

Minutes of Strategic Policy Committee (Economic Development & Enterprise Support) meeting

held Thursday 20th May 2021 on MS Teams

In attendance:

Cllr. Sean Gilliland (Chair)	Monaghan County Council
Cllr. Sean Conlon	Monaghan County Council
Cllr. David Maxwell	Monaghan County Council
Cllr. Noel Keelan	Monaghan County Council
Cllr. Brian McKenna	Monaghan County Council
Cllr. PJ O'Hanlon	Monaghan County Council
Alan Johnston	Monaghan Town Team - Business Pillar Rep
Patrick McCormick	Irish Farmer's Assoc. – Agricultural Pillar Rep
John Tobin	Carrickmacross Chamber of Commerce
Peadar Black	Latton Social Services
Paul Clifford	Director of Services, Economic & Community Development
Adrian Hughes	Senior Planner
John McEntegart	Head of Local Enterprise Office
Toirleach Gourley	Senior Exec Planner
Angela Gallagher	A/Administrative Officer, Planning
Briege Quinn	Senior Enterprise Development Officer
Gavin McEntee	IS Technical Support
Robyn Flanagan	Clerical Officer Planning Section

1. Previous Minutes

The minutes were proposed by Cllr. Brian McKenna and seconded by Cllrs. Noel Keelan & Sean Conlon.

2. Matter Arising

Mr Paul Clifford referred to item 3 in relation to the draft General Development Contribution Scheme and advised that it received approval at the Council Meeting and it is now out for public consultation and will be brought back to the SPC after the Summer.

Mr Paul Clifford referred to the two motions which were raised at the last SPC meeting and confirmed they have both been referred to the CPG.

Mr Paul Clifford stated that the SPC meeting which took place in April in relation to the Climate Action Plan and Decarbonisation Zones which was organised by the Environment Section and they will circulate the minutes for this.

Cllr Sean Conlon referred to the two motions and stated that they were not on CPG Agenda, Mr Paul Clifford advised that they were too late for the last CPG, however they will be items of agenda on the next CPG meeting.

3. Two Year Progress Report of the County Development Plan 2019-2025

In his presentation Mr Toirleach Gourley stated that within two years of adoption of the County Development Plan the Planning Authority is required to carry out a two review and prepare a report in achieving the objectives of the Plan. The progress report follows the format of the Plan for ease of reference, it examines each objective set out in each chapter and provides commentary on progress of achieving the objective. Mr Toirleach Gourley stated that a significant amount of work has been done over the last two years, with more to do over the next 4 years.

Mr Toirleach Gourley referred to Chapter 16 Implementation and Monitoring and in particular to housing need at county level and advised that in April 2021 the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage published guidelines for Planning Authorities in respect of Housing Need & Demand Assessment which is a long-term strategic view of the County's housing need that informs the Housing Strategy.

Mr Toirleach Gourley advised that in respect of the specific review of the uptake of zoned residential land over the last two years, most towns are lagging behind in relation to planning activity that would be expected in line with the Core Strategy figures set out in the Plan except for Carrickmacross In respect of planning activity on brownfield sites that would be expected in line with the Core Strategy figures set out in the Plan in all towns is lagging except for Castleblayney Town.

Mr Adrian Hughes stated that the Planning Authority does not have the expertise in relation to resolving the housing need within the county and has stated that external consultants will be appointed to look at this and the Report will be brought before the SPC for review.

Cllr Sean Conlon referred to the guidelines from the Department and stated that they can be several years old and stated that the Department needs to be reshaping guidelines which are effectively out of date.

Cllr Sean Gilliland asked that advice be sought from the external consultants on what they recommend is the best approach to the Department in this regard.

Cllr Brian McKenna stated that Monaghan does not have enough developers coming in and asked in relation to the Housing Needs & Assessment what is the timescale to have this completed?

Mr Toirleach Gourley stated that ultimately this information is required by the next review of the Plan which is two years away, however the consultants will be appointed now to progress this.

Mr Alan Johnston asked if the shortfall was in relation to lack of applications, refusals, delays or onerous conditions?

Mr Toirleach Gourley stated that planning applications for housing developments are being made to the Planning Authority for example in Drumbear Wood and Knockroe Glen in Monaghan Town and that applications are not being refused as developments are going ahead for example again in Kilnacloy and Hill Street in Monaghan Town and thus that the Planning Authority is in favour of granting housing developments and not putting onerous conditions on developments which are preventing them from being built. Mr Toirleach Gourley stated that the lack of interest could be due to profitability.

Cllr Noel Keelan stated that the missing link is the development of private housing and asked if we were in contact with the OPR in relation to these issues.

Mr Toirleach Gourley confirmed that the Planning Authority will be communicating with the OPR in relation to this.

Cllr PJ O'Hanlon stated that Carrickmacross is only ahead in relation to Social Housing but not private housing and stated that legalities need to be sorted out in relation to the zoning of land, developers will not get the same return to build houses in Monaghan and if this continues no new private houses will be built.

Mr Adrian Hughes stated that the zoning land is critical but it is not the only issue, there are other matters at play and hopes that the report will highlight this.

