



**Review of the National Development Plan**

**Submission by Cork Chamber**

**June 2025**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

The review of the National Development Plan (NDP) comes at a pivotal time for Cork and for Ireland.

The challenges that have existed in housing for a decade have not yet been addressed and amid changing dynamics on a global scale, they threaten to undermine Ireland's capacity for progress and development.

This review needs to prioritise housing, but also the components essential for delivering housing: utilities such as water, wastewater and the electricity grid, as well as infrastructure, transport, connectivity, education and critical skills.

Without a focus on these, Ireland simply cannot expect to maximise its output and delivery potential.

Since the publication of the NDP in 2018, Cork has demonstrated on numerous occasions that it can achieve ambitious aims and deliver key projects when resourced to do so. In terms of population and employment, Cork city and county is performing well.

We have seen the delivery of major works, such as the Dunkettle interchange upgrade, rapid progress in the development of the commuter rail network, and we are already witnessing the benefits of investment in the city's docklands, where 6,000 people are employed, and work is progressing in the delivery of housing and office space.

Government capital investment has increased to more than €15bn in 2025, four times the level of investment of a decade ago, and this investment needs to target key strategic areas to ensure the maximum benefits are delivered across the board. This review also takes account increased exchequer funds, the Apple Escrow funds, proceeds of the AIB share sales, and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund, and it is critical that these resources are used to boost economic growth and competitiveness, while providing value for money.

If Project Ireland 2040 is to be successful, there needs to be proper integration between the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the NDP to reflect the ambitions for all regions. It is not possible for Cork city and county and the wider southern region to develop at the rate needed without significant investment in infrastructure in the coming years.

There is a need to rapidly accelerate infrastructure investment in the southern region to take account of infrastructure deficiencies, improve economic competitiveness, achieve climate targets and improve quality of life. The opportunities for rapid improvement exist

and the disparity in funding between the regions narrowed to achieve this growth in the other regions, providing a genuine economic alternative to the eastern corridor.

Key projects in Cork and the southern region include housing provision, Luas Cork, the Cork Northern Distributor Multimodal Route, the Great Island Connectivity Project, the N/M20 motorway to Limerick, the M28 Cork to Ringaskiddy motorway, the upgrade of the N25 East Cork road, investment in rail and active travel infrastructure, Bus Connects, the development of the city docklands, educational infrastructure, flood defences, the development of offshore renewables, and investment in Cork Airport and the Port of Cork.

There is also a critical need to ensure that one of the three large-scale next generation sites identified in the IDA's strategy for 2025 to 2029 is located in Cork to ensure continued industrial and commercial development in the coming decades.

The success of these initiative and projects are of local and national importance. A strong southern economy will support a strong national economy.

Investment in our health infrastructure, including a new elective hospital, is needed, as is major investment in our water, wastewater and electricity infrastructure to match these developments if the ambitions mapped out in the NPF and other strategies are going to come close to fruition.

Delivery timelines also need to be addressed, with many projects delayed for far too long. Delays to projects of national strategic importance that must be delivered end up costing the taxpayer much more in the longer term. Decision makers must factor in the cost of inaction in their calculations.

The result of the NDP, and the projects included therein, is not simply the completion of those projects but the consequences they deliver: the continuation of sustained growth and prosperity for our country.

This can only be achieved through the delivery of essential infrastructure which will attract and retain investment in Ireland, grow our economy and foster regional development, enabling the achievement of housing targets and climate goals.

## **2. Overview & Benefits**

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the revision of the National Development Plan (NDP).

As the leading business organisation for the Cork City and County region, representing over 1,200 businesses, that together employ in excess of 130,000 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 GDP<sup>1</sup> 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 preparing this submission, Cork Chamber has actively engaged with both local authorities in the region, as well as numerous key stakeholders and decision-makers.

Our submission sets out key parameters and deliverables that will enhance Cork as a regional powerhouse and a counterbalance to the Dublin region.

It also identifies key blockages that will serve to undermine delivery. This is both in terms of policy and physical infrastructure, including utilities, and it is essential that these are addressed as a matter of priority.

Since the publication of the NDP in 2018 (updated in 2021), Cork has experienced encouraging developments, including the completion of the upgrade of the Dunkettle interchange, the continuation of the redevelopment of the city docklands, and much-needed commuter rail improvements. In recent months, further progress has been in terms of major plans, including the publication of the emerging preferred routes for the Cork Luas and the Northern Distributor Multi-Modal Route, as well as the publication of Cork Airport's development plan. These have come against a backdrop of global uncertainty but Cork, and Ireland, remain well-positioned for growth and development in the coming years.

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<sup>1</sup> [Cork City Council – Economic Facts and Figures](#)



Cork Chamber’s advocacy priorities are driven by the needs of our members. These include housing and a high-quality public realm, transport choice, talent availability, renewable energy, sustainability, and infrastructure. Additionally, members have identified priorities such as affordable childcare, and urban evolution, 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 reflects the collective ambition for Cork’s future.

This review of the National Development Plan establishes the need to prioritise the delivery of transformative, critical and growth-enhancing infrastructure over the next five years.

In announcing the review, the Minister noted that priority would be given to investments in “sectors and programmes that will boost our economic growth and competitiveness, while providing value for money.”

The revised NDP must represent an updated document that responds to the ongoing changes and challenges of implementing government policy, including climate pressures, biodiversity, renewable energy, marine and spatial planning, digitalisation, AI and inflation. Furthermore, it must prioritise the alignment of critical investment and infrastructure, particularly in the case of crucial utilities, like water, wastewater, the electricity grid, and broadband connectivity.

### **3. Cork in the National Planning Framework (NPF)**

The NPF emphasises the importance of enabling all parts of Ireland to accommodate growth and change by facilitating a shift towards the regions and cities, while also recognising Dublin’s key role.

Cork Chamber welcomes this and notes the importance of strengthening the four regional cities and metropolitan urban areas by delivering the key infrastructure to support the required population growth in these areas.

However, it must also be noted that Cork is already developing as an international metropolitan area of scale with a vibrant city at its centre and has the tools and attributes needed to function as a genuine counterbalance to the economic corridor in the east.

As such, this submission focuses on the requirements of Cork, both city and county, and the framework and supports required to ensure the delivery of thousands of much needed jobs and homes.

The revised NPF, published in April 2025, establishes the need for a 50:50 distribution of future growth between the Eastern and Midland region, and the Southern and Northern and Western regions combined.<sup>2</sup> The need for balanced growth has been established as Dublin, and to a lesser extent the Eastern and Midlands area, has witnessed the biggest concentration of population, homes and jobs growth.

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<sup>2</sup> [National Planning Framework, First Revision](#)

The NPF sets out population growth of approximately 330,000 for the southern region to a total of 2 million, representing an increase of 450,000 when compared to 2016. Within this target, Cork city and its suburbs are forecast for an increase of 96,000 to at least 320,000, a larger increase than the combined totals of Limerick city and suburbs (up 44,000 to 150,000) and Waterford city and suburbs (up 28,000 to 88,000). In addition, it is expected that enhanced population growth targets for the rest of Cork County will be identified in the upcoming NPF roadmap having regard to the strong performance of the county settlements in delivering employment-led compact growth.

The headline population figure of 6.1 million by 2040 is an increase of 250,000 on the projected figures in the 2018 NPF. Achieving this requires 50,000 homes per annum and with population growth expected to be more concentrated in the coming decade than in the one that follows, it is essential that the barriers to delivering these homes, and the associated required infrastructure are removed as a matter of priority.

We believe that Cork and the southern region retain a pivotal role in being a counterbalance to the eastern economic corridor and can ease the capacity pressures that exist in the Dublin region. Updated ESRI population projections<sup>3</sup> highlight the need for enhanced measures to ensure that the Government's balanced regional development objective can be achieved, and Cork can play a key role in delivering this.

From 2016 to 2022, Dublin achieved 166% of its projected growth, exacerbating capacity issues in a market that is already under pressure. It was more than three times that of the other cities combined, with Cork achieving 56% or 24,527 people, demonstrating the need for investment and infrastructure as the capacity for substantial further growth exists.<sup>4</sup>

Similar to all locations nationwide, Cork is experiencing an undersupply of housing compared to its NPF target. However, and critically, planning permission for urban housing – in both the city and county settlements – are meeting their NPF targets, while housing completions are the highest outside of the Greater Dublin Area. This indicates a strong performance in Cork relating to market demand and planning processes, but with external barriers to activation impacting negatively on supply.

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<sup>3</sup> [ESRI; Population projections, the flow of new households and structural housing demand](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Census 2022](#)



There is a major contrast in the amount of housing being delivered in Dublin (78%) in comparison to the other four cities combined, which is primarily being driven by apartments. That volume of output is not present elsewhere, with 93% of the 30,821 apartments built in the state since 2020 having been constructed in Dublin. In Cork, there was a rise in commencements in 2024, driven by a rise in large apartment schemes,<sup>5</sup> but all of these are supported by some form of public investment through government initiatives. There is a near total absence of private financing for apartment developments outside of Dublin.

Ireland's rural fabric is intrinsically linked to the success of the regions. Cork Chamber proposes a model to promote the potential of towns, villages 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. Support for Cork's county towns is in alignment with the strategic goals of Project Ireland 2040 and the NPF as almost all county towns in Cork have resident-to-worker ratios above the median for the southern region.

Cork stands on the cusp of monumental change. The policy framework established in the National Planning Framework (NPF) has established the structures for substantial population growth in the region, putting Cork in the position of economic counterbalance to Dublin.

