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To: National Planning Framework
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I wish to make a few observations in relation to this most important document. Such a framework and strategy is badly needed in Ireland but it must give opportunities to each town and region to share in the Country's prosperity and not just a few selected areas. The proposals indicated by 'Our Plan' in relation to active land management has to be supported and the approach to consolidation of town centres has to be applauded. There are many other such proposals contained in the Framework that are worthy of support.

However, I want to be parochial in an attempt to demonstrate that the the thinking in the NSS of 2002 is to a great extent influencing the current policy.

Taking the Midland town of Portlaoise as an example, in the course of the NSS this town bucked all the trends. It was not intended to grow but did so in spite of that Strategy and is now the largest town in the Midland Region. There is a multiplicity of reasons why this happened and I now suggest that for the purpose of the NDF, we play to our strengths and designate Portlaoise as a satellite town of Dublin and Prime Urban Centre. There is the concept of a satellite town within urban planning and it it should be utilised. As an example, the future of maternity services at Portlaoise General Hospital is assured because of it's relationship with the Mater and Coombe hospitals, by linking with 3rd level institutions in the city we can have a viable 3rd level outreach centre in the town. We already have exceptional connectivity with our capital city through rail, bus, and road. There are many more examples and it is to be hoped that the NDF agree that the best value for Ireland's money is to be found by investing in areas where people have shown unequivocally where they wish to live. Furthermore the state has made considerable investment in primary and secondary schools in the town in recent years. This investment should be built on.

In addition, if we are serious about FDI in the future, we must bring the jobs to the people and not the other way round which flies in the face of reducing our Carbon footprint.

To conclude, I suggest that Portlaoise and Laois be encouraged to expand and not put a 'dead hand' on development in this part of the Midland Region. The broad objectives contained in this Framework document can best be achieved by abandoning the old anachronistic thinking contained in the NSS and by thinking outside the box and bearing in mind some of what I have stated here.

Our country needs this plan but it has to be fair to all and not just to pre-selected areas.

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