**Ballinamore Area Community Council Town Team Submission to County Development Plan 2022 – 2028**

**The Core Strategy - 4.3 Housing**

a. Town Centre Housing: To provide incentives at County and National Level for the refurbishment and occupancy of existing town centre housing. This would rebuild the town centre community and enhance the town viability overall.

b. The lifetime cost of housing in rural areas needs to be considered- provision of services, transport costs, etc when compared to town housing.

c. Land close to towns should be available for house building at lower prices especially when tax-payers money has been used to provide services to those lands.

d. Rear access to town houses should be provided as a priority where possible. For example, there are existing roadways at the rear of most of the houses in Ballinamore which are little used and could provide off street parking, access for fuel delivery, or access to provide district heating systems. This would also free up on street parking for customers for the few shops that remain.

e. Grants should be given for reconstruction of town houses e.g. Large three stories houses could be refurbished into two units.

f. Owners should not be allowed leave houses vacant for more than 5 years.

g. Social housing should be built to the highest standards, with special emphasis on noise abatement to prevent “social” housing becoming “anti-social” housing. People who behave in an anti-social manner in one town **should not be moved to** another town.

h. Planning applications for housing in this areas should **only be considered** hand-in-hand with employment opportunities. No point in bringing people to live in an area for them to then discover that there is no chance of employment. Commuting long distances to work is detrimental not only to the well-being of the individual, his/her family but also to the environment. Covid has proven that commuting is unnecessary, which ties in with this – it is vital to provide housing where employment is available.

i**. A proper survey** needs to be carried out by Leitrim County Council in consultation with local communities to ascertain housing requirements, no point in building 2 bedroom houses if nobody wants them.

**4.4 Rural Housing**

1. **Rural Housing:** The plan must address the current EPA regulation relating to County Leitrim soil percolation levels. While most of the neighbouring councils with similar soils makeup, are granting planning permission for one off rural houses.

**4.5 Compact Growth: (a)** All towns in Leitrim have capacity to house more people but people need to see a real advantage to living in or close to the town and this needs to be matched with employment opportunities.

(b) Currently there are 9 Social Houses being built in Ballinamore. If emphasis was placed on refurbishment to encourage re-occupancy of existing housing, there would may be no need for more houses in the town. **Urgent** **Survey needed.**

© Before considering additional housing, works need to be carried out on the town sewage system and upgrading of drinking water pipes, more footpaths, street lighting etc. A walkability study needs to be completed for the visually impaired and those with mobility aids.

(d) In order to make our town a more desirable place in which to live, we need more streetscaping, more common areas nicely landscaped, better footpaths, street lighting etc. LED bulbs would be more environmentally friendly, cheaper to run and throw a better light.

(e) We live on the waterway but it is not very visible in or on the entrance to our town – tall hedgerows need to be trimmed down to allow views of the waterway, more visual art pieces etc. A hanging footpath to the inside of the bridge from the former Girls’ NS to the turn for Aughnasheelin Road (directly past McGirl Monument) would be not only be an attractive addition but a safer footpath for all the National & preschool children. The existing footpath on the bridge could be removed, allowing larger vehicles exiting the Old Back Line, enough turning space.

**5. Economic Development, Enterprise and Employment**

1. ***The Junction Project***

Located at the former St. Felim’s Railway Station Headquarters, this landmark project owned by Leitrim County Council, will provide space for an Art School; a digital hub with We-Work offices; North Connacht Youth Services and Foróige and also the headquarters for newly developed Cavan and Leitrim Greenway, which will run through the actual site. The former railway platform and yards will be transformed into a magnificent shared space for old both the youth and elderly to enjoy.

1. **The Buzz Centre at Ballinamore Enterprise Centre**

The Buzz Centre, owned by the community, has numerous units; comprising of - hot desks office spaces; stand-alone office units and start up industrial/commercial units available for the short and long term rental. It has the most up to date broadband facilities. The aim is to develop the centre for those wishing to start up a new enterprise, people working from home or wishing to relocate to rural Ireland.

1. **Broadband Provision**

To upgrade the five-mile radius of Ballinamore to 100 mg broadband to every business and household. Our aspiration would be to have FITTH.

