

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENTERPRISE, TOURISM AND PLANNING STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 23rd JUNE 2025 AT 2:15PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DOORADOYLE AND ONLINE

Present in the Chair:

Councillor Peter Doyle

SPC Members Present: Cllr. Sharon Benson, Cllr. Bridie Collins, Cllr. Michael Collins, Cllr. Maria Donoghue, Ms. Michelle Gallagher, Cllr. Ursula Gavan, Mr. Séan Golden, Mr. Declan Hehir, Mr. Michael Joyce, Cllr. Stephen Keary, Cllr. Dan McSweeney, Cllr. John O'Donoghue, Cllr. Kieran O'Hanlon, Cllr. Olivia O'Sullivan, Cllr. Joe Pond, Mr. Vadivel Raj, Cllr. Padraigh Reale, Cllr. Jerome Scanlan and Mr. Brian Thompson.

Officials Present: Ms. Juratae Andrijauskienė, (Administrative Officer), Mr. Mike Cantwell (Head of Enterprise, LEO) Ms. Caroline Chambers (Senior Staff Officer), Ms. Eileen Coleman (Senior Executive Officer), Ms. Patricia Fogarty (Administrative Officer), Mr. Shane Feane (Staff Officer), Mr. Vincent Murray (Director of Services), Mr. Kieran O'Brien (A/Senior Executive Engineer), Ms. Nuala O'Connell (Senior Planner), Mr. Craig Power (Night-Time Economy Advisor), Mr. Daire MacGrath (Staff Officer), Ms. Anna Peters (Clerical Officer), Mr. Ben Noonan (Senior Executive Engineer), Mr. Michael McNamara (Senior Executive Engineer), Carmel O'Carroll (Clerical Officer), Mr. Brendan Troy (Senior Executive Officer) and Mr. Matthew White (Director of Services).

Presentation from Mr. Mark O'Connell, Repucon Consulting

Meeting

Item 1

Minutes: To adopt the draft minutes of the Meeting of the Economic Development, Enterprise, Tourism and Planning Strategic Policy Committee held on Monday 14th April 2025.

The draft minutes were adopted.

- Proposed by: Cllr. Michael Collins
- Seconded by: Cllr. Bridie Collins

Item 2

Proposed new Tourism Strategy – Presentation by Ms. Eileen Coleman, Senior Executive Officer and Mr. Mark O'Connell, Repucon Consulting

Ms. Coleman outlined the achievements of the Tourism Department since the last strategy – Limerick Tourism Development Strategy Action Plan 2019 – 2023. Key achievements included:

- Limerick Greenway opened July 2021 at a cost of €10M.
- Launch of Brand Limerick in 2020.
- Discover Limerick DAC launched by LCCC in 2021.
- Limerick Greenway Hub at Rathkeale
- Ryder Cup coming to Adare in September 2027
- Achieved Wild Atlantic Way Gateway City Status
- Ballyhoura Country DEDP commenced
- Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) Category 1 Funding amounting to €17.23M in February 2024

- Festival & Events Unit established
- Festival & Events Strategy published
- Sports Tourism Events

Mr. O’Connell updated members on the proposed new Tourism Strategy 2025 – 2030. Highlights of the rethinking Tourism presentation included:

- Strategy was developed based on the views of approx 1000 people from the local community, tourism industry, visitors to Limerick & all stakeholders.
- The 10 Strategic Objectives – 1. Limerick for Tourism, 2. Linking City & County, 3. Scale our Tourism & Community Assets, 4. Community Tourism Development, 5. Inspired Marketing & Brand, 6. Events Destination, 7. Creative Limerick Experience, 8. Destination Place Making, 9. Regional Role and 10. Sustainable Tourism Destination.
- Vision
- Strategic Pathway
- Project 10 – represents strategic roadmap for tourism.
- Tourism targets

Members thanked Ms. Coleman and Mr O’Connell for their presentations and questions followed:

Cllr. Donoghue had the following questions:

- When is O’Connell Street Phase 2 due to commence? Mr. Murray responded that LCCC are waiting for the Transport Strategy and to see what level of priority public transport for O’Connell Street will have and if NTA will fund works.
- What does the World-Class Waterfront comprise of and how will it be world class? Mr Murray said that this is a working title for a series of projects. Example being the Pedestrian Bridges which will be delivered by the Active Travel Dept. and the Preliminary Business Case has been approved by the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage (DHLGH) URDF unit. The upgrading of the riverside between Shannon Bridge and King Johns Castle and the upgrading of Arthurs Quay Park has been delayed due to flood relief works.
- Cllr. M Donoghue noted that there is a lack of city centre projects in the presentation. Ms. Coleman responded that city centre projects include King John’s Castle Masterplan, the public realm works at Opera Square and proposed upgrade of the Milk Market. These projects will help increase tourism in the city.
- When was the Wild Atlantic Way Gateway City status received and is this being communicated? Ms Coleman responded that status was received in 2020 and there is wayfinding signage in place.

Cllr. J O’Donoghue asked about the €3m annual income for the Greenway and how LCCC gauge these costs year on year. He asked what income has been generated for Lough Gur and King John’s Castle? Mr. O’Connell responded in relation to the Greenway income. There was a survey of 1,000 users of the Greenway and with the survey information combined with other data like traffic count they were able to build up a profile (key indicators). The study was taken in 2023. There has been no study on the impact of other attractions. Ms. Coleman said she will get figures regarding other attractions for Cllr. J O’Donoghue.

Cllr. Gavan had the following queries and comments:

- She noted that there were not many projects for Limerick City East.
- Are there any plans for the Greenway to join up with the city centre? Ms. Coleman said this was an aspiration, continue the greenway into the city and on into Patrickswell.
- Asked if there are any plans to have Visitor Ambassadors. Ms. Coleman responded that there is engagement with Community Development on that.

Cllr. Pond asked why there is no mention of the Regatta in Castleconnell & Montpellier and plans do not extend to these riverside areas. Ms. Coleman responded that there is no exclusion of any areas, and they look at projects that come up. Funding for projects is limited.

Mr. Hehir brought up the following issues:

- Why are tourist buses not stopping in Limerick city in the same numbers as other counties e.g. Bunratty Castle gets 350k visitors annually? Mr. Murray said that there are different types of tourism. Bunratty Castle is more traditional tourism and Limerick city attracts sports tourism. Ms Coleman said that Limerick does attract buses but there is limited parking and looking at ways to increase spaces.
- Is there any aspect of the €400m Cleaves development for tourism? Mr. Murray answered that this is a Limerick Twenty Thirty DAC projects which went to public consultation recently. It will be a mix of TUS student accommodation and commercial development. The student accommodation can accommodate tourists during the summer months.

Cllr. Keary asked to look at the 10 strategic objectives and had some comments and questions:

- He said that LCCC should only have taken on King Johns Castle with vacant possession. The current opening hours of 9.30am - 6pm are not suitable for tourism. Is there anything going to be done to address the opening hours of tourist attractions?
- Cllr. Keary commended the Greenway in Rathkeale but said that there is nowhere to turn a bus, LCCC own land there but have no plans to develop. He said that there should be a continuous bus going to and from the greenway from May on. There is a need to get tourists into towns and areas are not being exploited. Ms. Coleman said that while the merits of buses going to and from the Greenway is strong, it would potentially be loss making. Mr. O'Connell commented that slowing visitors down is the essence of the plan.
- In relation to the World Class Waterfront Cllr. Keary said that a there is a lot of planning and investment required. Limerick should look at waterfronts in other cities; Limerick needs a heartbeat like other major cities.
- He asked how many staff are in the Tourism Dept. and what was the budget for 2025? Ms. Coleman said there was 13 staff over a number of sections. She will get the budget figure for him as there are a number of budget job codes and for staff budget.

Cllr. Scanlan asked the following:

- When will there be an adequate car park for the Greenway at Newcastle West? Ms. Coleman responded that the development of that car park is out to tender, going to site later this year and will finish in 2026.
- He said that there was nothing done to promote castles in the county. Ms Coleman said they are working with OPW on development of Fullers Folly. Wild Encounters is highlighted on Limerick.ie.

Cllr. M Donoghue said that there is a range of tourism that is not Limerick City and County Council /owned e.g. Hunt Museum and should be included in strategy. Cllr. M Donoghue said that Limerick is a very walkable city and a solution to the lack of parking spaces for buses should be maps of tourist attractions. Ms. Coleman confirmed that these maps have been done for the City and County.

