

Minutes of meeting of the Economic Development and Enterprise Support SPC meeting held on Monday 21st June 2021 via ZOOM.

Present: Councillor Gerry Walsh Chair
Councillor Avril Cronin
Councillor Pat Kennedy
Councillor Mary Kavanagh
Mr. Michael Ryan
Mr. Killian McGreal
Mr. Christopher Fox

In Attendance: Ms. Lorraine Gallagher, Director of Services
Ms. Susan Nichols, Administrative Officer
Ms. Deirdre Whitfield, Administrative Officer
Ms. Vibeke Delahunt, Head of Enterprise
Ms. Caroline Dunne, Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies: Ms. Christine Flood, Senior Executive Officer
Councillor Tom Fortune
Councillor Irene Winters
Mr Michael Allen
Mr Huw O'Toole
Ms Ruth Donnelly

ITEM 1

Minutes of meeting of the Economic Development & Enterprise Support SPC held on Monday 8th March 2021

On the proposal of Cllr. Avril Cronin, seconded Michael Ryan, the minutes of SPC meeting held on Monday 8th March 2021 as circulated were agreed.

ITEM 2

Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

ITEM 3.1

Update on LECP: Community Activities

Ms. D. Whitfield provided updates on the following;

Goal 1: Develop community capacity in disadvantaged communities and engage in urban and rural regeneration

Announcement of Town & Village Funding Scheme to Revitalise Towns and Villages

Following on from the announcement by Minister Humphreys of the launch of the 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme, Wicklow County Council is delighted to announce that the scheme is open for applications in the county.

The Town and Village Scheme objectives are being refocused to align with commitments within 'Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021-2025'. The 2021 Scheme will prioritise the objectives of this policy such as tackling vacancy in towns and villages, remote working and supporting town centre living. Other projects which will be welcomed include regeneration projects that support active and vibrant town or village centres, upgrading shopfronts and street facades, and green spaces and parks, etc.

The measures that will be supported by the 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme include (but are not limited to):

- Tackling dereliction in town centres
- Turning vacant properties into remote working and multi-use community spaces
- Investing in town centre living
- Investing in amenities to make town centre living more attractive
- Upgrading and improving shop fronts and streetscapes on Main Streets
- Projects that support and enhance the night time economy and add vibrancy to town centres

Grant Levels:

For the 2021 Scheme, the minimum grant which is available is €20,000. The maximum level of grant funding available is being raised to €500,000 in respect of one application from each Local Authority. A maximum of €250,000 will apply in respect of 2 applications and €100,000 in respect of 4 applications. **2 applications must** be in respect of Towns/Villages that have not previously received funding under the Standard Town & Village Renewal Scheme

Project Development Measure:

A new Project Development Measure (up to €50,000) is being introduced this year. This Measure is being introduced on a trial basis in order to put in place the preparation work needed to progress to a full project.

All relevant guidelines and application forms are available on www.wicklow.ie. All queries should be emailed to townandvillage@wicklowcoco.ie

Connected Hubs Fund

This call is intended to develop and leverage the capacity and quality of **existing remote working facilities & Broadband Connection Points (BCPs)** in support of the National Hub Network initiative. The total indicative funding available for the Connected Hubs Call is €5 million. The fund will provide grants from €10,000, up to €250,000 for multi-hub applications.

Applicants must be BCPs or existing hubs which provide, or will provide, remote working facilities and can demonstrate they have been in operation for 6 months (NB: this 6 months requirement does not apply to BCPs).

Projects funded through this call must be completed before the end of 2021 and applications must demonstrate credible project timelines to this effect or they will be deemed ineligible.

It is a requirement that funded applicants must commit to membership of the National Hub Network for a minimum of 3 years and must also complete the National Hub Survey which is available [here](#)

The application scheme is restricted to existing Remote Working hubs and Broadband Connection Points. These will be contacted by Wicklow County Council and invited to apply.

Announcement of the Rural Regeneration Development Fund Category 2

The Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, on May 12th, announced the third call for Category 2 applications to the €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

This Fund will support landmark regeneration projects across the country that will breathe new life into rural towns and villages.

This fund is for projects that will drive economic growth and footfall, combat dereliction, regenerate town centre and heritage buildings, develop pedestrian zones and outdoor spaces and make rural towns more attractive places to live, work and raise a family.

