Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC)

Planning policy and cross-border housing markets on the island of Ireland

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UK COLLABORATIVE CENTRE FOR HOUSING EVIDENCE

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Acronyms

AB&CBC Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council

BCC Belfast City Council

BI Business Intelligence

BIDS Business Improvement Development Scheme

BTR Build to Rent

CaCHE Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence

CAGR Compound Annual Growth Rate

DBEC Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor

DfINI Department for Infrastructure Northern Ireland

DHLGH Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

DoEHLG Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government

DoENI Department of the Environment Northern Ireland

DRDNI Department for Regional Development Northern Ireland

EMRA Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

ESRI Economic and Social Research Institute

EU European Union

FDI Foreign Direct Investment

FfC Framework for Co-opertaion

GB Great Britain

HGI Housing Growth Indicator

HNDA Housing Need and Demand Assessment

ICT Information and Communication Technology

IDA Industrial Development Agency

LAP Local Area Plan

L&CCC Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

LDP Local Development Plan

LGD Local Government District

MASP Metropolitan Area Spatial Plan

MOU Memorandum of Understanding

NI Northern Ireland

NIHE Northern Ireland Housing Executive

NM&DDC Newry, Mourne & Down District Council

NPF National Planning Framework

PESTLE Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological. Legal and Environmental

POP Preferred Options Paper

PSB Public Sector Body

RDS Regional Development Strategy

RPO Regional Planning Objective

RSES Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

SPG Supplementary Planning Guidance

SPPS Strategic Planning Policy Statement

STR Short-term Rental

TEB Trinational Eurodistrict Basel

TEN-T Trans-European Transport Network

UK United Kingdom

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Executive summary

On the island of Ireland, the number of people living in one jurisdiction and travelling to employment in the other continues to rise. People and goods move freely between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with Northern Ireland remaining part of the EU customs market as a consequence of the post-Brexit Northern Ireland Protocol. On the eastern seaboard of the island of Ireland this proposition is enhanced by continuous dual carriageway / motorway between Belfast and Dublin that has reduced road travel time between the capitals to less than two hours; both governments have also committed to reviewing high-speed rail connectivity. In addition, there is renewed interest in the eastern corridor concept, first promoted 25 years ago by Sir George Quigley. Eight local authorities joined together in March 2021 to launch the Dublin- Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) initiative, incorporating a region of 2 million people described as "Ireland's most important region" (DBEC, 2023). It is within this context that this project, investigating the influence of spatial planning policy on cross-border housing markets, is timely. As a result of Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol, there has been much scrutiny of people and trade crossing the Irish border. Little is known, however, about cross-border housing markets. Therefore, this research seeks to address a gap in the current understanding of relationships between planning policy and housing markets across what is now a UK-EU frontier. The aim of this project therefore is to determine the extent to which current local and strategic planning policy on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) influences cross-border housing market dynamics, and how the DBEC concept may in future impact on policy and markets. In so doing, this report also provides guidance – through policy and practice recommendations – on what the future might look like as the DBEC concept matures.

Planning for housing on the Dublin-Belfast Corridor

It is evident from the review of spatial planning policy, particularly planning for housing, that local councils in each jurisdiction are operating within well-established strategic policy frameworks. In NI, the current round of local development plan preparation and adoption is the first since responsibility for planning returned to local councils in 2015. Whilst the strategic policy framework is somewhat dated – the current Regional Development Strategy (RDS) was published in 2010 – there is no evidence of policy inhibitors to considering the spatial development potential of DBEC, either in each local council area or as a collective sub-regional grouping. Indeed, references in Building a Better Future, pre-dating the current DBEC initiative, indicate that central government in NI recognises the Corridor's strategic influence and the importance of policy in guiding development rather than the former laissez-faire approach. At the Local Development Plan (LDP) scale, where included in the Plan Strategy, consideration of the Corridor is typically limited to economic development. Housing impacts from future Corridor growth are nevertheless implied, for example through research on population analysis and housing requirements underpinning preparation of LDPs.

As anticipated, the policy context differs in Ireland. This reflects the inter-jurisdictional nature of DBEC, straddling an international border that has in the past benefited from a European approach to regional development which sought to negate the dividing impacts of such boundaries. Similar to NI, national policy in Ireland (Ireland 2040) provides the outline structure necessary for the interpretation of DBEC into policy across spatial scales. Regional level policy, through the Eastern and Midland Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES), actively promotes the Corridor as a development opportunity; this is in turn explicitly incorporated into local government policy through county development plans. There is evidence of integrated local government policy that links corridor development with settlement expansion and housing provision.

Therefore, the prominence of DBEC in strategic and local spatial planning policy varies between (inter-) and indeed within (intra-) the two jurisdictions. This is not surprising, and indeed reflects challenges observed elsewhere in relation to cooperation across local authorities within the same jurisdiction. That said, there is a demonstrably stronger vertical policy relationship and more explicit translation of the Corridor into planning for housing in Ireland compared to NI, which is in part a product of more recent policy development processes and the additional, regional, scale of governance. Overall, though, there is no evidence of a joined-up approach to spatial planning along the full length of the Corridor, and certainly not in relation to planning for housing. Crucially, there is no consideration in public policy, in either jurisdiction, of cross-border housing markets. This mirrors both the current stage in the maturing development of the DBEC concept and political realities on the island of Ireland. Going forward, the Framework for Co-operation – Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is an existing mechanism that enables stakeholder discussion of, and facilitates policy development for, planning for housing on the Corridor.

Methodology

The study utilised a mixed methods approach that reflected both resources, timescales and data availability in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The methodology comprised several components. Firstly, a literature review that focused on the most relevant policy related documents. Secondly, a series of semi-structured interviews with approximately 30 participants who represented 18 organisations that play a key role in planning for housing in the Corridor north and south of the border. Thirdly, an analysis of two major datasets provided by PropertyPal relating to house prices and rents (2016-22) in three LGDs on the Corridor in Northern Ireland (no comparable data readily available for Ireland). Finally, an engagement session with members of the CaCHE (NI) Hub in January 2023 that enabled the research team to elicit further useful insights that were reflected in the final report.

Understanding current spatial and policy dynamics

Northern Ireland

Whilst cross-border issues are not specifically required to be taken into consideration, planners acknowledge that such issues should be considered in council areas geographically close to the Border. Some local authorities place a stronger emphasis on collaboration with neighbouring (cross-border) councils. In addition, some councils on the Corridor expressed a desire to develop spatial planning policy, including in relation to housing, on a cross-border basis. There is widespread recognition of a Corridor 'dynamic' that brings economic benefits to the region, though the impact on growth was challenged by one council. Notwithstanding this, there was a generally strong sense amongst participants that this has existed for decades, though the prominence of the Corridor 'waxes and wanes' over time. DBEC is considered by the majority of respondents to be an opportunity for a more organised approach to economic development in the region.

No single housing market exists in DBEC. Rather, the Corridor comprises of 'sub-regional' markets that are highly segmented (e.g. tenure and income) and differentiated (e.g. typology and use patterns). There is, however, a premium associated with geographical location on the Corridor: higher rents; higher purchase costs (land and completed dwellings). Cost of living in Dublin is influencing location decisions across the eastern seaboard. Proximity to family and social (support) networks are a key motivator for household location decision-making, maximising economic opportunity (higher paid employment) with lifestyle. This was further evidenced through reported increases in planning and building control applications during 2020-2022. Social housing providers, though, tend to focus on meeting current demand in local areas and consequently the Corridor does not drive development decisions per se, but rather considerations such as accessibility to amenities and availability of land. Whilst there is a 'sense' of dynamics on the Corridor – reference is made to people re-locating to the region; business investment and start-up – this was regarded by participants to be 'high level'. Significant data gaps exist, such as the scale of impact of the actual number of households moving from one jurisdiction to another, some of which may be addressed through census data.

LDPs are led by the strategic policy direction established in the RDS and also Northern Ireland's Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS); whilst the Corridor is "acknowledged" in the RDS 2035, alongside the "benefits" of working with neighbours through a joined-up approach, any additionality to this position will need to framed within a revised RDS. Existing instruments, including the Framework for Cooperation, explicitly highlight housing as a key area for cross-border collaboration. A greater emphasis in policy is observed to be placed on economic development, and particularly the necessary supporting transport infrastructure, than housing.

Ireland

Spatial planning policies at national, regional, and county level all refer to the importance of the Corridor. However, in practice the local authorities are under pressure to manage implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and RSES targets so that cross-border co-operation is limited. In part, this may also be because of the political implications of Brexit where co-operation, no matter how limited, might be controversial. There is clear evidence of economic growth along the Corridor, spreading out from Dublin and impacting on Fingal County as well as Drogheda and Dundalk in Louth.

The housing crisis in Ireland, centred on Dublin, has led to housing development moving to Fingal and Drogheda, where prices and rents are somewhat more affordable than in Dublin City. There is limited evidence of NI households moving across the border to purchase. Evidence does suggest cross-border demand from NI households for short-term rentals associated with employment and commuting patterns. Strong demand for urban long-term rentals was also noted in border counties. There is some evidence of senior professionals in local authorities living in NI and commuting to places like Dundalk, Drogheda and Swords. Educated and living in NI, the motorway makes commuting relatively easy. Higher wages in the RoI and the lower house prices in NI, ensure this trend is likely to continue. There is limited evidence of the reverse trend.

There is a dearth of published data on spatial dynamics in the Corridor, with a particular lack of information on cross-border trends. Interviews with senior local authority officials reinforced this conclusion. City and County development plans, for example, are driven by the data produced for the NPF. The NPF and the RSES will continue to exert a significant influence on the distribution of population and housing. As the overall policy is to contain the growth of the Dublin region, this will strengthen policy to increase population and jobs in Drogheda and Dundalk. The provision of employment opportunities in Fingal, Drogheda and Dundalk, and the associated housing development, may make these areas less dependent on Dublin.

House price and rents analysis

Analysis of PropertyPal's annual house price and rental data for Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon, Lisburn & Castlereagh, and Newry, Mourne & Down over the period 2016-22 confirms that both owner occupiers and private tenants living in the DBEC area of these three LGDs pay a premium to purchase a house or rent a property. In 2022, homes in the DBEC area commanded an average price premium of approximately 8% compared to the three LGDs as a whole. This premium had gradually increased over the previous six years and applied regardless of whether the property being purchased was a house or a dwelling, although the premium for a house was on average 6.4%, almost twice that for an apartment (3.5%). At the individual LGD level, the relationship was more nuanced, reflecting differences in settlement patterns and housing market area boundaries.

The analysis of house prices by number of bedrooms also confirms the views expressed by a number of key actors in the local property market that there is a particularly high demand for larger properties in the Corridor, reflected in the quantitative data by the increase in premium from 2.1% for 3 bedroom dwellings, to 3.9% for 4 bedrooms and 7.5% for 5+ bedrooms.

A similar picture emerges from the analysis of rental prices: overall, in 2022, the Corridor area of the three LGDs commanded a rental price premium of 7.0% compared to the three LGDs as a whole. The trajectory of annual average increases was more varied than in the case of house prices, but although the largest annual increase in average rental prices took place in 2022 (as in the case of house prices) the size of the premium remained consistent at around 7-8% throughout the 2016-22 period.

Again, as in the case of house prices, there was a premium to be paid regardless of whether the property was a house or an apartment, but the premium was slightly higher for an apartment in 2022 (6.1%) compared to a house (5.1%). However, in contrast to house prices there was no discernible relationship between number of bedrooms and the premium as a proportion of average rent.

The analysis has thus answered the interlinked research questions posed in the introduction (section 5.1) to this chapter. However, the analysis also suggests that having more granular data and a more in-depth analysis of local housing markets would provide a more nuanced approach to planning for housing at both local authority and local level. In turn, this would suggest the need to utilise data sources, skills and knowledge harnessed from a wider pool of sources than currently, including from the private sector.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical evidence and PESTLE analysis of this study, three recommendations have emerged that can support enhancements to policy formulation and implementation. These focus on what is required for the future integration of planning for housing policy and practice across the range of stakeholders, considered through this research as key for realising the full potential of DBEC; the evidence base necessary to underpin strategic and operational decision making across different spatial scales and governance networks associated with DBEC; and further research to assist in creating a comprehensive understanding of the complex and integrated spatial and housing dynamics that exist along the Corridor to underpin long-term, sustainable development.

Recommendation 1: Governance arrangements and networks

The DBEC concept currently prioritises the potential for job creation and economic prosperity throughout the Corridor region. Key to achieving this is (horizontal) economic development policy integration and cooperation across the eight local government partners, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders and networks. Experience from elsewhere highlights the benefits of adopting a spatial planning approach – including cross-sectoral cooperation, networking, visioning, partnership – in securing positive outcomes. Causal relationships also influence regional development, such as competitiveness and quality of transport infrastructure. In the case of DBEC, an emphasis is placed on the existence of, inter alia, a "well-educated and talented workforce; a strong entrepreneurial eco-system" (DBEC, 2023). A causal relationship linked to this is access to housing, both in terms of affordability and availability of suitable property types, which is crucial for attracting and retaining workforce to the area. Evidence presented in Chapter 4, for example, noted the demand for family-sized homes for diaspora returning home. Such relationships – and any associated policy measures – should not be considered in isolation to the overarching aspiration of DBEC.

Consequently, there is a case to be made for incorporating planning for housing within DBEC governance arrangements, building on the recognition of spatial planning in the Partnership Strategy (DBEC, 2022) to provide a focus for this strategic area of cooperation as an integrative pillar of DBEC operations. Recognising the varying public sector arrangements for housing in each jurisdiction, a specific network of agencies involved with planning for, and delivery of, housing could be established. This would facilitate communication between decision-makers, the monitoring of development plans, and the creation of appropriate policy interventions. Such contact already exists to an extent between some councils that are partners within DBEC. There is scope to formally extend this and acknowledge the integral role of spatial planning in delivering DBEC for example with the chief planners of local councils more closely liaising on housing trends and land allocations to achieve strategic outcomes for the Corridor region. This would not require any new instruments but rather would be an extension of existing cross-border networking provisions and activities, though more explicitly focused on DBEC. As cross-border housing markets are already included as a reference point within the Framework for Cooperation there is clearly scope to maximise utilisation of the framework, with the purpose of increased collaboration amongst the DBEC partners and central government and housing agencies in both jurisdictions.

Recommendation 2: Data Strategy, ICT infrastructure and Interoperability

The critical role of data for evidence-informed decision-making emerged from interviewees as a priority and immediate issue for actionable change. Substantial gaps in relevant data were noted in both jurisdictions. Concerns were expressed on matters of data strategy, policy and procedure, including the need for data security, sharing and access to quality data. Related concerns were noted with data infrastructure, methodology, lineage, use and interoperability for analytical and research purposes. Significantly, interviewee expectations are that cross-border cooperation in the production, exchange and use of data to help realise DBEC strategic objectives is a 'lower hanging fruit' potentially offering immediate and relevant benefits.

Given this study's findings, today's context and the recommendation above in relation to governance arrangements, it is therefore recommended that a DBEC Data Infrastructure and Business Intelligence Strategy is developed by relevant actors and agencies on a cross-border basis that comprises:

1. NI and Ireland public sector body (PSB) database registries and trusted identifiers for data relevant and useful to the core DBEC objectives of sustainable development in housing, economy and society;

2. A resourced cross-border housing and planning data infrastructure with required privacy, confidentiality and cybersecurity protocols and features allowing for data sharing and data platform interoperability between PSBs in Ireland and NI;

3. Development of housing and planning data fields and from public and private sources that support Business Intelligence (BI) for decision-making by DBEC stakeholders;

4. Development of applied Business Intelligence (BI) data solutions for housing and planning policy to address gaps in understanding and knowledge on, inter-alia;

a) cross-border population changes in household composition and formation;

b) definition of functional housing markets areas;

c) housing development and supply by tenure;

d) labour-market dynamics and income distribution;

e) mortgage market and equity investment activity;

f) house prices and rents;

g) commuting patterns; and,

h) net migration trends and composition.

Recommendation 3: Further Research

The qualitative and quantitative evidence that has emerged from this study would suggest that there is merit in undertaking further research in a number of planning for housing related fields:

1. A data audit of sources of information from not only public sector but also private sector sources that could facilitate more extensive and consistent analysis of cross-border housing markets.

2. The undertaking of an analysis of cross-border DBEC housing markets that utilise a version of the Scottish Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) model that is appropriately modified to reflect data availability and cross border flows. This would inform an assessment of the potential for greater integration of modelling within (development) planning more generally throughout DBEC with a view to achieving greater commonality of approach.

3. Given the important role that the private rented sector will continue to play in meeting future housing requirements there is a pressing need for research that would provide a greater understanding of the dynamics of this sector of the housing market – with a particular focus on the impact of contrasting labour markets north and south of the border and the related cross-border journey-to-work patterns.

4. The availability and role of development finance for housing continues to be an under-researched field in the context of planning for housing. A public-private partnership research project focussing on this issue with key actors in the sphere of housing development would provide useful insights into the more effective use of zoned or potentially zoned land for housing in DBEC. The study would examine a number of different segments of the market: super prime, prime, BTR and lower cost affordable housing.

1. Introduction

1.1 Cross-border spatial planning

On the island of Ireland, the number of people living in one jurisdiction and travelling to employment in the other continues to rise. People and goods move freely between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with Northern Ireland remaining part of the EU customs market as a consequence of the post-Brexit Northern Ireland Protocol. On the eastern seaboard of the island of Ireland this proposition is enhanced by continuous dual carriageway / motorway between Belfast and Dublin that has reduced road travel time between the capitals to less than two hours; both governments have also committed to reviewing high-speed rail connectivity. In addition, there is renewed interest in the eastern corridor concept, first promoted 25 years ago by Sir George Quigley. Eight local authorities joined together in March 2021 to launch the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) initiative, incorporating a region of 2 million people described as "Ireland's most important region" (DBEC, 2023).

The geographical extent of the Corridor is somewhat 'fuzzy', perhaps necessarily so, with a broad definition agreed by the partners:

> The Dublin–Belfast corridor is a term used to loosely describe a geographical area that encompasses the two Irish capital cities of Dublin and Belfast, the smaller cities of Lisburn and Newry, and the area between that includes other major towns such as Drogheda and Dundalk (DBEC, 2023)

Whilst economic strengths do exist on the Corridor in general, closer analysis highlights the contrasts between the four local authorities in Ireland compared to the four NI district councils. This, and other cost factors, impact spatially on the configuration of the Corridor including location decision-making.

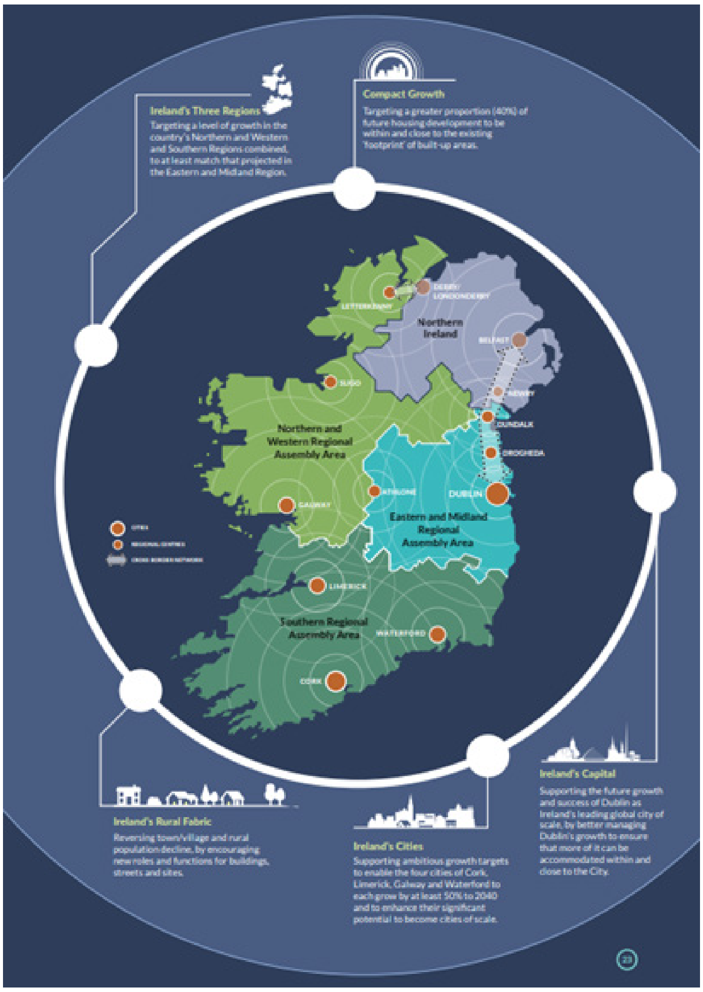


Figure 1.1: Eastern Corridor identified in Ireland 2040.

