



Northern & Western Regional Assembly
The Square
Ballaghaderreen
Co. Roscommon
11th August 2020

Planning Department
Leitrim County Council
Áras an Chontae
St. Georges Terrace
Carrick-on-Shannon
Co. Leitrim
N41 PF67

Re: Review of the existing Leitrim County Development Plan 2015-2021 and preparation of a new County Development Plan for the period 2022-2028.

Dear Mr Greene,

I refer to your notification dated 17th June 2020 inviting submissions in respect of the above and the Strategic Issues Paper prepared to stimulate debate and participation in the process.

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly wish to commend Leitrim County Council on the publication of the Issues Papers. The forthcoming County Development Plan will shape the medium-term future of the county and it is also important to areas that lie beyond the county. The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, requires that the Planning Authority ensure, when making or varying the County Development Plan, that it is consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the area of the plan, thus ensuring full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy.

This submission is made in accordance with Section 27A of the Planning and Development Acts. The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, requires that the Planning Authority ensure, when making or varying the County Development Plan, that it is consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the area of the plan, thus enabling full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy. This submission was considered by the Assembly at its meeting held on 24th July 2020.

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It is the role of the Regional Assemblies to provide leadership and to identify regional development objectives and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning and economic policy. This is primarily achieved through the preparation and implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) that are bespoke to the region and which implement and amplify the National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework (NPF). The Northern and Western Regional Assembly adopted the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2020 – 2032 (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region in January 2020. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Leitrim County Council for their collaborative input to this strategy. The Strategy is available on our website www.nwra.ie/rses

Our RSES is crafted on the principle that it wants to work collaboratively to deliver effective regional development for all our communities, regardless of administrative boundaries. This means that we need to understand their catchments and their potential and to enable the spatial development opportunities specific to each of the sub-regions (Rf Fig 2 of the RSES) – we need to connect their strengths and celebrate their unique selling points.

The RSES aims to be responsive to trends (e.g. urbanisation, digitisation and globalisation) whilst also interpreting risk (e.g. climate, global economic challenges, future of work and population health outbreaks like Covid-19) by connecting our plans to the Sustainable Development Goals, the EU Growth Strategy (including the EU Green Deal) and the National Strategic Outcomes (NPF).



At its core the RSES recognises the weak urban infrastructure in our region and that this region has not prospered economically compared to the other two regions of Ireland, as evidenced by reclassification of the region by the European Commission from a ‘More Developed Region’ to a ‘Transition Region’ for the Post 2020 (2021-2027) funding period – see also a recent publication ‘A Region in Transition: The Way Forward’ published by the NWRA.

Our RSES is responding by adopting a clear strategy that delivers key business elements known to inform their location of choice, namely:

1. Development of compact urban centres with critical mass in population; encouraging the revitalisation of urban areas and re-inhabitation of urban cores.

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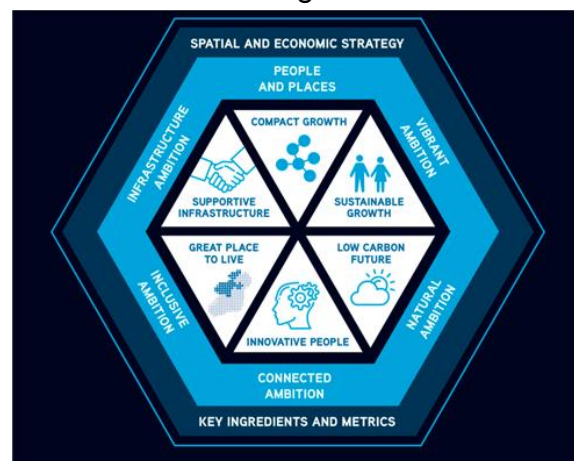




2. Provision of connectivity and access (including national and international), enabled by physical and technology infrastructures with capacity resilience and quality especially post-Brexit.
3. Establishment of competitive, smart and integrated public transport networks within and between cities and urban areas.
4. Nurturing of world-class infrastructure and competitive services with capacity, resilience and quality.
5. Growing our third level infrastructures, access to skills and research, development and innovation.
6. Availability of property solutions – including ‘ready-to-go’ commercial properties, ‘landing spaces’, co-working spaces and flexible property solutions and affordable housing.
7. Co-location or dynamic clustering, enabling connectivity and linkages within and between suppliers and purchasers, between enterprises and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).
8. Development of quality of life factors and sense of Place, including harnessing the social, and cultural dimensions of the living experience of communities, including the unique social, linguistic and cultural dimensions of our Gaeltacht communities.