There will also be a strong focus on developing remote working facilities such as digital and enterprise communities, as well as e-learning, cultural and community spaces.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is a key component of Our Rural Future – the Government’s ambitious five year policy for Rural Ireland.

The €1 billion Fund is also part of the Department’s Rural Development Investment Programme, which is funded under Project Ireland 2040. Projects that will be funded under Category 2 are those that require significant development before they reach the stage of being shovel ready.

The RRDF is being developed and coordinated by an inter-departmental team of Wicklow County Council.

Goal 2: Promote Active Citizenship and Public Participation to improve governance, participation and enrich decision making

Age Friendly Programme

The Age Friendly programme is focusing on the Keep Well Campaign and the Community Call. 500 winter care packs were delivered to those most isolated and vulnerable in the county and were very well received. 17 tablets were delivered to 7 participating nursing homes Wicklow in order to assist residents stay connected. Funding for these was through Age Friendly Ireland and the HSE. Training for setting up a Befriending service in Arklow has started with two sessions complete.

Comhairle na nÓg

The Comhairle na nÓg, through the Coordinator, are taking part in the COVID-19 Community Response Forum, bringing the perspective of young people to the table. They are also taking part in the Time Machine project which is an intergenerational project.

Funding has been secured from DCYA to continue to support the Comhairle na nÓg. Tablets were purchased for use by the Comhairle in each Municipal District, to help them to keep the youth council going during the COVID-19 restrictions.

PPN – report attached

Goal 3: Strategic Direction – Develop high quality integrated services, available to all communities, in particular, disadvantaged communities and vulnerable groups

1. Healthy Wicklow Strategy

Round 3 of Programme is underway but implementation has slowed down because of COVID-19. An extension to 31st December 2021 has been granted. €30,000 has been allocated to a number of groups under the Healthy Ireland Mental Health Small grants Scheme.

Under the Healthy Ireland Fund, Wicklow County Council has received €67,225 to help with the 'Keep Well' campaign. This is a national campaign, part of the government plan for 'Living with COVID-19' focused on 5 major themes:

- Keeping Active & Being Outdoors – even during winter it is important to help physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Keeping in Contact – staying connected with people and addressing isolation as person-to-person connection is important to our wellbeing
- Switching Off and Being Creative - Switching Off and Being Creative or learning something new, getting back to nature and finding ways to relax
- Eating Well – by nourishing your mind and body we can positively impact our physical and mental wellbeing.
- Minding Your Mood – relaxation, mindfulness and asking for help if needed.

There have been a number of initiatives under this scheme running since January 2021. They are all coming to an end at present.

3. Migrant Integration Strategy

This has been passed by Wicklow County Council and is now in the implementation stage

Goal 4: Develop a vibrant and innovative community and social enterprise sector

Bray Area Partnership has continued to work within its operational area of Bray and north Wicklow to advance social enterprise activity and initiatives. A summary of this work includes:

- As part of SICAP resourced actions, providing ongoing support, advise and guidance to pre-establishment, early stage and trading social enterprises with respect to structuring; business planning; accessing viability and more sustainable operation etc.
- Planning an information session, to be held later in the year, for potential and new social enterprises covering various topics related to day to day business requirements underpinning a sustainable operation.
- Diversifying the range of services provided by an existing managed social enterprise – developing a service range to be made available to older members of the community in the Bray and north Wicklow areas supporting independent living.

- Completing the programme of work under the SEED Initiative that provided training modules, individualised mentoring together with a promotional video production for up to nine local social enterprises.
- Finalising the market research and feasibility study being undertaken to inform the development of a social enterprise having ex-offenders within its workforce.
- Developing a proposal, as a collaborative venture with two other LDCs, seeking funding to implement a six months programme for social enterprises focusing on governance, compliance and sustainable trading.

A query was raised with regard to the focus of Rural Regeneration and how it appears to have moved away from traditional rural economic activities such as farming, forestry etc. In response to this, the meeting was advised that submissions are made to the Draft County Development Plan to highlight concerns over the lack of rural regeneration in the areas mentioned above.

