

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

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly notes the publication of the 'Pre-Draft Strategic Issues Paper' (Issues Paper) to inform the preparation of the Meath County Development Plan (CDP) 2027-2033 and sets out hereunder recommendations and observations on behalf of the Assembly. The submission has been prepared by the executive and approved by the members of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly at its meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> 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, 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Assembly, including the scope of the RSES, as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, has been superseded by the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended.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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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, 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, and alignment with the investment priorities of the National Development Plan (and thus Project Ireland 2040), by coupling new development with the requisite investment in services and infrastructure. The RSES, as the succeeding tier of policy delivery in Ireland, is of critical importance for the delivery of Project Ireland 2040. The RSES 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 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2025, the Regional Assembly received notice from Meath 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 would like to acknowledge the work that the Local Authority has carried out in order to prepare the Pre-Draft Strategic Issues Paper. The overall approach and effort of Meath County Council is welcomed, particularly the indication of the spatial planning hierarchy and the requirement to ensure consistency with the RSES and NPF.

### **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 Meath 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 Meath 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 fulfil its ambition and potential. In turn, the Regional Assembly considers that a new Meath 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. Meath.

#### **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 Meath, 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 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.

The Assembly further recommends that compact growth objectives be coordinated with integrated land-use and transportation and Transport-Orientated Development (TOD) principles as set out in the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2022–2042 (GDATS) and the All-Island Strategic Rail Review 2024.

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 County Meath' graphic in the Issues Paper which allocates each relevant town and settlement in the County to its respective typology, including Drogheda as a Regional Growth Centre (as designated by the NPF) and Navan as a Key Town (as designated by the RSES).

The RSES defines Drogheda as Regional Growth Centre in the Core Region and 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 4.11-4.25, 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. A priority policy mechanism for the future co-ordinated development of Drogheda was the preparation of a cross boundary statutory Joint Urban Area Plan for Drogheda by Louth and Meath County Councils in a manner consistent with the RSES. 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.

The RSES defines Navan as a Key Town within the Core Region, and the Settlement Hierarchy of the CDP is required to reflect this. RPOs 4.26 and 4.27 address the role of Key Towns within Core Strategies and this is augmented by RPOs 4.42-4.47 which specifically relate to Navan. It is noted that Maynooth is also identified as a Key Town (within the Metropolitan Area). Whilst the town is located within north-east County Kildare, the town's environs are located in County Meath. A priority for the Key Town of Maynooth is the preparation and adoption of a Joint Local Area Plan for Maynooth which was completed and agreed by both Kildare and Meath County Councils and is consistent with RPO 4.35 of

the RSES which set out the requirements for this.

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 Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan**

The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan for Dublin (MASP) is a key policy driver setting out an integrated land use and transportation strategy for the sequential development of the Dublin Metropolitan Area which includes the towns of Clonee and Dunboyne and their hinterlands, as well as the northern environs of Kilcock and Maynooth that fall within Co. Meath, taking into consideration that Maynooth is a Key Town identified within the RSES. Table 5.1 of the MASP sets out further detail identifying a number of strategic development areas along key public transport corridors, which have the capacity to deliver sustainable compact growth in tandem with the phased delivery of key enabling infrastructure.

The Assembly notes that the planning policy framework for the Meath County Development Plan is informed by the National Planning Framework (NPF), and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). The Development Plan should therefore ensure that transport and settlement policies are aligned across these frameworks, particularly in relation to the sequencing of development and public transport investment.

The Assembly further recommends that the Development Plan supports relevant recommendations of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review 2024 and gives effect to the requirements of the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2022–2042 (GDATS) through a framework for phased, cross-boundary implementation of the MASP. This should integrate Transport-Orientated Development (TOD), active-travel infrastructure, local permeability measures for community connectivity to maximise access to rail and bus corridors serving Clonee, Dunboyne, Maynooth and Kilcock.

Section 5.7 of the MASP and RPOs 5.4 and 5.5 are relevant with respect to these lands within the Metropolitan Area and future CDP policy should be consistent with this approach. In this regard, the Core Strategy of the CDP should focus on the delivery of these sites in the MASP area whilst retaining flexibility to provide for ongoing opportunities for increased densities, reduced vacancy and re-use of underutilised lands, and a robust evidence-based analysis of demand, past delivery and potential.

