



**Minutes of the Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee Held on
6th February 2024 at 10.30am in TUS Thurles Campus and by Zoom.**

Members of Council in Attendance	Sectoral Interests in Attendance	Staff in Attendance:
Cllr. Imelda Goldsboro Chairperson	Mary Spillane, PPN	Brian Beck (Director of Services) (Zoom)
Cllr. Mary Hanna Hourigan	Theresia Gruschlbauer, PPN	Anthony Fitzgerald, Head of Enterprise and Economic Development
Cllr. John Crosse (Zoom)	Pat Carroll, Farming Pillar	Kathleen Prendergast, Economic Development Officer
Cllr. Joe Hannigan (Zoom)	Conor Mulcahy, Development Construction Pillar	Simon Howe, Broadband Development Officer
Cllr. Phyll Bugler (Zoom)		Donough Leahy, Clerical Officer
Cllr. John Fitzgerald (Zoom)		
Cllr. Siobhan Ambrose (Zoom)		
Cllr. Mairín McGrath (Zoom)		

Guest Speakers in Attendance: Tadhg Buckley (IFA) (Zoom), Ross Shone (NBI), Joe Lavin (NBI), Damien Fitzgibbon (NBI), Marie Taylor (TUS) & Shane O'Sullivan (TUS)

Apologies: Cllr. Peggy Ryan, Cllr Seamus Morris, Cllr. Seamus Hanafin, Laura Jones (Business Pillar), Seamus Hoyne (TUS) and Tom McGrath (Business Pillar)

Absent: Cllr. Tony Black.

1. Welcome

Cllr. Imelda Goldsboro, Chairperson, opened the meeting. She welcomed Conor Mulcahy, the new representative for the Development Construction.

2. Adoption of the Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The Minutes of the last meeting were considered. The adoption of same was then proposed by Mary Spillane and seconded by Cllr. Mary Hanna Hourigan. There were no matters arising.

3. The current status of the National Broadband Project - Intervention Area Project in County Tipperary

Simon Howe, Broadband Officer introduced Joe Lavin, Chief Commercial Officer of NBI, who was also accompanied by Ross Shone and Damien Fitzgibbon of National Broadband Ireland (NBI).

Joe Lavin advised that the National Broadband Plan (NBP) is in place to ensure that every premises in the country will have access to high speed broadband. He has advised that since 2020, their plans have changed and they now intend to provide full fibre broadband to every premises across the country by 2028 and not just to properties with less than 30 Megabytes, as was the original aim of the National Broadband Plan. He advised that as the Commercial Operators such as SIRO, Virgin Media and Open Eir have committed to rolling out fibre optic cables, it makes sense to for NBI to deliver services to all 564,000 premises in the country. It is foreseen that the project, despite the delays caused by Covid and the extension of the original remit, will be finished by the end of 2026 ahead of the original timeframe.

In looking at Design and Build, currently 464,000 premises have been surveyed (82%) and it is expected that the balance will be completed by quarter three of this year. Of the 464,000 surveyed, Joe advised 447,000 premises have been designed at this stage and of these 378,000 are either constructed or under construction with 69,000 premises fully connected at this time.

On completion of the 'Design and Build phase' NBI pass the connections over to the retail service providers who then sell the connections directly to the customer. NBI have signed contracts with over 60 retail service providers, resulting in a huge choice for consumers.

In terms of the Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) and the Schools Programme, where expedited internet access was provided in specific difficult to reach locations within counties, the programme has now been completed and in practice every school in Tipperary County has access to at least 150 megabytes of Broadband.

In the update on Fibre to the home, Joe Lavin, using a map of County Tipperary demonstrated the different deployment areas - 227 divided throughout the county. €118 million will be invested in County Tipperary under the National Broadband plan. Over 30,000 premises will be covered under this plan with almost half of these premises now being able to place an order and be connected within 10 days.

Joe provided the elected representatives with the email address reps@nbi.ie, that can be used by them to make contact directly on behalf of their constituents should they have queries to raise.

