

**Outdoor Dining Enhancement  
Schemes, 2021**

**Implementation in County Meath**

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## INTRODUCTION

Vibrant hospitality, restaurant and tourism sectors play a central role in maintaining economically active and animated town centres. These sectors were significantly impacted by Covid-19 and associated trading restrictions. The survival of many of these businesses depended on their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and regulations. Consumer behaviour has also adapted considerably during this period with a greater focus on use of outdoor spaces.

A number of Government initiatives were launched to fund outdoor dining infrastructure provision.

In March 2021, the Minister for Tourism and Fáilte Ireland announced details of a €17 million scheme to fund the development of outdoor dining infrastructure for food businesses. The aim of the 'Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme' is to deliver both short and long-term strategies by providing an increase in outdoor dining capacity in the short term, during a time when premises were unable to facilitate indoor dining, and secondly to facilitate a long-term strategy for Local Authorities to develop an appropriate permanent weatherproof outdoor dining infrastructure.

An Additional Outdoor Infrastructure fund was announced in April 2021 by the Department of Transport to allow Local authorities to seek funding for short term measures which would enhance outdoor urban space and improve walking and cycling facilities.

The aim of the schemes is to support economic recovery and business activity, to transform appropriate outdoor spaces within our cities, towns and villages into welcoming, vibrant places that will help support economic recovery.

In Meath, individual businesses were invited to apply for funding supports for outdoor dining infrastructure. The scheme was advertised on [www.meath.ie](http://www.meath.ie) and was managed by the Economic Development Section of Meath County Council. Licenses for street furniture in accordance with Section 254 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000-2021 were required in a significant number of cases. These were processed by the Transportation Department with input from the Planning Department. A bespoke application form and guidance note was developed to streamline this process.

A scheme of parklets were provided by Meath County Council across the County with Department of Transport/NTA funding.

This report provides an assessment of the development of outdoor dining infrastructure in County Meath in 2021.

## 1.0 POLICY SUPPORT

Fáilte Ireland's 'Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme', in partnership with Local Authorities aims to facilitate a greater capacity for outdoor dining by offering support to Local Authorities and hospitality businesses to implement measures to accommodate outdoor dining and also to upgrade and enhance streets and public spaces. The aim of the scheme is to transform outdoor spaces which will support jobs and businesses and will provide much needed assistance to those who have been impacted most heavily by Covid-19 closure measures.

BDP Urban Design Consultants produced best practice guidelines with a vision to: *"Provide an attractive, coordinated and inviting external environment through enhanced public streets and spaces, which enable and encourage people to safely and comfortably dine, enjoy and spend time in the public realm, and allow businesses to flourish."*



## 1.1 SECTION 254 LICENCE

Under Section 254 of the Planning and Development Act 2000-2021, *'a person shall not erect, construct, place or maintain:*

- a) Vending machine;*
- b) Town/landscape map;*
- c) Hoarding/fence/scaffold;*
- d) Advertising structure;*
- e) Cable/wire/pipeline;*
- f) Telephone kiosk;*
- g) Any other appliance, apparatus or structure that may be specified'*

*On under, over or along a public road save in accordance with a licence granted by the Planning Authority under this section.'*

In April 2021 three new Exempted Development Regulations were issued to support the package of measures included in the Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme. These provided:

- For an exemption for a temporary change of use from a premise selling food for consumption on the premises to one which could sell food for consumption off the premises;
- A waiving of the fee for street furniture for 2021;
- For the licensing of awnings, canopies, coverings, parasols, shades, windbreakers, heaters or similar for the purposes of facilitating outdoor dining where tables and chairs are being licensed.

## 1.2 PARKLETS

Parklets, funded by the Department of Transport have been provided to create vibrant streets, support local businesses and provide an attractive place for locals and visitors to dine and relax in. Parklets transform on-street parking spaces into contemporary open spaces to accommodate outdoor dining and additional seating. Parklets create an environment that is more pedestrian oriented and boosts the vibrancy and appeal of outdoor dining. Parklets can be constructed from natural and recycled materials, such as wood, making them a sustainable design response.

## 1.3 OUTDOOR DINING GRANT

The 'Outdoor Seating & Accessories for Tourism & Hospitality Business' scheme, part of the 'Outdoor Dining Enhancement Investment Scheme', focuses on providing financial support to tourism and hospitality businesses for the purchase or upgrade of equipment to provide additional outdoor seating and heaters, windbreakers etc therefore increasing their outdoor service capacity. This scheme financially assists and support hospitality business owners to create an outdoor service experience in a regulated and accessible manner.

Businesses could apply for a grant of up to €4,000 (for up to 75% of the ex-Vat cost of equipment purchased). The grant covers expenditure occurred between the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021. Items which were grant aided included outdoor table and chairs, umbrellas, electric heaters, screens/ windbreakers and outdoor plant stands.



## 2.0 OUR LOCAL RESPONSE - OUTDOOR DINING INFRASTRUCTURE

The Council successfully promoted the Outdoor Dining scheme across all its social media platforms. Meath Chamber also assisted with promotion of the initiative among its members. Businesses such as hotels, restaurants, cafes, public houses and tourist attractions, where food and drink are sold, could avail of the scheme.

All Section 254 licence applications were assessed for compliance with the following criteria:

- The proper planning and sustainable development of the area;
- Any relevant provisions of the development plan, or a local area plan;
- The number and location of existing appliances, apparatuses or structures on, under, over or along the public road, and the convenience and safety of road users including pedestrians;
- Relevant apparatus standards, the impacts on pedestrians, the impacts on residential amenity including those arising from noise impacts and hours of operation, the implications for traffic management, potential impact on Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) and Protected Structures.

