



Your Ref: Draft Edenderry Local Area Plan 2023-2029

Our Ref: **FP2022-076**

(Please quote in all related correspondence)

03 February 2023

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Via email planning@offalycoco.ie

Re: Notification under Article 28 (Part 4) or Article 82 (Part 8) of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended.

Re: Draft Edenderry Local Area Plan 2023-2029

A chara

I refer to correspondence dated 12 December 2022 received in connection with the above.

Outlined below are heritage-related observations/recommendations co-ordinated by the Development Applications Unit under the stated headings.

Nature Conservation

The following observations are made by the Department in its role as the authority with overarching responsibility for nature conservation and the nature directives (i.e. the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)). The observations are not exhaustive but are intended to assist Offaly County Council in meeting its obligations in relation to nature conservation, European sites, biodiversity and environmental protection in the process of preparing the Draft Edenderry Local Area Plan 2023-2029, hereafter referred to as the LAP.

Chapter 2 Economic Development Strategy

The Department notes Objectives EDO-02 '*Develop an integrated network of greenways, heritage/tourist trails and looped walks where appropriate (including taking into account the findings of the Appropriate Assessment and Flood Risk Assessment), within the town centre and along the Grand Canal, River Boyne and at Blundell Park*'. The Department recommends



that such developments must be subject to Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA), in addition to other required assessments. This is due to the location of proposed greenways, heritage/tourist trails and looped walks within or adjacent to the Grand Canal proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) (Site Code 002104) and in accordance with Offaly County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 Objective BLO-04 *‘It is an objective of the Council to ensure that the impact of development within or adjacent to national designated sites, Natural Heritage Areas, proposed Natural Heritage Areas, Ramsar Sites and Nature Reserves likely to result in significant adverse effects on the designated site is assessed by requiring the submission of an Ecological Impact Assessment prepared by a suitably qualified professional, which should accompany planning applications’*. The Department recommends inclusion of an objective that such developments be subject to EclA.

Chapter 3 Town Centre and Regeneration

The Department welcomes objective TCP-16 *‘Seek a survey of existing numbers of bats, swifts and swift/nests for planning applications for renovations, redevelopment or demolition of old buildings in Edenderry Town centre. Where bats and/or swifts are shown to be present, specific mitigation measures during and after construction shall be proposed’*. The Department advises that the results of such surveys are collated in order to provide monitoring data on the impacts of the LAP on biodiversity. This should be specified in the monitoring section of the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Chapter 6 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

6.5.3 Pollination Zones/Biodiversity Zones

The Department welcomes that the Council’s supports pollinator friendly planting and wildlife strips or Biodiversity Zones to enhance biodiversity in accordance with the recommendations of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan. The Department advises that this section includes a provision that wildflower seed mixes will not be planted outside of garden settings as recommended by the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan. While visually appealing and dramatic, the planting of wildflower seed mixes do not contribute towards the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025 and this practice is harmful to existing wildflower biodiversity.

6.6 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)

This section states *‘Where space constraints apply, underground modular attenuation structures should be considered’*. The Department recommends that underground solutions must only be considered as a last resort and where it has been demonstrated that over-ground solutions are not feasible. The Department recommends that this sentence is replaced with text from the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which states *‘In some exceptional cases, and at the discretion of the Council, where it is demonstrated that SuDS devices are not feasible, approval may be given to install underground attenuation tanks or enlarged pipes in conjunction with other devices to achieve the required water quality. Such alternative measures will only be considered as a last resort. Proposals for surface water attenuation systems should include maintenance proposals and procedures.’* The council should consider an objective to incorporate over ground nature-based SuDS, into developments.



Green Infrastructure (GI)

It appears that a large portion of the towns existing green infrastructure has been zoned for 'Enterprise and Employment'. The Department recommends that Strategic Environmental Assessment must assess the impacts of the loss of areas of GI. The Department further recommends that habitat mapping should be carried out in order to assess the value of existing GI before it is zoned for development. This is in accordance with Offaly County Development Plan objective BLP-01 *'It is Council policy to protect, conserve, and seek to enhance the county's biodiversity and ecological connectivity'*.

Green Infrastructure comprises a wide range of environmental features that operate at different scales and form part of an interconnected ecological network. The Department recommends that further work is needed (including habitat mapping) to identify key environmental values with the aim of mapping an interconnected ecological network of Green Infrastructure within the LAP area with a view to protecting and enhancing this network. Mapping of potential GI projects should be overlain on an updated GI network to see how they enhance or diminish the network. For example it appears that the potential Boyne River Walking Trail shown in red in Figure 6.13, will result in the loss of existing Green Infrastructure (an ecological corridor along a river). A potential ecological corridor shown in purple are also proposed road corridor. Consideration should be given as to how this road corridor will function as an ecological corridor and how it will connect to the existing GI network.