ITEM 3.2

Update on LECP: Economic Activities

Ms. S. Nichols provided a report to the meeting (copy circulated) which covered the following:

FILM STRATEGY

WCC has appointed Saffery Champness Ireland to develop a Film Strategy for County Wicklow, this project is underway at present. The timeline for completion has been extended to allow the consultants to engage with key film industry participants and to speak to Minister Harris with regard to the skills and training side of the sector.

TOWN TEAMS

Town Teams continue to meet virtually and to plan a range of projects and events within the limitations of the Covid restrictions.

Greystones 2020 are in the process of forming a company and renaming as Greystones Town Team. Company Directors, Secretary and Members are currently being appointed and Greystones 2020 will be formally dissolved once the new CLG is in place.

A Town Re-opening Committee has been established in Bray, with representatives from the Municipal District, An Garda Síochana, Chamber of Commerce and local business representatives.

The focus for the next months will be on Town Re-opening and recovery. It is proposed to reengage with the Town Teams / Re-Opening Committees in this regard. Re-opening committee meetings have been held in each of the Municipal Districts. Some of the actions being carried out include arranging deep cleaning of public spaces, provision of social distancing markings, additional bins, an additional cleaning regime, flower baskets, provision of additional public toilets.

In some cases towns are putting up bunting to encourage a holiday atmosphere. A newspaper and feature, encouraging to the public to shop local, has been published with information on each of the Municipal Districts and Wicklow Local Enterprise Office (copy attached)

RRDF FUNDING

Wicklow County Council's most recent RRDF applications in respect of Rathdrum and the Mountain Rescue HQ at Roundwood were unsuccessful.

The call for Category 2 has just opened. It is proposed to submit the following 3 applications:

Shillelagh/Carnew/Tinahely: developing the villages for the eventual arrival of the Greenway – purchasing some of the old station buildings linking in with the Tinahely Trails and other tourist venues including the Tinahely Farm shop and the Orchard Farm

Kilcoole/Newtown: connected communities building on placemaking and linking to the green route proposal.

Blessington: redeveloping and resubmitting the proposal to design and develop the Square for when the N81 is re-routed and to make the town greenway ready to be able to cater for the large influx of visitors expected.

A call for Category 1 (shovel ready) proposals is to be made later in 2021. It is proposed to submit the following projects:

1. Rathdrum
2. Newtownmountkennedy
3. A Food Incubation Hub

These projects will be developed over the year to bring them to a stage where they are ready to be submitted.

URDF

There are currently three 2018 URDF projects underway; Arklow Historic Town Core, Wicklow Library and Fitzwilliam Square and the Bray Public Transport Bridge.

Funding of €7.14m has been announced for the Bray Harbour Area Integrated Regeneration Project from the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and this funding has the capacity to unlock the great potential of Bray Harbour and surrounding area. The harbour, its piers and adjacent lands are a major asset for Bray and this funding will facilitate an integrated scheme to develop the harbour and associated public realm works to provide a vibrant waterfront area with excellent connectivity between the promenade, the town centre the Dublin Road area and beyond.

Work is ongoing to further develop the unsuccessful applications for Wicklow and Arklow Harbours. A meeting with the Department of Housing URDF has been requested for feedback on the previous applications.

TOURISM

Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains Masterplan and Visitor Orientation Plan for Wicklow

The first round of consultation has been completed and was positively received, with over 170 individuals having participated in the Zoom sessions to date and a similar number of surveys returned. Issues raised during those sessions include congestion at key sites, security, car parking and visitor services, signage, availability of maps showing all the trails and routes, issues with local access, rewilding, erosion and degradation of the environment.

The consultants are preparing the draft masterplan and this will be presented to the Steering Committee (the various government agencies) at the end of June.

In the short term additional car parking has been provided at Laragh and Pier Gates Luggala, an electronic traffic management system (ITS) is to be introduced and the toilets at the Council owned car park are to be upgraded.

The improved junction with R757 and R756, where the Glendalough road meets the Wicklow Gap, was officially opened on 15th June and has proven successful in accommodating vehicle movements and improving safety in the area, especially for larger vehicles.

In 2020 a **Tourism Recovery Taskforce** was established by Failte Ireland – this Taskforce is chaired by the Chief Executive and Brian O’Flynn of Ireland’s Ancient East

4 key objectives have been agreed:

Project 1: Wicklow Outdoors

Project 2: Wicklow Passport

Project 3: Family Market

Project 4: New Wicklow Experiences - maximising the potential of Wicklow Naturally to link food experiences with the outdoors and adventure experiences and emerging film tourism opportunities.

