

Westmeath County Council
Roscommon County Council

Via: athlonejointplan.ie

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Westmeath & Roscommon County Council Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan Submission by IDA Ireland - Stage 1 Pre-Draft Consultation Stage

IDA Ireland is pleased to provide the following submission in relation to the proposed Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan 2024 – 2030.

IDA Support for the Plan

Athlone serves as the primary economic driver for the midlands region in attracting employment and providing the necessary infrastructure to sustain business and enterprise. Athlone's designation as a Regional Growth Centre provides exciting opportunities to capitalise upon the town's spatial and infrastructural strengths, synergies with the Technological University of the Shannon and successes associated with sectoral clustering and attracting inward investment. In this regard, IDA fully supports the preparation of the Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan (2024-2030) and is committed to working with Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council in its delivery and in achieving its key objectives, particularly in relation to economic development and attracting inward investment.

IDA Strategy Objectives

Regional development is at the centre of IDA's current strategy *Driving Recovery & Sustainable Growth*. IDA is committed to the pursuit of more balanced, compact regional development which can deliver complementary efficiency and equity gains, with the overall impact of helping to advance national development.

Key to IDA's success in the past and essential to future success is strategic collaboration with national and local stakeholders on the enhancement of the regional value proposition for FDI. On that basis, it is essential that each region has the necessary conditions in place to foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and talent.

The delivery of necessary infrastructure and property solutions that are appropriately established and zoned, the availability of a skilled and future ready workforce, and an emphasis on quality of life and placemaking in each region are pre-requisites to winning continued investment from MNCs.

The national context for IDA's approach to winning investment for the regions is set by Project Ireland 2040 and the associated National Planning Framework (NPF), National Development Plan and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. IDA's Regions pillar

also aligns with the objectives of the Programme for Government in relation to regional development.

The overarching ambition of national policy on regions is to promote balanced, compact and sustainable growth outside of Dublin. The realisation of the strategic outcomes of the NPF, through the growth and development of regional cities and towns, will significantly enhance Ireland's value proposition to FDI and support emerging urban locations of scale, such as Athlone, to become future FDI growth drivers.

Athlone – A Key Regional Growth Centre

As set out in the Issues Paper for the Plan preparation, it is envisaged that Regional Growth Centres, such as Athlone, will be a focus for significant growth and investment to enable them to serve as regional economic drivers as envisioned in the National Planning Framework (NPF). One of the key strategic issues for Athlone, as introduced under the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) is the promotion of Athlone as a principal location for regional economic development, and to support increased employment and enterprise opportunities. This is entirely consistent with IDA's view of Athlone as a strategic location for the growth and expansion of Foreign Direct Investment in key sectors. Athlone's central location, regional transport connectivity (e.g. road, rail and public services), established infrastructure such as broadband and accessibility to other large Irish markets, such as Dublin City and Galway, have already contributed to the town's robust economic base and extensive catchment area.

The national context for IDA's approach to winning investment for the regions is set by Project Ireland 2040 and the associated National Planning Framework (NPF), National Development Plan and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. Our Regions strategy also aligns with the objectives of the Programme for Government in relation to regional development. The overarching ambition of national policy on regions is to promote balanced, compact and sustainable growth outside of Dublin. The realisation of the strategic outcomes of the NPF, through the growth and development of regional cities and towns, would significantly enhance Ireland's value proposition to FDI and support emerging urban locations of scale to become future FDI growth drivers.

The Midlands–West Region, and the Monksland Life Science Cluster

The Midlands-West region has proven itself as a global hub of choice when it comes to attracting strategic manufacturing, research, and business activities of the world's leading Pharmaceutical & Medical Technology companies. Central to this is the cluster of high value life science and biopharmaceutical manufacturing that has established within a vibrant hub in Monksland on the west side of Athlone. Companies include;

- Alkermes (and its new parent company Novo Nordisk)
- Alexion (and its new parent company Astra Zeneca)
- Jazz Pharmaceuticals
- Arran Chemical Company (a member of Almac Group)

Figure 1 shows the broader cluster of high technology manufacturing facilities within 60 minutes of the Monksland hub.

The continued expansion and growth of the Monksland biopharma industry cluster is seen by IDA as a key enabler to achieving critical national targets for balanced regional

investment, and the sustainable growth of the Athlone urban area, all within the context of the economic and social objectives of the Joint Urban Area Plan.

