

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK – SUBMISSION TO NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION PROCESS

BACKGROUND

The University of Limerick makes this Submission to the National Planning Framework with the intent of placing on the agenda of the Minister, the Stakeholders to the Consultation Process and Oireachtas Eireann the opportunity presented by the development of the University Zone for the social, economic and cultural development of the Mid West Region and Ireland. The submission seeks priority for the development in future investment decisions.

The zone includes the existing campus of the University north of the River Shannon in County Clare and a large tract of un-developed land strategically located between the River Shannon and the planned Limerick Northern Distributor Road.

The land area is defined in the Clare County Development Plan 2017 – 2023 as the University Zone.

The potential for the future of the zone is already determined by its location integral to and contiguous with the University campus. The zone is the sole un-developed land bank contiguous to any European University. It is the green-field invitation to embark immediately on a development which will be a game-changer in the future of the Region. It will be of scale sufficient to attract investment by industries wanting to locate on a University campus. It will integrate modern living standards attractive to young international players originating in Cities where car-based transport is deemed unnecessary favouring instead a pleasant integrated living environment where high-amenity living space is mingled into the logical extension of a modern University campus.

The project will see the development of a fresh urban quarter of Town and Gown as a neighbourhood quarter of Limerick City and located in County Clare.

It will rely on public infrastructure in transport, services and amenity and this submission seeks to place the project in priority for investment. In particular the submission emphasises the need for investment in the Limerick Northern Distributor Road, the completion of a Bus-ring Limerick Corridor and the restoration of the Errina Canal waterway

The University makes this submission in support of the submission presented jointly by the Local Authorities of the Region, Limerick Institute of Technology, Mary Immaculate College, Shannon Group, Shannon Foynes Port Company and Mid West Region Action Plan for Jobs.

This submission is referenced in that joint submission.

1. SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 This submission to the National Planning Framework consultative process is on behalf of the University of Limerick.

1.2 The University of Limerick is a long established and well respected University, the first University established since the foundation of the State. The University land holding straddles the River Shannon placing the University strategically at the confluence point of both Counties Limerick and Clare.

1.3 The University has a proven track record of continuous educational development within its own campus lands and is also well versed in the requirements of the commercial and industrial developments through contacts with these sectors since its foundation. The University has also contributed to the cultural and sporting life of the region in its developments together with attention to both providing amenities on its lands and developing the natural amenities that already exist. Through this work the University has made a major contribution to the educational, economic, social and cultural life of the general area.

1.4 The University has had links with the commercial and industrial sector since its inception. This included the first co-operative education programme in the state, with work placement included as part of each degree programme.

1.5 The University has worked in close co-operation with the Local and Regional Authorities down through the years, particularly with respect to their planning and development remits and has made submissions to all relevant plans and strategies, emphasising both its educational role and its contribution to the development of the Region. The University also took part in the preliminary stakeholder consultation process for the National Planning Framework

1.6 The University welcomes the new National Planning Framework and is making this submission because it considers that it has not alone a unique historic perspective on the development issues involved but can also put forward a 'game changing' key project for investment that is spatial, large scale, collaborative, regionally focused and capable of being brought to fruition within a very short framework when essential infrastructure is provided.

The outcome of a successful project would be the provision of a growth point in County Clare that would be national in its implications as it would drive investment in the region.

1.7 In making this submission the University has had particular regard, inter alia, to –

- The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020
- Mid-West Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022
- Mid West Area Strategic Plan 2012-2030
- Regional Indicators report 2014
- Mid West Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017
- The Planning Policy Statement of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government 2015
- The Report on the Preliminary Stakeholder Consultation for the National Planning Framework
- National Planning Framework Ireland 2040 Report: Views of expert group
- Towards a National Planning Framework: A road map for the delivery of the National Planning Framework 2016. December 2015
- National Planning Framework: Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report
- National Planning Framework: Issues and Choices. February 2017
- Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023
- Limerick City Development Plan 2010-2016 (as extended)
- Limerick County Development Plan 2010-2016 (as extended)
- The University's Strategic Plan

1.8 This submission is set out as follows:

Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Origins and development of University of Limerick and expansion into Co. Clare

Section 3. National/Regional planning context of submission

Section 4: Details of the University Investment Zone being put forward for consideration for inclusion in the National Planning Framework

SECTION 2: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK/EXPANSION INTO COUNTY CLARE

2.1 There had long been an ambition to provide a third level/university for Limerick – a campaign began in earnest in the 1950's and in fact a university was proposed in the Lichfield Report in the late 60's. With the surge in development in the 1960's there was a recognition that there was a lack in expertise that was not being satisfied by the existing universities and the state announced the proposed establishment of the National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE) in Limerick in 1969. The Institute opened in 1972 on 50 acres of land purchased around Plassey House in County Limerick. The development of the Institute represented the largest educational building project in the history of the state and was undertaken with state and international funding.

2.2 The Institute was to provide a higher level technical education than that offered by the regional technical colleges, a level that was in effect university level. The NIHE Dublin followed in 1980.

2.3 The Limerick & Dublin Institutes were delivering University level education from the start and were de facto universities. Their recognition as Universities came in 1989 when the NIHE Limerick became the University of Limerick (UL) and the NIHE Dublin became Dublin City University (DCU). With the announcement of University status UL became the first university established since the foundation of the state in 1922.

2.4 The area alongside the University in the townlands of Castletroy and Sreelane was, up to that point, undeveloped farming countryside. The State agencies of IDA, and subsequently from 1987 Shannon Development, recognised the opportunity to build a University hinterland of enterprise entities which would capitalise for the Region on the employment potential of the new Institute's focus on the economic and social development of the Region in which it was established. This approach led to the establishment of the National Technological Park covering some three hundred hectares of land extending principally from the Shannon on the North to the Groody River on the West and the Mulcair River on the East.

2.5 The National Technological park "Zone" was undeveloped as to infrastructure. A plan put in place by the Development Agencies supported by the Local Authority provided key infrastructure including roads, advance industrial and commercial facilities, services as to water, sewage, power and communications facilities. The entity became a leading international brand alongside the Regional brand of the "Shannon Region" and became the focus for a significant number of international industrial enterprises who opted to partner with the then NIHE in research, development and recruitment ultimately leading to the establishment of a significant number of service, research and manufacturing firms in the Park.

