



Offaly County Development Plan 2021 - 2027 Public Consultation - Issues Paper

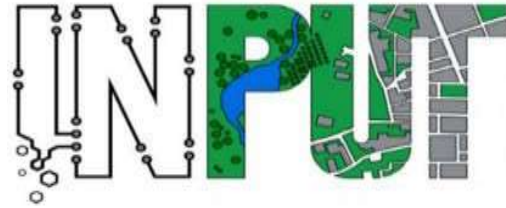


TELL US YOUR VIEWS & BECOME INVOLVED IN THE FUTURE OF CO. OFFALY



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

Project Ireland 2040
National Planning Framework



What is a County Development Plan?

A County Development Plan is a document which details the overall strategy of the council for the proper planning and sustainable development of the county over a 6-year period. Put simply, it has the potential to directly impact on the quality of life of every single person in Co. Offaly. A County Development Plan includes a written statement and maps. A County Development Plan is a material consideration in making decisions on planning applications. As part of the approximate two-year plan-making process, we are seeking your views on your vision for the County.

Why get involved?

Offaly County Council is commencing the review of the existing Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020 by preparing the new Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. This process presents an opportunity to you to shape your County into the future and to have a say when it comes to important issues such as climate action, energy, biodiversity, heritage, housing, transportation, environmental protection, employment & enterprise, social inclusion, community, tourism, recreation, regeneration, and retail.

This Issues Paper is the first step in the preparation of the new County Development Plan. At this early stage in the process, we are considering the 'big picture' issues in the county. This Issues Paper is intended to stimulate discussion and to encourage and facilitate your involvement in the process at this early stage.

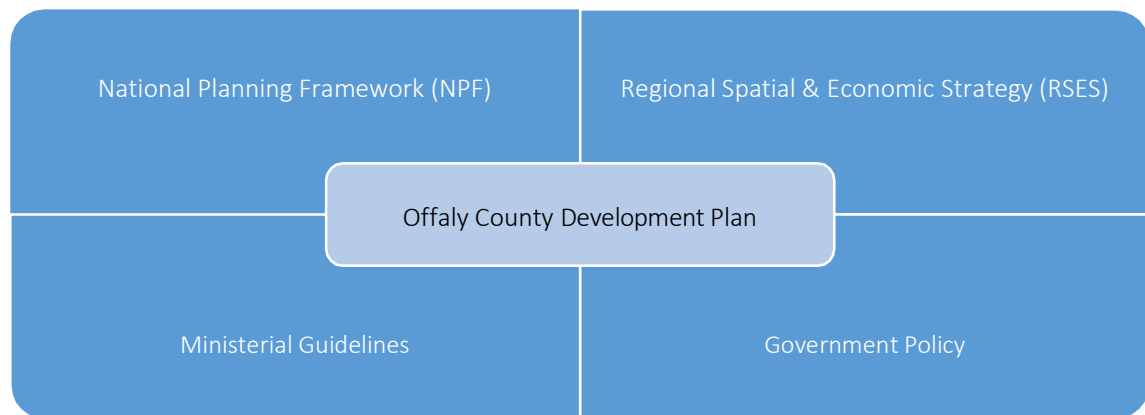
It is important that you help us shape the content of the Plan

We want the new plan to reflect the needs and aspirations of the communities in Co. Offaly, so it is important that we have your input right from the outset of the process. The Council would really welcome your views, and those of interest groups and organisations on what should be contained in the new County Development Plan. We want to hear from you on what you think are the main issues facing the County.

Context of the County Development Plan

Co. Offaly is located within the Midland Region of the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly area as identified in the adjoining map.

The County Development Plan does not exist in a vacuum. The County Development Plan exists within a policy hierarchy within which it must be consistent, as set out below.



Environmental Protection

The County Development Plan will be the subject of three environmental assessments, namely Strategic Environmental Assessment, Appropriate Assessment, and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which will consider the potential effects of the Plan on the environment and on habitats & species protected by EU designation.

Issues to consider...

Overall Vision

Offaly County Council's mission statement as stated in its draft Corporate Plan 2019-2024 is *'to lead sustainable economic, social and community development in Offaly'*.

What kind of County would you like to see Offaly become by 2027 and what could the County Development Plan target specifically to help achieve that vision?

