



Comhairle Cathrach
& Contae **Luimnigh**

Limerick City
& County Council

Forbairt Gheilleagrach,
Ceanncheathrú Chorporáideach,
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15th June 2020

To the Mayor and Each Member of Limerick City and County Council

**Chairperson's Report for the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning
Strategic Policy Committee Meeting of 8th June 2020**

A Chomhairleoir, a chara,

A meeting of the above SPC took place on 8th June 2020 over Webx On-Line Meetings. Outlined below is a summary of the key items considered by the committee.

Item 1 – City Centre Revitalisation Project

Ms Cecilia Larkin has been appointed as City Centre Revitalisation Manager to spearhead a programme to help redress challenges in the retail sector and to increase footfall in the city centre. She informed members that a Steering Group comprising of representatives from Traders, Gardai, Council officials and Chamber of Commerce had been set up to address a number of issues. Two meetings have been held to date and the following actions have been taken:

- Increased Garda presence in City
- Cleaning Scheme activated
- Laneways cleaned and upgrading being considered
- Suite of activities proposed to increase footfall
- Ongoing networking with business owners to provide assistance / guidance
- Set up Shop Limerick to assist business during Covid 19 and into the future – 216 businesses showcased on Limerick.ie and 28,000 visitors to the site.

It is proposed to consult with estate agents and landlords to discuss options on vacant properties; to liaise with retailers with a view to upskilling staff for 'new way of shopping' and pursue the possibility of setting up a discussion/co-operation group with counterparts in other cities.

V. Murray stated that this initiative was part of short term strategy for the redevelopment of Limerick City, he also outlined medium / long term goals such as the delivery of Kirkland office development, Project Opera, UL City Centre Campus, Cleaves Campus, World Class Waterfront, Docklands, Colbert Quarter, New Arthur's Quay and other private sector developments.

Members thanked Cecilia for the presentation and were delighted to see the progress and innovation shown in getting businesses online, particularly during Covid19. They expressed concern over the donut effect created by suburban shopping centres and suggested a city centre light rail / free city centre bus / incentivised parking be introduced to encourage people back into city centre. All such proposals are being considered under the Metropolitan Area Transport System, which is going out for public consultation shortly.

While some members felt that the initiative was mainly city focussed, they stated that County Limerick had also plenty of alternative shopping / tourism experiences to offer. They suggested that a bigger focus should be placed on the domestic tourism market, which will give a platform to support other businesses and give people a reason to visit Limerick. It was confirmed that a promotional campaign for domestic tourism in Limerick city and county would go live at end of June.

C. Larkin assured elected members that they will be invited to join the Steering Group and she agreed to circulate a list of members of the Steering Group and a copy of the presentation to the committee.

Item 2 – Guiding Limerick through Covid-19

V. Murray gave a presentation to members on the draft proposals of Guiding Limerick through Covid-19. He stated that Limerick City and County Council had commenced public consultation in relation to trialing a range of innovative measures aimed at getting the city centre moving in the short-term and with an eye on its long-term transformation into a top urban destination. The proposed measures which aim to make Limerick more family friendly throughout the summer months will include pedestrianisation of a number of streets, widening of footpaths allowing retailers bring their business out on the streets and the provision of pop-up urban playgrounds for citizens allowing performance spaces and bespoke activities unique to Limerick. The measures will be introduced in Catherine Street, Denmark Street, Upper Denmark Street, Robert Street, Howley's Quay and Nicholas Street. A speed limit of 25kph will be introduced in the core city centre to make the city safer for pedestrians and additional cycle routes will be introduced from the suburbs to the city centre to encourage families /cyclists to use this mode of transport.

On foot of receipt of public submissions of the proposals the Council may revisit some of the specific of the plan.

He also pointed out that while small business and retailers were particularly affected by Covid-19, he outlined a number of measures that the Council and Limerick Local Enterprise Office were providing to assist businesses through this difficult time e.g Business Restart Grant, Rates Deferral, Covid-19 Business Loans, Trading Online Vouchers, Shop Limerick, Training and Webinars and Tourism Sector Support Scheme.

