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## Greater Drogheda: Emerging Demographic Evidence Base for Ireland's Sixth City.

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## Greater Drogheda: Emerging Demographic Evidence Base for Ireland's Sixth City.

*This Paper investigates the recent demographic growth history of the Greater Drogheda Area (GDrA) as evidence of Ireland's emerging sixth city. In May 2012 this writer assisted the City Status Group in making a PowerPoint Presentation in Leinster House, to the then Minister for the Environment Phil Hogan and to Junior Minister Fergus O'Dowd. At that meeting, Minister Hogan hinted to the fact that the Government was considering the replacement of the 2002-2020 National Spatial Strategy (NSS). The Paper finds that the much faster growth south of the Boyne has resulted in equalising the populations on both sides of the river. The Putting People First Local Government initiative provides a basis for the Government to formally recognise this demographic evidence for Ireland's next city.*

**1. Background:** With Ireland's strong economic recovery and the gradual revival of its construction industry, the future potential status and growth of its provincial cities in general for Drogheda, and the near 80,000 population of the Greater Drogheda Area (GDrA), is viewed as having been portrayed in an underwhelming way in the withdrawn National Spatial Strategy (NSS). Drogheda straddles both Louth and Meath counties, thereby presenting historic governance issues. Its impressive growth since 1996, in becoming Ireland's largest town, has required several county boundary adjustments. This divided governance has inhibited its commercial growth. The purpose of this Paper is to have GDrA's status and its future as Ireland's next city, appropriately articulated in the revised National Planning Framework (NPF), supported by the demographic evidence-base of this Paper.

Nothing immediately resulted from that 2012 Ministerial meeting; it may have contributed to the Government's subsequent decision in the *Putting People First* Local Government reform document, in transferring Louth from the Border Region and including both Counties Louth and Meath in the same East (NUTS 2) EU super region. When fully implemented, this will remove one of the boundary impediments that have thwarted the unification of Drogheda: of its straddling two planning regions, the GDA and Border. Since then, initial Scoping Steps have been taken to replace the NSS with the National Planning Framework (NPF). The NPF will not be completed in the remaining lifetime of this Dail but, nevertheless, the placement of Drogheda in its appropriate context within that future plan-formulation remains as an important objective for the strategic planning steps that are now in train.

Despite having been Ireland's largest populated town since the Census of 2006 the NSS had failed to nominate Drogheda as either one of its Gateway or Hub location. Meanwhile, the nearby large town of Laytown-Bettystown-Mornongton (LBM) had grown and is Ireland's thirty-fifth largest town in the most recent census of 2011. In that period a major waste-water treatment plant to serve both Drogheda and LBM was completed on the Marsh Road, Drogheda. This has facilitated the expansion of the two towns towards each other. Furthermore, major residential and commercial projects were commenced on development lands located between the towns, further consolidating their physical agglomeration – some of which were suspended following the introduction of the Troika due to Ireland's deep economic downturn, *vide* Meredith, D and van Egeraat (2013).

**2. Town and County Boundaries:** There still remains the need to rectify the unfit-for-purpose Drogheda Borough boundary. A recent local government initiative is predicated on the principal of transferring further tranches of County Meath into Louth, south of the River Boyne. This objective will require a united approach to be taken by both by the public and private sector interests, in ensuring that this additional objective is realised. The question is: should it be the unambitious objective of the City Status Group to expand Drogheda to reflect its town and environs as a single settlement? Alternatively, as is posited in this Paper, should the far more ambitious objective of recognising the inevitability of Drogheda's impending urban agglomeration with LBM now be addressed?

A parallel governance issue arises under current legislation: does it automatically require county boundaries to be changed as towns grow and spread outward into others, *vide* Zoellick, RB, (2009)?

Currently Waterford is the smallest of the State's five cities. It is likely on the basis of comparing the 1996-2011 population growth differential (PGD) of Drogheda Borough with that of Waterford City, that it would take 20 years for Drogheda's population on its own, to overtake Waterford. There is no evidence to suggest on grounds other than population size, how any Irish town with a lower population can become a city. On the same PGD basis, Drogheda+LBM may exceed Waterford by 2016.

