ISSUE 24
AUGUST 2025

Little Village

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HILLCREST UNDERWATER - SEE P8

From Ambassador's Estate to People's Park: Lucan House's €20 Million Transformation

A Walled-Off World Finally Opens

For nearly 80 years, Lucan House—a stately Palladian mansion nestled in 12 hectares of mature woodland along the River Liffey—stood closed off from public life. Hidden behind iron gates and leafy walls, it served as the private residence of Italian ambassadors, a secluded enclave inaccessible to the community just beyond its borders. That era quietly came to a close in late 2024, when South Dublin County Council (SDCC) signed the deeds, acquiring the estate for €10 million—well below its €15 million market valuation.

Now, the once-secluded property is set to become a centrepiece of civic life. SDCC has unveiled a €20 million masterplan to transform Lucan House into a public landmark by 2028, blending heritage, nature, and community in what promises to be a flagship park for West Dublin. The vision is bold: create not just a green space, but a heritage hub and ecological connector that knits together Lucan, the Liffey Valley, and surrounding districts.

Funding for the transformation is coming from a mix of sources, including €11 million in council capital, €4 million from the THRIVE: Town Centre First heritage programme, and €5 million from the EU's ERDF Southern, Eastern & Midland Regional Programme for 2021–27.

The journey from diplomatic estate to public park is already well underway. Following the purchase, SDCC's first order of business was emergency repairs to the perimeter wall—resolving a long-running dispute that had hampered public safety and visibility. In early 2025, a hybrid community design process brought more than 400 locals into the conversation through workshops, youth panels, and accessibility-focused input. Residents were clear about what they wanted: everyday access, safe cycling routes, and affordable events that would draw people in without pricing them out.

By July 2025, the council had translated those priorities into a published masterplan, now on public display at Lucan Library through September. Formal planning submissions are scheduled for early 2026, with archaeology and ecology assessments set to begin that spring. Phase one of the project, running through 2026 and 2027, will focus on infrastructure—laying out paths, stabilising protected structures, and tendering for a café fit-out. If all stays on track, the gates will open for good in summer 2028, marked by a public festival celebrating the estate's layered history.

That history is part of what makes Lucan House such a rare civic prize. Beneath its grounds lie traces of a medieval towerhouse. Inside, the mansion features 18th-century plasterwork by Michael Stapleton, one of Ireland's master craftsmen. Together, these layers form what heritage experts call a "textbook of Irish architectural history," just a short walk from Lucan's Main Street.

The project is also expected to bring a measurable economic lift to the area. SDCC's forecasts include 85 construction jobs during development and 30 long-term roles in hospitality, maintenance, and cultural programming once the park is fully operational. More than a heritage site, Lucan House is being positioned as an active node in the region's green infrastructure. The masterplan links it into the Liffey Valley green corridor, finally connecting a continuous 8 km route for walkers and cyclists from Lucan Bridge to Leixlip.

Inclusivity has been a priority throughout. The design incorporates level-grade pathways, Changing Places toilets, and sensory planting—all shaped by feedback from disability advocates during the consultation phase. It's a tangible example of universal design in action, ensuring the space will be accessible and welcoming for all.

Lucan House's opening marks more than the reclamation of a single site—it's a rare moment when history, environment, and community interests align. What was once an elite enclave is being reimagined as a shared civic asset, rooted in local voices and backed by serious public investment. With the plans in place and momentum building, the next three years will determine whether South Dublin County Council can turn that potential into something real and lasting. For the first time since the 1940s, Lucan House's gates are poised to stay open—for everyone.

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to our latest edition of Little Village.
For those of you still interested in travel within Ireland before the summer is out, have a look at our article on'' Beyond the Pale'' and maybe consider West Cork for a short trip.

As the long summer evenings gradually come to an end enjoy the remaining few weeks……..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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University in the Balance

Why the Price Tag on an Irish Degree Keeps Climbing

From "Free Fees" to Four-Figure Bills

When then-Education Minister Niamh Bhreathnach abolished tuition in 1996, Ireland became a poster child for widening access to higher education. But universities soon filled the funding vacuum with a "registration fee" that climbed from €150 in 1997 to €1,500 by 2009, before being rebranded in 2011 as the student contribution charge—set at €3,000 a year, where it stayed for more than a decade.

The Cost-of-Living Reprieve—Already on the Chopping Block

In Budgets 2023 and 2024, the Government shaved €1,000 off the €3,000 charge for all students and introduced an extra €500 grant for middle-income families, pushing the bill down to €2,000—or €1,500 for households earning €62,000–€100,000. Universities have implemented the reduced rate for the current academic year (e.g., UCD lists €2,000 for 2024/25).

That relief is temporary. In early July, the new Minister for Further & Higher Education, James Lawless, warned that—barring another cost-of-living package—fees will "snap back" to €3,000 in September 2025. The prospect has already sparked rallies outside Leinster House and a Sinn Féin motion demanding not just retention of the cut but a further €500 reduction.

What Students Really Pay

The headline fee is only a slice of the university price tag. TU Dublin's cost-of-living study puts average monthly rent at €792; in Dublin city, the figure now tops €1,200, triple the Berlin equivalent. Even before tuition is added back in, a typical student living away from home must find roughly €14,000 a year to stay in college.

Grants Rising—but Not Fast Enough

Successive budgets have lifted SUSI maintenance rates by up to €615 and raised income thresholds so that families earning under €55,924 now pay no student contribution at all. Yet the grant's maximum still covers barely half of average off-campus living costs, let alone fees.

Universities Say They're Broke Too

Institutions argue that cutting student fees without new State money is unsustainable. The Irish Universities Association warns of a €92 million funding hole this year, rising to €171 million in 2025, just to meet public-sector pay awards. Staff-student ratios already trail the EU average, and capital budgets for labs, libraries, and housing are stretched to breaking point.

