

Oifig an Phríomhfheidhmeannaigh
Chief Executive's Office

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22nd January 2019

Mr. Jim Conway
Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
3rd Floor North, Ballymun Civic Centre
Main Street
Ballymun
Dublin 9 D09 C8P5

Dear Jim,

With regard to the draft Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) which went on public display for consultation in November 2018, Longford County Council welcome the opportunity to make a submission on the draft.

A copy of Longford County Council's submission is attached.

I would be grateful if you could please indicate at your earliest convenience that you have received our submission in good order. I hope this meets with your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Paddy Mahon
Chief Executive

Designated Public Official under the Regulation of Lobbying Act

cc: Mr. Malachy Bradley, Assistant Director/Senior Planner

Longford County Council
Submission on
Draft EMRA RSES



Aras an Chontae
Great Water Street
Longford
N39 NH56

22nd January 2019

In relation to the Draft Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) prepared and circulated by the Eastern and Midland Regional Authority (ERMA), Longford County Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission. While it is recognised that there are good elements within the Strategy, it is nonetheless considered that the Draft ERMA RSES has the following shortcomings:-

General

- In relation to the counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath, the use of the term '*outer*' should be abandoned in favour of a more appropriate positive term such as '*midland*'.
- The text could benefit from better cross referencing of subjects and chapters.

In relation to the specific chapters the following observations and comments are made:-

Chapter 1: Introduction

Page 14

- Reference is made to 1 in 6 non-nationals; whereas on Page 160 reference is made to 1 in 3. This should be clarified.

Chapter 3: Growth Strategy

Page 30

- As per section '*3.2 Growth Enablers for the Region - The Outer Region*' the list of Key Growth enablers needs to be expanded to include Infrastructure and energy; reverse commuting and amenities.

Chapter 4: People and Places

Page 38 and 62

- In keeping with the earlier recognition by EMRA of the different dynamics of the '*outer*' region (to be renamed '*Midland*') with the decision to reduce the upper population threshold of '*small towns and villages*' from 5,000 to 4,000 persons, it is also considered that the lower population threshold in this category should consequently be readjusted, with a recommendation of 800 persons to replace the lower 1,500 person threshold i.e. '*small towns and villages*' in the Midland area would fall within the 4,000-800 population band rather than 4,000-1,500 population band.

- To take account of the aforementioned reduction to the lower threshold of 'small towns and villages' in the Midland region, the threshold associated with 'Rural Areas' should consequently be reduced from 1,000 to under 800 persons.

For example, if these thresholds are unchanged Granard town will technically constitute a 'rural area', yet it is a thriving market town and the only town in County Longford highlighted in the Retail Strategy. The thresholds should reflect the functional area and associated role of small settlements, with the application of the Asset Based Test approach as advocated in the RSES. A town like Granard with a population of approximately 900 persons serves a much larger functional area than its size suggests and provides services and employment for a large number of people outside of its town boundaries. It hosts a number of large industries and employers that service national and international markets. As it would fall within the existing classification of a 'rural area' this would be seriously detrimental to its future well being.

Page 42 'Headroom'

- In terms of the headroom population allocation, all other counties in the EMRA region with the exception of Longford, Offaly and Laois have an additional headroom allocation of 25% over the figure specified in the NPF roadmap. Currently Longford does not have this flexibility. This is inequitable and will result in the creation of greater disparity and increased depravity between those counties being left out. The decision to bring natural gas to County Longford, job announcements by a number of large employers, expansion plans of existing businesses, the construction of the largest holiday facility in the country in Longford (Center Parcs), and the high level of inward commuting has the potential to increase population figures substantially upon those projected. Accordingly the flexibility of headroom variation by up to 25% should also be afforded to County Longford.
- The RSES baseline allotted population allocation to 2026 represents a shortfall of approximately 2,000-3,000 persons/400-800 houses (see appendix 1). In addition there is a current Social Housing Demand of over 800 houses which has not been taken into account. This makes it even more imperative that the additional headroom contingency of 25% is permitted.
- We are already seeing evidence of the shortfall in affordable housing and the impact this is having on employers trying to fill vacancies. Currently Longford has the highest percentage of inward commuters in the country.
- The role of Longford town as a strategic portal to the northwest and south should be considered more, particularly taking account the proposed N5 Ballaghaderreen Bypass, N4 upgrade and N55

planned works. This makes Longford an attractive base for business investment and expansion and a place to live.

