

7<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Forward Planning Section,  
Offaly County Council,  
Áras an Chontae,  
Charleville Road,  
Tullamore,  
County Offaly

### Submitted via consultation portal

Our Ref: 501-00180-00141-27L

Your Ref: Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: DRAFT OFFALY COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027- SUBMISSION ROADSTONE LTD.**

SLR Consulting Ireland acts as planning and environmental advisors to Roadstone Limited, Fortunestown, Tallaght, Dublin 24. This is a submission relating to the Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 and has been prepared on their behalf.

## ROADSTONE LIMITED

Roadstone Ltd. was formed in 2009 by the amalgamation of three of the construction materials businesses operated by CRH in Ireland, which were Roadstone Dublin Ltd., Roadstone Provinces Ltd. and John A. Wood Ltd.

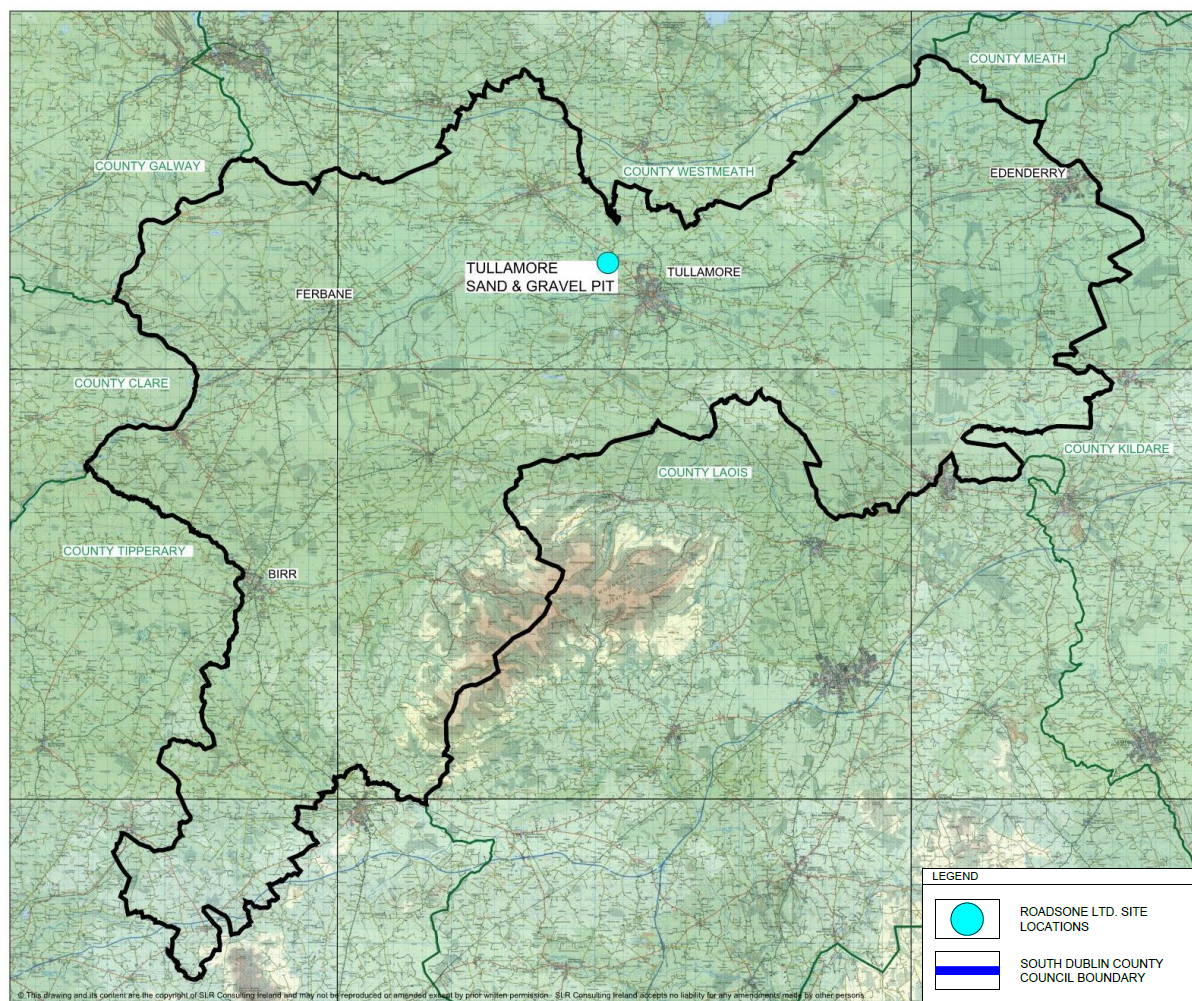
The company is Ireland's leading supplier of aggregates, construction and road building materials and it employs several hundred people throughout the country.

Roadstone forms part of CRH, which is an international building materials group. It was founded in the 1930s and became part of Cement Roadstone Holdings (CRH) plc in 1970, following the merger of Roadstone and Cement Ltd. CRH is the leading global diversified building materials business, employing 79,200 people in 30 Countries across the globe.

## PROPERTY ASSETS

Roadstone Ltd has a property asset / extraction location within the Offaly County Council administrative area, refer to Figure 1 which shows the site at Tullamore Sand and Gravel Pit (property of Roadstone Ltd.).

This property asset / extraction location contain aggregate resources and they are essential to the future long-term secure supply of aggregates to support the local, regional and national economy.



**Figure 1: Roadstone Ltd. – Property Location in County Offaly**

## BASIS OF THE SUBMISSION

### National and Regional Policy Context

The importance of the extractive industries to the wider economy and the need to protect the operations of working quarries and proven aggregate resources is firmly established in national and regional planning policy.

Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework (NPF) refers to the following National Policy Objective which is supportive of the extractive economy. National Policy Objective 23 states that it is the intention of the NPF to (emphasis added):

***‘Facilitate the development of the rural economy through supporting a sustainable and economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of***

*maintaining and protecting the natural landscape and built heritage which are vital to rural tourism.'*

The principal purpose of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) is to support the implementation of the NPF and the economic policies and objectives of the Government as contained in the National Development Plan (NDP) by providing the long-term strategic planning and economic framework for development of Ireland's regions.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031 for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly also acknowledges the role of the extractive industry and 'recognises that the rejuvenation of rural towns and villages requires that appropriate job creation in rural areas and that traditional sectors such as agriculture, tourism, extractive industries and forestry are complemented by diversification in sectors such as food, renewable energy and opportunities provided from improved digital connectivity'.

The RSES acknowledges that minerals form part of the region's natural capital, and presents regional policy objective 6.7 in support of the extractive industry in relation to economy and employment

**RPO 6.7:** *Support local authorities to develop sustainable and economically efficient rural economies through initiatives to enhance sectors such as agricultural and food, forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and **extractive industries**, the bioeconomy, tourism, and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting the natural landscape and built heritage.*

## Importance of Extractive Industries

**In preparing policies that reflect the importance of the extractive industries, the planning authority should consider the recently published Essential Aggregates – Providing for Ireland's Needs to 2040<sup>1</sup> prepared by the Irish Concrete Federation (refer to copy appended to this submission).**

The objective of this document is to highlight to Government the need for a national planning policy for aggregates, which will underpin local and regional planning policy and ensure the sustainable supply of aggregates for Project Ireland 2040 and beyond. The document provides further detail on the role of locally supplied aggregates in supporting the demand for new homes, new schools and better infrastructure. In meeting the demand arising from the projected population increase of an additional 1 million people as identified in the National Planning Framework, it is worth noting that every new home typically requires up to 400 tonnes of aggregates and every new school typically requires some 3,000 tonnes of aggregates. These requirements are most sustainably met by local sources and suppliers.

The document also makes recommendations to ensure that Government's stated objectives on aggregates within the National Planning Framework 2018 are implemented, not just for the benefit of the extractive industry, but also for the achievement of the ambitious goals of Project Ireland 2040. It highlights three important points that statutory planning policy needs to address at all spatial scales. These are:

1. Importance of Extractive Industries and Aggregates

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.irishconcrete.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Essential-Aggregates-Final.pdf>



2. Identifying and Protecting Reserves
3. Enabling Extraction of Aggregates

## Current Development Plan Policies

The Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020 came into effect on Adopted 15<sup>th</sup> September 2014. It was subject to one variation on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 2018 to incorporate the provisions of the Urban Regeneration & Housing Act 2015 relating to the Vacant Site Levy, Urban Renewal and Regeneration.

