



**“DUNDALK 2000 AND BEYOND
- A VISION FOR ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT”**

prepared by

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DUNDALK 2000 AND BEYOND - A VISION FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In preparing this Economic development Plan “*Dundalk 2000 and Beyond - a Vision for Economic Development*” our objective was to establish the business community’s vision and priorities for the future economic development of Dundalk; devise a strategy to achieve the vision and to involve the main economic players in Dundalk from both public and private sectors in furthering key identified development projects.

The development plan is the result of a process which involved:

- A comprehensive survey of Chamber members to identify the business community’s views and priorities for development.
- Consultation with other organisations involved in economic development.
- Consultation and discussion between Business Sectoral Working Groups established for this purpose.
- An examination of the demographic and industrial profile of Dundalk and a detailed SWOT analysis.
- Defining the vision and strategy necessary to achieve the vision.

From consultation with other organisations and an analysis of the profile of Dundalk, it is clear that the area possesses many strategically important strengths in terms of location, infrastructure, tradition of industry and entrepreneurship; presence of a high quality higher education institute and excellent lifestyle. However, the area has suffered from a negative perceived image because of its peripheral border location. Also, although the area has a strong micro-electronic and high technology industrial base, it suffers from a lack of perceived strong industry identity. Dundalk’s rich prehistoric legacy and mythology offers tourism development potential which has yet to be realised. Dundalk’s position as a North-South Gateway offers significant opportunities for tourism and retail development.

The **vision** is intended to address as a priority the issue of Dundalk’s image and promotion. Development projects have been identified that will capitalise on Dundalk’s strengths and fully exploit opportunities offered :

Dundalk will be perceived as an attractive place in which to invest, locate, work and live with a high level of quality employment.

Dundalk will be recognised as Ireland’s premier industrial location for High Technology and other Internationally Traded Service Sector Companies, both indigenous and inward investment.

Dundalk will be recognised as the premier retail and commercial location in the North East. It will be a diverse, attractive and secure retail environment with excellent parking facilities.

Dundalk will be an attractive tourism location for both national and international visitors and will capitalise on it’s unique Mythological strengths.

The **strategy** to achieve this vision will require

- The designation of a particular area as a **North-East Business & Technology Park** . This development is seen as a key step in improving Dundalk's image as a key industrial location for high-technology indigenous and inward investment companies.
- The construction of **A Science Services Centre** in this designated area providing workspace for indigenous start-up companies, growing local I.T. and other knowledge based companies, will further enhance Dundalk's image as a centre of excellence.
- The production of **promotional material** on Dundalk will re-inforce this image .
- The creation and development of a **marketable brand and tourism identity** for the area drawn on its rich **mythological heritage**.
- The development of **A National Mythological Interpretative centre** will consolidate this identity and provide a much needed tourism flagship attraction for the area.
- An **Annual Festival** with a **mythological theme** will further re-inforce this theme.
- The appointment of a **retail development manager** will promote co-operation and mobilise all interested parties in the town towards a common purpose.

The vision is intended to identify key areas for action which will advance the development of Dundalk. It is not meant to be prescriptive or comprehensive, but is intended to stimulate discussion, generate new ideas and, most importantly, act as a catalyst for constructive action. The involvement of the main economic players in Dundalk from both public and private sectors would greatly benefit the development of key identified projects and promote a shared vision of the future economic development of Dundalk.

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We would also like to thank representatives from the following organisations with whom we consulted in formulating our vision:

Dundalk Enterprise Development Company

Dundalk Employment Partnership

Dundalk Institute of Technology

Dundalk Urban District Council

Fas

Forbairt

IDA

IFI

Louth County Enterprise Board

Louth County Council

Louth County Tourism Committee

Regional Development Centre

DUNDALK 2000 AND BEYOND - A VISION FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1.PROFILE OF DUNDALK

1.0 LOCATION

Dundalk is strategically positioned on the east coast of Ireland lying approximately mid way between, and fifty miles from ,the two largest cities in the island of Ireland, Belfast and Dublin.

1.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Dundalk, the largest provincial town in the Republic takes its name from Dun Dealgan, Dalga's fort home closely associated with the famous mythical warrior Cuchulainn. The early town of Dundalk was founded around the late twelfth century (1189). The town was sited on the lowest bridging point of the Castletown River, on a ridge which ran in a north-south direction. Today, the modern Town of Dundalk still retains the linear characteristics of the medieval Town.

Although there is clear evidence of prehistoric and early Christian Settlements in the area, the majority of the archaeological deposits relate to the medieval period. The layout of the central urban area derives from the medieval period and it is noteworthy that there are two extensive medieval settlements within the Town.

The pattern of development of the town has been largely influenced by the Dublin-Belfast rail line which runs slightly to the west of the town centre and the Castletown River, to the north of the town and by low lying land to the east. The town has therefore developed largely to the south-east and to the west over the past thirty years.

Today Dundalk is the administrative capital of the north-east region and the business and shopping capital of County Louth.

1.2 INFRASTRUCTURE

ROADS: Dundalk is serviced by the N1 which is the National Primary Road which connects Belfast and Dublin. The national NI forms the line of the presently developing Euro-Route EO1. This Euroroute will connect Dundalk to Larne and Belfast in the North, and Dublin and Rosslare in the South. Sections of this route have already being constructed including the Dunleer by-pass. It is estimated that the Balbriggan bypass will be completed by the first quarter of 1999. The Dunleer - Dundalk phase is expected to be completed by the second quarter of the year 2001. The Drogheda bypass is estimated to be completed by the first quarter of 2003. The Dundalk Western motorway is expected to be completed by the final quarter of the year 2002. The construction of the Dundalk/Newry Dual Carriageway is estimated to commence before 2005.

The completion of this motorway project will be of major beneficial significance to Dundalk, significantly reducing time/distance between Dundalk and Dublin and Belfast, and will facilitate to a greater extent the Dundalk region as a centre from which to service the two main cities on the island. Several other road improvements have recently been completed. The Dundalk inner - relief road which was completed in 1996. The Minor Link road connecting Ardee and Dunleer is due to commence in 1999 and is expected to be completed by 2002.

RAIL: The town is serviced by an excellent and recently upgraded Railway line that connects Belfast and Dublin. The new "Enterprise" rail service runs between Dublin and Belfast and offers passengers increased service and travel times of shorter duration: 50 minutes to Dublin and 1hr. 15 mins. to Belfast. Including existing services there are now 10 trains to and from Dublin and 7 to and from Belfast per day.

Two freight trains, with a carrying capacity of 36 TEUs (20 ft.units) , service Belfast and Dublin daily with links either by rail or road to all major ports. There is capacity to increase these freight services should there be a demand for same.

The Iarnrod Eireann freight station has the following facilities:

- Gantry crane 35 tn capacity with hydraulic spreader.
- 12 ton fork lift
- Hazardous chemical handling/storage facility.

PORTS: Dundalk, a port town is in close proximity to many other ports: Greenore, Warrenpoint, Larne, Drogheda and Dublin. Dundalk Port has 5 berths and with 400 metres of near linear quay is ideally suited for bulk and general cargo. The port has the capability to cater for ships of up to 3200 m tonnes deadweight and also up to 105m in length. Warehousing of 17000 sq.metres and up to 10 acres of uncovered storage is available on and off the quay and there are two 60 tonne weighbridges. Greenore port is the only privately owned port in Ireland and three berths are available at this port. The port can handle vessels of up to 10,000 tonnes cargo. Warrenpoint has two roll-on/roll-off berths and has approximately handled on average of 1.3 million tonnes per year. Larne is a roll/on roll/off port, and is the second largest port in the United Kingdom.

AIRPORTS : Belfast International, Belfast Harbour , and Dublin International Airports are all extremely accessible from the town of Dundalk as all are approximately one hours drive away. There are direct flights to Atlanta, Boston, New York, Chicago, Newark and other major centres in Europe and mainland U.K.