Discussion concluded and Members agreed and recommended that the draft Limerick Tourism Strategy 2025 – 2030 be considered for approval by Limerick City and County Council at the September Plenary Full Council meeting.

- Proposed by: Mr. Michael Joyce
- Seconded by: Cllr. Ursula Gavan

Item 3

Proposed Draft Night Time Economy Action Plan – presentation from Mr. Craig Power, Night Time Economy Advisor

Two surveys were conducted with the public (1,352 participants) and 37 businesses participated. The combined survey conclusions were as follows:

- Challenges identified – 1. Personal Safety Concerns, 2. Limited Activity Diversity, 3. Transport & Accessibility and 4. Lack of Business Participation
- Strategic recommendations – 1. Enhance safety measures, 2. Expand non-alcohol related activities, 3. Improve transport options and 4. Encourage business collaboration, increase promotional effort.

The Action Plan has 7 Key Pillars – 1. Events, Experiences & Activities, 2. Retail & Hospitality, 3. Place Making & Public Realm, 4. Transport & Access, 5. Safety & Security, 6. Visibility & Communication and 7. Governance & Sustainability.

Mr. Power outlined the key actions which included Twilight Thursday and the key dates for events going forward.

Members thanked Mr. Power for his presentation and acknowledged the success of Twilight Thursday for the city. Questions and discussion followed:

- Cllr. Scanlan said that the presentation highlighted the lack of policing, safety concerns, and need for social activity. These three issues need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. He also acknowledged there was a lot of positives in the presentation.
- Mr. Thompson said it is resounding that there need to be increased Garda presence and where are the community Gardaí? The brief covers a broad spectrum. Twilight Thursday touched on the seven pillars.
- Mr. Power responded that there are nine Night Time Economy Officers nationwide and they meet. There are structures at government department level above them that they feed in to and bring issues. There is dialogue with the Gardaí in Limerick and they realise the bigger footfall on Twilight Thursday and that an increased presence is required. The NTE is a team of 1 with a small budget and the Gardaí is a broader issue for LCCC.

- Cllr. J O'Donoghue asked are there are numbers on those who attended the first Twilight Thursday. Response was that these figures were not available and difficult to track. There were 600 tickets sold for ticketed events.
- Cllr. Gavan said she was looking forward to Twilight Thursday had a number of questions:
 - Are there any events planned for students when they return back into city? Response, the end of August Twilight Thursday will be aimed at students.
 - Transport in and out of city is an issue and are there plans to address this? Response, Limerick does have bus service in place and we will welcome the addition of Bus Connect when it's completed, and that we also have the new 24-hour route from Shannon to Limerick which is up and running. Under Twilight Thursday we have a partnership with taxi providers to provide a 40% fare reduction for every Twilight Thursday.
 - Any plans for non alcohol & family friendly events? Response, looking at family friendly events – 3 bridges walks, family movie nights, committed to doing this.

Members agreed and recommended that the Draft Night Time Economy Plan be brought to the July Plenary Meeting of the Full Council for noting.

- Proposed by: Cllr. Ursula Gavan
- Seconded by: Cllr. Maria Donoghue

Item 4

Update on Kings Island Flood Relief Scheme – presentation from Mr. Kieran O'Brien

Mr. O'Brien gave members an update on the Kings Island Flood Relief Scheme which is now at construction phase. The project is critical for investment in Limerick city and provides flood protection for 506 properties and 22 businesses. There has been significant progress to date and Mr. O'Brien's presentation outlined who the project stakeholders are (OPW, LCCC, Arups & Ward & Burke), project timelines (project due to be substantially complete in November 2026) and gave a project overview which included visuals.

Members thanked Mr. O'Brien for his presentation. Discussion as follows:

- The Chair asked if it will be possible to walk full circumference for King's Island. Response, yes, there will be a 3-meter footpath around the area. Length of walk will be approx. 3 km.
- Cllr. J O'Donoghue asked when the project will be complete. Response – project will complete in November 2026 if all critical deadline dates are met, project is currently on schedule.
- How much higher will the wall be at Georges Quay, there didn't seem to be a difference in presentation? Response, difference is 100mm.
- Cllr. Pond asked where the extra water will go if not into Kings Island. Response, due to tidal nature there will be no negative impact in other areas in the city.
- Cllr. J O'Donoghue asked if the glass walls will have high maintenance costs. Response, glass panels have been selected and that a maintenance contract will be in line with other similar schemes, which will be funded by the OPW.
- Cllr. Gavan asked if there is a timeframe for Georges Quay. Response, the works there are yearlong, contractor waiting to begin works in September so to not to negatively affect the summer trade for business owners there.