The Rural Strategy within the Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020 identifies construction, quarrying, tourism-related services, transport, education, waste disposal and health as all significant areas of employment in the rural areas of County Offaly.

In relation to the 'Sand and Gravel Extraction', the Council recognises the importance of sand and gravel extractions in the economic life of the county and its importance as a valuable source of employment in parts of the county. However, it is also recognised that exploitation of deposits can have a damaging environmental impact on the scientific, recreational and amenity value of the County's natural landscape, in particular its esker network.

Offaly County Council acknowledges that a satisfactory balance is required between the needs of the building industry and the need to protect the environment. The suitability of any extraction enterprise shall be assessed on the basis of the sensitivity of the local environment to such impacts, the scale of the development proposed and the capacity of the road network in the area to accommodate associated traffic.

It shall be the Council's policy to ensure that those extractions which would result in a reduction of the visual amenity of areas of high amenity or damage to areas of scientific importance or of geological, botanical, zoological and other natural significance including all designated European Sites shall not be permitted.

It is Council policy that all such workings should be subjected to landscaping requirements and that worked out quarries should be rehabilitated to a use agreed with the Planning Authority which could include recreational, amenity and end-of-life uses. The use of these rehabilitated sites shall be limited to wastes such as soil, stone and subsoils and sites shall be authorised under the appropriate waste regulations.

The Planning Authority will have regard to the Department of the Environment's Guidelines for Planning Authorities for Quarries and Ancillary Activities 2004 when assessing applications relating to the extraction industry in the county. In this regard, bonds or levies will be required by the Council as a condition of any planning permission granted to ensure satisfactory reinstatement on completion of extraction. The Council will require the payment of a contribution towards the cost of road improvement and reinstatement works necessitated by permitted developments.

The Council recognises the unique importance of Offaly's esker landscape deriving from its scientific, botanical, archaeological and historical value. All proposals for sand and gravel extraction at eskers will be determined by reference to the need to conserve the environment, character and scientific value and the extent to which the proposed development would be damaging to these qualities. The Geological Survey of Ireland has completed Aggregate Potential Mapping providing an indication of where potential gravel extraction can take place in the county.

The following **rural development policies** were identified in the Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020:

- **RDP-16** It is Council policy to continue to protect existing resource based industry from encroachment by residential development, for example mining, quarrying, gravel pits, peat extraction and intensive agriculture.

Within the ‘**Development Management Standards**’ set out in Chapter 8, section 8.13 refers to extractive industries and states that

The Planning Authority will have regard to the DoEHLG’s Quarries and Ancillary Activities, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2004 when assessing quarry related proposals. Particular constraint will be exercised in areas of archaeological importance, recorded monuments, areas of ecological importance and other environmentally sensitive designated areas.

All developments should have regard to and comply with the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) publication ‘Environmental Management in the Extractive Industry (non-scheduled minerals)’, 2006, the ICF Environmental Code of October 2006, the Wildlife, Habitats and the Extractive Industry (Notice Nature/ Irish Concrete Federation / NPWS 2010) and the Geological Heritage Guidelines for the Extractive Industry (GSI / Irish Concrete Federation / Planet Earth 2008).

An Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Licence from the EPA is required for metal mining, for quarries associated with cement, lime and ceramic manufacture, and for the extraction of other minerals covered by the Minerals Development Acts which exceed threshold levels as set out in the Protection of the Environment Act, 2003. Such a licence covers noise, emissions to air and water, and waste management.

The Council favours the use of extensions to existing licensed quarries over proposals for extraction from green field sites. There is a presumption against new quarry developments on the County’s Eskers.

## OFFALY COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027: DRAFT STAGE

Once adopted, the Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 will constitute the land use plan and overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the functional area of County Offaly for the 6-year period of 2021-2027. It will replace the existing Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020.

The Strategic Objectives for the county as set out in the Draft Plan are to:

- I. **Plan for a population increase in County Offaly during the plan period of 9,239 persons.**
- II. Consolidate settlements by avoiding undesirable and inefficient sprawl. This will be achieved through targeting a significant proportion of future development on infill/ brownfield/ underutilised sites within the existing built-up footprint of all settlements in accordance with the principle of Compact Growth set out in the National Planning Framework.
- III. Ensure better alignment between the location of population growth and employment growth. This will allow settlements to become more self-sustaining, sustainable and balanced rather than based on long distance commuter driven activity.
- IV. Reduce car dependency, and increase the use of sustainable mobility such as walking, cycling and public transport through planning for and encouraging integrated transportation and landuse.
- V. **Direct a significant proportion of the county’s development and population growth into Tullamore a Key Town as designated in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy in order**

- to build up its critical mass and fulfil its role as a key growth driver of the county and midland region.
- VI. Reverse the decline / stagnation of towns and villages through renewal and regeneration, and create healthy place-making by improving the attractiveness, quality, design, viability, vibrancy and liveability of the county's settlements. Also to manage urban generated growth in Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence and Stronger Rural Areas.
  - VII. Protect and enhance Offaly's natural assets of clean water, biodiversity, landscape, green infrastructure, heritage and agricultural land.
  - VIII. Provide high quality housing of a sufficient scale, mix, tenure, sequence and density, located in optimum locations and aligned with adequate infrastructure, services and amenities.
  - IX. Make more efficient use of key resources such as land, water, energy, waste and transportation infrastructure.**
  - X. Create a competitive business environment supporting economic development, job creation, tourism and prosperity for all.**
  - XI. Achieve transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy. This should be facilitated through reducing the need to travel, by integrating land use and sustainable modes of transport, and by reducing the use of non-renewable resources. In line with this, promote active and healthy lifestyles through increased opportunities for walking, cycling and active sport recreation.
  - XII. Encourage inclusive and active sustainable communities based around a strong network of community facilities and amenities.
  - XIII. Contribute, as practicable, towards achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## Economic Development

It is outlined in the **Economic Development** chapter that Offaly County Council, within its capacity, will positively contribute towards the promotion of the maintenance and growth of employment across every sector in County Offaly. In Section 5.6.8, Aggregates and Minerals are referenced. It states that

'The Council **recognises the importance of sand and gravel extractions in the economic life of the county and its importance as a valuable source of employment in parts of the county.** It is also recognised, however, that exploitation of deposits can have a seriously damaging environmental impact on the county's natural landscape, in particular its esker network. Offaly County Council acknowledges that a satisfactory balance is required between the needs of the building industry and the need to protect the environment.

The Council recognises the importance of ensuring that those extractions which would result in a reduction of the visual amenity of areas of high amenity or damage to areas of scientific importance or of geological, botanical, zoological and other natural significance including all designated European Sites are not be permitted.

The Council requires that all such workings should be subjected to **landscaping requirements** and that worked out quarries should be rehabilitated to a use agreed with the Planning Authority. The use of these rehabilitated sites shall be limited to wastes such as soil, stone and subsoils and sites shall be authorised under the appropriate waste regulations.

The Planning Authority will have regard to **the Department of the Environment's Guidelines for Planning Authorities for Quarries and Ancillary Activities 2004** (and any updated editions) when assessing applications relating to the extraction industry in the county.