Councillor Imelda Goldsboro thanked Joe for his presentation and opened it up to the floor for questions.

Mary Spillane, PPN asked who covers the deficit in relation to NBI covering 30,000 premises out of 85,000 which Joe Lavin advised that the remaining 55,000 are covered by commercial operators such as Open Eir, SIRO, Virgin media etc. Mary also asked for details of eligibility of those premises covered by NBI. Joe stated that originally in 2019, if your premises could get 30 megabytes or higher it was not included in the intervention area. Since then the Government's goal has been upgraded to have 100 percent of premises within the 26 counties having access to fibre broadband. Part of the rationale for this is that Open Eir have indicated that they desire to close down access on the Copper Network and for that to happen, everybody will have to have access to Fibre Optic Cable.

Pat Carroll of the Farming Pillar asked about connections in relation to a rural area, where you have an adjoining premises or farm-yard to a residential connection and would need to have a second connection for that land or premises. He also enquired about the challenge of some routers not being up to the required standards and the operators not willing to deal with this situation.

Joe responded by advising that NBI would identify a farm as having two premises (Business & Residential), they therefore would allocate two ports to that. Joe stated that for services required for certain times of the year (e.g. 3 months of the year for a calving camera), the pay-as-you-go on a monthly basis would be the most suitable option. An alternative option, in cases where it was only needed for a very short period of time, a single connection to the home with a Wifi extender that extends to the farmyard, or a cable connection directly to the unit might suffice.

He advised that for businesses that depend on high-speed broadband, they should look at the internet service providers that specialise in providing services with suitable routers for those types of functionality.

Councillor John Crosse stated that, in his constituency, people have not found their broadband strength to be sufficient. He asked for more information on intervention areas as it is in these areas where there is very low broadband signal. Joe Lavin advised that in terms of the intervention area the website www.broadband.gov.ie has an interactive map which is managed by the Department of Communications that displays the specified areas that cannot receive high-speed broadband. Those are the areas the NBI are contracted

by the government to deliver services to. In the Intervention area, the government can use state-aid to fund the building of infrastructure.

Simon Howe, Broadband Officer advised that the commercial operators are rolling out fibre into areas but at a much slower rate than NBI so it may take a number of years for roll-out to reach smaller areas such as villages in the county.

The chairperson, Cllr Imelda Goldsboro, thanked Mr Levin and his team for their attendance and for their informative and candid responses to all the questions posed.

4. The Economic and Enterprise impact from the Farming/Agriculture Sector in County Tipperary

Tadhg Buckley Director of Policy / Chief Economist for the IFA gave a presentation on the positive impact the Farming Sector has on the Economy of County Tipperary. Tadhg advised that Tipperary is the second largest farming county in Ireland, with a total area of 770,000 acres - the third largest area allocated to agriculture in the Country. Tipperary is predominantly grass land- 61,000 acres in tillage and the balance in grass.

In Tipperary there are:

- 182,000 cows (second largest number of milking cows in the country)
- 5% of beef animal production
- The third largest county for pigs with 10% of the total production in the country.
- There are 75,000 ewes in Tipperary
- 877 thoroughbred horse-breeders.
- 40% of cider apples grown in the country are grown in Tipperary.

In terms of the Agri sector employment, there are about 15,000 people either directly or indirectly employed in agriculture in Tipperary and about 10% of the working population work directly in farming.

The average age of farmer in Tipperary is 59 years old which is in line with other counties.

In terms of the economic contribution, it is estimated that agriculture in Tipperary contributes €2.6 billion to the local economy. There is a strong Agri businesses sector operating in Tipperary including AVP, Rosderra, Arrabawn, Tipperary Centenary, Walsh mushrooms, Germinal, Ag-tech, C&C group and Coolmore.

Tadhg then discussed the opportunities and challenges for Tipperary from an Agricultural perspective. On the positive side, the land quality is very good and it has a favourable climate for both animal and crop production. With the large number of Agri-business firms in Tipperary there are more economic opportunities for Tipperary businesses to expand and they also attract spin-off's and associated businesses.

