



Kilkenny County Council

Local Economic and Community Plan: Draft Economic Actions

Economic Development, Enterprise Support and Tourism Strategic Policy Committee

Kilkenny Local Community Development Committee

November 2015



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Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

CEC	Community Enterprise Centre
CEDRA	Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas
CSO	Central Statistics Office
EDs	Electoral Divisions
EI	Enterprise Ireland
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FET	Further Education and Training
GHDI	Gateways and Hubs Development Index
HSE	Health Service Executive
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IDA	Industrial Development Authority
KCC	Kilkenny County Council
KLEO	Kilkenny Local Enterprise Office
LA	Local Authority
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee

LDS	Local Development Strategy
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
NACEC	National Association of Community Enterprise Centres
NSS	National Spatial Strategy
OSI	Ordnance Survey Ireland
PMBRC	Pharmaceutical and Molecular Biotechnology Research Centre
PPN	Public Participation Network
Q	Quarter
R&D	Research and Development
REDZ	Rural Economic Development Zone
SCO	Sustainable Community Objectives
SEA	Sustainable Environmental Assessment
SEDO	Sustainable Economic Development Objectives
SES	Socio-Economic Statement
SICAP	Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme
SPC	Strategic Policy Committee
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology

Note:

This document relates solely to the **economic dimensions** of the Kilkenny Local Economic and Community Plan

1 Kilkenny LECP Action Plan 2015-2021

The purpose of the Kilkenny LECP Action Plan 2015-2021 is to identify the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of Kilkenny.

The Action Plan has been developed using a comprehensive process engaging with key stakeholders, including agencies and the local community.

The Action Plan has been proofed for consistency with the Kilkenny County Development Plan 2014-2020, and takes account of the SEA Directive and Article 6 of the Habitats Directive to ensure compliance.

Theme and High-Level Goals

The economic dimension of the Action Plan has an overarching theme of *Fostering a High Employment Economy*. This is supported by nine high-level goals. The high-level goals were developed from the outcomes of the community and key stakeholders' consultation, the strategic policy review, and an analysis of the evidence to be found in the demographic and socio-economic profile of the county. The high-level goals were designed to be consistent with the appropriate statements of the Regional Assembly as defined in the Regional Planning Guidelines.

SEDOs

The nine high-level goals are built upon a suite of eleven objectives that underpin the Action Plan. Of these, some contain cross-linked dimensions of SEDOs and SCOs.

Actions

Each objective within the economic element will be achieved through the implementation of specific, time-bound and measurable actions. There are 54 actions, which in some cases contain sub-elements. In all cases responsibility for the individual action has been linked to a lead organisation and, where appropriate, partner bodies.

1.1 Action Plan Thematic Framework

The economic action framework is built upon the overarching theme of *Fostering a High Employment Economy*. This theme was identified from the outcomes of the community and key stakeholders' consultation, the strategic policy review, and the proofing processes.

The theme is designed to integrate the economic development and the local and community development components, and thereby facilitate the creation of an integrated plan that references the potential roles of all of the local actors.

1.2 High-Level Goals

From the analysis of the evidence-base, a Socio-Economic Statement, with high-level goals and targets for the Kilkenny LECP, was prepared. A number of tools were used to synthesis and analyse the outputs from the socio-economic evidence base and the various levels of consultation.

The original high-level goals were refined during the plan development process to represent the anticipated outcomes to be achieved by Kilkenny LECP.

The economic dimension of Kilkenny LECP comprises of a series of nine high-level goals.

1.2.1 High-Level Goals and Objectives

- **Goal G1: Support the Enterprise Economy**

High-Level Objective: strengthen the local enterprise base, and thereby encourage job creation and multi-sectoral employment potential.

□ **Goal G2: Facilitate Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

High-Level Objective: provide an integrated support structure for enhanced levels of enterprise start-up and growth.

○ **Goal G3: Enhance Visitor Experiences**

High-Level Objective: support, co-ordinate and optimise the visitor experience potential across the county.

○ **Goal G4: Provide for enhanced levels of Educational Attainment and Skills Development**

High-Level Objective: encourage and support upskilling, job mobility and enterprise creation in key economic growth sectors.

□ **Goal G5: Develop the Rural Economy**

High-Level Objective: increase the levels of rural economic activity and build sustainability into the rural economy.

□ **Goal G6: Improve Access and Communications Infrastructures**

High-Level Objectives: encourage integrated transport systems through the use of existing and new infrastructure innovations, and increase the use of communications technologies through enhanced infrastructure and skilled communities.

□ **Goal G7: Foster Leadership and Increased Local Capacity**

High-Level Objective: develop leadership capacity in promoting economic and integrated development.

□ **Goal G8: Protect and Utilise the Natural, Cultural and Built Environment**

High-Level Objectives: To encourage and support biodiversity and the protection and enhancement of local heritage and culture, support energy efficiency and maximise the circular economy potential.

□ **Goal G9: Contribute to Regional Growth and International Potential**

High-Level Objective: contribute to the growth of the region and expand the international reach of the local economy.

1.3 Objectives

The suite of Sustainable Economic Development Objectives (SEDOs) for the economic dimensions of the Kilkenny LECP has been developed from the agreed high-level Goals and their attendant projected outcomes.

1.3.1 G1: Enterprise Economy Support – Objective

Goal G1 is an enabling measure to ensure that the LECP has the capacity to respond to the requirements of *Economic Action Area 6* in promoting increased economic activity in line with both county and regional priorities. The goal also aligns with *Economic Action Areas 2 and 3*.

Strong economies are essential to the development of sustainable communities. Kilkenny LECP is founded on the concept that a successful county must have thriving settlements at the core. These settlements will drive economic growth. Human capital, as expressed in educational attainment and skills training, is critical to economic prosperity and a high quality-of-life.

Employment is the key driver of economic activity. The proportion of the population who are in full-time employment is a defining feature of economic prosperity. Europe 2020 provides an employment target of 75%, whilst the National Reform Programme sets a target rate of 69-71%. The International Labour Office (ILO) employment participation rate for Ireland in Q3, 2014 stood at 60.4% (unadjusted) or 60.0% seasonally adjusted rate.

Over the period 2006-2011, male unemployment in Co. Kilkenny experienced a threefold increase, reaching 23.2% in 2011. This compared to a national male unemployment rate in 2011 of 22.3% and a two-and-a-half fold increase since 2006. Female unemployment in Kilkenny experienced a twofold increase, reaching 14.7% in 2011, compared to 15.0% nationally.

Unemployment rates in individual EDs reached levels well above those prevailing county wide, and are highest in Urlingford (38.5% male, 26.3% female), followed by Graigueenamanagh (36.0% male, 18.8% female), Johnstown (29.6% male, 23.3% female), Clogh (31.7% male, 20.5% female) and Moneenroe (32.4% male, 19.6% female), all of which relate to small town areas.

The CSO Business Demography Survey 2012 found that there were 3,273 businesses operating in Co. Kilkenny, employing 13,970 people.

The number of businesses in the county fell across all NACE categories over the period 2006-2012, excepting in Mining and Quarrying (where the number of businesses is very small and increased from 11 to 13).

The total number of businesses fell by over 700 (or 17%) during the recession from 3,996 in 2006 to 3,273 in 2012. The numbers employed in each business sector also declined during the period by an average of 23%, excepting in the Financial and Insurance business sector, which experienced a slight increase of 3%, highlighting the critical importance of this sector to the local economy.

The CSO Business Demography Survey 2012 identifies the importance of the Manufacturing, Wholesale and Retail, and the Accommodation and Food Sectors, as measured by the level of employment supported in Co. Kilkenny. These three sectors accounted for some 9,864 employees in 2012.

Belview Port 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. The Belview Development Zone is 6 km from Waterford City and is an ideal location for industry in agribusiness. The zone incorporates 265 hectares of zoned land, including a strategic IDA land bank, the Marine Point Business Park and Belview Port. Agri-food businesses that are located in Belview benefit from a good transport infrastructure and access to the national motorway network.

