

Tionól Réigiúnach an Deiscirt

Teach an Tionóil, Sráid Uí Chonaill, Pórt Láirge, X91 F8PC Éire.

Southern Regional Assembly

Assembly House, O'Connell Street, Waterford, X91 F8PC Ireland.

Frank Cullinan, Staff Officer, Rural and Community Development, Clare County Council, Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare, V95 DXP2.

11th March 2024

Dear Frank,

RE: Clare County LECP

I refer to the Clare Local Economic and Community Plan 2024 to 2030 Framework Document received on 16th February 2024.

At the Southern Regional Assembly meeting on 8th March 2024, the Assembly considered the LECP Framework Document and agreed a *Statement of Consistency* as provided for under Section 44 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (amending Section 66C of the Local Government Act 2001).

A copy of this Statement is attached along with the Report and Recommendation on the Clare LECP to the Regional Assembly.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us – contact Brigh Ryan at bryan@southernassembly.ie

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The Regional Assembly commends the work in preparing the Local Economic and Community Plan 2024 to 2030 Framework document and wish you well in the final stages of the LECP Process.

Le meas,

David Kelly, Director.



Statement on the Clare Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2024 - 2030

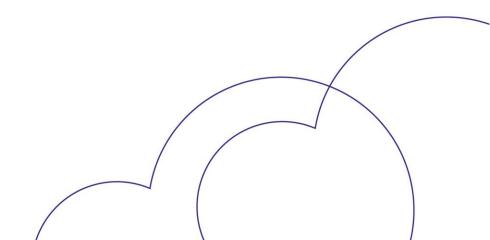
The Regional Assemblies' role in the LECP process is set out under Section 44 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (amending Section 66C of the Local Government Act 2001), in particular Section 66C 2(c) and 3(c), which states that the consideration of an LECP by the Regional Assembly shall relate to its consistency with (i) the core strategy and the objectives of the development plan of the local authority concerned, (ii) any Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) or, as appropriate, Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) that may apply, and (iii) between the economic and community elements of the Plan.

The Clare LECP was considered by the members of the Regional Assembly at their meeting of 8th March 2024 where it was agreed:

- 1. To commend the work of Clare County Council and LCDC in the development of the LECP and
- 2. In accordance with Section 44 of Local Government Reform Act 2014 (amending Section 66C of the Local Government Act 2001), the Regional Assembly are satisfied that the Clare Local Economic and Community Plan 2024-2030 has demonstrated consistency with:
 - (i) the core strategy and the objectives of the Development Plan
 - (ii) The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region
 - (iii) between the community and economic elements of the LECP

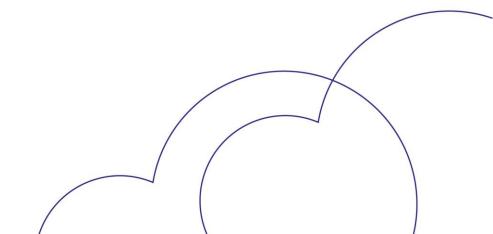
Subject to the recommendations as follows:

- Objective 2.1 under High Level Goal 2 Lifelong Training and Learning could be strengthened by referencing support for the development of the Southern Region as a *UNESCO Learning Region*, in which Co. Clare can participate to develop opportunities for life-long learning and skills development.
- Objective: 6.3 under High Level Goal 6 A Collaborative, Diverse, Innovative
 County refers to the provision of an independent forum for discussing the long-term
 future of Clare in setting direction for the County at regional and national level as well
 as the resource requirements to underpin efficient local service delivery. Clarity could





- be provided in terms of the scope of this forum. The Southern Regional Assembly is available for assistance in relation to strategic regional, spatial and economic matters.
- Change the reference under Key Policies at National Level on Page 46, from National Development Plan 2018-2027 to National Development Plan 2021-2030 (which is the updated National Development Plan).
- Omit the reference have regard to, under: At Regional level preparation of the plan has had regard to the provisions of, on Page 46 as the LECP is required to be consistent with the RSES under the legislation, rather than simply to have regard to. In addition, reference to Southern Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Plan 2018-2030 on Page 46 should be changed to Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032, reflecting the correct time period within which the plan is in force.
- Under Section 7.1.11 Southern Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Plan 2020-2032, on Page 59, specific reference should be made to the **designation of** Ennis as a **Key Town** under the RSES. The presence of the Technical University of the Shannon (TUS) Ennis Campus within the County, in addition to the University of Limerick Clare Campus, could also be referenced.







SOUTHERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING: 8th March 2024 ITEM: Consideration of the Clare Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) Reference No: E 24/002

1.0 Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) and purpose of this report

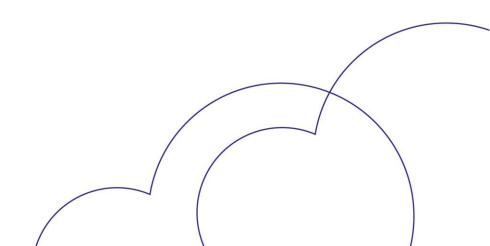
Section 44 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 provides that every Local Economic and Community Plan shall be consistent with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) as well as the relevant City/County Development Plan that apply to the area of the Plan. It also states that the local authority and Committee concerned shall submit a draft of the economic and community elements of the LECP to the regional assembly who shall adopt a statement on the draft for consideration by the elected council of that local authority and by the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC).

The review and preparation of the new LECPs is a key instrument through which local authorities will reflect RSES economic and community polices for their area. This report takes account of the relevant legislation contained in the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014) and the *Local Economic and Community Plans Guidelines 2021*.

The Act requires the Regional Assembly (SRA) to examine how the draft economic and community elements of the LECP has achieved consistency:

- with the policies and objectives of the Government or any Minister of the Government or other public authority
- between the economic and community elements
- with the core strategy and the objectives of the development plan
- with any regional spatial and economic strategy

The purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of the draft LECP under Section 44 of the Act and for the Regional Assembly to adopt a statement on the draft for





consideration by the elected members of Clare County Council and by the LCDC who may make changes to the LECP based on the statement.

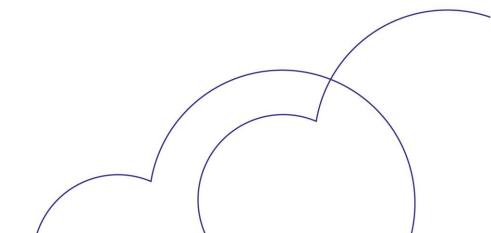
This LECP is important to support the transformative change identified for the Southern Region in *Project Ireland 2040* and in the RSES. We acknowledge and commend the work that has been undertaken in the preparation of the LECP and acknowledge the challenge that is faced in delivering on this task.

The evaluation and recommendations set out in this report are intended to assist and support the LECP process through successful alignment with the RSES, County Development Plan and National Policy Objectives.

2.0 Key elements of the RSES and other regional considerations for the Clare LECP

The RSES came into effect on the 31st of January 2020, and its Strategy is to make the Southern Region one of Europe's most Creative and Innovative, Greenest and Liveable Regions. This overarching Strategy is based on 11 Strategy Statements, focused on Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) Policy Objectives. The RSES includes a number of regional priorities for Clare. The key spatial, economic and community elements of the RSES that are relevant to the draft Clare LECP are set out below:

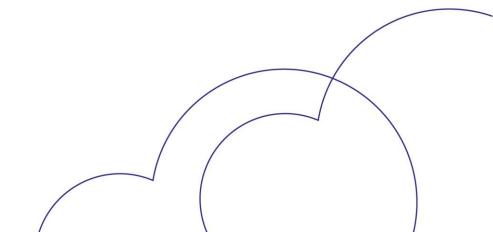
- Co. Clare is located within the Mid-West Strategic Planning Area (SPA), which is a sub-regional area of the Southern Region.
- Part of the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area is located in South-East Clare, including the largest metropolitan town of Shannon as well as settlements such as Sixmilebridge, Ardnacrusha, Clonlara, Cratloe, Ballycannan, Bunratty and O'Briensbridge. The Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) aims to strengthen the role of the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area as an international location of scale, a complement to Dublin and a primary driver of economic and population growth in the Southern Region. Compact growth and regeneration of Shannon Town is also an objective as well as recognising the town as a significant regional strength and employment centre.
- **Ennis** is designated as a **Key Town** of significant population scale within the RSES, with a targeted population increase of more than 30% by 2040. It has a





strategic location relative to Limerick and Galway Cities and Shannon International Airport and forms part of the Limerick-Shannon-Ennis economic triangle. RPOs 11 *Key Towns* and RPO 13 *Ennis* can be consulted for the specific objectives relating to the town. *Ennis 2040 Economic and Spatial Strategy* and its role for higher education growth potential and centre for lifelong learning are also supported.

