



Forward Planning Policy Unit,
Galway County Council,
Áras an Chontae,
Prospect Hill,
Galway

09 September 2020

Re: Issues Paper – Galway County Development Plan 2022 - 2028

Dear Sir/Madam

The Department of Education and Skills welcomes this opportunity to engage with Galway County Council in the preparation of the Galway County Development Plan 2022 - 2028. The population growth projected in the National Planning Framework combined with its focus on compact growth and sustainable development requires a collaborative engagement between this Department and planning authorities in order to support the provision of additional and enhanced education facilities in our communities.

In considering potential emerging and future education accommodation requirements, this Department will work with Galway County Council to identify projected population growth to a circa ten-year horizon in order to make sufficient provision for the planning and construction of school and other education accommodation where necessary.

In existing developed areas, in particular, this Department will seek to protect opportunities for potential longer-term requirements in order to ensure that sustainable communities can be supported with appropriate education provision throughout the lifetime of the National Planning Framework.

As more specific population and housing growth figures become available, this Department will analyse these in the context of existing and planned school provision in order to identify potential additional school and other education accommodation requirements. An opportunity to engage on this matter at an early stage of the Council's process of drafting the new Plan would be welcome.

In the interim, the Department wishes to make the following observations:

1. This Department requests that the Galway County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 would be explicit in its support for the provision of school accommodation, including the development of new schools and the expansion or alteration of existing ones.



That the Galway County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 would include policy objectives on both the provision of new schools and the protection of existing schools and the development of wider infrastructure and amenities objectives within the Plan to support both categories of school serving your communities.

2. It is noted that some Local Authorities' Development Plans contain a community and infrastructure land use zoning objective which includes schools as a use that is permitted in principle. This Department requests that Galway County Council consider the use of such a land use zoning objective where appropriate.
3. It is worth noting that a challenge to the Department may arise whereby the expansion of residential use in Existing Built Up Areas can upset the balance of use relative to education provision in the area. The absence of specific school site provision in such locations can significantly challenge the delivery of required school places associated with intensified residential development. This is particularly relevant in the context of NPF objectives around the development of brown-field sites for housing. Given the 30% requirement for such brownfield development in the NPF, it is critical that explicit provision for school development to meet that projected population growth be made in Existing Built Up Areas.
4. The inclusion of buffer zones and land use designations that support education development adjacent to existing and established schools (where required to facilitate potential future expansion) will be critical in meeting school accommodation requirements arising in Existing Built Up Areas. In some instances, such provision may present the only viable solution for the provision of school places to meet the needs of the local community.
5. Support for urban-design schools, as per the DES guidelines, in established areas would be welcomed. In particular, measures to facilitate reduced requirements for onsite parking and set-down and to support access to off-site public amenities and facilities is essential to achieving the delivery of schools in the urban carbon-neutral model promoted in the NPF.
6. In some instances this Department is experiencing challenges in acquiring school sites to meet current requirements where neither zoning provision nor a relevant objective for school provision exists. In that context, it is critical that any school sites required to meet current needs or planned population growth, as may be identified by this Department, should be explicitly supported by means of an appropriate zoning provision and/or by a Specific Local Objective on the subject site in the relevant Plan.
7. The proposed development of sites which have already been identified by this Department for school provision to meet immediate school place requirements should also be explicitly supported by means of an appropriate zoning and/or by a Specific Local Objective on the subject sites in the relevant Plan.
8. The Department requests that Galway County Council would actively facilitate the principle of permitting schools, both permanent and temporary in as many zoning categories as possible.



9. The DES' current Technical Guidance Documents on school site identification and suitability assessment (TGD 25 and TGD 27) can be used to inform the selection of proposed school sites and are available on www.education.ie . Revised guidelines for schools designed for urban sites will be published by the Department in 2020 and Galway County Council should monitor the Department's website as guidelines for school developments may be updated from time to time.
10. Galway County Council should consider potential synergies with adjacent public (and commercial) facilities in the proposed siting of schools or vice versa, particularly opportunities to locate schools adjacent to open space or recreation amenities, childcare provision and/or other community facilities.
11. That the capacity of existing schools and any planned schools, as published by the Department, be considered as "supporting infrastructure and facilities" and given high priority in Galway County Council's assessment of the suitability of specific lands for residential development.
12. Where a designated school site forms part of a wider development it is critical that the granting of permission for that wider development be contingent upon the provision of infrastructure and services to the school site as part of that development and such infrastructure and services must be specified to the standard which is required for any future school provision at that location.
13. Where a designated school site forms part of a wider development area or plan that is being implemented incrementally, or divided into phases by the developer(s), then the Department requests that the granting of permission for any part or phase of that wider development be contingent upon the full consideration and provision of infrastructure and services to the school site as part of that development and such infrastructure and services must be specified to the standards and capacity required for the future school provision at that location.

This Department would appreciate an opportunity to meet with Council officials to discuss educational provision in the Plan and I would appreciate if the relevant official could liaise with myself at Statutory_plans@education.gov.ie , phone 057 9324474 with a view to arranging same.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Hanlon
Statutory Plans,
Forward Planning Section