

## **The Westmeath Examiner**

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

### **County Westmeath receives €500,000 for town and village enhancement schemes**

County Westmeath received in excess of €500,000 for the town and village enhancement schemes, Fine Gael Deputy Peter Burke told the Dáil. Towns, he said, such as Multyfarnham, Castlepollard and Castletown Geoghegan benefitted from the funding for key infrastructural improvements.

“The Minister (Michael Ring) got a 27% increase in his budget for 2019, which was the biggest increase of any Department,” he said. “That makes an important statement for rural areas that he was able to deliver that for his Department.”

Speaking during Question Time, Deputy Burke said numerous schemes are funded by the Department, said. “A total of €1 billion is available for the rural infrastructure scheme in the next ten years. Mullingar has been a significant beneficiary of the urban regeneration scheme for category B projects. The scheme is worth €2 billion nationally over the next 10 years. A number of the schemes are targeted on rural areas and they are a significant asset in terms of changing the discourse and showing there is a lot to talk about in rural areas.”

In reply, Minister Ring said the Government launched the town and village renewal scheme in 2016, with funding of €10 million to start the process of rejuvenating Ireland's rural towns and villages to make them more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential. “The scheme is part of a package of national and local support measures to revitalise rural towns and villages throughout Ireland,” he said.

The 2018 town and village renewal scheme was launched on 27 April last, he said. The scheme is funded by his Department and is administered through the local authorities. “On 5 October, I announced funding of €21.3 million for 224 projects under the 2018 town and village renewal scheme,” he said. “Since the launch of the scheme in 2016, a total of €53 million has been allocated to more than 670 projects throughout Ireland. The projects cover a range of activities, from improving the public realm to making towns and villages more attractive for locals and visitors alike, and to job creation initiatives such as the development of enterprise hubs and digital hubs.”

### **Urgent need for second runway at Dublin Airport**

A second runway for Dublin Airport is imperative in light of the economic uncertainty presented by Brexit, which requires Ireland to strengthen its links with existing trading partners and to develop trade with new partners, Fianna Fáil Deputy Robert Troy told the Dáil. Work has commenced on this runway, he said, with a view to it being operational in 2021.

“Our airports not only connect us with large trading partners such as the United Kingdom and the United States, they also foster connections with new and growing markets,” he said. “In the past year, Dublin Airport announced new direct services to Beijing and Hong Kong. Amidst the growing uncertainty of Brexit, the capacity of our airports to offer new direct services and increase the country's connectivity is of great comfort to businesses and citizens concerned about their economic futures.”

Deputy Troy said conditions attached to the planning permission for the second runway following an appeal to An Bord Pleanála resulted in 31 restrictions being added to the planning permission, two of which would limit flight arrivals and departures at Dublin Airport to 65 between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. and permit no night time flights on the new runway.

“To put this into perspective, currently at night time, 99 flights arrive and depart from Dublin Airport, which means night time flight movement would be reduced by approximately one third,” he said. “It is estimated by the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) that these restrictions, if applied, would result in the loss of more than 14,000 jobs. It is the view of Dublin Airport that these restrictions are not fit for purpose and that the DAA needs to appeal them before the second runway is scheduled to be completed. However, for this appeal to proceed, there must be an independent Noise Regulator in place.”