

1.0 Introduction

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out the policies and objectives and the overall strategy for the development of the County over the plan period 2021-2027. The Plan has been prepared at a time when the national economy displayed strong signs of continued growth. Unemployment rates had fallen to their lowest rates since 2008, consumer confidence improved, and economic forecasts are positive for the future. Despite the foregoing positive signs, concern and uncertainty regarding the potential economic impact of Brexit, and the sudden and unforeseen impact from the Covid 19 pandemic, has required careful consideration in the drafting of the Development Plan.

This Plan provides a positive vision for Meath which will enable the county to continue to make a significant contribution to national economic recovery by promoting sustainable development and facilitating stable economic growth thus delivering long term benefits for the citizens of the county.

The Strategic Vision of the Development Plan is as follows:

'To improve the quality of life of all citizens in Meath by creating an environment that supports a vibrant growing economy and a well-connected place to live, learn and do business.'

1.1 County Overview

The administrative area of Meath covers an area of over 230,000 hectares and is the second largest county in Leinster. It adjoins Dublin to the south and this geographical proximity and the strong functional relationship between the two counties results in Meath being a vital supporting partner in the recent growth of the Greater Dublin Area. This locational advantage has enabled the county to play a major part in the development of the National Gateway, the nation's most economically dynamic and progressive area.

Meath has a population of over 195,044¹ people accommodated in a network of attractive towns, villages and the rural area. It possesses a diverse range of landscapes, including 10 kilometres of coastline, the drumlin hills of north Meath, rich pastures, tracts of peatland and raised bog in the southwest and the central upland area that includes Tara - the ancient capital of Ireland. This landscape reflects the changing influences of its population over time; from the megalithic sites at Newgrange and Oldcastle, to the Norman castle ruins at Trim, the landed estates at Slane, Dowth and Oldbridge, to modern day dynamic settlements such as Navan, Drogheda, Dunboyne and Ashbourne.

The county benefits from a wealth of natural and man-made resources. It is supported by a well-developed road and rail infrastructure system which provides access to international

transport networks at Dublin Airport and Dublin Port and the remainder of the country. The fertile soils provide the basis for a thriving agricultural and food sector, and the natural and built heritage enhances the quality of life for the people of the county and has long enticed visitors to Meath.

1.2 Legislative Framework

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 enacted legislative requirements, to enable the co-ordinated and timely incorporation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant RSES into each City or County Development Plan. Section 11(1) of the Planning & Development Act 2000 as amended, sets out legal provisions which either suspended or deferred county development plan processes, or require plans to commence variation or review processes within six months of the making of the RSES.

Meath County Council had commenced the preparation of the new County Development Plan with a Pre-Draft Consultation process in December 2016. The 2018 Planning Act required that the Plan review be deferred pending the completion of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy process. The Strategy was made on the 28th June 2019, in accordance with section 24(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), accordingly the review process recommenced.

This Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and fully complies with the mandatory requirements for preparation of a Development Plan. These consist of, inter alia, objectives for the zoning of land, the provision of infrastructure, the conservation and protection of the environment, and the integration of the planning and sustainable development with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population. It is also a requirement to prepare a 'Core Strategy' for the County, which must be consistent, as far as practicable, with National and Regional development objectives as set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF) which on the 16th February 2018, replaced the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and the RSES, which replaced the RPG's in 2019.

As stated above the NSS has been replaced by the NPF which was launched on the 16th February 2018. The purpose of the NPF is to act as a strategic development framework, setting out the long-term context for Ireland's physical development and associated progress in economic, social and environmental terms. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) replaced the Regional Planning Guidelines and are discussed in more detail in Section 1.4.4 below.

In accordance with European and National legislation, the Council carried out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), in line with the SEA Directive and an Appropriate Assessment (AA) under the Habitats Directive, which informed the preparation of this Development Plan. These assessments were undertaken to ensure that the potential impacts of the objectives contained in the Plan on the environment can be evaluated. This process informs the content of the Plan and ensures that the built environment responds appropriately to sensitivities and requirements of the wider natural environment.

