

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE UÍBH FHAILÍ

**MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING
OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL ON
PRE -DRAFT OFFALY COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021 -2027:**

**HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, CHARLEVILLE ROAD, TULLAMORE ON
MONDAY, 6TH JULY AT 10.30 A.M.**

PRESENT	<p>Cllr. J. Carroll (Presiding), Cllrs. C. Claffey(R), J. Clendennen, E. Dooley, N. Feighery(R), E. Fitzpatrick, J. Foley, M. Hackett, D. Harvey, J. Leahy, T. McCormack(R), R. McDermott, F. Moran, S. O'Brien, P. Ormond D. Owens, L. Quinn and K. Smollen <i>[(R) denotes remote access]</i></p>
APOLOGIES	<p>Cllr. N.Cribbin</p>
IN ATTENDANCE	<p>Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S. (R); Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S. (R); Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F.; Ms. A. Dillon, A/D.O.S., Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator, Mr. R. Bell, H.I.S.; Mr. A. Murray, S.P.; Ms. L. Mitchell, S.E.P.; Mr. J. Condron, E.P.; Mr. D. Meehan, P.; Mr. J. Egan, A.P.; Ms. K. Gray, C.O. (R) and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O. (R) <i>denotes remote access]</i></p>
CLARA TOWN PLAN - DISCUSSION OF WRITTEN SUBMISSOINS RECEIVED FROM ELECTED MEMBERS	<p>Mr. J. Condron, E.P. provided the members with a presentation on the Clara Settlement Plan, Volume 2 in respect of the written submissions made by the elected members between the First Special Council Meeting (30th June) and this second Special Council Meeting. He indicated the three proposed zoning sites at Raheen, Kilbride Road and Kilbeggan Road and highlighted the objectives to reinforce vitality and vibrancy to the town centre, to address dereliction, support regeneration projects, provide car parks and promote good urban design. He outlined the green infrastructure and walking trails.</p> <p>It was agreed to zone the Kilbride Gardens site to new residential use (submission ref EMPD – 8 by Cllr. Harvey).</p> <p>Cllr. Moran’s submission (EMPD-2) related to the provision of parking on lands zoned ‘Open Space’ in the Silverdale housing estate in Clara. Mr. J. Condron, E.P. advised the meeting that the construction of parking spaces on ‘Open Space’ zoned land is not permitted in the Land Use Matrix of the current 2014-20 County Development Plan and would require a material contravention. The proposed Land Use Zoning Matrix in the Pre-Draft Plan does not permit car parking spaces on lands zoned ‘Open Space and Amenity’ either so a material contravention would be required in this regard when the new Plan is adopted.</p> <p>In response to his presentation Cllr. F. Moran queried the total figure of 8 hectares proposed for zoning, noting that this is a reduction on the previous development plan and that landowners had not been consulted.</p> <p>Ms. A. Dillon responded that landowners are not consulted at this stage of the process. Mr. A. Murray informed the members of the new zoning classifications and that the 8 hectares are new residential zoning.</p> <p>Cllr. F. Moran proposed that the land at the GAA pitch on the Ballycumber Road should be zoned residential (submission ref EMPD-1).</p>

