



comhairle chontae na mí
meath county council



Submission of Meath County Council to Ireland 2040 - Our Plan - National Planning Framework

March 2017



Meath County
Development Plan
2019-2025

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Location and Overview of County Meath

County Meath is located in north Leinster along the East Coast of Ireland. Meath is strategically located within the Greater Dublin Area and benefits from excellent connectivity to Dublin Airport, Dublin City centre, and Dublin Port. The 4 no. motorways that traverse the County also provide strong connectivity between Meath and the remainder of the State.

Notwithstanding the poor economic conditions of the recent past, the population of Meath has continued to grow. In 2016 Meath had a population of 194,942¹. This represents a 5.9% increase on 2011, which is the highest increase of any county (entire) in the country². This population growth has resulted in Meath being the only County in the Greater Dublin Area to meet its 2016 population target as set out in the Regional Planning Guidelines³.

However, employment growth within County Meath has not kept pace with the rapid growth in population. In 2011, there were 184,135 people residing in Meath but there were only 38,822 jobs within the County, resulting in a jobs to-population ratio of just 21%, compared with 40% for the country as a whole in that year⁴. The comparably low jobs to population ratio in Meath illustrates the high incidence of outbound commuting from the County. Analysis of the POWSCAR data reveals that 54% of people living in the County in 2011 and at work did so outside Meath, predominantly in Dublin.

In order to address these issues Meath County Council, as part of its remit for economic development conferred by 'Putting People First' and the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 adopted a proactive approach and commissioned the preparation of an evidence based independent Economic Development Strategy 2014-22⁵ that promotes Meath as a location of choice for economic development.

This Strategy, which is being successfully implemented, identifies that the County needs more high quality, knowledge-oriented employment, commensurate with the skills of its residents. Such employment includes foreign direct investment (FDI) jobs and Enterprise Ireland employment (export-oriented indigenous employment) as well as jobs generated by clients of Meath LEO (Local Enterprise Office).

In respect of the area of FDI, which will likely become even more important for the Irish economy in the Brexit environment in the years ahead, while Dublin is set to get most inward investment, urban centres like Navan and the Meath Environs of Drogheda, which have IDA Business and Technology Parks, should be proactively promoted by the IDA, in tandem with Meath County Council. The Economic Development Strategy identified proactive engagement between the Council and the IDA

¹ Preliminary results Census 2016

² The average growth for the State was 3.7%

³ Table 5 of RPGs 2010-22 'Population Target for Local Authorities'

⁴ POWSCAR Data Census 2011

⁵ Prepared by PMCA Economic Consultants and John Spain Planning Consultants

as one of the key parts of the external engagement process and the evidence demonstrates that this is already proving successful for the County.

Meath's connectivity with the Greater Dublin Area has been instrumental in the successful rollout of the Economic Development Strategy to date. For example, the FDI announcements by Facebook, Shire and Aramark (Avoca) in the Dunboyne area, which is in the Metropolitan Area of Meath in addition to jobs growth in Navan, Kells and the Southern Environs of Drogheda.

Generally speaking, the capacity for an investment location to host or accommodate new business and employment is very important and Meath County Council considers that the capacity of Meath to accommodate new FDI is very strong, by virtue of the track record of the County in attracting high quality FDI, the local labour pool and the availability of a competitive location which enjoys excellent connectivity with the Greater Dublin Area.

Meath County Council considers that sustainable economic growth is required in parallel with population growth in order to provide employment for existing and future communities and to improve the quality of life of existing and future residents of the County.

1.2 Participation in the National Planning Framework

Meath County Council welcomes the opportunity to participate in the preparation of a National Planning Framework. The National Planning Framework will form a fundamental part of the planning system in the future as its role is to provide an evidence based, strategic, and long term approach to the delivery of housing, employment, and infrastructure across the State.

For ease of reading this submission follows the structure and layout of the document.

1.3 Regional Planning Context

The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area 2010-22 provide for the implementation of the National Spatial Strategy at a regional level.

Under the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, changes were made to regional structures whereby the 8 Regional Authorities were dissolved and replaced with 3 Regional Assemblies. Under these new structures, Meath is located within the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA). There are 12 Local Authorities within this Region.

The current Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 are to be replaced by a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). Until the RSES are prepared, the Regional Planning Guidelines remain in place.

The population projections contained in the current Regional Planning Guidelines, 2010-2022 are largely based on 2006 census data. This presents challenges for Local Authorities preparing evidence-based plans. The population and housing projections set out in the Regional Planning Guidelines are up to 2022. The County Development Plan (currently under review) extends up to 2025. The absence of up to date data has resulted in difficulties making long term projections (beyond 2022) as required in the preparation of the Plan.

The preparation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region is expected to commence in 2017. Meath County Council welcomes the intention of the Director of the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly to begin work on the Strategy and look forward to engaging in the process.

Within the Greater Dublin Area the current Regional Planning Guidelines make a distinction between the built up area of Dublin and its immediate environs (the Metropolitan Area) and the remaining area (the Hinterland Area) which consists of the lands between the edge of the Metropolitan Area and the outer boundary of the Greater Dublin Area.

The Guidelines require that an additional 15% of the allocated quantum of the Mid East Counties additional population to be directed to the Metropolitan Area thus achieving a higher population concentration within its existing footprint in conjunction with an enhanced public transport system.

Growth in the Hinterland Area is to be concentrated in designated settlements that have a comprehensive range of services and access to public transport.

Dunboyne is the only Large Growth Town in the Metropolitan Area that is located entirely in Meath⁶. The County's remaining growth centres are located in the Hinterland Area. As outlined in Section 1.1 above, the FDI jobs announcements for Dunboyne demonstrate the attractiveness of this area for FDI investment and illustrate that the Council's strategic economic targets are being met in partnership with the IDA.

1.4 Local Planning Context

The local planning context in Meath is provided by the Meath County Development Plan 2013-19. This Plan was adopted on 17th December 2012 and came into effect on 22nd January 2013.

Since the adoption of the County Development Plan, three separate Variations have been proposed and adopted as follows: Variation No. 1 which was adopted on 4th November 2013, Variation No.2 which was adopted on 19th May 2014 and Variation No 3 which was adopted on 23rd May 2016.

A consolidated version of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-19 Written Statement and the associated Book of Consolidated Maps are available for viewing at the following address: <https://countydevelopmentplan.meath.ie/adoptedplan/>.

The review of the Meath County Development Plan 2019-25 commenced on 14th December 2016 with the publication of a Strategic Issues Paper until 17th February 2017. Information events were held in each Municipal District. The Chief Executive's report is being prepared at present on the 282 submissions received as part of the formal consultation process. A dedicated website for the County Development Plan review is available to view at the following address: <http://countydevelopmentplanreview.meath.ie/>.

A proposed variation to the Navan and Kells Development Plans are currently on display. The primary purpose of these variations is to align these Plans with the key tenets of the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022.

