

Westmeath County Council

Áras An Chontae,

Mount Street,

Mullingar,

Co Westmeath

Roscommon County Council

Aras an Chontae,

Roscommon,

Co Roscommon

31 January 2024

**Re: Issues Paper – Athlone Joint UAP 2024 – 2030**

Dear Sir/Madam

As noted in the 'Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan 2024-2030 Strategic Issues Paper', Athlone is now designated as a 'Regional Growth Centre' which confers significant scope to position the town as a dynamic hub for new and expanding communities, business and enterprise, sustainable transport, tourism and heritage as well as a platform for new joint initiatives between Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils. The Strategic Issues Paper also notes that new opportunities will present in association with the town's projected population growth and economic development.

Athlone has experienced sustained population growth since 2016 with 22,869 persons living in the urban area in 2022. The Joint Urban Area Plan will have a strategic role in setting out sufficient amounts of land, including the identification of appropriate locations, to accommodate this population target and associated housing demand.

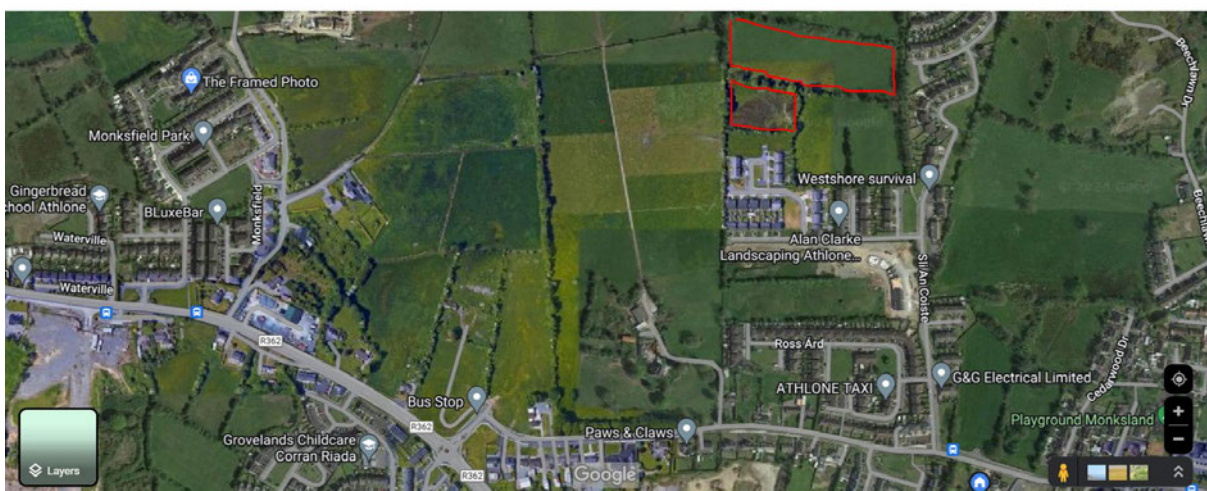
This significant level of growth highlights the importance of housing and service provision to meet these demands and support sustainable development within the town. Whilst the Strategic Issues Paper estimates that the town's strategic population target of +30,000 persons will be met by 2031 (based on the previous population allocations set out in the National Planning Framework Project 2040 and the Regional & Economic Spatial Strategy), it is essential to note there is a risk that these may not be fully representative of the population numbers now available from the most recent Census data, and therefore risking housing shortage.

This potential risk is reflected by research undertaken by The Irish Institutional Property Group, which commissioned Dr. Ronan Lyons, an Assistant Professor of Economics at Trinity College, Dublin, to review the ESRI report in August 2020. Lyons contrasts the predictions of Project 2040 starkly with what he believes will be the actual outcome based on his analysis of current and likely future demographic and economic trends. Key findings of the review include:

- The Lyons review states that demand for housing up to 2025 will require an annual build of 47,000 units and not 25,000 units as previously envisaged.
- Furthermore, that estimate is based on demand created by net migration of just 20,000 whereas if the pre-Covid pattern re-emerges (and global trends suggest that it will), then immigration is likely to be higher than that, of at least 33,000 every year.
- The Lyons review also reflects on another interesting dimension of the housing market, which is the radical change in household composition. Between the 1996 and 2016 Census, 66% of new households were one- and two-person households, which now constitute over 50% of all households.
- Another significant statistic is that 40,000 new households are what are described as “crammers,” that is households made up of people who are not related to one another. That cohort constituted 35% of the overall increase in all households between 2011 and 2016.
- In contrast to the ESRI report cited above which used a national household size of 2.75, the Lyons review states that the demographics imply a true household size in 2016 closer to 2.4, requiring an additional 217,000 households. If Ireland’s average household size converges to the European average, it will create major demand, especially for homes for smaller households:
  - Even with a fixed population, a rise in the fraction of 1-2 person households creates demand for a significant number of new dwellings.
  - Relative to a 2.7 average household size, a population of 4.8m with an average household size of 2.5 requires 142,000 extra dwellings.
  - This is the equivalent of 11 years of construction output at 2015 rates.
  - Convergence to the EU average of 2.3 would require an additional 300,000 dwellings.

The trends identified above are further supported by the most recent Census (2022) results. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) found that the national average household has decreased to 2.74, reflecting the long-term trend of declining household size. It is, therefore, crucial to ensure that new housing stock is reflective of these trends and changes, ensuring that appropriate zoned land is readily available; and assisting Athlone to fulfil its ‘Regional Growth Centre’ designation.

With the above in mind I welcome the opportunity to submit land for residential development in the Athlone Joint Urban Area plan 2024-2030. The landholding (plan number 30 & 32 on Folio RN7868F comprising 0.70 & 2.28 hectares respectively) is located in the Mount William area of Monksland in Athlone, see red highlighted sections below of screenshot taken from Google maps.



Although living in Monksland I work for a Pharmaceutical company in a business park on the east side of town and witness first-hand how hard it is for new employees to find housing who wish to move to or settle in the Athlone area hence the need for more housing development in the Monksland area of Athlone. The landholding would be a 10 minute drive to employment in the business parks on the east side of town and within walking or cycling distance of employment in the business parks on the west side of town. It is also well served by the town Bus Route (A1 & A2) and has shops, parks and recreational facilities including the Monksland greenway within 10/15 minutes' walk.

Roscommon County council have previously purchased zoned land from myself in 2019 and the landholding I am looking to submit for residential development is very close to the land purchased by the County council in 2019.

Yours Sincerely

Derek Goode

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