Housing: The Hidden Tuition

Accommodation is now the biggest single driver of college costs. A February Irish Times analysis found three applications for every bed on campus, with rents in new private complexes pushing beyond €300 a week. The Minister has floated exemptions from new rent-reset rules for student house-shares, tacitly acknowledging the pressure.

Where Next?

Budget 2026 (October 2025) will decide whether the €1,000 subsidy survives. The Coalition parties are divided: Fine Gael backs permanent cuts, while Fianna Fáil stresses "budgetary realism." Opposition parties want the contribution abolished within two years; universities want the State to plug the €307 million core-funding gap identified in the Funding the Future roadmap.

Until that political tug-of-war is resolved, Irish students face an uncomfortable paradox: a country that nominally offers "free fees" but where the all-in cost of a degree is climbing faster than inflation—and may soon rise by another €1,000 overnight.

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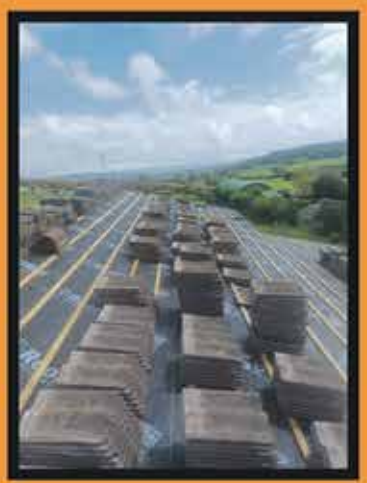

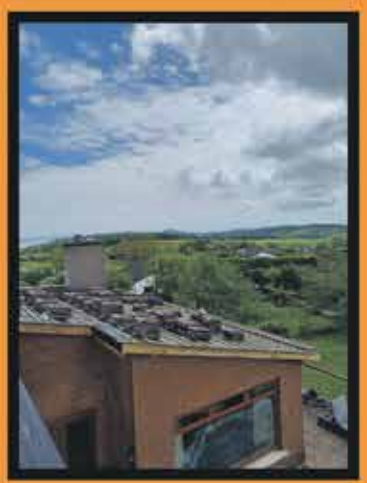

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Rupert Heather takes the chair - what Celbridge–Leixlip's new Cathaoirleach means for North Kildare

In July 2025 – Labour councillor Rupert Heather was voted Cathaoirleach of the Celbridge–Leixlip Municipal District at the committee's annual meeting, with Fianna Fáil's David Trost chosen as LeasCathaoirleach.

The vote itself was quick and procedural, lasting less than five minutes—but its impact will resonate across the year ahead. With it, Rupert Heather takes up the gavel as Cathaoirleach of the Celbridge–Leixlip Municipal District, just as the area prepares to roll out its most ambitious Local Property Tax (LPT) programme to date.

Under Kildare's local government structure, reshaped in 2014, each of the county's five municipal districts selects a chairperson every July. The role may appear ceremonial from the outside, but it's anything but. The Cathaoirleach sets the tone and direction of monthly meetings, helps steer motions onto the agenda, and plays a pivotal role in shaping the draft district budget. For Celbridge–Leixlip, that means overseeing a pot of retained LPT funds that totaled around €1.8 million last year. In short, this is the person who decides which local priorities get attention—and funding.

Heather, now 47, brings a mix of personal and professional experience to the role. Originally from Dundee, he moved to Ireland in 2000, building a career as a digital content specialist and settling in Celbridge with his wife Sinéad and their three children. On his Labour Party profile, he cites fairness and equality as guiding principles and names sustainable infrastructure, social inclusion, and improved access to green spaces as top priorities for the rapidly growing commuter district.

Even before his formal election, Heather was already active on key local issues. In June, he tabled a motion calling for traffic-calming measures on Shackleton Road following a string of near-misses, urging engineers to revisit a previous decision that had rejected interventions there. Just weeks later, he joined fellow councillors in seeking an emergency meeting with the Housing Minister after a public-private partnership deal for social housing was abandoned due to cost overruns. And shortly after Friday's vote, Heather informally flagged his intention to push for more investment in active travel. Specifically, he wants the 2026 LPT programme to prioritise safe cycling corridors linking Celbridge, Leixlip, and the nearby Intel campus—a remark that was noted in the official meeting minutes, due to be published next month.

Reactions to his appointment have been positive, particularly from fellow councillors and local stakeholders. Leas-Cathaoirleach David Trost welcomed Heather's election, highlighting his ability to secure cross-party support for practical measures, such as recent school-zone speed surveys—referencing Trost's own motion for St Wolstan's College passed the same day. Meanwhile, Martina Clancy, chair of the local Tidy Towns group, expressed optimism that Heather's focus on the public realm might finally breathe life into long-stalled plans to revitalise Main Street.

Heather's first 100 days will set the tone for the rest of his term. With Celbridge–Leixlip's population approaching 55,000 and growing fast, local leadership has never mattered more. This is Ireland's most dynamic commuter corridor, where the ripple effects of small decisions—be it a pedestrian crossing installed, a housing project unblocked, or a park approved—can make a bigger difference to daily life than many national policy debates.

Heather's track record points to a preference for these "micro-wins"—targeted, practical achievements over headline-chasing gestures. If he can bring that same focus and pragmatism into the budget room this autumn, residents might see tangible improvements in safety, mobility, and public amenities by 2026. If not, another year of well-meaning plans may end up gathering dust.

For now, Rupert Heather holds both the bell and the responsibility. The chair is his—and so is the opportunity.

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Hillcrest under water—again: why Lucan's flashflood hotspot keeps going under

A Familiar, Unwanted Wake-Up Call

At 6:45 a.m. on Monday, 21 July, the residents of Hillcrest Walk in west Dublin were pulling on their wellies—again. Overnight thunderstorms had unleashed between 50 and 63 millimetres of rain, setting a new July rainfall record at Phoenix Park and prompting a Status Orange weather warning. Within minutes, the estate's lowest point transformed into an ankle-deep lagoon. Cars stalled, garden sheds bobbed like buoys, and residents turned to wheeled bins as makeshift barricades. Even when South Dublin County Council (SDCC) crews arrived with pumps, the drains couldn't keep up. "The water just had nowhere to go," neighbours posted on local Facebook pages. It was the fourth flood since Christmas 2023—and the community has had enough.

