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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Summer Edition of Little Village.
Not a great summer so far, is it? We have all heard of "El Nino" and its effect on world climate. Have a look at our article here

and see for yourselves how it will effect world climate for 2026.

Summer is here allegedly and so are strawberries. You have probably never heard of a strawberry sandwich but if you look at our recipe here, you might be tempted to try it out for yourselves and perhaps end up making them for friends and family.

Finally, there are two very different stories being told about Health in Ireland today. The first is the cheerful one - we are all living longer!!!! The second story is one we recognise when we try to get a GP appointment!!!! Find out more by reading our report on "Ireland's Health Check." We have lots of funny and interesting articles for you to enjoy in this edition.

So, until next time...

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LITTLE VILLAGE MAGAZINE

All correspondence should be addressed to:

Little Village Magazine, 11 Cherryhill Avenue, Kells, Co. Meath.
Creative Top Publishing Ltd. publishes Little Village Magazine.

Company registration No. 534480

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Ronan Bright
Director / Head of Sales
bightronan83@gmail.com
085 199 8321

Patrick Browne
Graphic Design
hello@patrickbrownedesign.com
086 831 9322

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EL NIÑO

The Pacific weather pulse that could shape 2026

Ireland's weather normally comes at us from the Atlantic, not the Pacific. Yet every few years, a change in ocean temperatures on the far side of the world manages to disturb rainfall, crops, heatwaves and food prices across the globe. That change is called El Niño, and forecasters are watching 2026 closely.

El Niño is part of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation, or ENSO. In plain English, it is a natural swing between warmer and cooler sea-surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific. During El Niño, the surface waters in that region become unusually warm. That extra heat alters wind patterns, shifts rainfall belts and changes the odds of drought, flooding and heat in many parts of the world. Its opposite phase is La Niña, when those waters are cooler than normal. WMO says El Niño typically occurs every two to seven years and usually lasts around nine to twelve months.

The 2026 outlook

The current expert view is that El Niño is very likely to develop during 2026. On 2 June 2026, the World Meteorological Organization said there was an 80% likelihood of El Niño during June–August 2026, with probabilities near or above 90% that it would continue until at least November. WMO says most models suggest the event will be at least moderate and possibly strong, though the peak strength and timing remain uncertain.

NOAA's Climate Prediction Center had a similar outlook in its 14 May 2026 diagnostic discussion, saying El Niño was likely to emerge soon, with an 82% chance in May–July 2026, and a 96% chance of continuing through December 2026–February 2027. NOAA also warned that no strength category had more than a 37% probability, which is a useful reminder that “likely El Niño” does not yet mean “guaranteed monster El Niño”.

That distinction matters. Some headlines use phrases such as “super El Niño”, but WMO does not use that term in its standard classifications. The safer wording is: a significant El Niño is likely, a strong one is possible, and its precise strength is still uncertain.

What does it mean for Ireland?

For Ireland, El Niño is not like a storm arriving on the Atlantic chart. It does not point at Donegal, Dublin or Cork and say: “You’re next.” Its influence here is indirect,

filtered through the jet stream, Atlantic pressure systems and other climate patterns.

Met Éireann's position is cautious: El Niño has clear impacts in many regions worldwide, but its influence on Ireland and Europe is “comparatively weak, highly variable, and not robust” in the present climate. It also says there is no clear evidence of increased Irish summer warming due specifically to El Niño.

So, for Irish readers, the practical message is this: do not assume El Niño means Ireland will definitely get

Continues P.6

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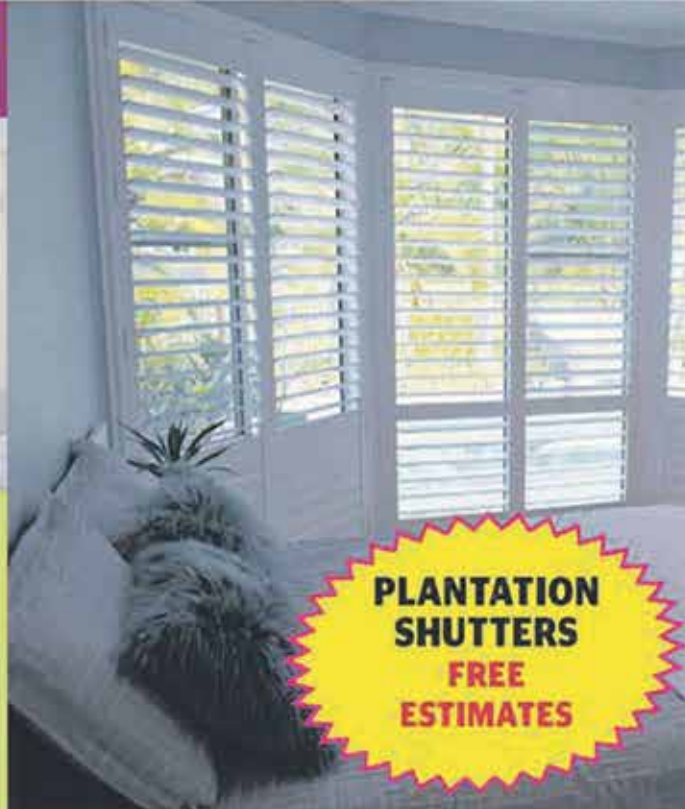
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Continued from P.4

a scorching summer, a wet autumn or a snowy winter. It may tilt the odds in some background way, but Irish weather remains dominated by the Atlantic.

Where we may feel it more clearly is through the wider world: food prices, crop yields, coffee, cocoa, rice, grain, insurance costs, humanitarian crises and global temperature records. El Niño tends to raise global average temperatures with a lag of several months, and in a warmer world the effects can be amplified because the atmosphere can hold more moisture and heat.

Who is most at risk?

The countries likely to be worst affected are those where El Niño overlaps with existing vulnerability: dependence on seasonal rains, weak water infrastructure, heat exposure, poverty or fragile food systems.

South Asia is a major concern. WMO says rainfall is likely to be below normal across much of South Asia during the June–September 2026 southwest monsoon, with above-normal temperatures also expected. Countries involved in that regional outlook include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar and the Maldives. The greatest concern is for countries where farming, drinking water and hydropower depend heavily on the monsoon.

India is especially exposed because the monsoon supplies most of the annual rainfall across large areas, and delayed or reduced rains can affect crops, reservoirs, electricity demand and food prices. Recent reporting has already highlighted concerns for India, south-east Asian rice production and Australian wheat areas as hot, dry weather combines with the expected El Niño pattern.

South-east Asia and Australia are also high-risk

areas. El Niño is commonly associated with drier, hotter conditions in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam and parts of Australia, raising the risk of drought, crop losses, water shortages, wildfire and smoke pollution.

In the Greater Horn of Africa, WMO says below-normal rainfall is likely across much of the northern region during the critical June–September rainy season, particularly affecting South Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, much of Eritrea, Sudan, and western and coastal Kenya. The risks there include rain-fed agriculture, water availability, livestock, hydropower, food security and public health.

In Central America, the worry is drought. UN agencies have warned that El Niño could worsen vulnerability in Central America's Dry Corridor, especially through drought and disrupted rainfall patterns. The Dry Corridor includes Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, where many rural communities depend on small-scale farming.

THE IRISH TAKEAWAY

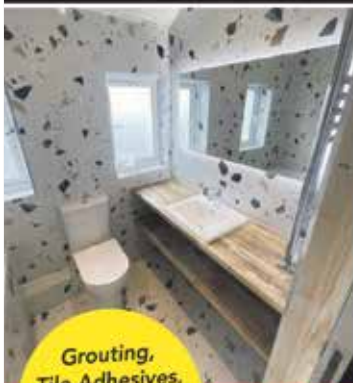
For Ireland, El Niño is less a direct weather forecast than a global warning light. It tells us that 2026 may be a year when climate extremes become more likely in already vulnerable places. We may not see the Pacific in the sky over Ireland, but we may see it in the price of rice, the cost of coffee, the pressure on humanitarian aid, and another round of record global temperatures.

The sensible Irish response is not panic. It is perspective. El Niño is natural, but it is now operating in an unnaturally warmer world. That means the same old climate swing can land harder than it once did.



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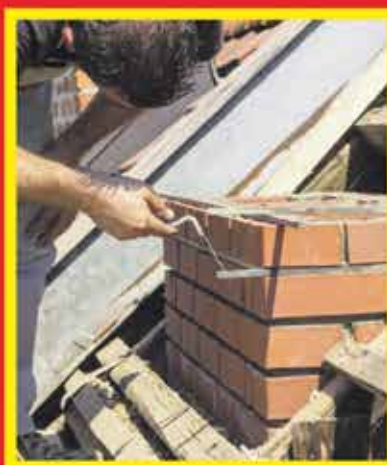
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There are fellas in every town who never became rich, famous or important, yet everybody knows who they are.

In our town, it's Tommy on checkout six.

Tommy left school with Leaving Cert results that caused great silence at home. His mother kept staring at the paper as if more points might appear if she looked hard enough. His father simply folded it once and said, "Well, I suppose we can rule out medicine."

Back then, if college wasn't happening, life sort of carried you along. Before long, Tommy was stacking shelves in the local supermarket. Thirty-something years later, he's still there, only now he's on the checkouts, and half the town deliberately queues for him.

Not because he's fast either.