- In terms of increased population growth, the large employment generator of Center Parcs, which is to open in Summer 2019, and the job announcements by a number of existing businesses should be factored in.

Page 47 'Athlone Regional Growth Centre RPO 4.4'

- In relation to the Joint Urban Area Plan to be completed by Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils', the supporting role of other towns within the 1 hour catchment zone should be considered (i.e. Longford, Ballymahon, Mullingar and Tullamore). Therefore the inclusion of representatives from such counties in developing the Strategy should be considered.
- A long term strategy for the Midlands, recognising the Regional Strategic Objectives of the Midland Regional Enterprise Plan and the important role of Athlone as an economic driver and growth centre of the region, should be developed.

Page 58 'Outer Region Key Towns – Longford'

- The RPO's for the key towns of the 'Outer' (to be renamed 'Midland') counties need to be refined and re-examined. These RPO's needs to recognise the specific strengths of the key towns and should be worded in a positive light to attract further economic investment and opportunity to act as local, regional, national and international drivers' contributing to balanced regional development. In this regard the document should have a positive bias and serve as a marketing tool selling the region.
- The unique selling points of the region and for each county should be clearly identified and Regional Policy formulated to address same e.g. the Midlands as the 'food' and 'biomass' baskets, the service centre and 'playground' for Athlone, 'Hidden Heartlands' etc.

The following changes are recommended for Longford town:-

- **Omission** of RPO 4.39 as this is appropriate in a large urban city area, but not for a provincial town.
- **Omission** of RPO 4.42 as this is covered under CFRAMS, and also the town in comparison to other towns (Athlone) is not at a particularly higher risk of flooding.
- **Amendment** of RPO wording in relation to the following: –

- RPO 4.40 – *‘Expand Longford Town’s potential to become a significant tourism centre having regard to its accessibility to key attractions such as Center Parcs, and the lattice of national and regional tourism trails that include Longford Town as a key axis point’*. Examples include cross regional recreational opportunities such as the Royal Canal Greenway, the Rebel Longford Trail, the Longford Literary Trail and the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park.
 - RPO 4.41 – this should be subdivided with the educational attainment levels, up skilling in key competencies and skills acquisition constituting an individual RPO.
 - In relation to social inclusion measures this should be an individual RPO with the potential for the *‘new communities’* that now make up a sizable percentage of the Longford population included in this new RPO. Alternative wording as follows is suggested;
‘invest in community development and social inclusion measures that maximise the opportunities for everyone including the substantial ‘new communities’ cohort to contribute positively to the future economic, social and cultural well-being of Longford Town’.
- **Inclusion of additional RPO’s** are recommended given that in Chapter 3 (see section ‘3.2 Growth Enablers for the Region’) it is indicated that Longford is among the towns identified as key growth enablers for the outer region, which *‘function at a much higher level than their resident population and play a key regional role in providing employment and services for their own hinterland’*.

The following **additional RPO’s** should be included:-

- As it is stated that *‘the town has a particularly high ratio of jobs to resident workers’* a specific RPO on employment should be included with the following suggested.
‘the continued development of Longford Town as a strategic employment hub, which is particularly attractive as a location for firms with a national and international market reach’.
- Support the provision of additional hotel/conference/event facilities.
- Support Longford town’s role as an important employment hub by improving the ratio of jobs to resident workers in the town.
- Support and promote employment clusters in Longford e.g. advanced manufacturing, robotics, engineering, pharma, energy potential, back office services and food and agri-related businesses etc.

- Development of enterprise, innovation and digital hubs to promote and support fledgling industry/enterprise;
- Address and support the concept of ‘reverse commuting’.
- Support Longford’s role as a service centre to the Regional growth centre of Athlone.
- Promote, support and develop Longford Town as a strategic portal to the northwest and south in recognition of its location at the junction of the N55; ‘M4 /N4 Dublin/Sligo’ and N5; and due to its location within 1 hour of the regional growth centre of Athlone regional centre.
- Promote the plan-led development and regeneration of publicly owned land banks in the town for residential, employment, education, community, cultural and recreational opportunities.
- Promote the consolidation of the town centre and the enhancement and linking of Brownfield and outlying sites to the town centre, with a focus on the regeneration of underused buildings and strategic sites.
- Provide enhanced support to improve public realm in derelict areas to encourage greater private sector investment.
- Support the provision of necessary infrastructure in key locations to open up lands for future development.
- Support the delivery of gas energy supply to Longford town.