In addition, the Plan has had to have regard to other relevant environmental legislation and guidance such as, the Water Framework Directive, Floods Directive, Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, Shellfish Directive, Waste Water Treatment Directive, the Wildlife Acts, National Monuments Acts and Waste Management Acts. Thus, it is considered that the development objectives in the Plan are consistent, in as far as practicable, with the conservation and protection of the environment.

1.2.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

This Plan was subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), as required under the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004. SEA is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before the decision is made to adopt the plan or programme. The SEA process seeks to *‘provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development.’*²

The results of the SEA process have been fully incorporated into the preparation and making of this Plan. The resulting Environmental Report has been published as a separate document in conjunction with this Plan and is included in Volume 4.

1.2.2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

The Office of Public Works (OPW), as the lead agency has statutory responsibility for flood risk management, is responsible for the overall implementation of the Floods Directive.

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) was undertaken of the Plan area having regard to the appropriate guidelines³. Flood Risk Assessment was integrated into the SEA process. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has been published as a separate document in conjunction with this Plan and is included in Volume 4.

1.2.3 Appropriate Assessment

Article 6(3) of European Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive) requires Competent Authorities, in this case Meath County Council, to undertake an Appropriate Assessment of any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site, but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects. The assessment examines the implications of proceeding with the plan or project in view of the site's conservation objectives.

A Natura Impact Report has been published as a separate document in conjunction with this Plan and is included in Volume 4.

1.2.4 Ministerial Guidelines

Ministerial Guidelines issued to Planning Authorities regarding their functions under the Planning Acts have been fully considered in the making of this Plan in accordance with Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

1.3 The Review Process

1.3.1 Preliminary Consultation Process: Pre-Draft Plan

The Pre-Draft consultation stage was undertaken from 14 December 2016 until 17 February 2017. 282 submissions were received during the Pre-Draft consultation period. The opinions and views set out in the written submissions, and of those expressed and recorded at the public consultation events/stakeholder meetings, were considered and a Chief Executive Report dated 5 April 2017 set out the response of the Chief Executive to the issues raised together with recommendations for the preparation of the Draft Plan.

Pursuant to Section 11 (b) (ii) of the Planning & Development Act 2000 as amended, the County Development Plan review process was suspended between May 2018 until May 2019, pending the preparation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

1.3.2 Draft Plan Consultation Process

The Draft Plan consultation stage was undertaken from 18 December 2019 until 06 March 2020. 2542 submissions were received during this Draft Plan consultation period, with three submissions subsequently withdrawn. The extent and detail of the submissions and observations received highlights the significant level of public interest in the plan-making process.

Pursuant to the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act, 2020, a further pausing of the statutory timelines occurred from 29 March to 23 May 2020.

1.3.3 Members consideration of the Chief Executive's Report on the Draft Plan

In accordance with Section 12(5) of the Act, Members considered the Chief Executive Report on the Draft Plan. A series of Special Meetings were held between November 2020 and March 2021 whereby Members resolved to place material amendments to the Plan on public display. The meetings were spread over such a long period of time due to restrictions around Covid-19.

1.3.4 Material Amendments Consultation Process

Consultation on the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Meath County Development Plan 2021- 2027 together with associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) Determinations and Reports was carried out for a period of 4 weeks from 31 May 2021 to 29 June 2021 inclusive. 308 submissions were received during the Proposed Material Amendments consultation period. Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, (as amended), the final (third) phase of public consultation is solely limited to the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Plan.

1.3.5 Members consideration of the Chief

Executive's Report on the Material Amendments

In accordance with Section 12(19) of the Act, Members considered the Chief Executive Report on the Material Amendments and at a Special Meeting held from 20-22 September, they resolved to either accept the Chief Executive's recommendation, accept the Chief Executive's recommendation subject to minor modification(s) or reject the Chief Executive's recommendation. The Plan was made on 22 September and comes into effect 6 weeks from that date.

1.4 Preparation of the Development Plan

1.4.1 Main policy considerations

The preparation of this Development Plan has been influenced by a number of strategic International, National, Regional and Local policy documents as illustrated in Figure [1.1](#). Details of same are contained within the Appendix 2 to this Plan. Primarily the Development Plan is required to be consistent with the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the requirements of the Planning Act 2000 as amended and accompanying Regulations.

