

Submission to Electoral Area Boundary Committee

The Borough of Drogheda and Louth County Council/Meath County Council border: correction of existing Drogheda/Louth County and Drogheda/Meath County border anomaly in the urban area of Greater Drogheda

Date: 13th March 2008

From: Cormac Bohan, 99 Ashfield, North Road, Drogheda, Co.Louth.

Borough of Drogheda Proposal: that the contiguous urban areas of Drogheda currently situated in Meath and Louth Rural are transferred to the Borough of Drogheda which should be reconfigured into two six seat wards, north and south of the Boyne. The transfers from “rural” Meath and Louth will provide for Drogheda’s existing spill over into these areas and forecasted population per the Planning Strategy for the Greater Drogheda Area (PSDGA) as agreed by Meath County Council (MCC), Louth County Council (LCC) and Drogheda Borough Council (DBC).

It will also allow estates currently in the town of Drogheda but part of the Meath and Louth county areas take part in the electoral process in the urban area in which they actually reside as opposed to the current “rural” status which is conferred on them by their current inclusion in Meath Rural or Louth Rural, where they are administered as though outlying rural areas over 25 miles away from both Navan and Dundalk respectively.

Louth County Council Proposal: that those same parts of Drogheda currently situated in the Slane Local Electoral Area of Meath County Council are transferred to Louth and that one seat is transferred from the Slane LEA in MCC to the Drogheda West LEA in LCC bringing it’s seat total to five seats on Louth County Council. In addition those parts of the Duleek Gate borough ward in the Drogheda East LCC LEA should be transferred to the Drogheda West LEA so that the area south of the Boyne has a consistent and concurrent electoral area with both DBC and LCC.

Current status

The Borough of Drogheda currently has three electoral wards, the two wards north of the river Boyne, Westgate and Laurence Gate (once known as Fair Gate) have three seats each on Drogheda Borough Council (DBC) while the south side ward known as Duleek Gate has 6 seats. The Borough Council has a total twelve seats, one of which is twice as large as each of the other two which is inconsistent in terms of electoral proportionality. The river Boyne divides the north and south sides of the town while the two north side wards are split geographically by a border running along the road known as Hardmens Gardens / Ballymakenny Road.

The Louth County Council LEAs for Drogheda are Drogheda West (4 seats) and Drogheda East (5 seats). The area encompasses the existing Drogheda Borough Council area and parts of South Louth including areas such as Clogherhead, Tinure and Tullyallen among others. These two LEAs are divided by the old N1 Dublin Belfast Road which runs through Drogheda. This in itself creates an anomaly whereby a minority of voters on Drogheda’s south side or Duleek Gate ward vote in Drogheda East while the majority of voters on the other side of the road in the same borough ward vote in Drogheda West on the county council ballot paper.

Anomalies

Many large suburban estates on Drogheda's south side currently reside either fully or partly in County Meath due to the fact that the county boundary has not kept pace with the urban expansion of the town (see table below). Two large suburban estates on Drogheda's north side, Termon Abbey (465 houses) and Aston Village (192 houses) are also part of the town but are consigned to the Louth Rural area under the sole jurisdiction of Louth County Council. Drogheda is now the largest urban area in the country outside of the five designated cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford (Census, 2006).

Resolution

The following are estates in the contiguous Urban Area of Drogheda though outside of the Drogheda Borough Council administered area although still part of the town itself. They are currently denoted in the Meath register as part of "Duleek Rural North", "Donacarne" and "Rathmullan" (see enclosed excel download of register) despite being in Drogheda town. These areas are anything but rural. Again, their designation as "Meath" is extremely confusing from both a voters' and candidates' perspective. An arbitrary boundary cuts through the urban area of South Drogheda. These areas were transferred to the revised Louth constituency in the recommended changes to electoral boundaries recently published by the Constituency Commission. To be consistent, these parts of Drogheda should be transferred into the Borough of Drogheda with representation thereon. In addition, one seat in the MCC Slane Electoral Area should be transferred from MCC to the Drogheda West LEA in Louth County Council to provide for the concurrent representation for Drogheda voters on both DBC and LCC.

Estates in the town of Drogheda but part of Meath County Council

	Voters per Meath East 2006 register	
Drogheda Urban Area		
Highlands	441	
Laghorveen Manor	179	
Lagavooreen	17	
Beaubec (The Cairns)	140	
Millmount Abbey	318	
Grangerath	960	
Hazel Lane	56	
Deepforde	300	Estimated (new build)
Bryanstown	44	
The Oaks Estate	15	
	2470	

Source: Meath East Register 2006

Estates in the town of Drogheda but part of Louth Rural

	Voters per Meath East 2006 register
Drogheda Urban Area	
Termon Abbey	646
Aston Village	237
	883

Source: Louth Register 2006

The combined total of registered voters in these areas which are all part of the town of Drogheda but registered in County Meath or Louth Rural for electoral purposes is 3,353. The extrapolated population is 4,359 taking a multiplier of 1.3 and applying it to the 3,353 voters. This multiplier was calculated by dividing the total population of “St. Mary’s (part of)” per the 2006 census, 9,044 persons, by the total number of registered voters on the 2006 Meath East register for that area, 6,982. These areas have similar planning densities and social demographic profile so I have used the same multiplier.

This population of circa 4,359 persons should be added to the Drogheda Borough Council area i.e. by moving those parts of Drogheda town currently on the Meath register and Louth Rural area to both Drogheda Borough Council and Louth County Council. In addition, the forecasted increase in the population of Drogheda to the year 2014 per the Planning Strategy for the Greater Drogheda Area (PSGDA, 2006) agreed by Meath County Council, Louth County Council and Drogheda Borough Council should also be considered by the committee. The population forecast is 48,000 persons by 2014 (table 4.4 on page 62 of the PSGDA) compared to the current population of 35,090 (Census, 2006)

This population addition to Drogheda Borough Council and Louth coupled with the allowance for the agreed forecasted increase in population would comply with the Committee’s own guidelines that “the Committees must also seek to draw up, where possible, electoral areas that would, alone or in combination, have an urban or neighbourhood focal point or points” and “to take due account of the desirability of preserving natural communities or the hinterlands of population centres, and, where possible, of aligning local electoral area boundaries with Dáil constituency boundaries.”.

Summary

Drogheda suffers from a representational anomaly whereby a significant portion of the contiguous urban area of Drogheda is currently situated in the County Meath LEA of Slane. If this part of the town is added to Drogheda Borough Council and to Louth County Council and due account is taken of the agreed population growth of the town which was agreed by the three local authorities which straddle the town then a fifth seat can be added to Drogheda West on Louth County Council. Both the north side and south side of Drogheda can retain their current number of Borough Council seats i.e. six each but with the two north side wards merged into one six seat ward. The breaching of a county boundary in this instance would correct rather than create an anomaly especially in the light of the recent recommendations of the Constituency Commission. This solution would allow the Electoral Area Boundary Committee to maintain the existing number of seats on Drogheda Borough Council for the whole population of the urban area and transfer just one seat from Meath County Council to Louth County Council in keeping with the stipulation that “the Committees are asked to assume no change in present numbers of elected members at overall local authority level”.

The Drogheda Borough Council boundary is currently arbitrary in terms of its application to the growth pattern of Drogheda where voters are trapped in an artificial electoral vacuum where they can have little or no say in the political representation for the town in which they live because of an arbitrary boundary that splits the town and effectively disenfranchises voters. Voters require representation in the urban area in which they obtain most of their public services and in which they conduct much of their economic activity. Those estates currently located in Meath and Louth Rural, but part of the town of Drogheda, the sixth biggest urban area in the country, do not currently have an electoral stake in their own urban

centre of gravity. These estates should be transferred to Drogheda Borough Council and the Drogheda West LEA as a priority.

Sources

Census 2006

Constituency Commission Report 2007

Meath East Electoral Register 2006

Louth Register 2006

Planning Strategy for the Greater Drogheda Area 2006