

**MAYO COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
2020 – 2026**

A new plan for our county...

**Have your say in shaping it!**



**CONSULTATION PAPER AND ISSUES**

**MAYO COUNTY COUNCIL  
COMHAIRLE CONTAE MHAIGHEO**

**APRIL 2018**



## 1. Introduction and explanation

### 1.0 Introduction

Mayo County Council has commenced the review of the Mayo County Development Plan 2014 – 2020 and the preparation of a new Plan for the period 2020–2026. The current County Development Plan was adopted in April 2014 and has been varied twice since it was adopted.

All planning authorities are legally obliged to make a new development plan every 6 years. This ensures it remains up to date, relevant, and responsive to new issues as they arise. The entire development plan-making process will take approximately 2 years.

### 1.2 What Is the Purpose of this Consultation Paper?

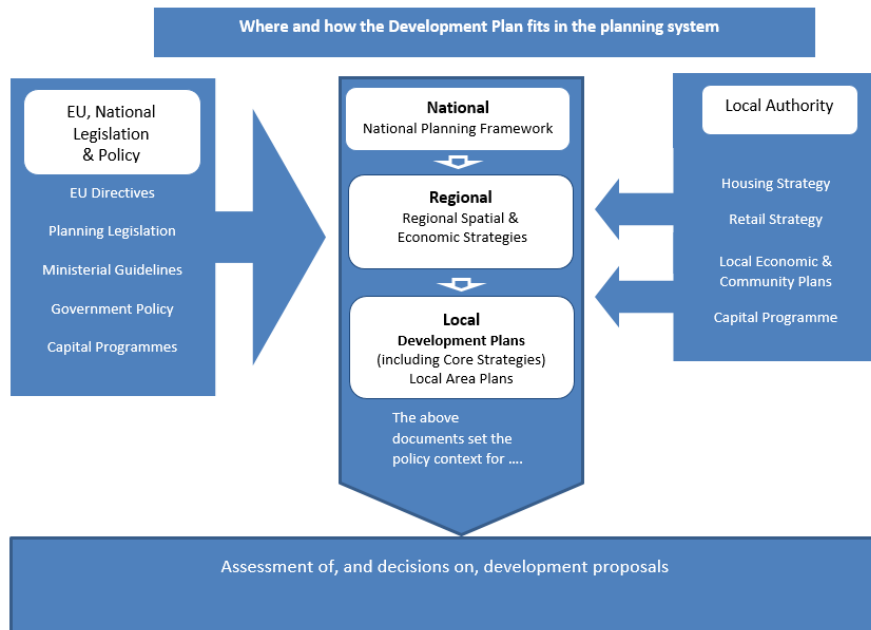
The purpose of this paper is to encourage as many individuals, organisations and communities as possible to become involved in shaping the new Plan for our county.

- It includes guidance and information on the development plan process, including how you can become involved.
- It highlights some of the main issues that will be considered in preparing the plan and poses a series of questions, which it is hoped will stimulate debate and ideas about the future of Mayo.

The issues outlined in this paper and suggested questions are by no means exhaustive and we welcome your views on any or all of the topics mentioned in paragraph 1.3 below, or other strategic planning issues that you consider important.

### 1.3 The County Development Plan – What is it?

The County Development Plan is a land-use plan which sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the county for a six-year period. The plan making procedure is set out in law and is guided and influenced by EU and national legislation, policies and guidelines and also regional policy.



As the diagram on the previous page shows, the Development Plan sits within a hierarchy of plans — being influenced by those above it and in turn, influencing plans and programmes and development decisions at the local level. The new Plan will be set within the strategic context of and be guided by the recently published National Planning Framework (NPF) and the forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) which is currently being prepared by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA).

The Plan will comprise of a written statement, accompanying maps and environmental reports, and will set out policies and objectives on a wide range of topics, which will guide the physical, economic and social development of County Mayo from 2020 – 2026. These include;

- Settlement planning
- Housing
- Town and village regeneration/renewal
- Rural development
- Economic development
- Social and community development
- Infrastructure (e.g. transport, energy, telecommunications etc)
- Climate change
- Natural resources
- Environmental protection
- Heritage

**The County Development Plan provides the framework & policy context for all local planning decisions. This means that all planning applications and proposals for development are assessed against the policies and objectives in the Plan.**

The Plan will also include guidance on such matters as design, layout and other standards to ensure a high quality of development.

