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07 Feb. 2019

Re: The Northern and Western Regional Assembly – Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

Dear Sir/Madam,

I refer to the draft strategy prepared on behalf of this region, the objective of which is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040 and the economic policies and objectives of the Government.

This strategy is based on an increase in population of this region amounting to 180,000 between 2016 and 2040 and assigning that population to Galway and various other towns based largely on the existing size of these towns. So we have Galway City and the growth centres of Sligo, Letterkenny and Athlone and the key towns of Ballina, Castlebar, Tuam, Ballinasloe, Roscommon, Carrick on Shannon, Cavan and Monaghan. The target population increase for Carrick-on-Shannon between 2016 and 2040 is 1219 people suggesting a requirement of 30 houses per year which does not reflect growth in jobs and the local economy. New sources of construction finance, restoration of personal finances together with wage growth all suggest that average demand will be much greater than this.

The stated objectives of the plan are welcomed and address the broader requirements of sustainable development and service delivery. This strategy is useful in that it compiles statistics on the economy and strengths of the region and clarifies what the strategy would hope to achieve. Is the figure of 180,000 likely to be achieved or is it ambitious enough? Population growth will help the region but is unlikely to happen without jobs. Competitiveness ultimately will dictate where those jobs will be sustained. Existing infrastructural capacity is the cheapest and should be used first in determining where those jobs should be located. Our low carbon future will require suitable accommodation located close to those jobs. Once again, low priced accommodation, particularly if already in place is a significant competitive advantage which should not be lost to the town or region through over-prescriptive planning.

Carrick on Shannon is the smallest of the “Key” towns in this region and unlike the other key towns is well removed from the environs of a Growth Centre (Sligo or Athlone). It has experienced rapid growth since 2004. It is, - and will be required to continue as, a service provider for a rural hinterland in a very large geographical area in South Leitrim, parts of Cavan and Longford and North Roscommon.

The town has excellent infrastructure-

- Surplus water and waste water capacity.
- On the North Western corner of the 220kV network.

- Serviced by main-line rail and National Primary road network.
- Fibre MAN network and connectivity to three National fibre loops.
- Over 100 ha. Of serviced land
- Enterprise Ireland Industrial estate with spare capacity
- New schools at Primary and Secondary level.
- Cheapest housing in Ireland
- Modern entertainment and tourism facilities.
- Underutilised retail space on the High Street.
- Inland marine cruising and leisure facilities.

Existing assets should be used and improved to maximise the return on public investment.

In summary, no restriction should be placed on the construction of houses, public or private, in Carrick on Shannon during the currency of this plan given the amount of physical, social and natural infrastructure already paid for and in place. Lands should not be de-zoned or developed in sequence as the areas involved are relatively small. This would result in development land escalating in price as has happened already in the larger urban areas again negating a competitive advantage enjoyed by this town. Because Carrick on Shannon is on the extreme edge of every border, it is disadvantaged by not having control/influence over projects necessary for its development. These include -

1. The N4 upgrading from Longford to Rooskey is absolutely essential for future development.
2. The upgrading of the road from Carrick on Shannon to Elphin and Knock Airport (there is a proposal at an advanced stage to upgrade the N5 from near Elphin to the existing re-alignment at Ballaghderreen and so it is timely that the link from Carrick on Shannon to it at Elphin be promoted in this development strategy).
3. An appropriate and cost effective approach to flood prevention rather than flood protection. This would focus on preventing more valuable land from being deemed "Liable to Flooding" and business costs being raised through lack of maintenance and poor management of the River Shannon. This affects a significant part of our region including Carrick on Shannon, Athlone, major transportation links, emergency services but particularly business and farming.
4. The provision of properly serviced park-and-ride facilities at the Railway Station located on the Roscommon side of the town.

These projects should be identified and promoted as part of the 2040 plan for the region.

Thank you for the opportunity for commenting on this very important plan. I hope you will take my comments on board and make appropriate adjustments to the strategy and subsequent plan to ensure that no brakes are placed on the development of Carrick on Shannon or indeed any other of the growth centres or key towns. Although highly unlikely, if Carrick on Shannon trebled in size before 2040, it would not threaten any of the aspirations of this strategy but it would help stabilise services in this very fragile rural area.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Kenny BE, C.Eng.