Everyone living on the estate is asking the same thing: why does Hillcrest keep flooding, and why hasn't anything truly fixed it?

Part of the answer lies in the ground itself. Hillcrest was built in the early 1970s on what used to be a floodplain, once traversed by a now-culverted tributary of the Griffeen River. The estate's bowl-like topography funnels water towards the culvert intake near No. 102 Hillcrest Walk. When heavy rainfall—anything above roughly 25 millimetres per hour—overwhelms the system, it quickly backs up.

That system, too, is showing its age. The original concrete drainage pipes, just 300mm in diameter, were designed for what was then considered a "1-in-5-year" storm. But that standard is long out of date in today's climate. Compounding the issue, changes over the last two decades—like paving over gardens, installing tarmac driveways, and adding extensions—have reduced the estate's permeability. SDCC estimates that impermeable surfaces in Hillcrest have increased by 18% since 2000, which means significantly more runoff flowing into already overburdened pipes during every major downpour.

July's flood was, for many, the final straw. Residents say they've seen little more than short-term patch jobs over the years. Although repeated pressure from local councillors led SDCC to increase gully-cleaning frequency in Lucan Village to four times a year, Hillcrest still receives only two visits annually. Minor drainage works in 2023—such as installing a junction box and cleaning out 70 metres of pipe—offered only modest relief, improving overall capacity by just 8%. And while South Dublin's 2024 SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) pilot is targeting some estates for flood resilience upgrades, Hillcrest was not included, despite being flagged in the council's own drainage strategy.

Now, there are finally signs of a more serious response. Council engineers are proposing a €1.6 million flood-relief project for the estate, currently in early design. If delivered as planned, the works could reduce peak flood depths from a damaging 250mm to 50mm or less—enough to keep water below door thresholds during a 1-in-30-year storm. Design teams have been hired, and local councillors have stated firmly that "no more sticking-plaster fixes" will be tolerated.

While residents wait for the diggers to arrive—possibly by next spring—there are still ways to take action. Keeping verges and gullies clear of leaves and debris can significantly boost drainage during cloudbursts. Installing floodgates or gelsacks at doorways can prevent interior damage, and SDCC offers Community Flood Grants of up to €1,000 per household to support those measures. Water butts can also help: a 200-litre container on each downpipe can divert about 5% of a typical July storm from the network. And perhaps most importantly, reporting every incident through SDCC's FixYourStreet platform helps build the documented case needed for long-term investment.

The broader challenge looms large. Met Éireann's rainfall records now show that intense convective downpours—"cloudbursts" that once seemed rare—are happening with yearly regularity. Without comprehensive SuDS retrofits, Hillcrest will remain a symbol of urban flooding in West Dublin, a place where heavy rain means dread and damage instead of just wet streets.

But this summer's flood may finally have been the wake-up call that sticks. With real money on the table and engineers at work, the community is holding out hope. The sight of a digger on Hillcrest Green next spring wouldn't just be a step toward stormwater control—it would be a symbol that after years of mop-ups, long-promised solutions are finally taking shape.

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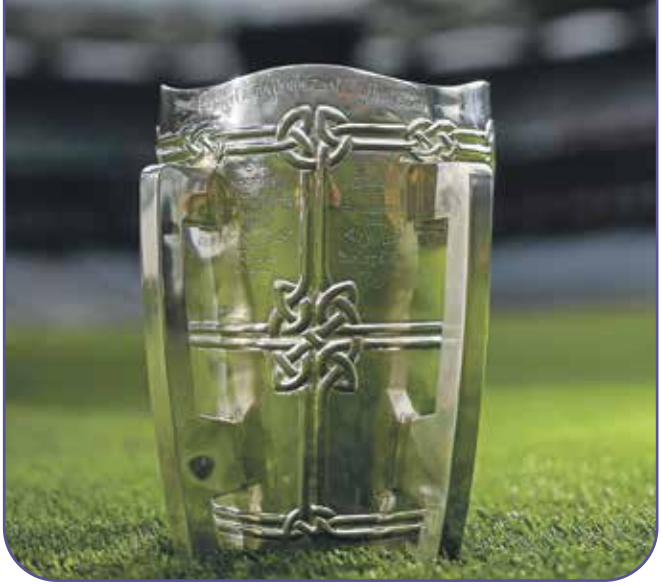

A lighthearted census of who's bursting the shelves and who's still stuck with dust covers

Serial Collectors

Fun fact: add those two tallies together (74) and they're still short of the number of times Kerry people have pol itely reminded Dublin that "thirty-one is lovely, but…".

Honourable Mention for Hurling's Hungry Three

Kilkenny may be kings, but Cork (30) and freshly crowned Tipperary (now 29 after that 2025 shellacking of Cork) keep the cat honest.

Counties Still Waiting for the Call From Silverware HQ

(Full lists would run longer than a Galway–Mayo penalty shootout; if your county is missing above, assume the drought continues.)

How to Spin It at the Bar

Supporter from Kerry or Kilkenny? Simply clear your throat and let the medals jangle audibly.

Supporter from anywhere on the "never-won" list? Claim moral victory: "Sure winning's grand, but have you ever felt the pure hope of an unbeaten streak that's older than electricity?"

Dual-code optimist? Point out that in 1904, the ball burst during a Cork–Kerry game and everyone went for sandwiches—proof that anything can happen.

Crystal Ball Bonus

At the time of going to print, Football 2025 still has the Sam final to play (Donegal v Kerry). If Kerry win, they hit the biblical 39, and Donegal stay on two; if Donegal upset the Kingdom, expect celebrations audible from Malin Head to Mizen.

