



Kilkenny Chamber submission to City & County Development Plan 2021-2027

12th March 2021

Kilkenny is a great place in which to live and do business and the County Council and Planners are to be commended for the many good decisions they have made over the years which have contributed to the making of the great City and County we enjoy today. There is always room for improvement and given the very positive growth rates projected for our population and economy over the coming years, it is critical that our plans for the future ensure the best possible outcomes for Kilkenny going forward. It is in this context that the Board Members of Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce make the following observations and recommendations for consideration in the City & County Development Plan 2021-27.

Housing

- The current **housing stock** is inadequate and this is proving to be an impediment in attracting potential new businesses and employers of size from setting up in Kilkenny. This is a crucial issue now and will continue to be for the foreseeable future and therefore must be addressed.
- We welcome the upcoming development of residential units on **Western Environs** and at **Louchmacask** and the supporting infrastructure of schools and transport links in the Western Environs.
- **Sites** that will become available when schools move out to the Western environs may be **suitable for residential** uses and such redeployment possibilities must be fully explored and factored into the city plans for the future.
- **Age friendly housing** complexes should feature in the centre of the community to allow older inhabitants to enjoy the benefits of proximity to the City.
- Consistent with Living City and Town Centre First initiatives, easement on complexities to bring **above shop residential units** back into use should be considered with incentives for owners maximised and well communicated.

Broadband

- Delivery of high quality **broadband** and smart city measures must be prioritised.
- The trend of **Remote Working** and Home-Based Economic Activity in Rural Areas is increasing and it is imperative that robust and reliable rural broadband services are made available throughout the county to support this dynamic.

Retail

- The creation of not just a county retail strategy but also a joint **retail strategy for the entire South East region** is hugely important to ensure the viability of the City and County and to protect against outflows from Kilkenny, maintain inflows and avoid over saturation of retail floorspace within the region.
- The uniqueness of Kilkenny's independent and craft retail offering must be protected and enhanced to **maintain our attractiveness** as a retail destination.
- Kilkenny's **retail future** will hinge on connectivity, public spaces and the concept of a ten minute walking city to bring visitors to the City and feel like we have a unique and convenient City Centre.
- It is noted that the core retail map does not indicate the outer **400M isochrone** since the last plan. We propose an amendment to the Core Retail Area map which follows **S 3.4.2** and also the appendix 2 map to include John Street.
- It is vital that all of our **retail & hospitality** businesses survive the uncertainty not just of Covid-19, but also of the regional development that is planned.
- Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce feels that consideration should be given to the appointment of a **City Business Liaison Manager** with responsibility to co-ordinate the business of the main streets. This role could incorporate items such as assisting the governance of planning permissions to include signage and housekeeping, improvement of communication and the overall marketing and attractiveness of the City as a destination reporting into the local authority; co-ordination of method statements and safety measures relating to works on business facades or street works and supporting City rate payers in the advancement of their businesses. The focus would be on managing the "busy-ness" of the city centre dynamic.

TUSEI

- There is a convincing **educational, social and economic case** for locating tertiary/higher education and training provision in Kilkenny and the proposed establishment of TUSEI is an opportunity to make this happen.
- The Chamber of Commerce supports the targeted **Technical University of the South East (TUSEI)** campus plan being proposed by Kilkenny local authority.
- Kilkenny Chamber regards it as an imperative that the development of a third and/or fourth level campus(es) in Kilkenny is secured as part of the development of a **Technological University for the South East**.

Public Realm

- The Chamber proposes that **John Street be added to the list of areas for civic realm upgrades**. This street contains many shops and businesses and forms an intrinsic part of the city centre. As an important entry route for many visitors arriving by train, bus and car it is important that the public realm aspects are reflective of the great city that Kilkenny is.
- Accordingly we propose an amendment to **S 2.9.19** of the Development Plan to include an objective for public realm improvement on John Street thus connecting Hight Street to John Street and MacDonagh Junction.

Tourism / Hospitality

- Our tourism industry has been **devastated by COVID-19** and all indications are that it will be at least 2025 before a full recovery to 2019 levels. Prior to this pandemic, 6,500 people's livelihoods were supported by tourism in Kilkenny and in some cases, whole communities are built around it. Tourism was one of the main economic drivers out of the last economic recession and must be placed at the forefront of this recovery.
- We are fully supportive of the objectives laid out in this plan i.e. **S. 5.2.5 & S. 5.2.9**, however, this plan should ensure that Tourism is put at the heart of Kilkenny's economic recovery for the next 6 years and to ensure the following:
 - That Kilkenny continues to be **internationally and nationally recognised** as a highly appealing tourism destination with a strong reputation for the quality of its activity, arts and culture, and heritage attractions, for the vibrancy of Kilkenny City, and for the historical towns and rural villages where warm welcomes and authentic Ireland awaits.
 - To ensure a **coordinated approach** to tourism continues and to galvanise the enthusiasm of key actors by providing a strategic framework to optimise assets, create appealing places and enable the successful implementation of tourism actions and initiatives.
 - To continue support **strong growth** in the tourism sector in Kilkenny and to ensure that the economic and societal benefits of tourism are effectively distributed throughout the county by making vital connections between complementary sites and attractions, by encouraging visitors to move around the county, and to enable them to do so with ease.
 - To put in place a **set of metrics** that allow for measuring the recovery and ultimate growth of our tourism economy over the next 6 years and beyond.
- Since the closure of the Hub at Cillin Hill, for outside events and conferences, Kilkenny is poorly represented as a **potential venue for large conferences or entertainment events**. This has had a significantly negative effect of business and event tourism, in particular and we call on the Local Authority to ensure that this Plan seeks to address this by committing to research the viability of such a project and, if viable, having appropriate reference to engaging with potential partners and proactively seeking expressions of interest from potential investors in this regard.

Sport / Recreation

- Given the projected expansion of the population in both the city and county (for example, the development of the Western Environs is to include a town centre and commercial hub, new housing, 3 new schools plus amenity and recreational facilities), the Development Plan should include robust plans to expand the provision of **sports and recreation facilities** accordingly. This should include the provision of PE halls, gyms and small hard surface courts and sports pitches and also factor in appropriate facilities for new and lesser known sports.
- In this context it should also be noted that new facilities of this nature which will form part of the new schools due to be built in the Western Environs, should be made available for use by the wider public **outside of school hours** and land should be made available for sporting bodies to

purchase and develop their own grounds like Dicksboro GAA, Evergreen Football Club, James Stephens GAA, Kilkenny & District League, Kilkenny GAA and Kilkenny Rugby Club to name a few.

Ring Road

- It is vital for the proper functioning of the city that the **Northern extension of the Ring Road** is completed as soon as possible. This incomplete section impacts negatively on many other planning and traffic management issues across the whole city. The additional housing and schools planned for the Western Environs / Loughmacask areas will result in further additional traffic thus increasing the need for the Ring Road to be completed. The delivery of the northern extension of the ring road from the N77 Castlecomer Road to the R693 Freshford Road should be stated clearly in the plan as an absolute imperative, not just an aspiration.

This Development Plan is a comprehensive document and is intended to span the next 6 years to 2027. Whilst we can never be sure of exactly what the future may hold, we can be certain of change and it is vital that we factor that inevitable change dynamic into our plans for the future. We are fortunate to have a great city and county and it behoves us all to contribute positively to supporting its ongoing growth and improvement for future generations.

Signed on behalf of the Board,

J. Hurley

John Hurley, CEO

Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce