

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL HELD REMOTELY VIA MS TEAM, ON WEDNESDAY, 7TH APRIL, 2021 AT 2.30PM.

PRESENT: Councillor Laurence Fallon, Cathaoirleach **PRESIDED**

MEMBERS: Cllr T. Crosby, Cllr D. Kilduff, Cllr M. McDermott, Cllr A. Waldron, Cllr V. Byrne, Cllr L. Callaghan, Cllr I. Connaughton, Cllr J. Cummins, Cllr N. Dineen, Cllr P. Fitzmaurice, Cllr J. Keogh, Cllr O. Leyden, Cllr M. Mulligan, Cllr J. Murphy, Cllr J. Naughten, Cllr K. Shanagher and Cllr T. Ward.

OFFICIALS: Eugene Cummins, Chief Executive
Shane Tiernan, Director of Services
Majella Hunt, Director of Services
Martin Lydon, Director of Services
Pat Murtagh, A/Director of Services
Fiona Ni Chuinn, Senior Executive Officer
Patricia Bohan, Meetings Administrator
Pio Byrnes
Mary Grier, Senior Planner

Apologies: .

30.21 TO CONSIDER DRAFT COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027

The Cathaoirleach welcomes everyone to this Special meeting to discuss the Draft Development Plan 2021-2027 and invited the Chief Executive to speak.

The Chief Executive welcomed all of the Elected Members to the Special meeting to discuss the Draft County Development Plan – an important plan that will shape the county for the next 7 years and the councillors have a huge role in bringing this document to finality.

The Draft plan is extremely readable but complex regarding some policies and in particular S28 guidelines regarding climate change, density issues and rural housing.

This plan has embraced new initiatives in its preparation – the issues paper, a dedicated website, new village plans, new zoning that creates flexibility. The RSES has set parameters that Local Authorities must adhere to but members should be aware that every detail cannot be included. It is expected that the Planning Regulator will engage closely with the plan. There will be good debates on its content but it is important for the people of the county to engage during the 10-week consultation process.

Mr. Martin Lydon, Director of Services welcomed Mr. David L’Estrange from CAAS who advised on the plan and Mary Grier, and Pio Byrnes from the Planning Department.

Mr. Pio Byrnes outlined the Development Plan process, the content of the Draft plan and the headline issues:

- Stage 1 of the Plan involved the Pre-Draft Stage including the public consultation for the issues paper, the Chief Executives report on the consultation, the member’s direction and the preparation of the Draft Plan

- The Draft County Development Plan is now at Stage 2 of the process and has been prepared in line with the principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial Economic Strategies, and in accordance with S. 28 Ministerial Guidelines
- The Draft Plan consists of:
 - Volume 1 - consists of the written statement which sets out the local level strategic direction for the development of County Roscommon. The written statement sets out the Core Strategy, and details a series of mandatory and discretionary objectives across a wide range of policy areas.
 - Volume II contains Settlements Plans for the towns of Ballaghaderreen, Castlerea, Elphin and Strokestown as well as 28 Village Plans for smaller rural settlements. It also includes Area Plans for the Hodson Bay / Barrymore area in the south of the county, and for the Lough Key Area in the north.
 - Five Associated Documents – Housing Strategy and Housing Need Assessment Demand, Landscape Character Assessment, Record of Protected Structures, Renewable Energy Strategy and Retail Strategy
 - Environmental Reports – SEA Environmental Report and Non-Technical Summary, Natura Impact Report and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.
- The Headline issues:
 - **Core Strategy:** The *Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework* outlines a population increase for the county of between 6,000 and 7,000 people for the plan period. Housing demand projections in the *Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning Guidelines* allows for a total of 2,353 houses - a population increase of 6,387 people in the plan period.
- The new approach to the plan is a more strategic and innovative land use strategy and a transition from conventional land use zoning. The overall aim is to facilitate greater flexibility to facilitate appropriate development and to allow a greater mix of complementary uses in appropriate locations while Development proposals will continue to be assessed having regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
- There are now seven zones associated with the towns:

Town Core: To consolidate the town centre as a resilient and vibrant economic and social urban centre; develop a high quality built environment; n appropriate mix of residential, commercial, service, tourism, enterprise, public and community uses.