Mr Alan Johnston asked if the Council would consider servicing lands with a view to selling them on at cost for private development?

Mr John Tobin stated that he has not seen anything being built over the last 10 years and that this is a cost issue which has nothing to do with Planning. He added that houses are selling for approximately €100,000 more in Dundalk than in Monaghan, and that even if the sites were given away free, the developers would still not make a profit. Mr John Tobin also stated that lack of finance is an issue, and banks are not lending.

Cllr Sean Gilliland asked if the Council could buy land, develop it and sell it on.

Mr Adrian Hughes stated that this is a matter that has been previously raised with the Department in respect of single sites in towns and villages and there was no funding regime in place to facilitate this. He added that a solution has to be found, and it is hoped that the study will identify these issues and come up with solutions to resolve them.

Cllr PJ O'Hanlon stated that the Council should buy land, service the sites and sell them on.

Cllr Sean Conlon referred to 15 acres of land at Latlurcan and the sale of six sites and asked what is the delay with selling these on.

Cllr Brian McKenna referred to a masterplan for Latlurcan and asked if the Member could receive this.

Mr Paul Clifford stated that the 6 sites were sold by Monaghan County Council, however the sales fell through. The sale of sites and development of a masterplan at Latlurcan is the responsibility of the Housing Section of the Council.

Mr Patrick McCormick asked if houses could be built with integrated offices which could accommodate all.

Mr Toirleach Gourley stated that there is a policy in the current development plan for home based work units.

4. Local Enterprise Office Presentation

In her presentation Ms Briega Quinn advised the group that the role of the LEOs is to stimulate economic activity at county/city level and to develop indigenous enterprise potential in their areas and the key focus is to maximise opportunities for job creation and retention. Ms Briega Quinn referred to the financial supports which are available to businesses along with training and mentoring services which have been provided.

Ms Briega Quinn referred to the Online Trading Vouchers which offers small businesses the opportunity to develop their website or digital marketing strategy by availing of vouchers of up to €2,500 and advised that this was an important COVID response to ensure our businesses, especially retailers could continue to trade.

Cllr Sean Gilliland thanked Ms Briega Quinn for her presentation and congratulated all the staff working within LEO and in particular with the online trading vouchers. Cllr Sean Gilliland referred to the students from Co Monaghan who won two National Student Enterprise Awards. He asked that a letter be issued to them congratulating them and wishing them well in the future.

Mr Paul Clifford stated that the work carried out by John and the LEO staff has been phenomenal over the past 15 months and wished to acknowledge and recognise their achievements.

Mr Peadar Black referred to the Lean for MICRO and asked if there is a big uptake on this?

Ms Briega Quinn stated that there has been a big uptake and that they are expecting a bigger uptake as it is not a complicated process, they are currently seeing small project wins and expecting this to increase.

Mr Peadar Black referred to the student awards and asked if the projects were based on school curriculum?

Ms Briega Quinn stated that at Junior and Intermediate level there is some crossover with curriculum, however at TY Stage there is a teacher assigned and a more integrated approach with the pupils.

Cllr PJ O'Hanlon stated that the LEO were doing a great job and commend them regarding their role with small and medium companies and stated that education is critical, he also congratulated the Planning Section regarding the development of the CTEK buildings, which are a big success story.

Cllr Noel Keelan acknowledged the good work of the LEO and stated that they do not get enough support centrally and asked will the provision of hot desking/working hubs continue with these services in advance in the roll out of broadband?

Mr Paul Clifford stated that hot desks are still available in Monaghan, Castleblayney and Carrickmacross with a new addition at the Station House, North Road in Monaghan Town.

Cllr Noel Keelan asked the public partners what concerns they have when Covid supports run out and with online trading?

Mr Alan Johnston stated that he would have concerns about businesses not opening up, tax incentives are helping at the moment, however the majority of businesses would need to be working at 85% capacity just to survive. Restart grants are gone, rent arrears are an issue with some

landlords looking for the money back. Mr Alan Johnston stated that footfall is small at the moment and once supports are gone businesses will be affected, businesses who also trade online are likely to survive.

Mr John McEntegart stated that the Local Enterprise Office is seeking additional support and that negotiations are ongoing. He thanked Briege for her presentation and thanked all his staff for their hard work over the past year.

Cllr Noel Keelan referred to the Hot Desks in the CTEK and stated that they are oversubscribed in Carrickmacross and asked if this can be looked at?

Mr Paul Clifford stated that the demand for single offices is not oversubscribed but hoped that CTEK 2 will deal with the demand for single offices.

Cllr Sean Gilliland stated that there should be an announcement over the coming days of two new Covid Grant Schemes.

5. AOB

Mr Paul Clifford referred to Agri Food & Poultry report which was published regarding the economic significance and counter side to this is the Environmental impact of Poultry houses.

Cllr Sean Gilliland stated that this could be added onto the agenda for the next meeting.

Cllr Sean Gilliland also asked the public partners if there is any item they would like to add to the agenda to let him or Mr Paul Clifford know.

6. Date of next meeting

The next SPC meeting will be held on Thursday 8th July 2021 at 4pm on MS Teams

This concluded the business of the meeting.