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Dublin Road
Navan
County Meath
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17 February 2017

Re: Submission to the Meath County Development Plan 2019-2025 Pre-Draft Public Consultation Phase

Dear Mr Clarke,

Future Analytics Consulting Ltd (FAC), 23 Fitzwilliam Square (South), Dublin 2, wish to make the enclosed submission to the review of the *Meath County Development Plan* on behalf of *Ashbourne Playspace Network* (APN), c/o Rebecca Walsh, [REDACTED]

APN is an advocacy group comprised of actively engaged local residents seeking to increase the quality and availability of public open space in Ashbourne, Co. Meath. The submission provides a case in support of this goal.

In brief, the submission:

- Recognises and illustrates the recent and expected population change of County Meath and the town of Ashbourne;
- Provides an overview of the existing provision of freely available and accessible public open space in Ashbourne;
- Compares the recent delivery of open space in key Meath towns with Ashbourne;
- Demonstrates the requirement for further high quality, freely accessible public open space for Ashbourne, in accordance with Irish and international good practice standards; and,
- Proposes a pathway to delivering the required public open space.

We respectfully request that the enclosed submission be given thorough consideration by the Planning Department and the Chief Executive in advance of formulating the *Draft Meath County Development Plan 2019-2025*. Should the Planning Department have any queries relating to the content of this submission we would be happy to meet to discuss these or to facilitate any further supports.

On behalf of *Ashbourne Playspace Network*, we thank you in advance for the inclusion of this submission in your review.

Yours sincerely,



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SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF THE MEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN



Submitted by:

FutureAnalytics
Planning + Research + Economics

On behalf of:





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1.0 Introduction

This submission to the review of the Meath County Development Plan is made by Future Analytics Consulting Ltd (FAC), 23, Fitzwilliam Square (South), Dublin 2, on behalf of Ashbourne Playspace Network (APN), c/o Rebecca Walsh, [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

1.1 Ashbourne Playspace Network

APN, founded in 2012, is an advocacy group working for greater provision of public, outdoor recreational space for Ashbourne residents of all ages and backgrounds. The Ashbourne Community Park fundraising initiative was launched in 2015 with the purpose of raising funds to assist the development of a community park for the town.

APN is comprised of actively involved and concerned residents of Ashbourne. In brief, their mission is to:

“Highlight the importance of good quality play space in our large town, and to work with stakeholders to provide high quality, diverse and accessible community recreational amenities which enhance the quality of life for all ages and abilities”¹.

The values of APN are concise and reflect their mission above:

- “Promote healthy living through advocating for the provision of parks, open spaces and community recreational facilities in the town;
- Promote the economic competitiveness of Ashbourne as a place for businesses to locate through a robust parks and community recreation system that attracts skilled workers and their families;
- Promote a sense of community and civic pride;
- Nurture an appreciation for our natural environment;
- Shape healthy, safe, green communities;
- Collaborate with other community groups and stakeholders to provide sustainable, accessible and diverse community recreational facilities;
- Engage a diverse community and proactively respond to changing demographics, needs, and trends; and
- Advocate on behalf of the community”².

1.2 Purpose of this Submission

The purpose of this submission is to illustrate the growth of Ashbourne in recent years, both as a commuter town serving Dublin and increasingly as a centre of employment and enterprise in itself. In recognising this change and growth, the town has not been provided with sufficient freely accessible public open space to match. This submission will demonstrate this lack of open space and illustrate the appropriate quantum of freely accessible public open space – as a park – that should be delivered in Ashbourne.

1.3 Structure of this Submission

Following this introduction, Section 2 provides the context of Ashbourne. It indicates the growth of the population and projects it into the future. A review of public open space provision in the Ashbourne and other County Meath towns is then undertaken and examined in relation to a ‘historical amenity deficit’.

Section 3 outlines and reviews existing public space policies internationally as well as at national, county and local levels to illustrate the framework within which its delivery is found. It also identifies some of the benefits that additional freely accessible public open space will have for the town.

Section 4 uses the findings of Section 2 and 3 to propose an appropriate quantum of additional freely accessible public open space for Ashbourne.

Section 5 takes account of the outputs of the preceding sections and proposes a route through which greater provision of quality, publicly accessible open space can be achieved.

Section 6 concludes the submission with a number of summary points and key recommendations for consideration by Meath County Council.

¹ Ashbourne Playspace Network (2015) Strategic Plan 2015: for the provision of Parks, Open Spaces and Community Recreational facilities in Ashbourne, Co. Meath.

² Ashbourne Playspace Network (2015) Strategic Plan 2015: for the provision of Parks, Open Spaces and Community Recreational facilities in Ashbourne, Co. Meath.



2.0 Ashbourne

Ashbourne is one of County Meath's largest towns, second only to Navan. Its location adjacent to the N2/M2 motorway is strategic as this transport corridor links Dublin city with Northern Ireland and is the primary route north from the capital to Derry/Londonderry. Belfast can also be reached in 1 hour 40 minutes. During off-peak hours, Dublin city centre and airport, Navan and Dunshaughlin can all be reached in under 30 mins by private car (Table 1). Public transport connections from Ashbourne to Dublin are via Bus Eireann's 103 route, which leaves as frequently as every 20 minutes. The route originates in Ratoath and terminates in Beresford Place.

From Ashbourne	Dublin City	Dublin Airport	Navan	Dunshaughlin	Belfast	Derry/Londonderry
Distance	23 km	23 km	28 km	14 km	144 km	211 km
Travel Time (off-peak)	29 mins	20 mins	27 mins	18 mins	1 hr 40 mins	2 hr 40 mins

Table 1: Travel times and distances by car from Ashbourne, Co. Meath to the centre of a series of different towns and cities. Source: Google Maps.

2.1 Population Profile

In the 10 years between the 2006 and 2016 censuses, the population of the State grew by over 500,000, representing an increase of 12.2%. By comparison, County Meath's population increased by 19.7%. However, Ashbourne's population is estimated to have increased by 42.3% to reach 12,137 during this period. This is based on FAC's estimates following analysis of the preliminary results of the 2016 census³. Between 2006 and 2011 alone, the town's population grew by 2,810 or 33.0%. The population and census-on-census changes for the State, Meath and Ashbourne are found in Table 2. Ashbourne clearly underwent a much greater level of change between 2006 and 2011, accordingly the estimated growth of 7.0% between 2011 and 2016 is likely to be a conservative estimation by FAC.

	2006	2011	2016
State	4,239,848	4,588,252	4,757,976
Change (%)		8.2%	3.7%
Meath	162,831	184,135	194,942
Change (%)		13.1%	5.9%
Ashbourne	8,528	11,338	12,137
Change (%)		33.0%	7.0%

Table 2: Population and its change 2006 to 2016. Source: CSO 2011 and FAC calculations.

The composition of the population, according to the results of the 2011 census, indicates a young population with 41.6% of the town's population comprised of individuals in the 24-44 years of age bracket (Figure 1). This is the key household and family formation cohort. Relatively, this is notably higher than the same cohort within the State and across the rest of County Meath, 31.6% and 33.1% respectively. While the 0-14 bracket, at 23.5% of the population, is marginally lower for Ashbourne than Meath (25.2%), within this the 0-4 years of age cohort accounts for 10.8% of the town's population. This equates to 1,230 of the population.

The older cohort of Ashbourne's population is significantly lower than those of the State and Meath. Respectively, the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over in the State, Meath and Ashbourne represents 11.7%, 8.9% and 4.1% of their totals (see Figure 1). This is a further reflection of the town's youthful community.

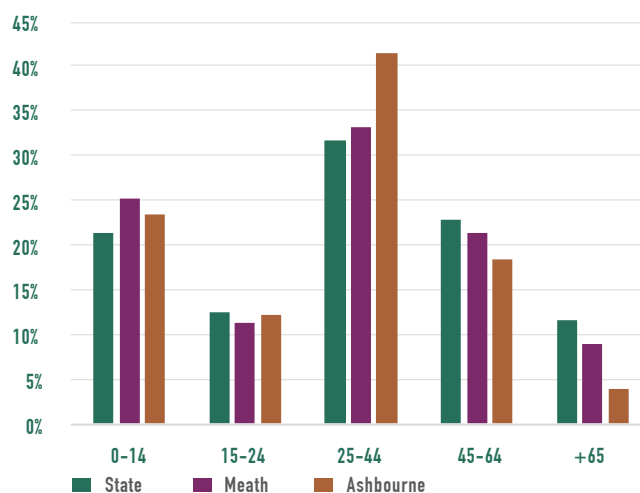


Figure 1: Age groups of the populations of the State, Meath and Ashbourne, 2011. Source: CSO 2011.

³ This 2016 population for the town may be revised upwards (or downwards) upon release of settlement-based results later in 2017.

The Department of Education lists five primary schools⁴ in the town, as well two secondary schools⁵ educating this young, emerging population. Enrolments total 1,811 in the former and 1,277 in the latter. Additional schools have recently completed construction in the west side of the town at Killegland. These include a permanent school for the town's 'Educate Together' which had previously occupied prefabs at the community centre, and new upgraded buildings for Gaelscoil na Mí (Gaelscoil) and Coláiste De Lacy (secondary school). Both primary schools have 16 classrooms, teaching from junior infants through to sixth class. Coláiste De Lacy has capacity to accommodate up to 450 students in Phase 1, increasing to 1,000 in Phase 2.

Considering the foregoing, population projections using a best-practice methodology (CSO's M1F1 scenario) suggest that the population of Ashbourne will reach 14,225 by 2026⁶. This would be an estimated increase of 2,088 (17.2%) during the 10-year period 2016-2026. The existing young population, of family forming age, will increase naturally as the residents of the town have children and as in-migration continues.

The composition of the population will also change with increases in all age groups except the 25-44 bracket. It is estimated that a strong youth cohort has emerged since 2011, driven by the natural growth of the population, although this will fall slightly by 2026. The existing population will continue to age, hence the increase between 2011 and 2026 from 2,108 to 4,061 and 464 to 1,431 in the 45-64 and over-65 years of age groups respectively. Figure 2 displays the 2011, 2016 and 2026 populations by age group in Ashbourne.

The consequences of this growth are two-fold. Firstly, there will be a need to house the greater number of people. FAC undertook population projection and housing requirement analysis on behalf of the Housing Agency and identified that by 2026 there will be a *minimum* requirement to deliver an additional 889 residential units by 2026⁷. However, this is an *absolute minimum* based on internal growth within the conurbation and does not account for any external demand being exerted on the town. Yet, the town has clearly been the focus of much growth originating in Dublin and this is likely to continue. This pressure is certainly much greater than that experienced in western and northern parts of the county. Secondly, as the population grows there will be additional pressure applied to public services and amenities, including public parks and open space. This will particularly be the case if this provision does not keep pace with population growth.

Figure 3 illustrates where the existing and future populations will live based on the zoning designations of the Ashbourne LAP. A review of aerial imagery (June 2016) has been undertaken to update 'future residential' areas to 'existing residential'. The majority of the future housing will be located on the outskirts of the town, primarily to the west, south and east, but with other pockets in the centre and north of the town.

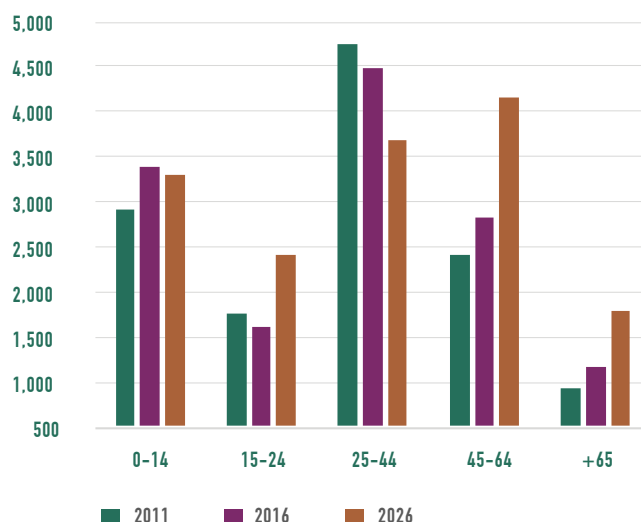


Figure 2: Population by age group, 2011, 2016 and 2026. Source: CSO 2011 and FAC calculations.

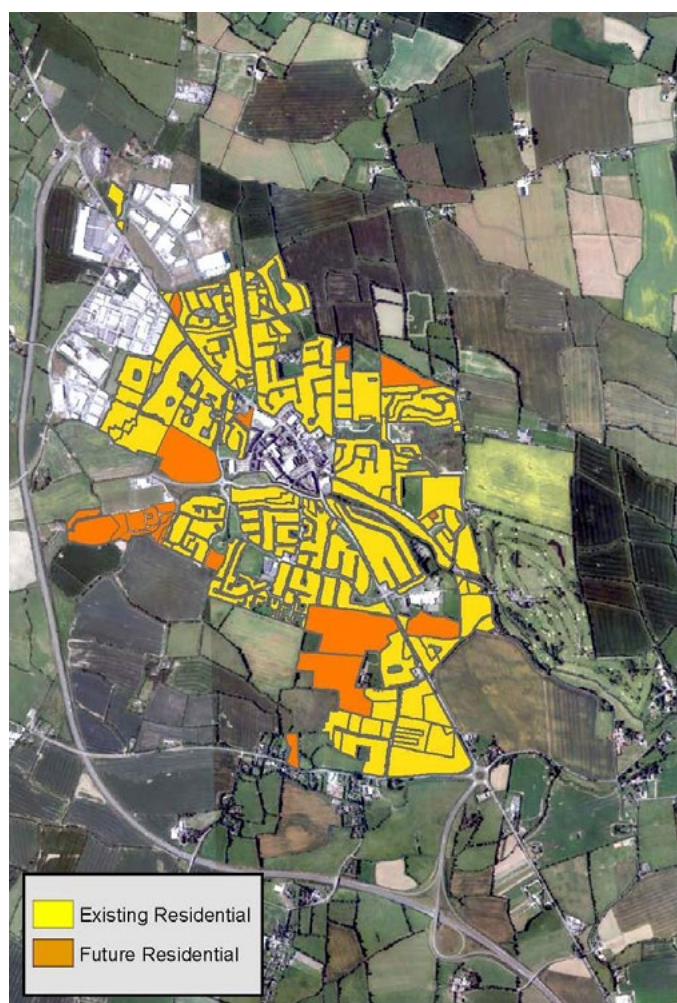


Figure 3: Zonings for existing and future residential development. Source: Ashbourne Local Area Plan 2009-2015 and Google Earth.

