

## **Services and facilities infrastructure**

From a County Development Board perspective there is a clear need for co-ordination to ensure that South Tipperary has a good infrastructure in terms of facilities and services that facilitates access of the citizens of the county to economic, social and cultural opportunities.

The Cultural Working Group recommended that there should be an agreed facility development strategy for the county and that services be accessed at as local a level as possible, especially with the use of an outreach approach. The County Development Board developed these recommendations into a services and facilities infrastructure theme that links wider facility development and the provision of services so as to reduce access time for citizens to services and to participation in social and cultural activities.

There is a strong correlation between cultural spend/participation and the availability of facilities. Research carried out by the Cultural Working Group in West Tipperary and Slieve Ardagh highlights the connection. In the Slieve Ardagh area where there are limited community cultural facilities, the community cultural spend works out at 32 Euro per capita retained in the Slieve Ardagh area (for ongoing activities not including capital investment). Whereas in the Tipperary Town catchment where there is significant cultural infrastructure the community cultural spend works out at 200 Euros retained in the West Tipperary area.

Minimum facilities need to be considered at four levels:

- ❖ Parish level – focus on multi-usage of facilities (access to a hall that can accommodate arts/crafts and indoor sport and recreation activity; access to a sportsfield that can accommodate play and outdoor recreation facilities; access to heritage aspects); primary school
- ❖ Sub-county facilities – focus on smaller sized specialized facilities (for a main town and the communities in its hinterland): include small specific centers for performing arts, heritage, library and specialized sports facilities (sports hall, athletics track, etc); second level school;
- ❖ County facilities – focus on medium scale specialized facilities (for the population of the county); such as a municipal theatre, arts centre, museum/heritage centre; third level institute; etc.
- ❖ Regional facilities - focus on larger scale specialized facilities (for the population of the region); such as a municipal theatre, arts centre, museum/heritage centre; university; etc.

The County already has a kaleidoscope of facilities at all three levels. What is needed is the transfer of a model that works well in Germany: a strategy that plans for a generation – 20 to 30 years (plans for the upgrading/renewal of existing facilities and also addresses gaps in the existing provision).

Currently, the provision of social and cultural infrastructure is highly dependent on voluntary fund raising. Given the pressure on volunteerism generally as life and work

styles change, a development strategy based on voluntary fund raising is not sustainable. Raising matching funding for infrastructure is also not an efficient use of volunteer time. Simpler methods of funding facilities need to be found.

The public purse is partly resourcing social and cultural infrastructure but in an uncoordinated manner. Often, as in the case of FAS schemes, the improved community facility is a byproduct of the main aim to upskill people who are seeking work. Also, the community promoter must often apply to a range of agencies, involving considerable administrative hardship, in order to get a project completed.

What is needed is a more coordinated and direct approach to the provision of social, cultural and community infrastructure, ideally tied into a 'Generation facility development plan for South Tipperary'. This approach will be assisted greatly by the inclusion of provision for development levies for social and cultural infrastructure in new Development Plans prepared by local authorities under Section 48 of the 2000 Planning and Development Act.

Service provision to citizens in South Tipperary are also provided at different levels (population size being the most significant factor):

- ❖ Parish level – significant but variable local voluntary services; some private services such as retail outlets and professional services, limited and variable provision of localized public services (more in bigger centres of population that also service catchments)
- ❖ Sub-county level – limited and variable voluntary services; more private and commercial services; some public services including outreach services, Co Council, Health Board, Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, Gardai)
- ❖ County services – voluntary networks servicing the voluntary sector, local development companies/partnerships; significant private and commercial services; more public services again with outreach responsibility for the County (such as the County Enterprise Board, FAS, Tipperary Institute; specialized services such as the Local Authority planning section, acute hospital services, etc)
- ❖ Regional services – very limited voluntary services; bigger private services; some public services (IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland) including networks (South East Regional Authority, South East Tourism).

Inclusion and participation are at the heart of the social and cultural vision for South Tipperary.

An outreach strategy can complement the facility development strategy in ensuring that the entire South Tipperary population has good opportunities to access services and engage in social and cultural activities.

The Cultural Working Group has a firm view (endorsed by the County Development Board) that the onus is on service providers to reach out to the general population in proven ways and in new innovative ways to enable its customers improve and enhance

their quality of life. A number of cultural and community providers are availing of the FAS resources to do just that.

A quality job within 30 minutes commuting time is the main output desired from economic strategy by each adult member of the South Tipperary population. Consequently, access times and availability of access modes within the county and to neighbouring urban centres are important indicators of economic progress.

South Tipperary has a locational advantage in being at the cross roads of the N8 and N24. The National Development Plan's focus on upgrading National Roads provides an opportunity to shorten access time to external markets. The challenge in upgrading the road infrastructure in County Tipperary is to ensure that there are sufficient access points to the new main roads in the county, so that the smaller towns and villages are not further disadvantaged.

There is an underutilised rail network in the county linking four of the biggest five towns in the county. The Dublin-Cork railway line also passes through the county with good connections for much of West Tipperary to these cities.

Access time to airports which are substantive international hubs is a critical indicator for future competitiveness. Waterford Regional Airport is the closest airport to much of the county excluding West Tipperary which is nearer to Shannon Airport.