



Ashbourne Greenspaces Discussion Document 2021





ASHBOURNE GREENSPACES

2021 Discussion Document

This document is presented to the Community of Ashbourne by Ashbourne Public Greenspaces Group. It provides an update on progress towards achieving the goal of a Community Park for our Town and proposes how we might work towards this over the next year. Its aim is to inform, promote discussion and engender action towards this goal.

This is the document of record on the above topic at this point in time, and as such is quite detailed and somewhat lengthy. A synopsis of the main points can be viewed in multiple formats which make more frugal use of the reader's time. See further details at Chapter 2, Section 5



ASHBOURNE GREENSPACES

Acknowledgements

The Committee

Ciaran Donnelly John Harmon Jack Holmes Fiona Woods

Wish to thank the Chairman, Councillors, Chief Executive and Executives and Staff of
Meath County Council
and our cohort of Friends and Advisors, nameless for now

for their assistance so far in pursuing this great goal of
Building a Community Park for Ashbourne

The photo of Ashbourne in 1952 is copyright of Patrick Kiersey. It was taken by ex-RAF
pilot Norman Ashe. The modern view is courtesy of Google Earth

We would like to express our gratitude and pay our respects to our friend
Ken Woods (RIP, 12 March 2021). Ken kindly offered us his time, wisdom, and
good counsel at a pivotal period in the development of our thinking and planning
for a park for Ashbourne.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Published by Ashbourne Public Greenspaces Group

June 1, 2021

*All material herein is copyright in the first instance of Ashbourne Public Greenspaces
Group or their suppliers and must not be reproduced in any form without written
permission from Ashbourne Public Greenspaces Group.*

Foreword

Top Ten Takeaways

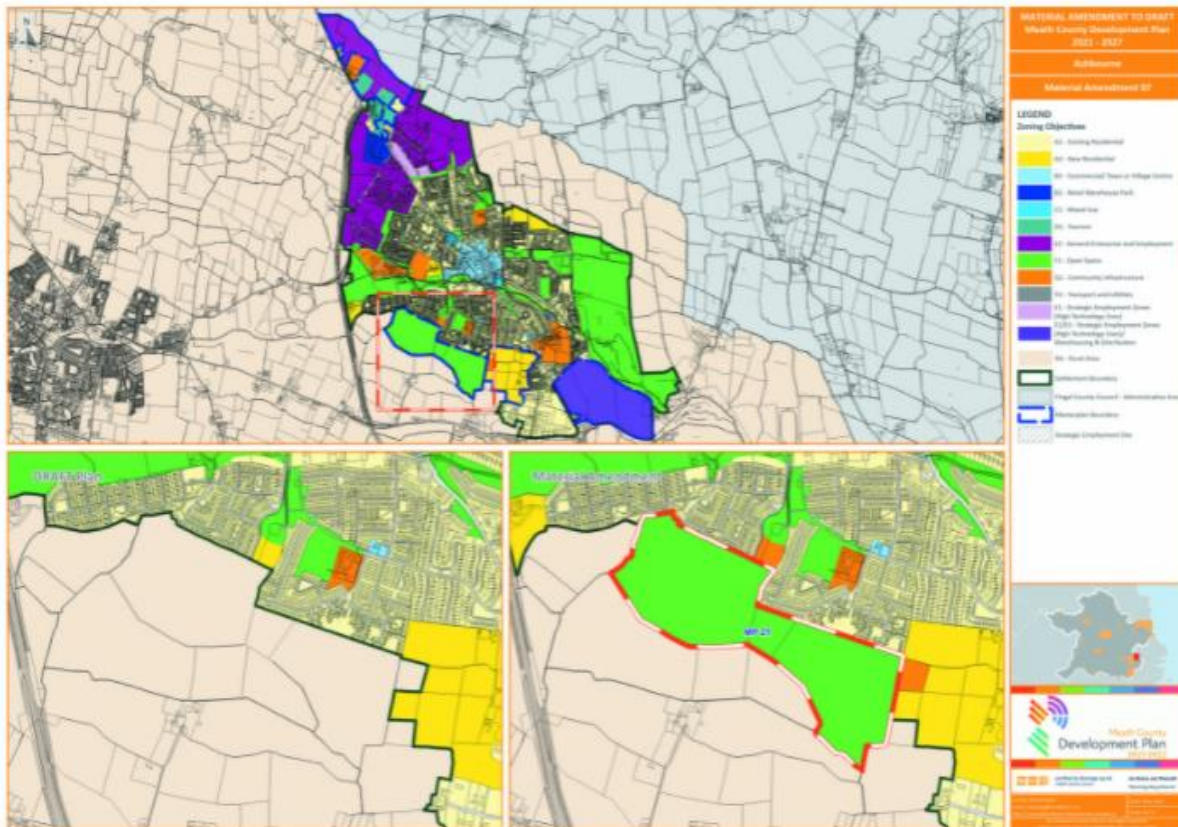
Top Ten Takeaways from this document	
1	The most suitable location for Community Park is Killegland Farm. There is general agreement on this.
2	80 acres has been zoned by Councillors. This figure is based on the 33.4ha arrived at in the Playspaces' Future Analytics Report. MCC Executive feel it should be 20 acres or less. Greenspaces argue for 80 acres as a minimum.
3	Greenspaces and some Councillors argue for a Community-driven approach to this project, as was taken by the Golf Club, the GAA, the Arkle statue, etc. MCC Executive appear to prefer an MCC-driven approach, as with the Linear Park.
4	Best guess on delivery date (Greenspaces): 2024 (Phase 1) – 2029 (Phase <i>n</i>). Principal determinant (absent legal manoeuvres) will be level and quality of Community Engagement.
5	Some MCC executives and to a degree also Ashbourne Councillors display a reluctance to engage with the PPN-endorsed Greenspaces group.
6	The general shape (though not every detail) of the County Development Plan (2021-27) that is emerging seems to be balanced and citizen-friendly, at least as far as Ashbourne is concerned.
7	Ashbourne residents strongly support the Community groups in the area (there are 126 of them). Not so well supported are the cross-Community entities (ADCC, PPN, Greenspaces). The Parks project is the ultimate cross-Community project.
8	Geographically, Fate has smiled on Ashbourne. Proximity to Dublin, Motorway network, Airport, Prehistoric Ireland, and Tayto Park qualify it as potentially the DisneyWorld of Ireland and much, much more. Building on this calls for Big Picture, Blueskies, long-term thinking and collaboration.
9	A project on this scale will draw on and contribute to Learning in the Social Sciences. Greenspaces will continue to be the Chronicler of this for the present.
10	Keywords for this project are: 80-acres, Community-driven, Community engagement, Collaboration, Planning.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Section Titles	Page
1	Setting the context	7
	1 How the landscape has changed in 12 months	7
	2 Long-term Vision, Medium-term Objectives, Short-term Plans	8
	3 Guidelines, Principles, Assumptions	9
	4 Seize the Day	9
2	About this discussion document: Purpose, Scope and Use	10
	1 Purpose of 2021 Discussion Document	10
	2 Scope of 2021 Discussion Document	10
	3 Using the 2021 Discussion Document	11
	4 Please let us have your feedback	12
3	The Story so far	13
	1 Greenspaces' origins and raison d'être – the story up to May 2020	13
	2 Killlegland Farm comes on the market	15
	3 How the past 12 months played out	15
	4 Key developments since publication of April 2020 Killlegland Park Discussion Document	16
	5 Lessons Learned since Greenspaces' founding in 2018	22
	6 A summary of the immediate priorities	24
4	Where to from here? The 2021 workplan	26
	1 Assumptions underlying 2021 workplan	26
	2 Building the Medium-term plan – immediate tasks 2021-Spring 2022	29
	3 A Future-Vision for Ashbourne – Building the Long-term plan	33
5	Building the Greenspaces Community Network – Some thoughts on Organisation	36
	1 All have a role to play	36
	2 Role of existing Greenspaces committee going forward	37
	3 Organisation design considerations – some thoughts	37
	4 Skillsets that are likely to be needed	39
	5 First thoughts on Greenspaces Organisation Structures	40
	6 Possible future Functions/Teams (probably Stage 3 or later)	42
6	Ten Top Takeaways from this Discussion Document	44

Abbreviations

PPN	Public Participation Network	https://www.meathppn.ie/
AMDC	Ashbourne Municipal District Council	Conor Tormey (Cathaoirleach), Cllrs. Joe Bonner, Suzanne Jamal, Aisling O'Neill, Amanda Smith, Alan Tobin.
MCC	Meath County Council	https://www.meath.ie/
CDP	County Development Plan 2021-2027	http://countydevelopmentplanreview.meath.ie/
LAP	Local Area Plan	Probably around 2023-24
APN	Ashbourne Playspaces Network	https://www.facebook.com/AshbournePlayspace/
TOR	Terms of Reference	For Greenspaces Working Group in 2019
NoM	Notice of Motion	Tables issues for debate in Council



Extract from MCC Material Variations Document - Proposed Ashbourne Amendment No. 7
<https://consult.meath.ie/en/consultation/material-amendments-draft-meath-county-development-plan-2021-2027/chapter/ashbourne>

Chapter 1: Setting the context

This discussion document is presented a little over a year after its predecessor, the 'Killegland Park Concept Description' document launched by us (the Ashbourne Public Greenspaces Group) in April 2020. That document set out the case for siting a Community Park of approximately 34ha within the boundaries of Killegland Farm, which had come on the market the previous month. Subject to zoning decisions unanimously passed by Meath County Council (MCC) Elected Members in Council on Jan 21, 2021 surviving the remainder of the planning process, and not being overturned by a judicial challenge, this objective has been achieved. A good years' work all round!!

Translating the historic decision on Jan 21 into a functioning park will be a multi-year project. Much debate, discussion, negotiation, *rí rá agus ruaille buaille* will occur, a few Christmases will pass, before the pastures of Killegland are reincarnated as the verdant walkways and gardens of Ashbourne Community Park. This document is published to start the ball rolling, to prompt those Park-lovers amongst us to plan and prepare for the next stage. Most of the activity in 2021 will be about 'Planning to plan'; doing the groundwork and collecting the data that will feed into the medium-term plan, which will deal with the delivery of the park.

So, in 2021 we expect to focus on:

1. Copper-fastening the achievements so far - seeing the County Development Plan through to adoption.
2. Building the coalition that will deliver the Park, viz. Community (incl. Public Participation Network (PPN)), Ashbourne Municipal District Council (AMDC), Meath County Council (MCC), Business).
3. Mobilising a small number of groups who can get going immediately (e.g., Funding group).
4. Developing the outline plan for the medium-term (2022-2027).
5. Scoping the longer-term plan (2021-2045).

1.1 How the landscape has changed in twelve months

Much has changed on many dimensions since we last went to print in April 2020.

- 1) Ownership of Killegland Farm has changed; Our original objective of acquiring the farm in its entirety changed when it became clear that this was not a runner.

Last year, the great goal was to rezone a site for a Community park. This is now virtually achieved though vigilance remains essential until the County Development plan is done and dusted, and the period wherein it can be legally challenged has elapsed (best guess, 12 November 2021, if no legal challenge). So, the context in which we draft this discussion document is much improved from where we were last year. Now we need to discuss and agree on how we move from concept to delivery. A much happier place to be, but a challenging place, nevertheless.

