

PLANNING IN MAYO

Dear Sir,

Mayo is a county burdened with a history, in recent decades, of very, very poor planning decisions. The results of this failure of local government, specifically Mayo County Council, affect locals and visitors to the county every day, i.e.: increasingly polluted lakes and rivers, deteriorating tap-water quality and beauty spots bled by ill-sited dwellings and other buildings.

In "The Mayo News" recently (Page 5 of May 24) several of the elected councillors expressed concern at what, given the above, should be seen as a hopeful sign, i.e.: that the professional planning officers are refusing to okay an increasing percentage of the planning applications as proposed. One explanation for this dismay from our elected councillors is that it is costing them money as many councillors are also estate agents, i.e.: no planning means no house is built equals no sales commission for the councillors in their day job as estate agents.

Maybe I am being overly cynical. Maybe these councillors of the county have only the best interests of the community at heart. And if so, I call on the contributors to your article of May 24 who both double as estate agents and County Councillors to use your newspaper to explain how they resolve the conflicts of interest inherent in passing planning permission for houses they would subsequently be selling.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Malone,
Mayfields,
Kilkeerin, Bellinrobee.

Uggool again

Dear Sir,

Hold it, hold it, Linda Cusack; you assume some mighty assumptions from the one-sided, obviously biased, report issued by the Ombudsman against one small farmer (Uggool Beach, "Mayo News", 7th June).

You are insulting the intellect of the Mayo County Council management and staff with their supposed inaction on the lack of political reaction from the Mayo elected persons; or the local small farmers — very sticky ground!!! Wellington territory??

So one-sided; will you be satisfied with one beach, one farm, one farming family under duress — you will not, or neither will the K.I.O.; they seek our western nation on its knees!

For dictatorial reading, try 'The Farmers Journal 2', April 22, 2000; you will then know what K.I.O. stand for; and what we must be watchful for in our future reading, including the blood, guts, and structure, against the elected Mayo County Council, its representatives, and the small farmers — dialogue, how are you!!!

One is much afraid; the 50 or so small farmers in the wider Killadown area must now seek their Ombudsman without bias, fair, with pre-expressed opinions, that can protect small farmers against the 'might' of the jack-booted K.I.O., in taking over their private property; their right to control stock; even farm their share...!!

It starts with one farmer, then creeps like colonial malaise of unasked, unwanted control; greater than R.E.P.S., S.A.C., even greater than the needs, wishes or requirements for small farms or its farmers.

What appears our greatest sin; we own our own land, the K.I.O.'s tramping machine aspire to you. You could, next, request tents in St. Stephen's Green...!!! or even Eyre Square...!!!

How do, dialogue; How do 'Party of Esteem'!!!

Sincerely,

Joe Rafferty,

'Yellow House',

Roundstone, Connemara.

Uggool, the Ombudsman and K.I.O.

Dear Sir,

With reference to your article, front page, Mayo News, May 31, Co. Council censured for delay in accessing beach. I wish to express my disgust and indeed the disgust and anger of the entire local community, at the utterly one-sided handling of the issue by the Ombudsman.

The general public holds the Office of the Ombudsman in high esteem, with the Ombudsman being viewed as an honest broker, supposedly defending the rights of ordinary people. Since when did this office become a tool for pressure groups? By all means investigate the issue, but after a three-year investigation one expects a comprehensive report that has considered the difficulties and indeed the legal rights of all parties to the dispute.

It is clear that the Ombudsman is seeking a particular result from his so-called investigation and says that in the Uggool case the Co. Council claimed they would have difficulties in obtaining this successful resolution through the courts. This is simply and solely because they knew the courts would uphold the landowner's legal rights to his private property.

He was not happy with that decision and decided to pursue the matter. Surely he was aware that a simple land registry check could establish that the land was not subject to any right-of-way and that in the absence of a legal existing right-of-way, it was necessary for members of the public to have crossed weekly basis for upwards of 30 years without restriction before a public right-of-way could be established. Why did he feel that in such a remote location and with the existing tidal restrictions

those conditions could possibly have been fulfilled? Who can dispute that this entire locality is virtually free from visitors for at least six months of every year. Surely he was also aware that in the absence of a public right-of-way, the planning authorities had no power to insist on styles or other public access.

The report becomes even more fanciful as it goes on and claims that the fencing contained certain points on to the foreshore and public beach. The location of the fence is a matter of fact that can be easily established by any suitably qualified engineer, so there is no excuse for this factual error. Why was he not aware that the fence had been inspected by the Dept. of the Marine staff who found that it was on the farmer's land. Certainly K.I.O. (Keep Ireland Open) were aware of this development. Why publish such a damaging allegation without checking the facts.

