



*Helping  
youth and community  
**GROW***

*Maynooth Road, Celbridge, Co. Kildare*





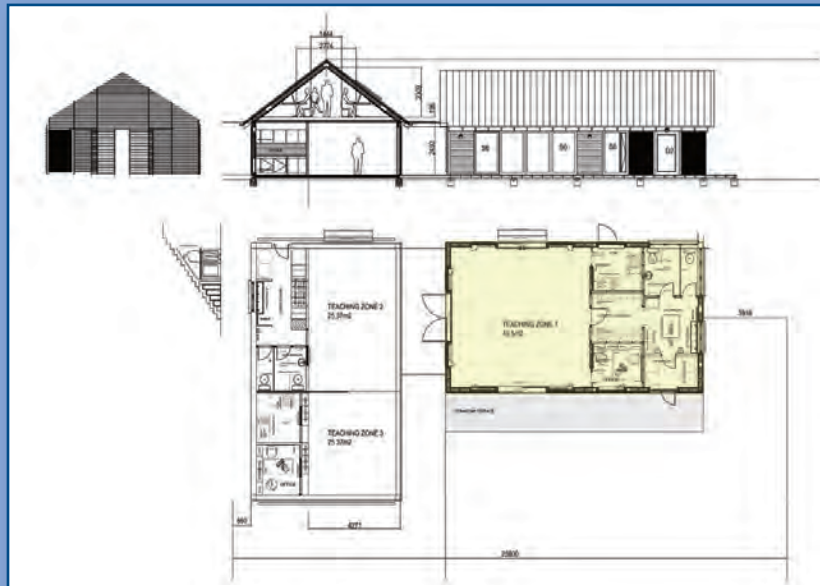
# ACRE project

A COMMUNITY  
RETHINKING  
ITS ENVIRONMENT



# ACRE project

A COMMUNITY  
RETHINKING  
ITS ENVIRONMENT



*Above: Plan of second building showing present building in yellow.*

*Right: First group to do the FETAC 3 Course "Grow your own veg".*



*Above: Architect's drawing of finished site with:  
1. ornamental garden; 2. resource buildings; 3. wind turbine;  
4. tool shed; 5. polytunnels.*



# 1. Executive summary

The ACRE Project (*A Community Rethinking its Environment*) is an eco-friendly community based project on a site on the Maynooth Road in Celbridge. The project provides internal and external spaces which local communities can gather in and use. It focusses on the following core elements:

- a creative space for the community to gather and engage;
- an interactive setting where people can learn about ecology and environmental living;
- a structured setting where young people can meet and grow;
- non-formal education through the medium of horticulture and the creative arts.

The driving force behind the ACRE project is a group of local people whose interests vary from business, to educating young people, to community development, to horticulture and the environment. Funding for the facilities to date has been due to the work of this group, in collaboration with a large team of volunteers drawn from the North Kildare region. This funding has been a mixture of fund-raising and philanthropic grants.

Current and future target groups include:

- community and parent groups
- back-to-work initiatives
- community based youth projects
- the non-formal education sector
- those seeking an outlet for artistic creativity
- those wishing to share their skills and knowledge to improve the community.

Research, both formal and informal, has indicated that there is a demand for the facilities. The research has also listed programmes and events that are in demand. As well as horticultural courses and programmes, examples include photography, creative writing, basket making, community mothers' programme, men's coffee club, personal development and art & craft courses

Due to a steady increase in demand for the facilities and in line with its overall vision the project is now entering a second phase of development, which includes the following:

- a hybrid wind turbine and solar panel electricity generating system in line with the environmental and green nature of the project;
- a second resource building to cater for current demand and new programmes;





Willie Blythe

- a sensory ornamental garden, for both individuals with learning difficulties and physical challenges, and for the community to visit, contemplate and relax;
- two polytunnels, to allow for the production of a greater variety of produce and to greater facilitate teaching and working all year round and
- landscaping.



Mairead Byrne

The estimated cost for completing this work is €450,000. No similar community based facility is available in the North Kildare Area. There is a broad welcome for the project and letters of support from a variety of sources including the Mill Community Centre, local schools and local community groups have been provided.