UTILITIES

Waste Water Treatment

Dundalk's industrial and domestic effluent is presently treated by a basic treatment plant located east of Dundalk at Soldiers Point. This treatment plant is not effective enough to meet certain E.U. Directives. Therefore the construction of a new waste water treatment plant is now underway. Construction began late in 1997 and completion is scheduled by the year 2000 . This new plant will provide complete secondary treatment of all industrial and domestic sewage and will meet relevant E.U. Directives. This project is estimated to cost £35 million and is funded by the Government , the E.U. and main industrial users in line with the EU 'Polluter Pays' Policy.

Telecommunications

In the Dundalk Urban area all Telecom Eireann services are available on demand: Voice, Data, Facsimile, Eircell, Eirpage Mobile Communication and Integrated Services Digital Network (I.S.D.N.)

The Dundalk Telephone Exchange along with its regional , national and international interconnecting links operates off the most modern digital equipment, with national and international links utilising Fibre Optic Cables and Microwave Radio.

Copper conductor cables are in general use. I.S.D.N. facilities are available through the use of Fibre Optic Cables and can accommodate broadband telecommunications. Multicore Fibre Optic Cables with substantial spare capacity are in place to serve the Finnabair Industrial Park and the Coes Road Industrial Estate area.

The main cable network is reviewed on a regular basis and extended as required. Capacity is continually upgraded for both exchange switching and interconnecting links by the ongoing application of electronic traffic measuring equipment which ensures that additional capacity is provided to keep pace with demand.

Esat Telecom is now building a fibre optic network in six cities in Ireland, including eight interlocking rings in Dublin. The local fibre optic networks will enable Esat Telecom to directly connect customers to its network and offer high-speed data as well as voice services. Esat Telecom is also developing a national trunk fibre optic network connecting all major Irish cities, using CIE's rail network. This network will be 1,950km long and will become operational 1998.

Gas Supply

Dundalk is located on Ireland's natural gas grid. Bord Gais has an extensive Network of mains throughout Dundalk town. All of the larger existing Industrial/Commercial Companies are using Natural Gas i.e. Harp Lager, as are the vast majority of companies in the IDA, Finnabair Industrial Estate. Bord Gais has a local sales team and Gas Showrooms located at Brightgas Energy, Partnership Court, The Ramparts, Dundalk.

Power

The ESB has a strong infrastructure in the North East. The nucleus of this network is a 220 kilovolt National Grid Station at Ballykelly (near Louth Village) which feeds the 2 x 63 MVA 110/38kv Substation in Dundalk town. From here the electricity is distributed at 38kv volts to a series of 38 kv/10kv substations situated strategically around the town and hinterland. Medium voltage distribution is primarily at 10kv with some circuits supplied at 20 kv.

Fresh Water

The Urban District Council provides a clean water supply to 28,000 consumers. The current production level is 4.5 million gallons per day.

The Dundalk Water Augmentation Scheme located at Cavan Hill, Stephenstown (4 miles south west of town) completed in 1991 at a cost of £29m increased substantially the quantity and quality of the water supply to the Town. Water is sourced from Lough Muckno, Castleblayney, and channelled via the Fane River to Cavan Hill.

The Town has, for the period of this Development Plan and beyond, adequate supplies of water. These supplies can cater for the physical expansion of the Town. Industrial development requiring large volumes of water as part of their processes, can be readily accommodated for the long term and those existing industries which have a high demand for water can expand.

SERVICED INDUSTRIAL SITES AND BUILDINGS

Dundalk's Finnabair Park , a fully serviced high quality parkland setting of some 100 acres, is well located just off the N1 , in close proximity to Dundalk Institute of Technology and Dundalk Regional Development Centre and all regional development offices. The park contains:

- An **Advance Factory** of 25,000 sq. Ft. is scheduled for completion end of March 1998 and will be available for rent , or purchase and is capable of being extended as required.
- A **High Technology Office Campus** development of 15000 sq. ft. will be available for occupation in the 3rd quarter of 1998. This development can be expanded in modular form to a total floor area of 45,000 st.ft. if required.
- A **Science Services Centre** will be constructed in 1998/9. This Chamber of Commerce backed development will consist of a phased development of 30,000 sq. ft. of primarily office type workspace aimed at start-ups and growing local I.T. and other knowledge based companies.

Other Industrial Land: Development of a further 60 acres of land in local authority ownership is planned for 1998/9.

1.3 BUSINESS SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

DUNDALK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The mission of Dundalk Chamber of Commerce is to represent the interests of its members and to promote the economic development of the community. Membership is drawn from the local business community and is representative of businesses of all sectors and sizes. The chamber has excellent human resources through the voluntary participation of local business people on active committees. The core activities of the Chamber are:

Local Economic Development: The Chamber acts with other development organisations to promote enterprise development and to attract investment and industry to the area.

'*Dundalk 2000 and Beyond – A Vision for Economic Development*' is an economic development plan prepared by the Chamber defining its vision for economic development in Dundalk.

Dundalk Chamber manages Dundalk Enterprise Development Company's 7,500 sq. ft. Enterprise Centre consisting of nine industrial units.

The Chamber is also involved in the economic development of the border area through cross border programmes such as *The Gap of the North Association* and *Chamberlink*.

Representation: The Chamber articulates the views of its members to local authorities, central Government, to T.D.'s, European Institutions and other relevant bodies and lobbies on behalf of its members on relevant issues.

Education and Training: Dundalk Chamber promotes links between business and education and is represented on Education Boards. The chamber assists with the training needs of members through a programme of seminars.

Information Provision and Trade Promotion: A comprehensive range of business information is available from the Chamber. Dundalk Chamber also provides a certification service to exporters and publishes directories and guides. The chamber engages in international and cross-border trade promotion activities

Member Services: The chamber facilitates networking through the organisation of business lunches, dinners, seminars and meetings.

DUNDALK ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

Dundalk Enterprise Development Company (DEDCO) was founded by the Chamber of Commerce in 1985 to improve economic activity in the area and to encourage a spirit of enterprise. The company has been involved in developing an enterprise

centre, initiating an advance factory, various promotions of Dundalk and extensive lobbying for status and infrastructural requirements of Dundalk.

DEDCO now plans to develop a 'Science Services Centre' in Dundalk. The centre will consist of a phased development of 30,000 sq. ft. of primarily office type workspaces aimed at start-ups, growing local companies providing technology services to industries within the region. It is envisaged that the service organisations operating from this centre will supply and interact with national and multi-national companies on both sides of the border.

The Science Services Centre will supplement the infrastructure of the region and thus attract inward investment.

DUNDALK EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP

Dundalk Employment Partnership was established in 1991 under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress. It has a voluntary Board of 18 directors representing Social Partners, State Agencies and the Community. The Partnership is committed to fully involving the local community in developing both policy and specific initiatives in relation to long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups. The primary objective of the Partnership is to improve the chances of the long term unemployed getting access to education, training, jobs and self employment.

THE DUNDALK – DROGHEDA TERRITORIAL EMPLOYMENT PACT

The Dundalk- Drogheda Territorial Employment Pact is promoted by the key partners: Dundalk Employment Partnership, Drogheda Partnership and Louth County Council, assisted by other participants and supported by practically all agencies and groupings in the area. Those involved in the Pact are representatives of the social partners, relevant statutory agencies and the community sector.

The key objective of the Dundalk Drogheda Territorial Employment Pact is to work towards sustaining the underlying growth in employment by developing a number of specific projects, while at the same time spreading the benefits of employment growth to the disadvantaged sections of the respective communities in Dundalk and Drogheda - with particular emphasis on projects which benefit specifically the Long-Term Unemployed.

FAS TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

FAS, the Training & Employment Authority's functions include the operation of training and employment programmes, the provision of an employment-recruitment service, an advisory service to industry and support for co-operative and community-based enterprise.

