

Submission to the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

by the Bray Chamber of Commerce

21st January 2019

Re: Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region

This submission is made in response to the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region published in November 2018. It is informed by the ideas and thinking of the business community of Bray as represented by the Bray Chamber of Commerce and following inputs made to the Bray Municipal District Local Area Plan 2017 – 2023.

This submission is in addition to the previous submission made by the Bray Retailers Group in February 2018 at the stage of raising issues pertaining to the future spatial and economic development of the region.

A. Vision

The business community of Bray fully supports the RSES vision statement:

“To create a sustainable and competitive region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all” (p4)

The business community fully supports the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) included in the RSES and specifically the strategy to intensify development along transport corridors. The business community note the significance of development in Bray as part of the North-South Corridor plan that reads:

North – South Corridor (Northern/south-eastern commuter lines and DART expansion programme)
“The DART Expansion Programme proposes electrification of the Northern commuter line, which is estimated to be delivered by 2027 and will support increased capacity at key nodes, including ongoing large-scale urban expansion of the North Fringe of the city served by Clongriffin Station and continued residential development in Donabate. On the south-eastern line, there is capacity for new residential communities served by a new station at Woodbrook - Shanganagh, for consolidation of Bray town centre and extension westwards to Old Conna and Fassaroe, linked to improved public transport connections.” (p70)

B. Settlement typology

Bray is identified as a Key Town of the Dublin Metropolitan Area. Its future spatial development and economic prosperity are closely tied to the economic growth of Dublin and its environs.

The business community fully endorse the assertion that the Core Strategy of Wicklow County Council should apply higher densities to developments in the Key Town of Bray (p40) together with

the possibility for headroom of up to 50% on existing lands zoned for residential development to increase population growth (p42).

This is in accordance with the business community's emphasis on initiatives that will propel the development of the town through the following drivers:

- Significant residential development specifically close to the town centre
- Significant improvement of traffic flow to and through the town centre
- Maintaining the retail hierarchy and the prominence of the Bray town centre as the primary retail destination in the Bray Municipal District
- Promotion of Bray town as a destination for FDI and indigenous investment to yield a significant increase in the number of jobs in the town.

Regional Policy Objective 4.28

The business community fully support the policy objective to:

"Support the continued development of Bray including the enhancement of town centre functions, increased employment opportunities and the westward extension of the town, linked to the delivery of key infrastructure including Bray-Fassaroe public transport links." (p55)

In the light of this objective, the business community urge all key stakeholders to embrace the future compact development of Bray town allowing for increased building heights and densities on lands close to the town centre that are available for mixed use redevelopment.

At the same time, as per previous submissions and as identified also in this draft RSES, Bray urgently needs investment in transport infrastructure which should include the extension of the LUAS Green Line to Bray town centre, expansion of the transport hub at Bray DART Station and reconfiguration and easing of the traffic flow through the town centre with the introduction of strategically positioned roundabouts and restrictions on motorists making right turns 'against the oncoming traffic'.

These improvements should be accompanied by a comprehensive strategy to lessen car dependency in the town and enable other modes of transport, especially cycling and the use of e-scooters. To incentivise the use of these alternative modes of transport, the business community will work with other stakeholders to bring about changes to the layout of streets and signage and to advocate a lowering of speed to 30km/h in the town centre which will make it safer for other road users.

The redevelopment of our town (residential, commercial and with improved infrastructure) should thus follow the *Guiding Principles for Integration of Land Use and Transport* including the '10 minute' settlement concept, whereby a range of community facilities and services will be accessible within short walking and cycling distances from homes or be accessible via high quality public transport to the town centre. (p145)

C. Sustainable development

The business community recognises that the future of Bray town depends on our ability as businesses, residents, community organisations, social agencies and the local authority to work together to achieve a transition of our local economy to a low carbon, circular, smart and environment-friendly economy.

We are optimistic that together we can create a town that is more walkable and easy to access by alternative modes of transport, with a range of offers and services at the doorstep of many

residents. We hope this will encourage more frequent visits to the town that do not require the use of cars and will result in an increase of daily shopping trips.

Our greatest asset is our natural setting on the coast with the backdrop of the Wicklow mountains. Both residents and businesses are conscious of our responsibility to preserve our environment and that it is in our economic interest to do so.

Regional Policy Objective 7.41

The business community fully support the policy objective aimed at decarbonising transport and promoting the accommodation of electric vehicles in our town that reads:

“Local Authorities shall include proposals in statutory land use plans to facilitate and encourage an increase in electric vehicle use, including measure for more recharging facilities and prioritisation of parking for EVs in central locations.”

Regional Policy Objective 9.7

The business community applauds the emphasis on vibrant urban spaces and the emphasis on urban design and placemaking activities that revive the vibrancy of town centres.

