

Southern Regional Assembly

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 10th February 2017

Presiding: Cllr. Michael O'Shea, Cathaoirleach

Present: Cllr. J. Bourke, Cllr. J. Brennan, Cllr. J. Carroll, Cllr. K. Conway, Cllr. H. Cremin, Cllr. S. Cosáí Fitzgerald, Cllr. D. Forde, Cllr. D. Geoghegan, Cllr. N. Gleeson, Cllr. T. Kinsella, Cllr. K. McCarthy, Cllr. P. McMahon, Cllr. P. Millea, Cllr. G. Murphy, Cllr. J. Murphy, Cllr. M. Murphy, Cllr. D. Nolan, Cllr. D. O'Brien, Cllr. L. O'Brien, Cllr. F. O' Flynn, Cllr. M. O'Shea, Cllr. M. Ryan, Cllr. T. Shannon, Cllr. J. Sheahan, Cllr. B. Slattery, Cllr. O. Walsh.

Apologies: Cllr. P. Breen, Mr Tim Lucey, CEO Cork County Council

Officials Present: Mr Stephen Blair, Director; Mr. David Kelly, Assistant Director; Mr. Liam McGree, A/Senior Planner, Ms Derville Brennan, Programme Executive; Ms. Karen Coughlan, ASO.

1. Adoption of Minutes of Meeting held on 13th January 2017.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13th January 2017 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Damien Geoghegan and seconded by Cllr. Deirdre Forde.

2. Matters Arising

No matters arising.

3. Updated schedule of meetings

Cllr Damien Geoghegan advised that the AILG conference is on in Ennis the same day as the revised date for the April meeting and they have requested that where possible meetings don't clash with their events. In light of this Cllr Geoghegan queried if the meeting could be reverted to the original date of 14th April regardless of it being Good Friday.

Cllr Michael O'Shea reminded Cllr Geoghegan the change in date had been settled and agreed by all at the previous meeting.

Mr Stephen Blair stated that it was up to the Members to decide.

It was agreed by all that the April meeting of the Southern Regional Assembly would revert back to the original date of Friday 14th April.

4. Planning Matters (for noting)

a) Observations on 8 Cork Draft Municipal District Local Area Plans

Ballincollig-Carrigaline, Bandon-Kinsale, Blarney-Macroom, Cobh, East Cork, Fermoy, Kanturk-Mallow, West Cork

Mr. Liam McGree advised that these are the Municipal Local Area Plans covering the entirety of the county of Cork. Mr. Blair made a submission to Cork County Council on the 13th January stating the Assembly had noted there were a number of parcels of land that had been identified as strategic land reserves but there were no proposals in the draft to zone the lands. Clarification has been sought on how these lands could be prioritized and what sequencing might apply in the choice of lands brought forward for zoning and also clarity as to how any proposed rezoning's comply with the core strategy of the county development plan as it currently stands.

Cllr Deirdre Forde said she is also looking for clarification at municipal district level particularly for 'shovel-ready' land for zoning proposals as there is pressure on for housing and in her opinion there will be a wait for any land being considered for zoning.

b) Proposed Material Alteration to Proposed Variation No.2 – Listowel Town Development Plan 2009-2015

Mr. Liam McGree clarified that a submission was sent in relation to this to Kerry County Council on 27th January 2017. The proposal is to rezone 1.8 hectares of land which had been shown in the draft as zoned for agricultural purposes to now change this to residential zoning and in turn to change 1.8 hectares of residential land to agricultural resulting in no net loss. The Southern Regional Assembly has no issue in this matter.

5. ROP Communications Action Plan 2017

Mr. Stephen Blair recalled that at the last meeting there was a discussion around communications work and following this he wanted to show the breadth and range of activities being undertaken to promote the work of the Assembly. In response to inquiries about the budget devoted to communications he confirmed there is upwards of €0.75 million available to promote the work of the Assembly and the Operational Programme over the programming period. He assured that there are resources which will be dedicated and deployed over the life of the Programme.

Cllr Deirdre Forde informed all there was a ‘great’ ad in the Independent newspaper that morning from the Enterprise Board which spoke of the role of the Assemblies and highlighted the assistance they provide. Cllr Forde felt this was very effective and something the Assembly could emulate.

Cllr Kieran McCarthy said he requested the information around communications work at the last meeting and welcomed the document. He inquired if there was a full-time PR person and a team behind them.

