



**Shannon
Chamber**
Advancing business together

CLARE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022 -2028

Shannon Chamber Submission to Public Consultation

Issues Paper

November 2020

Preface

Shannon Chamber welcomes this opportunity to partake in the 'Pre-Draft: Phase 1 – Presentation of an Issues Paper' stage of the development of the Clare County Development Plan.

In preparing this submission, we were cognizant of the contributions we have made to a number of other 'calls for submissions' that should also be taken into account when preparing this Plan, namely: the Shannon Town Masterplan, the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS), the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) Southern Region, the National Planning Framework and, the Atlantic Economic Corridor.

Our response will therefore be presented from a macro perspective, under a set of headings and themes which match the requirements of the Issues paper, as opposed to responding to each individual suggested question presented as response prompts. Our submission will build on the extensive range of previous work and inputs to other Council and Government initiatives as mentioned above.

Our aspiration, and Clare County Council's, is that the output of the public consultation process – Stages 1- 3 - will lead to the compilation of a Plan that will be implementable within a specific timeframe to enable Co Clare:

'maximise its unique characteristics, strengths, location and connectivity to become Ireland's centre of culture, tourism, heritage and the preferred international destination for sustainable investment and innovation. A county in which citizens, visitors and all stakeholders are empowered and supported by public bodies under the leadership of a professional, responsive and progressive local government system'. (Vision for Co Clare in Clare County Development Plan 2017 – 2023).

Shannon Chamber Response to Stage 1 of the Public Consultation Process– Issues Paper

1. Introduction

Acknowledging the many challenges that Clare County Council faces in drafting this Plan, namely...

- Developing a unique identity and building on the strengths of County Clare
- Growing the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Town of Shannon, the Key Town of Ennis and other settlements throughout the County to achieve compact growth
- Reducing our carbon footprint and achieving the national target of zero emissions by 2050
- Improving mobility and accessibility for all, within and through the County in a sustainable manner
- Promoting town and village centre vibrancy and vitality with multi-functional uses including entertaining, living, gathering, shopping etc.
- Delivering a balance between social and private housing
- Living in the future and how it will be different
- Living sustainably without compromising future generations
- Accommodating the needs of an ageing population
- Providing sufficient physical and social infrastructure to support economic development and to enhance our quality of life
- Building on the provision of high-quality employment and economic opportunities at appropriate and sustainable locations

... we strongly believe that, to maximise how Co Clare benefits from and contributes to national economic and social goals, it is essential that the Plan is placed in the relevant strategic context.

In this regard, the fact that the Issues Paper recognises and documents key elements of the strategic context in which the Plan is being devised, namely, the National Planning Framework (NPF) and RSES and that Shannon Chamber has participated in and made submissions to each of the above, it is essential that this content is also considered during the deliberative process for the County Development Plan. (*Our submissions to the RSES, Southern Region, is presented as a separate pdf with this Submission*).

As Clare County Council is aware, Shannon Chamber is also currently actively engaged with the Council and stakeholders on the drafting of the Shannon Town Masterplan and the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS) and these outputs should also inform and be taken into account when drafting the County Development plan (*Summary of key points raised in our submission to LSMATS is included in Section 7 and full submission also presented as a separate pdf with this Submission*).

Shannon Chamber has been actively involved with other chambers in the West of Ireland, together with public and private stakeholders, in the development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC). The AEC has been recognised in the NPF, RSEs (Northern and Southern regions), a Government-led AEC Task Force has been established with AEC officers appointed in each local authority across the corridor and, funding has been provided to the Western Development Commission for AEC initiatives

Shannon serves as an engine of economic growth for the AEC through Shannon Airport, Shannon Free Zone and the Shannon Estuary and its position in the Limerick Shannon – Ennis – Galway portion of the corridor creates opportunities to accelerate delivery of the next iteration of the County Development Plan

The recognition of, references to, and resources available to the AEC in the wider policy and planning context should be leveraged to maximise the impact and influence of the County Development plan

2. Impact of External Shocks

The development of the County Development Plan must take account of the negative economic impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on a range of activities and sectors that are central to the economic and social well-being of the county, regions and country. This includes a catastrophic collapse in air travel at a global level, which has brought Shannon International Airport to a standstill and led to the cancellation of long-standing and viable air services. The unprecedented drop in demand for aircraft and air travel has had a knock-on effect on a range of aviation industries such as leasing, maintenance, repair and overhaul as well as tourism, ground transportation, retail and travel services.