1. **Ballinamore Area Community Enterprise Units**

There are 5 office units and 2 industrial units, which have been continuously rented out at minimal cost to encourage start-ups. These need upgrading, solar panels, insulation etc. to bring up to modern day standards as they play a very important part in our Economic Development.

1. **Vacant business premises**

The introduction of Rates on vacant premises **is unjust.** Rates in general, in struggling small town, needs reviewing. A 3 year Rates FREE would encourage and help sustain new businesses. This would lead to reopening up of vacant business premises in rural areas.

1. **Creation of new jobs**

**Job creation is a MUST.** 2016 Census figures show a significant fall in the number of jobs in Co. Leitrim. Commuting long distances to work is detrimental not only to the well-being of the individual, his/her family but also to the environment. Covid has proven that commuting is unnecessary. The priority now is to create employment in the area where people live especially as we lack Public Transport in this area also. Above we have outlined The Junction Project, The Buzz and the Community Council Enterprise Units where employment in Information & Communication; Administration & Support Services; Financial and Professional could be created.

1. **Family Resource Centre**

Ballinamore and surrounding areas are in URGENT need of a family resource centre. B.A.C.C. Ltd office was used extensively as part of the COVID response with printing off of school homework etc. Down through the years we have filled a void on a VOLUNTARY basis, assisting with advice, filling in application forms for grants, school transport, SUSI, medical cards etc. The volume of work has doubled in the past few years and without proper funding of a Resource Centre, we are not able to sustain this on a voluntary capacity.

1. **Country Markets ran as a Social Enterprise**

With raised awareness of health and avoidance of fruit/vegetables which are not organic, there is an opening for a properly ran Country Markets as a social enterprise.

**5.3 Tourism**

1. **The Cavan and Leitrim Greenway Project**

This project has commenced with two sections near completion to date and further section applications are currently being submitted for funding. The full completion of this Project from Belturbet to Mohill is essential to tourism and job creation in this area.

1. **The John McGahern Centre, Ballinamore. (Redevelopment of old Courthouse)**

This project would involve developing the McGahern’s Archives, provide a Research Centre and a space for Creative Writing, together with a Third Level McGahern School linked to University of Ireland Galway.

(Similar to ‘The Seamus Heaney Centre’ in Derry).

Plans are already in place for a **John McGahern tour**, twice yearly, May Bank Holiday Weekend and during the Annual Summer Festival. It was proving very popular but COVID prevented it from happening this year.

1. **Poll an Easa Waterfall Viewing Deck**

The lands around Poll an Easa is owned by Ballinamore Area Community Council Ltd. Further development is required at the waterfall in Aughnasheelin and it should be made more accessible by creating gangway walk leading up to and looking down on the waterfalls. (similar to the Glencar Waterfall development). This is one of the most scenic Waterfalls in the County but it needs financial support. More signage from main roads is also needed as the vast majority of tourists don’t even know it exists. It would also need more coverage in Leitrim Tourism magazines.

1. **Ballinamore Mountain Bike Trails.**

The proposal is to develop trails including forest road climbs, tight twisting single track with loads of ups and downs board walk, light turns and rock bits – on the slope of Sliabh an Iariann Mountain.

Similar Projects – Ballylaura Co. Limerick; Biguard Trails, Co. Down.

1. **Sliabh an Iarainn “Tribe of the Gods Trail”.**

This is based on the Irish Myth of the Tuath De Dannann who are

believed to have originated on the Sliabh an Iarainn Mountain. (There is already a plaque to commemorate it up there.) They were seen as the “Tribe of the Gods” and this could be incorporated into the Trial. We all know how successful the Stairway to Heaven (Cuilcagh mountain) has turned out to be. Cuilcagh is essentially only a stairway going up the hill, but attracts many visitors across Ireland, if we were to do something similar and include this Myth throughout the trial, it could be a massive success and bring several tourists to the area, along with the other many attractions already here (such as Poll an Easa Waterfall, Glenview Museum and the new greenway being developed). It would make sense for visitors to visit the area as they could hit the other attractions in the area in one visit.

