

Planning Department
Meath County Council
Buvinda House
Dublin Road
Navan
Co. Meath
C15 Y291

10th February 2017

Re: Submission in respect of the Meath County Development Plan 2019 – 2025

We are pleased to have the opportunity to input into the Meath County Development Plan 2019 – 2025 process. Attached please find the submission from the Gormanston Community Association in respect of the above.

Please acknowledge receipt of this submission.

Yours Sincerely,

Peter Brady

Peter Brady
Chairman

GORMANSTON COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE

Gormanston Community Association Company Limited By Guarantee

Our Submission for County Meath Development Plan 2019 – 2025

Our Community Association Progress to date:

Gormanston Community at a meeting in 2014 put forward a number of initiatives to enhance Community involvement and encourage pride of place and set out a mandate for a Community Association. Following that meeting Gormanston Community Association Ltd. was incorporated. Thereafter, the Community Text Alert was successfully launched and completed. The new Community Association gave a more prominent platform to the already regular campaigns on Gormanston Beach with regular clean-ups throughout the year organised in cooperation with Meath County Council. Since then Membership of Community Text Alert has grown and the Community clean-ups have extended to all roads in Gormanston culminating in the award of a Silver Medal in the Meath Anti-Litter Competition in 2016. We also entered the Pride of Place competition in 2016 and proposed a number of projects which enhanced the visual aspects of Gormanston. All these initiatives and achievements aim to fulfil the mission of the Gormanston Community Association Company Limited by Guarantee, to 'preserve and enhance the environment and community of Gormanston'.

Structure of Submission

We have followed the headings in the Meath County Council Strategic Issues Paper and have made our submission under the relevant headings giving page numbers and the title. Some of the recommendations below can be achieved under the present County Meath Plan. We request that serious consideration be given to our Submission document and for the inclusion of our strategic proposals in the County Meath Development Plan 2019 - 2025.

Vision for the 2019 - 2025 Plan – (Reference Page 03 in the Strategic Issues Paper):

The Vision statement needs to be something that will inspire the reader and also guide all activities to fulfil that vision. We would suggest that the two key constituents that should be incorporated explicitly into the vision statement are: -

- 1) Meath County Council.
- 2) The Residents of Meath.

The development of a vision statement is not an easy task but well worthwhile if it delivers that inspiring vision.

A sample of what we mean could run something like, "Everyone in Meath is energised by Meath County Council delivering equitably its services, resources and supports thereby fostering engagement and sustainability throughout all of Meath's diverse Communities and Businesses".

The Development Plan process seeks to deliver a strategy. To do that comprehensively though requires not only a full analysis of the strengths today but also the current weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The Strategic Issues document on which we are basing our suggestions contains only the strengths. We would recommend that Meath County Council conduct an assessment of the weaknesses, opportunities and threats in attempting to deliver on the new vision and devise a strategy to deliver effectively on the overall objectives outlined in Meath County Council's Corporate Plan 2015 - 2019 and beyond. To do otherwise will result in a strategy that will be overly ambitious and unrealistic from the outset.

Key Areas requiring action from Gormanston's perspective include the following: -

- County and Community Cooperation to maximise our efforts, for better interaction with our natural neighbours in Julianstown, Stamullen and other East Meath Coastal Communities.
- The current poor quality of communication between individuals/communities and Meath County Council is a critical challenge to overcome.
- The exceptionally low expenditure by Meath County Council in the Gormanston area over a long number of years is a key weakness, if we are to try to sustain community involvement and growth.
- The lack of apparent appreciation for Gormanston in its efforts to cope with increased traffic volumes and all its attendant problems e.g. speeding, noise, safety issues, littering on roads and beaches etc.
- The level of litter and waste collection we are currently coping with on a voluntary basis is far in excess of what a small village should be expected to cope with on its own.
- The roads within Gormanston village do not in general have footpaths, and the public lighting is poor and out-of-date.
- The bus stops at three of four Junctions on the R132 on the Gormanston Road have no bus Shelters.
- There is a dangerous junction at the Gormanston M1 interchange where it meets the R132 travelling from the direction of the City North Hotel and exiting for Gormanston. This flyover exit road to the former N1 Road has inbuilt design errors from a road safety perspective, from its inception e.g. the look and feel of a roundabout, but it is not a roundabout. This right turn for Gormanston is an 'accident Blackspot', you cannot see vehicles approaching on the rising slope from the R132 Drogheda/Julianstown Direction. Existing Road Design, road markings and signage are source of serious concern for road users at this location.
- Traffic Calming measures are urgently required on the R132 road, north and south of Gormanston Cross to enable school children, elderly and local pedestrians to cross the road safely at this location.
- The poor level of compliance with laws and regulations (e.g. illegal commercial waste dumping, abandoned cars on the beach, speeding etc.) and the equally poor level of enforcement by responsible bodies is a constant frustration to the community.
- The complete lack of exploiting the significant tourist potential of Gormanston; Meath's gateway to the East with the beach; the existence of the passage graves at the mouth of the Delvin River and the recreational importance of those assets to the rest of Meath.

