

Submission to National Planning Framework.

I am 70 years of age and am a Waterford man and current chair of Waterford Civic Trust. The following submission is a personal one.

I have been involved in many local organisations over the years and have a deep interest in regional development. It has not been easy watching other cities progress and towns in the periphery of Dublin add on services and population while Waterford city struggles for recognition. Recent media articles on the growth of Drogheda and on that towns push for city status underline the problem and an article by Harry McGee in the Irish Times of 22nd of July 2017 encapsulates the Dublin perception of Waterford.

“How do you describe Waterford? Like any city there are countless ways. It’s Ireland’s oldest city, with an extraordinary Viking heritage. It’s the home of Waterford [Crystal](#), which once employed 3,500 people. Its exquisite cut glass is still the city’s biggest tourism attraction. It has a place strong in arts and drama, with Red Kettle and Spraoi, and a light operatic heritage. It’s where, for some strange reason, punk bands and mods have long had a strong foothold. It’s the home of the distinctive bread roll, blaa, and also the place, and this may surprise, where the cream cracker and the rasher (through Henry Denny) were invented. With a population of about 53,000, it’s a pleasant city, pedestrianised, with good motorway connections – blessed with a spectacular, often sunny coast lines. Ireland’s Florida. Against all that, people have concentrated on the negative in recent years. The first thing noticed by visitors is that everything is on one bank of the Suir and the other is a desolate wasteland. That kind of lopsided quality defines the city – there is a sense that there is something about it that is unfinished or incomplete. The figures bear that out. Waterford has the country’s second-highest number of unemployment blackspots, nine of them. It is second only to [Limerick](#). Its unemployment rate is 9.3 per cent, lagging 3 per cent behind the national figure of 6.3 per cent. [Waterford Institute of Technology](#) has yet to gain yearned- for university status. Less than 1 per cent of IDA jobs created between 2011 and 2016 went to Waterford. Many of the jobs that came were poorly paid. There is a prevailing belief (expressed in varying degrees) that the city has been neglected, forgotten about, not given a fair crack of the whip.”

The issues which impact on the growth of Waterford city have remained relatively similar since I was a boy: unemployment, low political support, low government investment, lack of political leadership, low educational attainment, lack of university access, very tight urban boundaries, lack of appropriate regional strategies, dysfunction within the south east region, interurban and intercounty competition within the south east, lack of service industry jobs etc. The issue of access to the capital has been solved with the development of the M9 motorway although lack of investment in

Waterford Airport has seen it struggle to hold on to any scheduled services in the absence of a Boeing 737 standard jet runway.

The speech by Taoiseach Leo Varadkar in Waterford on 31st July 2017 on the opening of a new manufacturing plant for Bausch and Lomb encapsulates the position Waterford finds itself in.

“In my office in Government Buildings, I have a portrait of the great Waterford patriot, Thomas Francis Meagher, who introduced the Irish tricolour to Ireland, and unveiled it for the very first time in this city in 1848. It’s there to remind me of the ideals of our Republic and also remind me of Waterford and my responsibilities to be Taoiseach for all of Ireland - every city and every region. The portrait reminds me that Waterford has for many centuries been at the heart of Irish life and Irish politics. Waterford’s history is filled with exceptional innovators and thinkers, such as Robert Boyle, Luke Wadding and Ernest Walton. Bausch and Lomb are to be applauded for supporting the continuation of that rich tradition. When I became a minister in 2011 the very first place I came to for an official visit was Waterford, to open the Bishop’s Palace. Today the Viking Triangle is an award-winning cultural resource, with the Medieval Museum, Reginald’s Tower, and the Bishop’s Palace showcasing the rich history of this wonderful city. As the official history of the museum reminds us, Waterford was pillaged, ruined, and burned down in 1050, and it was ravaged again in 1087. It was destroyed by fire in 1252 and again thirty years later. Each time it was rebuilt, and each time it came back stronger and better. The spirit of resilience carried through over the centuries. No matter what was thrown at her, Waterford remained the untaken city. This is a great city - historic, resilient and proud. However, I fear that, in recent times, the city has regrettably lost some of its confidence. Maybe in dark hours, the city lacks hope that its future will be better, brighter. That should be of concern to all of us. Many in the city and city region feel that Waterford has fallen behind, has been neglected, even forgotten. And, it’s not hard to understand why. Until the 1970s Waterford was bigger in size than Galway. Today Waterford is significantly smaller. Galway has benefitted from having a successful university, an increasingly vibrant city centre, new industries, and falling unemployment. Limerick has too. In contrast, Waterford’s population growth has been substantially below the national average over the past 20 years. So the people of Waterford could be forgiven for thinking that the city has finally been taken - that Ireland’s oldest city seems to have fallen behind in health, industry, education and infrastructure. This must change.”

