

Minutes of the Rural Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) held on Tuesday 20th February 2024 at 10.00 am in Ennis Digital Hub and on-line

In attendance:

Cllr. Pat Hayes
Cllr. Shane Talty
Cllr. Cillian Murphy
Cllr. Mary Howard
Cllr. Rita McInerney
Mr. Denis Tuohy
Ms. Jean Tierney O'Keeffe
Ms. Anne Haugh
Ms. Bernadette Haugh
Ms. Helen Walsh
Mr. Brian McCarthy
Mr. Brendan Boyce
Ms. Helen Moloney
Ms. Kathy Lordan

Organisation:

Chair
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Agriculture/Farming
Social Inclusion
Director of Rural & Community Development
Senior Executive Officer
County Librarian
Senior Planner & Killaloe MD Co-Ordinator
Administrative Officer
Assistant Staff Officer
Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies:

Cllr. Pat Burke; Cllr. Joe Killeen; Ms. Niamh O'Callaghan; Ms. Mary Ann Kearns.

Cllr. Hayes welcomed the members to the meeting, in particular new Director of Services Anne Haugh; Helen Walsh County Librarian; Brian McCarthy Senior Planner and Cllr. Rita McInerney.

1) Minutes of Meeting held on 21st November 2023

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2023 were proposed by Cllr. Talty, seconded by Cllr. Murphy and agreed.

2) Matters arising

Mr. D. Tuohy advised IFA were invited to join Cliffs of Moher Geopark Green Team; awaiting response re. joining full Tourism Advisory Board.

Cllr. Hayes noted issues re. Active Travel where funding was assigned to urban (Ennis & Shannon) rather than rural locations in 2023; same in 2024.

Anne Haugh advised there was no call for funding in 2024; despite that the Council submitted projects for both rural and urban locations for consideration but unfortunately they were not approved. She advised the Council will continue to pursue projects in both urban and rural MD's with the Department and the NTA.

Cllr. Murphy stated the Council budget for roads should take account of the reality that rural areas are not receiving Active Travel funding and that a rebalancing would be appropriate.

Cllr. Hayes fully supported this and suggested it could still be done in this year's Roadworks programme.

Anne Haugh listed areas that have been funded previously.

Cllr. Talty indicated the same point is constantly being made and there is a need for clarity on whether applications that go forward have been rated, scored and prioritised at county level before going to the Department.

Anne Haugh advised project prioritisation happens in the Department and NTA.

3) Climate Change and Biodiversity

Cllr. Hayes referenced the Climate Action Plan and agreed to circulate it to non-elected members on SPC.

Cllr. Murphy suggested that an update from the Climate Action Officer and Biodiversity Officer could be provided for SPC meetings going forward under the recurring item.

4) LECP & current funding opportunities:

Brendan Boyce circulated draft Framework Local Economic and Community Plan 2024-2030 and presented on the process of Consultation.

Bernadette Haugh advised of final stages of the statutory process, i.e. signing off by LCDC; Economic Development SPC, Meeting with the 4 Municipal Districts; Southern Regional Assembly and to full Council for adoption in April.

Cllr. Hayes complemented the very interesting Census stats and overview at beginning. He queried how the key objectives and actions will be implemented and achieved. Bernadette Haugh advised that the delivery of the LECP will be through three two-year implementation plans the first of which will be published alongside the framework document. The implementation plan will identify local lead agencies in the County to deliver on the actions with support from other collaborators.

Brendan Boyce stated that Dr. Seán O Riordáin is currently preparing a broad socio-economic analysis document as a tool to the LCDC and local stakeholders which will inform the current and future implementation plans.

Mr. D. Tuohy queried if current County Development Plan is accurate and fit for purposed and if there is a need for a mid-term review based on Census 2022 data.

Cllr. Howard confirmed it was a very difficult County Development Plan as there were no Census stats and a huge amount of variables that couldn't be factored in.

Cllr. Murphy indicated it would be useful to have numbers of people in disadvantaged areas; which may assist in identifying where the disadvantage is stemming from which would serve as a useful tool to alleviate it.

Cllr. Talty agreed it's a great presentation of the figures and hugely interesting.

Bernadette Haugh advised it is a community led document led by significant consultation process. Elected Members have informed the document from MD sessions and that coupled with the Census and the LCDC commissioned Clare survey 2023 will inform the socio-economic analysis that will be provided to decision makers in the county as a separate reference data source.

Cllr. McInerney queried the 2-year implementation plan timeframe in terms of how the LCDC will prioritise the objectives and actions that get implemented first.

Brendan replied that specific workshops identified 50 actions which will be presented to LCDC; these comprise of short term, medium term and long-term goals and the actions in the first implementation plan will be agreed by the LECP advisory steering group.

Cllr. Howard welcomed the document as hugely valuable to have such evidence-based research put together in one reference document.

Brendan Boyce confirmed PPN were a significant contributor to the process and were a great asset in their delivery of the Pilot Engagement Project which informed the LECP's development.

