

**Urban Demographic Change in Ireland:
Implications for the GAA Club Structure**

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Acknowledgements

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Foreword

Ireland has undergone a great deal of transformation in recent times; these have affected every fabric of our society, including that of the GAA. *'With the dawn of the new millennium, we have recognised that there have been huge social, economic and demographic changes that require self examination and critical analysis'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 3). With this in mind, the headquarters of the GAA requested the Leinster Council (the governing body of the GAA in Leinster), to carry out an investigation into the changing demographic nature of Leinster's urban areas and how this will affect club structures. These changing demographics are affecting the GAA clubs in these areas, and thus, there needs to be an inquiry into the impacts, consequences and possible solutions of such changes. This is the primary focus of this thesis. As Ireland is becoming increasingly urbanised, the GAA understand that it is essential to monitor the changing situation, and to thus take the necessary action to ensure the organisation maintains its popularity nationwide. According to MacNamee, the GAA has traditionally been *'weakest where the population is increasing'* (MacNamee Report, 1971), and thus in a rapidly urbanising society there needs to be steps need to be taken to ensure the preservation of a high standard on the playing field. The association is held very closely to many Irish hearts, and it is considered too valuable an asset in Irish life, culture and sport to be neglected. It would be a high price to pay as a consequence of our negligence to adapt, understand and examine the demographic shift that has been occurring recently and continues to transpire.

The thesis will follow a series of steps, which will examine the different issues at hand, and will lastly be drawn together with some general conclusions. It will follow these steps; firstly in chapter one there will be an introduction to GAA, which will provide the background to the association and its current status. A literature review will follow on from this in chapter two. It will explore the relevant writing on this issue, spanning from an extremely broad sporting and population examination, to one more focused specifically on Ireland and the GAA. Next will be the methodology chapter where I will be discussing the ways in which the research has been carried out. It will be a run through of the methods used, people encountered and problems experienced along the journey. Chapter four will focus on the research used and will

be broken into three sections. Firstly, urban demographic change in Leinster will be investigated, and the reasons for the choice of the target towns will be revealed. Secondly, each town or city will be examined individually and in greater detail. Specific population figures and current club situations will be analysed, including indebt interviews with people involved in those areas. Recommendations for the future of the GAA will be provided for each town. The third research section is a case study. It is based around an interview with an individual who occupied a major role in the setting up of a new GAA club in a rapidly urbanising area. The final chapter will outline the conclusions that have been formulated and detail recommendations for the future of the GAA in the urban environment.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The exact origins of the games predate recorded history. The legend of Cu Chullainn provokes the image of a powerful man with hurl in hand. Elements of the Brehon laws indicate that the games were regulated as far back as the eighth century. These indicate that the GAA is an intrinsic part of our past, in that it is woven into our legends and laws. Foreign visitors to Ireland as long ago as the seventeenth and eighteenth century '*noted that hurling and football occupied an important place in the social life of the community*' (www.gaa.ie).

November 1st, 1884 was the date of the foundation meeting of the GAA, which took place in Hayes Hotel in Thurles, Co. Tipperary. This day has been recorded in many books and from it has stemmed the largest sporting organisation in Ireland. The venue was the billiard room of the hotel, and the group of men were; Michael Cusack, Maurice Davin, James K. Bracken, P.J O’Ryan, John McKay, John Wyse Power and Thomas Mc Carthy. Maurice Davin was elected as the first president of the association and Archbishop Croke became the first patron of the association. Davin noted that '*there are no rules for either hurling or football and they are often dangerous*' (www.terracetalkireland.ie), and so they set about formulating rules to revise the Irish games and open it up to all the men of Ireland. 'Gaelic Athletic Association Preservation and Cultivation of our National Pastimes' was the original name, it became abbreviated to 'Cumann Luthchleas Gael' or, the 'Gaelic Athletic Association'. Two of the founding members were journalists, Cusack, being one of these wrote an article for 'United Ireland' and 'The Irishman' wherein he put forward the argument for the growth of the GAA. They generated great publicity between them and with this aid according to Cusack '*the association swept the country like a prairie fire*' (www.gaa.ie).

It is important to note that this was a very difficult time in Irish history. The famine had left many deep wounds on the nation. '*The emigrant ship was taking the flower of the nations manhood into exile; the survivors at home were engaged in a life or death struggle for their lands and homesteads*' (www.terracetalkireland.ie). At the time there was strong political, economic and cultural oppression for the people in Ireland. The bleak situation posed many challenges to the revision and development of the

GAA as an organisation. Despite the odds, the GAA began to grow. In January 1885 the rules were put in place and although they have changed to a certain degree they are the foundation stone for today's games. The first game took place under these rules between Cavan and Kilkenny on February 15th 1885 in a football match. In that year, dozens of matches were played, and it was in 1886 that the county committees were introduced. The first All-Ireland hurling and football championships took place in 1887 in which twelve counties entered. It was in 1888 that rule 21 came into existence stipulating that members of the British Crown Forces were banned from participating in the GAA. This rule has since been eradicated in 2002. The games grew stronger over the years, however they experienced difficulties during the civil war years. Matches were not played, many of the members were interned including the then GAA president James Nolan, and the GAA was banned by the British government after the 1916 rising. This brought about an extremely testing period for the Association. However, with the end of the civil war the GAA once again prospered and many would say that it was instrumental in reuniting the country. The GAA has since grown from strength to strength throughout the nation.

Today there are over 2,800 clubs with over 800,000 members in the island of Ireland and Croke Park *'is one of the finest sports stadiums in Europe'* (Cronin, 1999; 3). This is a far cry from a handful of men in a billiards room. The GAA is undoubtedly the strongest and largest sporting association in Ireland, and has only reached this status due to the relentless voluntary work over the years. It is regarded as being *'omnipresent within Irish society...this relates to it being very visible throughout the length and breath of Irish society'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 69). GAA grounds can be seen in every corner of the country from large urban areas to the very smallest rural communities. The GAA's main focus is on the development of hurling, football, handball and camogie throughout the land, in addition to this it aims to encourage the growth of the Irish culture. It aspires to *'support activities which enrich the culture of the nation and further Gaelic ideal, including the Irish language and Irish music and dance'* (www.gaa.ie). The sports have maintained an amateur status over the years and are run on a voluntary basis. Without the tireless work and dedication of thousands of men and women the association would never have reached its current level.

The GAA is often associated with the Irish identity. It is not only remarkably popular in Ireland, but is played in distant locations. It reaches the far corners from Australia to America, and from Asia to the UK. It draws Irish and non-Irish people in, and is played as a celebration of the Irish identity. Perhaps most importantly, the GAA has provided individuals with a sense of place and a sense of pride. Like many sports *'it provides meaningful activity for individuals by allowing them to express themselves and to acquire stable personal identities, thereby integrating them into the structure of society and it stabilises the social order by reinforcing common norms and values'* (Hargreaves, 1982; 2). Over the last 120 years the GAA has been part and parcel of Irish life. Today, all 32 counties have representing teams, and crowds of up to 80,000 flock to the matches in Croke Park during the championship summer months. The GAA has journeyed a long and winding road and needs to be monitored and nurtured in order to ensure its continued success. *'The GAA is now synonymous with community and is an integral part of community life...It is part of the fabric of Irish life'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 77).

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction:

Numerous books, articles, reports and websites have been researched in order to gain a greater insight into this area of study. This review will be broken down into sections in order to ease understanding and to ensure a logical development. There was a limited availability of literature on the specific issue that is being researched, however, many pieces have been included which address the relevant issues. This review begins by examining the broader issues at hand, and eventually becomes more focused as it progresses. Sections to this review will be divided as follows:

- there will be a look at sport in society and the importance of the role that it plays
- general trends in population will be examined from a large scale
- urbanisation as a major feature of the modern world and Ireland will be discussed
- the 'sense of place' will be looked into to establish its importance
- significance and identity within the GAA is analysed
- the impact of population on clubs will be addressed.

Sport:

'I believe that sport, all sport, is one of the few bits of glue that holds our society together...where one can learn how to win and how to loose' (New York Times 1971). Sport is undoubtedly one of the most influential bodies on the face of the earth. Millions of people throughout the globe participate in sporting activities around the world on a daily basis. Sport is *'an important arena for the construction of certain identities'* (Bairner, 2001; 1). For many people it is in a sporting context that they have discovered the capacity of not alone their physical body but also of their personality. It is something that can become a huge part of their lives for which they will go to extremes in order to achieve success. Sport has the ability to shape and mould peoples personalities. It is something that builds debt and character. Its

capacity to reach out and touch the lives of so many people throughout the globe is unquestionable.

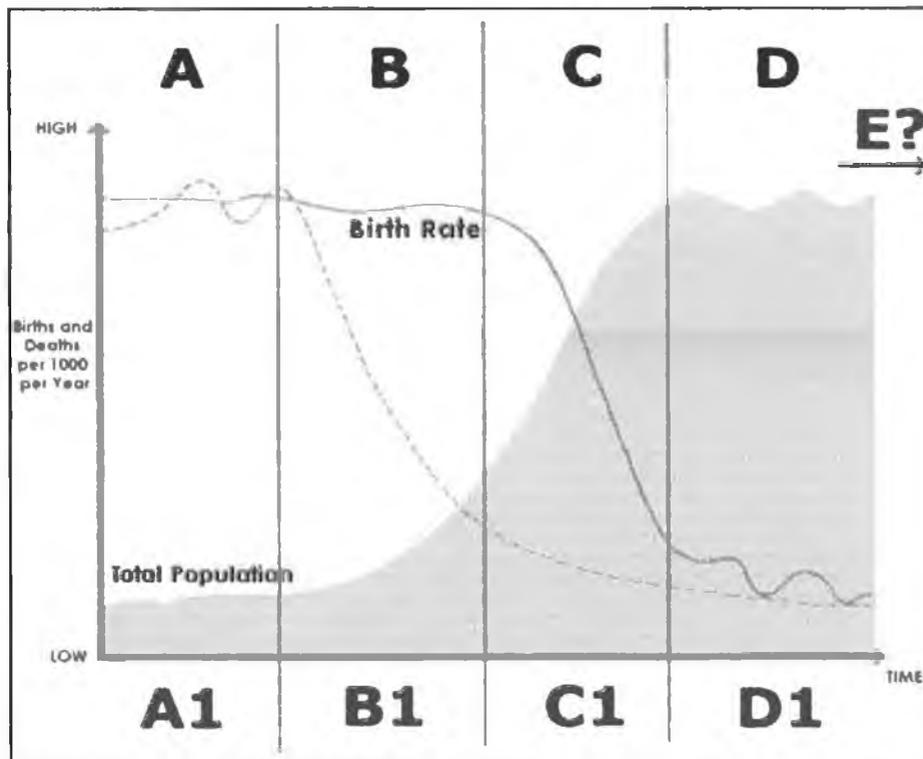
All of these are fitting descriptions for what sport has become to signify in this modern world. It is now a medium through which people can express themselves, their passion and emotion, and many may argue that no clearer is this displayed than on the GAA grounds throughout Ireland. *'Sport is about human development...it is good for the individual, good for communities, good for the nation'* (Fr. Healy, Director of C.O.R.I., 2001). This has been true regarding the GAA in Ireland and the development of the nation. It has been a major actor in the growth of our country and has given a social cohesiveness that would have otherwise been difficult to discover. It offers people a chance to come together and participate in healthy activity that ultimately builds character and strength. Individuals may be involved in two ways (Kenyon, 1973). He subdivided involvement into "primary involvement" which refers to actual participation, and "secondary involvement" which refers to all other forms of participation. In a GAA context, primary involvement includes all those who are playing the sports, and secondary involvement is those who are coaching, working with the GAA, supporters and spectators on the television, etc. *'In the case of sport...skills and knowledge are often obtained by means of formal instruction'* (Loy, Kenyon and McPherson, 1981; 29). The GAA is run mostly on a volunteer status, the coaches and mentors throughout the country have shared a wealth of information to players which they in turn can pass on to the next generation. This passing on of valuable skills and information is essential for the continued survival of the games in the country.

Perhaps most importantly sport can provide a guide map to the journeys yet to be encountered by the youth. It sets out routes, some which should be followed and others avoided. It directs many along the right path, be it in the form of a Canadian ice hockey team or a small hurling team in Co. Cork. A sense of conduct, fair play and responsibility is passed on. For the building of character it is necessary to have *'trainers of character...who used the games field as the medium of moral indoctrination'* (Mangen, 1987; 71 from Bairner, 2001; 139-140).

Population:

This thesis aims to look at the increases in population of certain areas and the impact this has, if any, on participation rates in GAA clubs. The population of the world is increasing in general at present and it is important to monitor these trends at a global and national level. The United Nation's population division has projected a global population of 8.04 billion for the year 2025 and 9.37 billion for 2050. These are huge increases that are expected, and Ireland in a small way is contributing to these figures. The Demographic Transition Model (figure 1) may be used to demonstrate where Ireland fits into the worldwide changes in population.