	<p>It was agreed by members to discuss this further at the Third Special Council Meeting on 13th July.</p> <p>Mr. A. Murray responded that it is outside the area to achieve compact growth. Ms. A. Delaney advised that as per the report from Future Analytics the zoning proposed is in line with the core settlement strategy, helping to reduce commuting and carbon stagnation.</p> <p>Cllr. F. Moran queried if a material contravention is required to provide extra car parking spaces at Silverdale Estate, Clara. Mr. A. Murray noted this and said he would revert back to him on this query.</p>
<p>SETTLEMENT PLANS IN EDENDERRY MUNICIPAL DISTRICT – DISCUSSION OF WRITTEN SUBMISSOINS RECEIVED FROM ELECTED MEMBERS</p>	<p>Mr. J. Egan, A.P. provided the members with a presentation on settlements within the Edenderry MD area that were subject to written submissions made by the elected members between the First Special Council Meeting (30th June) and this second Special Council Meeting.</p> <p>Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick queried if Sráid could be extended in Garryhinch, however agreed that this is 1 in 1,000-year flood zone. He noted that land in Bracknagh north of the school would provide a set down area for the school. (Submission ref EMPD-3)</p> <p>Cllr. R. McDermott queried 1.1 hectares to the north of Clonbullogue, for new residential zoning however Mr. J. Egan responded that zoning this land is contrary to compact growth and represents leap-frogging. (Submission ref EMPD-4). Members agreed to discuss it further at the third Special Council Meeting on 13th July.</p> <p>In relation to Rhode submission seeking new residential zoning on a parcel of land (submission ref EMPD-4) it was agreed that scale of schemes should be proportionate, a marginal increase could allow zoning to increase housing stock from 33 to 36 or 37 houses. Members agreed to discuss it further at the third Special Council Meeting on 13th July.</p>
<p>SETTLEMENT PLANS IN BIRR MUNICIPAL DISTRICT – DISCUSSION OF WRITTEN SUBMISSOINS RECEIVED FROM ELECTED MEMBERS</p>	<p>Mr. J. Egan provided the members with a presentation on settlements within the Birr MD area that were subject to written submissions made by the elected members between the First Special Council Meeting (30th June) and this second Special Council Meeting.</p> <p>Cllr. P. Ormond queried the possibility for additional tourism objectives for Moneygall Village (submission ref EMPD-6). Mr. J. Egan responded with suggested wording.</p> <p>Cllr. P. Ormond queried additional residential and enterprise/employment zonings in Moneygall village (submission ref EMPD-6). Mr. J. Egan responded by explaining emphasis on compact growth and limitations in terms of core strategy allocations. It was agreed to discuss it further at the third Special Council Meeting on 13th July.</p> <p>Cllr. P. Ormond queried additional residential and community services zonings in Shinrone village (submission ref EMPD-6). Mr. J. Egan responded by explaining emphasis on compact growth and limitations in terms of core strategy allocations. He advised that the proposed community services/facilities zoning for land associated with the national school is feasible. It was agreed to discuss it further at the third Special Council Meeting on 13th July.</p>

	<p>Cllr. P. Ormond queried land south of the old N7 being included within the Dunkerrin Sráid (submission ref EMPD-6). residential and community services zonings in Shinrone village. Mr. J. Egan responded by advising that the proposal was contrary to a compact growth pattern envisaged for Sráids. It was agreed to discuss it further at the third Special Council Meeting on 13th July.</p> <p>Cllr. J. Clendennen queried land at the Birr Rugby Club; he wanted it zoned in a manner that allows a primary care centre (submission ref EMPD- 10). Cllr. J. Carroll stated that he wants it left zoned open space. It was agreed to discuss it further at the third Special Council Meeting on 13th July.</p> <p>Cllr. J. Clendennen queried additional residential zonings in Kinnitty Village (submission ref EMPD-10). Mr. J. Egan responded by explaining emphasis on compact growth and limitations in terms of core strategy allocations.</p>
<p>RURAL HOUSING POLICY & MISCELLANEOUS</p>	<p>Cllr. John Carroll had made a written submission (ref EMPD-11) seeking clarity on the rural housing policy. Ms. Lorraine Mitchell made a presentation on the policy as set out in the pre-draft Plan with the provision of additional text stating that pending the revised Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines, the functional social requirement shall be taken to be point no. 1 of the said policy.</p> <p>It was agreed to brief the elected members on the revised Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines when they issue.</p> <p>Cllr. M. Hackett asked in his submission (ref no. EMPD-5) that ‘community archaeology’ and ‘wetlands landscape’ be incorporated into the draft Plan.</p> <p>Cllr. J. Foley in his submission (ref no. EMPD-7) asked that a 2km setback for wind turbines from every home be provided for. Mr. James Condrón explained that there is no provision for this in Wind Energy Guidelines and we are obliged to adhere to them.</p>
<p>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM</p>	<p>Ms. L. Mitchell brought the members attention to the Economic Development and Tourism section. She highlighted the key principle of the plan to create the right conditions and opportunities for the county to realise sustained economic growth and employment that ensures good living standards for all by creating a competitive business plan. She outlined the key initiatives and policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-operate with local, regional and national enterprise authorities e.g. IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland in the attraction of investment into Offaly. • Direct significant development into Tullamore Key Town, the primary driver of economic development, to compliment Athlone Regional Growth Centre. • Strategic Employment Zones in Tullamore for large scale employment & enterprise activity (as required by RSES). • Catch-up investment e.g. employment & enterprise required in Portarlinton and Edenderry Self-Sustaining Towns to reverse long distance commuting. • Potential for relocation of ‘back-office’ facilities from the Dublin Metropolitan Area to Offaly to take advantage of

cheaper land, high quality life and reduce long distance commuting.

