

Heather Cooke

From: Anthony Moore <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 23 January 2019 16:14
To: RSES
Subject: Submission on Draft RSES
Attachments: Submission to EMRA 220119.pdf

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find attached hereto my submission in relation to the above matter, concerning my home town of Drogheda.

Best wishes.

Anthony Moore

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

22nd January, 2019

Re: submission to Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Plan (the “draft RSES”) regarding the development of Drogheda

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a Fianna Fáil local election candidate for Drogheda Urban and I make these submissions in connection with the above, in support of my home town and future city of Drogheda.

Drogheda’s location

Drogheda, located on the River Boyne, is the largest town in Ireland and is rapidly developing to city status, especially when viewed alongside the population centres on the East Meath coastline, namely Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington. According to the 2016 census, there are approximately 83,000 inhabitants of Drogheda and its environs, with the population being evenly split by the banks of the Boyne. This represents an increase in population of 78.77% (46,451 to 83,042) in the twenty years since 1996, at a time when Ireland itself has only grown by 31.22%.

Drogheda’s economic potential

Drogheda is placed at the highest level (Large Growth Town 1) of the Settlement Hierarchy in the Louth County Development Plan 2015-2021. Drogheda is strategically located to attract jobs and investment and to alleviate the strain on the Greater Dublin Area in terms of service provision, particularly housing.

Drogheda sits on the M1 motorway and on the Dublin-Belfast train line. This means that it is located just 20 minutes from Dublin Airport, which attracts 29 million passengers annually, and 25 minutes from the Dublin Port Tunnel. It is the largest settlement on the Dublin-Belfast Corridor and is growing rapidly, for instance, at three times the rate of Waterford City.

Drogheda has a relatively young population and, importantly, a well-educated population. The Drogheda Institute of Further Education offers courses in a variety of areas and, in time, has potential to develop further. Contrary to perceived wisdom, Drogheda is not a commuter or dormitory town, as only one in five of its inhabitants works more than 45 minutes away from home. Rather, jobs growth has taken place in and around the town and this demonstrates its capacity to respond well to targeted investment.

The bulk of its economic activity is at the tertiary or service level, with 9,000 jobs in that area, representing 58% of employment, followed by jobs in industry at 40%. It has significant terms of office space and is therefore well-placed to attract service industries from particularly in the light of Brexit, which will likely see foreign companies in the service industry move from Britain to Ireland.

Drogheda – a bespoke solution required

Despite being Ireland's largest town, Drogheda suffers as a result of straddling counties Louth and Meath. This means that key decisions on its future, whether in the areas of its status, its tourism potential and its economic development, are made in places as far away as Navan and Dundalk. It is administered by two IDA Regional Offices and it lacks any IDA, Enterprise Ireland or LEO offices.

One way of redressing this would be to have greater cooperation is needed between Louth and Meath County Councils, but this seldom happens. It is therefore clear that what is needed for Drogheda is the creation of a bespoke administrative area which will cover the town and its environs and enable decisions concerning the development of Drogheda to be made by a single body, thus ending the disastrous state of affairs which sees Drogheda fall between two stools, as it were, in the manner outlined above.

Drogheda – ripe for expansion

Drogheda has the land available to absorb further population growth and to cater for investors. There are 355 hectares of undeveloped residentially zoned land within Drogheda and the Northern Environs, and a total of 124.88 hectares of zoned land available for employment use in Drogheda Southern Environs. This far exceeds what is currently required.

Importance of Port Access Northern Cross-Route in developing Drogheda

Crucial to this is the development of the Port Access Northern Cross-Route, which is a 3km road leading from the M1 motorway to the north of Drogheda, running to the port. Plans for this were approved as far back as 2005 but, up to now, the project has been stymied by lack of government funding. Construction of the PANCR will open up access to a 254-hectare land bank and unlock the development potential of Drogheda, with houses being built to accommodate a population increase of 20,000, with accompanying amenities and job opportunities. This would constitute a great boost for Drogheda's internal economy and enable pressure to be taken off Dublin, with families and employers being able to relocate to Drogheda.

Drogheda – excellent public services

There is a significant level of public service provision in Drogheda, most significantly Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, the de facto regional hospital for the north-east. This operates as the acute hospital for the north-east region and provides other significant medical treatment

and services which ordinarily would have to be obtained in Dublin, such as oncology day services and cardiac care. Elective procedures generally take place in the Louth County Hospital, only 20 minutes north on the M1 motorway.

The Courts Service opened a new courthouse in the town in late 2017, which sits adjacent to Drogheda Garda Station and comprises two courthouses, office accommodation and holding cells. This befits the importance of the town and the wide variety of legal services available in it, covering all areas of law.

There is also a waste-water tertiary treatment plant in Drogheda capable of servicing a population of 100,000, and which serves Drogheda and East Meath.

Drogheda – a place to party and have fun

Drogheda is also a fun place to live. It has significant amenities for its population, including cinemas, bars, restaurants, nightclubs and shopping centres. For those who like outdoor pursuits, it has beautiful riverside parks and woodlands, and only a few miles distant are some of the most beautiful beaches in Ireland, such as Termonfeckin, Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington. A wide variety of sporting activities are also catered for in the area, spanning GAA, soccer (with Drogheda United F.C. set to build a magnificent new stadium) and rugby, not to mention golf, including the world-renowned Baltray Golf Club, which has hosted the Irish open, and Seapoint Golf Course in Termonfeckin. Culturally, there is an array of activities, including choirs, galleries, musical groups and theatres, capable of suiting all tastes.

Drogheda – a cultural feast for all ages

As befits a town founded in 1194, Drogheda gives its inhabitants a sense of history and identity. It sits on Fáilte Ireland's new tourist trail, "Ireland's Ancient East," and its tourist industry can expect to grow accordingly. It has a wealth of historical buildings, including the iconic Norman-built St. Laurence's Gate, the surviving walls of the town, Millmount, Magdalen Tower, and the Old Abbey. Barely a few miles from the town is Newgrange, a World Heritage Site, and the early Christian settlement of Monasterboice, which boasts outstanding Celtic crosses and a round tower.

Drogheda's welcoming spirit was evident to all in last year's Fleadh Cheoil, when the town greeted over 400,000 guests who enjoyed a magical week of music and song on the banks of the Boyne, earning accolades galore. We are looking forward to the return of the Fleadh this year. We are also ideally placed to take part in Fáilte Ireland's new "Samhain" festival, scheduled to begin this coming October, and centred on a number of sites in Meath close to our town.

I am gravely concerned at the content of the draft RSES which states at page 48 that "The vision...is that Drogheda will act as a Regional Growth Centre with a population target in the region of 50,000 by 2031". As has been pointed out above, Drogheda's population already exceeds 40,000 and, taking into account areas immediately adjacent the town, exceeds 80,000 inhabitants. Failure to acknowledge this and amend the draft to reflect the true position can only render any such content in the final report irrational and prejudice the conclusions contained therein regarding Drogheda's development potential, which will undermine the town's ability to attract jobs and investment in the years ahead.

In my submission, the information I have set out above shows that Drogheda and its environs are poised to become a major driver of economic growth into the future and constitutes compelling reasons for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Authority to acknowledge Drogheda as a prime location for development in the coming years.

Yours faithfully.

Anthony Moore

Fianna Fáil Local Election Candidate
Drogheda Urban