



## MINUTES OF MEETING

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Strategic Policy Committee</b> <b>Enterprise, Economic Development &amp; Tourism</b>	
<b>Purpose of Meeting</b>	<b>Agenda Attached</b>	
<b>Location of Meeting</b>	Hybrid meeting  (Council Chamber & via Microsoft teams)	<b>Date and Time</b>
		11.00 am  2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2024
<b>Present</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
	Cllr. Conor Bergin Pat Culleton Jackie Carroll PJ Phelan Cllr. Aidan Mullins Cllr Seamus McDonald Cllr Aisling Moran Brenda Earl (BE), A/Administrative Officer BSU Gerry Murphy (GM), Head of Finance Elaine Moore (EM), Administrative Officer Mark Clancy (MC), Business Advisor, LEO	Chairperson SPC Dev/Construction Rep Business/Commercial Rep Community/Voluntary Rep Member LCC Member LCC Member LCC LCC LCC LCC LCC
<b>In attendance</b>	Sheila Cahill (SC), Staff Officer BSU Pamela Tynan, Senior Executive Officer Community Orla Fitzpatrick (OF), A/Senior Staff Officer Community	LCC (Minute Taker) LCC LCC
<b>Apologies</b>	Pat Hennessy Deirdre O`Connell-Hopkins (DH) Evelyn Reddin (ER), Head of Enterprise Suzanne O`Connor, Senior Staff Officer Community Donal Brennan (DB), Director of Services	Agriculture/Farming Rep Trade Union Rep LCC LCC LCC

Item No.	Description	Action By	Date for Completion
1.	<p>The meeting was chaired by Cllr Seamus McDonald.</p> <p><b>Confirmation of Minutes</b></p> <p>Minutes of meeting held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2024 were proposed by Cllr Aidan Mullins and seconded by Pat Culleton.</p>		
2.	<p><b>Local Economic and Community Implementation Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pamela Tynan gave a presentation on the LECP Implementation Plan.</li> <li>➤ Looking for committee's feedback on the IP.</li> <li>➤ Committee members complimented the presentation and the work involved.</li> <li>➤ Query re advisory steering group. Pamela Tynan advised that it is made up of representatives from different sectors.</li> <li>➤ All lead agencies will be contacted as part of next step.</li> </ul>		
3.	<p><b>Tourism Update</b></p> <p>Elaine Moore (EM) provided an update on the current projects being carried out by the Tourism Section. (Attached).</p>		
4.	<p><b>BSU Update</b></p> <p>Brenda Earl (BE) provided an update regarding the current projects being carried out by the Business Support Unit (BSU) (Attached).</p> <p>Cllr Aidan Mullins queried the uptake of the Shop Front Grant Scheme. Brenda Earl advised that we are looking at further ways of advertising at present.</p> <p>Cllr Aidan Mullins queried interaction with the Portarlington Business Association. Gerry Murphy advised that he meets with the association a number of times a year and they are aware of the supports/grants available.</p>		

5.	<p><b>LEO Update</b></p> <p>Mark Clancy (MC) provided an update on the current projects being carried out by the Local Enterprise Office (Attached).</p>		
6.	<p><b>Laois Chamber Alliance Update</b></p> <p>Jackie Carroll provided an update on the current projects being carried out by the Laois Chamber Alliance (Attached).</p>		
7.	<p><b>Date of Next Meeting</b></p> <p>Last meeting of this SPC. The next meeting date will be decided after the local elections in June.</p>		
8.	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <p>On behalf of the Executive, Gerry Murphy thanked the SPC members for their input over the last 5 years.</p> <p>Cllr Seamus McDonald thanked the SPC members on Cllr Conor Bergin's behalf.</p> <p>This concluded the business of the meeting.</p>		

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT UNIT UPDATE**

### **1. Shop-front Improvement & Accessibility Grant Scheme**

This scheme is available again for 2024. There are 13 applications being processed at present - 7 approved, 2 refused and 4 in progress. Three of the applications were approved in 2023 however an extension to the 2024 Scheme was given to allow sufficient time to carry out the works.