The closing date for submissions is Wednesday 12th April 2017.

Variation No 2 of the Navan Development Plan 2009-2015 is available to view at the following address:

⁶ The Environs of Maynooth and Kilcock are also located in the Metropolitan Area.

<http://meath.ie/CountyCouncil/Publications/PlanningPublications/NavanMunicipalDistrictPlanningPublications/NavanDevelopmentPlan2009-2015DraftVariation2/>

Variation No 1 of the Kells Development Plan 2009-2015 is available to view at the following address:

<http://www.meath.ie/CountyCouncil/Publications/PlanningPublications/KellsMunicipalDistrictPlanningPublications/KellsDevelopmentPlan2013-2019DraftVariation1/>.

2.0 Ireland's National Planning Challenges

The Issues and Choices Paper 'Ireland 2040 Our Plan' outlines the unprecedented growth that has taken place in Ireland since the 1990s. The proximity of Meath to Dublin, its location within the Greater Dublin Area and affordability issues arising in Dublin resulted in the County being under significant pressure for residential development during this period. Between 1996 and 2016 the population of the County increased by 78%. During the same period the housing stock in the County increased by 134%. Figures 1 and 2 below highlight the sustained population and housing growth that has taken place in Meath during this period.

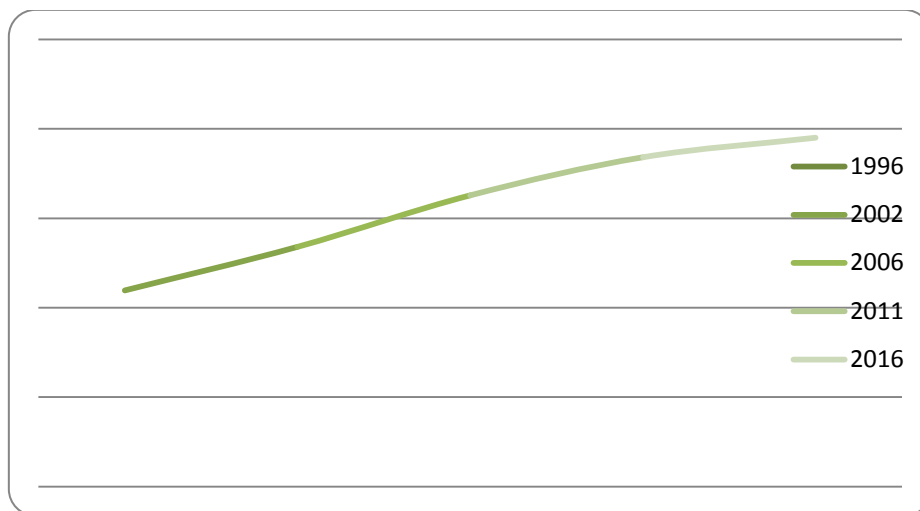


Figure 1: Population growth in Meath 1996-2016 (Source: CSO)

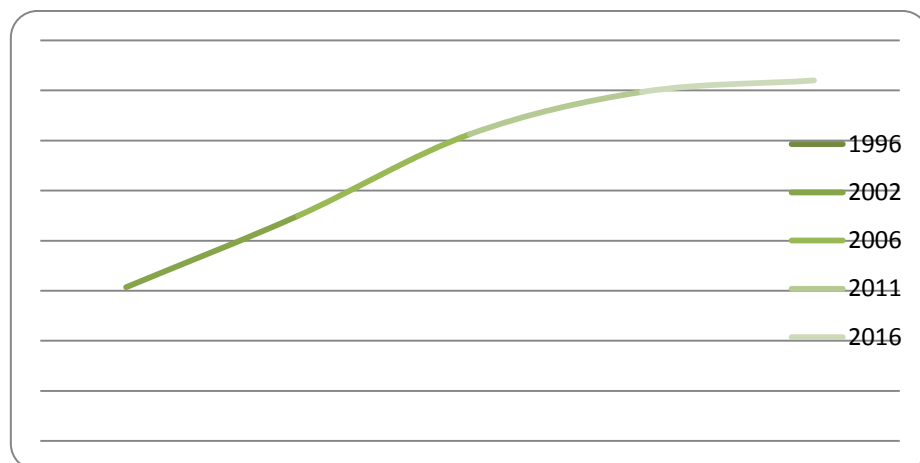


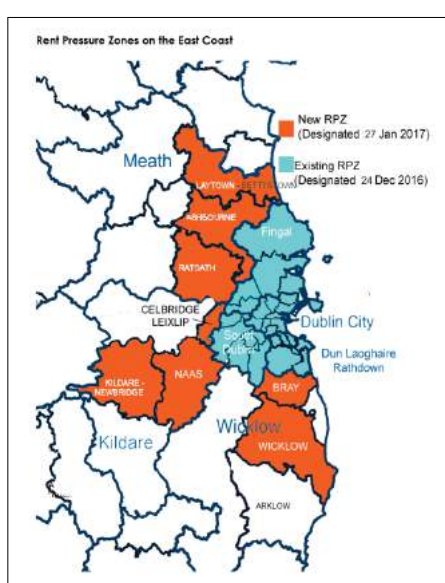
Figure 2: Housing Stock in Meath 1996-2016 (Source: CSO)

This growth is evidence of the interdependence between Dublin and Meath in that a substantial number of the people employed in Dublin chose to reside in Meath. Indeed this growth strongly

contributed to the achievement of a critical mass of population in the Greater Dublin Area to the level that supported the employment growth experienced in the Region during this period.

The Government has published an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness which provides a framework for the delivery of additional housing stock across the State. This is to be supported by initiatives such as the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) which will provide funding for major infrastructure projects that will assist in the delivery of housing. Meath County Council recently received confirmation from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government that it is to receive funding for a Distributor Road at Farganstown, Navan, and an Outer Relief Road in Ratoath. The provision of this infrastructure will greatly assist in stimulating development in these settlements and is welcomed by Meath County Council.

The designation of Rent-Pressure Zones in January 2017 (see Map 1 below) is a further demonstration that the housing market operates independent of county boundaries and that the housing market in County Meath is heavily influenced by activity in the Dublin market.



Map 1: Rent Pressure Zones along the East

In 2016 10.2% of the total population in the Greater Dublin Area resided in Meath. As indicated in section 1.1 Meath is the only County in the Greater Dublin Area to reach its population target as set out in the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-22⁷. However the population and housing growth experienced in Meath over the last 20 years was not mirrored with employment growth in the County. The 2004 Regional Planning Guidelines included provision for a higher jobs to labour force ratio target for County Meath relative to other counties in an attempt to address the lack of a significant employment base and the imbalance between population growth and employment growth. This target was not met and this ratio was not included in the 2010 Regional Planning Guidelines. Whilst Meath has a highly skilled and educated workforce, the employment base for many of these workers is outside of the County. This is highlighted by the fact that in 2011 54% of

⁷ Table 5 of RPGs 2010-22 'Population Target for Local Authorities'

the labour force travelled outside of Meath to work⁸ This rate of outbound commuting made Meath the largest 'commuter County' in Ireland in 2011.