2.6 The services required to complete the entity of the Park with the University as its hub have themselves followed as demand gave rise to supply. These include hotels, retail shops, incubation space, leisure facilities, churches, schools, residential housing and a range of facilities commensurate with the needs of a population itself the natural devolution of a University hinterland as modelled throughout the world over centuries.

2.7 International firms were attracted to the Park from the beginning through novel academic concepts developed elsewhere in the world and offered in NIHE Limerick, including the US grade point average, the trimester system and above all the commitment of relevance and excellence to its Industrial neighbours in Graduate placement and research. The decision of the World Bank and the European Investment Bank to commit private funding which allowed rapid expansion of the Institute was driven by this harmony of education and economic progress and was itself key to allowing the Institute to aspire to and secure University status.

2.8 The University expanded rapidly in the 1990's both spatially and in the diversity of educational programmes offered. In 1991 Thomond College of Education and the University were merged and from that year also degrees from Mary Immaculate Collage (Mary I) were awarded by the University diversifying even further its third level influence in Limerick City and County. By 1998 the campus area in Limerick had also increased substantially in area and in that year was 200 acres (81 ha).

2.9 When the Institute opened in 1972 it enrolled 100 students and had 2000 sq metres of educational space. By 2017 the University has expanded and diversified such that there are now 13,581 students. The University land holding is now 242 acres (97.9 ha) in the Limerick Campus and 124 acres (50 ha) in Clare showing its rapid expansion in 45 years.

2.10 While the University was expanding, changes were occurring at national, regional and local level with respect to its planning context.

In 2002 the National Spatial Strategy was published to cover the period 2002 – 2020, a twenty year framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development and population growth in Ireland with an object to assist in the implementation of the then extant National Development Plan 2000-2006.

The Strategy introduced the key concepts '*Gateways*' and '*Hubs*', seeking to develop critical mass around such development areas. '*Gateways*' were designated centres with the strategic location, nationally and relative to their surrounding areas, to provide national – scale social and economic infrastructure and support services. '*Hubs*' were strong towns who would support balanced development by linking the capability of the gateways to other areas. The NSS recognized Limerick/Shannon as a Gateway and Ennis as a hub. Development in these areas was recognised as key features in the achievement of the strategy. The existence of a University was one of the key elements recognised as desirable to the recognition of an urban area as a '*Gateway*' and the University of Limerick fulfilled this function for Limerick.

2.11 The very earliest ambitions of the National Institute for Higher Education reflected the desire that the Institute should have a strong presence in County Clare. The Director of the Institute approached Clare County Council to discuss this ambition as early as 1970 and the first strategy aimed at the development of a Campus in County Clare was formulated from that year.

2.12 There were a number of issues to be addressed to allow expansion into Clare. Firstly, the University did not own land at this location. Secondly, the River Shannon formed a strong physical barrier as there were no crossing points to allow what might have been in other cases a logical and easy expansion into the County. The University began to purchase land in County Clare in 1999 to support its expansion and began planning for vehicular and pedestrian access to link its existing campus with the Clare lands.

2.13 The expansion into Clare was strongly welcomed and supported by the elected members of Clare County Council at policy level since the 1999 County Development Plan which outlined its policy to *‘encourage the development of third level educational opportunities in County Clare, including the expansion of the University of Limerick campus and the development of other university facilities in the County’* and the Council began zoning land to facilitate this expansion from 2003 onwards with the Council recognising that the expansion would have direct and indirect positive benefits not alone to education in the County but to the economic and social infrastructure of the County Clare and the mid-west region.

2.14 The expansion into Clare could not be supported by the limited road structure on the County Clare side. For this reason, in the interim, a new vehicular/pedestrian bridge had to be constructed by the University to access the Clare campus from the Limerick side. This bridge (The University Bridge) was officially opened in 2004 and allowed development to proceed on the ‘Clare Campus’ followed in 2009 by the construction of a dedicated pedestrian bridge (The Living Bridge). Despite some 40% of the built stock of the University being de facto in County Clare all access still remains through the Limerick campus with significant limiting effects on the future expansion of the whole campus and its hinterland. Planning permissions for developments in the Clare Campus have all, of necessity, been granted subject to the condition that no vehicular access to the campus is permitted from County Clare as the adjacent Clare road network is inadequate to serve such traffic.

2.15 The physical expansion of the University into Clare occurred during a period of significant change for the University itself. The growth of the University over that period had been two-fold. Expansion of both student numbers and the physical campus has seen the University double in size between the opening of the bridge to the Clare campus and, parallel with this expansion, the University diversified its remit in both teaching and research during this period to parallel developments in higher education in the developed world. Much of the developments over this period were not foreseen but arose from opportunity generated by the University’s participation in shaping and responding to national economic and social imperatives.

These developments included the establishment of the Country’s first Graduate Entry Medical School, the establishment of a practise based International School for the performing Arts and a range of developments in Health and Social sciences and Sport. Each of these faculties was based in County Clare and are poised for further expansion, diversification and partnership.

