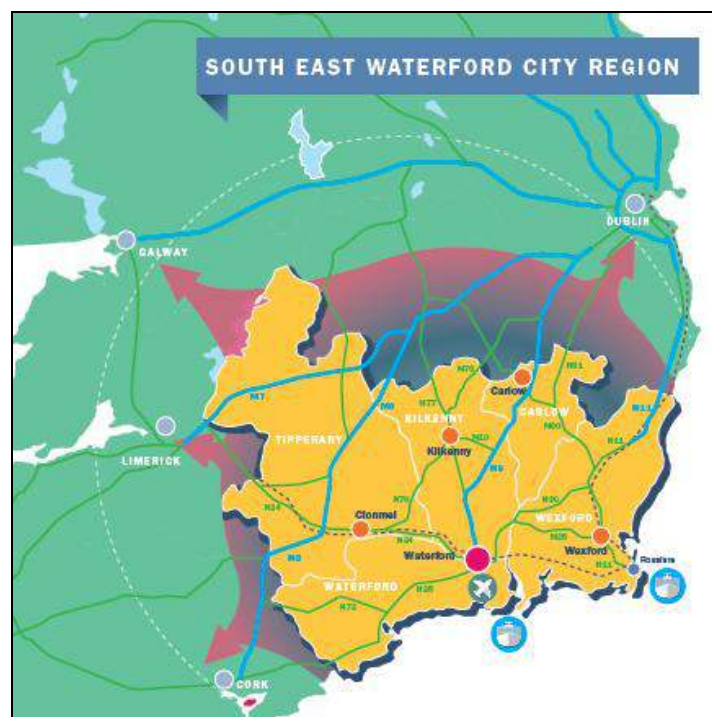


Consultation response from Wexford County Council to the National Planning Framework

Wexford County Council welcomes the opportunity to submit observations to the National Planning Framework (NPF). The NPF will set out the framework for the future development of the Country and it is imperative that it reflects both the wishes of the people and the exigencies of proper planning and sustainable development. The NPF will play a crucial role in addressing disparities that have occurred both spatially and in terms of development and advantage. In order to do so it is imperative that the Framework sets out a clear strategy by which all agencies and infrastructure providers are bound.

Wexford County Council supports the submission of the South East Waterford City Region. The region offers an attractive and viable alternative development region; investment and targeted development will both revitalise this region and take pressure off the Dublin Region. Moreover, the region, due to its close physical links to Dublin, access gateways to Britain and Europe and natural and cultural assets is ideally positioned to benefit both the Dublin and South-east regions and by consequence the Country.



South East Waterford City Region in Context

Settlement Strategy

Wexford County Council acknowledges the need to develop a strong city region in the South East and supports the development of Waterford City to grow to 100,000 people in order to reach the economies of scale necessary for the region to succeed.

Wexford County Council also acknowledges the importance of the urban network of towns and villages within the region as critical to the region's growth. Within County Wexford it will therefore be essential that Wexford, Enniscorthy, New Ross and Gorey are identified for growth and are provided with the infrastructure to enable this growth. There is a need to retain a strong sub-regional urban structure of connected vibrant towns and this can only be achieved through economies of scale and sustainable growth.

Wexford County Council therefore considers that, in order for the South East to achieve a strong City Region, there is a requirement to grow Wexford Town to 35-40,000 people and Gorey, Enniscorthy and New Ross to 15-20,000 people. Continued investment in the social and physical infrastructure of villages will also be critical to retain strong rural communities and, as such, the National Planning Framework needs to provide for Irish Water's investment in smaller localised wastewater treatment plants.

It must also be acknowledged that, notwithstanding efforts by Wexford County Council to control development and zoning within the sphere of the Dublin region, it will continue to be an attractive location for commuters. While this will be carefully managed by Wexford County Council, there will continue to be a high level of commuter related in-migration to the County putting pressure on housing supply for existing and future residents. The NPF will need to consider this and mechanisms to address this issue.

Gateway to Europe

Rosslare Euro Port provides the closest gateway to Continental Europe. It is geographically located at the position closest to mainland Europe and it has the capacity to carry additional traffic. It provides an alternative to the land-bridge crossing the UK which is likely to be under threat as a result of the UK leaving the European Union.

The development and promotion of Rosslare Euro Port - a direct and strategic transport link to the European Union - will provide value for money investment that will improve our competitiveness and help retain Ireland's freedom of movement of people, goods and services.