Accordingly, it is posited in this Paper that the less ambitious quest to just expand the Drogheda-alone boundary is not in the best interests of those who argue for Drogheda to be made a city. Due recognition of Ireland's consolidation of its theoretical core region and of the resulting dynamics of its core-periphery interface is typified and confirmed in the literature of Robert-Nicoud, F (2006)

**3. Urban Agglomeration:** The precedence of Galway having been made a city, some 35 years ago (1981) was based on the fact that it had by then overtaken Waterford's population. It is likely that the only foreseeable way forward, is for Drogheda to achieve full agglomeration with nearby Laytown-Bettystown-Mornington (LBM) and driven by residential development shortages in the Dublin-Belfast Corridor, for their combined populations to be shown to exceed that of Waterford at a future census, possibly as early as 2016, *vide* Williams, B., Hughes, B. and Redmond, D. (2010).

As the three former, freestanding and adjacent coastal villages agglomerated with each other to form the town of LBM in the early 1980s and given the fact that it has continued to grow vigorously and expand in Drogheda's direction since then, it is reasonable to assume that the further agglomeration of these two towns is a realistic spatial possibility within a short timeframe, *vide* Henderson, JV (2000). This is foreseeable on a number of grounds, including:

- The rates of growth 1996-2015, as evidenced in the GDrA Demographic Table, hereunder.
- Availability of the recently-completed wastewater infrastructure at Marsh Road.
- Drogheda's south-eastern expansion and its new District Shopping Centre at Southgate.
- Past residential development in the vicinity of Donacarney village and in Colp West.
- The anticipated recommencement of greenfield and zoned residential development activity in these vicinities.
- Job creation and economic recovery, nationally and locally
- Resumption of population growth: the impending 'flip' from out to inward migration, boosted by economic recovery, job creation, international events and refugee pressures.
- The thrust of housing shortage and specifically, how GDrA is able to respond to rectifying what is potentially the most significant impediment to Ireland's international competitiveness, *vide* Hughes (2010).

Attention is drawn to a tightening of the criterion parameter, set out in Appendix 2 of the Area Volume, P. 153, in the CSO 2011 Census, *i.e.* to "*avoid the agglomeration of adjacent towns caused by the inclusion of low density one off dwellings on the approach routes to towns*". This separation is achieved by applying a 100 metre linear distance from any building to an occupied dwelling. Prior to 2011, the distance specified under this rule was 200 metres. This stricter measure has separated Balrothery from Balbriggan and Bearna from Galway in the 2011 census, wherein both Balrothery and Bearna have become new settlements. Currently, at its nearest point the separation of the Drogheda with LBM is estimated to be some 700 to 800 metres, at the point between Donacarney and Colp West.

However, it is clear from the on-the-ground evidence in the GDrA, that further residential estate developments are intended for lands around and to the south of Donacarney, thus making the north east-south west axis between Southgate and Bettystown the likely focus for the anticipated agglomeration to occur. It is also recognised that a second axis further north, linking Drogheda eastwards along the Boyne and agglomerating with Mornington, is another merger possibility. Further development immediately to the north-east of Drogheda's Railway Station is mooted in the relevant Local Area Plan.

Although the Dublin-Belfast railway line, in a sense, forms a physical barrier between Colp West and Donacarney; of themselves, roads or railway lines do not normally prevent urban agglomeration. On the contrary, they contribute to the overall accessibility of an urban area, at nodal points including railway stations, intersections, bridges and other points of access, *vide* Fujita, M and Thisse, J (2013)

**4. Demographic Evidence:** The momentum of population growth in the Greater Drogheda Area (GDRA) has exceeded that of most Irish towns and cities over the fifteen years to 2011. This evidence is sourced from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) censuses, as shown thus:

**Table 1: Drogheda-LBM: The emerging Sixth City of State – Demographic Growth 1996-2011**

**Analysis of Drogheda+LBM+ Rural Areas Growth in 2011:**

SUMMARY:	Greater Drogheda: 2011 Urban and Rural Populations North and South of Boyne							Share of
	Borough	Add non-Bor.	Town+envs.	L-B-M	Dr.+LBM	Rural (net)	TOTAL	Total pop.
North of River	23,830	2,202	26,032	0	26,032	13,279	39,311	50.02%
South of River	<u>6,563</u>	<u>5,983</u>	<u>12,546</u>	<u>10,889</u>	<u>23,435</u>	<u>15,848</u>	<u>39,283</u>	<u>49.98%</u>
Total	30,393	8,185	38,578	10,889	49,467	29,127	78,594	100.00%
Share:	=78.78%	=21.22%	=100.00%					

