



27 April 2022

Planning Department,
Leitrim County Council,
Aras an Chontae,
St. George's Terrace,
Carrick on Shannon,
Co. Leitrim,
N41 PF67

Re: Draft Leitrim County Development Plan 2023 - 2029

Dear Sir/Madam,

I refer to the above. The Department of Education acknowledges the draft Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029 and makes the following submission.

The Department notes that the draft plan has to sit within the framework of the ESRI's 50:50 scenario which aligns with the NPF's 2040 population targets and settlement pattern. The NPF Implementation Roadmap projects a population for County Leitrim of 36,000 to 37,000 people by 2031. This represents an increase of some 4,000 – 5,000 people over the 2016 population of 32,044 people. The Department notes that the draft plan considers that as of the start of 2022, the population of Co. Leitrim is estimated to be between 33,500 and 33,750 people. In consultation with the Council, the Department understands that the projected growth between 2022 and 2028 will be 3,020 people and that the 2031 population for County Leitrim will accord with the NPF high growth scenario of 37,000 people. Therefore the population of Co Leitrim is projected to increase by c. 3,500 people between now and 2031. The Department has regard to this longer-term framework as population increase is one of the key variables that drives school place requirements.

The Department notes that to supplement the land use zoning objectives and other policy objectives of the Development Plan, a local area plan for Carrick-on-Shannon is currently in use. It is noted that a Joint Local Area Plan will be prepared for the combined urban centre of Carrick-on-Shannon/Cortober (Roscommon) as required pursuant to the RSES. It is noted that the draft plan confirms that the land use strategies in this joint local area plan will be consistent with the core strategy of the draft county development plan.



Objectives in the draft plan

The Department notes Section 7.8 Community Infrastructure in Chapter 7 of the draft plan and acknowledges that objective CF OBJ 1 “*To maintain and improve the provision of community facilities in the county*” incorporates educational facilities such as schools. The Department notes section 7.8.1 Education Facilities and welcomes the statement that the Council will work with the Department of Education to identify projected population growth over the plan period in order to make sufficient provision for the planning and construction of schools and other education accommodation.

The Department notes and welcomes the education policy objectives outlined on page 141 of the draft plan. In particular, it is noted that ED POL 2 regarding the consideration of permissible uses within land use zoning objectives and ED POL 5 in respect of considering the need for buffer zones and land use designations that support the expansion of schools is supportive to the Department’s submission to the Issues Paper in August 2020. The Department also welcomes ED OBJ 1 regarding the identification and reservation of lands to facilitate the establishment, improvement and expansion of education facilities. In noting the importance of the existing school network for meeting future requirements, the Department considers that an additional objective along the following lines would be welcome:

To ensure that existing school sites are protected for educational use and that land buffers adjacent to existing schools are protected for future educational use in order to allow for expansion of these schools, if required, subject to site suitability.

By way of clarification, responsibilities relating to the education function at central government level were re-aligned in recent times. This re-alignment resulted in the schools functions (primary and secondary schools) remaining in the Department of Education. The further and higher education functions were transferred to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) which was established officially on 2 August 2020. This Department is recognised as the body responsible for policy, funding and governance of the Higher and Further Education and research sectors and for the oversight of the work of the State agencies and public institutions operating in these areas.

GIS mapping of existing school sites and zoned school sites

The Department’s policy is to intensively use the sites of existing schools so that their potential is maximized to meet educational requirements. This is in order to meet future educational requirements arising from infill and compact development in existing settlements. It is necessary to protect existing schools and the lands around them in order to be able to meet future needs. The optimum way to meet a future need may necessitate extending an existing school or developing a new school alongside an existing school to form a campus arrangement. Therefore, the Department requests that in respect of existing schools, the entire site (buildings, play area and any green areas including pitches) be zoned and mapped for educational use. This will strengthen the zoning provision on existing school sites and assist in future planning and delivery



of educational requirements. Where there is a land buffer around an existing school the Department requests that it be zoned appropriately to enable expansion of the school.

In addition, if possible, could all future education sites be zoned and mapped whereby the mapping and zoning of school sites by the Local Authority would enable the Department to pick up the information on our own GIS system and aid us both in the school planning function.

Potential educational requirements arising from the draft plan

In considering the implications of the Draft Plan for school accommodation requirements, the Department is cognisant of potentially differing scenarios where variances in factors such as household sizes, demographic profiles and housing delivery rates could significantly alter the future school accommodation requirements. There are 48 schools in Co Leitrim (7 post-primary and 41 primary). The Department also took into account planned school capacity increases for existing schools in considering the plan, as well as underlying demographic trends at both primary and post-primary levels which will serve to mitigate additional school place demand arising from the population increases that are envisaged in the Draft Plan. Based on all factors, a view has been formed concerning projected future requirements and how they can best be met at each settlement and commentary is provided in this regard. In its assessment of population trends, the Department uses a number of parameters to determine future needs. Requirements at primary level are currently assessed on 11.5% of population and 25 students per classroom. Post-primary requirements are assessed at 7.5% of population numbers.

