

**Report on 'Submission DCDP-40' to the Draft Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027,
with regards to Ardagh House, Demesne, and the Ardagh Neighbourhood Park.**



**Catherine Joseph,
Green Party LEA Rep- County Longford**

I joined the good people of Ardagh for a walk of the village and park following an invitation from the Ardagh Preservation Society. I must confess it was heartbreaking for me to learn that the beautiful area of Ardagh House and Demesne, which includes the only park in the village, is now on recommendation to be re-zoned from tourism to agricultural, with Ardagh House and the two gate lodges re-zoned from tourism to residential.

I was taken aback from the information gathered from reliable sources that if the Chief Executive's recommendation to re-zone the lands of the demesne is accepted by the Longford County Councillors, there is a real and significant risk the beautiful vegetative covers and cheerfully shaggy tress of the Ardagh Neighbourhood Park will be felled as it is within the boundary of the demesne.

Ardagh Neighbourhood Park is a four acre planned amenity area. The park was designed in 1989 by former President of the Tree Council of Ireland, Dr. Christy Boylan, and was officially opened on the 4th of March 1990 by then Taoiseach, Mr. Charles Haughey. Other visitors on the day included Mr. Albert Reynolds (Minister of Finance), Mrs. Mary O'Rourke (Minister for Education), and Mr. Louis Belton (Longford-Westmeath TD).



Photograph of Ardagh Neighbourhood Park information board located in The Heritage Centre

"The aims of 'The Neighbourhood Park' would be [to] provide a recreational area for the local inhabitants and for visitors and to give awareness of the environmental values of the site. The main aim of the tree planting programme is to provide a range of species for timber and wildlife value."

We learned that in October 2017, workers of the current owners engaged in significant (unlicensed) tree felling within the park. The lasting impact of this felling is still clearly evident, and if not for the timely intervention of horrified community members, they may have removed all the trees that help create the tree-lined entrance to this unique heritage village. From a candid environmental point of view and in the age where countries are spending millions of euros to plant trees as a conduit to mitigate the threats of climate change and biodiversity loss. I strongly believe losing this mature tree filled park will cause more harm than good not only to the natural environment, but to humanity at large.



View of Ardagh House

It is a well known fact that Ardagh House, Demesne, and the structures of Ardagh Village are notable for the extent of their unique history. Ardagh Demesne has existed since 1703 and Ardagh House was first constructed in the 1730s. The current layout and (protected) structures of the village were planned and designed by James Rawson Carroll in the 1860s. The rarity of a planned village in Ireland is one of the factors for Ardagh being an Architectural Conservation Area. This holds a huge potential as a tourist attraction with generational benefits of preserving nature whilst creating much needed jobs which guarantees economic development to the Longford County.

I, together with Ardagh residents and members of the wider community, plead with authorities to keep Ardagh Demesne zoned as 'Tourism'. Protecting Ardagh House, Demesne, and the Neighbourhood Park from re-zoning will ensure opportunity for the council to give the requisite support needed to harness the solid tourism potential of the area. I must be quick to add that good examples of such tourist attractions are Strokestown Park House, Gardens, and National Famine Museum, Roscommon; Belvedere House in Mullingar, Westmeath; and Marlay Park, Rathfarnham, Dublin.

Please find and regard below as an important paragraph from the email I received from the community group detailing the nature of the permission being sought from Longford County council:

"As I am sure you are aware, the Draft Longford County Development Plan is currently at the Third Stage Public Consultation. During the Second Stage, a submission was made on behalf of the current owners of Ardagh Demesne, Ardagh Demesne Ltd. They requested that the land of the demesne be re-zoned from 'Tourism' to 'Agriculture' – "The owners intend to construct a milking parlour subject to obtaining the necessary consents at this location." - and Ardagh House and the two gate lodges be re-zoned from 'Tourism' to 'Residential'.

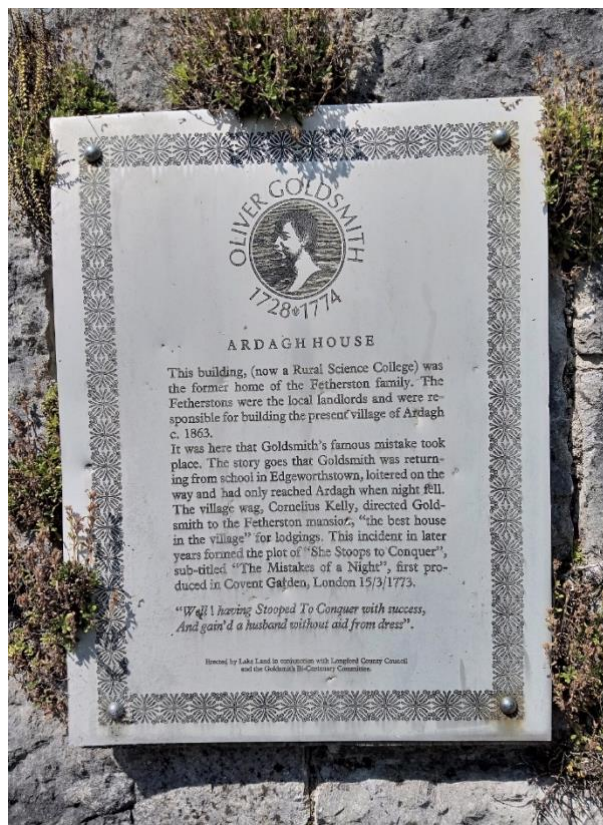
In the Chief Executive's Report on Submissions Received, it was recommended that the submission be granted:

“The Council consider that the proposed zoning of the lands Tourism to not be required and the lands re-zoned to Agricultural use, given the existing use of the lands. However, the existing Ardagh House and the two gate houses be zoned existing residential in order to reflect their existing use.””

This recommendation is deeply concerning to not only members of the local community, but to many people with an inherent interest in protecting built heritage and public access to green space.

Robert O'Byrne, a writer and lecturer specialising in the fine and decorative arts, who has a blog called [The Irish Aesthete](#), was granted access to Ardagh House and Demesne in late 2020. His blog post, [Stooped but not yet Conquered](#), includes photographs validating the concerns of the local and wider community for the welfare of Ardagh House and the Demesne structures.

At the time of writing, their online petition, ['Protect Ardagh House, Demesne, and the Ardagh Neighbourhood Park'](#), is continuing to receive global support with three hundred and thirty six (336) signatures gathered and still counting. They have also received many messages from people who express a lot of confusion, shock, and dismay by the recommendation.



The history of Ardagh House

Conclusion

As the Green Party **LEA Representative** in county Longford and as someone who has visited Ardagh village in the past to take photos in the green area and beautiful scenery, I am concerned about this development and therefore appealing for support from colleagues, environmental conscious people, and interested activist groups to oppose the granting of the Chief Executive's recommendation by signing the online petition and by giving your support to the Ardagh community to help preserve the village's history and cultural heritage.

Let's hear mother nature's cry as she watches her animals die, hear mother nature's call as one by one her trees fall, hear mother nature's shout while there's pollution all about, hear mother nature weep as the pending damage they are about to do runs deep, hear mother nature's cry as she is left asking why. A county without trees is almost helpless and we must understand that if the last tree dies, the last man dies too.

For more information:

Contact me – Catherine.joseph@greenparty.ie

Phone: 0874630361

A PDF of 'Submission DCDP-40' is available from [here](#).

A PDF of the 'Chief Executive's Report on Submissions Received on the Draft County Development Plan 2021-2027' is available from [here](#).

All information for the Draft Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 is available from [here](#).

A PDF of the Longford 'Record of Protected Structures' is available from [here](#).