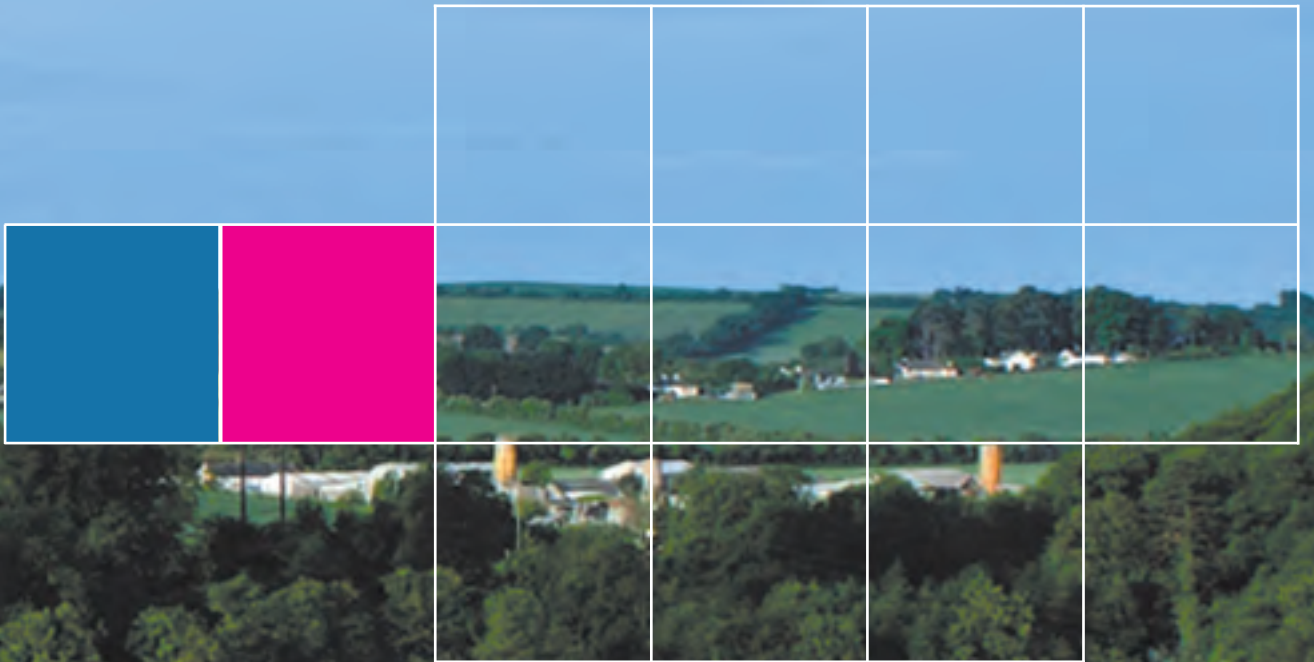




# 3.0 Policy Context



## 3.0 Policy Context

### 3.1 Introduction

There is an extensive range of strategic guidance and policy for land use planning in Ireland. This has been fully examined in the preparation of this Report. The following section sets out a summary of the overall policy context for the Study Area.

### 3.2 National Spatial Strategy, 2002-2020

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS), published in 2002, sets out a twenty year planning framework for the Republic of Ireland, which is designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between regions. It provides a national framework and policy guidance for the implementation of regional, county and city plans. The NSS identifies a number of 'Gateways', 'Hubs' and 'Development Centres' into which future growth will be directed and facilitated. These are dispersed throughout the eight regions in Ireland.

The concept of balanced regional development is central to the NSS. The NSS aims to sustain Dublin's role as the engine of the economy while strengthening the drawing power of other areas, bringing people, employment and services closer together. The overall aim is to provide for a better quality of life for everybody in Ireland through aiming for less congestion, less long distance commuting, more regard to the quality of the environment and increased access to services like health, education and leisure.

The NSS notes that an increasingly mobile, international labour force has certain locational preferences. This has implications for places that try to attract such a highly skilled labour force. The NSS lists some of the elements that contribute to the attractiveness of places in terms of quality of life:

- A thriving, human-scale, cultural and social environment, concentrated around distinctive street patterns, mixes of restaurants, cafés, bars and attractive shops.
- A high quality physical setting in terms of sensitive conservation of heritage buildings, contemporary architecture, street paving, formal and high quality public spaces and parks.
- Pedestrian friendly zones.

