From:	Moate Action Group <​█████████████████>
Sent:	31 March 2017 12:53
To:	National Planning Framework
Subject:	Fw: National Planning Framework
Attachments:	Submission Page 1.jpg; Submission Page 2.jpg; Submission Page 3.jpg; Submission Page 4.jpg; Submission Page 5.jpg

Follow Up Flag:	Follow up
Flag Status:	Flagged

30th March 2017

To whom it concerns

We would like to make a submission on the National Planning Framework on behalf of Moate Action Group and Community Office. We can see the effects of the deterioration in rural communities in the Midlands, and we can also see the commuter movement between the Midlands and Dublin city.

Moate Action Group strongly supports the creation of city status for Athlone, as this will generate a growth centre for the Midlands. We fully recognise that the earlier attempt in the National Spatial Strategy linking Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar was never going to succeed.

We fully support the submission made by Cllr Frankie Keena MCC, in relation to this.

Copy attached.

Moate Action Group
Moate Community Office

Phone : █████████

https://www.facebook.com/moateactiongroup

From: postmaster@environ.local <postmaster@environ.local>
Sent: 31 March 2017 11:47
To: ███████████████████
Subject: Undeliverable: National Planning Framework

Delivery has failed to these recipients or groups:

gcsofficer@housing.gov.ie (gcsofficer@housing.gov.ie)
The email address that you entered couldn't be found. Check the address and try resending the message. If the problem continues, please contact your helpdesk.
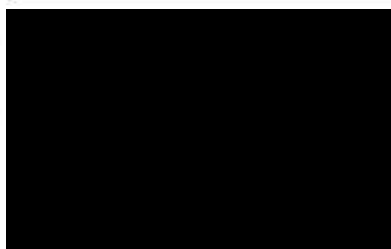

Diagnostic information for administrators:
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From: Moate Act███████████████████
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Return-Path: moateactiongroup@outlook.com

Submission by Cllr. Frankie Keena, MCC,

on the National Planning Framework dated 30th March 2017.

Submission:

Place Athlone as Ireland's Central City at the Heart of the NPF

Dublin has led the early economic recovery phase since about mid-2013, evidenced by increasing employment, population growth and a number of other significant statistical indicators. Today, there is a strong perception supporting hard statistical evidence that (most of) the remaining parts of the state are lagging behind and continuing to feel the brunt of the 2009 economic collapse.

Furthermore, such evidence confirms that the specific benefits accruing to urban agglomeration are city-based and due to the modest sized populations of Ireland's provincial towns, that their capacity to generate "spill-overs" are currently constrained, limited perhaps to Dublin and the wider area surrounding Cork city. Despite the quests to simultaneously assist as many towns and villages within the state, there is a wealthy base of literature supporting the statistical evidence in this increasingly post-industrial digital and post-distributive era: that Ireland's future economic and social development will increasingly depend on city-led growth, for employment, job creation and population growth. The 2016 census provides evidence to confirm this viewpoint, with the fastest growing counties in the country comprising the four admin areas of Dublin, along with the commuter belt counties of Meath, Kildare and Laois and the cities of Cork and Galway.

Thus the central issue here, for the purposes of the new National Planning Framework (NPF) is whether the policy will focus on the abstract pursuit of balanced regional development (BRD) as envisaged under the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) or alternatively, articulate a strategy to develop the cities and larger towns with a view to widen the growth momentum away from the greater Dublin area to the rest of the state.

As a Councillor, I believe that overall state growth will be much stronger if cities and larger towns – are performing to their optimum.

The NSS designated eight regional centres for development, termed as gateways, with Cork, Limerick- Shannon, Galway and Waterford, which were referred to as "existing" gateways, and Letterkenny-Derry, Sligo, Dundalk and the Midlands gateways, which were termed "new" gateways. According to the NSS, *"all of the new gateways outside Dublin existing and new – will have to grow by a considerable factor"* in order to generate or attract "substantial new investment" (Government of Ireland, 2002, p.44).

For the purposes of this submission the focus will be on the required midlands revitalisation measures.

The Midlands Gateway comprises of an amalgamation of three neighbouring towns of similar size [Athlone, urban pop.15, 936; Mullingar, urban pop.15, 621 and Tullamore, urban pop.11, 098; (CSO, 2002)] and range of functions, that for the most part, are of sub-city status. The NSS aim was to develop complementary links between the towns in an effort to attract investment in comparison with cities of similar population size, including Galway and Waterford. However, the gateway groupings lack of true city functions and faculties places it at a disadvantage.