While Members welcomed the presentation, they suggested that Byelaws for street trading should be reviewed before the plan is enacted, that local authority staff be on-hand to identify pressures points and monitor queues once businesses reopened and that a reduction in interest rates applied to business loans should also be examined.

Members expressed concern regarding the future of services from Shannon Airport and urged the Council to support Shannon in any way it can.

Item 3 - Mid-West Business Response to Covid-19 – Regional Enterprise Plan

Rory Corbett informed members that the Mid West Response Group (MWRG) was launched in early March to assist in the Covid-19 economic recovery programme. Its main purpose was to provide a pilot programme focussing on upskilling and reskilling people, displaced within the retail, hospitality and tourism sectors. To date, 800 expressions of interest have been received and 270 people have commenced training. He also pointed out that if the pilot scheme was successful, it was hoped to have it rolled out to the entire region. The MWRG are developing a longer term strategy to identify and maximise regional development opportunities and it is hoped that EU funding will be available to progress the project.

Members thanked Rory for such a comprehensive presentation and stated that they were delighted to see such a robust piece of work carried out in such a short period of time.

Item 4 - Presentation of Forward Planning Work Programme

M Woods, A/Senior Planner updated members on the workflow for the new Development Plan.

- Official commencement of Development Plan – note at Council Mtg-July 2020
- Public consultation on issues paper will take place between 15 Aug -12 Oct 2020 (currently looking at new ways of engaging with the public)
- Draft Development Plan will be presented for adoption – Council Mtg May 2021
- Public consultation on Draft Plan - 5th June–16th Aug 2021
- Proposed amendments to Draft Plan – Council meeting - Jan 2022
- Public consultation on amendments to Draft Plan – Feb-Mar 2022
- Adopt Development Plan at Council meeting - May 2022.

Development Plan workshops will be commencing shortly for elected members.

Many members raised serious concerns with regard to the National Planning Framework Rural Housing policy and the interpretation by An Bord Pleanála of social and economic need. The restriction on rural housing is threatening the viability of rural communities by taking away the right of building a house in County Limerick unless you have a 'social and economic need'. Some members stated that they will have reservations on adopting a development plan that contains this type of policy.

Ms Woods clarified that a number of planning decisions made by the Council for one off houses in rural Limerick were being overturned by An Bord Pleanála and that this matter will be discussed further at a proposed workshop with elected members.

Replying to members, M. Woods clarified that the existing Development Plan cannot be rolled over, as it has expired since 2016 and we have a legal obligation to implement national policy. She also pointed out that should the new Development Plan not be adopted by the Council then the responsibility for its adoption would fall to the Chief Executive.

On the proposal of Cllr. Scanlan, seconded by Cllr. Egan, it was unanimously agreed to request a meeting with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to address the issue of 'social and economic need' in reviewing the Limerick City & County Development Plan 2021-2026.

Members also asked that following such high incidences of Covid19 in densely populated areas, that housing designs for older people would incorporate smaller units in reviewing the Development Plan.

Ms Woods also updated members on the following:

Southern Environs Area Plan – expiry May 21, new plan will commence on 25th July, 2020.

Supplementary Contribution Scheme (for the 3rd phase of Mungret Road) – to commence end of Aug 2021.

URDF – 2 local authority applications made:

- World Class Waterfront (cost €500m / funding sought €158.63m)
- Living Limerick City Centre (€93m / funding sought €56.8m)

Members thanked Maria for the presentation and welcomed the plans for both projects under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) Scheme.

She confirmed that the plans showing the footbridge in the World Class Waterfront application were only indicative and further discussions will be held regarding the exact location of same.

Item 5 – Arrangements for Future Meetings

While members thanked the executive for organising the meeting virtually, they were informed by V Murray that the Council Chamber in Dooradoyle had been fitted out to allow for social distancing for any further meetings.

Recommendation:

The Economic Development, Enterprise, and Planning Strategic Policy Committee recommends that the full Council of Limerick City & County Council requests an urgent meeting with the Minister with responsibility for Planning to outline the Councils opposition to the National Planning Framework on Rural Housing Policy.

The SPC also recommends that the request be circulated to all local authorities.

Mise le meas

Eddie Ryan

Cllr. Eddie Ryan

Chairperson

Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning