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Draft National Planning Framework

Consultation Response Submission

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Supported By:



Grant Thornton

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Draft National Planning Framework (NPF) is being developed by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to guide the future development of Ireland up to 2040. The purpose of the NPF is to establish a structured approach to future development of the country. The NPF represents a paradigm shift in Irish planning, moving away from rapid Dublin centric growth to a more regionally balanced model.

We welcome the NPF and its planned implementation through the regulatory statutory framework however this submission seeks to highlight what we see as an underestimation of the development potential of Limerick. We believe that Limerick offers a realistic, cost effective and deliverable location to achieve significantly more population growth than that currently targeted in the NPF.

Our view is that the proposed allocation of population growth does not adequately reflect Limerick's existing and emerging infrastructure and the opportunity to capitalise on investments which have already been made. We recommend that more consideration is given to the targeted population increases by city prior to finalising the NPF. A summary of our recommendations is included below.

1. Scale, capacity and urban structure

It is recommended that Limerick's population targets are increased to reflect comparatively greater opportunities for sustainable development by way of urban regeneration and renewal on greenfield and brownfield sites within the city. The NPF appears to overlook strategic infrastructure project such as the Northern Distributor Road that will unlock significant additional capacity for growth. We recommend that the population targets are increased to at least align with medium-term historical growth rates.

2. Accessibility

Limerick benefits from a central location, approximately equidistant from Cork and Galway and just over two hours from Dublin. Additionally, Limerick benefits from close proximity to Shannon Airport for international accessibility. It is recommended that Limerick's population targets are increased to reflect this accessibility.

3. Business environment

As an employment and retail centre, Limerick serves a large hinterland. The continued success of the surrounding areas is very much dependent upon the success of Limerick itself. The NPF should be framed to reflect the importance of Limerick to the 450,000 people living within a 60 minute drive of the city.

Limerick benefits from three third-level institutions creating a highly skilled talent pool and significant start-up activity showing creativity and ambition. Foreign direct investment related employment is underdeveloped and the office market has the highest vacancy rate and lowest rental rates compared to other Irish cities. It is recommended that the NPF aims to utilise this available talent and maximise the value from the available office space. It is recommended that employment and hence population targets are increased accordingly.

4. Sustainable travel

Limerick's workforce benefit from an average commute time well below the national average. Additionally, Limerick benefits from significant opportunities for transit oriented development. Given the links between longer commute times and adverse health effects, we recommend that population targets are increased to reflect this.

5. Cost of living

Limerick benefits from the lowest house prices and lowest cost of living of all Ireland's cities. To capitalise on these benefits requires a concerted effort to improve the availability of employment. It is recommended that employment targets are broken down to city level targets to enable effective targeting of employment growth.

6. Tourism potential

Limerick's location at the estuary of the Shannon, with the Burren, Kerry, the Wild Atlantic Way and Shannon Airport on its doorstep, means that there is significant tourist activity in the area. Limerick City and County Council has a plan in place to develop Limerick as a destination in its own right and the population targets should be increased to reflect the resultant increase in tourism related employment.

7. Socio-economic impact

Limerick has significant levels of poverty and deprivation and as such offers the greatest socio-economic benefit from effective implementation of the NPF. It is recommended that the employment and population growth targets are revised to reflect the socio-economic benefits to the Limerick region.

Conclusion

There are a number of recommendations to increase Limerick population targets to 2040 and in summation these increases amount to an additional 41,000 people. In addition to the 52,000 already targeted in the NPF, this would mean Limerick City growing from 94,000 in 2016 and to a minimum of 187,000 in 2040. This increased growth would require commensurate infrastructure funding support in the National Investment Plan.