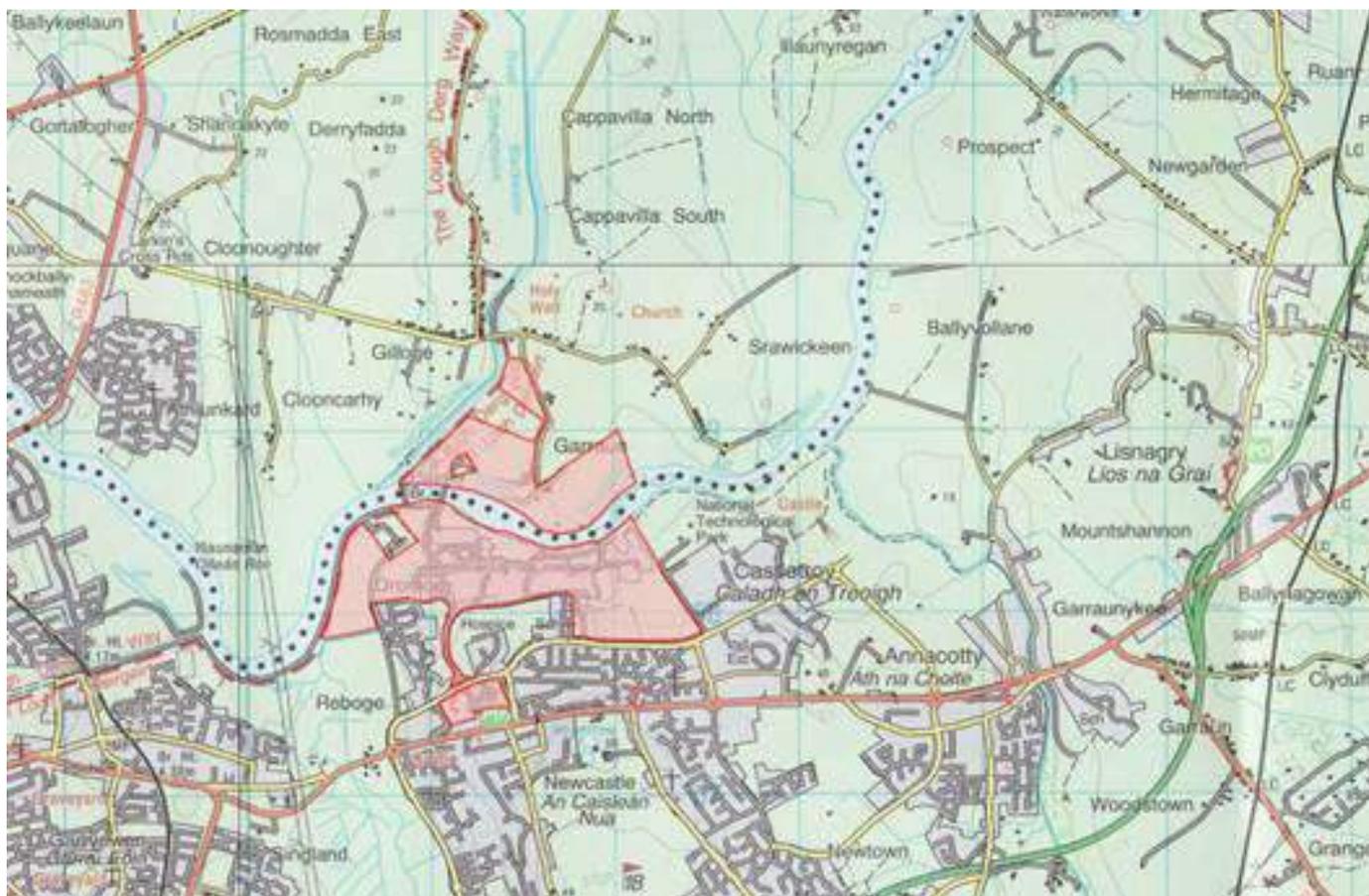
2.16 To date the following developments have been completed on the Clare Campus

- Thomond Village Student Accommodation
- The Health Sciences Building
- Cappavilla Student Village
- The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance
- Post Graduate Medical School and its attendant accommodation complex

- President's House
- Sports Complex, including playing fields and sporting pavilion

2.17 The map below shows the location and extent of the University of Limerick's land holding, coloured pink.

As mentioned earlier, the Limerick Campus is 242 acres (97.9 ha) in extent and the Clare Campus is 124 acres (50 ha) in extent.



University of Limerick Land Holding Map

2.18 The expansion of the University into County Clare saw the concurrent evolution of local planning policy and context relating to the presence of the University in Clare. As the physical development of the University's land holding took place, an expanded vision of the University's potential contribution to Clare, not alone in educational terms, but to the economic and social life of the County was acknowledged and encouraged in planning policy and objectives in the Clare County Development Plans and Local Area Plans that were adopted since 1999.

2.19 The 2005 County Development Plan/2003 Local Area Plan designated the University and the Gillogue area in the vicinity (former Burlington factory site) as a 'University Strategic Development Area', one of 3 identified areas for the focus of economic growth within what was called the 'Limerick/Ennis/Shannon Corridor' economic growth area. The

2009 Local Area Plan built on this strategic focus by designating the University lands and their wider hinterland as a 'University Zone.' *The 2011-2017 gave further emphasis to the importance and role of the University by zoning the lands in the County Development Plan. This zoning set reflected the overall priority of the Clare County Council for the expansion of the University, as it was one of only 2 areas of lands given prominence in the County Development Plan by its zoning – the other being lands in the Shannon Estuary under the SIFP. (all other lands in the county were zoned in the lower level Local Area Plans)*

2.20 The 2017-2023 Clare County Development Plan, made on 19/12/2016 and effective from 25/1/2017, replaces all previous development plans in the County, including the plans of the previous Planning Authorities of Ennis and Kiltrush and the 4 Local Area Plans that existed to that date. The new Clare County Development Plan retains the University Zone designation but expands once again on the vision and policies with respect to the area. This will be detailed in Section 4 of this submission.

2.21 There has been substantial and continued investment by the University since its initial development at this location. In the last 10 years € 960 million euro has been invested in campus developments €382 million of this has been invested in the new campus in Co. Clare.

2.22 Direct employment by the University has expanded greatly from its start in 1970 to 650 in 1991 and to 1,750 in 2017. The University itself is therefore a major employer in the region.

2.23 The University setting is also a residential entity with a substantial number of students living on campus. The campus currently is home to 2,700 students with 1,300 living on the Clare side of the Shannon. Uses complementary to the educational, employment and residential elements have resulted in the development of some 15 restaurants, a church, a bank, sports complexes etc. The result is that the combined campus areas already have the uses and population equivalent of a small town. During semester the campus population is approximately double the population of Nenagh and half that of the combined Ennis and Clarecastle conurbation both being significant County Towns within 30 minutes driving distance.

