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Manager's Foreword

In preparing this new County Meath Development Plan, which will guide development within the county during the period 2007 to 2013, there is a growing emphasis on balanced development, in accordance with the principles of proper planning and sustainability. The development plan, while addressing the Planning Authority's specific areas of responsibility such as Roads, Sanitary Services, Housing, Environmental Protection, Culture, Heritage, Community and Social Infrastructure, also sets out a longer term vision of the county. This vision establishes the manner in which the county will be developed and its environment protected and enhanced, employing the principles of sustainable development and social partnership.

The challenges facing County Meath cannot be underestimated. We find ourselves in a position of unprecedented growth within the residential sector, unparalleled by any other county, even those within the Greater Dublin Area or Mid-east region. The population of the County has risen from 109,732 in 1996 to 162,261 people in 2006, which is a phenomenal growth rate. However, our employment sector and economic development generally has remained low, unable to keep pace with the increases in residential population. We have provided homes for the people of the county, and for many who have migrated here, but have been unable to match this with a corresponding level of jobs, amenities, services and physical infrastructure necessary to sustain such a population.

The introduction of the 'sustainable development' concept was considered an innovative and positive force of change within planning at the time of writing the 2001 plan. However, it was not until the Planning & Development Act, 2000 that the principles of sustainable development were first statutorily introduced into the Irish planning legislation. The current county development plan review has now had the benefit of additional national and regional guidance, which have been devised and written with greater understanding of the realities of and implications for 'sustainable development'. In particular, the need to encourage balanced growth and development within communities and across the county and where possible self-sufficient communities, is recognised as being critical to achieving sustainable development. The real challenge in implementing this new plan, will be implement actions and realise targets that will result in the sustainable communities we so desire.

The adoption of the County Development Plan for 2007 – 2013 marks a significant progressive step in the overall planning and sustainable development of County Meath. The main thrust of the settlement strategy to locate population growth and channel development in line with the principles of the NSS and RPGs. This includes the promotion and channelling of development in the first instance to Navan, Drogheda Environs and the Dunboyne / Clonee / Pace Rail Corridor which are the three major designated areas of growth in the county. These centres are identified to accept the County's share of regional growth going forward and will continue to accommodate a significant level of immigrants. The continued development of Ashbourne on a sustainable basis will also be pursued along with the development of the environs of both Kilcock and Maynooth which are located in a Primary Dynamic Cluster in the Metropolitan Area of the GDA. The continued development of Kells and Trim will be balanced with the protection of the inherent qualities of these Heritage Towns which may limit the quantum and scale of development which these centres can assimilate. The increased role which Dunshaughlin can play in accommodating a greater share of residential development is also provided for. This will be balanced with the development of smaller rural towns and villages being more closely related to locally driven residential growth and in a manner which is appropriately scaled and reinforces the character of these settlements. It is acknowledged that it will take time for the overall development strategy to be effective but is required if County Meath is to develop in a more balanced manner and to avoid unsustainable pressures at particular sensitive locations. The preparation of the Environmental Statement, the culmination of the first Strategic Environmental Assessment of a County Development Plan, has proven beneficial in this regard.

It is accepted that there is an ever increasing need to ensure that County Meath is attractive from an investment perspective and that the leakage from the local economy is reversed. The new County Development Plan includes a detailed economic strategy whose successful implementation will result in increased economic activity. The implementation of successful economic policies attract additional people to live in an area, placing increased demands on housing and employment opportunities, and also requiring higher levels of public services.

The preparation of this County Development Plan was not a task performed in isolation. From the outset, it must be stated that the process was a review of the existing County Development Plan (adopted in 2001) and formed the basis of much of our deliberations. The development plan review was further guided and influenced by the Irish planning code, as outlined in current legislation and other important national and regional guidelines and strategies. Such guidelines and strategies include, inter alia, the National Development Plan, the National Spatial Strategy, the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area, Dublin Transportation Office Strategy 'A Platform for Change', Transport 21, Retail Planning Guidelines, Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines, Comhar Principles for Sustainable Development.

The Development Plan was further influenced by the Council's own studies, plans and strategies, which seek to influence development within the county. In particular, the County Development Board Strategy, 'Le Chéile' which is a ten year strategy for the economic, social and cultural development of County Meath provides a template, guiding all public services and local development activities, in effect bringing more coherence to the planning and delivery of services at a local level. The review of the County Development Plan sought to address the spatial ramifications of 'Le Chéile'.

In preparing this new County Development Plan, we have endeavoured to address the challenges and the many issues raised by the Elected Members over the years as they present themselves in terms of their spatial implications. To this end, the Planning Authority published a series of Strategic Issues Papers, detailing the opportunities, constraints and challenges facing the county and sought comment regarding same. We acknowledge and welcome the participation of those who took this opportunity to make submissions at pre draft, draft and amendment stage to the Draft Development Plan and seek the continued involvement and participation of all in the community. Meath County Council, during the period of this County Development Plan, will continue to set positive community leadership within County Meath. Significant levels of community co-operation are already being achieved through the County Development Board Strategy and there is a positive working relationship with other agencies and groups participating in community development.

This County Development Plan, which has been prepared in accordance with Section 11 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, now replaces Volume I and Volume III of the Meath County Development Plan 2001. The new County Development Plan sets out a statutory strategic framework and settlement structure for the county, and will provide the necessary strategic policies and objectives to guide the preparation of the Local Area Plans, which will replace Volume II and associated book of maps over the course of the next 2 years

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the dedication and partnership approach adopted by elected members, officials and the public and other stakeholders during this 2 year process. Collectively, we have been able to make the decisions necessary to ensure our continued and improved economic prosperity while maintaining the particularly high-quality life that exists in Meath.

Tom Dowling,
County Manager.