

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Study Background**

The City of Waterford faces a defining moment in its modern history. There is strong and widespread recognition at national, regional and local level of Waterford's role and importance in contributing to balanced spatial development within the State and as the economic driver of the South-East region in particular.

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) designates Waterford as one of the five Gateway cities within Ireland. Gateways are strategically located and have a key role to play both nationally and relative to their surrounding areas by virtue of their existing economic and social attributes. In this respect, Gateways will be able to confer wider economic benefits arising from their growth and development to their respective hinterlands. Waterford possesses many of the assets or attributes that will contribute to its success as a Gateway. Many of these assets will be further enhanced and developed as part of the proposed development Strategy.

The NSS identifies the importance of this strategic planning framework in a national context and an opportunity is now presented to Waterford to be in the vanguard of the implementation of the NSS.



The Waterford Planning, Land Use and Transportation Study (PLUTS) was commissioned by Waterford City Council in February 2001 in response to the need for an integrated framework of plans and solutions to address the needs of the City in both land use and transportation terms up to the year 2020. The Strategy is consistent with the direction and requirements of the NSS and supports and fosters balanced spatial development at a local, city and regional level. A key element of the Strategy is the achievement of critical mass to allow Waterford to reinforce and develop its role as the economic driver in the South-East region.

A glossary of terms used in this report is set out in **Appendix A**.



### **1.3 Key Development Issues for Waterford**

Waterford faces a number of significant challenges over the next 20 years as the scale and pace of change quickens. How these challenges are embraced and managed will determine whether the City and Environs will develop in a sustainable manner. The key issues that will need to be faced are:

#### **Achieving Critical Mass**

The achievement of critical mass for economic and social development is of paramount importance for the future of Waterford. Critical mass has been identified in the NSS as an essential prerequisite for the formation and designation of Gateways.

Critical mass is a multi faceted concept embracing a wide range of social and economic criteria. In the context of the NSS, critical mass implies:

- An explicit recognition of the hierarchical structuring of settlement patterns and the pre-eminence of some cities as 'drivers' in their sub-regional economies;
- The benefits to be derived from economies of scale in the provision of basic urban infrastructure;
- The need to maintain a diverse economic base which recognises the needs of new industries while supporting indigenous ones;
- A recognition of the need for Gateways in Ireland to accommodate a range of housing types capable of embracing the often diverse needs of its residents at different stages in their life cycle and incomes;
- The need for good social and recreational facilities;
- Provision of good healthcare and educational facilities;
- Good quality transport systems which link both the Gateway City to its hinterland and facilitate access within the City.

The range and quality of Waterford's key assets and its future development path fits within this framework.

#### **Developing a Compact, Balanced City**

Waterford has a stunning riverside location the potential of which has not been fully realised in recent generations. The unique quality of the riverside vistas and prospects has long been admired by outside observers. For many reasons, including difficult topography, the availability of adequate amounts of development land on the southern bank of the river, the single river crossing of the Suir and the location of the Port facilities on the northern bank of the River, the City has developed principally on the south side of the Suir around the historic core and along the southern and western approaches which link the City with the coast.

A key development challenge for Waterford and its Environs is to fully harness its riverfront potential and the amenity of the River in the City as a central focus for the

development of a new Irish urban experience. This will involve addressing the current spatial development imbalance and bringing the northern banks of the Suir fully within the economic and social ambit of an expanded Waterford City, which will be the economic driver for the Region.

### **Integrating Land Use and Transport**

An efficient and sustainable transport system will be the oil that lubricates the regional economy. Currently, the provision of transport in Waterford for both internal and external needs is largely car based and the existing road network, even with committed planned improvements, is not adequate to meet all the transport challenges of the future in a sustainable manner. Public transport and sustainable slower modes will have a key role to play in easing and improving accessibility and mobility within a compact urban area that is to develop around a small but expanding City Centre.