Figure 1: The Demographic Transition Model:



(www.kesgrave.suffolk.sch.uk/Curric/geog/dtm.html)

The Demographic Transition Model is a graph that attempts to display population change throughout the world. Many people would be in agreement in saying that Ireland is currently in the third stage of this model. In this stage, birth rates are falling and so too are death rates. The population is rising (presently at 3.9 million); the

national increase was 8% from 1996 to 2002. The rate of natural increase rose by over a quarter since the 1991-1996 intercensal period. There has been a decrease in family size that may be attributed to the *'urban industrial society in which the desire for, and possibly the economic value of, large families has decreased'* (Hornby and Jones, 1980; 8). Some of the reasons for this decrease include; increased access to contraception, more women are career orientated and, larger families are no longer the 'norm'. This leads us to believe that as well as there being an increase in population, there is a change to the family structure that will affect society as a whole. There is also the recent increase in the rate at which the world is urbanising, and this is an issue that needs to be addressed and examined in further detail.

Urbanisation:

In order to understand the changes in Ireland that have been occurring with new trends in demographic flows, it is important to look at urbanisation on the global scale so as to gain a greater understanding. *'Urbanisation in developed countries has been closely associated with industrial expansion, agricultural change and the development of modern transport networks'* (Hornby and Jones, 1980; 49). Urbanisation has swept the world and affected everywhere in some degree. Urban centres have mostly grown from trading places, nodal points and administrative centres of the years gone by. *'Urbanisation is characterised by high population densities and high densities in the use of primary energy'* (RIVM Report). Today the size of them may be attributed to the modernisation of any society, and Ireland is no exception.

Before the industrial revolution the face of the globe was very different to the way it is today, *'after the industrial revolution cities became the engines for economic growth'* (RIVM Report). Numbers increased in urban areas after the medieval period but it was at the time of the industrial revolution that most of the people began residing in a urban dwellings. At this time people were needed in mass numbers to man the machines of the industrial period. This was to be the turning point for the way we live today. There was great demand for people in the factories, and so they moved in their thousands to the towns. This brought about a decline in the traditional rural community to a certain extent, and it also brought about the evolution of the

towns and cities, as we know them today. *'Economic changes occurred first in Western Europe and were accompanied by the transfer of workers from agricultural to industrial and service occupations, which resulted in the transfer of people from rural to urban areas'* (Hornby and Jones, 1980; 49). The level of people living in urbanised areas is expected to continue to increase. Levels of urbanisation in Ireland have been increasing rapidly particularly in the Leinster region. This will be discussed later in the research section.

Place:

There needs to be a sense of understanding of the landscape, especially when it is sport that is being discussed. This research will be looking into the possibility of the formation of new clubs throughout Leinster. With new clubs comes new grounds, this is why understanding how people relate to their landscape of sport is required.

Many geographers are of the opinion that geography is all about the landscape, and according to John Bale comments that it *'seems reasonable to assume that geographers might be the most likely group of scholars to have addressed the landscape of sport'* (Bale, 1994; 3). Places have the ability to impact on people's emotions. *'Topophilia – literally a love of place – assumes many forms, varies in intensity and strength of emotional response'* (Bale, 1994; 121). This notion can often be felt around Ireland when people discuss their love of the land, and in many cases this can be associated with their playing field and club. This attachment to the sports landscape or the club is an important issue to keep in mind while thinking of establishing new clubs. The affection for the land is not something that occurs overnight. It is something that develops and gradually becomes more meaningful. *'Sport landscapes do matter... in many ways they contribute to our quality of life'* (Bale, 1994; 2). This fondness for the land is not inbuilt in people, and thus may pose problems if there was to be an emergence of new clubs without great consideration.

GAA:

As already discussed in the introduction, the GAA has had a huge impact on life in Ireland. The significance of the GAA, and at the role that it plays in Irish society by creating a national identity is important and requires addressing. *'While the GAA is seen as being primarily a sporting organisation, it was also acknowledged as being responsible for generating a huge level of pride in local communities and in Irish identity'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 68). The GAA today reaches the four corners of the country, and indeed the world. It carries with it an enormous sense of what it is to be Irish, and this originates from the clubs. *'One of the main strengths of the association is the fact that its games, competitions and structures are centred on local identity, building hierarchically from club, through county and province, to a sense of national identity'* (Strategic Review, 2002; 83). The GAA promotes its sports at all levels, and this is not only to enjoy the sports for what they are, but also to celebrate the Irish culture. *'It appears that the primary role of the GAA in modern Irish society...is to express Irish culture through the promotion and development of Gaelic games'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 62).

The GAA like other sports has the ability to form a common bond among people with similar interests, and it has a powerful mode of displaying this. *'While the message of the politician or writer may slowly be spread across the nation, distilled and retold, the experience of sport is available to all. Ideas of identity are quickly formed and are widespread'* (Cronin, 1999; 19). Many would agree that the games are enjoyed as much off the pitch as on it. *'The games induce a great feeling of fraternity through a combined passion, a common language, an enjoyment of physical endeavour, of a pint after the match and of friendly rivalry'* (Cronin, 1999; 72). It is argued that the GAA can act as a catalyst for bringing a community together, and that it has its very own *'symbolic dialogue'* (Dunning, 1971; 23). It can generate an *'identification with a specific place...and pride in ones locality'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 77). The GAA has greatly impacted the cultural lives of the Irish on many levels and through various forms.

Club:

'The club has always been the corner-stone of GAA activities' (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 127). The club is the beginning of many children's lifetime involvement with the GAA. It is a place of growth, learning, activity and friendship. It is important that it continues to be such a place and is *'probable that strong club units will provide the main foundation for the growth and progress of the association in the twenty first century'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 127). The changing demographic structure of Ireland currently is presenting many challenges for the clubs. The decline in the rural areas in Ireland has left many clubs struggling for players and volunteers and has in some cases resulted in the amalgamation of clubs *'in an attempt to provide adequate standards for good players'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 128). On the other hand is the existing clubs in the urban areas of Ireland and particularly Leinster that have been experiencing a surge in population growth and do not have the structures to cope with these numbers. The most worrying aspect of the urban population influx is the possible loss and fall out of players if the association is not providing them with adequate facilities. This is why the GAA needs to look into the setting up of new clubs in such areas so as to ensure that it remains the largest sporting association in Ireland for many years to come. *'County committees must take an active role in developing new clubs particularly in emerging urban areas... the association's aim should be to maximise the number of viable sustainable clubs in each county'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 129). It is vital that there are clubs available that have the ability to cater for the large numbers of children in these areas. They must *'ensure that there are sufficient competitive teams at all levels to provide all potential players in the area with the opportunity to play Gaelic games'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 128).

Parish rule is a rule that applies in many of the counties. It stipulates that an individual must play with the parish within which they are living. This rule has in the past served the association very well, however in recent times this is being questioned. In areas that have and are experiencing a huge growth in population the parish rule may no longer be *'universally appropriate [and] flexibility in the interpretation of this rule*

will be required' (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 127). The *'importance of the club in progressing and promoting local identity'* (Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Strategic Review, 2002; 127) needs to be maintained and encouraged, and therefore appropriate action must be taken in order to ensure its development into the future.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

For the purpose of the research, in depth knowledge of the study area was required. In order to become more familiar with the areas, information was gathered that would provide a broad introduction. The internet provided a good source of basic data surrounding Leinster and the major towns within. The Central Statistics Office was useful in providing valuable statistical information regarding the populations of the counties and major towns. At this point it was also important to become familiar with the exact location of these areas, and particularly the towns. Maps provided a visual aim in understanding the landscape, topography and size of the study areas and this assisted greatly in coming to terms with the towns as individual and unique places. A combination of this information provided the fundamentals in order to become familiar with the study area, and proved to be of vital importance for the continuation of the research.

It was now imperative that as much as possible literature as possible was gathered and read. This literature varied greatly. It began examining from a very broad angle that initially looked at some of the issues of sport, population and urbanisation, this information was gathered from books, articles, and the internet. The remaining literature was more finely tuned into the specific focus of the research, and examined issues of demographic change in Ireland, the impact of the GAA on the community and the nature of the club structure. Much of this data was found on the form of reports commissioned by the government, the GAA and independent planning agencies. All of the county boards were contacted and provided a list of their clubs and this facilitated the familiarisation process. This mixture of reading greatly improved the scope of knowledge on the topic and allowed a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.

The Leinster Council development committee hold a meeting monthly in order to discuss issues that need to be addressed regarding the GAA. This research is of great interest to the committee and so a meeting with these people was arranged and the venue was the Leinster Council's Headquarters, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. A representative from all of the counties in Leinster is requested at these meetings and it

was important that they became familiar with the report. A presentation to the development committee to ensure they understand the research proposed and also to introduce myself as the researcher. Contact details for these individuals were gathered, in order to facilitate the flow of information.

At this point the specific towns/cities were chosen that would be receiving particular attention. These include: Carlow, Celbridge, Naas, Kilkenny, Portlaoise, Longford, Drogheda, Dundalk, Navan, Tullamore, Athlone, Mullingar, Wexford and Wicklow. Having decided on the towns/cities (called 'target towns'), the next step was to contact all of the development officers in order to identify the most appropriate people to speak with. A list of people to contact was formulated and they were contacted one by one in order to set up interviews. An interview method was chosen which would enable the interviewee to voice their opinions in an unrestricted manner. The interviews would consist of open-ended questions designed to encourage the interviewee to speak about the relevant issues in their own respective areas. The interviews took place mostly in the aforementioned towns throughout Leinster and were held in the interviewee's workplaces, households, GAA clubs and local coffee shops. A meeting was also set up with a town planner by the name of Eamon Printer, in Dublin who was previously employed by the GAA. Mr. Printer provided some valuable and relevant information. With the interviews completed, the information needed to be transcribed. This process was very time consuming, however, it was highly important for purposes of analysis.

On completion of gathering all the data, it was then time to begin analysing the information. The location of the existing clubs and also the location of the growth zones in these areas needed to be identified. Extracting the important, relevant information from the interviews was then critical. Interviewee's had vast knowledge of their applicable areas and this was required by the author in order to gain an in depth insight. The many individual cases had their own unique characteristics such as physical boundaries, parish rule etc, that needed to be taken into consideration.

This process did not run smoothly from beginning to end as different problems were encountered along the way. One obstacle came in the form of literature. There was an abundance of literature available that detailed the GAA's history and evolution.

However, there was a lack of extensive information dedicated exclusively to demographic changes and its implications for club structures. This was a small problem, yet on the other hand it meant that the issues being dealt with in this thesis would be new and original.

Another aspect of the research that posed problems was the timing and coordination of the interviews. Phone calls had approximately a 30% success rate as a means of contacting people, and this became frustrating at times. The next step was arranging to meet the interviewees at times that were suitable for both parties. Lastly, when it comes to dealing with people there is always an element of human error. This came in the form of individuals forgetting prearranged meetings, not returning phone calls and also the mis-interpretation of meeting points. This part of the research required patience. The author's persistence however, eventually paid off.

Chapter 4 - Research

A - Urban Demographic Change in Leinster and Identification of Target Towns:

Within Ireland, it is Leinster that is experiencing the greatest increase in population (especially in the urban towns). All of the provinces have experienced a growth in population, however, Leinster has been the greatest.

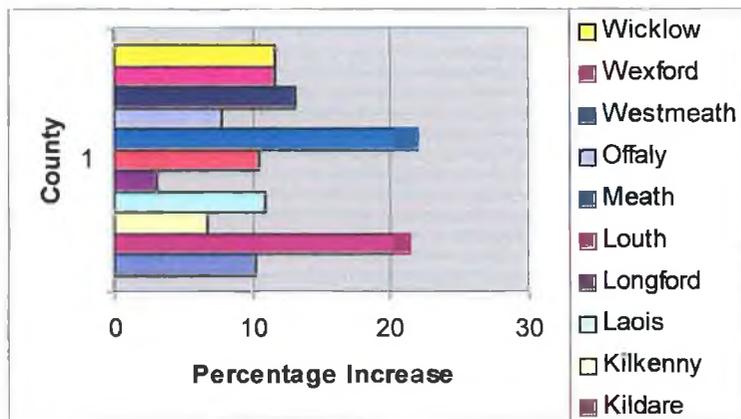
Figure 2: All provinces increase 1996-2002:

PROVINCE	% RISE	POPULATION 2002
Leinster	9.4%	2,105,449
Connacht	7.1%	464,050
Munster	6.5%	1,101,266
Ulster	5.3%	246,571

(Central Statistics Office, 2002)

Presently in Leinster the population is equal to over half of the Republic of Ireland's total population, and it has recorded the highest percentage and absolute increase in the State. *'Analysis of demographic trends since 1926 reveals that Leinsters share of the overall population is continuing to increase while the share of the other three provinces has declined over the same period. In the absence of strategic policy intervention such as the National Spatial Strategy, this trend is set to continue'* (Planning and Policy Report, 2002; 3). The level of increase of population in Leinster (180,747) was nearly six times that experienced in Connacht (30,819) in the same period between 1996 and 2002. Possible impacts of this disproportional provincial increase of population for the GAA include providing adequate clubs and facilities to cater for the rise in numbers that has occurred. There needs to be an *'ease of access should the popularity of the games continue'* (Planning and Policy Report, 2002; 3).

