



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

3ú Urlár ó Thuaidh | Ionad Cathartha | An tSráid Mhór | Baile Munna | Baile Átha Cliath 9
3rd Floor North | Ballymun Civic Centre | Main Street | Ballymun | Dublin 9



Draft Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly notes the publication of the draft Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan 2024-2029 and sets out hereunder observations on behalf of the Regional Assembly. The submission has been prepared by the executive of the Regional Assembly and approved by the elected members of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly at the meeting of 12th April 2024.

1.0 Overall Context

1.1 Role and Function of the Regional Assembly

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is part of the regional tier of governance in Ireland. It is primarily focused on driving regional development through the formulation, adoption and implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), oversight and coordination of County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), management of EU Programmes, EU project participation, implementation of national economic policy and additional functions working with the National Oversight and Audit Commission. As a strategic policy body, EMRA also participates in the consultation processes of other relevant strategic plans and policies.

This submission relates to the statutory role of the Assembly regarding the Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan 2024-2029.

1.2 Legislative Context

Section 44 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (amending Section 66C of the Local Government Act 2001), provides that every Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) shall be consistent with any Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy as well as the City/County Development Plan that applies to the area of the LECP. It also states that the Local Authority shall submit a draft of the economic and community elements of the LECP to the Regional Assembly and it shall adopt a statement on the draft Plan for consideration by the Elected Members of that Local Authority.

The Act requires that the consideration of a draft plan by the Regional Assembly, shall relate to its consistency with—

- (i) the core strategy and the objectives of the development plan of the local authority concerned,
- (ii) any regional spatial and economic strategy that may apply, and
- (iii) the need to consider consistency between the economic and community elements of the draft plan.

The Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP) Guidelines 2021, published in November 2021, assist with the preparation of the draft LECPs, with a key focus on sustainability, consultation and engagement with local communities and businesses. The Guidelines also require local authorities to consider housing needs when formulating both the economic and community elements of their LECPs in accordance with the commitment in Housing for All, the Government's national plan for housing to 2030.

The LECP process consists of two parts: the development of an overall LECP framework detailing the High-Level Goals and sustainable community and economic objectives, including outcomes for a six-year period; and the development of Implementation Plans of the objectives of the LECP.

1.3 The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region

The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region was made by the Members of the Assembly in June 2019 and is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape future growth throughout the Region. The overall vision of the Strategy is to create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunity for all. The vision is supported by sixteen Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) that are framed around three key principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity.

A primary statutory objective of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF), alignment with the investment priorities of the National Development Plan 2021-2030 (and thus Project Ireland 2040), by coupling new development with the requisite investment in services and infrastructure. The RSES is of critical importance for the delivery of Project Ireland 2040, given that it is the succeeding tier of policy delivery in Ireland.

The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region presents a Spatial Strategy, devised and informed by a complementary Economic Strategy, which provides a framework for future growth, ensuring the delivery of effective regional development through the realisation of viable and vital places. This includes championing the capital city of Dublin as a smart, climate resilient and global city region; identifying Regional Growth Centres which act as regional economic drivers and supports for their wider catchment areas; and promoting a network of large economically active Key Towns that provide employment and services to their surrounding areas. All of this is supported by Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns and a network of multifaceted Rural Places. The RSES identifies Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns within the Region, however Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns and Rural areas are to be defined by Development Plans.

In relation to County Kildare, the growth strategy contained in the RSES identifies that the majority of County Kildare is included in the Core Region, however the northeastern part of the county is located within the Dublin Metropolitan Area, whilst a section of the southwest of the county is also situated in the Gateway Region. There are two Key Towns situated within the county, namely Naas (within the Core Region) and Maynooth (within the Metropolitan Area), as set out in the RSES settlement strategy.

The RSES outlines that Naas is a Key Town in the Core Region that is well served by the M7 motorway with good road connections to the rest of the country and a commuter rail service to Dublin. Naas had a population of 21,597 people in 2016 with a highly skilled workforce and plays a key role as a County Town in providing employment and services for a wide catchment. There are strong links between Naas and the nearby settlements of Sallins and Newbridge, with a strong interrelationship of services, employment and education between Naas and Newbridge. There is potential to capitalise on the significant infrastructure investment which has taken place in Naas, to further strengthen the local employment base, promote regeneration and consolidation of the town centre and surrounding residential and employment areas, with improved permeability and sustainable transport links and to build on assets including the historic centre, Naas Racecourse and Grand Canal.

The key priorities listed in the RSES for Naas town include the regeneration of the historic town centre with enhancement of retail and commercial functions and consolidation of strategic development areas including the Castle Quarter, Devoy Quarter, Corban's Lane and the Canal Quarter, along with the further development of Millennium Park in the Northwest Quadrant and regeneration of industrial lands in the northeast of the town. There is also a need to redress past legacies of rapid housing growth to ensure the delivery of further appropriately and easily accessible social, education, recreation, sports and amenity spaces to ensure that facilities grow to meet the needs of the increasing population and keep pace with development. In relation to transport, Naas has a high level of internal trips, however further investment is needed in public transport and active travel connections within the town linking residential areas and the Northwest Quadrant to Sallins-Naas railway station. Through targeted investment, the town can achieve a walkable and cycle friendly connected environment underpinned by a sustainable transport network.