In developing a transport system for the future, the challenge lies in planning transport networks that are appropriate to and will integrate with designated land uses within a compact, sustainable city. These networks should focus on the movement, mobility and choice of mode for large numbers of people in preference to large numbers of vehicles. Provision will need to be made for improved and greater mobility within the City. While some of the growth in the short-term at least must by necessity be provided by improvements to the road network including more and better cross river linkages, the supply of a choice of transport modes that promotes public transport - bus and rail, cycling and walking, is critical to offer sustainable solutions to land utilisation, transport and energy use. The emphasis on providing improved public transport choice will focus attention on the importance of developing land for high quality designed residential developments at increased densities along public transport corridors.

### **Harnessing the Excellence of the Educational Resource**

The availability of a highly trained and educated workforce is one of the key attributes of successful economies. The Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) is a highly progressive regionally based centre of education but currently lacks the funding and status to independently offer a sufficiently attractive environment and range of incentives including quality of life which will be required to attract and retain the critical combination of cutting edge research and associated incubator industry clusters.

The educational infrastructure in Waterford needs to be brought into line with the requirements of modern urban economies. This will be achieved by developing a university status research and education centre which will serve as the beacon for the regional education system and which will be at the forefront of innovative and collaborative research. This is required in order to attract and retain the leading national and international figures in key designated sectors. The success of WIT forms a strong platform for the development of a new University of the South-East (USE).

By creating and supporting the conditions for positive industry and education cooperation and collaboration and by promoting the attractions and incentives that Waterford can provide including its high quality of life, Waterford will in time grow and develop not only an indigenous world class work force but also the educational and entrepreneurial environment of intellectual ferment which will sustain and develop clusters of industries which will be at the cutting edge in their respective sectors.

## **Utilising Existing Key Assets**

Waterford is one of the oldest urban settlements in Ireland and was the first settlement in Ireland to be granted an official city charter by King John in 1214. The City and its environs is endowed with a number of potentially significant assets including:

- It's riverside and estuarial location;
- The River and it's amenity value to the City;
- Local, national and international links – by road, rail, air and sea;
- The Port of Waterford at Belview and the South-East Regional Airport,
- It's skilled and educated workforce and it's educational institutions including the WIT,
- It's existing traditional industrial base and the high profile of the Waterford Crystal name internationally,
- It's high quality urban and natural environment arising from its historic development and its riverside location in close proximity to leisure amenities both on the coast and inland,
- It's profile and potential as a tourist destination;
- It's proximity to coastal holiday resorts at Tramore and Dunmore East.

## **Managing Growth**

Setting the conditions for the planned growth of Waterford is already in hand at City Council level and across a range of stakeholders. These initiatives are now reinforced and supported by the NSS. Given the scale of change that is to be planned over the next twenty years, a critical challenge will be to manage growth in an inclusive manner so that all sections of the community in Waterford can embrace the change positively and be well informed in a timely manner as to the benefits that will accrue from change and the consequences of the critical choices that are to be made. The active participation and cooperation of each of the stakeholder groups including the general public within the City will be required to harness the full benefits of the Strategy and to overcome the constraints of the past.

## 1.4 A Vision Statement for Waterford

The following is now proposed as the Vision Statement for the Waterford PLUTS:

*“Waterford will realise its potential as an internationally competitive City and the premier settlement within the South-East Region. The City will provide a range of employment and educational opportunities and a choice of residential, retail, leisure, tourist and cultural facilities, where the principles of quality of life, environmental enhancement, economic development and social equity will be key drivers of the City’s future.”*

This future will be achieved by integrating and harnessing:

- The City’s strategic links with Europe and the capital;
- Its vibrant intellectual and educational life and its capacity for innovation;
- The quality of its built environment and landscape setting;
- Its compactness and human scale, arising from its origins as a walled City;
- It’s potential to focus development on the banks of the River Suir to create a unique and memorable Irish urban experience.

The proposed vision sees Waterford as a:

- Stimulating City in which to live;
- Gateway for intellectual innovation and educational excellence both generally and in key identified areas in which it will lead nationally;
- Highly desirable centre for living, working, shopping and leisure;
- City that delivers the highest standards of quality in the natural and built environment.

## 1.5 Study Goals and Objectives

The Vision has a number of elements, which have been expressed as goals and objectives. The scope of the goals and objectives takes particular note of Government guidance on sustainable development and the scope and direction of the NSS. The proposed grouping and ordering of the Study goals reflects the organisation of chapters in the Waterford City Development Plan, plus one additional goal, namely Implementation. The goals and objectives can be broadly defined as falling under five headings, namely Economic Development, Social Cohesion and Community Development, Sustainable Land Use and Transportation, Heritage and Environment and Implementation.