**Analysis of Drogheda+LBM+ Rural Areas Growth in 1996:**

SUMMARY:	Greater Drogheda: 2011 Urban and Rural Populations North and South of Boyne							Share of
	Borough	Add non-Bor.	Town+envs	LBM	Dr.+LBM	Rural (net)	TOTAL	Total pop.
North of River	21,501	36	21,537	0	21,537	7,659	29,196	62.85%
South of River	<u>2,959</u>	<u>786</u>	<u>3,745</u>	<u>3,678</u>	<u>7,423</u>	<u>9,832</u>	<u>17,255</u>	<u>37.15%</u>
Total	24,460	822	25,282	3,678	28,960	17,491	46,451	100.00%

**Growth in populations over the 15 years to 2011:**

	Borough	Add non-Bor.	Town+envs.	LBM	Dr.+LBM	Rural (net)	TOTAL	Share of Growth
North of River	2,329	2,166	4,495	0	4,495	5,620	10,115	31.47%
South of River	<u>3,604</u>	<u>5,197</u>	<u>8,801</u>	<u>7,211</u>	<u>16,012</u>	<u>6,016</u>	<u>22,028</u>	<u>68.53%</u>
Total	5,933	7,363	13,296	7,211	20,507	11,636	32,143	100.00%

**Drogheda+LBM Growth Rate Analysis: 15 years to 2011:**

	Borough	Add non-Bor.	Town	LBM	Dr.+LBM	Rural (net)	TOTAL
North of River	10.83%	6016.67%	20.87%	0.00%	20.87%	73.38%	34.65%
South of River	<u>121.80%</u>	<u>661.20%</u>	<u>235.01%</u>	<u>196.06%</u>	<u>215.71%</u>	<u>61.19%</u>	<u>127.66%</u>
Total	24.26%	895.74%	52.59%	196.06%	70.81%	66.53%	69.20%

**Source: Analysis of CSO censuses of 1996 and 2011, by Brian Hughes, extracted from the Area Volumes 1, 1996 and 2011.**

**5. Demographic Analysis:** This population analysis now forms the core aspect of the research study. The above Table shows the fifteen-year demographic history of the Greater Drogheda Area (GDRA) 1996-2011. It is displayed on a North of River and South of River format, so as to focus on the geo-demographic growth that has taken place on either side of the river since the commencement of net inward non-indigenous migration to Ireland. This has been particularly significant factor influencing the State's population growth since 1996. This approach to the demographic analysis for the GDRA, enables a picture to be composed, independent of the complicated layers of the unfit-for-purpose, and obscuring administrative boundaries of individual settlements, as now exist.

The 'County' has traditionally been the most significant unit of local administration since Ireland's independence in 1922. Thus, with the growth of Ireland's largest town settlement Drogheda, the political prioritisation of maintaining 'the county' as an integral unit has been the motivation so as to confine the town within one specific county, in this instance Louth. This has resulted in the legal transfer of about seven square kilometres (gross of river) of land south of the Boyne into County Louth, made in a series of Local Government statutory provisions since the 1950s. Thus, by 2011, as shown in the above Table, some 6,563 of Drogheda's population residing south of the Boyne are legally living in Louth County, within the Borough boundary area. The Elizabethan-established counties usually observed physical divisions, as in this case it was the centre line of the Boyne River.

However, despite the many statutory transfers of sections of south-river Drogheda from County Meath into Louth, the sustained physical growth of Drogheda, particularly south of the Boyne to 2011 has resulted in a further 5,983 of the town's population now live in parts of residential estates outside the Borough area, but which are located in County Meath. By the 2006 Census, Drogheda had become and remains as Ireland's largest town. Thus, in 2011 some 12,546 people, being 35.52% of Drogheda town's 38,578 population resides south-river, compared with just 3,745 or 14.81% in 1996.

Drogheda's own population growth, including its environs, represents just part of the Greater Drogheda's growth story. First, the south river three former villages of Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington agglomerated into what is now Meath's third largest large town of LBM, trebling in population, from 3,678 in 1996 to 10,889 by 2011. Furthermore, by 2011 that town's physical expansion westwards, has resulted in a near-physical agglomeration with Drogheda's expansion at the West Colp-South Gate-Donacarneay axis, all of which were served by the completion of the new wastewater infrastructure.

As that census is now four years old and despite Ireland's economic downturn, the east of State has continued to experience most of Ireland's more modest demographic growth: 4,588,252 in 2011 with this writer's projected 4,680,000 (projected) population figure for 2016. Accordingly, the results from next-year's census could see Drogheda town plus LBM's 2011 aggregate of 49,467 would be expected to match or exceed the population of Waterford City, which was 51,519 in 2011, should their respective 1996-2011 growth rate differential be maintained.

