



Planning Office
Sligo County Council Planning Office
City Hall
Quay Street
Sligo
Via portal : consult.sligococco.ie

04/12/2024

RE: DRAFT MINISTERIAL DIRECTION - SLIGO COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2024-2030

A Chara,

I refer to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's Notice of Intention to Issue a Direction to Sligo County Council regarding the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030. The Northern and Western Regional Assembly wishes to express its gratitude to Sligo County Council for the opportunity to make this submission.

Please find attached a report titled 'Draft Ministerial Direction on the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030,' which was circulated to the elected members of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly for consideration at their monthly meeting on 15 November 2024.

Following careful review, the elected members resolved to accept the report and to make the submission as outlined, subject to advising that Sligo County Council and the Minister ensure that population and housing figures in the finalised plan are clearly and accurately transposed. This is considered essential to safeguard the robustness and integrity of the County Development Plan.

I trust this submission is of assistance. Should you have any queries or require further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact this office

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Denis Kelly
Director





REPORT: DRAFT MINISTERIAL DIRECTION ON THE SLIGO COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2024-2030

INTRODUCTION

The Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 (herein referred to as “the CDP”) was formally adopted by the Elected Members of the Sligo County Council at their meeting on 30 September 2024. As required under Sections 31AO (5) of the *Planning and Development Act 2000* (as amended) the planning authority issued notification of the Plan’s adoption to the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). The Chief Executive (Sligo County Council) also informed the OPR of the decision of the planning authority not to comply with certain recommendations made in the relevant report of the OPR, together with reasons for the decision of the Authority. Having considered the recommendation made to the Minister by the Office of the Planning Regulator, the Minister of State for Local Government and Planning issued a ‘Notice of Intention to Issue a Direction’ to the Planning Authority under Section 31 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (As Amended) (‘the Act’). A copy of the draft Ministerial Direction and Statement of Reasons dated 8 November 2024 was sent to the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (herein referred to as “the Assembly”).

The draft Ministerial Direction is subject to a 2-week public consultation period which will commence within two weeks of the receipt of the draft Ministerial Direction notice. Submission can be made within a two-week period.

The Assembly made previous submissions to the planning authority during the CDP plan-making process:

- Issues Paper stage (Pre-Draft Consultation);
- Draft CDP (dated 21/12/2023); and
- Proposed Material Alterations to the draft CDP (dated 05/07/2024).

This report sets out the content of the draft Ministerial Direction and opinion of the Assembly from a regional perspective, taking into consideration the content of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032 and previous submissions made by the Assembly on the draft Plan.

THE DRAFT MINISTERIAL DIRECTION

The Draft Direction consists of 22 deletions from the adopted County Development Plan (noting there were originally 311 proposed Material Amendments to the draft County Development Plan) and sets out the following:

- (1) This Direction may be cited as the Planning and Development (Sligo County Development P Plan 2024 – 2030) Direction 2024.



- (2) The Planning Authority is hereby directed to take the following steps with regard to the County Development Plan:
- a. Delete the following zoning objectives from the adopted County Development Plan:
- (i) the lands on the L3203 on the western approach to Grange, i.e. the subject land reverts to not zoned from Strategic Land Reserve;
- b. Delete the following material alterations from the adopted County Development Plan such that the subject lands revert to as indicated in the draft County Development Plan:
- (i) PAZ 9, i.e. the subject land reverts to Strategic Land Reserve (SLR) from New Residential (nRES);
 - (ii) PAZ 11, i.e. the subject land reverts to Green Belt from New Residential (nRES) and Open Space (OS) and the Development Limit reverts to the draft Plan;
 - (iii) PAZ 12, i.e. the subject land reverts to Green Belt (GB) from New Residential (nRES);
 - (iv) PAZ 13, i.e. the subject land reverts to Strategic Land Reserve (SLR) from New Residential (nRES);
 - (v) PAZ 14, i.e. the subject land reverts to Green Belt (GB) from New Residential (nRES);
 - (vi) PAZ 15, i.e. the subject land reverts to Green Belt (GB) from New Residential (nRES) and Strategic Land Reserve (SLR);
 - (vii) PAZ 31, i.e. the subject lands revert to Open Space (OS) from New Residential (nRES)
 - (viii) PAZ 32, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from New Residential (nRES)
 - (ix) PAZ 33, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt from New Residential (nRES)
 - (x) PAZ 42, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from New Residential (nRES)
 - (xi) PAZ 45, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from New Residential (nRES)
 - (xii) PAZ 57, i.e. the subject lands revert to Strategic Land Reserve (SLR) from New Residential (nRES)
 - (xiii) PAZ 62, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt from Tourism (TOU)
 - (xiv) PAZ 63, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from Rural Village (RV)
 - (xv) PAZ 76, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from Rural Village (RV)
 - (xvi) PAZ 79, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from Rural Village (RV), and the Development Limit reverts to the draft Plan
 - (xvii) PAZ 80, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from Rural Village (RV), and the Development Limit reverts to the draft Plan