⁴ Department of Education and Skills: Ashbourne Educate Together National School (220), Gaelscoil na Cille (253), Gaelscoil na Mí (151), Scoil Mhuire (501) and Scoil Nais Dealgain (686).

⁵ Department of Education and Skills: Ashbourne Community College (1,095) and Coláiste De Lacy (182).

⁶ Housing Agency (2017) Housing Supply Requirement in Ireland's Urban Settlements 2016-2020.

⁷ Housing Agency (2017) Housing Supply Requirement in Ireland's Urban Settlements 2016-2020.



2.2 Ashbourne's Open Space Provision

To understand the quantity and quality of open space available to the public, a desktop audit was undertaken. This involved analysis of the land-use zoning map from the *Ashbourne LAP*, a review of built and un-built space using Google Earth and Google Maps (last updated June 2016) and an examination of Meath County Council's report entitled *Open Space Provision in Ashbourne*⁸ published in 2015.

96.0 ha of open spaces (of considerable size) were identified within the boundary of the town (Table 3 and Figure 4). Smaller public open space areas provided as part of residential planning applications were not included as their uses are generally limited, other than for passive surveillance and as part of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS). 50% of the 96.0 ha is contained within the Ashbourne Golf Course, while a further 29% (28.1 ha) is in the ownership or care of sports clubs, including the National Shooting Grounds in the eastern part of the town. 12.5 ha of more 'sizable' space was identified as being contained within, or a comprising element of, existing residential developments. Of the 96.0 ha, areas 2 and 3 (see ID in Table 3 and Figure 4) may be lost to future residential development as they currently have a residential zoning designation.

The public park and playground bound by the Broadmeadow River and Castle Street in the town centre has an area of approximately 1.2 ha. It forms part of the emerging linear river walk. To the east of this park, the linear Broadmeadow River Walk has an area of 2.6 ha, while to the west, the extension of this walk measures some 3.3 ha. However, the latter of these is not as advanced as the former in terms of accessibility, landscaping, design, functionality and connectivity.

ID	Open Space	Intensity of Use	Accessibility	Area (ha)		Use Type
1	Ashbourne Golf Course	Active	Membership/Fee	48.3	48.3	Golf Course
2	Ashbourne Baseball	Active	Membership/Fee	1.7	28.1	Sports Clubs
3	Ashbourne and District Community Council (1)	Active	Membership/Fee	1.9		
4	Ashbourne and District Community Council (2)	Active	Membership/Fee	2.2	7.1	Parks and River Walks
5	Ashbourne United Football Club	Active	Membership/Fee	4.0		
6	Donaghmore/Ashbourne GAA	Active	Membership/Fee	6.3		
7	Ashbourne Rugby Football Club	Active	Membership/Fee	5.4		
8	National Shooting Grounds	Active	Membership/Fee	6.6		
9	Castle Street Park	Passive	Freely Accessible	1.2	12.5	Public Open Space in Residential Schemes
10	Broadmeadow River Walk (1 of 2)	Passive	Freely Accessible	2.6		
11	Broadmeadow River Walk (2 of 2)	Passive	Freely Accessible	3.3		
12	Other Public Open Space 1 (Residential)	Passive	Freely Accessible	2.7	96.0	
13	Other Public Open Space 2 (Residential)	Passive	Freely Accessible	2.6		
14	Other Public Open Space 3 (Residential)	Passive	Freely Accessible	4.7		
15	Other Public Open Space 4 (Residential)	Passive	Freely Accessible	1.8		
16	Other Public Open Space 5 (Residential)	Passive	Freely Accessible	0.7		
Total				96.0	96.0	

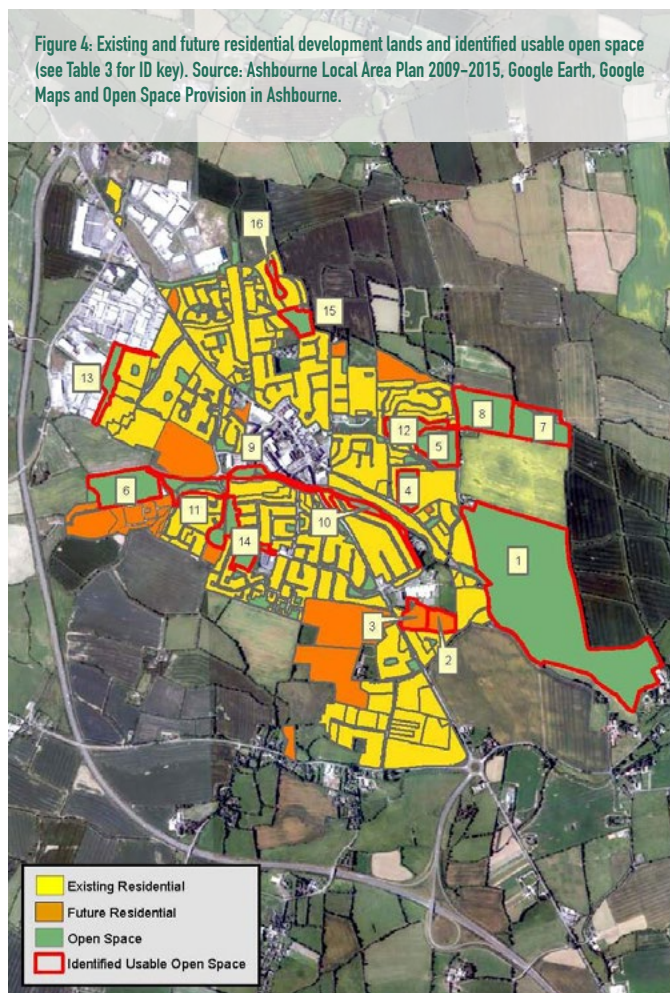
Table 3: Desktop audit of open space in Ashbourne, Co. Meath. Source: Ashbourne Local Area Plan 2009–2015, Google Earth, Google Maps and Open Space Provision in Ashbourne.

It is revealed that 76.4 ha – while open to the public – requires the payment of fees or a membership to access and enjoy its benefits (golf course, sports clubs and shooting grounds). Therefore, it is not deemed to be 'freely accessible' to the public. This open space is primarily for intensive, active use and is predominantly man-made and heavily managed and maintained for specific purposes. This open space accounts for 80% of the total.

⁸ Meath County Council (2015) Open Space Provision in Ashbourne.

A further 12.5 ha is part of existing residential developments and not intentionally developed as 'parkland'. The landscaping and design attributed to this is limited. The quality of this space is questionable in the context of its appropriateness to cater for the passive recreational needs of the town's community. Further, such space is restricted to only some residential areas with primary purposes being to heighten passive surveillance and improve SUDS. Some of this open space (4.7 ha at Church Fields, Bourne View and Crestwood) does link with part of the Broadmeadow River Walk; although, it does so in an uncoordinated fashion.

