

Laure Antoniotti

From: Cllr Darren O'Rourke (MCC Ashbourne MD)
<[REDACTED]>
Sent: Tuesday 22 January 2019 23:18
To: RSES
Subject: Meath Sinn Féin submission to the East and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
Attachments: Meath SF submission to draft RSES.pdf

A chara,

I write on behalf of myself and my 7 Sinn Féin councillor colleagues in Co. Meath:

Cllr. Sinéad Burke, Navan Municipal District Cllr. Eddie Fennessy, Navan Municipal District Cllr. Michael Gallagher, Kells Municipal District Cllr. Johnny Guirke, Kells Municipal District Cllr. Eimear Ferguson, Laytown/Bettystown Municipal District Cllr. Caroline Lynch, Trim Municipal District Cllr. Maria Uí Ruairc, Ratoath Municipal District

Please find attached the Meath Sinn Féin submission to the East and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

Address for correspondence: Cllr. Darren O'Rourke, Brookhaven, The Riggins, Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath A85 E060

Is mise,

Cllr. Darren O'Rourke
Ashbourne Municipal District
T: [REDACTED]

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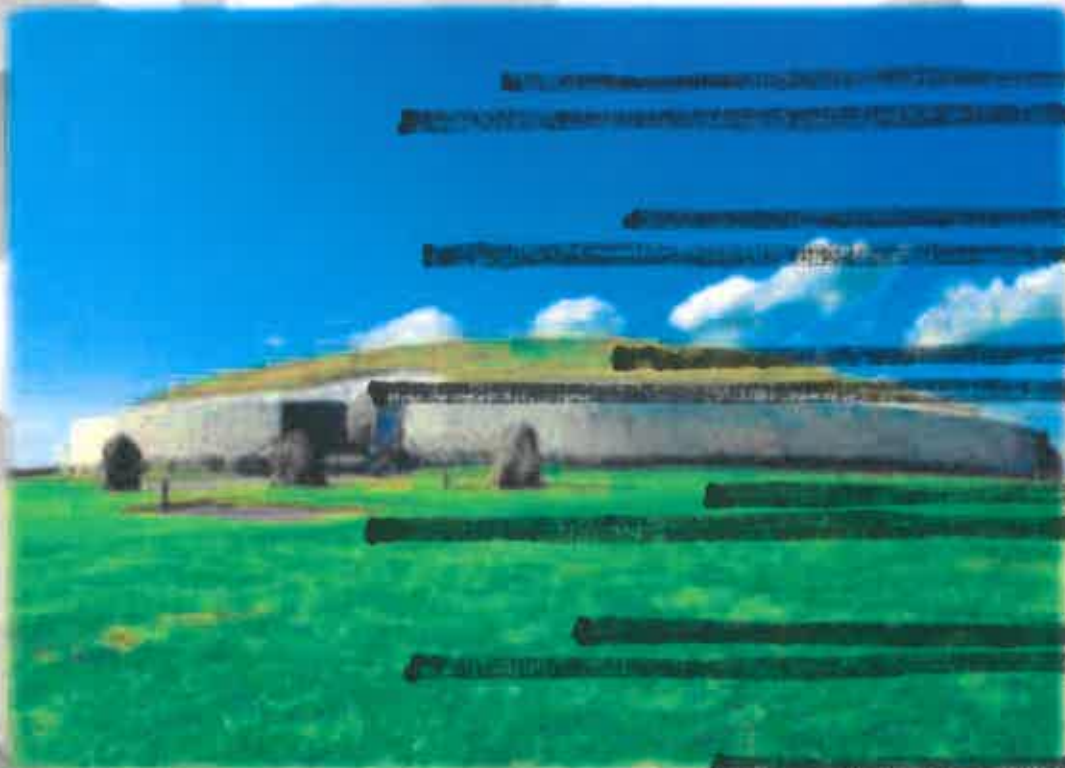
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Meath Deserves Better *Tá níos fearr tuillte do Chontae na Mí*



Meath Sinn Féin submission to the
East and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA)

Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

Ennair 2019

Ar DO Thaobh



OnYOURside

A chara,

We, the Sinn Féin Group of 8 councillors on Meath County Council write to:

- 1) support Meath County Council's submission to the East and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and
- 2) make our own substantive points

