

11th January 2024

Forward Planning,
Mayo County Council,
Aras an Chontae,
Mayo,
F23 WF90.

Re: Adopted Castlebar Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2023-2029

A chara,

The Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) acknowledges the adoption of the Castlebar Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2023-2029 (the LAP) by the members of Mayo County Council on the 27th November 2023.

The Office notes that while notification of the adoption of the LAP was issued to the Office on 5th December 2023. However, the notice letter further to section 31AO(5) of the *Planning and Development Act 2000*, as amended (the Act) was not received until 12th December 2023, which is outside the statutory timeframe of five working days of the making of the local area plan. Furthermore, the notice did not set out in full the reasons for the decision of the planning authority not to comply with the recommendations made by the office on the draft LAP.

Having reviewed the adopted LAP, the Office is of the view that the LAP was not made in a manner consistent, in whole or in part, with a number of the recommendations included in our submissions on the draft LAP and at material alterations stage.

In relation to the recommendations of the Office concerning:

- Recommendation 1 (i) and (ii) regarding the requirement for a clear core strategy table and the need to ensure that the extent of lands zoned for residential use is in accordance with the core strategy of the Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028;

- Recommendation 3 (ii) regarding land zoned Employment and Enterprise at Cloonagh (site EE1), to the south of Lough Saleen and to the immediate east of the rail line; and
- MA Recommendation 1 regarding material alterations for residential zoned land under MA 10, 12, 14, 21, 13, 17, 15 and 18,

the Office has made a recommendation to the Minister in respect of a proposed draft Direction in accordance with the legislative requirements set out in section 31AO (7) of the Act.

The Office's recommendation to the Minister of a proposed draft Direction and notice letter pursuant to section 31AO, will be made available on the [Office's website](#). This correspondence will also be published on the Office's website in the coming days.

As you will be aware, the matter is now to be determined by the Minister under section 31 of the Act.

With the exception of the matters raised above, the LAP provides the basis for a positive approach to regeneration in the town centre. The identification of opportunity sites in particular builds on the success of other initiatives including the Castlebar Historic Core Reactivation Initiative Project; the Castlebar Military Barracks Project; and the Castlebar Urban Greenway Link Project. The Office also welcomes the decision of the members to make the LAP without MA 22, MA 6 and MA 7 regarding the proposed Mixed Use zoning located on the southern fringes of the town, removed from the town centre.

It is noted, however, that the planning authority did not accept the recommendation of the Office to include measurable targets to reduce vacancy for the plan-period, nor the advice to provide development frameworks for the key opportunity sites in order to provide clearer parameters for their future development. Vacancy and dereliction issues are significant in the town centre and it is disappointing that the inclusion of measurable targets to address the issue and to support investment and funding applications was not supported by the elected members.


The health check map prepared for the town centre area (as detailed in the Chief Executive's Report on the draft LAP consultation) does however provide an opportunity for this baseline information to be used as part of the overall implementation strategy for the LAP to proactively monitor and address vacancy through further targeted active land

initiatives. There is also an opportunity for the planning authority to prepare non statutory masterplans for the opportunity sites to guide future development and target investment/funding opportunities.

It is also concerning that the recommendation regarding the management of flood risk in the town has not been fully addressed. In addition to the decision to zone land at risk of flooding which is the subject of the aforementioned recommendation to the Minister, the methodology and modelling underpinning the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) is not compliant with *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2009) and does not fully assess the extent of flood risk in Castlebar. In this regard, there will need to be careful consideration of flood risk in the town through the development management process and through the preparation of site specific flood risk assessments.

In conclusion, while the Office strongly supports the growth of Castlebar as a Key Town, with an important role in the economic and social development of the county and wider region, it is crucial that this growth happens in a sustainable and compact manner. The Office looks forward to positive engagement with Mayo County Council in achieving this objective and the implementation of national and regional policy at the local level.

Is mise le meas,



Anne Marie O'Connor

Deputy Regulator and Director of Plans Evaluations
