

09th June 2023

RE: Public Consultation on the new Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2029

To whom it concerns,

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members employing over 100,000 people throughout the city, metropolitan area and county. Our vision is to be a world-leading Chamber of Commerce, delivering on a progressive economic, social and sustainability agenda at the heart of a vibrant business community. Our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

On behalf of our membership, Cork Chamber welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the new Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2023 – 2029. Cork city is on the cusp of major transformation and is on track to be the fastest growing city in the next 20 years. Confidence levels are high and continue to drive FDI and indigenous investment in the city, it is uniquely placed to harness the potential of offshore wind and become a major renewable energy hub, and plans are afoot for major developments right across the city.

However, in order to maintain this momentum focus must shift to the stumbling blocks that exist to development including shortfalls in housing supply, infrastructure and public transport. Cork has also been designated as one of 100 European cities who will lead the way on climate action and smart cities across Europe by becoming climate neutral by 2030. This offers a real opportunity to transform our city and tackle the obstacles that exist to further development and inward investment.

The LECP is another step in driving our city forward and ensuring its success in a rapidly changing global economy while putting its people first. This submission has been prepared based on the six high-level goals of the LECP with insights from our members. We hope you will take into consideration our observations in each area and the LECP itself has scope for review throughout its life span as it can be an integral part of building a truly sustainable, inclusive and thriving city.

Yours sincerely,



Conor Healy

CEO

Vision

Our vision is for a world leading sustainable city of neighbourhoods with affordable housing in the right place, with green spaces, sustainable public transport networks and active travel corridors across the city, a vibrant and inclusive cultural scene, a diverse, integrated and welcoming city with innovation and enterprise at its heart, making it the best place to work, live and invest.

The following submission has been prepared under the following headings that are key enablers for the six high level goals of the LECP:

- Housing
- Economic Growth, FDI and Enterprise Development
- Integration, attraction and retention of talent
- Sustainable public transport
- Sustainability and the Climate Neutral City
- Tourism
- Cork City Culture, Community and Tourism

Housing

Housing remains the number one priority as the lack of supply continues to outstrip demand and the impacts are being felt right across Cork. The crisis is being compounded by several other issues including but certainly not limited to rising house prices, rental market pressures, social housing shortfalls, land availability and zoning and planning and regulatory issues. This crisis has become a key social and economic concern, and has the potential to impede FDI and Cork's ability to attract and retain talent. This plan offers a real opportunity to address the issues being experienced and make a difference.

Compact growth in the city centre through high quality affordable and sustainable housing will provide multiple benefits across health and wellbeing, sustainability and climate action, economic and enterprise development, delivering safe accessible neighbourhoods and inclusion and equality. This LECP must do everything it can to take into account these challenges as the city's population continues to grow and everything that can be done to facilitate new developments that allow people to live and work *in* the city.

For example, the transformation of the Docklands, Ireland's largest regeneration project, offers great potential and opportunity to transform our region by delivering homes for up to 25,000 people. But to open up the Docklands to development, we must see the delivery of the M28 as soon as possible and we must ensure that there is a mix of tenures to build sustainable neighbourhoods in the docklands. It is essential that any stumbling blocks are removed so the city can flourish.

The LECP is a six-year plan that should set out goals to achieve improvements in this area. A new assessment of housing for the specific time period of this plan could be beneficial to establish more accurate targets and generate new ideas to achieve housing delivery. Although great progress has been made with the local authority setting out affordable and social housing targets in its Housing Delivery Action Plan, raising those targets and finding ways to expedite the handover process i.e., getting the keys to those who have qualified for affordable house quicker, should be explored.

More emphasis should be placed on the utilisation of vacant spaces that could be converted into housing. This is particularly important for above-shop living. Currently the refurbishment requirements for some of these spaces is too difficult and expensive, particularly for those upper floor spaces that do not have a separate entrance for above the shop. Many of these spaces continue to remain vacant due to these stumbling blocks.

The LECP should focus on reducing some of these obstacles which would allow for more housing. The increase in grants for vacant and derelict properties as announced in the latest amendments to the Housing For All strategy are a welcome move in this regard and this should be promoted in the coming months and years to bring life to these types of spaces.

Sustainability must be at the heart of decision making when it comes to housing, and proximity to public transport should be the cornerstone of future design. The benefits of public transport provision in close proximity to housing will lead to vibrant communities, promote mixed use development, and will contribute to regeneration.

Engagement with local stakeholders such as businesses and community groups is important throughout the lifespan of this LECP.

Economic Growth, FDI and Enterprise Development

Cork has a strong record of attracting foreign direct investment to the region which has been a key driver of economic growth and enterprise development. Some of the key building blocks for that success are now under threat, with a lack of affordable housing in the right place, infrastructure deficits across power, water and transport, and a lack of greenspace and active travel infrastructure in the city that form a key part of the placemaking that make the city an attractive investment and job creation destination.