Business as usual will not achieve these aims - it is essential that the NDP identifies and delivers on the key infrastructure and enablers to match this ambition, supported by the policy and funding required to ensure Cork can reach its potential as an international city of scale.

#### **4. Climate Action**

Cork Chamber welcomes the significant alignment between the UN SDGs and the NDP'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.

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<sup>5</sup> [CSO New Dwelling Completions 2024](#)

The world is currently not on course to achieve climate targets and urgent 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.

Cork Chamber notes and welcomes the commitment by the Minister to ensure that climate action and environmentalism is considered at the heart of the NDP and in the delivery of these projects.

Ireland will need to multiply its renewable energy generation approximately sevenfold to meet its net zero 2050 target as set out in the EU Green Deal. Not delivering on the EU Green Deal requirements will potentially result in significant strategic disadvantages for Ireland, including possible trade restrictions and fiscal penalties.

With the South Coast DMAP in place, the first in the State, coupled with the existing energy assets and ecosystem in the Cork harbour area, Cork harbour is positioned to provide first mover advantages to the region in terms of offshore renewable energy generation, development of synthetic renewables, ORE supply chain development, energy supply to the national grid, decarbonisation of existing industry, and as a key attractor for new renewable energy and digital-enabled commercial investment, a key national need as highlighted in the recent IDA Strategy 2025-2029.

In addition, Cork city has been awarded a prestigious Mission Label by the European Commission (EC) for its strong leadership and ambitious climate action plans. Cork is one of 100 Mission cities and its participation in the programme is a strong commitment to climate action. This award has required the buy-in of local authorities, public bodies, businesses, third level institutions and civil society to tackle emissions and progress climate actions.

It is a powerful lever for change and a symbol of shared hope and determination to build a better future, one where we continue taking meaningful action to benefit people today and generations to come.

Not only is climate action an environmental necessity, decarbonisation is a key driver of competitiveness and countries and cities at the forefront of this movement will reap benefits from economic growth in areas such as energy, clean technology, construction and finance.

The most recent data published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) shows that Ireland is falling significantly short of where it needs to be in achieving the required reduction

in greenhouse gas emissions. We have a target of a 51% reduction on 2018 levels by 2030 but are currently likely to achieve just 23%, putting us at risk of enormous fines and further climate damage.<sup>6</sup>

The data shows that none of the largest emitting sectors are on course to achieve these legally binding targets and demonstrates that significant action needs to be taken across the board.

It is welcome to see the Minister put climate action at the centre of the review of both the NPF and the NDP and it is simply vital to ensure it remains a key tenet of all actions and policies that emerge from this process to enhance day-to-day life now and for the decades to come, better preparing us for a cleaner, greener future.

## **5. Funding & Return on Investment**

The revised NDP needs to redress the regional imbalances that currently exist and implement a coherent national policy for regional growth.

The southern region, driven by Cork's strong economic output, has one of the highest rates of GDP per capita in Europe, with the south-west sub-region having the highest at NUTS 2 Level. Additionally, it is projected to have one of the highest rates of population growth in Europe up to 2050, ranking in the top 3% of regions, according to Eurostat.<sup>7</sup>

However, despite this, it ranks in the bottom 15% of the 234 EU regions with respect to infrastructure provision, as tracked by the EU's Regional Competitiveness Index, which measures the ability of a region to offer an attractive environment to live and work in, including a measure of existing transport infrastructure, such as road, rail and inland waterways.<sup>8</sup> As per the Project Ireland 2040 Capital Investment Tracker (May 2024), the southern region has received just 17% of the overall planned investment for 2021-2030 in comparison to 51% in the Dublin Metro region.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [EPA Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections 2024-2055](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Eurostat Regional Gross Domestic Product \(PPS per inhabitant\) by NUTS 2 region](#)

<sup>8</sup> [EU Regional Competitiveness Index](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Project Ireland 2040 Capital Investment Tracker \(May 2024\)](#)

In the metropolitan regions, 79.3% has been allocated to Dublin in comparison to just 11.2% (€4.89bn) in Cork.

Per capita, this planned investment equates to €14,877 in Cork, far less than Dublin Metro (€22,823) and Galway (€18,835).

The funding allocated to Cork under Project Ireland 2040 neither takes full advantage of the strategic planning legacy in Cork nor reflects Cork's delivery capacity. There are numerous examples of Cork meeting and exceeding delivery targets when the support and finances are made available, including the delivery of major infrastructural projects like the Dunkettle interchange, essential transport projects like the Cork Commuter Rail enhancement, the Cork Airport development plan, or the local authorities exceeding social housing targets.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the NDP needs to address existing funding mechanisms.

The Urban Redevelopment Fund (URDF) and Rural Redevelopment Fund (RRDF) have contributed to significant projects in Cork, including the docklands redevelopment works in Cork city and the Coláiste Íosagáin Regional Development Centre in Baile Bhúirne, but these streams are both accessed via a competitive bidding process which is not an appropriate means to achieve efficient and effective strategic change.

We would like to see this process replaced with a longer-term, more targeted, strategic funding model aligned to a region or city's status in the NPF.

Additionally, it is absolutely vital that the NDP is underpinned by multi-annual or project lifecycle funding. It is simply impractical to tender and commence work on projects of regional and international importance without certainties around the allocation of funding through the lifecycle of a project.

Cork has a history of successful strategic planning. The principles and growth strategy set out in Cork 2050 continue to be realised through the implementation of both local authority's strategies and this history of cooperation and delivery should be given weight and consideration when it comes to allocating funding for projects which need to be delivered in the short term for large-scale benefits.

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<sup>10</sup> [Cork City Council Housing Targets](#)

## **6. Delivery**

Many large-scale projects of national importance take far longer to reach completion in Ireland than in other countries. Economically and societally important projects often languish due to planning appeals and slower-than-ideal procurement and delivery processes, and the impact of these delays in an economic sense is keenly felt.

It is critical that we improve efficiency in delivering projects from concept to completion in a cost-effective manner.

This can be achieved by streamlining processes in procurement and reducing regulatory burdens without removing essential oversight. Furthermore, accelerating planning reforms could yield quicker decisions and, ultimately, quicker delivery.

It should also be considered to give priority to projects identified in the NDP or those that can demonstrate their national strategic importance when it comes to decision-making. These can and should include infrastructure and large-scale housing projects but also matters such as the grid, water works and flood defence systems.

Cork Chamber supports a plan-led approach, and the revised NPF establishes the pathway to achieving our national, regional and local objectives in a coherent and coordinated manner.

It is vital to take on board local expertise in achieving this growth to ensure that local targets are not inhibited by national trends. This is particularly pertinent in housing, for example, where a huge volume of work is required, but we have already seen the beginnings of progress in this area, with strong social housing delivery in Cork city and several large schemes underway by private developers with the assistance of state-funded schemes.

In addition, as set out in Cork County Council's County Development Plan Two Year Progress Report (published in 2024), the County has delivered housing permissions annually in excess of its NPF target (+26% overall), with 86% of those permissions within urban areas and with particular delivery focus at its rail-based Metropolitan settlements and higher densities also – c.60% of all urban housing has been permitted at rail-based settlements and c.60% of all urban housing is in terraced or apartment form, delivering NPF compact growth. In addition, only the four Dublin local authorities and Kildare have higher numbers of housing completions than Cork County.

There is a significant differential (in Cork and nationally) between housing consents and completions. State interventions aimed at accelerating delivery should be nuanced to

reflect regional differences and should support NPF policies for balanced regional development and compact growth.

For these objectives to be achieved and to avoid delays in the delivery of infrastructure, there will be a need to ensure alignment between local authority 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 lie idle and be 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 areas to the electricity grid.

Recent interventions from the government, including the development of a dedicated Accelerating Infrastructure Taskforce at the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and the Strategic Housing Activation Office at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, are welcome. Both bodies appear to have been developed with clear guidance around identifying and removing blockages in projects to accelerate the delivery of infrastructure and housing.

It is too early to see the results of their work, but it is vital that these are properly staffed and resourced and, if needed, updated with new representation as issues and new blocks emerge in time. For too long, delays have caused unnecessary setbacks in the rollout, development and completion of projects of all sizes and scales, and it is simply not possible to achieve the economic, population and development goals established for Ireland without accelerating these processes.

At a local level, Cork has a proven track record of delivery when the resources are allocated. In terms of the lifecycle of the current National Development Plan, there are clear examples of large-scale infrastructure projects being approved and delivered on time and on schedule, with the benefits of these already felt throughout the region.

In recent years, we have seen a number of major projects reach completion, and others reach other crucial stages of their development, including the completion of the N22 Macroom bypass, the Dunkettle Interchange. There has also been significant progress in the development of the M28 Cork to Ringaskiddy motorway, the Cork Commuter Area Rail Network, and the Cork Docklands.

To date this year, we have also seen significant steps forward in the development of two key projects which did not have a commitment to capital funding in the previous version of the NDP in Luas Cork and the Cork Northern Distributor Multi-Modal Route, both of which have seen emerging preferred routes published and put to public consultation.

It is a credit to the work of local stakeholders and national bodies who have collaborated to get these projects to this stage of their development, and it is crucial that they are resourced appropriately to continue the development of these and other projects.

The case studies below should be taken as examples of what can be achieved when Cork is resourced properly. They demonstrate the capacity for development and delivery, and the benefits that can emerge even during the early stages of major projects.

Similarly, they also show the strengths of collaboration and the track record therein that stakeholders in Cork have demonstrated in recent years when it comes to working together for the benefit of the entire region.

## **7. Case Studies: Residential development in the city and county**

### **1: Cork Docklands**

At 147 hectares, Cork Docklands is Ireland's largest brownfield regeneration project. It has the capacity to deliver 10,000 new homes and up to 25,000 jobs.