Mr. Stephen Blair reconfirmed that Ms. Derville Brennan is the dedicated Communications Officer spending a considerable part of her time working on communications.

6. National Planning Framework Launch & Consultation Paper

Mr. Stephen Blair gave a comprehensive presentation on the details of the National Planning Framework ‘Ireland 2040’ and outlined the timeline relevant to the work of the Assembly. He then opened the floor to comments.

Cllr Michael O’Shea thanked Mr. Blair for a very detailed presentation. He feels this is a very important document for the Southern Region and as such there should be a ‘think-in’ for one full-day at some stage throughout the year with all the relevant stakeholders in the region providing everyone the opportunity to go through this document in detail. While the presentation Mr. Blair gave was very comprehensive he believes the department officials should be called on to go through the plan in further detail to give the best opportunity to avail of the opportunities in our region.

Cllr Gerard Murphy said a twenty-year plan is an enormous task as we have no idea how technology is going to develop over the twenty years other than to say it will continue to change rapidly. Without a vision of how this will develop it will be hard to plan for example there might be only electronic cars on the road or even self-drive cars and lorries all off which he noted would be environmentally friendly. There could be advanced office procedures whereby the vast majority of people are working remotely from home with the added advantage of less damage to the environment. He referred to the director’s mention of infrastructure observing there is sufficient infrastructure in place in the towns and villages which will lend itself to people working from their own locality rather than commuting. The main issue hindering this is the lack of broadband, if it was accessible to everyone it gives a better chance of making all this possible.

Cllr Larry O'Brien asked that the assembly members take into consideration that it is hard for some of the members to get away for a full day to discuss this.

Cllr Michael Murphy thanked the Director for his presentation sensing an enthusiasm from him by the approach and issues and that the Minister is getting it right in his approach. Despite the current NPF showing just how out of date the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is the County Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidelines still have regard to the NSS, he questioned that considering the timetable for the NPF are we still working with the NSS in relation to County Development Plans as they still have 2-3 years left on them welcoming the Directors view on this. In particular he made reference to housing saying to date the approach of Local Authorities has been to zone lands based on population projection, he questioned is there to be a different approach to housing whereby there will be no zoning of lands beyond the timetable of the NPF.

Cllr Dianne Nolan commented that much of the talk of the 'NPF Ireland 2040' is about the new way forward however there is a requirement to look at a remedial work plan on the legacy plans that have not taken place and on projects not yet completed. She further emphasised the need for a bridging plan between the old and the new plan as there is some small-scale finishing needed to complete the old plans and strategies in order to allow an appropriate level of quality of life in the communities this affects. Cllr Nolan suggested this could be in the format of a lower level plan possibly worked through the Regional Assemblies to ensure nothing is stopped mid-way. She said this ties in with what Cllr Murphy had been saying about the NSS and will ensure that nothing falls between the cracks.

Cllr Joe Carroll commented on the reference to Oceans saying the value of Irelands coastline cannot be emphasised enough. In his opinion there is not enough being spent on the infrastructure of our piers and harbors as if they were looked after properly the investment would return ten-fold. He feels that the South-West of Ireland is neglected and considered only as a place to retire. In Mr. Blair's presentation there was reference to growing our towns and regional cities however there is more ground in Clonakilty and Kenmare than most counties in Ireland but no progression being planned for this area emphasizing that the South-West is seen only as a holiday or retirement destination.

Cllr Frank O' Flynn agreed that the Assembly should make a submission and that time should be set aside to sit down and review the plan especially in light of the tight timeframe. He commented that in previous plans the small towns and villages were forgotten about so it is good to see plans to have the small towns compliment the cities for example the town of Fermoy is in a perfect position to compliment Cork City. He stated it is obvious Dublin is going to thrive and Cork city will do well but it's the towns and villages that need help to facilitate balanced growth and quality of life for everyone. Cllr O' Flynn agreed connectivity is key referring to page 11 of the report, he emphasised the fact that everybody needs broadband. He commented that in no other country could it happen where there is no motorway connecting the 2nd and 3rd major cities. This is an opportunity to rectify mistakes requiring a full session to review and take ownership. Cllr O' Flynn believes there are exciting times ahead even in the face of post Brexit stating it's at hard times like these that opportunity presents itself.

