

Cork Chamber Submission - National Planning Framework Draft First Revision

Sept 2024



**Cork
Chamber**
Advancing business together

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1. Introduction

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework (NPF).

As the leading business organisation for the Cork City and County region, representing almost 1,200 businesses, that employ in excess of 120,000 people, Cork Chamber has a mandate to develop and promote policies that ensure Cork is a significant player in the Irish economy. The Cork economy contributes 19% to Ireland's GDP¹ and covers sectors such as agri-food, biopharma, healthcare, education, research, international financial and business services, information and communications technology, tourism and energy.

Cork Chamber is the voice of business in the region and is focused on advocating for developments identified by business members and employers, as well as priorities to meet current, medium term and future economic growth needs.

In parallel with this submission Cork Chamber has again actively engaged with both Cork local authorities as we did for the original iteration of the NPF with their joint "Cork 2050 submission"² to the NPF. As a result, Cork 2050 is referenced on several occasions in this submission. Cork is the fastest growing region on the island and will lead the Southern Region at national, European and international level, as a magnet for investment, talent and innovation for the benefit of Ireland as a whole. The collective influence of the businesses represented by Cork Chamber and other Chambers in the region will play a crucial and central role in the implementation of the NPF.

Our submission sets out key parameters and deliverables that will sustain and expand the wider Southern Region, led by Cork, as the perfect counterbalance, and strategic support for, the Greater Dublin Area, without compromising the exceptional quality of life with which the region is synonymous.

Cork Chamber in consultation with our Board of Directors, partners, members and stakeholders in Cork have developed business priorities for Cork and the wider Southern Region. These priorities are broadly aligned with the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs), Strategic Investment Priorities (SIPs) and National Policy Objectives (NPOs) of the First Draft Revision of the National Planning Framework.

Since the publication of the NPF in 2018 Cork has experienced encouraging developments like the Dunkettle interchange completion, the continuation of the Docklands redevelopment, and the much-needed commuter rail improvements. This progress was against the backdrop of a challenging 2023 marked by global conflicts, economic pressures, and domestic challenges. However, we have entered 2024 and the next decade with a renewed sense of optimism for the future of Cork, this is underpinned by the resilience of our Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and indigenous companies and coupled with the ambitious goals the region and the wider community have for Cork.

Cork Chamber's advocacy priorities are driven by the needs of our members. These priorities include familiar areas of importance like housing, talent availability, renewable energy, sustainability, and infrastructure. Additionally, emerging priorities like available and affordable

¹ [Cork City Council](#)

² [Cork 2050 Realising the Full Potential](#)

childcare and urban evolution are gaining attention, underlining the need for vibrant, safe urban centres to attract investment and talent. These priorities underscore the interconnectedness of all these priorities, and the need for a holistic strategy towards Cork’s development which reflect the collective ambition for Cork’s future.



As we have mentioned earlier, Cork is on the cusp of monumental positive change. The NPF must match the ambition for Cork that we see on the ground in Cork, be it from local authorities and their development plans, multi-national companies and their investments supported by IDA Ireland, by indigenous SMEs supported by Enterprise Ireland or by state agencies such as Uisce Éireann and Eirgrid opening new offices in Cork as an acknowledgement of the crucial role Cork plays at a national level. Significant and ambitious plans are already in place such as the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (CMATS). However, for much needed infrastructure, such as a light rail service, the ambition alone is not good enough and execution is too slow. Delays in making big decisions regarding projects will cause major organisations to abandon ship and damage our competitiveness. We can no longer use out of date “business as usual” formulas when deciding on what to go forward with. Ambition, forward thinking and a strategic approach is required to ensure Cork can reach its potential as an international city of scale.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Cork Chamber welcomes the significant alignment between the UN SDGs and the NPF’s NSOs. Cork Chamber has been chosen by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications as one of twenty organisations nationwide to become a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Champion for 2024-2025.

The world is currently off track to achieve the SDGs and accelerated action is needed. However, in this decade of action for the SDGs, Cork Chamber is determined to play a leading role in delivering on the goals – locally, nationally and internationally.

We are honoured to accept this appointment by DECC to champion the Sustainable Development Goals among the business and wider community and this is a recognition of the work we have been undertaking for a number of years. Businesses have a crucial role to play in contributing to a more sustainable and resilient future. We look forward to working with the Minister, the Department and other SDG Champions over the next year to make impactful changes.

Appointed as part of the 2024-2025 SDG Champions Programme, the chosen organisations will help raise awareness of the importance of the SDGs as a roadmap for a safer, fairer, more prosperous and sustainable future for all.

The organisations appointed under this year's programme have been selected from across the public, private, community, voluntary, youth and NGO sectors and are represented by larger national organisations and smaller community groups.

2. A New Way Forward

Realising Ambition and Potential

The draft NPF emphasises the importance of enabling all parts of Ireland, whether rural or urban to successfully accommodate growth and change, by facilitating a shift towards Ireland's regions and cities other than Dublin, while also recognising Dublin's ongoing key role.

Cork Chamber welcomes strengthening the four regional cities of Cork Limerick, Waterford and Galway to create strong growth poles for business and a critical mass for service and infrastructure delivery.

Our submission is focused on positioning the Metropolitan Cork area as an international driver of regional population growth and economic activity, interacting with other cities in the Southern Region, and mobilising rural towns and villages. The collaborative approach between regions advocated in the draft revised NPF is not a new concept to Cork as the central driver of economic growth for the Southern Region. Through engagement with the Southern Regional Assembly, local authorities, civic society, and communities' collaboration is at the heart of all that we do in Cork as a leader for the wider Southern Region.

The Metropolitan Cork area is the most productive and efficient economy of scale in the Southern Region and as such is well positioned to deliver significant value and growth for the entire region and, indeed, nationally. The NPF should acknowledge that Cork and the Southern Region is growing at a faster rate than initially estimated in the original NPF. The Southern Region according to Census 2022 has already reached 47.3% of the 2040 projected population growth in the first 10 years of the 24-year projection period. and the NPF should callout Cork's strategic position and potential as the southern capital and, like Dublin, will continue to play a significant and strategic role in economic, population and employment growth.

Cork has all the necessary credentials, including global and indigenous economic clusters, international connectivity (port, airport and digital infrastructure), road infrastructure, health infrastructure, water infrastructure, energy infrastructure, population base, world leading higher education institutions, skills, culture and quality of life. Given this unique opportunity to shape our future, it is important that the NPF carries sufficient weight once adopted.

The complexity of stakeholders, institutional tiers and interdependencies in the delivery of the NPF through local authority development plans, regional assemblies, and state agency delivery and strategic plans, delivery of the NPF may pose a significant logistic and hierarchical challenge. There is potential that due to this complexity our planning system will not be as effective as possible, and investment will be lost. To reach our full potential, the administrative mechanisms that lead to implementation should be respectful to the NPF. The hierarchy and significance of the plan must be clearly established with all stakeholders, including state agencies strategic delivery plans, fully aligned with the delivery of the NPF.

Cork Chamber agrees with the move away from the ‘business as usual’ pattern of development and that as the largest centres of population, employment and services outside Dublin, the four cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, will continue to provide a focus for their regions. As stated in the draft this will require the combined potential of all four cities to be realised at an unprecedented rate, to create viable alternatives to Dublin. However, Cork Chamber believes if Ireland is to achieve the level of growth required, Cork metropolitan area and the wider county will require prioritisation as the region best placed to deliver growth at the rate required, which in turn will support the economic growth of the other city regions.

The NPF correctly identified the significance of cross-border interactions. It is therefore important that the NPF acknowledges the economic potential of stronger links between the island’s two largest cities outside Dublin in Cork and Belfast. Stronger rail, air and port connectivity and coordination has the potential to unlock substantial economic activity.

The NPF Strategy

Cork Chamber broadly welcomes the revised NPF strategy in aligning with new and improved investment and governance arrangements and all aspects are to be implemented together and are mutually complementary. However, we should emphasise the importance of a strategic approach in prioritising regions and infrastructure projects that are most needed and can be delivered at a rate that is required to ensure growth targets can be achieved.

In relation to targeting a level of growth in the Northern and Western and Southern Regions combined to ‘at least match’ that projected in the Eastern and Midlands Region. If the NPF is to truly make a significant impact on balance regional development Cork metropolitan area and the wider Southern Region will need to grow at a significantly faster rate comparatively and should be prioritised as such.

Cork Chamber welcomes the addition of the point, “Prioritisation of key enabling infrastructure in each region to promote growth where it is required”. It will be crucial for enabling infrastructure projects to be funded and delivered at an accelerated pace.

Ireland’s rural fabric is intrinsically linked to the success of a region. Cork Chamber proposes a model to promote the potential of towns, village and rural areas outside the Metropolitan Cork area to contribute to the successful development of the region. This will require investment to

allow the revitalisation of rural town centres, transport infrastructure, broadband, energy and water networks.

Cork Chamber has long advocated for compact urban growth and welcome a commitment to the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF).

Strategy Development

Cork Chamber acknowledges the NPF is informed by demographic and econometric modelling undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) as a core element of the Framework.

We noted that, the draft states, “Census 2022 recorded a population of 5.15 million (CSO) in Ireland. The ESRI has updated its national and regional population projections to account for Census 2022 and to take account of up to date economic, fertility, mortality and migration data. The updated projection is that the population of Ireland will increase to approximately 5.7 million by 2030 and to 6.1 million by 2040. Given the key role of international migration in shaping population growth in Ireland, the ESRI have also modelled a higher international migration scenario with a projected population of 6.3 million people by 2040 (baseline + 200,000). The ESRI projections form the basis for the revised NPF. This means that the NPF will now need to plan for a population of 6.1 million by 2040, an additional 250,000 people over that planned for in 2018.”

We also note that, The Housing Commission Report published in May estimated that, as of the 2022 Census, there was a housing deficit of between 212,500 and 256,000 homes. This deficit must be taken into account in the NPF if any meaningful progress is to be made in the delivery of housing.

While we acknowledge the strategy development is targeting the pattern of development, rather than precise numbers, the current deficit must be taken into account when looking at the long-term, national perspective and proportionality of growth as Ireland is not starting from zero but rather from at least minus 212,500 required units.

Growing our Regions

As noted, earlier Cork Chamber agrees with the NPF moving from ‘business as usual’, under which a majority of growth would occur in the Eastern and Midland Region. We further appreciate that the ‘regional dominance’, approach whereby the combined Northern and Western and Southern Regional Assembly areas would grow at twice the rate of the Eastern and Midland Region is neither realistic nor implementable given the significance of Dublin and would result in a diminished scale of overall national development.

However, it is Cork Chamber’s view is that National Planning Framework, ‘regional parity’ approach, whereby growth of the Northern and Western and Southern Regional Assembly areas combined would at least equate to that projected for the Eastern and Midland Region may not deliver the required regional balance. If we have learned anything from this approach to date is that a more strategic intervention is needed if significant improvements in balanced regional development is to be achieved.

If the revised framework maintains the ‘regional parity’ approach, in effect it is adopting the ‘business as usual’ approach. Notwithstanding the significance of Dublin and the continuing

need for the Eastern Region to continue to grow, when it comes to enabling infrastructure projects in the Southern Region e.g. Cork Light Rail should be considered favourably. This will enable sustainable balanced regional development and allow Cork, and the Southern Region grow at the required rate to ensure Ireland achieves its growth targets.

It is noted in the draft that Census 2022 and other indicators highlight significant unmet demand for housing in Dublin and the Mid-Eastern Region in particular. Cork Chamber would highlight that all reports including the Housing Commission Report has estimated that, as of the 2022 Census, there was a housing deficit of between 212,500 and 256,000 homes in Ireland. Thus, there is significant unmet demand across the entire country.

The report also notes that between 144,000 and 282,000 new dwellings are expected to be required in Cork by 2050. Cork makes up 11.3% of Ireland's total population according to Census 2022, so population adjustment would mean Cork was short between 24,000 and 29,000 homes. For this reason, it is crucial that enabling infrastructure projects in Cork, and the other regional city regions, such as transport, water and electricity are prioritised so we can first catch up and then achieve our required target growth.

We agree that this can only be undertaken and delivered in line with longer term strategic planning for Transport Orientated Development (TOD) in Ireland's five cities to support the delivery of new sustainable communities at brownfield and greenfield locations along existing or planned high-capacity public transport corridors within the metropolitan area.

Building Stronger Regions: Accessible Centres of Scale

'Centres of scale', such as Cork City are important for economic development, sustainable development and providing a focal point for the wider region. The draft identifies twin elements required to address issues of scale and peripherality in Ireland. The first, is a focus on building internationally, nationally and regionally strong cities and towns, that deliver a lot of positive impacts and enhance overall national growth. The second is improved accessibility between centres of scale separate from Dublin.

