

17th February 2023

The Central Planning Unit,
Donegal County Council,
County House,
Lifford,
F93 Y622.

Re: Draft Letterkenny Plan and Local Transport Plan 2023-2029

A chara,

Thank you for your authority's work on preparing the Draft Letterkenny Plan and Local Transport Plan 2023-2029 (the draft LAP).

The Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) wishes to acknowledge the considerable and evident work your authority has put into the preparation of the draft LAP against the backdrop of an evolving national and regional planning policy and regulatory context and the need to balance competing pressures within an increasingly complex system.

As your authority is aware, a key function of the Office is the assessment of statutory plans to ensure consistency with legislative and policy requirements relating to planning.

The Office has evaluated and assessed the draft LAP under the provisions of sections 31AO(1) and 31AO(2) of the *Planning and Development Act 2000*, as amended (the Act) and this submission has been prepared accordingly.

The Office's evaluation and assessment has had regard to the current county development plan, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and relevant section 28 guidelines.

Recommendations issued by the Office relate to clear breaches of the relevant legislative provisions, of the national or regional policy framework and/or of the policy of Government, including as set out in the Ministerial guidelines under section 28. As such, the planning authority is required to implement or address recommendation(s) made by the Office in order to ensure consistency with the relevant policy and legislative provisions.

Observations take the form of a request for further information, justification on a particular matter, or clarification regarding particular provisions of a plan on issues that are required to ensure alignment with policy and legislative provisions. The planning authority is requested by the Office to action an observation.

A submission can include advice on matters that the Office considers would contribute positively to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The planning authority is requested by the Office to give full consideration to the advice contained in a submission.

Overview

The Office generally welcomes the preparation of the draft LAP, having regard to the statutory requirements for same under section 19 of the Act. The document is engaging and easy to read, and is supported with appropriate mapping and illustrations.

However, the timing of the published draft in advance of the completion of the development plan review will give rise to significant practical and legal uncertainties regarding the relevant policy framework for both the public and the planning authority itself. This matter needs to be resolved prior to the adoption of the LAP.

The designation of Letterkenny as a Regional Growth Centre in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy is highly significant in terms of the development of the town. Letterkenny provides a strong employment and service base for the region, in addition to higher level health care and educational facilities. The level of housing growth, however, has been very low over recent years and it is critical that the LAP puts in place a focused strategy to deliver housing close to the infrastructure and facilities within the town and avoid displacement to less sustainable locations.

The Office welcomes the preparation of a Local Transport Plan (LTP) in conjunction with the draft LAP. However, the LTP is overly focussed on road building projects and is not consistent with more recent transport policy to reduce carbon emissions by facilitating and encouraging walking, cycling and other sustainable modes. The Office also has concerns regarding the methodology and data in the LTP and strongly advises the planning authority to consult with the NTA when addressing the matters raised below.

The Office notes that the draft LAP is generally based on the growth ambitions for Letterkenny as a Regional Growth Centre, as designated under the NPF and RSES.

However, as the growth targets applied in the 6-year draft LAP (up to 2029) exceeds those in the RSES for 2040, the area of land zoned for residential purposes is significantly in excess of that required. This matter is addressed in detail, below.

The excess zonings and inappropriately located land use zoning objectives makes development difficult to coordinate and has implications for the implementation of compact growth and integrated land use and sustainable transport planning in accordance with national and regional objectives and with the government’s National Sustainable Mobility Policy. This also affects the ability of Ireland to meet its obligations for climate action through the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 51% by 2030. The Office aims to help the planning authority align with the relevant objectives and with government policy through several of its recommendations.

The Office has also found it necessary to include recommendations on several other land use zoning objectives which impact on compact growth and sustainable transport and climate action, and also on the strategic road network. Matters relating to the regeneration of the town centre are also addressed.

Finally, the Office is highly concerned that the planning authority has prepared a draft LAP that does not provide for an appropriate level of flood risk management, consistent with a national objective under the NPF, in view of the increased future risks to property and people associated with climate change and, in particular, potential sea level rise. The Office’s submission identifies the lands concerned and makes recommendations on how this matter is to be resolved.

It is within this context the submission below sets out sixteen (16) recommendations and two (2) observations under the following themes:

Key theme	Recommendation	Observation
<u>Consistency with Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategy</u>	-	-
<u>Consistency with Development Plan and Core Strategy</u>	<u>Recommendation 1</u>	-
<u>Population and housing targets</u>	<u>Recommendation 2</u>	-
<u>Zoning, compact growth and infrastructural services</u>	<u>Recommendation 3</u>	-

Approach to development	Recommendation 4 , 5 , 6 , 7 & 8	-
Sustainable Transport and Accessibility	Recommendation 9 , 10 , 11 , 12	-
Education, Social and Community	-	Observation 1
Economy and Employment	Recommendation 13	Observation 2
Climate Action	Recommendation 14 , 15	-
Regeneration	Recommendation 16	-

1. Consistency with Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategy

Section 19(2) of the Act requires the LAP to be consistent with any RSES that applies to the area of the plan. The draft LAP acknowledges the policy context set by the RSES and by the NPF including the designation of Letterkenny as a Regional Growth Centre and its role as part of the linked metropolitan area of Derry and Strabane. These are reflected in the growth ambitions for the settlement under the draft LAP, as set out in chapter 2.

However, while the planning authority is to be commended for embracing ambitions for the Regional Growth Centre, the growth targets in the draft Plan do not align with those of the RSES and the time period within which the RSES envisages they can be sustainably delivered. This is particular so having regard to the 6-year period of the LAP. This matter is addressed in more detail under section 3.

The Office also notes that the settlement boundary for Letterkenny does not align with that of the RSES (figure 32, refers), inconsistent with RPO 3.7.24. The planning authority is advised to review the boundary selected for the draft LAP with a view to ensuring consistency with the objective of the RSES.

2. Consistency with Development Plan and Core Strategy

Section 19(2) of the Act also requires that a local area plan be consistent with the objectives of the development plan and its core strategy. This requirement also applies under section 20(5) of the Act. In this regard the Office notes that the development plan

objectives and its core strategy has not been varied to incorporate the objectives of the NPF and RSES as required under section 11(1)(b) of the Act.

The Office also notes that the current development plan includes extensive objectives relevant to future development in Letterkenny (in chapter 12 of Part C), including a land use zoning map.