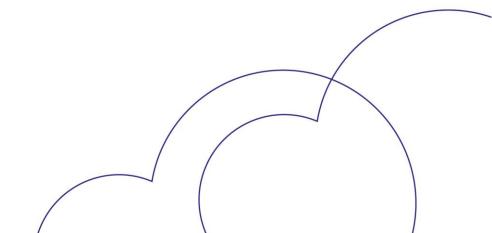
- The Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative is a linear network along the
 western seaboard connecting businesses and organisations as a driver for
 enterprise growth, investment and attracting entrepreneurial skills and talent
 to the rural catchments as an economic complement to the metropolitan areas
 and larger urban centres along the corridor. The Galway-Ennis-ShannonLimerick (GESL) Economic Network is included in the RSES as a potential
 network to promote greater collaboration between the metropolitan areas of
 Galway and Limerick-Shannon and Ennis.
- Shannon Free Zone is included as a Strategic Employment Location in the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area with the largest agglomeration of American companies outside Dublin, with plans to develop as part of a Mid-West high-tech ecosystem.
- **Shannon International Airport** is recognised as a national and infrastructural driver of economic, social and tourism growth
- The **University of Limerick Clare Campus** is an important location in relation to economic development and education, included under the **South Clare Economic Strategic Development Zone** section of the RSES
- The national and international importance of the Shannon Estuary and support for the Strategic Integrated Framework Plan (SIFP) for the Shannon Estuary is included
- The importance of the sustainable growth and development of Towns and Villages and Rural Communities is recognised. Chapters 3 and 4 include RPOs relating to rejuvenation of towns and villages, sustainable connectivity





and rural economic development, including tourism. The **Clare Rural Development Strategy** is included as a good practice example of a rural development initiative

- Policies are also included to develop potential inter-regional networks and local rural networks with opportunities for economic collaboration and cooperation at inter-regional and local level
- Place-making and 10-minute Town approach aims to promote sustainable development in all settlements
- Climate Action is promoted through Climate Resilient Development and land-use
- It is aimed to drive the contribution of Tourism, Enterprise, and Industry to the wider regional economy
- Sustainable development of the unique cultural, built and natural heritage of Clare is included and leverage of its location within Fáilte Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands
- Development of Regional Scale Amenities including development of Blue Green Infrastructure and Greenways is promoted
- Enhanced Regional Connectivity and development of a Smart Region is also a key element
- The **5 principles of the RSES Economic Strategy** include: Smart Specialisation; Clustering; Placemaking for enterprise development; Knowledge Diffusion; and Capacity Building



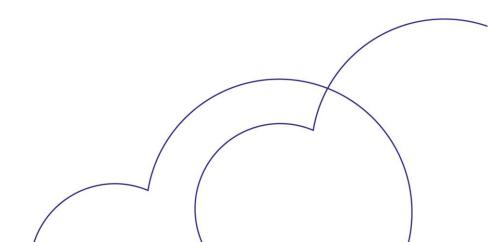




- Lifelong Learning Developing a Learning Region is a significant regional initiative Towards a Learning Region paper published in 2022 includes 19 Actions which support LECP High Level Goals (HLGs) and Objectives
- Blue Green Infrastructure & Biodiversity (Chapters 5 and 7) 'Our Green Region: A Blue Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions Framework for the Southern Region' published in 2022 is a significant regional initiative which seeks to address 3 areas: climate change; protect biodiversity; and support high-quality green and blue spaces which are important not just for nature but health and wellbeing, particularly in the context of an increasingly urban society and increasing settlement densities

3.0 Overview of the Draft Clare LECP

The purpose of the Clare Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), as provided for under the Local Government Reform Act 2014, is to set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and





the local and community development of the area, both by itself directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.