The development of the docklands is of national strategic importance and its inclusion in the previous version of the NDP is welcomed. This support must be matched and enhanced in the reviewed document to accelerate the delivery of enabling and supporting infrastructure.

The planned population growth will accommodate 20% of Cork City's future population uplift increase to 2040 (up to 25,000 people), building on its critical mass as Ireland's second City and creating more balanced regional growth within the Southern Region and the State.

The regeneration of Cork Docklands will strengthen the heart of Cork city and create walkable neighbourhoods that connect with the river, the city centre and surrounding communities. New infrastructure that prioritises pedestrians and cyclists will enable this vision for a vibrant, healthy and easily accessible district.

The development of Luas Cork, which will provide direct access through much of the Docklands area, along with investment in the urban rail network and Bus Connects, will contribute significantly to the sustainability of the region, with approximately 80% of the journeys set to be made by walking, cycling, or public transport. New streets and bridges are also planned as key components of this enhanced connectivity.

It includes more than 100 acres of parks and open spaces, protecting and enhancing the natural heritage and biodiversity of the area, essential in achieving the ambitious climate goals we have for our city.

Already, there is substantial private sector investment in the docklands and the early signs of its success are clear. Investment in Penrose Dock, Horgan's Quay, Navigation Square and Albert Quay have transformed the area and supported the creation of some 6,000 jobs.

There is planning approval for developments that provide capacity for a further 5,000 jobs and more than 3,000 residential units. The success stories in the region also include the recently opened Marina walkway. While some 30% of the Cork Docklands will be allocated to parks, public spaces, playing pitches and recreational facilities, there is already a huge number taking advantage of the work done to date by walking and cycling this pristine riverside walking route, which serves as an example of immediate benefits being delivered as part of a long-term project.

The regeneration of this 147ha site is proposed to be an exemplar in compact and sustainable urban living, creating an attractive, inclusive and safe neighbourhood.

The growth of Cork City is an intrinsic part of national and regional planning policy to create a more balanced regional development. At a metropolitan scale, the regeneration of Cork Docklands represents a focus on large-scale regeneration within the existing built-up area and a more compact urban form facilitated through well-designed, higher density development and Transit-Orientated Development as envisaged by the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region. The Draft Revised National Planning Framework references Cork Docklands as a case study of transformational regeneration funded through the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF).

At a local level, the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 sets out 9 Strategic Objectives to guide the future growth of the City based on the 15-Minute City principles. The regeneration of Cork Docklands continues the ambition of the Cork City Development Plan to create a compact, high-density and sustainable new neighbourhood designed to



contribute to delivering a 15-Minute City and accommodate 20% of the City's future population growth to 2040 as envisaged by the core strategy.

The regeneration of Cork Docklands also supports the delivery of new Green and Blue Infrastructure, including an extensive new parkland at Marina Park already delivering a new green lung for the City in advance of planned residential development. This will be accompanied by a network of new connected public spaces north and south of the River Lee which will contribute to the amenity and biodiversity value of the area.

## **2. Water-rock, Midleton**

Complementing the City's growth strategy, Cork County Council has identified a number of strategic Urban Expansion Areas (UEA) within Metropolitan Cork that will provide for strategic population, housing and jobs growth at Transport Orientated Development (TOD) locations. These include rail-based UEAs at Midleton (Water-rock), Carrigtwohill and Cobh, with an additional UEA located at Carrigaline - strategically adjacent to the Strategic Employment Location of Ringaskiddy.

When fully developed, the Water-rock UEA will accommodate 2,500 homes, 40,000m<sup>2</sup> of community floorspace including 3 schools, 50,000m<sup>2</sup> of high-quality enterprise and employment floorspace, a new rail-stop and a biodiverse green network across the UEA linking two pocket parks with a 9-hectare linear park along the River Owenacurra.

Significant progress has been made over the last number of years in activating the Water-rock UEA, through a whole of government approach, to create a sustainable new settlement which aligns with government policy at national, regional and local levels, particularly in relation to achieving compact growth and building high quality communities around strategic public transport infrastructure.

In 2016, Cork County Council established a multidisciplinary team, the Housing Infrastructure Implementation Team (HIIT), to provide a leadership role with all key stakeholders in activating the development of the Water-rock UEA, which is now at an advanced stage of implementation.

Challenged with a large number of landlocked residential and community development sites in multiple land ownership, Cork County Council collaborated with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) in 2017 as part of the Rebuilding Ireland Programme to provide advance

strategic infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of housing. An integrated and co-ordinated approach to infrastructure delivery has since been progressively developed in collaboration with the department and other key State agencies, for example Irish Water, Irish Rail, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), the Office of Public Works (OPW), which, in addition to leveraging significant funding to unlock the UEA, will also benefit the wider settlement of Midleton.

The County Council has now delivered the key strategic infrastructure required for the activation of the UEA on a phased basis in tandem with housing delivery, including the provision of an internal services corridor link road, the upgrade of the Water-rock road, the implementation of a surface water drainage system, the delivery of three parks (1 Linear Park and 2 pocket parks) and a number of off-site junction/road improvements.

In terms of key project milestones, Part 8 planning for the 'Water-rock UEA Infrastructure Works' was approved in March 2019, Development Agreements were signed with key landowners in December 2020, the Restricted Tender Stage 1 Suitability Assessment for Contractors was finalised in January 2021, the Tender Stage 2 assessment finalised in Q4 2021 and the new bespoke Water-rock Development Contribution 2021-2041 Scheme was adopted in April 2021 – culminating in the construction of the LIHAF infrastructure that has enabled the delivery of development consents and activation.

Since the Q1 2022, consents for over 2,700 new housing units have been permitted within Midleton Town and commencement notices for almost 2,000 received.

## **8. Case Studies: Environmental Action**

### **1. Cork's Mission Label**

Cork city has been awarded a prestigious Mission Label by the European Commission for its strong leadership and very ambitious climate action plans that have been subject to a robust evaluation process.

As part of this, Cork has committed to an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, supported by clear strategic priorities and extensive stakeholder collaboration. It integrates adaptation goals based on climate risk assessments and emphasises co-benefits like health, resilience and climate justice. The mission goal of 80% is significantly more ambitious than the statutory goal of 51%, as set out in the Climate Change and Low Carbon Development Act 2021.

Achieving this label has been a triumph of collaboration across sixteen different bodies in the public and private sector, working on individual and shared initiatives to benefit communities, enterprise and the city on a wider scale.

It is a fitting example of the benefits that can be reaped when a framework is established and support provided for such cooperation and should be used as an example in the NDP process in how to translate ambition into tangible action.

Cork is positioned to be the fastest-growing city in Ireland under the NPF. While the city benefits from strong foreign direct investment and public sector investment, it is vulnerable to extreme impacts of climate change. Notably, flooding has been a recurring theme in the city's history, including damaging floods in the city and many nearby towns in recent years.

In its official award letter, the European Commission said the Mission Label is an endorsement of Cork City's climate action strategy and "it should help facilitate access to EU, national and regional funding as well as to private investment by boosting confidence in the soundness of your city's plans".

Since Cork City was designated one of the European Union's (EU) 100 Mission cities, it has been at the forefront of demonstrating how local authorities, public bodies, business, third-level institutions and civil society can work together to tackle emissions.

Its participation in the EU Mission is also a strong signal of the city's ongoing commitment to climate action.

The EU Mission model requires commitment to action from a range of public, private and community stakeholders, working together in a whole-of-city approach. The Climate Neutral Cork Leadership Group, a multi-stakeholder body, was formed to lead the transition process in Cork City over the next five years.

The leadership group includes representation from sixteen bodies, including Cork Chamber, Cork City Council, Comhairle na nÓg, Munster Technological University, University College Cork, Cork ETB, Cork Business Association, the Health Service Executive, the Construction Industry Federation, Ibec, Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann, ESB Networks, An Garda Síochána, Cork Public Participation Network, and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

Organisations, businesses and communities across Cork city are already busy making positive changes to their buildings, work environments, neighbourhoods, and to their ways of working and travelling. Some of those actions include:

- a. Cork City Council has retrofitted more than 1,000 social homes to achieve high energy efficiency. It is also building A-rated BER social and affordable houses at, for example, Ardostig (Bishopstown), Heathfield (Ballincollig), and Crann Darach (Montenotte).
- b. Solid progress has been made on the implementation of the €3.5 billion Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy including increased opportunities for cycling and walking, improved rail connectivity and urban bus network, to reduce 46,000 tonnes of road related emissions annually.
- c. Bus Connects is set to increase bus services by 53%, electrify the bus fleet and improve frequency and reliability.
- d. The route selection and design of a 17km light rail system is progressing. Iarnród Éireann has begun the expansion and electrification of suburban rail and is advancing planning for urban light rail.
- e. Cork City Council has constructed more than 70 km of safe cycle routes and greenways around the city as well as a major new pedestrian bridge from Grange to Tramore Valley Park.
- f. An additional 20,000 A-rated new homes are to be built to achieve the city's goal of compact growth, as described in the Cork City Development Plan 2022–2028.
- g. Cork Docklands will deliver A-rated homes for over 20,000 people on a 147-hectare site that builds in green space, active travel, nature-based drainage solutions and other climate-friendly features.
- h. Cork community organisations are delivering €860,000 of climate action projects.
- i. The NTA selected Cork City as a pilot location for Smart Mobility Hubs, in part because Cork City is a member of the Mission
- j. Retrofit of Cork City Council sports and leisure facilities.
- k. A review of all policies and procedures, including enhanced green public procurement procedures.