The adoption of the draft LAP with an alternative zoning map and objectives will therefore give rise to considerable practical and legal uncertainty regarding the policy framework that will apply in the context of individual planning applications and having regard to the statutory obligations of the planning authority.

In these circumstances the planning authority is strongly advised to consider how this situation can be fully resolved prior to the adoption of the LAP, for example by way of a concurrent variation to the development plan.

Recommendation 1 – Statutory policy framework

Having regard to:

- the statutory requirements for local area plans under section 19 and 20 of the Planning and Development Act 2000; and
- to the potential for practical and legal uncertainties having regard to the policies and objectives of the Donegal County Development Plan (2018-2024)

the planning authority is required to ensure that the policy framework that will apply to future development in Letterkenny is both clear and consistent with the requirements under the Act.

3. Population and housing targets

The RSES (RPO 3.7.20) provides that Letterkenny will grow to 27,300 by 2040, an increase of 8,026 people or c.42% over the population of 2016. This is anticipated to take place in stages, rising from 19,300 in 2016, to 23,700 by 2026 (+4,400 or c.22.8% over 2016), and to 25,900 by 2031 (+6,600 or c.34.2% over 2016).

The draft LAP is based on an increase of almost 10,000 population (9,881) to 2031, which is more than 50% greater than the RSES target for 2031 (6,600) and is c.25% greater than the RSES target for 2040.

Notwithstanding that the RSES sets minimum targets, it is essential for the proper planning and sustainable development of the settlement that the targets included in the draft LAP are realistic and consistent with the implementation of compact growth.

Similarly, the draft LAP is not consistent with the RSES housing targets. RPO 3.7.23 seeks to provide between 3,000-4,000 housing units to 2040, compared to 3,600 units proposed to 2031 in the draft LAP. Moreover, the housing growth targets do not align with the LAP period.

The inclusion of significantly higher targets necessitate greater areas of residential zoning, which directly conflict with national and regional objectives for compact growth (NPO 3a and NPO 3c; RPO 3.7.22) and with the policy objective for sequential growth under the *Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2022). The zoning of excessive land will reduce the ability to provide the physical and social infrastructure needed to deliver housing on better located lands.

Notwithstanding the importance of ambition, it is important that the LAP is seen to be a credible document. In this regard, the targets also need to be seen in the context of recent housing delivery for the settlement. Only c.350 units have been completed in Letterkenny during the 6-year period 2017 to 2022, inclusive.

Recommendation 2 – Population and housing targets

Having regard to the:

- growth targets for Letterkenny under RPO 3.7.20 and RPO 3.7.23;
- targets for compact growth NPO 3a, NPO3c and RPO 3.7.22;
- provisions for the sequential approach to land use zoning under the *Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2022);
- 6 year plan LAP period; and
- growth that has taken place in the settlement since census 2016;

the planning authority is required to amend the population and housing targets to be consistent with the RSES population and housing growth targets, pro rata with the 6 year statutory local area plan period only.

4. Zoning, compact growth and infrastructural services

As referred to, above, the population and housing growth targets, which have informed the land use zoning objectives, are materially in excess of and inconsistent with those in the RSES.

The planning authority proposes to zone 123.87ha for new residential development. In determining land area required to accommodate the project growth, the planning authority included only lands zoned 'Primarily Residential' and portions of 'Opportunity Sites'. It excluded the considerable potential for such development within the extensive 'Town Centre' land use zone, inconsistent with objectives UB-O-2 and UB-O-9 of the Development Plan and LK-TC-P-02 of the draft LAP, with RPO 3.7.29 to consolidate the town centre and national objectives for regeneration under NPO 6 and NPO 11, and with RPO 3.7.22 and NPO 3a and NPO 3c compact growth. It is also inconsistent with the Government's Town Centre First strategy.

Similarly, the planning authority has not taken account of or quantified the potential for infill residential development in the 'Established Development', to which many of the aforementioned objectives also apply.

In determining the land area required to accommodate the projected growth, the planning authority has applied a density standard that does not have regard to the recommended standards under the *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Cities, Towns and Villages* (2009). The density rate applied is not consistent with RPO 3.7.27, which requires a minimum target of 50uph for the town centre area and a general default rate of 35uph (gross density), or with NPO 35, which seeks to increase density in settlements.

It is apparent, therefore, that the draft LAP has proposed considerable excess zoning for residential use, even allowing for 'additional provision' under the *Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2022). This is inconsistent with the delivery of compact growth in accordance with RPO 3.7.22 and NPO 3a and NPO 3c.

Recommendation 3 – Zoning for housing growth

Having regard to:

- growth targets for Letterkenny under RPO 3.7.20 and RPO 3.7.23;
- NPO 3a and 3c, and RPO 3.7.22 compact growth;
- RPO 3.7.27 and NPO 35 residential density,
- Town centre development objectives UB-O-2 and UB-O-9 of the County Development Plan
- RPO 3.7.29 consolidation and NPO 6 and NPO 11 regeneration;
- the Government’s Town Centre First strategy;
- the *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on the Sustainable Residential Development of Urban Areas: Cities, Towns and Villages* (2009) concerning the application of recommended minimum residential density standards; and
- the policy objective to adopt the sequential approach to land use zoning under the *Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2022), ,

the planning authority is requested, taking account of the potential housing yield from the extensive and underdeveloped Town Centre land use zone in table 10.2, to:

- (i) review its determination of housing yield from proposed zoned lands in the draft LAP; and
- (ii) amend, on foot of point (i), the land use zoning areas proposed in the draft LAP, including the extent of new ‘Primary Residential’ and / or ‘Opportunity Sites’, consistent with the amendments to the housing targets under Recommendation 2.

5. Approach to development

5.1 Residential lands

The Office welcomes much of the approach to the zoning in the draft LAP. In particular, the reduction in the Strategic Reserve and the definition of the Southern Strategic and Sustainable Development Site provides a clearer picture of the intended longer term and medium development strategy for the settlement.

Lands PR3, PR4, PR5, PR6 and PR19 are consistent with the definition of compact growth and infill and, therefore, the proposed zoning as Primarily Residential is a positive approach. As, these lands (18.8ha) would have potential to deliver between approximately 500 and 700 units, they would absorb a significant proportion of the housing target.

The zoning 'Primarily Residential' of certain lands in Leck/Scribly (PR9, PR10, PR11 and PR 12), identified in the RSES as potential residential development areas, to the south of the river is also considered a reasonable approach. But, only if good connectivity across the river to the town proper (in addition to across the subject lands) is first provided for active and sustainable modes. If not, these lands will serve to reinforce the existing pattern of car-based development in Letterkenny, contrary to National Sustainability Mobility Policy, and impact on the strategic national road network to the east contrary to the SPNRGs.