#### 3.2.1 Drogheda's Role under the National Spatial Strategy

Under the NSS Drogheda's close relationship with the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) is recognised. It is designated

a Primary Development Centre alongside other towns in the Greater Dublin Area. The NSS states that the role of Primary Development Centres should take account of wider considerations beyond their relationship with the Metropolitan Area, such as how they can energise their own catchments and their relationship with neighbouring regions. A population horizon of 40,000 is recommended for Primary Development Centres to support self-sustaining growth that does not undermine the promotion of critical mass in other regions. The NSS states that:

*"Drogheda has much potential for development given its scale, established enterprise base, communications and business and other links with the Greater Dublin Area." (Chapter 4.3)*

The NSS also recognises and supports the role of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor and records Drogheda's position on that corridor. Overall, the NSS notes:

*"While Drogheda is an inherent part of the Border region its development is strongly influenced by its relative proximity to Dublin. In seeking to develop the potential future role of Drogheda, therefore, account must also be taken of*

- *Drogheda's relationship with its own catchment,*
- *Its role within the Border region,*
- *Its role as a significant port,*
- *Its role in the spatial development of the Greater Dublin Area having regard to the town's close functional and physical links with the area."*

#### 3.2.2 The Role of East Meath under the NSS

Laytown-Bettystown-Mornington are designated in the category of towns yielding a population of 1,500-5,000. The NSS states with regard to these towns:

*"Towns of this scale in the GDA are also generally located on or near the transportation corridors radiating from Dublin and are relatively close to the larger urban areas. While the primary development centres will be the main focus for responding to future growth in the GDA hinterland, these smaller towns cater for local growth in residential, employment and service functions through enhancing the built environment, water services, public transport links and capacity for development in these centres. Accommodating such additional functions must however be balanced with protecting the character and quality of these towns."*

### 3.3 Regional Guidance

Within the overall framework of the National Spatial Strategy, Drogheda straddles two regions. While it is clearly seen as having strong linkages with the Greater Dublin Area, in terms of its location Drogheda is part of the Border region. Reference to Drogheda is therefore contained in both the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border Region and in the guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area.

#### 3.3.1 Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border Regional Authority

The Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) provide a 20-year strategic planning framework for the Border Region. Within the Border Region Drogheda falls into the third tier of hierarchal settlements beneath the gateway of Dundalk and the Hubs of Monaghan and Cavan. It is acknowledged in the Guidelines that special attention should be afforded to Drogheda to drive growth, given its unique strategic position and the fact that it will be driven in part by factors originating outside the Border Region. It is an objective however to facilitate the self-sustaining development of Drogheda despite its peripheral location within the region and its close links with Dublin. It is acknowledged that these links with Dublin may be responsible for driving its future development and as such the scale of growth in Drogheda may well drive the future population horizon for the Border Region over the 550,000 population forecast in the Guidelines.

The Border Region is divided into three sub-regions and Drogheda is categorised within Sub-Region 3 - Cavan, Monaghan, Louth and the hinterland of Northern Ireland. The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor is recognised as a key strategic opportunity for development and links with Navan and the Mullingar/Athlone/ Tullamore gateway are important.

Drogheda's relationship with Dundalk is emphasised in driving the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. Drogheda's extensive base of employment, retailing functions, social infrastructure and amenities are reasons that the Guidelines highlight the town for an appropriate population growth from 50,000 to 60,000 to the period 2020 and beyond. Such growth should be focused on a compact urban form with a balanced allocation of development in both northern and southern environs.

It is stated that the future of Drogheda is dependent on a number of triggers being put in place including the following:

- Location of new high-tech industries.
- Location of third level education facilities.

- Need for improved social and recreational facilities.

The Border Regional Authority supports the ongoing strategic development of Drogheda Port having regard to its potential for the region. It is the objective of the Regional Authority to ensure optimum connectivity to regional and international ports and in particular to support the development of a Drogheda Port Access Route. However, as highlighted in previous reports, no single manufacturing activity or enterprise stands out as a potential driver of economic development in the Drogheda area.

