

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM EALAÍONA, OIDHREACTH, GNÓTHAÍ RÉIGIÚNA- CHA, TUAITHE AGUS GAELTACHTA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON ARTS, HERITAGE, REGIONAL, RURAL AND GAEL- TACHT AFFAIRS

Dé Céadaoin, 24 Bealtaine 2017

Wednesday, 24 May 2017

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 2.10 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 2.10 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Ciarán Cannon,	Maura Hopkins,
Michael Collins,	Marie-Louise O'Donnell.
Danny Healy-Rae,	
Martin Heydon,	
Éamon Ó Cuív,	
Niamh Smyth.	

Teachta / Deputy Peadar Tóibín sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: I ask members to turn off their mobile phones because they interfere with the recording and broadcasting meaning that people cannot be heard properly.

We will consider the topic of the national spatial strategy for 2002 to 2020 and its successor within the context of the-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: When will we get a chance to address what happened at the last meeting, where the Chairman took it upon himself to represent all of the committee by doing what he did?

Chairman: In the private session after the-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: The Chairman told-----

Chairman: Let me answer the question. We will have a private session during which we will go into full detail on the topic of the fishermen that I understand the Deputy wishes to discuss. Is that right?

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Yes.

Chairman: We will address that later. It is just that we have guests before us.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: At what particular time? I cannot stay here all the time and I want to be there for that.

Chairman: It depends how many questions our guests are asked. I cannot say for sure, but it will be towards the end of the meeting.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: There are two parts to this meeting, session A and session B. Is it after the first session?

Chairman: It is after both sessions.

Sustaining Viable Rural Communities: Discussion (Resumed)

Chairman: We will now consider the topic of the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 and its successor within the context of the committee's current project on what it takes to sustain a viable rural community. Our first witness is Dr. Brian Hughes. Later in the meeting we will consider the same topic with representatives of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

I wish to note that we also invited Professor Des McCafferty, head of the department of geography in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, and Mr. John Moran, former Secretary General of the Department of Finance, to address this meeting on this topic, but unfortunately they were unavailable to attend.

I welcome Dr. Brian Hughes, who is an urban economics and demographic consultant, and engages in research into urban economics, demography and growth centre agglomeration. He has lectured extensively, including in University College Dublin and is a member of the Gov-

ernment's CSO expert group on national and regional population migration and labour force projections. I thank him for his attendance today.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. If you are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and you continue to do so, you are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of your evidence. You are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and you are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, you should not criticise or make charges against any persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. The opening statement and any other documents you have submitted to the committee may be published on the committee website after this meeting. Members are reminded of a long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House, or any official by name in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I now call on Dr. Hughes to address the meeting.

Dr. Brian Hughes: I am also a retired lecturer from Dublin Institute of Technology. I welcome this opportunity to present my research evidence to the committee on the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 and its successor, the national planning framework, on the subject of what it takes to sustain a viable rural community.

I am not quite sure as to the extent to which I can specifically assist this committee. My areas of experience are primarily urban in nature but nevertheless I accept the kind invitation in good faith and because of the complementarity between urban and rural. My academic research colleague, Dr. Conor Skehan, is unable to be with me today as he is chairing a housing seminar in Cork. In sending his apologies, he has very kindly provided me with material which I am at liberty to use and it will assist and broaden this presentation. His input comprises sections 4 to 7, inclusive, of this submission and I therefore beg the committee's forbearance for the fact that will take somewhat longer to deliver than had originally been intended.

I am also grateful to my collaborating research colleagues in the Dublin Institute of Technology and in other research centres and indeed, also to the assistance afforded by the Central Statistics Office in the use and application of its census data. I will also refer to five appendices attached to this 15-page opening statement document, which run from pages 16 through to 78. Some of the historical appendix material, unavoidably, repeats the submission content.

What is urban agglomeration? Urban agglomeration was first identified in 1920 by Alfred Marshall as geographic human concentration, supporting specialisation and labour market pooling, and, most importantly, geographic proximity, facilitating the spread of information. Thus urban agglomeration increases productivity and reduces public per capita spending requirements because of scale economics. It also increases the occurrence and viability of services, human capital formation and today's knowledge-based economic activity.

The output from urban agglomeration is the formation and growth of cities, epitomised by the density of people and density of firms. Cities are increasingly dominant in the world's economies and are now responsible for most of their national wealth creation.

Furthermore, large towns, particularly if they physically merge with another large one, can also agglomerate into cities. A current Irish example of this process at work is the forma-

tion of the State's sixth city. This is Drogheda's agglomeration with Laytown-Bettystown-Mornington, including Donacarney village, and their densifying areas that link these former individual settlements to creating a greater Drogheda population now approaching 90,000 with a settlement grid agglomeration that now matches the population of and exceeds the density of Waterford city. The Drogheda City Status Group is in the process of petitioning Government to confirm-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Can we have copies?

Chairman: I apologise to Dr. Hughes. We want to see if we can get copies of the speech. I know that a 29-page document was circulated. I picked it up yesterday from the Lotus Notes system.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I did not get it. I went in when the link was sent and it was not on it.

Chairman: We will seek to get a copy and have it circulated. I ask Dr. Hughes to continue

Dr. Brian Hughes: The Drogheda City Status Group is in the process of petitioning Government to confirm both this dynamic and expanding settlement as Ireland's next city, copperfastening the eastern development corridor and consolidating the socio-political and geo-economic importance of the Dublin-Belfast corridor, post Brexit.

This added value from urban agglomeration is critical to Ireland's economic future and is essential to its rural future, as increasing revenues generated from the core area are then available to assist the periphery. This is one of the most important principles of both the disciplines of urban economics and the new economic geography. Thus the home market effect is boosted both by population growth and *per capita* incomes. In addition, increasing property values provide a feel-good factor that encourages spending and further rounds of both residential and commercial investment. The resultant four years of Ireland's sustained economic growth and its employment recovery is not evenly spread, nor is intended to be. The United Nations, the OECD and the World Bank are advocates of what is called "lumpiness" or centripetal agglomeration. This results in city formation and, critically, it is the expanding cities, in turn, that support their regional and rural spheres of influence, as emphatically confirmed in the evidence-base demographics of the Central Statistics Office, CSO, census results.

Accordingly, the idealistic but impracticable principles of balanced regional development, which was intended as the core driver of the national spatial strategy for 2002 to 2020, have resulted in unintended demographic consequences, aggravated by the faulty selection of some gateway and hub centres. In any event, 23 was far too many for a State that has the population equivalent of greater Manchester. I use this opportunity also to convey my sympathies to the people of that great city. The irony of the failed national spatial strategy was demonstrated with the same number of matching, alternative centres achieving greater population growth in the 2002 to 2016 period than those centres selected.

The second section concerns the national planning framework and the current demographic background. The replacement for the national spatial strategy, Ireland 2040, the national planning framework, proposes to be different. It is intended to have full statutory backing as recommended in the Mahon tribunal and it must achieve prior all-party political agreement. It is intended to be fully aligned with the State's economic strategy and it is hoped it will be properly resourced to rectify the near-cessation of infrastructural investment over the past decade. It will

be managed by way of the three newly established regional assemblies for the east and midlands, the southern regional area and the Border and western regional area.

Given the depth and length of Ireland's economic collapse with its loss of economic sovereignty and the international bailout, the demographic outcome of the 2016 census was surprisingly benign, especially so against the alarmist political background utterances of 80,000 plus emigrants per annum. The reality, however, in the definitive census results published last month confirms that these outward flows were 87% counterbalanced by inward migration flows. This resulted in the modest net emigration figure of 4,300 per annum for the five years to April 2016. During this period Ireland's population continued to increase by almost 35,000 per annum. These two-way demographic flow volumes are reflective of the offshore location and economic characteristics of this small but dynamic trading nation, one that is endowed with a temperate climate but is still disadvantaged with a "tundra" population density outside of the greater Dublin area and Louth. Likewise, our exports plus imports, expressed in relation to Ireland's gross domestic product, emphatically confirm the reliance on the high globalisation index rating that this country enjoys and the nature of Ireland's open trading economy.

The State's population increased by 173,600, with the natural growth of births less deaths figure at 196,100 offset by net outward migration of 22,500, resulting in a creditable State population growth of 3.78% in the five years to April 2016. The net emigration loss represented just 13% of the net gain in population, as I mentioned, occurring at a time of Ireland's deepest economic and financial crisis and the subsequent, necessary corrective measures. It is now 30 years since Ireland's population last contracted, when net outward migration was greater than natural growth. Given the profound nature and depth of our recent economic and financial difficulties and the subsequent and sustained recovery, it is unrealistic to expect that Ireland will return to a population loss scenario any time soon. The opposite is likely to be the case with the resumption to net inward migration for the past two years and the reality of continuing world population growth, with its supply-push effect that will require careful managing. Indeed, Ireland will have every cause to celebrate this coming July because in or about that third quarter of 2017, this State will mark its 2 million growth in population, up by some 71% since the low point of April 1961. Furthermore, for the first time, Ireland's cities are growing at a faster rate than their surrounding home counties. We have much to be grateful for as to the extent to which our cities are able to buffer what otherwise would have been much more serious emigration outflows, especially from rural Ireland.

Nevertheless, the forthcoming national planning framework must contain combined aligned spatial and economic strategies to address the fact that Ireland's provincial cities have an average population of just 109,000, which is only 9.3% of Dublin's city and suburbs. That comparison excludes Dublin's burgeoning towns, together with its modest rural population.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I did not catch that. The witness said provincial towns were at 9%.

Dr. Brian Hughes: No, I mentioned the four provincial cities, and their average population is approximately 9% of the population of Dublin city and its suburbs.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Could the witness define the suburbs?

Dr. Brian Hughes: That is in the table 7 data published by the Central Statistics Office.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: What is that?

Dr. Brian Hughes: There are no gaps. It is a single ink blob.

Chairman: There is about three minutes left for the speech and the Deputy has a full ten minutes for questions.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Unfortunately, we do not have what he is saying in front of us. It is hard to-----

Chairman: Every member has been sent a copy of the document.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Yes. It is one of the most fascinating submissions we have had.

Chairman: It is a 21-page document.

Dr. Brian Hughes: I will try to clarify the matter. The four Irish provincial cities have an aggregate population of 436,000, with the average being 109,000. Dublin city and its suburbs alone have a population 1.165 million.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I will try to clarify my point. The witness is referring to Galway city, Cork city, Limerick city and Waterford city. I take it he is referring to the city populations.

Dr. Brian Hughes: I refer to the cities and their environs.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I am trying to find out what is defined as environs.

Dr. Brian Hughes: The environs are defined by the Central Statistics Office as a continuum of development, without interruption.

Chairman: We can return to the presentation. In three minutes we can start the questions.

Dr. Brian Hughes: This comparison excludes Dublin's burgeoning towns together with its modest rural population. If Ireland's provincial cities are to become the drivers of their regions and their wider rural areas, as is now encouragingly evident for Cork and Galway, considered spatial strategies will be required to promote their accelerated growth so that their average size difference with that of Dublin can be reduced. This is imperative because the default alternative is for a Dublin city state to emerge later in this century. Ireland therefore, needs to have that set of missing teeth restored, in contrast with the city-size hierarchies of comparable countries such as Finland, Denmark, Scotland and New Zealand.

The researched, strategic, demographic objective is at least to double the size of the provincial cities as quickly as possible but well within the 2040 timescale of this plan. That was the end objective of the Dublin Institute of Technology's Twice the Size study of 2009 which had proposed a somewhat shorter timescale but without having had the foreknowledge of our subsequent, dreadful economic collapse.

I shall now turn to the town settlements and their demographic performance. There is a direct correlation between a city's size and its sphere of influence, in terms of the growth outcomes of surrounding towns and their countryside, as shown in the statistics I have included in the submission supplied to the committee. It confirms some of the most significant town population losses since April 2011. Some of these dreadful population losses are topped by Birr with a 24.9% loss in the five years to April 2016. Other areas with losses in the 20% range include Clifden and Bantry. Within the same five year period Cootehill had a population loss of 12.7%, Ballina lost 8.3% of its population, Bundoran and Ballyshannon lost nearly 8% each,

Templemore lost 6.4% and so on.

Not all towns or villages thrive, in the same way as there are laggard areas within cities. Nearness to a city, however, is a critical factor in influencing town growth rates. Generally, the nearby fastest-growing towns are those within the sphere of influence of a nearby city, as exemplified by the performance of Cork or Galway towns. Distance decay is an important land use transportation reality as the spatial counterpart to urban agglomeration. Within County Offaly, for example, its second town Birr was replaced by Edenderry in the census of 2002. Edenderry is twice as near to Dublin as Birr and is now 68.4% larger. In the five years to April 2016 Edenderry grew by 5.5% whereas Birr lost 24.9% of its population.

Further research work is required to provide individual explanations for some of the above horrendous population losses occurring within such a short time period. Many other towns not listed in this statistical table have either stopped growing over a number of censuses or have exhibited weak growth characteristics. Thurles, for example, is home to the founding of the GAA and location of the largest capacity stadium outside of Croke Park. In the 1981 census Thurles was placed within the top 20 of Ireland's towns by size but in 2016 it was placed at 56. I have a "what if" question in this regard. If the Buchanan plan been politically accepted and implemented in 1969, and if its 1986 target of 175,000 for Limerick, including Shannon, had been attained, what would have been the spillover benefit for Limerick's regional sphere-of-influence towns, including Thurles? This would be on the basis that the self-generating benefits of urban agglomeration would have continued to 2016 with that city's population now standing at 235,000, instead of 94,000, in direct proportion to the State population increase that has taken place during 1986 to 2016. The irony is that the State's population for 1986 was 1.16% above Buchanan's projected 3.5 million.

