



8th August 2023

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

Re: Issues Paper for the Wexford Town Local Area Plan 2024-2030

A chara,

Thank you for your authority's work in preparing the Issues Paper for the proposed Wexford Town Local Area Plan 2024-2030 (the Issues Paper). The Wexford Town Local Area Plan 2024-2030 (the LAP) is a mandatory local area plan under section 19(1)(b) of the *Planning and Development Act 2000*, as amended (the Act).

The Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) welcomes the timely commencement of the plan-making process, through the publication of the Issues Paper, in view of the recent adoption of the Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028 (the Development Plan) on 13th June 2022.

The Office acknowledges your authority's work, more broadly, in advancing the preparation of the LAP.

As section 20(1) of the Act does not prescribe the requirements for public consultation at pre-draft stage for LAPs, the planning authority is commended for publishing an Issues Paper, engaging proactively with the public and notifying the Office of its intention to prepare the LAP. The Office also commends the local authority for the drop-in public consultation events that were held in Wexford Town Library on Wednesday, 14th June and Thursday, 13th July. The future LAP has the potential to deliver on key objectives of the Development Plan, including housing, employment and services. It is considered that engaging with the public at an early stage can help achieve this.

In accordance with the provisions of section 31AO of the Act, the Office is obliged to evaluate and assess local area plans in the context of certain statutory parameters including:

- matters generally within the scope of section 19;
- consistency with the objectives of development plan, its core strategy, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Regional Assembly (the RSES);
- consistency with the transport strategy of the National Transport Authority;
- ministerial guidelines made under section 28;
- ministerial policy directives issued under section 29; and
- such other matters as the Minister may prescribed under section 262 or otherwise prescribe.

The Office has set out some broad issues, relevant to the preparation of most, if not all, LAPs in addition to some specific issues of particular relevance to the preparation of this LAP, under the following ten (10) themes:

- 1. Strategic policy framework
- 2. Development plan and core strategy
- 3. Zoning, compact growth and infrastructural services
- 4. Regeneration
- 5. Education, social and community amenities
- 6. Economic development and employment
- 7. Transport and mobility
- 8. Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- 9. Environment, built and natural heritage
- 10. Implementation and monitoring

The Office's comments are offered without prejudice to any observations and recommendations as may be forthcoming from the Office at future stages of the plan making process. They do not affect the obligation on your planning authority to comply

with the relevant legislative requirements, or to be consistent with the fullness of the detailed policy context of the higher order plans and strategies and Ministerial guidelines.

1. Strategic Policy Framework

The planning authority will be aware that section 20(5) of the Act requires the LAP to be consistent with the objectives of the RSES, in addition to the *Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework* (NPF), the specific planning policy requirements (SPPRs) of section 28 guidelines and the relevant development plan.

In relation to the RSES, the Office encourages the planning authority to liaise with the Southern Regional Assembly, particularly where clarity is required on the objectives and guiding principles.

The Issues Paper demonstrates a clear understanding of the role of the settlement in the wider county and regional context. Wexford Town has been identified in the RSES as one of two settlements designated as a Key Town in County Wexford. It has experienced strong population growth since the turn of the century and presents significant opportunities for economic development and employment growth as well as improving the social infrastructure in the town.

In aligning with the RSES, the LAP should consider the strategic vision, goals and guiding principles of the RSES, in addition to consistency with the relevant regional policy objectives (RPOs). For example, RPO 16 sets out a number of key infrastructural requirements necessary to support the growth and development of the town.

2. Development plan and core strategy

Section 19(2)(b) of the Act also requires that the LAP be consistent with the objectives of the Development Plan and its core strategy. A key message of the section 28 *Local Area Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2013) (LAP Guidelines) is that consistency between local area plans and the core strategy of development plans is an essential requirement, particularly in relation to the quantum and location of lands identified for development.

In this regard the Office notes that the core strategy of the Development Plan provided for a population increase of 3,149 persons over the period from 2021–2027 and a requirement for 2,174 housing units and 62.11 hectares of residential land. Having reviewed the core

strategy table, it is noted that compared to the previous zonings for Wexford Town, there is an excess of 344 hectares of land zoned for residential purposes.

As part of the preparation of the new LAP, it will be necessary to re-evaluate the approach to zoning for residential development so that housing is prioritised in locations closest to existing facilities and services in the town, and it allows for new physical and social infrastructure to be planned and delivered in a timely and cost effective manner.