Outcomes

Given the current economic performance of the county, the objective of Goal G1 is to strengthen the local enterprise base. This will be achieved through targeting those diverse sectors that are seen to have an increased employment potential during the period 2015-2021. Indicators have identified these sectors to include (but are not limited to) FDI (generally), digital arts, culture-based activity, the tourism sector, and agribusiness.

By encouraging further development across these sectors, the economic dimensions of the LECP will provide for increased levels of job creation requiring a range of skills delivered through a variety of employment models.

1.3.2 **G2: Facilitate Innovation and Entrepreneurship – Objective**

Goal G2 reflects core elements of *Economic Action Area 5: Action Plan for Jobs and Labour Market Activation*, and *Economic Action Area 6: Specific Action to Promote Increased Economic Activity in line with Regional Priorities*.

Goal G2 aims to advance economic activity and employment creation through the encouragement of innovation and collaboration to provide an integrated support structure for enhanced levels of enterprise start-up and growth.

The Gateways and Hubs Development Index (GHDI) 2012, provided a detailed breakdown and assessment of the socio-economic performance of individual Gateways and Hubs as designated under the former NSS 2002-2020.

The GHDI indicates that the Kilkenny Hub has been performing relatively well, and that there is a case for future designation as a Hub in any successor NSS framework.

In the Kilkenny Hub, the number of new firms established in 2011, at the rate of 8.19 per 1,000 employees, is only slightly below the figure for 2006 at the commencement of the economic recession, when the rate was 8.97 new firms per 1,000 employees. This was the highest rate of all of the nine Hubs in the country (the average rate was 6.76 new firms per 1,000 employees). While the comparatively high rate of new firm formations reflects the entrepreneurial activity that exists in Kilkenny, it may also suggest the dominance of the City in attracting entrepreneurs from the outlying towns and villages to start-up.

Co. Kilkenny has shown the capacity to harness its locational attributes, and its well-developed image as a county that is integral to the south-eastern economic corridor, whilst being largely rural in nature. It is also served by a range of third-level institutions that can be further leveraged to support targeted sectoral enterprise innovation: -

- ❑ Institute of Technology, Carlow provides a Research and Commercialisation Support Centre. This provides a supportive environment to enterprise and entrepreneurs in the south-east region, connecting them with cutting-edge research and expertise.
- ❑ Limerick Institute of Technology Clonmel delivers programmes in Business, Marketing, Creative Multimedia, Digital Animation Production and Game Art and Design.
- ❑ Teagasc Kildalton is the largest agricultural college in the country. It is a leading provider of training in Equine Studies, Machinery, Agriculture and Horticulture.
- ❑ The Kilkenny Campus of NUI Maynooth offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses for adult students from Kilkenny and the south-east.
- ❑ Waterford Institute of Technology ArLabs is a one-stop-shop for small businesses in the south-east and beyond, which wish to access the resources that the Institute offers to industry.

Johnstown Castle Research Centre in Co. Wexford and Oak Park National Bio-Tech Research Centre at Carlow are national centres for agricultural research and are a strong asset in terms of developing the region's agricultural base.

Outcomes

The outcome that is anticipated is the creation of an attractive and dynamic business environment that caters for the needs of both existing and new employers and employees. It will enable Co. Kilkenny to capitalise on its image and location through positive engagement with key players, including Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, and Third Level Institutions. Closer alliances between local employers and the enabling State Agencies will increase the opportunity to foster innovative and sustainable employment options.

1.3.3 **G3: Visitor Experience Enhancement – Objective**

Engaging with *Economic Action Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6*, Goal G3 builds on a key infrastructural strength of the Co. Kilkenny and Kilkenny City. It considers both the tourist market and the business visitor (conference offerings).

Tourism is currently a major revenue generator for the local economy. It is estimated to be worth approximately €60 million, and Kilkenny City is a thriving tourist base, accommodating over 200,000 domestic and 204,000 overseas tourists in 2013.

In October 2014 Fáilte Ireland published a set of key statistics on the performance of tourism across the regions in 2013. This placed Kilkenny third behind Wexford and Waterford, with some 207,000 overseas visitors.

Of the attractions in the county and city, Kilkenny Castle attracted a total of 241,302 visitors in 2013.

Kilkenny is marketed as a heritage destination with a large number of associated visitor attractions. There is potential to build upon the contribution of heritage to the economic development of Kilkenny.

Natural heritage is a further significant asset for the county. The high quality, natural environment supports the economy by attracting employers, visitors and inward investment.

There are almost 350 food and accommodation businesses in County Kilkenny, accounting for approximately one in six (or 16.7%) of the total number employed by all businesses. The county has also developed an international profile as a venue for festivals that enhance the visitor offering, including: -

- ❑ The *'Rhythm and Roots'* Festival, which hosts international stars of the bluegrass and country music scenes;
- ❑ The *Cat Laughs Comedy Festival*, now established as one of the top international comedy festivals;
- ❑ The *Kilkenomics Festival*, which brings together some of the world's leading economists and financial commentators with stand-up comedians;
- ❑ The *Source Festival*- an outdoor music festival;
- ❑ The *Kilkenny Arts Festival*, which features the best of visual art, street performance and classical music;
- ❑ *Subtitle*, the world's only festival of exclusively European subtitled films; and
- ❑ The *Savour Kilkenny Food Festival*, which showcases the produce of local food producers.

Outcomes

Given the proven capacity for the tourism industry to generate economic activity across a number of sub-sectors, including accommodation, events, activities and transport, the goal is one of encouraging the spread of the sectoral impact across the county beyond the established honey-pots.

The development of the goal is also seen as instrumental in attracting FDI and business start-ups in the county by reinforcing a positive image encompassing history, culture and the natural and built environment.

1.3.4 **G4: Educational Attainment & Skills Development - Objective**

Goal G4 responds to *Economic Action Area 5: Action Plan for Jobs and Labour Market Activation, and Economic Action Area 6: Specific Action to Promote Increased Economic Activity in line with Regional Priorities*. It builds upon the strength of the county in the context of the existing third-level institutions, and further encourages the prospect of a fourth-level facility.

In line with the SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 the objective will be to support economic development, increase social inclusion, and meet the needs of all learners, communities and employers who engage with Further Education and Training. In terms of higher-

level education and training, this may be further reinforced in the future with the establishment of the South East Technological University based on the integration of Waterford Institute of Technology and Carlow Institute of Technology.

The education and training system is seen as a core part of the local enterprise, development and innovation infrastructure. The goal will help to address the unemployment challenge and provide targeted skills programmes that support job seekers to re-skill and up-skill for sectors where sustainable employment opportunities are emerging. This will be achieved through the delivery of higher quality, flexible and responsive programmes. Working with SICAP and the Action Plan for Jobs, the goal will also be to support initiatives designed to focus on unemployed people, in particular those who are long-term unemployed, and the young unemployed.

Outcomes

The development of an integrated working relationship between employers, and the training and educational providers will be achieved through innovative Enterprise Liaison Strategies, particularly encouraging meaningful dialogue between the ETB and sectoral business networks. The encouragement and acceleration of marketing skills using targeted sectoral networking will be facilitated to complement the existing marketing interventions and supports provided by Kilkenny LED. Additionally, the goal will encourage increased research and development activity on the interface of 3rd and 4th Level academic facilities and local enterprise.

1.3.5 **G5: Rural Economy Development – Objective**

Goal G5 particularly references the framework of *Economic Action Area 2: Promoting Economic Development Through General Local Authority Powers and Functions*, and *Economic Action Area 6: Specific Action to Promote Increased Economic Activity in line with Regional Priorities*.

