



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

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

Wednesday 13th April 2016, 10.00am

Galway County Council, Centre Point Building, Liosbaun, 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
Cllr. Tom Healy	Galway County Council
Cllr. Seán Ó Tuairisg	Galway County Council
Breda Fox	Galway County Council
Dan Dowling	Community representative
Paul Mannion	Scott Tallon Walker Architects
Paul Quinn	Trade Union representative

Present

Catherine McConnell	A/Director of Services, Galway County Council
Alan Farrell	Senior Executive Officer, Galway County Council
Valerie Kavanagh	Galway County Council
Caitriona Morgan	Galway County Council
Teresa O'Reilly	Galway County Council
Michael Fitzsimons	Fáilte Ireland
Brian Quinn	Fáilte Ireland

Apologies

Michelle Murphy	Business / Commercial representative
Cllr. Karey McHugh	Galway County Council

Welcome & Introductions

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn welcomed those in attendance to the second meeting of 2016. He particularly welcomed Michael Fitzsimons and Brian Quinn from Fáilte Ireland and Teresa O'Reilly from the planning department who would give presentations later in the meeting.

1. Minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development & Enterprise SPC held on 24th February 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th February 2016 were approved on the proposal of Cllr. Michael Finnerty and seconded by Mr. Paul Mannion.

2. Business Incentive Scheme

Chairperson Cllr. Jimmy McClearn invited Ms. Catherine McConnell, Director of Services to deal with this item first.

Ms. McConnell circulated to the committee the revised version of the Business Incentive Scheme. She explained that the Scheme is designed to encourage and support the use of vacant commercial premises in the principal towns of the county. She said that since the last draft had been circulated at the SPC meeting on 13th April, no submissions or comments had been received from members. She said that two tweaks had been made; the existing rates liability does not exceed €3,000 annually and the vacancy period had been extended from 6 months to 12 month. Ms. McConnell proposed to the committee that if they were happy with the scheme it would proceed to full Council.

Breda Fox, Head of the Local Enterprise Office told the committee that it would complement the new Retail Incentive Scheme recently developed for Galway City and County.

Cllr. Mary Hoade asked if all towns were eligible. Ms. McConnell said that only towns with a relevant town plan in place were eligible.

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn added that it was a good pilot project and that if challenges arose they could be dealt with.

Cllr. Shane Donnellan asked if two businesses near each with one paying €3,000 and the other paying €3,100 in rates, if the later business would be disqualified. He also asked if €3,000 was too low a cut off point.

Ms. McConnell said that most businesses in town centres would be paying less than €3,000 in rates. She added that the Rates Office had advised her that €5,000 was too high but there may be some flexibility in certain cases.

Cllr. Tom Healy said the scheme was brilliant and asked if it would be available online to make people more aware of it.

Ms. McConnell said that the Scheme is intended for new businesses and the Council will use their extensive networks to make people aware of it. The Director of Services added that it is a rebate scheme as it is a legal requirement to pay rates so the money will be refunded.

Cllr. Healy enquired about the duration of the scheme for a business. Ms. McConnell said that it would be for three years, a 100% rebate is given in year one, 50% in year two and 25th in year three.

The Business Incentive Scheme was proposed for approval by Cllr. Mary Hoade and seconded by Cllr. Tom Healy.

Ms. McConnell thanked the committee.

3. Tourism Strategy Update

Mr. Alan Farrell introduced this item saying that tourism was considered a very strong sector and Galway County Council is currently drafting a 10 year Tourism strategy with the City Council. Teresa O'Reilly in the planning department has been tasked with drafting the strategy since August 2015 and it should be completed by mid 2016. Mr. Farrell also thanked Fáilte Ireland for their cooperation to date. He added that the strategy will require resourcing and this could present challenges.

Ms. Teresa O'Reilly gave a power point presentation on her work to date. She talked about;

- Key tourism facts and figures
- The importance and challenges of tourism and Galway's experiences to date
- Tourism in Galway and its stakeholders
- The context that the strategy is set in and its guiding principles
- The importance of tourism trends, marketing and branding
- Strategic priorities and actions so that a return on investment is achieved
- How the strategy will be delivered and monitored

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn thanked Ms. O'Reilly for her presentation and said that the committee can make comments after the Fáilte Ireland presentation.

4. Fáilte Ireland Presentation

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn invited Mr. Brian Quinn from Fáilte Ireland to give an update on their activities.

Mr. Quinn gave a power point presentation outlining the successes and challenges of the Wild Atlantic Way initiative. He said that Fáilte Ireland are currently working on interpretation and branding (Photo Points) at each of the 188 Discovery Points including the off shore islands. This will tell the stories of the place and will encourage visitors to increase their dwell time in the area. A Wild Atlantic Way passport is also being introduced where visitors can get it stamped at each of the locations. He also told the committee that the Connemara Cultural Centre at Pearse's Cottage will be opening in September 2016. He stated that the biggest challenge for this year is to grow the Wild Atlantic Way brand internationally and to get visitors to stay longer when they get here.

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn thanked Mr. Quinn for his presentation and invited questions on both presentations.