5) Overview of the Library/Cultural Services function:

Helen Walsh, County Librarian, gave presentation on the Library/Cultural Services function.

Cllr. Howard acknowledged great work that has been done by the Library service; still thousands borrowing books. She acknowledged the work during Covid where books were delivered to older people noting it was a great service and great to see it continue. She noted the new Library is a credit to all and queried how many car parking spaces are being lost and how many study spaces in new Library.

Helen Walsh advised that circa 5 parking spaces being lost and there will be up to 50 study spaces around the building.

Mr. D. Tuohy acknowledged the very interesting presentation and queried re. hybrid library and possibility of bringing museum items around to Libraries.

Helen Walsh advised there will be a lot of new technology; high functioning wifi; soundproof booths for interviews/meetings etc.; She advised that there is some element of outreach of Museum artefacts to schools and that the new Education Officer will help in bringing the Museum to the public. However, she advised that a large portion of the collection is on loan from the National Museum of Ireland which is unique and not replaceable and that insurance of pieces is a major consideration. For this reason, it was not advisable to leave artefacts out for public viewing except when presented by Museum staff.

Cllr. McInerney thanked Helen for presentation; referred to technical difficulties with app; She acknowledged support of Arts Office and queried future plan re: Decade of Centenaries and if there is a way to capture what has been done and integrate into

museums; She also queried a link to Music Generation and if 3rd level students can study in new Library.

Helen acknowledged difficulties with the app and advised it is a national system. She noted that there is a set of DVD's in all Clare Libraries and Local Studies Centre which were filmed during the 1916/2016 commemorations with all aspects of 1916/2016 in Clare available in Local Studies Centre. Regarding Music Generation she advised that there are no storage space for instruments. In relation to study spaces; primary, 2nd and 3rd level students can use new Library and there will be ample space to accommodate everyone.

Cllr. Talty acknowledged one of the key areas is funding and the support provided for so many small festivals and events throughout the county.

Cllr. Murphy queried archives space; Helen advised there is space.

Cllr. Hayes referred to the WRAP Programme as a really beneficial funding mechanism – Blackshore in Killaloe being an example; advised there is a lot of interest in Edna O'Brien Library; queried if Study Centre stays where it is and what is the plan for the old building; also re. access while archiving – is it accessible for everyone; should look for increase in Arts funding.

Helen replied that the Archivist will be housed in the new library and access to the Archives will be through the Archivist under supervision; archival material is reference only, the public can spend time viewing but have to give it back; Local Studies is also moving into the new building; vacated buildings go back into Asset register of CCC; Creative Ireland also funding many Arts events.

6) Note of information on the Shared Island initiative

Helen Walsh, County Librarian presented on the Shared Island Initiative and advised that there is a group of women from the North visiting Ennis at the end of the month and they will be meeting Mná ag Gáire and launching the project.

Cllr. Hayes wished Helen the best of luck with the project.

7) Any Other Business

Cllr. McInerney referred to the previous Minutes and stated that they had a presentation from Fáilte Ireland in relation to accommodation and enquired how this feeds into the Tourism Strategy. Anne Haugh advised that it was agreed that the SPC Meetings would rotate between Tourism and Rural and this meeting is focusing on Rural and it will revert to Tourism for the next meeting.

Cllr. Hayes referred to a joint B motion on burial grounds and requested the members to support it.

Mr. D. Tuohy recommended that if there are reports to sanction at further SPC meetings that the documents be supplied beforehand as the non-elected members would not have seen the documents beforehand. This was agreed.

Cllr. Murphy raised concerns about Rural and Tourism meetings being held every second meeting. He stated that Rural tends to be left on the back burner but that it has its own Directorate and is deserving of its own SPC. Cllr. Hayes recommended that the matter be raised with the Chief Executive. Anne Haugh advised that the current situation where two directorates were sharing the SPC evolved from the recent restructuring and the addition of a new Directorate specifically for Tourism. She advised it was on the radar for Management and would likely be reviewed in the context of the SPC reconfiguration which would follow the local elections.

Mr. D. Tuohy stated that it is important to have tourism and rural at the same table and it is a positive thing. Cllr Murphy advised that any new SPC would have an agricultural representative in the membership.

Cllr. Talty referred to the 2023-2027 Leader Programme which is not being delivered by the Council. Bernadette advised that communication issued last Friday and Elected Members were notified that CLDC had been successful in their bid for the new LEADER programme. She stated that irrespective of who is delivering the programme, €6.8m is coming in to the County which is hugely positive. She advised that the notification will be on the Agenda for the next LCDC meeting and the LCDC have a right to appeal it which will be a matter for the LCDC to determine. Bernadette took the opportunity to congratulate CLDC on the submission and acknowledged their work in the County and their engagement on the development of the LECP.

Cllr. Hayes took the opportunity to congratulate the CLDC and stated that it is important to work together to deliver for the communities.

Cllr. Hayes thanked the Director of Service and acknowledged the contribution from the staff and the SPC.

With no other business Cllr. Hayes drew the meeting to a close.