

**A key parameter for the future development of Athlone is the effective implementation of compact growth. Compact growth seeks to consolidate the urban built environment in order to develop more integrated and connected settlements with improved integration between land uses, social / community infrastructure and services and sustainable modes of travel.**

**Established urban framework areas such as Monksland / Bellanamullia, Curragh / Lissywollen, Lissywollen South and Cornamagh, in conjunction with a range of potential opportunity sites, have capacity to cater for a significant extent of residential development in the Plan area.**

**Liveable neighbourhoods, those which provide an appropriate mix of adaptable and inclusive housing options and social / community infrastructure, will set the foundation for delivering Athlone's sustainable communities. Sustainable communities are places of resilience, where the needs of everyone in the community are met, the economy is robust with economic security established and the natural environment is protected. A key characteristic of sustainable communities is high permeability with the surrounding built environment. Drawing from the '10 Minute City' concept, ease of access to essential employment, recreational and social services within a 10-minute walk or bicycle journey of one's home can positively contribute to health, wellbeing and quality of life, social inclusion and improved opportunities to encourage sustainable mobility patterns.**

**Athlone's employment profile largely centres on professional services, information & communication, retail and manufacturing with other key sectors being public administration, transportation and accommodation & food. In line with Town Centre First policy guidance, the Local Authorities acknowledge that a strong retail sector is a key attribute in maintaining the vitality of urban centres with respect to employment and economic activity**

**The Joint Urban Area Plan will set out a policy framework guiding the alignment of new development, sustainable transport modes and social / community infrastructure in order to ensure Athlone's growth is balanced, socially inclusive with respect to culture and people and meets the current and future needs of Athlone's neighbourhoods and communities.**

1        Monksland already has a significant residential housing provision with a significant and diverse population. Whilst I acknowledge that there is a plan afoot to develop and create a "heart" in this area, I personally would question the logic of any more residential houses being developed at this time until the full range of services and efficient infrastructures are in place. I know that there's a housing shortage but it's not good enough to build houses in an area

which is not capable of meeting the needs of the people who will live in these houses. This is just a short term solution. In fact, since the responsibility of providing local authority housing was no longer a function of individual Local Authorities, the housing situation has become a crisis. Surely local authorities are best placed to establish the housing needs in their catchment area and this function should be returned to Local Authorities.

2 At the moment, there is one supermarket in Monksland (excluding the Tesco Express). Efforts to have planning passed for a second and arguably a more competitive and affordable supermarket have been ongoing for years but to no avail. No further residential housing should be approved until a second supermarket has been approved. A large proportion of the residents of Monksland and its environs, travel to Roscommon Town or Ballinasloe to avail of a choice of supermarkets and retail outlets rather than suffering the traffic levels in Athlone. This is counterproductive on many levels including employment, use of personal cars, wellbeing and sense of belonging, etc. A second supermarket for the moment, would potentially counteract this issue. One of the reasons given for the most recent refusal by Roscommon County Council for the development of a second supermarket was that it would be car dependent. This makes no sense to the general public given the scenario outlined above. It is also fair to say that any household doing a weekly shop would not be able to use public transport to bring a large haul of shopping home.

3 Traffic at certain times in Monksland is particularly heavy – school runs, work travel, diversions, etc. particularly at the roundabout at Exit 13 Westbound. This is further impacted when the Town Service buses pull up at a stop at the entrance to Danesfort/Daneshill/Cluain Broc, where there is no proper place for them to park and essentially block the road heading towards SuperValu. This needs to be rectified and appropriate spaces developed to allow buses to pick up passengers without bringing the flow of traffic to a standstill. Some line markings on the roundabout might also help with driving etiquette. It is also extremely difficult and dangerous at these times for residents of the previously mentioned estates to egress onto the main road such is the volume of traffic and in some cases the speed. Alleviation methods might be considered going forward.

4 Monksland needs its own primary school. Part of the traffic issue is created by the fact that most children living in Monksland are transported to schools in Summerhill, Ardkeen, Coosan, Dean Kelly, Bealnamulla, Cloonakilla, etc. A primary school in Monksland would also create a sense of community where children could be at school with the friends that they live beside and parents could develop relationships with their neighbours. This has always been a key element of life in Ireland and it's what builds and sustains good relations in any community. Nobody wants to live in a place where you don't know who your neighbour is. It could be built with an environmental goal of having no transport links – where all the children can walk to school.

5 If you are on any of the Social Media platforms, there are numerous and fairly frequent reports of anti-social behaviour in the larger Monksland area. I would consider that Monksland is a large enough area to have a substation of sorts of An Garda Síochána in a central location which would be open 24/7. I think it would certainly make the residents feel safer and potentially have a limiting effect on the anti-social behaviour.

6 In a previous iteration of this plan, it was quite clear that Athlone was the top dog and Monksland was the poor relation. Essentially, the gist of it was that nothing could happen in Monksland that would have any negative impact on Athlone. Frankly, I'm baffled as to why Roscommon County Council would collaborate on something that would not ultimately lead to having the possible outcome for its residents. It appears that autonomy on this issue has been somewhat being passed to Westmeath County Council. This is particularly relevant in the context of the retail sector. Due to the Orange Loop system, Athlone has become congested with traffic, Church Street is dying on its feet and it's no longer a pleasurable outing to go to Athlone. I think you will find that this is a view shared by many. It would be wrong therefore for Westmeath Council to have any veto when it comes to the development of retail outlets in Monksland or for any planning application for a retail outlet to be refused in Monksland lest it has an impact on Athlone.