The BSU designed a new tri-fold pamphlet to promote the grants and services provided. The BSU worked with the Commercial Rates Department to have the pamphlet issue to all Commercial Rate Customers with the Rate Demands. We are also working with Planning to have the pamphlet issue with derelict site(s) notices etc. The Team is now looking at other forms of advertising the grants.

### **2. Business Incentive Scheme**

This scheme is available again this year to businesses who open up a new business in premises which have been vacant for 6 months or more. It gives businesses a three-year reduction on their rates.

### **3. Portlaoise Town Team**

The BSU are working closely with the sub-committee of the Portlaoise Town Team which comprises of representatives from the business group Downtown Portlaoise.

Work is continuing on the project entitled "Marketing Portlaoise Online". Funding for this project is coming from Laois Partnership and Laois County Council. Working with a social media company to market Portlaoise as a place to live work and visit.

Some of the projects for 2024 will be to have signage in other languages such as Irish etc.,

A new project for 2024 is for Digital signage. To-date an Expression of Interest was made under the EU Just Transition Fund. Failte Ireland have advised we will not have a decision until after the closing date of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024. As such the BSU & Downtown have applied under the Climate Action Grant Scheme which closed on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

### **4. Laois TASTE group**

The BSU are working with Laois Taste again in 2024 to promote Laois as a food and drinks destination. An application for the Agri Food Fund was made in the sum of €25k (the maximum grant), we have received the official acceptance from the Department. The BSU will commence working on the projects with the group i.e. a new video, photography and some Gazabos.

## **5. Town and Village Scheme Killeshin**

The BSU are working with Killeshin Community Group on the extension of the Community Centre and remote working hub in Killeshin. The sum of €500,000 was received from the Department with the project cost totaling €691,628.73. Ken Morley, S.E.E has completed his inspection and all is in order apart from the lift. The commissioning of the lift is happening on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April. Once this is in order, the final payment will be processed next week and the final claim submitted to the Department.

## **6. Town and Village Scheme- Digital Hubs**

The BSU are working to promote the digital hubs on a marketing campaign to attract remote workers to the hubs in Laois. The sum of €50,000 was received for this project. Work is on-going, the Tender process is complete. Filming took place between 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The video and photography element of the project is completed. The BSU will source materials to further promote the County and run an advertising campaign, this will consist of posts on social media etc.

## **7. Wolfhill Development Association**

The BSU commenced working with the Wolfhill Development Association in 2023, the group identified a project that would benefit the area for both commercial businesses and residents alike. A walking/cycling trail in Wolfhill. A Public meeting was held in October 2023, subsequently a Trail Proposal Request Form has been completed and submitted to Coillte in January 2024. Since the public meeting in October a community shop opened. It is anticipated that an on-site meeting will take place over the next few weeks.

Once more funding streams open the BSU will commence new projects with the group.

### **Façade Enhancement Scheme – Stradbally**

The BSU has set aside a budget of €15k to provide a façade enhancement scheme in Stradbally. We identified Stradbally as being a town that would benefit from a scheme like.

Terms and conditions together with the advertisements are prepared. The scheme will be opened to both commercial and residential. There will be a cap on applications (20 applications) the maximum grant will be €750.00. the scheme will open on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2024 with a closing date for receipt of completed application forms Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024, all works to be completed by 30<sup>th</sup> August 2024. To-date 4 applications have been approved and 2 are in progress.