If you're in a hurry, Tommy is not your man. He scans groceries at the pace of a lad examining evidence.

"Bag of chips..." beep.

"Healthy eating gone out the window altogether."

"Wine?"

"Ah, a parent's little reward for not abandoning the family."

"Dog food?"

"Fair play. The dog's eating better than the rest of us."

The funny thing is, he never sounds like he's trying to be funny. It just falls out of him naturally, dry as old turf.

And he remembers everything.

"How's your mother after the operation?"

"Did the young lad pass the driving test?"

"Any sign of yourself going to bed before midnight, or are you still watching rubbish on Netflix?"

You could arrive at his till in shocking humour and leave smiling despite yourself.

One Friday evening, I saw a woman ahead of me clearly after having a hard day. Eyes red. Trying not to cry while unloading shopping. Tommy said nothing for ages. Just packed away quietly. Then he handed her the receipt and said, "Sure, look, if life was meant to be easy, we'd all be spoiled."

She burst out laughing.

Even old lads who claim they hate "messaging" secretly



adore him.

There's a farmer comes in every Saturday complaining about prices.

"Nearly four euros for butter now," he says.

Tommy shakes his head sadly.

"At this stage, the cows should arrive out personally and thank us."

The farmer tries not to laugh every single week and fails every single week.

Young mothers love him too because he talks to exhausted parents like survivors of a war.

One toddler having a complete meltdown once threw a banana across the conveyor belt. Tommy calmly picked it up, scanned it and said,

"Well, somebody's gone bananas altogether."

Even the child stopped roaring.

The truth is Tommy probably earns very little. He drives an old Toyota that sounds like a lawnmower climbing hills. He brings tea in a flask. His uniform is slightly too big for him, and his shoes have seen better decades.

On paper, society might say he didn't make much of himself.

But honestly, I know people with big jobs and impressive titles who wouldn't lift the mood of a room the way Tommy does, standing beside a till with a barcode scanner.

There are people who leave you drained after five minutes. Tommy somehow sends you home lighter.

And maybe that's worth more than all the Leaving Cert points in Ireland.

Because most of us won't be remembered for money or status. We'll be remembered for how we made people feel.

Tommy, without ever meaning to, became part of the reason people didn't completely lose faith in humanity while buying toilet roll and sliced pan on a wet Thursday evening.

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Kildare Libraries Partner with Vodafone Foundation to Provide Digital Skills to Older People



Public libraries across Kildare launch tablet loan scheme to support digital skills training for older people through Hi Digital partnership

Following World Telecommunication and Information Society Day on Sunday May 17th, the Vodafone Foundation, through its Hi Digital programme, has partnered with Kildare County Council's Library Service to make digital skills training more accessible for older people by introducing a tablet loan scheme.

As Ireland becomes increasingly digital, World Telecommunication and Information Society Day highlighted the importance of ensuring no one is left behind. Recent research by the Vodafone Foundation highlights both the challenge and the opportunity facing older people in Ireland. While 91% are open to learning new digital skills, one-in-three feel digitally excluded, and 22% say they have no one to turn to when they encounter

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digital difficulties.

The tablet loan scheme is the latest initiative by the Vodafone Foundation to help address this by providing library members access to ready-to-use tablets preloaded with the free Hi Digital course, in a familiar and supportive environment.

Hi Digital, in partnership with ALONE, is Vodafone Foundation's free digital skills course for older people, designed to help them use technology with confidence. The course involves short, easy-to-follow online lessons and practical modules such as using smartphones, avoiding scams, and using WhatsApp, alongside other supports such as quick tip videos. Through Hi Digital, learners can also access in-person support, with free DropIn Fridays at Vodafone stores every week, regular workshops and classes delivered by Hi Digital partners across the country, and now through the tablet loan scheme at participating public libraries.

The scheme is available in 30 public libraries across seven participating counties, with 200 tablets supplied to date across Dublin, Kildare, Limerick, Monaghan, Waterford, Wicklow, and Wexford. Across Kildare, tablets with the Hi Digital course pre-loaded are now available to borrow from Athy Library, Celbridge Library, Kildare Town Library, Leixlip Library, Maynooth Library, Naas Library and Cultural Centre, and Newbridge Library. The scheme is supported by Vodafone Business, which securely manages the devices behind the scenes – helping libraries roll out and maintain the tablets easily, while ensuring a safe and seamless experience for users.

The scheme is completely free to access, and library members are encouraged to drop in, borrow a tablet, and explore what it can offer, whether that's completing the Hi Digital course, researching hobbies and interests, listening to music, or getting more comfortable using a digital device in everyday life.

Sabrina Casalta, CEO Vodafone Ireland, said: "Digital inclusion is often about much more than skills — it's about access, confidence, and feeling supported. By working with libraries to provide tablets with our Hi Digital programme

preloaded, we're removing some of the most practical barriers older people face and making it easier to take that first step towards building digital confidence and skills."

Dr Stuart Hamilton, Head of Libraries Development for the Local Government Management Agency, added: "Libraries have always been places of learning and inclusion at the heart of communities. This partnership allows us to support older people in a very practical way — giving them access to technology they may not otherwise have, and the time and space to learn in a setting they trust. In our libraries, we see how even small digital skills - like making video calls or using online banking - can make a big difference in the lives of older people."

Sandra Lewis, Executive Librarian at the Athy Community Library, said: "We see how transformative it can be when someone who has been hesitant about technology finally gets a chance to learn at their own pace. The Hi Digital tablets give our older borrowers a gentle, step-by-step way to build digital skills, and it's incredible to watch their confidence grow with every visit. It makes a real and lasting difference to people's lives, helping them feel more confident, connected, and capable in a digital world. Libraries are at the heart of our communities, supporting people of all ages to learn and develop."

By embedding digital access and learning within local libraries, the programme supports older people to stay connected, confident, and independent in an increasingly digital world.

Public libraries in Ireland join charity partners Friends of the Elderly, ALONE, Society of St Vincent de Paul and others as Hi Digital partners in Ireland, with the ambition to support and provide digital skills training to older people. Since its establishment in 2021, over 170,000 older people have benefitted from digital skills training through Hi Digital.

For more information on Hi Digital, or to find your nearest participating library, call 1800 203030 or visit <https://hidigital.ie/in-person-support>

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These new additions two Irish branches double the company's footprint in the Island of Ireland – with existing branches on Dublin's exclusive Burlington Road and Belfast. This brings the number of branches for the group to 15 across Ireland, the UK and Spain.

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Kildare County Council is delighted to extend congratulations to the twenty schools across County Kildare that were awarded Green Flags in 2026 under the An Taisce Green-Schools Programme.

The awards, which took place in the Helix Theatre in Dublin, recognise the exceptional commitment, creativity, and leadership demonstrated by students and teachers in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices. From waste reduction and recycling initiatives to biodiversity enhancement and water and energy conservation, Kildare's schools continue to set a powerful example of the importance of protecting the environment.

Students across the county rolled up their sleeves, planting pollinator-friendly gardens, reducing waste, improving recycling practices, and spreading awareness far beyond the school gates. Teachers, parents, caretakers, and local communities also played their part in supporting and encouraging the students on their Green Schools journey. This collective effort continues to make the Green-Schools programme a powerful and effective initiative throughout County Kildare.

Richard Curtin, Environmental Awareness Officer, Kildare County Council, praised the schools' achievements, saying: "It's so inspiring to undertake the school visits as part of the Green Schools Programme, you get to see firsthand all the tremendous work students and teachers are doing. The Green Flag is a symbol of real commitment and meaningful change. The young people of Kildare are leading the way in building a more sustainable future. I would like to congratulate all twenty schools that were awarded flags in 2026."

The Green-Schools Programme, operated by An Taisce, encourages a long-term, whole-school approach to environmental action. Schools that receive a Green Flag have successfully completed a student led process of auditing, planning, and implementing environmental improvements.

Kildare County Council is proud to support schools on their Green-Schools journey and looks forward to seeing their initiatives grow and flourish in the years ahead.

KILDARE SCHOOLS AWARDED GREEN FLAGS IN 2026

Athy

Athy College – Water

Ballymore Eustace

Scoil Mhuire N.S. - GC Energy

Carbury

St. Brigid's N.S - GC Litter and Waste

Celbridge

Celbridge Community School - Energy

North Kildare

Educate Together School - GC Travel

Scoil na Mainistreach - GC Food & Bio

Clane

Clane Community School - Litter and Waste

Kildare Town

St Brigid's Primary School - GC Marine

Leixlip

Scoil Chearbhaill Uí Dhálaigh - Litter and Waste

Scoil Mhuire - GC Travel

Maynooth

Gaelcholáiste Maigh Nuad - Litter and Waste

Maynooth Post Primary School – Water

Monasterevin

St. Paul's Secondary School - Litter and Waste

Naas

Meanscoil Iognáid Rís - Biodiversity

Kilashee Multi-Denominational N.S. - GC Litter and Waste

St. David's N.S - GC Litter and Waste

Prosperous

St. Farnan's P.P.S. - Litter and Waste

Scoil an Linbh Íosa - GC Travel

Rathangan

Bunscoil Bhríde - GSP Hedgehogs

Sallins

St. Laurence's N.S. - GC Energy

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Email Clutter

The Cupboard Under the Stairs of Modern Life

Remember when post arrived through the letterbox, landed on the mat, and was dealt with in a civilised manner. Bills went on the mantelpiece. Wedding invitations were displayed proudly. Junk mail went straight into the bin, unless it contained a picture of a pizza, in which case it was studied with the seriousness of a Leaving Cert paper.