#### 3.3.2 Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area

Whilst most of the Study Area is located within the Border Region it is evident that the Mid East Region (which forms part of the overall Greater Dublin Area) exerts more influence on Drogheda. This is compounded by the fact that Drogheda's southern environs are in County Meath and therefore within the Mid East Region.

The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area divide the overall strategy area into a Metropolitan Area and a Hinterland Area. Drogheda is sited at the northern edge of the Hinterland Area. The Strategy for the Hinterland Area is to channel development into a number of self-sufficient growth towns, separated by areas of green belt with only limited commuting to Dublin in the long term.

A key objective of the Guidelines is to increase employment in the strategic growth centres in the Hinterland Area while at the same time increasing housing output in the Metropolitan Area. This is seen as a necessity to reduce the average distance between home and work throughout the Greater Dublin Area. To this end, jobs ratios (i.e. the relation between jobs and resident labour force in an area) are set to increase for the three local authorities in the Hinterland Area. The majority of new employment is envisaged for the Primary Growth Towns.

The Guidelines point to a number of national economic trends which are predicted to continue:

- *The tendency towards spatial concentrations of technology intensive companies in electronics, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, medical products and software.*
- *The increasing importance of companies in the services sector will have spatial effects in the form of their preference for locations at or close to major points of consumer demand and end clients, plus their requirements for infrastructure to trade in products and*

*services which have a high information content.*

- *Foreign Direct Investment will remain a significant structural feature of the Irish economy, although the character of the projects attracted to Ireland will change over time in response to changes in the advantages offered by Ireland and the evolution of the multinational firms and industries operating here.*
- *The establishment and strengthening of enterprise clusters will require the support of high quality education, skills and research, together with physical infrastructure.*
- *Improved productivity will be central to maintaining competitiveness.*

The four employment sectors considered to be in the best place to drive the economic development of the Greater Dublin Area are Life Sciences, International Services including Financial Services (IFSC) and e-commerce, ICT/ Software development and e-learning/ Digital Media.

The East Meath area is geographically located within the Greater Dublin Area and therefore falls within the remit of the Guidelines. In the overall settlement hierarchy, the Guidelines introduce the concept of Small Growth Towns and Commuter Villages which are the two categories most relevant in the East Meath context.

Laytown-Bettystown-Mornington by virtue of its population size falls within the category of Small Growth Town. The guidelines set out the following key points with regard to Small Growth Towns:

- *They are largely synonymous with the centres identified by the NSS as yielding a population between 1,500 and 5,000 persons.*
- *Relatively small and locally financed businesses are expected to locate in Small Growth Towns; however, other economic investment could be permitted. Retail is likely to be mainly in the convenience category.*
- *Small Growth Towns would likely contain facilities such as a primary and/ or secondary school, as well as a Health Clinic.*

The RPGs further introduce the concept of Commuter Villages. These are different from Key Villages. Key Villages are considered to be 'rural service centres', whereas Commuter Villages by and large serve a dormitory function. By definition, most of the other settlements in the East Meath area fall into this category.

The key points with regard to these settlements are as follows:

- They are located proximate to Dublin City or other Large Growth or Moderate Growth Towns, and are often on or close to significant public roads.

- The future growth of these villages should be curtailed or safeguarded so that they do not act as catalysts to facilitate continuing expansion of the outer suburbs of Dublin City in particular, or other Large or Moderate Towns.

### 3.4 Statutory Planning Policy Context

#### 3.4.1 Drogheda Borough Council Development Plan, 2005-2011

The Drogheda Borough Development Plan takes cognisance of the fact that Drogheda Borough is fast approaching its natural capacity and therefore seeks to coordinate future development of the town with the adjoining local authorities. It expects the Greater Drogheda Area to grow to a resident population of 70,000 by the year 2020. The plan sees the town of Drogheda thriving at the heart of this Greater Drogheda Area

*“to form the natural point for a wide variety of urban functions including Employment, Retail, Leisure, Healthcare, Tourism, Community Facilities, Transportation, Infrastructure and Services. The 2005-2011 Development Plan has been framed with the aim of consolidating Drogheda's 'lynch pin' role within both the envisaged 'Greater Drogheda Area' but also within the wider South Louth and East Meath context.” (Section 1.3)*

The main policies in the Plan in relation to housing are the promotion of higher densities in line with overall government policy and the redevelopment of brownfield sites close to the town centre and near public transport corridors. The Plan notes that large suburban type housing estates are likely to be located outside the town boundary in future.

