

**Tionól Réigiúnach an  
Deiscirt**

Teach an Tionóil,  
Sráid Uí Chonaill,  
Pórt Láirge,  
Éire.  
X91 K256



**Southern Regional  
Assembly**

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Margaret Moore,  
A/Senior Executive Officer,  
Community Department,  
County Buildings,  
Athy Road,  
Carlow R93E7R7

11<sup>th</sup> September, 2023

Dear Margaret,

**RE: Carlow County Council LECP**

I refer to the Carlow Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 to 2028 Framework Document received on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2023.

At the Southern Regional Assembly meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 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 Carlow LECP to the Regional Assembly

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us – contact Dominic Walsh at [dwalsh@southernassembly.ie](mailto:dwalsh@southernassembly.ie);

The Regional Assembly commends the work of Carlow County Council in preparing the Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 to 2028 Framework document and wish you well in the final stages of the LECP Process.

Le meas,

David Kelly,  
Director.

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### Statement on the Carlow Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2023 - 2029

The Regional Assemblies' role in the LECP process is set out under Section 44 of 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 Carlow LECP was considered by the members of the Regional Assembly at their meeting of 8 September 2023 where it was agreed:

1. To commend the work of Carlow County Council 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 Carlow Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028 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 content reflecting the statutory role of the RSES and Regional Assembly and recommendations for the inclusion of additional references to the RSES Statutory Designations & Regional Initiatives in the LECP High Level Goals and Objectives as follows:

#### The strengthening of the High-Level Goals & Objectives to reference:

- RSES Regional Policy Objectives for the development of **Carlow** as designated **Key Towns** and achievement of economic, environmental and community objectives contained in RPO 16 (Carlow Town).
- Development of the Southern Region as a **UNESCO Learning Region** in which Co. Carlow can participate to (i) Grow our Region's Human Capital base, (ii) to Improve Lifelong Learning, (iii) to develop the Region's skills and education proposition & (iv) to build Resilience and capacity building, and

- The **RSES Economic Strategy** & policies in Chapter 4 (as appropriate) to support LECF Objectives and/or actions.
- The **Smart Southern Region** initiative which seeks to work with people and communities on collaborations across all sectors to harness digital and data to create vibrant, sustainable and liveable communities.



## **SOUTHERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**ASSEMBLY MEETING: 8 September 2023:**

**ITEM: Consideration of Carlow Local Economic & Community Plan.**

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### **1.1 Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) & 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. It also states that the local authority 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 LECP Committee.

The review and preparation of the new LECPs is a key instrument through which the Local Authorities will reflect RSES Economic and Community policies 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 to examine how the LECP has achieved:

- consistency with the policies and objectives of the Government or any Minister of the Government or other public authority
- the need to integrate the economic and community elements
- The consideration of the economic and community elements of a draft of the Plan by the regional assembly, the municipal district members, shall relate to its consistency with—
  - (i) the core strategy and the objectives of the development plan
  - (ii) any regional spatial and economic strategy.

The purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of the LECP in terms of relevant section 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 Carlow County Council and by the LECP Committee who may make changes to the LECP based on the statement.

This LECP is important to support the transformative change identified for the 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 Plan process through successful alignment with the RSES, Development Plan and National Policy Objectives.

## 2.0 KEY ELEMENTS OF RSES & OTHER REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CARLOW LECP

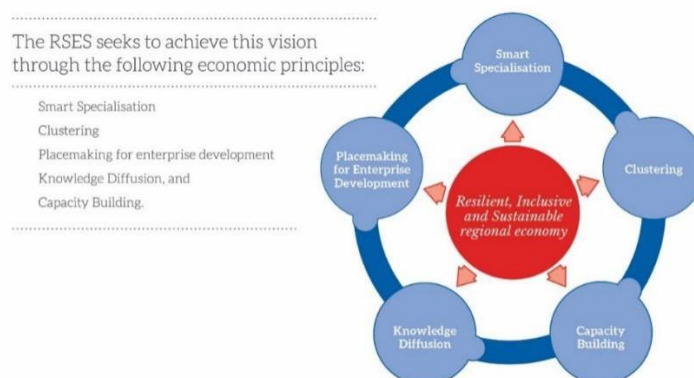
**KEY ELEMENTS OF THE RSES** that the SRA consider the LECP should address:-

### KEY SPATIAL PLANNING ELEMENTS .

- Acknowledgement of the status of **Carlow Town as a Key Town** with Targeted population increases of 30-40% to 2040. Consult RPOs 11 Key Towns and RPO 14 Carlow for the specific objectives for these towns.
- To support a **co-ordinated approach** to guide the future growth and development of the **Greater Carlow and Graiguecullen Urban Area** through the delivery of strategic infrastructure including preparation of a cross-boundary Joint Urban Area Plan (UAP) for Carlow Town by Carlow County Council and Laois County Council.
- **Sustainable growth and development of Towns and Villages and Rural Communities.** Chapters 3 and 4 include RPOs relating to rejuvenation of towns and villages, sustainable connectivity and rural economic development, including Tourism.
- Policies to develop **potential inter-regional networks** and **local rural networks** - opportunities for economic collaboration on the Waterford-Kilkenny-Carlow-Dublin M9/Rail network.

### KEY ECONOMIC ELEMENTS

- Reference the **5 principles of the RSES Economic Strategy:** Smart Specialisation; Clustering; Placemaking for enterprise development; Knowledge Diffusion; Capacity Building.



- **Placemaking** including public realm improvement and tackling vacancy and dereliction.
- Reference to other **RSES Economic Policies** in Chapter 4, for example, in relation to Tourism, Retail, Low Carbon / Bioeconomy, social enterprise, skills and talent, capacity building.
- Reference to the **Strategic Locations for Enterprise and Employment** identified in the Development Plan.

- Reference to **Smart Cities and Smart Region** Objectives (Chapter 6) & **Smart Southern Region** initiative

### KEY COMMUNITY ELEMENTS

- 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 HLGs and Objectives
- Recreation & Sporting Facilities including Blueways & Greenways
- 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:
  - ✓ to address **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 SUBMISSION RECEIVED

The Draft Carlow LECP received on **16/8/2023** contains the following sections:

- Background & Summary of Process
- Policy Context
- Socio-Economic Profile
- SCOT Analysis
- Summary of Consultation Process
- LECP Vision
- High Level Goals & Potential Objectives

#### Main Elements of the Carlow LECP:

#### VISION FOR COUNTY CARLOW:

Based on an analysis of the findings from the public consultation process Carlow County Council and the LECP Advisory Team developed the Vision for the County along with the 6 accompanying High Level Goals.

“County Carlow is committed to a just and sustainable future - with inclusive, diverse and resilient communities, thriving and innovative enterprises supported by proactive organisations/agencies, working together to support the education and well-being of all

#### LECP Goals

The LECP sets out the following **6 Goals** – each with supporting objectives:

**Goal 1** Carlow is a **carbon-neutral** and **climate-resilient** society - with affirmative **climate and biodiversity actions and environmental sustainability** at the heart of all decision-making.

**Goal 2** Our communities are safe, empowered and supported through an active **community-led local development** approach and **participative democracy**.

**Goal 3** Our **communities are more welcoming, inclusive and accessible**, and are enriched by **culture, heritage and diversity, health and well-being**.

**Goal 4** **Life-long learning and education opportunities** are available and accessible to all.

**Goal 5** Our **towns, villages and rural communities are great places** in which to live, work and do business – supported by community-led local development, **collaboration, enterprise and tourism development, creativity, entrepreneurship, and inward investment**.

**Goal 6** **High-quality employment** is provided across all sectors by innovative, creative, smart, adaptable and connected businesses.

#### **4.0 EVALUATION**

The Draft Carlow LECP **Policy Context** provides a comprehensive overview of key International and European, National, Regional and Local Policy to assist in the framing of key priority areas for the economic and community development of Carlow.

The approach places the Sustainable Development Goals at the centre of Carlow LECP Policy formulation and addresses EU Policies including the European Green Deal and key national policies including the National Recovery Plan, Housing for All, Our Rural Future and the Climate Action Plan.

A separate section addresses spatial planning and sets out the policy context of Project Ireland 2040, the RSES and the County Development Plan and Town Centre First.

In relation to **Regional Policy** we consider that this section could be strengthened by reference to key RSES Policy Objectives / Initiatives, including:-

- Acknowledgement of the status of **Carlow Town** designated as a **Key Town** in the RSES.
- Reference the economic principles and the Region's economic drivers set out in the **RSES Economic Strategy**
- Reference to development of the Southern Region as a **UNESCO Learning Region** in which Co. Carlow can participate to (i) Grow our Region's Human Capital base, (ii) to Improve Lifelong Learning, (iii) to develop the Region's skills and education proposition & (iv) to build Resilience and capacity building, and
- The **Smart Southern Region** initiative which seeks to work with people and communities on collaborations across all sectors to harness digital and data to create vibrant, sustainable and liveable communities.
- Reference to the SRA publication on **Blue Green Infrastructure** 'Our Green Region - A BGI and NbS Framework for the Southern Region' - as a supporting document for Goal 1 on climate and biodiversity actions and environmental sustainability
- Reference to the SRA **10 Minute City & Towns Concept** (Regional Policy Objective 176) with the '10 Minute Towns Accessibility and Framework Report', which provides a framework and good practice guidance for using the '10 Minute Town' concept (including a case study of Carlow) to support active travel measures in Goal 1.