The midlands region of Ireland, I argue, will continue to haemorrhage potential commercial and economic opportunity to the greater Dublin area unless the NPF addresses this issue. Ironically, the better road system that was constructed to channel economic and commercial actively to the regions has had the polar-opposite effect. Instead, communities from further and further away make their way to the

capital, on a daily basis, making the drive which is quickly grid locking our road network.

Analysis of spatial distribution of employment in new firms between 2001 to 2011 show, contrary to NSS objectives, that Dublin accounted for 34.9 percent of all employment in assisted firms in 2001 and 45.9 percent of employment in new firms between 2001 and 2011 (Forfar). The figures for the combined regional gateways were 24.3 and 24.0 per cent respectively, i.e. attracting a disproportionately low share of the new firm employment over the same period. Meanwhile, the figures for the Midlands show 2.0 per cent of all employment in assisted firms in 2001 and 1.3 per cent of employment in new firms between 2001 and 2011.

By any standard it is fair to say that the share of initial employment in the Midlands and its shares of all new firm employment are catastrophic. Dublin continues to claim a disproportionate share of new employment creation, especially in terms of inward foreign investment. Ireland needs a series of strong second tier cities to drive regional economic development and to encourage a more balanced spatial structure. These cities would provide a counterbalance to Dublin's dominance while at the same time acting as a complement to the Capital. Importantly, however there cities would also support regional and rural opportunities.

The development of our existing cities of Cork, Waterford, Galway and Limerick as a means of maximising potential and driving economic priorities as a major urban corridor that can complement and compete more favourably with Dublin is much needed. However, this approach leaves the midlands part of the country without a key urban economic driver.

Recommendations

Therefore, I strongly recommend that Athlone, the most central urban centre in the country, is designated as the midlands regional city. Ultimately this would strengthen the midlands region so that the area could act as a key counterbalance to Dublin. Athlone is the largest town in the midlands region with a population of approximately 25,000 (including population within a 3km radius of the town) and could act as the

catalyst for urban-rural interaction in the region and aim to mitigate the continued shift of population and activity into the capital. The development of Athlone as the key midlands city would also act as a counterbalance to support the ESRI projected population declines in Roscommon and Leitrim over the coming years (ESRI, 2014) by driving investment and economic activity in the region.

The "Athlone City" would see the town expand geographically and economically, delivering the genesis to support other midland towns such as Mullingar, Tullamore, Longford, Portlaoise and Roscommon which would provide the crucial counterbalance of economic growth not only to Dublin but also to Galway.

The next tier of towns such as Moate, Kilbeggan, Kinnegad and Ballymahon would also experience much needed significant development in businesses and services.

It is important to point out that Athlone as a centre has substantially more employment than other towns of its size in Ireland. For instance, Athlone and Mullingar have similar populations but 13,000 people per day work in Athlone while 8,500 people per day work in Mullingar. This shows that Athlone is a major employment centre for the midlands even at this present time which indicates that it has the potential and attractiveness for future expansion to City status.
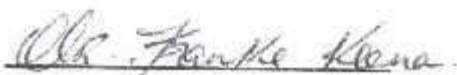
The Athlone location on the river Shannon and as the gateway to the border, midlands and western region is placed as an ideal gateway hub to provide for the development of the midlands region over the lifetime of the NPF. The ongoing development of Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) provides the third and fourth level educational dimension of research and development desired by inward investment decisions-makers. The 370,000 people who live in this midland region must be prioritised in the new framework and the recognition of Athlone as the key regional city presents the best platform to do this.

The designation of Athlone as a city and gateway under the National Planning Framework would result in a revitalised specific growth focus to the entire midlands region. Importantly, Athlone possesses the capacity to expand and such an expansion would provide critical mass and allow the midlands part of Ireland to play a central role in the states future, where the population could rise to 6.5 million, within the republic over the next twenty years.

In order to make sure that the National Planning Framework is a success when adopted I feel the clustering of similar type industries in designated cities should be encouraged. This will dilute the competition within the regions. For instance, at the moment Athlone hosts a large number of Pharma, Medical and IT Companies and when the IDA identifies similiar multinational companies who are looking to come to Ireland then they should be encouraged to locate in the Athlone and wider area.

I argue that the midlands must be allowed develop so that people can work and live in the area. If the NPF were not to designate Athlone as a city and gateway then we will be here again in twenty years-time debating the hollowed out midlands.

Now that's a prospect I don't want to contemplate.

Cllr. Frankie Keena
Member Westmeath County Council