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Planning Department
Clare County Council
New Road
Ennis
County Clare



25th March 2022

RE: Submission on proposed revisions to development plan 2023 to 2029.

Shannon municipal District, Local Area Plan for Sixmilebridge.

Request to retain existing zoning of lands.

Dear Sirs/Madame,

On behalf of my client Ahaclare Developments Ltd. of Smithstown Industrial Estate, Shannon, County Clare, Director Mr Darragh McDonagh, we wish to make a submission in respect of the proposed revisions to the development plan. The area of land belonging to my clients is outlined in blue on the attached map at figure 1.

While Sixmilebridge is classed as a "Small Town" under the proposed new development plan, it is evident that the town has experienced very substantial growth over the past 10 years. It is a highly desirable location being

strategically positioned proximate to the hub town of Ennis and the Metropolitan area of Shannon/Limerick. It has the substantial range of facilities which a larger town enjoys including a railway station, a secondary school, medical and other professional services, church and active recreational facilities.

The site the subject of this submission is located at the southern section of the town. In the current Development Plan, 2017-2023, it is zoned as *Low Density Residential (LDR1)*.

At the present moment, a planning application is in course of preparation with detailed pre-planning discussions having taken place (Pre-planning Ref. PPI 21-181). This application for 55 houses is on the point of lodgement subject to a requested environmental study being carried out. This submission, which is time sensitive must be carried out later this year. Significant expense has already been incurred in the preparation of the relevant documentation for this application.

The proposed revision to the development plan indicates the zoning of this land being changed from *Low-Density Residential* to *Strategic Residential Reserve*. This submission is to request that the existing zoning is retained as is, i.e. for residential purposes.

It must be understood that the process of procuring housing development can be a lengthy process involving several years of work often including preparation of environmental studies which are time-of-year sensitive. It is therefore important if housing is to be successfully procured that zonings are kept in position for a reasonable amount of time.