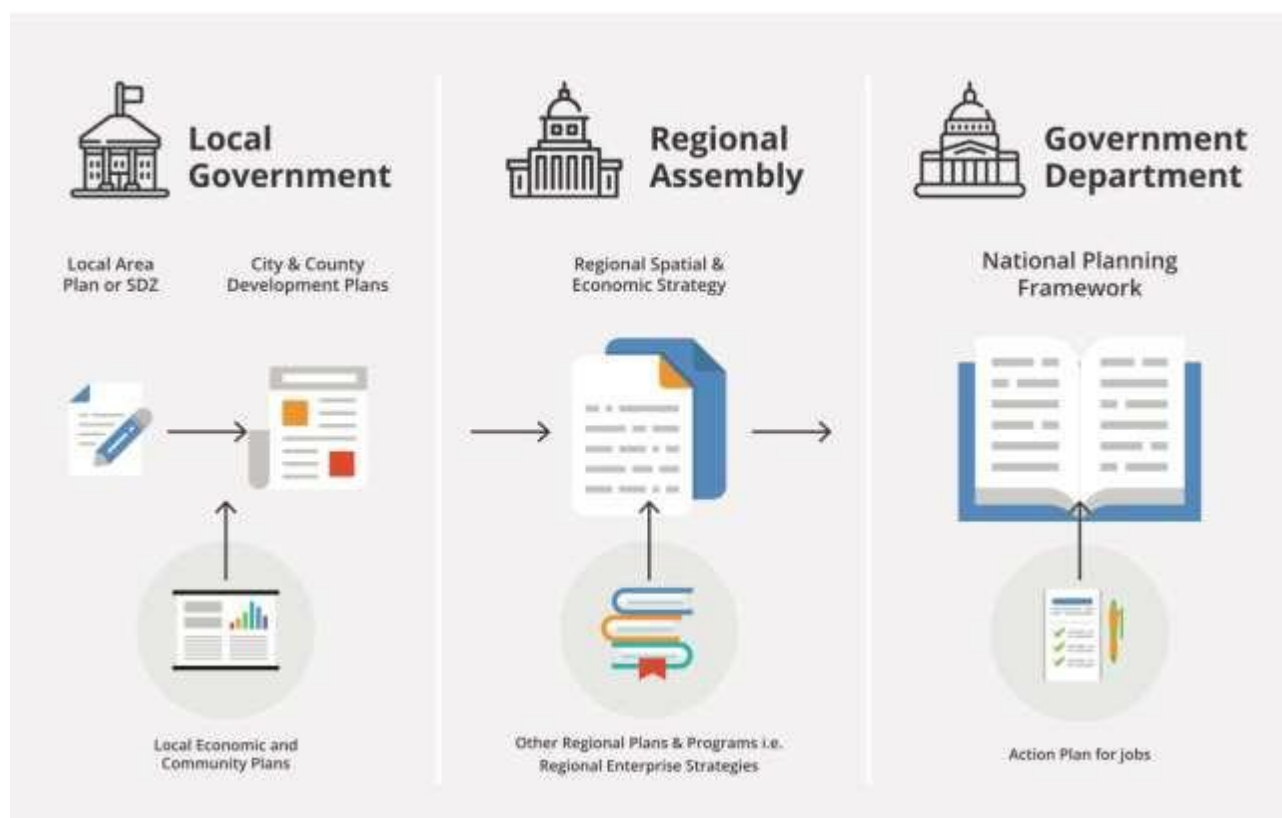
Under Section 9(6) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000, as amended, Development Plans must be consistent, as far as is practicable, with national plans, policies or strategies that the Minister for the Housing, Planning and Local Government determines as relevant to proper planning and sustainable development. The Minister can issue guidelines to Planning Authorities regarding their planning functions and Planning Authorities must have regard to these.

In addition, as a Planning Authority within the Greater Dublin Area, the Plan must be consistent with the Transport Strategy of the GDA.

Finally, this Plan must have regard to the Development Plans of adjoining Local Authorities. The Local Authorities adjoining County Meath are Louth, Kildare, Westmeath, Monaghan, Cavan, Offaly and Fingal.

1.4.2 National and Regional Guidance

The chart below demonstrates the integrated relationship between the various components of policy making at National, Regional and Local Level.



International Guidance

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a roadmap to a better, more inclusive and equitable world and aims to bring every single person on this journey, a plan of action for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognise that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Meath County Council will embrace the SDGs and embed them into our services, projects and actions, and to include them in policy making going forward.

It is the policy of the Council:

INT POL 1

To promote the UNs Sustainable Development Goals within Meath County Council for our customers and stakeholders through the actions and policies taken by the organisation.

1.4.3 National Policy Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is the Government's overarching policy initiative to make Ireland a better country for all citizens. This policy initiative is set out in two documents as follows:

- i. The National Planning Framework (NPF), which sets out the planning strategy for Ireland until 2040.

- ii. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-27, which sets out details of infrastructure investment until 2027.

The investment programme set out in the National Development Plan is closely aligned to the 10 National Strategic Outcomes detailed in the NPF. This will ensure that investment priorities and capital expenditure will be consistent with the underlying principles of the planning strategy set out in the NPF.

National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework seeks to deliver regional parity between the EMRA region and the remainder of the Country in terms of population. In order to comply with this requirement reduced population growth targets have been allocated to the EMRA region relative to the other Assembly areas. Consequently, the existing growth trend of this region has been adjusted in the RSES to ensure compliance with National policy. The County Development Plan is mandated to implement this downward population growth trajectory.

The regional growth strategy set out in the NPF represents a significant change to current trends and growth patterns, referred to in the document as ‘business as usual’. In order to implement this strategy population growth in the Eastern and Midland Region will be curtailed by implementing a policy of ‘regional parity’ whereby the projected growth of the Eastern and Midland Region must be at least matched by the combined growth of the Northern, Western and Southern Regions.⁴ The population target for the Eastern and Midland Region is for an additional 490,000-540,000 people to be living in the region by 2040.

One of the overriding objectives (from an economic and quality of life perspective) of this Plan is to redress the current high commuter levels from the County specifically in towns such as Navan, East Meath and Ratoath where the population has grown rapidly, without equivalent increases in jobs. In order to achieve this objective a strategic and targeted approach has been applied to the development of economic opportunities within the County.

This plan has identified 7 additional key strategic employment sites within the County which support the development of compact settlements linked by multi-modal corridors and are in accordance with the criteria for employment growth as set out in Section 4.4 of the NPF. The economic development of the County and the policy direction employed by the Council, which was strongly influenced by the policies of the NPF and the RSES, is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this Plan.

National Development Plan 2018-2027

The NDP sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the successful implementation of the new NPF. This will guide national, regional and local planning and investment decisions in Ireland over the next two decades, to cater for an expected population increase of over 1 million people.

Climate Action Fund

Set up as one of four funds under that National Development Plan 2018-2027 as part of Project Ireland 2040. The aim of this fund is to support initiatives that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets. The Fund will also seek to facilitate projects that contribute to other Government policy priorities including:

- Supporting innovation and capacity building towards the development of climate change solutions capable of being scaled and delivering benefits beyond a once-off impact
- Generating wider socio-economic benefits such as job creation, air quality improvements, reduction in fuel poverty, bio-diversity and community resilience and development

It is the policy of the Council:

INT POL 2

To utilise the Climate Action Fund established under the National Development Plan to facilitate public and private climate mitigation and adaptation projects in line with criteria set out by the fund at that time.

1.4.4 Regional Policy

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly was established on 1st January 2015. The Region covers nine counties containing twelve local authorities namely – Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Fingal, South Dublin and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils and Dublin City Council. The Region includes 3 sub regions or Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs), namely the Midland, Eastern and Dublin SPAs. Meath is located in the Eastern SPA with Kildare, Wicklow and Louth.

The RSES is a strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives.