Is sinne,

Cllr. Darren O'Rourke, Ashbourne Municipal District,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cllr. Sinéad Burke, Navan Municipal District,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cllr. Edward Fennessy, Navan Municipal District
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cllr. Michael Gallagher, Kells Municipal District
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cllr. Johnny Guirke, Kells Municipal District
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cllr. Eimear Ferguson, Laytown/Bettystown Municipal District
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cllr. Caroline Lynch, Trim Municipal District
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cllr. Maria Uí Ruairc, Ratoath Municipal District
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

At the outset, we express serious concern at the continuing prospect of population caps in Co. Meath. We welcome the fact that the population projections included in the Appendix include headroom of 25% and understand that this can be supplemented by additional headroom of 25% and, further, that this can be applied regionally and locally at RSES and City and County Development Plan Stage. This is an important advancement on previous drafts of the RSES and is absolutely essential for Co. Meath. We believe, however, there remains insufficient clarity on this issue and, related, that there is a distinct lack of detail in the draft document regarding future occupancy rates in projecting future household requirements. These points should be clarified.

We appreciate that the RSES is an ambitious document but, at a very fundamental level, we believe it may be unrealistic to allocate arbitrary population projection on settlements and without appropriate regard for past experience. We are concerned that unrealistic population targets may leave the RSES resigned to the dusty shelves of the Custom House or elsewhere. To ensure this document has the potential to deliver on the agreed objective of sustainable development it must have credibility. We note Meath County Council's paragraphs in relation to the policy shift in the National Planning Framework and share their concerns regarding 'regional parity'.

The population of Meath is increasing rapidly. There are now nearly 200,000 people living in the county and that's likely to increase to 250,000 people in the next 30 years. This has led to significant pressure for housing in the county with 3,000 people on housing waiting lists, many for as long as 8 years yet Meath is the lowest funded Local Authority in the state per head of capita. Rent is increasing in Meath at a higher rate than any other local authority in the state.

Meath has a disproportionately young population: while the county accounts for 4% of Ireland's population, 4.6% of the children of the south of Ireland lived in Meath in 2011.

We support Meath County Council's submission to the EMRA draft RSES and recognise the importance of the specific points they raise regarding Meath's social and economic development in recent years and the considerable growth that has been experienced. This has presented the Council with significant challenges to keep pace.

The need to include Ashbourne and Ratoath in the Dublin Metropolitan Area. We fully support the Council's call in this regard and believe they have put forward a very strong case where they show that both Ashbourne and Ratoath have the characteristics and function of Metropolitan settlements and are de facto part of the Metropolitan Area. It is long-recognised that Ashbourne, for example,

was 'transitioning away from a dormitory hinterland to a more urbanised, metropolitan character'. This is the language used in the last Regional Planning Guidelines. We believe it is unacceptable that the case would be ignored. Indeed, as Meath County Council have so clearly presented, the case for Ashbourne and Ratoath is far stronger than some settlements already in the Metropolitan Area. Indeed, Meath has only 1 centre in the Metropolitan Area while other, equivalent, counties have more. This is a deeply unfair anomaly. We would further request that the trio of Ashbourne, Ratoath AND Dunshaughlin should be considered for inclusion in the Metropolitan Area, straddling as they do, 2 major road networks (N2/M2 and M3). We believe there is an urgent need to review the areas included in the Metropolitan Area.

The contradictions now presented in the current and future development of Dunboyne: Under Variation No.3 of the County Development Plan parity of esteem was given to the development of the lands in Dunboyne North with the Town Centre lands. This is a position that Sinn Féin supported and continues to support. It is essential from our perspective, and from the perspective of Meath County Council, that the situation established by Variation No.3 of the CDP 2013-19 is restored in the final iteration of the RSES document. We are aware that ongoing negotiations are taking place with landowners in the town centre but we believe that they should not be afforded the very privileged position of vetoing development opportunities, including the prospect of a rail-based live-work community, in Dunboyne. Further, we cannot understand why Dunboyne has not been included along with Bray, Maynooth and Swords to provide relief for Dublin City and Suburbs as provided for under NPO68 of the NPF. This is a completely unexplained and unacceptable anomaly and has very significant knock-on effects on the population targets provided for Co. Meath. This should be rectified in the next draft of the RSES.