In relation to employment, the Plan notes that the key challenge is to cater for the anticipated population growth and the need to create more local jobs thereby reversing the unsustainable trend of large numbers of the workforce commuting to Dublin. The main strengths are the improved transport network whereas the weaknesses of the town are the predominance of small manufacturing firms, the lack of substantial Foreign Direct Investment, the untapped potential tourism market and the low participation rate in higher education. In the light of this, some lands near the M1 northern interchange (near Mell) were rezoned from residential to business park/new economy use.

The Plan notes that major improvements in transportation have taken place over recent years with the completion of the M1 Motorway and a new fleet of

trains on the suburban commuter line. The Drogheda Rail Station takes on a central part in facilitating a new zone of high density mixed use development near the station (Drogheda Transport Development Area). The need for a Northern Access Route (in conjunction with Louth County Council) is stressed to alleviate congestion in the town centre, particularly HGVs. The need for a Southern Access Route is also pointed out in the light of Drogheda Port expanding facilities to the south of the River Boyne. This route will be facilitated in conjunction with Meath County Council.

In relation to retailing, the Plan notes that this sector has not always kept pace with development. The strategy provides for the reinforcement and further development of the town centre as the main retail location and in particular the development of the “The Inner Quays” area (IQDA) and the DTDA zone adjoining the rail station. The Plan also notes the possibility of a new district centre as part of the overall retail hierarchy. Furthermore, provisions are made for a retail park on the north-western edge of the town (near the M1 at Mell) where lands were rezoned from 'light industrial' (under the 1999 Plan) to 'Retail Park'.

### 3.4.2 Louth County Development Plan, 2003 - 2009

The Louth County Development Plan acknowledges Drogheda's position as the largest town in the county. The Plan refers to the preparation of a Local Area Plan for the Northern Environs which will accommodate an additional population of up to 20,000. The Plan acknowledges Drogheda's role as a commuter town and the Council states that it is *“anxious that the town should develop as a self-sustaining settlement providing employment opportunities for its inhabitants.”*

The policy for future development of the town is clearly asserted in the settlement strategy for Co. Louth:

*“To promote and facilitate the growth of Drogheda as a major urban centre that can accommodate substantial population growth and act as a driver for development in the south of the county and wider surrounding region”.*

### 3.4.3 Local Area Plan for the North Drogheda Environs

The Local Area Plan was adopted in 2004. It notes that demand for development in the lands adjacent to Drogheda on the County Louth side has increased over recent years. However, many applications were refused in the absence of a development policy for this area and

a deficiency in infrastructure services. The aim of the Plan is therefore to facilitate existing demand and to direct future demand in an orderly, economic, sustainable and coherent manner.

The Plan states that potential exists for a population of up to 20,000 people on the zoned lands. However, the Plan states that it will not be possible to fully develop the lands in the Northern Environs Plan until infrastructure constraints have been addressed and the Northern Access Route has been completed.

The bulk of the lands in the Plan are zoned for residential purposes subject to a Masterplan. To the east and west of the residentially zoned lands there are large tracts of land zoned for employment uses. In addition to this, lands along the North Road are zoned for a 'retail park' and lands adjacent to the proposed train station are zoned for 'mixed uses appropriate to a transport hub'.

### 3.4.4 North Drogheda Environs Masterplan

On foot of the Local Area Plan recommendations a Masterplan has been adopted. This sets out the detailed development framework for an area of approximately 254 hectares of land in three separated but integrated neighbourhoods. The Plan further provides for the Northern Port Access Route and the provision of other essential infrastructure.

