

REPORT OUTLINES ROADMAP TO REVITALISE LIMERICK CITY CENTRE

Limerick Chamber has highlighted the need for affordable residential units in the city centre in its latest report on the future development of the Treaty City. It recommends a mechanism to measure progress on key local projects and is also calling for a strategy to support the development of regional urban centres.

Initiatives that promote vital, liveable city centres are essential, according to Limerick Chamber, which has launched the 'Future Development of Limerick City' report by Indecon Economic Consultants.

Against the backdrop of the Covid crisis, the report was carried out as a benchmark assessment of the performance of Limerick city versus other Irish cities. Looking at international best practice, it outlines several measures to support the sustainable future development of the city.

Ahead of the first Directly Elected

Mayor for Limerick, the report sets out the challenges to recover and develop the regional economy in the period to come. Recommendations include the acceleration of important projects in the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan and the implementation of a citizens' dashboard on key local projects, as the report notes that accountability and measurement is critical in moving Limerick city forward.

Donnacha Hurley, President of Limerick Chamber, said: "Having fully reviewed the current situation and taking a holistic approach across a wide range of measures,

Indecon has outlined a roadmap on how to achieve city revitalisation in a sustainable way. A key recommendation for us is for improved measurement and accountability through a citizens' dashboard, so that all stakeholders have visibility and ownership of progress."

KEY PROJECTS IN LIMERICK 2030 PLAN
Hugh Hennessy, Divisional Director with Indecon said: "Indecon believes there is the potential for Limerick city to be transformed into an urban environment where significantly higher numbers of



Limerick Chamber's Chief Economist Dr Catriona Cahill, President Donnacha Hurley, and CEO Dee Ryan, pictured with Hugh Hennessy, Divisional Director with Indecon, on Howley's Quay in Limerick, following the launch of the report.

individuals live in the city and others are attracted to visit and to participate in cultural, hospitality, educational and other activities.”

He added that the availability of daytime, evening and night-time activities will be important. This will require an integrated approach involving the acceleration of the important key projects in the Limerick 2030 Plan including residential, commercial, cultural, educational and public realm initiatives.

“However, it will also require measures to enhance mobility within the city, reduce its carbon contribution and attract new innovative business. In addition, measures to enhance skills and reduce social exclusion will be critical to realising the exceptional potential of the city as a location with a high quality of living.

“Based on the research undertaken, Indecon has developed a number of policy recommendations for consideration by Limerick Chamber and by local and national policymakers to assist in the future development of the city,” Hennessy noted.

REPOPULATING THE CITY CENTRE

The report recognises that Limerick is one of the more affordable cities in Ireland, with the population expected to grow by 10% by 2040. Over the course of the last two decades, the city centre has seen an increase in the number of vacant buildings due to a growth in housing, commercial and retail developments across the ever-expanding suburbs. Compact growth and core density are also essential for sustainable development, the report notes.

Dr Catriona Cahill, Chief Economist with Limerick Chamber, said: “Repopulating the city centre will have a greater impact on its revitalisation than any other policy intervention. We must ensure that housing supply meets projected population growth and that the right type of housing is delivered in the right locations.

“Over 1,100 new homes will be needed each year over the next 19 years to meet our lowest population growth projections. That is an increase of 100% on the current annual delivery rate for Limerick city and county. A higher delivery rate will



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be required to address the historical undersupply of affordable homes that has resulted in a considerable proportion of our 25-29 years olds still having to live at home with their parents.