Furthermore, it is recognised that Dublin Port is physically limited in its capacity for future development being constrained by Dublin city on one side and the protected habitats of Dublin Bay on the other. Further investment in the development of Rosslare Europort can offer a viable complimentary port which, working together with Dublin Port and Belview, can maximise freight and passenger transport for the benefit of the Country.

Education

Wexford County Council recognises the need to invest in all levels of education throughout the County. Current deficiencies at 2nd Level within the County must be addressed urgently. The Council is acutely aware of the disadvantage in the Region due to the absence of a University. The Council therefore considers that the development of a Technological University of the South East as critical to the provision of affordable and accessible educational opportunities and the economic development of the region.

Health

The expansion of the University Hospital network in Dublin and Waterford benefits the residents of County Wexford and is supported by Wexford County Council. Wexford General Hospital must also be expanded along with the General Hospitals in the main towns of the region. Wexford Hospital must have a key role in providing additional health care services alongside the specialist services provided by the University Hospitals. The development of University Hospitals cannot, however, be at the expense of the existing services including the A&E Departments in the towns.

The Council supports the continued expansion of services at Wexford General Hospital to meet the needs of the expanding and aging population. The Council also notes the need to continue with the investment in primary care facilities for the towns of Gorey, Enniscorthy and New Ross.

Wexford County Council notes the continued need to develop mental health services within the County. The current deficiencies in this service must be improved to support those in need.

Housing

Wexford County Council notes that the projected increase in population will require new housing solutions that provide for the housing needs of the County's residents. Additional

investment to provide for social housing is critical to the development of sustainable communities. New housing solutions need to take account of the aging population and the likely reliance on social housing to provide affordable, safe and warm accommodation.

Economic Development

It is expected that the success of the National Planning Framework will be measured on the provision of balanced economic growth throughout Ireland. Growth and attractiveness of the towns and cities is contingent on creating new employment opportunities and supporting existing industries.

Wexford County Council has prepared and is implementing strategies to grow indigenous industries and lay the ground for inward investment opportunities. County Wexford can also provide an attractive alternative to overheating of the capital's economy by providing strategic, serviced land banks therefore contributing to the Country's competitiveness.

Investment made by Wexford County Council will require continued support and partnership from Government agencies. The development of the service/financial support industries is seen as a key growth area for the County. The strength of the County's tourism, industrial and agricultural sectors will require continued support and innovation to deal with the challenges of the UK exiting the European Union.

Key Infrastructure

The key transport and water services infrastructure deficiencies that must be addressed to ensure the balanced growth of County Wexford are as follows-

- Completion of the M11 to Wexford and N25 Wexford to Rosslare Harbour
- Improvements to the N25 Wexford to New Ross to Waterford
- Upgrading Enniscorthy to New Ross N30 including Clonroche by-pass
- Upgrading of Enniscorthy to Carlow N80
- Connection of New Ross to the M9
- Extension of the energy networks including the Gas Network
- Delivery of the broadband infrastructure throughout the County

- Carry out the planned expansion of the Enniscorthy wastewater treatment plant
- Plan expansion of Wexford wastewater treatment plant
- Develop network of village treatment plants
- Retention and upgrading of the Rosslare-Dublin Rail line
- Development and maximization of the port and port related development at Rosslare.
- Extension and deepening of the Rosslare Europort,
- Develop freight services on the rail lines connecting to Rosslare Europort
- Retention and expansion of the bus network including linkages to the Towns within the Region as well as services to Waterford and the capital.
- Coastal Protection and flood protection to established settlements.

Conclusion

Wexford is an attractive place to live with an excellent quality of life. It is heavily influenced by its close proximity to Dublin which has resulted in a number advantages such as access to the capital's services and employment opportunities. It has also resulted in pressures; there has been significant growth experienced in the north of the county and this will extend further south with the completion of the M11 Enniscorthy by-pass. Not all of this growth is negative, especially for those choosing to make their homes and bring up families in this attractive and secure environment. The settlements of the County remain sustainable and attractive places to live, with Gorey, the town that has experienced the highest growth, still a vibrant and well serviced town.

The growth that the County has experienced and will see in the future brings the need for services, infrastructure and employment. In order to develop a successful urban structure, it is the Council's view, that essential infrastructure needs to be front loaded. Towns and cities need to be further developed to ensure that they are vibrant, connected, clean, secure and healthy. Such towns can provide additional alternative capacity for growth at a fraction of the comparable cost to accommodate the same growth in Dublin. In this regard it is considered that Wexford and the South-east can offer an excellent value proposition for development.