



MINUTES OF MEETING

Project Name	Strategic Policy Committee Enterprise, Economic Development & Tourism	
Purpose of Meeting		
Location of Meeting	Microsoft Teams	Date and Time 11.00 am 2 nd September 2021
In attendance	Name Cllr. Conor Bergin Cllr. Aidan Mullins Cllr. Aisling Moran Pat Hennessy Deirdre O`Connell-Hopkins Caroline Hofman Julie Bergin, A/Head of Finance Mark Clancy (MC), Business Advisor, LEO Denise Rainey (DR), Administrative Officer BSU Sheila Cahill (SC) Staff Officer BSU Dominic Reddin, Administrative Officer	Representing Chairperson SPC Member LCC Member LCC Agriculture/Farming Rep Trade Union Rep Community/Voluntary Rep LCC LCC LCC LCC LCC
Apologies	Pat Culleton Gerry Murphy, Head of Finance	Dev/Construction Rep LCC

Item No.	Description	Action By	Date for Completion
1.	<p>Confirmation of minutes</p> <p>Minutes of previous meeting were proposed by Dominic Reddin and seconded by Cllr Aidan Mullins.</p>		
2.	<p>Support to Business (Covid 19) – Julie Bergin</p> <p>Small Business Assistance Scheme (SMASC)</p> <p>29 grants were issued under Phase II of the Small Business Assistance Scheme for Covid (SBASC) with a total of €92,000 paid out. The grants ranged from €1,000 to €4,000 per business. The Scheme is now closed.</p> <p>Commercial Rates Waiver</p> <p>€1.14 million has been paid out to business accounts in Quarter 3 of 2021 in relation to the Commercial Rates Waiver Scheme. This brings the overall total for the first three quarters of the year to €3.39 million.</p> <p>Cllr Aidan Mullins queried if this money was being recouped from the Department and JB confirmed that it is being recouped.</p>		
3.	<p>BSU Update</p> <p>Denise Rainey (DR) provided an update with regard to the projects being carried out by the Business Support Unit (BSU) to date this year specifically highlighting the following:</p>		

Shop Front Grant Scheme

14 applications received to date in 2021. 10 applications approved to the value of €5,865.00. Good spread across all towns/villages in the County.

Business Incentive Schemes

1no. application has been approved to date this year under the Business Incentive scheme totalling €5,380.67 over the 3 years.

Currently reviewing the extension of this scheme to Borris in Ossory. The scheme will be presented for approval at the next Municipal District meeting on 22nd September.

Town and Village Streetscape Enhancement Scheme 2021

The BSU are now accepting online applications for the above Scheme. The focus of this Scheme is to support the upgrade and enhancement of shopfronts facades and residential facades within selected rural towns / village centres.

Laois County Council has received an allocation of €260,000 for the scheme. Mountrath, Mountmellick, Rathdowney, Ballinakill & Ballylinan are the towns and, villages chosen for this Scheme. The Scheme covers commercial, residential and unoccupied premises.

The BSU have liaised with business groups and tidy town representatives and also advertised in local press and through social media.

Portlaoise Town Team

The BSU is in the final stages of completing a marketing project with the Traders Association Downtown Portlaoise.

The only item outstanding from the project is the installation of the Artistic Feature at the Top Square which is due to be completed in the next couple of months. The BSU are now looking at commencing another project which will be more focused on attracting tourists/visitors to the Town.

Portarlington Façade Enhancement Scheme

The Portarlington Façade Enhancement scheme was launched at the beginning of the Summer. There has been great interest in the scheme. 36 applications have been received to date. 19 applications approved to the value of €13,793.00. The scheme is open to both residential and commercial properties in French Church Street, Market Square and Main Street. The grant available is 75% of the cost of the works subject to a maximum grant of €750.

Portlaoise Façade Enhancement Scheme – Phase 2

Phase 2 of the Portlaoise Façade Enhancement Scheme was also launched at the beginning of the Summer and has also generated a lot of interest. Bull Lane, Lyster Lane & Lyster Square are the areas of the town being focused on for Phase 2 of the Portlaoise Façade Enhancement Scheme.

14 applications have been received to date. 1 application approved to the value of €750.00.

Tourism Destination Town Project Portlaoise

The BSU continue to work with Catherine Casey, Heritage Officer and Dom Reddin on advancing aspects of this scheme:

Consultants have been appointed to design the new interpretative and wayfinding signage around the laneways in Portlaoise and in the Old Fort Quarter.

