

## **Submission to Naas Area Development Plan by Réada Cronin TD**

This Plan has much to offer our community in its vision, ambition, breadth and depth. As the Sinn Féin TD for North Kildare, I'm pleased to make observations and submissions here on the areas below.

This plan was devised, largely, in a time before Covid and its impact on our society. There is no doubt the virus and its management have exposed the social fault-lines in how we are living. We have yet to see its full impact on our health services, finances, jobs, working habits, travel and mental health.

My submission takes account of Covid, in so far as this is possible, given our ongoing experience of the virus is writing the medical textbooks and social instructions. But the submission is made, primarily, in the context of the global issue what will define all our futures: Climate Change. The heating of our planet and the attendant effects mean that Climate Change is now inevitable. In our plans, choices and actions here in Naas, island-wide and worldwide, all we are affecting and ameliorating, is its severity on our children and grandchildren.

Covid19 has brought huge challenges to us all globally and locally. These challenges will be amplified with the change in our Climate, and our need as humans, to live within its tough physical and psychological parameters. With imagination and the courage and seriousness to make the tough political decisions, I believe we certainly can. What each of us does individually matters hugely. But what governments do and demand matters even more. We didn't sort out the ozone layer by penalising ordinary people. We did it by banning CFCs in their manufacture. We can do the same in Climate Change with the right attitude, orders and legislation.

For the sake of our children, in planning and all matters, politicians must now look to a future beyond a seat at the next election.

The areas I am making observations on are as follows:

*Transport & Travel*

*Housing*

*Sport and Leisure*

*Mental Health*

*Schools*

## **Transport & Travel Overview**

As a member of the Climate Committee in Dáil Eireann, I am under no illusions as to how quickly and thoroughly we need to curb our emissions in order to reduce global heating. There is no point in making plans - even this plan for Naas - unless we have a habitable planet. There is not a second to lose.

Across the world, communities are hard hit by floods, fire, heatwaves and freezing. Drought, soil-erosion and desertification are forcing greater displacement of people and migration. Until recently, the world's poorer communities who had contributed the least to global heating were affected the most. While we First-World parents were teaching our children to swim for sport and pleasure, Third-World parents were teaching their children to swim, so they had a better chance of surviving the floods. First World or Third World we love our children the same; we want to the best for them and our grandchildren.

In recent years, however, the extreme-weather impacts of Climate Change have become more 'egalitarian' and universal. We have seen parts of Australia and the US in flames, homes, towns, lives destroyed, animals burned to death or suffocated, the biodiversity we all depend on globally, for our very existence, under threat.

Here at home, we see more and more extreme weather, 100-year meteorological events appearing with regularity. Hurricanes, too, are making their way northwards to us in the high Atlantic. The oceans continue to warm, making the air over them moister. It is in all our interests – and especially the interest of our own children and those to be born in the decades ahead – that we act now to spare them the worst effects of Climate Crisis, which if we continue as we are, are dead ahead.

A bigger and quicker move to public transport is a must. We have to move away from the old, 20<sup>th</sup>-century view of public transport being a poor second choice, to the European view,

where it is widely used and depended on, across all strata of the population, urban and rural. Electric cars are excellent and welcome, but they are not a solution in themselves. They still damage, locally, by their intrinsic pollution, for example in burning of rubber, and distantly in the effects of mining for cobalt and nickel on landscape and the miners themselves. Equally, bio-fuels, though welcome, have an impact in the clearing of rainforest, the burning of the Earth's lungs and the stress on soil due to vast planting of fuel crops.

In transport and travel, then, and particularly Sustainable Movement and Strategic Vision, which are among the key bases of this Development Plan, we must be vigilant. We simply must make the necessary changes. With legislation and imagination we certainly can. I believe, in time, we will have to move to free public transport. Free bus services are already proving popular in European cities where they are offered. Sinn Féin is already in favour of free public transport for all our children under 18. Overall, we are facing into unprecedented challenge, but also unprecedented opportunity to do better and differently. What worked in the past won't work for us in a radically-different future. It is time to be brave and pursue a creative mix of approaches and possibilities in the coming six years, be it in transport rental, hubs or sharing. If the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the transport age of the individual, the 21<sup>st</sup> is the age of the community and the common good, as we grapple with Climate Change. In something as essential as travel, it is important our choices and facilities for the public, who pay for such services in their taxes, represent and reinforce this.

## **Go Electric**

Electric rail travel is the proverbial no-brainer, especially for us in the capital commuter belt. More trains, going more frequently, over longer timetables and at a good price, will make electric rail a natural choice both for work and for pleasure, in the evenings and weekends.

The Naas rail connection is through bus to Sallins. This service is less than satisfactory but an app could be useful in helping commuters plan their journeys and connections. The success of the direct rail link from Sallins to Dublin, notwithstanding the limits of the bus service, points to even further success possible, with the appropriate Strategic and Sustainable development. Therefore, I welcome the Plan's proposed engagement and co-operation with the NTA in the development of Park & Ride facilities and the electrification of the rail line to Sallins with DART facilities. I have already proposed that the extended DART services should go beyond Maynooth to Kilcock.

A facility for safe bike storage would be a welcome addition at the stations.

## **Bus**

Bus is, and will continue to be, critical. I am anxious to see a more holistic, Strategic and Sustainable development of bus routes and capacity, both to increase permeability and to open up passenger access and business access in the area locally, across the county. and in all age groups and demographics and believe, the plan as presented, has clear potential to achieve this. As with rail we must make the bus a natural and attractive choice of transport so we cut down, dramatically, on short-hop travel in our cars. Bus is a critical form of transport for our older community members, and just as we need to make sure we have adequate mix of housing for our ageing population, we must also have adequate and appropriate bus services with the attendant penetration and permeability.

## **Walking & Cycling**

Walking and Cycling have reached new levels of engagement, value and interest in the first Covid year. It is clear the appetite exists for the major development of, and investment in, these vital high-value, low-impact methods of travel as we see in the popularity and love of the canal-way. In terms of cycling, I am in favour of community or public bikes being available for all children to age of 18 in Naas, the county generally and the state. The more walkways and cycleways are used, the more community buy-in there is in the environment, clean air and biodiversity. The better it is for personal fitness and public health both physical and mental. Therefore, I welcome the Plan's real commitment to walking and cycling, in terms of access to work, business, education and also to leisure, fitness and wellness pursuits.

Pedestrianisation, pathways and walkways are essential for permeability, space and access. Disability access and parking, and with appropriate and safe surfacing is crucial. It has been brought to my attention that the surface in the pedestrianised Poplar Square area can be excessively slippery for people when wet. All such developments must be high-quality in surface, well lit, well-planted, both aesthetically and for the thriving of local flora and fauna, and with appropriate services/furniture for personal litter and dog-waste.

In the context of encouraging outdoor activity in walking and cycling, protecting our biodiversity and building community, I believe we have a real opportunity to create a public park or amenity by linking up the various mapped green corridors around the grounds of the local church, and making a viable and valuable green space in the centre of Naas town.

## **Cars**

Over time, we simply must have fewer private cars on the road. Electric vehicles, fewer short journeys and the proposed mix of hubbing, renting and sharing, and the imaginative development of public transport, will be critical to our local transport needs and climate commitments now and long after 2017. For constituents, I have been lobbying for more EV charging points and am glad to see them arrive in strategic points throughout North Kildare.

## **Traffic Management**

Traffic management continues to be a problem in Naas and its surrounds, with long delays on the commuter routes and frequently in access to the motorway. Clearly, we are moving – and will have to move – to having fewer individual cars on the roads, fewer people making short journeys, with commuters having more and better public-transport options. Until we reach that point, we need better traffic management.

Specifically, traffic management issues persist on the Kilcullen Road, Pipers Hill area, exacerbated by the confluence of residential and school traffic.

I am proposing a drop-off point on the Kilcullen Road where secondary-school children can alight safely and prevent the traffic chaos and bottlenecks that can attend.

## **Observations on Particular Developments**

### **Gallops Avenue**

My objections to the so-called Gallops Avenue aspect of the Naas-Sallins development plans are already recorded with Kildare Co Council. If anything, my concerns have deepened and

extended over the intervening 10 months, as we accommodate the health, working, travel and transport impacts of Covid19 and tackle, with new and necessary alacrity, the effects of Climate Change, our state-wide and local responsibilities to it and opportunities within it.

In terms of Climate, at the time of making this submission, the world's largest ice-bloc known as A68a, has fractured and rapidly melted away, having separated from the Larsen C ice-shelf in Antarctica only in 2017. Our children are particularly aware that how we live and what we do locally in and around Naas, particularly in our energy, travel and transport has an impact globally; as does how we look after our biodiversity and keep our air as clean and free of particulate as possible. In terms of Climate, the local micro does really affect, even decide, the macro. So, in addressing the Gallops Avenue plan, in broader terms, we are also addressing the impact of development, transport and traffic on a wider scale.

