

SOUTH TIPPERARY COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD

SIXTEENTH MEETING REPORT

Meeting held: April 7, 2003
Members present: 22 (76%)
Chair: Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald.

SUMMARY

The 2002 Annual Report was launched by the Chair at the April Board meeting. An economic review of the County was also presented. The Economic Programme Management Group has agreed the following four priorities within the County Economic Strategy for 2003:

- Advancement of the Ballingarrane development
- Decentralisation for Carrick on Suir and Tipperary Town
- Realistic economic strategies in the key towns of Cashel and Cahir
- Attract Hotel development.

In response to the National Spatial strategy, the Local Authorities had agreed to work on these four priorities and also on three other issues reflected in the County Strategy:

- Ensure that the Regional Planning Guidelines are consistent with the County Spatial Strategy and that Clonmel retains its competitiveness
- Other towns and villages in the county have a good social infrastructure
- Waterford becomes a more competitive gateway and has better connectivity with the South Tipperary.

Since setting the priorities, the County Development Board had been requested by Tipperary Town Council to set up a working group to review the economic situation in Tipperary Town and advise on ways of improving it. Board members also made an input into what is helping and hindering economic development in the county. Positives include providing property solutions for mobile investors; clustering of industries; third level institute; regional solutions for waste management and broadband provision. A major inhibiting factor outside local control is the cost of business insurance. Other factors also play a role, the planning regime, infrastructure provision and childcare provision.

The County Development Board **adopted** the following amendments to the County Strategy as follows

- Measure 1.4 New Action 1.4.8 Make proposals and advise the County Development Board, in response to the economic situation in Tipperary Town
- Measure 2.3 New Action 2.3.5 **Co-ordinated County Traveller Action** focusing initially on delivering the targets of the accommodation programme (Lead Stakeholder: South Tipperary County Council).

1. Economic Watch: Review and Economic Priorities of the County for 2003

Ned O'Connor, Chair of the Economic Programme Management Group, presented the context and the economic priorities for 2003.

The National Spatial Strategy has been published and will guide economic activity over the coming years. While it is disappointing that Clonmel has not been designated a hub town, there is nothing in the National Spatial Strategy that contradicts the fundamentals of the spatial strategy inherent in the Board's County Economic Strategy. These fundamentals are the growth of Clonmel as the major centre in the county and within the Waterford Economic Zone; a secondary focus on Carrick on Suir and Tipperary Town with local agreement that these are priority towns in the county for decentralization; realistic economic strategies based on clear advantages for Cashel and Cahir; and a commitment from all stakeholders to build the social infrastructure in the 54 small towns and villages that service the rest of the county.

The Programme Management Group has agreed the following four priorities within the County Economic Strategy for 2003:

- ✓ Action 1.4.5 – **Ballingarrane** development (central to the growth of Clonmel and the economic well being of the county)
- ✓ Action 1.4.1 – **Decentralisation** for Carrick on Suir and Tipperary Town, preparation of a template
- ✓ Action 1.4.2 – **Realistic economic strategies in the key towns of Cashel and Cahir**
- ✓ Action 1.1.4 (Subset of imaging strategy) – **Attract Hotel development**. The main action involves an imaging strategy but the first practical project from the Imaging group is targeting hotel investment).

The Local Authorities have an important role to play in relation to the County Economic Strategy. The Cathaoirleach facilitated a process whereby the South Tipperary Local Authorities agreed a common plan of action in response to the National Spatial Strategy at a joint meeting on February 3, 2003. The basic strategy in the Local Authorities plan of action is to adopt Clonmel as a de facto hub of the gateway Waterford City and to prioritise actions arising from the opportunities/threats posed by the National Spatial Strategy to achieve the following results.