The draft plan outlines the current population distribution for Co. Leitrim. It is notable that 62% of the population is based in rural villages and other rural dwellings (21,369 people out of the estimated 2022 county population of 33,544 people). The post-primary schools which are based in the towns have to serve the requirements of the surrounding rural population and this has been included in our consideration. Apart from the rural population, the balance of some 12,175 people is distributed as follows:

- 1 key town of Carrick-on-Shannon – c 3,600 people
- 2 sub-regional growth centres with a combined population of c. 2,500 people. The towns are Ballinamore and Manorhamilton.
- 4 Tier 2.a towns with a combined population of c. 3,765. The towns are Dromahair, Drumshambo, Mohill and Kinlough
- 6 Tier 3 Key villages with a combined population of c. 2,336 people

The Department notes that the projected population increase for the period from 2023 to 2031 is 3,456 people distributed (approx.) as follows:

- 30 % of the growth (1,035 people) to take place in Carrick-on-Shannon
- 16% of the growth (556 people) to take place in Ballinamore & Manorhamilton
- 16% of the growth (548 people) to take place in the 4 Tier 2A towns



- 14% of the growth (472 people) to take place in the 6 Tier 3 Key villages
- Remaining 24% of the growth to take place in rural areas

In respect of the settlements identified in the Core Strategy Table 2.2, this Department has the following observations:

Key Town

Carrick-on-Shannon

Carrick-on-Shannon is the largest town in Co. Leitrim and its administrative capital.

The draft plan indicates a potential population increase of 1,035 people to a projected population of 4,617 people by 2031. This increase equates to 30% of the overall projected population increase for County Leitrim.

The town is served by two mainstream primary schools and one post-primary school.

At primary level, it is anticipated that the level of additional potential requirements arising from the projected population increase can be met at the existing facilities. It is noted that both Leitrim and Roscommon County Council intend to prepare a joint Local Area Plan for Carrick-on-Shannon and Cortober (Roscommon). The Department will engage with the development of this plan.

At post-primary level, it is anticipated that the level of additional potential requirements arising from the projected population increase can be met at the existing facilities.

Sub-Regional Growth Centres

Ballinamore

The draft plan indicates a potential population increase of 278 people to a projected population of 1,235 people by 2031. This increase equates to 8% of the overall projected population increase for County Leitrim.

The town is served by one mainstream primary school and one post-primary school.

At primary level, it is anticipated that the level of additional potential requirements arising from the projected population increase can be met at the existing facilities.

At post-primary level, it is anticipated that the level of additional potential requirements arising from the projected population increase can be met at the existing facilities.

The Department welcomes OBJ BNE 19 which provides for the expansion and development of educational, social, community and recreational facilities in Ballinamore to provide for the needs of the resident community and that of the wider rural hinterland.



Manorhamilton

The draft plan indicates a potential population increase of 278 people to a projected population of 1,813 people by 2031. This increase equates to 8% of the overall projected population increase for County Leitrim.

The town is served by three mainstream primary schools and one post-primary school.

At primary level, it is anticipated that the level of additional potential requirements arising from the projected population increase can be met at the existing facilities.

At post-primary level, it is anticipated that the level of additional potential requirements arising from the projected population increase can be met at the existing facilities.

The Department welcomes OBJ MHN 21 which provides for the expansion and development of educational, social, community and recreational facilities in Manorhamilton to provide for the needs of the resident community and that of the wider rural hinterland.

The Department also notes OBJ MHN 26 which seeks to facilitate the Department of Education in the development of a new Gaelscoil on the Creamery Road.

Other settlements

No other projected educational requirements were identified at any of the other settlements (Tier 2a towns or Tier 3 & 4 villages). Objectives which provides for the expansion and development of educational, social, community and recreational facilities in Dromahair(OBJ DMR 19), Drumshambo (OBJ DSO 14), Kinlough (OBJ KLN 14) and Mohill (OBJ MHL 16) are noted and welcomed.

Conclusion

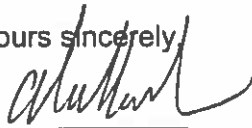
The planned population increase to 2031 of 3,456 people for Co Leitrim could generate school place requirements which, for the most part, can be met by the existing school facilities. This underlines the importance of the existing school network in meeting future projected needs across all settlements in Co Leitrim. This is particularly critical in towns where dispersed infill and possibly brownfield development could take place and create a denser, populous neighbourhood. For this reason, all existing school sites and a land buffer around them (wherever possible) should be zoned and protected to meet the future educational needs of the county. The Department requests that Leitrim County Council would actively facilitate the principle of permitting schools, both permanent and temporary, in as many zoning categories as possible.

No requirement has been identified for a special school in this submission as it focused on demographic need. However, if a specific need in regard to a special school arises the Department will get in touch with the Council.



School accommodation requirements across the county will continue to be kept under review. In that regard, the Department welcomes an ongoing engagement with Leitrim County Council and will continue to work closely with the Council in meeting the challenges associated with the provision of new schools and the redevelopment /extension of existing schools. The Department acknowledges the crucial importance of the ongoing work of the Council in ensuring sufficient and appropriate land is zoned for educational needs. The Department wishes to thank the Council for the consideration given to the Department's submission to the Issues Paper in August 2020.

If you have any queries in respect of the above, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,


Alan Hanlon
Statutory Plans
Forward Planning Section