Additional contextual information circulated by EMRA via email

- The additional **contextual** information circulated by EMRA via email on 21/12/18 to Longford County Council is welcomed subject to amendment as per appendix 2 of this document.
- The ‘*Enabling Infrastructure*’ section should be broadened to reference the excellent public and private transport links which Longford town has with other areas, regionally and nationally (see appendix 2).
- Comments in relation to the RPO’s are as outlined earlier in this document.

Page 62 – 63 ‘4.8 Rural Areas’

- This section appears to be heavily focused on one-off rural housing, and as such there is a need to include additional references to urban towns and villages.

Chapter 6: Economy and Employment

Page 92 ‘EMRA’s Enterprise Development and Innovation Assets Map’

- This is based on existing infrastructural facilities and does not reflect infrastructural improvements to be delivered as part of the National Development Plan i.e. the extension of

the M4 motorway/dual carriageway to Longford. This is an economic asset which should be reflected in the RSES.

- Business Innovation Centres in the form of hubs in both Longford town and Edgeworthstown have also received government funding and are in development and should also be included as part of the consideration of key economic assets for the RSES, particularly taking account of its 12 year timeline.

Page 95 'Sectoral Opportunities in Midlands (including Athlone)'

- ICT enterprises should be included given the presence of Ericsson in Athlone, which currently employs 1,000 workers on its campus.
- Specify brewing and distilling, eco-machinery/green infrastructure products (wind turbine development), agri-foodstuffs; as both the 'food basket' and 'biomass basket' for the large urban conurbations of Dublin, Athlone and Galway.
- Opportunities to provide back office services and data centres in a cost competitive region should be included.

Page 98 'Table 6.1 Retail Hierarchy for the ERMA'

- In terms of the retail hierarchy the most favoured approach would be that towns should not be identified/categorised by the RSES and that alternatively this role should be allocated to the local authority in the development of their own individual County Development Plan.
- In recognition of EMRA's acknowledgement that this table is based on out dated information and acknowledging their support of the preparation of a new retail strategy in the future, this table should be omitted.
- If the RSES is to prescribe the towns in the retail hierarchy, it is noted that in County Longford only Granard has been identified as a level 3 town and/or district centre and sub county town centre (Key Service Centre). This should be expanded to include other towns in the county such as Ballymahon, Edgeworthstown and Lanesboro, which have strong retail bases.
- Granard falls technically in the existing RSES definition of a 'rural area' (the definition of which should be amended, see earlier points on this on pages 2-3 of this report) yet it is the only town in County Longford highlighted in the retail strategy.

Page 100 'Regional Policy Objectives'

- RPO 6.16 should be expanded to include peatlands.

Page 101 'Investing in the Tourism Product'

- The tourism section should reference Center Parcs as a case study, or at least make provision for its own specific Regional Policy Objective.
- Reference should be made to the completion of the Granard Motte Interpretative Centre and Heritage Park which will act as a driver for economic and tourism growth.
- With the Midland's historic and future role in energy production, there is an excellent opportunity to tell this unique Irish story and also the Midland's role in addressing climate change. Inclusion of a specific objective in the RSES would provide the incentive to not only develop a unique tourism product but also to develop a research and educational facility.
- The role of Knock airport as an international tourism feeder for the 'Outer' (to be renamed 'Midland') counties is not recognised. While Knock airport is outside of the region, it is very much within its sphere of influence, and therefore should be considered as it has a large transboundary impact.
- RPO 6.18 should make reference to 'Ireland's Ancient East' and 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands'.
- Additional RPO's should be included recognising the importance of tourism in regional development and investment in tourism potential. In particular attention is drawn to inclusion of the following additional RPO's:-
 - The Midlands Region in association with Failte Ireland shall provide a new alternative tourism experience based around 'slow' tourism and an opportunity to experience landscape, nature and local communities at a more human pace of walking and cycling through green fields, bogs, forests, lakes and rivers.
 - Opportunities have been identified by Longford, Westmeath and Offaly County Council's to link the River Shannon Blueway, the Royal and Grand Canal Greenways and the proposed Barrow Blueway right across the Midlands, incorporating the towns of Longford, Athlone, Mullingar, Tullamore and Portarlinton. These links are almost overwhelmingly on public lands. Such a network presents an international scale walking and cycling offer which is recognised by the 'Outdoor Recreation Plan for State Lands and Waters (2017)'.