SECTION 3: NATIONAL/REGIONAL PLANNING CONTEXT OF SUBMISSION

3.1 The previous section has dealt with the establishment of the University of Limerick and its expansion, including that in County Clare and the evolution and growing importance of the University lands in Planning Land-use policy in the County Development Plans. Its higher education establishment role, history of involvement at national, regional level, linkages into the economic, social, community and local government life of the Mid West region and being a developer in its own right has given the University Authority an appreciation of what might be achieved with the right investment in the right area and how that would contribute to the proper planning and sustainable development of the nation.

This section examines the national and regional/local context for the University's project submission, looking at opportunities and needs from a spatial planning viewpoint.

3.2. National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020: The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) set out to balance regional development, introducing the concept of 'gateways' and 'hubs' that between them encompassed 23 cities and towns spread across the country.

The concept behind the strategy was that each would grow to a 'critical' mass and provide a spatial focus which would move development away from the Dublin/wider Dublin area while at the same time spreading development out to their wider regional catchment areas. One of the criteria for the selection of the 'Gateways' was the presence of a University. The University of Limerick fulfilled that function for the City of Limerick/ joint Shannon Gateway.

While the NSS established spatial planning at a national level and was a touchstone in relation to planning for the last 15 years, it suffered from a number of drawbacks and was undermined by other factors viz -

- Dublin and the wider Dublin region was allowed to continue to grow in a way that, while to some degree necessary for national growth, at the same time bore no particular reference to the impact of this unbridled growth on the need for regional balance, a concept that was at the core of the NSS concept
- The spread of selected centres was too wide for the investment and resources available, particular since Dublin was still in the mix from the point of view of a selected development location
- Some Government action went against the thrust of the strategy, particularly the 2003 decision to relocate government departments and state agencies out of Dublin but with little regard for the designated Gateways and Hubs. This decentralisation undermined both the concept and the impetus of the spatial strategy and reflected poorly on the Government's own 'buy in' to the project.

- The recession that hit from 2008 onwards served as the death knell for the remnants of the strategy that remained. The investment necessary (the gateway fund) was not there to promote the regions in any meaningful way for some years and Dublin continued to be the central focus as the crisis deepened and the National Development Plan was adjusted.
- Census results indicated that population growth was happening at a remove from but under the influence of the gateways that in some cases were losing population, putting pressure on the countryside and small villages and towns and giving rise to increased commuting

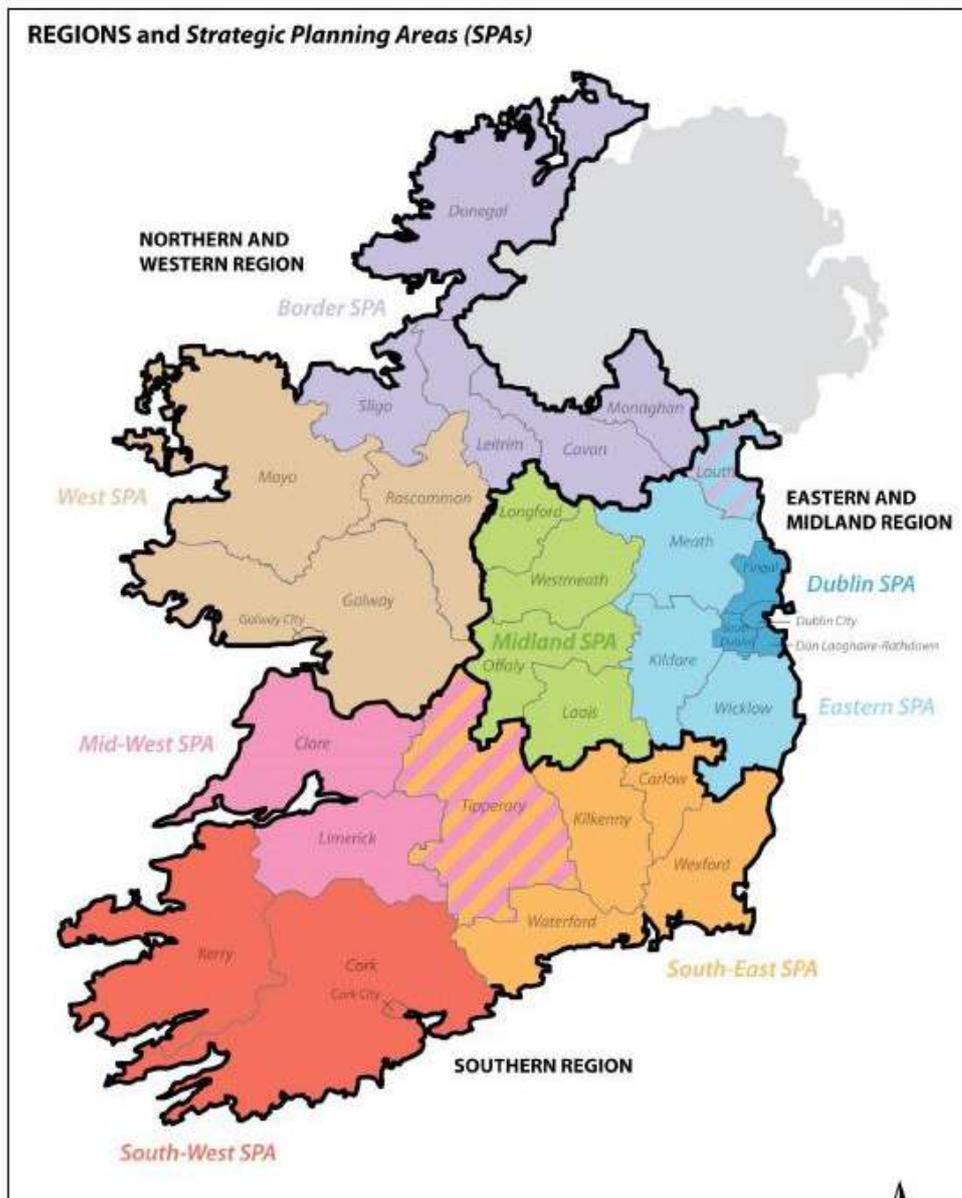
The NSS did, however, become part of the national conversation and was built into national and regional plans. It was a key element in the decisions of An Bord Pleanála in its assessment of public and private development projects that fell within its remit. The needs of the NSS also underpinned the introduction of the ‘Core Strategy’ concept into county development plans by means of the Planning & Development Act 2010 onwards which ensured that county plans had to abide by regional and national policy objectives.