In my youth there were four recognised cities, Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford. Waterford city was well recognised as a strong port and manufacturing centre and generally had some national profile. When I was a young man, Waterford city was nearly twice the population of Galway, a town which at that stage did not even have recognised city status. Galway achieved that status in 1986 on the back of very strong growth and government support and investment. As the world of work and began to change from a situation where hard resources began to matter less than the soft resources of education, culture and tourism, Waterford city, although it is the oldest city in the land, found itself singularly ill-equipped to deal with the new order

As the 20th century matured, the importance of a university as a driver of a local economy became increasingly obvious. There have been many attempts to achieve university status for Waterford, all without success. The closure of the De La Salle teacher training college in Waterford city, being the only third level institution in the south east and being the only third level institution in Ireland which was completely closed (it is now a second level college) dealt a mortal blow to intellectual leadership in Waterford city and the south east. When it closed in 1936, a university group was formed and the college was offered to the state as a constituent college of the National University. This offer was refused. The push for university status re-emerged in 1956 when a second university committee was formed, again without success. The development of Waterford Regional Technical College (WRTC) in 1969 gave hope that the third level deficit would eventually be solved. A third University Action Group was established in 1985 after the Bannon Report (Dr Michael Bannon Urban Policy Unit of UCD) proposed the development of a Technological University in Waterford. Political pressure led to the upgrading of WRTC to Institute of Technology status originally recognising the situation that Waterford found itself in vis a vis its peer cities, but the IoT status was eventually awarded to every RTC in the land. The upgrading of the National Institutes for Higher Education (NIHE) in Dublin and Limerick to DCU and UL respectively effectively pushed Waterford city out of the list of recognised Irish cities. How could it be otherwise when Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway all had large, fully functioning universities and Institutes of Technology plus the student numbers, staff and resources that accompanied that while Waterford made do with its IoT. An application for university status by WIT was kicked to touch by government. Without a university in Waterford servicing the south east, the city will always struggle to attract service industry and be recognised as the regional centre for the south east. Current plans to amalgamate Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) with Carlow IT (ITC) to form part of a national technological University are undeveloped and without any clear direction. The proposal that any new TU in the south east would have to have campuses in each county town in the region is a denial of reality. Without a strong regional centre in Waterford city, the south east will struggle as it is doing and as it has done for many years.

The Forfás report 'Our Cities: Drivers of National Competitiveness' highlights the important role that cities play within their regions and that competitive cities drive competitive regions, by promoting growth and employment. Cities act as economic engines for their regions providing a critical mass of public and private institutions. Cities boost regions by creating employment for residents and they provide national and international connectivity through the concentration of infrastructure. Cities also facilitate regions by enhancing their international profile which is particularly important when attracting foreign direct investment. The key role of cities within their region is further highlighted in European Commission 'State of European Cities Report' which states that 'urban areas play a key role in driving the development of their hinterlands, and successful regions have a dynamic and vibrant city at their core'. Waterford's failure to fulfil its role as a gateway city is increasingly evident.

The south east region has over 500,000 inhabitants. It is among the best situated regions in the state with good land, a good climate and good location. Yet it has always failed to achieve its full economic potential. There are many reasons why this is so but chief among them is the inability of Waterford city to act and be supported by other counties in the region, as a regional centre. Interurban rivalry in the south east is intense and spurred by local politics. The closeness of the city boundary in Ferrybank is a visible testament to the inability of local government to recognise the realities of 21st century life, where all facilities cannot be retained and developed within small units such as Irish counties. The constant difficulties with smaller hospitals in Ireland highlight this situation and many

of these facilities and the administration that surrounds them are a hangover from mid-19th century decisions which are simply unworkable in the present day. University Hospital Waterford with some 110 consultants is the biggest such facility in the south east and is one of eight national cancer services. Public hospitals in Wexford, Clonmel and Kilkenny all have approx 27 consultants. It is a matter of public record across the south east that services from the cancer centre at UHW have led to better services and increased survival rates in the region.

Too often, the positive outcome from sensible administration, are lost in a plethora of county council politics. The regional IDA structures in Waterford which served the south east were dismembered in 1996 by the then coalition government under political pressure within the south east to spread industrial development across the region. The result was that IDA sponsored job growth collapsed as that organisation concentrated on centres such as Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick. A three city pole strategy (Dublin, Cork and Galway) for the country emerged which to some extent sidelined Limerick city but the success of UL and pressure to form a counter point to the growth of Dublin city has seen Limerick emerge with very strong job creation and growth in recent years. The 2015 decision of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to reappoint a regional manager to Waterford (in a political acknowledgement of the economic damage caused by the lack of such staff in Waterford since 1996) for the south east underlines the necessity to take a focused regional approach to such things. Already several major new industries such as Nypro and West Pharma have located in Waterford and this will surely benefit the wider region. A coherent planning regime under one council for Waterford city and its environs north and south of the Suir would surely be highly advantageous in job creation terms. Waterford city has been designated as a Gateway city under the old National Spatial Strategy, but there is no real evidence that government policy in education, industrial development and especially health support that status.

The 2013 brief on the appointment of consultants to consider the merger of Waterford city and county councils says it all really:

“There is an urgent need to do more to halt the economic, physical and social decline of Waterford City and County. In order to arrest this decline and to improve the City centre, it is necessary to introduce measures to revitalise the economy of the City and County with innovative proposals, an injection of investment and a mix of public and private sustainable developments which will greatly enhance its physical attractiveness and bring people back to work, shop, visit, engage in recreation and learning and to live in the centre of Ireland’s oldest City.”

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