7 There is insufficient parking in the town but I suspect that this all part of the greater plan to discourage people from driving their own cars into the town and encouraging the use of public transport. If this is part of the broader "green" initiative then consideration should be given to a time when people will drive zero emission, electric cars (when they come down to a more affordable price) with no environmental impact and will be looking for somewhere to park. There will always be older people, e.g. collecting pensions, shopping, where public transport is not suitable to their needs. There needs to be more charging points/spaces for electric vehicles and this should be considered going forward in any planning context. There shouldn't be a total reliance on public transport.

8 Consideration also needs to be given as to whether the fleet of electric vehicles are at such a level as to encourage people to use them. The timetabling needs to be examined to ascertain if the frequency of the service is appropriate to meet the demands of all of our residents at critical points during the day – school, work, etc.

9 There is a need for more green spaces in the town – a place where people can sit and have a coffee and watch the world go by. I would suggest that it is not sufficient to build a green space and not have somebody employed to manage the spaces. Such spaces can very often turn into havens for anti-social behaviour and are in some cases not maintained in the long term. It would be worthwhile having a team employed by the Local Authority who supervise the spaces, particularly large spaces such as the Regional Sports Centre at Brawney. It should not be a box ticking exercise but rather the creation of a safe space for all which is maintained to a high standard, where rules are adhered to and which is ultimately attractive to all users. I know that there is a plan to develop such a park in Monksland and the same applies for that.

10 The development of a Bark Park is something which is badly needed in Athlone/greater Athlone area given the number of dog owners in the area. A safe and enclosed space where dogs (not dangerous breeds) can be allowed off lead. Again, it needs to be supervised with rules in place. A nominal fee could be charged or an annual fee which would pay for a supervisor if deemed necessary and which would create employment.

11 There is a need for more litter bins in the town and around Monksland. Ones which are regularly emptied and monitored. Not everybody is sufficiently green minded to bring their rubbish home and moreover it's not always possible to carry it around. More dog waste bins are also needed. I usually walk in the Monksland area and you have to pick your step in terms of avoiding walking on dog poop. Between that and the broken glass strewn along the pathways, it is not a pleasant place to walk, not to mention the danger of injury to dogs from the broken glass. This should not be left to a few volunteers to sort. As a country, we are overly reliant on the community and voluntary pillar to perform tasks in our communities that were heretofore carried out by State Bodies. In another few years, there will be very few volunteers and a lot of issues will arise overnight. This is a function which the Council always provided and which should be provided again.

12 In the context of the issue of dog fouling, there is a clear and present need for a Dog Warden – one for Athlone and one for Monksland. We have many incidents of dogs off lead, owners not clearing up after their dogs, dangerous dog breeds with no muzzles, etc. If we want to make our spaces safe and encourage people to walk/exercise, then it is vital this issue is tackled in the short term.

13 I note planning application for the development of a further IDA park on the Ballymahon Road which I understand will be located in close proximity to the Department of Education. This road is already congested with traffic despite what the accompanying traffic management report states. Ask anybody who uses it on a regular basis. There's the Department of Education, Medtronic, Direct Provision Centre, Schools, Retail Outlets, etc. all along that road. There's also substantial additional housing being erected at Cornamaddy and beside the Bounty with more to come. This road will effectively become a car park unless robust traffic management is put in place. If the current system is anything to go by, it is not hard to see why there wouldn't be much faith in this happening. When exiting the motorway eastbound to enter the Ballymahon Road, I have been in my car when it has taken 7 changes of lights for me to actually get onto the Road. This is partly due to the volume of traffic coming from/going into town and partly because there's no yellow box so cars coming from town essentially block the exit from the slip road onto the main road. The lights at the Coal Bunker Junction do not stay green for very long. This needs to be examined. If the IDA is to be given planning permission, then there needs to be traffic lights/yellow boxes to allow the substantial number of employees in the DES, Medtronic and potentially the IDA to be able to safely enter and leave their work premises otherwise accidents are inevitable. There needs to be strict regulations where all services are brought to the IDA site at the one time to minimise disruption and the ripping up of newly laid roads – water, sewage, broadband, etc. Those defunct islands in the middle of the Ballymahon Road at certain points along that road need to be removed. They have no function other than representing a hazard to drivers.

14 Any child who lives in Danesfort/Daneshill/Cluain Broc who wishes to go to a shop must cross at least one busy road to get to one either walking or on a bicycle. Both crossings are located at extremely busy roundabouts and represent potential accidents. This needs to be addressed and a pedestrian crossing established (this could be located at the entrance to these estates which would have a dual purpose in allowing traffic to exit/enter the estates

and allow residents to safely access the opposite footpath and continue safely in either direction. A speed limit sign is imperative in both directions at the entrance to these estates.

15 The issue of street lighting needs to be addressed including the efficient replacement of bulbs, etc. Many people who work full time only have the opportunity for exercise in the evening and during dark hours in Winter time. This should be a basic requirement and be a mandatory requirement in terms of any future developments of roads or buildings