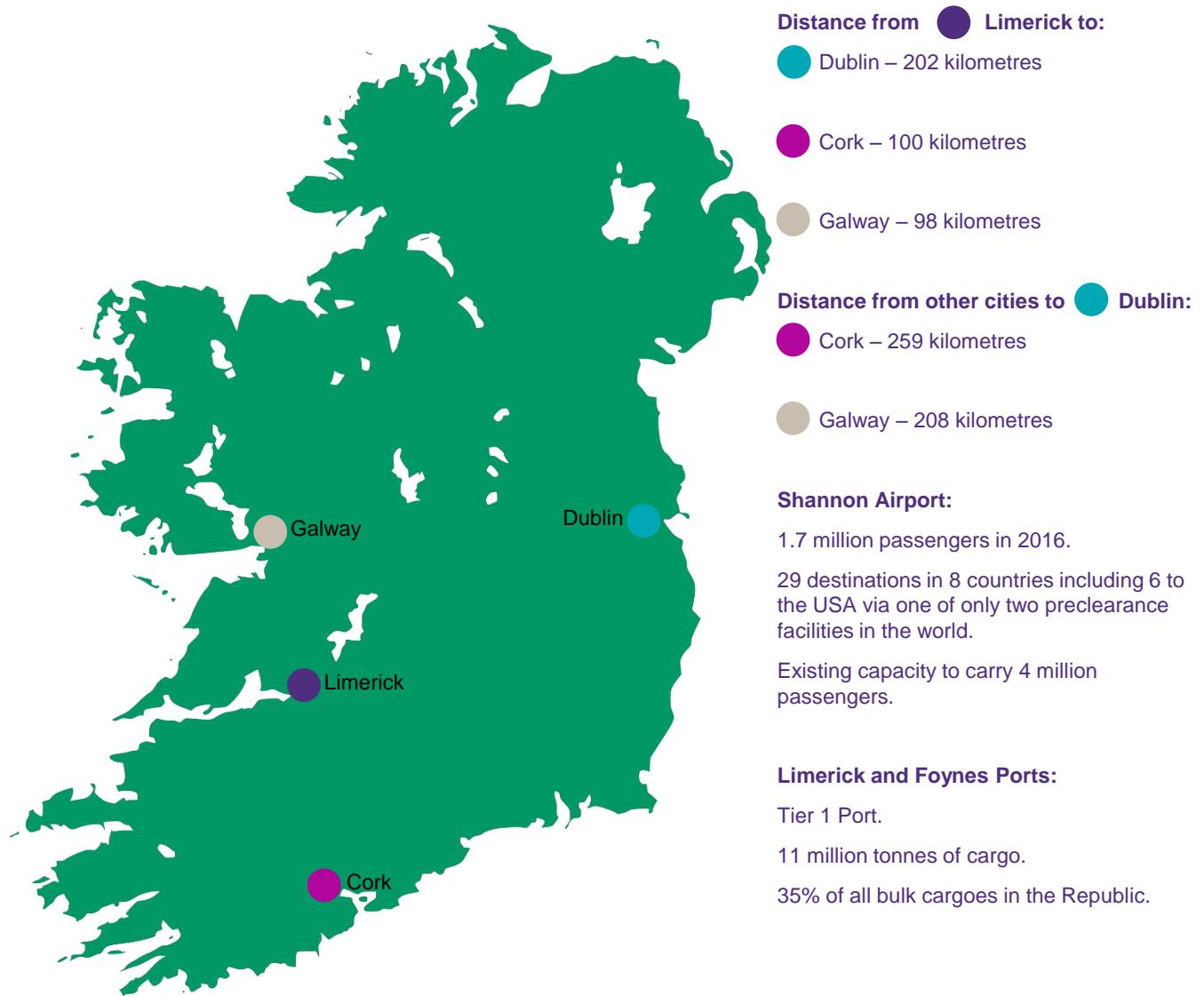
Executive Summary

Summary Table: Clancourt Management Submission Population Projections 2016 to 2040

