

Ashbourne Playspace Network



30th November 2017

Re: Open space provision in Ashbourne, Co. Meath – addendum report.

Dear Ashbourne Playspace Network,

Future Analytics Consulting Ltd. (FAC) are delighted to provide Ashbourne Playspace Network (APN) with this update to the research regarding open space provision in Ashbourne, Co. Meath, that was carried out in March 2017. The research formed the basis of the submission made by APN to Meath County Council (MCC) as part of the review of the *Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019* and the preparation of the forthcoming *Draft Meath County Development Plan 2019-2025*.

The update provided in this letter is an addendum report and should be read in conjunction with the original document ‘*Submission to the review of the Meath County Development Plan*’, dated March 2017.

Shortfall in the Provision of Open Space in Ashbourne

The purpose of the research and submission was to determine the extent of freely accessible open space that is currently available in Ashbourne, and by comparing this with best-practice and international standards, to illustrate the shortfall within the town. While the town benefits from the presence of different sports clubs, the use of their facilities requires memberships. Furthermore, their open space areas are for structured, intensively active uses. Excluding sports grounds, the best-practice and international **standards suggest an appropriate public open space provision rate of 2.0–2.5 ha per 1,000 population**. However, the research indicated that only 3.8 ha was being provided as part of the Castle Street Park (and part of the River Walk); equating to a **provision rate of just 0.3 ha per 1,000 population in the town**.

Clearly, a shortfall of freely accessible, public open space exists in Ashbourne.

Population Growth in Ashbourne

To determine the appropriate level of open space provision for Ashbourne, the size of the town’s existing and future populations needed to be determined. As the research was undertaken prior to the release of the 2016 Census data, it was necessary to project the population forward from 2011 Census data. It was estimated using established population projection techniques that by 2016 the population of Ashbourne would increase by 799 (7.0%) to 12,137. Projections to 2026 estimated that the population would rise by a further 2,088 (17.2%) to 14,225.

2016 Census data is now publicly available and **Ashbourne’s population was noted as having reached 12,679, an increase of 11.7%**. This make the towns the fastest growing settlement in County Meath and the second fastest town in Ireland with a population over 10,000. CSO data also shows that Ashbourne has the third youngest population in larger towns in Ireland with an average age of 32.2 years. This compares to a national average of 37.4 years and an average in County Meath of 35.2 years. Based on this higher than expected population increase, **FAC’s updated projections suggest that the town’s population will reach 14,860 by the year 2026**.

Appropriate Provision of Open Space in Ashbourne

Having reviewed the updated data for Ashbourne, taking account of the larger population noted in 2016 and the larger population expected by 2026, it is appropriate to amend the open space requirement for the town. This is vital to do in advance of the finalisation of the *Meath County Development Plan 2019–2025* as this Plan will inform

the future physical, social and economic development of the County. Considering the existing availability of approximately 3.8 ha of open space in Ashbourne, there is significant need for further open space to serve the town. Using the standard of 2.0–2.5 ha open space per 1,000 population, **the current (2016/2017) requirement is for an additional 21.6–27.9 ha of open space.**

However, Ashbourne is expected to continue growing. This is recognised by Meath County Council and is identified in the projections for the town. It is strongly advised that the needs of the future are addressed now. Consequently, using the same open space standard, **the requirement by 2026 will be for 25.9–33.4 ha of open space.**

Type and Scale of Open Space Required for Ashbourne

As has been alluded to above, Ashbourne benefits from numerous sports clubs and their grounds, one of which is understood to be in the early stages of an expansion. However, the town lacks high-quality, freely and publicly accessible parkland for passive and moderately active uses, to benefit all age profiles of the local community and visitors. Such space should include walks and trails, be landscaped with semi-mature vegetation (native where practicable) and include appropriate playground facilities. Its proximity to the town should be considered, and accessibility (via safe pedestrian paths and cycleways) identified as being paramount.

Importantly, the pursuance of such a venture has the benefit of ‘informed foresight’. With an understanding of the possible future population of the town, it is the opinion of FAC – based on the best available information – that the future needs (in 2026 and beyond) should be considered now through the forward planning process. **Therefore, FAC asserts that at a minimum, the requirement for the future (2026) is planned for now, and preferably at the rate of 2.5 ha of open space per 1,000 population. This means an additional open space requirement of 33.4 ha.**

Conclusion

There is a definite need and want for additional open space in Ashbourne. The persistent shortfall in open space provision in the town must be addressed promptly to ensure that its social, economic and environmental potential is maintained.

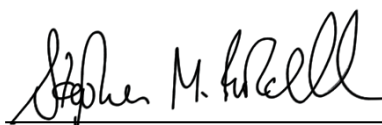
Delivering additional open space for the town is a significant opportunity for its residents and Meath County Council. It would be a progressive action, and to also take account of future needs would be a proactive effort to think beyond the present. As ‘Principle 1’ of the Planning Policy Statement 2015 remarks; *“planning must be plan-led and evidence based so that at the appropriate level... local authorities and local communities, work together to set out a cohesive vision for the future of our country” [emphasis added]*. The research within the original submission and the updates contained herein are the evidence base, as commissioned by the local community, that is required by the local authority to adequately define the Plan for the future.

We wish you well as you progress your efforts to secure additional open space for Ashbourne. Of course, should you require any further insights please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



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