The business community fully supports the policy objective that reads:

“Local Authorities shall support the preparation of Design Guidelines to provide for improvements in the appearance of streetscapes and for revitalising spaces for example with cost effective, temporary uses that build on the longer-term vision for space.”

Regional Policy Objective 6.11

The business community endorses placemaking in our town centre as a key mechanism for town centre rejuvenation.

The business community view placemaking as the processes which improve the design and experience of the public realm. These processes require collaboration between the local authority and other role players such as the retailers in the town centre, the Tidy Towns organisation and various organisations and local groups that organise events and activities to animate the public spaces.

The business community welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of a Placemaking Strategy for the town centre as per the policy objective that reads:

“Local Authorities shall include objectives in Development Plans and Local Area Plans supporting emphasis on placemaking for town centres, for example through inclusion of a Placemaking Strategy for towns and implementation of Town Centre Renewal Plans.”

D. Retail and Tourism

The business community fully supports the classification of Bray town centre as a Major Town Centre – Level 2 in the Eastern and Midlands Region’s retail hierarchy. (p98)

Of concern is the limited attention given in land use policy frameworks to the fundamental changes in consumer preferences that are trending towards online shopping and where the need for retail floor spaces to hold ‘acres of stock’ is becoming redundant. These trends are however ignored when local authorities still pursue a logic of increasing retail space in proportion to population growth when zoning for new development.

There is adequate retail space in Bray town centre once the Florentine Centre is completed. The challenge is to ensure quality development and promotion of the town centre experience, in particular the leisure and hospitality offer.

Regional Policy Objective 6.13

The business community fully support the policy objective that reiterates the dominant role of town centres for the provision of retail and leisure uses, that reads:

“EMRA will support the use of targeted financial incentives to re-establish the dominant role of town centres provided for in planning policy to encourage a greater take up of town centre development opportunities for retail, residential, commercial, and leisure uses.”

Bray town has a well established tourism brand which reflects the attractiveness of its natural environment, especially the beach front and the amenities that complement the enjoyment derived by thousands of visitors who avail of the coastal setting including the cliff walks. The leisure and hospitality offer continue to improve and expand.

Regional Policy Objective 6.18

The business community propose that Bray town be identified as a ‘Destination Town’ as per the policy objective that reads:

“EMRA will work with Local Authorities and Fáilte Ireland to identify destination towns within the Region for the prioritisation of investment and supports to drive tourism growth in the Region.”

Regional Policy Objective 6.14

The business community intend to actively participate and contribute to the enhancement of the visitor experience in Bray town and in this regard will contribute to the development of Visitor Experience Development Plans as per the policy objective that reads:

“Support the preparation and implementation of Visitor Experience Development Plans within the Region to underpin the overarching regional tourism brands and to deliver greater tourism benefits and to promote the natural and cultural assets of the Region.”

E. Future Employment and Enterprise Development

In Chapter 6 of the RSES, an approach for identifying, nurturing and developing new industry or expanding existing footholds in specific sectors is outlined which requires the following principles to be included in the analysis for local spatial enterprise strategies (p88):

- **Smart specialisation:** Consultation with local and national stakeholders to consider the strengths and potential of a locality for specific industry sectors using the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process
- **Clustering:** Identification of the local components of existing industries, together with appropriate cross-sectorial services and local supply chains, to assess the potential to expand and deepen the local business ecosystem and to strengthen the competitive advantages of the locality
- **Orderly growth:** Identification of locations for strategic employment development that take in consideration the principal goal to achieve compact growth (not sprawl), which underpins priorities for sustainable infrastructure development and connectedness between local work places and local networks of skills and talent

- *Placemaking*: Identification of a wide range of elements and activities in the locality that can be improved and promoted to enhance its investment potential and to influence the decisions of international and local business leaders and entrepreneurs as to where to establish, invest or expand their business
- *Future proofing and risk management*: Collaboratively planning for threats and opportunities – from local to global perspectives – which will impact on the future employment and enterprise development in Bray

The Bray Chamber of Commerce intends to work with Wicklow County Council to re-establish a town team for Bray as recommended in the Wicklow Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 – 2022 (LECP). It is foreseen that a primary role for this team will be to engage with all stakeholders to develop a vision and strategy for the town while also making use of the above principles.

The business community fully agree with the following summary in Chapter 6 of the RSES:

“In general, companies are attracted to invest in locations where they can access human capital (skills and talent), higher education institutes and lifelong learning prone environments, where people will want to live and work and where the surrounding infrastructures are supportive of business. It is a combination of factors, such as innovation capacity in the location, continuous flow of infrastructure investments to ensure connectivity, competitive services and amenities, property solutions, housing, quality of life, and access to trade and markets, that delivers efficiencies, economies of scale and wider societal benefits.” (p88)

The following High Level Goals of the Wicklow LECP underpins future employment and enterprise development in Bray:

- Goal 6: *Develop infrastructure and measures that are positive and supportive to investment, enterprise, innovation and knowledge creation in strategic locations*
- Goal 7: *Sustain existing enterprise and develop quality employment and income opportunities for the wide range of employment needs in the County, with possibilities for reversing commuting patterns*
- Goal 8: *Capitalise on Wicklow’s unique attributes and proximity to the Dublin market, excellent quality of life, human capital, tourism, landscape, marine, agricultural and forestry resources*
- Goal 9: *Support a shift towards low carbon and climate change resilient economic activity, reducing energy dependence, promoting the sustainable use of resources and leading in the Smart Green Economy*

The LECP also identified a number of weaknesses which could be addressed with a future local spatial enterprise strategy for Bray namely:

- Meeting future infrastructure needs and dependency on outside agencies to deliver
- Lack of inward investment
- Traffic congestion on the N11/M11/M50 bottleneck
- High level of residents commuting to work outside of the County
- High vacancy levels of commercial sites
- Insufficient alignment between training and education and employer needs and trends

The business community fully support the guiding principle for growth in the Dublin metropolitan area that reads:

Better alignment of growth

“Target ‘catch up’ investment to support employment, infrastructure and amenity provision and/or sustainable transport links in towns that have experienced a high level of population growth but are reliant on other areas for employment and/or services.” (p67)

This targeted approach for investment to support new employment reinforces the aim in the MASP to support employment generation in strategic locations of which Bray is mentioned as one of the proposed future employment districts. (p80)

In this regard, the Bray Chamber of Commerce has commissioned an explorative study to identify possibilities and opportunities for expanding and deepening a Life Sciences cluster in Bray with its convenient proximity to several Life Sciences firms in South County Dublin and North Wicklow.

Ireland has developed a leading position in Europe within the multi-billion euro Bio Pharma, API Pharma and Medical Devices industries which are projected to continue to grow in double digit percentages for the next twenty years. Bray has an established record for attracting Foreign Direct Investment, currently with seven IDA client companies. Bray is well located in the South County Dublin/North Wicklow area where a number of Life Sciences multi-nationals have settled.

To attract new Life Sciences investment to locate in Bray will require answers to questions such as:

- What future transport infrastructure investment, specifically in public transport (rail, tram and bus) and cycle networks, will be committed to improve mobility for employees and clients?
- What future communications infrastructure investment, specifically for next generation broadband, dark fibre and mobile networks, will be committed to ensure capacity to support local new businesses with ‘ready to go’ installations and rapid scaling?
- How will future residential and amenity development in Bray contribute to affordable housing for employees (local population as well as immigrants) while maintaining a high standard for quality of life?
- How does Bray compare with other localities in the Dublin Metropolitan Area for ‘ease of living’ and with potential competitor locations of Life Sciences clusters in other parts of Europe?
- What are the characteristics of the pipeline for start-ups and scale-ups in the Dublin metropolitan area that could support talent development and innovation in an expanding Life Sciences cluster in Bray?
- How will inter-agency collaboration (e.g. IDA, SFI, EI, Skillnet, Wicklow LEO, KWETB) contribute with incentives to attract new Life Sciences multi-nationals to Bray?
- Which cultural and natural environment features will position Bray internationally as a place of interest?

The main focus will be to deepen a future Life Sciences cluster in Bray by establishing a new innovation campus in Bray with facilities for incubation and acceleration, specifically for R&D collaboration between multi-national companies with local SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups. The aim will be to attract leading international Life Sciences research universities to establish their European base for applied research (post-doctoral) on the Bray campus. Such a campus will be a driver with multiplier effects for multi-nationals and SMEs to locate as well as providers of associated technologies, services and others in the supply chain. The location of the campus should be determined by reaching agreement with private sector property developers who are committed to redevelop existing commercial and industrial premises in Bray to AAA grade facilities.

F. Conclusion

The future development of Bray town and its environs in the Municipal District in the next ten to fifteen years will be a period of escalation in construction activity and a phase to welcome a fast growing new population.

This is not just an economic opportunity for local businesses but will also achieve a strategic objective for the Dublin metropolitan area and for the EMRA region to serve as an appropriate location for compact development as identified in the RSES.

The business community of Bray town is mindful that the development process will require local leadership and commitment both to maintain high standards in the built environment and to minimise the negative impacts on our natural environment.

The next ten to fifteen years will lay the foundation for a new era in the history of our town. The settlement pattern will result in a much more pronounced urban grain with increased building heights and more people living in close proximity to the town centre. The business community will in collaboration with the local authority and other local stakeholders take on the challenge of ensuring that all these new developments and changes will lead to an improvement in the quality of life of all the residents in our town.