The Ombudsman then goes on to say 'The conclusion that the fencing was intended to prevent access to the beach is unavoidable'. This despite the fact that the erection of this fence was approved and grant-aided by the Dept. of Agriculture as part of farm improvement scheme in which 160 Tonnes of farm limestone were spread by hand over the lands and that it is clearly necessary to prevent farm livestock from wandering on to the public beach at Silver Strand and on to the public road. In fact without this fence the landowner would be unable to get public liability insurance for his farm.

He concludes his report: 'I am greatly concerned that this delay on the council's part has resulted in the loss of access rights for members of the public over a 10-year period'. This claim that access rights

have been denied is a disgrace, in that it is the same as declaring a right-of-way has been blocked. This is something that only a Judge and Jury could decide after having heard the evidence of all parties to the dispute. Yet this supposedly honest broker didn't bother to talk to the farmer concerned, or indeed to the local people who have supported the landowner all along and who, after all, ought to know where there are and are not rights-of-way in their area. Had the Ombudsman looked at the facts he would quickly have realised that had the landowner applied for planning permission for the fence, the planning authority would have had no option but to grant it, which is probably why nobody in authority ever made the request and consequently the fence is not and never was an illegal fence.

It is regrettable that the Office of the Ombudsman has been demeaned in this way. Was the Ombudsman aware that the Keep Ireland Open Organisation who referred the case to him had already taken the law into their own hands and mounted a campaign of invasion and intimidation against this farmer and his young family in an effort to secure their own way. It would appear that they also were aware as Mayo County Council were, that they would have difficulties in obtaining their successful resolution through the courts. What does all this say about the protection of the rights of the individual and how often is this type justice dispensed in rural Ireland? Well not any longer, when we are right we are right.

Yours faithfully,
Walter Davitt,
Curradavitt, Louisburgh.

Letters to the Editor

Safety measures

Dear Sir,

There has been a lot of tragic road accidents in recent months and I believe that it is time now for positive action on a number of fronts. I believe that cars should be produced that would not be damaged too much on impact. A special type of car that would not be too big or fast should be sold to people under twenty-five only and in some cases insurance should be increased.

Measures to prevent accidents in the home and on the farm should also be implemented. All dangerous substances should be properly labelled and kept out of reach of children. All dangerous tools should be kept locked away when not in use and all electrical and plumbing repairs should only be done by professional people, properly trained. When heavy work is done on the farm children should be kept away from the machinery, much care and responsibility is always needed to prevent further tragedies.

James A. Corcoran,
James Street, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo.

Recycling Centre suggested for Westport

Dear Sir,

Now that Mayo County Council have purchased a big area of land on the outskirts of Westport, I hope the first thing sited there will be a recycling centre. The fact that a town responsible for so much waste has only one small set of bottle banks and those placed inconveniently in the car park in the middle of town is obviously far short of what is needed.

Basic materials such as paper, cardboard, plastic, compostable materials, batteries, rubble, etc. simply have nowhere to go other than the tip, adding to the problems of pollution.

Recycling centres raise

awareness of the waste we are producing, are clean, improve our environment and should be part of any forward-thinking plans to tackle the mounting problem of waste disposal. The responsibility of waste management doesn't rest only with the Council but is the obligation of us all. We can't expect the mess we are making to go away without changing our habits! A compost bin, separating cans and bottles, refusing unnecessary carrier bags, not pouring bleaches, etc., down the sink, etc., is easy to achieve and might just save the beautiful Newport river from running foul with our waste. It just takes some effort on everyone's part.

Recycling centres are tidy, efficient places; they provide jobs and are certainly a better choice than the other options being suggested. Things like batteries which contain dangerous chemicals, are hugely harmful to our environment if not disposed of correctly.

Recently it has been established that more than fifty per cent of Ireland's water courses are polluted in some way — a shocking statistic of which we can hardly be proud. We can all play our part in helping to reverse this if we establish a proper recycling programme — sooner rather than later. C.J. Brown,
Lower Quay,
Westport.



● Mr. Stephen Molloy, Cathaoirleach, Mayo County Council, presenting the prizes for the National Essay Competition to Mary Mullen and Helen Roche (St. Joseph's Secondary School in Castlebar) in Castlebar. Also included are their teachers, Ms. Berkeley (left of pic), Ms. Harrington and Jerry King, Senior Library Assistant. Mary Mullen was the third St. Joseph's winner, Vicky Sweeney, The National Essay Competition is now in its fourth year and is a major competition run by The Library Council in conjunction with The Irish Times and sponsored by International Education services from Leixlip, County Kildare. This was a remarkable for the three St. Joseph's students in the U-18 category — 50% of the winners nationally — as almost every county in the country participated in the Competition. Pic.—Michael Donnelly