

Submission to National Planning Framework

The Greater Drogheda Area - Drogheda (Co. Louth), Drogheda South (Co. Meath) & the Meath Coast

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Proposal: that Drogheda and its full surrounding urban area in both Louth and Meath be counted and administered as one single unitary urban area and designated as a City & Primary Development Centre in the National Planning Framework / Ireland 2040.

Many estates on Drogheda's south side are situated either partly or fully in County Meath due to the fact that the county boundary has not kept pace with the urban expansion of the town which is now the largest urban area in the country outside of the five designated cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

See "Greater Drogheda: Emerging Demographic Evidence Base for Ireland's Sixth City"
Brian Hughes Dublin Institute of Technology

<http://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1047&context=beschreoth>

The Greater Drogheda Area has a population of nearly 80,000 people straddling both counties Louth and Meath when Drogheda itself and the adjoining Laytown, Bettystown, Mornington (LBM) urban area are combined. It makes no sense for these areas to be counted in isolation of one another in either statistical or planning terms. Doing so leaves a huge gap in the services and infrastructure required and actually provided to what is actually one of Ireland's largest urban areas and deprives the State of an alternative Primary Development Area to counter congestion in Dublin.

The 2007 Constituency Commission proposed that those parts of Drogheda and the Meath Coast known as Julianstown and St.Mary's (part rural) be included in the constituency of Louth and that the expanded area be increased to a five-seat constituency. This corrected the historic anomaly where estates in the town of Drogheda but part of the Meath East constituency were conferred with "rural" status due to their location in County Meath. In addition the suburban areas located on the Meath Coast were added to the Louth Constituency.

The 2007 Constituency Commission itself noted "that Louth should become a 5-seat constituency by extending the constituency southwards from, ***and in the environs of, Drogheda and taking in electoral divisions (population: 17,333) which have extensive linkages with the town. This will allow the inclusion of the town of Drogheda and hinterland areas in a single constituency***" (Report on Dail and European Parliament Constituencies 2007).

There are many Drogheda housing estates in the Meath County Council administered area although still part of the town itself. Prior to 2007 their inclusion in the Meath Constituency was extremely confusing from both a voters' and candidates' perspective.

An arbitrary constituency boundary that cut through the urban area of South Drogheda was corrected by the inclusion of these areas in the Louth Constituency as proposed by the 2007 Commission and reaffirmed by the 2012 Commission.

Drogheda Urban Area located in County Meath now part of the Louth Constituency

Highlands
Laghorveen Manor
Lagavooreen
Beaubec (The Cairns)
Millmount Abbey
Grangerath
Hazel Lane
Deepforde
Bryanstown
The Oaks Estate
Rosevale Est
Millmount Abbey (The Park DB)
Ard Ri Est
Black Bush Avenue, Bryanstown,
Bryanstown
Bryanstown Village
Lagavooreen

In addition the Commission, through inclusion of the full electoral area known as “Julianstown”, added the suburban areas of the Meath Coast adjoining Drogheda to the Louth Constituency including Mornington, Donacarney, Bettystown, Laytown and Julianstown. This has resulted in **the full Greater Drogheda Area being included in a single constituency** for the first time and with voters now being given the option of voting for candidates from the local area and availing of representation in constituency office facilities in their nearest urban area, Drogheda, located just a few minutes away rather than in Navan some 40 minutes away and the other side of both the M1 and M2/N2.

Up to 2007, Drogheda, Drogheda South (Co. Meath) and the Meath Coast had previously suffered from a representational anomaly whereby a significant portion of the contiguous urban area of Drogheda was situated in the Meath constituency. The breaching of a county boundary in this instance corrected rather than created an anomaly. The old boundary was arbitrary in terms of its application to the growth pattern of the Greater Drogheda / Meath Coast area.

The same logic should prevail in the National Planning Framework and the Greater Drogheda Area including the town itself plus LBM should be counted as one contiguous interlinked urban area for statistical and planning purposes.

Geographical manifestation of the Greater Drogheda Area

Both of the maps on pages 4 and 5 of this submission (courtesy CSO Census 2011 findings) showing both population density by electoral area and the increase in population between 2006 and 2011 clearly demonstrate that the area surrounding

Drogheda stretching from South Louth down through the town itself and on to the Meath Coast (areas shaded Red and Orange) is a contiguous urban area and that it forms a natural geographical entity which should be recognised as one city.

Drogheda IDA Business & Technology Park and the Border, Midwest, West Region

Drogheda IDA Business & Technology Park on the Donore Road in Drogheda is located in Co. Meath. Meath is not a part of the Border Midlands & West (BMW) Region while Louth is. Under rules agreed with the EU Commission the BMW region attracts higher grant aid for FDI than non BMW regions. Drogheda's 24 Hectare / 64 Acre IDA Business & Technology Park is largely empty, despite being 25 minutes away from Dublin Airport, with the exception of one building. In contrast, Dundalk's industrial estates, an additional 25 minutes away from Dublin Airport and located in the BMW region have attracted significant FDI including Paypal/Ebay, Xerox, Sumi Trust Global Asset Services, National Pen, Prometric and Satir. Dundalk has benefited greatly from FDI and should continue to do so in the future but surely it makes sense to have some balance across the North East region by correcting this very obvious anomaly so that the urban area at the centre of South Louth / East Meath can attract similar levels of FDI to support its surrounding populations in both counties Louth and Meath. The only way to rectify this BMW anomaly is to move the IDA Business & Technology Park on the Donore Road in Drogheda into a single urban entity which would form part of the BMW region which would benefit the entire area and lessen pressure on commuting routes into Dublin city.

Promotion of the Greater Drogheda area for Foreign Direct Investment for the benefit of the populations of both Louth and Meath

Until such time as the size and population of Drogheda is recognised in full through the rectification of the county boundary issue the area will not reach its full potential for the attraction of FDI. Drogheda is on a par in terms of surrounding infrastructure and location with parts of Fingal such as Swords and the Airport Zone and major urban centres such as Galway and Limerick but attracts very little Foreign Direct Investment. Drogheda has the potential to be a major economic hub for the Louth/Meath region with a critical mass of employment opportunities which would end the daily commuting misery into Dublin City for thousands of people in the Louth/Meath area and reduce southbound congestion on the M1/M2 and Northern Rail Line services. In order to achieve this critical mass and corresponding marketing from the IDA it needs to be under the administration of a single local authority within the BMW region.

Conclusion

County Boundaries can be useful arbiters in rural areas with low population density and where urban areas do not cross ancient feudal boundaries. County boundaries may have important resonances in terms of GAA support or for other soft identification reasons but such legacy identities can coexist with relevant planning or administrative boundaries which reflect the realities of modern urban growth patterns. People identify primarily with the town/city of Drogheda rather than their county as would be more common in rural areas of the country. Indeed, the majority of people in the Greater Drogheda Area in both South Louth and East Meath will respond with the short answer “Drogheda” if asked where they are from if in another part of the country or abroad. This demonstrates a deep rooted urban identity which manifests itself in the relevant spatial and socio-economic factors, including settlement and employment patterns.

Drogheda’s true size both in urban spread and population size needs to be represented more accurately in census data and national statistics which inform Government and Local Authority decisions on planning, resource allocation and prioritisation for public services and promotion of foreign direct investment. Drogheda’s absence from the previous National Spatial Strategy should be addressed by nominating the city as a Primary Development Centre in the National Planning Framework.

Yours sincerely

Cormac Bohan, Drogheda