The importance of connectivity and accessibility cannot be underestimated and is repeatedly highlighted across all sectors as critical to attracting and retaining investment and talent to and within a region. Cork, following the completion of the Dunkettle Interchange and the N22, is very much on the right path strategically as regards infrastructural development for a growing and progressive Southern Region, reinforced by strategic employment zones and residential planning, effectively focused on maximising each strategic infrastructural investment.

Improved connectivity from Cork to Limerick, Waterford and the Southern Region will require further investment in the M20 and the N25, encouraging further collaboration and driving growth in the Southern Region. The delivery of the M28 is critical to the continued success of the global cluster of economic activity that has been long established in Ringaskiddy.

A particular focus was put on improving accessibility and connectivity northwards on the emerging Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) network. As we have noted earlier, there is significant potential for economic development by linking the island's two largest cities outside of Dublin, in Cork and Belfast. Stronger rail, air and port connectivity and coordination has the potential to unlock substantial economic activity. For Cork, Dublin and Belfast intercity connectivity is paramount and it is imperative to upgrade the core intercity railway network to top speeds of 200km, develop a cross-Dublin solution and multi-track railways with new short

sections of track on congested corridors. Only when travelling by train between the Island's largest cities is a realistic alternative to the car will rail become the prevalent mode of transport in the head of the consumer and create deeper economic connection between Cork and Belfast.

We are also pleased to see that our calls for the accelerated delivery of a more direct service between Cork and Limerick and the new 200km per hour intercity trains, which will see journey times reduced, have been included in the final report of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review.³

It is disappointing that a more direct route between Cork and Waterford was found to be impractical due to the geography of this corridor, it is very positive to see the recommendation to install a curve at Limerick Junction which would enable trains leaving the Cork-Dublin line to join the Limerick-Waterford line.

Securing Compact and Sustainable Growth

The ongoing shortages in the housing sector are without doubt negatively affecting Cork's attractiveness and the availability of housing continues to be a top concern for our members. In recent years, Cork Chamber has called for the viable and adequate provision of housing close to the city centre to allow for compact growth, while working to address the issues that are hampering the delivery of apartments. Changing guidelines to increase dwelling densities in cities, towns and villages will not affect change if issues surrounding the viability and affordability of apartment building are not addressed. While there has been some progress with affordable housing schemes and bodies given access to lower cost finance through government intervention, much more needs to be done.

It is also crucial that increases in dwelling densities do not have implications for the historic value of an area. It is intended that decision makers will need to make a judgement in relation to the suitability of a proposed development having regard to the receiving context and the need to protect the character and amenities of an area. Consultation with local residents and businesses in advance of any development will be of great importance to ensure future high-density developments are well received within the area and the business community. Therefore, provision should be contained within any guidelines for full consultation with local communities in advance of the higher density developments within areas. Equally, where a high-density development is planned in an area in need of rejuvenation, it must seek to improve the area and create character.

The term 'Urban Evolution' is a new priority highlighted by our members. It encompasses a number of interconnected actions to enhance city and town centres from a functional and aesthetic perspective. Cork has the potential to be a national leader in urban rejuvenation. Vibrant towns and city centres rely on people living in the urban heart and, throughout Cork, there are beautiful buildings currently being underutilised and in danger of falling into disrepair. Therefore, potential urban centre housing units that currently lie vacant, such as those over shops, should be further targeted to remove any impediments from converting these spaces into sought after living quarters. One of the largest impediments to repurposing vacant premises is the difficulty in obtaining fire certification. Opportunities to explore innovative options to develop these units without compromising safety must be taken. Bringing residents back into

³ [All-Island Strategic Rail Review](#)

the urban centre is a vital cog in growing vibrant liveable towns and cities and is a great opportunity for Cork and Ireland.

Translating the NPF to City and County Levels

Cork Chamber has always welcomed plan-led approach and how the NPF sets out how we can achieve our overall national, regional and local objectives in a coherent and coordinated manner. However, it will be essential for local authorities to be consulted to provide a ‘bottom up’ input to this iteration of the NPF. This is to ensure that local targets are not restricted by targets identified by national trends. As identified in the Housing Commission Report, we are not starting from zero and there is a significant deficit in housing provision, and this should be acknowledged in the revised NPF. The updated ‘Implementation Roadmap’ when published should translate national and regional planned growth projections to city and county levels but also take into account the housing deficit.

The revised targets will support a plan-led approach to NPF implementation at regional and local level, allowing NPF growth objectives to be incorporated into city and county development plans as they are reviewed. For these objectives to be achieved and to avoid delays in the delivery of infrastructure there will be a need to ensure alignment between city and county development plans and utility delivery plans such as water, wastewater, electricity, and transport. The non-alignment has a detrimental impact on the delivery of housing. Lands can lay idle and sterilised for development for years if wastewater and water infrastructure delivery is not aligned with local authority plans. Similarly, housing can be delayed due to the requirement to upgrade road connectivity or connect area to the electricity grid. Local authorities should be lead authorities in the delivery of the NPF and state agencies should align their delivery plans to the respective local authority development plan.

It is Cork Chamber’s view that although the NPF and the NDP as the two parts of Project Ireland 2040 were designed to be the national blueprint for all development and planning that all other plans would be aligned, in reality this has not been the case. If we look at An Garda Síochána the HSE and many other state agencies that should have their Strategic Delivery Plans fully adopted and aligned with the NPF, they are not. The revised NPF and NDP will need to ensure fully alignment with state agencies, and this will be done by guaranteeing multi-year funding to allow the agencies plan longer term in line with the NPF.

3. Strategic Development of Ireland’s Regions

Regional governance and regional development are essential cogs for translating and delivering national policy at a local scale. The three Regional Assemblies are tasked to co-ordinate, promote and support the strategic planning and sustainable development of the regions.

Our submission will focus on the Southern Regional Assembly, which has a leadership role to play in identifying regional policies and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning policy primary through the implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). The RSES provides regional level strategic planning and economic policy in support of the implementation of the NPF and provide a greater level of focus around the National Policy Objectives (NPOs) and National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF.

The draft NPF, notes for both the Eastern and Midland and the Northern and Western Regions, interaction with Northern Ireland is a critical consideration. As we have already stated in earlier sections, it is important that the NPF acknowledges the economic potential of stronger links between the island's two largest cities outside Dublin in Cork and Belfast. Stronger rail, air and port connectivity and coordination has the potential to unlock substantial economic activity.

Cork Chamber welcomes the NPF's acknowledgement of the need to strengthen institutional and governance arrangements to coordinate implementation of the NPF at national, regional and metropolitan levels, across all stakeholders involved, will be required if the strategy is to be delivered successfully.

The draft notes that a broad range of stakeholders are involved in delivering the social, community and 'hard' infrastructure elements required to facilitate transformative growth in metropolitan areas. It states including not just regional assemblies and county and city councils but also Government Departments and agencies such as Uisce Éireann, TII, NTA, OPW, port authorities. Cork Chamber believes that the draft should also recognise the importance of community, civic and business representative bodies in the delivery of sustainable development of our regions.

Southern Region

The Southern Region is of significant importance when it comes to Ireland's balanced regional development goals. With three cities of scale and strategic importance with Cork the largest metropolitan area outside of Dublin followed by Limerick and Waterford. The region is well equipped with the Port of Cork (including Bantry Bay), Shannon Foynes Port and Rosslare Port. The region has international connectivity also from Cork Airport and Shannon Airport. The wider region is supported by a strong network of large towns, including county towns, many of which provide employment and functional roles much greater than their population scale, such as Ringaskiddy and Little Island for example.

Cork metropolitan area as well as Limerick and Waterford cities are crucial asset of the region and play a major role in both driving and accommodating a significant proportion of the additional 300,000 people anticipated in the overall region between 2022 and 2040, taking its population to two million people. However, as outlined in the Housing Commission Report Cork, Limerick and Waterford are currently in a deficit of required infrastructure to accommodate these additional people. The NPF should acknowledge this and upgrade its targets to take into account these deficits.

We agree with the draft that the biggest challenge for the Southern Region is to position its cities as more significantly scaled, while also more compact and attractive, acting as metropolitan drivers for the region as a whole. However, we do not believe, if Ireland's balanced regional development targets are to be met that they should be mere "complements to the economic strength of Dublin" but counterbalances. The NPF should ensure a balanced approach in activating and realising much underutilised potential of the Southern Region an prioritise infrastructure delivery to the region.

The well-established term "Second City Region" is something that is absent from the draft NPF and this will need to be rectified in the final version. Cork is a thriving second-city region, which is poised for significant growth over the next 20 years. The Government has identified Cork as the fastest-growing city region over the next two decades. We're very focused on accelerating the level of growth that we have had for the last decade, and on ensuring that we have the

correct environment for both businesses and a growing population and we are particularly focusing on quality of life, education, sustainability and providing the best possible environment for investors and their employees to grow in a very forward-looking, exciting city, which is really determined to continue to deliver the best quality of life and opportunities for business.

If we are truly going to make progress on sustainable regional development, the NPF will be required to acknowledge Cork as the counterbalance to Dublin as the second-city region. This will benefit not just Cork but also Limerick, Waterford, and the wider Southern region.

South-West

Cork City has been selected, as part of the EU 100 Climate-Neutral & Smart Cities Mission, to seek to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. Great responsibility comes with being one of a hundred cities across Europe as a leader in our shared ambition of climate neutrality. The NPF should acknowledge this opportunity and use Cork as an innovative experiment for the wider Southern Region and indeed the country in ways to delivery sustainable infrastructural development. It is an opportunity the country cannot afford to waste.

Cork Chamber has long argued that housing development should be based on centres of employment and employment growth, higher densities, access to amenities and sustainable transport, in order to avoid long-distance commuting patterns and quality of life impacts. We welcome the NPF's commitment to this and reiterate Cork has the potential and ambition to deliver this ambition at scale if infrastructure investment for enabling projects such as commuter rail, light rail, BusConnets and water and electricity are delivered.

The tailoring of policy approaches to capitalise on quality of life and sectoral strengths through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), is an important point. To take full advantage of these crucial funding mechanisms will require collaboration and coordination with local authorities and projects that are seen as critical, and deliverable should be prioritised and more importantly funded without the labour-intensive competitive approach. Local authorities should not be pitted against one another for projects identified in Project Ireland 2040. The government needs to be more selective and strategic in their approach and guarantee the funding required on projects that have been identified as crucial, which would allow local authorities forward plan.

Cork City and Metropolitan Area

Cork Chamber welcomes the acknowledgment by the Draft NPF that Cork is performing well as a major urban centre in Ireland and the City has positioned itself as an emerging medium-sized European centre of growth and innovation. It will be crucial that we continue to build on this momentum and do not let Cork's potential be wasted. As mentioned earlier a new priority for our members is the idea of "Urban Evolution", this priority is to enhance our region and build on our successes and to acknowledge and provide solutions to our challenges.

Cork Chamber's members have no shortage of ambition for Cork, this is evident and bolstered by Cork continuing to perform well in attracting FDI and supporting the SME sector through continued investment in the region. In 2023, Cork City beat off stiff competition in the highly competitive small city category, which includes well established business cities like Geneva, Cambridge, Basel and Luxembourg. In addition to placing first for FDI strategy, Cork was placed:

- 2nd in Europe for economic potential

- 3rd in Europe for business friendliness
- 4th overall in the small European category

Topping the rankings for Foreign Direct Investment strategy represents a ringing endorsement of the policies that have seen over 200 major international companies establish a presence in Cork.

If Cork is to continue to be internationally competitive, we must invest in our sustainable urban environment. Cork has the potential to accommodate a greater proportion of the growth at a greater scale and faster rate than any other region. Plans are in place to offer improved housing choice, transport mobility through fruition of CMATS and quality of life. What is required is the national policy not to hinder but enable Cork to grow at the rate we know it can achieve. This will mean prioritising a range of critical enabling infrastructure to deliver large-scale urban growth - housing, transport, amenities and energy systems to allow for this continued growth. We need to prioritise the development of the N25 and R624 Belvelly Bridge route to allow the Port of Cork move their operations to Ringaskiddy to progress plans to make Cork a renewable energy hub. Likewise, accelerated delivery of the Cork light rail service is crucial to ensure Cork grows in a sustainable manner. These developments are interlinked and together will be game changers for the development of the region.

As mentioned earlier Cork City is one of two Irish cities out of one hundred European cities to be selected as a Climate-Neutral Mission City. The draft NPF acknowledges the requirement to focus on a number of large regeneration and redevelopment projects within the existing built-up area, and a more compact urban form, facilitated through well designed higher density development. Cork should be prioritised as a mission city for projects that can reduce the carbon footprint of sites that can be integrated into the existing built-up area of the city and that are serviced by existing or planned high-capacity public transport, including large-scale brownfield and greenfield Transport Orientated Development opportunities.