- Decentralisation - 200 + additional public services jobs in both Tipperary Town and Carrick on Suir. (Cllr Michael Fitzgerald and Ned O'Connor met Department of Finance officials in February 2003 to communicate the County's Spatial strategy).
- Ballingarrane – SDI designation, IDA purchase and development of 50 acres, Tipperary Institute relocated, Ballingarrane and Clonmel with excellent broadband connectivity; 1000 jobs in Ballingarrane (Working Groups advancing).
- Regional Planning Guidelines include specific objectives: (i) that Clonmel grows to service its 80,000 catchment and positively influences growth in Carrick on

- Suir, Tipperary Town, Cashel and Cahir; and (ii) that there is excellent road connectivity linking Clonmel with Waterford and Limerick with bypasses in Carrick on Suir, Tipperary Town, Cahir, and Cashel. (Regional Planning Guidelines published and Project Manager currently being recruited by the South East Regional Authority).
- ❑ Carrick on Suir, Tipperary Town, Cashel and Cahir – each of the four towns is working to its own economic development workplan, with a data base of specific development opportunities and promoting these potential assets within and outside South Tipperary. (Town Managers leading actions – work already underway in Tipperary Town and Carrick on Suir. Cahir economic strategy scheduled to commence in April and Cashel in June 2003).
 - ❑ Other towns and villages in South Tipperary have a good social infrastructure (services and facilities specified in the County Strategy’s Local Agenda 21 Wheel).
 - ❑ Hotel bed spaces in the county have increased from 460 to 800 hotel beds in the county (being advanced by a CDB Sub-group – CD Rom of specific sites being developed and will targeted at hotel operators in late April).
 - ❑ Waterford city becomes a more competitive gateway and has better connectivity with South Tipperary.

The challenge is to make headway on the priorities to achieve the above results and the economic partners on the County Development Board are fully committed to their achievement.

Separately and since the priorities have been set and agreed, there has been another blow to Tipperary Town’s well being with the imminent loss of 150 jobs in Pall. Following an initiative from the Mayor of Tipperary and the Cathaoirleach of the County Council meetings have been held with the management of Pall both in Ireland and in the US. Unfortunately Pall management has not agreed to reverse or defer the closure but the management is more clearly aware of the impact of their decision on Tipperary Town and has expressed a willingness to co-operate with the IDA and the local authorities to facilitate other uses in the 170,000 square foot facility. Arising from these meetings, Tipperary Town Council has requested the Tanaiste to set up a Task Force to secure a replacement industry for the town. Separately the Town Council has requested the County Development Board to establish a Working Group of key officials to prepare the information required by a Task Force and also to review the performance and the potential of Tipperary Town with regard to economic development.

In concluding his presentation to the Board, Ned O’Connor recommended that the County Development Board respond favourably to the Tipperary Town Council request. It was important that the Board contribute to an action that could boost morale and confidence in the town. He proposed that the Working group be chaired by the Director of Community and Enterprise, serviced by Eileen Horgan (South Tipperary Co Council) and initially include officials from IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, FAS, County Enterprise Board, Tipperary Institute and Tipperary Town Council. He also proposed the following terms of reference:

- ❑ Replacement industry/industries being located in the area which can utilize the Pall premises and workforce
- ❑ Assisting Pall workers in such areas as career change and re-training, job search and enterprise
- ❑ Supporting local SMEs to expand
- ❑ Such other matters related to the situation in Tipperary Town that the working Group may determine.

In response, Board members from IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, FAS and the County Enterprise Board outlined the actions that they were already implementing in response to the imminent loss of jobs. These agencies along with Tipperary Institute committed to participating in a working group. The following additional issues were identified:

- Limited set of local employment opportunities and the necessity to capitalise more on the proximity of place to Limerick City and the Mid West region. The Regional Planning guidelines provide an opportunity to proactively promote what Tipperary Town has to offer the mid-west. It is important that Tipperary Town does not become a dormitory town but that it is actively considered as an employment base capable of servicing and attracting some of the Limerick County population.
- Critical to do something quickly. Carrick on Suir suffered a devastating blow with the tannery closure in 1985 and it is only in recent years that the town has recovered from that blow.
- Decentralisation while not providing all the answers would be a major boost to the morale in the town. It was critical to identify sites and encourage risk-takers to build office space, because experience in other towns indicated a time lapse of up to three years between announcement and job placement in the town benefiting.
- There are some advantages that can be exploited – a sizeable factory with clean rooms and a work force in the medical sector which has generally been less affected by the economic downturn. In the case of PALL the local operation was making money for the company.