Page 107 – RPO 6.27 'Infrastructure Investment'

- This is not very clear and requires additional clarity in terms of wording, background and context.
- An additional RPO should be included which makes reference to the provision of broadband and an associated supporting objective for telecommunications in County Longford. Reports have

highlighted that Longford has the slowest broadband and highest number of blackspots in the Country.

Chapter 7 Environment

Page 124 'Table 7.1 Strategic, Natural, Cultural and Heritage Assets in the Region'

- Under the 'Greenways, blueways and peatways' section Corlea is misspelt.
- Under 'National and Regional Parks' reference should be made to the Lough Ree and Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park and to Lanesborough Commons North Park.
- Consideration should be given to designating Lough Ree and adjoining peatlands as a National Park and UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Page 126 'Greenways'

- The Royal Canal Greenway offers an alternative opportunity to link cycling and walking routes from east to west. With support from the Northern and Western Region there is a real possibility of linking with Dublin with Mayo and/or Sligo.
- Integration of Greenway, Blueway and Peatway concepts – the integration and linking of all three 'ways' provides the Midlands with a unique tourism and recreational tourism opportunity.

Page 128 'Farming'

- This section is very scant and contains no specific regional objectives. Regional objectives must be included to target the midlands and peatlands in terms of the following:-
 - facilitating various types of agricultural diversification.
 - the potential for the development of a 'food basket' to service and sustain the large conurbations of Dublin, Athlone and Galway.
 - the potential for the development of a 'biomass basket' to service and sustain the large conurbations of Dublin, Athlone and Galway.

Page 128 'Peatlands'

- In addition to wind and biomass the alternative energy uses identified should also include solar energy.
- The role of peatlands to alleviate flooding should be investigated.

Page 129 'Regional Policy Objectives: Landscape'

- Inclusion of a Regional Policy Objective in relation to the provision, support and promotion of a National Park in the Midlands focusing on Lough Ree and the extensive tract of publicly owned peat extraction areas. This would take on the form of the Lough Ree and Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park and reflect the shared ambition and vision of the Lough Ree and Mid Shannon 'Spirit Level' document (see page 37 of 'Spirit Level' document submitted as part of a previous submission).

Chapter 8: Connectivity

Page 146 'Regional Policy Objectives: Integration of Transport and Land Use Planning'

- Interconnectivity with other regional areas should be comprehensively addressed and an additional RPO included.

Page 148 Table 8.2 Rail projects for the Region'

- RPO 8.6 'Rail Infrastructure' relates to the support of a number of rail projects set out in table 8.2 which includes to 'provide for an appropriate level of commuter rail service in the Midlands'. An 'appropriate' level of service is a very vague term and more clarity is required.
- In particular there should be a RPO that dual rail lines are provided between Dublin and Sligo (it is noted that this service is currently operating at a profitable level).

Page 150 Table 8.4; Road Projects for the Region'

- The N55 is missing from this list and should be included as it is a vital north south interconnector and providing access to Athlone, Center Parcs and Motorway connections. Furthermore as TII is committed to upgrading same, it needs to be included in this table and placed as a priority.
- The 'N4 Mullingar to Longford (and Sligo)' should be renamed the 'M4 /N4 Dublin/Sligo', and due to its importance in linking Dublin with the designated regional centre of Sligo, it should be placed at the highest priority in this table.
- No reference has been made to road improvement works for secondary and regional routes within the county. To this extent, proposed improvement works to the N55 should be included.
- The location of this table should be placed ahead of RPO 8.8 'Investment in Improved Strategic Road Connectivity'.

Page 154 'International Connectivity'

- Knock should be recognised as a vital connection for the 'Outer' (to be renamed 'Midland') region, which is very accessible and brings much economic and tourism potential, which will be accentuated with the forthcoming opening in 2019 of Ireland's largest holiday resort in Ireland, Center Parcs in County Longford. Accordingly an additional section with associated RPO's should be included to recognise and support the role and impact of Knock airport on the Midland region which is very much within its sphere of influence.

Page 157 'Communications Network and Digital Infrastructure'

- This section should be strengthened and given more detail.
- An additional RPO should be included which makes reference to the provision of broadband and a supporting objective for telecommunications provision in County Longford.
- Provision for the encouragement of data centres in the 'Outer' (to be renamed 'Midland') counties should be encouraged.

Chapter 9: Quality of Life

Page 162 'Housing Supply and Affordability'

- Attention is drawn to the fact that Longford County Council has ample land to cater for this.