Foras Aiseanna Saothair (FAS) north-east Region covers the counties of Louth, Cavan, Monaghan and Meath. The Regional Office and Training Centre are based in Dundalk.

There are special programmes for individuals wishing to start their own business and the Region has funding for community and co-operative groups. Direct support for industry to improve the skills of existing employees will continue through the provision of grants under the Training Support Scheme. This Scheme is targeted at small companies to assist them to consolidate and grow.

FAS organises cluster industry training in key areas such as management training, marketing, finance, quality systems and the functional areas of business. The Training Support Scheme and Traineeship Scheme are being implemented and the Job Training Scheme has been expanded and employers are being encouraged to use this scheme to increase skills at operative level.

FORBAIRT

Forbairt was established by the government to facilitate the development of Irish business and to provide a range of science and technology services and programmes for enterprise in Ireland. Forbairt is committed to fostering enterprise, innovation, investment and growth in Irish business in particular and the Irish economy in general, with science and technology playing a pivotal role in this development process.

Forbairt's strategy for the North East Region is centred on the Engineering, Food Processing, Timber and Furniture, and the Internationally traded Services Sectors, as the sectors offering the most potential for indigenous industry development in the region.

The North East Region Offices is located in Dundalk.

IDA

The IDA's role is to stimulate and support the expansion of overseas companies already in the Republic of Ireland and to win new projects from foreign companies, seeking the best of Ireland's competitive advantage.

The North East Regional Office servicing counties Louth, Cavan and Monaghan is located in Dundalk. The IDA have been highly successful in attracting inward investment to Dundalk and in promoting the development of the required infrastructure: advance factories and serviced sites.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Louth County Council and Dundalk Urban District Council play a crucial role in relation to infrastructural services in the County. Apart from the normal services provided by the Local Authorities in relation to planning permissions and infrastructural services, the Councils are now more involved in the broader cultural, social and economic development of the County.

The services provided by them are much more focused on action for development and are closely linked to the work of the other agencies which operate in County Louth.

The work of FAS, Forbairt, Leader 11 and various community organisations coupled with the statutory bodies of the Local Authorities are all unified towards the one objective of improving the general circumstances of our County.

Louth County Council commenced construction of the new County Offices in early 1998 for completion late 1998. The offices are located at Barrack Street, Dundalk. The development of Dundalk Swimming and Leisure Centre is also planned for this site.

LOUTH COUNTY ENTERPRISE BOARD

The Louth County Enterprise Board works to support and encourage job creation, within County Louth. It does this primarily through the provision of financial and technical support for new and expanding small enterprises. Board members are drawn from and represent a broad base of local, community, statutory and business interests. Enterprises which may be eligible for grant aid include those in Manufacturing, Services & Tourism.

LOUTH LEADER 11

County Louth Rural Development Company Ltd. was established in 1996 to administer LEADER 11. The Louth Leader 11 Board comprises representation from the statutory, community, voluntary and private sectors within the County. Louth LEADER offers a range of supports and services, which include: Technical Support, Feasibility and Training & Employment grants. LEADER offers a range of support and services for rural tourism, small enterprises, services and crafts, the development and marketing of natural resource products and environmental and preservation projects.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

The Regional Development Centre was established by Dundalk Regional Technical College (now DKIT) in January 1989. Its principle objective is to contribute, in partnership with State, European and International development organisations, to the industrial and commercial development of the East Border Region and to enhance the regions Science and Technology infrastructure.

The Centre acts as a commercially oriented interface between Dundalk Institute of Technology and the industrial, commercial and business life of the region, and through its various activities makes available the expertise, facilities and resources of the college for the wider benefit of the regional economy.

Services include:

- .. High Quality Incubation Facilities.
- .. Applied and Industrially focused Research and Product Development Services.
- .. Business and Marketing Support Services.
- .. Consultancy and Information Services.
- .. Regionally based special Industrial and Business Training and updating Programmes.

To date 13 new businesses employing over 100 people, who had been located in the centre during the incubation stage of development, have been located in Dundalk.

TEAGASC

Teagasc is responsible for Research, Advice and Training in all areas relating to Agriculture, Horticulture, the Food Industry and Rural Community Development. Its objectives are to raise the competitiveness of agriculture and the food industry, ensure the continued farm viability of the maximum number of farmers and to stimulate rural enterprise development and employment in rural communities.

It is the policy and practice of Teagasc to liaise with local communities and assist local and national bodies engaged in aspects of rural development and to share their expertise in training. Teagasc has experience of programme development, delivery, monitoring and assessment.

1.4 CROSS-BORDER DIMENSION

Extremely close and positive relationships exist between the towns of Dundalk and Newry at local authority level as well as business, development agencies, educational institutions and tourism, etc. For example,

- there are joint committees operating between Local Authorities of both towns
- there are formal associations of business and development organisations on both sides of the border to promote economic co-operation and business between the two communities.

1.5 LIFESTYLE

Dundalk, which was first granted its town charter 800 years ago, is located in one of the most scenic and historic parts of Ireland. Its coastal location against a picturesque background of mountains, woodland and rolling farmland provides residents and visitors with a high quality environment. Add to this setting the modern amenities of life - high quality housing, shops, sporting facilities, schools and medical facilities - and you have the ingredients of a truly attractive lifestyle.

A new County Library was completed in the early part of 1994. The most up-to-date equipment is available at the new Library with the provision of audio books, music cassettes and a range of language courses as well as video facilities. The library is on the Dynex Integrated System and the public have access to the lending stock through OPAC, the On Line Public Access Catalogue.

A County Museum and Interpretative centre is now located within the Old Distillery complex on Jocelyn Street. It offers an extensive programme of temporary

exhibitions, films, concerts, lectures and recitals to provide visitors with a wide variety of events from which to choose from.

Dundalk offers a rich cultural life catering for wide tastes in art, drama, music and theatre. The Dundalk Arts Council organises an annual programme of events featuring many performers of international repute. Dundalk's International Maytime Drama Festival attracts many Irish and overseas visitors adding to the cosmopolitan flavour of the town.

Outdoor and indoor facilities are widely available for sports such as squash, sea and fresh-water fishing, hill climbing, horse riding, squash, badminton, tennis and golf. There are five 18 hole golf courses within a twenty minute drive of Dundalk.

Plans for an eight lane 25 metre swimming pool complex have been sanctioned by the local authorities and central government. It is envisaged that work will commence on release of funds from central government. Local financial contributions are already in place.

Dundalk is fortunate in that it is located close to a number of waterways and also has an extensive coastal boundary. As a result there are a number of areas of high amenity value. In addition to general attractions Dundalk Marches is an area of ecological, botanical, zoological and ornithological interest and the Ballymascanlon Estuary is of botanical and ornithological interest. The development of these natural amenities is being supported by the Tourism Committee of the Chamber of Commerce. The Castletown River, flows through the northern part of the Town and a section of the Riverside Walk known as the 'Navy Bank' is a major recreational source for the people of the Town.

Dundalk Racecourse to the north of the Town, Oriel Park and the Dundalk Greyhound Track plus 4 major GAA grounds facilities provide a significant contribution to the range of recreational facilities in the Town.

Dundalk has a large number of buildings of architectural, artistic and historical importance: St. Patrick's Cathedral, the Town Hall, the Court House, the Dundalk Democrat Offices, the Garda Station, the former Jail, the Louth County Council offices on the Crescent and the Carrolls Factory on the Dublin Road.

Evidence of the prosperity of Dundalk during the 19th. Century is seen in a number of Italianite facades in the flamboyant 'Dundalk Style' and prominent amongst these are No. 64, Clanbrassil Street, No. 70, Clanbrassil Street and the Clanbrassil Hotel.

Dundalk and its hinterland boast a variety of excellent hotels and restaurants.

