



WEXFORD ENTERPRISE STRATEGY GROUP



National Planning Framework 2040



WEXFORD COUNTY



Executive Summary

Michael O’Gorman - This paper is presented by Michael O’Gorman M.B.A; P.G.C.E; V.M.P.; (MOG). MOG has worked with regional, national and international companies, with experience gained across a wide number of sectors including; manufacturing; engineering and construction; education and business consulting; operating through such senior management and director roles responsible for business development, bid management, commercial management, strategy and transformation together with training and development and lecturing to MBA and CIMA students.

The above experience has been gained within a diverse career which continuously included development and delivery of national infrastructure projects, including a critical period spent in the UK during the privatization of many of the UK’s national infrastructure organisations. In a similar capacity, over the past ten years, responsible for the delivery of a significant national infrastructure project here in Ireland on behalf of a UK international organization and ROI indigenous JV.

This paper is compiled and presented within the constraints of time and is for much an overview and an expression of interest from one who has recently made a choice to set up business in the South East Region and make it work Regionally, Nationally and Internationally. It is presented by one who recognizes significant opportunities and many issues.

Recognition - MOG has passion for positive change and development within Irelands business and educational communities and specifically the South East’s pivotal role in the Government’s leading ‘consultation’ process, towards a better future for all.

Whilst recognising the constraints of this early stage document MOG both acknowledges the significant work and excellent content and construct that is the National Planning Framework (NDF 2040) and in doing so welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the NPF 2040.

It further acknowledges the commitment in the Programme for Government to encourage and drive consideration and implementation while focusing on adding value in the development of an improved new economic model and platform for change. This submission pursues the purpose and objectives set out in NDF 2040 in contributing, developing and delivering a successful, value added programme for change, providing and infrastructure which attracts Irish and multi-national investment, growing jobs and wealth in vibrant communities.

MOG considers the significant untapped capability that could be realised through the NPF 2040. The NPF 2040 should first reflect a ‘blue sky’ paradigm shift in strategic planning that is required in order to maximise potential and deliver a sustainable new State. Job creation and economic growth is led by private sector investment and the NPF 2040 must signal to investors our committed to building on our natural resources, human capital and availability of green energy. In this submission MOG signals an ambitious vision for Wexford.

One that sees Wexford as a 'go to' region with modern business models and practices, consistent and sustainable population growth by 2040 and contribution to our economy through GVA increase that out performs others. Key performance measures are critical when developing and tracking ambitious vision and plan for our infrastructure and business design, implementation, support and growth.

Whilst preparing this submission the writer has considered what would make Wexford Town, County and Region successful. In consideration it is believed that first, what approach and construct ought to take place to determine a bespoke, best in practice model. Urban areas must use resources sustainably, and provide a sound economic base that provides the setting for a good quality of life for their inhabitants.

Flows of capital, people, and technologies change rapidly, whereas the planning of cities and regions evolve slowly and requires significant capital investment, whilst being flexible and adaptable in order to withstand shocks.

I hope that you find this submission both informative and interesting, whilst given the constraints of time and resource, it is intended to signal intent, promote discussion and place the writer within such regional and national discussion groups. Wexford and its Regional Assembly Area in construct will develop its ambitious vision, contribute to 'first principles', 'add value' and dynamically drive economic growth.

As a business consultant with a specific experience in developing business and delivering national infrastructure projects through engineering and construction, MOG has significant interest and experience in development, transition and change management.

MOG is currently developing systems and processes with UK companies in support of our regions SME's and future start-up companies. I hope to identify and assist in establishing a Wexford Enterprise Strategy Group and ensure Wexford is at the heart of our economy and the journey ahead. In submitting this paper MOG offers his full support and that of business partners in the creation and implementation of a bold and ambitious vision for Wexford Town, County and Region.