3.3 Regional Context: The spatial context in this submission is the Mid West Strategic Planning Area. This was known as the Mid West ‘Region’ prior to its amalgamation in the new Southern Regional Assembly in 2015. This Mid West Strategic Planning Area covers the Counties of Clare, Limerick and Tipperary as indicated below –



‘Map of Midwest Region’ Extract from figure 2: MidWest Region Action Plan for jobs 2015-2017

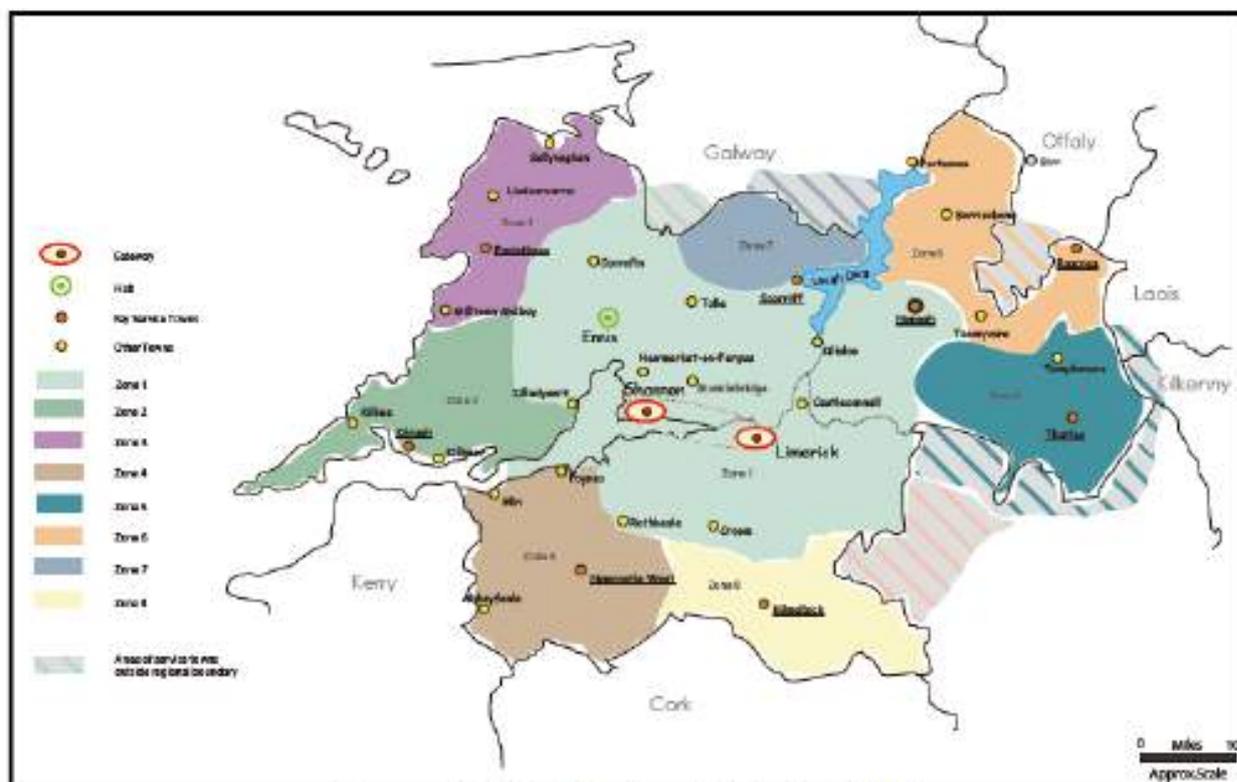
The Midwest Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2020 give effect at regional level to the NSS spatial planning framework and directly informs the county development plans in the three relevant counties. These guidelines will, however, be superseded by the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy that will be prepared by the Southern Regional Assembly in due course and this in turn will be governed by the provision of the new National Spatial Framework. The new regions and the strategic planning areas are indicated below.



Map of new Regions and Strategic Planning Areas as of 2015
Extract from 'Towards a National Planning Framework' 2015

As of now the Mid West Strategic Planning Area is divided into regional development zones as indicated below.

Figure 2.2 Regional Development Zones



Source: Mid-West Regional Authority (2010)

The University of Limerick is located in Zone 1. Zone 1 is spatially in the centre of the zone and is the core area of the region. It has a high population growth, good accessibility, a strong settlement presence and varied community and social facilities. Zone 1 is the economic powerhouse of the region containing the linked gateway of Limerick City and Shannon and the hub town of Ennis.

The performance of the Limerick City and the Mid West region relative to the nation and to other regions has been mixed –

- In population terms, of the 5 cities in the Country (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford) only the built up area of Galway experienced consistent growth in excess of the national average (31%) from 1996 to 2016 and the growth in question was limited at 23,000.

The Limerick built up area grew by 20% over the period in question, a population growth of 15,600. This equalled the percentage growth of Waterford and was ahead of Cork (16%)

- The Regional Indicators Report of 2014 (a monitoring framework primarily for implementation of the regional planning guidelines) acknowledges that employment is the key driver of economic activity. In this regard the employment rate reported in the Mid West at the time of the report was 62.9% - above that of the Border (57.8%); the South East (60.4%) and the Midlands (61.7%) but behind that of the remaining four regions. The unemployment rate was 15.6% - higher than Dublin (11.1%), the south west (11.1%) the west (12.8%), the Mid East (14.1%) and the Border (15.4%) and only lower than the midland (17%) and south east (18.4%).