The RSES also states that Maynooth, located in the Dublin Metropolitan Area (and thus within the Metropolitan Area Spatial Plan area) and on the Strategic Development North-West Corridor, has a population of 14,600 people in 2016, is a large active town in north-east Kildare, that is strategically located on the Dublin to Sligo railway line, M4 motorway and the Royal Canal. Maynooth provides a significant level of employment at Maynooth University, the M4 Business Park and local business in the town centre. A number of higher order services are located in the town including education, health, cultural, leisure and recreational facilities. The town has experienced significant population growth and has a young demographic with many university students living in and travelling to the town. St. Patrick's College, the Royal Canal, Maynooth Castle and the nearby demesne landscape of Carton House are key assets and attractions. The RSES highlights that to enhance the co-ordination of development in Maynooth, including its environs in County Meath, the preparation and adoption of a Joint Local Area Plan (LAP) should be carried out by Kildare and Meath County Councils.

Section 3.1 of the RSES outlines the Growth Strategy for the overall Eastern and Midland Region which includes an objective to deliver sustainable growth of the Metropolitan Area through the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) and to embed a network of Key Towns through the Region to deliver sustainable regional development.

Section 3.2 of the RSES identifies the key Growth Enablers for the Region which include a number of

measures relevant to County Kildare as follows;

- Promote global connectivity and regional accessibility as part of an integrated land use and transport strategy, with a focus on protecting national assets and enhanced inter-regional connectivity.
- Deliver strategic development areas identified in the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) to ensure a steady supply of serviced development lands to support Dublin's sustainable growth.
- Promote compact urban growth to realise targets of at least 50% of all new homes to be built, to be within or contiguous to the existing built-up area of Dublin city and suburbs and a target of at least 30% for other urban areas.
- Embed a network of Key Towns throughout the Region, which have the capacity to deliver sustainable compact growth and employment for their catchments in tandem with enabling public transport, infrastructure and services.
- Promote balanced growth in a limited number of economically active settlements which have the identified capacity and potential for self-sustaining growth.
- Promote targeted 'catch up' investment to support self-sustaining local employment, and in services, sustainable transport and amenities in places that have experienced rapid commuter driven population growth.
- Promote regeneration and revitalisation of small towns and villages and support local enterprise and employment opportunities to ensure their viability as service centres for their surrounding rural areas.
- Support rural areas by harnessing natural resources to develop renewables, recreation and tourism opportunities including green infrastructure planning and the development of an integrated network of greenways, blueways and peatways.

In relation to the Economic Strategy of the RSES, it should be noted that this has five key principles which include smart specialisation, clustering, placemaking, orderly growth and future proof. This Strategy includes a retail hierarchy for the Region, as outlined in the RSES under Chapter 6 Table 6.1. This identifies Naas/Newbridge and Maynooth as Level 2 (Major Town Centres and County Town Centres), and Celbridge, Kilcock, Kilcullen, Athy, Kildare, Monasterevin, Clane and Leixlip as Level 3 (Town and/or District Centres and Sub-County Town Centres) of the retail hierarchy.

In relation to community development, the RSES outlines support for community and adult education providers who are already providing formal and non-formal education to targeted disadvantage groups and who have already identified the barriers to participation in lifelong learning such as childcare, transport and rural isolation to increase participation rates and support progression into further education and employment. The RSES also highlights the importance of recreation and sporting facilities including blueways and greenways.

The draft LECP submitted makes reference to key spatial planning, economic, social and community elements of the policies and objectives of the RSES such as the status of Naas and Maynooth as Key Towns in the Region, along with the county's location encompassing the three sub-regional areas in the

RSES Growth Strategy consisting of the Metropolitan Area, the Core Region and the Gateway Region, in order to demonstrate consistency with same, which is welcomed by the Regional Assembly. This is discussed further in Section 3 of this submission.

2.0 Overview of the draft Framework LECP

The draft Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) was received on 22nd February 2024 and contains the following sections:

- Introduction
- Process to Develop the LECP
- Kildare LECP in Context
- Kildare – Socio Economic Profile
- Kildare LECP Consultation Process
- Kildare LECP Analysis
- Kildare LECP Vision and High-Level Goals
- Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation
- Appendices

It is also indicated that the draft LECP is accompanied by, and should be read in conjunction with, the following documents:

- Co. Kildare LECP Socio-Economic Statement
- Co. Kildare LECP Baseline Report (July 2023)
- Co. Kildare LECP Policy Review (July 2023)
- Co. Kildare LECP Consultation Report (November 2023)
- Co. Kildare LECP SEA and AA Screening Reports (not submitted to EMRA)
- Co. Kildare LECP Census 2022 Reports (not submitted to EMRA)

The community component of the LECP is prepared by the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), with the economic component prepared by the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) of Kildare County Council (KCC). An overarching Advisory Steering Group was formed and is responsible for the integration of both elements and to prepare the plan for final adoption. The final LECP is to be approved by the elected members of Kildare County Council.

Section 2 of the draft document sets out the following ambition statement for the LECP;

“County Kildare; working together as a sustainable, inclusive, economically vibrant, healthy community for all”.

The document highlights 4 no. High-Level Goals as follows;

Goal 1	County Kildare as a PLACE with resilient communities where all people live full, healthy and inclusive lives.
Goal 2	County Kildare nurtures its PEOPLE to reach their full potential and to enjoy a high quality life at all stages.

Goal 3	County Kildare promotes and prioritises CLIMATE ACTION, CLIMATE JUSTICE and SUSTAINABILITY
Goal 4	County Kildare attracts the RESOURCES and INVESTMENT to be a sustainable, inclusive, economically vibrant community for all.

Each of the High-Level Goals above are supported by several listed objectives along with key desired outcomes that are provided and explained in detail in Chapter 7 of the draft LECP.

It is noted that Section 8 of the draft LECP refers to the first 2-year implementation plan to be contained in Appendix 4 of the LECP. This will set out specific actions, outcomes, sources of funding, lead partners and a timeframe for each of the named objectives in the LECP. However, the initial implementation plan has not been completed to date and is not included in the draft document submitted to the Regional Assembly for review on 22nd February 2024.

The draft LECP indicates that the High-Level Goals, which set the direction of the LECP, were devised based on the findings from the socio-economic analysis, consultation, and review of existing policies. It is further stated that these High-Level Goals and their associated objectives, have been jointly developed by Kildare County Council, the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), and the Special Planning Committee (SPC) for Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning in consultation with key stakeholders.

The content of the draft LECP, including the High-Level Goals, will be discussed in the following sections of this report.

3.0 Evaluation of Consistency with the RSES

The draft LECP states that it has been developed in line with the requirements of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and the revised Local Economic and Community Plans Guidelines 2021. In this regard, the following are noted from the draft LECP submitted to EMRA for consideration.

3.1 Policy Context

Section 3 of the draft LECP details the preparation structure of the LECP which includes a list of international, national, regional and local plans and strategies that were considered to inform the overall plan. These plans include the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the National Planning Framework (NPF), the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031, the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 (CDP), Local Area Plans in County Kildare, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Kildare 2024 Economic Development Strategy, the Mid East Regional Enterprise Plan 2022-2024, Ireland’s Climate Action Plan, Our Rural Future – Ireland Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, the Government’s Housing for All plan and the Housing Delivery Action Plan 2022-2026.

Overall, the policy considerations are in line with the LECP ministerial guidelines, and Section 3.2 (LECP and Spatial Planning) sets out a comprehensive overview of how the LECP is taking into account the spatial planning context of County Kildare as it relates to the NPF, the RSES and the Kildare CDP 2023-2029.

3.2 Socio-Economic Profile, Consultation Process and SCOT Analysis

Section 4 of the draft LECP provides information on the socio-economic profile of County Kildare. It is noted that the information and figures provided arise from information gathered from the most recent CSO Census 2022. This is welcomed by the Regional Assembly and provides a strong evidence base for the socio-economic profile of the county. Some of the key points noted from this section of the report are outlined below;

- The population of Kildare has doubled from a population of 124,321 persons in 1991 to 247,774 persons in 2022. Kildare currently has the fifth highest population of any local authority in the State with a population bigger than Limerick City and County Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and Cork City. Population projections for County Kildare in the National Planning Framework (NPF) envisage that the county's population could grow to over 266,000 by the end of 2031. Census 2022 indicates that Kildare is on course to at least reach and perhaps exceed this threshold.
- There has been major growth in the urban centres within County Kildare between 2016 and 2022 with the county now having seven settlements with a population greater than 10,000 persons (Naas, Newbridge, Celbridge, Maynooth, Leixlip, Athy and Kildare Town).
- The number of children and young people in the county under 25 is 86,155 persons which is the 4th youngest proportion (34.8%) and 5th highest number of children/young people among all local authorities.
- Kildare is increasingly multicultural with the last census showing that non-nationals make up 11.4% of the population.
- Kildare is one of the most urban counties in the State with Census 2022 indicating that approximately 70% of the population reside in an urban area (towns >= 1,500 population). However, there is a clear spatial pattern to the urban distribution with the vast majority of this population being within the north-east metropolitan area and in key settlements in close proximity to the motorway network.
- The remainder of County Kildare is rural with a total population of 74,509 which is the 11th highest number of rural dwellers in the State.
- Kildare is a commuting county with 41,688 or 36.5% of the workforce travelling to work outside the county. This is the 6th highest rate in the country. For those who travel to work, car is by far the dominant mode of transport at 57% with the primary destination being Dublin.
- While Kildare is relatively affluent overall, there are substantial pockets of deprivation particularly in the south and northwest of the county and within pockets of urban areas.