Street Furniture Licence and funding applications were processed promptly, by Meath County Council, in response to the urgency created by the Covid 19 restrictions.

Below is a breakdown of Section 254 licence applications received, granted or refused;

No. of Section 254 Licence applications received	Granted	Refused/ineligible
27	26	1





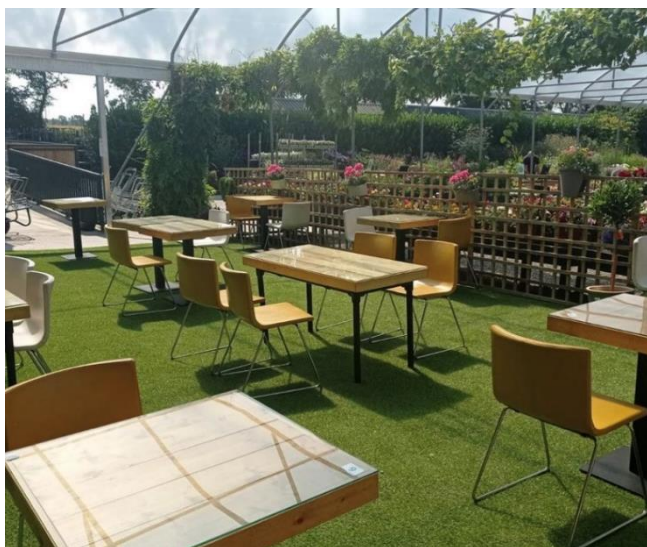
All applications for grant funding were assessed for compliance with:

- Terms of the scheme, i.e. is the business a hospitality/food business;
- Section 254 licence in place if required;
- Receipted expenditure occurred between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

Payments were made by Meath County Council to approved applicants on submission of receipts and photography of the items purchased in situ.

No. of grant applications received	Granted	Ineligible/ incomplete applications
267	196*	71

\*131 have received their grants to date.



### 3.0 OUR LOCAL RESPONSE - PARKLETS

The parklet initiative was also promoted widely by Meath County Council among the business community and wider public with the assistance of the County Meath Chamber. Parklets have been in place since Summer 2021.

Social media promotion included a video on You tube <https://bit.ly/MeathParklets> . Total reach: 7,430 views.

The 'Parklet Partners Schemes' has been established to help promote and manage parklets.

The scheme is administered by the Local Authority who install the infrastructure for parklets, and work with 'Parklet Partner's' who are responsible for the day to day maintenance of the structures.

The Parklet initiative was very successful with currently 25 Parklets in the County. These are located as follows:

Settlement	Parklet
Ashbourne	3
Dunboyne	2
Kells	2
Navan	11
Nobber	2
Stamullen	2
Trim	3





## 4.0 SUCCESSFUL OUTDOOR DINING

Over the last year outdoor dining has truly taken off in Ireland. It is a new element to be considered in public realm design for towns and villages, and can positively contribute to the character and identity of its surrounding area. The layout of outdoor dining focuses activity onto the streets by creating active street frontages. The streets transform into places where people gather instead of simply passing by, creating a safer, secure and more enjoyable public space.

Outdoor dining is not only suitable for main streets it can also be developed along laneways, this is an asset to be considered going forward as laneways can be spaces that encourage anti-social behaviour and consequently are areas people try to avoid.

The provision of outdoor dining now occurring along laneways offers a new sense of purpose by providing active frontages and providing interest and overlooking on the streets. There is an opportunity to enhance laneways by creating unique visual experience through appropriate quality of materials, furniture and lighting.

Overall the implementation of outdoor dining in County Meath has been very successful, leading to an entire new culture around outdoor dining. From main street coffee shops and restaurants to active laneways, people are enjoying eating al fresco more than ever before.



## CONCLUSIONS

Meath has successfully embraced the outdoor dining concept with a notable increase in businesses offering outdoor dining. There is a new attitude towards outdoor dining with more people converting to dine outside. Outdoor dining will be a permanent feature going forward for the hospitality industry, and it is clear that outdoor dining is here to stay and will become a major part of design principles for public realm in the future.

While outdoor dining is considerably more effective during summer months, it is possible to have outdoor dining all year round. Outdoor dining should be efficiently sheltered from bad weather using awnings, umbrellas, gazebos or other structures. Additionally, other methods of winter proofing such as heating should be considered.

Outdoor dining has created a new space for people to gather, it creates a more vibrant and safer atmosphere, which attracts people into towns and villages. Outdoor dining has aided in enhancing the visual amenity of the towns, by creating active frontages and providing interest and overlooking on the streets.

Public Realm and Urban Design plans recognise the need to facilitate outdoor dining infrastructure by implementing wider footpaths. It is important that space being used to facilitate outdoor dining doesn't affect the space required to accommodate wheelchair users and those with visual impairments using footpaths. It is important to note, any temporary structures put in place to facilitate Covid-19 regulations being developed into permanent structures, will require appropriate consents and all designs must incorporate universal design principles and take a design for all approach.

Various new trends and norms are being established with a heightened awareness and greater appreciation for being outdoors and the ability to access public and green spaces, as well as greater recognition of the importance of mental health and wellbeing. Outdoor spaces will therefore play a key role in providing areas where people can relax, be active and participate in events. The Covid-19 pandemic has reconnected many people with their local areas with regard to the importance of having quality local places to enjoy.

The addition of Street Furniture outside restaurants and cafes enhances the streetscape and creates a positive ambience and atmosphere throughout towns and villages. Incorporating outdoor dining into future development proposals will create an attractive network of streets and spaces that are comfortable to meet, gather, work, relax and move through.

Planning Department, Meath County Council,  
December 2021.





