



Better Together

A Community Plan for Castletown Geoghegan

This Action Plan was part-funded by Westmeath Local Community Development Committee under the Rural Development Programme (LEADER 2014-2020)



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Explanation of Process

Blue Moss was commissioned by Westmeath Community Development to undertake an Action Planning Initiative for seven rural towns and villages in County Westmeath, one of which is Castletown Geoghegan. This initiative will act in support of the regeneration of these rural towns and villages and will prioritise projects for development in each of the seven areas.



Action planning for rural towns and villages has been set out in the LEADER Local Development Strategy for County Westmeath under the subtheme of Rural Towns. This sub-theme supports the regeneration of rural towns, promoting them as attractive places to visit, live and do business in. This is to be achieved by building on the economic strengths and infrastructure of the area while also addressing the key challenges for business, community and recreation.

The process involving all seven villages took place over six months, between January and June 2018. They all followed a similar process based on a participatory model called Outcomes Based Accountability or OBA. Blue Moss have used this approach before as it is a process that is interactive and aimed at turning words into action. Each village went through the same stages however the number of meetings varied slightly depending on the availability of the group.

Process Stages:

- I. Development of a Vision Statement and underpinning values. This included considering what is good about living in the village and what would the group like to see in the future.
- II. SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) of the village. The information gathered was then considered against statistical data, principally drawing upon a census completed in 2016.
- III. Deeper consideration of the wellbeing that the group wanted to see in their village and the projects and activities that would be needed to create these. This led to the point of the first draft of the plan being developed which was circulated with the group.
- IV. Joint meeting of the villages where they considered aspects of their individual plans that overlapped and how the villages could support each other in reaching their goals. Those participating included:

1. Castletown Geoghegan

2. Collinstown
 3. Coole
 4. Milltownpass
 5. Multyfarnham
 6. Rosemount
 7. Streete
- V. Identification of potential partners and strategies- village representatives met with public bodies and agencies relevant to their plans.
- VI. Joint launch of all seven community plans hosted by Westmeath Community Development.

Castletown Geoghegan

Castletown Geoghegan is in the south west of County Westmeath, with roads from Kilbeggan, Kinnegad, Loughnavalley and Mullingar all joining at the village. It is approximately 14km from Mullingar.

The village is mainly linear, with some clustering at the crossroads and Y junction at either end of the village. It retains a strong rural character with a community hall, wedding venue, GAA club and school within the village.

The GAA are central to village life, focussing on both football and hurling. The hurling club is well known for its strip of black and amber. There is a strong youth section in the club with national success in 2007 and 2010. The club holds 13 senior titles, the last of which was won in 2017.

The name Castletown Geoghegan draws upon the direct influence of the MacEochagain (Geoghegan) family, presenting as the town of the castle of the MacEochagain family. They were descendants of the Southern Ui Neill. There is some evidence of the MacEochagain family being buried in the old village graveyard and the MacEochagain's were at one time resident in Jamestown House to the north of the current village.

The MacEochagain family existed peacefully within the Tudor reconquest by surrender and regranting, receiving 'reward' from Elizabeth I. This enabled the family leader, Kedagh to reside in the principal Geoghegan castle of the barony which was located in the village at this time. During future Civil Wars, invasions and plantation the family lost a great deal, including significant proportions of land. This finally resulted in the Geoghegan leaders, along with many other landholders, being exiled to Connaught and further afield.

The Geoghegan family, along with others, are prominent in a set of historical records called the Annals of Clonmacnoise. A Franciscan monk, Conall Geoghegan, translated these records into Elizabethan English in the 16th century. In the 18th century, Abbe James Mac Geoghegan, who was born in nearby Uisneach, wrote the Mac Geoghegan's History of Ireland, a book that would heavily feature in the reading of Eamon De Valera.

As a medieval settlement, Castletown Geoghegan still contains one of the more imposing Motte and Bailey structures in Ireland and a graveyard dating to around 1400. This graveyard is historically important and has buried within it members of the Geoghegan family. This includes David McGeoghegan, who died in 1778.

This graveyard represents a feature of some tranquility to the north end of Castletown Geoghegan and is an important element of the rich history present in the local area and the stories of the local community.

Our Vision

All the people of Castletown Geoghegan experience the strong community spirit that has grown with our history, our heritage and our people at its heart.

We are a safe and active community, remaining connected to our environment, to other places and to each other.

Our Values

Development

Change is important and valued in our village. All development is in keeping with and in connection to our history, heritage and unspoiled village.

Meitheal

In our day-to-day living, events, activities and development we consider our people. We look out for others, supporting them as they need.

Respect

We appreciate our difference and uniqueness, celebrating our religions, our stories and our people.

