

# **Minutes of the Rural Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February at 10:00 a.m. in Room 242 and on-line**

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## **In attendance:**

## **Organisation:**

Cllr. Pat Hayes	Chair
Cllr. Shane Talty	Elected Member
Cllr. Pat Burke	Elected Member
Cllr. Joe Killeen	Elected Member
Cllr. Cillian Murphy	Elected Member
Cllr. Bill Chambers	Elected Member
Cllr. Ann Norton	Elected Member
Ms. Niamh O'Callaghan	Community/Voluntary
Mr. Denis Tuohy	Agriculture/Farming
Ms. Jean Tierney O'Keeffe	Social Inclusion
Mr. Leonard Cleary	Director of Service, Rural Development
Ms. Bernadette Haugh	A/Senior Executive Officer
Mr. Frank Cullinan	Staff Officer, Rural Development
Mr. Brendan Boyce	A/AO, Rural Development
Ms. Helen Moloney	Assistant Staff Officer

Cllr. P. Hayes welcomed the members to the first meeting of the New Year and advised that two PPN members Anny Wise and Eugene Crimmins have withdrawn from the SPC.

### **No. 1 Minutes of Meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022:**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Bill Chambers seconded by Cllr. Cillian Murphy and agreed.

### **No. 2 Matters arising:**

Cllr. Cillian Murphy advised that he had asked for Hemp4soil to present to the SPC. He advised that they recently won a national award at the IPB Pride of Place Awards. He stated that it would be good for them to get exposure with the SPC or the full council as it is a very interesting and an important piece of work being done. It would be good for the SPC to get a sense of it. Cllr. Pat Hayes congratulated them on winning an award at the IPB Pride of Place Awards and would look forward to hearing from them. He stated that it would be a good idea to see how other elements are working.

Cllr. Pat Burke enquired if there was any update on the proposed takeover of the Shannon Heritage sites. Leonard advised that discussions have taken place with Government, Clare County Council and Shannon Group in relation to the transfer. A 600-page due diligence was produced and this went through the finer details. He stated that the Council are satisfied that they have a detailed analysis carried out. In order for the transfer to take place investment is needed from Government as they could not put a burden on the Council and ratepayers. Leonard advised that they are almost at the final stages of the discussions with the department and stated that it is

better to prepare in advance before the transfer and have a good business plan in place. He advised that there is a good relationship with the government departments and understands why the delays occurred as everyone had to agree on the facts. Due diligence looked at the legal aspects and all has been fine-tuned. He stated that it is important not to rush into it and overall the one reassurance is that staff and their jobs are secure. There is a good solid basis and Shannon Group have engaged with the Council and the national departments. It is now a cabinet decision. Shannon Heritage sites have had the opportunity to recover after COVID and the green shoots can be seen post Covid. Leonard reassured the members that they will work with the team there and work on the recovery. He stated that they would like government approval of the transfer before the summer. He took the opportunity to pay tribute to Donnacha Lynch and his team. It has been their top priority and will continue with the business plan. Part of the plan will be capital investment. It will take a number of years to build but it will be built gradually. A full brief will be presented to the full council before a decision is made and the full council will need to endorse the business plan. Once government approval is secured it will go back to the full council

Cllr. Burke thanked Leonard for his positive reply Cllr. Hayes thanked Leonard for the update and stated that it gives great encouragement and hope of bringing it to a resolution, in particular for the workers who are looking forward to stability.

### **No. 3 Update on the Review of the Burial Ground Bye Laws:**

Bernie updated the members as follows:-

- Three workshops have taken place with Marina Keane to review the Bye Laws.
- Under the current legislation for Burial Grounds, the Council's Byelaws are comprehensive and robust.
- The three key pieces of legislation which give responsibility to the Local Authority are; Public Health Ireland Act 1978, Local Government Sanitary Services Act 1948 and the Local Government Act 1994
- There is a clear need for updated national legislation to support the Burial Ground oversight and management function at local level. This will need to be raised at national level.
- The Council would like to see improvements in relation to contractors doing work in Council owned burial grounds. The Burial Ground unit is currently revising the application form and procedures for Monument Sculptors to regulate this process.
- The Council will meet the legal advisors to finalise the wording of the updated Bye Laws to reflect the revised process around Monument Sculptors.
- The new Historic and Archaeological Bill 2023 is at second committee stage which will replace the National Monuments Act 1930-2004. The act will give more powers to the Local Authority in relation to historic burial grounds.

