



Minutes for Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Meeting for (Planning)
Dungarvan Civic Offices on 6th June 2023

Present (Councillor and PPN members)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cllr Thomas Phelan (Chair)• Cllr Liam Brazil• Cllr Tom Cronin• Cllr David Daniels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cllr Seanie Power• Cllr Mairead Tobin• Donal Lehane (Social Inc. Rep)
Present (WCCC Officials)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kieran Kehoe• Liam McGree• Aisling O'Sullivan• Hazel O'Shea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hugh O'Brien• David Quinn• Audrey O'Mahony• Michelle Moran
Apologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cllr Frank Quinlan• Cllr Eamonn Quinlan• John Galloway• Mary O'Halloran (resigned)	

1. Minutes & Matters Arising

The minutes of the last meeting were proposed by Cllr Liam Brazil, seconded by Cllr Seanie Power, and agreed.

Matters arising: No matters arising.

Action: Adopted minutes to be published on the website and added to Decision Time. (MM)

2. Government Announcement re Development Contributions

Liam McGree reported on the Circular (PL 04/2023) from the Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in relation to a temporary time-limited waiver of Development Contributions. The Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (The Dept) will reimburse the local authority (LA) for development contributions. This is a positive for the developer as they receive a waiver, and easier for the LA as only one invoice to The Dept is required.

Issues raised included the possibility of back-dating the date of the exemption to earlier in the year, however Liam McGree stated that the LA has no control over the date from which The Dept will cover the contributions, and if WCCC was to backdate it further we would have to cover the fees ourselves. Furthermore, no matter when it is backdated to, someone will always be on the wrong side of the line.

The issue of householders being notified of this waiver after their commencement notice triggers the development contributions liability was also raised. Liam McGree stated that we will continue to advise developers of the liability, but The Dept will be invoiced directly.

3. Residential Zoned Land Tax - Update

Hugh O'Brien gave a presentation on the current status of the Residential Zoned Land Tax. Once An Bord Pleanála has decided on the appeals (currently 36 appeals) relating to WCCC's determinations, the next step will be to create the final RZLT maps.

The issue of why certain lands were excluded from the map was raised. Hugh O'Brien stated the relevant land use zone, nature of existing use/vacancy and serviceability of the lands were key issues for identifying whether lands were in scope for the tax and as such individual land parcels required assessment individually, on their own merits.

The question of how much tax it is anticipated that the RZLT will raise was asked, and whether this will be returned to the local authority's funds. Hugh O'Brien stated that the LA's remit is to identify relevant lands and to create and publish the corresponding maps, but that we will have no involvement in the collection of the taxes, nor will the funds raised be directed to the Local Authorities. He also underlined that not all land that is in scope will be eligible for the tax, and where LPT is already being paid in relation to a site, it will not also have to pay RZLT.

In relation to a query about whether land that is being farmed would fall within the scope of the RZLT, Hugh O'Brien stated that if the land is zoned as agricultural then it would be excluded from the tax, but if it is zoned for housing then it would be in scope.

In relation to a query about whether clubs will be liable for the RZLT if they have land zoned as R1 (new residential), Hugh O'Brien advised that the tax is payable by the owner of the property, and if not being used for the zoned purpose, they would be liable.

Concerns were raised regarding the ability of An Bord Pleanála to make decisions on the RZLT determination appeals within the 16 week target, when there are planning appeals waiting up to 20 months for a decision.

A discussion was then had relating to;

- (i) the lack of development in the Dungarvan/Ballinroad area, and the number of applications being refused by An Bord Pleanála, and how this can disincentivise investment in residential developments
- (ii) the difficulty for Gaeltacht locals to build in these areas, while non-Irish speakers can easily buy houses, and the possibility and challenges of the LA intervening directly by buying land and providing affordable houses
- (iii) the issue of the number of houses in a particular area being limited by the Development Plan and how these numbers are derived from Regional and National Policy, and monitored by the OPR
- (iv) the Core Strategy
- (v) land activation policies and how it would require a collaboration between Planning, Housing, Property Management
- (vi) the need for policy to ensure consistency.

Hugh O'Brien advised that WCCC is obliged to monitor the implementation phase of the development plan and its core strategy. The planning section is currently developing a GIS based tool to assist in this regard and it is intended that the development plan monitoring report will be issued to the OPR and the Council in Q3. This report will be a very important document for the SPC as it will provide a basis for discussion on the SPC workplan for the coming year. It is hoped that it will be available in time for the next meeting.

4. Dungarvan & Tramore Local Area Plans - Update

Hugh O'Brien gave a brief presentation on the current status of the Dungarvan & Ballinroad and Tramore Local Area Plans. They are currently at pre-draft consultation stage, which means that in terms of the legislation the clock has not yet started ticking on the process. The goal at this stage is to prepare an LAP as close as possible to what is required, that won't be subject to material alterations later, which will facilitate its preparation and adoption within 24 weeks.

The next step is for the Planning Dept to work with the National Transport Authority (NTA) to create a Local Transport Plan (LTP) as has been requested by the NTA and Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). WCCC is to meet with the NTA regarding tenders, and the NTA have agreed to pay for them.

The importance of the LTP was highlighted, particularly in cases where we have land zoned for development that is land-locked.

