

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

30th March 2017

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

RE: SUBMISSION REGARDING NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Myles Shortall, I am an Executive Member of the Tullamore Chamber of Commerce and also a Property Manager with 13 years of experience working with the planning system across at least 20 different county councils in Ireland. I greatly welcome this opportunity to lend my voice to the vision for Ireland towards 2040.

I am 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 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020 was never actually implemented and therefore cannot be proven to have been a bad document. The country as a whole essentially experienced a lost economic decade and therefore the plan was in effect postponed as the country's attention was focused on IMF, bank rescue etc.

I will make my submission as brief and succinct as possible and base it on the OECD principles on Regional Development. In accordance with the OECD Innovation Strategy, regions have become increasingly relevant actors for boosting job creation and economic growth in the quest to build stronger, cleaner, and fairer economies.

Two main principles are noted by the OECD in this respect for helping to drive regional development:

- A.** We need to favour strategies based on the mobilisation of regional assets for growth, bringing innovation to the core of regional development agendas.
- B.** The increased relevance of networks and connectivity for innovation to prosper.

Based on these guiding proofs of success in other countries I wish to strongly advocate for the following for the National Planning Framework.

1. Make Tullamore/Athlone/Mullingar a green sustainable city in the heart of Ireland.

A gateway city of Tullamore, Athlone and Mullingar has the potential to anchor the midland of the country and provide much needed balance to the continuing sprawl of the Greater Dublin Area. In continuing gateway status of Athlone, Mullingar & Tullamore, it has the potential to become Ireland's first green city that will be in keeping with the current transformation of Bord Na Mona to a completely green company by 2030. As a beacon of clean energy Ireland can point to the fledgling midlands gateway city as being a standard bearer for the rest of the country. The Government's job initiative of 2015 earmarked the potential of the midlands to become a centre of excellence for sustainability in this regard. The new Live Green Tullamore project proposed by the Tullamore Chamber of Commerce will be a founding block for the 2030 vision of clean energy from the Midlands. In this respect by using the assets of the Midlands - biomass plants, wind turbines and solar farms on our extensive bog lands - the gateway city will bring an innovative agenda towards multinational and domestic industries looking to further their own green credentials. By strongly backing this project from a national government level, Athlone/Mullingar/Tullamore gateway will be boosted with added tourism growth as witnessed by the town of Gussing in Austria who took this step in the early 2000's.

2. Better connectivity throughout the country is key to balanced and sustainable development.

The OECD 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, heterogeneous skills training, diversified employment, affordable housing, public services and amenities.

The following needs to be addressed to help Ireland grow and prepare for the significantly bigger population growth in the country and to ease the massive congestion in Dublin.

A second rail track along each of the major intercity routes from Dublin to Galway, Cork and Limerick. A more efficient train system will garner greater customer use and a move away from 2 hour plus car commutes into Dublin.

An upgrade of the N80 route from the Midlands to Rosslare to Motorway status. With the impending issues with Brexit, trade from Rosslare to France vice versa that bypasses the UK will become a much busier trading route. By providing a motorway standard road from the Midlands to Rosslare you will enable all HGVs from Galway, Sligo, Derry, Limerick and the Midlands gateway of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore to bypass the M50 around Dublin and ease congestion.

3. Dublin needs to grow upwards and into its docklands.

Significantly more high rise developments will be required in Dublin city to improve its population density and allow the city to compete better on an international basis. Serious consideration must be given towards the excellent idea of moving Dublin port to Bremor near Balbriggan to allow the city to have significant growth potential into the Docklands.

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.

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.

I wish you every success in compiling a National Planning Framework document for a balanced and sustainable future for Ireland.

Yours Sincerely

Myles Shortall
Executive Member Tullamore Chamber of Commerce