Involvement

Our village thrives as people thrive. We encourage and create opportunities for people to be involved, giving of their time and energy in support of others.

Community Engagement and Key Findings

The community spent time considering the current status of Castletown Geoghegan. This included reflecting on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats connected to the village. This following is a record of the views of those who participated.

Strengths in Castletown Geoghegan

Community Spirit

Tight knit and friendly; sense of Meitheal; enthusiasm of people for Castletown Geoghegan; a friendly rural area

Unspoiled and Picturesque Village in a Good Location

Close to town; Close to Greenway; Close to Uisneach; Lough Ennell; Hospital is close; 10km to motorway. It's in the centre of Ireland.

Good Local Services

We have all the essentials; playground; pubs; GAA; shop; Post Office; school; sports facilities; church; medical centre.

We also have a range of groups that encourage our community spirit. This includes, among others, Macra Na Feirme, the GAA, an active retirement group, a friendship group and Comhaltas.

Tourism

Wedding venue; cycle path; Lilliput Adventure Centre; Point-to-Point; Macra Na Feirme; fishing; central location

Safe Place to Live

Tourism and Heritage

Wedding venue, Lilliput Adventure Centre, Motte & Bailey; Abbey graveyard; McGeoghegan territory, Uisneach

Musical Tradition

Good Range of Organisations that Support the Community

GAA, BCDL (Friendship Club), CARA (Active Retirement), CCE (Comhaltas), MACRA (Young Farmers), coursing, gun club, Responder Scheme

Weaknesses and Threats

- The census areas are not reflective of our village as we understand it.
- Speed of traffic through the village, especially HGVs
- Lack of employment opportunities especially for those in their 20s.
- There are constraints on the primary school group with no grounds for expansion or additional parking.
- There are no places to eat in the village.
- Lack of broadband (inhibits ability to work from home and to grow local business)
- Public transport – interlink between towns and hospital
- Poor signage to the village
- No housing land zones or commercial. There is also a lack of sheltered accommodation, creating some social isolation.
- Insufficient street lighting
- Poor sewerage system
- No proper community centre and connected facilities. Current hall is 200 years old and is not adequate for village needs. This is especially true for older people as the heating requires upgrade and the space limits the activities that can be done.
- Gaps in footpathing
- Wind turbines
- Losing Post Office service
- Lack of Garda presence
- To lose our resident priest
- Lose of GAA

Opportunities

- Link the village to the old rail cycleway
- Further develop Lilliput Adventure Centre
- Moate & Bailey and historic graveyard
- Uisneach
- Centre Parcs
- Artisan foods and local produce
- Comhaltas
- Hunt, coursing, point-to-point
- GAA – there are lots involved and this needs supported. Lots of teenagers involved but as people get older there is a drop in participation. We could consider how to correct this.
- Mount Druid
- Development of community centre
- Support from whole village to make the plans work
- Coffee shop
- Further develop the Active Retirement Club
- Potential to develop local heritage trail
- Improve the connectivity through the cycle path and walkway

Consideration of County Wide Information

Participants also considered a range of census information connected to Castletown Geoghegan and to County Westmeath. Although there was some concern that the census information did not correspond directly to what local people understand as 'the village', there were some broad reflections given. The following was recorded.

Land and Agriculture

- Drop-off in full time farmers.
- Lots of land used but few people are employed in it. Low percentage in fishing too.
- Little development of artisan food (Good examples in Cork)
- Rural but low forestry land
- We are reliant on cars

Tourism

- Free attraction in Moate
- Other major attractions locally
- Numbers accessing tourism facilities is quite low

Broadband

- Percentage seems good but how much is urban focussed?
- Even though the percentage seems good, the quality of the broadband is not good.
- There are business impacts from the coverage and quality of the coverage.

Employment

- 7,000 people leave the county for work. This seems like a lot.
- A transport system is needed to support this movement of workers.

Population

- There is a low percentage of 20 year olds. What can we do to keep them?
- Although older people are very involved in community life, the population is aging.

Quality of Life Conditions

In considering how they would like the village in the future, local people thought that the following elements were vital:

- Remains a safe place to live
- A well lit village
- A village that keeps its picturesque, rural identity as it develops
- A village that promotes a healthy and active lifestyle
- That our connectivity is improved, including our walking and cycling opportunities, our broadband and our connection to public transport
- That our young and old citizens remain key parts of our village
- That we have spaces such as a café to continue to build our social interactions
- Provision of local employment is a priority as it will encourage young adults to remain in the area and will reduce the need for driving long distances to work.