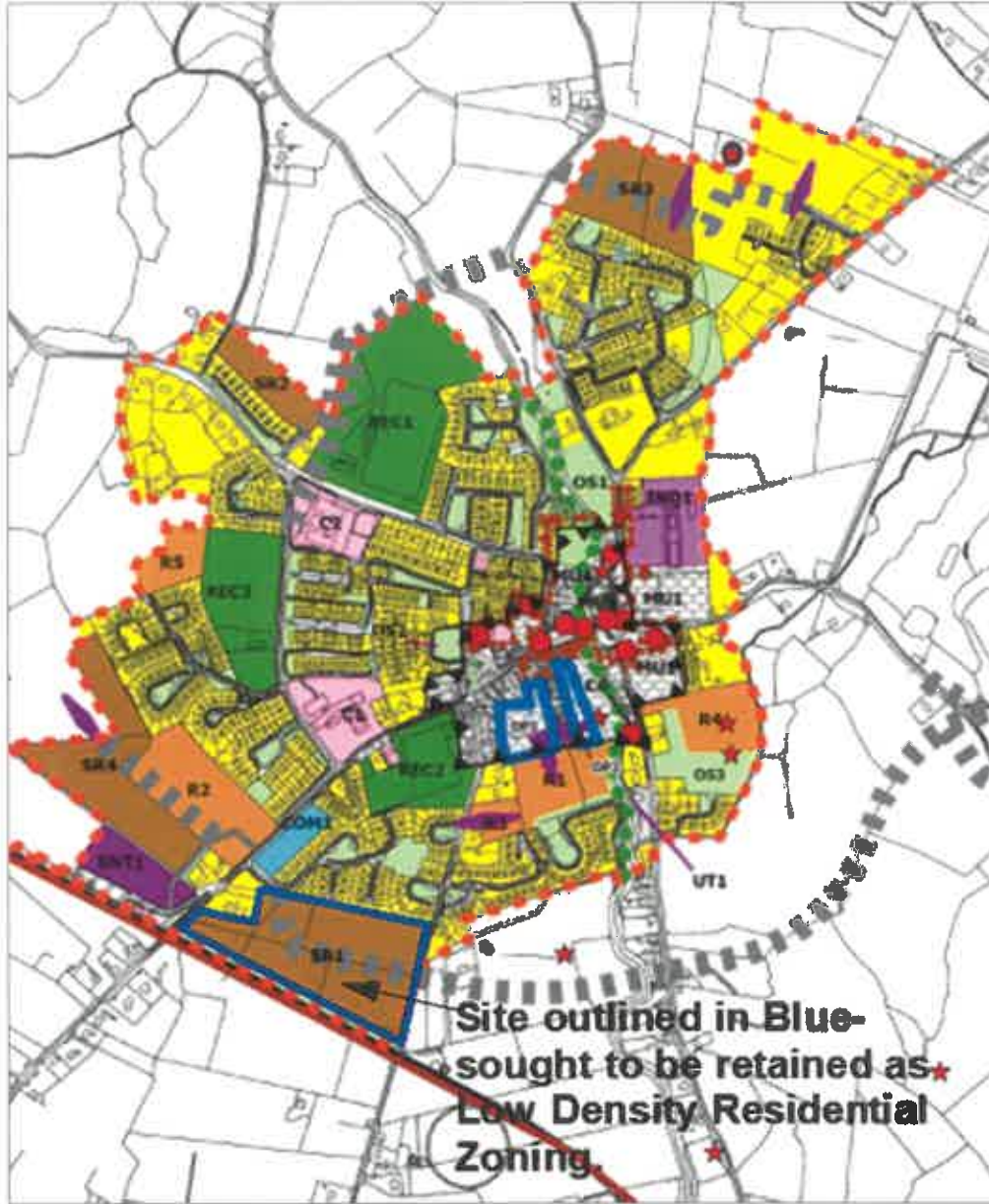


Fig 1. Extract from proposed revision to Development Plan with site shown outlined in Blue and proposed re-zoning area indicated.

While it may be argued that the imminent planning application will be assessed under the current Development Plan if it is lodged before any changes are made to the Plan, nevertheless it must be borne in mind that in the event of a third-party appeal, which frequently happens in the case of a substantial housing application, that if the plan is changed during the course of an appeal, that an Bord Pleanála will be entitled to take into account the revisions to the development plan and not just the zoning which existed at the time the planning application was lodged. This is a critical matter and must be taken into account by the planning authority in determining whether to make the dramatic change proposed to the zoning.

As the planning authority will be aware it can be difficult to bring elements of land forward for development in the context of a smaller town. Is it not appropriate therefore that the planning authority should have regard to extant pre-planning enquiries on land which is likely to be brought forward for development under a previous plan before effecting change to an upcoming plan?

Core Strategy.

The proposed Core Strategy requirement for Sixmilebridge is for 186 houses. Even at a very high density of 35 per hectare this translates as some 5.3 ha with a total of 6.3 ha proposed to be zoned for housing. The council may argue that a limited freeboard is necessary given the possibility of 30% of residential units being contained within the existing built-up area. The reality is however that it will be very difficult to ensure that 30% of 186 houses (56 houses), will

be built within the existing central built-up area of Sixmilebridge. The bulk of existing older houses in the central area are not suitable for conversion to apartments over existing commercial use, and there is likely to be a continued pressure for commercial space in the town as the population continues to grow. Further, many of the older buildings in Sixmilebridge are of historic significance and many are protected structures. This certainly tends to militate against the provision of modern up-to-date apartment accommodation. While it is laudable that central areas should be redeveloped for residential accommodation, one must be realistic in one's aspirations, and the suggestion that 56 units can be accommodated within the central area is very unlikely to be realised.

We would therefore argue that a substantial case can be made that insufficient land has been provided for under the Core Strategy. Even if all of the zoned land comes to be available and if a lesser figure than the 56 houses proposed for the central area is built within the lifetime of the plan (let us say 25 units), then in reality the entirety of the zoned land would have to be developed at quite high densities, of the order of 30 houses per hectare, to achieve the core strategy targets.

All of zoned land rarely comes available within the lifetime of a Development Plan, and this may be for a variety of reasons including reasons of title, the individual circumstances of landowners, difficulties of finance et cetera.

In the context of the proposed zoning of Sixmilebridge we would also point out that some of the sites which have been zoned for residential appear to be small in extent and not attractive to developers. On the other hand, the site

subject of this submission is immediately available, of sufficient size to be attractive to a developer (some 6 hectares), and of course is immediately adjacent to the railway station.

One of the difficulties in regard to the entire Core Strategy process, is that while it seeks to identify the appropriate **quantity** of land for zoning in an area based on the ratio between preferred densities and population growth projections, it does not seek to investigate the suitability of each site, or indeed the likelihood that it will become available for development. This represents a particular difficulty in the case of smaller towns and villages. In a large urban situation, where large area of land zoned for a particular use and where a reasonable freeboard is included, it is likely that sufficient land will be brought forward for development within the lifetime of a plan.

