

Hello,

Please find below my submission relating to National Planning Framework 2040. If you have questions or require any additional information please let me know.

Thanks,  
John

John Clendennen MCC

Offaly County Council

Kinnitty, Birr, Co. Offaly

Tel: 087-6118883

**The National Planning Framework 2040 Draft is a welcome document to identify and outline the future needs of Ireland. If one looks back 23 years to 1994, it is daunting to think of all that has occurred in the interim period, but it also puts in perspective the rate of change that we can expect in the next 23 years from now to 2040.**

**On a National Level we must continue to invest in infrastructure and technology to maintain our competitiveness in attracting multinational companies and foreign direct investment, whilst also supporting our domestic SME sector. Ireland must continue to hold its position as the country at the centre of the world, adapting to the ever-changing needs of its population and ensuring Education, Health & Well-Being continue to be a priority.**

**As we strive to further consolidate our relations with our primary trading partners in the USA and EU, we must prepare ourselves for challenges such as Brexit and the growing opportunities that will present themselves in Asia.**

**Domestically, there is an understandable rationale to support the proposals for concentrated growth across the identified five cities, which are all located at coastal areas. However, I believe that to truly provide impetus to the Midlands Region, an existing town must be identified as a location for investment and development that would result in a similarly defined 'sixth city', with an equivalent population and level of growth.**

**There must also be the flexibility to provide the opportunity for 'organic growth' in development and population, with investment that is adequate rather than proportionate, right across rural Ireland. The National Planning Framework may have legislative backing and be placed on a statutory footing, but there must be scope to embrace opportunities, that are yet to be identified, that doesn't rely solely on the evaluation and recommendations of the Planning Regulator.**

**The Midlands has never truly enjoyed the same levels of investment as other regions and Offaly in particular, has relied heavily on key sectors such as agriculture,**

construction, SME's and commuting to larger cities, for employment. We must reduce our over-dependence on Dublin for employment, but for those who will continue to commute there must be improvements to our existing transport infrastructure. The introduction of a high speed rail service and improved / upgraded national primary roads such as the N62, and the motorway network are critical. There must be strong consideration for a motorway that would serve the region north and south, complimenting the existing M7 from east to west. The logical proposal would be to connect to the existing M8 where it interconnects with the M7 and continue in a northerly direction to Sligo.

Offaly has a number of strengths that will be crucial in securing job-creation into the future. The current tourism offering has considerable scope for development and infrastructural investment. With 22% of the county in state ownership, it provides a unique opportunity to develop the existing greenway network strategy that would provide economic opportunity for villages and towns across the county. With one of the lowest volumes of guest bedroom stocks in the country, a commitment to such an investment would provide a unique opportunity, and would allow the county to present itself as the 'Biking Capital of Ireland' or the 'Playground of Ireland' and attract inward investment, additional services and visitors.

The world is at a crossroads in terms of energy consumption and it's impact on the environment and climate change. There is a sharp focus on renewable energy and reducing our dependency on fossil fuels. Peat production has played a vital role in Offaly over the years creating significant employment. As trends in the sector evolve, there is an opportunity for the county to establish itself as a centre for renewable energy production, and also as a Centre of Excellence for energy research and development, aligned to a third level institute. Land that is now exhausted from peat production should be considered to be put forward by the respective agency's as a suitable site location for future Data Storage Centre investment projects.

In 1994, the iPhone didn't even exist and mobile phones in general were in their infancy. The advancements and dependency on technology have been exponential on every level and the trend is likely to continue. The National Planning Framework is an important exercise but whether it be technology or otherwise, we must be ready, willing and able to adapt to the next and future global phenomenons in order to ensure Ireland continues to be at the Centre of the World.

**DOCUMENT ENDS**