Wicklow Passport

- Sales of Wicklow Passport have exceeded 1500
- Promotion of the Passport continues on social media, supported by video and extensive imagery.
- Work continues on developing the network of Wicklow Passport resellers with focus on Bray, Enniskerry, Glendalough, Greystones.
- A series of promotional itineraries and tours around the Wicklow Passport are being planned. The first tour focusses on South West Wicklow and includes Carnew, Shillelagh, Baltinglass, Donard and Tinahely.

Tracks & Trails Show

- Wicklow featured on the Tracks and Trails show broadcasted on RTE, providing national exposure for the county.
- The Wicklow episode was presented by Pól Conghaile and showcased the Bray to Sugarloaf trail as well as the Tinahely trails.

Trail Digitisation

- The digitisation of the Wicklow Trails is underway with the aim to help visitors to choose and follow any of the Wicklow walks. Each walk is to include the following information: GPS start/finish location, Google Maps track, GPX download, Runmap app link and printable PDF.

EcoTrail Wicklow

- EcoTrail Wicklow is set to take place on 25th of September 2021.
- Registrations have reopened and there are currently around 1400 people signed up split between 4 distances and races on the day.

Celtic Routes Project:

Funding of €1,917,770 for the second phase of the Celtic Routes tourism project has been secured for Ireland / Wales's tourist project, Celtic Routes. This is a partnership project between Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire County Councils and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority in Wales and Wicklow, Wexford and Waterford City and County Councils in Ireland. It is a branded collection of tourism experiences encouraging travellers to visit Ireland and Wales to discover the Celtic spirit by suggesting immersive and authentic experiences in West Wales and South East Ireland. A toolkit is available for businesses and destinations with guidance and ideas about how they can create their own Celtic experiences and contribute to the success of the project.

The Celtic Route Partnership project has released an online platform to access the database of imagery that has been produced over the past year. The imagery has been used to support the extensive promotional campaign that is undergoing, including high quality and high resolution photos and videos.

Destination Town Funding:

Fáilte Ireland has made over €500,000 in Destination Town funding available to Wicklow town. Wicklow County Council are working closely with Wicklow Municipal District on a project to develop visitor amenities in the Abbey Grounds. Mosart, a local architect team who specialise in architecture, landscape and urban design, have been appointed to design the Abbey Grounds project with a view to increasing visitor numbers to Wicklow while maintaining this important oasis at the heart of Wicklow town.

Ireland - County by County

Wicklow featured in a recently launched 'Ireland - County by County' travel series which will be extensively aired throughout the US television network. Featuring 10 counties, this exciting new television showcases the best of Ireland county by county to television audience's right across the United States. The Wicklow episode follows Ciara Whelan as she discovers the incredible paintings at Russborough House; takes some unusual furry friends for a walk; hikes in the spectacular Glendalough National Park; enjoys some Wicklow Naturally produce at the stunning Killruddery House, and much more. Ciara also becomes a Wicklow Ambassador as she collects the various stamps for her Wicklow Passport.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE STRATEGY**Wicklow Naturally**

County Wicklow Partnership have advertised through Etenders for a Food and Beverage Co-ordinator role for Wicklow Naturally and a tender for the supply of event costs for the period 2021 - 2023 in support of Wicklow Naturally's Promotional Activities Plan. Funding of €220,000 will be applied for via the LEADER Food Programme for both tenders. If successful, funding of 75% will be awarded, Wicklow Naturally will contribute 10% from subscriptions and it is hoped that Wicklow County Council will contribute €50,000 over a two year period.

A large number of events in the calendar such as Bloom and the National Ploughing Championships have been cancelled; it is proposed to run October Feast again this year with a mix of virtual and "in person" events. This event was run virtually in 2020 and had a good participation rate.

MARITIME

There are a number of Offshore Wind Energy projects at various stages of development:

Arklow Bank

SSE Renewables has submitted a planning application to An Bord Pleanála for the development of the landfall for two offshore export circuits underground high voltage connections, a new sub-station and transmission compound along with a 220kV overhead power line connection from Shelton Abbey to the transmission network.