#### **1.4 Why Become Involved?**

The Development Plan is an important document with the potential to impact each one of us in some way in terms of where we choose to live, work or study, and how we move around or meet our energy needs - these all influence our quality of life.

This is our county and your views will play a **crucial** role in what is included in the Plan and in shaping the future of Mayo. We need to hear those views so that the Plan reflects the needs and aspirations of all sectors of the community.

**Getting involved in the preparation of the Plan gives you an opportunity to have your say on issues that you feel are important for our county.**

## 1.5 Have your Say in Shaping the new Mayo County Development Plan

Mayo County Council wishes to engage with as many individuals, groups and organisations as possible. Over the next two weeks (see timetable on back page) the Forward Planning Team will engage in a series of public information/consultation events throughout the county, where members of the public can discuss issues highlighted in this document or raise new issues.

As this is the early stage of the process, we are concerned mainly with strategic planning issues which need to be addressed in County Mayo i.e. bigger picture issues that affect the entire county. We cannot consider **submissions relating to specific land use zonings and designations**. However, there will be further opportunities to make submissions on these issues when the Draft Plan is published and also in the event of any proposed material alterations to the Draft.

**Details of where to send your submissions or observations are on the back page.**

## 1.6 The Process in Brief

It takes about two years to prepare a Development Plan. There are four main stages involved:

1. Pre-draft—the Council consults with the public, interested parties, ‘prescribed bodies’ (e.g. government departments and providers of infrastructure) - taking on board their views before preparing a draft. This is the stage we are at now.
2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage consists of preparing a Draft Plan for public consultation and consideration by the elected members.
3. A 3<sup>rd</sup> stage may occur where amendments are proposed to the draft, which are considered ‘material’, i.e. significant changes that warrant them going back on public display for consultation.
4. The final stage is when the elected members of Mayo County Council adopt the Plan.

## 2. Issues and questions for consideration (note this is not an exhaustive list)

### 2.0 Establishing a Vision

The current Plan sets out eight goals for the future development of the county:

**Goal 1:** To promote rural sustainability by encouraging more people to live in Rural Areas through the promotion of sustainable rural communities and economic development

**Goal 2:** To attract investment and people into the County

**Goal 3:** To ensure a sustainable economy

**Goal 4:** To adopt 'green principles' that promote a high quality of life

**Goal 5:** To create attractive settlements that promote a high quality of life

**Goal 6:** To maintain and provide additional services for our citizens, investors and visitors

**Goal 7:** To protect and enhance our natural environment

**Goal 8:** To offer visitors, from Ireland and overseas, a range of high quality experiences.

#### What do YOU think?

- Do these goals reflect the kind of county you would like to live in?
- Do you agree with these goals or how would you change them?
- What are the critical elements that need to be in place to achieve these goals?

### 2.1 Core Strategy & Settlement Strategy

The Core Strategy is a key element of the Development Plan. It sets out the strategy for the location of future development, including how development in different areas will be regulated and managed.

The settlement strategy defines the role of settlements and informs decisions on investment such as wastewater, housing, roads, amenities, and town and village renewal.

The designation of two rural area types in the current Plan - Rural Areas under Urban Influence and Structurally Weak Areas, underpins the strategy for housing in the countryside.

The policies relating to the 'Rural Area Types' aim to guide rural housing to appropriate locations and in a manner that will sustain rural communities without having subsequent negative impacts.

The new Core Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy will be derived from the policy framework established by the NPF and RSES.

Figure 1 shows the Settlement Hierarchy in the current Plan. This is based on criteria in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Guidelines for the Northern and Western Region (the NPF and RSES will replace both these documents).

One of the national strategic outcomes of the NPF is Compact Growth. This outcome aims to secure the sustainable growth of more compact urban and rural settlements supported by jobs, housing, services and amenities, rather than continued and unplanned urban sprawl. The NPF places an emphasis on renewing and developing existing settlements, rather than continual expansion and sprawl of our towns out into the countryside, which is happening at the expense of town centres and smaller towns and villages in the rural areas.

Figure 1 - The Settlement Hierarchy 2014-2020



The NPF recognises the strategic role of larger towns with populations of over 10,000, such as Ballina and Castlebar, and also the scope for potential growth in all towns.

These principles and guidance set out in the future RSES will influence and guide the new Core Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy, including housing in the countryside.

#### What do YOU think?

- Do you think the above hierarchy should be changed, if so, how?
- How can we ensure that the complementary role of towns, villages and rural areas can be supported in the Development Plan?
- How do we achieve a balance between supporting towns and villages and one-off housing in the countryside?
- Do you think housing in rural areas should be regulated?
- How can we strengthen our rural villages?
- How can we ensure sustainable rural communities?
- What issues relating to the core strategy and settlement do You think should be addressed in the Plan?

## 2.2 Population & Housing

2016 Census recorded:

- A population of 130,507 in Mayo, a slight reduction (0.1% or 131 persons) from 2011. However, the long-term trend since 1971 has been of population growth. It is anticipated that this will continue.
- A population that is aging - the percentage of people in Mayo aged 65 and over increased by 17% (3370) since 2011. 17.5% (22,909) of the population is aged 65 and over as against the national average of 13.4%.

The Housing Strategy in the current Plan aims to ensure that the housing needs of the existing and future population of Mayo are met. The key objective is to enable every household to have available an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment and, as far as possible, at tenure of its choice.

10,597 vacant housing units were recorded in Mayo in Census 2016 (excluding holiday homes), a vacancy rate of 16%, the fourth highest in the country.

### What do YOU think?

- Do you agree with the key objective for housing as outlined above?
- How can we best facilitate provision of appropriate housing in the right location to cater for our changing demographics?
- How can we sustainably accommodate the housing needs of all sectors of our community?
- What can we do to encourage use of vacant houses in towns, villages and rural areas?
- Where do you think new housing should be located?
- What issues relating to population & housing do You think should be addressed?

## 2.3 Our Towns and Villages

Mayo has a large network of towns and villages, which play a vital role in our social and economic well-being. They are integral to community identity, heritage and quality of life. Unfortunately, over the last number of decades they have suffered significant economic, social and environmental decline.

There are critical links between the quality of our towns and villages and business investment/job creation. In many of our towns, dereliction, loss of services and the retail function, combined with associated high vacancy rates and poor public realm in town centre areas have resulted in towns and villages becoming less attractive places in which to live, work and do business.

To address these issues, public and private investment will be required in both physical and social infrastructure including: water services; roads connectivity; telecommunications; energy; development lands; business support infrastructure; and social and recreational facilities.

It will also be essential to improve the physical attractiveness of our towns and villages as places in which to invest, live and work in. This will require attention to the built environment particularly the town centres, in terms of caring for, restoring, renewing and revitalising the physical fabric of the towns. Revitalisation of the town centres through appropriate development, including residential development and addressing vacant units, is crucial in terms of creating vibrant, attractive towns capable of attracting investment and population growth.



Town and village renewal and regeneration will be a key focus in the review and we are keen to hear your views and ideas as to how our towns and town centres can be developed in terms of land use, physical fabric and the public realm to support and maintain thriving towns and villages.

#### What do YOU think?

- What policies do you think would help support our towns and town centres?
- Do you think current zoning in the Area Plans support & protect the town centre areas?
- Should brown-field and derelict sites be prioritised over green-field development?
- How can we encourage use of vacant retail units in the town centres?
- How can we protect the distinctive characteristics & heritage of our towns & villages?
- How can we ensure that place-making & good urban design is integrated into the planning process?
- How can we encourage people to see our towns and villages as attractive and sustainable alternatives to building in the countryside?
- In addition to high quality design in buildings, public spaces and other areas of the public realm, what other measures are required to add vibrancy to our town centre areas?
- How can the Plan promote the night time economy?
- What characteristics of our towns and villages would you like to see protected?
- How can the Plan support sustainable communities in our towns and villages?