The Draft Clare Framework LECP was received on the 16th of February 2024 and includes 7 chapters:

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Socio-Economic Conditions
- 3. Socio-Economic Rights and Just Transition
- 4. Vision Statement and SCOT Analysis
- 5. High Level Goals for Clare
- 6. Implementation
- 7. Policy Alignment

It also includes 5 appendices: High Level Goal-Objective 1.3 Definition, Consultation, LCDC and Economic SPC Membership 2023, UN Sustainable Development Assessment and Potential Funding Sources.

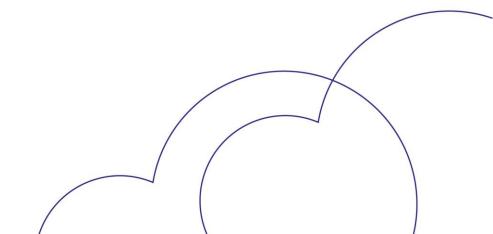
It is noted that the initial LECP Implementation Plan has not been submitted with the documentation, however this is not a requirement for consideration by the SRA under the legislation and Guidelines.

The Vision Statement is taken from the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and states:

That County Clare would develop as a place to be part of and proud of, where urban and rural communities enjoy a high quality of life, work practice choice, inclusivity, and service access and so that the county is a dynamic, resilient, connected and internationally competitive location for innovation and investment and is a national leader in climate action, creativity, culture, heritage, tourism, & environmental management.

The LECP sets out the following **6 High-Level Goals (HLGs)** – each with supporting objectives:

- **1. Healthy, Equitable & Inclusive County-** that Clare will be a county that prioritises the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of all people, where socioeconomic rights are realised, making it a healthy place to live, work, grow and learn.
- **2. Life-long learning and Training-** that Clare will be a county which supports and promotes education facilitated across early years primary, secondary, higher, and further education that provides opportunities for life-long learning, upskilling and personal development



- **3. A County with sustainable retail, industry, manufacturing, agriculture, marine, tourism, aviation, culture and services sectors**that Clare will have sustainable retail, industry, manufacturing, agriculture, marine, tourism, aviation, culture and services sectors that will offer employment and recreational opportunities for the well-being of all and support the seeking of national funding to overcome the current wide ranging infrastructural deficits within the County.
- **4. Enhance economic, cultural & social opportunity-** to enhance the economic, cultural, and social vibrancy of the County so its people can live, work, invest and learn.
- **5. A Sustainable and Resilient County-** Clare will be a county with strong, balanced urban and rural areas, where people can reach their potential, ensuring protection of the environment with the intention of building support for a Just Transition, assisting Ireland to achieve our carbon emission targets and enhancing the economic benefits to our local communities.
- 6. A Collaborative, Diverse, Innovative County- Clare will be a collaborative, diverse, and innovative county and will further strengthen local democracy and enhance delivery of services at local level to provide economic and community development opportunities.

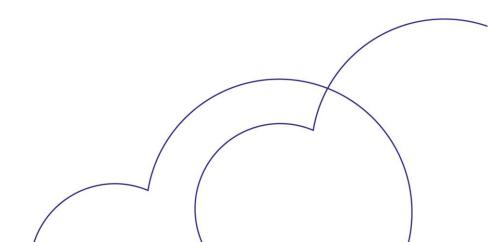
Each High-Level Goal (HLG) is underpinned by targeted objectives, which provide for the direction of the County over the years 2024 to 2030, with implementation to be achieved through individual strategic actions on a 2-year rolling basis during that period.

4.0 Evaluation

The following evaluation is based on the structure of the LECP document itself with comments set out under the relevant chapter headings:

4.1 Introduction

The Draft Clare Framework LECP *Introduction* provides a good overview of how the LECP fits into the overall policy context, being the primary tool for delivering actions from national and regional strategies at a local level and achieves conformity with the





Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES). It also details the engagement process, including participation of marginalised groups, data gathering, implementation, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) processes as well as addressing cross-cutting themes and priorities that the plan deals with such as sustainability and climate change, equality, poverty, rurality, age and disability.