The Teagasc Rural Towns Index (2014) notes that at national level, poverty rates are higher (10%) in small towns than cities (5%), and that one third of working age households have no one in work in small towns compared with less than 20% in cities. It also notes that spending has fallen faster in smaller towns than in urban areas as a consequence a vicious cycle is generated where higher unemployment change results lower spending, which means more local shops close. In turn, this results in more vacant properties. In Co. Kilkenny, the Index identifies Castlecomer with an index rating of 289, rating it as 'weak'¹.

¹ Index of economic "strength" based on the unemployment rate and the level of migration. The higher the unemployment rate, the weaker the town, and the

Farming and farm related industries are of major importance to the economy of Co. Kilkenny, and there is a strong tradition of progressive farming in the region. The average farm size of 44.7ha is the largest of any region in the country and the standard output per farm as measured by the CSO is almost double the national average.

The region has an ideal climate and soil type for growing grass and grazing enterprises predominate. Dairying is the dominant enterprise in the region from an economic point of view although only one third of farms have a dairy enterprise. There is a cattle-farming enterprise on almost all farms in the region. There are also major food processing plants in the region, including Glanbia, Dawn Meats, ABP Foods, and Flahavans (Waterford).

The National Field Vegetable Census 2009 confirmed that Kilkenny was a significant county for field vegetable production.

The major companies operating in the agri-food sector within Co. Kilkenny include 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.

In order that the above growth targets are to be met, world-class environmental performance will be required across all dimensions of the agri-food sector, from the farm to the factory and on to the customer and consumer. International buyers in the agri-food sector also require evidence of good environmental performance on the farm, as a contractual requirement. This will continue to drive the range of world-class quality assurance schemes that the sector has been developing.

Outcomes

Notwithstanding the impact of the economic downturn, certain areas of Co. Kilkenny have been shown to be more attractive for rural settlement, particularly around the major centres such as Kilkenny and Waterford. The trends show that population increase in urban areas has been stronger than the aggregate rural areas.

The County Development Plan notes that Co. Kilkenny can be divided into three broad categories: -

1. Areas under Urban Influence;
2. Stronger Rural Areas; and

lower the level of inward migration, the weaker the town. Restricted to towns and their surrounding districts that had a population of 1,500 or more in 2011.

3. Peripheral Areas of Population decline

The goal particularly focusses on rural areas that are in decline, and will use a portfolio of actions to increase the level of economic activity. The outcome of this will be to build sustainability into the local rural economies, and enable them to contribute to the economic generation capacity of the county and region.

1.3.6 G6: Access and Communications Infrastructure – Objective

Goal G6 relates specifically to *Economic Action Area 4: Economic Components of the Community/Local Development Role*, and *Economic Action Area 6: Specific Action to Promote Increased Economic Activity in line with Regional Priorities*. It builds upon the amenity and environmental value of the City and county. It proposes that the County Council engages positively with the Societal Change Pillar of EU Horizon 2020, and key aspects will be delivered in close cooperation with Carlow-Kilkenny Energy Agency.

Transport

Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future 2009-2020 notes that delivering a sustainable transport system is an important dimension of the climate change agenda. The strategy concludes that to achieve a sustainable transport system, individual lifestyles will have to change and develop a range of solutions which deal with conflicting goals, including economic growth, reduced emissions, less use of motorised transport and better accessibility.

Kilkenny City and Environs Development Plan 2014-2020 introduced the ‘*ten minute city*’ concept, based on the concept of access all local facilities with a 10-minute cycle or walk from home. Kilkenny City is approximately 3km wide and 4.5km long. Few journeys undertaken within the city are more than 2.5 km in length; and assuming an average cycle speed of 15 km per hour, that equates to 10 minutes. Similarly, the city’s commercial centre is approximately 0.5 km wide by 0.5 km long, it is therefore possible to walk its extent, assuming a walk speed of 4km per hour, in approximately 10 minutes.

Broadband

High-quality reliable broadband is a prerequisite of business. Such a service is not widely available to the rural consumer at recognised industry standard speeds and at an affordable price. Whilst a number of initiatives are in place to improve coverage, it is likely that some areas, particularly in rural locations, will still be unable to access commercial offerings.

Outcomes

Achieving the goal of a more sustainable public transport system will lead to a better quality-of-life, not just in terms of economic competitiveness, greater social inclusion and a healthier population, but also through an improved urban landscape, which will be enhanced through traffic calming and other measures.

The promotion of walking, cycling, public transport and other more sustainable forms of transport as an alternative to the private car, together with the development of the necessary infrastructure and promotion of the initiatives will be supported within Kilkenny LECP.

The LECP will support the development and implementation of innovative solutions designed to improve the quality of broadband services across the county, including those being offered in rural locations. In so doing it will support the concept of the Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) in providing for sustainable enterprise opportunities.

1.3.7 G7: Leadership and Local Capacity – Objective

Referencing the enhanced role of Kilkenny County Council in leading economic and community development in the future, Goal G7 responds to *Economic Action Area 2: Promoting Economic Development Through General Local Authority Powers and Functions*, and *Economic Action Area 4: Economic Components of the Community/Local Development Role*.

Kilkenny County Council has a significant influence on the local economy as provider, enabler, procurer or regulator in a range of matters such as infrastructure, sustainable development, and local services, as well as directly providing over 500 jobs.

The County Council works to promote local economic development in various ways, including co-ordinating response to possible local economic setbacks.

In addition to this significant impact on economic activity, in the future, economic development will be regarded as a core local authority function alongside these more traditional roles.

The guidelines for the LECP note that ‘*while certain local authority functions have a very specific economic character, the economic development role needs to be approached from the perspective that ALL local government activity has the potential to contribute to this overarching goal, and it should be a lens through which all relevant activities of the local authority are viewed. In addition, the impact of local authority functions on local and regional competitiveness is significant, particularly in relation to local housing markets, and also in terms of investment in and management of key infrastructure including roads, and direct impact on the cost of doing business in an area*’.

Outcomes

Optimisation of the role of the County Council will be necessary to embed and prioritise the objective of economic development in all relevant County Council functions, including planning, infrastructure, environment, and amenity.

It will be necessary to consider not only publically owned land-banks but also opportunities for private sector development. The County Council role in housing and related planning and infrastructural functions, are crucially relevant to the overall economy, both in supporting competitiveness and maintaining balance and sustainable development in the housing market to avoid any repeat of cyclical economic instability.

A number of tools will be used to achieve the outcome, primarily focussing on the development of smarter sectoral and local networking forums within the business community. In turn this will see the development of new models of fostering local leadership that will innovatively link across the divide between existing structures such as Chambers of Commerce and the Public Participation Network.

1.3.8 **G8: Natural, Cultural and Built Environment— Objective**

Goal G8 is linked to Goals 3 and 5. It particularly references Economic Action Area 6: Specific Action to Promote Increased Economic Activity in line with Regional Priorities.

The goal recognises that the natural environment performs a wide range of roles in enhancing Kilkenny City, the towns, rural villages and the wider countryside. The environment encompasses natural amenity, biodiversity, education, social and community benefits, and health and well-being benefits. Playing fields, parks, gardens and informal open spaces are not only important as a recreational resource but also provide valuable green areas for wildlife corridors and habitats, act as buffers between different land uses, enhance visual amenity, especially in developed areas, and contribute to the quality-of-life of everyone.

The goal also recognises the importance of the built environment of the county to the creation of sustainable communities as places where people will want to live and work, now and in the future. A quality built environment is required to contribute to a high quality of life by providing safe, inclusive, and well-planned spaces that offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

The social and economic development of Co. Kilkenny is intrinsically linked to its heritage. The county's character and culture are vital assets that help the county compete as a tourism destination and a location of choice for investment. It also provides the basis for leisure activity adding to an enhanced quality-of-life and sense of well-being.

Abbey Creative Quarter

The location of the Abbey Creative Quarter site adjoining the medieval heart of Kilkenny City provides not only an opportunity to regenerate the area economically and socially but also provides an opportunity to repair the fabric of the city, to reinstate traditional streets and slipways.