The Idea would be to include a history plaque explaining the myth at the foot of the trail, statues scattered throughout the trail depicting these gods and create several “Instagram worthy” pictures for people to take on their way up and down the trail, as well as another photo opportunity at the end where you could stick you head into a board that has the Myth on it. Similar to the Wild Lights at Dublin Zoo, but for adults.

1. ***Ballinamore Hill Walking Festival – in September***

To create a new hill walking festival on the existing marked walks on the Sliabh an Iariann Mountain in September.

1. ***Ballinamore ‘Hitchcock Halloween’ Weekend***

Alfred Hitchcock ancestors were from Ballinamore – (his mother was Whelan from Ballinamore). The aim been to develop a weekend festival at Halloween to incorporate a Hitchcock Film Festival at our newly developed Island Theatre Cinema.

1. ***John McGahern festival Week – in June***

To develop a week long McGahern Festival in mid-June with discussions reading etc. and to include a Summer School for the week

(Located at the John McGahern Centre in Old Courthouse)

1. **Aghoo Trail Blazers Walking Trail**

Aughoo Trail Blazers are a walking group established in January 2020. The purpose of the group was to promote healthy outdoor exercise and general wellbeing. Our group initially consisted of 8 which has now increased to 22. Our general route was access via ‘The Loop’, an off-road walkway adjoining the Shannon/Erne waterway adjacent to Lock 5. It is a stretch of approximately 1.9km, ending at Aughoo bridge on the R204.

**Purpose:** Continuing such walk along the R204 from Aughoo Bridge to Ballinamore has proved to be hazardous and a threat to the safety of those who walk such a route. The increasing volume of traffic on that roadway has increased such risk as the lack of area on which to walk safely on this route is insufficient. Our proposal is for the new development plan is to consider constructing a walking trail in order to continue ‘The Loop’ from Aughoo bridge, into Ballinamore and link back to Lock 5 via the current walkway at Kiltymooden. Such loop would also encompass a walkway around the community hospital on the outskirts of the town.

**Advantages:** In addition to such walking trail being utilised as a scenic loop adjacent to the canal, it has the added advantage of providing a safe walkway/cycle path for the many children, visitors and citizens who use the swimming pool and gymnasium at Riversdale House - the only location in the immediate area that offer such facilities. Many of the local schools also use this facility during the school term. It is also a tremendous asset to the community in hosting Water Safety Week each summer. In addition, such a walking trail provides a direct walking access to Glenview Folk Museum, situated next to Aughoo Bridge.

**Conclusion:** This submission addresses all 4 themes, as outlined in the Corporate Plan. Such a project would promote safe accessibility to continue a much cherished and utilised walking trail and in doing so, provide a means for our children and visitors to safely access the wonderful facilities we have to offer in Ballinamore while promoting health and wellbeing in the continued use of such a facility.

1. **The Drumlin Way.** Ballinamore is at the heart of Drumlin country so why not create a “Drumlin Way/Park” similar to the Burren in Clare. The Burren is not terribly impressive in some ways but yet it attracts huge visitor numbers because it is different to the what we perceive as the “natural” landscape of Ireland and a huge story has been built around it. Drumlins are very different to the “natural landscape of Ireland” yet they don’t stand out as such- to many they are just small hills covered with rushes, whins, scrub, etc. divided into small fields. There are no examples of what they were like when they were first formed, no information boards of how and when they were formed etc. There are a few locations easily accessible from the town with readymade access paths which could be part of the Drumlin Way. The highest drumlins in the parish are about 400 ft and offer tremendous views of the Leitrim countryside.
2. **Fishing Stands and Access to lakes.**

To upgrade the access to fishing stands and to upgrade the stand structure with sustainable maintenance free materials to all lakes, rivers and canal banks within a six-mile radius of Ballinamore.

It is vital that angling is supported in the area. We have the lakes, we have the fish, we just need to embrace the opportunity it presents. It’s the one resource that Ballinamore has in abundance.   Our waters are recognised internationally as being among the best in Ireland – we are not sure that is understood locally.

1. **Water sports**

The Shannon Erne Waterway flows through our town. There is a NEED to create more water based activities e.g. canoeing, kayaking, Stand Up Boarding etc. **This would also aid job creation.**

1. **Golf**

We have a high class Golf Course in our town. This could be promoted better as part of overall tourism in Leitrim. It could also be used as a golf training school for golfing enthusiasts.