Hurling 2026 offers 19 long-suffering counties one more swing at Liam. The bookmakers' collective shrug says: "don't remortgage the farm just yet."

Whether you're counting cups or chalking up gallant defeats, the GAA's roll of honour is really Ireland's longest-running soap opera: same families, same grudges, fresh cliffhangers every summer. One warning though—if you meet a Kerry or Kilkenny fan heading for the trophy cabinet, step aside quickly; those doors swing open an awful lot.

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COUNCILLOR HELEN FARRELL LUCAN'S VOICE

My name is Councillor Helen Farrell, an Independent Local Councillor sitting on South Dublin County Council (SDCC). My role is to bring the voice of Lucan people to the table and help better shape decisions that affect our lives.

Having lived most of my life in Lucan, I am working to improve life for its residents and visitors. I co-founded the compaign @Pool4Lucan to lobby for a public swimming pool 11 years ago. I also co-founded Society for Old Lucan (SOL) to record, promote and protect Lucan's rich heritage. It's been a privilege to meet Lucan people and work with them to achieve positive things for our area. Being an Independent Local Councillor, I am continuing this work for constituents. On a day-to-day basis I deal with issues and concerns for local people, which I represent to SDCC to achieve results for constituents.

Areas that I am actively working in include:

•Ensuring Access to Education (including Lifelong Learning)

•Making Planning & Development happen in a way that benefits our communities

•Supporting Local Businesses

•Quality of Life for all

•Our Heritage and Ecology (including Archaeology and Local History)

•Promoting The Arts in our communities

•Gaeilge (Tá beagán Gaeilge agam agus tá grá agam di, ach níl mé líofa)

I am a member of the Land Use, Transportation & Planning Strategic Policy Committee in SDCC and recently represented Lucan concerns on our National & Motorway roads to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).

Email me: hfarrell@cllrs.sdublincoco.ie

Cllr. Helen Farrell – Independent – SDCC

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I work in close co-operation with (former Councillor) Paul Gogarty TD, who co-opted me in his place in December 2024.

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Intel's Leixlip Layoffs: What a 195 job cut means for Dublin 15 commuters and businesses

The headline numbers

On 30 June 2025 Intel confirmed it will seek up to 195 compulsory redundancies at its Leixlip campus as part of a global restructuring drive led by new chief executive LipBu Tan. The plant employs about 4,900 people, so the local cut is just under 5 %—but it lands at a time when Intel is also shedding thousands of roles worldwide.

Why the Californian giant is trimming in Kildare

Intel's worldwide costsaving plan aims to rebuild an "engineeringdriven culture" after several tough years in which rivals sprinted ahead on AI chips. The company has paused some megafab projects in the US and Germany, narrowed management layers and told staff that tougher onsite attendance rules are coming. Leixlip remains central to Intel's future—Fab 34, opened in 2023, is its first EUV production line in Europe—but even flagship sites must share the pain.

Why Dublin 15 is watching nervously

Although the campus sits across the county border in Kildare, West Dublin is Intel country:

• Short commute: Blanchardstown is barely 11 km from the factory gate; the C3 Dublin Bus service or a drive down the M3/M4 takes about 25 minutes.

•Hourly Route 139 link: JJ Kavanagh's orbital bus runs Naas – Leixlip – Blanchardstown, feeding estates from Castleknock to Ongar with shift workers.

• Housing patterns: Agents estimate that hundreds of Intel engineers rent or own in Dublin 15 estates where prices undercut Kildare's newer commuter belts (figures echoed in recent mortgage drawdown data, though not broken out in public statistics).

A HR manager at a Blanchardstown software firm put it bluntly: "When Intel sneezes, west Dublin's rental market gets a cold."

Early ripple effects—catering jobs and local spend

The first collateral damage is already visible:

•Compass Ireland, which runs Intel's inhouse catering, says it will drop 37 of its 99 roles—onethird of its onsite staff—after the chipmaker asked for a "reduced food offering".

• Contractors based in Dublin 15 industrial estates, from cleanroom fitout firms to logistics outfits on Damastown Rise, report that project work on Fab 34 has slowed since April; several told this magazine they are holding off on hiring apprentices until Intel clarifies 2026 capital budgets.

Retailers in Blanchardstown Centre say weekday lunch trade has dipped "noticeably" since rumours of cuts began in the spring. (No hard figures yet, but Centre management is tracking footfall.)

Political and union reaction

Local Fine Gael TD Joe Neville called the layoffs "a blow that must be cushioned by every support the State can muster", while opposition TD Réada Cronin demanded an emergency task force for affected families. Intel's own workforce is lightly unionised, but craftworker union Connect warned that the decision proves even flagship FDI sites are "not immune" to global downturns.

What help is on the table?

The Department of Enterprise says its Rapid Response Team—first used after the 2019 Bord na Móna closures—will offer:

1. Onsite information days in September covering redundancy terms and upskilling grants.

2. Fasttrack Springboard+ places in AI processcontrol and EV powerelectronics at TU Dublin Blanchardstown.

3. Fáilte Ireland employment exchanges for displaced catering staff ahead of the 2026 Ryder Cup hospitality rampup.

Could more cuts follow?

Industry analysts note that the 195 figure is "worstcase" and may shrink if enough staff take voluntary packages, but Intel's global restructuring target remains a 20 % headcount reduction. The Irish plant escaped the deepest axe swings because Fab 34 is integral to Intel's turnaround, yet further trimming can't be ruled out if PC demand falters again.

The longterm view

Intel has invested €30 billion in Leixlip since 1989, and last year sold a 49 % stake in Fab 34 to Apollo Global for $11 billion—cash it still plans to spend ramping EUV capacity. That deal, plus a new EU Chips Act subsidy window, suggests the site's future is secure once the current turbulence passes. For Dublin 15, the challenge is to weather the next 6–12 months without losing the skilled commuter base that has helped the suburb thrive.

