

DUNDALK CHAMBER SUBMISSION

SUMMARY

Dundalk's role in the future of the island of Ireland is a challenging one. We face the problem of Brexit on one side and the growth of Greater Dublin on the other. However the town is a resilient one that has faced similar problems in the past only to overcome these.

We see the town developing with our sister town, Drogheda and to the North our "twin city" Newry into a coherent linear growth centre to compliment the cities of the South. It must be remembered that Louth is one of two counties; the other is Dublin, where a majority of the population lives in an urban environment. The urban population of the three areas exceeds 100,000 with Newry being the smallest.

The town has a strong record of producing indigenous companies that have become multinationals in Food (two), Energy conservation/construction (two) and Manufacturing (one and potentially another). The skill set of this entrepreneur class needs to be encouraged and developed.

The area, from Newry to Drogheda offers an excellent infrastructure in terms of broadband, transport (3 airports), deep water ports plus 3rd level education and is therefore well positioned to service any FDI project.

The area is blessed with major tourist attractions from the World Heritage Site at Newgrange to the beauty of Carlingford Lough where "the mountains sweep down to the sea".

The 2040 plan must address the needs not of the 26 counties but of the island. This can be achieved by closer cooperation with the North (The MOU between Louth and Newry and Down can be seen as a blueprint) and by recognising the infrastructural needs of the island and not the State. The development of the linear city of Drogheda, Dundalk Newry would be a positive practical contribution to the work of the Good Friday Agreement.

The area has not developed as might have been hoped due to the decline in traditional industries, Brewing, shoes, tobacco and heavy engineering which were all lost in the 60's and 70's. The retail and tourist industries have suffered due to the distortions caused by the Border.

As a result Dundalk's deprivation index is the poorest of the 9 Gateway towns.

This area has the capacity to accept industry and people which wishes to be near the capital city but at the same time sufficiently separate so that the quality of life as well as the infrastructure is better.

It is equidistant, 80km, from the two main population centres and their resources. It therefore has 3,000,000 or 60% of the island's population within a 90 minute drive.

Drogheda has within 60 minutes nearly 1,800,000. Both of these are the highest figures for their respective distances.

Northern Ireland

In preparing this report we have collaborated with Newry Chamber of Commerce and Trade and also with Warrenpoint Chamber. We have also consulted with a number of Northern politicians. All share our vision of closer links between ourselves and Newry and Mourne and Down. All share our concern re BREXIT.

The overwhelming response is the recognition that the interests of Newry and Mourne and Down, if not Northern Ireland will be best served in the BREXIT negotiations by the Southern Government

OVERVIEW

The Problem:

Dundalk's future risks being characterised by:

- piece-meal, un-balanced, and un-sustainable development,
- under-achievement in fulfilling our regional potential as a major urban centre,
- increased in-equality and uneven standards of living and wellbeing for our citizens.

Goal:

That Dundalk can maximise its positive potential as a major urban centre within the Northeast of the *island of* Ireland as a vital part of the Greater Dublin Region in Ireland.

Through this, Dundalk recognises its pivotal role and contribution to the Ireland's National Planning Framework (NPF) out to 2040 and beyond. The NPF recognises and caters for the vital role that Dundalk, Drogheda and Newry as a sub-regional town has to play in supporting the balanced and sustainable social, economic and environmental development of the Greater Dublin Region.

Objectives:

In maximising and sustaining our potential, and working collaboratively, stakeholders in Dundalk's future need to reinforce and further develop Dundalk's social, economic, environmental and cultural assets, fill gaps, and strengthen recognised weaknesses. Specifically we need to build on:

- A strong sense of place and community resilience, *developing the linear city*
- Strong connections
- A great quality of life
- Strong economic growth and development opportunities
- Green: Attractive and clean energy, environmental and ecological resources
- A culture and infrastructure for innovation
- Improved equality and inclusiveness

A strong sense of place and community resilience:

- A shared vision of our place in the region, in Ireland, and internationally, now and into the future
- An open culture and strategy that positively addresses our activities across sub-regional boundaries in all directions (Northward/(Newry/Belfast) / Eastward/marine(Ports) / Southward/Louth Cities/Corridor (Drogheda/Dublin) / Westward/Midlands (Ardee/Meath/Westmeath/Monaghan)
- A pride of place – that supports our promotion, awareness raising, communications, and continuous improvement of how we want others to see Dundalk, and Louth, as a vibrant part of the Greater Dublin Region.