SSER is planning to make its application to Wicklow County Council in respect of the O&M base at Arklow within the coming weeks.

Codling Wind Park

The Codling Wind Park has published its Onshore Infrastructure Scoping Report which covers the land-based elements of the Codling Wind Park project, such as the point at which the cables will come ashore (landfall), the routing of onshore cabling and any electricity substation(s) that may be required to connect the project to the national grid. It also describes how the operations and maintenance base for the project, which will be located at a port along the east coast, may be considered in the EIA.

Dublin Array: There are no updates available at present.

Cailleach (off Bray Head): Further information is awaited.

The following points were raised following the report:

- When will work start and expected completion of the Abbey Grounds?
- In relation to the unsuccessful applications for Wicklow and Arklow Harbours a request was made to the Department for feedback on these applications, has this been received?

The following responses were provided:

- Design work on the Abbey Grounds project has started with an expected substantial completion in Quarter 1 of 2022.
- Feedback from the URDF applications has been received from the Department which requires further clarification and a meeting with the Department has now been requested to discuss the applications further.

ITEM 4.1

Business Continuity Response to Covid 19

Outdoor Seating & Accessories for Tourism & Hospitality Business Scheme

Application fees for use of public footpaths or spaces by local businesses during COVID-19 have been waived to the end of 2021. The Council is anxious to assist and support businesses in the recovery period arising out of the pandemic. One of the measures that the Council is keen to support in the recovery is the use of public footpaths and/or public space for local businesses which may require the use of these spaces, particularly as outdoor seating areas while restrictions are ongoing. The Council is advising businesses that such activity can be permitted by our Planning Department under

a Section 254 licence. The application form and further information is available on the Wicklow County Council website.

Applications for funding under the Outdoor Seating and Accessories for Tourism and Hospitality Business Scheme opened on the 12th April and will remain open until 30th September 2021.

Fáilte Ireland in partnership with local authorities across the country is working to assist town centre hospitality businesses to increase their outdoor seating capacity while providing a safe environment for shoppers and diners. The key aim of the scheme is to provide support to individual hospitality and tourism businesses towards the cost of equipment to provide additional outdoor seating and facilitate individual businesses to increase their outdoor dining capacity for the summer of 2021.

In order to place furniture in public places, applicants must firstly have applied for and been granted a Section 254 licence by Wicklow County Council.

To date 27 applications have been received under this scheme, a large number of which have outstanding documentation required to support their application. Seven applications have been approved to a value of €28,000, with three businesses having received their grant.

Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme and Urban Animation Scheme

Fáilte Ireland has launched two new funding schemes for local authorities to enhance the outdoor dining experience in the county and to animate the urban areas in towns. Applications were prepared in collaboration with the Municipal Districts and Town Teams have been submitted for the following:

Abbey Lane, Arklow – Outdoor Dining Enhancement

Market Square, Wicklow – Outdoor Dining Enhancement

Wicklow, linking Main Street and Wicklow Gaol to South Quay – Urban Animation Scheme

ITEM 4.2

Business Continuity Response to Covid 19

Small Business Assistance Scheme/Restart Grants

The expanded Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID is now open for applications.

Closing date for this scheme is 21st July 2021.

Phase 2 of this scheme has been expanded to include those that had previously been ineligible.

Businesses working from non-rateable premises are now eligible to apply and if they meet the other eligibility criteria will receive a grant of €4,000.

Businesses with a turnover between €20,000 and €49,999 are also now eligible to apply if they meet the other eligibility criteria and will receive a grant of €1,000.

SBASC gives grants to businesses who are not eligible for the Government's COVID Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS), the Fáilte Ireland Business Continuity grant or other direct sectoral grant

schemes. This scheme aims to help businesses with their fixed costs, for example, rent, utility bills, security.

Applicants who have received Phase 1 of SBASC can apply for Phase 2 where they continue to meet the eligibility requirements.