Cllr Kieran McCarthy said he agreed with all points being made and stressed the need to be strategic in our approach. He feels there is too much emphasis placed on Dublin already and that we now need to look to the South for development and opportunities. He believes that the cities and regions are to be the new powerhouses and not nation states. He welcomes the evidence-based approach to public policy which could mirror the plans in European policy. He suggested the Assembly look at and do some desktop research on the opinions of the Committee of the Regions

such as Health and Wellbeing, Placemaking etc. There has also been some work done already by the Committee of the Regions around social indicators for territorial planning e.g. CAP Reform, Digitizing European Industry, Cross-Border Infrastructure, Cohesion Policy, Housing & Poverty. He also advised that Malta are already looking at the difficulties of being an island so there is a lot of interesting work going on that the Assembly could look at from their own perspective.

Cllr John Sheahan understood the 'NPF Ireland 2040' to be another strategy looking into the proverbial future remarking how he is enthused by the vision Cllr Murphy predicted. He referred back to the initial national strategy report done in the mid-60's by Colin Buchanan however regardless of how good the plans are he believes you need the will of the people and politicians behind the plans to make these visions work otherwise all the planning and theory is pointless. Cllr Sheahan said he is tired of hearing platitudes about rural Ireland and asks for honesty about towns, villages and green areas even if it is 'bad medicine'. He inquired as to the plans for the towns and villages in Ireland. In his experience planners in general talk a lot about looking after rural Ireland but their definition is different to the people living in rural Ireland. The starting point he believes is a proper definition of Rural Ireland, something nobody has been able to provide to date. He suggested we look to the young people growing up and being educated in these areas and look to where they are going to end up. He also questioned is it realistic to look at the Maritime and coastal line of Ireland for development. He implored for an honest talk about the future of Ireland leaving the 'spin' out of it. Cllr Sheahan believes none of these reports/plans have been fulfilled to date as politics is getting in the way and the planners were not honest in relation to where they wanted the vision to go using language which can be difficult to decipher.

Cllr Damien Geoghegan concurred with everything said before him and strongly agreed a submission needs to be made identifying the infrastructure required for example the upgrade of motorways between Waterford to Limerick and Cork to Limerick, he also said a decision is needed on the Waterford City boundary extension which he understands is a big issue at the moment. Cllr Geoghegan stressed the importance of not repeating previous mistakes pointing out the 'shocking statistic' that not one of the gateway or hub towns identified in the NSS were noted as the fastest growing areas in the country proving the plan was not implemented properly. He stressed the need for joined up thinking between departments referring to the Capital Investment plan pointing out that the Cork to Waterford motorway was not included in it despite it being a critical piece of infrastructure. Looking at the motorway network in Ireland all roads lead to Dublin, an honest debate is needed around this looking at what is best for Ireland not just our own local areas. He referred to a discussion on Primetime recently discussing rural Ireland which suggested a bullet train between Dublin and Shannon Airport questioning how is this beneficial.

Cllr Pat McMahan said that good points were being made and this is a great challenge to embrace as it is the first time we have had a stationary policy we can put in place. He stated the need to forget about the mistakes made in the past and concentrate on putting a sustainable plan in place. To achieve this, there needs to be an awareness of what the country needs for example Ireland has fallen behind in infrastructure requirements. He stressed that industry will always pick developed areas, it is vital to get industry out of Dublin and a viable alternative must be made available.

Cllr Mattie Ryan speaking as someone from rural Ireland said something needs to be done. He questioned what 'rural development' is as things appear to be getting worse, he himself comes from a town that has decreased dramatically in size. It is time to make the voices of rural Ireland heard before it is too late.

Cllr Michael O'Shea said some very valid contributions have been made. The 'NPF Ireland 2040' opens on a positive note as there are plans to build 30,000 more houses per year which will lead to

more secure jobs, this is a very positive aspect to announce as it may entice more young people into the building trades. He urged that if the powerhouse of Dublin doesn't let balanced Regional Development happen than there is no point as nothing can happen.

Mr. Stephen Blair said there were too many contributions made to give a detailed response to each however he ensured he would try to encapsulate the essence of the comments made in the 1st draft of the submission. He advised that tactically it is best at this early stage to keep the submission at a strategic level and identify the key principals before going into too much detail. He won't list what may be seen as parochial issues at this stage.