## **2. Climate Action Regional Office & Public Transport / Active Travel**

This Mission City status is reinforced by complementary initiatives being advanced simultaneously by Cork County Council. Cork County Council is the lead authority in the Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) which aims to drive climate action and build capacity and expertise within the local government sector. The Council has appointed a Climate Action Co-ordinator, Climate Action Officer and Community Climate Action Officer to implement climate change initiatives and programmes for the county.

Cork County Council has also adopted its Climate Action Plan (LACAP) 2024-2029 setting out the actions and objectives that Cork County Council will carry out across its own services to meet national emissions targets and to increase the resilience of its human and infrastructural assets against climate change impacts. This plan also specifies how the local authority will work with its communities to advocate for change and with national government and state agencies to deliver climate action.

Cork County Council has identified Macroom as a decarbonising zone (DZ). Macroom will advance Cork County Council's decarbonising schemes by engaging stakeholders and championing pilot projects to help reduce emissions and promote biodiversity in the area.

Cork County Council is also committed to supporting and implementing the Community Climate Action Programme (CCAP) funded by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications to address climate change at a local level. The programme provides targeted funding to eligible community organisations to deliver local climate action.

Commitment to Climate Adaptation is also reflected in its Capital programme through investment in rural work hubs, improving living conditions in urban and rural areas, flood and coastal protection works for vulnerable communities, energy efficiency projects in Council-owned facilities, protection of waterways and sustainable travel projects.

A key component of climate action relates to transportation. In addition to targeting population, employment and housing growth at key public transport orientated settlements, Cork County Council has a dedicated Sustainable Travel Unit facilitating the planning, design and delivery of sustainable travel infrastructure throughout the County. Schemes include active travel interventions, such as Cork County Metropolitan Area pedestrian & cycle network, the bus network enhancement programme, which entails the installation and upgrade of bus shelters and stops including the installation of accessible stops, and the Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) programme.

Annual funding allocations by the National Transport Authority (NTA) have enabled the delivery of several high-quality sustainable travel projects. A significant proportion of this funding is allocated to the Metropolitan Area, while funding has also been extended countywide across all Municipal Districts to include towns and villages.

Since 2020 Cork County Council has received over €55m in funding from the NTA under the Active Travel Investment Grant. This will rise to over €75m by the end of 2024. The majority of this funding is targeted within the Cork County Metropolitan Area. The key Active Travel projects in Cork County are as follows:

- a. East Cork Sustainability Corridor (part of Government's National Pathfinder Programme) – Inter-urban pedestrian and cycle route between Dunkettle and Midleton. It will provide connectivity to the MY Greenway in the east and to Cork City's network to the west.
- b. Carrigaline Transportation and Public Realm Enhancement Plan (TPREP) (integrated public transport and public realm enhancement)
- c. Little Island Sustainable Transport Infrastructure (enhancement of sustainable transport infrastructure serving a key strategic employment rail-based location) – as well as providing connectivity between the employment centre and the train station it also serves as an extension of the East Cork Sustainability Corridor into Little Island.
- d. Passage West Link (pedestrian and cycle route providing high quality connectivity between Carrigaline, Monkstown and Passage West, and Cork City)
- e. Carrigaline to Ringaskiddy Pedestrian and Cycle Route
- f. Ballinacurra to Midleton Cycleway - an extension of the East Cork Sustainability Corridor to Ballinacurra.
- g. Cobh Ferry to Town Centre Route – will connect Cobh into the wider Cork County Metropolitan network via the cross-river ferry.
- h. Towns and Villages Active Travel Fund
- i. Safe Routes to School (SRTS)
- j. Bus Shelter and Accessible Bus Programme
- k. Midleton Youghal Greenway Link to Greenpark / South Abbey, Youghal
- l. Carrigtwohill & Midleton Urban Expansion Area Connectivity Initiatives

As stated previously, critical to the combined efforts of both local authorities, as well as all other public and private stakeholders in the Cork region, will be the delivery of renewable Offshore Wind Energy at scale off the Cork coast – a key enabler for sustainable economic growth at scale that will provide the needed counter-balance to the Greater Dublin Area (See NSO 8).

## **9. National Strategic Objectives**

### **NSO 1 Compact Growth**

Housing remains the most pressing concern in Cork and nationwide.

Despite the appearance of tower cranes in the Cork city skyline and the completion of a range of projects city and countywide, nowhere near enough progress has been made in turning the tide on housing delivery in the region.

Cork Chamber's members routinely raise it as the most pressing concern for staff, undermining competitiveness and the ability to attract and retain staff, and diminishing the experience for those already living and working here.

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, but more needs to be done.

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 to 10,000 units per year to keep pace with demand.

While record volumes of capital funding have been announced in recent budgets, the speed of implementation and delivery is 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.<sup>11</sup>

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, and with the forecasted increase in population in the coming decades, this is only likely to worsen. If Cork is to stand any chance of achieving its targets as mapped out in the National Planning Framework, housing output needs to sharply increase.

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 and

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<sup>11</sup> [Report of the Housing Commission](#)

metropolitan areas 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.

In addition to activating brown and greenfield development, it is vital to see a significant increase in initiatives such as over-the-shop living and returning derelict properties to use in our towns and villages, both to improve the volume of housing stock in the country and also to reinvigorate our urban spaces as somewhere to live, work and visit.

The Programme for Government establishes the need for 60,000 houses per annum<sup>12</sup> to catch up to what is needed.

In 2024, some 30,330 homes were completed in the State<sup>13</sup>, a 6.7% decline from 2023 and some 16,154 short of what had been aimed for in local authority development plans nationally. This included just 8,707 in the southern region.

The country also saw a decline in planning permissions to 32,401, a 21% decrease on 2023.<sup>14</sup>

It is noted there was a sharp increase in commencement notices, with the southern region witnessing a 126% increase year-on-year to 18,925 and Cork city seeing the biggest increase largely due to large-scale apartments.

Currently, output is also imbalanced and steps need to be taken to remedy this. From 2022 to 2024, there was a target of 45,500 homes for the southern region, with just 53% of those completed.

In contrast, the Dublin and mid-East region was assigned a target of completing 49% of all new homes in the State from 2022 to 2024. Instead, it saw more than 60%, undermining the regional development objectives of the National Planning Framework.

Since 2022, more than 50% of housing completions in Cork were in the city and county metropolitan areas. While this is below the 75% target included in the NPF, it exceeds the average for the southern region as a whole, which is at just 43%.

It is not possible to achieve the volume of housing at the densities required without a significant number of apartments and affordability in apartment development remains a

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<sup>12</sup> [Programme for Government](#)

<sup>13</sup> [CSO New Dwelling Completions 2024](#)

<sup>14</sup> [CSO Planning Permissions 2024](#)



significant issue. Since 2020, some 30,821 apartments have been completed in the country's five cities, 93% of which are in Dublin.

While 2024 saw a sharp increase in apartment commencements in Cork, almost all of these schemes are primarily or partly-financed in partnership with either the Land Development Agency or Approved Housing Bodies. This is an untenable system that needs to be rectified to achieve the volume of development required as there is still a near total absence of privately funded large-scale apartment developments outside Dublin.<sup>15</sup>

New funding streams and the introduction of multi-annual or project lifecycle funding for those schemes is a necessary step in ensuring that output increases.

The cost associated with developing housing poses a substantial challenge. The following cost figures from the Southern Regional Assembly demonstrate the challenge:

- 3-bed semi-d – €450,652;
- 2-bed duplex - €466,834;
- 2-bed suburban apartment - €549,790;
- 2-bed urban apartment - €591,783.

Time-bound tax measures to improve viability are essential<sup>16</sup>, in particular when it comes to tackling the significant costs associated with apartment building. Accelerated capital allowances were key to delivering high-density apartments in Cork city centre and metropolitan towns in the county, which would never have been built without them. A short-term introduction of capital allowances for less than five years would deliver a significant number of apartment units and is needed to move the dial and deliver a step change in housing delivery.

Furthermore, there are thousands of potential new homes associated with now-defunct planning schemes that need to be activated or approved. In Cork, as of January 2025, there were some 3,137 units associated with schemes that had applied for permission through the Strategic Housing Development system, which have yet to be determined. Resourcing

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<sup>15</sup> [Southern Regional Assembly – Housing Delivery in the Southern Region – 2024 analysis](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Cork Chamber – Addressing the Viability and Affordability of Apartment Development in Our Cities](#)

in this space is vital to accelerate these decisions, which could result in a sharp uptick in housing output.

Cork Chamber acknowledges the steps that have been taken to rectify issues in the planning system, including changes at An Bord Pleanála, increased staffing levels in planning, and changes to rules relating to appeals and judicial reviews. We would encourage further funding and support in this area to further improve outcomes and accelerate the length of time it takes to go from concept to decision.

The cost of construction needs to be tackled through financial support or tax incentives, and this needs to be done in tandem with investment in utilities to ensure that all stakeholders are aligned to function towards the same goal.

Constraints in water infrastructure are undermining housing developments all over the country, and large water and wastewater infrastructure is needed en masse to turn this around.

Investment in water infrastructure is critically important for the delivery of economic strategy development, employment, urban and rural development, and housing delivery. Strategic water investment is required to account for an increased emphasis on growth, including jobs growth in the National Planning Framework. Furthermore, both local authorities in Cork have a responsibility for our strategic employment areas that act as regional drivers which may not experience significant planned population growth but importantly will account for significant jobs growth in the period to 2040.