Criteria/details of Phase 2 of SBASC:

- The scheme is available for businesses that do not qualify for CRSS, MEBAS, Fáilte Ireland Schemes or other sector schemes designed to assist with fixed costs
- the scheme is available to companies, self-employed, sole traders or partnerships;
- the business is not owned and operated by a public body;
- the business is not eligible or availed of CRSS, Fáilte Ireland Business Continuity Scheme, MEBAS or other sectoral schemes. The details of these schemes are set out on the application form and FAQs.
- the business operates from a building, including working from home, or similar fixed physical structure such as a yard or a street trading pitch for which rates are payable or in a co-working hub or a rented fixed desk. This does not include businesses carried on from motor vehicles, such as PSVs or construction trades;
- the business must have a current eTax Clearance Certificate from the Revenue Commissioners;

Business Turnover criteria:

- the projected average weekly turnover of the business over the claim period 1st April to 30th June 2021 is estimated to be no more than 25% of the:
 - average weekly turnover of the business in 2019; or
 - the projected average weekly turnover of the business in 2020, for businesses that commenced after 1st November 2019, and the financial statements as of end of 2019 should be uploaded with the application;
- the business intends to resume trading in full once Government COVID-19 restrictions are eased.

Proposed Term and Level of Payments

- The scheme will aid eligible businesses that meet the scheme criteria for the trading period beginning the 1st April to 30th of June 2021.
- All eligible applications with a minimum turnover of €50,000 will receive a payment of €4,000.
- All eligible applications with a minimum turnover of €20,000 and less than €49,999 will receive a payment of €1,000.
- Payments will be dispersed in the same format as rates refunds via bank transfer.
- The Scheme will close to new applicants on 21st July 2021.

The scheme will be run on a first-come-first-served basis.

ITEM 5

Report of Head of Enterprise, LEO supports

Ms. V. Delahunt provided a report to the meeting (copy circulated) which covered the following:

General

- LEO Wicklow provides a critical front line service to support small business with their business continuity throughout the COVID pandemic.
- The LEO remains open for business but public reception is closed for walk ins. All engagements are by prior appointment and conducted online or by phone.
- Contingency Plan in place to ensure continued staffing, monitoring of central email and phone to ensure continued fast response and offer of business supports.
- All business advice clinics and business skills and IT skills training courses, seminars and networking events are moved to online delivery platforms (Zoom / Teams etc).

Business Supports:

Client engagement: Information services and signposting

- Weekly newsletters circulated to client and enabler database
- Social media promotions of training events and new and existing supports updated a number of times a day.
- Radio interview / press releases on new and existing supports.
- Dissemination of relevant information to portfolio clients.
- Participation in information webinars with Network Ireland / LEO Lunch and Learn etc
- Information dissemination on other supports such as Revenue, CCRS, CBAS, Tourism supports such as the Outdoor Dining Scheme, WCC rates deferral to clients and interested parties.

Trading Online Voucher (TOV)

- The TOV offers up to €2,500 towards enhancing the business website with e-commerce.
- 548 Trading Online Voucher applications received, processes and 430 of these were approved (value of €1,022,007) by end December 2020. Our average annual number of applications is about 45.
- Interest in this scheme continues to be strong. 93 applications approved year to date, approval value of €200k.

Feasibility / Priming and Business Expansion Grants

- Evaluation and Approvals Committee meetings moved online
- 17 funding application approved in 2021 year to date, and a strong pipeline of applications for the Evaluations and Approvals Committee meeting in June.
- General increase in LEO grant funding enquiries from eligible and non eligible businesses looking for support and to pivot.

The Client Stimulus Scheme

- 32 portfolio clients qualified for this scheme, which includes specifically focussed consultancy support to enhance capabilities throughout 2021.

Training / networking and seminars

- Spring Summer training programme is coming to a close at the end of June. Planning has started for the AW training programme. There is continued high demand for all courses, especially Start Your Own Business courses.
- Over 420 participants took part in training events year to date.
- Network of Entrepreneurial Women meetings now each monthly and delivered online.

Lean for Micro Program

- This programme has commenced again with an intake of 10 businesses in 2021. This program assists businesses to become more efficient resulting in becoming more productive and competitive.

Microfinance Ireland Loan Applications:

- Microfinance Ireland offer COVID Loan for businesses affected by COVID who have been turned down for loan application by pillar banks.
- MFI loan reduced from €50k back to €25k, interest dropped to 4.5% for applications submitted through the LEO.
- After a very strong interest in 2020 and 14 applications approved, interest in MFI loan applications has dropped significantly since start 2021. Just 3 applications submitted through the LEO have been approved year to date.
- Promotions for the MFI will be increased through the newsletter and social media.

