



Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Phort Láirge
Waterford City & County Council

Ireland 2040 – Our Plan

National Planning Framework

Submission on behalf of Waterford City and County Council

Waterford City
SE Regional Economic Driver (2040)

INTRODUCTION

The National Planning Framework must not be about setting Dublin, The Regional Cities and Rural Ireland against each other but rather must seek to define the future Ireland. Our ambition should be to transform the country in terms of economic and social cohesion such that we have:

- A Capital City that is a leader on the world stage and offers opportunity and quality of life that is commensurate with this objective.
- Connected City Regions that have robust cities of reasonable critical mass acting to complement to Dublin and as genuine economic drivers for their regions.
- A re-imagined Ireland outside the cities that facilitates our towns, villages and communities to redefine and buttress themselves against the new world order.

To achieve this there are two critical elements

- As a nation we must invest in and in accordance with our Spatial Strategy to avoid the failures of the past. It is not a question of whether we can afford to but rather a question of whether we can afford not to and it is imperative that our spend is on the basis of rigorous appraisal of economic benefit and not on geographic spend.
- We must align policy across all departments with our spatial strategy to maximise return on investment.

Our regional cities have to grow propulsively to attract a reasonable proportion of the increased population and are critical to the country's economic output and to the success their Regions. **For Waterford it is very simple – it has to double its population and that of its Metropolitan area within the life of this plan to achieve a degree of critical mass and to fulfil its role.**

This Council does not presume to hold competence in the context of how Dublin should develop but recognises that it has to be our main centre of innovation and entrepreneurial endeavour particularly in respect of higher order international activities. It must offer a quality of life such as to attract the skill sets necessary to be a genuine international centre of vibrancy and consequence. This will not be achieved without investment but for the purposes of this submission, we are confining ourselves to the areas of Regional City development, the measures required for Waterford to reach its core population objective and to Rural Ireland, having an unique viewpoint as only one of two local authorities with both rural and City responsibilities.

THE CITIES AS ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DRIVERS OF CITY REGIONS

All evidence is that for Cities and City Regions to succeed the drivers are:-

- Financial Capital
- Connectivity
- Governance/Cohesion
- Innovation
- Entrepreneurship
- Human Capital
- Diversity
- Place Quality

We will address the development of our cities in the context of these headings.

Financial Capital

Our view is that moderate additional state investment will dramatically alter performance in our Regional Cities. The logic for this is that the success wheel, so evident in Dublin in its recovery from recession, is not available to the Regional Cities. In the Capital, market forces and critical mass determine that a cycle of additional activity leads to increased supply of human and financial capital in a way that will never be available to cities of small scale in international terms.

The counter to this is to create a dedicated investment fund to enhance the competitiveness of our Regional Cities, over and above state supports currently available. Historically our cities have been viewed as not requiring state investment of consequence having 'a rates base' and thereby considered self-sufficient. This is mis-guided thinking given their future role as the homes of a significant proportion of our population and their importance in the context of our economic output. They must be viewed as economic entities and assets, that can yield return on targeted investment decided on the basis of rigorous analysis.

This fund would facilitate the early provision of infrastructure, not deemed National in scale and enhance place making and the quality of our urban centres. Certainty of availability would also allow for genuine delivery on spatial planning, social and economic objectives and change development planning at local level from aspirational to reality.

It is our view that a Regional City Investment Fund of €150M per annum for projects, that would be subjected to competition and full cost benefit analysis and matched by local contribution or private sector development, would materially alter over time the competitive position of our Regional Cities.

In Waterford it is imperative that public funds are available in timely fashion for infrastructure works to enable the North Quays development and access to the City Centre, while future access and radial route infrastructure as required by the Waterford Planning, Land Use and Transportation Strategy will also be required over the life of the framework.

Physical and Virtual Connectivity

One of the great legacies of the Celtic Tiger has been the motorway network, yet it has the flaw that all roads lead to Dublin and this is compounded by the lack of public transport links between our regional cities. This can be corrected by the provision of a motorway link between Cork, Limerick and Waterford on a choice of routes that when aligned with the Limerick Galway motorway would physically link the regional cities. Aligned with policy instruments that would incentivise collaboration and innovation between the key assets in the regional cities, it would be our view that this single instrument would be a game changer. Notional branding or collaboration initiatives, such as the Atlantic Cities, will change little without improvement of the physical connectivity.

