



Re: Clare County Development Plan 2022-2028

Submission from the - Younger Voices – Youth Group at Clare Youth Service

November 16th 2020

Younger Voices are delighted to be able to offer broad input in the drafting of the new county development plan at this early stage. Generally speaking young people – and particularly under 18's - are not typically politically active so much of policy which impacts on us is developed without our input. As such we would wish to acknowledge therefore the efforts of Clare County Council to hear lesser heard voices and include our views, concerns, and suggestions in their planning and policy development processes. Regrettably owing to other commitments at this time the group are providing some initial thoughts but look forward to having the opportunity to input again in greater detail when the first draft is available.

Throughout much of 2020 our group have been conducting surveys and focus groups with young people in Clare. The intention of this work is to identify key concerns and solutions while capturing the experience and impact of lockdowns and the pandemic generally on our age group. We include the summary of our findings as part of our submission and respectfully ask that the concerns raised and the solutions offered are considered in the planning process.

In addition to the survey findings the group would offer the following observations:

We feel that part of the overarching vision needs to include a commitment to the development of our county both economically and socially to create a place where young people wish to live. While it is a natural part of development that many young people chose to travel or relocate for education or employment, for many there is simply no alternative but to leave the county. Similarly as we complete our education or begin to consider settling down there are often little opportunities or incentives to support our return to live in Clare.

We feel that a vision and plan which is focused on supporting young people to remain and/or return to live in Clare will ensure the creation of economic and social opportunities and physical spaces that are attractive to all members of the community.

We respectfully raise the following concerns and offer some suggestions:

Transport

Public transport is a desperate issue for young people. It is of particular concern for young people living in rural areas wishing to access urban centres in Clare for work, training or social purposes. It is also an issue for students wishing to access third level education in Limerick or Galway. Ideally it should be possible to easily access university at times that align with classes and allow for late night study or practical classes. One of our members living in Shannon was forced to move to Limerick as the typically twenty minute journey by car took up to four hours of her time each day by public transport. The Service was so unreliable that the member had to take earlier buses to ensure that she arrived on time. The expense of the tickets meant that there was little difference in paying rent. This is also a huge issue for young people gaining employment in places like Shannon where public transport simply fails to align with the requirements of posts and other opportunities.

Many of our members live in more rural areas. The lack of public transport impacts directly on our access to services, employment and education. Our group raised this issue many times in recent years and were gratified to see the Council invest in piloting our idea for a rural uber in Clare. We look forward to the outcome of the pilot.

Car ownership is a real challenge for young people – the costs of insurance are prohibitive as are the costs associated with mandatory lessons. While we acknowledge these are issues beyond the remit of the Council it is important that decision makers understand the challenge as it impacts on young people. We also believe that staff and elected

officials have opportunities to influence national policy and question unfair practices. Efforts undertaken in this area would be seen by young people as really hearing and sharing our concerns.

Of greatest benefit in this area would be:

- A network of small buses allowing for increased connectivity.
- Bus timetables that service need – i.e. buses that allow people to connect with factory opening and closing times or shift cycles.
- Rural uber or similar supported lift sharing or car sharing platforms.
- Influence brought to bear on insurance companies to reduce the cost of insurance for young people.
 - Third Party Insurance is a statutory requirement yet there is no statutory/public provider.
- Support for the significant costs associated with obtaining driving licences, including mandatory professional lessons and testing.

Internet access and access to technology

Coupled with transport, this is the single biggest issue for young people wishing to remain living in rural areas.

The impact has become even more visible now as students wish to access education online. The reality for most is that we must relocate in order to be able to continue with our studies. At the moment moving to Limerick or Galway is of limited value and comes at huge expense. With limited access to the college and little or no opportunity to connect socially with our fellow students it would be great to be able to avoid the expense of student accommodation however the lack of internet access or strong consistent coverage makes this impossible. Similarly poor mobile coverage ensures that mobile dongles are also ineffective.

The Digi hubs are certainly of great value but have limited space and are designed and intended to support business development and work from home. Educational responses to Covid19 restrictions have highlighted the digital divide again as accessing online learning in a rural setting with 'rural broadband' is a burdensome undertaking.

Of greatest benefit in this area would be:

- The rollout of quality internet access for all homes that want them with a particular focus on connecting rural homes as a matter of urgency.
- The further development of Digihubs and their promotion locally and with expats. As employment is increasingly available in the technology sector it makes real sense to invest in supports that make working in Clare a real possibility for older young people.