### 3.4.5 Local Area Plans for Louth Villages

A number of Local Area Plans have been adopted for villages in the hinterland of Drogheda. After years of moderate increase or even stagnating population, substantial development has taken place in recent years in the villages of Dunleer, Clogherhead, Termonfeckin/Baltray and Collon. The Local Area Plans for these villages also envisage a substantial increase in the medium to long-term future with Dunleer and Termonfeckin/Baltray approximately quadrupling their population in the long term and Clogherhead and Collon approximately doubling their current population.

### 3.4.6 Meath County Development Plan, 2001

The Meath County Development Plan seeks to facilitate and promote the development of Drogheda on the Dublin Belfast economic axis as a vibrant major development centre in co-operation with the adjacent planning authorities of Louth County Council and Drogheda Borough Council.

The Development Plan further sets out the general

context for the southern environs of Drogheda, i.e. the areas adjacent to the southern town boundary. The Plan states that any development of zoned lands can only be considered after strategic regional infrastructure has been put in place. There are substantial development lands zoned which are subject to an Action Area Plan.

The Plan notes the need for a link route between the M1 and the N1 at Colpe Cross which will in the longer term act as a southern distributor road for the Greater Drogheda Area. The Bryanstown Cross Route, an orbital link road closer to the town centre, still remains an objective of the Plan. Both residential zoning (130 ha) and commercial/ industrial zonings (230 ha) remain in line with the 1998 Drogheda Environs Development Plan.

The Plan further makes reference to the villages of Donore and Duleek which are within the hinterland of Drogheda. Only modest development is envisaged for the village of Donore (current population 334; 2002 Census) which has extensive land zoned for residential use not yet developed. The town of Duleek is expected to grow to a population of approximately 5,000 in the medium to long term (current population 2,173; 2002 Census) and significant land has been zoned under the Development Plan to accommodate this future population.

The Plan also sets the overall development context for the East Meath area. The settlement strategy contained within the Plan indicates that Navan is the administrative, retail/commercial and transportation hub of County Meath. It is proposed that it continues and develops in this role with a particular emphasis on expanding its employment base. The Plan states that Navan can accommodate the most significant share of future residential development in the county.

The Plan further identifies three development corridors, namely the two main corridors of Navan-Trim-Kells and East Meath and the supplementary third development corridor of the South Meath Fringe. A number of broad objectives are set out for the East Meath corridor as follows:

- *Encouraging development at suitable locations where there is established carrying capacity in terms of sanitary services and where the development would be well served by rail-based transportation.*
- *Within urban development areas along the M1 corridor, to reserve areas adjacent to intersections for appropriate industrial or transport related development.*
- *To protect the M1's capacity from development in the vicinity of the motorway so that it can continue to perform as a long distance transport corridor.*
- *The development of the coastal area in a manner which conserves sensitive marine ecosystems and promotes leisure, sporting and tourism uses.*

The role for East Meath is further envisaged in the Plan as follows:

- *This region is part of the Dublin Belfast corridor and is the only coastal strip in the county.*
- *The area is attractive to and in places suitable for development, given the proximity to the M1/N1 and Dublin Belfast and Navan-Drogheda rail lines.*
- *Given its position between major population centres, it will be important to protect sensitive coastal areas from uncoordinated sprawl and to consolidate the development of existing or emerging centres such as Laytown/Bettystown, Mornington/Donacarne and Stamullen/Gormanstown.*
- *This in turn entails a broad concept of the key development areas lying to the north and south respectively of the Nanny and Delvin estuaries with the area between being promoted for leisure uses and ecological protection.*

### 3.4.7 East Meath Local Area Plans

The document 'East Meath Local Area Plans - North and South' sets out a settlement hierarchy for the settlements in East Meath which is grounded in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines. The overall area has been divided into East Meath - North and South. The settlement strategy for East Meath North designates Laytown/ Bettystown/ Mornington (East) as a Small Growth Town within the meaning of the Regional Planning Guidelines definition. Mornington/Donacarne and Julianstown have been designated as Commuter Villages.

