

Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

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Draft Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly notes the publication of the Draft Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and sets out hereunder submissions and observations on behalf of the Assembly. This submission has been prepared by the executive and approved by the members of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly at the meeting of 13th May 2022.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

As indicated in the Assembly's previous submission to the County Development Plan review process made under Section 27A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, The Council will be aware of the finalisation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region, made on 28th June 2019, which consequently initiated the statutory time period within which the Council are required to prepare their Draft Development Plan, as stated at Section 11(1) (b) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act). In this regard, The Assembly welcomes the publication of the Draft Kildare County Development Plan which enables the coordinated and timely incorporation of Project Ireland 2040 - the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), thus ensuring full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy.

Legislative Context

As required by Section 27B of the Act, The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly has prepared this submission, and sent a copy of same to the Minister and Office of the Planning Regulator.

In accordance with the aforementioned Act, a submission shall contain a report which shall state whether, in the opinion of the Regional Assembly, the draft development plan, and in particular its core strategy are consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. If, in the opinion of the Regional Assembly the draft development plan, and its core strategy are not consistent with the RSES, the submission / observations and report shall include recommendations as to what amendments, in the opinion of the Regional Assembly, are required to ensure that they are consistent.

This report contains the opinion of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly in relation to the above matters along with recommendations as required under Section 27B of the Act.

The attention of the Council is also directed to the requirements of Section 12 (4) of the Act, whereby a Chief Executive's Report prepared by the Planning Authority shall summarise the issues and recommendations raised by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, and outline the recommendations of the Chief Executive in relation to the manner in which those issues and recommendations should be addressed in the development plan.

Submission

The Assembly would like to acknowledge the extensive work that the Local Authority has carried out in order to prepare the Draft Plan and, in particular, that this work follows a period of considerable change, within a planning policy context, that included the publication of the National Planning Framework (NPF), the RSES and the establishment of the Office of the Planning Regulator. Accordingly, the Assembly welcomes the overall approach and effort of Kildare County Council to coordinate and incorporate policies and objectives, so that they are consistent with the RSES and NPF.

The Assembly considers that the overall draft development plan, including its Core Strategy, are generally consistent with the RSES subject to the contents of the remainder of this submission. The submission broadly follows the chapter headings of the Draft Development Plan, under the following headings:

1. Introduction and Context
2. Core Strategy
3. Housing
4. Resilient Economy and Job Creation
5. Sustainable Mobility and Transport
6. Infrastructure and Environmental Services
7. Energy and Communications
8. Urban Centres and Retail
9. Our Rural Economy
10. Community Infrastructure and Creative Places
11. Built and Cultural Heritage
12. Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure
13. Landscape, Recreation and Amenity
14. Urban Design, Placemaking and Regeneration
15. Other
16. SEA, AA, SFRA

1.0 Introduction and Context

The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of the first chapter of the Draft Plan, which provides an overview of scene setting matters including the Strategic Vision, Strategic Objectives, the Policy Context and Socio-Economic Profile.

The indication that the three cross cutting principles of the RSES, namely healthy placemaking, climate action and economic opportunity, will be incorporated into all facets of the new Development Plan is considered to enhance the plan and its consistency with the RSES.

It is considered that Section 1.4 of the Draft Plan could be strengthened through emphasising that the Kildare County Development Plan is required to be consistent with the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region.

2.0 Core Strategy

The Assembly acknowledges the work that has gone into the preparation of Chapter 2 which details the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy of the Plan.

The inclusion of the overall chapter aim at the outset of the chapter is a positive addition to the plan, outlining that the aim of this chapter is to enable the delivery of additional housing units and population by the end of the Plan period, through the delivery of sustainable, compact settlements supported by a commensurate level of physical and social infrastructure to mitigate against climate

change. Reference to the RSES, including the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP), at Section 2.4.4 helps to contextualise the requirements of the Kildare plan from a national and regional perspective.

2.1 Statutory Requirements

Kildare County Council are reminded of their obligations to prepare a Core Strategy in accordance with the provisions of Section 10 of the Act. Relating specifically to this chapter of the Draft Plan, the Assembly draws the attention of the Council to the contents of Section 10 (2A), (2B) and (2C) of the Act and asks Kildare County Council to ensure consistency in this regard.

2.2 Population

Section 2.5.2 of the Draft Plan sets out the population projections for Kildare to 2031. Table 2.2 identifies that the population for Kildare in 2031 is within the range of 259,000 – 266,500. National Policy Objective (NPO) 68 of the NPF enabled that up to 20% of the phased population growth targeted in the principal city and suburban area of Dublin, to be accommodated in the wider metropolitan area i.e. outside the city and suburbs or contiguous zoned area, in addition to growth identified for the Metropolitan area. This resulted in an additional population allocation for the Key Town of Maynooth, within Kildare, of 10,000. This means that the overall population growth for Kildare is 276,500 (high) for 2031. The MASP Transitional Population Projections for Local Authorities adjusted to comply with NPO 68, finalised in July 2020, relate.

The Assembly notes that this point is mentioned within the Core Strategy Chapter as part of a footnote. Footnote 8 outlines that there is an additional population allocation for Maynooth of up to 10,000 persons from redistribution of NPF City and Suburbs allocation (EMRA, July 2020), but that the precise allocation that will be attributed to Maynooth however will be determined at LAP stage on foot of detailed assessments and audits of available social and physical infrastructure.

In light of the above, it is recommended that the MASP Transitional Population Projections adjusted to comply with NPO 68 in so far as they relate to County Kildare, are documented as part of Section 2.5.2 of the Draft Plan. Furthermore, and notwithstanding the inclusion of Footnote 8, it is recommended that the Draft Plan clearly indicate how this additional allocation has been accounted for as part of Table 2.8, noting that the additional 10,000 population allocated to County Kildare is to the Key Town of Maynooth.

