



# Waterford City & County Development Plan 2022-2028

**Submission in response to the  
Public Consultation on the  
Draft Waterford City & County  
Development Plan 2021**

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## Key Recommendations

- Create the conditions for the Experience Economy to achieve world class potential that is sustainable.
- Prioritise investment in the tourism infrastructure and new product development. Investment should support visitor experience development, upgrading of existing attractions and sites, visitor awareness and accessibility.
- Support investment in sustainable transport infrastructure that will make walking, cycling, and public transport more attractive, appealing and accessible for all.
- Develop transport and land use through a coordinated approach to support compact, urban growth.
- Ensure enhanced connectivity between regions including the N25 to Cork (and N24 to Limerick)
- Provide sufficient funding to improve the existing stock and to implement substantial works on the existing road network.
- Support the strategically important roles of the Port of Waterford and, as circumstances permit, Waterford Airport.
- Progress the development of the Circular Economy Action Plan at a local level. Set an ambition to make Waterford a leader in resource efficiency and sustainable value creation.
- Ensure a consistent approach to land use zoning and community gain that balances the legitimate interests of transport providers and users, energy providers and users, and local communities.
- Support the sustainable reinforcement and provision of new energy infrastructure by infrastructure providers (subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process), ensuring the energy needs of future population and economic expansion across Waterford can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner.
- Deliver quality and affordable homes, continue investment in social housing and support the delivery of the right housing and tenure mix (e.g., apartment focus, rental sector, ageing population, students, social housing, affordable housing etc).
- Avoid delays to supporting infrastructure, so that housing and other key projects in Waterford can progress without delay.
- Ensure the rapid roll-out of the National Broadband Plan and a supporting regulatory environment for the successful roll-out of 5G.
- Ensure the right infrastructure is in place to support the TUSE and to allow Waterford to become a University City and drive national and regional growth, prosperity, and innovation.
- Support compact urban growth and ensure that development proceeds sustainably and at an appropriate scale and density.
- Provide a focus on re-intensification of existing business locations, to create the right conditions for enterprise to thrive such as placemaking, 'smart' specialisation and clustering.
- Facilitate urban resilience and recovery through investment in mitigating against legacy issues caused by Covid, remote working, changes to retail and other external factors.
- Consider all options of funding regional projects. The potential of Exchequer and non-Exchequer funding of regional and local projects must be fully exploited. This includes encouraging new partnership models such as City Deals and leveraging the potential of competitive financing.



# Introduction

## Introduction

Ibec is a national organisation with a strong regional structure. The South-East Regional Executive Committee (REC) is made up of nominees from Ibec member companies operating within the counties of Waterford, Kilkenny, Wexford, Carlow and Tipperary. It includes both multinational and indigenous companies and reflects the diversity of business in terms of business sectors and company size. The committee works to shape, guide and influence business policy priorities for the region that contribute to sustainable economic growth and employment.

Skills, talent, connectivity, and quality of life are critical to the County's productivity and a key part of a value proposition to attract and retain businesses and workers. The Waterford City & County Development Plan 2022-2028 comes at a critical time for the economy and society. Several factors, including the twin crises of Brexit and Covid, have significantly changed the policy landscape. The priorities for the new Waterford City & County Development Plan therefore need to reflect these developments in the external environment and identify, resource, and deliver solutions to address these new and emerging challenges. With the right focus, investment and planning, Waterford can continue to grow and be successful, and provide a vibrant and sustainable environment where future generations can live and work.

The Waterford City & County Development Plan should be accompanied by a clear statement on its alignment with the National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Waterford Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan. A lack of cooperation and collaboration between authorities in many areas has led to unsustainable development patterns and urban sprawl. Institutionalising collaboration and coordination between local authorities on economic and spatial development is to be welcomed.

## Connectivity

The RSES and MASP set a framework for the sustainable growth of Waterford by over an additional 27,824 persons to 2031. The NPF, NDP and RSES for the Southern Region identifies several key enablers to support this growth, which will enhance transport connectivity within the Waterford Metropolitan Area and benefit the wider region. Waterford City & County's commuting patterns are substantially car dependent. In the Waterford Metropolitan Area, travel mode to work/education by private car is 81%. The Development Plan must be underpinned by a commitment to sustainable mobility, the keys to which are public transport and active travel.

Transport policies must allow people to choose where they want to live and work, rather than having these decisions dictated by circumstance. Connectivity and effective land use planning will ensure Waterford is a living county. It is essential that land use and transport are developed and planned through a coordinated approach. Strengthening our multi-modal transport networks for enhanced international connectivity, enhanced regional connectivity and transitioning to smarter, sustainable mobility, are critical to future proof our infrastructure for economic and climate change resilience.

The Council will need to ensure that the Waterford Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (WMATS) underpins sustainable population growth, that quality-of-life objectives are efficiently and effectively achieved, and that the strategy is aligned with the MASP and RSES.

## Sustainable mobility

Greater modal shift towards more sustainable forms of travel is needed to ensure targeted growth is infrastructure-led. The City & County Development Plan must support comprehensive public transport and active travel programmes and ensure they are prioritised in the Waterford Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy. BusConnects Waterford is a progressive measure improving the public transport system and will reduce commuting by private car.

Metropolitan and regional growth are inter-dependent. Sustainable mobility will require a package of investment measures and behavioural incentives to deliver a lasting modal shift for commuting.

These will not be cheap or easy to implement but are fully justified in terms of wider societal co-benefits, including improved air quality and public health.

Investment in public transport services including enhanced public transport services to county towns would offer significantly greater potential to displace private cars. Progressive measures aimed at improving the public transport system should be encouraged in all sustainable modes of transport. To do this, capital investment in other public intra-urban projects should be increased.

A major investment programme is needed to support the decarbonisation of our transport system, support alternative fuels, promote active travel, and build a user-friendly integrated public transport system. Prioritising sustainability as a core consideration will be essential in ensuring the county's ability to be resilient in the face of environmental challenges.

## **Active travel infrastructure**

Increasing investment in active mobility is a necessity to better reflect the changed hierarchy of road users. Investment programmes should support the provision and maintenance of quality footpaths and dedicated cycling infrastructure. There should be a conscious effort by Waterford City & County Council to continue reallocation of road space to more sustainable modes long-term. Installation of new cycle lanes or projects involving the reorientation of traffic and/or access routes should occur after consultation with the local businesses have been carried out. Improvements to the public transport and active travel network in Waterford, must be underpinned by appropriate land use decisions at local authority level that maximise opportunities for sustainable travel and direct future development to existing or planned higher capacity public transport corridors. This is essential for Waterford's competitiveness, quality of life and to transition to a carbon zero economy and society.

## **Road infrastructure**

It is critical for Waterford that strategic road projects as identified in the NPF, NDP, RSES and MASPs are prioritised. These projects complete strategic links to enhance our international and regional connectivity between economic drivers of growth, especially between cities and ports. These projects are integral infrastructure for sustainable multi-modal transport.

Car dependency in the region means that an ever-increasing number of commuting trips cannot all be accommodated on the Waterford metropolitan road network. Inadequate road infrastructure risks undermining the region's liveability and hence the ability of the region to attract and retain staff and compete for investment. Commuting and accessibility impact considerably on quality of life.

A core priority under the NPF is the essential requirement to enhance and upgrade accessibility between urban centres of population and their regions. The Development Plan must support the accelerated delivery of the N25 Waterford to Cork (and N24 Waterford to Limerick) connecting regions, cities, towns, villages and rural areas.

Quality is a key component of any analysis of our built environment. Waterford City & County Council must continue to improve road connectivity and road quality locally. Poorly maintained roads have a significant impact on competitiveness, in the form of increased journey times and capital overheads. They are also an additional cost on businesses at a local level. This requires increased funding for local bodies to improve the existing stock and to implement substantial works on the existing road network. A new approach to funding road maintenance is required, and without a restructuring the quality of our roads will continue to deteriorate.

Finally, the issue of surface quality does not solely impact motorists, as bus and cycle lanes also need to be kept to a high standard for safety and comfort. Therefore, improving the quality of our roads retains relevance in the transition to more sustainable modes of transport.

## **International connectivity**

Strategic assets supporting international connectivity include the Port of Waterford and Waterford Airport. The continued development of these assets and drivers for growth for the entire region is key to attracting investment, diversifying the economy and building resilience. As we are an island-

economy, the success of our economic recovery will be shaped by our capacity to engage in international connectivity and mobility. This connectivity is critical to the economic development of the South-East and Ireland, including trade, tourism, FDI and business location decisions.

Accessibility to major infrastructure is essential to the functioning of a strong regional economy and must be prioritised to unlock regional growth. Our ports and airports are assets of strategic national infrastructure, underpinning regional development. It is important that we improve accessibility, such as continuing to invest in road and rail. The Development Plan should support the continued operation and growth of Waterford Airport and the Port of Waterford as important elements of transport infrastructure. It is to be hoped that Waterford Airport will be in a position to commence commercial flights in the near future.

The growth and development of the Port of Waterford is key to the development of the Metropolitan Area and the major urban centres of the South-East. The Port has significant plans relating to the strategic development of the port functions. The Development Plan must support these in the interest of building the economic function of Waterford as a regional city of scale.

We understand that the Port of Waterford facility at Belview is particularly well positioned in terms of existing rail infrastructure, and we believe it makes sense to utilise these facilities to as great an extent as possible. The limiting factor revolves around the lack of availability of rolling stock and inland rail freight depots. It is to be hoped that the Rail Review currently underway might address these shortfalls. Expansion of rail freight is one clear positive action that can be taken to reduce the carbon footprint of the transport sector.

## **Recommendations**

- Make Waterford's transport network more connected, integrated, and efficient. Commuting patterns have and will change from what was observed pre-Covid, and the Plan must be reflective of this.
- Ensure enhanced connectivity between regions including the N25 to Cork (and N24 to Limerick.)
- Support investment in sustainable transport infrastructure and public realm projects that will make walking, cycling, and public transport more attractive, appealing and accessible for all.
- Successfully connect transport to land use policies to allow people to choose where they want to live and work, rather than having these decisions dictated by circumstance.
- Continue to implement and promote sustainable travel projects across Waterford and ensure they are prioritised in the Waterford Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy.
- Progress new and upgrading of existing rail network and infrastructure which would improve journey times and enable an increase in the frequency of services and connections.
- Transport investment should be integrated with land use and development objectives, resulting in an ambitious multimodal transport network.
- Enhance Park & Ride facilities in the County to encourage commuters to utilise public transport.
- Sufficient funding should be made available to improve the existing stock and to implement substantial works on the existing road network.
- Support the strategically important roles of the Port of Waterford and, as circumstances permit, Waterford Airport.
- Support the delivery of strategic sustainable transport projects including BusConnects.

## Sustainability

In a changing world where investment, consumers, and talent follow environmental integrity, Ireland has no choice but to change its ways and build a more sustainable economy. As such, Ireland's commitment to break away from a dependency on fossil fuels and a take-make-waste economy, and transition to a zero carbon, circular, and environmentally sustainable society by 2050, is as much an economic objective as it is an environmental obligation. With this plan, Waterford has an opportunity to lead the way and become a destination for green investment, talent and purpose driven tourism, all while improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of citizens.

This will not be easy. Significant investment and smart policymaking will be needed in the coming years to ensure economic and demographic growth in the city and county is fully decoupled from environmental harm. Issues like climate change, waste circularity, air pollution, and water quality need to be central considerations in the Development Plan.

### Climate Action

Ireland's climate ambition and international obligations will increase significantly in the next few years because of the European Green Deal and the 2021 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act. Ireland is now targeting 51% emissions reduction by 2030, and net zero emissions by 2050. This increase in ambition reflects a greater understanding of the threat posed by climate change and the closing window for an effective response.

The new ambition will be enormously challenging for Ireland. Our record on climate action is poor compared to other EU Member States and we are struggling to meet even existing greenhouse gas emissions reduction obligations. The lockdown of our economy last year, and the resulting temporary 6% fall in emissions, has revealed the full extent to which our economy remains wedded to carbon, and our lack of progress in recent years.

Only through an escalation in sustainable investment, and a major transformation of Irish society, will we be able to deliver the emissions reduction needed to meet our new targets and play our part in the global effort to combat climate change.

However, there are risks. Poor decisions, and a failure to reinforce our climate ambition with adequate investment and policy supports, could lead to missed targets, higher energy costs, a weakening of national energy security, and reduced industrial competitiveness. The careful balancing of energy costs, decarbonisation, and energy security must be central to policy development and decision-making.

The Waterford City & County Development Plan must support the delivery of these national climate goals. The Development Plan will need to facilitate the incorporation of long-term emissions considerations in planning and infrastructure decisions across Waterford City and County. Because many infrastructure and development decisions are effective over several decades, decisions now will affect Ireland's emissions profile in 2050. More effective land and marine planning and development will be needed to increase Waterford City & County's resilience to climate change, reduce emissions and support the delivery of vital energy infrastructure. Furthermore, it is crucial that the City & County Development Plan enhances and expands renewable energy infrastructure in Waterford which will support the Region's Green Economy. The strengthening of Biodiversity, Green and Blue Infrastructure will be not just be a key enabler for climate action but also for economic growth and connectivity.

With the passage of the 2021 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act and the publication of the Climate Action Plan 2021, all relevant climate mitigation, climate adaptation, and renewable energy strategies and targets will need to be reviewed and updated. As noted in the draft plan, the revised act introduces a requirement for all Local Authorities to prepare individual Climate Action Plans. The Waterford City & County Development Plan will need to be designed with these plans in mind and flexibility given to support their drafting and delivery. This plan should not in any way restrict the scope or hinder the ambition and/or development of these local climate plans.

## Water and wastewater infrastructure

High quality water is a vital resource and is essential to the region's economy and broader society. Water is an important resource to industry, agriculture and tourism. It will underpin sustainable growth of the region's population for decades to come.

Adequate water services infrastructure is essential for the region to thrive. We support investment in water infrastructure through regional projects to meet growing demands from both industry and the increasing population. Along with investment in water infrastructure it is necessary that the region undergo efforts to conserve mains water. Investment in water conservation should be prioritised to reduce demand on current supply. Promotion of water reuse and recycling initiatives should be supported. This will be necessary to secure an additional water source in the medium term.

The country faces EU sanctions for continuing to discharge inadequately treated municipal sewage at multiple locations. Poor water quality in our estuarine regions can be a serious problem not just for marine life, but also for leisure and tourism activity. Irish Water's proposed new framework for the National Water Resources Plan, and the subsequent rollout of regional implementation plans, is likely to identify the need for additional investments across a multitude of water supply zones. It is also imperative to accelerate the programme of network maintenance to bring the leakage rate more into line with EU norms.

## The transition to a Circular Economy

The traditional focus of waste policy in Ireland was on how to best manage waste disposal and increase recycling and recovery rates. However, with the European Green Deal and Ireland's National Waste Policy 2020-2025, the narrative has shifted. The objective now is the near elimination of waste through the development of a circular economy where products and packaging are designed, manufactured, and distributed in such a way that they remain in circulation as long as technically possible. Ibec strongly supports this objective. The current linear take-make-waste approach is not compatible with future demographic growth and resource availability. Ireland is already struggling to manage current levels of waste production. We produce approximately 14 million tonnes of waste each year and export 38% of this for recycling and recovery. The transition to a circular economy must form a key part of the Development plan. The plan must develop the necessary infrastructure and assist businesses, communities and public entities make the necessary transformations.

## Recommendations

- Review and update all relevant climate energy plans to incorporate new environmental obligations as set out in 2021 Climate Act and the forthcoming 2021 Climate Action Plan.
- Ensure Ireland's long-term emission reduction obligations and wider environmental objectives are considered when making planning decisions for new developments and strategic infrastructure.
- Support the sustainable reinforcement and provision of new energy infrastructure by infrastructure providers (subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process), ensuring the energy needs of future population and economic expansion across Waterford can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner.
- Support the transition of the gas network to a carbon neutral network by 2050, thereby supporting Waterford to become carbon neutral.
- Ensure that all future and retrofitted infrastructure is climate proofed, through design and construction, and does not become an obstacle to transition.
- Support the development of renewable energy projects in support of national climate change objectives.

- Avoid delays to supporting infrastructure so that housing and other key projects in Waterford City & County can progress without delay.
- Liaise with Irish Water during the lifetime of the Plan to secure investment in the provision, extension and upgrading of the piped water distribution network and wastewater pipe network across the City & County, to serve existing population and future population growth and sustain economic growth, in accordance with the requirements of the Core and Settlement Strategies.
- Ensure adequate and appropriate wastewater infrastructure is available to cater for existing and proposed development, in collaboration with Irish Water, to avoid any deterioration in the quality of receiving waters and to ensure that discharge meets the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.
- Ensure the principles of circularity and smart resource use are embedded in the Plan.
- Progress the development of the Circular Economy Action Plan at a local level. Set an ambition to make Waterford a leader in resource efficiency and sustainable value creation.
- Identify specific short-term deliverables to build early momentum.

## Housing

The biggest single domestic driver of competitiveness pressures is the lack of housing supply. Continued shortage of affordable housing threatens to undermine the achievement of many economic policy goals, including the attraction of overseas investment into Ireland, the promotion of third-level education, the reduction of emissions and the improvement of household incomes and wellbeing.

It is essential that land use and transport are developed and planned through a coordinated approach to avoid the mistakes of the past that handcuffed the growth to urban sprawl. Compact, urban growth must be actively supported through the Waterford City & County Development Plan. Remote working and digitalisation of services, including retail (e.g., omnichannel) were growing trends prior to the pandemic; they have accelerated since March 2020.

The projected housing demand for the 6-year development plan period is 5,568, providing an annual average housing demand for County Waterford of 928 units. We need the right mix of housing in the right areas, in accordance with suitable and sustainable development practices. By ensuring an appropriate mix of housing, more sustainable communities are created.

The Council must provide social and affordable housing specifically to meet the forecast housing needs of new additional households over the housing strategy period to 2028 as identified by the Waterford City & County Housing Strategy and Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA). The Housing Strategy identifies a requirement for between 132 to 274 social and affordable housing units annually during the plan period, equivalent to 20-30% of the total of additional anticipated households in County Waterford. Ramping up of shovel-ready construction projects will be key to delivering quality and affordable homes. The construction of enabling infrastructure must be delivered in key development areas to pre-empt and expedite delivery of housing.

### Plan for a realistic population increase to meet economic potential

The Southern RSES sets out the population projections for the region and county/local authority contained within. It outlines the “headroom” that can be built into each area in terms of population and housing needs, including how it differs for urban areas over rural areas. The population targets and 25% additional growth allocated between the period 2016 to 2026, will guide the location of housing and population growth across the County. Sufficient zoned lands should be provided to ensure that no shortage in supply arises during the lifetime of the development plan. In prioritising the zoning of lands, regard should be had to their deliverability, accessibility, and capacity to consolidate urban development.

Given the level of growth targeted for metropolitan areas and their role as engines of growth at the top of the County settlement hierarchy, the distribution of population and employment growth needs to be transport infrastructure led so employment, housing and other services are better integrated and support sustainable travel.

## **A changing housing and tenure mix**

Ireland will see a steady increase in the number of new households being formed, reflecting the growth in population coupled with a decline in average household size. Based on these forecasts, we estimate that nationally new household formation will average over 36,000 per annum between 2018 and 2046. Each of these households will need a home. This will involve a combination of owner-occupied and renting households.