Decision: The County Development Board agreed with the recommendation of the Chair of the Economic Programme Management Group. The following action is to be added to the County Economic Strategy: Measure 1.4 New Action 1.4.8 Make proposals and advise the County Development Board, in response to the economic situation in Tipperary Town (Lead stakeholder: Economic Programme Management Group)

The County Development Board also undertook a **review of what was helping and hindering the achievement of economic development** in the county. The main areas covered in the review were:

- **Providing property solutions:** Mobile investment can be attracted where the property solution is right as in the case of Blarney Woolen Mills recent purchase of

the Tipperary Crystal site near Carrick on Suir. Affordable workspace is a major asset to getting entrepreneurs up and running

- **Clustering** of healthcare industries is a major asset to the county. There is also potential to build a cluster of telesales enterprises. There are 2100 foreign direct investment jobs in South Tipperary. 75% of these are in health and pharmaceutical industries which have proved to be more resistant to the recession. Also 75% are located in Clonmel which has proved to be a magnet in terms of attracting industry in the South East.
- The issue of **Clonmel as a growth center** is very important but there is a need for good transportation and communication linkages with the other towns. The outcome that has to be avoided is that everything is sucked into Clonmel. But the county needs a dynamic growth centre. One of the advantages of Galway has been its capacity to offer very good property solutions to developers. Clonmel now has this in relation to industry.
- **Infrastructure** is improving all the time and the promise of infrastructure is important. The priorities need to include access to airports and to the main cities from all main towns in the county. Some of this access is very good. Low cost housing is another advantage.
- **Image** of the county needs to be positive. The establishment of Tipperary Institute which allows the county to project an image that it has third level facilities is a major step forward. A post graduate trained workforce is becoming an important indicator in terms of attracting outside industrial investment. More and more companies are looking for researchers.
- The **planning regime** is also a key factor in relation to mobile investment. There is a progressive attitude to development in the county. Pre-planning meetings where issues can be scoped is an important service as the planning environment needs to be made very clear. One of the difficulties outside local control is that almost everybody can have an input and that input, especially if it is non-local, can miss the local advantage in a proposed development. Also responses tend to come from objectors and it is often too late when the 'silent majority' makes its views known. Communities and Chambers of Commerce could be more proactive in this regard
- **Village development:** The importance of building up urban centres and villages is critical, especially in sustaining local services on an ongoing basis. But there is a need for an initiative which offers a carrot to people to live in towns and villages. Rural people resent being told that they cannot build in the countryside.
- **Decline of traditional areas** of employment such as agriculture is largely invisible. It is easier to react to the concentrated factory closures but up to 1000 people currently employed in farming in the county will need off farm income within the next five years. Conversely, the equine industry in the county has been growing and now employs 2600 people.

- How does the county rate in responding to **cultural urbanisation**? One aspect of this is that young people are attracted to bigger urban centres. Are there transport systems that can get them easily back so that they do not lose touch with all that is good in their home locations? A second aspect relates to entrepreneurship. Traditionally in rural areas, for farmers and shop keepers, the business and their way of life was intertwined. How are those affected accessing and coping with the new operational environment?
- In South Tipperary, there needs to be a **focus also on the small and medium enterprises**. Small scale activity will remain important in the county. Another important aspect is self help. Tipperary has a strong tradition in this regard especially in the community and voluntary sector.
- **Insurance costs** are a major inhibitor of growing and retaining small businesses.
- There is a **gap in the support services** for industries employing more than 10 people but who are not exporting such as bakeries.
- Some entrepreneurs start their businesses too early and do not access the information needed. There is a need **for one-stop shop information**. On the other hand there are comprehensive training supports available but there is no dedicated entrepreneur training centre in the county.
- **Childcare** is a critical factor and needs to remain a priority for the Board.
- Consultations on the Draft County **Retail Strategy** will be requested in the coming months. A critical issue is whether major shopping centers are allowed outside town centres. The previous policy has been to build town centres and this was facilitated by Town Renewal tax schemes.
- **Regional issues** are also important. The South East region while it has a good tourism image in the sunny south east, does not have a strong industry image. Three things will certainly help – good solutions in terms of waste management, broadband and road access.

