



160 Acre People's Park for Ashbourne?



(Tom Keenan)

Plans are being developed to significantly improve amenities in the Ashbourne area by providing a new "People's Park" and it is essential that what comes out of the process meets Ashbourne's needs, now and into the future. Improved access to public Park space has long been recognised as being beneficial for peoples physical and mental health, as well as improving civic spirit in the community and having beneficial effects for the environment, climate change, bio-diversity, etc.

Access to park space is also a well-recognised attraction for visitors to an area. How many times every year do we all hop in the car to drive to a Public Park or Greenspace in some other area? (Hill of Tara, Ardgillan Castle, Balrath Woods, Newbridge House, Malahide Castle, Phoenix Park, Blackwater (Navan), etc., etc). A public Park / Greenspace is a destination for many, and the aim is to provide that destination locally for the people of Ashbourne, and for people within a 15 to 20 km radius in South-east Meath and North-west Fingal, at least.

There is no doubt that the communities of these areas would benefit massively from such a development in this area. A public park / greenspace is not a luxury in any area, it is an investment in public health, an investment in social infrastructure, an investment in our environment, and as such is an essential element of infra-structure for all communities.

Greenspace and other nature-based solutions offer well recognised, but none-the-less innovative, approaches to improve the quality of life for residents in 'urban' settings. Parks and vegetation in public and private places are a central component of these approaches and can help to ensure that:

- residents have adequate opportunities for exposure to nature;
- biodiversity is improved, maintained and protected;
- environmental hazards such as air pollution or noise are reduced;
- the impacts of extreme weather events (heatwaves, extreme rainfall or flooding) can be mitigated;
- the quality of 'urban' or 'town' living can be enhanced;
- the health and well-being of residents is improved,
- groundwater is protected;
- reduction in the 'heat island' effect, etc.

Green space and parkland are basic components of "green infrastructure". The community and our environment need this development. It must be easily accessible

for all population groups in the area and respond to the many and varied interests of the population and the locality.

The value provided by a public greenspace / public park is only limited by the collective imagination of the community it serves, and in this regard, we must aim high and plan for the long-term. The Community in Ashbourne has shown plenty of examples of beneficial and imaginative community projects in the past and this project will be no different. (See <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/a-track-record-of-achievement/>). This project is not about "catching up" with any particular leaders in the field, it is about leading the field and using our collective vision and resources to show what can be achieved while blazing the trail for others to follow.

What size of Park is right for Ashbourne? Why should it be 160 acres (65 ha)?

A study carried out on behalf of the World Health Organisation (2012) showed that the ideal green space / park area that should be available to a community is 50 m² per capita. With a current population of about 13,000 people Ashbourne needs a public green space / public park, excluding playing pitches, of about 160 acres (65 ha). That's the target that this project is aiming to fulfil. With the support of the Community, Meath County Council, our County Councillors, and others, this can be achieved in the term of the upcoming County Development Plan. (2022-2027)

Many other studies on the benefits of public greenspace and public parks are referenced on the "Bookcase" Tab of the website www.ashgreenspaces.com.

Ashbourne is taking the long view with this project and this public space can become the hearth and lungs of Ashbourne and surrounding areas. Climate Change is real, financial penalties for non-compliance with CO₂ emissions are real, concerns about public health and obesity are real. A 160 acre (65 ha) public greenspace / public park provide a significant beneficial response to all those problems. We must be sure that these and all other possibilities are considered.

This is the most important decision regarding Ashbourne's future for years, and its outcome will impact the quality of life in our Town for generations. Stay informed and, if you wish, get involved by following us on Facebook <http://facebook.com/AshbourneGreenspaces> or link to us on www.ashgreenspaces.com.