Bernie requested that John Treacy review the content of the proposed bill and he responded as follows:-

“This new bill makes specific legislative protection for all the elements that make up the fabric of a burial ground. It will make provisions for the regularisation of vested ownership of the historic burial grounds in local authority care and consolidates sequences of legislation from historic Acts. It also reinforces central government

commitment to protecting the immeasurable heritage resource contained within our graveyards and places additional powers of enforcement to local government officials in dealing with some of the compliance issues faced across most local authorities. The consequence of this revision will introduce limitations on what types of behaviours and alterations are permissible in historic burial grounds in order to protect the artefacts contained within them. It also gives greater reach for local authorities to adapt local byelaws to deal with specific geographical challenges as individual local authorities see fit. The bill includes a number of pathways for cooperation and collaboration between all the relevant authorities and stakeholders to deliver better outcomes in the long term conservation of burial grounds and the artefacts contained within them”.

Bernie stated that she will provide a further update to the SPC once they have completed due diligence on the review of the Byelaws with the legal advisors.

Cllr. Pat Hayes stated there is a need to look at the national legislation before making changes to the Bye-Laws and he hopes it will take into account the issues that the SPC has raised. He advised that there would be implications for local burial grounds and they can be contentious and challenging. Cllr. Hayes stated that until National Byelaws have changed there is no point in changing Clare’s Byelaws. Bernie advised that they are working on revised processes alluding to contractors and the Bye Laws will reflect this.

Cllr. Killeen stated that it would be wise to wait it out to see what modifications will apply.

Denis Tuohy advised that it would be worth looking at the legislation and engage with the processes. It is a Bill and if there is something that the SPC feel that needs to be raised or acted on it would be worthwhile. Bernie agreed to circulate the link and stated that if the SPC wants to make a submission she can organise same. She advised that it is an Historic and Archaeological Bill and will give more power at local authority level. As it happens in Clare most of the 140 burial grounds are historic and it is important to get it right. This will give greater power to the Local Authority in terms of enforcement etc. The Bill does not mention the register. It contains details of local management and preservation. Bernie stated that it is worth continuing with the review and it can be reviewed again in advance of the Act.

Cllr. Joe Killeen stated that it would be beneficial to engage with public representatives in Dáil Eireann and inform them of the SPC’s views and approach.

Cllr. Cillian Murphy echoed Joe’s comments and advised that they have the opportunity to influence or give feedback and he is in favour of giving more power to local authorities.

Cllr. Pat Hayes stated that it is very emotive and suggested that the SPC engage in this process to see what can be delivered. He advised that 140 burial grounds are under the Council’s remit and nearly all of them are managed by the communities in most places. Some of the larger ones are managed by the local authority. He stated that the Council needs to ensure that their role is minded. Bernie advised that they have been looking at some of the legislation around burial grounds and staff have been in contact with Oireachtas members and there is an opening to do something more around that.

## **No. 4 Presentation on Renewed Clare Rural Development Strategy 2030:**

Bernie advised that the Clare Rural Development Strategy 2030 is gone to layout and print but is not for publication at this stage. It will be presented to the Rural Development Forum on the 9th March. This presentation will give a sense of what the focus is and the important key points on how to sustain rural communities. Bernie introduced Frank and he presented on the following:-

- Changing Rural Environment
- Mid-Term Review – Consultation Process
- Review of Existing Strategy
- Overview of Renewed Development Strategy 2030
- Key Indicators used to appraise Success of Plan
- Additional specific actions
- SWOT Analysis of Strategy
- Next Steps

Cllr. Cillian Murphy thanked Frank for the presentation and stated that it was interesting to see the outcomes and synopsis. He advised that it is all about what can be measured. He referred to the metrics around rate increases and recommended that caution be taken. He also referred to the Marine Acts and stated that it is critical that the Council does not just look at it through tourism. He advised that showcasing of food products took place recently at the Cliffs. It is important that the tourists are getting more than just a veneer and fishing is really important. He stated that it is important to have a base line and referred to the consequences of the National Planning Framework in relation to de-depopulation and it is important that this baseline can link back to the County Development Plan. If it is not measured and they do not have the facts they will be back in a worse position. He advised that it is something that may need to be added in.