## Rural Economic Development

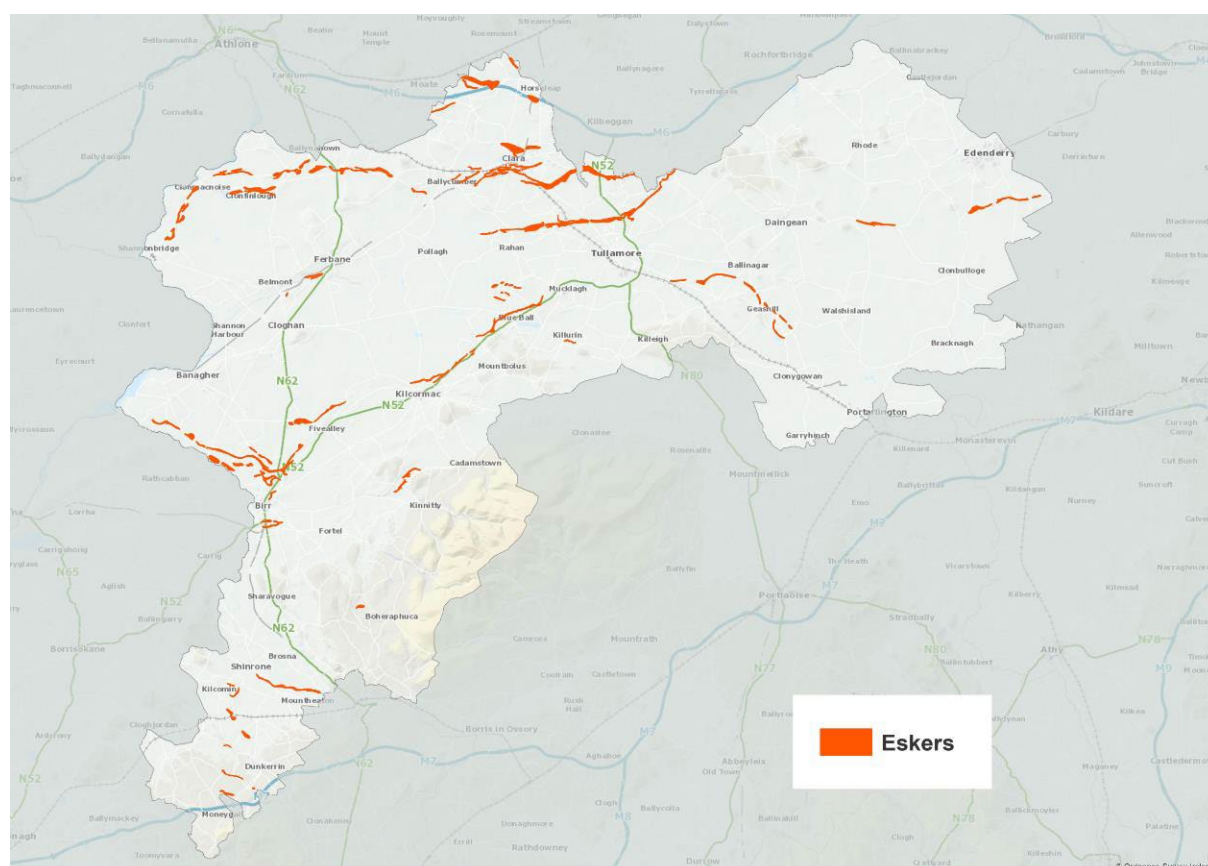
Section 5.10 identifies Rural Economic Development Policies. Rural Economic Development Policies REDP-16 relates to Aggregates and Minerals. It states that:

**It is Council policy to ensure those extractions (quarries / sand and gravel pits) which would result in a reduction of the visual amenity of Areas of High Amenity, eskers, esker landscapes,** protected views or damage to designated sites, habitat types or species shall not be permitted. It is Council policy that all such workings should be subjected to landscaping requirements and that worked out quarries should be rehabilitated to a use agreed with the Council which could include recreational, biodiversity, amenity or other end-of-life uses. Planning applications for extraction shall be assessed against section 28 Ministerial Guidelines. The use of these rehabilitated sites shall be limited to wastes such as soil, stone and subsoils and sites shall be authorised under the appropriate waste regulations. Where the Council considers and accepts that in cases where inert material (for example soil, stones and subsoil) cannot be recycled or otherwise sold, such materials may be considered for the phased restoration and landscaping of the site in line with planning conditions imposed.

## Biodiversity

In Chapter 4 Biodiversity, the following Biodiversity and Landscape Policies relating to Geology, Eskers and Quarries will apply:

- **BLP-12** It is Council policy to assess the impact of proposals for quarry development on nearby eskers, with reference to their status or relative importance, for example, amenity, landscape and scientific value in the context of the overall esker system. See figure 2 overleaf for reference to mapped eskers.
- **BLP-13** It is Council policy to recognise the natural heritage value of disused quarries as rich habitats and to encourage landowners to preserve quarries post extraction as habitats rather than levelling or infilling the quarry area where possible subject to health and safety considerations and the protection of the relevant conservation objectives, qualifying interests and integrity of Natura 2000 sites.



**Figure 2 Map of Eskers as identified by the Draft Development Plan**

### Development management

In Chapter 13, the following development management policy is stated and will apply to extractive industries:

- DMS-112 Quarries and Ancillary Developments

**DMS-112** states that:

When assessing planning applications for quarry and ancillary developments, the Council will have regard to;

- Section 261 and Section 261A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended);
- the Quarries and Ancillary Activities Guidelines 2004 and any amendments to the Guidelines which may be made, and
- Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) publication 'Environmental Management in the Extractive Industry (non-scheduled minerals)' 2006.

In addition to the above, all planning applications for quarry and ancillary developments, such as batching plants, crushing, screening, shall appropriately detail the environmental baseline of the area in which extraction is proposed, likely impacts and proposed mitigation measures relating to;

- Human health;



- Groundwater, surface water and important aquifers and compliance with the objectives of the Water Framework Directive;
- Natura 2000 sites (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas), Natural Heritage Areas, proposed Natural Heritage Areas and other sites for environmental or ecological protection such as Statutory Nature Reserves, Ramsar Sites, Wildfowl Sanctuary and Biogenetic Reserves;
- Flora and fauna;
- Sensitive local receptors such as residences, Areas of High Amenity, Landscape Sensitivity Areas, Key Scenic Views and Prospects, and Key Amenity Routes as outlined in Chapter 4 of this Plan;
- Landscaping, berms and screening proposals;
- Local transportation network with particular reference to details of haul routes, trip movements and articulated lorry weights;
- Noise, vibration and dust emissions; and
- Archaeological and architectural heritage of the area.

Planning applications shall also include general details on the proposed development such as:

- Project description including:
  - Description of aggregate to be extracted or processed;
  - Method of extraction and equipment to be used;
  - Details of storage of materials and overburden;
  - Total and annual tonnage of material extracted or processed;
  - Details of any blasting;
  - Fuel and chemical storage;
  - Floor levels showing depths of extraction.
  - Phasing programme for extraction and rehabilitation;
  - Restoration and after care proposals for the site (plans and section drawings), including long-term quarry face stability, long-term water pollution potential and control, removal of buildings, plant and machinery, fencing and security and a demonstration of how emerging biodiversity and habitats have been incorporated into proposals.

In order to facilitate the sustainable development of the extractive industry, the Council will require the lodgement of a financial bond to ensure the satisfactory reinstatement of the site following the completion of extraction and the payment of an adequate contribution towards the upgrading or repair of the local road network.

Traffic Assessments and Road Safety Audits may be required in accordance with DMO-105.

Proposals for batching plants, crushing and screening on exhausted quarry sites are required to provide details on the source of aggregate and also the number of expected trips from source to plant and then from plant to offsite.

The following notes are also included:

- The **Council favours the use of existing licensed quarries over proposals for extraction from green field sites. There is a presumption against new quarry developments on the county's eskers.**
- The Planning Authority, may in certain instances, depending on the size and characteristics of the proposed development, require the preparation of a Natura Impact Statement, Environmental Impact Statement and other assessments as listed in Section 13.8 of the same Chapter.
- This list is not exhaustive and the Council may consider other requirements contained in the chapter on a case by case basis with planning applications should the need arise and Ancillary Developments.

## Sustainable Mobility and Accessibility

Chapter 8 deals with Sustainable Mobility and Accessibility and includes the following objective in relation to roads which is relevant to the Tullamore Sand and Gravel Pit.

SMAO-09 It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development of the national secondary road network in Offaly through the continued construction, upgrading and improvement of the national secondary roads in the county, the N62, the N52 and the N80 where on examination it is found to be feasible, including as outlined in the accompanying table.