The new Plan must take account of this current reality but most importantly, must provide a signpost and measures to accelerate recovery, namely:

- Position Shannon International Airport as the preferred international point of access to the AEC and the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW)
- Provide a planning framework that prioritises and supports multi-modal transportation of visitors between Shannon Airport and WAW attractions rather than from Dublin
- Strike a better balance between quantity and quality in visitor numbers and revenue to the county
- Build on the opportunity presented by a change in consumer and public health preferences from congested urban areas to accessible and less populated areas offering high-quality, authentic experiences grounded in a sense of place
- This opportunity can be reinforced by a County Development Plan that supports, for example:
 - An increase in private jet traffic at Shannon International Airport
 - The design and construction of combined working/living spaces in a range of locations

- Integrated multi-modal transport solutions that facilitate ease of movement between hubs of activity across the county, metro area and the AEC
- High-speed broadband connectivity which is accessible to all regardless of location or socio-economic circumstances
- Social and cultural facilities that create a better living environment and thereby increase the ability to attract skilled and creative people to live in the county

3. Utilise and Build on Opportunities to Exploit Existing Assets

The impact of the pandemic provides an opportunity and a necessity to make best-possible use of existing and underutilised assets:

- The AEC, including County Clare, has abundant natural resources that can contribute to the development of a low-carbon, high-value economy including renewable energy, agri-technology, culture and heritage (see *January 2019 submission to incoming Government 2020-2040 AEC Business Forum Manifesto Final.pdf...included with this Submission*).
- The potential for use of existing green infrastructure in Shannon for cycleways, walkways and amenity use has been highlighted during the Shannon Town Masterplan and LSMATS processes.
- The opportunity to maximise the impact of existing assets and public expenditure by piggy backing on flood relief works to add to the existing network of pedestrian and cycle friendly pathways along the river embankments.
- Shannon is based on three key components: Shannon, the Airport; Shannon, the Industrial Zone; and Shannon, the Living Town. This is a strength, but the weakness is that Shannon, the Living Town, lags behind the other two in terms of focus and investment.
- A key strength is that there is potential, without the need for major infrastructural investment, to build a Shannon brand based on integration of Shannon - the Airport, Industrial and Living Town. It is possible to live, learn and work in Shannon in a sustainable way (walk to work and school, avail of the abundant green spaces and facilities, ...) but yet be part of internationally trading and globally competitive businesses and have the ability to connect to other parts of the world through the airport.

4. Housing

- The County Development Plan must promote investment in a mix of housing types in order to enhance Shannon, the Living Town, which, in turn, will increase the potential to attract and retain the skilled workers and visitors which are essential to the future prosperity of Shannon Airport and Shannon Free Zone.

- There is an opportunity for refurbishment of Shannon’s private sector stock of housing to create opportunities for new families to purchase aspirational properties in a compact and smart urban environment.
- The requirement for additional housing in Shannon will be linked to its attractiveness as a place to live.
- Given that Shannon now has a multi-generational population, consideration should be given to providing housing to meet the specific needs of the elderly and independent-assisted living e.g. retirement village concept.
- In order to fast track solutions for individual residents and developers to the absence of serviced sites for residential development, the Council, or other State entity, must invest in the delivery of infrastructure ahead of demand by providing parcels of serviced sites for housing (roads and key services in place and sites ready for purchase).

5. Civic, Community and Creative Facilities

- Shannon is currently seen mainly as Shannon - the Airport, and Shannon – the Industrial Zone.
- Shannon the living town is a critical third component which must be integrated with the other two from a planning and policy perspective
- For the community there is a missing component: a civic, community and creative focal point to complement the strong community-led investment in sporting and leisure facilities.
- Build on Shannon’s position on the estuary and its place as both a drop-off point on (and point of international access to) the Shannon Estuary Way (a loop off the Wild Atlantic Way) and promote existing strengths of the airport lagoon and estuary mud flats and shoreline for bird watching and nature activities as highlighted by Birdwatch Ireland.
- Reinforce and reveal Shannon’s hidden gems of heritage by supporting and promoting initiatives already underway by groups such as Shannon Archaeological Society and Duchas na Sionna (original Shannon settlements before development of the new town, Hasting’s Cottage, Shannon Wetlands, ...)