The Department considers that minor watercourses, streams and drains form an important part of the town's GI and must be included in the map of existing GI, particularly given the connection between minor watercourses and the River Boyne and River Blackwater Special Area of Conservation (Site Code 002299). The River Boyne Runs along the northeast boundary of Edenderry Town and is hydrologically connected to the town by Weaver's Drain. This drain flows northwards from the town passing through a number of culverts along the way before discharging to the Boyne to the north. Both the River Boyne and Weavers Drain are considered 'At Risk' water bodies¹. Latest Q values at Kinnafad Bridge downstream of the town in 2020 indicate that the river is in poor ecological condition. The Department recommends the inclusion of objectives which contribute to an improvement of water quality in both Weaver's Drain and the River Boyne.

Swift

The town's swift population is a significant biodiversity asset². The swift is an urban bird species of conservation concern in Ireland. Given the town's importance for breeding swift, the Department recommends that objectives to conserve the town's swift population are included in this chapter of the LAP.

¹ <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/Water>

² <https://birdwatchireland.ie/our-work/surveys-research/research-surveys/swift-surveys/>



Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Department welcomes the Strategic Environmental Objective (SEO) guiding principle '*no net contribution to biodiversity losses or deterioration*' which is in accordance with Objective 1.1.3 of the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017 – 2021. This objective requires all Public Authorities and private sector bodies '*move towards no net loss of biodiversity through strategies, planning, mitigation measures, appropriate offsetting and/or investment in Blue-Green infrastructure*'.

In relation to monitoring of the LAP, it is noted that monitoring is based around indicators that relate to the SEO's. Monitoring should focus on measures to monitor the identified potential significant environmental effects and the implementation of mitigation measures (and their effectiveness), not the full range of environmental criteria used to assess the plan/programme³. In this regard, the Department recommends that indicators should be linked back to environmental effects and proposed mitigation measures outlined in Table 9.1.

It is noted that SEA monitoring should reflect the nature and level of detail of the LAP. Monitoring of local-level plans should focus on both local issues (e.g. habitat loss) and particular aspects of larger scale problems that are relevant to the LAP area. The Department notes that a potentially significant adverse effect of the LAP outlined in the Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna section of Table 9.1 is 'Disturbance (e.g. due to noise and lighting along transport corridors) and displacement of protected species such as birds (e.g. swifts) and bats'.

The Department recommends inclusion of monitoring indicators that monitor bat populations along such routes and in particular along the Grand Canal, Edenderry Branch, where both new and upgraded walking routes are proposed. Monitoring of mitigation measures to avoid impacts from new developments on the town's swift population should also be considered.

Another potentially significant effect is 'Habitat loss, fragmentation and deterioration, including patch size and edge effects' particularly given the zoning of Green Infrastructure for 'Enterprise and Employment'. The Department recommends inclusion of monitoring indicators that monitor habitat loss. A baseline habitat map will be required in order to monitor loss effectively.

Monitoring methods and frequency must be defined and provisions for carrying out remedial action, as appropriate and aligned to the scope of the plan, as well as reporting requirements (e.g. who should be notified).

Architecture and Built Heritage

European Context

³https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/EPA_Guidance_web.pdf



The UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015) set out the objectives that nations are taking individually and globally to balance human needs and the fragile 'spaceship earth'. SDG 11.1 sets out to '*protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage*'. The recent UN Conference of Parties on Climate Change (COP 27) highlighted the need for mankind to change how we live to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide and related greenhouse gases been emitted into our planet's atmosphere. Assembling the evidence base to inform this cultural change is critical and how we build and where we build is fundamental to the conversation. Furthermore, we will have to stop doing many things we now do, for example, turning our back on our existing places and start working with the built heritage resources of our existing built environment, providing exemplars for consolidation of the extant vacant building stock and innovative approaches to constructing and infilling under-utilised urban building plots.

Strategies to achieve this level of innovation and focus will overlap markedly with conservation practice and require resources within Local Authorities to deliver the levels of upgrade and beneficial adaptation to sustain existing historical places and the transmission of their cultural significance. Ireland's built environment and in particular its urban settlement of all scales need to play a greater and central role in government's response to housing shortage, climate change and the biodiversity crisis. The embodied carbon embedded in under-used housing, traditional structures and the diversity of architectural space within urban forms that define Irish cities, towns and villages provide the basis for future sustainability. The planning system is becoming an ever-more important forum for collective decision-making on 'sustainable development', climate and biodiversity action, as well as having a role to play in tackling housing shortage. Conservation approaches and practices for heritage management contribute to maintaining these finite resources.

