



31 May 2024

Planning Department,
Civic Offices,
Emmett Street,
Clonmel,
Co. Tipperary,
E91 N512

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Pre-draft Carrick on Suir Local Area Plan 2025 - 2031

The Heritage Council was established in 1995 as a statutory body under the Heritage Act 1995 with a Council (the Board of the body) appointed by the Minister. The Heritage Council is a prescribed body under the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 and S.I. No. 600/2001 of the Planning and Development Regulations, section 28 inter alia, in accordance with its functions under Section 6 of the Heritage Act, 1995.

We seek to provide submissions on forward planning, development control and strategic infrastructure developments as they relate to Ireland's heritage, namely built, cultural and natural heritage. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Pre-Draft Carrick on Suir LAP Issues Paper. We have considered the questions in the Issues Paper, and our comments below are a response to these questions, where they were relevant. Our comments will deal with both built heritage and natural heritage. Ireland's national heritage is defined in the Heritage Act, 1995 as including: 'monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, wrecks, geology, heritage gardens, and parks and inland waterways'.

National and Local Policy Context

It is important to state from the outset that the **National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040**, identifies "*Enhanced Amenities and Heritage*" as one of our national strategic outcomes. Within this, the NPF correctly notes that built, cultural and natural heritage has intrinsic value in defining the character of urban and rural areas, adding to their attractiveness and sense of place. National policy objectives 16, 17 and 52 in the NPF give further support to this ambition and there is a need to reflect this in LAPs.

Development Plans – Guidelines for Local Planning Authorities was prepared for county and city councils in June 2022. Within these guidelines, there are detailed requirements for local forward planning objectives. Features of special architectural, historical, or natural value are our heritage assets, and mandatory objectives under the themes of 'heritage and landscape' have been identified throughout these guidelines. There is an obligation on local authorities to ensure the inclusion of such objectives in their statutory plans.

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The 4th edition of Ireland's **National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023 – 2030** was published in January 2024. The NBAP states that “local authorities play a key role in biodiversity conservation through the planning system”. There are several targets identified under Outcome 2A (*The protection of existing designated areas and protected species is strengthened and conservation and restoration within the existing protected area network are enhanced, regarding designated areas and protected species*) that are relevant for local authorities in their plan making functions. However, of key importance is Outcome 3C (*Planning and development will facilitate and secure biodiversity's contributions to People*). Action Numbers 3C2 and 3C3 are especially important, whereby the objectives of the NBAP are to be aligned and integrated within the statutory land use plans. In addition, actions 1B9, 1C5 should also be key considerations for all plans.

Heritage Ireland 2030 was published in February 2022, and details a number of action points relevant for local authorities and these should be included in local area plans. Most importantly are Action 22 - *Introduce policies on supports for urban biodiversity and tree planting*; Action 26 - *Support nature-based solutions for land-use management*; and Action 37 - *Integrate heritage considerations into urban and rural regeneration to ensure that built and natural heritage objectives underpin the planning and development process and inform the 'Town Centres First' policy approach*.

The **Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Architectural Heritage Protection** were developed in 2004 and give expression to the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000, with regards to built heritage. Chapter 2 and 3 give detailed guidance on the role of statutory county level plans with regards to the Record of Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas. The Office of the Planning Regulator has also provided guidance on **Archaeology in the Planning Process** through **Planning Leaflet 13**.

The Southern Regional Assembly's **Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019-2031** is the current regional plan for County Tipperary. Whilst the RSES primarily deals with spatial planning matters at the regional level, there are several sections within the RSES that are relevant for local area plans. We would bring particular attention to Objective RPO 110, which aims to ensure that local authorities promote an ecosystem services approach to statutory land use plans, while Objectives RPO 124 and 125 promotes green infrastructure and biodiversity in terms of the need to establish objectives in relation to habitats and connectivity. In terms of built heritage, Policies RPO 204 to RPO 208 provide robust policy provision for architectural and archaeological assets.