Our term “Urban Evolution” is the answer to one of the challenges identified in the draft NPF in achieving significant growth that will move Cork to the next level is addressing the long-term decline of the City’s urban population.

It is true Cork City’s urban population has grown in the 2016 and 2022 Census, however a significant challenge that faces Cork City centre and every urban centre is attracting additional people to parts of the city. This is due to challenges around deliverability and viability of above shop living due to fire safety regulations and dereliction.

Cork Chamber welcomes the acknowledgement in the draft NPF of the importance of the Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme, and the issue of flood management as part of any future growth strategy for Cork.

Cork City Docklands – Case Study

Cork Chamber welcomes that the Cork City Docklands development has been highlighted in the draft NPF as a case study. It cannot be understated the importance of this development for Cork if it is to achieve the growth targets.

This development will be Ireland’s largest regeneration project which will accommodate a population of around 25,000 and a workforce of approximately 29,000, along with a student population of more than 3,500.

Over 146 hectares of land will be developed over a 20-year period, which will see homes, schools, medical and social services, sports and recreation facilities, office space, pubs, bars, restaurants, hotels, retail and two new bridges for the city.

It's hoped Cork City Docklands will become an internationally recognised brand and act as a magnet for major inward investment projects, similar to the IFSC in Dublin.

Among the projects which are being examined are developments at Marina Park, further embracing the River Lee as an amenity, and the development of a transport hub at Kent Station.

The Docklands area is already seeing extensive development with 82,475 sqm of office development in construction or completed and over 12,000 sqm in the planning process.

Over 1,600 residential units are currently in the planning process in the area, while 136 hotel rooms are constructed or in construction with 265 rooms seeking planning.

The project will also incorporate 25,000 sq meters of open public amenity space, with a number of ground-level mixed use units set aside for cafés/restaurants with outdoor seating, service retail units and a convenience retail store.

The development will also include a standalone two-storey crèche, gymnasium, a mobility hub on the Centre Park Road, pedestrian and cycle paths, road crossings, public lighting and other ancillary services and works.

The development will be an exemplar for the 15-minute city, an urban planning concept where the majority of daily necessities such as work, shopping education and healthcare can be reached within a 15-minute walk.

The development will be highly sustainable, served by efficient public transport and, in every sense, an example of the emerging new city and will make an even bigger statement on the attractiveness of Docklands as a location to work and live.

Cork City Docklands is recognised as having a key national economic development role. Thousands of jobs have already been created in the Docklands and it is imperative that residential development runs parallel, otherwise investment momentum will be impacted.

Any stumbling blocks that exist to development in Cork City must be removed. One such stumbling block is the development of the N25 and R624 Belvelly Bridge route whereby for progress to be made port infrastructure and material from the Goulding site need to be relocated to Ringaskiddy. While the required upgrades to the N25 and R624 Belvelly Bridge route remain unfunded this will in turn jeopardise the Docklands development, which must be avoided.

This development is also reliant on the advancement of our public transport improvement plans, such as BusConnects and commuter rail. A major aspect that was not mentioned in the draft NPF was the accelerated timeline for the final route selection and delivery of Cork's light rail system.

Cork Chamber broadly agrees with the "Key future growth enablers for Cork" but the admission of an accelerated delivery timeline for light rail system for Cork is disappointing considering it will be the ultimate game changer to change commuter habits and reliance on private vehicles and a reduction in our carbon footprint.

Furthermore, the recently published All-Island Strategic Rail Review Final Report states it aims to connect Dublin, Belfast International, and Shannon Airport to the railway. It is disappointing that Cork Airport has been omitted from this plan, save for mention of the proposed light rail route between Mahon and Ballincollig, which in the longer term could extend south to Cork Airport and Carrigaline. If Cork is to facilitate its growing population and achieve climate neutral status by 2030 a light rail option for Cork will be needed in the immediate future. An accelerated delivery timeline for a light rail system in Cork and a commitment to connecting Cork Airport with the system should be included in the final revised NPF as a key future growth enabler.

4. Making Stronger Urban Places

Cork Chamber agrees with the draft NPF that at all scales, our cities, towns and villages offer a range of opportunities for community and social interaction, potential for innovation and prosperity and support and enable their surrounding rural areas.

As we have mentioned previously one of Cork's major future population locations is Docklands development, but this is not the only location. Other include Tivoli as well as the south and west environs of Cork City. At present, Cork City benefits from more than 180 hectare of waterfront sites suitable for dense urban development in sites immediately adjacent to the city centre, one of which is located on the existing rail network corridor. In order to unlock the development potential of locations such as the Docklands and Tivoli, new planning frameworks are being advanced by local authorities to facilitate initiatives such as regional road and rail infrastructure. Key investment in infrastructural components will help to unlock Cork's potential.

Cork County Council is also advancing proposals to zone additional landbanks for significant residential development in the south and west environs of the city, in addition to the identified urban expansion areas to the north and east of the city. A key aspect of developing residential landbanks is unlocking access. The Cork Northern Distributor Multi-Modal Route is one such route that will unlock access to residential development. The proposed road is indicatively outlined in the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (CMATS). The Cork Northern Distributor Multi-Modal Route will provide for orbital movement for bus, pedestrian, cycle and some strategic and/or general traffic thereby reducing reliance on radial routes through Cork city centre.

Urban Evolution

The idea of urban evolution identifies the interconnected actions to enhance city and town centres from a functional and aesthetic perspective and Cork has the potential to be a national leader in urban rejuvenation. Urban evolution is made up of a number of different aspects including, vibrant urban centres where people live, work and play, urban safety and policing, integration and supporting business in urban centres. Below we will outline these aspects in more detail.

Vibrant Populated Urban Centres

Vibrant towns and city centres rely on people living in the urban heart and, throughout Cork, there are beautiful buildings currently being underutilised and in danger of falling into disrepair. Therefore, potential urban centre housing units that currently lie vacant, such as those over shops, should be further targeted to remove any impediments from converting these spaces

into sought after living quarters. One of the largest impediments to repurposing vacant premises is the difficulty in obtaining fire certification. Cork has the opportunity to lead the way in exploring innovative options to develop these units without compromising safety. Bringing residents back into the urban centre is a vital cog in growing vibrant liveable towns and cities and is a great opportunity for Cork.

Urban Safety and Policing

Safety, and the feeling of being safe, in our city and urban areas is essential for all those who live, work and visit Cork. Safety in urban areas, and especially the city centre, is a matter that has been slowly increasing on the radar of Cork Chamber and our members over the past period. It must be addressed before anti-social behaviour in Cork damages our reputation as a welcoming city for talent and investment. Greater Garda visibility plays an important role in maintaining a safe and pleasant environment. Taking into account Cork's population growth currently and into the future, there is a need to see more Gardaí on the streets to ensure the feeling of safety and security is maintained.

Continued Integration

Cork is now a multicultural city. This evolution over the past 20 years has been harmonious, but we must not be complacent. We all need to ensure that social cohesion and integration continues to be a positive aspect of the city. We have seen in other regions the harmful impact that a coordinated and sustained negative narrative around immigration can have. Cork Chamber has advocated for years that it is no longer good enough to be pro-diversity we must be actively anti-racist. With an increasing number of people seeking international protection in Cork, it is vital that social and economic integration pathways are provided to newcomers, whether that be through long-term funding for English language classes, upskilling and re-skilling programmes, or supportive community initiatives. A practical and pragmatic approach towards people seeking international protection in Ireland is required to counter anti-immigration sentiment and support migrants in developing the skills they need to thrive and contribute positively to our economy. By strengthening our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion through professional development we can ease the pressures in the currently tight labour market.

Supporting Business in Urban Centres

Cafés, restaurants and coffee shops are often at the heart of villages and towns across the country bringing life to these urban centres. Given the severe impact on food-related hospitality businesses, many of which are facing enormous financial pressures, it is crucial to create a pro-business environment by being conscious of the impact of policy decisions on SMEs and promote policies that ease the burden on smaller businesses.

Population and Role of Employment

Population and employment growth are integrally linked when we discuss urban settlement patterns. As we have mentioned previously there have been positive indications around population growth within the city centre core however continued challenges around viability of brownfield sites and planning restrictions.

Cork has a strong diverse economy with more than 200 multinational firms operating in clusters across the technology, financial services, cybersecurity, pharmaceuticals and life sciences

sectors. Some of the world's leading companies, including Apple, have located their European headquarters here due to a wealth of educated talent across various degree disciplines, a highly collaborative and supportive business eco-system and strong connectivity to European markets.

Many of these large employment providers due to the nature of their industries are located outside the city in strategic IDA industrial sites. That has led to growth in population in towns such as Carrigaline, Cobh, Carrigtwohill, and Ballincollig.

It is important that sustainable urban growth patterns are maintained while ensuring the required infrastructure such as wastewater are delivered to allow these communities grow. Connectivity between urban centres is crucial to ensure the long-term viability of these settlements. Good commuter rail and bus services linking key urban centres to strategic employment areas allows for better outcomes in relation to sustainable modes of transport being chosen. This is clear as upgrades to the Cork to Cobh/Midleton lines have seen the annual passenger numbers on this line hit two million last year from a pre-covid level of 1.45 million. Irish Rail says the figures are up a further 15% so far this year. If the trend continues for the rest of the year, Irish Rail says it could be more than 55% ahead of pre-covid levels.

Ireland's Cities

The draft NPF states a key element of the NPF strategy is to grow Ireland's three regions, build more accessible centres of scale and ensure compact and sustainable forms of development that will be supported by focused investment and proportionality higher levels of population growth in the five cities.

Dublin continues to be Ireland's globally competitive city and much of the growth as a whole continues to be in Dublin. While Cork is emerging as an international centre of scale, much more investment and infrastructure is required if Cork is to achieve the required growth targets. Cork's ambition should not be limited to just complement Dublin but in its own right be globally competitive.

The draft NPF notes Dublin City and suburban area should grow at a targeted rate of around 20% to 25% to 2040. The planned rate of growth in the Cork City and suburban area should be approximately 40%, over the same period. While we support that the growth rate targets are higher in Cork in reality there is no real step change in population growth and Dublin will continue to grow its population at over three times the rate of Cork. Balanced regional development will not be achieved if we continue to along this path. Dublin as the capital city of course needs to continue to grow but Cork and the other regional cities need more ambition with their growth targets to make a meaningful impact on balanced regional development.

Planning for Urban Employment Growth

The draft NPF rightly identifies that Ireland's employment growth is subject to our capacity to accommodate it. Cork City and County Strategic Employment Areas, including the City Centre, the North Environs, Mahon, Little Island, Carrigtwohill, Ringaskiddy and Whitegate Energy Zone, and existing zoned landbanks for industrial use facilitate FDI investment, and employment growth. However, new fully serviced landbanks will be required in collaboration with IDA to ensure Cork continues to have the capacity for expansion of existing companies and attraction of new companies to the region.

Achieving Urban Infill/ Brownfield Development

Cork Chamber believes that Cork can be an internationally competitive high-rise city. The Chamber believes that consolidation and increased efficiency in land use with between 3,500 and 4,500 people per square kilometre at centres and along transport corridors is the most effective way to generate a strong and vibrant business and community environment serviced by effective infrastructure. Cork boasts an abundance of brownfield land in the city environs that is ideal for regeneration and densified development such as 180ha of waterfront docklands. These developments are better for the environment with lower carbon footprint and with some upgrades are already serviced. There is also considerable capacity along the existing transport corridors with towns such as Midleton and Carrigtwohill ideally positioned for considerable growth.

Considered focus should be put on looking at ways to activate and deliver housing on brown field sites and freeing up existing stock including over-the shop living.

5. Planning for Diverse Rural Places

Cork is the largest county in Ireland and is made up of large urban areas (Cork City, suburbs and metropolitan area). However, Cork is largely a rural county with 61% of the population of the county living in the open countryside and smaller towns and villages of less than 1,500 people.

These areas make a major contribution to Cork and Ireland's identity and to overall national development in economic, social, cultural and environmental terms. While some of this rural population works in the rural area, there is also a significant reliance on urban areas for employment both within Metropolitan Cork and the county towns.

Rural areas hold much of Ireland's natural resources, biodiversity, environmental qualities and landscape and contribute in a unique way to Ireland's culture. Well over a third of Irish people live outside cities and towns and this proportion increases to half of the population, if smaller towns and villages are included.

The communities living across the towns, villages, countryside, and islands of the county are socially, economically, environmentally, and functionally intertwined. Towns and villages provide many of the goods, services, educational and community facilities and economic opportunities to sustain their hinterlands. The countryside and coastline provide many of the resources, assets, and amenities to sustain the wider population and economy, including agriculture, fishing, quarrying, tourism, renewable energy and the biodiversity and natural environment needed to sustain all of the above.

The revised NPF should acknowledge that supporting sustainable rural communities requires a holistic approach, one which recognises the functional relationship between settlements and their hinterlands. The careful management of all our rural assets will be a key component to ensure that these important assets are protected and will continue to support the communities who rely on them.