#### 2.4 Rural Development

Mayo is predominantly a rural county. The 2016 Census indicates that 71% of Mayo's population live in rural areas and 29% in urban areas (i.e. settlements over 1,500). The national urban/rural divide was 63% urban 37% rural. Our rural areas play a key role in defining the identity of Mayo, in contributing to its economic, social and cultural environment and in terms of its high-quality environment.

The rural areas, including the Gaeltacht areas and islands, are home to our rural communities, natural resources, biodiversity and landscape and are a focus for working and recreation activities through rural based activities including agriculture, forestry, agri-food, renewable energy, tourism and leisure. While agriculture remains an important part of the local economy, its share of economic output and employment continues to decline, and diversification and other enterprise and employment opportunities are required to sustain our rural communities. A key challenge will be to ensure there is a balance between the need to accommodate sustainable rural communities and increasing rural based economic activities with the need to protect the many different facets of the rural environment which are critical to the economic, social and cultural development of the county.

#### What do YOU think?

- How can the Plan support rural based economic activities etc.?
- How can the Plan support the protection of our rural amenities and landscape?
- How can the Plan accommodate sustainable rural housing whilst ensuring protection of the landscape and environment?
- What services are required to support rural communities?
- What do you think are the greatest threats to our rural areas?
- How do you think the countryside can be safeguarded in terms of biodiversity and habitats while accommodating development?

## 2.5 Economic Development

Economic development provides the backbone for progress and sustainability in any county. Mayo has a hugely unique offering in terms of economic development opportunities across many sectors, including manufacturing, tourism, renewable energy, marine development and other rural based sectors e.g. agriculture, forestry and fishing, aquaculture and the extractive industry etc.

The role of local authorities in supporting economic development has increased significantly in recent years, particularly since the establishment of the Local Enterprise Offices in 2014. A review and analysis undertaken in 2013 of the key emerging economic sectors in the county concluded that the existing and emerging sectors that offer best potential for sustainable employment growth, clustering and value added are:

- Tourism
- Energy, including renewables
- Food & Agriculture (including agri-tech)
- Digital, ICT & Creatives
- Manufacturing.

A number of strategies are in place to guide the development of these sectors which are reviewed and updated from time to time.

It is also vital that Mayo retains its existing Foreign Direct Investment and indigenous industries within the county and provide enabling infrastructure that supports their retention and growth. Mayo has become synonymous with some internationally established large brands and employers e.g. Allergan Pharmaceuticals in Westport; Baxter in Castlebar; and Ballina Beverages (Coca Cola).

Indigenous industry is also a major employer with a number of manufacturing facilities particularly in the areas of textiles, agriculture and engineering - employing a significant number of people collectively. Mayo County Council recognises that the marine sector presents a major economic opportunity for the county and is currently preparing a Marine Strategy for Mayo. The Council will engage with the public in a separate consultation process in this regard.

The designation of Ireland West Airport Knock in 2017 as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) will have significant impact in terms of social and economic development, not alone for Mayo but for the region as a whole. The Planning Scheme for the SDZ is currently being prepared and will be made available for public consultation (under a separate statutory process) before adoption.

### What do YOU think?

- What other sectors should be promoted /supported in the Development Plan?
- How can we support a strong, local economy with job creation and sustainability at its core?
- What are Mayo's prime strengths/competitive advantages?
- How can we support a strong retail function in our town centres?
- How can the Plan support new/evolving work patterns and practices in a sustainable manner e.g. e-business & home based economic activity?
- How can Mayo be promoted to attract inward investment?
- How can the Plan support sustainable rural enterprise?
- How can the Plan support sustainable economic development whilst ensuring protection of our rural and natural amenities?
- What key issues should be prioritised in the Marine Strategy?
- What economic development issues do You think should be addressed?

## 2.6 Infrastructure

It is generally accepted that the level of economic activity of an area is related to the quality of its infrastructure e.g. roads, rail network, telecommunications/broadband, energy etc. Mayo's peripherality, in national and international terms, is exacerbated by major infrastructure deficiencies, particularly in relation to strategic road and rail connections, telecommunications and energy.