In addition to the above, it is noted that the 2021 population estimate has been used as the baseline for the population targets from 2023 to 2028. It is recommended that this issue is clarified as part of the Draft Plan and that the population growth figure for the plan period 2023- 2028 is clearly stated and used for the purposes of the Core Strategy.

2.3 Housing Supply

The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of Sections 2.5.3 and 2.5.4 of the Core Strategy Chapter, which documents housing demand and housing targets. The inclusion of a Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) at Appendix 1 is noted. In calculating housing supply for the plan period, the Assembly welcomes the application of the methodology outlined in Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning Guidelines, issued in December 2020 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended). The stated housing demand for the years 2023 to 2029 (the relevant development plan period) is 9,144 residential units for the six-year period.

2.4 Core Strategy Table

The Assembly notes the inclusion of Table 2.8 and, for the purposes of this submission, has presumed that this Table addressing population and housing unit targets, is the Core Strategy Table. It is

recommended that the title of this table is changed to reflect this, given the requirement and best practice for a Core Strategy Table within the Plan. The Assembly considers the inclusion of Table 2.8 as a positive addition to the Plan, as it sets out the population and housing targets for each settlement within the County for the plan period. The comments provided at Section 2.2. of this submission also relate.

Notwithstanding the indicated housing targets and the subsequent residential zoned land requirement documented as part of this Table, it is unclear how the Local Authority have considered the quantum of existing zoned land already available and extant permissions, in determining the overall quantum of zoned land that is required for the plan period. Accordingly, it is recommended that the Core Strategy of the Draft Plan be revised to document same, ensuring that the overall quantum of residentially zoned land is in keeping with the population targets outlined as part of the RSES and the Housing Supply Targets calculated in accordance with the Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning Guidelines, issued in December 2020 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended).

In addition to the above, and in line with the requirements of page six of NPF Roadmap, the Local Authority is also asked to demonstrate how specific consideration of infill/ brownfield and greenfield capacity has been included within the Core Strategy in order to ensure compliance with RPO 3.2 of the RSES and National Policy Objectives 3b and 3c of the NPF which relate to compact growth.

In addressing the above, the Draft Development Plan Guidelines published in August 2021, provide guidance in this area, specifically Chapter 4 and Appendix A.

2.5 Tiered Approach to Land Use Zoning

The Assembly welcomes the inclusion within the Draft Plan of the reference to the requirement under NPO 72a, for a local authority to differentiate between zoned lands that are serviced and zoned lands that are serviceable within the life of a development plan. The Assembly notes the indication within the Draft Plan that a 'Sustainable Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (SPIA)' was undertaken to assess the suitability of lands for future development. Furthermore, it is stated that Volume 2 of the Draft Plan sets out the land use zoning for settlements of the small towns and villages within the county and is accompanied by an assessment which provides a weighting of potential sites for future development on the basis of sustainable planning and serviceability/infrastructural grounds. The Draft Plan goes on to state that this assessment assists in the designation of lands as either Tier 1 lands or Tier 2 lands and identifies the likely development services required to support new development.

The Assembly also welcomes the efforts of the Local Authority in preparing an infrastructural assessment which is contained at Chapter 17 of the Draft Plan, which seeks to assist in providing a tiered approach to zoning through an infrastructural assessment for each of the towns (which are not LAPs), villages and rural settlements. It is noted that the methodology includes an examination of all sites that were undeveloped and within or contiguous to existing settlement boundaries.

Notwithstanding the work already undertaken by the Local Authority, it is recommended that the Local Authority provide a Tiered Approach to Zoning in line with the requirements of NPOs 72a, b and c of the NPF, for all of the targeted development lands identified as part of the Draft Plan. This tiered approach will differentiate between zoned land that is serviced and zoned land that is serviceable within the life of the plan and detail an estimate of the full cost of delivery of the specified services. It is considered that this tiered approach will facilitate the prioritisation of development lands within the Local Authority. As part of this prioritisation, the Local Authority should consult with Section 3.1 of the RSES which details an asset-based approach in order to determine an overall growth strategy and settlement hierarchy.

2.6 Settlement Strategy

The Assembly notes Section 2.9 of the Draft Plan which details the Settlement Strategy for Kildare. As part of this the Assembly welcomes the indication that designations should be made on the basis of the role and function of each settlement consistent with the asset-based approach of the RSES and the potential for economic and social development. The inclusion of table 2.5 is a positive addition in this regard, documenting the different tiers of the settlement hierarchy in line with the terminology and settlement tiers prescribed within the RSES.

It is considered that the Settlement Strategy expressed at Section 2.12 and Table 2.7 of the Draft Plan, aligns with the overall Core Strategy and is consistent with the Settlement Hierarchy outlined at Section 4.2 and Table 4.2 of the RSES. Additional information could explain and justify changes to the settlement hierarchy from the existing county development plan (varied in June 2020), along with explanatory descriptions of self-sustaining towns and self-sustaining growth towns, available in the RSES.

In addition to the above, the inclusion of Section 2.11 detailing Rural Settlements in the Countryside is a positive addition to the Plan. This includes an indication that a number of the sites have been identified for serviced sites in the county's small towns, villages and rural settlements. This is in keeping with RPO 4.78 which states that "Development plans should support the development of a 'New Homes in Small Towns and Villages' initiative which would augment the delivery of actions by local authorities, Irish Water, communities and other stakeholders in the provision of services and serviced sites to create 'build your own home' opportunities within the existing footprint of rural settlements to provide new homes to meet housing demand."