The RSES vision is as follows:

“To create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all”

Due to the scale and diversity of the Eastern and Midlands Region the RSES sets out a vision for future growth and development at both a Strategic Planning Area (SPA) level and a regional level. The RSES has a much greater focus on promoting economic development.

This greater economic focus is intended to strengthen links between planning policy and economic trends and realities on the ground, and identify regional attributes that are deemed necessary to promote improved economic performance such as physical infrastructure and services, community development facilities, the general quality of the environment and other assets and amenities. The Meath Economic Strategy, which aligns with the economic policies outlined in the RSES, includes the 'live work' community model, emphasis on addressing the high levels of outbound commuting from the Eastern SPA and identification of strategic employment sites.

1.4.5 Local Policy

Meath Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 required the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDC's) within all Local Authorities. The Meath Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) was established in 2014 to develop, coordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development.

County and City Development Boards (CDBs) were abolished in June 2014 under the 2014 Act.

One of the primary functions of the LCDCs is to develop, implement and monitor a six-year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) for the Local Authority area.

The Development Plan and the LECP effectively operate parallel to one another whereby the LECP provides a supporting framework for the economic development and local community development of Meath, the County Development Plan provides an overarching strategy and statutory policy support for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County at a spatial level. Consequently, the policies and objectives of the County Development Plan must be complementary to and consistent with the high level goals and objectives of the LECP.

EMRA has a statutory remit in respect of the alignment of the LECP policies with County Development Plans.

Meath County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024

The Meath County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024 mission statement is to '*drive the economic, social, cultural and environmental growth of our County in a balanced manner that is inclusive of all our citizens*'. This plan's vision for Meath is *to lead economic growth of our county to enhance the quality of life of the people of Meath. This plan's vision for Meath is 'To make Meath the lead county for economic prosperity, social development and environmental protection, with efficient and good value services and a Council representing the people and communities of County Meath in an effective and accountable manner.'*

The Corporate Plan sets out six organisation wide objectives to guide and shape the direction of the functions of Meath County Council. These objectives are summarised below:

1. Deliver Excellent Public Services to our Citizens
2. Lead Economic Development, Support Enterprise and Employment Creation

3. Provide a blend of Solutions to the Complex Housing Challenges at Local Level
4. Support the Transition to a Low Carbon Economy and Lead on Climate Action
5. Engage the Wider Community, Increase Participation and work to make Meath an Age Friendly County
6. Build Strong, Influential Partnerships to Maximise the County's Potential
7. Develop Organisational Capability through Innovation and Staff Excellence

These objectives and those of the Meath Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 as well as the Meath County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024, have contributed to formulation of the vision and strategic direction of the Development Plan, set out in Chapter 2, the Core Strategy and Chapter 4 Economy and Employment.

Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014- 2022

The Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022 sets out clear, concise, innovative and evidence-based measures aimed at accelerating the economic transformation, revitalisation and sustainable development of County Meath from 2014- 2022.

The measures recommended within the Economic Development Strategy have succeeded in enabling County Meath to fulfil its economic potential and to prosper as a successful, diverse and vibrant social, civic, commercial, and residential centre that is recognised locally, nationally and internationally as a highly attractive and distinctive location in which to conduct business.