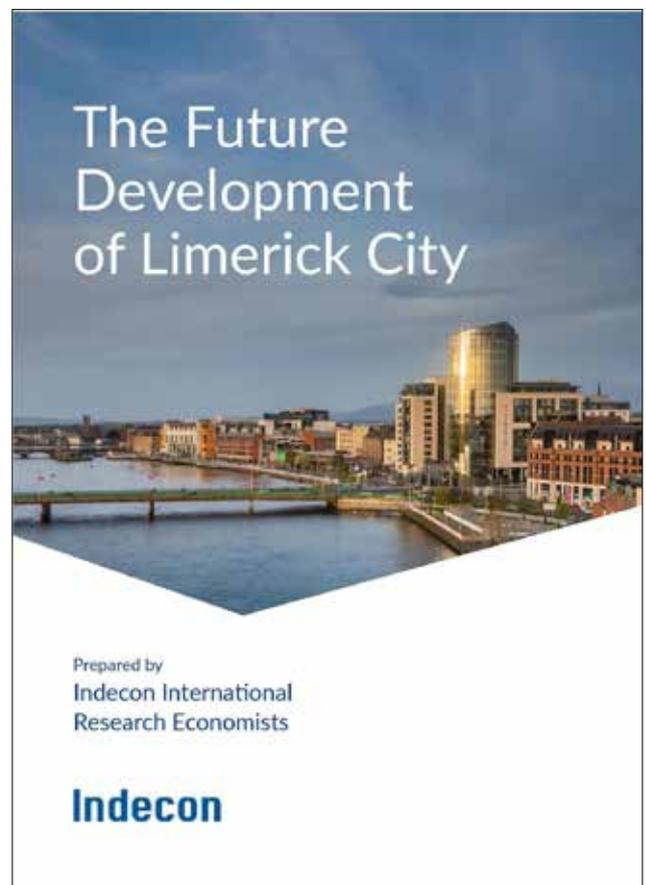
“We must entice more people to see the city centre as an attractive place to live in. Public realm and access to green spaces are key. Policies must be developed to deliver quality affordable houses and apartments in our city centre, through a combination of refurbishment of vacant existing stock and new developments over the medium to long term.”

QUALITY AFFORDABLE ACCOMMODATION

Indecon highlights the need to deliver quality affordable residential units in Limerick city centre. Warning of the potential knock-on impact on homelessness, Dr Cahill continued: “Failure to provide for this

forecasted housing need will exacerbate existing generational and social divides.”

A further concern for Limerick, common to all cities in Ireland and internationally,



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Source: 'The Future Development of Limerick City Overview' (Limerick Chamber)

is that cities are significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. The Indecon report found that 11% of housing in Limerick and suburbs was built post-2000 with older buildings tending to have much lower levels of energy efficiency.

Hugh Hennessy, Divisional Director with Indecon said: "Our analysis of housing stock by energy rate shows that there were only 3% of housing in Limerick city with A rating. The fact that around 45% of housing had a D, E, F, or G rating highlights the need for a major retrofitting programme as part of the strategy for sustainable growth in the city.

"We need to see increased funding under the Energy Retrofitting Programme for social housing as well as a Limerick Energy Forum to support the development of the green economy. There needs to be accountability and monitoring at a local level."

Another key challenge identified in the Future Development of Limerick City report is the 'brain drain' from regional cities to the capital and other international destinations. While the share of graduates staying and working in the

Limerick region increased between 2015 and 2018, immediate focus on retaining these valuable knowledge workers is recommended.

Limerick Chamber says capital investment in its higher educational institutions is essential to complete the transition to a modern university city with students on campus in the heart of the city centre. Limerick Chamber is calling on the Government to support capital funding for Higher Education Institutes.

ADDRESSING BRAIN DRAIN CHALLENGES

Hugh Hennessy continued: "Proximity to skilled talent is a decision-making factor for investors and challenges such as brain drain need to be addressed to maintain regional competitiveness.

"Measures around liveability in the city are crucial to addressing these challenges along with attracting more companies of scale to locate to the city. If the existing education gap is addressed, new modelling by Indecon suggests that there's potential for employment in Limerick to increase significantly."

The 'Future Development of Limerick City' report by Indecon also found that Limerick has the second highest disposable income per person after Dublin. As a result of Covid, the share of youth unemployment has increased from 12% to 15%. Cities like Rotterdam have strong youth employment initiatives, and this is something the report recommends could be implemented in Limerick city.

Dee Ryan, CEO of Limerick Chamber, said: "Focus is urgently required on how cities can facilitate increased urban living and overcome major challenges such as digitalisation, climate change, remote working and traditional retail decline. We're particularly keen to see measures introduced to address the rise in youth unemployment, due to the pandemic to ensure that these young people aren't locked out of opportunities.

"Shared goals and collaboration are key but most of all we need to see delivery and implementation of these recommendations by Limerick 2030 DAC and Limerick City and Council, who both hold the key to unlocking the tremendous potential in Limerick city."