

# **Submission on DRAFT EU Territorial Plan on behalf of Longford County Council**

## **Introduction**

Longford County Council welcomes the publication of the draft EU Territorial Plan and the opportunity to provide some feedback. As we navigate the challenges associated with the transition process to achieving a climate neutral economy, this plan has the potential to deliver sustainable growth and build resilience to deal with the transition.

The entire county of Longford has been severely impacted by the fast tracking of Bord na Mona's brown to green strategy and the closure of the Lough Ree Power Plant. As a small rural county, which already faced challenges from a social and economic perspective, the impact has been greater and more evident than in some of the larger counties. Direct and indirect employment opportunities were severely impacted, confidence in local communities diminished, business lost contract work opportunities and smaller towns and villages saw first-hand the severe impact of an economic downturn.

## **Most Negatively Affected Territory**

We note that the plan has had regard to the recommendations of the European Commission and is aligned with the territorial coverage of the national Just Transition Fund. It has provisionally identified East Galway, North Tipperary, Longford, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath, West Kildare and Roscommon as the territories to be targeted.

Longford County Council requests that the focus of funding concentrates and address the impact on communities in Lanesborough/Ballyleague and Shannonbridge. Some mechanism needs to be incorporated in the plan to ring fence funding for these two communities.

Longford County Council would advise that priority and focus in the plan be then given to the four Midland counties of Longford, Offaly, Westmeath and Laois. By restricting the territory to these counties, a holistic and regional approach can be taken, by building on the structures and relationships already established. Such an approach would also align with the Midland Counties under EMRA.

We also note that the proposed territory may change during the implementation period. We would advise against any extension and there needs to be clarity from the outset on what will be delivered and where during 2021-2027.

The plan needs to recognise that there is no quick solution to the challenges faced by the region. Some short term deliverables may be identified but the expectations of the region and communities must be carefully managed.

## **Diversification of company activities**

While many plans were presented by Bord na Mona as part of its Brown to Green strategy, there is still lack of clarity of how these will or when they will be delivered. Opportunities for alternative land uses, previously launched with significant fanfare, are now deemed to be uncommercial. The original plans brought hope for many communities, providing promises of alternative employment and opportunities for collaboration with businesses.

The plan needs to be stronger on the input by ESB and Bord na Mona on how they will support the plan and assist communities in leveraging support for projects and delivering sustainable economic development.

## **Modernise the Business Environment and Create Employment Opportunities**

- Focus must be on the development of new job opportunities.
- The development of clusters must be regionally balanced.
- Retrofit programme should be more broadly defined.
- Complement supports provided by LEO.
- Support for communities and individuals to develop cooperatives.
- Consider the repurposing of existing Bord na Mona buildings for incubation units and start-up enterprises.
- Build on existing regional collaboration and sharing of best practice.
- Support the implementation of the Regional Food & Drink Strategy and delivery of the food hub in Lanesborough.
- Recognise the legacy of Bord na Mona in the light engineering sector.
- Capacity building for those involved in or interested in developing social enterprises.

## **Enhance the Skills Profile**

- Build on what is already in place and interventions which were introduced to meet the needs of Bord na Mona employees.
- Link skills development with existing and development business opportunities.
- Develop entrepreneur programmes.
- Expand apprenticeship programmes and opportunities.
- Consider the repurposing of existing Bord na Mona buildings for outreach programmes.
- Work experience programmes for transition year students in emerging industries.
- Develop a proposition which follows the enhanced rehabilitation of the wetlands to provide a template and roadmap for outer regions and countries.
- Consider the impact on seasonal operators and students and identify alternative opportunities.
- Identify opportunities under farm relief services.
- Expand beyond skills to capacity building.

## **Promoting Environmental Sustainability and Industrial Heritage**

- Support the development of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Shannon Masterplan.
- Identify opportunities to retain, record and celebrate the rich engineering and energy history of the region.
- Care must be taken to protect infrastructure in the region which could be used to support and expand the tourism offering.
- Create global project around the enhance rehabilitation of the bogs – opportunities for research, tourism and education.
- Identify opportunities for research tourism to capture the physical, economic, social and cultural aspects of tourism, tourist markets, and destinations.
- Support ecotourism.
- Look at innovative ways to capture and tell the story of energy production and engineering in the region through interpretative centres.
- Expansion of the greenway provision in County Longford, including on Bord na Mona boglands, and enhancing its position within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands as a significant tourism destination, whilst extending and linking the broader National Cycle Network.
- Support the vision and designation of the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park as UNESCO Biosphere candidate site.
- Realise and develop the potential of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park and Lough Ree Biosphere Nature Reserve.

- Support community projects and industry – led collaborative tourism initiatives which aim to enhance and promote the visitor offering in towns and villages in the region.
- Facilitate communities to play an enhanced role in developing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening and enhancing local communities, and recognise, value and enhance Ireland’s natural environment as the cornerstone of Irish Tourism.

### **Enhancing potential of region as a place to live and work**

- Manage expectations – can’t have one for everyone in the audience.
- Link with town centre first and town centre renewal.
- Add value and build on other Government interventions.
- Provide serviced lands for the development of incubation and start up enterprises.
- Build on the expertise in the LEO and Regeneration and provide additional resources to assist communities and businesses.
- Support the promotion of the region at national and international level, highlighting the unique features and resources available in the region.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Local Authority sector should be included in the relevant stakeholders reflecting their role in economic, social, community and environment dimensions.