Policy and practice requires strengthening as per the Revised Leipzig Charter and the first EU architectural policy - '*Towards a Shared culture of architecture – investing in a high quality built environment for everyone*'. This EU policy is set to be the focus of Davos 2023, as Switzerland is hosting a Second Conference of Ministers of Culture on the implementation of high-quality *Baukultur* under the title '*Common Good – Shared Responsibility*' that will again be held on the opening weekend of the World Economic Forum.

Building on past policies and in consideration of European initiatives, the National Policy on Architecture contains architecture and built environment actions to ensure quality in our urban and rural buildings, places and spaces for the benefit of the people who use them, now and in the future.

The development of a National Policy for Architecture in the context of both EU architectural policy and President von der Leyen's European Bauhaus "*the co-creation platform for architects, engineers and designers, to launch the architectural style of our times, reflecting our aspirations to make Europe the first climate neutral continent.*" This places architecture as central theme to the European recovery and provides the opportunity for each Member



States to respond to key environmental concerns and to plan for their future.
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f9879-places-for-people-national-policy-on-architecture/>

National Policy on Architecture and Integration of Architectural Heritage

Our architectural heritage is a non-renewable and finite resource. It is part of a continuum or tradition of settlement and commitment and valuing of a place. Irish towns have a direct connection to European culture and have evolved over time. Historic places and may be cultural layered so that monument sites are inter-related to each other and the topography of their situation. Built heritage becomes the backdrop or context for earlier monumental sites and evidence points to the continuous re-making and over-building of town building fabric concealing cultural significance until discovery during regeneration. The protection, promotion and enhancement of the built heritage post pandemic is recognised as key to community well-being, cohesion and enrichment. It is recommended that each local authority set forth a quality agenda within their statutory plans in respect of architectural heritage, that seeks a way forward in achieving environmental, economic and social sustainability into the future.

Architectural heritage is a multi-disciplinary entity and as relevant, it is imperative that it is integrated into other policy areas within a plan including, climate action, urban and rural regeneration, place making, housing delivery and strategic infrastructure schemes. Such integration guarantees a cohesive and holistic approach to delivering innovative and optimal solutions to current national environmental, economic and societal challenges.

Architectural Heritage Policy Context

Ireland has a high quality and ambitious policy framework that aims to achieve a circular economy for increased environmental, economic and social sustainability and resilience. These principles are integrated within current national policies including; Project Ireland 2040, Climate Action Plan, Housing for All (of which Town Centres First is an objective), National Policy on Architecture, Heritage Ireland 2030, Our Rural Future and A Living Tradition; A Strategy for Enhancing the Understanding, Minding and Handing on of Our Built Vernacular Heritage.

Architectural heritage is one of the key assets in meeting the varying aims and delivery outcomes of current national policies. It is therefore considered that in order to achieve optimum results, architectural heritage must be given equal weight and embedded strategically within regional and local policies and plans. As a means of achieving this it is imperative to understand the evolution of our historic towns and wider environment and how their progression, changes and transformations have cumulatively created the existing physical, social, economic and cultural environment. An innate understanding of place will allow for a more balanced, agile and informed decision making process in planning and developing our historic built environments.

Architectural Heritage and Plan Alignment



Architectural Heritage statutory designations such as protected structures, architectural conservation areas and areas of special planning control to form part of the relevant City and /or County Development Plans and supported by specific development management policies and objectives. In the interest of coherence, it is recommended that in the case of area based plans (such as Local Area Plans, Municipal District Local Area Plans or similar) they shall specifically include the relevant architectural heritage statutory designations and development management policies and objectives or have a clear cross-referencing system to where this information can be found in the City and/or County Development Plan. All plans should also reference any guidance documents or assessments that the relevant authority may have produced in respect of architectural heritage.

From a practical perspective all plans should be fully accessible in various formats including digitally. Consideration should be given to the use of mapping in open data format to allow for the ease of adoption into other mapping systems for the purpose of collating numerous data layers and /or information sets.

Policy and Objective Cohesion

It is vital to ensure that policies and objectives relating to the architectural heritage align and support with overlapping land use policies and objectives. This is of particular importance in regeneration areas and/or individual regeneration sites. Conflicting or unclear policies and objectives introduces varying levels of uncertainty which may disrupt the successful delivery of necessary and well-intended projects. It is therefore recommended that a robust assessment is undertaken to ensure cohesion within overlapping policies and objectives relating to architectural heritage and specified land uses.

It is equally important to ensure that local policies also align with and take into accounts the most up to date policy documents. In particular, the very recent Town Centre First Policy will be a key policy in creating town centres that function *‘as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community’*.

