

# LEITRIM COUNTY COUNCIL ENCOURAGE THE DIASPORA TO TAKE A FRESH LOOK AT LEITRIM THROUGH A SERIES OF COUNTY PROMOTION EVENTS!



Carrick on Shannon Business Campus

Leitrim has long been cherished as a privileged place to call home by those lucky to have been raised there, but recently Leitrim County Council has been asking people across New York, Dublin, London, and beyond, could they and their businesses thrive there too?

The ambitious campaign, entitled ‘Take a Fresh Look at Leitrim’, presented the county as a dynamic location in which to live, work, and invest. Three events promoting the county (held in New York, Dublin, and London) were delivered in partnership with Leitrim GAA and LGFA, tapping into the county’s largest community organisation and its huge ex-pat populations and networks in both America and the UK. Case studies from a diverse range of thriving businesses located in the county, as well as personal testimonies as to why people chose Leitrim above any other location, featured at each gathering.



The Boardwalk at Acres Lake

Such professional and personal testimonies are backed up by hard data. On Wednesday, November 29th, 2023, the day before the ‘Take a Fresh Look at Leitrim’ event in the RDS in Dublin, hosted in partnership with the Leitrim Dublin Business Network, Leitrim was crowned the top county in Ireland in which to set up a business. Using extensive research, Procure.ie, considered crucial factors like population, average office rent per square metre, average square metre, average salary, jobs per capita, and houses

to rent per capita, before awarding Leitrim the top spot. Across the series, contributors painted a picture of a changing county with significant business opportunities that remains in touch with its core values of community and quality of life.



Panel Members at the Irish Cultural Centre, Hamersmith, London

The first event was scheduled for April 2023 to coincide with Leitrim’s Connacht Championship match in New York. Fittingly, it was facilitated by Caitriona Clarke (Drumshanbo), who, along with her husband Seamus (Mohill), owned JP Clarke’s in Yonkers, then sponsor of the Leitrim Senior footballer team. The event attracted a large crowd to The Rambling House in The Bronx, including a younger generation, for whom it was a new experience to hear first-hand of the opportunities now available in the county. These included investment opportunities, high quality jobs available across growth industries and remote working options available in the post pandemic era.

Contributors included Brian Conroy, Head of IDA in North America; Lar Power, then Chief Executive Leitrim Co Council; and Keith Dimmock, Principal Architect, Cora Systems, Carrick-on-Shannon. One of the county’s premier businesses, software company Cora Systems were keen to lure professionals to take up positions in their growing company - including Americans or Irish returnees. Mr Dimmock outlined how Cora Systems sells its software products in 53 countries; a Yorkshire man who married Leitrim woman Michelle Reynolds, he spoke of the high quality of life since relocating to her home county when he joined the burgeoning software company.

Leitrim has a strong private sector economy which is dominated by the micro-enterprise sector. The results from the 2021 Business Demography highlight that the majority (95%) of enterprises in the county employ less than 10 people. 70% of jobs are in Carrick on Shannon, Manorhamilton, Ballinamore, Mohill, Drumshanbo, Dromahair and Kinlough.



Mohill Enterprise Centre

One of those businesses, Jinny’s Bakery and Tearooms, Drumshanbo, told their story at the Dublin event, held in the RDS last November. As their strapline suggests, Jinny’s Bakery is ‘a family thing’. Sinead Gillard (néé Maguire) returned to her native Drumshanbo in 1998 to help in the family business, set up by her parents James and Moira in the 1970s. It comprised of self-catering cottages and a restaurant. Sinead loved making breads and cakes for the restaurant and in 2003 her best friend convinced her to try selling her bread to the local shops in Drumshanbo. From humble beginnings, one baker and 16 loaves, Jinny’s is now a team of 11 people supplying brands like SuperValu, Centra, Tesco, Gala and Independent retailers among others and is available online and in 70 locations nationwide. And the business has come full circle. The kitchen and family restaurant that Sinead worked in when starting off Jinny’s bread has now been transformed into Jinny’s Tearooms. These beautiful Tearooms on the shores of Acres Lake look onto the Blueway - a haven for walkers, cyclists, boating tourists and the local community.

Leitrim County Council’s current Capital Investment Programme includes a total investment of €400m (or €12,000 per person) and includes €70m on tourism - including recreational amenities and trails such as Acres Lake boardwalk and the planned Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR) Greenway - and €50m on economic projects, including readying the Carrick-on-Shannon Business Campus. This 112,000 sq. ft ‘Grade A’ turnkey office accommodation is a prestigious, regional, high tech business campus. It currently boasts five tenants, Avant Money, PAYAC, MGC Derma, Image Skillnet and WERLA, with current employment on site of almost 300 staff.

The Council’s has significant ambition for future development of the Campus, among the opportunities identified the Campus has the potential as a location for a European landing site or European HQ. The ultimate goal of Leitrim County Council is to see further job creation through multiple operations at the Campus with a target job creation of 700 in total for the site.

At the Dublin event, Leitrim County Council were delighted to have CEO of IDA Ireland the foreign direct investment agency of the Irish Government, Michael Lohan as part of the panel on the evening. In 2022, there were four IDA supported companies in the county employing 1,011 people and 18 companies supported by Enterprise Ireland employing 834 people.



Panel Members at the RDS, Dublin

Mr Lohan highlighted the opportunities that Leitrim and the northwest as a hub have to offer, including Leitrim’s proximity to the new Atlantic Technological University, offering access to 22,000+ students.

