15 June 2018

KILKENNY COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2020 - 2026

This submission is based on the feedback from our initial Public Meetings, the work that TCN has done since its inception in 2016, together with points raised at our last Special Management Meeting which referenced the Pre-Draft Issues Paper. Additionally, the request for comments went out to over 300 people on our mailing list and what follows is a compilation of comments from the Management committee as well as the general public. Some of the feedback below may be repetitive and may/may not represent the opinions of the community as a whole. People expressed the need for "joined up thinking" in all areas.

The 11 categories listed below are representative of the 11 categories listed in the Pre-Draft Issues Paper of the Kilkenny County Development Plan 2020 – 2026. Members of the Management Group attended 2 of the Information Evenings hosted by the Council.

1. Population
2016 census: 2,445 people
Projected population according to LAP 2006 -2016:
2014 - population 2595
2020 - population 2815
Highest age group - 39-39yrs : 414
2nd highest age group 0-9yrs : 410

2. Housing and Settlement Strategy
- How do we ensure sustainable patterns of settlements and employment:
  The development plan should be open to live-work proposals and any other manifestation of home-based businesses, especially within established towns and villages.
- Is there a settlement that could absorb more development?: There is a great demand for housing in Thomastown. Both for sale and rental. The area around Thomastown should be studied and zoned accordingly for high/low density.
- Density zoning is worth considering to help reduce sprawl and to encourage vibrant town centers. The development plan should be open to co-housing (housing co-op) developments.
- Should estates be phased?: phasing of a very large estate could help the town absorb the new citizens more effectively, ie. The schools' enrollment could be better addressed instead of a large influx all at once. Theoretically, the first phase has a chance to develop a sense of community that could hopefully be extended to each new phase instead of one large mass all moving into an anonymous estate all at the same time.
- There is potential for smaller units for student rental or shared accommodation
- Cater for existing schools/education centres (School of Food, Grennan Craft School, Pottery Skills Schools, Wine Academy Language school, Grennan Equestrian school, Thomastown Community Kindergarten, St Marys Primary school, Grennan College).
- Key Development Areas of LAP to be reviewed.
- Address existing housing stock which is in disrepair/unused. Possibility of penalties.
- Utilise exist in housing stock.
- Develop living over shops in town centre.
- New developments to be of quality housing.
- Accessible housing
- Small cluster groups with a mix of housing type.
- Contemporary aesthetics referencing the Rural context
- Use of shared renewable resources for cluster group housing
- Cooperative type of housing
- Urban experience to be enhanced

3. Economic Development and Employment

- Support of the town's Tourism initiatives will help attract visitors to the town, bringing business opportunity and economic growth.
- Good quality, innovative affordable housing will attract younger families to settle in the town and utilize the good, established school facilities
- Providing working/studio facilities for graduates from Craft and Pottery schools would encourage employment and development
- Agriculture?
- High speed internet would attract businesses to the town and allow for home based and online work patterns such as e-commerce. Additionally, high speed internet is required for all town/village centers to ensure central retail/office opportunities are maximized.
- Thomastown would benefit from an IT hub / co-working development in the center of town.
- For example, businesses in Thomastown have felt an effect from the Post office moving out of the town center. Outlying developments that will take people out of the town centers should be discouraged.
- Kilkenny City would be an appropriate town to be put forward as a 'support city' to Dublin. The parks, river, festivals, retail, restaurants, etc. all provide a good quality of life without the crazy housing prices and congestion of Dublin. Thomastown could provide spill-over support for Kilkenny City for this venture.
- "Business improvement districts" could be set up by the council to help establish an identity, ie. "The Square" in Thomastown. It would then be up to the businesses within the district to work together to create a directory and improve the streetscape, signage, lighting, benches, green space, etc. to make their district a pleasant place to visit. The goals and efforts would need to be coming from the business owners within the district but if the framework is established by the council it could be enough to spark some cooperation amongst the local businesses. It is very hard for a single business to start an initiative like this but if the council takes the first step then at least there's a chance it could take off.

4. Rural Development

- Sustainable agricultural production?
- Extractive Industry?

5. Transportation & Mobility

- There is a linear transport system is in place between Kilkenny and Waterford.
- Proposed loop link, using electric vehicles/mini buses, between the other district towns such as Graiguenamanagh and Callan and the small towns and villages. To be utilised by tourists and locals.
- Train : Only train station stop between Kilkenny and Waterford. Should be more utilised. Transport required from station to town centre for elderly and disabled - Electric Vehicle.
- Railway station to be reopened and utilized as a celebrated entry point into Thomastown.
- Encourage the general use of electric vehicles. 2 charging points exist in the Quay car park.
- Bus : Proposed new electric mini bus service between Kilkenny and Thomastown and surrounding towns for tourists, students and the elderly.
- Tourist buses – to encourage smaller tailor-made package type for tourist visits as opposed tourist coaches/buses.
- Cycling – Trail Kilkenny Cycle routes.
- Walking: currently working of 2 Community Loop walks.
- Refer to the Walkability Study, (Age Friendly Committee, Kilkenny County Council) May 2018.
- Encourage visitor, residents and shopkeepers to utilise the existing free parking in the Quay carpark, Chapel Lane, the Library parking & Mill Street,
- Current status of the bypass requested.
- Beware of falling into the trap of trying to build more roads to reduce commuter congestion. It has been shown around the world that when more roads and lanes are added to help reduce congestion it only broadens the commuter belt and the new roads and lanes are soon just as congested. This is not necessarily a major problem in Kilkenny now but something to be considered. This goes hand in hand with rural development.
- Something like a "carpool Kilkenny" website could help provide a more sustainable alternative for commuters.

6. Environment and Climate Change

- Flooding
  Referred to the flood risk assessments submitted by the Thomastown Community to the OPW.
  Refer to the survey done by river Nore Vision.
  Proposal to enforce a fenced off and protected green belt corridor on either side of the river banks.
- There should be flood warning and flood resilience community groups set up in areas prone to flooding. This was promised as part of the OPW proposals to deal with flooding and there has been no progress since.
- The OPW plans for flood relief on the Nore are primarily focused on hard engineering solutions. Most experts now accept that soft engineering solutions, reversing previous drainage and planting trees are a better long-term strategy to mitigate flooding and we feel that these options should also be utilised in any plan. There should be real consultation and partnership with local communities.
- A recent Teagasc report show that Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions from Irish agriculture are projected to **increase by 9%** relative to levels recorded in 2005 by 2030. This doesn't bode well for Ireland's commitment at EU level to reduce overall GHG emissions by 20% by 2020 and 30% by 2030, relative to the 2005 level. We can combine our efforts to mitigate flooding, reduce agriculture pollution and river bank erosion, reduce GHG emissions and reduce EU penalties by planting buffer strips along our waterways and compensating landowners for the set-aside. This will also create a wildlife corridor and help promote eco tourism.
- In short, we need to change totally our approach to all of these themes.

- No new development should be at the expense of either the built or natural environment. No stone walls, structures, or existing trees to be removed for new development without consulting the local community.
- Thomastown to be considered for the location of solar farms. These to be placed in appropriate locations and to meet the electrical demands of the town.
- There needs to be an overarching body to coordinate the Nore and ALL its catchment areas to properly address flooding, invasive species, etc.
- Similar to the existing wind mapping, a solar study should be carried out over the county to identify the best locations for solar farms.
- Pollution concerns: black smoke, burning trash?