The SWOT analysis highlighted the lack of public transport options compared to other cities and the overdependence on private cars for transport and remedying these deficits should form a key focus of the LECP through both investment and street and neighbourhood design, to build a more sustainable city and reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Skills shortages that holding back growth in the city are directly linked to the lack of affordable housing in the city region, and again this has to be a key focus and is one of the key enablers to strong future economic growth. It is hindering cultural, social and economic growth with a need for a focus on housing of all tenure types.

Upskilling programmes (education and training) targeted at disadvantaged areas of the city which focus on particular area of skills shortages identified by major employers could deliver a win-win in terms of addressing inequality and disadvantage, while filling skills gaps for growing enterprises in the city. There is a clear opportunity here for collaboration between businesses and city council and agencies to create a programme around this.

To advance our entrepreneurial potential the LECP should look at introducing new supports for businesses at seed funding stage and beyond to support the ecosystem of developing entrepreneurs. At the moment, a significant proportion of these innovative companies move from Cork at that stage, and supports need to be developed to address this gap.

The establishment of a central ideas/incubator hub for sustainability ideas and start-ups in the city centre would align well with the city's mission to be climate neutral to 2030, and open up the canvas to people from all parts of the city.

With the massive renewable resource off our coast, the diversification of our economy by building a green energy industry is well underway but much work needs to be done to secure that once in a generation opportunity. A clear focus on supporting and developing the renewables sector and green industry should be central to the LECP and integrated into the planning for creating a Climate Neutral City to produce a future-fit economic base for the city region.

Integration, attraction and retention of talent

Cork's future success is intrinsically linked to our ability to continue to attract and retain high quality and diverse talent and on skills building to fulfil future needs for the digital and climate transition.

With over 15% of the population hailing from other countries, clear integration and inclusion programmes will be key to Cork continuing to be a welcoming location for the top talent and to allow both locals and newcomers to enjoy the full benefits of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural city. A clear integration and inclusion strategy should form a key part of this LECP.

Retaining talent requires an increasing focus on quality of life and quality placemaking in Cork, including affordable housing in the right place, access to the highest level of fibre broadband connection in the city, access to greenspaces and sustainable and active transport systems. However, it also requires a clear strategy on integration, both to make newcomers welcome, retain talent, and to avoid challenges in the future.

In developing the skills of the future, Cork's internationally recognised universities and research institutes, and reputation as a learning city with strong ties between the business community and academia place our city region at an advantage. It is essential that these relationships be continuously nurtured so that universities can better understand current and future business needs in order to produce more agile graduates.

Sustainable Public Transport – safe, accessible, resilient neighbourhoods

Developing a sustainable, reliable and well-connected public transport system is key to the future economy of Cork as the population continues to grow and as we strive to reach climate neutrality by 2030. Getting people out of the cars and onto public transport is one of the easiest ways to decarbonise our city region, decongest our roads, improve air quality and attract international talent who expect to have a comprehensive public transport system to get around.

The delivery of the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy, including the electrification of Cork's rail network, the expansion of suburban rail to the East and North of the city and the co-design of Bus Connects are key to this vision.

The development of the light rail transit system should enable increased connectivity by serving key destinations including Cork's universities and research centres, the city centre, Kent Station, the Docklands and Cork Airport. However it must become a reality in the immediate future to support the increase in population, meet climate targets and facilitate economic growth. An accelerated

timeline is needed to ensure that Cork is viewed as a high functioning city like its counterparts in Dublin and across Europe.

Cork's commuter rail service will play a central role in transforming the region and enhancing its attractiveness and competitiveness. Suburban rail offers the quickest and best opportunity to get people out of their cars in Cork.

But in order for this zero-carbon transport solution to become a reality, investment of €300m is required in enabling infrastructure to facilitate the use of these carriages in Cork. A plan to secure and enable this huge opportunity should be reflected in the LECP.

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. However, the speedy delivery of a number of roads projects are crucial to facilitate the expected level of growth on Leaside in the coming years. The delivery of the M28 is crucial to open up the docklands in Cork to housing development (especially for newcomers there is an expectation of an opportunity to live in or around the city centre of Cork) as well as enabling the Port of Cork to move its operations completely to Ringaskiddy.

This project is crucial to the future of the city and although funding has been allocated the rate of progress is too slow. Road infrastructure must be a focus of this LECP as it is the key to unlocking great potential in the city in terms of housing, sustainability and economic growth.

