

Minutes of the Economic Development and Enterprise Support SPC
Meeting held on Monday 8th December, 2025 at 10am
in the Boardroom of Clermont House, Newrath, Rathnew, Co. Wicklow

Present:

Cllr. Tom Fortune – Chair (TF)
 Cllr. Peir Leonard (PL)
 Cllr. Ned Whelan (NW)
 Mr. T.J. Foley (TJF)
 Ms. Margaret Coughlan (MC)
 Mr. Huw O'Toole (HOT)
 Cllr. Ian Neary (IN)

Presentation: Stephen Clarke (SC), Town Regeneration Officer, WCC

In Attendance:

Ms. Helena Dennehy (HD)
 Mr. John Powderly (JP)
 Mr. Fred Verdier (FV)
 Ms. Michelle Curley (MC)

Apologies:

Cllr. Avril Cronin (AC)
 Ms. Jean Ryan (JR)
 Mr. Chris Fox (CF)
 Ms. Susan Nichols (SN)
 Ms. Vibeke Delahunt (VD)
 Ms. Caroline Cullimore (CC)

TF welcomed everybody and started the meeting.

ITEM 1: Minutes of meeting of the Economic Development and Enterprise Support (EDES) SPC held on Monday 13th October, 2025

The minutes of the EDES SPC which took place on 13th October, 2025 were proposed by Cllr. P. Leonard and seconded by Huw O'Toole.

ITEM 2: Matters arising from the Minutes

None.

ITEM 3: Presentation by Stephen Clarke, Town Regeneration Officer at Wicklow County Council.

SC delivered a presentation titled 'Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns', which included reference to the policy Objectives, Challenges and Opportunities, The Town Centre First Approach, Current Projects (2023-2026) and Funding Streams. Questions arising from the presentation were as follows;

PL noted that vacancy and dereliction is an issue in Arklow and that people and businesses need to be incentivised to utilise empty spaces. SC responded that the URDF Stream 3 is available to support large scale urban development and regeneration projects. HD mentioned that Wicklow County Council is currently in talks with developers to address dereliction. These negotiations involve repurchasing vacant buildings through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) Call 3, specifically under the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) Activation Programme. HD

also acknowledged the need for a specific strategy to increase retail diversity and address concerns, noting the high concentration of mobile phone shops as an example of this issue.

PL queried whether there will be a town centre plan for Arklow. SC responded that this is funding dependant, with HD acknowledging that town centre plans lead to accessing funding and subsequent support.

HOT enquired how environmental, tourism, and biodiversity factors guide town centre design. SC clarified that plans must adhere to Town Centre First guidelines and funding criteria—specifically SuDS and biodiversity requirements—noting the Murrough pump track as an example of the Part 8 consultation process. When HOT asked how the committee could assist, TJF reaffirmed the SPC's role as a policy-led body.

Discussions relating to ongoing project maintenance followed, with PL providing the example of landscaping after the fact which can be costly. Addressing concerns about partial funding, HD stated that while there may be a town centre plan in place, funding is more likely but not guaranteed any may only be available to funding part of a project. SC advised that various funding opportunities will continue to be available until 2040.

TJF noted that ongoing engagement with town centre teams is key to success in the example of the recent Newtownmountkennedy masterplan. TF recognised that cross sectional interactions are also key, and that town teams should be working together not competing. HD acknowledged that we will need to learn from past experiences so that town teams can become self-sufficient. Addressing HOT's query on maintaining momentum, SC noted that completing smaller projects provides teams with a necessary boost.

TF thanked everyone for their contributions to the discussion and acknowledged the great work led by the TRO in recent months.

ITEM 4: To consider drafting a multi-annual work plan for the EDES SPC.

HD extended thanks to all those who have provided feedback and submitted ideas on the workforce plan so far. While there were some great suggestions, focus is now needed to align operational ideas in terms of policy with specific activities under the remit of economic development, as some ideas fell outside of this scope.

TF reinforced the scope of the SPC in terms of policy matters and referred to the email sent by SN to the group on the 5th December.

This item will remain on the agenda for the first meeting of 2026 to be held in February. In the interim, all members are to review the plan for discussion in February – all members are to come to the meeting prepared. HD proposed to have 2-3 policies for 2026.

There was confusion in the group regarding strategy versus policy and how they are different. PL queried if strategy was policy and TJF queried what the big picture view is. HD clarified that strategy is the implementation of policy; all ideas are to be clear and need progression within meetings of the SPC.

PL suggested that members could look at the ideas of other SPC's and TF suggested that a working group could be established as an extension to the SPC.

ITEM 5: Update on the County Wicklow Skills Strategy

HD noted that the SPC report serves as a comprehensive reference for all updates regarding the Wicklow Skills Strategy.

HD acknowledged the success of the recent Offshore Renewable Energy Event which focused specifically on the skills needed to support the industry over the next few months. PL extended her congratulations to the team for the success of the event.

TF asked how the skills taskforce is driven and HD responded that representation around the table considers SETU, KWETB, LEO – who are all collectively responsible for ensuring the actions of the strategy are achieved. TF queried why there is no public representation. With JP responding that organisations are independent in their own right. Clarification is needed regarding the individual responsible for ensuring actions are achieved.

ITEM 6: To consider updates from each group: Economic Development, Head of Enterprise, Content Creation Hub and Wicklow County Campus, and Tourism Officer

JP noted that applications for the short film awards are now open for submission. There are two prizes available for €15,000 and submissions are open until end of Feb 2026. PL asked about supports for unsuccessful applicants. JP explained that since funding focuses on delivering finished products, it was decided to award two larger prizes rather than distributing smaller amounts among more winners. HD suggested recognising and acknowledging all applications via a press release.

FV acknowledged that all tourism updates are reflected in the SPC report and that Wicklow County Tourism is currently under restructure. TF commented that there is confusion with the structure and all the different entities feeding into the new DEDP. FV agreed that the current structure is weak and that we can expect the new Draft DEDP by Feb 2026, pending Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment Screenings. TF questioned how this plan differs from previous ones, while PL noted the difficulty of promoting tourism given Wicklow's lack of accommodation but that we should capitalise on Wicklow's position between Dublin and Wexford.

ITEM 7: Correspondence

PL to reach out to small businesses in Arklow to assess issues and how the SPC can provide supports through appropriate policy.

ITEM 8: AOB

Meetings for 2026 will be held bi-monthly, with the first meeting for 2026 to be held on the 9th February.

A request was made to have a presentation on policy and operations to clarify the specific role and function of the SPC.

TF thanked the group for their work over the past year and wished everyone a Happy Christmas and New Year.

Signed:



Cllr. Tom Fortune / Chair
Economic Development and Enterprise Support SPC

Date:



