the relevant RSES, through their CDPs.

Section 10.3 of the RSES highlights the importance of a secure and resilient supply of energy to a well-functioning region. With projected increases in population and economic growth, the demand for energy is set to increase in the coming years. This section of the RSES sets out Guiding Principles for CDPs to support the roll out of future energy networks enabling the integration of and promotion of renewable energy sources, in line with RPO 10.19 of the RSES. The Planning Authority is also advised to consider EirGrid’s Framework for Grid Development in the context of electricity infrastructure in the County and RPOs 10.19 –10.24 of the RSES.

The RSES refers to the Dunleer Sustainable Energy Community which was established with the vision of providing leadership to the community of Dunleer, Co. Louth and other communities across Ireland on addressing the challenge of climate change as a best practice example within Co. Louth.

Communications

Section 8.6 of the RSES addresses communications networks and digital infrastructure and associated RPOs 8.25–8.26. Digital technologies impact on every aspect of our lives: from transport, to education, leisure and entertainment and health services. Infrastructure to deliver better connected services is vital to our continued growth, supporting businesses and enhancing our communities.

The availability of infrastructure such as water, wastewater, surface water drainage, energy, and telecommunications networks will play a key role in securing economic investment. The RSES recognises that the sustainable growth of the Region requires the provision of services and infrastructure in a plan-led manner to ensure that there is adequate capacity to support future development.

In order to further assist the Council in developing its policy framework, the Assembly draws attention to its [submission to the Public Consultation on Accelerating Infrastructure Delivery](#) by the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation which identifies barriers to infrastructure delivery in the context of the RSES and proposes a range of solutions to address those barriers. The document highlights the need for spatial alignment between land use, infrastructure investment, and regional economic priorities, as set out in the RSES. By drawing on EMRA’s recommendations, particularly those on embedding spatial alignment in infrastructure decision-making and adopting a multi-criteria, spatially aware prioritisation framework, the Council can support infrastructure provision that underpins sustainable development, enhances connectivity, supports enterprise activation, and complies with environmental and climate obligations.

The CDP should identify infrastructure priorities that align with higher-level frameworks, supporting compact settlement patterns, decarbonisation and integrated investment sequencing.

4.2.9 Climate Action and Flooding

Climate Action

The Assembly welcomes Louth County Council's Climate Action Plan with its vision to be net zero by 2050. It is recommended that this forms part of the overall vision for the CDP and is closely linked with all chapters and policies and objectives of the CDP as a cross-cutting theme to transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society, with increased emphasis on sustainable development and travel patterns, energy use and the protection of green infrastructure.

The Issues Paper also refers to good governance, energy efficiencies and de-carbonising the Council's operations, promoting biodiversity and adoption green salutation, involving and resources communities and waste recycling, efficient use of resources, minimising waste and reusing materials sustainably. The latter is in line with the transition to a circular economy.

The inclusion of 'Climate Change' as a one of the main issues for consideration in the CDP review process is welcomed by the Assembly. Climate Action is a key principle of the RSES which is supported by RSOs 6-11. Information contained at Chapters 7, 8 and 10 of the RSES will assist the Planning Authority in developing an integrated climate policy, in particular Section 7.9 Climate Change and the related RPOs address the need for decarbonisation of the transport, built environment and energy sectors.

To this end, it should be noted that EMRA participated as lead stakeholder on the [ESPON QGasSP Targeted Analysis Project](#) which aimed to deliver a robust, simple and proportionate method for quantifying and forecasting the relative Greenhouse Gas (GHG) impacts of alternative spatial planning policies, with pan-European applicability. EMRA led stakeholder input on methodology development and multiple iterations of the various project deliverables including the final main report, the [Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Tool](#) and case study pilots, including the Ireland Case Study Pilot which focused on Co. Meath. The Assembly remains committed to supporting the development of a user-friendly tool for quantifying and forecasting the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies in Ireland.

The Council is further directed to the updated text in NSO 8 of the NPF which takes account of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act which was enacted in 2021 and the National Climate Action Plan 2025 (reviewed annually).

The Assembly further recommends that the CDP Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) includes a robust climate assessment, as required under the SEA Directive and Planning and Development Regulations. For example, the SEA should evaluate the climate implications of different spatial and transport scenarios and demonstrate how the preferred approach supports emission reduction and resilience. In this regard, the Assembly also recommends utilising the National Transport Authority's modelling capacity to assess the likely transport and climate impacts of alternative plan options, supporting evidence-based decision-making and alignment with the RSES Climate Action Strategy.