Navan is our County Town and we believe it's position in the draft RSES is underwhelming in the extreme. We support Meath County Council's argument that they have employed, in co-operation with elected members, and evidence-based, plan-led approach to the town's development. They have identified and secured development area and they have attracted investment. Much more needs to be done and we believe the RSES needs to properly assist Meath Co. Co. and its members to continue this work. The Council have identified more lands for economic development as outlined in their own submission. All of this is consistent with Variation No. 3 of the County Development Plan. Again, we believe the draft RSES needs to be more explicit in its ambition for Navan. Furthermore, we believe the lack of progress on the Dunboyne to Navan rail-line is extraordinary. It is completely unacceptable. Progress on this issue is essential for the social and economic

development on Navan and of Co. Meath. The hinterland is huge. We want to see a clear time-framed commitment on the Dunboyne-Navan rail line.

Train Line: Meath people commute further than any other county. At rush hour the traffic is at a crawl at the Meath Dublin border which is miles out from Blanchardstown. Yet Navan is the largest town in the state without a rail line and there is no plan for one any time before 2045.

The only line that is actually operational in central Meath at present is the Tara Mines to Drogheda line. It is estimated that each train removes the equivalent of 40 HGVs from the road network. The NTA have refused to transform this back into a passenger line despite the fact that it would allow for transport from Meath to Belfast as well as Meath to Dublin. It was also extremely disappointing to see this issue put on the long finger in the recent Ireland 2040 plan.

In rush hour the return commute from Navan to Dublin now often takes 3 hours a day. Furthermore, there is an environmental cost to our limited train network. Ireland likely to be fined up to €610 million by 2020 for missing greenhouse gas targets. Ireland could face fines of up to €5.5 billion by 2030 if it fails to bring forward measures to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions in line with EU targets. It is expected that there will be between 10% and 16% increase in CO2 emissions in the transport sector before 2020. Global temperatures are expected to increase from between 2.6 to 4.8°C by the end of the century leading to untold environmental damage and deaths. The Dublin-Dunboyne railway should be extended to Navan in such a way as to maximise its use for residents from Dunshaughlin, Ratoath and Ashbourne. The currently proposed route south of Dunshaughlin is wrong. There is insufficient commitment to the Navan rail. This is a major omission and we believe completely contrary to the spirit of the document. If Meath is to develop in a sustainable and progressive way it is essential that the Navan-Dunboyne railway is prioritised. This would have a huge impact on the lived experience of thousands of residents of county Meath. It would provide the opportunity for a far better commute and would serve the growth areas of Navan, Ratoath and Dunshaughlin in particular but also their hinterlands. Work-life balance would be far better. Access into and out of the county would be far better. And the impact on the environment would be very significant.

We believe the draft RSES fails to recognise the real potential of **Drogheda**. Drogheda is Ireland's largest town and we share Meath County Council's opinion that the town will attract in excess of its 50,000 target population by 2031. That compounds our opinion, then, that the Southern Environs of Drogheda are under-represented and under-appreciated in the draft RSES. There is little or no reference to the Southern Environs in the draft RSES despite the record of successful residential and employment delivery in the area and the presence of an IDA business park in the area. This is

something that needs to be addressed. Laytown/Bettystown/Mornington is a thriving community that reaches in to South Drogheda. To achieve balanced, sustainable development and to realise the potential of the Dublin-Belfast corridor it is essential that the vision for Drogheda is amended to realise its full potential. Inclusion of the South Drogheda Environs is an essential part of that. Furthermore, another anomaly which must be addressed in the draft RSES is the fact that reference is made to the preparation of a Joint Urban Area Plan for Drogheda between Meath and Louth County Councils. The potential development lands that have been identified are all in the jurisdiction of Louth County Council?!