There is currently a mismatch between what housing is suitable and what is available. This affects affordability of housing and ultimately Ireland's ability to attract or retain people. The demand for homes is also driven by changes in the average household size.

Waterford's housing strategy must account for the required change in household mix and tenure. We need the right mix of housing in the right areas, in accordance with suitable and sustainable development practices. It is important that the City & County's housing policy adequately accounts for the expected demographic changes that will impact the housing stock and mix required over the coming years. A holistic view of housing is required, allowing for an appropriate mix of location, type, tenure and accommodation. Students, young professionals, families, and an older population all have different housing needs.

## **Increased housing supply requires availability of zones and serviceable land**

Increasing the availability of zoned and serviceable land will be essential to meeting Ireland's housing needs. It is critical that funding is available to ensure sites can be provided with the necessary supporting utilities and infrastructure. Only 45% of the cost of delivering a new home is accounted for by the build cost. Additional measures such as a bridging finance scheme will be required to better utilise the supply of zoned and serviceable land suitable for housing.

## **Enhanced delivery of social housing**

Increased housing provision by the local authority sector would provide immediate economic and social benefit across the country. Over the next few years, the maintenance and refurbishment of the existing social housing stock will come to the fore. The social housing stock is ageing in key urban areas. Taking housing out of the system adds to the demand for additional housing. Maintenance, refurbishment, and potential replacement will become an increasing focus of local authorities in metropolitan areas. The age and condition of units impact the reletting time of social housing. The social housing stock will also require deep and substantial retrofitting.

## **Recommendations**

- Develop transport and land use through a coordinated approach to support compact, urban growth.
- Change housing design guidance to allow greater density of new home development.
- Continue investment on social housing. The demands for purpose-built social housing have not dissipated and only been exacerbated by the economic shock brought on by Covid.
- Increase the availability of zoned and serviceable land.
- Seek to promote the creation of sustainable places and healthy communities, while ensuring that development occurs at an appropriate pace and that infrastructure is delivered in tandem to support this growth.
- Encourage compact growth, through the development of infill sites, brownfield lands, under-utilised land/buildings, vacant sites and derelict sites.

- Support redevelopment and reuse, including energy retrofitting, of existing housing stock.

## Reimagining and Rethinking Waterford

### Metropolitan growth

Waterford's economy relies on a thriving and successful City. Enabling the city to become better functioning, more sustainable and vibrant will ensure economic growth and social advancement. The city and other large urban centres, such as Dungarvan and Tramore should be targeted to house a growing population through compact growth. This requires better infrastructure and service provision, ranging from transport, energy, and water infrastructure through to healthcare, social services and investment in education.

Talent is mobile. It is not just businesses that invest in an area, people do too. It must be recognised that urban planning necessitates building communities, not just housing. All of this impacts a city's ability to attract or retain people.

Waterford City can drive economic growth across the region and reduce Ireland's reliance on the greater Dublin region. The Development Plan should strive for Waterford to form a strong, resilient, and complimentary network that reinforce growth and drives growth across the entire Southern Region with Cork and Limerick-Shannon.

As Waterford aims to become a dynamic, modern city of scale and a UNESCO Learning City, it will be crucial for the Development Plan to ensure the right infrastructure is in place to allow Waterford drive national and regional growth, prosperity and innovation. The TUSE is critical to the future economic performance of the City and County. Focused investment across the Metropolitan Area, will deliver a vibrant and diverse University City with a high quality of life for all through a high standard of physical and community infrastructure and opportunities for employment.

A living City and a Metropolitan Area with revitalised well-functioning places including large scale urban regeneration at key locations such as the North Quays Innovation District provide opportunities to create a more attractive and liveable city. The key future growth enablers of the North Quays SDZ regeneration site should be prioritised for integrated sustainable development through the provision of supporting transport infrastructure and services.

Smart cities can enhance quality of life. Technology can be utilised to solve the challenges our cities are facing. A 'smart city' does not solely focus on efficiency, it also strives to provide a higher quality of life for those that live and work there. Initiatives seek to deliver smart mobility, a healthier and safer city, a cleaner and more sustainable environment, public realm improvements and better use of space. Smart cities seek to connect government, business, academia, and inhabitants in delivering lasting and sustainable transformation. The 'smart city' concept can be connected to 'smart regions.' Metropolitan and regional growth are inter-dependent.

### Town centres that work

Covid has resulted in dramatic changes to how people live and work and many of these changes will ultimately become embedded in a 'new normal'. The post-pandemic economic fate of town centres across Waterford County cannot be left to chance. It must be planned for and invested in.

Immediate challenges, if not mitigated or addressed, will cause lasting damage, and undermine any recovery effort. The revised Development Plan must provide the tools to help reimagine and revitalise towns and maximise the new and unexpected employment and investment opportunities for towns and villages in Waterford.

There is a strong interdependence between the planning, development and creation of an attractive environment and enterprise development. Companies are attracted to invest in locations where they can access skills, where people will want to live and work and where the surrounding infrastructure is supportive of business (including, for example, transport and broadband networks; education and training facilities, retail etc.). Establishing a strong sense of place contributes to the attractiveness

factors for entrepreneurship, for business investment, for foreign direct investment (FDI), talent and tourism.