Factor	Population	% Growth	CAGR
2016 current	94,000		
Current NPF 2040 projected growth	146,000	55%	1.85%
Plus our recommendations:			
Accessibility (Page 7)	7,368	8%	0.20%
Business environment (Pages 8-9)	7,368	8%	0.20%
Sustainable travel (Page 10)	7,368	8%	0.20%
Scale and capacity (Page 6)	5,200	5%	0.14%
Tourism potential (Page 12)	13,500	15%	0.30%
Recommended 2040 population target	186,803	99%	2.90%

Source: Own calculations

Executive Summary



Introduction

Clancourt Management

Clancourt Management have been developing and managing buildings in the Limerick area since the early 1970's. As the owner of the Crescent Shopping Centre for 44 years, the group have been a large employer in the Limerick area.

During that time Clancourt Management have also been a passionate and committed supporter of the city. The group have sponsored both the 'Limerick National City of Culture 2014' and 'Limerick 2020' initiatives, and have made significant investments into Limerick City & Suburbs, Limerick people, charitable causes and cultural activities of the region.

Clancourt recognises the NPF as a key driver of the transformation and future success of Limerick and are therefore making this submission as a key stakeholder in and passionate supporter of the ongoing success of the Limerick City and the wider region.

Nature of this submission

The purpose of this submission is to examine the assumptions that underpin the population allocated to Limerick & Suburbs in the draft NPF and comment on their suitability. This submission has been prepared by Grant Thornton on behalf of Clancourt Management.

National Planning Framework

The Draft National Planning Framework (NPF) has been developed by Central Government to guide the future development of Ireland up to 2040. The purpose of the NPF is to establish a structured approach to future development of the country. The NPF represents a paradigm shift in Irish planning, moving away from the rapid Dublin centric growth to a more regionally balanced model.

Section 3.4 of the draft document outlines the projected population growth for Ireland from 2016 to 2040, with a countrywide target growth in population of 1 million people. It is a stated intention within this section that proportionately higher population growth will be encouraged in areas where it can be best accommodated, with this 'proportionate growth strategy' being based upon three key factors:

- scale and capacity;
- urban structure; and
- accessibility.

The population growth projections that underpin the Draft NPF are presented in **Table 0.1** opposite.

Table 0.1: NPF Population Growth Projections 2016 to 2040

	% Growth	CAGR
Dublin - City and Suburbs	23%	0.85%
Cork - City and Suburbs	55%	1.84%
Limerick - City and Suburbs	55%	1.85%
Galway - City and Suburbs	55%	1.84%
Waterford - City and Suburbs	54%	1.81%

As per the table above, the projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) for all four regional cities, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, are very similar. However we propose, within this submission, that there is much greater potential for population growth in Limerick than has been allowed for in the NPF.

We propose that the population projections for each city are revised to reflect these key criteria. We also suggest that consideration is given to the following criteria:

- business environment;
- sustainable travel;
- cost of living;
- tourism potential; and
- socio-economic impact.

Following this introduction, the submission examines each of the criteria identified above in detail and offers a recommendation to strengthen the NPF and improve its overall effectiveness.

1. Scale, capacity and urban structure

Recommendation: It is recommended that Limerick's target population increase is raised by at least 10% owing to the scale and capacity to accommodate additional growth.

Introduction

The distribution of national population growth targets in the NPF is based, in part at least, on scale, capacity and urban structure. This section examines Limerick & Suburbs opportunity from these perspectives for significant future population growth.

Scale

Limerick is already experiencing significant change with developments to bring about new opportunities and future proofing capacity to the city already underway.

The establishment of the Limerick Twenty Thirty Strategic Development DAC (Designated Activity Company) is one such forward thinking development. The first entity of its kind created by a local authority, its target is to deliver a city and county wide programme of investment. It is the biggest single Irish commercial property development programme being undertaken outside of the capital and is tasked with delivering over €500 million worth of transformational investment infrastructure across four strategic sites in

Limerick City:

- Opera Site;
- The Gardens International Office;
- Troy Studios Film Hub; and
- Cleeves Riverside Campus.

