



Institiúid Teicneolaíochta
Baile Átha Luain
Athlone Institute
of Technology

By post and e-mail to npf@housing.gov.ie

29th March, 2017.

Ms. Anne McCoy
National Planning Framework
Dept. of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
Custom House
Custom House Quay
Dublin 1

Re: AIT's Submission to the National Planning Framework

Dear Anne,

Further to my e-mail to you of 15th March, 2017, please find attached AIT's submission to the National Planning Framework.

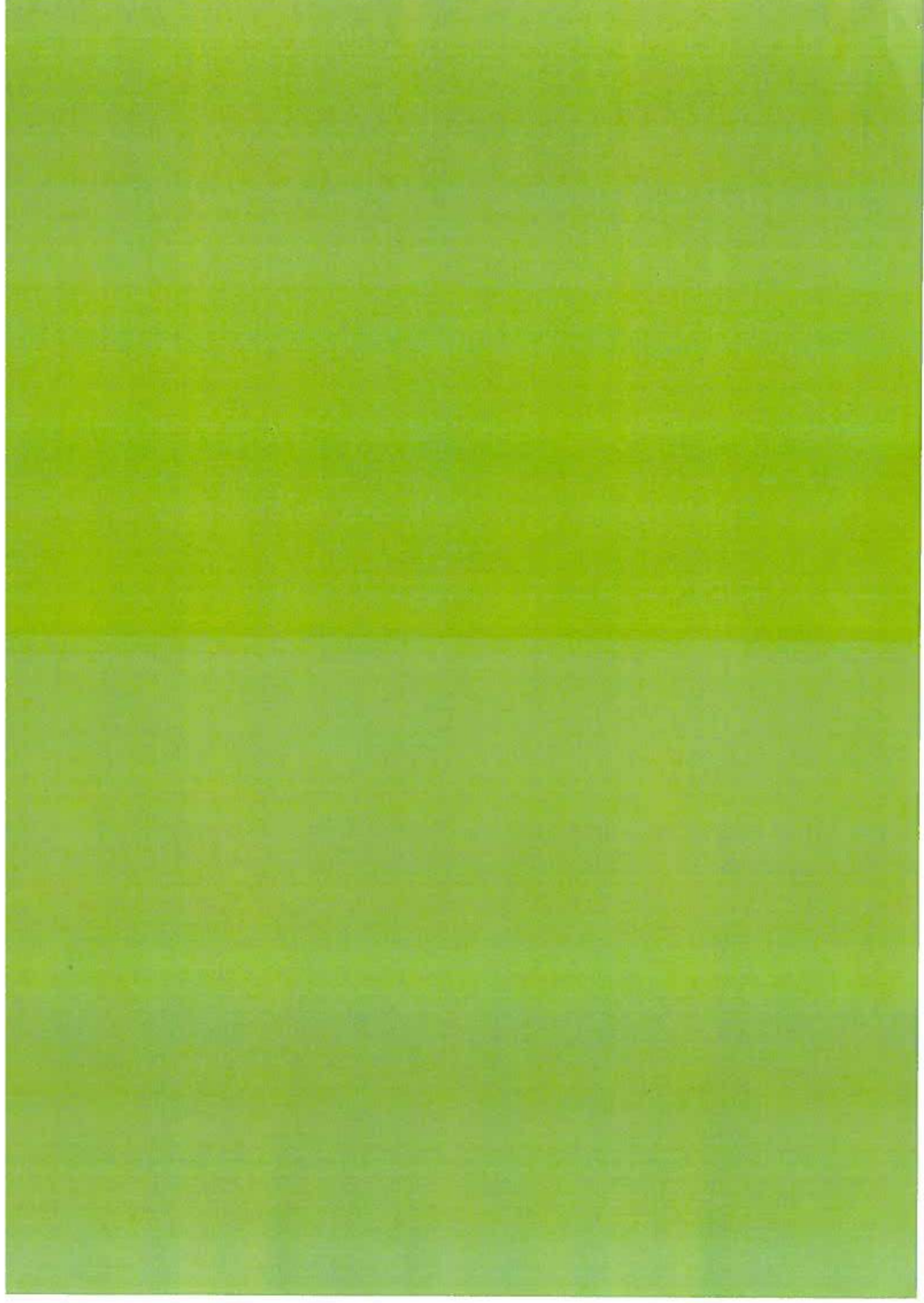
Yours sincerely,

Mr John McKenna
Vice-President: Strategic Planning & Institutional Performance

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Submission to the National Planning Framework by Athlone Institute of Technology

Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) welcomes the forthcoming National Planning Framework and recognises that it has the potential to provide structured and balanced growth for the midlands region. As the region's only third level Institution AIT is well positioned to assist in achieving this growth.

We believe that the miss-match in growth between the greater Dublin region and the rest of the country must be addressed by the plan. The region best placed to achieve this is the midland region. A growth centre in the midlands is essential to act as a "pull factor" for activity to move out from the greater Dublin region. Without this we will continue with over-development in the East.

While there is a myriad of issues involved in this process, AIT wishes to comment on four issues it considers of significant importance.

1. Designation of Athlone as the major growth centre for the midlands.

The midlands is well placed to pull development away from the Dublin Region, but this will only happen if there is a city with a critical mass that will act as anchor for the region. Government, through the National Planning Framework need to lead the way by investing in the region and enabling industries and business to locate into a receptive environment.

2. Connectivity

Significant investment is needed in Connectivity including high speed Broadband, road upgrade and rail investment. High speed Broadband is now just as critical as power and water and is needed throughout the region not just in some major population centres. While east/west road connections are good, the midlands needs further development of North/South and North East/ South West routes. Rail links from Galway and Sligo to Dublin should be high speed links thus reducing commuting time and enhancing the viability and attractiveness of the midlands as a residential location and a region to base enterprise.

3. Designation of AIT as a Technological University for the Region.

Agencies such as IDA and Enterprise Ireland have stated that a University is essential if they are to deliver new investment for the region. On the International scene, the designation "University" is becoming more important and over time non-university institutions will have diminishing recognition. According to world leading expert Simon Marginson "...universities are generally more proactive and more autonomous bodies than non-universities, more capable of anticipating and responding to local needs and taking national and international influences. More is rightly expected and they can get more done, especially in active collaboration with local stakeholders". It is essential that legislation to allow for the creation of Technological Universities is enacted in order to allow AIT to progress to Technological University status.

4. Sustainability

The development of the region by implication will increase the demand on energy resources. To prevent a resultant increase in CO² emissions, it is essential that planning and support mechanisms are brought into effect through planning guidelines and legislation. These actions should be designed to increase the penetration of sustainable energy for Transport, Heating and Electricity. The support mechanisms should provide for facilities with onsite parking to provide

charging facilities in each parking lot for Electric Vehicles. The planning guidelines should mandate inclusion of onsite sustainable electricity generation for charging, on campus use and or export.

Conclusion

Without a plan we will have more of the same, namely, over-development in the East with all the attendant issues that go with that.

Balanced economic development and sustainable growth across the state will only be achieved if there is a concerted effort lead by government together with a coherent plan. The midlands region is key to pulling development out from the Dublin region. We have consulted with regional stakeholders, local industry, state agencies and groups such as Destination Athlone, and the views expressed by them align closely with ours. There is a shared vision amongst us that a city of Athlone with critical mass is the only option that will achieve regional and national planning goals.