



**Forward Planning Unit,
Development Plan Review,
Louth County Council,
Town Hall,
Crowe Street,
Dundalk,
Co. Louth,
A91 W20C.**

23rd November, 2020

RE: NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF THE DRAFT LOUTH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027

A Chara,

I refer to your notification of 14th October, 2020 inviting the Northern & Western Regional Assembly to make a submission in relation to the Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 and thank Louth County Council for giving the Northern and Western Regional Assembly the opportunity to make a submission. The Northern and Western Regional Assembly considered the Draft Plan and agreed to make this submission at its meeting on 20th November 2020.

Whilst Louth is no longer aligned to the Northern & Western Regional Assembly, this Assembly views Louth and its Strategic Growth Centre's of Dundalk & Drogheda as a significant strategic partner and key influencer for Counties Cavan and Monaghan, which together make up the North East / Central Border Sub-Region.

It is the role of the Regional Assemblies to provide leadership and to identify regional development objectives and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning and economic policy. This is primarily achieved through the preparation and implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) that are bespoke to the region and which implement and amplify the National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework (NPF). The Northern and Western Regional Assembly adopted the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy in January, 2020, and is available on our website, www.nwra.ie/rses

County Louth is relevant to the NWRA RSES as it is crafted on the principle that it wants to work collaboratively to deliver effective regional development for all our communities, regardless of administrative boundaries. This means that we need to understand their catchments and their potential and to enable the spatial development opportunities specific to each of the sub-regions (Rf Fig 2 of the RSES) – we need to connect their strengths and celebrate their unique selling points. One of the shared sub-regions we have with the Eastern and Midlands Region is in the North East, as County Monaghan in particular is within the M-1 Corridor Zone of Influence, which includes Dundalk as a significant employment and education centre for its residents, with DKIT providing a key facility for the student population of the wider Region.

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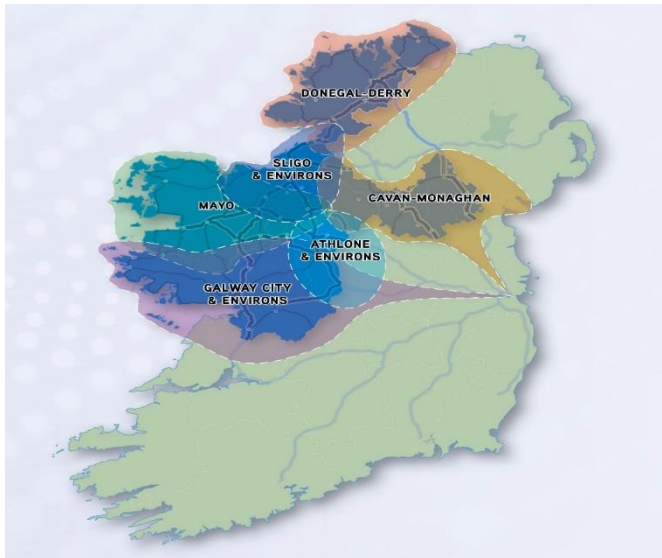


Image 1: NWRA - RSES – Sub Regions / Catchments

The RSES aims to be responsive to trends (example urbanisation, digitisation and globalisation) whilst also interpreting risk (e.g. climate, global economic challenges, future of work and population health outbreaks like Covid-19) by connecting our plans to the Sustainable Development Goals, the EU Growth Strategy (including the EU Green Deal) and the National Strategic Outcomes (NSRF). At its core the RSES recognises the weak urban infrastructure in our region and that this region has not prospered economically compared to the other two regions of Ireland, as evidenced by reclassification of the region by the European Commission from a ‘More Developed Region’ to a ‘Transition Region’ for the Post 2020 (2021-2027) funding period – see also a recent publication ‘A Region in Transition: The Way Forward’ published by the NWRA. Our RSES is responding by adopting a clear strategy that delivers key elements known to inform the location of choice for businesses, namely:

1. Development of compact urban centres with critical mass in population; encouraging the revitalisation of urban areas and re-inhabitation of urban cores.
2. Provision of connectivity and access (including national and international), enabled by physical and technology infrastructures with capacity resilience and quality especially post-Brexit.
3. Establishment of competitive, smart and integrated public transport networks within and between cities and urban areas.
4. Nurturing of world-class infrastructure and competitive services with capacity, resilience and quality.
5. Growing our third level infrastructures, access to skills and research, development and innovation.
6. Availability of property solutions – including ‘ready-to-go’ commercial properties, ‘landing spaces’, co-working spaces and flexible property solutions and affordable housing.
7. Co-location or dynamic clustering, enabling connectivity and linkages within and between suppliers and purchasers, between enterprises and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).
8. Development of quality of life factors and sense of Place, including harnessing the social, and cultural dimensions of the living experience of communities, including the unique social, linguistic and cultural dimensions of our Gaeltacht communities.

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Potential cross boundary Considerations

Cavan / Monaghan Catchment: Cavan Town and Monaghan Town have been identified within Section 3.9 of the RSES as Key Towns, with a strategic role as Sub Regional economic drivers for a wider catchment. The targeted population uplift for both of these Centre's is approximately 30% to 2040.

