



# Saint Joseph's Community Centre: New Remote Working Hub and Cycle Tourism Centre

 Kilcormac, County Offaly

This project is designed to reinvigorate the local economy and realise the potential of Kilcormac as a gateway to Boora. The project is aiming increase footfall and dwell time of visitors, supporting existing businesses and creating demand for new enterprises and activities related to the tourism industry.

The Tourist Recreation Hub will include facilities for bicycle hire, a coffee shop, commercial space, train ticket purchase and a tourist office. Within the Community Centre, there will also be a Remote Working Hub which offers co-working facilities for commuters and businesses. The Remote Working Hub will offer double and single office hubs, alongside meeting rooms, conference space and upgraded facilities. The space will offer lower rates to new enterprises and an alternative working option for commuters within the community.



This project received grant funding from the Just Transition Fund for €435,796.



## Interview Questions and Responses

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

The Kilcormac Development Association was set up to stay ahead of the needs of the local community and established a strategic plan for Kilcormac to 2032. The plan identified how to create sustainable employment, enable increased dwell time and rebrand as the gateway to Lough Boora.

A feasibility study was undertaken to better understand how to leverage sustainable employment in Kilcormac which identified the potential development of a remote working hub and cycle tourism centre.

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

The project is harnessing the existing community centre to be developed to attract tourists, become an enhanced enterprise hub and community working hub.

The project idea was identified through the Board of the Kilcormac Development Association, using evidence from the existing feasibility study and based upon the internal strategic plan.

**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 objective of the project has not been challenged, and consensus has remained strong.

This has been supported by the strategic plan, underpinned by a survey to all households which obtained a 35% response rate, several public consultations and engaging with other community groups such as the GAA, Tidy Towns and Green Offaly.



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Funded through the Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund

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

Linda Kelly acted as project manager for the project. As a result, she sits on the executive management team and the Board of the Kilcormac Development Association has played a key role in making decisions.

Linda organised a separate project planning group, named the Executive Management Team with two key members of the Board attending regular weekly or bi-weekly meetings. Hosting regular meetings has been key for managing the project, especially when designing tenders for procuring external support.

### 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 approach of project management through the Executive Management Team has been critical in approaching challenges and revising plans. The Executive Management Team presents the problems and options for solutions, allowing the board to make a clean decision.

For example, due to the cost of materials and construction increasing by 30–50%, certain elements of the project had to be removed. This involved the board playing a key project management role.

### How did you identify a funding need?

The opportunity from the Just Transition Fund came in parallel when the KDA were seeking funding for a larger scale centre and to drive long-term employment for Kilcormac and added economic impact in the community and benefiting local retailers.

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

Linda managed the bidding process directly, with support from the Executive Management Team and the KDA Board. Linda is an employee funded by the KDA using revenues generated primarily from existing tenants.

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

At the very start of the application process for the Just Transition Fund, the KDA directly approached existing consultant contact to support with the application process in initial stages.

Following this, the KDA procured an architect through an open tender process, who subsequently appointed a civil engineer.

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

The main difficulties have been delays to the project relating to the funding application process and securing planning permission. These difficulties have been overcome by working closely with the Just Transition Fund team and Offaly County Council. The expertise of members of the board has been critical in overseeing these difficulties.

Due to high construction costs, the KDA are currently deciding different options for the project and will seek additional funding if required or seek a new arrangement with the Just Transition Fund regarding the usage of the grant funding.

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

The KDA and community have remained true to the original project vision of generating increased local employment and footfall in Kilcormac.

Although different elements of the project may have to change, it will not have an impact upon the overall project and vision.

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

Communities require a clear plan as an initial step, identifying what you want to achieve and where you want to see the plan or village in 10 years' time.

This creates a foundation before applying for funding and identifying what the community is trying to achieve and how you are going to achieve it.

Undertaking feasibility studies can support this process, providing evidence for funding applications.

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

The key initial decision was aligning the project with the existing strategic plan and feasibility study, which was undertaken to identify ways to improve tourism in Kilcormac.

These two documents were merged to identify what the KDA wanted to achieve and the outcomes of the project, centred upon generating employment opportunities, having a direct economic impact and generating revenue for the community centre.

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

The KDA worked closely with Offaly Local Development Company which opened professional networks to develop the project, whilst advising upon governance, funding opportunities and accounting.

However, the KDA Board and Executive Management Team had a strong membership of experienced professionals to design and develop the project and access professional networks to support procurement.

#### Key contact

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#### Links

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/kilcormacda/>

**YouTube:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18TGaEc8kDw>