The Abbey Creative Quarter presents Kilkenny City with an opportunity to create a modern intervention adjoining its medieval core that will enhance its cultural heritage, improve its sustainability and allow it to compete in the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century.

Belview Port Development

The Belview site has excellent access to the Waterford City Gateway, a city with a population of 50,000 and there are three third level facilities within 50 minutes drive, producing 3,500 graduates per year.

Outcomes

The goal is designed to encourage a deeper understanding of the natural, cultural and built assets of Co. Kilkenny. This will result in more enlightened physical development, and will support the creation of a strong culture of environmental sustainability across the county. Within this overarching outcome, the goal will support the greater appreciation of the heritage of the county. In turn this will help to protect the environment and local heritage.

Local communities of place and interest will be encouraged to innovatively consider the implementation of key aspects of the green economy and the adoption of appropriate alternative and smart energy solutions.

1.3.9 **G9: Regional Growth and International Potential – Objective**

Goal 9 is the major crosscutting element of the Kilkenny LECP. It is designed to respond to, and enable all of the Economic Action Areas.

Over the period 2010-2014 the IDA reports that it won 34 investments for the South East Region (Wexford, Waterford Carlow, Kilkenny, and South Tipperary). There are currently 12,081 people employed by IDA clients in the region in a range of companies, with particular strengths in medical technologies.

The Life Sciences and PharmaChem sector has a defined requirement for a skilled labour pool, competitively priced property options, robust telecommunications infrastructure. The IDA's Belview site is available for pharmaceutical, industry and technology use.

Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) offers significant research expertise capability locally to the sector through its Pharmaceutical and Molecular Biotechnology Research Centre (PMBRC). This facility focusses on areas such as polymeric materials, drug delivery, process technologies, separation science and molecular biotechnology.

Outcomes

Between 30% and 40% uplift in investments for the South East Region delivered through IDA Ireland would result in some 44 to 48 projects. This will capitalise on the regional activity, particularly where this is focussed on realising new and emerging international opportunities.

To further support this Goal G9 will facilitate the development of international linkages resulting in potential export market access for local business. It will also encourage FDI and visitors to the county.

This goal will enable the county to develop a more coherent and successful mechanism for pursuing additional funding and resource opportunities. It will also facilitate 3rd Level international linkages and networks that are designed to add value to the existing or emerging business community in Co. Kilkenny and the region.

1.4 LECP Economic Actions

The LECP provides for a suite of 55 actions that will lead to the achievement of the objectives over the time period 2015-2021.

1.4.1 G1: Enterprise Economy Support – Actions

Supporting Economic Recovery and Jobs – Locally² 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

² *DECLG: Local Government Sectoral Strategy to Promote Employment and Support Local Enterprise.*

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 NACEC³, 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: -

³ National Association of Community Enterprise Centres

- ❑ 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 scheme 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.

1.4.2 **G2: Facilitate Innovation and Entrepreneurship** – Actions

Enterprise Start-Up

Goal G1 aims to advance economic activity and employment creation through the provision of targeted supports. Goal G2 complements this by harnessing Kilkenny's economic and locational strengths, and references the availability of a skilled labour pool, and the ability of the county to attract a workforce with new and emerging skills.

The common outcome that is anticipated from the actions emerging from G2 is the creation of a dynamic business environment that caters for the needs of entrepreneurs in establishing new businesses or upscaling existing enterprises. This will be achieved through positive engagement with key players, including LEO Kilkenny, the Kilkenny Leader Partnership, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, ConnectIreland, South East Business Innovation Centre and 3rd Level Academic Institutions. Additionally, closer alliances between local employers and the enabling State Agencies will increase the opportunity to foster new and sustainable employment options.

Strategic Client Support

One of the main objectives of Goal G2 will be to identify and provide strategic supports to scalable start-ups and existing small businesses with high potential and job creation. The South East BIC will facilitate this process in conjunction with EI and LEO Kilkenny, to include provision of intensive mentoring and other specialist support. The South East BIC has access to the European Business Network – EBN and Business Angels and Seed Capital Funds, including the Halo Business Network (HBAN) in the South East.

Abbey Creative Quarter

Kilkenny is the driver of growth for the county at a sub-regional level and also supports Waterford City in its role as a Gateway. Under the South East Regional Planning Guidelines, Kilkenny City has a target population of 28,200 to be reached by the year 2022. The acquisition of the former Smithwicks Brewery site affords the opportunity to re-plan the city to enhance the role of Kilkenny City as an economic driver.

The Kilkenny City and Environs Development Plan and the Kilkenny City Centre Local Area Plan, also establishes conservation, sustainability, public realm and urban design strategies for the site. These will deliver a mix of uses to ensure that this new quarter will be a vibrant and successful addition to the medieval core. It will see the delivery of the following: -

- ❑ A new linear park on the banks of the River Nore;
- ❑ A new landscaped walk along the City Walls and Bregagh River;
- ❑ Conservation of historic buildings on the site;
- ❑ New public, landscaped spaces including a public square at St Francis Abbey;
- ❑ Sustainable and energy efficient strategies for individual buildings and the overall site;
- ❑ A university quarter centred on the regenerated industrial buildings to be retained on site;

- ❑ A new residential /student residential district;
- ❑ Indigenous and international knowledge economy uses on key sites; and
- ❑ Cultural, retail and tourist related uses on defined sites.

The LECP will facilitate the agreement of a phased development strategy for capitalising on the Brewery Site potential taking into account the Abbey Creative Quarter, and 3rd and 4th Level Educational Provision. It will also facilitate the provision of enterprise incubation and advance office space, and enterprise support mechanisms focusing on innovation and research.

Design Thinking Initiative

The brand name '*Kilkenny*' is synonymous with creativity and quality design. The '*Design Thinking*' initiative will also focus on young people, and will deliver enterprise skills. The initiative will be designed to assist those who have a digital business concept to bring it to a pre-commercial or commercial stage.

It will also be suitable for those who have recently started a new digital based business and wish to further develop their skills in technical and business areas.

Social Enterprise

The European Commission has placed the social economy and social innovation at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy, and the Programme for Government 2011-2016 recognises the important role of social enterprise in the country and contains a commitment to promoting the development of a vibrant and effective social enterprise sector. The Action Plan for Jobs 2014 identified social enterprise as a growing enterprise sector that can bring further job gains and deliver economic potential. At national level it was estimated that the social enterprise sector employed between 25,000 and 33,000 people in over 1,400 social enterprises, with a total income of around €1.4 billion.

Social enterprises tend to be set in the heart of rural and urban communities, and often employ those that are most marginalised, and who find it most difficult to get jobs. Typically they provide local services, and so jobs are created in local communities. As well as the multiplier effects from the direct jobs in the sector, further indirect jobs are created either by enabling the development of other enterprises, for example by social enterprises that assist economic and community development, or by providing services that bring people to a community such as local festivals.

The consultation process for the LECP identified a number of significant social enterprises in the County falling into four categories: -

1. Economic and community development organisations;
2. Those creating employment opportunities for marginalised groups;
3. Those that deliver services that bring people to a community such as local festivals or events;
and
4. Those with commercial opportunities that are established to create a social return.

This action will investigate further opportunities by developing a social enterprise strategy taking into account specific needs of local communities. To achieve this, the action will build upon the experience of successful local social enterprises, and will identify models of successful social enterprise that are relevant to communities across Co. Kilkenny.

Incubation Workspace

As a complementary measure to that of Goal 1, an audit of potential enterprise incubation workspace in Co. Kilkenny will be undertaken. The audit will include vacant buildings, office and industrial space. The emerging profile will provide an evidence-base to identify the need for additional space.

G2: Actions Summary

A12: Provide a seamless information, advice and training support service for entrepreneurs throughout the enterprise lifecycle from start-up through to up-scaling, expansion and growth. Particular emphasis will be placed on accelerating the growth of high potential start-ups and businesses with job creation potential.

A13: Develop partnerships with all frontline access points for business, including banks and accountants, to ensure there is maximum awareness of the supports available to entrepreneurs, in particular from KLEO.