Figure 3: Percentage Population Increase at County Level in Leinster 1996-2002:



Every one of the 26 counties in Ireland experienced a rise in population between the period of 1996 to 2002. As can be seen in the chart it was Meath and Kildare that recorded the greatest population increases, rising by 22.05% and 21.48% respectively. The greater Dublin area (Dublin, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow) accounts for almost 40% of the total population of the country. Laois, Louth, Westmeath, Wexford and Wicklow all experienced a growth of over 10%, with Offaly and Kilkenny growing by over 6% and Longford recording the smallest growth of 3.1%. The growth pattern here indicates that those counties closest to Dublin are experiencing the highest increases in population. These counties are considered as part of a commuter belt which stretches out from Dublin along all of the national roads of Leinster and thus the expansion of population outwards. *‘Dublin is all over the place these days, with its entrails spilling out into Leinster...At the rate things are going...Dublin will occupy a land area equivalent to Los Angeles but with less than a quarter of its population’* (Irish Times, 26/4/03). Dublin’s commuter belt has been expanding for many years and is continuing to do so; within Leinster this growth may be described as *‘the spreading stain of Dublin’* (Irish Times, 5/5/03). In a study undertaken by Eamon Printer, 2002 it was indicated that the increasing and continued urbanisation of Leinster will lead to larger settlements getting larger, smaller settlements declining, overheating and an overall decline in the quality of life. These are some of the issues that need to be considered and addressed before it becomes too late.

The towns in the east are experiencing phenomenal levels of growth especially those that are within commuting distance of Dublin. With the increasing urbanisation of the country it is also important not to forget that the rural population is in constant decline, as people are opting to live in the larger towns and cities. The rural population downturn is a major challenge that faces the future of the GAA and should not be neglected. However the changing demography of Leinster in the towns assures a different type of test for the association.

The towns that have been chosen for this report are from all the counties in Leinster excluding Dublin. The reason for the exclusion of Dublin is two-fold. Firstly, it has been examined in the GAA Strategic Review of 2002, and this would lead to a major overlap of information. Secondly, Dublin would need to be studied exclusively on its own, as it is such an expansive area to cover. The 'target towns' have been chosen due to their common characteristics and attributes. They include: Carlow, Celbridge, Naas, Kilkenny, Portlaoise, Longford, Drogheda, Dundalk, Navan, Tullamore, Athlone, Mullingar, Wexford and Wicklow. All of these towns (or city in the case of Kilkenny) have a population of over ten thousand people, except for Longford. Ten thousand people in a given area became the cut-off point for the study, as this would ensure that the major towns in Leinster would be examined. The reason Longford's inclusion, despite it does not have a population of over ten thousand, is due to the fact it is the largest town in Longford (population of 7,937) and, therefore, it is important that it is examined. All of these towns have been experiencing a growth in population, some more so than others and therefore it is imperative that the implications for the GAA in these areas are treated as a priority. These 'target towns' will be now looked at and discussed individually based on interviews conducted with individuals who have a firm knowledge of these areas.

the west of the town has remained up until recently largely undeveloped, however, it has seen an increase of population of nearly 21% in the small period from 1996 to 2002. In this area *'further growth seems likely based on the number of planning permissions granted'* (Irish Times; 7/5/03). According to the County Carlow development plan 2002, they projected the population for the town to grow to 24,000 by the year 2011.

Carlow town has four GAA clubs, and they are: Aisce (south east), Carlow Town Hurling Club (north east centre), Eire Og (south centre) and O'Hanrahans (north east). With the exception of Carlow Town Hurling Club they all cater solely for Gaelic football, and they all have their own facilities except for Aisce. Tommy O'Neill is the county secretary, and he was recommended as a knowledgeable contact in this area by Jim English, the Development Officer, Leinster Council. Aisce, Mr. O'Neill described as an intermediate football club and *'would be the weaker club in the town'*. Eire Og is a *'strong senior club in the town with good facilities'*, and O'Hanrahans is the other football club in the town. On the outskirts of the town are three other clubs; Palatine hurling and football club on the Hackettstown road, Ballinacarrig to the south west of the town centre and Kilbride which is on the main Wexford road. Mr. O'Neill has seen the *'significant changes'* that have occurred in the towns over the years. *'Developments are on all sides of the town [especially] the east side of the town'*. When asked about the possibility of setting up a new club in the town Mr. O'Neill believed that this would be a good idea, *'for the numbers of children that are in the town there aren't enough clubs'*. He described how some of the clubs such as Eire Og would have two teams at many levels and *'that's a sign that there are too many people there for what teams are there'*. He believes that *'there's certainly not too much [clubs]'*. However, he does see a problem with regard to the setting up of a new club. *'Its very hard to get manpower...to set up a club, those kind of people are scarce'*. Another element which he noted in the town is the level of commuters who are *'only sleeping here'*, and are therefore *'not getting involved'*. Carlow is one of the towns that has a major commuting population and *'the people who are commuting are not playing anywhere, they're busy...its only when their families come along they get involved in a club'*.

Other sports in the area *'certainly have an impact...and what we would hope is that we get our share and hold onto our share'*. Mr. O'Neill believes that this *'is down to the clubs, how active, successful and how well run they are'*. His fear for the games lies in holding on to these numbers, *'if you have a weak club-that's dangerous, [the children] are not being properly catered for and they'll go play soccer or rugby'*. Hurling in the town is very limited with only the one club, and *'it tends to be the weaker relation around here...it doesn't get the loyalty or support that it should'*. When questioned about whether any of the clubs are suffering low numbers was not an issue but it was the lack of manpower that arose as the major problem, as Mr. O'Neill noted many people *'stand back and let someone else do it'*. He is of the opinion that there *'certainly should be space [for an] underage system and structure of a club'* however once again finding the people to commit to this would prove very difficult. As he appropriately put it *'it's easier to be a hurler on the ditch than a hurler on the field'*.

Carlow town's population is set to keep on rising for the time being. The issue of improving the current numbers in such an expanding town is vital. It is imperative that the clubs in Carlow town are reaching out and drawing in as many people as possible so that there is no fall out in the numbers playing, and also, so as to maintain and increase the standard of the games. The setting up of an underage club system would be highly recommended especially to cater for hurling so as to ensure the town is providing adequate GAA opportunities for its constant rising population.

County Kildare- Celbridge:



(Source: Ordnance Survey Ireland)

County Kildare's population stands at 163,995 in the 2002 census. This is an increase of over 21% since 1996. It is second to Meath in the whole of Ireland for the largest growth rate. Celbridge is located in the east of Kildare and is directly west of Dublin. The targeted population growth according to Kildare County Council is to be 189,426 by the year 2006, this would indicate of an increase of over 15% of its current population in less than four years. Celbridge has experienced one of the highest increases in population of any electoral division in the greater Dublin region since 1996. Its current population is 14,251, and this increased from 11,143 in 1996. This is a rise in population of almost 28%, which is a huge leap in such a short space of time. The town does not have its own development plan with population projections;

nevertheless it can be assumed that the growth of the town will continue into the near future.

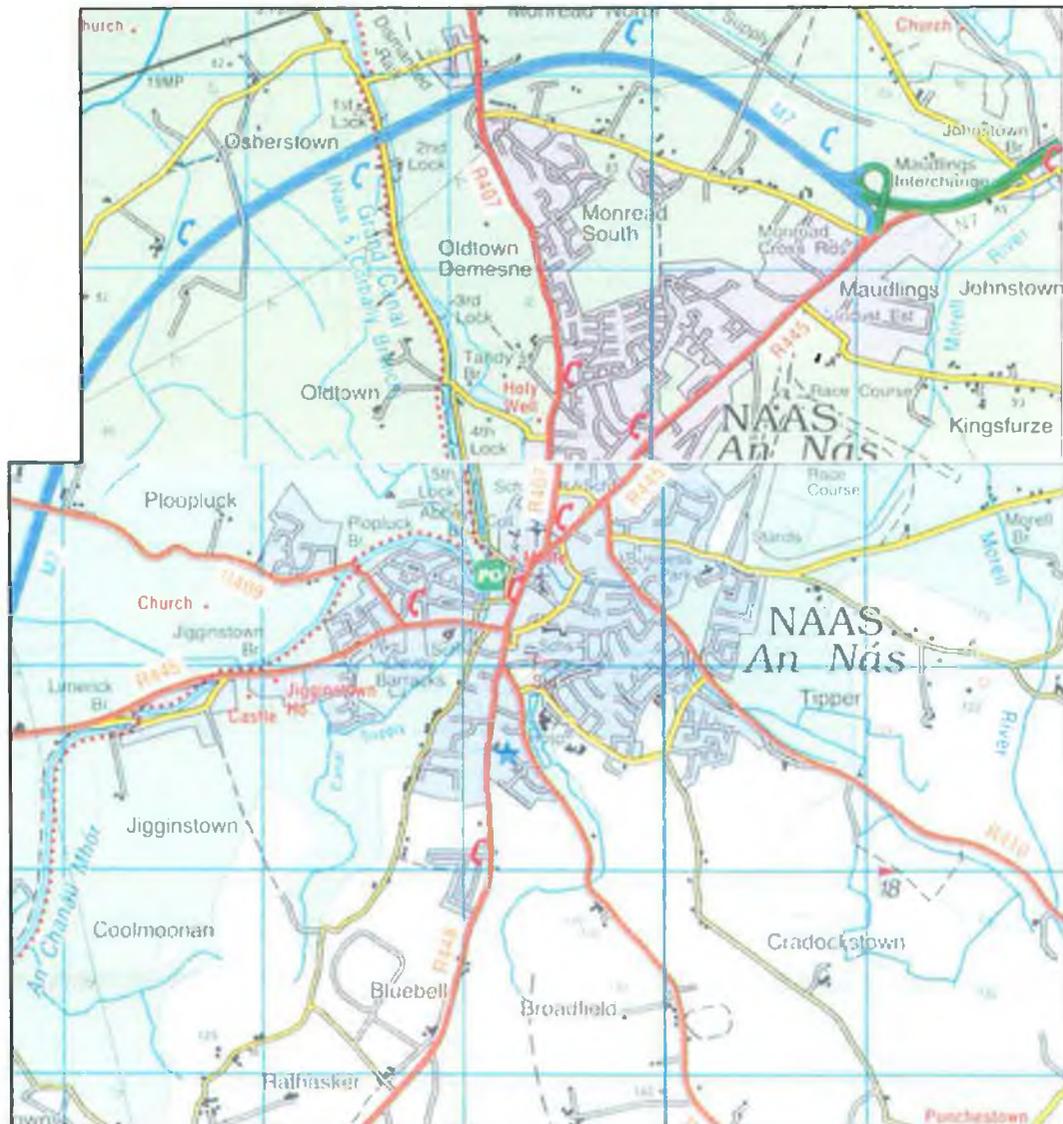
Andrew O'Sullivan was the interviewee in relation to Celbridge. He is currently the chairman of Kildare County Board, and was previously the chairman in Celbridge for six years. The club is located south west of the town. Celbridge GAA club is the only club in existence in the town and according to Mr. O Sullivan it is *'a very big club...putting out in excess of thirty teams between camogie, hurling and football'*. The club has two pitches but *'it's not enough'*, at the moment they're in the process of acquiring another two pitches. It used to be a junior club because *'our place was very small [however it's] a senior club now'* (in both hurling and football). When asked about the introduction of a new club into the area Mr. O'Sullivan did not feel that this would be necessary straight away. *'You have a lot of people coming into the community but very few of those get involved in the club'*. He attributed this to the amount of time it takes for *'the kids to come along'*, and also to *'players moving in but they continue to play with their home clubs'*.

When faced with the question of whether there should be a new club set up in the future, Mr. O'Sullivan stated that *'there would have to be, I would imagine so'*. He felt that at the moment the club is in the process of trying to establish itself. However he did believe that there would be a need for a new club in years down the line to cater for the influx of people. *'I know that the Association needs to get extra clubs into areas of big population but they need to concentrate on the more established towns at present'*. Mr. O'Sullivan foresees some problems with the idea of setting up new clubs. The availability of land is a major concern and he believes that the local authority and the developers should liaise with each other to ensure there is land zoned for amenities. The other major problem according to Mr. O'Sullivan is manpower and *'the huge difficulty with numbers'*; he saw this as *'the most difficult part'*. It appears that the level of children who are involved in the GAA is not being maximised, *'there's plenty of kids, and maybe they could put out more teams and do more if they had the personnel'*. He believes that the *'clubs are stretched to the limit with the numbers they're trying to cope with [and there's] a reluctance to get more in because they cant cope with them'*. At the juvenile level there are two teams at every level, and they are doing *'extremely well'*. There are two full time coaches in Kildare who are

providing a coaching service in schools, and this is a good idea. However, they have to cover a large area and so are quite restricted for time.

Celbridge GAA club has at present a very successful juvenile section and an increasingly improving adult section. This area has experienced a huge population growth in recent years and when the families of these new residents come along adequate facilities will need to be provided for new residents. To ignore the provision that need to be made by the GAA for these children, could lead either to the existing club becoming totally saturated numbers wise, or alternatively the children will be drawn to other sports that will cater for their needs. The GAA needs to strongly consider the establishment of a new club in this area to ensure the popularity of the games continue.

