



Comhairle Contae **Lú**
Louth County Council

Draft Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES)

23rd February 2019

Louth County Council Submission



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Introduction

Louth County Council welcomes the preparation, publication and public display of the Draft RSES (November 2018) for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA). The Draft successfully incorporates the vision and policy objectives of the National Planning Framework (NPF). The Council agrees in principle with the settlement and economic growth strategy for the Region, as provided for in the published document and as encapsulated in the vision statement:

To create a sustainable and competitive region that supports the health and well being of our people and places, from urban to rural with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all.

Growth Strategy (Chapter 3)

The growth strategy for the Region sets out the key locations for population and employment growth. The role of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and the regional centres, of Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk, is acknowledged and supported in the Draft RSES, as two of the key growth enablers for the region. The Growth Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region will *inter alia*:

- *Facilitate the collaboration and growth of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor*
- *Target growth of our regional growth centres of Athlone Drogheda and Dundalk as regional drivers.*

The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor

In the matter of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor Louth County Council acknowledges and supports the following inclusion, Section 3.2 'Growth Enablers for the Region' in the Draft RSES text.

The Growth Enablers for the Dublin-Belfast Corridor include:

- *Compact and focused growth in the regional growth centres of Drogheda and Dundalk to grow to city scale*
- *Drive in the linkage between Dundalk and Newry to strengthen a cross border synergy in services and functions*
- *Improve accessibility and service by rail, road and communication between Dublin and Belfast*

It is acknowledged that the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor is a key element in the development of the Draft RSES. It is further acknowledged that the Corridor has the capacity to provide the only potential paired city European growth pole of scale on the island: reaching a European benchmark 5 million population target to compete with similar city regions in the EU. It is further recognised that the imperative to counteract BREXIT with a proactive spatial economic policy adds to the significance of the Corridor. We note in particular National Policy Objective 44:

In co-operation with the relevant Departments in Northern Ireland to further support and develop the economic potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor and in particular the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network and to promote and enhance its international visibility.(NPF, February 2018)

It is clear that further development of the linear Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor by providing alternative accessible locations for setup or relocation of indigenous businesses and FDI within the urban centres identified in the Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry cross border network will complement the national growth engine in Dublin.

The regional drivers of Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as urban centres of population and employment growth

Louth County Council endorses the translation into the Draft RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region of the National Planning Framework designations of Dublin and the regional centres of Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk, as the principal drivers of regional growth. The methodology adopted in the Draft RSES underpinning the settlement and economic growth strategy is evidence based and logical. The Draft RSES clearly defines the urban centres of scale that have the potential to achieve greatest agglomeration and sustainable productivity growth using a transparent evidence base. The adoption of an asset-based approach to underpin the settlement and growth strategy for the Region is welcomed and supported.

Development of an Asset-Based Approach:

In developing the Growth Strategy for the Region, there has been a strong recognition of the need to integrate an evidence driven asset-based approach to the identification of settlements which have the greatest capacity and potential for growth and to act as engines for wider regional growth.

Drogheda and Dundalk are urban centres of significant scale. Drogheda has a population of 42,347 (2016) and Dundalk and Environs Plan area has a population of 39,004 (2016). They are the largest towns in the State. It is welcomed that the existing scale of Drogheda and Dundalk and their potential to grow sustainably to city scale is recognised. The vision for both towns to achieve city scale as provided for in Section 3.2 'Growth Enablers for the Region' will be supported and promoted by Louth County Council and in the instance of Drogheda in collaboration with Meath.

In tandem Drogheda and Dundalk are uniquely located between the Dublin and Belfast metropolitan areas with access to the deep labour markets in both city

regions. The existing population and employment agglomeration in Drogheda and Dundalk and collectively within the cross-border network of Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry will support and promote RPO 6.4 (Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor):

Support the collective planning and development of the large centres of employment along the main economic corridor, in particular Drogheda and Dundalk.

Settlement Strategy (Chapter 4)

The settlement strategy 'People and Place' prioritises the designations identified in the NPF as national and regional drivers, namely Dublin and Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk, respectively. The regional drivers, located outside the Dublin metropolitan area, are in addition to Dublin, critical to the implementation of effective regional development as set out in the NPF.

Furthermore the acknowledgment of the role of the regional drivers within the broader Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry cross-border network is welcomed: Drogheda and Dundalk have the potential to form part of a sustainable network of centres of scale, including Newry, connected by public transport within the Region and within the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. It is appreciated that the location of Drogheda and Dundalk provides for enhanced cross-border interactions which if promoted can help to realise the growth potential of Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry as an important cross-border network for regional development. Louth County Council will support in collaboration with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council through the existing MOU, and otherwise, and with all other stakeholders the progress of this vision.

