



**Unique Reference Number:** DHLGH-C1-176

**Status:** Approved

**Submission:** Submission from Ged Nash TD

**UID:** 597

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**Consultation:**

Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework

**Date Created:** 12.09.2024 - 11:06

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## Observations:

### 1. The Vision

**Chapter:** 1. The

Vision

I wish to make some general observations in regards to the first draft, with a specific focus on the future sustainable economic, social and cultural planning of the Drogheda, South Louth & East Meath area.

Drogheda is Ireland's largest town that has yet to be designated as a city. The sustainable development of the area is hampered by its location straddling two local authority areas. The genuine sustainable development of the Drogheda area insists that urban areas of scale such as Drogheda ought to be administered and planned by a single local authority.

In my view and in the view of several experts in the field, this requires the designation of the Drogheda area as a city with its own, fit-for-purpose local authority structures befitting the town's scale and regional importance and the wholesale reorganisation of the anachronistic local government system which in my opinion does not best support the accepted international principles of urban development and regeneration. To enable this in the first instance, meaningful town government needs to be re-established along the lines of Labour's 2018 Restoration of Town Council's Bill.

The failure of current local governance and administrative arrangements is laid bare by the fact that, almost a decade on from the Drogheda Boundary Review, Meath and Louth County Councils have yet to publish a vision for how both local authorities will manage the subject area of 'South Drogheda' in Meath, that was considered in the 2015-commissioned review.

The status quo has not worked for Drogheda, South Louth and the parts of East Meath that comprise the Greater Drogheda area. Implicit in this review, which will govern the context of important investment and planning decisions for at least the next two governments, is that the Drogheda area will have to wait for city status and a fundamental reorganisation of local government and methods of best practice and real reform of local governance. This is not acceptable and could tie the hands of future administrations.

I accept and understand the importance of the connection between Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry in respect of the scale the region presents, and I welcome the commitment in the document to promoting the combined scale and 'visibility' of the region in regard to investment. Newry is a city under UK law, and the same designation ought to be awarded to Drogheda. Logic would suggest that the argument could also be made for the Dundalk area as well. The

term 'city' is one that is immediately understood by international investors and the case for the M1 corridor as a 'tri-city' region ought to be considered.

Page 28 of this draft gives a revealing insight into the thinking of this government and officials in relation to the development of this region. There is reference to the need to "prepare co-ordinated strategies for Dundalk and at settlement level to ensure that they have the capacity to grow sustainably and secure investment..". This passage must be clarified to include the same commitment to Drogheda, especially in light of the fact that the Dundalk area houses close to 30 IDA-backed projects, many of significant scale, compared to eight, and falling, in Drogheda. The skill levels of workers in Drogheda are substantial and the high levels of commuting to work from the area needs to be rebalanced.

I am reminded that the designation of Drogheda as a 'regional growth centre' in the initial plan happened only after a campaign which I helped lead in order to halt the effective relegation of Drogheda to 'third-tier town' status alongside urban areas in the regions (with populations of circa 10,000 people), as envisaged in the first draft of this NPF.

The inclusion of Drogheda as a 'growth centre' was a politically motivated afterthought by then Housing Minister Simon Coveney TD and it can be argued cogently that little or no practical benefit has been derived from Drogheda having this designation.

Population growth and the expansion of the area is happening in spite of, and not because of, the current iteration of the NPF. The danger is that it is occurring in a haphazard way, with local employment opportunities limited and pressure being created for local school, health services and in terms of early-years provision.

It is abundantly clear that during the lifetime of the NPF, Dublin has continued to grow unchecked and the hoped-for growth of scale anticipated for Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford has not occurred. Allowing the small city of Drogheda to achieve its full potential provides an eminently achievable and sustainable counter-weight to the primate city, a vision envisaged as far back as the 1960s.

## DERELICTION & VACANCY

An enormous step- change and cultural and legislative shift is required if we are to end the scandal of vacancy and dereliction. The current NPF mentions 'dereliction' twice, and this draft refers to the problem on ten occasions, largely in reference to the current government's modest programmes such as the URDF, and the Town & Village Renewal Schemes.

We cannot create sustainable city, town and village centres if we do not;

- extend the Living Cities initiative to areas such as Drogheda
- change the legal definition of dereliction in the Derelict Sites Act
- Streamline the Compulsory Purchase Order system and introduce innovations such as Compulsory Sales Orders
- Resource local authorities to do the CPO operations they aspire to undertake
- Give the Revenue Commissioner responsibility for collecting derelict sites levels.

ends.

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**Documents Attached:** No  
**Boundaries Captured on** No  
**Map:**