At present there are several large settlements in County Cork where the delivery of economic development and both social and private housing is restricted due to insufficient capacity in the existing Uisce Éireann infrastructure. Of particular concern in County Cork are;

- a. Kinsale, Mitchelstown, Dunmanway, Newmarket, Skibbereen, Ballydesmond - insufficient capacity in the wastewater treatment plant.
- b. Clonakilty, Youghal , Castletownbere, Kanturk, Mitchelstown- insufficient available capacity in the water supply system.
- c. Kanturk, Charleville and further settlements in the blackwater catchment area - issues pertaining to the classification of the Pearl Mussel on the Blackwater SAC that, to be resolved, require upgrade works to wastewater treatment plants.

As planning authorities, both Cork City and County Councils have a requirement to consider impacts on the environment and ensure compliance with a variety of European directives including the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive. It is imperative that strategic water infrastructure is funded to allow Cork's strategic forward planning objectives to be deliverable.

In addition, funding for County settlements currently without water services infrastructure will create growth in rural and smaller settlements and contribute to facilitating planned population targets. This funding investment is not significant in relative terms, but is critical in maintaining the fabric of our rural areas.

Similar investment is needed in the electricity grid, which is under capacity constraints in many areas.

This situation is also only going to intensify as we see the development of more data centres and the electrification of the transport sector in the coming years, all putting further strain on our existing grid.<sup>17</sup>

## **NSO 2 Enhanced Regional Accessibility**

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 regarding 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.

It is critical for the Cork region that the N25 Carrigtohill to Midleton scheme is reactivated with funding restored. It is a significant economic driver for metropolitan Cork. The continued funding of the N25 Midleton to Youghal project is necessary to improve

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<sup>17</sup> [EirGrid, All-Island Resource Adequacy Assessment 2025 - 2034](#)

connectivity between Waterford and Cork. The continued funding of the NM20 Project is critical to connect Ireland's second and third cities and critical to the wider national economy in terms of counterbalance to the Greater Dublin Area. 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 and the Cork Harbour Area.

The Great Island Connectivity Scheme has also emerged as a matter of regional and national priority. This significant project is required to provide improved access to Great Island and Cobh Town and to remove dependence on the 200-year-old Belvelly Bridge. Cobh is earmarked for major residential and commercial development in the coming years, and Port Cruise traffic is increasing on an annual basis.

The reality of the importance of these works, which were not included in the previous version of the NDP but simply must be prioritised now, were clarified in recent months when planning permission for the development of an agricultural fertiliser facility at Cobh's Marino Point was denied due to road capacity issues.<sup>18</sup>

That decision now means that Goulding Soil Nutrition ROI will continue to function in the city docklands on a site which had been earmarked for 1,300 apartments as part of the landmark Cork Docklands development.

It undermines the potential of Cork docklands to provide the quantum of housing envisioned under national strategies.

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 Dublin, Cork and Belfast.

Stronger rail, air and port connectivity and coordination have 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/h, develop a cross-Dublin solution and multi-track railways with new short sections of track on congested corridors.

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<sup>18</sup> [Irish Examiner](#)

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 mind of the consumer and create deeper economic connection between Cork and Belfast. Furthermore, the restoration of flights between Cork and Belfast is of paramount importance. It is a key priority for the Tri-Region Partnership, established between Cork Chamber, Dublin Chamber and Northern Ireland Chambers to foster deeper cooperation and connectivity across the island of Ireland.

It is noted that the accelerated delivery of a more direct service between Cork and Limerick and the new 200km/hr intercity trains, which will see journey times reduced, have been included in the final report of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review.<sup>19</sup>

While 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.

The southern region is envisioned to operate as economic counterpart to the concentration in Dublin and the east of the country and a vital step in achieving this balance is investment in regional connectivity, including roads and rail, which will open up new lands for economic and residential development throughout the region.

### **NSO 3 Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities**

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, villages and islands 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. Almost all county towns in Cork have resident jobs ratios above the Southern Region median, an indicator of strong local economies and sustainable growth. There is also a strong employment relationship between those county towns within and closest to Metropolitan Cork.

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<sup>19</sup> [All-Island Strategic Rail Review](#)

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.

While large amounts of investment will be made into our urban centres to facilitate population and economic growth, our rural economies and towns must not be left behind as a consequence.

The NDP 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.

The national secondary road network plays an important role in Ireland's rural economy. In Cork, the development of the Mallow Relief Road on the N72 will provide opportunities for growth in Mallow, while further opportunities could be enabled through the provision of relief roads on the N71 for Inishannon, Clonakilty and Bantry, and the completion of the Bandon Relief Road.

We must build an economy and infrastructure that can adapt to the jobs of the future. In this respect, we emphasise the importance of digital infrastructure, cluster development 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.

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. However, it must also be noted that the RRDF funding is significantly lower than URDF funding, which places rural areas at a disadvantage.

Cork's rural areas, which for the most part are located around the Cork coast, are dominated by agriculture, agri-food and tourism sectors. These rural sectors must be enabled to face challenges, such as the loss of traditional industries and employment, emigration and poor connectivity.

Cork Chamber would encourage further investment in coastal locations and ports. In the context of ORE development, additional berthing capacity at Cork's Tier 1 ports is critical, while capital projects should also be considered in local authority owned harbours such as Union Hall to ensure the development of sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture and seafood. These could yield significant job opportunities, as well as ensuring Cork can better utilise the natural asset that the 1,000km coastline represents.

Improved infrastructural connectivity, such as commuter rail, the N22 and Dunkettle Interchange are just a few examples of 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 NDP 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.

Enhanced regional transport is vital too, including upgraded and more frequent bus services between the rural population centres and larger employment and educational centres, as well as the expansion of the local link bus services, and longer-term prospects such as a West Cork rail route should also be reconsidered in the context of population and economic development throughout the entire county.

#### **NSO 4 Sustainable Mobility**

Substantial investment is needed across a range of transport sectors to rebalance the modal share in the Cork metropolitan region.

This is essential both from an economic perspective, in making the urban area somewhere more attractive to live, visit and work, but also from a climate and environmental perspective, in taking people out of private cars, reducing emissions and congestion.

Census 2022 found that some 71% of travel in the region is completed by private car, far above the Climate Action Plan target of 53%. Just 8% is completed by bus and 19% by cycling or walking, demonstrating the shortfalls in infrastructure provision for these areas.<sup>20</sup>

Positive results have been observed on the Cork-Mallow, Cobh and Midleton rail services where increased frequency has yielded a 50% growth in usage numbers in recent years.

Analysis by the Department of Transport on the economic cost of congestion in the regional cities 2022 to 2040 demonstrates the sheer scale and importance of work in tackling this issue and providing sustainable alternatives.<sup>21</sup>

The results indicate that congestion will increase significantly over the coming decades, primarily due to population and economic growth.

Investment in transport infrastructure, particularly large-scale public transport projects, will lead to a reduction in the rate of congestion.

The economic and climate case for significant investment into Cork's public and sustainable transport network is clear and it must be prioritised in the National Development Plan, including the accelerated delivery of Luas Cork, and the continued support for investment in rail and bus infrastructure, and cycling and walking facilities.

The Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (CMATS)<sup>22</sup> was published in 2020 and represents a coordinated land use and transport strategy for the Cork metropolitan area out to 2040.

It maps out an ambitious development in the city region based on current national strategies and projections and incorporating significant employment centres. Some of our significant employment centres, including Ringaskiddy, are under-served by current public transport infrastructure and are in need of significant investment to rectify this deficit.

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<sup>20</sup> [Census 2022](#)

<sup>21</sup> [The economic cost of congestion in the regional cities 2022-2040](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy](#)



It maps out a process to deliver an “accessible, integrated transport network that enables the growth of the Cork Metropolitan Area as a dynamic, connected, and internationally competitive European city” as envisaged by the National Planning Framework, and the aims outlined in the strategy must be properly resourced to ensure Cork can develop as such.

Cork Chamber is calling for:

- Bus: network enhancement by BusConnects with the addition of 220 buses to the fleet, 200km of cross-city routes, 50km of orbital routes, and 150 km of radial routes including priority lanes.
- These bus enhancements need to incorporate the significant employment bases in Ringaskiddy, Little Island, the Cork Airport business park and other areas around the city, as well as residential areas.
- Cork Area Commuter Rail programme: construction of new stations along existing lines to open up new lands and areas for residential and economic development, and implementation of measures to enable interchange such as integrated ticketing, regionally integrated fares, and high-capacity parking at interchanges to enable park and ride journeys.
- Parking: development of Park & Ride facilities along with the BusConnects network and local mobility hubs.
- Road network: upgrades to key roads such as N25, N27, N71, N72, N22, R624, R630 and M20 to support regional connectivity, along with several bridge projects, and improvements in multi-modal access on important roads.
- Walking and Cycling: specific measures for active travel including the construction and regeneration of a number of strategic pedestrian routes and the construction of cycle lanes, tracks, and trails as well as developing mixed streets and quietways including those along disused railways with a better wayfinding system.

Furthermore, we have recently seen the publication of the preferred route for Luas Cork, a vital light rail connecting the city from east to west. It is welcome to see this progress, and it is essential that this is funded as a matter of national priority. This project is potentially transformative from an economic and environmental perspective. In delivering it, it must also be futureproofed to ensure additional connectivity to Cork Airport and the towns around Cork city is possible too.

In a similar vein, we have also seen the publication of the preferred route for the Cork Northern Distributor Multi-Modal Route in recent months. This, too, represents a vital

development in the city, having the potential to open up vast lands on the city's northside for residential and economic purposes, and ensuring better access to and from the residential communities and major employers already operating in the area.

Investment in sustainable and active travel measures can also yield major benefits. The CMATS estimates that some 24,000 daily car trips in Cork could be made by walking if the appropriate infrastructure was put in place, resulting in a major increase in footfall in areas such as St Patrick's Street, yielding a potential boost for businesses.

