



## Minutes of the Economic Development and Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee

Held on 9 March 2021 at 10.30am in Tipperary MD Civic Offices and by Zoom.

Members of Council	Sectoral Interests	Staff <u>In Attendance</u> :
Cllr. John Crosse - <b>Chairman</b>	Imelda Walsh – Farming Pillar, Zoom	Kathleen Prendergast, Economic Development Officer
Cllr. Seamus Hanafin, Zoom	Mary Spillane - PPN, Zoom	Pat Slattery, Director of Services Zoom
Cllr. Mary Hanna Murigan, Zoom	Tom McGrath – Business Pillar - Zoom	Aisling Kelly, Assistant Staff Officer, Zoom
Cllr. Siobhan Ambrose, Zoom	Laura Jones – Business Pillar, Zoom	Nuala O’ Connell, A/Senior Planner, Planning, Zoom
Cllr. Dr Phyll Bugler, Zoom	Jim Sheehan – Development Construction Pillar, Zoom	
Cllr. John Fitzgerald - Zoom	Clare Cashman - Zoom	
Cllr. Joe Hannigan, Zoom		

**Apologies:** Cllr Tony Black; Cllr Imelda Goldsboro; Seamus Hoyne and Cllr Seamus Morris.

**Absent:** Anthony Fitzgerald, LEO; Cllr Máirín McGrath; Noel Byrne, PPN and Cllr Peter Ryan.

### **1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

Cllr. John Crosse, Chairman, opened the meeting and welcomed all attending by Zoom. He noted the apologies received for this meeting.

### **2. Adoption of the minutes of previous meeting and matters arising**

The minutes of the last meeting were considered and Cllr Siobhan Ambrose proposed the adoption of the minutes and Cllr Joe Hannigan seconded this item.

### **3. Agreement on the Standing orders adopted by TCC**

The Standing Orders regulating the proceedings of the Strategic Policy committee were adopted by Tipperary County Council on December 14<sup>th</sup> 2020. These were noted by the members of the SPC. Cllr Joe Hannigan proposed the implementation of same and Cllr John Fitzgerald seconded this item.

#### **4. County Development Plan & Economic Development**

Nuala O'Connell, A/Senior Planner, TCC, gave a presentation on the process for the development of the County Development Plan 2022-2028 with a particular focus on the Economic Development aspects.

Ms O'Connell set the context for the preparation of the County Development plan and the associated timeline for same. She outlined the next steps in the process, when the opportunities for input into the plan will be and what has changed since the process for the last plan was commenced. She informed the meeting on what will be the focus of the new plan.

This included the following areas:

- Climate change.
- The opportunity in terms of Tipperary and the Tipperary Brand
- Plans for our villages and town in rural areas and settlement strategies.
- Land zoning in each town.
- The Identification of the three key towns: - Clonmel, Nenagh and Thurles.
- Identifying Rural Settlement Networks.
- Using the N24 Corridor [Limerick to Waterford] seek to improving the rail, roads, tourism and economic initiatives.
- Collaboration with the IDA – places-making our towns and FDI initiatives.
- Utilisation of the opportunities under two types of funding available the RRDF (€1 billion) and the URDF (€1 Billion).
- Driving town centre regeneration and revitalization for vibrant town centres, retail planning to livability, boutique style hotels, age friendly housing and digital hubs.

Ms O'Connell provided an outline of the variations adopted since the last plan was issued and also noted the fact that there was both a North and South Development Plan in the county previously and that this will be the first all-county County Development Plan. The plan will have regard to the National and Regional Planning framework and it will seek to strengthen our economic focus and lay the foundation for the Local Economic and Community Plan [LECP].

A recent public consultation on the first draft has been completed. The Chief Executive's report has been published and now is available on the Council's website. The Draft plan will be presented to the members of Tipperary County Council at their July 2021 meeting. The next stage will be a critical

stage in the plan development as it will comprise of a broad public consultation in order to garner the views of the public.

Ms O'Connell also highlighted that County Tipperary is a national leader in the area of Climate action and Sustainable energy. She noted that there was an application currently awaiting the outcome under the URDF for the development of a national centre of excellence for growth in sustainable energy, training and research in conjunction with LIT, Tipperary Energy and the community.

Making reference to sustainable towns and rural development Ms O'Connell stated that as a county we will be looking at opportunities such as Lisheen Mines; Littleton bog and the further development of the Munster Vales.

It was also important to look at life after Covid, making remote-working work through the development and the identification of remote working hubs and the development of rural educational hubs.