Then email arrived and promised to make life easier.

That, we now know, was a trap.

Today, many of us have inboxes containing 12,000, 25,000, even 50,000 emails. Some people have so many unread messages that the little red number beside the mail app looks less like a notification and more like the national debt. We don't open them. We don't delete them. We just allow them to accumulate, like plastic tubs without lids.

The trouble began innocently enough. We gave our email address to a hotel for a booking. Then to a supermarket for loyalty points. Then to a garden centre for 10% off a bird feeder. Before long, everyone wanted to be part of our "email journey". Airlines, charities, pharmacies, estate agents, dentists, delivery companies, and one mysterious shoe shop we visited once in 2017 all began writing to us as if we had shared a deep emotional bond.

The real villain, of course, is the phrase: "Sign up to receive updates."

Updates? On what? A kettle? A pair of socks? A

lawnmower blade? Yet we sign up because there is usually a discount involved. We are not weak people, but we are not made of stone. Ten per cent off is ten per cent off.

And so the inbox fills.

There are emails from companies we no longer remember, about products we no longer own, sent to an address we no longer admit to using. There are newsletters we meant to read "later", delivery notifications for parcels that arrived three Christmases ago, and emails marked "Important" by people who have a very relaxed understanding of importance.

Worse still, we dare not delete anything.

Somewhere in those 35,000 emails might be the warranty for the dishwasher, the receipt for the hotel in Galway, or the email from Revenue that will one day save us from prison. So we keep everything, just in case. This is how a practical storage system becomes an emotional support animal.

The Unopened Email: A Modern Shame

Unread emails are especially humiliating. They sit there accusingly. Some are harmless. Some are expired offers. Some are newsletters with headlines like "You won't believe what happened next," and we can confirm, after six years of not opening them, that we still don't.

But the inbox is clever. It gives the illusion of control. We star things. We flag things. We create folders called "To Do", "Important", "Important 2",

Continues P.20



20  05

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and “Sort Out Later”. “Sort Out Later” is where emails go to die.

The truly organised among us create labels and filters. The rest of us rely on the search bar and prayer.

So What Can Be Done?

The good news is that help exists. The bad news is that it requires us to admit the problem is not the emails. It is us.

Gmail now has a **Manage Subscriptions** feature that shows active subscriptions and lets users unsubscribe from frequent senders more easily; Google says it can sort senders by how often they have emailed recently and offers an unsubscribe option from that view.

Outlook has tools such as **Sweep, Archive, Move to**, and automatic filtering, which can be used to clear recurring messages and organise the inbox without manually attacking every email like a man emptying a shed before a house move.

Apple users can use **Hide My Email**, part of iCloud+, to create random email addresses that forward to their real inbox. This is useful when signing up for shops, apps, and services, because the address can later be deactivated if it starts attracting too much digital confetti.

There are also paid inbox-cleaning tools that identify newsletters and bulk unsubscribe from them. These can be useful, but caution is needed: any service that cleans your inbox may need access to your email account. That means you should check who runs it, what permissions it asks for, and whether you trust it more than you trust yourself after two glasses of wine and a “delete all” button.

The Nuclear Option

Some people declare “email bankruptcy”. This involves archiving everything older than a certain date and starting again.

It sounds reckless, but it has a certain appeal. After all, if an email from 2019 was truly important, surely someone would have followed up by now. Unless, of course, it was the one containing the dishwasher warranty.

A less dramatic version is to create three simple folders: Action, Keep, and Receipts. Everything else should be archived or deleted. Not seventeen folders. Not a folder for every possible human activity. Three. We are managing email, not cataloguing the Book of Kells.

Inbox Zero, But Without the Martyrdom

The famous “Inbox Zero” idea is often misunderstood. Its originator, Merlin Mann, has argued that the “zero” is not really about obsessively having no emails sitting in your inbox, but about reducing the mental hold your inbox has over you.

This is comforting, because most of us will never reach zero. We might get to 14,000 and feel heroic. Then the next morning Ryanair, the chemist, the broadband provider and a hotel in Kerry will all have written to us before breakfast.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is to stop email behaving like a second job.

A Sensible Irish System

Here is a realistic approach :

First, unsubscribe from the worst offenders. Not all of them. Just the noisy ones. If a company emails you five times a week and you haven't bought from them since lockdown, let them go.

Second, use search terms like “unsubscribe”, “receipt”, “invoice”, “booking”, and “delivery” to separate useful emails from marketing sludge.

Third, archive old emails instead of trying to manually sort the entire past. Archiving removes them from view but keeps them searchable. This is ideal for people who want a clean inbox but still fear deleting the one email that proves they paid for a toaster.

Fourth, create a separate email address for online shopping. This is the digital equivalent of keeping muddy boots at the back door.

Finally, stop signing up for everything. The next time a website offers 10% off in exchange for your email address, pause and ask yourself: “Do I want a discount, or do I want a lifelong relationship with a company that sells garden cushions?”

Admittedly, the answer may still be “discount”.

The Inbox as a Biography

Our inboxes are messy because our lives are messy. They contain holidays, bills, schools, doctors, car insurance, forgotten hobbies, abandoned diets, loyalty cards, and offers on things we briefly thought would improve us. An inbox with 40,000 emails is not a failure. It is an accidental autobiography.

Still, every autobiography needs editing. Otherwise, by the time we finally look for the important message, it will be buried between “Last Chance Sale Ends Tonight” and “We Miss You”.

And they don't miss us.

They miss our data.



Community Safety Is a Priority for Me” as South Dublin Partnership Begins Work

Cllr Caroline Brady: “Community Safety Is a Priority for Me” as South Dublin Partnership Begins Work

New Local Community Safety Partnership brings Gardaí, State agencies, councils, community groups and residents together to shape South Dublin’s first three-year safety plan

Community safety concerns raised by residents in Lucan, Adamstown and across South Dublin will now directly inform a new county-wide safety strategy following the establishment of the South Dublin Local Community Safety Partnership (LCSP).

Cllr Caroline Brady, appointed to the Partnership by the Minister for Justice, said the new structure represents a major change in how local safety issues are identified and addressed, with local communities placed at the centre of decision-making.

The South Dublin LCSP recently held its first public engagement meeting, on Thursday 14th May 2026, at Tallaght Stadium, following the Partnership’s first formal meeting on 20th February. The event brought together residents, elected representatives, An Garda Síochána, South Dublin County Council, the HSE, Tusla, community organisations, and voluntary groups to discuss local safety concerns and possible solutions. The public meeting formed part of the Partnership’s statutory requirement to hold at least one public meeting each year, alongside a minimum of six annual Partnership meetings under the legislation.

Established under the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, Local Community Safety Partnerships replace the former Joint Policing Committees with a broader structure that brings together Gardaí, State agencies, councils, community organisations and residents to address community safety issues.

Unlike the previous Joint Policing Committee structure, which primarily involved Gardaí, councillors and the local authority, the new Partnership brings a wider range of agencies and community representatives together to develop coordinated responses to safety issues affecting local communities.

Cllr Brady said, *“I am very pleased to be nominated by the Minister for Justice to the South Dublin Local Community Safety Partnership to represent the Lucan Electoral Area. This Partnership puts the voice of local communities at the centre of community safety planning.”*

Cllr Brady said the expanded approach is essential. *“Community safety is a priority for me and this Partnership is the start of important work across South Dublin,”* she said.

The public meeting at Tallaght Stadium used a roundtable discussion format, with facilitators recording concerns raised by residents and community groups from across the county. Lucan and Adamstown were strongly represented throughout the evening.

A wide range of issues were discussed, including anti-social

behaviour, park safety, the use of scooters and e-bikes, online safety concerns and misinformation.

Residents also outlined practical proposals to address those concerns, including increased Garda engagement within communities, better youth supports, expanded CCTV coverage, early intervention programmes and the creation of safe spaces for teenagers and young people.

“The public meeting in Tallaght Stadium brought together a strong turnout from across the county, including excellent participation from Lucan and Adamstown,” Cllr Brady said.

“Residents clearly outlined the issues affecting their daily lives, from anti-social behaviour and park safety to concerns around e-bikes and online safety.”

The meeting also included an update from Sgt Louise Mc Hugh, Crime Prevention Officer with DMR West, while information stands were provided by Dublin Fire Brigade, An Garda Síochána, the Volunteer Centre, Saoirse Domestic Violence Services and the Clondalkin Drugs and Alcohol Task Force.

The feedback gathered during the event will now contribute to the development of a bespoke three-year Local Community Safety Plan for South Dublin.

Cllr Brady said the format allowed local concerns to be heard directly and translated into practical actions. “The roundtable format worked well. It allowed for direct engagement and ensured that practical, community-led solutions were identified, including youth supports, increased Garda engagement and improved CCTV coverage,” she said.

The South Dublin LCSP is scheduled to meet again on 3rd July, 18th September and 13th November. Cllr Brady explained that questions and issues for consideration by the Partnership must be submitted 14 days in advance of each meeting.

“Community safety is a priority for me. I encourage residents to continue contacting me about issues in their area so these concerns can continue to be raised through the Partnership as the work progresses.”

Local Community Safety Partnerships are hosted by local authorities and supported by two full-time permanent staff funded through the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration.