The following scheme description of the **Tullamore Western Bypass** is provided in the accompanying table on page 258 of Chapter 8;

To examine the feasibility of the provision of a Western Bypass/Relief Road to the west of Tullamore town linking the R420 to the north west of the town with the N52 to the south west of the town taking into account environmental sensitivities as identified in the SEA Environmental Report and the policies and objectives of the Plan relating to sustainable mobility. Where feasibility is established, the Council will seek to pursue and / or facilitate the relevant project, subject to other provisions in the Plan, including section 8.5.4 Corridor and Route Selection Process. The line on the map in Volume 2 is indicative only.

Figure 3 overleaf is from the draft Tullamore Town Plan and identifies an indicative corridor for the proposed western bypass. As stated this will be the subject of a corridor and route selection process which is set out in Section 8.5.4. The Corridor and Route Selection Process will include:

### Stage 1 – Route Corridor Identification, Evaluation and Selection

- Environmental constraints (including those identified in Section 4 of the accompanying SEA Environmental Report) and opportunities (such as existing linear infrastructure) will assist in the identification of possible route corridor options;
- Potentially feasible corridors within which infrastructure could be accommodated will be identified and these corridors assessed. The selection of the preferred route corridor will avoid constraints and meet opportunities to the optimum extent, as advised by the relevant specialists; and
- In addition to the constraints identified above, site-specific field data may be required to identify the most appropriate corridors.

### Stage 2 – Route Identification, Evaluation and Selection

- Potentially feasible routes within the preferred corridor will be identified and assessed. The selection of preferred routes will avoid constraints and meet opportunities to the optimum extent, as advised by the relevant specialists, taking into account project level information and potential mitigation measures that are readily achievable;
- In addition to the constraints identified above, site specific field data may be required to identify the most appropriate routes; and
- In addition to environmental considerations, the identification of route corridors and the refinement of route lines is likely to be informed by other considerations

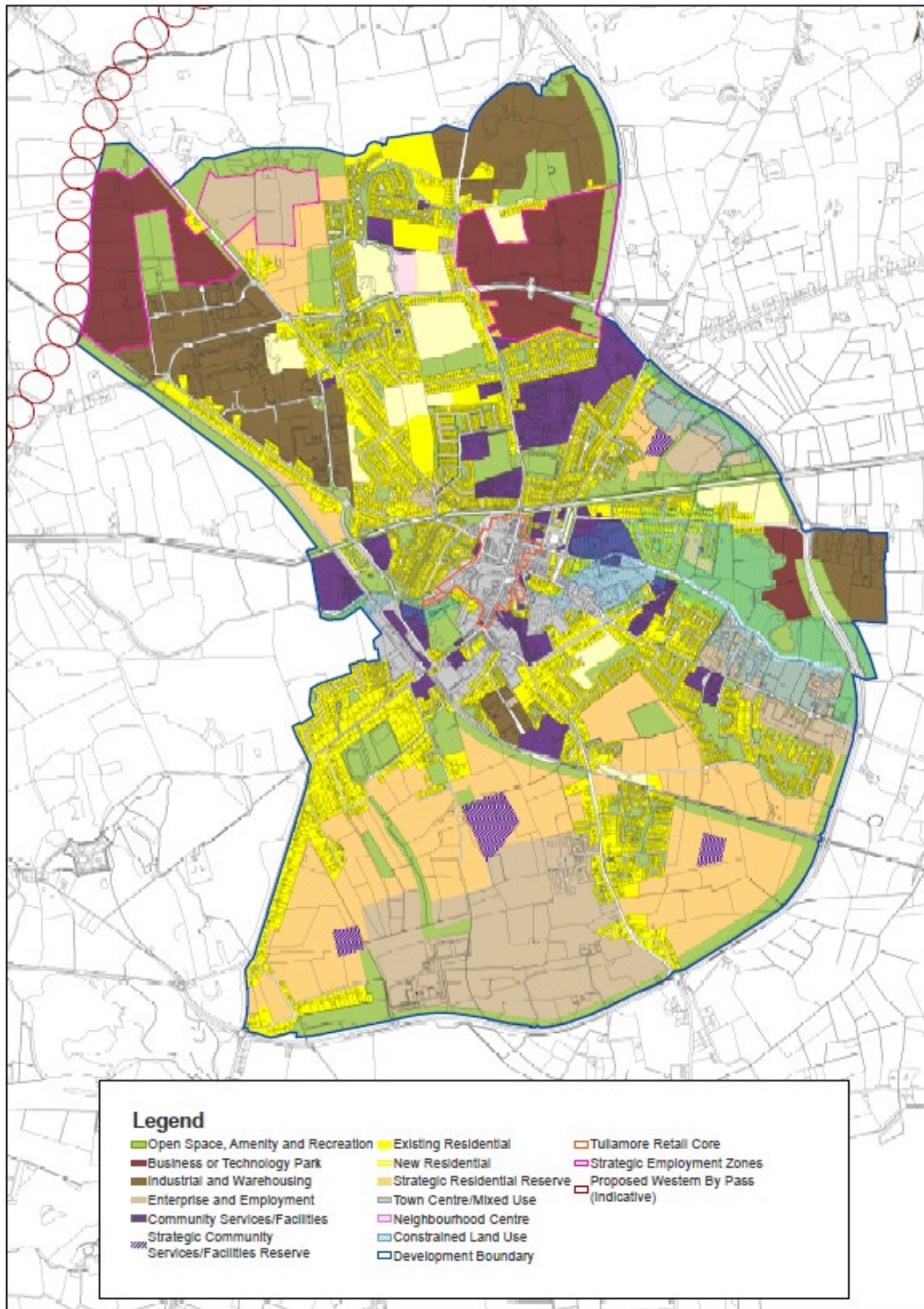


Figure 3 Draft Tullamore Town Plan

### SUBMISSION COMMENTS

The extractive industry provides the necessary raw materials for the majority of building and infrastructure development in Ireland. Roads, motorways, homes, schools, hospitals, colleges, factories, water and sewerage systems are all constructed with construction aggregates and concrete

products. The construction of power stations, railways, wastewater and water treatment plants and sporting stadia is heavily dependent on the supply of crushed stone, concrete and other building materials made from aggregates.

Aggregate extraction can only take place where suitable aggregate resources exist; aggregates are a 'tied' resource. It is considered, therefore, that planning policies should be carefully constructed to avoid adverse effects on aggregate resources and the related extractive industries and added-value production that are essential for our built environment, infrastructure and future economic development.

While this submission welcomes the recognition of the importance of sand and gravel extractions in the economic life of County Offaly and its importance as a valuable source of employment, it is also necessary for the Development Plan to include further emphasis on the sectors significance and added value in terms of the local, regional and national economy. It is particularly important to highlight the sectors central role within construction and development supply chains, therefore, supporting economic development and employment in Offaly and further afield.

It is submitted that the Council should have due regard to Roadstone Ltd.'s property assets within County Offaly, which includes 1 established operation and the added value this location can bring within construction supply chains and the related impact on the local, regional and national economy. The existing operation is long established, capable of providing continued significant socio-economic benefits to the area and should be regarded as central to achieving the wider county development targets and objectives.

Offaly has significant but finite mineral resources and it should also be the aim of the proposed CDP to safeguard areas of significant resources from incompatible developments to ensure the continued viability of the extractive industry, whilst of course, ensuring that environmental, rural, scenic and residential amenities are protected. There is a need to safeguard valuable un-worked deposits from permanent development that would prevent or hinder their future extraction and thus appropriate control measures should be put in place to avoid such a scenario.

This is particularly important as the Draft Offaly County Development Plan favours the use of extensions to existing permitted quarries over proposals for extraction from green field sites and that there is a presumption against new quarry developments on the county's eskers. The introduction of additional policy constraints on existing quarry operations should therefore be avoided to ensure that the efficient use of these existing facilities is maximised.

In particular, due consideration should be given to the operational needs and planned expansion of Tullamore Sand and Gravel Pit during route selection stage of the Tullamore Western Bypass. In this regard, Roadstone Ltd. will engage with the County Council during the consultation process for the corridor and route selection.