A14: Develop support initiatives to target Back-to-Work Enterprise Allowance participants.

A15: Establish a panel of local business leaders, entrepreneurs and enterprise role models that will champion entrepreneurship and enterprise in Co. Kilkenny.

A16: Promote enterprise and innovation opportunities among young farmers, in conjunction with Kildalton College. This should include hosting of an annual Enterprise event specifically aimed at young farmers and also examination of the potential of incorporating enterprise related elements into the curriculum of mainstream courses.

A17: Agree a phased development strategy for capitalising on the potential of the Brewery Site as a Creative Quarter, with particular emphasis on 3rd and 4th level education provision, incubation and advance office space, innovation and research.

A18: Develop a strategy to promote and further expand Digital Media, Animation and Design activities in County Kilkenny, building on the past experience of the Kilkenny Design Workshops. The strategy should include a 'Design Thinking' initiative to deliver enterprise skills to young people

A19: Develop a social enterprise strategy facilitating access to a range of social enterprise supports and services and learning through other models of success. This will include building on the experience of the REDZ initiative; and designing support structures tailored to suit both urban and rurally based social enterprise initiatives, creating jobs and providing potential services into local communities. This should also include an examination of co-op type community shops selling local produce in rural villages.

A20: Undertake an audit of industrial and incubation workspace throughout the County and assess gaps and/or need for additional space so as to better inform the market and highlight zoned and serviced lands in the County.

1.4.3 **G3: Visitor Experience Enhancement – Actions**

Tourism Development

In 2013, Kilkenny achieved recognition as the *Best Tourist Town in Ireland*, one of the *Friendliest Cities in Europe*, the *Cleanest Business Town* and the best *Gathering Festival*. All of this reinforces the sector as a major revenue generator for the local economy of very great regional significance within the sector.

In 2011 the South-East attracted approximately 14% of domestic tourism. Kilkenny has traditionally benefited from the domestic tourism market, particularly for short visits and this market is likely to become increasingly important.

The LCEP will support the development of sustainable tourism as an essential component of the local economy. This will be achieved through co-operation between Fáilte Ireland, Kilkenny County Council, Kilkenny Tourism, the LEADER Implementer and neighbouring counties in the South East Region.

The attributes for tourism in the county include the nature conservation areas, parks, public realm open spaces, rivers, floodplains, wetlands, woodlands, farmland and the built environment of the villages, towns and urban areas. In this context, the LCEP is designed to ensure that sustainable

tourism development should not only increase revenue for the sector, but should also deliver on conservation, environmental and social goals.

The LCEP provides for actions that will sustainably increase the volume of visitors, revenue per visitor, their average length of stay and seasonal spread; whilst protecting the built heritage and green infrastructure that form the resources on which the industry is based.

The LCEP will support the implementation of the Strategic Marketing Plan for Kilkenny Tourism, the Fáilte Ireland Destination South East, and the Destination Kilkenny Development Strategies.

G3: Actions Summary

A21: Undertake an analysis of business tourism potential in Co. Kilkenny with reference to conferences, business and major tourism entry points (such as Rosslare Port and Waterford Regional Airport), marketing and PR and Ireland's Ancient East campaign. This action will closely link with other regionally-focused actions.

A22: Improve the visitor experience and business capability of outdoor activity providers active in tourism. Initiatives to include analysis of the potential for: linking activity hubs and amenities; and the development of the County's river assets for fishing, boating and blueway trails.

A23: Undertake an Asset Mapping exercise across the county to develop area based specific tourism strategies. This will also include initiatives focused on delivering a quality international tourism experience around the Ireland Ancient East Brand. In particular, the potential to develop international "stand-out" products based on Kilkenny's comparative advantage in built and cultural heritage. This action will include the development of the Medieval Mile Museum as a potential 'hero site' within *Ireland's Ancient East*.

A24: Continue development of the 'Medieval Mile' and develop an action plan that links complementary visitor attractions across the county aimed at prolonging and enhancing the visitor experience.

A25: Design a county marketing and communications strategy to include activities around the design and distribution of marketing materials, cluster initiatives, signposting and historical and cultural information signs. This action is aimed at increasing visitor numbers, sustaining the quality of the visitor experience and prolonging the visitor's stay in the county. This action will also include maximising the potential of digital marketing, and use of tourism apps, video promotion and social media.

A26: Develop a strategy for Festivals as an economic driver, building on the very successful range of existing festivals programmed throughout the year in County Kilkenny.

1.4.4 G4: Educational Attainment & Skills Development – Actions

FET and Skills Development

The goal will be to provide for enhanced local education and skilling access, including enhanced access from currently excluded communities. In this regard, the delivery of SICAP in Kilkenny, aimed at tackling poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies, will be supported.

Community and voluntary sector facilities, Arts Centres and Libraries will be engaged to drive new ideas in the area of training and education - specifically for those who wish to build a career in arts and culture. The potential of e-learning to provide access to information for otherwise hard to engage communities will be exploited.

3rd Level Provision

The Action Plan for Jobs 2015 cites the improvement in skills provision that have occurred over the past years, including the launch of SOLAS, the establishment of the Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board, the Momentum Programme, and the raft of employment incentive schemes such as JobsPlus and the doubling of high-end skills as part of the second ICT Skills Action Plan.

The Kilkenny LECP recognises the need to develop high-end skills, in particular in ICT, analytics and engineering. This demand must be met by increasing domestic graduate supply from the local higher education sector. The LECP also notes the local importance of the agri-foods, tourism, craft and the digital arts sectors.

The LECP further notes the importance of ensuring that all have access to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) education, since these are increasingly central to the majority of employment opportunities being created.

G4: Actions Summary

A27: Identify key sectoral needs in terms of management and business development and co-ordinate training activities in response to sectoral needs.

A28: Establish a local Enterprise Training and Education Forum to ensure co-ordinated delivery of enterprise training and management development supports to small business owners and entrepreneurs in the County.

A29: Promote greater awareness of the tourism product/offering across the County (through initiatives such as “Know Your Own County” Campaign); develop tourism ambassadors for the County; and highlight potential career opportunities within the tourism sector. This will also include delivery of Local Tour Guide Training Programmes to upskill service providers, to increase knowledge and co-ordination of existing and new visitor attractions, and to encourage cluster marketing and collective initiatives.

A30: Undertake to ascertain potential job opportunities in Kilkenny and assess skills requirements and qualifications. Respond through education and training initiatives working closely with business community and second and 3rd Level sectors. This action will include the potential of training across a broad spectrum from traditional building skills to digital media/film production and will also involve proactively engaging with third level institutes to further enhance and develop 3rd and 4th level education provision, based on Kilkenny’s strengths and emerging opportunities.

1.4.5 G5: Rural Economy Development – Actions

Kilkenny LECP aims to increase the resilience of the rural economy.

The impact of the economic recession has triggered many changes in rural town and village settings. It has resulted in the creation of empty retail spaces, eroding the attractiveness of villages. This impact has been further exacerbated by the changes that have occurred in the nature of retail activity, increasing the perception of remoteness, and the impact of dormitory lifestyles.

Rural Economy

The development of resilient local economies will be the point of focus. This approach references the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) Report *‘Energising Ireland’s Rural Economy’* noting that rural communities have experienced the most negative impacts of the current economic crisis due to their heavy reliance on declining employment sectors.

Whilst Kilkenny generally benefits from its strategic location and relatively easy access to centres of population, its rural settlements are placed under stress by the conflicting desirability of living in a rural location, and the reducing local employment opportunity. This rural reality creates an environmentally unsustainable situation, dimensions of

which are addressed through the development of more resilient and self-sufficient local communities.

G5: Actions Summary

A31: Prepare and implement a Local Development Strategy for the next LEADER Rural Development Programme.