In terms of local democracy, I believe it is profoundly anti-democratic, and damaging the community's sense of agency, to impose on it, a plan already rejected, and what's more, already out of date, and therefore with no future-proofing capacity for how people will live in the coming years in the area.

I remain of the view that the 'solution' in question is neither a discrete transport development to the local area, nor a mere 'infrastructural' element in Naas and its surrounds. It certainly does not involve 'relief'. Rather, the plan has the capacity to impact negatively, and profoundly, on life as lived in the community, with residents continuing to express major and growing concerns. This is particularly so with the changes in working, living and travelling wrought by Covid19 and the new and increasing awareness of, and concern for, what constitutes 'a good life' and rich, clean environment in 2021 and beyond.

This physical plan then, and its outdatedness, continue to be of profound social, even philosophic, import for local people in their attitudes and aspirations, and particularly so, as it pertains to their children's experience and expectation into the future. In their stated concerns to me, it is clear the community affected does not wish to have 20<sup>th</sup>-century standards and vision deciding the capacity and quality of their 21<sup>st</sup>-century life.

There has been some recent political suggestion that this plan, might not, in fact, come to fruition at all. However, as a public representative, it is my duty to listen to my constituents, heed their concerns and indeed their anger and disbelief, at being ignored and to reiterate them herein, despite a number making their own submissions in such regard. In politics and

government, locally and island-wide, we do more and better for all our communities when we do it together. And, above all, with the necessary imagination.

### **1 Concerns that the proposed plan risks ignoring local democracy & the civic expectation & aspiration of modern communities**

There is considerable community concern that the proposed Gallops Avenue plan is being pursued despite its being rejected by Kildare County Council last year. People have made it clear they believe this weakens local democracy, *per se*, and individual and community faith in the power of the vote at local level. This, obviously, negatively affects their sense of agency, which is something all of us want to avoid. Planning and development cannot, and must not, be done ‘over the heads’ of communities, but rather through consultation and collaboration.

### **2 Concerns that the proposed plan is already outdated, being outpaced by development of the built environment and new public attitudes to health and sustainability**

The route is based on a 26/27 year-old plan, perhaps suitable for Naas in that time, but definitively and logically, not an adequate transport proposal for the modern, major and growing commuter town that is Naas now. It would be impractical and illogical for a plan, prepared for a wholly-different era to the current busy reality of housing, business, traffic, commuting, and in addition, the increasing public and community awareness of Climate, noise & air pollution and air-quality, to be progressed without the consultation we are having. Air pollution and quality are of particular concern for families with children, as they are for the elderly and those living with respiratory conditions. The state has one of the highest-rates of respiratory disease in the EU, ever before Covid19.

### **3 Concerns that the route plan is ‘blind’ and therefore unsustainable**

In a sense, the Gallops route was planned ‘blind’ to the current state of development in Naas, leaving aside that expected in the future. A future, perhaps, with even higher population, more business and commuting, increased traffic. In addition, the predicted 6-to-10 year term of its delivery raises further questions about its sustainability and capacity in the longer term.

Constituents cite, for example, a situation of congestion on the Blessington Road alone, should further planning be granted. They are concerned by what they regard as a constrained, and constraining, route plan. They prefer an outer ring-road option, to provide the capacity, quality and the breathing space (literal and metaphorical) essential for their lives and those of their children and grandchildren.

#### **4 Concerns that the route splits the lands of the racecourse; isolates the amenity**

All of us take great pride in Naas Racecourse's reputation nationally and internationally. The route's splitting of the racecourse lands would do little to enhance this amenity and also have a potentially deleterious impact on the everyday lives of those in the estates affected, namely The Gallops and Racecourse Gate. This, to the degree some residents say they would feel 'imprisoned' in their homes. Moreover, as we are all aware, the Gallops Avenue aspect has been rejected by residents as a replication of the plan already defeated.

#### **5 Concerns that the plan's age renders it obsolete and therefore not the best use of public funds**

Covid19 leaves Ireland in uncharted economic waters. Value for money, with the right projects, being funded at the right time, will be absolutely essential to, and in, our economic future. With the public need and demand for an outer ring-road at an all-time high, it is necessary to look again at the plan in terms of financial and economic sense. Could that money can be better, and more strategically ,invested in the ring-road *per se* and on other community initiatives to protect jobs, increase financial security and quality of life for the community?