- Economically vibrant County, providing homes for all existing and future residents in sustainable locations
- If Offaly County Council wishes to meet the aspirations of the NPF, the replacement Development Plan should recognise that Tullamore is the county town, and is a main service centre for the region. The Plan should emphasise that it is:
 - Is the only settlement which is a county town,
 - is central to the county and country,
 - is served by rail and motorway
 - is the main source of housing to serve the resident and future population
 - is the main hub of employment, education and social provision

On this basis, Offaly County Council should take an innovative and realistic approach to development within the County, and the Plan should give priority to and focus development on Tullamore, through the use of positive policy, so that the development and growth requirements of the resident and projected population and work-force from within and outwith the whole county area are concentrated on Tullamore. Development should be permitted in other towns and villages, straits and the open countryside to meet defined needs of that area and providing this does not harm the intentions that Tullamore be the main focus for development. This would allow the positive benefits of a strong central town to be better distributed throughout the County.

- As development plans are reviewed every 5 years, when Tullamore reaches capacity following OCDP review, growth and development beyond any other settlements' immediate needs should then be focussed on smaller towns and larger villages.

What vision statement would you like for County Offaly in the County Development Plan?

Towns, Villages & Regeneration

Regeneration and renewal is inherent in the proper planning and sustainable development of the county's settlements. An emphasis on high quality and well-designed development makes places more attractive and so contributes to healthy place-making and quality of life. Urban place-making is about improving the attractiveness of the public realm. An erosion of the sense of place can occur due to urban sprawl, and hollowing of town centres due to a focus on the quantitative aspect of building outwards rather than the creation of sustainable communities.



Tullamore has been designated as a Key Town in the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy which gives it a role as a key growth driver of the county and Midlands region.

Offaly County Council recognises that there needs to be a focus on the regeneration of towns and villages in order to make them more attractive. This can be considerably contributed to through the sustainable growth of our settlements in the form of compact growth rather than sprawl which is uneconomic. 'Compact Growth' is a proposed Outcome of the National Planning Framework (NPF).

A compact form of growth of settlements has the potential to make a transformational difference. It can bring new life and footfall, contribute to the viability of services, shops and public transport, increase housing supply and enable more people to be closer to employment and recreational opportunities, as well as to use sustainable mobility more e.g. walking or cycling. It would help strengthen settlement cores to meet their full potential.

How do you suggest we make our towns and villages more compact and avoid undesirable and inefficient sprawl, as required by the NPF?

- **Development to meet the needs of the County should be directed by policy to Tullamore with the development needs of individual towns and villages being met by infill development and small-scale rounding off of existing built areas.**

How do you suggest we target a significant proportion of future development on unused / underutilised sites within the existing built-up area of towns and villages as required by the NPF?

- **The OCDP needs to acknowledge the more complex development constraints facing the development of previously developed, under-used or under-utilised sites within urban areas and should focus investment programmes, through an action plan, to target first the infrastructural issues associated with the development of Tullamore and the larger towns.**
- **Policies should seek flexible implementation of development standards and contributions for previously developed sites to ensure their more complex development issues do not result in a constraint to their development.**

How can we deliver new development in a way that better aligns the location of population growth and employment growth, allowing towns to become more self-sustaining and balanced rather than based on commuter driven activity?

- **Target growth to Tullamore, which has good access to the rail network and is the focus for economic activity.**

How do you suggest we develop Tullamore a Key Town, in order to fulfil its role as a key growth driver of the county and Midlands region?

How do you suggest we reverse the decline / stagnation of towns and villages and regenerate them by creating attractive, vibrant, viable, liveable places of high quality design?

- **Policies should direct development within other towns and villages to infill / rounding off of built areas to meet the needs of that settlement and its surroundings such that it becomes more financially advantageous to develop within the built area. Increasing development, employment and population-related development within existing areas will improve their vitality.**
- **Detailed town / village centre appraisals should be carried out to ensure the centres as currently defined are fit for purpose and to identify the strengths and weaknesses to the vitality and viability of each centre. Full consultation should be carried out with all stakeholders, including those with land interests in the area and economic appraisals should be undertaken for a realistic understanding of options for town centre sites.**
- **Town centre boundaries should be modified as necessary in all settlements to seek a realistic focus to retail and employment-related activities and encourage the re-use of redundant / empty shops to residential use.**
- **Tullamore should remain the key retail destination of the County and positive policies should be included within the Plan to focus new retail development to the defined town centre and currently identified opportunity sites.**

What areas are underused and in need of regeneration?