4.2 Socio-Economic Conditions

This chapter includes a socio-economic snapshot of the County with some interesting statistics on size, population, employment, health, education, housing, deprivation, ethnicity and cultural background.

4.3 Socio-Economic Rights and Just Transition

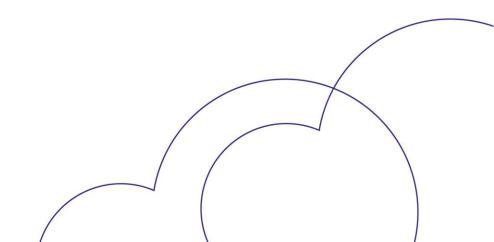
Clare Public Participation Network commissioned an anti-poverty strategy with communities who experience poverty and deprivation in Clare, which is detailed in this chapter and feeds into seeking to enshrine socio-economic rights within the LECP Framework. The plan also embraces the 'just transition' approach in addressing climate change with actions and goals including diversification, mentorships, sustainable livelihoods, local food production, public transport, valuing care work, protecting, and restoring biodiversity, social enterprises, and community wealth building. This approach is welcomed in terms of helping deliver some of the key economic and community aspects of the RSES and regional initiatives such as Lifelong Learning and Blue Green Infrastructure & Biodiversity, at local level.

4.4 Vision Statement & SCOT Analysis

This chapter sets out the vision for Clare and includes the 3 pillars of People, Place and Potential as a basis for the 6 cross-cutting High Level Goals. It examines Strengths, Constraints, Opportunities and Threats (SCOT), which include the variety of challenges and opportunities facing the County, which are set out within the framework of the County Development Plan and the Renewed Clare Rural Development Strategy. Acknowledgement of some of the County's key assets such as: Shannon Airport and Shannon Free Zone; natural landscape and heritage; rural, marine, industrial and agricultural sectors and strong community spirit and rural development strategy are welcomed.

4.5 High Level Goals

The Draft Framework LECP addresses key regional priorities in the 6 High Level Goals (HLGs) (set out below) and Objectives for each Goal. The Objectives are a key element in setting out the detail of the Draft LECP. Overall it is noted how the Objectives develop the Goal in a focused and targeted way that provides an effective strategic





framework for the LECP implementation. The SRA also welcomes how the document sets out the alignment of the HLGs with the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Healthy, Equitable & Inclusive County- that Clare will be a county that prioritises the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of all people, where socioeconomic rights are realised, making it a healthy place to live, work, grow and learn.

The health, well-being, equality and social inclusion goal, and its objectives are supported and endorsed.

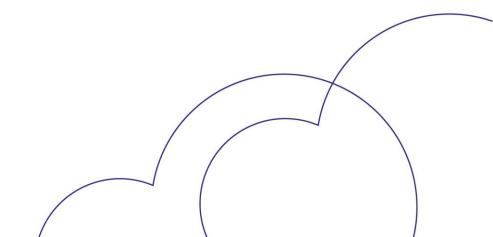
2. Life-long learning and Training- that Clare will be a county which supports and promotes education facilitated across early years primary, secondary, higher, and further education that provides opportunities for life-long learning, upskilling and personal development.

The promotion of education and life-long learning is particularly welcome as part of this goal and its objectives. This could be strengthened by referencing support for the development of the Southern Region as a *UNESCO Learning Region*, in which Co. Clare can participate to develop opportunities for life-long learning and skills development.

3. A County with sustainable retail, industry, manufacturing, agriculture, marine, tourism, aviation, culture and services sectors-that Clare will have sustainable retail, industry, manufacturing, agriculture, marine, tourism, aviation, culture and services sectors that will offer employment and recreational opportunities for the well-being of all and support the seeking of national funding to overcome the current wide ranging infrastructural deficits within the County.

The goal and objectives on supporting the rural economy, tourism, viable and vibrant town centres, social enterprises and the circular economy are noted and welcomed, as is universal access to public transport and supporting greater action and engagement on climate change.

4. Enhance economic, cultural & social opportunity- *to enhance the economic, cultural, and social vibrancy of the County so its people can live, work, invest and learn.*





The promotion of the arts and culture sector, use of emerging technologies, sustainable management of the economic, social, and recreational potential of the Wild Atlantic Way, Hidden Heartlands and Shannon Estuary, while protecting the coastal zone and its biodiversity, is welcomed.