Kells and North Meath: We believe it should be recognised that this is an area that is very significantly under-resourced. Indeed, in the Teagasc Rural Towns Index (2014) Oldcastle finished 291st out of 302 rural towns in terms of infrastructure, environment and jobs. Nearby Athboy didn't fare much better, finishing 280th. This reflects decades of under-resourcing in terms of Government – intervention, roads, transport infrastructure, etc. – and we believe the communities are suffering as a result. We believe the draft RSES continues in this vein and fails to recognise the importance and potential of rural communities. We need broadband investment. We need roads investment. We need energy infrastructure investment (the North South Interconnector should proceed UNDERGROUND). We need jobs. It must be recognised that 35% of the landmass of Co. Meath lies north of Navan town, our county town. The draft RSES has nothing to say on this area. We believe this is a rich and vibrant area that holds huge social and economic potential. People want to live and work in North Meath. We believe the access to the M3 motorway and access to a very large rural population, spanning into Westmeath, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth should be recognised and developed. Kells town is the largest urban settlement in this area and it's potential to drive social and economic development. We must have some appreciation, some understanding, of the types of lives people want to live. That must inform our planning strategy and we believe the draft RSES comes up very short in this regard.

There is no vision or clarity on the future of the region's Gaeltachtaí – **Rathcairn and Baile Ghib** – both located in Co. Meath. This is an important shortcoming of the draft RSES. It is essential that the unique culture and heritage of our Gaeltachtaí are recognised and nurtured. This will not happen by chance, yet they barely earn a passing mention in the draft RSES. This is completely unacceptable. The Gaeltacht regions have a social, cultural and economic potential that has been ignored and neglected. The next draft of the RSES should make specific commitment to the Gaeltachtaí.

We believe that the completion of the **Maynooth** Outer Orbital Route (MOOR) is compromised by the complete absence of any reference to development of land in County Meath in the draft RSES. All areas identified for growth in Maynooth are located in County Kildare. Future development in Maynooth is dependent on the delivery of a number of key pieces of infrastructure in particular the Maynooth Outer Orbital Route (MOOR). This is a significant anomaly and omission. We believe that the draft RSES should be amended to reflect the important potential of the Maynooth Environs in Co. Meath.

Stamullen and Enfield: We believe there is a clear contradiction between the Meath County Development Plan (particular post-Variation No. 3) and the draft RSES regarding settlements at Enfield and Stamullen. Meath County Council set out a vision for the towns of Enfield and Stamullen in Variation No.3 of the County Development Plan. This was endorsed by the members of the Council and supported by the Department of Housing and Local Government. This vision sought to capitalise on the potential of the Maynooth and Dublin-Belfast economic corridors, respectively, and see both Enfield and Stamullen thrive. In recent days alone, we have seen how this conflict between local development strategy and regional/national is in conflict when a proposed link road between Stamullen village and the M1 motorway was approved by Meath County Council but opposed by Transport Infrastructure Ireland and ultimately An Bord Pleanála. This is a contradiction that must be rectified. In the case of Stamullen, the weakness of the draft RSES in relation to South Drogheda further compounds the problem. We should be seeking to let the population and future population of these areas benefit from the potential for economic growth. Instead we seem to be condemning them to a future of commuting. This is inconsistent with the stated objective of creating live-work communities.

The potential of **Trim** to be the economic engine in the south-west part of Meath is not realised in the draft RSES, nor is the potential for the creation of livework community in the town. Trim is an area of very high demand and is of unique importance in terms of history, tourism and (having a very large hinterland) employment. The development of the Dunboyne-Navan railway line would make a huge difference to commuters in this area and would change the nature of work. The Council are in the process of investing significantly in arts infrastructure in the town which, again, will contribute to a better quality of life for residents. It is essential that the RSES supports Meath County Council in this work.

In addition, we:

- welcome the inclusion of Slane bypass in the draft RSES but believe this should be extended to the N2/A5 and include a front-loading of funds for the bottleneck at Kilmoon Cross-Rath Roundabout. This upgrade would have significant economic benefits for the area including at the Tayto Park complex.
- welcome the inclusion of the Laytown-Bettystown link road in the draft RSES.
- welcome the inclusion of the N3 from Clonee to the M50 in the draft RSES.

