



16 March 2017

NPF Submissions, Forward Planning Section
Dept. of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government
Custom house
Dublin 1

IRELAND 2040 – National Planning Framework

Dear Sirs

I set out below the submission from Lakeland Dairies Co-operative Society Limited in regard to the above.

Introduction

Lakeland Dairies Co-Operative Society Ltd welcomes the opportunity to input to the new National Planning Framework being prepared. We are acutely aware there have been a multitude of national and regional social and economic plans produced over the past four to five decades.

These include: -

- The Wright Plan (1967)
- The Buchanan Report (1968)
- National Development Plan (2000 -2013)
- National Spatial Strategy (2002- 2020)

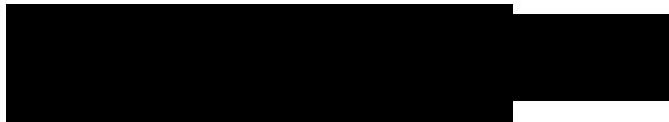
There is considerable learning to be derived from the mistakes of the past, for example, the critical error made in adopting the Wright Plan rather than the balanced regional development approach espoused in the Buchanan report, and which culminated in the creation of new towns/areas, such as Tallaght, Blanchardstown and Ballymun, with many social problems, whilst the jobs available remained in the city.

Colin Buchanan had, on the other hand, adopted a more balanced view of reducing the dependency on Dublin, and recommended: -

- Two national "growth" Centres for Cork and Limerick;
- Six regional "growth" Centres for Dundalk, Drogheda, Athlone, Sligo, Galway and Waterford;
- And, the creation of smaller "growth" centres at Cavan, Castlebar, Letterkenny and Tralee.

How different Ireland (and indeed Cavan) might look today had Buchanan been accepted and implemented?

The National Development Plan 2000 – 2013 (NPD) focussed on the concept of "balanced regional development" with a city centric "gateway" approach (Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford and Dublin). Whilst considerable progress was made in its early years, particularly infrastructural investments, notably roads and transport (e.g. rail), the prolonged recession from 2008 put paid to much of the investment required to achieve the objectives set for growth of the regions.



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The National Spatial Strategy 2002- 2020 (NSS) also set out the ambitious plans for improved social, economic and physical development focussed on an enlarged number of “gateways” including Sligo, Letterkenny, Dundalk and Athlone/ Mullingar/ Tullamore. A range of smaller “hubs” were identified for development and expansion, including Cavan and Monaghan. The overall aims of the National Spatial Strategy are very similar to those of Buchanan – however, as with the NDP, the prioritisation and investment required to develop the gateways and hubs, and to create the critical mass necessary in the selected centres has not materialised (e.g. hubs to have a population of up to 20,000).

We understand the new National Planning Framework (NPF) will replace the NSS – key lessons from past failures must be taken on board!

High Level Overview

It is assumed that the NPF will comprise new regional spatial and economic strategies focussing on a set of investment priorities in economic and social infrastructure, spatial planning, economic and enterprise development (including education, training and innovation).

It is crucial that the severe infrastructural deficit in the regions is comprehensively highlighted and prioritised for investment – in this regard, it is critical that a whole of government, joined up approach is adopted, backed up by annual budgetary provisions against a defined set of agreed National and Regional priorities to redress the situation, leading to the making of real and tangible progress towards the much talked about “balanced regional development and growth”. Otherwise, the entire process will be flawed from the outset, doomed to failure, and thus a waste of time and resources. In that scenario, the rampant progression of the exponential growth of Dublin will continue, to the detriment of most regions of Ireland, leading to depopulation and further marginalisation of people who remain committed to live in rural Ireland. Such an outcome cannot be contemplated.

In preparing the NPF, Lakeland Dairies (which has interests on both sides of the border) strongly recommends that, to the maximum extent possible, an all island approach is adopted in selecting key infrastructural investments and economic planning priorities. The impact of Brexit, whilst still at a very early stage must be factored in at all stages. The border between the ROI and NI runs to 499km , having more than 200 crossing points, and with 177,000 lorry crossing per month, plus 208,000 vans and 1.85m cars (Source : BDO). Some form of border control is inevitable. This will add considerably to operational costs for business, not to mention delays. Companies such as Lakeland Dairies (trading in the milk, food and Agri business sectors) will be potentially the most affected by tariff introduction.