The subject lands, at 24.68ha, have the potential to deliver between c.650 and 925 dwelling units. Taken together, these 9 sites would likely exceed the applicable housing target for the plan period.

The zoning of more peripheral sites to the northeast and northwest, although technically within the existing built-up footprint, are not desirable in terms of facilitating active and sustainable modes due to their distance to the town centre and the nature and design of the junctions on existing road network, including the N56. In this regard, the Office has specific concern regarding the extensive greenfield site (10.75ha) PR1 to the northeast and the individual greenfield sites, PR15, PR16, PR17, PR18 and PR22 at the remote northwest of the town, especially when there is extensive greenfield land nearer the town centre.

In relation to Killylastin the RSES states ‘the phasing of this growth will have to be done in tandem with the growth figures outlined in table 6’, ‘*delivered sequentially on a phased basis, providing for compact growth*’¹. It does not anticipate that all these lands would be proposed at the outset and such an approach is neither feasible nor sustainable. It also recognises that there are opportunities to provide infill or and/or consolidating development that would assist in expanding the growth of the Town, without significantly extending the overall urban footprint in an outward manner, consistent with RPO 3.7.29.

Although PR13 is located relatively close to the town centre, it is not strategically located for the purposes of the draft LAP period compared to the above-mentioned accepted PR sites. In view of the quantum of development that can be accommodated on more suitable, strategically located sites that should be prioritised, PR13 should be reserved for a future plan period as strategic reserve.

Recommendation 4 – Primary Residential

Having regard to:

- growth targets for Letterkenny under RPO 3.7.20 and RPO 3.7.23;
- NPO 3a and 3c, and RPO 3.7.22 compact growth;
- RPO 3.7.27 and NPO 35 residential density,
- Town centre development objectives UB-O-2 and UB-O-9 of the County Development Plan
- RPO 3.7.29 consolidation and NPO 6 and NPO 11 regeneration;
- the Government’s Town Centre First strategy;
- the *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on the Sustainable Residential Development of Urban Areas: Cities, Towns and Villages* (2009)

¹ P.90

concerning the application of recommended minimum residential density standards; and

- the policy objective to adopt the sequential approach to land use zoning under the *Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022)*,

The planning authority is required to amend the following land use zoning objectives from Primarily Residential to either Strategic Reserve or Agriculture:

- PR1, PR13, PR15, PR16, PR17, PR18 and PR22

and to amend or omit relevant associated text from the draft LAP.

5.2 Opportunity sites

The Office welcomes the identification of key opportunity sites in the draft LAP. The more centrally located sites in particular allow the authority to plan strategically for the sustainable growth of the town in the northeast area. However, while provision for mixed-use sites offer certain flexibility, the number and extent of these zoning objectives result in a lack of clarity in the future development pattern for the settlement. Moreover, the uses proposed on these sites cannot be viewed in isolation of the uses, services and facilities already available on the surrounding lands.

RPO 6.30 seeks to promote active and sustainable modes by maximising the number of people living within walking distance of centres, transport and other services at a local level, consistent with the goals of the NSMP, as supported by the CAP 2023. Sites 1, 7 and 11 are centrally located within the settlement, adjacent or very close to the Town Centre and are well placed to facilitate active and sustainable travel if developed for residential uses. The sites, by reason of their location and character and setting within the wider lands including the town park and institutional lands, have the potential to deliver very high quality residential environments close to all the amenities offered by Letterkenny Town Centre.

The Office considers the non-residential uses proposed on these sites, including offices, restaurants, pubs, hotels, tourism, institutional use, commercial and retail, in particular, to be unnecessary in view of the substantial lands available for such uses in the Town Centre, and on other lands zoned for such uses in the immediate vicinity. This is

particularly so in respect of the proposed retail and commercial uses on Site 11 and Site 7.

The overarching objective of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 is to enhance the vitality and viability of city and town centres in all their functions through sequential development. It is a national policy objective (NPO2) to promote greater vitality in city and town centres by promoting the Sequential Development Approach. It is also the objective (NPO5) to ensure that retail development plays its part in realising quality outcomes in relation to urban design.

The County Development Plan sets out the sequential approach from the RPGs and states that focusing retail land uses within the established town centres is central to the strategy. It is an objective of the Development Plan (RS-O-1) to achieve critical mass of retail in key urban centres, (RS-O-2) to ensure consistency with the retailing objectives of the RPGs, and (RS-O-8) to promote the regeneration of derelict land and buildings within town centres for retail uses consistent with RPO 3.7.29 consolidation and NPO 6 and NPO 11 regeneration and the government's Town Centre First Strategy. The proposed land use zoning objectives for Sites 1, 7 and 11 concerning retail and commercial uses in an edge of centre location, without justification by an appropriate evidence base, is inconsistent with the objectives of the development plan, and does not have regard to the objectives of the RPGs.

In addition, having regard to RPO 6.30 sustainable mobility, RPO 3.7.22 compact growth and RPO 3.2.29 consolidation, the Office has concern about residential development in more peripheral Opportunity Site locations, in particular sites 12 and 3. Both sites will facilitate car-dependent development at a distance from the town centre and are inconsistent with the implementation of compact growth and sustainable mobility and therefore the development of these lands in the short to medium term should not be prioritised over more suitably located lands. Although lands at Carnamuggah (Site 12) are identified in the RSES as a potential new area for residential development, the development of a c.10ha site on the periphery of the settlement is not consistent with the objective to consolidate the existing neighbourhood through targeted measures. These lands should therefore be set aside as Strategic Reserve.

Recommendation 5 – Opportunity Sites

Having regard to:

- growth targets for Letterkenny under RPO 3.7.20 and RPO 3.7.23;
- NPO 3a and 3c, and RPO 3.7.22 compact growth;
- RPO 3.7.27 and NPO 35 residential density;
- Town centre development objectives UB-O-2 and UB-O-9 of the County Development Plan;
- RPO 3.7.29 consolidation and NPO 6 and NPO 11 regeneration;
- the Government's Town Centre First strategy;
- the *Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)*; and
- the *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on the Sustainable Residential Development of Urban Areas: Cities, Towns and Villages (2009)* concerning the application of recommended minimum residential density standards,

the planning authority is required to amend the following land use zoning objectives:

- Opportunity Site 1, 7 and 11 – from Opportunity Site to Primary Residential;
- Opportunity Site 12 – from Opportunity Site 12 and masterplanned approach to Strategic Residential Reserve
- Opportunity Site 3 – to omit consideration of residential use.

5.3 Masterplanned Approach

The Office generally welcomes the proposal to masterplan the area encompassing Opportunity Site 12, the Strategic Community Opportunity land and General Employment and Enterprise lands to the north of the N56. The Office has recommended the omission of Opportunity Site 12 and the associated masterplanned approach objective as related to site 12 for reasons set out above. However, the extension of the proposed masterplanned

approach objective (from the Strategic Community Opportunity and General Employment and Enterprise lands north of the N56) to other lands in the vicinity would resolve concerns it has about the potential impacts on the strategic road network.

Due to the nature and scale of development in the vicinity of the future junction between the N56 and the TEN-T PRIP objective (a national roads project of European significance), there is potential to affect the capacity of the strategic national road network. This is inconsistent with RPO 6.5 and does not have regard to requirements of the *Strategic Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)*. The Office therefore recommends that the subject lands, including Opportunity Sites 2, 3, 4 and 8 and adjoining General Employment and Enterprise lands on both sides of the N56 are encompassed within the masterplan objective, also.

However, there is no provision for masterplans under the *Planning and Development Act 2000*, as amended. Similarly, there is no provision for masterplans under the *Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022)*. Although the *Local Area Plans Guidelines (2013)* refer to masterplanning, this is within the context of the more detailed planning approach to be contained as part of an LAP, rather than an exercise to be carried out separate to the statutory plan making process. The preparation of masterplans to determine the future development of extensive areas of lands with potential adversely affect, among others, national infrastructure should be carried out within the statutory plan making process to facilitate environmental assessments and consultation with the public and public agencies.

Recommendation 6 – Masterplanned Approach

Having regard to:

- RPO 6.5;
- The provisions of the *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)*; and
- The *Local Area Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2013)*

The planning authority is required to amend the maps and written statement of the draft LAP to:

- Extend the objective to prepare a masterplan for Strategic Community Opportunity and General Employment and Enterprise lands to the north of the N56, to encompass Opportunity Sites 2, 3, 4 and 8 and adjoining General Employment and Enterprise lands on both sides of the N56;
- Include an objective that the LAP will be amended to incorporate the masterplan for these lands prior to implementation.

5.4 Strategic Residential Reserve

The Office notes the inclusion of zoned Strategic Residential Reserve lands in the draft LAP and recognises the value of this designation as an indicator of the future growth of the town in long term and as a tool to protect strategically located lands.

However, the Office is concerned with the Strategic Residential Reserve proposed to the west of the settlement. The scale of the area is excessive in view of the growth targets for Letterkenny to 2040. In addition, the southern portion of the lands are non-sequential and leapfrog lands (zoned 'Local Environment') that are adjacent to the existing built up footprint of the settlement and that are proximate to the centre of the settlement. While the northern portion (northeast of the dividing watercourse) is adjacent the built up area, it is much further from the centre compared to lands proposed to be zoned 'Local Environment' to the south.

This approach does not have regard to the policy objective to implement the sequential approach to zoning under the *Development Plans Guidelines (2022)*. It is also inconsistent with RPO 3.7.20 and NPO 3a and NPO 3c for compact growth and with the potential new areas for residential development identified the RSES. Furthermore, the subject lands necessitate substantial additional roads infrastructure, in the form of the 'Western Relief Road' and a 'Developer Led Road', that are inconsistent with objectives to promote active travel (RPO 6.30) and goals for modal shift under the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022). These lands are therefore not considered appropriate as 'Strategic Residential Reserve' and should be deleted from the draft LAP.

In terms of preserving the Strategic Residential Reserve, the Office welcomes explanatory footnote 12 to the land use zoning matrix Table 7.2, which indicates that proposals for multiple (i.e. 2 or more) residential units will not be considered on such

lands. However, policy LK-H-P would contradict this approach, in that it provides for the ‘appropriate release of ‘Strategic Residential Reserve’ lands on the basis of a transparent, evidence-led approach’, notwithstanding that it would require an amendment of the LAP. In view of the scale of land use zoning proposed for residential use, the Office would advise that this policy results in ambiguity and should therefore be omitted.

Recommendation 7 – Strategic Residential Reserve

Having regard to

- RPO 3.7.22 and NPO 3a and NPO 3c; and
- RPO 6.30 and NPO 27 and NPO 33;
- The *Climate Action and Low Carbon (Amendment) Act 2021*,
- The *Climate Action Plan 2023*; and
- The *National Sustainability Mobility Policy*, including goal 6,

The planning authority is requested to delete the Strategic Residential Reserve lands and associated strategic and development led roads objectives to the west of the settlement.

5.5 Southern Strategic and Sustainable Development Site (SSSD Site)

The Office welcomes the inclusion of the SSSD Site, which will provide for a rebalancing of Letterkenny to the south to allow for residential development that is physically closer to the centre of the settlement than other potential development locations. This is consistent with the provisions of the RSES, which envisages new residential growth to the south of the River Swilly in the Leck / Scribly area. Although, in view of the relatively substantial area contained in the SSSD (90ha, excluding PR zoned lands of c.25ha within Leck / Scribly), it is important to note that the RSES is silent on the extent of land this would include.

The Office welcomes the identification by the planning authority of the significant infrastructure constraints to the future development of the SSSD Site and notes the proposals to resolve the delivery of these constraints under LK-H-P-10 through the

delivery of the masterplan approach. In view of the scale of these constraints and the need to avoid piecemeal delivery (as acknowledged in section 10.7 of the draft LAP) and the importance of these lands to the future of Letterkenny, it is important that the planning authority take the lead in coordinated infrastructure and planning.

In addition, assuming the resolution of infrastructure constraints, the delivery of the entire SSDS Site over a single plan period is not likely feasible, sustainable or necessarily desirable. For practical purposes, there is a need to provide balanced development, including the development of alternative development lands in the settlement over the LAP period.

The Office therefore recommends that the draft LAP prioritises the delivery of the northern portion of the SSDS Site. These lands, north of the Southern Network Project (road scheme), are closer to the town centre and better able to contribute to compact growth (RPO 3.7.20) and active travel (RPO 6.30). Their delivery could be expedited through the more focused, staged delivery of infrastructure to resolve constraints for that specific area. The draft LAP, including maps and policy, should therefore distinguish between the two in terms of short/medium and long term phasing.