This will enhance the Limerick 2030 Plan, a 15-year plan that aims to transform Limerick through the economic, social and physical renaissance of the City Centre and the wider region.

This initiative highlights Limerick City and County Council's ambition and commitment to the development of Limerick. This ambition should be supported by the NPF through the establishment of equally ambitious population targets.

Capacity

Despite being the most densely populated city and suburb outside of Dublin, there are currently 8,000 vacant dwelling units (CSO) in Limerick or 11% of the housing stock. The housing vacancy rate in Dublin is 7% and 8% in Cork. While

enjoying the 2nd highest disposable income per person levels in Ireland outside of Dublin (€21,633), Limerick remains, as highlighted by the '12th Annual Demographic International Housing Affordability Survey', the most affordable out of 367 international cities to buy a home in.

The Draft NPF targets a population increase of 52,000 up to 2040. However, Limerick over the past 18 years has seen the labour force and employment levels grow by almost one-third. If this trend were to continue then an additional 49,000 employed persons could be reasonably expected by 2040 with all of the required levels of infrastructure investment to accommodate such growth.

Additionally, Limerick City and County Council currently have zoned land available to accommodate a population increase of around 40,000. This potential will be further enhanced with the planned Northern Distributor Road, which is a notable omission from the Draft NPF and an essential factor enabling Limerick's growth.

Urban structure

Limerick benefits from having large tracts of greenfield and brownfield development sites within the city boundary providing ample opportunities for urban regeneration and development. With the exception of the Shannon estuary, which bisects the city, there are few constraints on development. It is noted however that there are adequate crossing points, particularly with the new Limerick Tunnel that mitigates the division caused by the Shannon.

Conclusion

Limerick is well placed to accommodate future population growth from a scale, capacity and urban structure viewpoint and it is recommended that the population growth targets are revised upwards accordingly.

Given the potential to reduce the housing vacancy rate, the capacity for growth and the commitment of the local authority, we propose that the target population increase is raised by at least 10% or 5,200 or an increased CAGR of 0.14%.

2. Accessibility

Recommendation: It is recommended that accessibility is given a higher weighting in the derivation of population growth targets and hence in the development of infrastructure to accommodate same. Population growth targets for Limerick should be increased by at least 0.2% p.a. to reflect superior accessibility.

National accessibility

The accessibility of all major Irish cities was examined using an indicative journey time matrix, presented as **Table 2.1** and **Table 2.2** below.

Table 2.1: National accessibility to cities by road

	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Galway	Waterford	Total
Dublin	00:00	02:56	02:23	02:25	02:00	09:44
Cork	02:56	00:00	01:36	02:50	01:57	09:19
Limerick	02:23	01:36	00:00	01:27	02:14	07:40
Galway	02:25	02:50	01:27	00:00	03:15	09:57
Waterford	02:00	01:57	02:14	03:15	00:00	09:26

Source: Google Maps

Table 2.2: National accessibility to cities by public transport

	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Galway	Waterford	Total
Dublin	00:00	02:30	02:15	02:30	02:23	09:38
Cork	02:30	00:00	01:45	02:50	01:41	08:46
Limerick	02:15	01:45	00:00	01:22	02:25	07:47
Galway	02:30	02:50	01:22	00:00	03:53	10:35
Waterford	02:23	01:41	02:25	03:53	00:00	10:22

Source: Google Maps

As evident from the tables above, Limerick's central location gives it a strategic national accessibility advantage over all other regional centres, and indeed an advantage over Dublin. Limerick is therefore ideally placed to accommodate additional employment and residential growth as the most accessible regional city.

The national accessibility advantage possessed by Limerick should be reflected in the distribution of population and hence employment opportunities resulting from the NPF.

International accessibility

International accessibility of each city has been examined by way of proximity to international airports and the number and variety of routes served. **Table 2.3** below presents this analysis.