To achieve this vision Wexford Town, County and Region must strive to be recognized as:

- A highly competitive region through a pro-business environment, providing grow quality jobs for all
- A region of education, innovation and entrepreneurial clusters
- A region that is well connected by fibre, road, rail, sea and air
- A region of culture, diversity, with resilient communities and exceptional quality of life

A Case for Change - Cities are continuously evolving, seeking to become more attractive places to live, work, develop and grow. Our 'Regional Assemblies' must be engines of economic growth and key to our future health and wellbeing. Dublin is again bursting at the seams; lessons were not learnt. We failed in the delivery of the 2002 to 2020 Spatial Strategy Plan. Dublin continues to be the focus of all that we do, this must change if we truly believe in the ethos and purpose of the NPF 2040.

We must avoid sunk cost, we must 'truly believe' that investment in regions will, in the medium to long term, re-shape Ireland and provide our people with the business communities, education, health and wellbeing to compete globally and through an ever adaptable economy.

Internationally, powers are being devolved to Regions, which are increasingly taking control over their own futures and setting their own priorities. We can look to the UK as a means of reflecting and benchmarking. The UK are building a 'Northern Powerhouse', which is about boosting the local economy by investing in skills, innovation, transport and culture, as well as devolving significant powers and budgets to Regional Assemblies to ensure decisions in the North of England are made by the Northern communities.

Brexit – We can only deal with what we know and risk assess that which we don't. At a minimum, Brexit will encourage our businesses to think different, to risk assess better and to plan. We will continue to develop markets across Europe and to open up markets in non-European Countries. At best, Brexit will cause us to host UK companies with dominating markets in Europe, we can become a preferred European base for UK companies.

We see cooperation first hand in solution and resolution of Northern Ireland Assembly. We see cooperation and partnering in the form of the North South Interconnector where EirGrid have led the planning and development of the Island of Ireland Electricity Grid. We see connectivity of power through the East West Interconnector Grid between the UK and Ireland.

Wexford is supporting business growth right across the Southern Assembly Area. Wexford advocates giving our great cities and regions the investment and resources needed to reach its huge untapped potential. We see plans emerging for 'Celtic Interconnector for a 600km pipeline of electricity interconnectivity from Rosslare to France with the potential capacity estimated at approximately 700 MW, enough to power approximately 450,000 households.

Interconnectivity and technology is changing the face of the world we live in but business is and will remain, delivered through people by people. Our people are our greatest asset. Promoting a regional assembly business model will allow regions to create bespoke businesses, form partnerships, enter into joint ventures and openly share specific knowledge and assets, not solely in region or country but internationally and globally.

Worth reiterating, this model is primed for success in the face of Brexit. So many UK companies will wish to partner with specialist regions and their businesses, where their markets are established in and dominated by Europe.

MOG is committed to the needs of Wexford and the Southern Assembly Region. With the support of likeminded business people across the region and nationally, our mission is to promote Wexford to the top table and be integral in the transformation of our region from its existing economic state, through vision, into planning and in execution to a safe, vibrant and friendly place in which to visit and live, in which to develop and grow as a leading economy and community. A place of choice.

Consideration - What might ensure the future prosperity and health of our people, region and county is an important question. Building a clear framework for Wexford and the region to succeed and prosper has been, and should continue to be, a collaborative process involving local communities, civic bodies, local authorities, cross region steering groups and the national government.

Wexford faces a number of challenges. Whilst unemployment has fallen significantly (c: +15% SE) in recent years, many of those employed are facing challenges, with comparatively high levels of taxation, increases in rent and stagnant wage inflation. Internationally BREXIT has major implications for our agriculture, tourist and retail sectors and exporters. Whilst it would be wrong to base our economic strategy on changes to be implemented in America and wrong to over think subsequent impact of these on Ireland, we must be observant, prepared and pivot accordingly in order to strengthen our domestic economy. We must design our strategy to be the best open and adaptable economy possible.

We must stop spending scarce resources on dated institutions, their systems and processes. We must change our culture in the way we behave and think. The architecture of our new state should be futuristic and realistic. There are two types of change, emerging and prescriptive, being mindful and brave enough to know the difference and when to engage such change rests with the honesty and integrity of the NPF 2040 architecture.

In change, one must consider both traditional business models, corporate business, SME business models and start up business models. To use a 'start up' business term, in our design, we must be able and know when to pivot.

Acknowledgement is often the first stage of improvement in all that we do, individually and collectively. In the start-up global community, Ireland performs badly when compared to others. Ireland has the second lowest start up birthrate in the EU at 6.2%; Eurostat. C: 75% of new jobs in Ireland (0 – 5 years) are created through SME businesses, this provides problems in that our start-up business economy and ecosystem underperform and yet, provides a positive in that SME and start-ups are designed to operate on a regional basis and therefore ought to be a significant focus in our NPF 2040 architecture.

Ireland - Open Economy - Ireland is a nation which can be considered as a 'small open economy' and as such should consider the 'best practice' traits of such economies. Through the NPF 2040 consultation process, it is best to first consider the purpose of such a framework. In consideration of the purpose, one should be very clear from the outset as to the method one uses to create foundations and build out an architecture which meets the purpose of this developing architecture and plan. The developing plan should continuously refer direct to the stated objectives, purposes and demonstrate clearly the science based business improvements are delivered through it.

The writer advocates that a method of 'first principles' is applied to the 'foundation' of such a plan. For example, to take a clean canvas and logically apply fixed assets of national importance such as the built environment. Our recently built national road infrastructure for example would logically form an integral spatial awareness, become a first principle and a fixed asset to our 'developing spatial design'. The Bord Gais Gas distribution expansion and reinforcement should overlay the road network architecture.

There has been significant design and planning to the EirGrid / ESB 400KV Electricity reinforcement network in order to secure our national energy needs. Irish Water is established, significant national pipelines, rehab and maintenance is in its early years and can be reengineered or designed to fit any modification brought about by the NPF 2040.

ESB and Vodafone have developed and are rolling out fiber optic broadband using blown fiber and existing network ducting. ESB run electricity to virtually every household in the country. With such potential and leading innovation, a region should be designated and encouraged through investment to become a center of excellence for fiber connectivity. Every business and every household needs broadband speed at least comparable to our competing markets. This is not an option.

Strategy and approach - MOG supports a genuine desire to reverse the depopulation of regions and significantly increase employment within those regions. The Wexford vision is to realise the hidden, untapped, present opportunity in bringing jobs and investment, and to develop a region of scale in the South with Wexford firmly at the top table; driving change which focuses of the future and value added change processes. This paper considers an objective of driving the gross value add per person (GVA) above the national average by 2040.

In support of this, the strategy considers six areas of focus including:

Design through first principles	Changing business mindset and culture
Securing active community engagement	Partnering / JV / Supply Chain agreements
Start-up business culture / Innovation + Enterprise Focused	Upskilling a dynamic workforce
Utilising assets and growing capacity	Investing in infrastructure

The strategy considers the opportunity and risk in respect of those areas of focus. We must look at our regions and national risk in terms of impact and probability. What is the probability of something occurring and what is the impact should it occur, 'risk management'.

This paper ponders the need for an integrated approach to economic development which clearly aligns investment in infrastructure and capacity with enterprise and job creation. It also requires alignment and long term commitment to investment by both the private and public sector, that in turn engenders certainty and confidence, which are key attributes that are not currently present.

Approach - Regional Economic Models (REM) have specific or critical criteria which enable positive economic growth and performance. The core of the REM model is an input-output model that represents inter-industry relationships. This way, the industry structure of a particular region is captured within the model, as well as transactions between industries. The REM model can represent long term general equilibrium between the supply and demand as prices, production, consumption, imports, exports, and other such changes as lifestyle and wellbeing occur to stabilize the economic system.

The model's equations and responses are estimated using advanced statistical techniques. The model is also capable of capturing the spatial dimension of the economy. This incorporates the productivity and competitiveness benefits due to the concentration, or cluster, of economic activity in towns, cities and regions, and to the clustering of industries within those regions.