It is clear that the former central-place functions of many Irish towns as market places and as service providers for the agricultural surrounds has radically altered, reflecting both fundamental changes in agriculture, the nature and change of what constitutes work and modes of living. Today, the Fordist style manufacturing single-branch plant era has almost finished and Nenagh is in the process of winding down its largest remaining plant. This is, however, a worldwide phenomenon epitomised by the most famous firm town, the city of Detroit. Yes; cities also fail.

Dr. Conor Skehan has kindly allowed me to present some of his own research work which helps clarify some of these changes and their effects on agriculture and on rural life.

Chairman: I might draw a halt to the presentation element. The content that Dr. Hughes has supplied will be part of this committee's study and the report it will compile, and it will be read further by the members. I will open for questions, if this is all right with Dr. Hughes.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Certainly.

Chairman: I will ask Deputy Ó Cuív to start off the questions part of the session and there is ten minutes, which he can manage in any manner he wishes.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: First, I did not realise that extra material had been put onto the site and I did not get an opportunity to print it, which I would have done if I had known it was available.

I thank Dr. Brian Hughes for coming to the committee. It was one of the more interesting presentations the committee has received. Is Dr. Hughes's theory that in the next spatial strategy we should concentrate in the first place on developing the cities of Waterford, Cork,

Limerick and Galway?

Dr. Brian Hughes: Yes, together with a number of other growth centres, to be nominated in the national planning framework.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: But it is all growth centres. This is very ambitious. I shall ask Dr. Hughes to outline further for me. If we consider Galway, and I am sure Dr. Hughes has looked at Galway-----

Dr. Brian Hughes: I was born there.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Good. If we decide to double the population of Galway we must consider that in the last six years there have not been enough houses available to meet demand. Only 200 extra houses were added to the city of Galway and 500 houses in the county, strangely enough. That is total housing stock and we need 2,000, so there is literally not a house available in Galway for anybody. Dr. Hughes is probably aware that Galway also has tremendous traffic and transport issues.

Dr. Brian Hughes: I think they are going for a tunnel now rather than a bridge.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No, it will be a bridge with little bits of tunnel. That project will be a minor alleviation. To make Galway, Limerick or Cork fully functioning cities over the next ten years there will be issues of housing, services for housing and transport infrastructure for roads and public transport. Has Dr. Hughes done any quantification of what kind of investment we would need to demand from the Government to make this happen?

Dr. Brian Hughes: It is my understanding, looking at macroeconomics, that the GDP of the State is about €200 billion, of which we were spending some 23% at the high point, in 2008. That collapsed to a very small 2% or 3% at the time of the crash and occurring immediately after 2008.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I always get worried when people are not precise. The drop in Government expenditure was not that dramatic.

Dr. Brian Hughes: The overall drop between public and private in gross domestic fixed capital formation went from 23% of GDP-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I am interested in the State investment from its resources not in private investment.

Dr. Brian Hughes: I was taking overall investment because-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I want to hear what Dr. Hughes is saying because he is advising Government. The Government is drawing up a plan and it will put €20 billion, €30 billion, €50 billion or €100 billion into capital investment in housing, infrastructure, water and sewerage, roads, public transport and so on. I am interested in finding out how much of that pot of gold will be spent on the provision of fundamental services such as hospitals, schools and all the things that will be put in if we are going to expand a city and double its size. What proportion of the national capital plan will have to be put into the five, six or seven growth centres? Dublin will have to get a fair bit of money just to deal with the chaos already in the city in terms of transport which has been so well articulated by Dr. Hughes's colleague, John Moran, who says we have a very bad transport system in the city and that it should be like Paris. Of the new national plan, to make the spatial strategy real, what proportion of the total investment should

go into the cities - the nominated agglomeration centres? Are we talking about 80% or 90%?

Dr. Brian Hughes: To come back to a normal economy, perhaps having gone from 23% to 3%, it is generally felt in the economies of modern countries throughout the world that a healthy level of gross domestic fixed capital formation, GDFCF, is about 12%. Depending on how much of that is public sector-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Will Dr. Hughes go back again? I want to explain something. The public can watch proceedings today. They do not know these technical terms so can we speak in English?

Dr. Brian Hughes: Yes.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Gross domestic-----

Dr. Brian Hughes: Fixed capital formation.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Why can we not call it that for the greater public? What Dr. Hughes means by that is the amount of capital investment into an area - in plain English - private and public. Is that right?

Dr. Brian Hughes: Into the entire State.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Yes. Let us remember, people watching proceedings want to hear all this and they want to understand it. They do not want to be bamboozled by technology. What Dr. Hughes is saying is that all this capital formation, as he called it-----

Dr. Brian Hughes: Yes.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: What percentage of it should be focused towards the nominated cities?

Dr. Brian Hughes: I cannot answer that because, quite clearly, any investment, public or private, is dependent upon profitability either by-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The State cannot control the private. I am talking about public policy and public control of public money. That is why I went back to the national development plan, which will be a sister plan to this. How much of that should be focused towards driving city growth? Is it the lion's share of 80% or 90%, or is it 10%?

Dr. Brian Hughes: There has to be an order of priority. It would be based on cost-benefit analysis. Therefore, Government would make decisions, presumably, on the basis of best return and greatest need.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: How is best return defined?

Dr. Brian Hughes: Presumably it will be defined in cost-benefit analysis terms.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: What benefit? Dr. Hughes said "cost" and I know the cost. What does he define as benefit?

Dr. Brian Hughes: The utility of the investment created.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: What does Dr. Hughes describe as utility? I am sorry for being obtuse.

Dr. Brian Hughes: It is defined as the ability of an economic good to satisfy a human want. In its simplest terms, that is what utility means.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: In English, what does it mean?

Dr. Brian Hughes: To satisfy what is needed.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Okay. Dr. Hughes is saying the order of priority should be to push the money towards the cities.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Not necessarily. The order of priority should certainly be focused on giving the best return if it is in the national interest to do so.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I am trying to understand what Dr. Hughes said. His thesis is the national interest is best served by focusing the growth into these urban areas. That is what I took from it.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Yes, certainly.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Therefore, the lion's share should go in there.

Dr. Brian Hughes: It is because, in turn, those urban areas, if they are growing, will be better able to assist the rural hinterland. There will be more in the national pie to distribute to the rural hinterlands than there would be if the country is not doing well.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: May I ask Dr. Hughes a question on that? I have only two more questions. I do not want to hog the meeting. Dublin was growing rapidly up to 2008 and 2009. In the greater scheme of history what has happened in the past five years in terms of growth will be seen as a very minor blip. It is growing rapidly again and the M50 is not up to it. Is there a danger that as the city grows, gets bigger and draws more people, the State will never get on to distributing the money because it will keep needing more and more transport, schools and houses and it will have a whole set of new problems to deal with and will not be able to give the money to Donegal, for example? Is that a danger in the outworking of the theory?

Dr. Brian Hughes: I am sure the National Transport Authority and the other leading bodies looking after national infrastructure have to make the call on what the costs and benefits are.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: What about the demand?

Dr. Brian Hughes: The demand is certainly there.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The demand will be ever circular and this spill-out theory does not work. The more people they have, the more they can suck it back in again. Does Dr. Hughes not think there is a danger of that?

Dr. Brian Hughes: No, I do not. The Nobel Prize winner, Paul Krugman, who has also advised Ireland, has shown there can be a multiplier effect resulting from a strategic investment which will create greater benefits to the nation. Other literature has also shown that. We are looking at what is in Ireland's best national interest.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: May I ask one final question?

Chairman: I will let the Deputy back in. There are people waiting.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I have one final question. I will be gone then. May I ask just one question?

Chairman: The Deputy's time is finished and there are people waiting.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: May I just ask a question? May I beg the Chairman's indulgence?

Chairman: No. I thank Dr. Hughes for coming in and for the deep and detailed report he sent to us. It was fascinating. It is startling that 70% of the total State tax revenue comes from the greater Dublin area. Something like 74% of growth that happened between the two censuses happened in the Leinster area, which is incredible. The fact the population of a number of different counties, even some counties combined, could fit into Croke Park shows that we have had a lopsided, spatially rudderless type of growth over recent years which, as Dr. Hughes says, creates the potential for a city state. Unfortunately, the rest of the country may end up as a national park to that city state. I agree with the argument Deputy Ó Cuív made that there are two conflicting objectives. First, there is such demand in the urban space of Dublin that it will be difficult to feed from capital investment. The other objective is we need to disrupt that demand to a certain extent by creating other locations in other parts of the country that develop the necessary critical mass to create an even balance. Dr. Hughes said it is necessary for those regional cities to double in size. How do we do that? Do we create a formula that outlines two types of spend in our capital investment, one for Dublin demand and the other for demand disruption? How do we orientate Government investment to disrupt it? Will Dr. Hughes give us an example of another country that did it?

Dr. Brian Hughes: If we compare Ireland's second city, Cork, to Finland's second city, Tampere, Cork has one of the best natural harbours in the world and is located in a temperate climate whereas Tampere is very close to being a tundra climate. Why is it that in the 20 years preceding the 2011 census, Tampere has been growing at twice the rate of Cork and has passed it out? This is the sort of fundamental question that we have to address as a nation. It is very disturbing to me. I know that Ryanair flies into Tampere and all the rest of it, but Cork equally has huge resources. One can see the growth of its necklace towns of Cobh, Midleton, Mallow and Carrigaline, with well over 10,000 people. It is feeding outwards. The problem now is one of critical mass. Cork is now very nearly at the point at which it can really take off because it surprisingly increased its city population from 119,000 to 125,000 people and its overall agglomeration increased by about 10,000 people to 208,000 or 209,000 people. That is very encouraging as it happened during the time of Ireland's deepest recession. It does look as if Cork is beginning to really take off now. As Mr. John Moran and others said, we would like to see that happening in Galway and Limerick especially.

Chairman: It would be fascinating for us as a committee to see the particular policy initiatives used to accelerate Tampere's population growth *vis-à-vis* Cork.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Education, modern technological industries and all the rest of it.

Chairman: Okay. One of the problems with the democratic system in this country when it comes to spatial planning is that we are cursed with the idea of one for everybody in the audience. When we hatch particular plans for developments, they are usually orientated by good and sound economic and demographic advice etc. However, by the time they get through the political system here, they are nearly shattered into directing funds and investments in far too many locations to achieve that critical mass. Mr. John Moran, whom the witness mentioned earlier, would nearly be of the extreme view, to a certain extent, that all of the energy should

go into one of those regional cities. Even if we were to take Waterford, Cork, Limerick and Galway and try to grow them as a group of four, we are still probably not going to get to that critical mass that Aarhus in Denmark achieved by managing to build its city up in balance to Copenhagen. How does the witness feel about that? Does he think that four cities are too many or should we be going for less with regard to that development?

Dr. Brian Hughes: Every location has its potential. That was recognised in the definition of balanced regional development. The problem is priority and resources. Clearly, the resources in this recovering country are affected by a still very high national debt and very low interest rates that are going to rise, resulting in a huge amount of future taxation resources having to go towards paying off the national debt and the interest to service that debt. Obviously, we should be investing to give the best returns in the longer term. To my mind, it is not a question of Dublin versus the rest of the country or Dublin plus the other cities versus the towns and rural areas. It is about complementarity. We are all on the Irish team. We are all batting for each other. The point is that we must select winners in preference to laggards, initially anyway, in order that the benefits from the winners can then be available to distribute from the core to the periphery.

Chairman: The witness mentioned in his report that there were some towns that self-selected. He mentioned Portlaoise, for example, which did not necessarily have the same emphasis in the national spatial plan but had its own massive growth. I ask for the witness's views on that. Much of the demographic growth has happened in smaller towns around the country.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Indeed.

Chairman: In a way, one could say that they are self-selecting in a similar manner to which Portlaoise self-selected.

Dr. Brian Hughes: What I am talking about is the multiplier effect. If a large town like Portlaoise because of its growing size and labour pool availability can attract more foreign direct investment and so on, the benefit of that in turn ought to be greater than it might be if a town of 2,000 or 3,000 people was selected. It is difficult politically because the politician has to try to influence the best for Ireland in terms of the national planning framework. Given our resources and all of the things that are coming down the line such as Brexit etc., what is going to be the best for Ireland in the longer term?

Chairman: The witness mentioned the new regional assemblies. Could he tell us a little bit about them? From the vantage point of Leinster House, it is very hard to see how they function and what addition they are delivering.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Dr. Skehan, whose section I have not had time to read out yet, very much pays attention to how centralised the Irish governance system is. Therefore, in terms of subsidiarity, it is a question of how much more decision-making can be handed down to these three new regional authorities. It is quite an interesting one because as the Chairman said, it has not happened yet. Table 2 in my handout and PowerPoint presentation shows the 2011 and 2016 populations of the three regional authority areas. It shows that despite the best efforts in the way they are divided up, there is still a very big imbalance in population and growth achieved between 2011 and 2016, in the 2016 population share and, most importantly, in the population density per square kilometre. If these regional assemblies are set up, there will be a huge task for Government to try to ensure that resources are divided up in a way that gives the best national return but at the same time does not ignore each of these three regional assemblies.

Chairman: I have one final question. The witness alluded to the Dublin-Belfast corridor earlier. I know that he is involved with the advice to Government on the development of it. Is it the case that we are looking at this on an all-Ireland basis? Some of the figures in the witness's report indicate that the western Border area has had some of the largest falls in population. That creates a difficulty. Some of that could be alleviated or mitigated through more North-South integration. Is any of that in the thinking and the development of the national development plan?