In summary, it is asserted here that the town of Ashbourne has a total of 3.8 ha of freely available and accessible, functional public open space, with a further 3.3 ha likely to be provided in the future. Yet with a population of over 12,000 (and set to exceed 14,000 by 2026), the town lacks a sufficiently sized open space area that is openly available to the entire community. Such space should be of an appropriate quality with landscaping and design, as well as features and facilities, that address the needs of both the existing and future populations of the town.



2.3 Historical Amenity Deficit in Ashbourne

Section 2.1 demonstrated the significant population growth of Ashbourne in recent decades, however, it is also clear that the town has not gained large areas of freely accessible public open space to meet this. The towns of Navan, Kells and Dunshaughlin, as three examples within County Meath, have all been the recipients of quality public open space in recent years. Most notably, the Blackwater Park opened in Navan in 2015. These towns have been the benefactors of focused efforts to enhance recreational, public amenity space. This has been evidenced and facilitated by the two preceding County Meath Development Contribution Schemes (DCSs) agreed in 2004⁹ and 2010¹⁰. A full list of the 'Class 3: Social Infrastructure' projects to be supported in select towns through the DCS is found in Appendix 1.

The 2004 DCS was divided into existing projects that would continue to be mandated for funding and new projects that would be provided. Navan had 2 existing projects listed, the Bull Sculptor project and Town Park (Site Acquisition). Trim also had an existing project included, Porch Field Phase I and II. Dunshaughlin had the existing One Stop Shop project listed.

No existing project was listed for Ashbourne.

The 2004 DCS then went on to identify social infrastructure that would be provided. In this section of the DCS, 13 different projects were identified for Navan, including the provision of a Boyneside Linear Park and a children's playground at Blackcastle, as well as the development of a town park. The same DCS identified a total of 11 projects to be supported in Kells. Amongst these was the provision of a town park. Four projects were listed for Trim, including a linear park. Two projects were noted for Dunshaughlin: the provision of civic space and the development of an 8-acre (c. 3.2 ha) park at Knock's Green. Other towns that were identified for playground and park projects included: Bettystown, Drumconrath, Duleek, Dunboyne, Enfield, Julianstown, Kildalkey, Kilmessan, Longwood and Summerhill.

By comparison, only four projects were identified for Ashbourne: a branch library, a "one stop shop", a village centre walkway and a new cemetery.

The 2010-2015 DCS social infrastructure list included cemeteries, planting and landscaping and environmental improvements across several of the county areas. The list also included specific projects, 4 of which were listed for Navan, including a public park. 10 projects related to Kells, with walks through the town and "development of land gained under the development plan amenity/recreational" included, as well the related "enhancements to the People's Park in Lloyd". 7 specific initiatives were noted for Trim, including amenity development at Townspark North, a town centre linear park and the Porchfield Amenity Plan and Development project. The 2 projects listed for Dunshaughlin were a swimming pool and town square works.

⁹ Meath County Council (2004) County Meath Development Contribution Scheme 2004.

¹⁰ Meath County Council (2010) Meath County Development Contribution Schemes 2010–2015.

No projects specifically relating to Ashbourne were included in the 2010-2015 DCS.

The current DCS, running from 2016-2021, lists significantly fewer specific social infrastructure projects to be funded. Funding for Navan's public park and the Solstice Centre are included among three projects for the town, while two are No projects specifically relating to Ashbourne were included in the 2010-2015 DCS.

For Ashbourne, it is recognised and appreciated that two projects are to be financially supported by the DCS: the linear park and the community centre.

From this review of the three most recent DCSs, it is clear that Ashbourne has not been afforded an appropriate level of financial support for social infrastructure projects. Even though the town has undergone considerable growth in recent years and is the county's second largest town it would appear that it failed to receive its fair allocation of funding and attention for needs that reflected its importance and its population size (including growth therein). While it is acknowledged and applauded that funding is now to be directed to two Ashbourne projects, it is asserted that a level of urgency is required to deliver high quality, freely accessible public open space of an appropriate quantum for Ashbourne. Such urgency is required to ensure that the town maintains its attractiveness as a place in which to live, work and invest.

2.4 Public Open Space Provision Elsewhere in Meath

To understand the relative rate of under provision of freely accessible public open space in Ashbourne, a review of some of Meath's other settlement has been carried out. It is worth noting that the areas used below exclude lands owned or in the care of sports clubs or that comprise part of residential developments. It only includes open space that can be freely accessed by the community and visitors.

The new Blackwater Park is the major freely accessible public open space in Navan and has a total area of approximately 28.0 ha. This equates to a total provision of 0.92 ha per 1,000 population¹². The park is located on the central edge of the town. In Kells, the town's People's Park at Lloyd is freely accessible. The Spire of Lloyd, built in the 18th century is the centrepiece. With an area of 7.9 ha, the rate of freely accessible open space provision in Kells equates to 1.3 ha per 1,000 population¹³. Dunshaughlin's town park measures 3.2 ha, providing public open space at a rate of 0.8 ha per 1,000¹⁴.

By comparison, public park open space in Ashbourne (3.8 ha) is provided at a rate of 0.3 ha per 1,000 population¹⁵, significantly lower than the aforementioned towns. Of the four towns, the average rate of provision is 0.8 ha per 1,000 population. This equates to a rate of provision that is 160% better than that in Ashbourne. Clearly, the town is underserved.

Town	Name	Location	Area (ha)	Population	Ha per 1,000 Population	2026 Population	Ha per 1,000 Population
Navan	Blackwater Park	Edge of town	27.5	29,884	0.9	34,263	0.8
Kells	People's Park (Lloyd)	Out of town	7.9	6,075	1.3	6,883	1.1
Dunshaughlin	Dunshaughlin Town Park	Within town (residential area)	3.2	4,026	0.8	4,647	0.7
Ashbourne	Castle Street Park (and part of River Walk)	Edge of town centre	3.8	12,137	0.3	14,225	0.3
Average			10.6	13,031	0.8	15,004	0.7

Table 4: Public open space (parkland) provision in four of County Meath's towns (all areas rounded to 1 decimal place).

¹¹ Meath County Council (2016) Meath County Development Contribution Scheme 2016-2021.

¹² 2.0 ha per 2,173 population.

¹³ 2.0 ha per 1,548 population.

¹⁴ 2.0 ha per 2,485 population.

¹⁵ 2.0 ha per 6,388 population.



3.0 The Case for Additional Playspace and a Community Park in Ashbourne

3.1 Good Practice and Standards in Public Open Amenity Space

Internationally, different planning, local and municipal authorities apply varying public open space standards for their urban areas to serve their populations. These authorities are well aware of the benefits associated with the provision of, and accessibility to, public adequate public open space: physical and mental well-being, environmental, economic, social and physical/aesthetic.

New York City guidance notes that underserved areas are those with a high population density and less than 2.5 acres [1 ha] per 1,000 population, while well-served areas can avail of over 2.5 acres or are within 400 m of regional parks¹⁶. New York City's standards consider its high density, large population.

Dover District Council proposes standards of 2.22 ha per 1,000 population¹⁷ on the basis that it meets accessibility and quality standards. Canterbury City Council (UK) outlines quantitative standards for a range of open space typologies. The summary found in Table 4 indicates a standard of approximately 4.0 ha per 1,000 population, excluding semi-natural and natural open space which if included brings the standard up to 8.0 ha per 1,000 population¹⁸.

Typology	Distance Threshold	Quantitative Standard
Parks and Gardens	2,000 m	0.3 ha per 1,000 population
Green corridors	300 m	1.3–1.7 ha per 1,000 population
Amenity green space	1,000 m	1.3–1.7 ha per 1,000 population
Fixed play areas	100 m to over 1,000 m	0.3 ha per 1,000 population
Semi-natural and natural open space	1,000 m	4.0 ha per 1,000 population
Outdoor sports pitches	1,000 m	0.87 ha per 1,000 population
Allotments	N/A	15 plots per 1,000 population
Civic space	TBC	One major civic space per urban centre

Table 5: The open space standards of Canterbury City Council .

In Auckland, New Zealand, the Council does not outline an explicit quantum of public space for existing residential areas as these are deemed to be established and already served. However, for new developments, “local recreational space” should be made available at a rate of 2.0 ha per 400 household units (c. 4.5 ha per 1,000 populations for households averaging 2.5 persons)¹⁹. No standard is prescribed for “sub-regional and regional recreation open space”, “conservation open space” or “green infrastructure”, but they should be available to communities. Also in New Zealand, Wellington City Council defines a hierarchy of open space: ‘Local, ‘Neighbourhood, ‘District and ‘Regional’. The majority of the population should be able to access over 5.0 ha of open space types and qualities.

Open Space Type	Area
Local	0.1–0.5 ha
Neighbourhood	0.5–2.0 ha
District	>2.0 ha
Regional	>>2.0 ha
Total	>>5.0 ha

Table 6: Open space standards, Auckland, New Zealand.

This brief review of applied international standards suggests that a minimum requirement of 2.0-2.5 ha per 1,000 would be an appropriate level of provision.

¹⁶ Mayor’s Office of Environmental Coordination (2010) City Environmental Quality Review: Technical Manual.
¹⁷ Dover District Council (2013) Parks and Amenity Open Space Strategy.
¹⁸ Canterbury City Council (n.d.) Draft Open Space Strategy for the Canterbury District 2014–2019.
¹⁹ Auckland Council (2014) Parks and Open Spaces Interim Provision Guidelines: For greenfield developments and urban areas.

3.2 National, County and Local Public Open Space Policy

3.2.1 National Policy: Ireland

In 1987, the former Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local (DEHLG) published A Policy for the Provision and Maintenance of Park, Open Spaces and Outdoor Recreation Area by Local Authorities²⁰. The policy document outlined a series of quantitative standards and utilised a hierarchy of open spaces. It asserted a requirement to provide a minimum of one local park of 2.0 ha of open space per 1,000 population, with a “typical” provision of a 16.0 ha neighbourhood park and two 2.0 ha local parks for per 10,000 population. The neighbourhood park would be capable of including, inter alia: up to 6 football pitches, up to 10 tennis courts and 1 children’s playground.

The Sustainable Residential Guidelines²¹ are now of greater influence as statutory guidance and acknowledge both the qualitative and quantitative importance of public open space in urban areas. Considering “qualitative standards”, the Guidelines list the importance of: design, accessibility, variety, shared use, biodiversity, sustainable urban drainage systems and provision for allotments and community gardens. Such considerations are required to ensure that the type of space being provided is appropriate for the community in which it will be provided. For example, there is little point identifying land as a public park if it is not accessible to members of the public with physical disabilities, if it not landscaped to support fauna and other flora or if it lacks the facilities that the local community need and want (playgrounds, walking and running tracks and sports pitches, etc.).

When considering “quantitative standards”, the Guidelines recognise the approach adopted by many planning authorities, with a range of 2.0-2.5 ha of public open space provided per 1,000 populations. This open space is then “allocated according to a hierarchy of spaces” which is not defined by the Guidelines.

The recommended quantitative standards for public open space in *new* developments as outlined in the Guidelines are:

- 1) A minimum of 15% of the total site area of green-field sites or those sites for which a local area plan is appropriate should have dedicated to usable public open space.
- 2) A minimum of 10% of large infill and brownfield sites; and
- 3) A minimum of 20% of institutional or ‘windfall’ sites

However, in addressing the foregoing the Guidelines accept the need for planning authorities to be flexible in the application of quantitative standards and recognise the need for greater emphasis to be placed on the quality of space.

3.2.2 County Policy: Meath

The *Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019*²¹ (CDP) states that: “public open space is a critical element to the creation of a quality and distinctive urban environment, offering opportunities for both passive and active recreation, contributing to the quality of life of residents and visitors alike and offering environmental and ecological benefits”.

At present, Meath County Council supports this viewpoint with policies such as SOC POL 40 and SOC POL 41. Respectively, these policies are: “to encourage where possible local community involvement in the upgrading and improvement of open spaces” and “to facilitate the development of children’s play areas and playgrounds in proximity to existing and proposed neighbourhood centres, where feasible”.

The current *Meath CDP*, provides objectives; SOC OBJ 7, “to examine existing public open spaces and carry out improvements where necessary to increase their usefulness as recreational spaces”; and SOC OBJ, “to provide for appropriate play provision in accordance with the Meath Local Authorities Play Policy 2008-2012 and any revisions thereof”.

However, the development standards and guidelines of the *Meath CDP* outline the following areas for different uses per 1,000 population:

Proposed Use	Minimum Area per 1,000 Population
Children’s play area	0.4 ha
Urban Parks/General Amenity Space	1.2 ha
Playing Fields	1.6 ha
Total	3.2 ha

Table 7: Minimum open areas as per the Meath CDP .

In assessing the foregoing, the outgoing plan does not include policies or objectives that ensure Meath County Council will regularly examine the need to deliver *new*, freely accessible public open spaces in the county. Nor do they include policies or objectives that would facilitate the delivery of such. Excluding playgrounds, they simply commit Meath County Council to the retention and maintenance of existing open space. These observations indicate clear shortfalls to the plan, reducing its flexibility and ability to respond to changing demographics and economic conditions. Such changes have been evident in County Meath and Ashbourne, but also in Dublin which exerts considerable social and demographic pressures on the town of Ashbourne.

²⁰ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local published (1987) A Policy for the Provision and Maintenance of Park, Open Spaces and Outdoor Recreation Area by Local Authorities.

²¹ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009) Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (Cities, Towns & Villages).

²² Meath County Council (2013) Meath County Development Plan 2013–2019.

3.2.3 Local Policy: Ashbourne

The *Ashbourne LAP*²³ – guided by the content of the adopted *Meath LAP* – provides rather limited commentary on the provision of public open space other than in the case of new residential developments. However, the LAP recognises the importance of accessible open space provision: *“the availability of appropriate amounts of high-quality open space is essential for building sustainable communities... Public open space is ideally provided in the form of a hierarchy of spaces, ranging from town parks to smaller spaces serving residential areas”*.

The LAP contains a series of key policies to satisfy the foregoing statement. SOC POL 15 is *“to ensure that high quality open space is provided to serve the active and passive recreational needs of the population of Ashbourne”*, while SOC POL 16 is *“to ensure that private open space acts as recreational and living space for children and pets respectively as well as providing a safe, enclosed area for the residents’ personal enjoyment and relaxation”*.

It is the explicit intention of Meath County Council to abide by these policy stances with a series of objectives. SOC OBJ 13 binds Meath County Council to investigate the provision of a riverside and pedestrian walkways in the town. SOC OBJ 14 and SOC OBJ 15 aim to protect existing walkways along the River Broadmeadow, encourage improvements to its banks, while also providing passive and active recreational spaces within its vicinity.

However, as will be illustrated below, the extension of the riverside walkway to complete the linear park will not be of a sufficient size (estimated c. 13.0 ha) to cater for the existing and future populations of Ashbourne. Furthermore, it is as yet unclear how the linear park will develop and when it will be finished.

3.3 Benefits of Additional Public Open Space for Ashbourne

3.3.1 Economic Benefits

Urban parkland has the potential to result in numerous economic benefits. It will ensure that the town remains an attractive place in which to live and work; and therefore, to invest. Such investment would be by local residents committing to their town and community, as well as by external companies recognising the attractiveness and desirability of the town. There is also the potential for the park to induce the creation of spin-off companies and jobs, benefitting from the catalyst effect. Examples may include personal trainers using the park, a café within or adjacent to the park or even professional dog walking.

There are also significant opportunities for tourism, which positively impact many sectors of a town’s economy. The *Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas* (CEDRA) recommended (No. 28) in its report *Energising Ireland’s Rural Economy* that: *“Local and Regional Tourism Destinations to complement National Destinations should be developed through a multi sectoral approach. This should be complemented by a destination management and marketing initiative”*²⁴. Promoting and advertising a recognised, high quality public park in Ashbourne would allow the town to retain some of estimated 750,000 people who visit the nearby ‘Tayto Park’ each year²⁵.

In support of this, one of *Ireland’s Ancient East’s* objectives is *“to link the larger iconic visitor attractions with lesser-known sites nearby in order to disperse visitors and increase their dwell time and spend in the area”*²⁶. This reflects the premise of the CEDRA recommendation, above. Ashbourne is one of the key towns serving *Ireland’s Ancient East*, linking the region with Dublin city. The town serves as a gateway to the tourist destinations and attractions of the northern part of *Ireland’s Ancient East*, in particular those along the Boyne Valley. However, according to the *Ireland’s Ancient East* website, Ashbourne offers only a limited number of high-interest attractions and activities to lure and retain visitors. This further strengthens the case to deliver a public park of significant size and quality, maximising its appeal. The opportunity to strengthen the town’s tourism offer must be recognised as being an incentive for its provision.

3.3.2 Social and Health Benefits

The provision of a new park in Ashbourne will benefit the cohesion of the community in Ashbourne, facilitating people meeting and engaging with each other. Having undergone considerable population growth in recent years and set to experience further increases into the future (Section 2.1), park space (with appropriate onsite facilities) has the potential to improve social interaction and community development.

Freely accessible public parkland can host countless events that support the town’s development and enhance the unity of a community. Parks are a place of equality – open to all members of the community – and do not (and should not) discriminate or prejudice. While the town is listed by Pobal as being ‘marginally above average’ in the 2011 HP Deprivation Index, a review of the numerous ‘small areas’²⁷ reveals that the populations within them range from ‘disadvantaged’ to ‘affluent’²⁸. A park for the town would be an equaliser and unifier for the town’s community.

²³ Meath County Council (2009) Ashbourne Local Area Plan 2009–2015.

²⁴ CEDRA (2014) *Energising Ireland’s Rural Economy*.

²⁵ Fáilte Ireland (2016) *Visitors to Top Fee-Charging Visitor Attractions 2015*.

²⁶ Stated in: Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (2016) *Action Plan for Jobs: Mid-East Region 2016–2017*.

²⁷ Smallest area (lowest levels) at which the CSO collects statistical data.

²⁸ Haase, T. and Pratschke, J. (2012) Pobal HP Deprivation Index.

Ireland has been recognised globally for its worsening physical health, with obesity as a major issue²⁹. Greater levels of exercise and physical activity are an important method through which this can be addressed. Additional public open space, preferably that which is in close proximity to the town centre and residential areas has the best potential to provide benefits. Where children grow up being able to avail of a park, regularly using it from a young age has the potential to create a positive mind-set in which they enjoy physical activity and being outside.

Parkland is also excellent amenity space for older members of the community unable to take part in active sports like football or rugby. A park for the town would support passive and moderate recreation. This consideration is of particular importance when one revisits the findings of Section 2.1. FAC estimates that the population aged 45 years and older will increase to 5,492 by 2026, accounting for 39% of the town's population. Functional, casual public open space will address the needs of this growing portion of the town's community.

In addition, free public open space benefits mental health as well as physical health. Open space that allows distinct separation from built space provides an escape and an environment in which people can relax, removed from the stressors of daily life. It provides a place where children can develop their cognitive and emotional skills as they use the park, engaging with it and other children. A park would also support good mental health as it facilitates physical activity and social interaction. Mental Health Ireland notes 'five ways to wellbeing' that can be promoted and supported by a park for Ashbourne: *"connect", "be active", "take notice", "keep learning" and "give"*³⁰.

3.3.3 Environmental Benefits

The environmental benefits to additional public open space are numerous and three have been included here. Firstly, it will continue to augment the town's SUDS. This is of importance as the town expands in the future and the surrounding agricultural lands are developed for various uses. Much of the development could see fields and hedgerows lost to impermeable structures and surfaces. The creation of a park would ensure the protection of a pocket of natural vegetation and permeable features.

Secondly, the vegetation that would comprise the park would sequester carbon as it grows, removing CO₂ from the air and releasing O₂ to breathe. The park would be a positive contribution to efforts to tackle the outputs of burning fossil fuels for energy creation and powering transport. In fact, developing the park in a relatively central location would likely reduce the need for private vehicle use as the population could safely and enjoyably walk or cycle to work and school.

Thirdly, a park would be beneficial to the biodiversity of the town and county. While the majority of the flora would likely be introduced during the design phase, it would be an opportunity to include native Irish species of trees and plants, often omitted in afforestation projects. New fauna – mammals and birds – would come to inhabit the space. The boost to the ecosystem can only be seen as a positive: a protected enclave within the town. In addition, it would also be an interactive learning environment in which children could find out and identify different species in real life.

²⁹ O'Brien, T. (n.d.) Overview of the Obesity Problem in Ireland.

³⁰ Mental Health Ireland: <http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/five-ways-to-wellbeing/>



4.0 Data-led Assessment: Strength in Numbers

Taking account of the growth in the population of Ashbourne in recent years and the expected growth into the future there is clearly an immediate need to provide additional public open space for the community. An increase of 2,088, or 17.2%, will mean that this demand is set increase. Only 3.8 ha of freely accessible public open space is available to the public and failure to appropriate adequate public open space has the potential to significantly impact the residential and economic attractiveness of the town. The two ‘test cases’ described below give an indication of the quantum of open space that would be sufficient for Ashbourne.

4.1 Test Case 1

If the former DEHLG’s 1987 publication standards are to be used as a guide, the provision of public open should be up to 24.0 ha (12,000+ population: 16.0 ha neighbourhood park and two 2.0 ha local parks, plus two additional 2 ha local parks). This could be revised upwards to 28.0 ha by 2026 based on expected population growth.