Growth Framework: The strategy has introduced the concept of a Growth Framework that links strategic and operational challenges with prioritised capital interventions. The Framework will be the basis for determining metrics, linking with National Strategic Outcomes and assessing the region’s actual contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Growth framework incorporates ‘Five Growth Ambitions’ that define each priority and how they are mutually complementary. Our Vision is for a region that is smarter, greener, more specialised and connected, with a stronger and more compact urban network, focusing on ‘People’ and ‘Places’. It brings a new “place-based” approach that involves tapping into the economic potential that remains unused, so that all parts of regions, be they cities, towns or their rural hinterlands, can contribute to national development. From an enterprise development perspective, investment in the creation of ‘place’ is key to delivering the key elements that inform business location choices.



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People and Places: The settlement strategy is focused on a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) for Galway and tailored Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plans for Sligo, Athlone and Letterkenny. A network of 'Key Towns' that perform a support role in providing regionally strategic employment development of significant scale have also been identified. The intention is that these strategic places will be supported as required by detailed action plans, investment proposals and delivery partnerships (e.g. The Exchequer (PI2040), EU Investment Programmes, Financial Instruments, Community and Local Authority investment, Private Investment).

The Key Towns are centres, which provide functions, and services to entire sub regions and Carrick-on-Shannon is one such Key Town. The RSES provides a target that, within the lifetime of the RSES, Carrick-on-Shannon will grow its population by at least 30% and simultaneously grow its number of jobs and increase service provision across several areas.

Carrick-on-Shannon already boasts a high ratio of jobs to resident workers (1.686, NPF – Ireland 2040), and this is something which can be further reinforced within the lifetime of the new plan, given its position as the employment hub within the South Leitrim / East Roscommon hinterland.

The key future priorities for Carrick-on-Shannon are outlined within the RSES (Sec 3.8) and it includes the need for a Joint LAP with Roscommon County Council.

It is acknowledged that the overall number of jobs within County Leitrim fell between Census Period's 2011 – 2016, and Table 1 within the Strategic Issues Papers illustrate this trend. The growth of jobs within the County may be assisted post Covid-19, with increasing ratios of workers opting to work remotely, work from home, or work from local hubs, where they are available. The Economic Strategy for Leitrim, as referenced within 5.1 of the Issues Papers and the targets therein may benefit from a review to factor in any potential Covi-19 impacts and the changes in work patterns arising.

The Census in 2016 highlighted an outflow daily of approximately 44% of Leitrim's workers to other Counties. This is something which the County Development Plan, and LECP should strive to reduce, and indeed, the current trends and shift towards remote working may assist in reducing this figure.

In a further measure to foster the core of our Towns and Villages, the RSES contains the ambition (RPO 3.7) to prioritise a programme for serviced sites to be provided by Local Authorities in selected settlements. This measure has received further validation insofar as it has now been incorporated into the Programme for Government recently agreed, and the Draft Plan for County Leitrim should include specific details on how this measure is to be achieved in County Leitrim.

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The development plan is an opportunity to also reflect the rural nature of settlement patterns across the county and how it proposes to balance the needs of all places, including the rural towns, villages and rural areas. Recent figures (through the Geo-Directory) highlight that County Leitrim has a relatively high level of housing vacancy (running at 11%). The RSES recognises the extent of vacant properties in rural areas and has attempted to commence a meaningful target in reducing vacancy, and this is set out via RPO 3.3, which sets a target of 20% delivery on brownfield sites in Rural areas.

The plan should reflect on the issues of providing for vibrancy and vitality of rural areas, how to realise their potential and to re-imagine these areas as referenced in section 3.5 of the RSES. The plan should consider measures that support the role of smaller and medium sized towns (See RPO3.13) and to support the regeneration of sites within towns, villages and rural areas – thus realising RPOs 3.3, 3.8 and 3.9.

The Growth Ambitions of the RSES will also offer opportunities to inform the development plan, both urban and rural.

Growth Ambition 1 - Vibrant Region: The NWRA believes that strong economic growth, which creates permanent, sustainable jobs, is best achieved by building a competitive and productive economy. Focusing policies on scale, investing in connectivity and our people whilst aggressively pursuing a low carbon approach to enhance our differentiation. Under this Growth Ambition, the RSES gives recognition to the importance of place-based networks such as the Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy Project. The RSES reinforces the provision of a sustainable framework for tourism development.

