COOLE

VILLAGE PLAN 2018 – 2023

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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 Coole. 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 sub-theme 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. Blue Moss used a participatory facilitation process called Outcomes Based Accountability or OBA with all 7 villages; a process that is interactive and aimed at turning words into action.

Process Stages:

i.   Development of a Vision Statement and underpinning values- 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 outcomes that the group wanted to see for their village and connected people, 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. Reflection, amendment and agreement of previously identified outcomes and actions within the draft plan.

v.   Joint meeting with the villages where they considered aspects of their individual plans that overlapped and how the villages could support each other in reaching their goals.

1. Castletown Geoghegan
2. Collinstown
3. Coole
4. Milltownpass
5. Multyfarnham
6. Rosemount
7. Streete

vi. Identification of potential partners and strategies – village representatives met with public bodies and agencies relevant to their plans.

vii. Joint launch of all seven community plans hosted by Westmeath Community Development.

COOLE

Coole, An Chúil, is a peaceful, pretty village of 1.4 square miles in County Westmeath, Ireland, on the R395 regional road. It is situated on a plateau that overlooks part of the Bog of Allen. The village is stretched over a series of junctions and cross-roads. These regional and communal roads connect to Castlepollard to the east, Coolure, near Lough Derravaragh to the south, and Abbeylara to the north-west in neighbouring County Longford; the village benefits from a good local bus service.

The village has strong connections to its bog heritage with a recent focus on the preservation of the village's ancient bog road. The bog is now cultivated for peat for fuel consumption purposes and for garden plant soil compost products creating challenges for the village.

Within Coole there is a pub, a post office, a shop, a church, and a medical centre. There is also a primary school, a creche, playground and a parish community hall where local events take place. Coole has long been noted for its Community Games which have been re-instated in recent years.

COOLE

OUR VISION

The people of Coole will benefit from and contribute to a vibrant, well-resourced and self-sustained, safe village.

WE VALUE

Our resources: Our people, their skills and qualities; our natural environment and our facilities and assets.

Our community participation: Living and working together, strengthening our collective community.

Our heritage: Our connection to our rich local history.

Our community identity: All generations within the village can have pride in where they come from.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND KEY FINDINGS

The community spent time considering the current context and status of Coole. 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

- ► Community spirit – people look out for each other
- ► Good infrastructure - roads access and bus service
- ► Good local amenities – shop, pub, post, clinic, creche, school (2), church (2), rivers, lakes, hall, playground, basketball court, wildflower garden – all within walking distance.
- ► Safe area (little crime)
- ► Quiet but not isolated

WEAKNESSES

- ► Minimal local employment
- ► Poor maintenance of infrastructure – footpaths, approach roads
- ► Poor use of hall - community don't have information as to how to access, no charging structure etc. lack of community 'ownership'. Needs youth involvement.
- ► Poor use of rivers and lakes - used to be regular fishermen, including from England. Lake shore is not currently accessible or safe.
- ► Poor information for tourists
- ► Community participation /involvement – especially regarding organising/responsibility. Same small number of people who are involved
- ► No / little accommodation for tourists

OPPORTUNITIES

- ► Local political interest – TD / Councillor involvement
- ► More interest in local bog land – local authority – protection. Restrictions on large companies
- ► More use of hall – social inclusion
- ► Good broadband to be extended throughout the village. Encourage home working, businesses, commuters, young families
- ► More investment in local CE scheme to help progression into employment
- ► Graveyards – genealogy / history / tourism

THREATS

- ► Windfarm
- ► Mobile phone coverage / broadband. If doesn't improve will discourage new families, businesses, work from home etc from coming to the village – affect long term sustainability
- ► Not enough local representation
- ► Potential of turf cutting becoming illegal for locals / those who currently cut individual banks
- ► Danger of lorries entering bog and damage to road
- ► No local employment on bogs
- ► Threat of closure of local CE scheme

CONSIDERATION OF COUNTY WIDE AND VILLAGE CENSUS INFORMATION

Participants also considered a range of census information connected to and to County Westmeath. Statistics relating to Coole are found in the statistics for the electoral area of Glore. It was acknowledged that the village of Coole's catchment area is beyond the Glore electoral area and 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 on pertinent information. The following was recorded.

