

DROGHEDA – Ireland’s 6th City



How a Greater Dublin City can make Dublin City Great again.

I live on the northern fringe of Greater Dublin.

Bettystown is my home, a place where Dubliners & Northerners once holidayed at the beach. We used to be *the country* until Dublin moved North. We’re now the outer ‘burbs

Laytown / Bettystown / Mornington were once small villages and Drogheda, which we adjoin, a medium sized town. That was before the migration of property price refugees from Dublin over the last 2 decades. We now have city scale, but not status.

The **2016 Census** has almost 11,000 people now living along this **LBM** coastal strip, with almost 34,000 in the Laytown / Bettystown electoral district.

Drogheda, our medium sized town, has nearly 39,000 within the town boundaries and over 44,000 in the electoral district.

That’s nearly 80,000 within 15mins of Drogheda city centre.

AGE Group	Laytown- Bettystown	Drogheda	Total Population
PreSchool (<5)	2,778	3,232	6,010
Primary (5 – 12)	5,070	5,663	10,733
Secondary (13 – 18)	2,944	3,686	6,630
College (19 – 24)	1,744	2,737	4,481
Working (25- 64)	17,726	23,486	41,212
Retired (> 65)	3,490	5,248	8,738
Population	33,752	44,052	77,804

Source : 2016 Census Small Area Population Statistics

The Fingal constituencies of Balbriggan & Swords with combined populations of 125,000 + border us to the south and beyond that Dublin.

What has this to do with anything ?

In terms of size we have a larger population than Waterford, almost as much as Galway and by 2040 will likely outgrow Limerick. The only thing in the document relating to Drogheda is a photo of the magnificent Mary McAleese Boyne Bridge – which we are tolled to cross from North to South side of the city.

By right we should be treated as a city. Because of proximity to Dublin we are overlooked as irrelevant to the national plan. This has consistently happened over the years, but that is where the fundamental mistake is repeatedly made, not just with Drogheda but with other proximate clusters of towns along the Motorway routes out of Dublin in Kildare and Meath.

Rather than look on a favourable treatment of Drogheda as unfavourable for Dublin – the old “winners & losers” mindset of the 2002 National Spatial Strategy – we have to view it as a Win Win situation.

WHY ? Because Drogheda’s problem is Dublin’s problem and vice-versa. Likewise Drogheda’s solution can be a large part of Dublin’s solution.

As I write, the NEWS (not fake) is filled with the following primarily about Dublin :

- A worsening homeless problem on a scale we’ve never seen before.
- Rents / House prices at Manhattan / Tokyo levels and totally unaffordable..
- Slum landlords acting with impunity cramming people into chicken coop conditions.
- The US chamber of Commerce complaining that thousands of additional affordable homes are needed fast as FDI companies can’t house staff or the staff can’t afford to live there
- Daily gridlock in and around Dublin with underfunded public transport taking turns on strike.
- Irish Water proposing direct re-cycling of sewage back into the water supply to meet demand.

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As an area we impact significantly on the problems of Dublin. Huge numbers of local residents commute daily to add to Dublin's congestion problems. Locals are sometimes forced to compete for accommodation in Dublin to work there as long-term commuting is unsustainable for many.

One joint solution is to encourage people to work where they live. That solves problems for both areas.

As we stand The City of Drogheda has significant locational advantages for development and for easing the chronic traffic, housing and other problems of Dublin.

ACCESS

- We are located on the M1 corridor and are easily reached from Dublin & Belfast.
- We are located along the Dublin Belfast rail line, an hour from Dublin, 30min non-stop on the Enterprise
- We are within 30 mins of Dublin Airport at virtually all times of the day. This is much closer than anyone in South Dublin.
- We have a port in Drogheda and are an hour from either Dublin or Greenore, less than two hours from Belfast / Larne.

At present about 20,000 people daily from the area and further north travel to Dublin to work. Taking these people out of Dublin makes their life easier and allows Dubliners within the M50 to get around more freely.

The M1 is 50% empty each day at rush hour – The Northbound lanes are hardly used in the morning, Southbound much lighter in the evening. To optimally use this key infrastructure if jobs were located North of Dublin, each morning all of Fingal and most of the North-side could be across the Boyne quicker than they could cross the Liffey. Likewise getting home. Don't go with the flow, go against it!. We need contrarian thinking in planning.

PEOPLE

- We have a young and very highly educated workforce.
- Many of the area's residents are originally from Dublin, many graduated and thousands work there

These same skilled people do not dislike Dublin, but do dislike commuting. Employers lose productivity with fatigued commuters and a large amount of unproductive travel time is wasted. Working locally would benefit all.

HOUSING

- House prices are significantly lower than "Dublin", wherever "Dublin" now ends
- There is room for expansion all around Drogheda and the surrounding region..

Little or no co-ordinated planning went into the expansion of the area in the last 30 years. Opportunistic housing development was followed much later by the provision of water treatment, schools and other services. The result however was that communities galvanised and starting to fight for their basic rights and *Meitheal* is still alive in the area.

One of the plan's goals is to have *choices as to where we live, work and study*. Most people are very restricted by price as to where they live, so this mismatch can be addressed by promoting work where they now live.

Looking outside Dublin will have a greater impact on Dublin than many of the plans for Dublin itself.

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Beyond Drogheda

A Vision for Ireland 2040 and a 10 year National Investment Plan are exactly what the country needs. A huge focus on decentralising from Dublin to all the regions will benefit all and a greater emphasis on this is needed throughout the Plan.

The stated desire in the document to *provide fair play and opportunity for all and choices as to where we live, work and study with quality in all aspects of life* driven by *creativity, connectivity and collaboration* are all great and noble aspirations. My immediate concern is that these vague aspirations will see another lifetime squandered if we believe that we can simply create an Investment Plan without first addressing the fundamental dysfunctionality at the heart of many of our current problems. As well as housing and congestion problems in Dublin which apply elsewhere nationwide, other issues that are also in the news repeatedly which need resolution are :

- Massive overcrowding in hospitals, unprecedented waiting lists with chronic shortages of doctors & nurses nationwide. Massively increased training and funding for Irish doctors in our universities is needed along with structural changes – more after care beds, health centres, local access etc.
- Shortages of teachers after more than a decade of increasing student no's and poor conditions of tenure in the profession
- Apple managed to build a data centre in Denmark and are now looking likely to build a second one while a site in Athenry after 2 years hasn't resolved it's planning issues. We can't function like this.
- There are 99 different statutory bodies - so getting anything done in Ireland is a bureaucratic nightmare.
- The courts system is backlogged for years in advance, costs are prohibitive, so matters of major importance go unresolved
- Insurance & compo culture needs to be sorted. It is costing us all in so many ways.
- Irish Water needs somehow to allowed function properly. A country with more rain falling than almost anywhere on the planet can't seem to collect and distribute clean water. Converted sewage is now proposed as an option.
- Our regulatory bodies are under-resourced and largely toothless

These are all long-standing interconnected problems that stem from a lack of overall vision and focussed effort at the highest levels to fix the system. As long as the system is broken, no amount of "Planning" around it will significantly improve Ireland by 2040.

My great hope and wish is that before grandiose Plans and Investments are announced in advance of the next election cycle that some true Visionary will stand up and demand that before we go off chasing a dream of the future that we will fast-track solutions to sort out all of the systemic failures that have led to many of the present nightmares.

I wish everyone involved in the delivery of this plan the very best of luck.