East Border Region

Promoting Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Cross Border Region

Strategic Plan 2008–2011
enterprise and innovation
collaboration
# Acknowledgements

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The East Border Region Committee would like to thank the sixty members of our Committee who have given selflessly of their time over the years to ensure the success of the East Border Region Committee.

In addition we would like to thank the Council Officials of our ten member Local Authorities and stakeholders such as Government Departments, SEUPB, the Enterprise/County Enterprise Boards, Colleges of Further and Higher Education and Chambers of Commerce who have contributed to making our Strategy for 2008-2011 a reality.
Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland face the same economic and social challenges of border areas throughout Europe. The European Union’s INTERREG IIIA Programmes were designed to enable authorities and organisations to address and overcome these challenges, making their region more innovative and competitive and enabling citizens living near borders to have better access to services.

A unique cross border, local authority partnership approach to delivering INTERREG IIIA in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland has helped to ensure the programme has been a true success story in this part of the European Union, reaching or surpassing all of its objectives.

The East Border Region (EBR) Partnership has played no small part in implementing the INTERREG IIIA Programme. From the award winning Tourism Partnership promoting the area as a viable tourist destination, to the Midas Project which has enhanced creative and digital media facilities, most of the 800,000 citizens that live within EBR’s ten local authorities will have benefited from the 38 projects awarded INTERREG IIIA funding through the partnership.

EBR and its fellow partnerships, ICBAN, the North West cross border Group and recently the North East Partnership and Comet, has ensured INTERREG IIIA assisted over 3000 SMEs through clusters created to support cross border business enterprise and research and development linkages. In terms of developing the knowledge economy and individuals’ skills, the partnerships have also overseen INTERREG IIIA fund almost 10,000 participants in either ICT training and education initiatives or sectoral initiatives and reskilling programmes.

Whilst much has been achieved through the INTERREG IIIA Programmes, the European Union has made a commitment to further support regional development through its INTERREG IVA Programmes.

Each of the cross border partnerships has created Multi Annual Plans to deliver the INTERREG IVA Programme in their area. The inclusion of these plans in the new programme will enable the partnerships to build on the competences gained in the previous programme, ensuring that further methods of delivering innovation and enterprise at the local level will be developed in a strategic manner. With the successful legacy of implementing INTERREG IIIA, I am confident that EBR will effectively deliver their INTERREG IVA Multi Annual Plan: The aim of the plan, to promote balanced and sustainable development of the cross border East Border Region, complements fully the overall aim of the INTERREG IVA Programme, to support strategic cross border co-operation for a more prosperous and sustainable region.

I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues in EBR and wish them every success in the implementation of both the INTERREG IVA Multi Annual Plan and their own Strategic Plan for the coming years.

Pat Colgan
Chief Executive, Special EU Programmes Body
Introduction

The East Border Region is a highly distinctive cross border region comprising ten local authority areas, seven in Northern Ireland and three in the Republic of Ireland with a population of 826,000 people – 1 in 7 of the population of the island of Ireland.

The constituent authorities of the East Border Region are Newry and Mourne, Down and Banbridge District Councils, Armagh City and District Council, Craigavon, Ards and North Down Borough Councils in Northern Ireland and Louth, Monaghan and Meath County Councils in the Republic of Ireland.

The East Border Region (EBR) has a history of cooperation for cross border development stretching back over 30 years growing from consultation between two adjacent, cross border councils to a much more broadly based concept of balanced and sustainable development of the cross border region.

1.1 East Border Region Limited

East Border Region Limited is the mechanism by which this cooperation is carried forward. East Border Region Ltd. (EBR Ltd.) was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee in 1998, but its origins date back to 1976.

EBR Ltd. is directed by its Board and draws on its constituent local authorities for advice and guidance. All of the political parties in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland are represented in EBR Ltd. and the organisation has extensive social partner and other networks in the region and internationally.

This document sets out the East Border Region Ltd. Strategic Plan for the period 2008 – 2011.

In 2007 EBR Ltd. submitted to the Special EU Programmes Body the INTERREG IVA Multi-Annual Plan for the East Border Region 2007 – 2013. The EBR INTERREG IVA Plan was the subject of wide consultation across the EBR and it has been used, along with other inputs, to inform this Strategic Plan for EBR Ltd.