Thus there needs to be a rational, spatial overview, understanding of the GDrA population growth that has occurred, comparing north with south-river, to also include both Louth and Meath Rural Districts, which form a 'corona' sphere-of-influence 'shell' of population that surrounds both Drogheda and LBM towns. A recent draft Retail Study for Drogheda concentrated its demographic focus on the much slower growing core-area of the 'Borough' administrative area, thereby misinterpreting its intended wider study remit and distorting the population growth dynamic of the GDrA.

Had it taken a wider perspective, one that was not legally constrained by the above-described unfit-for-purpose, historic, political boundaries, that Retail Study might have avoided what appears to have been a serious understatement of the overall GDrA population growth that has occurred up to 2011. Its content approach however, does serve to highlight the misapprehensions and resultant handicaps that Drogheda has to endure because of these existing, artificial, multi-boundary constraints. Furthermore, in 2011 the two Rural Districts of Louth and Meath comprised a further 29,127 in population, up from 17,491 in 1996. Thus in 2011 the GDrA population totalled 78,594, which is nearly 2,000 more than Galway City and is greater than many of the State's counties and three of its cities. These two Rural Areas include the surrounding towns of Duleek (3,988) and Stamullen (3,130) to the south and Clogher Head (1,993) to the north – a 'town' being the CSO-defined free-standing settlement of 1,500 and over in (urban) population.

**6. Analysis Findings:** This demographic evidence confirms that in 2011, there was *an almost even balance of populations*, living north (39,311) and south (39,283) of the Boyne. The scale of those two populations (*e.g.* when compared with all of Longford County's 39,000 in 2011) reflects not only the scale size of the GDrA due to its own economic importance and of its strategic position within the Dublin-Belfast Corridor. However, there the population similarities end because of their very contrasting, component growth rates since 1996, as shown in the above Table 1.

Undoubtedly, due to the proximity and superior accessibility of Drogheda to Dublin, its Port and Airport, during 1996-2011, the South Boyne population has grown by some 2.28 times (+127.66%) being 11,913 greater than that of the North Boyne: that is, a fifteen year growth of 127.66% versus 34.65% north of the river, the latter being also influenced by the much slower growing north-of-river Drogheda Borough population.

Furthermore, the future advantages and probability, for that south of river growth trend differential being likely to continue, appears to favour the Meath area whilst at the same time providing compelling evidence for *the inevitable fusion/ agglomeration of the LBM and Drogheda settlements*. Significantly, since 2011 census, and for the first time since the establishment of Drogheda as a settlement, on the basis of their differentiated population growth momentum, indicates that there are today, *more GDrA residents living south rather than north* of the River Boyne.

Amongst those advantages for further development to occur south-river are the new Waste-Water Treatment Plant on the Marsh Road and a number of ready-to-go residential development sites, when set against the higher unavoidable cost of future North Boyne investment, including that of a mooted north side train station, all necessary road and utility infrastructure and the provision of a downstream bridge linking the eastern portions of the town. Furthermore, the historic Drogheda Borough capital debt burden, aggravated by its land acquisition programme is also a development-constraining issue.

**7. Governance Issues:** Increasingly so and resulting from to the pace of its demographic growth, the administrative boundaries in the Drogheda area have become illogical, making the task of local administration difficult to implement in its present format and resulting in governance anomalies. However the transfer of County Louth Border and Western Region to an enlarged NUTS 2 East and Midlands Region, made under the Government’s *Putting People First* initiative, should serve at least to remove the Regional-level administrative anomaly that up to now had been present.

The prospects for further population expansion post-2011, provide a compelling case for further action, including the petitioning of government for the establishment of a single, Unitary City Authority (UA), reporting directly to the East Super Regional Assembly: one that should be quickly established in Ireland’s and GDrA’s common interests. The intended surface area may be that of all Drogheda together with both the Louth and Meath Rural Districts. There may be a need to ‘tweek’ the GDrA boundary, to decide on including or excluding a small number of southern Electoral Districts in the vicinity of Balbriggan, e.g. Stamullen, south of the Nanny river.