## **Strategy for reimagining and rethinking our town centres**

The focus must be on re-intensification of existing business locations. This strategy aims to create the right conditions for enterprise to thrive, to create wealth and improve quality of life for all. Key aspects are orderly growth, placemaking, smart specialisation and clustering. Consideration is given to future proofing risk management so that growth is sustainable, competitive, inclusive and resilient. Skills, talent and innovation are identified as drivers for resilient and sustainable growth.

Towns must be developed in terms of their economic self-sufficiency to minimise the need for commuting and support the development of surrounding areas. This would support locally generated employment and create prospects for growth. Employment creation will come from a broad base of possible activities; it is critical that potential is recognised and supported across a range of possible sources both indigenous and from overseas.

We must help firms attract and retain scarce talent; maintain a greater focus on supporting indigenous enterprises; and commit to underscore Ireland as a beacon of certainty for mobile investment in an increasingly uncertain global economy. Employment, along with social protection and pension systems, needs to support easy career transitions.

Town centres will have to be rejuvenated but they will also need to be reimagined. They must be able to adequately respond to trends that have accelerated over recent years, including those that experienced hyper-acceleration at the outset of the crisis. These include the effects of continued growth in remote working and online retail on town centres. Increasing footfall is one priority and is important to helping town centre businesses navigate the current crisis.

Remote working is an accelerating trend which is here to stay and will require an adequate local response, as this has an immediate knock-on effect on other town centre businesses. It is time to address the long-term sustainability and resilience of town centres. A combination of tax relief and other supports should be put in place to incentivise levels of home and remote working.

The importance of daily services and accessibility, including last-mile delivery, for the retail sector should be taken into consideration for future investment. Given the significant contribution the sector makes to our town centres, consultation should be made with businesses regarding rejuvenation and restructuring plans, to support existing stores and accurately reflect the requirements of retail.

The pragmatic response of local authorities to Covid in terms of actively supporting outdoor seating and the use of the public realm should become a positive legacy of the crisis. Efforts such as this, pedestrianisation initiatives, and the creation of new public spaces will improve local destinations. Ongoing consultation and engagement must be had with local businesses in the design and development of these schemes. It is important that the space made available is actively used, sustains local economic activity and contributes to urban placemaking.

## **Urban living key to sustainable town centres**

Achieving greater diversity of land use within urban areas will aid sustainable rejuvenation. This requires a better and more appropriate balance between residential, retail, and other commercial or business activity. According to the OECD, the crisis provides an opportunity to develop a new long-term strategy for urban spaces based on accessibility to amenities and services.

This replaces previous thinking of designing urban areas from solely the logic of mobility, which has led to unsustainable commuting patterns. It requires a focus on the “localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals”, “the 10-minute city/town/community concept” and “tactical urbanism”. Above all, it is a core pillar of the National Planning Framework (NPF). This fundamental shift will require a collaborative approach between local businesses, Waterford City & County Council and Government to be successful. The Plan must promote the development of additional convenience retail to support housing and population growth. New residential settlements in the Core and Metropolitan Areas should be supported with required services.

In the past year, the retail industry has seen an unprecedented level of change, particularly in regard to digitalisation and online shopping. The retail sector is pivotal to regeneration and renewal of Town Centre areas, their economic viability and delivery of a high-quality public realm, built environment and sense of place.

## Recommendations

- Ensure the right infrastructure is in place to support the TUSE and to allow Waterford to become a University City and drive national and regional growth, prosperity, and innovation.
- The city and other large urban centres, such as Dungarvan and Tramore should be targeted to house a growing population through compact growth, in line with national and regional policy.
- Support the delivery of the North Quays SDZ regeneration project for integrated sustainable development through the provision of supporting infrastructure and services.
- Development and regeneration of town centres through careful planning and a high-quality public realm with increased usage of green landscaping to enhance urban areas.
- Facilitate urban resilience and recovery through investment in mitigating against legacy issues caused by Covid, remote working, changes to retail and other external factors.
- Develop the capacity for Dungarvan to grow as a Key Town of sufficient scale to be a driver of regional growth.
- Support Self-Sustaining Towns and Small Growth Towns and Villages as areas for local services, residential and employment potential.
- Work with partners across the region to implement smart initiatives.
- Support the delivery of the right housing and tenure mix (e.g., apartment focus, rental sector, ageing population, students, social housing, affordable housing etc).
- Promote the development of additional convenience retail in line with housing and population growth.
- Support compact urban growth and ensure that development proceeds sustainably and at an appropriate scale and density.
- Provide a focus on re-intensification of existing business locations, to create the right conditions for enterprise to thrive such as placemaking, 'smart' specialisation and clustering.
- Consider all options of funding regional projects. The potential of Exchequer and non-Exchequer funding of regional and local projects must be fully exploited. This includes encouraging new partnership models such as City Deals and leveraging the potential of competitive financing.
- Promote and support the renewal and revitalisation of rural town and village centres to enhance the vitality and viability of settlements as attractive residential and service centres, including actively addressing issues of vacancy and dereliction in settlements in Waterford.
- Invest in sustainable transport measures to support the '10-minute city/town/community' concept.