A detailed list of Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats (SCOT) Analysis for County Kildare has also been outlined within Section 7 of the draft LECP, (LECP analysis) which is welcomed by the Regional Assembly.

The draft LECP is accompanied by a separate Consultation Report (2023) that outlines the community participation and stakeholder engagement process that was carried out during the preparation of the draft LECP. The public consultation process took place from July to October 2023.

The main aim of the consultation was to gather views to inform the vision and High-Level Goals, and the objectives and actions of the LECP. A draft vision and four draft High-Level Goals were developed as part of the socio-economic statement and formed the basis of all consultation.

The methods used to consult with stakeholders included:

- A review of relevant recent plans
- An online survey (869 responses received)
- Community and voluntary consultation (5 in person workshops, one in each Municipal District)
- Employer and business consultation
- Statutory agencies
- Collaborative structure consultation (a series of targeted meetings to ensure the views of the most excluded, largely through their representative groups, organisations and forums, took place). In total 231 individuals engaged through twenty-one different organisations/networks.

Over 1,300 individuals directly engaged in consultation as part of the Kildare LECP's development. This distinct consultation stage helped to finalise the vision and High-Level Goals of the draft LECP which were approved by the Kildare LCDC on 29th November 2023 and the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning SPC of Kildare County Council on 12th December 2023.

The Regional Assembly considers that the public consultation stage was satisfactorily carried out and in accordance with the LECP Guidelines 2021 which require the public consultation phase to take into account different stakeholder needs across both the economic and community sectors. The consultation report is comprehensive and is generally in accordance with Section 66C (2)(a) (i) (I) and Section 66C (3)(a) (i) (I) of the Local Government Act 2014.

It is considered however that the Consultation Report should be included as part of the appendix of the final LECP. In addition, the report should be amended to include full details of the public consultation information, a list of written submissions and the membership of relevant structures (LCDC, SPC) as detailed in Appendix 2 of the LECP Guidelines 2021.

3.3 High-Level Goals, Objectives and Outputs

Section 7 of the draft LECP details that four High-Level Goals have been created based on the findings from the socio-economic analysis, consultation, and review of existing policies. These High-Level Goals and their associated objectives have been jointly developed by Kildare County Council through the Kildare Advisory Steering Group (ASG) comprised of representatives from the LCDC, the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning SPC and other key agencies. The objectives are categorised as Sustainable Community Objectives (SCOs) and Sustainable Economic Objectives (SEOs) associated with each High-Level Goal. In addition, the draft LECP includes a number of shared Community and Economic Objectives under each High-Level Goal.

It should be noted that the LECP Guidelines 2021 recommend that the economic objectives included under each High-Level Goal be worded 'Sustainable Economic Development Objectives' or SEDOs for short. The wording included in the draft LECP is slightly different (i.e. Sustainable Economic Objectives) which should be amended to reflect the recommended wording in the guidelines. Furthermore, in relation to the shared community and economic development objectives, it is also noted that High-

Level Goals 1 and 2 have used the wording ‘Sustainable Shared Community and Economic Objectives’ whereas High-Level Goals 3 and 4 use the wording ‘Sustainable Joint Community and Economic Objectives’. For consistency, the final LECP should use the same wording for each of the High-Level Goal objectives in this category.

The LECP Guidelines 2021 recommend that High-Level Goals should be achievable and realistic. These are discussed in detail below, including an evaluation of consistency with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).

It is noted that for High-Level Goals and their corresponding objectives, alignment with the strategic objectives of the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029; the Kildare Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 and the Kildare 2025 Economic Development Strategy was pivotal. Whilst this is welcomed by the Regional Assembly, the final LECP should be amended to ensure alignment of High-Level Goals and objectives with the National Climate Action Plan 2024 as approved by Government on 20th December 2023, in accordance with the LECP Guidelines 2021

Overall, the Regional Assembly is satisfied with the selection of the four High-Level Goals and the stated objectives and outcomes, based on the evidence-based approach used and the socio-economic profile which was analysed to develop the goals. The Regional Assembly is satisfied that the chosen goals broadly align with the 3 Key Principles of the RSES (Healthy Placemaking, Economic Opportunity and Climate Action), the 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) of the RSES and with a number of relevant Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) of the RSES as highlighted in this section of the report.

Each High-Level Goal is discussed in more detail below:

Goal 1: County Kildare is a PLACE with resilient communities where all people live full, healthy and inclusive lives

This goal contains 18 no. objectives in total. They are split between 7 no. Sustainable Community Objectives, 5 no. Sustainable Economic Objectives and 6 no. Shared Community and Economic Objectives. The objectives are wide ranging and relate to topics such as improving social infrastructure assets in the county, upgrades to libraries, upgrades to school facilities and improved childcare facilities in areas of high growth, improvements to healthcare provision, improvements to remote working facilities and hubs across the county, promotion of Kildare as an attractive and age friendly retail destination, increasing housing provision, promotion of sustainable travel modes and improvements to broadband and telecom infrastructure in the county.

