

Minutes of the Rural Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) held on Tuesday 6th December at 3pm in Ennis Digital Hub 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. Anny Wise
Mr. Leonard Cleary
Ms. Bernadette Haugh
Ms. Helen Moloney

Organisation:

Chair
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Environment/Conservation
Director of Service, Rural Development
A/Senior Executive Officer
Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies

Ms. Niamh O'Callaghan
Mr. Eugene Crimmins
Mr. Denis Tuohy

Community/Voluntary
Community/Voluntary
Agriculture/Farming

Cllr. P. Hayes welcomed the members to the meeting and thanked them for changing the date and time.

No. 1 Minutes of Meeting held on 20th September 2022:

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th September 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Pat Burke, seconded by Cllr. Joe Killeen and agreed.

No. 2 Matters arising:

Cllr. P. Hayes requested an update on the Burial Ground Review. Bernie Haugh advised that they are working on it and have had two meetings with the County Solicitor in relation to local issues and what amendments the Council would like to see in the Byelaws. The legal advisors have taken these views on board and a meeting has been set for 9th January to go through the Byelaws in greater detail. It is anticipated that the workshops will take place in Quarter 1 2023 in order to have an open discussion. Cllr. Hayes requested that this item be discussed at the February SPC Meeting.

No. 3. Update on the takeover of Shannon Heritage sites:

Cllr. P. Hayes referred to the news this morning on Shannon Heritage and expressed disappointment that it will not be sorted by the end of the year.

Leonard Cleary read out a statement by way of an update that Clare County Council will issue this afternoon.

Cllr. Pat Hayes stated that ultimately the government have asked the local authority to take over the Shannon Heritage sites and there is a funding mechanism involved. He stated that the Rural SPC does not have a say on this but the viewpoint is that the SPC would like the Council to take over the sites. He advised that he has sympathy for the workers. It is a wonderful tourism product and Cllr. Hayes stated that the SPC will fully support it.

Cllr. C. Murphy stated that the Council was asked to do due diligence and advised that this is an operation wholly owned by Shannon Group. He stated that he cannot commend the team highly enough. He stated that if Shannon Group feel there are other things to be done then they need to bring this to the table. Cllr. Murphy enquired who specifically asked the Council to take over the sites.

Leonard advised that the government asked Clare County Council to do due diligence and a report was furnished. The report was independently analysed by a competent financial firm. Key stakeholders included the Department of Local Government and Heritage, and the Department of Transport and other departments will become involved when there is agreement e.g., Department of Tourism and Finance.

Cllr. Pat Burke concurred with Cllr. Murphy's comments and stated that the figure is no doubt correct as due diligence was carried out by consultants and design teams, both internally and externally, and they have done excellent work.

Cllr. Shane Talty welcomed the statement. He advised that it is very clear that it is a proposal. As of now the Council has the due diligence report and he congratulated the team but acknowledged that there are distressed workers who are employed by an arm of the state.

Cllr. Joe Killeen referred to the Budget and advised that the Council's aim was not to raise rates because they want to support businesses. The LPT is set for 2023 and the budget is on a knife edge. Cllr. Killeen stated that he would be cautious in taking over another area. He advised that a cautious approach will be necessary as the Council do not want to raise rates or LPT. It is an arm of tourism that would support the tourism offer in the County. Cllr. Killeen expressed disappointment that there is not enough support for the takeover and recommended that the government be requested to look at it again as it will support employment.

Cllr. Mary Howard expressed her disappointment to hear the narrative after the FOI. She stated that a huge amount of due diligence has been completed. She stated that the morale of staff is very low, and employees need reassurance that jobs are safe. She advised that a lot of money has to be spent to bring these sites back up to standards. Some properties are over 100 years old and need to be properly maintained and made safe.

Cllr. P. Hayes stated that what is out in the public domain is very reactive and advised that workers are paramount. There is an urgency to get it resolved and he would like to see it resolved as soon as possible.