**8. Future Pointers towards City Emergence:** By end-July 2016 the CSO should be in a position to publish the Preliminary Report as the first volume of next year’s census. For the GDrA as set out hereunder, these data will inform the changes, in a like-for-like basis, in comparing the 5-year populations comprising the Louth and Meath Rural Areas together with those of Drogheda Borough with the Preliminary equivalents for the 2011 census, set out in the incomplete Table, as follows:

<b>Table 2: Populations for:</b>	<b>Preliminary</b>	<b>Preliminary</b>		<b>%</b>
	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b><u>Louth Rural Area</u></b>				
Clogher	3,026		-3,026	-100.00%
Dysart	917		-917	-100.00%
Monasterboice	1,333		-1,333	-100.00%
Mullary	1,726		-1,726	-100.00%
St. Peter's (Pt)	5,157		-5,157	-100.00%
Termonfeckin	<u>3,292</u>		-3,292	-100.00%
Sub Total:	15,451		-15,451	-100.00%
<b><u>Drogheda Borough</u></b>				
Fair Gate	9,769		-9,769	-100.00%
St Laurence Gate	4,006		-4,006	-100.00%
West Gate	6,100		-6,100	-100.00%
St Peter's Gate	4,000		-4,000	-100.00%
St Mary's (Pt)	<u>6,560</u>		-6,560	-100.00%
Sub Total	30,435		-30,435	-100.00%
<b><u>Meath Rural Area</u></b>				
Ardcath	1,911		-1,911	-100.00%
Duleek	5,177		-5,177	-100.00%
Julianstown	9,588		-9,588	-100.00%
Mellefont	564		-564	-100.00%
St Mary's (Pt)	10,772		-10,772	-100.00%
Stamullen	<u>4,683</u>		-4,683	-100.00%
Sub Total	32,695		-32,695	-100.00%
Total GDrA:	78,581		-78,581	100.00%-

Source: CSO Preliminary Report, 2011 Census.

**Note: Table incomplete: awaiting corresponding July 2016 Census Preliminary data.**

**Observation:** Such analysis from the completed Table 2 data will enable a reasonably accurate comparative growth assessment of the Table 1 components of the GDrA demography to be made at this earlier date, pending the CSOs publication of its Area data due to be published in mid-2017.

Given the effects of the severe economic downturn, this writer expects the State's population for 2011-2016 to be in the 2% to 2.5% growth range, in contrast with the 8.2%-plus growth performances for the last two inter-censal periods. 2002-2006 and 2006-2011. However, based on the CSO 2015 *Population and Migration Estimates* outturn at the Regional level, it is evident that the East of State growth, 2011- 2015, of about 65,000 contrasts with a loss of nearly 18,000 population occurring in three western plus the west of the Border Planning Regions. It is anticipated that the GDrA area may have continued to grow, in line with the East of State's estimated performance.

**Note:** The assessment for the 2011-2015 Border Region's population disaggregation as between Donegal+Sligo+Leitrim and Louth+Cavan+Monaghan is based on their respective differential growth 1996-2011, being then applied to the Region's population loss for that most recent four years.

**9. Demography and Distance:** Resulting from the NSS focus on Gateway and Hub linkages in its fatuous attempt to boost Ireland's fragile content of major urban centres, it is instructive to consider Analytical Models based on Newton's Universal Law of Gravitation, wherein population and distance have been in use for nearly a century in the measurement of urbanisation – vide William Reilly's (1929) law of Retail Gravitation and not unrelated, to Christaller's measurement of Centrality (1933).

The NSS recognition of the fragility in Ireland's level of urbanisation in the task of the nomination of potential growth centres did result in the linkage exercise. Most Irish settlements are too small in population or are too distant from each other to be able to create significant critical mass over and above their population sums, *vide* Losch (1954) modification for accessibility, of Christaller's theory. Accordingly, it was proposed that this deficiency would be alleviated by formally linking Killarney to Tralee, Castlebar to Ballina, Derry to Letterkenny and the Midland tri-centric Athlone linked to Mullingar and Tullamore. In all these cases distances are between 20 and 50 kilometres which despite their transportation linkages, are excessive to the creation of meaningful urban growth momentum with the objective of generating a multiplier that is significantly greater than that of their population sum.

The application of Reilly's Law for example to such distances and to their respective populations – finessed in direct proportion to distance and in inverse proportion to population - produces profoundly lower results when compared with Drogheda and LBM which are located less than one kilometre apart. However, the measures of centrality are less divergent in result because of the quantum of their external employment dependency and because of their low incidences of cross-employment counts, *Door to Door*, CSO 2011 Census, of Daytime Working Population data, Table 9 and related local data, kindly provided to this writer by the CSO.

In contrast to the NSS-nominated 'linkages', Drogheda and LBM's proximity means that they can effectively be regarded as a single settlement for growth-pole single settlement purposes, unlike say Waterford and Tramore which are some fourteen kilometres apart. In contrast, the town of Dundalk's population was consolidated when its adjoining nearby southern village of Blackrock agglomerated with Louth's other and Ireland's second largest town.