2.7 Employment and Economic Considerations

The inclusion of dedicated sections detailing employment in Kildare are considered positive additions to the Draft Plan. In line with the RSES, the Assembly welcome the indication that the primary focus for employment growth in Kildare will be towards the Key Towns of Naas and Maynooth. Reference at Section 2.15.2 of the Draft Plan to the contents of the MASP enhance this section of the Draft Plan. The Draft Plan reinforces a number of key strategic employment sites identified within the MASP at Table 5.1 of the RSES, including, in particular, a research and technology park adjoining Maynooth University (further emphasising the importance of Maynooth as a Key Town) and the former Hewlett Packard site and Collinstown site at Leixlip. The Draft Plan goes on to state that the development of both these sites could attract further inward investment and counter commuter outflows from the county.

2.8 Core Strategy Objectives

The Assembly notes the inclusion of a number of objectives that form part of the Core Strategy Chapter. This includes objective CSO 1.1 that seeks to ensure that the future growth and spatial development of County Kildare is in accordance with the population and housing allocations contained in the Core Strategy which aligns with the regional growth strategy as set out in the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

The inclusion of objective CSO 1.5 to "Promote compact growth and the renewal of towns and villages through the development of underutilised town centres and brownfield sites...to achieve the sustainable compact growth targets of 30% of all new housing within the existing urban footprint of settlements" is a positive inclusion within the Draft Plan and is considered to be in keeping with RSO 2 and RPO 3.2 of the RSES.

3.0 Housing

The overall aim of this Chapter which is ‘To show how the Plan intends to accommodate the full range of current and future housing needs of all members of society throughout the county while giving clear guidance on making provision for specialised housing requirements and providing for the needs of communities in order to deliver sustainable residential communities across the county’, is welcome by the Assembly. The assembly support the reference to the concept of ‘Healthy Placemaking’, which is a Key Principle of the RSES. The inclusion of the Strategic Context of the Chapter, which details the RSES at Section 3.4.2, is a positive addition to the plan.

3.1 Housing Strategy, Supply and Compact Growth

The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of policy and objectives at Section 3.6 of the Draft Plan that focus on ensuring sufficient zoned land in compliance with the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy, and to co-operate with the EMRA in planning for new homes in the Dublin Metropolitan Area through the implementation of the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP).

The dedicated section at 3.9 of the Draft Plan, which details regeneration, compact growth and densification is a positive addition to the draft plan. Policy HO P6 and the accompanying suite of objectives, including HO 09, are in keeping with points raised at Section 2.8 of this submission, and reinforce the RSES through supporting residential consolidation, urban renewal, infill and brownfield development, regeneration, tackling vacancy, supporting the revitalisation of the social and physical fabric of town and village centres, and delivering compact growth including the requirement that at least 30% of all new homes in settlements be delivered within the existing built-up footprint.

3.2 Sustainable Rural Housing

The Assembly notes the inclusion of Section 3.13 of the Draft Plan, which focuses on Sustainable Rural Housing. In line with policies contained within the RSES, namely RPOs 4.77- 4.83, reference to the National Planning Framework policy is welcome, including the acknowledgement that rural towns across Ireland function as local drivers for their surrounding areas through well-established economic, administrative and social functions, that they support clusters of services, have a significant share of homes and jobs, and act as transport hubs for a much wider rural community. The Draft Plan also indicates that rural town living requires a proportionate and tailored approach to residential development, meaning that it is necessary to tailor the scale, design and layout of housing in rural towns to ensure that a suburban or high-density urban approach is not applied to a rural setting and that development responds to the character, scale and density of the town.

Included as part of this section of the chapter, is criteria detailing the requirement for housing in the open countryside. It is recommended that prior to the finalisation of the Draft Plan, the Council ensure that related policy in this regard is consistent with RPOs 4.80 and 4.81, NPO 19 of the NPF and the content of Circular Letter PL 2/2017 “Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2005 – Local Needs Criteria in Development Plans.”

4.0 Resilient Economy and Job Creation

The Resilient Economy and Job Creation chapter presented as part of the Draft Plan is welcomed by the Assembly. The Assembly values the statement at the outset referring to the significance of climate action, sustainability and the Green Economy to the future economic development of the County and that the policies and objectives set out in the Draft Plan have been prepared in accordance with national and regional economic policies and objectives.

Reference to and inclusion of RE EP3 with regards to the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is a positive inclusion within the Draft Plan. The Regional Assembly has a statutory role in overseeing the preparation of LECPs and is mindful of the upcoming review period of the Kildare LECP. In this

regard, the inclusion and reference to the LECP as part of the Draft Plan is a positive addition and reflects a number of RPOs included in the RSES such as RPOs 9.18 and 9.19.

The Assembly welcomes the publication of Kildare 2025 in 2021; the County's Economic Development Strategy, with the focus on developing the County's Key Towns, in particular, to act as economic drivers and provide for strategic employment locations. These will be supported by the regionally important self-sustaining growth towns and self-sustaining towns, aligning with the growth strategy set out in the RSES (Objective RE O1). The inclusion of the Economic Development Hierarchy set out in Section 4.4 is welcomed which sets out the sectoral strengths and opportunities of each settlement in the hierarchy. The inclusion of policies and objectives tailored for each tier of the economic development hierarchy are a positive addition and reinforce the settlement strategy and commensurate economic development of each settlement.

It is also welcomed that the Draft Plan acknowledges and supports the Strategic Development Employment Areas in the MASP as identified in the RSES. Strategic Development Areas have been identified at key nodes along high-quality public transport corridors in tandem with the delivery of infrastructure and enabling services, including Maynooth, Leixlip, Celbridge and Kilcock located along the North-West corridor. The intention of the Council to undertake a Strategic Land Use, Employment and Transportation Study of north east Kildare including the Dublin Metropolitan area towns as set out in Objective RE O14 is also a positive inclusion and will establish an up to date evidence base to inform the future growth of these settlements.

