



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

7th October 2020

Re: Draft Offaly County Development Plan

To whom it may concern,

I refer to the above. The Department of Education and Skills wishes to make the following submission in relation to the proposed Draft Offaly County Development Plan.

The Department of Education and Skills wishes to acknowledge the Draft Plan and welcomes the content of *Chapter 9 Social Inclusion, Community and Cultural Development*, in particular Development Policies SICCDP–20 and SICCDP–21 as supports for the timely provision of required school accommodation to meet the needs of local communities.

In considering the implications of Draft Plan for school accommodation requirements, this Department is cognisant of potentially differing scenarios where variances in factors such as household sizes, demographic profiles and housing delivery rates could significantly alter the future school accommodation requirements. In addition, given planning and construction timeframes, it is necessary to identify site requirements to provide for potential school accommodation requirements beyond the lifetime of the Plan. In order to address this, this Department has considered the Draft Plan in the context of projected population growth in the County to 2031.

Based on its analysis, this Department anticipates that some requirements for additional educational accommodation may emerge over the lifetime of the Plan, should the projected population increases materialise. Given the National Planning Framework's objectives around compact growth, the facility to expand existing schools and/or to otherwise maximise the use of existing school sites will be critical for this Department in the future, to meet emerging requirements in Offaly and nationally. In that context, the inclusion of a specific objective in the Plan explicitly supporting the intensification of development on existing school sites would be welcomed.

In respect of the individual settlements in the County, this Department has the following observations:



Tullamore:

Having considered projected population growth in the settlement, this Department has identified a potential future requirement for additional primary and post primary school accommodation in Tullamore, subject to the projected population materialising, the age profile of that future population and other factors which influence school accommodation needs. Explicit support in the Plan for additional school accommodation in the settlement would be welcomed, in particular the reservation of a suitable site or sites for one new primary school and one new post primary school, in order to meet potential requirements which may emerge over the lifetime of the Plan.

Birr:

This Department notes the zoning of a circa 6 acre site, to the rear of the Lidl supermarket on the Tullamore Road, as Public/Community/Educational in the Birr Town & Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 (extended until 2020). It is requested that this zoning (or an equivalent) be retained in the new County Development Plan in order to support potential future educational provision in the settlement.

This Department has not identified the requirement for school site reservations at any other settlement at this time, however school accommodation requirements across the county will continue to be kept under review. In that regard, the Department welcomes the ongoing engagement with Offaly County Council and will continue to work closely with the Council in relation to the provision of new schools and the development of existing schools. It also wishes to emphasise the critical importance of the ongoing work of the Council in ensuring sufficient and appropriate land is zoned for this purpose.

If you have any queries in respect of the above, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Hanlon
Statutory Plans
Forward Planning Section