Dr. Brian Hughes: It is. If we look at the entire island, half of the population is located in the Dublin-Belfast corridor and the surrounding areas. That is just the reality. The shift is taking place further east. The current centre of gravity of the national population on a single point is now focused on the town of Maynooth and is moving further eastward. That historically has been the case since the foundation of the State, particularly because of the centralised nature of our Government and the fact that so much activity is going on within Dublin. There are gains to be had in the Dublin-Belfast corridor, and obviously also the other corridors of Derry-Letterkenny and so on and forth. The Dublin-Belfast one is hugely important. It is about the accessibility of it. Dublin Airport, with its 29 million people a year, is not just available to Dublin but is only 20 minutes down the road from Drogheda, for example. Likewise, Dublin Port, doing 30 million tonnes a year, is similarly located. It is the complementarity that might be achieved in an all-Ireland context with a satisfactory post-Brexit situation that we are now trying to negotiate. That will hugely benefit the country if we can get it right.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: I thank Dr. Hughes for his very interesting and compelling presentation. The phrase of "distance decay" that he used earlier on was an interesting one. I live in County Galway and see that physically before me everyday in terms of the economic footprint of Galway city and how the economic power of the city peters out as one goes out to the outer fringes of both east Galway and west Galway. There are what the witness described as the necklace towns of Oranmore, Athenry, Tuam, Gort and Loughrea, and they are all within easily commutable distances of the city. In fact, the census results a few weeks ago proved that 50% of the working population originates from outside the city. However, in the far reaches of east Galway, in places such as Lawrencetown, Eyrecourt and Kiltormer, there is little or no economic impact from the city. Is it the experience that when the size of a city such as Galway is doubled, the consequent economic footprint widens in terms of a greater economic benefit accruing to towns that were formerly beyond the existing economic footprint? Does the distance decay element decrease as the city increases in size?

John Moran has spoken and written extensively on my second question. If we are to prioritise investment in the future on trying to create an economic counterpoint to Dublin city and its unstoppable growth, which is quite apparent now, a huge opportunity exists in developing Galway and Limerick cities as a single urban conurbation. There are many reasons that it would work. First, there are Galway port and Foynes, both of which offer huge opportunities for development in the future. There is also Shannon Airport, whose existing infrastructure is not capitalised upon to any great extent. In Limerick city and Galway city there are incredibly successful third level institutions. If we are deadly serious about developing these powerful counterpoints to Dublin and the Dublin-Belfast conurbation, as Dr. Hughes described it, we must focus on Galway-Limerick as a genuine opportunity to develop a single city in the future. What are Dr. Hughes's thoughts on that? What type of investment would be required to make that happen?

I understand Deputy Ó Cuív's argument to a certain extent, but when one looks at what is happening globally, it is clear that cities are becoming the engines of economic growth and de-

velopment, almost to the point that cities are competing with other cities across the globe rather than countries competing with other countries. It is becoming a city-centric economic growth model for the future. Is Galway-Limerick realistic and is it a solution? John Moran at one time suggested continuing that conurbation down to Cork and ultimately to Waterford. Will one dilute the possible effect by trying to spread it across a greater part of the country? Is Galway-Limerick enough to make it happen?

Second, all our cities in the past 100 or 150 years have developed economically primarily because they had the infrastructure in place for that to happen. What opportunity, if any, exists to move beyond the cities to the smaller towns and villages and to generate economic growth with digital infrastructure? Is there something happening in the digital area whereby, if we get our broadband infrastructure right nationally and we get the magical minimum of 30 Mbps into every house by the end of 2021 or 2022 and 100 Mbps in other locations, there is an opportunity to move beyond that city-centric economic development model to use digital technology, particularly in the creative space? Is there anything we are not tapping into or ignoring in our rush towards growing our cities? In the past the infrastructure required for economic development was solely located in our cities. With the use of technology, that economic growth model could be migrated to smaller towns and villages. Is that being examined and is it an opportunity for the future?

Dr. Brian Hughes: The Deputy made some interesting points. Professor Edward Walsh's Atlantic corridor is a hugely important opportunity for Ireland if we can get it right. Obviously, the first thing is the M20 or N20, the road from Cork to Limerick. That is an important aspect and would be high up on the priority list of infrastructure. Yes, we must utilise Shannon Airport. It is a marvellous asset. I have flown from there many times. Certainly, we must focus on concentrated infrastructure. People will ask about the regional airport at Carnmore in Galway and the linking of the motorway from Dublin to Galway for a two hour trip-----

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: In two months one will be able to drive from the periphery of Galway city to the door of Shannon Airport in a little over an hour.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Absolutely. There is also the link from that same road to Tuam. It is very exciting to see that happen. However, it is about infrastructure priority. We put substantial amounts of money into upgrading the Galway to Limerick railway. How many thousand people are using that per day or week? It is a question of the return on capital employed. This goes to the heart of the Deputy's question. The Deputy referred to distance decay. That is undoubtedly a huge factor. In other words, it might take some time to get the Galway and Limerick population up to a point where it creates this urban agglomeration synergy between the two, but it is a hugely important issue in the Irish context. Galway and Limerick are, respectively, the fourth and third largest cities and cannot be ignored.

The Deputy's second point related to examples of local infrastructure. Through my in-laws in Mitchelstown and Kilbehenny it has been fascinating to see the work that has gone into the Ballyhoura initiative and the way it has been able to part-fund the extension and improvement of the community centre in Kilbehenny. What is happening there with the surrounding Knockmealdown, Galtee and Ballyhoura mountain ranges is that people can come and have showers, use the IT and so forth if they wish. Clearly, linked in with that is the need for better access to the mountains as our tourism increases. There are other very exciting examples such as local beer, local quality beef and quality deer. There is the hugely increased Dairygold plant and the resulting milk intake. All those developments are replacing the industry that disappeared and which greatly affected Mitchelstown 15 or 20 years ago. It is great to see how it is on the way

back and to see the vitality. It is a fantastic place to visit and the golf club is super. I hope I have covered the Deputy's points.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: This is not my area, but I live there and I have a son there. What the witness is discussing is extraordinary information for the future of how we want Ireland to look and how we want to survive post Brexit. Perhaps he would drill down further on this. His theory is that if we put all this into cities such as Galway, Limerick and Waterford, it will have a tentacle effect outside. Perhaps he will elaborate and outline the change that happened between Birr and Edenderry, one of the examples he gave. How did Edenderry survive and Birr retract? His theory falls apart somewhat when one considers Naas, which is dying on its feet, and Portarlington. Saying it falls apart is a little dramatic, but one could question the theory.

I have read guys such as Stiglitz and Krugman. Sometimes when one hears all this talk it sounds great. Tampere is a very good example. What exactly did it do that Cork is not doing? Do not tell me that it lacked a population of 400,000 or 500,000, because I am not sure that is the only reason. I agree with much of what Deputy Ó Cuív says. Rather than distance decay, I think of distance creativity. I would not call it decay. I was in Longford and Roscommon yesterday. It is very good to roll up into a town in the middle of the day to see what is going on by visiting shops and visiting guys who are selling cars, all on personal contract plan, PCP. That is why half the country is driving around in trucks. We all have three or four cars now because we can get them on the never-never at low interest rates. Longford has a huge population and huge unemployment. I ask Dr. Hughes to go through those three aspects.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Regarding town size and growth, in an earlier life, I worked in the provincial bank in Birr so I got to know the town. The Senator's question is why Edenderry and not Birr. If one commutes daily, every ten minutes extra one must spend commuting is ten minutes less one has to be able to assimilate each day into the local community. I call this the Rochford-bridge scenario. Regarding distance decay, apart altogether from the cost of commuting, it is a matter of the time and the energy spent commuting. I understand that Intel, for example, says it is not terribly happy taking people on in Leixlip if they must spend more than 45 minutes commuting in each direction because the realisation is that this very much affects the amount they can then put into their job that is already gone in commuting.

The Senator talked about-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: It is a question of distance.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Yes. The Senator asked a question about Tampere specifically. How has Tampere been able to do what it has done? It has focused hugely on education-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: So have we.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Yes, but Tampere got in on technical education at an early point. I asked whether the growth was only occurring in Tampere itself or whether the surrounding areas were growing as well. I was very interested to be told the surrounding areas are also growing. Obviously, density of population is hugely important. Tampere is 100 miles north of Helsinki so it is very far north. It has always fascinated me how Tampere's population has been able to grow at more than twice the per annum compound of Cork's. An awful lot more urban economic and new economic geography research is needed in this regard. In the 1980s, we had a research body called An Foras Forbartha, the National Institute for Physical Planning and Construction

Research, that carried out this kind of research. It is terribly unfortunate and very sad that, on political grounds, it disappeared.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I ask Dr. Hughes to respond to my point about Naas being so near Dublin yet not alive in the same way.

Dr. Brian Hughes: It is interesting to compare Naas. I have looked back over the past few censuses, comparing directly Naas with nearby Newbridge. Naas is the county town, yet why has Newbridge been growing at twice the rate of Naas in recent years? It is probably because of the necklace of towns surrounding Naas to some extent diluting the population centring in Naas. The same phenomenon is very evident in the case of Sligo and its surrounding towns. However, the way in which places such as Straffan, Kill and so on have developed suggest to me that to some extent some towns are being diluted. The Irish people - at least, some of them - to a large extent still prefer to live in the countryside if they can then work in Dublin, Naas or wherever. It is fascinating to see the comparable growth of Naas and Newbridge.

Deputy Martin Heydon: As a Teachta Dála based in Newbridge, I am delighted to have the opportunity to get involved in this discussion. I was going to use Athy as an example to try to tease out the places Dr. Hughes is thinking about. I thank him for his presentation, which I found hugely interesting, but I cannot let the Naas-Newbridge comparison go. Newbridge has definitely passed out Naas as a retail town, and I think some of the reasons for this are down to planning decisions. A very large Tesco complex on the edge of Naas town was given planning permission, which has effectively caused the town centre to die. This coincided with a town centre development not going ahead because of the recession. It was the perfect storm. There are perfectly viable businesses in the heart of Naas town now closing, with business moving out to the shopping centre because of more footfall. I think this is largely a planning decision.

I would not say Naas is dying on its feet. Retailers are very negative, but there are many positives in Naas, and Kerry Group was a huge one. Naas basically fought off competition from Amsterdam and London to win that business, and Kildare County Council did very well in playing its part in helping to secure it. When one talks to senior management in Kerry Group, one hears that one of their main reasons for locating in Naas and not Dublin, London or Amsterdam was the quality of life for their staff and the staff's ability to afford housing in the area and send their children to school in the area. Senior management's view is that if their staff are happy and the company is able to attract and retain good staff, it is very positive for them, which I thought was an interesting insight.

The whole middle of Kildare has benefited from 900 jobs coming into the Naas area, but this has also brought its challenges, specifically the increased housing demand that comes with an increase in employment opportunities. I take Dr. Hughes's point that Sallins and similar towns on the edge of Naas have grown exponentially and that Newbridge does not have the same pull out of it. Interestingly, Kildare County Council's long-term master plan is for the population of Naas to increase from 22,000 at present to 50,000 and for the population of Newbridge, at present 23,000, to increase to 25,000. If this plan remains the same, we will see that change continue into the future.

I wish to use the example of Athy, further south in south Kildare and still an hour from Dublin. There is a perception of Kildare as being affluent all over. When people from outside Kildare meet a person they discover is from Kildare, they ask him or her whether he or she owns a racehorse. They believe everyone in Kildare owns a racehorse, works for Intel or Pfizer or is a big farmer. This perception poses huge challenges for us as a county. Like everywhere else,

we have our pockets of deprivation. Those pockets of deprivation tend not to get looked after as well as other areas that are perhaps better recognised as being deprived. Leixlip and Athy, in the very south of our county, are worlds apart, yet when it comes to making decisions as to how much Leader funding Kildare gets, the county is bundled up all together, which is a challenge. This was very much evident when the Minister, Deputy Bruton, and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation a few years ago extended the regional aid map ever so slightly and Athy was one of the three towns included in the extension. This was a recognition that there was difficulty attracting business there. However, the town has recently undergone regeneration.

What I am interested to find out is what our aspiration as people who have responsibility for trying to manage Athy should be in the context of what Dr. Hughes says. I do not disagree that key cities can be drivers of economic growth. Athy is an hour south of Dublin, was a thriving market town for years and was home to enterprises such as Minch Malt and Batchelors peas for years. The main industry in the town of Athy was predicated on the fact that it is surrounded by some of the best agricultural land in the country. This has fallen away now. We do not have that same level of employment in the area. Should the aspiration of Athy be simply that people will work in Dublin or nearby or for Kerry Group and it is hoped they will live in Athy and commute back and forth? Are we wrong to want our own industry and enterprise in the town?

As part of a regeneration project, we have undertaken a survey of the town. Some of the demographics in Athy are very challenging for a variety of reasons. We have worryingly high youth unemployment, and the extent of employment in the area is probably a little more negative than it would be in other towns. In doing the survey, we found out something that surprised us: there are 900 people in a town of 9,500 basically sleeping in Athy but going up and down to Dublin or elsewhere to work. We are trying to ascertain exactly what kinds of skills they have. This could then allow us to sell the story to multinationals or other industry that we have this talent pool here that does not want to be travelling up and down the road or the railway and would prefer to work in the Athy area. What should our aspiration be in this regard? What does Dr. Hughes envisage for regional towns with population sizes of 10,000 or perhaps 5,000 that are not a million miles away from a big city? Obviously, it comes down to quality of life; it is not just about population. While it is interesting to see that Athy's population is decreasing, this does not really tell us much because if the whole population is travelling, its quality of life is not the same. What I have personally seen happen in the town is that, of those 900, those who are likely to get involved in the local community are those who have children. This is the same for Kildare town or any of the commuter towns. Once one has children in a school, one gets to know other parents, one's kids go to play in the local GAA or soccer club, one gets to meet other people and one gets involved in the local community centre. The double-income, no-kids couples who are working hard to pay off their mortgages probably do not have that same attraction. If they are originally from Dublin, they tend to go back to Dublin to socialise at the weekends and do not ingratiate themselves with the community at all. This is not what we want to build in our towns, specifically our regional towns. I am considering the matter more in the societal context than just the economic context. We want to make sure our towns are live, living communities because that is where the support will be. As our population ages, we will need that level of support and that everyone would know their neighbours.