#### **6 Concerns that the plan could have a negative impact on health and safety of the affected communities and therefore cannot achieve its "holistic" objectives**

I believe the health and safety of residents along the chosen route is, and must be, a primary concern. Families are worried that the volume of traffic on the route would impinge on the safety of children and the sense of security of their parents, in terms of exiting these estates by walking or cycling. There is a real concern among residents for example at Kingscourt,

The Gallops and Racecourse Gate, that the difficulty for pedestrians accessing shops and leisure services at Monread would be compounded by further. This is a valid and serious health-and safety concern which applies equally to residents of Sundays Well, The Paddocks and Woodlands. Could such volume of traffic see the plan fail in its ‘holistic’ aspiration?

## **7 Concerns that the plan would result in excessive vibration, noise and air pollution**

Vibration, noise and air pollution could impact powerfully on the inhabitants of hundreds of homes along the route. People are voicing serious worry that this volume could lead to levels above and beyond those within the town or the along the Dublin Corridor. There are worries also that the chosen route is too close to, and therefore with the capacity to overwhelm, its ‘neighbouring’ communities. With more research being done into air pollution and paediatric, geriatric and general respiratory health, the nearness of the route to populated areas must be a logical consideration. In terms of noise and vibration pollution, the recent Covid quarantine showed the community in Kildare and all over Ireland, the value of peace and the improvement in quality of life by the removal of excess noise from their lives. This realisation will be a factor in all road transport development into the future, as communities’ environmental perspectives and priorities progress and deepen.

## **8 Concerns that the plan is short-term in the ‘relief’ it offers**

There is considerable concern that the plan is too short term with any ‘relief’ offered referring to a situation of almost 30 years ago, as opposed to today. When it comes to roads and transport, communities are so longer seeking short-term ‘relief’ *per se* but a long-term, sustainable ‘renewal’. Such renewal to be achieved, in so small part in this case, through an outer ring-road, at a distance sufficiently removed from residential development and in keeping with the 21<sup>st</sup> century ambitions, needs and aspirations of the community.

## **Mill Lane**

I have also had representations from residents with serious concerns about the proposed RD3/RD3A road/flyover of the Naas Branch of the Grand Canal due to the following.

### **1 Conflict of Objectives**

There is concern that the proposed RD3/RD3A routes present a “Serious Conflict” with four of the seven Core Themes & “Vision” as set-out in Section 2 of the overall Draft Naas Local Area Plan - Homes and Communities, Heritage and Culture, Environment and Climate Change and Urban Design.

## **2 Not future-proofed**

There are further community concerns that the plan, in this element, does not take proper account of the change in work patterns and increased awareness of the value of natural amenity such as the Canal Greenway and the local environment and clean air, effected by Covid19.

## **3 Residential Disruption**

The re-routing of significant Newbridge Road traffic via Finlay Park over the Canal to Mill Lane to the Sallins Road and vice-versa routing, would run through the residential area (Millbridge Court, Mill Wood, Millbridge Avenue and Millbridge Way inclusive of Mill Lane Nursing Home) to an extremely busy Sallins Road with attendant impact of noise, pollution and vibration.

## **4 Damage to the environment**

This is a local area of outstanding natural beauty. Such development could severely damage the local environment, including an indicated Wildlife Sanctuary on both sides of the Canal, at the proposed location of the bridge), thereby negatively affecting public, residential and natural peace of the Canal Banks, Mill Lane, Oldtown Water Gardens, St Patrick’s Well and Millbridge areas. Up to 10,000 people use the canal in this area on Car Free Sunday.

## **5 Further overloading of current traffic**

While improving access we must also reduce traffic and its environmental and human impact in terms of noise and particulate. There are real community fears that the proposed development would overload current traffic on Sallins Road by forcing even more vehicles

onto the road at the Mill Lane junction, while routing further heavy traffic through a residential and proposed greenway area. This proposed design passes 7 junctions within 100 meters of each other Millbridge Way, entrance to Mill Lane Nursing home, Millbridge Avenue, Mill Wood, Millbridge Court and Mill Lane itself

## **6 Street without Street Features**

It is noted by residents that the RD3/RD3A route is being branded “Millbridge Street” though it will have **no** actual “street” features. The plan alludes to it as a “relief road” for diverting Newbridge Road and Main Street traffic over the Canal and directly through residential areas already mentioned above. There are particular concerns that this element seems to ignore the magnificent amenity of the soon-to-be-public Oldtown Water Gardens, nor the adjacent St Patrick’s Well, both to provide future cultural, heritage and environmental value and contribute to the uniqueness of Naas Town.