The **Tipperary County Development Plan 2022 – 2028** has comprehensive chapters on Environment and Natural Assets (Chapter 11) and Built Heritage (Chapter 13). Policies 11-1 to 11-3 establish the required statutory provision for designated sites, while policy 11-4 details more specific policy provision for local biodiversity, ecosystem services and the importance of trees and hedgerows. Matters of architectural and archaeological protection are clearly provided for through policies 13.1 to 13.7 while objectives 13-A to

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13-F provide further emphasis on specific heritage assets, including the conservation of Carrick on Suir's historic walls.

These pertinent national and local policies are emphasised to provide context to our comments. Additional guidelines and policies are identified for specific thematic sections below in response to the questions in the Issues Paper.

Specific comments on the Issues Paper

Overall Vision

The vision should capture the importance of balancing future development with the protection of the town's natural and built heritage. We recommend that there be a heritage emphasis in the new plan. Carrick on Suir is one of the 32 walled towns under the Heritage Council's Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) with several heritage assets present in town i.e. The Tholsel, Castle Park and St. Nicholas Church. These nationally and regionally important assets, along with features such as the Old Bridge and the linear townscape on Main Street give a distinct character to the town. A historic environment such as this cannot be replicated and should be the point off which future development pivots. In this regard, the traditional [Irish townscape](#) of linear townhouse development along arterial routes is an important part of our heritage. Protecting this heritage along with ensuring compact growth need not necessarily be conflicting objectives but can be achieved through a heritage led design approach that should be part of this vision.

The LAP could assist this heritage led vision, by ensuring infill development which mirrors this linear townscape. A consolidated urban form that amplifies this 'townscape' character should be pursued. Collaboration with other departments in the council, insofar as supporting the repurposing of vacant/ derelict buildings, particularly for residential uses, is needed in this regard. This should be pursued with the same rigour that regeneration/consolidation sites are pursued during the lifetime of the plan. This design approach can simultaneously achieve a relatively high density/compact urban grain while respecting heritage.

The Heritage Council would recommend the LAP emphasise the need for compact growth. In this regard, there is also a need for the LAP to identify opportunity sites/ brownfield sites to maximise brownfield potential. This is the specificity that is needed from local areas plans. Whilst we recognise that it is unlikely that all the housing need of a local authority would be met on brownfield sites only, we do encourage the LAP to exhaust the potential for brownfield site locations before any greenfield expansion is pursued. The town also benefits from the River Suir, designated a Special Area of Conservation. This is an important natural heritage feature for the town and should be promoted in the vision/strategic objectives.

The LAP should also note the trainline connection between Waterford and Limerick as an asset. One of the key fundamentals of proper planning, identified in the *development plan guidelines* for local authorities, is the integration of land use (patterns of

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development) and transport (mobility). Like other towns in Ireland, there is a greater need to identify development locations next to existing large scale public transport infrastructure. Unless there are showstopping constraints (e.g. flood risk, natura 2000 sites etc), there are sites adjacent to the station that could be assessed for their development potential as part of the LAP. This consolidation of development in the inner core of the town and the area surrounding the station can establish greater critical mass to justify the retention and improvement of train services in the southeast. The vision should recognise this. The compact growth area identified in the issues paper should include the area around the train station, if it does not already.

We would recommend that all these positive elements be strongly protected and be fully appreciated in the vision for Carrick on Suir.

Town Centre and Regeneration

In relation to achieving compact growth and regeneration, it is important to note that the Irish terraced townscape can be of a relatively high density-high coverage development form, that also achieved good design. The more sustainable aspects of this historic design should be promoted in new housing design. It is also essential that CDP development management standards, in terms of residential amenity, set back distances, and parking standards are not automatically assumed for inner town sites. It is likely that some of these standards are excessive and not conducive to compact growth or regeneration, particularly with regards to the reuse of buildings of heritage value.

