



Northern & Western Regional Assembly

The square

Ballaghaderreen

Co. Roscommon

11<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Forward Planning Section

Planning Department

Cavan County Council

Johnston Centre

Farnham Street

Cavan Town

H12 V3W4

**Re: Review of the existing Cavan County Development Plan 2014-2020 and preparation of a new County Development Plan for the period 2022-2028 incorporating a Local Area Plan for Cavan Town and Environs.**

Dear Mr Jennings,

I refer to your notification dated 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020 in respect of the above and confirming that a Strategic Issues Paper in advance of the Draft Cavan County Development Plan had now been published and inviting submissions.

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly wish to commend Cavan County Council on the publication of the Issues Papers. The forthcoming County Development Plan represents an opportunity to think regionally and operate locally as it gives effect to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. It will shape the medium-term future of the county, and it is also important to areas that lie beyond the county area at both sub-regional and regional level.

This submission is made in accordance with Section 27A of the Planning and Development Acts. The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, requires that the Planning Authority ensure, when making or varying the County Development Plan, that it is consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the area of the plan, thus enabling full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy. This submission was considered by the Assembly at its meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

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An Chearnóg, Bealach an Doirín, Co. Ros Comáin

+353 (0)94 9862970

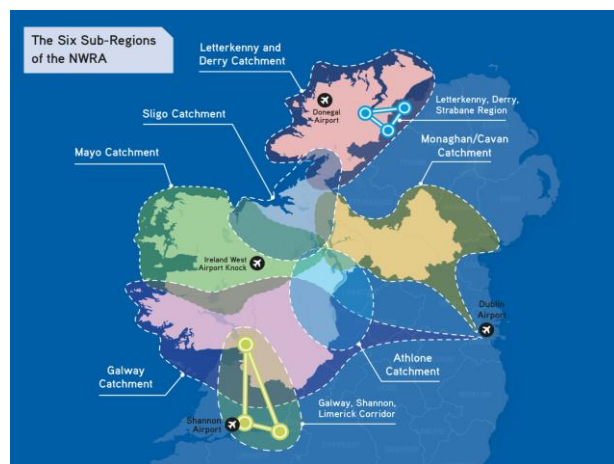
+353 (0)94 9862973

[info@nwra.ie](mailto:info@nwra.ie)



It is the role of the Regional Assemblies to provide leadership and to identify regional development objectives and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning and economic policy. This is primarily achieved through the preparation and implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) that are bespoke to the region and which implement and amplify the National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework (NPF). The Northern and Western Regional Assembly adopted the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2020 – 2032 (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region in January 2020. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cavan County Council for their collaborative input to this strategy. The Strategy is available on our website [www.nwra.ie/rses](http://www.nwra.ie/rses)

Our RSES is crafted on the principle that it wants to work collaboratively to deliver effective regional development for all our communities, regardless of administrative boundaries. This means that we need to understand their catchments and their potential and to enable the spatial development opportunities specific to each of the sub-regions (Rf Fig 2 of the RSES) – We need to connect their strengths and celebrate their unique selling points.



The RSES aims to be responsive to trends (e.g. urbanisation, digitisation and globalisation) whilst also interpreting risk (e.g. climate, global economic challenges, future of work and population health outbreaks like Covid-19) by connecting our plans to the Sustainable Development Goals, the EU Growth Strategy (including the EU Green Deal) and the National Strategic Outcomes (NPF).

At its core the RSES recognises the weak urban infrastructure in our region and that this region has not prospered economically compared to the other two regions of Ireland, as evidenced by reclassification of the region by the European Commission from a 'More Developed Region' to a 'Transition Region' for the Post 2020 (2021-2027) funding period – see also a recent publication 'A Region in Transition: The Way Forward' published by the NWRA.

Our RSES is responding by adopting a clear strategy that delivers key business elements known to inform their location of choice, namely:

1. Development of compact urban centres with critical mass in population; encouraging the revitalisation of urban areas and reinhabitation of urban cores.
2. Provision of connectivity and access (including national and international),

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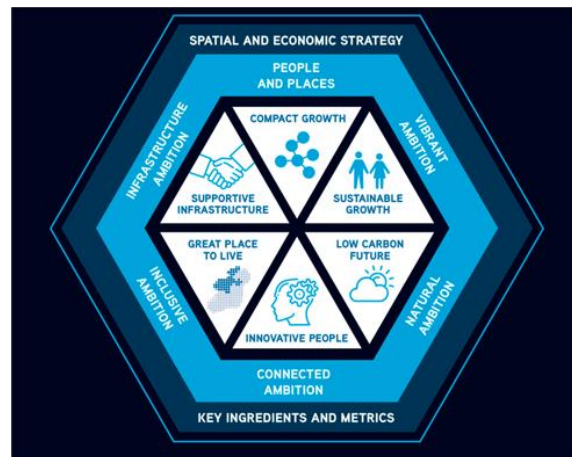


enabled by physical and technology infrastructures with capacity resilience and quality especially post-Brexit.