Brexit

Since the UK exited the EU on 1st January 2021, LEO Wicklow continues to support and assist businesses with Brexit and customs related issues through a number of supports:

- The supports are listed on our website and include scorecards, checklists, information guides, workshops, currency exposure calculator, financial supports, mentoring, webinars, training events, and Lean for Micro programme as well as a weekly newsletter and social media promotion.
- Two dedicated Brexit / Export Business Advisors are available to support small businesses to get Brexit ready by signposting these to available supports through the LEO and other agencies.
- Two Prepare your Business for Customs workshops have been held in 2021, with 38 participants.
- Nine One to One Brexit mentoring clinics have taken place with Brexit and customs experts assisting over 40 businesses with their customs queries.

- Export Opportunities in Northern Ireland workshop held in partnership with Intertrade Ireland on 12th May 2021.
- Extensive Export Development programme is developed for role out in partnership with LEO Kildare in Q3/4 2021 to assist first time exporters get ready.

Events:

- Spring Summer Training Programme has launched in January 2021 with 30 training workshops organised and ready for booking.
- National Enterprise Awards virtual ceremony took place on 11th February 2021 from the Mansion House.
- Local Enterprise Week 1st – 5th March 2021, line up of digital workshops, networking events and webinars including 10 spotlight events open to all clients nationwide.
- Student Enterprise Programme has moved online and commenced Sept 2020 with 18 schools signed up and will culminate in a digital version of the Co.Wicklow Student Enterprise Awards on 23rd March. Sugar Shack from Colaiste Craibh Abhain won the junior category and Simple Signposts representing East Glendalough School took the Senior Award. Both represented co.Wicklow at the National Student Enterprise Awards which took place on 14th May.
- The ‘Breakthrough Innovation Programme’, an Innovation focussed programme consisting of a mix of mentoring and group workshops moved online and continued to be rolled out. Twelve LEO Wicklow clients participated with very positive results and feedback.
- Hi-Start, Get Investor Ready Programme has started in May with 2 LEO Wicklow participants.
- A regional Food Academy course is coming to an end with 3 LEO Wicklow clients pitching for shelfspace in Supervalu.
- A workshop for the retail sector called ‘Energising Retail through Re-Opening’ took place on 27th May. The purpose of this workshop is to give the participants the ability to recognise the strengths they gained through lockdown by gaining an online presence and how to maximise both online and face to face sales now that doors are open again! Limited uptake despite extensive promotions.
- A food sector specific workshop called: ‘Telling Your Food Story (Tips on free PR, food styling & photography)’ is planned for 23rd June.

Micro Enterprise Assistance Fund

- The objective COVID-19 Micro-Enterprise Assistance Scheme is to provide a grant of a minimum of €500 to a maximum €1,000 in respect of vouched expenditure contribution towards the cost of reopening or keeping a business operational and re-connecting with employees and customers
- In 2020: 18 Applications received and 7 approved. Others didn’t meet eligibility criteria.
- This scheme is now reopened but awaiting details ahead of promotions to clients.

#LookforLocal Campaign:

A local Look for Local campaign is scheduled for June 2021 to support the re-opening of the economy

A series of webinars on how to maximise online trading and investment in your website will be offered to LEO clients in partnership with Google Garage.

The Local Enterprise Office Wicklow has approved 430 in 2020 and 93 TOV applications year to date 2021 and the recipients will be targeted for the promotion of these webinars.

The following points were raised following the report:

- In terms of additional staff resources assigned to LEO was there a timeframe given for these staff or are there additional measures to come?
- Conor Sweeney presented to the committee last year and it was suggested that he be requested to do another presentation to the committee before the end of the year?

The following responses were provided:

- Enterprise Ireland has issued a letter of offer to extend the additional three members of staff until the end of 2021. They are also going to add an additional member to the LEO team permanently from next year.
- Ms. V. Delahunt will contact Conor Sweeney and refer back regarding his availability to make a presentation.