The South Dublin LCSP will now begin the work of drafting a safety plan for South Dublin County, shaped by the concerns and priorities identified by residents across the county. The process marks a significant shift towards more collaborative, community-informed safety planning, with public participation expected to play a central role in developing future responses to local safety issues.

Contact Cllr. Caroline Brady on (085) 255 1602 or email CBrady@Cllrs.SDublinCoCo.ie

Fashion Victim

By an elderly bloke

Like every young person, I was once interested in fashion. I know that is hard to imagine now, when my big decision is whether the jumper with the small stain is still acceptable for going to the shop.

But in the late 1960s, I cared.

Unfortunately, caring did not mean I looked good.

This was the era of flares, hipster trousers and pink crewneck tops. I had them all. I probably thought I looked like Steve McQueen. In truth, I looked like someone who had lost a bet in a boutique.

The trousers sat dangerously low, the flares flapped about in the wind, and the pink top announced to the world that I was a young man prepared to make a fool of himself in public.

So, I have no right to laugh at what young people wear today. I did my time. There may still be photographs hidden somewhere, and if there are, they should be burned before the grandchildren find them.

I had an uncle I was very fond of who managed Wrangler jeans in Ireland. This made him, in my young mind, a man at the very heart of fashion. One day, full of confidence and ignorance, I told him what young people wanted.

He looked at me calmly and said, "You'll wear whatever we tell you to wear."

At the time, I thought this was an insult to youth, freedom, rebellion and possibly my pink jumper.

Years later, I realised he was dead right.

Fashion is not about choice. It is about surrender.

First, we laugh at something. Then we say, "I suppose it's all right on some people." Then it appears in the shops. Then someone buys it for us. Then, before we know where we are, we are wearing the very thing we swore would never touch our bodies.

We had skinny jeans for a while. I never trusted them. They looked painful. Young men walked about in them as if their legs had been shrink-wrapped. I admired their courage but feared for their circulation.

Now, baggy trousers are back. They don't call



them flares, of course. That would expose the whole racket. They call them wide-leg, relaxed fit or some other nonsense. But I know a flare when I see one. I wore them when they could take the skin off your ankles in a crosswind.

The great thing about men is that we resist fashion longer. Not because we are clever, but because we are lazy. We find something that fits, and we stick with it until a woman intervenes.

Every man knows the moment.

You come downstairs thinking you look grand.

Your wife or partner looks up and says, "You're not wearing that?"

And just like that, the outfit is dead.

You may argue. You may say the jeans are perfectly good. You may point out that they still have years left in them. You may even mention that they were expensive.

This will not help.

"They're awful," she says.

And back upstairs you go, a broken man carrying

trousers from 2008.

The older you get, the more difficult it becomes. You don't want to look like you have given up, but you don't want to look like you are trying to get into a nightclub either. There is no sadder sight than an older man dressed head to toe like someone his grandson follows on TikTok.

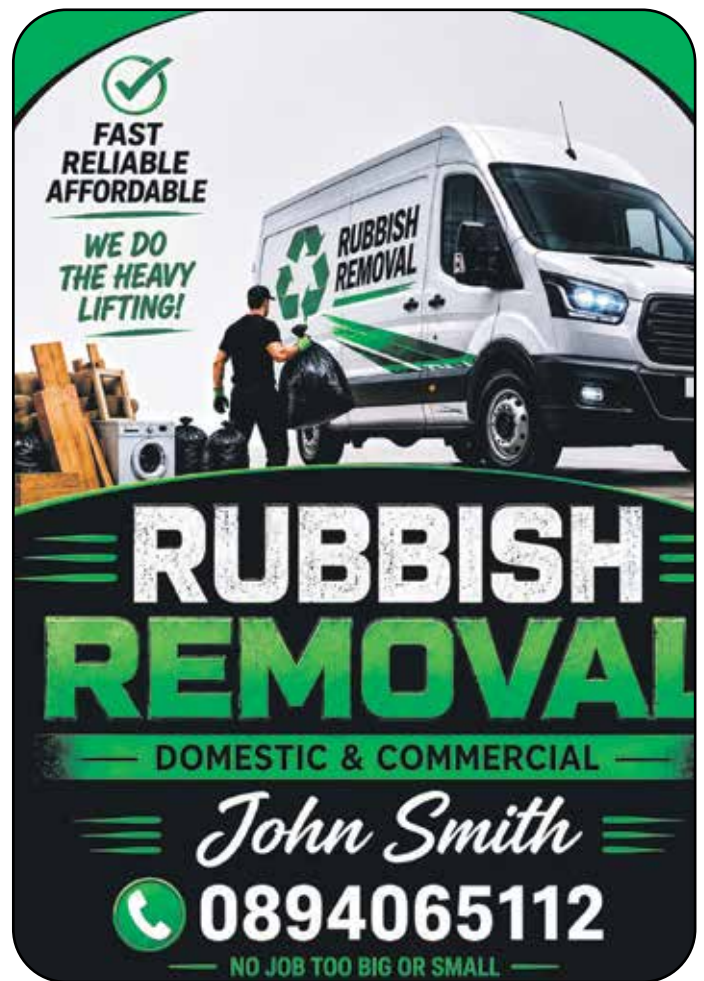
The answer, I think, is to aim for harmless. Decent jeans. Plain jumper. Good shoes. Nothing ripped. Nothing shiny. Nothing with a slogan. And never, under any circumstances, anything described as "edgy."

Fashion will keep going round in circles. Skinny will become baggy. Baggy will become flares. Flares will come back under a new name. Young people will think they invented it all.

And we will say nothing.

Because somewhere, in an old biscuit tin or photo album, there may still be evidence of the pink crewneck top.

And none of us can afford to be too smug.



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The Liffey Valley Effect

How One Shopping Centre Changed Local Life

There are places we visit, and then there are places that quietly reorganise our lives.

Liffey Valley is one of those places.

For readers in Lucan and Leixlip, it is not just a shopping centre. It is a wet Saturday solution, a teenage meeting point, a family feeding station, a cinema trip, a place to buy socks, a place to lose the will to live in a phone shop, and a handy excuse to avoid going “into town”.

Technically, Liffey Valley Shopping Centre is in Clondalkin, Dublin 22, but emotionally it belongs to a much wider territory. It pulls people from Lucan, Leixlip, Palmerstown, Clondalkin, Celbridge, Maynooth and beyond. It sits close to the M50 and N4, which means it has become the great western magnet: not quite Dublin city, not quite Kildare, but close enough to both to change how people shop, eat, meet and spend.

And spend we do.

Liffey Valley describes itself as one of Ireland’s largest shopping and leisure destinations, with shops, restaurants, cinema and free parking. Its current offer includes over 80 stores, 20 restaurants and a cinema, according to Visit Dublin. That is not just retail. That is a lifestyle machine.

The death of “I’ll just pop in”

Nobody just pops into Liffey Valley.

You may tell yourself you are only going in for one item. A shirt. A birthday card. A replacement phone charger. A pair of school shoes. Something modest, targeted and morally defensible.

Two hours later, you are eating something involving melted cheese, carrying three bags, and trying to remember where you parked the car.

This is the first law of Liffey Valley: the shopping centre always wins.

Part of its success is that it solves several domestic problems at once. Need a birthday present? Sorted. Need to feed children who have become feral after 90 minutes of browsing? Sorted. Need to let teenagers wander in a safe-ish loop while you drink coffee and pretend not to check where they are every six minutes? Sorted. Need a cinema trip without negotiating city-centre parking? Sorted.

The result is that Liffey Valley has become part of the weekly rhythm of households across west Dublin and east Kildare.

It is where couples go when they have run out of conversation but still want to leave the house. It is where grandparents bring children when the weather has turned biblical. It is where parents discover that a “cheap day out” can somehow involve parking, lunch, bubble tea, runners, cinema tickets and a small mortgage.

The teenage republic

Every large shopping centre has a second life as a teenage nation state.

To adults, Liffey Valley is shops, parking and queues. To teenagers, it is freedom with boundaries. They are not in the house, not quite on the street, and not yet loose in Dublin city.



They can meet friends, buy food, look at clothes they cannot afford, orbit the cinema, and practise the ancient teenage art of going nowhere in groups.

This matters more than adults sometimes admit.

Towns like Lucan and Leixlip are good places to live, but they are not always designed around young people. There are clubs, sports grounds and schools, but casual teenage spaces are limited. Liffey Valley fills that gap. It gives young people somewhere warm, bright, busy and reasonably public.

Of course, parents have mixed feelings about this. We want young people to socialise, but preferably without spending money, eating rubbish, blocking escalators, or communicating entirely through shrugs and hoodies.

Still, compared with many alternatives, the shopping centre has become a practical compromise. It is supervised without being supervised. Independent without being reckless. A place where young people can feel grown-up while still being collected by Dad at entrance three.

A weatherproof town square

Ireland has never properly solved the problem of weather.

We build lovely parks and public spaces, then spend half the year looking at them through rain-streaked windscreens. Liffey Valley’s great advantage is that it is weatherproof. It offers the fantasy of outdoor life without the outdoors.

In old towns, people gathered in squares, markets, churchyards, pubs and main streets. In modern commuter-belt life, the shopping centre has taken over some of that function. It is where people bump into neighbours, meet cousins, see work colleagues in unsuitable leisurewear, and exchange local intelligence beside a coffee counter.