1. **Glenview Museum**

Again we have a top class facility on our doorstep. This could be included in marketing this area and packages could be created around “Things to Do in the Area” to promote and encourage tourists to visit and stay in the area.

**6. Rural Development**

**Realising our Rural Potential –** any of the above ideas will increase opportunities for employment locally and provide a wider, more interesting range of healthy things for local people to also engage in.

**6.1 Agriculture:** A localised community based approach around the issue of land use needs to be explored.

**6.2 Forestry:**

**It is essential that proper Planning Regulations are put in place for the Forestry Industry.**

1. **Audit on Sitka Spruce Forestation**

The development plan needs to address the imbalance in forestry development in our country and the current situation regarding planning permission in forestry development where forestry is exempt for regulation.

**Forestry Vs Farming in Leitrim- Resource Use in our County**

This is a critical issue for the future of our county, but it is not being addressed in a way that will bring any long term benefits to the county or its people. Overall much of the argument against forestry is playing on people’s emotions which is not the best way to address the economic future of our county.

The anti-forestry lobby e.g “Save Leitrim” are basically against any further increase in forestry within the county as they feel we have a higher percentage than other counties and also are fully against Sitka Spruce, but as the number of farmers continues to decline, what is to happen to the land? For example, if we were to limit the area of forestry in Leitrim to its current level of 20% will the level of farming output increase or will the number of “farm families” increase? Unlikely, if the population trends in farming continue as they have been going for the last 50 years. In many instances people who inherit farms may no longer live in the area, have no interest in farming the land but may want to use it in a way that gives some return i.e. forestry. That they may be prevented from doing what they want with the land by an anti-forestry campaign is as much of an injustice to them as the planting of the land may be to their farming neighbours.

For many engaged in farming in Leitrim, it is of necessity a part time occupation- supported financially by off farm income. Given the low level of returns from farming in the county many would not reach the average industrial wage if they increased their farm size by 10 times. That level of movement in land structure is unlikely to happen, especially as farmers/land holders have not used long term leasing as a means of improving farm structure. The only solution to providing decent standards of living for people who want to be farmers is to provide off farm jobs in rural areas and this is the only way we will “Save Leitrim”. Forestry can provide off farm jobs in rural areas but it must be done in a way that does not impact negatively on the local community but benefits it.

Farm structure in Leitrim was designed to create conflict between neighbours - the current thinking with regard to farming and forestry is continuing that conflict to the extent that there will be no winners- we won’t have forests of sufficient scale or any industry based on forestry or forestry jobs and if we don’t have jobs whereby people can live locally we will not have anybody willing to farm holdings that are not viable/sustainable even on a hobby basis.

The “forestry versus farming” debate as it is today needs to be parked and the focus should switch to managing the rural resources of the county to create more jobs. The issue needs to be addressed much more at local level with complete and honest engagement by all the stakeholders. An organisation needs to be set up to recommend on the future use of the land/lakes i.e. “rural resources” in Leitrim. A good starting place would be to study the “Leitrim Resource Survey” published in the early seventies by an Foras Taluntais. In the foreword of that survey the then Director of AFT stated “The objective is to bring about an overall improvement in the welfare of the people of the county and of the drumlin belt as a whole” - that should still be our objective. Most of the problems identified in that report are relevant today as are some of the solutions and if the above objective is to be met it will not happen if the starting point is to place limits on the development of our resources. This organisation needs to be overseen by the council, (suggest 1 for each of the electoral areas) and comprise of people with expertise in - agricultural, forestry, environment, fisheries, tourism, economics, sociology, local government - locally /community based to try and get local agreements put in place whereby rural space would be planted/farmed/ used for recreation in accordance with the best interests of everybody living in the area. This organisation needs to explore the new technologies that are becoming available - for example burners that can burn high moisture wood chip, using mushrooms to convert bark into animal feed, cost effective drying of animal manures to produce fertiliser.

**7. Transportation & Infrastructure**

**7.1 Sustainable Transport**

* Fast Electric Charging Points are needed in every town in Leitrim.
* Improvements need to be made to Local Link to cut down on car usage.

More employment needs to be created in each town to cut down on car usage.

**7.3 Broadband and Telecommunications**

***Broadband Provision***

To upgrade the five-mile radius of Ballinamore to 100 mg broadband to every business and household. Our aspiration would be to have FITTH.

**7.4 Renewable Energy**

Ballinamore is in the process of becoming a **Sustainable Energy Community**. More supports need to be put in place to assist voluntary committees in achieving this.

**Harvesting Electricity from Waterways Weir.**

This project could provide electricity to service community buildings or as a commercial enterprise.

**7.5 Water and Wastewater and Waste Reduction**

**Rainwater Harvesting:**

Grants should be put in place to encourage householders to put rain water barrels outside to water their plants, wash their cars etc.

Irish Water should be forced to stop adding products which are potentially damaging our health.

**Plastic usage and recycling:**

The Govt should bring in stricter regulations regarding food packing, reusable plastic etc. and enforce it with heavy fines. This would reduce waste. Even the use of Plastic, which may be recyclable, is an issue for us here in Ballinamore and all of county Leitrim. We cannot bring our plastic to the Bring Banks. We are the only county where this has been enforced. The recycling centre in Mohill is quite a distance to travel to recycle plastic and not everybody is on a Bin Route.

**Waste Bins:**

We need more assistance from our County Council with regard to bins/dog waste bins in scenic areas and even in our towns. Bins with tiny openings would prevent household rubbish being put in. It is impossible to keep a town tidy where there aren’t any bins for ice cream papers etc.

More litter wardens and fines for littering.

More staff employed by LCC to assist with keeping footpaths clean and tidy.

Recycling companies should be fined if they do not empty their bins at the Bring Banks often enough.

**8. Amenities and Public Rights of Way**

**8.1 Blueways and Greenways**

As already stated, plans are well underway for the opening of our Cavan Leitrim Greenway, which will eventually run from Belturbet to Mohill and which will transform this area as a tourist destination.

**8.2 Public Rights of Way (PROW)**

**8.3 Green Infrastructure**

* **To protect the Playing Pitch associated with St. Felim’s for active recreational use.**

***All Weather Running Track:*** To develop a running track around the perimeter of St Felim’s Sports Grounds which is next door to Ballinamore Sports Hall & close to the community school.

***Tennis Courts:*** The development of a two Court Tennis Facility located close to the Ballinamore Sports Hall for those who aren’t into GAA & Soccer.

***All Weather Pitch:*** To develop a facility in the locality of the sports hall/community school and GAA grounds.

***Teenage Recreation Area:*** To develop a recreation area specifically for teenagers located next to the existing children’s playground**.**

**Adult Outdoor Recreational Area:** To develop a recreation area for adults in the vicinity of the St. Felim’s Pitch.

**Older Persons Recreational Area:** To create an indoor exercise/games area for the older person.

1. **Heritage**

We have a unique drumlin landscape, an area ideal for developing walks.

* 1. **Built Heritage**

Stricter protection should be given to our built Heritage, so that a repeat of what has happened to our Court House, never occurs again.

* 1. **Cultural Heritage:**

The survival of cultural heritage is essential and should be encouraged and supported by LCC. We have already mentioned the John McGahern Centre, Festival and Tour.

The Square should be renamed the John McGahern Square and a Mural should be painted onto the gable of Smith Monumental above the train mural. A small committee of volunteers are already working on plaques for numerous John McGahern places of interest. One can be seen on the old Pat Macs Garage. The Tourism Office has a John McGahern Reading Room. Glenview Museum have a number of items from his home and his farm on display in their Museum.

The Plan can assist with the reuse of the former Courthouse, a listed building in the very heart of our Main Street.

1. **Regeneration and Placemaking**

**i. Weather Canopy at Courthouse**

To provide a permanent or retractable structure to facilitate festival crowds in the forecourt of the courthouse building.

**ii. Pedestrian Crossing upgrades.**

To ramp the crossing in front of the Courthouse and provide upgraded warning signs and overhead lighting.

