

10th January 2024

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 11th December, 2023**

A Chomhairleoir, a chara,

A blended meeting of the above Strategic Policy Committee took place on 11th December, 2023. The following is a summary of the business transacted at the meeting.

Item 1

Adoption of Minutes from Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning SPC Meeting of 9th October 2023.

The draft minutes were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. John O'Donoghue, seconded by Cllr. Liam Galvin.

Item 2

Presentation from Nephin Renewable Gas Ltd. (NRG) on BioMethane Development by Michael Sweeney, Operations Manager.

The presentation from Nephin Renewable Gas Ltd gave an update to members as follows:

- Introductions
- What is Biomethane?
- Renewable Gas – Untapped Potential?
- Benefit to project partners?
- Employment benefits for Co. Limerick?
- Policy alignment – Co. Limerick.
- CO2 Savings from Biomethane.
- CO2 Savings for Co. Limerick.
- Summary.

Members thanked NRG for their informative and detailed presentation. It was acknowledged that NRG have a massive role to play in agriculture and they were wished the best of luck. There was some discussion and members requested further information on the following:

- Sustainability of plants
- Cost of plants
- End use
- Elements contained in bag of fertiliser
- Worth to farmer – get back fertiliser for land?
- Grant aid to establish?

- Plant proximity to town – in context of slurry & abattoir waste?
- Crops incl. maize – how does this fit in with current agriculture programmes?
- Lifetime of site and % of energy used?
- What are the negatives?

Members were thanked for their crucial & critical questions. Mr. Sweeney responded to the members and advised that a lot depends on how many plants are sustainable in Limerick. NRG have engaged with LCCC. All sites will require an EPA licence and the life of a plant will typically be 25 years.

Full presentation will be circulated to members.

Mr. Daly thanked NRG for coming to the SPC, they are industry leaders in this area and information will be shared with LCCC colleagues.

Item 3

Residential Zone Land Tax Update – Carmel Brislane, Acting Senior Executive Planner, Forward Planning.

Members thanked Ms. Brislane for her presentation and update.

Cllr. Keary asked if active farmland is included or excluded. Ms Brislane responded that there will be an opportunity for landowners to make submissions on the 2025 Draft Maps and to make a request for a variation of the zoning of land. Maps will be on display from 1st February 2024 – 1st April 2024. Discussion followed and Cllr. Keary stated that a lot of Councillors will have a problem with this legislation. While land is in use for agricultural use it should be exempt from tax. Cllr. Galvin agreed that this land should not be taxed. Cllr. Keary proposed that a Notice of Motion be brought before Full Council with a view for it going to Government – wording to be provided. The motion was seconded by Cllr. Scanlan.

Maria Woods stated that this is Government policy and it has to be implemented, any changes will have to be done nationally. Vincent Murray said that the legislation was intended to encourage the development of land.

Cllr. Murphy said it is now too costly for builders to develop out in County Limerick. The tax will have a negative effect overall and long-term developers don't want to buy land forward.

Item 4:

Presentation on Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme by Mr. Paraic Rattigan, Programme Manager, Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan.

Mr. Rattigan gave a members a briefing on The Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme and highlights are:

Scheme is funded under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and is aimed at accelerating economic growth in all regions of the country.

- Replaces the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF).
- Total fund value of €145.1m (delivered in 3-4 tranches).
- Performance based scheme based on outputs and results.
- The Scheme has 4 Streams:

- Local Infrastructure projects
- Innovation clusters & consortia
- Services to SME's to drive innovation solutions
- Feasibility & Priming Grants

Members thanked Mr. Rattigan for his presentation. The scheme is run through Enterprise Ireland and the closing date is 31st March 2024.

Cllr. Keary asked about the two banks in Askeaton & Rathkeale and if they would be included in the scheme. Mr. Daly responded that they are being advanced at feasibility options stage and funding options are being looked at.

Item 5

Update on changes to the Draft Planning and Development Bill 2023 from Nuala O'Connell, Senior Planner, Development Management & Place-Making.

Ms. O'Connell gave members an update on new Draft Planning & Development Bill 2023 to give members the background to the legislative review, some of the key legislative changes and the next steps. This is an introductory presentation and there will be further presentations going forward. Ms. O'Connell advised members to look at the Explanatory Memorandum as it is written in lay terms.

Members thanked Ms O'Connell for her presentation and some queries were raised as follows:

If inaccurate information is given in a planning application, can this be resolved? Ms. O'Connell answered in context of current legislation, the answer is yes but this situation is rare.

The presentation should go to full Council, Ms. O'Connell agreed and said that she expects legislation to be signed off early in the new year.

Local Area Plans are currently being drafted under current legislation.

Presentation will be made available to members.

Item 6

Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor C. Sheehan (referred from Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick held on 18th September, 2023 to the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning Strategic Policy Committee)

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.

Notice of Motion submitted by Cllr. Sheehan raised out of concern for Cruises Street and vacant sites and dereliction on the street. He said that there should be a deep clean of the public realm and look at animation in the vacant shop fronts. Asked should there be a Strategic Plan & Vision for the street and a working group made up of relevant stakeholders set up.

Mr. Murray responded that LCCC have engaged with the traders and set up a working group. There has also been engagement with letting agents regarding solutions for vacant shop fronts. Some short-term measures will be put in place early in 2024. Longer and medium term measures will be

brought back to members for approval and Mr. Murray is happy to look at expanding the group with whatever is required.

Cllr. O'Sullivan agreed with Cllr. Sheehan. She has been working with traders since the summer and she is confident with how the group is proceeding. She said it wasn't necessary to convene a group with elected members.

Cllr Sheehan acknowledged that the Notice of Motion was submitted a number of months ago and he is glad to hear of progress and wanted to commend those involved. Agreed that there is no need for elected members to be involved in group but they should be kept up to date with developments.

Item 7

Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor E. Secas (to be referred to the Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning Strategic Policy Committee)

I will move at the next meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick that the Council employ an infrastructure-led approach with any future planning applications in order to ensure we create sustainable communities.

Cllr. O'Sullivan formally seconded this motion.

Mr. Murray responded that a written response has been done for this Notice of Motion as follows:

Planning applications are assessed against the zoning, policies and objectives of the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 and Local Area Plans for the relevant settlements.

In accordance with the National Planning Framework, these plans incorporated an infrastructure led approach to the zoning of land and differentiated between Zoned land that is service and zoned land that is serviceable within the life of the plan.

Furthermore, the Development Plan requires the preparation of Sustainability Statements and Social Infrastructure Assessments to be completed as part of planning applications to assess the impact of a proposed development on the social infrastructure of an area.

Mr. Murray said is a crossover on what is essential and what is desirable in an area. LCCC will deliver in accordance with Active Travel Policies and infrastructure budgets.

Cllr. O'Sullivan said a rethink of what is essential may be needed as there may be a miscommunication. Infrastructure like school transport and crèche facilities are essential.

Cllr. Secas appreciated the response but would like to see infrastructure delivered based on planning applications e.g. developers don't always develop the crèche facility that is part of planning permission and would like to see action on these issues.

Cllr. Collins concluded that this will be an issue going forward and will require a multi-agency response.

Item 8

Any Other Business

The Chairperson suspended standing orders to extend the time of the meeting so business could be concluded. Proposed by Cllr. Keary and seconded by Cllr. O'Sullivan.

There was no further business.

Cllr. B. Collins, Chairperson