ITEM 6

Wicklow County Campus, Content Creation Hub

- The construction tender currently being assessed.
- Construction contractor to be appointed in Q2 2021 and following stand still period construction to commence.
- Foul drainage system to be developed for the whole campus concurrently. Topographical and CCTV surveys carried out to inform the design.
- Directors invited to the board of Clermont Enterprise Hub CLG. AGM due on 17th June.
- Insurance cover and lease agreement with Law section.
- First REDF drawdown in Q2/3 2021.
- Promotion and marketing of facilities to commence, Q3 2021
- Recruitment of Centre Manager Q3/4 2021 depending on construction progress.
- Screen Development Strategy for County Wicklow: Roundtable event with industry scheduled for mid June. Final report due end June.
- Clermont Enterprise Hub CLG has led a consortium application for €365,000 funding for screen skills training courses under the Crew Development Hub vt Screen Ireland.

ITEM 7

Blessington Greenway

Ms. S. Nichols provided a report to the meeting (copy circulated) which covered the following:

Documents for the Natura Impact Statement are currently under final review and plan to be lodged to An Bord Pleanála in the next few weeks. Timeline is dependent on the requirement for an Oral

hearing for the planning process but it is hoped that planning would be in place by the end of the year with construction starting early 2022.

Wicklow to Greystones Greenway

The Feasibility Study is complete with an emerging preferred route. In summary, it is considered that it is potentially feasible to develop a coastal route through the designated conservation area of the Murrough Wetlands SAC / SPA without impacting on the qualifying interests of the SAC if the route is developed so as to ensure there is no disturbance to birds species nor impact on the sites qualifying interests (i.e. habitats) and features of interest (i.e. species) of the sites. It is considered likely that there will be significant impacts, which have the potential to be mitigated for, on the Annex I (non-qualifying interest) Fixed Dune system which runs alongside the railway line.

Alongside this the Coastal Protection Study has been completed between Merrion Gates and the County boundary between Wicklow and Wexford. The outcome of this study is fundamental to the ultimate determination of the feasibility of the coastal trail. In this context the proposed solution analysis and determination of the recommended measures to address the critical erosion locations is expected in the near future.

In order to advance and complete this Coastal Trail Feasibility Study, the preferred route has been recommended that is neutral of any potential Coastal Protection Study recommendation. The determinations of the Coastal Protection Study will be fed in to the Greenway Feasibility and updated.

Arklow to Shillelagh Greenway

The design and environmental surveys are almost completed for Arklow to Shillelagh Recreational Trail/Greenway Scheme, and the project is nearly ready to be progressed through the statutory process. We are planning to lodge this scheme for planning in the coming months. The time line for this is very much dependant on the observations / submissions during the process but we would hope it would be in place by early 2022. We shall then be seeking funding for the construction for the scheme possibly to the Dept. of Transport under the Greenway Strategy.

The following points were raised following the report:

- A campaign to get Blessington Businesses Greenway ready would be welcomed
- On the Wicklow to Greystones Greenway/Coastal Route proposal; is there funding for the latest feasibility study for ecology report or is an application to be submitted to the Department?

The following responses were provided:

- It was agreed that further work is needed to identify with Town Team to highlight the opportunities of the Greenway. LEO would be happy to support and provide a guest speaker/trainer.
- The Costal Erosion Report needs to be finalised and work can then progress to feasibility study and funding avenues, however all information needs to be collated first.

ITEM 8

The Forestry Sector: Felling Licences

At the SPC meeting of 14th December 2020 Mr. C. Fox raised an issue in relation to the forestry sector in Wicklow regarding;

- Serial objections are being raised to felling licences
- This is having a huge effect on all aspects of forestry – nurseries, sawmills, etc.
- None So Hardy nursery had to shred 2.5m trees as mature trees had not been removed to allow for planting
- There is now a 900 day wait for a felling licence
- Felling licences are administered at national level but some aspects are dealt with by the local authority.

It was agreed at the SPC meeting of 8th March 2021 that a letter be sent to the Minister and the five Wicklow T.Ds outlining the above concerns to which a reply has yet to be received. It was suggested that a follow up letter be issued.

ITEM 9

Correspondence

There was no correspondence

ITEM 10

AOB

It was noted that concerns regarding obtaining and pricing of insurance for outdoor activities has been raised.

ITEM 11

Next meeting: It was agreed that the next meeting of the Economic Development & Enterprise Support SPC will take place on **Monday 13th September @ 10am.**