The revised NPF must include a roadmap identifying the key enablers to ensure a diversity of activities, energy and transport technologies, technologically enabled and connected

population centres, and business innovation hubs to adopt successful growth models across rural areas.

Building an economy and infrastructure that can adapt to the jobs of the future. In this respect, we emphasise the importance of digital infrastructure, clusters and coworking supports to enable our rural areas to prosper.

The awarding of public funding through instruments such as the Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) should support the objective of improving public realm and cultural space. Considering Cork's geographical magnitude, it is no wonder County Cork received the third highest amount of funding from the RRDF since 2020. The RRDF provides funding for the development and construction of large-scale capital projects in towns, villages and rural areas across Ireland.

Over €32 million has been assigned to County Cork under the RRDF since 2020. €551,250 in 2020, €4,861,211 in 2021, €21,763,573 in 2022 and €5,131,963 in 2024.⁴

This funding is of crucial importance for the continued development of the county. The projects that this funding goes towards highlights the ambition there is in rural Cork to grow, support the rural economy but also sustainability.

Cork's rural areas, which for the most part are located around the Cork coast, unsurprisingly are dominated by agriculture, agri-food and tourism sectors. The NPF will need to enable these rural sectors as they continue to face challenges, such as the loss of traditional industries and employment, emigration and poor connectivity.

Improved infrastructural connectivity, such as commuter rail, the N22 and Dunkettle Interchange are just a few examples how delivery of infrastructure provides opportunities to build on the success of many Irish and multi-national companies supporting employment in rural areas.

The revised NPF should acknowledge the critical importance for the national road network in ensuring inter-urban and rural connectivity, thus supporting the competitiveness of Ireland and the Southern Region. The accelerated completion for the M28 and the delivery of the N25 and M20 will be key to ensuring those living in rural areas are connected to employment opportunities and support economic growth.

Enabling Infrastructure

Poor infrastructure has halted the delivery of hundreds of homes in Cork alone. New homes need services including water, electricity, and broadband. The under-capacity at wastewater treatment plants is jeopardising the building of hundreds of homes.

Poor public infrastructure is stalling the delivery of housing across the country, large tracts of land which local authorities have zoned for housing cannot be developed as they do not have the required water, wastewater, electricity, broadband, or transport infrastructure.

⁴ [Dáil Questions to the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Tuesday, 21 May 2024](#)

There is a real urgency required to deliver the necessary water/wastewater services and upgrades, electricity connections and transport connections so that we can build at the scale required.

The delivery of hundreds of homes in Cork are being held up because of inadequate wastewater treatment facilities.

One recent case, near the city, plans to build over 100 new homes on land which has been zoned residential for almost 20 years are at risk because the local wastewater treatment plant is at capacity.

In another area, the local authority is no longer considering planning applications for projects that require a new connection to the town's near-capacity wastewater treatment plant.

The revised NPF will need to pursue measure that accelerate the delivery of wastewater treatment plants or large portions of zoned residential lands will remain underutilised.

6. People, Homes and Communities

Quality of Life and Place

An important and defining feature of Cork is the quality of life that the area offers, be that sporting activities, the arts, culture, heritage and leisure pursuits.

This must be protected and enhanced. Cork Chamber also believes that the revised NPF has the potential to lead to more sustainable development patterns and ways of living which support a strong quality of life. As such, we welcome that the revised NPF has been developed in the context of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development which provide an overarching framework.

Cork is unique as the meeting place of both the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East. In terms of business and leisure tourism, the South-West consistently performs as one of the top three visitor destinations on the island. Cork's diverse range of arts and cultural assets include Cork Schools of Art and Music, theatres, galleries, including the Crawford Art Gallery which is the only National Cultural Institution outside of Dublin, performance venues, and a wide range of festivals, catering for every interest from choral singing to French film and Jazz. To date, Cork boasts an internationally renowned cultural and tourism offering, and Cork Chamber asserts that with strategic investment in this area (combined with our international connectivity) there is vast potential to grow our reputation as a cultural hub of international significance. A thriving Southern Region must have an appropriate events centre. This cultural and business infrastructure is essential to compete internationally and there is a strong demand to support it within the Cork Metropolitan Area and the wider Southern Region. We cannot overlook the value in growing our domestic locations in appeal to the domestic market. Herein the opportunity once again exists to grow on the existing foundations and expand the offering.

To maximise the potential additional investment will be required in existing tourism infrastructure of national significance, such as Spike Island, the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East. In this context, improving quality of life through continued promotion of Cork as a vibrant location on an international platform is essential.

The NDP has the delivery of the Cork Event Centre as key commitment of the government. The project represents a major contribution to urban regeneration, enhanced amenity and heritage and increased quality of life for Cork. It will also aid the wider economic potential and balanced regional development of the Southern Region.

Following a review of the project in 2019 the procurement process was completed, and planning permission has been granted. While there were some unavoidable delays due to Covid 19, the project is now awaiting the finalisation of the funding agreement with funding provided by the department of Housing local government and heritage under the NDP. Cork City Council will also deliver significant and complementary public realm enhancements in the city centre.

Following the revision of the NPF it is critical that the NDP reconfirms its commitment to the delivery of this once in a generation project that will have an enormous positive economic impact for the Southern Region and the country.

Healthy Communities

Cork is also a national leader in healthcare innovation which is of both social and economic significance, and which offers great growth potential for indigenous industries into the future. For example, the National Health Innovation Hub Ireland, led by UCC, facilitates and accelerates the commercialisation of innovative healthcare solutions. Cork University Hospital (CUH) is the largest university teaching hospital in Ireland and is the only Level 1 Trauma centre in the country due to the presence of over 40 different medical and surgical specialties on the campus.

Looking ahead, Cork is well placed to support the nation's future healthcare needs while contributing to employment growth. In order to maximise this opportunity, the NPF should actively support Cork's existing health infrastructure developing into a Health Centre of Excellence for all of the Southern Region to benefit.

Diverse and Inclusive Ireland

As we have mentioned in previous sections, the idea of urban evolution is a priority for our members. Cork is now a multicultural and progressive city with many different religions and people with diverse backgrounds. In Cork non-Irish citizens accounted for 12% of the population. This evolution over the past 20 years has been harmonious, but we must not be complacent. We all need to ensure that social cohesion and integration continues to be a positive aspect of the city. We have seen in other regions the harmful impact that a coordinated and sustained negative narrative around immigration can have. Cork Chamber has advocated for this for years, it is no longer good enough to be pro-diversity we must be actively anti-racist.

With an increasing number of people seeking international protection in Cork, it is vital that social and economic integration pathways are provided to newcomers, whether that be through long-term funding for English language classes, upskilling and re-skilling programmes, or supportive community initiatives. A practical and pragmatic approach towards people seeking international protection in Ireland is required to counter anti-immigration sentiment and support migrants in developing the skills they need to thrive and contribute positively to our economy. By strengthening our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion through professional development we can ease the pressures in the currently tight labour market.

Age Friendly Communities

Cork City and County Councils are actively engaged in age friendly strategies and are working to increase the positive experience and social, community participation of those across all ages in the region. We believe that through careful investment and appropriate spatial planning we can create a society that is truly inclusive and supportive to people at every stage of life. We believe that the focus on spatial consolidation and development at key locations along established transport corridors will help to facilitate and promote this type of society.

Accessible public realm is important at both early and later years in life. Cork has an excellent recent track record in creating parks and playgrounds (e.g. Tramore Valley Park and Marina Park). However, both Tramore Valley Park and Marina Park are located outside of the historic city centre. There are no playgrounds in Cork's historic core. The closest playground is at Shalom Park. Bishop Lucey Park is undergoing an ambitious redesign as part of the wider Grand Parade Quarter project. However, when the works are completed, the park will be slightly smaller. The revised NPF should prioritise age friendly public realm projects that provide age friendly access at the core of the city centre.

Childcare, Education and Lifelong Learning

Childcare

The need for high-quality, accessible, and affordable childcare services in Cork is evident. Our members have expressed concerns about the lack of options, the high cost of childcare, and the impact it has on their employees' ability to work effectively. This issue is not unique to our region but is a nationwide concern that requires urgent attention.

The shortcomings in the childcare sector in Ireland have been well-documented. The lack of affordable options, long waiting lists, and inconsistent quality of care have created a significant barrier for working parents. This situation is exacerbated by the current economic climate, where the cost of living continues to rise, making it increasingly difficult for families to afford childcare.

The provision of affordable childcare and its potential impact on economic growth and talent retention is a key concern for our members. An accessible, functioning, and affordable childcare sector is essential to support economic growth and ensure that employees have robust choices when considering their participation in the workplace. Our Q1 2024 Economic Trends found that 72% of respondents feel that further government intervention is needed to improve the provision of childcare.

The revised NPF will need to ensure that the required childcare and early learning services are available as our population grows. It must take into account the deficits that are already in the system and not just forecast for future demand.

Primary and Secondary Education

Cork is home to some of the country's most prestigious primary schools and high-achieving secondary schools. There is a good mix of both public and private schools in Cork, all aiming to ensure that each school in Cork reaches the government approved benchmark in educational standards.

There can be great demand for places in schools, particularly near Cork City and large towns around the county. It is really a failure of planning that areas experiencing the highest demand for school places are located in the hinterland of larger urban centres, as families are pushed out by rising accommodation costs.

The long lead in time for opening new schools and the moving target in terms of increased demand caused by demographic change both contribute to the deficits. It can take in the region of 10 years from inception to completion, to open a new school. Quicker timelines and better use of available demographic data would go a long way to solving the problem. The need for more investment is a given.

The negative impact of a failure to plan for a growing population is not confined to education. It has had consequences, too, for the health service, but most of all for housing.

In all these areas the slack is taken up by those most affected. As mentioned earlier, in the healthcare system it takes the form of delays at A&E, long waiting lists and the shortage of beds. In housing, the symptoms include prices beyond reach, high rents and homelessness. In education, it is parents making long commutes to get their children to school, or even relocating or tutoring children at home. All this leads to more congestion, higher carbon footprint and undesirable quality of life.

To ensure Cork and Ireland stays competitive and has the ability to attract and retain talent it is essential that primary and secondary level education is invested in, and a long-term strategy is put in place in accordance with our population growth projections.

A related point that our members raise with us regarding retaining talent in the region, particularly retaining talent at C-Suite, Senior Executives levels many of which largely work for multi-nationals within the region, is International Schools.

International schools were traditionally established to educate the children of diplomats, NGOs or employees of large multinational corporations. Families posted overseas couldn't send their children to a local school, so international schools came to be.

There are over 12,000 international schools world-wide, with none in Ireland outside of Dublin. When multi-nationals within the regions are competing for talent from around the globe, we hear a common reason for the region losing out on talent is due to the lack of international schools. The NPF should look at ways to attract in providers into our regions and improve our competitive offering.

Higher and Further Education and Lifelong Learning

Cork possesses world renowned higher education institutions accommodating over 35,000 students. UCC is recognised as in the top 2% of research institutions in the world and the world's first green campus, while MTU produces more accredited engineers than any other higher education institution in Ireland. The steady stream of ICT, science and engineering graduates will be a draw for FDI and the support for emerging indigenous talent. Cork is also home to many leading research and education providers such as, the Tyndall National Research Institute, the NIMBUS Centre for Research, the Rubicon Centre, and the National Maritime College of Ireland.

Cork is not short of educational collaboration with UCC and MTU driving the delivery of joint programmes and awards, with a consortium approach in technology transfer, a collaborative approach to student and graduate entrepreneurship and the provision of collaborative research across a number of research centres.

The quality of education and research institutions in the region with their capability and track record of adapting to the current and emerging needs of industry is a differentiator. The future educational needs are likely to be significant given the pace of technological change. For example, Cork is a cluster for cyber-security activity, an industry which did not exist a few years ago.

Cork ETB has performed well in recent years in delivering growing numbers of apprentices in Cork, with 600 in 2022, 650 in 2023 and 766 in 2024. Continued support for apprenticeships will be required into the future to ensure we keep pace with the required workforce for our region to grow.

The NPF must acknowledge the role played by further and higher education for enterprise and regional growth. It will be important that the NPF seeks to strengthen the capacity of third level and further education providers to deliver the required skilled talent to drive economic development nationally and grow Ireland's reputation internationally as a great place to work and study.

The demand for talent, skills and people will continue to be strong into the future. It is of paramount importance that continued investment is made into our universities and training providers, not only for day-to-day operations and initiatives but also for large capital programmes to ensure our institutions remain amongst the most modern in the world.

There is a need for a significantly higher level of investment in further and higher education to unleash its potential as world leaders in research and innovation. Research and innovation are crucial to fuelling economic growth by enabling education providers to partner with industry, ensuring graduates are prepared to meet the future skills needs of industry.