Central to the Economic Development Strategy 2014-22 is the intention to address the high rate of outbound commuting from the County, recognising the reality that commuting to work in the capital from other parts of the EMRA Region will continue to be a fact of life in the coming years.

The extent of outbound commuting is evident in the analysis of the POWSCAR data 2011 conducted as part of the Economic Strategy. The data analysis revealed that:

- Of the total 38,822 jobs in Meath in 2011, 28,449 jobs (73%) were held by Meath residents and 10,373 (27%) were held by people working in the County but living outside of the County (*inbound* commuters).
- In addition, there were a further 32,942 jobs held by *outbound* commuters in that year (i.e. people living in Meath but working elsewhere).
- These figures imply that over half (54%) of all residents of Meath at work did so outside the county in 2011.
- In comparison with other local authority areas in the State, the outbound commuter rate in Meath was the highest in the country, apart from South Dublin, Fingal and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, which had outbound commuter rates a little above that in Meath, but less than 60%, and one would expect the commuting rates among these local authority areas of the capital to be high in any event owing to the concentration of employment in Dublin.
- Dublin accounted for 25,008 jobs among the Meath commuters in 2011 (76% of all the outbound commuters), which was almost as many as the number of jobs pertaining to those both living and working in Meath in that year (28,449).
- In some parts of the County, the outbound commuter rate was well above the 54% rate observed for Meath as a whole in Census 2011.
- The situation in Dunboyne in 2011 is illustrative of the pronounced outbound commuting from the south of the County.
 - In that year, there were 1,163 jobs in the Dunboyne settlement area (not including Clonee). Of these, 392 jobs were held by people living in Dunboyne, 302 by people living elsewhere in County Meath and the remaining 469 jobs were held by inbound commuters to Meath working in Dunboyne.
 - On the other hand, there were 2,309 people living in the Dunboyne settlement area working outside of County Meath in that year, which would imply an outbound commuting rate for Meath in respect of people living in Dunboyne of 77% (the outbound commuting rate for Dunboyne in respect of the people living there was even higher at 85%)⁹.
- Other parts of the County with very high outbound commuter rates include the East Meath area in the vicinity of Drogheda and the area around the towns of Ashbourne, Ratoath and Dunshaughlin. Like Dunboyne, these settlement areas have grown very strongly in recent years and they all share the common feature of being closely located to major transport links (motorways and/or rail), which has benefitted the capital *economically* – workers have been able to move out of Dublin to Meath and commute back to work there given the strong transport links with the capital.

⁸ Census 2011

⁹ The figure of 77% is calculated as the number of people living in the Dunboyne settlement area working outside of County Meath (2,309) as a proportion of those living in Dunboyne, and other parts of Meath, and working within or outside the County in 2011 (2,309+392+302). On the other hand, the figure of 85% is calculated as the number of people living in the Dunboyne settlement area working outside of County Meath (2,309) as a proportion of those living in Dunboyne and working within or outside the County in that year (2,309+392).

However, large outbound commuting is not sustainable for local communities because it entails significant social and community costs as well as economic leakage – spending 2 hours or more per day travelling to and from work is not conducive to life beyond work and erodes social capital and its benefits. This fact has become very apparent to Meath County Council when it was preparing the Economic Development Strategy.

The extent of the economic leakage from Meath is also borne out by the fact that there were more employers and managers living in the County but working outside Meath (7,438) compared with those employers and managers both living and working in the County in 2011 (6,115); in addition, the number of higher professionals living locally but working outside of Meath in 2011 (2,859) exceeded the corresponding number of people both living and working in the County (2,089) and the same pattern applied to lower professionals as well (6,068 versus 5,759).

The evident ‘dual’ in the local economy of County Meath – between those both living and working within the County, on the one hand, and the outbound commuters, on the other hand – is further illustrated when one considers another key fact highlighted in the Economic Development Strategy, namely that, of the aforementioned 38,822 jobs within Meath in 2011, just 4,683 or 12% of the total were in IT and professional services, whereas the corresponding proportion for the State was 18.5% and that among the outbound commuters from Meath was 24% (in the Dublin Region it was over 30%).

Accordingly, a key part of the Economic Development Strategy is to rebalance or broaden the base of employment within the County, commensurate with the skills and work experiences of its residents, by working to attract more of such employment (in IT and professional services) in Meath.

The challenge, or opportunity, for Meath is therefore to provide for the sustainable economic growth of the County in tandem with population growth. Such economic growth would be in accordance with Government policy which supports an increase in Regional employment. The Action Plan for Jobs for the Mid-East Region published by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise, and Innovation in 2016 included an objective to increase employment in the Mid-East by 10-15% by 2020.

Meath County Council considers, that in order to ensure the sustainable economic growth of Meath in the future and to assist in the creation of sustainable ‘live-work communities’, the National Planning Framework should acknowledge the continued population growth that has taken place in the County and identify the key settlements in Meath identified for growth in the Regional Planning Guidelines and facilitate the consolidation and expansion of these settlements in a sustainable manner in accordance with current National and Regional policy.

3.0 People's Health and Well-Being

Meath County Council welcomes the reference to Health and Well-Being in the Issues and Choices Paper including a specific section relating to this issue reinforces the connection between spatial planning and health and quality of life. The 'Live Work' community model embodies the spatial dimension of achieving a healthy well balanced population with a thriving community life where volunteerism can flourish. To ensure alignment with national health policy, reference should be made to the document 'Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Well-Being 2013-2025'.

3.1 Local Economic and Community Plans

The data gathered as part of the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) provide an overview of the socio-economic conditions in Local Authority Areas across the State including employment levels, dependency rates, poverty, deprivation, and social exclusion.

For example the youth dependency rate (children 0-14 years) in Meath was 38.3% in 2011 (national average 31.9%). This demonstrates the relatively young population in the County. In comparison, the old age dependency rate was comparably low at 13.5% (national average 17.4%).

The age profile of commuters is also relevant in that 71% of all outbound commuters in Meath were aged 20-44 in 2011.

The average age of the population living in rural areas in Meath was 37 compared to 31.4 in urban areas in that year.

In 2011, 10.8% of the population in Meath were non-Irish (12% for the State). The highest concentration of non-Irish nationals is in the larger urban areas and the eastern parts of the County.

The information included in the Local Economic Community Plans provide a solid basis for anticipating the future needs of the population up to 2040. This information could be used to identify the socio-economic issues within all Local Authority Areas and in turn could inform the policies and objectives in the National Planning Framework.