Page 168 'Third level education and lifelong learning'

- Feedback from industry and business would indicate that between business and third level colleges there needs to be more interaction. Greater engagement and consultation with industry to ascertain specific business needs would result in stronger linkages between colleges and enterprise, and more practical and relevant college programmes. This element in the strategy while it is picked up somewhat, needs to be strengthened.

Chapter 10: Infrastructure

Page 180 and 181 'Future Electricity and Gas Supply and Demand'

- There should be reference to supporting Bord na Mona in their forthcoming transition from peat with reference being made to biomass.
- This reference should also be made in relation to the 'Energy Infrastructure' section in terms of appropriate and adequate cross-referencing.

Chapter 11: All Island Cohesion

- This chapter focuses on Northern Ireland; however reference to cross regional objectives, to include adjoining RSES' should be included.

Chapter 12: Implementation and Monitoring

Page 197 'RSES Implementation Group'

- This should include a representative of the adjoining regional assemblies in order to ensure cross collaboration in terms of transboundary issues.

Appendix B: Strategic Planning Area (SPA) and County Population Tables

- The NPF does not make provision for a 'low' and 'high' target, and therefore it is unclear how the RSES 'low' figure arises. The targets provided in the NPF roadmap are the same as the 'high' targets in the draft RSES, however provision has also been made for a new 'low' target which was not indicated in the NPF 'Roadmap' and should therefore be omitted.
- For County Longford the population allocation to 2026 is 44,500-45,500. However Longford County Council has calculated that there is a shortfall of approximately 2,000-3,000 respectively, and that the figure should in fact be 47,500. This will result in a housing shortfall of approximately 400-800 houses (see appendix 1). In addition to this is a current Social Housing demand of over 800 houses which has not been taken into account.

Appendix C, Figure 1: Hierarchy of Settlements and related Infrastructure considered by NPF

- The application of this concept should include the 'functional' area of towns which encompasses a large population base and is cross boundary, rather than strictly geographic and CSO based.
- The diagram should be made bigger as the script is too small to be legible.

Issues raised by Elected Members at Special Meeting of the Council with EMRA officials on 9/1/19

- A list of the topics raised is attached (appendix 3).

Conclusion

Longford County Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback and hopes that the observations will be of aid in finalising the final document.

APPENDIX 1

Population and Housing Projections for County Longford (2016-2026 and 2026-2031)

Longford County Council Planning Department has undertaken a preliminary assessment of recently published population targets for County Longford by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) for the target years of 2026 and 2031. This assessment also examined the projected population targets for Longford Town, as prescribed in the most recent working draft of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA) which is based on the population targets provided by the DHPLG.

The purpose of this assessment was to provide an overview of the future planning and development implications for County Longford and, principally, the level of future residential development that can be accommodated for the County and Longford Town on the basis of such population targets.

Table 1 sets out the recorded Census 2016 population figures (rounded to the nearest 500) and the population projections for the Midlands Strategic Planning Area of the EMRA as established by the DHPLG in its recent publication, *Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework* (July, 2018).

Table 1: County Population Projections to 2031 for Midlands SPA

Midlands SPA	2016	2026	2031
Longford	41,000	44,500-45,500	46,000-47,000
Westmeath	89,000	96,500-98,500	100,000-102,500
Laois	84,500	92,500-94,000	95,500-97,500
Offaly	78,000	85,000-86,500	88,000-90,000
Sub-total	292,500	318,500-324,500	329,500-337,000

The population targets for 2026 and 2031 are rounded to the nearest 500 persons and expressed as a range with 20% variation.

Effectively, even allowing for the higher projected range values, the population projections for County Longford (including Longford Town) provide for an **additional 4,500 persons from 2016-2026** and an **additional 1,500 persons from the period 2026-2031**. This equates to a population increase of approx. 11% over 2016-2026 (or 1% population growth per annum); and an increase of approx. 3.3% over 2026-2031 (or 0.66% population growth per annum).

The veracity of these population projections is questionable in the context of historic population trends in County Longford as demonstrated in Table 2 below, where the population of the County grew by approximately 35.5% (additional 10,707) over the 20 year period between 1996 and 2016.