Dr. Brian Hughes: Two or three weeks ago, when the CSO produced its data on towns, I first looked at the general trends before drilling down into specific towns, including Athy. It occurred to me that, in general terms, the towns in the east of Ireland are growing much faster than the towns in the west. However, Athy stood out. Why has Athy lost 200 people over the

past five years? Why has it bucked the trend that has otherwise occurred in the east? I began to ask around and discussed with several people why this was the case. Athy is a very interesting urban laboratory to study. Specifically, it has had a long industrial base that was partly associated with agriculture, milling and so on. The tall buildings visible from miles around as one goes into Athy from any direction are evidence of that. I understand that Athy has had a number of social problems, which the Deputy has alluded to. Therefore, it is incumbent on any town to try to do its best to stamp out those problems as early as possible so that it - I am not saying this is the case with Athy - will not get a specific reputation. I think the Deputy knows what I mean. I can speak to him afterwards in greater detail about what happened and what I think is happening in Athy. However, I do not want to say any more at this point if the Deputy does not mind.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: May I add something? When I was speaking about Naas, I did not mean to undermine the wonderful town that it is. I was really talking about the dumbing down of the shops and the big Tesco taking over the whole life force and pulling it out of the town. That is bad planning. In Naas, McAuley Place is one of the greatest and most creative places for older people to live in the middle of the community. It is the greatest template for the rest of the country. Therefore, there are incredible things going on. I was really giving that as an example and Dr. Hughes knows his geography better than that. However, it sort of questions his great theory about satellite towns near a great city pulling or being able to pound on the tentacles of the great city. Where is that theory there? In one way, I understand it but, in another, Dr. Hughes is saying that a town must stand up for itself and be totally independent and that it cannot be dependent on a big city and must do it for itself. Therefore, where is the theory?

Dr. Brian Hughes: Athy is in a flat plain, more or less, in south Kildare. Admittedly, it is not too far away from the Dublin-Wicklow mountains. However, people choose to live in locations with excellent environment. This has always been the case. That is why the golf courses and the historic bases of Drogheda make it so attractive, which might not be the case with Athy or some other towns. That is considered by people when making decisions on where to locate.

The other hugely important thing in all of this, particularly in terms of what Deputy Heydon was saying about youth unemployment and so on, is that we are experiencing a massive societal change in what is called the nature and change of work. That societal change means that there is an imperative to try to regard one's life as a whole of life. In other words, there is an imperative to use all of the time in that life to obtain as much education, learning, skills and development as one can, specifically in terms of the huge changes that are taking place in the nature of work.

Going back to Athy, therefore, or to any other town that might not have a specific educational institute or whatever else close by, I am not saying that this is necessarily always the case always but it is an important factor. In terms of skills training and opportunities for work, we see the Construction Industry Federation listing 115,000 jobs in a range of differing activities, for example. I have listed them in one of my appendices. We have to get back to skills training, particularly apprentices and so on. It is fantastic now to see the latest information in terms of the number of additional people employed. We are back to within approximately 120,000 of our 2006 high point, with 2.04 million people at work. The number of additional people working in each quarter is so encouraging. The hope would be that all young people would be encouraged, depending on their abilities and interests, to try to gain that education or work experience, particularly in the building industry and nursing. They talk about the number of additional nurses that we will need in Ireland. Resources are hugely important in that context to be able to fund health further. However, there are huge opportunities available now. We are

in the fourth year of the fastest recovery of any European nation. We have led that recovery in terms of the rate of growth. It is fantastic to see that now being translated into more employment opportunities.

Chairman: Deputy Ó Cuív has indicated that he would like to come in again.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Dr. Hughes said at the very beginning that cities grew and became important because of the facility for the spread of information. Will he elaborate on what he means by the spread of information? How did that work in cities and not in the country?

Dr. Brian Hughes: It is a fascinating one. People ask, with broadband and instant communication, what happens to distance decay and the need for proximity. It seems looking another in the face, eyeball to eyeball, where a person can actually discern the human language and the mannerisms or whatever else is a hugely important factor in negotiating and in terms of building team work, trust and all the rest of it. That might not be there to the same extent if operating over a long distance or using the benefits of broadband. Therefore, the exchange of ideas that comes about from being in coffee shops, at business meetings or whatever else is hugely important in this respect. That again is why, with technology and information, which we are all having to work with, despite our age or whatever, we are learning from each other all the time. This in turn is increasing our confidence and our ability to do business, take on board new ideas, play a better game, help my golf swing or whatever the case may be. We are students all our lives and proximity is hugely important in that context.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: That is a valid and interesting concept. As politicians, I think that we would all agree with it. When I was a Minister, I had a policy of never refusing a delegation from anyone and I went off and met the delegations as opposed to them coming to me. I agree with Dr. Hughes that there is a very serious role in that regard. However, one could say that us Teachtaí Dála from rural Ireland do that three days a week up here and three days a week in our constituencies. We do not have to be here seven days a week. For example, many of us would admit that we do not spend all that much time in our constituency offices - if they are away from here - because a great deal of what we do involves being out and about. However, we maintain a fantastic relationship with our staff by meeting them every week and sitting down with them, but not all day every day. We do the rest by this - I know it annoys people when they are misused - and by Internet, telephone and in a million other ways. I am wondering if this has been modelled in. What seems to be happening quite frequently is that Eir does all the houses and then stops. I suddenly get a whole lot of frantic calls from people saying they are working from home three days a week, living out the country, and that they nearly got the Gbit but did not quite get it.

Has anyone modelled an Ireland that accommodates what is very likely to happen, which is that people come to a city two or three days a week to do the little coffee shop gig, the meetings and the conferences, and do the rest in peace and quiet where they can get on with the work in a more secluded location? Has Dr. Hughes modelled all this? Life has a funny habit of beating people such as the witnesses with their plans because the people move ahead of them. It seems to be happening. I certainly know from my experience that if I want to get away from it all and avoid meetings for a day to catch up with the paperwork and do the e-mails and the phone calls, the best place for me to be is sitting in my home in Corr na Móna, because then people only come to me on Saturday morning at the right time and I can get on with the job. Has anyone done a model that asks what if the future is not the simple model the witnesses are putting forward here today? What if the future is that we live on an island that is the size of the footprint of many American cities when their recreational areas are taken into account, for ex-

ample, New York, New Jersey and upstate Connecticut or wherever they all go for the weekend. Should we not model that rather than this 20th century view that seems to be predominant in public thinking at the moment that everyone has to come in at eight o'clock every morning and be in work at nine o'clock, clogging every street? We are actually going to have many people working at home, coming in at ten o'clock or 10.30 two days a week and not having to travel up to the city. In that way we could relieve a lot of the traffic and people would live in a much more salubrious manner.

My second question concerns those who come from the nice comfortable middle classes and move into the city. More rural people get a good education per 100,000 than urban people, so these are our biggest resource in generating all this great growth and foreign interest and so on. The big growth has been the high-performing rural areas which, per 100,000 population, get more into the top end than the whole of Dublin city. By not growing the countryside, particularly the non-urban countryside, are we not in danger of killing the goose that laid the golden egg? What if that supply dries up some time in the future?

Anyone who watches hurling or football teams will see this crazy phenomenon. Anyone who went to see the Cork hurling team last Sunday, who had a fantastic achievement, should take the population of Cork city and its environs, what Dr. Hughes call the dominated area of Cork, as the total population of the hurling playing part of the county, so we can count out west Cork, and see how many of the people who came from urban areas and from the city made the team compared with how many from rural areas. They will ask if there is something happening here that defies logic. Has that factor been included?

How does Dr. Hughes deal with the fact contained in this model that as we grow cities, we grow the RAPID areas of this country, defined by Trutz Haase as areas high in deprivation? I do not care what statistics show. Try asking rural people if they would swap where they are living. Does the committee know where Ballycroy is? One night in Ballycroy I had approximately 300 people in a hall, which would be one for every two that live in the place, and I offered to put any one of them up in any RAPID area of my choice for a week at my expense. I did not get one taker. If it was really so attractive, why were they not queuing up at the end of the hall? That is because they would have dreaded to go where I was going to send them. My question is how do we create cities without creating these RAPID areas that account for so much of the rim of Dublin city around the M50? These are economically non-generative, they are destroying huge resources and they are places where people have more drugs than jobs, unfortunately, and I am not blaming the fabulous people who live there. How does Dr. Hughes deal with that?

The programme for Government states, "We also recognise that as the economy recovers it is essential that the new Government, together with the Oireachtas, puts in place measures to revitalise all of Ireland so that the benefits are felt inside every doorstep and in every community." Is that not at odds with the direction that Dr. Hughes and Mr. Moran are pushing things? They are saying that is poppycock, that we cannot get to every doorstep, and that we have to concentrate the development in the growing areas for the benefit of an economy, whatever that is.

Dr. Brian Hughes: I love going down the fields with a half-cup of coffee in my hand to collect cattle to bring them back and to help do relief milking. Our environment can be various and our lifespan's experience suggests we will not always be in one location at one time. To take the Deputy himself, for example, he grew up and was educated in Dublin and now he has the benefit of both worlds in rural Galway, which is fantastic. The thing is to try to build on the strengths of all aspects of Irish life, both urban and rural. That is why I said initially in my presentation that the need for complementarity between urban and rural is what we all need to

focus on.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Will Dr. Hughes-----

Chairman: Deputy, there were ten minutes for questions. Nine minutes have been taken up and the witness has only had 30 seconds to respond.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I hear the nice words, but in cold cash, we are putting in the resources because we have to. If we are going to double the size of Galway, Cork, Limerick and Waterford and deal with the crazy problems Dublin city already has with its present population, we are going to have to put in megabucks. We all admit that Dublin is growing. Therefore it is going to take more and more megabucks. Last year, €200 million was spent just to service a site. Is Dr. Hughes not saying in simple English that the vast bulk of the cash has to go into the towns and cities? Let us call a spade a spade and be blunt about this and stop the sweet talk. Is that not what Dr. Hughes is telling us? If that is the way, then that is his thesis and I am just trying to understand his thesis.

Dr. Brian Hughes: It is not the way. The problems faced by rural Ireland are the same worldwide. Welsh sheep farmers, for example, live on an average income of £12,500 a year, 85% of which comes from the EU. The problems faced here are not specific to Ireland. That is my point. The opportunities that Ireland has, however, are going to benefit this country hugely if we take things in easy stages and make the right decisions at the right time.

This plan, Ireland 2040 Our Plan - Issues and Choices, is out to 2040. It is going to be the replacement for the national spatial strategy. I really worry about this document in the context of what Deputy Ó Cuív has just said, however, because on several of its pages it seems to suggest that we need to think again about the business as usual model that has got us to where we are. The bailout is gone, we have had the third or fourth year of the strongest European growth, and yet this plan we are now looking at for both urban and rural Ireland plans to try to modify or get rid of the business as usual model. We need all the resources we can get to help both urban and rural Ireland.

Problems are not just specific to rural Ireland, but there are several rural Irelands. There is the rural Ireland the Deputy described, there is the one that I described with the half-cup of coffee in my hand, and there is a rural Ireland with the huge amount of produce from horticulture in north Dublin and so on. Given our new lifestyles and what we like, there is also the rural Ireland of fishing and seafood and so forth. We want to try to take advantage of all these assets and attributes in order that by 2040, we can get the best Ireland there can be.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Can we get to the urban deprivation issue? It is wrong. If one thinks that there are challenges in rural Ireland, we must be honest that the challenges in rural Ireland with regard to lifestyle quality pale into total insignificance when compared with disadvantaged urban areas. Is there a plan in this great model to eliminate the drug problem in Dublin, the total social deprivation and the low educational rates of certain revitalising areas by planning, investment and development, RAPID, programme areas? I will define them as that because they are scientifically worked out. Is there a plan to do that?

Chairman: We have had 15 minutes on this and I have a couple of questions. In many ways, the problems that Deputy Ó Cuív-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I have to leave to speak in defence of sheep farmers in the Chamber.

Chairman: Okay. In many ways, the questions that Deputy Ó Cuív asks are as a result of the lack of spatial planning. They are as a result of the rudderless experience that we have. Ireland will have a population of about 10 million people in 2050. There is going to be significant population growth. The question with which we are faced is where to locate people. The current spatial plan is leading to problems in urban Dublin, the commuter belt and rural Ireland. Dublin is overheating in many ways and cannot take the level of growth it is getting with the level of investment it is getting. In my county this morning, more people left-----

Dr. Brian Hughes: Where is that?

Chairman: County Meath. More people left Meath to go to work outside the county than actually worked inside the county this morning. It is the only local authority area in the State where the majority of workers leave that local authority area to work. The majority stays within a local authority area everywhere else. As Navan is the biggest town in the country without a rail line, we do not even have the infrastructure to allow for that commuting space. People spend three hours a day commuting back and forth from Navan. That works out at 90 full days unpaid a year, for that particular commute. It is worse if one is from Athboy, Oldcastle or Kells.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Why have there not been moves to create a rail line?

Chairman: There has been little or no investment in heavy rail line building in Ireland for the last 15 years.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Surely that would be central?

Chairman: We have pushed and pushed it. One of the last projects was the project Dr. Hughes mentioned, between Limerick and Galway. Unfortunately, that happened at the same time as the motorway being built. It was slower than the motorway and therefore was not selected by commuters and passenger numbers are low there. I have no doubt but that were one built to Navan, it would massively reduce the amount of people using the roads that are feeding into the M50. To help the M50, a rail line would take about 15,000 cars off the M50. It would be an investment not just from Navan to Dublin, but for all of the Dublin area as well.