## 2. Company description

### Directors

Willie Blythe  
Mairead Byrne  
Patrick Egan  
Patrick Hennessy  
Michael Leyden  
Michael McCann  
Dominic McEvoy  
Ken McEvoy  
Robert Norris  
Ann Taaffe



Patrick Egan



Patrick Hennessy

### *Willie Blythe:*

Managing Director of Axis Office Supplies for over 20 years, Willie brings considerable business and entrepreneurial experience to the project.

### *Mairead Byrne, B.A., H. Dip. Ed.:*

Retired Principal Teacher of Rathcoffey National School. Director & Chair of Celbridge Community Centre Ltd, Camelton Enterprises Ltd and Guardian Administration Ltd (a Community Employment Project employing 26 persons).



Michael Leyden

Mairead has extensive experience and involvement in community groups from the Celbridge Community Council to Day Care Club for Older People to the Youth Café at Celbridge Mill. Her interests include youth development, provision of facilities for older persons, provision

of facilities and programmes for persons with disabilities, Community Development, Drama, Theatre, Music, Sport, Current Affairs, Politics and History.

***Patrick Egan SDB, STL:***

His skills include People Development, Community Projects (Youth Café, summer camps, Honorary President of *Soccer Skills for Fun*), Communications, IT Development, Volunteer Management.

He spent four years in the Social Communications Dept at the Salesian HQ, Rome, with responsibility for training members in social communications. He is currently Director of SDB MEDIA Publishing House and Editor of a quarterly magazine, *The Salesian Bulletin* and is interested in photography, graphic design and audio visual presentations.

***Paddy Hennessy SDB, B.Sc, B.A. (Hons), M.Ed., Diploma in Counselling :***

As well as his role as a Salesian priest, Fr Paddy has worked as a teacher and is an Education Officer with the Salesians. He has vast experience in education and youth work. He has been involved with community based youth work in inner city parishes, he ran community based summer programmes and has worked in special needs education.

***Michael Leyden, B. Comm, FCA (Chartered Accountant):***

Former Finance Director Coca Cola Bottlers Ireland and Group Finance Director – Operations of Coca Cola Hellenenic and Audit Manager with PwC.

Michael has considerable experience in finance, marketing, change management, corporate governance, coaching and mentoring.

***Michael McCann, B.A., M.A.:***

Director InforMarex (International Translation Agency), Business Consultant, Recruitment and Personnel Consultant.

Michael is a member of many organisations including the North Kildare Chamber of Commerce, the TCD Senate and the Irish Writers Centre. He is heavily involved in local community and parish work serving on the Celbridge & Straffan Parish Finance Committee. He has a keen interest in writing and gardening.

***Dominic McEvoy, B.Sc., B.Sc (Comp).:***

Deputy Principal in Salesian College Celbridge.

Dominic has worked with young people since the early 1980s in various capacities from Summer Camp director to teacher of maths



Michael McCann



Dominic McEvoy



Ken McEvoy



Robbie Norris



AnnTaaffe



and science. He is on ICT Advisory committees with the Department of Education and Skills and has been the Irish representative on projects in both Europe and Latin America.

***Ken McEvoy:***

Coming from an early background as a Senior Executive in the financial services sector Ken has held positions in the areas of Finance, Facilities Management and Information Technology. Ken later took a break from the industry to pursue private projects in Management and Property advice together with a further involvement in Technology and Product Innovation based opportunities.

Over the last 25 years, he has had extensive involvement with Community and Youth Development projects and has been involved with The Acre Project since inception.

***Robert Norris, Dip Hort.:***

Head Gardener in *Áras an Uachtaráin*.

Robbie has extensive experience in all aspects of horticulture. Having studied in the National Botanic Gardens, currently he is in charge of 130 acres of parkland and garden as well as fruit and vegetable gardens.

***Ann Taaffe:***

Director Equine Stud Farm.

Ann has long and successful involvement with the equine industry in Ireland and works in the local community and spends a considerable amount of her time in fundraising activities.

## **Advisors**

Legal: O’Riada & Co., Celbridge, Co. Kildare.

Auditors: HTH Horgan Traynor & Co., Celbridge, Co. Kildare.

## **Company status**

The ACRE Project is a company limited by guarantee ‘not having a share capital’ and incorporated on 7 October 2011. The Company registration Number is 504580 and registered address is Salesian House, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.