Niamh O'Callaghan echoed Cillian's comments. She referred to funding that was secured last week by government in the sum of €300,000 for the Greenway in Shannon and Ennistymon. During COVID the highest segment in tourism was walking and this funding is important. She referred to the Government's strategy (page 22) in relation to flood defenses in Shannon. It is all about creating the aspect of bringing in tourism and referred to the Greenway in Waterford. Without putting this first the other pieces will not be seen as clearly and the revenue generated by Greenways is a no brainer. She stated that it would create jobs and revenue and it will show people how amazing Clare is. She referred to the Eurovelo routes and stated that they are not clearly signposted. There is a lot of money to be made from cyclists.

Jean Tierney O'Keeffe advised that it is great to see support for Youth Services but transport is a big issue. Youths are relying so much on neighbours and more transport links is important.

Denis Tuohy advised that it is good to see that Section 5 is there and it is a lot bigger than in the previous strategy. He stated that it is also good to see implementation and performance indicators 2026 in the new strategy. He advised that one of the indicators that should be developed more is broadband. It mentions average broadband speed but Denis stated that really good broadband in every town and village is needed not

just average. This is important for everyone as was evident during Covid when some people tried to buy houses and the broadband quality was the first question they asked. He stated that average is not descript.

Cllr. Pat Hayes advised that a number of key issues had been raised and welcomed the Greenway funding. East Clare secured funding of €700,000 and he stated that there is a need to open up all parts of the county. In relation to transport, it is an obstacle, even in Ennis. The services around the town could do with improving. He recommended that the views of the local transport units be taken into consideration. In relation to climate change there is a need to push the transport issue. Broadband is key if people want to buy properties.

Leonard advised that they will arrange for the Project Management Office to give an update to the SPC. They are involved in a very large project for Clare and it will be a great contribution for rural areas. The funding will give a significant boost to the County. There are a lot of workshops taking place and many of them have gone to the design stage. Leonard agreed to ask Sean Lenihan to present to the SPC.

Bernie stated that, in relation to Cillian's query, she will revise the indicator and agreed that it needs further clarification in relation to the baseline. She agreed to speak to Sean in advance of going to print and there may be an opportunity to gain stats based on the survey. Killian advised that it needs clarity.

Cllr. Pat Hayes stated that it is important to bring up the areas by looking at services and schemes available in the County, in particular the CE schemes and the value they are to communities. He advised that it is something that is keeping this show on the road.

## **No. 5 Presentation on Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) 2023 to 2028:**

Bernie advised that it was necessary to bring an update to the SPC on the LECP process. There is a new plan to be prepared and it has to be in place by the end of this year. She stated that she hopes that the SPC will have an opportunity to input into the document. Bernie introduced Brendan to the members and he presented on the LECP as follows:-

- Purpose of the LCDC
- LCDC Functions
- Community Support Fund
- LECP 2016-2021
- New LECP Guidelines
- Preparation of LECP
- LECP – Stage 1 Preparation

Cllr. Hayes thanked Brendan for his presentation and stated that in relation to the LECP the public need to know more about it. The whole remit plan is only as good as it is implemented. The delivery is the key thing and it needs to align with what people are thinking. The more consultation that can be done with communities the better as they do not understand this plan or have not been engaged enough in the application process for grants. He referred to the "Are you aligned to the LCDC plan?" and people

do not understand what this means. The more information that can get out there the better and getting people's views are critical.

Leonard referred to the Rural and Economic SPCs and their responsibility around policymaking. He stated that over the last six years they have bedded down the Rural LECP and have tried to connect with the Rural Strategy with specific projects. The economic side of it straddles businesses and communities. It does not happen in isolation and there is a need for an action plan. They do not want a big long 70-page document. It should be clear enough for measurable projects. For community groups it would be easier to scan 15 pages. It is a more simpler approach. The LECP consultation is the same as the consultation for the Rural Strategy and Leonard stated that he was confident that rural communities will be very well represented. LEO will have good inputs and it is a partnership of a number of organisations.

