

National Planning Framework 2040

Submission from Ardmore Grange Housing Study Group,

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Introduction

The parish of Ardmore Grange is a community of less than a thousand people. It has two distinct parts, one being the seaside village, the other being the rural farming area. The area is steeped in history highlighted by the iconic Round Tower. St Declan founded a Christian community here early in the fifth century. It is reputed to be possibly the oldest Christian community in Ireland. Ardmore is popular with tourists due to the favourable weather, and its many beaches; making it ideal for family holidays. Tourism first took off here in the early 20th century, as a result of the Irish college; Ardmore being once a Gaeltacht.

Strengths

The key strength of this community is that people in the area care about the community and the area. We are proud of the beauty, historical remains, the achievements of its visitors and residents, and the environment of the area. This community has won many national awards such as Tidy Towns, etc.

Communications

Ardmore Grange has its problems of poor locally based employment, mainly caused by a decline in farming and fishing employment. In recent times, tourism has become important due mainly to the setting up of the new Cliff House Hotel, and its subsequent achievement of a Michelin Star restaurant status; helped on by its ongoing promotion of the hotel and the area. Communication is a major barrier especially the availability of high speed broadband. We do not feature highly (demand needed) in the Dept of Communications listings, however the 'on the ground' situation is significantly at variance with that perception. Good wifi is patchy and generally poor in this area. Home working is growing in this area; we believe it is a key engine to growth and prosperity within this community. We require significant improvement of the wifi infrastructure locally.

Fishing and Farming

This community was once a major vegetable growing sector. This has concentrated and declined. Efforts could be made to refocus on organic speciality farming and the

development of more local markets where producers could sell directly to consumers. This requires central support and funding to the betterment of consumers and small vegetable farmers.

The EU common fisheries policy has been detrimental to Ardmore, similar to other Irish coastal communities. Once we had up to 20 seasonally employed people in fisheries, now it is reduced to 6. We advocate that a preservation zone of 5 nautical miles from the coast be excluded from the control of Brussels, and be considered a zone managed for the use of leisure fishing and small boat operators.

Housing

Housing for year round resident families has become an issue. There are about 400 houses in the zoned village area, of this half (47% to be precise) are holiday homes. These are left vacant during the winter months. As a result, a small group of individuals within the parish of Ardmore Grange formed a housing study group in early 2017.

We formed it because we realised that soon, the parish of Ardmore Grange will face a critical problem, namely its possible survival, as a year round community, into the future. It is becoming increasingly difficult for families to find year round homes in the area. The availability and the cost of a site, for a new home, in this area are high, relative to similar situations in nearby communities. If we continue as we are, then in 30 years time, it is likely, that the village and the parish will be a different place. It will be populated by older retired people, with very few young children; and a dominance of vacant holiday houses, for most of the year. This is not sustainable.

This will result in our shops, post office, school, churches, only being open (if still there) during the holiday periods. We will not be able to field sports teams (already a major issue for the local GAA club) and we will be heavily challenged to keep voluntary efforts like 'tidy towns, 'pattern festival' etc., going .

Is there anything the community can do about this, or change it?

Our approach has been to study the issue, quantify it, and project forward; seek alternatives that are within our control, publicise the issues, and get community agreement on a way forward. These ideas may hopefully address, and attempt to redress this perceived imbalance.

We are in discussion with Waterford City and County Council officials, housing cooperatives elsewhere, and other specialists, in an effort to understand and quantify the issue.

Possible Housing Solutions

Working within the constraints of our constitutional right to own property, we need to ensure that new housing developments have a balance in terms of suitability for family year round

living, and that measures are introduced to ensure a certain proportion of the houses are exclusively focused on ‘principle and private residence’, status. We welcome new developments including holiday homes, but the community must be able to continue on a year round basis; accordingly provide balanced developments.

Reverse the recent move in local authority (LA) housing development and financing, where it was effectively privatised via PPP schemes. The constant small scale provision of LA housing into communities like Ardmore Grange, during good times and bad, must again be brought back. We encourage the accessing of EU low interest schemes like CALF.

The private rented sector in Ardmore Grange is a key resource in housing terms. There are now many people who prefer renting to owning. In Ardmore, there is a high demand due mainly to trainee hotel staff, on short semesters, requiring accommodation. This can amount to up to 50 in a total village population of 400.

The higher taxes introduced on rented accommodation post 2008 (the crash) have been detrimental, (eg applying USC and PRSI to full rental income) It is now more advantageous for holiday house owners to opt for casual summer lets, rather than go for more formal year round rentals. We would also advocate extending the rent a room tax scheme to holiday homes in key ‘pinch’ areas such as Ardmore Grange.

Very little improvement would change the accommodation situation for the better in this community.

Environment

Preservation of our many historic monuments are a key requirement in any development plan for this area. Further, the beaches and wild areas must not be encroached upon, so that the valuable tourism product we have, will continue for generations to come. There are many walks in this area. Developments such as the Waterford Greenway will heighten the demand and attractiveness of this area for walking. The recent funding and upgrade of St Declan’s Way (from Ardmore to Cashel) is a welcome development. There are many other walking routes in this area just awaiting the encouragement, to be opened. Funding and resourcing of these would be beneficial for the local economy and the health of the overall Irish community.

End

Contact

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