## CONCLUSION

It is welcomed that the Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 adequately outlines the economic value and significance of the aggregates and minerals sector, emphasising the sectors significance and added value in terms of built environment's supply chain and related impact on the local, regional and national economy.



As highlighted in our submission, extraction is tied to certain locations and can only take place where resources occur. It is therefore important to ensure that the future interpretation of county development plan policies does not result in the sterilisation of existing resources and existing quarries and in particular given the presumption in favour of the use of existing permitted quarries, policies do not prevent the secure, long-term supply of construction aggregates and related value-added products, such as concrete blocks and road and house making materials.

Through this submission, Roadstone Ltd. request that the considerations set out above are incorporated into the forthcoming adopted development plan.

Yours faithfully  
**SLR Consulting Ireland**

**Aislinn O'Brien**  
Principal

Enc. Copy of "Essential Aggregates" (Irish Concrete Federation, 2019)

Cc. Mr. S. Geraghty (Roadstone Ltd.)



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# ESSENTIAL AGGREGATES

PROVIDING FOR  
IRELAND'S NEEDS  
TO 2040

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## Statement by Larry Byrne, President, Irish Concrete Federation

Aggregates are the essential primary raw material used for the construction of Ireland's built environment. They are used extensively for the construction, upgrade and maintenance of our homes, schools, hospitals and places of work as well as other essential infrastructure such as our road and transport network and water and wastewater infrastructure. In essence, aggregates are the backbone of sustainable construction in Ireland, without which modern and future living would not be possible.

Ireland has a ready but diminishing supply of high quality aggregate reserves. It is critical that Government recognises the strategic importance of access to a steady and dependable supply of local, high quality raw materials necessary for the construction of Ireland's future built environment as highlighted in Project Ireland 2040 which was launched in 2018. It is also essential that Government, when planning for Ireland's future needs, recognises that by their nature, aggregates can only be accessed where they occur. It is therefore essential that Ireland's future supply of aggregates is planned, monitored and managed in a sustainable manner. This will require leadership from Government and support from industry and all other stakeholders.

The Irish Concrete Federation (ICF) greatly welcomes the statement in the National Planning Framework

2018 acknowledging the essential role of aggregates in Ireland's future development. It is now essential that Government, in consultation with all stakeholders, develop a national policy for aggregates which acknowledges their strategic importance in Ireland's future. This overarching policy should underpin and inform local and regional planning, promote the identification and protection of essential strategic reserves of aggregates throughout Ireland and enable the extraction of aggregates in a sustainable manner compatible with protection of the environment and the quality of life of our people. To this end, it is also essential that the Government's enforcement and procurement functions ensure that the public infrastructure projects identified in Project Ireland 2040 are constructed with aggregate raw materials from authorised extractive sites.

ICF looks forward to presenting this policy statement on behalf of our members throughout Ireland to all stakeholders and we welcome all feedback on its content. We hope it will stimulate discussion and outcomes that will contribute towards a sustainable future, not just for our industry but for the achievement of the ambitious goals of Project Ireland 2040.



## Statement by Koen Verbruggen, Director, Geological Survey Ireland

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and the Geological Survey Ireland are acutely aware of the key role that raw materials will play in the delivery of Project Ireland 2040. While the ultimate building blocks of our homes, schools and roads are frequently overlooked, the role they play in society cannot be understated. For every house we build in Ireland, we need approximately 400 tonnes of aggregates, which is a house-sized hole in the ground. Raw material potential has recently been explicitly recognised within the 2019 Climate Action Plan as a key potential rural employer while local sources of aggregates are vital in the drive to reduce our carbon footprint and to transition towards a more sustainable society.

It is extremely important that the current realities of aggregate production are fully understood and that any deficits in the current planning system can be identified and remedied appropriately. Geological Survey Ireland has previously collaborated with the Irish Concrete Federation to publish guidelines for the management of the protection and promotion of geological heritage

in the quarry industry, in previous iterations of quarry directories, and robustly supports sustainable access to raw materials. It is a provider of key geoscience information for spatial planning and policy decisions and current initiatives include aggregate potential mapping, a quarry directory and planning tools for aggregates. These aspects form a crucial part of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment's statement of strategy for 2019 to 2021, specifically the overarching goal of sustainable resource use.

Geological Survey Ireland is pleased to welcome this publication of the Irish Concrete Federation's document on planning policy for the aggregates industry. I trust that the recommendations within will be helpful and informative for planners and policy makers and that we can work together to ensure continued sustainable access to necessary raw materials.





# 1. Foreword

In February 2018, the Irish Government launched Project Ireland 2040, a national commitment over a multi-annual period, of significant investment in Ireland's infrastructure. A capital budget for investment was accompanied by the National Planning Framework 2018.

An easily overlooked reality is that the achievement of the objectives of Project Ireland 2040 will necessitate access to significant reserves of aggregates (stone, sand and gravel) over the lifetime of the plan. It is not an exaggeration to state that many of the investment priorities within Project Ireland 2040 will not be realised without aggregates and aggregate based materials.

The importance of aggregates was acknowledged in the National Planning Framework 2018. However planning policy at national, regional and local level fails to grasp the unique and strategically critical role that aggregates play in underpinning economic and social life. It is essential that the importance of aggregates and aggregate based products to Ireland's future is recognised by Government and that Ireland's strategic reserves of aggregates are identified and protected and their use enabled in a sustainable manner.

It is equally important that the quarrying industry plays its part in ensuring that operations are carried out in a sustainable manner and that the state's planning enforcement and procurement functions ensure that only authorised operators are entitled to supply the marketplace.

The objective of this document is to highlight to Government the need for a national planning policy for aggregates, which will underpin local and regional planning policy, to ensure the sustainable supply of aggregates for Project Ireland 2040 and beyond. The document examines the Government statement on the role of aggregates within the National Planning Framework 2018, distils it down to its key points and compares it to the industry's experience in interfacing with the planning system currently. The document also makes recommendations to ensure that Government's stated objectives on aggregates within the National Planning Framework 2018 are implemented, not just for the benefit of the extractive industry, but for the achievement the ambitious goals of Project Ireland 2040.



## 2. Irish Concrete Federation

The Irish Concrete Federation (ICF) is the national representative body for the Irish aggregates and concrete products industry. ICF members comprise almost 100 companies employing over 5,000 people throughout Ireland. ICF members are involved in the extraction, processing and delivery of the essential aggregate and concrete materials used in the construction of Ireland's built environment. The members of the ICF account for approximately 80% of total industry output in terms of volume and value.

Since the formation of the ICF, environment and planning have been priorities to be addressed in a proactive, professional and responsible manner

by the organisation. ICF strongly believes that the key to success in this area is a partnership approach between industry, government departments, national and local planning bodies and environmental organisations. In the past, ICF has participated in the development of Planning & Environmental Guidelines, Codes of Practice and Guidelines in the areas of Archaeological Heritage, Geological Heritage, Groundwater Investigation and Biodiversity with various Government departments, the Environmental Protection Agency, Institute of Geologists of Ireland, Geological Survey Ireland and National Parks and Wildlife Service. The ICF regularly meets with non-governmental environmental bodies on many matters of common interest.



## 3. Essential Points

1

Ireland has **abundant natural reserves** of high quality aggregates (stone, sand and gravel).

2

These aggregates are the **essential raw materials** from which Ireland's future infrastructure will be built, including our homes, offices, schools, hospitals and transport network.

3

Aggregates can **only be accessed where they occur**. Currently there are approximately 500 large commercial quarries extracting aggregates throughout Ireland.

4

The supply of local aggregates is essential to the sustainable development of Irish communities. Local supplies of raw materials reduce transport distances, thereby **reducing their carbon footprint** compared to non-local sources.

5

Current demand for aggregates in Ireland at 12 tonnes per capita is twice the average demand in the EU 28. Project Ireland 2040 will necessitate the production of approximately **1.5 billion tonnes** of aggregates.

6

Scarcities of some particular aggregate products are already emerging in the eastern and midland regions. Therefore, the future supply of aggregates needs to be **planned, monitored and managed** in a sustainable manner.

7

In recognition of the strategically essential role of aggregates, Ireland needs a **National Aggregates Planning Policy** to underpin local and regional planning policy.