Outer Core: Provide a range of uses, which are easily accessible and compliment rather than detract from the vitality of the town core; small scale additional residential development, primarily on infill sites.

New Residential: Identified in line with the sequential approach; will accommodate residential development of a scale which cannot be accommodated in the Town Core Zone; multi-unit residential development will be the primary form of development facilitated in this land use zone.

Strategic Industrial/Enterprise Areas: Opportunities to enhance the overall economic and employment infrastructure of the area; Lands suitable for investment at both macro and micro level in industry and enterprise.

Green Belt: Protect the setting, character and environmental quality of these areas; includes lands where landowners confirmed that said lands were and would continue to be used for agricultural purposes when being assessed for the Vacant Site levy.

Unzoned Lands: Located towards the outer environs of the settlements; Given their peripheral location it is not appropriate to assign a land use within which development would be actively promoted; development proposals will be considered on their individual planning merits, having regard to the

location and the context of the surrounding environment.

- Village Plans will facilitate new economic, social and residential development which is appropriate to their scale and surroundings and provide an attractive alternative to one-off housing for those seeking to live and integrate into a rural community.

Rural Housing

- The NPF and RSES have designated two rural area types: Areas Under Urban Influence and All other rural Areas. Areas under Urban Influence are defined as areas where 15% of the workforce is employed in Metropolitan Areas, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns. Commuter figures from the CSO have been used to identify these areas.

Rural Housing policy:

- Facilitate single houses in rural areas subject to appropriate siting and design criteria, including demonstration of adherence to the principles set out in the County Roscommon Rural Design Guidelines. In addition, in the case of proposals for single houses in defined Areas under Urban Influence, applicants will be required to demonstrate a social or economic link (as per Table 3.2) to the rural area in which they proposed to build.
- Promote cluster type layouts appropriate to the rural area, where more than one house is proposed on a landholding. Discourage proposals for single dwellings which give rise to or exacerbate patterns of ribbon development in the rural area.

Mary Grier, Senior Planner detailed the timelines with regard to the completion of the plan:

- If adopted today, the Draft Plan will be presented for a 10-week public consultation period commencing no later than 21st April.
- The Chief Executives Report on submissions received on Draft RCDP will issue to Members “not later than 22 weeks after giving notice” of the Draft RCDP (i.e. by 22nd September at the latest);
- Members formal consideration and making or amending of the Draft RCDP : “Not later than 12 weeks after the submission” of the CE’s Report (i.e. by mid-December at the latest).
- In the event of no amendments, the adopted Plan would come into effect 6 weeks later (i.e. by early February 2022), unless subject to Ministerial Direction.

In the event of Material Alterations to the Draft Plan:

- Material Alterations to the Draft Plan to be prepared within 3 weeks of Members decision (i.e. either pre-Christmas or early January, dependent on date of Members decision);
- Public consultation on Material Alterations for “not less than 4 weeks” i.e. end January 2022;
- Preparation of the CE’s Report on submissions received on the Material Alterations – Report to be with Members “not later than 8 weeks after giving notice” i.e. end February 2022;
- Members formal consideration of the CE’s Report and decision to make the Plan “not later than 6 weeks after the submission” of the report i.e. by mid-April 2022
- The adopted Plan comes into effect 6 weeks later (i.e. by end May 2022), unless subject to Ministerial Direction
- Several stages of the process allow for shorter time periods (e.g. preparation of CE’s Report, Members periods of consideration of Reports), and where practical and appropriate, shorter periods will be applied. The application of shorter time periods could enable the adoption and coming into effect of the new Plan prior to the end of Q1 2022.

