



**Kildare County Council  
via website**

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: Kildare County Development Plan**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

County Kildare Chamber is the business organisation in Kildare, proactively working to identify and progress developments that are facilitative of economic and sustainable growth. Representing an employer base of 400 businesses and over 38,000 employees across the county, County Kildare Chamber is the largest business organisation in the mid-east region of Ireland.

Given the significant breadth and depth of our membership, and our representation on various bodies at local and national level, County Kildare Chamber constitutes the representative voice for business in Kildare, a particularly important role given the current economic circumstances in the county and the state.

County Kildare Chamber is committed to improving the business environment and quality of life in Kildare and the wider region, and strongly supports the vision of growth contained in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Mid Eastern Enterprise Plan. With this in mind, County Kildare Chamber welcomes the opportunity to comment on Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029. This plan is a significant opportunity for Kildare to drive forward the dynamic and ambitious vision for the county encompassed within Project Ireland 2040.

As a business organisation, County Kildare Chamber believes that long term planning for the development of the county is essential in responding to the challenges presented by Covid 19, climate change, Brexit and the current crisis in Europe.

We have set out below a number of broad areas for you to consider within the confines of the County Development Plan.



## **2.0 SUBMISSION**

As a county, Kildare has a number of significant attributes. Kildare, according to the last census has a population of 222,504, the fifth highest in the state, which is projected to grow by up to 44,000 by 2031. It has a substantial multinational economic cluster, a highly skilled workforce coupled with a high quality of life, our excellent infrastructure provision and connectivity (port, airport and digital infrastructure) ensures we are well placed to achieve the goals set out in the National Planning Framework.

The Covid 19 pandemic has changed the way in which we all live, work and play. People are leaving bigger cities and choosing smaller cities and towns that offer a better work life balance. People are now choosing hybrid forms of work, using hub spaces and flexible opportunities. With its close proximity to Dublin, this offers new opportunities for Kildare to introduce innovative policies and capitalise on same.

Through continued investment in areas such as housing, sustainable transport, energy and active travel Kildare can, not just compete but can outperform other regions. However, a focused strategic investment in infrastructure is vital for the county's continued growth.

### **Housing & Strategic Growth:**

One of the key objectives of this plan is the integration of land-use, to achieve a more sustainability urban development model.

The National Planning Framework sets out the projected demand for new households in an area over a specific time period. Kildare's housing supply target to 2031 is a total of 13,840 units, of which 3,934 are expected to be social housing supports and 1,818 are expected to be affordable housing.

County Kildare Chamber notes the county is split between three different developmental regions; Dublin Metropolitan Area, Core Region and Gateway Region. We believe, with regard housing supply targets to these areas, the development plan should demonstrate consistency with projected growth for each area.

A recent survey of our membership identified Housing availability as the number one issue affecting business competitiveness in Kildare over the past 12 months. As our society has evolved, and in particular over the last two years, so too has much our infrastructure.



Many people made the decision to move home during the Covid 19 pandemic, due to the opportunities provided by remote and flexible working. This combined with the projected increases in our population has and will continue to put pressure on the housing stock available within Kildare.

It is reassuring to see the Council objective ensuring sufficient land is zoned at appropriate locations in line with settlement strategy. However, given that current housing stock levels are inadequate, it is crucial that the level of housing supply target is correct for key growth areas such as Naas, Maynooth and the surrounds. We are very concerned that inadequate zoning of land for residential use in North Kildare will lead to a potential decrease in FDI and indigenous demand.

County Kildare Chamber believes the population averages used, in the National Planning Framework, to calculate the figures are too low for future need and this will negatively impact on our ability as a county to attract new business and employers of size from setting up in Kildare. We believe a tiered system of zoning could be more appropriate in these instances, as there is currently no space for flexibility in the system.

This is a crucial issue now and will continue to be for the foreseeable future and therefore must be addressed. County Kildare Chamber believes larger county towns such as Naas, should be harnessed as they are infrastructurally enabled already to deliver the required housing to alleviate the current housing crisis. While this is being done, work can begin on preparing other towns and villages throughout the county, as it can take a decade to prepare towns from an infrastructure perspective which are not currently enabled.

The Chamber would like to see the Development Plan be more imaginative in its approach to the provision of additional housing units and their potential for associated townscape and public realm improvements. There is little emphasis on encouraging derelict and brownfield sites being brought back into use, reusing and reimagining empty structures, renovating long-vacant commercial units for residential accommodation, living over-the-shop scheme, Live-Work units and the subdivision of large dwellings into multiple units.

