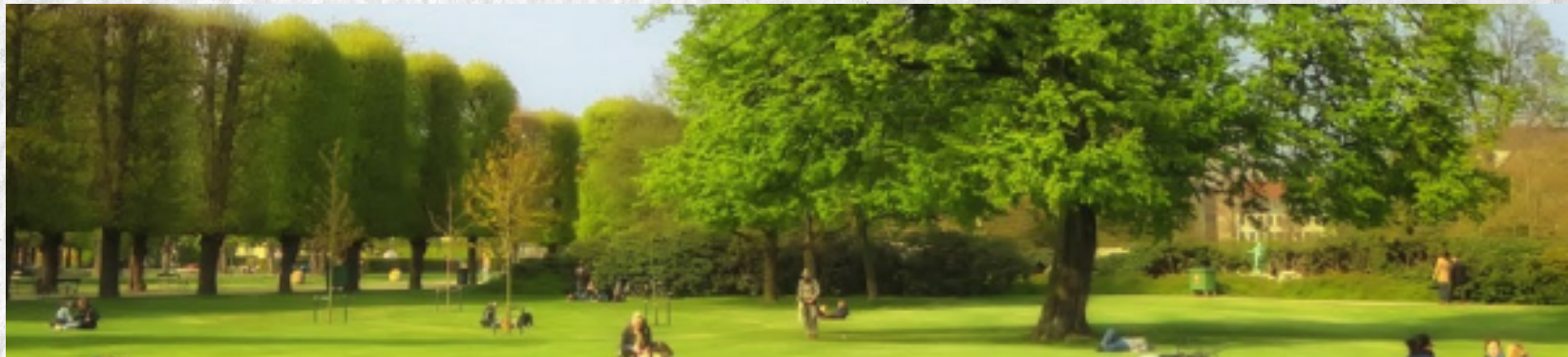


# FRIENDS OF THE COMMUNITY PARK NEWLETTER

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The Friends Newsletter is published periodically to keep the citizens of Ashbourne informed on how the park project is developing and to provide a forum for all to participate in the design and delivery of the park. It is published by the Greenspaces group, a community organisation set up in 2018 by the PPN Secretariat at the request of MCC Executive to promote the cause of a community park in Ashbourne.

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# THE NEWS

Vol 22-3

## The ASH2020 Garden gets underway.....



<http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/>



Early in our bicentennial year, the ASH2020 Board agreed a ten-year licence to develop a commemorative garden on the Dunnes Stores-owned plot of ground adjacent the Stags Head Tavern, at the junction of Frederick Street and Declan Street. When the Hand of Covid struck, this project suffered the fate of most others; hence we are just now getting started on what we had planned to achieve on this site during 2020. On 4th March, the first sods were turned by AMDC Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Suzanne Jamal and by ASH2020 Chair, Liam Mulvihill. Both addressed an assembled

audience of around 25, as did Fiona Lawless, Municipal District Manager and MCC Financial Controller. Fiona Woods, ASH2020 Board Member and event organiser also spoke. A choir drawn from the Ashbourne Community National School gave a rousing performance of the National Anthem. Afterwards, the assembled group repaired to the Stags Head for refreshments. The event was replete with symbolism. Since its initial designation as Founder's Day in 2020, March 4 has been marked to the extent that the constraints of the pandemic permitted. The significance of the date is that *March 4, 1820*, was the



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day on which Frederick Bourne registered the lease on the land on which he established Ashbourne. Shortly thereafter, the building now known as the Stags Head was erected. It was then called the Ashbourne Hotel and became the coaching inn where horses were changed, and travelers refreshed. It was established by the McAuley family from Millinam, over near Fairyhouse. Anne O'Neill, a direct descendant of the McCauley's, was a special guest at the sod-turning ceremony. The project to lay out the garden is a community project of the ASH2020 committee and will be carried out during the Summer.





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# Stepping it out for the Park

## - launch of the Greenspace Strollers

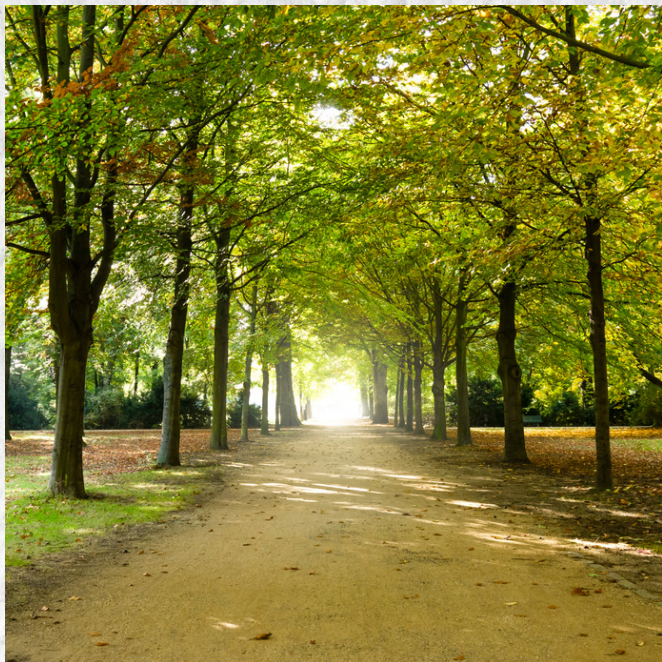
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*'The measure of any great civilization is in its 'town's (city's), and a measure of a town's (city's) greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and its squares.' John Ruskin*

<http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/>





Over the past four years, we at Ashbourne Greenspaces have been working to secure a Community Park for Ashbourne. Greenspaces and green infrastructure must be planned in partnership with all in the community who will depend on and utilise it. To draw more people into the discussion, we are planning a series of walks over the coming months to explore some local, national, and private parks and greenspace. with a view to inspiring, informing

and influencing our new greenspace to ensure that this space is inclusive and meets the needs of all in our community.