In terms of challenges, land prices in Tipperary from a purchasing perspective is difficult as it is the third highest priced land in the country. This results in higher rental prices for land also. Nitrate derogations, which govern the maximum number of cows a dairy farmer can keep on their farm per acre depending on the size of their farm, impact on the need to rent or purchase additional land and higher priced land, for rent or purchase, make it a difficult position for farmers. The economy in Tipperary is heavily dependent on dairy production and the limit on expansion through the reduction in nitrate derogation by a farmer would have a stronger impact on the Tipperary economy compared to similar challenges in other counties – for example, it is estimated that the economic output in terms of dairy from Tipperary is double that of Kilkenny and Waterford so a reduction in nitrate derogation would provide a disproportionate impact in County Tipperary than other counties less reliant on agriculture for its economic success.

Councillor Imelda Goldsboro thanked Tadhg for his very informative presentation and opened it up to the floor for questions.

Mary Spillane thanked Tadhg for the very interesting presentation and asked why the environmental impact was not included when he was discussing the challenges and also enquired if the 15,000 employers is just from Agri business or does that include farmers as employers themselves.

In response, Tadhg advised that he had focused on the economic side of the sector for today's presentation, as per his brief. He stated that sustainability, as with all sectors of the economy, is a massive challenge. The sector is aware of this challenge and is in fact the only sector in the Irish economy at this time with a plan in place for the sustainability of the sector. He recognised that the 23% emissions reduction target by 2030 is a massive challenge. In terms of nitrate derogation and sustainability impact, he does not agree that removing the current nitrate derogation will have a positive impact from an environmental sustainability perspective. He advised that Ireland has one of the highest water qualities in Europe and that it is going to be a huge challenge to protect that position.

In terms of employers in agriculture, the 15,000 employees would also include downstream non-Agri businesses.

Councillor Joe Hannigan thanked Tadhg for his presentation and queried a perception being held at this time that people promoting sustainable farming in certain situations were not actually producing food but grants were provided to them to do so. Councillor Hannigan asked if the IFA should be challenging this situation and seek a system that would show clearly the level of food production

In response to Councillor Hannigan's query in relation to sustainable food production, Tadhg advised that the IFA look at it from three aspects: 1. Environmental, 2. Economic and 3. Social. He stated that all three aspects are so important for farms to be sustainable. He noted that food production is of great importance – we need to continue to produce food at the levels we do now but we also need to improve our production from a sustainability perspective too.

Councillor Phyll Bugler thanked Tadhg for the presentation and she acknowledged the importance of farming in County Tipperary. Councillor Bugler she asked for information on the importance of organic farming.

In terms of organic farming, Tadhg advised that only 3% of our area in Ireland is organic which is low compared to the EU average of 10%. There is a plan by the government to bring this up to 8% over the next few years.

Councillor Mairín McGrath thanked Tadhg for the very interesting presentation and stated that the Cahir area has numerous Agri businesses, from which the area benefits greatly from. Councillor McGrath asked if it was possible to circulate the presentation as there was very interesting facts and figures included in it.

Pat Carroll referred to the huge amount of technology that has come into the farming industry over the last ten years and how progressive the farming sector is in developing solutions and using this technology. The fact that the development of technology for farming is so progressive, it has enabled further employment in the development of same for farming use.

Anthony Fitzgerald, Head of Enterprise and Economic Development informed the meeting that, in relation to Environment/Sustainability, a new company was launched last week in Tipperary Town called "Nephrin Renewable Gas" who will be working to assist farmers throughout Ireland, by utilising their methane gas for renewable gas. Anthony agreed

with Pat Carroll that technology is now a major part of the agriculture industry, whereby it assists in decreasing the amounts of physical inputs for better efficiencies.

Councillor Siobhan Ambrose made the meeting aware of a co-operative farming scheme in the West of Ireland, that assists younger farmers to partner-up with farms holders that have no next of kin.

