

WESTPORT CIVIC TRUST

ISSUE PAPER

WESTPORT LAP 2021-2027

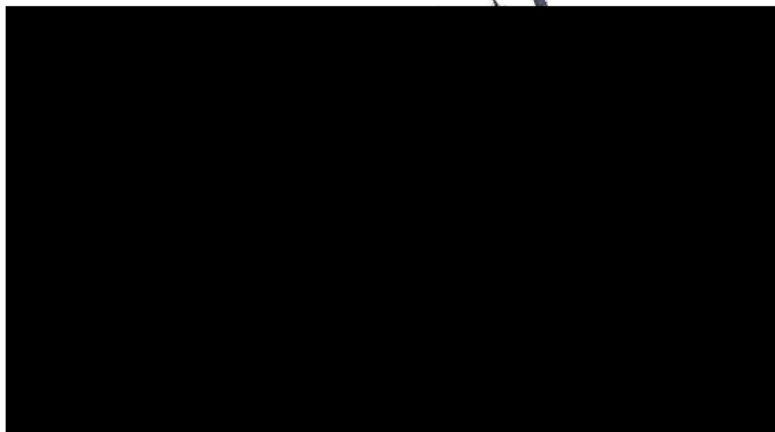
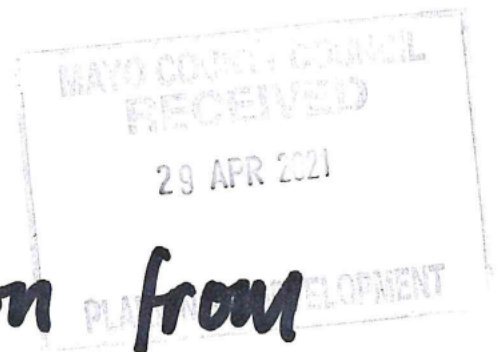
Attached submission from
Westport Civic Trust.

Presented 29th April 2021.

by

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W.C.T.



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ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT

What are the economic strengths and competitive advantages of Westport?

Location, Location and Location. A number of business work together to bring tourism to Westport. Lucky to have Westport House so close to the town. Train service.

What type of industry/employment opportunities do you think should be encouraged in Westport and where should it be located?

Westport should do everything to become the outdoor recreation hub of Mayo. All outdoor activities should be catered for, marine, aquatic, land-based.

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TOURISM

What can the plan do to support/enhance tourism in Westport?

Get the basic infrastructure right first. More public conveniences and amenities that are well maintained. Introduce more pedestrianised zones. Promote Westport as the premier base for an activity holiday in West Mayo.

Promote ECO Tourism

Are there areas in the town that have the potential to be developed for tourism and recreational purposes?

Romany Island would benefit from a well thought out plan. Why so many car park spaces at the end of the quay? There is already a large car park area there. Yet there is no seating, play ground bike park, or facilities for the swimmers like a cold shower. Imagine a smaller version of Salt Hill in Galway. At least a place for swimmers to leave cloths while swimming and a lean to for changing, a picnic area for families, a play ground for all ages. A decent skate park with good size problems for older children, a art instillation. Certainly spaces for disable cars, you also need access for the slip way but no parking.

Another idea could be a permanent swimming pool. A sea wall build to keep water in that goes from the swimming area over to the other shore where the hotel use to be. This could be tidal and a great facility in summer for swimmers.

One other issue would be storage for kayak, etc. No all families have garage facilities or lock up facilities, a lock up facility down at the Marina would be very helpful.

What are your views on the development of Marine related to tourism in the town and future development of Westport House and Demesne?

It would be well worth putting a marina there and also to develop water sports.

As regard Westport House. They have a long term plan. I hope that there will always be access to the public.

With regard to the future of Tourism. Staycations are a big thing not only now but I think in the future. We are seeing more and more campervans. Both from the Irish market and the overseas tourism market. It is shocking in this day and age that there are no facilities for these campervans. Westport as a tourist destination has no facilities to support these camper vans. Their waste needs to be emptied and their water needs to be replenished. When travelling in France or Europe there

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Tourism Continued..

are specific areas where one avails of these facilities. Some are attached to garages, a place to empty their tanks or some town councils provided special parking facilities also. These parks are chosen strategically, some outside the town but well within walking distance, some in towns also but not that they overtake scenic areas. This prevents people emptying their waste in wild places out in the country, (A farmer told me how some campervans just dump on the side of the road, and they have had to go with shovel to clear up mess). If we want tourists, we need to put in proper facilities and I believe this could be a business for one or also a paid public service.

Pedestrianize Bridge street or part time during the tourist season.

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POPULATION AND HOUSING

What are the priorities for housing in Westport, in terms of size and type of housing?

“Before you become elderly, learn how to care, respect, and love elder-ones since you will be that one thereupon and ultimately.” — Ehsan Sehgal

Greater consideration should be given to the disabled and people of limited mobility. Dementia is becoming more common and housing needs to be designed and located in appropriate locations.

