

## News Feature



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# NO SIEGE MENTALITY HERE

## CHANGING LIMERICK

A major series on the transformation of the county  
**Patricia Feehily reports**



**F**OR most people, mention of Glin brings to mind two very disparate images – a romantic castle and a less than romantic industrial school. The school has long been consigned to the more lugubrious pages of history, but the castle and the village are about to be united in an unprecedented cooperative venture, undertaken by the Knight of Glin, Desmond FitzGerald, in conjunction with the local development association and other bodies such as West Limerick Resources and Limerick County Council.

The aim is simply to plan the future of the village, with the future development of the castle playing a pivotal part.

"Glin is a special place. As it grows and develops we need to make sure that it remains special," said the chairman of the development association, John A Culhane.

A public meeting in the village last week heard the views of local people on what needed to be done, what services were needed, what kind of housing development would be acceptable and how change could be accommodated.

But of special interest was the future development of the castle and how that future could benefit the village. The Glin Village Framework, described as "a long term and integrated strategy for how a village might grow", is being

### No 22: GLIN

Population: 566, up 1.1 per cent on the 2002 census. Famous for: Glin Castle, football, traditional music and the drowning of Ellen Hanly, the tragic inspiration for the "Colleen Bawn".

Famous sons: Desmond FitzGerald, the Knight of Glin; footballer Con Fitzgerald, who captained Limerick in its second and last football All-Ireland; Thomas Culhane, the only Kerryman on a Munster Railway Cup team and one-time All-Ireland referee; and the late Maggie Moloney, who was the only woman harbour master in the world in her day.

Biggest event: the bloody siege of Glin Castle in 1600; the visit of former President Mary Robinson to open the heritage centre, and a monster Home Rule demonstration in the village in the early 1900s.

tants led by Colin Buchanan and Partners.

Once again, Glin, the place which refused to bow to Sir James Carew in the bloody siege of 1600, has taken control of its own destiny.

But Mr Culhane, who is the principal of the local school, St Fergus', is nothing if not pragmatic.

"What saved us from the kind of unplanned developments other villages experienced was the fact that the sewerage scheme wasn't adequate to cope with major development up to this. Now we are all working together to influence the direction and quality of change," he said.

There is, of course, a lot more to Glin than the castle and the industrial school. For

right down to the broad expanse of the estuary, is quite breathtaking. Not many small places have a town park lapped by the waves of the Shannon estuary. It was once the centre of commerce for West Limerick – every commodity imaginable arrived on Glin Pier – but today it suffers from being just off the beaten tourist track.

The town park project was the brainchild of Glin Development Association, and entailed the provision of a new farm car park, the planting of trees and shrubs, and the laying of footpaths and raised flower beds as well as the installation of the new lighting system.

"There was a great response to this amenity. It's now used by locals and tourists alike and



The Knight of Glin, Desmond FitzGerald, and his wife, Oida, in front of Glin Castle

Mr Culhane.

The association is not stopping at that. They have set out their aims and objectives for the next two years and with the continuing help and support of the county council and West Limerick Resources, and with the recent intervention of Shannon Development, through area manager Finbar Brougham, they believe that their objectives are achievable.

They have already installed 11 defibrillators and have trained 96 volunteers in CPR and AED, after raising €22,000 locally. Another 30 parishioners will be trained over the next few weeks, and they hope to have a defibrillator with a team of trained personnel within five minutes of every resident in the parish. The Irish Red Cross and local businesses have given invaluable support to the project.

underway in Glin is the construction of a new footbridge across Glencorby river at the town park, to link with the popular scenic walkways along the estuary, east and west of the village. They have secured €30,000 in EU funding through the county council, and are hoping to get matching funding from West Limerick Resources. Planning permission is expected by the end of this week.

Other projects being tackled by the development association are what they describe as "the unsightly and neglected eastern approach road to our village"; the re-alignment of the Pier Road exit in the interests of safety; the provision of a playground; the development of the Mail Road walkway and the introduction of a 40km speed limit.

Unlike many towns and vil-

lages, Glin is certainly not in decline. We have some fine shops and all the services we need. But there are only four or five families living on the street now," she said.

She and her husband John, sponsor of the football club, still live in the historic pub, but they have also built a house outside the village.

But the community spirit remains almost palpable in

John Healy's contribution to Comhaltas is acknowledged everywhere.

The response to the defibrillator programme surprised even the organisers themselves, and the village on its own initiative has provided a sheltered housing scheme with 20 houses and a daycare centre that caters as well for a large hinterland.

The manager of the centre, Una Crisculolo, told us that it catered for three groups during the week when people gather for Bingo, a raffle, music and entertainment.

The village also has a growing Polish community attracted by industry on the estuary.