Boyne Greenway: Meath is blessed with one of the most significant internationally recognised tourism resources in the country. The 70 miles of the Boyne Valley is littered end to end with internationally recognised historic and heritage sites. Unfortunately, Meath is grossly under exploiting this resource. Most tourism in the county consists of a day tripping bus arriving from a Dublin hotel to visit Trim Castle and Newgrange and then returning to Dublin for dinner and to spend the night. Walking and cycling tourism are booming internationally despite the down turn. The Camino de Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain is an example of a tourist attraction growing in popularity every year. The Western Greenway has proven to be a shot in arm of the economy of Mayo. A walkway and cycle way from the source of the Boyne to estuary needs to be developed in the coming years in order to provide a valuable tourism product in the county that will bring thousands of tourists into the county for up to 10 days. A project such as this would be a boon for Hotels and B&Bs, restaurants, bars, shops and activity centres throughout the county. It would significantly increase employment, business and standards of living in the county.

Book of Kells: There are 4 volumes of the internationally renowned Book of Kells. All 4 are located in Trinity College in Dublin. 1 of these volumes on view in Kells, Co Meath would deliver an enormous boost to the county with regards tourist numbers. It is a cultural and local asset that cannot be ignored, the potential of building a tourism strategy around this proposed move cannot be underestimated.

Regional Hospital: The building in a suitable location of the planned Regional Hospital in Meath must be a priority and we are encouraged to see this noted in the draft plan. In the meanwhile, every effort must be made to protect current hospital services in Navan until the new hospital is up and running. In 2008 the HSE under Professor Drumm commissioned a report to identify the optimum location for a new regional hospital for the mid north east. The report stated that Navan was the most logical location. Due to a lack of funding at the time the hospital was not built. Navan remains

the hub of the mid north east and due to the massive population increase logic dictates that Our Lady's Hospital remain a fully function hospital with a 24/7 ED until the HSE build a new Regional Hospital in the Navan area.

The absence of a clear investment programme in the form of a capital programme as an integral part of the draft is a fundamental weakness particularly with respect to ensuring an adequate provision of public service, transport and economic opportunities.

The document does not give enough focus on the all-Ireland dimension. It lacks vision and firm targets for the development as truly inter-regional 'National' framework. This is most evident in the lack of focus on the Dublin-Derry strategic infrastructural links and investment strategies across the EMRA and neighbouring regions, including the border region and north of the border. We welcome the commitment to the Dublin-Belfast corridor but believe it too lacks clarity.

The document is blind to the spatial dimension of social and economic disadvantage and as such, if implemented as currently drafted, would simply serve to further entrench that disadvantage.

In order to make Meath a well-planned, and complimentary county to Dublin, we submit the following points on future planning developments:

- **Front-load social and community infrastructure**

The south-east of county Meath has, like many areas within the commuter belt and greater Dublin region, seen exponential increases in population and housing development in the past number of years. The coordination of this development by the various responsible authorities has been severely lacking. Massive housing estates have been built without adequate social or community infrastructure. Schools, roads, water infrastructure, public transport, public green space (the list goes on) were all secondary considerations. This is something that need to be addressed in this planning document. Central government should introduce rules for regarding the commitment to essential social and community infrastructure alongside new houses. Developers, for example, should not be allowed sell subsequent phases until previous phases are complete and community infrastructure should be "front loaded".

We must move away from developer led infrastructural development.

Green Spaces and play space

Future planning in community spaces, housing, rural and urban areas must incorporate suitable and adequate green spaces and play spaces as per the government National Child Play Policy.

There has been a plethora of research indicating the importance of public green space to health and well-being. Provision of high quality public green space for communities should be of the highest priority and this reflected with necessary legislation, guidelines, rules.

Good planning and investment will lead to Sustainable rural communities

Demographic and population projections highlight the potential of a very serious threat to rural communities right across Ireland. The human cost of this, especially for older people, may be very significant. It is essential that the new NPF has tangible measures to tackle this.

The lack of high quality and high-speed Broad band throughout the county and in particularly Rural Meath is costing jobs. The national roll out of broadband must be expedited immediately.

The lack of high quality and safe roads throughout the county and in particularly in rural Meath is costing jobs and compromising rural community's capacity to sustain and encourage development and growth. The Meath rural road network must be upgraded.

Urban regeneration

The strategic plan on the regeneration of derelict sites must be expanded and funded adequately. Consideration and purpose to this would revitalise urban centres, prevent anti-social behaviour and encourage dual purpose buildings, encouraging a return to "over the shop" accommodation.

Planning for disabilities

All future projects both civic and infrastructural would be disability proofed.