A layoff of 195 may look modest next to Intel's 5,000plus global cuts, but its shock waves reach well beyond the Leixlip fence. Fewer Intel paypackets mean fewer lunchtime customers, fewer EVs in the Park P&R, and fewer highspec mortgages in new Castleknock estates. Whether those ripples fade or widen will depend on how quickly Intel's big turnaround starts to deliver—and how fast government supports can redirect talent into the next wave of West Dublin industry.

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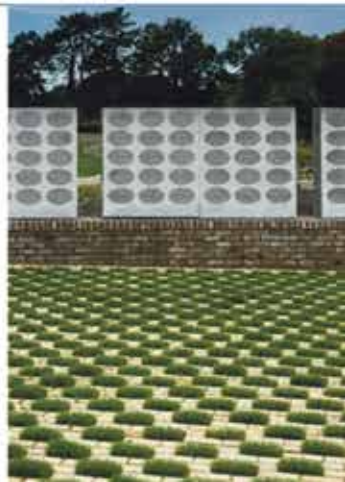

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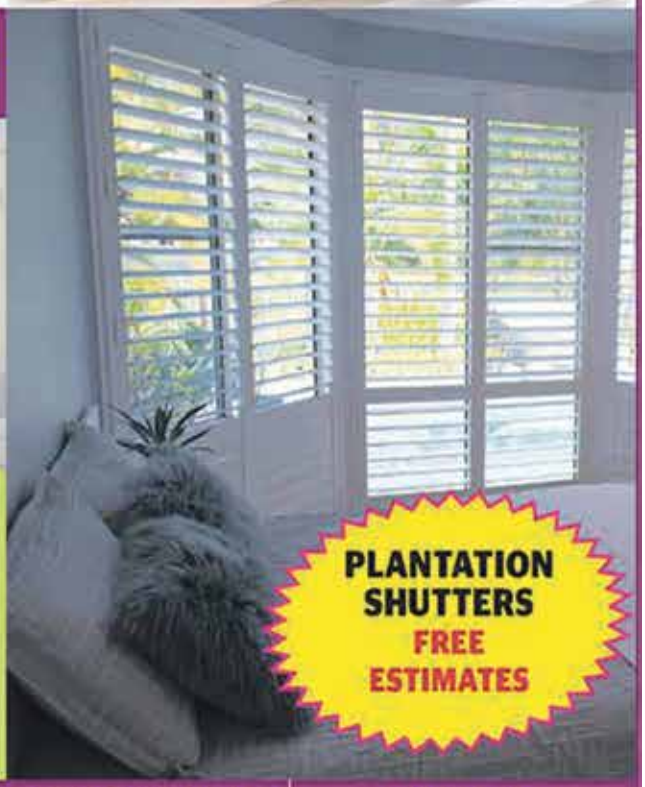

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Kildare County Council Welcomes Ambassador of Barbados to Áras Chill Dara

Kildare County Council recently had the honour of welcoming the first Ambassador of Barbados to Ireland, His Excellency Cleviston Haynes, to a meeting at Áras Chill Dara.

Accompanying the Ambassador was Mr Shane Thomas, Investment Executive, Invest Barbados.

Representing Kildare County Council at the meeting were The Cathaoirleach of the County of Kildare, Councillor Carmel Kelly, Annette Aspell, Deputy Chief Executive and Jacqui McNabb, Head of Enterprise, Economic Development and Tourism. During the meeting, the Ambassador offered an introduction to the recently established Embassy of Barbados, which opened in Ireland, in June 2024.

The strong relationship between Ireland and Barbados was acknowledged and tourism possibilities were explored.

Discussions also centred around the potential for increased cooperation and collaboration between Ireland and Barbados, particularly with regard to Climate Action and harnessing energy.

Following the meeting, the Cathaoirleach of the County of Kildare, Councillor Carmel Kelly said: ***"It was our distinct honour to welcome His Excellency Cleviston Haynes to Kildare County Council today. Barbados and Ireland have a shared history dating back to the 1600s and Irish culture and surnames can still be found throughout the island. Today's meeting has placed us on the path to developing a deeper bond between our countries and we look forward to fostering that relationship".***

Ireland's Nursing Homes Who Runs Them, Who Watches Them and What's Going Wrong

Ireland's nursing home sector is under sharper scrutiny than ever. With 548 registered facilities providing 32,370 beds, the system remains a vital pillar of elder care—but it's already showing signs of strain.

In 2024 alone, there were five net closures, suggesting that capacity is not just stagnating but starting to contract. The structure of the sector itself adds complexity: around three-quarters of nursing homes—and 80 percent of all available beds—are operated for profit. The rest fall under the management of the Health Service Executive (HSE) or not-for-profit and voluntary organisations.

At present, private and voluntary providers are caring for the vast majority of residents—some 27,500 people across 420 homes, according to figures from Nursing Homes Ireland, the industry body. That leaves the HSE managing the remainder, often in older public units that have not seen significant reinvestment in decades.

