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To: National Planning Framework
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Dear Minister Coveney,

This submission is made on behalf of the Fianna Fail Halpin Leech Whelan Cumann in Drogheda for the purpose of contending that Drogheda and its environs, namely South Louth and East Meath, should be identified as an area ripe for economic and demographic expansion between now and 2040, and should accordingly be the focus of government plans to encourage investment and growth in this area over that period.

Drogheda, located on the River Boyne, is the largest town in Ireland and is rapidly developing to city status, especially when viewed alongside the population centres on the East Meath coastline, namely Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington. According to the 2016 census, there are approximately 83,000 inhabitants of Drogheda and its environs, with the population being evenly split by the banks of the Boyne. This represents an increase in population of 78.77% (46,451 to 83,042) in the twenty years since 1996, at a time when Ireland itself has only grown by 31.22%.

Drogheda is placed at the highest level (Large Growth Town 1) of the Settlement Hierarchy in the Louth County Development Plan 2015-2021. Drogheda is strategically located to attract jobs and investment and to alleviate the strain on the Greater Dublin Area in terms of service provision, particularly housing.

Drogheda sits on the M1 motorway and on the Dublin-Belfast train line. This means that it is located just 20 minutes from Dublin Airport, which attracts 29 million passengers annually, and 25 minutes from the Dublin Port Tunnel. It is the largest settlement on the Dublin-Belfast Corridor and is growing rapidly, for instance, at three times the rate of Waterford City.

Drogheda has a relatively young and well-educated population. The Drogheda Institute of Further Education offers courses in a variety of areas and, in time, has potential to develop further. Contrary to perceived wisdom, Drogheda is not a commuter or dormitory town, as only one in five of its inhabitants works more than 45 minutes away from home. Rather, jobs growth has taken place in and around the town and this demonstrates its capacity to respond well to targeted investment.

The bulk of its economic activity is at the tertiary or service level, with 9,000 jobs in that area, representing 58% of employment, followed by jobs in industry at 40%. It has significant capacity in terms of office space and is therefore well-placed to attract service industries from abroad, particularly in the light of Brexit, which will likely see foreign companies in the service industry move from Britain to Ireland.

Drogheda has the land available to absorb further population growth and to cater for investors. There are 355 hectares of undeveloped residentially zoned land within Drogheda and the Northern Environs, and a total of 124.88 hectares of zoned land available for employment use in Drogheda Southern Environs. This far exceeds what is currently required.

There is a significant level of public service provision in Drogheda, most significantly Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, the de facto regional hospital for the north-east. This operates as the acute hospital for the north-east region and provides other significant medical treatment and services which ordinarily would have to be obtained in Dublin, such as oncology day services and cardiac care. Elective procedures generally take place in the Louth County Hospital, only 20 minutes north on the M1 motorway.

The Courts Service is due to open a new courthouse in the town in late 2017, which will sit adjacent to Drogheda Garda Station and comprise two courthouses, office accommodation and holding cells. This befits the importance of the town and the wide variety of legal services available in it, covering all areas of law.

There is also a waste-water tertiary treatment plant in Drogheda capable of servicing a population of 100,000, and which serves Drogheda and East Meath.

Drogheda is also a fun place to live. It has significant amenities for its population, including cinemas, bars, restaurants, nightclubs and shopping centres. For those who like outdoor pursuits, it has beautiful riverside parks and woodlands, and only a few miles distant are some of the most beautiful beaches in Ireland, such as Termonfeckin, Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington. A wide variety of sporting activities are also catered for in the area, spanning GAA, soccer and rugby, not to mention golf, including the world-renowned Baltray Golf Club, which has hosted the Irish open, and Seapoint Golf Course in Termonfeckin. Culturally, there is an array of activities, including choirs, galleries, musical groups and theatres, capable of suiting all tastes.

As befits a town founded in 1194, Drogheda gives its inhabitants a sense of history and identity. It sits on Failte Ireland's new tourist trail, "Ireland's Ancient East," and its tourist industry can expect to grow accordingly. It has a wealth of historical buildings, including the iconic Norman-built St. Laurence's Gate, the surviving walls of the town, Millmount, Magdalen Tower, and the Old Abbey. Barely a few miles from the town is Newgrange, a World Heritage Site, and the early Christian settlement of Monasterboice, which boasts outstanding Celtic crosses and a round tower.

In our submission, Drogheda and its environs are poised to become a major driver of economic growth into the future and the above factors constitute compelling reasons for government to earmark this area for development and investment between now and 2040.

Anthony Moore

Chairman
Fianna Fail Halpin Leech Whelan Cumann
Drogheda