2. Launch of the 2002 Annual Report

The Chair, Cllr Michael Fitzgerald, formally launched the Board's 2002 annual report at the meeting. He thanked the members and previous members of the Board for their commitment in ensuring that the implementation of the County Strategy was going as smoothly as its design. In less than a year from the launch of the County Strategy, four of 67 actions have been completed and considerable progress was made on 40 others during 2002. The highlights of the year for the Chair related to provision of new rural transport services, the enhancement of infrastructure in the County's CLAR area, the

engagement with the community in the RAPID areas and the provision of additional full time day care facilities within the county.

On behalf of the Board members, Cllr Patsy Murphy representing the Urban Councils, stated that the County Development Board represented a new way of working. While the early results are very good, the process of working together represents the best chance of delivering the success all want for the county.

3. Implementation and amendments to the County Strategy

The Social Inclusion Measures Working Group (SIM) met on February 3, 2003 to review service provision to the Travelling Community in South Tipperary and identify if co-ordination of measures would add value to public provision. Detailed reports on the services provided and of the review are available from Breda O'Connor (052-34597). The review was sparked by feedback during the Board's Cultural watch in November that it was too early to address opportunities relating to minority cultures and by ongoing guidance from the National Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems.

The main outcome of the SIM meeting was a new action. It was agreed that Traveller accommodation issues needed to be resolved first as the priority action in addressing social exclusion of the Travelling Community. Four tasks were agreed: – all the public and community service providers working to one action plan; each Travelling family being visited and signing off on their accommodation need; South Tipperary Forum to investigate the possibility of extending the SEHB 'Traveller Awareness Programme' into the wider community; and South Tipperary Co Council incorporating the overall action team in an existing/amended structure.

Decision: Addition to the County Strategy – Social Programme. Measure 2.3 Implementation of specific strategies Action 2.3.5 **Co-ordinated County Traveller Action** focusing initially on delivering the targets of the accommodation programme (Lead Stakeholder: South Tipperary County Council).

Alan Curtis also reported on a recommendation from the Social Inclusion Measures Working Group meeting held earlier on April 7 that the County Development Board endorses the principle of employing a policy worker for the South Tipperary Network of local development groups. The context of the recommendation was that the post had already been approved by the Government but had not been filled in recent months. There was a danger that the post would be lost and that South Tipperary and its Social Inclusion Measures Working Group would not have the same level of support as other counties in the south east.

Decision: The County Development Board agreed with recommendation from its Social Inclusion Measures Working Group that the post of policy worker needed to be retained within the county.

The Cultural Programme Management Group met March 11 while the Local agenda 21 Programme Management Group met on April 1. The Local Agenda 21 Group will be reporting formally to the Board at its July meeting of the issues of volunteerism, integrated planning and the provision of social infrastructure in the county.

4. Other Information

A number of Government decisions will have implications for South Tipperary County Development Board. Local development groups and local authorities are now requested to show consistency in their annual operational plans/programmes with the South Tipperary County Strategy. The Chair of the County Childcare Committee is to become a member of the County Development Board. The Department of Finance NDP Evaluation Unit is carrying out an evaluation of the social inclusion co-ordination performance of city/county development boards and the operation of Social Inclusion Measures Working Groups.

Two further RAPID endorsed projects (one in Clonmel/refurbishment of a community centre and one in Tipperary Town/rural travelers project) have received allocations from the National Development Plan. Government policy now appears to have accepted the view of the South Tipperary Social Inclusion Measures Working Group that 'service integration' is to be the most pragmatic focus of the RAPID plans in Carrick on Suir, Clonmel and Tipperary Town.

Applications are invited by Tipperary LEADER for the 2003 Golden Mile Awards and by South Tipperary Co Council for a grants scheme for the provision of amenity and community facilities.