

Cllr. Conor D. McGuinness

Waterford City and County Council

Submission
to the

Southern Regional Assembly

in relation to the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region and the Public Consultation on the Proposed Material Amendments to same.

I want to commend the members and officials of the Southern Regional Assembly for their work to date in drafting this Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

It is the first time that strategic planning at this level will take into account both the spatial and economic factors in one unified document.

I am heartened by the inclusion of and reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which have at their core values of equality, fairness, inclusion and justice.

There are many positive and progressive aspects in the draft strategy and indeed in the schedule of material amendments. I would suggest some changes however, and my submission below makes reference to these.

I would be obliged if you would give the following points due consideration as you continue with your important work in developing this much awaited strategy.

2.1 Strategic Vision

Our Strategy

The 11 key elements outlined together form a comprehensive and progressive strategy however I suggest the amendments below:

No. 5 Building a competitive, innovative and productive, **sustainable and socially just** economy.

Rationale: To align more fully with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Building competitiveness and productivity, in the absence of social justice, can have detrimental effects on

workers' pay and conditions. Similarly unchecked production is not necessarily sustainable, and in the context of climate change and climate crisis it is important to underline the need for economic growth to be sustainable.

No. 7 Strengthening and protecting our region's diverse culture, recreation, ~~natural heritage~~, biodiversity and **natural, linguistic and** built heritage

Rationale: There is a rich linguistic heritage in the region that manifests itself in the five distinct Gaeltacht areas, the Gaeltacht Service Towns, the bilingual town status of Carlow, the many Gaelscoileanna and Gaelscholáistí, The Irish Language Network in Ennis and many community based language projects. This is recognised within the draft plan, but it is important that linguistic heritage is included alongside natural and built heritage from the outset.

3.4 Cities Metropolitan Areas

Waterford MASP

The Metropolitan Area should include the City's hinterland as understood by the boundaries of the Waterford Metropolitan District. This is consistent with the inclusion of Shannon in the Limerick Metropolitan Area and Midleton in the Cork Metropolitan Area.

The Vision for the Waterford Metropolitan Area correctly identifies the city as the main urban centre in the South East but stops short of acknowledging it as the economic, administrative and transport hub for the South East. I believe this is a mistake that may lead to uncertainty in the future.

The Waterford Metropolitan Area, comprising the extant Waterford Metropolitan District, must be clearly identified as the economic, administrative and transport hub for the South East in the final Strategy.

3.5 Key Towns

The material amendment to Section 3.5 introduces a two-tier approach to Key Towns, and distinguishes between two types. This distinction appears to serve no purpose and is not material to the objectives outlined. The distinction fulfils no function and serves no concrete or demonstrable purpose. It introduces an unhelpful categorisation for no apparent reason and may have future repercussions when it comes to development, investment and prioritisation.

This material amendment should be rejected.

Dungarvan

Key Infrastructure Requirements

The following two points should be included under this heading

vi. Development of sufficient quantity of public and affordable housing to keep pace with population growth and economic development

Rationale: The provision of housing that is affordable and accessible to workers is vital to social wellbeing, the development of sustainable communities, securing inward investment, and the creation of jobs. Economic growth in Dungarvan has not been matched by growth in the number of homes available to buy or rent.

vii. Development of community and recreational infrastructure to support the vibrant and growing community and voluntary sector in the town and its hinterland.

Rationale: Dungarvan lacks a dedicated community centre and or multi-use recreational facility, which is not typical for a town of its size. this is despite a dynamic and growing community and voluntary sector, which is dependent on commercial venues for their activities.

RPO 23

b.

Regarding improvements and upgrading of roads infrastructure it is important to note that the R672 to Clonmel is also of strategic importance in linking Dungarvan to Limerick City via the N24 and the Western transport corridor. This detail should be referenced in this measure.

c.

The addition of measure **a.** and its reference to Dungarvan as a Gaeltacht Service Town is welcome but does not compensate nor replace the need for a separate measure ‘to support the development of Dungarvan as a Gaeltacht Service Town.’ Supporting the development in this regard is crucial as scheme is at its core a development process that will span the best part of a decade.

The material amendment to remove measure **c.** ‘To support the development of Dungarvan as the Gaeltacht Service Town for Gaeltacht na nDéise’ should, therefore, be rejected.

The Development of Dungarvan as a Gaeltacht Service Town is Government Policy and will be of important to the cultural, social, and business life of the town, its hinterland, the City and County of Waterford and the South East as a whole. Gaeltacht na nDéise is the only Gaeltacht located on the East coast, and is an accessible and important centre of learning and linguistic heritage for the South East region.

f.

This RPO should include a measure in support the development of Dungarvan as a sub-regional centre for education and training, including lifelong learning, by building on existing links with international third-level education providers and WIT.

7.2.3 The Gaeltacht and our Linguistic Heritage

RPO 188

Amend this priority to include the text in bold.

local authorities should ensure that decision-making relating to the development of social and economic infrastructure including the development of communications and renewable energy are informed by an appropriate level of environmental assessment, **community consultation, and the support of local development bodies. Proposed infrastructure developments shall be assessed on their impact on the delivery of language plans in the Gaeltacht LPAs.**

8.2 Strategic Energy Grid

RPO 213

The amendments to this priority relating to strengthening local/community renewable energy networks, micro renewable generation, climate smart countryside projects and connections from such initiatives to the grid are welcome and should be retained in the final Plan.

An additional point should be added as follows

(d) RSES supports cooperation between local authorities to develop sub-regional renewable energy plans including provision for micro renewable generation capabilities for local authority housing stock and other local authority buildings.