Dundalk combines an excellent local and regional quality of life environment while simultaneously providing access to all of Dublin's and Belfast's attractions.

1.6 POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Dundalk is the largest town in County Louth and the largest Urban District Council (UDC) in the Republic of Ireland, with a population of 25,744 as enumerated in the 1996 Census of Population.

Including surrounding areas (i.e. Dundalk UDC and Dundalk Rural District) it has a population of 44,889, representing 48% of the County total. Overall, the population of the town (UDC) has decreased since 1986 - largely due to net outward migration, while the County and National levels have steadily grown, as is evidenced in the table below.

Table 1.1
Dundalk Population trends relative to Co. Louth and State 1986 - 1996

	1986	1991	1996	%Change
Dundalk UDC	26,669	25,843	25,774	-3.4%
Dundalk R.D.	18,722	18,759	19,115	+2.1%
Co. Louth	91,810	90,724	92,163	+3.8%
State	3,540,643	3,523,401	3,621,035	+2.3%

Source: CSO, Census 1991, Local Population Report, 1st Series
CSO, Census 1996, Preliminary Population Report

The recent (1986 - 1996) population decrease coincides with a sharp decline in Dundalk's economic fortunes and highlights a reversal of previous trends which showed an increase in population in Dundalk of 23% between 1971 and 1986.

Future population trends predicted by the Urban District Council show that in line with national trends, the population of Dundalk is expected to increase slightly over the future years. The population by 2001 is expected to be in the region of 26,939, an increase of 4.2 per cent on 1991.

Table 1.2
Conservative Population Projections for Dundalk 1991 - 2011

Year	Population
1991	25843
1996	26229
2001	26939
2006	28160
2011	29892

Source: Urban District Council Plan

Table 1.3
Dundalk Population classified by Age Group. Co Louth and State.

	Ages 0-14	Ages 15-24	Ages 25-44	Ages 45-64	Age 65+	TOTAL
DUNDALK	27.6%	17.6%	27.1%	16.9%	10.8%	100%
CO. LOUTH	27.8%	17.2%	27.0%	17.2%	16.7%	100%
STATE	26.5%	17%	27%	18%	11.5%	100%

Source: CSO Census 1991, Local Population Report, 1st Series.

Dundalk's age profile is similar to that of the Republic of Ireland, although there is a slightly higher than average proportion of young people (27.6% aged under 15 yrs/ 45.2% aged under 25 yrs).

Future population age profiling has been projected by Dundalk Urban District Council as follows:

Table 1.4 Projected Population based on Age Groupings

Age Group	1991	1996	2001
Pre School	2172	2026	2047
School	7514	6976	6424
Working	13366	14261	15499
Retirement	2791	2966	2969

(Source: Dundalk Urban District Council Plan)

This table shows that although the pre-school age group is expected to stabilise and the school age groups are expected to fall, those in the working age groups and the retirement age groups are expected to increase by 15.9 per cent over the period 1991 to 2001.

The expected fall in the school going age groups will have implications in terms of the provision of educational facilities. The increase in the population of the working age group will have implications in terms of the size of the labour force and having regard to the existing levels of unemployment in the town, points to a need to redouble efforts to attract new employment opportunities to the town.

The increase in the labour force also points to a continuing availability of a well educated and motivated pool of labour which would be seen as an asset to the town from the point of view of industrialists considering locating in Dundalk

1.7 EDUCATION

Introduction

Over the period 1986 to 1991 the overall population of Dundalk decreased by 3 per cent and this is indicative of the profile of the national population with falling numbers in the school-going age groups, and increasing numbers in the working and retirement age groups.

At the same time, the population in the post-school age groups is expected to increase. Over the period 1991 to 2001, the overall population of the Town is expected to increase by 4.2 per cent whilst the population in the 0-19 age group is expected to decrease by 12.5 per cent. At the same time the population in the 20-24 age group is expected to increase by 23.9 per cent.

Such an increase will have clear implications for third level education, through clearly the impact in terms of the demand for places at the third level institutions in the Town cannot be assessed on a purely local basis.

Primary/Post-Primary Education

The existing changes as they are occurring in the profile of the primary and post-primary school-going population as well as the trends in terms of the expected future profile of the primary and post-primary school-going population, can also be expressed in terms of school enrolment figures and the plans which schools have for future physical expansion.

Figures obtained from the Department of the Environment and survey work on school expansion plans revealed that there are 18 primary schools within the Urban area (schools containing boys and girls sections are counted as separate schools) and there were 4277 pupils enrolled in these schools at the beginning of the 1994 / 1995 academic year.

This represented a decline of 2.7 per cent on the previous year's enrolment figures.

There are seven post primary schools in the Town and within these there were 4960 pupils enrolled at the beginning of the 1994 / 1995 year. Although this represented an increase of 2.2 per cent on the previous year, the vast majority of post-primary schools expect a declining school population over the next five years and none have plans for large scale expansion.

Overall, the survey of expected future enrolment figures and future expansion plans revealed that in general terms both the primary and post-primary sectors expect

declining enrolment figures over the five year period 1996 to 2001 and no school has plans for large physical expansion.

During this period most schools, in both sectors, expect to concentrate on improving and upgrading facilities. Such improvements would include small scale additions to the number of rooms available in order to develop an improved learning environment, new and additional technical, social and community infrastructure, including sport fields and facilities, computers, maintenance of existing physical infrastructure and remedial classes.

Third Level Education

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT) presently has 2362 full time students, and in 1997 DKIT increased their intake of first year students to 1100 pupils. DKIT offers five degree programmes; four add on degrees (either as one or two year post diploma courses and one ab-initio degree) . The Degree courses currently on offer are: Bachelor of Arts in Accounting and Finance; Bachelor of Business Studies; BSC in Commercial Computing ; BEng.in Product Design and Engineering and Bachelor of Science in Quantity Surveying.

DKIT also offers a full range of National Certificate and Diploma courses as well as a range of part time and evening courses. The National Diploma courses include Cultural Studies, Computing and Electronics. The National Certificate Courses include courses such as Business Studies, Civil Engineering, Food Studies, Chemistry, Mechanical Engineering and Office Information Systems. With some of these National Diploma and Certificate courses, students may transfer to other universities in order to obtain a degree.

1.8 INDUSTRIAL PROFILE AND EMPLOYMENT

Industrial Profile

Dundalk has a proud tradition of industry dating back to the early eighteenth century. In the 1970's it was one of the most industrialised towns in Ireland and enjoyed virtually 'full' employment. In 1968, for example, there were 616 people registered as unemployed in Dundalk, whereas in December 1997 there were 4,500 on the Live Register. This high increase in unemployment was caused by the town's over reliance on declining traditional industries such as engineering, clothing, footwear, tobacco and brewing. The proximity to the border has also acted as impediment to local economic development.

Notwithstanding the decline in the Industrial base of the Town, Dundalk has begun to redress the decline with several major inward investments locating in Dundalk bringing new manufacturing employment , notably in food processing and electronics..

Dundalk engineering tradition manifests itself today in the manufacture of high technology electronic, micro electronic, industrial control and precision equipment. Other traditions have now given Dundalk brewing facilities that are amongst the most modern in the world. An excellent industrial relations tradition characterises Dundalk's industrial maturity as does a very sophisticated sub supply and services.