## Supporting the experience and night-time economies

The Development Plan must help create the conditions for the Experience Economy to achieve world class potential that is sustainable. The wider experience economy, particularly those activities in the evening and night-time, is a key pillar underpinning sustainable recovery.

Incorporating the needs of the night-time economy is key to reimagining our town centres. It can make a significant contribution to the local economy to the benefit of towns and villages across Waterford. Waterford City and County Council must actively support the needs of its local night-time economy, which includes rethinking the use of public space and reimagining under-utilised spaces.

A new events strategy is required. This would cover areas such as short-stay visits, conferences, events, markets, and other local visitor attractions. Waterford City & County Council and other regulators must adopt a partnership approach to events. This includes consistent, predictable, and simplified licensing procedures; a constructive approach to risk management; and incorporating short-term and long-term economic benefits into the decision-making process. This includes the role events play in supporting the night-time economy; increased footfall; and local economic benefits such as direct (e.g., venue owner, events contractors etc) and indirect (e.g., neighbouring bars and restaurants, accommodation, transport, supply-chains etc). Incorporating the needs of the night-time economy is key to reimagining our town centres.

## **Tourism**

As tourism is an important indigenous sector in Waterford, attractions and infrastructure will need to be upgraded over the coming years, in addition to developing new experiences that could be enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. Stakeholders will need to work together to facilitate the better targeting of tourism investment across visitor experience development, visitor awareness and accessibility, and critical enablers. Local, regional, and national public bodies must continue to advance projects that leverage place-based assets and catchments sustainably. This includes the development of infrastructure assets such as greenways and blueways.

The natural assets of the Coastline play a valuable role as economic resources for tourism, particularly in rural areas. The protection of the coastline as a tourism asset is imperative to ensure long-term benefits from tourism activities. The Development Plan must support expansion of the Waterford Greenway network and opportunities to connect with other strategic greenway networks, ensuring tourism continues and grows as a significant economic activity for Waterford.

## **Tourism promotion and marketing**

An increase in tourism promotion and marketing will need to occur in tandem with the re-opening of the country. The priority should be to target international visitors in the higher spending source markets and segments. This will result in sustainable growth in employment across the sector, which will in turn boost employment levels. Focus should be on the development and enhancement of cultural and heritage experiences to attract a wide range of visitors to Ireland.

## **Recommendations**

- Renewed focus on the night-time economy. Prioritise immediate investment in supporting infrastructure, such as late-night transport provision, for the recovery and growth of the night-time economy. Waterford City & County Council must actively support local night-time economic development, which includes re-thinking the use of public space and re-imagining under-utilised spaces.
- The city should have a dedicated “night mayor or night-time economy advisor” to coordinate the development and delivery of a vision to develop the city-region’s nightlife, making it stronger, safer, better-connected, and an even more attractive destination.
- Roll-out smart tourism and smart destination initiatives, which includes smart city and smart region initiatives.
- Prioritise investment in the tourism infrastructure and new product development. Investment should support visitor experience development, upgrading of existing attractions and sites, visitor awareness and accessibility.

- Support development of the tourism sector in Waterford including investment in Ireland's Ancient East and capture key opportunities to grow the sector based around Waterways, Activities, Heritage, Arts and Culture, in an urban and a rural environment.

## Digital Infrastructure

The expanding digital economy plays an increasingly crucial role in the exchange of goods and services. Insufficient broadband connectivity leaves local businesses and householders at a significant disadvantage. The opportunities the digitalisation offers cut across sectors and play to the strengths of both urban and rural areas. Digital infrastructure and smart technologies are critical enablers for economic and social revitalisation. A Smart Region, embedding digital technology across many functions will enhance Waterford's competitiveness, attractiveness and economic resilience.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) will provide the infrastructure for high-speed broadband that could not be provided commercially. Rapid roll-out of the NBP is essential to bring high speed broadband to the remaining 23% of homes and businesses in the State currently without high-speed broadband, including across Waterford County. Covid-19 has highlighted the urgent need to accelerate the process as fast as possible. It is imperative that Waterford City & County Council acts to remove any unnecessary administrative or regulatory obstacles to achieving this. Local Authority Broadband Officers should be empowered to co-ordinate the local implementation of any necessary changes.

5G will be very important to Ireland's economic recovery and future competitiveness. In the context of Brexit, Ireland must not fall behind its nearest neighbour when it comes to digital competitiveness. The Development Plan must support 5G infrastructure deployment.