The items listed above are a dispassionate appraisal of the current weaknesses facing the Gormanston community in trying to be responsible citizens in a county we want to be proud to live in and contribute to. The weaknesses are hindering our efforts to deliver on our mission.

Economic Development, Enterprise and Employment - (Reference Page 8 in the Strategic Issues Paper):

Gormanston is a Coastal village located on the north side of the Delvin River, the natural geographic dividing line between County Dublin (Fingal) and County Meath. The combined population of the five adjoining communities (Gormanston, Julianstown, Stamullen, Balscadden and Balbriggan) already exceeds the population of the largest town in Meath. There is considerable scope for all these communities to support and participate in the shared economic activity and in the employment and trade generated in all the adjoining businesses and industries.

2nd level Schools:

There are a large number of schools in Balbriggan plus other specialist training facilities such as the Fingal Adult Education Service. No child living in the three Meath communities, (Gormanston, Julianstown, Stamullen) and Balscadden, other than Balbriggan can safely walk or cycle to any of these institutions, including those attending the new Gormanston Public Second Level School. In most cases this is because the footpath infrastructure is not in place to span the gaps.

Residents of Gormanston, Stamullen and Balscadden cannot safely reach the bus stops on the R132 or reach the existing footpath on Station Rd which leads to Gormanston Station.

Meath County Council in cooperation with Fingal County Council, should prioritise the completion of the missing sections of footpaths and cycle ways where currently there is a failure to link the populations of Stamullen, Gormanston, Balbriggan and Balscadden.

Gormanston Castle, Gormanston College, the private (but available to rent) Aras Preston Sports Complex, the mature bio-diversity of woodland and planted landscapes (residual from the former Gormanston Demesne and Woods), including the Bee Hive shaped Tree House, the Yew Tree Cloisters walkway from the 17th/18th Century, a walled orchard and a wide variety of tree species within the curtilage of the Castle and School, must be protected for the benefit of present and future generations. Heritage Objectives (HER OBJ 1) and (HER OBJ 2) as outlined in the present County Meath Plan (2013 - 2019) should be included in the proposed New Plan.

The main employers in Gormanston are :-

- 1) Gormanston Public (Second Level) School, (in association with the Franciscan Religious Order);
- 2) Gormanston Park Ltd; development of year-round Sporting and various other residential and for non-residential youth and adult training courses in Gormanston.
- 3) Gormanston Woods Nursing Home; caring for convalescent and elderly patients and retirees who choose a sheltered lifestyle.
- 4) Department of Defence, Gormanston Military Barracks; military personnel are stationed here for security duties and provide military training for soldiers going overseas on United Nations (UN) missions.
- 5) Agricultural and Horticultural farming employment in Gormanston is strong due to its warm, fertile early growing soil. Many full-time and seasonal farm workers are employed in crop propagation, harvesting and marketing. We ask Meath County Council to provide whatever supports are available to ensure the continuity of these employments in Gormanston.

Tourism - (Reference Page 10 in the Strategic Issues Paper) :

Gormanston College campus is a 110 acres landscaped demesne where there is situated some temporarily partly redundant buildings, enormous accommodation blocks, a castle, dormitories, playing fields and outdoor running track, an Olympic-size indoor arena, swimming pool, golf course and much more. These facilities cannot be safely accessed on foot. Visitors staying at Gormanston College campus can only access the adjoining Gormanston beach with difficulty by car, because of the lack of viable parking at the adjoining East Meath beach.

In contrast, City North Hotel which is located at junction 7 of the M1, and one of the largest hotels in Meath and adjoining the M1 route north from Dublin, has its own direct access to the Stamullen-Gormanston Road albeit with gaps in the paths and cycle ways. Hotel literature promotes access to sites of local interest such as local East Meath beaches, shoreline, Heritage assets and activities such as walking and cycling.

Transportation and Movement - (Reference Page 14 in the Strategic Issues Paper):

There is a dramatic increase in traffic circulation along Gormanston's rural village roads resulting from the expansion and development of Stamullen and increased usage of the private facilities and sporting amenities promoted by the Gormanston Park/Franciscan complex.

Gormanston College, which used to be predominantly a boarding school, now only takes day pupils arising from its transition to a second level public school serving the educational needs of local students and students from the surrounding Urban Areas. This increase in traffic circulation and the speed which vehicles travel has altered the character of the village and made road usage by pedestrians and cyclists extremely dangerous. The Winter months are a particular cause for concern due to the lack of adequate street lighting in conjunction with the absence of footpaths.

Most of the R132 from Dundalk to Gormanston has a hard shoulder or a footpath until it comes to Gormanston. Thereafter, there is not a hard shoulder, footpath, or cycleway on any side. There is also a failure to light the roadway and junctions for the safety of road users and pedestrians alike.

