

Minutes of the Rural Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) held on Tuesday 20th September at 10.30am in Room 242 and on-line

In attendance:

Cllr. Pat Hayes
Cllr. Shane Talty
Cllr. Pat Burke
Cllr. Joe Killeen
Cllr. Cillian Murphy
Cllr. Bill Chambers
Cllr. Mary Howard
Ms. Niamh O'Callaghan
Mr. Eugene Crimmins
Mr. Donnacha Lynch

Mr. John Treacy

Mr. Leonard Cleary
Ms. Bernadette Haugh
Ms. Helen Moloney

Organisation:

Chair
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Community/Voluntary
Community/Voluntary
Head of Commercial Services Shannon
Heritage
Burial Ground/Community
Playground Co-Ordinator
Director of Service, Rural Development
A/Senior Executive Officer
Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies

Ms. Jean Tierney O'Keeffe
Ms. Anny Wise
Mr. Denis Tuohy

Social Inclusion
Environment/Conservation
Agriculture/Farming

Cllr. P. Hayes welcomed the members to the meeting.

No. 1 Minutes of Meeting held on 26th April 2022:

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th April 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Bill Chambers, seconded by Cllr. Mary Howard and agreed.

No. 2 Matters arising:

Cllr. P. Hayes requested an update on the Rural Development Strategy. L. Cleary advised that the Draft Rural Development Strategy was viewed and reviewed on the "Have your Say" public platform and submissions were received. This public consultation is now closed and the submissions were forwarded to the Consultant who is assessing and integrating them into the final draft. Leonard advised that there should not be major changes but it was important to give the public the opportunity to submit views/observations.

Cllr. M. Howard paid tribute to Music Generation and advised that they do amazing work and it is important to acknowledge this. Cllr. Howard recommended that the SPC visit the group as it is quite extraordinary what they do in their own building e.g. teaching music, production, concerts, tuition and they also travel around the County. They provide a huge service but receive the lowest funding. Cllr. Howard

recommended that this be reviewed at Budget time. She stated that they are one of the most successful groups but the least funded. Leonard advised that a recommendation can be brought before the CPG and funding decisions will then go before the full Council. The members will have an opportunity to engage with the Finance team and seek resources. Bernie advised that one of the concerns expressed around funding for Music Generation is their requirement to plan ahead which would welcome a commitment from the Members of funding over a number of years. This would require a formalised agreement as part of the budget. Cllr. Hayes stated that he fully endorses it and there is a need to sponsor it. Cllr. Howard advised that it would be an ideal scenario as a lot of the funding schemes are coming to an end. The idea that they could have a guaranteed amount each year would be ideal. If they were to benefit from a decent amount of money they could showcase what they do, so people can understand what they are all about.

Shannon Heritage Sites:

Leonard stated that Cllr. Talty raised a query on the Shannon Heritage Project under matters arising at the last meeting. Leonard introduced Donnacha Lynch who has been working as a leader in the County Council to look at the Shannon Heritage transfer and has produced a 600 page analysis on business, assets etc. It is a very deep analysis from a due diligence perspective. Leonard invited Donnacha to present on Shannon Heritage:-

Donnacha introduced himself to the members and presented on the following:

- Shannon Heritage Background
- Shannon Heritage Clare sites
- Shannon Heritage Due Diligence Process
- Clare Tourism Strategy - Action Plan

L. Cleary thanked Donnacha for his presentation. He advised that out of the Clare Tourism Strategy there are a number of objectives including integration of the tourism product portfolio in order to increase visitor dwell time and move to a world class tourism destination. There are strong visitor attractions in Clare and it is important to present Co. Clare in a way that is distinctive. He stated that it is important to disperse the benefits from the wider community. Visitors coming to the Wild Atlantic Way need to be drawn into the Hidden Heartlands. Leonard stated that it is important to work with stakeholders and engage with the tourism industry, work with them and couple all of the products. Shannon Heritage sites are a high level requirement to develop future plans. Shannon Airport needs to have a particular strategy for Shannon Heritage and needs financial assistance and good political support. Leonard stated that finance is needed and they have received positive feedback and he would expect that government will assist with the transfer as it needs a financial package in order for the transfer to proceed.

N. O'Callaghan stated that she worked in Shannon Heritage and knows the sites very well. She stated that what is there is magical and can be worked upon. She stated that Craggaunowen is one site that could be developed and could replicate facilities similar to Lough Key Forest Park. She enquired how much money did Shannon Heritage have to run the Cliffs and what agreement was put in place then. She advised that the Cliffs

of Moher was one of the places that kept Shannon Heritage going and this should be recognised. She stated that she hopes the government will allocate funding, especially for Bunratty as she would like to see the staff being kept on. She asked that the staff be remembered and to talk to the people on the ground.

Cllr. J. Killeen thanked Donnacha for his presentation. He stated that a full analysis of the situation needed to be carried out to include details of exactly what is involved, what it will cost and what resources is needed. He calls on the government to support this. He stated that it is important to disperse tourism spending. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the destinations are within striking distance. He stated that Clare are doing what they are doing in Kerry; picking 3 or 4 sites and developing them to a high standard. Clare is competing with tourism all over the world and he hopes that the government will make the funding available.

