

Final Submission for the NPF 2040 - Fergus O'Dowd TD

10/11/2017

Dear Sir/Madam,

As a local TD I welcome this opportunity to make a formal submission to the 2040 National Planning Framework and I propose that Drogheda and its environs be included in the final 2040 National Planning Framework as a city in its own right with a directly Elected Mayor and dedicated CEO as city manager.

Drogheda is presently the largest town in Ireland with a census population of 40,956 (2016) persons. It is now without a Borough Council and the centre of decision making for our town of Drogheda presently resides in Louth County Council which is headquartered in Dundalk.

Drogheda was ignored in the last spatial strategy and this meant Drogheda and its environs lost out on considerable national and multi-national investment. People locally are very angry and concerned at this and I fully support the campaign to make Drogheda a city and be in control of its own destiny. This view is widely held locally and is supported by all local political parties.

Projecting forward the existing population of 40,956 (2016) for the census town of Drogheda at present CSO population growth rates it becomes clear that the census town of Drogheda will exceed 52,000 persons by 2030, thus exceeding the 50,000 persons as defined in the draft plan as qualifying as a city. The National Planning framework will run until 2040 so I believe by giving Drogheda City Status now the appropriate investment and forward planning decisions will be put in place so that Drogheda can finally grow in a measured and controlled manner.

There are projecting growth reports of upwards of 90,000 people to be living in the Drogheda and its Environs by 2024, the town is already above the population sprawl of Galway when it was awarded its own City Status.

Since the abolition of the Drogheda Borough Council we have not seen the devolution of power in Drogheda. The influence of the voice of the people of Drogheda at Council level is considered to be much less than previously held. The significant population regardless of which CSO/specialist figure you use, shows that the population warrants that the Drogheda Borough Council should be re-introduced or at the very least the current set up to be re-structured in order to provide more powers to the elected officials in the Drogheda area.

A boundary Review may have to be revisited by the Minister to align the current settlement and Growth patterns with appropriate County Council services. If the boundary discussion is not re-visited than at the very least we will need a City/County/Town manager that has the level of power to draw down the necessary services and funds from both the Louth and Meath County Councils to manage the town of Drogheda and it's hinterlands appropriately and professionally and without the current limitations that affect so many of the estates and residents that currently live in the Drogheda, Co. Meath area which presently amounts to approximately 6-7,000 people.

Drogheda certainly doesn't lack in terms of local amenities on our doorstep, our heritage is second to none but yet we fail to capitalise on the volume of tourists flocking in to Dublin airport on a yearly basis. Drogheda has many famous tourist draws such as Plunkett's Head, St Laurence's Gate, Millmout's Cup and Saucer, Baltray Golf Club, the Boyne Valley and many other significant historic, hospitality and family friendly draws. That said I do not believe the town's planning lends itself to being a tourist trap, we have a significant amount of derelict premises in the town centre some of which are side by side famous historic structures, we need to escalate the powers of CPO in order to ensure as funds come in the country we resolve the derelict issues that have blighted many of the fantastic towns such as Drogheda. The town suffers dramatically from traffic issues and I hope the proposed Drogheda Cross Route will draw the commercial traffic away from our town centre to make it more accessible and more aesthetically pleasing as such I would hope that funding will be made as part of the long term plan under the Local Infrastructure Housing Application Fund.

For Drogheda's future planning in a radical sense I firmly believe a detailed assessment and pre planning report should be funded on the viability of a new road bridge on the East side of the Viaduct bridge to be built closer to the mouth of the River Boyne to connect the Dublin Road traffic South of Colpe Cross to the North of Drogheda in order for HGVs and commercial vehicles travelling south bound to avoid the town completely, this would certainly limit the damage the local M1 tolls are doing to the towns traffic congestion and provide many other tourist and local opportunities to develop.

The proposed M1 Payment Corridor is an example of the potential enterprise and job growth that can be achieved in the Drogheda and environ area. We have a significant number of highly skilled people in the largest town in Ireland, however as Drogheda was excluded from the previous spacial strategy we have none of the required infrastructure required to attract and harness these types of Fintech companies. We need a significant change in the way Drogheda is managed nationally, we have a business park on the Donore Rd in Drogheda but because it lies in County Meath it lies completely neglected. Again another example of the bizarre and unacceptable power struggle between Louth and Meath Council that has negatively impacted on possible trade and employment for the town of Drogheda.

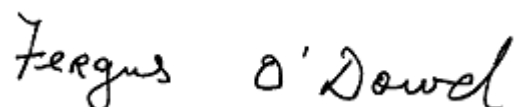
Local employment has continued to rise and the live register has dramatically fallen since 2012, however we cannot boast the availability of large type business premises and business parks that would provide the larger business model the option of expansion in the area. There is currently no Local Enterprise Office in our town. The 30min trip to the Dundalk LEO does not lend itself to providing hands on advice and practical help to what is the largest town in Ireland. There is no reason as to why we can't look at the overall plan to include an enterprise/development office locally that works in conjunction with local business and constituents.

In respect of the National Planning Framework I believe this submission along with many from the Drogheda area will lead to identifying Drogheda as a unique opportunity and an area that deserves and warrants an individual and sustainable plan. Drogheda needs and deserves a plan that will identify the huge mistakes made over the last 2 decades and provide a plan to cater for the huge levels of growth that can be expected in the area, this will involve a more thorough plan to address our road and rail network, our connectivity, our health services, our water and utility network among many others.

The people of Ardee have also felt forgotten on many of the national strategies and it was to our dismay that the proposed Ardee By-Pass was not highlighted as part of the Transport Capital Plan Review funding. The Ardee Bypass is a vital infrastructure project for the people of Ardee and Mid Louth, traffic congestion in particular has become unbearable in the town itself, having a major impact on the traders of the town. The Bypass would finally give the town the opportunity to reach its potential, in particular it will rid the town of the unwanted congestion and HGV traffic that has plighted trade in the town over the last number of years. The proposed Ardee bypass scheme is approximately 4.5km in length, running from Mandistown in County Meath to a new junction with the N2 just north of Ardee, providing a western bypass of the town and removing N52 through traffic. The proposed scheme will be a single carriageway and include six road junctions and two bridge structures, spanning the River Dee and the Garra River. This must be included in future funding and in any framework decision for town strategies as the current situation is choking the life and trade from the town.

I thank you for considering my submission,

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fergus O'Dowd". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fergus O'Dowd TD