Strategic planning policy on the island of Ireland no longer stops at the border. Reflecting practice that exists in other European cross-border regions, consideration is made of development dynamics either side of the border in both the Regional Development Strategy 2035 for Northern Ireland, and the Dublin government's Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework. Indeed, coordination of planning policy on an all-island basis, particularly in relation to economic development and infrastructure investment, is a stated National Policy Objective within Ireland 2040. In addition, a 'Framework for Cooperation' (DRDNI/DoEHLG, 2012) enables policy makers in Ireland and NI to explore and collaborate on trans-boundary spatial issues. The Framework specifically references area plans and housing policies (p.20), making the case that "Planning for future housing needs should take account of any oversupply and the cross-border nature of housing markets" (p.20, emphasis added).

It is known that in some areas of the border region, social connections and economic conditions strongly inform the location decision of households that traverse the 310-mile frontier for employment, education and access to services. Previous research (NIHE, 2012) on cross-border housing systems in the Irish central border region concluded that, "behavioural and socio-psychological factors in the forms of close family ties and affinity to local communities have had the greatest impact in shaping the residential decisions of households across all tenures and on both sides of the border" (p.5). Articulating this knowledge and other evidence (e.g. census data) into spatial planning strategy must contend not only with cross-border political structures, but also the challenges of intra-jurisdictional policy making.

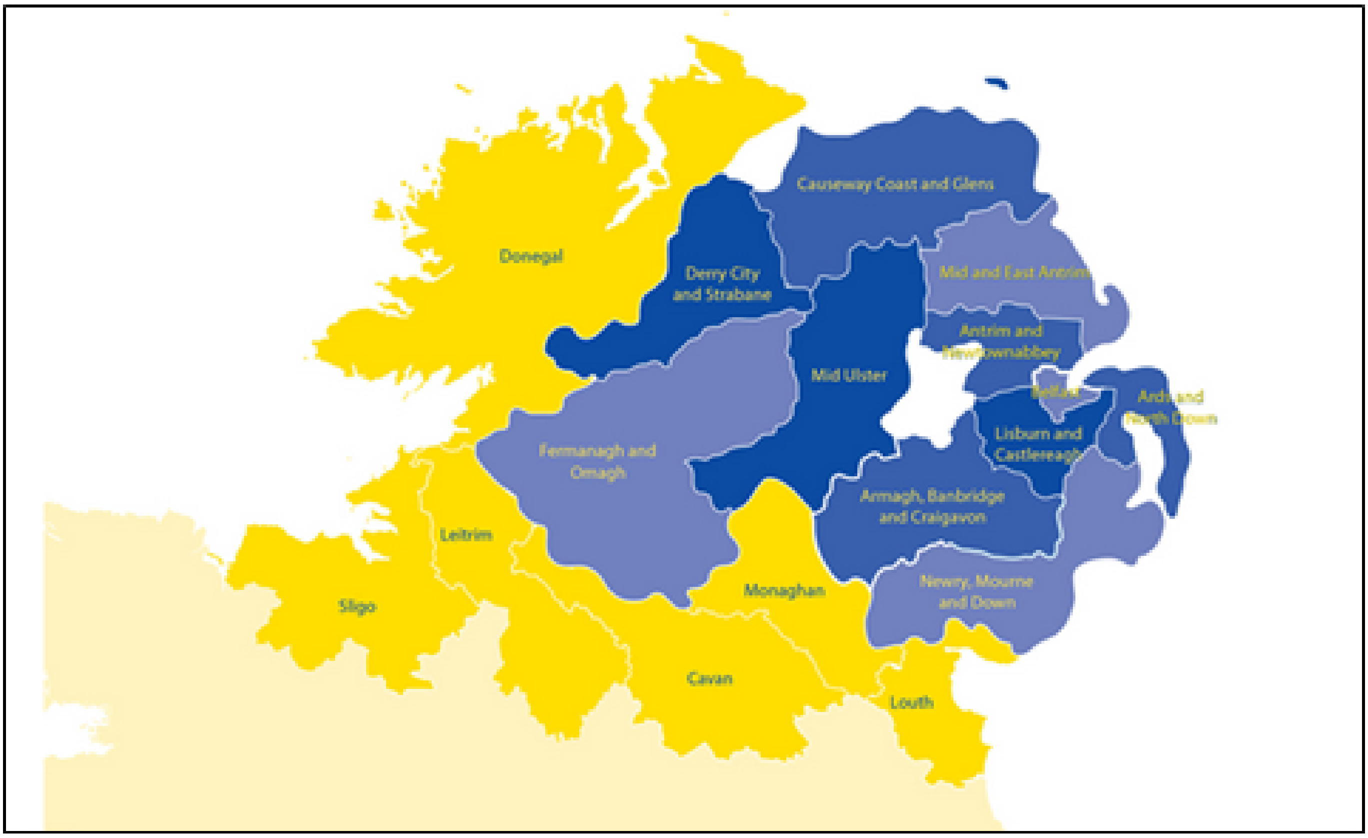


Figure 1.2: Map showing the Irish Border Region comprising six counties in Ireland and five local councils in Northern Ireland that adjoin the border. Source: seupb.eu (2023)

1.2 Current knowledge gaps and justification for the project

Local councils continue to collaborate via border networks including the East Border Region; bespoke sub-regional arrangements also exist such as between Newry-Mourne and Down District Council and Louth County Council. Although this is generally considered to have positive potential – such as addressing social need, and the benefits to be derived from strategic thinking – there has been limited movement in the planning for housing policy area in the ten years since the Framework for Cooperation was published. Indeed, whilst at present there are 'good relations' between policy / decision-makers, including regular meetings, shared conference platforms, as discussed later in this report, 'active' cross-border collaboration on planning for housing-related matters is limited. There are a variety of reasons for this, including alignment of roles and responsibilities of service provision within local and central government; departmental resource constraints; and political sensitivities with respect to the constitutional position of NI within the United Kingdom.

It is within this context that this project, investigating the influence of spatial planning policy on cross-border housing markets, is timely. As a result of Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol, there has been much scrutiny of people and trade crossing the Irish border. Little is known, however, about cross-border housing markets. Assumptions are made, for example, about the Dublin housing market and the ripple-out effect as households seek options in more affordable areas such as Drogheda, Dundalk, and Newry. A similar dynamic is known to exist in the Belfast Metropolitan housing market area (2018). It is anticipated that there is not a 'single' housing market on the Corridor, but potentially several smaller (sub-regional) markets as well as the influence of the two capital cities at either end of the Corridor.

Dublin and Belfast are key economic drivers both within each jurisdiction and across the island of Ireland. The performance of housing market areas in these core centres is regularly analysed (see for example: Ulster University, 2021). However, there is a knowledge gap with regard to the sub-regional influence of the Corridor, for example, at district town level. It is in urban settlements beyond the centre of Belfast and Dublin where more affordable new build housing is currently available. Consequently, this research deliberately focuses on defined geographical areas along the Corridor, rather than the growth poles of Dublin and Belfast.

Therefore, this research seeks to address a gap in the current understanding of relationships between planning policy and housing markets across what is now a UK-EU frontier. In so doing, this report will also provide guidance – through policy and practice recommendations – on what the future might look like as the DBEC concept matures.

1.3. Project aim and objectives

The aim of this project is to:

> Determine the extent to which current local and strategic planning policy on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) influences cross-border housing market dynamics, and how the DBEC concept may in future impact on policy and markets.

Objectives:

1. Examine current development (area) plans, and strategic planning policy, in the DBEC area in relation to housing provision.

2. Identify current housing market trends in the DBEC area, including the dynamics influencing these trends.

3. Establish the broad extent of a cross-border housing market in the DBEC area, including contributing factors and influences.

4. Make recommendations to statutory bodies in relation to enhancements to planning for housing policy, taking into consideration the potential future impact of DBEC.

The project will focus on local government (development) planning policy and specifically on the areas of the Corridor outside of the two main cities of Dublin and Belfast in recognition that factors other than DBEC are much more powerful determinants in the dynamics of the housing markets in both cities.

1.4 Report structure

This report is organised as follows. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature, including policy documents, research reports / position papers, and academic papers. Chapter 3 explains the methodology adopted for conducting the study. Chapters 4 and 5 outline the findings from the empirical study, both qualitative and quantitative. Chapter 6 concludes the study by setting out recommendations for future policy and practice.

2. Planning for housing on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter explores current policy across the island of Ireland in relation to planning for housing. Public policy and strategy documents are reviewed both for Northern Ireland and Ireland to ascertain the extent to which the Dublin-Belfast Corridor concept features, if at all, across different spatial scales. Having identified in Chapter One that the Corridor is a strategic priority, though to varying extents in either jurisdiction, it is important to understand how this is manifested in regional and local policy, and particularly the consideration (if any) of planning for housing-related issues.

The initial emphasis within DBEC has been inter alia on economic development, transport infrastructure, skills, and tourism. Whilst the role of spatial planning is recognised in the DBEC Partnership Strategy (2022, p.28-p.30), details of how to achieve a coordinated approach to housing provision, arguably necessary to maximise the potential impact from the ambitious objectives in these spheres, is not fully elaborated. Therefore, the purpose here is to establish if gaps exist in the underpinning policy infrastructure necessary to support the DBEC concept, beyond the current 'laissez-faire' approach that is principally based on market forces as the key determinant for shaping the Corridor. This will then be triangulated with empirical data in Chapters 4 and 5. The Chapter is structured as follows: a brief consideration of cross-border cooperation elsewhere in Europe sets the scene for an exploration of relevant policy in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

2.2 Examples from elsewhere

Numerous examples of cross-border cooperation exist across continental Europe, driven by the agenda for European integration and territorial cooperation (see for example: Harguindeguy and Sanchez Sanchez, 2017). Compared to the island of Ireland – though acknowledging the progress made through the Irish border networks – cooperation is more significantly embedded into practice, and governance structures more advanced. Operating at varying spatial scales, these can include infrastructure development / enhancement, social cohesion, and agreement on housing provision. The Trinational Eurodistrict Basel (TEB) is of particular interest given the similarity with DBEC in terms of historical social and economic links across national boundaries and the EU border, including the movement of people and goods. At its core, TEB is a "platform" for cooperation that pursues the goal of "promoting… urban centers as attractive cross-border economic and living space with high environmental quality" TEB, 2023). This is achieved through projects and agreements, moving from the broader functional territory of the metropolitan region that comprises the TEB, incorporating municipalities and local authorities through to more geographically localised initiatives. An example of the latter is the '3LAND' cross-border urban district, with joint planning agreements the third of which was agreed in 2022 [1].

The macro and more localised approaches that exist within TEB are an example of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor opportunity, which – as explored later in this chapter – encompasses a territory 100 miles long punctuated by settlements and their (separate) development plans that collectively comprise the DBEC functional territory. That said, and whilst there is much to learn from policy and practice elsewhere, including benefits from workforce mobility, the limitations of cross-border cooperation, including planning for housing, should also be noted. Constraints can come in the form of institutional obstacles, cultural obstacles, divergences of strategic visions and priorities, and relational obstacles (Decoville and Durand, 2017). In practice, there are often disparities inter alia in public sector responsibilities between jurisdictions, mismatches across data collection, and competition in terms of attracting (and retaining) investment. In the case of planning for housing this is manifested on the island of Ireland through different agencies in NI and Ireland responsible for the delivery of social housing, and the lack of strategic data collection necessary for a comprehensive understanding of spatial dynamics.

2.3 Planning Policy Context on the Island of Ireland

2.3.1 Northern Ireland

The policy framework in Northern Ireland is complex, reflecting the previous organisational structures of local and central government and the (continuously) evolving political context since the 1998 Belfast / Good Friday Agreement. This is reflected in the number statutory bodies with a significant role in the planning for housing process. This is evidenced in the range of relevant publications produced over the last 20 years by these organisations:

(1) The Department for Regional Development (since 2016, the Department for Infrastructure) – responsible for Northern Ireland's Regional Development Strategy.

(2) The Department of the Environment – Area Plans, Planning Policy Statements and development management (since 2016, responsibility for these aspects of planning for housing have been almost entirely transferred to the 11 newly formed Local Government Districts).

(3) The Department for Social Development (since 2016, the Department for Communities) with responsibilities in relation to an overall Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland and the provision of affordable homes).

1 3 cities, 2 languages - how does that work? - 3Land EN (3-land.net)

(4) The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (the regional strategic housing authority – a Non-Departmental Public Body) with responsibility for Strategic Housing Market Analyses and Housing Investment Plans.

(5) Local councils – following the transfer of planning development powers to local authorities in 2015, each of the 11 new Councils is legally obliged to produce a Local Development Plan (LDP). These are currently at various stages of the planning cycle[2] . The DBEC Corridor in Northern Ireland spans four local government districts (LGDs): Belfast, Lisburn & Castlereagh, Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon and Newry, Mourne & Down.

Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035: Building a Better Future

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035, is the current spatial strategy of the Northern Ireland Executive reflecting the (then) Programme for Government approach of balanced sub-regional growth and recognises the importance of key settlements as centres for growth and investment (DRDNI, 2010, p.5).

The RDS notes the benefits of Lisburn as a meeting point on the Corridor with potential for economic growth. When considering hubs and clusters outside of the Belfast Metropolitan Area the RDS identifies the strategic location of several towns and clusters within the study area including Craigavon, Banbridge, Armagh, and Newry with an emphasis on employment and transportation links.

The RDS has eight aims including seeking to 'strengthen links between north and south, east and west, with Europe and the rest of the world'. (ibid., p.22), furthermore stating that accessibility, communications, education and employability within the population are required to change in order to achieve this.

While the RDS is cognisant of the Corridor and cross border collaboration generally, the agenda is clearly driven by economic growth and transport connectivity. For example, the RDS specifically notes that:

"Newry & Mourne Council and Louth Local Authorities signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MOU) committing the region to increased cross border co-operation. This MOU is the first of its type in Europe and underpins the pivotal role of the greater Newry region. It sets out the detailed workings of the strategic alliance between these bodies and seeks to support and promote the economic development and competitiveness of the region. The relationship will see them work collaboratively together and share key services" (ibid., p.71)

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) is a key part of the planning process in Northern Ireland and must be taken into account in the preparation of the Local Development Plans (DoENI, 2015, p.6). It sets out the purpose of planning with sustainable development at the heart alongside the furthering of balanced social, economic, and environmental objectives.

The core planning principles of the planning system in NI are:

- Improving Health and Well-being;
- Creating and Enhancing Shared Space;
- Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth;
- Supporting Good Design and Positive Place Making; and
- Preserving and Improving the Built and Natural Environment.

As noted above, local development planning, since 2015, is the responsibility of the eleven NI local councils that set the strategic direction of development in each council area. The SPPS specifically notes that "…Whilst planning will inevitably give rise to many complex and often competing issues, councils have the important responsibility for setting a vision for the long-term future development of their areas (emphasis added)" (ibid. p.23).

The SPPS guides local councils on both the plan preparation and implementation processes:

> "In preparing LDPs councils must take account of the RDS 2035, the Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland, the SPPS and any other policies or advice in guidance issued by the Department" (p. 25).

The SPPS also outlines the process for LDP implementation along with relevant subject policies to be considered when assessing planning applications and LDP local policies.

Of key importance for this study, however, and in contrast to the RDS, the SPPS as a key strategic policy document omits any mention of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor or indeed cross-border spatial planning collaboration generally.

Local Development Plans

Notwithstanding the point above, decisions regarding land allocation for housing in the DBEC are the responsibility of the four local councils, as inferred in the SPPS that states:

> "the LDP process is the main vehicle for assessing future housing land requirements and managing housing growth" (DoENI, 2015, p.71).

Following the transfer of powers to the local councils in 2015, and in accordance with the Planning Act (NI) 2011, councils have been preparing a new suite of Local Development Plans, consisting of two documents: the Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan. The progress of this process varies across NI from council to council.

2 Current position of LDPs in Northern Ireland can be accessed here: Local Development Plans | Planning Appeals Commission (pacni.gov.uk)

Of the four councils spanning the Corridor, Belfast City Council (BCC) and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (L&CCC) plan strategies have been independently examined and have published their Plan Strategies. Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (AB&CBC) and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NM&DDC) have yet to publish their draft plans for consultation. NM&DDC revised the LDP Timetable in September 2022, estimating completion of both the Plan Strategy and Plan Policies around 2027/2028.

These gaps and variations in plan progress make it a challenge to undertake a systematic review of the context for emerging planning for housing policy on the Corridor within these council areas. That noted, the delays do provide a useful opportunity for contributors, through future consultation and independent inquiry processes, to comment on the potential importance of the impact from DBEC on planning for housing including land allocations on the Corridor.

The table below summarises the current position in relation to the LDP process for the four NI councils included in DBEC:

Belfast Local Development Plan Plan Strategy 2035	Belfast City Council's Local Development Plan Strategy was adopted in May 2023. In addition to the LDP Plan Strategy, there are several Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents that support the LDP topics and policies including Affordable housing and housing mix. While the SPG is non-statutory it is a material consideration and should be read in conjunction with the SPPS. Despite BCC LDP being one of the most advanced and the significance of its strategic location at the end/start of the Corridor, the Plan Strategy is silent about the role of the Corridor and links to the Republic of Ireland in general, referring only in terms of transport links (6.2.17).
Lisburn Castlereagh City Council Local Development Plan 2032	L&CCC LDP was adopted on 26 September 2023. The LDP notes the strategic role of the city of Lisburn on the Corridor with an emphasis on employment (L&CCC,2023) Consideration of the Strategy and relevant supporting documents makes little reference to the Corridor with housing growth directed at settlement hierarchies. Lisburn & Castlereagh Urban Capacity Study (L&CCC, 2019) notes that: 'opportunity exists to maximise the strategic location of Lisburn on the Dublin economic Corridor and East/West transport Corridor, and improve connectivity throughout the council area to enhance the movement of people, goods and services, and linkages between towns and rural areas.' 'Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Corporate Plan - 2018/2022 and Beyond' promotes the ambition economic growth offered by its unique location on the North-South economic Corridor, and the access to a talented and skilled workforce, competitive costs and supporting infrastructure. Several references have been made in relation to the economic, rather than housing context of the council and its positioning on the Corridor.
Newry, Mourne and Down Local Development Plan 2030	Newry, Mourne and Down revised timetable indicates the draft Plan Strategy will be published in the second quarter of 2024/2025 (NM&DDC, September 2023). Unsurprisingly given the border location of the council the Preferred Options Paper (POP) makes several references to the strategic position of the district on the Corridor with an emphasis on economic development and transportation links. Population and growth data for NM&DDC LDP identifies that the percentage of people living in the district from Ireland is over twice the NI average. NM&DDC Economic Regeneration and Investment Strategy 2015–2020 feeds into the council economic development proposals and identifies the function of Newry as a Gateway (p.9) to Ireland as well as its position on the Corridor. There are opportunities through the LDP inquiry process (2024) to highlight the gaps in the plan relating to housing policies on the Corridor.

Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Local Development Plan 2030	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council are also several years behind schedule in their LDP delivery. Evidence-based preparatory papers are available. It is recommended through the POP that the LDP approach to housing will be in line with the regional direction of the SPPS with a mix of house types and tenures being encouraged (AB&CBC, 2018). The POP, taking direction from the RDS, identifies the strategic position of the Borough on the Corridor as opportunities cluster within the Spatial Growth Strategy. It recognises that the position between Belfast and Dublin offers an attractive place to live offering strong retail, leisure, built and natural environment and economic opportunities.

2.3.2 Ireland

In Ireland, responsibility for planning for housing is divided between:

(1) Government of Ireland: National Planning Framework (2018); National Development Plan (2021); and Housing for All (2021).

(2) Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH): Housing Need and Demand Assessment Guidance.

