

MEATH'S ROADMAP CONTINUES *Economic Development Strategy*

Meath County Council has launched an Economic Development Strategy Roadmap to continue with the focus and vision as identified in its Economic Development Strategy 2014-2022, and to ensure that those considering establishing or expanding their business interests in Meath look upon the Royal County as an ideal place to live, work and to do business.

Cathaoirleach of Meath County Council Cllr Tommy Reilly was joined by Meath County Council's Chief Executive Fiona Lawless, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee and Minister for Sport and Physical Education Thomas Byrne at the Council's Head Office in Navan for the official launch of the Meath Economic Development Strategy Roadmap on 30 June.

The council's current strategy has identified several key focus areas and sectoral opportunities to expand the economic base of Meath, particularly with investment in food, knowledge and creative economies. The aim is also to attract further Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by marketing Meath to overseas and indigenous investors as a county willing to support and work in collaboration.

Launching the strategy's roadmap, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee said that Meath Economic Development Strategy sets out very clear strategic priorities to deliver on economic growth and new jobs in the coming years.

"Supporting towns and villages to remain attractive to live, work and thrive is not just about business but creating a home for people. We must continue to promote Meath, not just locally but internationally, support initiatives that enhance the quality of life and finally, continue to further co-ordinate and to focus development on connectivity, digitalisation and smart initiatives," the Minister noted.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

During his term as Cathaoirleach Cllr Tommy Reilly said that he will ensure that economic development will be his priority. He added that the council will prepare and adopt a new innovative strategy to build on the county's successes to date.

"To deliver on this promise we are going to put together an Economic Development Forum that will be made up of business leaders and entrepreneurs and high achievers to oversee the preparation and implementation of this new strategy," he added.

Meath County Council's Chief Executive Fiona Lawless

paid tribute to the work done to date, and acknowledged the work of the elected members, the Strategic Policy Committee, the Planning and Economic Development teams, the Local Enterprise Office and Meath Enterprise staff on the implementation of the Economic Development Strategy.

"With their commitment to giving investors the support and services they need to conduct business in our county, we will continue the journey to being at the centre of cutting-edge innovation in the 21st century and a great place to live, work and build a brighter future for our growing number of inhabitants," she added.

Following Census 2022, Meath's population is now 220,826 (an increase of 25,782 from 2016), with 101,189 people in



To download Meath's Economic Development Strategy Roadmap visit <https://bit.ly/3KaGWw0>

employment (up 17,930 from 2016). “With work on Meath’s new Economic Development Strategy scheduled to commence later this year or early next year, the council is awaiting the final Census results and will carry out some studies such as a commuter survey, the Chief Executive told ‘Council Review’.

“We are still awaiting further analysis of the data; Meath is currently home to 13,345 local businesses and 36 new company formations per 10,000 population, which is the fourth highest in the state. These are across a range of industries including agri-food and beverage, tourism, engineering, manufacturing and the creative sectors,” she explained.

DUBLIN BELFAST ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

Meath County Council is working with the other seven local authorities and agencies north and south of the border along the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor, which was set up in 2021, to identify and establish opportunities linked with the Corridor and the promotion of this on an international level.



Meath’s Cathaoirleach Cllr Tommy Reilly pictured with Minister for Sport and Physical Education Thomas Byrne TD and Meath County Council’s Chief Executive Fiona Lawless, (back row): Meath’s Director of Services Des Foley, General Manager of Finnegan’s Farm John Smith, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee TD, and Meath’s Senior Planner Padraig Maguire. (Pic: Barry Cronin)



Meath County Council’s Head of Finance and Director of Services Fiona Lawless was appointed the new Chief Executive, succeeding Jackie Maguire who, after spending 10 years at the helm of the Royal County, retired in early June. (Pic: Barry Cronin)

“One of the first aims is to jointly support initiatives that will boost economic growth throughout the region for mutual benefit. KPMG have been engaged to conduct a feasibility study on developing regional innovations hubs within the cross-border Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor area.

“These facilities would be based around sectoral clusters in partnership locations and Meath County Council is participating in the study to identify potential development possibilities.”

The cross-border partnership includes the councils of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Belfast City Council; Dublin City Council; Fingal County Council; Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council; Louth County Council; Meath County Council; and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. The partnership also includes representation from Dublin City University and Ulster University.

This local authority led cross-border partnership aims to develop a regional proposition for economic growth, covering the 100 miles between Dublin and Belfast, with a population of two million.

It was created partly in response to the uncertainty in Ireland north and south, following the UK withdrawal from the EU on 31 January 2020. “Brexit created several challenges for businesses in the county, particularly those in the food and farming sectors. Meath needed to identify its unique circumstances and develop tailored strategies to mitigate the risks and take advantage of new opportunities,” Meath’s Chief Executive pointed out.