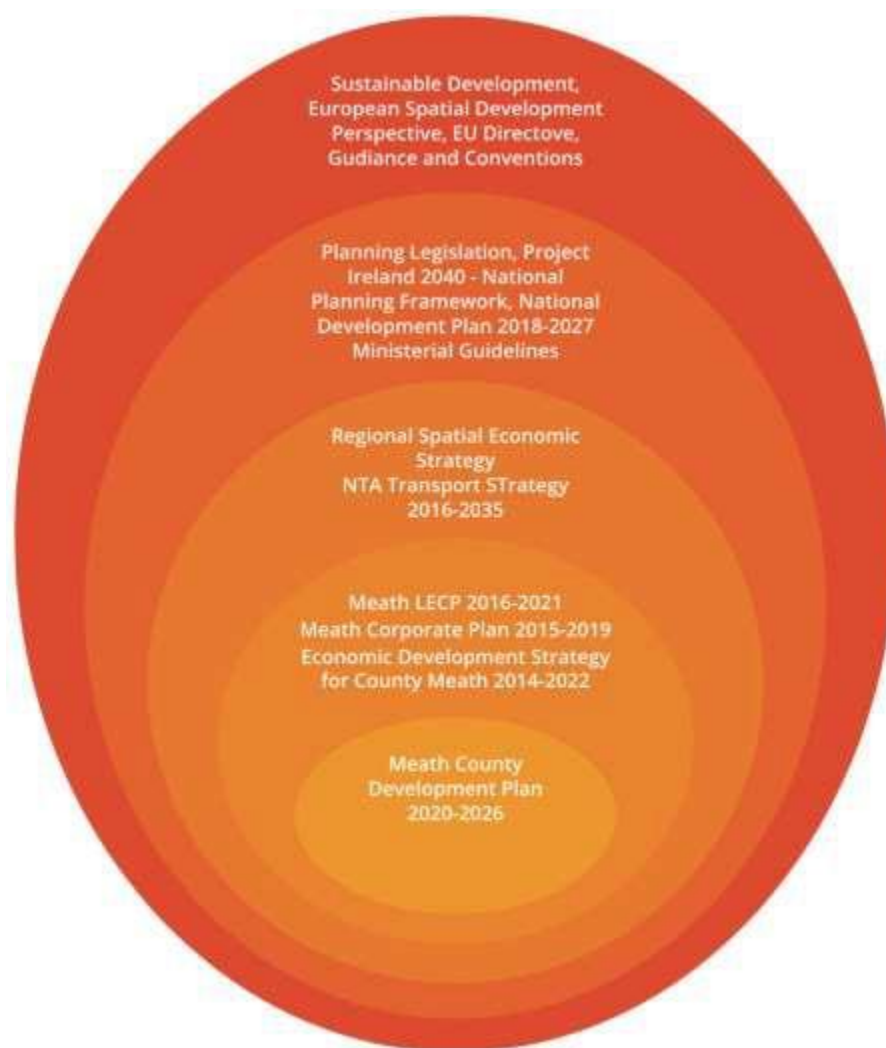


Figure 1.1: Strategic policy influences on the preparation of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

Strategic Employment Sites

Building on the momentum of the successful implementation of the Economic Strategy and the identification of 5 strategic employment sites, a number of additional strategic employment sites have been selected which reflect those areas with the highest incidence of outbound commuting⁵ combined with high quality skill set profile.

The 5 strategic sites are as follows:

- Navan (IDA Business & Technology Park)
- South Drogheda (IDA Business & Technology Park and lands in private ownership)
- Dunboyne North (Lands adjacent to the M3 Parkway Rail Head)
- Ashbourne (Lands north of the Rath Roundabout)
- Kells Business Park.

In the case of Maynooth, the opportunities presented to develop synergies with Maynooth University accord with the RSES policy direction to focus on technology and innovation poles located at universities when identifying sites for enterprise.

The sites comprise a combination of new and existing zoned lands. The intention in designating these sites as strategic employment sites in the Economic Strategy and the County Development Plan is to facilitate the marketing of the sites and to stimulate development on these lands.

These additional Strategic Sites are as follows:

- Trim Rd lands, Navan and additional lands to the north;
- Maynooth Environs (employment land);
- Ratoath, lands between the existing built up area of Ratoath and including the Fairyhouse/Tattersalls Equestrian complexes, for the creation of an equestrian based employment hub (existing employment land, additional lands identified);
- Kells, lands opposite Headfort Golf Club (existing employment land);
- Laytown, lands adjacent to Laytown Train Station (existing employment land, additional lands identified);
- Enfield, lands to the east of the built-up area of Enfield (existing employment land);
- Dunshaughlin, lands to the south of the town which will facilitate the delivery of a key route to the M3 Motorway.

1.5 Table of Contents of the County Development Plan 2021-2027

The County Development Plan consists of a written document with supporting appendices and maps, as set out in the table of contents. There are four volumes contained in the Meath County Development Plan:

1. Volume 1 Written Statement
2. Volume 2 Written Statements & Maps for Settlements
3. Volume 3 Book of Maps
4. Volume 4 Strategic Environmental Assessment, Appropriate Assessment & Flood Risk Assessment

Volume 1, the written statement, contains the policies and objectives of the Development Plan and comprises 11 chapters.

