



Comhairle Contae Liatroma Leitrim County Council

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Contae Liatroma
N41 PF67

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**NPF Submissions,
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30th March 2017

Leitrim County Council submission to the National Planning Framework Overview

At the launch of the national pre draft consultation phase, An Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny, stated that

We need to unlock the potential of our regions and avoid cyclical boom and bust cycles. Today marks the start of an honest conversation about the potential of our places, urban and rural. We are not coming to you with preset answers. We want to get everyone engaged in the debate.

Leitrim County Council therefore welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the preparation of the new National Planning Framework (*Ireland 2040 - Our Plan*) and to seek the influence the final strategy from the outset.

The new National Planning Framework must provide a robust basis for integrated national planning, pulling together relevant Government policies and investment on national and regional development. It must also ensure that the future focus of economic development, enterprise and employment addresses the existing imbalance which is centred on the Greater Dublin Area and to a lesser extent on the other large cities of Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway. This should permeate to state assisted employment and the implementation of a regional employment strategy by the IDA and Enterprise Ireland.

The new National Planning Framework must challenge previously accepted principles that vibrant technological companies seeking to attract young highly educated and well paid staff can only satisfy such requirements in larger cities whilst lower paid back office and administration functions can be readily accommodated in smaller regional towns. There are examples of such thriving technological and medical device companies operating from Co. Leitrim (Viasmed, Cora Systems and others). There is also capacity to attract companies in the Business Process Outsourcing and Financial Services areas. The former MBNA site in Carrick on Shannon which is now referred to as the Carrick Business Campus is an ideal low cost property solution for a company operating in this area. In locations such as Carrick on Shannon, set up costs and commercial rents are significantly lower, staff retention is considerably higher and the 'green' factor which is becoming an increasingly important consideration for business can be demonstrably achieved whilst employees are being attracted by

lower relative housing and childcare costs, less congestion and time spent commuting to work and the general quality of life on offer. Leitrim's proposition in this regard is considerable.

The Framework is being presented on the basis that it will address all parts of Ireland, avoid the perception of 'winners' and 'losers' but avoid unrealistically treating all parts of the country in the same way. The new National Planning Framework needs to ensure that the potential of all areas are realised, relative to their capacity for sustainable development and to prioritise rural development and address the declining small towns and villages of Co. Leitrim (and other midland and western Counties) where businesses and essential services are closing down with vacancy and dereliction levels rising all of which is affecting the morale of the remaining resident population. A further complication is that the remaining population is becoming increasingly elderly in their age profile and have more limited access to personal transport to avail of the remaining services which are being moved to larger towns and rely on subsidised bus services such as Local Link and on lifts from neighbours. The resident population require access to a range of health, nursing home care, home help within easy access from their homes whilst access to third level and possibly outreach educational opportunities closer to home will arrest the outflow of the younger population cohorts from the county.

In addition, Leitrim County Council will be seeking to ensure that the following issues are addressed in the new National Planning Framework

- That, parity of esteem of Carrick on Shannon, with other county towns is provided for in the resultant urban hierarchy contained within the Framework;
- The potential designation of Sligo as a 'Gateway' or similar nationally important centre should take cognisance of the need to develop functional economic synergy with Carrick on Shannon, supported by the N4 and national rail and bus routes, and other regionally important centres in the county such as Manorhamilton and Ballinamore. The new National Planning Framework must stipulate tangible and measureable targets for such synergies being realised than occurred in the previous iteration, the National Spatial Strategy. Through Sligo IT and the proposed Technological University status for the North West appropriate educational linkages will assist in the attractiveness of the region to further business investment.
- Additional employment opportunities must be developed in the larger urban centres of the County facilitated by high speed broadband to ensure that more of our resident population are afforded the opportunity to work within reasonable distance from their homes or work from their homes;
- Expedited rollout of the National Broadband Strategy which is considered essential for rural counties such as Leitrim to become competitive in attracting and retaining enterprise, employment, commercial and residential uses. There are concerns that the length of time being afforded to competitive dialogue will cause delays to the rollout of the strategy and other possible delays due to the need to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment of Ireland's Broadband Intervention Strategy. These concerns should be addressed as a matter of priority;
- Ensure that infrastructure improvements commensurate with the economic and spatial designations afforded to Carrick on Shannon and other regionally important centres are provided in future National Investment Strategies by the Government.

These infrastructural improvements would include further improvements to the N4 National Primary Road to include the continuation of the Roosky – Dromod bypass to provide for a bypass of Carrick-on-Shannon and improvements to the N16 National Primary Road which links Sligo through Manorhamilton as far as Blacklion in Co. Cavan to connect with the A4 as the main travel route from Sligo to Belfast.

The delays for national traffic travelling through Carrick on Shannon on the N4 from Sligo to Dublin are becoming particularly acute and sections of the N4 have been impassable during sustained periods of flooding. This problem has been exacerbated with the Sligo to Dublin train also been impassable due to flooding between Dromod and Longford stations. Both the national primary road and train line being out of commission for periods of up to 5 – 6 weeks places counties Leitrim and Sligo at a distinct economic disadvantage as a result.

Long sections of the N16 are narrow and winding which can make travelling on it slow and difficult. As the N16 joins with the A4 road to Enniskillen and onwards connecting to Belfast via the A4 and the M1 Motorway, it is considered an important strategic connection between Sligo and Enniskillen and onwards to Belfast. An upgrade of the N16 including a bypass of Manorhamilton would be considered an important consideration for Leitrim County Council.

There must be continued investment in critical water infrastructure in the key urban centres of the county to promote as credible employment centres conscious of the uncertainty of the future investment model which will be pursued by Irish Water.

Equally, continued investment will be required in gas and electricity networks with the latter being particularly important to Co. Leitrim having regard to the potential for significant renewable forms of electricity generation which include wind, solar, biomass and possibly wave areas.

- There is commendable work underway by Waterways Ireland in conjunction with Local Authorities in the development of Blueways Ireland promoting a network of multi-activity recreational trails, based on or alongside lakes, canals and rivers in Ireland. They provide scenic routes into the heart of rural Ireland by canoe, bike or on foot. The further development of Blueways and of other rural tourism initiatives such as the greenways and the Lakelands proposition in addition to the development of social infrastructure for residents and visitors alike in the form of playgrounds, sports facilities, etc. must be prioritised in the National Planning Framework;
- Seek to minimise the impact for border counties such as Leitrim of the impending departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union with regard to the free movement of people and goods. The future of successful cross border and all island initiatives such as Waterways Ireland established under the British-Irish Agreement Act of 1999 to manage Ireland's inland navigable waterways is uncertain.
- A possible opportunity from Brexit is that Insurance and Financial Services companies are now looking for a European base outside the UK. The promotion of options outside Dublin would be attractive in terms of cost and quality of life.

Leitrim County Council requests that you take this submission into account in the formulation of the new National Planning Framework and acknowledges the difficult task faced by those charged with

its preparation and the extent of challenges which must be overcome. Leitrim must play an integral part of the future of this region and in turn, this country as we continue in our economic recovery. Rural counties such as Leitrim must become more resilient to the cyclical boom and bust cycles and unlock the unrivalled potential of our regions. The National Planning Framework must provide the basis for achieving this vision.

In addition to this submission, Leitrim County Council has also assisted in the formulation of the submission by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly and fully endorses the contents of the detailed collaborative submission which has been prepared.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Curran', written over a horizontal line.

Mr. Frank Curran,
Chief Executive,
Leitrim County Council