- ***We view the creation of a motorway interlink between Cork, Limerick and Waterford as an imperative for the development of our Regional Cities, as a legitimate collective complement to Dublin. (The preferred route in our view is appended in schematic form to this document and when aligned with a Northern Ring Road in Cork represents the best strategic solution to connectivity of the City regions.)***
- Policy instruments in the Education and Enterprise areas should be put in place to encourage real and virtual collaboration in innovation between Regional Cities.
- Broadband Connectivity is now as important as motorways and it is vital that a dark fibre link is created between all our Cities.
- Existing public transport links should be sustained and improved where possible, with the security of the Limerick-Waterford Rail Line for freight services critical to Waterford Port, which needs to be sustained as a core part of our national infrastructure.
- The availability of international connectivity through Waterford Airport needs to be retained at a modest scale to facilitate tourism and business activity in the South East.

Governance/Cohesion.

All evidence would suggest that for cities to prosper they require a unitary brand and voice, with single leadership pulling together the complex web of stakeholders necessary to create the best environment for innovation, entrepreneurship, investment and quality of life. Dual governance simply doubles the complexity of creating propulsive growth and dilutes messaging and branding efforts for our cities. All of our cities have some element of dual government but Waterford is most compromised, with only a small amount of development to the North side damaging its efficiency as an urban centre and reducing the potential of its City Centre as a core economic driver.

To add population of consequence significant numbers of jobs and homes will have to be added in Waterford and the North side of the City has to be a significant part of this solution, particularly with the North Quays coming into development. It is no less than irrational to suggest that this can be achieved without single-minded administration and leadership and certainly cannot be achieved by governance that has a competing urban priority and limited elected member presentation from the area.

It is imperative that the recommendations of the Waterford Boundary Review Committee be implemented with immediate effect.

Human Capital, Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Diversity.

Our cities are critical as environments for the creation of economic output and contain the key elements of population, diversity and enterprise skill sets. These attributes must be grown and fostered propulsively in our Regional Cities and the key drivers must be in place.

In a Waterford context:

- **We must grow the City to 100,000 population in the life of the plan and the Metropolitan area to 200,000**
- **The City needs a Technological University as a Key driver of human capital, innovation and diversity and should be targeted for an additional 6,000 student places in the next five years.**

This should be achievable in the context of the Technological University of the South-East but if this does not advance immediately and the primacy of Waterford in economic and spatial planning terms is not respected in the process then WIT should be allowed to proceed independently. The process that has numbers of institutions seeking Technological University status should be ended immediately with the South East and the DIT agglomeration being progressed as rational measures in a state context.

- **All City Regions require Regional Hospitals as Centres of Excellence, as residence for human capital and knowledge in scale in the health field and for the well-being of their population. In this context University Hospital Waterford needs to be upgraded to reflect the population it should serve in the South East region.**
- **Enterprise policy needs to reflect the primacy of the Cities, the value of clustering, the alignment with educational institutions and the availability of human capital.**

IRELAND OUTSIDE OUR CITIES

When one addresses the importance of the Cities to our economic and social performance, the accusation is regularly made that this is to the exclusion of all other areas of the country. This could not be further from the truth as:

- In a growing Ireland there is no reason that the population cannot be stabilised and grown outside of the cities.
- Our larger towns are important to our economic and social performance
- Our rural economy is very significant relative to other countries and central to our agricultural and tourism output.

The key challenges faced by our larger towns and rural Ireland as a whole are:

- The lack of Financial Capital for investment
- The limitations on the supply of human capital
- The absence of broadband connectivity

- The loss of market function on foot of the draw of consumers to the larger centres and of online trading.

The key issue here is the use of State and EU investment. It is certain that without driving growth and economic output in our Cities the country will not be able to invest appropriately and that there will be a continuing loss of human capital in rural Ireland and our large towns will not attain their potential either.

Currently there is a myriad of schemes supporting rural Ireland, such as Rural Development, CLAR, REDZ, FLAG, enterprise supports, urban and village renewal, housing schemes to name but a few. The investment is simply being spread too thinly, however, with multiple small scale interventions arguably and in evidence yielding no return for the state.

The answer is for the state to invest in an integrated and strategic way such as economic and fiscal return is guaranteed. In our view this is simply achieved by challenging the wit and imagination of our people and communities and requiring a local contribution from communities, the private sector or in kind for integrated projects that will:

- Continue to advance our larger and
- Repurpose our smaller towns and villages as places of residence, tourism, and rural enterprise to replace the ongoing and irreversible decline in market function.
- Best integrate existing support schemes.

In our view an investment fund of €100 million per annum, matched by local contribution would manifestly alter the sustainability of our towns, villages and communities.

Is such an investment warranted? It is an imperative in fact. Our towns and villages of all scales and rural Ireland are critical to the quality of life of every citizen being absolutely central to our amenity, culture, heritage and the brand of Ireland as a whole.