A32: Work with local businesses and representative organisations to support the regeneration/development of rural towns and areas by developing a strategic development plan for each key town centre (incorporating social and community development aspects and hinterland associations). These will include proposals to enhance the consumer experience and attractiveness of town centres and villages for shopping and visiting.

A33: Support the development of rural enterprise and diversification initiatives.

A34: Support the development of an agri-food-science network and identify and support employment creation potential.

1.4.6 G6: Access and Communications Infrastructure – Actions

Co. Kilkenny has an opportunity to develop its 'green' credentials by encouraging the development and implementation of innovative, integrated public transport modes, moving significantly beyond the existing infrastructure. This approach will encourage the development of integrated models of City Access, Parking, and *Park-and-Stride* to relieve congestion and improve the environment and attractiveness in particular of the compact Kilkenny City core.

Strategic Infrastructure

Belview Port is the nearest deep-water Irish port to mainland Europe. Two thirds of the Irish domestic market lies within a 160km radius of Belview, with direct access to the national rail network and the motorway network. It is regionally very significant in terms of employment creation.

Kilkenny City represents the largest centre of employment for those resident, and also working in the county. Kilkenny attracts employees from throughout the county, defining itself as a strong commuter town, the majority of which travel by car. Inward commuting Kilkenny employees tend to be most distributed in the centre and north of the county.

Co. Waterford is the largest employment centre for those who are resident in Co. Kilkenny but are working outside of the county, comprising a majority of 50%; 45% of which are employed in Waterford City alone, whilst the remaining 5% are employed elsewhere in Co. Waterford.

Broadband

It is necessary to encourage the development of an enhanced Broadband Infrastructure, particularly in the rural areas, by ensuring that improvement initiatives are successful, and that innovative local solutions are enabled.

G6: Actions Summary

A35: Maximise the potential of the Belview Port industrial zone in terms of infrastructure and job creation opportunities.

A36: Develop a walking and cycling trail strategy to include the potential of enterprise related activities and job creation potential and linked to tourism actions.

A37: Develop a linked County and City integrated transport service. This will integrate with the successful rural transport service *Ringalink*.

A38: Undertake a Broadband Needs Analysis and facilitate the rollout of high speed broadband across the county, in particular in rural areas.

1.4.7 G7: Leadership and Local Capacity

Referencing the enhanced role of Kilkenny County Council in leading economic and community development in the future, the development of smarter sectoral and local networking forums within

the business community will encourage a closer relationship between the agencies that support and regulate the local economic environment.

G7: Actions Summary

A39: Work closely with the private sector in developing a county level approach to ensure that office and industrial developments can come on stream quickly.

A40: Ensure sufficient land for residential and industrial development and infrastructure is provided in the county as set out in the City/County Development Plan consistent with population targets and identified industrial needs.

A41: Establish an inter-agency working group to ensure strategic and efficient support of LECP action implementation.

1.4.8 G8: Natural, Cultural and Built Environment – Actions

The encouragement of a deeper understanding of the biodiversity of Co. Kilkenny will result in more enlightened physical development, and will support the creation of a strong culture of environmental sustainability across the county. It will also underpin the protection of the environment and local heritage as a driver of economic gain, rendering the locality as a better place in which to live and work.

A greater appreciation of the heritage of the county will encourage the implementation of measures that expand upon key aspects of both cultural and educational tourism, building on the existing urban and rural infrastructure of the county.

G8: Actions Summary

A42: Undertake to map the natural and cultural assets within the county with a view to a maintenance and protection whilst addressing access to job creation and skills development potential.

A43: Support community and farm based initiatives to encourage wildlife and environmental protection.

A44: Design and implement biodiversity awareness initiatives within industry, schools and communities.

A45: Support the development of the Abbey Creative Quarter.

A46: Expand the Better Energy Communities Initiative in Kilkenny to promote energy efficiency measures and promote cost savings through energy efficiency programmes and training for the local business community. This will include working with the Carlow Kilkenny Energy Agency to promote energy efficiency best practice.

1.4.9 G9: Regional Growth and International Potential – Actions

Co. Kilkenny is already involved in a significant number of regional initiatives that have a direct bearing on the economic development of the region. These will be reinforced through this goal, which will seek to initialise and capitalise on regional activity, particularly where this is focussed on realising new and emerging international opportunities.

From an economic perspective, the development of international linkages that result in access to international markets in terms of tourism and export potential for local business will be facilitated.

It is recognised that Local Authorities in Ireland have not been accessing and availing of EU funding opportunities to the same extent as other European municipalities. This goal will be used to enable the county to develop a more coherent and successful mechanism for pursuing additional funding and resource opportunities, and in developing innovative engagement models that seek to scale-up local actions to identify and secure funding opportunities. Focus will be given to INTERREG funding and the new ERDF Urban Development Fund, and also enabling actions related to relevant initiatives of investment programmes such as the SFI.

The South East BIC is actively involved in EU projects. Through its EBN connection and membership of Special Interest Groups the BIC can assist suitable companies to be engaged / participate in suitable Horizon 2020 projects. In particular South East BIC is involved in the BIO Economy Group which is heavily orientated towards agriculture and ICT. LEOP Kilkenny will work with South East BIC to ensure that these opportunities can be maximised for businesses in County Kilkenny. It is expected that Goal G9 will result in more local companies participating in EU projects and benefitting from greater transference of ideas, processes and project funding opportunities.

G9: Actions Summary

A47: Support industry-led fora and strategic collaborations at regional level, with a view to contributing to the overall development of the South East Region. In particular, Kilkenny County Council will proactively support the implementation of the South East Enterprise Action Plan for Jobs. This will include collating baseline data to contribute to the actions in the South East Action Plan for Jobs.

A48: Support the participation of Kilkenny based enterprises in best practice events across the South East Region, including participation in EU funded programmes and initiatives.

A49: Further advance the proposal for a European centre of excellence for ICT in Agriculture in Kilkenny.

A50: Participate in the eDIGIREGION Project and assist in the development of smart specialisation strategies for the South East Region.

A51: Proactively work with other local authorities to promote the region and advance regional opportunities, including the implementation of the South East Region - Action Plan for Jobs. This will also include collaborating to develop the South East as an agri-tech centre of excellence.

A52: Assist in the development of a showcase of the region's manufacturing base with a dual focus on: attracting young people to careers in manufacturing; and facilitating manufacturing companies to promote more STEM participation in schools.

A53: Exploit the potential of convergence opportunities in the South East, linking life-sciences with pharma/medical devices, engineering, ICT, and Telecoms.

A54: Contribute to a regional assessment of the economic value added potential of the forestry sector.

A55: Establish a programme on a regional level for large employers to collaborate to brand the region as a tourist destination and promote the Ancient East theme.

1.5 Kilkenny LECP Structure

Table 1 – G1: Enterprise Economy Support

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 <i>BizFest</i> , 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 3 rd 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 <i>Savour Kilkenny</i> 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 <i>Connect Ireland</i> 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 <i>Retail Excellence Strategy</i> 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 scheme 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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Table 2 – G2: Facilitate Innovation and Entrepreneurship

