

*“Coming together is a beginning;
keeping together is progress;
working together is success”*

Henry Ford



**PROPOSAL TO CONVERT THE OLD
RAILWAY LINE FROM
BALLAGHADERREEN TO KILFREE
INTO A COMMUNITY GREENWAY**

A Community Initiative
Submission to the
Ballaghaderreen Swimming
Pool Committee

October 2016 - Ballaghaderreen

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1. Background



Introductory Note – Irish Red Cross

The main aim of the Irish Red Cross is to empower and enable local communities, to make them stronger and more resilient and to support communities where we can. Vulnerability & Capacity Assessment (VCA) is a tool used successfully by National Red Cross Societies around the world to work with and help people within their own towns, villages and cities.

Utilising VCA tools, and following a succession of meetings between the Irish Red Cross Ballaghaderreen members and representatives of Ballaghaderreen community and its stakeholders, it was identified that there were gaps in both physical amenities and mental health services in the Ballaghaderreen Area. During discussions and workshops around how we could work together to reduce that gap, and looking at links between physical exercise and mental health psychosocial well-being, a proposal was put forward to consider the development of the old railway line in Ballaghaderreen into a community greenway. It was felt that an initiative like this could serve the purpose of meeting the characteristics that determine a safe and resilient community including its ability to be knowledgeable and healthy, to be in a position to manage its natural assets, to be connected and organised, to develop its infrastructure and services and to create economic opportunities in the area.

Following a public meeting on September 21st 2016, a vote decided to collapse the old community pool fund and the Lead Committee invited submissions for alternative ideas for use of the fund. This document puts forward a submission for the Committee's consideration for this purpose.

2. Proposal

This submission proposes that the use of the Community Swimming Pool Fund be designated to transforming the old Railway Line from Ballaghaderreen to Kilfree into a Community Greenway

This submission aims to present a concept that will help improve the lives of the people of Ballaghaderreen and its surrounding areas and communities.

The Railway Greenway initiative will provide the perfect amenity for people of all ages, **from the cradle to the grave**, of all religions and cultures to interact and build friendships. The combined results of delivering this initiative will serve to improve the health and mental wellness of our community and its identity. It will enhance its cultural awareness and appeal, as well as potentially attracting tourism and creating opportunity for wider economic prospects. The following pages detail information on the proposed site and what constitutes a Greenway. It strives to outline possible community benefits ranging from health to education and includes detail on advantages of an initiative such as this, including cultural and heritage rewards in addition to the creation of economic opportunities.

This ambition is substantiated by results from and testimonials relating to similar projects and case studies around Ireland. It is proposed that this project be developed in stages giving us the opportunity to also link up with other Greenway and national/cross county initiatives.

3. Ballaghaderreen & Railway Line Historic Information

Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon, is the terminus of the former branch line from Kilfree Junction on the Midland Great Western's Dublin to Sligo line. The branch opened in 1874 and had two intermediate stations at Edmondstown and Island Road. Goods on the branch were mainly agricultural, cattle were important traffic on the MGWR lines, and it had just three passenger trains a day. The branch closed completely on the 4th February 1963. Our unusual station building at Ballaghaderreen, built with rough stone, remains very derelict. Part of the platform survives, complete with name board posts. The goods shed, remains complete with its typical long cattle bank platform.



No. 655 running round its train at Ballaghaderreen. 23.9.60. Photo: Roger Jones.

Ballaghaderreen has a rich archaeological and historical heritage; of note are buildings such as St. Nathy's Cathedral and The Old Military Barracks. The Cathedral was constructed on the old fair green ground and is the most prominent building in the area. The Tower and Spire was completed in 1909 and is noted for its beautiful and rare stain glass windows. The barracks was built in 1798 by Lord De Freyne and Viscount Dillon after the 1798 Rebellion, and it remains much as it was. Another well-known building is Dillon House, which is located in the Square and currently houses The Western Development Commission and The Ballaghaderreen Branch of Roscommon County Library. Other historic buildings of significance still play an active role as features of the town centre. Our main street is characterized by two and three storey nineteenth century residential and commercial buildings.

4. Greenways

Greenways are corridors of land recognized for **their ability to connect people and places together**. A Greenway is an all-encompassing, **free facility** catering for people of all ages within a community - literally from the cradle to the grave. Greenway trails can be designed to accommodate a variety of trail users within a community, including bicyclists, walkers, hikers, joggers, skaters, and those confined to wheelchairs. Greenways are also utilized for the purposes of fisheries and bird watching activity. Greenways are ribbons of space located within natural linear corridors such as abandoned railroad beds.

It is proposed that the Greenway Development for Ballaghaderreen will be multifunctional, serving local, recreational, schools, and tourist needs and thereby drawing recreational users, visitors, young families and school pupils from the immediate area, nationally and internationally.

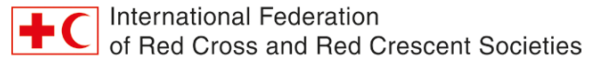
Trails and greenways provide a variety of benefits that ultimately affect **the sustainability of a region's economic, environmental and social health**. These benefits include; **improving health through active living, enhancing cultural awareness and community identity as well as creating value and generating economic activity for a community**.

The European Greenway Association states that aspirations include the promotion of healthy lifestyles, eco-tourism and natural & cultural heritage as well a supporting the economic and social development of communities including enterprise development.



Physical activities have various significant effects on human well-being. The positive effects on physical health are well-known, but sport and physical activities also have strong positive impact on cognitive and psychosocial well-being. This means that sport and physical activity in and of themselves have **the power to improve people's lives**.

5. Community Benefits



Community Health Benefits



Evidence shows that a physically active life can benefit psychosocial well-being in a number of ways, including reduced risk of depression and dementia and lower stress levels. Sport and physical activities are popular all over the world and can be a powerful tool for social inclusion, creating a strong sense of community and togetherness. Combining psychosocial support and sport and physical activities can universally benefit diverse groups across cultures and geography.

Mental health and psychosocial well-being are closely linked to physical health and can be improved by physical activities. In most cases, even moderate physical activity can help reduce physical

complaints and at the same time improve health and psychosocial well-being. Physical to reduce physical feelings of stress and also help to reduce incidents of violence, by alternative physical outlet.

People must make a personal choice to exercise, but communities can make that choice easier for them.

overall physical activities also help anxiety. They can giving people an

People with mental health and psychosocial problems often have many other health problems resulting in shorter life expectancy and the lower levels of well-being. People who receive medication are often less physically active, more isolated and often have harmful eating and health habits. Contrary to the general understanding of these problems, people affected by mental health and psychosocial problems are interested in increasing their physical activity level, changing their eating habits and influencing their own general well-being. However, they need support and facilities to be able to do this. This information is provided by the Psychosocial Centre of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

A region's trail network will contribute to the overall health of residents by offering people attractive, safe, accessible places to bike, walk, hike, jog, skate, and possibly places to enjoy water-based trails.

Obesity and mental health issues are two common health concerns in our community which would benefit from physical activity facilitated by the Greenway. Alan Ryan, Chairperson, Ballaghaderreen Chamber of Commerce.

Creating or improving access to places for physical activity is strongly linked to increasing activity in communities. Numerous studies have found that people become more physically active in response to the creation of or improved access to places for physical activity. This includes developing or improving walking, cycling and other recreational trails. Availability and access to walking trails has been shown to increase the number of individuals partaking in physical activity – National Trails Office- A National Sports Council Initiative



Community Social Benefits

The Greenway will provide a location for all members of the community, from the youngest to the elderly, to mix and get to know each other. In our modern age of smart phones and widescreen TV's, opportunities for social interaction, particularly for the older members of our community, can be limited. The Greenway would provide the perfect location for people of all ages, religions and cultures to interact and build friendships. By creating a place such as a greenway in our community for people to be physically active we can increase the percentage of people who exercise. Additionally as people become more active they make more connections with their neighbours so we can work to reduce instances of isolation and marginalization.



Making connections contributes to better social health and improves the quality of life and health for those in our community

Community Educational Benefits

Our Greenway could serve as a hands-on **environmental classroom for people of all** ages to experience natural landscapes, furthering environmental awareness. The Greenway would provide a safe environment for our children to learn about our local flora, fauna and history. We have excellent schools in the town and hinterland that could utilise the Greenway for the educational development of our children. There is also the possibility to create a museum on-site and we have access to old railway artifacts which would also support our desire to educate.



Community Cultural & Heritage Benefits

Greenways serve as connections to local heritage by preserving and highlighting local historic places and by providing access to them. Ballaghaderreen has its own unique history. With the development of a greenway we can recognise, honor and connect our historic features, enhancing cultural awareness and our community identity.

We are fortunate that this railway line skirts by the edge of the beautiful **Lough Gara**, a world class and untapped trip attractor because of its ancient **Crannogs**, which have been carbon dated to 7000BC. It is thought to be the oldest settlement in Ireland. Nearby, we have the 12th century **Moygara Castle**, named after the O’Gara family who ruled this area since 1285. The route makes its way through the beautiful wooded forest at the rear of the McDermott Estate in Clogher, which also contains the well preserved **Round or Ring Stone Fort**. Close by the line we have the **Four Altars**; a well preserved ruin of penal times built by the Costello’s of Creggane and dating back to the 17th and early 18th century. Another attraction close by is **Saint Attracta’s Well** with its many local folklore tales.



Developed recreational trails are an integral part of the walking tourism product in Ireland. Fáilte Ireland estimate that over 800,000 overseas tourists engaged in walking while on holiday in Ireland in 2010



‘Community buy-in’ and collaborative dialogue are of paramount importance as was shown in ‘The Great Western Greenway’ (Mayo) which is one of the real success stories for adventure tourism in Ireland in terms of usage. The Greenway has transformed the Newport and Mulranny areas in terms of tourism performance while creating almost 40 jobs locally. 157,000 trips have been recorded along the route since the beginning of 2013 (up to mid-August) and 2013 looks set to surpass the 177,000 users that visited in 2012 with current projections at 200,000.

