



Forward Planning,
Planning Department,
Roscommon County Council,
Aras An Chontae,
Roscommon,
F42 VR98

1st February 2024

Re: Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan 2024-2030 – Pre-Draft Consultation Strategic Issues Paper

Dear Sir/Madam,

St. Joseph's Football Club, Athlone welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan 2024-2030 – Pre-Draft Consultation Strategic Issues Paper.

St. Joseph's FC Athlone (SJFC) is a community-based football club on the Western side of Athlone, Co. Roscommon. The club was founded in 1998 and has been growing consistently since its foundation. SJFC serves the western catchment area and despite numerous endeavours during the years has to-date no facilities of its own, nor have the club been able to attain a lease or licence to use any lands in Athlone.

Over the past 25 years SJFC has grown to be one of the largest and successful soccer clubs in the Midlands, with close to 500 members (u6's -u16's) playing in the Midland School boy/girl league, FAI Cups etc. This involves over 80 voluntary qualified coaches all Garda Vetted and have participated in official FAI courses, Child Welfare and coaching qualifications applicable



to their age group. This does not include the many committee members and parents who give up their time on a voluntary basis every week to make the club the success it is today.

With this success brings logistic problems such as access to football pitches/astro turf slots, clubhouse/dressing rooms & sanitary facilities for all during training and match days. The lack of meeting/training rooms also limits the amount of on-site education courses that can be given on topics such as health & wellbeing, strength and conditioning, player education and performance to our players. Above all this should be a social amenity for all members of the community, young and old, children to Grandparents to meet and promote social inclusion and provide a recreational facility fit for purpose to serve this extensive community in one central location.

To date, we cater for 11 Age groups with a total of 28 teams training and playing matches in 4 different locations on the East and West side of Athlone. The club expenditure on rent is colossal and increasing on an annual basis which is not sustainable. Two of these venues have indicated that a number of slots/training hours will not be available for the season 2024/25. These rents are not sustainable for the medium to long-term growth of the club.

The Club is seeking through the Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan 2024-2030 to rezone potential lands for Sports & Recreational which may be suitable for development of Football pitches, Astro turf pitches, clubhouse & assoc. works. Monksland and its hinterland lack the facilities and resources that similar areas of population have. In the recent 2022 CSO, results show population figures for the Monksland /BealnaMulla (Urban & Rural) area has a near population equivalent to Roscommon town (Urban & Rural).



The only 'Recreational & Amenity' zoned land on the current LAP 2016 -2022 which is undeveloped relates to an c.8 acres parcel of land which is landlocked with access only through land that is currently zoned Strategic Residential with the Cross River located along its Western boundary.