The Chamber welcomes the proposed study of a serviced sites initiative for smaller towns and villages as defined in Section 3.13.7 of the Draft Development Plan and we look forward to reviewing them on publication.



We welcome the Council's objectives for age friendly housing complexes within the centre of community hubs, in order to allow older inhabitants to enjoy the benefits of proximity to towns and villages. As we become a more age friendly county, the requirement to adequacy zone for nursing homes etc in our towns and villages is required, nursing homes can be included in the planning matrix's. McAuley Place as an exemplar in Ireland and can be replicated elsewhere in the county <https://www.mcauleyplace.ie/>

We also agree with the sentiments within the development of smaller towns and villages, that cautions against 'large scale, rapid development that may overwhelm and detract from the quintessential character of towns and villages that have developed slowly and organically over time'. In towns and villages such as these, we believe development should be focused on regeneration and public realm works, enhancing, protecting and reimagining our public spaces.

We support the Council's objectives in relation to one-off sustainable rural housing to meet National Policy Objective 19 of the National Planning Framework 2040. We note that efforts have been made to define demonstrable social or economic need to live in a rural area to facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside with new objective criteria for assessing density and determining ribbon development have been proposed.

To accelerate the processing and determination of planning applications, the Chamber would welcome greater utilisation of Conditions that agreement with the Planning Authority is obtained prior to development commencing being attached to Grants of Planning Permission instead of prolonged Requests for Further Information and Requests for Clarification of Further Information. This might also have a benefit on how the Council's limited staff resources are utilised.

County Kildare Chamber concur with the overall sustainability of the Housing section, which is consistent with Living City and Town Centre First initiatives and the UN Sustainable Cities and Communities Development Goal. We are encouraged by the Council's ambition for developing on former infill and brownfield sites, promoting integration and well needed regeneration of areas within the county.

The Chamber believe it is important to highlight that delivery of housing stock also needs to equate to the delivery for communities. With this in mind, we welcome the provision for services such as crèche facilities being active parts of any planning proposal for housing estates of size and the need to be completed in phase 1 of any new development.



It is imperative that in line with service demand and projected growth that Kildare County Council continues its investment in every aspect of the planning function, from personal to online service provision, to ensure this does not become a limiting factor to planning and delivery of housing supply.

**Transport & Infrastructure:**

County Kildare Chamber commends Kildare County Council on the significant sustainable transportation projects outlined within the Development Plan. These will serve as future economic, social and population growth enablers for Kildare.

We welcome the Councils support of the Draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area, the Workplace Travel Plan, and the informed approach taken by the Council regarding regional strategies informed by local transportation plans.

The Chamber agrees with the Council for the need to reduce public reliance on private cars for travel, and the support for moves towards, public transport, cycling and walking routes. This new approach is also essential in achieving the '10 minute settlement' concept. The idea that all community facilities and services are accessible within a 10 minute walk or cycle from homes or are accessible by public transport services connecting people to larger scaled settlements. Kildare County Council must ensure these facilities are delivered in conjunction or in advance of any future residential or commercial development and are sufficient to cope with inevitable increased demand into the future.

Specifically, the plan must support the electrification expansion of the rail line, to Kildare Village, a central hub within the County, a key connector between the different regions within Kildare.

We also believe the expansion should take in Kilcock in the North West of the County, owing to its proximity to areas such as Maynooth, Celbridge and Leixlip, and its continuing rise in population as a commuter town. Tied with this expansion, we also believe should be the promotion and investment in increased numbers of 'Park and Ride' facilities, and the electrification of the Sallins/Naas train line. Again, encouraging reduced carbon footprint and reliance on private car travel, providing a healthier, more sustainable attitude towards transport.



We support the Council's plans regarding the promotion and implementation of BusConnects projects, in addition services such as Local Link, and the provisions made regarding feasibility studies for a number of cycle routes around the county. We also welcome the Council's pledge of support to improvements in public transport in Monasterevin.

Our public transport system is now back to pre-pandemic levels, meaning it is at capacity at commuter times. Additional and expanded public transport networks and active travel schemes, are the only tools in ensuring this concept is viable, and therefore need to be fully committed to within the Development Plan, with funding mechanisms future-proofed.

