



*“Anyone can build a new building...Only some can build a new culture”*

[www.themilldrogheda.ie](http://www.themilldrogheda.ie)

**Largest and fastest growing towns – CSO Press Release May 2017,**

*“**Drogheda**, with a population of 40,956 (up 6.2% since April 2011) remained the largest town in Ireland. Swords (39,248) and Dundalk (39,004) complete the top three. Ennis (25,276 persons) remained the largest town in Munster. Sligo with 19,199 persons was Connacht's largest town, while Letterkenny (19,274 persons) was the largest town in the three Ulster counties. The latter three towns experienced a slight decline in population since April 2011”.*

[\(http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/presstatementcensus2016resultsprofile2-populationdistributionandmovements/\)](http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/presstatementcensus2016resultsprofile2-populationdistributionandmovements/)

## **The Greater Drogheda Area:**

### **Designation as a City & Primary Development Centre**

**Date:** November 9<sup>th</sup> 2017

**From:** Drogheda Enterprise Centre Ltd t/a The Mill Enterprise Hub (Breannan Casey – Business Development Manager)

**Address:** Newtown Link Road, Drogheda, Co. Louth

#### **About Us:**

The Mill's mission is to promote a culture of innovation and enterprise to everybody in our community (Drogheda, South Louth, and East Meath area), and work with other relevant organisations across the region to promote these aims. The supports include training (personal & business skills), coaching and mentoring, access to state of the art office space, guidance from an experienced Centre Manager, sign-posting to sources of finance, and being part of a 'can-do' community.

We're a registered Charity with a Board of voluntary Directors from the private and public sector.

The Mill Phase 1 building, completed in October 2013 was a significant milestone and proved that the Drogheda region is truly entrepreneurial, and has delivered significant entrepreneurial support on the ground. The Phase 2 building was completed in December 2016, and has been equally successful with 95% occupancy projected from April 2017. Our Capital projects are now fully operational, comprising of a 15,000 sq. foot centre of excellence campus.

We have benefited from Capital and Programme donations from local large and small companies including CRH, Coca-Cola, State Street, Flogas and a plethora of smaller SMEs. In addition, we have been supported by Louth County Council and Enterprise Ireland.

In its short existence, the Mill has created a number of critical economic development programmes to foster entrepreneurship in the region, for example:

- M1 Payments Corridor (included in NorthEast Action Plan for Jobs) – Designated region for Digital Payments Industry

- FoodTech programme for companies providing IT and professional services to the Food & Beverage sector
- Illuminate Female Entrepreneurship (partnered with DCU Ryan Academy) for early-stage entrepreneurs,
- IgnYte programme - Supporting young unemployed sector to develop a business idea
- Drogheda Young Innovators – supporting innovative ideas from 9 local secondary schools.

The M1 Payments Corridor (M1PC) initiative, [www.M1PaymentsCorridor.com](http://www.M1PaymentsCorridor.com) is included in the Government's 'North East Action Plan for Jobs', and in Louth Economic Forum's (LEF) Strategy. The M1PC's achievements to date includes:

- Two National ePayments Conferences: October 2015 and September 2016.
- World's First 'Payments Dojo', Oct 2016 – Teenagers examining Digital Payments sector.
- Steering Group formed of industry (State Street, PayPal, Coca-Cola International Services, Yapstone, Vesta), Government Agencies (IDA, Enterprise Ireland, and Academia (DCU and DKIT) to deliver the project's potential.
- *Next Stage: Q4 2017* – Applied for three year's Funding (€1.5 million) via the Irish Government's 'Competitive Enterprise Initiative' Programme to formally designate the region as a 'Payments Corridor' and deliver a range of programmes supporting the sector.

#### **Response to Draft NPF:**

In response to the first draft of the National Planning Framework, which failed to recognise Drogheda as one of the largest urban areas in the State, we wish to propose that Drogheda and its full surrounding urban area in both Louth and Meath be counted and administered as one single unitary urban area and designated as a City & Primary Development Centre in the National Planning Framework / Ireland 2040.

