

Simon Musial

From: Michael Nevin <mnevin@leo.longfordcoco.ie>
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To: RSES
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Malachy,

I made a number of observations at the consultation session in Tullamore on the 4th December last and I submit comments on same.

My comments relate primarily to the economic chapter of the draft plan and as they are more or less opinion I wouldn't expect them to impact significantly on the actual draft.

I do believe strongly however, that some of the RPO's for County Longford need to be redefined to reflect more accurately our ambition as a County. I know Jim met some of our executive before Christmas and I see revised RPO's down via email this week which will hopefully help address this area.

My first comment relates to the attempt to try and achieve regional balance or the attempt to stop the greater Dublin area from growing exponentially relative to the rest of the EMRA region.

Dublin is indeed an international city and the real urban centre of scale in Ireland and given the history over the last 20 years the ambition to manage an orderly growth has merit but may prove difficult as it continues to absorb the energy in terms of investment, jobs and infrastructure.

At some point in the future there may be need to have a regional policy based on **actual positive discrimination**. This would be a central planned approach where certain sectoral development or investment would be precluded from Dublin, forced to establish outside the greater Dublin region.

Initial focus would be on sectors that are currently listed in APJs and Regional Enterprise Strategy for the greater Dublin area as sectoral areas offering further opportunities for development (page 94 of draft) but in reality, are now lower value sectors that don't necessarily need to be in Dublin.

If the future of Dublin is in FinTech, Corptech and other high value sectors then further investment in sectors such as manufacture, logistics, administration etc. doesn't make sense and is clogging up the arteries Dublin needs to be a modern, vibrant city. Positive encouragement to locate these type businesses in the regions helps create regional balance.

A related point is distance from the centre of Dublin and the desire of international companies to locate in or close to Dublin.

From an international perspective and with some imaginative thought it would not be a tall stretch to classify the whole EMRA region as being part of the Greater Dublin area.

I expect that in China or the United States in some of the great cities it would take you ninety minutes or more to get to the city centre from some part of its hinterland. Ninety minutes from Longford and we are in the centre of Dublin so as a Chinese investor I could potentially be located in Longford in the Grater Dublin Area. This might not wash politically but in my opinion would be a more inclusive approach than the Outer Region that has been referenced on a number of occasions.

I commented on the retail sector at the consultation session and I believe that a more robust strategy is needed to establish viable retail cores in each town and village in Ireland. This will include a recognition that the sector is contracting, that current retail footprints are too large and that any public realm or infrastructural improvements need to be concentrated on those areas that support future designated retail cores.

The temptation related to current urban-based funds is to enhance infrastructure to try and maintain the current retail footprint size in towns and villages but that is fighting against an irreversible tide.

The current footprint will need to be redefined based on greater diversification of space to include residential and professional services. This diversification needs to be co-ordinated to ensure that the focus is concentrated on designing and developing urban communities. The priority for future funding streams should be to support efforts to facilitate that diversification.

Regional Policy Objectives

In relation to the RPO's, the initial RPO's for Longford were not the strongest and needed to be revised. The latest RPOs are stronger and I whilst I might suggest amendments to them, others might think that they accurately reflect our position.

I like the RPO 4.48 for Portlaoise on carbon because it suggests that Portlaoise is trying to achieve a higher order objective than the other towns in the midlands. This is what might give Towns competitive advantage.

The new RPO's for Longford while realistic don't stretch our ambition to any great extent.

I would like to see an RPO specific to employment. As referenced in your revised document 'The town has a particularly high ratio of jobs to resident workers' and Longford has further potential to build on this strength. I would like to include an RPO like: ***The continued development of Longford Town as a strategic employment hub, particularly attractive as a location for firms with a national market reach.***

The tourism objective while admirable is based on an infrastructural weakness around accommodation that undermines its short term ability to become a tourism hub if hub means a point where visitors can base themselves for a duration. (RPO 4.0) . Your new draft reads:

Support the development of Longford as a tourism hub having regard to its accessibility to key attractions such as Center Parcs, and cross regional recreational opportunities such as the Royal Canal Dublin to Westport Greenway, the Rebel Longford Trail and the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.

I would replace with something like ***Expand Longford Town's potential to become a significant tourism reference centre having regard to its accessibility to key attractions such as Center Parcs, and the lattice of national and regional tourism trails that include Longford Town as a key axis point.***

Your following two objectives could be merged in my opinion

RPO: To promote the consolidation of the town centre with a focus on the regeneration of underused buildings and strategic sites and the establishment of residential uses to encourage greater vibrancy outside of business hours and the enhancement of the public realm.

RPO 4.39: To enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within the town centre to create a pedestrian focused environment and to improve links between the core and surrounding areas through the further development of walking and cycling routes and improved public transport.

to read ***To promote the consolidation of the town centre with a focus on the regeneration of underused buildings and strategic sites, enhanced accessibility and sustainable mobility and an imaginative approach towards the future development of in-town residential communities.***

Your final RPO is fine although I think it could reference the potential for the new communities that now make up a sizable percentage of our population to add real value going forward. It currently reads;

Support social inclusion measures including the revitalisation of areas by physical regeneration, planning, investment and community development and measures to improve educational attainment levels, up skilling in key competencies and skills acquisition.

I would suggest Invest in community development and social inclusion measures that maximise the opportunities for everyone including the large population from the 'new communities' to contribute positively to the future economic, social and cultural well-being of Longford Town.

In conclusion, I think the draft RSES is robust.

The main assurance I would be seeking at political level is an assurance that public bodies and utility companies would not be able to use the strategy as the basis for denying investment in critical infrastructure if a particular location such as Longford can put forward a viable business case that justifies further investment.

Center Parcs is the case in point where entities like Gas Network Ireland conceded that a justifiable case existed to install the required infrastructure. If GNI had used a spatial planning document as a basis for denying Longford that critical infrastructure the Center Parcs project could have been lost to the County.

Areas outside the Greater Dublin area need to be agile and opportunistic in their efforts to attract investment. Any plan then should support all areas to maximise their potential.

I believe that your plan is flexible enough to accommodate the ambition of all

Regards

Michael

Michael Nevin
Head of Enterprise
Longford County Council
Email: mnevin@longfordcoco.ie

Tel: 086 8042005

Office: 04333 43346

www.youtube.com/longfordtourism