Sections 6.4 and 6.5 of the RSES identifies the Region's economic engines, sectoral opportunities and key sectors and these are also reflected in this chapter which contains a suite of policies and objectives to support placemaking and regeneration, repurposing and reducing vacancy and underutilised lands, clustering and smart specialisation, remote working/co-working/digital hubs, home based employment, FDI, SME's and the knowledge economy. The significance of the retail sector is also acknowledged and dealt with under Chapter 8 of the Draft Plan, and Section 8 of this submission. The policies and objectives to support enterprise development, the Green and Circular Bio-Economy, Agri-Food and Beverage, Agriculture and Equine Industry are also welcomed. In particular, the Assembly welcomes the breadth of policy and objectives to support sustainable tourism and enhancing its potential in the County through heritage, blueways/greenways, peatlands, inland waterways and Agri-tourism which are all supported in the RSES.

5.0 Sustainable Mobility and Transport

The Regional Assembly welcomes the Council's stated aim in this Chapter to promote the integration of sustainable land use and transportation and to support and prioritise investment in more sustainable modes of travel. The Council also recognises its important role as a local authority in increasing accessibility, promoting active travel modes and reducing car use by a variety of means as expressed in Policy TM P1, which is welcomed.

The Assembly welcomes the policies, objectives, actions and targets set out in this Chapter, in particular Objectives TM 01 and TM 09 which supports the NTA Draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042 and aims to facilitate and secure the implementation of projects identified within the Strategy. The action to prepare a County Kildare Sustainable Mobility Plan to address urban and rural issues and the intention to review Local Transport Plans (LTPs)/Transport Strategies in consultation with the NTA and TII aligning with RPO 8.6 are welcome additions.

In a recent submission to the NTA's Draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042, EMRA indicated that the strategy could be enhanced to offer guidance to local planning authorities on publishing an overall policy approach to frame their more detailed policy objectives and their Local Transport Plans, thus providing the public with an overview of modal shift, emissions reduction

objectives, design references and a hierarchy for prioritising options from the thematic measures set out in NTA Transport Strategy e.g., the Avoid-Shift-Improve Model.

The Assembly acknowledges the work of the Council in providing comprehensive transport analysis under Section 5.4 Sustainable Movement. In particular, the presentation of recent data on the transportation situation in the County establishes an accurate evidence base for an informed policy approach to modal shift interventions. The section sets out the baseline figures for trips including commuter flow patterns for work and education, car-based travel to work per settlement and results of a commuter survey. The Council has also introduced a minimum target (TM T1) in the draft plan with the aim to reduce car based trips for work and education which is a welcome addition.

It is further welcomed that Council policy will prioritise and promote the development of high-quality, suitable, safe and sustainable walking and cycling pathways and facilities throughout the County (TM P2) and this is supported by a suite of objectives and actions to enhance active travel and the “10 minute” settlement concept, in addition to delivering the cycle network, various blueway/greenway projects and walking routes. These are accompanied by targets TM T2 and TM T3 to increase cycling and walking modal shares which are also positive inclusions. The Assembly also supports the emphasis in this chapter on public realm (Policy TM P10), placemaking (Policy TM P8) and permeability including new guidelines and schemes (Actions TM A11, TM12, TM A3, Objectives TM O17, TMO18, TMO26, TM O30, TM O34) which aligns with the guiding principles for healthy placemaking set out in Section 9.4 of the RSES. The Council is also directed to Action 231 of CAP 21 which requires each local authority to assess their road network and identify where additional space can be reallocated to pedestrians and cyclists to continue the improvement and expansion of the active travel and greenway network. In addition, upcoming Section 28 Guidelines will inform Planning Authorities on Sustainable and Compact Settlement Guidance (SCSG), including guidance on connectivity and ease of movement for sustainable modes and place making (Action 255 CAP21 as per Annex of Actions).

Long term strategic transport planning will be facilitated by the delivery of key sustainable public transport infrastructure projects including the DART+ programme (Including DART+ West and DART+ South West), BusConnects, the light rail investments (Objective TM O9), the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan (Objective TM O20) and also through the NTA’s Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan (Objective TM O12). The Assembly notes Objective TM O43 “Facilitate and support the extension of the DART+ line to Kilcock, the extension of the DART+ Southwest line to Naas/Sallins and Newbridge and the extension of the LUAS network...”. The NTA’s Draft GDA Transport Strategy 2022-2042 indicates under Measure Rail 3 that “the NTA and Irish Rail will, over the lifetime of the Strategy, extend the DART to deliver electrified rail services to the towns of Sallins/Naas, Kilcock and Wicklow”. It is recommended that the Council revisit this particular objective as the inclusion of Newbridge is currently not part of the NTA’s proposed DART+ programme as indicated in the Draft GDA Transport Strategy.

The chapter also sets out a number of objectives (TM O38, TM O46, TM O47, TM O81) to promote ‘Park and Ride’ services at suitable locations. Locations are currently under review by the NTA as part of the review of the NTA’s Transport Strategy for the GDA. The Council is directed to Action 260 of the CAP 21 which proposes implementation of the NTA’s Park and Ride Strategy for the GDA in Q1 2022 which should further inform decision making in this area. The Assembly also welcomes the targets indicated TM T4 – TM T6 which set out minimum targets to increase public transport modal share in the County and TM T7 to increase ‘car share’ modal share over the lifetime of the Plan.