- (xviii) PAZ 34, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from Tourism (TOU) and Open Space (OS)
- (xix) PAZ 41, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from Business/Industry/Enterprise (BIE)
- (xx) PAZ 44, i.e. the subject lands revert to Green Belt (GB) from Business/Industry/Enterprise (BIE)

c. Delete the following text at section 33.9.1:

Where direct vehicular access onto national primary roads cannot be avoided (such as situations arising from national road realignment schemes), a Departure from TII Publications Standards DN-GEO-03060 with justification shall be required, as provided for in Section 5.5. Direct Accesses of DN-GEO-03060. In all cases, the number of accesses on to the national road should be minimised, either by consolidating them into a single access point, or connecting them to existing side roads. The sight distances required for access onto national primary and secondary roads are set out in Table 33.8. The sight distances are measured from the access point to the near-side edge of the carriageway in accordance with the TII Publications Standards DN-GEO-03031 and DN-GEO-03060.

and apply all necessary consequential updates to the text of the plan consistent with the foregoing.

STATEMENT OF REASONS

A Statement of Reasons for the deletions is given in the draft Ministerial Direction as follows:

I. The County Development Plan as made includes material alterations to the draft County Development Plan for zoning objectives in peripheral and/or non-sequential, and/or unserved locations, and/or outside the relevant CSO settlement boundaries, and/or do not conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of County Sligo, providing additional residential land in excess of what is required under the growth targets of the core strategy for Sligo Town, Grange, Enniscrone, Ballysadare, Strandhill, Curry and Gorteen.

The zoning objectives and material alterations would individually and cumulatively encourage a pattern of development in particular locations which is inconsistent with the core strategy of the County Development Plan, NPO 3c, NPO 18a, NPO 60, NPO 72a-c of the National Planning Framework (NPF), RPO 3.2(b), RPO 3.7.39, RPO 5.14 of the RSES, and section 10(2)(n) of the Act concerning the promotion of sustainable settlement and transport strategies and the obligations under the Climate Action and the Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended (the Climate Act), and fails to have regard to the policy and objective for settlement capacity audits and the policy and objective for sequential zoning under the Development Plans, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022) (the Development Plans Guidelines).

II. The County Development Plan as made also includes material alterations to the draft Plan, which zone additional land for Tourism in the area of Enniscrone and Easky, and for Business/Industry/Enterprise in the area of Ballysadare which can accommodate a range of high intensity employment uses. These zoning objectives are located in peripheral and unserved locations, outside the relevant CSO settlement boundaries and would encourage a pattern of development that is inconsistent with NPO 18a and NPO 74 to align the NPF and the NDP through



the delivery of National Strategic Outcomes including NSO 1 compact growth and NSO 2 Enhanced Regional Accessibility, NPO 72a-c tiered approach to zoning, RPO 6.5 of the RSES to protect the strategic transport function of national roads, and section 10(2)(n) of the Act concerning the promotion of sustainable settlement and transport strategies and the obligations under the Climate Act, and fails to have regard to the policy and objective for sequential zoning under the Development Plans Guidelines and section 2.5 of National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012) (National Roads Guidelines).

III. The County Development Plan as made includes material alterations to zone land for vulnerable and highly vulnerable uses in Sligo Town, Easky, Ballinafad, Curry and Gorteen which lands are partially located within flood zone A and/or B, inconsistent with NPO 57 to avoid inappropriate development in all areas at risk of flooding in accordance with the Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009), and RPO 3.10 to implement the recommendations of the Flood Guidelines.