This is the second Liffey Valley Effect: it has become a social centre as much as a commercial one.

That is not necessarily bad. People need places to gather. But it does raise an uncomfortable question. If the busiest “public” spaces are privately owned retail spaces, what does that say about how we are designing our towns?

Lucan and Leixlip both have village centres with history, identity and local character. But they struggle with the things shopping centres do so well: parking, toilets, shelter, long opening hours, food choice, accessibility and convenience.

A village main street may have soul. Liffey Valley has escalators.

In modern life, escalators are hard to compete with.

The effect on local businesses

The relationship between Liffey Valley and nearby towns is complicated.

On one hand, it gives local families access to major retailers, restaurants and leisure options without having to go into Dublin city centre. That is a real benefit. For people in Lucan and Leixlip, it can be easier to get to Liffey Valley than to navigate town, pay city-centre parking charges, or rely on public transport schedules that may or may not align with human patience.

Continues P.26

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On the other hand, every euro spent in a large shopping centre is a euro not spent in a local village shop, café or restaurant.

Local businesses cannot always compete with scale. They cannot offer endless parking, giant fashion stores, multiplex cinema screens and a food court atmosphere in which everyone in the family can eat a different cuisine and still sit together.

But they can offer something Liffey Valley cannot: memory, personality and community. The owner who knows your name. The café that remembers your order. The shop that supports the school raffle. The restaurant where you are not eating beside a man trying to assemble a buggy.

For Lucan and Leixlip, the challenge is not to beat Liffey Valley at its own game. They cannot, and should not try. The challenge is to make local centres attractive for the things shopping centres cannot do: charm, walkability, independent businesses, evening atmosphere, local events and a reason to linger.

People may go to Liffey Valley for convenience. They go to a proper town centre for belonging.

The great car park ballet

No article about Liffey Valley can ignore parking.

The car park is where civilisation is tested.

Hines, the property group associated with Liffey Valley, says the centre has over 3,400 car spaces and access off the M50. That sounds generous until Christmas week, when everyone in Leinster appears to have simultaneously remembered they need wrapping paper, perfume and something for “your man in work”.

The car park has its own choreography. Drivers slow down beside people carrying bags, hoping they are heading to a nearby car. Families point key fobs hopefully into the distance. Someone always forgets where they parked. Someone else tries to reverse a car the size of a fishing trawler into a space designed during a more innocent age.

The car park is also central to Liffey Valley’s appeal. Free and easy parking is one of the reasons people choose it over Dublin city centre. It makes the centre accessible, especially for families, older people and anyone carrying enough shopping to require upper-body strength.

But it also reinforces car dependency. If every major trip becomes a car trip, then traffic grows, roads clog, and local villages suffer.

Which brings us to buses.

BusConnects and the next chapter

Liffey Valley is no longer just a shopping and leisure destination. It is becoming a more important transport point.

The BusConnects Liffey Valley to City Centre Core Bus Corridor is designed to link the centre with Dublin city via Fonthill Road, Coldcut Road, Ballyfermot and onwards. The scheme begins at Fonthill Road, tying into the new bus interchange facility on the northern boundary of Liffey Valley Shopping Centre.

Construction activity is now part of the local reality. The official construction map lists Liffey Valley/Fonthill Road works from 18 May 2026 to 7 December 2026, with the overall scheme marked as approved and under construction.

This could change the centre’s role again. If public transport improves, Liffey Valley may become less dependent on cars and more like a western hub: shopping, eating, cinema, buses and connections in one place.

That would be a significant shift.

For Lucan and Leixlip readers, the question is whether these transport changes make life easier or merely add another phase of cones, diversions and temporary confusion. In Ireland, infrastructure usually arrives with the phrase “short-term disruption”, which is often followed by long-term muttering.

Still, the direction is clear. Liffey Valley is no longer just somewhere you drive to. It is being woven more deeply into the transport network.

Why we keep going back

It is easy to sneer at shopping centres. They are not quaint. They are not historic. Nobody writes poetry about a food court. No tourist comes to Ireland dreaming of a Saturday afternoon in a multi-storey car park.

But that misses the point.

Liffey Valley works because it understands ordinary life. It knows that families are busy, children are hungry, teenagers are restless, phones break, trousers shrink mysteriously, birthdays arrive without warning, and nobody wants to trail across six different streets in the rain looking for a communion outfit.

It offers convenience, and convenience is one of the most powerful forces in modern Ireland.

That is the real Liffey Valley Effect. It has not simply taken shopping away from town centres. It has changed expectations. People now expect choice, parking, food, shelter, toilets, late opening, cinema, coffee and convenience in one place.

Local towns have to respond, not by becoming mini shopping centres, but by understanding what people need. Better public spaces. Easier walking. More reasons to visit. Cleaner streets. Events. Outdoor seating. Family-friendly facilities. Local food. A stronger evening economy. A bit of imagination.

Because Liffey Valley is not going away.

For many families in Lucan and Leixlip, it is already part of the mental map. It is where you go when it rains, when someone needs shoes, when the children need entertaining, when the fridge is empty, when the cinema beckons, or when you simply need to get out of the house and look at things you probably should not buy.

It may not have a parish hall, a castle or a village green.

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There are many competitive sports in Ireland. Gaelic football. Hurling. Rugby. Horse racing. Arguing about planning permission.

But none of them compares to the school run.

The school run is where ordinary decent people, who would normally hold a door open for a stranger, become tactical road warriors before 9am. It is a daily contest of nerve, patience, positioning, snack management, and the ability to reverse a seven-seater into a space that does not technically exist.

In D15, as in every growing Irish area, the school run has become less of a journey and more of a military operation. It begins with good intentions and ends with someone shouting, "Where is your other shoe?"

The morning begins badly

The school run does not begin in the car. That is a common mistake made by people without children.

It begins in the kitchen, where a parent tries to create breakfast, lunch, emotional stability and a functioning timetable, all while someone is looking for a PE top that was definitely "just there yesterday".

At 7.55am, there is hope.

At 8.10am, there is tension.

At 8.23am, there is screaming.

Nobody knows why children are surprised by school. It happens five days a week. It has happened since September. Yet every morning they react as though the concept has just been sprung on them by a cruel state.

"Get your bag."

"What bag?"

"Your school bag."

"Where is it?"

"Where did you leave it?"

"I don't know."

This is not a conversation. It is a hostage negotiation.

Then comes the lunchbox revelation. The child who declared last night that they loved ham now finds ham disgusting. The banana is too brown. The apple is too appley. The yoghurt is the wrong yoghurt. The sandwich

has been cut in triangles, which was acceptable yesterday but is now a personal insult.

Meanwhile, one parent is trying to remember if today is swimming, music, Irish dancing, football, science project day, non-uniform day, or the mysterious "bring in something from nature" day, which usually ends with a child producing a damp leaf from the footwell.

The driveway sprint

Eventually, everyone reaches the car, though never at the same time.



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One child has forgotten their coat. One has forgotten their homework. One has brought a toy they are not allowed to bring. One is crying because someone looked at them. The parent, already mentally exhausted, starts the engine with the haunted expression of a person heading into battle.

And then you meet the traffic.

D15 was once a place where roads seemed to make sense. Then everyone had children, cars got bigger, schoolbags got heavier, and housing estates multiplied. Roads that once carried bicycles, Escorts and the occasional van are now expected to handle SUVs, delivery drivers, buses, electric scooters, grandparents, dog walkers and teenagers walking three abreast while staring into phones.

At this point, the school run becomes strategic.

The experienced parent knows every shortcut. They know which estate road saves three minutes, which junction is a trap, which traffic light has turned against humanity, and which lane contains people who still believe in kindness.

The novice parent thinks they can “just drop them at the gate”.

Ah, innocence.

The school gate ballet

The area outside a school at 8.45am is one of the most fascinating studies in human behaviour available to science.

Cars arrive from all directions. Indicators are used as expressions of hope rather than actual intention. Doors open suddenly. Children emerge backwards, sideways, half-dressed and carrying musical instruments the size of agricultural equipment.

Parents perform manoeuvres that would cause a driving tester to weep.

There is the Pause and Push, where a parent stops in the middle of the road and encourages children to exit at speed.

There is the Pretend Parking, where a car is technically abandoned but the driver remains inside with hazards on, as if the lights grant legal immunity.

There is the Reverse of Shame, where someone realises they have committed to an impossible space and must now retreat under public scrutiny.

There is the Grandparent Drift, calm, slow, and utterly unpredictable.

And then there is the most feared figure of all: the parent with time.

This person has arrived early. They have parked properly. Their children are wearing coats. Their hair is brushed. Their lunchboxes are labelled. They are smiling.

Nobody trusts them.

The politics of parking

Every school has parking rules. Nobody understands them, but everyone has strong feelings.

There are yellow lines, cones, signs, polite emails, less polite emails, and at least one WhatsApp group where someone says, “I’m not naming names, but...”

Parking near a school is a moral test. We all know we should not block gates, driveways, bus stops, cycle lanes or pedestrian crossings. We also know it is raining, the child has a project, the road is full, and we are late for work.

This is how decent people end up making poor decisions in high-vis territory.

The lollipop person sees everything. Never underestimate the lollipop person. They know who parks badly, who waves, who ignores them, whose child is always late, and which parent has lost control of both the car and the family unit.

They should be running the country.