**iii. New trees and build out at Junction**

To design a street landscape to incorporate trees, flowerbeds and public seating together with build outs at street junctions. A number of tourism information billboards throughout the town should also form part of the design.

**V. Enhancement to the bridge at the entrance of the town.**

i. A hanging footbridge would look attractive, open up the view of the Waterway and make a safe crossing for all the National and Pre-School children, which would encourage children

to walk to and from school. It would also allow for larger vehicles to exit the Back Line safely as the existing footpath would then be removed.

ii. Existing trees growing in the wall of the bridge, which may be a listed bridge, will cause structural damage and needs to be fully and safely removed.

iii. Extra lighting on the walls of the bridge would enhance its appearance.

**VI. Slí na Slainte to Graveyard and St Brigid’s Well:**

Plans to continue footpath, with Street lighting, from former Textiles Factory all the way up to St. Brigid’s Well are in the pipeline. This would be: (a) Healthy, safe walkway (b) a cultural trip (c) a Health & Safety Solution. This walk is frequently used and with a properly lit footpath would encourage car users to leave their cars in town and walk out. On days like The Blessing of the Graves and Funerals, this can be a very dangerous area for pedestrians.

**VII. Extension of Footpaths/Street Lighting:**

1. Extension of Street Lighting from the town perimeter on the R202 to the Filling Station at the Mohill Junction. All footpaths should have adequate lighting.
2. Extension of Footpaths/Street Lighting from town boundaries on the Carrigallen Road.

***Landmark features***

To provide key features at entrances to the town.

1. Life size fisherman art piece located, opposite Scoil Chlann Naofa on the Mohill/Carrick road.
2. Signage depicting that it is a former Railway town.
3. John McGahern Mural.
4. Refurbishment of Fountain with large art piece at the Square.
5. **Community Development**

There is a strong need for a paid Community Development Officer in the town, if only on a part time basis. This role could be incorporated into the Junction Project. The County Development Plan needs employment, tourism, sport and recreation to play a huge role in the county. Unless proper supports are put in place, small rural towns will no longer be able to build their community development.

* 1. **Education and Childcare**

1. ***Ballinamore Childcare Project***

To develop the former boys national school into a childcare facility incorporating a crèche, preschool and after school services.

***(2) Ballinamore Education Centre***

Located at the former Technical School this centre owned by the ETB is currently running part time and full time 3rd level courses and also facilitated the Ballinamore Men’s and Hen’s Shed groups. The aim is to develop this facility to provide further 3rd level courses.

More courses for Young People who failed to sit Leaving Certificate and for disadvantaged Youth. By providing such courses we are again being environmentally friendly by cutting down on car usage. Covid has brought us a “new” model of living – remaining more in our own communities and less crowding on trains, buses etc.

**12.2 Healthcare**

**Ballinamore Nursing Unit.**

This magnificent facility which currently operates with a 20 bed capacity needs to be upgraded to 40 bed capacity as was originally **detailed in ALL feasibility studies** prior to its construction in 2014. The development of the Day Care Services needs to be activated with facilities for such a service already in place at the nursing unit.

Meals on Wheels also need to be provided, this became blatantly obvious during Covid Shutdown, when the elderly who usually went to hotels/restaurants had no place to get dinners.

**Library Service:**

Ballinamore is proud to host the County Library and has been very well serviced with excellent Librarians down through the years. This status must be retained. In recent times the Local Studies has been downgraded and provision must be included in the County Development Plan to restore and enhance this. Local Studies is also part of our Heritage and draws people from all over the world into the town. This ties in closely with our Genealogy Centre, which also must continue to be supported.

**13. Climate Change and Adaptation**

More emphasis must be placed on rainwater harvesting, renewal energy, electric cars etc. Ballinamore Sustainable Community and Tidy Towns will work closely together on these issues.

**This Submission has been compiled by Ballinamore Area Community Council Ltd., in consultation with the Town Steering Group at a meeting on Wed 29th July 2020.**

**Members also attended the Public Consultation on Thursday 23rd July.**

**Members who could not attend the meeting, emailed relevant information which is all included in this one submission.**

**Any queries relating to this submission can be made by email to**

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**Máirín Martin, Chairperson,**

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