

Planning Department,
Leitrim County Council,
Aras n Chontae,
Carrick-on-Shannon
Co Leitrim

27th April 2022

Re: Submission to Draft Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029

Dear Sirs,

I read with interest the Draft County Development Plan in particular how the plan proposes to address universal design in the built environment. As a Chartered Architectural Engineer I always had an interest in universal design of the built environment to ensure it is accessible to everyone regardless of their ability. However after acquiring an impairment which affects my mobility I discovered that the built environment is not adequately accessible to everyone and things that I took for granted previously now became a real struggle. Will I find a truly accessible disabled parking space, will there be a suitably graded ramp to get onto and off the footpath, is there suitable access to the building, the list goes on.

After becoming a member of the Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) Housing Network I learned about the social model of disability and how 'disability' is not the impairment but 'disability' is people who have impairments experiencing a disadvantage caused by environmental or social barriers. Leitrim County Council has an opportunity through this new County Development Plan to be a leader in removing the aforementioned barriers in the built environment by implementing the principles of universal design across all areas such as recreational, tourism and sporting infrastructure, transport, public realm, housing, public buildings and through its development management standards. By showing such leadership and examples of good universal design this will educate other public bodies and the private sector in how universal design will become the norm rather the exception.

To facilitate this transition to a universal design approach there needs to be a shared goal across all departments within Leitrim County Council to make this work and this is best served through a dedicated 'Universal Design Working Group' which not only having relevant representation from Leitrim County Council would also include representation from those with 'lived experience' of the daily obstacles of accessibility faced by people with disabilities, older people and young families.

As a starting point the accessibility of existing infrastructure throughout the county needs to be audited. I welcome the 'Age Friendly' initiatives were it is hoped that walkability audits will take place for Manorhamilton and Ballinamore during this plan period. However such initiatives need to be broadened to include people with disabilities and young families and rather than hope such audits be carried out there needs to be a definite time frame in the plan and such audits also extended to other towns and villages. There is a Crowd4Access project which is mapping footpaths for accessibility on a pilot basis in certain cities in Ireland through the public's help, there may be an opportunity to use this mapping technology as part of these audits.

With regard existing private housing that require adaptations to facilitate independent living the existing grant schemes are not fit for purpose and hopefully Leitrim County Council can be to the fore in seeking a review of the current schemes.

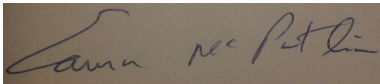
All new and upgraded infrastructure and services should to be constructed and located using the principles of universal design. Accessibility is more than just the building, the location needs to have accessible links to transport and services and be part of the community. There is no use having an accessible bus if the footpath from your house to the bus stop is not accessible! It is very important that all new housing is 'life time housing' to minimize the need for costly adaptation works as the current Building Regulations do not legislate for this, but hopefully a review will be forthcoming shortly to enhance 'access for all' in these regulations. Accessible housing should not be deemed a 'luxury'.

There are a number of new Government policy developments and standards relevant to universal design which on my my review I did not see referenced in the draft plan, these are:

- The ratification by Ireland in 2018 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
- The National Housing Strategy for Disable People 2022 – 2027
- The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2017-2022
- The 2020 DMURS Interim Advice Note – Covid-19 Pandemic Response
- I.S. EN 17210:2021 Accessibility and usability of the built environment

I look forward to Leitrim County Council being committed to ensuring people of all abilities should have access to all places and buildings so that they can be enjoyed by everyone.

Yours faithfully,

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in dark ink. The signature appears to read "Eamon McPartlin".

Eamon McPartlin, BEng CEng MIEI