

Leixlip Town Council



The Case for Retaining Leixlip Town Council

DO TOWN COUNCIL'S HAVE A PURPOSE?

In 2009 Colm McCarthy "Bord Snip Nua" report recommended the abolition of all Town Councils together with the amalgamation of some County Councils. The McCarthy report identified specific ways in which savings of €5.3 billion could be made across most sectors of the economy.

A recent submission by Fianna Fail has endorsed the proposal to abolish all Town Council's. Their "vision" is for the County Council's Area Committees to be slightly expanded.

It is timely that the question is asked, do Town Councils have a purpose? If so what is that purpose and would expanded "Area Committee's" (District Council's) be an adequate replacement.

The program for Government between FF and the Green Party included a commitment for reform of local government. They subsequently set out the following in relation to Town Council's.

- *Establishing town councils in those towns that have shown significant population growth in recent years (including the upgrading of the former Town Commission towns, where appropriate, to full Town Councils);*

In recent years a demand for new town councils has come from

Celbridge, Carrigaline, **Maynooth**, Laytown-Bettystown-Mornington, Ashbourne, Rush, **Kildare** – all large, and growing, suburban or dormitory towns. The common challenge in new or expanded communities such as the ones above will be to develop cohesive and healthy communities.

New Urban Living Study

The New Urban Living project (NUIM Sociology Department) studied the emerging social fabrics of four new suburbs and satellite towns in the greater Dublin region, Lucan, Leixlip, Mullingar and Ratoath, which were considered to be representative of development patterns occurring throughout much of Ireland's cities and towns.

The study found that the 'attachment to place' of local residents was influenced by four main factors:

The built and natural environment; the cultural character and life of the area; the quality of informal associational life and 'elective belonging' – reasons why people had chosen to live in their place of residence.

The study found evidence of strong attachment of residents to their town and locality even though they may have moved there from outside the county, which shows a more dynamic picture of identity-formation below county-level is emerging.

The District Council model as advocated by Fianna Fail fails to understand the sense of attachment that is felt by new urban residents. The Towns of Leixlip, Celbridge and Maynooth for example would be combined into one district council. Each of these towns has a separate identity.

RISKS TO NEW COMMUNITIES

Despite positive evidence of a healthy social fabric in Ireland's new communities, the New Urban Living study did warn, however, that

While there are many ties that bind in suburbia, those ties are in danger of being eroded by the intensification of development and its attendant problems on one hand, and the absence of locally embedded institutional structures for responding to community needs on the other.

All this points to the need for a reassessment of the county tier in the context of local government reform.

UK review says "Place Shaping" is primary purpose of Local government

The recent independent review of local government in the UK suggested that "Place Shaping" "the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens" should be the primary purpose of local government.

Sir Michael Lyons who carried out the review said local government would be responsible for creating secure and integrated communities, promoting economic prosperity benefiting individuals and public services, and promoting sustainable lifestyles and minimising environmental degradation. The Lyons report represents a new wave in thinking on reform, it is currently being implemented.

COMMUNITY

RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION'S

Grants

PRODUCE RESULTS

A grant scheme to improve open spaces was introduced in 1989. Residents Associations were invited to submit proposals for improvements. Leixlip Town Council then provided matching funds.

In excess of €100,000 in grant assistance has been allocated since 1989, with residents association spending multiples of this figure.

€90,000 SPENT PRUNING TREES IN LEIXLIP HOUSING ESTATES

Almost all of the housing estates in the town have benefited from Leixlip Town Council's tree pruning scheme, with over €90,000 spent to date. Initially the then Town Commissioners engaged Coillte Teo to do a tree survey which was followed by a management plan. A similar service is not provided by Kildare County Council.

TOWN TWINNING

Leixlip Town Council hosted the inaugural meeting of the Town Twinning Association in 1993. The Town is twinned with Bressuire in France and Niles in Chicago. Below are some of the successes.

Bressuire:

Student work placements - by Leixlip students in Bressuire and Bressuire students in Leixlip School exchange between Coláiste Chiaráin and Lycée St. Joseph for at least 14 years.

Sports exchanges between Leixlip United; Barnhall Rugby Club; Leixlip Tennis Club and their counterparts in Bressuire.

Cultural exchanges between Leixlip schools of Irish dancing, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann; Art exhibitions by Leixlip artists;

Tourism promotion; French/Irish history talks etc.

YOUTH PREMISES CORE FUNDING

An annual payment of €25,000 to Leixlip Youth Premises Group is paid for offices rented by Leixlip Town Council. This is critical core funding for the centre.

SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT SCHEME ENDS 2003

At its peak the Community Employment Scheme had 17 employees. They undertook maintenance and project work under the direction of the Town Council. The scheme ended in 2003 which was a time of near full employment. All the participants progressed into paid employment. Leixlip Town Council contributed over €80,000 towards the project. The scheme was a major loss to the town. Kildare County Council have insufficient outdoor staff to undertake similar work, that was the reason the scheme was sanctioned.

OUR ROLE MODELS

In 1990 an Honours scheme was put in place by the Town Council. Each year nominations are sought from the public. In excess of 120 people have been honoured across a range of categories including Social, Sporting, Cultural, Business, Non Resident achievement of the year. Some years later a Young person of the year category was added. The awards themselves carry no monetary value, however, they are prized by those who receive them.

Competition

TIDY ESTATES & FRONT GARDEN COMPETITION

Annual Tidy Estate and front garden competition is run with some prizes sponsored by local businesses. The competition is timed to coincide with the National Tidy Towns judging. This has resulted in very favourable comments being made about the maintenance of the towns housing estates. All of this work is done on a voluntary basis.

INDUSTRY & COMMUNITY ADOPT AN AREA SCHEME

In 2003 Leixlip Town Council, in conjunction with Hewlett Packard and Intel, launched an Adopt an Area competition. Public area's outside housing estates are adopted and maintained by volunteers. The scheme was later amended to include a Youth Category.

Keeping Leixlip Clean & Tidy

Below is a sample of the type of maintenance work carried out directly by Leixlip Town Council.

The maintenance, repair and replacement of street furniture is carried out plus the maintenance of the following grass areas is undertaken.

- The area around Newtown House and the Library, flower beds are also maintained here.
- The grass area adjacent to Riverforest Hotel
- Confey Church at the apartments
- The wide grass verge on Easton Road.
- The grass verge at Hewlett Packard to fly-over bridge

Many of the roads around Leixlip Village are sprayed in order to prevent build up of weeds. Hedge cutting is also carried out between the roundabout at the Canoe Club to the village; from Intel to the village from Kilmacredock to the village and also opposite the Garda Station.

While it is sometimes necessary to call in specialists the initial removal of graffiti is done directly by the Town Council. A similar situation applies to repairs carried out in areas such as the boardwalk to the rear of the Courtyard hotel and around the Scouts den. Removal of litter from around recycling banks following consultation/visit by the Litter Warden is also carried out.

The work outlined above is done by way of a contract and is provided for each year in the Town Council's budget, it is far from an exhaustive list. Kildare County Council have a relatively small outdoor staff, if the Town Council did not do this work it would fall to voluntary effort or would remain undone.

€25,000 INVESTED IN NEW LITTER BINS

Since its inception Leixlip Town Council embarked on projects intended to reduce litter and change behaviour about litter. In excess of €25,000 was spent on the provision of litter bins. The bins matched the street furniture complementing other urban renewal projects.

Once provided Kildare County Council arranged to have the bins emptied.

€81,000 spent on Street Sweeping

Close to €81,000 has been spent by Leixlip Town Council over the years on street sweeping. This is in addition to street sweeping done by Kildare County Council

Bio-degradable Dog Doo Bags

Following ongoing complaints from local citizens about a problem with dog fouling, Leixlip Town Council initiated a scheme of purchasing bio-degradable dog doo bags. In addition a series of collection points was arranged. The Town Council also erected "No Dog Fouling" signs.

CLEAN UP DAYS INVOLVE COMMUNITY

An annual "Brooms Day" event is held at least once each year. A location and date is nominated. Members of the public are invited to take part. Litter pickers, gloves and skip hire is arranged by the Town Council. In 2010 for example 200 bags of rubbish were removed from the area around the Wonderful Barn. Special clean up initiatives have also taken place such as a joint clean up of Confey Cemetery arranged by Leixlip Town Council and Kildare County Council. Soon afterwards a full time cemetery caretaker was employed.

The Town Council together with Leixlip Angling Association prepared an action plan to clean up the River Rye. The clean up day on that occasion included the scouts - tidy town association - anglers - the Chamber of Commerce and the Town Councillors.

Major clean ups were also done in advance of such events as The Ryder Cup; the Irish Open the year it was held in Carton; the Special Olympics etc.

The Town Council has also arranged for the removal of graffiti and provide recycling facilities for batteries and printer cartridges. They successfully sought door to door recycling.

Promoting Leixlip

A promotional video of Leixlip was produced together with a range of promotional leaflets/brochures. These primarily focused on industry and tourism. A tourist guide together with specific topics such as fishing was produced.

