

15th November 2020

Development Plan Review,
Planning Department,
Clare County Council,
New Road,
Ennis,
Co Clare.
V95 DXP2



Date: 15th November 2020

Re: Development Plan Review,

I, Andrew Hersey Planning Consultant MIPI am a private planning consultant with over 20 years of experience in landscape architecture, environment and planning. I am based in Kilkee Co. Clare where I work remotely. I wish the following strategic issues to be addressed in the forthcoming development plan

Biodiversity Loss

Recent and past scientific advise is that the biodiversity of the planet is been lost at an alarming rate. Ursula von de Leyen, President of the European Commission recently called on everyone to join the global movement for nature and to call a half to biodiversity loss.

I believe this should happen at every level including a local level and that the county development plan can implement polices to halt biodiversity loss. Some ways that Clare County Council could do this would be:

- (i) That every plan & project in the county results in no loss of biodiversity as a consequence of the implementation of the plan or project. In the case where there is an inevitable loss then then compensatory measures can be proposed to mitigate against this loss. Every plan and project therefore should therefore go through a screening process before it is permitted. Plans for the development of a single rural house therefore should be screened against biodiversity loss and not just for protected areas - this should be for every development in every location. At present, when a house is constructed sites are razed of all trees and hedgerows at any time of the year resulting in significant biodiversity loss, the houses are then built and suburban gardens are constructed around the house using alien plant species. The indigenous biodiversity of the site is completely lost as a consequence.

A new approach is therefore required so that there is zero biodiversity loss to a site as a consequence of a development. Plans and proposals that can show at proposal stage and implement projects which result in



zero biodiversity loss, should only then be permitted. I recommend in this case that a bond be secured by the council to ensure that projects are developed as proposed and that there is no net biodiversity loss as a consequence of the development. The bond should be of a sufficient value to enable the council to 'rewild' the site to an acceptable standard in the case where plans are not implemented as permitted. The council should also encourage plans and projects which result in biodiversity gain

I am also of the opinion that the forthcoming development plan should seek to halt council operations which result in biodiversity loss. This is not an operational issue - it is an issue to prevent further biodiversity loss which should inform council operations. The council could address the following:

- (i) the council's use of herbicide (which results in loss of biodiversity),
- (ii) the significant hedgerow maintenance programme where it is not required (every operation which results in the cutting of hedgerow and/or trees should be only on the basis where there is only a traffic safety issue which is reported upon by a competent road engineer.
- (iii) extensive grass cutting programmes need to be reduced

Alternative Wastewater Treatment Options

That reedbed and willow bed treatment options be allowed by Clare County Council in areas of the county where percolation to ground does not exist or where there are no other options but to use such systems. The current Galway County Development Plan allows for this under *Objective WW9 – Integrated Constructed Wetlands* which states:

Galway County Council shall support the use of Integrated Constructed Wetlands (ICW) as a low cost and environmentally sustainable alternative having regard to the Integrated Constructed Wetlands- Guidance Document for Farmyard Soiled Water and Domestic Wastewater Applications as appropriate

Any policy in this regard must override the EPA Code of Practice 2009 which is not a statutory document but has been endorsed by every county council in Ireland.

Dereliction

That the council should incentivise through policy the prevention of dereliction and encourage refurbishment of derelict properties through monetary incentives.

That the council prepare Dereliction Strategy in the first two years of the development plan to tackle dereliction which would include a survey of all the derelict properties in the county with measures to bring them back into use. Owners should be encouraged to prevent dereliction and refurbish. Where they have no means to do so then the council should acquire the property through compulsory purchase or by means of the



Derelict Sites Act and either sell it on with clauses that the property must be refurbished within 2 years .Alternatively the council could refurbish the property themselves for the purposes of social and/or affordable housing.

Pedestrian and Cyclist Priority over Private Car Use

The emphasis on the use of the private motor vehicle is still given priority over sustainable means of transports such as walking, cycling, or public transport. This is evident throughout the current plan through zoning in peripheral locations and through the quantum of parking required for certain uses (e.g. Schools). In addition, every development should be assessed on its ease of access by sustainable transport means. Developments adjacent to sustainable transport routes should be given priority over those which are not.

Forest Schools

There is a growing trend for alternative forms of education including forests schools. It is recommended that a policy be put in place to encourage the use of forests for outdoor education. See <https://www.parkchildcare.ie/park-academy-nature-kindergarten>. and <https://irishforestschoollassociation.ie>.

Forestry

There should be a general presumption against biodiverse poor Sitka plantations in the county.

Greenways

That a strategy be prepared within the first two years of the plan for off-road cycling routes and walking routes throughout the county particularly along the estuary, coast and Lough Derg.

Traffic Congestion along the Wild Atlantic Way

That this perennial issue be addressed. It is recommended in this instance that one way routes be imposed along the coast roads which would leave room on the same road for walking and cycling routes. Buses in particular should only be allowed to go one way along this route.

Rural Clusters

That the council encourage the clustering of rural houses throughout the county as an alternative to one houses and that existing clusters are expanded to allow for limited and sustainable development. I further recommend that small scale short term tourist accommodation (Air B&B Pods) be allowed in rural clusters



as an alternative source of income for rural families. In this regard I recommend one pod per house. Group Sewerage Schemes should be encouraged in such clusters.

Community Facilities

Every citizen in the county should have access to playgrounds and swimming pools, and library services. At present the nearest swimming pool to Kilkee and Kilrush is Ennis. There is a pool in Kilkee which is opened for tourists through the summer months and is closed to the community. Clare County Council are therefore using the pool as a tourist attraction and not as a community facility. I would have thought that it would be more appropriate to have the swimming pool open during the winter months for community use. There are sufficient tourists in Kilkee during the summer - there is no need to attract more and the sea is open for swimming during those months. It makes no sense to have the pool open for the summer and closed for the winter. While the planning authority may consider this to be an operational issue I argue that this is not - it is about community services to permanent residents of Kilkee, Kilrush and West Clare in general.

Similarly the library at Kilkee has more services available during the summer months when tourists are around - there are craft courses and cinema for kids. This is not available for the rest of the year. The library much like the swimming pool should be a community service for local people not a tourism service.

Provision of Permanent Housing.

There is a perennial problem in Kilkee, Lahinch and other villages along the coast in that local people cannot afford to buy houses in their community. Houses are both by tourists for short term accommodation at a very high premium. While I note that the council imposes inurement clauses on new development in these settlements, this condition does not dissuade developers from selling the property to short term tourism purposes. I understand that a new development along the Strand Line in Kilkee are currently selling for €600,000 each. This is completely out of reach of a local person. This issue needs to be addressed by the council or our coastal towns and villages will all but be deserted in a few short years. There has been a 408 person reduction in the permanent population of Kilkee from 2006 and 2016. It is recommended therefore that the inurement clause needs to be strengthened. I recommend the acquisition of a significant bond (no less than €50,000), from the developer in this respect. This bond is released only when the purchaser of the house or the developer can categorically prove that the house is been permanently occupied. Evidence could include for instance the occupiers children being signed up to a local school, a letter from a councillor or peace commissioner, a letter from revenue or any similar form of proof.

If you have any queries regarding the same please contact me at 087-6870917 or by email at hersey.andrew@gmail.com.



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