

Dear Minister,

I attended the forum regarding the National Planning Framework (NPF) which was held in UCD on 28th February. I am very concerned with the lack of investment which is intended for the Midlands region. While I myself, given my chosen career path have no intention of returning to the Midlands on a long-term basis, I am anxious to raise my concerns about the Midlands being essentially forgotten in the NPF proposal. I raised this issue during the Q&A session and was frustrated that once the question was asked there was no further opportunity for dialogue.

The National Spatial Strategy, however unsuccessful it may have been, had provided for Mullingar, Athlone and Tullamore to work together to create a hub in the Midlands. It seems that the venture was not an overwhelming success, so the NPF has just completely omitted all three Midland towns when looking to Ireland's future.

The point was raised that it is up to the people of these three towns to fight for investment and raise their concerns. The problem with this is that only around 22% of people in Offaly have attended third level education and have the necessary knowledge to tackle such national level issues. Those locals who are well educated, like the rest of the country, migrated east. All of my siblings have emigrated and a substantial number of their friends have too. Therefore, I think it is unfair to ask the local people to fight for something they know little about.

Secondly, I have lived away from home for the past 4 years. Over that time I have noticed a rapid decline in the quality of Tullamore as a place to live. I dread returning here. There is little to do and professional job opportunities are practically non-existent. Tullamore is a dying town and by omitting it, as well as Mullingar and Athlone from the NPF, you are writing its death cert. We need to get more big employers into the town to encourage young people to stay.

While I understand that investment in facilities such as public transport systems and a University for the town are not feasible for economies of scale, there are two things I think the Government should consider in terms of developing the Midlands:

1. **More Frequent Train Services** – Tullamore is just outside the commuter train service from Dublin. It is around a 50 minute train journey from Tullamore to Dublin Heuston. With the Luas at Heuston, it is approximately 80 minutes to O'Connell Street. For many, including myself this is a feasible commute. The problem is that the trains to Tullamore only go about every hour and a half with the last train leaving Dublin at 19:35. If the trains went more frequently and the last train was at about 21:00, it would be possible to live in Tullamore and commute Dublin. This would also address the problem with the rental market in Dublin and increase spending in Tullamore (which is so badly needed).
2. **Tax Incentives to move more multi-nationals to the Midlands** – Tullamore, over the last decade has seen a huge investment in infrastructure. The Tullamore Bypass links on to the M6 and is only 68 minutes from Dublin Airport. The infrastructure is already there and should be put to good use. Why push the big companies the whole way to Galway when Tullamore is a viable option due to its proximity to Dublin?

I hope that you will give due consideration to the economic future of the Midlands and particularly to Tullamore in compiling the National Planning Framework.

Kind regards,

Lorraine Sheridan