SCO 1.1	To advance the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 to progress a range of universally accessible, multi-use and inclusive social facilities. This includes community, arts/cultural, museums, enterprise, sports, family resource centres, childcare and recreational facilities in close proximity to the communities that they serve. These facilities will also support and promote social inclusion and enterprise development.
SCO 1.2	To increase the provision of children’s play facilities, teen spaces, sports fields, civic spaces, outdoor gyms, open space and adult exercise equipment in central locations that are accessible to all and promote social inclusion.

SCO 1.3	To support the ongoing development and upgrading of existing library facilities in central accessible locations and encourage their use as key facilitators of community, arts, educational, social and cultural activities.
SCO 1.4	To cater for the needs of all school-going children and young people across the county, particularly targeting high-growth areas, by actively planning for the expansion and building of centrally located schools that support sustainable transport access through continued collaboration with the Department of Education and Children. Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board and other applicable patrons.
SCO 1.5	To increase the range and types of childcare facilities across the county, particularly in high-growth areas, to enable children to develop equitably and to support parents to return to employment, education/training and caring duties.
SCO 1.6	To increase the provision and range of healthcare and eldercare facilities/ services across the county, particularly in areas of high growth and where service deficits are identified. These will respond to general healthcare requirements across the lifecycle and to specific health needs such as mental health, addiction and disability.
SCO 1.7	To continue to work with central Government, relevant State Agencies, local organisations and communities to support the provision of accommodation and other services for International Protection Applicants and Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection from Ukraine and to support their longer-term economic and community inclusion.
SEO 1.8	To establish a comprehensive and integrated network of remote working hubs and identify suitable locations and support existing co-working facilities, digital hubs/e-hubs and e-working centres across the county, targeting city-based employers and promoting flexible, local working.
SEO 1.9	To promote and support economic development across the county, particularly targeting areas where economic engagement is weak and where traditional economic activity is no longer viable/sustainable, e.g., due to the closure of the peat industry.
SEO 1.10	To facilitate and support the expansion and sustainment of the retail offering in County Kildare.
SEO 1.11	To develop and promote Kildare as an attractive and age-friendly retail destination.
SEO 1.12	Encourage promotion of mixed-use developments and support dwellings over shopfront buildings to regenerate urban living and increase housing availability in towns and villages.
Shared Objective 1.13	To provide high quality, accessible, sustainable and environmentally friendly housing to respond to the varied and strong housing demands in Kildare, particularly responding to those with specialist accommodation needs.
Shared Objective 1.14	To progress policy outlined in Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 through the provision of appropriate infrastructure to promote sustainable development through facilitating movement to, from and through the county that is accessible to all and that prioritises walking, cycling and public transport.
Shared Objective 1.15	Encourage and support Irish Rail and other transport agencies in the delivery of sustainable transport projects in the county such as Dart+West and Bus Connects projects.

Shared Objective 1.16	To continue to develop the infrastructure and use of the Greenways/Blueways/Peatways and their surrounding towns/villages across the county to support employment, tourism and healthy lifestyles.
Shared Objective 1.17	To support the safety of our citizens through the provision of Gardaí, fire and emergency services that are in line with the requirements of a county of our size.
Shared Objective 1.18	To increase high-quality broadband and telecom infrastructure across the county.

These objectives support the Key Principles of Healthy Placemaking and Economic Opportunity outlined in the RSES, including RSOs in relation to Compact Growth and Urban Regeneration (RSO 2), the RSO in relation to Healthy Communities (RSO 4) and to Improve Education Skills and Social Inclusion (RSO 13). In addition, the goal and objectives support a number of RPOs such as RPO 9.13 in relation to new social infrastructure developments being accessible and inclusive for a range of users, RPO 9.16 in relation to public health policy supports and RPO 9.21 in relation to the need to consider future school provision in areas of significant new housing. Many of the objectives listed above also support the Guiding Principles for the creation of healthy and attractive spaces detailed in Section 9.4 of the RSES

Goal 2: County Kildare nurtures its PEOPLE to reach their full potential and to enjoy a high quality of life at all stages.

This goal contains 15 no. objectives in total. They are split between 4 no. Sustainable Community Objectives, 6 no. Sustainable Economic Objectives and 5 no. Shared Community and Economic Objectives.

Notably again, the objectives included under this High-Level Goal are wide ranging and include themes such as social inclusion, skill improvements, support for volunteering, encouragement and support for businesses to become more accessible for employment opportunities, support for small and micro enterprises, promotion of local based festivals and cultural events, developing a smart economy/digital upskilling for the benefit of all, progress the Kildare Climate Action Plan and support for public transport and active travel.

