

22nd August 2025

Administrative Officer,
Planning Section,
Sligo County Council,
City Hall,
Quay Street,
Sligo.

Re: Issues Paper for the Sligo Town and Environs Urban Area Plan

A chara,

Thank you for your authority's work in preparing the Issues Paper (the Issues Paper) for the proposed Sligo Town and Environs Urban Area Plan (the plan).

The Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) notes the decision of Sligo County Council (Planning Authority) to prepare an Urban Area Plan in anticipation of the commencement of the Planning and Development Act 2024 (the 2024 Act). The Planning Authority is commended for publishing an Issues Paper, engaging proactively with the public, and notifying the Office of the intention to prepare a plan for Sligo Town and Environs. The Office notes that this is a non-statutory consultation, and advises that statutory consultations, such as preparation of a draft Urban Area Plan, cannot commence until such a time as the relevant provisions are commenced.

Nevertheless, the Office has set out some broad issues relevant to the preparation of a plan for a local area, in addition to some specific issues of particular relevance to the preparation of this plan, under the following headings:

1. [Strategic policy framework](#)
2. [Development plan core strategy](#)
3. [Zoning, compact growth and infrastructural services](#)
4. [Regeneration](#)

5. [Education, social and community amenities](#)
6. [Economic development, employment and retail](#)
7. [Transport and mobility](#)
8. [Flood risk management](#)
9. [Climate action](#)
10. [Environment, built and natural heritage](#)
11. [Implementation and monitoring](#)

The comments are offered without prejudice to any observations and recommendations by the Office at future stages of the plan-making process. They also 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, at future stages of the development of this plan.

1. Strategic policy framework

When commenced, section 71 of the 2024 Act requires urban area plans to be consistent with the settlement-specific and zoning objectives set out in the relevant county development plan . Accordingly, an area plan for Sligo Town and Environs prepared under the 2024 Act requires the integrated overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of County Sligo as set out in the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 (the County Development Plan) and to take due account of any relevant transport strategy of the National Transport Authority (NTA).

Recognising Sligo Town's Regional Growth Centre status in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (RSES), the Office encourages the Planning Authority to liaise with Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) in preparation of the draft plan, particularly where clarity is required on how the objectives and guiding principles set out in the RSES relate to the plan.

2. Development plan core strategy

The Office notes the core strategy of the County Development Plan provides for a housing supply target of 2,649 units for Sligo Town during the period 2024-2030.

A key part of the Office's assessment of the draft plan is to consider whether the objectives are consistent with the level of growth set out in the core strategy for Sligo Town and Environs. As such, the Office highlights the opportunity for the Planning Authority in preparing the plan to set out clear implementable policy objectives, essentially building blocks, to ensure the successful delivery of housing growth requirements in Sligo Town and Environs.

3. Zoning, compact growth and infrastructural services

The Office recognises that the plan will not address zoning and that the zoning objectives for Sligo Town and Environs are set out in the County Development Plan. As such, our assessment will carefully consider whether proposed objectives are consistent with the core strategy and objectives of the County Development Plan and whether they can demonstrate consistency with the objectives for compact growth and densification¹ under the National Planning Framework First Revision (2025) (NPF) NPO 7, NPO 45 and the RSES RPO 3.7.39. and RPO 3.7.44. The implementation of effective compact growth to avoid urban sprawl also plays a key role in climate change mitigation. The preparation of a building heights study, as a strategy to guide the future development of the Sligo Regional Growth Centre, as supported by RPO 3.7.44. should form part of an urban development framework for the plan.

In relation to residential development, any provisions or standards for density or building height in the Area Plan is required to have regard to relevant section 28 guidelines and to comply with any SPPRs therein, including, in particular:

¹ Including through reductions in vacancy, re-use of existing buildings, infill development, area or site-based regeneration and increase building heights.

- Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2024);
- Urban Development and Building Heights, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2018); and
- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2023).

4. Regeneration

Both the NPF (NPO 12 urban places; NPO 14 urban regeneration; NPO 26 proportionate growth; and NPO 45 increasing residential use) and the policy objectives of the RSES emphasise the importance of opportunities for urban regeneration to create attractive, liveable, and high-quality urban places. The reuse of brownfield sites and vacant buildings will also contribute to climate change mitigation.

The Office notes the Issues Paper highlights the 14 regeneration sites identified in the County Development Plan within Sligo Town.

The Office acknowledges that the Wine Street Masterplan accompanies the County Development Plan, and that the preparation of the Sligo Docklands Masterplan (Harbour Area Master Plan) is underway.

The Public Realm Plan for Sligo, commissioned in 2018 by the Planning Authority, has supported successful Urban Regeneration and Development Fund funding, which has funded projects which prioritise accessibility, attractive town centre spaces and urban regeneration at O'Connell Street, Stephen Street car park and Queen Maeve's Square. The Planning Authority is commended for its progress on this and forthcoming projects, highlighted in the Issues Paper for Stephen Street, Rockwood Parade, Tobergal Lane, Water Lane and Holborn Street.