- **The previously designated opportunity sites as defined in the Tullamore Town and Environs Development Plan, extended to 2020.**
- **Undeveloped / under utilised sites within the confines of Tullamore town (for example at Cloncollig and the 'masterplan' areas)**

Housing



The population of Co. Offaly was 78,000 at the 2016 census. With the identification of projected population growth for Co. Offaly (a population of 85,000-86,500 at the year 2026, and a population of 88,000-90,000 at the year 2031 in accordance with the NPF Implementation Roadmap), housing land will have to be allocated to deliver new homes to meet a growing population in a sustainable manner. Offaly's population in urban areas dropped between the 2011 and 2016 Census by 205 people, whereas its rural population increased by 1,479 people.

The Co. Development Plan will include a Core Strategy, Settlement Strategy and Housing Strategy which determine the location and scale of housing in each of the settlements, and the role and hierarchy of settlements. The amount of land and / level of housing for the plan period that is identified in the Core Strategy must be in line with the amount of land / housing specified in the NPF and Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy.

In accordance with the NPF we will need to target at least 30% of all new homes that are proposed in settlements within their existing built-up footprints, with a focus on infill / brownfield lands, rather than continually sprawling outwards. In accordance with the NPF, development in our settlements should be on serviced land and land that would be serviceable within the life of this Co. Development Plan.

How can we encourage efficient use of land?

- **Higher density should be promoted on appropriate sites**
- **Policies and investment should be concentrated on developing serviced sites, or sites capable of economic servicing, prior to embarking upon a programme of infrastructure and servicing of other, non-serviced and remote sites**
- **There should be flexibility in implementing policy to allow innovative design to address the particular site characteristics of each particular site**
- **Policies should recognise the importance of viability and market requirements to investment proposals**

How do you propose we provide high quality housing of a sufficient scale, mix, tenure, sequence and density, located in suitable locations and aligned with adequate infrastructure, services and amenities?

How and where can the housing needs of all sectors of our community be adequately accommodated?

Is the open countryside experiencing too much pressure to accommodate one-off housing at the cost of allowing our towns and villages to decline?

- **As one-off housing in the countryside is only allowed when stringent tests are met, the housing so provided should not be discounted from the overall housing requirement of the area.**

How can we improve the design of rural dwellings and buildings in County Offaly?

How can we encourage the occupation of upper floor units for residential purposes in town centres?

- **There should be flexibility in relation to developer contributions and development standards**

What criteria should be used to determine economic and social need to live in the open countryside?

- **As above.**

Climate Action & Energy

Ireland's climate is changing in terms of sea level rise, higher average temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, more frequent weather extremes, the spread of invasive alien species and increased risk of wild fires, for example upland gorse fires.



It is an aim to achieve transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by reducing our carbon dioxide emissions across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors.

According to the EU Effort Sharing Regulations 2018, E.U. member states have binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for the years 2021-2030 for the following sectors of the economy; transport, buildings, agriculture, and industry and waste that is not related to landuse / forestry. This accounts for 72% of total greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland.

Climate action will continue to be driven by the need to limit global temperatures, improve energy efficiency, increase energy consumption from renewable sources, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, replacement of fossil fuels of high embedded carbon products with sustainable alternatives such as bio-based products, and also enhancing carbon sinks.

There are a range of renewable energy technologies available such as wind turbines and solar farms all of which contribute to a reduction in non-renewable energy demand.

Population growth, labour force participation, and settlement patterns have an impact on travel demand. Effectively meeting travel demand in a manner that avoids congestion and limits greenhouse gas emissions requires effective spatial policies to be implemented. The spatial relationship between where a person lives, works, goes to school, shops and socialises forms the basis for travel demand.

How do you suggest we transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society?

How can we best co-ordinate and integrate land use and transport in order to reduce the demand for travel and dependence on private car transport?

- **Focus new development to Tullamore, which is the most accessible settlement with the greatest offer of housing, social and economic land uses.**
- **Investment should be provided elsewhere providing it does not harm the potential for Tullamore to accommodate growth.**

How do you suggest we reduce car dependency, and increase the use of sustainable mobility such as cycling, walking and public transport?

- **Focus new development to Tullamore, which is the most accessible settlement with the greatest offer of housing, social and economic land uses.**
- **Concentrate infrastructure resources to improving the rail, footpath and cycle way provision in Tullamore.**
- **Investment should be provided elsewhere providing it does not harm the potential for Tullamore to accommodate growth.**

What types of renewable energy should be pursued in county Offaly and in what areas e.g. solar farms, wind farms?