Additionally, within Sec. 3.9. of the RSES identifies Virginia / Carrickmacross as places of Strategic Potential, given the role of both settlements in the provision of sub-regional functions for employment, housing, and services for East Cavan, and South Monaghan. Both centre's are also identified as being in close proximity to the Dublin – Belfast economic corridor.

Having regard to the above, and the overall growth framework relating to Counties Cavan and Monaghan, the Northern & Western Regional Assembly consider there to be a number of areas (within the context of the Louth Plan) which could potentially benefit from modification to capture these aims encompassed within the RSES, thus enhancing and leading on the coherence of the overall message across the Eastern and Central Border Region within the Planning Policy hierarchy.

The context piece of the County Plan could for example, further emphasise that Louth is part of the NE economic catchment which includes Cavan and Monaghan – reflecting upon the Regional Enterprise Plans of Dept of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Border Enterprise Development Fund is an example of a stimulus package which is applied across the entire 6 Border Region Counties of which Louth is part and it may be of benefit that this catchment is referenced in addition to Louth being central on the Dublin – Belfast economic corridor.

Key Towns within the NWRA - RSES: The Louth Draft County Development Plan could benefit (within Section 1) with the addition of reference to the proximity of the North of the County, particularly Ardee, to Cavan Town & Monaghan Town as identified Key Towns, in addition to Virginia / Carrickmacross, which have been identified as Places of Regional Significance within the Northern & Western Regional Assembly RSES.

Tourism: Ireland's Ancient East: Cavan Town & Monaghan Town have been identified within Sec. 4.4. of the NWRA RSES as Key Destination Towns in Ireland's Ancient East, and contained therein Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 4.7 supports the establishment of a Tourist / Amenity attraction(s) of scale within both Counties. There has been emphasis recently placed (Programme for Government 2020) on a number of ongoing Cross Border Projects, including the development of the Ulster Canal restoration, and associated Greenway, and the growth of the Cavan Burren Geopark.

There are preliminary examinations of potential connections across the National Greenway Network (proposed) at Departmental level to potentially identify area's where routes may have some prospective capacity to inter-link. Within this context the inclusion of the Dundalk – Sligo Greenway within Sec. 7.5.11 of the Draft Plan is welcome.

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Infrastructure: The key infrastructure needs for the Northern & Western Regional Assembly area identified within the RSES include the following:

The upgrade of the N-2 from Ardee to the Border (Emyvale), which serves the wider North West, and this is identified as a key measure within the National Planning Framework (NPF). This project is seen as critically enabling for the North West of Ireland, including Letterkenny / Derry, the Assembly welcome its detailing at Sec. 7.8.1. of the Draft Plan.

RPO 6.10. reflects the ambition to incrementally upgrade of the East – West, Dundalk to Sligo Road via the following Route (Dundalk – Carrickmacross – Shercock – Cootehill – Cavan Town – Eniskillen – Blacklion – Sligo).

Furthermore, in respect of Electricity Infrastructure, the NWRA note that Sec. 10.10.1 of the Draft Plan commits to effect Eirgrid’s Grid Development Strategy. The RSES outlines the key grid projects which are priority for the Northern & Western Region, and several of these projects extend beyond the Region’s boundary into County Louth (See Sec.8.2. and Fig.64).

Submission/Observations:

The foregoing outlines some key considerations that could be given within the County Louth development Plan that will enable effective regional development for our shared communities. In summary, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly ask that Louth County Council give further consideration to the following as part of the plan making process:

1. Further reflect that Louth is part of the NE functional area that comprises part of two Regional Assembly areas, including most of County Cavan and County Monaghan in the Northern and Western Region – thus reflecting the NPF and both RSESs
2. Examine the potential to reflect that Dundalk represents a significant employment and education centre for Monaghan and Cavan, with DKIT providing a key facility for the student population.
3. Consider opportunity to improve the narrative alignment between the Louth County Development Plan and the RSES through a wider context piece, which includes the use of terminology that describes Monaghan Town and Cavan Town as ‘Key Towns’ within the wider Sub Region and which confirms that Carrickmacross is a ‘Place of Regional Significance’.
4. Examine the opportunity to broaden the narrative / context given to Irelands Ancient East, so as to acknowledge the opportunity for collaborative networking with the Destination Towns of Cavan & Monaghan, as identified through Failte Ireland, and potentially explore the linkages / opportunities for the reach of Louth to extend North / North Eastwards.
5. Consider giving additional reference to the incremental upgrade of the Dundalk to Sligo East / West Road, and the Route specified therein which includes the N-53, and the improvement of this route, as outlined within RPO 6.10 of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly RSES. This corridor across the Central Border Region (where Rail is infrastructure is absent), is considered a key component of inter-regional accessibility.

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It is hoped that the above observations are of assistance in ensuring that the Louth County Development Plan is consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the region in a manner that shall be of benefit to our shared communities and places. The Assembly look forward to further engagement with Louth County Council and if you have any queries in respect of the above observations, then do not hesitate to revert.

Is mise le meas,

David Minton
Director

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