A mixture of important traditional industries such as Guinness Plc together with major international companies such as Harris Semiconductor, Asea Brown Boveri, Quantum and H.J. Heinz and Alcoa Fujikura Limited bear witness to the diverse nature of Dundalk's industrial output. The main employers in manufacturing (50 + employees) are listed below in alphabetical order :

<i>Company</i>	<i>Product</i>
A.F.L. (Alcoa Fujikura Ltd)	<i>Precision Tooling / Automotive Parts</i>
Anord Electric Controls	<i>Electrical Switchgear</i>
Ardmac Industrial Products Ltd	<i>Internal Construction Facilities</i>
Asea Brown Boveri Ltd (ABB)	<i>Process Control Systems</i>
Blackthorn Shoes	<i>Mens / Ladies Footwear</i>
PJ Carroll & Co Ltd	<i>Cigarettes & Tobacco</i>
Custom Foods Ltd	<i>Pizzas</i>
Great Northern Brewery	<i>Lager / Ale</i>
Harris Semi-Conductors Ireland Ltd	<i>Semi Conductors</i>
Horseware Products Ltd	<i>Horse Blankets / Related Products</i>
IKEI - Irl. Kotobuki Electronics Ind. Ltd	<i>Disc Drives</i>
Louth Transport Ltd	<i>Bus / Coach refurbishment</i>
Mallon Technology Ltd	<i>Geographic Information Systems</i>
McArdle Moore Brewery	<i>Lager / Ale</i>
National Pen Ltd	<i>Personalised Pens</i>
Quantum Peripheral Products Ireland Ltd	<i>Specialised Disc Drives</i>
Riverside Manufacturing Co. Ltd	<i>Special Purpose Workwear</i>
United Beverages Ltd	<i>Bottled Minerals</i>

From The IDA/Forbairt's listing of Manufacturing and internationally traded services it is evident that in terms of numbers of business, Dundalk's industry is dominated by small business with 85% employing less than 50 people with only 5% employing more than 200. Indigenous sectors showing particularly strong growth in recent years are: Engineering, I.T. and Internationally Traded Services; Food Processing.

Manufacturing is a very important sector in Dundalk employing over 25% of the labour force. This is largely due to overseas investment. The major overseas companies in Dundalk include:

<i>Company</i>	<i>No. Of Employees</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
A.F.L.	600	U.S. / Japan
Asea Brown Boveri Ltd (ABB)	90	Swiss / Swedish
Custom Foods Ltd	250	U.S.
Harris Semi-Conductors Ireland Ltd	300	U.S.
IKEI	398	Japanese
National Pen Ltd	125	U.S.
Quantum	500	U.S.
Riverside Manufacturing Co. Ltd	110	U.S.

Employment and Labour Force Analysis

Table 1.5
An Analysis of Dundalk's Labour Force in Principal Occupation Groups
Source: CSO Census 1996 - Occupations

	Agricultural, forestry workers & fishermen	Producers, makers & repairers	Labourers, & unskilled workers (n,e,s)	Transport & communication workers	Clerical workers.
Female	69	926	116	108	1448
Male	861	3313	915	1065	571
Total	930	4239	1031	1173	2019

Contd.

	Commerce, Insurance & Finance workers	Service Workers	Professional & technical workers	Others	Looking for first regular job	Total labour force
Female	807	714	942	239	210	5572
Male	1411	617	1028	946	310	11032
Total	2218	1331	1970	1185	520	16604

1.9 THE RETAIL AND TOURISM ENVIRONMENT

The Town Centre

It is the stated policy in the Dundalk Urban District Council Development Plan 1996 to strengthen the role of the Town Centre as the primary retailing centre for both the Town of Dundalk and for the north-east Region.

The Local Authority has introduced the concept of principal shopping streets, based on the strategic aim of maintaining the Town Centre as the principal shopping area to avoid the loss of retail functions from the primary shopping streets of the Town. Shop fronts and the facades of buildings are considered an important part of the streetscape and they contribute significantly to the overall Town Centre environment.

This is evident from the changing proportions of the available shopping floor space between the Town Centre and the Urban area. In 1971, 31 per cent of establishments were located in the Town Centre. By 1977, this percentage has increased to 62 per cent and by 1987 it had increased to 76 per cent. There was a corresponding increase in the relative amounts of sales spaces in the Town Centre over the period 1971 to 1987.

Between 1990 and 1994 a significant amount of retail space has been constructed within the Urban area of Dundalk with the vast majority of this space being within the Town Centre area. Retail developments extending to 14000 m.sq. have been completed including the Long Walk Centre which commenced trading in 1994. The planned PJ Carroll Development located at Clanbrassil Street, encompasses 45,000 sq metres of retail space together with town housing, a cinema complex and a small hotel.

Other smaller retail developments on the west side of the Long Walk and at Eimear Court, Market Square, have contributed to the growth in retail space in the Town Centre area. These developments have also contributed significantly to the redevelopment and renewal of the central part of Dundalk. The protection and enhancement of the Town Centre of Dundalk as the primary shopping area for the Town, the County and the Region is the cornerstone strategy.

Dundalk has been included by the Dept. of Justice as one of the six prioritised locations for the installation of CCTV systems. The installation of this system will be of major benefit in helping curtail crime and public order offences in Dundalk town centre.

Pedestrianisation

The success of the pedestrianisation of Earl Street and the introduction of appropriate street furniture, including lighting and tree planting represents a major improvement in the environment of the Town Centre. The feasibility of pedestrianising other suitable parts of the Town is being examined within the context of upgrading the

environment of the area thus making the centre of Dundalk and increasingly attractive area to visit and to shop.

Urban Renewal

Dundalk has been successful in having many areas of the Town Centre designated for urban renewal. The redevelopment of these areas has been a major success in terms of their rejuvenation. The Long Walk Designated Area has seen significant retail developments extending to 14000 sq.m. including the Long Walk Shopping Centre which extends to 11000 sq.m. not including the proposed development at the PJ Carrolls site on Clanbrassil Street, Dundalk.

Park Street has also seen major development under this scheme with new and existing business expansions plus town housing and light industrial units.

The Distillery Lane Designated Area has also seen substantial redevelopment with the centre point of the redevelopment of this area being the refurbishment and conversion of the former Carrolls bonded warehouses into the Museum / Interpretative Centre and County Library at a cost of £5m.

Dundalk is eligible for inclusion in the 1998 Urban Renewal Scheme.

The Tourism Product

Dundalk is a relatively unexplored tourism area in spite of its accessibility and many attractions: an unspoilt natural environment offering many scenic touring and walking routes; a area steeped in Irish legend ,folklore and mythology a wide range of special interest activities ; an adequate supply of accommodation and facilities and annual International and other festivals.

The Cooley Peninsula covers a large area from Dundalk Bay to Carlingford Lough, and offers many scenic drives which incorporate mountain views, coastline and forests.

Ballymascanlon is a picturesque hamlet which grew up around the nearby estate. The grounds of the estate, now Ballymascanlon Hotel, contains the famous Proleek dolmen. The dolmen is known locally as the “Giants Load”, and all the local giants, both visitor and native, including Fionn MacCumhaill have been credited with its deposition. Other attractions in the area are the Long Woman’s Grave, the magnetic hill in Bellurgan and Ravensdale Forest Park.

Carlingford a medieval town with the remains of its Castle, Tower House, Monastery Walls and Mint is a major tourist attraction. Carlingford has been designated a ‘Heritage Town’; and its story is told at a local Heritage Centre.

Dundalk has the County Museum which has recently been impressively renovated, and which is now a member of the Heritage Island Attractions Marketing Group.

There are many archaeological sites in the area, some of which are sign-posted, but others of which require the use of one of the new 'Discovery Maps' to identify their location. Sites range from the Stone Age through the early Christian, to Norman and beyond. As such, there is much 'hidden history' that is not easily accessed by the visitor. Perhaps the greatest example of that 'hidden history' are the stories associated with the Iron-Age Ulster hero Cu Chulainn and his exploits during the Tain Bo Cuailgne (The Cattle Raid of Cooley).

There are also a number of equestrian centres, one of which is in Carlingford. There are four eighteen-hole golf courses and one nine-hole course; there are a number of beaches; game, coarse and sea fishing opportunities can also be enjoyed.

There are five hotels in Dundalk. Three hotels in the North Louth Region are three-star (Ballymascanlon, Carrickdale and Fairways). There are also numerous guest house and B& Bs.

2. THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY VIEW ON LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

DUNDALK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MEMBERS SURVEY

In 1997 Dundalk Chamber of Commerce conducted a comprehensive survey of its members to obtain their views on the priorities for development of the area with regard to :

- Infrastructure
- Economic Development
- Business Support.

There was an excellent response to the survey with 102 (46%) members replying. The respondents were from a variety of sectors as follows:

Sector	%
Industry and Commercial Services	36
Tourism & Leisure	7
Retail	24
Professional Services	15
Financial Services	9
Other Services	9

2.0 PRIORITIES FOR INFRASTRUCTURAL INVESTMENT

The majority of respondents considered the greatest priority for investment in infrastructure for Dundalk to be *the completion of the EO1 Route North and South of Dundalk*. 40% of respondents gave the completion of the road South of Dundalk a '1' rating, (i.e. the highest priority) with 36% giving the completion of the road north of Dundalk a '2' rating i.e. second highest rating.

Candidates were asked to grade this list of priorities from 1 to 7. When the percentage of respondents who gave priority ratings of 1 , 2 & 3 are combined in order to give a representative view on how members have prioritised the options given.

Table 1.6

<i>Priorities for Infrastructural Development</i>	
Priority Rating	%
Completion of EO1 Route north of Dundalk	63
Completion of EO1 Route south of Dundalk	62
Enhanced Telecommunications Network	45
Construction of Sewage Treatment Plant	35
Hospital and Healthcare facilities	29
Improved Rail Access	20
Improved Air Access / New Airport	18

2.1 PRIORITIES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The issues of most importance to respondents with regard to the economic development of Dundalk are the *Promotion of Dundalk as a base for inward investment* and the *Development of indigenous industry* with 95 % of respondents giving both of these options a ‘High’ or ‘Average’ Importance Rating. This issues were closely followed by *Reduction of Unemployment* (93%) and *improvement of the general image of Dundalk* (92%).

The table below gives the priorities for Economic Development in Dundalk in order of importance showing the percentage of respondents who gave either a high or average importance rating for each option.

Table 1.7

<i>Priorities for Economic Development</i>	
	%
Promotion of Dundalk as a base for inward investment	95
Development of Indigenous Industry	95
Reduction of unemployment	93
Improvement of general image of Dundalk	92
Development of Technology based industry	92
Increased availability of industrial space	90
Increased investment in Tourism initiatives	89
Decentralisation of Government Departments to Dundalk	88
Promotion of Dundalk as a centre of food industry excellence	84
Increased Investment in Retail Development	59

2.2 PRIORITIES FOR BUSINESS SUPPORT

Again, in this section, respondents were asked to rate issues as high , average or low importance. *Crime Control and Policing* was considered an important issue under this category with 86 % of respondents giving it a ‘High Importance’ rating and 95% giving this issue either a ‘High’ or ‘Average’ importance rating with only 5% considering this issue to be of low importance.

75% of respondents considered *Traffic Management and Improved Parking Facilities* as a high priority with 99% giving this issue either a ‘High’ or ‘Average’ importance rating and only 1% considering this issue of low importance.

These issues are closely followed by *Investment in Third Level Education* with 94% giving this issue either a ‘High’ or ‘Average’ importance rating.

The table below lists Business Support issues in order of importance when the percentage of High and Average importance ratings were combined for each issue.

Table 1.8

Priorities for Business Support	
	%
Traffic Management / Improved Parking Facilities	99
Crime Control and Policing	95
Investment in Third Level Education	94
New tax incentive schemes	92
Adequate Labour Supply	90
State Agency Support	88
Review of Commercial Rates	87
Business co-operation and networks	86
Business and Management Development Training	85
Overseas Trade Promotion	85
Improved Public Transport	83
Economic Information & Planning	83
Local Trade Promotion	82
Improved Postal Service	81

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The main priority for infrastructural development is

- *The completion of the EOI*

The main priorities for economic development were:

The promotion of Dundalk as a base for inward investment

- *Development of Indigenous Industry*

Reduction of Unemployment

- *Improvement of general image of Dundalk*

These four priorities can be considered to be inextricably linked, as an improvement of Dundalk's general image would aid the development of indigenous industry and inward investment, which would in turn result in a reduction of unemployment.

The main priorities for business support were:

- *Traffic Management and improved parking facilities*
- *Crime control and policing*
- *Investment in Third Level Education*

The priorities identified in the survey were taken into consideration by each chamber business sectoral committee when formulating their vision.

3. DUNDALK: AN ANALYSIS OF THE STRENGTHS WEAKNESSES OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

The Chamber committees carried out an extensive analysis of Dundalk's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats .

Strengths:

It was recognised that the area possesses many important strengths :

- Its key location on the Economic Corridor , one hours drive from the major population centres of Dublin and Belfast with easy access to airports , ports , Colleges and Universities.
- Excellent road, rail infrastructure and utilities: The EOI autoroute , and connecting road network, is nearing completion. A mainline rapid rail network services Dundalk and there are excellent supplies of water, power , natural gas , state of the art telecommunication services and fully serviced industrial sites and buildings.
- Dundalk has an excellent business support network:As the administrative capital of the north-east region , the County and regional offices of the local authority, semi-state and support agencies are located in Dundalk offering comprehensive support to businesses in the area.
- Dundalk has comprehensive third level educational and training establishments . Dundalk's Institute of Technology offers degree, diploma and certificate course and interfaces closely with local and national industry and includes a Development Centre on its campus. For specific industrial training needs Dundalk has an excellent State funded industrial training centre. In addition the universities of Dublin, and Belfast are just an hour's drive from Dundalk .
- Dundalk Institute of Technology is currently being expanded and will include a new library and information technology centre and a new Hospitality training Centre and has increased its incubation facilities at its Regional development Centre.
- Dundalk has as a result an excellent availability of highly skilled graduates for employment .
- Dundalk has a strong tradition of entrepreneurship and the positive promotion of the area by Dundalk's successful Business Leaders.
- Dundalk has a strong industrial base and its industrial profile is characterised by a mixture of important traditional industries and an established base of excellent multinational companies serviced by an excellent sub-supply network of indigenous companies. Dundalk's engineering tradition manifests itself today in the manufacture of high technology electronic , IT and industrial control and precision equipment. Food processing , Timber and furniture and the Internationally Traded Services Sectors are other strong indigenous industry sectors .

- Dundalk's coastal location against a picturesque background of mountains, woodland and rolling farmland provides residents and visitors with a high quality environment. High quality low cost housing; shops, sporting facilities, schools and medical facilities all contribute to an attractive lifestyle.
- Dundalk has a rich prehistoric legacy and mythology and attractions for tourists include the beautiful Cooley Peninsula, the medieval village of Carlingford and an annual International Maytime Festival .
- Dundalk's retail strengths are its wide variety of quality independent shops, two shopping centres and free parking. Dundalk has been successful in having two areas of the Town Centre designated for urban renewal and the redevelopment of these areas has been a major success in terms of their rejuvenation. Dundalk is eligible for inclusion in the 1998 Urban Renewal Scheme.