- Mr. Thompson complimented the contractors on their level of engagement with the community. One issue is that the roads near embankment are getting dusty and stained. Response, there is a dedicated road sweeper contractor provided, Mr. O'Brien will bring this to contractors at their next meeting.

Item 5

Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor P. Doyle

I will move at the next meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick that Limerick City and County Council would introduce measures to incentivise the use of vacant city centre retail units like one year's rates exempt for new retail premises and penalties for owners of vacant retail premises that have been idle for over two years.

The Chair further commented that idle shops are a blight on our city centre. We want successful retail shops in Limerick to make Limerick city centre an attractive place to shop. There a number of premises vacant or years – Krank's Corner on Thomas Street, Greene's etc. on Little Catherine Street, McDonalds on Cruises Street etc. New businesses would attract shoppers into the city and all retail shops would benefit. Existing shop owners and commercial rate payers are disappointed with the high level of vacant units in Limerick City.

At present we have a policy of refunding 75% of commercial rates on vacant units up to €3,000 annual rates and 50% of a rebate on commercial rates on units with commercial rates from €3,001 to €12,000. He suggested that this is incentivising landlords to leave units idle rather than invest in same and rent out to new retail units. He would prefer if landlords were charged full rates on vacant units if the unit was vacant for more than 2 years and 12 months rates free was offered to new retail shops which were vacant for previous 2 years.

Revitalising Limerick city centre is a challenge, and the Chair welcomed peoples view on the motion.

A number of members expressed their support for this motion:

- Cllr. M Donoghue – LCCC needs to start actively looking for vacant premises, losing talent due to a lack of premises. LCCC needs to take action with developments that are incomplete for a long time and take action against the owners of these developments.
- Cllr. Gavan supported the motion and agreed that action is needed for Limerick to utilize vacant premises.
- Mr. Thompson said the PPN supports this motion and said that LCCC needs to be more assertive about dereliction. LCCC needs to be more innovative around support for vacant properties.
 - Proposed by: Cllr. Peter Doyle/Cllr. Maria Donoghue also proposed the motion
 - Seconded by: Cllr. Ursula Gavan

Item 6

Proposed Economic Development, Enterprise, Tourism & Planning Strategic Policy Committee Meeting Dates up to June 2026

Proposed Dates

- Monday 8th December 2025 from 2.15 pm to 4.15pm
- Monday 9th February 2026 from 2.15 pm to 4.15 pm

- Monday 13th April 2026 from 2.15 pm to 4.15 pm
- Monday 8th June 2026 from 2.15 pm to 4.15 pm

Item 7

Date of next meetings

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 13th October 2025 at 2.15 pm.

Item 8

AOB

The Chair, Cllr. Doyle, sought an extension beyond the Standing Order No. 9 at 3.50 pm to continue with the remaining agenda items until 5pm. The members agreed and the meeting reconvened.

Taking in Charge

Mr. Thompson raised the point in relation to liability at previous SPC meetings and it was agreed that officials would review with the Council's legal advisors and revert back to a future SPC this has not happened yet. Mr. Thompson has since discovered that the Protocol for the Taking in Charge of Estates was uploaded to the LCCC website on 1st November 2024. He referred it to the Practice Committee of the RIAI (The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland) for comments it might have as it is very relevant to its members who would be required to sign certain documents in the process. The RIAI has passed it on to their colleagues in Engineers Ireland and the ACEI (Association of Consulting Engineers of Ireland) for their opinion and he is awaiting feedback from this.

Mr. Thompson sought to seek clarification on the matter as to what transpired between the meeting of 9 October 2023 and the uploading of the Taking in Charge Protocol to the website on 1 November 2024.

The Senior Planner has discussed his concerns with Mr. Thompson and the Senior Planner will liaise with Mr. Thompson.

The Chair concluded the meeting at 4.45 pm and thanked the SPC Committee for their input.

Signed: Cllr. P. Doyle, Chairperson