



The Shannon Energy Valley

The University of Limerick, Shannon Development, NUI, Galway, ITLG in consultation with the local authorities and industry in the region over the past several months have developed a plan for a ‘Shannon Energy Valley’ as a succession strategy in anticipation of the demise of computer manufacturing. The Energy Valley will provide a National hub for Energy R&D, Industry and Commerce which will attract mobile international investment and generate high end employment.

We believe that our plan will assist in driving the long term competitiveness and sustainability of our electricity generation requirements. Being at the forefront of international research in this area will together with state agency support drive the creation of start up companies. Furthermore through focusing education and infrastructural supports on the sector a compelling case can be presented in conjunction with appropriate incentivisation to attract mobile international investment.

The plan draws from the history, assets and potential of the region:

1. The Shannon Estuary has special significance to renewable and other forms of energy. The area has a history of innovation in power generation through Charles Parsons, the inventor of the steam turbine and Ardnacrusha, the largest renewable energy project worldwide when built. It has large-scale coal, oil and gas generating stations (Moneypoint, Tarbert and Aughinish) along with excellent connectivity infrastructure (400 kV, 220 kV, 110 kV and 38 kV grid already in place and the liquid natural gas (LNG) terminal under construction).
2. The immediate future for sustainable energy in Ireland is the construction of €10Bln worth of windfarms, the majority of which will be within one hour of the Shannon Valley. There is strong evidence from the operation of the single electricity market that wind generation reduces the price of electricity, while displacing the use of fossil plants which have contributed significantly to the fines that Ireland has incurred in breach of its emissions commitments. A substantial portion of indigenous wind generation would together with other emerging renewable energy technologies hedge against oil and gas price/supply shocks whilst mitigating the trade balance.
3. Shannon Development has committed to provide a 214 acre Energy Park in Tarbert and a greenprint re-vamp of Shannon Free Zone. Both Teagasc and Shannon Development have committed to provide further land banks for Energy activities.
4. The universities are also fully supportive of the proposed commercial activities offering deeper collaboration to create further national access research facilities as a significant attractor for mobile international investment in the Energy space. Furthermore, the universities plan to launch a suite of complementary undergraduate Energy programmes including the University of Limerick B.Sc. in Energy with options in Energy Markets; Energy Systems Control; Energy Science and Energy in the Built Environment and NUI, Galway B.E. and B.Sc. degrees in Energy Systems Engineering and Energy, respectively.

Providing modules and conversion courses will also rapidly expand the population of skilled workers and graduates with Energy knowledge/training.

In recognition of the above we believe that the following themes of industrial, commercial and research activities can form the basis of sustainable long-term employment and wealth creation in the Shannon Energy Valley:

- Energy and carbon emissions trading and Energy management services
- Renewable Electricity Generation and Storage
- Second generation Biorefining
- Engineering and Servicing the €10Bln investment in Irish wind energy planned to 2020, half of which is within 1 hour of the Shannon Valley
- Re-training and advanced training for the sustainable energy sector

Recent economic developments have made investment in the Mid West Region an imperative. In addition to the financial crisis, the Shannon region has lost its EU 'objective 1' status, putting it at a comparative disadvantage with respect to neighbours in the Gaeltacht and BMW Region. Our plan to have the Shannon Valley at the heart of internationally significant Research and Commercial Development in the area of Energy Supply and CO₂ abatement allows the region build on its existing strength in the sector and will, with support, allow the region to come up with a viable answer to its current challenges.

We recommend that government policy and all arms of the state work with industry to invest, incentivise and promote the above themes and focus these activities in the Shannon Valley to achieve a critical mass attractive to mobile international investors.