Weaknesses:

- Dundalk and the North-East has in the past suffered from a poor perception by potential indigenous and inward investors because of its peripheral border location, the unstable political situation in Northern Ireland and exchange Rate fluctuations.
- From an industrial profile point of view Dundalk suffers from the lack of a specific strong industry identity for the area .
- Dundalk's unemployment is much higher than the national average with most of the unemployed in the 'long term unemployed ' category.
- Other current weaknesses include a current shortage of land zoned industrial for use by indigenous industries and difficulty in securing Managerial personnel .
- There a lack of a balanced retail mix of shopping facilities ,with few multiples and chain stores and insufficient parking facilities
- Dundalk does not have a major hotel which has conference facilities.
- Dundalk suffers from being inappropriately designated by Bord Failte as part of the Midlands East Tourism Region .
- Although Dundalk has a strong tradition of Music and the Arts it suffers from a lack of promotion of this tradition.
- Dundalk does not have a major tourism amenity / attraction.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Dundalk's border location offers many opportunities to businesses in the area who can readily access Northern Ireland Markets and EU funding programmes for border county businesses.
- IFI and EU funding are available to support the development of border counties.
- The current climate of political stability in Northern Ireland offers further development opportunities.
- The already established base of excellent multinational companies offers opportunities for industrial clustering.
- An excellent Institute of Technology in the area will aid in the development of a multi-lingual computer literate workforce in response to the national shortage of same. This will add to the attraction of Dundalk as a location for inward investment.
- There is a growing lack of suitably qualified working population in Dublin. As a result, inward investors are more likely to consider areas other than Dublin in which to locate.
- Given Dundalk's history as the cradle of Ireland's microelectronic industry, the current number of these multinational companies and the number of indigenous IT companies in Dundalk there exists an opportunity to greatly improve Dundalk's image by the development of IT /Electronics industry identity for the area.
- There exists the opportunity to further develop Food processing industry identity for the area.
- Representation of the business community on the new local authority Strategic Policy Committees will allow greater input on economic development and planning issues.
- There is still some availability of property for Retail Development in the main streets.
- Dundalk is eligible for inclusion in the 1998 Urban Renewal Scheme.
- Dundalk's border location has helped in prioritising Security Camera Provision for Dundalk by the Dept. of Justice.
- There exists an opportunity to develop a Co-ordinated retail strategy for Dundalk. Many UK multiples have decided to locate in Newry. There exists the potential for Dundalk to benefit from this by developing a co-ordinated marketing strategy with Newry.
- Dundalk's tourism potential is completely untapped. There exists the opportunity to develop tourism in the region by branding and marketing the wider area as an entity.

- Border county funding might be accessed for tourism flagship projects which would exploit Dundalk's rich historical, cultural and mythological wealth.
- An Annual Festival themed on Dundalk's mythological and rich history could be organised.
- The development of a new Hospitality Training Centre in the Dundalk Institute of Technology will result in increased tourism training in the area.
- The development of a website for Dundalk would do much to promote the region at home and overseas.

THREATS

- A breakdown in the Peace Process would have a devastating effect on Dundalk.
- Cheaper labour costs in other countries are causing overseas companies to locate elsewhere.
- The growth of large retail developments elsewhere eg. Blanchardstown retail complex, continues.
- The clustering of IT overseas companies in the greater Dublin area continues.
- There is an apparent lack of Government support for the development of tourism, in County Louth.

4. A VISION FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The future vision for Dundalk's development should capitalise on these strengths, minimise the impact of weaknesses, fully exploit future opportunities and counter threats. In formulating this vision Dundalk Chamber took cognisance of the analysis of its members survey which determined their priorities for development. In addition meetings were held with representatives of agencies and organisations involved in the development of Dundalk and their development plans were taken into consideration.

The vision is intended to address the issues in a comprehensive and coherent way looking at all key aspects of the Development of Dundalk. It is not meant to be prescriptive, rather it is intended to stimulate discussion, generate new ideas and, most importantly, act as a catalyst for constructive action.

4.0 A VISION FOR INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

(1) Dundalk will be recognised as Ireland's premier industrial location for high technology and Internationally Traded Services Industries , both indigenous and inward investment.

(2) Dundalk will be perceived as an attractive place in which to invest, locate , work and live with a high level of quality employment.

4.1 A VISION FOR RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

Dundalk will be recognised as the premier retail and commercial location in the North East. It will be a diverse, attractive, secure retail environment with excellent parking facilities.

It is envisaged that Dundalk will have the following attractions as a retail / commercial location:

- A good mix of retail and service businesses and a diverse retail offering including Multiples, Chain Stores and Independent Retail outlets.
- Excellent parking facilities , including a multi-storey car park..
- A CCTV Security Camera System in the town will control crime and increase public safety.
- An attractive well laid out and litter free town centre will do much to attract consumers into the town
- Increased pedestrianisation of the town will improve its attractiveness.

4.2 A VISION FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Dundalk will be an attractive Tourism location for both national and International visitors and will capitalise on it's unique Mythological strengths.

5. ACHIEVING THE VISION: A STRATEGY

5.1 INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

In line with the members survey analysis and the SWOT analysis carried out by the Chamber's Industry Committee, a development strategy which focused on a major project was envisaged:

(1) North East Business & Technology Park

The establishment of a North-East Business & Technology Park is seen as a key step in improving Dundalk's image as key industrial location for high-tech indigenous and inward investment companies:

From the analysis it was quite clear that the area possesses many strategically important strengths: -

- It's key location on the Economic Corridor (EOI), halfway between
- Dublin and Belfast
- It's proximity to key ports I.E.: Dundalk, Warrenpoint, Greenore and Drogheda and to Dublin and Belfast Airports.
- It's strong tradition of entrepreneurship and the positive promotion of the area by Dundalk's successful Business Leaders.
- The recent up-grading of the Dundalk/Belfast Rail Link for both
- passenger and cargo handling.
- The presence of a high quality Higher Education Institution (DKIT)
- and availability of highly skilled graduates and R&D services for industry.

Dundalk Institute of Technology through it's Regional Development Centre have supported the development of new knowledge and technology based innovative enterprises (20 to date supported, employing 100). Increasing also is the growth of industrial research activity, in particular Applied Research and Development, Technology Transfer and industrial training activity. The nucleus for the new activity rests within a geographic envelope in Dundalk consisting of:

- Finnabair Industrial Park (containing a number of technology and computer based multi-national companies)
- Forbairt and IDA Regional Offices
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Regional Development Centre

This area, therefore, contains all that is essential in the designation of the area as a Business and Technology Park. The main Dublin/Belfast road runs through this area

and it's critical and strategic location on the economic corridor could be enhanced through the development of a new high tech image.

This new identity would also assist in enhancing the attractiveness of Dundalk as a location for overseas tech based companies, as a new location for indigenous tech based SME's and as a focus for Research and Development activity and advisory support and information services.

Proposal:

Dundalk now needs to build on its progress of the past 6 years and position itself as the premier industrial area north of Dublin so it can compete successfully with other regional locations such as Limerick, Waterford and Galway. The following measures are therefore proposed:

- To establish an identity around the Finnabair Industrial Park, DKIT. Campus.R.D.C. and designate this as the North-East Business & Technology Park.
- To up-grade the area's environment, infrastructure, landscaping and image.
- To provide highly visible signage (with a common corporate identity and theme on approaches to the park and within it.)
- To develop marketing packs (brochures etc.) and a special web site to assist development agencies market the park at home and overseas.
- To develop high quality office type facilities (20,000 sq. ft in 10 units) for medium scale overseas companies and as follow on space for incubated enterprises from the R.D.C. and for other tech based regional SME's wishing to locate technology based type activities to a single prestigious location.
- To enhance the IT infrastructure and network on the park (including high bandwidth communication infrastructure and video-conference facilities for shared use)
- Establish business clubs and networks for industries and organisations on the park to enhance business networking
- To provide improved market intelligence, business information, research and development and technology transfer services to companies on the park.

This concept could be modelled on the success of Plessey's National Technology Park in Limerick.

Partners:

Proposed partners in the North-East Business & Technology Park would include:

- Dundalk Chamber of Commerce
- IDA Ireland
- Dundalk Institute of Technology and Regional Development Centre
- Dundalk U.D.C.
- Forbairt
- Louth County Enterprise Board

- Teagasc
- Fas
- Dundalk Employment Partnership
- Louth County Council
- International Fund for Ireland
- Dundalk Enterprise Development Company

Funding

At this stage, it is extremely difficult to predict costs . A feasibility study will be commissioned. Application for funding of the feasibility study will be made to Forbairt with matching funding provided by the partners.