Having regard to Ireland's statutory obligations for GHG emissions reductions, the targets for modal shift under the *Climate Action Plan 2023* and under the *National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022* (NSMP), in addition to the objectives and vision of the RSES concerning modal shift (RPO 6.30) and promoting healthier lifestyles, it is essential that transport and accessibility are very carefully planned. The exact details of the Southern Network Project are not included in the draft LAP, however the layout on Map 7.1 suggests it follows the traditional relief road format.

In view of the transport and climate policy context, transport infrastructure planning must apply the road user priority hierarchy under the NSMP and the *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets Standards* (2019) (DMURS) (RPO 6.26 and goal 7 of the NSMP). Although the County Development Plan and draft LAP refer to DMURS, there is no objective or policy to apply these standards to urban areas. The planning authority will therefore need to review the design of the Southern Network Project to ensure consistency with the current transport policy and roads design standards context.

The planning authority will also need to consider all modes in accordance with the road user priority under the NSMP and DMURS, and the relevant transport networks (including

walking and cycling) will need to be integrated with proposed and existing land uses, north and south of the River including the entire Leck / Scribly area. The integrated land use transport planning for this area should be specifically addressed in the review of the Local Transport Plan (see transport and accessibility recommendations, below).

Recommendation 8 – Southern Strategic Sustainable Development Site

Having regard to

- RPO 3.7.22 and NPO 3a and NPO 3c;
- RPO 6.30 and NPO 27 and NPO 33;
- The *Climate Action and Low Carbon (Amendment) Act 2021*,
- The *Climate Action Plan 2023*; and
- The *National Sustainability Mobility Policy 2022*, including goal 7,

the planning authority is requested to:

- a) Prioritise the development of the SSDS site north of the proposed Southern Network Project route and to zone lands to the south of the route as Strategic Residential Reserve;
- b) Provide that the design of the Southern Network Project will be reviewed to ensure consistency with the NSMP and the application of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (2019); and
- c) Review the transport and accessibility requirements for the SSDS lands and the wider lands in Leck / Scribly south of the River Swilly, integrated with existing and proposed land uses north and south of the river, as part of the overall review of the Local Transport Plan (Recommendation 9 on local transport planning, below, refers).

The planning authority is advised to consult with NTA and TII in responding to this recommendation.

6 Sustainable Transport and Accessibility

6.1 Local transport planning

The Office welcomes the preparation of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Letterkenny, as required by RPO 3.7.32 and RPO 6.27, to inform the draft LAP. This approach has the potential to deliver an integrated approach to land use planning for Letterkenny and, in tandem with compact growth, to help it achieve a shift from private car transport to active sustainable modes (walking and cycling) and to public transport, consistent with RPO 6.30. A significant shift to active and sustainable modes will be necessary to enable Ireland to achieve its mandatory climate action targets under the *Climate Action and Low Carbon (Amendment) Act 2021*, that is to reduce GHG emissions by 51% by 2030, with a commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

However, the Office has concerns about the approach taken by the planning authority in preparing the LTP and its integration into the draft LAP. RPO 6.27 requires, among others, the application of the Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) guidance in carrying out the LTP, which is to be based on a clear set of objectives and the most recent demographic and travel information and alignment with national and regional policy.

Although the LTP refers to ABTA, it has not applied the methodology to consider all transport modes and to identify key opportunities to improve access to/from places where people live to where they work, study, play, shop or relax. It also does not apply the road user hierarchy under *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (2019)*, considering the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport before private car and goods vehicles, in accordance with the *National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022*.

The LTP has addressed walking and cycling as a collective 'active travel' mode, when these modes have different infrastructure requirements, especially in a town of hills, notwithstanding that they are compatible modes and can frequently share infrastructure. The pedestrian and cycling networks need to be set out separately, including integrating these networks with the active travel schemes referred to in the draft Plan. The Office is concerned, however, that many of these schemes are dependent on road schemes included in the plan, when ideally they should be capable of being delivered as independent networks.

The Office welcomes, however, the inclusion of Table 19.1 ‘Compilation of identified Active Travel Schemes’ which identifies 19 no. projects which are included in Map 19.2 and which have been assessed under a Multi-Criteria Analysis Framework process (Appendix D). However, additional ‘proposed interconnecting routes’ and ‘local permeability’ interventions that do not correspond with an active travel scheme identified in table 19.1 are also included on Map 19.2. These also do not correspond with the Active Travel Projects identified in the Zoning Map for the Town Centre Core Area and the routes shown on the town centre zoning map.

It is important that relevant projects, objectives and measures are consistent across the LAP. It is also important that appropriate policy support is included in the LAP to ensure the delivery of the LTP objectives and measures, consistent with RPO 3.7.33 and RPO 6.28 and with the positive policies and objectives for walking and cycling infrastructure in the Development Plan, in addition to NPO 27 and NPO 64.

The LTP does not adequately address public transport, although policy LTP-PT-P-1 seeks the provision of a local bus service in consultation with the NTA. Letterkenny, as a regional centre (and Regional growth centre under the RSES) plays a focal role in public transport within Donegal and the wider region. This is inconsistent with RPO 6.20 and RPO 6.21 of the RSES to review bus services within regional centres and between settlements and rural areas. It is therefore important that the LTP acknowledges this role and reference the NTA’s Connecting Ireland: Rural Mobility Plan in developing transport linkages across the region.

The LTP is also expected to identify the interventions required to prioritise the movement of public transport within the town and to/from key destinations, having regard to existing dispersed development and proposed future development lands, in addition to around the town to serve regional networks.

The LTP does not adequately address how road proposals and increased road capacity have been considered in the context of the multi-modal focused solution (i.e. with walking, cycling and public transport) in accordance with ABTA methodology. In particular, the Southern Network Project, which will be critical to the delivery of the Southern Strategic Sustainable Development Site, has not been considered in terms of the different transport modes, including the potential for more direct pedestrian, cycle and public transport connectivity across the River Swilly to the Town Centre.

Finally, the Office has significant concerns with the use of the ILUTS Report, 2009, as an evidence base for proposals in the LTP, notwithstanding updates. The national and regional policy context has changed dramatically since that time and the modelling will not have considered the potential impacts of a change towards more sustainable transport modes reflecting the road user hierarchy.