Our Outcomes

The primary intention of this plan is to enable people in and around Castletown Geoghegan to achieve their intended vision for the village:

Our vision is that all the people of Castletown Geoghegan experience the strong community spirit that has grown with our history, our heritage and our people at its heart.

We are a safe and active community, remaining connected to our environment, to other places and to each other.

This will be achieved through a focus on the three long term strategic themes of:

Health and Social Wellbeing

Sustainable Environment and Infrastructure

Education and Economy

Theme One: Health and Social Wellbeing

Outcome 1: All people from Castletown Geoghegan have the opportunity to be involved in village life				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Time Frame	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
Upgrade current community facility, including improvements to environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased number of activities in the current facility. - Increased numbers of people using the current facility. - Decrease in the amount of time that facility is unused. - Increase in numbers of people, especially older people, involved in physical activity. - Reduction in the overhead cost of the facility - Decrease in energy use in the village 	Medium	<p>Westmeath County Council</p> <p>Westmeath Community Development</p> <p>Local sports clubs and activity groups</p> <p>Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)</p>	<p>Town and Village Renewal Scheme</p> <p>Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)</p>

Outcome 2: All people of Castletown Geoghegan benefit from improved physical and mental well-being				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Time Frame	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
Establish a new community facility in the village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in numbers of involved in community activities - Increase particularly in numbers of young people involved in community activities - Greater connections between the range of activities available to young people - Increase in people from outside the village accessing community activities - Growing sense of community spirit in Castletown Geoghegan - Deeper and new relationships built across the village and throughout the wider area. - Improvement in physical health benefits, especially for older people and younger people - Improvements in mental health benefits 	Long	<p>Westmeath County Council</p> <p>Westmeath Community Development</p> <p>POBAL</p>	Leader Programme

<p>Establish a Men's Shed in the village</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvement in mental health outcomes for men, especially older men. - Greater number of men involved in community activities in Castletown Geoghegan - Improvement in physical health outcome - Increase in number of friendships between men, especially older men, in the village - Deeper relationships among men, especially older men, in the village 	<p>Short</p>	<p>Westmeath Community Development Irish Men's Shed Association</p>	<p>Leader Programme Irish Men's Shed Association</p>
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Theme Two: Sustainable Environment and Infrastructure

Outcome 3: All people from Castletown Geoghegan have access to physical structures that make them feel safe				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Time Frame	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
Upgrade Mullingar Road Footpath	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in numbers of people walking in the village - Increase in social connections in the village - Improvements in health outcomes for village residents - Increase in sense of community togetherness for village residents - Decrease in number of dangerous incidents on the Mullingar Road 	Medium	Westmeath County Council, Roads Section	Annual Roads Programme Community Involvement Scheme
Decrease speed of vehicles through the village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decrease in number of dangerous road incidents in the village - Decrease in vehicle pollutants in the village 	Medium	Westmeath County Council An Garda Siochana	Town & Village Renewal Scheme

Outcome 4: All people of Castletown Geoghegan can access facilities that encourage sustainable living				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
Upgrade Station Road Footpath (up to Greenway/Cycle Track)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in number of local people walking - Increase in the distance that local people walk - Increase in number of local people cycling - Increase in social connections in the village - Improvements in health outcomes for village residents - Increase in cyclists visiting Castletown Geoghegan 	Medium	Westmeath County Council, Roads Section	Town & Village Renewal Scheme Annual Roads Programme Low cost safety programmes

Theme Three: Education and Economy

Outcome 5: People in and around Castletown Geoghegan are better connected				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
Improve broadband service across the village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in percentage of households connected to broadband - Decrease in the number of fallouts of broadband service - Increase in the quality/speed of the broadband service - Increase in numbers of local businesses able to offer services online - Increase in employment opportunities in the village 	Long	Westmeath County Council Westmeath Community Development	LEADER Programme Theme 1, Sub-Theme 'Broadband'
Improve transport access to the village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in number of visitors to Castletown Geoghegan. - Decrease in car use among villagers - Establishment of greater public transport access 	Medium	Westmeath County Council Local Link	Community Involvement Scheme

Outcome 6: Castletown Geoghegan provides opportunities for everyone to know and understand the history and heritage of the village

Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
<p>Create Heritage Trail brochure for the area that will include the Motte and Bailey.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in numbers accessing tourist sites in and around the village - Increase in numbers employed in tourism services - Increase in numbers of people accessing other village services e.g. shops 	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Tourism Officer – Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer – Westmeath County Council Westmeath Community Development</p>	<p>Leader Programme Tourism Officer – Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer – Westmeath County Council</p>
<p>Complete the refurbishment of the Old Graveyard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in numbers of people accessing the Old Graveyard - Increase in numbers of people, especially local children, accessing the information drawn from the Old Graveyard - Increase in numbers of people involved in the regeneration of the Old Graveyard - Increase in sense of community spirit in the village - Increase in numbers of people accessing other village services e.g. shops 	<p>Short</p>	<p>Tourism Officer – Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer – Westmeath County Council Westmeath Community Development</p>	<p>National Monuments Service Tourism Officer – Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer – Westmeath County Council</p>