Westmeath County
- ❖ County crime rate is higher than the national average
- ❖ Amount of people with respiratory problems – hospitalised. Recorded asthma figures are second highest in Ireland.
- ❖ Broadband – only 64% of County has broadband & this makes no reference to quality of signal
- ❖ County suicide rate is higher than national average
- ❖ Unemployment rate is higher that national average

Electoral area of Glore
- ❖ Significantly ageing population
- ❖ Young people studying manufacturing yet there is no employment in area
- ❖ Large decline in number of houses built

QUALITY OF LIFE CONDITIONS

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

➢ People are safe

➢ Young people have space to play and interact socially

➢ People can stay connected

➢ All are included in village life and no one is marginalised

OUR OUTCOMES

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

The people of Coole will benefit from and contribute to a friendly, welcoming village that sustains all generations, has a thriving centre and is connected to its beautiful natural surroundings.

This will be achieved through a focus on the three long term strategic themes across which fall 10 outcomes:

THEME 1:   Health & Social Wellbeing

Outcome 1:   All people of Coole can have the opportunity to engage in Community activities

Outcome 2:   All people of Coole can have a sense of community ownership and participate in the development and sustainability of their village

Outcome 3:   All people of Coole can feel safe

THEME 2:   Sustainable Environment & Infrastructure

Outcome 5:   All people of Coole and visitors can access, appreciate and sustainably use Coole's beautiful, surrounding natural environment

Outcome 6:   All people of Coole can have pride in an attractive, sustainable village

Outcome 7:   All people of Coole can access good quality communications service

THEME 3:   Education & Economy

Outcome 8:   All people of Coole are aware of their rich natural environment and heritage

Outcome 9:   Coole's rich natural environment and heritage attracts tourists to the local area

Theme One: Health and Social Wellbeing

Outcome 1: All people of Coole can have the opportunity to engage in Community activities				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
a) Community noticeboard	‣ Increased knowledge of local activities ‣ Increased participation in local activities ‣ Increased sense of community identity ‣ Increased social inclusion	Short	Westmeath Community Development Westmeath County Council, Community Development Section	Leader Programme 2014 - 2020 Community Grants
b) Publicise community activity in Coole parish Facebook	‣ Increased knowledge of local activities ‣ Increased participation in local activities ‣ Increased sense of community identity	Short	Local activity and sport groups/clubs	
c) Youth Club	‣ Increased numbers of young people engaged in activity ‣ Increased sense of community for young people ‣ Reduced social isolation ‣ Increased positive mental health	Short	Westmeath Community Development Faroige Westmeath County Council, Community Development Section	Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme Faroige grants/programmes

d) Mother & toddler Group	‣ Increased participation by mothers with toddlers ‣ Increased peer support for mothers with toddlers ‣ Increased social interaction and reduced social isolation ‣ Increased positive mental health	Short	Westmeath Childcare	
e) Improve or upgrade facilities around hall - Basketball court - Playground - Garden	‣ Increased access to multi-purpose outdoor facilities ‣ Increased provision of community activity ‣ Increased participation in activity ‣ Increased social inclusion	Medium Short for Playground	Westmeath County Council, Community Development Section Westmeath County Council Department of transport, Tourism and sport Westmeath Community Development	Town and Village Renewal Scheme Sports Capital Programme7
f) Sports field - everyday access	‣ Increased safe, outdoor play especially for children & young people ‣ Increased participation in community activity	Short	Local land owners	