The design should be completed by the end of November 2021.

Economic Development Update

Mark Clancy (MC) provided an update on the works carried out by the LEO to date this year.

- Delivered 9 Start Your Own Business Courses with 134 participants.
- Delivered 50 workshops to-date with 749 participants.
- 7 Laois Businesses currently taking part in the Lean for Micro Programme.
- The Management Development Programme is due to commence in September 2021 – 8 of 10 signed up.
- 27 business currently taking part in the Client Stimulus Programme – about 50% complete.
- Delivered the Midland Food Programme to 20 businesses from 4 LEO's - led by Laois LEO.
- 4 Laois companies taking part in the Engineering Cluster Programme.
- 5 Laois companies took part in the First Time Exporters Programme.
- 12 Laois companies engaged in the Green for Micro Programme.
- Delivered 152 mentoring assignments to date under the Mentor Programme.
- LEO approved €226,001 in grant aid to 14 Laois businesses with the potential to create 36 full-time jobs. The next evaluation committee meeting in September/October.
- Worked with 4 clients to access the Back to Work Enterprise/Short Term Enterprise Allowance.
- Approved 64 Trading Online Vouchers to the value of €124,439.
- Assisted 7 businesses to access funding under the Microfinance Loan Scheme.
- LEO going paperless with the use of submit.com for grant management and the use of DocuSign.

	<p>Cllr Aidan Mullins congratulated Denise, Mark and the BSU/LEO teams on the great work taking place despite the difficult times we are/have been in.</p> <p>Caroline Hoffman queried the uptake on the Business Incentive Schemes across the County. DR advised that the uptake was very low for the past 18months but this could be attributed to the COVID pandemic and it was envisaged that this would revert to normal rates once the economy recovered after COVID.</p> <p>Cllr Aisling Moran queried the closing date for the Streetscape Enhancement Scheme. DR advised that the closing date was 7th September 2021. She advised that John Mulholland had liaised with the Department regarding an extension.</p> <p>Cllr Aisling Moran also queried if businesses who have been closed for the last 18 months due to Covid are entitled to apply for the Business Incentive Scheme. DR advised that they are not entitled to apply – this scheme only applies to businesses who set up in a building that has been vacant for 6 months. DR advised that such businesses can contact the BSU/LEO who will advise on other supports that are available to them.</p> <p>Mark Clancy asked the SPC attendees to promote the Green for Micro programme and also the new Autumn Programme detailed on the website.</p> <p>Caroline Hofman queried if there was any development with the Pop Up Shop Incentive Pilot Programme. Denise advised that the BSU were doing some research on this scheme to determine if it could be introduced.</p>		
<p>4.</p>	<p>Tourism Update – Dom Reddin</p> <p>Dominic Reddin (DRed) provided an update on the following:</p>		

Tourism Destination Towns

Works are at an advanced stage on Bull Lane as part of this project. Works on Lyster Lane and Peppers Lane are scheduled to commence in the coming weeks. DRed advised that LCC are currently working with Haley Sharpe Design Ltd on proposals for Interpretation Panels at the Old Fort, and Wayfinding and directional signage at other areas within the town. The objective of this project is to interpret and present the interesting heritage of Portlaoise in an engaging manner that is informative and evocative to both residents and visitors, and to create a sense of place in the historic core of the town using high quality design of wayfinding and interpretation.

Wayfinding information - Portlaoise Digital Kiosks

Two digital touchscreens have been installed at Market Square and Church Street. These information kiosks will provide information about the town and visitor attractions and facilities and also Council services.

Barrow Blue Way

The stretch of the Blueway from Ballymanus to Vicarstown has been completed.

Progression of works between Vicarstown and Courtwood have been postponed until after September 2021 for operational & environmental reasons, with works progressing from Courtwood instead (CH31100m). Works will recommence on the Vicarstown to Courtwood section in October 2021.

Courtwood compound was set up and works commenced towards Fisherstown.

Waterways Ireland made a presentation on the development of the Blueway to the Elected members of the Municipal Districts Kildare and Graiguecullen/Portarlinton on June 23rd. The Teams presentation was very well attended from both Counties where updates and reports were given on the progress to date and a

range of questions/points raised were answered and discussed. The Steering Committee will meet again in August to oversee the development and address ongoing issues.