Denis thanked Brendan for his presentation. In relation to the IFA Dennis enquired if there are any specific questions that the IFA need to answer. He stated that it would be good for them to see the presentation for information purposes and to set the scene where the IFA is needed and where they could provide feedback. Bernie advised that there is a need to make it more relatable to people and the local authority has been asked at national level. There is a pilot in Clare engaging with more marginal communities and she stated that they will work closely with the Consultants. She advised that Sean could be invited to present. In addition to doing a new LECP they can look at the Clare Survey and have it run alongside it. There are gaps in the data and they do not have the data relating to Clare. Bernie suggested getting input from the IFA into data gathering. Denis stated that he would welcome a meeting with Sean and suggested that a speaker from Teagasc (based in Athenry) or a speaker from NUIG attend the next meeting as it would be interesting to get their views. He stated that engagement is very important and he questioned the accuracy of the data from the previous 2011 plan. In relation to the Anti-Poverty Plan he stated that the figures were very impressive.

Cllr. Cillian Murphy concurred with Leonard and stated that there needs to be relatable grant applications. He referred to the sheer scale of the previous version and asking groups to specify or connect their grant application with the LECP is where gaps are found.

Cllr. Pat Hayes thanked the Director for informing the SPC of the reduced volume and a more targeted approach. He stated that it is now an opportunity to have a plan that works with the rural communities and services, and how to align this. He recommended that a workshop be organised in advance or a combined workshop to review the existing plan with the Economic SPC and the LCDC. An invitation could also be extended to the Rural SPC. Brendan advised that it would be beneficial to bring the Rural SPC into this. Pat stated that he would be happy to align with the Economic SPC and LCDC.

Cllr. Murphy enquired if there is merit in going back through a number of projects that have been grant funded over the last 18 months and check to see if they had been asked to align to the LECP and where they would have put it. It would be a way of getting constructive criticism.

Bernie referred to the complexity of the last LECP which was acknowledged and criticized. She stated they are working under those guidelines and there will be an overarching document that will be produced within the two years. There is a need for fluidity that can be tweaked and that is very much recognised and will be focused on.

## **No. 6 Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Biodiversity**

Cllr. Hayes stated that there is a need to look at implications for the farming community as climate change has issues pertaining to agriculture. Denis advised that he could organise a speaker to present to the SPC as he hears from a lot of farmers who advised that they want to defend themselves in terms of nitrates. With proposed reduction in the national herd these implications can affect the growth of rural communities. Leonard advised that Morgan Lahiffe was recently appointed to the role of Climate Action Co-Ordinator and it was discussed at management team the importance of having a dedicated unit. The Council has responsibility to look at government policy and finance have prepared strong investment packages. He advised of the need to have a number of shovel ready projects to address climate change. The Council can influence in a practical way in a lot of areas but they can only deal with their own area. He stated that Morgan would be happy to present to the SPC. He advised that it is a standing item on all SPC agendas as there wasn't a specific SPC developed to implement climate change. Therefore, it was integrated into all four SPC's. Morgan is working on a Climate Change Strategy and is looking at a number of projects that are at feasibility stage. In order to apply for grant funding it needs to be shovel ready. There is a need to work with communities engaged in climate change. Climate change is established now and Leonard advised that tourism is another business area that is being focused on.

Cllr. P Hayes agreed that Morgan should be invited to a meeting and the members agreed.

### **Any other business:**

Denis enquired about an update on Bunratty, Holy Island, Loop Head and Money Point. Leonard advised that the Council recently received significant RDF funding. He recommended that the Head of Tourism present on the above projects and can include the Vandeleur Gardens. He referred to the Tourism Strategy and the importance of marketing plans. He stated that there is a lot of detail on all those products and a site visit could be arranged. He advised that some projects are completed and some are at a development stage. He stated that the Council will be an honest broker in these flagship tourism products. It is important to get the visitors in so that tourism can grow and create jobs .

Denis thanked Leonard and referred to Hemp4soil and enquired if the presentation was given to the full council could the SPC be invited. This was agreed.

With no other business Cllr. Pat Hayes drew the meeting to a close and thanked the members.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cllr. P. Hayes**  
**Cathaoirleach**

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**Leonard Cleary**  
**Director of Rural Development and**  
**West Clare Municipal District**