High-Level Goal	High-Level Outcome	Objective	Co-Ordinating Body	Key Partner Organisations	Timeframe	Project Milestones	Actions
G2: Facilitate Innovation and Entrepreneurship	The creation of an attractive and dynamic business environment that caters for the needs of both existing and new employers and employees.	O2: Provide an integrated support structure conducive to enterprise start-up and growth.	KCC KLEO	LEO (L); EI; SEBIC	2016-2021	Enhanced service established. Develop SLA with SEBIC.	A12: Provide a seamless information, advice and training support service for entrepreneurs throughout the enterprise lifecycle from start-up through to up-scaling, expansion and growth. Particular emphasis will be placed on accelerating the growth of high potential start-ups and businesses with job creation potential.
				LEO (L) Banks; Local Accountants	2016-2017	Establish access.	A13: Develop partnerships with all frontline access points for business, including banks and accountants, to ensure there is maximum awareness of the supports available to entrepreneurs, in particular from the LEO.
				LEO (L); Kilkenny Leader Partnership	2016-2017	Support initiatives.	A14: Develop support initiatives to target <i>Back-to-Work Enterprise Allowance</i> participants.
				LEO; Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce (L)	2016-2017	Panel established.	A15: Establish a panel of local business leaders, entrepreneurs and enterprise role models that will champion entrepreneurship and enterprise in Co. Kilkenny.
				Kildalton College (L); Teagasc; Farming Organisations	2016-2019	Event established.	A16: Promote enterprise and innovation opportunities among young farmers, in conjunction with Kildalton College. This should include hosting of an annual Enterprise event specifically aimed at young farmers and also examination of the potential of incorporating enterprise related elements into the curriculum of mainstream courses.
				KCC Planning	2016-2017	Agreement of strategy.	A17: Agree a phased development strategy for capitalising on the potential of the Brewery Site as a Creative Quarter, with particular emphasis on 3 rd and 4 th level education provision, incubation and advance office space, innovation and research.
				3 rd Level Institutes	2016-2019	Publication of strategy.	A18: Develop a strategy to promote and further expand Digital Media, Animation and Design activities in County Kilkenny, building on the past experience of the Kilkenny Design Workshops. The strategy should include a ' <i>Design Thinking</i> ' initiative to deliver enterprise skills to young people
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership (L); PPN	2016-2017	Publication of strategy.	A19: Develop a social enterprise strategy facilitating access to a range of social enterprise supports and services and learning through other models of success. This will include building on the experience of the REDZ initiative; and designing support structures tailored to suit both urban and rural based social enterprise initiatives, creating jobs and providing potential services into local communities. This should also include an examination of co-op type community shops selling local produce in rural villages.
				LEO (L); EI; KCC Planning	2016-2021	Phased publication	A20: Undertake an audit of industrial and incubation workspace throughout the County and assess gaps and/or need for additional space so as to better inform

						of audit.	the market and highlight zoned and serviced lands in the County.
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Table 3 – G3: Visitor Experience Enhancement

High-Level Goal	High-Level Outcome	Objective	Co-Ordinating Body	Key Partner Organisations	Timeframe	Project Milestones	Actions
G3: Visitor Experience Enhancement	The goal will encourage the spread of the sectoral impact across the county beyond the established honey-pots. It will also attract FDI and business start-ups in the county by reinforcing a positive image encompassing history, culture and the natural and built environment.	O3: Support, co-ordinate and optimise the visitor experience potential.	KCC KLEO	Failte Ireland; Kilkenny Leader Partnership; Kilkenny Tourism	2016-2017	Analysis Completed and Action plan agreed, locally and regionally focused.	A21: Undertake an analysis of business tourism potential in Co. Kilkenny with reference to conferences, business and major tourism entry points (such as Rosslare Port and Waterford Regional Airport), marketing and PR and Ireland's Ancient East campaign. This action will closely link with other regionally-focused actions.
				Failte Ireland; Kilkenny Leader Partnership; Kilkenny Tourism	2016-2019	Action plan agreed.	A22: Improve the visitor experience and business capability of outdoor activity providers active in tourism. Initiatives to include analysis of the potential for: linking activity hubs and amenities; and the development of the County's river assets for fishing, boating and blueway trails.
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership; Failte Ireland; Kilkenny Tourism;	2016-2017	Asset mapping complete. Strategy established.	A23: Undertake an Asset Mapping exercise across the county to develop: area based specific tourism strategies. This will also include initiatives focused on delivering a quality international tourism experience around the Ireland Ancient East Brand. In particular, the potential to develop international "stand-out" products based on Kilkenny's comparative advantage in built and cultural heritage.
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership; Failte Ireland; Kilkenny Tourism; Heritage Council	2016-2017	Phased Action Plan agreed.	A24: Continue development of the 'Medieval Mile' and develop an action plan that links complementary visitor attractions across the county aimed at prolonging and enhancing the visitor experience.
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership; Failte Ireland; Kilkenny Tourism; Heritage Council; Connect Ireland; IDA	2016-2019	Strategic Plan agreed.	A25: Design a county marketing and communications strategy to include activities around the design and distribution of marketing materials, cluster initiatives, signposting and historical and cultural information signs. This action is aimed at increasing visitor numbers, sustaining the quality of the visitor experience and prolonging the visitor's stay in the county. This action will also include maximising the potential of digital marketing, and use of tourism apps, video promotion and social media.
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership; Failte Ireland; Kilkenny Tourism	2016-18	Strategy established.	A26: Develop a strategy for Festivals as an economic driver, building on the very successful range of existing festivals programmed throughout the year in County Kilkenny.

Table 4 – G4: Enhanced Educational Attainment and Skills Development

High-Level Goal	High-Level Outcome	Objective	Co-Ordinating Body	Key Partner Organisations	Timeframe	Project Milestones	Actions
G4: Enhanced Educational Attainment and Skills Development	Innovative Enterprise Liaison Strategies between the ETB and sectoral business networks will be used to accelerate sectoral networking, and the existing marketing interventions and supports provided by Kilkenny LEO. Additionally, it will encourage increased research and development activity on the interface of 3 rd and 4 th Level academic facilities and local enterprise.	O4: Encourage and support upskilling, job mobility and enterprise creation and management	KCC KLEO	LEO (L); IBEC; Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce; ISME; Skillnets; 3rd level Institutes	2016-2019	Key sectors identified, analysis of needs undertaken and training strategy agreed (ongoing).	A27: Identify key sectoral needs in terms of business development and co-ordinate training activities in response to sectoral needs.
				LEO (L)Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce; Teagasc; ETB; Skillnets; 3rd level Institutes	2016-2019	Forum established. Action plan agreed.	A28: Establish a local Enterprise Training and Education Forum to ensure co-ordinated delivery of enterprise training and management development supports to small business owners and entrepreneurs in the County.
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership; Fáilte Ireland; Kilkenny Tourism; Heritage Council	2016-2021	Collective engagement of key players. Action plan agreed. No. of initiatives delivered.	A29: Promote greater awareness of the tourism product/offering across the County (through initiatives such as <i>“Know Your Own County”</i> Campaign); develop tourism ambassadors for the County; and highlight potential career opportunities within the tourism sector. This will also include delivery of Local Tour Guide Training Programmes to upskill service providers, to increase knowledge and co-ordination of existing and new visitor attractions, and to encourage cluster marketing and collective initiatives.
				3 rd level Institutes; ETB; Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce	2016-2021	Assessment of needs/opportunities. No. of initiatives. Engagement of key players.	A30: Undertake to ascertain potential job opportunities in Kilkenny and assess skills requirements and qualifications. Respond through education and training initiatives working closely with business community and second and 3rd Level sectors. This action will include the potential of training across a broad spectrum from traditional building skills to digital media/film production, and will also involve proactively engaging with third level institutes to further enhance and develop 3rd and 4th level education provision, based on Kilkenny's strengths and emerging opportunities.

Table 5 – G5: Rural Economy Development

High-Level Goal	High-Level Outcome	Objective	Co-Ordinating Body	Key Partner Organisations	Timeframe	Project Milestones	Actions
G5: Rural Economy Development	Focus on rural areas that are in decline to increase the level of economic activity and build sustainability.	O5: Increase economic activity and build sustainability into the rural economy.	KCC KLEO	Kilkenny Leader Partnership	2015-2016	Publication of LDS Strategy.	A31: Prepare and implement a Local Development Strategy for the next LEADER Rural Development Programme.
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership (L); Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce; Tidy Towns Groups	2016-2019	No. of area development plans produced. Engagement of cross section of communities.	A32: Work with local businesses and representative organisations to support the regeneration/development of rural towns and areas by developing a strategic development plan for each key town centre (incorporating social and community development aspects and hinterland associations). These will include proposals to enhance the consumer experience and attractiveness of town centres and villages for shopping and visiting.
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership (L); Teagasc; EI	2016-2021	No. of initiatives supported.	A33: Support the development of rural enterprise and diversification initiatives.
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership; Teagasc; Kildalton College; Bord Bia	2016-2019	Establishment of network. Action plan agreed. No of jobs created.	A34: Support the development of an agri-food-science network and identify and support employment creation potential.

