



# Pulse Hub / Ballinasloe Enterprise Hub

 Ballinasloe, County Galway

The aim of the project is to support enterprise, innovation and start-ups to grow the economy of Ballinasloe and increase footfall. The new remote working and co-working hub will involve the refurbishment of the 6,000 sq.ft. Bank Chambers Building, to work in collaboration with the existing Ballinasloe Enterprise Centre and the Galway County Council Enterprise Space.

The project aims to attract over 40 people to work remotely by 2023. Residents will be able to access new job opportunities, allowing the population to retain and adapt to new types of work.

The project received a €490,748 grant from the Just Transition Fund, a €320,000 loan from Ballinasloe Credit Union and a €250,000 grant from the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in 2021.



## Interview Questions and Responses

**How did you as a community agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?**

Ballinasloe Area Community Development Ltd (BACD), a not-for-profit organisation with charitable status, has a board with membership from the local community, businesses and Galway County Council. The BACD was formed in 1999 to attract investment and jobs into Ballinasloe, initially funded by Ballinasloe Chamber of Commerce, Ballinasloe Credit Union, Ballinasloe Town Council, Creagh Community Development and members of the public.

A board manages the BACD and was a key mechanism for agreeing the objectives of the Pulse Hub project.

**How did you decide upon a single project idea that could deliver against those objectives?**

The objectives of the Pulse Hub align directly with BACD and the Ballinasloe Enterprise Centre which it operates, aiming to drive footfall in Ballinasloe town centre, drive investment and create and support jobs. Furthermore, a remote working hub for businesses aligned directly to the requirements of the Just Transition Fund.

**Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects. Has that consensus held or does it remain challenged by some in the community? If so, how are you dealing with that?**

The Ballinasloe Enterprise Centre is fully occupied and BACD decided that expansion was key to provide a remote working hub and more office space for businesses, which will provide increased revenue through rents.

In 2019, the Pulse Club was formed, a networking group for businesses with training and events provided. The Pulse Club also needed a place to meet. In addition, Galway County Council also had enterprise space which the BACD were using, but was no longer in use. Therefore, the BACD bought the building for the Pulse Hub to provide extra physical space, fully supported by neighbours of the building and the local business community.



Funded through the Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund

### How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

Lyn Donnelly, Manager of the Ballinasloe Enterprise Centre, is a full-time employee with project management experience. The project is directly managed by Lyn and by volunteer sub groups of the board. Lyn's wages are funded by the BEC, generated by revenue from businesses occupying the centre, established over the last 25 years.

### How has the project management approach stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans. How have you managed that process?

The plans for the Pulse Hub / Ballinasloe Enterprise Hub have changed over time. Originally the BACD considered renting a building. However, the agreed approach was buying the premises using the Just Transition Fund, although the concept for establishing a remote working hub has remained the same.

The project management was undertaken by Lyn, internally. Costs were uncertain and putting enough against it was a priority. As costs have changed since the original application, growing from a 2,000 sq ft to a 6,000 sq ft building, the process had to be managed closely by the Board due to a financial shortfall.

### How did you identify a funding need?

BACD identified a funding need by continuously horizon scanning for grant funding opportunities, a role undertaken by Lyn as the single paid member of staff. There was a clear funding need to finance the purchase of a building to establish a physical hub in Ballinasloe town centre.

The shortfall has been covered by securing funding from the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, and a loan from the Ballinasloe Credit Union. In addition, because of extensive business relationships established since 1999, the BACD were able to approach local businesses for unsecured loans. As the BACD is long established, it is able to leverage funds.

### How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

The BACD has established strong connections with existing funders and the local senator raised awareness of the Just Transition Fund with the BACD, who helped Lyn and the BACD with applications, in tandem with support from the board. The expertise of the board was critical in this process.

### Did you have a need for specialist expertise for your project? If so how did you handle that and approach experts?

The BACD tendered for a consultancy to support with writing the documentation to do the public procurement for the design team for the new Hub. This was a really useful process for BACD and was procured directly through existing business connections. Existing grant money from a different funding pot in the Ballinasloe Enterprise Centre was used.

### What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

The main challenge is securing match funding. Initially costs were uncertain, although the BCD obtained cost estimates.

The BCD has also obtained challenge from the local community over the renovation of the building is not through a local contractor, as the BCD has to open the tender to Europe wide contractors. The BCD managed this challenge through communicating channels with the local community, including the Ballinasloe Life Magazine, strong social media presence and directly responding to emails.

### Has the community managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

Although around 11 months from opening the new Hub, the BCD have been approached by local community groups regarding occupying the Hub. However, the main focus is business supporting businesses and there is currently a waiting list for occupying the Hub.

This vision was underpinned by initial market research via a survey through the Pulse Club network, the Ballinasloe Life Magazine, social media and business emails. Out of approximately 95 respondents, around 83 were interested in obtaining individual office space and were overwhelmingly keen on the remote working hub concept.

The project and wider board has stayed true to the project vision, alongside the need for the Hub to generate income and to become a sustainable remote working hub.

### What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

Establishing a strong board who can support staff in making critical decisions is a key learning for any community aiming to establish a Hub or begin to bid for large-scale funding.

The first application to the Just Transition Fund directly and independently was challenging, as previously the BCD have applied as partners with the County Council to largescale funding pots. Following the successful application, the BCD are now independently managing the project and can make decisions more swiftly.

### What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

The key decision was to still pursue establishing the Hub despite the financial shortfall in funding due to larger premises than originally planned. The board were critical in taking a well informed and evidenced risk and pushing forward with the project. This has been critical as the project has now been secured by a loan from the Ballinasloe Credit Union, if other grant funding is not secured in the meantime.

### What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your community as you moved through the different phases of the project?

Expertise on the BCD Board was critical from initial project design, to applying for funding and moving forward into construction phase. For example, the Chair of the Board, Seamus Duffy, was a former AIB Bank in a high-profile management role, with a range of financial expertise. The BCD Board was originally established in 1999 with representation from businesses, the County Council and local community, with membership co-opted annually. Furthermore, a sub-committee has been heavily involved in shaping and delivering the project, meeting in between board meetings with Lyn as project manager.

#### Key contact

**Lyn Donnelly**, Ballinasloe Area Community Development Ltd  
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#### Links

**YouTube video introducing the project:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8Bra4KBeko>

**Ballinasloe Life Magazine (page 7):** <http://www.ballinasloeenterprisecentre.ie/magazine/issue72/Ballinasloe-Life-Magazine-Issue-72.pdf>

**Ballinasloe Area Community Development Facebook page:** <https://www.facebook.com/BallinasloeEnterpriseCentre/>