

# MEATH MARKS OUT AMBITIOUS INVESTMENT PLANS

*Meath County Council has agreed its most ambitious Capital Programme ever with a projected spend of €454 million over the next three years (2019-2021), with the most significant investment in the area of housing, which makes up 50% of the total programme.*

**O**n preparing its latest three-year Capital Programme, Meath County Council had to make a substantial investment in the national priority of housing and homelessness, according to Chief Executive Jackie Maguire.

“However, we were also conscious of other considerations such as, the need to give priority to projects of strategic importance and underpin the future potential of the county, an emphasis on projects where we could leverage greater external funding and at the same time be mindful of investing in projects that will support enterprise and future job creation in Meath.”

She was also keen to underline that projects in the capital programme will only be progressed where a clear business case has been made and funding has been identified.

On the issue of funding, Meath County Council has been successful in increasing the volume of levies that it collects for the development of roads infrastructure and community amenities.

## INVESTING IN KEY AREAS

Allied with that, the prudent management of its finances over the



**Cllr Maria Murphy, Cathaoirleach of Ratoath Municipal District, Ministers Damien English and Regina Doherty and Meath County Council’s Chief Executive Jackie Maguire pictured at the sod-turning ceremony for the Ratoath Outer Relief Road in March.**

last decade or so has meant that the Council is in a better position to invest resources in key areas and to match-fund the increases in grant funding that it is receiving from a number of

Government sources.

That said, Ms Maguire pointed out that Meath County Council still operates from a position of disadvantage, in that it receives



**'Navan 2030' is an ambitious project to revitalise and rejuvenate Navan town centre.**

the lowest grant support per head of population in the state, with expenditure per head at only 61% of the national average (€537 per head in Meath versus €875 nationally).

One other challenge the Council faces in realising its ambitions is the fact that it has the lowest number of staff per head of population of all local authorities in the state.

While it has actively recruited in the last number of months, it is seeing huge change and turnover, as staff seek opportunities elsewhere.

This is not unique to Meath and the Chief Executive is quick to point out that "our staff have a long and distinguished record of delivery. We have the local knowledge, the skills and experience and we have the right people to deliver what is required by the people of this county".

#### FOCUS ON HOUSING DELIVERY

Over 50% of the Meath Capital Programme is earmarked for spending on housing over the next three years.

A total of €230 million will increase the Council's housing stock, as well as supporting the provision of social housing by the Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), an increase in Traveller Accommodation units and a programme of energy retrofits and

upgrades of the existing social housing stock.

The Council expects to deliver 1,325 new additional homes by the end of 2021 through construction, acquisition, the Part V process and in conjunction with the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector.

Director of Housing Barry Lynch

explained that the Council has completed 71 units under its direct construction programme for 2017 to 2021. A further 118 units are under construction on eight separate sites.

The Council has a strong pipeline of construction projects with another 10 projects throughout the county, which will see delivery of up to 223 units over the lifetime of the Capital Programme. This is in addition to 279 units delivered in partnership with the AHBs during 2017 and 2018 with a further 205 units approved and at various stages of delivery.

#### SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

"Meeting the housing needs of individuals and families is the Council's main priority, but we are also about building sustainable communities, which is also an essential aspect of many of the other investments under the Capital Programme.

"We're working to regenerate a number of derelict sites in Navan and Kells with the assistance of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and the Social Housing Investment Programme," said Mr Lynch.

One key project is focussed on



**Opening of the Cantilever Bridge in Navan.**



**Construction began on the Ratoath Outer Relief Road in March and the new road, costing €5.5 million, will help to open up zoned lands for development.**

bringing vacant homes back into use at Carrick Street in Kells. The Council has also recently completed a small purpose-built Age-Friendly development at the Proudstown Road in Navan on what was a brownfield site and expects to see more of this type of development in the years ahead.

Facilitating the development of housing for the market is also part of the Capital Programme. As an example, the Council began construction of the Ratoath Outer Relief Road in March 2019.

This new road, costing €5.5 million, will serve not only as an important piece of local infrastructure for residents in the area but also helps to open up zoned lands for development.

The road is being delivered under an agreement between Meath County Council and Sherwood Homes (Ratoath) Ltd and has been funded by the Council and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government using the LIHAF Programme (Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund).

A condition of the LIHAF funding is that a certain number of the homes built will be affordable and social homes, with 52 such units in total expected from the development. The road is scheduled for completion in March 2020.

“Over 50% of the Capital Programme is earmarked for spending on housing over the next three years. A total of €230m will increase the Council’s housing stock, as well as supporting the provision of social housing by the AHBs, an increase in Traveller Accommodation units and a programme of energy retrofits and upgrades of the existing social housing stock.

#### PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Meath is a large county where investment in its physical infrastructure is playing catch-up with the demands of a rapidly expanding population.

In particular, the extensive road network requires up-grading with notorious traffic blackspots on the N2 at Slane and Kilmoon Cross earmarked for improvement works in the Capital Programme.

The total roads budget sees €90 million being invested in a number of significant national, regional and

local road schemes. ‘Navan 2030’ is an ambitious project to revitalise and rejuvenate Navan town centre. The project will see over €12 million of investment in the next three years, with support from the National Transport Authority.

Jackie Maguire explained that the town must adapt to meet the needs of an expanding population. “Navan 2030 will deliver a new, attractive, pedestrian-friendly town centre, combined with frequent and reliable public transport services, making for a better experience for those visiting the town centre. It will encourage more people to visit, to shop and to stay longer.” Project work has already begun and will be substantially complete by 2020.

#### ‘MAKE IT MEATH’ CAMPAIGN

The road network is fundamental to enabling nearly 45% of the working population in Meath to commute out of the county on a daily basis, the highest rate in the state. The Capital Programme is supporting measures to attract investment and to create jobs in the county.

The Council’s ‘Make it Meath’ campaign seeks to increase investment into the county by 40% up to 2022, in addition to the creation of 7,500 new jobs. The Capital Programme will help ensure that the county is best placed to avail of opportunities that arise and remains an open and attractive location for business to succeed.

While the county is an attractive place in which to live, with close proximity to the capital city, key infrastructure such as Dublin Airport, its rich heritage and natural assets, the Capital Programme will provide additional community facilities.

A total of €8 million is being provided to up-grade the library network with a further €8 million set aside for parks, playgrounds and other community facilities.

A total of €54 million of investment is planned in recreation and amenity projects across the county, to enhance the environment within which communities can grow and prosper.