3.2 Ageing Population

The Issues and Choices Paper indicated that by 2040 there will be over 1 million people over the age of 65 residing in the state. This is a fundamental issue for long term planning of the State. The National Planning Framework should act as the principle document guiding the co-ordination of integrated land use, transport, housing, and health care policies. It should encourage or require buildings and communities to be designed with ageing in mind in order to ensure people will be able to enjoy independent living for the longest possible period.

Accommodation for an ageing population should be designed so as to avoid expensive retro-fitting of standard dwelling units that is common practice at present. The mobility of the ageing population should also be considered in terms of access to and provision of public transport and access to local services. The integration of the ageing population into local communities should also be encouraged in order to prevent isolation of elderly people living alone.

3.3 Active lifestyle

Sports and physical activity are an important means of managing personal wellbeing. The National Planning Framework should encourage an active lifestyle and promote the benefits of community-based sport and physical activity.

The ability of people to lead an active lifestyle would be enhanced if their place of employment was located close to where they live.

The Meath Local Sports Partnership (LSP) works proactively with local communities in relation to the provision of community and sports facilities aimed at promoting active and healthy lifestyles. The distribution of towns and larger villages throughout the County means that one is never far from a wide range of facilities (in both minority and major sports) and in the rural areas away from the main settlements the work of the GAA cannot be underestimated, where there is a very strong and proud tradition in County Meath. As well as helping to grow Gaelic Games among young people, the GAA clubs of the County are also involved in various community initiatives, such as healthy living, health minds, Irish language classes and various other activities, such as fitness and pilates/yoga aimed at improving health and fitness among older people.

These clubs and facilities are an important fabric of local communities and once again highlight the importance of facilitating sustainable communities locally: commuting to and from the capital two-three hours per day entails costs of a financial and non-financial nature, and mean that people may have less time to engage in local extra-curricular activities.

This is all the more reason for one of the core aims of planning and economic development at Meath County Council to support and facilitate more employment opportunities closer to where people live.

4.0 A Place-Making Strategy

Chapter 4 of the Issues and Choices Paper makes reference to the Dublin City Region however it does not provide a definition for this Region. A map depicting this region in the document would have been beneficial. The population of the Greater Dublin Area in 2016 equated to 40% of the national population (1.9 million persons). Section 4.1.2 of the Issues and Choices Paper indicates that the Dublin City Region accounts for 40% of the national population. Based on this it is assumed that it is intended that the Dublin City Region remains analogous to the current boundaries of the GDA for the purposes of the National Planning Framework. In the interests of clarity it is considered that the National Planning Framework should provide a definition of the Dublin City Region and clarify whether or not it is aligned with the Greater Dublin Area as identified in the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area 2010-22. Any departure from the existing development model as set out in the current Regional Planning Guidelines which attempts to diminish the role of the Mid East Counties would be unacceptable to the Executive and the Members of Meath County Council.

The Issues and Choices Paper also does not make any reference to the Metropolitan and Hinterland Areas of Dublin. As detailed in Section 1.3 of this submission, the Regional Planning Guidelines require growth in the Region to be concentrated in the Metropolitan Area. There has been significant investment in infrastructure to support the growth of settlements in the Metropolitan Area in the Region. This includes the completion of Phase 1 of the Dublin to Navan Railway in 2010 which involved the construction of a spur of track from the Maynooth Line at Clonsilla to serve Dunboyne and the interchange at Pace. This infrastructure will support the growth of Dunboyne, which has been designated as a Large Growth Town II in the Regional Planning Guidelines. Meath County Council would consider that the National Planning Framework should continue to support the growth of such settlements in the Metropolitan Area.

No reference to settlements below City level is made in the Issues and Choices Paper. Whilst it is acknowledged that the National Planning Framework will be a strategic document, it will provide the framework for the formulation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). Taking this into account, the interconnections between Dublin and the growth settlements in the Greater Dublin Area should be clearly acknowledged and set out.

The higher-order settlements in Meath experienced a population growth of between 12-33% in the period 2006-2011. Ashbourne, which is a Moderate Sustainable Growth Town, experienced the highest level of growth at 33%, whilst Navan (Large Growth Town I) had an increase of 14.9%. In comparison, during the same period the population of Waterford City grew by 2.2%. This demonstrates the pressure settlements located in proximity to Dublin are under to accommodate development.

In order to facilitate the future growth of these settlements, there has been significant investment in capital infrastructure (public transport (road and rail), schools, water, and wastewater). This has improved the connectivity of these settlements within the County and Region and has improved their attractiveness as a place of employment.

Meath County Council consider that the National Planning Framework should acknowledge the value of this investment together with the importance of the continued growth of these settlements in complementing the role of the Metropolitan Area as the National Gateway and the creation of sustainable communities within the County by providing jobs closer to where people live.

4.1 Economic Role of Meath County Council

As part of the economic function allocated to Local Authorities under ‘Putting People First’ and the Local Government Reform Act 2014, Meath County Council took a lead role and positioned itself at the forefront of service delivery, particularly in relation to economic development. An Economic Development Strategy for the County was completed in 2014 by an external team of Economic and Planning Consultants. The key target of the Strategy is the delivery of 7,500 jobs by 2022. This Strategy is evidence-based and included significant baseline research and surveys.

The Economic Development Strategy is aligned with the County Development Plan and Regional Planning Guidelines in that it recognises the key development and growth centres and the role of these centres in providing employment and services.

5 no. key strategic sites have been identified in Navan, South Drogheda, Dunboyne, Ashbourne, and Kells. It is intended that these sites will be regional anchors for enterprise and employment growth in the County, and will reduce the need for residents of Meath to travel outside the County for employment.

Navan is retained as the primary development centre in the County. The strategic location of Dunboyne adjacent to a multi-modal interchange within the metropolitan area of Dublin is also identified and highlighted as key to the economic development of Meath in the coming years.

The continued population growth in Ashbourne together with its proximity to the Dublin Metropolitan Area has resulted in it being identified as a strategically important location for employment growth in the County.

The settlements of Ratoath and Dunshaughlin are identified in the Regional Planning Guidelines on the basis of their unique potential to support economic development.

4.2 Settlement Growth in Meath

The Settlement Hierarchy in the Regional Planning Guidelines for the GDA 2010-22 identifies 8 key settlements for growth in Meath, which are as follows:

Settlement Type	Settlement Centre
Large Growth Town I	Navan, Drogheda Environs
Large Growth Town II	Dunboyne, Maynooth Environs
Moderate Sustainable Growth Towns	Ashbourne, Kells, Trim, Kilcock Environs, Dunshaughlin

The 2019-2025 County Development Plan will seek to promote the growth of Navan, South Drogheda Environs (in co-operation with Louth County Council), Dunboyne, Ashbourne,

Dunshaughlin, Kells and Trim. In the case of both the Maynooth and Kilcock Environs, their town centres are located in County Kildare, therefore any development in these areas will be complementary to the development of the towns as a whole. As part of the development plan review process all residentially zoned lands identified for release post 2019 will be re-examined in the context of the preparation of a new core strategy for County Meath. In this regard, with particular reference to higher tier centres in the settlement hierarchy where such lands would assist in the delivery of key pieces of much needed infrastructure a mechanism should be found for these lands to retain their current planning status. In the context of County Meath and for the purposes of clarity this is restricted to the towns of Navan, the Southern Environs of Drogheda and Dunboyne.