Tourism

Tourism is a huge economic driver in the region with thousands of direct and indirect jobs depending on it. In recent years Cork overtook Kerry as the most prosperous region for domestic tourism, however more attention must be paid to this sector in Cork as it has so much to offer economically, socially and culturally. In a recent LECP workshop attended by Cork Chamber we heard first-hand of the challenges that exist in relation to the Value for Money offering, staff accommodation, room availability, the lack of different hotels that exist, and the need for a conference centre due to the huge demand.

It is crucial that this LECP has the tourism agenda at its heart and further supports and promotes the offerings already here in Cork city such as iconic attractions like the Shandon Bells, the English Market and Cork City Gaol. It must also foster new tourism offerings such water activities given the city's location. In addition, it must focus on the longer-term goals like securing the highly anticipated Events Centre, addressing value for money and facilitating the hospitality sector by working towards the development of more hotels, and working with those in the hospitality sector to address the problems staff are facing with the cost and lack of supply of accommodation.

As Cork journeys towards its 2030 targets there is a real opportunity to incorporate sustainability into our tourism offering. Providing electric vehicles for rental purposes for longer journeys and electric bikes for city excursions via an app, as seen in other European cities, would increase the attractiveness of Cork as a sustainable tourist destination. In the coming years tourists who arrive

here will expect to know what their carbon footprint will look like and we need to facilitate this expectation.

Sustainability and the Climate Neutral City

Energy security, sustainability and the deployment of renewables will be key to Cork's ability to take climate action, and to providing a resilient and affordable clean energy supply and continuing to attract FDI. Delivering on these objectives at pace will be key to realising Cork's designation to be a climate neutral city by 2030.

As the city continues its climate journey, we urge that bold leadership be taken to address the planetary health crisis that has defined this generation, radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate the risks associated with climate change, put in place the tools and systems to increase climate resilience and climate justice and reverse biodiversity loss while delivering socio-economic benefits to the community.

A just transition must be at the heart of Cork's transition towards a carbon-neutral and sustainable economy and society. Without a just transition, real progress will not be made and those not considered will remain disadvantaged from a socio-economic perspective risking Cork's reputation for talent and investment. Climate justice should be integrated and considered throughout all actions and targets, and across economic, social, climate and infrastructural policies and strategies to reduce unintended negative consequences.

Engaging the Community

All parts of the community need to be involved in the journey towards climate action and feel that they have contributed towards the solutions in order to ensure buy-in. The Limerick Citizen Innovation Lab is a key example of a collaboration hub, funded by Creative Ireland in partnership with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications through the Creative Climate Action Fund. This lab, part of the Decarbonising Together project, has put co-creation and civic participation at the heart of Limerick's decarbonisation journey. We recommend a similar approach be taken in Cork, with lessons learned from Limerick's experience.

Energy efficiency

The Irish government has committed to retrofitting 500,00 homes to a B2 rating or cost-optimal equivalent standard by 2030. A recent report from Saint Vincent de Paul found that the number of people in energy poverty and unable to heat their homes last year more than doubled¹ since energy prices have soared. Retrofitting the homes of those in energy poverty has a life changing impact and

we have a number of recommendations to meet this retrofitting target and increase the energy efficiency of commercial buildings. We echo the recommendations in the SVP report including:

1. Develop a new consumer protection strategy to increase protections for vulnerable customers and those in energy poverty.
2. Implement a community energy advice service to provide tailored support to people and businesses to access information, financial advice and grants. The Home Energy Upgrade Office on Grand Parade has been welcome, however community and business outreach would ensure a greater portion of the population are being targeted.

¹ <https://www.svp.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Warm-Safe-Connected-Full-report.pdf>

3. Address the split-incentives gap for the private rented sector, which there is currently no incentive for either tenants or landlords to retrofit.

Under the Net Zero Cities Sprint, a taskforce was proposed to tackle the decarbonisation of commercial buildings in the city and this should be integrated into both the LECP and the Climate Action Plan of the city. With new requirements around sustainability reporting potentially driving companies out of older office buildings in the city, a targeted initiative on this is a key action for both LECP and the city's climate action plan. Energy costs are also a key pressure point for businesses and so a clear opportunity now exists to engage building owners and businesses alike.

Further to this, skills requirements and an increase in the uptake of apprenticeships are needed to meet these targets. It is essential that industry, the City Council and the third level institutions work together to map out the skills needed to achieve this target.

We advise that a communications campaign be undertaken targeting secondary school students and their parents to shift the cultural mindset regarding higher and further education in Ireland which favours university over apprenticeships. Both pathways are equally important and the inclusion of apprenticeships on the CAO would be very welcome to shift the perception many have towards them.

