



**Limerick  
Chamber**  
Advancing business together

## LIMERICK CHAMBER

Mid West Business Priorities  
for General Election

2020



@LimerickChamber

# INTRODUCTION

**Limerick Chamber is the largest business representative body in the Mid West, with over 450 member organisations supporting in excess of 50,000 jobs across the region.**

A shared vision for what a city or region aspires to be in the future must inform the policy decisions and infrastructure initiatives that affect a city's development pattern and growth trajectory. These decisions invariably inform the choices people make about where to live and also businesses make about where to locate.

The new Government that will be formed after the election on February 8 must underpin the ambitions for regional development that have been advanced by Project Ireland 2040 and the draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). The overpopulated and congested nature of our Capital is undermining our competitiveness on the international stage and in this context Limerick Chamber calls on the new Government to appoint a Minister for City Regions with responsibility for developing an effective regional counterbalance.

Furthermore, the new Government must take the decisions that are essential for Limerick's future growth. This necessarily includes support for the election of a Directly Elected Mayor and the infrastructure preparations for the impending Ryder Cup in 2026.

## 1. CITY CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

A sense of "Place" that can serve all Limerick's citizens must be at the heart of any new Programme for Government. By emphasising the importance of community in how we work and do business, we are far more likely to successfully create a sustainable, balanced, and progressive economy.

Investing in our urban environment has direct business benefits, improves quality of life, and generates tangible savings in welfare and health spending. Building vibrant, living towns and cities represents a win-win scenario for a wide range of personal, private and public interests.

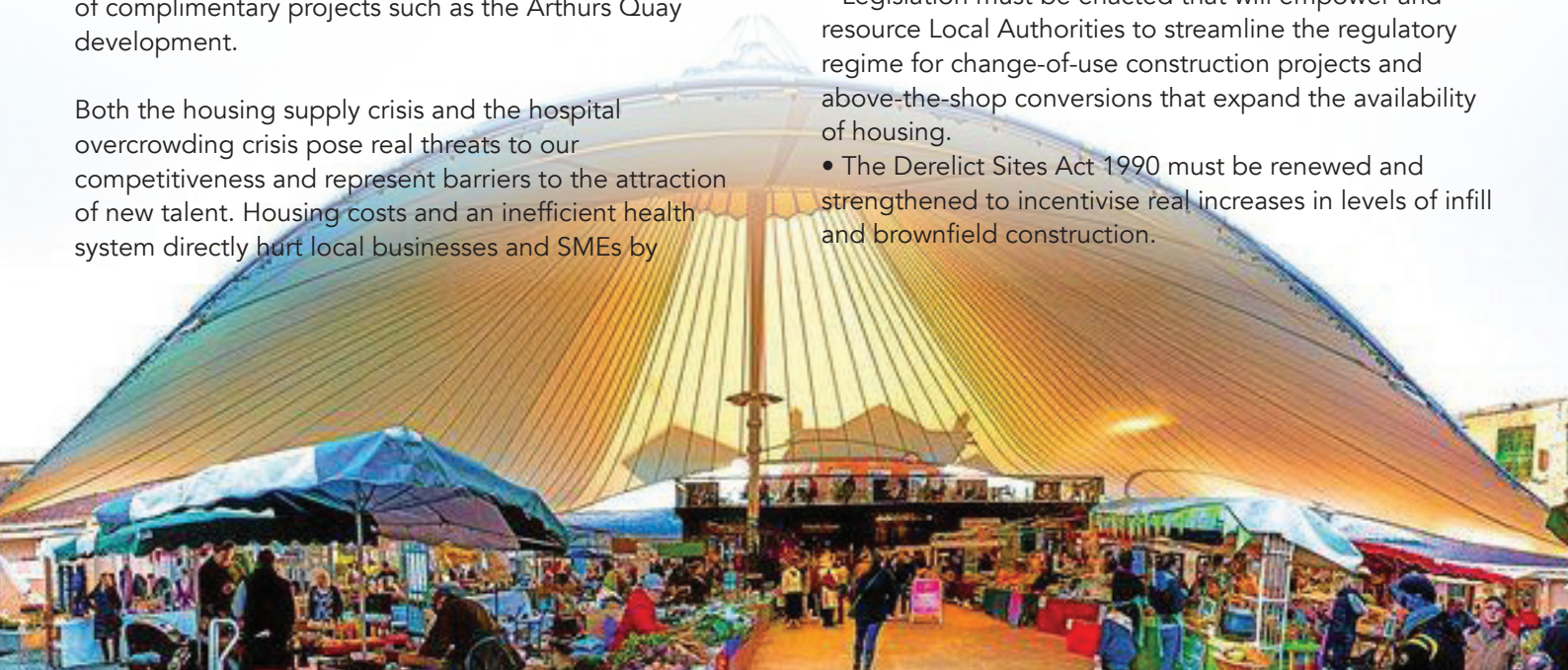
Shopping habits and retail are both in continuous development. Furthermore, a lack of population density and the growth of suburban shopping centres is contributing to consistently low levels of footfall within regional city centres. With the loss of retail activity, cities are also losing attractiveness, vitality and liveability. The new Government must recognise and promote city development plans, in particular Limerick 2030. A number of key sites identified in the plan, notably the Opera Site and Cleeves, will play a vital role in reviving the city centre and ensuring the successful delivery of complimentary projects such as the Arthurs Quay development.

Both the housing supply crisis and the hospital overcrowding crisis pose real threats to our competitiveness and represent barriers to the attraction of new talent. Housing costs and an inefficient health system directly hurt local businesses and SMEs by

making it harder to hire and retain key staff. Housing costs in particular lead to increased wage demands incommensurate with domestic growth that exacerbates the recruitment challenges companies are reporting in every sector of the economy.

An increased stock of appropriate and affordable housing is essential if Ireland is to sustain let alone increase current levels of foreign direct investment. The new Government's Programme must focus on initiatives that are targeted to the needs of the disproportionately affected younger members of the workforce. Limerick Chambers call on the Government to:

- Promote city development plans, in particular Limerick 2030 as well as other strategic development sites such as the Limerick Docklands and Arthurs Quay.
- Increase investment in public health service provision while ensuring VFM
- The Living City Initiative should be expanded to include long term vacant commercial properties built post-1915 in the cities and NPF towns across the country and reformed to include acquisition costs of LCI qualifying properties.
- Legislation must be enacted that will empower and resource Local Authorities to streamline the regulatory regime for change-of-use construction projects and above-the-shop conversions that expand the availability of housing.
- The Derelict Sites Act 1990 must be renewed and strengthened to incentivise real increases in levels of infill and brownfield construction.





## 2. CONNECTIVITY

### Roads

The current transport network does not adequately support connectivity in the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan area. The economic crisis in the early part of the century resulted in significantly reduced road infrastructure investment. In particular the Mid West regional and national road network remains incomplete. Limerick Chamber firmly contends that the Limerick Northern Distributor Road (LNDR), will provide significant opportunities for economic growth in the region. The LNDR is however currently not included in the National Development Plan (NDP) and must instead be financed from the Local Authorities' limited resources.

Furthermore, urban centres across the regions continue to be poorly connected to each other. This must be addressed if Limerick, in cooperation with Cork, Galway and Waterford, is to provide an effective counterbalance to Dublin as mandated by the National Planning Framework (NPF). Improved connectivity between Ireland's second and third largest cities is vital for sustainable and balanced economic growth within the Mid West and Southern regions. Limerick chamber asks that:

- The new Government put Exchequer regional and local road grant funding in place to progress the LNDR scheme through the planning process to the construction stage.
- Delivery of key Project Ireland 2040 road infrastructure projects is completed, most notably the M20 Cork-Limerick motorway and the N69 Foynes to Limerick upgrade. Furthermore, the new Government should ensure that the delivery of Adare bypass is prioritised given that Adare will host the Ryder Cup in 2026.

### Air Transport

As an island nation, aviation plays a crucial role in connecting Ireland to the global economy. The ability of firms located in Ireland to do business internationally, and the attractiveness of Ireland for foreign firms, labour, and tourists depends on aviation. The dependency of economic growth in Ireland on aviation is strongly emphasised in the Irish National Aviation Policy (NAP).

The NAP in its current format means that many goals outlined in Project Ireland 2040 cannot be achieved. While national and regional policy (i.e. Project Ireland 2040 and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies) recognise the strategic importance of airport infrastructure for economic growth, no targets have been set for the development of airports outside of the Capital. Furthermore, no formal links exist at present between route development and FDI strategy. This runs completely counter to the 'clustering' principle that is the key theoretical foundation for future economic growth in the regions. For too long aviation policy has only been viewed through the lens of cargo and tourism. More attention must be placed on the role of aviation in supporting the development of intellectual capital, which is crucial for modern economic development in a globalised world. Limerick chamber recommends that:

- The National Aviation Policy (NAP) be reviewed so that the goals of Project Ireland 2040 can be achieved. NAP must demonstrably strengthen the role of airports as key strategic assets for balanced regional development.
- An enhanced suite of strategic routes from airports outside of the capital are developed as a matter of urgency.
- The costs and benefits of increasing the number of Irish airports eligible for state aid is reassessed so that alternative policy instruments are established to secure balanced regional growth.
- NAP is aligned far more clearly with current Enterprise Policy.

### 3. PUBLIC AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

Traffic and road capacity are not the inevitable result of growth, they are instead a product of very deliberate choices that have been made to shape our cities around the unbounded use of private cars. If increased urbanisation is to be sustainable then the promotion of other modes of transport such as walking, cycling, and public transport must be supported in a real way that moves far beyond the lip service that has been paid thus far. At its core transport policy must:

- Facilitate car free living in the built-up areas of regional cities;
- Make inner city areas more affordable and attractive places to live;
- Reverse societal preoccupation with suburban living.

Approximately 42 per cent of Ireland's energy needs are associated with transport. As a significant contributor to Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions, the new Government must invest in a rapid adoption of transport options that are sustainable and will enable the challenging carbon reduction goals that have been set in Climate Action Plan 2019 to be achieved. Limerick Chamber recommends:

- A significant investment in cycling and walking infrastructure that is benchmarked so that funds can be directed away from the use of the private car in a structured manner.
- Implementation of the long standing Coke Zero Bike Scheme commitment to extend multiple stations on the North-side of Limerick City, LIT's Moylish campus and UL as a priority.
- The implementation of 'Bus Connects' projects in all the regional cities.
- An increased commitment to the decarbonisation of public transport, particularly in cities. This requires significant investment in bio-fuelled vehicles, the electrification of trains and buses as well as the establishment of corridors so that public transport is prioritised in regional city spatial development strategies.

### 4. PRODUCTIVITY AND SKILLS

Alignment of education and training capacity in a region to the current and future structure of the jobs market is fundamental to preserving strong employment levels as well as attracting new FDI. As we rapidly approach 'full employment', employers face increased challenges related to productivity, sourcing employees with the right training, and skills mismatches in the workforce. As such, it should be as easy as possible for businesses to access skills and training provision for their employees.

A resilient economy will exhibit robust increases in job creation and the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) have a key role to play in supporting this growth. Student enrolment is set to increase significantly over the next decade, however, HEIs continue to be underfunded. Given the crucial role that HEIs will play in addressing the skills shortage that is emerging across several industries, increased funding is required as a matter of urgency. Limerick Chamber calls on the new Government to:

- Increase core, capital and research funding for HEIs.
- Improve the use of the National Training Fund to support in-work training and education.



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