The Greenway is an example of taking an underused local asset and exploiting its full potential for the betterment of the local community and economy.

Michael Ring, Minister of State for Tourism & Sport

6. Economic Benefits & Opportunities

As Westport and other towns have already proven, a world class Greenway can have considerable economic benefits for the local community. Many thousands of visitors, both local and tourists, use the Westport Greenway every year. While the Westport Greenway has beautiful views over Clew Bay, a Greenway along the old Kilfree line would also benefit from stunning views over Lough Gara. The Ballaghaderreen Greenway however would have so much more to offer than just views as we have an incredibly rich local history reaching back to the ancient past and encompassing such gems as crannogs, ringforts and Moygara castle along the proposed route. Considerable work has already been done marketing this region under the Lakes and Legends banner, a Greenway through the heart of the ancient west could become a focal point in attracting visitors to the region with considerable economic benefits for Ballaghaderreen. Guided tours, such as walking, cycling, and on Segway as well as fishing and bird watching activities, all become possible once the Greenway infrastructure is developed, as do bike rental opportunities.

Tourism and recreation-related revenues from trails and greenways come in several forms. Trails and greenways create opportunities in construction and maintenance, recreation rentals (such as bicycles, kayaks, and canoes), recreation services (such as shuttle buses and guided tours), historic preservation, restaurants and lodging/accommodation services as well as construction and labour involved in the initial development phase. Given the central location of Ballaghaderreen, and its excellent transport links and close proximity to Knock airport, it is possible to envisage Ballaghaderreen becoming a base for tourists visiting the west. The Greenway will provide us with the opportunity to showcase our many local historical attractions on and off the route and unlock the undoubted tourist potential of our town and hinterland. It is an indirect opportunity to provide much needed employment in the area.

Similar business case studies to that of the proposed railway conversion to a greenway include The Western Greenway which attracts 200,000 visitors annually and at least 20 other Greenways around the country are at different stages of development. The costs of adapting old railway lines as Greenways are relatively small by comparison in terms of comparable infrastructure, and maintenance is also minimal. With the ongoing linking of these and their phenomenal success in boosting their local economies, it is vital that Ballaghaderreen taps into this available opportunity now and avail of the growing success of Greenways which would contribute towards the much needed revitalization of the town including the potential development of new businesses.



Research undertaken by the Irish Sports Council and Coillte in 2006 estimated the direct economic expenditure by Irish trail users on items such as food, drink, accommodation and trail equipment to be €307 million annually, while the public good value to users of trails was found to be €95 million.

Mayor of Clare Cllr. Joe Arkins on the West Clare Railway Greenway. "The proposed track will serve as an important piece of recreational infrastructure for the people of Ennis and surrounding area, as well as a tourism attraction for those who visit the town."

7. Down the line - Future opportunities

The Greenway would act as a focal point, benefiting many other potential projects being discussed for Ballaghaderreen.

The development of the old railway ticket office, waiting room, train turntable and goods store into a Steam Engine Museum, with an option to re-lay 100m of track complete with engine and carriage, as an additional tourist attraction which would further enhance the proposed Greenway.

Other proposed complementary projects include;

A town park that would benefit from close proximity to the Greenway.

Building a replica crannog on Lough Gara is another example of a project that would go hand in hand with the Greenway.

We also have a natural "Blueway", a water route running parallel to the Greenway along the Lung River from town into Lough Gara. This is ideal for kayak/boat tours, allowing our local natural and historic assets to be explored from land and water.

Re-development of the old railway station in town, and of Moygara castle as tourist attractions are other projects that would benefit from our Greenway.

In addition to developing trails for walking, cycling and hiking, there is an opportunity to develop many elements as part of the railway conversion site itself i.e. a coffee shop, benches and places to picnic, a cultural center, a community hub for group physical activity and a place to hold classes and run projects such as the men shed initiative. A key point to consider is that similar greenway projects in Ireland have delivered significant business impacts in their communities for instance as part of the Great Western Greenway Project, of 160 businesses surveyed indicated that 47% noted an increase in business turnover and 31% noted an increase in expenditure. These increases in turn facilitate the development and opportunity of complementary projects such as those above.

Our Greenway could also be developed to align and link up with other greenways and national cross border projects i.e. the Achill to Westport Greenway.





8. Concluding Notes:

“Ballaghaderreen Chamber are 100% supportive of the Kilfree line Greenway project. “We believe this Greenway would be a fantastic asset to the town. It would bring wide ranging benefits to the entire community “

“We are not aware of any other project that would bring such wide ranging benefits to all sectors of the community”.

Ballaghaderreen Chamber of Commerce, October 2016

Let us join all the dots, grasp this opportunity while it exists, and put Ballaghaderreen back where it rightfully belongs, as a notable gateway to the West and give our town back that identity of which we were once so proud.

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References:

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- Fáilte Ireland
- West Clare Railway Greenway
- National Trails Office
- Moving Together -Promoting psychosocial well-being through sport and physical activity - IFRC& International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education
- Lough Gara Lakes & Legends
- West Clare Railway Greenway
- The Irish Sports Council
- Coillte
- European Greenway Association