

Draft Minutes of the Blended Meeting of Limerick City & County Council Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning SPC Strategic Policy Committee held on Monday 9th October, 2023 at 2pm.

Members Present:

Cllr. Collins (B), (Chairperson), Cllr Butler, Cllr. Collins (J), Cllr. Egan, Cllr. Keary, Cllr. Murphy, Cllr. Novak Uí Chonchuir, Cllr. O'Sullivan, Cllr. Pond, Cllr. Ryan (E), Cllr. Scanlan, Cllr. Slattery, Mr. D. Hehir, Mr. B. Thompson, Dr Madeleine Lyes

Officials Present:

Mr. V. Murray (DOS), Mr. G. Daly (DOS), Ms. M. Woods (Senior Planner) Mr. D. McGuigan (Administrative Officer), Ms. C. Larkin (Administrative Officer)

Apologies:

Martin Ryan and John O'Donoghue

In attendance:

Mr Barry O'Sullivan (Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce), Mr Paraic Rattigan (Mid-West Regional Economic Plan), Dr. John O'Neil (IPA), Ms Alice Kelly (IPA), Ms Olive Downes (Placemaking), Ms Denise Murray (Metropolitan Workshop Architects)

Mr Murray advised the Committee members that Dr. John O'Neill and Ms Alice Kelly of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) were present to observe the proceedings of the Committee as part of a review of SPCs which the IPA was undertaking on behalf of the Department of Local Government. He advised that Dr. O'Neill and Ms Kelly would be available after the meeting to hear the member's views on SPCs.

Item 1 - Adopt minutes of the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on 10 July, 2023.

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th July 2023 were proposed by Cllr. Egan and seconded by Cllr Ryan (E).

Mr Thompson asked when the draft Taking in Charge Protocol would next be the agenda of the SPC. Mr Murray confirmed that consultations had been held with the Construction Industry Federation in this regard, and Mr McGuigan said that he would raise the matter with the TIC team.

Item 2 - Presentation on the Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce Report: Next Steps

Mr O'Sullivan gave a presentation on the recently published Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce Report. It focussed on three main areas: 1. Protect Economic Progress; 2. Identify New Opportunities; 3. Provide Practical Recommendations.

The presentation outlined the potential to create an energy-based industry, which would include the manufacture, construction and deployment of wind turbines, and the potential to onshore, the electricity generated in Foynes. This has the potential to create up to 10,000 jobs. The report recommended the establishment of a national agency, which would oversee the bringing of this power onshore.

This had the potential to attract new high-energy user industries, creating additional employment; the development of a high tech manufacturing zone between Limerick and Galway; grow local towns and villages; and support national and local clean energy targets. The report anticipates 50,000 incremental jobs by 2050.

The report also identifies opportunities for enhancement of tourism building on the momentum that will be generated by the Ryder Cup in 2027, and including attracting cruise ships to the estuary and the potential for a conference centre in the region.

This would require an upgrade of infrastructure serving Foynes from both land and sea including roads, rail, port, water and wastewater, energy and digital.

Mr O'Sullivan stated that the Council could support the Report's recommendations by:

- Supporting investment in improved roads, data, electricity & housing infrastructure
- Encouraging efforts on employment retention through addressing energy security, cost and decarbonisation: biomethane, solar and wind.
- Encourage the improvement of existing and the development of new amenities, prior to the Ryder Cup.
- Supporting the delivery of the agreed 2032 Power Onshore Plan.
- Supporting the development of Foynes Port.
- Support the development of 'shovel ready' industrial sites to enable value-add.

The members welcomed the Report.

Cllr Keary asked how the Taskforce got buy in from public utility companies, and how had the Ryder Cup benefitted other communities, which had hosted it? Mr O'Sullivan replied that the composition of the Taskforce or its sub-groups included public utilities. He saw the Ryder Cup as a once in a generational opportunity to ensure that infrastructure was upgraded to European standards.

Mr Thompson asked what national and local policies did the Taskforce think were contrary to achieving decarbonisation? In response, Mr O'Sullivan said the challenge was to support the existing industrial base to decarbonise. He cited rates and legislation on biomethane plants which could be amended to support businesses to decarbonise.

Cllr Egan asked where the money to develop Foynes port would come from? Mr O'Sullivan responded that the Taskforce Report is a conduit to support local authorities in the region to get investment for infrastructure and industries.

Mr Murray concluded that the Council would be reviewing the valuation base and rates in general, and rates for energy companies.

The Members requested a copy of the presentation, and it was agreed that it would be circulated.