## 4.2 Issues Paper

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

1. Core Strategy
2. Settlement & Housing
3. Employment & Economy
4. Transport & Movement
5. Infrastructure & Utilities
6. Community Services
7. Rural Development
8. Cultural & Natural Heritage
9. Climate Change

The Issues Paper sets out the strategic context and policy hierarchy for the CDP 2027-2033 and identifies 9 main strategic themes, which the Plan must address and are considered to provide a robust basis for scoping and developing the Plan.

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

### 4.2.1 Core Strategy

The Pre-Draft Strategic Issues Paper recognises that the purpose of the Core Strategy is to set out an evidence-based strategy for the future spatial development of Co. Meath, and in so-doing, demonstrates that the CDP and its objectives are consistent with national and regional development objectives as set out in the NPF and the RSES. The Issues Paper further identifies the role of the Core Strategy to detail population and household projections and the quantum of lands to be zoned for residential and mixed use. In this regard, the Planning Authority is directed to RPOs 3.2 and 3.3 of the RSES which require Core Strategies to set out measures for compact urban growth with a focus on regeneration areas including infill and brownfield regeneration sites.

In the Issues Paper, the Planning Authority references the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on National Planning Framework Implementation – Housing Growth Requirements issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. These Guidelines set out the housing demand scenario to 2040 for each local authority based on ESRI modelling of population growth and structural housing demand, and assumptions relating to unmet demand. They provide updated ‘housing growth requirements’ which Meath County Council must have regard to when making or varying its CDP. For Meath County Council, the annual new housing growth requirement to 2034 is 2,942 units. Further to this, the Council 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 CDP.

RPO 9.5 of the RSES outlines the commitment of the Regional Assembly to support local authorities in the provision of a Housing Need Demand Assessment. This is in keeping with National Policy Objective (NPO) 47 of the NPF. It is also noted that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage 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 a number of 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.

**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
Meath County Council	2,826	2,942	1,362

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

#### 4.2.2 Settlement & Housing

The Issues Paper notes that the settlement structure in Co. Meath 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 identifies the need for the Development Plan to recognise the importance of creating a robust network of settlements with a wide range of services, amenities and job opportunities to contribute to a balanced and healthy quality of life. The Assembly welcomes this recognition, which is aligned with the healthy placemaking principle of the RSES, as well as the inclusion of a graphical representation of the settlement hierarchy of Co. Meath. This provides a framework for the development of the urban centres in the County and the distribution of future growth. Points outlined above, under the heading ‘Ensuring Consistency with the RSES – Key Areas’ should be considered in this regard. The role of Drogheda as a Regional Growth Centre at the top of the Settlement Hierarchy of Co. Meath is recognised, as well as the role of Navan (and Maynooth) as Key Towns as identified at Section 4.6 of the RSES.

#### 4.2.3 Employment & Economy

The Issues Paper states that Meath possesses significant economic potential to prosper with unique competitive advantage due to its strategic location, its infrastructure and amenities and its highly skilled workforce. Economic Opportunity is one of the three key principles of the RSES and is supported by RSOs 12-16 of the RSES. The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of a section on Employment and Economy as part of the Issues Paper.

Section 4.6 of the RSES identifies Navan as the primary centre of employment in the County with a range of retail and services including two retail parks, an acute hospital, health centres, court service and a number of primary and post primary schools. Whilst the industrial and business parks in the town are performing well, outbound commuting for employment remains an issue. Navan is promoted as a strategic centre for employment in the County to address this issue and improve the ratio of jobs to resident workers. There are a number of industrial estates, including an IDA Business and Technology Park providing employment in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, medical devices, services and communication. In addition, the Boyne Valley Food Hub, with approved state funding, aims to develop an innovation-rich enterprise support system in Navan to intensify growth of food and drink entrepreneurs. The continued success of Navan Enterprise Centre illustrates the growing demand for workspaces by entrepreneurs, start-ups and established businesses. The planned consolidation and expansion of existing business parks along with the town centre offers an opportunity to broaden the employment base while the delivery of a distributor road at Farganstown has potential to attract new investment in high quality intensive employment uses. Strategic lands are also reserved for the future development of a Regional Hospital for the northeast of the country. The future re-development of Páirc Táihteann will be an important economic, sporting and cultural asset for the County and the Region and is significant in the context of Navan 2030 and the vision of an enhanced town centre. In this regard, the Planning Authority is directed to RPOs 4.42 – 4.47 of the RSES. Regarding Maynooth, the Maynooth and Environs Joint Local Area Plan (JLAP) 2025 - 2031 came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025. The preparation of the JLAP is in line with RPO 4.35 of the RSES. The JLAP supports RPOs 4.33 -4.36 of the RSES, as well as the identification of lands at Moygaddy within the Maynooth Environs of Co. Meath for science and technology-based employment.