Benchmarking and reliable statistical data is critical to the NPF 2040. We must avoid 'sunk cost' in our business decision-making. The UK has developed significant learning and development in their Regional Assembly developing models such as their 'Northern Powerhouse' initiative.

In consultation and development of the NPF 2040 we ought to be clear and therefore mindful to avoid contamination of the sunk cost trap by recognizing that any investment we have made into such projects as infrastructure, education, health, policing or associated decisions to date should not be taken into account in first draft model and possibly future decision making. We must evaluate decisions based on first principles, future costs and benefits, and be open to realizing a loss where it becomes evident. We must avoid basing decisions on costs that have already been incurred rather than on the expected future benefits.

In response to the proposed national planning framework and on behalf of a Southern Regional Assembly representation, this paper proposes six actions for immediate effect:

1. **Infrastructure provision** to support the expansion of key urban areas required to support capacity expansion, and the best economic return on new infrastructure and private capital investment. (Roads, access to air and rail, High speed broadband network, power, energy, water and waste water, education, health and community development)
2. **Steering Groups.** With a common national framework guide, Regional Assembly Area steering groups should be created to focus and develop targeted areas and performance measured objectives.
3. **Investment and Regional Development Plans.** This can be significantly supported by private investment assuming that we can create the certainty and competence necessary to support that investment.
4. **KPI's and Benchmarking.** Simple, measurable and meaningful KPI's are required to provide a tool for base measurement, future desired state and a plan to take regions and the country from where we are now to the desired better state in a visual manner with critical milestones.
5. **Enterprise Hubs.** An immediate refocusing of national investment on the **Innovation** opportunity that can be realised in the South using a vibrant eco-system of human and natural resources.
6. **Development Manager.** Each Region should appoint a 'business manager' from the 'private sector' to lead the development and reporting of development. Collectively such business managers will provide a common approach, shared learning and initiatives.

Learning and Development - A number of possible advantages of spatial clustering or regional assembly areas have been identified in much published research literature, notably those related to shared costs for infrastructure, the targeted build-up of infrastructure; targeted and flexible life-long learning and education; a trained and developed skilled labour force; transaction efficiency and knowledge spillovers leading to firm learning and innovation.

There are a number of theoretical concepts and explanations and notably a general lack of action targeting and validating such mechanisms. It is therefore prudent to provide science based evidence and benchmarking to prove theory and in doing so add confidence to the building of the model towards change and a 'new state' This I'm sure will be evidenced in first draft submissions.

The NPF 2040 consultation and design process should consider the nature of the Regional Assembly Areas from a knowledge-creation or learning perspective. The writer would argue for the need to establish a specific theory to support the NPF 2014 initiative, where learning occupies center stage.

The writer also advocates the avoidance of negative terminology such as 'feeder towns' or 'tier 1' and 'tier 2' towns and cities. The benefits of a developing model, planning and implementation can be measured by efficiencies gained in regional, national and international business, life style and wellbeing of our businesses, communities and citizens. Such measures can be published against key criteria born from the 'purpose and objectives'.

Education - A well-structured, targeted and executed education system is critical. The current Irish university model, a broad-based teaching and research institution, with a large base of assets and back office, will prove unviable in all but a few cases.

The NPF 2014 needs to address such issues; the author has looked at developing Universities in the UK. The University of Teesside for example was first shaped and established in the form of a skills education facility to support the emerging steel industry during the Industrial Revolution. It later became a Polytechnic (similar to our Institutes of Technology) and in recent years a well-established University.

Many believed that a University born out of the Industrial North of England with a poor regional economy would find it impossible to compete with the established more popular Universities. With the right vision, belief, leadership, culture creation and planning, our government in supporting Wexford could take from this example. The University of Teesside has won many national awards as it progresses and in competition with such Universities as Durham, Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh.

The availability of 'knowledge' online and access to university education means a fundamental change in the role of universities as originators and keepers of knowledge. Digital technologies have transformed media, retail, entertainment and many other industries — higher education is next. Campuses will remain, but digital technologies will transform the way education is delivered and accessed.