The Office considers that development frameworks to guide the future development of the identified regeneration sites with appropriate guidance regarding layout, massing, permeability, green infrastructure and Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) etc. should be prepared as part of the plan.

The plan also provides an opportunity to identify any further opportunity and regeneration sites, or vacant or underutilised buildings, in accordance with the guiding principles of the RSES for urban infill and regeneration, where applicable. The Issues Paper references two significant areas for future urban regeneration in this regard:

- redevelopment of the Harbour Area, and
- City Campus Project

The Office recommends that the plan includes a strong policy framework to support the utilisation of existing buildings, brownfield/infill sites, and derelict and underutilised sites. The Planning Authority should consider proactive land activation measures including the Planning Authority's powers for land acquisition / compulsory purchase and derelict sites and vacant land. The plan should also align with sources of funding to facilitate key regeneration projects such as the recently announced Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund Scheme, and Town Centre First-aligned funding streams under the Government's Town Centre First, A Policy Approach for Irish Towns (2022) (Town Centre First).

5. Education, social and community amenities

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

As such, the plan should be informed by a social or civic infrastructure audit to establish the capacity of existing facilities, including community centres, leisure, amenity and cultural facilities to serve existing and future residents, and identify the need for any additional facilities.

It is also important that access to existing and proposed facilities by walking or cycling is prioritised consistent with the sustainable approach to settlement and mobility discussed below. The Issues Paper highlights active travel Initiatives and progress on these and a program for future initiatives should form part of the plan.

The provision of investment in education and training are central to reinforcing the delivery of sustainable communities, promoting inclusion and offering choice and accessibility to a high standard of education and employment.

The Office encourages the Planning Authority to engage with the Forward Planning Section and Site Acquisition and Property Management Section of the Department of Education. The need for further school sites should be determined via an evidence-based approach taking account of proximity to public transport services and active travel methods.

Importantly, given RPO 7.6 of the RSES which seeks to support and promote the growth, development and success of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance consortium's ambition towards becoming a Technological University² serving the west and north-west, the provision of suitable student accommodation should be considered as part of the plan.

The County Sligo Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2030 – Sligo 2030 One Voice One Vision and Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025-2029, should also inform the plan to provide for the co-ordinated spatial planning of housing and community services for the area. In this regard, the Office notes that the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025-2029 includes three sites which have a traveller accommodation objective at Finisklin, Cleveragh and Shannon Eighter in Sligo Town and Environs.

6. Economic development, employment and retail

The NPF, RSES and section 28 guidelines emphasise the need to take an evidence-based approach to the inclusion of objectives for employment and other commercial uses.

In particular, the plan should be aligned with the detailed economic strategy and all relevant guiding principles of the RSES, in addition to any objectives concerning strategic

² Atlantic Technological University (ATU) was established on 1 April 2022 following the merger of Galway/Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Sligo, and Letterkenny Institute of Technology.

enterprise / employment sites. It will also need to ensure it is consistent with the economic strategy of the County Development Plan and any associated objectives.

The Office notes the RSES outlines an ambitious target to grow the number of jobs in Sligo Town and Environs to 17,000 by 2040 (RPO 3.7.57). Further to this, the RSES and County Development Plan identify the new IDA Business Park at Oakfield as a strategic employment landbank for Sligo area and also the existing IDA Park at Finisklin for potential consolidation and expansion of enterprise and employment uses in the Northern Docklands area. The RSES and County Development Plan identify the need to give effect to the infrastructure needed to transform Sligo into a Smart City.

The Office recognises the Issues Paper highlights the promotion of Sligo as a tourism destination, supported by the RSES and Fáilte Ireland's Destination and Experience Development Plans and the plan should seek to build on this success.

The facilitation of retail facilities also needs to be considered to provide for the anticipated population growth. Particular regard should be given 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 town in the retail hierarchy of the County Development Plan.

The Office welcomes that the plan will focus on the importance of a strong retail sector in maintaining the vitality of Sligo's urban core, in accordance with Town Centre First policy.

7. Transport and mobility

The Climate Action Plan 2025 identifies the need to significantly reduce car kilometres and increase sustainable journeys, guided by the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022) and the proposed National Demand Management Strategy.

The integration of land use and transportation is centrally important to this objective and to the objectives and provisions of the NPF (NPO 37 alternatives to the car; NPO 43 location of new homes; NPO 69 to reduce our carbon footprint; and NPO 93 air quality) and the RSES.

The preparation of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) as part of the County Development Plan, in consultation with the NTA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, provides an opportunity for the plan to implement the measures for Sligo Town and Environs set out in the LTP, including ambitious (but realistic) modal shift targets.

In order to increase the potential for trips to be made on foot, bicycle or public transport, the plan should demonstrate consistency with Avoid-Shift-Improve principle and the 10-minute town concept, as well as providing for the proactive implementation of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (revised 2019) and the NTA's Permeability Best Practice Guide.

