



Miontuairiscí / Meeting Minutes

Economic Development, Enterprise, Tourism, EU Affairs & Rural Regeneration SPC
2.00pm Thursday 12th December 2024, Buvinda House & Hybrid

Attendees

Councillors: Cllr Joe Fox (Chairperson), Cllr Brian Fitzgerald, Cllr Gerry O'Connor, Cllr Eugene Cassidy, Cllr Sarah Reilly, Cllr Padraig Fitzsimons

Sectoral Representatives: Paula McCaul, Meath Chamber, Carol McSherry ICTU

Apologies: Dermot Ward IFA, Anne Headley Kentstown ICA.

Officials: Dara McGowan, Director of Services; Pat Shore, Rural Regeneration, Majella Farrell, Economic Development, Joe English, LEO, Michelle Goodwin, Regional Enterprise Plan Manager, Michele Whelan, Tourism Development, Ella Ryan, Food Culture Development, Áine Bird, Rural Regeneration.

Item	Discussion
1.	<p>Welcome and Introductions</p> <p>Chairperson Councillor Joe Fox welcomed all to this inaugural meeting of the new Economic SPC. He said he looked forward to working with the committee over the coming 5-year term.</p> <p>Director of Service, Dara McGowan welcomed everyone to the first committee meeting. He introduced all members and the officials and said he looked forward to working with everyone over the next five years.</p>
2.	<p>Ethics Declaration</p> <p>Áine Bird updated on the Conflict-of-Interest ethics. She said that this will be a standing item on the agenda and that all committee members must disclose any financial or other beneficial interest that they may have with an item that comes before a meeting.</p>
3.	<p>Economic Development</p> <p>3.1 Update on the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor</p> <p>Dara McGowan updated on the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor where he outlined the strategic collaboration between eight councils and two universities. He said that</p>



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	<p>there is 100 miles between the two capital cities with 2.2m of a population along the corridor. He advised that there is a website live since October 2024 and that Councillors Sharon Tolan, Helen Meyer and Stephen McKee sit on the cross-border committee. An event will take place in February 2025 to launch this Economic Corridor.</p> <p>The committee welcomed the update. Cllr Fox said that a marketing campaign will help promote this corridor internationally. Cllr Cassidy suggested that links from Navan to Drogheda and Navan to Dublin should be included as part of the corridor.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3.2 Update on the Economic Action Plan</p> <p>Majella Farrell, Economic Development gave an update on achievements since the action plan was launched. These included the launch of the Food strategy and Boyne Valley Tourism strategy, Trade delegation to Toronto along with production of Business Supports Packs. She briefed on the focus for 2025 which included PR and Marketing, establishing the Meath Centre of Business Excellence, acquiring lands for economic development and the completion of an analysis of the business profile for Meath.</p> <p>Cllr Fox stated that the key to the success of the plan is to follow the actions. Cllr O'Connor said that the PR and Marketing will be critical to attracting international businesses. He referred to Markam outside Toronto like Carey in the US where top companies are based here, and he suggested linking in with them. He also mentioned that there is 31 acres of zoned lands available to buy on the R147.</p> <p>Cllr Fitzgerald suggested getting in contact with the Irish US Council as several companies in Boston are looking for a base in Europe. He asked that a survey be carried out on the IDA and Business parks to find out why they are not attracting businesses to them.</p> <p>Cllr Cassidy referred to businesses wanting to move into turnkey units and that the Council should consider providing such units.</p> <p>Dara McGowan responded and said that the Council is working with the IDA to promote Meath internationally and to attract FDI into the county. He said that the Council recently bought 47 acres of zoned land in Navan and will develop and sell as serviced sites. He said that there are three sites in Kells that the council intend to develop and sell as serviced too. He advised that the Council does not intend building units as companies prefer to build their own spec.</p>

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	<p>Majella Farrell said that she has noted the issues raised and will link up with all contacts suggested by the members.</p> <p>3.3 Update on Event (Puca and Samhain festivals)</p> <p>Michelle Whelan, Tourism Development officer gave a presentation on the recent Púca festival held in Trim and Athboy. She said that the festival this year focused on building on last year's event to refine the location, scale, event offerings and operations to ensure a larger and more impactful festival for 2024. She said that visitor numbers of 49,050 surpassed the expected attendance of 44,000. She outlined the festival programme and said that there was a stronger focus on stakeholder participation through workshops and events. This year saw a sensory tent located in the market and a sensory area at the start of the Púca procession along with improved accessibility throughout the Market.</p> <p>The members commended the team on all the work done and said it was a huge success which brought a lot of visitors to both towns.</p> <p>Ella Ryan Food Culture Development officer presented on the Samhain Food and Culture festival which took place in Kells from November 7-10th. She outlined the events and said that there was 5000 plus visitors, an increase on 2023 numbers. She said that this year saw the Samhain festival join up with the Sheridan's Irish Food festival which increased the local community engagement and involvement. The long-term vision is to establish the festival as the flagship annual event for the Centre of Food Culture attracting international audiences and to provide a stage to showcase and teach food craft skills and for the Boyne Valley producers to reach new audiences.</p> <p>The committee members congratulated all involved on a very successful event. They said that food festivals are very popular in Europe and that the annual event will attract visitors from outside the region bringing tourism and business into Kells.</p> <p>3.4 Proposed Business Support Document</p> <p>A copy was circulated to members whereby Dara McGowan advised that the pack is making businesses aware of the services, grants, training and supports available to them. It gives access to Mentors, Consultants, Business advisors and will assist with information on employment sites, business set-up or expansion. He said that the Council have a dedicated team in place to support businesses to succeed and grow. He said the booklet is due to be launched next week and will be on the website then.</p>



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4.	<p data-bbox="300 405 440 443">Enterprise</p> <p data-bbox="300 461 874 499">4.1 Update on the Regional Enterprise Plan</p> <p data-bbox="300 521 1415 790">Michelle Goodwin, Regional Enterprise Strategy Manager presented on the plan and said that Meath hosts the regional role. She said the plan was launched in 2022 and includes projects across Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. The purpose of the plan is to work collaboratively to facilitate regional enterprise development and job opportunities. She said the plan focuses on several key priorities within the Mid East region and that workshops within the counties are scheduled to review challenges, successes and priorities in preparation for the next plan.</p> <p data-bbox="300 792 1415 869">The committee welcomed the update and stated that the county and region have a lot to offer.</p> <p data-bbox="300 929 1054 967">4.2 Update on the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) activities</p> <p data-bbox="300 990 1415 1137">Joe English, LEO gave an update on activities and said that 2024 has been busy with, €1.2m in grants allocated to small medium enterprises in Meath, 400 mentoring assignments, 1400 training courses, with 70 small medium enterprises taking part in green digital programmes.</p> <p data-bbox="300 1182 1415 1330">The committee welcomed the update and all the work being done with the business sector. Cllr Fitzgerald suggested getting more young people who have a business idea and encourage them to work with others to develop their idea. He suggested that the Council lead on this and have a unit available for this.</p>
5.	<p data-bbox="300 1379 560 1417">Rural Regeneration</p> <p data-bbox="300 1440 858 1478">5.1 Summary of Projects to be delivered.</p> <p data-bbox="300 1500 1415 1877">Pat Shore, Rural Regeneration outlined the various schemes in operation from the Vacant Homes and Derelict Sites grants to the Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure scheme, Town and Village and Clár grant schemes. He updated on progress to the Town Centre First plans and the establishment of town teams in three towns. He said that the section is also dealing with the RRDF scheme and the URDF scheme category three for compulsory acquisitions of property and sites. He updated on the facilities team who undertake the maintenance of 50 public buildings which include the libraries, council offices and heritage buildings. The team delivered the fit out on projects such as St Kenneth's Church, library fit outs, Kells Courthouse and currently the new Business Centre of excellence.</p>



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	<p>The members commended on all the works being undertaken under the various schemes and said also that the Town Teams are working well with a good turnout at the various meetings.</p>
6	<p>Work Programme 2024 – 2029</p> <p>Cllr Fox asked members to submit items for inclusion in the Work Programme over the next 5 years.</p>
7.	<p>AOB</p> <p>The committee were updated on the schedule of meeting dates for 2025, which will be held at the later time of 3pm. It was noted that other meetings may be scheduled should the need arise.</p> <p>Thursday 13th March 2025 Thursday 12th June 2025 Thursday 11th September 2025 Thursday 11th December 2025</p> <p>The meeting concluded at 4pm.</p>