(3) Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA): Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019-2031 (2019).

(4) Local councils: Dublin City, Fingal County, Louth County, and Meath County, responsible for their respective development plans.

National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF), published in 2018, is the core planning document for future settlement strategy to 2040 (DHLGH, 2018). The context for the NPF is the forecast of an increase in the population of one million by 2040, the creation of 660,000 new jobs and the need for 550,000 new dwellings. In planning for this growth, the core policy of the NPF is to achieve balanced regional development. Without going into the detail of the population targets, the aim is to restrain the growth of the eastern and midlands region (especially the Dublin region) and to increase growth in the other two regions. The targets set in the NPF are further elaborated on in the three regional spatial and economic strategies (RSES) and in relevant city and county plans. The growth of cities and towns is to be enabled by a commitment to compact development, with 40% of new housing development to be located within the confines of the current urban footprint. Indeed, compact growth is the first of ten National Strategic Outcomes in the NPF. In addition to these broad strategic outcomes, the NPF also contains 75 National Policy Objectives.

The development of the Corridor is set out most clearly in National Policy Objective 44. It should be noted that that the emphasis is very much on economic development and not on housing. However, it is closely linked to the spatial planning objective of developing the Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network, with the NPF and the regional plan emphasising that Drogheda and Dundalk should be developed as regional growth centres, eventually achieving city scale.

NPF National Policy Objective 44:

In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, to further support and develop the economic potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor and in particular the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network and to promote and enhance its international visibility (DHLGH, 2018, p.110).

NPF and Spatial Planning Co-operation

In order to develop the Corridor economically and spatially, the NPF foresees co-operation between the two jurisdictions on planning, as can be seen in the quotation below.

> "Implementation of the National Planning Framework in tandem with the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland will assist in addressing these challenges (population and economic growth). This collaborative work will be supported by the Framework for Co-operation on Spatial Strategies between Ireland and Northern Ireland, which will be updated and reviewed as required" (DHLGH, 2018, p.108).

More pertinent to the Corridor, the NPF suggests that co-operation between councils on either side of the border may be possible, though this has not been elaborated on in any detail. The suggestion of co-ordinating spatial planning functions, for example, has yet to be specified:

> 'Reconfiguration of local authority and council structures on both sides of the border presents opportunities for collaboration, in particular for areas on the Dublin-Belfast corridor and in central border areas. Building up the economic, infrastructural, and developmental ties will be supported through local leadership and co-operation arrangements such as the co-ordination of statutory planning functions and corresponding infrastructural investment' (DHLGH, 2018, p.111).

The NPF goes on to specify three areas of potential spatial planning co-ordination.

- Develop the critical mass and the potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor, in particular the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network to compete with other large cities.

- Creating more resilient towns and villages in the central border area.

• Supporting co-ordinated spatial planning through objectives and actions embedded within development plans, community plans and local economic and community plans (DHLGH, 2018, p.111).

As yet, these ambitions to co-ordinate spatial planning functions have not been established. This may be in part because of political reluctance but also because of other pressures on central and local governments. It is worth noting that the NPF is currently being reviewed and a revised version is set to be published in the spring of 2024.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly 2019-2031

Regional spatial and economic strategies (RSES) have been developed for the three regional assemblies. Counties Louth and Fingal, which are the most relevant to the development of the Corridor, are part of the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA). These strategies are in effect subsets of the NPF and provide much more detail on population and housing targets for the period up to 2031.

With regard to DBEC, it is specifically referenced in the RSES as the largest economic agglomeration on the island of Ireland and is identified as a regional growth enabler. The RSES notes how the DBEC comprises a 'nationally important spine' connecting the two largest settlements on the island of Ireland via the regional centres of Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry. Further, the RSES notes how the DBEC is underpinned by a strong presence of transport infrastructure connecting Dublin and Belfast.

The RSES notes that Drogheda and Dundalk have the potential to form part of a "sustainable network of centres of scale, including Newry, connected by public transport within the Region and within the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor" (EMRA, 2019, p.229) and also that the promotion of cross-border interactions will assist the growth potential of Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry as 'an important cross-border network for regional development'. Notably, the RSES supports a drive in the linkage between Dundalk and Newry to "strengthen a cross border synergy in services and functions between these towns". It notes how economic drivers and policy should be complementary and not competing and that Dundalk and Newry should continue their approach to shared services and interlinked growth. There is a substantial reference to targeted investment in transport infrastructures and services that further enhances connectivity along the DBEC. Elsewhere a commitment to undertaking a feasibility study on a high-speed rail link between Belfast and Dublin is made (ibid., p.32).

These policy statements are formalised in regional policy objective 4.13, which relates to both Drogheda and Dundalk.

RPO 4.13: Promote and enhance cross-border interactions to realise the growth potential of Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry as an important cross border network for regional development.

Notwithstanding this, the RSES make no direct reference to any aspect of cross-border residential development or housing markets. Further, it overlooks any reference to cross-border labour market integration or relationships. Neither does it explicitly reference commuting patterns between Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry and gives little consideration to their interaction with housing market dynamics specific to supply and demand and how regional planning objectives can be identified here. The RSES does, however, commit to a generalised regional planning objective (RPO) from which planning objectives for housing provision and development may be inferred as components of spatial and infrastructure planning, namely:

RPO 11.1: In co-operation with relevant departments in Northern Ireland, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, and where appropriate in association with the Northern and Western Regional Assembly, will support mutually beneficial policy development and activity in the areas of spatial and infrastructure planning, economic growth and related spheres (EMRA, 2019, p.233).

The Role of Drogheda and Dundalk

Dundalk and Drogheda are identified as 'regional growth centres' in the RSES. The RSES, which plans to 2031, targets a growth of almost 16,000 in population for Drogheda, an increase of 46 per cent between 2016 and 2031. Likewise, there is a target for the growth of Dundalk, with population forecast to grow by almost 11,000 or 28 per cent. These are quite ambitious targets and are testament to the policy of focusing urban growth in cities and towns.

Table 2.1: Population targets for Drogheda and Dundalk, 2016-2031.

	Population 2016	Target Population 2027	Target Population 2031	Increase 2016 -2031
Drogheda	34,199	41,133	50,000	15,801
Dundalk	39,004	46,664	50,000	10,996

Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Louth County Development Plan, adopted in November 2021, has several strategic and policy statements regarding the Corridor. Most of these statements stress the importance of the Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry 'spine' and its economic importance. There is a particular emphasis on Drogheda and Dundalk each growing to a population of 50,000 and achieving what is called 'city scale'. Leaving the scale aside, these are ambitious targets. However, they are seen as critical elements in strengthening this urban spine.

"Contents" on page 2

Strategic Objective 1

'Realise the potential and promote the development and growth of County Louth through harnessing the economic and employment potential of the competitive advantages of the County. This includes its strategic location, connectivity and accessibility to external markets and having regard in particular to the role of Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres located on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor'.

Policy Objective CS11

'Support the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk as regional economic drivers targeted to grow to city scale with a population of 50,000 by 2031 and capitalise on their strategic location on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.'

Policy Objective CS12

'To promote and support the sustainable development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, safeguarding and improving accessibility and service by road, rail and communication and enhancing cross border interactions to realise the growth potential of Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry as an important cross-border network for regional development'.

Policy Objective SS1 (Drogheda) SS19 (Dundalk)

'To support the role of Dundalk (and Drogheda) as Regional Growth Centres and a driver of growth along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and in the border area and to facilitate the continued expansion and growth of the town based on the principles of balanced, sustainable development that enables the creation of employment, supports economic investment, and creates an attractive living and working environment'.

Fingal County Development Plan 2023-2029

The most recent development plan for Fingal County Council has sparse mention of the Corridor, which is somewhat surprising given its importance in terms of its role in the Dublin metropolitan area. The table below highlights the statements in the recent plan on the Corridor.

Objective EE06

'Engage and collaborate with adjoining Local Authorities and regional assemblies, as appropriate, to promote the continued economic development of the Dublin–Belfast Economic Corridor.'

Objective EE08

'Support economic growth within the Core Area through strengthening and promoting the importance of Balbriggan as the major urban centre and having regard to its strategic location on the Dublin–Belfast Economic Corridor and directing appropriately scaled growth opportunities into the other urban centres in the area'.

Dublin City Development Plan 2022-2028

The Dublin City Development Plan was adopted in November 2022. It makes a small number of references to the Dublin-Belfast Corridor. It emphasises the central role played by Dublin in the 'all-island' economy and, citing the RSES, notes that the Corridor has 'the capacity to provide the only potential paired city growth pole of scale on the Island – reaching a European benchmark 5 million population target to compete with similar city regions in the EU' (p.180).

The Development Plan also sets out two specific objectives that focus on DBEC:

City Economy and Enterprise (CEE) 5

'To build on and promote the Dublin–Belfast economic Corridor in order to maximise the advantages of north–south links and the development of an all-Ireland economy'.

Sustainable Movement and Transport (SMT) 32:

'To support the improvement, and protection, of the EU TEN-T (Trans-European Transport Network) and the strategic function of the Dublin to Belfast road network'.

Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

Meath County Development Plan was adopted in September 2021 and makes a considerable number of references to the Corridor. Citing the National Planning Framework (2018) the Plan acknowledges 'the importance of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor in harnessing future economic growth, supporting regional development, and strengthening the urban structure in the northern and eastern parts of the country' (2.3.1.1). It also makes reference to the RSES that recognises the importance of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor in harnessing and driving economic growth and, more generally, to the economic success of the region.

One of the Council's objectives (CS OBJ 15) is specifically: 'to continue to promote economic development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor' and its Economic Development Strategy also recognises Meath's 'unparalleled and unique competitive advantage' due in part to its location on the Corridor (4.5).

Drawing on the National Planning Framework (2018), Meath's Development Plan specifically highlights that the Corridor is the 'largest economic agglomeration on the island of Ireland' and a 'national entry point to the island' and notes that it is a policy of the NPF 'to support and 'promote the economic potential of the corridor and develop it as a distinct spatial area'. The Corridor's extended strategic connections throughout the Island of Ireland are noted as well as the Irish Government's proposal to create a 'digital payments hub' along the Corridor with the potential to create hundreds of sustainable new jobs (4.7.2.1).

Finally, in a number of its sections, the Plan emphasises the importance of the Corridor to the development of specific settlements in County Meath. Dundalk's designation as a Regional Growth Centre by the National Planning Framework is directly related to 'its connectivity with Dublin and Belfast in addition to Dundalk and Newry' providing 'opportunities … to develop synergies and economic links along this corridor' (4.7.2.2). Stamullen's designation as a 'Self-sustaining Town' is also attributed largely to its location on the Corridor. 'The town functions as a local employment centre that serves the wider East Meath area. The City North Business Park has capacity for further expansion. The location of this Business Park, which includes a hotel with conference facilities, along the M1 Dublin to Belfast Economic Corridor makes it an attractive location for investment due to its transport links with regional and national growth centres' (4.7.4.4).

2.4 Planning for Housing

National Projections and Forecasts

The methodologies for planning for housing have, since 2018, become centralized (see Table x.x). Using population projections developed by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in 2018, the NPF developed population targets at a region and city level. These are then used and elaborated on in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. With regard to housing, the population projections were converted into what is called structural housing demand and this is produced at a county level. Critically, local authorities, in developing a core strategy for their development plan, must use these estimates. They can, using a centrally issued methodology, adjust the estimates by taking account of new residential development and unmet need and demand. Overall, however, they must use the central estimates of housing need and demand.

Table 2.2 Summary of Planning for Population and Housing

Source	Inputs to plan for housing requirements
ESRI Prospects for Irish regions and counties: scenarios and implications (2018)	ESRI Population projections
National Planning Framework (2018)	ESRI projections used in the NPF
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (2019)	NPF targets used to provide more detail on population targets
ESRI Regional demographics and structural housing demand at a county level (2020)	ESRI and NPF population projections are converted into structural housing demand at a county level
Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning (2020)	A methodology for local authorities to adjust the structural demand to local circumstances
City and County Development Plans (various)	Core strategies to comply with the NPF, RSES and county structural demand estimates

2.5 Housing Strategies and Housing Needs and Demand Assessment

As indicated above, local authorities must use the centrally derived estimates of both population and housing demand. However, since 2000 city and county development plans have had to produce a 'housing strategy'. This strategy also produces estimates of need but in addition calculates the incidence of households who have affordability issues. Based on that calculation the strategy goes on to plan for the provision of social and affordable housing. Housing strategies are generally very detailed and allow the local authority to assess performance and plan in detail for the future. However, the estimates of need and demand produced do not have the same status as the core strategies. In fact, there may be significant differences between the estimates in the ore strategy and the housing strategy.

The methodology used to estimate need in housing strategies has some limitations and National Policy Objective 37 of the National Planning Framework (NPF) provides for a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) to be undertaken in each local authority area in order to ensure long-term strategic housing needs are met. The purpose of the HNDA is to better evidence projections of housing need and demand. This does not replace housing strategies but should strengthen them by having a more robust methodology based on a wider array of data. With respect to the Corridor, while Louth County Council have produced a housing strategy, due to the timing of their development plan review, they have not produced a HNDA. It is worth noting that there is sparse analysis of cross-border housing markets in the most recent Louth and Fingal Development plans. However, the interim HNDA methodology, or a variation of it, could be used in an analysis for cross-border housing markets.

2.6 Conclusion

It is evident from the review of spatial planning policy, particularly planning for housing, that local councils in each jurisdiction are operating within well-established strategic policy frameworks. In NI, the current round of local development plan preparation and adoption is the first since responsibility for planning returned to local councils in 2015. Whilst the strategic policy framework is somewhat dated – the current RDS was published in 2010 – there is no evidence of policy inhibitors to considering the spatial development potential of DBEC, either in each local council area or as a collective sub-regional grouping. Indeed, references in Building a Better Future, pre-dating the current DBEC initiative, indicate that central government in NI recognises the Corridor's strategic influence and the importance of policy in guiding development rather than the former laissez-faire approach. At the LDP scale, consideration of the Corridor in planning policy is restricted, where included in the Plan Policy, to economic development. Housing impacts from future Corridor growth are implied, for example through research on population analysis and housing demand underpinning preparation of LDPs.

As anticipated, the policy context differs in Ireland. This reflects the inter-jurisdictional nature of DBEC, straddling an international border that has in the past benefited from a European approach to regional development which sought to negate the dividing impacts of such boundaries. Similar to NI, national policy in Ireland (Ireland 2040) provides the outline structure necessary for the interpretation of DBEC into policy across spatial scales. Regional level policy, through the RSES, actively promotes the Corridor as a development opportunity; this is in turn explicitly incorporated into local government policy through county development plans. There is evidence of integrated local government policy that links Corridor development with settlement expansion and housing provision.

Therefore, the prominence of DBEC in strategic and local spatial planning policy varies between (inter-) and indeed within (intra-) the two jurisdictions. This is not surprising, and indeed reflects challenges observed elsewhere in relation to cooperation across local authorities within the same jurisdiction. That said, there is a demonstrably stronger vertical policy relationship and more explicit translation of the Corridor into planning for housing in Ireland compared to NI, which is in part a product of more recent policy development processes and the additional, regional, scale of governance. Overall, though, there is no evidence of a joined-up approach to spatial planning along the full length of the Corridor, and certainly not in relation to planning for housing. Crucially, there is no consideration in public policy, in either jurisdiction, of cross-border housing markets. This mirrors both the current stage in the maturing development of the DBEC concept and political realities on the island of Ireland. Going forward, the Framework for Cooperation, introduced in Chapter 1 and explored further in Chapters 4 and 6, is an existing mechanism that enables stakeholder discussion of, and facilitates policy development for, planning for housing on the Corridor.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Introduction

The study is underpinned by a mixed methods approach that reflects data availability in Ireland and Northern Ireland as well as project resources and timescales. The methodology encompasses a number of elements: firstly, a literature review that focuses on policy related documentation; secondly, a series of semi-structured interviews with a range of key actors in planning for housing in the DBEC Corridor; and, thirdly, an analysis of datasets relating to house prices and rents in the NI section of the Corridor and the area surrounding it. However, no comparable dataset for the section of DBEC in Ireland was readily available to the research team.

3.2 Methods

Literature review

The project team collaboratively identified a wide range of relevant documents. Some were of a more academic nature that provide some broader contextual background to the study, including, in particular, the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor: Current Profile, Potential for Recovery, and Opportunities for Cooperation report (Blair et al., 2021). However, most of the review examined documents that illuminated the specific policy context and helped to highlight where there is scope for policy and practice to be refreshed and tweaked to reflect current housing market dynamics and challenges.

Key issues emerging from this focussed literature review helped the research team to both shape the research questions that have underpinned the study and develop the semi-structured interview schedule that guided the second component of the research. The wide range of relevant policy documents available is to a considerable degree reflective of the number of organisations with a statutory responsibility for one or more aspects of planning for housing.

A list of the key documents examined is included in the bibliography,

Stakeholder interviews

In all, 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with approximately 30 participants representing organisations that play a key role in planning for housing in the Corridor, north and south of the border. These informants were selected on the basis that they were in senior positions in Government organisations with a direct input into the planning for housing process or were themselves key players in the housing market. All of the interviewees were selected to provide expert insights from a range of perspectives. Eight of these interviews were with representatives of organisations in Northern Ireland, nine in Ireland and one that straddled the border.

In both jurisdictions, interviews were carried out with officials employed in central Government, in housing organisations and in DBEC Councils, and with estate agents.

The interviews were carried out between March and June 2022. Given ongoing concerns regarding COVID-19 as well as pragmatic considerations, all of the interviews were undertaken using one or other of the widely available virtual platforms. Interviews were not recorded in order to help participants feel that they could speak openly. The views of informants were recorded using the more traditional "notes and quotes" process.

In advance of the interviews, stakeholders were sent a Participant Information Sheet that set out the background to the study and its broad aims as well as providing assurances on confidentiality and confirmation that the project had been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee at Glasgow University. The Interview Topic Guide is included at Appendix 1.

Participants were also sent the Topic Guide that was used to provide a broad structure for the interview. The schedule consisted of 12 questions which in the event were normally grouped into a number of themes. These themes were not only designed to facilitate a broader discussion, but also to provide a framework for the chapter in the final report that would provide a synthesis of the stakeholder insights. Most interviews were carried out using the main Topic Guide. However, a shorter, modified one was used for interviews with estate agents.