In addition to helping to regenerate our town centres, this would yield significant health benefits, with 20 minutes of activity per day reducing the risk of heart disease, type-2 diabetes and depression by at least 20%. With the correct funding and support, Cork can be the most walkable city in Ireland, as initially mapped out by the Cork City Walking Strategy 2013-2018.<sup>23</sup>

CMATS identifies 200km of primary cycle network and the transfer of 56,000 daily car trips to cycling instead. Some 150km of secondary cycle network, 60km of inter-urban cycle network, and 140km of greenway will support this, with positive impacts on climate, emissions, and health.

Funding to develop and expand public bike schemes, bike parking and storage, and appropriate, and segregated, bike infrastructure. This also involves the inclusion of cycle infrastructure in road upgrades and developments, such as that mapped out in the CNDMR plan, and ensuring that these connect to existing cycle routes rather than simply terminating or merging onto lesser roads.

## **NSO 5 A Strong Economy, supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills**

Ireland's ongoing competitiveness hinges on its ability to strike the right balance between leveraging FDI and supporting domestic enterprises to realise their full potential. Cork city and county already punch well above their weight in terms of economic output, yet its ability to maintain and enhance its global competitiveness is dependent on the region's capacity to ensure the provision of a highly skilled and talented workforce through nurturing, attraction and retention.

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<sup>23</sup> [Cork City Walking Strategy 2013-2018](#)

To meet the region's current and future needs, measures must be taken to address skills gaps and support the existing workforce. Initiatives like enhanced educational offerings and the provision of affordable, accessible childcare are essential to meet the needs of the region's diverse business community and ensure sustainable economic growth.

The coming decades will see profound changes in the types of industries that our graduates will be entering and Ireland's higher and further education system needs to be innovative, flexible and agile to respond to these needs as they emerge.

Recent research by Skillnet Ireland has highlighted urgent skills needs in key growth areas, including AI, cyber, advanced manufacturing, bioprocessing, big data analytics, robotics, and the green transition.<sup>24</sup> It also identified the need for roles in clean energy, environmental management, and offshore wind, and noted that Ireland's ageing population will increasingly become a factor in labour market dynamics, bringing new talent challenges in areas such as healthcare, digital health provision, financial literacy and more.

People benefit from having access to different paths to employment and education, and it is important to recognise that not every person or profession is the best fit for traditional higher and further education. Alternative training programmes and routes to employment should therefore be prioritised by the new government through direct funding, and by widening the range of programmes available through apprenticeships and upskilling.

Ireland's economy has benefited from a strong research base and in the current changing global environment, there is an opportunity to invest in this area to attract further expertise and talent. The NDP should make provisions for significant investment in research and development, and policy changes should follow to ensure a whole-of-government approach to advancing this. Building on the goals of Impact 2030, there is an opportunity to strengthen and support the research ecosystem in Ireland to create, attract and retain the very best talent.<sup>25</sup>

A core element of the strategy for the coming years should be to attract further investment to regions outside Dublin to maximise the benefits for communities all over Ireland.

In its new strategy for 2025-29, IDA Ireland has a target of ensuring 55% of investments are in regional locations in the next five years.<sup>26</sup> It sets out that this will be achieved through

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<sup>24</sup> [Skillnet Ireland: Ireland's Talent Landscape 2025: Future Skills Challenges of Irish Business](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy](#)

<sup>26</sup> [IDA Ireland, Adapt Intelligently: A Strategy for Sustainable Growth and Innovation 2025-29](#)

continued partnership with regional stakeholders and it is vital that these partnerships are supported and enhanced through direct funding and investments in key areas in training, skills and education where needed.

The 2025-29 IDA report identifies as key priorities the achievement of the following:

- Drive sustainable change;
- Locations of choice for green-powered and digitally enabled enterprises - affordable, resilient, and renewable energy, is now central to investment location decisions;
- Improve the digital maturity and sustainability footprint of existing Irish operations;
- Attract green and digitally enabled investments; and,
- Identify three strategic sites – develop up to three significantly larger scale, pre-permitted developments.

Cork's existing economic and energy assets, in particular those located within the Cork Harbour Area, position it to be a first mover in delivering on these key priorities. In Aghada, Cork already has a strategic zoned energy development site of 388 hectares, located adjacent to its two existing large dispatchable power plants.

Steps need to be taken to close the core funding gap by unlocking the National Training Fund and a borrowing framework for technological universities should be established as a matter of priority.

The NDP needs to include specific provisions to support universities to meet their carbon reduction plans and there also needs to be a specific and substantial investment in student accommodation to ease the pressures on the private housing market, which is meeting a large proportion of this demand at present. The delivery of purpose-built student accommodation will benefit facilities and communities all over Ireland.

The previous version of the National Student Accommodation Strategy, published in 2019, targeted the delivery of 21,000 purpose-built student beds by 2024.<sup>27</sup> From 2017 to the end of December 2024, 15,779 were delivered.<sup>28</sup> It was confirmed earlier this year that a new, updated strategy is in the works and this must be finalised and published as a matter of priority to urgently address this shortage.

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<sup>27</sup> [National Student Accommodation Strategy 2019.](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Oireachtas.ie](#)

Further allocation and resources must be provided to our third-level institutions, including changes to the borrowing framework for Technological Universities, to ensure they can progress at pace and deliver accommodation on the scale required.

To ensure that our world-class educational facilities retain and expand their reputation, it is vital to invest in a range of specific projects for development too. At UCC, these include the development of Tyndall North, the Cork University Business School, the Kane Building Refurbishment, the dental school project, Cork University Medical School, further research infrastructure and outdoor sports developments, the Granary Theatre redevelopment and the Boole House project.

It is vital the NDP supports the green transition fund to drive decarbonisation and enterprise resilience in the transition to a low-carbon economy. It also needs to support the Digital Transition Fund, aiding SMEs, larger operators, and bodies such as educational institutions to make this step to a digital future.

Further investment in a network of digital hubs in towns and cities throughout Ireland is vital, as is investment in future manufacturing and advanced manufacturing measures, support for seed and venture capital funding and other start-up initiatives, and investment to develop and expand new industries and developing sectors.

The likes of IDA Ireland will be key to this. Cork contributes 19% of Ireland's GDP and is home to 194 multinational firms in a range of important industries, including pharmaceuticals, technology, cybersecurity, and financial services,<sup>29</sup> but there is now a lack of appropriate IDA lands to attract new industries at the scale that we have previously seen.

It is critical to fund this area to identify and develop appropriate sites for economic development in the coming decades, and it is critical that one of these sites is located in Cork due to current capacity constraints on existing lands.

Continued and expanded funding for Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland is needed to ensure access and support for emerging and expanding enterprises in all corners of Ireland.

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<sup>29</sup> [Cork City Council, Economic Facts and Figures](#)

Similarly, Enterprise Ireland has an aim of supporting 1,000 new start-ups in the next five years.<sup>30</sup> It also aims to support companies to be more productive and acknowledges a need to focus on sustainability, innovation, digitalisation, and operational efficiencies.

Cork Chamber supports these goals and encourages the government to allocate appropriate funding to ensure Ireland can continue to be a great place to do business.

Additionally, while the NDP is a long-term strategy for growth and infrastructure development, largely focused on matters which we can control, Ireland is at the behest of global trends as an island nation reliant on international investment, trade and travel.

In the current climate of global economic uncertainty, it is vital that a framework for enhanced overseas trade and the development of new markets is developed, and that the appropriate supports put in place to help businesses of all sizes to operate in this new dynamic.

The European Commission's Spring 2025 Economic Forecast estimates a 3.4% growth in Ireland's GDP this year, but it warns that Ireland's deep economic ties to the US pose downward risks in the context of rising protectionism.

While that growth is still ahead of the wider EU area, which is forecast to grow by 1.1%, it highlights a need for new trading partners, and it is vital the NDP sets out the supports for this.

## **NSO 6 High-Quality International Connectivity**

As an island nation, continued investment in our port and airport connections to the wider world is vital, underpinning our international competitiveness.

In the current economic climate, a post-Brexit world, and changing global trading patterns, flexibility and the ability to adapt are essential in our ability to respond to opportunities and challenges as they emerge.

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<sup>30</sup> [Enterprise Ireland, Delivering for Ireland, Leading Globally](#)

Cork Airport and the Port of Cork play vital roles in the Irish economy as international gateways. Enhancing Cork's regional and international connectivity is a key economic enabler for the southern region as a whole.

The development of a new National Aviation Plan and National Ports Policy, as outlined in the Programme for Government, are essential in 2025, mapping out the pathway for these vital facilities in terms of improving connectivity, fostering growth and ensuring safe and secure operations.

Cork Airport recently launched its ambitious €200m capital development plan.<sup>8</sup> The airport has grown its passenger base by 50% in the last decade to 3.4 million and is targeting 5 million in the coming years. To match this growth, it is investing in new passenger facilities, security screening facilities, car parking, boarding gates, airside facilities, and a solar farm.

It is essential that the NDP fully resources and supports the airport to meet these targets.

There is also a significant appetite for an expanded range of destinations from Cork Airport, for business and leisure travellers alike. Cork Chamber's 2024 research found that better connectivity to European capital cities, such as Geneva, Berlin and Madrid, is a key ask for respondents, while New York emerged as the most sought-after future route for users of the airport.<sup>31</sup>

Almost nine out of ten respondents said that direct connectivity into Cork was important for colleagues travelling from overseas and this is a recurring theme in our engagement with members, in particular in the context of connections to London and the biggest hubs on continental Europe for direct and onward travel.