As alluded to in the previous section, work on identifying sites in the town should be pursued based on a sequential town centre first approach. Within regeneration/consolidation sites, it is key to identify natural and built heritage constraints/assets; and these should then inform the design/development approach to the site. In the first instance, development should not negatively impact the integrity or the setting of important features of natural, archaeological, and architectural interest. High quality design will be essential in this regard.

More specifically the most successful public realm proposals anchor off the heritage assets that exist, using them as the centrepiece in new public realm projects. This can successfully contribute to the perception and experience of the built historic environment, which is all too often car dominated. In this regard we would recommend that public realm and landscaping proposals do not only concentrate on hard landscaping (paving, stonework). Greater emphasis on soft landscaping, that incorporates native plant species, will not just make the built environment more pleasant, but will also aid local biodiversity ambitions.

An initial view of the town gives the impression that vacancy is an issue, and some figures on levels of vacancy would be welcome. The approximately 100metre long Bridge Street has significant project potential. The street is narrow, with a good sense of enclosure, and is primarily residential in nature, sporadically interspersed with small commercial premises, many of which have attractive shopfronts. A desktop view suggests high

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vacancy, whereby the lived experience of “traffic outside the front window” may have contributed to a general perception of an inhospitable residential environment.

There is opportunity here for an innovative public realm design to improve the liveability of the street, which is punctuated at both ends by the Old Bridge and Main Street respectively. The thoroughfare could undergo a new paving and landscaping scheme, not so dissimilar to the Parade in Kilkenny in terms of a material palette. It would slow down vehicle movements, encourage vehicular movements to circulate west rather than through Bridge Street, would ensure greater footfall/business viability, as well as greater attractiveness of the street as a place to live. If combined with a new triangular public realm design at the junction of Bridge Street, West Gate and Main Street this could bring benefits to the area (see Tramore as an example in this regard). The objective would be to enable Bridge Street to be perceived as a semi-private residential quarter, albeit in a public space. (See Kolenstraat/Rodetorenstraat, Zutphen as an example).

More generally, the *Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements guidelines* published in January 2024 specifically note the importance of responsive placemaking for existing heritage as well as the expectation for the application of density and development management standards. We strongly recommend that Tipperary County Council consult in detail these guidelines with specific concentration on the relevant sections for the settlement size of Carrick on Suir. This guidance should then inform and be incorporated into this section of the LAP.

Climate Change Action and Biodiversity

The Heritage Council support policies to reduce car reliance, which we believe are essential. We have already noted this under the vision section. The *development plan guidelines* rightly emphasise that objective 10(2)(n) is to promote sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas, in relation to the location, layout and design of development. At the level of first principles, together with the reuse of the embedded carbon in vacant buildings, this is the most important role the planning system has in reducing greenhouse gas emissions i.e. the cause of climate change. In this context it is important that the Carrick on Suir LAP:

- Ensures that any greenfield release makes efficient use of land, whilst providing the mix of homes necessary, and having densities and facilities, that are conducive to public transport roll out, and cycling and walking.
- Existing brownfield sites and well-located sites within the urban boundary are preferred in a sequential approach to development.
- Active reuse of existing building stock, which does constitute much of our vernacular and urban heritage building stock.

Achieving this will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the built environment but it will also ensure that land take is restrained and does not pose undue threats to cultural and natural heritage.

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In terms of adaptation there naturally will be flood plains along the Suir adjacent to the town. Development should be avoided in these locations, while we would recommend to Tipperary County Council that any flood defence measures should be considered at the entire catchment level in the first instance. There is opportunity to manage flood risk via nature-based solutions, whereby lands liable to flooding should be avoided in terms of development, while at the same time natural habitats should be allowed to replenish in these flood plains. Flood plains and their riparian zone should be the “low hanging fruit” for ecological restoration measures given their unsuitability for development. While it is recognised that in urban areas where development has occurred, flood relief schemes may be needed; in the first instance, a whole river basin catchment approach to managing flooding should be pursued (as noted under actions 2D6 and 2D7 of the NBAP 2023-2030).