Conclusions & Recommendations:

In conclusion, the proposal will need further research and discussion and the preparation of a detailed study and implementation plan. The maximisation of the potential synergy's of the many partners involved will lead to an Integrated Environment for Technology based Business Activities and the realisation of the potential of the Dundalk area as the ideal Business Location in Ireland.

Key to the achievement of this goal will be the preparation of a feasibility study at the earliest opportunity.

(2) The construction of a Science Services Centre in this designated area , providing workspace for indigenous start-up companies and growing local I.T. and other knowledge based companies, will further enhance Dundalk's image as a centre of excellence.

(3) The production of promotional material on Dundalk will re-inforce this image. It is intended to update and republish the "Dundalk Advantage" publication .

(4) Availability of cost effective land zoned for industrial development.

Dundalk Chamber will actively liaise with local authority planners with regard to a strategic plan for the zoning of land for industrial purposes. Business representation on the local authority Strategic Policy Committee which deals with planning will further assist this process.

(5) Promote the growth and diversity in High Tech, Internationally Traded Services and Tele Services sectors.

5.2 RETAIL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

(1) The Appointment of a Retail Development Manager

Dundalk Chamber will endeavour to source funding for the recruitment of a Retail Development Manager who carry out many of the functions of a Town Centre Manager.

The Retail Development Manager will be responsible for developing:

- A co-ordinated Dundalk-Newry Retail Marketing Strategy which will target potential shoppers nation-wide.
- A co-ordinated retail strategy involving an investment plan ensuring a diverse retail offering.
- Co-ordination of the town centre and the promotion of co-operation among traders , retailers and the Urban District Council.
- A coherent parking strategy which takes into account location, management and pricing of car parks.

(2) CCTV Security Camera System for Town

Dundalk Chamber has made on-going representations to the Minister for Justice and local Minister Dermot Ahern for the provision of security cameras.

The Minister for Justice has confirmed that Dundalk will be included as one of the six prioritised locations in the country for the installation of Security Cameras. Since approval has been given, the steering committee established, representing the above partners will co-ordinate the planning for the installation and funding of same.

5.3 TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

(1) The creation and development of a marketable name and identity for the area, drawn on its rich mythological heritage:

A Feasibility Study commissioned by the Gap of the North Association has examined the feasibility of the creation of a marketable tourism product i.e. a name and identity for an area comprising the four border counties of Armagh, Monaghan, Down and Louth, which will be drawn from the history, culture, heritage and facilities and amenities in the area. The consultants recommendations include an implementation plan which now requires to be actioned to progress the project.

(2) National Mythological Interpretative Centre

The development of a National Mythological Interpretative centre will consolidate this identity and produce a much needed tourism flagship attraction for the area.

Over the last 20 years North Louth has gone from a position of virtual full employment to an unemployment number of 10,000.

To combat this unacceptable situation, Dundalk Chamber of Commerce Tourism Committee have carried out a study of the strengths and weaknesses in the area at the present time. Feasibility studies commissioned by “Gap of the North”, Leader and Louth County Council have been used to evaluate the situation.

The conclusions are that a cross border tourism area including North Louth, East Monaghan, South Armagh, South Down should be created. One of the main faults is the fragmentation of effort both on the ground and within the support agencies which are involved in tourism development. More co-ordination is needed to develop an identity for the area.

The feasibility study concluded that a marketing brand and identity should be established for the area and that the brand should focus on the area’s wealth of history, heritage, culture and mythology.

Dundalk Chamber would like to present the idea of a National Mythological Interpretative Centre.

Why Mythology ?

1. Enhance public perception of ancient Irish folklore on a National and International basis. By using characters like Cuchullain and stories like Tain Bo and the Red Branch Knights we will help to enhance peoples perspective of Irish Folklore on a National and International basis.
2. Education. We see this as a major selling point. On a National basis we envisage the centre will become one of the major attractions for special interest groups and school trips. On an International basis the scope is enormous.
3. Encourage Film Industry development. Cartoon film based on the characters from Irish Mythology is envisaged. The benefits are many i.e.
 - a) employment.
 - b) could use one of the characters as a symbol for the area.
 - c) create an identity for the area.
4. Help create tourism links North, South, East and West.

We suggest Dundalk and the Cross Border land of Oriel as the ideal location for this centre.

- a) It has the richest tradition of folklore in the whole country.

- b) Prime Geographic location on the North South corridor.
3 million within 60 miles, good Airport and Seaport access.
- c) One of Europe's most beautiful and unspoilt landscapes.

Develop Tourism Products. We intend to use Mythology as our flagship for development and investment.

- a) The confidence projected by the state organisations will help concentrate the mind and unify the purpose of all those working on the ground.
- b) Encourage private development to build all the amenities to support a successful Tourism Industry.
- c) To create a unique and unified image.
- d) Culture: Help to promote song, Dance, Writing and Crafts to show the world how deep this area is steeped in Culture.

To progress with this project a feasibility study will need to be commissioned. We estimate the cost to be in the region of £25,000.

When this structure is put in place we are confident their conclusions will concur with ours, the outcome being a major advance in the development of tourism on a cross border basis in the North East.

The GNA feasibility study concluded that the brand should focus on the area's depth of history, heritage, culture and mythology. The development of a National Mythological Interpretative Centre in the region would re-inforce the areas brand image. The establishment of same would also enhance public perception of ancient Irish folklore on a national and international basis.

Dundalk Chamber will continue to make representations to An Taoiseach, tourism organisations and local political representatives to gain support for the development of a National Mythological and Interpretative Centre in Dundalk. A Feasibility Study will be commissioned.

(3) Development of Dundalk Bay

Dundalk Bay is currently an area of great ornithological interest and is visited on an ad-hoc basis by ornithologists from at home and abroad. It is however under-developed from a marketing and infrastructural point of view. Dundalk Chamber of Commerce have made applications to various funding agencies for funding for a feasibility study on the bay. The objectives of the proposed study is the preparation of a plan to develop this natural resource and its existing facilities into a major tourism and leisure attraction which will attract cross border and overseas visitors to the area, 12 months of the year.

(4) Tourism Promotion for the area should be more focused to take account of the identity and character of region.

It is the intention of the Dundalk Chamber of Commerce to negotiate and pressurise funding agencies for more investment and marketing of this region promoting awareness of this region at home and abroad.. The Chamber Tourism Committee will co - operate with Louth County Tourism Committee, Bord Failte and MERTA. Following the meeting held with the Minister Jim Mc Daid on 5th November 1997, a meeting is being arranged between Bord Failte, Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the four chambers in the Gap of the North Association to discuss tourism development for this area.

(5) Investments for upgrade of existing facilities and provision of hotel with conference facilities.

Representation will be made to the Minister for Finance to request that Louth be included in special funding for refurbishment of accommodation in border region and that the Minister reconsider his decision to exclude County Louth in the debate on the Finance Bill.

(6) Establishment of more festivals in the region -

It is the intention of the Dundalk Chamber of Commerce Tourism Committee to further investigate the possibility of identifying regional and local festivals that can be organised i.e. Fleadh Ceoils and themes which identify with the region.ie mythological themes such as Cu Chulainn and the Tain Bo Cuailgne

6. CONCLUSION

This document has identified key areas for action, which will advance the development of Dundalk. In identifying and proposing specific projects we have endeavoured to take account of our chamber members priorities for Dundalk's development and of the development plans and suggestions made in consultation with other development organisations. It is not meant to be prescriptive or comprehensive, but is intended to stimulate discussion, generate new ideas and, most importantly, act as a catalyst for constructive action.

Many of the requirements and projects identified have already been actioned. The identification of the various partners required to bring projects to fruition and the involvement of other organisations involved in the development of the region will contribute greatly to the achievement of the identified objectives.

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