County Kildare- Naas:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

The population of Kildare has increased by over 21% since 1996, and Naas too has contributed to this growing number. Naas has a current population of 18,312. The town has experienced a population growth of over 30% between the period of 1996 to 2002. In the development plan for Naas in 1999, the Council had envisaged a population of 22,000 by 2003. This figure has not yet been reached and the Town Council is currently reviewing its plan. However, it has been growing rapidly and is set to continue. This is a phenomenal growth rate, and in actual figures it has 4,238 more people living there since 1996. Naas is the largest town in Kildare and is located south west of Dublin along the N7 route.

Mick Hoban is the secretary of the Naas GAA club and it was recommended I speak with him in relation to the town. The club is situated presently north east of the town on the Dublin road on the left hand side as one approaches Naas from the capital. They are however moving in two years to the north of the town along the Sallins road, which is the R407. There they will have two adult pitches and two juvenile pitches and a clubhouse. *'Everyone is delighted were going to have a better place than we currently have, its going to be bigger and its going to have better facilities'*. The new location *'will make a big difference [and is] very close to a number of housing estates'*. All around the new club is going to be further developed and so *'there will be quite a large local population'*. Currently, they have 34 teams registered, and many of the juvenile teams have two if not three teams at each grade. They play both hurling and football where the kids *'overlap greatly'*. The camogie is not quite as popular, however, the ladies football has *'got quite strong'*.

When asked about the possibility of a new club in Naas, Mr. Hoban was uncertain, *'my jury is still very much undecided on that one'*. He added that *'we can see that it hasn't hurt Newbridge...they have two very strong clubs'*. Mr. Hoban held many reservations about the setting up of a new club for many reasons. He spoke of the difficulties in getting land, financial aid and the people who were going to do all the work. He also discussed the strong competition in the town from other sports, *'rugby is ferociously strong, the tennis club is very strong, the athletics club is very strong, and soccer is very strong'*. Mr. Hoban was by no way completely opposed to the establishment of a new club and stated that *'if it was to happen and done well it would be a good thing'*. As he saw it *'if the club was to become too big, that you have too many lads and you cant facilitate them and they're stopping playing, then its time for another club'*. He does not feel that it is *'necessary'*, but also says that he does not think it would be *'necessarily a bad thing'*. The size of the club was not a threat to Mr. Hoban, *'I think you can have a big club if it's done well'*. At present *'every age group is operating at the top'* and there is great strength *'coming up'*. He acknowledges *'success can breed success-there will be a lot of demand for spaces'*.

The majority of children in the schools who are playing with the school are playing with the club, and this indicates that they are being well catered for. All of the children with *'the gra to play [should have somewhere that] will facilitate them'*, this

is the bottom line when it comes to providing for the future GAA players. Naas appears to have a well run and organised structure, yet as the numbers in the town continue increasing, this will place added pressure on the club. In setting up a new club *'the big problem would be how to split the town...as the Dublin road is the only sort of geographical divide...and there's a colossal number of people playing with the club from both sides'*. It would be *'a very hard thing to get sufficient adults who are willing to start a new club, to start with nothing from nothing'*. Other clubs are located within a short distance including Kill, which is out the Dublin road (east of Naas), Ardclough near Straffen (north east of Naas), Eadestown (south east of Naas), Two-mile house in Mylerstown, and Raheen who are in Carragh (north west of Naas). There are *'a good few clubs within a couple of miles'*.

The issue of a new club in Naas is one that needs some serious consideration. At present, the children are well catered for but with the population set to keep on rising it is crucial that this issue is given greater attention.

County Kilkenny- Kilkenny City:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

The county of Kilkenny has not had quite the same level of population increase as the likes of Kildare and Meath, yet has still grown by 6.7% since 1996. There are now over 5,000 more people living there and this brings the population of the county to 80,421. Kilkenny city has according to the figures in the census has a population of 22,157. This is made up by three District Electoral Divisions (DED's): Kilkenny No.1 urban (4,858), Kilkenny No. 2 urban (3,736) and Kilkenny rural (13,563). As can be seen from these figures the majority of the population of Kilkenny city is located not in the centre but towards the outskirts. Since 1996 the population of Kilkenny city has risen by 2,011 people and interestingly 1,927 of these people are living in the Kilkenny rural DED. Kilkenny lies along the banks of the River Nore and along the

N10 to the south west of Dublin. The Kilkenny County Council have estimated a growth in the county's population to 85,585 by 2007, and the city is projected to grow also. However, the city's Council has no estimates of this figure as yet.

The development officer with Kilkenny is Barry Hickey and he spoke about the GAA situation in Kilkenny city. There are three senior clubs in the city. These are James Stephens to the south of the town, O'Loughlin Gaels to the east of the town and Dicksboro to the north west of the town. There is also Bennettsbridge, Clara and Dancsfort near-by. Kilkenny operates under the parish rule system, and the city of Kilkenny falls under the one parish that is divided into church areas. *'O Loughlins would have three pitches, Dicksboro have two pitches slightly outside the town [but] James Stephens would need space badly...the others are probably reasonably well catered for but wouldn't mind having another pitch'*. James Stephens are *'in the process of trying to get more ground'*, and would be considered *'a very good club'*. All of the three clubs *'are very good for the first 15, James Stephens would be very strong for second 15, O Loughlin Gaels and Dicksboro would be falling off a bit for the second 15'*. The clubs are playing hurling and football, with the football spanning the winter months and the hurling occupying the summer months, with *'so much camogie as well'*.

A new club forming in the area is not necessarily on the agenda for Mr. Hickey. *'The clubs are there if we can develop the club structures a little bit more'*. He was of the opinion that the numbers are there but are not being harnessed enough by the existing clubs. The clubs need to *'bring on more young people as the population is growing [and] these people are not being fully catered for'*. One of the solutions to this problem according to Mr. Hickey would be that the *'clubs that join the city can be afforded the opportunity in some fashion or another to pull from the city out into their areas'*. This would be good in providing the children with other options for places to play and it would also aid the more rural clubs that are sometimes struggling for numbers. Some of the *'children on the fringe go into school in the town and so play with that area, where they're living probably needs them more so than where they're going to'*.

There are two full time coaches in Kilkenny who teach both hurling and football, one covers the north of the county and the other covers the south. There is a *'good relationship between the county board and the teachers and that's the one thing that has helped...everybody pulling together'*. The county board provides hurls and sliotars to the schools, gives the teachers free tickets to county finals and invites them to dinners, and this ensures a strong rapport. Mr. Hickey emphasised the need for more pitches especially for James Stephens, which is *'curtailed for land'*. Other sports in the city *'don't interfere with us a huge amount'*; one of the reasons for this is that *'Kilkenny win All-Irelands so that does help'*. One way that they are reaching out is by running street leagues, *'we wanted to bring along lads who might never have hurled before to give them a chance...it affords more people the opportunity to play'*. One of the problems they face in Kilkenny city is once again manpower *'it's one of the big issues'*. *'Everybody wants the first 15'* and then after that the interest dwindles.

The population in Kilkenny has certainly increased especially in the environs and this needs to be monitored carefully. If it is the case that people are not being catered for then either *'the clubs should expand their market more'* or, there should be the setting up of a new underage club structure to ensure that there are adequate provisions of facilities for the future generations.

County Laois- Portlaoise:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

At present the population for County Laois stands at 58,732. This figure has risen from 52,945 and thus indicates an increase of almost 11%. Portlaoise is located south west of Dublin along the N7. Its population totals 12,395 people and it comprises of Portlaoise rural (8,913) and Portlaoise urban (3,483). It has experienced a growth of 28.7% between 1996 and 2002. *'The periphery of Portlaoise has been colonised by commuter-belt housing estates, resulting in a 41% increase in population between 1996 and 2002 while the town itself recorded a marginal decrease – a classic example of the "doughnut effect" in planning'* (www.Ireland.com). This indicates a huge level of growth being experienced by the town in its suburbs. *'A recently adopted land use and transportation study envisages Portlaoise's population could*

rise to 35,000 over the next 20 years' (www.Ireland.com). This increase would signify that the population would at least double in this time period.

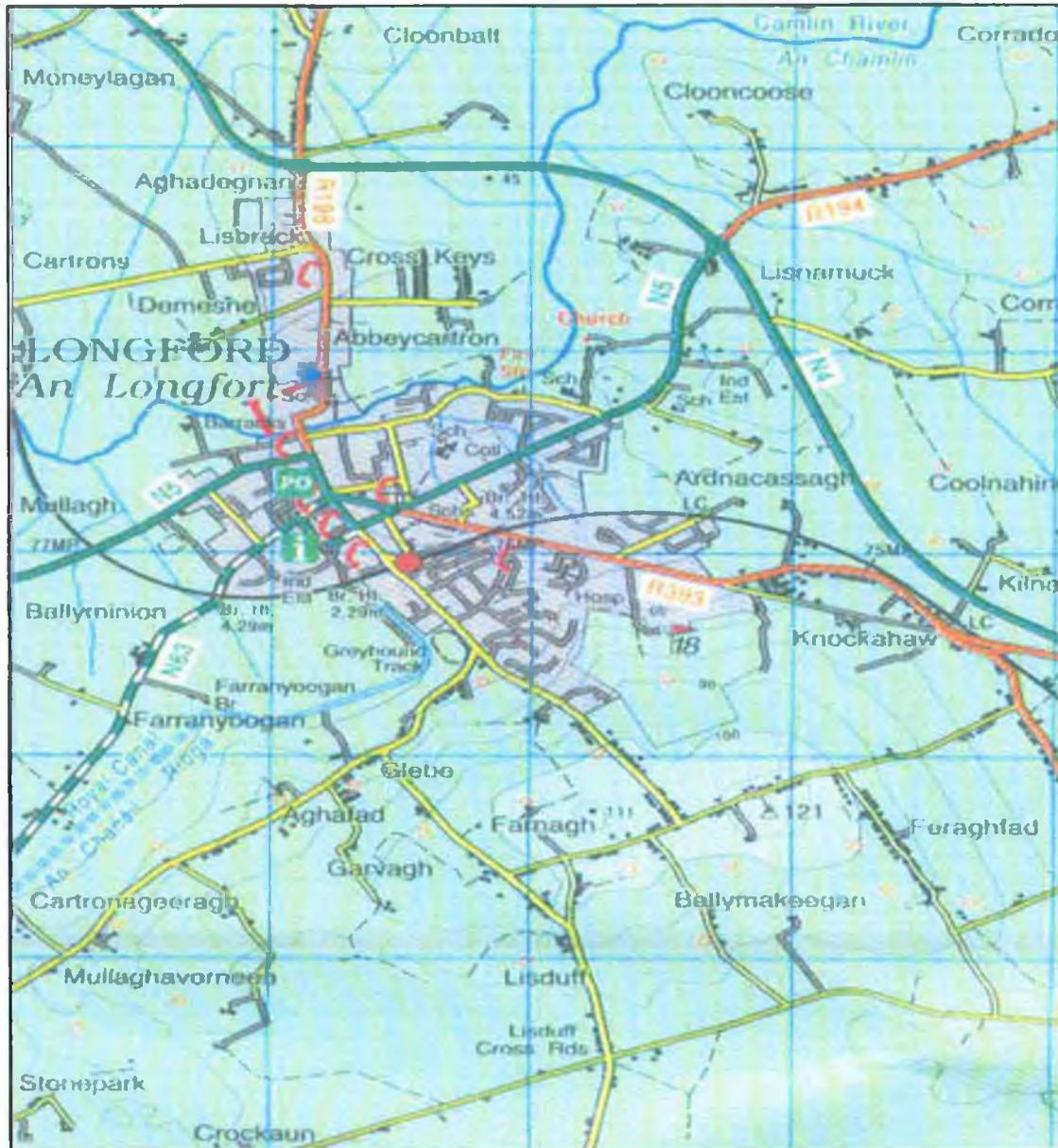
The development officer for Laois in the Leinster Council is Tom O'Loughlin, and he offered to be interviewed. There is only one club in Portlaoise at the moment, and there has been the setting up of another club in the Kilminchy area, on the Dublin side of the town this year, Mr. O'Loughlin feels that *'it will take many years to impact'*. The Portlaoise GAA club is *'very strong'*. Last year alone *'they won senior football, intermediate football, junior football, under 21 and minor, and they won several of the hurling competitions'*. The growing population ensures *'a natural influx of players so the net result is there's huge numbers of people who never get the opportunity to play'*. According to a school survey undertaken by Portlaoise's GAA club in 2002 there are 416 girls and boys registered in 2002 and playing with the club. Results showed that only 4% of the school played hurling for the club, only 13% played hurling and football, and 39% do not partake in any sporting activity. These figures hold very serious implications. *'There are huge numbers of people who never get the opportunity to play...and yet the club is probably one of the most successful in the country which means that there is an acceptable fall out rate in Portlaoise that wouldn't be acceptable anywhere else'*. If this pattern is to continue to repeat itself it will have detrimental effects on the Association. A continuation of this will only impede on the development of the games. *'One of the problems young fellas have is they're associated with a club like Portlaoise that's so successful [and] they don't see much incentive to go to what a lot of people would see as no hoppers'*. People are attracted to the play for the bigger clubs that are well run and have earned plenty of status. The unfortunate situation with it is it may cast shadows over the reality that many are many are not availing of the opportunity to play, *'the big level of activity in Portlaoise is masking the fact that there's so many more out there that are not involved'*. According to Mr. O'Loughlin there needs to be a *'huge effort and reorganisation at juvenile level in Portlaoise to bring in more competition [as] there's a fringe group of players that are not getting any exposure to competition'*.