Technological Universities (TUs), especially Munster Technological University (MTU) for the Southern region, will play a key role in building the required talent pipeline and driving investment in innovation, research and development. As MTU and other TUs are in their relevant infancies it will be crucial for continued and sustained investment in the TUs to ensure their potential is realised.

The availability of a skilled and entrepreneurial workforce, in particular in science, technology and engineering, is crucial to the delivery of an additional 121,000 jobs. In this regard, it is vital that the NPF addresses current funding obstacles to the delivery of such programmes at third level.

Additional investment, including in infrastructure, will be required in all levels of education and research and innovation. It is important to recognise that people benefit from different paths to employment. Therefore, further funding to expand and market apprenticeships across higher and further education is needed with a specific focus on STEM.

Housing

The housing situation in Cork has emerged as a pressing concern in recent years and remains one of the top priorities for Cork Chamber. There remains a considerable journey ahead to deliver the scale of housing our city region needs to cater for the projected population increase in the coming decades and deal with the ongoing deficit that already exists. However, there are discernible signs of progress which can be attributed to the policy changes implemented by government, which have stimulated the delivery of apartment projects in Cork, marking a positive turning point in addressing housing challenges. The widening of the cost-rental threshold as well as government schemes such as Croí Cónaithe and Project Tosaigh are having a direct impact in Cork. As we look ahead ensuring the availability of affordable housing is essential for fostering economic development in the region. It is imperative that housing delivery aligns with existing demand and anticipates the capacity required for planned future population growth. Cork needs to produce at least 7,500 – 10,000 units per year to keep pace with demand. While the capital funding for housing in 2024 stands at a record €5 billion, speed of implementation and delivery are crucial. The Housing Commission has estimated that, as of the 2022 Census, there was a housing deficit of between 212,500 and 256,000 homes in Ireland.

Cork makes up 11.3% of Ireland's total population according to the same Census, so population adjustment would mean Cork was short between 24,000 and 29,000 homes.

Any obstacles to the speedy delivery of housing must be removed, such as planning and infrastructure delivery delays.

It is crucial that the NPF acknowledges the agreed ambition for Cork's future across Government as Ireland's second city and that this ambition is matched by the framework and more importantly prioritised for delivery.

Mentioned previously, but relevant here is activating the delivery of housing on brownfield sites and freeing up existing stock including over-the shop living, through innovation and reimagining our city centre through urban evolution.

7. Realising our Island and Marine Potential

Integrated Land and Maritime Planning

Cork Chamber welcomed the official launch of the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) in 2023. MARA has been set up to streamline the consenting process for the maritime area, and so is central to the development of the offshore wind industry. We also welcome that the responsibility for MARA and marine forward planning has been transferred to the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC). We believe this was a correct decision and that DECC is best placed give practical effect to Ireland's ambition to have a modern, fit for purpose, world-leading marine planning system.

With the recent publication of the Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) off the south coast, a significant milestone has been passed in the development of Ireland's maritime area and offshore renewable energy ambition. Offshore wind is one of the most important opportunities of our generation and every effort must be made to ensure that the planning and development

process is as streamlined and transparent as possible. Consistency in policy and certainty in our planning and regulatory system are important to attracting the investment required into the sector.

The recent publication of the National Hydrogen Strategy represents another important step in Ireland's journey towards a net zero integrated energy system and economy. The roadmap is welcome, and delivery of the key actions set out will be essential to reaffirm investor confidence. Harnessing our abundant wind and renewable energy resources to decarbonise industry and electricity, and eventually becoming an exporter of green hydrogen provides a huge opportunity for Ireland, Cork and the Southern Region.

Cork is well positioned to become Ireland's first international renewables hub which facilitates the growth in production of affordable and clean energy. The resourcing of MARA, our planning system and the continued investment in infrastructure such as our port and the grid are essential to enabling the development of the renewables sector. Decarbonising our energy is essential for Ireland to meet its 2030 climate and energy targets, while also importantly achieving greater energy independence for our country and continuing to attract foreign direct investment. It is important now that we build on the momentum and ensure that any barriers to progress are addressed.

Maritime Economy

Cork has the longest total coastline in Ireland, with a length of 1,199 km (745 mi). The maritime sector is of critical importance to the Cork economy.

Cork Harbour is a natural harbour and the second largest natural harbour in the world. When it comes to economic impact Cork Harbour has some existing advantages that will allow for the rapid development of offshore wind in the seas around Ireland, with positive implications for infrastructure, jobs, environment, and economy.

As outlined in [Cork Harbour 2025 – Ready to Float – Offshore Wind](#)⁵, Cork Harbour is the de facto floating offshore wind hub in the Celtic Sea, for a number of reasons, including:

Cork's Harbour's geostrategic location

- One of the largest natural harbours in the world, Cork Harbour features a deep, extensive and sheltered waterbody.
- Proximity to the Celtic Sea, Irish Sea and Atlantic pipeline of offshore wind projects, with the potential to support developments off the east, south and west coasts, as well as projects from the UK and France.
- Perfectly positioned on the doorstep of ~ 50GW of floating wind resources in the Celtic Sea, with a pipeline of floating wind projects creating demand for high impact port assembly and installation facilities from 2025, and long-term operations and maintenance bases.

Existing port capacity

- The Port of Cork, a Tier 1 port of national significance, hosts excellent modern deep-water facilities in Lower Cork Harbour, ideal to support offshore wind development.

⁵ [Cork Harbour 2025 Ready to Float – Offshore Wind](#)

- The Port of Cork is the only port in Ireland with full planning permission to build out this infrastructure to support the development of the ORE industry by 2030.
- The privately owned DSG vision for Cork Dockyard as a strategic hub for offshore wind is an unprecedented opportunity for the region.
- The dry-dock in Cork Dockyard, the only large dry-dock in the Republic, located in Cork Harbour, is an important support facility for the offshore sector. (Max length overall 165m; max beam 21.3m; max draft 7.5m).
- The deep, sheltered waters of Cork Harbour and nearby Bantry Bay provide ideal wet storage options.

Ireland's maritime capital

- As the maritime capital of Ireland with centuries of maritime heritage, Cork Harbour is perfectly poised to build on the maritime and energy capability that already exists, to accelerate towards a vision for 2025.
- Cork Harbour has been used for decades as the primary servicing base for offshore oil and gas exploration off the south and west coast of Ireland.
- Marine operators have a track record in offshore support activities, including towage and service vessels for the Kinsale gas field, which is currently being decommissioned.
- In recent years, the port has increasingly been used as a landing location for wind turbines and other components of onshore wind farms.
- The Dockyard has a proven track record in assembly and deployment of major structures. Figure 2.2 shows a shipment of Liebherr cranes at the Dockyard in December 2021. These had been assembled at the yard for shipment to Somalia.

Supply chain development

- Facilities and berths are available to support deployment of survey vessels for geophysical, geotechnical and marine biology surveys (e.g. Cork City, Ringaskiddy, Cork Dockyard, Crosshaven).
- The availability of local survey vessels provides advantages to developers by potentially being more competitive in mobilisation and demobilisation costs.
- Cork-based marine contractors own and operate vessel fleets capable of servicing offshore platforms and subsystems.
- Cork is being primed as a key location for aerial surveys, with recent investments by companies in the region
- A number of important large and small consultancies provide engineering, marine, financial, and other support services

Regional infrastructure

- In addition to maritime transport, Cork Harbour is well connected by multiple other modes.
- Cork airport is the second largest of the three principal international airports in the Republic, after Dublin and ahead of Shannon, providing excellent access for international business.
- The M28 motorway project from Cork to Ringaskiddy is planned to improve access for port related traffic.
- Cork Dockyard is strategically connected to the Cobh to Midleton railway line.

Skills and training

- The world-class navigational and simulation facilities in the NMCI provide excellent opportunities for simulating deployment scenarios for different offshore wind developments.
- New training courses and training facilities dedicated to offshore wind, are planned by the National Maritime College of Ireland.
- Green Rebel Marine plans for a world class offshore wind training hub in Crosshaven will utilise state-of-the-art commercial facilities.

Industry and energy profile of Cork Harbour

- A concentration of large energy users exists in and around the port, including Ireland's only oil refinery, two Combined Cycle Gas Turbine plants at Whitegate and Aghada, and the pharmaceutical clusters in Ringaskiddy and Little Island.
- The harbour can be a nerve centre for scaling-up green hydrogen production powered by floating offshore wind.

Strategic designations

- The Port of Cork is a 'core' port under the Trans-European Transport Network (Ten-T). This enables the Port to meet future connectivity needs and to support the wider regional and national economy.
- An area of 776 acres at Ringaskiddy is designated as Ireland's only Marine Freeport. The land which is fully serviced and zoned for Industrial development by Cork County Council is owned by IDA Ireland and Port of Cork. Advantages include VAT exemptions on imports within the zone, certain import duty exemptions for non-EU goods and operational advantages such as simplified customs procedures.
- The National Planning Framework envisages that Cork will become the fastest-growing city region in Ireland with a projected 50% to 60% increase of its population in the period up to 2040. With the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan committing to Cork as Ireland's fastest growing city region, it is essential that all government policy aligns with the objectives of Ireland 2040 and the position of City Regions as economic drivers.

Human capital

- University College Cork (UCC), the Munster Technological University, and the National Maritime College of Ireland (NMCI), provide undergraduate and post graduate talent in key areas such as engineering, environmental studies, marine science, supply chain management, nautical science, marine engineering, and marine electro-technology.
- Cork hosts world class research infrastructure, including the LIR National Ocean Energy Test Tank Facility in UCC's Beaufort Building in Ringaskiddy.
- An opportunity exists to further develop the innovation ecosystem established by the IMERC project in Ringaskiddy, including co-location with the naval service, headquartered on Haulbowline Island in Lower Cork Harbour.
- The Tech Industry Alliance Cluster provides the knowledge-base for the type of high-tech automation systems and controls required for the operation of offshore wind farms.

- Cork Chamber established Cork Offshore Renewable Industry Forum (CORIF), bringing together representatives from the sector to identify key policy and infrastructure enablers and to ensure Cork benefits from the development of offshore renewables.
- Home of Ireland's unique energy industry cluster, Energy Cork. Energy Cork strengthens enterprise and employment within the energy sector supported by Cork City Council and Cork County Council through their respective Economic Development Funds. Energy Cork was conceived by Cork Chamber to build on the unique opportunities for the region to secure competitive advantage in the energy sector.
- Development agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and IDA help to nurture and attract indigenous talent and FDI investment to the region.

IDA Strategic Plan Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth 2021- 2024

- IDA are placing sustainable growth at the centre of the 2021 to 2024 strategy, in line with Government policy, international consensus, the vision of IDA clients, and the demands of citizens.
- IDA will seek growth that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, while fostering an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient economy and society.
- The national context for IDA's approach to winning investment for the regions is set by Project Ireland 2040 and the associated National Planning Framework (NPF), National Development Plan and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and the objectives of the Programme for Government in relation to regional development.
- Two key sustainability objectives of the IDA are to support de-carbonisation and responsible production across the IDA client base and crucially to win sustainability investments to drive a green recovery.

Ports

The Port of Cork is the key seaport in the South of Ireland and is one of the only two Irish ports which service the requirements of all six shipping modes i.e. lift on, lift off, roll on, roll off, liquid bulk, dry bulk, break bulk and cruise. It is capable of taking post Panamax vessels and handling 19% of seaborne trade in Ireland.

The ongoing Port of Cork Redevelopment Project in the Lower Harbour will form an extension to the existing facilities that the Port currently operates in Ringaskiddy. It is enabling the Port to facilitate larger vessels and ensuring long term international competitiveness.

The Port of Cork has planning permission to build the infrastructure that would support the Offshore Renewable Energy sector. We have called for proactive port investment and clarity regarding funding, which is essential for these projects to move forward.

Offshore wind will be of the order of four times the magnitude of onshore wind. However, ports are a bottleneck which must be immediately actioned by government to deliver this.

Ports need to be delivered not only to facilitate the roll-out of the offshore windfarms but also deliver the economic boost within the island that wind development activity can bring. The alternative is continued use of insecure, expensive foreign fossil fuels and missing targets, triggering a €5bn bill by 2030.

Wind Energy Ireland's report, 'We can build them – Supporting Irish ports to build offshore wind farms'⁶ explores the funding gap that ports will be required to solve to deliver the infrastructure and space that will be required. The Government state departments should follow the State-led development approach for the requisite port infrastructure to maximise the local content element of the work involved with the manufacturing, delivery, and installation of offshore wind. The payback in the return to the Exchequer is sizeable if it is planned correctly.

Port of Cork recently were approved funding in the tune of €38.4m from the EU's Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), which will help fund the construction of two quay berths at the Port's deepwater site in Ringaskiddy. However, the port, which flagged concerns earlier this year about a €70m funding gap threatening its ambitious plans to fund the works to become a hub for the offshore renewable energy sector, must still source at least another €31m to pay for the works.