- 2) On a different front, the pandemic has changed the context to a great degree. It has probably created an Overton Window* during which many concepts, previously considered futuristic or even utopian, now seem the sensible thing to do. Examples:
 - Working from home
 - Rejuvenation of depopulated rural communities
 - Lower density housing
 - Increased levels of social activism

- Increased Government emphasis on Community building.

Some of the above, and more besides, may have a bearing on our deliberations.

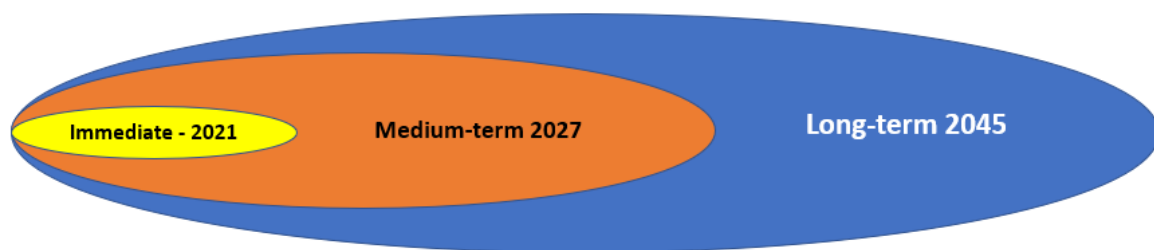
Again positively, attitudes to the Park from parties involved appear to have shifted somewhat. There now appears to be a better appreciation of the beneficial impacts of greenspace in urban populations, though this conversion is not yet total. The lessons learned about mental health impacts of the Lockdown have prompted a keener appreciation that Urban areas have needs that have not previously been considered. Policies in other jurisdictions, e.g., Fingal, Derry City and Strabane, serve to illustrate this point (See www.ashgreenspaces.com/Bookshelf).

On a negative note, many Ashbourne residents use the Phoenix Park as their nearest access to green space. In most cases this requires motor transport. The new restrictions on parking there will effectively rule the Phoenix Park out of bounds to Ashbourne residents. This serves to accentuate the point re the need for facilities nearer home.

1.2 Long-term Vision, Medium-term Objectives, Short-term Plans

The Community Park project will have a profound impact on Ashbourne, extending for many generations. Thus, it is critical to make our immediate and medium-term plans in the context of what a vision for Ashbourne a generation hence would look like. The old adage *'If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there'* captures this thought well.

Draft 2 of the County Development Plan, when taken along with the Chief Executive's Report on Submissions (published to Councillors last August) seems to have been prepared with the long-term in mind and we touch on this later. This means we can proceed with immediate and medium-term plans without having to divert resources to designing the long-term context for our Town. That being said, commencing detailed long-term thinking for Ashbourne cannot start soon enough, even though it is not on the critical path for the Community Park. So, we will invest a small amount of competent resource in long-term planning activity during the year, though it will not be a mainstream activity, and ultimately will probably reside outside the Greenspaces group.



So, by early 2022, we should have developed:

- The outline of a medium-term plan covering the delivery of the Park and the Sports hub
- FutureVision - First thoughts on a vision for the long-term development of Ashbourne and a plan for how this might be further developed.

This Discussion Document proposes how we might achieve the above.

1.3 Guidelines, Principles, Assumptions

The list of high-level assumptions below has guided the Greenspaces group in developing their thoughts and preparing this document. We assume that the majority of the citizens of Ashbourne agree with us on these. But of course, we could be wrong, in which case these will be changed, and the implications of such changes will be reflected in the plans going forward.

- 1) Perhaps the key assumption, that the Park is a Community-driven project. That means:
 - Like the Golf Club, the GAA facility, the Community Centre, citizens of Ashbourne will be responsible for the success or failure of the project.
 - Apart from MCC's €1.4m ring-fenced funds, responsibility for raising the significant further funds that will be required will fall largely to the Community, though further funding may of course be sought from MCC, as it will be from various other public sources.
- 2) Lest there be any concern, Greenspaces respect that MCC is the relevant statutory authority for many aspects of the forthcoming project, and we assure all that we will respect such authority.
- 3) This project will not subscribe to an '*entitlement*' mindset. By and large, we will be entitled to whatever results emerge from our collective efforts.
- 4) Greenspaces greatly values the opportunities for growing '*Social Capital*', those intangible but powerful reserves of goodwill and resilience that such projects as this call on and augment. This mindset will influence decisions that will arise throughout the duration of the undertaking, e.g., where we have the choice of using volunteer labour or bought-in resources to accomplish a particular task, all else being equal we will opt for the former.

1.4 Seize the Day.....

Although the pandemic severely constrained much of 2020's Bicentenary program, what was salvaged gave us a glimpse of a town that understands its past, knows where it came from, manages its present with a consciousness of its future, a Community that displays an awareness of possibilities into the longer-term, and the wit to connect current decisions to future impact.

The potential that the Park project presents for the long-term future of Ashbourne call to mind the words of James Baldwin, cited recently in Kamala Harris' autobiography "*There is never a time in the future in which we will work out our salvation,*" he'd written, "*the challenge is in the moment; the time is always now.*"



Chapter 2: About this Discussion Document: Purpose, Scope and Use

2.1 Purpose of 2021 Discussion Document

In April 2020, Greenspaces published the Killeghland Park Concept Discussion document, setting out some ideas on what might be achieved by applying a bit of lateral thinking to the possibilities that arose from the coincidence of a) Killeghland Farm coming to market and b) the stage we were at in the preparation of the County Development Plan (CDP). A little over a year on, this document is presented to continue and to some extent re-focus that discussion. Its purpose is fourfold:

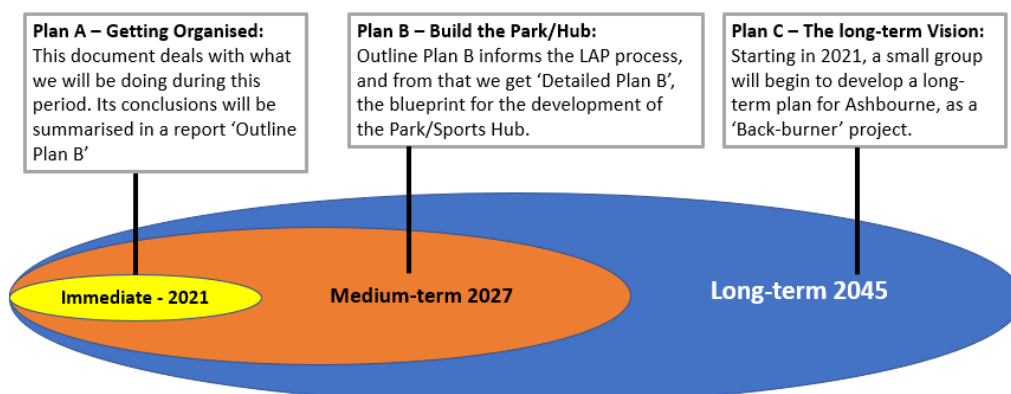
- 1) To update Ashbourne residents on where we are at now, thirteen months later, on the Parks Project.
- 2) To encourage discussion and receive feedback from the Ashbourne Community on next steps, how we take it to the next stage.
- 3) Also, to pose some fundamental questions that need answers in the short-term, to receive and collate feedback.
- 4) To begin to build the Community Networks that will deliver the Park and the Sports Hub. and that, in parallel but with less urgency, begin to sketch out a long-term plan for the Town.

Much has changed since last year's document was published, almost all of it positive. The conversation now should focus on how to build on what has been achieved, anticipate, plan for, and mitigate setbacks which will arise (risk management), and most importantly galvanise the Community Engagement necessary to carry this work through to the next and future stages.

2.2 Scope of 2021 Discussion Document:

In Chapter 1 Section 2 we mentioned the need to think in terms of three timeframes - Long, Medium and Immediate-term. Picking up again on this Planning theme:

- 1) Long-term: All plans with significant or long-term impact must be designed within the overarching context of at least an outline plan of long-term factors, say 25-35 years, a multi-generational Vision. Let us call this Plan C - the Vision.
- 2) Medium-term: A project on the scale of the Park and Sports hub requires detailed plans to achieve these medium-term Goals. Let us call this Plan B - Build the Park/Sports Hub, which must take account of the overriding constraints and dictates of Plan C.
- 3) Immediate term: Getting ready to develop Plan B in itself requires a plan. Let us call this Plan A - Getting Organised. Executing Plan A will constitute the main activity for the next year or so, and many of the ideas and issues that will feed into that work are presented in this document.



So, the period covered by this document will oversee the development of Outline Plan B, which will in time (2022-2027) and along with the output from the LAP, morph into Detailed Plan B, which will oversee the delivery of the Park and Sports Hub. As Plan C develops in parallel with the roll-out of the Park/Sports Hub, major decisions will be tested against Plan C's macro-level criteria.

So, at the risk of sounding like a stuck record, the focus of this document is short-term (now until early 2022), to promote and facilitate the public discussion about the Park and the Sports Hub, and to do the research, thinking, discussion, compromise, and agreement that will form Outline Plan B, the principal outcome of this stage. This in turn will feed into the preparation of Detailed Plan B - Build the Park/Sports Hub, which will start in 2022.

The preparation of Plan C - the Vision, will commence as a parallel but 'backburner' project during 2021. It will use some of the work done by Public Participation Network/Social Justice Ireland on Community Wellbeing as its Life-Goal, its 'Northern Star'.

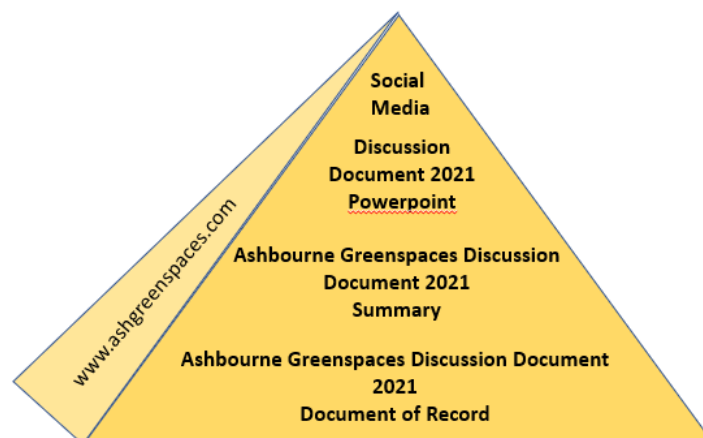
2.3 Using the 2021 Discussion Document

2.3.1 The document is presented in six Chapters:

Chapters 1 and 2 set the scene and describe the document. Chapter 3 details the story of Greenspaces and the Park question up to the present day. Chapter Four deals with what we have to address in the future, with particular emphasis on this year. Chapter 5 proposes how we might organise ourselves, in the immediate term and somewhat speculatively in the longer term. Chapter 6 presents what we consider are the Ten most important messages in the document – this section also doubles as a Foreword.

2.3.2 Multi-layered communication through multiple channels

Layered communications will be published during June, in order to reach the broadest possible audience.



- The 'Document of Record' (this version) is the most detailed form in which this document appears and is distributed as an e-mail attachment in PDF format and also as hard copy.
- A summary version will be presented, which will link to the underlying detail on the ashgreenspaces.com website.
- A PowerPoint version of the summary will be available on www.ashgreenspaces.com

- Extracts from the Document will be used to drive messages via Social Media, principally Facebook, using the Top Ten Takeaways as Post themes.
- All the above formats will be available from the Greenspaces website.

2.4 Please let us have your Feedback.

A key purpose of this Document is to encourage extensive discussion on the issues and choices around the Greenspaces projects. We encourage all interested parties to get in touch with questions, suggestions, comments, criticisms, new ideas, old ideas, offers of help, anything anyone considers relevant in the context of the development of the Park/Sports Hub.

Our preference is to accept feedback via our website <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/contact-us/>

Alternatively, drop an e-mail to: info@ashgreenspaces.com

Please note: By contacting us via any medium, we take this as an indicator, for GDPR purposes, that you are happy to receive communications from us.

Chapter 3 - The story so far

3.1 Greenspaces origins and raison d'etre – the story up to May 2020:

The groundwork for what became Ashbourne Public Greenspaces Group was laid over a period of about six years by the Ashbourne Playspaces Network (APN). APN focused specifically on the dearth of children's playgrounds in Ashbourne, on the development of the Linear Park, and more generally on the aspiration to get a Community-sized park for the Town. A budget of €1.2m was allocated for the Linear Park (Seven zones, with a playground in Zone 4). A working group, comprising members from Playspaces, Councillors and MCC Executive met on two occasions in early 2018 but was stood down by MCC when Playspaces protested in May 2018 against what they perceived as continued delays and over-expenditure on consultancy with no tangible results. MCC asked that a more representative group be formed, drawn from a wider swathe of Community Groups in Ashbourne. The Public Participation Network (PPN) Secretariat was asked to organise the setting up of this group, and all PPN-registered groups in the Ashbourne Municipal District (MD) were invited to nominate one member each to a Working Group. This was in Autumn 2018.

In the event, six Community Groups responded:

- Ashbourne Historical Society
- Ashbourne Playspaces Network
- Killlegland Soccer Club
- Broadmeadow River Conservation group
- Ashbourne 2020 Bicentenary Group CLG (ASH2020)
- Ashbourne Tidy Towns.

The Group met, elected officers, and delivered a presentation to the December meeting of the Ashbourne Municipal District Council indicating how they hoped to proceed, stressing collaboration and positive advocacy; a sentiment echoed by most (but not all) of the elected members present, and not by the senior MCC executive in attendance.

The key action point from the December meeting was a direction from the senior MCC Executive to a staff member to develop a Terms of Reference (TOR) document for the Greenspaces Working Group to be presented to a later meeting of the AMDC. We had misgivings that these Terms of Reference would be unnecessarily constraining, and subsequent to the December AMDC meeting we requested to have an input into their drafting. This request was not accommodated; we were told that the TOR would be presented to an upcoming meeting for ratification by the elected members. Our fears regarding the TOR proved to be well-grounded; discussion of anything to do with a Community Park was omitted from the Terms of Reference; the explanation offered by the senior MCC executive present was effectively 'the Community Park does not exist so therefore there's no point in including it in the Terms of Reference.'

Greenspaces met with MCC Executive and Councillors on multiple occasions throughout 2019. The key (often the only) item on the agenda was our attempt to change the TOR to include the Community Park. We got no effective support from either the elected representatives or the Executive on this. As the year passed, most of our group dropped out, considering the Working Group to be a waste of time. In December 2019 we suspended our participation in the group and resolved to seek another way. By this stage, the number of Community group representatives 'reporting for duty' was down to two. In January 2020 one of the absentee participating Groups nominated a replacement representative and the GAA, hitherto not a participant, nominated the fourth member. Since that time, these four have constituted the core group. Later in the year, three

experienced Community activists with impressive track records offered their services, and we have gratefully drawn on their wisdom from time to time, and to great effect.

This story has been recounted in some detail here in order to help pilot the way forward. The absence of collaboration that characterised that period has not gone away, though there have been instances of Teamwork from time-to-time, particularly from some of the elected members, and indeed from many sections within MCC, though unfortunately not from those who were actively involved in the issues described above. Resolving this absence of a collaborative mindset will be a key challenge of the next stage.

During that time, the development of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 was proceeding apace; Draft 2 had been published for Public inspection on December 18, 2019 and was open to public comment, observations and submissions, the closing date for these to be 6 March 2020. So, in February Greenspaces resolved to make submissions regarding the Community Park and to encourage and facilitate others to do likewise. Thus, by March 6, in excess of 300 submissions had been delivered to MCC Planning office advocating for a Community Park. We also made submissions of a similar nature supporting Ashbourne Playspaces Network, as well as Millbourne Residents, who organised a monster submission numbering close to 350. The total number of submissions from Ashbourne was unprecedented, and we had some fleeting qualms about the workload we were landing on the unfortunate Planners. But needs must, and as matters played out, on this occasion the end justified the means, of which more later.

The following analysis of submissions by settlement (town or village) in Meath gives some idea of the comparative scale of this action:

Analysis of numbers of Submissions/Observations by settlement:

MCC County Development Plan 2021-2027 - Written Statements - Submissions and Observations by Settlement														
Ashbourne	736	741	Donore	2	2	Julianstown	7	7	Longwood	9	9	Ratoath	28	44
Athboy	10	10	Drumconrath	2	3	Kells	23	29	Maynooth Environs	7	7	South Drogheda	14	14
Baile Ghib	5	5	Duleek	15	15	Kentstown	8	9	Moynalty	8	8	Slane	6	6
Ballivor	4	4	Dunboyne, etc.	25	27	Kilbride	6	10	Navan	36	37	Stamullen	32	40
Carlanstown	5	5	Dunshaughlin	21	24	Kilcock Environs	7	7	Nobber	0	0	Summerhill	7	8
Carnaross	2	2	Bettystown etc.	32	40	Kildalkey	6	6	Oldcastle	3	3	Trim	21	26
Clonard	4	4	Enfield	26	41	Kilmainhamwood	2	2	Rathcairn	0	0			
Crossakiel	1	1	Gormanston	110	129	Kilmessan	6	6	Rathmolyon	2	2			

And on an inter-county comparison, we understand that Westmeath had 48 submissions all told.

We have treated this aspect of the story in some detail a) to illustrate what we believe is a valuable lesson; follow procedure and you may indeed get a hearing, at least when the receiving entity has an objective, professional attitude towards your cause, and b) because we believe we may need to make use of this facility for public input to the Planning process again before the 2021-2027 Plan is adopted.

3.2 Killegland Farm comes on the market

Meanwhile, as the submissions deadline drew near, as the Covid-19 clouds started to form, another aspect of the story began to play out. The issue of a preferred site for a Community park had caused us some unease; the 'preferred site' (at least as far as some of the Councillors were concerned) seemed to us to be constrained, at least in the context of a 33.4 ha Park. But we had resolved to tackle that once we had finished with the submissions; we had enough balls in the air (three of our four members were also on the Board of Ash2020, and the pace of the Bicentenary program was beginning to hot up). Then two things happened:

- 1) The first lockdown brought the Ash2020 program to a sudden halt, freeing up resources.
- 2) A week before close of submissions, on February 28, we became aware that Killegland Farm would shortly be going on the market (it did so eventually on March 12). On February 28, we immediately contacted the appropriate executive in MCC, as we thought that there might be an opportunity for MCC to make a bid before the sale went on the public market. That this opportunity did not materialise was in no way due to inaction on MCC's part; we believe they acted promptly and positively.

When the Killegland landbank went on the open market, we at once resolved to submit an expression of interest in making a bid in the medium-term. We knew this was a long shot. The asking price was €8.2m. We had no funds and would need at least six months to put a bid together. But we reasoned:

- 1) The uncertainty introduced by what was becoming a pandemic would caution likely investors to play safe and hold off, in which case there was an outside possibility that our declaration of interest in putting a long-term bid together might gain some traction.
- 2) Rumours emanating from Government formation talks suggested that a program involving the Greens would call for policies inimical to land speculation.
- 3) Our bid would alert residents and Planners to the possibilities that were inherent in the Killegland landbank; if we didn't succeed in interesting the sellers, we could always take a shot at interesting the new owners.

So, we prepared the Killegland Park Concept document and distributed it on April 14 to about a hundred persons, including influential residents of Ashbourne, Local Councillors and National Politicians, and senior Executives of MCC. A copy of that document is available on our website, though it is really only of historical interest at this stage. It is important when reading it to understand that it was written as an expression of interest in acquiring the whole property (241 acres) and selling on much of it in order to fund the acquisition and the development of the remainder as the Community Park/Sports Hub. Within a short time, we knew that this had indeed been a long shot; a buyer emerged, and we set about refocusing our attention into convincing MCC and the Councillors that they should redirect their attention to the Killegland landbank, and to seek a much larger tract than would likely have been available at what was still at that time the Councillors' 'preferred site', to the southeast of the Town.

3.3 How the past 12 months played out

Our discussion document of April 2020 was purposely bold and ambitious in its thinking, picking up as it did on MCC Chief Executive Jackie Maguire's invitation at the Founder's Day Civic Reception on March 4 that, 'if we followed procedures and dealt through our excellent Councillors, great things were possible for Ashbourne'. And so it came to pass; great things were indeed possible, culminating in the vote of January 21, 2021 to zone 80 acres of Killegland Farm (now under new ownership) for the development of the Community park.

But that is dealing with a complex story in a very summary manner. We pick up the threads at the point where we submitted our expression of Interest in acquiring all 241 acres of Killeghland Farm and have just been advised that the likely new owner has been identified and all that remained was the paperwork. This was in early May 2020. We received many positive responses to our Discussion document along with offers of assistance. We received some encouragement from national politicians, including messages that the content of our document was well considered, innovative and well argued, and would be of value to anyone charged with planning the Town’s future. We considered expanding our ranks beyond the four core members, but eventually decided to stay as we were for the present but to construct a cadre of advisors whom we referred to from time-to-time, and who have provided invaluable advice. We resolved on the following workplan:

- a) To monitor progress on the sale of Killeghland Farm and to make contact with the new owner with due despatch.
- b) To research and build a knowledge bank of research and theory around Park scale, features, governance etc. – see <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/bookshelf/>
- c) To develop a Social Media competence, initially focusing on a Website and Facebook
- d) To advocate for a change of views on Location
- e) To advocate for a change of views on Park size
- f) To seek to build alliances with Councillors and MCC
- g) To build a small cohort of advisors to assist the core group of four.

3.4 Key developments since publication of April 2020 Killeghland Park Discussion Document

There follows a chronological account of the main developments since early May 2020.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 1) We published the frontpage article ‘Blueskies Thinking for Greenspace Living’ in the May/June issue of the Ashbourne News. Later in May we launched our website <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com>
- 2) and our Facebook page <http://facebook.com/AshbourneGreenspaces>.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 3) On May 15, 2020 we wrote to all Ashbourne Councillors requesting a meeting. Their response was that they could only meet with us at a formal AMDC meeting. A motion to invite us to present at a future session would be discussed at the June meeting.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 4) In anticipation of an invitation to present at the July AMDC meeting we prepared an extensive slideshow and submitted it to MCC. It can be viewed at: <https://www.ashgreenspaces.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/20-07-05-Presentation-Bluesky-thinking-for-Greenspace-living.pdf> The key messages therein described how the opportunity could be used for the benefit of Ashbourne; how, though ambitious, it was eminently achievable. We finished with a plea that all join forces to realise this great opportunity. In effect it is a PowerPoint version of the April discussion document. When

viewing retrospectively please remember that the possibility of acquiring the complete landbank was still considered ‘unlikely but still possible’, as closing the sale of Killeghland Farm seemed to be dragging a little.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 5) As matters transpired, and for reasons on which we can but speculate, we received an invitation to present, but to the September rather than the July meeting (the AMDC does not meet in August). Our instructions were that we had fifteen minutes speaking time and could not ask questions. In the event the Chairman allowed us ‘as much time as we need’. We took the opportunity to prepare a second presentation, this time stressing Collaboration and Common Purpose. This can be viewed at <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/telling-the-greenspaces-story>

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 6) Throughout this period, we continued to seek out science-based papers around all questions to do with Greenspace and assembled a sizeable collection which we placed on our website. One of our advisors summarised this knowledge bank in the October 2020 issue of Ashbourne News. His article made the case for a Park well in excess of 80 acres, based on World Health Organisation and other guidelines.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 7) On August 13, MCC released the Chief Executive’s response to submissions to Draft 2 of the County Development Plan 2021-2027, to a limited circulation list which included the Elected Members. It was to be released generally at a later date, in line with the County Development Plan (CDP) procedures. When it issued to the public on September 23, we were very pleasantly surprised, and will elaborate on this later. Suffice it to say that regarding the question of Location, the Chief Executive and Greenspaces seemed to be totally on the same page.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 8) But we (Greenspaces) knew nothing of this impending good news when we presented to the monthly AMDC meeting on September 8. Neither it seems did the MCC Executives in attendance at the meeting who, as became clear when the meeting commenced, were presenting MCC Executive’s conclusions on the question of a Community Park for Ashbourne. That presentation can be viewed at <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/bookshelf/> It is short and to the point. It recommends a Park of 15 acres on a site to the southeast of the Town (not the site recommended by the Chief Executive four weeks earlier). In the discussion which followed both presentations, no mention was made by anybody present of the changed location mentioned in the Chief Executive’s Report. The principal outcome of the meeting was that a group of the Councillors resolved to submit a Notice of Motion (NoM) to salvage what they could of the situation. Only Councillors could submit NoMs and the deadline for submission was October 6.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

9) The period between September 8 and the publication of the CE’s report on September 23 was perhaps the lowest point of the past twelve months. We consulted with our advisors and concluded that the best we could do was to seek to get the key decision on Location and Size postponed until the LAP, not a prospect we viewed with any great enthusiasm, but that in the circumstances as we understood them, appeared to be the least worst option.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

10) When the CE’s report hit the streets (more correctly, the in-boxes) on September 23, and its implications began to dawn on us – the preferred location was now Killlegland, joy was unconfined; somebody **was** listening; great things were indeed possible. Five of our six Councillors convened, sharpened their quills and a flurry of NoMs issued. We piled in with our advice, though we have to acknowledge in retrospect that we were preaching to the converted. The way forward was clear; the case for Location had been taken on board; it now remained to press the case for Park Size, and there was already a quantum of evidence assembled to support the case for at least 80 acres. Looking back there was a great sense of common purpose in the air at this time and this sentiment survived into the new year.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

11) Our approach in this account has been to tell the story without doing the readers’ thinking for them, to curate the facts and let the readers form their own opinions. We will depart from this norm for a brief moment to pay tribute to the quality, equity, and clarity of the Chief Executive’s Report and the current state of the draft plan. Many issues, some of long-standing, have been addressed; the Park is a real possibility now, and in a location that commands widespread support. Also, the issue around Millbourne greenspace, long a festering sore, has been addressed (albeit still facing the An Bord Pleanála hurdle), thus remedying a grievance with which there was widespread sympathy; the zoning of large areas to the Northeast and Southeast of the Town made eminent sense; The Chief Executive’s response to Submission 411 and particularly the reference to ‘the creation of a ‘live-work’ community shows visionary thinking. Multiple offers to ‘solve the housing crisis’ were treated with caution, at least for the present. The overall impression is of a plan where the needs of the Community were strongly considered, and the complementary need to create employment also embedded in a balanced plan for the Town.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

12) Five of the six Ashbourne Councillors having submitted NoM 111 calling for the zoning of 80 acres of Killlegland Farm for use as a Community Park, the ball was now very definitely in the court of these five Councillors. Their principal task was to build a coalition of Councillors from all six Municipal districts in Meath sufficient to vote through NoM 111. This involved skilful alliance-building, familiarisation with the finer details of the case, and the application of those interpersonal skills that is the secret sauce of effective local representation. In this instance, our group of five councillors

excelled themselves and deserve unstinting gratitude from the Citizens of Ashbourne. The Future Analytics report, originally developed in 2017, organised by Ashbourne Playspaces Network and funded by Councillors discretionary funding proved invaluable in building the case here.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

13) NoM 111 came up for debate on the afternoon of Thursday January 21, 2021. By this stage in the County Development Planning process all sessions of the Special Planning meeting (29 in all) were being conducted over Zoom and remote attendance by members of the public was facilitated. The January 21 session was possibly the best attended of all the sessions that took place between October and March, with around forty members of the public in attendance. Though all of the Ashbourne Group of Five Councillors contributed, the presentation of the case was adroitly manoeuvred by one Councillor, who delivered a tour-de-force of filibuster proportions. The outcome exceeded all expectations; all Councillors present (32 out of a full complement of 40), voted to support the Motion. Members of MCC Executive present, while recording reservations on Park size, did so with a warmth for Ashbourne’s achievement that hinted at more than a sense of congratulations, that our Town had got no more than its fair dues. This date should be formally embedded in Ashbourne’s Calendar in future years.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

14) Thus, the major objective of Greenspaces, Playspaces and the Councillors Group of Five (the zoning of the 80 acres for the Community Park) was achieved. This is, of course, subject to it not being overturned in later stages of the Planning process, or, following adoption of the plan, by a legal or similar challenge. But the outstanding objective of the 2021-2027 County Development Plan as far as Ashbourne was concerned had been provisionally achieved. All involved should deservedly feel proud.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

15) There were some attendant developments which occurred during the same planning session on January 21 that we suggest might be revisited, viz:

- A set of separate motions, NoMs 112 and 114, removed the residential zoning from a three-acre site at Killegland Graveyard and transferred it to another site on the western end of Churchfields. This change may cause controversy within the Community and give an impression of unfair treatment.
- Another motion, NoM 118, to restore an historic residential zoning to lands owned by Ashbourne and District Community Council fell in the absence of the Proposer. We feel that the impacts of this on possibilities regarding the Community Park may have been overlooked and that it deserves further discussion and possibly action during the public Submissions stage in June.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 16) After the success of January 21, later that month Greenspaces wrote to the Ashbourne Councillors congratulating them on their achievement and requesting a meeting to discuss next steps, how we might work together on the grounds that ‘if two heads are better than one, then sixty might be better than six’.

We received a response from AMDC Cathaoirleach on February 8, the tone of which signalled that the short period of common cause may have passed. The writer perceived no need to meet with us, other than in the distant future (years). To our disappointment, the content of the reply strongly suggested that the Park project would be run by MCC Executive, with minimal Community involvement. It was at odds with the sentiment that we had heard from some of the Councillors over the previous months; it showed little sense of urgency and a very basic approach to project planning. It is at such a remove from the sense we had from previous discussions with Councillors that we are left perplexed.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 17) During February we sought to contact the new owner of Killegland Farm. We wanted to impress on him that we ‘came in peace’; that insofar as we could influence outcomes, we would prefer to see a ‘Win, Win’ outcome and were optimistic that such could be achieved. We agreed to meet in the near future, as soon as restrictions permitted. We made no claims to any influence ‘other than that available to the normal citizen’ and wrote to make this position explicit. We have had a number of conversations and expect to meet up when Covid restrictions permit, i.e., within a matter of weeks.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 18) We continue to research the subject area of Public Greenspace and Parks and have made some valuable contacts in this area. We anticipate that we will have to continue to press the case on issues like Park size, Health benefits of Greenspace, Park features and other such matters. Most of the material we unearth we share on our website.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

- 19) On Monday 19 April the Chief Executives Report on the Notices of Motion submitted by Councillors was made available for Public Viewing. This can be retrieved at <http://countydevelopmentplanreview.meath.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/1.-Chief-Executives-Report-on-Notices-of-Motion-submitted-by-Councillors-on-the-Chief-Executives-Report-on-Public-Submissions.pdf>

Pages 156-191 refer to the Ashbourne NoMs. The motion relating to the zoning of the 80 acres, NoM 111, is dealt with on Pages 156-160. We have strong concerns about the wording in the response, particularly the emphatic language used (‘The quantum of land detailed on the map submitted with this motion is **far in excess of that required**’ – ‘The precise location **and scale** of the public park can be determined as part of the detailed LAP process’ – ‘**It is the strongly held view of the Chief Executive** that the formal designation of the public park for Ashbourne should be considered within the proposed Local Area Plan for Ashbourne.’

We are concerned that the strong emphasis may indicate a push-back towards the September 8 MCC proposal for a 15-acre Park. By suggesting that Park size be left until the LAP stage, the response appears to discount the historic vote of January 21. This will give comfort and encouragement to those who seek to frustrate the ambitions of the vast majority of the Citizens who aspire to an 80-acre Community Park.

The response to NoM 111, particularly given its attributed source, comes as a surprise to us. It directly threatens the cause of the Park and deserves an emphatic response at the appropriate time from the elected representatives and the Citizens of Ashbourne. We wrote to the Ashbourne Councillors on Tuesday 27 April stating our concerns and requesting a meeting with them to discuss this and other important matters relating to the Park. We await a response.

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

20) In our letter of 27 April, we also asked the Councillors to address the following:

1. How secure is the fence around the 'Ringfenced' €1.4m? At an AMDC meeting in Navan in October or November 2019, a proposal from MCC Executive that would permit some of these funds to be used for a skatepark in the linear park was passed unanimously by Councillors. Have any funds been spent under this heading or is the €1.4m still intact?
2. What is the procedure for putting a Development Contribution Scheme in place? Who has the authority here? Councillors or Executives? Is timing important here, for instance does it have to be done as part of the Planning Process? (Note: These schemes are described in Section 48 and 49 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). They appear to be designed to help fund projects such as the Community Park. On the face of it, they could pay for the purchase of the land over the term of the plan, thereby permitting new residents to contribute to the cost amenities funded by those who came before. This is a key question.)
3. What can and cannot be done during the LAP phase? Is the exact location of the area zoned 'fixed in stone', or could it be amended e.g., in negotiation with the owner? Or as a result of other issues that might arise during preparation of the LAP? For instance, if it proved sensible to locate the principal access through Cherry Lane or elsewhere, rather than via the road at Killeglan Graveyard/Churchfields, can this be done as part of the LAP or would it need to have been anticipated before the 2021-27 CDP was adopted?
4. Can we brainstorm what are the risks that might stymie the park? Can MCC Executive, a Court or An Bord Pleanála over-rule the Councillors' decision? What is the story on Strategic Housing Developments, which seem to be outside the rules that we are depending on? I suppose we are talking about a general Risk Assessment and Mitigation exercise, which would benefit from advice from a planning expert.
5. The issue that arose regarding the de-zoning of the Church-owned lands at Killeglan graveyard has the potential to cause delay and also to split the Community. We believe this can be resolved, given some lateral thinking. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss possibilities here.
6. Urban Regional Development Fund - to what extent could we avail of this source of funds for the park?
7. A training workshop for Greenspaces on the Planning system would be useful. Could the Councillors arrange this please?
8. When do Councillors believe we will have a park? And what do Councillors believe are the key actions that they and the community can do to achieve a successful outcome?

We believe the planning approach that informed the email of 8 February can be improved upon.

9. Could we have an exploratory discussion on the roles and relationships of the different parties (Councillors, Community, MCC, Business) with specific reference to Greenspaces in a spirit of collaboration for what we understand all agree will be a Community-driven project?
10. When do Councillors believe the first stages of the Community park will begin to appear? Over what timeframe do you expect the full 80 acres will be built out?

May 2020	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2021	Feb	Mar	Apr	May 2021
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----------	-----	-----	-----	----------

21) The Material Variations to the CDP were published for public viewing, observation and submission on May 31, 2021. The document can be viewed at <https://consult.meath.ie/en/consultation/material-amendments-draft-meath-county-development-plan-2021-2027>

A final reflection.....

Given all the forgoing, it is easy to overlook the fact that Ashbourne Public Greenspaces Group is a creature of the PPN, formed at the request of MCC Executive, having been assembled in late 2018, drawn from representatives of those Community groups who chose to nominate members, and endorsed by the Secretariat of the PPN. Although the PPN is in something of a rebuild mode just now, we have great faith in the concept, and in its capacity to build a model of Community Engagement for Meath that compares with the best in other local authorities, but which is still very much in its formative stages here. We expect that it will play a key role in helping build the alliances that will be required to achieve the Greenspaces ambitious Vision.

3.5 Lessons learned since October 2018 (Greenspaces founding)

1) The Pandemic drove home the need for a Community Park

Although the strong public support for a Community Park predates the pandemic by many years, the absence of such a facility and the impact of that absence on Community wellbeing over the past fifteen months drove the message home: Urban areas need unfettered access to greenspaces. If this is not self-evident, or if the case needs to be monetised, refer to <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/bookshelf/> and in particular the material on Derry & Strabane District Council’s parks program. At the outset we had thought that the case for a park had to be made on ‘soft’ or qualitative grounds; the literature suggests that it is much more quantifiable than that.

- The pandemic drove the Park message home – it’s not discretionary, not a luxury.
- The zoning is only the first hurdle in a long journey.
- A County or National Parks policy would be helpful.
- **‘Community engagement’** is a concept foreign to some key influencers.
- Collaboration is complex and cannot be assumed.
- Great Wisdom is to be had for the asking.
- There exists a high level of professionalism within MCC.

2) **The zoning is only the beginning**

Though one might think that the Park was 'home and dry' after the vote on January 21, that is far from the case. There exist parties within all sectors, who are unsympathetic, indeed strongly opposed to the idea of a Community-scale Park. We sense that pockets of resistance exist amongst the Executive, Elected Representatives, the Community and Business. The case is far from won and good old 'eternal vigilance' will be essential for a long time.

3) **Absence of policy at the County and indeed National level makes the Park project much tougher that it needs to be**

In our discussions we saw little evidence of policy or even light research on the importance or otherwise of greenspace to Society. Also absent was any understanding of how such policy might vary as between Rural and Urban areas. During the discussion leading to the zoning of 80 acres, a range of park sizes were proposed, each with its supporting rationale, from 15 acres advanced by MCC in their presentation

to the AMDC on Sept 8, 2020, to 160 acres proposed in an article in the October issue of Ashbourne News. This suggests that perhaps a policy consistent with the nature of the jurisdiction (urban or rural, and in between) needs to be established at a National level. * Some Local Authorities on the island have such policies in place which could be used as models.

A key benefit of a policy is that it takes the subjectivity and emotion out of the discussion and increases public acceptance of the outcome. 'Trustworthiness is founded on process (people are more likely to respect a decision if it was arrived at fairly), while legitimacy is largely about the values embodied in the process ('Values', Carney. M, 2021, P239).

* Regarding our point on the desirability of having a policy for Parks, it came to our attention that a National Policy for Parks was in preparation during the last months of the 24th Dáil, when John Boland as Minister for the Environment sought to craft a National Policy on Public Parks. The project did not survive the fall of the Government in March 1987.

4) **The concept of Community Engagement in decision-making is at an embryonic stage in Meath and viewed with foreboding by some Executives and Politicians**

- The PPN is in re-development mode in Meath.
- There exists room for improvement in levels of engagement, both at a Community, AMDC and at Executive level.
- The level of Public interest in active participation is low. For example: 1) Six groups nominated representatives for Greenspaces when > 80 were invited to do so in Autumn 2018; 2) Attendance by public at AMDC meetings is extremely low, despite the fact that MCC Executive has gone to considerable lengths to facilitate such attendance.

5) **Lessons re collaboration:**

A coalition of collaboration (Community, Councillors, MCC Executives) will be difficult to achieve but is a must. The concept of Community engagement is viewed with askance by some and is seen as a nuisance by a small number of key influencers. We appreciate that the prospect of frequent and often unsolicited advice can be annoying, that exposure to constant entitlement-fuelled demands breeds auto-pushback, that politics by its nature is competitive and unaligned 'do-gooders' must be seen as suspect or, God forbid, potential rivals. We have and will continue to encounter these responses. We understand that these concerns have some foundations in the real world but that does not mandate an antagonistic response. Rather a response based on process and procedure has been found to resolve such challenges in other contexts or locations. We have hopes that the emergence of a refreshed PPN model in Meath might improves matters under this heading.

A final note on the value of a collaborative environment: Achieving the Vision for Ashbourne will require considerable investment from decision-makers who have no connection with the Town, at National, European and other International levels. A critical ingredient that prospective investors will look for when evaluating opportunities will be local sentiment and attitudes, and key amongst these will be the degree of unity and common purpose displayed by the four parties that together comprise the social structure of the area, Community, Elected representatives, Executive and Business.

6) Some advice we picked up along the way, from some great sources:

- Keep ground for Sports Hub/Clubs separate from the Community Park. Sports clubs will naturally (and by virtue of investment) develop a proprietorial and exclusionary view of the land they inhabit; with Community Parks we are dealing with something more akin to a commonage. Each requires totally different modes of management.
- In case the dreaded term CPO becomes relevant, we understand there is a body of precedents around CPOs arising from the acquisition of land for Tymon Park in Tallaght which we were encouraged to study.
- And it bears repeating, getting the zoning is only the start. We’re just over the first fence and it’s a long way to the finish.

7) Level of professionalism in MCC

Over the past fifteen months, and almost without exception, we have been highly impressed by the level of professionalism and courtesy displayed by members of MCC Executive and Staff with whom we have come in contact. Their professionalism we quickly came to accept as a matter of course; the extent to which they went the extra mile to assist those of us finding our way deserves to be recorded.

In conclusion, there will be many valuable lessons learned from this project. It would be a pity if their value is lost to others going through the same challenges elsewhere and at future times. A project to chronicle the insights gleaned and lessons learned might be considered, perhaps as part of the remit of the Planning and Research function (See Chapter 5).

3.6 A summary of the immediate priorities

At the macro-level, two imperatives are clear:

1. Complete the County Development Plan 2021-2027

The County Development Plan will complete its final stages and hopefully be adopted by end of year. There has been some clarification of the timeframes for the remainder of the planning process and the following provisional dates are the latest word on this:

Date	Activity
31 May - 29 June	Material Variations on view to public who may submit observations or suggestions/submissions
3 August	CEO’s report responding to submissions shared with elected members
17 September	Meeting of elected members to adopt plan
29 October	Adopted plan takes effect
12 November	Any Judicial Review challenge must be made within 8 weeks of Plan adoption

There is a need for active public engagement to influence the plan during the period 31 May – 29 June and depending on CEO’s response, perhaps again during the interim between 3 August to 29 October.

Note: The above dates are at the mercy of the pandemic, and other issues, and are subject to change.

2. Get the general Ashbourne Community engaged in the Parks project:

We need to conduct the discussion, build the organisation, and draft the outline plan to move to the next stage (which will deal with detailed planning, LAP, negotiation with interested parties, etc.). Over the next twelve months, the above work can be done largely in parallel with the completion of the County Development Plan 2021-2027. The detail of this program of work is the subject of the remainder of this document.

Zooming back out to a multi-year viewing point, we are at the start of Stage 2 of what will likely be a four-stage program, which is sketched out below:

Stage	Stage name	Date	Activity
1	Land zoning	2020-21	Get 80 acres of Killeghland Farm zoned for a Community Park. Subject to the remaining stages of the County Development Plan proceeding as expected, and absent legal challenges, this Stage will be complete by end 2021.
2	Coalition building and outline planning	2021-22	Foster the discussion that will begin to put a shape on the Project. Build the nucleus of the organisation and network that will deliver the Park. Compile and publish the Outline Medium-term Plan.
3	Acquisition & detailed planning	2022-23	Engage in Local Area Planning process and develop detailed physical and project plans for Park. Acquire initial tranche of the 80 acres.
4	Commence building Park	2024	Commence laying out the first phase (e.g. 20-40 acres) of the Park, working to an overall plan developed for the full 80 acres.

These dates are based on an optimistic view of:

1. Absence of legal issues following on plan adoption.
2. Degree of Community engagement and
3. Fundraising success (which is closely related to (2)).

The premier critical success factor will be Community Engagement.

Chapter 4 – Where to from here? The 2021 Workplan

This Chapter will focus primarily on the workplan for Stage 2, which it is hoped will run from May 2021 to early 2022. Before jumping into that, we want to restate our key assumptions, a subject we touched on in Chapter 1 but is here dealt with in more detail and also takes into account the experiences described in the previous chapter. We will also in closing touch on the question of long-term planning, a subject with a more tolerant timeframe and which at this stage is disconnected from our main goals, but not to be overlooked, as it frequently is in exercises of this nature.

So, Chapter 4 deals with:

1. Assumptions underlying the workplan for the next twelve months.
2. Building the medium-term plan – immediate tasks 2021-early 2022.
3. A FutureVision for Ashbourne: Building the long-term plan.

4.1 Assumptions underlying 2021 workplan

a. Pandemic ends

We are assuming that normal social activities resume by late Summer, with no residual restrictions that would inhibit the activities in the Greenspace plan.

b. The County Development Plan is adopted by year-end

We assume in any date projections for this year that the CDP process finishes on schedule. We cannot conclude our planning beyond a certain point until the CDP is adopted and we have passed through the eight-week phase wherein objections might be lodged. Though not initially, at a certain point the CDP adoption is on the critical path (much preparatory work can be done).

c. Location and scale of Park



'What is the appropriate size for a Regional Park serving Ashbourne and its environs?'

There is lots of research out there to help answer this question. We have compiled many supporting documents and reports (all accessible on our website)

Here are some (there's many more):

The World Health Organisation formula suggests 160 acres is appropriate.

*The Future Analytics report commissioned by the **Ashbourne Playspace Network** in 2017 advises 83 acres. Dublin City Council's Parks Strategy Plan would see a Park of 140 acres as being appropriate.*

We are assuming that the Community Park will be located in what is now called Killelland Farm, its exact location to be determined during the LAP stage.