Cllr. P. Burke stated that it is great to hear that they are receiving positive vibes. If the government can ringfence money for this it will be fantastic for Clare. He advised that pressure should be put on the Oireachtas members.

Donnacha advised that they are engaging with all staff and post transfer they will be arranging workshops as there is a lot of knowledge and great ideas there. He stated that the staff are very positive and they will be listened to.

Leonard advised that Shannon Heritage is still operating the gift shop at the Cliffs of Moher. Niamh stated that re-investment is very important and she would like to see positive engagement with staff and unions.

Cllr. S. Talty thanked Donnacha for all his work and is looking forward to working together on this. He stated that there is an eagerness that staff are engaged with.

Cllr. C. Murphy congratulated Donnacha on his remarkable achievement to produce this analysis inhouse. He queried if when they go to the Government to look for funding how important is it that they have maximised the funding streams?

Niamh highlighted that Knappogue Castle is severely neglected and the gardens are in serious need of maintenance. She stated that if these works were carried out it would bring more visitors to Quin. She congratulated Donnacha on his hard work.

Cllr. P. Hayes thanked Donnacha for his presentation and wonderful work. He complimented all the staff who continue to do excellent work. He stated that there is a need to get the tourists in to Shannon. Shannon Heritage products all came about because people were coming into Shannon and Clare and it is important to get the balance right. Niamh stated that Irish Tourism have paid €1m to invest in Americans coming into Clare. This was announced last week and this in turn will bring a lot of money into tourism.

L. Cleary acknowledged and commended the rebranding of Shannon Group which was a very significant statement. He stated that the Head of Tourism will work on marketing of Shannon Airport and there is a need to proceed with the business plan. Leonard advised that tourism generating funding goes directly for reinvestment. The Cliffs of Moher are paying for a loan and assists other sites. There is a requirement to reinvest on an ongoing basis but there is also a need to explore other revenue schemes

in order to take on Shannon Heritage. He stated that they are not going to increase rates. Shannon Heritage will have to be self-sustainable. Leonard advised that they are confident there is a commercial business there and that there are other income streams that need to be looked at. A small contribution from the public may be necessary to cover car parking, facilities etc.

Cllr. P. Burke referred to the shortage of accommodation and Cllr. Hayes concurred with this as a lot of accommodation is taken up with Ukrainians. Cllr. Hayes stated that this merits a full discussion in relation to a plan as Clare does not have the capacity.

Cllr. C. Murphy thanked Donnacha for his presentation and thanked Leonard. He stated that it was good to have clarity that it will be self-sustainable. He enquired about the LPT fund and stated that any reduction of LPT comes at a cost to the Council. Leonard advised that any proposals or costs associated with Shannon Heritage will not be drawn from the LPT funds. He stated that the right decision was made in the interests of delivering services in Clare. If the LPT was not approved services would have to be cut in 2023. Elected members avoided that scenario in terms of balancing the budget. Leonard advised that if the LPT had not been continued they would not be able to take on Shannon Heritage. Leonard took the opportunity to thank the elected members, with their partnership with Clare County Council there is a good solid base to take on Shannon Heritage but external funding will be necessary. Overall tourism sites will be working collaboratively selling each other's products to retain visitor spend. Leonard stated that they can discuss the accommodation deficit at a future meeting.

Cllr. J. Killeen stated that if the tourism product comes on stream it will give the tourists reason to stay and encourage entrepreneurs to provide accommodation as everything is interlinked.

Niamh stated that there was a lot of uproar on the LPT and suggested that somebody take 10 minutes to explain it on Clare FM. Cllr. Hayes stated that they did go on the local radio and the Council are doing their best to maximise the use of funding.

No. 3. Update on Ukrainian Crisis. (Presentation by Jason Murphy).

Leonard advised that Jason was unable to attend the meeting as an urgent issue had arisen that he had to assist with. He requested a deferral of the item and it was agreed to present it at the November meeting.

4. Update on the Review of the Burial Ground Bye Laws.

Bernie introduced Joe Spellissy and John Treacy to the members and advised following a recommendation from the members of the SPC the Burial Grounds unit undertook an independent review of the Burial Ground Bye Laws, co-ordinated by Ollie O'Loughlin on behalf of the Rural Development Directorate. This was to be undertaken by Ollie O'Loughlin (Retired Director of Service who had just completed a review of the operation of Burial Grounds) Unfortunately due to other personal commitments he was unable to complete this element. The Burial Grounds unit

recently met to review the existing Bye-Laws with a meeting arranged with the Council's Legal Advisors for November.

