

4.0 Strategy Development: Population Projections

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report sets out how the preferred Strategy for the Study Area was developed and how the overall population projections for the study period were arrived at.

4.2 Strategy Development

The Strategy draws on a series of preferred options based on evaluating eight different land-use scenarios. Each land-use scenario examined different possible strategies for the delivery of population and employment growth in the area over the study period.

The scenarios were evaluated against a set of criteria derived from development principles set out at strategic policy level (National Spatial Strategy, National Sustainable Development Strategy for Ireland, Border Region Planning Guidelines) and from the project brief in relation to the four main areas of the Strategy, i.e. spatial planning and land use, transportation, economic development and urban design.

Each alternative is described in detail in the Appendices (Volume 2 of this report) with an illustration of the scenario concept. The implications of each scenario are described in terms of 'piped services', planning, transport and economic issues. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the various spatial strategies are summarised in a matrix. This effectively scores the scenarios against the evaluation criteria, to establish the major elements of a preferred Strategy.

4.3 Population Estimates

An analysis of population patterns was undertaken as part of the Strategy development with a view to determining a robust population horizon for the phasing of the Strategy. The full detail of the population projection exercise is contained in the Appendices. The following sets out a summary of four projections of possible future growth in the Study Area. The first projection took current growth trends in the study area and projected these into the future. The second projection took its lead from a recently published report by the Central Statistics Office which makes assumptions about future growth in the different regions of Ireland¹⁰. The third and fourth

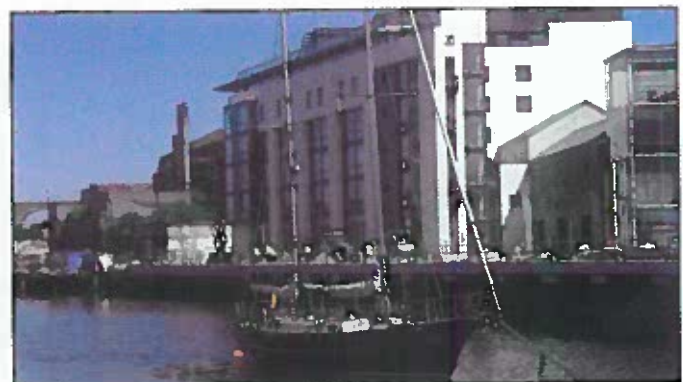
projections are based on an extrapolation of the growth trends contained in the National Spatial Strategy and an application of these to the Study Area¹¹.

The table below sets out the four different growth projections for the combined Drogheda and East Meath area. This is done for six-year intervals from 2002 to 2020 and a four-year interval for 2020 to 2024, the horizon of the twenty-year Strategy.

The 'current trends' projection sets the strongest levels of growth. The other three scenarios based on predictions under the NSS and CSO reports for the Mid East Region (in this case applied to Drogheda and East Meath) forecast a population in and around 60,000 people for Drogheda and East Meath by the year 2024.

Table 4.1 Population Growth Estimates for the combined Drogheda and East Meath (North) Areas

Year	2002 Population (CSO)	2008 Projected Population	2014 Projected Population	2020 Projected Population	2024 Projected Population
Current Trends Projections	36,618	49,456	64,348	84,533	101,980
CSO Projections	36,618	45,493	51,837	59,068	64,440
NSS High Growth	36,618	47,695	54,136	57,284	58,303
NSS Low Growth	36,618	45,221	49,888	54,116	56,694



Drogheda Riverside

¹⁰ Central Statistics Office "Regional Population Projections 2006-2021" (CSO, May 2005)

¹¹ Jonathan Blackwell and Associates "Population, Labourforce and Housing Demand Projections" (Background Report to the National Spatial Strategy, Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2001)

As can be seen from Table 4.1, the projected population under the 'current trend' projection is nearest to the population target set out under the study brief of approximately 100,000 persons in the overall Study Area. The current trends projection is therefore analysed in more detail in Table 4.2 and Graph 4.1 which break down the projections between Drogheda and the East Meath area.

The respective average annual increases for the period 1996-2004 have been used to project population growth to the year 2024, taking current population estimates (for 2004) as a starting point, as follows:

Table 4.2 Population projections based on current trends

Year	1996	2002	2004	2008	2014	2020	2024
	Population from Census figures 1996 and 2002		Population Estimate **	Projected Population based on past trends (1996-2002) of 3.47% and 7.25% average annual growth rate for Drogheda and EM respectively			
Drogheda & Environs*	25,282	31,020	32,300	37,019	45,422	55,731	63,874
East Meath (North)**	3,678	5,597	9,400	12,437	18,926	28,802	38,106
Total	28,960	36,618	41,700	49,456	64,348	84,533	101,980

* defined as the Core Study Area

** defined by the East Meath Local Area Plan as the area encompassing the villages of Bettystown, Laytown, Mornington, Mornington (East), Donacamey and Julianstown.