8

To provide for the country's future development, Ireland's strategic reserves of aggregates need to be **identified, quantified and protected**.

9

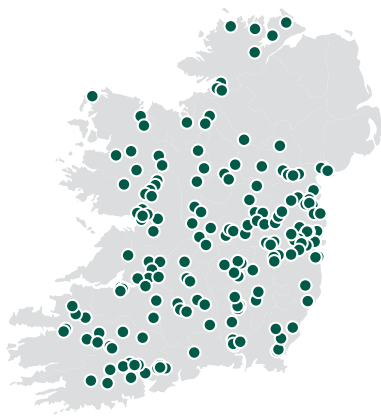
**A robust, effective and efficient planning system** for quarries is necessary to ensure that the extraction of Ireland's aggregate reserve is enabled in a sustainable manner. Currently, the average decision making timeframe for quarry planning applications is **76 weeks** with some decisions taking in excess of **2 years**.

10

The state's planning enforcement and procurement functions must ensure that **only authorised operators are entitled to supply the marketplace**.

# 4. The Irish Quarrying and Concrete Products Industry 2018

## PEOPLE & LOCATIONS



**500+**  
ACTIVE QUARRIES

**200+**  
CONCRETE  
MANUFACTURING PLANTS

**€300  
MILLION+**  
WAGES & SALARIES

**5000+**  
DIRECTLY EMPLOYED

## EXPORTS



**> €125  
MILLION**  
EXPORTS OF PRECAST  
CONCRETE

## PRODUCTS



**> 4.8 MILLION m<sup>3</sup>**  
OF READY-MIXED CONCRETE



**> 125 MILLION**  
CONCRETE BLOCKS



**> 36 MILLION**  
TONNES OF AGGREGATES



**> 2 MILLION**  
TONNES OF ROAD SURFACING  
MATERIALS



**> 2 MILLION m<sup>2</sup>**  
OF PAVING PRODUCTS



**> 1 MILLION**  
TONNES OF AGRICULTURAL LIME



## 5. Project Ireland 2040

In February 2018, the Government published Project Ireland 2040 which is the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of our country for the next 20 years and beyond. It includes the National Development Plan - a ten year strategy for public capital investment of almost €116 billion to 2027 and the 20-year National Planning Framework.

The National Planning Framework 2018 is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of our country to the year 2040. It is a framework to guide public and private investment, to create and promote opportunities for our people, and to protect and enhance our environment - from our villages to our cities, and everything around and in between.

In its public consultation process which formed part of the process of the development of the National Planning Framework, the Government issued its "Issues and Choices" consultation paper. In response, ICF made a submission highlighting the essential role that Ireland's national reserves of aggregates (stone, sand and gravel) will play in achieving the objectives of the National Planning Framework.

Notwithstanding its brevity, ICF greatly welcomes the statement in the National Planning Framework acknowledging the essential role of aggregates in Ireland's future development. This statement by Government must now underpin and inform national, regional and local planning in respect of aggregates.



*"Extractive industries are important for the supply of aggregates and construction materials and minerals to a variety of sectors, for both domestic requirements and for export. The planning process will play a key role in realising the potential of the extractive industries sector by identifying and protecting important reserves of aggregates and minerals from development that might prejudice*

*their utilisation. Aggregates and minerals extraction will continue to be enabled where this is compatible with the protection of the environment in terms of air and water quality, natural and cultural heritage, the quality of life of residents in the vicinity, and provides for appropriate site rehabilitation".*

**National Planning Framework – Feb 2018**

## 6. Aggregates within the National Planning Framework 2018

The Government's statement on the role of aggregates as outlined in the National Planning Framework 2018 while welcome, does not grasp the strategically essential role that aggregates will play in achieving Project Ireland's objectives for the coming 20 years. It correctly acknowledges the role that the planning process will play in identifying and protecting important reserves of aggregates and enabling extraction of aggregates in an environmentally sustainable manner. However, the reality is that, for operators of extractive sites, the current planning system is prolonged, overly complex and can be a source of great uncertainty for operators who wish to continue existing operations or seek planning approval for new locations.

In order to highlight the challenge facing Government to achieve its stated objectives for aggregates and the extractive sector, it is necessary to examine the core statement within the National Planning Framework against the background of current practice and operator experience. For the purpose of analysis, the statement has been subdivided into three constituent parts as follows:

1. *Importance of Extractive Industries and Aggregates*
2. *Potential of the Sector / Identifying and Protecting Reserves*
3. *Enabling Extraction of Aggregates*

### 6.1 IMPORTANCE OF EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES AND AGGREGATES

*"Extractive industries are important for the supply of aggregates and construction materials and minerals to a variety of sectors, for both domestic requirements and for export"*

**- National Planning Framework, 2018**

The Government statement on the importance of extractive industries is welcome. However it misses the essential point that extractive industries are not just important as a source of supply to a variety of sectors both domestic and for export; aggregates are an essential requirement for Ireland's future. Put simply, Project Ireland 2040 will not happen without aggregates! This is not an inflated statement of the extractive sector's importance. It is simply a statement of fact.

The Irish quarrying industry comprises approximately 500 active quarries. These quarries produce aggregates from crushed rock, sand and gravel which are used as key building materials in the construction of all of Ireland's social infrastructure and are essential to our quality of life. Aggregates are also the basic raw materials for concrete products which are ubiquitous in Ireland's built environment. There are approximately 220 ready mixed concrete plants and 20 large scale precast concrete plants located throughout Ireland. In addition, there are 40 plants producing bitumen bound road surfacing materials for Ireland's national road network.

Put simply, Ireland's economy could not function without aggregates which touch virtually every aspect of our lives – in housing, schools, hospitals, offices, roads, rail, airports, water infrastructure and agriculture. Aggregates underpin the economy and are the backbone of sustainable construction in Ireland, without which modern and future living will not be possible.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the output of aggregates and ready mixed concrete in Ireland since 2013. It should be noted that despite the steady growth in output in recent years, demand for aggregates and aggregate-based construction materials remain substantially below levels experienced throughout the previous decade.

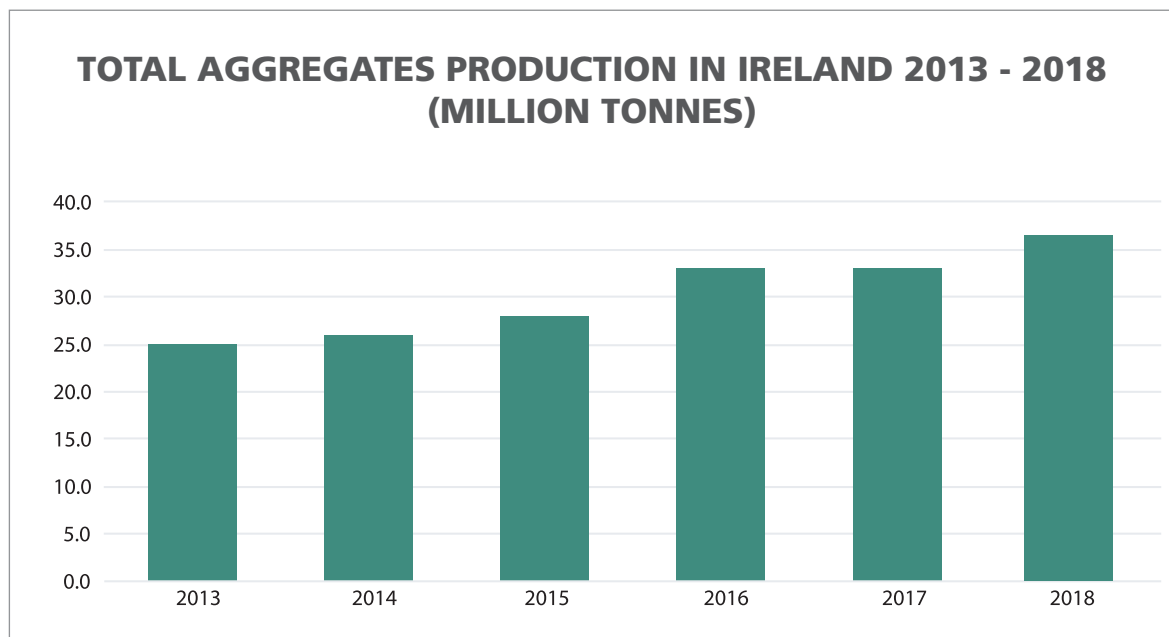


Figure 1

### Did you know?

- Every new **home** typically requires up to **400 tonnes** of aggregates
- Every new **school** typically requires some **3,000 tonnes** of aggregates
- A new **sports stadium** may require up to **300,000 tonnes** of aggregates
- Every new **1 km of roadway** requires up to **30,000 tonnes** of aggregates

Aggregates are not just essential for the manufacture of construction materials for the domestic market, they are also the key ingredient for the production of precast concrete products, approximately half of which are exported to the UK. In 2018, the value of precast concrete exported to the UK exceeded €125 million.