Then we have the rural Ireland element. As for part of the reason this is happening, Teagasc produced a report stating a young family now needs two incomes to pay for itself. If one wants two incomes, one needs to be outside of a large urban area to be able to get those two incomes. We need to do a number of things to disrupt that. We need to make sure that investment is prioritised away from demand to a certain extent. It is not disruption if it completely follows that demand. We also need to make sure that the key elements - communication, transport and education infrastructure - are part of those disruptive investments.

The other element is that the Government needs to move first. We cannot ask foreign direct investment to go to Waterford if the Government will not go to Waterford. We need the Government to lead on that disruption in its own right. As part of that, a guarantee must be given to people in rural areas that they will have access to decent transportation and communications.

Dr. Brian Hughes: I have a question to ask the Chairman, if I may. I thought that there was a railway line from Navan to Drogheda which is used for-----

Chairman: There is a freight line from Tara Mines, which has the effect of taking about 40 HGVs off the road a day, so it is a great addition. We have asked the Government to consider putting a passenger line back into Drogheda, which would give it access to the Dublin to Belfast

corridor. The Government's view is the length of time it would take to take the journey would not allow for take-up. The three hours in a car currently spent going back and forth to Dublin has an enormous cost on family life as well. Mothers and fathers leave their kids in crèches at 7 a.m. and race back to pick them up in the evening. How do we formulate that disruption in order that we at least meet some of the demand needs in Dublin but also re-orientate development into those key cities around the country?

Dr. Brian Hughes: One major thing we must do is try to separate regional and local traffic. If, for example, we get our act together and decide to build the eastern bypass, we would get an enormous return from that straight away. I know it means looking at Sandymount Strand again and so on but that is just one example. There are many other examples as well. The Chairman talks specifically about overheating. It is clearly important that, as all of our cities develop, the infrastructure needed for them to operate more smoothly is developed in turn. Look at the improvement to Limerick when the tunnel was put in west of the city. There are other such examples as well. It is fantastic now to be able to get as quickly as possible to the Blarney viaduct in the southern part of Cork city. One goes down under Dunkettle roundabout through the tunnel, and before one knows it, if going to Baltimore or wherever else, one is at the Blarney viaduct.

To help all of this, we have to think in terms of accessibility and putting as much as we can into an ordered priority of infrastructure to try to help this. The Chairman is absolutely right about County Meath and the number of people who work elsewhere. Clearly, critical mass is hugely important. As the critical mass of Drogheda, for example, increases, more service-type employment is going to come into the town because it is so close to Dublin Airport, Dublin Port and so on, as well as the port in Drogheda itself. Even small elements of infrastructure have to be considered. For example, Mr. Peter Monahan and others have had difficulty in trying to get a cycleway from Mornington over to the Battle of the Boyne site, and it is only a small project. There is clearly a need for this new spirit of openness and planning for the best Ireland. We all need to be positive instead of resisting things. We need to be as positive as possible about opportunities to allow us to capture this as soon as possible, to put in the motorway, the cycleway or whatever is needed.

Chairman: I thank Dr. Hughes for appearing before our committee today. The information he has given to us will become part of the report we are writing. We wish him luck with his advice to the Government in the development of its report.

Dr. Brian Hughes: I thank the Chairman and Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell.

The joint committee went into private session at 3.58 p.m. and resumed in public session at 4.45 p.m.

Chairman: We will now consider the topic of the granting of planning permission in rural areas and the national spatial strategy for 2002 to 2020 and its successor within the context of the committee's current project - what it takes to sustain a viable rural community - with representatives from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. I welcome the following witnesses who are representing the Department: Mr. Niall Cussen, principal planning adviser; Mr. Terry Sheridan, principal officer; Mr. Paul Hogan, senior planning adviser; Ms Alma Walsh, planning adviser; and Maude Ní Bhrolcháin Uasal, oifigeach riaracháin. I thank them for attending.

I draw the witnesses' attention to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the com-

mittee. If, however, they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. The opening statement and any other documents the witnesses have provided may be published on the committee website after this meeting. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House, or any official by name in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

Mr. Niall Cussen: I thank the Cathaoirleach for the opportunity to meet with the committee today to discuss the topic before us. My colleague, Paul Hogan, will go through some of the issues relating to the spatial strategy and the national planning framework and then I will revert to some of the issues around housing and rural development in the latter part.

Mr. Paul Hogan: I thank my colleague, Mr. Cussen, the Chairman, Deputies and Senators. I will speak a little bit about the Ireland 2040 process. I will run through it very quickly because I am sure members have seen the statement at this stage.

Since the national spatial strategy, NSS, was published 15 years ago, a lot has happened. There has been a lot of positive progress in terms of infrastructure, particularly transport infrastructure. More concerning is the fact that the locations which were identified as strategic growth points, in other words as “gateways” and “hubs”, in that strategy were outperformed in the intervening years by many other locations and that has caused us difficulties. Nonetheless, the NSS was a very important starting point in the process in which we are now engaged. It established a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to planning and infrastructure co-ordination. The lessons learned from the NSS are a valuable resource for us in developing its successor strategy, which is why our Department commissioned an expert advisory report to independently appraise its implementation a couple of years ago. That report is available on the Ireland 2040 website and the national planning framework website.

Public consultation on Ireland 2040 kicked off on 2 February. It was launched by An Taoiseach and the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Deputy Coveney, at Maynooth University. As part of the process, we had an Ireland 2040 issues and choices paper that outlined key areas for consideration in planning for Ireland’s future, including a section devoted to the potential of rural areas. We also engaged in a large number of consultation events throughout the country with the Minister and, independently, with local councillors. Further to the consultation process, we received more than 3,000 submissions before the deadline at the end of March. Many of those were specific to Ireland 2040. Also informing the preparation of the framework is a statistical, demographic and econometric model report prepared by the Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI, which projects population and employment data for a number of different scenarios into the future. That aligns with the latest 2016 census data. In terms of legislative compliance, we also need to prepare a strategic environmental assessment, a strategic flood risk assessment and screening for habitats directive assessment as part of this process. We have to do all of those things.

In Ireland, we have the good fortune of being able to plan for the progression of our country in terms of economic and demographic growth and social development and the environment. Over the next 20 years, our country is likely to grow in population terms by at least 1 million. There will be approximately two-thirds of a million people at work and we will need at least

500,000 more homes to be provided. We are very different from many of our European neighbours in this regard because of our still-young population and the agility of our economy in adjusting to various economic shocks and opportunities. Ireland punches way above its weight, as do some of our cities and their wider regions, notably Dublin which, as our capital city, puts the country on the global map, particularly from a foreign direct investment perspective.

There are some key questions for the national planning framework, NPF. Where should people live and work? How can we best ensure a high quality of life and environment and the delivery of the kind of physical and social infrastructure that is needed to sustain progress for all our people? The population of Ireland in April 2016 was just over 4.76 million people. As regards the proportion of the national population residing in rural Ireland, the CSO regards rural areas as those outside settlements with inhabitants of 1,500 or more people and, in those terms, we have a population that is 63% urban and 37% rural. Some 1.75 million people are thus defined as rural. If the threshold is raised to include those towns with a population of 10,000 people, almost half of Ireland's population would be considered to live in rural areas. That metric is more useful for the integrated planning we need to do and it enables us to look at urban and rural issues together to reflect the complementary nature of their roles and functions.

In overall terms, rural parts of Ireland outside census towns experienced quite high levels of national population growth between 1996 and 2016. This level of growth was almost unique in Europe, where the trend has generally been that rural populations have declined, especially where located outside the catchments of large cities. Map 1.1 in our presentation illustrates the contrast between the growing parts of our country, in red and brighter colours, and declining parts of our country, in grey and darker colours. While a growing population and a fast-developing country in some parts are a plus from a strategic planning perspective, the way in which our larger cities and towns have been growing fastest at their edges, while in many cases city and town centres are in population decline, is presenting many infrastructural, investment, social and environmental challenges. At the same time, the data highlight a contrast between a growing population in many, but not all countryside areas, while ever-higher vacancy rates of housing and other premises are being experienced in smaller towns and villages. Many of our major cities and towns are growing fastest at their outward limits, placing overspilling residential development pressures on smaller rural towns and villages that, at times, are struggling to cope with the influx of such development. Once one moves further out into remoter and more rural communities, it is the smaller towns and villages that appear to experience higher levels of vacancy and underutilisation of their built environment, leading to the familiar spiral of loss of services and depopulation. The challenge we face is that the continuation of these trends into the future might well undo much of the progress of recent decades. We need a new way forward.

Mr. Niall Cussen: Population growth and the places where development has taken place in Ireland over the past decade or so paint a contrasting picture and pose key challenges that must be faced in preparing the national planning framework. On one hand, rural areas on the edges and in the environs of strongly performing urban areas are being built up at quite high rates. These areas are growing very fast and infrastructure provision and management of environmental pressures are proving very challenging. On the other hand, remoter rural areas and small to medium-sized towns and villages are presenting with a striking trend of depopulation and the spectre of empty dwellings and shops in what were once vibrant and viable towns and villages.

It would appear to the Department that some of the key factors driving the most rapid patterns of growth outward from city and town cores include: increasing costs and complexity in

developing new housing in central urban areas which has to compete for land with higher-return commercial development and is drawn, instead, to cheaper land and development costs associated with edge or greenfield development; enhanced accessibility of large areas around the main cities and towns as a result of recent motorway and public transport investment, bringing with it a pressure on development; household choices that trade affordability and dwelling size for proximity to employment, a factor which often relates to the life stages of the households in question, with young people wanting to be in the centre and people with families looking for more space until, at a later stage of life, they want to return close to the services again; and the ready availability of zoned lands in edge locations coupled with broadly flexible rural settlement policies.

I will not go through all the statistics in the paper but I will highlight a few points. We have a national vacant house reuse strategy which is in the final stages of development. This is a major issue in terms of the broader challenges we face. Looking at the levels of vacancy in rural housing stock in the census of 2016, it is very notable that the areas with the highest proportions of one-off housing provision are the areas with the highest proportion of vacancy and where population has stabilised or declined and is ageing.

The CSO data suggest that long-term vacancy is more of an issue in rural than in urban areas. A sample of vacant properties in rural areas showed that almost 21.7% of empty properties were listed as long-term vacant, which is almost twice the rate of the sample taken in the Dublin area. The evidence could be seen, therefore, to suggest that while the supply and proportion of single houses in the countryside in many western parts of the country is high, these are the very areas continuing to trend towards long-term rural depopulation and decline, most notably in terms of their smaller towns and villages. The Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional and Rural Affairs, Deputy Humphreys, highlighted the need to revitalise smaller towns and villages for the benefit of the committee when discussing the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and the pillars of the policy for sustaining rural communities.

Many NPF public consultation submissions expressed concerns about the construction of identikit suburban-style housing estates in many of our smaller towns and villages in the commuter belts, and a dearth of attractive housing location alternatives to households that wish to self-build. The evidence could furthermore suggest that there needs to be a renewed focus on policies and mechanisms to appropriately manage the development of smaller towns and villages within the commuter belt that are under pressure from overspill development, as well as to turn around the fortunes of smaller towns and villages in remoter and economically flagging areas with a focus on jobs and local economic, social and residential development.

There are various tasks being undertaken in the preparation of the national planning framework. The varying development issues and challenges facing the strategic development of Ireland's countryside highlight a contrast between the areas under pressure versus those that are being depopulated and have weak small towns and villages at their core. We would welcome the committee's views on a couple of issues, particularly the future role of our smaller settlements and how those that are struggling to retain basic services and economic viability might be turned around in light of wider societal changes, particularly the ageing of our population, online transactions for retailing and basic services, and a preference for urban lifestyles, particularly on the part of younger people who are drawn to the bright lights. We would welcome hearing the committee's views on how serviced sites for self builders might be provided at reasonable cost in rural communities. The cost of a site or starting a home is a big factor for younger households in rural communities. We would also welcome hearing the committee's

views on how we provide that alternative for them in small towns and villages, the potential role of local authorities in the provision of that type of alternative and measures to prevent the displacement of urban and suburban housing estates that are really better suited to larger cities and towns to smaller rural settlements. Many members, including the Chairman, know that this has been a very strong trend over the past decade. We would welcome hearing the committee's views on the best mechanisms to ensure a healthy balance between ensuring dispersed rural communities can meet their housing needs and, at the same time, ensuring we build up smaller towns and villages to act as focal points in their areas.

The Department is advancing the draft national planning framework, NPF, to be with Government by the end or middle of next month. On approval of the draft, it is expected that it will be placed on public display over the summer months. It is anticipated that the NPF will be approved by the Oireachtas in the autumn. We are happy to address whatever questions or issues members wish to discuss with us.

Chairman: There is a strong sense that spatial planning in this State is defunct, that the 2002 spatial plan was jettisoned very shortly after it was created and that there is nearly a free-for-all with regard to development. That development is creating great difficulties for places like Dublin because of overheating and difficulties involving services in Dublin. It also creates great difficulties for areas like my constituency, which is in the commuter belt, where the road is chock-a-block. It takes three hours commuting per day to get in and out of towns like Navan. There is massive flight from many towns in rural Ireland. We received a list from our previous guest listing towns like Birr, Athy and Clonmel, which have seen massive drops in different censuses of population. We know that a big change is happening, that it is not being driven in any particular direction *per se* and that this is an opportunity to, hopefully, fix that.