Do you think that parking standards for new developments should reflect the need to reduce car dependency?

- **The OCDP should introduce maximum car parking standards,**
- **Development should be restricted by tight policy consideration the more remote an area or site lies from public transport and cycleways**



Economic Development

Offaly's location within the centre of Ireland with easy accessibility and connectivity, attractive environment and infrastructural provision lends itself to being appealing to the set up and expansion of enterprise development.

The Council recognises that potential investors in County Offaly want to make sure that they can attract employees with relevant skills who will want to work and stay in the local area and that these decisions are influenced by such factors as the availability of recreational amenities, good transport links, local schools and attractive town centres.

The retail sector plays a significant role in the economy of county Offaly and in place-making and the vitality of town centres. The decline in town centres in county Offaly is recognised as a challenge that needs to be addressed.

How do you suggest we create a competitive business environment supporting economic development, and job creation?

- **The Plan should focus economic growth to Tullamore by means of positive policy requirements.**
- **Policy should be included within the Plan which :**
 - **places priority in determining planning applications to economic-related development and those within Tullamore**
 - **Recognise the economic, market and viability issues associated with delays to determination and OCC's lack of understanding of viability issues**
 - **place job creation as the major priority and main consideration when determining applications for employment-related applications**

Are there infrastructural deficits which are inhibiting economic growth and development in the County?

- **Water and waste limitations in Tullamore**
- **Congestion issues in Tullamore**

Is there demand for innovative designated hubs/ co-working spaces that would mitigate long commuting times?

Can you identify suitable locations for strategic employment development for large scale employment and enterprise activity?

- **Opportunity sites as identified in the Tullamore Town and Environs Development Plan**
- **Masterplan sites in Tullamore**
- **Sites on the edges of Tullamore**

Should we support digital technologies in the interests of efficiency and competitiveness such as robotics, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, digital fabrication, augmented / virtual reality, blockchain, and autonomous mobility?

How can Offaly best capitalise upon its tourism potential?

- **Promote tourism-facilitated development (eg retail development) which extends the reasons for tourists to visit the County's existing cultural heritage and natural landscape assets.**

Are there any areas / attractions in Offaly that you think have been overlooked but have the potential to be developed for tourism and recreational purposes?

How can the retail environment and performance of the towns and villages in Offaly be improved?

- **Major retail development should be targeted to Tullamore to ensure that it is a fully functioning, top-of-the-hierarchy county town centre. Retail development outwith this town centre should be controlled so that only new retail development is permitted where it is demonstrated that it will have no impact on the existing and future vitality and viability of Tullamore town and centre, as currently defined in the TTEDP.**
- **Ensure the defined town / village centre boundaries of all other settlements are compact areas which are accessible to the areas served / purpose of the centre, to support the vitality and viability of those areas and promote alternative and uses (residential / other employment / social) in those smaller settlements.**

What type and scale of retail opportunities should be provided and where are they best located?

- **Convenience and comparison retail-led development on the opportunity sites of Tullamore, as demonstrated as viable and to meet market demand such that the associated planning permission will be implemented.**
- **Retail development within all other towns, village and straits should only be permitted to meet the needs of that settlement and providing it is demonstrated that the vitality and viability of Tullamore town centre will not be affected.**
- **No out-of-town retail development.**



Natural Assets

County Offaly has a rich biodiversity and range of ecosystems, extensive peatlands, wetlands, rivers, Grand Canal, woodlands, grasslands, eskers, trees and hedgerows. Protecting and enhancing our biodiversity and eco systems is vital not only for our health, well-being, tourism, attractiveness of place, and quality of life of our communities but it is also crucially important in adapting to climate change. Offaly also has an abundance of natural, and cultural heritage. Preservation of these resources not only enriches the identity of Offaly for generations to come but also provides for a unique selling point in terms of tourism and thus the local economy.



How do you suggest we protect and enhance Offaly's natural assets of clean water, biodiversity (plant & animal life), landscape, amenity, natural heritage and agricultural land?

How can we achieve a balance between the growth of the County and the protection of the environment?

How can we encourage the use of green infrastructure e.g. green roofs, green walls, green space, tree planting, in new or existing development to provide solutions in relation to water management, and the need to adapt to the predicted impacts of climate change?



