



MINUTES OF MEETING

Project Name	Strategic Policy Committee Enterprise, Economic Development & Tourism	
Purpose of Meeting		
Location of Meeting	Council Chamber	Date and Time 12.00 noon 10 th December, 2020
Present	Name Gerry Murphy (GM), Head of Finance Evelyn Reddin (ER), Head of Enterprise Denise Rainey (DR), Administrative Officer BSU Jake Lawlor (JL) Assistant-Staff Officer BSU Dom Reddin, Administrative Officer Cllr. Conor Bergin Cllr. Aidan Mullins Cllr. Aisling Moran Pat Culleton Pat Hennessey Bernie Everard	Representing LCC LCC LCC LCC LCC Chairperson SPC, Member LCC Member LCC Dev/Construction Rep Agricultural/Farming Rep Business/Commercial Rep
Apologies	Cllr. Seamus McDonald Deirdre O`Connell-Hopkins	Member LCC Trade Union Rep
Item No.	Description	Action By Date for Completion

<p>1.</p>	<p>Confirmation of minutes</p> <p>Minutes of previous meeting were proposed by Pat Culleton and seconded by Cllr. Aidan Mullins.</p>		
<p>2.</p>	<p>Economic Development Update</p> <p>Evelyn Reddin (ER) gave an update on the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and she specifically highlighted the increase in the uptake of grants, supports and training that businesses have availed of since the COVID pandemic began.</p> <p><u>The Cube</u></p> <p>ER announced that Niall Kelly commenced employment as director of The Cube on the 2nd of November. The remit of the Cube will be to assist the transition of businesses and communities to a low carbon economy and to assist in attracting companies with a low carbon focus to Laois and the wider midlands region.</p> <p>Following queries raised, Evelyn Reddin advised that funding would be committed for 3 years by Enterprise Ireland. The Cube will become self-financing thereafter through a combination of rental revenue, training courses and pursuing other funding sources (research, grants, etc.).</p> <p>Regarding Brexit, Evelyn Reddin advised that most large businesses were engaging with the LEO and have a plan in place. The LEO is currently offering mentoring sessions that assess each business and the impact of Brexit on it.</p> <p>Evelyn Reddin advised that information packs and Brexit supports would be promoted in January 2021. 3,000 Brexit agents are currently being put in place across the country to aid the transition.</p>		

Denise Rainey (DR) provided an update on the works carried out by the Business Support Unit (BSU) to date this year and in particular relating to the following:

J17 Enterprise Park

J17 is progressing well with all major infrastructural works completed and public lighting and landscaping due to commence early in the new year. Alpha Drives have commenced site works. Interest in J17 remains high and other sales enquiries are progressing at various stages.

Business Incentives & Supports

The Shop Front Grant Scheme has been very successful in 2020. DR highlighted that majority of approved applications were in Portlaoise and asked the Committee to encourage applications from other businesses and towns across the County.

Façade Enhancement Schemes

The current façade enhancement scheme in Lower Main Street Portlaoise will conclude in Spring 2021. 39 units have been painted with 1 unit remaining. Plans are progressing for a similar scheme in Portarlinton.

Portlaoise Town Team

Various projects arising from the Portlaoise Town Team are being supported and advanced by the BSU. Recent projects included the development of new welcome signage on five approach roads into the town. The signs will be used to promote key events and features in the town throughout the year. Additional Christmas lighting was also purchased for Portlaoise town centre. Further promotional features are

	<p>planned for 2021 including lamp post banners for JFL Avenue and an artistic feature for the Top Square in Portlaoise.</p> <p><u>Tourism Destination Towns</u></p> <p>The BSU is working with the Tourism and Heritage Sections to deliver on the objectives of the Destination Towns Project. The BSU will oversee a paint scheme and signage for the Laneways and Lyster Square as well as the provision of digital touchscreens which will provide visitor information at several locations throughout the Town.</p>		
3.	<p>Restart Grant Scheme and Rate Waivers</p> <p>Gerry Murphy provided an update on the Restart Grant Scheme. To date €6.97 million has been paid out. A number of Restart Grant appeals are currently being processed.</p> <p>LCC will receive an estimated €6 million in funding to cover rate waivers for the period 27/03/2020 to 27/12/2020.</p>		
4.	<p>Tourism Update</p> <p>Dom Reddin provided an update on tourism activities.</p> <p><u>Tourism Destination Towns:</u></p> <p>An in-house Steering Committee is working on plans for Signage / Interpretation at the Old Fort Site and other specific locations across the town as part of the proposed works under the Tourism Destination Town Scheme. Work will commence early in the new year on enhancing the laneways in Portlaoise, to include, stone paving, lighting painting, seating and soft landscape works.</p>		

Barrow Blue Way:

The Planning Section (Laois) has assessed the planning compliance submission from Waterways Ireland in relation to the works proposed for the trail way along the Canal in Laois as part of the Barrow Blueway Development. All requirements were met and notice to commence was sent on to Waterways Ireland. A Draft Memorandum of Understanding for the works to be carried out at road crossings in Laois & Kildare is currently being reviewed by the two Authorities and will be finalised over the coming weeks following discussions and agreement by both parties on its content.

Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trails

12.5km of trail have been completed in Co. Laois and 25.5km in Offaly. Tenders for an additional 5.5km are currently being assessed with a proposed start on site of January 11th, 2021. It is also envisaged that work will commence on the site office in the coming weeks.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2020:

An application on behalf of Laois & Offaly County Councils for the development and implementation of a signage, orientation and interpretation strategy for the Slieve Blooms was submitted to Fáilte Ireland in late November 2020. The projected cost is €300,000.

Laois Tourism:

There is a very strong online promotion of local businesses through various social media channels. Laois Tourism regularly promotes local businesses and shares the online promotions that each business is making available.

Dom Reddin commended Laois Chamber on promoting the Laois Gift Card which has signed up over 100 stores across the County.

Dom Reddin informed Cllr. Moran that he has discussed the development of a Greenway from Maganey in Co. Laois to Carlow with Waterways Ireland and they have advised that they will review this and revert in 2021.

	<p>In response to Councillor Moran, Dom Reddin advised that alternative parking areas at the Rock of Dunamaise were being reviewed and explained the difficulty in finding a suitable site due to the sloped terrain.</p>		
<p>5.</p>	<p>Laois Chamber Update</p> <p>Bernie Everard gave an update on the activities of the Laois Chamber. 2020 has been a challenging year and the inability to host live events has affected their revenue. The Chamber has not been charging for digital events and will aim to host the Laois Jobs Fair and Business awards in late 2021.</p> <p>Laois Chamber is currently offering a 3-month membership extension to members experiencing difficulties.</p> <p>Laois Chamber has launched the Laois Gift Card in collaboration with the Local Enterprise Office and Laois Tourism. This is a prepaid Me 2 You Gift Card that can be spent in over 100 businesses across the County, both in store and online. The Laois gift card replaces the Portlaoise gift card and had already exceeded the revenue generated by the Portlaoise Gift Card in the previous 2 years (€30,000). The Laois Gift Card features the Laois Tourism logo and is being promoted by a digital marketing campaign supported by the LEO.</p> <p>Bernie Everard outlined the projects planned for 2021. Laois Chamber has been selected as 1 of 8 counties to lead an age friendly initiative. The chamber will assemble a committee in 2021.</p> <p>The chamber is planning a collaborative project with the BSU and LEO to market Laois as a businesses and investment location. This is envisaged as a 2 to 3-year project which will commence with market research to identify clusters, USP's and call to actions.</p> <p>Bernie Everard thanked the Council on behalf of Laois Chamber for their continued financial support.</p> <p>In response to Cllr. Mullins, Bernie Everard advised that the newly formed Portarlington Business Owners Association is actively engaging and have been promoting and encouraging sign ups for the Laois Gift Card.</p>		

<p>6.</p>	<p>AOB</p> <p>Cllr. Bergin commended John Mulholland, Evelyn Reddin and Gerry Murphy on their work on the article promoting Laois as a business and tourism destination in the Sunday Business Post.</p> <p>Cllr. Bergin enquired if there was for the official opening of the Slieve Bloom Bike Trail. Gerry Murphy responded that there was currently no date. Dom Reddin added that people are already using the trail.</p> <p>In response to Cllr. Moran, Dom Reddin advised that new camping sites in various location across the County would be examined.</p>		
	<p>Next meeting to be held on Thursday 4th March 2021 @ 11.00 am.</p>		