

Pat Gallagher,  
County Manager,  
Westmeath County Council,  
County Buildings,  
Mullingar,  
County Westmeath



### **Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014-2020**

Dear Manager,

I am writing to you in connection with the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014-2020.

As you will be aware I issued a Ministerial Direction having considered the report and recommendation prepared by the Inspector, pursuant to s.31 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended as well as the written submissions and observations received on his report in relation to the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014-2020.

In taking this decision and given the approach taken by Westmeath County Council in a site and development specific approach to the zoning of lands at Clonmore, action to uphold the relevant national policies by means of a Direction was warranted.

The difficulty with the decision of the Council in relation to zoning of lands in Clonmore for retail warehousing was that it was conducted without an evidential basis as to the need for such development taking account of a wider retail strategy for the town and the findings of that strategy as regards the need for and appropriate locations for such activity in the town.

Such an approach, replicated at national level, would not uphold the relevant national policies including the planning guidelines on retailing issued by me as recently as April 2012.

As to the appropriate levels of need for and location of retail warehousing in Mullingar, this matter should be determined by reference to:

- the provisions of the planning act;
- planning guidelines on retail development issued by the Minister under Section 28 of the above;
- Midlands Regional Authority Regional Planning Guidelines; and
- Relevant provisions of Westmeath County Development Plan and Retail Strategy

Retail development in Mullingar should be informed by an overall strategy for retailing in Mullingar including retail warehousing. Such a strategy could, in a manner that upholds the guidelines above:

- determine the most appropriate future development options for the sector;
- identify the likely levels of demand for retailing activity, including retail warehousing;
- outline measures to support the vitality of existing retailing businesses in established retailing and retail warehousing locations in the town; and
- define the town centre area, retail warehousing centres and the most appropriate usage of areas adjoining the town centre, such as parts of Clonmore or similar areas.

Such a strategy would then be a strong evidential basis from which to decide to take actions to support the retail sector in Mullingar, up to and including a decision to vary the local area plan for Mullingar.

I am of the view that such a strategy should be brought forward and that informed by that context, that the Council consider whether or not a variation of the local area plan for Mullingar is required to implement the objectives of the strategy.

The officials of Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government would be available, if required by the officials of Westmeath County Council to advise on relevant national policies if the members adopted such an approach.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Jan O'Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Jan" is written with a large, sweeping initial 'J'. The surname "O'Sullivan" follows, with the 'O' being a simple circle and the 'S' being a large, prominent letter. The rest of the name is written in a more fluid, connected script.

Jan O'Sullivan, T.D.,  
Minister for Housing and Planning,  
Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government