

SUBMISSION TO

DRAFT LOUTH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Key recent milestones:

- Census 2016 confirmed Drogheda as Ireland's largest town
- Ireland 2040, launched February 2018, endorses key Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry axis
- An FT report in 2018/19 identified Drogheda as one of Europe's emerging cities
- The EMRA's RSES Plan accords Drogheda similar status to Dundalk as one of just five Regional Growth Centres (RGC) outside the present five cities. It also acknowledges the future city status of both towns – though Drogheda is clearly best positioned to attain that status in the short term – see attached map

Given that over fifty years ago, the Buchanan Report identified Drogheda as a key regional centre, the above is long overdue.

Considering the huge potential advantage such status (RGC) confers on a large urban centre, it is assumed any Local Authority securing such advantage/status for one of its urban centres that it would “go into overdrive” to capitalise and maximise such advantage.

With almost three years having elapsed since the endorsement of Drogheda in the Ireland 2040 NDP Plan, it is of major concern that Louth Co. Council have done so little to leverage that RGC status, reinforced by the later RSES – and this plan as drafted continues to ignore the opportunities Drogheda's new found status offers, all but ignoring the needs of circa 80,000 people in the Greater Drogheda area (GD) of Drogheda, South Louth and East Meath – where huge numbers are compelled to make long commutes to work, mostly in the Greater Dublin area. This plan all but ignores the huge social, financial and environmental impacts on community; businesses and the environment in the south of the county.

Indeed, as heretofore, it is not unreasonable to consider that **this draft plan has been developed though the lens of Dundalk** - where currently, all Senior LCC Management are based (and where most reside, many with local connections) – and North Louth. LCC appears to place in this draft plan disproportionate focus on (a) North Louth and (b) North of the Border – with less focus on the urgent needs of (c) South Louth and (d) adjacent East Meath.

Evidence of this can be seen by the existence of an “MOU” Committee established some years ago between LCC and their Newry & Mourne counterparts – while NO such joint committee exists to address shared issues between LCC and MCC, especially the relationship in the Greater Drogheda. The proposal for a bridge spanning Carlingford Lough is an expensive, vanity project where the main beneficiary would be Warrenpoint, ironically, a competitor to Drogheda Port – while NO reference is made to examining the feasibility of an “Eastlink” bridge connecting the future PANCR to planned road developments on the Meath

side from the M1 south of Drogheda across to Colpe etc – creating an orbital route which would define the inner Drogheda and assist in focussing residential and commercial development within that orbit while recognising the emerging City of Drogheda that would include parts of South Louth and East Meath. An article by Dr. Brian Hughes – attached – advocates city status even before the recent endorsements cited above.

To have any credibility, the LCC CDP MUST include an SO/Strategic Objective that addresses the urgent need to collaborate with Meath Co Co (and EMRA) to address and resolve the range of issues that currently prevail in the Greater Drogheda area as a consequence of two Local Authorities – with NEITHER having a senior management presence in Drogheda – managing a catchment population of 80,000. This contributes to the lack of local industrial development, as Drogheda does not appear to be a priority for either Council, and with two IDA Regions operating in the area (with limited activity & results) Greater Drogheda has “the worst of both worlds.” National and Local Government must prioritise to resolve this – the creation of the City of Drogheda with inputs from both Councils is one way to resolve this impasse and begin to capitalise on Drogheda’s strengths and opportunities.

A prime objective of this plan should be – put simply – to bring Drogheda up to the scale of economic activity currently being enjoyed by its smaller sister town Dundalk. A first step is to engage IDA Ireland to secure status with that organisation similar to Dundalk currently enjoys. Drogheda needs a senior LCC team LOCALLY, headed by the LCC Deputy CEO, to include planning, heritage, tourism etc officials – given tourism is vastly below potential at present; the local Millmount Museum should be supported financially by LCC and consideration needs to be given – through Boyne Valley Tourism to create a National Museum of Ireland - Military History – sensitively developed by OPW on the Oldbridge Estate.

LOLOL – as a major Regional Hospital – needs to be endorsed as such by the plan.

Please also consider the attached six key issues/challenges facing the Greater Drogheda area.

ENDS.

1. HOUSING:

Expedite PANCR (Port Access Northern Cross Route), one of Ireland's largest shovel ready solutions to the housing crisis – Planning Permission is already in place for over 4,500 houses; educational & sports facilities; a new railway station etc. This extensive plan also facilitates easy access to Drogheda Port; will create new job opportunities and end the pollution and road safety hazards that HGVs create as they are currently required to trundle to/from the port through central Drogheda. As Greater Drogheda continues to grow rapidly, consideration should be given to a feasibility study examining the need for an “Eastlink” bridge connecting the PANCR with South Drogheda and East Meath via an orbital route

2. LOCAL JOBS:

Urgent need to secure IDA FDI in Greater Drogheda area, given DWP statistics. In tandem, urgent need for IDA/LCC/MCC to replace IDA Business Park following approval of Amazon Data Centre. PANCR will also create jobs – port related and others. The Financial Times recognises Drogheda as one of Europe's emerging cities – why not Government & IDA? While Dundalk; Athlone; Sligo & Letterkenny (all smaller towns) have IDA and EI offices, Drogheda – Ireland's largest town - doesn't and Greater Drogheda is managed by two IDA Regional Offices. Need to urgently revisit “Ireland 2040” Plan which “bundles” Drogheda (currently an IDA jobs blackspot) and much of Leinster with Dublin, which is bloated with jobs and congested with traffic. Drogheda's heritage and strategic location as “the Gateway to the Boyne Valley” that includes a UNESCO World Heritage site adjacent to key North-South road and rail connections also warrants serious tourism/visitor investment, given that Co.Dublin's tourism/visitor revenues are 38 times the COMBINED figure for Louth & Meath.

3. COMMUTING:

A consequence of the lack of local employment is the huge numbers from Drogheda; South Louth and East Meath forced to make long commutes to Dublin to work or study. The social; economic and environmental cost for thousands of local families is huge, including traffic diminishing the quality of life for residents of Julianstown where traffic movements of >22,000 are experienced on weekdays. Pending the achievement of “reverse commuting,” by creating local employment, ensure adequate and affordable Mass Transport (both Public and Private) and address excessive rail fares. Develop robust car sharing & car-pooling initiatives to alleviate traffic congestion.

4. COMMUNITY:

Urgent need to target areas of deprivation and provide suitable supports – e.g. Community Centre in Moneymore Estate. Provide Greater Drogheda with Garda resources appropriate to its size and needs (e.g. population now on par with Waterford City; lack of resources has allowed the drugs crisis to escalate. Needs Limerick style approach/significant investment to address social deprivation).

5. ADMINISTRATION:

Critical to expediting the above is the need to end the fragmentation of Greater Drogheda which sees key economic; planning; tourism and other decisions for the 80,000 people in the outer catchment being taken in Dundalk or Navan. Drogheda needs a “supremo” currently at the level of Deputy County CEO to be based locally with a management team to plan the future City of Drogheda in an orderly fashion, including co-ordinating responses to the above. Allied to this is the urgent need to restore local democracy – through reinstating the Drogheda Borough Council as an interim step to establishing Drogheda City Council, involving Councillors representing Drogheda; South Louth and East Meath – at which time the “supremo” becomes a City Manager.

6. INFRASTRUCTURE:

The population of the Greater Drogheda area grows rapidly to position it as Ireland's next city (which will be reinforced by the next Census). In addition to the urgent need for local jobs (above), there are key infrastructure matters that need to be addressed. Within a 25 mile radius of Drogheda, there are 750,000 citizens (compared to 125,000 citizens in a similar radius from Dundalk), yet the opportunity for Drogheda to be a major centre in the provision of State Services has not been recognised – with the exception of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, which should be formalised as the North East's Regional Hospital. Greater Drogheda is in the centre of the M1 Corridor, which is bookended by two Third Level institutions – DKIT to the north and DCU to the south. There is a strong logic – at a time when there is rationalisation within the Third Level sector - that these two geographically adjacent institutions be merged – and that legislation be amended to facilitate a merger, creating a North Eastern University with potential for faculties to be located in Greater Drogheda. *Version 12/20*