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. Of particular note for Co. Meath is the recognition of the Regional Growth Centre of Drogheda as an economic engine for the Region and the role of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor 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, including Drogheda. 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.

Section 6.6 of the RSES focuses on the drivers for resilient, sustainable and inclusive economic growth with further opportunities for foreign direct investment, clustering and smart specialisation, and the development of a smart city programme to be supported in Drogheda (RPO 6.30).

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.

#### 4.2.4 Transport & Movement

The Issues Paper highlights that an efficient strategic transport system is vital for the future economic, social and physical development of the County. It further states that the CDP must promote and facilitate movement to, from and within the County, by integrating land use with a high-quality, sustainable transport system that prioritises walking, cycling and public transport. The Issues paper identifies priority infrastructure investments including the Navan Rail Link, DART+ Coastal North and DART + West.

The Assembly further notes the publication of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review 2024, jointly prepared by the Department of Transport and the Department for Infrastructure (NI), which sets out a long-term vision for an integrated, electrified rail network across the island of Ireland. The Review identifies the Dublin–Belfast and Dublin–Navan corridors as strategic elements within this network.

The Assembly considers that the Development Plan should refer to the findings and recommendations of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review to support the application of Transport-Orientated Development (TOD) principles at existing and potential rail nodes. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of additional or reopened train stations where these align with objectives of the RSES and GDATS.

The Assembly welcomes Meath County Council’s recognition within the Issues Paper that public transport and the offering of alternatives to the private car are crucial to supporting the County’s sustainable transport and active travel objectives and that the priority focus for the CDP will be to reduce the negative impacts of car usage in tandem with appropriate land use policies, which promote and facilitate effective travel options.

The Assembly recommends that the Development Plan includes specific objectives to improve permeability and community connectivity within and between settlements, ensuring that walking and cycling routes connect directly to schools, workplaces and public-transport nodes. This should include requirements for permeability audits of new development areas, integration of walking and cycling infrastructure with public transport services, and the creation of connected street networks. Active-travel policies should incorporate road-safety and public-health principles consistent with the National Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030 and the National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022, ensuring that pedestrian and cycling routes are designed to high standards of safety, accessibility and comfort.

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.

In formulating development plan policy for improving sustainable connectivity within and between communities the Planning Authority is directed to Section 8.3 of the RSES which, by way of Guiding Principles and related RPOs, 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 (LTPs), in conjunction with the NTA, for selected settlements in the Region including Drogheda, Ashbourne and Navan. LTPs should be based on a clear set of objectives and the most recent demographic and travel information taking into account 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 strategic function of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor 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.

#### **4.2.5 Infrastructure & Utilities**

The Issues Paper states that the CDP must put in place a framework that promotes and provides high quality physical infrastructure to allow development to progress in a sustainable manner. It notes that 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. Information contained in Chapter 8, Connectivity, and Chapter 10, Infrastructure, will assist the Council in developing its policy framework. In particular, the RSES emphasises that infrastructure to deliver better connected services is vital to our continued growth, supporting businesses and enhancing our communities. Section 8.6 of the RSES sets out the Region's policy objectives with regard to the communications network and digital infrastructure. Chapter 10 of the RSES sets out policy guidance in the areas of water supply, energy and waste management and related Guiding Principles.

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, Meath County Council can support infrastructure provision that underpins sustainable development, enhances connectivity, supports enterprise activation, and complies with environmental and climate obligations.

As detail is developed in the preparation of the CDP, further opportunity for focused environmental assessment will be required, including Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). It is recommended that the Council take into account the need to identify risks and ensure the resilience of critical

infrastructure, as set out in RPO 7.43 of the RSES. The Planning Authority should also note the provisions of the National Adaptation Framework 2024 in this regard.