There remain a number of strategic issues to be addressed on the road to obtain full spatial agglomeration of Drogheda and LBM. Progress in further infill development will be the measure of their eventual and inevitable agglomeration. The zoning of lands deemed suitable for development between south-east Drogheda and the west side of LBM, and the extent that the development of such lands which could result in achieving full agglomeration between the two settlements, is also linked to the pace of both the current and future end-use demographic demand for such new development. This could be an ideal green-field location for a Third-Level Campus, situated between Drogheda and LBM and close to its rail station.

The current strong and continuing resurgence of national and local economic activity and its associated on-the-ground physical development is the pre-requisite for a resumption of GDrA's demographic growth momentum, to follow the economic 'pause' of the past seven or so years. It has to be

emphasised that there are potential political ‘pitfalls’ that could frustrate the attainment of these objective. Likewise, there continues to be the critical task to re-adjust Ireland’s Spatial Planning and Economic imperative from its present ‘distributive’ focus of ‘balance’ to that of agglomerated ‘lumpiness’, as a necessary policy adjustment to consolidate its competitive position in the wider context, *vide* O’Leary, E. (2003) (ed.) and Calzada, Igor (2015).

**10. Conclusions:** It was unfortunate that the Minister and Junior Minister did not provide a direct response to the City Status Group Presentation, made to them by the City Status Group of May 2012. A Private Secretary’s reply was sent in December 2012 in response to the follow-up query from a member of the City Status Group, together with subsequent correspondence. It has to be recognised that local government at whatever level tends to resist change. However, for the first time since 1898, the *Putting People First* reform initiative – as was briefly articulated in a closer reading of the Private Secretary’s letter content – together with the GDrA population growth momentum - provides a unique opportunity to ‘push an open door’, provided the will of the GDrA people is demonstrated, Nash (2015).

There remains the task of identifying what these unification steps are – in any case some of them will be novel - as, apart from the experience that was gained from Galway ‘promotion’ to its city status, no other modern precedent exists in Ireland for the creation of city status. However, when the GDrA case has been prepared and submitted, the government must then be persuaded of its content and importantly, so that it will then be willing to have it included as an objective of that new spatial strategy. For this to happen, the evidence-base, including the content of this Study Report must be tabled before government, together with a ‘road map’ of legal steps that require to be undertaken.

In consultation with government, an appropriate, legal-based Investigative Commission should address the necessary steps to be taken so as to achieve a Unitary City Authority (UCA) for the GDrA. Likewise, appropriate ‘road shows’ will have to be held to inform all interested public and private interests and not least, all of the citizens of GDrA, of what is involved and of the contributions that all can make to achieving the sixth city of state status. Obviously, the enlarged Drogheda would in fact then become the fifth city of State as it would then been shown to have exceeded Waterford’s population!

Elsewhere on the island, in Northern Ireland, the significance of the population growth within the Dublin Belfast Corridor has been recognised since the millennium with city designation having been given to both Lisburn and Newry-Mourne.

The pathway for the necessary Local Government reform is already laid in the Government’s own *Putting People First* Action Programme (2012), although it does point to the need for additional legislative initiatives, *vide* Section 12.2 therein, now underway but the outcome of which may be interrupted due to the impending General Election. There must be a firm resolve that the current irrational and penalising governance set-up needs to be replaced and that it is in the public interest, nationally as well as locally, that a comprehensive review be undertaken.

The City Status Group could take the more modest approach to petition for a Drogheda alone boundary review and ignore the differential growth momentum. This writer avers for the more ambitious approach, to opt for the GDrA city designation approach. Primarily, there must exist, an as yet underlying unity of mind and an ambitious mind-set amongst the citizens and local politicians of Drogheda and especially of the town of LBM, if the central objective of achieving city status for GDrA is to be agreed. Will LBM be prepared to integrate its newly-won large-town status within the proposed city? Ultimately, the necessary political acquiescence at Town, County, Regional and National levels must be demonstrated, Moran (2015).

In conclusion, this paper is now presented in draft format, prior to the completion of the National Planning Framework (2014) processes to replace the National Spatial Strategy (2002) and pending the availability of the CSO Preliminary Report data from the 2016 census, so as to provide an earlier opportunity for critical commentary and observations on Greater Drogheda as Ireland’s emerging next city, Hughes, (2015b).



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