

### **3 VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Dundalk is the administrative capital of the northeast region and the administrative, business and shopping capital of County Louth. It is the largest town in the County with a population of 25,744 in 1996, which placed it as the sixth largest urban area in the Country after Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

Dundalk has significant potential to expand and develop on a regional scale in the coming twenty years, due to a number of factors as follows;

- Ideal situation on the Dublin to Belfast economic corridor, equidistant between the two cities.
- Gateway status under the National Spatial Strategy.
- It benefits from recently improved rail links to the two cities, and will benefit from the completion of the M1 motorway link between these two capital cities during the plan period (2003 to 2008).
- It has few constraints to its long-term development - there is ample land surrounding the town to allow for a significant physical expansion of the town.
- the new Dundalk sewage treatment plant will have the capacity to treat effluent for a population equivalent of 179,000 persons.
- the new political climate between the North and South could also be of great benefit to the image of Dundalk as a place to live and work.

The people of Dundalk would appear to be keen to see Dundalk capitalise on these strategic advantages, to grow in size and to provide additional jobs, housing and other commercial, social and recreational facilities in order to achieve city status. The new political climate with a growing potential for peace between the north and south will be of significant importance to the image of Dundalk as an attractive place to live, work and recreate.

#### **3.2 Background to the Vision for Dundalk**

The vision for the new Dundalk and Environs development plan is to capitalise on the strategic advantages and to set out an expansionary, yet sustainable, development pattern.

This Plan takes the first step in setting out a framework to help achieve the vision. The vision is based on issues raised at the consultation phase and throughout the plan-making process. Possibilities are outlined as part of the visioning process for how Dundalk could develop in the future. The plan allows for the long-term growth of the town. The population forecasts are consistent with and primarily based on, the forecasts developed in the County Housing-Strategy.

There is substantial optimism for the future growth and expansion of Dundalk throughout all sectors of the community. The Dundalk Chamber of Commerce in their Dundalk Technology City Initiative report also suggests that Dundalk could grow significantly for the same strategic reasons, should the new inward and internal investment take place. The consensus emerging from the public consultation is that this level of growth in the long term would be possible should Dundalk be successful in capitalising on its strategic advantages.

There may also be potential for further growth, as a regional gateway if Dundalk is identified for such a role in the National Spatial Strategy.

### **3.3 Achieving the Vision**

Dundalk has the capability to accommodate a population of 63,000 in the future, much similar to Galway's current population. It has substantial potential for growth on a regional scale, given its location midway between Dublin and Belfast; current levels of growth and planned infrastructure improvements. Dundalk is well placed to acquire city status and indeed gateway status and should have a level of infrastructure and services commensurate with its size and status. Without the high quality infrastructure to accommodate growth, the vision cannot be achieved, nowhere is this more important than in the area of medical and health services.

In the medium to longer term Dundalk could and in most cases *should* achieve;

- University status - with top level educational facilities; the DKIT has an excellent reputation and has the potential to develop and grow significantly; the campus has recently been expanded and new state of art sport facilities provided; there are also plans for as a 'centre of excellence for technology.'- based on plans for the 'city of technology' which will have the potential for developing a media cluster and promoting 'Sports research.';
- Regional Leisure and Sports attraction status - Dundalk has a strong tradition in sports and leisure and has a wealth of Sports and Leisure facilities – Cinema, Dog Track, GAA Pitch, Oriel Park, and the recently completed Swimming Pool. There are plans to develop a Leisure Park with Indoor soccer facilities;
- Standing as a Centre of Excellence for education, research, enterprise and innovation;
- Top-level medical facilities are a basic and fundamental requirement. Facilities should be developed, not only to cater for the current population but should also be developed to cater for a future population of 60,000 plus. These facilities should provide full services including emergency/ day care/ maternity and doctors training functions;
- Regenerated Port; new gateway entrance from north with recreation/ commercial Port facilities and mixed uses;
- Rich cultural life - arts and crafts and retail thoroughfares combined with informal recreational areas/street entertainment and café society;
- Regional status shopping destination - an expanded town centre with the old and the new working in harmony for the ultimate all round shopping experience;
- Integrated transport system - park and ride - the development of a major new public transport hub/ interchange, in close proximity to the town centre, in the long term as the need arises;

### Dundalk and Environs Development Plan

- 'City of technology' status - greater employment opportunities - more high tech and research and development- greater integration between education/ training and local employment generation;
- New sustainable integrated neighbourhoods; with live work areas and facilities and services within walking distance;

The Development Plan sets out the first step in the process of achieving a vision for Dundalk through promoting a balanced sustainable approach to new development. The new development plan aims to direct new employment, housing, and retail and community facilities towards the defined growth areas within the plan area. This will include new land use zoning to the north of the Castletown River.

Dundalk has the potential to be part of the strategic planning solution to the pressure for development. It is ideally located with the potential to emerge as a Regional Gateway in the impending National Spatial Strategy (NSS), as advocated in the National Development Plan 2000 – 2006<sup>4</sup>.