- Chapter 1 Introduction provides background information to the Development Plan.
- Chapter 2 Core Strategy sets out the overall vision for the county and the core principles underlying the development strategy in the Plan.

- Chapters 3 to 10 expand on the development strategy for the county, giving an in-depth policy direction for housing, economic development, movement, infrastructure, social issues, built and natural heritage, rural development and climate change. Each of these chapters includes a written statement in which strategic themes, policies and objectives for each topic are provided.
- Chapter 11 provides detailed development management standards. This chapter sets out the criteria which will be used by the Council in assessing planning applications. They support the various policies and objectives which are provided throughout the Plan.

Volume 2 contains the Written Statements and maps for the settlements as follows:

ASHBOURNE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT

Ashbourne
Gormanston
Kentstown
Stamullen
Kilbride

KELLS MUNICIPAL DISTRICT

Athboy
Baile Gibb
Carlanstown
Carnaross
Crossakiel
Drumconrath

Kells
Kilmainhamwood
Moynalty
Nobber
Oldcastle
Rathcairn

LAYTOWN/BETTYSTOWN MUNICIPAL DISTRICT

Bettystown/Laytown/Mornington/Donacarney (East Meath)
Donore
Duleek
Julianstown
Slane

NAVAN MUNICIPAL DISTRICT

Navan

RATOATH MUNICIPAL DISTRICT

Dunboyne (& Clonee)
Dunshaughlin

Kilcock Environs
Kilmessan
Maynooth Environs
Ratoath

TRIM MUNICIPAL DISTRICT

Ballivor
Clonard
Enfield
Kildalkey
Longwood
Rathmolyon
Summerhill
Trim

Volume 3 contains the maps associated with Volume 1, which includes:

Settlement Hierarchy
Rail Reservation Corridor
Road Upgrades National & Regional

Access to National Roads – Exceptional Circumstances
Bru Na Boinne World Heritage Site
Architectural Conservation Areas
Natural Heritage Designations (Natura 2000)
Geological Heritage Sites
GSI Aggregates Potential
Public Rights of Way
Views and Prospects
Rural Area Types Development Pressure
Tree Preservation Order's (TPO)
Gaeltacht Areas Rathcairn & Gibbstown
Management of Future Access to Strategic Corridors
Dublin Airport Safety Zones
SEVESO Sites

the Council's approach to the implementation of Ministerial Guidelines in the Development Plan, Housing Strategy, Retail Strategy, Landscape Character Assessment, Record of Protected Structures, Architectural Conservations Areas, Protected Views and Prospects and all other relevant maps and information pertaining to the preparation of the Plan.

1.5.1 Written Statements for Settlements in Meath

A Written Statement and Land Use Zoning map to establish a framework for inter alia the future LAP's, to support economic development and to provide a basis for continued operation of the development management process pending the completion of the LAP's (in the case of Drogheda the UAP) has been included in Volume 2 for each settlement. These Written Statements will continue to have effect unless they are replaced and superseded by their respective Local Area Plan, Joint Local Area Plan or Joint Urban Area Plan. On adoption, the Local Area Plan, Joint Maynooth Local Area Plan or Joint Drogheda Urban / Local Area Plan will replace the respective Written Statement in Volume 2 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 by way of a variation to the Plan. During the intervening period, the Written Statement contained in the Meath County Development Plan will continue to have effect.

1.6 Interpretation

In interpreting this document, should any conflict arise between the written word and accompanying maps the written word shall take precedence.

1.6.1 Protocols

In all cases the following protocols apply:

- The Council refers to Meath County Council.
- The Plan refers to the County Development Plan 2021-2027.
- The County refers to County Meath.

1 - 2016 Census

2 - European Directive 2001/42/EC

3 - Ministerial Planning Guidelines on The Planning System and Flood Risk Management 2009

4 - [National Policy Objective 1a and 1b of the NPF](#)

5 - Census 2016 POWSCAR Data