



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

Coiste Polasaí Straitéiseach Gnóthaí Forbairt Eacnamaíochta & Fiontraíochta
Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)
Cruinniú /Meeting

Wednesday 24th February 2016, 10.00am

Council Chamber, County Hall, Galway County Council, Prospect Hill, Galway

Members in attendance

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn, Chairperson	Galway County Council
Cllr. Peter Feeney	Galway County Council
Cllr. Shane Donnellan	Galway County Council
Cllr. Mary Hoade	Galway County Council
Cllr. Michael Finnerty	Galway County Council
Dan Dowling	Community representative
Paul Mannion	Scott Tallon Walker Architects

Present

Catherine McConnell	A/Director of Services, Galway County Council
Alan Farrell	Senior Executive Officer, Galway County Council
Valerie Kavanagh	Galway County Council
Kieran Coyne	Galway County Council

Apologies

Paul Quinn	Trade Union representative
Michelle Murphy	Business / Commercial representative
Cllr. Tom Healy	Galway County Council
Cllr. Seán Ó Tuairisg	Galway County Council
Cllr. Karey McHugh	Galway County Council
Breda Fox	Galway County Council

Welcome & Introductions

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn welcomed those in attendance to the first meeting of 2016.

1. Minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development & Enterprise SPC held on 8th December 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2015 were approved on the proposal of Cllr. Peter Feeney and seconded by Cllr. Shane Donnellan.

2. Final Draft Galway County Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 – 2022

Mr. Alan Farrell briefly recapped for the SPC how the plan had been drafted over the last two years. The draft plan had been recently approved by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly at their meeting on 22nd January 2016 and it is to go before the LCDC at their meeting on 25th February 2016. Mr. Farrell said that once the plan is finally approved, it will move into the implementation stage and there would be a continuing role for the Advisory Steering Group (ASG) and the Economic SPC regarding the economic elements.

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn thanked Alan and added that the Regional Assembly dealt with 9 plans from the local authority areas and County Galway was the only one where they didn't come back with a query.

Paul Mannion asked if the Economic SPC had a role in the implementation and review of the plan. Ms. Catherine McConnell, Director of Services said that the ASG will have the overall monitoring and review role but that Economic related actions will be referred back to the Economic SPC.

The Draft Galway County Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 – 2022 was proposed by Cllr. Michael Finnerty and seconded by Cllr. Mary Hoade.

Alan Farrell thanked all those involved in the process in particular Ann Mallaghan and Brian Barrett in the Community, Enterprise & Economic Development Section.

3. European Region of Gastronomy 2018 Bid

Mr. Alan Farrell told the SPC that the Bid Book had been submitted. He said that the Bid team will travel to North Brabant in the Netherlands on St. Patrick's Day to present to an international jury of 11 members. They should know later that day whether they have been successful. Mr. Farrell added that there had been huge 'buy in' from all the stakeholders since the previous SPC meeting with both national and local support. He invited the SPC members to forward on any suggestions or input they might like to give.

Mr. Paul Mannion asked if the team will know at the presentation if they have been successful. Mr. Farrell said that they should have a good idea. It was a strong application and

a lot of partners had come on board. He added that he was meeting with the steering group that evening. There was one joint project with the European Capital of Culture Bid Team to be progressed. The next steps would be to look at governance and a delivery structure.

4. Business Incentive Schemes

Ms. Catherine McConnell introduced this item and handed out a Draft Business Incentive Scheme for Towns of County Galway to the SPC members.

The Director of Services said that existing schemes in other local authority areas had been examined. She said that the aim of the scheme is to provide a financial incentive to new businesses on vacant properties in Town Centres that would be due to pay rates. It would be on a reducing scale over 3 years in towns with local area plans. It is hoped that it would also help address vacancy rates. The Director added that there cannot be any outstanding Local Authority bills owing, rates must be paid up to date and the property must be vacant for at least 6 months as identified on Council records. She read through the draft document outlining the eligibility, conditions and assessment process.

Ms. McConnell added that she would like the SPC members to consider the document outside of the meeting, forward any comments or suggestions with a view to approving the scheme at the next SPC meeting and then it will be brought to full Council.

Cllr. Michael Finnerty welcomed the draft scheme and said that any effort to help businesses was positive.

Cllr. Mary Hoade also welcomed the document and said that as the next SPC meeting won't be for 2 months and the Council meeting will be a further month after that, would it be possible to have an earlier SPC meeting.

The Director of Services said that it would be better not to rush the process and to get it right.

Cllr. Peter Feeney said the scheme is what towns need. He questioned the displacement issue and said that any business that is standing is just about standing and they shouldn't be impacted on. He added that it may need further fleshing out.

Mr. Paul Mannion mentioned the obstacles for businesses to access upper floors of buildings such as fire safety issues, disability access, planning, mixed use development etc.

