

Submission to National Planning Framework

The Greater Drogheda Area – Designation as a City & Primary Development Centre

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Dear Sir/Madam,

As the CEO of an indigenous high-tech start-up based in Drogheda and supported by Enterprise Ireland under the High Potential Start-Up programme (HPSU) I wish to make a submission in response to the first draft of the National Planning Framework

I believe this draft failed to recognise Drogheda as one of the largest urban areas in the State, I wish to propose that Drogheda and its full surrounding urban area in both Louth and Meath be counted and administered as one single unitary urban area and designated as a City & Primary Development Centre in the National Planning Framework / Ireland 2040.

I believe this is counter to the needs of Ireland's largest town, the existing regional planning and policies in place at regional levels by Louth and Meath County Councils, the services required by the people and businesses of the greater Drogheda area but moreover fails to take advantages and opportunities that exist on the M1 Corridor (Drogheda – Dundalk – Newry).

M1 Corridor as logical economic stimulus

The joint foreword by An Taoiseach and Minister Murphy in the document sets out the challenge in that by 2040, we know that Ireland will be home to an additional one million people. We will need at least an extra 600,000 jobs and a half a million additional homes.

The Louth Economic Forum ([https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/Services/Economic-Development/Louth Economic Forum/](https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/Services/Economic-Development/Louth_Economic_Forum/)) which has been recognised as one of the best regional economic models by a county council¹ has membership including national and regional representation from Enterprise Ireland, IDA, SEAI, LMETB, Fáilte Ireland, Louth County Council, Drogheda & Dundalk Chamber of Commerce and The Private Sector. It's strategy includes 10 task groups and policy areas culminating in an overarching development strategy focused on the Drogheda Dundalk Newry Corridor.

¹ Winner council of the year and Best Economic Partnership Unit at the LAMA Community and Council Awards

In its Foreign Direct investment plan the Forum states,

“The M1 serves Drogheda, Dundalk and Ardee (via the N33 link road) and provides high quality road access to each of the county’s three main towns and their hinterlands. This infrastructure offers excellent opportunities to establish businesses adjacent to Ireland’s motorway network In addition to the easy accessibility of Dublin port, which is the main shipping location in Ireland, via the M1 motorway and Port Tunnel, Louth has three commercial freight ports of its own, namely Drogheda, Dundalk and Greenore. Close proximity to these facilities within the county gives Louth’s location a low carbon rating for exports. The overall population of Louth and its hinterland is set to grow to almost 140,000 by 2020 providing a strong skills set to employers. The population within a 60 kilometre radius of Drogheda is circa 1.8 million while within a 60 minute radius of Dundalk it is circa 1.3 million. This positions Drogheda and Dundalk as the largest population catchment areas in the country after Dublin.”

Since it’s formation in 2009 based on a study entitled Louth County Economic Development Strategy (2009 - 2015), commissioned by the Louth Local Authorities from Indecon International Economic Consultants, the Forum, the County Council and regional stakeholders such as IDA and Enterprise Ireland have used the strategies and recommendations of Louth Economic Forum as the blueprint for regional economic and social development in Louth and the wider North East Region.

