

Public Consultation

Issues Paper for the Southern Region's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

Submission from Transition Town Kinsale (TTK)

INTRODUCTION

Under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (2015) a National Mitigation Plan was put in place June 2017, on how Ireland will reduce its climate pollution. The National Adaptation Framework was published January 2018 and sets out the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of positive impacts. These developments come in the context of the Paris Agreement 2015, the landmark climate deal adopted by 195 countries which came into force on 4th November 2016. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reported that Ireland's current emissions are 6.6% above 1990 levels, and emissions increased by 3.7% in 2015. Minister for Climate Action Denis Naughten has accepted that Ireland is unlikely to meet EU targets for emissions reduction by 2020.

Ireland is one of only two countries in the EU which will overshoot its 2020 targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions. TTK would argue that this is not acceptable for moral reasons and because of our international commitments. Given that the USA has declared it will withdraw from the Paris Agreement, it is even more imperative that the other nations of the world, and as citizens of Ireland we would say especially Ireland, stand up to their commitments.

The EPA and the Climate Advisory Council describe what is required as "a major societal and economic transformation". The Advisory Council made clear that the National Mitigation Plan should not just focus on our EU targets for 2020 and 2030 but "should outline the roadmap to achieve the 2050 national objective". That objective, set out in the National Policy Position on Climate Action, is an 80% aggregate emissions reduction between the buildings, energy, and transport sectors, and carbon neutrality in agriculture.

Investment and funding over the lifecycle of the National Planning Framework (Ireland 2040) and this Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy must correspond with Ireland's Mitigation Plan, our National Adaptation Framework and our international commitments under the Paris Agreement. How Ireland will achieve greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets for 2050 must be laid out in these strategy documents and thus feed into County Plans and each of our Local Area Plans.

To be consistent with the national 2050 objective of an 80% cut in net emissions, this will require at least year-on-year cuts of 5% per annum. Ireland is already heading towards paying non-compliance costs. This money would be better spent on investing in our future economy.

Climate change is inevitable due to emissions already released into the atmosphere, so Ireland need to adapt to reduce exposure to climate risks and reduce emissions at the same time. Adaptation strategies need to develop and express a vision for a well-adapted local community that is resilient to the impacts of climate change (Ref. Climate Act - National Adaptation Framework on Local Adaptation Plans).

COMMENT

In 2017 Transition Town Kinsale made a submission to our Local Area Plan Review and to the Citizens' Assembly on the topic 'How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change'. We are making a brief submission to the Issues Paper for our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy with a similar perspective.

In our submission to the Citizen's Assembly we asked what would a nation, which is a leader in tackling climate change look like? We suggested it would be:

- equitable and inclusive;
- a caretaker for the environment;
- its economic growth would not be at a cost to society or to the environment;
- optimistic, but realistic about the future;
- solution focussed;
- innovative;
- it would trust the state to drive policies and directives that would fulfil its moral responsibility for climate justice;
- demonstrate a model of an effective participatory approach in decision making.

In our submission to our Local Area Plan Review (Bandon-Kinsale Municipal District) we requested that the Local Area Plan would highlight how the National Adaptation Framework and the National Mitigation plan would be integrated to same and include the following:

- Climate action commitments in our Local Area Plan
- Community energy generation
- Climate resilient infrastructure
- Responsible and sustainable development
- Appointment of person responsible for the implementation of the commitments which are made under The National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework in our Local Area Plan (2017-2022)

The CEO's response to part of our Local Area Plan Review submission was that it was not relevant to the plan being prepared. Because of this we suggest that it is imperative that in this regional strategic document and in the National Planning Framework document the issue of greenhouse gas emission reduction should be prioritised in the opening statements. All future strategy in every sector should be framed in the context of greenhouse gas reduction. If our future is not planned under this framework Ireland will continue to fail to achieve its international commitments in this regard. Despite the following statement in the Issues Paper this essential context is not raised until page 21.

With Irish per capita Green House Gas (GHG) emissions among the highest in Europe and the wider global climate challenge, Government has identified 'Climate change as the most important long-term challenge facing Ireland' and is committed to 'the transformation required to achieve a low carbon resilient future'. Southern Regional Assembly Issues Paper RSES

Guidelines in national and regional spatial strategy leads to actual number of houses 'needed' listed in our Local Area Plans. If there is clear strategy and directives in national policy documents such as the National Planning Framework and the Southern Region's Economic and Spatial Strategy it will lead to clear actions in our County Development and Local Area Plans as to how we will take responsibility for greenhouse gas emission reduction.

The 'minding' of our environment overrides all strategy. If, as global citizens, we do not take on the challenge of global warming with the urgency it requires the realisation of the vision outlined in this Issues Paper, a society with wellbeing of all at its core and a sustainable economy, becomes unachievable.

Ireland 2040 will articulate shared national development goals, including improved living standards, quality of life, prosperity, competitiveness and environmental sustainability and will provide greater clarity for private sector investment. Southern Regional Assembly Issues Paper RSES

Our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy needs to refer to how the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework will be devolved locally. Energy generation; land use planning; transport; housing; waste management; economic development and agricultural practices, all need to be considered in this context. Integrated planning and collaborative work will be required to achieve this between many stakeholders and TTK hopes that processes will be put in place to facilitate this. Aspirations in National Policy Documents and Regional Strategy documents need to be seen as resourced actions in in County Development Plans and Local Area Plans.