Concerns were raised about the possibility of the LTP slowing down the LAP. Hugh O'Brien stated that it is the LA's intention to have a draft LTP for Tramore ready by Christmas, and a draft for Dungarvan/Ballinroad by end of Q1 next year. He also highlighted that as Tramore is not categorized as a key town in the *Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region*, a full LTP is not required.

The issue of timing was raised, and whether it is possible that planning permission might be granted for lands that will be required for roads, etc. and whether people might try to get planning permission before the LTP is settled. Whether a deadline exists for the commencement of the LAP process was also raised. Hugh O'Brien stated that the objective is to begin the process of creating the Dungarvan LAP within 12 months of the Development Plan being adopted. Liam McGree stated that this is not a hard deadline, as there are no consequences if the objective is not met. He also stated that it is unlikely that the plan will be adopted before the next local elections.

The process of a settlement audit was raised and whether people can feed into this. Hugh O'Brien said that it is about identifying where 10 minute towns could be, and building up knowledge.

5. Derelict & Vacant Sites

David Quinn gave a presentation on Derelict & Vacant Sites, including the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) call 3.

The issue of how vacant/derelict houses are identified was raised. David Quinn stated that among other things, WCCC are hoping to utilise an app used by the Vacant Home Officer, as well as An Post's geo-directory. Meetings are also frequently held with the Vacant Homes Officer.

Whether the LA will renovate premises or just buy and sell them was raised. David Quinn stated that the LA's remit is to intervene as little as possible, just what is required to facilitate releasing the property back onto the market. For example, clearing up any title issues, and then selling them on the open market.

The issue of how long the compulsory purchase order (CPO) process takes was also raised. David Quinn explained that there is a process to be followed as set out within the Derelict Sites Act, and once a property is on the register it could take months or years, for example, if it goes to the High Court.

The issue of overlap between Derelict Sites and Vacant Sites was raised. David Quinn stated that there is definitely overlap and we regularly engage with the Vacant Homes Officer (VHO). Liam McGree also added that some vacant properties might be “above the shop”, where the ground floor unit is in use but the floors above are vacant. The new approach is much more proactive in tackling unproductive premises, with levies to be paid if on the Derelict Sites register. A steering committee has been set up with Kieran Kehoe as Chair, involving Planning, Housing, and Property Management.

How WCCC compares to other LAs in terms of this was raised, as well as the effect that more publicity/visibility of the process could have in terms of inspiring action. David Quinn stated that WCCC are ahead of the curve on this with the experience that Property Management have in CPOs, for example. Some LAs haven’t done these before. David Quinn also pointed out that issuing notices could kick-start the process of returning houses to productive use without the need for CPOs.

In relation to the Croí Cónaithe Towns Fund grant, it was queried whether one-off rural houses which are derelict and vacant for 20 years, and have paid no LPT, whether they would be ineligible for the grant? There is a question on the application form about whether LPT has been paid on the property. David Quinn stated that he will know more after meeting with Revenue next week, but if the house is habitable LPT would have to be paid.

The question was raised of whether buildings with a business on the ground floor and space above would be able to apply for the Croí Cónaithe grant. Audrey O’Mahoney stated that they would. Applications for this grant scheme are being dealt with by the Vacant Homes Officer. She also advised that there are FAQs on Derelict Sites available on our website, as well as information on grants and where to go regarding this.

Action: Derelict Sites FAQs to be circulated to the SPC members.

Action: Cllr Phelan requested that the number of Derelict Site/Vacant Site notices issued be included in the monthly plenary report.

6. Taking in Charge Policy - Update

The Draft Taking in Charge Policy (circulated prior to the meeting) was discussed. Liam McGree explained that the policy sets out the process for the taking in charge of estates, etc. The document is a step by step process for the LA to follow until it ends up in front of the Council (as taking in charge of estates is a reserved function of the Council). At that point it would then become a public asset, with the LA responsible for maintenance etc. It establishes how to manage the transition from a private to a public asset without the LA being left with legacy issues, as has been the case with older estates, where the bond has run out and the LA has then been liable for works.

Monitoring of this will be passing to David Quinn’s team, including a new Grade VI who will be dealing with bonds specifically. The LA will have to make funds available for taking in charge for some estates where there are still issues.

It was discussed whether the Taking in Charge policy has to be adopted by the plenary. Liam McGree advised that it was an internal procedure only.

Action: The wording of the Resident Request form (Appendix 6 of the draft policy) was queried by the Chair. He suggested that the word “consider” be removed from the form.

8. Any Other Business

Mary O'Halloran, the representative of the Community and Voluntary PPN, has tendered her resignation from the PPN and SPC. A replacement will be selected by the PPN. We will be informed by the PPN Co-ordinator.

Donal Lehane said that for a future SPC meeting he would like to discuss policies regarding the revitalization of our vibrant rural communities, water and sewage services, village hubs with phone systems, ATMs. He cited the example of Sweden's automated shops. Other possibilities include serviced sites, small enterprise parks, services like doctor/nurse/hairdresser, which might not be viable alone but could possibly work together in combination. Irish Water, for example, have a policy of big capital investment with everyone connected to one large system, but smaller systems can work better sometimes.

The Chair suggested that there is overlap with Economic Development, but that there might be a role for the SPC to have a policy on this.

Action: Kieran Kehoe suggested that we could invite Richie Walsh from Economic Development to the next meeting.

The date for the next meeting has already been scheduled for the 8th September and will be held online via MS Teams.