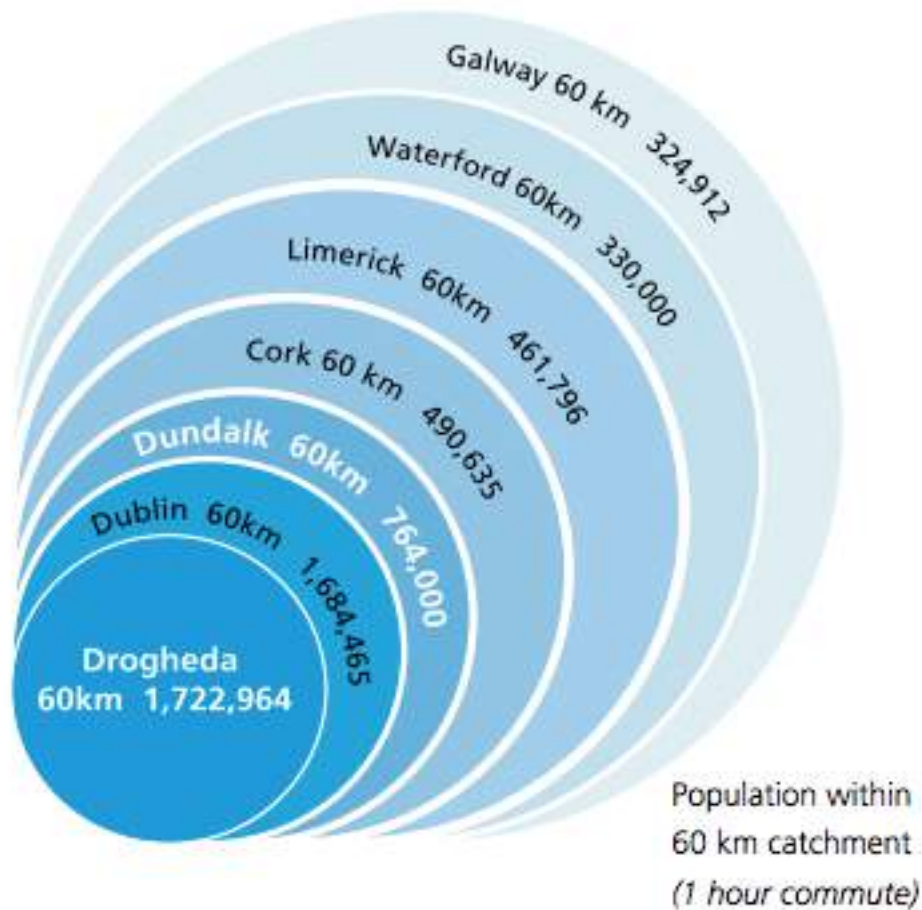
The Forum also states for Drogheda that,

“A prime objective of the Forum is that Drogheda will attract a number of new FDI investments during this plan. Enhancing the range of suitable properties for FDI companies is the subject of active discussion with the property owners, developers and IDA Ireland. The Forum wishes to promote the provision of 2 new facilities suitable for manufacturing or office activities and the completion of Phase II of the Mill Enterprise Centre. It will press for support for the provision of these facilities from the five year €150m property investment programme of IDA Ireland. The concept of a National Payments Centre in Drogheda is currently being explored.”

Drogheda as part of an organised City Corridor / Region including Dundalk and leading to Newry not only strengthens Drogheda but also the Region. The natural population growth of Drogheda (6.2% in the last census) will mean it will continue to outgrow most other urban centres in Ireland.

Drogheda a natural Talent Pool for Job Creation

Louth County Economic Development Strategy (2009 - 2015), commissioned by the Louth Local Authorities from Indecon International Economic Consultants identified the potential of the population mass on the M1 and in particular the catchment of Drogheda with over 1.7m people within a 1 hour commute. Due to congestion this is the largest commuter population in the country including Dublin.



The Indecon report also pointed to the uniquely large high skill base in the commuter population of Drogheda that is currently relatively untapped as a source of reverse commuting, indigenous start-ups and talent for new incoming FDI outside of Dublin.

The NPF states under the key objective of “Connectivity”,

Given Ireland’s scale and pattern of development, improvements in connectivity are achievable and are necessary to boost both competitiveness and quality of life. It is a reasonable target for most people to have no more than a 30-minute commute time to work and for most people and goods to have access to international connections within 90 minutes of their home or work base.

The plan recognises the importance of the Dublin-Belfast corridor and I call for the minister to continue the work of the Forum in explicitly recognising how a Drogheda-Dundalk hub within that corridor that would meet these objectives by

- Reversing the commuting trends
- Better utilising the Airport infrastructure (35 mins without congestion from Drogheda)
- Realise new indigenous and FDI jobs outside of but complementary to Dublin
- Better utilise the existing road, rail, bus and communications with counter flow commuting from North County Dublin up the M1 corridor

Cross Border Local Initiatives

The Plan acknowledges the need for Cross Border Local Initiatives and Drogheda represents the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity to develop a model of excellence.

The Greater Drogheda Area has a population in the region of 80,000 people straddling both counties Louth and Meath when Drogheda itself and the adjoining Laytown, Bettystown, Mornington (LBM) urban area are combined. It makes no sense for these areas to be counted in isolation of one another in either statistical or planning terms. Doing so leaves a huge gap in the services and infrastructure required and actually provided to what is actually one of Ireland's largest urban areas and deprives the State of an alternative Primary Development Area to counter congestion in Dublin. The Greater Drogheda Area including the town itself plus LBM should be counted as one contiguous interlinked urban area for statistical and planning purposes.