Flooding

As the CDP is being prepared, focused environmental assessments will be required, including Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). It is recommended that the Council consider the need to identify risks and ensure the resilience of critical infrastructure, as set out in RPO 7.43 of the RSES. Specific flooding RPOs (7.12-15) are set out in Section 7.4 of the RSES and it is supported by a Regional Flood Risk Appraisal. It is also recommended that the Council utilises OPW resources available from www.floodinfo.ie in relation to Flood Risk Management Maps, Flood Relief Schemes, Flood Maps, flood mitigation/ coastal protection works, etc., follows the requirements set out in the Planning System and Flood Risk Management - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and note the provisions of the National Adaptation Framework 2024.

4.2.10 Green Infrastructure

Section 7.7 of the RSES relates to Green Infrastructure (GI) and Chapter 10 Infrastructure sets out Guiding Principles for the incorporation of SuDS. GI should be recognised and preserved where possible as natural defences against flood risk in both urban and rural areas. It maintains ecosystems services where habitats are connected and relates to terrestrial and aquatic habitats. It has a role in carbon sequestration and is a key component of climate resilience.

GI has significant health benefits, promotes wellbeing, recreational and tourism benefit and is an integral part of placemaking. The RSES supports the preparation of GI strategies at local authority level with Guiding Principles and associated RPOs 7.22-7.26 which should be incorporated into the future CDP. It is recommended that habitat mapping is created to inform zoning within settlements.

4.2.11 Natural and Built Heritage

The Issues Paper notes that Co. Louth has a rich natural and built heritage which contributes substantially to its character and identity; the preservation and enhancement of which is critical to creating a better future for all. It also boasts a rich archaeological and architectural heritage, particularly in its many historic towns and villages including Drogheda, Dundalk, Ardee and Carlingford which contributes to the vibrancy and attractiveness of places where the people of Louth live, work and play, in addition to serving as a catalyst in attracting tourism and investment.

As per Section 7.5 of the RSES, biodiversity protection is core to the EU Birds and Habitats Directives but is also incorporated into the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Water Framework Directive (marine waters) the Nitrates Directive (agricultural run-off), the SEA Directive, EIA Directive and the Invasive Species Regulations.

The NPF emphasises the need for protection and restoration of biodiversity including protected habitats and species, integration of biodiversity protection and restoration in planning and development, a consistent/strategic approach across local authorities on their Local Biodiversity Action Plans influenced by the National Biodiversity Action Plan and implementation of a new National

Nature Restoration Plan. Work on the preparation of this new Plan is underway, as it must be submitted to the EU Commission by September 2026.

RPOs 7.16 to 7.20 of the RSES deal specifically with biodiversity and natural heritage. RPO 7.16 supports the implementation of the Birds Habitats Directives to ensure alignment between the core objectives of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and CDPs. RPO 7.17 supports cross boundary co-ordination between local authorities and the relevant agencies in the region to provide clear governance arrangements and coordination mechanisms to support the development of ecological networks and enhanced connectivity between protected sites whilst also addressing the need for management of alien invasive species and the conservation of native species. The new CDP should support these objectives.

Through participation in the Interreg Europe PROGRESS project, EMRA has developed [a range of resources](#) to support the implementation of RSES objectives for ecosystem services and green infrastructure. These resources include a green infrastructure and ecosystem services mapping methodology, policy briefs which include 'how to' recommendations, good practice handbooks, and infographics. These may be of assistance to the local authority in developing the future CDP.

The RSES emphasises that good heritage management should be incorporated into spatial planning to promote the benefits of heritage-led urban regeneration in historic towns, for example through the protection of historic urban fabric, the reuse of historic buildings and the enhancement of places of special cultural or natural interest. It should also be recognised that the built and natural heritage are key resources that will play a positive role in driving economic development in terms of tourism potential. Section 9.7 of the RSES and its related RPOs provides guidance in this regard which should assist in developing plan policy in this area.

Section 7.8 of the RSES covers landscape considerations including areas such as Carlingford Lough in Co. Louth with Guiding Principles and RPOs 7.27 – 7.28 of the RSES.