Housing:

While we understand that national policy changes have removed the provision of social housing as part of the Council remit it is clear to young people that this policy has failed. There is a real and significant issue with the availability of affordable and secure accommodation for all. This particularly impacts on young people who are at the bottom of the list when rental accommodation is available. When younger people find accommodation they are forced to pay rent at rates that will never allow them to secure mortgages as they are at a level that prohibits young people building any savings. It is clear that as we will be facing huge economic issues in the coming decades we feel that the Council should begin to challenge national policy and return to the direct provision of social and affordable housing.

We fail to understand the logic of the Government paying private landlords through HAP for what is often insecure and unsuitable accommodation. This support for the private sector is at the expense of quality of lives for citizens.

We look at the huge stock of empty and decaying homes in rural areas especially – support could be provided to save these homes and if the transport issue could be resolved affordable homes could be available while the depopulation of rural areas could be reversed.

There is so much evidence of good practice internationally with respect to addressing the housing issue and we would highlight in particular the Housing First Model while we feel the Tiny House movement would have real benefits for young people particularly. We include the following link with respect to Social Housing in Vienna as an example of what can and should be achieved when we dream big.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6DBKoWbtjE>

Of greatest benefit in this area would be:

- Clare County Council directly involved in the building and provision of high quality affordable social housing.
- Rent controls that ensure rent increases are in line with cost of living and wage increases.
- Security of tenure for tenants.
- Support for young people to get onto the first step of the housing market.
- Support for rent to buy schemes targeted at young people.
- Support for the development of derelict housing in rural areas.

Climate action and environmental issues.

We recognise that we are only passing through this world and have a responsibility to safeguard the world for future generations. We recognise that Clare offers such wonderful opportunities to support alternative forms of energy creation and feel that there should be more investment and support for initiatives such as harnessing the power of the ocean.

We would also ask the Council to ensure that developments which harm or potentially harm the environment are carefully scrutinised or simply made unwelcome in the county

At times we are surprised at a punitive and critical approach to issues rather than taking a creative solution focus. If one is wealthy then they can pay fines and buy plastic bags as a matter of frivolity – there is nothing in this to encourage or incentivise actions that support a better way of thinking.

Of greatest benefit would be:

- Paid bottle return scheme in the county – this would be of particular benefit to people on low income, young people and people who are unemployed. This would include incentivised refunds at point of purchase.
- Policies which support and encourage the protection of the environment.
- Policies which support people to live in rural areas rather than move to towns.
- Provision of public bins – many people are willing and interested in cleaning up rubbish, and picking up dog mess but the nuisance of having to carry this home is discouraging. Bins should be widely available in public areas.
- Host competitions or invite submissions that encourage people to find practical solutions to common issues – show that you have heard by publishing *You said and we did* reports.

Social Inclusion

Our group are increasingly concerned with the widening gap between the haves and have nots. Many jobs are simply not providing a living wage, young people and young adults are considered the responsibility of their parents with lower social welfare entitlements and lower training allowances for under 21's and under 18's. Indeed, why it is possible to pay a 16 year old a lower rate than that paid to an older person for the exact same job?

It is increasingly difficult to live independently with the lack of income, lack of housing or rental stock all impacting a person's ability to find secure accommodation. For younger people increasingly the government investment in youth services is focused on areas of deprivation and overly concerned with attaching a label to each young person.

We believe that this can stigmatise and limit a person's view of self and consequently their opportunities both now and in the future.

Short term funding is available for programmes such as Healthy Ireland but this is of limited value when young people and communities need consistent access to programmes, supports and services.

Of greatest benefit in this area would be:

- The introduction of a living wage nationally which is available to all. While we appreciate this is beyond the remit of the County Development Plan we feel the plan should seek to influence national policy which impacts on a person's quality of life.
 - Initiatives such as a Clare living wage campaign would greatly benefit and stimulate the local economy as low wage workers do not stagnate money through schemes designed to lower one's personal tax liability or move it to offshore bank accounts, they simply spend it locally.
- Prioritising the support and recognition of employers in Clare who have fair employment practices.
- Funding which is focused on inclusive, open access, and universally accessible facilities, events and opportunities.
- Funding for initiatives that are proven to work, rather than closing funding to something if it is not 'new'

Finally we offer a suggestion that the Council invest in the development of its online presence ensuring that it makes best use of available technology. Efforts need to be made to connect more effectively with young people ensuring that the Council is appropriately present on the platforms we use. There are many developments and worthy initiatives that young people are completely unaware of.


We wish you every success with the development of the plan and look forward to the opportunity to input to the review of the first draft.

Signed on behalf of Younger Voices:

Lorraine Haugh & Jordan Cassells

Co-Chairpersons of Younger Voices,

November 2020



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