



Mullingar Chamber of Commerce
26 Lough Sheever Corporate Park
Robinstown
Mullingar
Co Westmeath

NPF Submissions,
Forward Planning Section,
Department of Housing, Planning,
Community and Local Government,
Custom House,
Dublin D01 W6X0

***BY EMAIL TO NPF@HOUSING.GOV.IE

15/03/17

RE: SUBMISSION REGARDING NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Dear Sir/Madam,

Mullingar Chamber of Commerce is taking this opportunity to support Tullamore & District Chamber of Commerce in offering a counterpoint to the assumption that the National Spatial Strategy 2002 was fatally flawed in its design, politically motivated and not grounded in enlightened thought. Instead, we argue that the shortcomings in its implementation were due mainly to prevailing macro-economic turbulence, lack of funding and lack of compliance on the part of state agencies and local government.

The success of the NSS in the Midlands may be viewed as the extent to which it has prepared Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar to grow their urban populations and thereby drive regional growth. Because of investments made under the auspices of NSS, each town now has the underlying infrastructure to support centralised populations twice their current level, meaning the combined population capacity of the three towns is approximately 100,000, not including hinterland population or small towns within the Gateway region. This spare capacity should be recognised and utilised.

The vision for development of the Midlands region contained in the National Spatial Strategy 2002 was based on sound, pragmatic and well-researched sustainable concepts, having a high regard for quality of life, economic and social development and respect for the environment. The 2002 plan referenced other similar European regions such as Denmark's Triangle Region, which has implemented and demonstrated the merits of polycentric regional development (Appendix IV, page 146).



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Pre-requisites for regional growth include connectivity, identity and accessibility. Connectivity refers to infrastructural linkages, viable public transport, high quality broadband and strategic alignment between government agencies, local government and interest groups, manifesting in regular, structured collaboration. Identity refers to the reinforcement, promotion and development of a locality's unique character, history, attractions, and core competencies. Accessibility refers to local availability of education, heterogenous skills training, diversified employment, affordable housing, public services and amenities.

It is our assertion that Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar, working together, have the potential to stand on their own two feet, drive regional growth in the Midlands and support the growth of Dublin. If supported by strategic policy and tactical initiative, the three principle towns of the Midlands offer a complementary alternative to city life and potentially ample concentration to create sustainable demand for services, efficient local commuting, economic stability, lower crime rates, lower pollution and high propensity for promoting physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of its denizens. The solutions espoused by the polycentric approach of the NSS cannot be dismissed as "one for everyone in the audience" politics; they are as applicable in 2017 Ireland as they were in 2002, and as they continue to be in Denmark.

Yours Sincerely,