However, in a smaller town, where only a small amount of land is so zoned, the failure of even one parcel of land to come forward for development can have a significant negative impact on the implementation of the plan. We believe that this may be a danger in the case of Sixmilebridge, and that a failure to zone a greater portion of land or to carry out a detailed examination as to the suitability of each site, may result in a failure to enable sufficient land to be brought forward for development, and this may result in inadequate provision for housing at a time of severe housing shortage.

We also note the requirement of **paragraph 3.4.1** of the Core Strategy which, having regard to *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas 2009 (Cities, Towns and Villages)*, and circular letter NRUP 02/2021, indicate that provision should be made for low-density development which does not

represent more than 20% of the total planned housing stock. We would suggest that Sixmilebridge is an ideal location for the provision of a certain quantum of low-density housing but the proposed development plan does not make provision for this.

This 20% figure equates to some 37 houses in the case of Sixmilebridge which, given the low-density range of 10 houses per hectare, (4 per acre) would suggest that some 4 ha should be made available for this type of housing. We would suggest therefore that it is very important that the land the subject of this submission, should have an allowance for the provision of low-density housing.

We also wish to point out that even though permissions have been granted in Sixmilebridge over the past 5 years, the total number of houses which have been built within the 5 year period of the last plan does not exceed 50 houses. This is despite the fact that the Core Strategy allocation for Sixmilebridge contained in the 2017 to 2023 plan was for 136 houses. We would suggest that this is a clear indication that the Core Strategy process is failing to deliver the necessary housing targets and it may be appropriate to ask whether it in fact impedes rather than facilitates the delivery of housing.

Section 28 guidelines.

Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Planning Act are mandatory for local authorities to follow so it is important to examine them to ensure that government policy is being followed in the local area plans.

The principal document issued under Section 28 of the Planning Act dealing with the design of smaller towns and villages is ***Sustainable Residential Development In Urban Areas, 2009***, issued by the Department of the Environment, and in particular Chapter 6 of that document.

Chapter 6 sets out a number of key policy advices in respect of the development of smaller towns, and three of these are of particular relevance in the present case:

- That new development should contribute to compact towns, (paragraph 6.3.(a))
- That new development should offer alternatives to urban generated rural housing, (Paragraph 6.3(d)) and
- That the scale of new residential schemes for development should be in proportion to the pattern and grain of existing development Paragraph 6.3.(e)).

In regard to the development of compact towns we point out that recent government emphasis has been on the creation of the “10-minute town” concept whereby services are located within a 10-minute cycle or walk from residential areas and whereby such an arrangement can significantly reduce car dependency.

This is now widely accepted concept in urban development. In the context of smaller towns, it is evident that perhaps a smaller or shorter walk distance would be more appropriate. A five-minute walk distance represents a distance of some 540 m at a pace of 1.8 m/s which is the normal walking speed of 2

paces per second of most people. Even reducing this to a 500 m walk distance indicates that the site of this submission is within that 5-minute radius.

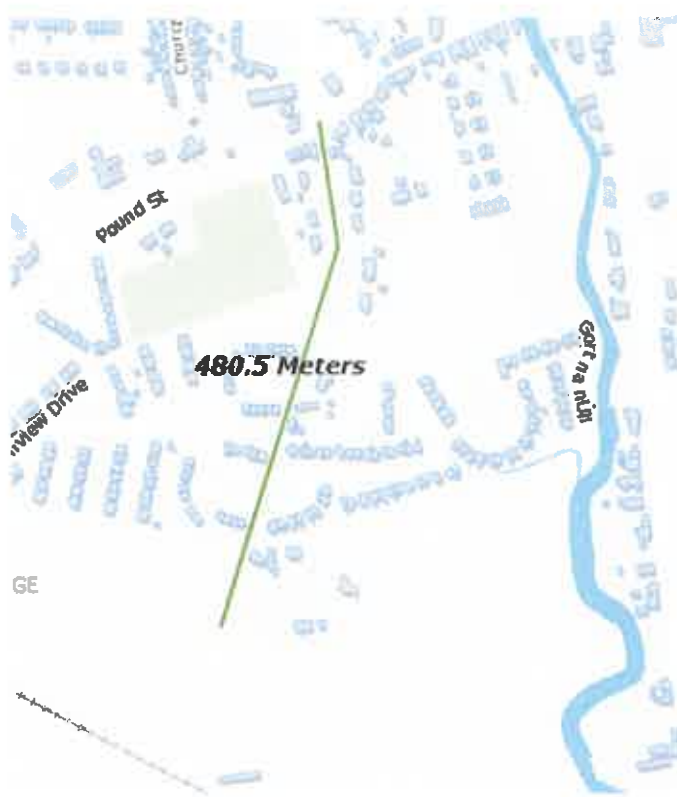


Figure 2.
Google Map Extract showing walk distance from frontage of site to Town Centre.

