



# Virginia Town Team Plan 2024 – 2025

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**Cover photo:** *'Flag Iris Lough Ramor'* by Artist Michelle Boyle. In the collection of the Ramor Theatre / Cavan County Council. Michelle brings public attention through her paintings to the aesthetic and year round cycle of Lough Ramor.

## 1. Introduction and Background to Virginia Town Team

Virginia Town Team is one of four in the county, set up in 2016-2017 to respond to community and business needs in the town and its hinterland. Town Teams bring people and groups together through a Team that is representative of the different stakeholders. The Town Teams act as a catalyst to encourage businesses, local communities and others to work together to energise and reinvigorate their towns and communities in collaboration with public authorities and other service providers.

Virginia Town Team has made a number of successful improvements over the past number of years. These included:

- A number of developments were carried out at the lakeshore in Virginia, making this under-utilised amenity attractive and accessible for locals and visitors;
- A play area for children was developed as part of the lakeshore initiative and seating suitable for people with disabilities were also put in place;
- Footpaths were re-made and extended on the Bailieborough road;
- Information boards were installed in key locations;
- An information pamphlet with a map was printed for visitors and for people new to the area.



## **2. Process for this Plan**

In 2022, an AGM was held and a number of new people came forward with an interest in becoming involved with the Town Team. This group of people worked with Ómra Support Agency, who were contracted by Cavan County Council to facilitate the drawing up of this plan. At an AGM in April 2024, the group became officially the Town Team together with some new people who had attended the AGM.

This plan sets out what Virginia Town Team hopes to achieve over the next 2 years. It was drawn up between June 2023 and April of 2024 and commenced with a meeting held with former members of the Town Team. A community consultation process was then undertaken, which involved:

- An online survey sent out to a large number of emails and publicised through social media, posters in local premises, print media and church newsletters. 198 responses were received (excludes youth response);
- Suggestion boxes, made by Virginia Men's Shed and placed in local premises;
- Consultations through the local primary school and a local pre-school;
- The survey was promoted among teens and young people under 25 and received a total of 27 replies;
- A workshop session held in September, which was well attended.

All of the data from the consultation process was analysed and an action plan drafted from the results of this over a number of meetings. A meeting was held with Cavan County Council in relation to the draft plan and it was presented to the AGM in April 2024 with some final additions then made.

### 3. Members of Virginia Town Team

| Name                              | Sector / group represented  |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| T.P. O'Reilly (Chairperson)       | Cavan Co. Council Elected Member                                      |
| Angela Deighan (Secretary)        | Local Montessori owner  |
| Bernie Sheridan (Joint Treasurer) | Housewife and collector of local memorabilia                          |
| Lisa Bodkin (Joint Treasurer)     | Adventure 21 Café   |
| Nora O'Carroll (PRO)              | Virginia Rugby Club member  |
| Edel Barry                        | Primary school teacher at Carnaross N.S.                              |
| Eileen Fitzsimons                 | Member of Virginia Ramblers walking group                             |
| George Allen                      | Bicycle shop owner  |
| Michelle Boyle                    | Artist, with significant interest in and work relating to Lough Ramor |
| Ewan Fuller                       | Law student in University College, Dublin                             |
| Owen Brodie                       | Virginia Agricultural Society   |