Table 2.3: Distance (km) to International Airport

Destinations	UK	EU	USA
Dublin	11	11	11
Cork	10	10	10
Limerick	26	26	26
Galway	89	89	215
Waterford	10	128	128

Source: Google Maps

Shannon Airport operates flights to 29 destinations in 8 countries including Boston, Newark, John F. Kennedy, Stewart, Philadelphia and Providence in the USA. This compares to just one destination in the USA served from Cork Airport. With USA pre-clearance, Shannon Airport is a nationally significant infrastructure and as such deserves much more prominence than is currently afforded in the NPF.

Limerick benefits from excellent international accessibility through Shannon Airport and is therefore ideally placed to accommodate significant foreign direct investment growth during the NPF period.

Local accessibility

Limerick benefits from local commuter rail services to Ennis and Nenagh providing good opportunities to utilise sustainable modes of transport for the Limerick workforce.

Additionally, Limerick has the potential to pursue a transit oriented development policy through the rejuvenation and reopening of rail connections to Munget and Foynes, and indeed the establishment of a rail link to Shannon. This would encourage higher public transport mode share thus future proofing the transport network.

Conclusion

Limerick benefits from exceptional local, national and international accessibility and is therefore well placed to accommodate future employment and population growth. We therefore propose a further population increase of at least 0.2% p.a. to reflect this superior accessibility.

3. Business environment

Recommendation: Given Limerick's attractive business environment and the significant potential for employment growth, we recommend that the population growth target is increased by at least a further 0.2% per annum.

Limerick as a regional centre

Limerick is Ireland's third largest city with a population of almost 100,000 including suburbs. The population served increases to 450,000 within an hour drive. With this expansive hinterland, Limerick serves as a strategic employment, retail, healthcare, education and cultural centre for the region.

Limerick as an employment centre

As with other major cities, a significant proportion of the workforce commute to the city from the surrounding areas. Limerick has the highest proportion of workforce travelling into the city for employment highlighting the city's importance to the wider region.

Table 3.1: Proportion of workforce travelling into cities

	% Travelling into city
Dublin - City and Suburbs	25%
Cork - City and Suburbs	41%
Limerick - City and Suburbs	51%
Galway - City and Suburbs	50%
Waterford - City and Suburbs	46%

Source: Census 2016

Limerick's role as an employment centre is fundamental to the success of the wider hinterland and efforts should be made to strengthen the employment opportunities of the city. The NPF offers a significant opportunity to distribute employment opportunities to Limerick thus improving the prospects of the surrounding areas.

Salaries

According to new research, salaries for similar positions in Limerick are generally lower than those in Dublin and less than or equal to wages in Cork and other cities. This highlights Limerick's attraction to accommodate future employment growth.

Limerick as a retail centre

Limerick is an important retail destination in the region serving Limerick city and county as well as parts of Clare, Tipperary and Kerry. It benefits from four shopping centres as well as the traditional high street at O'Connell Street.

It is important to maintain and enhance Limerick's position as a retail centre by securing adequate ongoing investment in the retail offering. The investment in the retail offering will largely be made by the private sector but this must be accompanied by supportive policies from local, regional and central agencies.

There is significant scope to strengthen the retail offering in Limerick with the regeneration of the city centre as well as supporting the further development of the urban fringe. Policies could further the sustainability agenda through encouraging mixed use development patterns in the vicinity of the out-of-town centres to reduce the need to travel.

Talent

Limerick benefits from three third level institutions, University of Limerick (UL), Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) and Mary Immaculate College (MIC), with a combined student population of over 20,000 and an outturn of around 6,000 graduates per year.

This outturn of talent feeds a growing and valuable talent pool in Limerick that should be encouraged to remain in the city through high value employment opportunities.

3. Business environment

Start-ups

The prevalence of start-ups is a very salient indicator of the business environment for entrepreneurs and small and medium size enterprises. Additionally, the presence of start-ups is indicative of the talent and creativity that exists within the local population.