IV. The County Development Plan as made includes a material amendment to introduce text into section 33.9.1 of the Plan which provides for direct vehicular access onto national primary roads in certain circumstances inconsistent with NPO 74 to align the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan through the delivery of National Strategic Outcomes including NSO 2 Enhanced Regional Accessibility, and RPO 6.5 to give effect to NSO 2 and to maintain the strategic capacity and safety of the national road network, and fails to have regard to sections 2.5 and 2.6 of the Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines to maintain the capacity, efficiency and safety of national roads, avoiding the creation of any additional access point from new development or the generation of increased traffic from existing accesses to national roads to which speed limits greater than 60 km/h apply.

V. Further, the statement under Section 28(1A)(b) attached to the Development Plan as made fails to include information that demonstrates that the planning authority has formed the opinion that it is not possible to implement the policies and objectives contained in the Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022), and/or in the Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines and/or in The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) because of the nature and characteristics of the area or part of the area and to give reasons for the forming of that opinion and to explain why it is not possible to implement the policies and objectives of the Minister, contrary to Section 28(1B)(b);

VI. The Development Plan has not been made in a manner consistent with, and has failed to implement, the recommendations of the Office of the Planning Regulator made under section 31AM of the Act.

VII. The Minister is of the opinion that the Development Plan as made is not consistent with the objectives of the RSES, contrary to section 10(1A) and section 27(1) of the Act.

VIII. The Minister is of the opinion that the Development Plan as made is not consistent with National Policy Objectives 3c, 18a, 57, 60, 72a – c and 74 of the National Planning Framework.

IX. The Minister is of the opinion that the Development Plan as made fails to set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

X. The Development Plan is not in compliance with the requirements of the Act.



For noting, the Minister decided not to issue a draft direction in relation to one zoning recommended by the OPR at Easky, stating that ‘the subject lands are Tier 1 serviced lands and were zoned for residential use in the Sligo CDP 2017-2023’ and accordingly the zoning of these lands for new residential is reasonable in the circumstances.

NWRA ASSESSMENT OF THE DRAFT MINISTERIAL DIRECTION

Having assessed the draft Ministerial Direction, the Assembly notes that the Assembly, in its submission on the proposed Material Alterations (dated 05 July 2024), did not support Material Amendments now contained in 2. b (i) – (vi) of the draft Ministerial Direction (i.e. PAZ 9, PAZ 11, PAZ 12, PAZ 13, PAZ 14 and PAZ 15). Relevant extracts from the Assembly’s submission are in *italics* hereunder.

There are 16 zoning amendments to the Sligo Town Zoning Plan, 7 of which merit consideration due to the role of Sligo as a Regional Growth Centre as per RSES and NPF.

*The proposed amendments in **PAZ 9 and PAZ11-15** represent significant amendments to the Sligo Town Plan that would constitute an increase of approximately 66.87ha. of nRES (New Residential) zoned land, primarily at the periphery of the plan area or outside the plan area.*

This increase would represent a 75% increase in the overall Residential Zoning allocation for the Sligo Town Plan area, as per current Core Strategy allocation.

However, these Proposed Amendments provide for approximately 66ha. of additional nRES New Residential Zoning landbank (as proposed under PAZ-9-15). These proposed additional lands would generate between 2,500 and 3,000 additional residential units at the density of 35-50 dwelling units per hectare as required for Regional Growth Centres in the Sustainable and Compact Settlements, Guidelines for Planning Authorities. This would provide for a population increase of approximately 6,000 – 7,000 people.

This additional zoning does not appear to be realistic nor reasoned, based on the current demographic growth trajectory of Sligo Town, with the Town currently delivering approximately 30% of the housing / population ambition set out in the RSES, which is borne out in the highlighted statistics around housing completions, and which is commented upon in the concluding comments of the RSES 2 Year Monitoring & Implementation Report (published by the Assembly in 2022).

