



Oifig an  
Rialaitheora Pleanála  
Office of the  
Planning Regulator

25<sup>th</sup> September 2019

Forward Planning Department  
Offaly County Council  
Áras an Chontae,  
Charleville Road  
Tullamore  
Co. Offaly

### **Public Consultation – Issues Paper – Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021 – 2027**

A Chara,

Thank you for your authority's work in preparing the Offaly County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, Public Consultation – Issues Paper. The OPR acknowledges and welcomes the publication of the Issues Paper and its role to inform the preparation of the Offaly County Development Plan.

The OPR was established in April 2019, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 31AM of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), the OPR will evaluate and assess the Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, when published.

The review of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 is being undertaken by your authority at a point in time when Government is placing a much enhanced degree of emphasis on the role of Ireland's planning process in addressing many of the environmental, economic and social issues we face today.

These include addressing climate change, the renewal of key parts of our cities, towns and villages, supporting sustainable rural communities and ensuring physical, social and green infrastructure delivery.

An important impetus for your authority's review of the county development plan will be to put the National Planning Framework (NPF) 2018 into practical effect in County Offaly in line with the enhanced hierarchy of plans and strategies including the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly area.

The overall population of Ireland will increase by approximately 1 million over the next 20 years and the NPF sets out population growth targets for each of the three regional assembly areas. The strategic vision is incorporated at a regional level by the adopted Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The adopted RSES will in turn inform the preparation and making of the Offaly County Development Plan in particular the settlement strategy. The NPF also sets out employment growth targets in NPO 1c. Tullamore is identified as a Key Town in the RSES and these towns will have an economic function that provides employment for their surrounding areas and have a wide catchment area.

As your authority will be aware, a major opportunity for our planning process is that where plans at local level align with regional and national level plans, objectives and policies, the NPF will be supported by capital investment<sup>1</sup> which will ensure alignment between planning and infrastructure.

In this regard, a central element of the NPF relates to renewing and consolidating the many parts of cities, regional and rural towns and villages that are underutilised and can avail of existing infrastructure or enable investment in infrastructure for sustainable urban and rural development.

For this reason, National Policy Objective (NPO) 3c requires development plans to outline mechanisms that will enable the delivery of at least 30% of all new homes in settlements other than the five cities and their suburbs within their existing built-up footprints’.

The OPR welcomes recognition in the Issues Paper of this national policy objective as set out in National Strategic Outcome (NSO) 1 (Compact Growth) of the NPF and awaits further detail on how this objective will be put into practical effect in the written statement and maps, taking the contents of the NPF NSO 1 into account. A major issue that your authority’s development plan review must address under the provisions of the Act is action in relation to climate change, both in terms of mitigation of its drivers and adaptation to its effects.

The practical effect of the above is that the settlement and transportation elements of the plan must include demonstrable measures to reduce energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions, by virtue of the location, layout and design of new development.

Maximising the output of renewable energy sources in a manner compatible with wider sustainable development considerations and re-purposing of former fossil fuel resources in the County, in line with wider Government policies on climate change, will be a key issue for the plan in transitioning to low carbon sustainable economy and policy objectives in the Offaly County Development Plan should underline the importance of environmental sustainability for future generations. NPOs 52, 53 and 54 of the NPF set out the environmental and sustainability goals and these objectives will inform the preparation of the Offaly County Development Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> National Development Plan, 2018 - 2027

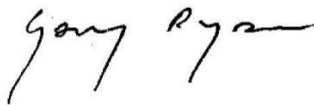
The recognition in the Issues Paper that natural assets and built heritage are key resources that will play a positive role in driving economic development in terms of tourism potential is welcomed.

NPO 17 of the NPF sets out an objective to enhance and protect built heritage in rural town and villages which will enhance the quality of life and encourage investment. This objective sets out to make rural towns and villages more attractive places to live and work and identifies the role that the natural environment and built heritage can play in enhancing quality of life.

The OPR acknowledges and welcomes the recognition in the Issues Paper of rural places and people and their contribution to rural economy and rural hinterland. The recognition that the rural hinterland contributes to the rural towns and villages is a key objective of the NPF. The OPR would welcome the section on 'Sustainable Communities' as included in the Issues Paper.

Finally, the OPR will be conducting a series of engagements with planning authorities prior to plan preparation. This will commence in the coming months and Offaly County Council will be notified in due course. The OPR looks forward to continued positive engagement with Offaly County Council in implementation of national and regional policies at the county and local levels.

Is mise le meas,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Ryan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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**Gary Ryan**

Director, Office of the Planning Regulator

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