

# **Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework**

## **Submission by Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce**

### **Introduction:**

The Kilkenny Chamber of commerce, through its affiliation with Chambers Ireland, is part of the largest business representative organisation in the country. Chambers Ireland has made a submission to the NPF outlining, at a national level, our collective view of Ireland 2040 and Kilkenny Chamber concurs with the recommendations outlined therein.

### **Our National / Regional overview:**

Kilkenny Chamber wants Ireland to be a place where businesses and people can thrive and where vibrant cities reflect their competitive regions as great places to live and do business.

As Ireland recovers from recession over the last decade we face the legacy issues of underinvestment in infrastructure and a capital city that is under enormous pressure as it drives growth in increasingly more areas surrounding it. These issues together with the challenges of projected increases in population, climate change, infrastructure deficits, skills gaps and competitiveness issues must be addressed in the NPF.

In this context the NPF must support the effective and sustainable economic growth of Irelands regions taking into account the interdependence and interconnectedness of Irelands villages, towns and cities and also consider the need to support city regions as the drivers of growth of the country. The NPF must work towards ensuring that growth in a city can benefit the region in which it operates.

A coordinated approach is necessary to ensure that the role of cities and towns and their inter relationship within a regional ecosystem is properly recognised and planned for. The concept of connectedness must be a vital element of planning for our future and ensure physical connectedness between and within Irelands cities, towns and regions as well as between Ireland and the wider world. This must embrace the provision of high speed internet and safe and stable supplies of water and energy.

Planning and investment in new infrastructures will be an essential element of the NPF with a clear vision for the identification of priority infrastructure projects in the areas of transport, energy, water, broadband and housing.

Learning from the National Spatial Strategy, it is clear that significant emphasis must be placed on developing a robust governance and implementation structure for the NPF.

### **The focus for Kilkenny:**

The following specific challenges must be given priority in the NPF to enable Kilkenny City and County develop and perform to its true potential.

## **Housing**

There are significant housing shortages in the main urban centres throughout the county of Kilkenny and this is adversely affecting Kilkenny's ability to attract new business set-ups in the area. The NPF must contain robust plans and resource commitments to deliver sufficient housing to redress this shortage and also factor in the potential for Kilkenny city to double its population by 2040.

## **Broadband:**

The provision of high speed broadband throughout the county is essential for business to thrive and prosper. Whilst Kilkenny City has fibre optic provision at its core, the broadband service in the periphery and across rural locations is unacceptably poor and significant immediate investment is required.

## **Craft Industry:**

The Craft Industry benefits hugely from the central location of the Design and Craft Council of Ireland having its Headquarters in Kilkenny. The NPF must contain plans to continue with this arrangement but also link to the requirement for improved broadband in rural Kilkenny as the current service is not fit for purpose and mitigates against many crafts people basing their businesses in rural home locations.

## **Health:**

The NPF should include plans for the further development and utilisation of the excellent campus on St Lukes Hospital and also secure Kilcreene Hospital as a centre of excellence in providing for the needs of our growing and aging population into the future.

## **Transport:**

The completion in recent years of the M7 and M9 have had hugely positive benefits for Kilkenny but have also highlighted the inadequacies of many of the secondary roads throughout the county. An example of such inadequacies would include the incomplete Ring Road around Kilkenny City – the completion of this road should be a top priority in the NPF. Similarly significant investment is required to improve the standard of roads connecting Kilkenny City through Freshford and on to Urlingford where it joins with the M7. This would provide valuable connectivity between the M9 and M7 through Kilkenny.

Furthermore, a large proportion of the population is dependent on public transport and the NPF should include provision for maintaining and extending rail and bus services as the population grows.

## **Economic Development:**

Statistics suggest that Kilkenny has not been receiving a fair share of FDI and given the lack of high quality office accommodation available, especially for inward investment projects, the IDA must be encouraged to invest more in Kilkenny as part of the NPF. Allied to this is the need for significant investment by IDA in the Bellview Port area.

### **Education:**

It is crucial that a final decision is made as soon as possible to deliver a Technical University for the South East. The establishment of a multi campus model through the merger of IT Carlow and Waterford IT is critical to ensuring the long term sustainable economic development of the region and this model should include a campus in Kilkenny where an ideal location would be within the development of the Abbey Quarter / former Smithwicks Brewery site.

### **Agriculture:**

Agriculture is hugely important to the Kilkenny economy as it incorporates so many diverse businesses of all sizes. Kilkenny has a very large farming population producing the highest quality products and aligned with that we have big businesses such as Glanbia, Connollys Red Mills, Callan Bacon and many others relying heavily on agriculture. There are significant challenges coming our way following Brexit and the NPF must factor these realities into the plan accordingly.

### **Tourism:**

Already an established success at attracting domestic tourist visitors, the tourism offering for Kilkenny needs greater promotion on the international stage in order to increase its visibility and ability to attract international visitors. Continued and increased investment in the promotion of Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Medieval Mile are important in this context. Increased investment in this area will have the knock on effect of making the area more attractive for investment.

### **Proposed change to the Kilkenny / Waterford boundary:**

The proposed change to the Kilkenny / Waterford boundary is of such potentially huge consequence that it merits special mention here.

Kilkenny Chamber is vehemently opposed to the proposed boundary changes to the south of the county between Kilkenny and Waterford. Whilst acknowledging that a strong and vibrant Waterford City is a vital component for the South East region, this can be achieved through a mandated cooperation model which would include:

- The preparation of a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy to coordinate across local authorities.
- Implementation programmes developed on a cross-local authority basis within the Regional Assembly structure.
- Strengthened legislative cooperation on planning.

The adverse implications for Kilkenny in the event of this boundary extension for Waterford being approved are considerable. The loss of rates and property tax would reduce the income of Kilkenny County Council resulting in adverse effects on the rural road network, reduction in investment in capital projects and leading to an inability to maintain and improve services, hinder the progress of business and the rural farming industry and placing

further challenges on the local economy and particularly on small businesses and start-ups. The Boundary Committee have failed in their terms of reference to address such issues.

The loss of Ferrybank would reduce the population and financial base of the south of the county and these are key ingredients to the critical mass required to attract future industry into the county. Ferrybank is a primary strategic development area which has seen much investment from Kilkenny County Council and has been a further source of income to the county through development contributions, rates, property tax, etc. The loss of the urban area of the south of the county would result in a sprawling rural and aging population placing a further burden on council resources.

Rates for comparative businesses in both counties are not comparative as Waterford rates are considerably higher. This added financial pressure for businesses in the affected area could be the catalyst that would see their demise and this is of particular relevance to small businesses.

Politically the proposed boundary change would result in the loss of two local councillors in the south of County Kilkenny and a consequent requirement for a further electoral boundary review across the entirety of County Kilkenny. Such a scenario would be woefully inefficient bearing in mind that it is only since 2014 that the existing electoral arrangements have come into place together with the associated economic and community development plans that the business community of County Kilkenny have helped to develop.

The proposed boundary change is neither necessary nor justified. It would be disruptive and hugely divisive and become an obstacle to many other objectives across the region where cooperation and collaboration between counties is an ongoing requirement. Instead, the mandated cooperation model set out above should be established.

## **Conclusion:**

Kilkenny Chamber welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the development of Ireland over the next 20 years through the launch of the National Planning Framework.

The future holds great promise in terms of both challenges and opportunities. A robust set of plans based on true knowledge and understanding of the real issues and dynamics at play will produce the positive outcomes for Kilkenny that we desire.

Kilkenny Chamber is well positioned to give advice and guidance in this regard. We have outlined our views in this document and look forward to engaging further in the process over the coming months and years.