The Chair thanked Mr O'Sullivan for his presentation.

Item 3 – Presentation on the 12 Monthly Monitoring Report for the Limerick Development Plan

Ms Maria Woods gave a presentation on the Year 1 Monitoring Report for the Development Plan. She advised that the focus of this report was on the housing supply against the housing targets in the Plan.

The review found that the estimated population growth figures in the Plan are still valid. The Core Strategy identified a requirement for an additional 15,500 additional households by 2028. On an annualised basis the review found that a shortfall on the annual target of 1,832 houses in Year 1.

Ms Woods advised that there are a number of housing developments currently going through planning, and more in the pipeline, and said that the planning process is not delaying delivery. She noted that planning permissions for rural houses had exceeded targets.

There had been 39 applications for commercial premises granted, with an approximate floor area of 20,000 sq. m., however none of these developments had commenced as yet. She advised that some R&D developments had commenced.

Ms Woods advised that the Year 2 review will look at all aspects of the Development Plan and not just at the Core Strategy and housing.

Mr Thompson expressed concern with the proposal for additional commercial office space at the Cleeves site. He argued that there is currently an oversupply of office space.

In response, Mr Murray advised that no planning had been applied for at the Cleeves site as yet, and that at present Limerick 2030 DAC was still trying to identify the best tenure mix. He went on to say that it appears at present and understood that there is a strong demand for LEED Platinum standard office accommodation in the city.

Cllr Novak Uí Chonchuir asked about the growth figures in the city area, and requested that the figures for pipeline developments could be broken down into more detail. She also raised the concept of transit related development.

In response, Ms Woods confirmed that she would send on more detailed figures to Cllr Novak Uí Chonchuir. In the context of transit orientated development, Ms Woods advised that the Department currently has draft guidelines on public display at the minute, and that Forward Planning would re-look at this once the guidelines were published. The Development plan as identified development corridors where higher densities are open for consideration.

Cllr Keary echoed Mr Thompson's comments on the over supply of office accommodation, and asked whether the Gardens International building was at full capacity. He also suggested that a conference centre should be considered for Cleeves.

Mr Murray advised that Gardens International was currently at 75% capacity, and agreed to pass on the member's concerns to Limerick 2030 DAC.

Item 4 – Presentation on the Emerging Arthur's Quay Framework Plan

Ms D Murray of Metropolitan Workshop outlined progress to date on the Framework Plan. There are six stages: Stage 1 – Research is complete; Stage 2 – Options Testing is almost complete; Stage 3 – Engagement is almost complete; Stage 4 – Preferred Options will commence in October/November; Stage 5 – Framework Finalisation will be in early 2025.

She outlined that there are a number of parcels of land being looked at, and at present there are a number of constraints at Arthur's Quay, namely that there is a lack of permeability and that it is too car focussed.

Challenges identified at this point are flood defence proposals; roads and traffic; quality and use of existing green space; buildings and retail offering. Opportunities identified include public space; the river; face buildings towards the river; reduce car access in parts; view of mountains/hills.

Ms Murray provided examples of urban enhancement schemes from around Europe which were at planning stage; under construction; or completed.

The members welcomed the presentation and asked about the following items: whether retail is included in the framework options, and whether retail is an appropriate option; has undergrounding the road through Arthur's Quay been considered; who commissioned the Framework Report; has LCC spoken with UL regarding its city centre building; how to encourage businesses and people back to the city centre; the need for ambition for the city centre and flexibility in the Framework Plan. Ms Murray answered that Arthur's Quay had been identified as a key retail area in the Framework and Development Plan. The vision was not for large-scale retail, but rather for ground floor food and beverage retail on the ground floors and residential or hotel accommodation. Undergrounding of the road has been considered, but a detailed cost-benefit analysis would need to be done before a decision could be reached on it. It was envisaged that as cycling and pedestrian infrastructure improved, that the reliance on the car would reduce.

Mr Murray advised that LCCC had commissioned the Framework Report, and that they are working to identify options for each key site, which could include housing and educational uses. Ms Woods clarified that the overall policy, which connects all the sites, are set out in the Development Plan, but that each key site will need its own Masterplan.

Item 5 - Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor S. Novak Uí Chonchuir (referred from Meeting of Metropolitan District of Limerick held on 10th July, 2023)

I will move at the next Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick that a City Centre Forum be established, comprising Councillors from all three Metropolitan Wards, to ensure balanced and sustainable economic and physical development of the city centre.

