

COMHAIRLE CONTAE FHINE GALL

FINGAL COUNTY COUNCIL

FINGAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2023-2029

TUESDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER 2022

Chapter 13 – Land Use Zoning Objectives

Motion from Councillor Paul Mulville, Councillor Joan Hopkins: 82331

Include data centres as not permitted within the GE (General Employment) zoning matrix.

Justification:

As acknowledged in Section 7.5.1 and Section 14.15.3 data centres generate low intensity employment while encompassing extensive spatial and resources consumption. In light of this, data centres should be added to the not permitted zoning objective of GE. This designation will bolster the objectives stated in DMS094 and dispel any contradictions within the Development Plan.

REPORT:

The content of the motion is noted.

At both national and regional level, policy and objectives set out in both the NPF and RSES promote and support communications networks and digital infrastructure at appropriate locations. Specifically, National Strategic Outcome 5 'Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills' of the National Planning Framework (NPF) aims to create places that can foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and talent. Delivering this outcome will require the coordination of growth and place making with investment in world class infrastructure, including digital connectivity. NSO 5 sets out the importance of digital and data innovation and indicates a number of objectives to achieve this including: *'Promotion of Ireland as a sustainable international destination for ICT infrastructures such as data centres and associated economic activities.'*

The RSES indicates that the increasing use of digital technologies is impacting on every aspect of our lives and due to a fast moving and evolving infrastructure, the region will need to be able to respond and adapt to future communications

networks and technology along with changing work practices and emerging economic models. RPO 8.25 on Communications Networks and Digital Infrastructure states: *'Support the national objective to promote Ireland as a sustainable international destination for ICT infrastructures such as data centres and associated economic activities at appropriate locations.'*

At local level, Data Centre use remains open for consideration in the GE-General Employment zoning objective in the Draft Plan. In recognising the locations of general employment zoned lands and specifically GE zoned lands along high-quality transport corridors within the County and the space extensive nature of Data Centres and if left uncontrolled, could have undue negative environmental impacts and be contrary to the land-use and transport integration approach as well as the compact growth and regeneration approach as advocated by Objective EEO4 of the Draft Plan which seeks to, *'Ensure that space extensive uses are located within appropriate locations which do not compromise labour intensive opportunities on zoned lands, adjacent to public transport nodes or within existing built-up compact growth areas.'* In addition, DMSO94 sets out specific environmental, energy, high-quality design and sustainability criteria requirements in the context of Data Centre proposals.

Having regard to the foregoing, these controls provide a level of control on Data Centres proposals and importantly locational controls to ensure that such a use is located within appropriate locations which do not compromise labour intensive opportunities on zoned lands, adjacent to high quality public transport corridors or within existing built-up compact growth areas.

In the context of this level of locational control for employment lands adjoining high quality public corridors or within existing built-up compact growth areas and criteria set out under DMSO94 and having regard to government policy relating to the support and promotion of the digital economy as set out above as well as the precedence in the County for such a use within GE zoned lands, it is considered appropriate for a Data Centre use to remain open for consideration in the GE- General Employment zoning objective.

Given the complex issues surrounding this type of development, it is considered that the Draft Plan, where data centres are an 'open for consideration' use, is the most appropriate approach, allowing for an assessment on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the GE zoning objective and supporting vision as well as the employment provisions of the plan and normal standard planning criteria through the Development Management process. Such a categorisation also allows for assessment against the relevant government policy and any changes to that policy that may occur.

Critically, this motion has also to be taken in conjunction with Motion No. 82333 and if both these motions are passed, this would result in a Data Centre use being in the not permitted category for both the GE-General Employment and HT-High Technology zoning objectives, limiting such a use to the HI-Heavy Industry zoning objective only and where such a use is open for consideration and of which there is a limited quantum in the County.

Due to continued support for Data Centres within Government policy documents, an outright ban within this zoning objectives, runs contrary to government policy at this time. Furthermore, recent comments from the IDA outline that data centres are an “integral part of the technology ecosystem”, and “the inability of technology companies to expand their data centre footprint is problematic in terms of continuing to attract investment and to continue to maintain the investment we have here.”

In recognising that data centres and other industries have particular needs which, if left uncontrolled, could have undue negative environmental impacts, objectives EEO4 and DMSO94 of the Draft Plan as referred to above contains strong criteria which must be addressed by space extensive enterprises such as Data Centres through the Development Management process. As such, the provisions of the Draft Plan as set out above is sufficiently robust to guide and inform any future proposals for Data Centres in the GE zoning objective within the County.

RECOMMENDATION:

No change to the Draft Plan.