Where there is risk in significant capital investment, we ought to consider more flexible less costly but effective arrangements such as partnering with other European Universities **to deliver on campus and digitized learning. Ireland can be a leader in the future of universities, but radical change is required to the way in which we currently deliver education. In addition, universities will need to build significantly deeper relationships with industry to differentiate teaching and learning programs, support the funding and application of research, and reinforce the role of universities as drivers of innovation and growth.**

We must be brave, have vision, leadership, investment, planning and execution in order to realize our potential.

There is argument that a modern 'fit for purpose' specialized education model would sit well in the Wexford area and in partnership with the internationally acclaimed UCC would best provide for ease of access from within the Southern Regional Assembly Area. A partnership with UCC taking the lead would provide for a modern uncontested approach.

Innovation – Research suggests that net job creation results from start-ups and young growth companies. Wexford must be seen as the ideal place in Ireland to start and grow a business. Increased investment is required on a national level and drawing funds from the EU to create a network of incubators and accelerators linked to universities. Again, the current national policy of housing and investing in Dublin based organizations supporting start-ups requires reorientation. Digitization has revolutionized the way in which we interact and buy and sell goods and services. The need to be physically located has also evolved. Without Government intervention, regions will continue to be feeders of people for the Greater Dublin area.

The presence availability of skilled people and a vibrant start-up eco-system are key to attracting Foreign Direct Investment. Greater consideration must be given in terms skilling up our indigenous population and supporting a Wexford based start-up eco-system.

Tourism - Tourism is one of the key economic pillars of region’s economy. There is an urgent need to create a long-term strategy for tourism within the region. Visitor numbers are comparatively low. We must endeavour to connect globally and highlight the many reasons to visit and stay.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure will feature and be prominent in all submissions. In order to identify the ‘need’, input meaningfully and to build a solid evidence based issues and opportunities profile, we need to identify a team of infrastructure specialists across the Southern Assembly Area. The consideration process may include:

Preparation of a baseline report	Model core economic balance of spatial value – economic epicenters
Identification of Infrastructure deficits	Evaluation
Identify Need Management (Opportunities and Issues)	Plan

The objective being to examine the current state of infrastructure together with the requirements for developing infrastructure on a phased basis against a national model and in order to unlock opportunities for economic development towards 2040.

Infrastructure considerations - It is the writers belief that our infrastructure is $\frac{3}{4}$ the way to a balanced structure. Dublin, Galway and Cork are well established centres of economic standing with significant balance and potential. They unmistakably have their own identity and are well received on the international stage. The South East has been significantly under invested, lacks international identity and has lingered on the coat tails of Waterford and Dublin. There is an opportunity to develop Wexford as integral in the national balance; with Dublin our Capital serving the North East, Galway the North West, Cork the South West and Wexford the South East.

With additional design and implementation, infrastructure between Wexford and Cork would copper fasten ease of access within and to and from these epicentres of economic growth. Such Infrastructure networks would result in connectivity improvements of:

Road Network	Electricity	Ports and harbour
Air	Gas	Air Quality
Rail	Potable and Waste Water	Education
River and Marine	Broadband	Flood Protection

The required infrastructure must be identified, acknowledged and invested to ensure it supports economic investment and grows from within.

Sector Focus and the Community - The writer considers that there is significant collateral in the direct engagement of communities in the creation of jobs. Importantly, a global trend is quickly emerging, where communities play a pivotal role in the creation and support of social, business and community based enterprise in the way of co-working space, incubation and accelerator funded enterprise. Such regionally based businesses have far global outreach and much regional economic benefit.

The emerging workforce have a need to operate in an ever increasing flexible environment. This developing economy demands a quality lifestyle, wellbeing and one that embraces a reduced carbon footprint.

Regions have areas of common sectoral interests and capability together with unique or bespoke capability. Wexford has always provided a solid base for such sectors as; agriculture, marine, food, tourism and creative arts. Other sectors including healthcare, education, internet and media services and professional services have been neglected, yet suited to community and cooperative enterprise.