Analysis of house sales and rental data: defining DBEC

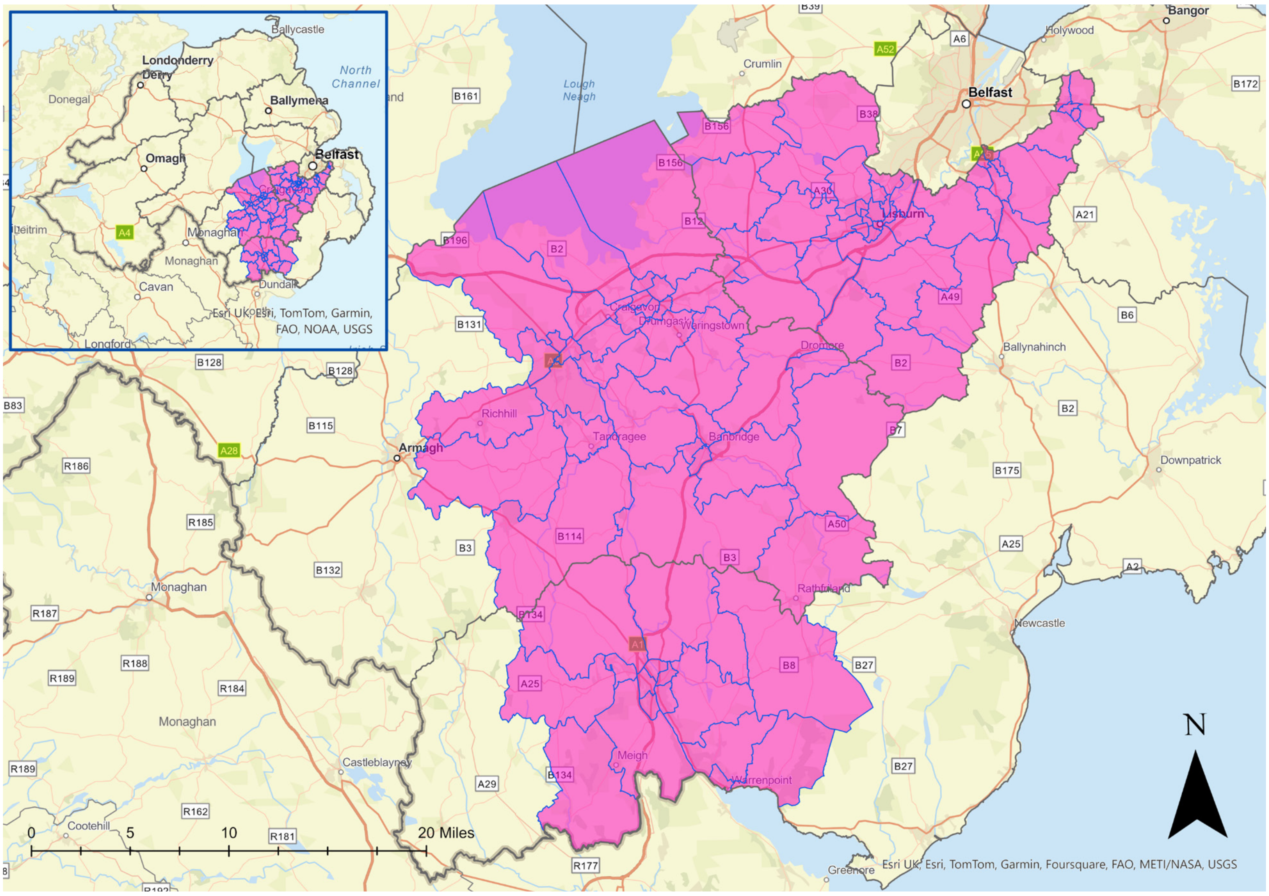
Chapter 1 indicated that the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor has so far not been defined with a specific geographical boundary. However, in order to examine one of the study's key research questions, namely that the Corridor exerts a small but significant influence on both house prices and rents, its delineation was essential. For both conceptual and pragmatic reasons, the research team agreed that the 'fuzzy' boundaries of the DBEC corridor area had to be drawn somewhat arbitrarily. Indeed, it was clear that regardless of what geographical limits were chosen for the purposes of analysis they were bound to be to a greater or lesser extent arbitrary.

The DBEC corridor area also had to be delineated on a basis that reflected residents' ability to access and utilise the transport network (road, railway line and airports) with a similar degree of relative ease. However, any attempt to specifically identify the price impact of this accessibility characteristic using a hedonic approach was considered an impossible task given the geographic scale of the investigation and the complexity of trying to unpick the various elements of the 'bundle of characteristics' that determine market prices.

Bearing this in mind the research team agreed that for the purposes of this study a 'reasonable' geographical distance of 10 km either side of the Dublin-Belfast could provide a sufficiently broad geographical area that could be considered accessible to the M1/A1 and the railway and would yield a sufficient number of transactions (house sales and lettings) to enable comparisons to be made with data for the LGDs as a whole. It was agreed that the comparator should be for the LGDs as a whole rather than the areas of the LGDs outside the Corridor area to enhance statistical robustness – although it was noted that this would in fact underestimate the differential between any price/rental 'premium' for living the in Corridor.

The comparative analysis was limited to the three more rural LGDs, because given the large concentrations of dwellings in Belfast City the 'pull' of its Central Business District and the housing choice effect of access to key services (hospitals, schools, etc.) would completely override any apparent price/rental effects of a 20 kilometre wide Corridor (that would effectively include the whole of Belfast). However, this 'urban effect' was also noted in relation to larger urban centres such as Lurgan and Portadown, so it was agreed that where the 10 km boundary touches a settlement that comprises more than one ward then all the wards in that settlement should be included – even though one or more of them lie outside the 10 km zone in their entirety. In addition, for pragmatic reasons it was decided to include any ward in the three Council areas as a whole as part of the Corridor if any part of it comes within the 10km either side of the road/rail strip. Map 3.1 below shows the geographical extent of the Corridor as defined for analysis purposes in Chapter 5.

Map 3.1: DBEC (NI) wards used in the analysis



Source: PropertyPal (2022).

Data Sources

Both the house price and private rental data used in this study were provided by PropertyPal (Northern Ireland's leading property website) from the comprehensive datasets that it holds on properties advertised for sale and to let[3] . The analysis examines the data for the period 2016 to 2022 for three LGDs: Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon, Lisburn and Castlereagh City, and Newry, Mourne & Down – the three LGDs that contain the majority of the DBEC corridor area in Northern Ireland. Both sale and rental datasets include additional information on a number of dwelling characteristics, including the number of bedrooms and whether it is a house or an apartment/flat.

Stakeholder engagement

An important concluding element of the research

3 The rental data for properties includes rates – as this is the way in which privately rented properties are consistently advertised in Northern Ireland.

methodology was an engagement session with members of the CaCHE (NI) Hub on 24 January 2023. A detailed presentation of draft findings and proposed recommendations for policy and practice were presented to an expert audience of approximately 25 key actors in the housing market. A number of very useful additional insights were provided and these are reflected in the final report.

4. Understanding current spatial and policy dynamics

4.1 Introduction

Having examined housing and planning policy in Ireland and Northern Ireland (Chapter 2), the current state of policy implementation and practice across the sector is explored through this Chapter. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the status of housing within the various governance scales linked to DBEC, establishing the extent to which housing is regarded as a core spatial planning issue and potential for enhanced cooperation. Evidence presented here is derived from the qualitative data generated within the project, which took the form of semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Chapter 4 is structured as follows: first, data from Northern Ireland-based interviewees is explored, identifying key themes and issues for further consideration. The same approach is then applied to Ireland-based research participants. The third key part of Chapter 4 is a review of similarities between the two jurisdictions, to compare and contrast conditions, which – after house price and rents analysis (Chapter 5) will inform conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 6.

4.2 Northern Ireland

4.2.1 Regional Strategic Planning and DBEC

Scoping the Corridor

There is a degree of understanding amongst interviewees of the economic corridor concept, and particularly the DBEC 'brand' following the launch in March 2021, though awareness of associated government policy – such as provisions of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) – is typically limited to the public sector. That said, the Corridor is recognised as having "important economic benefits for people coming to live there" (estate agent). Respondents noted that a 'Corridor dynamic' has existed for decades, and that locating on the Corridor enhances potential for business growth. Quantifying the nature and extent of this dynamic is critical. Although economic data does provide a picture of business 'health' on the Corridor, several respondents noted the need for more data to assist with strategy and policy making. This includes information on commuting patterns that would go beyond the number of vehicles crossing the border on a daily or weekly basis to understand where people are travelling from / to.

Role of the Regional Development Strategy

A review of current influences on public sector policy making linked to spatial planning, housing and DBEC in NI inevitably leads to the current RDS. The strategy is affirmed by local government officials as the starting point for plan making and spatial strategy, as part of the LDP process, required under the provisions of the NI Planning Act (2011). The RDS is therefore pivotal in guiding LDP content, alongside the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS). Consequently, the provisions of the RDS are key in terms influencing references to, and consideration of, the Corridor and cross-border collaboration / cooperation. The pervading view amongst participants is that this first needs to be assessed for currency and subsequently updated within the RDS, as otherwise this will not be considered at the local government level. This assertion leads to a consideration of current policy provision.

A central government representative noted there has been a shift in regional spatial planning policy since 2015, away from strategic and cross-border issues, to focus on LDPs. This timeframe reflects the transfer of planning powers from central to local government, and the associated oversight of this process by the Department for Infrastructure (DfINI) including supporting councils in the preparation of LDPs, moving towards a plan-led system in Northern Ireland. As noted in Chapter 2, this is a two-tier system comprising Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan, with councils required to take account of the RDS 2035 in preparing their Local Development Plans, a measure that is described as a "great opportunity to spatially plan positively for their areas over the next 15 years".

In 2023, it was confirmed to the research team that DfI has no plans to review the RDS 2035 in the immediate future. A central government representative confirmed that the RDS 2035 recognises the importance of collaborating on a North-South basis and indeed, one of its eight Strategic Aims seeks to strengthen links between north and south. There is no specific policy emphasis on DBEC, but the RDS acknowledges DBEC has the potential to become a significant axis of development within the wider European context and highlights the need for its development to include development of the wider eastern seaboard corridor, including the Newry/Dundalk area. In line with the RDS designation of Newry as a 'Main Hub' it is envisaged by Government that Newry should grow sustainably, clustering with Dundalk in particular to benefit both towns, their catchment areas and the wider Dublin-Belfast Corridor itself. New infrastructure, such as the Narrow Water Bridge, is designed for socio and economic benefit, connecting people and providing economic opportunity.

Public sector cooperation on the Corridor

Cross-border cooperation and the Dublin-Belfast Corridor is "acknowledged" (central government representative) in a number of places both within the Framework for Cooperation (FfC) and the RDS 2035, with a "recognition" of the relationship between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and the "benefits" (local government representative) of working with neighbours, taking a joined-up approach. Another local government interviewee noted that the "[RDS] highlighted the need for cross-border cooperation, but nothing was looked at in detail". Whilst there is "no specific requirement" (central government representative) to take cross-border issues into consideration, an expectation does exist that such issues will be considered in areas geographically close to the Border. This follows a pragmatic, practical approach to spatial planning issues particularly in relation to transport communications as it would be "foolish to work in isolation… the interconnections are there" (local government representative) with another adding that "things don't end at the border" (central government interviewee).

Framework for Cooperation: a vehicle for cooperation

Some local authorities on the Corridor expressed a desire to develop policy on a cross-border basis, whilst others noted that their local council area did not tend to look beyond NI for growth. Local politicians have an important role in the shaping of planning policy, and it was noted that this does impact on the extent of consideration given to cross-border issues and dynamics. For those local councils that do wish to operate in this space, the FfC, linked to both strategic and LDP planning processes, is an enabler of information exchange and engagement on a cross-border basis. Whilst the FfC incorporates reference to cross-border housing markets, as well as other policy areas, there is a question mark over the extent to which the Framework features as a tool for cooperation by local government (local government interviewee). Alternative measures include Memoranda of Understanding, typically bilateral agreements between local councils either side of the border on key operational areas including planning. Housing provision does not feature given the variation in local government functions either side of the Border.

Potential outcomes from the DBEC initiative

All the interviewees either recognised or made the case that an economic corridor does exist in the space between Belfast and Dublin, but the extent to which this currently influences government decision making varies between sectors. Some respondents also noted the need for clarity on the purposes of DBEC as a concept, to ensure that it does not duplicate what already exists on the Corridor, but brings real 'value-added'; for example, economic growth along the Corridor is already anticipated regardless of the current eight-council programme. Furthermore, there are indications from interviewees that whilst an important issue DBEC is not currently a high priority for local councils, and that local councils in NI "have so many issues to deal with that [DBEC] may not be a big one" (central government representative).

Summary

For an issue or concept such as DBEC to be specifically included as a policy provision in (Northern Ireland) local development plans it would be necessary for this to feature in the RDS first, and then be translated into local policy. The geographical articulation of DBEC is also an important consideration, with one local government participant noting that a 'fuzzy' approach would better support policy development rather than the particular designation of a specified area or 'buffer' around road / rail infrastructure. However, this too would need careful consideration in terms of managing expectations of what can (or cannot) be achieved in resolving some of the 'sticky' development issues including housing growth allocations and associated zoning.

There is currently no indication that there will be a fundamental review of the current RDS, and that the Department will focus on implementation of the current strategy. At present, there is no significant policy emphasis on DEBC, and in regional spatial planning terms, DBEC is not a priority, and there is minimal data gathering at a strategic level; indeed, there are known data 'gaps'. A central government representative noted that while there is currently no cross-border data gathering on planning issues, relationships with planners across both jurisdictions at central and local government are such that cooperation on this issue can happen as and when appropriate. Indeed, co-operation between sectors and across different scales of government is regarded by respondents as key, particularly because solely establishing a DBEC 'label' or 'brand' will not lead to tangible outcomes.

There is an expectation that certain councils will review the interconnections between both jurisdictions though this would not necessarily lead to joint policy provision. That is, an understanding would exist between planners in neighbouring local authorities on either side of the border of the development pressures experienced in each jurisdiction but that separate – rather than joint – policies will emerge to address these issues. This is explored further below.

4.2.2 Local Development Planning in DBEC

Cross-border relationships in the public sector

Under the provisions of the FfC, a 'Cross-Border Development Plan Working Group' exists to facilitate discussions between local planning authorities in both jurisdictions. Several interviewees highlighted the existence of strong cross-border relationships between coterminous local authorities north and south of the Border. Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, for example, which historically has cooperated with authorities south the Border, incorporated "a lot of collaboration" with Louth County Planners in the development of the LDP. As was the experience in other sectors, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on aspects of existing cross-border relationships. One interviewee noted that various forums and working groups involving local government had either stopped meeting, or the work of newly formed groups had not commenced. Re-establishing these groups will take time and resource.

Importance of cooperation

Whilst participants highlighted examples of collaboration at the local government level on an inter-jurisdictional basis, there are also significant challenges associated with inter-council working within Northern Ireland. This is driven by a high degree of competition between councils and the fact that there is no duty on plan making authorities

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in NI to cooperate, unlike elsewhere in the UK[4] . Several interviewees noted the need for councils to complement, rather than compete with, each other. Inward investment and infrastructure spend is finite and each council is "trying to get the biggest piece of the pie" (local government representative) for residents and businesses. Going forward, participants expressed the view that there is scope for "improvement" in cross-border engagement associated with local planning (including both development plan and management). One local government interviewee noted "there is plenty of talking… but [there is] a lack of collaboration".

There are various options for achieving this, informally and formally. For example, supporting opportunities for local councils to "talk to each other" on applications and policy; that is, an informal sharing of information and views. This is necessary to achieve a joined-up approach – a central tenet of spatial planning – and is already facilitated under provisions in the FfC and acknowledged within the RDS. Other, more formal, arrangements proposed by participants include cooperation arising from statutory requirements. Examples here include links to environmental issues that are, in nature, cross-border such as greenways and canals or specifications of public funding that could require demonstrable intra- and inter-jurisdictional collaboration.

Land use impacts from Corridor growth

Some local councils have adopted a pro-active approach to supporting economic development opportunities associated with the Corridor. This is within the remit of local council responsibilities in NI (housing is not a core function) and incorporates creating a portfolio of land – though not ownership – that is zoned for economic development which could be utilised by businesses seeking to establish or expand their operations. The economic opportunities of the Windsor Framework (2023) – direct access in NI to the EU and UK markets – could further drive demand for enterprise lands. There is a sense that traditional approaches to land supply policy, particularly in local development plans, will need to change with a more explicit link made between facilitating economic growth and housing. This is reported as being driven by the approach of some businesses to locate closer to housing areas and a change in personal mobility choices away from private car ownership towards public transport. At the same time, there does continue to be demand for large urban extensions, from landowners and developers, which councils consider lack sustainable development credentials.

Summary

Moving from the regional scale to the local highlights some of the challenges that exist in implementing DBEC as a coherent, cohesive concept. Across all local government respondents there was a recognition of the potential opportunities that DBEC could bring, and indeed is already happening on the Corridor through business enquiries and actual investment / growth. Furthermore, there is evidence of cross-border engagement, albeit interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are significant potential mutual benefits from cooperation on spatial planning matters. Nevertheless, whilst the focus is often on the difficulties associated with cross-border (inter-jurisdictional) policy making, intra-jurisdictional policy making, including in relation to planning for housing, is also problematic.

Local councils are, as a result of current arrangements and responsibilities, in competition with each other. The focus of councils, according to a housing expert, is to keep housing within their own local areas primarily to retain the economic benefits associated with new residential developments. This is further exacerbated by the legacy of local government reform in NI, with amalgamation necessary in 2015 to reduce the number of councils from 26 to 11 which respondents noted resulted in increased competition between towns within the same local government boundary. Respondents pointed towards initiatives such as the Belfast Region City Deal and the Mid South West Growth Deal, to demonstrate that cross-council collaboration is possible, with one interviewee noting the potential for a Subject Plan as a vehicle for collaboration between the four NI councils of DBEC.

4.2.3 DBEC and the housing market

Influences on the housing market

A number of dynamics have impacted on the housing market in the NI part of the Corridor over the past fifteen years since the global financial crisis; Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasingly "prohibitive" (local government representative) cost of living for families in Belfast and Dublin. There is also an increasing awareness of sustainability-related issues associated with the climate emergency, and the need to ensure that housing generally meets net zero targets. This includes issues relating to retrofit of existing stock, which respondents argued should take an island-wide approach to maximise carbon reduction benefits.

Housing market activity on the Corridor is multi-faceted; there is no single, dominant dynamic. A number of respondents noted the Corridor is proving desirable because of accessibility to higher-wage employment, particularly for NI commuters working in the Greater Dublin area. In addition, several interviewees noted lifestyle choice and perceived better quality of life are key attractors, for example access to the Mournes for leisure. This is particularly attractive to 'returnees', a reported influx of people returning to NI, mainly from GB but also internationally. The most desirable locations are semi-rural, lower cost compared to GB but still connected to places with strong GDP, particularly Dublin and to a lesser extent, Belfast. There is strong demand for, and a reported shortage of, 1,500+ sq ft homes in rural areas across the NI portion of the Corridor. Generally, this type of accommodation in rural areas outside of Belfast or Lisburn is regarded as being "better value for money" (estate agent).

Impacts of high demand

For social housing providers, the Corridor does not have a

4 There are, though, indirect provisions for inter-council development plan preparation including DPP N6 which advises that in preparing a LDP councils "must have regard to" plans, policies and strategies within the adjoining council area.

significant influence over the identification, purchase and development of land for housing schemes; rather the focus for Housing Associations is on meeting need. However, the consequences from growth of the owner-occupier market are impacting on the social housing sector, with one housing organisation reporting that they "could be priced out of the market" along the Corridor as a result of rising land prices. This is a particular concern because there is existing, unmet demand for social housing in the region which is competing with the financial resources of private sector developers. Furthermore, housing professionals observed that some – particularly in the social rental sector, and typically in different housing type to the homeowner market – are experiencing the disadvantages of rural living including accessibility to employment, services, social networks. It was reported that some people who moved to more rural areas are now returning to towns / town centre locations, where there is lower travel-to-work cost and potential for higher income.

Understanding housing market dynamics

In addition to the data issues noted above relating to cross-border commuter movements, several respondents also highlighted gaps in housing data including market intelligence and housing needs / demand analysis, both for LDP preparation and for understanding the Corridor more widely. Indeed, there appears to be a disconnect between local government development planners and real estate agents, the latter possessing data that has potential to generate a more accurate picture of current dynamics, which potentially could inform policy responses. However, some respondents cautioned about potential limitations of such data.

Allocating housing growth on the Corridor

Planning for housing on the Corridor is driven by housing growth indicators (HGIs), which are based on past population trends, and should be treated as indicators that are flexible. It is the view of central government that HGIs should not be ignored, but it is recognised there is potential alternative evidence that would lead to a different outcome. There is scope for councils to develop their own estimates through the LDP process, though this varies from council-to-council. In the context of DBEC, there may be agglomeration effects that should be considered if additional growth occurs along the Corridor, beyond current anticipated levels (see comments above on the 'value added' of DBEC).

PESTLE analysis of housing and spatial planning in NI component of DBEC

The purpose of this analysis is to draw together the key findings from the interviews, identifying policy and practice impacts. Joining with the analysis of findings from Ireland, these will inform recommendations from the study.

PESTLE framework	Factors impacting on planning for housing in DBEC	Evidence summary	Policy and practice impacts
Political – including motivation of local council decision making	Analysis of local authority participation in the DBEC network and approaches to cross-border cooperation in spatial planning	Whilst there is "no specific requirement" (central government interviewee) to take cross-border issues into consideration, an expectation does exist that such issues will be considered in council areas geographically close to the Border. Some local authorities place a stronger emphasis on collaboration with neighbouring (cross border) councils. In addition, some councils on the Corridor expressed a desire to develop spatial planning policy, including in relation to housing, on a cross-border basis. One local authority noted that their council area did not tend to "look beyond" Northern Ireland for growth opportunities.	Potential exists for enhanced collaboration on spatial planning amongst the DBEC councils, including housing-related issues. Whilst local authorities in NI do not have responsibility for social housing provision, greater collaboration such as in relation to residential zoning allocations would nonetheless lead to more comprehensive approaches to housing issues on the Corridor.