Urban Area Plans (UAP)

The Council welcome the preparation of the strategic urban area plans (UAP) for Drogheda and Dundalk, as provided for in the NPF, the NPF Implementation Road Map of July 2018 and in the text of the Draft RSES:

Drogheda

RPO 4.8

A cross-boundary joint Urban Area Plan (UAP) shall be prepared by Louth County Council and Meath County Council to provide a coordinated planning framework to identify and deliver strategic sites and regeneration areas for the future physical, economic, social development of the town to ensure targeted compact brownfield / infill growth of a minimum of 30% and ensure a coordinated approach is taken to the future growth and development of the town.....

Dundalk

RPO 4.15

An Urban Area Plan (UAP) shall be prepared by Louth County Council for Dundalk to provide a coordinated planning framework to identify and deliver strategic sites and regeneration areas for the future physical, economic, social development of the town to ensure targeted compact growth of a minimum of 30% is achieved.....

Target Population Growth

In the context of the regional drivers, the vision provided for Drogheda and Dundalk in the Draft RSES is that Drogheda and Dundalk will perform the function of regional centres of population and employment growth each individually with a population target in the Region of 50,000 by 2031. Louth welcomes the incorporation of population targets rather than population caps, which will support National Policy Objective 5:

Develop cities and towns of sufficient scale and quality to compete internationally and to be drivers of national and regional growth, investment and prosperity (NPF, February 2018)

Targeted Area Regeneration Drogheda & Dundalk

Louth County Council has prepared urban design visions for the physical, economic and social regeneration of the Westgate area of the historic town centre of Drogheda and the Longwalk area of Dundalk. Their inclusion in RPO 4.8 and RPO 4.15 is welcomed on pg. 49 and pg. 51, respectively. Both of these projects have secured funding under the URDF. In tandem the Council has commenced the public realm regeneration project on Clanbrassil Street in Dundalk, which will support RPO 4.15 in general, and in specific in improving accessibility and sustainable mobility in the town centre by enhancing modal choice through integration of transport modes. The targeted area regeneration of Westgate in Drogheda and Longwalk in Dundalk will support and promote the following: Drogheda RPO's 4.8 (strategic site & regeneration), 4.11(balanced growth), 4.12 (urban tourism destination), 4.13 (social inclusion) and Dundalk RPO's 4.15 (regeneration), 4.17(Strategic employment location), 4.18 (DKIT), 4.20 (social inclusion).

The amendment of RPO 4.8 is suggested to include an objective to achieve within the growth vision for Drogheda the implementation of the Urban Design Framework Plan for the Heritage Quarter, Drogheda (2013). The amendment of RPO 4.15 is suggested to include within the growth vision for Dundalk an objective to achieve the implementation of the Dundalk Urban Design Framework Plan (2008), or as may be revised as part of the Urban Area Plan process.

Smaller Towns and Villages

It is considered that the identification of Drogheda and Dundalk as regional drivers of growth is a viable and sustainable growth framework for their functional catchments

in Louth and beyond the County boundary. This strategy will provide for the spatial and economic development of these large towns themselves to city scale, the measured development of other towns and villages in the County and the extensive cross border and cross boundary rural hinterland.

In Louth, the population allocation must be informed by the future housing needs of all urban settlements including Level 2, 3 and 4 settlements in County Louth. All of the designated settlements act as the service locus of their immediate rural hinterlands and are the sustainable locations to promote compact urban living. In instances housing development on serviced sites abutting the build urban footprint can be an attractive alternative to one-off housing in the countryside. It is considered that the RSES should include a RPO which would acknowledge the existing pattern of development in smaller urban settlements and the role of serviced sites in urban settlements in providing an attractive alternative to one-off housing development in the rural hinterland. In this regard Louth County Council supports the inclusion of RPO 4.51.

Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategy (MASP) (Chapter 5)

Louth welcomes the MSAP for Dublin, which is the first statutory metropolitan regional plan for Dublin and its CSO defined metropolitan area. The Council acknowledges that Dublin is the engine of national and regional growth and that the proper planning and sustainable development of the Dublin Metropolitan Area will promote and enhance the growth of the broader region and in specific the key enablers of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.