5. Social Enterprise Opportunities: Social Impact Assessment /Engaging and Developing Community and Rural Enterprise

Marie Taylor and Shane O'Sullivan from TUS gave a presentation on Social Enterprise Opportunities including Social Impact Assessment, Engaging and Developing Community and Rural Enterprise.

Marie Taylor who works in the Development Unit in TUS, discussed the various research areas which include; climate change, farming, renewable energy, rural development, social enterprise, community development, tourism and sustainability. Marie discussed a project she worked on with PAUL Partnership Social Enterprise Programme and 5 Local Social Enterprise practitioners to develop and trial Impact Assessment Methodologies within their Social Enterprises. She advised that Social Enterprises will have to start to measure social impact, especially if they are aiming to receiving funding in the future and this project worked to develop a social impact measuring toolkit to assist capturing the social impact. The five social enterprises they worked with were, PALLS, Moyross Community Centre, the Learning Hub, Urban Coop the Gaff which were varied in terms of size, scale and sectors they came from.

She also informed the committee of the types of impact that can be assessed as an outcome from the work of a social enterprise, which include lifestyle, culture, economic community, health, and environmental. She also explained the key features of Social Impact Assessment – Monitoring and Management of the intended and unintended social consequences of an activity. The main tools identified from the project were 1.) Quantitative based, which allow data such as numbers, percentages and amounts to be collected, and 2.) Qualitative based, where data can be collected using the Social Impact Assessment Toolkit. While quantitative data such as numbers, percentages etc. is easier to collect, the qualitative data such as people's opinions, experiences and stories, is equally important but more difficult to gather. This toolkit aids significantly in gathering that qualitative data. Marie provided some examples of the tools before she closed her presentation.

Shane O'Sullivan gave a presentation on the two European projects he is involved in which are 1.) The ComEnt project - which is fostering Rural Resilience and 2.) Assisting Communities to establish their own Enterprises.

The ComEnt project was funded by the Higher Education Authority and Erasmus+. The key premise of the project was to equip stakeholders with the necessary knowledge, skillsets and competencies to develop and enhance the development of community owned and community-led enterprises. One of the key outputs of the project was a certificate in community enterprise. Overall the project sought to identify and reflect on best practice examples of successful community enterprise and to develop the knowledge, skillsets and competencies of learners on the concepts of community-led local development and community owned enterprises. This was a transnational project with universities and community/rural development organisations from throughout Europe. From their research they were able to derive a definition for Community Enterprise. This definition was "A community enterprise is an organisation owned and managed by the community, whose mission and vision are centred on serving individuals from a defined geographical area and/or community of interest". There were several best practice examples which include

two from County Tipperary which are The Cottage in Loughmore and Community Power Electricity provider based in Nenagh.

Shane then discussed his second project on Rural Resilience. The project is a transnational project with the aim of developing the capacity of a rural community or territory to utilise equilibrium or evolutionary approaches in order to respond to sudden socio-economic or environmental shocks. The capacity to continuously adapt to the multiple processes of change whilst strengthening their essential functions and structures, ensuring good governance.

Shane advised they charted best practice examples of rural resilience and spoke about the 6 case studies that they studied in the projects. He directed people to the following link for further information www.ruralresilience.ie

Councillor Imelda Goldsboro thanked both Shane and Marie for their informative presentations.

6. The European Entrepreneurial Region Award 2025

Kathleen Prendergast flagged that there is an opportunity to apply for a European Entrepreneurial Status Badge for the whole County of Tipperary. Consideration was given to applying for it for 2025. As a number of pre-applications steps were required that would have to be developed first, it was proposed that when the new 2024 – 2029 SPC will be in place in September 2024, it should be asked to consider if it would be worth preparing an application for the year 2027. This was agreed.

7. Any Other Business

Clr Imelda Goldsboro, Chairperson confirmed there was no other business to discuss.

8. Close of Business – Date of Next Meeting

Chairperson, Imelda Goldsboro thanked everybody for attending and confirmed the next meeting will be held on Tuesday 7th May 2024.

The meeting then concluded.

Signed: Imelda Goldsboro Date: 7/05/2024 Chairperson