These infrastructure deficiencies are a major inhibiting factor in terms of the social and economic development of the county and quality of life in general. A high standard of transport infrastructure, together with access to a range of transport modes, linking Mayo with the major urban centres is critical for the longterm economic growth and sustainable development of the county.

Infrastructure development and investment in transport and movement (roads, rail, cycling, walking), water services, energy (including renewable energy), waste and telecommunications are critical to promote Mayo as an attractive location for enterprise, investment and a place to live, work and visit.

While it is acknowledged that the Council does not have direct responsibility for the provision of some of this infrastructure, it works to facilitate the timely provision of such infrastructure, and it is essential that the Plan provides a policy framework to support and direct other providers. The creation of sustainable communities is dependent on integration and co-ordination between land-use and the delivery of services. This includes the identification of priority infrastructure in the Plan.

### What do YOU think?

- How can the Plan support the relevant agencies in the provision of infrastructure? e.g. roads and public transport; energy provision, including renewable energy; water and wastewater; telecommunication and broadband?
- How can the Plan ensure that residential amenity and environmental quality is not compromised by the provision of such infrastructure?
- What areas of infrastructure should be prioritised in the Plan?
- How can the Plan provide for better co-ordination and integration between land use and transport facilities to support sustainable development?
- How can the Plan support greater use of public transport over private motor car?
- Can our current infrastructure be better utilised?
- How can renewable energy be maximised throughout the county?
- What infrastructure issues do You feel should be addressed in the Plan?

## 2.7 Environment, Heritage and Amenity

A high-quality environment is essential for a good quality of life and is a key component of sustainable development. Mayo has a varied and unique landscape of international acclaim which contains a broad range of natural and cultural resources. Natural resources include water bodies, agricultural land, forestry, soil, geology, mineral deposits, flora and fauna. Almost a third of Mayo's land area is designated for the protection and conservation of flora and fauna. This high percentage reflects the international and national significance of Mayo's wealth of natural heritage. Cultural resources include our settlements, archaeological monuments, Gaeltacht areas and built heritage.

Deriving from our natural and cultural heritage are a number of amenities such as walkways, cycle ways, bathing areas, boating areas, fishing rivers and lakes etc. and many of our valuable assets including Croagh Patrick, Westport House, Ballycroy National Park, Turlough House, Ballintubber Abbey, Céide Fields, Knock Shrine, Great Western Greenway, Moy River, Tochar Phadraig, Atlantic Drive, Blue Flag Beaches to name just a few.

The sensitive development, management and conservation of these resources is essential to the economy and quality of life in that they provide amenity and recreation; water supplies; food; fuel; flood protection; coastal protection; and nutrient recycling. Green infrastructure such as the Great Western Greenway supports and improves environmental conditions in a way that facilitates environmental, economic and societal benefits. The Council has a statutory obligation to protect and manage water quality through implementation of the Water Framework Directive. Other environmental management issues include water conservation, waste management and the protection of our cultural heritage, to name but a few.

### Climate change

Central to environmental management is the issue of climate change, which is now emerging as one of the most significant global challenges for the planet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Climate change will have diverse and wide-ranging impacts on our environment, society, economic sectors and natural resources. Management of areas prone to flooding and the coastal zone must be addressed along with measures to adapt to climate change.

The *National Climate Change Adaptation Framework* (DoECLG, 2012) emphasizes the importance of integrating climate change considerations into development plans. Local development planning will, in effect, become the mechanism for the delivery of local climate adaptation action and local authorities are required to integrate climate change adaptation/ mitigation objectives into their plans.

Currently the Council is engaged in the process of preparing a climate change adaptation and mitigation plan/framework.

### What do YOU think?

- What are the main environmental management issues facing the county?
- What aspects of Mayo's natural & built heritage are important and worthy of protection?
- What is the best way to conserve the character and quality of our unique landscape?
- How should we address issues of coastal zone management in the Plan?
- How can we achieve a balance between economic development & environmental protection?
- How can natural heritage and biodiversity be enhanced?
- What landscapes do you think need to be protected?
- What parts of our towns and villages should be protected through the designation of additional Areas of Architectural Conservation?
- How can we facilitate access to amenity/heritage assets whilst ensuring they are protected?
- How can the plan promote adaptation to climate change at the local level?
- What environmental issues do You think should be addressed in the Plan?

