

Local and European Election Manifesto

2024



**Cork
Chamber**
Advancing business together

CEO Introduction

On Friday, June 7 you will be asked to vote in the local and European elections. Cork Chamber asks voters and candidates to support a strong Cork by committing to our election priorities outlined on the following pages. This manifesto is guided by Cork Chamber's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, five of which have been identified by the Chambers Ireland Network and underpin all our activities.

Through Ireland 2040, the government has set targets for Cork which includes a 50% growth in population. This will require a concerted effort to build houses, develop our transport infrastructure, create circa 75,000 jobs and provide a range of health, social, community and cultural services. While Cork has potential to accommodate significant economic and spatial change to play a leading role in delivering balanced national socio-economic growth for Ireland this requires targeted innovation and investment.

In 2024, running for election requires candidates that are ambitious for the region, have an understanding of the pressing policy issues that are facing Cork, Ireland South and Ireland, and are committed to improving local communities, the economy and the environment.

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members that employ 120,000 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. We call upon the business community to use this manifesto as a tool for communicating this pro-enterprise collection of priorities with candidates running for election. We call on those elected councillors and MEPs to work with the Cork Chamber membership and with businesses in the region in progressing these goals and objectives over the next five-year term.



CONOR HEALY,
Chief Executive



The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Cork Chamber is deeply committed to advancing the SDGs, five of which have been identified by the Chambers Ireland Network and underpin all our activities. We aim to lead by example, using the SDGs as a guiding framework for both our internal and external activities. Our goal is to influence government, stakeholders, and our members to transition towards more sustainable practices.

The five goals are:



Priorities for Cork

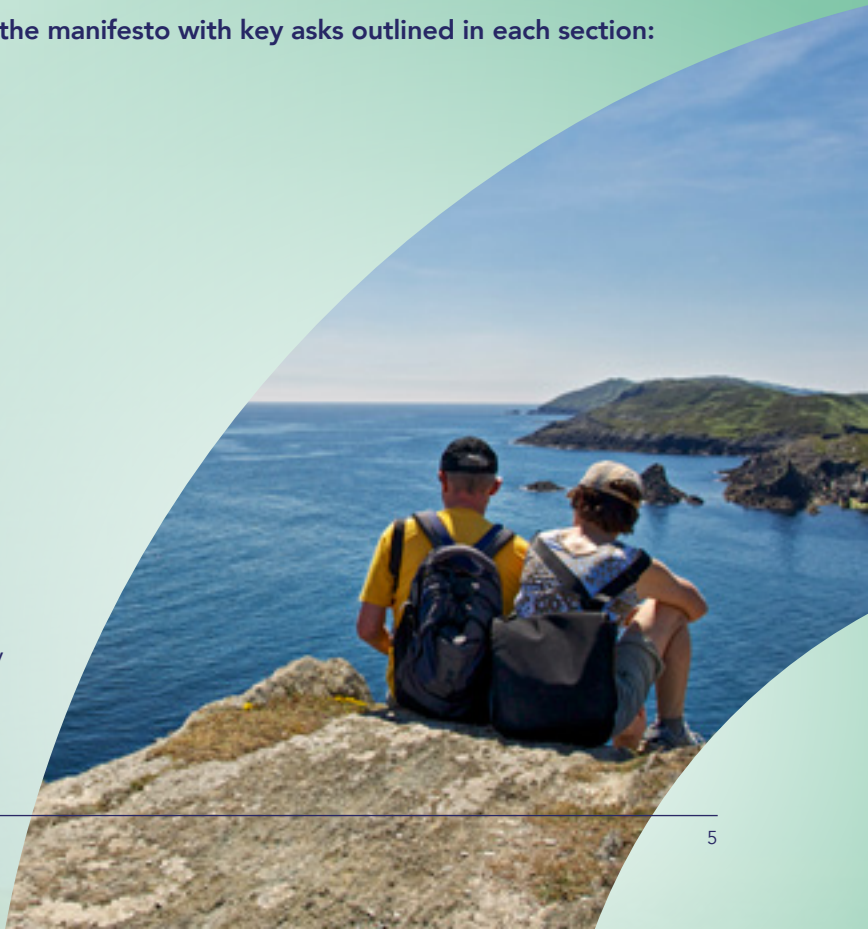
In drafting this Local and European Election Manifesto, Cork Chamber's advocacy priorities are driven by the needs of our members.

Through our Thought Leaders Council, the work of our Board, our quarterly Economic Trends surveys and our constant engagement with our

members, we have a unique understanding of economic and social needs of business in Cork. This manifesto reflects their collective concerns and key priorities for the five years ahead, but it also charts a course for the broader future for Cork and our social, economic and environmental security and prosperity.

There are eight key priority areas included in the manifesto with key asks outlined in each section:

- 1 Housing
- 2 Urban Evolution
- 3 Talent and Skills
- 4 Renewables & Energy System Integration
- 5 Sustainability & Climate Neutral City
- 6 Infrastructure and Connectivity
- 7 Supporting Local Business
- 8 Planning Reform & Speed of Delivery



Housing

Housing availability in Cork has remained a pressing concern in recent years and is one of the top priorities for Cork Chamber and our members.