Members thanked the Chief Executive and planning staff on an excellent proposal and discussed the Draft Plan as follows:

- Agriculture is very important to Roscommon and as a county it produces a lot of food with over 12,000 people directly or indirectly affected. The plan does not reflect this enough and there should be more emphasis on agriculture.
- There have been a significant number of village plans completed and now there needs to be an assessment of what land is actually available for development.
- Protected Structures and
- In relation to inclusion of biodiversity, traditional farming practices should be preferred to accelerated farming such as dairy which encourages the removal of hedgerows.
- Community engagement in relation to Just Transition should be facilitated.
- In relation to the environment and climate issues there is an overemphasis on wind energy.
- A circular economy is also to be encouraged
- There is a need to include a Play Strategy and Irish Language strategy
- Some houses should be removed to get access to backlands.
- There are very few houses to rent or buy in the county – how can this situation be improved?
- 15-minute access to towns – encouraging people to walk or cycle to work is a welcome aspiration.
- It is most important to ensure the public are aware of the plan and encouraged to engage.
- People want to move to Roscommon, to live and work and enjoy the amenities and this plan should help in facilitating this.
- Welcome new policy on zoning lands in towns and villages as it is less complicated
- There should be very strong emphasis on climate change throughout the plan
- Difficult to see the projected increase of 6,000 in population over the life of the plan.
- Propose that development charges for infrastructure and community facilities that are collected in the local area are spent there and this should be included in the Plan
- Concern that in an area like Monksland, high density housing of 50 per Ha is high. What is the legal status of the proposed Joint Area Plan for Athlone with Westmeath?
- Can the Director provide clarity on infill sites?
- Can the Director expand on the proposal for clustered housing developments as outlined in the plan and the status of building individual houses?
- Welcome the inclusion of the N61 for National primary road status
- The plan is broad ranging and does not focus on particular areas
- Some towns still have a number of derelict houses and it would be preferable to have these completed first before concentrating on new houses.
- The Rural Development Plan announced last week to revitalised rural areas will see unprecedented investment in Rural Ireland and as a county we have to be ready to take advantage of it.
- Are the Rural Housing Guidelines updated and are they included in the plan?
- Scramoge had developed in recent years with all houses occupied, two businesses a pub and on the Famine Way – this should be designated as a village and included in the plan.
- A cycleway to Tarmonbarry from Scramoge should be considered for inclusion as should villages plans for Strokestown, Ballaghaderreen and Elphin.
- Is there any reference to Anaerobic Digestors in the plan?
- Welcome the designation of Roscommon Town as a hub for third level education.
- Welcome inclusion of Age Friendly policy and purpose built accommodation in proximity services.
- Need to tighten up on tillage and crops for humans
- Concern with the stats used for unfinished housing estates from 2017 – can these be updated to current figures?
- The County is primed for development in light of the upgrade of Athlone IT to University status and this

will allow added benefit.

- Welcome the provisions for rural housing development and hope the OPR will embrace this.
- Send a link to the Draft Plan to the Councillors to circulate to constituents as councillors have a big part to play in promoting the plan.
- The creation of the stimulus from the Plan for the provision of jobs is most important
- The projected population increase is not enough and the RSES and NPF need to be revised as the town and villages need to grow. The plan is not ambitious enough.
- Welcome the inclusion of the sustainable energy communities and all our policies should seek to support this.
- Lands adjacent to services should be zoned as residential as this is compatible with sustainability.
- Wind energy should not be part of our policy – this is more suited to out at sea or remote locations. Concerned about the impact of masts that are potentially 180m high on turloughs and water sources. Solar panels are a more appropriate source of energy.
- The policy on forestry is not elaborated sufficiently in the plan – we need to be more specific and focus on native trees.
- There is a new way for assessing housing demand and the figures are based on ESRI.
- If we are to sustain young farmers to have a viable living in agriculture the we need to be aware of this while also protecting the environment. It has to be noted that the only commercial income for farming is dairy.
- We need to be careful of the invasive nature of dairy farming.
- We need sustainable jobs in agriculture that take the environment into account but
- Welcome the use of clustering of houses in villages – we have been concentrating on towns heretofore and it is now time to look at developing our villages.
- The town development plans and the village plans– they will be adopted in the county Development plan. Will lands outside the boundary will be considered for housing?