In terms of natural heritage, the new NBAP 2023-2030 has a list of targets that are relevant for planning authorities regarding their statutory plan making functions. We would strongly recommend that all local authorities, through their biodiversity officers, audit this document to identify the relevant actions/ targets for land use statutory plans, and subsequently reflect them in their LAPs. Each local authority will also have its own biodiversity action plan in due course which needs to be incorporated into the LAPs if timelines align.

The *Development Plans Guidelines* detail mandatory heritage and landscape objectives in Chapter 9. Whilst these may be more relevant for CDPs, there is a need to ensure that the Carrick on Suir LAP secures compliance with these objectives. These guidelines also rightly note that the majority of the country “*lies outside of the network of protected sites, and that there are many other sites which are of local importance for flora and fauna*”. Local authorities have an important role to play in preventing the loss of such sites. Features such as hedgerows, river corridors, ponds and small stands of trees etc. provide important habitats, and land use plans can play an important role in protecting these assets. From an ecological view these linear features are one of few ecological corridors/hotspots in and around settlements. These ecological networks should have a level of protection in the LAP, and any forthcoming Biodiversity Action Plan can map and classify these features in order to provide a scientific evidence basis for their inclusion in the LAP.

It is with this in mind that The Heritage Council strongly supports measures that enhance biodiversity in Carrick on Suir. There is a need to protect existing hedgerows/ trees when new development is proposed. There is often needless removal of mature trees and hedgerows, of considerable character and ecological value, as part of site works to ‘tidy’ the site before construction commences. While opportunity sites within the town or any phased greenfield release should have stringent design standards for retention of natural features. It is also important to note that some of the older buildings, in advance of refurbishment are likely to need bat surveying.

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In Carrick on Suir the riparian zone along the River Suir (Special Area of Conservation) would be particularly important (with a proposed Natural Heritage Area east of the town also present). Specific actions could be taken here to amplify its importance for the town as well as placing obligations on the plan to take actions to protect and enhance its ecological integrity. We recommend that Tipperary County Council familiarise itself with the qualifying interests and the site synopsis for this SAC, which is available via the [NPWS](#), and to include reference to the relevant guidance documents from Inland Fisheries Ireland, namely “*Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment*”, in the LAP.

We would also remind Tipperary County Council that such biodiversity policymaking is a requirement of National Policy Objective 58 of the NPF, insofar “*as integrated planning for Green Infrastructure and ecosystem services will be incorporated into the preparation of statutory land use plans*”; while National Policy Objective 60 (*Conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural and cultural heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their significance*) is also a requirement. In addition, policies noted previously in the Tipperary CDP 2022-2028 re-enforce this ambition.

The *development plan guidelines* also specifically seek the protection of areas of amenities (natural features) namely (i) Special Amenity; (ii) Landscape Conservation Areas; (iii) Tree Preservation Orders; and (iv) Public Rights of Ways. Within an urban area not all such natural features will be relevant, however public rights of way are often essential for not just the experience of the landscape, but also the experience of local heritage, in both towns and rural areas. We would recommend that public rights of way are maintained or expanded where necessary.

The Heritage Council would also encourage active TPO work in the form of a fresh ‘walk about town’ assessment of trees of important ecological and character value with the view to identify further TPOs. The mature trees located along Ask Park, within the park itself and along the N24 are good examples of mature specimens with character and ecological value. These should be retained and maintained and would be an illustrative case where a TPO would be of considerable benefit, if one does not already exist. We also recommend that “*Amenity Trees and Woodlands – A guide to their Management in Ireland*” published by the Tree Council of Ireland, be identified as source in the relevant section of the LAP, which should also consider the inclusion of a green network strategy, or similar.