The draft Plan sets out a comprehensive suite of objectives to support the existing and future road and street network in the County including identifying Priority Road and Bridge Projects indicated in Table 5.4. The Assembly welcomes the overarching policy which aims to ensure efficient transport movements in support of economic development all while prioritising sustainable modes of transport (TM P4). In addition, the Assembly welcomes the suite of policies and objectives that supports the

delivery of a programme of high-quality cycling and walking infrastructure across County Kildare including the greenway network and the greenway projects set out in Objective TM O210 which will enhance Green Infrastructure in the County and Region as advocated in RPOs 7.24 and 7.25 of the RSES.

In a recent submission to the NTA's Draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042, EMRA highlighted the need for road projects to be assessed for consistency with the reductions in climate emissions as required under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 and the potential to undermine the economic viability of existing or proposed public transport. Concerns have been expressed relating to the inclusion of the road link between the N3 and N4. In light of this, the Council may consider it helpful to work with the NTA to analyse the nature and extent of the risks posed by issues arising on the M50 between Junctions 6 and 7 and to consider the full range of options to respond to and mitigate those risks.

6.0 Infrastructure and Environmental Services

The Chapter sets out a range of policies and objectives to ensure availability of high-quality water, drainage infrastructure and environmental services within the County. The Assembly welcomes Council policy to support Irish Water and their role in relation to water supply and wastewater treatment, to manage surface water in a sustainable manner, to minimise waste in accordance with the principles of the circular economy approach and to provide flood protection measures and to reduce flood risk as far as possible.

RPO 4.2 of the RSES requires infrastructure investment and priority alignment with the spatial planning strategy of the RSES whereby all residential and employment developments shall be planned on a phased basis in collaboration with infrastructure providers so as to ensure availability of adequate capacity for services (e.g. water supply, wastewater, transport, broadband) to match projected demand and so that the assimilative capacity of the receiving environment is not exceeded. In this regard, the Assembly welcomes policies IN P1 and IN P2 to ensure water supply infrastructure is sufficient to meet the growing needs of the population and facilitate economic development along with the protection and enhancement of water quality. Council objectives to work with and support Irish Water to protect existing water infrastructure, reduce leakage, improve water quality and upgrade water supply infrastructure through delivering key water service projects in the county are also welcomed. In addition, the policy and objectives set out to ensure adequate, available and appropriate wastewater treatment infrastructure to service the projected growth of towns and villages throughout Kildare in accordance with the Core Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy over the plan period are positive inclusions.

The Assembly supports the Council's approach to the sustainable management of surface water using nature-based solutions through SuDS and the suite of supportive objectives set out in the draft Plan which align with the Guiding Principles for SuDS set out in the RSES. The draft Plan recognises how SuDS can offer the opportunity to combine water management with amenity/green spaces increasing amenity and biodiversity and providing a complementary green and blue infrastructure planning approach, which is particularly welcome. It is also an objective to require buffer zones for riparian corridors (Objective IN O6 refers) which aligns with RPO 7.26 of the RSES.

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) of the County has been carried out to support the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Kildare County Development Plan. The assessment was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Flood Risk Management Guidelines and the EU Water Framework Directive. The SFRA identifies and maps flood risk in the County and has supported a sequential approach to planning, in accordance with the recommendations of the Flood Risk Management Guidelines. A two-stage assessment of flood risk was undertaken, to identify flood risk and an initial flood risk assessment. The SFRA carried out a flood risk review and land use appraisal for each planning area within the County. These are accompanied by Flood Zone Maps which highlight

the areas of flood risk concern including Flood Zones A and B. It is stated in the SFRA Review that outputs from future studies and datasets may trigger a review and update of the SFRA during the lifetime of the 2023-2029 Development Plan.

In terms of waste management, the Draft Plan sets out a comprehensive suite of objectives that support the principles of the circular economy, and the implementation of best practice in relation to waste management in the County in accordance with the requirements of The Eastern Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015–2021 (EMRWMP), and future update expected in 2022, as outlined by RPO 10.25 of the RSES. The Council is also directed to the potential and opportunities of the Bioeconomy as supported by RPO 7.34 of the RSES.

The Assembly further welcomes the Council’s commitment to ensuring environmental protection including policy IN P7 with regards to supporting the implementation of the River Basin Management Plan and Local Authority Water Programme and IN P8 in the implementation of EU and National legislation with regards to air, noise and light pollution.

7.0 Energy and Communications

The Assembly welcomes this dedicated chapter to energy and communications within the draft plan. The chapter outlines a comprehensive suite of policies and objectives to support and promote renewable energy in the county in the areas of wind, solar, hydro, geo-thermal, bio-energy and micro-renewables. There is also a dedicated section on energy efficiency promoting and encouraging the use of district heating systems, air to water heat pumps, energy from waste, energy efficiency in buildings and EVs.

The Council have also considered climate adaptation and mitigation and the Assembly welcome the intention within 1 year of the adoption of the County Plan to prepare a Sustainable Energy Climate Action Plan (SECAP) for County Kildare in order to provide a baseline analysis for Kildare and for the inclusion of measurable targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation and adaptation (Action EC A1). It is noted that the Draft Plan refers to the Climate Action Plan 2019 and related wind energy target EC T1. All references should be updated to reflect the new Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP 21), where applicable and the associated annex of actions should be reviewed as they relate to local authorities and sectoral emissions reduction targets. The Assembly welcomes Policy EC P1 to reduce the County’s carbon footprint in line with national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions. It should be noted that EMRA is leading an ESPON EU research project (QGasSP) to identify a robust method for quantifying the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies, the outputs of which are anticipated in 2022, and should inform the Draft Plan as it progresses.

In the area of renewable energy, the Council have included notable actions including EC A2 and EC A3 to establish a Mid-East Energy Bureau with Wicklow County Council, Meath County Council and the SEAI and to prepare and implement an overall Renewable Energy Strategy for the County. It is noted that a Wind Energy Strategy prepared in accordance with the provisions of the DHPLG’s Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Wind Energy Development (2019) also forms part of this Development Plan and is presented in Appendix 2, which is welcome.