The goals and objectives are set out in **Table 1.1**. These form the basis for the Preferred Strategy for Waterford City and Environs as presented in **Chapter 2**.

Table 1.1 Study Goals and Objectives

Goals	Policy Objectives
<p><b>(1) Economic Development</b></p> <p>Develop a business environment that is attractive to indigenous enterprise and which is placed at the forefront of destinations for inward investment within the State.</p> <p>Create a City with a vital and vibrant commercial core, facilitating the juxtaposition of an appropriate range of commercial, heritage, riverside, and residential uses.</p>	<p>01. To promote and foster an internationally oriented and highly competitive location</p> <p>02. To provide for a wide range of development opportunities so as to foster a balanced economic structure</p> <p>03. To develop the tourist products of the Waterford Region, including the provision of new attractions and facilities</p> <p>04. To develop Waterford as a centre for higher education with WIT as a driving force in the local economy</p> <p>05. To develop the national role of the Port of Waterford and the Belview Industrial Zone</p> <p>06. To develop the Regional role of South-East Regional Airport</p>
<p><b>(2) Social Cohesion and Community Development</b></p> <p>Develop a socially equitable City, which seeks to provide improved equality of access to opportunities for education, employment, shopping and leisure activities.</p>	<p>07. To strengthen the retail position of the City and to ensure the maintenance of a healthy City Centre.</p> <p>08. To ensure the availability of sufficient land to accommodate housing needs, including different housing types</p> <p>09. To improve access to employment opportunities, community facilities and services, including education, health, community services and utilities</p> <p>10. To ensure ready access to open space and the natural environment</p> <p>11. To ensure an adequate range of and access to recreational facilities</p> <p>12. To ensure the adequate provision of healthcare facilities</p> <p>13. To ensure the adequate provision of primary and secondary educational facilities</p>
<p><b>(3) Sustainable Land Use and Infrastructure</b></p> <p>Establish an efficient, equitable and sustainable pattern of spatial development that meets the aspirations of existing and future generations, and which provides the necessary critical mass to ensure that the City enjoys maximum benefits from the National Spatial Strategy.</p> <p>Develop a (significantly improved) transportation network, which makes the most efficient use of the existing facilities and seeks to maximise the benefits of new infrastructure</p>	<p>14. To promote the sustainable use of resources and the re-use of 'brown-field' sites</p> <p>15. To create a balanced spatial strategy</p> <p>16. To minimise routine commuting and reduce car dependency</p> <p>17. To encourage a settlement pattern that encourages public transport, cycling and walking</p> <p>18. To develop and maintain on an ongoing basis a modern telecommunications network</p> <p>19. To maximise the use of existing infrastructure</p> <p>20. To minimise the cost of new service provision and operation</p> <p>21. To enhance public transport within the City of Waterford and its environs and between Waterford and other key settlements in the PLUTS Study Area</p> <p>22. To enhance inter-urban transport measures</p>
<p><b>(4) Heritage and Environment</b></p> <p>Define a City based on a combination of individual characteristics such as history, built heritage, landscape and setting, river and port activity, glass-making etc. to create a unique and attractive sense of place which conserves and enhances the cultural and natural heritage of the PLUTS Study Area and has a clearly definable tourism product.</p> <p>Create a City, which enjoys a superior urban experience, through the provision of a co-ordinated package of innovative and landmark design both within the public realm and in private developments.</p>	<p>23. To increase awareness of the rich environmental and heritage legacy of Waterford and to promote access to and enjoyment of this amenity by all</p> <p>24. To maximise the use of the River as a civic amenity while respecting its value as an environmental asset</p> <p>25. To improve the physical fabric and public realm of the City to serve the needs of existing and future citizens while contributing to the attractiveness of the City to potential investors and visitors</p> <p>26. To minimise negative impacts on the cultural and built heritage and character of the PLUTS Study Area</p> <p>27. To minimise the adverse impacts on ecologically sensitive areas</p> <p>28. To minimise the negative effects of development on the setting of the City and the attractive landscape of the surrounding countryside.</p>
<p><b>(5) Implementation</b></p> <p>Adopt an integrated City and Environs planning strategy in which the goals and aspirations of all stakeholders, including national government, the local authorities, businesses and the local communities, are taken on board.</p>	<p>29. To ensure reliable delivery of Study objectives by stakeholders within the Study timeframe</p>

## **1.6 Strategic Development in Context**

Waterford is not unique in facing the development issues that have been discussed in the previous sections and the need to plan strategically is widely recognised.