6. Shannon as a Strategic Development Zone

- Shannon’s significance in economic terms is recognised by the NPF through its inclusion in the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area. This recognition should be built on by thinking of Shannon as a special economic zone that brings together an area bounded on the south by the River Shannon, to the north by the airport runway and, to the east by a line from Bunratty to the N18/N19 junction. The Plan could be even more ambitious by extending the eastern boundary to run through Sixmilebridge to Newmarket on Fergus. The northern boundary could also be extended along the back roads to Ballygirreen and Dromoland.

- Adaptable land use zoning is key to generating enterprise growth in Shannon.
- Regardless of the boundary, the main point is to think of Shannon as a living, working, multi-modal transportation zone with significant capacity for testing of all kinds of sustainable ideas. Pilot-testing new approaches that can then be applied elsewhere is part of Shannon's DNA across multiple dimensions: aviation, industry, living, education, ...
- A good current example of this approach is Future Mobility Campus Ireland, led by the private sector with substantive and practical backing from key public stakeholders such as Shannon Group plc, Enterprise Ireland, Western Development Commission, Clare County Council. Consideration should be given to developing other such innovative and education centres in which Shannon has a proven specialism e.g. aviation and med tech.
- Prepare for the future by considering and laying the groundwork in policy and planning terms for the potential of a fourth river crossing which would connect the Limerick and Clare sides of the Shannon Estuary at Shannon International Airport thereby increasing its catchment area, reducing journey times and reinforcing its place at the heart of the AEC and in the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area.

7. Transport and Infrastructure

Summary of key points from Shannon Chamber's Submission to LSMATS, which apply equally to the compilation of the Clare County Development Plan. Fill Submission pdf included with Submission.

Walking

- Improve walkways in and around Shannon to allow for better accessibility between services in the town centre, the key employment hub of the Shannon Free Zone and Shannon Airport.
- The abundant green areas in Shannon, which include a long-established network of "black paths" developed as the town was built, offer real potential for attractive and green walkways and cycleways.
- Extend the walkway/cycle way from Limerick to Bunratty to Shannon using existing riverside infrastructure – using existing green and landscaped areas, not roads.
- Refocus walkways in Shannon on the existing black path network that already exists and is extensively linked to the town.
- Upgrade the existing Shannon walkways signage to include direction indicators – develop a wayfinding system for Shannon.
- An outcome from the LSMATS should include a recommendation that a walkable neighbourhood map be created for Shannon.
- Ensure that the pedestrian environment is significantly enhanced, more attractive and safer than at present, particularly around key visitor attractions such as King John's Castle.
- Enhance wayfinding in both Shannon and Limerick City Centre with a focus, in Limerick particularly, on ensuring ease of access to key tourist sites.

Cycling

- Designate a coherent network of cycle routes and cycle hubs across Shannon which will provide access to Shannon Airport, Shannon Free Zone and Shannon Town.
- Expand the Bicycle Sharing Scheme to Shannon.
- Development of cycling and walkway from Shannon to Bunratty /Sixmilebridge and following the riverbank to Limerick
- Shannon offers significant potential for cycling and walking using the existing network of off-road and riverside pathways and rural roads.
- Consider pilot testing walk and cycle-to-school initiatives in Shannon using quiet ways based on existing pathways.
- Create long-stay parking and cycle parking hubs in Shannon, Shannon Free Zone and Shannon Airport.
- Introduce a dockless bike system for Shannon.
- Extend the cycle lane in Shannon to take in the riverside in Shannon and on to the airport; achievable through piggybacking on the upcoming flood relief works.

BusConnects

- Implement more direct inter-regional bus services between Shannon Airport and the second- tier cities of Galway and Cork.
- Assess how private operators can be licenced to operate on routes noted in our commentary on P3/4 (Section 3... comments related to P19) of this submission.
- Connect with Shannon to Limerick City Centre and other key locations such as UL and LIT via a fast frequent and reliable bus service.
- Develop Park and Ride in both directions – Shannon to Limerick and vice versa and to facilitate access to e.g. inter-city buses also.