3. Establishment of competitive, smart and integrated public transport networks within and between cities and urban areas.
4. Nurturing of world-class infrastructure and competitive services with capacity, resilience and quality.
5. Growing our third level infrastructures, access to skills and research, development and innovation.
6. Availability of property solutions – including ‘ready-to-go’ commercial properties, ‘landing spaces’, co-working spaces and flexible property solutions and affordable housing.
7. Co-location or dynamic clustering, enabling connectivity and linkages within and between suppliers and purchasers, between enterprises and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).
8. Development of quality of life factors and sense of Place, including harnessing the social, and cultural dimensions of the living experience of communities, including the unique social, linguistic and cultural dimensions of our Gaeltacht communities.

**Growth Framework:** The strategy has introduced the concept of a Growth Framework that links strategic and operational challenges with prioritised capital interventions. The Framework will be the basis for determining metrics, linking with National Strategic Outcomes and assessing the region’s actual contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Growth framework incorporates ‘Five Growth Ambitions’ that define each priority and how they are mutually complementary. Our Vision is for a region that is smarter, greener, more specialised and connected, with a stronger and more compact urban network, focusing on ‘People’ and ‘Places’. It brings a new “place-based” approach that involves tapping into the economic potential that remains unused, so that all parts of regions, be they cities, towns or their rural hinterlands, can contribute to national development. From an enterprise development perspective, investment in the creation of ‘place’ is key to delivering the key elements that inform business location choices.



**People and Places:** The settlement strategy is focused on a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) for Galway and tailored Regional Growth Centre Strategic

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Plans for Sligo, Athlone and Letterkenny. A network of 'Key Towns' that perform a support role in providing regionally strategic employment development of significant scale have also been identified and Cavan Town is one such Key Town. The intention is that these strategic places will be supported as required by detailed action plans, investment proposals and delivery partnerships (Eg. The Exchequer (PI2040), EU Investment Programmes, Financial Instruments, Community and Local Authority investment, Private Investment).

Within the context of the Central Border Region, Cavan Town and Monaghan Town have been identified as Key Towns, which provide functions and services to entire sub regions, and it is anticipated within the lifetime of the RSES Cavan Town will grow its population by at least 30%, and simultaneously grow its number of jobs, and increase service provision across several areas. Cavan Town already boasts a high ratio of jobs to resident workers (1.388, NPF, 20), and this is something which can be further reinforced within the lifetime of the new plan, given its position as the employment hub within the Central Border Region.

The key future priorities for Cavan Town, as outlined within the RSES (Sec 3.8) including the need to address the potential lack of suitably zoned lands for economic development purposes, and a Local Transport Plan for Cavan Town are critical in this regard.

The Regional Assembly acknowledge that in respect of the preparation of the Cavan Town & Environs Development Plan, there has been challenges in respect of residential zonings around the Town, with some reconfiguration of identified residential land-banks to ensure housing growth can be realised at the projected growth rates.

It is recognised within the RSES (Sec 3.9) that South / East County Cavan, and the area around Virginia (and Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan) is one of Strategic Potential. Whilst the centre's within South, and East Cavan area have witnessed consistent population growth over a number of census', it should now be the ambition of Cavan County Council to augment Virginia and other medium size towns within the East / South Cavan sub-region, with public amenity spaces, through (where possible urban regeneration & renewal), and other measures which enhance place-making and bring further service provision. Equally important to the viability of these settlements to become self-sustaining will be the growth of the ratio of jobs to resident workers and reduce the pattern of long distance daily commuting from County Cavan to the Greater Dublin Area via the M1 and M3 corridors.

In a further measure to foster the core of our Towns and Villages, the RSES contains the ambition (RPO 3.7) to prioritise a programme for serviced sites to be provided by Local Authorities in selected settlements. This measure has received further validation insofar as it has now been incorporated into the Programme for Government recently agreed, and the Draft Plan should include specific details on how this measure is to be achieved in County Cavan.

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The development plan is an opportunity to also reflect the rural nature of settlement patterns across the county and how it proposes to balance the needs of all places, including the rural towns, villages and rural areas. In this regard the plan should reflect on the issues of providing for vibrancy and vitality of rural areas, how to realise their potential and to re-imagine these areas as referenced in section 3.5 of the RSES. The plan should consider measures that support the role of smaller and medium sized towns (See RPO3.13) and to support the regeneration of sites within towns, villages and rural areas – thus realising RPOs 3.3, 3.8 and 3.9.

The Growth Ambitions of the RSES will also offer opportunities to inform the development plan, both urban and rural.