An enhanced range of routes would be a game-changer for business travellers and also from a tourism perspective, and it is essential to provide financial supports and incentives to encourage airlines to introduce these routes to and from Cork rather than adding further traffic to an already at-capacity Dublin Airport.

However, it is also critical to explore methods of increasing or removing the Dublin Airport passenger cap as it simply harms inbound travel, in a tourism or business sense, for the whole island.

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<sup>31</sup> [Cork Chamber: Cork Business Travel Survey 2024](#)

It is also critical to provide support for the Port of Cork's ongoing expansion and transformation in line with its 2050 Masterplan.<sup>32</sup> The Port's importance as a cruise destination and ferry terminal continues to grow, and this should be supported with enabling infrastructure to accommodate additional ships, passengers and tourists.

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.

It has ambitious goals of moving its port operations downstream and consolidating all activities in the lower harbour by 2050, which is essential in increasing global vessel sizes, providing consolidated, efficient and sustainable operations for customers, and ensuring global connectivity for the southern region.

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.

In addition to enhanced connectivity, it is essential that the NDP supports the continued green agenda at our ports and airport.

Cork Airport's proposal to develop a solar farm as part of its development plan and the Port of Cork's aims to develop and enhance the offshore renewable energy sector are just two examples of the work underway and it is vital the government allocate support and funding to ensure these and other initiatives progress as a matter of urgency.

As an island nation, Ireland is reliant on our ports and airports to connect us to the wider world. But we are also subject to potential fines for missing climate targets and we will all

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<sup>32</sup> [Port of Cork Masterplan 2050](#)



feel the impact if steps are not taken toward net zero. Enhancing the green agenda at our ports and airports will be a vital step in achieving such targets.

## **NSO 7 Enhanced Amenity and Heritage**

Ireland's heritage is of fundamental importance to all aspects of our society, identity and wellbeing, and plays a critical role in our economy and the perception of Ireland globally.

Investment in this space has the benefit of protecting our natural and historic built environment.

The state's heritage portfolio represents a key asset for residents to relax and enjoy themselves and also serves as a significant tourism asset too.

Significant investment in visitor facilities, with a focus on conservation and protection of our biodiversity, is needed to ensure these facilities are maintained and developed appropriately, and that they can also play a critical role in our climate targets in the coming years.

Cork is included in three of Fáilte Ireland's four key experience brands: the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East, and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Under these plans, Fáilte Ireland is developing destination experience development plans, which are strategic roadmaps to outline regional growth and the development of tourism offerings over a five-year period. These plans aim to strengthen the destination's appeal, extend the tourism season, increase visitor numbers, and boost local economies by enhancing visitor experiences and maximizing the area's unique strengths.

These development plans include a range of strategic aims, such as promoting world-class harbour experiences, developing family experiences, enhancing the gastronomic offering of the region, and creating compelling outdoor activities and experiences, all with a focus on sustainability. Targeted multi-annual funding is essential to ensure these strategies can be implemented effectively. Specific investment in broadening the green- and blueways that have been developed in recent years would be welcome as their popularity and use is clearly evident already as both transport and visitor assets. Similarly, it is vital to invest in our waterways from a public health and a leisure perspective.

The NDP must allocate substantial resourcing to Heritage Ireland 2030<sup>33</sup> and the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030<sup>34</sup>, which builds on earlier work and strives for a “whole of government, whole of society” approach to biodiversity.

Previous strategies have recognised the value of cultural, linguistic, tourism and sporting amenities as a key component of and contributor to the attractiveness of our towns, cities, and villages.

Creating vibrant, welcoming and thriving public realm places ensures that our cities and towns remain attracting to those wishing to live, work, visit and invest in Ireland. The country’s urban centres have undergone challenges and changes in recent years for visitors and residents alike, and it is essential that we respond appropriately to these. Safety in our cities is critical to maintaining the attractiveness and reputation of our towns and cities as welcoming destinations for talent and FDI and investment in our amenity and heritage sites is a key part of this too.

It is crucial that the Government sets in motion the policy framework for investment and development in our city centres and that the National Development Plan identifies and supports key projects that will reinvigorate our urban centres as must-visit destinations and for the promotion of city centre living, social cohesion and economic growth.

A crucial project in this space is the Cork Events Centre, the delivery of which is vital to unlocking considerable social and economic benefits for Cork city and county and will attract visitors to and investment in Cork. It is essential that the new version of the NDP allocates sufficient funding to ensure that this project can proceed through tendering and procurement, and finally get off the ground and be delivered.

The project was identified as a priority in the previous edition of the National Development Plan and also in the recent Programme for Government as a means of boosting the city’s regeneration and enhancing its cultural offering, with significant complementary public realm enhancements in the city centre.

In addition, the regeneration of the Grand Parade quarter, including the upgrade or relocation of the city library, will be vital in enhancing the city’s vibrancy.

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<sup>33</sup> [Heritage Ireland 2030](#)

<sup>34</sup> [National Biodiversity Action Plan](#)

Other cultural projects in Cork, including the redevelopment of the Crawford Art Gallery, will contribute greatly to the city as a place to work, live and visit when completed and it is critical that multi-annual funding is afforded to this project to ensure it can progress through its revamp as a matter of urgency and meet its targeted reopening date of 2027.<sup>35</sup>

The Crawford Art Gallery is the only National Cultural Institution located in its entirety outside Dublin and is the regional art museum for Munster, with a permanent collection of almost 4,000 works. Welcoming 200,000 visitors a year, it is simply vital that its development is supported to ensure it is completed to the highest possible standard and on time.

Furthermore, additional funding and support should also be extended to facilities such as the Glucksman, the Granary Theatre, the Triskel Arts Centre and more in recognition of the vital and important role played by cultural and artistic institutions in our towns and cities.

Similarly, sports facilities throughout the city and county would benefit from support and redevelopment, improving access to as wide a range as possible for the population.

## **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.

Schemes that support urban populations, such as above-the-shop living and the renovation of derelict buildings, are key to ensuring population growth in these areas. 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.

Safety, and the feeling of being safe, in our cities and urban centres is essential too. Returning the population to these areas would result in a form of passive policing, rather than our streets being empty in the evenings.

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

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<sup>35</sup> [Crawford Art Gallery](#)

for talent and investment. Greater Garda visibility plays an important role in maintaining a safe and pleasant environment. Given Cork's current and projected population growth, it is essential to increase Garda presence on the streets to maintain a strong sense of safety and security.

## **NSO 8 Transition to a Climate-Neutral and Climate-Resilient Society**

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.

Cork and Dublin have been designated as EU Mission Cities for climate neutrality by 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 the 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.

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. A dedicated coastal infrastructure fund would allow Cork to turn this natural asset into an economic asset that will also underpin the sustainable transition of our national energy systems to renewable sources.

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, the environment, and economy.

As outlined in Cork Harbour 2025 – Ready to Float – Offshore Wind<sup>36</sup>, Cork Harbour is the de facto floating offshore wind hub in the Celtic Sea, for a number of reasons, including:

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

Cork’s maritime history and existing support network add to its case for being designated as a centre of excellence, while the existing supply chain, including facilities and berths, local survey vessels, locally based operators and consultancies, and its proximity Cork Airport and several well-connected motorways set it apart from other areas.

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<sup>36</sup> [Cork Chamber – Cork Harbour, Ready to Float](#)

This also extends to the world class facilities in the National Maritime College of Ireland, as well as cooperation with UCC and MTU, which can support and train future industries. They already provide undergraduate and postgraduate talent in key areas such as engineering, environmental studies, marine science, supply chain management, nautical science, marine engineering, and marine electro-technology.

The industry-wide cooperation in the region supports investment and the development of further facilities. 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, while the region is also home to Energy Cork, which 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.

An opportunity exists to further develop the innovation ecosystem established in Ringaskiddy, including co-location with the naval service, headquartered on Haulbowline Island in Lower Cork Harbour

Furthermore, the NPF sets out crucial targets for solar and onshore wind and it is vital that supports are put in place to achieve these to ensure that Ireland can achieve enhanced energy security.

The southern region is in line for 40% of the country's onshore wind and 43% of solar PV by 2030.

It is vital that progress on the delivery of renewable energy continues to be accelerated over the lifetime of this Government, in line with objectives set out in key documents such as Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy, which sets out a target of 5GW of installed ORE by 2030.<sup>37</sup>

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

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<sup>37</sup> [Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy](#)

economy from geopolitical risks and price volatility. This will enhance our energy independence and security and attractiveness to large energy companies.

The development of offshore renewables and other sectors also has the potential for significant economic benefits.

Cork Chamber is also concerned about the impact climate change will have on Cork City and other urban areas located around the coast. Cork is, unfortunately, no 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 flooding.

The Blackpool Flood Relief Scheme and the Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme (LLFRS) are currently at the design/ planning stage by the 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 NDP must acknowledge the extreme urgency around making progress in these schemes to ensure the safety of the people and properties in these areas.

## **NSO 9 Sustainable Management of Water and other Environmental Resources**

Development restrictions are in place in settlements all across the country due to limited water and wastewater supplies. It is a massive inhibitor of development throughout the southern region and, currently, the planned investment will take considerable time to catch up with demand.

In fact, at this point, the largest planned investment in water infrastructure in the southern region is the Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project,

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.

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 are 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.

Essential aspects of the transition to a cleaner and greener system are the increased use of green hydrogen and biomethane, both of which can be supported through the use of targeted operational supports and upgraded infrastructure.