It is also of note that many parts of Sixmilebridge which have been zoned for development are outside of this walk distance and we would consider it appropriate therefore that the site of this submission should be included in the zoned areas. We also point out that the road connection along Rossmanagher Road is now at an urban standard with footpaths on both sides to a point close to the frontage of the site the subject of this submission.

In regard to the provision of an alternative to urban generated rural housing in the County generally, we would see that the site is ideal in that it is not

town-centre and provision can be made for a certain level of low-density housing as is provided for in the Core Strategy. In fact, we would regard it as something of a lacuna within the proposed Local Area Plan for Sixmilebridge that no provision has specifically been made for the provision of low-density housing. It is important, more-so in the context of smaller towns and villages that land be made available for such housing than in the larger towns if the policy outlined in paragraph 3.4.1 of the Core Strategy of the Development Plan is to be met.

In regard to the 3rd policy direction mentioned above, that of ensuring that new residential developments should be in proportion to the pattern and grain of existing villages, again the issue of zoning a certain area of land for lower density is important. The bulk of the housing close to the site of the current submission is developed at lower density, certainly much lower than the currently recommended 35 units per hectare and in this respect, land immediately adjoining these existing housing areas should be similarly zoned.

Relief of infrastructural deficit.

Sixmilebridge is an historic town with a strategic location but a very poor road infrastructure. Major traffic, including substantial forestry traffic, is forced to go through the central part of the town and traverse the very old bridge which gives the town its name. This has led to significant congestion on a regular basis in the town centre, not to mention the danger of causing structural damage to the bridge. The Local Area Plan indicates a land reserve for the

provision of an urgently needed relief road and a substantial portion of this proposed road will pass through the site the subject of this submission. We point out that enabling the granting of planning permission on this site will in turn enable this relief road to be brought forward, as a special development contribution levy can be attached by condition of planning permission on the site to facilitate the construction of this relief road. The provision of this road will also of course make the site more accessible.

It is important in planning for the future of Sixmilebridge that account be taken of the need for relief of significant infrastructural bottlenecks and how zoning can facilitate such reliefs being brought forward without entailing significant expense of the public authority.

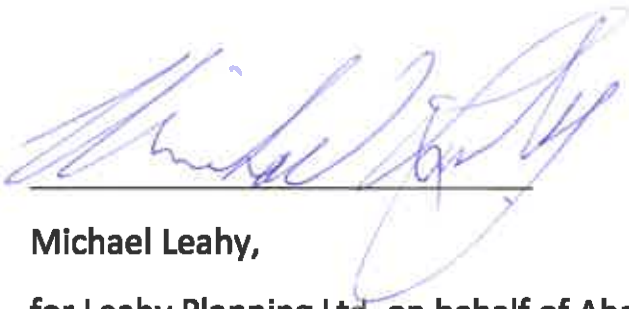
Conclusion.

We request that the zoning of the land the subject of this application be retained as ***Low Density Residential***. It is serviced, it is adjacent to public transport, it is available for development and planning application documentation is well advanced aiming at the lodgement of planning application in the very near future. It is clear that housing delivery is critical at both national and local level and it would be very regrettable if an alteration in zoning would preclude the development of a section of land readily serviced, immediately adjacent to the railway station, and one which would facilitate the completion of a much-needed relief road. Given the failure to deliver the housing allocation indicated in the last Core Strategy, we believe that the future Core Strategy should add the unused housing allocation of the

last development plan to the proposed allocation of the proposed Core Strategy, and that this justifies an increased allocation of land zoned for housing.

We trust that you will take this submission into account, and I would be obliged if you could acknowledge receipt of this submission quoting an appropriate reference number to the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Leahy', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Michael Leahy,

for Leahy Planning Ltd. on behalf of Ahaclare Developments Ltd.