



13th March 2008

URBAN FORUM CALLING FOR A DEBATE ON THE FUTURE SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

Forum says focus on distinctiveness of gateway cities and towns rather than population growth

The Urban Forum today said that there is an urgent need to have a reasoned debate on the future shape of settlement in Ireland, and to make decisions as to how the gateway cities and towns are going to be developed to counter-balance Dublin.

The Forum believes that gateway cities and towns should be encouraged to develop their own 'distinctiveness' and should focus on achieving complementarity with the Eastern Corridor, rather than concentrating solely on population growth as outlined in the National Spatial Strategy.

These proposals are based on a research paper prepared for the Forum by the Futures Academy of Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT): *Twice the Size? Imagineering the Future of Irish Gateways* which was launched today. The Urban Forum is made up of five key organisations representing construction professionals in Ireland, namely Engineers Ireland, Irish Landscape Institute (ILI), Irish Planning Institute (IPI), Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and Society of Chartered Surveyors (SCS).

The Urban Forum's Chairman, Henk van der Kamp, explained that the document was commissioned by the Forum, with the purpose of stimulating public and political debate on the built environment.

"We have underestimated growth in Ireland for too long and the quality of the built environment has suffered. We need the government to act now to ensure the highest quality, which may also mean high buildings and high density. In relation to gateway cities the focus should be on distinctiveness rather than on their ability to attract population growth.

Mr. van der Kamp explained how we need to plan for an island with population projections of 8 million people in 25 years time and 12 million in 50 years time.

“The population growth in the gateways in the period between 2002 and 2006 has been rather modest compared to the State’s average. Only two gateways, Galway and Letterkenny, which are not in Dublin’s sphere of influence, achieved a growth rate higher than the State’s average. It is unlikely that the gateways outside Dublin’s sphere of influence will achieve high rates of population growth in the future, as projected in the NSS, without robust implementation of specific growth policies”.

The report emphasises the economic case for concentrating population growth in the Eastern Corridor, stretching from Waterford City through Dublin up to Belfast, while advocating that the other gateways should develop based on their own distinctiveness and inherent advantages

“For example, Cork is a ‘City of Water’ with the river Lee, the harbour and the docklands. The potential recreational use of Lough Mahon and Cork harbour could be maximised as well as developing advanced water technologies, water based energy generation and a stop for cruise ships. The branding of the city could also be based on the cultural and recreational facilities it offers, with the strong GAA spirit of the county. In this context it has the potential to develop itself as being the capital of Irish culture and sports, which could strengthen Cork’s unique tourism product.

Further proposals for developing the ‘distinctiveness’ of other gateways include:

- **Limerick** has the potential to build as a ‘Campus City’ with worldwide recognition for its multicultural learning environment, arts and sporting facilities as well as a centre for language studies. A new cluster of the city could be developed around the Shannon, based on the quality of life, sports and leisure.
- **Waterford** could be branded as a ‘Water Garden City’ with the high quality of natural environment, which surrounds the vibrant city centre. It could strengthen its position as a regional centre for the South East by providing education, health and professional services. The city has the potential to showcase the high quality of life, supported by outer lying towns and villages for energy, food production, tourism products and recreation.
- **Galway** could be branded as a ‘City of Talent and Creativity’, a huge asset being its pool of talented young people in universities and artists. There could be further development of high value added services in Information, and Communications Technology (ICT), life sciences and medical devices sectors upon collaboration of NUI Galway and GMIT with industry.

The Forum is also calling for stronger regional and local governance, which should be based on the concepts of sustainability, subsidiarity and integrated policy formulation and implementation. There is also a strong need for fostering collaborative visionary

leadership at all levels and across all sectors as the main ingredient for the future success of cities and regions.

Twice the Size? Imagineering the Future of Irish Gateways was commissioned by the Urban Forum and carried out by The Futures Academy, Dublin Institute of Technology in conjunction with the School of Spatial Planning, Faculty of Built Environment at Dublin Institute of Technology.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Elaine Ryan/ Laura Wipfler at Montague Communications
Telephone: 01- 830 3116 Mobile: 087 295 1096/ 087 625 2217

Notes to the editor:

This report for the Urban Forum is based on a study that was commissioned by the Urban Forum. The purpose of the report is to stimulate debate about future spatial development in Ireland. The report does not necessarily represent, nor does it intend to represent, specific policy actions that are recommended by any of the individual professional institutes that make up the Urban Forum.