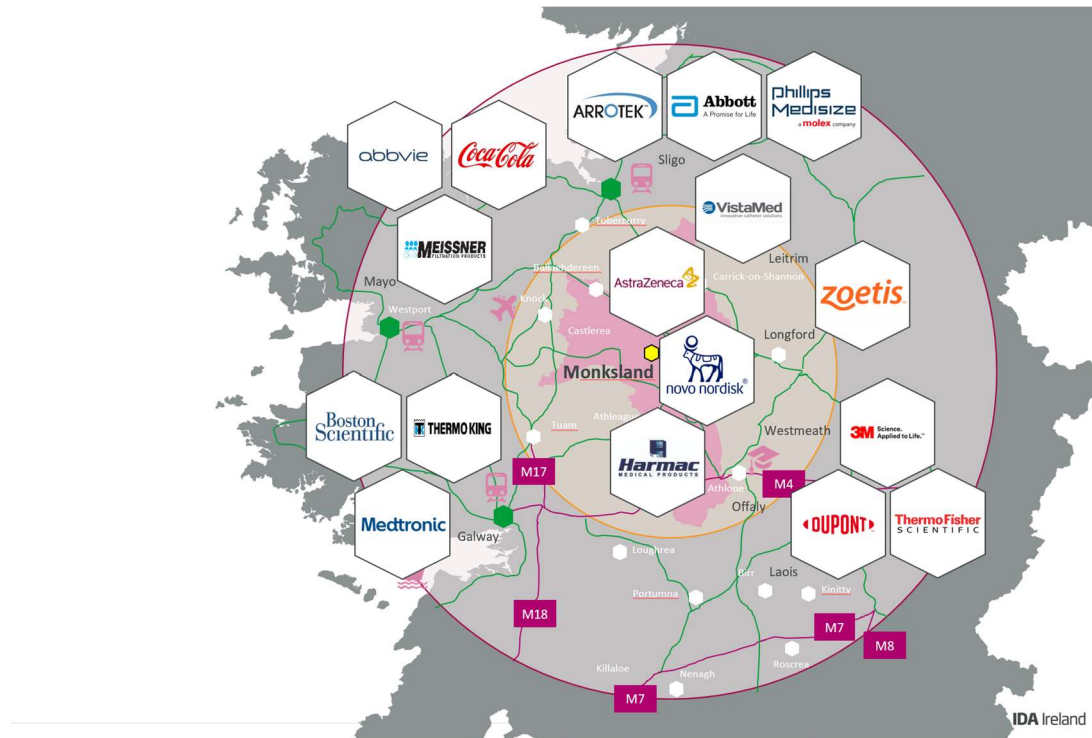


Figure 1 FDI Manufacturing Sites within 60 minutes of Monksland

This growth will be achieved through a combination of (i) the expansion of the existing established manufacturing operations in the area, all of which are operating at the high end of the global biopharmaceutical supply chain, and (ii) the attraction of new greenfield investment to the area.

A World Class Hub for Biopharmaceutical Manufacturing

Since 2016, The current Monksland and Bellanamullia Local Area Plan has served the area well and enabled the Monksland industrial zone to transition into a world class hub for biopharmaceutical manufacture including research and development. IDA anticipates that significant new investment will be attracted to the location in the period 2024 to 2030 and is keen that the Athlone Joint Urban Plan continues to enable and broaden the growth and expansion of the Monksland cluster. It is considered imperative that the cluster is allowed to expand sustainably whereby sufficient lands zoned for Industry and High Technology are available to facilitate the expansion of existing sites, and the attraction of new life science manufacturing and R&D.

The creation of further high value employment in the Monksland life sciences cluster will require appropriate forward planning including improvements in sustainable transport links, water services and related utilities. IDA is committed to working with the Local Authorities and all relevant public and private stakeholders to ensure that the preparation of a balanced and sustainable plan for Athlone can contribute to significant economic development for the region, including the attraction of high value Foreign Direct Investment into the future. The creation of high value employment opportunities in the Athlone catchment will be fundamental to achieving the town’s strategic

population target of +30,000 persons by 2031, and the expansion of the life sciences manufacturing cluster at Monksland should be a key component of this plan.


Athlone has in excess of 1,100 active enterprises within 5 kms of Athlone, employing over 13,000 people from the regional centre and further afield. A considerable proportion of these firms (24%) are from the following sectors and clusters:

- Life sciences;
- Global business services.
- Engineering, manufacturing & construction;
- Fintech & ICT;
- Professional, scientific & technical activities.
- Tourism.

The majority of these companies benefit from the continued strong connectivity and accessibility of Athlone, the continued development of appropriate housing, the planning and development of landing spaces and growth spaces for companies, the quality of life the midlands can offer, the strong enterprise ecosystem of indigenous, Enterprise Ireland Local Enterprise Office and multinational IDA Ireland companies operating in the region and the active promotion of Athlone and the wider midlands region.

These companies benefit from proximity and engagement with TUS and other education and training providers in the Athlone environs, the continued promotion of Athlone, its environs and the wider Midlands Region as attractive destinations for citizens, businesses and Investors including the continued development of a vibrant and thriving town centre. There is a strong multinational base of 24 IDA-backed firms currently located in Athlone and its environs. The creation of further high value employment in the Athlone environs will require continued ambition, engagement and appropriate forward planning. IDA is committed to working with the Local Authorities and all relevant public and private stakeholders to ensure that the preparation of a balanced and sustainable plan for Athlone can contribute to significant economic development for the region, including the attraction of high value Foreign Direct Investment into the future.

Yours faithfully



IDA Ireland