

8th July 2022

Forward Planning,
Planning Department,
Block B,
Wexford County Council,
County Hall,
Carricklawn,
Wexford,
Y35 WY93.

Re: Adopted Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028

A chara,

The Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) notes the adoption of the Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028 (the Plan) by the members of Wexford County Council on the 13th June 2022.

The Office also acknowledges receipt of your letter of 20th June 2022, further to section 31(AM)(6) of the *Planning and Development Act 2000*, as amended, (the Act).

The Office has reviewed the adopted Plan in accordance with the legislative requirements set out in section 31(AM) of the Act and welcomes the decision of the planning authority to comply, in whole or in part, with many of the recommendations on the draft Plan and at material alterations stage.

Where the recommendations of the Office were not complied with, the Office gave careful consideration to the reasons of elected members and, with the exception of certain specific matters, accepted that these reasons addressed the matters raised by the Office.

Housing Supply Targets

In respect of MA Recommendation 1 in relation to Housing Supply Targets, the Office accepts the rationale provided in section 31(AM)(6) notification and in the Chief Executive's Report at Material Alterations stage.

Indeed the Office acknowledges that recent CSO data has demonstrated that there has been steady uplift in house completions in County Wexford over the last number of years and that this trend is continuing, enabling the use of appropriate adjustments to the Housing Supply Target Guidelines of the Minister.

The Council intends to accommodate significant additional housing provision in a planned manner over the next six years (of the order of 6,500 homes applying both adjustment 1 and 2 from the HST guidelines of the Minister). The above underscores the need to expedite implementation of wider and enabling objectives of the Plan, such as the preparation of local area plans and future variations of the county development plan that will provide the necessary detail in relation to how the location of such housing provision will meet proper planning and sustainable development objectives.

It is imperative that attention now turns to reviewing and making subsidiary local area plans and settlement plans in the timeframes committed to in the adopted Plan. These local area plans and settlement plans will contain the necessary land-use zoning maps, settlement boundary maps and specific objectives for infill and regeneration to support sustainable development in the right locations, consistent with both the development plan and wider strategic policies such as the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy of the Southern Regional Assembly.

Core strategy & settlement strategy

The Office accepts and supports the Plan's settlement hierarchy and therein its strategy for the sustainable management of population growth across Wexford.

As adopted, the Plan demonstrates the Council's commitment to key towns such as Wexford and Gorey, together with a commitment to realise the potential of the county's network of towns and villages and the promotion sustainable patterns and forms of development.

In particular, the core strategy table provides clear and precise population targets, housing allocations and housing land requirements that set clear and reasonable parameters for the preparation of local area plans and settlement plans.

With regard to New Ross, the Office acknowledges that the Council's initial policy focus is on the economic growth and regeneration of the town through the preparation of a Town Centre First Plan, under the Town Centre First Initiative. It is further welcome that the

Council will monitor progress at the two-year review of the Plan (as outlined in PMA CH 3.54) and augment population/growth projections, where required, to reinforce New Ross's position within the overall settlement hierarchy.

The Office does note with concern (in response to MA recommendation 2) that due to resourcing constraints that the Council is not in a position to confirm that local area plans for Wexford, Enniscorthy and New Ross will be in place within one year of the adoption of the plan.

Noting the statutory obligations to advance local area plan reviews once a new county development plan is in place, we would like to engage further with your authority in finding a path to bring these local plans on time and to be in a position to demonstrate that the development of Wexford is consistent with the NPF and RSES.

The Office also notes and supports the core strategy development approach to vary the plan to include the necessary land-use zoning maps, settlement boundary maps and specific objectives for infill and regeneration (as outlined in PMA CH3.24, CH3.26 and CH3.29).

The above will give effect to the overall core strategy framework.

However, as indicated in response to MA Recommendation 2, we note that the work programme is such that the outworking of the core strategy into updated local area plans and settlement plans may not be in place until mid-way through the life of the development plan. There is therefore a risk of developer rather than plan-led development at inappropriate locations until such time as updated local area plans and settlement plans have been put in place.

The Office is aware that resourcing is an issue facing many planning authorities and will continue to proactively engage with the planning authority, Department and wider local authority sector to ensure that the resourcing obstacles do not undermine the implementation of the Council's policy objectives in the Plan or the sustainable development of County Wexford.

Rural Housing and Regeneration

Regarding the decision of the members not to fully comply with Recommendation 7 of the Office's submission to the draft Plan concerning rural definitions and qualifying criteria,

the Office accepts that the Council has committed to review the rural housing policy, as and when revised section 28 Ministerial Guidelines are published.

Energy Strategy

The Office recognises the Council's proactive work with the 3 Counties Energy Agency (3CEA) and leadership in sustainable energy and climate action, this is borne out in the detailed energy strategy within the Plan. There are, however, areas of policy detail, specifically the photo-voltaic (PV) exclusion zones, that will require careful monitoring to ensure the energy targets of the Plan are achieved.

In respect of MA Recommendation 7, while the Office notes the decision of the members not to omit the policy requirement for adjoining landowner consent for wind development (PMA ES.17 and ES.20), it will be a matter for your authority to seek legal advice on the vires of this policy, especially in light of long-standing policy advice of the Minister (*Development Management, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2007)*) in relation to the reasonableness of conditions requiring agreements in respects of land or property not in the control of applicants.

Notwithstanding the above, in an overall sense the Office is satisfied with the manner in which the vast majority of our recommendations and observations were addressed at draft plan and material alterations stages.

The Office will be in contact shortly regarding ongoing forward planning and will work with your authority in the context of prioritising additional forward planning resourcing, as it will fall to the early progression of the forthcoming round of local area plans to carry the implementation of the county development plan forward.

Is mise le meas,



Niall Cussen

Planning Regulator