## 4. Priorities (from Community Consultation and Town Team Discussions)

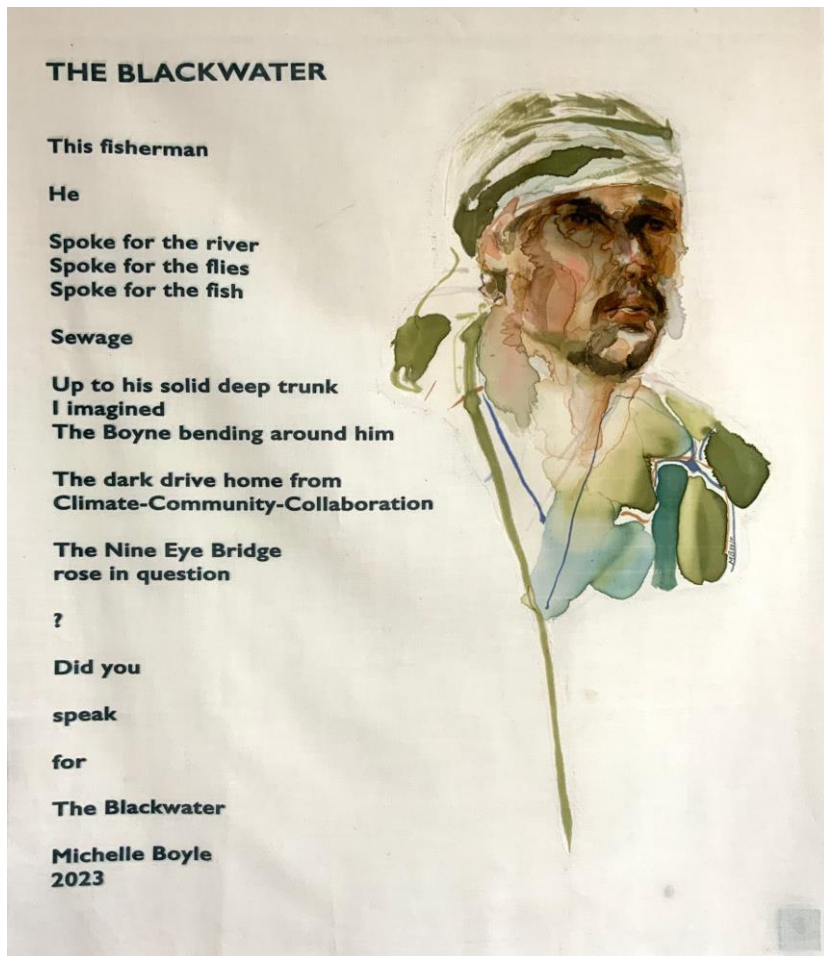
Out of the extensive consultation process that took place, the following priorities emerged:

- **The lake** – water quality and all other aspects. This is felt to be a central focus of the new plan and many developments can centre in some way around the theme of the lake. A meeting with a representative of the Local Authorities Waterways Programme (Border Region) and resident in the area enabled Team members to have a better understanding of the condition of the lake, the catchment area, factors affecting lake water quality and, generally, the time and complexities involved in bringing a lake to an acceptable standard.

Potential roles for the Town Team may be in generating awareness about the issues and what can be done to help it recover, and requesting regular testing in relation to bathing quality. Other projects that may help may be biodiversity initiatives and it is also hoped that other interested people can be attracted to the Town Team and/or a working group of it to focus on this.

- **The forest** – engage with Coillte re the boathouse, signage, connection to the town and other aspects including the protection of native species – plants and animals. This is also very connected to the lake.
- **Heritage**
  - Historical buildings – try to find a grant for the QR code idea – the Historical Society can then pursue this. This is being looked at within the heritage plan under development for the county;
  - Find a way to recognise when buildings are well done up;
  - Engage with the Council around derelict buildings and shop-fronts.
- **General improvements to the environment:**
  - Litter has come up as a significant area of concern. The provision of bins, education and awareness-raising in relation to litter and involvement of the schools are seen as important in tackling this issue;
  - Public toilets – this is seen as an essential facility to have in place;
  - Roundabout – traffic issues and planting on it;
  - The By-Pass – joining the planned cycle and walkways to the town. Parking area for bikes generally
  - Air quality – traffic, coal, lack of trees are contributing to poor air quality. Can it be monitored or tested?
- **Garda presence / vandalism / safety.**
- **Facilities** – maintenance and updating of playgrounds, community and youth facilities. A person or organisation is needed to carry out pre-development work with possible youth and community leaders and bring them on through training and support to become more involved in activities and to expand the volunteer base.

