

Karen Devine,



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Submission to the National Planning Framework Consultation Process (Draft Stage)

I welcome the development of Ireland's National Planning Framework. I'm part of a generation that has grown up with and lamented the absence of strategic planning and joined-up thinking in this country. We've been poorly served by fragmented, sporadic planning without reference to a larger vision and set of goals. The development of a National Planning Framework, that is backed up by a National Investment Plan, brings forth a sense that Ireland is maturing and developing as a society and a nation. This is a good day.

"A PLAN is typically any diagram or list of steps with timing and resources, used to achieve an objective. It is commonly understood as a temporal set of intended actions through which one expects to achieve a goal."

I'm a campaign and event manager by profession. My work requires me, on behalf of clients, to look at the facts but to also anticipate what's coming down the tracks. My job is to plan for both the current status and changing circumstances to ensure that projects are delivered flawlessly. Planning based on current circumstances is easy. Planning for changing circumstances requires you to look ahead, take in all the intelligence available to you, assess the implications and plan accordingly. Planning for changing circumstances, especially over time, is most certainly complex. But it must be done ... because not to plan for changing circumstances, especially evidence based-growth, is just irresponsible.

*If you knew that Ireland was due to have another City during the lifetime of the National Planning Framework would you anticipate it in the Framework and plan for it?
And if not, why not?*

My submission to this consultation process falls under 3 key headings:

- The True Population,
- The Importance of Government Plans and
- Forced Commuting.

THE TRUE POPULATION:

50,000	Definition of a City according to the National Planning Framework
43,000	Current population of Drogheda within the Borough Boundary
6,000	Current population of people living in Drogheda, Co. Meath (including me!)
49,000	Sub-Total – current population of Drogheda
15,000	Northern Environs Plan* (<i>pop. increase on the north side of Drogheda within 10 years</i>)
64,000	Anticipated Population less than 10 years into the National Planning Framework**.

- * *The Northern Environs Plan for Drogheda (serviced sites, access roads, funding in place) is due to commence construction in 2018. The Plan allows for 15,000 additional citizens within the next ten years.*
- ** *This figure does not include the populations of outlying towns and villages who rely on Drogheda for services such as public transport, education, retail, state agencies and health services.*

Incorrectly classifying Drogheda as a “Town” instead of a “City” will hurt the people of the North East who rely on Drogheda for employment and public services.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOVERNMENT PLANS:

Ireland’s largest town / next City, has no plan. It has no permanent Local Government Management presence within in the town. A clearly defined strategic plan for Ireland’s next city is a necessity.

We are a passionate and dynamic community who work together against the odds. We know what it is to be excluded from government plans. Drogheda was a mere “Hub” in the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020. We were not designated a “Gateway” and were excluded from targeted strategic funding in infrastructure. Our National Spatial Strategy status was used as the excuse for exclusion from investment in infrastructure and other job creating measures over the past 15 years.

We’re dynamic. We’re spirited. We’ve triumphed in the face of adversity. We’ve worked with state agencies to attract jobs, despite government policy. We’ve developed specialist clusters of industry. We’ve lead trade delegations, developed investment materials and worked collaboratively to attract FDI and support indigenous enterprises. We had to – no one else was going to do this for us. But Drogheda, Ireland’s largest town / next city needs its own strategic plan in the National Planning Framework and ring-fenced investment through the National Investment Plan. For all our community spirit and collaboration, we cannot overcome the damage of being incorrectly classified as a “Town” instead of a “City” in Ireland’s legally binding strategic plan for the next 20 years.

Incorrectly classifying Drogheda as a “Town” instead of a “City” in the National Planning Framework will copper-fasten the 15 years of damage done by the National Spatial Strategy.

FORCED COMMUTING:

I was struck by one of the key aims of the National Planning Framework:

Enable people to live closer to where they work, moving away from the current unsustainable trends of increased commuting.

Drogheda has a long tradition of industry and manufacturing. The town was decimated by the recession of the 1980s when many inter-generational industries just folded. But Drogheda has developed new industries, especially in the food processing, payments and product development sectors. Regrettably, Drogheda also has a long history of forced emigration with many locals leaving for Europe and further afield just to get work. While permanent emigration may be less common now, many thousands of our population live the life of forced commuters. Absence of planning and attraction of high tech and professional services companies, means that many thousands of highly skilled and highly educated Drogheda citizens commute to jobs in Dublin early each morning. Despite our excellent public transport, it’s a miserable existence with many people commuting 20 hours a week which translates to a month a year.

It's time to stop this – we are not a “commuter town” and nor should our future be planned as such. Drogheda has a bright future. We're a driving force for enterprise, food and tourism. We are the home of the M1 Payments Corridor. We are the economic engine of the North East. We provide health services to the entire region. We've had enough of exporting our children to find work ... we want to reach our true potential. We want to stimulate enterprise and employment here in Drogheda. We want to provide jobs and services for all of the people in Drogheda and in the surrounding towns and villages.

Incorrectly classifying Drogheda as a “Town” instead of a “City” in the National Planning Framework will further deepen the unsustainable trend of increased commuting.

CONCLUSION: GOOD PLANNING:

In conclusion, good planning is all about thinking ahead. It's about understanding and anticipating change and making provision for it. Like it or not, within the next 10 years, Drogheda will have a population well in excess of the city population designated in the National Planning Framework. Good planning would dictate that the National Planning Framework should anticipate this and plan for it ... quite simply, **Drogheda needs to be designated a city in the National Planning Framework.**

Calling for city status for Drogheda is not a vanity project. We're not looking for a favour. We're not asking for special treatment. This is not about town boundaries or turf wars between Louth and Meath. It's about making sure that Ireland's largest “Town” is correctly classified as a “City” in this important strategic plan. Drogheda is Ireland's largest town, a mere 1,000 people short of a city according to your own definition.

We are asking to be rightfully included, planned for and funded as a “City” for the next 20 years within Ireland's legally binding strategic development plan.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission!

With kind regards,



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