



Woodford Dolmen Hotel: [L-R] Aisling Maher [Woodford Dolmen Hotel], Jim Woods [LEO Carlow], Colin Duggan [Woodford Dolmen Hotel]

Sustainable Agenda focus for catalysing success

Woodford Dolmen Hotel: A Carlow Local Enterprise Office 'Making It Happen' story

Five years ago, one of Carlow's longest-established hotels, the Woodford Dolmen, was in receivership. Today, despite the hardship of the lockdown and the difficulties faced by the hospitality sector, it has more than doubled its staff to 105 and added a fourth star to its rating certification.

For Colin Duggan, General Manager, the journey back from the brink has been hard fought and hard spent, but the results speak for themselves.

"Our biggest success has been our growth," says Colin. "We've spent over €2.5 million on the property in the last five years, and we're looking forward to developing the hotel further from 80 to 120 bedrooms."

Colin says that the Local Enterprise Office in Carlow has played a major part in bringing the 45-year-old Woodford Dolmen Hotel back to life.

"The first time we encountered the Local Enterprise Office was when we were just coming out of recession. We were looking for a partner to help us along the way, to bring us through the process of developing the hotel."

The Local Enterprise Office provides Carlow businesses with a range of financial supports, such as priming, feasibility and expansion grants, and non-financial assistance, including mentoring and networking events. The Local Enterprise Office works with all levels of businesses, be they in the pre-start, start-up, or established growth phases.

"The Carlow Local Enterprise Office is the first-stop shop for businesses within the county that require assistance," says Jim Woods, European Project Officer at the Carlow Local Enterprise Office. "We provide confidential, relevant, and meaningful information to businesses. We also signpost businesses to other relevant supports within the organisation, Carlow County Council, and further afield."

CATALYSING SUCCESS

Through the Local Enterprise Office, hotel management and staff have availed of funding, mentorship, and training, including the Catalyst Optimization programme, a unique EU-backed sustainable development initiative specifically designed for food and drink businesses in Carlow, Tipperary, and Wales.

“The collaborative approach of the Catalyst programme was excellent,” says Colin. “I’m confident that because of what we’ve learned over the course of that programme, we can make our hotel—and Carlow—more sustainable.”

The Woodford Dolmen’s consistent success, aided by the Local Enterprise Office, has laid the groundwork for future expansion. It has instilled a sense of hope in Colin and the staff, even though they are now faced with the prospect of a prolonged Covid-19 downturn.

“Our business has been developed over the last few years through our fantastic teams, be they marketing or the kitchen. Each team has taken responsibility to develop the business. Together, we’re now at a point where we’re always looking to innovate.”

“We see a bright future for the hotel,” says Colin. And they’re not the only ones. In the past year alone, the Woodford Dolmen Hotel has received a number of consumer and trade awards, including Best Place to Stay, Hotel Venue of the Year for Leinster, and a Customer Service Excellence Award from Fáilte Ireland.

“I’m confident that because of what we’ve learned we can make our hotel—and Carlow—more sustainable.”

Colin Duggan,
Woodford Dolmen Hotel

“The Carlow Local Enterprise Office is the first-stop shop for businesses within the county that require assistance.”

Jim Woods,
Local Enterprise Office Carlow

*If you have a business idea, talk to us.
Together, we can make it happen.*