Mr. Blair referred to the comments on honesty and agreed that this is important if there is to be full buy-in. There was a comment in the paper about leadership and the role of the Assembly, Mr. Blair agreed there is a role for the Assembly in bringing people along and if we truly believe in what we are working on then people will follow. Mr. Blair warned that expectations must be realistic, thought is needed to work out the role of small towns and villages and how to make them viable because currently they are not. The question is can the planning system alone help or does it need to be accompanied by fiscal measures such as tax incentives, changes in property laws, etc. He emphasized the need for awareness and better understanding of future dynamics, however hard these are to predict. The reality is Ireland is at a crossroads and if the Government is serious about this plan then it must address the bigger societal challenges. This is an opportunity to make the Minister aware of these challenges and encourage government to face up to them in an open and honest fashion.

Mr. Blair confirmed he will work on the first draft and to have it ready for circulation in advance of the next meeting.

7. Report on Study Trip to Brussels/Leuven (31st Jan – 02nd Feb)

Cllr Frank O'Flynn wanted to extend his thanks for a very worthwhile trip however felt some changes could be made if the trip is to be repeated. He felt there were too many lectures and that there could have been more time allowed around the Parliament. He praised the presentation given on agriculture as being one of the most exciting. Cllr O' Flynn said it was a great experience to meet the Commissioner and have the opportunity to air their views to him. On the whole he felt the agenda was too full and that a city tour would have been a welcome addition.

Cllr Larry O'Brien agreed the agenda was too packed and an extra day would have been beneficial, he would also have liked more time around the Parliament.

Mr. Stephen Blair thanked everybody for their feedback agreeing it was intensive but also worthwhile. He informed the members that he is collating the presentations and will circulate them once he has them all.

8. Any other business

Cllr Michael O'Shea confirmed that this is to be his last meeting as Cathaoirleach due to internal changes in his political party and Kerry County Council. Therefore, there will be an election for the new Cathaoirleach at the next meeting. He wanted to thank everyone for their time saying it was an honour to be chair of the Southern Regional Assembly

Cllr Pat Millea extended his thanks to Cllr O'Shea and commented on his courtesy and efficiency as chair. Cllr Millea wanted to bring the proposed Waterford boundary extension to the Members attention. He pointed out there have been 19,000 submissions in Kilkenny against this extension and less than 100 submissions from Waterford. This is going to the Oireachtas and he wants pressure to be put on them to scrap this highlighting that no savings can be made with this change.

Mr Blair assured that the Assembly were aware of this as they had been invited to make a submission to the boundary commission committee. However on this as with other cases like this before the Assembly has taken the decision to leave it to the relevant Local Authorities, and did not make any written submission.

Cllr Joe Carroll said it was wise to have no comment on this as it is a local matter and one he hopes can be agreed on. He congratulated the chair on a job well done saying he raised the standard for those that followed. He questioned the scheduled date of the meeting on the 10th March however understands if this has been set.

Cllr John Brennan also congratulated Cllr O'Shea on his time as Chair saying he always found him to be fair and impartial. He wanted to join Cllr Millea in his shock and disappointment with the decision around the extension of the Waterford boundary. He argued it goes against democracy as it will move people from Kilkenny county against their own wishes. He feels the committee must have ignored the submissions and wanted to note that he is calling on Minister Coveney to ensure this doesn't go ahead.

Cllr Damien Geoghegan congratulated the chair. He said he is hopeful the boundary issue will be dealt with however asked that Cllr's leave the emotive language to one side when discussing it as it is not helping. The reality is while it may not be what people want it is what people need. He pointed out that Waterford City has been held back as a result of the boundary limitations, it is a City that needs to be given the opportunity to grow and thrive. South Kilkenny looks towards Waterford City for jobs and opportunities.

Mr Blair on behalf of the staff of the Assembly thanked Cllr O'Shea for his excellent job as Cathaoirleach, and wished him every success for his remaining term as Mayor of Kerry.

9. Confirm date for next meeting

Cllr Joe Carroll asked again if the next meeting could be moved.

Mr. Blair said he was conscious of the submission date for the NPF and any later than the 10th March would be too late.

The date for the next Regional Assembly was confirmed as **Friday, 10th March 2017.**

Cllr Henry Cremin congratulated the Chair on his time and was delighted to hear him say there would be an election as he has brought up in previous meetings that this position should be open to everybody and hopes that all parties will have a say in the election as requested.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Cllr. Michael O'Shea,
Cathaoirleach

Date: _____