**Growth Ambition 1 - Vibrant Region:** The NWRA believes that strong economic growth, which creates permanent, sustainable jobs, is best achieved by building a competitive and productive economy. Focusing policies on scale, investing in connectivity and our people whilst aggressively pursuing a low carbon approach to enhance our differentiation. Under this Growth Ambition, the RSES gives recognition to the importance of place-based networks such as the Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy Project. The RSES reinforces the provision of a sustainable framework for tourism development. The RSES includes reference to the ambition to develop Tourist / amenity attractions of scale over the next decade within the Cavan / Monaghan Region (RPO 4.7), and this is an ambition that should be considered by Cavan County Council with the relevant stakeholders in advance of the Draft County Development Plan. Any such project should share our ethos that adverse impacts upon local communities, archaeology, built heritage, landscapes and habitats are minimised while at the same time ensuring economic benefits accruing to local economies are maximised.

In a similar vein, RPO 7.7 supports the provision of third level educational facilities for Cavan / Monaghan, and the inclusion of this strategic ambition within the Draft Plan would help reinforce this key ambition for the Central Border Region.

The RSES confirms that the agri-food sector is vital to the region and particularly to Cavan. The stimulation of gastronomy as part of our cultural heritage is something that offers local opportunities and is to be encouraged. The development plan provides an opportunity to reflect how to best support this sector through delivery of the regional development objectives RPOs 4.23-4.26. In addition, the opportunity to support the bioeconomy should be articulated through the development plan.

**Growth Ambition 2 - Natural Region:** It has been identified that more strategic actions are required to prepare the region for what is to come. These actions need to be cognisant of our natural resources, landscape and heritage (natural, social and cultural) and this ambition provides the necessary framework for the Northern and Western Region but are equally transferrable to Cavan and represent a shared opportunity (See Chapter 5 of RSES).

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The NWRA is a partner in the OUR WAY INTERREG project that aims to contribute to conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage in using Greenways as sustainable and smart transportation links in rural areas. It is using this as a platform to transfer learnings at Regional and National level so as to advance the expansion of an integrated network of Greenways across the region's catchments, including those envisaged to be shared by Cavan and Fermanagh. This will further enable the appropriate development of local businesses and start-ups in the vicinity of greenways, which is an objective of this Growth Ambition.

**Growth Ambition 3 – Connected Region:** Accessibility and mobility within the region have a direct effect on the region's economic competitiveness. It also has an effect on the attractiveness of the region as a favourable living and visiting environment. The RSES sets out that the provision of prudently managed transport and digital infrastructure is key to delivering our vision. The strategy outlines how we plan to better integrate land-use and transport planning and it also focuses upon how the digital economy can enable our region, growing exports, innovation, investment and productivity – attained through building new sound partnerships and facilitating mutual connections and collaboration.

The Draft County Development Plan may benefit from the incorporation of Local Transport Plans for Cavan Town and Virginia. This would enable an examination of potential growth of walking, cycling, and an increased focus on modal shift. This shift may attract additional momentum based on the recently agreed Programme for Government, as well as the increase in home working during, and post Covid-19, where the opportunities for workers to remain in Cavan during the working day may give rise to added demand for walking and cycling networks.

In terms of Road projects, the by-passing of Virginia (N3) is within the key Regional (National) projects within the National Development Plan. The route is to progress to pre-appraisal, and early planning in the short term. Additionally, The East – West Route (Dundalk / Sligo), and the need to gradually upgrade same is recognised within the RSES (RPO 6.10). RPO 6.8 also identifies a number of key routes which are of strategic importance to all of County Cavan, and it is the ambition of the RSES that these are prioritised - these include the N3 upgrade, the N54 Cavan – Monaghan, and N55 Cavan to Athlone.