The pandemic has transformed the traditional perception of office-based work, with greater flexibility on location allowing for better life balance while opening up the likes of Leitrim as a base for those able to work remotely, either partially or wholly. For those with a flexible office base in Dublin, for example, Leitrim is served by convenient train stations in Carrick-on-Shannon and Dromod, with the north of the county in close proximity to the Sligo terminal. If international travel is required, Ireland West Airport is under an hour’s drive. People are already making the move. In terms of overall population growth, Leitrim experienced a 9.5% growth at the last census compared to national growth of 7.6% and 6.5% in the Western region making it the fastest growing population in West of Ireland and fourth fastest nationally.

Respondents in a recent relocation survey indicated the following positive results:

- 71% noted better work life balance.
- 85% have a lower or similar cost of living.
- 79% reported lower property prices.
- 73% noted career opportunities.
- 88% indicated less traffic.

According to 2022 figures, 14,816 people are at work in Leitrim, an increase of 16% on 2016. 4,100 (28%) of these work from home at least some of the week with more than 1,000 doing so five days per week. Nine local community digital hubs (The Hive, Carrick, Mohill Enterprise Centre, Kinlough Hub, Manorhub/Future Cast Hub/W8 Hub, Manorhamilton, The Food Hub, Drumshanbo, Drumshanbo Enterprise Centre, and Ballinamore Enterprise Centre) enable those working remotely to enjoy a highly connected dedicated office/workspace should they so desire.

ATU produces 5,000+ graduates per annum, where the most popular fields of study (based on 2021 graduates) were: STEM (24%) and Business (21%). TUS (formerly Athlone IT) is also nearby. Leitrim boasts a highly educated population base with an 81% progression rate from second to third level education and over 3,000 residents registered as students, while 6,940 residents in Leitrim hold a third level qualification (equal to national average according to the CSO 2022).



Event organisers and panel members at The Rambling House, New York



Event organisers and panel members at the London Event

One graduate of both colleges, Barry Regan, Vice President of Leitrim-based Freudenberg Medical (formerly Vistamed) enthused about his experience of Leitrim as a place to live and work. Vistamed was founded in 1999 in Carrick-on-Shannon. The company supplies the global Medtech industry with tubes and catheters for diagnostic and minimally invasive surgical procedures in the areas of cardiology, urology, endoscopy, neurology and pain management. It boasts a diverse and highly skilled workforce of 800+ employees in Leitrim (with sites in Carrick-on-Shannon and Rooskey) and has ambitious plans for further growth of 30% to meet growing demand.

Mr Regan, speaking to a packed crowd at the Irish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith, London, last March, noted the challenge of finding suitable accommodation for future employees in and around their Leitrim base due to the current housing crisis in Ireland. Mr. Joseph Gilhooly, Interim Chief Executive of Leitrim County Council, acknowledged this nationwide challenge, noted that on the week of the London event (March 22nd) there were only six properties to rent in the county, with 65 more within a 20km radius of County Leitrim. There were a further 152 properties for sale in the county and 697 for sale within 20km of Leitrim (according to Daft.ie). Mr. Gilhooly highlighted the excellent value that the county offered compared to elsewhere in the



Manorhub, Manorhamilton

country (Leitrim has lowest average monthly rental price in Ireland at €1,051, less than half that in Dublin city centre, while the average house price is €184,000).

Mr Gilhooly also highlighted the Croí Conaithe Scheme, which offers a grant of €50,000/€70,000 to refurbish a vacant property. Geodirectory figures indicate there are 2,462 vacant properties in Leitrim, one of the highest levels in the country per capita. Leitrim County Council had received over 140 applications to this scheme and continues to encourage people to consider this grant as a means to providing a housing solution.

Capturing the diverse stories and scale of ambition of the ‘Take a Fresh Look at Leitrim’ campaign isn’t easy, but two contributors manage to capture the essence of the evolving potential of Leitrim. Pat Gallagher, chairperson of

the Gallagher Group (current sponsors of the Leitrim Senior Football team) left his native Aughnasheelin in 1966 at the age of 17. As he recalled the day to the audience in the Irish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith, London, he could have been reading from a John McGahern short story. As he drove down the lane, his younger brother Michael seated in the passenger seat and his parents in the back, he looked in the rearview mirror and watched their neighbour Christy Dolan as he started to board up the windows of their house. From such humble beginnings, his UK-based Gallagher Group has developed into a very successful multi layered business employing over five-hundred local people, some of whom are second or third family generations. He spoke about today’s Leitrim as being unrecognisable from the one his family were forced to leave in order to seek work, and enthused about its ambition and potential.

Another contributor to the Dublin event some months earlier, PJ Rigney, the man behind the global phenomenon Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin, epitomises that ambition and potential. He and his wife Denise had no knowledge of or connection to Leitrim until they visited a potential site in Drumshanbo for their planned new distillery. It required significant vision to see its potential and even more can-do attitude and investment to bring it to life, but Pat recognised a similar willingness to bring his vision to life amongst the representatives he met that day from the Local Enterprise Office Leitrim and Leitrim County Council. Fast forward ten years to 2024 and The Shed Distillery has, in addition to the global award-winning Gunpowder Gin (available in 80 countries and sold in over 60 international airports), laid down the first whiskey in Connacht in over 101 years while also bringing to market its unique Sausage Tree Pure Irish Vodka. The Shed Distillery and Jackalope Café, which collectively employ over 100 local people, has become a must-experience destination for locals and visitor alike.

Summing up his future plans, Mr Rigney explained to the gathered crowd in the RDS that despite predictions of a challenging few years in the global drinks market, they plan to expand both production capacity and their visitor experience. They also want Drumshanbo Gunpowder Gin to become a permanent fixture in the top-ten global brand league table. This level of ambition, he declared, is built on the solid foundations of where the Shed Distillery is located. Right in the heart of Leitrim.



The Hive, Carrick on Shannon