3. Zoning, compact growth and infrastructural services

The Office recommends that all land-use objectives should demonstrate consistency with the objectives for compact growth under the NPF (NPO 3c), the RSES (RPO 35) and densification (NPO 35).

Zoning objectives should also be consistent with any strategic development sites for the delivery of residential, employment or other uses identified in the RSES.

In relation to residential development, any provisions or standards for density or building height in the LAP should have regard to relevant section 28 guidelines and any SPPRs therein, including:

- Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Cities, Towns & Villages (2009);
- Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2018); and
- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022).

Land use zoning should also follow the sequential approach as set out under section 6.2.3 of the *Development Plans, Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2022) (the Development Plans Guidelines).

The planning authority will also need to ensure consistency with the provisions of the tiered approach to zoning under NPO 72 a-c of the NPF. In this regard, the LAP should include an infrastructure assessment for the town in accordance with Appendix 3 of the NPF and with section 4.5.2, Settlement Capacity Audit, of the Development Plans Guidelines.

It will be of critical importance to the implementation of the LAP to ensure that all lands zoned for residential and other development are serviced, or will be serviceable, during the plan period.

In this regard the Office notes that the planning authority has identified capacity issues with public transport as well as active travel infrastructure for the town. The Office therefore advises the planning authority to liaise closely and collaborate with the relevant prescribed authorities concerning the delivery of essential services and infrastructure.

4. Regeneration

Both the NPF (NPO 4, 6, 18a, 18b and 35) and the policy objectives of the RSES place a strong emphasis on the opportunities for urban and village regeneration to create attractive, liveable, well-designed and high quality urban places. The reuse of brownfield sites and vacant buildings will contribute to climate change mitigation.

In larger settlements, the Development Plans Guidelines advise that the identification of regeneration areas should be coordinated with the identification of Settlement Consolidation Sites determined by the planning authority. The Development Plan identifies the Wexford Campus of the multi-campus South East Technological University, Trinity Wharf (which has been awarded URDF funding), and the Commercial Quay Redevelopment Area as regeneration/opportunity sites for the area of the LAP. Public Realm works are also noted in the Development Plan for Crescent Quay, Monck Street and Commercial Quay.

Where the RSES identifies any opportunity sites to support town centre regeneration, these opportunity sites and others should be clearly identified in the LAP.

In addition, an evidence-based approach should be taken to the identification of regeneration sites, or vacant or underutilised buildings, generally, in accordance with the guiding principles of the RSES for urban infill and regeneration.

In accordance with section 5.7 of the LAP Guidelines, where opportunity sites are identified, the planning authority is advised to prepare a development framework for future development with appropriate guidance regarding layout, massing, permeability, green infrastructure and Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDs) etc.

The Office recommends that the LAP includes a strong policy framework to support the utilisation of existing buildings, brownfield/infill sites, and derelict and underutilised sites. Proactive land activation measures, including the planning authority's powers in respect of land acquisition/compulsory purchase, derelict sites and vacant land, as well as intended sources of funding to facilitate key regeneration projects, such as the recently announced Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund Scheme, should all be considered.

Also important in this respect is Government's *Town Centre First: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns* (2022) (Town Centre First), which envisages Town Centre First Plans as central to informing the future direction of towns and the priority investment interventions supported through Town Centre First aligned funding streams.

5. Education, social and community amenities

'Access to quality childcare, education and health services' is a National Strategic Outcome of the NPF.

The LAP should therefore seek to align population growth with investment in childcare and education facilities on well-located sites within or close to the existing built-up areas, to meet the diverse needs of local populations. Specifically in relation to schools, the planning authority should consult with the Forward Planning and Site Acquisitions section of the Department of Education.

The LAP should also have regard to the provisions for social audits under the Development Plans Guidelines (or civic infrastructure audits under the LAP Guidelines) and consider the capacity of existing facilities, including community centres, leisure, amenity and cultural facilities to serve existing and future residents. In addition, the LAP should also ensure that such facilities can be easily accessed by walking or cycling infrastructure.

The LAP should also be consistent with the objectives of the RSES and the Development Plan for social and community facilities, in particular the proposal to develop a *'destination playground'* in Wexford Town, as outlined in Table 14-3 of the Development Plan.

The local authority's *Local Economic and Community Plan* (LECP) should inform the LAP to provide for the co-ordinated spatial planning of community services for the area. In addition, the local authority's *Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024* should also inform the LAP.