The idea of setting up a new club in Portlaoise was something that Mr. O'Loughlin sincerely agreed with, *'there's at least scope to set up another two clubs in the town'*. *'Portlaoise is a fantastically well run club [and] I think new clubs wouldn't affect it at*

all'. Mr. O'Loughlin's point was that you can only have 15 on any one team and so there is adequate numbers to cater for another club. He used the example of Rosenallis parish that has possibly 33 or 34 houses and they manage to put out intermediate, junior and juvenile teams every year. One of the problems Mr. O'Loughlin anticipated with the '*rapid*' and '*recent*' growth is the pitch space. Portlaoise have '*superb grounds*', with three playing pitches, but '*anybody else at this stage to start from scratch wont have facilities and would find that they would be very expensive*'. Other concerns Mr. O'Loughlin has with Portlaoise '*the voluntary level from teachers which is no longer available to the same extent as it used to be*'. Coaching in the schools is also another factor that needs to be addressed urgently, as '*it is too broadly based*'. There are two full time coaches who are covering 63 schools in the whole of the county, and due to time restraints and long journeys their time and skills are under great demand and strain.

Portlaoise has an extremely well run and successful club, however, it is clear that Portlaoise town would benefit in the establishment of a new club. The levels that are participating in the club are minimal (only 4% play hurling and 13% play hurling and football). These statistics clearly demonstrate that there should be immediate actions taken to counteract these increasing fall out levels to ensure development of the games well into the distant future.

County Longford- Longford Town:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

County Longford has the smallest population of all of the counties in Leinster. In 2002 its population was 31,127, and this figure rose from 30,166 in 1996. It experienced the smallest rise in population in Leinster of only 3.1%. Longford town is situated north west of Dublin along the N4. The town itself has a population of 7,937. This is made up of four DEDs: Longford No. 1 urban (2,841), Longford No.2 urban (779), Longford rural part (3,279) and Longford rural part (1,038). Although the county's population only increased by 3.1% overall the town of Longford's growth level differed in the fact that it increased by 9.1% from 7,274 to 7,937 in the period of

1996 to 2002. This demonstrated that the county is becoming more urbanised with people tending to locate in the urban rather than the rural. Longford's population as a whole is set to increase to 35,152 by the year 2016, and the town's population is projected to grow to 12,292 in 2009 according to the present draft development plan. If this were to become a reality this would mean an increase in the towns population of almost 55% between 2002 and 2009.

There are three football clubs in Longford town, which all fall under the parish of Temple Michael, this is important, as parish rule is applicable in Longford. Seamus Quinn is the development officer for Longford and he agreed to share his knowledge of the area in an interview. The three clubs are Shroid, Young Grattans and Longford Slashers, and *'Longford Slashers is by far the largest...and it caters for the largest numbers'*. All of these clubs play football and only Longford Slashers cater for hurling as both Shroid and Young Grattans *'wouldn't have the numbers to field a team'*. Shroid is located north east of the town along the R194, Young Grattans is south of the town near to Stonepark in Ballymacormick, and Longford Slashers is in the town itself. Young Grattans in the Ballymacormick area *'is a growing club [as] a lot of building in Longford is moving towards it'*. It is a relatively new club *'maybe in existence 15 years [and so] they are growing'*. Shroid have been established for a *'long while but they are struggling'* at the moment. Longford Slashers *'is the big club in the town'*, it has ample facilities, and it could be said that the other clubs have *'adequate facilities'*. Another major area of development is Melview, which is on the outskirts of Longford town on the north side. *'It has got a rapidly growing population, it has got a school and is zoned for development'*. This is an area that does not at present have a GAA club, and Mr. Quinn reveals that it will be interesting to see *'whether another club will form there, or whether Shroid will go into that area'*.

Mr. Quinn did not agree with the idea of a new club forming in the town, *'at present'*. Shroid being a club that is struggling with regard to numbers should move towards the developing Melview area as, *'Shroid have a very small catchment area...so it would be natural for them to come into Melview'*. He believes that that *'would be the best option'*. Longford Slashers are the only club to be of senior status in Longford as the other two clubs are both junior. *'I never envisage more than three clubs in the Longford environ area'*. What Mr. Quinn would like to see is one or both of the junior

clubs becoming senior before there are thoughts about an additional club in the town. With the population of Longford town he believed that *'they should be attracting a lot more'*, there is a large population and *'they are fielding three teams, whereas places like Dromard with a population of only 700 would be fielding three and four teams'*. He put some of this down to the presence of more competition of other sports in the urban area, there's *'a soccer club in Longford town in the premiership...rugby as well [and] social distractions in Longford town that you wouldn't have in rural areas'*.

One of the problems faced is the *'struggle to get people involved to look after underage teams'*, and it is here where the *'smaller clubs are especially struggling'*. Longford Slashers are fielding one team in all the age categories, and so *'it hasn't got to a stage where they would be fielding two...I don't envisage slasher's growing much—they're saturated, they're probably just fit to cater for the numbers they have at the moment'*. There is coaching in Longford where a group of *'four or five...go into the schools'*. He also noted that the level of involvement of the teachers is becoming *'less and less all the time [who] are interested in the GAA'*. The other issue in Longford town is the availability of pitches as it is *'tight on land'*, and this is currently being discussed with the planning office to *'free up some areas'*.

Longford town does not appear to urgently need new club structures; it however, does need attention regarding *'the constant battle to attract young people to play the games'*. There is according to Mr. Quinn a need to *'market the GAA in County Longford'*, and there also needs to be more of an emphasis placed on the continuation of hurling in the area. Longford town need not panic about its present availability of clubs, however at the same time it needs to be kept a close eye baring in mind the projected growth of almost 55% by 2009.

County Louth- Drogheda Town:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

Louth has currently a population of 101,802; it increased by over 10% between 1996 and 2002. Drogheda is positioned directly north of Dublin along the N1. It has become a major commuting town, as it is within a 30 mile radius of Dublin. At present it has a population of 36,378 and this is made up of seven separate DEDs. Five of these are in Drogheda urban area (Fairgate-10,574, St. Laurence Gate-3,357, Westgate-6,505, St. Peters Part-2,934 and St. Mary's Part-4,938), and the others are in Louth rural area (St. Peters Part-2,611) and Meath Rural Area (St. Mary's Part-5,459). The town's population has sharply increased by over 22% since 1996, and is now projected to grow to 70,000 people by 2020 according to the Drogheda development plan. This would implicate that the population in the town would almost double

within an eighteen-year period, and therefore, would place major strain on all the existing amenities including the GAA.

The development officer for the Leinster Council representing Louth is Thomas O'hEochaidh, and he agreed to share his knowledge of the county. Drogheda has five clubs, and this is '*an indicator that it is served well*'. There are two situated on the southern side of the town, these are Wolfstones (south) and St Nicholas (south west) and three on the northern side, which are Oliver Plunkets (north west), O'Raghallaighs (north) and Newtown blues (north east). Mr O'hEochaidh also noted that '*the boundaries are expanding all the time it has also taken in three other club areas that are being incorporated into and are part of the town*'. A lot of the development is taking place to the south of the town and this is due to its proximity to Dublin. Mr. O'hEochaidh noted that there have been huge '*demographic changes taking place [and that] there's a vast amount of extra people coming*' into the town. '*They use the town initially as a dormitory town*' and it is only when the children eventually come along that '*it kicks in and they become involved*'.

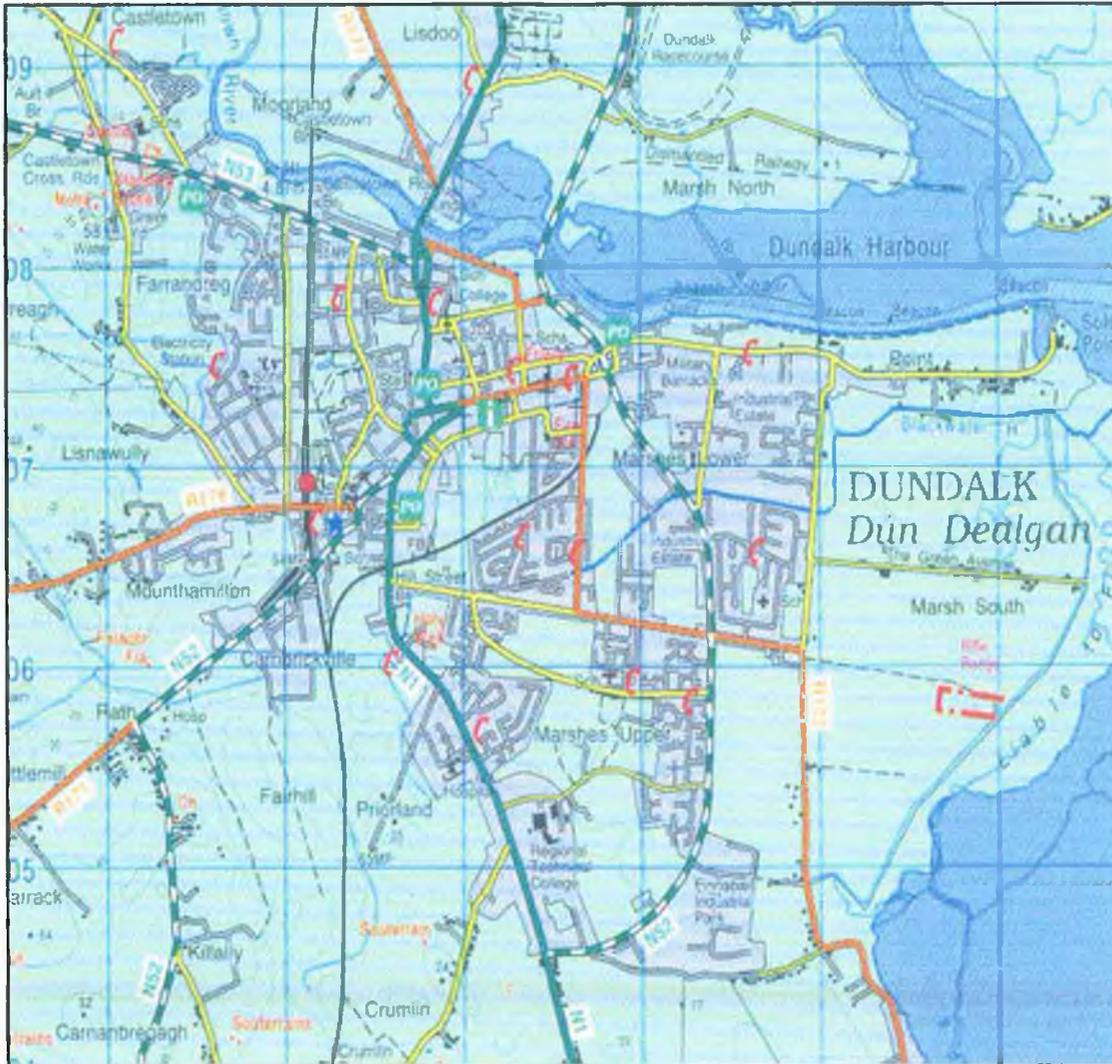
The prospect of new clubs becoming established in the area is quite viable according to Mr. O'hEochaidh. When asked if there is sufficient clubs in the area to cope with the recent influx of people, Mr. O'hEochaidh responded '*I believe no...in my estimation there would be room for another club*'. One of the clubs is struggling to field teams at underage levels '*despite an explosion [of population] in that area*'. The cause of this he points out may be the presence of many '*social problems*' in the area, where people are '*suffering from lack of confidence, a lack of employment opportunities and education interests*'. Mr. O'hEochaidh believes that '*you get the most out of people by challenging them, and channelling their energies into positive action*', and this is what a new club structure could bring about. He explains how the other club in that area, Wolfstones, were experiencing the same problems, and due to great efforts involved '*they certainly are turning the corner*'. Mr O'hEochaidh expressed concerns that '*certainly the existing clubs are not getting to grips with the many hundreds of young people living in the areas*'.

Problems being encountered in Louth according to Mr. O'hEochaidh include the growth of the south Louth and north Meath border area and this is causing ambiguity

surrounding the issue of borders requiring *'the two counties involved to sort it out with each other'*. As land space is becoming more of an issue in the Drogheda town area *'the difficulty would be having a field and facilities to serve a new club because territory is becoming less and less available, it's at a premium'*. If a new club was to be set up in the area, Mr. O'hEochaidh would envisage that the local authorities would *'play their part'* in providing some land. The problem is, in both *'affluent'* and *'disadvantaged'* areas, that many of the children are remaining *'untapped'*. It is essential that the parents be informed of the club structures that are available in their area so as to encourage participation in the games. Coaching is once again a problem in the county with only one full time coach, and this is insufficient. Mr O'hEochaidh questions *'does it have to become a crisis out of all proportion before anything is done?'*. *'The lack of manpower'* is another factor that needs to be contended with, as there are *'those people who are doing all the work will get burnt out very quickly'*.