According to Start-up Ireland, there are 38 start-ups in Limerick or one start-up for every 2,474 residents in the city and suburbs. This is the second highest level of start-ups per capita for a city in Ireland behind Galway, which has 41 start-ups but a smaller population.

Table 3.2: Start-ups by city

	Population	Start-ups	Pop. / Start-ups
Dublin	1,173,000	403	2,911
Cork	209,000	74	2,824
Limerick	94,000	38	2,474
Galway	80,000	41	1,951
Waterford	54,000	18	3,000

Source: start-up.ie

Foreign direct investment

As of 2015, there were 14,575 people employed in IDA client companies. This is 22% lower than the 18,652 employed in IDA client companies in the West region and less than half the number in the South-West region.

It is considered that the foreign direct investment (FDI) sector in Limerick, and the Mid-West region more generally is underdeveloped and there is scope to increase FDI related employment levels in the region, boosting population growth in the Mid-West region.

Limerick's potential to attract FDI is enhanced by the presence of Shannon Group's assets including Shannon International Airport, facilitating international access and trade.

Office market

As per **Table 3.3** below, Limerick has the highest proportion of vacant office space at 18% versus the nearest competitor at 11%. Galway has the lowest office vacancy rate at 8%. Additionally, Limerick has the lowest prime office rents in the country.

Limerick's capacity to absorb additional jobs growth with little investment is second to none.

Table 3.3: Available office space by city

	% Vacant	Prime Rents
Dublin	11%	€619
Cork	11%	€290
Limerick	18%	€194
Galway	8%	€250
Waterford	No data available.	

Source: Cushman and Wakefield

Trade

Shannon Foynes is a nationally significant port as one of only three Tier 1 ports alongside Dublin and Cork. The Ports at Limerick and Shannon Foynes have seen record growth over the past two years of greater than 10%, exceeding national and international averages. In 2016, a growth of 11.4% in year-on-year tonnages resulted in just over 11 million tonnes of throughput. This follows significant capital investment in developing and expanding the existing facilities.

Conclusion

Limerick performs a key role as a regional centre in supporting the local community and this role should be supported by national policy. Limerick benefits from a very attractive business environment and significant potential to accommodate additional jobs growth. This submission therefore requests an increase of at least a further 0.2% p.a. to account for these opportunities.

4. Sustainable travel

Recommendation: Limerick has significant potential for sustainable development. It is recommended that the population targets are increased by at least 0.2% per annum to reflect this.

Commuting times

In the 2016 Census, the counties bordering Dublin reported Ireland's longest average commuting time at 34-35 minutes each way, or around 70 minutes round trip each day. This compares with an average commute of 24.2 minutes in Limerick City and County, which is below the national average of 28.2 minutes. As the Greater Dublin Area continues to expand, it is expected that the number of people commuting longer distances to work in the capital will grow significantly.

Studies in the USA and the UK have linked longer commutes with health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol, depression and anxiety. Additionally, longer commutes have also been linked to poor life satisfaction and happiness scores.

In light of this research, it is considered that greater consideration should be given to the quality of life of the future residents of Ireland, particularly given the increasing prevalence of obesity, diabetes and other related conditions.

In this regard, Limerick should be prioritised to accommodate future population and employment growth up to 2040.

Sustainable travel

In order to secure the sustainable future of Ireland, it is important to adhere to the principles of sustainable development and to capitalise on the opportunities for sustainable travel. In this respect Limerick benefits from key advantages in that there are opportunities to develop three new rail lines to serve the population travelling to the city centre.

Pre-existing rail infrastructure between Limerick city and the Port at Foynes and Mungret which was built for bulk transport present an opportunity to upgrade the infrastructure to establish public transport connections serving the city centre. This could facilitate transit oriented development to the west of the city centre, maximising the opportunities for sustainable travel.