- Twenty four indicators in total were used in the Regional Indicators Report of 2014 highlighting the significant needs and differences between the 8 regions across a wide spectrum and representing the first time a comprehensive methodology was used to set out baseline figures as an aid to establish progress in achieving objectives of the regional planning guidelines/NSS. It is acknowledged in the report that the economic recession would have impacted greatly on targets.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in the regions is of particular importance. Data given in the Regional Indicators report shows that FDI is not uniform across regions. The report states –

The West, Dublin and South-West Regions show a strong link with IDA companies and, together with the Mid-West (when Shannon Development Companies are included in the figures), have the largest number of IDA Companies. The remaining regions have a similar level and number of IDA Companies. When the number of IDA Companies is measured against the population of each region, the Mid-West, Dublin and South-West have a comparatively higher proportion of IDA Companies per population when compared to other regions. There is a clear pattern emerging in that new FDI companies gravitate towards existing companies already established in Ireland. The clustering effect is, therefore, obvious and this can be seen when IDA companies are mapped spatially throughout the country.

This indicates a clustering effect in the general Limerick area which can be built on in any new strategy. It can be noted, however, that the figures relate predominately to Limerick City and Shannon. The impact of any additional employment will depend on its connectively/influence to and on the remainder of the region.

In looking forward the Regional Indicators Report makes particular reference to the ‘vital’ role FDI plays in the Irish economy. The clustering effect around the main Cities is both a challenge and an opportunity. The Report goes on to state in the Outlook section that the IDA Horizon 2020 strategy indicates that it will increase its focus on winning new investments in the following areas:

- *Global services*
- *High-end manufacturing*
- *Research, development and innovation.*

The sectors requiring focus are as follows –

- *Life sciences*
 - *Pharma and biopharma*
 - *Medical devices*
- *Information & communications technology*
- *Financial services*
- *Content industry, consumer and business services*
- *Diversified industries and engineering*
- *Clean technologies.*

In looking forward the Report states –

All regions must, therefore, strive to become competitive and create the right environment and conditions to attract FDI. Given the importance of the nature, scale and type of employment offered by IDA Companies, it is increasingly obvious that their contribution to regions is significant and, therefore, vital to their future prosperity

3.4 Looking forward: The need to review and alter approaches as necessary is now timely especially given the fact that the country is coming out of recession.

Looking forward the drawbacks of the NSS need to be counteracted and regional imbalance addressed, including the growth of Dublin/Dublin region.

At national level –

- The growth of Dublin/the Dublin area and the general eastern seaboard, to the detriment of the remainder of the regional areas, has to be curtailed and decisions taken to implement this issue by penalties/subventions as necessary
- A limited number of targeted areas have to be selected to counteract Dublin/Dublin area
- The targeted areas need to have the potential to grow and influence their respective regions in economic terms. For this reason the selected areas are likely to be the main Cities and their respective hinterlands, particularly in the early phases.
- Substantial infrastructural investment has to be made in the selected targeted areas

- Public and private level investment has to be encouraged and facilitated in the selected targeted areas
- City areas and the larger towns in each county have to be made attractive places to live to counteract the pull of the countryside and protect the attractiveness of the smaller towns and villages which need to be allowed to grow at a pace which will not destroy their qualities.

At regional level –

- The region has performed in the ‘midrange’ of performance during the period since the introduction of the NSS. The City has had limited growth, however, and the benefits of what development there has been has been limited in economic terms and certainly this growth has had limited spin off effects into the region, particularly the more rural counties of Clare and Tipperary.
- Coming out of recession and looking forward investment in the region will have to be such as to maximise returns and to develop a synergy around the existing and potential assets that are available. In this regard the Region has the potential to develop as a strong counterpoint to Dublin if it can properly capitalise on significant assets including -
 - The City of Limerick/hinterland/Shannon former Gateway urban core
 - The good national road linkages developed in recent years
 - The underutilised airport of Shannon which has significant capacity to develop not alone regionally as a passenger and freight hub but could be further developed as a national alternative to the congested Dublin airport. In this regard, important questions need to be addressed regarding how to use this underused capacity and it is understood that a general review at national level is proposed. There is already talk of increasing capacity in Dublin airport and even an additional terminal. How would this be reconciled with the National Planning Framework if growth is to be redirected to the regions? Dublin Airport already handles 85% of Irish air traffic while Shannon remains relatively underused.
 - The significant available commercial and industrial lands across the region, including in particular extensive lands in the general City area but also at Shannon and in the UL Development Zone. The UL Development Zone will be examined in more detail in the next section
 - The deep water resource of the Shannon Estuary and attendant land based commercial/industrial land holding

- The nationally recognised tourist attractions and facilities in the Region including the Burren National Park, Wild Atlantic Way, Cliffs of Moher etc.
- Opportunities to develop a new model of space for living and working which emphasises sustainability, amenity and work/life balance. The UL investment zone is being put forward as one significant example of how this could be achieved.