This approach is not supported by the Assembly on the following grounds:

- *It is inconsistent with the Core Strategy of the Draft Plan and an appropriate rationale has not been provided, contrary to the provisions of the Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2022.*
- *The additional zonings are not supported by an evidence-based approach, and are peripheral in nature, with 36ha. of proposed zoning nRES outside the current Sligo Town Boundary and negating the objective to deliver compact settlements of scale as set out in the RSES. The proposed Amendments fail to apply the sequential approach to development to support the sustainable compact growth of the town and its environs.*
- *PAZ 13 represents 27.08ha. rezoning of SLR (Strategic Land Reserve) to nRSES, which although within the Town Boundary, is considered peripheral to the town built up area and*



would constitute leapfrogging and contrary to the objective to deliver compact development.

- *The proposed amendments represent a significant departure from the RSES RPOs for Sligo Town and in particular RPO 3.7.37, which sets an ambition for Sligo to grow to a population of 27,200 by 2040.*
- *The implication of the Proposed Amendments has not been clearly considered within the context of the Local Transport Plan. They do not support the principle of delivering integrated land use and transport planning that will enable increased travel by sustainable transport modes and a reduction in in greenhouse gas emissions.*

The Assembly's position on these matters has not changed.

In relation to 2 a(i) and 2 b(vii)-(xx) (i.e. PAZ 31, PAZ 32, PAZ 33, PAZ 34, PAZ 41, PAZ 42, PAZ 44, PAZ 45, PAZ 57, PAZ 61, PAZ 63, PAZ 76, PAZ 79, PAZ 80) of the draft Ministerial Direction, the Regional Assembly did not make specifically comment on individual zoning amendments outside the Regional Growth Centre in its submission dated 05 July 2024.

However, the Assembly does support the concept of developing places of regional-scale and compact urban growth as outlined in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and in particular Regional Policy Objectives RPO 3.1, RPO 3.2(b), RPO 3.2 (c), RPO 3.3, RPO 3.4 and RPO 3.7.39 – along with ensuring prevention of flooding/flood risk through RPO 3.10. These principles were included in previous submissions to the plan-making process.

In relation to 2. c. of the draft Ministerial Direction (“delete Section 33.9.1”) the Assembly, through RPO 6.5 of the RSES, supports maintaining the strategic capacity and safety of the national road network.

(See Appendix 1 for relevant Regional Policy Objectives)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, having assessed the draft Ministerial Direction, and taking into account:

- The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032 and the aims therein relating to building the critical mass of Sligo as a Regional Growth Centre, and in doing so, promoting compact growth, and sustainable, sequential residential and other land-use growth.
- The Assembly's previous submissions on the plan making process, and the cumulative impact of the 21 zonings included in 2 a (1) and 2 b (i)-(xx) of the draft Ministerial Direction,

the Assembly supports the draft Ministerial Direction. This will strengthen compliance of the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032.



APPENDIX 1

REGIONAL PLANNING OBJECTIVES

- RPO 3.1** Develop urban places of regional-scale through:
- Delivering on the population targets for the Metropolitan and Regional Growth Centres through compact growth:
 - Delivering significant compact growth in Key Towns; and
 - Developing derelict and underutilised sites, with an initial focus within town cores.
- RPO 3.2 (b)** Deliver at least 40% of all new housing targeted in the Regional Growth Centres, within the existing built-up footprint.
- RPO 3.2 (c)** Deliver at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements with a population of at least 1,500 (other than the Galway MASP and the Regional Growth Centres), within the existing built-up footprints.
- RPO 3.3** Deliver at least 20% of all new housing in rural areas on brownfield sites.
- RPO 3.4** To support the regeneration and renewal of small towns and villages in rural areas.
- RPO 3.7.39** Ensure that at least 40% of new residential and employment-related development in the Regional Growth Centre occurs within Sligo's existing built up area, through regeneration and consolidation on infill and brownfield sites.
- RPO 3.10** Ensure flood risk management informs development by avoiding inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding and integrate sustainable water management solutions (such as SUDS, non-porous surfacing and green roofs) to create safe places. Development plans should assess flood risk by implementing the recommendations of the Planning System and Flood Risk Assessment Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and Circular PL02/2014 (August 2014).
- RPO 6.5** The capacity and safety of the region's land transport networks will be managed and enhanced to ensure their optimal use, thus giving effect to National Strategic Outcome No.2 and maintaining the strategic capacity and safety of the national roads network including planning for future capacity enhancements.