Roads that are of strategic regional connectivity are essential and County Kildare Chamber supports enhanced inter and intra-regional connectivity investment such as the Athy Southern Distributor Route, this is a vital project for Athy and the wider area, which will complement work the Council has done on the re-development of the town and the investment in the Barrow Blueway, to ensure Athy and the surrounds can drive economic activity into the area.

The development plan should also cater for less traditional modes of public or active travel, encouraging the expansion of existing bike schemes. Currently legislation is being drafted at central government level regarding the provision for e-scooter use. Given neighbouring local authorities have embraced active travel measures such as e-bike schemes, which are now in place and fully funded, we believe the plan should encourage new models and private operators into the space, to increase the pace of growth into the area and providing more alternatives for the public.

The way we look at transport and mobility has changed hugely over the last decade, especially policies regarding electric vehicles. County Kildare Chamber believes the Council through the development plan should be a leader in promoting the incorporation of electric charge points throughout our towns and villages, and in residential community and commercial settings.

#### **Economic Development and Employment:**

County Kildare Chamber welcomes as a whole the Council's objectives and commitments set out within the development plan, particularly the significance of climate action, the Green Economy and sustainability to any future economic development of Kildare.



Reference to and inclusion of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is a positive inclusion within the Draft Plan. County Kildare Chamber in its role as the main voice for business in Kildare is part of a number of regional bodies, including the Regional Skills Forum and the Regional Enterprise Forum, which has a role in the preparation of the LECP. We believe this to be a positive addition to the development plan.

As a key commuter county, with a large population, excellent infrastructure provision and connectivity to airports, rail and port services, with a large number of multi-national and domestic companies employing thousands of our highly skilled workforce, Kildare represents a driving force in the national economy and preforms a key role in ensuring the continued international competitiveness of the region. In order to achieve this the development plan must ensure the conditions are right for the creation of quality jobs in locations around the county.

With this in mind, the Chamber welcomes the publication of Kildare 2025 in 2021; the County's Economic Development Strategy, with the focus on developing the County's Key Towns, in particular, to act as economic drivers and provide for strategic employment locations. These will be supported by the regionally important self-sustaining growth towns and self-sustaining towns, aligning with the growth strategy set out in Objective RE O1.

The inclusion of the Economic Development Hierarchy set out in Section 4.4 is welcomed which sets out the sectoral strengths and opportunities of each settlement in the hierarchy. Maynooth focusing Life Science, High Tech, Bio Tech, ICT, Research & Development and working with institutions like Maynooth University and the newly established Kildare Innovation Campus. This campus has the capacity to deliver 4,500 new jobs over the lifetime of this plan. This area with the right investment and planning can become a centre of excellence in the knowledge-based economy in Kildare.

Naas as the primary centre of high-quality employment in the County, with the development of MERITS (Mid-East Regional Innovation Thinkspace), Millennium Park in the North-West Quadrant and the regeneration of lands including industrial lands in the north-east of the town. We also support the Councils development of the Self-Sustaining Growth Towns of Newbridge and Leixlip as an attractor but not limited to Biotechnology, ICT, professional services, High-tech manufacturing and research employment.



Promoting the town of Athy as a Food, Drink and Skills Innovation Hub and the continued support and development of Kildare Town as a bloodstock, tourism and manufacturing location are key to ensuring all districts within Kildare are well serviced for employment growth and protection.

It is also welcomed that the Draft Plan acknowledges and supports the Strategic Development Employment Areas in the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan. Strategic Development Areas have been identified at key nodes along high-quality public transport corridors in tandem with the delivery of infrastructure and enabling services, including Maynooth, Leixlip, Celbridge and Kilcock located along the North-West corridor.

The intention of the Council to undertake a Strategic Land Use, Employment and Transportation Study of north east Kildare including the Dublin Metropolitan area towns as set out in Objective RE O14 is also a positive inclusion and will establish an up to date evidence base to inform the future growth of these settlements.

Covid 19 has significantly impacted on the way we work, which in turn effects the way we interact with the community and spaces around us. Remote and flexible working have become are now common place, and will have a significant impact on transport infrastructure, its capacity and local communities, with people spending increased time and money locally. With this in mind, we support the Councils objects regarding remote working/co-working spaces. County Kildare Chamber will continue to work with the Council in assisting with digital hub strategy for the County.

