

## **Public consultation event for Tower and Cloghroe**

As part of the Collaborative Town Centre Health Check, an online public engagement session was held on Thursday 10th of June, 2021. The event was facilitated by students from the Centre for Planning Education and Research (CPER), UCC and supervised by CPER staff.

12 local residents of Tower and Cloghroe attended the event along with staff from Cork City Council.

The Place Standard Tool was used as a framework for the group discussion. The question format allowed the group to think about and assess the physical environment - the buildings, streets, public and natural spaces and the social elements that make up their place.

Eight themes were discussed and after each discussion the attendees were asked to rate the theme they were discussing from 7 "doing really well" to 1 "very weak". A synopsis of the attendees' discussion of the themes and agreed ratings are outlined in the following paragraphs.

### **A: Identity and Belonging**

There is a village feel to the area but not as strong and evident as in previous generations. Sense that the identity is changing with new demographics moving in.

There is no distinct identity for the area. Separation between newer and older parts of the town with a bit of a disconnect between new residents and the existing community.

Important to consider whether it is a village or small town. A few commented saying that Tower is very much a village with a desire for that identity to be kept.

The busy road would appear to be a real issue contributing to the division of Tower in different parts.

Comments made about the rich history in Tower that was perhaps untapped: the hydro, Muskerry tram, mills. Muskerry Tram. There is a real desire in the community to discover and promote existing heritage.

Summary: area has grown a lot in past decades, disjointed feel, perhaps divided by the busy road. There is a need to commemorate the local history of the area in order to help to create a better sense of place, foster community spirit and rekindle identity.

**Rating: 5.5**

## **B: Jobs and Businesses**

There was a general consensus that employment in the surrounding areas of Hollyhill and Ballincollig, created for example by 'Apple', 'VMware', 'EMC', were close enough to meet the employment needs of Tower/ Cloghroe, and make it an attractive area to live.

Of concern for the group was that Tower would lose its "village feel" if larger scale enterprises were located into the area.

There is some employment locally. It was noted that retail jobs were dominant in the area and this could end up driving some people away in the long-term as they go in search of jobs with a higher pay scale. Considering further retail services, the group was of the opinion that the close proximity to Cork City and the regular bus service took care of most needs. It was noted that there was a lack of cafes in the area.

On the quality of digital connectivity, the group noted that the broadband speeds were recently upgraded and speeds were good and there were no issues.

Summary: With large employers like Apple in close commuting distance, the group was of the opinion that this effectively provides sufficient employment. Large commercial/industrial use in the immediate vicinity would detract from the traditional village feel of Tower & Cloghroe.

**Rating: 6**

## **C: Nature, Tourism and Landscape**

Huge opportunity to open up the riverwalk to connect Blarney and Tower. It's council-owned land so very easily could be made into a "gem" again.

Hydro planning is missing in the area and the heritage area between Shamrock Rd and Muskerry rail is underutilized.

General consensus was that traffic increases year on, but no means of easing the issue of congestion or walk-ability. A similar walkway was proposed to that of one in the Limerick Golfway. Cloghroe also suffers from traffic congestion, especially near the school area. Constant stoppage and drop-off without adequate areas to do so.

Tower has large and underutilized grasslands, a suggestion was lighting and surfacing. The areas are presently not fully accessible and are largely used by adolescents for late-night socialising, due to the limited and scarce amenities made available to them in their area.

Summary:

'Tower is a community, not a motorway', people want people to be the priority, not the roads. Major desire to open up access to the river and make it an amenable area for all to use, not simply an abandoned grassland between housing estates.

**Result: 5.5**

## **D: Surrounding Countryside**

A general sense of the group was that the road quality leading in and out of Tower and Cloghroe is particularly poor. This is a concern, as Tower is utilised as a main service centre for a large rural hinterland area surrounding the town. The roads are very busy, especially during the morning travel peak times.

The high traffic speed was another major issue, as the danger posed by fast-moving vehicles is perceived to make cycling around parts of Tower and Cloghroe unfeasible. Two attendees voiced their dissatisfaction at the awkward location of the community centre at Ballanly, with its rural setting requiring it to be accessed by car.

Numerous suggestions were made as to how these issues may be remedied. Most of the vocal attendees advocated for more footpaths as a desperately needed feature along currently dangerous stretches of road. In particular, the stretch of road by Aunty's Bar leading towards SuperValu and the roadway leading out of the town across Tower Bridge were highlighted as particularly treacherous stretches of roadway lacking footpaths.

Furthermore, one of those attending raised the topic of a possible integrated mobility plan for walking based around safe, wide footpaths, being highly sought-after in the town. The riverside area running along the backs of the housing estates south of St. Ann's Hill was also highlighted here as showing strong potential for a safer walkway along which pedestrians could reach the likes of shops, work, and school.

Tying into this was a desire for more speed-ramps among several of the attendees, which they hoped would alleviate concerns surrounding high-speed traffic within the town limits.

Finally, strong interest was shown in the potential for a frequent bus-service running from Tower/Cloghroe towards Ballincollig. This is primarily due to the fact that many young people currently travelling from the town to Ballincollig for education and leisure

activities are forced to rely on private buses to reach their destination, which is not seen as ideal.

