

OBSERVATIONS OF THE HIGH LEVEL ADVISORY GROUP LEITRIM [HILAG] ON THE DRAFT LEITRIM COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2023-2029

1. The members of the Group appreciated the opportunity to have a briefing on the plan and presentation by the Senior Planner , Bernard Greene and to discuss it in a video meeting with him , Deputy CEO Joseph Gilhooley and Planning assistant Liam Flynn. We appreciate that the Leitrim Development Plan is part of a broader policy framework which includes Project Ireland 2040 , its National Planning Framework and National Development Plan and a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region which sets specific population and other parameters .

2. While accepting all these frameworks , our sense is that Leitrim county , given its unique characteristics is trying to fit into a national planning “ straitjacket “ which - applies to all counties and does not take adequate account of its distinguishing characteristics .

These include :

- the Leitrim Co Council is challenged with producing a Development Plan meeting all the criteria , parameters , consistency with multiple national and regional policies as the bigger counties - but with a population of 32,000 , the smallest population of any county in Ireland .
- the largest urban area - Carrick on Shannon - has a modest population of 4,000 , some 640 of which is in County Roscommon ;
- The key town - Carrick on Shannon - is on the perimeter of the County and is 77km (drive of one hour ten minutes) from Tullaghan at the northern end of the county ;
- The county , while small in population , is elongated geographically stretching 90km from Tullaghan on its Atlantic coast to Dromod in the southern end ;
- A very definite characteristic is that the county is physically divided by Lough Allen so that North Leitrim from Drumkeeran north to Manorhamilton to Kinlough and Tullaghan and including Dromahaire and Kiltyclogher form a distinctive area with many existing and potential networks -
- Very significantly , we believe Sligo town with a population of 22,000 and a designated regional growth centre , should have greater recognition in the Plan as having a key positive influence on the progress of Leitrim and specifically , north Leitrim
- We also suggest that Enniskillen - Manorhamilton - Sligo axis be noted as having the potential for greater economic interaction in future as the N16 road is improved and as the greenway from Sligo to Enniskillen progresses . The success of W8 and the progress of the Future Cast Innovation project , together with the availability of office type accommodation at the Manor Hub is proof that there is the drive and willingness at local level to support Manorhamilton becoming a much stronger economic driver for its hinterland.

All the above distinguishing features have a spillover effect on our various observations on different aspects of the draft Development plan .

3. We propose that under Section 2.2 Vision and Strategic Aims , where there are currently 13 aims , the following objective be incorporated .

“ To pursue accelerated growth in North Leitrim , capitalising on the centrality of Manorhamilton - with its industrial and service base, its strategic location between Sligo -a designated growth centre - and Enniskillen and the population expansion in Kinlough and Dromahair “

4. In the treatment of Kinlough and Dromahair in Section 2.4 , we suggest a different and

positive interpretation be given to the population growth in Kinlough and Dromahair and which would also align with the additional positive strategic aim we propose above for North Leitrim centred on Manorhamilton .

We suggest modifying the sentence in third para Page 20 which is currently :

“ It is accepted that there is a difference between in the range of services and functions supported in Drumshanbo and Mohill in comparison to both Kinlough and Dromahair , both of which have become somewhat dormitory in nature owing to the influence of Bundoran and Sligo Town respectively . This is a significant challenge to overcome “ .

Our alternative is as follows .

“ Kinlough (1,032) and Dromahair (808) have had increased populations in recent years and have been classified as Tier 2 B Support Towns in the Leitrim Settlement Hierarchy . The population growth is based substantially on persons with jobs in the nearby regional centre of Sligo (and additionally Donegal based jobs) in the case of Kinlough choosing to live in these adjacent Leitrim villages .

The additional households have added to the local school population and brought expertise and energy to local community and recreation activities .

5. Capitalising on the new Atlantic Technological University (ATU)

The new University with a major campus in Sligo increases the education and research capabilities available to Leitrim and enhances the attractions of the north west region , including Leitrim , as a location for investment by virtue of the new University .

We propose that a specific development objective for Leitrim should be the location of an ATU campus with the county of Leitrim .

6 Housing is obviously a big issue in the county. There appears to be a shortage of houses and a big interest in people relocating to the county. The allocation of just 1200 units over the period of the plan looks very small if the county is to grow and achieve the positive vision in the plan. We recognise the difficulties in getting builders to construct multiple houses in the current environment and there isn't an easy solution to this issue in the short term. However we are concerned that rezoning serviced land in towns will not help the situation.

There is an emphasis in the plan on compact development. We believe Government intervention with incentives will be necessary to make this a reality.

7 The situation regarding rural housing is serious and the document sets out the implications of rural decline. The problems with planning in the countryside, particularly due to soil conditions, are well documented. We welcome the plan to develop serviced sites in Graigs. There is an opportunity for the Council to exercise its development role in ensuring that this happens without delay.

8 Finally on housing we believe that some of the housing issues in Leitrim could be resolved if there was a national programme to get vacant houses, both in towns and villages and the countryside back into use.

Michael Feeney, Padraic White and Gabriel Darcy on behalf of the group