We also assume the Park size will be at least 33.4ha/80 acres. It will be developed in stages that align with availability of funds, details of which will be determined during Stage three and maybe later stages. We are assuming that there is general agreement on this among the Community, and among most of the Councillors. The thinking amongst some of the Executive appears to be at odds with some of the foregoing.

Note: In time, further land will be required to build a Sports Hub, which will be progressed under the auspices of the Greenspaces group for the present, but which is not covered in any detail in this document. The key assumption here is that the 80 acres is intended for a Community park with all the attendant features that it may include. Sports facilities are not included in the Community park.

d. We assume that all understand what we mean when we say ‘Timescale can be flexed’

The timeframe for the build-out for the Park can, up to a point, be flexed to match the availability of resources and the enthusiasm and energy with which the Community meet the challenge of resourcing the project.

e. Community-driven is the watchword for this project

This is probably the key assumption at this juncture, assuming that the zoning is secure. On the question of ‘who drives the project’, who takes the responsibility for ‘leading’ it from here, two models suggest themselves:

- i. The Local Authority model, driven by the Executive and the Councillors, as in the Linear Park, or
- ii. The Community model, as in the Golf-club or the GAA; in this instance driven by a pan-community organization yet to be assembled, and drawing assistance, advice, and legitimacy from the AMDC and the MCC Executive.

Key assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pandemic ends. • CDP is adopted by year-end. • Location and scale of Park. • Date for Park delivery is a moveable feast. • Community-driven project. • A strong role for PPN. • Advice and assistance welcomed from all.

In more urbanised jurisdictions with a Parks departments, budgets and strategies, the Local Authority model might be the obvious choice. In Meath, we are probably in the middle ground between Urban and Rural as regards demographics, and our organizations may have some way to transition. That is why we have opted for the Community-driven model, albeit with strong involvement and advice/expertise from the MCC Executive and the AMDC; a sort of hybrid which has worked very well in Ashbourne in the past.

f. We see a strong role for PPN here

PPNs, (see sidebar) first introduced in 2014, are still at a formative stage in many Local Authorities and that is the case in Meath. Like many other jurisdictions, there is a reluctance at Executive and Councillor level to fully enter into the new scheme of things and embrace the PPN concept. This is a natural part of the transition process in more conservative areas, and we expect that perspectives will change over time.

For our part we propose to work closely with the PPN to build the alliances and expertise-sharing that will be called for in the Parks project. When the natural unease towards the novel matures into acceptance of the new environment, we believe the PPN concept will bring great advantages to many aspects of Community activity.

<p>A Public Participation Network (PPN) is a structure that brings together Community and Voluntary, Environmental and Social Inclusion groups in each local authority area. Public Participation networks were established on foot of the report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government published in 2014, which recommended greater input by communities into decision-making at local government level. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for the formal establishment of PPNs and they are now operational in all local authority areas.</p> <p>The primary purpose of the PPN is to enable the PPN member groups to input into and have their voices heard within the formal decision-making structures of the local authority. The PPN is now the main way that local authorities connect with groups active in their area.</p> <p>Extract from Public Participation Networks Handbook, (Jan 2021, P 3). Department of Rural and Community Development</p>

g. We will explore the possibility of working with Fingal on developing the Park

Given the proximity of the border with Fingal, the absence of public greenspace in the northwest of that jurisdiction, the vast experience they have accumulated in Park construction and management, we will build on networks of connections to 'pick their brains' frequently when making our plans. We have every expectation that such assistance will be forthcoming.

4.2 Building the medium-term plan – immediate tasks 2021 to Spring 2022

Task	May 2021	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2022	Feb	Mar
a. Publish 2021 Doc											
b. Monitor CD Plan											
c. Resolve 3 acre issue											
d. Build relationships											
e. Communications											
f. Risk assessment											
g. Surveys, discussions											
h. Build network											
i. Draw conclusions											
j. Exhibition & conference											
k. Medium-term plan											

a. Prepare, Publish and Discuss 2021 Discussion Document

This document will be placed on the ashgreenspaces.com website in PDF mode, from whence it can be downloaded by any member of the public. We will promote it on Facebook and invite viewers to download it, also to email us to receive a copy via email. It will also be sent to the same email address list that we used to distribute the 2020 Discussion document, about 80 addresses including Community activists past and present, Politicians and MCC Executives. We welcome feedback – contact us at <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/contact-us/>

b. Monitor remaining stages of County Development Plan

The Material Variations to Draft 2 of the CDP were published for public observation/ submission on May 31. These variations are the changes proposed to the draft CDP unveiled to public view back in December 2019, changes which arise from of:

- Submissions made by the public between December 18, 2019 and March 6, 2020,
- MCC Executives responses to those submissions, and,
- The deliberations and votes of the Special Planning Meeting which was held over 29 separate sessions between October 19, 2020 and March 5, 2021.

The section for Ashbourne can be viewed at

<https://consult.meath.ie/en/consultation/material-amendments-draft-meath-county-development-plan-2021-2027/chapter/ashbourne>

We encourage all Citizens to study these carefully and engage in the process. Greenspaces is happy to assist persons needing help here.

The following table lists the remaining stages until CDP 2021-27 is in force.

Date	Activity
31 May - 29 June	Material Variations on view to public who may submit observations or suggestions
3 August	CEO's report responding to submissions shared with elected members
17 September	Meeting of elected members to adopt plan
29 October	Adopted plan takes effect
12 November	Any Judicial Review challenge must be made within 8 weeks of Plan adoption

c. Resolve the issue arising from proposed removal of residential zoning from three-acre site beside Killeghland Graveyard

This three-acre site until recently belonged to the Parish/Diocese. We understand it has now been bought by a developer who is seeking permission to build on it under the current County Development Plan. It is an ideal site for a Park entrance and its historic zoning as residential was the subject of many objections/submissions from local residents. There may be aspects to these transactions that merit scrutiny in a different forum; we are concerned about their implications for the Community Park and in that context propose the following:

- Rescind the vote on Notice of Motion 114 (21 January 2021), which effectively transferred the residential zoning from the graveyard site to a site near the M2.
- Transfer the residential zoning from the graveyard site to three acres of the 80-acre zoning for the Community park.
- The Park is likely to abut an area zoned for large-scale residential development around Cherry Lane. During the Local Area Planning (LAP) phase, swap three acres of the Park's 80 acres adjacent to Cherry Lane together with the residential zoning, for the three-acre site at the graveyard.
- This way, both parties win. The Park gets its entrance, and the developer gets his houses, albeit in a different location and a couple of years later.

This will take some fine tuning; the exact location of the 80 acres in the Park probably won't be determined until the LAP stage, so we're asking that the zoning be attached to a quantum of land not yet firmly fixed location-wise. But I'm sure this is well within the competence of the Councillors and the Planners.

In the meantime, it is imperative that Citizens of Ashbourne make their views known regarding any planning application for development at the graveyard site. There is always a 'third way', and it's pretty obvious in this case. If an outcome satisfactory to both parties can be agreed, it could possibly be submitted for consideration in the Submission stage currently underway, ending 29 June.

d. Build relationships

The quality and quantity of Community activism in the Ashbourne Municipal District scores well on many fronts. At present, there are 126 groups registered with PPN, almost all of them active and thriving. And the numbers grow at an impressive rate. This project will call for a slightly different model of community activism. Currently, our population of groups could be described as being 'deep rather than broad' and that is what one would expect. Members of (say) the baseball club will focus on their specialty and won't really take much notice of what the Choir or the History Society is doing. For this project we need to build a broad network; everyone has a role to play, some time or skill to contribute. So, what we have to say applies to all members of the Community, and then some.

We are seeking to build a network that connects all of the following:

- 1) Public Participation Network
- 2) Community Groups
- 3) Ashbourne District Community Council
- 4) Meath County Councillors
- 5) National Politicians
- 6) MCC Executive and Staff
- 7) Public Service at National level
- 8) Landowner/s
- 9) Chamber/Businesses
- 10) Fingal County Council.

e. Communications infrastructure including Opinion polling facility

In May 2020 we launched the Greenspaces website, and a Facebook page shortly thereafter. The structure of the website was calculated to support the principal objective at that time, to get a quantum of land zoned for a Community Park, minimum scale 33.4 ha. So, the website needs to be restructured to better support this year's workplan. Any material from last year that is no longer relevant will be archived within the website and available for viewing. We will also ramp up activity on our Facebook page to support this year's plan. We have been well served by the person who has managed our social media to date; we anticipate we will need more resources for what we believe will be an increasingly busy stage, as well as extending the number of channels that we use in addition to Facebook. Also, we envisage using Social media in new contexts, including Opinion polling and perhaps holding public meetings. So, if Social Media is your subject, and you are minded to support our efforts, please get in touch with us through our website.

f. Risk Assessment and Management Group

There is a tendency in matters such as the Park project to hear the good news, salute those responsible and then assume that everything will automatically fall into place. This will not work here; there are many points at which this project can go off the rails, not the least being the previously mentioned resistance to Park size as well as a certain reluctance to countenance extensive Community involvement in project delivery. For this reason, we propose establishing a Risk Management group, whose mantra will be 'What can go wrong?' We invite any professional Risk Managers in our Community to help out here. We will also invite a representative of the AMDC to join this group. Somebody from MCC Planning and also Finance could play an advisory role. Setting up this group is a priority.

g. Conduct extensive Community discussion and information gathering exercise

A key activity over the coming months, assuming the pandemic eases as expected/hoped, will be the collection of views of as many people as possible on how the Park should take shape. Surveys and face-to-face meetings, promoted by social media, will be used to ensure that all Citizens can feed into the plan development process.

h. Commence building out Greenspaces Network

Later in this document we describe options on how we organise ourselves for this undertaking. We don't want to design the network or organisation until we are familiar with peoples' views on many matters. That being said, we need a minimal organisation to get things moving, and we will seek to set that up as soon as possible- indeed some skeleton groups are already in place. See Chapter 5 for a more detailed treatment of the Organisation question.

i. Draw conclusions - Analyse and synthesize feedback from Public discussion

The various feedback, comments, survey data received over the Summer will be collated and published at a Parks Exhibition and Conference mentioned below.

j. Convene Community Exhibition and Conference

An exhibition and conference will be held over a weekend, probably in November. This will be the final interchange of views with the public before commencing the drafting of the Outline Medium-term Plan.

k. Complete and publish Outline Medium-term plan

All going well, we will publish the Outline plan for Stage 3 in the early months of 2022. We caution that this is very much a provisional date; as we said earlier, the timeframe for this project is flexible; there are so many variables at this juncture that hostages to fortune cannot be offered, nor, we hope, sought.

4.3 A FutureVision for Ashbourne: Building the long-term plan

When considering projects of moderately long duration, like Parks, it is easy to stray into the more distant temporal landscape and consider what future awaits us (say) a generation from now. It's often only then we realise yet again that we've got the planning sequence wrong (again), designing for tomorrow in the absence of a long-term plan. Study the two pictures below:

Think big, think far out, and make the strategic moves now



1952



2021

Had we done some forward planning during the 1960's, would the Town have turned out as it looks now? Almost certainly not. The 'Town Square' would probably not be a Car Park, we might have avoided the housing density causing problems in some estates, a Community Park would be more central than it can ever be now. Not that we got it that badly wrong, but I don't think anyone argues that piecemeal and sometimes opportunistic development gives the best results long-term.

This thought kept recurring during our discussions and brainstorming around Greenspaces; while we're asking the public to consider the Big Picture, why not also float the longer-term context, and channel this feedback into the processes that will determine what our Town will look like in another half-century. We have a little time to do this; the site chosen for the Park is easily the best we could pick in current circumstances, so long-term considerations need not delay anything there. But we feel we would be remiss if we didn't invest some resource, principally cerebral, in kicking off a 'back-burner' project which would begin to think about the long-term, independent of the Park, of course.

So, we will establish a small group of 'seers' whose role it will be to formulate the questions and generate some visions on twenty, thirty years out, and have them check back with the Community from time to time. And the further out they look, within reason, the better off our descendants will be.

Some initial thoughts, ideas, questions on longer-term considerations

We posit that Ashbourne’s proximity to Tayto Park, with its 750k visitors per year, presents Ashbourne with a unique opportunity to turn a fortuitous opportunity into a business success story, principally based on **Tourism**. Consider Ashbourne’s advantages:

- Its location on the national motorway network,
- Its proximity to Dublin (14km),
- Close to the Airport (20 Mins),
- As the natural base for the premier prehistory sites in Europe,
- Together with its tradition and reputation in Hospitality.

All add to the ‘Tayto’ strategic advantage. We believe this prospect to be very real, achievable, and meriting collective strategic thinking at the highest level. We will not go into detail at this point; for the moment we highlight below some thoughts and ideas, a question or two, and pass it to our FutureVision Team to take it up for deliberation.

	Title	Description
1	Steam Park	Academies, Institutes, Museums for STEAM subjects: (S)cience, (T)echnology, (E)ngineering, (A)rts, (M)athematics.
2	Academy of the Future	This might be the Home of the FutureVision Team, its public face eventually boasting Research units, Exhibition facilities, etc.
3	Ashbourne Net Zero	Still very much at an inchoate stage, this idea envisages a Community-based project targeted at reducing the Town’s carbon footprint in a manner which would create an interest across a broad population, attracting visitors. Early days.
4	Gateway to the Dawn of Prehistory	The Gods of Geografia have placed Ashbourne at the nadir of a circuit that runs thru Tara, Loughcrew, Slane, Brúna Bóinne, Fournocks, and many lesser sites of international historical interest. It is the natural base camp for this unique itinerary, has an embryonic hospitality infrastructure second to none in Meath, could rapidly expand to copper-fasten its position as the Gateway to the Prehistory Trail.
5	Prehistory Museum	Ireland lacks a museum specifically dedicated to the study of this subject. All other European countries have one or many. As a natural extension to the ‘Gateway’ idea, again Ashbourne is the logical location for this.
6	The Big History Trail	A concept developed by David Christian, World -famous Historian and Philosopher. His writings and lectures tell History at the level of the Cosmos. The idea here would be to include it as a walk in the Community, illustrating the story with a series of sculptures and other artistic representations. In time, a Virtual Reality layer could be included.
7	Institute for Community Studies	In time, this could grow out of the Research Unit in the Greenspaces Organisation. It could draw on local experience for Case development.
8	Conference Centre	If Ashbourne develops along the Tourism-based lines we present here, it would over time develop the infrastructure and facilities that would equip it as an ideal location for a Conference Centre.
9	Research and Innovation Hub	Initially to foster Community entrepreneurship, as the ideas mentioned here mature, such a facility would have a ready-made prototyping marking on its doorstep.
10	Health and Wellbeing	Part research facility, part advanced service facility, promoting positive physical and mental health for all

Many of these project ideas sit at the boundary where Community, Market and Education meet, and have Family as a common unit of focus. Given Ashbourne's demographics, this suggests a double payback for residents: Commercial and Educational. And a final thought, would a long-term perspective not suggest a rail link to the Airport, rather than to Dunshaughlin?

If this sounds like Pie-in-the-Sky, we understand; we are encouraged to dream on this scale by the success achieved in a short time by Tayto Park, who have already done the heavy lifting from a position of far less advantage. But that's for down the road. Must get back - we have a park to build.

'Walk on air against your better judgement' Seamus Heaney.

Chapter 5 – Building the Greenspaces Community Network - Some thoughts on Organisation

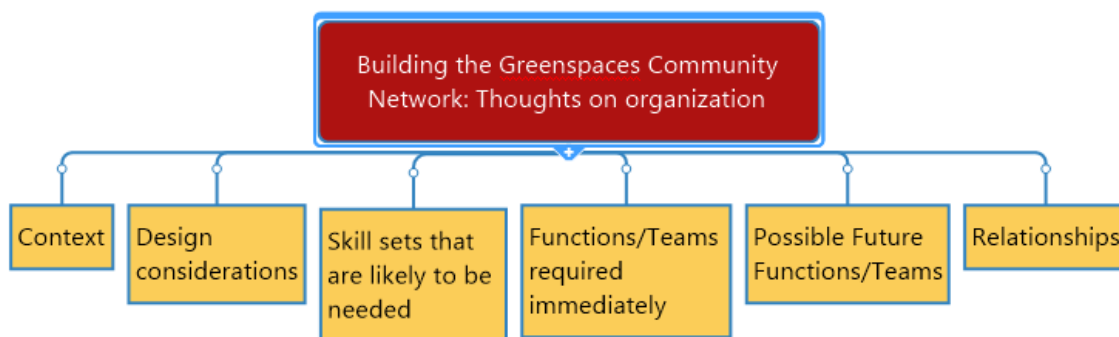
5.1 All have a role to play

The primary goal of the Greenspaces project is to get a Community Park and Sports Hub for Ashbourne. An important by-product is the strengthening of the Community in terms of resilience and other forms of Social Capital. Strong Communities better manage societal challenges and protect democracy. This secondary objective accords with thinking at both the National and European level.

It is our intent to ensure that anyone who wants to help out gets a chance to do so, and we welcome people who have ten hours a year to contribute as well as those who can spare ten hours a week. And if your ‘meeting-averse’ or ‘committee-allergic’, don’t let that deter you; with modern technology we can engage very usefully without moving very far at all!!!

So, ‘Fringers’ have a role to play as well as those who ‘eat, sleep and drink’ the Park project.

The following diagram illustrates the sequence of the core part of Chapter 5:



Stage 2 (2021-2) is about preparing to plan, identifying Tasks, Challenges and Ideas. So, this chapter is not about proposing a final organisation structure at this point; if all goes well, the structure and plan will emerge from our activities and discussions this year and will be described in the Outline Medium-term plan which should finalise by early 2022. That being said, it is clear that some functions/groups will be needed from the outset and these will be established without delay. These functions are itemised later in this chapter.

Earlier in this document we stated as a key assumption that the Parks project would be Community driven, while drawing on expertise and assistance from our Councillors and MCC. As a consequence, the onus is on the Community to build the organisation that will deliver the project. This will be no small task.

Earlier in this document, we gave a (heavily qualified) forecast of how the overall project might play out:

Stage	Stage name	Date	Activity
1	Land zoning	2020-21	Get 80 acres of Killeglan Farm zoned for a Community Park. Subject to the remaining stages of the County Development Plan proceeding as expected, and absent any legal challenges, this Stage will be complete by end 2021.
2	Coalition building and outline planning	2021-22	Foster the discussion that will begin to put a shape on the Project. Build the nucleus of the organisation and network that will deliver the Park. Compile and publish the Outline Medium-term Plan.
3	Acquisition & detailed planning	2022-23	Engage in Local Area Planning (LAP) process and develop detailed physical and project plans for Park. Acquire initial tranche of the 80 acres of lands.
4	Commence building Park	2024	Commence to lay out the first phase (e.g., 20-40 acres) of the Park, working to an overall plan developed for the full 80 acres.

So, we're now in the zone between Stages 1 and 2, and a key task for 2021 is to design and begin to assemble the organisation that we will need over the next few years. What we have presented in the following pages is our best guess at this juncture at how the Greenspaces organization might evolve. But it's just that, a 'strawman' that will prompt discussion and fine-tuning over the remainder of the year. When you have read it, we believe you will appreciate that this project is a considerable undertaking, requiring very much a business-like approach, and calling for substantial and highly competent skill-sets from the Ashbourne Community. We feel certain that these resources exist in our Town. Indeed, the success of the venture will be directly related to the degree that those resources and talents decide or can be persuaded to engage.

5.2 Role of existing Greenspaces committee going forward

The existing committee plan to stay at the helm through Stage 2 and will step down once the Outline Medium-term plan is complete, and a new Committee selected by a process that will be decided as part of Stage 2 discussions.

5.3 Organisation design considerations - some thoughts



Thoughts, ideas and guidelines:

1. Foster a culture which is collegial and apolitical. Seek to attract Team Players. Above all, place a strong emphasis on a Team philosophy.
2. Use existing groups where possible and sensible, but if this is likely to cause delay, replicate, and consolidate later.
3. PPN can play an important role in this project, but exactly what that will be, we do not yet know. That depends on many factors, including the degree of acceptance of the role of PPN by all. In theory PPN should be useful to connect with influential players locally and elsewhere. At present, the position of PPN in Meath is in something of a transition stage. This is an emerging situation, and important for the project's prospects.
4. Levels of performance sought will be that of a well-managed business; commitments entered into should not be considered discretionary thereafter. That being said, we will organise so as to attract people with ten hours a year as well as ten hours a week and will seek to accommodate persons who have unpredictable schedules and varying availability.
5. Design for the short/medium-term, but always within the constraints of a long-term model.
6. We will seek to engage with parties anywhere who can offer us assistance or advice, e.g., with Local Authorities who have lots of experience with building Parks. Our network should extend as far as is useful.
7. As we proceed, we may develop centralised services, e.g., to minimise compliance workloads on Project teams.
8. As part of Stage 2, we will develop a Constitution document:
 - a. During 2021, we will draft a Constitution covering the role and form of the Greenspaces initiative in the Community sphere. We will use the Charities Regulator's Constitution template as the base, with some customisations based on the ADCC and Ash2020 Constitutions.
 - b. We welcome thoughts on Mission Statements and inputs on appropriate Values, Objectives and Goals from anybody with relevant interest or experience.
9. Anticipated challenges:
 - a. Generating sufficient levels of Community Engagement (getting Volunteers)
 - b. Dealing with the entitlement mindset and selling the message that the success or failure of this project is up to the Community now. MCC and the Councillors are broadly doing their bit. Now it is our turn.
 - c. We may experience a reluctance to engage from some of the incumbent decision-makers (Councillors and MCC Executives), who may feel threatened by what they perceive as an intrusion into their territory. We expect that as PPN is understood and fine-tuned, this will morph over time into a workable relationship.

5.4 Skill sets that are likely to be needed

Most of the skillsets below will be useful as soon as they can be recruited. We mentioned earlier that we would expect to build an organization that will achieve performance levels on a par with a well-run business. This may seem a tall order but in reality, it is not. Many of the mature Community groups in the Ashbourne Municipal District compare with the best out there.

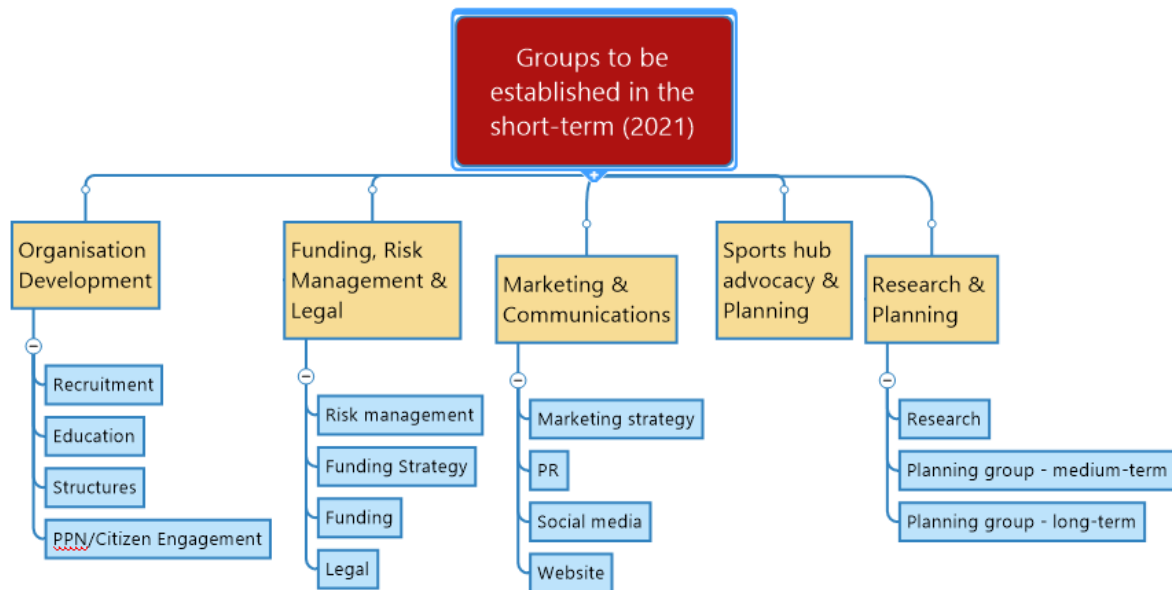
Ashbourne Greenspaces needs volunteers with experience in the following disciplines:

1. Human resource/Organizational Development/Training
2. Risk Management
3. Financial Planning
4. Project Planning and Management
5. Marketing and PR
6. Social media and website maintenance, design, building and management
7. Planning (as in Land use planning) and Legal
8. General administrative
9. General foot-soldiers, Convenors, etc.

If your particular calling does not feature in the above list, don't let that deter you. Anybody who believes in the Greenspaces cause, of the value of Community and who has a bit of time and energy can play a role in this historic undertaking, which your grandchildren will thank you for.

5.5 First thoughts on Greenspaces Organisation Structures

As stated, we do not present an organisation chart at this stage, though the following charts may look like such a representation. There follows a description of the Functions (which beget Teams) which are likely to feature in the short and medium term.



During this stage we will establish teams, most of which will be with us in one form or another in the long-term (see diagram above). The exception is the Sports Hub Advocacy and Planning Team, which will be established under the auspices of Greenspaces, but which will in time go on to a life in its own right. As it is likely to be with us for some time, we will consider it here as a Team within Greenspaces.

For the sake of clarity, please note that, unless otherwise stated, all the roles described here will be on a pro-bono, voluntary basis.

A short description of the role of each team follows:

Organisation Development:

By the time we are up and running, we will have a sizeable and reasonably complicated organization in place. Building and maintaining this will be no small task. We plan to build a small unit of professionals with experience in human resources, organization development, recruitment, education, and training. This need not be more than three or four people, but they need to be practitioners.

Funding, Risk Management and Legal:

The Parks project is likely to cost a large seven-digit sum before it is completed and will need an ongoing source of income to cover maintenance. Some of this will come from MCC but we expect the bulk of it will be raised elsewhere, from public and private sources, including from Ashbourne residents, present and future. We have already established the nucleus of this team, who are working on a fund-raising strategy.

Anticipating pushbacks and less inimical threats to the Parks body will be the responsibility of this group, and early moves will be made to put some expertise to work in this area. We expect it will be busiest in the initial years of the project. Legal advice will be needed from the outset.

Marketing and Communications:

We already have some access to great resource in social media and website design and construction, but our experience in this area says you can never have too much of these skills and we will be expanding here. We will need some 'heavy-hitter' strategic marketing and PR skills at an early stage.

Sports Hub Advocacy and Planning

Our focus on the Park has led us to neglect (or temporarily de-prioritise) this important area. Later this year, we will convene a discussion around this concept, which has had some airing in recent years with encouraging results. However, we still have sizeable and successful Sports clubs with no home in Ashbourne and this should not be the case, given the unquestioned social payback that these groups deliver to the Community.

Eventually this group may move outside the Greenspaces umbrella, but we are likely to always be close neighbours (metaphorically, at least).

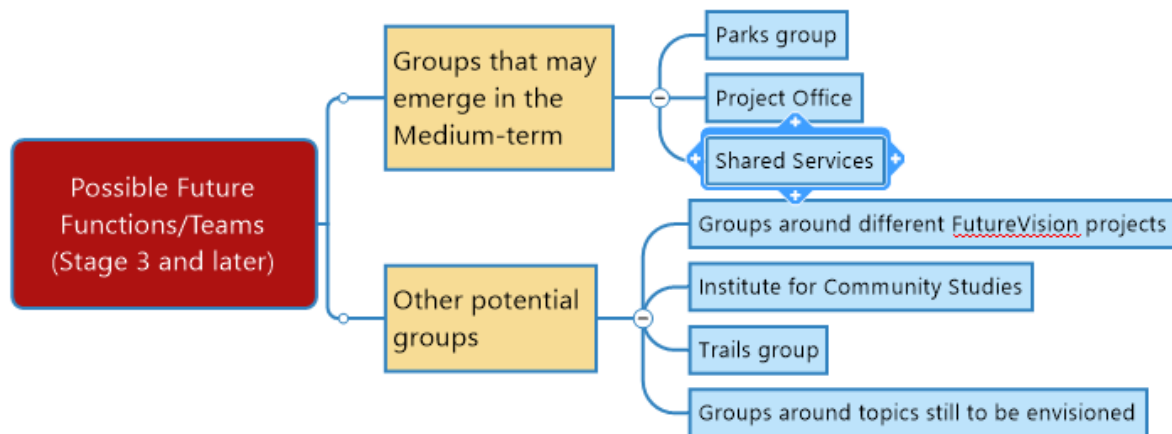
Research and Planning

Much of what Greenspaces has been engaged in to-date could be categorised under this heading; our belief is that it has paid off well. We will continue to give this activity a central role as we move forward. Initially it will focus on research to promote and build the Park, but the project is sufficiently large and interesting to be a source of considerable learning in its own right and in time our efforts may extend to capturing and disseminating some of this learning.

We expect to double down on recruiting for the above roles immediately but ramping up efforts as the opening-up of society progresses.

5.6 Possible future Functions/Teams (probably Stage 3 or later)

Some of the Teams mentioned here are quite likely to become very high profile in time, but we won't be spending much time on them during Stage 2, other than to form a nucleus around which they can later grow (e.g., Parks Team, Project Office). They are included here for completeness, to reassure readers that we haven't forgotten them, that we will get around to them.



Having said that, we have doubtless overlooked some and included some that will prove less relevant. Finding those oversights and mistakes is what Stage 2 is about.

Groups that may emerge in the medium-term:

Parks Team:

This Super-project team will emerge out of Stage 2 conclusions and will occupy centre stage during the construction stage of the project. It will have an ongoing existence as overseers of Park maintenance. It will be a sizeable team. It will probably draw membership from many existing groups including resident's associations.

Project Office:

Most of the teams that will be formed will operate on a project basis. In such situations, building a cohort of experts in Project planning/management and educating and applying standard approaches can add hugely to effectiveness. Another function that such a team could perform would be co-ordinating what will be many interdependent projects.

Shared Services:

This usually refers to IT services that could be performed at multiple different points in an organisation, but which are provided from a centralised source to achieve efficiencies. In our context none are immediately apparent but doubtless will emerge as we proceed.

Trails Team:

Some time back, one of the Councillors proposed a project to link up the various greenspaces in Ashbourne to one another by way of a walking and cycling trail. We believe this has great merit and maybe a project team should be established to progress it?

Other potential groups:

Since the following refer to ideas whose activation are probably somewhat distant in time, we include them here for the record only, and will not describe them in detail at this stage.

- Teams around different FutureVision projects
- Institute for Community Studies

- Teams around topics still to be envisioned.

Don't be misled by the detail above into thinking that we have it all 'figgered out'. The above is simply best guesses at this time, to be replaced/adapted/refined during Stage 2 in 2021 – early 2022.

6 Chapter 6 – Top Ten Takeaways from this Discussion Document:

11) **Follow us on Facebook:** <http://facebook.com/AshbourneGreenspaces>.

We will expand on these Top Ten Takeaways over the next few weeks.

Top Ten Takeaways from this document	
1	The most suitable location for Community Park is Killeghland Farm. There is general agreement on this.
2	80 acres has been zoned by Councillors. This figure is based on the 33.4ha arrived at in the Playspaces' Future Analytics Report. MCC Executive feel it should be 20 acres or less. Greenspaces argue for 80 acres as a minimum.
3	Greenspaces and some Councillors argue for a Community-driven approach to this project, as was taken by the Golf Club, the GAA, the Arkle statue, etc. MCC Executive appear to prefer an MCC-driven approach, as with the Linear Park.
4	Best guess on delivery date (Greenspaces): 2024 (Phase 1) – 2029 (Phase <i>n</i>). Principal determinant (absent legal manoeuvres) will be level and quality of Community Engagement.
5	Some MCC executives and to a degree also Ashbourne Councillors display a reluctance to engage with the PPN-endorsed Greenspaces group.
6	The general shape (though not every detail) of the County Development Plan (2021-27) that is emerging seems to be balanced and citizen-friendly, at least as far as Ashbourne is concerned.
7	Ashbourne residents strongly support the Community groups in the area (there are 126 of them). Not so well supported are the cross-Community entities (ADCC, PPN, Greenspaces). The Parks project is the ultimate cross-Community project.
8	Geographically, Fate has smiled on Ashbourne. Proximity to Dublin, Motorway network, Airport, Prehistoric Ireland, and Tayto Park qualify it as potentially the DisneyWorld of Ireland and much, much more. Building on this opportunity calls for Big Picture, Blueskies, long-term thinking and collaboration.
9	A project on this scale will draw on and contribute to Learning in the Social Sciences. Greenspaces will continue to be the Chronicler of this for the present.
10	Keywords for this project are: 80-acres, Community-driven, Community engagement, Collaboration, Planning.

And just in case you think Ashbourne isn't up to this....

- Track Record of Ashbourne Achievement**
1. Ashbourne Community Centre (1981)
Redeveloped 2017
 2. Donaghmore - Ashbourne GAA (2008)
 3. St. Declan's Ashbourne Credit Union (1970)
New Building 1999
 4. Ashbourne Parish Hall (1834)
Redeveloped 2014
 5. Baseball on the ADCC Grounds (2015)
 6. Ashbourne Golf Club (1904)
 7. Arika Statue (2014)
 8. Ashbourne Community School (1994)