Rail

- Shannon Chamber would recommend that the concept of light rail linking Limerick, Shannon, Sixmilebridge and Galway warrants further examination as the trend for this type of connectivity could become more beneficial in the future... given the requirement to reduce our carbon footprint; light rail might be a faster and direct method of transport and a driver of rail spur development.
 - *Our recommendation to Clare County Council, in the context of the County Development Plan, would be that land use distribution be examined vis a vis attaining the critical mass required to render rail connectivity feasible.*

- As a short-term proposal, a shuttle bus linking e.g. Sixmilebridge to Shannon might warrant consideration given that circa 40% of this ‘village’s’ population (6,000 – 7,000) commute to Shannon on a daily basis between schools and work.
- Review rail freight taking into account work on the Western Railway. The development of renewable energy (wind) along the Atlantic Economic Corridor will require interlinked and sustainable port and transport facilities.

Roads & Streets

- Upgrade the N19 approach road to Shannon Airport from the current single carriageway road layout.
- Address capacity constraints on the N19 at junctions connecting to the Business Park and Town.
- Develop a new signalised junction on the R471 at Smithstown and a new link road to connect the junction with the existing road at Smithstown.
- Upgrade the junction of L3126 and Low Road (and its approaches) at Bunratty.
- Review Shannon Town Centre parking including rationale for blocking a previous access point at the Lidl roundabout and its negative impact on traffic behaviour.
- Advance the M20 project linking Limerick and Cork and the Limerick Northern Distributor Road.
- Consideration should also be given to a future upgrade of the Limerick to Kerry route to facilitate easier access to Limerick, Shannon Airport, Galway, and the west of Ireland.

Traffic Management

- Develop an integrated coach management scheme to support traffic management measures at key locations.

Supporting Measures

- Support the development of the Connected Autonomous Vehicle (CAV)/Mobility as a Service (MaaS) sector in the Shannon area including Unmanned Ariel Vehicle (UAV) R&D.
- Consider the likelihood of future unexpected occurrences which could further alter the pattern of living and working.
- Consider the benefits of a 4th River Shannon crossing for long-term delivery. Potential to deliver a significant city of scale and enhance the served market for Shannon Airport. enhance Shannon Foynes Port, and create the potential for an orbital route around the airport and the greater Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area.

Housing – Impact on Transport

- The regeneration of cities and town will see an increase in the number of families and individuals opting for city-centre living. Consider the impact of remote working on city-centre office accommodation and the potential to regenerate such buildings to living spaces. Regeneration needs people and people needs better cycling, walking and a fast and easily accessible mode of transport.
- Rural areas will also benefit from remote and hub working but will also require access to urban areas such as Shannon and Limerick city. This trend needs to be factored into the delivery of an all-encompassing Transport Strategy.

8. Tourism

- References made in our submissions to both the RSES Southern region and the LSMATS, called for an upgrade of the road infrastructure at both Shannon Airport (N19) and Bunratty Folk Park(L3126), the former a point of entry for tourists to the western seaboard and the latter, a key tourism magnet for the region, delivering visitors to the many smaller tourism attractions dotted around the county.
- The upgrading of this road infrastructure will also benefit Shannon Town. If the many recommendations made in our submission to the LSMATS with regard to upgrading cycleways and pathways along the Shannon Estuary and connecting Shannon with Bunratty are taken on board, the potential this would present to develop a tourism product for Shannon Town would be enormous. A package of tourism products could be developed for Shannon Town, incorporating products such as Shannon Aviation Museum, Shannon Wetlands, Shannon Walkways and potentially a Shannon Greenway.
- As recommended in our submission to the LSMATS, Shannon Chamber believes that a ‘walkable neighbourhood’ map, similar to that produced by Limerick City and County Council, as presented in the draft LSMATS, would be most beneficial for Shannon and could be easily produced by Clare County Council, using the existing river and green area walkways. This would link with the Shannon Estuary Way, of which Shannon is part, which is a loop of the Wild Atlantic Way and includes both Clare and Limerick. There are multiple options to map out 2 to 5-minute walk segments from Airport, Zone, Town and amenity areas of Shannon. The routes already exist. This is not an infrastructural but a branding and communications issue and something Shannon Chamber would be keen to see being delivered as a recommendation from the LSMATS.

Conclusion

As outlined at the outset, our approach in framing this Submission was to review it from a macro perspective. Our commentary therefore focuses on areas that, we believe, warrant consideration and inclusion in the Plan to ensure that its compilation can position Co Clare to meet the challenges facing the county and Ireland in the years ahead.

We appreciate being given the opportunity to present this Submission and look forward to Stage 2 of the process – Public Consultation on the Draft Plan – which we will review and make a submission accordingly.

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