While it is accepted that the town benefits from a wide range of sports clubs and smaller open space areas that form part of residential developments, the park at Castle Street is not of a sufficient scale with appropriate facilities to provide for a town the size of Ashbourne. A larger park of significant scale with the capacity to serve the entire town with a facilities and services

4.2 Test Case 2

Considering the metrics used internationally (Section 3.1), two scenarios are proposed for the second test case. The first scenario adopts a requirement of 2.0 ha of *usable* public open space per 1,000 population and the second adopts a requirement for 2.5 ha of *usable* public open space.

Based on the 2.0 ha / 1,000 population scenario a requirement of over 24.0 ha is the result, rising to over 28.0 ha by 2026. As expected, using a 2.5 ha / 1,000 population scenario results in a 25% increase. See Table 6 below.

Scenario	Year	Population	Quantum of Space Required
2.0 ha / 1,000 pop.	2016	12,137	24.3 ha
	2026	14,225	28.4 ha
2.5 ha / 1,000 pop.	2016	12,137	30.3 ha
	2026	14,225	35.6 ha

Table 8: Quantum of public open space required.

4.3 Commentary

The results of both test cases are very similar: c. 24.0 ha based on the 2016 population estimate and c. 28.0 ha based on the expected population in 2026. This should provide reassurance. With less than 4.0 ha of publicly accessible, usable open space presently available in the town, an additional area of c. 20.0-25.0 ha should be developed and delivered. These considerations acknowledge the numerous sports clubs and their grounds in Ashbourne, recognising the specific recreational amenity that they provide to the community. However, the public open space being proposed here is parkland, accessible and freely available to the people of Ashbourne and beyond.



5.0 Roadmap: A Mechanism for Delivery with Meath County Council

The mechanism for the delivery of a high quality, publicly accessible open space for Meath is outlined in the five stages displayed in Figure 5. While Meath County Council would take the lead, collaboration with Ashbourne Playspace, as well as other interested residents and community groups in the town, will be vital for a successful outcome and enhanced 'buy in' from all. Consequently, consultation and engagement would be required during all five stages, as indicated below.

Realisation of this public open space would require funding, with the majority required during the three stages of 'land acquisition', 'design' and 'delivery'. This funding could originate in numerous ways and from different sources. The primary source of funding for capital expenses would need to come from Meath County Council potential through a special park development fund or development contributions. In relation to the latter, the county's DCS includes "*Ashbourne Linear Park*" as a potential recipient of funding as well as other relevant recipient projects listed as 'Class 3 – Social Infrastructure' include: "*community groups*", "*playground incentive fund*", "*forward planning*", "*community facilities (including recycling centres)*", "*improved pedestrian linkages*", "*walking trails, linear parks*" and "*improvements to amenity areas*"³¹. In addition, other funding sources are also available. For example, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) lists a series of different organisations that issue funding for "*biodiversity related projects*", including: The Heritage Council, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Irish Research Council (IRC), Teagasc and the Forest Service³². Fundraising by the APN and other Ashbourne-based community groups could also be a smaller element of funding. The APN launched already launched their *Ashbourne Community Park* fundraising initiative in 2015. Financial assistance from another philanthropic or charitable individual or group may also be a possibility.

Stage 1 will be to align the policies and objectives of the *Meath CDP* to support the delivery of additional usable public open space. At present, the policies and objectives adopted by both the *Meath CDP* and the *Ashbourne LAP* do not presently appear to be robust or definitive enough to realise this project. Meath County Council should act to align its policies to more actively facilitate and support open space in the form of larger, accessible and usable public parks. Key policy and objective recommendations that should be considered by Meath County Council are outlined in the Section 6, the conclusion.

Stage 2 involves the identification of appropriate lands for the delivery of a large park. Such a space would need to be of a sufficient size to delivery an appropriate quantum of public open space. Based on the estimates herein, this would be an area of c. 20.0-25.0 ha. Natural features to the lands such as waterbodies and wooded areas would increase their attractiveness and may reduce the level of design and physical works required to provide the park. Thus, reducing the costs of its delivery. The lands would need to be in close proximity of the town, maximising their accessibility and their use by the community. This would also minimise the use of private cars to reach the park and reduce the likelihood that future development will be drawn towards the park if located out of town.

Stage 3 would involve the acquisition of the identified lands and this would require the first major input of funding or financing. Several different sources of funding have been discussed above as possibilities. A 'land swap' may also be an option to acquire the desired lands.

Led by Meath County Council and supported by the local community, designing the layout of the public open space, as well as its features, facilities, access, security, etc. and its subsequent delivery would comprise Stages 4 and 5. These two stages would be the second and third points when funding would be required. The design should be cognisant of the existing types of open space in the town, particularly the open space of the sports clubs. Therefore, functional passive open space should be the primary element contained therein.

³¹ Meath County Council (2016) Meath County Development Contribution Scheme 2016–2021.