- **Business / economic environment** – what can help to improve it? Community café, restaurants, healthy eateries. Other measures to support business development and promotion.
- **Communication** – this is an important thread throughout all of the work and specifically in the following ways:
  - Knowing what the plans are of the Council in relation to developments and changes in the town;
  - Being consulted on relevant developments / changes and the community having an opportunity to have their say in these;
  - Improved communication between organisations in the town and consultation, where appropriate;
  - A community noticeboard – both physical and online, accessible to all.



'The Blackwater' with Loughcrew Ramor water poem addressing the custodianship of the water of Lough Ramor and the Blackwater and our shared responsibility to it. Painting and poem by Michelle Boyle.





**The grave of James Fitzpatrick**, a very important gentleman who has largely been forgotten yet he played a huge part in the development of the town and the Headfort estate and is credited with planting DeerPark forest.

This is a possible project for future attention.



### **Trees at the Pottle**

Maintaining existing trees, particularly old ones, and having new ones planted is important for the Town Team and an essential part of the green agenda

## 5. A Vision for Virginia

The following sets out how the Town Team sees Virginia – town and community – in the long-term.

### **Vision for Virginia**

Virginia (*town & community*) will be a welcoming, inclusive, attractive and vibrant place to live, work in and visit; with a strong community spirit and leadership; and where the environment and heritage is preserved and respected.



## TOWN TEAM PROPOSALS FOR VIRGINIA

**Diversity, inclusion and accessibility will be cross-cutting themes throughout all projects**

| Project  | Key Players   | Time scale to completion                   |                         |                      | Progress |
|--|---|--|-------------------------|----------------------|----------|
|  |   | Short-term (1 year)                        | Medium-Term (2-3 years) | Long-term (4+ years) |          |
| <p><b>1. Lough Ramor</b> – support the work to improve water quality and to develop usage of and around the lake.</p> <p>a. Meet rep of Local Authorities Waterways Programme (Border Region) re condition of the lake, the catchment area, factors affecting lake water quality and what is involved in bringing a lake to an acceptable standard.</p> <p>b. Hold further discussion with this person to help plan next steps / gain further understanding.</p> <p>c. Link in with other areas involved with this type of work, both those with improved lakes and those starting to work on them.</p> <p>d. Identify what agencies / organisations have roles / responsibilities and start connecting with them.</p> <p>e. Look into Blue Dot status / initiative.</p> | <p>Town Team, Cavan Co. Council, Local Authorities Waterways Programme (Border Region), other players to be identified.</p> | <p>Complete</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |                         |                      |          |



|  |  |  |                   |  |  |
|--|--|--|-------------------|--|--|
| <p>f. Hold a meeting to involve a broader set of people locally to begin discussions.</p> <p>g. Generate awareness about the issues and what can be done to help it recover e.g. talks at shows.</p> <p>h. Incorporate creative methods of raising awareness and holding conversations.</p> <p>i. Request regular testing in relation to bathing quality.</p> <p>j. Plan and secure funding for biodiversity initiatives in relation to any developments happening locally e.g. the footbridge.</p> <p>k. Set up a sub or working group to include those with a particular interest in the lake.</p>   |  | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |  |  |
| <p><b>2. Deerpark forest</b> – engage with Coillte re the boathouse, signage, connection to the town and other aspects including the protection of native species – plants and animals.</p> <p>a. Liaise with Cavan CC in relation to working group re Coillte forests and information coming from there, including questioning about the plan for invasive plants (laurels, rhododendrons).</p> <p>b. Find out progress / plans / ideas from historical and heritage groups and support or build on their work.</p> <p>c. Seek funding for protection / part-restoration of Castle Boathouse.</p> <p>d. Support the establishment of a locally based group in relation to the forest.</p> | <p>Town Team, Cavan Co. Council, Coillte, Historical Society</p> | <p>X</p> <p>X</p>                            | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |  |  |