Due to Ireland's infrastructural deficit and dispersed pattern of settlement and its resulting large road network, the current demand for aggregates in Ireland, at 12 tonnes per capita per year, is twice the average demand in the EU 28.

The National Development Plan, with planned investment in infrastructure of almost €116 billion in the ten years to 2027, will bring public capital investment in Ireland to be amongst

the highest in the EU. It is therefore inevitable that demand for aggregate based construction materials will continue to increase in the coming years, given that the planned investment in housing, transport and education infrastructure and other priorities identified in the Plan will require a sustainable supply of aggregates from our national aggregate reserves. ICF estimates that approximately 1.5 billion tonnes of aggregates will be required to meet Ireland's societal investment needs to 2040.

In addition, quarries will make an important contribution to the circular economy as recycled aggregates from construction and demolition waste, while unlikely to exceed 5% of demand, will be an integral part of the future construction supply chain.

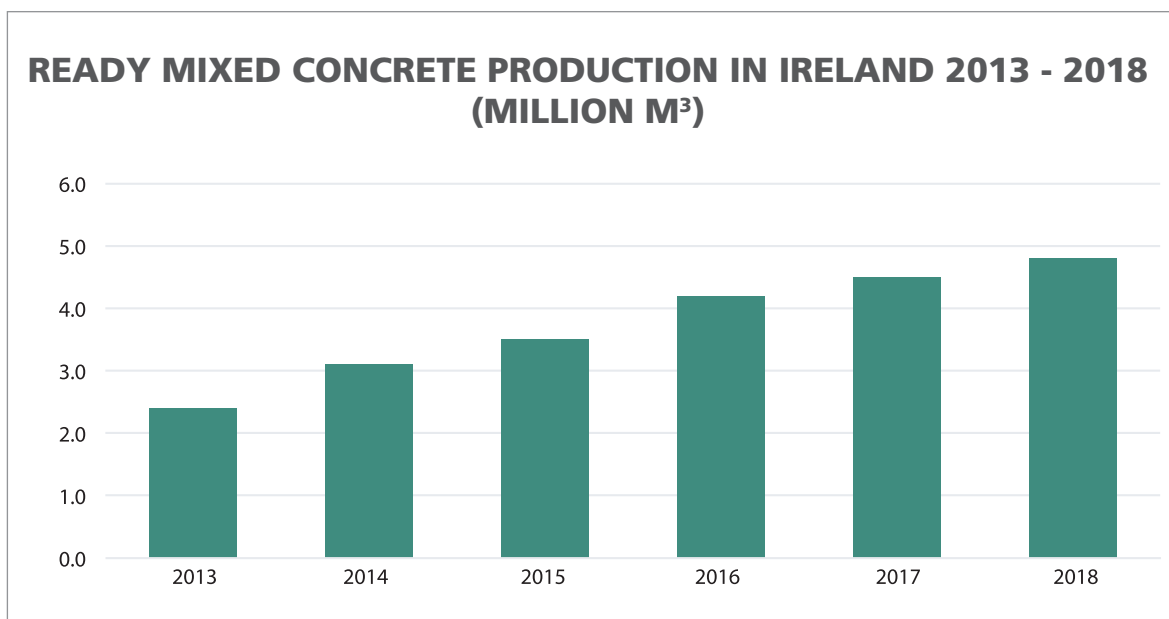


Figure 2



## 6.2 POTENTIAL OF THE SECTOR / IDENTIFYING AND PROTECTING RESERVES

*“The planning process will play a key role in realising the potential of the extractive industries sector by identifying and protecting important reserves of aggregates and minerals from development that might prejudice their utilisation”.*

**– National Planning Framework, 2018**

The planning process will undoubtedly play a key role in realising the potential of the extractive industries sector and enabling a long term, sustainable supply of raw materials. However, while crucially important, the identification and protection of important reserves of aggregates is not simply about achieving a sector’s potential; it is imperative for Ireland’s future development.

Policy makers and the general public often fail to make the link between the construction of Ireland’s public infrastructure and its dependence on a sustainable local supply of quality aggregates from quarries located throughout the country. Too often, certainty of supply of aggregates is assumed and decision making fails to acknowledge the reality that, unlike other industries, aggregates can only be accessed where they arise and where capable of achieving planning authorisation, compatible with the local environment.

While Ireland currently has a ready supply of high quality aggregate reserves, existing reserves at active quarries and pits are being progressively diminished by ongoing extraction activity and are not being replenished at an equivalent rate. Ireland needs an authorised reserve of approximately 1.5 billion tonnes of aggregates to meet expected demand for Project Ireland 2040.

However, scarcities in particular products such as sand in the eastern and midland regions of the country are already emerging as terrestrial sources of aggregates from sand and gravel and rock deposits continue to be diminished. It is increasingly difficult to source quality aggregates required for construction products such as high specification concrete, adjacent to major population centres, in particular, Dublin. In the absence of a local source of aggregates, demand can only be met by transporting large volumes of heavy product over longer distances with the obvious negative economic and environmental consequences.



In order for the planning process to identify and protect important reserves of aggregates, there needs to be a national planning policy overseeing access to national aggregate reserves and this policy must inform regional and local planning objectives and decision making. The current lack of a co-ordinated national policy on access to our national reserves of aggregates means that it is the responsibility of individual planning authorities to set their own planning policy in this area without regard to a national objective. For this reason aggregate planning policy in Ireland has evolved through the County Development Plan system. Inevitably this leads to much variance throughout the country in the treatment of planning matters for access to aggregate reserves. Often there is little consideration given to integrated aggregate resource assessment and associated planning and development with low importance attached to the identification and protection of important reserves of aggregates.

The absence of a national aggregates policy also means that the requirements on developers when extracting and processing aggregates vary greatly between local authorities. This contributes negatively to the development of a sustainable aggregate supply base throughout the country, damages environmental performance and creates uncertainty for operators. Indeed, there is the additional reality that, quite often, policy in areas which depend on aggregate extraction activities are often unduly restrictive rather than complimentary in nature with progressive aggregate planning policy. Local planning policy for access to aggregates should complement policy in housing and transport infrastructure. Similarly, local infrastructure development should not potentially sterilise access to the aggregate resources needed for its development.

Essentially there is often little appreciation at national, regional and local level of the reality that the future provision of aggregate resources has to be planned, monitored and managed now to ensure a sustainable supply of these materials to provide for Ireland's future infrastructure development.



### 6.3 ENABLING EXTRACTION OF AGGREGATES

*“Aggregates and minerals extraction will continue to be enabled where this is compatible with the protection of the environment in terms of air and water quality, natural and cultural heritage, the quality of life of residents in the vicinity, and provides for appropriate site rehabilitation”*

– **National Planning Framework 2018**

In order for Government to enable extraction in a manner compatible with the environment, natural and cultural heritage and local residents, the planning process for extraction operations needs to be reformed and streamlined.

Following Section 261 and Section 261A of the Planning and Development Act, the planning status of the extractive industry is on a much more sustainable footing. The former common practice of ‘retention and extension’ development applications has been replaced by fully prospective applications compatible with Environmental Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment legislation.

However the process of enabling the continued operation of existing operations and authorising new extractive sites in order to meet the country's future needs, while ensuring best societal and environmental practice, is prolonged, unwieldy and not fit for purpose. The excessive duration of the planning process for quarries has not been helped by historically poorly drafted national legislation

that consistently fails to recognise the evolving nature of quarrying activities, which differ greatly from other more common forms of development.

