

Hopeful times

InBUSINESS caught up with Mags Downey, CEO, Ballina Chamber to discuss positive developments in the town and its surrounds as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic.



Mags Downey, CEO,
Ballina Chamber

Q: How is life and how is business in Ballina at the moment?

A: The second lockdown was a very different experience for Ballina in general, and the business community rose to the challenge, embracing new opportunities and reacting more strategically in its approach to trading through the lockdown.

Ballina Chamber and Chambers Ireland have been working in partnership with the local authority, Failte Ireland and the Mayo Tourism Task Force to identify the future needs of the tourism sector in Co Mayo. Since March, we have lobbied hard on behalf of our members, influencing government departments and ministers in the direction they should be taking in relation to business supports for businesses impacted by Covid-19.

Q: Can you tell us about Ballina Chamber's Shop Local campaign?

A: The Chamber's retail group hosted several Zoom calls to strategise and organise a planned approach

to promoting and marketing a Shop Local campaign, commencing in late October 2020. We adopted a lateral way of promoting the businesses and retailers – through videos, live broadcasts, podcasts, interaction with the businesses and making full use of social media. There was a massive surge in Ballina Chamber's voucher scheme, with €150,000 worth of vouchers sold in November alone.

Q: Can you highlight some other interesting developments?

A: Already, there is unanimous agreement that the people of the town want to enhance the presentation, cleanliness and biodiversity of Ballina and the town has committed to working towards becoming Ireland's Greenest Town by 2025.

In 2019, Mayo County Council secured an investment of €3.2m from the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund to transform the military barracks in Ballina town

centre into a digital hub and innovation quarter. Work on this project is scheduled to take place in Q2 of 2021, and we envision that to be a game changer for the town centre.

The 'Ballina 2023' campaign kick-started in Q4 2020, which will be a year-long celebration of the 300th year anniversary of the official recognition of Ballina as a town in 1723. Ballina also won the Bank of Ireland Begin Together Award in the population category 7,000-14,000 in 2020.

The publication of a Public Realm Plan and a new Ballina Economic and Spatial Plan as well as the recent release of a Town Centre Health Check will bring Ballina forward as a vibrant centre for the county and contribute to its economic and social innovation and sustainability.

Q: Why is Ballina a good place to invest in?

A: The town has in recent years suffered from a lack of investment, infrastructure

development and promotion. Despite its challenges, Ballina is mobilising. The level of collaboration among businesses, volunteer groups and Mayo County Council is growing. Groups working for the betterment of the town include the Women in Business Group and the Mayo North Destination Steering group. The famed Other Voices festival has made a second home here, reflecting Ballina's affinity with the arts.

The new Regional and Economic Strategy adopted in January 2020 by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly identifies Ballina as a key town, with the aim of delivering significant growth. The consolidation of Ballina's vibrant town centre will be key to achieving this goal.

With easy rail and airport accessibility as well as its natural resources, warm and welcoming community spirit, Ballina Chamber believes that Ballina is the best place to live, work and invest in.