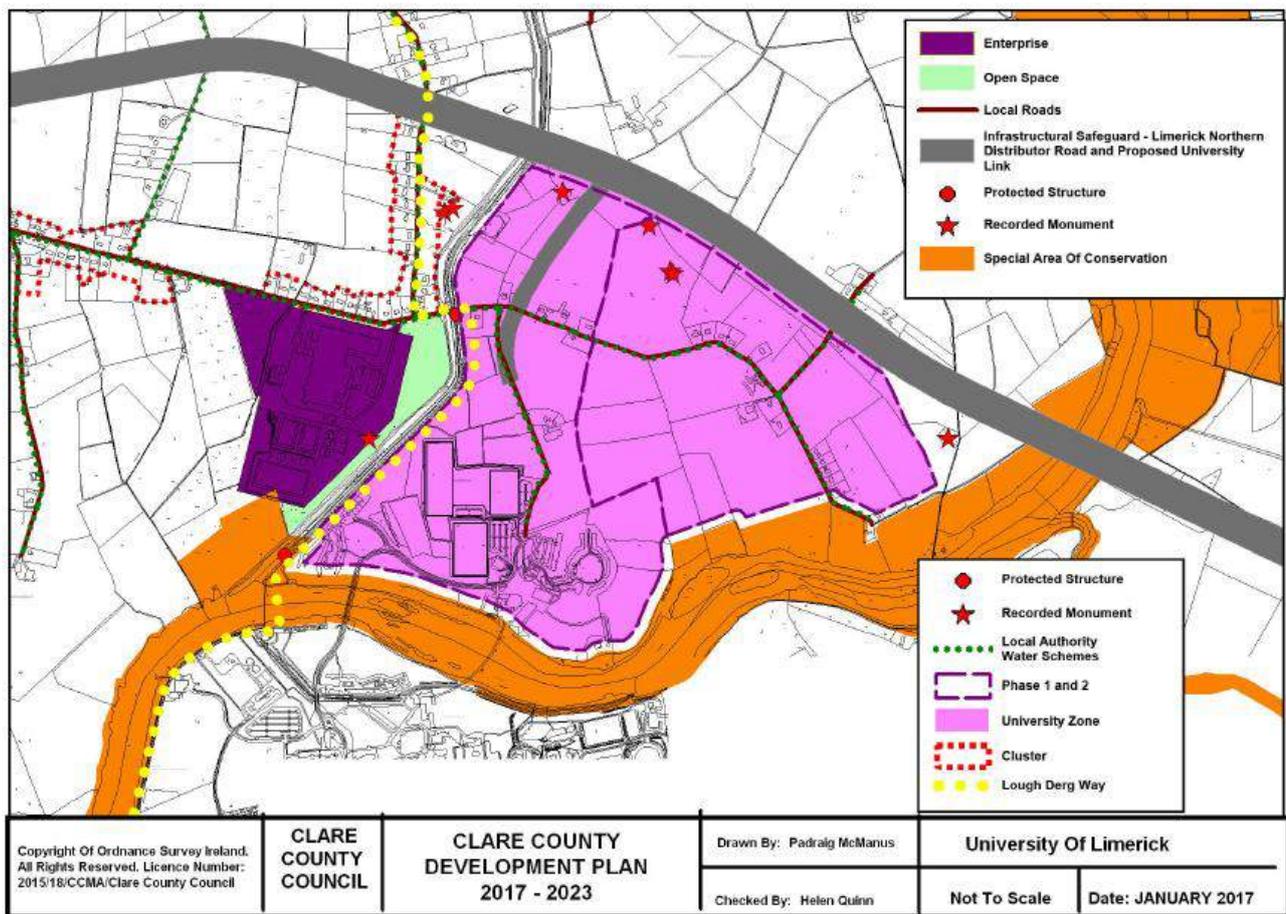
SECTION 4: DETAILS OF UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK INVESTMENT ZONE

4.1 Introduction: Section 1 of this submission has outlined the background to the development of the University of Limerick and its subsequent expansion in Co. Limerick and into County Clare.

This section sets out details of an innovative Investment Zone Project taking in the Clare Campus lands and its hinterland. This zone will be a substantial growth point in its own right in County Clare but will also be an innovative project in the way in which it is conceived and in its linkage to the University. The section will also indicate how the project has ‘game changing’ concepts and key potential that will tie in with what the new National Planning Framework sets out to achieve going forward.

The infrastructure required to develop the zone is modest relative to the scale of the project, the return on investment locally and the overall boost to employment on a scale sufficient to impact nationally

4.2 The University Zone/Investment Zone: The lands owned by the University in County Clare together with lands in the immediate vicinity have been designated as a ‘*University Zone*’ in the Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023, adopted by the Council on 19th. December 2016 and effective from 25th. January 2017. The zone is indicated on the map overleaf, copied from the County Clare Plan and referred to in the text as Map 6A.



This Zone is the Zone being put forward as an ‘Investment Zone’ in relation to the National Planning Framework.

The ‘University Zone’ lands are indicated in light purple on the map. The area of the Zone is 135 hectares. This is perceived in the longer term context as forming the nucleus of the zone with scope for further expansion north. The zone is physically defined at its boundaries by the Errinagh Canal along its western boundary, the River Shannon/River Shannon SAC along the southern boundary, the proposed Northern Distributor Road (LNDR) along the northern/north east boundary and agricultural lands to the east. A white ‘buffer zone’ runs between the Zone and the River Shannon/River Shannon SAC. The LNDR is designed in such paradigm as to ultimately facilitate development to the north of its route.

A public road (Srawickeen Road) runs through the zone south east to west. A minor road (Garraun Road) runs North – South off the Srawickeen Road. Both roads are single carriageway local roads limited in width and deficient in horizontal alignment. A new link road access is proposed to the University Zone/Clare Campus from the Northern Distributor Road - this is shown on the Council map, coloured grey and running south/south west from the distributor road, crossing the Srawickeen Road and located towards the western end of the zone.

The proposed Northern Distributor Road will give access from the University Zone directly into County Clare and in particular will help to drive investment influence from the Clare Campus more directly into that county.

4.3 The University is acknowledged at section 6.3.5 of the Plan as a *'significant strategic asset'* and as a *'critical driver of economic development and the fostering of an innovative, knowledge-based economy for the county and Mid-West and West Regions'*.

4.4 While the linkage of the Clare Campus/University Zone with the proposed Northern Distributor Road will give road access for the first time directly to the County of Clare, this direct link will also create a direct road linkage with Shannon International Airport, the North of Limerick City, Ennis and the west. The road linkages thus created will provide a very important means by which the benefits of the development of this Zone can be spread into County Clare and the Mid West Region in general and the synergy of the development, coupled with that of the other nearby growth points in Clare (particularly Shannon International Airport and environs and the Shannon Estuary) will be such as to generate critical drivers of the economy going forward.

4.5 Coupled with the new road linkage, the University is supporting proposals to re-open the Errina Canal which runs along the western end of the University Zone. It is proposed that this would be re-opened as a functioning waterway and would facilitate water-borne access to the Clare Campus.