The Greater Drogheda Area (within 10km of town centre) has a **population in the region of 80,000** people straddling both counties Louth and Meath when Drogheda itself and the adjoining Laytown, Bettystown, Mornington (LBM) urban area are combined. The **population is likely to double to 160,000** during the term of the 2020-2040 NPF plan. It makes no sense for these areas to be counted in isolation of one another in either statistical or planning terms. Doing so leaves a huge gap in the services and infrastructure required and actually provided to what is actually one of Ireland's largest

urban areas and deprives the State of an alternative Primary Development Area to counter congestion in Dublin. The Greater Drogheda Area including the town itself plus LBM should be counted as one contiguous interlinked urban area for statistical and planning purposes.

The area surrounding Drogheda stretching from South Louth down through the town itself and on to the Meath Coast is a contiguous urban area that forms a natural geographical entity which should be recognised as one city. *“With 35,960 people now living between Bettystown, Grange Rath, Mornington, Julianstown, and Stamullen, East Meath now has a larger population than Navan, the county town, with its 28,559 residents” – Census 2011,* (<http://www.independent.ie/regionals/droghedaindependent/news/huge-rise-in-east-meath-population-27166404.html#sthash.k8iyacwi.dpuf> ).

Over 40% of the Drogheda area population are between the ages of 20-44 (a higher percentage than the national average) providing Drogheda and the surrounding area with a comparatively higher economically active population.

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Drogheda, as the largest town in Ireland, should be considered a complementary City to Eastern region and Dublin sprawl. It is large enough to be stand-alone urban area which also supports the large population in hinterland, including East Meath, Fingal County, and the adjacent M1 Motorway region. This will be facilitated by improving services, increasing local employment opportunities.

As per CSO press release, above, it is not appropriate for the current draft NPF plan to group Drogheda with 40 other towns of over 10,000 population. The NPF plan should be encouraging the development of Drogheda to alleviate some of the stress on Dublin's infrastructure (housing, traffic etc). Drogheda is already expanding on a natural basis, in comparison to other smaller towns (Sligo, Ennis, Letterkenny) which are declining, according to the 2016 status. Drogheda will not be

able to cope with the growth if it is not supported by the appropriate funding and designated support.

Until such time as the size and population of Drogheda is recognised properly through the recognition of its real status issue the area will not reach its full potential for the attraction of FDI. Drogheda is on a par in terms of surrounding infrastructure and location with parts of Fingal such as Swords and the Airport Zone and major urban centres such as Galway and Limerick but attracts much less Foreign Direct Investment. Drogheda has the potential to be a major economic hub for the North East region with a critical mass of employment opportunities which would end the daily commuting misery into Dublin City for thousands of people in the Louth/Meath/North County Dublin areas and reduce inbound traffic and rail line congestion on the M1/M2 and Northern Rail Line services, using the outbound lanes on the M1/M2/N2/R152 and empty outbound morning trains and buses on northern commuter services.

Drogheda's true size both in urban spread and population size needs to be represented more accurately in census data and national statistics which inform Government and Local Authority decisions on planning, resource allocation and prioritisation for public services and promotion of foreign direct investment. Drogheda's absence from the previous National Spatial Strategy should be addressed by nominating the full urban area as a city and Primary Development Centre in the National Planning Framework.

Drogheda is an ideal situation (geographically & economically) to complement Dublin's dominant economic position, and absorb some of the strain on its resources. As the town with the largest population in Ireland, we believe that we can mirror the 5 cities in offering a focal point to drive growth, and to work with the smaller and larger (Dundalk, Navan, Swords) towns in our hinterland to develop pockets of innovation.

There is not enough suitable office accommodation for FDIs or expanding SMES. The IDA Business & Technology Park in Drogheda has not been developed in the past ten years, and only contains one large company. It is ideally located off the M1, but current IDA capital spend is limited to nine towns. Mill-ers have experienced extreme difficulty in obtaining suitable accommodation in the town of Drogheda.

There is a need to Increase regional infrastructure to match potential:

- Develop Drogheda Port
- Extend Dart service to Drogheda
- Develop Northern Cross road to alleviate port traffic through Drogheda town centre, and divert straight to M1.
- Local bus service between business parks, cycle lanes etc.
- Relieve development pressure on the Eastern part of the Country whilst protecting the key role played by Dublin.

Drogheda can complement Dublin by offering an alternative urban location that is large enough to be self-sustainable, and close enough to Dublin for supporting each other in relation to economic development.

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