An ever more complex and evolving European environmental legislative framework, as well as frequent and routine objections and appeals, both reasonable and vexatious, to the opening of new quarries and the continuation of existing operations also add to the indeterminate nature of the planning decision making process.

In effect, the reality is that the extractive industry operates in a planning system which has an indeterminate timeframe for decision making, despite the statutory objective of an eight week timeframe for local authority planning decisions and an eighteen week timeframe for appeals to An Bord Pleanála.

An analysis by SLR Consulting of quarry development planning applications appealed to An Bord Pleanála in the years 2015 to 2018 shows that the average decision making timeframe was approximately 76 weeks, taking into account both the local authority and An Bord Pleanála decision making processes. In some cases the decision making process took in excess of two years.

The average timeframe for a decision at local authority level was 34 weeks clearly indicating that requests for further information in respect of quarry applications are practically routine, while the average timeframe of 42 weeks at An Bord Pleanála is more than double its statutory objective of eighteen weeks to determine appeal cases.

Quarry Development Planning Decision Making Timeframe 2015-2018 (Planning Applications Appealed to An Bord Pleanála)			
Year Appeal Lodged with An Bord Pleanála	Average Timeframe at Local Authority (weeks)	Average Timeframe at An Bord Pleanála (weeks)	Average Total Timeframe (weeks)
2018	27	47	74
2017	41	65	106
2016	33	34	67
2015	34	37	71

The timeframes above do not include an approximate one year pre-application preparatory period for operators prior to lodging of planning applications, or the time required for any pre-commencement compliance submissions arising from conditions attached to planning permission and agreement of same with the local authority.

In addition, it is increasingly common for An Bord Pleanála decisions to be judicially reviewed in the courts, where ‘standing’ is becoming easier to achieve.

The principal contributory factors to the delays in the planning decision making process for quarries are as follows:

**(a) Lack of Priority**

The deficit of direction at national policy level on the need to identify and protect essential reserves of aggregates has led to a relative lack of priority attached to the management of a sustainable aggregate supply base in individual local authority areas when compared with other developments such as housing and infrastructure.

**(b) Lack of Expertise of Nature of Quarrying**

Quarry development is not the same in nature, scale and duration as other developments. Clearly, the ongoing extraction of aggregates in quarries is wholly different from other forms of “one-off” development such as houses, buildings and public infrastructure. This is due to a number of factors including the longevity of extraction activities, the range of impacts and the cyclical demand patterns for materials. Technically, extractive developments are a continuous combination of ‘works’ and ‘use’ unlike other developments which expand in discrete steps. Consequently, much national legislation is not written with quarries in mind, resulting in the need for further clarification and request for information leading to inevitable planning delays.

**(c) Decision Making Timeframes & Targets**

The statutory timeframe objectives for local authority and An Bord Pleanála decisions are not realistic in the case of extraction activities. The reality is that these target timeframes for decisions effectively prolong the duration of the planning process for quarries by encouraging ‘Requests for Further Information’ to avoid exceeding the target timeframes. In addition, the natural desire to meet statutory timeframes lends greater incentive to prioritise other more common and less complex forms of development such as housing.

Upon eventual emergence from the planning process, the grant of a planning permission is subject to planning conditions and a defined duration. Notwithstanding the complexity of the approval process, the duration of planning permissions for quarries range from as little as five years up to twenty five years. Permissions of five to ten years duration fail completely to grasp the scale of investment required to plan and manage the long term supply of aggregates to meet societal needs in a local area while also effectively stalling any future investment in plant, equipment and people by operators.

In summary, far from enabling ongoing extraction in a manner compatible with the environment, natural and cultural heritage and local residents, the duration and unwieldy nature of the planning process not only undermines ongoing access to aggregate reserves where they arise, it also adds great uncertainty to individual businesses, thereby directly impacting on investment in plant, machinery and people at individual enterprise level.





# 7. Recommendations

The Government has set ambitious objectives for the delivery of much needed homes and public infrastructure in Project Ireland 2040. It is crucial that the link is made between the need for Ireland's future housing and infrastructure and the raw material supply chain that enables those societal necessities to be delivered and that this raw material supply chain is identified and protected.

ICF recommends that the following proactive steps are taken by Government and other stakeholder organisations to ensure that future demand for aggregates can be supplied sustainably to ensure the achievement of Government's objectives.

## 1. National Aggregates Planning Policy

National policy makers must recognise that supply of aggregates cannot be assumed and must be planned, monitored and managed to ensure that future demand can be supplied in a sustainable manner and support growth in the economy. A national policy for aggregates must be developed by Government to underpin and inform local and regional planning policy and to promote the identification and protection of essential strategic reserves of aggregates throughout Ireland.

## 2. Identification and Protection of Aggregate Reserves

Drawing from the national policy, the three Regional Assemblies and individual Local Authorities should, as part of their development planning, have regard to and make provision for the protection of strategic aggregate resources within their functional areas.

Every local authority or area development plan should give due regard to the information contained in the Geological Survey Ireland Aggregate Potential Mapping resource maps when considering policy for the protection and zoning of raw material reserves. Geological Survey Ireland has undertaken a substantial body of work identifying the aggregate reserves of each county and planners should have regard to these databases and maps when considering planning applications.

Industry should have the opportunity to inform planning authorities on the location of substantial strategic aggregate reserves through the review of County Development Plans and Local Area Plans. Further development applications in the vicinity of these reserves should be considered having regard to the likely future development of these locally important reserves.

## 3. Decision Making Timeframes

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations transposing the EIA Directive (2014) require that a meaningful scoping process is undertaken prior to submission of development applications. It is imperative that such a scoping process is implemented for all quarry planning applications and that planning authorities are sufficiently resourced to carry out this process in an effective manner. An effective pre-planning scoping process should reduce the level of additional detail required during application processing, thereby reducing the decision making timeframe. In addition, An Bord Pleanála should prioritise quarry development to ensure its statutory objective of deciding appeals within 18 weeks is achieved.

#### **4. Direct Planning Applications to An Bord Pleanála**

As practically all decisions by local authorities in respect of large scale extractive applications are appealed to An Bord Pleanála, a process to facilitate development applications directly to An Bord Pleanála should be introduced, subject to thresholds in terms of scale or output.

#### **5. Quarry Planning Permission Durations**

Given the highly capital intensive nature of the extractive industry in terms of plant, equipment, site infrastructure, landscaping and mitigation measures, the regulatory certainty needed for professional operators can only be provided by the granting of permissions of long term duration. Planning permission durations should be commensurate with the planned extraction of resources present which can often exceed 30 years where important and substantial reserves have been identified.

#### **6. Sufficient Planning Authorisations**

The planning system should ensure steady and adequate provision of aggregate supplies within the context of a supportive national policy, by issuing sufficient planning consents to meet demand and to help the extractive industry to thrive in a sustainable manner. Priority should be given to existing sites to ensure existing employment and investment is maintained.

#### **7. Enforcement**

Government must actively promote a strong and consistent commitment to enforcement by planning authorities of planning legislation to

protect and enhance Ireland's natural environment and ensure that only authorised operations can supply the marketplace.

#### **8. Public Procurement**

A policy of procuring materials only from authorised sources by the state and local authorities is essential to protect the environment and support compliant businesses.

#### **9. Recycling of Aggregates**

Government should adopt national end-of-waste criteria to facilitate the processing and reuse of recycled aggregates in the construction chain within a supportive planning framework.

#### **10. General Public**

Industry should work with Government and other stakeholder organisations to improve public understanding of the critical need for aggregates for the development of local communities.

#### **11. Sharing of Knowledge**

Proactive and practical steps to address knowledge and understanding gaps within the planning system on the unique nature, duration and impacts of quarrying should be taken by both the industry and planning authorities. Resources within the three regional assemblies should be pooled to avail of specialist expertise in local authorities. Geological Survey Ireland is a source of valuable expertise available to regional assemblies and local authorities. Industry will actively encourage and facilitate education and training days and events for planners in quarries.





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