A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis was also carried out. The Town Council then worked to the towns strengths and worked on eliminating any identified weaknesses.

Special brochures were produced for events such as the Irish Open in the year it was held at Carton. Special events such as Arthur's Day have also provided an opportunity to promote the town's Guinness heritage. In addition to leaflets, the Town Council have an active website.

Welcome to Leixlip signs were designed, purchased and erected by the Town council. Community notice boards and tourist panels were also provided.

ASSISTING OUR TIDY TOWN COMMITTEE

An annual grant has been provided to the Tidy Town Association. Over €50,000 has been provided for a range of projects over the years. This augments the door to door collection which is done annually by the Tidy Towns Association.

LEIXLIP TOWN CREST

In 1989 work commenced to obtain a suitable crest which reflected the history of our town. In 1990 The Chief Herald of Ireland presented the town crest to the Town Council at a ceremony in Leixlip Castle. A chain of office was subsequently sponsored by AIB.

ANNUAL FESTIVAL

In 1989 the Leixlip Salmon Festival was inaugurated, the name was changed to the Leixlip Festival a few years later. Since then Leixlip Town Council has contributed in excess of €74,000. This highly successful festival is held on the June Bank Holiday weekend each year and draws large crowds.

While there are many local sponsors the annual sponsorship by Leixlip Town Council is key to the festival remaining successful.

SHOP FRONT IMPROVEMENTS

Leixlip Town Council commissioned a colour scheme for the buildings on Main Street.

In addition Leixlip Town Council introduced a grant scheme to encourage owners of premises in the village area to paint their premises.

LIGHTING UP OUR TOWN AT CHRISTMAS

More than €95,000 has been provided towards Christmas Lights in Leixlip by the Town Council. The scheme was initiated by the Chamber of Commerce in 1990 in an effort to make the town a more attractive place to shop at Christmas.

A Christmas Lights committee was then formed, in addition to the grant assistance from Leixlip Town Council, local business are asked to make a contribution. Contributions are also sought from the towns population. The switching on of the lights is an annual event that draws old and young alike

EDUCATION

Had meetings with the Dept of Education and Science in relation to new school buildings for Confey College and Scoil Ui Dhalaigh.

Supported the locating of an All Irish secondary school in Leixlip

IMPROVED POST OFFICE/POSTAL SERVICES

Met with the Minister for State in relation to problems with postal services. Also met with An Post CEO sought and got improved Post Office premises and delivery times.

GAS & TV

Meetings with Bord Gais towards the provision of natural gas to the town.

Sought an expanded Cablelink services to parts of the town who were without service.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY LIFE

COMMUNITY GRANTS TAILORED TO MEET LOCAL NEED

In excess of €120,000 has been paid towards “Community and Environment Projects” since the Community Employment Scheme ended. Like other schemes run by Leixlip Town Council matching funds are required from those proposing projects. Below is a sample of projects supported by this scheme.

DISABILITY GROUPS

A Town Council grant part funded the “ Sara 3000 lift and hoist” which was purchased by North-star Swimming Club, this is used to assist disabled swimmers get from the dressing area to the poolside.

Kildare Autism Support hold monthly meetings they also organise summer trips to places like Dublin Zoo, Lullymore Park, Fort Lucan etc. a Town Council grant provided assistance towards these events.

The North Kildare Arch Club celebrated its 20th Anniversary- Black Tie Ball, the Town Council were delighted to provided a grant for this wonderful evening.

SPORTING GROUPS

Leixlip Amenities Centre was awarded a grant to assist in upgrading their showers and changing areas.

The Salmon Leap Canoe Club ran a summer training course where up to 100 juniors were introduced to canoeing.

SOCIAL & CULTURAL CO-FUNDED PROJECTS

Leixlip Musical and Variety Group sought a grant in order to refurbish their prefab which is used for rehearsals. The 1st /10th / Kildare Leixlip Scouts were provided with funds to erect fencing and to complete their storeroom.

Leixlip Intercultural Friends Group- were awarded with a grant towards their their Christmas party and their informal monthly gatherings.

Confey Folk Group purchased a new sound system with a grant from Leixlip Town Council. While Leixlip Woman’s Studies were provided with a grant in order to expand their existing service, they run a help-line, computer classes etc.

A grant was provided towards the restoration of the Church of Ireland’s, St Mary’s Church, Main Street in recognition of the fact that it is Leixlip’s oldest building still in use.

COMMUNITY EVENTS SUPPORTED BY TOWN COUNCIL

Facilitated a public meeting to launch the Host Town Program for the Special Olympics World Games. Contributing £3,938 towards this very memorable event for which Leixlip had the honour of jointly hosing the Irish Team.