In relation to Section 3.4 – **Local Policy** we would recommend that the LECP includes key policy elements from the County Development Plan:-

- Highlight key elements of the **Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028** (Carlow CDP) having regard to the **Plan Vision**, the **13 Strategic Objectives & Core Strategy Objectives**.

We note the **Socio-Economic Profile** provides key socio-economic highlights with content on population and demographics.

The **SCOT Analysis** provides a detailed and valuable summary of the strengths, constraints, opportunities and threat identified for the County, including input from the Carlow LECP Advisory Team, the LCDC and Economic SPC.

We note and welcome the public and stakeholder consultation undertaken and the additional survey work also carried out.

### **High-Level Goals & Objectives**

The **Draft LECP** addresses key regional priorities in the **6 Goals** and **Objectives** for each Goal. We note and welcome the reference to RSES Strategy Statements relating to each Goal and to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Potential Objectives are noted and provide an effective strategic framework for the LECP to develop Actions for each to support LECP implementation.

It is in this context that we provide the following comments on the Goals and Objectives that we consider could strengthen the High-Level Goals and Objectives and contribute to greater consistency with the RSES and Carlow County Development Plan.

### **Goal 1: Carlow is a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient society - with affirmative climate and biodiversity actions and environmental sustainability at the heart of all decision-making.**

Potential HLG 1 Objectives:

- Education and Awareness Raising;
- Promote active travel (Active Travel Office);
- Reduce waste;
- Reuse derelict buildings;
- Support biodiversity;
- Provide practical support for a just Transition.

This goal and its objectives addresses key elements that contribute to the quality of life in towns, villages and rural communities in support of a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient society.

The Regional Assembly is involved in a number of Active Travel initiatives – such as the Ten Minute Town Accessibility Report and Pathfinder project which will support this LECP Goal and Active Travel Implementation and actions.

The Objectives and/or Actions could be strengthened by reference to the potential of Blue Green Infrastructure to support multiple objectives for climate and biodiversity actions and



environmental sustainability & Biodiversity, which are important not just for nature but health and wellbeing of citizens through improving the environment in towns and villages.

'Our Green Region: A Blue Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions Framework for the Southern Region' – published by the SRA in 2022 provides a regional resource on good practice and case studies which may be beneficial to LECP implementation in this area.

**Goal 2 Our communities are safe, empowered and supported through an active community-led local development approach and participative democracy.**

Potential HLG 2 Objectives:

- Proactively support community led local development;
- Address social isolation and promote wellbeing through the provision of support for volunteerism.
- Supported, specialist, safe accommodation for victims / survivors of DSGBV

This goal and its objectives for active and inclusive communities are supported and endorsed.

**Goal 3 Our communities are more welcoming, inclusive and accessible, and are enriched by culture, heritage and diversity, health and well-being.**

Potential HLG 3 Objectives:

- Support and progress the implementation of the Carlow Integration and Inter-cultural strategy;
- Ensure Carlow continues to be an age-friendly county;
- Enhance the accessibility of public, social, amenity and recreational spaces;
- Promote artistic expression and endeavour for its intrinsic value and its contributions to community well-being;
- Foster volunteerism and active citizenship.

This goal and its objectives for integration/inter-cultural strategy, an age-friendly county, accessible amenity and recreation spaces and active citizenship are supported and endorsed.

**Goal 4 Life-long learning and education opportunities are available and accessible to all.**

Potential HLG 4 Objectives:

- Improve and enhance access to life-long and life-wide training and education opportunities and pathways;
- Enhance people's knowledge and awareness of our natural resources;
- Promote linkages between education, training and cultural bodies.

We note and welcome the potential Objectives for Goal 4

It is considered that this objective would be strengthened by reference to development of the Southern Region as a **UNESCO Learning Region** in which Co. Carlow can participate to (i) Grow our Region's Human Capital base, (ii) to Improve Lifelong Learning, (iii) to develop the Region's skills and education proposition & (iv) to build Resilience and capacity building.