Resilience and climate adaptation

While developing more green spaces is essential for placemaking, amenity and delivering a better quality of life, they should also provide permeable and shaded surfaces throughout the city which are key to climate adaptation, absorbing increasingly heavy rainfall and reducing temperatures as we experience more heatwaves and extreme weather events.

Almost none of the goals of the LECP can be achieved if Cork is not a city that is adapted and resilient to climate change, and this should be central to the design of all new buildings, streetscapes and programmes so that new developments do not just meet cultural and social needs but also provide a clear avenue to adapting to climate change.

Renewable Energy

There is no doubt that Cork is ideally placed to capitalise on its natural resources and deploy renewable energy via offshore and onshore wind, solar, and hydrogen. Our ability to deliver on renewable energy and create pathways for industry to utilise this valuable resource will determine our ability to reach climate-neutrality by 2030 and to continuing to attract FDI.

The recent announcement from the Minister for Enterprise Simon Coveney on creation of a National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind will be key to bringing together renewables, hydrogen, energy storage, industry decarbonisation, the Port of Cork's Masterplan and grid infrastructure. Cork must have a strong voice in the creation of this strategy, and we would urge that an offshore wind taskforce in Cork, bringing together all stakeholders including those from the County would ensure Cork's voice remains heard be developed.

In the city, the supply of significant office space for the service sector that is built up around wind energy requires support for this industry to be developed with haste.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is integral to the socio-economic and environmental well-being of Cork city. The launch of the Cork City Heritage and Biodiversity Plan has been most welcome and signifies the important

nature of biodiversity to the city. It is essential that the plan and its actions are delivered to help stop and reverse the biodiversity crisis in the country.

Further to this, there are synergistic opportunities between green and blue infrastructure, placemaking and tourism that if activated could bring benefits to the city and its visitors. We have an invaluable resource at our fingertips, the River Lee, that could be better utilised and be made more accessible to the wider community. Opportunities to activate our Waterfronts and co-create inclusive, sustainable and environmentally sensitive spaces that unite nature, people and the city should be explored and implemented through this plan.

Research, development and innovation

Funding for research, development and innovation (RD&I) for climate technologies is key to enabling digitalisation and the decarbonisation of enterprise and society. Collaborative RD&I can help to accelerate the climate transition. Partnerships and clusters across private sector, public sector, and academia should be formed to increase efficiencies and knowledge sharing and accelerate Cork's transition.

Cork City Culture and Community

Cork city has a great deal to offer from a cultural perspective. It has a range of activities catering for all ages, interests and abilities. However more can be done to increase its attractiveness as a place to live. Placemaking plays a key role in this respect and should be an integral part of all city centre design incorporating more greenspaces, street furniture, lighting, and signage. The development of the night-time economy should also be a focus of the LECP, focusing on ways to provide more night-time events that would attract people into the city. The success of Culture Night for instance should be a source of inspiration for future planning in the city. Barriers that currently exist to a thriving night-time economy include overnight parking, public transport and safety concerns. All these issues must be addressed as part of the LECP as we map out a successful future for Cork City.

As Cork City continues to grow it will need to have a more visible policing presence, this will be key to the city's safety and image and should be a key consideration in the development of the city.

Cork Chamber is a member of the Age Friendly Alliance and has had input into the group's consultation for the LECP. However, the points we have made with an age friendly focus are applicable to wider society and speak to the importance of inclusion and diversity for people of all abilities.

The following are some of the recommendations we made that we hope will feature in the new LECP and that would be of benefit to all neighbourhoods and communities in the city.

- Design and placemaking
 - The inclusion of more street furniture
 - The inclusion of age friendly parking spaces
 - Removal of barriers to the use of outdoor spaces; footpath maintenance and addressing physical hazards i.e., potholes etc
 - Dedicated age friendly toilet facilities
 - Dedicated age friendly green spaces
 - Ensure adequate lighting across the city especially in walking spaces

- Accessibility
 - Ensure shops and businesses are accessible to those with mobility challenges or those who use the aid of wheelchairs/walking aids etc.
 - Ensure sign posting is adequate
 - Heavy doors are opened or replaced with an electronic alternative

- Transport
 - The provision of more bus shelters
 - Community bus services that could incorporate an age friendly door-to-door 'whole journey' approach to travel
 - Tackle anti-social behaviour on public transport
 - Introducing more traffic calming measures in built up areas to increase safety
 - Improving the walkability of the city
 - Accelerating the timeline of key projects like the proposed Cork Light Rail which would be of huge benefit
 - Ensuring adequate road crossings are in place

- Social Inclusion
 - The introduction of initiatives to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour with increased visibility of gardaí on streets
 - Offer more age friendly activities and initiatives to combat loneliness

- Civic Participation and Employment
 - Creating employment and volunteering opportunities
 - Ensuring that those in employment have the opportunity to access upskilling and training