Ms. McConnell replied that some businesses are more suitable to upper floor rather than being at ground level. She added that there is no 'one fix all' solution but the scheme might help financially.

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn said that he was concerned about vacant ground floor retail units as boarded up units look unattractive in towns.

Cllr. Shane Donnellan welcomed the scheme and asked if it was eligible for offices as well as retail. The Director of Services replied that it was. Cllr. Donnellan added that vacant upper floor spaces could be used for offices, however they may need refurbishing and it would be an incentive to refurbish but not be charged immediately with rates.

Ms. McConnell said that for the moment it was a confidential document and to put comments in an email to her and another draft will be presented at the next SPC meeting.

Mr. Alan Farrell added that when the scheme is being presented to full Council it will be presented the context that the scheme is only one of a number of measures aimed at helping and revitalising towns and businesses.

5. Diaspora Strategy

Ms. Catherine McConnell introduced Kieran Coyne to explain about the new Diaspora Strategy.

Mr. Coyne said that this item had originated from the *Gathering* initiative back in 2013. The success of the *Gathering* led to the roll out of the Community Tourism Diaspora Scheme in the subsequent years which provided funding to local communities to hold events that would attract overseas visitors, not just the Irish Diaspora.

Mr. Coyne said that the Department of the Taoiseach has now asked local authorities to start preparations on drafting a Diaspora Strategy. A plan of how the strategy will be drafted will be submitted to the Department. There is a national template toolkit to be used and it will focus on how the Diaspora can be mutually beneficial to both sides. It's hoped to bring something forward to the next SPC meeting.

Ms. McConnell added that there is a small amount of funding available for the strategy. It will focus on what it means for our overseas Diaspora and also for County Galway, both socially and economically.

Cllr. Shane Donnellan asked if there was a Diaspora Funding Scheme for communities. Mr. Coyne said that there was; the Diaspora Engagement Fund and it is to be advertised shortly.

Mr. Alan Farrell said that under the proposed new strategy there is a maximum of €10,000 that can be applied for from the Dept. of the Taoiseach. Mr. Farrell added that the Council's resources are limited but they will do what is possible to do.

Mr. Paul Mannion added that the Diaspora project should be linked to every other piece of work that we are involved in such as festival and events.

6. Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) Update

Ms. Catherine McConnell introduced this item giving a brief background on the process to date. The aim of the initiative is to provide supports to local efforts towards economic regeneration in zones or areas of the County that had suffered in the defined rural areas associated with key towns. The scheme covers all of the county. The local authority was notified in July 2015 of the initiative and there was a short timeframe to submit applications. Ms. McConnell added that the areas showed great capacity to deliver and 7 strong applications were submitted of which 6 were successful.

Mr. Kieran Coyne added that 10 areas in County Galway had been identified as REDZ areas. Seven applications were put forward for funding and 6 were successful; Carraroe, Ballinasloe, Gort, Glenamaddy, Tuam and Oranmore.

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn asked if there was any learning from the process. Mr. Coyne said that there was a short lead in time and the funding had to be drawn down in mid November last year. In future, the Local Development Strategy and Local Economic Community Plan should inform us better. He added that one project was premature but there may be potential if there is another round of funding.

Mr. Alan Farrell added that Teagasc are rolling out a Community Leadership development Programme around the County and together with the Local Development Strategy this will form part of a suite of packages for capacity building in areas. Mr. Farrell asked Dan Dowling how the initiative went in Ballinasloe. Mr. Dowling replied that there were mixed feelings about it. The challenge is to get 41 unoccupied units occupied again and a mix of residential and retail is needed.

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn said that the people operating businesses in towns are no longer living there and maybe some incentive is needed to encourage them to live over the retail unit.

Mr. Dan Dowling added that people shopping in the larger retail stores was one of the challenges, so different thinking was needed for the smaller stores to survive.

Mr. Farrell said that there was no 'one fit all' solution and that once the LECP starts to roll out, it should help address some issues.

7. AOB

Ms. Catherine McConnell said that the LEO office was launching a new Retail Support Scheme for existing or new businesses. An information document on the scheme was handed out to the committee. Details would be emailed on.

Mr. Alan Farrell said that if the committee had any ideas for the SPC work programme for the remainder of the year to email them in.

Mr. Dan Dowling wished Cllr. Mary Hoade good luck in the upcoming General Election and the rest of the committee joined with him in this.

Ms. Catherine McConnell said that Advisory Steering Committee (ASG), of which 3 members of the Economic SPC are also members, was a good structure to drive the LECP. The Director of Services asked the committee if they were in agreement that the ASG would drive and monitor the LECP and the Economic SPC would also have a monitoring role in the Economic actions. The committee agreed.

The date for the next meeting was agreed for Wednesday 13th April 2016 at 10am.