

Dear Sirs

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft National Planning Framework 2040.

Representing the constituency of Kildare South which is very much within the commuter belt of Dublin but also has large areas of rural hinterland towns and villages, I am particularly interested in areas of the framework that will deal with the infrastructure to service this type of population area. I particularly want to ensure that the framework keeps a focus on smaller towns and villages in rural areas which will be required as much as the larger urban centres to cater for our growing population.

My key priorities are

- Transport infrastructure, including enhanced rail links to main population and work centres such as Dublin;
- Improved communications critically fibre broadband and mobile phone coverage, to allow remote working where practical;
- Planning guidelines and housing development to ensure sustainable rural communities, and
- Services to towns and villages outside the 5 main cities.

From my experience to date, residents of areas such as Kildare South are willing to work in nearby cities such as Dublin when reliable and efficient transport services are provided. However given the increasing pace of worklife and commuting times, many now would also appreciate the option of working from home where possible and for this we will need to ensure that our communications infrastructure catch up and keep up to date with a changing world.

I welcome the stated aim of the framework to build up the fabric of our network of small towns and villages and rural areas by targeting national population and economic growth to these areas and would like to see enhanced supports in this area. This will be critical in supporting the development of the larger cities and very welcome to the many who already live in these areas.

Transport

While projects such as the M7 road widening and the Athy ring road are now progressing we cannot continue to rely on expanding the road network to cater for our potential increased population. Rail transport is an efficient and reliable form of transport that could be further utilized in areas around the larger cities such as Kildare. Many areas of Kildare even now need enhanced services with towns such as Athy not experiencing the same level of services as those closer to the city such as Celbridge, Naas and Newbridge.

In addition the past 5 years have seen increased numbers again using the existing train services placing many of the rush hour routes at capacity in areas like Newbridge which is firmly in the commuter zone and needs to be seen as such from a pricing and services viewpoint. The difference in price for commuters from Naas and Newbridge is not sustainable given the small distance between them and must be considered.

Consideration needs to be given to proposals to expand the number of rail lines coming out of the city to adjoining Counties such as Kildare to encourage the use of trains. A current proposal for a

third rail line to Kildare is already needed and must be considered as part of the overall development and enhancement of rail services.

Communications

Investment in technology to ensure our increased population have access to the fastest forms of mobile online communication will become even more critical as we grow to 2040. The ability to work from home or in remote centres outside the cities will enhance the work experience and bring greater levels of access to qualified staff who may have family commitments or excessive commutes.

Planning

Our rural communities are great places to live, work and bring up families. We need to ensure that in our growth towards 2040 we maintain the strong sense of place and communities that makes us who we are around Ireland and has added so richly to the fabric of our society. This can only be achieved by ensuring that our rural communities remain vibrant living centres with young and old mixing together. Planning and housing development is critical to this aim to ensure young people and families can access homes outside of the cities and main population centres.

Town and Village settlements with shared services are a road map for the future and can provide much needed activity and life to some of our small towns and villages. They will help to keep our rural communities populated and allow the continued provision of facilities and services in these areas. There should not be limits to the sustainable natural growth of the towns in Kildare South.

I also believe in the right of those who were brought up in rural communities to be able to continue to live in that environment and our planning laws into the future need to allow for that. We need to ensure that we continue to provide zoning for one off sites with shared services in towns villages and rural nodes around the Country.

We should also plan our future housing development in conjunction with the transport infrastructure available. Areas such as Monasterevin with a good rail line could be enhanced with increased rail services that would then make it a practical housing choice for those working in Dublin.

Public Services

Our towns and villages all around the Country need to continue to provide services. While there is a focus on the 5 stated cities in the framework, these will not cater for the population needs alone and should not have to. Our larger urban towns can be commercial centres and alternatives to the cities for those who don't wish to travel to cities if we set them up as such. A ring road for Newbridge would ensure it can continue to grow as a major commercial town for the region and hinterland it services.

We also need to ensure the continued viability of our smaller towns and villages. We need both and this framework and its future regional reviews need to ensure that focus is kept on both large and small areas in parallel.

I look forward to taking part in the continuing process of planning for 2040 and hope that these issues can be addressed as part of that process.

Regards

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