There remains a considerable journey ahead to deliver the scale of housing our region needs to cater for the projected population increase in the coming decades. However, recent positive indicators can be attributed to government policy changes that have boosted housing delivery in Cork, including widening the cost-rental threshold, schemes like Croí Cónaithe and Project Tosaigh, and waiving development levies.

As we look ahead, ensuring the availability and affordability of 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. Alignment is key between the priorities of Councils, developers and providers of crucial utilities to ensure efficient delivery of units. Any obstacles to the speedy delivery of housing must be targeted and removed.

While the capital funding for housing in 2024 stands at a record €5 billion, speed of implementation and delivery are crucial and any

obstacles to the speedy delivery of housing must be removed. The National Planning Framework will be open for consultation later in 2024 and this is crucial for securing the agreed ambition for Cork's future across government.



ASKS

- Cork should target the delivery of between **7,500 – 10,000 housing units per year** to meet demand
- The non-alignment of delivery plans **prioritisation of utilities for residential and industrial sites** with the necessary infrastructure such as electricity, water and wastewater, has been highlighted as a restricting factor to development. There must be greater alignment between local councils, state and semi-state bodies and developers
- The initiatives that have **stimulated the delivery of apartment projects** in Cork, especially those on brownfield sites, should be continued while also encouraging private funds to re-enter the market
- All Cork stakeholders need to **be ambitious for the future of Cork** in their submission to Government under the National Planning Framework consultation



Urban Evolution

Creating safe, welcoming and thriving public realm spaces ensures that our city-centre and town-centres are appealing to anyone wishing to live, work, visit or invest. The most effective way of doing this is through investing in attractive and appropriate urban environment developments and ensuring that our streets feel safe.

Vibrant towns and city centres rely on people living in the urban heart and, throughout Cork, there are buildings currently underutilised, and some are currently vacant and derelict. Therefore, vacant potential urban centre housing units, such as those over shops, should be targeted to remove impediments from converting these spaces into living quarters. Obtaining planning permission including fire certs are top barriers to repurposing and building innovative options to develop these units without compromising safety need to be explored. Bringing residents back into the urban centre is a vital cog in growing vibrant liveable towns and cities.

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, must be addressed before anti-social behaviour in Cork damages our reputation as a welcoming city for talent and investment.

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 and avoid 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 this year, 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.



ASKS

- Convene a multi-stakeholder taskforce to explore solutions to the current barriers that prevent the conversion of vacant and derelict buildings into housing units in urban centres
- A greater Garda presence is needed on the streets of the city and towns. Garda visibility is a prime deterrent to anti-social behaviour and all stakeholders must work together to ensure this happens. Commitment to additional resources is needed to fit Cork's growing population
- Cork needs to be proactive in ensuring that the social cohesion within the city and county continues. All elected officials must work together to combat harmful narratives and ensure that the positive impacts of imperative on businesses, the economy, and society, are recognised



Talent and Skills

Cork's ability to nurture, attract and retain talent in the region and workforce 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 and steps must be taken to mitigate these challenges.



ASKS

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION

These skills needs stress the importance of our universities and further education institutes in developing talent to bridge these gaps and prepare for the future. It is essential that that increased investment in further & higher education for capital projects and an ongoing funding pot to ensure talent and skills pipelines in Cork.

APPRENTICESHIPS

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.

CHILDCARE

The provision of affordable childcare and its impact on economic growth and talent retention is a key concern. 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.

TALENT ATTRACTION CAMPAIGN

Access to specialist talent is the top barrier to growth for Cork business as indicated time and time again by businesses in Cork. Therefore, a fully funded talent attraction and retention strategy is crucial for Cork.



Renewables and Energy System Integration

Cork has the opportunity to become a global hub for offshore renewable energy due to our harbour's existing geostrategic advantages, infrastructure and energy ecosystem. We must take the necessary steps to take this opportunity and reap the economic and environmental benefits that come from this generational prospect. 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.

Instead of decarbonising and enhancing efficiency in sectors independently, we need a circular approach to energy system integration. This involves the coordinated planning and

operation of the entire energy system across various energy sources, infrastructures, and sectors and adopting principles like circularity, core energy efficiency, direct electrification of end-use sectors, and the use of renewable and low-carbon fuels. 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.

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. Across supply chain, generation and use, Cork needs to capture the total value of the renewable energy and now is the time to change the conversation on for the future.



ASKS

- Ports play a crucial role in the development of the ORE industry, supporting the supply chain, forming industrial clusters, and meeting national targets. The Port of Cork is the only port in Ireland with planning permission to build the critical infrastructure to support sector. All elected representatives should support public funding for development of the necessary port infrastructure and work with the Port of Cork to secure it
- Cork must earn the social license to operate. A strong communications programme to convey the extraordinary economic, social and climate benefits of the ORE opportunity to the people of Cork must be delivered by all stakeholders
- Elected officials and public representatives must work with industry to understand the needs of the sector in order to foster and maintain the confidence of indigenous and foreign investors that will secure continued and further investment into the sector in Cork
- Cork must formulate a coherent plan for the region to capture the full value of the offshore renewable from the supply chain to potential new industries and innovations to maximise the potential energy system integration in the region





Sustainability & Climate Neutral City

Sustainability underpins every activity Cork Chamber undertakes. 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.