4.2.12 Tourism, Culture and Art

Section 6.5 of the RSES details specific sectors, such as tourism which should be consulted in developing related CDP policies and objectives. It highlights the recreational and tourism potential of natural and cultural assets in the Region, (RPOs 6.15 – 6.18 and RPO 6.8), which specifically supports alignment with the strategic objectives of Failte Ireland's key tourism brands. It also notes many key natural resources and tourism asset such as its coastal landscape at Carlingford and the Cooley Peninsula.

The RSES list Growth Enablers which include the promotion of the Region for tourism, leisure and recreational activities including development of an integrated greenway network while ensuring that high value assets and amenities are protected and enhanced. Within the Gateway Region, it also promotes the Region as a key destination for tourism, leisure and recreation activities and supports

the development of an integrated network of greenways, blueways and peatways while ensuring that high value assets and amenities are protected and enhanced.

As identified in the RSES, there are also significant opportunities to develop several flagship greenways in the Region (RPOs 7.24 to 7.26 and RPO 5.7) as part of a Strategic Greenway Network. Section 8.4 of the NPF, refers to the Carlingford Lough Greenway between Counties Louth and Down as a Cross-Border Greenway project, funded through Shared Island and EU funding schemes, which is one of two no. long distance cycling/walking routes which link Northern Ireland and Ireland.

The NPF states that tourism development and promotional branding must ensure that areas such as 'Ireland's Ancient East' and 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' are developed and promoted in such a way as to play their full part in tapping the economic potential of regional and rural areas in the Region. The CDP should be informed by the Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy & Action Plan 2024-2030 which sets out its objectives, projects and actions for Co. Louth and Co. Meath, which sets out an ambitious target to become one of the leading experiential destinations in the world.

The RSES highlights the Boyne Valley Food Hub associated with the Boyne Valley, synonymous with food production and trade as far back as 10,000 years ago. The Food Hub is a flagship project of Boyne Valley Food Innovation District in partnership with local authorities and Local Enterprise Offices, Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia, IDA, Teagasc and with leading universities and industry. The aim is to accelerate the growth of the agri-food sector through collaboration, innovation, and clustering to support scalable, sustainable and profitable food businesses in Counties Meath, Louth, Kildare and Wicklow. It packages several industry deliverables including food units for startup and scaling food business, a community kitchen, a Food Innovation and Research Lab and onsite food technologist and business development manager, to support food innovation programmes.

Section 9.7 of the RSES refers to access to arts, culture, language and heritage, with specific objectives RPOs 9.24-9.30 to guide the Planning Authority.

4.2.13 Community, Recreation, Amenity and Social Inclusion

The Issues Paper notes that Louth County Council recognises the importance of high quality, inclusive and accessible spaces and resultant benefits for the population of the County. The provision of community, sports, education, health, childcare and recreational facilities are becoming increasingly important. The Assembly supports the principles of lifetime adaptability and universal design which the Planning Authority proposes to improve the overall health and wellbeing of communities. It notes that the Planning Authority also proposed that the LECP will inform this section of the CDP.

Healthy Placemaking is one of the key principles of the RSES, aimed at promoting peoples' quality of life through the creation of healthy and attractive places in which to live, work and visit. The information contained as part of Chapter 9 of the RSES and associated RPOs, which details subjects including diversity, inclusivity, housing, regeneration, healthy placemaking, social opportunity,

economic opportunity, access to childcare, education, health services and access to arts, culture, language and heritage, will support the Planning Authority in developing relevant policy for the future CDP.

It is noted that the NPF places more emphasis on consolidating the development of places that grew rapidly in the past decade or so with large scale commuter driven housing development with a particular focus on identifying and prioritising infrastructure and local community and amenity facility provision in many of the larger commuter towns through targeted investment under relevant NSOs of the NPF. It is recommended that the Planning Authority conducts a Social Infrastructure Assessment including audit to inform this section of the CDP, to support the identification of existing community facilities and gap analysis for communities within the County.

The NPF seeks to build on the progress made in developing an integrated network of greenways, blueways and peatways, that will support the diversification of rural and regional economies and promote more sustainable forms of travel and activity-based recreation utilising canal and former rail and other routes.

4.2.14 Cross Border

Chapter 11 of the RSES examines All-Island Cohesion and although it is not specifically referenced in the Issues Paper, it is recommended that the Planning Authority supports the RPOs in this section in the new CDP. NPO 57 of the NPF seeks co-operation with relevant Departments, Reginal Assemblies and Local Authorities in Northern Ireland, to further support and develop the economic potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor (particularly the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network) and to promote and enhance its international visibility.

The Planning Authority is referred to the NPF which also identifies areas for cross-border local co-ordination with regional cooperation, joint initiatives and co-ordinated spatial planning. It is proposed to *'develop the critical mass and the potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor... the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network-to compete with other large cities'* and *'support co-ordinated spatial planning through objectives and actions embedded within development plans, community plans and local economic and community plans'*.

4.2.15 Environmental Assessment

The Issues Paper states that Environmental Assessments of the Plan are a crucial element of the process, assessing the potential environmental impacts of the implementation of policy objectives.

The Assembly welcomes the preparation of the CDP in tandem with the required environmental assessments, namely Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). The Council is directed to the SEA Guidelines for Regional

Assemblies and Planning Authorities prepared by the DHLGH (March 2022) which were formally issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Further to this, the Assembly recommends early engagement with the relevant bodies including the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Office of Public Works, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Uisce Éireann, and adjoining planning authorities in relation to any significant transboundary environmental effects.

4.2.16 Monitoring and Implementation

It is recommended that the CDP contains a section on monitoring and implementation of the CDP. In addition, it is recommended that a commitment is made to reporting on SEA Monitoring during the implementation of the Plan.

5.0 Recommendations and Observations

The Regional Assembly advises that Louth County Council pays particular attention to the following issues in the preparation of the draft CDP in order to ensure consistency with the RSES, and any future RSES that may be adopted during the CDP review process, and makes the following recommendations:

1. That the Planning Authority shall ensure, when making the County Development Plan, that it is materially consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region (RSES) and any future RSES that may be adopted during the CDP review process.
Reason: To ensure full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy in line with the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2025.
2. That the Planning Authority undertakes the Development Plan review in accordance with the new legislative requirements and demonstrates consistency with Project Ireland 2040 and other national policies.
Reason: To ensure full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy, the economic policies and objectives of the Government and any other relevant national planning policies and measures in line with the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2025.
3. Should the Planning Authority decide to revisit the categorisation and tiering of lower-level settlements in developing the County's Settlement Hierarchy, the Assembly directs it to Section 3.1 and Appendix A of the RSES which provides detail on the Asset-Based Approach to spatial development, or any update as part of any future RSES that may be adopted during the CDP review process.
Reason: To ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of Co. Louth in a manner consistent with the RSES and any future RSES that may be adopted during the CDP review process.

4. That the Planning Authority shall ensure, that the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) is supported in the new CDP to enable it to meet the objectives set out in the NPF and RSES.
Reason: To ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of Co. Louth in a manner consistent with the RSES and any future RSES that may be adopted during the CDP review process.
5. That the Planning Authority shall ensure, when making the County Development Plan, that the co-operation with relevant Departments, Regional Assemblies and Local Authorities in Northern Ireland, is promoted, to further support and develop the economic potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor (particularly the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network) to promote and enhance its international visibility and to promote All-Island Cohesion.
Reason: To ensure full alignment between local, regional and national planning and economic policy, the economic policies and objectives of the Government and any other relevant national planning and economic policies and measures.
6. That the Planning Authority shall align with the Transport Strategy set out in the RSES and considers strategic investment priorities including additional public-transport infrastructure and the recommendations in the All-Island Strategic Rail Review 2024; support integrated land use and transportation planning objectives including the application of Transport Orientated Development (TOD) principles; and coordinates with nearby local authorities, EMRA, the NTA and TII to ensure consistent regional frameworks.
Reason: To ensure full alignment between local, regional and national planning and transport policy, the transport policies and objectives of the Government and any other relevant national planning and transport policies and measures; evidence based integrated land use and transport planning; and strengthen the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.
7. That the Planning Authority shall ensure, when making the County Development Plan, that the cultural and natural heritage aspects presented are consistent with the NPF which emphasises the need for protection and restoration of biodiversity including protected habitats and species, integration of biodiversity protection and restoration in planning and development, a consistent/strategic approach across local authorities on their Local Biodiversity Action Plans influenced by the National Biodiversity Action Plan and implementation of a new National Nature Restoration Plan.
Reason: To ensure full alignment between local, regional and national planning and policy and any other relevant national planning policies and measures pertaining to biodiversity and natural heritage.
8. That the Planning Authority shall ensure, when making the County Development Plan, that the cross-cutting climate action aspects presented are consistent with the RSES Climate Action Strategy, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act, the National Climate Action Plan (reviewed annually) and the Louth Climate Action Plan 2024-2029.