4.2.1 Navan

Navan is identified as the Primary Development Centre in Meath in the National Spatial Strategy. In 2011, the population of the town was 28,559. This represented a 14.9% increase on the 2006 population. Population growth in Navan has been slower than the settlements in the east and south-east of the County i.e. Ashbourne (33% increase), Ratoath (24.7% increase), Stamullen (25.9% increase), Dunboyne (21.8% increase), and Bettystown/Laytown/Mornington (21.3% increase). The primary reason for this is the fact that these settlements are largely operating as commuter settlements for Dublin.

The Meath County Development Plan has identified that Navan could cater for a population of up to 50,000. Such growth is also supported in the Regional Planning Guidelines, which states that Navan *“should be promoted as an anchor for regional enterprise.....and should be prioritised for economic development and investment to redress the imbalance of residential development and jobs and emergence of dormitory areas.”*¹⁰

Research undertaken as part of the Economic Development Strategy indicated that almost one-quarter of all jobs in Meath are in Navan. About 30% of all people living in Navan and at work do so outside of the County town, meaning that the outbound commuting rate for Navan is below the figure for the County as a whole (54%, 2011).

Navan also benefits currently from having a very attractive and well-laid out IDA Business and Technology Park (for FDI jobs), functioning existing business parks (largely indigenous enterprises) and lands/spaces for new employment development.

Reflecting the Economic Development Strategy, it will be important that a good proportion of new employment in the town, and across the County, is high-quality employment in knowledge-oriented activities, commensurate with the skills of the local workforce and to help address the County's relatively high rate of outbound commuting.

A Health Partnership Report in 2008 identified Navan as the optimum location for a new regional hospital to serve the north-east region. The development of this hospital is regarded as one of the most important potential economic stimulants for the town. This development would go a long way to broadening the local economic base and to invigorating the local economy of Meath.

Meath County Council has been proactive in improving the attractiveness of Navan as a place to live and to do business. This is evident in the fact that Navan was shortlisted to progress to Stage Two of the Department of Transport's Smarter Travel competition. A public realm strategy is also being prepared for Navan, which will engage with various community groups and stakeholders in improving public spaces and making the town a more attractive place to live and work.

¹⁰ Section 3.7.1 Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-22

For Navan to develop further as a Primary Development Centre, Meath County Council considers that further infrastructural investment (with particular reference to the delivery of strategic roads) will be required in order for the settlement to realise its potential.

The potential of Navan could be further enhanced through the exploration of delivery models for employment creation through the utilisation of the Strategic Development Zone mechanism that would capitalise on the availability of suitable lands close to major arteries. The development model would be plan led and focus on strong connectivity with the existing urban form.

The implementation of Phase 2 of the Dublin-Navan Rail line is considered to be central to Navan realising its potential in terms of improving its connectivity with Dublin and the wider region. Navan is the only administrative capital in the Greater Dublin Area that does not have a rail service to Dublin city centre i.e. Wicklow Town and Naas have a rail link to Dublin¹¹. Indeed in the recently established Eastern and Midlands Region there is a rail service to Dublin from all 12 administrative capitals with the exception of Navan.

As part of the 6-year review of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-35, the National Transport Authority have committed to reviewing the requirement for the extension of a railway from M3 Parkway to Navan in the Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-35. It is considered that this should be referenced in the National Planning Framework. In considering the railway between Navan and the capital, the importance of ensuring investment in Navan and Meath cannot be overestimated – a new rail line should not be planned in such a way as it would result in one-way traffic from the town to Dublin and back again in the evening; such infrastructure planning needs to be seen in the wider round of economic development and that the local economy of Navan and Meath will also benefit as well as the capital.

In order to facilitate the future growth of Navan, additional capacity is required in the local road network. The Navan Development Plan has identified a number of distributor roads and associated infrastructure (including bridge crossings over the River Blackwater) that are required in the town. The Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund announcement recently allocated funding for the construction of one of these distributor roads which is welcomed. Meath County Council consider that the National Planning Framework should support the delivery of these Local Distributor Roads in order to enable the release of these lands for development and allow Navan to fulfil its function as a Primary Development Centre.

4.2.2 Drogheda Environs

Drogheda Environs is identified as a Large Growth Town I in the Regional Planning Guidelines. It is strategically located along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. With a total population of 38,578 in 2011 (Meath and Louth combined), Drogheda maintained its position as the largest town in Ireland. It is a multi-modal settlement that experiences a significant volume of outbound commuting. This is demonstrated by the fact that in 2011 91.9% of the labour force in South Drogheda Environs commuted outside of the town to work (noting that this includes people travelling the comparably short distance from the Meath Environs of Drogheda to the Louth part of the town as well as the commuters travelling to work in Dublin).

There is an IDA Business and Technology Park in Drogheda. Like the corresponding facility in Navan, the existing FDI employment contributes positively to the local economy but the opportunity for both towns is to grow this form of employment to help rebalance County-wide employment and this

¹¹ NTA Strategy confirms the delivery of Metro North to Swords

challenge is a core part of the Economic Development Strategy being rolled out by Meath County Council currently.

The Drogheda Boundary Committee was established in 2015 and tasked with carrying out an independent review of the boundary between Counties Louth and Meath. The Committee reported in February 2017 and recommended that no change to the existing boundary is to take place. It was recommended that a programme of structured co-operation is initiated by both Local Authorities for the future planning and delivery of services in the Greater Drogheda Area to ensure the sustainable development of the town. This should focus on an agreed vision for the area, and a Joint Local Area Plan and Retail Strategy for Drogheda. The Joint Retail Strategy is to be prepared within the next 18 months and the Joint Local Area Plan within 24 months.

Meath County Council welcomes the opportunity to collaborate and work alongside Louth County Council for the betterment of the whole of Drogheda, which has very significant economic development potential. There is a history of co-operation between Meath County Council and Louth County Council in areas of planning and development, transportation, water services, and tourism. Indeed the timing is opportune, taking account of the fact that under the re-organisation of the regional structures Louth is now part of the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly Region.

4.2.3 Dunboyne

Dunboyne is the only Large Growth Town in Meath located within the Metropolitan Area. The settlement had a population of 6,959 in 2011, which is a 21.8% increase on the population in 2006¹². It is strategically located in that it is adjacent to the M3 Motorway and is served by two rail stations. Section 3.7.5 of the Regional Planning Guidelines state that Dunboyne *“has yet to realise its long term potential but plays an important role in this economic growth area given its status and location on a developing rail line.”*

In terms of economic growth, Dunboyne has been identified as a Secondary Economic Growth Town in the Regional Planning Guidelines alongside Ashbourne¹³. The long term population growth of the settlement would be 25,000. The limited employment base in Dunboyne at present is highlighted by the fact that in 2011 85% commuted out of the town to work¹⁴.