## **LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE UPDATE**

### **Outputs since last SPC meeting in March**

- €108,000 was approved in grant aid to 3 businesses to create 8 new jobs.
- 8 individuals have availed of 1-1 business advice sessions.
- 38 Laois businesses have availed of 1-1 mentoring.
- 10 training courses have been delivered to 50 participants. Training programmes have been delivered in the areas of social media, marketing, finance and Start Your Own Business courses.
- 6 additional Trading Online Voucher Scheme applications have been approved.
- 10 businesses are currently participating in an Export Development programme where they have been taking part in export focused workshops and have completed individual export readiness assessments to determine how they can improve and develop to successfully grow their businesses through exporting. 3 businesses undertaking international prospecting trips on foot of the program
- 4 additional businesses are signed up for the Lean for Business Programme. This a continuous improvement programme designed to introduce efficiencies in business.
- 3 additional businesses are signed up for the Green for Business programme. Uptake for the programme remains strong. The support is a practical introductory sustainability programme and lines up an independent sector specialist to come out to businesses and to help them develop a sustainability plan.
- Dunmasc Gentic's Ltd (headed up by Stephen Dowling) have been selected as the county winners of the Enterprise Awards and will go forward to represent Laois at the National Awards in Dublin on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.
- The national LEO network is about to celebrate its 10 year anniversary and there will be some events nationally to mark this. Evelyn is compiling stats on key metrics produced over the period.

## **TOURISM UPDATE**

### **Tourism Grants**

The Tourism Grant Scheme (Festivals and Events) 2024 has been advertised. Applications can be made through the Consultation Portal on Laois County Council's website and by email. 34 applications for funding have been received so far this year.

### **National Ploughing Championships 2024**

The National Ploughing Championships will be held in Ratheniska from the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024. Requests for Expressions of Interest from exhibitors has been advertised, a number of applications have been received.

### **Barrow Blueway**

Works are 90% complete, snagging will commence once the main works to road crossings are completed. An application for additional funding has been submitted under the Rural

Regeneration Development Fund for the bridge in Rathangan, the additional cost of road crossings and for interpretation signage. It is hoped to have a decision on the additional funding in May.

### **The Rock of Dunamase**

An application for funding has been submitted to Failte Ireland under the EU Just Transition Fund for parking facilities at the Rock of Dunamase and a visitor attraction centre at the Hapenny School in the Old Fort Quarter.

### **EU Just Transition Fund – Failte Ireland**

There are five project categories under Scheme B. The following number of Expressions of Interest have been approved to application stage:

- Category 1 – Development or Enhancement of Sustainable Visitor Experiences – 14 e.g. small scall glamping and innovative styte accommodation;
- Category 2 – Development of Sustainable/ Low Carbon Tourist Accommodation – 9 e.g. large scale multifunctional destination projects with a combination of activities incl. health and wellness/Visitor experiences/Accessibility and accommodation
- Category 3 – Capital Project Planning & Design – 5 e.g. planning approved
- Category 4 – Digital Transformation -20 e.g. website development and upgrades to include support with attracting tour operators and content for social media
- 1. Category 5 – Accessibility enhancements to provide a more inclusive visitor experience – 5 e.g. Accessibility upgrades for B&Bs, hotels, gastro pubs (only pubs serving food at table service are eligible), other accommodation providers.

A number of public information events/meetings have been held in various locations since January across the County. Joint public meetings were held with the Kildare Tourism Activator in Graiguecullen and the Offaly Tourism Activator in Killenard.

### **Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail**

**Trailhead Building** - the design drawings have been completed and pre-tender estimates have been finalised. Pre-tender estimates are over budget, Coilte are looking at value engineering options. Therefore the tender is now likely to be issued in Q3 rather than Q2 with construction starting on site in either Q4 2024 or Q1 2025.

**Trail Construction** - Phase 4 was completed in February 2024. Phase 5 (1.1km) has been awarded and construction is scheduled to take place between August and September (*this is due to hen harrier nesting season Mar to Aug*). This will complete the trail construction.

## **LAOIS CHAMBER ALLIANCE UPDATE**

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

In the last month most engagement has been with Laois County council and members.