The RSES includes reference (RPO 5.3) to the ambition to consider the zone of North Sligo / North Leitrim (Belbulbin and its hinterland) as a potential National Park / National Recreation area. Collaboration to realising this goal will be crucial, and it would be important that the Draft Leitrim County Development Plan reflects this, within the Planning Policy Framework. The creation of such a Zone / amenity area should share our ethos that adverse impacts upon local communities, archaeology, built heritage, landscapes and habitats are minimised while at the same time ensuring social and economic benefits accruing to local economies are maximised.

The RSES encourages policies that support the development of local entrepreneurial ecosystems through local clustering and smart specialisation (S3). The priorities for action and recommendations contained in the RSES are based on the very significant potential for the region to generate further value from its Research and Innovation investments, within national policy and the EU's strengthening S3 agenda.

There is significant capacity to achieve this and to position R&I at the forefront of

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enabling policies to achieve sustainable growth in population. We would encourage Leitrim County Council to further consider policies aligned with S3 that would further harness the capacity of local innovation centres.

Growth Ambition 2 - Natural Region: It has been identified that more strategic actions are required to prepare the region for what is to come. These actions need to be cognisant of our natural resources, landscape and heritage (natural, social and cultural) and this ambition provides the necessary framework for the Northern and Western Region but are equally transferrable to Leitrim and represent a shared opportunity (See Chapter 5 of RSES).

The NWRA is a partner in the OUR WAY INTERREG project that aims to contribute to conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage in using Greenways as sustainable and smart transportation links in rural areas. It is using this as a platform to transfer learnings at Regional and National level so as to advance the expansion of an integrated network of Greenways across the region's catchments, including those envisaged to be shared by Leitrim, and cross border with Fermanagh. This will further enable the appropriate development of local businesses and start-ups in the vicinity of greenways, which is an objective of this Growth Ambition. The SLNCR Greenway is referenced as a key route within the Region, within Sec. 5.8.

Within the Issues Papers, Sec. 6.2 outlines the extent of forestry expansion within the County, and this matter is acknowledged within the RSES. RPO 5.24 provides for the establishment of a Regional Fora to set out a framework for sustainable forestry, and this should be supported within the plan.

Leitrim's Food Strategy confirms that food is a driver of employment and health. It reflects on how it has transformed itself as a food processing and food tourism destination. The RSES confirms that the agri-food sector is vital to the region and that the stimulation of gastronomy as part of our cultural heritage is something that offers local opportunities and is to be encouraged. The development plan provides an opportunity to reflect how to best support this sector through delivery of the regional development objectives RPOs 4.23-4.26. In addition, the opportunity to support the bioeconomy should be articulated through the development plan.

Growth Ambition 3 – Connected Region: Accessibility and mobility within the region have a direct effect on the region's economic competitiveness. It also has an effect on the attractiveness of the region as a favourable living and visiting environment. The RSES sets out that the provision of prudently managed transport and digital infrastructure is key to delivering our vision. The strategy outlines how we plan to better integrate land-use and transport planning and it also focuses upon how the digital economy can enable our region, growing exports, innovation, investment and productivity – attained through building new sound partnerships and facilitating mutual connections and collaboration.