Strong connections

- Multi-modal transport connecting to neighbouring towns, cities and regions (Motorway / N52/N53/N54), Trains (frequency/duration), Bus routes
- Broadband connecting virtually to everyone, everywhere, at any time. (Fibre / rural growth)

A great quality of life

- Education (Primary / Secondary / 3rd Level)
- Leisure (Sports /entertainment)
- Heritage (Culture / Arts)
- health and wellbeing (promotional / preventative / curative)

Strong sub-regional economic growth and development opportunities

- Agri-food / processing / farm-to-fork
- Tourism
- Retail
- Logistics / transport
- Health / well-being / age-friendly
- (Louth Economic Forum – updated agenda)

Green: - Attractive and clean energy, environmental and ecological resources

- Sustainable energy / wind / hydro
- Environment – forests / parks / natural
- Ecology – marine / waterways / protected areas

A culture and infrastructure for innovation:

- Regional Development Centre – Incubation / Technology Transfer
- Young researcher capability development (DkIT)
- Research and innovation in DkIT (Energy / Water / Health / Ageing etc)
- Access to wider national / international research infrastructures (DCU, UU, QUB, TCD, UCD and Maynooth)
- Creativity / Creative Spark
- Related innovation – Teagasc / EI / LEO

Improved equality and inclusiveness

- Long-term social and community investment in areas of greater deprivation
- Hope and aspiration - Long-term unemployed / families and children
- Innovative social financing for social innovation projects / NGOs / Community

Governance:

Spanning all these domains is a need to a more inclusive and ‘regionally aware’ participative governance and planning framework that sees the region more holistically as a web of interweaving and evolving centres – all working to strengthen

DUNDALK CHAMBER SUBMISSION

their sustainability. A more innovative and responsive governance can choreograph plans and actions in a more sustainable and mutually reinforcing mechanism, across scales from the neighbourhood to the regional.

Specific Flagship Projects:

As part of Dundalk's we can envisage a range of flagship projects that together could help strengthen the town, and its environs:

- The train station/GNB interface – An opportunity to develop the station as an urban –economic - innovation hub.
- The ports of Greenore, Drogheda and Balbriggan.
- Wind-turbine farm in Dundalk Bay / east coast.
- Projects to strengthen the Dundalk/Drogheda/Newry 'sister towns' relationship
- Projects to address the risk of a 'hard-Brexit' on the flow of people/workers, services and goods across the border.
- Projects to strengthen Dundalk's role in promoting/supporting the agri-food sector
- Projects to strengthen Dundalk's shrinking/decaying town-centre infrastructure (Clanbrassil St. / Park St.) and bring life/living back into the town centre.
- Projects to develop a 21st century primary healthcare innovation hub as a provincial model of excellence for 'health and rehabilitation' - linking innovators, industry and service providers.
- Dundalk as an economic and social bridge to our neighbouring village and rural economy.

Threats/Risks:

While there is great potential in Dundalk and its environs to build upon, we face the following risks:

Inclusivity: the existing disparity in prosperity and living conditions across the population poses dangers of a widespread decline in our community resilience and wellbeing if we do not maintain a concerted effort to strengthen social cohesion and inclusiveness - primarily through access to education and training, and viable work and employment opportunities that can instil an ethic of wider civic participation.

Brexit uncertainty: The political impasse in the North, combined with the UK decision to secede from the EU poses significant uncertainty on how Dundalk's cross-border relationship with Newry and Belfast will evolve over the mid to long term. While Dundalk may be a sub-regional town as part of the Greater Dublin Region, we are unique within this region as the only ROI urban centre facing an international land border (frictionless or not) with the UK/NI urban centre (Newry) only 15km apart.

Go Forward Scenarios:

In recognising the shift in direction from the previous National Spatial Strategy (and the Gateway/Hub hierarchy) to the more regional development oriented model of the new National Planning Framework shaped around key regional cities, and taking into consideration the above, we have several options before us:

- **A: Do nothing:** Continue on the existing piece-meal development approach, were we tending to be more responsive rather than pro-active. Here we run the risk of existing social disparities and gaps widening, with little go-forward movement. Such a scenario could see the advantages of many of our assets decay or lose their competitive edge over time, with us decline to a level where it might be difficult to recover.
- **B: Consolidation:** This is where we might concentrate on investing in what we have, focussed on the Dundalk urban area and North Louth only, and deal with improving the attractiveness and sustainability of the town's assets within our immediate area of influence.
- **C: Organise for Directed Growth:** In this scenario, we recognise the role that Dundalk play's regionally, and look to highlight and strengthen those dimensions that are most influenced by our NE position within the Greater Dublin Region. Southward looking, here we move to strengthen our links with Drogheda as 'twin sister towns' along the M1 corridor, and Ardee as we look westward. Our directed orientation is towards South Louth, Meath, Fingal and Dublin (and maybe across to Westmeath).
- **D: Organise for Maximum Growth Potential:** In this scenario, we recognise that while Dundalk's development needs to strengthen in orientation as part of the Greater Dublin Region, it must also accommodate its unique role as this region's International land border town – with significant cross-border catchment and flows to/from Down and Armagh in UK/NI. This is complimented by roles that Dundalk/Louth plays in supporting the ROI border counties and towns of Monaghan and Cavan. While farming this today is difficult - the gains and freedoms achieved over the past 40 years represent a precious resource that must be nourished over the period of the NPF horizon.

Comment

While the Chamber of Commerce is a strong voice for business in Dundalk and North Louth, it cannot achieve or act in isolation in pursuing any of these scenarios going forward.

The Chamber therefore believes that as the Gateway status it held will be lost it must assume a different role. The town of Drogheda and Dundalk offer a critical mass equal to or greater than Limerick and Galway. Together with our Northern sister, Newry the liner city of Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry offers a Northern counterweight to the Southern cities. It offers a clear opportunity to the Southern Government to work with Northern Ireland in developing an All Island plan for 2040

LINEAR CITY

The concept of a linear city will allow this area to grow. We will then be able to see this region reach its potential for the first time since partition. This growth we believe will be sustainable. At the moment the growth of the towns surrounding Dublin has not been coordinated or planned so as to maximise the potential of the area or indeed Dublin. By having a distinct area to the North of Dublin (yet close to it) and at the same time an area that includes a part of Northern Ireland the Government is afforded the opportunity of demonstrating in a practical manner the advantages of closer cooperation. It also shows our commitment to ALL of the people of Northern Ireland.

The Dundalk area has already large areas zoned for development. Its water including sewage has significant capacity. It has access to Natural Gas, Electricity and all other infrastructure. The road links North South are excellent, those going west and South West N54 require upgrade. The area is therefore primed for development which would not put strain on those resources.

The area has already seen the development of several clusters in the Food, Energy, Manufacturing and Services along the M1 corridor. There is a growing industry in the financial payments area, (in all three towns) which can be developed in a manner similar to that developed north of Atlanta in the USA.

The DKIT together with the Universities in Dublin Belfast plus Maynooth and Ulster along with the LMTB offer a wide range of 3rd level courses all of which are accessible to the whole region.

INDIGENOUS

This area has been blessed with several entrepreneurs who started business in the 1950's/60's. This pattern is repeating itself. Part of this is due to the fact that for business to grow they had to learn how to deal with Northern Ireland. It was then a less daunting step to tackle Britain and from there to grow internationally. As a result the area has multinational businesses in food, energy, manufacturing and services.

The DKIT has developed an entrepreneurial course which spans several disciplines in order to encourage this. The potential for this is significant.

FDI

The area has significant infrastructure which is underutilised. Its geographical position, being close to three airports (Drogheda is 20 minutes from Dublin while Dundalk is 35 and 50 to Belfast) with motorway connections, rail links and several deep water ports makes it an attractive area for FDI. The Greenfield pharma site in Dundalk could potentially be used by others. To date the area has NOT obtained a high value added, large employer FDI but rather a number of call centres. While these

are to be welcomed their impact on the retail and tourist industries is not significant. These industries do **not** require local SME interaction

The area has seen already a UK manufacturing company move part of its operation to Dundalk as a direct result of Brexit. The area can offer faster broadband speeds than that in place at the IFSC and is therefore ideally situated to attract UK companies in the financial sector. The executives could retain their UK residence by living in Newry.

It is agreed that the IFSC is overheating and that an IFSC2 needs to be established. This area needs to be close to the airports (plural), access to high speed broadband, (Dundalk as the first large town to receive SIRO has 1gb compared to 250mb in Dublin) and offer good quality lifestyle (mountains, sea, housing etc.) including education at all levels. This area offers all of these.

BREXIT

There are both threats and opportunities in this area. It is recognised by all in EU that Ireland requires special consideration in this area. It follows that this region which includes part of Northern Ireland will be more significantly challenged than anywhere else on the island.

