

Senior Planner
Planning Section
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08/05/2018

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**Re: Draft Local Area Plans for Portlaoise LAP, Portarlinton LAP, Mountmellick LAP
2018 - 2024**

Dear Sir / Madam,

Irish Water acknowledges receipt of your letter and welcomes the opportunity to review the Draft Local Area Plans for Portlaoise LAP, Portarlinton LAP, Mountmellick LAP 2018 – 2024.

Irish Water has no further comments to add to the existing information relating to water services within each settlement. In terms of determining serviceability for vacant sites, we advise that we will only be in a position to confirm water and wastewater availability for site specific new development through Irish Water's pre-connection enquiry process.

Irish Water is available to discuss the submission with the Council and any other issue with respect to the provision of water services within our remit

Yours Sincerely,



Suzanne Dempsey
Spatial Planning Strategy Specialist

**An Roinn Tithíochta,
Pleanála agus Rialtais Áitiúil**
Department of Housing,
Planning and Local Government



08 May, 2018

Senior Planner,
Planning Section
Laois County Council,
Áras an Chontae,
JFL Avenue,
Portlaoise,
Co. Laois.

Re: Draft Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2018-2024

A Chara,

I am directed by the Minister for Housing and Urban Development to refer to your recent letter in relation to the above and set out hereunder observations on behalf of the Minister.

The Department considers the Portlaoise Draft Local Area Plan 2018-24 to provide a comprehensive framework for the future development of this important town with planned growth in population and employment in tandem with supporting amenities and infrastructure. The focus on the enhancement of the town centre including improvement of the public realm environment is particularly welcome and will assist in consolidating and regenerating the town centre environment.

Regeneration Project

The Council will be aware that the National Planning Framework was published by the Government on 16th February last. As referenced in the text of the Draft LAP, section 4.5 of the NPF identifies Portlaoise as a *Regeneration and Development Demonstration Project* seeking to rejuvenate the historic core of the town and properly integrate it with surrounding residential areas and future employment development such as Togher. This project will be led by the National Regeneration and Development Agency that will shortly be established. The Department will also



continue to work closely with the Council and the other stakeholders involved to deliver on the vision and strategy of the LAP for Portlaoise.

Flood Risk

The Local Area Plan is accompanied by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) which examines the extent of flood risk within the town and compliance with ‘*The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines*’ (2009) issued under s.28 of the Planning & Development Act (as amended). The SFRA includes the production of detailed flood maps indicating the Flood Zones A and B (per section 3.5 of the 2009 Guidelines). The 2009 Guidelines clearly require that a sequential approach to flood risk management (see Figure 3.1 of the Guidelines) is taken to the zoning of lands for development (eg. lands in identified Flood Zones A & B should not be zoned for residential or other ‘*Highly vulnerable development*’ per Table 3.2 of the Guidelines). The Department advocates close adherence to the sequential approach to flood risk management in the plan process and the Council is advised to examine the Draft LAP to ensure that zoning objectives of the Draft Local Area Plan are fully integrated with the SFRA and the 2009 Guidelines.

The planning authority is reminded to have regard to any observations made by the Office of Public Works, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the National Parks & Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and Irish Water. In this regard, Laois County Council must satisfy itself that it has met the relevant requirements as appropriate, and that the Portlaoise Draft Local Area Plan 2018-24 is fully compliant with its obligations under planning legislation.

The officials of the Department are available to discuss the matters raised above and in the first instance you are advised to contact Mr. Stewart Logan, Planning Adviser on





Is mise le meas,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Niall Cussen". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light gray rectangular background.

Niall Cussen

Chief Planner

Forward Planning Section

Portlaoise Draft Local Area Plan 2018-2024

Submission by Sean Fleming T.D.

I wish to make a submission in respect of the Portlaoise Draft Area Plan covering a number of areas as set out below.

Planning Policy:

The population of Portlaoise town has grown substantially in recent years and is now the largest town in the Midlands region. Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework is the most recent national document in relation to planning.

The old Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region is now at the end of its life and will be replaced in the very near future by a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. The old Regional Planning Guidelines listed Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar as a linked gateway for the Midland Region and Portlaoise was only listed as a Principal Town. The passage of time has made this document redundant and while the Regional Planning Guidelines will still exist for a very short period we need to reduce dramatically any reference to these guidelines in the Local Area Plan. Some reference is obviously still required.

Therefore, I recommend that Paragraph 7.3 dealing with the guidelines be reduced substantially and Figure 8 showing the old map of the Midland Region be deleted as it is not necessary and serves no useful purpose going forward.

Development Vision and Strategy:

Objective 3 on page 20 in relation to the development of the Togher area is essential.

However, it is important that the Local Area Plan not only concentrates on land in the ownership of the Council but also land held by other public bodies for development purposes.

There needs to be an objective included, relating to working with the IDA in respect of the development of their site on the Mountrath Road. Everybody locally criticises the lack of interest by the IDA in Portlaoise but it would not be sensible to allow the IDA say we ignored their State owned site in our Local Area Plan. Accordingly, we must put in a positive objective in relation to this matter or otherwise our plan will be seriously lacking.

Delete policy number 3 on page 21 as the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines do not serve any useful purpose for the future of the town.

Population of Portlaoise:

The percentage of the population in Portlaoise town under 14 years of age is one of the highest for any town in the entire country. 87% of all households in the town are accommodated in houses built since 2001.

These new young families in the town have resulted in a very significant increase in the population in the town in recent years. According to the 2016 census the population of Portlaoise was 22,050. According to Table 4 on Page 23 the population projection for Portlaoise by 2023 is 25,382. This leaves a projected increase in population in Portlaoise of 3,332 between now and 2023.

