

Kildare Nationalist

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

County Kildare badly in need of investment in roads

There is a perception that County Kildare is a wealthy county, South Kildare Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin told the Dáil. All too often, she said people traversing its main roads en route to other counties do not see the heartland of Kildare.

“We need substantial investment in our roads,” she said. “The county has 2,528 km of road, for which we had a budget of €18 million for maintenance this year. This is not nearly sufficient. To cite an example, subsidence on Coughlanstown Road, which runs between Ballymore Eustace and Kilcullen, cut off a vital artery between these two rural towns 13 months ago. It would cost €4 million to repair the road. I have spoken to the Minister about this case on several occasions and he gave a commitment to meet the local community, although no such meeting has taken place. The Department repeatedly states that Kildare County Council must find, from its own resources, the funding required to rebuild the road. This is practically impossible as it would require almost 25% of the county's annual budget for 2,528 km of road.”

Meanwhile, she said the local school and businesses are suffering. For example, people living 500 m. from the school must drive 9 km to reach it. Issues such as this must be addressed in the National Planning Framework.

Speaking during a debate on the Framework, she said planning approval had been granted for the southern distributor road in Athy. This was a very welcome decision as this is an extremely important project. However, the Government had not yet provided the funding of €35 million required to complete the project, which will provide a vital lifeline for the town.

“Recently, I facilitated a meeting in Athy with representatives of IDA Ireland who highlighted this project as one of the issues that would help deliver jobs to the town,” she said. “I remind the House that Athy is an unemployment black spot, with a 35% unemployment rate among a certain age cohort. This issue must be addressed.”

Closer to home, Deputy O'Loughlin said Newbridge needs funding for its link road. “Almost all Deputies are familiar with Newbridge, which is a fine town,” she said. “However, despite the rapid growth in its population, which currently stands at almost 30,000, the town can only be accessed by one road which crosses a bridge.”

Heydon seeks update on sports capital funding

Many sports clubs in Kildare and around the country applied for funding under the sports capital programme earlier this year, Fine Gael Deputy Martin Heydon told the Dáil. “They are trying to plan for the next phases of their developments, upgrades and expansions. Will the Taoiseach or the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport tell the House when we can

expect the final decision to be made and when the clubs can expect to be informed of same?" he asked.

In reply, Minister of State Brendan Griffin said there was an unprecedented number of applications to the sports capital programme for 2017. "A total of 2,320 clubs nationwide applied and the value of their applications was €155 million," he said. "Initially there was a budget of €30 million. We were able to increase that to €60 million, €56 million of which will go to local sports capital applications. We expect to be able to announce the allocations in the coming weeks, it is hoped within the next fortnight. The announcement will include a *per capita* allocation for each county, so Kildare will be very well looked after."

O'Loughlin seeks update on Monasterevin Day Care Centre

The future of the Day Care Centre on Drogheda Street in Monasterevin was raised in the Dáil by Fianna Fáil Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin.

She said the Day Care Centre was an important focal point for elderly people, not just those living in the town itself, but also its rural hinterland. In 2014, the centre was closed on health and safety grounds.

"We all know that a respite resource is important so that those with Alzheimer's can engage with their peers and their families can have an opportunity to get on with their lives outside of the significant work that goes into caring for someone with dementia or Alzheimer's," she said. When the centre was closed, she said the Day Care centre moved to the local football club - fair play to the club for putting facilities in place - and the Alzheimer's centre moved to Moore Abbey, which kindly gave over space so that visits could be run on a three-day basis.

"Since then, we have been given a great deal of contradictory information on when the centre would reopen," she said. "No more than ten months ago, we were told that it would be opening this past September. This was especially important from the perspective of Alzheimer Society users. However, the latest news is that the centre will not reopen until 2019. That is far too long for a vibrant community to lack such facilities."

In reply, Minister of State Finian McGrath said the Alzheimer Society of Ireland receives annual funding from the HSE to provide services and supports in Kildare to people with dementia and their families and carers. These services are in addition to the supports provided directly by the HSE. "Monasterevin day care centre services were historically provided from an old GP surgery on Drogheda Street," he said. "In 2014, for health and safety reasons, the HSE unfortunately had to restrict access to this building. The Monasterevin GAA club kindly agreed to host the centre until capital works for the Drogheda Street premises were completed."

The Minister said the HSE met the chairperson and members of the Centre's board on 29 August in respect of funding issues. Unfortunately, the board subsequently took the decision to cease operations with effect from 7 September at the temporary site of the Day Care Centre. "The HSE arranged a plan with the board for the continuation of the service.

Regrettably, the centre was closed while a number of issues were resolved. All service users were notified of the temporary closure and the centre reopened at the GAA club on 25 September.”

The HSE has made funding available for the design phase of the Monasterevin day care centre project, he said. “It is estimated that the design phase will be completed in the first quarter of 2018. Once it concludes, the HSE will establish the exact amount of funding required from the capital plan for construction. A feasibility study in 2015 suggested a construction cost of €540,000. A project timeline can be developed once the design and costing phases are complete.” He said he would give a guarantee that he would go back to the Minister, Simon Harris, and ask him to address these issues, in particular the delays involved. “I will also bring this to the attention of senior people in the HSE,” he added.