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) provides the highest-level policy guidance towards the development of a spatial strategy for the PLUTS Study Area. The ESPD is based upon the balanced pursuit of three equal goals, namely:

- Economic and social cohesion;
- Sustainable development; and
- Balanced competitiveness across the European Union.

At a national level, the NSS provides the overall context and guidance. The NSS is a twenty-year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development, and population between regions. It focuses on people, places and on building communities. Through closer matching of where people live with where they work, different parts of Ireland will for the future be able to sustain:

- A better quality of life for people;
- A strong competitive economic position;
- An environment of the highest quality.

The NSS supports a better balance of activity and development between areas experiencing rapid development and congestion and areas that are economically under utilised. It sets a national context for spatial planning to inform regional planning guidelines and strategies and county and city development plans and strategies as well as strategic investment in transport and other infrastructure policy decisions for both public and private sectors. It will also help shape future National Development Plans and other investment plans. The NSS sets out general principles of good spatial planning practice to help develop ways in which the location of people and employment and the use of environmental resources can best serve national competitiveness, sustainability and a high quality of life.

Balanced national growth and development will be achieved with the support of a small number of nationally significant centres including Waterford, whose location and scale support the achievement of the type of critical mass necessary to sustain strong levels of job growth in the regions. To promote the strong urban rural structure needed in the rest of the country outside Dublin, the NSS builds on the strengths of the existing Gateways within a network of strong cities and towns and their associated hinterlands. Building on these strengths and the need to redress the weaker urban structure to the West and North West led to the conclusion that a range of Gateways and Hubs on an arc reaching from Waterford to Derry must become a primary driver of more balanced regional development.

Waterford is situated on a number of critical radial and linking corridors and lies within an area designated nationally in the NSS as requiring strengthening. This area comprises the sweeping arc from Waterford to Derry taking in Limerick, Galway and Sligo and much of the western seaboard corridor. Waterford with its port, airport, railway connections and road links is seen to have a critical role as an alternative access route for the south-western and western development corridors.

At the regional level, the Southern and Eastern Region Development Strategy 2000-2006 provides a broad spatial and economic development context for the PLUTS Study Area. The development objectives for the Region are to:

- Develop the regional urban centres such as Waterford, Cork and Limerick as counter magnets to Dublin;
- Tackle social exclusion in both urban and rurally deprived areas;
- Maintain viable rural economies;
- Foster economic growth in the Southern and Eastern Region while contributing to more spatially balanced economic activities.

### **1.7 The Waterford PLUTS and Other Studies**

Waterford City Council and other relevant planning and development agencies at all levels have already analysed, in a number of documents and over a period of a number of years, the impediments to and prerequisites for dynamic and sustained economic growth. This has given rise to well-developed, specific infrastructure initiatives, which are either at their planning stage or beyond with land use and transportation implications as well as general policy implications on matters such as City Centre development and industrial land use disposition.

Existing initiatives and established processes will be guided by the PLUTS but will also provide much of the mechanism for progressing its recommendations and proposals.

In this respect, it is anticipated that the PLUTS will provide the contextual planning framework in which both Development and Local Area Plans will be cast while similarly informing other aspects of the development process such as branding and marketing of the City Region.

The documents and reports relating to the various relevant studies that have been referred to in this document include:

- The 1998 Waterford City and Environs Strategic Framework Plan;
- The City and County Plans for Waterford and Kilkenny Environs including the 2002 Waterford City Development Plan;
- The Southern and Eastern Regional Development Strategy;
- The National Spatial Strategy.

A full list of reference documents is given in **Appendix B**. These documents should be consulted in conjunction with the Waterford PLUTS with regard to common planning areas or specific topics.