1.2 A Distinctive Region

As a region the EBR is distinctive as it represents, effectively, the coastal area between Dublin and Belfast, running from Gormanstown, south of Drogheda in County Meath, to Knocknagoney, west of Holywood in County Down.

The EBR experiences many of the development pressures arising from this positioning.

At the same time as this North – South axis experiences significant development pressures, the EBR has a considerable East – West dimension. For example Scotshouse in County Monaghan is 65 kilometres from the coast, while the distance, as the crow flies, from Middletown in County Armagh to the coast at Ardglass in County Down is almost 75 kilometres. The development pressures felt in the North – South axis of the EBR are relatively less intense along the East – West dimension and the issues related to the East – West dimension are often related to the opportunities to participate in the labour market and other benefits of the relative prosperity of the East coast area due to infrastructural and other deficiencies.

The most recent demographic data for the EBR are provided in Table 1 (below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority District</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
<th>Population Density (persons/km²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meath County</td>
<td>162,831</td>
<td>2342</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan County</td>
<td>55,997</td>
<td>1295</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louth County</td>
<td>111,267</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>134.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total for Southern Councils</strong></td>
<td><strong>330,095</strong></td>
<td><strong>4463</strong></td>
<td><strong>74.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ards Borough</td>
<td>73,500</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>193.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armagh City &amp; District</td>
<td>55,800</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banbridge District</td>
<td>44,800</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>99.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craigavon Borough</td>
<td>84,700</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>300.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down District</td>
<td>67,400</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>103.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newry &amp; Mourne District</td>
<td>91,600</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>102.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Down Borough</td>
<td>78,300</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>966.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total for Northern Councils</strong></td>
<td><strong>496,100</strong></td>
<td><strong>3412</strong></td>
<td><strong>145.4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for East Border Region</strong></td>
<td><strong>826,195</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,875</strong></td>
<td><strong>104.9</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The total population of the EBR is 826,195, the total area is 7,875 square kilometres and the average population density is 105 persons per square kilometre. However, there are substantial variations in the population density with Meath, Monaghan, Armagh and Banbridge all having notably low densities and Craigavon and North Down having high densities. This is a reflection of the diversity of the Region.

One of the difficulties of planning for a cross border region is the absence of a common set of statistics for the two parts of the Region. This means that it is much more difficult to garner and analyse data for a cross border region than for a region within a single jurisdiction. EBR Ltd. proposes to address this issue by a spatial planning development project to be funded through the INTERREG IVA Multi-Annual Plan.

1.3 A Very Diverse Region

The EBR is a very diverse region. It has two cities, two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a number of seaports and fishing villages, a strong Christian heritage offering across the Region, excellent sporting and recreational facilities, strong technology based industries and a tradition of educational excellence (although there is no university within the EBR).

At the same time, the EBR faces pressures of industrial change, decline of traditional industries, environmental degradation due to the development pressures in the region, decline of traditional seaside resorts and pockets of considerable deprivation remain in both urban and rural areas of what is, overall, a prosperous and successful region.

Although the EBR has substantial urban settlements (Bangor in North Down and Craigavon have populations in excess of 50,000, and Newtownards in Ards Borough, Newry in Newry and Mourne District, Dundalk and Drogheda in County Louth and Navan in County Meath have populations in excess of 25,000), the Region is essentially rural in character with generally small to medium size towns serving a rural hinterland.

1.4 Acting as a cross border Region

The EBR has learned over the years to think as a cross border Region, tackling joint problems together and taking opportunities together.

The growth of EBR Ltd. from a cooperation between two cross border local authorities to a network of 10 local authorities serving over 800,000 people is evidence of the value placed on cross border cooperation. This growth has seen the inclusion in the cross border process of local authority areas which have not traditionally been concerned with cross border development and whose political traditions might not have disposed them to cooperation with local authorities in another jurisdiction.

The common theme is the need for the EBR to sustain its economic development through processes which will embed the growth process in the cross border Region.
and at the same time spread the growth in an equitable and balanced manner throughout the Region. In other words, the EBR is seeking to achieve balanced and sustainable development of the cross border region.

To do so, the EBR requires investment in its businesses and its business infrastructure, it needs to develop approaches to innovation and the knowledge economy which are embedded in the Region, by implementing the Lisbon Agenda at the local level, and it needs to develop its cross border cooperative structures in ways which facilitate thinking about and planning for the region on a genuinely cross border basis, and to protect its natural and built environment and its biodiversity, both for their own value and as resources for leisure, recreation and tourism.

1.5 The East Border Region INTERREG IVA Multi-Annual Plan 2007–2013

The EBR INTERREG IVA Plan 2007 – 2013 has been drafted to reflect these development needs. The INTERREG Plan includes an extensive analysis of the strategic challenges which the EBR will face during the period of the new INTERREG Programme.

It examines the implications of key documents for the cross border region, including

- The documentation relating to the INTERREG IVA Programme, including its analysis of the socio-economic context of the INTERREG IVA region. This shows the current position of the EBR to include the following weaknesses or issues to be addressed:
  - low productivity, earnings and economic activity rates
  - dependence on old and vulnerable industries
  - low innovation potential
  - low levels of entrepreneurial activity
  - under-developed business networks, and
  - a need to address both North–South and East–West development issues

- The Comprehensive Study of the All-Island Economy published by the two governments in October 2006, which sets out their joint vision for the island economy and the two governments’ agenda for cross border cooperation which cluster around the following policy aims:
  - competitive and socially inclusive growth
  - clusters of businesses not impacted upon by the political boundary
  - investing in innovation, skills, the environment and enterprise to support the new industries
  - developing all-island business networks and


The INTERREG Plan also considers the key contextual challenges facing the region in the period of the INTERREG IVA Programme and identifies these as

- Globalisation,
- Climate change, and
- Changing EU priorities.
The analysis in the INTERREG IVA Plan shows:

- The importance of addressing both the North–South and the East–West dimensions of development in the EBR
- The contextual change drivers of globalisation, climate change and evolving EU priorities, which offer both opportunities and challenges to the EBR in the Programme period
- The current position of the EBR and of the eligible area in terms of under-performance in relation to indicators such as low productivity, low earnings and low economic activity levels, dependence on old and vulnerable industries, low innovation potential, low entrepreneurial activity and under developed business networks
- The policy aims, as indicated in the Comprehensive Study, of achieving competitive and socially inclusive growth, creating clusters unaffected by the political boundary, investing in innovation, skills, the environment and enterprise to support the new industries and developing business networks.

Each of these has an immediate and direct implication for the EBR aim of creating balanced and sustainable development of the cross border region.

The EBR INTERREG IVA Plan used the following diagram to summarise the strategic context:

### Change Drivers
- Globalisation
- Climate Change
- Evolving EU Priorities

### Current EBR Position
- Low Productivity, Earnings & Economic Activity Rates
- Dependence on Old & Vulnerable Industries
- Low Innovation Potential
- Low levels of Entrepreneurial Activity
- Under-developed Business Networks
- North–South and East–West Development Dimensions

### Policy Aims
- Competitive & Socially Inclusive Growth
- Clusters Not Impacted by Political Boundary
- Investing in Innovation, Skills, the Environment and Enterprise to Support the New Industries
- Developing Business Networks

### Outcomes
- Balanced and Sustainable Development of the cross border Region

The EBR INTERREG IVA Plan includes the following commitment:

‘By means of this Multi-Annual Plan, and using the other resources available to it, EBR Ltd. intends to equip the Region to compete in a globalised, innovative, knowledge-rich and competitive economy, offering opportunities on a balanced basis across the EBR based on practices which contribute to economic and environmental sustainability. In short, the aim is the **balanced and sustainable development of the cross border Region.**’
In recognition of this analysis the EBR INTERREG IVA Plan proposes 3 ‘Operations’ which are, in effect, Programme Priorities.

The Operations are
- Enterprise & Innovation
- Tourism, and
- Collaboration.

As with all of the activities of the EBR, the aim of the INTERREG IVA Plan is to achieve balanced and sustainable development of the cross border region. As a result, a major focus of each Operation in the Plan is on environmental sustainability.

EBR Ltd. is confident that the INTERREG IVA Programme will provide the region with substantial resources closely aligned to the objectives of EBR Ltd. and administration of the INTERREG IVA Programme funds will be a major activity for EBR Ltd. in the period to 2013.

1.6 The Wider Roles of EBR Ltd

However, EBR Ltd. is more than just the cross border regions’ INTERREG mechanism. EBR Ltd. has a wider active role in pursuing its aims through a variety of means above and beyond the INTERREG Programme. Indeed, it is arguable that in the period 2000–2006 EBR Ltd. concentrated too much on the administration of the INTERREG IIIA Programme, to the detriment of some of its wider activities.