The threats are in the areas of retail, loss of markets for exporters and the tourist industry. The development of infrastructure might be reduced if planning only applies to the Southern needs.

The opportunities are for the establishment by UK based companies of a presence in the South. It will be critical that these are not brass plate operations.

Areas of concern in this include

Smuggling, daily commuter time in crossing the Border, education recognition and access to Colleges in the other jurisdiction, tourism, Agribusiness, Health and other infrastructure services, transport including the movement of goods, retail and loss of markets or access.

RETAIL

This sector has been constricted by its inability to plan long term due to fluctuations in taxes and currencies between the two jurisdictions. This has resulted in the decline in the cores of the towns being more acute than in other provincial towns. The rate collection in Dundalk is at or below 50% and for the indigenous retail sector is poorer.

The impact of the border on Newry's traditional High streets is as dramatic as Dundalk. Drogheda has the problem of proximity to Dublin.

TOURISM

The area has a population of over 3,000,000 living within an hour's drive. It has two major attractions, Newgrange and Carlingford Lough plus numerous golf and other facilities. The island's only all-weather horse racing track is in Dundalk.

Ireland's Ancient East needs to be expanded to include Downpatrick and Newcastle (Down) and to include Warrenpoint and the Silent Valley.

The area is, as noted well served with Airports. BREXIT does raise issues as to movement within the region, for Irish, UK, EU and non EU citizens when holidaying. This will require careful negotiations.

The fact that there are two currencies and two Tourist bodies, each of which sees the area as a periphery has not allowed the area to develop.

MARINE AND COASTAL

The area has significant assets in this area with the deep water ports of Greenore (underutilised) Warrenpoint in Carlingford Lough and Drogheda in the south. Carlingford Lough offers considerable scope for Leisure activities with it being a deep natural area with sheltered water (Cooley and Mourne mountains on either side). There are existing marinas and the Carlingford Oyster is well known.

Dundalk Bay is shallow and has a number of areas which are designated s World/European or National importance for wading birds, many migratory. There is therefore considerable scope for offshore wind farms in Dundalk Bay. The electricity could then be supplied to either the Northern or Southern grids.

There is considerable scope to develop existing walk ways and unused rail links. This work has already started with the hope of linking with Newry Canal and on to Carlingford Lough in the North and the Boyne walkway in the South.

AGING

Dundalk, Louth and the Northeast continue to be leaders in innovation to address the challenge of demographic change and population ageing. Representing Ireland within the initial global study on age-friendly cities by the World Health Organisation in 2006, Co Louth was Ireland's first county to develop and implement an Age-Friendly county strategy. The Louth model, built on multi-stakeholder collaboration, an holistic, environmental, social and economic agenda addressing the WHO's domains effecting well-being, and a participatory and co-design engagement of older citizens, has now been replicated in all 31 Counties in Ireland. In partnership with UCC, Co Louth has been a leading international participant in the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP-AHA) and is an acknowledged European Reference Site for Age-Friendly innovation.

The NetwellCASALA applied research centre within DkIT operates as an 'LIVING LAB' for 'smart ageing' innovation in the Northeast, with a particular focus on ICT to enhance longer living in smarter places. Their partnership with the local authority and the HSE has brought forward the Great Northern Haven, a unique 'smart housing scheme for older people' that has been an exemplar for new of approaches to 'ageing in place'. Working internationally, NetwellCASALA are a member of the European Network of Living Labs and a member of the IGS/WHO's Global Ageing Research Network (GARN), and is founding members of the European Covenant on Demographic Change. Along with its ICT activities, on-going work in NetwellCASALA is looking at the challenge of how new local government reform structures and planning approaches (LCDCs/LECP etc.) can address the convergence of discrete urban programmes such as age-friendly cities, health cities, smart cities, sustainable cities and inclusive cities. This requires new forms of collaborative working, community and citizen-centric participation, and a focus on shared outcomes and impacts over the short-mid and long term.

THREATS

As noted already the town of Dundalk has seen a decline in its traditional industries. The result is a high deprivation score and the highest level of secondary school drop outs in the country. The AIRO reports highlight a significant number of deprived areas in the town. There are two demographics at play, those who were employed in the redundant industries and others who migrated here from Northern Ireland as a result of sectarianism.

There is therefore a multi-generational problem in certain deprived areas generating a social capital deficiency. The DKIT and O'Fiagh College have both made considerable progress in this area.

The Peace Process, including Interreg has addressed these issues. It is not clear what impact BREXIT will have on the funding of these projects in the long term.

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