As in many aspects of this submission there is little or no requirement for road widening or land acquisition in the case of the R132; the carriageway width and its wide roadside soil banks on each side are more than wide enough to accommodate on one side a footpath, cycle path and maintain an A-class road width. It is to be borne in mind that indeed for all of the population of East Meath and beyond, in their daily or weekend individual or group walking, jogging and cycling, there is no realistic North-South alternative route option to the R132. We strongly recommend cooperation with Fingal County Council to ensure the local weekly Walking and Cycling Clubs can explore the East Meath Coastal Heritage and the R132 in safety. It is noteworthy that much of the R132 was chosen for the Giro d'Italia, and many other similar long distance events take place on an annual basis. Upgrades ensuring safety would ensure that these sporting events continue for the foreseeable future.

Another particular characteristic of this stretch of the R132 is that passengers travelling by train out of Dublin, to arrive at 24.00 in Balbriggan, not infrequently arrive in Gormanston station having fallen asleep before Balbriggan Station. Teenagers and adults alike sometimes start walking back to Balbriggan along the grass verge and ditch, usually incorrectly on the east side of the roadway, but after a few vehicle near-misses, often seek help in adjoining homes.

The upgrading of the Junction 7 exit at the M1 to give direct access to and from Stamullen via the City North Business Campus and the Junction 7 M1 Interchange in co-operation with the National Roads Authority is essential. Once completed this should take a considerable amount of vehicular traffic out of Gormanston and help alleviate some of the transport weaknesses identified above.

The car park at Gormanston Railway Station is seriously underutilised for two reasons; the introduction of paid parking and the lack of security in the car park. This has resulted in cars parking along Station Road, causing inconvenience for residents and those seeking access to the beach at Gormanston. Iarnród Éireann have not responded satisfactorily to requests and submissions from commuters to waive the car parking charges (despite the additional premium that travelling from Gormanston entails), or to examine car park security where in the past partial concealment by hedging, and poor lighting, has contributed to car break-ins. Meath County Council should, in consultation with commuters, community groups and Iarnród Éireann, seek to remedy this situation.

Infrastructure - (Reference Page 16 in the Strategic Issues Paper):

Consideration should be given to making bold innovative moves to improve waste management as the current system is not producing any improvement.

Environment - (Reference Page 19 in the Strategic Issues Paper):

Meath County Council must be proactive in securing funding at EU and National level to assess and take urgent preventive measures now to protect the entire coastline in Meath including the Gormanston shoreline. The sustained levels of coastal erosion is clear and advancing at an alarming rate.

Many Gormanston residents and visitors alike, avail of and enjoy Gormanston Beach, also known as Silver Beach and the coastal walk from the Delvin River to the Ben Head sea cliff; even from Balbriggan Harbour to the Boyne. Cleaning, maintaining, protecting and taking steps to contain and prevent coastal and sand cliff erosion along the length of Gormanston Beach must be prioritised by Meath County Council.

Social, Community and Cultural Development - (Reference Page 23 and 24 in the Strategic Issues Paper):

It is imperative that all bus stops in the Gormanston are improved by the provision of paved bus stops away from the traffic with enclosed shelters. Safe access and use of the bus network is essential for employees and to avoid social exclusion and isolation from the wider community. It is also necessary to encourage people in care to enjoy the rural environment, by the provision of footpaths to Gormanston Woods Nursing Home adjoining the L5623 and R132 roads.

It is accepted that not all citizens can always expect a personal official County Council response to their every enquiry and or complaint. We would recommend that all citizens should have the opportunity to approach senior officers in their own Community Volunteer Groups who should be in receipt of a priority standard of appropriate response from relevant officials.

Landscape, Heritage and Green Infrastructure - (Reference Page 26 in the Strategic Issues Paper):

Safe, well planned Public Amenities are essential for the needs of both urban and rural communities of all sizes. Historically, EU grants were available to towns and rural communities through twinning with communities in overseas EU countries of similar geographic location and size. These grants were not always availed-of because of the lack of knowledge of their existence and/or no assistance and expertise to assist with complicated application forms and procedures. Meath County Council should as a strategy investigate, assist and pursue this avenue of funding with communities in County Meath.

In the present County Meath Development Plan 2013 - 2019 it is a stated objective to develop a linear park along the Delvin River. This objective should be proceeded with as this facility is in keeping with similar proposals for Riverside Parks and amenity areas in Stamullen and Ashbourne. This park would support the ecological integrity and biodiversity of both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, and would provide a superior quality open space for both active and passive recreation. The park could comprise of walking and cycling tracks, nature trails and picnic areas. A linear park along the Delvin River will serve the needs not only of the local Gormanston/Stamullen population, but also the needs of the adjoining urban areas of Julianstown, Balscadden and Balbriggan,

East Meath coastal communities observe with great interest the potential development of the Mornington to Slane walkway and would encourage Meath County Council to support greater dynamic development of Gormanston's and East Meath's coastal potential.

Submission Document - End