

**Joint Oireachtas Committee for Rural and Community Development.  
Dail Eireann & Seanad Eireann, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2018.**

**Personal Profile:**

**Employment**

- Joined Waterford Crystal at 14 years of age in 1959 as an apprentice craftsman (cutter) and graduated to master.
- Elected Senior Shop Steward for Cutting/ Engraving/ Sculpting Section (1980-1988)
- Appointed Communications Manager in 1989- 1990 and Education, Training & Communications Manager in 1990.
- Appointed as full time lecturer in DCU in 2006 for Masters and Taught Doctorate programmes.

**Education**

- Through part time study completed Leaving Certificate in 3 subjects, Diplomas in Social Studies, Industrial Engineering and Accountancy & Finance. Sent to DCU to complete, Masters in Education and Training (Leadership Strand) and a doctorate by research on “The Challenge of Educational Disadvantage in a Knowledge Economy” which was completed in 2006.

**GAA:**

- Filled roles of Chairman, Secretary and Under Age Hurling Coach with St Senan’s Kilmacow, Co. Kilkenny and with Dunhill GAA Club, Co. Waterford.
- Represented Kilkenny in Senior, U21 and Minor Hurling
- Currently Trustee and Deise Draw Promoter with Dunhill GAA Club

**Author**

- A History of the GAA in Kilmacow 1884-2010 (2010).  
The Enterprising Community (2018)

**Appointments**

- Social Enterprise Task Group (SETF) in Dublin in 2009.
- “Expert Group in Future Skills Needs” (2000-2004)
- “Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas” CEDRA (2014-2016)

**Social Enterprise:**

Member of founding team of 8 Social Enterprises in Waterford City & County.

1. 1993. DFBA Community Enterprises CLG.
2. 2002. Copper Coast Geopark CLG 1998 (became legal entity in 2002).
3. 1999. Dunhill Rural Enterprises Ltd (Ecopark, Enterprise and Education Centres)
4. 2000. Waterford Local Economic Development Company (LEDC) CLG, Ballybeg.
5. 2004. Dunhill Multi-Education Centre CLG.
6. 2007. Ireland-Newfoundland Connections CLG.
7. 2011. Communities Creating Jobs Ltd.
8. 2017. Waterford Social Enterprise Network (WSEN) is in its infancy.

**Currently**

- Member of Waterford LCDC and Director/Officer with 5 active Social Enterprises.
- Guest Lecturer on Level 7 Certificate in Social Enterprise in WIT- 2018 start up.

**Summary of DFBA Highlights (See Chapter 3)**  
**( 11 Directors on the Board)**

1. DFBA Community Enterprises CLG (1993) has promoted a very successful integrated development strategy 1993-2018.  
DFBA engages over 200 volunteers in affiliated and associated projects. Over 200 acres has been made available in Dunhill-Fenor parish under purchase and lease arrangements by a number of community organizations and clubs. DFBA volunteers are additional to the age old voluntary network that includes Pastoral Council and Sub Committees, 2 Schools, 2 GAA clubs, 1 Soccer club, 1 Squash club and a mix of social, charitable, recreational, cultural organizations.  
DFBA encourages everyone with ideas, skills and resources under “Let the thousand flowers bloom’ operating principle to develop projects while it provides financial, legal, networking, communications, mentoring back up and the support of the local community where and when required.
2. Local scientist has led the development of 26 best practice integrated constructed wetlands with village nature park wetlands, ecopark wetlands, farmers and private households). (RTE Ear to the Ground team is in Dunhill today filming a programme) In July 2013, 9 Chinese government officials with interpreter, cameras and IT tablets visited Dunhill Ecopark to study the wetlands process. It was heartening to observe the exchange of intellectual capital from a rural Irish Community to a high powered team of Chinese government officials.
3. Dunhill Rural Enterprises Ltd purchased and developed 11.5 acre ecopark in 1999 with enterprise centre opening in 2000 and education centre in 2004.
4. Enterprise centre accommodates 36 small businesses and 75 jobs (10 artisan food)
5. The multi-education centre encouraged and facilitated over 2000 people to return to education since 2004 by providing relevant accredited programmes. Many students engaged with further study in WIT, many others secured full time employment.
6. Established Copper Coast Geopark with Bunmahon and Stradbally communities as an EU and UNESCO accredited Global Geopark. Only geopark in the EU and world managed by volunteers supported by agencies i.e. GSI, Waterford City & County Council and UCC.
7. Purchased a 32 acre fen bog in Fenor in 1998 in partnership with Irish Peatlands Conservation Council (IPCC). It has been preserved achieving international recognition and awards.
8. Four GAA members acted as guarantors on a €400,000 loan from Tramore Credit Union to purchase a 4.5 acre site in Dunhill Village and to organize the construction of 40 affordable homes for young families only with under €400,000 profit being made. €200, 000 was allocated to Dunhill GAA to purchase an additional 7 acres (12 in total) and clear outstanding debts. The remainder (approx €200,000) was allocated to Dunhill Rural Enterprises Ltd to purchase an additional 9.5 acres to add to the initial 2 acres and create an ecopark accommodating a 2.5 acre wetlands, enterprise and education centres. The increase in population secured school student and staff numbers, local GAA club and increased business interests in the community.

