

(See attached file: National Planning Framework submission.docx)

Please find attached my submission to the Draft National Planning Framework document.

Kind Regards,



Shane Cassells T.D.

Meath West Constituency

Fianna Fáil Spokesperson for Local Government

Email: shane.cassells@oireachtas.ie

Newman's Mill, Athboy, Co. Meath
046 948 7599
Leinster House Office: 01 618 3283



Introduction

At this time of the consideration of the Draft plan there are a few areas which I wish to address from my position as a TD for Meath West and the impact of the plan on my county and the towns within it.

As a member of Fianna Fail I have worked with my party on our overall submission to the Draft Plan in terms of considering the impact of the document on the country as a whole.

However, for the purpose of this personal submission I wish to contain my remarks to County Meath and how the spread of population for the Eastern section, outside of Dublin, will be accommodated in places such as Meath and the ambition of creating job creation outside of the capital.

Impact on County Development Plans

One of the recurring themes that is prevalent during debates in Dail Eireann is the impact on small population centres as a result of the closure of services such as Post Offices, banks, religious places of worship and retail operations in village centres.

The very fabric of rural life in Ireland is at stake at this moment in time because if these communities do not have the opportunity to revitalise themselves then the inevitable continuation of services closing will continue unabated.

There is a clear link between these very important topics and the decisions taken in planning documents which has ramifications for generations to come.

We can see from the census figures that while certain towns have experienced massive population surges others have actually experienced depopulation.

That has occurred even in commuter counties such as Meath where the villages in the GDA have exploded into small towns but towns in the northern part of the county have actually experienced depopulation.

These areas are old traditional industrial heartlands and they are battling bravely despite the deficiencies in broadband, roads and other services.

If this plan and the follow up Regional Plans constrains county plans to such an extent that only a small area of Meath will be allowed to grow in order to create this desire for critical mass of population centres the trend of depopulation will continue in areas such as Oldcastle in the north of Meath.

This will consequently place the very survival of their industry, sporting clubs and agricultural sector at risk.

Despite a housing crisis we now have a draft county plan in Meath that is considering dezoning on an extensive scale.

Our county plans in future will be become more subservient to national plans and will be heavily constrained in their drafting as a result.

Having a cohesive set out of plans is all fine but when an overarching plan is scripted in such a way that it has detrimental impacts on county plans to offer these local authorities any chance of making positive changes then it is not in the best interests of our country.

Especially in the examples of counties that have been abandoned by Central Government when it comes to capital infrastructure investment.

If the Capital Plan to be announced shortly, which will effectively act as the engine of the Planning Framework, delivers nothing for a certain area, what opportunities has that county to try and improve the lot of their people if infrastructural spend is not forthcoming from Central Government?

Gateways and Hubs

The draft plan criticises the old Spatial Strategy and the creation of gateways and hubs on the basis that it created the concept of winners and losers among towns.

However, this plan will also create winners and losers by virtue of the fact that the Regional Plans will identify which towns will be allowed to grow.

So there will be winners but they just will not be named in this plan.

Furthermore there is no win for these population centres if the corresponding Capital Plan does not invest heavily in the many commuter towns that have been created over the past 20 years.

In the case of my own county I am specifically thinking of towns such as Navan, Trim and Enfield which have experienced massive population growth but do not enjoy the required level of physical and social infrastructure required to support these population centres.

It would be far more honest of the plan to identify where population centres should grow outside of the identified main cities so that there is an onus on the Capital Plan to produce a corresponding investment programme.

However, by not doing so it is a cop out which allows the Capital Plan to dictate to the NPF and the Regional Plans where the growth is going to happen by virtue of where the Government is going to place investment.

So Government pet projects will now dictate a planning framework as opposed to the other way round.

That should be halted straight away so that an honest appraisal of those areas that need capital support the most actually benefit from public expenditure.

Job creation plan for County Meath & Infrastructural Investment

The draft NPF does not set out a clear pathway on how proposed job creation is going to happen in counties such as Meath and how the spread of employment growth is going to be achieved in counties adjoining Dublin.

Meath has one of the highest figures in the country for people travelling outside of the county to go to their place of employment.

Naturally our proximity to Dublin is a major factor but there is an accepted need to stem this tide and reverse the trend.

Having organised meetings with key stakeholders including the IDA, Enterprise Board, County Chief Executive and others to discuss this issue there is a recurring theme that significant infrastructural investment on a significant level is needed in order to allow Meath to compete.

Investing in the completion of the second phase of the Navan-Dublin railway project has been identified by the IDA as a key item that needs to happen in order to allow Navan to compete on a level playing field.

However, there is no commitment to fulfil this project and this is going to severely hinder Navan and Meath's chances to compete

From a sustainable living point of view the lack of this rail line is also going to impact on the many tens of thousands of people who are making the commute into Dublin for employment.

Having allowed towns in counties such as Meath grow to record levels there is an onus on Government and this plan to support the areas where large population centres have been created.

That is not happening currently and in fact the plan will only further exacerbate that problem.

If the plan cares about how we live, work and enjoy recreational time then there needs to be the required infrastructure – both physical and social – in the towns that are identified to grow to allow our citizens fulfil those ambitions.

The plan needs to look at the current deficiencies in our system before creating additional residential zones in towns that lack the required infrastructure to cater for existing population bases.

Conclusion

I sincerely hope that this draft document allows for an honest discussion on where population centres will be centred outside of Dublin and that there is a clear identification of where investment needs to occur.

If that is not addressed then the Capital Plan is going to act as our de facto planning framework and dictate to it where population centres will grow.

From a national perspective the desire of the document to achieve balanced regional development is a welcome goal.

But there needs to be a clearer view on how this is going to be achieved.

Finally from a Meath perspective the requirement to provide the enlarged towns created over the past 20 years with an adequate level of infrastructure before any further population expansion occurs should be addressed now.

Projects which need to be progressed and identified in this plan include:

- The Navan Dublin Rail Line

- The development of the promised Regional Hospital for the North East in Navan

Kind regards,



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