#### **LEO**

The Chamber had several meetings in relation to different areas of collaboration. LEO are agreeable to developing a document detailing business supports.

The chamber has approached LEO regarding a basic customer service development training for retail and hospitality. They are reviewing their schedule and reviewing if it is something they can budget for this year.

On the Invest in Laois website we proposed a meeting with LEO to discuss the content for the website. We are developing a draft copy for the website based on our criteria.

#### **Community Climate Action**

The chamber was involved in a day long evaluation of applicants for the community Climate Actions fund. Really innovative projects were assessed, and funding allocated.

#### **Festivals Committee – Portlaoise Town Team**

The chambers meet with the festival committee to discuss the festivals and the implications of the lack of Leader funding. All festivals are using their own finances to deliver marketing. There was a discussion around the covered area in the music school and how this will be operated. Laois does not have a night-time economy officer and this was being investigated to see how we drive events and cafes in the evening.

#### **Age Friendly Expo**

Laois Tourism had a great stand at the highly successful Age Friendly expo in Laois.

#### **Tourism Officers Network Conference**

The chamber attended one day of a two-day conference on Tourism and local authorities. I was nominated to go by Gerry Murphy, and he was also in attendance. It was great to see the spending and projects in other counties.

#### **SEAI**

We had a meeting with the SEAI on how the Failte Ireland collaboration with the SEAI will help tourism members. This developed into a general Chambers discussion, and we will be running a business supports discussion in conjunction with the Cube.

#### **Walton Institute**

The Chamber attended a one-day workshop in the Walton Institute at SETU to look at a digitalisation audit of member companies/Laois. This is in development at present. We are also discussing the development of an App for Laois Tourism.

#### **Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan**

We attended an information seminar on the updates from the MRTT. This included a full update from the complete JTF not just the placemaking and tourism scheme.

### **Membership**

5 old members have reengaged with the Chamber which shows a little more confidence in the Chamber.

### **Networking**

The Chamber held a HR networking event in Preston House was a great success. 25 people registered and 13 people attended. What was great about this event was that it became a lively discussion amongst HR professionals about current cases in the WRC. The feedback was excellent from the event.

#### **Type Date Details**

Networking January 31st Coffee Morning

Networking March 15th Chambers After Dark

Networking April 19th Lunch and Learn

Networking May 16th Auto Enrolment

Networking June 13th Energy Efficiency Grant, The Cube and LEO



Networking July 19th Lunch and Learn  
Networking August 16th Breakfast Briefing  
Networking Sept 20th Chambers After Dark  
Networking Oct 18th Lunch and Learn  
Networking Nov 25th Breakfast Briefing  
Networking Dec 20th Chambers After Dark

## Digital Marketing

### Laois Tourism

The Just Transition Digital Transformation process has begun, this is a 9 month project to review the digital assets of Laois Tourism. This is funded by Failte Ireland.

### Laois Chamber

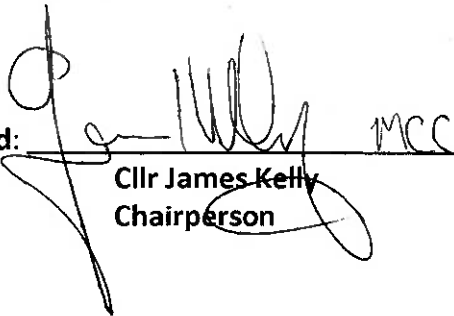
The project to update Laois Chambers website is on hold due to budget requirements, however the website will need updates and changes when the new Invest in Laois site is up and running.

### Funding and Events

1. Business Awards – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2024
2. Laois Shines – Postponed to 2025
3. Jobs Fair – Postponed to 2025

As Leader funding is unavailable at present the Chambers will be postponing paid marketing and delivery of large events. This is only a postponement.

Signed:



MCC  
Cllr James Kelly  
Chairperson

Signed:



Aisling Ryan  
A/Senior Executive Officer