Table 2: County Population Projections to 2031 for Midlands SPA

Census Year	Recorded Population	Absolute Change in Population From Previous Census	% Change From Previous Census Record
1996	30,166	-	-
2002	31,068	+902	+3.0%
2006	34,391	+3,323	+10.7%
2011	39,000	+4,609	+13.4%
2016	40,873	+1,873	+4.8%

Whilst the inter-censal period of 2011-2016 was characterised by significant economic recession across the country, the population in County Longford still maintained a steady increase, albeit not to the same scale as the preceding 10 years. Notwithstanding this, County Longford was second only to Co. Offaly (5.1%) in terms of rate of population increase between 2011-2016 in the Midlands SPA and ranked highest in rate of population increase in comparison to any of its neighbouring counties.

Since 1996, County Longford has averaged a population increase of approximately 8% increase on each census period since 1996. Accordingly, it would appear that the population projections for County Longford as depicted by the DHPLG, and retained in the working draft of the EMRA RSES, are significantly less than the historical reality for County Longford. Moreover, the per annum population projections for County Longford over the period 2016-2026 (1% population growth per annum) is comparable to the actual rate of per annum population increase between the period 2011-2016 (0.8% per annum), a period which was characterised by significant emigration and economic decline in the County as well as nationally. The veracity of the per annum population projections for the period 2026-2031 (0.66%) are even more questionable given previous populations trends in the county.

As well as the historical population trends in the County, the economic landscape within the County has seen substantial improvements recently, with significant employment expansion currently taking place in the County through Centre Parcs (1,000 jobs) and another 1,000 jobs planned for further

expansions of existing operations such as Finesse Medical, Red Seal Cups, Panelto Foods, Tool and Plastic and Abbott Ireland, amongst others. The increase in direct employment in such facilities will also lead to significant indirect employment for trade and service providers.

Set within this context, it is feasible that the population of County Longford could increase approximately in line with the average rate as recorded in the inter-censal period between 1996 and 2016, i.e. 8-9%. Taking the upper limit, this would equate to a per annum population rate of increase of 1.5%. Applying this rate to County Longford would see a population figure of 47,500 persons in 2026 and 51,300 in 2031.

From the above DHPLG population projections, an initial assessment on the number of residential units required for these additional population figures can be undertaken. Using an average household size of 2.5 (as envisaged by the NPF up to 2040), an additional 3,100 residential units will be required throughout the County (including Longford Town) over the period 2016-2026. This equates to an average of 310 units per annum. Over the period 2026-2031, 600 residential units will be required for the entire County, equating to 120 units per annum.

The Planning Department has conducted a rudimentary population projection for the county up to 2026 and 2031 on the basis of historical population trends and recent significant improvements in the local economy. This high-level analysis suggests a population rate of increase of 1.5% per annum more accurately reflects the population and economic trends for County Longford. Table 3 provides an overview of the population and housing projections for County Longford, as determined by the DHPLG and from initial high level analysis conducted by the Planning Department.

Table 3: Population and Housing Projections for 2026 and 2031 for Co. Longford (inc. Longford Town) based on DHPLG and LCC Figures

Year	County Population Target (DHPLG)	Number of Additional Houses (DHPLG)	County Population Target (LCC)	Number of Additional Houses (LCC)
2026	45,500	3,100	47,500	3,800
2031	47,000	600	51,300	1,400

- The Midlands should be specifically identified and targeted as a location for the siting and development of data centres to facilitate further economic development.

APPENDIX 2

Key Town – Longford - Contextual Information

Insert high quality image / photo

The county town of Longford is centrally and strategically located, acting as portal to the North and Western and Southern Regions. It provides a vital supporting role to the Regional Growth Centre of Athlone.

Longford acts as a key employment centre with strong retail, administrative and service functions that serve a wide catchment. The town has a young, diverse and growing population of 10,000 people and a growth rate of 13% in the ten years to 2016. Key priorities are to promote compact growth and the regeneration of town centre and to expand Longford's role as a hub for enterprise, employment and tourism.

Regeneration Longford has a number of strategic sites within the northern end of the town including the Connolly Barracks, Shopping Centre, Albert Reynolds Peace Park and adjacent areas. These can act as regenerative catalysts to increase the residential and leisure potential of the town centre, address vacancy and derelict buildings and create a vibrant town centre. The Longford Flood Relief Scheme will address flood considerations and support appropriate use of riverside locations. There are opportunities to improve links between both ends of the town and enhanced connections between the Royal Canal Greenway and the former location of the canal harbour around the Market Square. Other strategic and Brownfield sites outside the town core provide the catalyst for regeneration which will have an overall impact beyond their individual site boundaries. The provision of mixed development, civic spaces and adhering to the best principles of urban planning and design, while respecting the heritage and culture of the town, will bring a new energy to the town centre and revitalise day and night time activity.