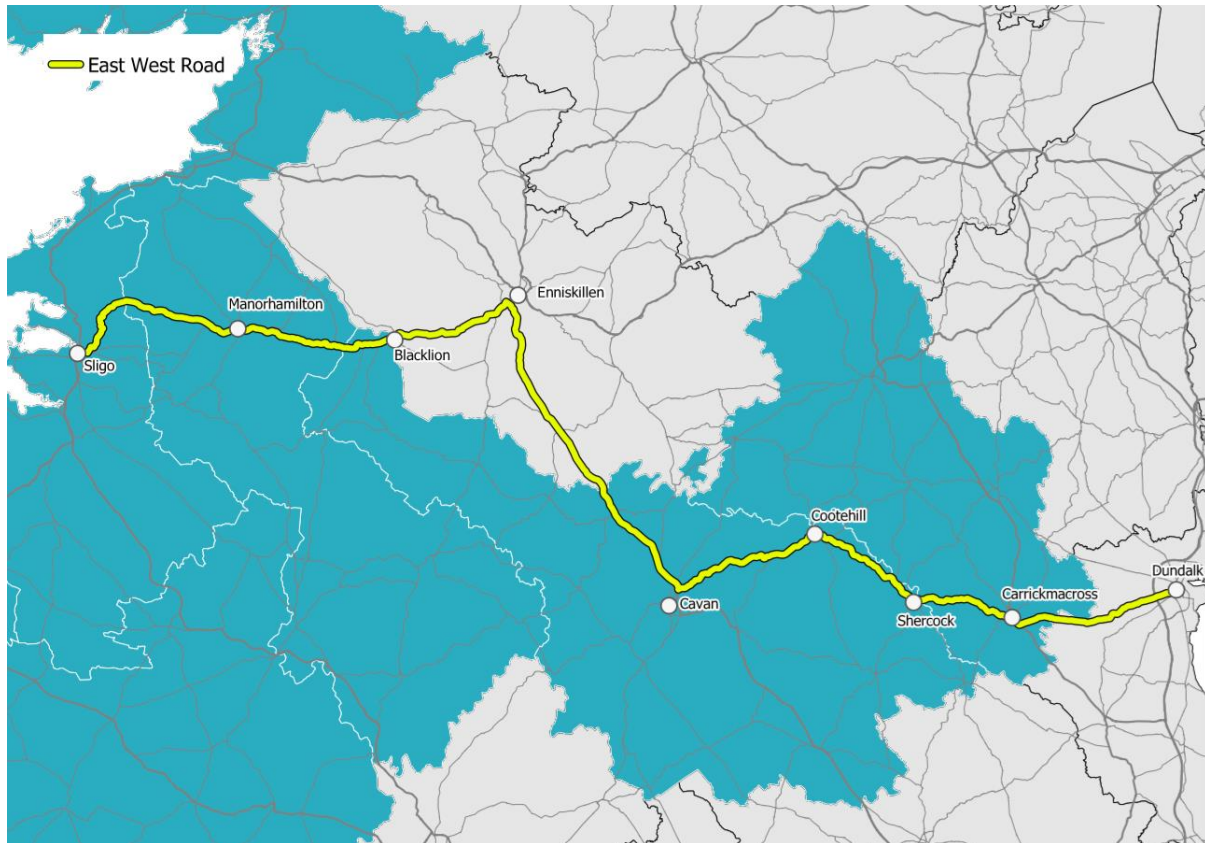
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RSES: Fig 57. 6.3.

In addition, to achieve our Vision for the region the RSES recognises the need to strengthen our digital network and enable new technologies to work by ensuring that policies and systems are in place that can help people transition to a world much more digitally connected. RPOs 6.36 - 6.60 are tailored to promote smart places. The reference to Smart initiatives within the Issues Papers is welcome and they present the potential to influence other policy and programme instruments, including the County Cavan LECP when reviewed.

The RSES encourages policies that support the development of local entrepreneurial ecosystems through local clustering and smart specialisation (S3). The priorities for action and recommendations contained in the RSES are based on the very significant potential for the region to generate further value from its Research and Innovation investments, within national policy and the EU's strengthening S3 agenda.

There is significant capacity to achieve this and to position R&I at the forefront of enabling policies to achieve sustainable growth in population. We would encourage Cavan County Council to further consider policies aligned with S3 that would further harness the capacity of local innovation centres.

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**Growth Ambition 4 – Quality of Life – Inclusive Region:** One of the strongest foundations and emerging propositions this region has to build on is its ‘liveability’. The region aspires to be one of the most liveable places in Europe with a commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth. Our objectives encourage industries that provide jobs that will raise per capita incomes and improve living standards for all. This requires a specific focus upon the enablement of access to education, health, employment, recreation and opportunity for all. The coordination and delivery of infrastructure, housing and employment land in the right places at the right time is a key outcome, with homes that are affordable.

The supply and location of jobs and homes must be aligned. This includes providing homes that are affordable and accessible to house the labour force, and the provision of land and premises that meet the needs of current and future businesses, including for smart design and orientation that meet current and future energy efficiency demands. The Draft County Development Plan should identify a roadmap for this, and zone lands in a range of locations, whilst simultaneously striving to achieve the targets of compact growth as outlined within Sec. 3 of the RSES. This is something that may benefit from detailed consideration through the making of the Draft Plan.

**Growth Ambition 5 – Enabling our Region:** The provision and maintenance of economic infrastructure, such as energy, water, and wastewater, are key to delivering compact growth and a connected, vibrant, inclusive, resilient and smart region.

It is hoped that the above observations are of assistance in shaping the new Cavan Draft County Development Plan in a manner that shall be of benefit to our communities. The Assembly look forward to further engagement with Cavan County Council as the preparation of the Draft plan is progressed.

If you have any queries in respect of the above observations, then do not hesitate to revert.

Is mise le meas,

**David Minton,**

**Director**

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