

Dunmore's future "can be brighter"



Reviving Dunmore East from a fisheries and tourism perspective has been at the heart of the 'Turning The Tide' project, which was discussed at the Ocean Hotel on Wednesday last. | Photos: Joe Cashin

Revival of Harbour buildings urged at Ocean Hotel meeting

The re-energising of disused buildings in Dunmore East Harbour, the creation of new marine and microbusiness opportunities and a meaningful way of engaging with the seaside village's youth were urged at a public meeting held at the Ocean Hotel on Wednesday last.

The meeting discussed the findings of 'Turning The Tide', a major community survey which was designed by the Dunmore East Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) Committee and a feasibility study team from Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

The plan also came with the official backing of Waterford City & County Council, along with Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM).

Some 557 surveys were circulated to residents between November and December, of which 178 (32 per cent) were returned.

Taking into account the seasonal variance in Dunmore's population (after all, 39 per cent of Dunmore properties were vacant on Census Night 2011), it's believed that "up to 20 per cent of the distributed surveys may have been delivered to empty properties".

Tony Ennis & Co inputted the returned surveyed data, which was in turn analysed by Dr Yvonne Byrne, who was among the keynote speakers on Wednesday last.

"The whole idea is that whatever we develop (from this survey) is developed for the village, by the village," said Peter McLoughlin, the feasibility study's leader and WIT's Head of School of Science and Computing.

The revitalisation of Dunmore East in terms of fish processing and packaging emerged as one of the survey's key findings, as did a hope expressed by over 70 per cent of survey respondents that a weekly fish market would be introduced on the pier.

Exactly 70 per cent of the survey's respondents wished to see Dunmore East branded on local produce, 65 per cent wished to see a fish factory, while almost the same number of respondents wish to see a major boat renovation service introduced to the village.

In some of the comments added to the survey under the question 'Would you like the following developed in Dunmore East', it was stated: "We already have (a) fish factory and weekly fish markets on (the) pier," and "A fish factory and support to remove barriers in (the) fishing sector (is) very important".

Adding value to the herring trade and the development of seaweed harvesting and baths was also referenced.

The development of yachting facilities was also raised in the survey, with 106 respondents offering a view on this issue, while 69 chose not to offer an opinion.

Of the 106 that did, almost 65 per cent would be pleased to see an expanded amenity of this kind in Dunmore East, 31 per cent expressed mixed views while 10 per cent were either opposed or not interested in such a proposal.

Respondents felt, (in the order as listed) that fishermen required the greatest level of support in Dunmore East, followed by the area's youth, the unemployed, small business owners and families.

As for what areas presented potential opportunities for employment, tourism and accommodation was noted by 58 per cent of respondents, with fish processing/factories/food just a percentage point down on the top biller. Micro-enterprises and the leisure industry listed third and fourth, but with considerably lower percentages (both in the mid teens).

But perhaps the most concerning outcome noted in the survey was the fact that 24 per cent of respondents said they had been directly affected by emigration, with husbands and children of local residents now working in, to list but a few, Dubai, Australia, the United States, Canada and London.

The input of the Department of Agriculture and the Marine, particularly with respect to the lease holding status of several buildings in the Harbour, is considered pivotal to any plan for Dunmore succeeding in the long term. That the Department had no presence at last Wednesday's meeting did not go unnoticed.

"They're dictating everything that is happening down in the harbour," said a member of the public from the floor. "And yet there are none of them here tonight. We pay their wages and there's not one of them here, and that doesn't seem right to me."

Those at the meeting were assured that Department officials shall be given "plenty of notice" ahead of the next public meeting which will be held in Dunmore when it comes to attempting to enact a formalised plan for the village's future.

But Michael Kennedy of the Dunmore East FLAG Committee believes that the perceived intransigence the local community has long since noted from marine-related officialdom cannot continue.

He explained: "Clonakilty (where the BIM Seafood Development Centre is located) has to listen to us because there is a lot more pressure that can be applied at local government level and local government needs to see something happening here."

“This is a prime tourist destination in this county and region and we cannot be left with a derelict industrial site – which we will have in two to three years’ time – if there aren’t new roofs put on those buildings, and if there isn’t an economic reason for retaining these buildings put in place.

“So we’re actually coming to an endgame in all of this, and it’s not just a village voice at work here; it’s a co-ordinated, networked voice of opinion when it comes to Dunmore East’s future.”

A public consultation process between now and March is to be undertaken prior to the publication of a draft report regarding the five-year plan for Dunmore East. We’ll have more on this survey in next week’s edition.