SCO 2.1	Through networks, including the Kildare Public Participation Network, Comhairle na nÓg, Older Persons Council, Disability Access Groups, Kildare Traveller Action, Kildare Volunteer Centre, Town Teams and other representative voluntary groups, meaningful engagement will be encouraged and supported to inform local community initiatives, planning and decision-making, as well as to promote social inclusion in line with national policy.
SCO 2.2	To support people of all ages across Kildare, particularly in newly developing, socially excluded and expanding communities, to meet and engage in social, educational, health, employment, recreational, arts and cultural opportunities through a range of community development, social inclusion, community arts, education, health and other targeted programmes. This will develop local leadership, ownership, inclusion and a sense of pride and belonging in local communities.
SCO 2.3	To fully utilise libraries, museums and arts opportunities across Kildare to engage people, particularly those least likely to use them, in order to

	learn, develop new skills, meet new people, and build strong, inclusive communities.
SCO 2.4	To promote, encourage and support volunteering and to recognise its role in developing communities across Kildare.
SEO 2.5	To establish an ongoing awareness of the skills required by local enterprises. This will help educators and trainers to proactively support people into employment opportunities - particularly people and areas experiencing unemployment.
SEO 2.6	To encourage and support businesses across Kildare to become more accessible and proactively employ groups who experience challenges to engage in the labour force, e.g., long-term unemployed, older people, people with disabilities, people with low educational attainment, lone parents, ethnic minorities and Travellers.
SEO 2.7	To promote local entrepreneurship through models of clustering and support their ongoing development through integrated, accessible support services targeting micro, small business and social enterprises across the county.
SEO 2.8	To increase the competitiveness and productivity of small and micro enterprises and support the ambition of local businesses to scale and compete internationally.
SEO 2.9	To promote Kildare as the Thoroughbred County through the discovery, sharing and application of new knowledge that will enhance the health, performance and management of horses.
SEO 2.10	To encourage and support upskilling, job mobility and enterprise creation management.
Shared Objective 2.11	To recognise, increase awareness of and embrace minority ethnic groups by listening and responding to their distinct needs. This will promote and support full inclusion in community and economic development across Kildare.
Shared Objective 2.12	To develop and promote locally based festivals and cultural events across Kildare to support community engagement, pride and inclusion. Larger festivals such as <i>Brigid 1500</i> will also serve to promote and support Kildare's tourism potential.
Shared Objective 2.13	To ensure that the developing smart economy and digital upskilling impacts towns and villages across the county, benefiting all communities - particularly areas and people that are traditionally excluded from technology (e.g., older people, people with low education levels, Travellers).
Shared Objective 2.14	To progress the Kildare Climate Action Plan to embed the principles of sustainability and the circular economy through empowering local people, state agencies and businesses, particularly more vulnerable communities within the county, to make informed, sustainable, circular and climate-positive choices.
Shared Objective 2.15	To promote and support the full utilisation of public transport and active travel as a means of accessing employment, education, recreation and other day-to-day activities.

These objectives support the Key Principle of Economic Opportunity outlined in the RSES, including the RSO 12 in relation to Building a Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise and Innovation and also RSO

13 in relation to Improve Education Skills and Social Inclusion (RSO 13). They also demonstrate consistency with a number of RPOs including RPO 6.28 in relation to supporting local authorities in the design, development and roll-out of social enterprise practices and RPO 6.31 in relation to supporting enterprise development agencies and LEOs in their efforts to increase business innovation and capacity.

Goal 3: County Kildare promotes and prioritises CLIMATE ACTION, CLIMATE JUSTICE and SUSTAINABILITY

This goal contains 9 no. objectives in total. They are split between 1 no. Sustainable Community Objective, 1 no. Sustainable Economic Objective and 7 no. Shared Community and Economic Objectives.

These objectives relate to increasing awareness for climate action and a just transition at local community level, support for energy efficiency and supports for business, progressing the implementation of the Kildare Climate Action Plan, improvements to rural public transport network, promotion of environmental sustainability and energy efficiency in housing, promotion of eco-tourism, the circular/green economy and the bioeconomy, and support for the agricultural sector while transitioning to reduce emissions and becoming more sustainable.

SCO 3.1	To increase the awareness and understanding of local communities to build their capacity for climate action and a just transition for economic and community development, particularly targeting more excluded groups/communities.
SEO 3.2	To support local businesses to become leaders in sustainable energy through the provision of energy efficiency training and supports. This will result in increased competitiveness.
Shared Objective 3.3	To progress the implementation of the County Kildare Climate Action Plan with Kildare County Council as leaders in mitigating climate emissions and mainstreaming climate action in conjunction with the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO).
Shared Objective 3.4	Support the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan to ensure that the public transport network encourages and supports changes in demand for transport, improves regional connectivity, and provides an enhanced alternative to the private car.
Shared Objective 3.5	To progress the objectives in the County Kildare Climate Action Plan to protect and enhance the natural environment and green infrastructure by supporting biodiversity and natural water systems, reducing the risk of negative impacts of climate change, and enhancing the health and wellbeing of all citizens.
Shared Objective 3.6	To promote the design and delivery of environmentally sustainable and energy efficient housing, including through the refurbishment and upgrading of existing local authority housing stock.
Shared Objective 3.7	Promote and support the development of eco-tourism, particularly in rural Kildare, to diversify farm income, increase use of the Barrow Blueway and Greenways, and increase employment opportunities in line with planning and environmental considerations.
Shared Objective 3.8	That Kildare will be a leader in low-carbon development, with a focus on sustainable sectors including the circular/green economy, land use diversification and the potential of the bioeconomy, and that this leadership be recognised nationally and internationally.