Key Investment Priorities

Lakeland Dairies has taken into consideration national, regional and local priorities in framing this submission. The following are a synopsis of priorities from our perspective: -

1- Road Transport

Virtually all transport of goods in Ireland take place by road, so the quality of our road infrastructure is vital for business, and none more so than our company (which has operations in both jurisdictions).

In this context, our key concerns relate to the need for:-

- (a) Access (from Killashandra)to the M3, with particular focus on the Virginia bypass;
- (b) Access from Cavan to the M2 and M1;
- (c) Enhancement of cross border routes;
- (d) Improvement of local access e.g. Sherock to Bailieboro;
- (e) Upgrading and reclassification of the East / West Route from Dundalk to Sligo (via Enniskillen).

In relation to (e) above, a considerable amount of route planning, combined with some improvement works, has taken place over the past number of years. However, much remains to be done, and this connection is vital to companies operating in the Central Border Region.

2- Energy

Energy consumption and reducing carbon emissions is a major consideration for all commercial operations. We are fortunate that some areas of County Cavan are serviced by Natural Gas. There is obvious potential, using modern technologies, techniques, and components, to extend the grid beyond its current reach at affordable prices. This should form part of any economic plan for our region.

Additionally, as an agriculture intensive region, the potential to extract biogas from animal waste offers real potential, again given technological advances.

3- Broadband

The need for high speed (up to 1 megabit) fibre optic broadband is now a pre requisite to enterprise development in any modern economy.

In Ireland, and particularly in rural regions, its absence means that we are virtually excluded from the internet of things and all emerging business in the computing field. The reality is that broadband now ranks *pari passu* with utilities such as ESB and water /sewerage; so without it new developments will locate elsewhere and existing businesses are being forced to either bi locate or re locate.

4- Education, Training, R&D, Innovation

We recognize that, like many other sectors, education and training has suffered years of inadequate investment, resulting in major challenges now being presented.

The move towards consolidation (of universities), and the establishment of technical universities, through amalgamations of Institutes of Technology (IoTs), is proving to be a lengthy progress.

However, modern industry, and human capital, are choosing to locate in or close to centres of population (mostly Dublin) where universities and other third level institutions are located. Capital flows are also channelled to such locations. This is exacerbating the divide between the cities, towns with IoTs, and other population centres, such as Cavan, which lack any facility of this nature.

Companies such as Lakeland Dairies have a need for its staff to have ready access to third level education facilities, including R&D centres. Proactive third level industry collaboration is a must, and there's a huge deficit in our region for such services. We have an urgent need for an initiative to bridge this gap, which will only be achieved in the short term through outreach and distance learning. We have to think, and work, outside the box, to find a solution. Organisations such as Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre (www.cavanitc.ie) and Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board can play a role here.

Market driven skills development, which is vital to employability of people and maintaining a quality work force, also requires significant prioritisation and investment. Focus on apprenticeships and trades has only re-emerged recently, and this area requires sustained focus over coming years. Market demand must, however be the driver of initiatives in this area.

5- Development of Clusters

There has been much talk in recent years concerning the development, and support, of industry clusters. We have a pre-eminence of food / agri business / building construction materials and engineering in our region which have considerable potential for cluster development. (Cavan / Fermanagh / Monaghan/ Meath)

There is need to develop a coherent plan to: -

- (i) provide tailored supports to develop these sectoral clusters and extract maximum added value through market led production;
- (ii) provide infrastructure (e.g. food premises), skills training, innovation and R& D capability (via connectivity with universities / third level institutes.)

In addition to agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices, the recently launched Action Plan for Rural Development could support this initiative.

6- Second Tier / Tertiary Development Centres

Economic development at present is mostly Dublin centric, and the pull to the East Coast continues unabated.

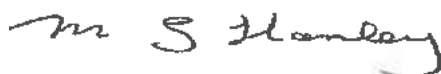
There is much talk about "second tier" cities, particularly in the South West and West. This approach will leave a large swathe of the country isolated from the action.

In our opinion, selection of second tier or tertiary development centres must look beyond the traditional (recent) view and include locations such as Cavan which was identified as far back as the Buchanan Report of 1968. Cavan is only an hour from Dublin. There is potential

to create an economic hub focussed on Cavan as the key geographic centre of population. It is after all, the natural centre on the East West corridor from Dundalk to Sligo, and is also a major hub between the Midlands and Northern Ireland.

I trust the foregoing will be of interest and look forward to further engagement in this process in due course.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael G Hanley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MICHAEL G HANLEY
CHIEF EXECUTIVE