

8<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Forward Planning Section, Offaly County Council,  
Áras an Chontae,  
Charleville Road,  
Tullamore,  
County Offaly

**Re: Adopted Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027**

A chara,

The Office of the Planning Regulator acknowledges the adoption of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 by the members of Offaly County Council on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

The Office welcomes the modifications made in the adoption of the Plan in response to recommendation 1(i), recommendation 4 and observations numbers 1 to 5. In particular, the Office commends the planning authority and its members for including targets for wind, solar and battery storage in the Plan rather than deferring their inclusion to a variation. This demonstrates that the planning authority recognises the significance of the challenge posed by climate change and the crucial role local authorities will play in mitigation and adapting to it.

The Office acknowledges the decision taken by the members not to implement recommendations number 1(ii), 2 and 3. The Office has no comment to make on the decision concerning recommendation 1(ii).

Regarding the decision of the members on recommendation no.2, concerning the extension of the core retail area defined in the Plan (MA274), the Office remains concerned about the potential adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the traditional retail core of Tullamore.

The Office notes that the decision to extend the core shopping / retail area was not informed by a retail strategy in accordance with the need for an evidence-based approach to retail planning under the Minister's section 28 *Guidelines for Planning Authorities Retail Planning* (2012). The Office therefore advises that following the making of a new retail strategy for the region (RPO 6.10 of the EMRA RSES, refers) the

planning authority should review the retail provisions of the Plan in accordance with the Guidelines.

It will also be for the planning authority to determine any future planning applications in accordance with the Guidelines. This includes, in particular, the promotion of greater vitality in city and town centres through the sequential development approach, with preferred location for new retail development within city and town centres.

Regarding the decision of the members on recommendation no.3, to retain the employment and enterprise zoning under MA263 in the Plan, the Office stresses the importance of compliance with the *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2012) and the need for close consultation with TII and NTA to ensure the capacity of the strategic road network (N52) is protected in any future development of these lands. The safety of all road users, including pedestrians and cyclists, and the promotion of active and sustainable modes will also be key considerations in view of the site's location.

The Office welcomes the proposal to improve baseline modal share, including setting targets in cooperation with NTA, CARO, EMRA and other stakeholders, and the incorporation of the ASI Framework diagram into the Plan. In view of the key role of transport in driving climate change, the planning authority should prioritise the setting of these targets to inform future development.

Regarding implementation and monitoring, the Office would draw the attention of the planning authority to chapter 10 of the *Development Plans, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Draft for Consultation* (August 2021) for how they might approach monitoring of plan implementation.

In conclusion, the Office welcomes the adoption of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, and looks forward to continued engagement with Offaly County Council in the implementation of national and regional policy at the local level.

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**Anne Marie O'Connor**  
Deputy Planning Regulator

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[Annemarie.oconnor@opr.ie](mailto:Annemarie.oconnor@opr.ie)