The Town Council assisted and supported the Community Access Centre at Leixlip Resource Centre. They also helped to compile a community information directory.

Worked with the Youth Premises Group towards the delivery of the Community Youth Centre.

Contributed towards the preservation of St Columbus Church at Confey Cemetery. The undergrowth around the church was removed and this ancient church was then carefully preserved.

In the Town Council supported and International soccer tournament held at Leixlip Amenity Centre.

A SAFER TOWN

1988 - One in every three Street Lights switched off by Kildare County Council

Following the election of the first Leixlip Town Commission in 1988, they decided the lights must go back on. In their budget over the following 4 years they provided a total of £72,000 towards the cost of providing a full public lighting system. In 1992 Kildare County Council reversed this ill conceived policy.

NEW STREET LIGHTING PROVIDED BY TOWN COUNCIL

In excess of €80,000 has been spent either upgrading or installing new lights.

Almost all of the housing estates have benefited from the scheme, in addition, the public lighting improvements have occurred in places like Old Hill, Accommodation Road, Green Lane, Main Street Car Park, Mill Lane, Celbridge Road and Captains Hill.

Over €1.3m spent upgrading Footpaths throughout our Town

Since 2005 towns with former Town Commission status have availed of a co-funded scheme towards footpath improvements. The Town Council prioritises the footpath grant work jointly funded by Kildare County Council and the Department of Transport. In recent years paths have been improved in many housing estates together with the Town Centre, Celbridge Road, Maynooth Road and Captains Hill. Total Amount to date exceeds €1.35million.

EXTRA GARDA RESOURCES & 24 HOUR GARDA STATION

Following the establishment of the first Leixlip Town Commissioners in 1988 no time was wasted seeking an improved Garda presence. The town was exclusively policed from Lucan at that time.

Soon a Community Garda scheme commenced with two Gardai on the beat. A couple of years later the Garda office was opened in the village. This was replaced in recent years by a 24 hour Garda Station. Leixlip Town Council met with Ministers and senior members of the Gardaí over the years towards this aim, which shows persistence produces returns. The fact that Leixlip Town Council was a statutory body helped to open these doors.

Street Signs Picnic benches House Numbers

New Street name signs were erected, in some locations, such as Main Street and Celbridge Road. Houses were also re-numbered.

Picnic tables were provided close to the Rye River and the Royal Canal.

Joint Policing Committee

For many years Leixlip Town Council had a policing committee. Several times a year a meeting was arranged to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Leixlip Town Council also hosted meetings where Residents Association's nominees and the Gardaí attended. The Town Council helped to initiate a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

A new statutory Joint Policing Committee is now in place.

LIMITED POWERS USED TO THEIR FULL

Leixlip Town Council introduced bye laws for the Control of Consumption and Possession of Intoxicating Liquor in Public Places. Under Gaming and Lotteries Act they banned gaming machines in the town.

€135,000 RYE WALK PROJECT COMPLETED

Work on upgrading of the Rye walk began in 2005. This involved resurfacing the path from the entrance at Rye Bridge to Distillery Lane. This was jointly carried out by the Town Council; Tidy Town Association and (KELT) Kildare European Leader Teo.

In 2007 the steps at the Scouts Den were added. 2008 finalised the project when the walkways from Ryevale Lawns to Lousia Valley were resurfaced by Kildare County Council and Rye Vale Lawns Residents Association. The total bill was in excess of €135,000

URBAN RENEWAL

€330,000 Town Centre Renewal

The Town Council sought expert assistance in designing an urban improvement scheme. The primary focus was the village centre. Included in that plan was the design of a new plaza close to the Health Centre, the provision of matching street furniture such as seating, bollards, street lighting and litter bins, window boxes and planters.

Following the transfer of land from the ESB to the town, to the rear of the Courtyard Hotel. A new 5 year plan was put in place in 2003. This included developing the William Francis Rowntree Park where railings, landscaping, paving, planting and bollards formed part of this major project.

Street furniture has been provided and maintained. The annual summer planting scheme sees over 200 window boxes, hanging baskets etc planted, watered and maintained during the summer months. Over €330,000 has been spent since the first urban renewal plan was adopted for Leixlip Village.

REMOVING OVERHEAD CABLES

The removal of the ugly overhead ESB cables was a joint project between Leixlip Town Council and Kildare County Council. They also met with Telecom Eireann and requested they underground their cables

PROJECTS

The area around Oaklawn Shops was improved some years ago. This included new paths, the provision of car parking spaces, planting, bollards, the total cost of the work was €22,700.

The Town Council have built up a fund that is intended for improvements in the Captains Hill Area.