9. Purchased Dunhill Castle and 6.12 acres, home of Waterford Power clan dating back to 1174. Robert le Poher was first baron of Dunhill.
10. Established Anne Valley Walkway and Wildlife Sanctuary from Dunhill Village to Dunhill Castle (3 kms). Currently extending the walkway from Dunhill Castle to Annestown Village which is another 3 kms. A record number of walkers/ visitors and families use the walkway throughout the full 12 months of year.
11. Boatstrand-Annestown communities constructed a new Sea Safety Centre and cleared outstanding debt through voluntary fund raising and Leader grant.
12. Gleann Ealach Elderly Housing Scheme established in 2001 is due to begin construction of 8 homes in early 2019. It suffered four major setbacks in the period
13. Dunhill Hall (an old school) has been restored with Leader grant support and voluntary fundraising
14. Dunhill “Tiny Tots” Childcare group set up in early 1990s and is accommodated in Dunhill GAA Clubhouse.
15. Fenor “ Kiddies Kingdom” Childcare set up 2010 and is accommodated in Fenor NS
16. DFBA Community Alert set up in 2010 has 220 paid up members. The group work in close co-operation with Tramore Garda using a text messaging system which has successfully foiled robberies and contributed to the capture of lawbreakers.
17. Set up Communities Creating Jobs with Carbery Enterprise Skibbereen in 2011.

Over 50 projects were completed with many of them small but important and awards were won such as ‘Pride of Place’ in 2005. The next step is to complete a strategic development plan for DFBA (2019-2022) and engage the interest of a new generation of volunteers with new ideas, solutions, networks and resources to be completed in first quarter of 2019. Many thanks to Leader Partnership, Council, LEO, Interreg and other agencies for their support.

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### **Overall Research Finding**

Research for “The Enterprising Community” and the completion of social enterprise research on Waterford city and county with Social Finance Foundation and UCC confirmed strong interest in urban and rural communities around regeneration. Communities want it but the State needs to recognize and support them with start ups and sustainability throughout project lifetime. Regeneration and employment are relevant to urban and rural communities, large and small, inner city and remote rural, on mountain and seaside, disadvantaged and resourced. Despite the devastation wrought on so many communities by the financial crisis and its aftermath there are many green shoots emerging and a new form of community is taking shape. While housing, health, €200b sovereign debt and Brexit is likely to cause severe hardships in the future there is hope that foreign direct investment, SME sector, education, agriculture, food, tourism, creative arts and social enterprise will offer many new opportunities and solutions. This is why it is vital ***to launch a new national policy and implementation plan for social enterprise in early 2019 which every political party and member of Dail Eireann and Seanad Eireann can support.*** Social enterprise can leverage sufficient resources to transform Irish society and economy over next decade. Senan Cooke.