The focus of this Strategic Plan 2008–2011 is, therefore, very much on how EBR Ltd. can go beyond its INTERREG IVA role to further its strategic mission of achieving balanced and sustainable development of the cross border region.

1.7 Governance of EBR Ltd

The role of EBR Ltd. under INTERREG IVA will be different from that which it played under INTERREG IIIA. In essence, under INTERREG IIIA EBR Ltd. and its counterpart local authority cross border groups were an important part of the INTERREG IIIA decision-making, monitoring and administrative process but funds provided to projects supported under the Programme did not flow through EBR Ltd., instead the Special EU Programmes Body made payments directly to supported projects. Under INTERREG IVA, by contrast, EBR Ltd. will itself directly draw down funds from the Special EU Programmes Body and will manage procurement and other processes to appoint delivery agents under its Operations. This means that EBR Ltd. will itself hold and disperse substantial amounts of INTERREG funds. In turn, this has implications for the governance of EBR Ltd.

This Strategic Plan sets out how EBR Ltd. has tightened and strengthened its governance in recognition of the requirements of the changed INTERREG IVA arrangements. The new arrangements strengthen the strategic inputs of elected members to the strategic development of EBR Ltd. while at the same time tightening membership of the Board of EBR Ltd. and ensuring stronger corporate commitment of the member local authorities of EBR Ltd.

These are among the outcomes of a review of its corporate governance which EBR Ltd. commissioned from the leading international accounting firm KPMG to ensure that its arrangements conformed with current best corporate governance practice. At the same time the opportunity has been taken to formalise some of the informal liaisons and other relationships which EBR Ltd. has developed into a new overall governance structure which recognises that EBR Ltd. undertakes various distinctive roles in pursuit of its mission of balanced and sustainable development of the cross border region, which are

- An advisory, liaison and facilitation role with a range of public and other bodies, enabling the cross border region to tackle common issues
- An executive role which includes but is not limited to the role which it will play under INTERREG IVA, and
- An advocacy and lobbying role making sure that the voice of the cross border region is heard and heeded by decision makers in the two capitals and beyond.

This Strategic Plan sets out the new governance arrangements for EBR Ltd.

1.8 Structure of the EBR Ltd. Strategic Plan 2008–2011

This section has set out some key strategic considerations which provide the context in which EBR Ltd. will work in the period to 2011.

The following sections of this Strategic Plan are structured as follows

- Section 2 provides an overview of the development of EBR Ltd. and its current structure and operations
- Section 3 summarises the proposals which EBR Ltd. has made for priorities for INTERREG IVA expenditure in the EBR in the period to 2013
- Section 4 sets out the proposed non-INTERREG IVA activities of EBR Ltd. in the period to 2011
- Section 5 sets out the way in which EBR Ltd. proposes to finance its non-INTERREG IVA activities and the changes to the governance of EBR Ltd. which have been introduced to strengthen the inputs of elected members to the strategic direction of EBR Ltd. while at the same time tightening membership of the Board of EBR Ltd. and ensuring stronger corporate commitment of the member local authorities of EBR Ltd.
East Border Region Ltd

This Section provides an overview of the background to East Border Region Ltd. and its development to date. Section 4 sets out its future priorities and Section 5 relates to the proposed activities of EBR Ltd. in the period 2008–2011 and sets out the governance arrangements which EBR Ltd. has put in place to ensure the effective delivery of its priorities in this period.

2.1 Development of East Border Region Limited

The origins of East Border Region Ltd. (EBR Ltd.) can be traced back to a single meeting between Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth County Council in January 1976. The meeting discussed the possibility of constructing a bridge across Carlingford Lough at Narrow Water. The agenda included the possibility of seeking grant aid for the bridge from the ‘Common Market Regional Fund’. The two Councils agreed to meet from time to time to discuss issues such as ‘cooperation on the development of tourism, drainage and the control of pollution in Carlingford Lough’.

From this low-key meeting and the follow up meetings grew EBR Ltd. and its three decade experience of cross border regional development.

In 1978 Down District Council and Monaghan County Council joined the bi-lateral Newry and Mourne and Louth discussions and the organisation was named the East Border Region Committee for the first time. The organisation became more active, producing publications and engaging with Ministers, MEPs and Commissioners – by 1988 EBR Ltd. had its first full time member of staff. For a long period EBR Ltd. continued to operate with the support of its member Councils but with only limited external support, including a small grant under the first INTERREG Programme. It was 1998 before another Council joined EBR Ltd., Banbridge District Council, and in that year EBR Ltd. was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee.