It may seem pedantic at this stage, after two years of containment, to have to argue for the importance of access to Greenspaces, but we frequently do. So, for one last time (hopefully):

The value of access to Parks

- Access to nature reduces stress and improves mental well-being
- Community greenspaces increase social inclusion
- Children's health improves when they have open greenspaces and woodland rather than just playgrounds to play in
- Good quality greenspace improves the image of an area
- A successful park or greenspace can be the making of a place, enhancing sustainability and reputation
- Such communities are places that people like living in, visiting and investing in.

<http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/>





In the Draft Utopia Report which Ash Greenspaces published in February (view it at <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/draft-utopia-report-feb-2022/>) we outline many ideas on how the design of the park and its facilities can add to quality of life in Ashbourne. This list is by no means exhaustive, and we want everyone to have a ‘Think’ and then add their ideas to the list. What better way to inspire such creativity than by joining us as we explore the many fine examples of well-thought-out greenspace that are not too far from us.



Join our new walking group – *The Greenspace Strollers*, where we will visit local, national, and private parks and greenspaces with a view to inspiring, informing and influencing our new greenspace. These walks will be monthly and start in April. For more details and a schedule of the walks, please email [info@ashgreenspaces.com](mailto:info@ashgreenspaces.com).



<http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/>



# Greenspaces members complete eTownz Smart Village training course

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It is reasonably accurate to say that, apart from the County Development Plan and the sub-plans that flow from it, planning at the community level, where it happens at all, is very much a case of each community group looking to its own future. There is little attempt to consolidate thinking at a town or regional level. This can lead to lots of re-invention, poorly informed decisions, and a Herculean task for public administrators, and funding bodies, who have to deal with myriad unique cases presented to them. Instinctively, one feels 'there must be a better way'.

Over the past two months, an online course 'Smart Villages' has been conducted by Meath Partnership for community activists from Ashbourne, Meath and Dunshaughlin. Sponsored by Leader, the Smart Villages concept describes a methodology and a supporting online toolset for designing, developing and monitoring a comprehensive community plan for a locality.

It is structured to permit input at the individual community group level, and in no way would allow infringement of group autonomy. The objective would be to use this approach and toolset to construct a cohesive plan for community activities in a village, a town, or a district. The program just completed with volunteers from the three towns is a pilot test for this approach in Meath. Post course review has been positive, constructively critical, and supports further deployment in the three towns. So, look for announcements of a further roll-out, possibly in May or June. Two members of Greenspaces completed the course. In its philosophy and design, it complements the approach we have been taking so far in the planning around the Community Park (see our 2021 Discussion Document at <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/greenspaces-plan-for-park/>)



# EDITORIAL

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORKS (PPN)

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A high level of community engagement, i.e., the involvement of your average citizen in the administrative decisions taken by Local Authorities, elected representatives, and other such bodies, is a hallmark of successful societies in Europe and elsewhere. Conversely, societies where the dominant attitude is 'cast a vote once every four or five years and leave it to those who are paid to do it', tend to perform less well, may be more exposed to influence by special interest groups, and generally provide a sub-optimal quality of life to their populations.

Conscious of this, and seeking to 'learn from the best', (in this case some of our EU colleagues), the Government introduced legislation in 2014 that provided for the roll-out of Public Participation Networks (PPNs - see sidebar) throughout the State, one in each Local Authority area.





# WHAT IS THE PPN?

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.

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.

*Extract from Public Participation Networks Handbook, (Jan 2021, P 3). Department of Rural and Community Development*

The PPN concept is still at a formative stage in many Local Authorities and that is the case in Meath. Like some other jurisdictions, there is something of a reluctance at MCC Executive and Councillor level to fully enter into the new scheme of things and embrace the PPN concept. This may be a natural part of the transition process in more conservative areas, and we expect that perspectives will change over time. For our part Greenspaces intend 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. We mention the subject of PPN and community engagement because there will be an election held shortly (April-May hopefully) to appoint a new Secretariat to manage the Meath PPN. Candidates are proposed by PPN-registered community groups, who also constitute the electorate. Greenspaces will be putting forward a candidate. If you would like more information on the concept and workings of the PPN, go to [www.meathppn.ie](http://www.meathppn.ie) or drop a note to this publication.





***....and if you feel inclined to lend a hand***

- We are building a Special Interest group to further research and develop the Environmental chapter of the Utopia Report, building on the ideas which you can find in the draft published on February 28 (see link below). If this is an area that interests you and you feel you could contribute some ideas on how the Park can inform, educate, illustrate or in any way advance the cause of environmental wellbeing, get in touch with us through <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/draft-utopia-report-feb-2022/>
- We're also looking for volunteers with writing skills, to develop material/content for this publication and for our social media channels. If you can help, please send us an email at [info@ashgreenspaces.com](mailto:info@ashgreenspaces.com)





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This section will be the 'Letters' page. Use it to seek like-minded persons to help develop an idea, to pose a question, to let off steam, whatever..... Don't use it to malign anybody or any body, rules of common courtesy apply and remember we're apolitical. Our email address is **info@ashgreenspaces.com** and we'd love to hear from you

**That's all until next month.**

**A Happy Easter on April 17!**

Follow us on Facebook at

<https://www.facebook.com/AshbourneGreenspaces/>

Or view our website at <http://www.ashgreenspaces.com/>