Dundalk is set to keep on expanding at such a rapid rate that it is critical the issue is looked at immediately. It is imperative that the clubs continue to reach out and draw in the children who are emerging in the town at a great rate. If the population rises to its projected figure of 70,000 by 2020 it is very evident that the GAA clubs and the county board need to sit down and discuss this as a matter of urgency. *'We need to do a lot more than we are doing to keep the traditional support alive'*. There will need to be immediate action taken for the likelihood of the establishment of new clubs, and the more efficient running of the existing clubs.

County Louth- Dundalk Town:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

As has already been mentioned, Louth population has increased by over 10% between 1996 and 2002. Dundalk is the most northerly town in County Louth directly north of Dublin and is located on the coast along the N1. Its population according to the 2002 census is 34,081. This encompasses ten different DED's, seven of which are in Dundalk urban area and three form Dundalk rural area. Dundalk urban area includes: Dundalk rural No. 1 (2,491), Dundalk urban No. 2 (1,070), Dundalk urban No. 3 (1,430), Dundalk urban No. 4 (6,521), Castletown part (1,546), Dundalk rural part (14,225) and Haggardstown part (116). Dundalk rural Area is where Castletown part (1,405), Dundalk rural part (507) and Haggardstown part (4,770) are placed. The town has seen an increase in population of 7.1% since 1996 and is set to continue on this plane. The town's development plan which was last completed in 1991, estimated a

population of 29,892 in 2011. The huge growth was not foreseen, as the projection has already been reached and is continuing to rise in the town.

Thomas O'hEochaidh (GAA development officer for Louth) spoke about the changes that have been occurring in Louth and their possible implications for the GAA club structures. *'There are six clubs in Dundalk and another couple of clubs bordering, those particular bordering areas are under the same influences as the urban areas themselves'*. These clubs are Clanna Gael to the north west, Dundalk Gaels in the centre, Na Piarsaigh in the south, Dundalk Young Irelanders in the south, O'Mahoneys in the east and Dowdalls Hill in the north. *'They are well served club wise'*.

Given the number of clubs that are located in the area, it was with relative ease that Mr. O hEochaidh stated that *'yes, there are enough of clubs in the Dundalk [and] they all have facilities'*. The underage structure is described as *'wonderful...with a number of competitions that are run to cater for the younger people of all ages'*. With regard to Dundalk it does not appear to be the lack of clubs or competitions that is causing the problem. There is a lack in manpower that is an *'on-going problem'* and it appears to be a constant battle. There is a need *'for more active coaching officers to be available'*, and the presence of many social problems persist which makes it *'very hard'* for the clubs to develop. All of the clubs cater for juveniles with the exception of Dowdalls Hill as, *'they never really respond to going out and playing underage'*. Mr. O hEochaidh believes that it is essential to maintain the interest of the players at all levels because otherwise *'the large slice of cake that we got...is going to get smaller as time goes by'*. Other sports, he said, are going into the schools and attracting more and more children and *'we have to try and match that'*. Dundalk is well catered for at club level wise at present, however there needs to be continued support and encouragement for the running of competitions and the continuation of a good juvenile structure as the population increases.

County Meath- Navan Town:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

County Meath has experienced the highest rise in population between 1996 and 2002 across the nation. It recorded an increase of 22%, and brought its population up to 133,936. The county is projected to grow to 161,000 by 2006 and 180,000 by 2011 according to the Meath County Development Plan 2001. Navan is the biggest town in Meath. It is located north west of Dublin along the N3. It has a population of 21,439 made up of three DEDs, two of which are in Navan urban area: Navan urban (2836), Navan rural part (579) and one in Navan rural: Navan rural part (18,024). This area has undergone major demographic transformations as it has grown by over 41% since 1996. It is projected that Navan will grow to a small city of 60,000 people by 2011, if this transcribes it will have major effects on the town as it will have grown by more

than 300% in such a short space of time. Whether growth occurs to this degree remains to be seen, but what is certain is that the town will continue to experience a huge growth in population.

There are three clubs in Navan that are catering for GAA in the town, these are O'Mahony's, Simonstown and Bective. Paddy O'Brien is a long time affiliated with O Mahony's GAA club, which is in the town centre, and he offered to be interviewed. Shane O'Brien was also interviewed and he is presently the secretary with Simonstown. Peter Fox (once the development officer for Meath) agreed to speak about the demographic changes in the Navan area and the possible consequences of these changes.

Parish rule applies in Navan and the three clubs are therefore drawing from the one parish. Simonstown and O'Mahony's would be the bigger and stronger clubs in the town, and *'Bective, while in Navan town, is basically a rural club'* (S. O'Brien). Simonstown is situated directly along the north of the town along the R162. It is an area that has in recent times seen a huge growth in population and is set to continue developing as there are 1,400 houses planned for across the road from the club. It is located in *'a strategic development zone'* (S. O'Brien), *'it is in the heart of it, it just exploded'* (P. O'Brien). Simonstown only caters for football and it has at least two teams at every age with three at the under 16-age group, and they have four adult teams. It is located on a huge site with two pitches, and they are currently trying to develop another one, they also have an all weather facility and a very new clubhouse. O'Mahony's is in the middle of the town, and there is both hurling and football catered for. It is in an area that is not developing at present and the level of young children has decreased due to the aging of the surrounding population. It does nevertheless field two teams at many levels although can be *'under pressure'* (P. O'Brien) to do so. The Trim Road to the south of the town is experiencing *'great development [and] were trying to get those people...because if we don't were going to be left isolated completely'*. (P. O'Brien). Bective *'wouldn't be as strong'*. It only caters for football as *'it disbanded from hurling a few years ago...it takes an awful lot of money to run'*. Bective is located to the south of the town, and has in recent years has started to become somewhat more developed, *'they're coming on strong at underage level, there's a lot of development there'* (S. O'Brien).

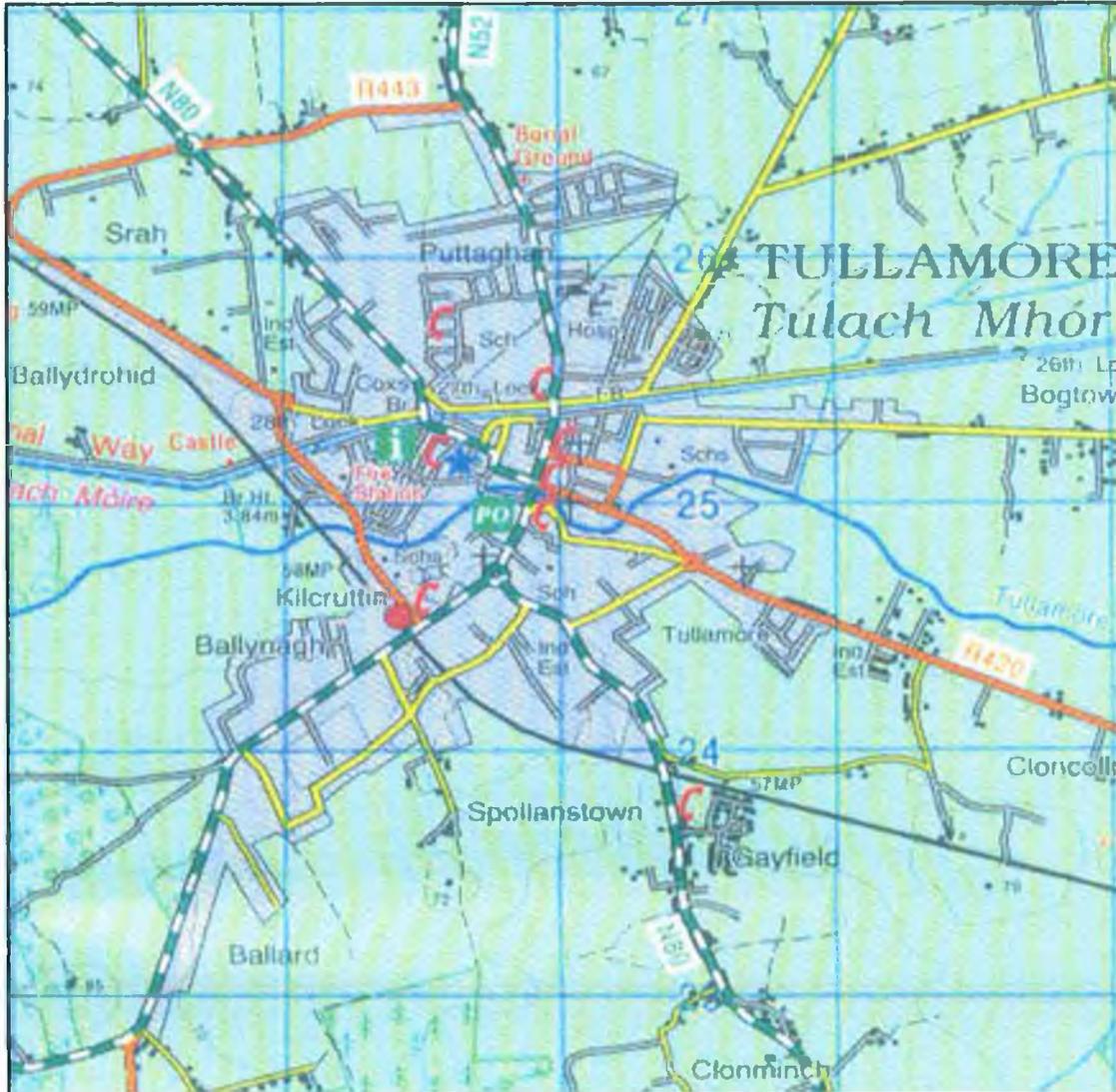
The prospect of a new club being established in the town received a mixed reaction. Paddy O'Brien did not feel that this was necessary, and he believed that extra players could be catered for in the town, *'I want to tell you that I can cater for more than I have at the moment, I'd be delighted to get them'* (P. O'Brien). He did say however, that a new club is not required in *'the immediate future but certainly in the distant future, you would have to be fooling yourself to think that there wouldn't be room for another club'*. Simonstown's Shane O'Brien was convinced that *'there would be room for another club...all you have to do is look at the numbers and the population'* (S. O'Brien). The reason he was certain there was room was due to the fact that when people are not getting their game (ie: making the panel) they *'drift away...whereas if there was another junior or intermediate club in the town'* (S. O'Brien) this would not happen. Peter Fox could also see the evolution of a new club in the town *'inside the next three or four years there would definitely be room for another club'* (Fox). His mentality for this is simple *'if people were bringing out their kids and they weren't getting looked after they'd be better off starting in a new club where they would be looked after because otherwise in a few years time your going to loose them'* (Fox). The main concern is that there is not a fall out in the level of children participating in the games as *'its amazing how they dwindle away'* (Fox).

Fortunately manpower in both Simonstown and O'Mahony's is very good and these volunteers are doing a good job of coaching the children. It is the smaller clubs that may find manpower *'scarce on the ground'*. Hurling is also a concern for Paddy O'Brien, he holds the fear that unless *'the powers that be put more money into hurling'* it will decline in the town. Other sports are also having somewhat of an impact on the children, and its something that *'we need to compete with'* (P. O'Brien). All of the men noted the great numbers of Dublin children that are coming into their clubs. *'Dublin have taken over...you should see the number of Arnotts jerseys on a Saturday morning!'* (P. O'Brien). The town is being used for many for commuting purposes and the people are *'only sleeping here [so] there's a lot of them who might never take any interest into the club scene, but in saying that the way the town is going there is room for another club'* (Fox).

Navan town has experienced one of the largest growth rates in the country. It is expanding constantly and it is important that the GAA is developing with the town

and nurturing all potential players in the area. Hurling and camogie are very costly and there should be more attention on them to ensure they continue to be played in the area. Fox is of the opinion that both Simonstown and O Mahony's *'will not be able to cater for the kids'* considering the level of growth expected and so the setting up of a new juvenile club structure in Navan would hopefully increase the numbers involved and playing.

County Offaly- Tullamore Town:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

Offaly has grown since the 1996 census by 7.75%. It currently has a population of 63,702, which increased from 59,117 in 1996. Tullamore is the biggest town in Offaly; it is in the east of the county and is west of Dublin. Its population is 10,260 and this signifies an increase of over 11% since 1996. Therefore, Tullamore's population is increasing at a faster rate than Offaly's on the whole. The most recent development plan for Tullamore is 1998 and it projected that the town would have a population of 10,175 by 2006, however this figure has already been exceeded and it is continuing to grow.

Tullamore has only the one GAA club, Gerry Clarke the club secretary agreed to an interview to discuss the GAA structure in the town. Tullamore GAA club is located on the north end of the town in the '*smallest part of the town*' and they cater for hurling, football and camogie. Parish rule applies in Offaly and Tullamore is part of a parish that has three clubs in it; these are Tullamore, Ballinamere and Durrow. On the other side of the canal are the parishes of Raheen and Daingean, which border the town.