No. 4. Update on Ukrainian Crisis. (Presentation by Jason Murphy):

Jason Murphy introduced himself to the members and thanked them for inviting him. He presented on the following:-

- What is the foundation of or basis for Ireland's commitment?
- Beneficiaries
- Temporary Protection Supports
- Housing Response/Ukrainian Crisis Response
- Accommodation County Clare
- Example of Impact Areas
- Current National Strategy
- Countywide Community Response Forum
- Next Steps

Cllr. Pat Hayes thanked Jason for his presentation and stated that it highlights Clare's response and shows the real challenges. He invited comments from the members.

Cllr. Joe Killeen commended the volunteers in Lisdoonvarna and Ballyvaughan for the huge work being carried out. He stated that there is a need to be positive about the future and to cope with the unexpected. He advised that his biggest concern is how the agencies will be able to cope with the extra influx and stated that they should be told in advance. He advised that the tourism season starts in March and he has huge concern about the hotel situation. He stated that research needs to be carried out now. It is not good for children's social contact and education if they need to move school's midterm. He recommended that accommodation contracts be extended to 12 months.

Cllr. Cillian Murphy thanked Jason for his presentation and enquired if the Ukrainians are now eligible for social housing. He advised that there are services being provided into the communities as a result of the influx, which can be seen as a positive. However, local residents are denied access to these services and there are a lot of stories out there and on line. He stated that this needs to be looked at. There is a need to make sure local people can access these services too. He enquired if the grant scheme is just capital or operational costs for the project.

Cllr. Pat Burke referred to the situation in Bodyke and stated that the road network is not suitable for walkers and the area is very isolated during the Winter. He enquired if the 21 houses were rural or urban. He enquired if Ireland is getting any funding from Europe.

Cllr. Pat Hayes stated that there are 26 people living in Flagmount and most of them are working. He advised that Bodyke do not have immediate supports like Lisdoonvarna etc. IPAS can pick Hotels without engaging with the services and this needs to be dealt with nationally.

Jason advised as follows: -

- There are 111 Ukrainians in Bodyke and the Department of Children make contact in advance. The Department enquired about transport to and from the facilities. They then reached out to Local Link to confirm that busses run regularly and they have been adjusting their services throughout.
- Concerns were raised with An Garda Síochána in relation to road safety and they have provided Road Safety Authority hi viz vests for distribution. A message will be put up on Telegram (the Ukrainian's social platform) in relation to road safety.
- It is broadly families going into accommodation, therefore it is important to get access to services.
- It is important to get a range of stories that can be developed and put out there in order to reflect integration. In reality it is an international and humanitarian crisis and the local authority has a role within the European Union and the national government has stepped forward.
- The role of the Local Authority is to work with all the agencies regardless of how many Ukrainians are coming in.
- The objective is to have sustainable communities and continue to respond. The Local Authority has been working closely with the agencies for the last two years, responding and sharing information and taking opportunities that come along. Communication is strong but there are scenarios whereby people cannot access the services. If there are situations to be addressed there is strong robust relationships with all the agencies and feedback can be brought back to them.
- The Department of Children work on the accommodation situation and they may have challenges next March in relation to the tourism season. They are managing 700 contracts and Clare County Council will support them in any way they can.
- It is a humanitarian crisis and the one thing they would like to avoid is moving children from schools.
- Under the Temporary Protection Supports, the Ukrainians are entitled to accommodation. Housing is a different programme and is being dealt with separately. They are being dealt with under two different directorates so the lines are clean.
- The call out for grants is not clear. It may come through the Rural Directorate and it is expected that it will be capital as well as operational grants.
- It is mixed accommodation contracts and includes holiday homes and town centre accommodation. A lot of the holiday homes may be used especially if the Ukrainians have cars. There are some 18-month contracts also in place.
- Funding is coming from Europe and Jason agreed to provide details.
- Flagmount has a figure of zero as the figures is about reflecting profile of response nationally. Some Councils have developed large rest centres, others depend on multi occupancy. Flagmount is a notable community that put their hand up early and integrated the people into their community. It was a rest centre that is now stood down. It is a talking point and is a credit how the community responded.

Cllr. P. Hayes took the opportunity to thank the community involved and thanked Jason for his presentation. He stated that housing will be the challenge and there are a number of vacant properties but it is how these can be matched and financed. It is a two tier system i.e. if they are living in a Hotel their food is being paid for and if

they are out in the community this is not the case. He stated that there is a need for people to be independent. 13,000 Ukrainians are working and this is a very positive situation and needs to feature in the public domain. There is a lot of sectors looking for workers and the tourism sector is being challenged for the coming year. There are no houses to rent. Cllr. Hayes thanked Jason and wished him well in his new role.

No. 5. Schedule of Meetings for 2023:

The Schedule of Meetings for 2023 circulated with the agenda was proposed by Cllr. Mary Howard, seconded by Cllr. Pat Burke and agreed.

No. 6. Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Biodiversity & Summary of the Rights of Nature:

Anny Wise addressed the members and advised that the Citizen's Assembly unanimously agreed that "The Rights of Nature" should be included within the Constitution and to achieve that, a referendum would be needed. She stated that when An Taisce brought a court case on the Kilkenny Dairy Cheese factory to the Supreme court, it failed. This was because in each court there are no Irish laws even though Ireland had EU obligation to have these. The only protection laws protecting nature are within planning applications. The Judge of the Supreme Court stated that this was the case, but he understood An Taisce's position, and such laws should be in place to protect nature. The public response to the legal action was highly supportive and An Taisce gained cash donations and many new members.

Anny stated that when they presented to the Rural SPC on "The Rights of Nature" it was felt that it was evolved but Clare or Ireland was not included or rural development was not targeted. Anny outlined the details of the summary document circulated with the agenda and advised that they are trying to let people know that humans are part of nature and if they do not think they are part of nature this will have a negative affect and this can be proven.

Cllr. Joe Killeen thanked Anny for her presentation and stated that it would be interesting to find out what fact-finding Strabane did and on what grounds. Cllr. P. Burke sought clarity on the outcome of the Kilkenny case. Anny advised that the Courts dismissed an appeal brought by An Taisce against a planning permission for a cheese factory. She stated that there are no laws present which protect the environment. Anny referred to nitrates and stated that the EPA has made it quite clear that nitrates has an enormous amount to do with pollution. She advised that many rivers and lakes are no longer up to standard. She stated that An Taisce requested to go to court to make the government devise a plan for nitrates. She stated that farmers are very good to deal with nature.

Cllr. P. Hayes thanked Anny for her presentation and stated that farmers are custodians of the environment and there is a need to be careful about the nitrates directive. Pollution and changes to the rivers etc. is a combination of a lot of things and Cllr. Hayes stated that this was a debate for another day. A lot of information is

needed before the SPC can take this on and Cllr. Hayes recommended that this be revisited in the New Year.

No. 5 Any Other Business

Cllr. P. Hayes thanked Jason for his presentation and wished him well in his new role. He stated that the engagement with elected members and communities bring it all together. He stated that when you see a country with no light or shelter Clare should be very proud of what has been delivered. He recommended that vacant buildings be looked at.

Cllr. Cillian Murphy recommended that Hemp4Soil present to the Rural SPC in relation to nitrates and water quality. He stated that it is a European Innovative Project in Loophead. Cllr. Hayes stated that he would speak to Cllr. Murphy on this.

Cllr. Hayes acknowledged the staff of the Rural Directorate and thanked them for their support to the Rural SPC during the last year. He acknowledged Margaret Ryan who sadly passed away in August. He thanked the members for their huge contribution and wished everyone a safe and Happy Christmas.

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