6. Economic development and employment

The NPF, RSES and the LAP Guidelines emphasise the need to take an evidence-based approach to the inclusion of objectives for employment and other commercial uses. The economic provisions within the LECP should also inform the LAP to provide for the co-ordinated spatial planning for the area.

The Office notes that the planning authority is currently preparing a new LECP and it is expected that there should be overlaps between these plans as they are both being prepared at the same time.

The LAP is required to be consistent with any objectives of the RSES concerning strategic enterprise/employment sites or in respect of development-type or location-specific development (e.g. rural development). In this regard, both the RSES and the Development Plans Guidelines recognise accessibility as a central consideration in selecting employment zonings and the transport provision of potential locations for development needs to be strategically considered, including through the application of the sequential approach.

The Development Plan identifies Trinity Wharf lands as a strategic employment landbank for Wexford Town and the Commercial Quay Redevelopment Area, as well as the planned marina at Trinity Wharf, as significant tourist infrastructure. While outside the plan boundary, connections to Rosslare Europort should be considered as part of the economic approach in the LAP, and opportunities to leverage the connections with the port should be considered, consistent with RPO 16 and RPO 42 of the RSES.

In terms of identifying the optimal locations for employment zonings, the key criteria should be compact growth, the sequential approach to development and the options for sustainable transport. The reuse of appropriate brownfield sites and vacant premises should also be prioritised.

The facilitation of retail facilities will also need to be considered to provide for the anticipated population growth. Particular regard should be had to the sequential approach to the location of retail development and other provisions of the *Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2012), and the position of the settlement in the retail hierarchy of the Development Plan.

7. Transport and mobility

The *Climate Action Plan 2023* identifies the need to drive implementation and acceleration of measures to reduced car kilometres, guided by the *National Sustainable Mobility Policy* (2022) (NSMP), in addition to the proposed National Demand Management Strategy. The NSMP commits to delivering an additional 500,000 daily sustainable journeys by 2030 and a ten percent reduction in kilometres driven by fossil fuelled cars by 2030.

The integration of land use and transportation is centrally important to this objective and to the objectives and provisions of the NPF (NPO 27, NPO 33 and NPO 64, among others) and the RSES.

The RSES identifies the requirement for a local transport plan (LTP) for the town under RPO 16. The Development Plan (Objective WT03) also commits to the preparation of an LTP to inform the LAP in consultation with the NTA and TII. It is recommended that the planning authority engages with both agencies in the preparation of this LTP, particularly due to the proximity of the M11/M25 to the boundary of the settlement, as noted in the Development Plan (Objective WT08).

The NTA's and TII's *Area Based Transport Assessment Advice Note* (2018) (ABTA) and the ABTA *How to Guide Guidance Document Pilot Methodology* (2021) should be considered by the planning authority in preparing the LTP. The LTP should inform the preparation of the LAP and, in particular, the zoning provisions therein. It is recommended that the planning authority liaises with the NTA and TII in the preparation of the LTP.

In addition, the LAP should set out an ambitious, but realistic, modal shift target for Wexford Town.

More broadly, the transport strategy of the LAP should also demonstrate consistency with the Avoid-Shift-Improve principle and the 10-minute town concept.

Similarly, the application of the *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets* (revised 2019) and the NTA's *Permeability Best Practice Guide* (2015) will also ensure enhanced access to public transport, pedestrian and cycle routes within the area of the LAP.

8. Climate change mitigation and adaptation

It is a National Strategic Outcome of the NPF to transition to a low carbon climate resilient society.

The effective implementation of climate mitigation objectives through the LAP, consistent with national and regional policy objectives, will be critical to the achievement of Government's Greenhouse Gas emissions reduction target to mitigate climate change.

Flood risk management is the most critical climate change adaptation measure to be addressed in the LAP, informed by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

The planning authority should ensure that it has regard to the detailed requirements and provisions of the section 28 Guidelines: *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2009) (Flood Guidelines), including the staged approach to flood risk assessment and, in particular, the application of the sequential approach and the requirement to carry out the plan-making justification test.

The planning authority should overlay the flood risk zones on any proposed land use zoning maps to illustrate the potential flood risk arising and to demonstrate how the sequential approach has been applied. The planning authority is also requested to make a copy of digital mapping data available to the Office and to the OPW to facilitate assessment.

The Office notes that the preparation of a flood relief scheme is at a preliminary stage for Wexford Town and if details are available in relation to this project it would be helpful if they were provided as part of the preparation of the LAP.