Mr. Lydon responded as follows to the Member's comments and queries as follows:

- Need a cautious approach to zoning as we await the input of the Office of the Planning Regulator.
- This is a strategic development plan and we can only incentivise developers by identifying housing lands and we have to take a sequential approach
- Welcome comments on the community engagement with the plan – it's very important that the public understand the plan.
- There is no separate village plan for Cortober – this will be a joint plan with Leitrim County Council
- The projected Population increase of circa. 6,000 is based on new calculations and as per the S28 guidelines from the Department and it is ambitious.
- The Development Contribution Scheme is based on the Planning and Development Act 2001 and if the contribution is designated as a Special Contribution it is spent in the area. Following adoption of the plan, the Development Contribution Scheme will have to be reviewed and adopted by the members. The income for development contributions is currently at an all-time low.
- The Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone has legal status.
- With regard to the vacant site levy, contact was made with owners of all sites and those that confirmed lands are for agriculture purposes were removed from zoning.
- We are awaiting Rural Housing Guidelines, however we have noted the Office of the Planning Regulators submission to other Plans in this regard.
- This is a strategic plan and has to stay at that level and not be too prescriptive of specific in some matters.
- Policy will dictate rural housing and the emphasis will have to be in creating housing as main homes

where people want to live and not just holiday homes.

- Siting and design will be of paramount importance in relation to density of housing in an area.
- Updates on Unfinished Housing Estates are provided in the Monthly Management Report. Since 2014 the number has reduced from 211 to 114 and continue to reduce. The 2017 figures are national figures but the Council has the up to date figures.
- The link to the plan will be sent to Members.
- The population projecting figures are calculated on an evidence based approach by the Department from ESRI figures. The number of houses are going to impact on housing targets and if we look at the last two census figures, they are ambitious figures and we will be delighted if we can reach this target.
- Agreed that we want to maximise the use of services villages and towns.
- We policy on forestry is included in the plan but a submission in relation to stronger wording will be considered.
- We are not encouraging housing developments outside the core of the town but a sequential based approach will be utilised – this does not rule out single rural housing.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Fallon

SECONDED by Cllr. Kilduff

It was **AGREED** that an assessment be carried out in towns and villages on lands that are zoned as residential to see if the owners of these lands intend to develop them. This assessment is to be achieved over the lifetime of the plan and considered before the first review of the plan.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr Fallon

SECONDED by Cllr. Ward

It was **AGREED** that reference to 419-425 policy objectives in Chapter 4 in reference to Hodson Bay be removed as they are included elsewhere in the plan.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr Fallon

SECONDED by Cllr. Ward

It was **AGREED** that as Hodson Bay is recognised as leisure area as well as a residential area of high demand, Hodson Bay/Barrymore be included in the serviced settlement category.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Leyden

SECONDED by Cllr. Shanagher

It was **AGREED** that landscape map be included in Figure2 Appendix 1 of the Draft County Development Plan.

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr Dineen

SECONDED by Cllr. Waldron

To write to the NWRA and the Department to review the population projections of 6,387 included the plan.

Cllr. Dineen stated that the ERSI is not a policy document but a research paper and the population projected increase for the North West Regional Assembly area is 160k to 180k. This and this could not be considered ambitious and the figures do not stack up.

The Director responded that the methodology used is the prescribed methodology and this is what the Office of the Planning Regulator will be assessing. This methodology was also presented previously to councillors at a meeting as it was a complicated matter and they understood we are in a process and we

have to follow this process in preparing the plan.

The Cathaoirleach closed the discussions on the plan and invited a proposal to agree the Draft Plan for public consultation. He asked the members to make every effort to engage with the citizens of the county to familiarise themselves with the plan and invite submissions.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Cummins

SECONDED by Cllr. Shanagher

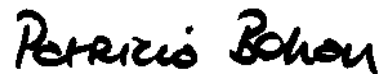
It was **AGREED** to approve the Draft County Development Plan 2021-2027 for public consultation in accordance with the planning regulations.

This concluded the business of the Special Meeting.

The foregoing Minutes are Confirmed and Signed:



Cathaoirleach



Meetings Administrator



Countersigned