Cork Chamber acknowledges and welcomes steps already taken in this space, including the construction of a central grid injection facility in Mitchelstown, which will enable biomethane to be injected directly into the gas network. This project should be used as a template for similar facilities elsewhere in the country to allow for the rapid rollout of biomethane throughout the network.

The Programme for Government<sup>38</sup> includes plans for financial incentives for biomethane producers, reinforcing the commitment to developing a sustainable renewable gas sector, and Cork Chamber encourages all parties to work together on this as a priority to accelerate and increase the decarbonisation of the network as soon as possible.

Similarly, the increased use of renewable compressed natural gas (BioCNG) in the transport sector is welcome. Commercial transport is responsible for up to 20% of Ireland's carbon

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<sup>38</sup> [Programme for Government](#)



emissions and BioCNG represents a viable and sustainable solution for the commercial road transport sector, where electric alternatives are not yet feasible. The opening of Ireland's first dedicated BioCNG refuelling stations in 2024 was a major step forward in this sector, offering a carbon-neutral option for Ireland's haulage industry.

Cork Chamber would encourage and support the further rollout of BioCNG refuelling stations throughout the road network.

We would also encourage the exploration of the opportunities associated with the development of an LNG terminal in Cork harbour as a strategic emergency reserve. A government led facility could support dozens of jobs and also play an important strategic role in a situation where Ireland's gas supply was interrupted for any period of time.

## **NSO 10 Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services**

Investments in social infrastructure, such as childcare, education and health services, is a vital component in ensuring that Cork and Ireland take advantage of the current opportunities for economic growth. These are critical elements in ensuring our towns and cities are places where people want to live and work, and will play an important role in retaining and attracting talent to fill skills gaps in our existing and emerging industries.

The National Development Plan should be structured in a manner that minimises delays in these vital projects and establishes a framework and delivery plan to ensure they are implemented as soon as possible. The costs of delaying these projects are enormous, in particular at a time of global economic uncertainties and the associated inflationary pressures this could cause. Accelerated decision-making and delivery processes should be a priority for this government as part of this plan.

The NDP should increase funding across a range of social infrastructure that supports and ties communities together, promoting social cohesion.

This should include the construction of a new elective hospital in Cork, ensuring the delivery of faster care and a better standard of care in the region, easing pressure on existing health facilities. It should also include continued support and funding for the development of those existing health facilities, including regional elective surgery centres, a regional paediatric centre, and new trauma facilities.

It should also extend to the development and delivery of enhanced dental training facilities, whether that is by revamping the existing UCC dental school or by constructing a new facility.

Further investment in the Sláintecare programme to reduce waiting times for vital health services and an increased number of beds where possible will also make a significant difference to patients.

Significant investment in access to and the affordability of childcare needs to be prioritised too.

Cork Chamber members have identified issues in childcare provision, with almost three-quarters of respondents to a survey urging policymakers to take further measures to address the challenges associated with childcare provision.<sup>39</sup> Nearly two-thirds agreed that childcare disproportionately affects women in the workplace, and around one-quarter of employers noted that the availability and affordability of childcare provision is impacting their staff.

A more enhanced, accessible and affordable childcare sector is important for supporting economic growth and for ensuring that employees are provided with a robust choice when considering their participation in the workplace. Further investment in the National Childcare Scheme would also be a welcome change in reducing costs for families.

The business community has shown great resilience in recent years, responding to previously unforeseen challenges, and adapting to changing work patterns. With the economy at near-full employment, it is clear that flexibility in a modern and future-proofed workplace is essential. Ensuring employees have a choice in their work patterns and are supported in their work-life balance will be essential to attracting and retaining talent, and bridging some of the skills shortages that businesses are experiencing today.

Ireland currently enjoys a strong education system, evident in high rankings in all forms of student achievement, and it is essential to continue this support.

Investment in ICT and the development of appropriate digital skills, such as coding, are essential to ensure our young people have the skills to compete in a digital world. It is also crucial to invest in foreign language teaching and other sought-after skills.

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<sup>39</sup> [Cork Chamber, Economic Trends](#)

Investment in school buildings, including programmes for refurbishment and decarbonisation, is vital, as is the development of new skills in areas of demographic growth, and the continued support of special education provision.

## **10. Shared Island**

Cork Chamber has worked together with Dublin Chamber and Northern Ireland Chambers to champion initiatives that will benefit the island as a whole.<sup>40</sup>

Two trade missions, including delegations of business leaders, key stakeholders and politicians, have taken place, one in Belfast and one in Dublin, with a third to take place in Cork later this year.

The series marks the first collaborative effort of its kind and demonstrates the potential benefits of cooperation between regional stakeholders.

In the case of the tri-region partnership, key initiatives including higher-speed rail between Cork, Dublin, Belfast and beyond, the restoration of Cork to Belfast flights, and improved funding allocation for the three major ports have been prioritised. All-island innovation clusters and enhanced tourism links have also been established as key aims.

The collective leadership demonstrated by the Chambers network in establishing this partnership and advancing these priorities shows the capacity and opportunities that exist through cooperation.

With appropriate funding and support, these aims can be advanced and similar partnerships could be established to replicate the cooperation shown here in championing key initiatives that would have regional and national benefits.

It is vital to maintain and strengthen these relationships in the context of trade and economic benefits, as well as sustainability, energy and transport opportunities and support.

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<sup>40</sup> [Cork Chamber Tri-Region Partnership](#)

## **11. Appendix**

### **List of Priority Projects**

- **Utilities**
  - Investment in the electricity grid to reinforce and build out the infrastructure
  - Water and wastewater infrastructure
  - Targeted water services investment for rural settlements currently without public water services
  - Expansion of energy systems to facilitate ORE and associated energy innovations
- **Housing**
  - 7,500 to 10,000 units per annum in Cork city and county
  - New social and affordable housing
  - New funding mechanisms for private housing
  - Timebound tax measures and capital allowances to encourage building
  - Changes to VAT on apartments
  - Accelerated relief for brownfield sites
- **Cork Docklands and strategic urban expansion areas**
  - Critical enabling infrastructure
  - New bridges
  - Roads upgrades
  - Social amenities, including parks and playgrounds
- **Transport**
  - Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy Actions and Review
  - Luas Cork
  - Cork Area Commuter Rail Programme
  - Bus Connects
  - Cork-Dublin-Belfast rail
  - Cork-Belfast flights
- **Roads**
  - Great Island Connectivity Project (R624 Cobh / Fota road, Belvelly bridge)
  - Cork Northern Distributor Multi-Modal Route
  - Cork City Northern Transport Project
  - M/N20 Cork to Limerick

- o N25 Carrigtwohill to Midleton
- o R630 strategic road to Aghada / Whitegate energy hub
- o Castlemartyr bypass
- o M28 Cork to Ringaskiddy
- o N72 Mallow relief road
- o N71 Bandon relief road
- o N71 Inishannon bypass
- o N71 Clonakilty bypass
- o N71 Bantry relief road
- **Social and Educational**
  - o Events Centre
  - o Crawford redevelopment
  - o Cork elective hospital
  - o Dental school project
  - o Tyndall North
  - o Cork University Business School
  - o Kane building refurbishment
  - o Research infrastructure (PRTL)
  - o Outdoor sports developments, including sports park in Curraheen
  - o Boole House
  - o Granary Theatre Redevelopment
  - o Student accommodation
  - o Cork ETB Bishopstown campus
  - o New school buildings
  - o Refurbishments and expansions of existing school buildings
  - o Enhanced funding for islands and Gaeltacht areas
- **Infrastructural development**
  - o IDA strategic lands – including one of the three strategic sites identified in the IDA Strategy 2025-29
  - o Cork Airport development plan
  - o Port of Cork development plan
  - o Offshore renewables infrastructure – linking SC-DMAP / Tonn Nua to Cork harbour area and city
  - o Dedicated coastal infrastructure fund

- o Targeted multi-annual funding for tourism-related development plans
- o Flood defences (Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme, Midleton, Skibbereen, Clonakilty, Bandon, Bantry)
- **Renewables**
  - o Designate Cork Harbour region as an energy park / hub
  - o Establishment of an Offshore Wind Centre of Excellence (OWCE) in Cork Harbour
  - o Support the development of enabling infrastructure for the offshore renewables sector
  - o Support the development of a skills hub within the NMCI
  - o Support the development of large-scale solar projects

## **Information Sources**

- Cork City Council - Economic Facts and Figures
- National Planning Framework, First Revision
- ESRI – Population Projections, the flow of new households and structural housing demand
- Census 2022
- EPA Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections 2024-2055
- Eurostat Regional Gross Domestic Product (PPS per inhabitant) by NUTS 2 region
- EU Regional Competitiveness Index
- Project Ireland 2040 Capital Investment Tracker
- Report of the Housing Commission
- Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future
- CSO New Dwelling Completions 2024
- CSO Planning Permissions 2024
- Southern Regional Assembly - Housing Delivery in the Southern Region - 2024 analysis
- Eirgrid All-Island Resource Adequacy Assessment 2025-2034
- All-Island Strategic Rail Review
- Department of Transport: Economic Cost of Congestion in the Regional Cities 2022-2040
- Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy

- Cork City Walking Strategy
- Skillnet Ireland: Ireland's Talent Landscape 2025: Future Skills Challenges of Irish Business
- Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy
- National Student Accommodation Strategy
- IDA Ireland; Adapt Intelligently: A Strategy for Sustainable Growth and Innovation 2025-29
- Enterprise Ireland; Delivering for Ireland, Leading Globally (2025-2029)
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- Heritage Ireland 2030
- National Biodiversity Action Plan
- Cork Chamber: Cork Harbour, Ready to Float
- Powering Prosperity - Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy
- Cork Chamber Economic Trends