#### **4.2.6 Community Services**

The Issues Paper notes that the creation of healthy, socially inclusive communities will be a cross-cutting theme of the CDP. The Assembly welcomes this cross-cutting ambition which is in keeping with the RSES key principle of Healthy Placemaking aimed at promoting people's 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, 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.

#### **4.2.7 Rural Development**

The Issues Paper identifies Meath as a predominantly rural county in terms of land use, home to a diverse range of uses with a large rural population. Ensuring the continued vitality and viability of the rural area is identified as a challenge for the County, particularly in terms of how best to manage competing social, economic and environmental considerations.

RPOs for Rural Places are contained under Section 4.8 of the RSES and are relevant for formulating CDP 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 rural places 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.

#### **4.2.8 Cultural & Natural Heritage**

The Issues Paper notes that Meath's cultural and natural heritage is a key strategic asset and a valuable economic resource. It notes the intention of the future CDP to seek to protect, restore and enhance the natural environment and biodiversity whilst satisfying economic and social need.

RPOs 7.16 to 7.20 of the RSES deal specifically with biodiversity and natural heritage. In particular, 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 local authority development plans, and 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. Furthermore, the NPF also 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 7.21 and 7.22 of the RSES require that local authorities promote a green infrastructure and ecosystem services approach in development plan preparation. The Planning Authority is directed in this regard to the Guiding Principles for Green Infrastructure (Section 7.7 refers) and for Sustainable Urban Drainage (SuDs) (Section 10.2 refers) set out respectively in Chapter 7 - Environment & Climate and Chapter 10 – Infrastructure, which should be incorporated into the future CDP.

Through participation on 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 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. There are also significant opportunities to develop a number of flagship greenways in the region (RPOs 7.24 to 7.26 and RPO 5.7) as part of a Strategic Greenway Network.

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.

#### **4.2.9 Climate Change**

The Issues Paper states that one of the cross-cutting principles of the future CDP must be to initiate a transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. It notes that the Meath Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 will inform the policies and objectives throughout the Development Plan process with increased emphasis on sustainable development and travel patterns, energy use and the protection of green infrastructure.

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 Local 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 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, which is reviewed annually.

Regarding renewable energy, the Council is directed to Section 10.3 of the RSES and the Guiding Principles 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 Council should further note that NPO 74 of the NPF requires that each Regional Assembly must plan, through the review of their Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, for the delivery of the regional renewable electricity capacity allocations indicated for onshore wind and solar reflected in Table 9.1 of the NPF, and identify allocations for each local authority, based on the best available scientific evidence and in accordance with legislative requirements, in order to meet the overall national target. Such allocations are intended to facilitate the accelerated roll-out and delivery of renewable electricity 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 the Eastern and Midland Region 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 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, through their City and County Development Plans.

### **4.3 SEA, AA and SFRA**

The Issues Paper states that in preparing the Plan, the environmental impact of change as a result of new development must be considered at each step in an iterative process to ensure that the implementation of the Plan will not result in a negative or adverse impact on the environment.

The Assembly welcomes the preparation of the CDP in tandem with the required environmental processes, namely Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). The Assembly further recommends that the Strategic

Environmental Assessment (SEA) include a robust climate assessment, evaluating the greenhouse-gas and resilience implications of alternative spatial and transport scenarios. In this regard, the Council should utilise the National Transport Authority's (NTA) modelling capacity to inform plan evaluation and to complement the Quantification of Greenhouse Gas in Spatial Planning (QGasSP) methodology. The Council is directed to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in 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.

## 5.0 Recommendations and Observations

The Regional Assembly advises that Meath 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, including, where relevant, the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan for the Dublin Metropolitan Area (MASP) and any future MASP that may be adopted as part of the RSES 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. That the Planning Authority shall ensure, when making the County Development Plan, that transport and settlement policies are aligned with the Transport Strategy and MASP as 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.

4. 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. Meath 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 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.

6. 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 Meath Climate Action Plan 2024-2029.

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

7. 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 Meath 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 Co. Meath in a manner consistent with the RSES and any future RSES that may be adopted during the CDP review process.

8. 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. Meath 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 SEA Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 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 Co. Meath 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, as amended.
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 [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.
8. The Assembly refers the Council to the [ESPON QGasSP Targeted Analysis Project](#) and the resulting [Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Tool](#) and case study pilots, including the Ireland Case Study Pilot which focused on Co. Meath. 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.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The Regional Assembly welcome 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  
14<sup>th</sup> November 2025