In particular, the government has adopted the Avoid, Shift, Improve Framework for transport in the *National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022*, in order to achieve the necessary modal shift to achieve the climate mitigation in accordance with the CAP 2023, including through expansion of sustainable mobility in regional and rural areas (goal 4), behavioural change and demand management (goal 5) and the application of universal design principles and the hierarchy of road user model (goal 7).

A revised approach will ultimately benefit residents and visitors to Letterkenny, and is a fundamental part of significantly reducing carbon emissions by 2030 consistent with the Climate Action Plan.

Recommendation 9 – Local transport planning

Having regard to

- RPO 3.7.32, RPO 6.27 and RPO 6.28 local transport plans
- RPO 3.7.33, RPO 6.20, RPO 6.21 RPO 6.30, NPO 27, NPO 64 active, sustainable and public travel;
- the provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021,
- the Climate Action Plan 2023,
- the goals and provisions of the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022), goals 4, 5, 6 and 7 refer;

the planning authority is requested to:

- a) review its Local Transport Plan (LTP) consistent with the requires of RPO 6.27 and in accordance with the Area Based Transport Assessment

methodology (Advice Notes December 2018; and How to Guide, Pilot Methodology 2021), in consultation with the NTA and TII;

- b) Amend the draft Local Area Plan based on the output of the appropriately revised LTP, to provide the appropriate policy basis to implement the objectives and recommendations of the LTP consistent with the aforementioned national and regional sustainable transport and climate policy context.

The planning authority is advised to consult with NTA and TII in responding to this recommendation, including with regard to the availability of funding for the preparation of the revised LTP.

The Office would advise that any proposed transport network (pedestrian, cyclist, etc.) and network improvement measures arising from the revised LTP should be shown in the context of the proposed land use zoning objectives map.

6.2 Local roads objectives

Policies LTP-T-2 and LTP-T-P-3 seek to support and facilitate the strategic road projects identified in Table 20.2 to manage traffic within the town. However, in view of the *National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022*, the Office has concerns that the proposed draft LAP depends excessively on the delivery of traditional road projects, including to facilitate more peripheral lands, particularly in the longer term. This concern does not extend to the critical TEN-T PRIP route, which has the potential to greatly improve regional connectivity consistent with RPO 3.7.30 and NPO 45 and NPO 56.

The Office considers the western strategic road corridor (Western Relief Road), which would facilitate the future development of extensive, peripheral lands (proposed Strategic Residential Reserve), to be inconsistent with the delivery of compact growth and sustainable mobility. The Office has similar concerns about the northern strategic road corridor (Northern Relief Road) and, also, in relation to the proposals for the southern corridor to the east of the Southern Network Project to connect to the N56, which will encourage car based development in this area.

It is important that all strategic roads projects are justified based on a transparent evidence base, that their delivery is consistent with *National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022*, and that justified projects are feasible to deliver within a specified timeframe. In particular the Office considers it unlikely that the Western Relief Road and the southern corridor to the east of the Southern Network Project can be justified.

This approach is inconsistent with RPO 3.7.20 and NPO 3c compact growth and would be contrary to goal 5 of the NSMP and to the targets for modal shift under the NSMP and the CAP 2023 and the GHG emissions reduction targets under the *Climate Action and Low Carbon (Amendment) Act 2021*.

Recommendation 10 – Local roads objectives

Having regard to:

- RPO 3.7.20 and NPO 3c compact growth;
- the goals of the *National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022*, goal 5, in particular, refers;
- the provisions of the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021*; and
- the *Climate Action Plan 2023*,

the planning authority is required to delete the Western Relief Road, the Northern Relief Road and the southern strategic road corridor to the east of the Southern Network Project, including text and from relevant maps.

6.3 Access to national roads

It is an objective of the RSES (RPO 6.5) to manage and enhance the capacity and safety of the region's transport networks to ensure optimal use and maintenance of the strategic capacity and safety of the national roads network. Similar policy provisions apply under the *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines (2012)* (the SPNRGs), including under section 2.5, which requires the planning authority policy to avoid the creation of

additional access points or increased traffic from existing access points to national roads with >60kph speed limit.

The Office is concerned that the wording of Objective LK-ED-O-2 and Policy LK-EDE-P-2, while seeking to safeguard the carrying capacity, function and safety of the N56 would facilitate new and intensified access onto the national road under certain circumstances. This approach is inconsistent with RPO 6.5 and the SPNRGs.

Recommendation 11 – Access to national roads

Having regard to:

- RPO 6.5 to manage and maintain strategic capacity and safety of national roads; and
- The provisions under section 2.5 of the *Spatial Planning and National Road Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2012);

the Planning Authority is required to amend:

i) Policy LK-EDE-P-2 as follows:

Policy LK-EDE-P-2: It is a policy of the Council to continue to avoid ~~an~~ ~~ad-hoc proliferation of the creation of~~ new or intensified existing access points along the N56 Four Lane Road. The Council will ~~prepare an~~ ~~access strategy to~~ consider limited and coordinated new junctions, or the intensification of use of existing junctions, where such proposals are presented and considered as part of an overall plan maximizing serviced areas and minimizing junctions, and where it can be clearly demonstrated that such development:

a. would not affect the capacity, operation or safe functioning of the road; and

b. would not prejudice the servicing of adjacent areas.

Such an access strategy will include consultation with TII and is required to be plan-led and evidenced based for inclusion in the Local Area Plan. Pending the incorporation of an agreed access strategy for the N56 Four

Lane Road into the Local Area Plan, the Council policy shall be to avoid the creation of new or intensified existing access points along the N56 Four Lane Road

ii) Objective LK-ED-O-2

Objective LK-ED-O-2: It is an objective of the Council to safeguard the carrying capacity, functioning and safety of urban sections of the N56 National Secondary Route in Letterkenny as a key strategic transport corridor, lifeline route and multimodal urban connector. Pending the development of an agreed transport solution and access strategy for the N56 Business Park Road, to be incorporated into the Local Area Plan, the policy of the planning authority will be to avoid the creation of any additional access point from new development or the generation of increased traffic from existing accesses to national roads to which speed limits greater than 60kph apply. ~~The Council will ensure that any development seeking direct access or that would result in the intensification of use of existing access points or junctions is designed and assessed to ensure that the capacity, operation and safe function of the N56 are preserved and/or improved. Where applicable, any development will tie in with any established or developed Junction Strategy/Policy for this key route as and where such are set out.~~

The Planning Authority should consult with TII in the amending of these Policies and Objectives.