Reason: To ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of County Louth in a manner consistent with the RSES and any future RSES that may be adopted during the CDP review process.

9. That the Planning Authority shall ensure, when making the County Development Plan, that the renewable energy aspects presented take account of and are consistent with the RSES Climate Action Strategy, the National Climate Action Plan and the Louth Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 and NPO 75 of the NPF which requires local authorities to plan for the delivery of future Target Power Capacity (MW) allocations consistent with the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, through their Development Plans.

Reason: To ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of County Louth in a manner consistent with the RSES and any future RSES that may be adopted during the CDP review process.

10. The Assembly recommends early engagement with the relevant bodies in relation to the required environmental processes, namely Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

Reason: To ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of Co. Louth in a manner consistent with the RSES and any future RSES that may be adopted during the CDP review process, and to have regard to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000, as amended.

The following are observations by the Regional Assembly that should be taken into consideration in the preparation of the County Development Plan.

1. The Planning Authority is reminded of its obligation under the NPF to prepare/update a Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) to align with updated data sources, in order to support the preparation of housing strategies and all related housing policy outputs, including the County Development Plan.

Reason: To meet existing and future housing need and demand and ensure full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy and to 'housing growth requirements' for Louth as set out in the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on National Planning Framework Implementation – Housing Growth Requirements issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000-2025.

2. The Assembly refers the Council to the [Regional Development Monitor](#) (RDM), which provides a series of national mapping and visualisation infrastructures to assist planners and policy makers in gaining a greater insight into social, economic and environmental trends to aid better policy formation and decision making.

Reason: In the interest of best practice.

3. The Assembly refers the Council to the [15-Minute City Implementation Pathway](#) report published by the Assembly, which identifies public policy support, ongoing actions, good practice examples and funding opportunities for '15-Minute City' and '10 Minute Town' concepts.
Reason: In the interest of best practice.
4. The Assembly refers the Council to the [Sustainable Mobility Academy](#) which is a repository of knowledge, showcasing case studies, project outcomes, and ongoing advancements across all local authorities in the area of active travel and sustainable mobility.
Reason: In the interest of best practice.
5. The Assembly refers the Council to its [submission to the Public Consultation on Accelerating Infrastructure Delivery](#) by the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation which identifies barriers to infrastructure delivery in the context of the RSES and proposes a range of solutions to address those barriers.
Reason: To inform infrastructure provision that underpins sustainable development, enhances connectivity, supports enterprise activation, and complies with environmental and climate obligations.
6. The Assembly refers the Council to the [Interreg Europe ORIGINN](#) project which is working to promote the economic and social transformation of rural areas through innovation, with a particular focus on digitalisation, green economy, industrial sustainability, social innovation, and soft innovation in the agri-food sector.
Reason: In the interest of best practice.
7. The Assembly refers the Council to the [ESPON QGasSP Targeted Analysis Project](#) and the resulting [Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Tool](#) and case study pilots. This may assist with a detailed climate assessment in the SEA and could be used alongside the National Transport Authority's transport modelling to evaluate the climate impacts of alternative plan scenarios.
Reason: In the interest of best practice regarding the development of a user-friendly tool for quantifying and forecasting the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies in Ireland; and strengthen the SEA process.
8. The Assembly refers the Council to [a range of resources](#) developed by the Assembly to support the implementation of RSES objectives for ecosystem services and green infrastructure. These resources include a green infrastructure and ecosystem services mapping methodology, policy briefs which include 'how to' recommendations, good practice handbooks, and infographics.
Reason: In the interest of best practice.

6.0 Conclusion

The Regional Assembly welcomes the publication of the Pre-Draft Strategic Issues Paper consultation phase which is a crucial opportunity to secure alignment of planning policy at county and local levels

with Regional and National Policy. The Assembly looks forward to corresponding with the Council on the forthcoming stages of the County Development Plan process.

It should also be noted that the officials of the Regional Assembly are available to discuss the matters raised above and will be available throughout the County Development Plan process.

Regards,



Clare Bannon
A/Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
14th November 2025