The major development of recent years has seen '*the houses have gone to the southeast, the Dublin side*'. The children '*in the housing estates at the moment are this side*' of the town. What happens is the population '*switches from one part of the town to the other [so when] this side grow up we'll have to take from that end of the town*'. The club has at present a juvenile section that has A and B teams at every level, and it has seven adult teams. '*Its very hard to grow [there's] enough problems trying to cater for our own members, cater for teams*'.

Many fundamentals are required in order for the county to progress and grow. '*There needs to be at least two coaches in the north and south of the county, you want them to go into the schools because rugby and soccer are going in*'. The use of the urban councils land needs to be pushed to ensure the availability of facilities for the future. Once again '*manpower is becoming increasingly difficult*' to avail of and Mr. Clarke noted that the switch from male to female teachers is '*a big problem*', as they are not coaching the children to the same degree as was normal in the past.

The idea of a new club in the town '*might be a good idea...I wouldn't have any objection to that*'. This would obviously create competition for players in the town, but for such a large town this is perhaps what is needed. '*We split in 1949 and in that period they won county championships and so did we- it built up a great rivalry*'. The canal splits Tullamore town geographically, and there are ample numbers of children playing in the area so the possibility of setting up a new club in the town is very practical. The main problem envisaged '*is trying to get other grounds*'. However, aside from this, the evolution of a new club in Tullamore could become a reality and needs to be sincerely considered by the GAA. If this issue is not treated with the

urgency it deserves, Tullamore may not be unable to cater for the growing numbers, and this would inhibit the participation rates in the games.

Gaels, Dermot Ryan from Garrycastle and Tom Farrell from Maryland-Tang and knows the town very well. Athlone has two football clubs on the Westmeath side which are Garrycastle and Athlone GAA club, and one hurling club called Southern Gaels that is affiliated with Athlone GAA club. Both the football clubs are in the east of the town and within a mile of each other. The far side of the parish is a different parish, in a different county (Roscommon). The other side of the town is catered for by two clubs Clanna Gael and St. Bridget's, which are at either end of the town.

The idea of setting up a new club in the town was neither attractive nor realistic to the men being interviewed. *'As far as I'm concerned I think two clubs is enough for Athlone town [and] it is surrounded by eight or nine smaller clubs'* (O'Sullivan). *'I don't see scope for another club...definitely not enough [numbers] to justify another club'* (Ryan). He pointed out that in the late 1980's and early 1990's Garrycastle would have been able to field two teams at under 12, 14 and 16 years, but cannot today field two teams even at the under 12 age group. Tom Farrell also was of the opinion that there would not be sufficient demand for the introduction of a new club to the area. In an attempt to reach out to more clubs a meeting was held last year among the teams to field more under 12 teams *'but the reality of it was they actually weren't there'* (Farrell). The group discussed the possibility of in ten or fifteen years down the line the setting up of a new club and agreed that it would possibly detrimental to the existing clubs, *'it actually probably would bring one of them to the ground'* (Farrell).

Hurling in the town has previously not been mentioned when it comes to the setting up of a new club, and this brings about a different scenario. Hurling in Westmeath would not have the same numbers and popularity as football has. Southern Gaels club is Athlone's only hurling club and they use the Athlone GAA clubs facilities, *'this is the only club between here and Castletown Geoghegans which is basically in Mullingar'* (Divilly). There are only 14 hurling clubs in the whole of Westmeath catering for a population of over 72,000. *'I think if there were more hurling clubs promoted in or around Athlone it would only do good for hurling in this part of the county because were fighting a losing battle basically'* (Divilly). The idea of new clubs in the area according to Divilly would *'benefit hurling...and we'd get stronger as a result of it'*. In recent years there has been an *'improvement'* (Divilly) in

Southern Gaels, and in order to enhance hurling in the long term the solution according to Divilly would be that *'every football club should have a hurling team'*. Ryan recalled a time that Garrycastle played hurling and *'what I noticed was that Southern Gaels got better too!'*.

Athlone has been regarded as a soccer town and this has been *'lived with for years...however rugby has made big in-roads'* (O'Sullivan). This causes some concern for the men, *'we have to mind not to lose guys'* (Ryan). Coaching in the area has been very effective in recent times through a Fas scheme that has encouraged the *'survival'* (O'Sullivan) of the football, and presently they are trying in addition to get them to cater for hurling. They feel that it is important to send coaches into the schools to promote the games to a level where they can compete with the other sports in the area.

Athlone does not appear to need the provision of another club at present, however, it does have other issues to contend with. There needs to be more of a focus on the promotion of hurling in the area in order to ensure that it does not become extinct as a consequence of negligence. There also needs to be the continued presence and support for coaching in the schools to enable the continued prosperity of the clubs in Athlone and to compete with the other sports on offer in the area.

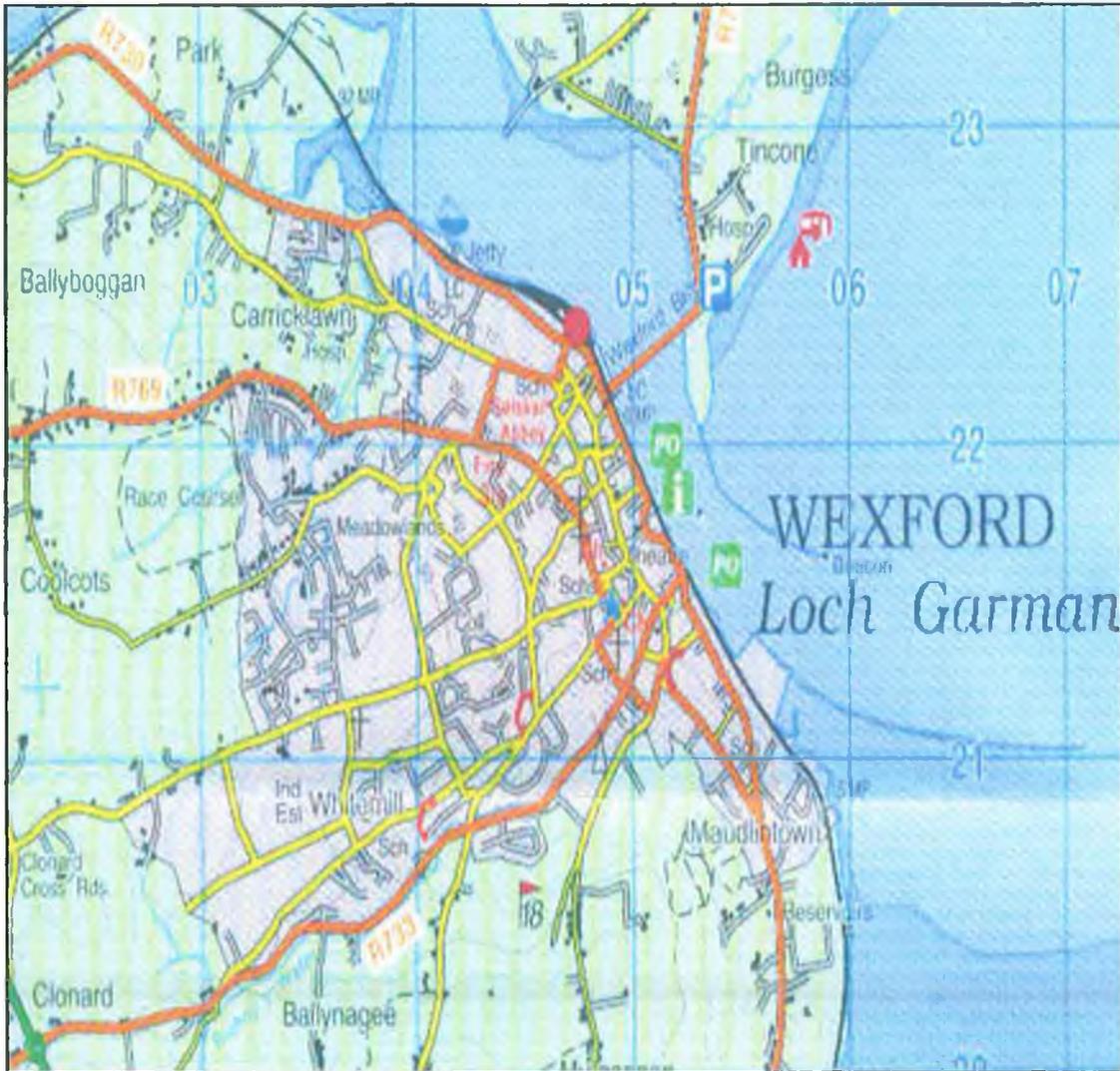
knowledge of the area. *'St Loman's, Shamrocks, Shandonagh and the Downs are the football clubs in the town, and the hurling clubs would be Oliver Plunkets, Cullion with Clonkill on the perimeter of the town'* (McHugh). The parish rule is not applicable in Mullingar. St Loman's is located north of the town along the R394, Shamrocks is also north but closer to the town than Loman's, Shandonagh is west of the town and the Downs is further out of the town in a southeasterly direction. Oliver Plunkets is located north west of the town, with Cullion at the north border of the urban area and Clonkill further out to the north east of the town. *'The town is pretty well catered for at present...there has been huge changes in population...but the kids aren't there yet'* (Martin).

Mullingar has also become a major commuter town to Dublin *'who are just here on weekends, you don't see them, they don't take part'* (Martin). There has been a sharp rise in population and the schools at present are full up, but unfortunately many *'are not being picked up'* (McHugh). The major difficulty is not the level of numbers that are available but lack of *'manpower is a big problem'* (McHugh). *'The facilities are there but its manpower and volunteers that are lacking'* (Martin). The single *'biggest problem is the clubs are not picking up the children from the schools'* (McHugh), especially in hurling. This is a major concern and McHugh uses the example of *'one school in particular [who are] contesting a hurling final...for their second year...yet 80% of that school are not picked up by any hurling club'*. The children in the town are either *'not here yet or they won't come down'* (McHugh). Loman's would be regarded as the strongest club in the town and are the *'only club who can field three under 10, two under 12 and four under 8 teams'* (McHugh). The teams now have to be *'divided straight down the middle to give the other teams a chance to win [therefore] the competition is being based solely on the weaker outfits and [thus] lowering the standard'* (McHugh).

Ten years down the line, the interviewees agreed that the *'facilities are adequate, and maybe Shandonagh will make a bigger impact due to the housing growth there'* (McHugh). The development on the town is accessing *'all areas'* (Martin) and needs to be closely monitored. The major issue in Mullingar is the recruiting of new players, and especially in the schools so as to bring on the standard for the future of the games in Mullingar. The clubs need to take a more pro-active role in this respect

to ensure the continued survival of their clubs, and the games in general in the area. Clubs need to urgently recruit more volunteers and helpers in the form of parents and interested bodies so that this growth can occur. If this does not transpire it will quite likely result in the big clubs becoming bigger and the smaller ones becoming even smaller.

County Wexford- Wexford Town:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

County Wexford is situated in the south-east of the country and has a population of 116,543, which is an increase of 11.66% since 1996. Wexford town itself is in the southeast of the county, along the coast and it is linked to Dublin by the N11. The town has a population of 17,771. This is made up of five DED's. These are: Wexford No.1 urban (1,848), Wexford No. 2 urban (4,809), Wexford No. 3 urban (1,353), Wexford rural part (1,433) and Wexford rural part (8,328). The town has seen an increase in population of just over 9%, this is set to keep on increasing as the Wexford and Environs development plan (1996) predicts a population of over 20,000 in the year 2011.

Joe Shaughnessy, the chairman of the Leinster Council Development committee, and Mick Kinsella, the secretary of the county board agreed to discuss the structure of the GAA in the town. There are five clubs in Wexford town, three football, one hurling, and one that caters for both. Sarsfields (football), Faythe Harriers (hurling), Volunteers (football) and St. Mary's (football) '*are all in the one field, in the one complex*' (Shaughnessy). These ground are located to the north west of the town, and Clonard is situated to the south west of the town. Faythe Harriers are the only senior hurling club in the town and would be regarded as the '*big hurling club...anyone who wants to play hurling goes there*' (Shaughnessy). Housing growth in the town is '*really everyway*' (Kinsella), however, it is especially to the south west of the town. The newest club is Clonard in '*the new end of the town [where] all the new estates are*' (Kinsella). It is the only club with a pitch in their own area which is a huge plus but unfortunately '*they don't even own that...it's a fierce disadvantage*' (Shaughnessy).

The potential for building a new club was not on the top of the agenda. When asked were the children of the town being properly catered for the answer was '*no, not really*' (Kinsella). The major difficulty was getting the children out to play with the clubs '*they're not being picked up unless they come themselves*' (Shaughnessy). '*Football is strong in the town [but there is need for a] good underage hurling club*' (Shaughnessy). They agreed that Clonard have the potential to certainly bring on the level and standard of hurling in the town, '*they do hurl but they are junior B*' (Shaughnessy). The Volunteers have '*started hurling*' (Kinsella) just last year, and they have the opportunity to create a good structure there also. It all depends on the '*clubs looking after themselves...they're not pulling in the numbers, they pull in enough to get to do what they want to do*' (Shaughnessy). '*The biggest single problem is that we don't have enough volunteers to help out...they just don't have the personnel*' (Shaughnessy). Another problem in the town is the fact that four clubs are all in the one area, and '*you need that attachment to an area*' (Shaughnessy). The clubs have to bus their children out and '*this is a disadvantage and its another reason why they're not going out*' (Shaughnessy).

