

28th of February 2020  
Submission for County development plans 2021 -2027.

Laois County Development Plan Review  
Forward Planning Team  
Laois County Council Aras an Chontae  
JFL Avenue  
Portlaoise.

Dear Sirs,

Many thanks for affording the opportunity to make a submission to the County development plan.

There are some very fine developments taking place in our County as I shared at our recent PPN secretariat briefing. Not least the recent ring road and the commencement of the new library in Portlaoise.

The recent jobs fair in the County and the County's willingness to host the national PPN conference are all signs of innovative and progressive developments taking place in Laois and are to be commended.

As a social inclusion representative on our PPN secretariat, I have endeavored to do all that I can to advance the cause of the disability sector in having it listed as a special interest group and compiling the report 'Access for all' which our PPN completed with the inputs of a facilitator and the DFI.

Our disability special interest group (DSIG) has now been asked to take the lead in this area by Martin Heydon with a view to developing the sector in a similar manner at national level. Our DSIG are meeting with a member of the DFI on the 4th of March 2020 with a view to maximizing the outcomes of the published report. From PPN secretariat discussions, it is clear that further clarification is needed to address how the role of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (UNCRPD) is linked to complimenting the work of the County development plan or the corporate plan which I made a submission to.

I attended the Disability special interest group (DSIG) national conference last year which Minister McGrath addressed on the 24th of October. The Minister committed to meeting with our DSIG in Laois prior to his announcement to cease his involvement in public life. He has however committed to remaining involved in advancing the cause of this sector.

Following my award at the C&V awards last year, I contributed to a number of PR articles. I was respectful to all involved. The management of Laois County Council, the Government, the UN in compiling the UNCRPD strategy etc. At such an event and on compiling our report, I have

reminded people of the inputs of Nelson Mandela, "A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones"

Our recent election has posed many dilemmas but it is clear that we are losing in our efforts to engage effectively and address some of the social challenges of our time.

The various sectors outlined in our report invariably, can only be developed through a collaborative and a cohesive approach. However it is the civic rights which I am particularly keen to protect for this sector and associated personnel.

This may well be something which is beyond the role of our local authority. However I am concerned from my own observations and those shared with me that this sector and other vulnerable personnel are being clearly exploited through ineffective processes.

I am conscious that our County meeting to finalise our wellbeing statements is imminent. However I am not convinced that we have the culture, commitment, or the will to represent such sectors effectively yet.

As the Laois representative on the national secretariat, I have also represented the sector in meeting with the EU economic and social committee who visited the DFI HQ on the 23rd of October 2019 and I have attached their report. I have also attached a copy of the cross party briefing which was shared with the cabinet on the 9th of January 2020.

As one affected by a challenging rheumatic condition and one who has a defibrillator, I understand only too well the constraints of living with disability. For me to represent social inclusion, I am not fulfilling my role if I am not articulating such concerns.

The 'segregation between the legislator and judiciary' is frequently shared as a front which is impeding addressing such concerns. For people affected by disability, illness or mental health challenges the realities of what is recommended through best practice and what actually happens are poles apart!

The inputs of Dr. Terry Lynch who was advisor to the State in the formation of 'see change.ie' and those of Dan Neville former chair of the Fine Gael party who has expertise in these areas have reaffirmed this.

The arrival of GDPR potentially contributes to further isolation and segregation for such marginalised groups.

My concerns and those shared with me can be addressed at little or no cost. The civic rights of our people based on equality must be reinforced for our County to be truly respected and considered an equitable place for its citizens to reside.

I have given commitment and I have applied my value system to advance the cause of this sector. As a County we now have to decide what we can do to take it to the next level to bring about meaningful and effective change which is undoubtedly in the common good.

The needs of the marginalised can only be represented with open and transparent exchanges. I have reminded the public at the launch of our report, of the commitments given by our President Michael D Higgins when seeking re-election “by making equality one of the four pillars which he will base his presidency on”

As a County, we now have an opportunity to step outside of the ‘political correctness’ and provide the leadership for these sectors.

The nuances will invariably need to be implemented in their entirety to address all of the areas covered in the UNCRPD. However in the meantime, I don’t believe any person’s civic rights should be compromised as these are already reaffirmed through the United Nations obligations on human rights.

Yours faithfully

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Donal O’ Shea