It is welcomed that the draft Plan identifies the key town of Maynooth as its inaugural ‘decarbonisation zone’ and supports the identification of further areas within the lifetime of the Plan. The Assembly also welcomes the Council’s support in identifying future strategic energy zones (EC 19, EC O35) in accordance with RPO 7.35 of the RSES. It is also the policy of the Council to support the long-term strategic planning for industrial peatlands aligning with RPO 4.84 of the RSES and the draft Plan includes supportive policy and objectives for the preparation of a comprehensive “after use” framework plan to meet the environmental, economic and social needs of communities in these areas. As Managing Authority (MA) for the Just Transition Fund (JTF), and the subsequent launch of the Draft

Territorial Just Transition Plan in late 2020, EMRA is currently engaging with various Government Departments to identify potential actions/schemes for inclusion in the EU JTF programme. In this regard, the Assembly particularly welcomes Objective EC O56 which supports the implementation of the 'Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare' to identify actions to support and advance sustainable, social, economic, environmental development in the transition to a low carbon future in the West Kildare region. EMRA in its MA capacity will continue to engage and liaise with Kildare County Council to identify relevant EU policies and funding opportunities.

The chapter also sets out Council policy in relation to ICT including data centres and energy supply. In this regard the Assembly welcomes the supporting policies and objectives which align with RPO 8.25 and 10.23 of the RSES.

8.0 Urban Centres and Retail

The draft plan acknowledges that retail is the single biggest private sector employer in the County and a fundamental element of town and village centre activity. It recognises that the sector is facing many challenges including an increase in online shopping, impacts from Brexit and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic including an increase in vacancy levels in towns and villages. In response, the chapter sets out policies and objectives to maintain, reinstate and improve retailing in the County which are welcomed.

The County Retail Hierarchy is set out in Table 2 of the Retail Strategy and is generally consistent with the Retail Hierarchy set out in Table 6.1 of the RSES. The stated purpose of the retail hierarchy is to enable an efficient, equitable and sustainable distribution of retail floorspace throughout the County. The hierarchy outlines the Level 2 Major Town Centres and County (Principal) Town Centres, a number of Level 3 Town and/or District Centres and Sub-County Town Centres and Level 4 Neighbourhood Centres, Local Centres-Small Towns and Villages, as appropriate to their level of retail service provision. It is noted that the town of Kilcullen has been identified at the lower Level 4 small town centre as opposed to its higher position at Level 3 in the RSES Table 6.1. It is also noted that a county retail study/strategy was not prepared to accompany the draft Plan and it is recommended that the Council provide justification/evidence base approach to the change in the hierarchy as to that presented in the RSES.

The Assembly welcome the detailed policy and objectives included in this chapter which support a sequential approach to new retail development, the defined core retail areas (and associated maps), and the suite of objectives for the promotion and enhancement of each of the towns and villages set out in Level 3 and 4 of the retail hierarchy. The Assembly further welcomes the objectives and actions to enhance the quality of the public realm and design of new developments set out in Section 8.9. In addition, the objectives and actions set out to ensure the re-use and regeneration of derelict/obsolete/underutilised land and buildings are positive inclusions. The Assembly welcomes the recognition to the new guidelines published by the Government under Town Centre First: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns, published February 2022 in Chapter 14, and it is recommended that a complimentary reference to same and/or a supportive policy be also included within this chapter of the plan.

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly carried out analysis to identify which urban centres are most exposed to economic disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as an economic analysis of co-working spaces to inform targeted supports and investment, and these publications can be found on at www.emra.ie.

9.0 Our Rural Economy

The inclusion of this dedicated chapter to the rural economy is a welcome addition to the Draft Plan. The chapter contains a number of policies and objectives to promote and support the various sectors

of the County's rural economy and enterprise including agriculture, equine, horticulture, forestry, boglands, and renewable energy together with the continued modernisation of the farming / food sector while also protecting the quality of the rural environment. The chapter provides a focus on sustaining the livelihoods of rural communities and facilitating the transition towards a low carbon and climate resilient society for instance. The chapter also emphasises the importance of bogs and peatlands to the County and sets out supportive policy and objectives for appropriate and sensitive diversification of these areas. This is in keeping with related RSES policies for 'Rural Areas' contained at Chapter Four of the RSES and also those contained at Chapter 6 that relate to the 'Rural Economy'.

10.0 Community Infrastructure and Creative Places

The Assembly welcomes this dedicated chapter to community infrastructure and creative places emphasising that provision and access to social infrastructure, community facilities and community development are vital to the creation of sustainable communities and supporting a healthy lifestyle. These are central to our health and wellbeing and contribute to healthy placemaking which is a key ambition of the development plan aligning with National and Regional Policy objectives. This chapter sets out the policy context by which community and social infrastructure is guided.

The Assembly notes and welcomes the number of recent policy publications specific to Kildare provide guidance on social, community and cultural development which has shaped the policy contained in this chapter. Through the plan's policies and objectives, the Council will seek to ensure that an appropriate range of facilities are provided in all communities taking account of the population profile and growth targets identified in the Core Strategy. This will include the provision of adequate and suitably located community, leisure and cultural facilities to support towns and villages as these significantly enhance the quality of life of citizens and the attractiveness of Kildare as a place to visit, which aligns with RPO 9.14 of the RSES.