5. A Sustainable and Resilient County- Clare will be a county with strong, balanced urban and rural areas, where people can reach their potential, ensuring protection of the environment with the intention of building support for a Just Transition, assisting Ireland to achieve our carbon emission targets and enhancing the economic benefits to our local communities.

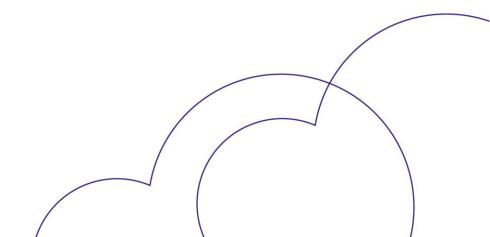
The goal and objectives on the sustainable development of urban and rural areas of the County, climate adaptation and mitigation, development of renewable resources, support for the marine and farming sectors and support for volunteerism and tackling rural isolation are also welcome.

6. **A Collaborative, Diverse, Innovative County-** Clare will be a collaborative, diverse, and innovative county and will further strengthen local democracy and enhance delivery of services at local level to provide economic and community development opportunities.

Support for employment creation in areas of high unemployment and enhanced digitalisation across the public service to support the development of Smart Places in the County are welcomed in terms of this goal and objectives, with Smart Specialisation being one of the key principles of the RSES Economic Strategy. Objective: 6.3 aims to provide an independent forum for discussing the long-term future of Clare in setting direction for the County at regional and national level as well as the resource requirements to underpin efficient local service delivery. It is unclear what the scope of this forum will be, however it would be worth informing the Council that the Southern Regional Assembly is available for assistance on issues relating to spatial and economic matters of relevance at a regional level. Other objectives relate to initiatives on anti-racism and discrimination and the partnership approach to the delivery of projects.

4.6 Implementation

This chapter acknowledges the need for an agile approach to the LECP process, championed through the *Local Economic and Community Plans Guidelines 2021*,





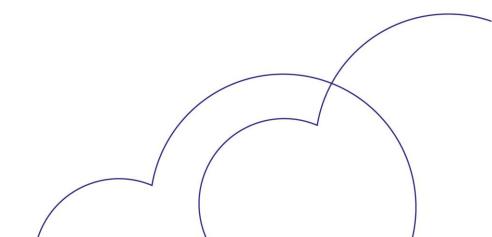
including three, two-year implementation plans to deliver on the LECP Framework document covering the 6-year period. The initial implementation plan itself has not been included with the Draft Framework document, however this is not a requirement.

4.7 Policy Alignment

This chapter sets the main context within which alignment of the draft framework LECP with the national, regional and local policy framework is demonstrated. A number of key documents of relevance to the LECP process are mentioned and some minor issues arise. In terms of the stated reference to the *National Development Plan 2018-2027* on Page 46, this should be changed to *National Development Plan 2021-2030* (which is the updated National Development Plan). In addition, reference to Southern Regional Assembly *Regional Spatial and Economic Plan 2018-2030* on Page 46 should be changed to *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032*, reflecting the correct time period within which the plan is in force. There is an incorrect reference to the LECP *having regard to* the RSES, under the section titled *At Regional level preparation of the plan has had regard to the provisions of*. The LECP is required to be **consistent with** the RSES under the legislation, rather than simply *to have regard to*, and this reference should be omitted.

Details are welcomed which provide information on the National Planning Framework and key aspects of relevance to the LECP including the 10 National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) and how each of the High Level Goals (HLGs) addresses the NSOs. The 10 Strategic Investment Priorities of the National Development Plan are also referenced and aligned with the HLGs. The Fáilte Ireland marketing initiatives of the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, as well as developing the potential of Ireland's Lakelands are referenced under the section relating to the Government's rural development framework *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025.* The role of lifelong learning and education including the Limerick Clare Education Training Board, is included under the section on the National Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024.