In proposing the Motion Cllr Novak Uí Chonchuir said that it related to the core city centre area. There is a need to tackle dereliction and cleanliness, encourage city centre living, support retail and generate employment. We must create a successful and thriving city centre.

Cllr J Egan seconded the Motion.

Mr B Thompson suggested that a sub-committee of the Economic Development SPC could be set up, which would include sectoral interests. Ms M Lyes supported Mr Thompson's suggestion saying that there had been a discussion at PPN Linkage Group, and there was considerable interest from the membership that the PPN would be involved.

Mr Murray provided the following response: The Limerick Development Plan and its supporting strategies approved in June 2022 by the elected members set out the policies and objectives that are

the blueprint for balanced and sustainable economic and physical development of the city centre. At the October Economic Development & Planning SPC meeting there will be a presentation on the first 12 month monitoring report on the development plan.

A further meeting is probably required with Metropolitan Members to understand what form any proposed Forum would take and what would be its terms of reference and to examine if any of the current structures/committees in place are the appropriate forum for the purpose set out in the motion above.

Cllr Novak Uí Chonchuir thanked the Director for his response.

Item 6 - Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor J. Leddin (referred from Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick held on 18th September, 2023)

I will move at the next Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick that the Council undertake a review of our strategy and policies to attract and maintain business, in particular retail, in the core city centre area.

In proposing the Motion Cllr Leddin said that there was a need for a good mix of offer in the city centre. He believed there was a disconnect between business owners in the city centre, and the strategic vision for the area. He called for greater engagement with business owners to explain what was contained in the vision and plans.

Cllr Novak Uí Chonchuir seconded the Motion.

Mr Murray provided the following response: The overall strategy and policies relating to retail are set out in the Limerick Development Plan 2022 -2028, which incorporates a number of accompanying strategies including the Retail Strategy for the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area and County Limerick and the Limerick 2030 Interim Review and Update.

The Strategy is aligned to the Core Strategy and the Settlement Hierarchy and focuses on maintaining and further developing Limerick City for its dominant retail function in the Mid-West hierarchy through maximising opportunities arising from Local Authority initiatives to enhance the customer experience of the City Centre.

A number of key actions and recommendations to facilitate improvements to sustain the vitality and viability of the City Centre are identified in the Retail Strategy as follows, many of which are currently being implemented.

1. Public realm improvements, through initiatives such as the revitalisation of O'Connell Street and the preparation of a City Centre Public Realm Strategy, which is currently underway.
2. Consolidating the core retail area.
3. Encourage and facilitate the reuse of vacant buildings or under-utilised sites. The €9m recently allocated to Limerick to tackle dereliction in the city centre will greatly assist in achieving this action.
4. Improved signage/street maps, which is currently being considered as part of the wayfinding strategy.
5. Incentivise owners to make improvements to their buildings/ shopfronts within the retail core through grant funding via the 'Business and Retail Incentive Scheme'. In this regard, a retail incentive of €6,000 was introduced in last year's budget to promote new retail start-ups in the core city centre.

6. Adopt a pilot programme for the extension of opening hours to allow for late night shopping within the retail core, which could be scheduled to take place alongside one of the City's major festival/events which will support the night-time economy.
7. Undertake an access audit of the built environment to seek to improve accessibility within the City for people with disabilities.
8. Support the retail charter for operators and landlords to sign-up to high quality goals for retail in the City Centre.
9. Support synergy with non-retail uses that attract footfall to the City Centre.
10. Work to define character areas and invest in marketing campaigns to communicate a broad City Centre experience to attract visitors and consumers.
11. Develop multi-channel synergy between retail, service and cultural offer of the City Centre.

Limerick City & County Council is also engaged with Trader Groups in the City Centre, Limerick Chamber, An Garda Síochána, letting agents and other key stakeholders to identify and resolve issues and promote Limerick City Centre.

Cllr Leddin thanked the Director for his response.

Item 7 - Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor C. Sheehan (referred from Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick held on 18th September, 2023)

I will move at the next Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick for a presentation from the Economic Directorate on Cruises Street and that the Council convenes a working group with all relevant stakeholders including Councillors to consider the future of Cruises Street and address the level of vacancy and dereliction on the street.

Ms C Larkin advised the committee that Cllr C Sheehan had asked that this Motion be deferred until the next meeting of the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning SPC.

The Chair thanked the members and closed the meeting.

Next meeting of the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning SPC - 11th December 2023

Is mise le meas,

Bridie Collins

Chairperson of the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning Strategic Policy Committee