

Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly

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January 21<sup>st</sup> 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

**SUBMISSION RE – DRAFT REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY (RSES)  
FOR THE EASTERN AND MIDLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY - LANDS AT DUNDALK,  
GRAMMAR SCHOOL, DUNDALK, CO. LOUTH**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This is a submission by Stephen Ward Town Planning and Development Consultants Limited, Jocelyn House, Jocelyn Street, Dundalk, Co. Louth on behalf of Dundalk Grammar School, The Crescent, Dundalk, County Louth.

Dundalk Grammar School is located on a c. 3.2 hectare site in the southern environs of the Town and incorporates both primary and secondary level facilities. The school campus occupies a highly accessible and sustainable location at the western edge of the town centre and is only c. 500 m (c. 6 minutes walking distance) from the mainline Railway Station, Clarke Station.

Over the years the Grammar School has invested heavily in expanding and improving on-campus sports/leisure and recreational facilities. At present these facilities include a full-size floodlit astro turf pitch; an all-weather hockey pitch; three artificial grass tennis courts; and two no. external basketball courts. There is also a multi-purpose Sports Hall incorporating three no. indoor badminton courts; a basketball court and a fully equipped gym with segregated changing facilities.

*As part of its ongoing expansion plans, the School intends to develop a high quality Sports/Leisure and Recreational facility of 'regional scale' on lands to the south of the existing campus (c. 8.5 hectares) and seeks recognition of this in the forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Region, by way of the insertion of a site specific objective.*

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The intention is to develop a first class sporting hub that encourages participation and progression in sport at all levels. It is envisaged the facility will provide a range of high quality sporting facilities and infrastructure of a type not currently available in Dundalk. The range of facilities it is proposed to provide includes –

- A floodlit rugby pitch, of international standard with ball stop nets;
- An 8 lane athletics running track;
- Long and triple jump facilities; javelin, discus and hammer throwing facilities;
- Pole Vault, Shot Put & High Jump Facilities;
- Additional 3 no. floodlit tennis courts;
- 1 No. MUGA synthetic sports pitch;
- Clubhouse with changing facilities;
- Site Perimeter walking; jogging track with age friendly exercise equipment;
- Spectator stands with capacity for c. 5,000 persons; and
- Bicycle/bus and car parking facilities.

The provision of such a facility would be fully in keeping with Dundalk's long standing designation as a Regional Growth Centre, a designation that is retained and reconfirmed in the Draft RESE.

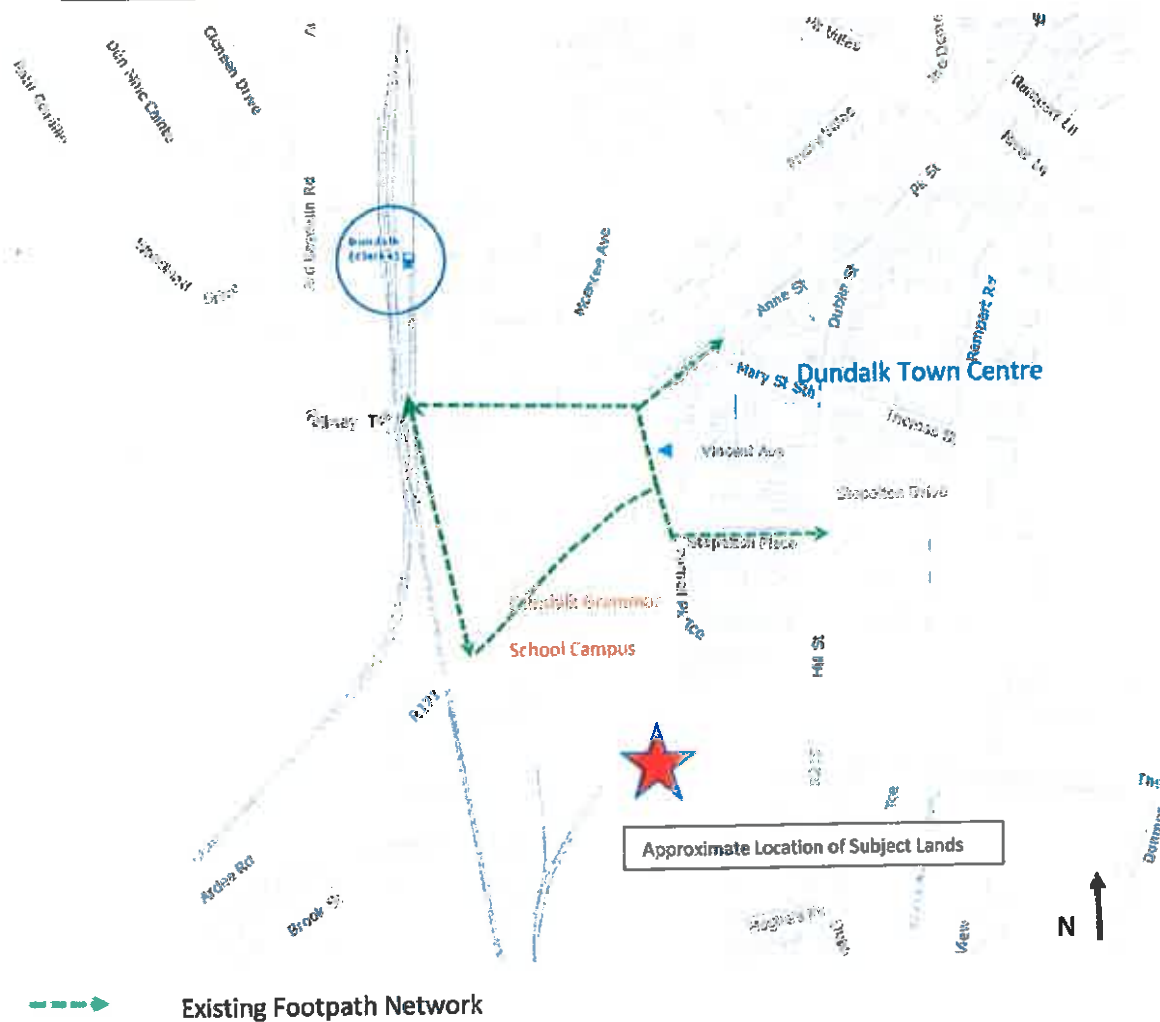
The Draft Strategy acknowledges the Town has the potential to form part of a sustainable network of "centres of scale". As a designated Regional Growth Centre, the Town is expected to support and sustain higher levels of population growth and development. As a Regional Growth Centre, the target population for the Town is 50,000 person by 2031. In addition to housing the delivery of supporting social, community and recreational infrastructure, therefore, in tandem with new housing will be essential.

The development of a regional scale sports/leisure and recreational facility at the Grammar School site, would also be consistent with one of the key elements of current national planning policy which seeks to ensure that new development is 'contained' and focused within the built-footprint of existing settlements.

The site is located within the existing built-up area and within walking distance of the town centre via a direct and continuous footpath connection.

In addition, the site is also within walking distance 500m (c. 6 minutes walk) from Dundalk Railway Station via a direct and continuous existing footpath links. ***The proximity of the site to the railway station makes it the optimum location for such a large-scale sports/recreational facility and very much adheres to the principles of 'smarter travel', as set out in Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future, ensuring land use planning and transport are fully aligned.***

**Figure 1 – Site Context Highlighting Proximity to Railway Station and Town Centre Area**



--- Existing Footpath Network

The importance of sport and the availability of accessible, high quality sports facilities is emphasised at national planning level. Project Ireland 2020, the Government’s National Development Plan seeks to promote a better quality of life for all. A key element of this is investment in sport in recognition of the societal benefits that a more active, sporting population can bring.

The provision of such a facility would also be consistent with draft regional policy objectives RPO 9.19 and RPO 9.20.

RPO 9.19 encourages the support of the planned provision of easily accessible social, community, cultural and recreational facilities, whilst RPO 9.20 acknowledges and reiterates one of the objectives of the *National Sports Policy (NSP) 2018-2027*, which is to increase and encourage more participation in physical activity and sports at grass roots level.

The <sup>1</sup>National Sports Policy also acknowledges the contribution that sport can make to the economy. Referring to a 2010 Indecon Report, the NSP highlights that national household expenditure on sport and sporting-related goods and services equated to 2 per cent of the value of the consumer spending; sport related spending contributed 1.4 per cent of economy wide

<sup>1</sup> National Sports Policy 2018-2017, Chapter 1, pg. 13

Gross Domestic Product (GDP); and sport and sport related activities supported over 38,000 full-time equivalent jobs. This equates to over 2 per cent of the overall level of employment nationwide.

The NSP also acknowledges the economic contribution of sport is likely to increase in coming years.

Further to this, the 2015 Government Policy Statement – ‘People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025’ acknowledges that the contribution of sport and sporting events to the tourism sector is highly significant. The development of high quality tourism infrastructure, such as a regional sports/leisure and recreational facility, capable of attracting critical mass will ensure these fiscal benefits to the tourism sector continue.

Improving and enhancing the provision of sporting facilities and access and participation in sport forms a key plank of current Government policy at all levels. The emerging RESEs must acknowledge this.

Having regard to Dundalk’s designation as a Regional Growth Town and projected population target of 50,000 by 2031, there is a need to ensure adequate sporting and recreational facilities are provided in tandem with housing and employment development.

The subject site represents the optimum location for the development of a Sports/Leisure and Recreational Facility of a regional scale, having regard to its location within the Regional Growth Town of Dundalk, its accessible and sustainable location in close proximity to a mainline railway station and Dundalk Town Centre.

Taking account of current Government policy objectives as set out above, Dundalk Grammar School seeks specific recognition of the subject site’s potential by way of the insertion of a specific objective along in the RESE the following lines –

***“Support the development of Sports/Leisure and Recreational facility of ‘regional scale’ on lands to the south of Dundalk Grammar School”.***

Yours faithfully,



**Stephen Ward**