A multi-disciplinary team is necessary to ensure a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to the compilation of cohesive policy, implementation of policy aims and the delivery of successful projects in complex urban environments. It is therefore recommended that each Local Authority draws upon a cohort of disciplines, including architects, architectural conservation officers, urban designers, engineers, planners, ecologists, archaeologist and similar when addressing current national environmental, economic and societal challenges in our built environment.

Character Assessments

Where ‘Character Assessments’, have been carried out for historic areas, architectural conservation areas and/or historic landscapes, these shall be included in all relevant plans and/or a clear cross-referencing system to where this information is located shall be provided.



Where Character Assessments are not in place, it is recommended that such assessments are undertaken and completed by suitably qualified person/s, for inclusion in all forthcoming plans and carried out in the context of established best practice i.e. UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape framework, Historic Landscape Assessment etc.

Character Assessments are an effective tool in assessing the historic environment, understanding its unique and authentic character and the significance and value of the same. This in turn supports the creation of informed policies and objectives and the insightful management of our architectural heritage.

Character Assessments, are a multi-functional and collaborative tool as they help to inform and direct frameworks, policies and strategies for the delivery of other essential services such as public realm schemes, strategic infrastructure, addressing dereliction and vacancy, urban and rural regeneration and integrated land use solutions.

Definitions and Terminology

It is recommended that relevant plans, including area based plans, provide definitions of architectural heritage and architectural heritage related statutory designations, such as protected structures, architectural conservations areas, areas of special planning control, vernacular buildings and historic demesnes. These definitions can be found in both the Planning and Development Act as well as in '*Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities*' and '*A Living Tradition; A Strategy for Enhance the Understanding, Minding and Handing on of Our Built Vernacular Heritage*'. The interchangeable use of terms and phrases such as architectural heritage, built heritage, cultural heritage and built historic environment can cause confusion for the end user. It is recommended that a consistent set of terms and phrases are adopted, explained and applied throughout the relevant plans/s.

Appropriate Personnel

It is recommended that suitably qualified persons shall be involved in the preparation of sections/elements of plans relating to the architectural heritage. For local authorities with Architectural Conservation Officers or similar such staff, they will be ideally placed to provide the necessary technical advice, policy analysis and development and operate in a cross collaborative manner to the benefit of the organisation.

Where a local authority does not have in house expertise, they may need to seek the appointment of consultants as a short term solution or consider the longer term need to increase architectural heritage capacity within the organisation.

Data Collection, Monitoring and Review

Data collection and analysis is at the core of informed public policies and the development of evidence based strategies. Policy cycles require a formula to measure the implementation of objectives and well as feedback mechanisms, which allow for review at key points of the policy cycle. Local Authority plans are at the forefront in the delivery of wider national



objectives. Effective data collection, monitoring and review at local authority level is critical to achieving integrated policies that deliver necessary public services.

A number of toolkits and guidelines are available to Local Authorities to highlight the importance of data collection. 'Measuring What Matters: Planning Outcomes Research', produced as part of a research project funded by the RTPI, (the governments of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, along with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Office of the Planning Regulator in Ireland). This report looks beyond simple measurements – such as speed of processing applications and number of houses built – towards more holistic understanding of policy impact and progress achieved from targeted measures. Further information on this process is available at <https://www.opr.ie/more-effective-way-to-measure-impact-of-planning-published-by-rtpi/>.

The Heritage Council in conjunction with numerous partners and communities nationally, has developed a trans-disciplinary, Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Programme, comprising of 15 key steps. It is an accessible programme that aims to raise awareness, understanding and appreciation of the critical role that historic town centres play and the wide-ranging impacts that their vitality and viability have on overall socio-economic, environmental and cultural growth and development, and on quality of life for citizens and visitors alike. The Health Check establishes an innovative baseline of data, which monitors and plans for the future of Irish Towns. Further information is available at <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/town-centre-health-check-programme>.

Reference;

Streetscape of County Cork, Cork County Council publication funded under the National Policy on Architecture contains guidance on the following areas;

European architectural policy development documents

- [Communication from the European Commission on the New European Bauhaus](#)
- [Council Conclusions on culture, high-quality architecture and built environment as key elements of the New European Bauhaus initiative](#)
- [Towards a shared culture of architecture – investing in a high-quality living environment for everyone](#)

You are requested to send any further communications to this Department's Development Applications Unit (DAU) at referrals@npws.gov.ie, where used, or to the following address:

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Is mise, le meas

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'MHillis', located below the text 'Is mise, le meas'.

Malcolm Hillis
Development Applications Unit
Administration