8. Flood risk management

In accordance with NPO 77 and NPO 79 of the NPF, the plan is required to integrate sustainable water management solutions, using SuDS nature-based solutions. The use of nature-based solutions for rainwater management is supported and required to have regard to section 28 guidelines and government guidance including, in particular:

- Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2024);
- Development Plans, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022) (the Development Plans Guidelines);
- 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); and
- Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets Advice Note 5 – Road and Street Drainage using Nature Based Solutions (2023).

The guidance promotes a more systemic and plan-led approach to water sensitive urban design that combines nature-based solutions with spatial planning, and advises on the cross-sectoral benefits of a nature base solutions in terms of protecting against pluvial flood risk, climate adaptation, water quality, biodiversity, road safety in active travel schemes.

9. Climate action

It is a National Strategic Outcome of the NPF to transition to a carbon neutral and climate resilient society. The effective implementation of climate mitigation objectives through the plan are critical to the achievement of the Government's Greenhouse Gas emissions reduction target to mitigate climate change under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended (the Climate Act).

The efficient use of land, including through infill development and brownfield development consistent with compact growth, will ensure consistency with NPO 67 (land use) of the NPF. An integrated approach to land use and transport planning will help ensure that climate action is integral to the plan in support of national mitigation targets (NPO 69 of the NPF) under the Climate Act. The plan should also consider how development in the area might best contribute to the delivery of renewable energy consistent with NPO 70 of the NPF. These NPOs, together with the relevant objectives of the RSES and County Development Plan, will be of particular importance in this respect.

The effective implementation of climate adaption objectives through the plan will be essential to ensure Sligo Town and Environs is climate resilient into the future. Flood risk management will be the most critical climate change adaptation measure to be addressed in the plan. The National Adaptation Framework (2024) specifies the national strategy for the application of adaptation measures in different sectors and by local authorities in their administrative areas in order to reduce the vulnerability of the State to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of any positive effects that may occur.

10. Environment, built and natural heritage

The Planning Authority is the competent authority for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment and will be aware of the Strategic Environmental Assessment, Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (2022) issued under section 28 of the Act and the Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland, Guidance for Planning Authorities (2010).

The Planning Authority should also ensure the plan is consistent with objectives of the NPF and RSES concerning environmental protection. In this regard the Office highlights

the importance of integrating green and blue infrastructure into the plan consistent with NPO 82 and planning for greenbelts (NPO 83) of the NPF. Planning for green and blue infrastructure can contribute to climate change adaptation, in particular flood risk management through nature-based solutions (NPO 78, NPO 79 and NPO 92). It can also make a positive contribution to climate mitigation and have positive impacts on biodiversity and clean air (NPO 93).

The Planning Authority should also ensure the plan is consistent with objectives of the NPF (NPO 89 and NPO 90) and the RSES concerning built heritage. Therefore, 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 plan. Accordingly, the Planning Authority should have regard to the Architectural Heritage Protection, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011). The Office acknowledges that five Architecture Conservation Areas (ACA) are identified in the County Development Plan for Sligo Town.

11. Implementation and monitoring

The NPF (NPO 105, NPO 106 and NPO 108) and the RSES place increased emphasis on the importance of monitoring the implementation of statutory strategies and plans to measure plan effectiveness and to continually update a relevant evidence base to inform future planning strategies.

The Planning Authority is therefore encouraged to set out specific provisions for monitoring the implementation of the objectives of the plan, having regard to the provisions of the Development Plans Guidelines.

Summary

In summary, the Office commends the Planning Authority for the preparation of this Issues Paper. The Office advises the Planning Authority to pay particular attention to the following issues in the preparation of the draft plan:

- clear implementable policy objectives, essentially building blocks, to ensure the successful delivery of housing growth requirements in Sligo Town and Environs;

- Sligo's role as a regionally important employment hub by promoting economic development in line with the RSES and the Economic Strategy of the County Development Plan;
- a building heights survey / analysis to identify suitable locations to facilitate higher densities and increased building heights;
- preparation of development frameworks for key regeneration sites providing guidance for future development regarding layout, massing, permeability, green infrastructure and SuDS;
- development of a strong policy framework to support the utilisation of existing buildings, brownfield/infill sites, and derelict and underutilised sites, in addition to current strategies, to tackle dereliction and vacancy and land activation measures to help reduce dereliction and vacancy;
- inclusion of masterplans for the Harbour Area and the City Campus Project;
- key implementation measures and actions from the LTP including ambitious (but realistic) modal shift targets for Sligo Town and Environs; and
- location specific objectives or measures to assist in the protection and / or improvement of built heritage and afford protection to the five existing ACAs in Sligo Town.

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



Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the
Planning Regulator

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,

Anne Marie O'Connor

Deputy Regulator and Director of Plans Evaluation

Designated Public Official under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015