POST-PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

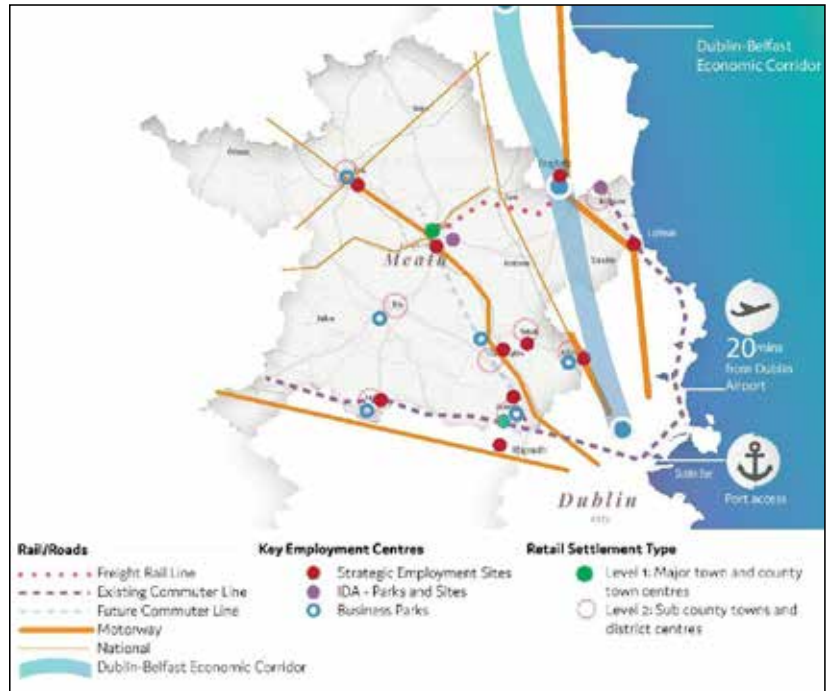
Just a few months later in March 2020, like the rest of Ireland, County Meath was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The pandemic has changed the landscape significantly, and we intend to invest in an intensive commuter survey, with our comparator local authorities in the necklace surrounding Dublin, to get a clearer picture of the amount of remote working and commuting, post Covid. This will commence later this year.”

The public health crisis led to the widespread closure of many businesses, including in the tourism and hospitality sectors, crucial to the local economy in Meath like other local economies. And like other regions around Ireland, this resulted in a significant increase in unemployment rates in the county, as well as a decrease in economic activity.

“However, the local and regional government were innovative and quick to respond by providing various supports to help affected businesses, including wage subsidies and grants, which helped to mitigate the economic impact,” Fiona Lawless pointed out.

In June 2021, the Government released its National Economic Recovery Plan which focused on a number of pillars, including supporting



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SEVEN KEY FOCUS AREAS

Meath County Council is working to support and promote economic development in the county in the following areas:

- Indigenous Industry/SMEs
- Foreign Direct Investment
- Tourism/ Hospitality & Heritage
- Innovation
- Retail
- Agriculture/Food Industries
- Creative Economy



These seven key focus areas and four enabling actions with priority areas are all underpinned by the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

the return to work, enterprise resilience and productivity and investing in infrastructure. While the COVID-19 crisis has created new challenges, Ireland was the only EU country to post positive growth in 2020 and 2021.

UNIQUE SELLING POINTS

Other notable trends include the rise of the digitalisation and tech industries, which have fuelled job creation and innovation in Ireland and the increasing importance of sustainability and climate action. And she claimed that Meath has managed to remain responsive to these economic trends, ensuring it could anticipate and mitigate any potential risks and opportunities and adjust the strategy accordingly.

“Meath’s unique selling points centre around the proximity to national and global markets, the availability of a large amount of appropriately zoned lands across the 12 strategic employment sites identified in our County Development Plan, access to a very skilled and educated workforce, together with the good quality housing, and quality of life for inhabitants, with all the recreational, heritage and entertainment facilities.”

Overall, the local economy of County Meath is influenced by a complex set of factors, including demographic changes, tourism, agriculture, technology, infrastructure investment, Covid-19 and Brexit. Meath is affected, like all Irish counties, by local, national and international trends.

“International supply chain issues and weary investors affect all counties in Ireland indiscriminately. However, Meath remains informed and well-positioned to take advantage of these drivers and to reduce any negative effects. As we look to 2030, Meath County Council is focused on driving sustainable economic growth and development across a range of sectors.”

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