The challenge for development plan is therefore to provide sufficient land, including choice of location, which encourages and supports a level of short-term growth that is consistent with this long-term vision. The new Development Plan will also aim to provide sufficient supporting facilities for this level of growth, including additional infrastructure and land for town centre expansion, recreation and community facilities.

The vision for Dundalk is an all encompassing one, which includes the following aspects;

- Sustainable socially inclusive and integrated communities.
- City status.
- A thriving regional shopping destination.
- A choice of employment opportunities for indigenous and inward investment.
- Improved linkages between enterprise, employment and innovation.
- Regional growth centre with facilities and services commensurate with the role; including educational, medical social and community facilities to cater for an expanding population.
- Reuse, regeneration and recycling of brownfield land/derelict buildings.
- Protection of natural resources and the built and natural environment/heritage.
- Ease of movement/efficient public transport system and reduced dependency on the private car.

The vision and the plan are underpinned by five sustainable development objectives;

- To encourage sustainable transport and mobility concepts.
- To strengthen economic development.
- To promote environmental awareness and responsibility.
- To minimise resource consumption.

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<sup>4</sup> See Addendum One

## Dundalk and Environs Development Plan

- To support social equality and integration.
- To promote an integrated planning culture.

For Dundalk and its environs to operate as a sustainable community it must achieve a stable, diversified and dependable economic base; a level of prosperity that is equitably shared; the provision of education and employment facilities for all; and a clean, healthy and vibrant natural & built environment.

### ***The Plan aims:***

***To provide a forward planning framework which promotes growth and development for the Dundalk Plan area and promotes the establishment of its Gateway status as a regional shopping destination and employment growth centre whilst protecting and, where appropriate, enhancing the natural and built environment and ensuring that development is both sustainable and of high quality.***

### **3.4 Strategic Objectives**

***SO1 Assist in the development of Dundalk's gateway status as a regional employment growth centre & regional shopping destination.***

The plan can help to achieve this strategic objective through ensuring an adequate land supply for employment, retail and commercial development focused on the existing settlement pattern and urban structure. In doing so, the 5-year plan must be placed within a longer-term national strategic framework, ensuring that long-term land supply, infrastructure and service requirements are anticipated and considered along with the associated environmental impact.

The plan allows that sufficient land is zoned not only to accommodate the specific and general uses defined above, but also strategic land reserve areas. These are areas, which are considered of strategic importance to the future growth and development of Dundalk. These areas should be protected from ad-hoc developments, which could affect their future comprehensive development within this first period of 2003-2008, for uses which are identified as required as part of a plan review or uses which are deemed strategically important to the town's growth.

The strategic land reserve also has a function, which could enable the development of the land in exceptional circumstances for a specified use, which would be considered of strategic importance to the development of Dundalk as a regional gateway, and that this development would be in the interests of proper planning and sustainable development.

Uses, which are considered of strategic importance, to achieving the vision for the future development of Dundalk would include,

- Educational/institutional uses/ leisure of a regional scale.
- A factory outlet centre and;

- A major employment use.

When considering if a use would accord with the exceptional circumstances for permitting development within a strategic land reserve, the use should, in the opinion of the local planning authority;

- be of strategic importance to achieving the vision for Dundalk.
- should be for one of the uses identified above.
- should accord with the strategic objectives and the other plan policies.
- be of a scale, nature and design befitting of a strategic use which would accord with the aims of achieving the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

**S02**

***Direct new development to the existing settlement structure; in accordance with the development strategy and other plan policies, relating development to accessibility to promote energy efficiency and helping to secure quality urban infrastructure and services.***

The aim is to promote containment, through consolidating and reinforcing the existing settlement patterns to help ensure an efficient use of existing services, facilities and infrastructure.

**S03**

***Create balanced sustainable communities through balancing economic growth with quality of life and the protection of resources.***

The plan seeks to balance the need to support the economy and provide recreational opportunities with the protection and conservation of the natural environment.

**S04**

***Encourage integrated community developments through state, local authority and voluntary sector partnerships, thus enabling the provision of co-ordinated community facilities and services - (education, recreation and social facilities).***

Community facilities play a very important role in helping to foster a sense of community. There is a recognised lack of community facilities in certain communities within the plan area, which needs to be addressed. It is through such partnerships that needs can be assessed and met.

**S05**

***Protect and enhance the quality of the natural and built environment as an asset to promoting tourism and enhancing the image of Dundalk as a place to live, visit, work and recreate.***

There is considerable potential to develop the tourism industry for Dundalk. The town is strategically located with good communication links and a strong heritage within a picturesque setting. Whilst there is a wealth of natural and historic assets in the plan area, this is for the most part, untapped in terms of

tourism. A balance will need to be struck between the need to promote tourism opportunities while also maintaining Dundalk's status as an attractive place to live, work and recreate.

**SO6**

***Protect and enhance the natural and built environment as an inherent part of the heritage of the Dundalk and environs plan area. Safeguard the natural environment as a resource in its own right and ensure that future generations can have a quality of life equal to our own.***

The natural and built environment of the plan area plays an intrinsic part in the character and success of the region. It must be protected in its own right to maintain a good quality of life for residents and visitors alike.