



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)

Online via Microsoft Teams

Dé Céadaoin 19 Iúil @ 10:00 am via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday 19th July @ 10:00 am via Microsoft Teams

Members Present:

Dan Dowling	Community Representative
Paul Carey	Construction/Business Representative
Dave Hickey	Business Representative
Marian Spellman	Trade Union Representative
Cllr. Gerry Finnerty	Galway County Council
Cllr Tim Broderick	Galway County Council
Cllr Declan Geraghty	Galway County Council
Cllr David Collins	Galway County Council
Cllr. Mary Hoade	Galway County Council
Cllr. Karey McHugh	Galway County Council (Chair)

Present:

Kieran Coyne	Galway County Council
Eimear Dolan	Galway County Council
Hazel Fox	Galway County Council
Liam Hanrahan	Galway County Council
Ali Curran	CHL Consultants

Cllr Karey McHugh welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20th December 2022 were approved on the proposal of Cllr Mary Hoade and seconded by Paul Carey.

There were no matters arising.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund project Update

Alan Farrell introduced Hazel Fox the new Town Regeneration Officer to give an update on Regeneration Projects.

Ms Fox gave an introduction to the Regeneration projects the Team have been involved in across the county and gave updates on RRDF schemes in Loughrea, Portumna, Gort, Clifden, Athenry and Tuam.

Cllr McHugh thanked Ms Fox for her presentation and for all the work that the Regeneration Team have done to date and in particular the work carried out on the Tuam Masterplan. Cllr McHugh stated that she was impressed with the designs for future plans.

Cllr McHugh opened the floor to questions and observations.

Cllr Tim Broderick thanked Ms Fox for her presentation. Cllr Broderick asked how the issue of closed businesses in town centres was going to be redressed, Cllr Broderick gave the example of Ballinasloe and all the businesses in the town centre that have closed in recent years and now lie vacant.

Cllr Gerry Finnerty thanked Ms Fox for her presentation and concurred with Cllr Broderick on the loss of businesses in town centres. Cllr Finnerty stated that the issue of vacant buildings in town centres needs to be addressed and something needs to be done to attract people back to town centres. Cllr Finnerty stated that a lot of small villages are also in need of enhancement and asked if there are any plans to look at these isolated areas.

Ms Fox advised that the intention of investing money in bigger towns is to attract businesses and investment in the town centres, the aspiration is to create destinations and to attract footfall to the town centres. Ms Fox stated that the hope is to create growth in our town centre areas.

In relation to the enhancement of villages, Ms Fox advised that this would be an issue that could be dealt with under the Town & Village Renewal Scheme as opposed to the regeneration section, as they are smaller scale projects.

Cllr Declan Geraghty queried if research had been carried out in the towns under the Regeneration Projects as to what type of businesses, they wish to attract into the town centres.

Paul Carey thanked Ms Fox for her presentation and stated that confidence needs to be rebuilt in our towns and to gain this confidence buildings need to look well, in particular vacant buildings.

Cllr McHugh gave an example of the work that has been carried out in Tuam that has seen some vacant buildings converted to residential, which is bringing life back into the town centre.

Dave Hickey concurred with Cllr McHugh and stated that it is important to get people back living in the town centres.

Alan Farrell stated that all the points raised were valid and that significant work has and will be carried out to the town centres under the Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) and the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF). Mr Farrell stated that there will be some short-term benefits

but that most will be long term. Mr Farrell stated that he is conscious of the importance of people have confidence in their town centres.

Ms Fox advised that in terms of public realm, there is no scheme that will be rolled out in isolation, the Regeneration Team are also looking at ways to improve amenities in town centres and to encourage people to live and visit our town centres. Ms Fox stated that the long-term vision won't be fixed overnight.

Cllr Mary Hoade thanked Ms Fox and all the Regeneration team for their work. Cllr Hoade stated that the number of pubs and shops closed in rural towns is only increasing and that it is really important to look at these towns. Cllr Hoade queried what the update is on the Gort Town Centre First Plan.

Cllr Tim Broderick stated that it will be difficult to get residential occupancy back into town centres above businesses. Cllr Broderick stated that parking fees is are a big issue and they need to be abolished if people are to be encouraged back into our towns.

Cllr Declan Geraghty concurred with observations made by Cllr Broderick in relation to parking fees in town centres. Cllr Geraghty stated that the problem with getting people back into town centres is the lack of investors. Cllr Geraghty stated that the right balance of residential and businesses in town centres must be achieved.

Ms Fox advised that the Gort Town Centre First Plan has been a big adjustment for the town team and that a lot of work has been undertaken by the team. Ms Fox stated that the Gort Town Team are enthusiastic and can see the benefits and opportunity for their town, the Gort Town First Plan is being community led and facilitated by herself and the regeneration team. Ms Fox advised that the next town centre plan will be in Athenry.

Ms Fox advised that in terms of public realm, the team are very aware of issues with parking and in particular off-street parking in town centres. Ms Fox stated that off street parking is a matter that will be looked at under town centre plans to encourage business owners to free up on street parking in front of their businesses.

Alan Farrell agreed with members that town regeneration alone won't enhance town centres. Mr Farrell stated that he hoped that a new rates incentive scheme will be launched soon by the Council and that his may help encourage and build confidence in town centres. Mr Farrell stated that big projects will take medium to long term and that a coherent planned approach is needed.

Dan Dowling stated that the issue of parking must be a multi-faceted approach and that off street parking is important. Mr Dowling stated that going forward thought must be given to the types of businesses going into town centres.