Outcome 2: **All people of Coole can have a sense of community ownership and participate in the development and sustainability of their village**				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
a) Grow & diversify active membership of Coole Community Development	‣ Increase active participation in village development ‣ Increased ownership of village development ‣ Increased volunteers & 'drivers' of activity ‣ Increased village sustainability	Short	Westmeath Community Development Westmeath County Council, Community Development Section	
b) Community fundraising alongside Church for Church renovations	‣ Increased collaboration and connection with the local Church ‣ Increased revenue for church repairs	Long	Church Parish Pastoral Council	

Outcome 3: All people of Coole can feel safe				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
a) Upgrade footpaths & create new ones in Mayne (consider including cycle paths)	‣ Increased numbers of people walking within the village ‣ Increased safety for pedestrians	Medium	Westmeath County Council, Roads Department	Annual Roads Programme

b) Set up text alert system	‣ Increased access to safety information ‣ Increased sense of safety for all villagers	Short	An Garda Síochána Muintir na Tire	Muintir na Tire funding programme
c) Lobby council for traffic calming - speed ramps, speed reduction signs	‣ Decreased traffic speed through village ‣ Increased safety for pedestrians ‣ Decrease in road traffic incidents	Medium	Westmeath County Council, Roads Department	Low Cost Safety Schemes

THEME 2: ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Outcome 4: All people of Coole and visitors can access, appreciate and sustainably use Coole's beautiful, surrounding natural environment				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
a) Lake shore development – safer	‣ Increased access to the lake shoreline & environment by locals and visitors ‣ Increased community activity using the lake environment ‣ Increased awareness of the lake environment; wildlife, geology, history…	Long	Westmeath Community Development Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer Westmeath County Council Tourism Officer	Leader Programme 2014 - 2020 Outdoor Recreation Fund
b) Engage with public representatives and the Local Authority regarding sustainable use of the road networks in response to high volume of commercial vehicles from peat extraction	‣ Increased positive communication with peat companies ‣ Increased collaboration to ensure the sustainability of local roads	Medium	Westmeath County Council, Roads Department Other local affected villages/communities	

Outcome 5: All people of Coole can have pride in an attractive, sustainable village				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
a) Tidy up hospital frontage – community involvement e.g. hoardings / panels	‣ Increased village roadside visual appeal ‣ Increased community involvement and ownership of village upkeep ‣ Increased village pride	Short	Tidy Towns	Westmeath County Council
b) Hall is energy efficient – solar panels	‣ Increased energy efficiency ‣ Increased sustainability of environment	Long	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) Westmeath Community Development	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) Leader Programme 2014 - 2020

Outcome 6: All people of Coole can access good quality communications service				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
a) Improve Broadband and Mobile service throughout the village	‣ Increase in broadband speed and quality ‣ Increase in mobile phone reception	Medium	Westmeath County Council Broadband Officer Department of Communications	Westmeath County Council Department of Communications

	‣ Decreased negative impact of poor communications on work, family and social life			

THEME 3: ECONOMY & EDUCATION

Outcome 8: All people of Coole are aware of and tourists are encouraged to visit Coole for its rich natural environment and heritage				
Action Project	Indicators of success	Timeframe	Potential Partners	Strategy and funding programme links
a) Tourist signs to lake, bog, graveyard, Tullynally Castle	‣ Increased awareness of Coole's heritage and natural environment within County Westmeath and beyond ‣ Increased number of visitors/tourists ‣ Increased revenue into the village	Medium	Westmeath County Council Tourism Officer Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer	Westmeath County Council Tourism Support Programmes
b) Promote heritage of Lake Derravaragh in village and lake shore e.g. village info panel	‣ Increased awareness of Lake Derravaragh's environment and heritage ‣ Increased number of visitors to Lake Derravaragh	Long	Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer Westmeath Community Development	Westmeath County Council Heritage Support Programmes Leader Programme 2014 - 2020
c) Raise awareness of bog heritage & connect to local museum e.g. village info panel & sign	‣ Increased awareness of bog heritage and connection to village ‣ Increased number of visitors to museum	Long	Westmeath County Council Heritage Officer National Parks and Wildlife Service Irish Peatlands Conservation Council	Westmeath County Council Peatland Community Engagement Scheme