|  |   |                                     |          |  |  |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|----------|--|--|
| <p><b>3. Heritage – support the work to preserve and enhance the heritage of Virginia</b></p> <p>a. Support the Historical Society to link with the Heritage Officer and other similar projects e.g. heritage trails and to secure grant-aid for a QR Code initiative;</p> <p>b. Identify examples of other successful towns in relation to heritage and incentivise putting up of attractive shopfronts.</p> <p>c. Engage with the Council around derelict buildings and shop-fronts.</p> <p>d. Secure funds for a further painting scheme through the Council.</p>   | <p>Historical Society, Town Team, Cavan Co. Council</p> | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |          |  |  |
| <p><b>4. General improvements to the environment</b></p> <p>a. Liaise with Environment section of Council re education and awareness-raising initiatives e.g. Picker Pals schools’ initiative.</p> <p>b. Support Tidy Towns to become re-established and to link with the Men’s Shed.</p> <p>c. Seek the provision of public toilets – use of facilities in library / courthouse during opening hours / sub-contracting to private shop facilities – raise with Elected Members.</p> <p>d. Link with Road Design section of the Council in relation to issues with the roundabout.</p> <p>e. Create link between the MD Office and the Men’s Shed in relation to planting on the roundabout.</p> | <p>Town Team, Cavan Co. Council</p>                     | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> | <p>X</p> |  |  |



|   |   |                   |  |  |  |
|---|---|-------------------|--|--|--|
| <p>f. Work with the Men’s Shed to secure further tree planting in and around the town.</p> <p>g. Support communication process in relation to the proposed new bridge.</p>  |   | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |  |  |  |
| <p><b>5. The By-Pass</b> (at phase 3, 2 more phases)</p> <p>a. Keep up to date with progress and information available.</p> <p>b. Promote information sessions within the community when they arise.</p>  | <p>Cavan Co. Council, Town Team, NRA (National Roads Authority)</p> | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |  |  |  |
| <p><b>6. Air quality</b> – seek to have monitoring and testing of air quality through a monitoring unit.</p>  | <p>Town Team, Cavan Co. Council</p>                                 | <p>X</p>          |  |  |  |
| <p><b>7. Garda presence / vandalism / safety</b></p> <p>a. Build relationship with new Sergeant and with Gardaí.</p> <p>b. Liaise with them re specific times of concern e.g. crowds at the lake in summer.</p>   | <p>Town Team, Gardaí</p>  | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |  |  |  |
| <p><b>8. Facilities and Services for Young People.</b></p> <p>a. Contact Bounceback project, ETB and Foróige re training / clubs available.</p> <p>b. Work with the Show Centre to bring in an organisation to work on development and training of youth leaders and to get youth clubs up and running.</p> | <p>Town Team, Show Centre</p>                                       | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |  |  |  |



|   |   |                   |                   |  |  |
|---|---|-------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| <p><b>9. Business / economic environment</b> – measures to support business development and promotion.</p> <p><b>a.</b> Identify current accommodation provision for tourists / visitors.</p> <p><b>b.</b> Research other areas that have successfully increased accommodation provision.</p> <p><b>c.</b> Hold information session in relation to tourism accommodation.</p> | <p>Town Team, Fáilte Ireland</p>  | <p>X</p>          | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |  |  |
| <p><b>10. Communication</b></p> <p><b>a.</b> Support good communication with agencies and the local community e.g. County Council, Cavan Co. Local Development, etc.</p> <p><b>b.</b> Work with other local players to create a means by which information about events and activities can be easily shared through social media and/or a website.</p>                        | <p>Town Team, Cavan CC, CCLD, Virginia Cavan Ireland &amp; Local Areas Community Page</p> | <p>X</p> <p>X</p> |                   |  |  |

