



MINUTES OF MEETING

Project Name	<p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Policy Committee</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Enterprise, Economic Development & Tourism</p>	
Purpose of Meeting		
Location of Meeting	Microsoft Teams	Date and Time
		<p>11.00 am</p> <p>4th March 2021</p>
Present	Name	Representing
	<p>Cllr. Conor Bergin Cllr. Seamus McDonald Cllr. Aidan Mullins Cllr. Aisling Moran Pat Culleton Pat Hennessey Bernie Everard Deirdre O`Connell-Hopkins PJ Phelan Gerry Murphy (GM), Head of Finance Evelyn Reddin (ER), Head of Enterprise Denise Rainey (DR), Administrative Officer BSU Linda Meredith (LM) Staff Officer BSU Dom Reddin, Administrative Officer</p>	<p>Chairperson SPC, Member LCC Member LCC Member LCC Dev/Construction Rep Agricultural/Farming Rep Business/Commercial Rep Trade Union Rep Community/Voluntary Rep LCC LCC LCC LCC LCC</p>
Apologies		

Item No.	Description	Action By	Date for Completion
1.	<p>Confirmation of minutes</p> <p>Minutes of previous meeting were proposed by Pat Culleton and seconded by Cllr. Aisling Moran.</p>		
2.	<p>Economic Development Update</p> <p>Evelyn Reddin (ER) gave an update on the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and she specifically highlighted the demand for supports from local businesses.</p> <p><u>Green for Micro</u></p> <p>ER outlined a new support launched this year called ‘Green for Micro’ which is a comprehensive support package to assist small businesses to adopt to greener technologies and to avail of opportunities in this emerging sector.</p> <p><u>Local Enterprise Week</u></p> <p>Local Enterprise Week took place from the 1st – 5th March 2021 and had over 200 events taking place nationally.</p> <p><u>The Cube</u></p> <p>ER suggested inviting Niall Kelly, The Cube, to the next SPC meeting to give an update and advise of plans for The Cube going forward.</p> <p><u>BSU Update</u></p> <p>Denise Rainey (DR) provided an update on the works carried out by the Business Support Unit (BSU) to date this year specifically highlighting the following:</p>		

J17 Enterprise Park

J17 is progressing well with the Glanbia building now completed and the company commissioning its new cheese plant. All major infrastructural works are completed. Works on public lighting and landscaping which were due to commence early in 2021 but were delayed due to Covid 19 restrictions commenced on 1st March 2021. A number of companies are currently at different stages of agreement for purchasing lands.

Business Incentives & Supports

The Shop Front Grant Scheme is in place again for 2021. The grant is a maximum of €750 per unit or 50% of the cost of the works whichever is the lesser.

This year to promote the Age Friendly Initiative Laois County Council will increase the maximum grant to €1,000 or 50 % of the cost of the works whichever is the lesser where applicants are installing accessibility features (e.g. accessibility ramps and railings).

Façade Enhancement Schemes

The new Portarlinton Façade Enhancement is due to be launched in April 2021.

The scheme will be open to commercial & residential premises in Main St, Market Square & French Church St.

Tourism Destination Towns

The BSU is working with the Tourism and Heritage Sections to deliver on the objectives of the Portlaoise Destination Towns Project specifically the following:

-The provision of a paint scheme

	<p>-A wayfinding & interpretative signage scheme</p> <p>- the provision of digital touchscreens.</p>		
3.	<p>Support to Business – Covid 19</p> <p>Gerry Murphy provided an update on the Restart Grant Scheme. €7.6 million was paid out in 2020.</p> <p>€5.9 million was applied in respect of commercial rate waivers to 1,313 businesses in the County.</p> <p>GM advised that commercial rates waivers will apply to relevant businesses for the 1st quarter of 2021. A Circular letter is currently being drafted regarding a commercial rates waiver to the end of quarter 2 of 2021.</p> <p><u>Small Business Assistance Scheme/COVID Restrictions Support Scheme</u></p> <p>A new Small Business Assistance scheme is being launched on the 11th March 2021. The Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID (SBASC) is intended to target those businesses with operating costs that do not qualify for the COVID Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS) operated by the Revenue Commissioners. The eligibility criteria for both schemes are similar. The main difference between SBASC and CRSS is the requirement, in the case of CRSS, for the public to have access to a business premises. SBASC also aligns with recently announced grant schemes for the tourism, arts and entertainment sectors.</p>		
4.	<p>Tourism Update</p> <p>Dom Reddin provided an update on tourism activities.</p>		

Tourism Destination Town:

Construction works, which were due to commence on Bull Lane in Portlaoise in January, were suspended due to Covid 19 Level 5 restrictions. They will now commence on March 8th 2021. The Steering Committee is currently finalising tender documents for Interpretation signage at the Old Fort Quarter and wayfinding signage for other areas included in the project.

Barrow Blue Way:

The Memorandum of Understanding for works to be carried out at road crossings in Laois & Kildare has been agreed by both Laois & Kildare Local Authorities. Work commenced on March 1st on the Towpaths from Athy to the Mink Farm in Vicarstown, Co Laois.

An Economic Business Plan is currently being prepared by Louise Brown & Associates to identify opportunities for potential businesses/services along the route. A series of workshops were held with local people. Meetings are proposed between Waterways Ireland and Laois & Kildare County Councils prior to the study being advanced to final draft stage.

Discussions took place regarding the Blueway being extended from Athy and bringing it through Maganey and past Knockbeg College into Graiguecullen.

Points were raised by Cllr. Moran, Deirdre Hopkins O`Connell & PJ Phelan.

Dom Reddin informed Cllr. Moran that he has discussed the development of the Blueway from Maganey in Co. Laois to Carlow with Waterways Ireland and they advised that when the current project is finished WWI will look at it.

G Murphy agreed to carry out a full review of the Barrow Blueway Planning file and to advise the Chairman and Councillor Moran of the exact position regarding the decisions made by Laois County Council and Bord Pleanala.

Fáilte Irealnd -Slieve Bloom Destination Development

Programme

An activation programme to help support the various Slieve Bloom community groups develop into a “Tourism focused activities cluster destination” has been launched. The programme is aimed at individuals/groups who are involved in selling packages and experiences for the destination.

A group of 16 key businesses from Laois & Offaly were chosen and they will work with Fáilte Ireland & the Councils in an online workshop designed to look at ways to develop, promote and sell the experience of the Slieve Blooms. The event is scheduled for 21st April 2021 for wider group and for trade and staff possibly in May 2021.

Outdoor Public Space Scheme

The Outdoor Public Space Scheme will allow each local authority to adapt, equip or otherwise improve public spaces for cultural and events activities. Funding will be awarded for projects that focus on the delivery of infrastructure to support arts, culture, creative activities, entertainment events/ festivals and the night-time economy.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2020:

The following Laois Projects were awarded funding in partnership with Failte Ireland, who are co-funding the projects with the Department of Rural & Community Development

1. Laois Tourism and Recreation Signage Upgrade Programme.

(Phase 1) Upgrade and replacement of signage countywide
€20,000

2. Corrigmeal Woodland Trail

Phase 2 Upgrade of trail and enhancement Dysart, Portlaoise
€16,695

3. Killeshin Reservoir Trail

Extension of existing trial Killeshin Village €19,800

4. Mapboard installation at Outdoor Recreation facilities

Countywide Trail promotion €17,206

5. Slieve Bloom Way & Ancillary

Maintenance & enhancement looped walks Slieve Blooms
€11,800

	<p><u>6. Borris in Ossory</u> Upgrade of existing Walking Trail €19,634.00</p> <p><u>7. Conoboro Walking Trail</u> Trail signage & promotion €17,910</p> <p><u>8. Laois Partnership Abbeyleix Bog Walks</u> Repair/replacement of bog bridge & resurfacing of trails €18,000</p> <p>Pat Culleton queried progress with regard to the car parks at Glenbarrow & the Rock of Dunamaise.</p> <p>Discussions on the purchase of a site at the Rock of Dunamaise have not been successful to date. Alternative sites are currently being examined.</p> <p>A planning application has been submitted by a private landowner for car parking in Glenbarrow.</p>		
5.	<p>Laois Chamber Update</p> <p>Bernie Everard gave an update on the current activities of the Laois Chamber. With the current Covid 19 restrictions in place the Chamber are lobbying for continued supports. 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><u>Laois Chamber Membership</u></p> <p>Laois Chamber offered a 3-month membership extension to members experiencing difficulties in 2020. This was reviewed at their board meeting in January where it was agreed to offer a further 3-month membership extension.</p> <p><u>Laois Gift Card</u></p> <p>Laois Chamber launched the Laois Gift Card in collaboration with the Local Enterprise Office and Laois Tourism in November 2020. They had set a target of €75,000 but reached over €120,000.</p> <p><u>Supporting Business Together</u></p> <p>Laois Chamber recently held a virtual conference “Supporting Business Together” which was live streamed from The Heritage Hotel in Killenard with speakers from industry and government bodies including Gas Networks Ireland, LOETB, Solas, TSSG, Laois LEO, Skillnet, National Learning Network,</p>		

	<p>Carlow IT – Life Long Learning, University of Limerick – Graduate and Professional Studies, Laois County Council, Laois Hubs Collective & Anna May McHugh, National Ploughing Association. The conference was recorded and can be viewed online.</p>		
6.	<p>AOB</p> <p>Deirdre Hopkins O`Connell as an ICTU nominee on the S.P.C. queried if there is capacity within the Local Authority for trades people such as painters etc.</p> <p>GM advise it is not practical to cover all works areas. LCC have their own indoor and outdoor workforce which consists of Road Maintenance & Housing Maintenance but in certain areas LCC require outside resources and expertise.</p> <p>Cllr. Aisling Moran suggest that LCC get an app developed with a list of all service providers i.e. painters / plumbers / electricians to enable tenants to access services quickly</p>		
7.	<p>Agreed dates for meetings 2021</p> <p>Thursday 3rd June 2021 Thursday 2nd September 2021 Thursday 2nd December 2021</p> <p>Meetings to be held @ 11am</p>		