Bernie stated that the issue of Columbarium Walls was raised on foot of a Notice of Motion at the May Council meeting and the Burial Ground Unit were asked to review the existing policy. She advised that the existing policy dated back to 2016 which predates the opening of the Crematorium in Shannon in 2018. It is clear that there has been a notable increase in cremations since 2016 which at the time cremation was at 2% in Clare and in 2021 cremation stats in Clare had increased to 23%. Bernie advised that from a Clare County Council perspective provision has been made in Illaunmanagh and planned provision in the extension in Drumcliffe. She stated that in their experience the increase in cremations has not translated into a requirement for columbarium walls but the Burial Grounds unit will continue to monitor this in order to continue to respond to the needs of the wider community.

John Treacy introduced himself to the members and presented on the following:-

- Columbarium Policy Review
- Prevalence of Cremation in County Clare
- Burial in an existing family grave
- Retention at home and private scattering
- Cremation Urn Vaults
- Columbarium Walls
- Remembrance Fountains and Urn Towers
- Other local authority arrangements
- Demand in County Clare

Cllr. P. Hayes stated that burials need a clear policy and it will be necessary to look at the practical element that will assist people.

Cllr. M. Howard stated that all issues in Drumcliffe Burial Ground has been resolved and is very much appreciated. Works on paths were carried out, trees cut back, water available in the tap, grass cutting done and there has been 100% compliance. In relation to theft Mary stated that there is great credit due to everyone that this has been resolved. There was a big community effort along with the Gardai and the Council. Anti-social behaviour has stopped and this is very welcome.

Bernie thanked the members for their feedback and stated that she will take their comments on board. She advised she would be meeting with the Council's legal advisors to discuss the Burial Ground Bye Laws.

Cllr. S. Talty requested that legal advice be presented along with the Bye Laws at some point in this process as they all share desired outcomes and goals. It would be beneficial to receive legal advice before adopting same. Bernie stated that she will engage with the Solicitors and review what can be updated to further support the management of burial grounds in the County which can then be presented to the SPC.

Cllr. J. Killeen enquired who is responsible for water issues at burial grounds. He stated that there is no issue during the Summer but during the Winter pipes have burst and destroyed graves. He enquired about the possibility of holding tanks. John Treacy

advised that there is a model for holding tanks and they try to avoid piped water where possible.

Cllr. P. Hayes recommended that discussions on the Bye Laws should be held off camera. Bernie stated that she can facilitate a workshop with the Members and these can be separate to any public consultation. The members agreed to this.

Leonard stated he would welcome the workshops and advised that the existing Bye Laws are still in situ. They are strong and robust and were adopted by the full Council with some minor improvements to be considered as part of the review.

The members noted that there is no law in relation to the spreading of ashes. John stated that there is no risk or biological risk to it but the Burial Ground Unit would like to be notified of same as it is the Council's statutory remit in relation to disposal of remains. Cllr. S. Talty thanked John and Joe and stated that it was a very useful exercise. John stated that ash plots could be used where people are new to an area that do not have a family plot and a dedicated area could be established for burial of urns. He advised that 20/30 years ago there was a lot of wasted area and these pods could be dropped in those areas around the perimeter walls. This solution could be offered.

N. O'Callaghan stated that Shannon already has a wall and a number of people have bought a pod. She advised that the Irish process from wake to burial is so important. She recommended that materials used should be biodegradable and not plastic so that it does not pose a biological hazard.

Cllr. P. Hayes requested that the presentation be emailed to all members as it merits the committee to think about it. There are a lot of challenges as there is an 840% increase in cremations.

Cllr. P. Burke stated that the increase is a real eye opener. He enquired if the Council is moving away from granting extensions to burial grounds. John advised that they are prioritising the extension element at the moment. It was noted that some burial grounds are reaching capacity and Cllr. Burke stated that there is a need to support communities in providing extensions. The level of funding needs to be reviewed as a lot of people have not moved away from traditional burials. Bernie advised that they are monitoring it and John and Joe are involved in collating statistics. Cllr. P. Hayes recommended that the funding and policy be discussed at a future meeting and that the Rural SPC should request that extra funding be set aside for communities acknowledging the role of the community sector in Burial Grounds who work very hard.

Niamh referred to a specific Children's burial ground and proposed that funding be put forward for this burial ground to show a greater understanding of the Mother and Children's homes and the need to acknowledge it. John stated that the Heritage Officer is currently mapping out a document acknowledging 160 burial grounds. He stated that they are closer to 220 as a lot of their locations have fallen out of the oral document. Co-ordinates are being sought for each location. A monument was unveiled at the end of May at the site of the Old Shanakyle Burial Ground.

Cllr. P. Hayes thanked John for his presentation and stated a longer discussion is needed on burial ground as it is important to seek input.

Bernie advised that the official opening of Illaunmanagh Burial Ground extension is taking place on Friday at 3.30pm and she acknowledged everyone who had supported the project from its outset.

Cllr. P. Hayes requested that item 4. Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Biodiversity be postponed and this was agreed.

No. 5 Any Other Business

With no other business the meeting concluded and Cllr. Hayes thanked everyone for their attendance.

Signed: _____

Cllr. P. Hayes
Cathaoirleach

Leonard Cleary
Director of Rural Development and
West Clare Municipal District