## 2.8 Social Infrastructure and Community Development

Social and community facilities play a critical role in developing sustainable communities. Such facilities include schools, colleges, childcare facilities, libraries, health centres, fire services, facilities for the elderly and people with disabilities, arts, culture, areas of public open space, sports and recreation facilities etc.

Quality of life and social inclusion are intrinsically linked to the adequate provision of social and community infrastructure in line with changing development needs and demographics etc and as such will be cross-cutting themes in the Plan.

**Gaeltacht Maigh Eo and the Islands**—these areas are located in peripheral parts of the county and continue to face significant challenges including maintaining population, services and their unique cultural heritage and identity.

The review of the County Development Plan presents an opportunity to examine the existing provision of social and community infrastructure throughout the county in the context of settlement and population characteristics and to plan for future needs. The new Development Plan will support and work in conjunction with other policy documents such as the Mayo Local Economic & Community Plan, Mayo Age Friendly Strategy 2016– 2020 and Irish Language Plans for the Mayo Gaeltacht areas which are currently being prepared.

### What do YOU think?

- How can the Plan facilitate necessary social and community infrastructure in areas of need?
- What type of social/community infrastructure needs to be prioritised in your community?
- Where do you think new facilities should be located.....in close proximity to existing facilities/close to public transport facilities, on the edge of towns or in central locations?
- How can the Plan support our Gaeltacht and Island communities?
- How can the plan maximise the full potential of all elements of our multi-cultural society?
- Is there a need for more childcare facilities and where?
- How can the Plan promote and support social inclusion?
- Where should nursing homes and sheltered accommodation be located?
- What issues relating to social and community do You think should be addressed in the Plan?

### 3.0 Environmental Assessments

An important aim of the Plan will be to ensure a balance between facilitating development whilst protecting the natural and built environment for present and future generations. To help us achieve this, three environmental assessments will be carried out in the course of preparing the Plan as part of the statutory requirements —