The EU funding announcement is a step closer to realising the Port's potential for offshore renewable energy, however the government must now work with the Port to ensure the required funds are sourced before planning expires in October 2025.

Coastal Environment and Planning for Climate Change

Cork Chamber shares the concerns outlined in the draft NPF regarding the impact climate change will have on Cork City and other urban areas located around the coast. Cork is, unfortunately, not a stranger to the impacts of floods and although progress has been made with many flood relief schemes throughout the county, Cork is still at major risk of climate related floodings.

The Blackpool Flood Relief Scheme and the Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme (LLFRS) are currently at the design/ planning stage by OPW. The LLFRS is designed to resolve Cork's flooding issues through the largest State investment in flood defence ever undertaken in the country. The scheme will provide protection for circa 2,100 properties. It is anticipated that the scheme will be submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform for approval in mid-2025 with phased tender/construction to be progressed following approval.

Following the devastating floods in Midleton last year, Cork County Council, acting as Agents for the OPW, has commissioned Arup to develop a Flood Relief Scheme for Midleton.

The revised NPF must acknowledge the extreme urgency around making progress in these schemes to ensure the safety of the people and properties in these areas.

Offshore Renewable Energy

Ireland, with its offshore wind resources has the potential to drive another major step change in the economy if, and only if, we can harvest the energy and related economic activity sitting in the seas and around our coasts.

Ireland has a well-founded approach to roll out offshore wind to the east, south and west with fixed bottom windfarms first in shallow waters and floating wind farms in deeper waters through auctions. Ireland's real potential scale lies in floating wind and the ability to be able to harvest it.

⁶ [Wind Energy Ireland's report, 'We can build them – Supporting Irish ports to build offshore wind farms'](#)

Job creation

Current government industrial capability strategy indicates that mainly highly skilled and professional jobs are of interest, i.e. development and project management, but Ireland needs to maximise potential job and economic opportunities that capture a spectrum of jobs, from high-skilled operations and maintenance roles to port marshalling and installation.

Ireland also needs to focus on manufacturing roles, i.e. concrete and steel fabrication, that can be delivered for the long term and expand our horizons, fulfilling many of these roles and skillsets from within our economy. It is in the manufacturing sector where serious additional opportunities can exist; not just limited to turbine tower manufacture, floating platforms, and mooring systems, but also gravity bases and other steel structures for fixed, huge floating structures and even turbine blades.

Ireland will need more than 7,000 blades manufactured over the next two decades, and a facility like this alone could create in excess of 750 direct jobs and 1,500 indirect jobs.

The regional economic impact of offshore development from 5GW of wind energy along the south coast is estimated to deliver €4.4 billion in additional benefits to the Irish economy. It will also deliver an estimated 49,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) years of employment to the Irish economy.

The growth of the ORE sector and eventually green hydrogen will catalyse a green industrial revolution and diversify our economy. The majority of the jobs and economic benefits will come from new spin off and other clean industries that Ireland can attract/develop if ORE is developed. For example, if the clean electricity produced is converted to hydrogen there is the potential to create a fertiliser industry here. Ireland currently imports just about all of its fertiliser. Considering the scale of the agri-food sector and the pressures farmers are under to decarbonise and comply with the nitrates directive, clean fertiliser is vital.

In addition, Ireland's commitment to ORE will enhance its attractiveness to FDI, especially from companies prioritising sustainability. This commitment to decarbonisation will also help retain existing FDI. The development of the ORE sector can also broaden and support the existing tax base, which is heavily reliant on energy intensive industries.

Energy Security

By developing domestic renewable energy sources and the accompanying infrastructure to store and transport it, Ireland can reduce its reliance on imported fossil fuels, insulating the economy from geopolitical risks and price volatility. This will enhance our energy independence and security and attractiveness to large energy companies.

Economic Benefits

It is estimated that at least €69bn extra is expected in the economy by mid-century. There is significant potential to deliver meaningful value to the economy through jobs and economic value add to workers pockets.

Offshore wind can support jobs and sustainable economic growth through mid-century and turn the country into a net exporter of energy as we deliver our own goal of net-zero by 2050.

As the renewable energy sector grows, ensuring that infrastructure has the capacity to facilitate the export of energy in the future will be an important step in the sector's development. Supporting and advancing a green transition is a cornerstone of the European Union's current priorities and demand for renewable energy, demand which could be met by production in Ireland in the future, continues to grow apace across the bloc.

All we need to do is start building ports, capture offshore wind manufacturing in Ireland and reap the benefits of long-term jobs, continued economic benefit and clean low-cost energy for customers.

Cork Offshore Renewable Industry Forum (CORIF)

The Cork Offshore Renewable Industry Forum (CORIF) established by Cork Chamber is bringing together representatives from the sector to identify key policy and infrastructure enablers and to ensure Cork benefits from the development of offshore renewables.

CORIF will provide a platform for industry leaders to collectively voice their needs and concerns regarding the direction of infrastructure and policy development, both in Cork and further afield.

8. Working with Our Neighbours

Cork is a proud European region. The second largest English-speaking city in the EU and a former European Capital of Culture. In the 2024 Financial Times FDI awards, Cork City defeated stiff competition in the highly competitive small city category, which includes well established business cities like Geneva, Cambridge, Basel and Luxembourg. In addition to placing first for FDI strategy, Cork was placed:

- 2nd in Europe for economic potential
- 3rd in Europe for business friendliness
- 4th overall in the small European category

Topping the rankings for Foreign Direct Investment strategy represents a ringing endorsement of the policies that have seen over 200 major international companies establish a presence in Cork.

Cork has a global reach with Cork Airport flying to over 40 destinations and connecting Cork with key international hubs for both business and tourism. The Port of Cork, the second largest natural port in the world, connects Cork with Ports and cities from around the world.

The Port is one of the three Irish Ports of National Significance (Tier 1) as designated by National Ports Policy, a Core Port of the EU Ten-T Network and is one of the Irish Ports on the EU North Sea Mediterranean Corridor.

The Port of Cork have an ambitious Masterplan out to 2050. The Port is currently on a 'River to Sea Port' journey, moving their port operations downstream and consolidating all activities in the lower harbour by 2050.

This once-in-a-generation move is essential to facilitate increasing global vessel sizes, provide consolidated, efficient and sustainable operations and ensure the global connectivity of the southern region.

The Port of Cork will also play a key role in facilitating Ireland's future energy needs, as the country and the world look towards green energy options. It is currently the only port in Ireland with planning permission in place to help facilitate the development of the Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) sector.

Cork has the potential to be an international city of scale. The ambition is there from the port, airport, business and the local authorities. The NPF should capitalise on this ambition and potential and ensure that the headroom is provided for Cork to achieve its potential and not hinder its growth.

Ireland and Northern Ireland

Cork Chamber earlier this year led a group of representatives from the region on a delegation visit to Belfast. The two-day event aimed at fostering connectivity and supporting shared economic interests across the island of Ireland.

Northern Ireland faces many similar challenges to that of Cork. The trip provided an opportunity to build relationships and connections, work collectively and prioritise real, everyday needs for the all-island economy so we can meet these shared challenges.

The two-day series of meetings, visits and discussions under the theme of 'connecting people and places' centred on building out and enhancing connectivity, harnessing the rail, air and port infrastructure, as well as advancing business and tourism links.

The stakeholders from Cork Chamber, Dublin Chamber and NI Chamber involved will play a key role in the period ahead in ensuring that we make the most of shared opportunities, including supporting the all-island economy, including potential direct rail and air connectivity from Cork to Belfast. These will strengthen our connectivity and be a source of prosperity, growth, and livelihoods for many from all communities across this island.

Northern Ireland's unique position as part of the UK internal market while, at the same time, having unique access to the EU's single market of nearly 450 million people provides a solid opportunity for growth. Cork is projected to be the fastest growing city region in the south, increasing population by 50% by 2040. By building relationships and connectivity it will ensure that Belfast, Dublin and Cork can prosper and grow together, using these unrivalled opportunities as key economic engines of the island.

A key pillar of both trade and tourism is connectivity and the ability to travel to and from a destination in an effective and efficient way. Air connectivity between Cork and Belfast would boost trade and tourism in both regions. Air connectivity could be a game changer for the island and both Cork Airport and George Best Airport have capacity to grow and act as gateways to the island.

Alongside providing better transport connections, railway lines contribute to employment, economic prosperity, and sustainability goals. Cork Chamber would be supportive of direct services between Cork and Belfast. An enhanced rail connection between Cork and Belfast would grow a two-way relationship for trade and tourism. Notwithstanding, the desire for through running of train services from Cork to Heuston to Connolly and on to Belfast, to see plans to move to a high-speed hourly service linking Belfast, Dublin and Cork would be significant progress in its own right.

The NPF correctly identified the significance of cross-border interactions. It is therefore important that the NPF acknowledges the economic potential of stronger links between the island's two largest cities outside Dublin in Cork and Belfast. Stronger rail, air and port connectivity and coordination has the potential to unlock substantial economic activity.

In light of recent events both in Belfast and Dublin, we must continue to be proactive in protecting and building true peace and reconciliation on our island. We have missed far too many opportunities in the past. The full potential of the Good Friday Agreement has not been fulfilled and we have done too little to build the shared understanding and ongoing engagement on which reconciliation must be based.

Cork Chamber welcomed the launch of the Shared Island Initiative and will look to continue to engage with bodies both North/South and East/West to continue to build on the progress to date and build economic opportunities for the whole island delivering progress for people and communities.

We won't build a shared future looking for easy answers – we'll do it by doing the much harder and unglamorous work of building understanding, investing and looking for sustainable solutions to deep challenges.

Working Together for Economic Advantages

We welcome the commitment in the revised NPF to continue to support the work of InterTrade Ireland to help businesses across the island grow all-island trade and investing in inter-agency working on common enterprise policy objectives.

Strong economic links and trade, across the island of Ireland and between Ireland, Great Britain and the wider world brings significant benefits, helping to create jobs, enterprise and tax revenues that in turn contribute to prosperity and better services to society at large.

Cork Chamber supports these strong economic relationships and opportunities. Cork Chamber supports two initiative that provide greater coordination and collaboration ensuring Cork is a great place to do business and invest in. These initiatives are Enterprise Europe Network and Connecting Cork, which we will outline below. The NPF should continue to support the development of relationships and networks through planning, investment and policy cooperation across a range of areas, both North/ South and East/West.

Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)

Cork Chamber is a member of the Irish consortium of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) which helps ambitious SMEs innovate, collaborate and grow internationally. The EEN offers support and advice to SMEs, helping them make the most out of business opportunities. It is delivered as part of a consortium with Enterprise Ireland, Dublin Chamber of Commerce, and the Local Enterprise Offices. The EEN helps businesses grow through customised support, new business and technology partnerships, commercial opportunities, licensing deals, and partner searches for EU funded R&D. The EEN is active in over 40 countries worldwide, bringing together experts from more than 450 partner organisations. The EEN is the largest support network for SMEs and combine international business expertise with local knowledge to help take businesses to new markets.

The EEN at Cork Chamber work closely with “Invest Northern Ireland”, a regional economic development agency in Northern Ireland and hosts of the EEN project. Through this network, Cork Chamber have helped SMEs engage in cross-border collaborations with Northern Ireland.

Connecting Cork

Connecting Cork is a Cork Chamber initiative to promote Cork for business, investment, talent and collaboration. Cork Chamber of Commerce has been a champion for the business community and a strong advocate for the economic development of the Cork region for over 200 years. With our members as our motivation, we champion Cork as a globally recognised place for business, innovation and quality of life. Working together, we empower and support a successful and inclusive membership who drive a thriving Cork. Cork Chamber offers initiatives and membership packages which support businesses at all stages of development. Connecting Cork engages with economic development agencies and strategically important organisations overseas to provide Cork businesses with a network to help them grow internationally.

9. Climate Transition and Our Environment

Sustainability is more than a compliance or environmental issue; it has become a core strategic imperative for businesses navigating today’s complex and interconnected global landscape. The transition to a more sustainable and climate-resilient region, grounded in principles of equity, quality of life, and sustainable economic development, with vibrant and diverse communities, will position Cork as a leading model for green innovation and progressive urban planning in Ireland and beyond.

Cork already embodies many of these qualities, with various structures and community groups collaboratively working to co-create this vision. The business community has a pivotal role to play in delivering this positive change. Cork’s designation as one of the EU’s 100 climate-neutral cities by 2030 presents a significant opportunity to accelerate this transformation.

The commitment from Government in Budget 2024 to invest in climate change through the creation of the new €14 billion Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund was welcome to address the challenges we will face in the years to come. However, funding and an investment plan is needed now to address the challenges we are already facing today.