Wexford, a town of 17,771 has five clubs serving the area. It may be said that the town has sufficient clubs numerically however there is a big question mark over

whether they are catering for the level of children in the town. The club structures need to be revised. The difficulty of having most of the clubs in the one area is that it may not create an affinity and identity to the land that is synonymous with clubs throughout the country. At present St. Mary's are looking for their own land and this should be supported, while at the same time as encouraging the other clubs into considering similar actions. The town requires new methods for attracting people into helping out with the clubs, in turn this will bring on the numbers and standard of the games in the town. Schools are not being tapped into enough by the clubs in order to maximise the numbers that are afforded the opportunity to play. Lastly for the purpose of maintaining and improving hurling in the town, major efforts should be placed upon maintaining the high standard in Faythe Harriers, and also on the development of the hurling structures in Clonard and the Volunteers.

County Wicklow- Wicklow Town:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

County Wicklow's population stands at 114,719 from the 2002 census. This indicates a rise of over 11% since 1996. It is one of the counties in the greater Dublin area and, therefore, has had a growth in the level of people living in the town and commuting to Dublin. Wicklow town itself has a population of 8,500, and when Rathnew is included in this figure it rises to 11,500. The reason Rathnew is being included although it has a separate identity '*it is part of the town for development purposes of the future*' (Doyle). The population is set to increase to 21,000 in the Greater Wicklow Area in the near future and so it is following the trend of urban towns throughout the greater Dublin area.

I interviewed Brian Doyle with regard to the GAA in Wicklow town. There is only one club in Wicklow town, St. Patrick's. It is located on the south end of the town, '*it would be on the older end of the town which is becoming quite remote from the newer part [where] practically all of the development is occurring on the Dublin side*'. St.

Patrick's is a *'big club'*, it has a senior and two junior football teams, two adult hurling teams, and hurling and football teams at all juvenile levels with *'possibly two teams at under 10 and 12 [age group]'*.

The prospect of another club in the area is not something that Mr. Doyle would see as a necessity. *'I don't see another club, on the basis of a population of 21,000 and don't really see a big problem if the club had more facilities'*. The projected 21,000 includes Rathnew and so *'you're talking of a town of about 16,000 which could have two teams without any great push but I don't see a push for it at this time'*. There are no plans to at present to build a new primary school however *'if there was another school, you would allow another draw'*. There are *'not enough people interested...and the clubs are not catering for them'*. Mr. Doyle used the school as an indicator to demonstrate the take up levels of the GAA. *'At the under 12 age group we have two sixth classes, that would be 60 pupils and we would be drawing on fifth class so that's another 60 totalling 120, but all you can cater for is 20'*. He compares this to a more country school where *'they would have much more playing'* and as a consequence there's *'a lot of wastage, a lot of people leaking away'*. Mr. Doyle partially blames the lack of manpower, the presence of commuters *'who have not embedded in the town'*, and also the fact that there are *'more attractions...you have the sea, a lot of soccer'*. Forming a new club would be difficult, whether *'we can give a new team an identity in the town I'm not sure, there's no natural barrier'*.

Mr. Doyle recognises that there will be a *'big fallout'* if the organisation of the GAA remains unchanged. A new club in Wicklow would *'seem to be the logical way'* [but] *'whether it would generate more of an interest and have more of an impact'* remains questionable. The growth in Wicklow town is greatest on the Dublin side and if there is to be the establishment of a new club it is between St. Patrick's GAA club and Rathnew that would be the most ideal location. It is imperative that Wicklow addresses this pressing issue without delay as *'if there was a time to do it, it would be now'*.

C - Case Study:

Leixlip:



(Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

Leixlip town is in County Kildare, and up until 1989 it only had one club called Leixlip GAA club, and this is located on the west side of the Liffey. Up until the early 1970's it was only a very small village of 200 people, and it was at this time that the houses began developing. Initially, they grew in the Leixlip area and then in the Confey area. Confey is situated to the east of the Liffey and as this area emerged it was decided that a new club was needed and so it was set up in 1989. Liam Dowd is one of the trustees of Confey GAA club, he has been a part in the formation of the club and he agreed to share the story. Many issues will be described in this section in order to become more familiar with the past, present and possible future of the club.

Reasons for the formation of the club:

In 1989 the population was growing at a great level and it appeared that *'there was a number of youngsters going down the hill, and reality was the club was able to service so many youngsters'*. This caused concern among the locals and so the *'view was that some would not get games or would not get involved [therefore] a club was justified and the purpose was to try to involve as many youngsters as possible'*.

Progress of the club to date:

The club was formed in 1989 and it was four years later that the first piece of land was bought. Six people put their names down to act as guarantors and a draw was run to clear this debt. *'That was six acres and then we were fortunate to get four more acres joining that within a couple of years...we fundraised again and the debt was cleared fairly rapidly'*. The ten acres allowed for two pitches, one juvenile and one adult. In the mean time *'the teams were being brought along with a major emphasis on underage, our adult teams...were barely able to justify their existence'*. *'Off the field in 1997 the clubhouse was opened'*, and they have a bar and six dressing rooms. Today they have thirty teams. Last year in the minor football they won both the championship and the league. *'Hurling wise we've represented Kildare in the Feile competition in four out of five years so we've got fairly strong'*. The club won the county intermediate championship last year and they were promoted to the senior division this year for the first time. The footballers got up to division one but weren't able to win championship so they are still playing junior football. Overall the club has displayed great levels of success and is working hard to maintain and improve the standard of the games.

Necessities for the setting up of a new club:

'Without a shadow of a doubt...no matter what other ingredients you have, you have to have very good, hard working, committed, structured, organised people'. Mr. Dowd believes that this is the foundation stone from which *'everything else flows'*. There needs to be the involvement of *'a lot of people because with a small number it wont happen and people will get burnt out and browned off'*. It is vital to draw as

many people as possible *'under the umbrella of the club'*. They can get involved in various ways, they *'don't have to play or be coaches as long as you are getting good will coming together'*.

He also recognised the other *'ingredients'* that are needed when setting up a new club. *'Obviously you need a pitch, a base...not just having the use of something, of somewhere to play, you need an identity'*. The clubs throughout Ireland are used as ways of building up an attachment to the land that can define people; they *'become our roots'*. In order for this to happen there needs to be a plan. *'You have to plan whatever you would like to achieve'*. Mr Dowd compares it to a business. In this way in order to be successful you have to identify a potential market, have a plan, get the people, spend money, work for it, repeat it and *'when you get to a certain level you cant just leave it there you have to keep it going'*. There is also the essential issue of fundraising *'which is very important'*, as very little can be achieved when there is no money available. The set up of any club must ensure *'the formulation of a very structured juvenile policy because at the end of the day you wont have adult teams unless you work with the youngsters and bring them along'*. Coaches are needed to be *'hard working and broad visioned'* and also prepared to bring themselves along as coaches by updating and learning more skills. If all of these factors come together the *'social side of it flows...and that is extremely important [as] then you get that sense of community and the knitting together of people'*.

Positive outcomes:

The tireless work that has been invested by the people involved in Confey GAA club has brought about a huge sense of togetherness in the area. *'When you have a team involved and wearing the jersey playing in a competitive match the sheer community spirit and pride'* is very evident. The *'knitting of the community'* is not something that is achieved by *'clicking your fingers together, it happens over time'*. It is created *'by celebrating on great days, and being together on very sad days...that to me says more about us as a club - that spirit, that community, that belonging, that support that has been there, is massive'*.

Aside from the building of the community spirit and identity, it is important to investigate the developments in the games department. With regard to the

establishment of the new club in Leixlip; this created greater competition in the area, however, did it improve or disimprove the games at large? According to Mr. Dowd, *'it certainly didn't disimprove them'*. A major objective was to get more people playing and it certainly was successful in this matter. *'Some children who might not have played [and] could have dropped off the fringes...were kept playing and that might not have been otherwise'*. Now there are two strong clubs in Leixlip and *'my belief is the games have benefited and that it has been a plus to the standard rather than a negative'*.

Formation of new clubs in Leinster:

Mr. Dowd agrees that the setting up of new clubs is *'desirable'*, but *'it is something that has to be handled very delicately'*. In our case *'it happened from within, it grew out of the community...it wasn't imposed or driven from outside'*. It is something that Mr. Dowd feels needs to be treated sensitively with *'caution and care not to create division, rifts and wounds that are very difficult to heal'*. He warns that it is not something that can be done *'crudely by someone looking at census figures and saying there's x number of people here so there has to be two clubs'*. It is important to remember that there is *'a lot of emotion tied up in a jersey [as] people have bled and sweat for it...and so I would have concerns for potential divides being created'*. The existing club could view an incoming club as *'damaging its potential to win competitions [and therefore] it is important to have good interaction and camaraderie between any new clubs'*. The new club would also require much support from all angles. *'If there's a natural nucleus there and its happening on its own initiative then certainly the GAA and Leinster Council should be supportive'*.

Chapter 5 - Recommendations and Conclusions:

This thesis has highlighted many of the issues that the GAA is facing today in Leinsters urban area. Some of them are relevant to all the urban areas, many of them apply at different levels in the areas, and others are unique to specific towns. The 'target towns' in Leinster have all experienced varying levels of population increase and this has created huge strain on infrastructure in the different areas including on the GAA clubs. Some issues have repeatedly arisen and it is imperative that they are looked into and tackled by the association before it is too late.

The recent surge in population in Leinsters urban areas was not predicted as little as ten years ago. It has been unexpected and has taken many areas by surprise. The phenomenal growth is creating big demands on the clubs, some of which are meeting these demands and others, which are quite obviously not. The numbers of children in these areas has jumped dramatically and it continues to do so. Some clubs are coping very well and welcome these new recruits with open arms. However this is unfortunately not the case all across the board. Other clubs simply cannot cater for these numbers for many reasons such as facilities and manpower.

The lack of manpower is common to all of the urban areas that visited. It was referred to countless times, and needs to be addresses urgently. The onus of running a club is often down to a small handful of people, and this needs to change. As many as possible (parents, retired players, interested people and teachers) should be encouraged to pull together in order to ease the massive effort involved in running a club. There is a need for guidance to be available to clubs regarding the most successful way to encourage greater participation and contributions from those who are not currently involved. The clubs that are not struggling for volunteers could provide valuable advice on this matter, as without these people there will be detrimental effects.

Coaching in the schools in many of the areas is simply not sufficient. Some areas are benefiting tremendously, they are seeing great improvements in the games. This, however, is regrettably not often the case. The school can be regarded as the pillars that are holding many of the clubs together, and without these pillars the clubs can no

longer exist. Schools provide a link with the clubs; they act as funnels filtering the children towards the clubs. If the children in the schools are not tapped into, they are loosing out on the opportunity to play the country's most popular games. From the interviews it is apparent that there is an abundance of children not being catered for, and this is essentially cutting off the supply of blood to the association. In order to counteract this problem there needs to be an increase in the number of coaches going into the schools. It would be hoped that the headquarters of the GAA, and the Leinster Council would tackle this issue (perhaps through the introduction of more Fas courses and Jobs Initiative Programmes). Coaches introduce children to the games and provide the basics at an early age, and this needs to be developed and continued to ensure the youth become familiar, and their love of the sport is fostered at an early age.

The increase in the presence of other sports in the counties has been recognised in the urban areas. The growth of other sports particularly soccer and rugby are creating more noticeable consequences for many of the urban areas in Leinster. Their popularity has been increasing and this calls for the GAA to continue marketing, promoting its image, and recruiting children to play the games.

The Association needs to encourage all ages, sexes and ethnicities. Women account for approximately 50% of the population and people of different ethnicities represent 6% of our population (Census, 2002). These people should not be neglected but rather they should be welcomed and catered for in order to make certain of the continued prosperity of the association.

New clubs in Leinsters urban areas needs to be seriously and immediately considered. At present there are some very large clubs that are strong and some small clubs that are weak. If growth, or the lack of growth, continues in this manner there may be the emergence of superclubs and the extinction of smaller clubs. This would lead to a decrease in club numbers, which would not be favourable for the Association. While all of the urban areas are experiencing a rise in population they are all very unique, and need to be treated this way. The setting up new clubs is not simply a matter of statistics; it needs careful consideration and an evaluation of the factors involved. It would be advised that the Leinster Council conduct individual studies of these areas,

in order to recommend future development. The 'one parish one rule' can no longer be deemed appropriate in many urban areas as it may be impeding possible growth. The preservation of the GAA's future must be addressed, and the formation of new clubs is of absolute priority. The club structure represents the foundation stone of the GAA. In order to ensure a prosperous future for the games, maintenance of the existing clubs and the creation of new clubs are undoubtedly essential actions that need to be taken.

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