

Background

Since its inception in 1925, Clonmel and County Tipperary Chamber of Commerce has served its mission be the primary collective voice of businesses in Clonmel and County Tipperary. Through successful development and promotion of the region, we work with other interested stakeholders to encourage economic growth through the recruitment of quality businesses and industries to the area, in turn contributing to the overall economic health of the community.

As a membership organisation for businesses across County Tipperary, the Chamber of Commerce provides a forum for business growth. This is enabled by provision of the tools to grow business through networking, information sharing, education and peer-learning events as well as representation activities on behalf of our members. In this context, it is critical that the voice of business in Clonmel and County Tipperary is clearly heard in the creation of the National Planning Framework, as key decisions are made on the approach to future development and investment in Ireland. As the stated intent of the framework includes the determination of “shared national development goals” and provision of “greater clarity for private sector investment”, the voice of business must be captured as a specific input to the process.

Current State

Before speaking to recommendations for action to support the future needs of Clonmel and County Tipperary, it is worth acknowledging some of the strategic strengths of our region. Each of these provides a basis for current success and economic value to the county, but each in turn offers an opportunity for significant growth and development in the future, with the right investment and support. Specific elements of note include:

- As a strongly **agricultural region**, County Tipperary relies heavily on appropriate supports for agri-business from local, national and European agencies. As increased automation and consolidation in this sector leads to reduced employment in farming, we have seen the very substantial development and growth in related food businesses across the county, culminating in networks such as the Tipperary Food Producers who independently promote and market locally produced produce from the county.
- County Tipperary is home to a number of outstanding **tourist attractions**, including the Rock of Cashel, the Glen of Aherlow, Cahir Castle, Lough Derg and the River Suir. These attractions form the basis of a steady flow of visitors to the region throughout the tourist season.
- County Tipperary has proven an attractive location for **foreign direct investment** with a large network of multinationals in the region. With companies such as Abbott, Boston Scientific, Merck Sharpe & Dohme and Amneal based in the county, it provides a positive reflection on the benefits of County Tipperary to international investors, particularly from the perspective of access to ports and airports, the regulatory environment, the availability of a highly skilled and highly educated workforce and the support of both local and national government and related agencies.

- The **motorway network** connects the county towns, and therefore centres of business, to larger urban centres as well as ports and airports. This network is a key to maintaining strong trading links in and out of the county.

Recommendations

With a view to describing how Clonmel and County Tipperary might be developed to support a vision of a transformed Ireland in 2040, the specific areas that warrant development and investment in our region are:

- As acknowledged in the National Planning Framework, Executive Summary, Issues and Choices document, Ireland in 2040 will have an increased population, with the number of people aged over 65 more than doubling in that time. As a result, access to effective and appropriate **healthcare** will be critical to support a vibrant and successful society. Therefore, provision of a network of primary care centres across the county is essential. In addition, retention of appropriate secondary health services in the county, including Tipperary General Hospital in Clonmel, is critical, as an essential support for tertiary services in the broader region, while providing a key support for a local workforce.
- An array of **sporting events and festivals** across County Tipperary (G.A.A. in Semple Stadium, Junction and Busking Festivals in Clonmel, Agricultural shows in Clonmel, Nenagh, Dualla, Bansha) provide a framework for community engagement and enhanced wellbeing across the county as well as an opportunity to attract residents to local businesses. An enhanced structure of support and investment in such events would provide the basis of enhancing their connection with a broader consumer base.
- To enhance the connectivity of business across County Tipperary to key infrastructural nodes (ports, airports, cities, universities), it is necessary to maintain the quality of the existing motorway network (M7, M8, M9), while enhancing key links to Waterford and Limerick by **upgrading the N24 to motorway** standard.
- The continued demand for a highly educated workforce to support local business should be satisfied by creation of a **university status institution** for the south east of the country. This will complement the services provided by the network of Institutes of Technology in the region.
- Provision of high quality **broadband connectivity** across the county has already transitioned from a luxury to an absolute necessity for sustaining an effective business environment. The requirement for high speed network access is a minimum expectation for business centres. However, the growing trend for mobile and remote working arrangements across businesses, large and small, defines the need for high quality, high reliability, and high speed broadband for all parts of the county as an absolute necessity.
- Like many other regions, the town centres in County Tipperary face the challenge of falling occupancy and reduced customer traffic. To re-energise our **town centres**, specific support measures to revitalise these areas, with the allocation of capital funds for projects to enhance civic and commercial spaces are critical. Developing our lakes, rivers and historical buildings as cultural centres and attractions, for visitors and residents alike, is a wonderful opportunity to increase traffic into the towns. Bringing life back to our towns will create a

refreshed sense of community in our urban areas and a steady flow of consumers to local businesses.

- As the location of some amazing tourist attractions, County Tipperary is also home to a vast array of untapped opportunity. Focused activity to increase visitor traffic to some of our natural resources would provide massive returns. The River Suir is a grossly underutilised amenity with opportunity for hiking, water sports as well as fishing developments. The recently opened River Suir Blueway is a great addition to Clonmel and should be seen as the starting point of initiatives, rather than the end. The confluence of the Comeragh, Galtee and Knockmealdown mountains offers a unique opportunity to explore the wonders of walking, hiking or horse-riding through some stunning landscapes. The county is also home to an array of historical sites and museums, which with some planning could be connected and developed into a historical trail of interest. Careful and targeted investments and supports are required to develop these **tourist amenities** in parallel to the more traditional sites such as the Rock of Cashel.
- As a key industrial centre, Clonmel is home to a number of multi-nationals, most in the Life-Sciences sector (pharmaceutical and medical devices). To enable the continued development and growth of this **life-sciences hub**, investment in the Northern Water Supply Reservoir in Clonmel is essential to support the potential development of over 300 acres of a strategic land bank owned by the IDA and County Tipperary County Council at Ballingarrane near Clonmel.
- Given County Tipperary's strong agricultural heritage, it is not surprising to see the development of a cluster of food and drink producing businesses across the county. For both artisan and broader commercial producers, the quality of raw materials combined with a trusted provenance for Tipperary produce has seen the growth of a number of recognised experts in their field. Investment in the development of a **Food Centre of Excellence** in County Tipperary would harness this expertise and collective value to create real opportunity for further growth and leverage opportunities presented by the convergence of tourism and food.

Conclusion

Clonmel and County Tipperary have a long and successful history in growing and sustaining businesses across many sectors. However, many challenges exist to that status, which without specific and strategic investment, will lead to a significant reduction in the ability of business to thrive in our county. From international factors, including Brexit and U.S. Economic and Foreign policy decisions, to global business trends, we have seen a number of key employers in the county announce the closure of their businesses (Ranbaxy, SuirPharma, Coty). As a cascade from these announcements, the impact to local, smaller businesses is very significant. Every opportunity must be taken to provide an infrastructure for Ireland in 2040 that supports business, large and small, to thrive and grow. We hope this document describes some of the key interventions that would support the creation of this future. If we can be of any further assistance, please contact us at

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