Economic Development The town has a particularly high ratio of jobs to resident workers with significant in-commuting and employment in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, pharma and agri-food. The planned development of a creative and innovation hub and co-working space on the Main Street offers a further opportunity to drive enterprise development and entrepreneurship in the town. There is also potential to build on significant investment in the nearby flagship Center Parc's holiday village and the investment by the Local Authority in tourism and recreational infrastructure. The Upper Shannon Erne Future Economic Project, which is a collaboration between

the Cavan, Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon Local Authorities with ESB and Bord na Mona, provides the opportunity to deliver cross regional economic projects.

Services and amenities Longford has a rich cultural heritage with potential to develop as a recreation and tourism hub, building on its proximity to attractions such as Center Parcs, the Royal Canal and Mid Shannon Wilderness Park and key assets within the town such as St Mel's Cathedral, the River Camlin, a theatre and walking routes such as the Rebel Longford Trail and Literary Trail. Longford is one of the most diverse towns in the country. Social inclusion measures will be key to supporting greater participation in local community and economic development and to addressing higher levels of unemployment and relative deprivation in the town.

Enabling infrastructure Longford has excellent transport links with other areas, both in terms of public and private transport networks. It is strategically located on the N4/M4 from Dublin to Sligo, with national roads the N55 to Athlone, N5 to Castlebar and N63 to Roscommon. Planned infrastructure upgrades include the N4 from Mullingar to Carrick-on Shannon and there is further potential to provide for enhanced rail service on the Sligo rail line and improve connections to Athlone. There is further potential to stimulate economic development by building on the provision of broadband, bringing natural gas to the town. Delivering on Longford's walking and cycling strategy will improve sustainable travel and provide links to national and cross regional walking and cycling trails.

Regional Policy Objectives: Longford Key Town

- Expand Longford Town's potential to become a significant tourism centre having regard to its accessibility to key attractions such as Center Parcs, and the lattice of national and regional tourism trails that include Longford Town as a key axis point. Examples include cross regional recreational opportunities such as the Royal Canal Greenway, the Rebel Longford Trail, the Longford Literary Trail and the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park.
- Support measures to improve educational attainment levels, up skilling in key competencies and skills acquisition.
- Invest in community development and social inclusion measures that maximise the opportunities for everyone including the substantial 'new communities' cohort to contribute positively to the future economic, social and cultural well-being of Longford Town.
- The continued development of Longford Town as a strategic employment hub, which is particularly attractive as a location for firms with a national and international market reach.
- Support the provision of additional hotel/conference/event facilities.

- Support Longford town's role as an important employment hub by improving the ratio of jobs to resident workers in the town.
- Support and promote employment clusters in Longford e.g. advanced manufacturing, robotics, engineering, pharma, energy potential, back office services and food and agri-related businesses etc.
- Development of enterprise, innovation and digital hubs to promote and support fledgling industry/enterprise.
- Address and support the concept of *'reverse commuting'*.
- Support Longford's role as a service centre to the Regional growth centre of Athlone.
- Promote, support and develop Longford Town as a strategic portal to the northwest and south in recognition of its location at the junction of the N55; *'M4 /N4 Dublin/Sligo'* and N5; and due to its location within 1 hour of the regional growth centre of Athlone regional centre.
- Promote the plan-led development and regeneration of publicly owned land banks in the town for residential, employment, education, community, cultural and recreational opportunities.
- Promote the consolidation of the town centre and the enhancement and linking of Brownfield and outlying sites to the town centre, with a focus on the regeneration of underused buildings and strategic sites.
- Provide enhanced support to improve public realm in derelict areas to encourage greater private sector investment.
- Support the provision of necessary infrastructure in key locations to open up lands for future development.
- Support the delivery of gas energy supply to Longford town.