Key Resources

It is important that our components of our built heritage such as our historic planned towns, heritage towns, protected structures, Geashill Architectural Conservation Area, sites and monuments, country houses and demesnes, industrial architecture, vernacular structures and monastic sites are valued and protected for future generations. The Record of Protected Structures will be reviewed as part of the County Development Plan making process.

Offaly County Council is committed to delivering on the key principles of environmental protection e.g. to protect the water sources in the county from pollution in accordance with relevant legislation.

The Council recognises the importance of providing a safe and efficient road system in the county in order to facilitate the development of the local and national economy, to protect the safety of users of public roads and to safeguard public investment in their provision.

Offaly County Council also recognise the benefit of greenways and strive to further extend them.

How do you suggest we make better use of key resources such as land, water, energy, waste and transportation infrastructure?

- **Concentrate resources and infrastructure investment to key development areas**

How should we enhance our heritage and amenity?

How can the Plan encourage the reuse and regeneration of protected structures that have fallen into disuse?

Are there places that require better accessibility?

- **Improve rail and cyclepath provision in Tullamore**
- **Reduce congestion around the centre**

What new transportation improvements are required to improve access in the County?

- **Improve rail and cyclepath provision in Tullamore**
- **Reduce congestion around the centre**



Sustainable Communities

Offaly County Council recognise the importance of promoting settlements and communities where people can live and work, with access to a range of quality community and cultural facilities (such as education, childcare, the arts, play facilities, libraries, healthcare, shops, community halls, places of worship and parks) which are a vital component in increasing social inclusion and contributing to the quality of life for all.



Social inclusion refers to the manner in which all members of the community are integrated in an equal manner, reducing barriers to participation such as discrimination, physical barriers such as transport or accessibility. Facilities that meet the needs of all people are necessary e.g. the youth, older people, people with disabilities. The leisure and social interactions available to us all combine to make a real difference to people lives.

How do you suggest we provide inclusive and active sustainable communities based around a strong network of community facilities and amenities and access to quality childcare, education and health services?

What areas are lacking in community facilities?

Are the needs of different cultural, ethnic, youth, older people, and persons with a disability being accommodated in our community?

Where should open space be provided in the future?

Is there adequate provision for both primary and secondary school facilities within the county?

Where should nursing homes be located?

Rural Areas



Construction, engineering, manufacturing, quarrying, tourism-related services, transport, forestry, agriculture, agri-food, education, waste disposal and health are all significant areas of employment in the rural areas of County Offaly.

Approximately one fifth of the county comprises peatlands and the majority of the remainder of the land is in agricultural / forestry use. Bord na Móna is the largest single landowner in Co. Offaly and owns approximately 27,650 hectares of land within the county. Peat-fired electricity generation will be phased out within the next decade in the interests of climate action, according to the Government's Climate Action Plan 2019. The after use of the peatlands is to be determined.

What ideas have you for the after use of Bord na Móna peatlands on cessation of harvesting & production?

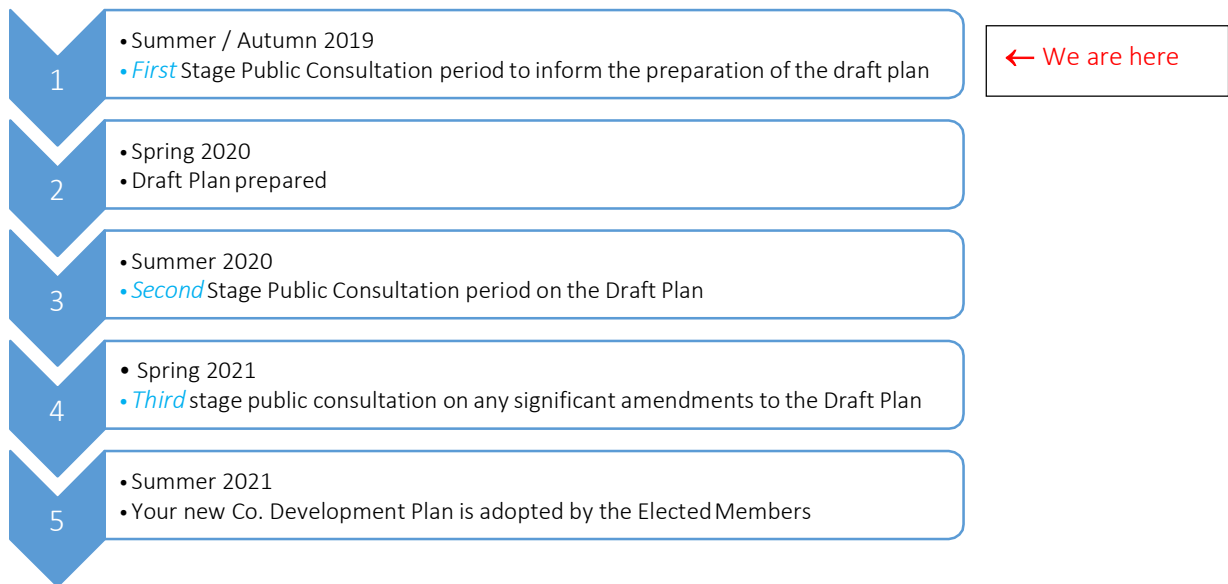
How do you suggest we strengthen our rural economies and communities?