<p>Complete the refurbishment of the Motte and Bailey.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in numbers of people accessing the Motte and Bailey - Increase in numbers of people involved in the regeneration of the Motte and Bailey - Increase in understanding of history of Castletown Geoghegan - Increase in sense of pride in the village - Increase in sense of community spirit in the village - Motte and Bailey in community ownership - Increase in numbers of people accessing other village services e.g. shops 	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Tourism Officer – Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer – Westmeath County Council Westmeath Community Development Local property owner</p>	<p>Leader Programme Tourism Officer – Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer – Westmeath County Council</p>
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Additional Notes

Renovation of the Current Community Facility

Following the development of a new community facility, the current facility could act as a 'Cultural Hub' and a central point in a heritage trail. This would focus on providing support to the tourism product in and around the village. It would provide access to genealogical information, particularly attractive to many from outside Castletown Geoghegan.

This facility would also maintain space for exhibitions of local photography, local historical information etc. This space would be multi-purpose, providing space for arts and crafts activities for children and adults. These activities and the wider tourism and historical information would be utilised by the local primary school, enhancing the curriculum that can be offered there.

In the weaknesses relating to Castletown Geoghegan it was noted that there are no cafes or other places to eat. This facility would provide space for this activity. The first market would be local people. This would be enhanced by those connecting to the heritage trail, the passing HGV and car traffic, and the high number of cyclists who already stop in Castletown Geoghegan seeking refreshment.

Development of Education Facilities

As part of the Local Area Plan commissioned by Westmeath County Council in 2012 lands for institutional and educational use were identified. The need for development of a site for education and incorporated buildings for community use were noted. It was recognised in the 2012 plan that the school is a substantial distance from the village core and that the site is confined. The site does not allow for adequate parking – essential because the school is outside the village core – or space for the necessary additional expansion.

An area within the village core was identified in 2012. This is sufficient to accommodate an 8 classroom school and the essential community facility. The location would maximise the opportunity for cycling and walking, reducing the use of cars in and around the village.

The need for the development of this education facility and connected community facility remains. The location selected in 2012 would also allow for the involvement of the GAA in this development process, further grounding education and community relationships in Castletown Geoghegan.

New Community Facility

The current facilities in the village are very limited. In particular the village can only hold a single activity at a time and county size events cannot be held.

A new community facility would be a modern space that would appeal to a range of age groups. Older people will feel warmer and safer in this new facility, while younger people will be able to access more appropriate activities in this larger space. The facility would be large enough to contain activities such as Pickle Ball, Drama Festivals, concerts, badminton, youth club, volleyball and perhaps gym facilities.

When developed, this facility would act as a central point for the whole community, connecting community activities with the GAA and other activities for younger people. This would bring new people into community activities, making it particularly worthwhile for the wider rural community to travel to use facilities in Castletown Geoghegan.

The involvement of more people in even more activities will build upon the community spirit that already exists in Castletown Geoghegan. Being able to offer people more will encourage their participation and involvement, building deeper and new relationships across our village and throughout the wider area.

Establish Men's Shed

This requires space sufficient for approximately 15 men to work in a vocational environment. The group would eventually pay a small amount of rent by selling the items that they produce. It is expected that financial support from the council and perhaps other sources would be necessary.

Tourism Developments

Old Graveyard: The old graveyard is being renovated and refurbished. It contains around 800 years of history and heritage.

Motte and Bailey: This Motte and Bailey is said to be the oldest and finest in Ireland. It is currently in private ownership and the owner is very open to working with the community. With work, this site could become the symbol of Castletown Geoghegan.

In time the community could take ownership of the Motte and Bailey. There would be a direct cost to this plus works to be undertaken on fencing and pathways. There would be ongoing costs of maintenance and insurance. The site would also need promoted.

Heritage Trail: Leaflet and brochure for the area that will include the Motte and Bailey.

Connections

There are a number of footpath issues around the village, two of which are particularly dangerous for walkers. One of these was noted in the 2012 Local Area Plan yet still remains incomplete.

Further to this, broadband access outside the village is very limited and the quality of access in the village is considered by residents to be very poor. It regularly crashes because of poor signal. This is impacting business particularly. It is also meaning that people are unable to work from home, increasing the traffic pressure in the village



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