### Recommendations

- Support the delivery and implementation of the National Broadband Plan.
- Address any local obstacles to the speedy roll-out of the National Broadband Plan and other telecommunications infrastructure so that networks are improved, and fibre broadband delivered as rapidly as possible.
- Ensure a supporting regulatory environment for the successful roll-out of 5G.
- Develop Waterford's digital infrastructure as a driver of a Smart Region.
- Support investment in incubation and ICT infrastructure to capitalise on remote working and learning opportunities, enterprise start-ups, e-commerce and up-scaling for businesses across all settlements in the City & County.
- Ensure all communities can transition to digitalisation for a better quality of life and eliminate digital inequalities, in terms of access to digital networks for the purposes of business, access to public services and education.

## Local Enterprise Development

Covid has altered the labour market, resulting in job losses in all sectors. Work is needed to make the Region more resilient and globally competitive due to Covid, Brexit, and other global threats, with sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and leisure particularly exposed. Government is committed to the national objective of balanced regional development, which will continue to prioritise the location of new FDI outside Dublin. Waterford City & County must also scale its indigenous enterprise base. It must be a location of choice for entrepreneurs. Waterford City & County Council has a key role to play in future economic development.

Placemaking, addressing strengths and weaknesses of each region, and smart specialisation are core components of Ireland 2025, the national enterprise strategy. Enterprise agencies such as IDA

Ireland and Enterprise Ireland have ambitious regional targets and goals. These are supported by each local authority through the local enterprise office network. The Action Plan for Jobs process, including regional enterprise plans, together with the regional skills fora and the Action Plan for Rural Development underpin smart specialisation strategies, sectoral ecosystems and regional development.

It is the interest of these agencies that enterprise growth can be achieved and sustained across all regions. Meeting their objectives in terms of delivering new jobs and investments requires an adequate supply of commercial and residential property, attractive areas to live and availability of skills. These underpin regional and local value propositions.

Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) play a vital role in local economies by offering support, guidance and training to people who want to start or grow a business. Waterford City & County Council's local enterprise network will play an important role during the economic recovery phase. Also, the Programme for Government envisages a stronger role for the LEOs where they will be allowed to provide direct grants to businesses with more than 10 employees; to ensure companies experience seamless transition moving from being a LEO to an Enterprise Ireland client; and streamlined application procedures for enterprise agency support.

## Recommendations

- Continue to support Waterford City & County Council's local enterprise network through the Local Enterprise Office.
- Ensure quality of life factors are incorporated into Waterford City & County Council's enterprise policies. Quality of life is critical to productivity and a key part of a value proposition to attract and retain businesses and workers.

## Planning Capabilities

Spatial planning policies at local, metropolitan, and regional levels must resist making rash and misguided changes to the sustainable development objectives at the heart of the NPF.

Planning capabilities at local authority level have been reduced over recent years, yet local authorities are usually the first point of call on planning matters. The local development plan making process, NDP commitments and private sector investment will compound the demand for planners and other key skills further. A programme to upskill existing local authority staff is needed to provide a more active role in performing planning including forward planning, regulatory policy, development management and enforcement.

In addition, sharing of planners and other specialist skills between local authorities must be encouraged. This will ensure professional and timely planning operations can be maintained. It would allow an individual local authority scale to meet short-term or immediate pressures because planning applications can vary in size, complexity, and timeframe. This is in addition to the required investment in e-planning.

Local authorities must not frustrate the provision of much needed infrastructure. Local charges can substantially affect the cost base of existing energy generation sites or undermine the attractiveness to develop new infrastructure projects. The local charging regime should be designed to incentivise development. However, it is through the development plan process that local authorities can threaten the delivery or viability of projects.

Local development plans through zoning practices can reduce the availability of land for infrastructure development. Implementation of the NPF at a local level will hopefully mitigate wholesale problems of old. Past practices have particularly frustrated efforts to meet Ireland's renewable energy needs such as windfarm development. This is not consistent with the stated priority to transition to a low carbon, clean energy and building climate resilience.

The regulation of noise pollution is complex and evolving. It has the potential to impact not only on urban infrastructure such as roads and airports, but also on rural areas where new wind energy

projects are being considered. It will be important to ensure a consistent approach to land use zoning and community gain that balances the legitimate interests of transport providers and users, energy providers and users, and local communities.

## **Recommendations**

- Create a programme to upskill existing local authority staff to provide a more active role in performing planning including forward planning, regulatory policy, development management and enforcement.
- Ensure a greater pooling and sharing of specialist skills between local authorities and other public bodies, involved in planning and construction.
- Ensure a consistent approach to land use zoning and community gain that balances the legitimate interests of transport providers and users, energy providers and users, and local communities.



## About Ibec

Ibec is Ireland's largest lobby group and business representative. We campaign for real changes to the policies that matter most to business. Policy is shaped by our diverse membership, who are home grown, multinational, big and small and employ 70% of the private sector workforce in Ireland. With 36 trade associations covering a range of industry sectors, 6 offices around Ireland as well as an office in Brussels. With over 240 employees, Ibec communicates the Irish business voice to key stakeholders at home and abroad. Ibec also provides a wide range of professional services and management training to members on all aspects of human resource management, occupational health and safety, employee relations and employment law.

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