It is welcomed that the Council will continue to provide community infrastructure to meet the demands of the County's increasing population and will build on significant investment in Kildare's social infrastructure, including the provision and expansion of services such as age friendly services, education, library services, childcare facilities, health services, community facilities, arts and culture facilities, libraries, recreational facilities, parks and playgrounds. The Assembly further welcomes Objective SC O94 to promote the goals and objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland and the National Physical Activity Plan in line with NPO 26 of the NPF and RPO 9.16 of the RSES. Chapter 9 'Quality of Life' of the RSES supports numerous policies and objectives contained within this Section of the Draft Plan. This includes those related to Social Inclusion, older people and those with disabilities, and social and community infrastructure. As part of this, in accordance with Section 9.6 of the RSES, the Assembly consider it necessary that the Plan ensures that social and community infrastructure can be adequately provided in a manner that supports the growth of County Kildare as envisioned in the RSES.

11.0 Built and Cultural Heritage

This Chapter includes specific objectives and guidance relating to the protection of the County's archaeological and architectural heritage as provided for in the County Kildare Heritage Plan. It is supported by the Record of Monuments and Places for Kildare, which is listed in Appendix 5 of the Draft Plan and the Record of Protected Structures also listed in Appendix 6 and shown on the Kildare Development Plan Maps. This chapter also includes maps of the identified architectural conservation areas in each of the towns which is welcome. The Assembly welcomes the suite of policies and objectives set out in the Draft Plan to enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, social, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets and ensure their preservation into the future.

Objective AH O1 is to implement the actions of the current Kildare Heritage Plan and subsequent heritage plans. In this regard the RSES emphasises the benefits of heritage led urban regeneration for

example through the protection of historic urban fabric, the reuse of historic buildings and the enhancement of places of cultural or natural interest, which can play a key role in driving tourism and economic development in terms of placemaking and enhance the vibrancy of historic town centres. The Council is also directed to the annex of actions in the Climate Action Plan 2021 as they relate to heritage properties, in particular the proposed outputs of Action 205 regarding climate proof planning procedures for heritage properties including upcoming Guidelines on resilience of heritage resources under current climate conditions.

12.0 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of a dedicated Chapter on Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure (GI). The draft chapter sets out clearly the Council's support of international and national legislative policies for the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the County and identifies the designated sites for conservation, protected habitats and species, wetlands, Ramsar sites and county biodiversity sites. The Assembly particularly welcomes the dedicated section 12.10.1 on riparian zones and the addition of Table 12.1 recommending riparian buffer zones adapted from the Inland Fisheries Ireland Guidance "Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment, 2020 which is a positive inclusion and aligns well with RPO 7.26 in the RSES.

The Assembly welcomes the comprehensive suite of policies and objectives to support a green infrastructure approach to spatial planning, in particular Policy BI P12 recognising the importance of Green Infrastructure in Kildare as a valued biological resource, the ecosystem services it provides and its contribution to climate resilience. In addition, Objective BI O40 supports the development of a Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy and the identification, management, development and protection of strategic GI connections in co-operation with Kildare's neighbouring counties and EMRA, aligning with RPO 7.22 of the RSES. Under Action BI A21 it is the intention of the Council to complete the mapping of Green Infrastructure for each town and village in County Kildare and to develop specific policies and objectives for each town specifically by incorporating green infrastructure policies and objectives into the various Local Area Plans as they are being prepared. This speaks to RPO 7.23 which supports the further development of GI policies and the co-ordination of GI mapping in the Region.

The chapter also sets out Kildare's County GI Strategy in Section 12.14.5 that identifies the core areas, stepping stones and corridors and the corresponding areas within the County including mapping. The draft Plan also identifies the importance of urban GI and GI in parks and open spaces which are positive inclusions. The Assembly acknowledges the Kildare Open Space Strategy which was prepared to inform the draft Plan (Appendix 3) and has identified a hierarchy of open space within the county which is welcome.

The Council is directed to Section 7.7 of the RSES which sets out Guiding Principles for local authorities in the preparation of Green Infrastructure Strategies. To enhance knowledge and expertise in this area, EMRA is currently participating in an INTERREG funded project, PROGRESS, with the objective of promoting improved governance for regional ecosystem services across 6 European regions. This involves working with regional stakeholders to identify and share Good Practices from the partner regions for inclusion on the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform. A project Action Plan is currently being developed and a Pilot Action is also currently testing a Green Infrastructure Decision Support Mapping Approach for Ecosystem Services and Green Infrastructure (case study is Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council). It is anticipated that the outputs and learnings from the project will be transferable to the rest of the local authorities in the Eastern and Midland region.

13.0 Landscape, Recreation and Amenity

The Assembly welcome this dedicated chapter to landscape, recreation and amenity which sets out policies and objectives to provide for the protection, management, and enhancement of the County's

landscape and to support the provision of high quality and accessible recreational facilities, amenities and open spaces for residents and visitors to Kildare.

A large section of this chapter is dedicated to identifying and mapping indicative Landscape Character Areas, including an analysis of the dominant sensitivity of each landscape character area to create an evidenced-based landscape sensitivity map. The draft plan has also indicated the likely compatibility between a range of land uses and principal landscape areas to aid decision-making in determining development uses which is a positive inclusion. In addition, it sets out an ambitious target LR T1 to increase the territory of County Kildare designated to nature from 3% to 27% by the end of the plan period. It is noted that Target LR T2 should be reviewed to reflect any new provisions within the new Climate Action Plan 2021.

Areas of High Amenity are also identified and described in this chapter, in addition to Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. A considerable number of scenic routes and protected views are also identified and mapped. The waterways, greenways, blueways, peatways and trails are identified and Policy LR P4 is welcome that aims to protect and maintain the existing recreation infrastructure and support the diversification of the rural economy through the development of the recreational potential of the countryside. In this regard, the Council is directed to the RPO's contained in Chapter 6 Economy and Employment as they relate to natural and cultural tourism assets. In addition, the Council is directed to RPO 7.25 which supports local authorities in the delivery of sustainable strategic greenways, blueways and peatways projects in the Region under the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways.