Cllr David Collins stated that footfall in towns is needed and in order to achieve this the parking issues needs to be addressed in towns.

Cllr McHugh stated that the bricks and mortar model of retailing has declined in recent years and that this needs to be brought back. Cllr McHugh queried if there is any update on Bridge Street in Dunmore. Cllr McHugh also queried tree and planting in future town plans and whether plants will be properly rooted as there has been issues with some of trees planted in areas of Tuam that are now starting to become unrooted.

Ms Fox advised that future tree root structures will be encased when they are being installed and that any planting under public realm will not lead to damage and they also can act as nature based drainage

Ms Fox advised that the works in Dunmore are being carried out by the Roads Department and that an update can be sought from Roads and circulated to members (Hazel has contacted John Coyle in relation to this but has not heard back, would be a good idea to request John give an update at a future SPC.

This concluded the Regeneration Section's Update.

Overview of Town and Village Renewal Scheme and Streetscape scheme

Cllr McHugh introduced Eimear Dolan to give an Overview of the Town & Village Renewal Scheme and the Streetscape scheme.

Eimear Dolan gave a brief update on each scheme.

Streetscape Enhancement Scheme

- Our Rural Future is the Government's five-year strategy to revitalise rural Ireland and includes a commitment to upgrade and enhance shopfronts and street facades in our rural towns and villages.
- Improving the visual appearance of our urban streetscapes increases pride and confidence in our towns and villages, making them more attractive places to live, work and do business.
- The Streetscape Enhancement Scheme is funded by the Department of Rural & Community Development (DRCD) as part of the Town and Village Renewal Programme and is implemented by Galway County Council with the involvement of local property owners, tenants, Tidy Towns, Business and Community Development organisations.
- Total Allocation for Portumna under this Scheme is 100k (TVRS 2022)
- Total Allocation for An Spidéal under this Scheme is 100k (TVRS 2022)
- Total Allocation for Tuam under this Scheme is 100k (TVRS 2021)

Portumna Streetscape Scheme

- Portumna has been identified as a Small Growth Town in the Adopted County Development Plan 2022-2028.
- The proposal for inclusion in the Streetscape Scheme was put forward by Galway County Council as a key step in unlocking and renewing Portumna's potential as part of a Regeneration Agenda and to add to the attractiveness of the Town.
- The Town's Streetscapes hold significant potential to contribute more fully to its attractiveness as a place to be, to shop and visit. Scheme is aligned to the Regeneration Vision for Portumna and Tourism Objectives

Portumna Street Enhancement Scheme 2023

- The focus of the Scheme is to support the upgrade and enhancement of shopfronts and street facades of defined areas within selected rural town/village centres.
- Eligible applicants are tenants or owners of commercial, residential, or unoccupied buildings in the qualifying zone in Portumna Town Centre.
- Applicants apply to Galway County Council with quotations for eligible works.

Town & Village Renewal Scheme

Ms Dolan gave an overview of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for 2023 and advised of changes to previous years as per below:

Town & Village Renewal Scheme 2023

The 2023 Scheme is designed to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland through a renewed focus on town centre regeneration and enhancing economic and social vibrancy in line with the Town Centre First policy.

This will be achieved through:

- Town Regeneration projects
- Enhancing our streetscapes
- Green spaces / recreational amenities in town or village centres
- Refurbishment of existing community centres
- A new option to allow local authorities to acquire plots of land to enable development of town regeneration, such as town parks, plazas, etc.
- Bringing vacant and derelict buildings/ back into use as multi-purpose or community spaces
- Projects to support town or village centre markets, e.g. farmers markets or artisan markets.
- Town/village centre plaza development
- The minimum grant available is €20,000.
- The maximum level of grant available for 2023 will remain at €500,000 in respect of one application from each local authority, in order to align the scheme with the type of projects and level of ambition identified in *Our Rural Future*. It is envisaged such projects will generate significant positive impacts.
- A maximum of €250,000 will apply in respect of a further 4 applications.
- One additional application will be accepted from each local authority with inhabited offshore islands, for one large scale project of up to €250,000.

Cllr McHugh thanked Ms Dolan for her presentation and opened the floor to questions/observations.

Cllr Tim Broderick thanked Ms Dolan for her presentation and queried whether it was possible to get a dedicated staff member in the Planning Department to deal with planning exemption queries in relation to the above schemes.

Liam Hanrahan advised the members that he would liaise with the Planning Department with a view to getting a dedicated staff member to deal with exemption queries.

Cllr Gerry Finnerty thanked Ms Dolan for her presentation and queried if businesses in villages can apply for the streetscape scheme and whether signposting in villages can be included.

Cllr Declan Geraghty queried if there was any grant available that can be used for finishing paving in towns and villages.

Eimear Dolan advised the members that the Town & Village Renewal Scheme has a limited number of projects but that villages and small settlements are eligible to apply for works under the scheme.

This concluded the overview of Town and Village Renewal Scheme and Streetscape scheme.

AOB

Alan Farrell stated that the recent announcement of Dexcom coming to Athenry was extremely important and that there was extensive work ongoing between Galway County Council and Dexcom.

Alan Farrell introduced Ali Curran of CHL Consultants who gave the members a brief overview of the Tourism Strategy. Mr Farrell informed the members that the strategy is to go before the plenary meeting in September for adoption.

Following Ms Currans overview of the strategy Cllr McHugh and the members thanked Ms Curran for her work on the strategy and expressed their gratitude to former Tourism Officer Ruth Mulhern for all her work in getting the Tourism Strategy completed.

The meeting then concluded.