Transport and Movement

To reduce car dependency, we would recommend that Tipperary County Council ensure that non-car-based alternatives are viable. On this point there is a need for safety during the journey and secure storage at both ends of the journey for cyclists. Cycle parking standards are needed for all development and for all uses, while active route planning for cycle lanes (number of km to be provided) needs to be carried out for the LAP. This is imperative to provide alternatives to the car, reducing GHG emissions, thus reducing climate change impacts on our natural heritage, habitats, and ecosystems.

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Built Heritage

As alluded to in our comments on the overall vision for Carrick on Suir, the town benefits from a rich built and cultural heritage. We strongly believe that conservation through use, and the refurbishment of existing historic buildings (designated and non-designated) should be a significant part of every settlement's local area plan. Heritage led regeneration can build on the existing character, which is unique, and cannot be recreated. Again, we would emphasise that regeneration and the need to bring life back into inner villages and towns respond in a positive way to the established pattern of development. It is important to note in this context that heritage protection is essential for a viable tourism product.

In response to the specific question – “*Does the protected status of buildings within the town inhibit their potential*”, we state the following.

The Record of Protected Structures (RPS) and Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA) designations are important policy and legislative provisions that protect our built heritage in Ireland. We do not believe that protective status is a significant obstacle to the re-use of historic buildings in towns in Ireland and we support conservation through use. Recent decades have seen more dispersed settlement patterns in Ireland, and the construction of out-of-town shopping facilities. These trends have directed activity away from towns and villages throughout Ireland which has led to decreased attention, and interest, in refurbishing and maintaining both designated and non-designated properties in towns. This along with changing lifestyle/retail patterns and the over-dominance of car infrastructure in towns has diminished the attractiveness of inner cores as a place to live. National Town Centre First initiatives and grant schemes have sought to rectify this trend, something the Heritage Council strongly support.

We have also noted in this submission that development management standards should be applied flexibly in terms of the re-use of historic buildings. We consider this essential for reducing vacancy and dereliction.

We note the relatively low visitor figures for the Ormond Castle OPW property located at the east of the town. These OPW visitor figures range from 3,871 in 2021, 4,791 in 2022 and 5,124 in 2023. While growth is evident in these, we suggest measures to increase footfall, to this significant National Monument, be explored with the OPW. Investment in the historic parkland surrounding Ormond Castle, interpretation, signage, and trails are measures in the remit of Tipperary County Council to enable this property to perform better for the town. Consideration of extending the Suir Blueway from the west of the town into the town centre and towards Ormond Castle should also be made.

As a walled town, there has been impressive conservation work carried out on the remaining sections of the town wall during 2014-20, in particular at Castle Street where the surviving portion of the wall was repaired and saved from collapse. This was achieved through funding from the Heritage Council's Irish Walled Towns Network. These works followed from the *Conservation, Management and Interpretation Plan (2013) Towns Wall:*

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Carrick-on Suir, Co. Tipperary and we suggest that the recommendations in this report are reviewed as a check on implementation.

Strategic Environmental Assessment/ Appropriate Assessment

There will be an SEA and Appropriate Assessment required for the LAP. There is a need to ensure that all future policies drafted are individually assessed against the SEA objectives, when the time comes. The Heritage Council recommends that the SEA guidance prepared by the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) be consulted when preparing the SEA for the LAP.

Conclusion

The Heritage Council strongly encourage Tipperary County Council to continue to acknowledge the primacy of Carrick on Suir's heritage resource. The built and natural heritage of the town should be the focus for guiding any future strategy. We recommend that this important heritage and character continues to guide a sustainable future development trajectory for the town and its environs.

I trust these comments will be considered carefully as Tipperary County Council progresses the Carrick on Suir Local Area Plan 2025-2031. Please note that due to resource constraints we are unable to comment specifically on the Tipperary Town LAP Issues Paper. However, many of the points raised in our submission here are also relevant for Tipperary Town.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Doyle
Head of Conservation

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