The Plan also recognises an evolving inter-relationship between a number of the settlements in the East Meath area and proposes to build upon this evolving relationship in line with the RPG by identifying and designating settlement clusters. In relation to the North East Meath area, the Plan notes that

*"In the northern part of the East Meath sub-region the designated Commuter Villages of Mornington, Donacarne and Julianstown and the designated Small Growth Town of Laytown/ Bettystown/ Mornington East will form one settlement cluster which interacts with the larger settlement next above it in the hierarchy; Drogheda. There is already an evolving dynamism and inter-relationship between these settlements, for example the primary school in Laytown serves both Laytown and Bettystown catchment, the primary school at Donacarne serves Donacarne, Mornington and Bettystown. In addition, the*

*regional routes, R150 and R151 connect all of these settlements together and also connect to Drogheda. These settlements and Drogheda are all served by the same wastewater treatment infrastructure. Higher order commercial services which are not available in Mornington East or Laytown can be accessed in Bettystown. This settlement cluster forms the basis for the designation of the East Meath Local Area Plan - North."*

The total amount of zoned land in East Meath (North and South) could take an additional population of 17,500 persons. This is a substantial landbank when compared to growth predictions made under the RPGs which envisage an additional population of 17,000 for the whole of Meath by 2010. It is also substantial in the context of the LAPs designation of Laytown/Bettystown/Mornington East and Stamullen as Small Growth Towns since these have a population horizon under regional guidance of around 5,000 population respectively. Further, the centre of Laytown/Bettystown/Mornington East has already outstripped this population target at present and has a zoned landbank that could provide for an ultimate population of up to 20,000 persons.

The LAP notes that the growth of employment based uses in East Meath has been limited. It further notes that *"under the East Meath Development Plan, lands were zoned for industrial use in Laytown and Stamullen. However, these lands remain undeveloped to date (2005)."* With the exception of the Bettystown Town Centre Development, commercial development in the area has been slow. However, the LAP is positive in its future outlook when stating that *"the emergence of a skilled labour pool, recent commissioning of new and upgraded infrastructure, further improvements in the future to the piped infrastructure and with the cooperation of a number of bodies/organisations, there are new opportunities emerging that should facilitate and encourage economic development and expansion in East Meath that were not previously available."*

With regard to tourism, the LAP particularly recognises the value of the coastline as a main attractor for tourists. The coastline is seen as a valuable resource that needs to be protected while at the same time the provision of tourist facilities needs to be enhanced in a sustainable and integrated manner. Any new development needs to take account of the sensitivity of the area. The Plan notes that tourism has the potential for added economic benefits for the overall area.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Although Drogheda has a population larger than other Primary Development Centres in the Greater Dublin Area and comparable for example to the Gateway of Dundalk in the Border Region, it is clear that the town suffers from its location *'at once in both regions, and at the same time in neither'*. In terms of sustainable land use and transport integration, there is a threat that Drogheda will continue to expand as a dormitory to the Metropolitan Area and fail to attract the necessary regional services, facilities and amenities of Gateways such as Dundalk which is of almost equal population if necessary steps are not taken.

There are some inconsistencies with regards to population projections for Drogheda within the different levels of planning guidance. The NSS states that Primary Development Centres should have a population horizon of 40,000; the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border Region estimate a population of between 50,000 and 60,000 for 2020 and beyond; and the Drogheda Borough Development Plan predicts a population in the region of 70,000 by 2020.

The population for the Border Region as a whole was 432,000 in 2002. If Gateways and Hubs are to grow to the level required to achieve critical mass as suggested within the NSS, the population within the Border Region would be approximately 550,000 by 2020. The scale of growth of Drogheda may well drive the future population beyond this figure.

The designation of Bettystown/ Laytown/ Mornington as a *'Small Growth Town'* in the Regional Planning Guidelines clearly indicates that the population horizon of this settlement and those of the wider area are intended to reflect a supporting role to other designated growth centres. This approach mirrors the policy set out in the Meath County Development Plan in which Navan is clearly designated as the Prime Centre, forming a cluster with Trim and Kells. The population horizon for East Meath going forward should reflect the levels envisaged under national, regional and local guidance and should ensure that the role of East Meath continues to be that of an important residential, local employment and community location, with a supporting role for other larger centres including Drogheda.