Economic Strategy (Chapter 6)

The economic strategy sets out Guiding Principles for location of strategic employment areas that include access to; sustainable locations; serviced sites; relocation opportunities; connectivity; proximity to Third Level; diverse local economy

sectoral mix; emerging specialist clusters and cross industry chains. In the context of the comparative advantage of Drogheda and Dundalk both are target locations for international and domestic investment for the following non-exhaustive reasons including:

- Existing agglomeration effects in identified economic sectors including fintech and pharmaceuticals embedded in resilient diversified local economies;
- Proximity to the deep labour markets of metropolitan Dublin and Belfast;
- The availability of young and skilled local talent and the availability of up-skilling at accessible third level institutions including DKIT in Dundalk and third level institutions in Dublin;
- The potential for business to grow in locations proximate and easily accessible by rail and road to Dublin and Belfast City centres with available serviced and zoned lands but without the growth constraints evident at the city core;
- The availability of international connectivity through Dublin and Belfast airports, Drogheda Port, Greenore Port and Dublin Port;
- Economies of scale resultant from proximity to other urban centres of scale on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor;
- Latent spare capacity in infrastructure including water services;
- Universal broadband access for business.

It is acknowledged that regional growth centres will serve as focal points to gain critical mass and to deliver positive impacts to their surrounding areas and enhance overall regional and national growth.

Connectivity (Chapter 8)

The Council welcome the inclusion in Road Projects for the Region of the N52 Ardee bypass and the N2 Ardee to the south of Castleblaney in section 8.4 'Transport Investment Priorities'.

It is important to recognise the significance of Drogheda Port as a commercial port within the EU Core Port Network. The status of Drogheda Port within a wider national and European context is crucial to future funding potential for enhanced connectivity with the wider EU. It is noted that the Port Access Northern Cross Route (PANCR) is not included in the list of critical road infrastructure to be delivered to achieve the objectives of the RSES, as provided for in Section 8.4 'Transport Investment Priorities'. The delivery of this link route to Drogheda Port from the motorway network will enhance regional and national connectivity. In tandem it will facilitate port relocation and will remove unnecessary port traffic from the town centre supporting compact growth in Drogheda town centre and the Drogheda Docklands.

The inclusion of the PANCR in the EMRA Strategic Road Network objectives would support the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor objective set out in RPO 8.9, which references the EU Ten-T network, while enhancing the international visibility of the Corridor as mandated in National Policy Objective 44:

In co-operation with the relevant Departments in Northern Ireland to further support and develop the economic potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor and in particular the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network and to promote and enhance its international visibility.

Quality of Life (Chapter 9)

The Draft RSES recognises that place-making is an essential link between spatial planning and facilitating improvements to people's quality of life while developing places that are attractive to live, work, visit and in which to invest. The Draft RSES acknowledges that planning for the regeneration of historic town needs an integrated approach that balances the protection of the built heritage and the sustainable development of historic urban areas with the needs of modern living and takes account of the community and key stakeholders.

The Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines (December 2018) acknowledge that historic environments can be sensitive to large scale and tall buildings. Planning Authorities must assess the existing character and setting of a place, which will establish the sensitivities of a place and its capacity for development or change and define opportunities for new development and inform its design.

Louth County Council is implementing urban design visions for the regeneration of the Westgate area of the historic town centre of Drogheda and the Longwalk area of Dundalk. Both of these projects have secured funding under the URDF.

Infrastructure (Chapter 10)

Water Infrastructure

Further and additional to Louth County Councils "Settlement Statement of Capacity" for Drogheda, submitted to EMRA in May 2018, in regard to potable water it is noted with reference to RPO 10.3 that investment in the provision of potable water is required in order to support the development of Drogheda as a regional driver of population and employment growth due to constraints presently identified.

Regional Hospital for the north-east

Essential infrastructure should include an RPO to support the development of a regional hospital for the north-east. It is suggested that the location of the regional hospital should be the subject of further spatial analysis in order to determine the optimum location. This is in the context of targeted population growth in the north-east, as provided for in the settlement hierarchy in the NPF and as distilled in the RSES.

All-island Cohesion (Chapter 11)

The recognition that the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor is the principal agglomeration on the island with the potential to achieve a European growth designation of scale to compete with other European growth centres of 5 million in population is welcomed. The requirement for collaboration and the recognition of the cross jurisdiction nature of the Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry cross-border network is acknowledged. The objective of enhanced linkages between Dundalk and Newry to strengthen a cross border synergy in services and functions is also welcomed. The vision of enhanced synergy, complementary growth and cross jurisdiction collaboration is endorsed and supported by Louth. It is considered that this vision of the Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry cross-border network is of heightened relevance in the context of BREXIT.

Conclusion

Louth County Council supports the settlement and economic growth strategy for the Region published as the Draft RSES. The inclusion in the Draft RSES of matters submitted in previous submissions made by Louth is noted and welcomed.

In conclusion Louth County Council supports in principle and in detail the content of the Draft RSES with minor alteration proposed, which may be given due consideration in the preparation of the final RSES document.