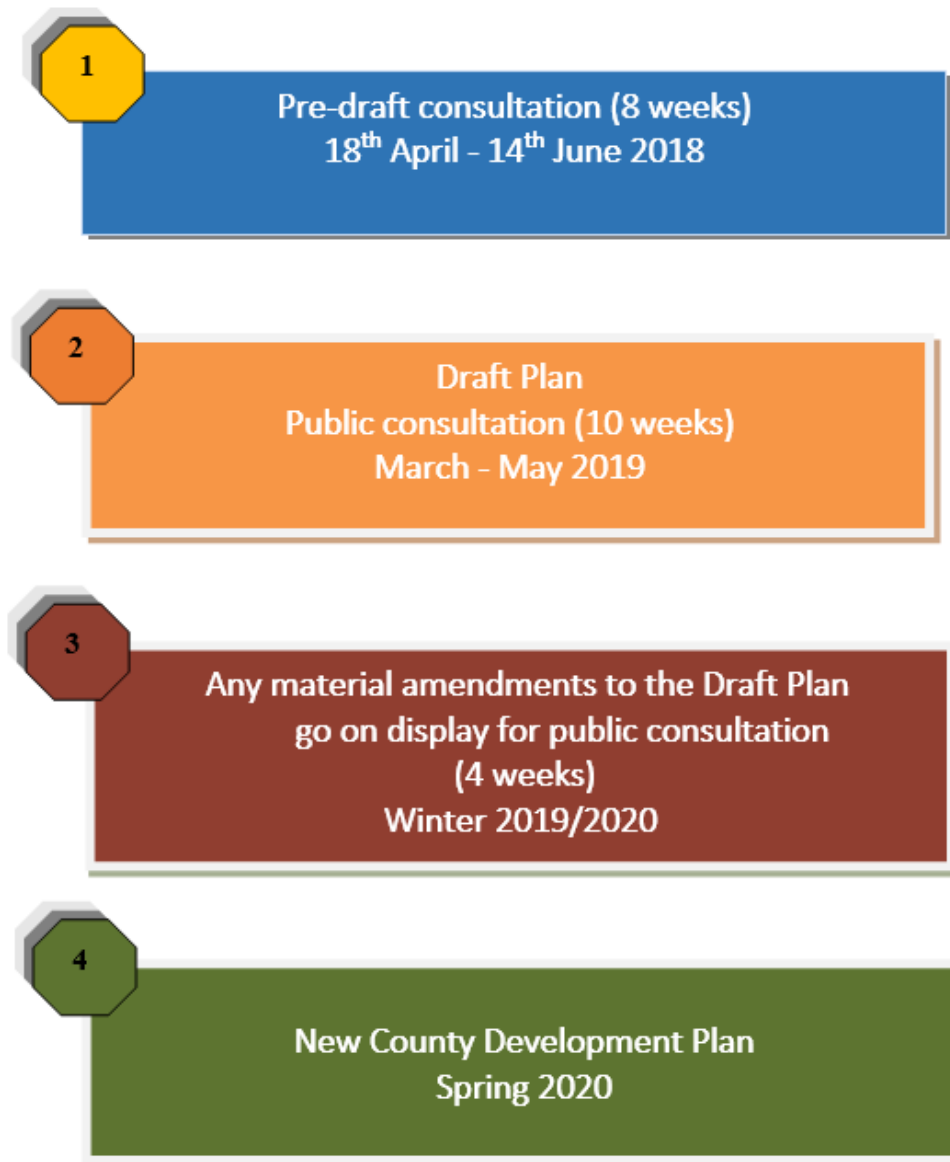
1. **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** - informs us of the effects the plan may have on the environment and helps us to identify ways to minimise those effects
2. **Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA)** - informs us on the effects the plan will have on any Natura 2000 site (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protected Areas (SPAs), and Ramsar sites) and helps us to identify ways to avoid or minimise those effects
3. **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment** - identifies flood risk areas and assists us in zoning appropriately.

#### 3. What do YOU think?

- What environmental consideration should be taken into consideration in the Strategic Environmental Assessment?
- Can you identify any measures that would assist in minimising any adverse effects of the Plan on the Natura 2000 network?



Main stages and anticipated schedule<sup>1</sup> for Mayo County Development Plan 2020 – 2026



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<sup>1</sup> Note that additional time may be required at Stage 3 to allow for Appropriate Assessment or Strategic Environmental Assessment to be carried out on any proposed material alterations to the Draft Plan — if it is determined that such assessments are warranted. This may extend the two-year timeframe accordingly.

## Information/Consultation Events

As part of the public consultation process, the Forward Planning Team will hold a series of Public Information/consultation events at the times and locations shown below:

Location	Venue	Date	Time
Ballina	Ballina Civic Offices Arran Place	Tuesday 24 <sup>th</sup> April	2.30 – 7.30pm
Westport	Westport Civic Offices Station Road	Thursday 26 <sup>th</sup> April	2.30 – 7.30pm
Castlebar	Áras an Chontae The Mall	Monday 30 <sup>th</sup> April	2.30 – 7.30pm
Béal An Mhuirthead Belmullet	Belmullet Civic Centre Church Street	Tuesday 1 <sup>st</sup> May	2.30 – 7.30pm
Claremorris	Claremorris Offices Kilcolman Road	Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> May	2.30 – 7.30pm

### Where do I send my submission or observation?

By hard copy to – Forward Planning Section, Mayo County Council, Áras an Chontae, The Mall, Castlebar, Co. Mayo **or**

By e-mail to – [countydevplan@mayococo.ie](mailto:countydevplan@mayococo.ie)

Please include your name and address and, if applicable, details of the organisation or group you represent.

**Closing date for receipt of submissions/observations is Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at 5pm.**

At this stage, requests or proposals for zoning of particular land for any purpose cannot be considered.

The full text of the formal notice regarding the review of the Plan and future updates on the preparation of the Mayo County Development Plan 2020 – 2026 may be viewed on the Council's website at –

[www.mayococo.ie/cdp2020](http://www.mayococo.ie/cdp2020)

