



Draft Longford Town Local Area Plan,
Administrative Office,
Forward Planning,
Planning Dept,
Longford County Council,
Great Water St,
Longford,
Co Longford.

18th September 2024

Re: Draft Longford Town Local Area Plan 2025-2031

Dear Sirs,

We, Longford Rugby Football Club, would like to make a number of submissions in relation to the Draft Longford Town Local Area Plan 2025-2031 (**"the Plan"**):

1.

At page 241 in the document, there is a map the title to which is "Phasing Map". It shows, among other things, land proposed to be earmarked for residential purposes. Attached to this submission is a map showing:

- The location of our clubhouse, pitches and car parking area, outlined and hatched in blue.
- Land adjoining our facilities which has been identified on this Phasing Map as "Residential Phase 2" land (**"the adjoining land"**), outlined and hatched in red.

This adjoining land is, and always has been, used by a neighbouring farmer for agricultural purposes. It is immediately adjacent to:

- One of our pitches, to the East.
- Our clubhouse and car parking area to the North.

We would have serious concerns about the adjoining land being used for residential purposes, and would strongly object to it being designated "Residential" or being zoned or earmarked for residential purposes for the following reasons:

1. Our facilities, which are used for amenity and recreational purposes, are already surrounded on three sides by housing, and to add yet another housing estate to the South and West would seriously detract from the amenity/recreational use of our facilities.

CLUB MANAGER: Gerry Carthy

TRUSTEES: Warren Turner, Pat Fitzgerald, Paddy Quinn, Robert Belton

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JIMMY MURPHY

M:

E:

Mini Co-Ordinator:

PAULINE MARLOWE

M:

E:

Women's Rugby

Head of Women's (Seniors) Rugby:

JOE MCCOLLUM

M:

E:

2. We cater for roughly 450 children who play rugby, aged between 5 and 18, boys and girls. Those children are entrusted into our care by their parents in the belief/expectation that they will be able to play and train in a secure, private and safe environment. Adding yet another medium to high density housing estate, which would have the effect of surrounding our facilities on all sides, would clearly negatively impact upon our ability to protect and safeguard the children entrusted into our care.
3. An integral part of the game of rugby is kicking a ball "into touch". One of our pitches (to the East) is immediately adjacent to the adjoining land, and during the course of every single game played on that pitch a number of balls end up in this adjoining land, usually dropping down from a height at a fast speed. At the moment, there is no risk to person or property because the balls are landing in an open field. Were housing to be allowed on the adjoining land, the balls would inevitably end up landing on the public road or in someone's front or back garden. That would pose a grave risk to people, vehicles and property. Under no circumstances should Longford Rugby Football Club be exposed, through no fault of its own, to legal action by people on the adjoining land or by the owners of vehicles, houses or property to be built on the adjoining land alleging personal injury or damage caused by a rugby ball. Furthermore, a match ball costs approximately €80. At the moment, our neighbour is quite happy for members of the Club to go into his field for the purpose of retrieving the three or four balls which end up there every single game. That would not be the case were the land to be used for housing purposes. It would simply not be possible for our members to retrieve the balls. Firstly, that would necessitate a trespass (something that is tolerated at the moment by our neighbour) but most assuredly would not be tolerated by owners of houses. Secondly, it is likely that any back gardens will be enclosed by high walls rendering access impossible in any event.
4. Apart altogether from rugby, which caters for approximately 450 children, week in and week out, our facilities are used by a host of other organisations catering for the sporting needs of children – Longford GAA, St. Mel's College, Moyne Community School, Longford and District Schoolboy League, Melview FC, Stonepark FC, Newtown FC and Inny FC, just to mention a few. We have three playing pitches and our resources are stretched to breaking point in catering for all these children. The adjoining land, were it ever to be offered for sale, would be our only hope of acquiring land for a new playing pitch adjacent to our existing facilities, at an affordable price. We are a not-for-profit community-based sports organisation catering for the sporting needs of a diverse range of children and adults, across a range of sporting codes, where every cent raised is ploughed back into the provision of playing and training facilities. We would simply not be able to compete against a large builder in a bidding war.