6.4 Rail corridor

In relation to the rail network, Policy LTP-PT-P-2 (b) states that it is a policy of the council to “not protect the abandoned historic railways corridors within the Letterkenny Plan area boundary for strategic infrastructure provision (such as rail/road/greenway projects) or for recreational development”. This policy is contrary to RPO 3.7.35 which seeks to carry out a feasibility study for a rail link between Letterkenny and Derry and contrary to the Policy T-P-24 of the Development Plan, which seeks to protect established historic railway corridors throughout the county.

While the Office accepts that the rail corridor may have been compromised in locations, in view of the Development Objective the corridor should not be disregarded. The LTP should consider what potential there is for the remaining parts of the corridor to deliver active travel infrastructure, in particular.

Recommendation 12 – Rail corridor

Having regard to

- RPO 3.7.35; and
- Development Plan Policy T-P-24;

the planning authority are required to delete Policy LTP – PT-P-2 (b), and to consider the potential use of the remaining corridor for active travel modes in responding to the recommendation on Local Transport Planning, above.

7. Education, Social and Community

The Office notes the provision of significant lands for Strategic Community Opportunity at Carnamuggah. The Office understands that these lands are proposed to accommodate a sports campus for the ATU, for which significant funding has been allocated at national level and the Office agrees that this is a suitable location for such facilities, in addition to standard educational facilities.

In this context, the Office has some concern that ‘office use’ is open for consideration under the land use zoning matrix. Although footnote 14 is acknowledged, the Office considers that any office use should be ancillary to the primary use of these lands. Furthermore, while the Office would accept as reasonable that student accommodation is open for consideration on these lands, this should be subject to the proviso that any such accommodation is to be located at the southernmost section of the site. This will facilitate active travel from the site to the main campus by students and staff, consistent with RPO 6.30, the goals of the NSMP and the CAP and will contribute better to the compact growth of the settlement.

Observation 1 – Strategic Community Opportunity

Having regard to:

- RPO 6.30 active travel,
- The *National Sustainable Mobility Policy*, goals 5 and 7 refer,
- The *Climate Action Plan 2023*; and
- RPO 3.7.20 and NPO 3a and NPO 3c compact growth

The planning authority is requested to:

- i) Insert a specific objective requiring any student accommodation to be located at the southernmost portion of the Strategic Community Opportunity lands (as contained within the 'masterplan' boundary); and
- ii) Amend footnote 10 to table 7.1 land use zoning matrix to limit office development open for consideration on the subject lands to office use ancillary to the primary uses acceptable in principle within this land use zone, namely School / Education, Playing fields, Cultural Uses / Library, Creche / Playschool and Community / Recreational / Sports.

8 Economy and Employment

8.1 Town Centre

The Office welcomes the revisions to the Town Centre land use zoning objective, which has been pulled back north of the River Swilly. This approach will provide a better focus to the planning, development and regeneration of the centre of this vital regional commercial centre. It will better enable the planning authority to invest in key projects in line with the Regeneration 2040, and to tackle vacancy and dereliction within this area by directing appropriate retail and commercial development to this area.

As noted, above, the Office has significant concern about objectives to accommodate retail and commercial and other town centre uses on Opportunity Sites outside the centre. This has been addressed in a recommendation on the approach to development. However, the Office considers there to be potential to further refine the Town Centre land

use zone with a view to identifying lands that would be most conducive to residential development, consistent with objectives for compact growth and active travel.

Observation 2 – Town Centre

Having regard to:

- RPO 3.7.22 and NPO 3a and 3c compact growth;
- RPO 6.30 and NPO 27 integrated active travel and NPO 33 sustainable development

the planning authority is advised to review and amend the extent of land zoned Town Centre, with a view to:

- i) consolidating the town centre lands into a more manageable, prioritise town centre area, and
- ii) providing for residential development, in particular, on appropriate centrally located sites conducive to active travel modes.

8.2 General Employment and Enterprise

The Office welcomes the rationalisation of General Employment and Enterprise lands south of the River Swilly, including taking account of flood risk management requirements. However, significant greenfield lands located in a peripheral location are proposed to be zoned for General Employment and Enterprise use in Bonagee.

The zoning of these lands are inconsistent with the achievement of the NSO compact growth and will contribute to the continuance of a highly dispersed settlement pattern. They will also encourage car-based development that will not support the modal shift to active modes contrary to RPO 6.30.

In addition, while the land use zoning objective has been removed from much of the TEN-T objective, there are still significant proposed zoned lands which conflict the indicative route of the TEN-T PRIP Objective. The proposed land use zoning objectives therefore conflict with section 2.9 Protection of Alignments for Future National Road Projects of the *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities*

(2012). It is also therefore inconsistent with RPO 6.5 concerning planning for future capacity enhancements of the national road network, with RPO 3.7.30 and RPO 6.7 to deliver the TEN-T PRIP, and with NPO 74, NSO Enhanced Regional Accessibility.

Recommendation 13 – General Employment and Enterprise

Having regard to:

- RPO 3.7.22 and NPO 3a, 3c and NSO compact growth;
- RPO 6.30 active travel;
- RPO 6.5, RPO 3.7.30 and RPO 6.7 national roads
- NPO 74 and NSO Enhanced Regional Accessibility; and
- Section 2.9 of the *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2012)

the planning authority is required to omit the General Employment and Enterprise land use zoning at Bonagee.

9. Climate Action

9.1 Flood Risk Management

Much of Letterkenny, by reason of location and topography, is highly vulnerable to flood risk. These risks are increasing due to the effects of climate change.

The Office welcomes the preparation of a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) to inform the draft LAP, including the production of detailed flood risk mapping for the town, which provides a clear picture of lands at most risk (flood risk zone A and/o B), and the preparation of some plan-making Justification Tests.

However, the plan-making Justification Test has not been carried out and passed for several proposed land use zonings within flood risk zone A or B that would accommodate vulnerable or highly vulnerable uses or development types.

This approach is contrary to the recommendation of *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2009), as amended by Circular PL

2/2014, that unless such lands first pass the plan-making Justification Test they should not be zoned for such uses. It is also inconsistent with the objectives of the RSES (RPO 3.10 and RPO 3.11) and the NPF (NPO 57) to implement the guidelines.