One of the most interesting submissions we heard from during this part of our investigation was from Teagasc. Witnesses from Teagasc said that an interesting development is taking place. Young people who are starting families need two incomes to survive. They need two incomes to buy a house today. They go to areas where they could access urban-type jobs. That means that they left their more rural towns, which makes a big difference in terms of changing the age profile of counties like Louth, Wicklow, Meath and Kildare and the counties on the western seaboard. The population average is increasing radically in the west and declining here because of young couples with young children in those places. It seems to me that to a certain extent, one of the greatest tools to re-balance that driving force within that demographic change is the location of jobs. If people can access two jobs in towns like Clonmel and Birr, which are losing people, they are more likely to want to stay there in the future, which will redress some of those age profiles. Jobs tend to migrate towards infrastructure. Regardless of whether it is transportation, communication or educational infrastructure, that is where most enterprises want to locate.

The NTA also appeared before us. I asked witnesses from the NTA what determines its development of infrastructure. They told me it was demand. If demand determines the location of infrastructure, the process just flows in exactly the same direction it is currently flowing so there is no change because the demand is where the development is happening at the moment and the lack of demand is where places have been emptied out. The key elements that the NPF needs to concern how to disrupt that trend. It needs to come up with a formula that apportions investment contrary to demand in the State. Obviously, this is a very difficult thing to do because as legislators, we typically respond to demand. We must meet that demand in Dublin and other large urban areas first and foremost to a certain extent but we must prioritise areas where

demand is not as great but where we want to shift future demand. What formulae can be used by policy makers to make that happen?

Mr. Niall Cussen: In his response, the Chairman set out very clearly and effectively the range of the challenges we must address in framing the national planning framework. A very useful critique of what worked and did not work with the spatial strategy is, as Mr. Hogan outlined, available on our website. At the time the national spatial strategy was launched in 2002, many subsequent steps were taken to support it. As they started to gain momentum - I am thinking of the national development plan 2007-2013, which was very much in the image of the national spatial strategy - far more significant economic challenges came along and to some extent, there was a lot of pressure on resources to exactly carry out the disruptive type or prudent, plan-led forward investment in infrastructure around which the Chairman's thesis pivots. We have the good fortune of having recovered economically to the point where resources are again available to consider those sorts of new directions we can take in terms of regional planning and infrastructure investment policy. Hopefully, in the coming months, we will see the opening of new road connections between Limerick and Galway and indeed the connecting to wider parts of the south Mayo-east Galway area. This is a crucial step in building an economic critical mass in the west which is not so much a competitor to Dublin but a complement to it. The Chairman is right that jobs constitute a key piece of this. This bringing together of infrastructure-----

Chairman: I apologise for interrupting Mr. Cussen. I have asked a heap of questions about this but I do not know whether we are prioritising regional infrastructural development or not. Can we say that *per capita*, more investment goes on infrastructure outside Dublin than in Dublin? Are those figures available to us?

Mr. Niall Cussen: I do not have those figures.

Chairman: Would Mr. Cussen know?

Mr. Niall Cussen: It is probably more a matter for our colleagues in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. I think that some of the investments we have made, for example, that motorway link, are made as much for the economic development piece - the long term - rather than asking whether that is the busiest stretch of road in the country right now. As the Chairman knows, there are infrastructure projects that would probably have a higher priority in terms of pressure of demand but it is a question of where that fits in an overall strategy. Finding ways to better connect our regional cities, particularly those on the western seaboard, was very much a key part of the spatial strategy back in 2002 so that they could present the economic and jobs catchments that could be seen as a credible complement to the Dublin area. IBEC and others have pointed out that where there is a labour force catchment of a million people that are broadly within an hour of getting to each other, productivity and innovation capacity increase markedly. Distance and time are the enemies of that kind of economic critical mass, which is why the M17 project is a very important step in realising the potential of two regional cities on the western seaboard - Limerick and Galway. Although these cities are very dynamic in their own way, they now have a new impetus behind them. That is something we must look at in terms of other regional cities in the context of the planning framework.

Mr. Paul Hogan: The Chairman has raised a couple of very good questions. One is on growth being employment-led, or jobs-led or infrastructure-led. On infrastructure led development alone, the ESRI, with which we are working, did a study recently on firm location in the country and what drives it, whether it can be influenced by infrastructure. It found that human capital is more influential than infrastructure. Increasingly because of the nature of work and

jobs they want very highly qualified people, people with the leaving certificate at least, if not a third level qualification. That militates against some of the declining communities where people may not have had the opportunity to avail of education so lifelong learning and retraining is critical to people participating in that sort of economy, as well as adding to the prospects of regions.

Another issue we have gleaned from our consultation, and we have learned as we went along, is that people choose where they want to live first, rather than where they want to work. People will always have a place that they want to live. It is not that they really want to work in a certain place. They will obviously move for work, that is what drives migration, but the preference will always-----

Chairman: This particular research has shown that these young families need two incomes and locate where the work is, so work is the primary decision.

Mr. Paul Hogan: That is the trade-off that people are forced to make by the way we have arranged things. It is possible for people to move for work but if opportunities for work can be more spread out on a distributed basis or focused on different places, people will have wider opportunity.

On infrastructure and transport being a derived demand, so that where one has the critical mass, demand is there, in an integrated regional development context one can disrupt that. For instance, one thing I looked at today was a submission from the Shannon Development Company. It argued that in the context of integrated regional development Shannon as an airport made a difference to the mid-west region. This was particularly the case historically, it is less so now. It was making a case for that sort of development. By focusing infrastructure it is possible. The combination of things such as human capital, spreading employment opportunities and infrastructural investment are what is critical. It is not one thing.

Chairman: We are running out of time so this is my last question. Do the witnesses have any idea whether the NPF is going down the route of a few small centres of growth along the west coast or will it be a case of one for everybody in the audience?

Mr. Niall Cussen: The Minister, Deputy Coveney, has made it very clear at the 18 events that were held as part of the initial public consultation stages on the national planning framework, NPF, that an approach of one for everybody in the audience is not the way forward. The evidence for is overwhelming. One of the criticisms of the national spatial strategy, notwithstanding that it set up a hierarchy of settlements, was that too many locations were identified. We have to be mindful of the fact that this is a national planning framework. It will be partnered by regional subsidiary documents from the three regional assemblies - the eastern and midlands regional assembly area, the northern and western regional assembly area and the southern assembly area which broadly equate to a lot of Leinster, most of Munster and south Leinster, and Connacht and parts of Ulster. They will be required under legislation to prepare replacements for the regional planning guidelines. There are some things that we need to settle at a very high strategic level in the national planning framework which will set the scene for the regional documents to then come in and provide an effective framework for co-ordinating planning at local authority level.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: The witnesses made a number of points with which I concur. I represent the Cavan-Monaghan constituency and we have a huge problem in west Cavan, which I see highlighted on the map. We have housing vacancy rates of greater than 23%. It is a whole

part of the county. As Mr. Hogan said here, unless there is a spread of job opportunities, one cannot keep the young people there. It was interesting to hear him say that people choose where to live before they choose where to work, with which I would agree, but if there is nowhere to work it forces them in one direction. Particular attention and focus has to be given to the Border counties in light of Brexit as we are already on the back foot by virtue of being Border counties. Our local enterprise offices and our local authorities can already see where there has been stagnation. We are naturally a very industrious people in Cavan-Monaghan, we have had to do it on our own; there are very high rates of self-employed people because there have had to be. There are no big factories or big IDA Ireland companies coming into the constituency and the area does not have the infrastructure, which was discussed earlier. Cavan-Monaghan has none of that and is way behind on human capital, infrastructure and job opportunities. I would hope that the east-west link which has been talked about for the last ten or 15 years, probably since the national spatial strategy first came out, will be a big part of that. That one piece of infrastructure has the potential to address a lot of these issues in one sweep if the attention and funding was provided. We have already seen how the N3 has opened up Meath. Of course, it is on the periphery, it is the usual story. It stopped when it got to the border of Cavan but it has made a huge difference to people in Meath in terms of where they work and the access to Dublin.

One thing we need to be careful about is the situation we have returned to where housing has gone beyond the reach of most people, there have to be two people employed in every household to be able to get a mortgage. There was a time, particularly in east Cavan which is quite densely populated, where there were people who had sold their homes in Dublin in search of a better lifestyle and continued to work in Dublin but they felt that they did not fit in. Maybe that was partly our fault, maybe it was partly their fault too, that it was too great a leap, but people were caught. They might have been too far from their own family which remained in Dublin, they could not return to where they had come from and some just upped and left. There were vacant houses where there had been high density population, with people scrambling to get back to Dublin. That scenario happened too.

There is a reference to self-build in the witnesses' submission. I am always talking about this. We are still at the point where it is too expensive for people in rural Ireland to build houses in their local areas. People have to spend €30,000 to €40,000 on connections to sewerage and water and on development charges and it pushes people into the urban areas. Until that is addressed, places like west Cavan will not be developed because it is too costly, they do not have the opportunity, and the infrastructure is not there. We are back to basics such as roads and broadband and the east-west link must be part of the national strategy plan.

I do not have questions, more observations on what the witnesses presented here today.

Mr. Niall Cussen: Maybe Mr. Hogan might deal with some of the specific vulnerabilities which we would see for parts of the Border area, bearing in mind some of the issues which the Deputy raised, including Brexit. I am very familiar with west Cavan. The Border zone is an area I know well. The Deputy is correct in saying it has always had an extremely vibrant enterprise culture working with local resources. In looking at the analysis it is striking that, considering all of the challenges we face such as rolling out broadband, holding on to public services in rural communities and all the issues the Minister, Deputy Heather Humphreys, addressed in the Government's Action Plan on Rural Development, we would redouble our efforts in what we are doing in practical terms to make smaller settlements in rural areas a viable proposition for exactly the type of households the Deputy mentioned. For example, many local authorities will have their statutory local area plans and their planning functions but one question we have

to ask is whether local authorities are appropriately equipped, from a resources and maybe a legal powers perspective - my colleague, Mr. Terry Sheridan, may come in on this on the vacant properties and derelict sites area - to implement those plans in practical terms to subsidise or make available land which young couples or local people can see as a viable alternative to provide a dream home for themselves to their own design and specification. Such a home would be across the road from the school, near the post office and all the local services in order that these places have a fighting chance to become nuclei in their own local communities and therefore create the conditions within which, as the Chairman mentioned, it then would be a sensible proposition in which to invest from the point of improving those services. One creates a virtuous cycle of people coming in and engendering a demand for services that can be addressed. Too often, if we are really honest about it, when we move beyond the suburban zones along the aforementioned motorway corridors to really get out into rural Ireland, we often see the twin cycles of villages, such as Dowra and so on, that are not reaching their potential but where there is a significant amount of building in a wider rural community. One asks oneself the question: if we could find a way to give the smaller settlements a fighting change to create a credible alternative, would it be different in terms of rolling out broadband, holding on to schools and services and justifying things because we now have a population to service? On the Brexit or Border issue, is there anything Mr. Hogan wants to add?

Mr. Paul Hogan: Part of our analysis indicated clearly that, certainly, north of a line from Galway to Dundalk, obvious large towns or cities are few and far between and we need a different type of strategy, particularly for the north west and Border part of the country. There is much uncertainty to do with Brexit. That has been a constant theme of recent months. It has been clearly brought to our attention as well that the part of the country to which I refer has generated much employment as a result of people using their own initiative and starting businesses in their own sheds, premises or whatever and leading to bigger things. It is a question of whether there is some way we can facilitate that type of activity.

It is clear that south Cavan, in particular, is coming in to the overdeveloped part of the country in terms of the settlements and the influence of Dublin. An idea we have looked at, which is mentioned in the paper, is that we would limit the capacity for settlements to grow endlessly, particularly in places where we have seen growth of hundreds of per cent. In parts of County Meath, for example, planning policies should prevent towns from growing three or fourfold over the course of a few years. That provides more for local communities as opposed to offering people to come in from elsewhere.

The sort of issues the Deputy raised have been communicated to us from similar distances out from Dublin where people have moved and then get stuck in negative equity and cannot go back. Many of the issues have been well communicated to us already and we are formulating responses at present.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: To finish off there, Mr. Hogan noted that there are no major towns between Dundalk and Galway. If that east-west link was there, it would be a corridor to open up that midland and borderland area. It is crucial.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I thank the officials for their attendance.

I raised planning on the Order of Business, both today and yesterday, with the Taoiseach in the Chamber. The witnesses state in their document that the granting of planning permission in rural areas is one of their roles or they are responsible for whether or not we can have it. At the outset, I have to say that we in Kerry have a great local authority, a great planning section with

good dedicated staff and a great group of county councillors. However, when we put together our county development plan, we are directed by the planning guidelines as to what we can and cannot have. Sadly, when those guidelines are implemented, they come down heavily on some people and deprive them of getting planning permission. That is why I raised it yesterday and today and I will continue to raise it.

In my local authority, there are three types of area. In areas of intense urban pressure, no one will get planning permission unless he or she is a family member of a resident. It is to stop people from coming out from town and building in such areas. This clause, in itself, is restricting the local person who was brought up in the place in his or her parent's house, who wishes to buy a site in the same townland but who is being deprived because of this clause on intense urban pressure. Such a person is being denied the opportunity to buy a site from his or her neighbour 300 yd. away. This is being replicated right around the town of Killarney and other towns where there is any mention of intense urban pressure. Not every family has more land in its holding and the obvious solution for those brought up in an area is to try to buy a site as near as possible. They are being denied that.

Then there are other so-called "stronger" areas. For example, there were 16 families living in one such area but because those 16 families left before the census of 2002 or 2006, they are not being regarded as suitable for letting people come in there. It is absolutely wrong.

The only place one will get permission is in an area that is known as a "weaker" area. In other words, for the stronger area, one must be from the area and have a need to live there. There is no attachment. They must have some attachment and they are not able to have an attachment because the people left it before that census. Those issues need to be addressed. These people are not asking for funding. They are asking for planning permission to put a roof over their heads. That needs to be addressed.

