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Thurles draft Local Area Plan – Submission

Introduction

Firstly, I would like to broadly welcome the draft Local Area Plan for Thurles that has been drafted by planners in Tipperary County Council. There are many welcome elements to this document and it is clear that an exciting plan for the development and betterment of the Thurles town area is in the works. It will be equally important that funding for the plan is met by central government through the various funding streams available.

Thurles By-pass and inner relief road

It is vital that that plans for a by-pass for Thurles town are progressed over the life of this plan 2024-2030. There is an immediate and urgent need to remove the flow of heavy goods vehicles through the centre of Thurles that has unfortunately been highlighted again recently with the untimely death of a pedestrian on Liberty Square. The removal of a significant percentage of heavy-goods vehicles from the town centre will make it a safer place for citizens going about their daily business. While making the town more friendly towards drivers, pedestrians and cyclists, it will also have a significant positive impact in terms of traffic flow.

The completion of the proposed inner relief road will also have a positive impact on traffic flow in the town centre as traffic will be able to travel across the River Suir without the need to transcend Liberty Square. Though the inner relief road will be an asset to the town it must not be passed off as a substitute for a fully developed by-pass.

Housing

The area of housing is another key priority for Thurles. We are currently in a nation-wide housing crisis that has been getting worse as the years pass by. One look at the national homeless figures emphasise this point. There is also a serious lack of affordable housing options for those seeking to buy a home. The rental market in Thurles is generally at full capacity, with many affordability issues. Added to this, we have demand at present for 399 social housing units. Careful planning in this regard is very important and this plan must reflect the reality on the ground in terms of housing need. Housing need and the response to it must be multi-faceted and meet the needs of all the citizens of Thurles.

Areas of housing that need to be addressed in terms of an increase in supply include: housing for elderly, student accommodation, one and two bedroom units, affordable housing, local authority housing, housing for projected increases in population, traveller accommodation, those who are homeless, migrant accommodation, hidden homeless, housing to meet the needs of the many young people who live at home with parent(s) or with grandparent(s) and those living outside Thurles including returning emigrants who wish to return home.

The draft plan under housing is aiming for an increase of 21% of overall housing stock or 784 units (2.7 persons average occupancy) before 2030. This is to account for a projected 10% increase in population growth in that period. This submission argues that additional housing units are required for Thurles to cater for people who are not included in the population increase figures.

Adults over 18 living with parent(s)

Recent CSO data released in August 2023 indicates that 14.6% (2,235) of adults over the age of 18 in the entire Thurles Local Electoral Area are living at home with parent(s). 14.6% of the population living with parent(s) in the Thurles town area, which is the area the plan covers, would be 1,195 adults. There is a great need for this section of our society to be catered for in our plan for the future. This figure will only increase during the lifetime of this plan, as those who were 10 when census 2022 data was collected will be 18 in 2030. Those who were 18 when the census occurred will be 26 by 2030 etc. Census data shows that by 2030 an additional 870 people will be over 18 in the town of Thurles, at a conservative estimate. We need to plan where all these young adults starting out independent lives are going to live.

People returning to Thurles to live & keeping our young people at home

Many people have emigrated from Thurles or have moved to another part of the country to avail of housing and employment opportunities. There is certainly a demand for housing in Thurles for this section of people. Not all would wish to return to the town, but it is fair to say that a percentage of those who were forced to leave for economic reasons do plan to return home to raise a family, progress a career or be near their family support network. Unfortunately figures for this section of our society are difficult to estimate. Nevertheless additional housing should be provided to cater for their needs. For example, 28,900 Irish nationals returned to Ireland in 2022, with 30,200 returning in 2021. Those returning from abroad are presumably accounted for in population increase projections. If there was a substantial social and affordable housing building programme in the town of Thurles there would likely be an increase in demand from people living across Ireland in other cities and counties wishing to return home. Having improved housing options locally, coupled with the employment opportunities that the building programme would provide would reduce the number of young people seeking to emigrate.

Hidden Homeless

Official homeless figures, according to the Simon Community and research from UCC are just the tip of the iceberg in Ireland. This phenomenon disproportionately effects the travelling community. The Simon Community has stated that with 1 in 4 report either themselves, family, friends, or acquaintances affected by hidden homelessness. This section of the community need to have their housing needs met also. The Simon Community estimates that there could have been up 290,000 people classified as Hidden Homeless in Ireland in 2022. This represents 5.5% of the population nationally, equating to 450 people when applied to Thurles.

Residential Land Zoning

In terms of land zoning for an increase in residential units, the draft plan indicates that there is current capacity for 1,205 residential units under New Residential (48.19 ha). A further 299 residential units under Urban Core (39.99 ha) and a further 8 units under Regeneration. This is the maximum capacity of the zoned land available and equates to a total of 1,512 units. This allows maintaining a strategic reserve of 20.6ha of land for long term strategic and sustainable development. The current draft plan is for an additional 784 units. This means that current zoning

arrangements allows for a maximum of 728 residential units in addition the 784 currently proposed in the draft plan.

Submission Proposal

This submission argues that the figures for additional housing development under the current draft plan are not sufficient. More ambitious aims or targets are needed.

This submission calls for a recalculation of the housing needs for Thurles, taking into account the new CSO data available around adults living at home with parent(s) including projections for those who will become adults during the life of this plan, hidden homeless figures, projected population increases and those on the social housing waiting list. There will inevitably be some crossover in the figures, for example the exact number of adults living at home that are on the social housing list would need to be considered and figures adjusted accordingly.

Housing Need	Number of units (average 2.7 occupancy rate)
Population Increase	2,117 people 784units
Social housing waiting list	399 units
Adults living with parents	1,195 people 442 units
Additional adults by 2030	867 people 321 units
Hidden homeless	450 people 166 units
Total	2,112

*Please note that the figures in the table above will need to be adjusted for accuracy purposes using more detailed local data that was not available for this submission.

Issues with these figures

- Cross over of people and families on social housing waiting list that are also included in Adults living with parents and Hidden homeless figures. To be adjusted using additional detailed data.
- Simon Community definition - *Hidden homelessness refers to people who are considered homeless, but who are not visible on the streets or not included in official statistics – essentially people living without a secure place to call home, but who haven’t presented to any housing authority or service provider for help. People who are classed as hidden homeless are sofa surfing, staying with friends or family on a temporary or long term basis and people who are living out of their car.* Difficult to quantify, figures used are based on national percentage (5.5%) as projected by the Simon Community. More accurate local data is needed in this regard and figures should be adjusted accordingly.
- In terms of adults living with parents, not everyone is in a position to or wants to move out of home when they turn 18. There is however a huge impetus to provide housing for those who do. CSO figures show that 52% of those living at home with their parent(s) are employed, 32% are students with just 6% are unemployed. Further data is needed around how many of those living at home are on the social housing list. A more accurate and fair calculation on the true housing need of this section of society can then be made using the available information. It must be noted that a survey conducted on behalf of the CSO found that 9/10 living at home wish to move out and half of parents want them to move out.