In 1999 Craigavon Borough Council joined EBR Ltd. and the organisation was funded, as a project, by the INTERREG II Programme. In the same year EBR Ltd. and its counterparts in the ICBAN and North West Cross Border Region launched the Border Corridor Strategy which was influential in shaping the INTERREG IIIA Programme.

In 2003 EBR Ltd., and its counterpart organisations, were appointed as Implementing Agencies for the INTERREG IIIIA Programme and they were jointly awarded €53.9 million of INTERREG IIIA funds. In preparing the East Border Region for this role over 100 Council officials took part in residential sessions to build the foundations for a strategic approach to cross border development to identify strong, working cross border projects across a range of thematic areas. Also in 2003 Ards Borough Council joined EBR Ltd.

In 2005 Armagh City and District Council joined EBR Ltd., in 2006 North Down Borough Council and Meath County Council became members of EBR Ltd., bringing the local authorities represented to 10, representing over 826,000 people.

Today EBR Ltd. is the means by which the cross border region addresses common issues jointly. EBR Ltd. enjoys broadly based political support from Councillors of all political persuasions across the Region. One of the strengths of EBR Ltd. is the active participation of Councils and Councillors from areas which have not traditionally been involved in cross border cooperation and whose political philosophies would not otherwise lead to the development of relationships with Councils and Councillors in another jurisdiction.

The result of this development process is that today EBR Ltd. enjoys a key role in...
cross border co-operation and has been responsible, jointly with its counterpart organisations ICBAN and NWRCBG, for the delivery of an increased allocation of over €65 million of INTERREG IIIA monies. EBR Ltd. is widely recognised at all levels as being at the forefront of regional cross border economic development.

2.2 EBR Ltd. Structure & Policies

Section 5 sets out the new governance arrangements for EBR Ltd., introduced as a result of the KPMG review which, in turn, arose from the need for EBR Ltd. to adapt its structures to play an enhanced role in the INTERREG IVA Programme 2007–2013.

Until the new governance arrangements were introduced, the EBR Ltd. Board comprised of sixty councillors, six from each member local authority. Councillors from every political party in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland were represented. The board was responsible for:

- Policy
- Strategy
- Lobbying

An Executive Committee comprised of councillors from all member local authorities was responsible for operational decision making and an Advisory Committee comprised of the County Managers and Chief Executives of the ten member local authorities was responsible for strategic inputs and providing advice and guidance to the Company.

The East Border Region INTERREG IIIA Partnership played an important role in the administration of the INTERREG IIIA Programme in the Region. The Partnership was a new model of partnership established at a regional level to implement a part of the INTERREG IIIA programme. It comprised a 50/50 partnership between local government and social partners, drawn on an equal basis from the Local Authorities, Local Strategy Partnerships and County Enterprise Boards throughout the region.

The EBR INTERREG IIIA Partnership was made up of 32 members who appraised over 200 applications and awarded grants in excess of €22 million to 35 projects. The broadly based membership of the INTERREG IIIA Partnership was important in contributing to awareness and understanding of the INTERREG IIIA Programme throughout the East Border Region.

EBR Ltd. has valued the relationships developed through the INTERREG IIIA Partnership. While the same structures will not be used in the INTERREG IVA Programme, EBR Ltd. intends to build on the wider social partner and stakeholder relationships established under INTERREG IIIA as an important element of regional development capacity in its implementation of the INTERREG IVA Programme and in support of its other activities.

In addition to its role as an Implementing
Agent under the INTERREG IIIA Programme, Ministers meeting in the North – South Ministerial Council decided that EBR Ltd., and its counterparts, should have an ‘authoritative consultation’ role across the INTERREG IIIA Programme and EBR Ltd. and its counterparts were appointed to the INTERREG IIIA Programme Monitoring Committee and to the Programme Steering Committee.

EBR Ltd. and its counterparts also played an important role in other INTERREG IIIA structures, for example in relation to the Rural Development Measures of the INTERREG IIIA Programme and in the structures for the Peace II Programme. The EBR Ltd. Working Groups drew upon funding from across the INTERREG and Peace Programmes to fund their thematic programmes of work.

2.3 EBR Ltd. Values, Policies and Strategies

In its previous review of its strategy, completed in November 2004, EBR Ltd. set itself the following priorities and objectives

- Focus on Cross Border Development
- Adding Real Value
- Achievable Realistic Goals
- Sustainable and Balanced Economy and Environment
- Ensuring a modern Infrastructure
- Consensus not Majority vote
- Regional and Pro Active Approach.

In order to achieve its key values East Border Region Limited has set the following objectives:

Policy and Strategy

- to DEVELOP realistic and achievable policies for the Region, at a regional level,
- to LOBBY for their implementation
- to RESPOND, on behalf of the region, to national strategies

Co-operation

- to FACILITATE and ENCOURAGE economic and other co-operation between the member councils and with the other cross border networks and to liaise with the Border Regional Authority and other organisations
- to PLAY AN ACTIVE PART in the arrangements for North-South co-operation and to maintain an active relationship with the European Commission
- to CO-ORDINATE local authority inputs to all cross border funding sources
- to ENCOURAGE and MOTIVATE, but not manage bi-lateral co-operation between East Border Region Committee local authorities

Projects

- to ACT AS DEVELOPER of cross border projects where the project is regional in nature
- to IDENTIFY and LOBBY for flagship projects appropriate for the East Border Region

Monitoring

- To MONITOR the development of the East Border Region in the context of implementation, spend and impact

Profile

- To PROMOTE the East Border Region and the member councils
In order to meet its objectives EBR Ltd. adopted a thematic approach to cross border economic development. As a result three thematic working groups comprising relevant councillors and officials from the eight member councils were formed, which report to the Board of EBR Ltd. The current thematic Working Groups are:

- Economic Development
- Tourism
- Environment and Infrastructure.

By adopting this thematic approach EBR Ltd. has ensured that the key strategic issues across all sectors within the Region are being dealt with in a structured, managed and co-ordinated manner. While these Working Groups have a role in investigating potential funding opportunities, their primary focus is strategic, encouraging a competitive, sustainable, integrated, outward looking and inclusive region. The Working Groups have been important in sustaining and developing the relationships between the member Councils’ officers who have become accustomed to working together on a cross border basis in a focused manner.

To support this work EBR Ltd. currently has a professional staff team of 9 people led by Pamela Arthurs, the Chief Executive, who has been with EBR Ltd. since 1996. EBR Ltd. also benefits considerably from inputs by the staff of member Councils and of social partner organisations.

2.4 Communications

EBR Ltd. has, to date, placed a particular emphasis on high quality communications about its work and has produced a range of high quality publications. One example is ‘Progress Through Partnership’, a report celebrating the 30th anniversary of the East Border Region Committee, now EBR Ltd.

EBR Ltd. has also made extensive use of information technology to communicate its cross border message. It has developed both a corporate website [www.eastborderregion.com](http://www.eastborderregion.com) and a visitor website [www.enjoyebr.com](http://www.enjoyebr.com).

EBR Ltd. has also produced a DVD to record its work under the INTERREG IIA Programme.

Further websites include [www.sustainandbuild.com/ie](http://www.sustainandbuild.com/ie) which provides cross border planning, building and environmental information and was launched in summer 2008.

[www.prideinourruralvillages.com](http://www.prideinourruralvillages.com)

This website illustrates the changing appearance of rural villages in the East Border Region through investment in new facilities and amenities and in helping communities to address economic development issues, attract more visitors and work together for a better and sustainable future.

[www.borderlands-ireland.com](http://www.borderlands-ireland.com)

A historical website which takes you on a journey through the ever changing landscape of Ireland’s Eastern Borders.

EBR Ltd is committed to continuing this emphasis on high quality communications using a variety of media in support of the INTERREG IVA Programme in the Region and in support of the wider role of EBR Ltd. A detailed Communication Plan outlining how EBR Ltd will engage with various stakeholders including Government Departments, the European Commission, Social Partners, Civic Leaders, and the Media has been drawn up.

Communications moving forward will include

- Regular Newsletters (distributed widely)
- Annual Report
- Presentations/Seminars
- Photo calls
- Ongoing development of EBR websites

EBR Ltd will endeavour to bring the message of cross border co-operation to a wide and varied audience and will also communicate with all Elected Members in the ten Member Councils by means of the Newsletter and dedicated presentations.
East Border Region

Artist’s impression of the newly opened FE McWilliam Gallery & Studio
3.1 The Enterprise and Innovation Operation

Globalisation and climate change pose real challenges for businesses in the EBR in the period to 2013. Local businesses need to find new competitive advantages which are based on innovation, service, knowledge or flexibility of supply, rather than cost, if they are to be able to compete in global markets. At the same time local businesses need to adapt to a world of increasingly scarce and expensive energy supplies – this requires the adoption of new working methods and of new technologies and some local businesses will find new product opportunities in the renewable energy and efficient energy management fields.