Cycling, scooting and the dream of a better world

Every so often, a school encourages walking, cycling or scooting.

This is admirable. In theory, we all support it. We want healthier children, quieter roads, cleaner air and safe routes to school.

In practice, Ireland adds weather.

A child may start the week enthusiastically cycling to school. By Wednesday, the rain is horizontal, the schoolbag weighs more than the child, and a parent is standing in the hall saying, “Are you sure you don’t want a lift?”

The scooter is another matter. Scooters are wonderful until they have to be carried home by a parent who has already carried two bags, a coat, a lunchbox, a plastic volcano and the emotional burden of family life.

Still, the ambition is right. Every child who walks, cycles

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Continues P.32

or scoots is one fewer car at the gate. The problem is that we have spent decades building communities around cars and then appear shocked when people use them.

A proper school-run revolution would need safe footpaths, decent crossings, joined-up cycle routes, and enough confidence that parents are not imagining their children being flattened by a van before maths.

Until then, we continue with the current system: everyone drives, then complains about everyone driving.

The WhatsApp Olympics

The school run is not confined to roads. It also takes place on WhatsApp.

Every class has a parents' group. It begins with noble intentions: reminders, homework updates, lost jumpers, school events.

Within weeks, it becomes a rolling broadcast of modern anxiety.

"Is it PE today?"

"Does anyone know if they need tin foil?"

"Are they supposed to dress as a character from a book or a character from Irish history?"

"Whose child came home with one black shoe and one navy shoe?"

"Did anyone else get the email?"

There is always one parent who replies to everything with a thumbs-up. There is another who writes "Thanks hun" regardless of context. There is usually someone who sends a message at 11.47pm asking if the children need to bring in a shoebox, three buttons and a photo of a grandparent.

The worst message of all is: "Just a reminder..."

Nothing good follows "just a reminder".

The evening return fixture

People talk about the morning school run, but the afternoon collection is just as competitive.

The morning has urgency. The afternoon has fatigue.

Parents arrive early and sit in cars staring into space, enjoying the only silence they will experience all day. Some pretend to read emails. Some scroll phones. Some simply grip the steering wheel and gather strength.

Then the children emerge.

One has lost their jumper. One has lost their water bottle. One has someone else's jumper. One has news that they need cardboard, glue and googly eyes for tomorrow. One says they are starving despite returning with a full lunchbox.

You ask, "How was school?"

They say, "Fine."

This is the entire debrief.

You ask, "What did you do?"

They say, "Nothing."

Apparently, the Department of Education is funding six hours of nothing per day.

Then, at bedtime, when you are emotionally finished, they suddenly remember an important note, a permission slip, a costume requirement or a project involving papier-mâché.

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For all the chaos, there is something touching about the school run.

It is exhausting, irritating, repetitive and often absurd. But it is also one of the rhythms of family life. The same roads, the same faces, the same crossings, the same children growing taller by the term.

One day, the child who could not find their shoe will be heading off to college, work or a life where they are responsible for their own lunchbox. The school gate that once felt like a battleground will become a memory. You may even miss it.

Not the traffic. Nobody misses the traffic.

But you may miss the small rituals: the kiss before they got too old for kisses, the little hand disappearing into the crowd, the anxious first day, the Christmas jumper morning, the school tour excitement, the wet coats, the art projects, the half-told stories from the back seat.

The school run is not just a commute. It is parenthood on wheels.

It is messy, stressful, funny, competitive and deeply human.

And in D15, every morning, thousands of parents line up once again for Ireland's most demanding amateur sport.

No medals are awarded.

But anyone who gets everyone to school on time, with shoes, lunch and the correct child, deserves a podium finish.



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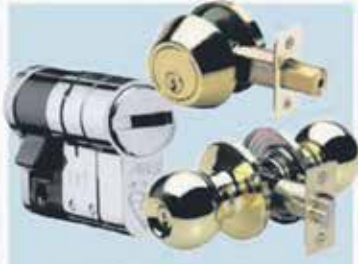
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Ireland's Health Check

Living Longer, Waiting Longer



There are two very different stories being told about health in Ireland today.

The first is the cheerful one. We are living longer, smoking less than previous generations, surviving illnesses that once carried a much worse prognosis, and most of us still describe our health as good. In fact, Ireland has one of the highest life expectancies in Europe, at 82.9 years in 2023, and almost 80% of people here rated their health as good or very good — the highest figure in the EU. Death rates from cancer, heart disease, respiratory illness and circulatory disease have all fallen over the past decade.

The second story is the one we recognise when we try to get a GP appointment, sit in an emergency department, wait for a scan, or hear of a child waiting months for mental health support. Ireland is healthier on paper, but increasingly anxious in the waiting room.

The ageing country

One of the biggest health issues in Ireland is not an illness at all. It is age.

Ireland's population has grown by 15.2% since 2016, but the number of people aged over 65 has risen much faster — up 36.7% between 2016 and 2025. Older people accounted for more than half of inpatient hospital bed days in 2024. That is not a criticism of older people; it is simply the arithmetic of modern healthcare. Longer life is a triumph, but it brings more arthritis, heart disease, dementia, falls, frailty, diabetes, cancer

follow-up care and medication management.

This is why the health service can recruit more staff, spend more money, and still feel under pressure. Ireland has more hospital doctors and nurses than it had a decade ago, and public health expenditure has more than doubled since 2015, but demand keeps running ahead.

Waiting has become part of the diagnosis

Waiting lists remain one of the great frustrations of Irish life. There has been progress: the Department of Health says the number of patients waiting more than 12 months has fallen by about 53% since September 2021. But it also acknowledges that recent gains have been hit by higher demand and increased referrals.

The problem is not just inconvenience. Waiting changes lives. A sore hip becomes immobility. A delayed assessment becomes a family under pressure. A long wait for a consultant appointment turns ordinary worry into full-time anxiety.

Emergency departments tell the same story in more dramatic form. On 7 June 2026, the HSE's 8am national urgent and emergency care snapshot showed 219 admitted patients on trolleys, 32 of them waiting more than 24 hours, alongside 524 delayed transfers of care. These are not abstract figures. They represent people medically well enough to leave hospital but unable to do so because home care, step-down care or nursing home places are not ready.

The GP is now the front line — if you can find one

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For most people, the GP is the health service. It is where chest infections, blood pressure, anxiety, blood tests, prescriptions, referrals and family worries all land first.

But GP access is under strain. The Irish College of GPs reported in March 2026 that workforce pressures are particularly evident in Dublin's commuter belt, the western seaboard, parts of the North West, Border counties, the South East, and areas of urban deprivation in north Dublin. It also noted that many practices are closed to new patients or working at capacity.

This matters because a strong GP service keeps people out of hospitals. When primary care is stretched, more people end up in emergency departments, illnesses are spotted later, and chronic conditions become harder to manage.

Mental health: the quiet epidemic

Mental health is now one of Ireland's defining health issues, especially among younger people. The CSO's Irish Health Survey 2025 found that almost 6% of people reported bad or very bad general mental health. Among women aged 15

to 24, the figure was 12.8%; among men of the same age, 8.4%. The same survey found that 10.4% of people reported depression in the previous 12 months.

Behind those numbers are the familiar pressures of modern life: housing insecurity, social media, loneliness, cost of living, work stress, family breakdown, and the constant low-level panic of being contactable all the time. We have more ways to communicate than ever, yet many people feel less heard.

Children's mental health services are under particular pressure. Public reports in 2026 pointed to more than 1,100 children waiting over nine months for CAMHS at the end of December 2025, with hundreds waiting more than a year.

Weight, food and the Irish lifestyle

Ireland's relationship with food has changed beyond recognition. The old diet had plenty wrong with it, but it did not involve constant grazing, delivery apps, giant coffees, ultra-processed snacks and a supermarket aisle dedicated to things pretending to be breakfast.

The CSO reported that 21.5% of people

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in Ireland were classified as obese in 2025, with the highest rates among those aged 55 to 64. Obesity is not just about willpower. It is about environment: car-dependent towns, long commutes, stress, cheap calories, sedentary work, and the fact that many people are too tired at 7pm to lovingly prepare meals.

The future health burden will not come from one dramatic national illness. It will come from the slow accumulation of weight, inactivity, poor sleep, high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

Alcohol: improving, but still part of the furniture
Ireland is drinking a little less, but alcohol remains deeply woven into social life. The Healthy Ireland Survey 2025 found that 71% of people aged 15 or over drank alcohol in the previous year, down from 73% in 2024. But 26% of the population reported binge drinking on a typical drinking occasion, and 20% were at risk of hazardous or harmful drinking. Men were much more likely than women to binge drink.

One interesting shift is the rise of non-alcoholic drinks. A quarter of people said they drink non-alcoholic beer, wine or spirits, often because they are driving, cutting down, or want to avoid a hangover. That may be one of the quieter health revolutions in Ireland: not giving up the pub, but changing what is in the glass.

Smoking down, vaping up

Smoking has fallen dramatically among young people, which is a public health success. But vaping has complicated the picture. The CSO found that 11.9% of people were daily smokers in 2025, while 6.9% were daily vapers, with vaping more common among younger adults.

The concern is that Ireland may be replacing one nicotine habit with another. Vaping is not smoking, and for some adult smokers, it may be part of quitting. But brightly packaged disposable vapes, sweet flavours and teenage uptake have made nicotine fashionable again in a way public health campaigns had spent decades trying to undo.