The Assembly also welcomes the policy support for urban recreation and amenity acknowledging the importance of local networks of high quality, well managed and maintained open space, sports and recreational facilities.

14.0 Urban Design, Placemaking and Regeneration

This dedicated chapter to urban design, placemaking and regeneration is a welcome addition to the draft Plan and compliments the other chapters which promote sustainable settlement growth and economic development of the County's towns and villages.

The Chapter sets out a positive policy response to improving the quality of life of its citizens through ensuring high quality urban design in order to create sustainable, healthy and climate resilient settlements. In particular, the acknowledgement and emphasis on healthy placemaking and quality of life aligns with the key principle of Healthy Placemaking in the RSES which is recognised as a 'growth enabler' for the region. It is also welcomed that the 10-minute settlement concept is a key aim of the plan and the intention of the Council to ensure its practical implementation aligns with the Guiding Principles for the integration of land use planning and transport set out in the RSES.

Section 14.5.2 sets out the Council's placemaking and regeneration mechanisms including the preparation of Town Renewal Masterplans identified in Table 14.1 and supported by Action UD A3. It is intended that the masterplans will focus on maximising the potential of towns and villages built and natural heritage by using existing assets to enhance their role as visitor destinations and helping to create new local employment opportunities. This should also contribute to addressing vacancy in towns and villages which is welcome. It is also welcomed that the draft Plan commits to supporting the rollout and implementation of the Town Centre First Policy (February 2022) to towns and settlements across County Kildare and to ensuring that the provisions and actions contained in the policy document are fully integrated into the established regeneration activities and work programme of the County Council.

Finally, the Assembly welcomes the guidance contained in the chapter on urban design terminology, principles and standards, and the overall design of urban streets, blocks and heights.

15.0 Other

Chapter 15 Development Management Standards sets out the standards and criteria to be considered in the development management process and provides a comprehensive framework for the assessment of planning applications in the County. It is noted that the NPF and RSES encourage and support the densification of existing urban areas and promote the use of performance-based criteria in the assessment of developments to achieve well designed and high-quality outcomes.

The inclusion of a dedicated chapter to implementation and monitoring is welcomed (Chapter 16), as is the stated intention at Section 16.6.2 and Objective MI O1 that Kildare County Council will report to the Regional Assembly, setting out progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES and the MASP in accordance with Section 25A (1) of the 2000 Planning and Development Act (as amended).

In addition, the Council has developed an Implementation and Monitoring Framework (Appendix 12), comprising a range of both quantitative and qualitative based key performance indicators to provide an overall level of focus to the monitoring of the Plan. The Assembly welcomes the detailed content contained within this comprehensive framework which clearly demonstrates how the plan's key performance indicators are aligned to the strategic vision and the overarching Guiding Principles that underpin its delivery. In particular, the Assembly welcome how this framework demonstrates how Climate Action is a cross cutting principle across each of the chapters of the Plan. The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of these monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective delivery of the County's development plan and for greater transparency on the progress made in its implementation.

The attention of the Council is also directed to the development of an emerging Regional Development Monitor by the Regional Assembly, which is aligned to National and Regional Strategic Outcomes in the NPF and RSES, and it is anticipated that this monitor will go live in Q2 2022. This may provide additional support in monitoring the delivery of local authority development plans.

Chapter 17 sets out a high-level Infrastructural Assessment in accordance with Appendix 3 of the NPF and contains a review of the available land supply within a defined study area for each of the settlements across the county.

Volume 2 of the draft Plan deals specifically with small towns, environs, villages and settlements and it is proposed that they shall have a key economic and social function within the settlement hierarchy of the Plan. This volume also sets out the land use zoning objectives and matrix for these areas. The role, function and delivery capacity of each of the settlements have been outlined and the Assembly welcome the evidence base approach undertaken. It is considered that these statements will assist in the preparation of future LAPs within the County.

16.0 SEA, AA and SFRA

The Assembly welcomes the preparation of the Draft Plan in tandem with the required environmental processes, namely Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

The SEA environmental report (ER) sets out the iterative process to date including an assessment of the overall environmental effects arising from the Draft Plan provisions. As outlined in the ER, where potential effects are identified, it is expected that these can be mitigated through the implementation of the mitigation measures.

The Draft Plan is subject to Appropriate Assessment (AA) and a Natura Impact Report (NIR) has recorded the decisions that were taken during its preparation. A precautionary approach has been adopted by the NIR to ensure that the policies and objectives proposed and supported by the Plan are underpinned by the principles of sustainability of which the protection of European Sites forms part of. The NIR states that the Plan itself, subject to it securing the mitigation detailed in the NIR report,

will not adversely affect the integrity of any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. The AA process is ongoing and will inform and be concluded at adoption of the Plan.

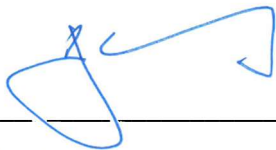
A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) has been undertaken alongside the preparation of the Draft Plan, the SEA and the NIR. The SFRA is required by 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2009) and associated Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government Circular PL2/2014. The recommendations from the SFRA have been integrated into the Draft Plan, as discussed under Chapter 6 above.

Conclusion

It is considered that the Draft Kildare County Development Plan, and in particular the Core Strategy, can achieve consistency with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031 by addressing the recommendations and observations set out above.

The Regional Assembly welcomes the Draft Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029, which marks the beginning of the alignment of planning policy at county and local levels with Regional and National Policy. It should be noted that the officials of the Regional Assembly are available to discuss the matters raised above and The Assembly welcomes further opportunities to engage in the statutory process of the making of the Kildare County Development Plan.

Regards,



Jim Conway
Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
16th May 2021