

## Offaly County Council

Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road,  
Tullamore, Co. Offaly, R35 F893.

## Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí

Áras an Chontae, Bóthar Charleville,  
An Tulach Mhór, Contae Uíbh Fhailí, R35 F893.



T: 057 9346800 F: 057 9346868 / [www.offaly.ie](http://www.offaly.ie) / [customerservices@offalycoco.ie](mailto:customerservices@offalycoco.ie)

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



9<sup>th</sup> January 2020,

### Re: 'Review of County Development Plan'

A Chara,

Please find hereunder the comments of Offaly County Council in respect of the review of the existing Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 and the preparation of the new Laois County Development Plan for the period 2021-2027. Offaly County Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the process and looks forward to continued co-operation with and between both Authorities; with particular reference to social, cultural and economic development and the protection of the environment.

Offaly County Council is currently reviewing its County Development Plan 2014-2020 and preparing a new County Development Plan 2021-2027, with a draft expected for public display during summer 2020. The CE report on submissions received is available on-line since November 2019; which includes CE policy recommendations for the new plan. Within it, it should be noted that the proposed settlement typology description for Portarlinton is as a 'Self Sustaining Town'. This type of settlement is described in the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Eastern & Midlands Region as settlements that have experienced rapid population growth with high levels of commuter focused residential expansion without equivalent increases in jobs and services. Such settlements require consolidation and targeted 'catch up' investment in services, infrastructure, suitable transport options, amenities and local employment to become more self-sustaining. Portarlinton has experienced a rapid population increase in the 10 years between the 2006 and 2016 census of 25%, which is in stark contrast to the average EMRA rate of 15%. With a 'Resident Workers: Job Ratio' of 0.435 (well below the recommended strong economic function of >0.7 as per Appendix A of the RSES), the town needs more of a focus on 'catch up' investment to meet the needs of existing residents, rather than compounding the commuter driven population further. The Joint Portarlinton Local Area

Plan 2018-2024 will likely require a variation after adoption of the new Offaly and Laois County Development Plans.

A policy to support remote working opportunities from home, and innovative **co-working hubs** should be provided, particularly in self-sustaining towns, in the interests of mitigating long commuting patterns.

The current Offaly County Development Plan includes **protected views and prospects**. The new Offaly County Development Plan will also provide protected views and prospects as is legislatively required. It is noted that the inclusion within the existing Laois County Development Plan of an area 'open for consideration' for **wind** farm development south of the shared border on the Laois side will impact upon the 'Protected View' (Ref. No V1 in the current Offaly County Development Plan) of the Slieve Bloom Mountains from the N80 in the townlands of Ballynasragh, Pigeonhouse, Killeigh, Derryclure, Derrybeg and Cloncon. Based on these viewpoints, Offaly County Council respectively request that the area between these viewpoints towards the Slieve Bloom Mts in Co. Laois is classified as an area where wind energy development will generally be discouraged. To ensure a consistent approach across county boundaries, Offaly County Council requests that Laois County Council considers the Wind Strategy of Offaly County Council Development Plan 2014-20 and the Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-27 when published, in the preparation of the Wind Strategy for the next Laois Co. Development Plan.

The 2030 **Rail Network Strategy Review** was published in 2011 and its purpose is to provide the Government with a basis for establishing a strategic policy framework for the future development of the rail passenger and rail freight sectors in Ireland. The review informs the strategic priorities and future investment strategy up to 2030 and the outstanding improvements in rail services to County Offaly include; double tracking from Portarlinton to Athlone (2020-2025) and Electrification of Dublin to Galway line (2025-2030). A potential link in the network could involve the provision of a new line from Enfield to Edenderry with a continuation to Portarlinton. This line, if provided, would be of great strategic importance in the context of the midlands. Many of the wayleaves between Portarlinton and Enfield are in the ownership of Bord na Móna.

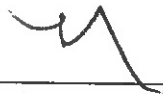
The **Slieve Bloom Mountains** extend over approximately 36,000 hectares straddling the borders of county's Offaly and Laois. This upland area of the county has a number of special environmental designations assigned to it. A balance must be maintained between conserving the environmental value of this area and the economic potential that can be generated from such a resource. The Slieve Bloom Mountains are also the focus for a number of walking routes and a mountain bike trail. Offaly County Council and Laois County Council should continue to recognise the value of these walkways & bike trails to the tourist economy of both counties and continue to promote and facilitate tourism development, where appropriate in this area. Both councils should continue to promote the mountain bike trail in addition to links to/from other existing and proposed greenways, peatways and blueways and tourist attractions.

Offaly County Council envisages a peatway link from Portarlinton to the Grand Canal Greenway and further linkage from the Grand Canal to the Royal Canal Greenway in Co. Westmeath. The link from Portarlinton could continue in the opposite direction through Co. Laois to join up with the River Barrow **Greenway** at Monastervin in Co. Kildare. Such connectivity would be in the interests of climate action and economic growth and should be reflected in the new Laois County Development Plan.

It is suggested that Laois County Council should investigate the potential of and opportunities for the development of linkages from People's Park in Portarlinton. One such potential link is to the **Derryounce Experience Lake & Trails** on the Offaly side of Portarlinton.

Offaly County Council respectfully requests that the relevant issues raised above are fully considered in the review of the Laois County Development Plan. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require clarification of any issues raised in this submission.

Is mise le meas



---

Mr. Frank Heslin

Director of Services