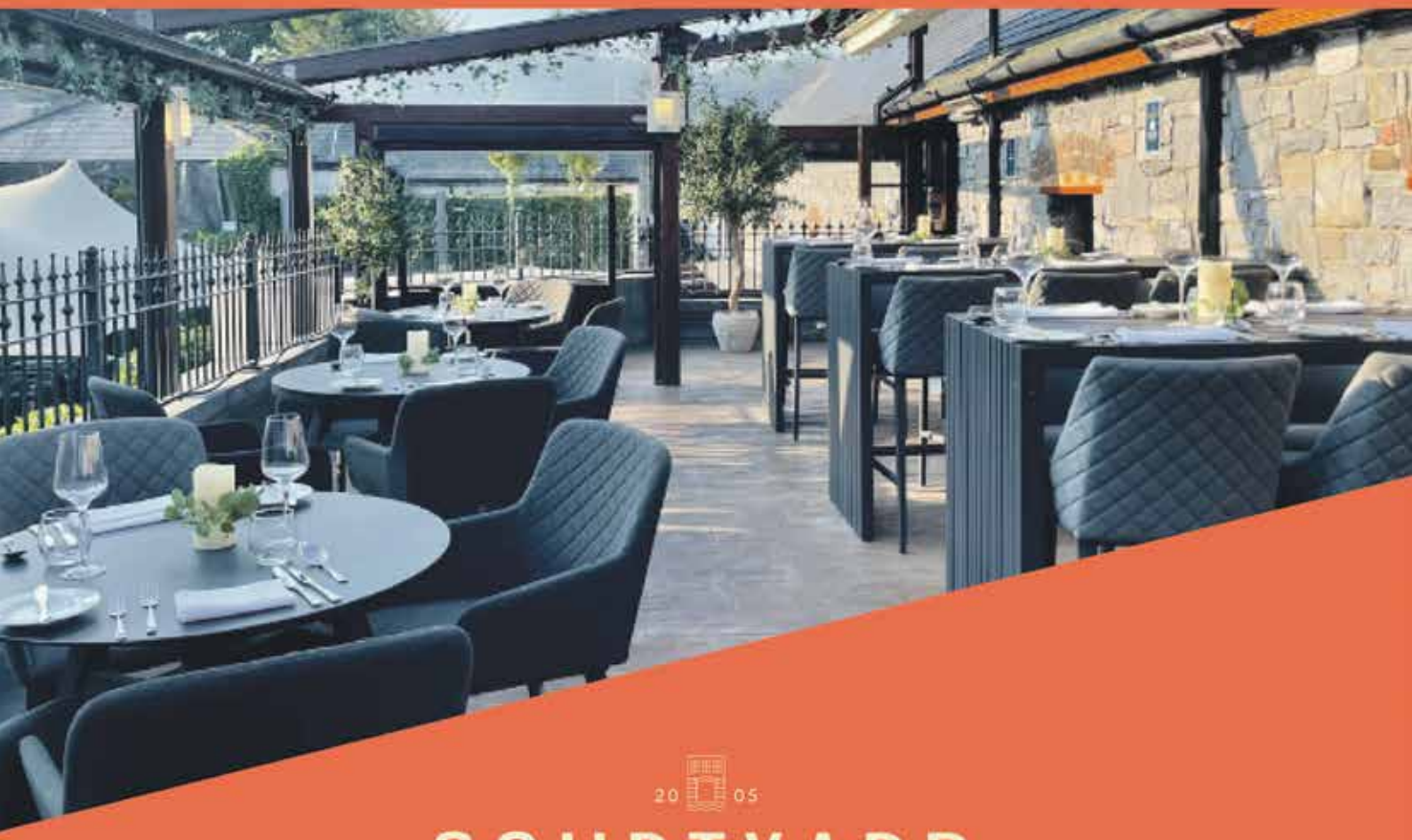
Oversight and funding fall under a patchwork of authorities and mechanisms. The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) serves as the regulator, with its Chief Inspector responsible for registering each home, conducting at least annual inspections, and exercising enforcement powers under the Health Act 2007. These powers include setting conditions, freezing admissions, or in serious cases, cancelling a licence altogether. On the financial side, most residents are supported through the Nursing Home Support Scheme—better known as "Fair Deal"—which pays a government-negotiated weekly rate for care. These rates are brokered by the National Treatment Purchase Fund, while overall policy direction lies with the Department of Health and the Minister of State for Older People. When a private licence is revoked, the HSE steps in as operator of last resort.

The past year has been punctuated by a series of high-profile failings, leaving public confidence visibly shaken. Even HIQA itself acknowledged to TDs that trust had been "dented," while Taoiseach Micheál Martin floated proposals for stronger enforcement tools, including larger fines and faster shutdowns in cases of serious non-compliance.

Several structural issues help explain why problems continue to recur. Staffing remains a major pressure point: private homes struggle to compete with the HSE's higher pay scales, forcing many to rely heavily on agency nurses—a costly and often short-term fix that fuels both financial strain and staff turnover. Rapid corporate consolidation has added another layer of complexity. Chains like Emeis (formerly Orpea) expanded aggressively through acquisitions, and HIQA has raised concerns that their governance structures have sometimes failed to keep pace with their growth. Meanwhile, many of the country's smaller, often family-run homes are housed in converted residential buildings, which brings longstanding fire safety concerns. Publicly run community nursing units often date back to the 1970s and require full-scale rebuilding to meet modern standards. Financial viability is another looming issue. The Fair Deal scheme has not kept up with inflation, and since 2017, more than 70 nursing homes—mostly smaller rural ones—have shut their doors, chipping away at national bed capacity.

In response, a slate of long-discussed reforms is back on the table. HIQA could soon be granted stronger enforcement powers, including the ability to issue on-the-spot fines and require mandatory CCTV in communal areas. There's also renewed momentum behind adult safeguarding legislation, which has stalled in the Oireachtas since 2017. This would put protection for vulnerable adults on a clear statutory footing. A new capital fund for upgrading fire safety in older homes is also being discussed, alongside a much-anticipated review of the Fair Deal scheme. That review, due as part of Budget 2026, aims to bring funding levels in line with staffing costs and could introduce incentives for developing smaller, homelier care settings.

At its core, Ireland's nursing home sector is now a predominantly private enterprise sustained by public money and monitored by a public regulator. The events of 2025 demonstrate that the system can, and does, respond when standards slip—but too often only after harm has already occurred. With Ireland's over-85 population set to surge, the challenge now is not just regulatory but political: how to restore trust, protect residents, and expand capacity before today's cracks widen into a full-blown care crisis.



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BusConnects CSpine - Has the 48 % passenger boom reached Lucan & Leixlip?

The headline numbers look spectacular

The National Transport Authority's March 2025 progress report says routes already switched to the new BusConnects network are carrying 48 % more passengers than in 2019, while unchanged routes are up just 8 %. Reliability has climbed 12 % and punctuality 23 %; 110 batteryelectric buses now ply the capital's streets, cutting an estimated 1,900 tonnes of CO2 a year.

But the westofM50 picture is mixed

In North Kildare, Social Democrat TD Aidan Farrelly told the Dáil in June that the CSpine had "emphatically disconnected" Leixlip and Celbridge, leaving riders "waiting a serious amount of time for buses to arrive." He called routes C3 and C4 "dysfunctional" and urged officials to travel them at peak time before claiming success.

Local user groups echo those complaints: Lucan commuters say evening C1/C2 buses still bunch on the N4, and the promised 10minute headway can stretch to 1820 minutes after 7 p.m.—long enough for riders to default to the carpool.

What the data does (and doesn't) show

The NTA report publishes networkwide gains but doesn't break out routelevel boardings. Officials confirm privately that the CSpine "tracks close to the 40 % network average" but won't release stopbystop figures until at least six phases of the redesign have a full year's data. Without that granularity, it is hard to prove—or disprove—claims that the West Dublin–Kildare corridor is lagging.

The connectivity wildcard: orbital routes

Phase 5a of BusConnects added orbital routes W4, W61 and W62, giving Lucan, Celbridge and Maynooth riders new eastwest links that avoid the city centre entirely. W4, for instance, meets every Croute at the same stop outside Liffey Valley, while W61 ties C3/C4 to commuter rail at Hazelhatch.

Taken together, the orbital buses have nudged up-boardings on the CSpine's "branch" legs, but they also expose transfer weak spots: there is still no realtime information screen at the Liffey Valley interchange, and crossticketing between GoAhead and Dublin Bus remains patchy.

Infrastructure catchup is finally approved

The LucantoCity Centre Core Bus Corridor—dedicated lanes, upgraded footpaths and segregated cycle tracks—won planning approval in October 2024. Construction contracts are due to be signed early in 2026; once finished, engineers predict a 6 to 10minute saving on each inbound rushhour trip.

If those lanes arrive on schedule, they should lock in the reliability gains claimed by the NTA report and free up timetable padding that currently blunts frequency west of the M50.

The takeaway for Lucan & Leixlip

• Yes, ridership is rising—but mostly at the network average, not the eyecatching 48 % headline.

• Reliability is better but fragile, especially when N4 congestion peaks.

• Orbital links are a gamechanger for crosssuburb trips, yet they still need simple, wellsigned transfers.

• Longpromised buslane infrastructure is finally through planning; the next two years will decide whether the CSpine delivers on its original "metrostyle" promise for West Dublin and North Kildare.

For now, the surge is real—but until buses glide past the Chapelizod traffic with priority lanes and Lucan riders see a clockface 10minute service late into the evening, many locals will remain unconvinced that BusConnects has truly arrived at their stop.

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SALMON COMEBACK?

Inside the citizenled fight to bring wild Atlantic salmon back to the River Liffey

The Leixlip Dam on the River Liffey, a 1940s hydroelectric structure, stands as the single greatest barrier salmon face on their journey to the Wicklow spawning grounds. That may soon change. A €4 million redesign of the dam's outdated fishpass is now under active consideration—a long-overdue intervention that could open the river to a migration nearly lost.

Not long ago, the Liffey was hailed as one of Ireland's premier spring salmon rivers. Today, it's a ghost of that past. In 2019, counter data recorded just 13 salmon in the entire run—a staggering 99% drop compared to numbers estimated in the 1980s. Anglers now say it's "as rare as could be to catch salmon … or even see one" along the riverbanks.

Into this bleak picture stepped the Liffey Salmon Project, a grassroots effort founded in 2023 by the Dublin & District Salmon Anglers Association alongside local scientists. Their mission is clear: restore access and revive spawning grounds before the Liffey's salmon run disappears entirely.

They haven't waited for major funding or top-down solutions to get started. In the past year alone, they've made visible progress. At the Strawberry Beds, 400 tonnes of graded gravel have been laid to help re-establish redds, the shallow gravel nests where salmon spawn. Winter floods are already

dispersing this material, and in January, the first spawning redds in over a decade were spotted near Palmerstown weir.

The project has drawn in volunteers by the dozens. In August, 120 citizen scientists took part in an electrofishing blitz, surveying 37 riffles and collecting baseline fry data for Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). Meanwhile, in Lucan and Leixlip schools, 250 students reared salmon parr in classroom tanks before releasing them into the Liffey, giving a new generation a personal stake in the river's recovery.

Project chair Mark McAndrew is quick to point out that these efforts, while crucial, are only a stopgap. The real turning point, he says, lies at the foot of Leixlip Dam. The ESB is now drafting a €4 million fishpass overhaul that would widen entry pools and install a trap-and-lift system to help salmon over the wall. Public consultation on the design is expected to open in October 2025.

The fight to save the Liffey's salmon is happening on multiple fronts. A €30 million upgrade to the Leixlip Wastewater Treatment Plant—now in Phase 3—promises to reduce chemical loads and improve filtration by 2027, easing pressure on downstream habitats. Meanwhile, the Liffey Salmon Project has prequalified for a €160,000 grant under the IFI's 2025 Habitats and Conservation Fund, which includes €1.2 million earmarked for barrier removal and gravel restoration across the country.

Is it working? The early signs are cautious but hopeful. Fry counts from the 2024 volunteer survey averaged 7.9 fry per 100 square metres—still a critical level, but more than double what was recorded in 2021. And while fishing regulations remain tight—with catch-and-release rules still in place below Lucan and a complete closure to salmon angling above Leixlip in 2025—the river is showing signs of life.