The Office is also concerned that the SFRA does not align fully with the Mid-Range Future Scenario set out by the OPW or the High-End Future Scenario, particularly in view of the settlement's location adjacent a tidal estuary and river, where coastal flood risk can be anticipated to be exacerbated by climate-change induced sea level rise. It is vital that appropriate mitigation for climate change impacts is included in the LAP, such as avoiding development in areas prone to flooding in the future, providing space for future flood defences, specifying minimum floor level and setting specific development management objectives.

Recommendation 14 – Flood Risk Management

Having regard to:

- RPO 3.10, RPO 3.11 and NPO 57 flood risk management; and
- *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2009), as amended by Circular PL 2/2014,

the planning authority is required to:

- a) review and amend the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the draft LAP, including to carry out the plan-making justification test for all lands proposed to be zoned to accommodate development vulnerable to flooding (fluvial and coastal) within areas at a high or moderate risk of flooding in particular the following:
 - SFRA Map 4 – ‘Established Development’ and ‘Town Centre’
 - SFRA Map 6 – ‘Community Education’, ‘Established Development’ and ‘Town Centre’
 - SFRA Map 7 – ‘Town Centre’ and ‘Existing Development’
 - SFRA Map 8 – ‘Existing Development’, ‘General Employment’ and ‘Community Education’

- SFRA Map 11 – ‘Existing Development’, ‘General Employment’ and ‘Existing Development’

- b) The planning authority is required, where relevant, to address the specific structure or non-structural mitigation measures for flood risk on the sites concerned, as per Part 3 of the plan-making Justification Test.
- c) The planning authority is required to either omit or appropriately amend (e.g. to water compatible use only) proposed zonings that do not meet the Justification Test in accordance with the provisions of the aforementioned Guidelines and Circular.
- d) The SFRA should note already developed lands that do not meet the criteria of the plan-making Justification Test and a policy objective should be attached to the zoning to limit development to that as outlined in section 5.28 of the Guidelines.

In carrying out this review, it is important that the climate change scenario considered by the SFRA aligns fully with the Mid-Range Future Scenario set out by the OPW or with the High-End Future Scenario.

The planning authority is advised to consult with the Office of Public Works regarding this recommendation

9.2 Surface water management

The Office welcomes the inclusion of policies and objectives, which relate directly, or indirectly, to surface water management policies, including support for green and blue infrastructure with reference to the River Swilling (LK-TC-P-05), to increase tree cover to enhance surface water management (CAM-LK-P-2), to require the use of SuDS (CAM-LK-P-6), and to support the principle of the creation of natural biodiversity and wetlands systems adjacent the River Swilly (LK-NBH-P-1).

However, the Office is concerned that many of these policies only suggest or support holistic approaches to surface water management rather than clearly require it. The draft LAP also does not reference up to date guidance on sustainable surface water management produced by the Local Authorities Water Programme – *Nature Based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas* –

Best Practice Interim Guidance Document (2022). This is inconsistent with the objective of the RSES (RPO 8.22) to prioritise investment in stormwater infrastructure to improve sustainable drainage and reduce the risk of flooding, and is also inconsistent with the objective of the NPF (NPO 57) to integrate sustainable water management solutions, such as SUDS.

The Office notes that the SFRA identifies extensive areas of lands at risk of flooding within the settlement, some of which will not pass the plan-making justification test (including extensive Town Centre proposed zoned lands) and will therefore only be suitable for water compatible development. Having regard to the requirements under the recommendation on flood risk management, the planning authority should consider how the implementation nature based solutions and green and blue infrastructure on such lands can help climate proof Letterkenny.

Recommendation 15 – Surface water management

Having regard to:

- RPO 8.22 and NPO 57 sustainable drainage, and
- *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009)*, as amended by Circular PL 2/2014

the planning authority is required to:

- a) review and amend its policies relating to sustainable surface water management, including LK-TC-P-05, CAM-LK-P-2, CAM-LK-P-6 and LK-NBH-P-1, its associated objectives, to ensure that sustainable surface water drainage approaches, including Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and nature based solutions will be implemented consistently throughout the settlement;
- b) reference *Nature Based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas – Best Practice Interim Guidance Document (2022)*; and

c) consider how the implementation nature based solutions and green and blue infrastructure on lands at risk of flooding can help climate proof Letterkenny and incorporate a clear strategy for same into the draft LAP.

10. Regeneration

The Office welcomes Policy LK-TC-P-05, which identifies specific strategic urban design / public realm interventions in Letterkenny Town Centre, similar to those in the Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Project. However, it would be appropriate to include relevant objectives and/or policies committing to the implementation of Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Project, integrated with other objectives of the draft LAP for the town centre development. This should be developed as a masterplanned approach, or tailored approach, forming part of the draft LAP, consistent with the requirements of RPO 3.7.26, and with NPO 6 and NPO 7.

In view of the vacancy problem in the Town Centre and historic core, it is important that the draft LAP facilitates and prioritises the regeneration of the Town Centre through appropriate active land management objectives and policies, in accordance with the government's Town Centre First policy. It should also identify the critical measures and/or actions the planning authority will implement, having regard to public funding available under, among others, the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and Town Centre First funds (e.g. Croí Cónaithe).

In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the planning authority's approach, the draft LAP should include measurable targets for the resolution of vacancy and proposals for the monitoring of same.

Recommendation 16 – Regeneration

Having regard to

- RPO 3.7.26,
- NPO 6 and NPO 7,
- to *Town Centre First, A Policy Approach for Irish Towns (2022)* –

the planning authority is required to amend the draft LAP to include a masterplanned approach to the Town Centre Area (comprising Main Street Area and New Retail Park area and the street linkages there-between), to include:

- i) objectives to implement the Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy integrated with other objectives of the draft LAP for the town centre development;
- ii) specific active land management objectives, policies and measures or actions tailored to address building and site vacancy;
- iii) measurable targets for the reduction of vacancy for the plan period and a strategy for the monitoring of same.

Summary

The Office requests that your authority addresses the recommendations and observations outlined above. As you are aware, the report of the chief executive of your authority prepared for the elected members under section 20 of the Act must summarise these recommendations and the manner in which they will be addressed.

Where your authority decides not to comply with the recommendations of the Office, made in the draft LAP and report, please outline the reasons for the decision in the chief executive's report.

Please feel free to contact the staff of the Office in the context of your authority's responses to the above, which we would be happy to facilitate. Contact can be initiated through plans@opr.ie.

Is mise le meas,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "AM O'Connor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a diagonal slash under the "n" in "Connor".

Anne Marie O'Connor

Deputy Regulator and Director of Plans Evaluations