Economic – including housing market analysis	Analysis of economic conditions and growth opportunities on the Corridor, and linked demand for housing.	Widespread recognition of a Corridor 'dynamic' that brings economic benefits to the region, though the impact on growth was challenged by one council. Notwithstanding this, there was a generally strong sense amongst participants that this has existed for decades, though the prominence of the Corridor 'waxes and wanes' over time. DBEC considered by the majority of respondents to be an opportunity for a more organised approach to economic development in the region. No single housing market exists in DBEC. Rather, the Corridor comprises of 'sub-regional' markets that are highly segmented (e.g. tenure and income) and differentiated (e.g. typology and use patterns). Premium associated with geographical location on the Corridor: higher rents; higher purchase costs (land and completed dwellings). Cost of living in Dublin is influencing location decisions across the eastern seaboard. Although spatial planning issues such as commuting are considered at the Cross Border Development Plan Working Group, cross-border housing markets are not discussed; respondents made the case housing markets should be included at future meetings.	Presence of an economic corridor will continue and is anticipated to increasingly impact on housing markets in the region. However, the extent of this impact is differentiated across a number of housing market factors.
Social	Analysis of social factors that influence household location decisions on the Corridor, and social housing provision.	Proximity to family and social (support) networks a key motivator for household location decision-making, maximising economic opportunity (higher paid employment) with lifestyle (see also 'Environmental' below). This was further evidenced through reported increases in planning and building control applications during 2020-2022. Social housing providers, though, tend to focus on meeting current demand in local areas and consequently the Corridor does not drive development decisions per se, but rather considerations such as accessibility to amenities and availability of land.	Linked to economic growth, social conditions on the NI section of the Corridor will continue to attract households into the region. This dynamic needs to be considered at the preparation of LDPs, to sustainably manage impacts arising from population increase and movement. = Increased social-based demand may negatively impact on availability of land for social housing developments, with HAs potentially priced out of the market.
Technological – including data	Analysis of trends and spatial dynamics on the Corridor using data modelling techniques.	Whilst there is a 'sense' of dynamics on the Corridor – e.g. reference made to people re-locating to the region; business investment and start-up – this was regarded by participants to be 'high level'. Significant data gaps exist, such as the scale of impact of actual number of households moving from one jurisdiction to another, some of which may be addressed through census data. Call made by participants for more detailed evidence to inform development plan processes. Several respondents suggested there is potential to further enhance understanding amongst local authority planners of development pressures experienced in either jurisdiction.	Need for increased data capture to address knowledge gaps. Several options available for this including bespoke gathering of data as part of the LDP preparation process, and monitoring of housing dynamics by central government agencies and social housing providers.

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Legal – including policy and (regulatory) frameworks	Analysis of processes, frameworks and policy tools to enable greater cooperation between stakeholders, principally but not exclusively in the public sector.	LDPs are led by the strategic policy direction established in the RDS and also the SPPS; whilst the Corridor is "acknowledged" in the RDS 2035, alongside the "benefits" of working with neighbours through a joined-up approach, any additionality to this position will need to framed within a revised RDS. Existing instruments, including the Framework for Cooperation, explicitly highlight housing as a key area for cross-border collaboration. There is, however, a greater emphasis in policy on economic development, and particularly the necessary supporting transport infrastructure, than housing. Furthermore, several respondents queried the extent to which the Framework features as a tool for cooperation by local government. Expectation that, in the short- to medium-term, separate – rather than joint – spatial planning policy, including planning for housing, will prevail on the Corridor.	Variety of options already available to facilitate greater levels of cooperation to enhance planning for housing on the Corridor. Existing provisions for collaboration on housing issues set out in the Framework for Cooperation provide a helpful platform for engagement. However, strategic leadership is necessary to coordinate decision making that connects across central and local government policy, and which is cognisant of public and private sector roles in the delivery of housing on the Corridor. As the LDP process hinges on the SPPS and RDS, the latter should be reviewed considering changes that have occurred since publication in 2012.
Environmental – including accessibility	Analysis of accessibility considerations attracting households to locate on or near to the Corridor.	Physical location characteristics, and particularly enhanced quality of life, considered to be a key attractor to the region, especially for young families and 'returnees' from GB and internationally. Ease of access to the Corridor, including Dublin airport (for European and global markets) considered to be a key attractor for employees and businesses. Commuting levels have increased post-lockdowns, though volume of movements still impacted by variations in work practices such as working from home / flexible working arrangements.	Range of direct and indirect policy considerations including transport infrastructure and public services such as schools, medical facilities etc. Providers may need to consider how to protect service delivery in the context of growing populations, particularly in rural areas of the Corridor.

4.3 Ireland

4.3.1 Economic Development, Regional Strategic Planning, DBEC and Housing

In the aftermath of Brexit and its potential for regulatory divergence, the Windsor Framework (2023) provides a basis for continuity of access in NI to both the EU single market and the UK. As such it helps underpin a continuity for cross-border economy on the island as it continues to develop and expand. Investment patterns are determining a new economic geography along DBEC with discernible impacts on cross-border labour markets now characterised by higher rates of participation of workers from NI in cross-border employment. As one local government interviewee affirmed "the Northern Ireland economy is bleeding people into the Republic for work. Previously it was just professionals, people with professional career pathways for example engineers living in Northern Ireland and training in the Republic. But now it's everyone".

Sectoral foreign direct investment (FDI) comprising USA, EU, British, Irish and Chinese capital investment continues to expand in cross-border counties with attendant Irish and EU state supports (i.e. EU Regional Funds, IDA Ireland, Bord Bia). This inward capital flow is further added to under Ireland's public capital investment and expenditure in utilities (e.g. energy, broadband, water) and mixed private and public investment in transport and communications infrastructure. New built environment infrastructure is enabling employment and job creation particularly for skilled workers and lower professional grades across a range of sectors including agribusiness, biotech and pharmaceutical manufacturing and industrial production, logistics and distribution services, Fintech (financial technology for banking and payments) and communication sectors.

Economic development is clustering in urban growth areas along DBEC including Portadown, Newry, Dundalk, Drogheda and at scale in north county Dublin. Investment is in goods and services distributed via the extensive motorway network and junctions serving Dublin Port and Dublin international airport and the specialist business and retail parks, offices and commercial facilities, warehousing, processing and distribution facilities that continue to expand along the Corridor to meet growing market demand. Indeed many employers note how they are experiencing labour market shortages in 2023. Importantly, post-Brexit locational decision-making by British capital interests and investors seeking an EU office footprint in Ireland is now also apparent.

While the growth in the scope and scale of cross-border employment is discernible, one interviewee working in cross-border conveyancing and auctioneering confirmed an absence of any focus on linkages between ongoing economic development and cross-border housing markets "there is growing cross-border employment and Brexit has made an impact too. The pharmaceutical and biotech sectors are growing rapidly as cross-border employers. We have Almac Group pharmaceutical manufacturers located in Portadown [NI]. We have the Wasdell Group who are UK based and have built a new pharmaceutical packaging plant in Dundalk to access the EU market. We have a major Chinese pharmaceutical company called WuXi Biologics located in Dundalk now. They are investing hundreds of millions in a new plant and employing over 500 staff and they are a big employer of people who commute from NI. But I don't think anyone has ever discussed any new major housing provision for this workforce. It's all commuting at present".

This insight was broadly echoed among interviewees, with one from local government who noted how "Paypal did raise issues on the rental accommodation market when they located in Dundalk. But overall, while we have talked to the IDA about employment north and south within the context of inward investment, I don't know that we've ever talked about housing as such. We never really asked how close housing is to [places] of employment". Another local government interviewee would echo this insight when they stressed how "Dublin-based developers now see the strength of the housing market in Louth and are building. They see clusters of industry and see the attractiveness of places for employment and further job market growth along DBEC…but overall I think housing [provision] is just taken for granted [i.e. market will supply] and I see a lot of 'developer-led pragmatism' driving our planning outlook [for housing]".

Previously well-established patterns of economic activity and development along the rail and road transport networks connecting Belfast, Dublin and key locations between them have influenced sub-regional housing market dynamics. As one local government interviewee said "historically, along the Corridor from Dublin, Fingal would be more affordable in terms of new housing supply…[this] has been overtaken by Co Meath and Co Louth in the last two years in this regard. There is a difference in the housing supply with a lower density of housing being more available as you go north [along DBEC]."

Yet Ireland's regional development strategy has only relatively recently developed a formal incorporation of discrete spatial locales and areas into the functional geographical area identified as the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC). Comprising Dublin City Council and the neighbouring administrations of Fingal, Meath and Louth County Councils to its north, DBEC's online formal launch in March 2021 notably included senior political representatives and public officials from both Ireland and Northern Ireland[5] thereby ensuring the collaborating Irish local authorities were politically cognisant of the overall DBEC concept.

As previously noted, (cf. lit review) DBEC seeks to advance agreed objectives for the planning and development of transport and related communications infrastructure along the Corridor specifically set out by Ireland's Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) Regional Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) originally adopted in 2019. And yet, over the period, there appears little to no further detailed articulation of DBEC transport infrastructure objectives in any of the local county and city development plans recently adopted for Dublin (2022-28), Fingal 2023-29), Meath (2021-2027) and Louth (2021-27) local authorities. Despite one local government interviewee insisting "cross-border housing is a whole new term, never previously considered. It's a new focus", an absence of emphasis on cross-border housing markets and land-use planning for housing development remains apparent in local development planning.

4.3.2 Local Development Planning, DBEC and Housing

Irish local authority 'core strategy' for overall development, including a dedicated housing strategy, is driven by the specific population growth target given respectively for each local authority under Ireland's National Planning Framework (NPF) and its 'compact growth' objectives. In turn, for Ireland's DBEC planning authorities, these cascade down through Ireland's planning hierarchy from the aforementioned Regional Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly to Dublin's new intermediate level Metropolitan Area Spatial Plan (MASP) and thereafter from the respective county and city development plans and on into constituent local area plans (LAPs).

Under this process specific DHLGH Housing Supply Targets for each local authority issued in December 2020 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act (2000) (as amended). They are the basis for specific residential development outputs required for each county and city development plan. This determines the extent of land use zoning required for all forms of residential development and ensures the required land use 'capacity' is zoned accordingly. For example, based on the population targets and calculated housing need set out within national and regional planning policy, guidelines and prescribed methodology, Dublin city's development plan must accommodate between 20,120 and 31,520 additional persons up to an overall population target of between 625,750 and 640,000 by 2028. The housing demand calculated sets a requirement for the development plan to provide for approximately 40,000 housing units between 2022 and 2028.

5 Minister Leo Varadkar T.D., Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Ire), Minister Darragh O'Brien T.D., Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Ire); Minister Robin Walker MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland (UK), Conor Murphy MLA, Finance Minister (NI) and chief executive officers of Dublin City Council (Owen Keegan), Fingal County Council (AnnMarie Farrelly); Louth County Council (Joan Martin), Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (Marie Ward) and Belfast City Council (Suzanne Wylie).

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The scale of Dublin city's requirements over the period to 2028 is such that it has a powerful influence over neighbouring development plans, in particularly with regard to DBEC and the core strategy developed for Fingal County Council. As a local government interviewee commented "our [Fingal] development plan is set in an EU and national planning context, but we look more to Dublin than elsewhere on housing" before confirming that regionally "what's happening in nearby Dublin City Council is the key driver".

Interviewees noted how connectivity and networking between local government helps inform opinion and shapes attitudes on DBEC with one local government interviewee noting how a BIDS (Business Improvement Development Scheme) company in Drogheda is "helpful for collaboration". However, all interviewees noted a significant disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border local government collaboration and networking. Re-engagement remains patchy. As it continues to return, overall, Irish local government Interviewees noted what they observe as the 'obvious and evident differences' in local housing markets north and south of the border with localities within NI settlements along DBEC viewed as having lesser affordability problems related to house prices and rents. Variance in price signals for local housing markets in the different jurisdictions generally continue to reinforce a view of NI having local housing markets that provide greater 'choice, access and better value' for workers who commute, particularly from Newry to Dundalk and especially from Belfast to Dublin. This was reinforced by one local government interviewee who indicated that they would look, in labour market terms, "more to the North" whilst influences on their local housing market emanate primarily from Dublin.

Nonetheless, interviewees confirmed how their respective local authority development plans continue to have insufficiently detailed studies on cross-border workforce details and patterns of employment, on residency and commuting patterns or on community, social or retail activity patterns. Interviewees noted the substantial challenges of an absence of accurate and timely data for planning and development at local government level in Ireland generally as well as specific to the DBEC sub-regional housing markets. As one interviewee noted "I would welcome greater collaboration north and south especially on better understanding of the dynamics of construction of new build to rent and the cost differentials between Northern Ireland and [Fingal CC] for new housing supply". Further, interviewees noted how specific housing data infrastructure requirements should be identified on a cross-border basis, including agreement on what data is collated, on methodology, verification and review particularly for new housing typologies. Therefore, while being well informed by individualised local experience and examples, all interviewee's agreed their observations on key aspects of the DBEC cross-border housing market are anecdotal in the main.

In this absence of quality, reliable data on cross-border housing, designated 'growth centres' comprising distinct sub-regional housing markets remain the key local authority development focus. For example, another local government interviewee stressed how development "has always been focussed on the two designated growth centres of Drogheda and Dundalk". Reflecting further on the paucity of information and analytics on cross-border housing markets and its minor, if any, influence on local core strategy and housing strategy, the same interviewee stressed how "the NPF demographic growth targets remain our key drivers for [development] policy and ensure we align with [development] guidelines at the national level". In summary, while DBEC is recognised as a 'developmental concept' among local government interviewees, it is not well specified nor fully embedded in local county and city development plans. As such it remains peripheral to key local development planning objectives on housing overall.

4.3.3 DBEC, sub-regional and cross-border housing market dynamics

Over the period from 2014, a persistent under-supply of new housing provision to meet effective demand became established as a chronic condition of Dublin's housing market. Subsequent house price and rent inflation is producing substantial affordability problems in both rental and home ownership markets. As the dynamics of housing market effective demand adjust spatially, ongoing effective demand for private housing from key demographic components originating in Dublin is increasingly realised through household locational decision-making at greater distances from core urban centres in Dublin and to localities where new housing market supply is, and remains, forthcoming. All local government interviewees noted this phenomenon of strengthened housing demand manifesting in local, sub-regional housing markets north of Dublin along the Corridor that comprises DBEC as a so-called 'ripple' effect of Dublin's housing market failure.

New housing supply for sale over the period since 2016 along DBEC is predominantly outer-urban. It can be characterised as mostly greenfield, lower density development accessed via minor road networks within reach of major trunk road and motorways routes, particularly the M50 and M1, the M2 and N2, N33 and N52 in Ireland and to a lesser extent the A1 route to Newry, Banbridge, Lisburn and the M1 into Belfast in Northern Ireland. As one local government interviewee observed "Fingal has been the location for the provision of a lot of new housing over the last period". Another confirmed how new residential development was meeting a combination of both local and displaced demand originating under the dynamics of Dublin's house price inflation than from elsewhere along the Corridor "in north Drogheda we have five to six thousand new private housing units with planning permission that have started construction. The big estate agents - the DNG's and Sherry Fitzgerald's are out selling. There is major demand for one-off housing on our east coast – for example around Termonfeckin – especially from people coming from Dublin. But the influence of Newry's house prices is lesser".

Another perspective on changing dynamics of housing market typologies and construction methods was offered from a local government interviewee who noted how "we are seeing new modern methods of construction being used [in DBEC]"; this includes off-site production and the

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use of timber as a sustainable building material. Elsewhere a private market interviewee was keen to stress how there are distinct characteristics to the manner of how markets operate in DBEC: "we are acting for a NI developer who is bringing a new 175-unit development to the market in the Blackrock area on the coast south of Dundalk. This is phase 1 and we are the sole agency handling sales for the developer. That's different to elsewhere. In Waterford our offices are involved in a development where there are multiple listings. It's different here that way."

Interviewees noted a small provision of Build to Rent (BTR) housing in DBEC to date although future planned supply for a more substantial increase in provision was noted. Particularly in Fingal, as one interviewee commented "all the new housing supply in Fingal recently is build-to-rent and this is producing its own challenges. Higher income households are renting locally in our BTR units". This apparent change in the so-called housing 'supply pipeline' was confirmed from the private market auctioneer who was busy with developers "who are selling new supply into the [Dundalk] area for purchasers who are commuting and for renters too". As this interviewee detailed "all our new supply locally is mostly moving to build-to-rent and developers are engaging with the local authority on purchase options. Development costs are an issue. We don't have any REIT activity in Dundalk yet". This is echoed in the local government experience with one interviewee noting how "the scale of build-to-rent development is not a burning hot issue as there are not many apartments in Louth. We are only beginning to move into all of that [BTR] now with maybe ten per cent of Drogheda on its south side closer to Co Meath getting BTR". All interviewees noted a substantial shift in housing development costs and expressed concern on how increased costs will impact supply and affordability issues as new housing supply and development comes forward. The view from the private market auctioneer was particularly stark "development costs are a growing issue. Look at Part V deals. The 'book' price for a two-bed apartment is say €250,000 per unit but the actual build costs are over €300,000 per unit and that adjustment brings problems. Costs are moving so rapidly that a quote for a house from a builder is valid for about a week before changing again".

Another market dynamic is the apparent net effect of increased job market opportunities and higher rates of remuneration that is strengthening and broadening commuting patterns from north to south especially within and across the east border region and particularly between Newry and Dundalk. This is noted by all interviewees, with one from local government who confirmed "we have a big staff component drawn from Belfast, Dungannon and Enniskillen in Northern Ireland and many – if not all – make the daily commute".

The same respondent argued how "the commute to work in [Fingal CC] from Northern Ireland for higher value employment is significant" and also how "employment and commuting patterns have huge impacts here [on the local housing market]". This is echoed in a separate local government interviewee's observation that "[private] market activity in Louth is being driven by pent-up local demand but also demand is due to the differential in house prices between Dublin and Louth – for example in Drogheda".

Yet interviewees also tended to agree how an absence at the local level of granular data and analysis into the scale and scope of changing commuting patterns and travel origination north and south, and the motivation of commuters, continues to hinder a clearer understanding of the follow-on impacts on local housing markets. Notwithstanding this, increased cross-border commuter demand for short-term rentals (STR) was noted in key DBEC urban growth centres (particularly Dundalk, Drogheda and north county Dublin) while demand for longer-term private rental housing is also very strong along the Corridor. One local government interviewee noted that "we have a challenge with short-term lettings (STR) and its impacts on the [long-term] private rental markets in Dundalk and Drogheda. They are very thin markets for renters now".

While also considered to be a likely result of displacement of effective demand from Dublin's razor-thin rental market for new rental transaction, one local government interviewee also noted "for housing generally and especially for those renting I see people again heading north" before offering the caveat that 'even with lower value employment further north, demand for rental there hasn't been negatively impacted too much – rental demand is strong".

In contrast however, interviewees affirmed there appears little to no equivalent effective demand among NI cross-border commuters for home purchase in DBEC local housing markets south of the border. The perceived, if not actual, negative trade-off between the costs and opportunities of home ownership in a separate jurisdiction versus the costs to workers resident in Northern Ireland of long distance or frequent commuting to a place of employment south of the border continues to mitigate and dampen demand for owner occupation along the Corridor in Ireland. As one local government interviewee commented "many of the commuting households are not settling in north county Dublin because Newry is 45 minutes away on the motorway and is more affordable".

This apparent variance between demand for short-term and private rental versus home ownership from NI commuters was understood by interviewees as being a function of substantial challenges of access to mortgage markets operating between distinctive, separate monetary, fiscal and legal systems. As one local government interviewee noted "issues around Brexit and taxation, personal income tax, are preventing people from moving [from NI] in large numbers". Additionally, variations in housing costs, household income and housing affordability were understood to apply as barriers here. And with an inadequate new housing supply and limited available housing typologies overall, the choice and quality of provision for homeownership in Ireland along the Corridor is considered another limiting factor.