The strategic location of Dunboyne is further supported by the investment in capital infrastructure in the town over the last 10 years. This includes the construction of Phase 1 of the Dublin-Navan Rail line and associated infrastructure including 2no. railway stations and a park and ride facility, and the construction of the Clonee-Kells Motorway. The completion of this infrastructure will assist in the settlement achieving its status as a Secondary Economic Growth Town in the coming years.

The attractiveness of Dunboyne as an employment location is endorsed through high profile announcements of significant FDI employment in the area by Facebook, Shire, and Aramark (Avoca).

In particular, 400 highly skilled jobs will be created in the first phase of the Shire bio-pharma manufacturing facility over the next four years.

Up to 200 jobs will be created at the Facebook Data Centre in Portan, Clonee. This is in addition to the 1,300 jobs created during the construction phase.

¹² Census 2011

¹³ Section 3.7.5 of the Regional Planning Guidelines.

¹⁴ Report of the Meath County Council Development Strategy 2014

Aramark (Avoca) also announced plans to open its largest retail facility in Ireland in Dunboyne which will result in the creation of 80 jobs.

Variation no.3 of the County Development Plan 2013-19, included for the provision of a new land use zoning objectives map for Dunboyne North which will provide for the creation of a sustainable 'live-work' community with provision for a suitable mix of land uses to stimulate the sustainable economic development of the area. These land uses will include employment, residential, community, educational and recreational uses.

Meath County Council consider that the National Planning Framework should acknowledge the importance of the creation and concept of 'live-work communities', such as Dunboyne, which will consist of sustainable, dense, mixed use community at key public transportation nodes.

4.2.4 Ashbourne

Ashbourne is strategically located along the N2 close to the Meath-Fingal boundary. Its proximity to Dublin Airport and Dublin City centre has resulted in the town becoming the second largest town in Meath in 2011 with a population of 11,338. The continued growth of the settlement is evident in the fact that its population increased by 33% during 2006-2011.

Ashbourne has been identified as a Secondary Economic Growth Town in the Regional Planning Guidelines, alongside Dunboyne¹⁵. In 2011, 83.1% of the population in Ashbourne commuted outside of the town to work¹⁶. This is evidence of the fact that at present the settlement is operating largely as a commuter settlement, although Meath County Council are cognisant of its future potential and seeking to facilitate more employment opportunities locally, in common with the other employment centres identified in the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 and Economic Development Strategy 2014-2022.

Meath County Council consider that the National Planning Framework should acknowledge the strategic location of Ashbourne and its proximity to Dublin Airport and the Dublin Metropolitan Area. The strong support for the growth of Ashbourne in the Regional Planning Guidelines as it continues to transition towards a settlement with metropolitan characteristics should also be recognised.

4.2.5 Dunshaughlin

The Regional Planning Guidelines indicate that Dunshaughlin will become a Moderate Sustainable Growth Town following the granting of a Railway Order for the Navan Rail Line Phase II.

Whilst Meath County Council welcome the progression of this project, it is considered that the alignment of the railway, and in particular the location of the train station, should be reviewed in order to ensure it is in the appropriate location in terms of connectivity with Dunshaughlin Town Centre and surrounding residential lands in terms of promoting walking and cycling to the train station and minimising reliance on the car. Therefore a re-examination is merited to address the possibility of an eastern alignment and station which would also serve Ratoath and parts of Ashbourne.

¹⁵ Section 3.7.5 of the Regional Planning Guidelines.

¹⁶ Report of the Meath County Council Development Strategy 2014

4.3 Summary

Meath County Council considers that the National Planning Framework should facilitate the continued growth and expansion of the above settlements, and Kells, Trim, Maynooth Environs and Kilcock Environs, in a sustainable and co-ordinated manner. It should also recognise their role in the Eastern and Midlands Region as a centre of employment and in the provision of goods and services. The continued investment in infrastructure in these settlements would consolidate their position in the settlement hierarchy and would result in the creation of more sustainable communities in that an improved jobs-pop ratio within the settlements would reduce the level of commuting out of the County and would improve the quality of life for residents.

4.4 Rural Ireland

Meath County Council welcome and support the inclusion of a strategic and long-term vision for rural Ireland in the National Planning Framework. The co-ordinated approach between State agencies and Government Departments in tackling rural issues through the publication of the Action Plan for Rural Development 'Realising Our Potential' by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs is welcomed.

The small towns and villages within the County provide a vital service to their catchment populations.

4.4.1 Rural Economy in Meath

The rural economy In Meath consists of traditional and modern industries such as agriculture, the equine industry, construction, minerals extraction, tourism, and the agri-food sector. The dependence on the more traditional industries for employment resulted in high levels of unemployment following the collapse of the construction industry.

The Kells Electoral Area was identified as being one of the least economically developed areas of the country and has been included in the Regional Aid Map for the period 2014-20. This allows the Government to provide enhanced financial assistance to businesses in order to support investment and employment. This Regional Aid has assisted in the continued success of Kells Business Park.

Kells has also been identified as a Rural Economic Development Zone (REDZ). This is a pilot initiative that emerged from the Committee for Economic Development in Rural Areas (CEDRA) Report (2012)

This scheme aims to enhance the involvement of the local community in local economic development through the creation of local economic development plans. Up to 75% funding is available to support the expansion of small, medium, and large indigenous enterprises.

The National Planning Framework should acknowledge the importance of rural Ireland as a natural resource and should support the revitalisation of rural areas. It should also highlight schemes such as the REDZ in Kells as an example of action/intervention being taken by the Government in the promotion of employment in rural areas.

The ability of businesses to operate in rural locations requires the provision of appropriate infrastructure. A high quality reliable broadband infrastructure is essential in ensuring connectivity is provided in rural areas and facilitating the growth of existing businesses. The National Planning Framework should therefore strongly support the rollout of the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

4.4.2 Rural Housing in Meath and Broadband in Rural Areas

In 2011 43% of the population in Meath lived in aggregate rural areas. This compares to an average of 38% for the state. There were 19,668 one-off rural dwellings in Meath in 2011. This is an increase of 13.7% on the figure in 2002. This increase demonstrates the pressure the open countryside is under for development of one off houses.

One-off housing in the countryside is a national issue which will be addressed in the National Planning Framework.

There is an opportunity for the National Planning Framework to encourage rural house building in conjunction with renewal of our rural towns and villages. This would contribute to the renewal of rural communities and would support the long term sustainability of rural life in Ireland and protect existing service provision particularly in the context of an increase in the Country's ageing population.

There is also the opportunity for rollout of the REDZ project in Kells to more rural parts of the County and this initiative may occur when the NBP is finalised and under implementation (in the intervention areas currently deemed as non-viable for broadband rollout). Meath County Council welcome the greater urgency now been shown by the Government in ensuring the NBP takes effect, where it is understood that the Department of Communications has shortlisted a small number of bidders, from whom the successful bidder or bidders will be chosen (around the end of the year, it is understood).

The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is funding all local authorities to assign an officer with responsibility for broadband to act as the single point of contact for engagement with operators to assist with accelerated rollout of the NBP and create awareness of/stimulate demand for broadband services. Meath County Council has already appointed a dedicated Broadband Officer, who will be working the Department of Communications¹⁷.

4.4.3 Figure 4.3.12, Planning Permission Grants 2001-15

Section 4.3.12 of the Issues and Choices Paper indicates that figure 4.3.1 includes a visualisation of planning permissions granted for houses in the countryside over a 14 year period. Further to a review of the source of this information on the CSO website and consultation with the CSO, it is apparent that the figures for one off houses refer to one off houses in rural areas and single/infill dwellings in urban areas.

It is therefore considered that these figures should be reviewed in order to provide details of one-off dwellings in the countryside only.

4.5 Ireland in an All-Island Context

The decision of the UK to leave the EU has brought short term risks for the Irish economy and uncertainty about the future. The border counties are particularly susceptible to these volatilities. Whilst the future relationship between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland will be decided

¹⁷ Departmental broadband maps are available at <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Broadband/Pages/NBP-Map.aspx>.

by political factors, the National Planning Framework should outline the existing relationship between the two jurisdictions in terms of shared services and the freedom of movement of goods and services and the potential to build on these relationships.

In 2011 Northern Ireland had a population of 1.8 million people. This is a significant market in terms of trade and tourism. The National Planning Framework should emphasise the importance and opportunities in maintaining and improving the links to Northern Ireland. Greater emphasis should be placed on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and the opportunities available to build on the relationships between both cities and the surrounding regions.

In order to improve connectivity between Meath/Eastern and Midlands Region and the north-west of the country it is also considered that the National Planning Framework should support the upgrade of the A5 Aughnacloy to Derry in Northern Ireland. The upgrade of this road in addition to the upgrade of the N2 Corridor (i.e. Ardee to Ashbourne) would significantly improve connectivity in the Region.

5.0 Ireland's Unique Environment – Sustainability

5.1 Renewable Energy

The development of renewable energy is a central part of energy policy in Ireland. Whilst wind energy is the primary source of renewable energy at present, there appears to be a switch towards solar energy, with 10 applications for solar farms received in Meath in the past 18 months. Planning permission has been granted for 5 of these solar farm applications, whilst 3 are currently on appeal with An Bord Pleanála (granted by Meath County Council), and 2 are at Further Information stage.

Meath County Council considers that the National Planning Framework should provide specific policy and direction regarding the development of renewable energy at either a National or Regional level. This should include best practice guidance in relation to the location, scale of developments, grid connections etc.

There is also an opportunity to utilise the MyPlan mapping system to map all pending and decided applications for renewable energy developments. This would be a useful tool in identifying the concentration of such developments at a national, regional, and local level. This information would be beneficial to the public, developers, and Local Authorities.

The latest data from Eurostat show that Ireland (along with the UK, France and Luxembourg) are currently furthest from achieving their renewable energy targets (Ireland's target in respect of the share of all energy used from renewable sources is 16% by 2020, while the actual rate at 2015 was 9.2% - the rate of improvement has been easing as we head towards the target date and Ireland could facing major fines from the European Commission if the target is not achieved by the end of the decade)¹⁸.

5.2 Heritage and Landscape

5.2.1 World Heritage Site and Built Heritage

Meath is regarded as the 'Heritage Capital' of Ireland and the birthplace of Ireland's 'Ancient East' due to its wealth of built and natural heritage, which makes the County unique in Ireland. This heritage includes the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne, the seat of the High Kings of Ireland at Tara, the passage tombs of Loughcrew, the largest Anglo-Norman Castle in Europe and Trim, the historic towns of Navan, Trim, and Kells. The protection of this unique heritage for the benefit of existing and future generations in order to retain the attractiveness of the County as a place to live and do business is central to the sustainable growth of the County.

The National Planning Framework should set out a framework to protect the 'Outstanding Universal Value and setting of World Heritage Sites' to reflect the international significance of these sites and the status of this international designation and as a guide to future nominations for inscriptions.

¹⁸ The latest progress report from Eurostat is available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7905983/8-14032017-BP-EN.pdf/af8b4671-fb2a-477b-b7cf-d9a28cb8beea>.

In relation to the built heritage the National Planning Framework should recognise that the State's built heritage assets are a non-renewable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to its significance. The sensitive and adaptive re-use of these buildings should be encouraged.

The National Planning Framework should support the promotion and protection of the nation's heritage and landscape and acknowledge the diversity of the landscape and heritage across the State. The role of Heritage Towns and Villages in supporting the rural economy through tourism should also be highlighted.

The recently published document from the Heritage Council 'Policy Proposal for Ireland's Town' may inform some of the policies and objectives in the National Planning Framework. Of particular relevance are proposals for tax incentives for heritage led regeneration, the reintroduction of incentives for 'Living Over the Shop', and proposals to ensure the strategic role of towns is reflected in rural economic development.

5.2.2 Meath Gaeltacht

The Meath Gaeltacht consists of two adjacent villages of Ráth Cairn and Baile Ghib. In 2011 these settlements had a population of 1,771, which represented 1.7% of the total Gaeltacht population. The National Planning Framework should continue to support the cultural heritage and economic development potential of the Gaeltacht regions.

5.3 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

Our natural heritage (i.e. biodiversity and natural capital) underpins important economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism and provides many other benefits or ecosystem services which can be grouped into provisioning, regulating, supporting, and cultural services.

A key objective of the National Biodiversity Plan is *"to mainstream biodiversity in the decision making process across all sectors."* The National Planning Framework should recognise the contribution that our natural heritage and green infrastructure makes to our quality of life and as mitigation against climate change. Relevant objectives and actions included in the National Biodiversity Plan should be embedded in to the National Planning Framework.

Building on recent initiatives and research on Green Infrastructure the National Planning Framework should embed in the planning hierarchy the principles of the green infrastructure approach to delivering ecosystem services through spatial planning.

In order to provide an appropriate evidence base to monitor the impact of the National Planning Framework on green infrastructure, baseline data is required. The National Planning Framework should facilitate the recording of our green infrastructure assets at an appropriate scale.

The National Planning Framework should support the protection, enhancement, and management of biodiversity and green infrastructure in an integrated and coherent manner. It should also identify the role of the Planning System in creating new opportunities to enhance biodiversity, prevent biodiversity loss and/or provide appropriate mitigation measures.

