

TRANSFORMING SLIGO AS ECONOMIC DRIVER OF NORTHWEST

Investment of over €220m is transforming Sligo and underpinning its status as the regional capital and economic driver of the northwest, according to Ciarán Hayes, Chief Executive of Sligo County Council. He points to a current unprecedented level of capital investment in Sligo being the catalyst for a sustained period of growth for the region.

This confident prediction is backed up by the combined efforts of the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and Sligo County Council with over 1,500 high quality job announcements for Sligo in recent months.

In addition, it is expected that some 300 construction jobs will be created in the delivery of council infrastructure projects. Within the last number of weeks, contracts have been signed for a number of long-planned projects.

On 22 February the Taoiseach and Minister for Transport visited Sligo for the 'sod-turning' ceremony for both the N4 Collooney-Castlebaldwin scheme (the largest roads project to be delivered in the county) and the Western Distributor Road that will provide access to the IDA's new 85 acre advanced industrial park.

Add to that the long-awaited approval for the Eastern Garavogue Bridge, which will address the issue of movement and access around Sligo and open up land to the east of the city for development. Progress has already been made with the acquisition of land for the approach roads and the construction of the bridge is expected to be on stream in late 2020/early 2021.

TOURISM POTENTIAL

However, it's not roads infrastructure alone. There are a number of innovative tourism projects that will build on Sligo's recent advances in tourism and contribute to achieving its undoubted tourism potential with the aim of adding an additional 700 jobs in the sector in the



Taoiseach Leo Varadkar turns the sod on the National Surf Centre of Excellence in Strandhill.



Surfing in Easkey.



The Embankment: 1 Gbyte Fast Landing Space in the heart of Sligo.

next five years.

Foremost among these is the development of a Surf Centre of Excellence in Strandhill. Strategically positioned on the Wild Atlantic Way, Strandhill is set to become the surfing capital of the northwest. And if outdoor activities are your thing, you'll soon be able to test your energy levels at the Coolaney Mountain Bike Centre, currently under construction and one of only four in the country.

For perhaps the more academic or even sedate among us, there is also the development of the 'Yeats Trail' – a loop trail off the Wild Atlantic Way that showcases the beauty of a county that was so inspirational to that world famous wordsmith and Nobel Laureate, W.B. Yeats.

The progress being delivered in this sector is a genuine county-wide endeavour, and the recent national award presented to South Sligo Tourism is a public recognition of the outstanding work being delivered by local agencies.

OPTIMISM AND VIBRANCY

Recent developments are evidence that Sligo has overcome the many challenges of recent years, including working within the constraints of legacy financial difficulties, limited staff resources and dealing with high profile legal issues.

However, credit is due to the council's

staff and the elected members for the manner in which the challenges have been addressed resulting in a renewed sense of optimism and vibrancy within Sligo County Council and among key partner agencies.

This was highlighted at the council meeting in January when the range and scale of current investment and development proposals were detailed and a roadmap outlined for Sligo to build on



Artist's impression of new Eastern Garavogue Bridge, Sligo.

its' leadership role within the region.

RENEWED CONFIDENCE

There is presently a palpable sense of creativity, innovation and inventiveness in Sligo and 2019 will witness the gradual unveiling of a new Sligo, where a much-enhanced public realm on O'Connell Street and Cultural Plaza replacing the Stephen Street Car Park will be developed and all with available public Wi-Fi.

Both projects will complement the recently launched 1Gigabyte Landing Space facility at the Embankment. This adds to the already successful Building Block and seeks to build on the concept of living and working in an attractive, sustainable and smart city centre.

ECONOMIC DRIVER

The infrastructure and projects now being advanced will contribute to the development and growth of every area of County Sligo for many years to come.

Now that Sligo has been positioned as the economic driver of the region and has been formally designated as a 'Growth Centre' under the National Planning Framework, it has the potential to see all areas of county and region grow and develop.