The Barrow Blueway Economic Plan

The Economic Plan is complete, and the Final Document is available on request. Louise Brown and Associates (LBA) were commissioned to write the Barrow Blueway Business Plan in consultation with the Steering Committee, local groups, and existing businesses in proximity to the Blueway in Kildare & Laois.

County Promotion

Marketing coverage for Laois - Fáilte Ireland.

A marketing campaign for Laois in association with Fáilte Ireland, included radio ads which were aired for four weeks on RTE Radio 1, RTE 2FM, Lyric FM, Today FM and a selection of regional stations. The ads featured the Abbeyleix Bog Walk, the Slieve Bloom and the Rock of Dunamase.

A two-month Midlands and County Promotion Campaign association with Offaly & Westmeath was promoted on Midlands 103. This joint staycation campaign promoted the Midlands and the individual Counties of the region. In Laois the various tourist attractions highlighted included the Rock of Dunamase, Round Tower at Timahoe, The Slieve Bloom Mountains, and Bike Trail, the Laois Garden Trail and Emo Court.

Glenbarrow Carpark

Final Grant on a planning application for the provision of a Car Park at Glenbarrow, Rosenallis, Co Laois will be issued next week. The Car Park will have the capacity to hold up to 75 cars.

Car parking at The Rock of Dunamase

Council are still pursuing options for the availability of a suitable site for the provision of Car Parking at the Rock of Dunamaise. Discussions are ongoing with landowners.

Timahoe Heritage Centre

Under the Town & Village Grants Scheme works will commence on the Conservation and upgrading of the Community-run Heritage Centre in the former Church of Ireland in Timahoe, to protect the fabric of the historic building and provide facilities and heritage interpretation for tourists and local people. Conservation Architect Richard McLoughlin of Lott's Architecture has been appointed to lead design team, specify and oversee the works associated with the application for the Heritage Centre.

Cllr Conor Bergin said it was great news about the Glenbarrow car park and that it will really help the parking issues in the area.

Cllr Aisling Moran queried if there will be a charge for the new Glenbarrow car park. DRed advised that if there was a charge to be introduced it would only be a nominal fee. Cllr Moran suggested that we also charge for our car park. Mr Reddin advised that a decision like that would have to be considered under the Council's Parking Bye - Laws for consideration.

Cllr Aisling Moran requested that meetings be called and set up with Carlow County Council and Waterways Ireland to discuss extending the Blueway into Co. Carlow. DRed advised Cllr Moran that he had discussed the Blueway Development with senior officials from Waterways Ireland and that their priority now was to complete the 46k area of the development which runs from Kildare into Laois. This will take until 2022, which will be followed by maintenance agreements to be drafted up and agreed with both Kildare & Laois County Council's. Waterways Ireland could not consider a new application for to extend the Blueway until such time this project was completed.

In relation to meeting Carlow County Council to discuss the matter with no application in for the above extension

	<p>DRed advised that he would not be in a position to request such a meeting at this time, however he agreed to discuss the above request with the Chair of the SPC Cllr Bergin and Director of Services Gerry Murphy.</p> <p>Deirdre O’Connell-Hopkins asked for clarification on the role of the SPC. Could the SPC request a meeting directly themselves?</p>		
<p>5.</p>	<p>Laois Chamber – Caroline Hofman</p> <p>Cllr Conor Bergin welcomed Caroline, new CEO of Laois Chamber to the SPC.</p> <p>Caroline Hofman provided an update on the current activities of the Laois Chamber:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New members are joining Laois Chamber even throughout Covid times. - Caroline advised that businesses need to see continuation of supports/grants. - The Chamber would like to see more IDA visits to Laois - ‘Laois for Business’ project – 2 to 3 years project. - Commended LCC on the various grants and Schemes available. - Operating through Zoom as a result of Covid. - Hoping to hold a Jobs Fair in 2022. - The Inaugral Business Awards has been postponed to November 2022. - Laois Chamber will be launching ‘shop local’ for Christmas promoting the Laois gift cards. - Thank you to LCC for financial support to Laois Chamber. <p>Cllr Aidan Mullins wished Caroline well in her new role. Good wishes were also expressed by Julie Bergin, Cllr Aisling Moran and Denise Rainey.</p>		

6.	AOB Julie Bergin and Cllr Conor Bergin welcomed Sheila Cahill to her new role in the BSU and also thanked Linda Meredith for all the work carried out to date.		
7.	Next meeting Thursday 2 nd December 2021 @ 11am		