## **Housing Overview**

A huge proportion of contact with my office involves housing and the current crisis, from parents of babies only a few days old, to people in their 50s and 60s forced to sell by the banks, to the elderly who are ‘living’ in single rooms and caravans. I am also being contacted, increasingly, by young couples in good jobs – such as the Gardaí, teaching and nursing – living back with parents, saving for years for a deposit, then sick in their stomachs when just as they think they can buy their home, investors sweep in, scoop up their ‘dream semi-D’ over their heads. These couples, the public servants we depend on in our schools, hospitals and Garda stations, have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the private market, its vagaries and exclusions.

In Naas and its surrounds young people, especially, face the stark realisation that they will never own even a modest home of their own, and so face a lifetime of renting, if they are lucky enough to be able to pay the rents demanded. Our County Development Plan and Naas Development Plan must take account of this in planning, zoning and re-zoning. Current housing delivery, far from addressing this issue, is not even making a dent in the rapidly-growing lists, where people can face a 15-year wait. The council must make it clear to central

government that this crisis in housing must be tackled and urgently. Childhood is a fleeting period. Parents watch entire childhoods go by, waiting for a ‘family home’.

The Plan is ambitious for developing housing and services proportionately and in tandem, unlike the practice previously, where sprawling estates often lacked a civic or social centre and cohesion in living, and the easy building of neighbourhood and community. I note the Plan’s commitment to proper and careful permeability in our housing developments and the outward reach to transport, walk and cycleways, schools, colleges, work, shopping, healthcare and leisure. If we are actively looking at creating 15-minute cities, where all essential services are available in that time, I believe we should equally be looking at five-minute towns.

I note the commitment to the appropriate mix of housing in size and type and welcome the proactive approach to Active Land Management, the Application of the Vacant Site Levy and the pursuit of funding under the URDF in order to utilise vacant and underused sites to increase housing capacity and to support urban generation. High-quality, affordable housing is an essential requirement of living, not a luxury commodity. In too many instances and for too many years, it has become the latter. I am all in favour of free-market enterprise. I am equally in favour of hard-working people having the reasonable expectation of renting or buying a home of their own. Just as I am fully in favour of the building of high-quality, beautiful, well-planted, accessible social housing, for those who require it, in the interest of the public dignity and the common good. Many outstanding people in politics, business, medicine, education and the arts, were reared in earlier public-housing developments. A secure home in the present, makes better futures possible.

### **Our Older People**

Looking at the demographics, I see that 55% of the Naas area population is in the 25-64 cohort. This means, and the Naas Plan wisely states, that it will need to find the appropriate housing mix for the over 65s in the coming years. I’m anxious about our older people in the future, especially in the context where the OAP was devised to be exclusive of housing costs. This should be of concern to us all, as if we are lucky, we will live to old age. Unlike earlier generations, many will now be paying mortgages into their 70s or rents until they die. Many buyers and renters are unlikely to have private pensions to rely on, given the exorbitant costs

of renting or buying, and the costs of child rearing and education taking every spare penny in the interim.

Given the ageing of our local population, the Naas Plan, like the Kildare County Plan, must be particularly attentive to the mix and accessibility of future elderly housing needs. I am immediately and particularly concerned that housing for our older people facilitate the keeping, or acquiring, of beloved pets; a cat or dog often being a sole – and indeed soul - companion in a person's life, bringing company, love, reassurance. It can be immensely, and unnecessarily, distressing for an older person to surrender a companion animal in order to be housed or rehoused. Equally, I believe accommodation for our elderly should have access to growing areas, be they plots or containers, for food and flowers, both individually and co-operatively. It is in their current, and our future interest, to ensure the wisdom of experience is valued, and our older people are not infantilised, by removing their choices over relatively minor matters that can, in fact, mean the world.

As stated in my observations on the County Development Plan, I am anxious that we move away from the privatised, commodified and commercialised care model for our older people, where huge international funds are operating for profit, what I believe to be a civil right to be cared for, in our old age. It is inevitable that some of us will require nursing-home care, but we must plan for our older people to remain in their homes, and in the community, for as long as possible.