Cllr. Seán Ó Tuairisg thanked Teresa and Brian for their presentations. He said that the Wild Atlantic Way is a great idea but that we should be taking more advantage of it especially the Islands. He said that the piers need more developing and if there were marinas they could attract yachts similar to Schull in County Cork. He said that Galway and Clifden are benefiting from the Wild Atlantic Way but more areas need to benefit.

Cllr. Peter Feeney said that there was great potential stemming from both presentations. He said that we have to create the capacity and add to the experience. He said that the stakeholders need to work better together to encourage visitors to stay longer in areas. For example a parking bay for coaches is needed in Athenry.

Cllr. Tom Healy said that it's important that Shannon remains Galway's main airport and that tour buses should be encouraged to visit smaller places. He added that when Fáilte Ireland are implementing their branding exercise in communities they should consult with them in advance. He said that casual trading should be more open in the County. He added that it was important to expand the season to avoid low seasons and the standard of food places outside of the City needs to be improved.

Cllr. Mary Hoade thanked Teresa and Brian for their presentations. She agreed with others that it's important that tourists are encouraged to visit other areas of the County and not just the City, Clifden or Dublin. She said that when visitors go to Ross Abbey they don't stop in Headford.

Mr. Dan Dowling said that the Battle of Aghrim Interpretive Centre near Ballinasloe was not utilised enough. He added that the new Rural Transport Scheme being set up by Galway Rural Development should be used to take people to these areas.

Cllr. Shane Donnellan said it's difficult for areas away from the Wild Atlantic Way to benefit such as Loughrea. He added that the lakes and waterways need to be better promoted.

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn agreed with Cllr. Donnellan saying that it was his understanding that the strategy on the Lakelands and Waterways was to be developed but it seems to have disappeared.

Mr. Brian Quinn responded by saying that the Lakelands and Waterways are under review at the moment and a decision as to whether the project will stay with the Ancient East Initiative or not has to be made. He added that loops off the Wild Atlantic Way are currently being developed so that visitors will be encouraged to go to beyond the Wild Atlantic Way locations. He also said that Fáilte Ireland are working with businesses under a Season Extension Programme.

Cllr. Seán Ó Tuairisg said that the World Fly Fishing Championships were taking place in the County and that Fáilte Ireland and Galway County Council had contributed some funding.

Mr. Paul Mannion said that the West of Ireland was a man made environment and that it's important to plan properly as to how we live in it. He said that the Cultural Centre at Pearse's Cottage is a good example of finding a way to build facilities in a sensitive landscaped area. He also added that the Wild Atlantic Way branding needs to be expanded to areas off the route.

Mr. Alan Farrell addressed Cllr. Tom Healy's comment regarding the casual trading saying that it would be something the Community & Enterprise section could look at. He added that the tourism strategy is only one of a number of measures to improve tourism in the County. He said that the strategy would feed into the LEADER programme and this will help with resourcing and implementation. He said that it would also be important to build the capacity of communities as they have a big role to play.

5. Local Economic & Community Plan Implementation

Mr. Alan Farrell informed the committee that the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) had been adopted by the full Council and was now in the final stages of printing. He reminded the committee that as was agreed at the last SPC meeting, the Advisory Steering Group (ASG) would take the lead role in monitoring the implementation of the plan. He said that implementing structures would have to be set up, actions prioritised and lead partners must also be committed.

Mr. Dan Dowling said that the Chamber of Commerce have an Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative and asked was this a duplication of the LECP. Mr. Farrell said that the Atlantic Economic Corridor had helped to inform the LECP and that the LECP was a statutory process. It was the only plan to be approved by its respective Regional Assembly without query.

Ms. Catherine McConnell put it to the committee that the ASG would continue as the monitoring structure for the implementation of the plan. The motion was proposed by Cllr. Mary Hoade and seconded by Cllr. Shane Donnellan. The Director of Services thanked the committee and informed them that there would be a launch of the plan in the near future.

6. European Region of Gastronomy Bid

Mr. Alan Farrell informed the committee that Galway, including the West of Ireland, were successfully awarded the designation of European Region of Gastronomy for 2018 subject to a jury visit in May. He said that while the designation was for one year it will have a lasting legacy. He said that the bid book is a snap shot of what can be achieved. There will be opportunities to include and develop a number of sectors including youth, education, heritage, small to medium business sector to name a few. He said that Galway has a strong primary production sector but there is an opportunity to develop the secondary production sector. He added that the next stage is to look at governance structures and a delivery strategy. He invited the committee to review the bid book and he would update them again with proposals on how to proceed. He showed the committee two video clips that were shown to the jury in North Brabant on St. Patrick's Day.

Ms Catherine McConnell thanked Mr. Farrell and acknowledged the amount of work he and Caitriona Morgan had invested in the bid.

7. AOB

Cllr. Shane Donnellan asked if there would be another round of the REDZ funding for towns in County Galway. Mr. Farrell said that he expected that there would be but there may be a small delay.

The date for the next meeting was agreed for Tuesday 14th June 2016 at 10am.