

Eight towns develop a vision of their future

Sean O'Riordan

A vision of their future is being developed by people living in eight towns in Co Cork through a collaboration with experts from the Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence, which is part of the School of Business at Cork Institute of Technology (CIT).

The work is being undertaken through the 'My Town, My Plan Community Training Programme', which is ongoing with community representatives from Carrigaline, Cobh, Clonakilty, Kinsale, Middleton, Rosscarbery, Skibbereen and Youghal, and has already sprung up a "wish-list" of projects which will improve the life of locals and their economies.

The programme was funded by development agency SECAD Partnership CLG.

The face-to-face training and consultative sessions by expert facilitators from the Hincks Centre began last September but as Covid-19 hit in mid-March, the April and May sessions moved online.

It comprised four core topics on developing community projects/enterprises, moving from ideas to validation, legal structures/governance and strategic planning, and was delivered in each town over eight evening sessions.

In addition to the core topics, each town group selected four specialist topics most relevant to their future development.

Dr Helen McGuirk, head of the Hincks Centre, said they noticed one general theme across most towns and that's the idea of developing greenways/trails and parks, opening up new areas to be explored and enjoyed by locals and visitors.

"This is particularly pertinent with many Irish holidaymakers opting for a staycation this year due to Covid-19.

The shared learning between the towns has been incredible and the Hincks Centre is delighted to have played a part in empowering these local communities. It was all about the participants and stakeholders working together, thinking creatively, evaluating options and making collaborative decisions to develop clarity and vision for their individual town ideas," Dr McGuirk said.

Ciaran Dineen from Carrigaline said the course gave

Kinsale is one of eight towns in Cork where a vision of its future is being developed by residents.

him the chance to share his thoughts and ambitions for the future of his town.

"By meeting people who shared an appetite and desire to make a real difference, My Town, My Plan has encouraged me to move forward and build upon the conversations we have had with the information and knowledge around community development that has

been provided. It has been a fantastic experience," Mr Dineen said.

Maaïke Mijland from Cobh said her experience of the programme made it easier to focus on community goals, provided guidance with project planning and offered a wealth of information from experts.

"I really enjoyed connecting with my community and

Claycastle Bay beach in Youghal. Many people opted for a staycation this year due to Covid restrictions.

the facilitator and speakers were excellent and gave me useful tools, motivation and hope for the future," Ms Mijland said.

Two free online learning events take place, tonight (Tuesday, September 29) for West Cork towns, and on October 7 for the others.

These will showcase each town's work so far and listen to great speakers from

around the country on topics such as Social Enterprise, retail in towns and tourism.

The events will also introduce the next phase of support that SECAD is offering through the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme.

For more information on the project and to register for the free events visit www.hinckscentre.ie.



Midleton is another of the eight towns to participate in the programme.



All of the towns involved expressed an interest in developing more greenways and nature trails.

TOWNS' VISIONS

■ Clonakilty: Develop greenways to various places in the town and collaborate with the Local Tidy Towns committee to develop a biodiversity garden to promote biodiversity projects whilst developing a historical trail featuring our well-known figures of national and international importance.

■ Kinsale: Set up a community partnership for open communication and consultation so everyone in it has a voice, act as a liaison between the many organisations in the community, and be a forum for applying and drawing down funds for initiatives.

■ Rosscarbery: Document local trails to create a number of walking loops from different locations in the region including Rosscarbery, Connonagh, Leap, and Glandore. Walks will be mapped and properly signposted with information

boards erected at these locations.

■ Skibbereen: Revisit the Skibbereen Traffic and Transportation Study to look at an alternative to the completion of the eastern relief road incorporating the new community school, implement a one-way system on North and Bridge Street, improve parking in the town and introduce cycle corridors at peak school times.

■ Carrigaline: Develop an 'Arts and Culture Centre' by repurposing an existing building which will be a new focal point for the community. The centre will incorporate a mixed-use office, flexible meeting spaces as well as a fully equipped theatrical, exhibition, and heritage space.

■ Cobh: Single-use takeaway litter on the streets, particularly at weekends, is a big problem, therefore, a reusable takeaway container scheme

will be set up to reduce the amount of litter and single-use items used by customers of food businesses on the island.

■ Midleton: Create a large regional park, matching play, culture, and heritage with biodiversity all over 150 acres set along the natural floodplain of the Roxborough/Dungourney River. Green spaces for leisure, sport and outdoor activities with playgrounds, cycle paths, and walking trails will improve the quality of urban and rural life.

■ Youghal: The provision of a 'Blue Way' to make Youghal and its hinterland easy to access by rail, bicycle, running, walking, and by ferry. Key to this is re-opening the rail link from Cork to Youghal which closed down in 1963 and recently extended to Midleton. A ferry service that operated between Youghal and Ferrypoint from the 13th century to the early 1960s should also be reinstated.