"We now have 16 Polish pupils in the school. We have special English classes for them and we have classes for their parents as well. The children are integrating very well



Bridget Healy, Una Crisculolo, manager, and Breda Costelloe, outside Glin Daycare Centre

PICTURES: MICHAEL COWHEY



Glin's main street as it winds down to the castle entrance

during school hours. But there is no focal spot where they and their parents could congregate with local children and their parents.

The community playground will be a very positive step in the integration of the foreign nationals into the life of our community," Mr Culhane said.

Glin has a colourful history too – thanks mainly to the FitzGerald, a family with its fair share of characters. But some of the more recent history of Glin might have been completely wiped were it not for the alert soul who saved the old school roll books of 1843.

They're the oldest school roll books in the country, and they tell a fascinating story about the people who lived and worked in Glin 165 years ago – two years before the Famine struck and really changed everything forever.



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There is, of course, a lot more to Glin than the castle and the industrial school. For a start, its location, sweeping

the centre of commerce for West Limerick - every commodity imaginable arrived on Glin Pier - but today it suffers from being just off the beaten tourist track.

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"There was a great response to this amenity. It's now used by locals and tourists alike and we're very proud of it," said

with the recent intervention of Shannon Development, through area manager Finbar Brougham, they believe that their objectives are achievable.

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The most immediate project

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Unlike many towns and villages in west Limerick, Glin is

old us that the biggest change she had seen over the years in Glin was that fewer families were now living on the main street. Most business people have built houses on the outskirts of the village.

"Glin is certainly not in decline. We have some fine shops and all the services we need. But there are only four or five families living on the street now," she said.

She and her husband John, sponsor of the football club, still live in the historic pub, but they have also built a house outside the village.

But the community spirit remains almost palpable in Glin. Music is strong, too, and

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They're the oldest school roll books in the country, and they tell a fascinating story about the people who lived and worked in Glin 165 years ago - two years before the Famine struck and really changed everything forever.

Glin has seen change, she said. "But we're certainly not in decline. We have some fine shops and every service you could need."

But they have escaped over development, she said. In her early days on the county council, unemployment was a major problem.

Glin is expanding, she said, but mainly on the outside.

"There are only four or five families living on the street now. We've built a house outside ourselves for when we need it, but I can't see us ever really leaving the street."

One good thing about Glin, Maureen said, was that there is no traffic congestion.

"It was designed as a market town and had its own fair days. So there's lots of room."

What she likes best about Glin, however, is the community spirit.

"It's a great community and always was - full of culture and music. The local Comhaltas has prizewinners at every Fleadh in the country."

The Barretts have three grown-up children, Siobhan, a pharmacist; Maria, a dietician and James, who works with FAS in Tralee.

**T**alk to John A Culhane, everyone says when you arrive in Glin and you ask who would talk to you about the changing face of the village. "He could talk for Ireland," one Glin man assures you.

Mr Culhane is the local school principal, but he's also chairman of the vibrant and active development association which has just presented its own seven-point plan for the village for the next two or three years.

Conscious of the winds of change blowing around his historic and scenic native village, Mr Culhane is grateful that the people of Glin have a chance now to "influence the direction and quality of change".

He's certainly not against progress. He and his association are currently involved in the Buchanan plan which is examining the future development of the castle and the village in tandem.

"The castle and the village need to grow together," he said. "People are very conscious that development should be properly planned."

## THE HISTORIAN



**John A Culhane: 'The castle and the village need to grow together'**

But the village is already adapting to change.

The school that Mr Culhane runs now has 16 Polish pupils on its roll books, and all of them are integrating well during school hours. The school provides special English classes and there are classes in the Cloverfield centre for the parents.

But the village needs a focal point where all parents and kids can meet.

"We are planning a community playground and this will be a positive step in the integration of foreign nationals in our community," he said.

There is little about the history of Glin that Mr Culhane doesn't know, but he is even more interested in planning its future and giving everyone a say in how that future should evolve.

He was born and reared in Glin, and although he went away to college in Cork and Dublin, he said: "I always wanted to come back. I just couldn't imagine living anywhere else. This is the only place where I've ever taught, and every day is better than the last one."

**M**AUREEN Barrett and her husband, John, run the historic Barrett's pub on Main Street, Glin, where the whole history of the village is recorded in photographs and press cuttings hanging on the walls.

Beside a picture of a monster Home Rule meeting in Glin in the early 1900s is a tribute to Maggie Moloney, the Glin woman who was, in her day, the only woman harbour master in the world. John, incidentally, sponsors the local football team.

Maureen was born in Glin parish and served for 14 years as a member of Limerick County Council, succeeding her brother-in-law, Tommy, and her late father-in-law, Jim Barrett. Before her marriage she worked first as an executive officer in the Civil Service in Dublin and later as a teacher in Listowel, and finally in Tarbert.

"I spent six years altogether in Dublin, but I never realised how beautiful Glin was until I went away."

"You tend to take familiar things for granted," she said.

## MAUREEN'S STORY



**Maureen Barrett: 'I always wanted to come back'**

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