## **The Project**

The ACRE Project is an eco-friendly community-based project on a site on the Maynooth Road in Celbridge. Eco elements incorporate state-





# ACRE project

A COMMUNITY  
RETHINKING  
ITS ENVIRONMENT



In aid of

**ACRE  
project**  
A Community Rethinking Education

An eco-friendly horticultural centre for young people

**Gardening Made Better and Easier**

**Gerry Daly**

Sat. 10 April 2010 at 8 pm  
Salesian College, Celbridge

**Tickets € 10.00**  
(Light refreshments provided)









of-the-art building design, rainwater harvesting to provide water to the kitchen, toilets and for plant irrigation; triple glazing; air to water heating pump. Phase two will include hybrid wind turbine and solar panels for electricity and a second building. The project provides internal and external spaces in which local communities can gather and for the community to use. Uniquely, these spaces provide opportunities to meet, to explore, to express, to create, to relax and to share through the medium of ecology and horticulture.

In addition to the community's creative use of these spaces, The ACRE Project has a particular focus. When fully completed, the project will operate from a location which will include:

- two eco-friendly architecturally designed buildings
- a growing area
- an ornamental sensory garden space.

This will allow the project, working with the community and educational groups, focus on back-to-work experiences, will provide an outlet for young people with special needs and will offer a space for horticulture and practical projects to the community.

## Objectives

The ACRE Project's objectives are:

- to support the work of local community groups by making available to them the ACRE facilities and networking with those who have the necessary expertise to help such groups develop;
- to address active citizenship through various training and non-formal educational ventures;
- to create a space where people feel close to nature and in the company of others can draw benefit and inspiration;
- to develop with the cooperation of government agencies and voluntary organisations, new projects which involve young people and develop, monitor and evaluate strategies and methods of promoting the work of The ACRE Project.
- to promote good practice in education, horticultural and ecological activity;
- to promote mentoring activities;
- to promote volunteer work;
- to promote, support and encourage community organisations and schools whose activities foster the growth and care of young people, especially those with social and educational needs, youth on the margins and encourage community and environmental projects;
- to provide a structured environment where the generations meet and benefit from this exchange;
- to retain at all times a creative and innovative spirit.

## Background to The ACRE Project's development

In 2008, a group, initially consisting of Ken McEvoy, Paddy Hennessy, Pat Egan, Michael Leyden, Mark Ryan, began to reflect on what they could do to make a difference within their community and to strengthen the experience of living within the community and its environs. This group had a range of interests from the creative arts to horticulture to education to doing business and living in an environmentally friendly way. Each had a strong belief that the future of a sustainable community lay in the engagement of the younger generation in the project. A core emerged from this group to spearhead the planning of the project.

As a result of research and consultation within the community the following were noted:

- the lack of a community garden space
- no community facility with a specific eco-friendly focus
- the need for more facilities in North Kildare area for youth on the margins
- the lack of training and development facilities for a broad range of community groups including unemployed people
- the lack of opportunities for the voluntary exchange of experience including mentoring
- with the exception of Castletown House, there is a shortage of leisure and recreational space.

In 2008, a site became available and was offered to this steering group for their use by Cunamh Teoranta, the property holding company of the Salesian Order in Ireland, on a fifteen year lease. This allowed the group to consult, research and to begin transforming their thinking into practice and has given rise to what is Phase One of The ACRE Project.

The ACRE Project opened its doors mid-2010. This followed numerous events and activities designed to communicate to local individuals and groups the vision of the project and to generate the necessary funds to establish the facilities which are currently on site. In excess of sixty volunteers have worked and continue to work with the project and its core team. This ranged from fund-raising to supervision of activities to public relations to general maintenance.

Events have included an evening on *Gardening with Gerry Daly*; in excess of 40 people running in the *Womens' Mini-Marathon*; a bridge evening; Creative Explosion and "Afternoon at the ACRE". The latter event consisted of plant sales, cake sales, jewellery and pottery making, art, face painting, a performance by the local Gospel Choir and a Ballet School performance.