Chairman Cllr John Crosse thanked Ms O'Connell for the excellent presentation and noted that there was a lot of work ongoing in the Development of the next iteration of the County Development Plan.

Jim Sheehan noted the information on sustainable energy projects at Macro level but queried supports for projects at a Micro level. In particular he referenced the ESB and the need for them to promote and encourage solar power creation in both domestic and business settings. Ms O'Connell advised microgeneration was very important, and that the current RES has a proactive policy to support domestic and commercial on-site RE. She advised also that the Council had previously written to the Dept. recommending that planning exemptions be revised to further support domestic options. She noted the comments regarding the ESB and she advised she would raise this at the next stakeholder consultation meeting for the CDP. She also mentioned the importance of ensuring that all grant applications are climate proofed as they would be more likely to proceed if they are.

Cllr Joe Hannigan noted the importance of being able to adapt post Covid. He noted the value of supporting towns and villages to develop digital hubs and sustainable energy technologies. Ms O'Connell advised that towns or villages could look at the option of joining the SEAI Better Energy Communities initiative and the preparation of an energy masterplan for the town. She mentioned that the Town and Village Renewal programme could be an option for looking at the re-use of vacant building for community uses.

Tom McGrath noted that the recent announcement on the closure of banks in 3 towns in the County. Mr McGrath enquired if these buildings or similar buildings could be considered for development of Digital hubs. In particular

he felt that the organizations owning these buildings should be requested to consider how they could support the communities left behind after their closure and perhaps they could do so by giving the properties for community use. Ms O'Connell noted that the buildings may have significant architectural design and importance in the town centres.

Cllr Seamus Hanafin asked if the Lisheen Mine site will be identified as a Hero project as this site has all the requirements for development. Cllr Hanafin also noted the importance of bringing life back into the town centres by bringing the people back to the local town's life and businesses. The Council will have to take this critical factor for future development into consideration and be accommodating to developers who are seeking to achieve this. Ms O'Connell agreed with Cllr Seamus's comments on the Lisheen Mines and its national importance.

Cllr Siobhan Ambrose noted the importance of the role of Architects in town development and noted the example of both Clonakilty and Westport in this regard. Being able to focus on the different specialties or uniqueness in each town would be very useful and require the expertise of both architects and planners in the Council. Ms O'Connell agreed that developing town centres needs a multi-disciplinary approach and local champions, and that traditional streetscapes and shopfronts are to be valued. She advised that this would be a consideration for the CDP and for future LAP(s) and non-statutory plans.

Cllr Siobhan Ambrose thanked Director of Services Pat Slattery for his commitment given at the last Council Meeting to work on the development of a new Digital hub in Clonmel town centre.

Clare Cashman noted the inclusion of education in remote digital hubs in the proposed plan. She commented that the delivery of a rural university as was the original proposal of Tipperary Institute [pre LIT] was a most welcome action. (Ms Cashman lost connection to the meeting at this point)

## **5. Digital Strategy Update December**

Kathleen Prendergast referred to the document that was circulated with the Agenda which gave a full update on the actions in the County Tipperary Digital Strategy which covered 4 thematic areas:

- Infrastructure
- Enterprise
- Citizen
- Training and Education

A briefing on the progress was presented which outlined the activity in the Digital sphere through Tipperary County Council and the partners involved working in collaboration on the strategy over the past year. It was noted that this growth was positively impacted by the challenges presented by COVID whereby many of the longer term actions had to be hastily implemented in order to continue services and connection in 2020.

Cllr Seamus Hanafin acknowledged all the work LEO had done in supporting businesses and in their effective and efficient provision of funding and grants to businesses during the pandemic. He felt that great credit was due to the staff in LEO for their continued support to businesses and training support. He highlighted there would be a further need to support businesses when they get the go ahead to re-open. There was a surge during Covid in savings along with an increase in the support of local businesses. Cllr Hanafin stated that it was just as important to support businesses as the Level 5 restrictions are lifted and give businesses the opportunity to harness any spending surge when they reopen.

Cllr John Fitzgerald concurred with Cllr Hanafin comments on the need to support businesses in post Covid when they started to open again.

Cllr Siobhan Ambrose noted that any of the businesses that had been in touch with her were pleased with the supports they had received. She acknowledged a lot of businesses were now trading online due to Covid and this had changed people's mindsets. She felt that COVID had refocused peoples perception on what was important and people are now realising the importance of shopping local and keeping the businesses we have locally. This was a new era and keeping business local should be promoted.

Laura Jones noted that unfortunately some businesses have been impacted more than others arising from COVID and that there may be some businesses that will not reopen. Ms Jones expressed gratitude to both Skillsnet and LEO for both their training and financial supports to businesses.

## **6. Preparing the way: Recovery and Resilience – County Tipperary's Future Digital Placement**

The County Tipperary Digital Strategy was developed in 2017 and it set out to identify the actions that would both deliver digital infrastructure to the County and the roll-out of use of new technology in the County to the best advantage of the citizens, the economy and specific vulnerable sections of society including the elderly, youth and those socially excluded.

The Strategy had very specific targeted activity over the period of five inclusive years from 2018 to 2023. However due to the impact and resulting disruption of the COVID pandemic, major changes have evolved in 2020

which has catapulted delivery of many of the action in the plan into a condensed period of time.

Kathleen Prendergast presented an over view of the need to review the Strategy based on the impact of the changes experienced in 2020 under the following headings:

- Digital and Broadband Impact on the future
  - The expectations of what the NBI is to bring from 2017,
  - How we have been catapulted into that world now with COVID,
  - What we can expect to gain from the future in this new work model of remote working
- The internet of Things
  - What the internet of things is all about and
  - How we must be ready to take this opportunity,
- The EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility
  - National Plan 6 Pillars and coherence targets
  - The 7 flagship areas
- Where should we be focused
  - Relook at the Digital strategy using these different relevant funding stream opportunities
- Next Steps

The Chairman Cllr John Crosse acknowledged that things had dramatically changed in the last year and there was a new way of doing business and it was pertinent to look at the County Digital Strategy again. He also felt that it would demonstrate that Tipperary was taking the lead role in this and this had the potential to bring the employment in the County also.

Cllr Joe Hannigan noted the impact that technology would have on businesses going forward and the displacement in certain jobs could see people being reduced in the workforce. Covid had accelerated the changes and was impacting everything including banks and Post offices closing down due to more services been switched to and facilitated online.

Seamus Hoyne [absent but submitted his view by email] was encouraged to see the focus on sustainability (energy, remote working, IOT as critical enablers etc.). He advised that the vision within the LIT Thurles campus is to have an increased focus on sustainability. Mr Hoyne stated that LIT are already involved in significant academic research and development activities in relation to sustainable energy and digitisation within that field including:

- Research on Training needs for new programmers on Building Information Modeling for the construction sector

- Development of a Digital Academy for the Sustainable Built Environment (DASBE) which will become a hub for education and training in relation to energy efficiency, circular economy and digitisation
- Research on electrification of heating and cooling using heat pumps, smart ventilation and other technologies
- Research on next generation buildings within integration renewables and technologies
- Data analysis in the context of climate change, sustainable energy and sustainable finance.
- Using Virtual Reality to create engaging experiences on the Blue Way (in collaboration with Tipperary Sports Partnership)
- Delivery of Degree Programmes in Data Analytics and Cyber security, Digital Marketing and others

Currently over 2,000 students are studying across Flexible Learning programmes in LIT, the majority of which are on-line or blended learning programmes. Mr Hoyne noted that a significant proportion of these students are from Tipperary or working in Tipperary and he offered to contribute to further discussions within the SPC members and the Council on how LIT (and the new TU) can support and enable the digital economy.

The Chairman Cllr John Crosse asked if a sub committee group could be considered with the intention of exploring a review of the digital strategy due to the changes in the last 3 years and continuing changes in the next few years and aligning with the 6 pillars of the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility and the 7 flagships areas. The sub group could consider the impacts, views, and suggestions or changes to the digital strategy plan. This report should then be brought back to this SPC group for discussion at a future meeting or workshop.

Cllr Joe Hannigan agreed that it was a good idea to have a sub group to work on the Digital Strategy and the fact there was funding opportunities for County Tipperary further substantiated this.

The sub-group was appointed as follows:

- **Tom McGrath** nominated by Cllr Joe Hannigan and seconded by Cllr Siobhan Ambrose.
- **Seamus Hoyne** nominated by Mary Spillane and seconded by Cllr John Crosse.
- **Laura Jones** nominated by Imelda Walsh and seconded by Jim Sheehan
- **Cllr John Crosse** nominated by Cllr Siobhan Ambrose and seconded by Cllr John Fitzgerald

## 7. Correspondences

Cllr John Crosse, the Chair confirmed there was no correspondence received prior to the meeting.

**8. Date of next meeting**

11 May 2021 at 10.30am

**9. Close of Business**

Cllr. John Crosse, the Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and time. The meeting then concluded.

Signed: John Crosse M.C.C. Date: 11/5/21

Chairperson.