The current over-dependence on old and vulnerable industries needs to be tackled and this means, in turn, that the innovation capacity of the Region has to be increased and the current low level of entrepreneurial activity increased, if competitive and socially inclusive economic growth is to be achieved. This requires the strengthening of local business networks and business infrastructure together with investment in innovation, skills, the environment and enterprise and the development of new, sustainable business clusters on a cross border basis.

The Operation contributes directly to the implementation of the Lisbon Agenda at the local level. It is targeted at local businesses with the potential to grow and adapt to the new business conditions which will be encountered during the period.

The aim of the Operation is to contribute to the balanced and sustainable development of the cross border region by stimulating innovation at local level, stimulating innovation in SMEs and micro-enterprises, filling gaps in the existing business infra-structure and developing sustainable cross border clusters and networks to support the region’s continuing development.

The components of the Operation are
- Innovation
- Business infrastructure, and
- Clusters and networks.
3.1.1 Innovation

In a globalised economy innovation is a global process. However, for SMEs and micro-enterprises there is a need for intermediate steps to be provided at local level to enable them to understand and be aware of the process of innovation and to take the first steps to innovation. Following on from the INTERREG consultation process, a working group of stakeholders from across the EBR formulated an Innovation Framework for the EBR which plays the key role of complementing national and international initiatives with action at the local level which will be relevant to SMEs and micro-enterprises.

The EBR Innovation Framework's aim is to improve the competitiveness of SMEs and micro-enterprises in the cross border Region through the commercialisation of new ideas, products and processes through four pillars:

- an awareness programme and associated information clinics at the local level
- a Pre-incubation Programme
- a Technology Enterprise Support Programme, and
- an Innovation Programme offering training, mentoring, in-company development and access to expertise and facilities.

3.1.2 Business Infrastructure

Sound business infrastructure is essential to the development of a strong, innovative regional economy in the cross border region. The EBR already has a number of high quality providers of workspace accommodation for SMEs and micro-enterprises and the Region has already benefited from the close working relationships between the local enterprise agencies in Northern Ireland and the County Enterprise Boards.

While no full scale programme of new enterprise accommodation is required, there are opportunities to address gaps in the market and to respond to new needs which arise.

There are also opportunities to improve the economic and environmental sustainability of enterprise accommodation provision, for example by equipping some centres as demonstration sites for the use of renewable energies in a business context.

This component of the Innovation and Enterprise Operation, therefore, provides for the limited provision of new enterprise space, upgrading or adaptation of existing space and the applications of renewable energy systems in new and existing enterprise accommodation.
3.1.3 Clusters & Networks

The comprehensive study of the all island economy recognised the importance of developing business networks and sustainable business clusters which were genuinely cross border in nature. The InterTradeIreland study ‘Business Networks on the Island of Ireland’ found that

‘Networks and clusters help firms to achieve critical mass and economies of scale and compete in larger, more diverse and more competitive markets than they could if they were to continue to act alone’.

The study found that there were numerous networks on the island of Ireland, that companies actively participated in those networks and were convinced of the value of the networks. The study made a number of recommendations to enhance the economic development impact of networks but it also found that 93% of the identified business networks were not all-island or cross border in nature.

This component of the Operation seeks to address the relative weakness of cross border networks and clusters including but not exclusively the following specific, niche and focused clusters and networks

• the environment
• the new and emerging technologies sector
• an export network
• the craft sector
• the food and horticulture sector, and
• the engineering sector.

The largest single element of this component relates to the environment, because economic and environmental sustainability is at the heart of the EBR strategy. It is essential to equip local businesses with effective responses to climate change and to develop the opportunities for new product and service development which climate change offers.

The EBR proposes two possible inter-related initiatives in relation to the environment.

• a major initiative to equip both SMEs and local authorities with the ability to respond to climate change based on the successful Environmental Management System (EMS) initiative funded by EBR Ltd. under INTERREG IIIA, and
• an environmental industries cluster initiative.