We would expect and be recommending that all current and Infrastructure projects must be considered and planned on an all island basis

Planning and the Environment

That all large developments be compelled, in planning regs, to install sustainable energy measures (eg solar) in new builds - not just state owned. Also RWH systems in each building by installed at build stage. This to operate in conjunction with mains water system.

It is essential also that a sustainable waste management plan for the region is developed. Currently Meath has an incinerator at Carranstown and a major landfill at Knockharley as well as facilities elsewhere. We believe the current waste management policy for the region is failing and Meath has, in recent years, been forced to take additional waste due to shortages of capacity elsewhere. In addition, there is a major SID application in for Knockharley Landfill which should be opposed on the basis of sustainable develop in the interest of the environment.

Education

With the increasingly high population in Meath and its surrounding area and considering the lack of a 3rd level educational facility in Meath

The economic case for a better deal for Meath

Meath County Council and its elected members are engaged in supporting economic development in Meath in an evidence-based and planned way. Recognising our historic difficulties, a key goal is to facilitate maximisation of employment within the County. To do this the Council developed and launched (in 2015) the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022. In 2016, Variation No. 3 of the County Development Plan incorporated key tenets of the Economic Strategy as they related to land use planning into the Meath CDP in 2016. We have outlined above the contradictions we now see between Variation No. 3 and the draft RSES (esp. in Dunboyne, Enfield, Navan and Stamullin). This focus on economic development by the Council and its members has had strong backing and support and since the launch of the Economic Strategy significant new FDI projects have been delivered (Facebook, Shire, Aramark). We believe this marks definite progress but that there are considerable challenges.

Major economic challenges

Meath remains one of the most poorly funded counties across all areas of provision. Meath County Council has the lowest income per capita, the lowest expenditure per capita and the lowest staff numbers per capita.

In most metrics funding in Meath has not kept pace with population growth and as a result in most areas per capita funding in Meath is near or at the bottom of the list. Meath has also not kept pace in terms of job creation and now more Meath workers leave the county every day to go to work than work in Meath. Meath is the only Local Authority area in the state where this is the case. Meath receives less enterprise investment than comparable counties. Meath County Council requires more government funding. In addition, our IDA Centre consistently attracts one of the lowest numbers of visits by foreign investors every year and must be made a priority. That said, local businesses are rising to the challenge, however a strategic plan to develop more business parks and innovation centres must be produced to accommodate and work with this local drive and ambition.

Despite progress, Meath continues to exhibit high, and unsustainable, outbound commuting and has the lowest jobs-to-population ratio in the EMRA. Meath needs to be supported out of this position. We don't believe the draft RSES does this anywhere near sufficiently.

There is an imbalance of employment in the EMRA – dominance of Dublin growing and without significant and targeted intervention through the creation of live-work communities, the dominance of Dublin will continue to grow. (IDA Ireland/EI have identified housing shortage as constraint on further jobs growth in the EMRA.) The RSES therefore needs to take a much more ambitious approach to economic development in respect of the following key settlements in Co. Meath – Ashbourne, Ratoath, Dunboyne, Stamullin and Enfield.

A very strong and cogent case has already been advanced for extending the Metropolitan Area of Dublin to include Ashbourne and Ratoath, which currently have outbound commuting rates to the Dublin Region well in excess of 50% and similar or even higher compared with other settlements in Kildare and Wicklow that are already included in the DMA. Nevertheless, these settlements have strong and unique economic development potential, and potential investor interest, necessitating their inclusion in the Metropolitan Area, which will aid in unlocking their economic potential

Furthermore, state agencies must be an important part of the RSES implementation process and implementation of the RSES must be tuned to employment demand and accommodation of skills.

And finally: Meath's Population to Local Employment Ratio is 0.52.

Based on 2016 figures, Meath has the highest outward commuting rate in the EMRA, using CSO population and POWSCAR data (2016). Meath continues to have a disproportionately high population share or a disproportionately low employment share, which is unsustainable. The relatively low ratios in the Meath towns illustrate the heavy reliance on Dublin, which is likely to continue to 2040 and beyond without intervention. **We need the draft RSES to assist Meath County Council and its elected members in addressing these unique challenges in order to provide for sustainable development and to deliver liveable, healthy and thriving communities.**
