### G1: Enterprise Economy Support – Actions

*Supporting Economic Recovery and Jobs – Locally[[1]](#footnote-1)* states that KCC is best placed to promote the county as places to work, and to offer direct support to labour activation schemes. The report also notes that the Local Authority is positioned to leverage local expertise to tailor national initiatives to meet business needs. Such efforts include supporting business networking events, establishing sporting and tourist heritage facilities, developing and driving a host of local festivals and events that support employment.

The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) has a strong track record of supporting new start-up’s and micro businesses and its integration with the functions of the Council provides an opportunity to support Kilkenny based businesses in new and innovative ways.

#### Enhanced Business Networking

Improved networking will complement the existing business interest groups, and the networking activities of LEO Kilkenny. It will also facilitate and support county-based business network events with the added purpose of generating innovation, business opportunities and investment. The networking model will also be used to identify the skills pool amongst the network membership and encourage the transfer of skills.

#### Food Sector

The Agri-Food sector is one of Ireland’s most important, employing approximately 50,000 people directly, as well as providing the primary outlet for the produce of 128,000 family farms. These jobs are dispersed throughout all regions of the country, and especially rural areas. The sector accounts for half of purchased Irish goods and services by the manufacturing industry and just over half of exports by indigenous manufacturing industries. The agri-food sector is a critical component of the local economy of County Kilkenny.

The major companies operating in the agri-food sector within the county include Glanbia plc and Connolly’s Redmills, complemented by an emerging artisan food producer base of approximately 40 micro- and medium-sized food producers.

Glanbia plc has their Global Nutritionals Headquarters and the Group's main innovation centre located in Kilkenny.

The Belview Development Zone is considered to be an ideal location for industry in agribusiness. Agri-food businesses located in Belview benefit from a good transport infrastructure and access to the national motorway network. It is the nearest major Irish port to mainland Europe providing a saving to shippers of both time and fuel while being a natural hub for the integration of port, shipping, road and rail freight services, all of which are vital to the agri-food sector.

#### Artisan Foods

Kilkenny Food Strategy, developed by Kilkenny LEADER Partnership, saw the establishment of a South East Interagency Food Group whereby four of the largest food service buyers in the country met with twenty-two food producers from the South East region. In turn, this led to the development of the South East Food Export Initiative, which involved high potential food producers in the region in fast tracking access to export markets, particularly the UK. The initiative also saw the potential for the future development of the *Town of Food Project, Regional Food Trade Desk* and the *South East Regional Artisan Food School*.

Savour Kilkenny has developed into an annual major regional event that engages with the full artisan food sector, reinforcing the potential for further development and indicating the strong cross-links with the tourism sector.

##### Incubation Space

Based on identified sectoral demand, this action will see the development of micro-enterprise business incubation units.

The action will see the development of innovative models of space provision, and will be informed by the experience of NACEC[[2]](#footnote-2), and the existing community-based enterprise centres. An initial study will be undertaken to ensure that the provision of additional space is economically sustainable, and will not introduce an undermining displacement effect on the existing provision.

In parallel with the above, the action will see the development of a collective promotional network strategy for incubation space in the county. This will inform the activities of all of the enterprise enabling agencies, including LEO Kilkenny.

#### Retail Excellence Strategy

There were 760 wholesale and retail businesses in County Kilkenny in 2012, employing over one in five (or 23%) of the total number employed by businesses in the county, making it the most important NACE code sector in terms of employment. A large proportion of these businesses are independent traders, specialist boutiques and fashion stores located in the retail centre of Kilkenny City.

The Kilkenny County Development Plan 2014-2020 establishes four objectives with respect to future retail development: -

* To improve convenience market share retained within the county to 80% post 2020;
* To improve comparison market share retained within the county to 75% post 2020;
* To increase convenience trade draw from 8% to 15% post 2020; *and*
* To maintain comparison trade draw at 58% post 2020.

#### The *Retail Excellence Strategy* will build upon cross-sectoral collaborations in areas such as shop frontage design, use of technology in marketing, and the use of local heritage and culture in marketing design. This will improve the retail experience in the county, and will support the attainment of the County Development Plan objectives.

##### Small Business Incentive Scheme

Kilkenny County Council is committed to supporting the economic development of the City & County in a structured and strategic manner. As part of the Action Plan for Jobs 2015 the Council is committed to prioritising job creation locally and supporting small businesses in meaningful and practical ways.

In 2014, the Council invoiced over €18 million in commercial rates to local businesses. Businesses and commercial premises owners, who have a vacant property, or vacant element, can have commercial rates struck-off to reflect the level of vacancy. There were 424 vacant units in Kilkenny in 2014, 311 of these were retail and office units. The average commercial rates for a shop are €4,213 and an office is €3,688. Vacant commercial properties have a negative visual impact affecting the streetscape and business sentiment of the community and visitors alike. KCC will investigate a ‘Small Business Vacant Premises Incentive Scheme’ for the occupation of vacant commercial units. Such a scheme will support job creation; encourage businesses to occupy vacant premises; help regenerate town streetscapes; and help improve business sentiment.

#### G1: Actions Summary

**A1:** Engage with local business to address sectoral needs, whilst simultaneously facilitating strategic collaborations, networking and innovation.

**A2:** Host an annual enterprise conference, modelled on the *BizFest* event, to promote cross-sectoral networking among small business.

**A3:** Undertake a needs analysis of the Agri-Food sector in County Kilkenny to include artisan food producers. Agree a Strategic Action Plan taking into account Food Wise 2025 targets, and facilitate access to markets for example: through local initiatives, participation in food and tourism related trade shows, thematic festivals and international linkages.

**A4:** Investigate the potential for an Artisan Food Hub in Kilkenny linked to collaborative partnerships and R&D initiatives between research centres, businesses and 3rd Level Academic Institutions.

**A5:** Promote greater business links between the tourism and food sectors, in particular promoting use of local produce by the local hospitality sector and attracting visitors to Kilkenny for additional food and beverage related activities. This will include building on the success of the *Savour Kilkenny Food Festival*.

**A6:** Maximise the potential of Connect Ireland within Kilkenny to further develop diaspora networks and international linkages in the areas of trade promotion, attracting investment and advice and support to entrepreneurs.

**A7:** Engage with Community Enterprise Centres (CECs) in the County to further develop incubation space and support services. Explore the potential of a collective approach to planning and promotion of CECs in the County.

**A8:** Promote greater awareness of and engagement in public procurement opportunities among small businesses, and in particular, opportunities available within local authorities and the HSE.

**A9:** Develop a Retail Excellence Strategy and include cross-sectoral collaborations in areas such as shop frontage design, use of technology in sales and marketing (including online trading), and the use of local heritage and culture in marketing design.

**A10:** Proactively assist IDA Ireland to update its online marketing and promotional material for Kilkenny City and County.

**A11:** Develop an incentive ccheme for the occupation of vacant commercial units as a means of supporting local business start-ups and job creation, as well as the regeneration of town streetscapes.

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| **High-Level Goal** | **High-Level Outcome** | **Objective** | **Co-Ordinating Body** | **Key Partner Organisations**  **(L) = Lead** | **Timeframe** | **Project Milestones** | **Actions** |
| **G1:** Enterprise Economy Support | Strengthened local enterprise base through targeting sectors with employment potential.  This will provide for increased levels of job creation requiring a range of skills delivered through a variety of employment models. | **O1:** To strengthen the enterprise base and encourage job creation activities | KCC  KLEO | LEO (**L**); Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce: EI; IBEC | 2016-2021 | Establish structure. | **A1:** Engage with local business to address sectoral needs, whilst simultaneously facilitating strategic collaborations, networking and innovation. |
| LEO (**L**); EI; Local Industry | 2016-2021 | Establish conference. | **A2:** Host an annual enterprise conference, modelled on *BizFest*, to promote cross-sectoral networking among small business. |
| LEO; Teagasc; ; FARMING ORGANISATIONS; Kilkenny Leader Partnership (**L**) | 2016-2017 | Completion of needs analysis. | **A3:** Undertake a needs analysis of the Agri-Food sector in County Kilkenny to include artisan food producers. Agree a Strategic Action Plan taking into account Food Wise 2025 targets, and facilitate access to markets for example: through local initiatives, participation in food and tourism related trade shows, thematic festivals and international linkages. |
| Kilkenny Leader Partnership (**L**); LEO; Farming Organisations; Teagasc | 2016-2017 | Publication of Report. | **A4:** Investigate the potential for an Artisan Food Hub in Kilkenny linked to collaborative partnerships and R&D initiatives between research centres, businesses and 3rd Level Academic Institutions. |
| LEO (**L**); Teagasc; Failte Ireland; Kilkenny Leader Partnership; Kilkenny Tourism; Bord Bia | 2016-2021 | Establish structure. | **A5:** Promote greater business links between the tourism and food sectors, in particular promoting use of local produce by the local hospitality sector and attracting visitors to Kilkenny for additional food and beverage related activities. This will include building on the success of the *Savour Kilkenny* Food Festival. |
| LEO (**L**); Connect Ireland; IDA; EI; Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce; Irish Hotels Federation; IBEC | 2016-2017 | Establish networks. | **A6:** Maximise the potential *of Connect Ireland* within Kilkenny to further develop diaspora networks and international linkages in the areas of trade promotion, attracting investment and advice and support to entrepreneurs. |
| EI (**L**); LEO; National Association of Community Enterprise Centres | 2016-2019 | Establish structure. | **A7:** Engage with Community Enterprise Centres (CECs) in the County to further develop incubation space and support services. Explore the potential of a collective approach to planning and promotion of CECs in the County. |
| EI; LEO (**L**) | 2016-2017 | Awareness events. | **A8:** Promote greater awareness of and engagement in public procurement opportunities among small businesses. In particular, opportunities available within local authorities and the HSE. |
| Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce; Retail Excellence Ireland; Retail Ireland; RGDATA; | 2016-2017 | Publication of Report. | **A9:** Develop a *Retail Excellence Strategy* and include cross-sectoral collaborations in areas such as shop frontage design, use of technology in sales and marketing (including online trading), and the use of local heritage and culture in marketing design. |
| IDA; LEO (**L**) | 2016-2017 | IDA material. | **A10:** Proactively assist IDA Ireland to update its online marketing and promotional material for Kilkenny City and County. |
|  |  |  |  | KCC Finance & Econ Dev Unit | 2016-2017 | Scheme Launched | **A11:** Develop an incentive ccheme for the occupation of vacant commercial units as a means of supporting local business start-ups and job creation, as well as the regeneration of town streetscapes. |

1. DECLG: Local Government Sectoral Strategy to Promote Employment and Support Local Enterprise. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. National Association of Community Enterprise Centres [↑](#footnote-ref-2)