Dwellings should be built for life.

Why have specialist housing especially for older people? Why not have mixed housing, for families, older people, single parents within a community. Mixed affordable and social housing. Playgrounds and play areas for all, with sheltered seating that supports older people close to the play area. What is more entertaining and joyful than looking at young people play.

As regard to ideas as to making housing more affordable in town area. I believe that above business would be ideal for living. If there is a policy of less cars in the town centre, there seems to be a large number of car parks, can these be used better for housing or gardens?

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COMPACT GROWTH / REGENERATION.

How can the LAP maximise the use of any vacant or underutilized sites in the centre of Westport.

The Bank of Ireland garden and courtyard has been derelict for 20 plus years. It is sad to see this courtyard going to rack and ruin. This could be converted for community use. In Cologne city centre are community workshops spaces for welding and woodwork, those whom have not space or money can make or mend items using equipment. Local groups could use this community space for gatherings etc. Twenty years, this once wonderful garden has been neglected. The fruit from the trees falling into the ground. This space could be an amazing garden for all. What is the possibility of the Bank of Ireland garden being purchased from Mc Hales by Mayo CoCo. and converted to a public amenity park. Is there any altruistic philanthropist willing to purchase or donate it. Have it named in their honour and handed over to the care of the town/county?

It is also sad to see the old market house underutilized, it too is such a beautiful building. Having this in use would bring more life to the town. It could be a museum with a display hall of old photos of Westport for tourists and locals, artesian workshops or studios, a meet up place for elderly and disabled, a coffee shop, accommodation for visiting artists, a venue for the 'Country Market' a wonderful Westport tourist centre, the sky is the limit. However it is sad to see a building so central and beautiful locked up.

What is the reason that a large business premises 'Shanleys' has been vacant for over 5 years. Obviously, the incentive for renting this is not big enough, or the penalty for allowing them to remain empty is too small. Overseas in France or Spain, if properties remain derelict or unkept severe penalties are implemented and collected. Do we have penalties in Westport or Ireland to prevent property developers sitting on investments, while families are paying the price through travelling distances every day, unable to afford homes. If these penalties are implemented, there needs to be systems in place and follow up procedure to allow for families or business to thrive rather than empty derelict sites.

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MOVEMENT AND TRANSPORT

How can the Local Area Plan help to improve and promote sustainable forms of transport in Westport?

Introduce more pedestrianised/cycle zones.

More comfortable seating for elderly.

Infrastructure Services.

Why only Newport for Light Pollution reduction? This should be considered for Westport too. The new lights are halogen however the looms are very powerful and affect the circadian rhythm of the bird life. Lighting that supports bird and insect life need to be installed.

Better broadband/Wi-Fi for all, town and environs. How far does this 'town plan' extend?

A ring road is badly needed for Ballinrobe, Leenaun and Louisburgh route. Traffic to and from these directions all go through town centre.

As mentioned previously, there cannot be enough emphasis on getting the basics right, SUSTAINABLY, i.e. if there are more Public toilets and Bins, then provision needs to be built in for their upkeep and maintenance.

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SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Does the level and range of community facilities and amenities adequately cater for the existing and future residents of Westport?

There are no free facilities for older teenagers. Ideally an exciting play ground with older kids in mind. E.g. a decent skate park with good size facilities. A proper outdoor gym, where one can do a good workout with instructions. From a water sport perspective there are no facilities to lock up gear leading to a car dependency.

A sill or other damming option could be explored to maintain a permanent minimum depth of water in the lower harbour area to facilitate use at all times.

A permanent location for a thriving country market, perhaps the old market at the Octagon.

What type of community and amenity facilities are most important to you?

As already stated, good facilities for teenagers.

As a space for cultural events, the Town Hall is excellent – perhaps it needs to be coordinated better with festival/ events organizers so that when these events happen they are not at a loss as to where to host their event

Thankfully Westport library is going to a bigger and better venue .

Are there enough facilities for younger and older residents in the town, and people with disabilities?

As stated already I believe that there could be a playground for the older generation the playgrounds are for younger children yet when I walk around there seems to be older children and young teens hanging around. In Loughrea, there is a more complex playground for older children where they can be challenged physically.

As regards older residents there does not seem to be a place where there is shelter to sit out of the wind.

Are there sufficient play areas, open spaces ,public parks ,sports amenities and recreation facilities in Westport ?

No we don't think there are enough. It would be great to have the equivalent or better at the Quay and another one on the Newport road and perhaps even one more and the Castle bar distillery /Fairgreen area perhaps in kernels wood.

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Social and community facilities continued.....

How can the plan utilize an enhance existing amenity areas such as the Greenway and the harbor to provide for both passive and active recreation?

As previously stated upgrade Roman Island and the point for a start. There's a lot of work required to develop the whole Westport Quay area into a proper functioning - year round amenity.

Are there open spaces play areas, public parks and recreational facilities accessible for younger and older residents of the town and people with disabilities?

