



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

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Draft Wexford County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly notes the publication of the Draft Wexford County Development Plan 2021-2027 and sets out hereunder observations on behalf of the Assembly. The submission has been prepared by the executive and approved by the members of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly at the meeting of 13th November 2020.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The Council will be aware of the finalisation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region which was made on 28th June 2019. The RSES, prepared in accordance with the National Planning Framework, sets the context for each local authority within our Region to develop their county and city development plans in a manner that will ensure national, regional and local plans align. The RSES identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives. At this strategic level it provides a framework for investment to better manage spatial planning and economic development throughout the Region.

In this regard, The Assembly welcomes the publication of the Draft Wexford 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 11(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the Regional Assembly received notice from the Council on September 25th 2020, of the preparation of the Draft Wexford County Development Plan 2021-2027. 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 any 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.

Whilst the various themes that are addressed within the draft county development plan are fully noted, the scope of this submission mainly focuses on issues directly linked to the Eastern and Midland Region, along with recommendations as required under Section 27B of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

Consistency and Alignment with Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies

Section 1.2 of the Draft Plan states that the plan review process and preparation has had regard to key recent development trends and national, regional and local policy developments, in particular, the National Planning Framework, Rebuilding Ireland, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region and the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, in particular, the Council's enhanced role in the promotion of economic and community development.

County Wexford borders the Eastern and Midland Region and therefore shall be cognisant of the long-term strategic planning and economic framework of the adjoining Eastern and Midland Region as it is expressed in the EMRA RSES.

Inter-regional and International Connectivity

The EMRA RSES recognises that inter-regional accessibility and co-operation is central to delivering the overall growth strategy for the Eastern and Midland region. County Wexford comprises part of the South East functional area with County Wicklow, where the key driver is the Eastern Corridor, an extension of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor that influences the County. The EMRA RSES seeks to protect and enhance strategic connections in the region and highlights the importance of the Eastern Corridor extending south to Rosslare Europort which is an important economic and transport link, particularly in the post Brexit scenario. The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) RSES policy is aligned with the EMRA RSES through RPO 42 which states:

It is an objective to support the development of an Eastern Corridor through the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and strengthening economic links with the SouthEast, extending to Rosslare Europort (incl. public transport connectivity and optimising the potential

for rail freight), which is an important economic and transport link, particularly in the post-Brexit scenario.

It is welcomed that the development of the Eastern Corridor is recognised in the draft Plan as both a transport and economic corridor with its strategic connection to the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. In addition, the development of the Eastern Corridor is one of the draft plan's ten Core Strategy Guiding Principles as set out in Section 3.4, which is welcome.

As a strategic growth enabler for the Eastern and Midland region the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor aims to drive synergy in the Drogheda-Dundalk Newry cross border network and strengthen links and synergies with the south east extending to Rosslare Europort. The EMRA RSES highlights that this Corridor is underpinned by a strong presence of transport infrastructure that connects large centres of scale offering extended strategic connections throughout the Island through links with the TEN-T network and the Dublin-Rosslare route. The further development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and along the Eastern Corridor by providing improved accessibility for setup or relocation of economic development will enhance the corridor's role as key regional economic drivers for both the Eastern and Midland and the Southern region. EMRA welcomes the recognition given to the Eastern Economic Corridor in the draft plan's Transport Strategy as crucial to effective regional development in both the RSES for the Southern Region and that of the Eastern and Midland Region.

In terms of the Ten-T network specifically, RPO 8.16 of the EMRA RSES supports the improvement and protection of the network to strengthen access routes to Ireland's ports, including investment in the ongoing development of the N11/M11 to improve connectivity to Rosslare and improvements to the Dublin-Wexford Rail line. EMRA welcome the draft plan's Transport Strategy's policies that aim to support the development of multimodal transport infrastructure and which seek investment in and secure the development of the TEN-T network (Policies TS04, TS05).

The EMRA RSES also highlights the importance of inter-regional national routes such as the N80 which connects to the Midlands and welcomes Policy TS56 which supports the future upgrading of the N80 to improve capacity and safety given the roads importance to connect to the Midlands and Rosslare Europort.

In terms of promoting sustainable transport links the EMRA RSES supports the development of flagship strategic greenways including the development of a wider East Coast Trail from Rosslare to Northern Ireland (EMRA RSES, pg. 109). This also supports an improved and consolidated approach to tourism development. It is therefore recommended that this approach and potential for a wider greenway network is recognised and supported in the County Development Plan.

To support economic growth and competitiveness across the Eastern and Midland and Southern regions continued crossborder collaboration and co-operation between the relevant local authorities, departments, agencies and stakeholders will be necessary. EMRA welcome the draft Plan's Core Strategy Policy Objective CS12 which "recognises the shared critical mass of population, strategic assets and economic potential of inter-urban networks working in collaborative partnerships as regionally significant drivers of growth and support investment in infrastructure and initiatives."

Other matters

The Council's attention is drawn to a minor error in the written statement where it refers to EMRA as the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly (emphasis added). It is recommended that this should be amended to read Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

Conclusion

It is considered that the Draft Wexford County Development Plan 2021-2027 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 Wexford County Development Plan 2021-2027, 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 welcome further opportunities to engage in the statutory process of the making of the Wexford County Development Plan.

Regards,



Jim Conway

Director

Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

November 13th 2020