The policies and objectives to support enterprise development, the Green and Circular Bio-Economy, Agri-Food and Beverage, Agriculture and Equine Industry are also hugely welcomed by the Chamber. In particular, the substantial policies and objectives to support sustainable tourism and enhancing its potential in the County through heritage, blueways/greenways, peatlands, inland waterways and Agri-tourism all of which are commended and supported by the Chamber.

We welcome the Councils proposals regarding the repurposing of sites and reducing vacancy and underutilised lands. With this in mind, the Chamber proposes lands along the M4 corridor could be looked at for commercial and industrial development, given their close proximity to the Capital, network and transport links and the educated workforce on its doorstep. The Chamber also notes that in significant sections between Kilcock and Maynooth there is no zoning for industry.





### **Energy and Climate Action:**

The Chamber welcomes the dedicated chapter to energy and communications within the development plan. This chapter outlines a comprehensive set of policies and objectives to support and promote renewable energy in the county in the areas of wind, solar, hydro, geo-thermal, bio-energy and micro-renewables.

There is also a dedicated section on energy efficiency promoting and encouraging the use of district heating systems, air to water heat pumps, energy from waste, energy efficiency in buildings and Electric Vehicles. The Council have also considered climate adaptation and mitigation and County Kildare Chamber welcome the intention within 1 year of the adoption of the County Plan to prepare a Sustainable Energy Climate Action Plan (SECAP) for County Kildare in order to provide a baseline analysis for Kildare and for the inclusion of measurable targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

County Kildare Chamber also commends the Council for its ambition to be an exemplar in its Planning Strategies and Policies with regard to Climate Action.

The Chamber welcomes the Council's objective to reduce the County's carbon footprint in line with national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions.

With regard to renewable energy the Council have included notable actions including to establish a Mid-East Energy Bureau with Wicklow County Council, Meath County Council and the SEAI and to prepare and implement an overall Renewable Energy Strategy for the County. This is of particular interest to the Chamber, and we will continue to work with the Council to promote sustainable energy within our business community.

County Kildare Chamber welcome the key town of Maynooth's identification as a 'decarbonisation zone', we would also support the continued role out of this scheme and identification of further towns/villages around the county, within the lifetime of this plan.

The Chamber also welcomes the Council's support in identifying future strategic energy zones and the policy to support the long-term strategic planning for industrial peatlands. Of particular interest is the supportive policy and objectives for the preparation of a comprehensive "after use" framework plan to meet the environmental, economic and social needs of communities in these areas.



In this regard, the Chamber particularly welcomes support for the implementation of the 'Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare' to identify actions to support and advance sustainable, social, economic, environmental development in the transition to a low carbon future in the West Kildare region. This region will be most affected by the phasing out of peat fired electrical generation. We believe these lands should be looked at as multi and mix-use lands into the future, with potential for industry, tourism and bio-diversity schemes.

The Chamber also supports the Council's objectives regarding energy supply. Security of supply has been the principal concern of businesses for some time, and recent geopolitical events only highlight the need to shift towards renewable sources at a greater pace than originally envisaged. Now more so than ever we need a modern and stable infrastructure with a capacity to meet future demands.

Finally, with regard to Electric Vehicles, County Kildare Chamber believes any new planning permission for residential development should have provision for at least one charging point. We also believe, in developments where car spaces are reduced or removed, in line with climate action and planning policy, provision should be made for initiatives such as GoCar.

### **3.0 CONCLUSION**

This development plan takes place at a unique time, in the wake of a pandemic, yet in the midst of continuing optimism around our economic growth and future policy provision, through initiatives such as the NPF, the NDP and a number of regional plans, all focused on promoting and furthering growth within our towns and cities.

County Kildare Chamber believe a review of the County Development Plan should be initiated on a yearly basis, outlining how Objectives and Actions are met and benchmarked, with objectives given priority status and a timeline for completion. With this in mind, The Chamber requests to be involved in this process as the business voice for the county.

Quality of life, housing availability, infrastructure, transport, sustainable practised and economic growth will all be dominant topics for the duration of this plan, it is essential for the continued success of Kildare, its communities and businesses that progress is made in each of these areas.



County Kildare Chamber looks forward to working with Kildare County Council to deliver a successful outcome for the whole county, and we are available at all times for consultation, discussion and support.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sinéad Ronan', is positioned above a horizontal line.

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