As already stated, I believe that there is no sheltered greenspace for older folks to relax outdoors as stated above. Also no area for 17 to 14 year old's to hang out either.

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BIODIVERSITY & NATURE

How can the local area plan best support the protection conservation and enhancement of natural heritage and biodiversity?

Do use appropriate weedkiller, Plant more edible plants. What about trees there seems to be an abundance of Ivy in old Woodlands. While this is good, only up to a point as when allowed to grow for too long without trimming, the Ivy becomes too heavy acts like sails in a ship, in strong winds, it can blow the trees down. Trimming of Ivy should be undertaken in certain places where it overwhelms the trees.

By continuing to support the biodiversity office on Westport Tidy Towns committee Pat Fahey, and by getting other organizations working on this together.

Are there local parks and green areas which you feel could benefit from enhancement or work to improve their biodiversity?

Yes the Roman island area and in particular the Woods. Also Colonel's Woods, the work started by Coilte, to develop this should restart and progress as soon as possible - it is essential for the future of our planet our people.

The playground on the Golf Club road, the area gets really mucky and would be enhanced with softer Mats. The surrounding green area is very wet and marshy, not great for playing on the grass there. Drainage there perhaps?

Do we need specific policy's / objective, standards to increase biodiversity?

Yes indubitably

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TOWN CENTRE / RETAIL

Regarding cafés and restaurants. If a premises is providing compostable packaging, the introduction of bylaws regarding an obligation to provide a brown bin to dispose of said packaging should be introduced. Such an introduction would reduce the amount of unnecessary waste going to landfill while also preventing the contamination of recycling bins in the area, both in public and households.

If we do not pedestrianize Bridge street all day, perhaps closing it at night time during summer season or tourist season would enhance the atmosphere.

An outdoor music venue would enhance the town centre again during the summer/tourist season

What do you see as the main issues impacting on the future development of the retail sector in Westport?

Probably exorbitant retail costs, loss of independent traders, loss of artisans, prohibitive rates, competition and proliferation of on line shopping.

Too many empty shops in Westport not sure why there are a number of people looking for retail area, is the rent too high? (This was also discussed in other section.)

In your opinion what type of measures are required to maintain and enhance the retail core of Westport while protecting its unique character and charm?

Address all the issues raised above in answer to the previous question, and reduce rental and rate charges, encourage more central living areas, bring back people living in the town.

Keep signage appropriate and in keeping.

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URBAN DESIGN AND PLACMAKING

What urban design standards should apply in Westport?

More drop curbs and tactile paving should be introduced at banks, post office and hotel entrances for people of limited vision.

More appropriate landscaping should be introduced in large open spaces such as car park areas

Certain standards should be kept by all. Ask the experts; follow Heritage Council, national government and EU legislative guidelines. Employed of state-of-the-art standards only

What are the unique features of Westport's urban environment that should inform future policies

Westport is a planned town bring back the town architect and town planner, they should never have been relocated to Castlebar. Westport is a very well designed town for 'today' but it needs to be carefully planned for the future - a post fossil fuel future - ban all burning fossil fuels.

We need to look to the future more than the past, we have more than enough memorials to historic events we need to be more future conscious but on the long term basis not just for the duration of the current or next government.

Where do you see potential to enhance the public realm in the town?

This has already been alluded to in above sections. The point, Roman Island, The facilities there, more appropriate landscaping in large open spaces such as car parking areas. Etc.

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CLIMATE AND ACTION FLOODING

How can the plans support our transition to a low carbon climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy?

Listen to the experts and follow a Norwegian example if appropriate.

How can the plan achieve a balance between the growth of Westport and the protection of the environment?

Surely as the environment is what we live and breathe in, is it not imperative that we put the protection of the environment **first** in all instances

How can the plan address flood risks and build resilience to better cope with erosion?

Consult with experts, Hydrologists, engineers, Geologists, - have them evaluate and mitigate the risks.

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BUILT HERITAGE

How can the Landscape and build heritage of Westport be suitably protected while accommodating the development needs of the town?

First and foremost, good clear communication re plans for heritage buildings. decisions may be open to discussion with all interested parties i.e. heritage, business, environmental and community. There is always some disagreement as to who's interest is served best, With clear communication, a chance to be heard, with an agenda that is best for all concerned will lead to thinking outside the box and good solutions discovered.

How can the LAP Encourage the reuse and regeneration of protected structures and older vacant structures located in the Town Center areas ?

The protected buildings need to be utilized. A good example of this is the Credit Union. The adjoining courtyard is an example of an unoccupied building now in serious decay, Buildings that can be converted into civic, cultural or community spaces could offer a strategic option as this keeps them functional and playing pivotal roles to the life of the town.

How can Westport house and Demesne be protected while simultaneously achieving its full economic potential in terms of tourism and other acceptable land use?

The present owners are the custodians of Westport House. Our hope is that they continue to enhance yet maintain Westport House and continue to facilitate access as this will ensure that locals value it as part of their heritage and place.