

02/11/2017

Submission to the National Planning Framework, Ireland 2040- Our Plan

The National Planning Framework will mean little if it is not backed up by co-ordinated capital investment and implementation across each tier of governance from local government upwards.

The NPF must take a balanced regional perspective on the future development of the country. This means developing economic counter weights to the increasing dominance of Dublin.

In short the aim of the NPF should be to enable growth across all regions while reducing regional disparities. In practice it means achieving growth in all areas, but attempting to reduce the share of national growth concentrated in high growth areas, such as the Greater Dublin Area.

I welcome this opportunity to address key areas in relation to my own constituency of Waterford and the South East region.

Despite the improving economy in the country Waterford and the South East continues to have the highest unemployment figures in the State. The figures remain stubbornly high at 8.5% including the counties of Waterford, Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary and Wexford. The average rate of unemployment throughout the rest of the country is 6.1%. The ambition set out in government to reduce joblessness rate to within 1% of the national rate is still more aspirational than achievable.

Recently a fantastic opportunity has presented itself for Waterford through the hard work and efforts of Waterford City and County Council under the leadership of CEO Michael Walsh. The proposed investment in Waterford City by the Alkohaier Group from Saudi Arabia has provided a much needed confidence boost for the City of Waterford and indeed the whole south east. The proposed development at a cost of €300 million will be a game changer for Waterford. The South East absolutely needs a regional City of consequence and that must be Waterford, Waterford must be enabled for propulsive growth, for regions to be strong regions, regions need a strong City.

Waterford being closest to Dublin with a very impressive road network must be enabled to be an alternative to Dublin, and by encouraging the growth of population in Waterford and the South East this will act as a release valve to Dublin's overheating issues re housing, transport congestion and education.

The North Quays is a project of Strategic Importance to Waterford and the region and the development of the Michael Street shopping Centre is also very significant. The region requires the capital to be assigned to it in light of this fantastic opportunity that we have been offered.

The proposed development has the clear potential to give Waterford and the South East region the emphasis it needs to produce additional; permanent services such as healthcare, education, transport and will result in an enhanced economy overall. The proposed development will happen on 8 1/4 hectares of substantial and spectacular river frontage. The proposal includes 30,000 sq. metres retail space, 15,000 square metres hotel and conference space and 30,000 square metres of residential space. The residential space is expected to include 300 units of which 100 will be owned by Waterford City and County Council and will immediately result in a reduction in the already extremely high local authority waiting list.

The proposal also include a significant pedestrian bridge which will be focal point linking the North Quays with the city. The proposal also includes the relocation of Plunkett Railway station and the relocation of Waterford Crystal Visitor Centre. It's estimated that 5000 jobs will be created during the construction phase and a further 5000 permanent jobs will be created on completion in the various industries and services.

The draft plans for this hugely significant development are now on view for the public, which will transform the way we are viewed and how we could be seen as a regional city of importance and significance, the economic driver of the South East, and our rightful position as Ireland's Oldest City.

The proposed North Quays development has the potential to kick start the economic recovery in the South East. The Alhokair Group are coming to the table with €220 million, the local authority proposing between €5-€10 million with the short fall of €61.5 million will have to come from government funds and state investment. The City and County Council have done an amazing job in getting the project to the current stage; we now need to see how serious the Government views promoting regional economic development. The City

and County council have applied to the Government for this significant funding to advance this proposal, however it is very important to state that it will be extremely unlikely that this project will get over the line without state funding. The employment opportunities, the housing opportunities, cannot be under estimated. This is an opportunity of a lifetime, of a generation and cannot be seen as a missed opportunity.

An independent report was recently prepared for Waterford City and County Council by Indecon International Economic Consultants and the conclusions raised are extremely positive

Indecon assessment highlights the significant potential economic benefits offered by the Waterford Redevelopment project. This reflects the role of the project in assisting Waterford to realise its potential to develop as a regional driver of economic growth. It should be noted that the benefits will only be achieved if the proposed private sector investments are made and will require initiatives to ensure that Waterford capitalises on the opportunities arising from the Ancient East tourism initiative and that other supporting actions are taken to develop the region as an attractive competitive location for foreign and indigenous investment.

The proposed major development plans for the Waterford would bring the city in line other Irish cities and signal to international investors that the city and region is open for business. Indecon independent analysis indicates that the proposed investment would provide a net benefit to society in socio-economic terms.

Transport Planning/ Connectivity are absolutely crucial for any region. The Waterford/ Dublin motorway has made a significant difference, however the motorway network throughout the country all leads to Dublin. The provision of a motorway between Cork, Limerick and Waterford would physically link three regional cities, would be seen as a game changer for the entire South of the country and could act as a counter balance to Dublin in terms of a release valve to Dublin's overheating re housing, transport congestion and education.

Waterford Airport lack of international and currently national connections is a huge challenge. The development of the runway extension at Waterford Airport is key to the region so that viable routes can be explored .The aviation industry is extremely tough, and the airport has seen its fair share of setbacks in recent years, however the delivery of funding to pay for the extension of the runway to allow larger aircraft use the airport, offering longer distance services to mainland Europe would ensure the future of the airport, and secure the many local jobs that are dependent on the airport being fully operational. A €10m investment is needed to develop the airport to an appropriate scale.

The Technological University of the South East must be delivered and the long awaited amalgamation between Waterford Institute of Technology and Carlow Institute of Technology is key, the slow pace of this amalgamation has to gather pace, delivery is imperative. There are approx. 20,000 from the South East in Higher Education. Of these 67.6% leave the region to secure a higher education, the brain drain cannot be allowed continue, this will have to be halted to equip the region with equality of education at Third Level that all other regions enjoy.

University Hospital Waterford must be further developed to be a complete Regional Hospital appropriate for the South East Region, with the appropriate funding that other acute hospitals enjoy. The provision of 24/7 Cardiac Care for the region is a necessity not an aspiration. The alignment of UHW to the South South/ West grouping has been a retrograde step and has not delivered on services, improvements or leadership in patient care. Waiting lists are at an all-time high among the highest in the country in some instances. Public confidence in this alignment with the South/ South West group is at an all-time low and needs to be addressed.

Rural areas cannot be forgotten about and towns and villages throughout the county need investment in Broadband, revitalisation of town and village centres and increase emphasis on agriculture and tourism offering and initiatives. Emphasis has also to be place on encouraging and repurposing our small towns and villages as places of residence, enterprise and community.

The recent opening of the fantastic Greenway of 46klm linking Dungarvan to Waterford has already been seen as a game changer for Waterford City and County. This fantastic amenity of off road cycling and walking trail along the old railway track is a beautiful journey amid beautiful scenery between the sea and the mountains in parts. The success of the Greenway has been unprecedented with the visitor figures bearing this out. The village of Kilmactomas has been rejuvenated, with businesses opening, employment opportunities and a general optimism. The continuation of the Greenway in neighbouring counties would be significant from a tourism offering.

Waterford City and County certainly needs this opportunity and the spin off for the enhancement of University Status for the WIT, the effect it will have on Waterford Airport and University Hospital Waterford should also be considered.

I would seriously ask you to consider the future of Waterford and The South East, our economic future, our regional future and include this investment in the National Planning Framework.

Yours Sincerely

Mary Butler TD

Waterford.