**Goal 5 Our towns, villages and rural communities are great places in which to live, work and do business – supported by community-led local development,**

**collaboration, enterprise and tourism development, creativity, entrepreneurship, and inward investment.**

Potential HLG 5 Objectives:

- Improve the liveability, appearance and attractiveness of all our towns and villages;
- Harness our natural resources in place-making;
- Ensure economic and infrastructural developments promote social inclusion.

We note and welcome Goal 5 and Objectives and its objectives to improve the attractiveness, liveability of towns and villages through place-making and supportive infrastructure. The SRA in conjunction with the OECD is engaged in ongoing research<sup>1</sup> with the OECD on measures of regional attractiveness such as residential well-being and visitor appeal, which may be of interest in developing the actions to support LECP implementation.

The Goal and Objectives would be strengthened by reference to:

- the enhanced role for **Carlow as a Key Town** in RSES with capacity to drive sustainable economic growth in the County.
- Where Goal 5 addresses Tourism, the Goal and/or objectives could be strengthened by including a reference to the Failte Ireland Tourism brand, **Ireland's Ancient East**.

**Goal 6 High-quality employment is provided across all sectors by innovative, creative, smart, adaptable and connected businesses.**

Potential HLG 6 Objectives:

- Enhance locals' and visitors' access to nature;
- Promote inter-county collaborations and regional approach to economic development.

This goal and its objectives for employment creation, innovation and business are supported and endorsed.

The Goal and Objectives would be strengthened by reference to:

- the enhanced role for **Carlow as a Key Town** in RSES with capacity to drive sustainable economic growth in the County.
- the 5 Pillars of **RSES Economic Strategy** Smart Specialisation; Clustering; Placemaking for enterprise development; Knowledge Diffusion; Capacity Building, which may inform potential actions in the LECP.
- **RSES Economic Policies** in Chapter 4, for example, in relation to Tourism, Retail, Low Carbon / Bioeconomy, social enterprise, skills and talent, capacity building
- the **role of SETU** to develop innovative, creative, smart, adaptable and connected businesses, in collaboration with LEO and Chambers of Commerce
- the **SRA's Smart Southern Region** initiative which seeks to work across all sectors to harness digital and data to create vibrant, sustainable and liveable communities.
- The role of **Regional Skills Forum** in supporting skills development.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rethinking Regional Attractiveness in the Southern Region of Ireland – OECD 2023*

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

The SRA note and welcome the preparation of the Draft Carlow LECP with clear Goals and objectives for the economic and community development of the County and the significant public engagement in the process.

It is considered that the consistency of the final Carlow LECP could be strengthened by the inclusion of additional references to ensure the content properly reflects the statutory role of the Regional Assembly and RSES in providing a statutory a framework for development of the Region and the LECP, and through the integration of key references to the RSES into the High Level Goals and Objectives. This is a key section of the LECP Framework document and frames the LECP Actions and Implementation arrangements.

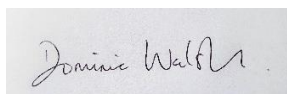
Key Elements of the RSES that should be considered for inclusion in the High Level Goals and Objectives are included in the recommendation below.

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATION:

That the SRA commend the work of Carlow County Council in the development of the LECP and issue a **Statement of Consistency for the Carlow LECP** as required under Section 44 of the Local Government Reform Act (as amended) subject to the content reflecting the statutory role of the RSES and Regional Assembly and recommendations for the inclusion of additional references to the **RSES Statutory Designation of Carlow as a Key Town** & Key Regional Policy and Initiatives in the **High Level Goals and Objectives** as follows:

The strengthening of the High-Level Goals and Objectives to reference:

- RSES Regional Policy Objectives for the development of **Carlow** as designated **Key Towns** and achievement of economic, environmental and community objectives contained in RPO 16 (Carlow Town).
- Development of the Southern Region as a **UNESCO Learning Region** in which Co. Carlow can participate to (i) Grow our Region's Human Capital base, (ii) to Improve Lifelong Learning, (iii) to develop the Region's skills and education proposition & (iv) to build Resilience and capacity building, and
- The **RSES Economic Strategy** & policies in Chapter 4 (as appropriate) to support LECP Objectives and/or actions.
- The **Smart Southern Region** initiative which seeks to work with people and communities on collaborations across all sectors to harness digital and data to create vibrant, sustainable and liveable communities.



Dominic Walsh

Regional Planning Officer

1/9/2023