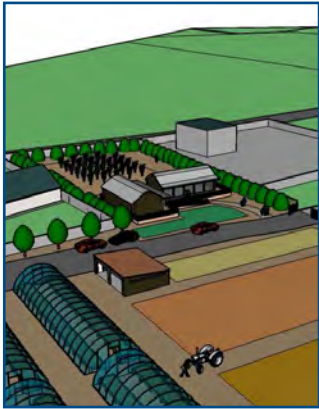


The project has developed its community aspect by engaging with a number of partners, community and youth organisations including Tidy Towns, Day Care Centre, Community Council, St Raphael's, Adult Learning Centre, the Irish Society for Autism, etc. Letters of recommendation from these and other community organisations have been provided.

**Development to date—Phase One**

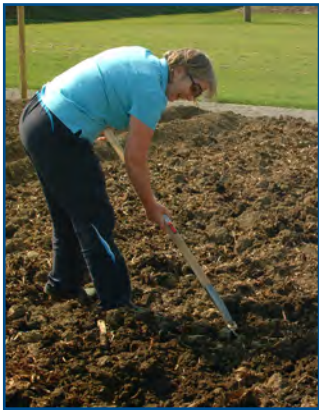
Phase One of the project involved capital expenditure to the tune of €270,000 (this is detailed on page 16.). This has resulted in:

- A state-of-the-art resource building with social, training and other facilities;
- An interactive zone including small animals;
- External beds for growing vegetables, flowers and fruit crops;
- Site services, including rainwater harvesting and air-to-water heating.



**Current Activities & Use of Facilities**

Working in collaboration with its volunteers and local community groups, the core group have organised a number of activities on-site. These have included a successful series of “planting days” under the supervision of a trained horticulturist; the running of an eight week lifestyle programme *Mindfulness Practice* which was offered to local parents; and in conjunction with the Celbridge Artistic Group held an open taster day, *Creative Explosion*, attended by over 450 adults and children. This was a day of interactive workshops in a variety of artistic and creative forms and was part of an initiative to promote creative culture in the community across many crafts and disciplines. Surveys conducted on the day indicated that people were more than willing to volunteer and help in future activities in The ACRE Project and participants indicated that they were looking for a variety of courses including:



- |                                   |                          |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| - Film & Photography              | - Sculpture              |
| - Painting                        | - Art & craft courses    |
| - Creative writing                | - Community Art Projects |
| - Music Appreciation              | - Music Classes          |
| - Drama Skills                    | - Youth Drama            |
| - Community Mothers Programme     | - Mens Coffee Club       |
| - Personal Development Programmes | - Mindfulness Training   |
| - Yoga Sessions                   |                          |

*Creative Explosion*

In addition the facilities are used on an on-going basis by adults following back-to-work FETAC Level 3 courses on Growing Your Own

Veg and by Transition Year (TY) students and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) classes following horticultural modules. Student feedback was very positive towards the horticultural module.

On a daily basis the facilities are being used by the young people attending the Learning Resource Department of Salesian College, Celbridge. The ACRE Project has been approached by the St John of God Kildare Services and the Irish Society for Autism with a view to the use of the facilities. Conscious of the long tradition in the Celbridge community of the provision of services to people with learning difficulties and the challenges they are facing, The ACRE Project is currently in negotiations with these groups.

During June 2012 a Summer School for students with learning difficulties has been based in The ACRE Project. This is a group of 14 to 18 year olds from the North Kildare area and they engage in a range of activities from gardening to physical education. As well as adult leaders, the group has teenage volunteers helping with the programme. The ACRE Project has facilitated visits from primary school groups. The schools are organising these visits as part of their school tours and also to demonstrate the practical implementation of some of the environmental and ecological practices that they have been teaching the pupils. The building has also been provided as a meeting venue to a variety of local community and family groups. These have included The Maynooth Hill Walkers and local groups of Polish people.

The project has also been the centre of academic research. Students from the Department of Community Studies and the Department of Electronic Engineering in NUI Maynooth have worked with the project in terms of their research, surveys and case studies. The wind generation programme was the subject of a full Master's thesis by a member of the Electronic Engineering Department.

The Department has further offered to make available resources during the construction of the turbine and to engage in follow up educational workshops to cover alternative power generation. Ongoing monitoring of the turbine would be available to create awareness of renewable sources of energy. There is great potential for this to expand in the future.