*** Estimate for Drogheda based on Issues Paper, estimate for East Meath (North) based on East Meath LAP

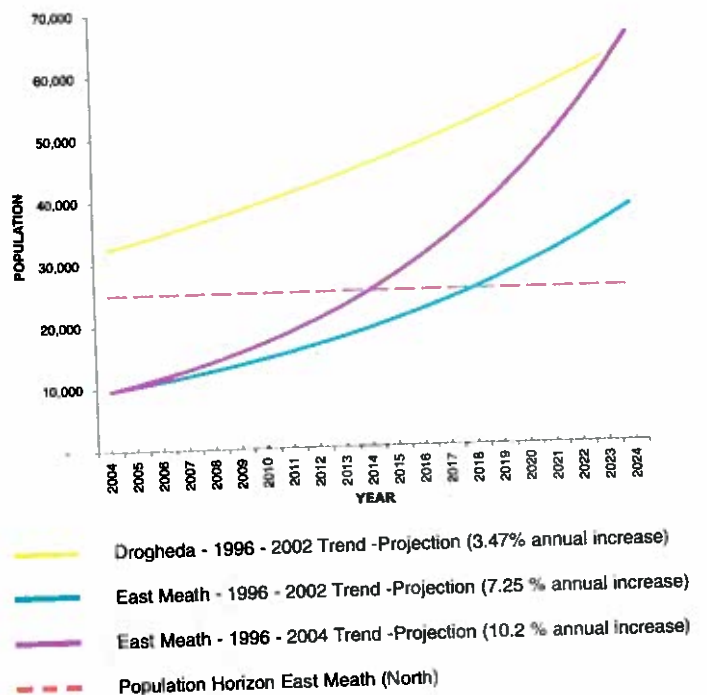
In the period 1996-2002 the main factor fuelling growth was the strength of new housing demand from within the Greater Dublin Area. Signs are emerging that housing supply might soon catch up with housing demand in the GDA. Taking this into consideration, the growth predictions under the 'current trends' scenario might not be attained. Nevertheless, they are a useful test of the robustness of the Study Area to accommodate change.

The projected growth for the East Meath Area would result in a population of approximately 38,000 people in 2024. It should be noted that the zoned landbank in the East Meath area at the moment could accommodate some 24,000 residents. Therefore the projected population for the full term of the Strategy would require a further zoning of residential lands. This growth rate however is not considered appropriate given the development options available within the Core Study Area.

The percentage growth estimates in the East Meath area for the period 2002 to 2004 outstripped the growth of the 1996 to 2002 period (though this is a reflection of a

small 'absolute' base population). In the graph below two population projections for East Meath are indicated. The first is based on the population increase between the census years 1996-2002. The second is a population projection based on the level of growth between 1996 and 2004. Taking Census figures for 1996 and LAP figures for 2004 into account, the annual average growth rate for the period 1996-2004 was 10.2%. As can be seen from the graph (below), should this growth trend continue, the population of East Meath would outstrip that of Drogheda by the year 2024. This again is a clear indication that current percentage growth trends for East Meath cannot be sustained in future. Graph 4.1 also shows the population of approximately 24,000 persons that could be accommodated on the currently zoned landbank in East Meath (North).

Graph 4.1 Drogheda and East Meath Population projections based on current trends



4.4 Population Growth Projection

The following sub-section sets out the potential ultimate population for the Study Area. The timeframe that is covered by the Strategy is divided into four phases and the growth projection for each of these phases is outlined.

A plausible residential population growth pattern to 2024 has been set at 65,000 people for Drogheda and 24,000 persons for the East Meath (North) area. The rationale for Drogheda is based on the fact that the Border Regional Planning Guidelines set a population target of 50,000-60,000 persons for the Core Study Area in 2020 and beyond. This population target is roughly in line with the 'current trend' scenario that was outlined above.

The population horizon for East Meath was set at 24,000 persons. This is the potential future population that could be accommodated on the currently zoned landbank. Demand for housing in the East Meath area remains high and should the area continue to be shaped by market forces alone an even higher level of population could potentially come to live in the area. However, one of the recommendations of this report is that no substantial further land should be zoned in the East Meath area certainly in the short term, to ensure that a reasonable proportional balance in terms of population between Drogheda and East Meath is maintained. The current and projected ratio in terms of overall population between Drogheda and East Meath at present and in 2024 is set out in Table 4.3 below.

It is important to point out that the ultimate horizon set for this Strategy is based on a strong growth pattern. This approach will provide for a viable Strategy even if the actual levels of population growth turn out to be lower than anticipated. Setting out the implications of the ultimate population horizon simply gives an indication as to what would happen if these growth levels were achieved, in terms of requirements for transport and services infrastructure and employment provision. The framework for estimating population growth consists of 4 indicative periods. Periods 1 and 4 are 4-year cycles, whereas Periods 2 and 3 are 6-year cycles.

The current population set out in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 below is based on a number of assumptions as follows:

- Drogheda: Appendix III of the Issues Paper (published in March 2005) estimates the current population of Drogheda to be approximately 32,300 persons.
- East Meath North: The East Meath Local Area Plan estimates the population for the North East Meath Area at approximately 9,400 persons.

Table 4.3 Current and Projected Population Ratio between Drogheda and East Meath

Area	2004 Current Population	2024 Ultimate Horizon	2004 Ratio Between Drogheda and East Meath	2024 Ratio Between Drogheda and East Meath
Drogheda + Environs	32,300	65,000	77.5%	73%
North East Meath, Meath (Laytown, Bettystown, Morningside, Donacorney, Julianstown)	9,400	24,000	22.5%	27%
Total	41,700	89,000	100%	100%

Table 4.4 Population Growth Projection

Area	2004 Current Population	2024 Ultimate Horizon	2008 Phase 1	2014 Phase 2	2020 Phase 3	2024 Phase 4
Drogheda + Environs	32,300	65,000 (+32,700)	36,300 (+4,000)	48,000 (+11,700)	59,500 (+11,500)	65,000 (+5,500)
North East Meath Meath (Laytown, Bettystown, Morningside, Donacorney, Julianstown)	9,400	24,000 (+14,600)	12,000 (+2,600)	17,000 (+5,000)	21,500 (+4,500)	24,000 (+2,500)
Total	41,700	89,000 (+47,300)	48,300 (+6,600)	65,000 (+16,700)	81,000 (+16,000)	89,000 (+8,000)