The bugs are getting smarter

Antibiotic resistance rarely makes the front page, but it should worry us. The HPSC reported that antibiotic consumption in Irish primary care was stable in early 2025 but remained above the EU average. Ireland ranked ninth highest among

EU/EEA countries for community antibacterial consumption in 2024, and meeting the EU's 2030 reduction target will require sustained effort.

The lesson is simple but difficult: antibiotics are precious. They do not work for viruses, and using them when they are not needed makes them less effective when they are.

Sexual health is still a public health issue

Ireland has become more open about sexual health, and free home STI testing is a major improvement. HPSC data published in June 2026 showed STI notification rates fell by 8% in 2025 compared with 2024, driven by decreases in chlamydia and gonorrhoea. But rates remain 21% higher than in 2019, and young people aged 15 to 24 accounted for a third of all STI notifications.

The message is not moral panic. It is practical: test, treat, inform partners, and remove the embarrassment. Silence is good for infections, not people.

So, are we healthy?

Yes — and no.

Ireland is a country where many people live long lives, survive serious illness, and benefit from skilled doctors, nurses, pharmacists, carers and therapists. But it is also a country where access is uneven, waiting is normalised, mental health services are stretched, and lifestyle-related illness is quietly building the next wave of pressure.

The health advice for individuals remains familiar: move more, drink less, stop smoking, sleep properly, get screened, mind your blood pressure, protect your mental health, and see your GP when something changes.

But the national advice is just as important: invest earlier, not later. A GP appointment today is cheaper than a hospital bed tomorrow. A child seen by mental health services this month may be a young adult spared years of crisis. A home-care package can free a hospital bed. A walkable town is a health policy. A decent house is a health policy. So is a school meal, a safe cycle lane, a shorter waiting list and a less lonely community.

Ireland's health challenge is no longer simply helping people live longer. It is helping them live better — and making sure they are not left waiting too long for the chance.



Strawberry Sando

Summer is here, allegedly, and so are strawberries that taste like strawberries again. Here is an unusual food idea to try.

INGREDIENTS

- 150ml double cream
- 1 tbsp icing sugar
- ½ tsp vanilla extract (optional)
- 8 slices of soft white bread (ideally milk bread)
- 500g strawberries (ensure they're similarly sized), hulled and halved

METHOD

step 1

Whip the cream, sugar and vanilla (if using) together using an electric whisk until soft peaks form. Spread the whipped cream over the bread slices. Arrange the strawberries, cut-side down, over the cream on half the bread slices, then sandwich together with the remaining bread.

step 2

Cut the crusts off the sandos, if you like, then

halve along the middle to create triangles. Wrap in baking parchment to take on a picnic.



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Leixlip at a Crossroads

The Town That Refuses to Become Just Another Dormitory Belt

There are towns that grow quietly, and then there are towns that wake up one morning and realise the future has arrived before the traffic lights have been upgraded.

Leixlip is in the second category.

For generations, it had the enviable feel of a proper town rather than a housing estate with a Centra. It had the river, the castle, the old village core, the Guinness connection, the walks, the pubs, the schools, the GAA, the familiar faces, and that slightly smug advantage of being close to Dublin without being swallowed entirely by it. Discover Ireland describes Leixlip as overlooking the River Liffey, 17km west of Dublin, with Leixlip Castle among its notable attractions.

But Leixlip is no longer just “out the road”. It is now part of one of the most pressurised growth corridors in Ireland. On one side sits Dublin. On the other side, Maynooth, Celbridge and the expanding commuter belt. In the middle is

Leixlip, trying to remain a real town while also accommodating new homes, new workers, new families, new traffic, and the expectations of a population that wants everything improved but nothing ruined.

That is the crossroads.

Kildare County Council has now extended the life of the Leixlip Local Area Plan 2020–2023, as amended, by a further three years, taking it up to 30 March 2029. The council says the extension is intended to provide “certainty and clarity” in securing the strategic objectives of the plan. In plain English, Leixlip’s future is not a vague conversation. It is being mapped, argued over, amended and extended. And that matters.

The problem with being desirable

Every town wants to be popular until it becomes popular.

Leixlip has what estate agents would call “strong fundamentals”, which is a polite way of

saying people actually want to live there. It is close to Dublin, close to the M4, served by rail, near major employment, and still has a sense of place. It has history without being a museum, and convenience without being entirely anonymous.

That combination is gold dust.

According to Kildare County Council's Census 2022 profile, Leixlip had a population of 16,733, making it one of the largest settlements in the county after Naas, Newbridge, Celbridge and Maynooth. That figure is not just a statistic. It is pressure on schools, GP surgeries, creches, sports clubs, roads, car parks, footpaths, playing pitches and every junction where locals sit muttering dark thoughts about planners.

The uncomfortable truth is that Leixlip needs development. Young people need somewhere to live. Older people need options to downsize without leaving their community. Families need houses that do not require a lottery win, a tech salary and a wealthy aunt in Rathgar. Local businesses need customers. Public transport needs population density to make services viable.

But the equally uncomfortable truth is that badly handled development can hollow out a town's character. It can produce estates without meeting places, roads without safety, houses without services, and growth without belonging.

That is where people in Leixlip become nervous. Not because they are against change, but because they have seen what careless change looks like elsewhere.

Confey and the shape of things to come

One of the most important elements in Leixlip's future is the Confey area. Kildare County Council adopted Amendment No. 1 to the Leixlip Local Area Plan in March 2024, integrating the Confey Masterplan into the statutory plan. The amendment came into effect on 6 May 2024.

The Confey Masterplan is exactly the kind of planning document that most people do not read until a digger appears near their back wall. Yet these documents matter enormously. They decide where homes go, how streets connect, where green space is protected, how transport

is managed, and whether new neighbourhoods feel like part of Leixlip or like something dropped beside it from a helicopter.

The council's consultation material said the Confey amendment was required because no residential development could take place on the relevant lands until a masterplan had been prepared and integrated into the Local Area Plan. It also noted that the amendment was accompanied by reports on transport, flood risk, environmental assessment and engineering.

That sounds technical because it is. But behind the jargon lies the everyday question: will this make Leixlip better to live in, or simply bigger?

The Intel factor

Leixlip is unusual because it is not merely a commuter town. It is also home to one of Ireland's most significant industrial sites.

Intel first chose Leixlip for its European manufacturing operations in 1989 and says it has invested more than €30 billion in the Leixlip campus, with around 4,900 employees across Ireland. That gives the town an economic importance far beyond its size.

This brings opportunity, but also dependence. A major employer supports jobs, local spending, suppliers, contractors and confidence. But it also places Leixlip in the path of global forces over which no local community has control: semiconductor cycles, AI demand, energy costs, corporate restructuring and international investment decisions.

That is a strange position for a town with a village heart. You can be walking by the Liffey one minute and reading about global chip manufacturing the next. Leixlip has both salmon-leap heritage and silicon-wafer economics. Few towns in Ireland carry that combination.

Traffic: the great local equaliser

Whatever your view on housing, planning or industry, nearly everyone can unite around one subject: traffic.

Traffic is where grand planning theory meets the school run. It is where "sustainable mobility" meets a parent late for work, a child who forgot

their PE gear, and a white van trying to reverse near a junction designed when half the town still walked everywhere.

Leixlip's challenge is not just the number of cars. It is the mismatch between old roads and new expectations. People want quieter streets, safer walking routes, proper cycling options, reliable buses and trains, and enough parking when they need it. They also want all of this without years of roadworks, diversions, orange barriers and men in hi-vis jackets looking thoughtfully into holes.

The future of Leixlip will depend heavily on whether transport improvements arrive before, during or after development. Too often in Ireland, the homes come first and the infrastructure follows years later, usually after residents have formed three WhatsApp groups, a protest committee and a deep suspicion of the phrase "phased delivery".

The fear of becoming nowhere

The biggest fear for towns like Leixlip is not growth itself. It is sameness.

People do not want Leixlip to become just another blur of estates, filling stations, traffic lights and takeaways. They want the town to keep its own face. That means protecting heritage, but also supporting ordinary local life: the small shops, the sports clubs, the library, the cafés, the river walks, the pubs, the community groups and the places where people bump into someone they know.

There is a difference between a town and a settlement. A settlement has houses. A town has memory.

Leixlip has memory in abundance. It has the Liffey and the Rye Water. It has Leixlip Castle. It has old streets, old families, new families, Intel families, Dublin blow-ins, Kildare loyalists, commuters, retirees, teenagers who think there is nothing to do, and older residents who remember when there was less to do but somehow more going on.

Good planning should not embalm that identity. It should allow it to breathe.

What locals will be watching

Between now and 2029, locals will be watching several things closely.

First, housing: what kind, how much, where, and at what price? There is a huge difference between homes that build a community and units that merely satisfy a target.

Second, infrastructure: schools, childcare, health services, sports facilities, public transport and safe walking routes. People can tolerate growth if they can see services growing with it.

Third, the town centre: Leixlip cannot afford to let its heart weaken while the edges expand. A lively centre gives a town identity. Without it, people live locally but spend their lives elsewhere.

Fourth, green space: the river, walks, trees, fields and open areas are not decorative extras. They are part of why people want to live there in the first place.

Finally, trust. Residents need to believe that consultation is more than a box-ticking exercise. They need to see that submissions, objections and local knowledge are taken seriously. People who live in a place often understand its daily rhythms better than any consultant's report.