In terms of the RSES, this chapter provides a good overview of the RSES and how it sets out policy for the Southern Region in terms of spatial and economic development. It states how parts of Clare are included in the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP), a critical aspect of the RSES, with MASP Objective 1 aiming to strengthen the role of the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area as an international location of scale, a complement to Dublin and a primary driver of economic and population growth in the Southern Region. It also mentions how compact growth and





regeneration of Shannon Town are a critical objective and it is highlighted as a town of significant strength and as an employment centre.

In terms of the role of Ennis, it states that it is one of the largest towns in Ireland playing a strategic role between the cities of Limerick and Galway forming part of the economic triangle between it and Limerick and Shannon. The RSES has as an objective that Ennis will be a self-sustaining economic driver with a role in higher education growth and as a centre for lifelong learning. The role of Ennis as a designated *Key Town* under the RSES is not mentioned and should be stated under this section.

It also mentions the location of the County along the Atlantic Economic Corridor, with the key role played by Shannon Airport and the importance of the University of Limerick Clare Campus. The presence of the Technical University of the Shannon (TUS) campus in Ennis could also be referenced here. It further recognises the potential of the Shannon Estuary first established in the Shannon Integrated Framework Plan and now being addressed through the Shannon Estuary Taskforce Report. The LECP also aligns its HLGs with the 11 RSES Strategy Statements, which is very helping in assisting the SRA on how consistency between the plans has been achieved.

In terms of local level, the Clare County Development Plan 2023 -2029 is referenced, including alignment between the HLGs and the 20 Development Plan goals. It also refers to the Draft Clare Climate Action Plan 2024-2029, Draft Clare Library Strategy 2023-2027 and Renewed Clare Rural Development Strategy 2030.

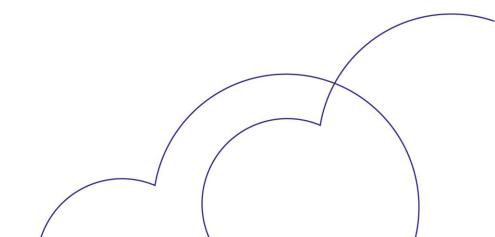
Overall this chapter provides a very good overview of the policy context within which the LECP sits.

4.8 Appendices

The appendices provide further detail on the public consultation process, LCDC and Economic SPC membership and identifying potential funding sources, which will be a useful resource in terms of future implementation.

5.0 Conclusion

The SRA notes and welcomes the preparation of the Draft Clare Framework LECP with clear goals and objectives for the economic and community development of the County and the significant public engagement carried out as part of the process. It is considered that the economic and community elements are consistent with the RSES and the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029. However, the Draft Framework document could be strengthened by inclusion of additional references to demonstrate



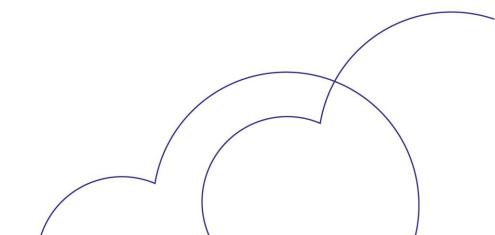


better integration of key policies and objectives of the RSES and the County Development Plan.

6.0 Recommendations

The SRA commends the work of Clare County Council and the LCDC in the development of the LECP and it is recommended to issue a **Statement of Consistency for the Clare LECP** as required under Section 44 of the Local Government Reform Act (as amended) subject to the content reflecting the recommendations as follows:

- Objective 2.1 under High Level Goal 2 Lifelong Training and Learning
 could be strengthened by referencing support for the development of the
 Southern Region as a UNESCO Learning Region, in which Co. Clare can
 participate to develop opportunities for life-long learning and skills
 development.
- Objective: 6.3 under High Level Goal 6 A Collaborative, Diverse,
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- Change the reference under Key Policies at National Level on Page 46, from National Development Plan 2018-2027 to National Development Plan 2021-2030 (which is the updated National Development Plan).
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- Under Section 7.1.11 Southern Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Plan 2020-2032, on Page 59, specific reference should be made to the **designation of Ennis** as a **Key Town** under the RSES. The presence of





the Technical University of the Shannon **(TUS) Ennis Campus** within the County, in addition to the University of Limerick Clare Campus, could also be referenced.

Brigh Ryan Regional Planning Officer 27th February 2024