While Dublin communities burst at the seams, Wexford sits in the wings needing infrastructure investment to breath economical independence from Dublin; Wexford needs to develop a strength and condition of its own, a strength and condition capable of competing with and supporting Dublin and other regions. What would our national asset that is GAA be like if our provincial towns could not compete against Dublin. Where would we be without Mayo over the past few years. The need to balance skills, development and growth in sport is akin to business; without awareness, measurement, acknowledgement, design planning and delivery it will falter.

Inclusivity is fundamental to buy-in and investment. The direct engagement of communities will support a proactive and balanced planning process that ensures economic development, in turn, job creation complements social transformation, the elimination of unemployment and the provision of critical supports and infrastructure for smaller and rural communities.

Challenges - Notwithstanding the history of our nation and its cyclar economic growth and decline. There has been unprecedented harsh and devastating lessons to be learnt from the economic crash and recovery in Ireland over the past two decades.

The present government came into power in a trough of economic misery. It equipped itself, set on a path of challenging economic and political choices and decisions.

This government made significant unpopular but necessary decisions with little or no time for decision making and zero time for planning the way out of economic recession. Thankfully Ireland has recovered from recession over the past years but given the lack of planning afforded to the government, in recovery economic activity and growth has been branded by an uneven distribution between Dublin and the rest of the Country and between Rural and Urban. Sunk cost is occurring.

We should now look to the challenges with a positive mindset. We should clearly state that Regional Assembly Areas will be designed with key specified business objectives and not by political influence.

We should look to the 2040 expected population levels; we should look to a 'blue sky' architecture of urban and rural spatial planning.

We need to be clear that regional assemblies are places to go to and to work, live and create wellbeing in our communities; we should avoid terminology and thinking such as 'feeder' towns and 'feeder' regions. All designated areas should be termed Regional Assembly Areas and Partner Areas to Regional Assembly Areas.

To our 'first principle' consultation process, conceptual design, detailed design, planning and implementation, we can immediately add our modern national road network. We can add to this our recently and ongoing Natural Gas reinforcement programme of works by Bord Gais. Irish Water is still in its infancy and therefore our waste and portable water network and treatment plants can be designed in line with the NPF 2040. We ought not to be extracting water from the River Shannon to feed our Capital rather build our regions and treat and deliver water from the regional rivers such as the River Shannon and the River Slaney within the regions where possible and science dictates as sustainable.

We are fortunate that the EirGrid / ESB 400KV reinforcement network has been delayed. The North South Interconnector may well be necessary as a stand-alone project and allow the Republic to sell much needed energy into the North but we do need to rethink further development of the 400KV network in line with the development of the NPF 2040.

As the west of Ireland lends itself to the development of Wind Energy and Wave energy, Wexford and the South is a natural environment in which to develop solar energy business. This needs a collective approach and clear government policy. At present solar energy businesses are approaching farmers on an ad hoc basis on the hope that they will secure a grid connection. Wexford is primed to manage a holistic approach through the guidance of ESB and again in line with grid and substation capacity and local planning.

Key Roles – Wexford has been for so long, a region without a voice and therefore one with a limited cause. The continuation of professionals from the area making daily trips to and from the capital must be alleviated.

Evidence of positive influence on business communities can be evidenced through the establishment of Wexford Bus. Wexford bus, a privately owned local business is thriving. Eight buses are on the road from Wexford at any one time, a 24 / 7 service. This has served particularly the student and commuting business community well when public transport from Wexford has failed miserably for so many years.

This daily migration has resulted in an inability of our community and business to take charge of its own future economic growth or respond positively to job investment opportunities. This requires a rebalancing of both the age and skill profile 'employed within' the region ensuring that a future skill profile can support the level of economic activity necessary to sustain the regions and contribute positively to the national economic program. Wexford must first have access to quality education, quality job creation and job opportunity.

In consideration of flexible work opportunities, we must consider partnering outside our 'jurisdictions' to gain a sustained presence.