Similarly, it is understood that there is a reservation for the potential development of a rail connection between Limerick and Shannon, such a development would provide for a similar transit oriented development pattern with similar sustainable travel benefits to the north west of Limerick city.

Conclusion

It is recommended that opportunities to provide for sustainable development and sustainable travel are capitalised upon. Limerick has significant potential in this regard and it is recommended that the population forecasts are increased accordingly.

It is anticipated that funding allocations under the National Investment Plan will be commensurately increased to ensure these sustainable development opportunities can be maximised. We recommend at least an additional population increase of 0.2% p.a. to reflect this.

5. Cost of living

Recommendation: It is recommended that the projected growth in employment is broken out by city in a similar manner to the break out of population growth.

Limerick housing costs

Limerick holds a strong advantage over all of Ireland's other cities in terms of the cost of housing. As per **Table 5.1** below, Limerick is the city with the least expensive houses for sale and the second cheapest rent behind Waterford.

**Table 5.1: Housing cost comparison
(3 bed semi-detached)**

	Average Price	Average Monthly Rent
Dublin	€414,500	€1,319
Cork	€311,000	€939
Limerick	€185,000	€710
Galway	€245,000	€864
Waterford	€190,000	€676

Source: REA 2017 Q2 CSO

As demand for housing and hence prices increase in Dublin, Cork and Galway, Limerick is ideally placed to accommodate growth in demand. This is particularly relevant for first time buyers and young professionals that are struggling to pay rent and save for house deposits in other cities.

Cost of living index

Expatistan.com was utilised to generate insights into the general cost of living in Limerick relative to other cities in Ireland. **Table 5.2** opposite shows a comparison of the cost of living in Irish cities showing that Dublin is 38% more expensive than Limerick.

Table 5.2: Cost of living comparison

	Cost of Living Indexed	Comparison versus Limerick
Dublin	203	138%
Cork	171	116%
Limerick	147	100%
Galway	158	107%
Waterford		No data available.

Source: Expatistan.com

Given that housing is more affordable and the general cost of living is much lower, there is significant potential to develop Limerick as a viable alternative to Dublin and Cork. The development of Limerick as a viable alternative is predicated on there being suitable employment opportunities. The NPF should give more consideration to the distribution of employment opportunities and should include employment targets as well as population targets.

Conclusion

Given the lower cost of living in Limerick, there is an opportunity to develop the city as a viable alternative to the Ireland's other major cities. This policy must be accompanied and supported by robust employment growth target that can be influenced at a national and local level.

It is recommended that more work is done to break down the distribution of job projections on page 35 of the Draft NPF by city.

6. Tourism potential

Recommendation: There is significant potential to develop Limerick's tourism industry and it is considered appropriate to increase the NPF population targets for Limerick by at least a further 13,500 to account for additional tourism jobs created.

Introduction

Having successfully hosted the '2014 National City of Culture', Limerick has changed perceptions across Ireland and is now growing in popularity as an attractive city for tourists. The city's convenient location between Galway, Cork and Kerry gives it the opportunity to tap into the popularity of these destinations as well as the Wild Atlantic Way. The local authority realise the potential of Limerick and have put in place several frameworks to help achieve these growth targets including the 'Limerick Cultural Strategy 2016-2030' and 'Limerick Economic and Spatial Plan 2030'.

Limerick's Tourism Industry

With 537,000 visitors bringing in €212 million in 2015 compared to Galway's 1,354,000 visitors and €475 million in revenue, Limerick City is clearly lagging behind in relation to tourist numbers and revenues (Fáilte Ireland, 2015).