The natural growth of the population in the town between 2011 and 2016 when practically no new houses were built was approximately 2,000. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the natural population growth from existing families in the town will increase by at least 3,000 over the lifetime of this plan. Page 24 of the document says that 2,128 additional houses are required in Portlaoise town for the population growth between now and 2024. If these new houses are built they will lead to an increase in population of approximately 5,000. When this is added to the natural increase in population in the town we will be far in excess of the projected population as outlined on page 23.

There is already planning permission for 1,500 new houses in the town and it makes no sense to suggest that the plan can only accommodate 600 additional new houses to be approved for planning in the next 7 years.

The table on page 23 is to be replaced and a new table inserted showing the population based on the 2016 census and not the 2011 census as is shown in this table.

If the Council produces a plan with a projected population in 2023 of 25,382 people, it will be obvious that such a plan will have no basis on actual reality.

The new plan for Portlaoise must be based on realistic population projections.

Economic Development:

Objective No. 1 on page 29 should be amended to delete the reference to the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines and an alternative reference included if considered necessary.

Policy No. 1 on page 30 regarding developing Togher is very welcome. However, there should be an additional policy inserted recognising the fact that An Post's largest distribution centre outside of Dublin is based in Portlaoise. The Mail Centre in Portlaoise deals with all inward parcels coming into Ireland both for distribution and for customs purposes. They also deal with extensive deliveries of parcels throughout the country and also the regular letter post on a daily basis. We should promote the existence of this facility in Portlaoise as part of the Local Area Plan to heighten the awareness of Portlaoise as a distribution/logistics centre.

We also need to have objectives and policies in this area in relation to working with the non-State agencies especially the private sector in relation to the promotion of employment in the town. It is not sufficient only to deal with the initiatives which the Council are directly involved in. This must be expanded as most employment in the town and surrounding areas comes from the private sector.

Transport and Movement:

There should be an objective and a policy of the Council to work with Irish Rail for the provision of car parking facilities for people who use the railway station as they are the customers of Irish Rail and the first line of responsibility for parking should not primarily be on Laois County Council.

There should also be an objective to work with Bus Eireann, the National Transport Authority and transport providers in the private sector to provide a bus terminus in Portlaoise while working with Laois County Council. The primary objective should be put on the companies whose customers use their services.

Objective no. 4 on page 48 while understandable puts too much emphasis on the CBS land for Portlaoise Railway Station. It is possible that this may not come to pass and all the more reason to have Irish Rail listed as requiring to work with Laois County Council on this issue.

There should be a policy to link the N80 from the Fairgreen area to the M7 motorway on the Dublin side of Portlaoise. This is necessary to take the N80 traffic away from the town centre, the Stradbally Road and the busy schools along the new Ring Road in the town. This is essential in the interest of sustainability of the town centre and safety of everybody who uses the new schools.

There should also be a policy on seeking to reduce the number of people who have to commute every day for jobs in Dublin and other regions. While this is a long term issue there should be a clear policy to try and provide more employment locally for people who live locally.

Key Infrastructure:

Explain the reference to “Both Councils” in Paragraph 1 of page 43.

The Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise is the most important key infrastructure in the town. This hospital serves not just the population of Portlaoise and Co. Laois but also a number of neighbouring counties.

It is a strategic facility for the region and it is located in Portlaoise. The Council must have in its document a key aim to promote and support and to work with state agencies and all others to enhance this key facility in the town for the years ahead. A plan that does not include this is an objective and policy will be seriously deficient. I look forward to a proper development of this subject in the Local Area Plan.

It is essential that Laois County Council work with and consider other State agencies in relation to the provision of key public services in the town.

There are significant statements in the Draft Plan regarding Portlaoise being a low carbon town and the essential need for sustainable development. In line with these statements it is essential that there be a key objective and policy in the Plan in relation to waste management. There is not sufficient detail in relation to matter included in the Draft Plan. Recycling of waste and reducing the carbon footprint are fundamentally connected with how we handle domestic and business waste in the towns. This must be addressed in this plan.

Housing:

There must be a clear policy objective in relation to taking existing housing estates in charge. These issues often gather momentum from year to year then they often fall by the wayside. It is important that there be a policy in relation to this matter in this plan.

Community Services & Culture:

On page 57 it refers to the requirement for additional preschool facilities based on existing facilities and new residential developments. This sentence must also include the existing natural population growth in the town.

Portlaoise is not well served by community hall facilities and meeting rooms for the public. Much of this has been left to the hotels in the towns. Most towns and villages throughout Co. Laois have more local community facilities than are available for the general population in Portlaoise. There needs to be a clear policy and objective stating the need to support such facilities available to the public in the town as there are very few public facilities at the moment.

There are 2 playgrounds currently in Portlaoise town. This is insufficient for the size of the town and additional facilities are required and they should be located near some of the new population growth areas in the town.

Many of the towns and villages throughout the county have more facilities available for their population than is available in Portlaoise. Again with such a young population, this issue should be given priority in terms of objectives and policies in the new plan.

Built Heritage:

A new Courthouse outside the town centre will be constructed in due course.

The Court Service has stated publically that it is their policy when they vacate an existing courthouse to hand it over to the Local Authority. There needs to be a policy and objective in this plan stating that the Council will work with Court Service and the Office of Public Works in relation to the future use of the existing Courthouse on Main Street. With the emphasis on regenerating the Main Street, the Courthouse is one of the most strategic buildings in this location and is in excellent condition and needs to be an integral part of any regeneration of the town centre.