³² NPWS website: <https://www.npws.ie/biodiversity/biodiversity-funding>

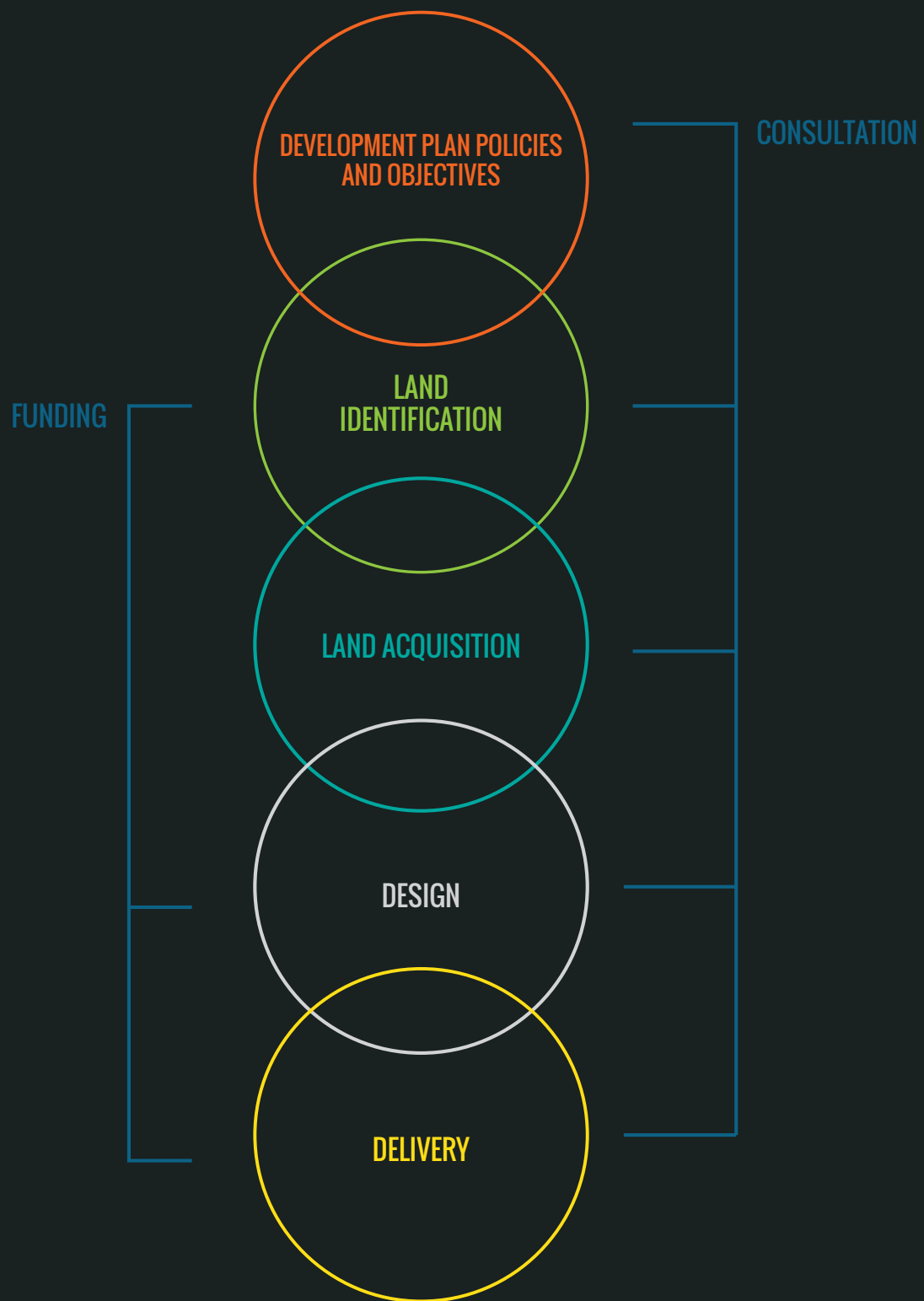


Figure 5: Mechanism for delivering new public open space in Ashbourne, Co. Meath. Source: FAC.



6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Summary

As has been illustrated in this submission, the population of Ashbourne has grown considerably in recent decades and is set to continue to do so up to 2026 when it is projected to reach over 14,000. This population growth has occurred while the town has failed to gain adequate, freely accessible public open space, contrasting with the towns of Navan, Kells and Dunshaughlin.

It is recognised that Ashbourne benefits from the presence of numerous sports clubs, yet the open space associated with these groups is for intensive, active use and while open to the public, requires a membership or an entrance fee. Only 3.8 ha – 0.3 ha per 1,000 population – of freely accessible public open space is available in Ashbourne; less than the rates in three towns listed above and significantly less than the standards identified in Section 3.

Ashbourne has clearly been underprovided with freely accessible public open space for many years and while recent announcements relating to the linear park are welcome, provisions must be made at county and local levels to guarantee the delivery of an adequately sized area of free, public open space. This area has been estimated to be c. 20.0-25.0 ha and will be vital to ensure that the town remains an attractive location in which to live, work and invest.

6.2 Recommendations

It has been clearly demonstrated that there is merit in realising the delivery of a new public park for the town of Ashbourne. To work towards addressing the public open space deficit in Ashbourne, several key recommendations have been proposed. It is requested that they be earnestly considered by the planning authority.

- 1) Meath County Council should pursue the delivery of a new, freely accessible public park for Ashbourne of c. 20.0-25.0 ha.
- 2) The following policies and objectives should be introduced into the Meath County Development Plan 2019-2025:
 - (i) It is a **policy** of Meath County Council: *“To ensure that its urban settlements are adequately served with freely accessible public open space”*.
 - (ii) It is an **objective** of Meath County Council: *“To monitor the public open space requirements of County Meath’s urban settlements and address public open space deficits where identified”*.
 - (iii) It is an **objective** of Meath County Council: *“To coherently coordinate the provision of public open spaces in future residential schemes to maximise their benefits, utility and usability”*.
- 3) Meath County Council should establish a special development fund for the development of a park at Ashbourne to address the historic amenity deficit of the town.
- 4) Meath County Council should examine the possibility of establishing a dedicated, internal Parks Department to oversee the maintenance of existing, and delivery of new, public open space throughout the county.

6.3 Meath County Council’s Commitment

It is worth noting that the current *Meath CDP* states that its aim *“is to drive the present day evolution of the county and to establish a framework for the coordinated and sustainable economic, social, cultural and environmental development of County Meath”*. The plan continues: *“that as the purpose of a Development Plan is to set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, the preparation of the Plan requires consideration of the long term goals and aspirations of Meath”*. The provision of additional parkland for the people of Ashbourne would adhere to and facilitate these fundamental principles of the *Meath CDP*. The long terms goals and aspirations of the county must include ensuring a sustainable future for the town and its residents.

Appendix 1

Meath County Council Development Contribution 2004 - 2009 - Projects provided between 1998-2003 that will continue to receive funding

Ashbourne	Dunshaughlin	Kells	Navan	Trim
	One stop shop		Town park (Site acquisition)	Porch Field Phase I and II
			Bull sculptor	
			Kennedy road	Town Hall Acquisition and Re-development

Meath County Council Development Contribution 2004

Ashbourne	Dunshaughlin	Kells	Navan	Trim
Branch Library	Civic Space	Environmental Improvements	Bruna Baun Development	One Stop Shop
One Stop Shop	8 Acre Park	Kenlis Place Car Park	Car Park at Public Transport Interchange	St. John's Parkland Purchase & Development
Village Centre Walkway		One Stop Shop	Environmental Improvements 1	Linear Park
Provision of New Cemetery		Swimming Pool	Environmental Improvements 2	Recreational Centre
		Town Centre Renewal	Fair Green Redevelopment and Kennedy Road Civic Space	
		Fair Green Wall	Kentstown Road Car Park Extension	
		Environmental Improvements	Landscaping on Approach Roads	
		Scout Hall Refurbishment	Arts Centre/Courthouse	
		Town Park	Boyneside Linear Park	
		Pedestrian Access to Town Centre	Town Heritage Signing	
		Railway Corridor for Amenity Purposes	Environmental Improvements	
			Provision of Children's Playground	
			Town Park	

Meath County Council Development Contribution 2010-2015

Ashbourne	Dunshaughlin	Kells	Navan	Trim
Environmental Improvements	Swimming Pool	New library	Public Park	St Pat's School, Unfunded Balance
Cemetery	Town Square	Swimming pool	Extension and Refurbishment of Library	Cemetery
Planting and Landscaping	Environmental Improvements	Heritage Centre	St Patrick's Academy	Environmental Improvements
	Cemetery	Cemetery	Cemetery	Town Hall Acquisition and Development
	Planting and Landscaping	Environmental Improvements	Environmental Improvements	Amenity Development Trim
		Development of park and ride facilities	Planting and Landscaping	Trim Town Wall Conservation and Pathway trails
		Town Hall Roof Replacement	Kennedy Road	Trim Town Centre Linear Park
		Pedestrian linkages Kells Town Centre		Planting and Landscaping
		Pedestrian overbridge at N3 West of Kells		Stella's Cottage Refurbishment
		Kells Walks		Porch Field Amenity Plan and Development
		Development of Land gained under the Development Plan Amenity/Recreational		
		Planting and Landscaping		
		Enhancements to People's Park in Lloyd		

Meath County Council Development Contribution 2016-2021

Ashbourne	Dunshaughlin	Kells	Navan	Trim
Ashbourne Linear Park	N/A	New Library	Public Park	Porch Fields Trim improvements
Ashbourne Community Centre		Heritage Centre	Solstice Arts Centre	Visitor Centre
			Kennedy road	Town Hall Acquisition and Re-development

