



Dunhill Rural Enterprises Ltd

A Case Study.

Background

In 1999 a small group involved with DFBA Community Enterprises Ltd (Dunhill-Fenor-Boatstrand- Annestown) four sub communities in the parish of Dunhill-Fenor, Co Waterford, established Dunhill Rural Enterprises Ltd (DREL) as an associate company to focus on job creation, education, training and research.

Dunhill Rural Enterprises Limited (DREL) is a voluntary community enterprise company limited by guarantee with charitable status. In 1999 two acres was purchased from the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore at Ballyphilip, Dunhill for a nominal sum. The Enterprise Centre is located opposite Dunhill GAA club grounds about a kilometre from Dunhill village. In 2003 9.5 additional acres was purchased making it an 11.5 acre site in total.

On 3rd March 2000, President Mary McAleese opened phase 1 of the enterprise centre. On 13th October 2000, An Tanaiste, Mary Harney T.D. opened phase 2 involving a total of 35,000 sq feet of unit space which included an education centre.

A Prime Location to Invest in, Work in and Live in!

From the very start there was great interest in renting and in some cases purchasing units. 80% plus occupancy rate was quickly achieved. Despite the financial tsunami that hit the country in 2008 the high occupancy rate has been maintained. Outline planning was achieved for small clean industries bearing in mind its location in the Copper Coast Geopark. The Geopark is one of 3 on the island of Ireland and of 100 worldwide. The others are The Burren and Cliffs of Moher in Co. Clare and the Marble Arch Caves in Co. Fermanagh in Northern Ireland. The Copper Coast Geopark was accredited by the EU and endorsed by UNESCO in 2004. This geopark status encouraged Dunhill Rural Enterprises Ltd to set aside 2.5 acres to accommodate integrated constructed wetlands which has proved to be a very important decision. The wetlands are a very effective and cost competitive way of treating the sewerage from GAA clubhouse and ecopark enterprises including the food waste from the artisan food units.

Significant Achievements

Since 2000 over 150 jobs have been created. Some thriving businesses have relocated in other centres for a variety of reasons. Currently there are 20 businesses and 50 jobs in the enterprise centre in the ecopark with enquiries for unit space arriving on a regular basis. In 2014 four of our

artisan food business won the McKenna Food Guide Award for best in country. These include Tastefully Yours, Elda Wild Irish Venison, Glorious Sushi and Healy's of Waterford.

In 1999 DREL purchased Dunhill Castle and 6.12 acres. Dunhill Castle is an historic site and is the ancestral of the Power clan. In 1169 Baron Robert le Poher the first baron of Dunhill built the Castle. The castle provides the meaning of the name Dunhill- Dun Aill, the fort on the cliff, which today dominates the landscape as it faces out towards the sea at Annestown. From 31st May to 4th June 2013 a Power Clan Gathering Festival was held. Over 100 visitors from overseas joined with a few hundred from southeast region. Twenty different events were organised in Dunhill-Fenor-Kill-Tramore and Waterford city in their honour. The festival was an overwhelming success. In 2014 a small group from the organising committee has established a Power Clan Tours initiative. They will be accommodating overseas visiting groups in summer 2014 and future years.

Education, Training and Research

In 2002 the Dunhill Multi-Education Centre was established which is now FETAC / ECDL accredited. It runs a number of education and training programmes and has an interdisciplinary team of 20 highly qualified trainers who deliver accredited contracted courses in Munster and South Leinster areas.

In 2007 in response to a request from Waterford Co Council to develop an overall integrated development plan for the 11.5 acre ecopark DREL established a 'Rural Research and Innovation Cell' to explore all the options available. The Research Cell produced a number of robust business plans on the best business options which would back up future capital funding applications. The overall aim was to secure the long term viability of the Ecopark. DREL funded a team of four people over a 12 months period. Four business plans were completed by the researchers as part of a part time Graduate Diploma in Enterprise in Waterford Institute of Technology which was 80% funded by Enterprise Ireland. A brochure containing a master development plan for the ecopark was produced by the team.

In 2010 two INTERREG Programme applications were successful. These were ACTION which a social enterprise project managed in partnership with Waterford Co Council and Community Forum along with the University of Wales Trinity St David and Carmarthenshire Co Council in Wales. This project ended in July 2012. A second successful INTERREG project HERCULES explored 'sense of place'. This project ended in June 2013. Nine adult students from Waterford graduated with a Graduate Certificate in Tourism 'Sense of Place' from University of Wales, Trinity St David. The transnational partnership included Waterford Co Council with University of Wales Trinity St David and Carmarthenshire in Wales.

DREL has employed four Leader sponsored TUS workers and a job bridge worker all of which have done very well on completing their contracts. They also contributed significantly to the progress of DREL while employed in the centre.

Plans are under development to establish a Dunhill Ecopark Food Hub. There are seven artisan food businesses in the ecopark currently. The hub will include growing our own organic vegetables and researching new products, markets, shared services and exporting possibilities along with holding relevant food related training and education programmes. Joint ventures are planned with WIT and DCU.

National Financial Crisis Hits Hard

Unfortunately the financial crash of September 2008 undermined the development strategy. Since then DREL has embarked on a much less ambitious but possibly a more imaginative series of developments. A wide range of cost improvements and income generation strategies have been adopted. While the company has come through some very difficult times it has survived. In the last six years some outstanding initiatives have been implemented with support from Co Council, County Enterprise Board, Leader Partnership Board and other state and private interests.

In November 2011 in collaboration with Carbery Enterprise Skibbereen Co Cork DREL established Communities Creating Jobs (CCJ) a national voluntary community enterprise organisation committed to sharing ideas, solutions, replicable projects, enabling tools, site visits and other resources of value to communities interested in creating new job opportunities. CCJ is engaged in promoting its strategy currently. Across the country there are a growing number of communities getting involved in enterprise development.

The Best Has Yet To Come

There are a number of positive signs appearing in 2014 which include an increased interest in the remaining vacant units. Both WIT and DCU are working with DREL on new developments. DREL has over the past year researched the production of a local business directory which is due for launch in March 2014. Since 2000 DREL and since 2011 CCJ have been lobbying government, business, civic leaders and GAA with its proposal to create 10 jobs in every community and 20,000 jobs countrywide by December 2020. Interest is growing in it and some breakthrough initiative is expected on it in 2014. CCJ is also planning to increase its membership base this year. Overall the future is looking much brighter for the ecopark and its associated projects in 2014.

DREL has developed a Global Investment Brief to attract foreign direct investment into its Ecopark. It is currently building an international team of contacts to help identify and recruit companies to locate in the Ecopark. The brief has received a very positive response to date.

A word of thanks to Co Council, County Enterprise Board, Leader Partnership Board, Failte Ireland, INTERREG, WIT, DCU and other state agencies including the Private Sector for their support over the years for helping to make so many worthwhile projects possible.

Finally a special word of thanks to all the Volunteers for their expertise and commitment and to Staff Members on various schemes who worked as a team to achieve so much for the local community over the past decade.

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