

National Planning Framework

From: Finbarr Filan [REDACTED]
Sent: 30 March 2017 20:53
To: National Planning Framework
Subject: Submission - SLIGO

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

A Chara,

I welcome the opportunity to make the following submission to Ireland 2040 on behalf of Sligo town.

The over dominance of Dublin on the nation's economy is widely recognized. If left unchecked much of the future growth projected over the life of the 2040 plan will happen in Dublin. Let no one fool themselves, Dublin will continue to grow. However the question to be asked is by what amount?

The aim of Ireland 2040 is to establish a plan which will see other towns and cities selected to act as a counter balance to Dublin.

When asked what cities should be selected to act as the counter balance to Dublin - Waterford, Cork, Limerick Galway are most commentator's choices. They would also state that there is possibly space for one and at most two other locations on that list.

One thing learned from the last spatial strategy, which was in place from 2002 to now, was the designating of 23 Gateway / Hub towns to satisfy local political interests was a failure. None of the 23 towns selected to act as gateways actually grew, Sligo included.

If you look at a map of Ireland it jumps off the page that Sligo is the obvious economic anchor for the entire North West region.

What do we have in Sligo that merits our addition to the list?

Critical Mass – If you look up Irish towns by population size on Wikipedia, Sligo comes in at number 24 with a population of 19,452. This under stated population number is based on those living inside the old

borough boundary. If you take a more realistic approach to the Sligo urban area by including the Strandhill, Carrowore, Drumcliff and Ballisodare areas, all of which are less than 10 minutes from the center of Sligo we are in fact an urban area of just over 25,000. This would see us jump up the rankings to number 11.

Daytime working Population – Based on 2011 CSO data Sligo has a daytime working population of 13,176, ranking Sligo as the 7th largest daytime working population in the country. This proves our ability to create and maintain employment when we are given the opportunity to do so.

Future Housing potential – currently there is enough residential land zoned in the Caltragh, Ballinode/Hazelwood, Rathbraughan/Bunrdoran Road and Dockland areas to house up to 26,000 new residents. More importantly due to the much maligned investments made by our county council into water treatment and wastewater treatment plants in the 2000's we now have the capacity to service a population of up to 80,000. It is great to see, what was regarded as a mill stone around our council's neck for the last ten years is now a massive advantage. Galway for example is now at maximum capacity in its wastewater treatment plant.

Our local services – we are fortunate to have University Hospital Sligo, Sligo Institute of technology, St Angela's College and a wide range of excellent primary and secondary schools in Sligo. One of the key factors we all consider when thinking of moving to a new area is where will the kids go to school and where do I bring them if they get sick.

Strong retail core – Sometimes we can underestimate how charming our town centre is and how strong the retail offering in the town centre actually is. Tourist's shopping in my shop, regularly comment on how pretty our town centre is and they really like the mix of locally owned businesses mixed in with the multiples. Our locally owned shops are a real advantage as you can only get shops like the Cat and the Moon, Kate's Kitchen or Mullaney's in Sligo while you can get Tesco or Dunnes anywhere in the country.

Having walked so many other town centers over the last three years I was pleasantly surprised at how interconnected our streets are. This allows pedestrians to move from one side of town to the other with relative ease. We have two strong, well located retail parks which provide the space required for the sale of the more bulky goods that not suited to town centre shops.

People comment on the number of vacant units in the town centre. Many of the vacant units are no longer fit for the demands of modern retailing and would be better if they were used for office or residential uses. However I see the modern vacant units as an advantage. As we grow we will attract more retailers to town and we have the space ready and waiting for them.

Life Style - no one can deny that we are so lucky to live in one of the most beautiful locations in the whole of Ireland. The natural scenery of Sligo is amongst the finest in the country and an amazing asset to have. It

is our primary tourist attraction after all, we are the closest point on the Wild Atlantic Way to Dublin. Now it is time to sell our scenery as a reason to move to Sligo on a permanent basis. The fact that you can be in the town centre and ten minutes later be by the sea, or a lake, or hill walking or in the open country side is special.

Standard of living – The relentless growth of Dublin has driven up the cost of living so far that the average person can no longer find a home in Dublin. Many are now commuting from as far away as Cavan or Athlone to Dublin. Sligo offers a very viable alternative to that.

Track record of decentralization – One of the options considered by some is a new decentralization process of public services away from Dublin. With the Pensions Office in Sligo employing over 700 people we have a strong positive story to tell.

sense of Place- One of the corner stone's of Ireland 2040 is Place Making. The government doesn't want to just build soulless towns or cities; they want to build places that people will want to be part off. Sligo is well on it's way to becoming one of the best Places in Ireland.

We are the only town in Ireland with a BID (Business Improvement District) and a Purple Flag (Award for excellence in the evening and night time economy). We were the first town in Ireland to be awarded Coach Friendly Town.

Sligo has being selected by the Department Jobs Enterprise and Innovation to be a case study in rural town revival and we are a top 5 Foodie town. In the realm of place making Sligo is now viewed as a town on the move and for once in the right direction.

We have issues that need to be addressed and it will be no surprise to anyone that poor infrastructure is our main issue.

The N4- The underdevelopment of the N4 from Sligo to Mullingar is an issue that has held back the growth of Sligo. The current project to upgrade the N4 from Collooney to Castlebaldwin is welcome. However we need to get the rest of the route moving. The route from Mullingar to Carrick on Shannon has been selected since the mid 2000's but has been suspended since 2007.

Now is the time to get the planning process moving on this section of the road. Remember that Ireland 2040 takes us out twenty three years from now. Therefore it is crucial that the N4 is a part of this plan.

Industrial Space – The Finisklin Business Park is close to capacity. In order to attract FDI to Sligo a new Business Park is required. The location of this park is in Oakfield. Currently the access to these lands is not

suitable for a busy Business Park. The proposed Western Distributor Road is key to opening up these lands. All going well we are going to see some movement on this road in the near future.

The Eastern Garavogue crossing- if we want our town to grow we have to improve the access to the eastern side of town. It is important that the funding is maintained in the current capital program to ensure that this critical piece of infrastructure is delivered.

All that is positive about our town outweighs the negatives. The negatives are infrastructural and can be address in time- if the correct resources are applied.

Many local business /community organizations and individuals like myself will be lodging submissions to Ireland 2040 on behalf of Sligo. I am confident that these will portray Sligo in a positive and progressive manner.

Sligo is a positive progressive place, has worked hard over the last number of years to improve relationships, co-operation and collaboration and is **READY AND WILLING TO GROW.**

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission.

Kind Regards,

Finbarr Filan

RENUA Ireland Local Area Representative - Sligo Leitrim