Table 6 – G6: Access and Communications Infrastructure

High-Level Goal	High-Level Outcome	Objective	Co-Ordinating Body	Key Partner Organisations	Timeframe	Project Milestones	Actions
G6: Access and Communications Infrastructure	A more sustainable public transport system will lead to a better quality-of-life, economic competitiveness, greater social inclusion and a healthier population. The improvement of the quality of broadband services across the county.	O6: Encourage integrated transport systems through the use of existing and new infrastructure innovation.	KCC KLEO	Port of Waterford Company	2016-2021	Agreed phased development plan.	A35: Maximise the potential of the Belview Port industrial zone in terms of infrastructure and job creation opportunities.
				Faillte Ireland; NPWS; Tidy Towns	2016-2017	Publication of strategy.	A36: Develop a walking and cycling trail strategy to include the potential of enterprise related activities and job creation potential and linked to tourism actions.
				Kilkenny Tourism; Rural Transport Network	2016-2021	Identification and completion of key initiatives.	A37: Develop a linked County and City integrated transport service. This will integrate with the successful rural transport service <i>Ringalink</i> .
				Kilkenny Leader Partnership	2016-2017	Needs analysis completed. Action plan agreed and progressed.	A38: Undertake a Broadband Needs Analysis and facilitate the rollout of high speed broadband across the county, in particular in rural areas.

Table 7 – G7: Leadership and Local Capacity

High-Level Goal	High-Level Outcome	Objective	Co-Ordinating Body	Key Partner Organisations	Timeframe	Project Milestones	Actions
G7: Leadership and Local Capacity	Optimisation of the role of the County Council to prioritise economic development. A number of tools will be used focussing on the development of smarter sectoral and local networking forums within the business community.	O8: Develop leadership capacity in promoting economic and integrated development.	KCC KLEO	KCC Planning	2016-2021	Annual prioritisation of key actions within LECP. Review of progress.	A39: Work closely with the private sector in developing a county level approach to ensure that office and industrial developments can come on stream quickly.
				KCC Planning	2016-2021	Setting and achievement of targets. Cross-departmental collaboration.	A40: Ensure sufficient land for residential and industrial development and infrastructure is provided in the county as set out in the City/County Development Plan consistent with population targets and identified industrial needs.
				IDA; EI; Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce; IBEC; ICTU;	2015-2021	Engagement of agencies. No. of actions progressed and completed. No. of integrated actions progressed.	A41: Establish an inter-agency working group to ensure strategic and efficient support of LECP action implementation.

Table 8 – G8: Natural, Cultural and Built Environment

High-Level Goal	High-Level Outcome	Objective	Co-Ordinating Body	Key Partner Organisations	Timeframe	Project Milestones	Actions
G8: Natural, Cultural and Built Environment	A deeper understanding of the natural, cultural and built assets of Co. Kilkenny. This will help to protect the environment and local heritage.	O9: Encourage and support biodiversity and the protection and enhancement of local heritage and culture.	KCC	Heritage Council; Kilkenny ETB; Skillnets; Failte Ireland	2016-2019	Mapping exercise completed. Action plan agreed. Engagement of agencies. No. of training Initiatives completed. No. of jobs created.	A42: Undertake to map the natural and cultural assets within the county with a view to a maintenance and protection whilst identifying job creation and skills development potential.
				NPWS; FARMING ORGANISATIONS; Tidy Towns; Community and Resident's Groups	2016-2019	No. of biodiversity initiatives completed. No. of individuals engaged.	A43: Support community and farm based initiatives to encourage wildlife and environmental protection.
				IBEC; EI; Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce; Schools; Community and Resident's Groups	2016-2021	No. of biodiversity initiatives completed. No. of individuals engaged.	A44: Design and implement biodiversity awareness initiatives within industry, schools and communities.
				Heritage Council; Failte Ireland; Kilkenny Tourism; Crafts Council of Ireland	2015-2021	Phased development plan agreed and progressed.	A45: Support the development of the Abbey Creative Quarter.
	Local communities of place and interest will be encouraged to innovatively consider the implementation of key aspects of the green economy and the adoption of appropriate alternative and smart energy solutions.	O10: Support energy efficiency and maximise the circular economy potential.	KCEA	KCC; IBEC; Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce; Kilkenny Leader Partnership; LEO; EI	2016-2021	Expansion plan agreed. No. of training initiatives. No. of businesses participating. No. of follow on actions/change in practices.	A46: Expand the <i>Better Energy Communities Initiative</i> in Kilkenny to promote energy efficiency measures and promote cost savings through energy efficiency programmes and training for the local business community. This will include working with the Carlow Kilkenny Energy Agency to promote energy efficiency best practice.

Table 9 – G9: Regional Growth and International Potential

High-Level Goal	High-Level Outcome	Objective	Co-Ordinating Body	Key Partner Organisations	Timeframe	Project Milestones	Actions
G9: Regional Growth and International Potential	The development of international linkages resulting in potential export market access for local business. Enable the county to develop a more coherent and successful mechanism for pursuing additional funding and resource opportunities.	O11: Contribute to the growth of the region and expand international reach	KCC KLEO	RA; Neighbouring local Authorities	2016-2021	No. of fora established. Strategy agreed and progressed	A47: Support industry-led fora and strategic collaborations at regional level, with a view to contributing to the overall development of the South East Region.
				RA; Neighbouring LEOs; SEBIC	2016-2021	No. of enterprises participating. Take up of EU funding	A48: Support the participation of Kilkenny based enterprises in best practice events across the South East Region, including participation in EU funded programmes and initiatives.
				Farming Organisations; Teagasc; WIT	2016-2021	Phased development plan agreed. Engagement of key players. Centre of Excellence established.	A49: Further advance the proposal for a European Centre of Excellence for ICT in Agriculture in Kilkenny.
				WIT; Neighbouring LEOs	2016-2021	Agreement and progression of strategy.	A50: Participate in the eDIGIREGION Project and assist in the development of smart specialisation strategies for the South East Region.
				RA; Neighbouring local Authorities; Institutes of Technology; EI; IDA	2016-2017	Participate in regional Forum for South East Action Plan for Jobs Centre of Excellence strategy agreed and progressed.	A51: Proactively work with other local authorities to promote the region and advance regional opportunities, including the implementation of the South East Region - Action Plan for Jobs. This will also include collaborating to develop the South East as an agri-tech centre of excellence.
				RA; Neighbouring local Authorities; EI; IBEC	2016-2021	No. of businesses engaged. No. of jobs created. No. of participating schools.	A52: Assist in the development of a showcase of the region's manufacturing base with a dual focus on: attracting young people to careers in manufacturing; and facilitating manufacturing companies to promote more STEM participation in schools.
				IBEC; 3 rd Level Institutes; Neighbouring local Authorities	2016-2021	Engagement of key players. Strategy agreed and progressed.	A53: Exploit the potential of convergence opportunities in the South East, linking life-sciences with pharma/medical devices, engineering, ICT, and Telecoms.
				Coillte; Neighbouring local Authorities	2016-2021	Report produced. Actions progressed.	A54: Contribute to a regional assessment of the economic value added potential of the forestry sector.
				Faillte Ireland; Kilkenny Tourism; Heritage Council; Design & Crafts Council; IBEC; Connect Ireland; Local Industry; Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce; Neighbouring local Authorities	2016-2021	Engagement of industry. Strategy agreed. Engagement of tourism stakeholders. Increase in visitor numbers.	A55: Establish a programme on a regional level for large employers to collaborate to brand the region as a tourist destination and promote the Ancient East theme.