

Economic Development & Enterprise SPC

Date: Thursday 11th December 2014

Time: 10 am

Location: Training Room, Block A, Wexford County Council Building

Committee Members Present: Cllr. Michael Sheehan, Chairman; Cllr Kathleen Codd Nolan; Cllr George Lawlor; Cllr John Hegarty; Cllr Johnny Mythen; Cllr Barbara Anne Murphy; Cllr Frank Staples; Cllr Paddy Kavanagh; Cllr Martin Murphy; Mr Sam Rose

In Attendance: Mr. Tony Larkin, Director of Service; Mr. Pdraig O’Gorman, County Development Officer; Ms. Carolyne Godkin, Tourism Development Officer; Mr Tom Banville, Head of Enterprise; Ms Siobhan O’Neill, Research Officer; Mr. Ger Mackey, Community Services Co-ordinator; Ms. Edwina Colfer, Clerical Officer.

Apologies: Cllr Keith Doyle; Mr Tom Enright, Chief Executive

1. Welcome & Introduction

Cllr Michael Sheehan, Chairperson, welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the newly formed Economic Development & Enterprise SPC.

2. Role & Function of SPC

Mr Tony Larkin, Director of Services, gave an overview of the role and function of the SPC which is to prepare the groundwork for economic development policies which are then presented to the local authority at the County Council meetings. The minutes of the SPC will be circulated to the County Council meetings for information. Mr Tony Larkin introduced the Economic Development and Local Enterprise office staff to the members and informed them that they are available outside meetings to discuss formulation of economic policy. Cllr Michael Sheehan thanked Cllr John Hegarty for his work as chairperson on the previous Economic & Social SPC.

3. Economic Profile of County Wexford

Ms Siobhan O’Neill, Research Officer gave an informative presentation on the Economic Profile of County Wexford. Main points include:

- Improving GNP/GDP growth rates
- The continuing momentum of Irish exports looks set to continue with international growth patterns looking positive
- Positive regional, local employment figures
- Key sectors in County Wexford; Agriculture, Life Sciences, Technology, Wholesale & Retail Tourism
- Local good news stories – Clearstream, Nutricia, Aldi TK Maxx
- Education a concern – lagging Third Level Rates
- Maintaining Key Infrastructure, Broadband, Innovative property solutions

A copy of the full Economic Profile of County Wexford is available for download on the Wexford County Council website.

Members raised queries in relation to the status in of the University of the South East, Enniscorthy and New Ross Road By-passes, Natural Gas and access to both Waterford and Dublin airports, which were dealt with by the Director of Services.

4. Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP)

Mr Ger Mackey, Community Development Officer gave a presentation on the Local Economic & Community Plan for Wexford. The purpose of the LECP is to promote and support the Economic Development and Local and Community Development of County Wexford both by itself directly and in partnership with other Economic & Community stakeholders. A steering group will be set up to work on the plan and members should include: at least one member of the LCDC; one member of the Economic Development & Enterprise SPC; Chief Office of the LCDC; Director of Service for Economic Development or his nominee and any person that the SPC and LCDC consider likely to make a contribution to the work on the plan.

The LECP should be completed by 31st December 2015 and will cover a 6 year period. A discussion took place on what funding would be available. There is circa €1.3 million funding available in SICAP (currently at tender stage) and circa €8 million in the proposed new Leader programme (over 5 years).

5. WCC Vacant Property Grant Incentive Schemes

Mr Pdraig O’Gorman, County Development Officer, gave an informative presentation on the Vacant Property Grant Incentive Schemes which are available in New Ross, Enniscorthy and Wexford Towns. The scheme is open to vacant properties in certain areas of the towns that have been vacant for at least one year. If there is a need it is proposed looking at developing similar schemes in Gorey and Bunclody.

6. Employment Service Nights

Cllr Michael Sheehan informed the group that the Department of Social Protection are in a position to hold information nights to groups on what help is available to them if they wish to get back into the workforce. The job officers will be on hand to give the information with a view to having one on one meeting’s with clients at a later date. It was suggested calling these nights Job Activation Nights. It was proposed writing to the Department of Social Protection to ask them to deliver these information sessions to communities around the County. This was proposed by Cllr George Lawlor and seconded by Cllr Kathleen Codd Nolan.

7. Economic Infrastructure

Pdraig O’Gorman, County Development Officer, gave an informative presentation on the Economic Infrastructure of the County. Key points as follows:

- New Ross Bypass – contract awarded April 2015 (BAM Iridium is the contractor) – construction will start July/August 2015 – construction period 36 months (river barrow bridge 30 months) – opening year 2018 – total cost €228 million
- Enniscorthy Bypass – contract award April/May 2015 – construction start July/August 2015 – completion December 2018 – total cost €341million
- Oilgate to Rosslare Harbour – negotiations are ongoing
- Flood Relief – New Ross Flood Relief Scheme €800,000 and Enniscorthy Flood Relief Scheme €35million
- Natural Gas – should be up and running in the first half of 2015 for industrial premises only for now – if a new factory wishes to open up on the line from Great Island to Wexford they may be facilitated
- Broadband
 - National Broadband Plan - every home, business and school across Wexford will have access to high speed broadband by the end of 2020
 - Vodafone and ESB Networks have come together to offer Fibre Broadband through the ESB Networks cabling, the scheme includes Wexford, Enniscorthy and Gorey.