### Summary:

Tower serves a large rural hinterland providing retail, education and health services. The poor quality of roads leading in and out of Tower and Cloghroe is concerning.

Wide, safe footpaths and traffic calming are a necessity to reduce the high speed of vehicles and provide a safe physical environment for pedestrians. An integrated mobility plan may prove fruitful in the development of the riverside walkway.

A frequent bus service to and from Ballincollig is highly sought-after, especially to meet young people's needs.

**Result: 3**

## **E: Streets and Spaces**

### Issues Raised:

Observations that Tower and Cloghroe are used as a rat-run for traffic and HGVs coming from North Cork and Kerry. As a result, traffic flow is very high and is a critical obstacle impeding the development of the area.

There are very few focal points and places to meet and socialise. Local businesses make an effort to provide this function. The main gathering point is the Park, known to the locals as 'Village Green', but the area is crying out for

At night, some parts of Tower are more inviting than others. References to minor anti-social behaviour in Village Green, while another comment came in about patchy street lighting in different locations around the village.

Poor layout and dynamic, with no real formal meeting place, means that perhaps Tower and Cloghroe are not meeting their full potential. Village Green could have the capability to develop into a key central point with the addition of some extra facilities.

### Summary:

All contributors were very much on the same page. There seemed to be quite a lot of appreciation for Village Green, particularly during daylight hours, but the layout of street networks and the considerable amount of traffic were seen as the fundamental areas that need to be urgently addressed.

**Result: 2**

## **F Amenities and Facilities for All**

There was a strong consensus that there is a lack of facilities for young people in Tower and Cloghroe. Other than Blarney soccer club, there are no facilities locally. There was at hockey pitch in Tower which now lies derelict. The facilities are Inniscarra community centre and sports grounds at Ballyanly and the sports facilities at Ballincollig were acknowledged however these are located at a distance from Tower and generally can only be accessed by car.

Particularly noted was the complete lack of facilities for teenagers in the area. There is a feeling that the lack of facilities, lack of purposeful activity and boredom are leading to some trouble-making by young people in the area. There is a shift in the dynamic of the population, there are now many teenagers and young people in the area with nothing to do which the group fear may lead to social problems.

The community are pro-active in this matter, for example the scouts are looking for a suitable hall and there was a recent effort to create a multi-use games area (MUGA), but have not had success. The potential of the Riverside Park as an amenity was raised and the group talked about the availability of public land in the area which could be used for this purpose.

Summary:

Concern was raised that there is a serious lack of facilities, which is not being addressed as new housing is being planned and built. Overall there was strong agreement that facilities, particularly for young people, should be provided to meet the needs of the growing population of the village.

**Overall score 1.5**

## **G: Housing and Living**

Presently there is a housing proposal for downsizing in the area for older residents. Large family homes are now quite empty due to other family members moving out. The proposal may see more houses open up to the market, but would allow the residents to remain in the area and retain their identity and belonging.

The market has drastically changed in recent years, the area has seen housing prices skyrocket and jump in price, leaving people unable to move out or into the area.

Nearby employment hubs draw people to live in Tower, but as one resident pointed out there is no 'gentrification of the area', as the area has not seen any new development or amenities to class it as gentrified.

The housing quality and supply are seen as no different from the national market currently experienced across Ireland.

The summary is that the people who live in the area feel that there is adequate housing provision in Tower, but acknowledge it is suffering the same deprivation as the rest of the country.

**Result: 5**

**H: Moving Around**

Consistent feedback over poor pedestrian permeability in the area. Where there are existing footpaths they are often narrow and cambered.

In many cases, footpaths simply end with no connection, requiring pedestrians to cross the road several times. Connectivity is a major issue

Opportunities to improve walking and cycling access, and it is crucial to link up with a Riverside walkway that is currently underutilised.

The speed of HGVs and cars creates a serious blow-back, and the wind can knock many off their stride both walking and cycling.

Movement within housing estates is good, with open access to green areas. However, once you move out onto the main roads, things change very quickly.

During the pandemic restrictions, the roads were safe and quiet, providing an example of what the area could be like with better mobility access and traffic calming measures..

Summary: Very poor connectivity for pedestrians, with existing footpaths very narrow and uneven in many places. Cycling infrastructure is non-existent and the current state of speeding traffic flow makes it very dangerous for both cyclists and pedestrians and as a result the village feel of Tower is lost. Need for a cycling plan and to address concerns raised over the transition from Cork County Council to Cork City Council.

**Result: 1.5**

## Commentary

The group of local residents were very engaged in the discussion.

Common themes ran through each section with repeated reference to the negative impact of the traffic passing through the Village. Also mentioned was the disconnection or lack of footpaths.

There is frustration that the additional housing growth in the village is not matched with improvement in facilities. Additional facilities are needed particularly for young people.

The consensus is that the riverside walkway has huge potential and would bring great benefits in terms of amenity and connectivity.

Employment and retail needs are met within a short commute. The public transport connection to Cork City is good, an additional orbital connection to Ballincollig would be a great benefit, particularly to young people.

## Tower: How Good is our Place? Based on the Place Standard Tool