Cork and Dublin have been designated as EU mission cities for climate neutrality to 2030. We welcome the support from the National Mirror Group in coordinating the Smart Cities Mission at national level, providing strategic leadership, governance and decision-making support. For Cork and Dublin to achieve these climate objectives, funding is essential.

A dedicated fund should be established by central government to fund the next six years of investment to meet that target of climate neutrality for Cork and Dublin by 2030. Currently no such dedicated funding exists and is urgently required to meet our climate targets.

Zero Carbon Economy

The national gas network and renewable gases will be key to the delivery of Ireland's climate objectives, while ensuring Ireland's security of energy supply is maintained, and economic growth and foreign direct investment is protected. Cork Chamber supports projects which deliver physical security of supply, such as energy storage facilities, in alignment with national decarbonisation commitments as strategic undertakings for Ireland.

Biomethane enables organisations to decarbonise using their existing equipment without the need for expensive retrofits. However, the industry is in its infancy and needs support similar to the support given to wind when it was developing. The recent biomethane strategy outlines support for 2024-25. Cork Chamber calls for the introduction of an exchequer-funded operational support to grow biomethane production. Additional work should be completed over the next year to design the operational support i.e. a minimum guaranteed price for producers, similar to those introduced to support renewable electricity, in order to grow the biomethane industry to achieve the 5.7TWH target by 2030.

Cork Chamber recognises the role Ireland's €2.8 billion gas network can play in delivering on Ireland's climate targets by transporting green hydrogen and enabling the development of a national hydrogen network to optimise this crucial energy resource. Using the existing gas interconnectors to Scotland, Ireland can also link into a wider European hydrogen network, providing export opportunities. During 2025, it will be important to provide clarity on who the national hydrogen operator will be so that they can work with the offshore wind sector to ensure that excess wind can be converted and transported via network around the country thereby enabling Ireland to indigenously produce sufficient gas to meet demand.

Cork Chamber supports and advocates for the development of an energy park in Cork for the production of renewable liquid fuels and green hydrogen. This will deliver energy security and independence for Ireland, remove Ireland from the extraordinary cost of energy importation, and enable Ireland to become a renewable liquid fuel exporter. The current energy-related infrastructure, large energy users, off-takers such as Irving Oil, and skilled workforce in Cork make it the ideal location to do so. The revised NPF should acknowledge this area to reap the full benefits.

Managing Waste

In addition to the continued need for investment in wastewater infrastructure, there is also a requirement to ensure that the general waste management infrastructure is fit for purpose and provided for in a strategic manner. The Waste Management Plan provides the framework for the prevention and management of waste in a safe and environmentally responsible manner and places a strong focus on the sustainable management of resources and a move towards a more circular economy at both regional and national level. As such, the plan highlights that significant investment will be required to develop higher-quality waste treatment infrastructure including new biological treatment, thermal recovery such as waste to energy and pre-treatment recovery in the next number of years. Given that the population is expected to increase significantly, it is of particular importance that such strategic waste infrastructure is provided for in order to allow the region and Cork to grow and expand in an environmentally sound and sustainable fashion.

The development of such infrastructure would also support the national dual objectives of achieving self-sufficiency in the recovery of residual waste and corresponding reduction in the reliance on export of this waste, which is at odds with circular economy principles.

Sustainable Water Management

Uisce Éireann was allocated funding of €5.26 billion to continue its overall delivery of, and investment in, public water services for 2020-2024. As a result, significant milestones were achieved across critical projects and programmes in water and wastewater treatment and capacity, leakage reduction and connections.

However, its projects, programmes and strategic national infrastructure developments are long-term, and as such we advocate for a continued commitment to growing investment in water services through a multi-annual funding structure that enables Uisce Éireann to deliver large-scale capital projects efficiently and effectively.

Uisce Éireann has an ambitious programme of capital and continuous improvement works, that we believe are necessary in order to ensure service resilience, protect public health, protect the environment and enable growth in plan-led developments across the country.

Sustained, ongoing investment will be required for many decades to offset the years of underinvestment in water services. This is optimal strategic investment that will increase capacity, reduce leakage, improve resilience, support the delivery of housing, facilitate economic growth and achieve greater compliance with water and wastewater standards.

In the absence of growing investment, there will be risks to service delivery and associated pressures on operational expenditure to maintain service levels. We are seeking a firm commitment to the necessary essential investment package for water services.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity has intrinsic value that cannot be easily quantified, yet its presence is felt in every sector of society. From a Cork point of view, the richness and diversity of its biodiversity is the lifeblood of the city and fundamental to the quality of life of all citizens. With the current biodiversity crisis, every action must be taken to enhance and protect this natural fabric that increases the resilience of our communities, the appeal and attractiveness of Cork to investment, and the reputation of Cork in attracting and retaining skills and talent. The promotion and enhancement of heritage and biodiversity is essential to the DNA of Cork.

Biodiversity enhancements should be considered essential to the appeal and character of our cities, towns and public realms, and be protected and enhanced at every opportunity. Green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, such as green roofs and living walls, offer potential to enhance biodiversity, absorb noise and water, and provide cleaner air and recreational sanctuary. Biodiversity integration should be considered integral to all new developments, public projects, and when retrofitting existing infrastructure.

Climate Adaptation

As the imperative to mitigate climate change strengthens, so too does the need for effective adaptation measures. Climate adaptation often takes a back seat to reducing carbon emissions and pollution, yet both are equally important and inherently linked. Scientific evidence shows our climate is changing, with extreme weather events in Ireland projected to increase in severity

and frequency over the next 40 years. Even if we meet the 2050 targets, we will still face the consequences of historic emissions. Inaction now can lead to a costly future, with climate change impacts projected to cost the global economy \$54 trillion by 2040.

A deficiency in financial and human resources has limited the impact of adaptation in Ireland to date, as reported by local authorities. We are pleased that the Climate Change Advisory Council's recommendations were included in the development of the revised National Adaptation Framework, specifically the development of a 2030 budget for adaptation and the assessment for 2050 and onwards. The allocation of adequate financial and human resources must be prioritised to enable local authorities to effectively implement adaptation measures and secure a sustainable future for Ireland.

We welcome National Policy Objective 54, which aims to address the effects of sea level changes and coastal flooding erosion. However, the government needs to allocate funds towards enhancing our resilience to withstand the impacts of climate change. With sea levels on the rise, it is imperative to promptly implement a Coastal Management Strategy aimed at effectively addressing the evolving nature of our coastlines.

10. Implementing the National Planning Framework

Following the finalisation of the revised NPF, it will be important that the National Development Plan be reviewed considering the changes to the NPF. This will be important to ensure that the two parts of Project Ireland 2040 remain aligned and to ensure a coordinated and plan-led approach to infrastructural development.

The NDP will need to reprioritise projects following the updated projections from the ESRI report and the Housing Commission Report. While alignment between the two parts of Project Ireland 2040 is important, there should also be a level of flexibility to allow Ireland to respond to challenges in the future that may not be on the horizon yet. The NPF should not be restrictive on the NDP's ability to accelerate the delivery of crucial enabling projects.

It is fundamental that investment is made in our public infrastructure to support the economic conditions for all regions and society to see growth. Unfortunately, underinvestment throughout the past number of decades has meant there is a deficit in our enabling infrastructure, which has hampered balanced regional development and has served to widen the gaps between the regions. The alignment of the NDP with the revised and more ambitious NPF will be crucial to deliver the well-prioritised programme of projects to comprehensively deal with the deficit, as well as to ensure future sustainable growth is supported.

As we have stated previously, population growth naturally follows employment growth, which requires investment in infrastructure. This will only be achievable through targeted, ambitious and strategic investment, particularly in the area of connectivity to close the gap within our regions.

The Government must review the approach taken in implementing the NPF and NDP and ensure that it prioritises enabling infrastructure in key locations to deliver on the ambition for sustainable regional balance.

A more strategic approach will be required to ensure adequate funding for capital investments in utilities such as water, wastewater and electricity projects in order to ensure sustainable compact urban growth as a clear objective of Project Ireland 2040. There is little point in developing a framework and plan without the appropriate funding in place to deliver projects.

Following the revised NPF and the review of the NDP, it is only right to expect some reprioritisation of projects as some may be better aligned with the revised NPF. However, it is one thing to reprioritise projects, but this must also be accompanied by better and accelerated delivery. Projects that have been identified as priorities under the NPF must see Government commitment to get them delivered. This will require working closely with state agencies, local authorities and other stakeholders to remove barriers to the delivery of these projects.

Monitoring of projects and delivery timeframes is one area that can improve following the revised NPF. Far too many projects are held up with significant delays. A more transparent system should be adopted to allow projects to be tracked from inception to completion.

Zoning

Strengthening Local Authority Planning: Plan Making and Core Strategies

Cork Chamber agrees that reforms of planning legislation in 2010 introduced a new approach to justifying land use zoning objectives in local authority plans so that enough land is provided to service projected development needs, but not so much that development becomes difficult to co-ordinate or undermines compact growth objectives and the regeneration of existing, but under-occupied and run-down urban areas.

We acknowledge that the core reforms have realised major benefits and support a more evidence-based and strategic approach to planning. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that a bottom-up approach will need to be looked at when reviewing land for zoning and local authorities on the ground will need to be consulted to ensure appropriate land is available to zone. As we have discussed in earlier sections, many areas of zoned lands are not being developed due to the water, wastewater, electricity or other enabling infrastructure either at capacity or not available. To have a planning and zoning system that truly works, the local authorities will need to be the lead authority, and all agencies charged with the delivery of enabling infrastructure and utilities will need to be aligned with the city or county development plan.

Coordinating Land Use Zoning, Infrastructure and Services

It is welcome that the draft revised NPF is targeting significant infill and brownfield development in order to achieve compact and sustainable growth that can act as a driver of urban regeneration and renewal in our cities and towns. This has the potential to revitalise traditional core areas while also ensuring that maximum benefit is derived from the very significant public investment that the State makes in services and infrastructure. Cork, as one of two Irish mission cities, can play an intrinsic role in unlocking innovative ways to deliver this objective at an accelerated pace.

As the city and county development plans will need to effectively implement these objectives, there is a need for substantially better linkage between zoning of land and the availability of infrastructure. The idea of a Residential Zoned Land Tax, if implemented logically and fairly, could have a positive potential impact. However, this tax should not be applied to any housebuilder that has been delayed by factors outside their control such as judicial review, infrastructure capacity constraints, the phased development of lands for residential purposes or any matter related to the planning system, be it pre-application or planning process.

It will be important that the Tiered Approach to Zoning will continue to differentiate between zoned land that is available for development and zoned land that requires significant further investment in services for infrastructure for development to be realised. There should also be a mechanism to identify what blockages there are and what investment is required to transform zoned lands that requires significant further investment in services for infrastructure for development to be realised into zoned land that is available for development.

Prioritising Development Lands

It is true that there are many other planning considerations relevant to land zoning beyond the provision of basic enabling infrastructure, including overall planned levels of growth, location, suitability for the type of development envisaged, availability of and proximity to amenities, schools, shops or employment, accessibility to transport services etc. Local authorities will have to weigh up all of these factors, together with the availability of infrastructure, to determine an order of priority to deliver planned growth and development. Once this order of priority is identified, it is important that funding is guaranteed and accessible so that progress can be made without undue delays.

11. Conclusion

To conclude we wish to outline once more our priorities developed in consultation with our Board and members.



Housing

The housing situation in Cork has emerged as a pressing concern in recent years and remains one of the top priorities for Cork Chamber. There remains a considerable journey ahead to deliver the scale of housing our city region needs to cater for the projected population increase in the coming decades. However, there are discernible signs of progress since the beginning of the new year which can be attributed to the policy changes implemented by government, which have stimulated the delivery of apartment projects in Cork, marking a positive turning point in addressing housing challenges. The widening of the cost-rental threshold as well as government schemes such as Croí Cónaithe and Project Tosaigh are having a direct impact in Cork.

Ensuring the availability of affordable housing is essential for fostering economic development in the region. It is imperative that housing delivery aligns with existing demand and anticipates the capacity required for planned future population growth. Cork needs to produce at least 7,500 – 10,000 units per year to keep pace with demand. While the capital funding for housing in 2024 stands at a record €5 billion, speed of implementation and delivery are crucial. The Housing Commission has estimated that, as of the 2022 Census, there was a housing deficit of between 212,500 and 256,000 homes in Ireland.

Cork makes up 11.3% of Ireland's total population according to the same Census, so population adjustment would mean Cork was short between 24,000 and 29,000 homes

Any obstacles to the speedy delivery of housing must be removed.

Talent and Skills

Cork's ability to attract and retain talent for current and future needs is paramount to the sustainable growth of our region, fostering innovation, enhancing our global competitiveness, and ensuring a thriving future for a diverse business community.