 Recreation & Amenity

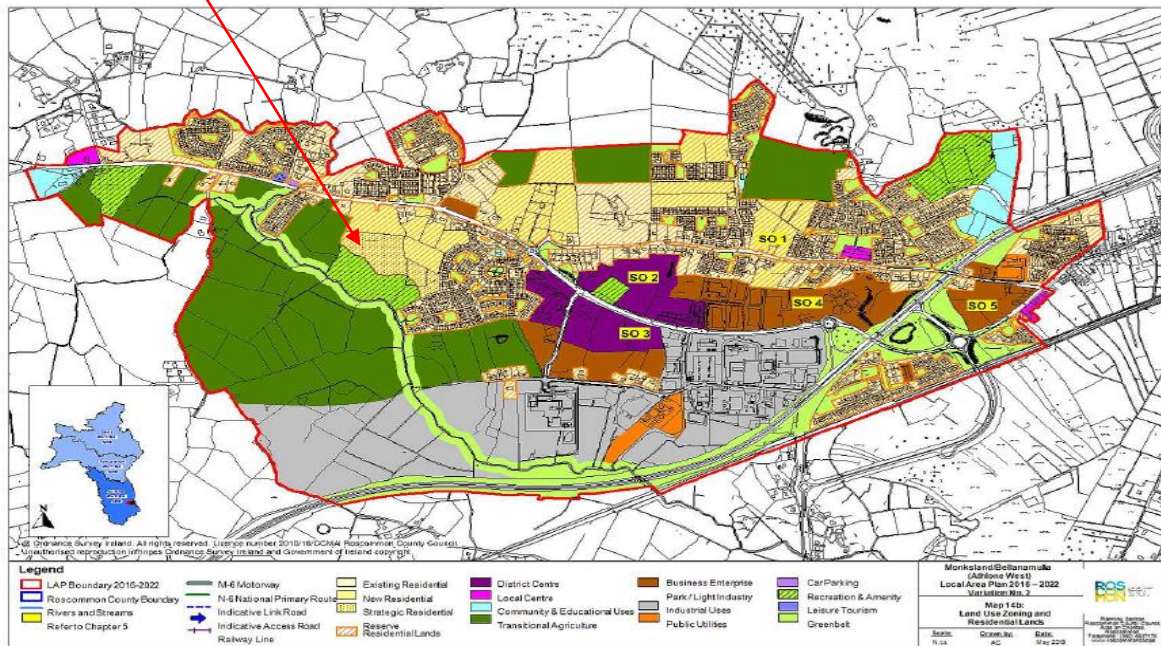


Figure 1: Monkland/Bealnamulla (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016 – 2022 Land Use Zoning & Residential Lands

SJFC are open to locate in any area in the Monkland/Bealnamulla region. Lands located North of the R446 Galway Road could possibly be considered given existing infrastructure bounding these lands, close proximity to a number of primary schools and secondary school which could use the sporting grounds and within walking/cycling distance of a large residential area. The siting of a recreational facility within this area would also increase passive surveillance along the R446 which while very popular with walkers and school children walking home is at present a lonely stretch of roadway particularly during dusk/late evenings. Having regard to existing residential estates within the Monkland/Bealnamulla area together with future



projected residential demand requires social infrastructure to support the quality of life and well-being of existing and future communities and it is the Council's obligation to zone lands for 'Recreational & Amenity' use.

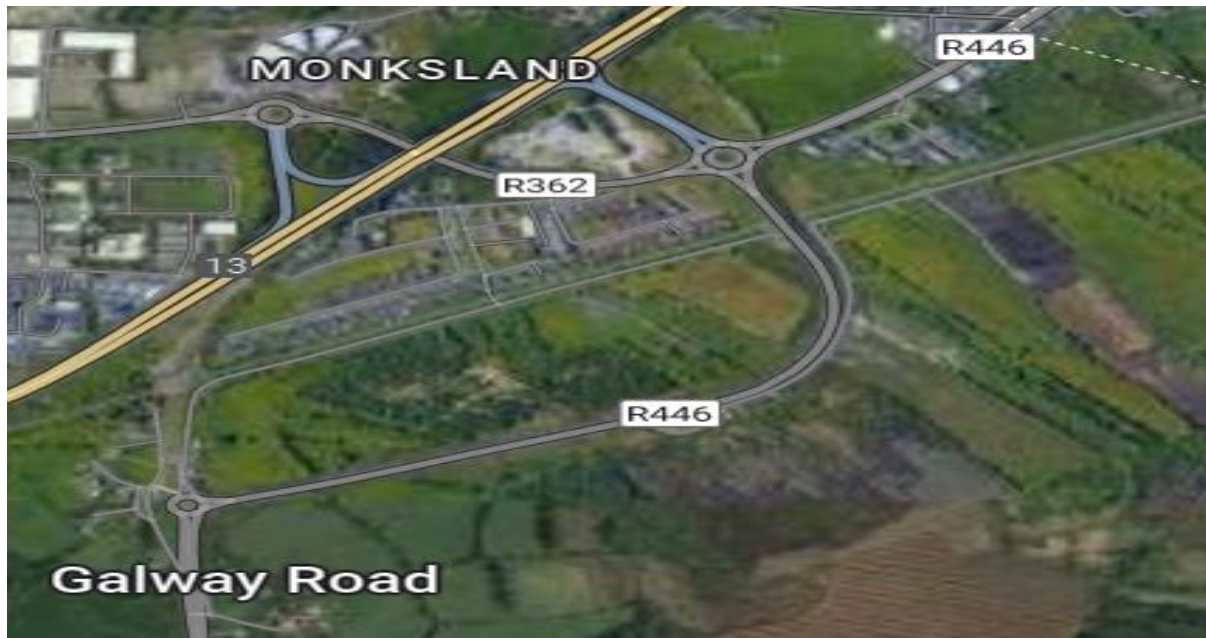


Figure 2: Potential Lands located North of R446 Galway Road, Athlone, Co. Roscommon