Sustainability is about developing a capacity that has the profile of skills necessary to attract mobile investment while at the same time maximising our natural resource opportunity. More importantly, we must maximise the creativity and diverse capability of the human resource. Therefore, inherent in all skill development and graduate programs must be the ability of graduates to create a job for themselves and others from their own diversity and strength.

Conclusion - Wexford's future is dependent on its capacity to be a major driver of regional development and a significant contributor to national success. Wexford's future success requires the interaction of a dynamic regional capital with a thriving region. The wider global context of new emerging economies and markets, of global innovation and competition for investment and talent presents Wexford with both future opportunities and challenges and must inform Wexford's economic planning.

Our collected vision is to make Wexford the model in Ireland, fueled by the energy, drive, culture and diversity of the people of Wexford, for inclusive innovation and economic growth.

The scale of employment creation and enterprise development needed requires new approaches and the exploitation of distinctiveness and excellence.

The delineation between county and city is arbitrary, where really does the city end and the county begin? What is of paramount importance is that long term planning must be inclusive irrespective of geographical demarcation and must ensure that both rural and urban grow better together.

Remove stigma, remove titles, remove legacy and create afresh. Look at Regions and balance, avoid negative and emotive terminology, communicate effectively, create belief and demonstrate results.

Hard-pressed towns must be helped to create new economic opportunities. Villages and small towns serve a role in the economic, social and cultural well-being of the South, yet many are struggling to cope with job losses, depopulation, empty buildings, poor infrastructure and for many stressful travel, stressed family life.

The mental health of our people is declining, our culture has metamorphosed into fear and dread. The divide between private and public sector is divisive by nature.

Geographic location should not dictate prosperity, but we must be cognizant of the fact that urbanization is increasing as populations are tending to move to cities where services, higher education institutions and cultural activities are centered.

There is confusion in 'decentralisation', it is perceived as largely having failed. To ease the stresses of Dublin and create a meaningful national balance is not decentralization. In easing the Dublin pressures, we can embrace mobility of work, afford our people choice of location, access of travel and quality of life. We are after all a small Island with a growing population. We have a global reputation which is the envy of many. We can create belief but we must lead by planning and investing to secure economic growth and treat our people with respect.

If we consider the cost, revenue and profit dictated to the delivery of our infrastructures national projects, the Greater Dublin Area is attractive to investment, outside the Greater Dublin Area is less attractive. When doing business on a national level, Greater Dublin is seen as attractive and outside the pale, often considered a necessity but not an investment. We need to rethink, model the future, invest and re balance.

Wexford must have the ambition to lead growth, not just in a regional context, but in a national context. This significant shift in economic and population growth is required to halt depopulation of our regions, stress of working and a continued exodus of our youth.

Addressing this growth challenge in a National and EU context requires that we reverse the current public and political acceptance that Wexford and its Region is in decline and that we insist on investment equity with the other Regions. In partnering with Cork, we can provide a pragmatic economic proposition that counters the current lack of investment in the Region.

Final Thought – As an open economy and similar to businesses, regional, national and international economies do not have sustained growth without continued adaption and innovation. If we take just one strategy adopted by many modern, progressive and leading businesses, the '70 20 10 Framework', it can be used to consider our regional and national economy, identifying 70% of our infrastructure, core business and skill sets as 'core business' 'pivot' 20% of our economy (adapt and change in line with international best practice) and encourage 10% innovation. This is the typical framework for managing change whilst managing risk.

"Start-ups" are the perfect encapsulation of what the 10 per cent embodies, an unproven, but grounded, investment in those who can deliver a product or service to solve critical business issues or deliver a unique advantage over the competition.

And if done correctly, the 10 per cent can soon become part of the 70 per cent, something that is core to how the businesses or economy operates, and drives future direction of the future 10.

But only if you embrace the 10 per cent for what it truly represents – a validation of the high risk, high payoff, ways of working, but grounded in business or marketing objectives and outcomes.

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