Businesses are grappling with pervasive skills gaps evident across various sectors and professions. Cork Chamber's Q4 2023 Economic Trends Member Survey⁷ found that the vast majority of businesses expect skills shortages to continue over the next year. The skills gaps in science, engineering, and technology professions are increasingly critical in the era of AI, digitisation, and the climate transition, underscoring the urgent need for R&D and specialised expertise to drive innovation and address these complex challenges.

Higher and Further Education

These skills needs and approaching economic transformations highlight the importance of our universities and further education institutes in developing talent to bridge these gaps and prepare for the future. This underlines the essential role for increased investment in talent and skills and Further & Higher Education through capital projects, as well as ongoing funding to secure talent and skills pipelines in Cork, including the unlocking of the National Training Fund.

Apprenticeships

It is important to recognise that people and organisations benefit from different paths to employment as employees seek fulfilling and rewarding careers. Therefore, further funding to expand apprenticeships across Higher & Further Education is needed. This must be

⁷ [Cork Chamber's Q4 2023 Economic Trends Member Survey](#)

complemented by an appropriate marketing strategy to attract candidates to the roles, with a specific focus on women in STEM, as they are often underrepresented on apprenticeship programmes.

Childcare

The provision of affordable childcare and its potential impact on economic growth and talent retention is a key concern raised by members. An accessible, functioning, and affordable childcare sector is essential to support economic growth and ensure that employees have robust choices when considering their participation in the workplace. Our Q1 2024 Economic Trends⁸ found that 72% of respondents felt that further government intervention was needed to improve the provision of childcare.

Talent Attraction Strategy

Access to specialist talent is the top barrier to growth for Cork business as indicated time and time again by our members through the Quarterly Economic Trends surveys. Therefore, a fully funded talent attraction and retention strategy is crucial for Cork. The We are Cork initiative is the appropriate vehicle to develop this strategy, and the project should have a dedicated resource specifically to undertake and implement it. Cork has the opportunity to be the first region in Ireland with a dedicated talent attraction strategy. This is crucial for the region as the competition for the best talent is now global.

Innovation, Research and Development

Cork is home to world class research centres such as Science Foundation Ireland's Nimbus Centre and Tyndall Institute. The level of awareness amongst Irish indigenous companies to the benefits of working and collaborating with these leading-edge institutions must be raised. By connecting Cork businesses with Cork R&D centres we can ensure that the region grows as a hub for scaling SMEs looking to find the differentiator amongst their competitors. A thriving and innovative indigenous SME sector is core to the success of the local and national economy.

Urban Evolution

A new priority for our members this year encompasses a number of interconnected actions to enhance the city centre from a functional and aesthetic perspective, and Cork has the potential to be a national leader in urban rejuvenation.

Vibrant Urban Centres

Vibrant towns and city centres rely on people living in the urban heart and, throughout Cork, there are beautiful buildings currently being underutilised and in danger of falling into disrepair. Therefore, potential urban centre housing units that currently lie vacant, such as those over shops, should be further targeted to remove any impediments to converting these spaces into sought-after living quarters. One of the largest impediments to repurposing vacant premises is the difficulty in obtaining fire certification. Cork has the opportunity to lead the way in exploring innovative options to develop these units without compromising safety. Bringing residents back into the urban centre is a vital cog in growing vibrant liveable towns and cities and is a great opportunity for Cork.

⁸ [Cork Chamber's Q1 2024 Economic Trends Member Survey](#)

Urban Safety and Policing

Safety, and the feeling of being safe, in our city is essential for all those who live, work and visit Cork. Safety in urban areas, and especially the city centre, is a matter that has been slowly increasing on the radar of Cork Chamber and our members over the past period, and it must be addressed before anti-social behaviour in Cork damages our reputation as a welcoming city for talent and investment. Greater Garda visibility plays an important role in maintaining a safe and pleasant environment.

Continued Integration

Cork is now a multicultural city. This evolution over the past 20 years has been harmonious, but we must not be complacent. We all need to ensure that social cohesion and integration continues to be a positive aspect of the city. We have seen in other regions the harmful impact that a coordinated and sustained negative narrative around immigration can have. As a business community, and as Cork Chamber has advocated for, it is no longer good enough to be pro-diversity we must be actively anti-racist.

With an increasing number of people seeking international protection in Cork, it is vital that social and economic integration pathways are provided to newcomers, whether that be through long-term funding for English language classes, upskilling and re-skilling programmes, or supportive community initiatives. A practical and pragmatic approach towards people seeking international protection in Ireland is required to counter anti-immigration sentiment and support migrants in developing the skills they need to thrive and contribute positively to our economy. By strengthening our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion through professional development we can ease the pressures in the currently tight labour market.

Renewables and Energy System Integration

The imperative to harness our renewable resources and vast maritime area is widely shared throughout Irish society today. This drive is not only about meeting our legally binding climate and energy targets but also about the significant economic opportunities that renewables will unlock, including job creation and enhancing Cork's appeal to foreign direct investment (FDI) and talent.

Cork has the potential to capitalise on various forms of renewable energy, including solar PV, anaerobic digestion, onshore wind, offshore wind, and hydrogen. Instead of decarbonising and enhancing efficiency in sectors independently, we emphasise the need for a circular approach to energy system integration.

Energy system integration involves the coordinated planning and operation of the entire energy system across various energy sources, infrastructures, and sectors. By moving away from rigid, parallel energy value chains and adopting principles like circularity, core energy efficiency, direct electrification of end-use sectors, and the use of renewable and low-carbon fuels, we can enable a more effective, affordable, and deep decarbonisation of the economy in alignment with the Paris Agreement and the United Nations SDGs. With electricity demand expected to more than double between now and 2050, it is crucial that we think about all our resources in a more integrated manner.

Over the past year, several renewable energy policy developments have occurred. Most notably, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) published "Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy." This publication marks a significant step toward

achieving Ireland's renewable energy targets and driving economic growth. The publication of this strategy underscores the sector's strategic economic importance.

While Cork is well-positioned to seize these renewable energy opportunities, additional enablers need to be realised to ensure Cork fully benefits from the offshore renewable energy (ORE) opportunity.

Ports play a crucial role in the development of the ORE industry, supporting the supply chain, forming industrial clusters, and meeting national targets. They are essential for the construction, deployment, maintenance, and decommissioning activities throughout the project lifecycle. Currently, Belfast is the only port on the island of Ireland fully equipped to service the ORE sector. Ireland needs at least one additional port to service the sector by 2030 to ensure the projects that qualified in the first ORESS auction are delivered. The Port of Cork has planning permission to build the infrastructure that would support this sector, and we urge for proactive port investment and clarity regarding funding, which is essential for these projects to move forward.

It will be important that Cork Harbour is recognised as a national hub for renewable energy and a central plank in delivering Ireland's and the EU's climate action targets.

Infrastructure and Connectivity

Connectivity and accessibility are continuously highlighted as a priority by our members. Cork has a real opportunity to integrate economic growth and environmental responsibility, but progress in enabling infrastructural projects such as the road network and public transport, will be required to be deliver these goals at a faster pace.

Road Infrastructure

Quality road infrastructure plays a key role in stimulating economic and social development as well as providing access to efficient and effective public transport options. Cork Chamber has been advocating at the highest levels for the speedy delivery of a number of roads projects, which are crucial to facilitate the expected level of growth in Cork over the coming years.

N25 Carrigwohill-Midleton & R624 (Belvelly Bridge) - East Cork is and will remain a very attractive area for FDI but improvements in infrastructure are key to enhancing its profile, encouraging expansion and attracting further investment. The decision to suspend plans for the upgrade of the N25 Carrigwohill-Midleton multi-modal route must be revisited as an enabler to investment and economic growth.

Road access to Marino Point must also be progressed. The R624, including the provision of an enhanced bridge crossing at Belvelly, must be progressed at pace to allow the Port of Cork to fulfil the ambitions set out in its 2050 Master Plan.

M20 Cork-Limerick - A consistent focus is required on the long-awaited Cork-Limerick transport corridor. The route is progressing, and we have had extensive engagement with Transport Infrastructure Ireland to ensure this project is delivered on time.

M28 Ringaskiddy - The delivery of the M28 is crucial to open up the Docklands in Cork to housing developments as well as enabling the Port of Cork to move its operations further out in the harbour. The project must be delivered by 2026.

Northern Distributor Road – Is vital to the north of Cork City to cater for access to planned development lands, provide walking and cycling linkages, access to radial public transport routes, orbital public transport provision, and the removal of some strategic traffic from Cork City Centre

Rail Infrastructure

Cork Light Rail - If Cork is to facilitate its growing population and achieve climate neutral status by 2030, light rail for Cork will be needed in the immediate future. While current plans outline the potential delivery to be closer to 2040, there is potential to accelerate the project and deliver light rail for Cork in the next decade. A preferred route should be agreed and published by the National Transport Authority without delay, and it is vital that this route is connected to Kent Station. In all our conversations with government, state agencies and local authorities, we stress the importance of light rail for the region and the potential it has to transform Cork metropolitan area.

Suburban Rail - Cork's suburban rail service will play a central role in transforming the region and enhancing its attractiveness and competitiveness. The upgrade of rail in Cork is continuing, but government commitment is needed to ensure enabling infrastructure is in place so that upgraded carriages are not lost to other locations.

Intercity Rail - Cork Chamber is also continuing to campaign for highspeed rail between Cork and Dublin and for a direct service from Cork to Limerick Colbert be explored and implemented. As highlighted in this submission, we also believe better connectivity between Cork and Belfast would bring a significant positive economic impact.

BusConnects - BusConnects Cork offers a unique opportunity for the creation of new sustainable transport corridors, with the final route decision is imminent. Routes with stakeholder approval should move ahead immediately while NTA consultations should continue on routes that have not been settled.

The opportunities that will result from Busconnects, light rail and the electrification of our suburban rail network will not only provide a greener, cleaner and more sustainable mode of transport, but will boost Cork's profile as an attractive location to live and work.

Cork Airport - Cork Airport plays a key role in the Irish economy as the principal international gateway to the south of Ireland. Enhancing Cork's regional and international connectivity is a top priority for our members and a key economic enabler for the south-west region. In the context of a growing population, in which we are set to be the fastest-growing region in the nation to 2040, Cork Airport must also continue to develop in line with these ambitions. Therefore, it is essential that Cork Airport receives its fair share of funding to expand in line with the region's growth.

Industrial Landbanks - The City and County Strategic Employment Areas, including the City Centre, the North Environs, Mahon, Little Island, Carrigtwohill, Ringaskiddy and Whitegate Energy Zone, and existing zoned landbanks for industrial use facilitate FDI investment and job creation. New fully serviced landbanks, however, will be required to ensure Cork continues to have the capacity for the expansion of existing companies and attraction of new companies to the region.

Servicing of Residential and Industrial Sites - The non-alignment of delivery plans with the necessary infrastructure and utilities for residential and industrial sites such as electricity,

water and wastewater, has been highlighted as a restricting factor to development. Cork Chamber continues to engage with Uisce Éireann, local authorities, developers and other utilities to ensure greater coordination and engagement.

Social Infrastructure - As Cork's population grows, we need the infrastructure to support an ever diversifying and demanding region. Therefore, social infrastructure, infrastructure that ties communities together, such as in health, education, culture and the community must be properly funded to promote social cohesion and make Cork a great place to live.

Sustainability and Climate Neutral City

Sustainability is more than a compliance or environmental issue; it has become a core strategic imperative for businesses navigating today's complex and interconnected global landscape. The transition to a more sustainable and climate-resilient region, grounded in principles of equity, quality of life, and sustainable economic development, with vibrant and diverse communities, will position Cork as a leading model for green innovation and progressive urban planning in Ireland and beyond.

Cork already embodies many of these qualities, with various structures and community groups collaboratively working to co-create this vision. The business community has a pivotal role to play in delivering this positive change. Cork's designation as one of the EU's 100 climate-neutral cities by 2030 presents a significant opportunity to accelerate this transformation. It is crucial that this narrative is portrayed positively to ensure buy-in across all sectors of society.

By integrating sustainability into every facet of Cork's development, from infrastructure and innovation to social initiatives and corporate practices, we aim to create a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous future for all, setting a precedent for other regions to follow.

Planning Reform & Speed of Delivery

We need planning reform that reduces delays, provides certainty on timelines for decisions and makes the broader planning system more effective and efficient.

We strongly advocate for this as part of a radical reshaping of the planning system to make it fit for purpose.

Concerns around the pace at which sustainable infrastructure is delivered is cutting across all industry and society, from housing, renewable energy and water infrastructure to public transport, and social and cultural infrastructure.

The Draft Planning and Development Bill is a significant step towards the urgent need to reform and streamline the planning system.

Follow-up

We ask that our recommendations and comments be considered, and we remain at your disposal for any additional insights from our membership.

For follow up and further information: Cathal McSweeney, Director of Public Affairs

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