Access to grants is available and possibly earmarked for clubs like St Joseph's FC. However, the lack of the club's own land and/or a long-term lease restricts the Club from availing of any capital funding to develop and prosper over the next 25 years.

There are a significant number of Grants available such as the SCEP (2023 now closed), Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (Open), LEADER and FAI Co-Development fund, all of which are unattainable for SJFC due to lack of lands and represent missed opportunities to sustainably develop facilities to cater for existing/future communities within the Monkland/Beallnamulla area. Despite this lack of resource it has been through the dedication of all members of SJFC and support from the communities of Monkland/Beallnamulla that the club has consistently grown and illustrates the need and



demand for this recreational amenity within the area however the waste of club members voluntary contributions on renting other Community & Club's facilities is demoralising and unsustainable.

If SJFC was to lease land on a long-term basis, it would provide a significant opportunity to apply for grants and most importantly develop a high quality sporting recreational facility to serve Athlone West and meet the needs of its existing and future catchment population over a planned development phased basis. This sporting development would include:

- 1 x 11x11 Astro pitch with assoc. works with Floodlighting
- 1 x 9x9 Astro pitch with Assoc. works
- 2 new full-size pitches with floodlighting
- Clubhouse to incorporated four dressing rooms, shower facilities, meeting rooms, club office, kitchen and store rooms.
- Ball wall & warm up area

All of the above have potential to be co-financed through grants available to the Club if the lands were available to do so. Below is a drawing/map of Mullingar Athletic FC with its fantastic facilities current and future development it is only 15 years more senior of SJFC and has 22 acres debt free to develop a state of the art facilities. Something we, SJFC would ensure is delivered and available for all local clubs to use within the Monksland/Beallnamulla area.



Figure 3: Overview of MAFC fully completed project

St Joseph's Football Club is relying on Limited Companies and other Clubs within Athlone East (Athlone Regional Sports Centre & St, Peter's FC) and West area for facilities to run its club. SJFC is one the largest Community Clubs in County Roscommon and it is not feasible to continue paying outrageous sums of money on rent while no land is in place in order to sustainably develop club facilities to cater for the clear current demand for sporting/recreational facilities for the communities of Monksland/Beallnamulla and develop these for future generations.

Sport is an important enabler of sustainable development and its contribution to the empowerment of children, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion. Sport isn't just a good way to keep children's bodies healthy, but it also has psychological benefits and teaches them important life skills and the positive impact of regular participation in sport and physical activity is far reaching and cross cutting across communities. Sport and recreation is now consistently referenced and prioritised across major government policies and strategies. The National Sports Policy 2018-2027 highlights the influence and importance of sport across Irish society, it provides a vision for Irish Sport recognising the pivotal role of Local Authorities and in light of participation trends the



National Sports Policy asks local authorities to develop 'local sports plans' which review needs and set out actions to increase participation locally.

Any new development, developed by SJFC will be available to all members of the community, working with other clubs, schools & Local partnerships to ensure everyone has an opportunity to make use of the facilities. SJFC provides a critical social infrastructure amenity for the Monksland/Beallnamulla population. The Executive of the Club have the drive, professional experience and determination to deliver this essential and much needed sporting resource and with the assistance of Roscommon County Council in identifying appropriate lands together with the existing availability of government funding, SJFC will deliver a high quality sporting recreational facility to serve the communities of Monksland/Beallnamulla both now and for future generations.

We SJFC, respectfully request that Roscommon Forward Planning section give due consideration to our submission.

Oliver McGrath

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Facilities Manager St. Joseph's Football Club