Shared Objective 3.9	That the Agricultural sector will be supported and will continue to be an important part of the county's economy while transitioning to reduce emissions and become more sustainable.
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This High-Level Goal and associated objectives support the Key Principle of Climate Action outlined in the RSES, including Regional Strategic Objectives (RSOs) of the RSES in relation to Building Climate Resilience (RSO 8), Supporting the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy (RSO 9), Enhancing Green Infrastructure (RSO 10) and Biodiversity and Natural Heritage (RSO 11). In addition, the goal supports RPO 6.23 in relation to supporting enterprise development agencies and LEOs on the development of industries that create and employ green technologies and take measures to accelerate the transition towards a low carbon economy and circular economy.

Goal 4: County Kildare attracts the RESOURCES and INVESTMENT to be a sustainable, inclusive, economically vibrant community for all.

This goal contains 6 no. objectives in total. They are split between 3 no. Sustainable Community Objectives, 1 no. Sustainable Economic Objective and 2 no. shared Community and Economic Objectives.

The objectives cover such topics as increased resources for young and older groups including vulnerable communities, improved educational facilities in areas of high growth, resources to reduce social exclusion, promotion of FDI investment in County Kildare, utilising funding opportunities to support community and economic development across the county and using available data to prioritise resource requirements for business and community development across the county.

SCO 4.1	To fully utilise recently developed strategic plans highlighting the need for additional resourcing to respond to the needs of children, young people, older people, vulnerable communities, Family Resource Centres, Travellers, and other groups.
SCO 4.2	To highlight and seek resourcing to expand education provision, particularly targeting secondary provision in the north and high-growth areas of the county. In addition to increasing the number of DEIS schools in the county.
SCO 4.3	To continue to highlight the need for ongoing, committed and sustainable resources to reduce social exclusion and to prevent further increases in the gap between affluence and poverty in the county.
SEO 4.4	To promote Kildare as the location of choice for new Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and support existing FDI companies in sustaining and expanding their business.
Shared Objective 4.5	To utilise the social infrastructure audits carried out as part of KCC Local Area Planning to allocate existing resources and work with Government Departments and Agencies to identify funding opportunities to inform funding applications to support community and economic development across the county.
Shared Objective 4.6	To ensure that the systems are in place to collate and analyse accurate and timely data to inform resource priorities and allocations for business and community development across the county. This includes data to supplement the Haase deprivation index for Kildare.

These objectives support the Key Principles of Economic Opportunity and Healthy Placemaking outlined in the RSES, including the RSO in relation to Collaborative Platform (RSO 16). They also demonstrate consistency with a range of RPOs including RPO 6.25 in relation to collaboration with educational

providers and industry and research agencies, and RPO 6.35 which seeks to improve the bidding capacity of local authorities, government agencies and regional stakeholders to identify infrastructure deficits and opportunities and to successfully attract competitive funding.

3.4 Implementation

Section 8.2 of the draft LECP indicates that a two-year implementation plan will be included within Appendix 4 of the LECP. However, the draft version submitted to the Regional Assembly for consideration does not include any content in Appendix 4.

It is further indicated that this implementation plan (when prepared) will set out the specific priority actions for Kildare between 2024 and 2026. These actions will be led by appropriate agencies/bodies, including but not exclusive to Kildare County Council. A highly collaborative approach is proposed in keeping with work through the LCDC and SPC to date. The objectives and actions in the LECP will be presented to align with current and possible future funding streams including central government funding through a wide range of agencies and non-departmental bodies.

In relation to monitoring, it is stated that once the LECP is finalised and adopted, the membership of the Kildare Advisory Steering Group (ASG) will be reviewed to establish an LECP Monitoring and Implementation team. This will ensure that the skillset required to oversee the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the LECP over the next six years is in place.

The key roles of the monitoring and Implementation team are to be finalised but will include:

- a) Liaising with the lead and supporting partners, bodies and agencies responsible for delivery of actions identified in the plan.
- b) Monitoring and reviewing progress.
- c) Writing reports and presenting updates.
- d) Amending the implementation plan as appropriate.

LECP progress will be included as a standing agenda item at all LCDC and Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning SPC scheduled meetings. An annual review of all actions will also be presented alongside a short, published progress report.