However, Limerick City and County Council is putting in place ambitious targets to achieve one million tourists per year by 2020 (Limerick Leader, 2016). Whilst this ambition is necessary to drive growth in the tourism sector, Limerick's major challenge in meeting it is a lack of major tourist attractions. Limerick features only twice on the list of Ireland's top visitor attractions with St. John's Castle and the Hunt Museum receiving 108,000 and 107,076 visitors respectively whereas Cork's has three listings with Fota Wildlife Park, Blarney Castle and The Jameson Experience receiving 961,386 visitors per year combined. Galway also has popular tourist attractions such as Kylemore Abbey and Garden, Dún Aonghsa and The Sheep & Wool Centre attracting 525,104 combined (Fáilte Ireland, 2015). The River Shannon is one of Limerick's main assets and is currently being underutilised with a small number of private bodies using it for recreational activities.

Significant investment is needed from the private sector, local authority and key tourism bodies to build Limerick as a destination in its own right.

On the positive side for Limerick, its proximity to Shannon Airport gives it a unique position to act as a gateway to Ireland and the Wild Atlantic Way for visitors arriving at Shannon. Additionally, Limerick's hotel industry had the highest RevPar growth for Irish cities in 2015, at 23.3%. With occupancy rates of hotels increasing yearly and the city continuing to offer extremely good value for money with the lowest average room rate in the country, Limerick offers a good value for money option in comparison to other destinations (Limerick.ie, 2015).

Future Potential

There may be significant funds available to develop the tourism offering in Limerick if successful in the bid to host the European City of Culture in 2020.

With increasing capacity pressure in both Cork and Dublin there is a pressing need to develop Limerick as a tourist destination in its own right and a gateway to Ireland and the Wild Atlantic Way.

According to Tourism Facts (Failte Ireland, 2015), every additional 1,000 tourists support 14 jobs in the tourism industry and therefore increasing visitors to one million by 2020 would result in almost 6,500 new tourism jobs. It is not inconceivable to envisage a further 500,000 visitors per annum by 2040, meaning a further 7,000 jobs.

Conclusion

The development of Limerick's tourism industry is not given adequate consideration in the Draft NPF and therefore it is considered appropriate to increase the NPF population targets for Limerick by at least a further 13,500.

7. Socio-economic impact

Recommendation: Limerick offers the best return on investment in terms of socio-economic benefit from the effective implementation of the NPF. It is recommended that more priority is given to developing high value employment opportunities in Limerick.

Socio-economic context

As per the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis undertaken as part of the ‘Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan’ (LECP), Limerick exhibits high levels of social and economic disadvantage. The city is struggling with significant poverty, deprivation and long-term unemployment. Additionally, there is a comparatively low level of third level qualification in the city compared to its peer cities.

Limerick’s unemployment rate, at 28.9% in 2011 (LECP, 2016), is extremely high. This is not helped by the lower levels of FDI when compared with its peer cities as well as lagging peer cities in terms of high-tech manufacturing. This is compounded by a decreasing number of jobs in small and medium size enterprises between 2007 and 2012. Overall, there was a loss of 11,000 jobs recorded in Limerick city and county between 2007 and 2012 (LECP, 2016).

Conversely, Limerick benefits from a healthy population, a close knit community spirit and strong sporting identity.

Socio-economic opportunities

The NPF offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform the fortunes of Limerick and bring the standard of living up to what we expect in Ireland in 2040.

To achieve this ambitious goal, Limerick needs to be prioritised as a location for new employment. The aim should be to retain the talent pool that is being created in the third level institutions but also to attract a new highly skilled workforce. A burgeoning high-skilled workforce will have a spill-over effect into the lower skilled service jobs, thus reducing the overall unemployment rates. The achievement of the transformation of Limerick is thus predicated upon allocating employment opportunities to the city and accompanying this with the high quality housing and urban environment required by this workforce.

There is huge scope to improve the lives of all Limerick residents through the creation of jobs and encouraging the retention and inward migration of a highly skilled workforce.

Conclusion

Limerick has the most to gain and offers the best return on investment from the effective implementation of an NPF that seeks to improve the quality of life of Ireland’s residents up to 2040 and beyond.

This opportunity must be capitalised on by the prioritisation of Limerick from an employment perspective and providing the necessary infrastructure to attract highly skilled talent.