Further, the planning authority is strongly advised to liaise with the OPW in the carrying out of an SFRA to avoid issues arising at draft LAP stage.

In accordance with NPO 57, the LAP is required to integrate sustainable water management solutions, such as SuDs. In this regard the Office would draw the planning authority's attention to *Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas, Water Sensitive Urban Design, Best Practice Interim Guidance Document* (2022).

9. Environment, and built and natural heritage

The planning authority is the competent authority for the purposes of Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.

In this regard the planning authority is required to have regard to the revised section 28 Guidelines *Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and*

Planning Authorities (2022). It should also consider the Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009).

It is an objective (NPO 52) of the NPF to ensure that the planning system responds to national environmental challenges and that development occurs within environmental limits. The planning authority should ensure the LAP is consistent with objectives of the NPF concerning environmental protection (NPO 52, NPO 57, NPO 58, NPO 60, NPO 62, NPO 63, NPO 64 and NPO 65, among others), in addition to the objectives of the RSES.

In particular, the Office highlights the importance of integrating green and blue infrastructure into the LAP, in accordance with NPO 58 and the objectives and guiding principle of the RSES. Planning for green and blue infrastructure, such as public parks and water bodies can contribute to climate change adaptation, in particular flood risk management through nature-based solutions. It can also make a positive contribution to climate mitigation, when integrated with greenways, and have positive impacts on biodiversity.

Regarding built-heritage, the planning authority should consider what location-specific objectives or measures would assist in the protection or improvement of built heritage over the period of the LAP. In this regard the planning authority should have regard to the *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2011).

The Office recognises that the planning authority has prepared a Heritage-led Regeneration Plan as part of the Historic Towns Initiative which will provide a sound basis for the consideration of such matters in the LAP.

10. Implementation and monitoring

The NPF and the RSES place increased emphasis on the importance of monitoring the implementation of statutory strategies and plans, as a measure of plan-effectiveness and to continually update a relevant evidence-base to inform future planning strategies.

The planning authority is encouraged to set out specific provisions for monitoring the implementation of the objectives of the LAP, having regard to the provisions of the Development Plans Guidelines and the LAP Guidelines.

Summary

In summary, the Office commends your authority for the preparation of this Issues Paper. The Office advises your authority to pay particular attention to the following issues in the preparation of the LAP:

- the draft LAP should ensure that residential land use zoning is consistent with the core strategy;
- a revised approach to zoning land for residential development is required for the LAP. Zoning objectives should prioritise housing in areas close to the facilities and services of the town centre where land is already served by appropriate infrastructure or is capable of being serviced within the plan-period, and avoid leapfrogging to more peripheral locations;
- an infrastructure assessment/settlement capacity audit should be prepared for all zoned land. The planning authority is advised to liaise with infrastructure providers to ensure that the existing infrastructure has the capacity to accommodate growth allocated under the core strategy for Wexford Town within the period of the LAP;
- the approach to residential density and building height in the LAP should be in accordance with national guidelines and should be consistent with any SPPRs;
- ensure that the draft LAP is consistent with the planning authority's *Traveller* Accommodation Programme 2019-2024, including any specific recommendations or needs identified for Wexford Town;
- the draft LAP should address matters relating to economic development and undertake an infrastructure assessment/settlement capacity audit prior to the zoning of land for economic purposes. The draft LAP should also address the opportunity/strategic locations identified in the Development Plan, such as Trinity Wharf, as well as other economic/regeneration matters including the connections with Rosslare Europort, the LECP and the Heritage-led Regeneration Plan for Wexford Town;
- the LAP should be informed by the preparation of a Local Transport Plan and should integrate land use and transport planning to provide for enhanced active and sustainable transport modes to help achieve the 10-minute town concept. The planning authority is advised to consult with both the NTA and TII in this regard;

- the SFRA should be carried out in accordance with the Flood Guidelines to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding. The planning authority is advised to liaise with OPW in this regard;
- adequate provision should be made for the proposed flood relief scheme in Wexford Town. The planning authority is advised to liaise with OPW in this regard; and
- policies and objectives in relation to the implementation of SuDs and nature based solutions as a means for managing surface water run-off at key development sites should be included.

The Office looks forward to reviewing the future draft LAP and is committed to continued positive engagement with your authority in implementation of national and regional policies at the county and local level.

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 the undersigned or at plans@opr.ie.

Is mise le meas,

Onne

Anne Marie O'Connor

Deputy Regulator and Director of Plans Evaluations