- Opportunities to capitalise on I-LOFAR in Birr e.g. in big data and data analytics, recognising Birr as a technology hub based on high quality employment parks & attractiveness of place.
- Adequate zoning in towns and villages to facilitate employment, enterprise and existing initiatives e.g. Ferbane Food Campus (food product development) and Rhode Green Energy Park (for green energy and other complementary green uses).
- Potential for new energy initiatives to facilitate climate action and energy transition.
- Infrastructure to support and attract new economic activity.
- Emphasis on place-making to attract inward investment and support vitality & viability of town and village centres.
- Support: Green jobs, green technologies, innovation, digital technologies, the Internet of Things, foreign direct investment, indigenous investment, productivity, competitiveness, clustering of products, social enterprise practices, circular bio-economy, food & beverage, advanced manufacturing.
- Co-working hubs to mitigate long distance commuting.
- Support the national objective to promote Ireland as a sustainable international destination for ICT infrastructure such as data centres.
- Support the delivery of the National Broadband Plan & Offaly Digital Strategy. Encourage Wi-Fi zones in public buildings & tourist destinations.
- Connectivity and accessibility.
- Development of talent and skills: (i) Encourage links with Maynooth University, TCD, UL, AIT and other higher level colleges as appropriate, (ii) provision of outreach / campus facilities, (iii) lifelong learning programmes, appropriate business supports and upskilling to counteract the effects from industrial decline, (iv) examine the need for a complementary third level outreach facility to support the hospital and its continued development as a teaching / University hospital with potential for linkages to med-tech businesses and research facilities, and (v) encourage incubator units that provide education and networking opportunities for new businesses.
- Improve the jobs: resident worker's ratio (>0.7 is a strong economic function); to create a balance in towns between residential development and jobs. Towns with weak ratios: Edenderry, Portarlinton, Clara, Daingean, Kilcormac.
- Appropriate retail development
- Develop Opportunity Sites in many settlements in the county
- Tourism development can make an important contribution to the economic life of the county.

Ms. L. Mitchell advised the members that with regard to Rural Enterprise the key initiatives and policies are to support sustainability and economic efficiency in agriculture, diversification, green technologies and post peat opportunities. This includes supporting the Midlands Regional Transition Team, consider proposals for the potential re-purposing of the Shannonbridge and Edenderry plants and to support the development of Lough Boora as a National Peatlands Centre.

She outlined the objectives for tourism:

- Facilitate Fáilte Ireland initiatives to deliver the ‘Ireland’s Ancient East’ and ‘Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands’ tourism brand promises.
- Promote Offaly as a tourism destination.
- Increase co-ordination between agencies involved in tourism e.g. Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Mona, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Coillte, & Offaly County Council.
- Protect natural resources on which tourism is based from insensitive development.
- Support provision and improvement of visitor facilities, infrastructure and increased bed nights supply at appropriate locations.
- Promote the monastic sites as tourist attractions e.g. Durrow Abbey and Clonmacnoise and enhance the visitor experience in conjunction with stakeholders. Develop proposals with OPW for Durrow Monastic Site to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Extend greenways, blueways, peatways, and trails & infrastructural supports; provide integration and linkage within and outside the County.
- Protect potential greenway, blueway and peatway routes along and in proximity to abandoned rail lines from inappropriate development.
- Re Slieve Bloom Mts: Continued development of mountain bike trail, walking trails and linkages to greenways, blueways, peatways and connection to Kinnitty as a service hub.
- Towns and village play role as focal points and service zones for nearby tourist attractions; invest in public realm enhancement to increase attractiveness. Tourism Destination Towns must raise their standard to satisfy the desires of tourists. Birr (funding), Tullamore (RSES).
- Encourage Charleville Castle & Demesne as an amenity area for the longer term development of Tullamore.
- Promote Tullamore’s role as a conferencing and event hub given its location, accessibility and experience.
- Recognise Edenderry as a service hub for the Grand Canal Greenway in east Offaly.
- Promote role of arts, heritage and culture.
- Due to the presence of Tullamore Dew Visitor Centre, Tullamore has potential as a destination for whiskey tourism and to become part of a whiskey trail throughout the region.
- Encourage water-based recreational activities on flooded cut away bog where opportunity arises e.g. Noggus Boy Bog and in Garryhinch.
- Investigate feasibility of an Energy Park with educational and amenity facilities relating to renewable energy projects.
- Explore potential for a Dark Sky area; exceptional quality of starry nights.
- Examine in conjunction with relevant stakeholders the feasibility of developing the Kilbeggan to Ballycommon link of the Grand Canal as a potential navigational route.