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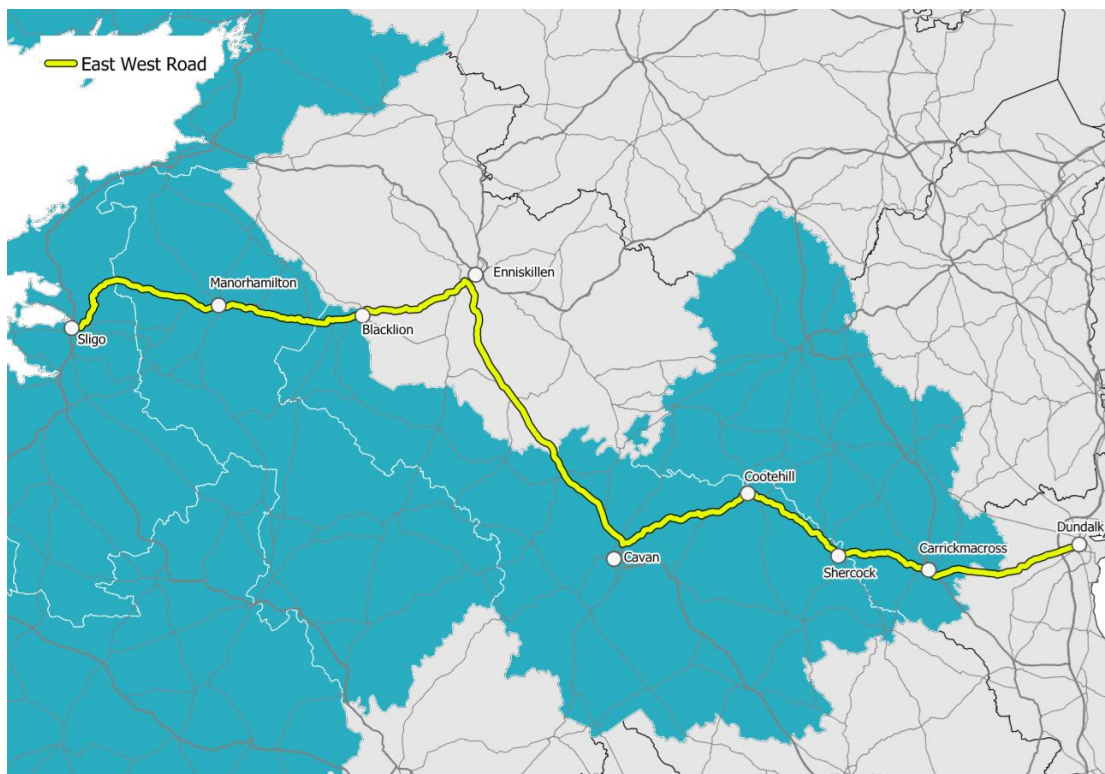
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The Draft County Development Plan may benefit from the incorporation Local Transport Plans for the county's larger settlements, including Carrick-on-Shannon - this would enable an examination of potential growth of walking, cycling, and an increased focus on modal shift. This shift will attract additional momentum based on the recently agreed Programme for Government, as well as the increase in home working during, and post Covid-19, where the opportunities for workers to remain in Carrick-on-Shannon during the working day may give rise to added demand for walking and cycling networks.

In terms of Road and Rail investment projects, these are identified in section 6.3 of the RSES and should be reflected within the plan. The by-passing of Carrick-on-Shannon - Dromod (N4) is within the key Regional (National) projects within the National Development Plan. The route is to progress to pre-appraisal, and early planning in the short term. Additionally, The East – West Route (Dundalk / Sligo), and the need to incrementally upgrade same is recognised within the RSES (RPO 6.8 & 6.10). This route impacts upon North Leitrim and is part of ongoing improvement works from Enniskillen to Sligo, via Manorhamilton.



RSES: Fig 57. 6.3. East – West Road. (Sligo / Dundalk).

In addition, to achieve our Vision for the region the RSES recognises the need to strengthen our digital network and enable new technologies to work by ensuring that policies and systems are in place that can help people transition to a world much more



digitally connected. RPOs 6.36 - 6.60 are tailored to promote smart places. The reference to Smart initiatives within the Issues Papers is welcome and they present the potential to influence other policy and programme instruments, including the County Leitrim LECP when reviewed.

Growth Ambition 4 Quality of Life – Inclusive Region: One of the strongest foundations and emerging propositions this region has to build on is its ‘liveability’. The region aspires to be one of the most liveable places in Europe with a commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth. Our objectives encourage industries that provide jobs that will raise per capita incomes and improve living standards for all. This requires a specific focus upon the enablement of access to education, health, employment, recreation and opportunity for all. The coordination and delivery of infrastructure, housing and employment land in the right places at the right time is a key outcome, with homes that are affordable.

The supply and location of jobs and homes must be aligned. This includes providing homes that are affordable and accessible to house the labour force, and the provision of land and premises that meet the needs of current and future businesses, including for smart design and orientation that meet current and future energy efficiency demands. The Draft Leitrim County Development Plan should identify a roadmap for this, and zone lands in a range of locations, whilst simultaneously striving to achieve the targets of compact growth as outlined within Sec. 3 of the RSES. This is something that may benefit from detailed consideration through the making of the Draft Plan.

Growth Ambition 5 – Enabling our Region: The provision and maintenance of economic infrastructure, such as energy, water, and wastewater, are key to delivering compact growth and a connected, vibrant, inclusive, resilient and smart region.

It is hoped that the above observations are of assistance in shaping the new Leitrim Draft County Development Plan in a manner that shall be of benefit to our communities. The Assembly look forward to further engagement with Leitrim County Council as the preparation of the Draft plan is progressed.

If you have any queries in respect of the above observations, then do not hesitate to revert.

Is mise le meas,

David Minton,

Director

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