

# BIOCONNECT CAN HAVE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT ON MONAGHAN ECONOMY

## Businesses, primary producers and public asked to help shape focus of new innovation centre



David Macauley, CEO of BioConnect in Monaghan with Cathaoirleach of the Monaghan Municipal District, Cllr David Maxwell, at the site of the BioConnect Innovation Centre building at Knockaconny. ©Rory Geary/The Northern Standard

The Chief Executive of the BioConnect Innovation Centre to be established at Knockaconny in Monaghan this week called on local businesses, primary producers and members of the public to play a determining role in the projects that the €7 million research and innovation facility will help develop.

In an interview with the Northern Standard, Dave Macauley said a unique opportunity was on hand for Monaghan people in the coming months to effectively set the BioConnect agenda and have an influential say on what areas of local economic activity the new development will help guide and improve.

BioConnect has opened a communications platform, accessible through the newly established website [bioconnect.ireland.com](http://bioconnect.ireland.com), where people can enter into a dialogue about what the innovation centre can best do to help drive the Co Monaghan economy. The nature of the Discord forum makes it globally accessible but Mr Macauley hopes that all those in Monaghan with a stake in developing the county's food, health and agricultural sectors will drive the conversation and mould BioConnect's future agenda.

"BioConnect want to facilitate meaningful dialogue with everybody that can make change happen to the benefit of Co Monaghan and the wider region," the Chief Executive told us.

He said the Discord platform chosen was the ideal tool to democratise the debate around how BioConnect can best help Monaghan farming and business get better and hoped that it would build "a strong online knowledge community" who would use the platform to test ideas, share

experiences and information and organise and have input into training and mentoring opportunities.

To get involved in the discussion, it's a simple matter of visiting the BioConnect website, selecting the Take Action button and then clicking the button that establishes a personal link.

Mr Macauley was anxious to dispel any notion of BioConnect being some sort of elitist assembly of boffins and high-tech gadgetry beavering away on obscure research projects of little relevance to ordinary Monaghan folk. The picture he presented of the 1,639 square metre development shortly to come into being on the Armagh Road was one of malleable and flexibly functionality, a shared space that would dispense with the trappings that create formality and exclusivity in order to hit its marks – which he defined as unlocking value in sectors of the local and regional economy that remained tantalisingly untapped, creating new business opportunities and delivering high-value employment that would give returning Co Monaghan graduates an exciting future close to their home place.

"We want to talk to everybody," he stated, "and get them talking to each other. This includes second-level pupils with enterprise ideas as well as the seasoned entrepreneurs and decision-takers, the farmers who are the primary producers as well as those who lead the agri-food businesses, the people with good ideas and the potential investors.

*Continued on page 5.*



# BioConnect can have transformative impact on Monaghan economy

## Businesses, primary producers and public asked to help shape focus of new innovation centre

Continued from page 1.

"The information we gather will be vital to BioConnect in the months to come. We need to know what's important to the people out there so I know the people to hire and the equipment to install so BioConnect is working on projects that are relevant to this area and can make a difference to it."

### FOOD-HEALTH CONVERGENCE

Mr Macauley saw BioConnect playing an accelerating role in the growing convergence of the food and health sectors.

"People are learning that it is better to eat good food now than have to take medicines later," he remarked, pointing to initiatives such as the production of Omega 3-enriched eggs or Vitamin D-enriched mushrooms.

"If we can get the primary producers, and the food and agri and health producers in a genuine, open, honest and ongoing discussion, we can transform the Border counties into an economic powerhouse," was his bold prediction.

"We hope people will be open to sharing experiences

and ideas. We want to democratise access to those who are local leaders in their field and encourage knowledge-sharing - who knows what future investment opportunities could emerge from the conversation?"

He added: "This is a conversation we have to start, a campaign we have to win. BioConnect needs engagement with the people, and we want to make that process as informal as possible. We want to talk to everyone, and we want to take a project-focused approach. Primary producers could be the net biggest beneficiaries from this as there is probably most scope for them to add value."

He cited the difficulties which the poultry sector faced in further expanding in the local region due to the problem of ammonia emissions as one possible focus of BioConnect research, pointing to the benefits of a solution that could remove and recover ammonia from chicken manure and turn the waste material to some productive benefit.

Mr Maccauley saw productive future partnerships between

BioConnect and education providers such as Monaghan Institute in the creation of collaborations specific to the needs of businesses and enterprises in the local area, and the formation of tailored education pathways with students seeking qualifications in the areas of specialisation for which BioConnect had a current or future requirement.

"Getting the dialogue going in a meaningful way will uncover so much value and new ideas and entrepreneurs. It is good to talk, and I think we have created the perfect platform to facilitate the conversation."

### M.D. CHAIRMAN'S APPEAL

Cathaoirleach of the Monaghan Municipal District Councillor David Maxwell who was present for our interview added his voice to that of Mr Macauley in an appeal to Monaghan people to take full advantage of the BioConnect consultation opportunity.

"From the day this project was first announced, and over the period when it started to become a reality through the funding provided by Minister

Heather Humphreys and by the Municipal District itself, I could sense the potential value that it was going to bring," the MD Cathaoirleach told us.

"It will be great to see work commencing and the building at Knockaconny coming into full operation. It will help the Co Monaghan economy make great strides in food-related technology and will offer a section of our graduates meaningful and remunerative job opportunities to return to - for the first time an opportunity to come back to Monaghan and work here in the field of their choice will be available to them.

"I am very excited by what BioConnect could lead to for Monaghan in the next 10-15 years. The vision is the creation of a food engineering and science powerhouse in the central Border region from Monaghan to Donegal, and the BioConnect building could be the nucleus of that.

"It is not every day that we get the opportunity to talk of Monaghan as the driver of something new but that is what Monaghan has in its hands with BioConnect. It can drive the food technology revolution going forward and

it will provide marvellous opportunities for future generations.

"I would appeal to everyone out there with an interest in this area to get involved in the dialogue and join the conversation. Get involved and find out what it is all about.

"David Macauley has a very ambitious vision for this project and everyone can have a share in making that vision a reality for this region. We have to grasp that opportunity."

## National Le

