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Planning Report Lands at Oldcastle, Co. Meath

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1 Site Location and Description

The site comprises a number of fields in the village of Oldcastle (2016 population 1,383). The site has an estimated area of 5.7 hectares. The site has road frontage onto the regional road R195 to the west and to a local road to the south. Adjoining development to the south and south west is road frontage development of a mixed use nature with commercial units adjoining the north western boundary. The site was not inspected.

2 Planning Policies: National and Regional

2.1 National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework¹ is based on a national population increase of ca. one million people of which no more than 50% should be accommodated within the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly area. Ca. half of the population growth within the region is to be accommodated in Dublin city and suburbs with the remainder in settlements throughout the region. The National Planning Framework does not contain a settlement hierarchy beyond the identification of Dublin City and Athlone, Dundalk and Drogheda as regional centres.

2.2 Regional Planning Guidelines

Pending the preparation of a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly area, the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 provide the current strategic planning framework for the development of the Greater Dublin Area and set out a hierarchy of settlements within the region. Oldcastle is in the category of 'small commercial towns'. These towns are described as: ..."*economically active independent towns, with less dependence on commuting for population growth, should be recognised in the Development Plans for their key local importance and be supported in this role.*"²

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly area is currently in preparation. An issues paper has been produced.³

3 Planning Policies: Local

3.1 Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019

Within the Meath County Development Plan the lands have been zoned A2: "*To provide for new residential communities with ancillary community facilities, neighbourhood facilities and employment uses as considered appropriate for the status of the centre in the Settlement Hierarchy.*" An indicative access point is shown in the southern boundary road frontage of the lands.⁴

Oldcastle is a 'small town' under the Urban Settlement Hierarchy of the development plan.⁵ In relation to population growth of the town the development plan states the following: ..."*Towns which have developed on a more local, sustainable basis will be*

¹ *Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework*, Govt. of Ireland, February 2018.

² *Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area 2010-2022*, Dublin Regional Authority and Mid-East Regional Authority, June 2010, p. 95.

³ *Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy, Initial Public & Stakeholder Consultation Paper*, Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly, November 2017.

⁴ *Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, Vol. 5 Book of Maps*, Land Use Zoning Objectives Map Oldcastle.

⁵ *Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, Table 2.1*, p. 10.

encouraged to continue developing in this manner and are considered to have greater scope to accommodate additional population e.g. Athboy and Oldcastle.”⁶

The lands can be described as ‘backland development land’ which is referred to in the development plan as follows: ...”*The potential of the considerable backlands areas of the town to accommodate mixed use developments should be afforded a priority over green field sites removed from the town centre and the main educational and recreational facilities of the town.”⁷*

The development plan makes explicit reference to the lands in question as being suitable for residential development: ...”*A total of 8.95 hectares of lands have been identified for A2 residential land use which have the capacity to provide 225 no. units at an assumed density of 25 units per hectare.”⁸*

3.2 Meath County Development Plan 2019-2025

A draft development plan is currently in preparation. Although a draft plan should have been on display by the end of February this has been delayed to the end of March 2018. There will be an opportunity to make submissions on the draft development plan.

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Planning History

There are no recent planning decisions relevant. There are no outstanding planning permissions for any of the lands zoned for new residential development in the development plan. This also applies to the subject site. Although there have been refusal decisions on the lands, these decisions are more than five years old.

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Potential Land Uses

5.1

Residential

The lands are identified in the development plan as being suitable for in depth residential development. While a density of 25 dwellings per hectare is envisaged in the county development plan, it is likely that a higher density would be acceptable to, or indeed required by, An Bord Pleanala. It is noted that in a recent decision to refuse permission for a development proposal for 113 dwelling units on 7.2 hectares in Galway, the Board refused on the single ground of low density and referred to the Ministerial Guidelines in the following way: ...”*It is considered that the low density proposed would be contrary to the aforementioned Ministerial Guidelines, which indicate that net densities less than 30 dwellings per hectare should generally be discouraged in the interests of land efficiency.”⁹*

5.2

Other Uses

Under the development plan zoning objective a limited scale of commercial or community facilities can be considered provided there is a link with the residential development proposed. For example, this may include: education, offices, healthcare, enterprise centre, restaurant.

⁶ Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, p. 50.

⁷ Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, p. 530.

⁸ Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, p. 531.

⁹ An Bord Pleanala ref. no. 300009-17.

6 Planning Issues

6.1 Vehicular Access and Car Parking

Vehicular access can be provided from the road to the south as a potential access point has been indicated in the development plan. Provided that the bulk of development traffic accesses the site at this location, secondary vehicular access from the regional road along the west may also be feasible.

6.2 Services

The county development plan refers to upgrades to both water and wastewater facilities.¹⁰ It is assumed that these works have been completed and that adequate services exist to facilitate development on the zoned lands. However, this requires verification.

6.3 Design Statement

The county development plan requires a design statement to be submitted with a planning application for residential development: ..."All designers of multiple residential developments within the Development Framework boundary are requested to submit a Design Statement to the Planning Authority with their planning applications in accordance with the requirements of Section 11.2 Residential Development of Volume I. A Design Statement is an appraisal of the distinctive character of the area adjoining the proposed development site and must consider how the design and layout of the proposed development responds to, and preferably enriches that character."¹¹

6.4 Density

The county development plan states that: ..."Residential densities of up to 35 no. units per hectare can be achieved in Oldcastle town centre and 25 no. residential units per hectare in the rest of the Development Framework area, subject to good design and site constraints."¹²

The Ministerial Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, refer to densities as follows: ..."Development at net densities less than 30 dwellings per hectare should generally be discouraged in the interests of land efficiency, particularly on sites in excess of 0.5 hectares."¹³

A net density of between 25 and 35 dwellings per hectare should be feasible.

6.5 Procedure

As the development proposed is likely to be more than 100 dwellings, a planning application will fall under Strategic Housing Development and must be submitted directly to An Bord Pleanala instead of the planning authority Meath County Council. However, under the procedures for Strategic Housing Development applications, consultation with the Planning Authority under section 247 of the Planning &

¹⁰ Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, p. 530.

¹¹ Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, p. 535.

¹² Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019, p. 539.

¹³ Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, May 2009, p. 45.

Development Act, 2000, as amended, is mandatory and must be carried out in the first stage of the process.¹⁴ This is a so-called ‘pre-planning consultation’.

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Conclusions

- The lands have been zoned for residential development with scope for additional limited community and commercial uses.
- A net density of between 25 and 35 dwellings per hectare should be feasible.
- A planning application for residential or mixed use development would come under the provisions for Strategic Housing Development and needs to be made directly to An Bord Pleanala.
- As a first step in the process a pre-planning meeting needs to take place with Meath County Council. Such a meeting can be based on a preliminary layout drawing with indicative house types. This meeting will assess all relevant planning issues incl. services.
- It is recommended to await the publication of the draft county development plan which is imminent in order to confirm the zoning objective for the lands in the new development plan.

¹⁴ *Strategic Housing Development Pre-Application Consultation Guidance for Prospective Applicants*, An Bord Pleanala, June 2017.