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5th November 2017

Dear Sirs

Re:- NPF Ireland 2040 – Our Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above plan. I've been following the lobbying and activities of the Drogheda for City Status group, and am therefore going to re-iterate the points they have made, as I fully support the research they've undertaken and the outcome of the independent report of Dr Hughes.

I am deeply concerned at the astonishing lack of foresight in omitting Drogheda from the draft national planning framework

Given that this plan will become the sole legal reference for all future discussions on city planning it makes absolutely no sense to omit the sixth largest urban centre in the country from the national framework particularly considering its potential as a major hub with its proximity to both Dublin and Belfast. Ease-of-access and the ability to distribute goods is vital to a region's development and no other regional town can match Drogheda in this respect as it occupies a prime location on the North/South Corridor with air, sea and motorway links within 20 minutes of the town.

A report by Dr Brian Hughes, a lecturer in urban economics, backs Drogheda and the fast-growing nearby towns of Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington Meath becoming the country's newest city. The area has the State's fifth largest population, more than Waterford, the country's fifth city.

Dr Hughes argues that the greater Drogheda area, twice the size of Co Longford, meets the criteria of the EU Commission and the OECD for city status because of population density per kilometre and exceeds numbers in excess of 50,000 people

According to last year's census, Drogheda had a population of 40,956, an increase of 6.2 per cent since 2011, but the surrounding area – part of the Dublin commuter belt – pushes that population to more than 80,000. That includes the east Meath towns of Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington that have a population of 10,000 people each and are expected to reach 15,000 or more by the next census in 2021.

Drogheda's young and educated population and the availability of high-speed broadband makes the town an attractive target for FDI which would in turn help create local jobs. But Drogheda needs to be included in the National Planning Framework to accomplish this and we need new thinking to address anomalies such as an almost-empty IDA Business Park which is unable to access BMR (Border Midlands Region) funding because it is in the wrong county. Third-level education is another area that Drogheda could excel in with industry-specific training centres.

Inclusion in the Framework could also address issues like regional transport. No other town in the state is split in half by a toll like Drogheda is. The tolls on the slip roads in and out of the town should be removed. The port company, Irish Rail and road hauliers should form a regional transport committee to properly plan the free movement of goods. The Port Access Northern Cross Route, long identified as a vital infrastructure project for Drogheda must finally be actioned and completed.

In local government, Drogheda Borough Council should be reinstated to properly manage this large urban area, with a view to Drogheda gaining city status and having a city council. Drogheda's population has grown at a faster rate than the other five large urban centres. If we are planning into the future, this fast expanding population must be planned for. The "nightmare" dual administration (Louth and Meath CoCos) of the town and its rapidly expanding satellite communities would be addressed by city status and appropriate administration of the Drogheda area locally.

The idea of planning is to anticipate events and plan accordingly. If the Minister is serious about balanced regional development, as is mentioned in the foreword to the framework, then Drogheda needs to be reconsidered for inclusion.

Yours sincerely

Áine Walsh

<http://npf.ie/>