As our city region transforms, we will continue to champion sustainability as a fundamental pillar of our strategic vision for Cork. 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.



ASKS

- > The responsibility of being designated as an EU Climate Neutral City comes with targets and costs. Cork City Council must be supported in securing funding from central government to ensure we can meet these obligations
- > Crucial infrastructure that opens Cork's potential to be a climate neutral city should be prioritised including rail, light rail, EV charging infrastructure and active travel
- > Reducing energy consumption is as important and providing renewable energy. Cork has a beautiful but aging building stock that needs major investment. A large public investment is needed to ensure that these buildings are retrofitted to increase energy efficiency and become attractive to sustainability conscious SMEs

Infrastructure and Connectivity

Connectivity and accessibility are key for the development of Cork. 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 delivered these goals at a faster pace.

Quality road infrastructure with multi-modal transport options play a key role in stimulating economic and social development as well as providing access to efficient and effective public transport options. Road infrastructure has implications beyond just the use of cars as it opens other opportunities like the moving of the port's industry further down the harbour.

The Light Rail option has the potential to be a game changer for Cork. It has the backing of all major stakeholders and businesses in Cork and should be delivered within the next decade. Enhancements to the Cork commuter rail have been widely welcomed and there has been a sharp increase in the number of users of this service in recent years demonstrating its popularity. BusConnects Cork offers a unique opportunity for the creation of new sustainable transport corridors which will enable our city to grow as we work towards a net-zero future. The advancement of BusConnects Cork must be accelerated.

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 to European capital cities and business destinations is a top priority for our members and a key economic enabler for the south-west region.

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 health, education, culture and community must be properly funded to promote social cohesion and make Cork a great place to live.



ASKS

We call on all elected officials to support the following restructure projects

PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

- > Cork Light Rail – all stakeholders must push for the delivery within the next 10 years
- > Suburban Rail – enabling infrastructure needs to be delivered and funding made available to upgrade the carriages
- > Cork Dublin Rail – plans for highspeed rail between Cork and Dublin must be accelerated
- > BusConnects – preferred routes options should be published without delay and should be supported by all elected officials

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

- N25 Carrigtwohill-Midleton – Must be funded to unlock the Ballyadam site for investment, improve safety and open up port relocation
- R624 (Belvelly Bridge) – Must be upgraded to enable the movement of the port activities further down the harbour at Marino Point
- M20 Cork-Limerick – Route is progressing, but momentum needs to be maintained
- N28 Ringaskiddy – Crucial to opening the docklands, the project must be delivered by 2026
- Northern Distributor Road – Vital to industry in north Cork City, to ease congestion in the city centre and for the community

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

- Cork Airport is crucial for the region. Its Masterplan must be fully resourced, and it should expand its route to more European capitals and have increased focus on business destination

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Social infrastructure such as health, education, culture and community infrastructure ties communities together and must be properly funded to promote social cohesion and make Cork a great place to live
- Delivery of the Event Centre is crucial for economic and social benefits it will bring the region



Supporting Local Business

Cork is home to world class research and development and indigenous companies must be supported and encouraged to collaborate with these leading-edge institutions. 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.

Local SMEs are the backbone of communities right across the city and county. Not only do they provide essential services and produce goods for consumption, but they also employ seventy percent of the active workforce. Currently SMEs are struggling with increased costs, overheads and responsibilities. Ireland's employment rate, energy prices, the increased statutory sick leave, increased PRSI, the phase-in of a living wage, pension auto-enrolment and have all increased the legislative compliance and financial burdens facing businesses. Therefore, Local Authorities need to promote pro-business policies that stimulate growth, create jobs, foster entrepreneurship and innovation while reducing the burden on the sector.



ASKS

- > 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
- > Actively promote greater engagement from SMEs with research and development institutes through targeted supports that encourage innovation through collaboration

Planning Reform & Speed of Delivery

Delays in the planning system continue to be the key limiting factor on the pace of delivery we need across housing, infrastructure and energy to support economic growth. We need planning reform that reduces delays, provides certainty on timelines for decisions and makes the broader system fit for purpose.

Concerns around the pace at which 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 was a significant step towards the urgent need to reform and streamline the planning system.



ASKS

- > Fully resource planning authorities at a local level to ensure applications are seen to without delay
- > Planning authorities should prioritise key infrastructure projects that are of national and regional importance



PLEASE USE YOUR LOCAL AND EUROPEAN VOTE CAREFULLY. THE ELECTED CANDIDATES WILL BE ENTRUSTED WITH DELIVERING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC GROWTH OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS FOR YOU, YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR COMMUNITY AND YOUR FAMILY.



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