She noted Section 10 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) required objectives for the preservation of public rights of way that give access to places of natural beauty or recreational utility and identify them on a map. In the pre-draft Plan there is an objective to

	<p>support the preservation and improvement for the common good of existing public rights of way for recreation and tourism purposes.</p> <p>Cllr. F. Moran queried if the walks in Clara Bog could be extended to create a looped walk, and if mixed uses can go on opportunity sites.</p> <p>Cllr. L. Quinn pointed out the success with gaining the access to a public right of way on Croghan Hill.</p> <p>Ms. L. Mitchell advised that the extension of the walk in Clara would be considered and pointed out an objective for Clara Bog in the plan.</p> <p>Cllr. Clendennan asked if there was potential for Artificial Intelligence is to be included in the plan. Ms. L. Mitchell confirmed it is addressed in Policy no. EntP15.</p>
<p>SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY AND RETAIL / REGENERATION</p>	<p>Ms. L. Mitchell made a presentation on Sustainable Mobility. She outlined objective in the pre-draft Plan relating to sustainable mobility as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support sustainable mobility, enhanced regional accessibility and connectivity. • Compact development reduces demand for transport, and supports use of sustainable modes of transport. • Promote transition a low carbon integrated transport system by reducing the need to travel through the use of design solutions and shift to sustainable modes of transport. • Integrate landuse and transport planning; mixed uses, improve permeability and connectivity of streets and prioritise the need for people to be physically active in their daily lives by promoting walking & cycling. • Larger scale trip intensive developments, such as high employee dense offices and retail, should in the first instance be focused into central urban locations and developed in a sequential manner. • Prepare a Local Transport Plan for Tullamore Key Town (RSES). • Support growth in use of electric vehicles through battery charging infrastructure. • Identify suitable areas in towns and villages for age-friendly parking bays (Age Friendly Strategy for Offaly) • Collaborate with Bord na Mona & Coillte in the development of the ‘Midlands Cycling Destination – Offaly’. • Secure cycle parking facilities. • Supportive to exploring opportunities for cycle lanes along the N80, preferably off road cycle tracks separated from vehicular traffic, subject to meeting TII Guidelines and a safety audit. • Extend greenways, blueways, peatways, and trails & infrastructural supports; provide integration and linkage within and outside the county. • Safeguard all existing rail infrastructure to encourage re-opening of rail stations. • Support reopening of Geashill Train Station. • Opportunity for Tullamore train station and adjoining lands & Clara train station and adjoining lands to be developed as a transport node with possible integration of local bus services.

- Manning of train stations and have frequent services.
- The 2030 Rail Network Strategy Review (2011): Provision of a second rail line between Portarlinton and Athlone (2020-2025) and Electrification of Dublin to Galway line (2025-2030).
- Support the Local Link Rural Transport Programme.
- Facilitate the provision of improved bus facilities and services for bus users in towns and villages including set down areas and bus shelters.
- Facilitate continued construction and upgrading of the road network.
- Protect the safety, strategic transport function, capacity and efficiency of national roads and associated junctions.
- Support the provision of an airport within the county or the midlands.

Ms. L. Mitchell made a presentation on Retail / Regeneration. She outlined objective in the pre-draft Plan relating to sustainable mobility as follows:

- Public Realm = all areas of the urban fabric (both public and private) to which the public have access e.g. streetscapes, public space around buildings, parks, canal / river banks.
- An erosion of the sense of place can occur due to urban sprawl, dispersed rural population and hallowing of town core.
- Regenerate the public realm to contribute to healthy place-making and in turn improved quality of life. Attractive places attract more investment, skills and talent and increase the livability factor of places.
- Opportunity Sites identified; under-utilised and their appropriate redevelopment would enhance / regenerate the local environment. Lined up for funding applications.
- Guidance in the pre-draft CDP to preparing redevelopment proposals in Opportunity sites.
- ‘Specific Planning Policy Requirement’ to support sites appropriate for taller buildings. Upwards rather than outwards; a more efficient use of land and infrastructure & can contribute to modern place-making. RSES: major towns; Tullamore.
- Address derelict sites, vacant sites and vacant homes.
- High quality buildings, structures, spaces and streets.
- Consolidation of land rather than piecemeal development to enable regeneration.
- Scheduled town and village improvement schemes be informed by joint walkability audits involving older people and LA officials (Offaly Age Friendly Strategy)
- The scale and size of retail development proposed shall be in accordance with the size and defined function of a settlement.
- Tullamore Key Town is the main retail centre in Offaly.
- Support the vitality and viability of town / village centres.
- Apply the sequential approach to retail development; core retail area outwards.
- High quality architectural design and urban design.
- Avoid overconcentration of a particular type of retail activity in a given area.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Brief for retail development that is large-scale / complex / sensitive site; shows rationale & evolution of the proposal and how the proposal complements its context and setting. <p>In response to L. Mitchell's presentations, Cllr. Leahy asked were by-passes listed and if there are policies for infrastructure supports for greenways and also what can the Council do in relation to derelict buildings. Cllr. Quinn said that he would like to see cycle lanes linked as a priority. Cllr. Harvey asked how can the Council require people to maintain their properties.</p>
<p>CLIMATE ACTION & ENERGY AND THE COUNTY WIND ENERGY STRATEGY</p>	<p>Mr. J. Condrón provided the members with a presentation on Climate Action & Energy and the County Wind Energy Strategy. He outlined the European and National objectives for climate adaptation and mitigation. He noted the peatlands are recognised as a significant resource for transition to after uses ranging from amenity, tourism, biodiversity services, 'wild areas', flood management, climate mitigation, energy development, industry, education, conservation and many more. He highlighted the potential for Green Energy Hub and an Energy Park.</p> <p>He stated that The Just Transition Process and the opportunities it presents Offaly is a cross cutting theme in the policy and objectives contained in chapters on Climate Action and Energy, Economic Development and Biodiversity and Landscape. He outlined the policies and objectives in relation to renewable energy, including bioenergy, waste material, solar, hydro, geothermal and wind. The policy is to ensure communities benefit in the form of contributions to local projects, assets and public amenities. He noted that they must co-operate with EMRA and achieve a reasonable balance between government policy and environmental sustainability.</p> <p>He outlined the policy in relation to wind energy as below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Wind Energy Development (or any update of this document) including applying appropriate setback distances as identified in the Guidelines; • 'Areas Open for Consideration for Wind Energy Developments' in the Wind Energy Strategy Designations Map from the County Wind Energy Strategy; • require a 2 km separation distance from turbines to town and village settlement boundaries in the county; • Development Management Standard 109 on wind farms contained in Chapter 13 of this Plan • existing and future international, European, national and regional policy, directives and legislation. • repowering of existing windfarm development on a case by case basis where the proposal does not result in a net increase in the number of turbines and it is demonstrated that there is no adverse impact on the receiving environment, landscape, designated sites or residences in the area. <p>He advised the members that the objective to implement the council's wind strategy includes development of windfarms and smaller wind energy projects, no development in areas not permitted and applications for repowering assessed on case by case basis.</p>

Mr. J. Condrón provided the members with an overview of the wind strategy taking into account new and updated legislation/guidelines, technological advances and spatial analysis, in line with Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment. This is also in line with the Climate Action Plan 2019 which aims to increase Ireland's renewable energy from 30-70% by 2030. He gave the members an overview of the 12 potential wind energy areas, noting that they are not automatically approved. He advised the members on the assessment process for wind farms and that draft guidelines are currently being reviewed and he outlined the key provisions in the draft guidelines.

He updated the members on Energy storage, waste to energy and biogas policies. He advised the members that applications for data centres would be considered under the relevant criteria.

The members thanked him for his presentation and raised queries on the community fund element, boundaries, recommissioning and bonds. Cllr. L. Quinn requested that the wording for biomass should be improved.

Cllr. Leahy said that there is a need to get a balance between tourism and windfarms.

Cllr. M. Hackett requested an amendment for the inclusion of wetlands, Mr. J. Condrón responded that this is not considered necessary as reference is made to the importance of all wetlands, it was agreed to amend the word landscapes to wetland landscapes.

Cllr. E. Dooley raised the issue of the rehabilitation of the wetlands and it was agreed that the rehabilitation of the peatlands brings significant challenges.

Cllr. J. Foley raised concerns with regard to wind energy set back distances and Mr. J. Condrón responded that the current wind energy guidelines apply but new guidelines are drafted and awaiting approval. The members discussed the planning requirements for wind turbines, the contributions in kind and that the communities should benefit more. It was agreed that the issues are not in the remit of the County Development Plan.

Mr. J. Condrón responded that the Department have confirmed that it is not possible to look for a bond, scrap value should be sufficient. He advised the new guidelines are not yet adopted so the current guidelines remain in place. He noted their concerns with regard to de-commissioning but stated that new technology is being developed that may future proof the process. Mr. A. Murray advised the members that bonds are a huge burden on developers and are very difficult to enforce.

A further meeting was scheduled for 13th July 2020 to consider members submissions.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

MINUTES CONFIRMED: _____
CATHAOIRLEACH RUNAÍ

21st December 2020