Just how different homeownership housing markets work on the island to produce obstacles that diminish effective cross-border demand from the north to the south was noted by an estate agent interviewee who confirmed "we don't have a lot of cross-border business in sales…but we will often get a probate sale referred to us, especially in Newry and

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south Armagh". Other interviewees in Irish local government confirmed how "housing demand is internal from within the region but not from Northern Ireland. The western end of the county, closer to Co Monaghan, is out the door with [housing] demand from MI motorway users who are capturing the benefits of cheaper house prices". Reflecting on this displacement of effective demand for homeownership one local government interviewee asserted "I see greater housing demand transferring north to cross-border housing choices". Finally, notwithstanding the expansion in cross-border economic activity and labour market growth, an interviewee working in auctioneering and conveyancing detailed how post-pandemic 'megatrends' in digitalisation and remote-working should be considered more likely to become the determinants of future patterns for effective housing demand in both Ireland and Northern Ireland: "overall the biggest impact is from COVID-19 and people wanting to move out of cities and congestion and to live differently. That's more significant here than anything to do with cross-border markets or NI and DBEC plans. That's where the new housing demand is coming from for me".

PESTLE analysis of housing and spatial planning in RoI component of DBEC

The purpose of this analysis is to draw together the key findings from the interviews, identifying policy and practice impacts. Joining with the analysis of findings from NI these will inform recommendations from the study.

PESTLE framework	Factors impacting on planning for housing in DBEC	Evidence summary	Policy and practice impacts
Political – including motivation of local council decision making	Analysis of local authority participation in the DBEC network and approaches to cross-border cooperation in spatial planning	Spatial planning policies at national, regional, and county level all refer to the importance of the Corridor. However, in practice the local authorities are under pressure to manage the implementation of NPF and RSES targets so that cross-border co-operation is limited. In part, this may also be because of the political implications of Brexit where co-operation, no matter how limited, might be controversial.	The NPF specifically refers to the potential for spatial planning co-ordination. The revision of the NPF, which has started, may allow this ambition to be realised with some concrete proposals.
Economic – including housing market analysis	Analysis of economic conditions and growth opportunities on the Corridor, and linked demand for housing.	There is clear evidence of economic growth along the Corridor, spreading out from Dublin and impacting on Fingal County as well as Drogheda and Dundalk in Louth. The housing crisis, which is centred on Dublin, has led to housing development moving to Fingal and Drogheda, where prices and rents are somewhat more affordable than in Dublin City. There is limited evidence of NI households moving across the border to purchase. Evidence does suggest cross-border demand from NI households for short-term rentals associated with employment and commuting patterns. Strong demand for urban long-terms rentals was also noted in border counties.	The designation of Drogheda and Dundalk as regional growth centres, with population projected to increase to 50,000 in each town, will ensure a concentration of population, housing and jobs. This is part of the policy to strengthen the urban 'spine' of Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry.

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Social	Analysis of social factors that influence household location decisions on the Corridor, and social housing provision.	There is some evidence of senior professionals in local authorities living in NI and commuting to places like Dundalk, Drogheda and Swords. Educated and living in NI, the motorway makes commuting relatively easy. Higher wages in the RoI and the lower house prices in NI, ensure this trend is likely to continue. There is limited evidence of the reverse trend	Investment in social and affordable housing provision along the Corridor will be substantial in Ireland over the next period to 2030 and will require sub-regional housing strategies with revise targets rising from Ireland's Census 2022 data and broadening demand form intermediate market households. Greater coordination for balanced regional development of transport and communications infrastructure will be required to support sustainable residential development. This will require greater cross-border engagement between local and regional authorities.
Technological – including data	Analysis of trends and spatial dynamics on the Corridor using data modelling techniques.	There is a dearth of published data on spatial dynamics in the Corridor, with a particular lack of information on cross-border trends. Interviews with senior local authority officials reinforced this conclusion. City and County development plans, for example, are driven by the data produced for the NPF.	There is a clear need for an agreed and coordinated approach to data collection and analysis of spatial dynamics in the Corridor. This would include population trends, commuting, jobs and housing markets. A HNDA or variation thereof, would allow analysis of cross-border housing markets.
Legal – including policy and (regulatory) frameworks	Analysis of processes, frameworks and policy tools to enable greater cooperation between stakeholders, principally but not exclusively in the public sector.	The centrality of the NPF and the RSES in influencing the distribution of population and housing will remain central. As the overall policy is to contain the growth of the Dublin region, this will strengthen policy to increase population and jobs in Drogheda and Dundalk.	The forthcoming study of governance of DBEC, while primarily related to economic issues, may have a positive impact on spatial planning co-ordination. The revision of the NPF, due in spring 2024, may be an opportunity for greater specification of c-operation mechanisms.
Environmental – including accessibility	Analysis of accessibility considerations attracting households to locate on or near to the Corridor.	The provision of employment opportunities in Fingal, Drogheda and Dundalk, and the associated housing development, may make these areas less dependent on Dublin.	Delivery of housing-led climate actions to maintain embodied carbon, build near zero energy housing, shift to renewable energy resources and introduce circular economy practices that also boost biodiversity and ecology will be required of policy and practice and increasingly so on a cross-border basis. The all-island electricity and energy distribution infrastructure offers real potential to build forward for agreed housing-led climate actions.

5. House price and rents analysis

5.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter of this report provided valuable insights into the dynamics of DBEC and a number of related planning for housing policy issues based on an exploration of the qualitative data generated by the semi-structured interviews undertaken with a range of key actors. This Chapter examines the quantitative data provided by PropertyPal (Northern Ireland's leading property website) in relation to both house prices and privately rented dwellings[6] . It covers the period from 2016 to 2022 for three Local Government Districts (LGDs): Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon (AB&CBC), Lisburn & Castlereagh City (L&CCC) and Newry, Mourne & Down (NM&DDC) – the three LGDs that contain the majority of the DBEC corridor area in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, no comparable dataset for DBEC south of the border was readily available to the research team. However, Appendix 2 provides headline information in relation to demography and housing market dynamics across the four DBEC council areas in Ireland.

Chapter 2 already indicated that, for the purposes of analysis, for both conceptual and pragmatic reasons, the boundaries of DBEC had to be drawn somewhat arbitrarily. The resulting approximately 20km wide strip between Belfast and Newry reflected the research team's view of the distance that enabled residents living within the Corridor to easily access the main arterial road and rail network between Dublin and Belfast and, indirectly therefore too, the airports.

Bearing this in mind therefore, this Chapter sets out to throw light on a series of related research questions: does living in DBEC mean that owner occupiers and/or private tenants pay a premium to purchase a house or rent a property? If so, how much is this premium and how has this picture changed over the last 6-7 years?

5.2 Analysis of house price data

This section of the report sets out the findings emerging from the analysis of house price data for the three selected LGDs individually and for the aggregate area as a whole. On the basis of this geographical framework, the analysis focuses on two comparative indicators: firstly, average listed prices for 2022 and, secondly, the trajectory of prices (2016-22). In both cases dwelling prices for the approximately 20km wide Corridor itself are compared to prices for the LGDs as a whole (individually and in aggregate).

Table 5.1 Average house prices in DBEC and LGDs

Table 5.1(a) Average House Prices in the DBEC Corridor

£	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022* [7]	6-year CAGR
DBEC	157,347	163,677	168,760	175,925	180,522	185,094	203,552	4.4%
AB&C	139,355	143,561	146,637	156,399	158,681	162,639	182,282	4.6%
L&C	181,171	188,048	191,346	198,344	201,692	208,130	227,507	3.9%
NM&D	137,648	142,470	153,573	162,038	169,681	173,963	190,228	5.5%

Table 5.1(b) Average House Prices in LGDs

£	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*	6 -year
CAGR								
LGDs	147,544	152,940	157,905	162,998	168,640	177,248	188,378	4.2%
AB&C	126,416	130,302	133,224	139,065	144,787	152,473	162,247	4.2%
L&C	172,147	178,176	183,571	187,974	192,174	203,276	217,001	3.9%
NM&D	146,291	150,176	158,219	164,566	170,689	179,689	190,817	4.5%

Comparison of key figures in Table 1(a) and (b) show that the average mix-adjusted price for dwellings in the DBEC area of the three LGDs in 2022 was £203,552 compared to £188,378 for the three DBEC LGDs as a whole, suggesting that in 2022 the Corridor overall commanded a price premium of approximately 8%.

The average price for the DBEC area rose from £157,347 in 2016 to £203,552 in 2022, an increase of 29% (a Compound Annual Growth Rate [CAGR] of 4.4% pa – but a figure that varied from 2.5% to 4.2% between 2016 and 2021, before increasing substantially to 10.0% in 2022[8]). For the three DBEC LGDs as a whole, the average over the same period increased from a lower base of £147,544 to £188,378 – an increase of approximately 28%. There is also a hint that the premium for properties within the DBEC area is increasing. In 2016 the differential was 6.6% rising to 8.1% in 2022 (an increase of 1.5ppts) and was between these two figures throughout the six year period with the exception of 2021 (a year dominated by the pandemic) when the differential was only 4.4%. However, while it is important not to read too much into this given the uncertain effects of the pandemic on dwelling prices, it is reasonable to conclude that comparing the Corridor as a whole with the three LGDs that encompass it there appears to be a consistent price premium of 7-8% for living in the Corridor and that this premium is growing, albeit slowly.

6 The rental data for properties includes rates – as this is the way in which privately rented properties are consistently advertised in Northern Ireland.

7 In all tables data for 2022 is based on the period January to September 2022.

8 Reflecting a post-pandemic uptick that was generally characteristic of Northern Ireland's housing market

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Tables 1(a) and 1(b) also indicate that while there is consistent evidence of a price premium at the aggregate scale, at LGD level the relationship is more nuanced, reflecting a somewhat heterogeneous relationship between dwelling prices in the DBEC Corridor and its surrounding LGDs .

In the case of A, B & C the 2022 average house price was £182,282 in the Corridor compared to £162, 247 for the LGD as a whole – equivalent to a premium of approximately 12.3%. The average price in its DBEC area increased from £139,355 in 2016 to £182,282, an increase of 31% (CAGR: 4.6%) – very similar to the rate for DBEC overall. Likewise, the price increase for the LGD as a whole was 28.3% (CAGR: 4.2% pa).

A different picture emerges in NM&DDC where the average dwelling price for the LGD as a whole in 2022 was £190,817 – marginally (0.3%) higher than for its Corridor area. The trajectory of price increases was also somewhat different to that of AB&CBC. Average prices rose in the Corridor area of NM&DDC by 38.3% (CAGR: 5.5%) over the period 2016-22 compared to only 30.4 (CAGR: 4.5%) for the LGD as a whole. This period of stronger appreciation in the Corridor has led to parity between prices and the wider LGD, closing the gap by more than 6 percentage points over the 6-year period, and confirming the growing attraction of the Corridor as an area to live.

It is of course impossible to account fully for these inter-LGD differences, but different settlement patterns may well be part of the explanation. In the case of the NM&DDC, Newry City and its immediate hinterland constitutes a dominant urban area comprising about one sixth of the entire population that effectively straddles the main Belfast-Dublin road and rail link. The other main urban centre (Downpatrick) and its immediate hinterland would be seen as an integral part of the Belfast housing market area linked to Belfast by a separate south-easterly orientated main road, where the pull of the DBEC Corridor would of lesser importance. In the case of AB&CBC, the urban population is more distributed – between Armagh City, Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown – resulting overall in a closer, but more complex relationship with the MI/A1 arterial roads and the railway line that form DBEC's spine.

Table 5.2: Dwelling price comparison by house type

Table 5.2(a) DBEC Houses v Apartments

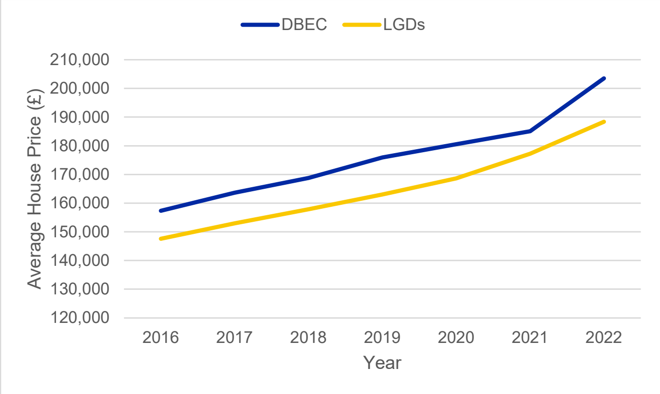
£	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*
Houses	160,722	167,275	172,359	179,430	184,443	189,074	208,368
Apart-ment	95,916	100,218	107,213	111,000	113,901	115,808	124,039

Table 5.2(b) LGDs Houses v Apartments

£	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*
Houses	153,714	159,002	164,041	169,125	175,677	184,019	195,743
Apart-ment	90,445	94,492	98,176	102,534	102,826	111,068	119,847

Comparison of Tables 5.2(a) and (b) indicates that there is a price premium for purchasing a dwelling in the Corridor, regardless of whether it is a house or apartment. In 2022 the average price of houses in DBEC was £208,368, 6.4% higher than the average price for the three LGDs as a whole (£195,743). Between 2016 and 2022 the average price of houses in the Corridor rose 29.6% compared to 27.3% for the three LGDs – confirming a widening gap over the six-year period (Fig. 1).

Fig. 5.1: DBEC house price premiums, 2016-2021)



In the case of apartments, the picture is fairly similar, but the premium for buying an apartment in the DBEC Corridor in 2022 is somewhat smaller (3.5%). The trajectories of price increases over the 2016-22 period are also somewhat different, with the average price of apartments increasing by 29.3% for the DBEC area compared to 32.5% for the three LGDs as a whole.

A more granular analysis of this data shows that the 2022 premium for a house in AB&CBC was 9.4%, whereas for an apartment it was 41.2%. In contrast in NM&DDC prices in the DBEC area for both dwelling types were actually lower than for the LGD as a whole (-1.0% in the case of houses and -7.7% for apartments).

The effects of a combination of geographic and property type related disparity is also reflected in the trajectories of house and apartment price increases over the 2016-22 period. In the case of houses in the DBEC corridor average prices increased 31.4% in AB&CBC and 38.2% in NM&DDC. For apartments the comparable figures were 21.5% and 42.7% respectively. Looking at the LGDs as a whole over the six year period. Houses increased in price by 28% in AB&CBC and 29.3% in NM&DDC, whereas the comparable figures for apartments were significantly higher (34.9% and 48.4% respectively). In summary, the trajectory of price increases (2016-22) for houses was steeper in the DBEC area of both LGDs than for the individual LGDs as a whole. In contrast, in the case of apartments, the trajectory of price increases was lower for the Corridor area compared to the individual LGDs as a whole.

PropertyPal's data is also categorised by dwelling size in terms of the number of bedrooms in a property (2,3,4 and 5+ in the case of houses and 1,2, and 3 in the case of apartments). However, in the case of 2 and 5+ bedroom houses the numbers of sales in any particular year are too small to provide a sufficiently robust analysis at individual LGD level. This is also the case for apartments where the vast majority of sales during the 2016-22 period are for 2 bedroom dwellings making dwelling size comparisons somewhat unreliable in statistical terms.

Table 5.3 Analysis of house prices by bedrooms DBEC v LGDs

£		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
2bed hses	DBEC	93,140	95,893	99,520	105,295	116,417	119,958	121,162
	LGDs	90,568	94,545	98,896	101,589	108,571	118,106	122,219
3bed hses	DBEC	128,718	131,778	136,653	141,233	146,455	152,918	162,062
	LGDs	125,987	131,367	134,087	139,407	144,247	151,153	158,728
4bed hses	DBEC	217,700	222,961	228,930	237,060	244,975	257,332	275,271
	LGDs	211,289	215,114	222,885	231,071	240,231	250,084	264,960
5+bd hses	DBEC	318,426	330,747	376,360	358,486	382,539	390,227	461,815
	LGDs	300,719	315,862	339,887	326,137	347,947	366,088	429,787

Comparisons based on Table 5.3 show that the price premium for houses in the DBEC area as a whole varies considerably depending on the number of bedrooms. For 2 bed there is no premium at all. Indeed, the average price of 2 bed properties in the 3 LGDs as a whole is slightly higher (0.9%) than in the DBEC area. However, in the case of larger dwellings there is not only a price premium for buying in the Corridor, but this premium grows both in absolute and in relative terms as the number of bedrooms increases – confirming the views of estate agents of the growing demand for larger family dwellings in DBEC (see Chapter 4). Table 3 shows that the price premium for living in the Corridor area of the 3 LGDs was 2.1% for 3 bed, 3.9% for 4 bed and 7.5% for 5+ bed houses.

This relationship is also reflected in the different trajectories over the six year period. In 2016 the average price for 2 bed houses was higher (4.8%) in the DBEC area than in the LGDs as a whole – a position that was reversed by 2022. In the case of larger houses there was already a premium for living in the DBEC Corridor but this premium grew more rapidly in percentage terms as dwelling size increased (by 2.2ppts for 3 bed; 3.0ppts for 4 bed; 5.9ppts for 5+bed houses) – again providing further confirmation of estate agents' views.

Finally, it is also worth providing an insight into developments at individual LGD level using 3 bed houses, the most commonly sold property, as an example.

Table 5.4: 3 Bed house prices: AB&CBC and NM&DDC comparisons

£		2016 (% premium)	2022 (% premium)
DBEC	AB&CBC	112,554 (4.6)	145,570 (4.5)
	NM&DDC	121,853 (-5.2)	161,034 (-3.0)
LGDs	AB&CBC	107,628	139,362
	NM&DDC	128,136	165,871

Table 5.4 shows that although average house prices in N, M & D were significantly higher than in A, B & C, there was a small but significant premium for buying a 3 bed house in A, B & C in 2022 and that this was almost exactly the same as in 2016. In contrast, in N, M & D prices were higher for the LGD as a whole compared to its Corridor area, reflecting the same factors mentioned above in relation to the analysis of all dwellings (p. X).

5.3 Analysis of rents

Table 5.5 Average rents in DBEC and LGDs

Table 5.5(a) Average rents in the DBEC Corridor

£/mth	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*	6-year
CAGR								
DBEC	567	589	598	616	625	652	689	3.3%
AB&CBC	515	539	552	564	577	594	633	3.5%
L&CCC	619	635	653	675	681	718	759	3.5%
NM&DDC	538	549	574	591	604	634	660	3.5%

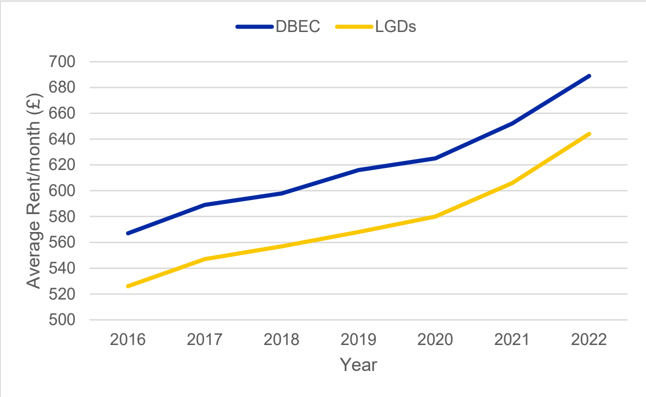
Table 5.5(b) Average rents in the LGD's

£/mth	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*	6-year
CAGR								
LGDs	526	547	557	568	580	606	644	3.4%
AB&CBC	466	489	508	514	520	539	577	3.6%
L&CCC	596	611	623	640	655	691	731	3.5%
NM&DDC	514	528	541	552	558	585	628	3.4%

Comparison of Tables 5.5(a) and (b) show that the average monthly rental price for dwellings in the DBEC area of the three LGDs in 2022 was £689 compared to £644 for the three LGDs as a whole, suggesting that, as in the case of purchasing a property, there is also a premium for renting a property in the DBEC Corridor – in this case a premium of 7.0% – similar to the overall price premium in the house sales sector of the housing market.