Following the end of the two-year implementation period, a more detailed extensive review will take place to inform the preparation of the second implementation plan.

As stated earlier in this report, no initial two-year implementation plan has been submitted for assessment by EMRA with the draft LECP. As a specific implementation plan is required in line with the LECP Guidelines 2021, the finalised LECP should include an implementation plan that is prepared and presented in accordance with the requirements of same.

4.0 Evaluation of Consistency with the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029

Section 44 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (amending Section 66C of the Local Government Act 2001) states that LECPs should be consistent with the core strategy and objectives of the Development Plan, in this respect the Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029. Given that the

Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 was deemed to be consistent with the RSES, as acknowledged by the submission made by EMRA on 16th May 2022, the Regional Assembly therefore considers that an analysis of the RSES is deemed sufficient in order to demonstrate consistency. The Regional Assembly notes the comprehensive overview of the LECP and Spatial Planning set out in Section 3.2 of the draft document that clearly sets out how the draft LECP has been informed to be consistent with the core strategy of the Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029, in addition to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

5.0 Other Considerations

A small number of clerical errors and anomalies are evident in the draft LECP document. In this respect, Section 2.1 should make the correct reference to the 'Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly' under the last line in the first paragraph. In addition, in Section 3.2 (LECP and Spatial Planning), the second paragraph on page 19 should omit reference to the 'National Spatial Strategy' and replace same with the 'National Planning Framework'. Also, the Settlement Hierarchy Table for County Kildare on page 19 appears to be incorrectly referenced 2016 – 2021, rather than for the period of the current Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029.

The above matters should be adequately addressed in the final LECP document.

6.0 Recommendation and Statement of Consistency

The Regional Assembly commends the work of Kildare County Council to date in the preparation of the draft LECP and issues a Statement of Consistency for the Kildare LECP as required under Section 44 of the Local Government Reform Act (as amended) subject to the following recommendation:

1. The LECP should make reference to the retail hierarchy for the Region, as outlined in the RSES Chapter 6 Table 6.1 which identifies Naas/Newbridge and Maynooth as Level 2 (Major Town Centres and County Town Centres), and Celbridge, Kilcock, Kilcullen, Athy, Kildare, Monasterevin, Clane and Leixlip as Level 3 (Town and/or District Centres and Sub-County Town Centres) of the retail hierarchy.

Reason: To ensure consistency between the Kildare LECP and the retail hierarchy for the Region as set out in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031.

The following are observations by the Regional Assembly that should be incorporated into the final LECP in the interest of best practice:

1. The draft LECP refers to Sustainable Economic Objectives under the High-Level Goals rather than being categorised as Sustainable Economic Development Objectives (SEDOs) along with Sustainable Community Objectives (SCOs) as per the recommendations of the LECP Guidelines 2021. The final LECP should amend Section 7 of the document to ensure that the objectives are suitably categorised and worded in accordance with the recommendations set out in the LECP Guidelines 2021.

Reason: To ensure that the objectives of the Kildare LECP are suitably categorised as SCOs and

SEDOs in accordance with the recommendations of the LECP Guidelines 2021.

2. The LECP is required to include an implementation plan that is prepared and presented in accordance with the requirements of Section B of the LECP Guidelines 2021. This should be included in Appendix 4 of the LECP which was not completed in the version submitted to the Regional Assembly for review. The final implementation plan should also indicate, for each action, the potential funding sources (programmes and funding streams) available, as well as the availability of other relevant resources.

Reason: The LECP Guidelines 2021 require an implementation plan to be prepared and form part of the overall LECP process and also recommend that the implementation plan should include suggestions on what funding streams may be available to support the implementation of the relevant identified prioritised actions.

3. The final LECP should ensure alignment of High-Level Goals and objectives with the National Climate Action Plan 2024.

Reason: The LECP Guidelines 2021 state that consideration of the role of the LECP in supporting the delivery of actions in Local and National Climate Action Plans should form part of the LECP with specific actions included in LECP Implementation Plans as appropriate.


4. The public consultation report that was prepared as part of the LECP process should be included as an Appendix of the LECP. In addition, the public consultation report should be amended to include the full details of all public consultation information, a complete list of written submissions received and the membership of relevant structures (LCDC, SPC) as detailed in Appendix 2 of the LECP Guidelines 2021.

Reason: To ensure that the final LECP for Kildare is consistent with Section 66C (2)(a)(i)(I) and Section 66C (3)(a)(i)(I) of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, which, as detailed in the LECP Guidelines 2021, requires that a report should be included in the LECP on this stage.

7.0 Conclusion

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) welcomes the progression of the Local Economic and Community Plan to a draft document and considers the objectives to be consistent with the RSES and the Kildare County Development Plan 2023–2029. Subject to the recommendation stated in Section 6.0 of this report being incorporated into the finalised LECP, the Regional Assembly considers that the document would be consistent with the policies and objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031 and the Kildare County Development Plan 2023–2029.

Regards,



Clare Bannon
A/Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
15th April 2024