*At the launch of the Energy White paper (2015) the Minister for Energy, Alex White, stated

"The State will provide the supports to enable energy consumers to become active energy citizens. Our energy system is going to change from one that is almost exclusively led by Government and utilities, to one where individuals and communities will increasingly be participants in energy efficiency and renewable energy generation and distribution. It's a story that will impact on all our people."

How this will be achieved needs to be highlighted in National and Regional Strategy Documents.

*All planning for infrastructure should be carried out in context of climate resilience. Though Ireland already anticipates not reaching its emission reduction commitments in 2020 what we do now will impact on our ability to make our committed targets for 2030 and beyond. Ireland also needs to adapt to reduce exposure to climate risks. The economic argument is to do it right 'first time' rather than the more expensive option of fixing later. [Ref. Global Commission report on the economy and climate change (2016), The Sustainable Infrastructure Imperative]

*TTK would also propose that only responsible and sustainable investment (i.e. climate proofed and low carbon) should be endorsed by the state.

*Our agricultural policies now need to enable the transformation required in this sector. Without this transformation, it will be very difficult to achieve our commitment for GHG emission reduction for 2030 and beyond.

*TTK would support, as a long-term strategy for flood prevention, green engineering and ‘soft strategies’ such as forestation in the river catchment area; wetland management, consideration of alternative agricultural techniques and protection of green spaces as per the Flood Directive. These green engineering or soft-strategies reduce the need to build flood protection and will maximise the natural capacity to ‘soak up’ or attenuate water in order to protect critical infrastructure from flooding. This is critical given future climate change scenarios which predict increases in precipitation and rising seas levels [Ref. Ireland’s Sixth National Communication to the UNFCCC (2014)]. These polices, with resources to support them, need to be part of our Regional Strategy.

Approaching the planning of our future in this context will enable the *‘Identification and prioritisation of key future growth enablers required to deliver our full regional potential in the interest of both the region and the state as a whole’* Southern Regional Assembly Issues Paper RSES

And help answer the question: *How do we maximise opportunities in the emerging sectors of the economy for the benefit of the region as a whole and what can we do to address those sectors that are in decline?* Southern Regional Assembly Issues Paper RSES

Climate action will impact positively on all key strategies e.g. protect biodiversity and boost the economy through job creation. [Ref. Unlocking opportunity – The business case for climate action in Ireland. Report by the Irish Corporate Leaders on Climate Change]

To achieve this TTK would suggest that the following needs to be resourced appropriately by the state as part of our Regional Strategy so that it is effective model of ‘access to information, public participation in decision making and access to justice in environmental matters’ (The Aarhus Convention, 2001).

Empower Local Communities, including through the development and support of the Public Participation Network and Local Community Development Committees, to ensure that a diversity of voices is heard and included in local decision-making processes and that communities continue to identify their own needs and solutions. Southern Regional Assembly Issues Paper RSES

QUESTIONS RAISED IN ISSUES PAPER

What measures need to be put in place at a regional level to ensure full implementation of the National Policy Objectives in the Draft NPF and the more detailed policies and objectives of the RSES?

As per our Submission to the Citizens' Assembly:

- The state needs to acknowledge that it is not doing enough to tackle climate change, and the consequence of this both nationally and globally.
- The state must insure that we all benefit from the green economy and that any lifestyle costs are shared in an equitable way.
- The state needs to show strong leadership and develop policies and directives based on our Climate Adaption and Mitigation Plans with clear commitments which are resourced for implementation. Communities across Ireland and sectors (e.g. energy, agriculture, transport) need to work collaboratively to develop action plans to achieve these commitments. An effective participatory approach at local level will enable communities to develop these plans. County Development Plans need to have measurable outcomes listed; as do Local Area Plans.

TTK recognises that integrated planning and collaborative work between many stakeholders will be required to achieve the aspirations outlined in this submission. TTK hopes that effective processes will be put in place to facilitate this.

'Future Proofing Auditors' should be appointed who are responsible for the implementation of our international commitments under the Paris Agreement. These Auditors should be sitting at the decision-making tables across all sectors.

What are the key indicators that could be used to determine the level of success of the adopted strategy?

TTK would suggest that a good measure of success of any forward-thinking strategy would be greenhouse gas emission reduction.

TO CONCLUDE

The National Planning Framework and the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies currently being developed needs to visualise and strategise for the “major societal and economic transformation” needed to tackle climate change, described by the EPA and the Climate Advisory Council. Such a framework will then lead to implementation of actions to bring about this vision in our communities through effective public participation; integrated planning and collaborative work between many stakeholders in different sectors. With the state putting the processes in place to facilitate this.

The health and well-being benefits, as well as the economic benefits, of mitigating and adapting to climate change are being established. Acknowledgement of our moral responsibility leaves us no choice but to shift from aspiration to implemented actions towards achieving our climate action commitments.

Who are Transition Town Kinsale?

Transition Town Kinsale is a voluntary community organisation which was set up in 2006 to look at how the area of Kinsale could adapt to the global challenges of climate change and peak oil. It was the birthplace of the global transition movement (over 1000 towns/ cities/ districts in 43 countries) Its vision is a sustainable and resilient town. It is a member of Transition Ireland and Northern Ireland (TINI).

Along with many other communities across the island of Ireland it has run events and initiatives to promote green awareness and sustainable development. It has endeavoured to be a catalyst for climate change mitigation and adaptation over the past 12 years. To involve all citizens in the ‘transition’ to a low carbon economy, so as to achieve our climate action commitments, community engagement needs to be facilitated by the state.

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