Transportation

From its inception Leixlip Town Council had a traffic and transport sub-committee.

A detailed origin and destination study had been carried out and published in 1986 by the Combined Residents Association and CIE. Public Transport improvements then followed and were tailored to meet the towns needs.

BUS

Some of the initiatives Leixlip Town Council were involved in were:

- ♦ The provision of additional bus services to HP
- ♦ The re-routing of the bus service to Easton Road
- ♦ Met with Dublin bus and sought amalgamation of 67 and 66B and linkage to Riverforest
- ♦ Regular meetings with Dublin bus towards providing a better service, including QBC and new bus shelters.

RAILWAY SERVICES

Leixlip Town Council took a leading role in seeking the doubling of the Maynooth Rail Line, working with Maynooth, Kilcock and the Dublin 15 Community Council's towards this aim. This included drafting a policy document which was used by Irish Rail to show public demand when seeking EU funding. 1998 £11m was allocated towards the project. The Minister for Transport and TD's along the line were frequently lobbied towards this aim. Also sought car parking at Louisa Bridge and Confey Stations.

Sought the provision of a train station at Confey.

Met with Irish Rail on many occasions sought improvements in service and rolling stock.

ROAD & PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

Lobbied Kildare County Council in the years between 1988 and 2010 for improvements in footpaths and road maintenance.

Sought pedestrian crossings at; Confey and Main Street car park and co-funded a crossing at the Church of the Nativity. Met South Dublin Council on several occasions, sought and got improvements in road footpath and public lighting between the Salmon Leap Pub and the roundabout.

TAXI

Made detailed submission seeking the inclusion of Leixlip in the Dublin Taximeter Area.

Lobbied over a number of years for a taxi service that meets public needs.

DEMOCRATIC MANDATE

Every 5 years the citizens of Leixlip have an opportunity to elect those who will make decisions on their behalf for the coming 5 years. In addition to making decisions on how to spend the budget, many, if not most, of the initiatives undertaken by Leixlip Town Council have been tailored to meet local needs, some have happened directly in response to concerns expressed by citizens during election campaigns. All are designed to improve the quality of life for the inhabitants of the town.

Local Government Role defined in Legislation (2001 Act)

Local Government is regarded by many European Countries as being the most assessable to its citizens and gives the public an opportunity to participate in public affairs. The 2001 Local Government Act, sets out the role a Town Council should play. Below is a summary of that role, we now invite those who read this document to match that role against the many initiatives Leixlip Town Council has undertaken and which we have summarized in this document.

Local Government Act. What it demands from a Town Council

To provide a forum for the democratic representation of the local community, to provide civic leadership for that community and to take such action as it considers necessary or desirable to promote the community interest...

To promote the social, economic, environmental, recreational, cultural, community or general development of the administrative area of the local authority.

Provide assistance in money or in kind (including the provision of prizes and other incentives) in respect of the organisation or promotion of competitions, seminars, exhibitions, displays, festivals or other events, or organise or promote such events. To provide assistance in money or in kind to persons engaging in any activity that, in the opinion of the authority, benefits the local community.

IF LEIXLIP TOWN COUNCIL WAS ABOLISHED HOW MUCH WOULD STATE SAVE?

2010 INCOME

Town Charges	€330,000.00
Local Gov Fund	€70,000.00
Total	€400,000.00

The "Town Charges" are paid by local ratepayers, therefore, there would be no saving to Government from this source.

The "Local Government Fund" allocation would revert to Kildare County Council, resulting in no savings to Government.

The net result, in terms of Leixlip, would be the loss of a democratic community forum with a proven track record.

Leixlip successfully campaigns for Town Council status

The fact that there has been a good turnout at every election since the first Town Council was established in 1988, is proof that it matters to local citizens who represents them.

Prior to the establishment of the Town Commission in 1988, Leixlip had a Combined Residents Association and prior to that a Community Council, both identified the need for Leixlip to have its own Town Authority, both worked towards this aim. It was recognized by them that they did not have the advantage of being a democratically elected statutory body, such a status was seen as incredibly important when engaging with organisations and state agencies such as the County Council the Gardaí the IDA, Local Industries etc.

The proposal to abolish our Town Council is totally unacceptable.

Leixlip Town Council wants reform not abolition

The members of Leixlip Town Council argued for Local Government reform over the years, and have made detailed submissions in this regard.

Their vision is for the transfer of powers from the centre to the local, which is also the most cost effective way of delivering many of our services.

They see this recession as an opportunity to do things differently, that opportunity will be lost if the decision is made in the coming White Paper to simply abolish all Town Council's.