A town worth getting right

Leixlip's great advantage is that it still has something worth protecting. That is also what makes planning it so difficult.

If a place has no character, development is easy. You can add more of the same and no one mourns what was lost. But Leixlip has a distinct identity. It is not Lucan, not Celbridge, not Maynooth, not Dublin, not quite country, not quite city. It sits in between, which is exactly why it matters.

The next few years will shape whether Leixlip becomes a better version of itself or a busier, more expensive, more congested version of everywhere else.

Growth is coming. In truth, it has already arrived. The real question is whether Leixlip can grow without losing the thing that made people want to live there in the first place.

That is the crossroads. And for once, the road chosen really does matter.

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Can You Grow Old Locally? The Big Question Facing Lucan and Leixlip

There comes a point in life when the family home, once a miracle of space and possibility, begins to behave like a badly managed hotel.

There are bedrooms nobody sleeps in, presses full of things that “might come in useful”, a garden that has grown ambitions of its own, stairs that seem steeper than they used to, and a heating bill that suggests you may be warming most of west Dublin and north Kildare.

At that stage, people begin to use the polite modern phrase: rightsizing.

It used to be called downsizing, which always sounded faintly insulting, as if someone had decided your life had become too big for you. Rightsizing is better. It means finding a home that suits the life you are actually living now, not the one you were living when the children were young, the knees were reliable, and Sunday dinner involved feeding half the street.

For Lucan and Leixlip, this is becoming one of the most important lifestyle questions of the next decade: can people grow old in the communities they helped build?

Not in theory. Not in a policy document. In real life.

Can you stay near your friends, your GP, your church, your club, your library, your favourite café, your familiar shop, your walking route and the neighbours who know when you are away, unwell or merely having a lie-in?

That is the real test of an age-friendly town.

The older population is no longer somewhere else

Ireland still likes to think of itself as a young country. In many ways it is. Lucan and Leixlip, in particular, have long been associated with young families, estates, school runs, football boots, communion dresses, buggies and people moving west because Dublin city became unaffordable.

But time has a terrible habit of continuing.

The parents who arrived in Lucan in the 1980s and 1990s are no longer young parents. The families who bought in Leixlip when it felt like



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the practical edge of Dublin are now looking at retirement, pensions, health appointments and whether the upstairs bathroom was ever a good idea.

The figures show the direction of travel. In Kildare, the number of people aged 65 and over rose by 35% between 2016 and 2022, reaching 29,720. The CSO described Kildare's average age in 2022 as 36.9, up from 34.9 in 2016. In Dublin, the number of people aged 65 and over increased by 19% to 195,664 over the same period.

South Dublin County Council also notes that the county had a population of 301,075 at Census 2022, with an average age of 37.2. These are still relatively young places compared with some parts of Ireland, but the direction is unmistakable: the commuter belt is ageing.

And it is ageing in houses that were not always designed for ageing.

The house that raised the family may not suit the next chapter

The family home carries emotional weight. It is where children took first steps, where Christmas mornings happened, where Leaving Cert rows were survived, where walls were painted and repainted, and where every creak in the floor has a history.

No wonder people are reluctant to leave.

But a house can become unsuitable long before someone feels "old". Stairs become awkward. Bathrooms are upstairs. Gardens become heavy work. Public transport is too far away. The nearest shop is manageable in good weather but impossible with a bad hip and two bags of groceries. The house may be valuable, but the person living in it may feel increasingly trapped.

This is where rightsizing matters.

South Dublin County Council defines rightsizing as finding a home that is right for someone "now and in the future", which might mean a smaller

home or one on a single level. Its Housing Delivery Action Plan 2022–2026 aims to deliver up to 600 age-friendly homes across the county, in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies.

That is significant for Lucan readers because it shows a shift in thinking. Older people are not just being told to manage. They are being recognised as a group with specific housing needs: accessibility, security, community, transport and independence.

Leixlip has its own live example. Kildare County Council has proposed an age-friendly social housing development at Mill Lane, Leixlip, involving 36 purpose-built apartments across four buildings, with one- and two-bedroom units, a common room and reception area to support community engagement. The Part 8 consultation for the Mill Lane proposal ran from 18 August to 29 September 2025.

That kind of development matters because it keeps the conversation local. It is one thing to say Ireland needs more age-friendly housing. It is another to ask where it should go in Leixlip, how it should look, who it serves, how residents will get to the shops, and whether it will feel like part of the town rather than a tucked-away afterthought.

Age-friendly is not just about housing

A bungalow is useful. A lift is useful. A downstairs bathroom is useful. But growing old locally is not just a housing problem.

It is a pavement problem.

It is a bus-stop problem.

It is a “can I get a GP appointment?” problem.

It is a “why is there no bench between here and the village?” problem.

It is a “who will notice if I do not come out for three days?” problem.

This is where lifestyle and planning meet. An age-friendly town is not simply a town with some apartments for older people. It is a town where daily life remains possible without heroic effort.

Lucan and Leixlip both have advantages.

They have established communities, active clubs, churches, libraries, parks, cafés, walking

routes and a strong sense of place. They are not anonymous new settlements. People know each other. There is memory in the streets.

But both towns also face the familiar suburban problem: many people live in housing estates designed around the car. That is fine when you can drive everywhere. It becomes less fine when driving becomes difficult, expensive or impossible.

The person who once ran children to school, training, music lessons and Liffey Valley may later find themselves dependent on lifts from the same children, who are now busy, stressed and living in Naas, Celbridge, Australia or some place they describe as “only twenty minutes away” but never visit.

Independence in later life depends heavily on small, practical things: safe crossings, level footpaths, reliable buses, nearby shops, accessible healthcare, good lighting, visible policing, community activities and somewhere to sit down without having to buy a coffee.

The loneliness question

There is another issue we are not always comfortable discussing: loneliness.

It is possible to live in a busy estate and still be lonely. It is possible to have family nearby and still spend too much time alone. It is possible to own a house worth a fortune and still feel invisible.

Older people do not just need roofs. They need connection.

That is why the common room in an age-friendly development is not a decorative extra. Nor is a nearby library, men’s shed, active retirement group, parish centre, bridge club, walking group or local café. These are not soft issues. They are infrastructure for human beings.

The danger with modern planning is that we count units more easily than relationships. We can measure housing output, car spaces and floor areas. It is harder to measure whether someone has a neighbour who will knock in, a reason to leave the house, or a familiar face at the till.

Lucan and Leixlip have strong community networks, but those networks need physical

places. If every public interaction is pushed into a shopping centre, a car journey or an online form, older people lose out first.

Digital Ireland may be grand if you are comfortable with passwords, QR codes and two-factor authentication. Less so if your mobile phone is held together by Sellotape and suspicion.

The emotional politics of moving

Rightsizing sounds logical from the outside. A person or couple in a large house moves to a smaller, warmer, more manageable home. A family home becomes available. The older person stays independent. Everyone wins.

Except people are not chess pieces.

Leaving a long-term home can feel like a bereavement. It can mean sorting through decades of possessions, confronting the passage of time, and deciding what to do with things your children absolutely do not want but are too cowardly to say so.

There is also the fear of making a mistake. What if the new place is too small? What if the neighbours are difficult? What if the service charges rise? What if you miss the garden? What if the children suddenly become sentimental about the family home five minutes after refusing to clear the attic?

That is why good age-friendly housing has to be attractive, not just available. People will not move from a much-loved home into a poor substitute. Nor should they be expected to.

The best rightsizing options are not places where older people are put out of sight. They are homes that offer dignity: warm, accessible, secure, well-located, near services and designed for living, not merely existing.

What Lucan and Leixlip need to get right

The future should not be a choice between staying too long in an unsuitable house or moving away from everything familiar.

For Lucan and Leixlip, the ideal is simple to describe and difficult to deliver: more age-friendly homes close to the heart of the community.

That means homes near shops, cafés, parks, buses, libraries, medical services and social life.

It means mixed communities, not age ghettos. It means building places where older residents are part of daily town life, not parked at the edge of it.

It also means respecting the fact that older people are not all the same. Some are fit, active and travelling the world. Some are caring for partners. Some are on their own. Some own valuable homes but have limited incomes. Some rent and face serious insecurity. Some want to move. Some absolutely do not.

The policy answer has to be flexible enough for real life.

The real meaning of ageing in place

“Ageing in place” is a phrase beloved by planners, but its meaning is deeply personal.

It means being able to walk down the street and remember who lived where. It means staying close to the grandchildren. It means knowing which pharmacist is kind, which café does proper tea, which shortcut avoids the hill, and which neighbour will bring in the bin.

It means continuity.

For Lucan and Leixlip, this is not a future issue. It is already here. The people who built these communities, volunteered in clubs, supported schools, paid mortgages, planted gardens and kept local businesses alive should not have to leave simply because their house no longer fits.

The challenge now is to create enough good options before people are forced into bad ones.

Growing old locally should not be a privilege reserved for those with perfect health, helpful families and deep pockets. It should be built into how towns are planned.

Because a good town is not one that only works for the young, the busy and the mobile.

A good town is one where you can arrive with a buggy, survive the school run, raise a family, retire, slow down, stay connected, and still feel you belong.

That is the test facing Lucan and Leixlip.

And if they get it right, they will not just be places to live. They will be places to stay.

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