As part of the promotion of healthy and active lifestyles it is considered that the National Planning Framework should include provision for the development of national cycle and walking routes. The development of such trails along tourist routes would be of significant benefits to tourists and the resident population. Such routes could be marketed under the brands 'Ireland's Ancient East' and the 'Wild Atlantic Way'.

6.0 Equipping Ireland for Future Development – Infrastructure

The under-investment in capital infrastructure during the recession has resulted in a number of the strategically important infrastructure projects identified in the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-22 effectively being placed on hold. In order to ensure the economic recovery continues an ambitious programme of capital investment is required. This investment should be targeted to the identified growth areas in the National Planning Framework.

One of the knock-on effects of the recession has been the under-supply of housing across the State. This is particularly prevalent in the Greater Dublin Area. The Action Plan published by the Government in 2016 'Re-building Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness' sets a target to double the delivery of residential construction to 25,000 units per annum by 2020 and deliver 47,000 social housing units by 2021. The delivery of this housing will require significant investment in infrastructure (roads, water, wastewater, and utilities) across the State.

Meath County Council acknowledges and welcomes the recent allocation of funding for the delivery of a major Distributor Road in Navan and an Outer Relief Road in Ratoath through the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund that would assist in the delivery of housing in these settlements. The National Planning Framework should support the delivery of such infrastructure and the construction of high quality, adaptable housing in the appropriate locations.

The return to economic growth has placed additional strains on the existing road network and has resulted in high levels of congestion along the road network in the network in the Region that connects to the M50 and Dublin City Centre. Longer journey times results in higher costs for commuters and businesses which ultimately reduces competitiveness. In contrast an efficient and effective transportation system results in reduced travel time which translates into cost savings, an increase in output and an increase in competitiveness.

In this regard Meath County Council would consider the progression of the Leinster Outer Orbital Route to be a critical piece of infrastructure in facilitating the continued growth of the Region. This road would have the dual benefit of removing the non-Dublin bound traffic from the M50 and would also improve the connectivity between the key growth centres in the Eastern and Midlands Region.

The provision of Phase 2 of the Dublin-Navan Rail line is critical to Navan fulfilling its potential as a Primary Development Centre. This would improve the connectivity between Navan and Dublin and would result in the provision of a sustainable mode of transport between the settlements. This infrastructure would also support a possible strategic employment cluster that would be based on the Strategic Development Zone concept. As part of the 6 year review of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-35 the National Transport Authority have committed to reviewing the requirement for the extension of a railway from M3 Parkway to Navan in the Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-35. This should be referenced in the National Planning Framework.

Upgrades to the local road network in Navan and in particular a new distributor road are also required in order to improve connectivity in the town and facilitate the movement of traffic and goods as the population of the town increases.

The construction of the Slane by-pass and the upgrade of the N2 Corridor (Ashbourne-Ardee Scheme) are regarded as crucial in improving connectivity within the Region. The N2 is a vital economic corridor in the Region. The upgrade of this road would significantly improve connections with Dublin and the north/north-west of the State.

The progression of the Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project and the Greater Dublin Drainage project would provide additional capacity in water and waste water infrastructure in the Region.

The North-South Interconnector is a key piece of energy infrastructure that would enhance the security of supply and improve the efficiency of the Single Electricity Market and facilitate the increasing proportion of electricity generation from renewable sources.

The provision of high quality broadband infrastructure is crucial in improving connectivity in urban and rural areas. In the National Broadband Plan the Government has committed to bringing high speed broadband to every premises in the State. This should be strongly supported in the National Planning Framework (see above).

7.0 Enabling the Vision – Implementing the National Planning Framework

The implementation of the National Planning Framework will require the commitment of successive Governments up to 2040 to the Vision and policies and objectives set out in the document. In this regard the statutory basis to be given to the National Planning Framework is welcomed.

If an evidence-based approach is taken to the formulation of policies and objectives in the National Planning Framework and various growth projections are modelled and scenarios developed based on these projections the document would become more informative and would allow stakeholders to understand the reasons behind the policy decisions taken. This would increase the likelihood of the successful implementation of the National Planning Framework as there would be greater 'buy in' by the stakeholders involved.

Meath County Council look forward to participating in the preparation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, which will set out the implementation of the National Planning Framework in the Eastern and Midlands Region.

In order to set the scene for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, the National Planning Framework should acknowledge the population growth that has taken place in counties such as Meath over the past 20 years and the contribution these counties have made to the economic success of Dublin. It should also facilitate the continued growth of these counties and identify the potential of the growth centres in these counties as a place of employment that would complement the national gateway and assist in the creation of sustainable communities.

A commitment from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the availability of funding for the delivery of key infrastructure projects is essential if the Vision of the National Planning Framework is to be realised. It would be useful if a timescale was included for the delivery of the key pieces of infrastructure in order to provide milestones in the implementation of the Framework. This would also provide greater certainty regarding the delivery of these projects.

Co-operation and agreement between Government Departments and agencies such as the Department of Housing, Planning, Community, and Local Government, Department of Transport, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, The National Transport Authority, Department of Energy, Communications and Natural Resources, and utility providers such as Irish Water and EirGrid in the infrastructure requirements for the State up to 2040 and a commitment to the delivery of these projects is also required if the Vision and objectives of the National Planning Framework are to be realised.

8.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the National Planning Framework should provide a strategic, achievable vision for the sustainable growth of the nation up to 2040 which builds on Ireland's successes to date.

In highlighting the importance of Dublin as the economic engine of the State the National Planning Framework should also recognise the contribution that counties such as Meath and adjoining Mid-East counties have, and will continue to make, to the economic success of Dublin in terms of the achievement of a critical mass of population that supports job growth in the national gateway and surrounding Region. Any departure from the existing development model as set out in the current Regional Planning Guidelines which attempts to diminish the role of the Mid East Counties would be unacceptable to the Executive and the Members of Meath County Council.

The implementation of the Meath Economic Development Strategy 2014-22 is showing signs of success with a number of recent high profile job announcements. The National Planning Framework should recognise the importance of facilitating the continued implementation of this Strategy in supporting economic development in Meath that would improve the job-population ratio, support the creation of 'live-work communities' in the County and ultimately improve the quality of life and health and well being of residents.

The successful implementation of this Strategy is also dependent on improvements in accessibility and connectivity between Meath and the remainder of the State. In this regard it is considered that the National Planning Framework should support and provide a timeline which sets out an a programme for prompt delivery of infrastructure projects including the Leinster Outer Orbital Route, Phase 2 of the Dublin-Navan Rail Line (acknowledging that Navan is the only Administrative capital in the GDA or EMRA not served by a rail link to the Capital), the upgrade of the N2 (Ashbourne-Ardee including the Slane By-Pass), and the roll out of the National Broadband Plan.

9.0 Recommendation

Meath County Council requests that this submission is fully considered in the preparation of the Draft National Framework.