The Errina Canal is the waterway connecting Limerick City with the Shannon Navigation system. The canal was first built to connect the City with Dublin via the Shannon River and the Grand and Royal Canal systems. At just 9km in length the canal is one of the shortest on the Island. The Errina canal opened in 1799 and closed in 1925 following the construction of the "Shannon Scheme" when the construction of the dam at Parteen Weir rendered navigation impractical. At that time it was considered that rail and road traffic would replace the cargo function of the canal. That decision paralleled the decline in use of the Island's overall canal network including the canals of the Shannon system. However by the late 1970s the value of the waterways as a recreational asset was becoming defined and the decision of Government in 1987 to embark on the restoration of the Erne Canal initiated the restoration of the central Shannon system including the Ballinamore and Ballyconnel canals to full use. The project began a period of intense activity beyond the restoration of the navigation system to include the installation of European class navigation and mooring facilities on the waterways network and became immensely successful in returning commercial trade to the towns and villages on route. Limerick City remains the sole destination on the Shannon system to be still effectively isolated from the Shannon Navigation system. The restoration of the Errina Canal is the last link in restoring the role of Limerick City as a destination maritime city. Significant stretches of the canal bound the University campus. The return on investment on existing canal restoration projects is estimated to run to up to double digit levels of returns. The return on the restoration of the Errina Canal will be significantly greater than the average as the destination point is a city and as the current boat population in the lower Shannon south of Killaloe is currently only a fraction of the population north.

4.6 Going forward, a strategic linkage to the Galway - Ennis- Limerick Railway line is also proposed as is the prospect of commute linkage to a docking point on the current Limerick -Ballybrophy rail line.

The combined access linkages (road, water, rail) would in the future provide sustainability attributes to what the University envisages as a unique urban quarter focussed on the University, having the qualities of an older style European *'town and gown'* development where people study, work, live and recreate in the same area.

4.7 The 'Town and Gown' concept is referred to in the Clare County Development Plan at section 6.3.5 where it sets out the basis for this concept -

'International experience of the development of universities and, in particular, those universities whose strategic mission focuses on knowledge transfer, indicates that their hinterland adapts quickly to become a focus for development arising from, and complementary to, the existence of the university. The potential of such hinterlands in terms of economic and social development is significant. The pace of hinterland development is determined by the factors of university-industry linkages, excellent relevant graduate output, modern connectivity infrastructure and the development of a "town and gown" environment commensurate with the requirements of a permanent living, working and social population. International university hinterland development models reflect the seamless integration of learning, research, employment, living and on-going economic, social and cultural development in permanent development nodes which become the globalisation nucleus of the administrative area in which they exist'.

4.8 The Investment Zone now proposed is based on this 'Town and Gown' concept, albeit spatially located on the edge of the City of Limerick.

The developments envisaged for the Zone are integrated developments based on the following –

- Expansion of the University's core educational facilities
- Research, including such research as would tie in with national and international industrial/commercial/medical developments, linking the University with cutting edge advances in these fields and providing a base for attracting industry and commerce to provide spatial linkages within the Investment Zone itself.
- Enterprise and start up business units
- FDI projects that would benefit from a base within the Zone
- High quality residential development complementary to and directly related to international business requirements for service industry and enterprise developments locating within the zone
- Student residential quarters and student support facilities
- Canal and riverside water- based uses and walkways
- Recreational and sports/social uses and green quarter provision

- Social and retail usage of a scale to service the living and working environment provided by the Investment Zone

4.9 The developed Investment Zone and its uses would create a *'living and working'* environment that would tie in with what is envisaged by the National Planning Framework.

The National Planning Framework Issues and Choices document sets out the challenges going forward regarding where people would live and work in the next 20 years; their health and wellbeing; connectivity and how we would develop 'places' and have regard to sustainability.

The University is putting forward a vision for the Zone in this context in that it would be –

- A defined spatial entity reaching a permanent population of 20,000 people in the first ten years of its development
- Development of a scale which would create a regional impact and be recognised at national level in the National Planning Framework as one that would help to deliver this impact
- Linked to the University in a planned and co-ordinated way both physically and functionally, partnered with the University.
- A natural integrated expansion of Limerick City neighbourhood hinterland
- Providing living and working space that would be sustainable by creating maximum linkage between those working and living in the Zone, based on their employment in the University and developments in the Zone itself
- A connected place linked to Limerick City by a circular bus corridor utilising the planned Limerick Northern Distributor Road, the existing Condell Road, Childers Road and a planned direct route bus corridor between the University and the City. Funding has been announced for this Direct Route element
- A critical driver of economic development in the Region
- A connected place linked to Clare and Limerick by means of the Errina Canal emphasising the sense of place and putting the campus at the welcoming point of boat traffic to the City.
- A connected place of high technology and linkage to the smart economy
- An attractive living environment with the character of a 'town' created on the concept of the old 'town and gown' characteristic of European towns of the past and based on sustainability principles

- A sustainable living, working, recreational place modelled on modern spatial environments where reliance on personal transport modes is replaced by homogenous commutes thereby providing an attractive destination to young mobile talent from Cities where car driving has become an obsolete skill
- An environment that will attract mobile FDI given the land availability, established land use zoning, established services, good road access to the National Road Network and to Shannon International Airport and direct on site links to the University with its educational services, graduate and undergraduate programmes, work placements and research capabilities. The Regional Indicators Report emphasises the vital role FDI is to play in economic development going forward and refers in particular to uses that the University Zone is particularly suited for including global services, research, development and innovation, life sciences (pharma and biopharma, medical devices), information and communications technology, etc.
- A spatial driver of economic development in South East Clare which when allied to the development growth resources of Shannon International Airport, Shannon Westpark, the Shannon Free Zone and the Shannon Estuary, would create a comprehensive growth corridor in this part of County Clare, creating employment and a substantial return for investment in public infrastructural development funds.

4.10 The University of Limerick is putting forward this Zone for consideration in the knowledge that it has an established track record not just as a provider of third level education but also a track record in research, integration with industry and commerce and as a developer in its own right.

4.11 The crucial initial public infrastructural requirements in the initial phase is the creation of the linkage into the National Road Network of County Clare and to Shannon International Airport by the provision of the Northern Distributor Road.

4.12 Additional infrastructure investment in the provision of public transport including bus and rail links and the restoration of the Errina Canal waterway are vital to the integral development of the zone