Wexford County Council have made a submission to have New Ross included in this scheme. It is hoped that New Ross will be included in the 2nd roll out in 2016.

- Business Parks – Planning is being sought for 2 advance buildings in Butlersland Business Park New Ross. Wexford County Council have put together a portfolio of ready to go Greenfield industrial sites around the County in Wexford, Enniscorthy, New Ross, Gorey, Taghmon and Rosslare Harbour. Tony Larkin informed the group that although there are vacant industrial buildings in the County there is a lack of buildings suitable for the needs of businesses.

8. Tourism Development

Ms Carolyn Godkin, Tourism Officer, gave an informative report on Tourism in the County. The key facts and figures as follows:

- €62million – 2012 overseas visitor revenue
- 8% of all visitors to Ireland enter via Sea
- Est. 1.29million Domestic Visitors 2012
- Wexford has most 4 & 5* hotel properties in the region
- Wexford has over 200km of beaches, 6 championship golf courses, 4 blue flag beaches, 2 blue flag marinas
- €7mn has been invested in Tourism Infrastructure in the past 4 years
- €9.7 million advertising equivalent PR for Visit Wexford Tourism from €97,000 investment (2011 – 2014)

A discussion took place on Tourism in the County and what plans are in place for future development. Key plans as follows:

- Wexford County Council in partnership with Waterford County Council and Kilkenny County Council and the IHF have put together an international sales plan for the South East – Forever Happening.
- Visit Wexford are putting together a significant marketing plan for Wexford for the next few years.
- Carlow, Wexford and Waterford are putting a bid together to become the European Capital of Culture for 2020. A decision has not been made on this but members will be kept informed.
- A Heritage Trail, Garden Trail and Craft Trail has been developed for the County. Work has just been completed on a walking trail for the County.
- Fáilte Ireland will announce the name and marketing plan for the East & South offering in early 2015. This offering will be on a par with the Wild Atlantic Way.
- Cllr John Hegarty suggested using the Wexford Ambassadors more to promote the County. This programme now sits in the Community Development Section. Michael Londra one of the Ambassadors is constantly promoting Wexford and he is bringing a tour of his supporters to Wexford in 2015.

9. Local Enterprise Office

Mr Tom Banville, Head of Enterprise gave a presentation on the Local Enterprise Office (LEO). The LEO is the first stop shop for any start up business. The LEO deal with small start up businesses with 1 to 10 employees and their role is to provide support, training and advice to these businesses. Grants available include:

- Online Trading Voucher - €2,500 max
- Trade Show Grant - €1,000 max
- Export Marketing Grant - €2,500 max
Eligibility criteria - less than 10 employees with €1million turnover
- Feasibility/innovation Grant - €20,000 max
- Priming Grant - €80,000 max

- Business development grant - €80,000 max
Eligibility criteria – manufacturing and internationally traded services

Total grant approval for 2014 was €375,221.

10. Economic Development Initiatives

It is planned to have an Economic Initiative in each of the 4 main towns in Wexford.

- New Ross – planning is in progress for 2 advance buildings in Butlersland Industrial Park
- Gorey – work is ongoing on developing a Digital Innovation Centre. An anchor tenant has been secured and a premises is currently being sought
- Enniscorthy – 22 acres of land is being purchased at Turret Rock with a plan to develop this land being worked on. The land adjoins 12 acres already owned by the County Council. It is hoped to include an Economic, residential and recreation element to the development.
- Wexford – no plan is in place yet but it will probably be around high end office space

The SPC agreed to endorse the 4 initiatives for the towns proposed by Cllr George Lawlor and seconded by Cllr Martin Murphy.

A substantial Marketing & promotion budget has been allocated to Economic Development for 2015. A promotional brochure re life sciences is currently being worked on and when complete this brochure will be adapted to other sectors in order to promote investment in the County. It is hoped to have these published by end 2015.

A discussion took place on the Connect Ireland programme and it was noted that the Council would be hosting an event to outline this project in early 2015.

11. Energising Ireland's Rural Economy – CEDRA Report

A copy of the CEDRA report was circulated to the group prior to the meeting for information.

12. AOB

Cllr Michael Sheehan suggested that a strategic document be compiled for both New Ross and Enniscorthy to prepare both towns for the impact of the Bypasses. Mr Tony Larkin, Director of Services is going to put a team together to help develop these strategies.

Cllr Michael Sheehan thanked Mr Tony Larkin and his staff for all their work in 2014. He also thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

It was proposed meeting again in 2 months time and then bi monthly, date to follow.