The average monthly rent for the DBEC area increased from £567 in 2016 to £689 in 2022, an increase of 21.5% (a CAGR of 3.3% – but an annual growth rate that varied from 1.5% to 5.7% over the six year period). For the three DBEC LGDs as a whole, the average rental price increased from a lower figure of £526 to £644 – an increase of approximately 22.4% (CAGR: 3.4% pa). As in the case of house prices, the largest annual increase in rental prices took place between 2021 and 2022. However, unlike house prices, there is no indication that the premium for renting a property in DBEC has increased over the six year period (Fig. 5.2)

Fig. 5.2: DBEC rental price premiums 2016-2021



In the case of AB&CBC the 2022 average rental price was £633 in the Corridor compared to £577 for the LGD as a whole – equivalent to a premium of 9.7%. The average rent in its Corridor area increased from £516 in 2016 to £633, equivalent to an increase of 22.7% (CAGR: 3.5% – almost exactly the same as the rate for DBEC overall). Similarly, the price increase for the LGD as a whole was 23.8% (CAGR: 3.7% pa).

A similar picture emerges for NM&DDC, although the average rental price for its Corridor area in 2022 was somewhat higher than for AB&CBC at £660, 5.1% higher than for the LGD as a whole. Average rental prices rose in the Corridor area of Newry, Mourne and Down by 22.7% (CAGR of 3.5% pa) over the period 2016-22 – coincidentally, the same overall increase as with AB&CBC (22.7% and a CAGR of 3.5%).

Analysis of Tables 5.5(a) and (b), therefore, would indicate that although the actual average rental prices in NM&DDC were consistently higher over the six year period, the trajectory of increases in both LGDs, both in the Corridor areas and for the individual LGDs in their entirety are very similar – and provide consistent evidence of a longer term premium for renting a property in the DBEC area.

Table 5.6: Rental price comparison by house type

Table 5.6(a) DBEC Houses v Apartments

£/mth	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*	6-year
increase								
Houses	579	605	610	630	640	669	711	22.8%
Apart ments	515	523	547	558	572	596	620	20.4%

Table 5.6(b) LGDs Houses v Apartments

£/mth	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*	6-year
increase								
Houses	548	573	582	593	604	632	676	23.4%
Apart ments	492	503	516	526	540	556	584	18.7%

Comparison of Tables 6(a) and 2(b) indicates that, as in the case of house prices, there is a premium to be paid for renting a dwelling in DBEC, regardless of whether it is a house or apartment.

In 2022 the average monthly rental price for houses in the Corridor was £711, 5.2% higher than the average price for the three LGDs as a whole (£676). The trajectory of increasing rental prices for houses over the period 2016 to 2022 in DBEC (overall 22.8%) was very similar to the trajectory for the three LGDs as a whole (23.4%).

In the case of apartments, the picture is fairly similar, but the premium for renting an apartment in the DBEC Corridor in 2022 is slightly higher (6.2%) than for a house. The trajectories of rent increases (2016-22) are also different, with the average rental price of apartments increasing by only 20.4% for the DBEC area and by only 18.7% for the three LGDs as a whole.

For both houses and apartments, the level of rental price increases between 2016 and 2022 were significantly lower than the increases in the price of purchasing a property both in the DBEC area of the three LGDs and for the three LGDs as a whole.

A more granular analysis of this data shows that the 2022 premium for renting a house in AB&CBC was 6.2%, whereas for an apartment it was 13.9% (in both cases a lower premium than for purchasing a house). In NM&DDC the price premium for renting a house in the DBEC area was 2.8% compared to 3.5% for an apartment – unlike for purchasing a property, where the premium was actually negative (see above).

As in the case of property sales, PropertyPal's data on rents is also categorised by dwelling size, but again the small number of apartments preclude meaningful analysis of this dwelling type by number of bedrooms.

Table 5.7 Analysis of rents by bedrooms DBEC v LGDs

£/mth		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	6-year increase
2bed hses	DBEC	481	504	508	533	537	568	611	27.0%
	LGDs	467	488	495	507	514	547	587	25.7%
3bed hses	DBEC	556	582	594	607	618	653	690	24.1%
	LGDs	540	565	573	587	597	625	667	23.5%
4bed hses	DBEC	741	738	768	791	809	848	939	26.7%
	LGDs	705	708	739	744	766	822	893	26.7%
5+bd hses	DBEC	985	984	969	986	1,093	1,146	1,161	17.9%
	LGDs	871	917	907	932	1,030	1,021	1,121	28.7%

Table 5.7 shows that as with house prices, there is also a premium for renting a house in the Corridor, regardless of dwelling size: 4.1% for 2 bed; 3.5% for 3 bed; 5.2% for 4 bed; and, 0.4% for 5+bed. However, in contrast to house prices there is no discernible relationship between the size of the dwelling and the premium as a proportion of average rent. The trajectories of increases in rental prices likewise show no discernible pattern of growth, ranging from 23.5% to 27.0 for 2, 3 and 4 bed houses. However, 5+houses are somewhat of an anomaly, with rents for this size of dwelling rising in the 3 LGDs as a whole at a much faster rate (28.7%) than the those in the Corridor area (17.9%) over the period 2016-22.

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Finally, it is again also worth providing an insight into developments at individual LGD level using 3 bed houses, the most commonly sold property, as an example.

Table 5.8: 3 Bed rental comparisons: A,B &C and N, M & D

£		2016 (% premium)	2022 (% premium)	
	6-year			
increase				
DBEC	AB&CBC	511 (3.7%)	635 (4.3%)	24.3%
	NM&DDC	542 (1.9%)	682 (2.2%)	25.8%
All LGD	AB&CBC	493	609	23.5%
	NM&DDC	532	667	25.4%

Table 5.8 shows that as in the case of houses, rental prices for 3 bed dwellings are significantly higher in NM&DDC than in AB&CBC. However, in contrast to house prices the trajectory of rental price increases has been consistently lower for both LGDs regardless of whether for their LGD areas or for the LGD as a whole. The premium for renting a 3 bed dwelling in 2022 in AB&CBC (4.3%) is similar to the premium for purchasing a 3 bed house (4.5%). In the case of rental prices in NM&DDC, there is a premium of 2.2% in contrast to dwelling prices in NM&DDC where the premium for a 3 bed dwelling is negative (-3.0%).

5.4 Summary and key conclusions

The analysis of PropertyPal's house price data for the period 2016-22 confirms that in 2022 homes in the DBEC area of the AB&CBC; L&CCC and NM&DDC commanded an average price premium of approximately 8% compared to the three LGDs as a whole, and that this premium had gradually increased over the six year period. This premium applied regardless of whether the property being purchased was a house or a dwelling, although the premium for a house was on average 6.4%, almost twice that for an apartment (3.5%). At the individual LGD level, the relationship was more nuanced, reflecting differences in settlement patterns and housing market area boundaries.

The analysis of house prices by number of bedrooms also confirms the views expressed to the research team by a number of key actors in the property market that there is a particularly high demand for larger properties in the Corridor, reflected in the quantitative data by the increase in premium from 2.1% for 3 bedroom dwellings, to 3.9% for 4 bedrooms and 7.5% for 5+ bedrooms.

A similar picture emerges from the analysis of rental prices: overall, in 2022, the Corridor area commanded a rental price premium of 7.0% compared to the three LGDs as a whole. The trajectory of annual average increases was more varied than in the case of house prices, but although the largest annual increase in average rental prices took place in 2022 (as in the case of house prices) there was no indication of any increase in the size of the premium, which remained remarkably consistent at around 7-8% throughout the 2016-22 period.

Again, as in the case of house prices, there was a premium to be paid regardless of whether the property was a house or an apartment, but the premium was slightly higher for an apartment in 2022 (6.1%) compared to a house (5.1%). However, in contrast to house prices there was no discernible relationship between number of bedrooms and the premium as a proportion of average rent: 4.1% for 2 bed; 3.5% for 3 bed; 5.2% for 4 bed; and, 0.4% for 5+bed.

The analysis has thus answered the interlinked research questions posed in the introduction (section 5.1) to this chapter. However, the analysis also suggests that having more granular data and a more in depth analysis of local housing markets would provide a more nuanced approach to planning for housing at both local authority and local level. In turn, this would suggest the need to utilise data sources, skills and knowledge harnessed from a wider pool of sources than currently, including from the private sector.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

Reflecting on the project aim and objectives, data analysis and policy review, this Chapter brings the study to a conclusion with recommendations for future policy enhancements. This project has found that there is a gap between strategic and local housing for planning policy. It is evident that the Corridor features as a strategic objective in national and regional planning frameworks specific to transport (road and rail) and economic development (particularly tourism and the wider service economy). This has required ongoing coherence in governance and cross-border collaboration and continuities such as through cross-border networks and the all-island electricity market. Notwithstanding these examples of cooperation, this study has found that DBEC actors and agencies have not yet sufficiently adopted the resources and programmatic engagement required in planning for housing policy and practice to underpin sustainable economic development, central to the DBEC concept.

6.2 Reflecting on study objectives

1. Examine current development (area) plans, and strategic planning policy, in the DBEC area in relation to housing provision.

This study uniquely analysed the current position amongst local councils associated with the DBEC network and links across governance scales. The examination focused on the prominence given to the Corridor in spatial planning policy, specifically identifying links to planning for housing. It is evident there are broad variations between local development plans. Whilst not a barrier to cooperation, this does highlight the challenges involved with establishing a coherent approach to planning for housing along the Corridor, which it is argued in this study is an essential 'ingredient' for economic success. Timeframes also vary with regard to the preparation and adoption of local development plans. In Ireland, for example, all four county development plans are now more current than several of the equivalent plans in NI. That noted, the delays in local development planning NI at any rate do provide an opportunity for contributors, through future consultation and independent inquiry processes, to comment on the potential importance of the impact from DBEC on planning for housing including land allocations on the Corridor.

2. Identify current housing market trends in the DBEC area, including the dynamics influencing these trends.

The study articulates what was previously observed anecdotally: that DBEC is indeed attracting residents into the Corridor regions, both from across the island of Ireland, and also returning diaspora. This is driven by a multitude of factors for example local accessibility to employment, a key driver for the rented sector; other dynamics include lifestyle decisions by families intentionally choosing the DBEC area that enables access to metropolitan services whilst retaining, outside of Belfast and Dublin, a rural living experience. In the absence of a definitive dataset, local market intelligence is key to understanding these trends. The exploration of housing market trends commenced in this study highlights gaps in understanding that should be addressed by additional data collection and analysis (see also recommendation three, below).

3. Establish the broad extent of a cross-border housing market in the DBEC area, including contributing factors and influences

Data constraints impacted on the ability of this study to analyse cross-border housing market activity. This was perhaps the most challenging aspect to the study, arising from the lack of comparable data in the broad geographical area of the Corridor, and differences in how data is captured. Consequently, it is not currently possible to definitively identify the spatial extent of housing markets in the DBEC area in the same way that housing market areas, for example, have been established in either jurisdiction. As anticipated and experienced elsewhere, it is evident through the empirical study there is not a single housing market. Rather, the sense is there are multiple, and often overlapping, housing market areas along the Corridor. What is clear, however, is the existence of a 'Corridor premium' for areas within commutable reach of the two capital cities on the island. Furthermore, discrete market trends are visible across different tenure types. Again, further research would be beneficial here to examine and understand the nuances of HMAs to better inform policy making at a strategic and local level.

4. Make recommendations to statutory bodies in relation to enhancements to planning for housing policy, taking into consideration the potential future impact of DBEC.

Based on the empirical evidence and PESTLE analysis of this study, three recommendations have emerged. These focus on what is required for the future integration of planning for housing policy and practice across the range of stakeholders, considered through this research as key for realising the full potential of DBEC; the evidence base necessary to underpin strategic and operational decision making across different spatial scales and governance networks associated with DBEC; and further research to assist in creating a comprehensive understanding of the complex and integrated spatial and housing dynamics that exist along the Corridor to underpin long-term, sustainable development.

6.3 Recommendations

On the basis of evidence emerging from the study, this report makes a number of recommendations that can support enhancements to policy formulation and implementation. These are grouped into the following three broad categories:

1. Governance arrangements and networks;

2. Data strategy, infrastructure and interoperability;

3. Further research.

1. Governance arrangements and networks

The DBEC concept currently prioritises the potential for job creation and economic prosperity throughout the Corridor region. Key to achieving this is (horizontal) economic development policy integration and cooperation across the eight local government partners, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders and networks. Experience from elsewhere highlights the benefits of adopting a spatial planning approach – including cross-sectoral cooperation, networking, visioning, partnership – in securing positive outcomes. Causal relationships also influence regional development, such as competitiveness and quality of transport infrastructure. In the case of DBEC, an emphasis is placed on the existence of, inter alia, a "well-educated and talented workforce; a strong entrepreneurial eco-system" (DBEC, 2023). A causal relationship linked to this is access to housing, both in terms of affordability and availability of suitable property types, which is crucial for attracting and retaining workforce to the area. Evidence presented in Chapter 4, for example, noted the demand for family-sized homes for diaspora returning home. Such relationships – and any associated policy measures – should not be considered in isolation to the overarching aspiration of DBEC.

Consequently, there is a case to be made for incorporating planning for housing within DBEC governance arrangements, building on the recognition of spatial planning in the Partnership Strategy (DBEC, 2022), to provide a focus for this strategic area of cooperation as an integrative pillar of DBEC operations. Recognising the varying public sector arrangements for housing in each jurisdiction, a specific network of agencies involved with planning for, and delivery of, housing could be established. This would facilitate communication between decision-makers, the monitoring of development plans, and the creation of appropriate policy interventions. Such contact already exists to an extent between some councils that are partners within DBEC. There is scope to formally extend this and acknowledge the integral role of spatial planning in delivering DBEC for example with the chief planners of local councils more closely liaising on housing trends and land allocations to achieve strategic outcomes for the Corridor region. This would not require any new instruments but rather would be an extension of existing cross-border networking provisions and activities, though more explicitly focused on DBEC. As cross-border housing markets are already included as a reference point within the Framework for Cooperation there is clearly scope to maximise utilisation of the framework, with the purpose of increased collaboration amongst the DBEC partners and central government and housing agencies in both jurisdictions.

2. Data Strategy, ICT infrastructure and Interoperability

The critical role of data for evidence-informed decision-making emerged from interviewees as a priority and immediate issue for actionable change. Substantial gaps in relevant data were noted in both jurisdictions. Concerns were expressed on matters of data strategy, policy and procedure, including the need for data security, sharing and access to quality data. Related concerns were noted with data infrastructure, methodology, lineage, use and interoperability for analytical and research purposes. Significantly, interviewee expectations are that cross-border cooperation in the production, exchange and use of data to help realise DBEC strategic objectives is a 'lower hanging fruit', potentially offering immediate and relevant benefits.

Given this study's findings, today's context and the recommendation above in relation to governance arrangements, it is therefore recommended that a DBEC Data Infrastructure and Business Intelligence Strategy is developed by relevant actors and agencies on a cross-border basis that comprises:

- NI and Ireland public sector body (PSB) database registries and trusted identifiers for data relevant and useful to the core DBEC objectives of sustainable development in housing, economy and society;

- A resourced cross-border housing and planning data infrastructure with required privacy, confidentiality and cybersecurity protocols and features allowing for data sharing and data platform interoperability between PSBs in Ireland and NI;

- Development of housing and planning data fields and from public and private sources that support Business Intelligence (BI) for decision-making by DBEC stakeholders;

- Development of applied Business Intelligence (BI) data solutions for housing and planning policy to address gaps in understanding and knowledge on, inter-alia;

  - cross-border population changes in household composition and formation;

  - definition of functional housing markets areas;

  - housing development and supply by tenure; labour-market dynamics and income distribution;

- mortgage market and equity investment activity;
- house prices and rents;
- commuting patterns; and,
- net migration trends and composition.

3. Further Research

The qualitative and quantitative evidence that has emerged from this study would suggest that there is merit in undertaking further research in a number of planning for housing related fields:

- A data audit of sources of information from not only public sector but also private sector sources that could facilitate more extensive and consistent analysis of cross-border housing markets.

- The undertaking of an analysis of cross-border DBEC housing markets that utilise a version of the Scottish Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) model that is appropriately modified to reflect data availability and cross border flows. This would inform an assessment of the potential for greater integration of modelling within (development) planning more generally throughout DBEC with a view to achieving greater commonality of approach.

- Given the important role that the private rented sector will continue to play in meeting future housing requirements there is a pressing need for research that would provide a greater understanding of the dynamics of this sector of the housing market – with a particular focus on the impact of contrasting labour markets north and south of the border and the related cross-border journey-to-work patterns.

- The availability and role of development finance for housing continues to be an under-researched field in the context of planning for housing. A public-private partnership research project focussing on this issue with key actors in the sphere of housing development would provide useful insights into the more effective use of zoned or potentially zoned land for housing in DBEC. The study would examine a number of different segments of the market: super prime, prime, BTR and lower cost affordable housing.

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Appendix 1

UK COLLABORATIVE CENTRE FOR HOUSING EVIDENCE

Ulster University

Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC): planning policy and cross-border housing markets on the island of Ireland

Topic Guide

Introductory comments re project by interviewer.

Role of interviewee(s).

Questions

1. To what extent do key strategic planning documents acknowledge the existence of cross-border housing markets – N/S and intercounty?
2. To what extent are these taken into account in planning for housing at the local level?
3. Has there been any change in this over the past two decades / following the GFC?
4. How effectively does your organisation take on board cross border housing search / commuting / migration patterns in determining future housing need and demand (including allocation of land)?
5. To what extent do you think that cross border housing need/demand / search / commuting / migration has increased over the last two decades – impact of GFC?
6. Has the shape and extent of cross-border markets changed following the GFC.
7. To what extent do planning authorities reach out to collaborate effectively with neighbouring authorities – N/S and intercounty?
8. To what extent are planning authorities aware of DBEC and of any impact it has had on planning policy – specifically planning for housing?
9. To what extent (and how) do planning authorities (your organisation) integrate economic factors with demographic projections to estimate the need and demand for housing?
10. To what extent do you think the existence of DBEC as a concept and in practice has influenced housing markets in the corridor area?
11. Any suggestions regarding methodological improvements that could reflect the potential impacts of DBEC?
12. Any other points?

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Appendix 2

Headline Demographic Change and Housing Market Dynamics for the four DBEC Local Authorities in Ireland

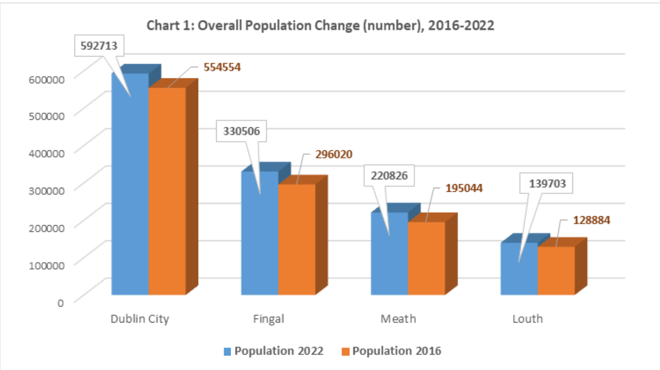
Local Authority:

- Dublin City, Fingal County Council, Meath County Council, Louth County Council

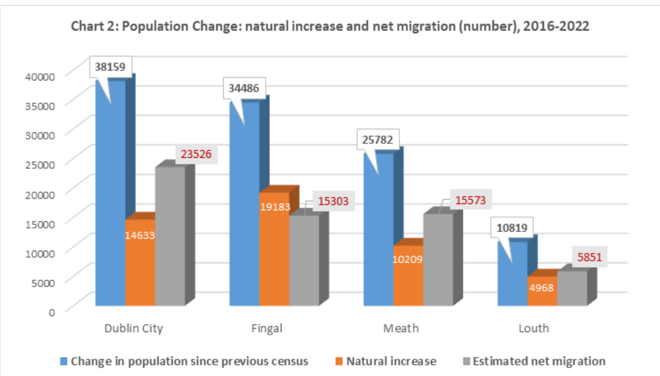
Source: CSO Census (Ireland) https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/censusofpopulation2022/

1. Population Change, 2016 to 2022

Each DBEC (Ireland) local authority experience a noted increase in overall population between 2016 and 2022. Meath County Council has the highest percentage rate of increase at 13.2%, followed by Fingal County Council at 11.6%, Louth County Council at 8.4% and Dublin City at 6.9% (see Chart 1).