APPENDIX 3

Issues raised by Elected Members at the Special Council Meeting with EMRA on 9th January 2019

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure • Prioritise in RSES the upgrading of N4/M4 (Mullingar to Leitrim border) and N55 (north south corridor) • Rail Line - dual rail • Recognise importance of N5 - connectivity to North West and Knock Airport • Knock Airport - important for regional development • Irish Water - concern that without their support and investment sustainable development may not be possible. Capacity issues will curtail expansion in housing and industry.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longford badly served by previous plans • Pressure to provide dense housing resulted in unfinished estates • Population and head room (25%) needs to reflect the historic increased and the impact of the job announcements (excess of 1,000) • Affordable housing required in order to facilitate recruitment and retention of employees • Impact on business decisions and ability of businesses to fill job vacancies • Longford's ambition for community and economic development cannot be restricted because of population caps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors influencing companies to invest, expand - access to qualified people, housing, social • Impact of lack of housing on companies like Abbott
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSES too Dublin centric • Each county should be afforded their own opportunities to develop • Concern that a project such as Center Parcs would not have been possible in Longford if the draft RSES was in place • Athlone is the strongest link for Longford and this needs to be expanded upon in the RSES • Flexibility required to provide opportunities to avail of national and EU funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N55 - North South artery and important link to Center Parcs • Rural Areas versus Small Towns and Villages - definition • Granard -example of town population versus functional area • National businesses / job opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of Life - Natural Assets • Lakes, bogs, woodlands, rivers - opportunities including tourism and activities such as angling, fishing, walking and cycling • Opportunities to address climate change • Trails already developed • Working with national bodies and agencies e.g. BnM, WI, IFI, Coillte • Disability access - Age friendly • Key attractor for people looking to relocate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outer Region - rename Midlands Region • Longford suffered under the previous NSS - negative economic implications for the town and County • RSES is an opportunity to address deficit in investment and rebalance economic development • Regional perspective and connectivity - links to other regions, especially Northern and Western Region

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic portal to North West • Midlands region supports Athlone development • Tourism objectives should recognise Ireland's Hidden Heartlands • Higher provide required for tourism - very few RPOs • Tourism - Mid Shannon, Greenways, Blueways, peatways, Corlea - opportunities and priorities • Highlight opportunities to extend the Greenways to Mayo and Sligo • Center Parcs - regional, national and international tourism offer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband and telecommunications - importance to rural counties such as Longford - impact on quality of life, education and enterprise • Digital Hubs - opportunity to address deficit in broadband provision • Libraries - including Open Library initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need fast access to and from Dublin and Sligo • Railway line - dual track - investment and upgrade required • N55 connectivity to Athlone, M6 and M7 • County Longford more aligned to West of Ireland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic opportunities and strategies for Longford need to be expanded • Definition of rural areas, small towns and villages need to be looked at in the context of functional areas and asset tests • Reverse commuting - Midlands Region issue - bring jobs to where the people live • Rural economies reflected in the draft but there is concern that lands may have to be dezoned, impacting on future economic development • Need services sites in order to attract new enterprises • Data centres and back office services - opportunities for rural counties such as Longford • Agriculture - need to increase profile and include objectives e.g. biomass, food basket • Opportunities provided by cutaway bogs • Gas - vision is to see extension to Edgeworthstown, Longford town and Granard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of Life - Arts, Cultural and Heritage • Longford support of communities through the provision of investment for the Mall, car parking, Backstage, etc • Need to support people who want to move back to the country • Wealth of talent • Support heritage led regeneration • Festivals - range increasing and improving • Role of Arts Council in promoting and supporting smaller theatres, arts facilities and festivals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision of the definition of rural area and small towns and villages • Rural communities - challenges faced with closure of post offices, banking facilities, small shops and pubs • Rural housing - RSES should not restrict or place unreasonable barriers on one off housing • Flexibility in RSES to allow sustainable development in rural areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of Life - Education and Young People • Links with Sligo IT, Athlone IT, Maynooth, Galway, Dublin • Need more links between business and third level colleges - prepare students for the real world • Connectivity essential - road, rail, broadband and telecommunications • Need opportunities to attract young people back to rural Ireland • ETB

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sports• Disability Training• Apprenticeships
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality of Life -Healthcare• Diversity / Integration / Opportunities• Flexibility in RSES to allow sustainable CDP
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to recognise that face of retail is changing - example Riverside Shopping Centre - experiential and entertainment focus• Longford town profile and objectives - need to be enhanced and strengthening• Recognise opportunities to build on business serving national and international markets• Retail Strategy - consider leaving to County Development Plans• Retail Strategy (if retained) - Longford and Granard included but need to include Ballymahon, Edgeworthstown and Lanesboro
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to be more ambitious for Midlands Region• Dublin under pressure• Population growth needs to be more ambitious• Expansion by companies - where will people live• Building on family farms - restrictions will impact on communities