

Westmeath County Council,
Aras an Chontae,
Mount Street,
Mullingar,
Co. Westmeath

Roscommon County Council,
Aras an Chontae,
Roscommon,
Co. Roscommon.

31.01.2023

Re: Issues Paper – Athlone Joint LAP 2024-2030

Dear Sir / Madam,

Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board welcome this opportunity to engage with Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils in relation to the Athlone Local Area Plan 2024-2030.

LWETB notes that Athlone is designated as a ‘Key Regional Growth Centre’ in the midlands under the National Planning Framework. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) targets a population growth of 40% for Athlone and envisages a population of 31,000 by 2031.

LWETB also notes the section titled Sustainable Communities & Social Infrastructure references the need to consider how best to plan for new, expanding, and emerging communities within the Urban Area and “Sustainable communities are places where the needs of everyone in the community are met”. Education is identified as one of the key elements of the Community & Social infrastructure mix, LWETB requests that the Draft Plan clearly identifies its support for the provision of adequate and suitable school accommodation, including the development of new schools and expansion of those existing.

LWETB are aware that Planning Permission has been approved or processed for circa 1500 residential units in the greater Brawny, Coosan and Cornamaddy areas, along with substantial development and regeneration opportunities in the greater Athlone area. Taking these factors into consideration, it is imperative that sites are zoned for the

provision of education in the greater catchment area; being primary, post-primary, further education and training (FET), and third level education.

LWETB are providers of educational services on a number of sites across Athlone, and as such have a number of short term and longer-term concerns for the duration of this LAP 2024-2030.

Short Term Concern.

Cornamaddy Community National School (N37 TR23) came under the governance of LWETB in September 2023. The school currently has circa 300 students enrolled. The school is a substantial single storey structure with additional prefab accommodation on a prominent site adjoining the N55 Cornamaddy roundabout. Recent applications for development on the site to facilitate additional capacity have been refused by Westmeath County Council for several reasons, with traffic related issues being the primary concern.

The population of Athlone is expected to increase by 7,000 people by 2030. Permission for the development of circa 1500 housing units has been approved in the Cornamaddy, Brawny and Coosan area. In addition to this, Westmeath County Council also proposing a considerable development of 100 units off the Ballymahon Road. It is envisaged that at least two new primary schools are required in Athlone to facilitate the increased student numbers.

LWETB wish to seek the zoning of lands in the Cornamaddy area for the development of a new school which could facilitate up to 600 pupils along with playing fields, yard space, parking, and appropriate set-down areas. LWETB do not own any land parcels in the area, however there is a significant site along the R916, partially owned by Westmeath County Council that should be investigated for the provision of education. The site is along a main service corridor, with good transport links and bus stops fronting the site. Westmeath County Council have proposals for an improved active travel corridor along the R916, which should improve the link from Brawny and the Greenway along with other areas to any proposed development. The site is also facilitated with traffic calming measures in the form of a pelican crossing.

LWETB have not engaged with any landowners for future development and should Westmeath Council wish to engage further on this matter, LWETB will duly oblige.

Long Term Concern.

LWETB Athlone Training Centre, Garrycastle Campus (N37 X985) provides education and training to the unemployed, PLC courses and various levels of apprenticeship programmes. The current buildings on site are at capacity. LWETB have engaged a

design team to undertake a masterplan for the future development of the site, consolidating the services provided elsewhere on a central site with the ability to expand services due to demand. The training centre is a key facility for Irish apprenticeship programmes and a significant contributor to the local economy.

As the demand for apprenticeship programmes increases in line with Government policy, this site may not have the capacity for further development. LWETB are proposing that any lands made available adjoining the centre are zoned for educational purposes or alternative and suitable lands near the facility are identified for zoning to facilitate any expansion of the services provided.

Educational Opportunities

LWETB believes there is a significant requirement for additional educational accommodation; both primary and secondary in the core / West side of the town. LWETB propose that the existing educational site(s) at Deerpark Road are investigated for zoning retention to provide education in the future. This will provide opportunity for educational provision on the Western side of the town, facilitating active travel.

Finally, LWETB welcomes the continued engagement with Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils regarding the provision of education in Athlone as part of the LAP 2024-2030.

Yours sincerely,

Adrian Farrelly

Adrian Farrelly,

Administrative Officer,

Buildings and Capital Development.