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EASTERN & MIDLAND

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REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

21/01/2019

**Re: Submission re Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
for the Eastern and Midland Region
Public Consultation**

Dear Sir/Madam,

We refer to the above invitation to make submissions or observations in respect of the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region. We have been requested by our clients Ashbourne Golf Club of Archerstown, Ashbourne, Co Meath. A84R528 address to make the following submission in respect of the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

Purpose of this submission

Whilst it is accepted that the specific details of development management are not a matter for the Draft RSES and the Golf Club intends to make submissions in respect of the Development Plan in the near future. However, the purpose of this submission is to request that an objective be placed in the RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region to ensure the protection of established amenities such as Ashbourne Golf Club.

Background.

Ashbourne Golf Club is a member owned, equal opportunity golf club based on 120 acres at Archerstown, Ashbourne, Co Meath.

Ashbourne Golf Club is an important sporting facility in the local area, catering to circa 600 members (males and female) plus 150 Juniors. In recent years they have increased the level of coaching made at Junior level and significantly reduced Junior fees. Well structured programs are run throughout the year and their Golf Pro plays a very active role at this level.

The club was founded in 1992, developed and maintained by members and the support of the local community. Considerable investment has been put into the course and facilities over the years and the club has never failed to meet its commitments though of course this was a struggle in recent times. Currently they believe that the outlook is far more positive and they look forward to increasing membership and participation by the local community in the sport.

Grant Aid:

Provisional Approval was given for Capital Sports Grant of €59,500 in 2017.

It is important to point out that the golf club “market” is at this time wide open. For most clubs, except the elite, entry fees are a relic of the past and annual subscriptions are very competitive. This means that there is no longer any barrier to golf players switching clubs. Therefore, retaining members is a priority for clubs such as Ashbourne Golf Club. This means that in order to stay open they must provide a high standard of facilities to members and especially in relation to the golf course itself.

Recent Development

In early 2018 a new housing scheme opened right on the boundary of their 5th hole and this has had a very significant impact on the playability of this hole. Because an occasional golf ball has gone over this boundary into the housing scheme and because it was not possible to protect this boundary in such a manner that their golf architect could guarantee with a very high level of assurance that golf balls could not “go over” again with netting or other protections they were in effect forced to significantly redesign 3 of their holes. And they have lost one of their best holes.

They are currently in the process of this redesign which will cost €200,000. This is a huge unanticipated blow to the club finances and is money much needed for investments elsewhere on the course. However, they were left with no choice if they are to maintain the playability of the course in a manner that will enable them to retain and attract members. This finance will be raised through bank loans and repaid by member subscriptions over the coming years.

This experience has highlighted the risks they face on their other boundaries because they could not again fund this level of expense on other boundaries and, more restrictively, they now have no further “spare land” that could be utilised to offset any further loss. Consequently, they genuinely fear that the very existence of the golf club would be seriously endangered should further development occur similar to the one described above.

Widening the Milltown Road is a very specific example which could impact significantly on their golf club boundary. The Milltown Road runs along the right-hand side of their 12th Hole and the Broadmeadow River runs along the left hand side. Considerable investment has been made over the years in tree planting to safeguard this, rather tight boundary. Any loss of land on this boundary would lose the entire Hole as it could not be moved left or relocated elsewhere.

Hence, they have decided to make this submission in order to highlight the seriousness of the situation and to ensure that their situation is understood and that future developments on their boundaries take into account that the viability of Ashbourne Golf Club may be at issue and the efforts and investment of 25 years lost.

The golf club members can appreciate that there will be development in the neighbourhood of Ashbourne Golf Club. However, they are anxious that any further development in Ashbourne takes the circumstances of the club into consideration especially those impacting the boundaries of the club.

They strongly feel that AGC has offered and continues to offer a great sporting and leisure facility to their local community. This has taken much effort and investment on the part of their members. They provide a quality facility that may be used by people of all genders and ages. They believe that future development should be undertaken in a manner which does not jeopardise the future of

this important recreational amenity. The most effective way to ensure this is to provide an appropriate buffer zone between the course boundaries and any future development. This buffer zone would need to be approximately 80 metres.

They previously had negotiated a voluntary agreement with the developer of "Milltown Meadows" for 8 metres but they have learned from experience that this was seriously inadequate and resulted in a costly reorganisation of the layout of the golf course which could have been prevented had an appropriate buffer been provided.

Another boundary vulnerability that will need to be addressed at some point will be in relation to the future "widening" of the Milltown Road from the entrance to Ashbourne Golf Course southwards. The road at this point borders the 12th Hole which is their "Index 1". Unfortunately, this hole is also bounded on the other side by the Broadmeadow River which means that there is no option to move it and the loss of this hole could endanger the viability of the golf course.

Conclusion

Whilst development management matters are not necessarily a matter for forward planning the Ashbourne Golf Club has suffered significantly as a result of previous developments being carried out close to their boundaries and are fearful of a repeat situation.

For this reason, on behalf of our client we are requesting that the Draft RSES for the Midlands and Eastern Region specifically includes a policy for the protection of existing recreational amenities within urban areas to ensure that appropriate buffer zones of an adequate size with an appropriate separation distance of 80metres to be provided between any proposed residential areas and existing golf courses such as Ashbourne Golf Club.

In accordance with the hierarchy of plans this should then be incorporated into County Development Plans and Local Area Plans and supported at Development Management Stage.

Yours sincerely,



Geraldine Fahy BA MRUP MIPI