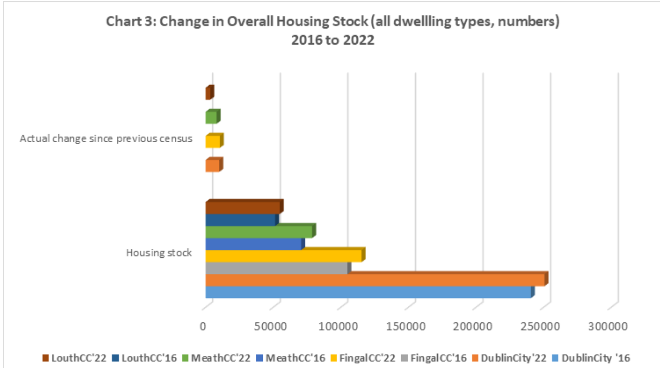


This increase in overall population was confirmed as comprising both natural increases and estimated net migration to the administrative area (from within Ireland and from elsewhere). With the exception of Fingal County Council, net migration accounted for the majority of overall population increase in the selected local authorities. The largest contribution of net migration to population growth is recorded for Dublin City Council, where a ratio of natural increase to net migration for the measured population growth is recorded as 1:1.6. The ratio for Meath County Council is recorded as 1:1.5, for Louth County Council is 1:1.1 and for Fingal County Council is 1:0.7 (Chart 2).



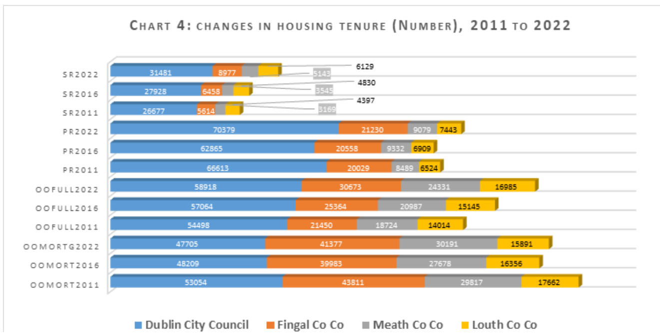
2. Change in Housing Stock, 2016-2022

Each local authority recorded an increase in their respective housing stock (for all dwelling types) between 2016 and 2022. While the largest overall growth in number of units was recorded for Dublin City Council at +10,079 units, Meath County Council recorded an overall growth in number of units at +8,110 representing an increase of 11.48% in housing stock from 2016. This is more then double the rate for Dublin City Council of 4.19%. The increase in housing stock number for Fingal County Council is +10,507 (a 10.2% increase, again more than double the Dublin City rate) and for Louth County Council is +3,443 (a 6.7% increase) (Chart 3).



3. Changes in Housing Tenure, 2011 to 2022

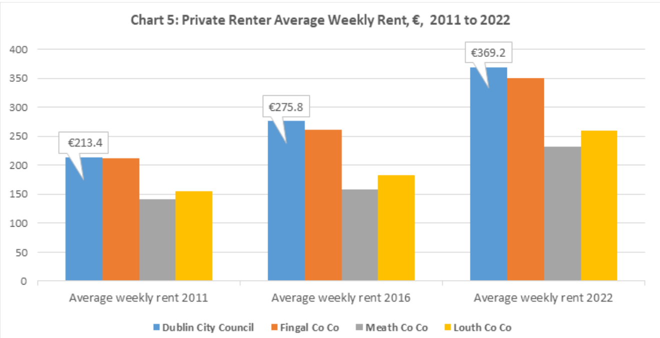
Substantial change in the distribution and scale of housing tenures is noted among local authorities over the decade form 2011. Despite an increase in provision from 2016, the relative scale of social housing provision for the reference authorities is small in comparison. The most notable change is the continued growth in the scale of the private rented tenure across all local authorities and particularly in Dublin city. The scale of outright or full ownership of owner occupied housing increased in all local authorities over the period. However, with the exception of County Meath, there is a recorded decline in the number of households in owner occupation with a loan or mortgage for the reference local authorities. Again, the most significant decline is recorded for Dublin city (Chart 4).

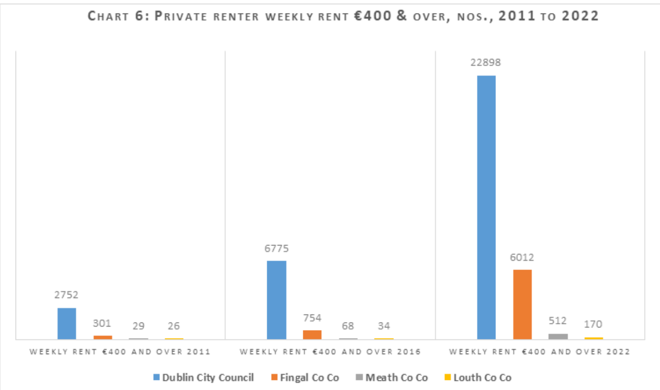


The data confirms how fewer households are entering homeownership with a mortgage or loan and instead are renting privately. This is taken to be the result of housing affordability challenges for aspiring new entrants to home ownership arising from inadequate supply and accompanying house price inflation combined with macroprudential rules on lending, stricter eligibility criteria and changes to labour market conditions of employment.

4. Changes in average weekly rents, 2011 to 2022

The transfer of demand to private rental over the period has also been accompanied by reduced overall supply due to transfer of properties into the under-regulated Short Term Rental market and a trend of increased landlord sales for capital accumulation. The new supply of built to rent (BTR) properties achieved over the period have been brought to market at higher premium rates. These factors are associated with the increase in both average weekly rents (Chart 5) and, very notably, the increase in the number renter households paying a weekly rent in excess of €400, particularly in Dublin (Chart 6).





5. Changes in Standard Average Rent for selected areas in Dublin City and Fingal County Council, 2021 to 2022

The standardised rent data used here is collated by the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and used to produce the national Rent Index (see here for more details Rent Index). The data used to produce the rent index is a mix-adjusted rent i.e. a measure of rents that takes account of the changing mix of properties rented in different time periods. The standardised average rent takes into account the changing mix of properties rented in different time periods, whereas the average rents on their own do not. At Quarter 4, 2022 the standard average rent for Dublin City was €1,982 per calendar month (pcm) and for Dublin County was €2,063. The national standardised average rent for the state was €1,507 pcm. Table 1 (below) gives more details for selected Local Electoral Areas (LEAs) in both Dublin City and Fingal County Council. The dynamics of Dublin's rental market is confirmed by the spatial variation in rents across localities that have registered a year-on-year decrease in rents wheres others that have experienced substantial double-digit inflation. There are multifactorial reasons for such substantial variations across spaces and locales that comprised the highly segmented and differentiated rental market in Dublin. Principal among these are the impacts of both rent stabilisation measures that restrict the rate of annual rate increase to 4% or below alongside the thin rate of transaction in new lettings in older rental stock. A significant driver of higher rates of rental inflation is the supply of new tenancies from purpose build student accommodation and corporate build-to-rent supply that charge premium rents.

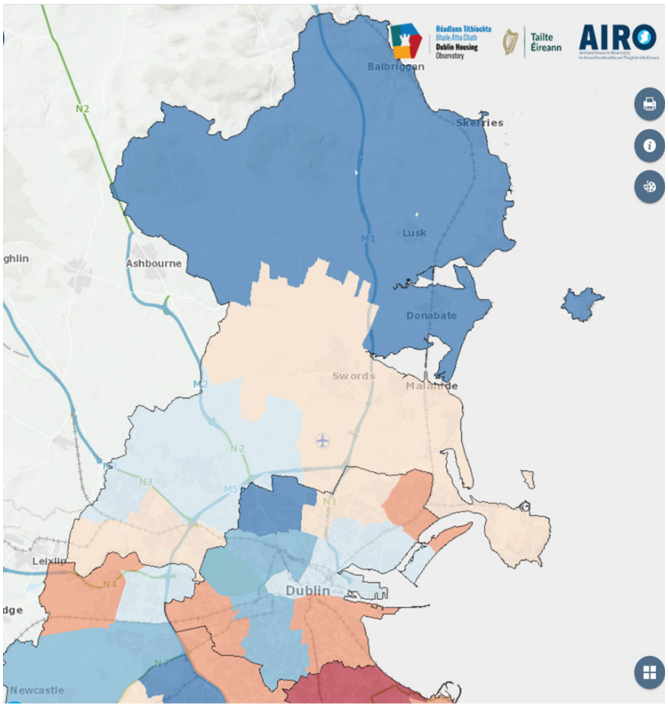
Table 1: Changes in Standard Average Rent per Local Electoral Area (LEA), €pcm, 2021 to 2022

Local Electoral Areas (LEAs)	Std Average Rent €pcm 2021Q4	Std Average Rent €pcm 2022Q4	Qtr on Qtr Change %	Year on Year Change %
Fingal County Council				
Rush-Lusk	1,703.14	1,696.34	-5.92	-0.40
Balbriggan	1,565.63 (e)	1,713.89	+8.65	n/a
Swords	1,861.66	1,964.95	+2.53	+5.55
Howth-Malahide	1,954.17	2,042.30	-5.26	+4.51
Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart	1,597.85	1,852.72	-4.5	+15.95
Ongar	1,861.09 (e)	1,896.75	-1.88	n/a
Castleknock	1887.68	2,004.41	+6.82	+6.18
Dublin City Council				
Ballymun-Finglas	1,775.07	1,693.26	-0.6	-4.61
Artane-Whitehall	2,100.74	1,988.79	-3.44	-5.33
Cabra-Glasnevin	1,722.05	1,828.54	+2.63	+6.18
Clontarf	1,783.81	1,881.66	+0.3	+5.49
North Inner City	1,811.61	1,915.88	+1.61	+5.76
Donaghmede	2,096.86	2,080.15	-2.37	-0.8
South East Inner City	2,142.23	2,156.20	-0.2	-0.65
Pembroke	2,009.10	2,198.17	+1.31	+9.41
South West Inner City	1,761.40	1,843.72	-1.39	+4.67
Kimmage-Rathmines	1,695.97	1,782.62	+1.61	+5.11
Ballyfermot-Drimnagh	1,751.22	2,158.28	+19.12	+23.24

(e) estimate

To better illustrate the variation within the Dublin City Council and Final County Council areas the available RTB data is given spatial expression by the DHO Data Navigator, as shown in Map 1 below.

Map 1: RTB Standardised Average Rent (€pcm) at 2022 Qtr2



6. Mean House Prices for Dublin City Council and Fingal County Council, Selected Areas, 2022

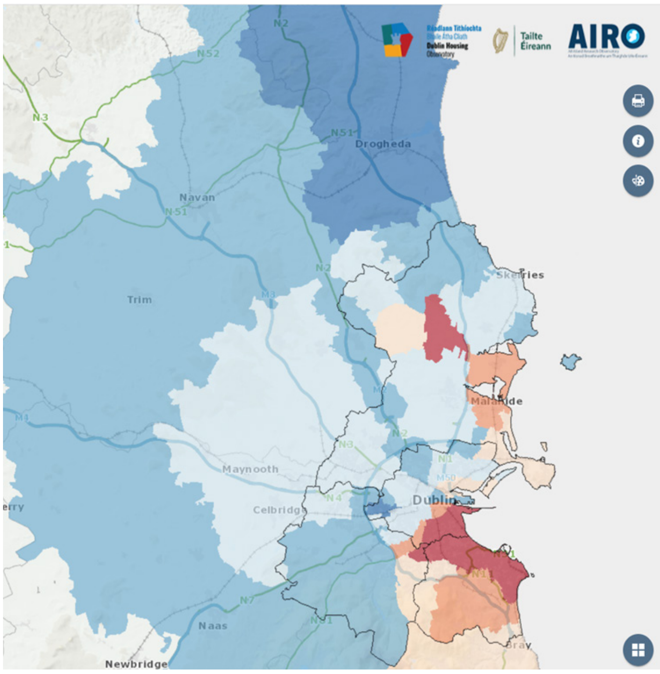
The Central Statistics Office (CSO) Property Price Index is available to the DHO Data Navigator and is used here to illustrate the mean house price for all sales recorded in 2022 in selected areas in Dublin City Council and Fingal County Council. The data is organised spatially under the Eircode routing key classification that allows for the selection of named localities. Table 2 gives the data for 2022 for all new or existing dwelling types sold to first time buyers or former owner occupiers in 2022. Map 2 gives spatial expression to the data set out in Table 2 and includes additional areas.

Table 2: CSO Mean House Prices, All Dwellings, First Time Buyers and Former Owner Occupiers for New and Existing Housing, Selected Areas, 2022

		Purchase price of New Housing, €000s		Purchase Price of Existing Housing, €000s	
LA & Eircode Routing Key	Area Name	First Time Buyer	Former Owner Occupier	First Time Buyer	Former Owner Occupier
Louth CoCo					
A92	Drogheda	323.56	326.67	258.31	298.5
Meath CoCo					
A84	Ashbourne	269.56	n/a	328.41	353.78
Fingal CoCo					
A42	Garristown1	389.16	429.93	380	453.42
A45	Oldtown	n/a	n/a	330	625.25
A41	Ballyboughal	420	n/a	n/a	746.87
K32	Balbriggan2	373.82	367.95	289.73	314.07
K34	Skerries	356.27	381.71	511.17	522.65
K56	Rush	385.52	376.62	344.22	410.51
K45	Lusk	446.8	433.04	355.68	425.35
K36	Malahide	611.83	770.23	485.2	646.47
K67	Swords	448.21	474.82	359.82	386.61
Dublin City Council					
D17	Dublin 17	439.64	495	291.1	307.11
D15	Dublin 15	433.92	482.23	370.6	452.3
D13	Dublin 13	543.74	613.49	426.89	617.68
D11	Dublin 11	350.66	282.75	334.79	340.14
D9	Dublin 9	605	813.09	422.31	522.13
D7	Dublin 7	n/a	522.1	411.37	447.29
D5	Dublin 5	501.66	716.25	438.95	510.5
D3	Dublin 3	560.26	733.46	472.53	618.48
D1	Dublin 1	340.5	n/a	339.56	330.09
D2	Dublin 2	608.98	768.26	520.03	688.11
D4	Dublin 43	1,034.06	1,620.33	668.06	1,016.43
D6	Dublin 6	1,039.06	1,412.46	639.36	1,106.87
D6W	Dublin 6W4	673.78	736.25	568.42	707.44
D8	Dublin 8	483.33	n/a	393,193	428.33
D10	Dublin 10	n/a	n/a	277.61	306.74
D12	Dublin 12	794.99	757.05	392.87	425.77
D20	Dublin 205	444.22	562.5	377.26	394.96

1: includes localities in Meath CoCo; 2: includes localities in Louth CoCo; 3 includes localities in Dun Laoighre/ Rathdown CoCo; 4 includes localities in South Dublin CoCo.

Map 2: Mean Sales Price 2022 for All Dwellings, All Buyers



Source: Dublin Housing Observatory Data Navigator https://airomaps.geohive.ie/dho/

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7. New Dwelling Completions for Dublin City Council and Fingal County Council, Selected Areas, 2012 to 2023Q1

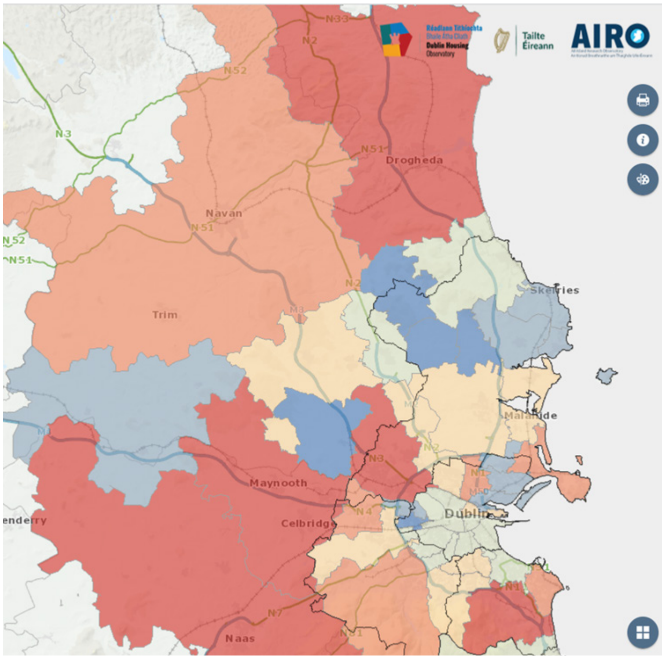
The Central Statistics Office (CSO) New Dwellings Completion data is available to the DHO Data Navigator and is used here to illustrate the variation in the supply of new dwellings across selected localities in Dublin City Council and Fingal County Council. There are areas in the region where new housing supply is substantial and considerably ahead of previous population growth targets, including Drogheda and areas comprising the 'north fringe' of Dublin City, including Dublin 15, 13 and 9. Substantial new supply in the city centre is found in Dublin 1, 2, 7 and 8 and primarily is comprised of build to rent (BTR) and purpose build student accommodation (PBSA) in the main. Another area with notable new dwelling supply over the period is Dublin 12. An association can be discerned between higher mean dwelling prices for sale and higher rates of new completions in areas including for example Malahide, Dublin 13 and Dublin 15.

Table 3: New Dwelling Completions for for Dublin City Council and Fingal County Council, Selected Areas, 2012 to 2023Q1

LA & Eircode Routing Key	Area Name	New Dwelling Completions, 2012-23Q1	New Dwelling Completions, 2022	New Dwelling Completions, 2023Q1
Louth CoCo				
A92	Drogheda	4,573	820	169
Meath CoCo				
A84	Ashbourne	1,046	19	10
Fingal CoCo				
A42	Garristown1	101	9	6
A45	Oldtown	25	3	1
A41	Ballyboughal	177	3	1
K32	Balbriggan2	1,229	114	7
K34	Skerries	487	31	10
K56	Rush	505	100	24
K45	Lusk	619	133	14
K36	Malahide	2,143	257	26
K67	Swords	1,907	211	91
Dublin City Council				
D17	Dublin 17	499	171	10
D15	Dublin 15	5,217	482	162
D13	Dublin 13	3,789	479	54
D11	Dublin 11	1,516	91	162
D9	Dublin 9	2,301	700	31
D7	Dublin 7	1,181	440	24
D5	Dublin 5	505	24	6
D3	Dublin 3	640	82	18
D1	Dublin 1	1,790	514	126
D2	Dublin 2	1,195	292	34
D4	Dublin 43	832	111	21
D6	Dublin 6	904	112	4
D6W	Dublin 6W4	826	84	2
D8	Dublin 8	1,240	70	5
D10	Dublin 10	242	62	0
D12	Dublin 12	1,135	456	5
D20	Dublin 205	486	166	95

1: includes localities in Meath CoCo; 2: includes localities in Louth CoCo; 3 includes localities in Dun Laoighre/ Rathdown CoCo; 4 includes localities in South Dublin CoCo; 5: includes localities in South CoCo

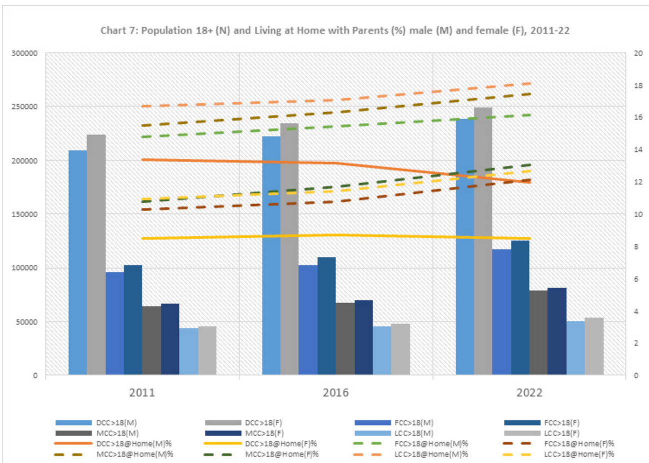
Map 3: CSO New Dwelling Completions, 2012 to 2023



8. Population Aged 18 years and above and percentage living at home with parents.

Chart 7 gives an indication of the extent of change notable among population cohorts entering household formation age from 2011 to 2022. Each of the selected DBEC local authorities experienced growth in the number of adults aged 18 years and above in their respective populations, with the highest growth rates being found in the Dublin region.

With the exception of Dublin city, the percentage of these adults who remain resident with parents in the family home has also increased over the period.



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