### **Our Single People**

We must pay particular attention to our single people's housing needs, since, increasingly, they are excluded from the rental and mortgage market where two salaries are necessary to secure even the most modest home. In the 21st Century it cannot be the case that being in a relationship decides our capacity to live alone and independently. I have encountered more people in their 40s, 50s and 60s finding themselves in suddenly-precarious housing circumstances due to a change in relationship, health or employment status. This can be extremely distressing and frightening for these people who have worked hard from their teens and 20s and took a 'home' for granted. They have less working time left to make up losses and opportunities, than those in younger age groups. I would like to see more one-bed

properties, with proper storage and space for a visiting family member, being developed and made available for single people.

### **Planting**

Critically, I believe all our housing developments in the Naas area, both planned and extant, should be heavily and attractively planted, including with mature trees in order to absorb pollution, improve air quality, encourage flora and fauna, facilitate drainage, birdsong, increase community pride and quality of life. I believe every child in the Naas area, regardless of their parents' means, should be able to experience the seasons changing through the trees on their own street or road. Community and group gardening offers the opportunity to enhance the shared space, connect with nature, grow community bonds, improve fitness and mental health.

### **Climate Proofing, Just Transition**

Since Climate Change is a pillar of the Plan's development the extreme-weather proofing and readiness of new and existing housing stock must be facilitated with residents not penalised, but assisted, to make the necessary changes to appropriate insulation and clean heating technology. It cannot – and must not – be the case where residents who can afford to make the changes speed ahead while those who cannot are left behind. Local and national government have key roles here. 'All in this together' became a Covid refrain, in the end, without basis. With Climate Change the phrase applies. We have just the one planet on which we all must live.

### **Sports and Leisure**

I welcome the ambitious and imaginative commitment to Sports and Leisure in the Plan. We have outstanding natural and built amenities in our community, from the canal to the racecourses, which all future planning must enhance and not diminish, particularly in the context of our heritage and environmental responsibilities and the stated remit and ambition of the Plan in those contexts.

However, there is a lacuna in the element of playing fields and easy access to them, for example in the case of Naas CBS who are forced to travel for such activity at the moment at major financial and time cost. Playing fields, adjacent and easily accessible, are integral to sports, fitness, personal development and team building in our schools. I am proposing that such an outstanding school, as Naas CBS, have access to playing fields as adjacently as possible, and that this be provided for within the Plan in the interest of current and future pupils and the community at large.

## **Mental Health**

I realise that TDs do not usually make submissions on mental health to an area Development Plan, but with Covid, these are not usual times. Mental health is already emerging as a critical issue for us locally and across the island. Our mental health and psychological wellbeing are intrinsic to every aspect of our lives and must be addressed and supported, in an unprecedented way, as we emerge from the acute phase of the Covid crisis. To truly ‘develop’ the Naas area, and the whole of North Kildare, requires adequate psychological services at primary-care level, and particularly for our young people who are consigned to waiting lists that were heaving ever before Covid. The community services we have are excellent, but not enough. After representations, the HSE have assured me that the psychology post at Celbridge is to be filled “imminently”. Last week I raised with the Minister how our children are being referred to primary-care psychological services in Leixlip that do not exist at all. ‘Mindfulness’ might have its place. But it is no match for qualified, accredited psychotherapists in the community, readily available to deal with acute problems as they arise and to protect and develop mental wellbeing, the latter not in any saccharine sense, but in how we can equip ourselves psychologically to live well. I would like to see Naas lead on prioritising mental-health in in how the area develops in the coming years. Immediately - and I appreciate this is an issue for government - I am proposing a mix of public and private psychotherapists, the latter being publicly-funded immediately and in the medium term, in order to clear lists, backlogs. If we seed a commitment to mental health in our ambitions and every aspect of this Plan, and especially in housing, then I believe with imagination and commitment, and the community, GPs, councillors and TDs working together, cross-party, to this shared and vital end, we can get the necessary results.

## **Schools**

I welcome the commitment to education and schools in the Plan and the ease of access to them, both in terms of travel and places. As our populations grows, lack of school places is causing misery in families in the Naas area, and particularly in special education, where parents have to become professional campaigners to assert their children's constitutional rights to an education. We simply must move to a rights-based system where such access is automatic and facilitated by local and national government as should, be expected both in, and of, the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Réada Cronin TD**

**Sinn Féin**

**Kildare North**