The area surrounding Drogheda stretching from South Louth down through the town itself and on to the Meath Coast is a contiguous urban area that forms a natural geographical entity which should be recognised as one city.

Until such time as the size and population of Drogheda is recognised properly through the recognition of its real status issue the area will not reach its full potential for the attraction of FDI. Drogheda is on a par in terms of surrounding infrastructure and location with parts of Fingal such as Swords and the Airport Zone and major urban centres such as Galway and Limerick but attracts much less Foreign Direct Investment. Drogheda has the potential to be a major economic hub for the North East region with a critical mass of employment opportunities which would end the daily commuting misery into Dublin City for thousands of people in the Louth/Meath/North County Dublin areas and reduce inbound traffic and rail line congestion on the M1/M2 and Northern Rail Line services, using the outbound lanes on the M1/M2/N2/R152 and empty outbound morning trains and buses on northern commuter services.

Drogheda's true size both in urban spread and population size needs to be represented more accurately in census data and national statistics which inform Government and Local Authority decisions on planning, resource allocation and prioritisation for public services and promotion of foreign direct investment. Drogheda's absence from the previous National Spatial Strategy should be addressed by nominating the full urban area as a city and Primary Development Centre in the National Planning Framework.

Housing

The plan targets the delivery of 550,000 additional households up to 2040 in accordance with the policy objectives of Ireland 2040.

Drogheda & east Meath has some of the best infrastructure in the country including power, water/waste, road, rail, schools, beach & recreational areas.

In July 2004 Louth County Council prepared and since adopted a local area plan for the North Drogheda Environs identifies:

“Drogheda affords excellent potential for development arising from the following:

- *Location in the Border, Midland and Western Region, with Objective 1 Status for Structural Funds in the period to 2006;*
- *Demand for housing in the greater Dublin Area*
- *Availability of land for development purposes*
- *Location within the Dublin commuter belt close to the Dublin Metropolitan Area;*
- *Location on the Dublin – Belfast economic corridor;*
- *Location on main existing and developing road and rail infrastructure;*
- *Its commercial port*
- *Modern Communications Infrastructure.*
- *Proximity to Dublin Airport*
- *Heritage town and excellent natural and physical environment*
- *Wide range of community facilities and services*

Its economic and residential development potential is aided significantly by its attractive coastal topographical setting, its archaeological and historical associations and the vibrancy of the town itself.

The town enjoys a unique physical planning context, having its own Borough Council, with suburban environs located in County Meath and County Louth. “

The plan was adopted in Feb 2007 (<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/councils-back-drogheda-plan-1.1193887>) and over its lifetime it predicts the population of the greater Drogheda area, which extends into large tracts of land in the county council areas of both Louth and Meath, will reach 90,000 by 2024. At the moment the population of Drogheda, its environs and the coastal area of east Meath is just over 41,000.

Specifically on housing the plan states the land bank enclosed *“could accommodate a population of between 50,000 to 60,000 persons, thereby potentially trebling the overall population of Drogheda from the current estimated level of approximately 32,300 persons to around 90,000 persons.* Further to this, there are approximately 400 hectares of greenfield and other undeveloped sites zoned for employment uses.”

I would argue for the minister that the return on investment for investment in the required Drogheda Port Northern Access Route that will unlock this plan will provide immediate

delivery housing units, thousands of which have already been master planned and compulsory purchase orders for the roads/access route have already been completed by Louth County Council.

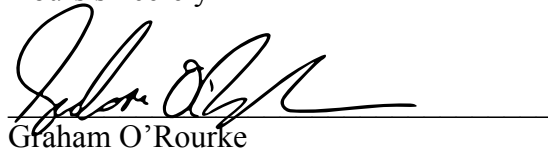
Conclusion

The National Spatial Strategy (section 1.2) of the report depicts the Mary McAleese Boyne Valley Bridge that spans Drogheda County Louth with Drogheda County Meath. It demonstrates the existing infrastructure that is currently under utilised. It is the back drop to a historic town with a unique urban/heritage balance, one with a economic and political heritage that has always been intertwined with Dublin but always separate.

Drogheda offers many solutions to balanced regional development, backed by the power of people in a growing population trend that is unstoppable. It offers immediate solutions to the housing crisis and to act as an alternative more sustainable and cost effective location for FDI and indigenous start-ups alike with a work-life balance that is 2nd to none.

I ask the Minister to consider explicitly recognise these opportunities in the final plan.

Yours sincerely



Graham O'Rourke