I make no apology to anyone anywhere for someone wanting to build a one-off house to accommodate himself or herself. That is what we should be all about. Whether it came from Europe, from national policy or howsoever it came to be, there seems to be a grudge against allowing people to build a house for themselves in rural areas. It is totally unsatisfactory. That needs to be addressed in the Department's spatial strategy or whatever.

Dublin is not able to cater for what is going on at present. Jobs are coming in here day after day. When one turns on the radio in the morning, one hears of another 100 or 150 jobs being created. We cannot get jobs in Kerry because of the non-existent Macroom bypass and the non-existence of broadband in most of the county. There is talk about a hub but a hub is not much good if we do not have a wheel and this is what has happened. People have left because there was no employment. I disagree with Mr. Hogan's statement that people choose where to live before they decide where they will work. If people do not have work they will follow the work and they will have to leave. This is what has been happening. Sneem and Caherdaniel had three football teams between the two of them and now the most that can be mustered is one team between the two.

Zoning was mentioned. There is an idea that the less zoned land there is, the better. If only one developer in each town or village is allowed to zone a piece of land with no competition on the other side of town, clearly the price of houses will be driven up and the poor young fellow and the young girl trying to start off will pay. I have held the view for a long time that zoning does not matter. The market will dictate how many houses are built and zoning does not matter. An awful lot of time is given by local authorities to developing plans and zoning. The planners

should decide whether there is genuine need, particularly if we were speaking about towns.

We have an awful lot of vacant houses in rural Ireland but the question we must ask is how suitable are they for occupation. Some of the houses are grand but most of them are not inhabitable. When people have to leave them they are out of date and falling down but the shell is standing. Perhaps the walls and roof are there. That cannot be counted as a house because all that is really there are four walls and we all know they are the cheapest part of any house to build. The walls and a roof can be put up in a couple of weeks and it does not cost that much. We need to be more accurate when we state the number of vacant houses.

We wonder why villages are disintegrating. Villages and towns will disintegrate if the community around them disappears and this is what has happened. Many people had to leave the glens and valleys around the small villages because of the lack of employment. In the bigger towns, even in fairly vibrant towns, multinational shopping arcades or companies have been established. What happens then? The centre of the town disintegrates because there is a whole town in a new place. All of the shops are in one place. I was only in the council a short time when I raised this issue in 2004. They are having a devastating effect. The harm has been done in many cases.

What do we do with the villages we have? Perhaps some of the houses would be suitable for elderly people. They should be reconstructed to suit elderly people who need the comfort of having people beside them. They are not suitable for children in most instances because there is always a road going through a village and it is not safe for children.

Dublin is not able to cater for what is going on there, socially and in other ways. Someone is shot or killed there every day and there are drugs. It cannot be monitored. It has gone out of control. We need assistance in rural areas. There are three rural Deputies here and Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell is representing Dublin. We have to fight our corner.

I have highlighted what is wrong with planning. The planning guidelines need to be addressed as do the problems they are creating for the planners. We were not able to cater for Kerry Group. It hurts me every time I pass that mighty operation when I go up to and down from Dublin. We should have had it in Farranfore. It was a designated hub but, sadly, because of infrastructure and accessibility issues we lost it. Up to 900 people are working there and I am told the smallest wage is €65,000.

There needs to be an emphasis on rural Ireland. In Kerry, 500 applications were made to local improvement schemes. The Department suggested they were private roads. They are not private roads. They are public roads that were never taken in charge by the local authority for one reason or another. There are ten, 11, 12 or 14 houses on some of these roads and there is no gate across them. The Department got its way. It did not get it in 2010 when my father was here, but in 2011 the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, suspended the scheme. This is hurting an awful lot of people. If some of the people in some estates in Dublin were told they could not have a road to their houses there would be uproar. The people on these roads have their own water. They have sunk their own wells. They have paid for their own septic tanks. They do not cost anyone a penny. They are entitled to a road to their door, the same as the people in Dublin 4.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I thank Deputy Healy-Rae for giving me the constituency of Dublin. I do not have the constituency of Dublin but I appreciate it. As a Senator I look at things more nationally, and I have to say the word "ugly" comes into my head. When I drive around the country, my first reaction is to ask how did that happen, who gave permission

for that and what is that about. I say it because I may be coming from a completely different vantage point. We do not live on linked roads. I know what Mr. Hogan is saying, that we need infrastructure to create life, but we do not live on linked roads.

We never question where we ask people to live. I was travelling down the country yesterday, it does not matter where, but the ugliness of the estates struck me, even in the paint, shape and size, and where we ask people to live. The houses were so near the road that Scania trucks would nearly be able to pass them the pepper and salt at the table. It is absolutely appalling, with no thought at all put into where people are being asked to live. We talk about wanting to give vibrancy back to towns and villages. We have to put some thought into beauty and by beauty I mean the shape of the site, or the idea of a tree or greenery. It is outrageous.

When we speak about spatial planning and communities, the communities are surviving despite the planners. They are trying to survive despite the developments. We talk about repurposing things and we have all these awful words that mean absolutely nothing. In certain towns in Ireland, people might have left and not come back and there is a house falling down, which is an eyesore. People have been employed in England to go around and find out where that person is from or where the family is from, to see whether they can do something about it, and this is their actual job. The rural redevelopment scheme was a great scheme and we might have to look at it again. I also think we have to bring more creativity and more imagination. I say the word “beauty” because if we look at parts of Kerry, Mayo and Cavan they are beautiful but sometimes, something comes in and creates a complete eyesore in what was once a beautiful area and one wonders how did that happen.

Can any of the witnesses give me three examples of great planning and an example of the worst planning? I really think one should know the standard of what one is trying to achieve and should know what one should not repeat.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: No planning would be worse.

Chairman: Who would like to take that question?

Mr. Niall Cussen: We might take all the questions from the Deputies as this would give us a chance to absorb them.

Deputy Michael Collins: I thank the witnesses for their attendance. They have given us an insight into the planning process. Having been a councillor in south-west Cork prior to being elected to the Dáil, as well as being a community activist, has given me experience in dealing with planning issues. Many young people in the scenic areas of west Cork were unable to get planning permission for a house on their parents’ land because of the beauty of where they live. That should not prevent anybody from getting planning permission.

In the course of writing an article for a newspaper, I was looking at the census of population breakdown in the district electoral divisions, DEDs, for my own community. It paints a picture of the challenge we face. The reason for that challenge is that successive Governments have decided that rural Ireland is not a place to do business. Our roads are in a scandalous condition and young people cannot get planning permission. Quite a number of people have come to a place as beautiful as west Cork and want to set up a business but are faced with a seven-year residential rule, which has been challenged. Our European advisers have been told that such a residency condition is no longer legally correct. Of the six DEDs in my community, there has been a population drop of 2.2% in Crookhaven, a decrease in population of 13.1% in

Dunbeacon, no change in Dunmanus, a decrease of 10.5% in Goleen and a decrease of 7.7% in Lowertown, where I live. There was an increase of 1.6% in Toormore, giving a population decrease of 5.4% in our community. That is the second consecutive census in which we have had a population decrease. We are finding it very difficult. We have lost two of the three banks in the peninsula, and the nearest bank is 20 miles away. We have lost our Garda stations and our post offices are on the verge of closure if the Government has its way. There is a complete lack of thinking on how we could turn this situation around. Some of my neighbours travel to Cork, a 120 km journey on shocking roads but more people are travelling from Cork to work in Dublin, a journey of 251 km on a beautiful road. I enjoy the benefit of that road. There has been no focus on improving our roads. People could commute from west Cork to Cork city, as employment has picked up in the city, but unfortunately not in rural areas.

A businessman who has lived in Ballydehob for the past four years came to my constituency office. He will be refused planning permission because he is not a local. That is a ridiculous rule. That rule has been challenged in Europe and it looks as if it will have to go and I would like the witnesses to comment on that. A young man in Kinsale wants to design a house that is the exact same as all his neighbours, but he has been refused as the regulations and guidelines have changed. His plans will have to be changed so that his house will be different from all the other houses that surround it. We talk about bad planning decisions in rural areas, I go out by the canal on my way home every Thursday evening and I look at this monstrosity-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Monstrosities

Deputy Michael Collins: -----of a skyscraper of a building out in the middle of nowhere. It is by the Black Horse bar. It seems to be an incredible planning decision. I certainly would not like to live there.

We need to look at derelict sites in rural communities. There is a need for a rule to deal with them because many wealthy people have derelict sites that they are sitting on. Nothing is happening with these empty sites, which could house ten families if they were built on.

The regeneration programme was in operation in County Clare but it now seems to have been parked. It provided an opportunity for families who are without homes. Yet, there are plenty of houses in places such as Drimoleague, Dunmanway or Schull, but people do not want to live there. That is the reason I read out the population fall in west Cork.

I would like to hear Mr. Cussen's response as I would appreciate his insight into these issues.

Mr. Niall Cussen: That is a good spread of issues to go through and I am not going to try to go through them all myself. Colleagues will come in to add to my response. There are many very sensible ideas, proposals and comments there and I tend to agree with a lot of them.

By way of opening remarks, the purpose of the planning system is to ensure the right development happens in the right place at the right time. There is a structure and some sort of shape to how things happen over time. All the members of the committee I am sure would agree with me that in rural areas, in particular nobody is proposing a free-for-all. If we are starting with this basic principle or building block, we then have to have some sort of policies within which to avoid a free-for-all and structure our approach. What planning policy in Ireland has typically tended to do, particularly with regard to housing development in rural areas, is to distinguish between areas that are under intense pressure for development, as Deputy Healy-Rae mentioned, particularly the areas that are closest to our cities and our largest towns. To some extent

if we do not have some sort of policy framework effectively these areas would be absorbed into the urban area very quickly. As the Chairman is aware, there are parts of south County Meath, for example, where we have had to retrofit sewerage schemes because effectively they became overdeveloped during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

In other administrations, particularly across the water, they have policies based on green belts. They distinguish between areas that are rural and areas that are urban. The only forms of development that take place in green belt areas are agri-industry, that is, people who are engaged in full-time large-scale farming or other occupational or functional links back to the rural areas. Bearing in mind Ireland's unique social history and the form of development in rural areas, we have settled our policies around distinguishing between housing that arises out of the linkages to a rural community and many members have mentioned this and those people coming from an area altogether different and want to build what are effectively urban-generated housing. My colleague, Mr. Terry Sheridan, will comment on where we are on some of the issues that have arisen with regard to this policy, the seven-year rule and similar conditions. We will come back to this.

On Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell's points on the visual integrity and the quality of much of our development in recent years, we were building 90,000 homes a year for several years during the boom year. While homes were built that people needed and in the places that needed more housing, the quality of some of the development left a great deal to be desired, particularly the spectre of unfinished housing developments. We have resolved 85% of these unfinished developments through slog during the past five or six years. Senator O'Donnell asked for examples of bad planning. If the Senator picks up any copy of the annual reports we produce on resolving unfinished housing developments throughout the country, particularly in the upper Shannon area, which benefitted from the tax relief scheme there, she will see plenty of examples of small very pretty riverside or canal side villages, which in some cases were very adversely affected by the apartment block or housing estate that was plonked in from nowhere and bears little or no relationship to the character of the area. We are grappling with a housing crisis so we must be mindful of those lessons and not forget them.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: That was my point. We are forgetting them.

Mr. Niall Cussen: Yes, it is very easy to forget them.

In terms of locations that have been carefully managed down through the years. I know that the Senator does not like the word "repurpose".

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I do not.

Mr. Niall Cussen: While I was growing up west Cork my neighbouring town of Clonakilty, which Deputy Michael Collins knows well, was gritty, grimy and not a particularly attractive location until it received the combined attentions of a vibrant local community, a far seeing county architect called Mr. Billy Houlihan and a progressive planning department. As a result the town was regenerated, the dump was turned into a model railway village and retail development took place. Today, it is a tourist destination that provides economic capital and drives tourism for the area of west Cork. Clonakilty is an example of a place that has been turned around by visionary urban design, planning and community activity that worked in conjunction with the local authority, etc.

Let us go back further in history. My colleague seated on my left is from Westport, County

Mayo.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I was going to mention Westport.

Mr. Niall Cussen: Westport has been carefully managed by a far seeing local authority that brought together the best architectural planning and all of the other skills. Again, all of the work was done with the assistance of a vibrant community who understood the value of the local authority's policy in terms of anchoring Westport's long-term economic strength.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Is the Department responsible for ensuring that local authorities are up to scratch? How come local authorities are up to scratch in Westport, Clonakilty and other places but appalling in other places? Is such work not part of the Department's *raison d'être*? Should it be?

Mr. Niall Cussen: The Minister and the Department set a broad regulatory and policy framework for planning. We have many different guidelines, legislation and so forth. We have the power to work with local authorities.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: The Department should use its powers on local authorities that do not have the same talent.

Mr. Niall Cussen: We have used our powers on a number of occasions down through the years. For example, on inappropriate zoning and policy decisions that we thought would create long-term serious repercussions.

I remind members of this committee that this country uses a third party planning appeals system and an independent planning appeals board. We always encourage citizens and communities to become engaged in both the policy-making and development management aspects of the planning process, and to exercise their rights to express their views about development and the quality of development. Successive chairpersons of An Bord Pleanála, in their annual reports that are shared with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the environment, have outlined some of the difficulties raised by the Senator. The annual reports are a constant source of learning for us in terms of how to improve our approach.

I can give the Senator lots of good examples of urban planning. When I was a young man studying planning Dublin city centre, particularly some of its dockland area, were areas of serious deprivation. There was a serious social housing concentration, serious dereliction, serious environmental and contamination issues. Today, the area is a vibrant centre that has over 10,000 high paid jobs, housing and a whole range of social and cultural facilities that drive the heart of the city from an economic point of view. That situation did not happen by accident but by deliberate thinking and strategising from a planning and urban design point of view. Indeed, we must take forward what we have learned. I urge members to remember that there are plenty of planning successes around the country.