Ten years ago, the idea of salmon fighting their way through Dublin's quays might have sounded like myth. Today, thanks to a passionate network of anglers, schoolkids, and citizen scientists, the Liffey's salmon run has a pulse again. The numbers are fragile, the challenges immense—but with every juvenile spotted, and each new redd dug into gravel, the river signals it's not finished yet. And neither are the people working to bring it back.

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I want to inform my constituents that I have formally resigned from People Before Profit. I left the party together with other members and we have set up our own independent socialist organisation-the Red Network.

I was a member of PBP for almost 20 years and leaving has not been an easy decision to make. However, I feel that the party is not the same as when I joined and I can no longer ignore the change in political principles.

Unity is important to me. I will continue to work alongside and with members of PBP in campaigns, movements and on the council. I will also continue to represent my constituents from the perspective of revolutionary socialist principles. I will work as hard as I always have for the working class communities that I represent.

I, and other members of the Red Network, have argued within PBP for years about the need for political honesty, deep organising in working class communities and workplaces and against opportunist practices.

I argued for a clear stance on a Sinn Féin government: **I would help get rid of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, supporting a Sinn Féin government from the opposition benches on a case-by-case basis while holding them to account.** However, I've been deeply troubled by PBP telling the public that they would join a left-government with Sinn Féin—while saying something different behind closed doors.

CLONBURRIS SDZ

A lot of housing is being built in Clonburris, and more is being planned by the council. I'm concerned about the decision to only build 30% social housing on council owned land. 70% will be affordable purchase and cost rental. Also, there is an immediate need for public transport, due to low provision of car parking spaces. We need amenities and facilities. We want:

- Public housing on public land; more social housing
- Shuttle buses to the train stations before regular bus routes come on stream
- Provision of shops, community facilities and childcare as soon as people move in

COMMUNITY ADVICE CLINIC
Ronanstown Youth Service Fridays 11am-12noon

Ireland's 2024 Emissions Scorecard

A Smaller Dip, a Steeper Hill

Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions fell for the third year in a row in 2024, but the drop—just 2%—was the slowest yet, raising serious doubts about the country's ability to meet its 2030 climate targets. New figures from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), published on 3 July 2025, show total emissions (excluding land use) at 53.8 million tonnes of CO□-equivalent, only 12% below the 2018 baseline. That's a quarter of the 51% cut legally required under Ireland's Climate Act.

Sectoral progress was uneven. Emissions fell in electricity (–6.2%) and transport (–3.4%), aided by record renewable output and greater biofuel use. A mild winter helped drive a 5.7% fall in home heating emissions. But agriculture dropped just 1.1%, industry was flat, and waste sector emissions actually rose by 2.9%.

The EPA warns that Ireland's first carbon budget is already 63% spent with a year to go. A 10% emissions cut will be needed in 2025 alone to stay within the limit. Under EU rules, Ireland met its 2024 target only by using flexibilities, and is far from the 42% cut required by 2030.

Climate experts say the slowdown is alarming. Marie Donnelly, chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council, called the figures "disappointing" and urged urgent investment in the grid, public transport, and agricultural reform. Friends of the Earth warned of a "flashing red warning light," noting the drop had slowed from 6.8% in 2023 to just 2% last year.

The EPA says progress in renewables and biofuels is encouraging but warns that deeper cuts are now needed across all sectors. From 2025 onward, annual emissions would have to fall by 8–9%—four times faster than in 2024—to stay on track for 2030. With Budget 2026 approaching, and compliance with climate law on the line, Ireland faces a critical year.

Beyond the Pale goes to West Cork this month

Wild, flavourpacked & quietly radical

Stretching from the pastel-painted lanes of Kinsale to the rugged cliffs of the Beara Peninsula, West Cork is Ireland's wild-at-heart playground along the Atlantic. Here, sea kayakers paddle alongside fishing boats in hidden coves, Michelin-star chefs give the spotlight to local dairy, and walkers swap city clamor for the crash and boom of ocean swells. It's a place where creativity and nature thrive hand in hand.

And there's no better time to visit than 2025. After a €1.6 million refurbishment, the legendary Dursey Island cable car is gliding once more—restoring Ireland's only oversea gondola ride and linking visitors to the very edge of the Wild Atlantic Way. A new wave of regenerative tourism is also blooming: Native, an off-grid eco-guesthouse tucked just outside Ballydehob, is rewilding the idea of hospitality with a focus on sustainability and community. Meanwhile, a freshly funded greenway project is set to connect Bantry and Skibbereen by bike, making it easier than ever to pedal through some of Ireland's most dramatic coastal scenery.

The region is alive with experiences that capture its soul. In summer, music spills into the streets and across harbours. The West Cork Chamber Music Festival celebrates its 30th anniversary with premieres and magical late-night concerts at Bantry House, while the Fastnet Film Festival transforms every pub and shopfront in Schull into intimate cinemas—perfect for an early season escape.

The food scene here is a delicious expression of land and sea. Whether it's tasting Durrus or Gubbeen cheese where it's made, licking sea-salt ice cream in Clonakilty, or snagging a coveted seat at Chestnut's 14-seat chef's counter in Ballydehob, every bite tells a local story. And when it's time for a pint, head to Levis' Corner House, also in Ballydehob, where traditional music sessions turn this tiny venue into a live-music gem.

Getting around is easy too. With the M8/N22 now a smooth dual carriageway, it's just over an hour from Cork City to Clonakilty and two to Bantry. If you're going car-free, Bus Éireann and West Cork Connect offer reliable routes across the region, including summer runs all the way to Mizen Head. As always, dress in layers—the Atlantic mood can shift quickly—and be mindful on the narrow coastal roads: stick to designated laybys and respect farmland gates.

Whether you're standing among ancient stone rows as the sun dips below the horizon, slurping oysters fresh from the boat, or watching chamber musicians play with seabirds wheeling outside the window, West Cork in 2025 is pure, poetic Ireland—untamed, unforgettable, and more vibrant than ever.

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