## Next phase—Phase Two

Based on the success of Phase One and on interest to date, it is clear that there is a need to develop the project further. In order to achieve this, it is proposed that in Phase Two of The ACRE Project the following are provided:

- a hybrid wind turbine and solar panel electricity generating system in line with the environmental and green nature of the project;
- a second resource building to cater for current demand and new programmes;
- a sensory ornamental garden, for both individuals with learning difficulties and physical challenges, and as a space for the community to visit, contemplate and relax;
- landscaping;
- office equipment;
- security fencing;
- tools, machinery and a tool shed to secure them, and
- two polytunnels, to allow for the production of a greater variety of produce and to greater facilitate teaching and working all year round.

### Strategic Initiative

The Project focuses on the following core elements, which often interlink and overlap:

- Community
- Environment
- Youth
- Non-formal education.

### Community

The ACRE Project provides internal and external spaces for the community to gather in and to use. These spaces have been designed to enable the community engage with their environment through horticultural, ecological and developmental activities. However, while the project has the community at the centre of its design, in consultation with the core group, those availing of the space decide how they want to use it. Examples include photography, creative writing, basket making, community mothers' programme, men's coffee club, personal development and art & craft courses. Developing this concept of *space* is a unique feature of the project. The space which the project provides, both inside and outside, allows the community work with nature, relax, be at peace, move quickly from urban to rural, connect with others, explore and express their creativity, and use the space to network and cross generational boundaries. As the project considers it to be essential for







any well-functioning community, it strives to be welcoming, friendly and flexible. It is somewhere that the community can ‘be’ and can ‘do.’

## Environment

Developing a project which includes a focus on living in harmony with the environment is a core principle of The ACRE Project. It has reclaimed an over-grown un-used plot of land which is now available to the local community and its young people. The facility has been designed to minimise its impact on the environment and is an example of energy sustainability in both design and day-to-day operation. It is planned to continue the development of the site with Phase Two.

In spite of being on the doorstep of an urban centre, the site has the potential of being a natural haven. Meeting, working or relaxing in such a space will encourage young and old to value in a more hands-on way the cycles of nature and how they impact on daily life.

## Youth

Many young people and young adults need support at some stage in their lives. Research and experience show that over one fifth of a school-going population will experience difficulties which can be expressed in terms of educational, emotional, spiritual, physical, behavioural or social needs. Being in direct contact with nature, in an open, friendly and family-like environment does have strong benefits and educational and therapeutic effects for young people. Collaboration between the various education providers, youth services and the community is a way forward for helping young people to tap into their own potential in an ever-changing and sometimes impersonal society.

The ACRE Project provides opportunities for further education (both formal and informal), sheltered work experiences and developing independent living skills. To date the facilities are currently used to deliver horticultural modules to TY students, LCA students and students with learning and behavioural difficulties. Discussions on a suitable programme for participants in The Bridge Project (local Garda Diversion Project) are at an advanced stage.

The ACRE Project is building a database of adult volunteers who, drawing on their own professional and personal backgrounds, are willing to share their skills and personal time to mentor young people and young adults. Currently, considering the eco-friendly nature of the project, there is interest in volunteering across many sectors of the local community, from business to retired people, from artists to those in trades.



With this in mind, two members of the ACRE team have already attended the Kildare Volunteers Training programme. Members have also attended *Leargas* information and training workshops with a view to the establishment of youth-in-action programmes in the areas of citizenship and entrepreneurial skills.

### **Non-formal education**

Just as being in direct contact with nature has strong benefits for youth, it also has benefits for the wider community. Building on this principle The ACRE Project will seek to provide activities for those people who feel that they do not fit into the more structured programmes of formal education. It will also seek to use these activities, where relevant, to encourage participants to engage in back-to-work or back-to-education initiatives. As a starting point the project will encourage people to “drop-in,” feel welcome and get involved with the day-to-day general gardening activities. By working to build this into a creative, social and community network the project will offer opportunities for:

- a meeting place for community clubs;
- a small business incubation centre;
- confidence building;
- engaging with the unemployed;
- engaging with early-school-leavers;
- local artists;
- mutual support;
- personal/social development;
- shared learning;
- volunteering, and
- workshops in Arts & Crafts.