My colleague, Mr. Sheridan, will comment on the seven-year rule and other points that were mentioned.

Mr. Terry Sheridan: Deputy Collins asked about the seven-year rule and Deputy Danny Healy-Rae asked about the local needs criteria applied by local authorities to determine planning applications in particular areas.

I will preface my remarks by saying that the national spatial strategy and rural housing

guidelines advocate that the planning system should facilitate rural generated housing, where feasible, in order to maintain rural populations and support rural communities and economies. That is the basic planning principle and policy. As Mr. Cussen has mentioned, there is a need to manage the overspill pressure in the areas located around the main cities, and in the rural areas located around the main cities in particular. I have outlined the areas where restrictions are generally applied.

As Deputy Collins has mentioned, we have an issue with the residency requirements that local authorities have included in the development plans. Applicants for planning permission are required to reside in an area for a specific period. We have conducted a trawl of the local authorities and discovered that the periods can vary from two to ten years. The provision breaches the EU treaty's requirement for the free movement of citizens because it discriminates against non-locals and prevents them from residing in areas.

We are in the process of revising the rural housing guidelines and the local needs criteria. A working group comprised of the Department and local authorities has been established to consider the criteria and recommend more neutral, non-discriminatory and balanced criteria that do not favour locals over non-locals. We hope to have the criteria finalised within the next couple of months thus ending restrictive residency requirements.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I urge the working group not to forget the local fellas that live in the area that has been deemed to suffer intense urban pressure. Such people are denied planning even though they have been brought up and reared in a house located in the area but, unfortunately, do not have enough land to build a house. The rules stipulate that planning permission can only be granted to family members in such instances. Many families do not have-----

Chairman: The point was well made in first part.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I ask the Department to remember that fact. The rule has hurt many people in many towns. The matter needs to be addressed.

Chairman: Does the delegation wish to deal with the remaining questions?

Ms Alma Walsh: On the national planning framework and our understanding of how to address wider housing distribution and spatial patterns in a rural context, we have examined the figures for 2001 to 2016, inclusive, in terms of what the system is dealing with.

In terms of one-off housing and the granting of planning permission as a proportion of planning permissions for residential dwellings, rural housing accounts for 84% of all planning permissions granted nationally as a proportion of all planning applications handled by local authorities. The system is handling quite a number of them and I can circulate the figures to members. The information is broken down on a county basis. We have a favourable system nationally that allows for this aspect. Having worked in planning departments in local authorities, we are fully aware of the intricacies of individual cases and the exceptional circumstances that can arise when assessing a planning application and a genuine need to live in the countryside.

Deputy Healy-Rae referred to the fact that villages will disintegrate if communities disappear. Evidence suggests that villages are disintegrating in spite of the fact that there are approximately 470,000 occupied one-off houses in the countryside. We suggest that when members of the committee reflect on the national planning framework and bring forward a draft that they are cognisant that what villages and towns in rural areas need is not necessarily more one-off housing.

Chairman: Mr. Hogan mentioned that one of the objectives is to stop the growth of certain towns. Earlier he mentioned County Meath, which is a concern for many people who live in County Meath. I imagine the objective was adopted because a few satellites towns located on the edge of Dublin have grown at a rapid rate. Logic dictates that one should curtail the growth of those towns, to a certain extent, and redistribute the growth elsewhere. There is a housing need at present so beggars cannot be choosers. We need houses.

I imagine there is a concern in counties like Meath that natural growth could be stopped. How would one seek to stop the growth of certain towns?

Mr. Paul Hogan: To unpack it a bit more, we are talking about proportionate growth. In other words, unless a place is specifically designated for growth, it should not just happen that it would grow tenfold in the course of a few years. For example, Ratoath, County Meath had a population of less than 1,000 20 years ago, but the settlement now has a population of 10,000. Obviously, all of the services required for that community have had to catch up with its development. In many instances, people will then go through much of their lives before the things they would expect to have are provided.

Chairman: Would there be a directive to zone less land in the Ratoath area to prevent that?

Mr. Paul Hogan: I agree with Deputy Danny Healy-Rae that one cannot restrict zoning to give one land owner the whole hand of cards for a settlement. Another way to look at it would be not to zone any land and just to have a growth restriction on the scale of the settlement. That is a consideration. Looking at the capacity of places, the larger a settlement, the more facilities and amenities it has, in particular if it grew at a certain stage. Leixlip is somewhere that grew largely during the 1970s and 1980s and there are a lot of facilities there. It has reached a certain stage of development. There is scope for further development in a place like that for example. Where a place is growing rapidly, adding more and more pressure to it is not the solution. That is what we are concerned about. It does not mean housing cannot be provided and growth cannot happen. It is that we have to reflect on where the capacity is.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I am very worried that we are going to get a spatial strategy that does not take the most important component into account, namely people. With the Department's last "put them all in Dublin" strategy ten or 15 years ago, I predicted what I call the "melting ice cream effect". In other words, the design of the Department was for everyone to live in concentrated city centres. It would all be like an ice cream block and cut off fresh and solid. However, the problem was that the naughty people had a different idea. A lot of them came from Meath and they wanted to live there. They wanted to live in that terrible thing, the one-off house. Imagine that. Just think about it, but they did. They could not be stopped from doing what they wanted to do because we do not live in a dictatorship. The grand plan fell and the ice cream melted all over the place. It has nearly melted as far as the Shannon now. I see the same phenomenon in Galway. Some 55% to 60% of those who work in the high-end factories in Galway actually live in rural areas. If I go to Westside and a few other places, I find very few people who work at the high end jobs. The people are naughty because they do not do what the planners want. However, the planners have no legal instrument to make it happen unless they ban one-off houses and assert that they will determine where people live and that is it, going the whole hog with their plan. There is nothing worse than a plan where the instruments to implement it do not exist. One gets a totally different effect in that case.

Having grown up in this city in a household that always had a car, even though we used to bus it or use our bicycles quite a bit, I do not believe on foot of all the patterns the NTA shows

that people will not continue to use private personal vehicles. I do not mean cars because “car” connotes an internal combustion engine. A private personal vehicle can be driven totally sustainably with sustainable fuels which have no carbon effect. They are on the way. We could have them now if we just put our minds to it, but we are too lazy. The idea that everyone in this lovely wet climate will go on foot or by bicycle, including the lame, the weak and the blind, is wide of the mark. I could just get rid of my internal combustion engine if we just made the electric car a real thing. However, I find that while cars are not much of a nuisance down the country, they are damnable things around cities where they get clogged up. As such, we have a lot of funny premises in this debate.

I was very interested in what was said about towns and one-off houses. The witness was absolutely right in the analysis that there is very little relationship nowadays between the vibrancy of a town and the total population. I know a good-enough sized town which has perhaps tripled in size in the last ten years, but the shopkeepers there tell us the business in the centre has absolutely decayed. They say that 80% of the shopping done in drapery stores is done by the rural rather than the urban population. Why is that? It is because in that town, the parents buy the children’s clothes in Dunnes rather than in the local drapery shop. The shops that are doing well in this particular town are the two major supermarkets to which one can drive. The high street stores are disappearing. There are three convenience shops in that town doing extraordinarily well and each of them is in a service station. It is very handy. One just drives in. If one does not need fuel one can still drive in, get one’s things and drive off. I suggest the Department gets some PhD student to remodel the town from memory as a project to ask what was there circa 1970 or whatever its heyday was. It would show if this premises was a shop, this one was a pub and this was a grocery. Do people remember video shops? Nobody goes to a video shop now because of Netflix. How many people go to small pubs anymore? Unless they are eateries, the answer is not too many. They sit beside the television on a big lounge chair, which they can do at home. How many people go to travel agents? I was stunned to hear that somebody had gone to one recently. Everyone who gets on to my office about passports have done the whole thing online. We know when we get the evidence of travel. The travel agent is gone.

There are a lot of complex factors in relation to towns. One can argue now about the idea of having to have a particular locus to do a thing. We have to get it into our heads that we live in a transformed world. I asked a planner why he wanted me to live in the village and he said it was so I could walk to the post office. I put my hand in my pocket and pulled out my best friend. I said, “Here is my post office. Here is my bank, my travel agent and ten or 15 other things”. People in rural Ireland must be the most technologically literate crowd because we do not move to do most of those things. We just do them on the net.

Senator Marie-Louise O’Donnell: Do we close all the towns now?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We are not closing the towns. I am saying the towns are closing themselves.

Senator Marie-Louise O’Donnell: We are helping them by putting Tesco at the top and Lidl at the bottom.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We happen to have a Tesco as well as a Supervalu in my nearest big town. If one took those out, they would just go to the next big towns of Castlebar and Galway. Anybody who thinks people are still going to go to the little high street store, park the car and drag their bags back one by one should get real. It is not going to happen. We have to plan for what real people do. I am very afraid that we are planning for some tidy model that does

not take real people into account. I note one of the very interesting things about what Eir has done with the 300,000 connections. The census does not show this because one could get into all sorts of planning problems for doing it where one's house is not meant to be a business place.

Chairman: The Deputy has two minutes left.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I want to make the point rather than ask a question. Since Eir started rolling out broadband - and there are many people 100 yards beyond the point to which the service is provided - what we are finding is that there is a quiet revolution taking place and people are only working odd days in cities. More and more of them are working more days at home. They commute into cities now and again to conduct whatever business they want, to attend meetings and whatever. The rest of the time they are operating from home. Even the big multinational technology companies are doing this.

I am very worried that the witness is driving a plan that is going to cost this country a fortune, that is not dealing with what is really happening on the ground, that is driven by a crazy ideology which is out of date and that does not deal with social deprivation in the cities, which is pervasive in large areas of the latter in which the most deprived and least educated communities in Ireland are to be found. In fact, the witness is basing the principle of driving things into the cities on some university thesis which states that the only creative thought happens in cities. I do not buy into that. I find I can think as creatively as anybody around here. When I go up the mountain on a Sunday, I think even more creatively in the clear air and away from the background noise. I do not think I am unique in that. Artists and all sorts of people ask for a quiet atmosphere in which to work. That is just putting myself into isolation. We have got every kind of high-tech way of talking to people. I am of the view that we need to hasten slowly on this and have a much more detailed debate about where we are going.

Galway city is chock-a-block. Dublin city is chock-a-block with traffic jams and there no houses available. The plan is that we are going drive more growth into those cities before we catch up with the absolutely astronomical problems already there. Galway has the worst traffic in the entire country. It seems to me to be a madness of massive cost to the economy, with billions and billions of wasted money and people sitting in cars-----

Chairman: Does Deputy Danny Healy-Rae want to come in with a question? I just wish to say that we are now entering the fifth hour of this meeting and we have work to do yet in private session.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I appreciate that. I want to respond to Ms Alma Walsh on the disintegration of villages. I would like to take her to a lot of areas where villages are disintegrating and do not have a population around them. I could show her all of the empty houses that people left. As I said, there are 24 in one townland and 16 in another. One cannot get planning permission in those places now. We are not allowed to let people back into these areas because they must have some ties to them. That is what is in the plans. That is what the planning guidelines have insisted that the local authorities implement. Those issues need to be addressed because people cannot have a tie to the area until they build a house there.

Chairman: There is no need to respond to these comments as they are statements. It was stated by Deputy Ó Cuív that many people want to live in Meath. That is the truth. It is a fine county. However, there are a lot of people living in Meath who do not want to live there. That is because they cannot get housing in Dublin as it is too costly. We need to go up vertically in the very centre of those urban areas.

I concur with Deputy Ó Cuív. Internet retail is sucking billions of euro out of the physical retail space on an annual basis. In 15, 20 or 30 years' time, I think there will actually only be a certain select retail space that will still be physically represented.

I thank the witnesses very much for attending. We appreciate it greatly. We wish them luck in their work and will no doubt have them before the committee again.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: When the witnesses were coming in, I do not think they thought it was going to be like this. It was awful really.

The joint committee went into private session at 6.15 p.m. and resumed in public session at 6.20 p.m.

Scrutiny of EU Legislative Proposals

Chairman: We will now consider COM (2017) 166, proposal for a Council decision establishing the position to be adopted on behalf of the European Union with regard to proposals for amendments to the appendices to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals with a view to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The EU policy clerk has assisted us with this and it has been accepted by the committee that we would agree with the legislative measure. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: Regarding correspondence item No. 292 and due to the fishing discussion we had on April 26, I wish to read something very briefly into the record. There have been a number of press releases and letters issued by fishing organisations since our discussions at this committee on 26 April 2017. One statement by the Killybegs fishermen's organisations quotes me correctly in places but misquotes my statement in other places. When I spoke of imbalance at the meeting on 26 April 2017, I stated there was an imbalance in the numbers in attendance only.

Much has been made of the fact we did not send a report to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. It is not usual practice for a committee to send reports to Ministers after meetings and it would be highly unusual for a committee to send a report of its meeting to a Minister of a Department outside the direct remit of the committee. When a committee does take this decision, it is only on the basis of all the members of the committee being involved to make that decision following a comprehensive consideration of the evidence given. Neither was the case in the meeting of 26 April 2017. As a point of information, a public record of all meetings are available on the Oireachtas website and is available to all, including all Government Ministers.

The committee will, as previously agreed, lay its report on what it takes to sustain a viable rural community before the Houses of the Oireachtas when it has completed and agreed this report. The committee will then present this report to the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for her consideration. The report will include the relevant evidence presented to the committee by all witnesses who have appeared before it and engaged with it.

24 May 2017

We will now send a letter to the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine asking it to investigate urgently the issue of fishing quotas by inviting in the fishing organisations throughout the country. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee adjourned at 6.25 p.m. until 2.15 p.m. on Wednesday, 21 June 2017.