How can a balance be achieved between protecting the natural landscapes of Offaly as a resource for tourism and residents of the county whilst accommodating development necessary to sustain the rural community?

Are improvements required in connectivity and accessibility?

Key Steps along the Development Plan process

The County Development Plan preparation process will involve public consultation at 3 stages which will subsequently lead to and inform the preparation of the County Development Plan as shown below.



How can I participate?

A) You can make a Submission

Suggestions or observations are invited from anyone with an interest in the future development of Co. Offaly. Submissions or observations regarding the review of the existing Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020 and the preparation of the new Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 may be made in writing to the Planning Authority from Wednesday 31st July 2019 to Thursday 26th September 2019 (both dates inclusive).

Online to: www.offaly.ie/cdp2021-2027 or

By hard copy to:

Review of County Development Plan,
Forward Planning Department,
Offaly County Council,
Áras an Chontae,
Charleville Road,
Tullamore,
Co. Offaly.

If you consider that you have a disability, please give details of any special requirements for public consultation purposes that you may have in order that appropriate arrangements can be made if necessary.

Children or groups or associations representing the interests of children, are entitled to make submissions or observations.

Submissions Should:

- Relate to the proper planning and sustainable development of Co. Offaly, from broad policy issues to specific types of development in identified areas.
- Not include zoning proposals at this pre-draft stage. Any submission requesting or proposing the zoning of any land for any use will not be considered at this stage.
- Include a map if you refer to particular locations or features.
- Be clear, concise, and to the point. If you need to make a lengthy submission, please attach an executive summary to it.
- Include your name and address on a separate page to the content of your submission in order to assist Offaly County Council in complying with the provisions of the Data Protection Act, as submissions are legally required to be published on line.
- Be in one medium only i.e. hard copy or online. This will avoid the duplication of submission reference numbers and will streamline the process.
- Preferably be in typed format in the interests of legibility.
- All submissions should be clearly marked "Review of County Development Plan".
- Be received by Offaly County Council no later than **4pm on Thursday 26th September 2019** as late submissions will not be accepted.

Please keep an eye on the local newspapers and the Offaly County Council website (www.offaly.ie/cdp2021-2027) for notifications of further opportunities to make submissions at the second and third stages of public consultation.

B) You are invited to a Public Consultation Session

Offaly County Council are holding a number of public consultation sessions at various locations within the county during this first stage of public consultation. These public consultation sessions will be an opportunity for you to discuss any issue that you may have with a member of the Forward Planning Team and possibly help frame future policies and objectives of the County Development Plan.

Public Consultation Sessions	Date	Time
<u>Tullamore</u> Offaly County Council, Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly	Monday 19 th August 2019	4-7pm
<u>Edenderry</u> Edenderry Municipal District, Market Square, Edenderry, Co. Offaly	Tuesday 20 th August 2019	4-7pm
<u>Birr</u> Birr Municipal District, Civic Offices & Library, Wilmer Road, Birr, Co. Offaly	Monday 26 th August 2019	4-7pm

Lobbying

At the later second and third stages of public consultation (excluding this first pre-draft Stage of consultation), submissions will be accepted for the zoning of land which itself is not considered 'lobbying'. However, communication with a Designated Public Official (e.g. Chief Executive Officer, Director of Service, Elected Members, Ministers of Government / State, other members of Dáil Éireann & Seanad Éireann & European Parliament), outside the formal public consultation process about the development or (re)zoning of land may be considered lobbying. Further information on this can be found at the website of the Standards in Public Office Commission www.lobbying.ie

THE PLACES IN WHICH WE LIVE, WORK & PLAY CAN AFFECT BOTH OUR PHYSICAL
& MENTAL WELLBEING