7. Tourism

- Proposed that Thomastown to be a part of the 'Dig a Little Deeper' of Kilkenny Tourism Plan.
- Within the Tourism County Tourism plan, it was proposed that Thomastown be considered to have a focus as a **Creative Arts & Cultural** destination hub for the County, supporting all existing creative schools and educational facilities, such as The Grennan Craft School, The Pottery Skills Course, The School of Food, as well as the creative arts initiatives/creative annual festivals & events which have been established in the town. For example : St Patrick's wheelbarrow Dash, Thomastown Creative Arts Festival, The Art of Upcycling, Pumpkins in the Park and Christmas in Thomastown.
- Visitors to the town would have access to all the natural & built amenities of the Norman Walled Town such as The Thomastown Heritage Walk, the proposed Community Loop Walks, the River Nore and associated recreational sports, the Thomastown Community River Trust/Weir Pools etc. Visitors also have access to a variety of shops, unique accommodation, such as Glamping sites, Air BnB, B&B, as well food outlets such restaurants, cafes, pubs and well-being treatment facilities.
- There needs to be a more proactive approach to the development of rural tourism in County Kilkenny. One way of doing this is have initiatives in geographical areas, for example the triangle of the towns/villages of Thomastown/Inistioge/Graiguenamanagh all have accessibility to the river and beautiful countryside. They should be linked in terms of activities, rural transport and marketing activities and sold as a product (for example the triangle of South Kilkenny). Someone from Kilkenny Tourism/Kilkenny County Council needs to drive this project with consultation from the local communities. The section of the Thomastown-Inistioge river walk needs to be further promoted and marketed and a rural bus link provided to bring people back, as most people just do it one way and there is no transport back.
- There needs to be more concrete initiatives/plans in the area of Tourism and more support from the local authority in terms of organising things. Volunteers from local communities have limited time and resources as they have businesses to run and are giving of their time on a voluntary basis. Rural Tourism is a great driver of economic growth and thus resources need to be put into developing it.

8. Urban and Architectural Design

- Adhere to the bylaws of Special Area of Conservation - Protection, signage etc.
- Completion of Thomastown Urban Renewable Plan – Thomastown has a unique medieval square town layout/plan type. It is currently re-presented as a linear town layout, with emphasis on Market Street only. Logan & Low Street need to be upgraded to the standard of Market Street to complete this unique town plan type.
- Derelict buildings in town to be addressed,
- Encourage the restoration & re-use of empty/abandoned buildings.
- Old SuperValu - Private Ownership
  Thomas town Community Centre – Old Sports Hall re-use - In progress
  Sessions house - Council owned.
- Castles requiring protection/attention : Grennan Castle - Requires protection from animal grazing/public access with protective fencing
  Sweetman's Castle – in a state of disrepair.
  Dysart Castle – threatened.
- Public facilities encouraged to remain in town centre eg Library, Public Toilet, Post office, Supermarkets, Medical centres, Pre-schools and Crèches.
- Renewable technologies to be utilised for all restoration and new building work.
- New architectural design to be of high quality - Encourage the use of contemporary design, referencing the Irish Rural context while utilising renewable technologies.
- The rural design guide should just include the actual requirements for sight lines instead of referencing the road design manual.

9. Infrastructure

- Update on water supply.
- Sewerage to meet the demands of the town.
- Completion of TURP.
- Utilising renewable energies.
- Solar farms to meet the demands of the town.
- 2 x existing Electric Vehicle re-charge points. Provision to be solar powered?
- Internet Technology:
  Proposed to access the existing one Gigabyte connection originally destined for the Social Department services for use by Community building requiring high speed connections.
- Create a free Wi-Fi zone in the town.
- Bring high speed Internet connection to Rural areas surrounding the town.

10. Social, Community and Cultural Development

- Provision for a new library to be located close to the town centre.
- Community childcare facilities required.
- Thomastown Community Kindergarten requires a site close to the town centre.
- Healthcare - New development at St Columbus nursing home - a new Community Nursing Unit proposed for 2018.
- Red Cross has been established in town with new Ambulance service proposed.
- Tennis Courts require upgrading.

11. Landscape, Heritage and Green Infrastructure

- Areas of Special Protection - to be protected and enhanced.
- River and its banks protected with a green / fenced off corridor either side of the River.
- Proposed that all spraying of chemicals to be banned by Kilkenny Council (in line with Dublin City Council).
- Biodiversity/Pollinator sites to be increased & protected.
- No trees to be cut down or green areas lost without consulting local community.
- Heritage:
  Existing stock restored/reused
  Sessions House - re-use as Community facility
  Castles requiring protection/attention :
  Grennan Castle - Requires protection from animal grazing/public access with protective fencing
  Sweetman's Castle - derelict unprotected
  Dysart Castle - threatened
  All existing stone walls and structures to be protected from new development.
  Integrity of the Normal Walled layout to be protected