2.

At page 205 in the Plan, there is a map titled "Walking and Cycling Permeability Schemes" (figure 6.7 of the LTP). It shows one of these schemes, marked PY-15, and on page 203 of the Plan PY-15 is described as "Demesne Lane to Lisbrack Road". It appears a Permeability Scheme is intended to be, in layman's terms, some sort of short cut for people to get from one location to another, either on foot or by cycle. The suggestion appears to be that this Permeability Scheme linking Demesne Lane to Lisbrack Road, and vice versa, would traverse our property, in whole or in part. This would be completely, totally and absolutely unacceptable to us, and to even suggest the possibility of a Permeability Scheme through our property would be, in our mind, grossly negligent and downright irresponsible.

As indicated previously, we are in not-for-profit community sports organisation

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catering for the needs of:

- The roughly 450 children, aged 5 to 18, who play rugby.
- The hundreds and hundreds of young visiting rugby players who come to play against our teams every year.
- The literally hundreds of children who use our facilities, week in and week out, for soccer and Gaelic football training and matches.

Not alone do these children use our pitches, they also use our dressing rooms and our toilets. Not alone are our toilets used by all these players, they are also used by the players' siblings, many of whom are also very, very young. The toilets and dressing rooms are accessed through a common door. When training and playing, the players leave their kit bags in the dressing rooms, and very often these kit bags contain mobile phones, jewellery and pocket money, apart altogether from clothing. On Saturdays and Sundays our facilities are likely to be used by children from 9:30 AM until 4:00 PM. On weekday nights, there is a constant turnover of personnel between different age groups and different sporting organisations from 5.30pm to 9.30pm, most of which is spent in darkness. All our personnel in the Rugby Club (Coaches, managers, First Aid personnel etc) are volunteers. It is simply not possible for us to police all these comings and goings. It is simply not possible for us to have full time security personnel at the door to the toilets and dressing rooms, or around the car parking areas. It is also impossible for us to do so when our facilities are actually being used by other sporting codes. Parents of underage players (whether rugby, soccer or Gaelic football) frequently deposit their children at our pitches and head off on their own business while their children are playing or training. These parents are entitled to assume that their children will be left in an environment which is as safe and secure as is humanly possible – but in the knowledge it is not possible to supervise every square inch of our facilities 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

At the moment, there is only one entrance to, and exit from, our facilities, namely, onto Lisbrack Road. Generally speaking, therefore, the only people coming and going are likely to be people who have business being on our premises – players, officials, parents and spectators. To suggest that our facilities will be transformed into some sort of public pedestrian thoroughfare, linking many housing estates with the Town, and vice versa, where complete and total strangers will effectively be invited to come into contact with vulnerable children and access the dressing rooms and toilets which they use is, to put it bluntly, reckless and irresponsible in the extreme. Neither we, the soccer coaches nor the Gaelic football coaches will have any way of knowing whether the complete and total stranger popping into a toilet which is shared by children is doing so because he is a parent of a player and just needs to go to the toilet – or is a thief or, worse still, a paedophile with malicious intent. It is quite ludicrous to suggest that children who are already exposed to many risks in their daily lives should have the risk unnecessarily increased exponentially by locating a Permeability Scheme where they are training and playing, often at night time with poor lighting.

We therefore need to make it absolutely clear that under no circumstances will Longford Rugby Football Club accept any responsibility if anything untoward were to happen as a direct or indirect consequence of a Permeability Scheme being imposed upon our facilities, and we would like to make it absolutely clear that responsibility for any harm to a child or children will rest squarely with those who have deemed it appropriate to subject children to such a reckless and irresponsible risk.

Yours faithfully,


Board of Directors

Longford Rugby Football Club.

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