

THE GLENCREE SOCIETY -- ANNUAL REPORT 2017

The highlights of 2017 in Aurora were : the receipt of planning permission in May for the Sports Hall plans drawn up by Douglas Carson, and presented to the AGM last year, with only standard conditions ; development of the camping facility, which is now virtually ready for launch, with cleaver planting, improved access and a new shower & toilets building ; and -- on our fourth attempt -- success with the Government Sports Grant, to the tune of €70,000. This money is to be used for the sports hall build.

Our centre at Aurora has become increasingly popular, with weekends seldom unbooked and mid-week days being taken up by Fighting Words, students from the Outdoor Activities Institute and, more recently, St John of God Services. This success does come at a price however, as it puts pressure on services - notably on water and waste - and on wear & tear. Much money has been spent on a new well, water filtration, septic tanks, soak pits and rubbish disposal. On the last named, we are urging visitors to take their recycling home and we are in discussion with Greenstar aimed at a tidier facility and fortnightly collection. Also, our traditional volunteers, - friends of friends who could be called upon for occasional maintenance jobs - are harder to find, and increasingly we have to resort to outside sources. It must be said that without the willingness and skills of Dave Lee and Ronan Mason, our situation would be a lot worse.

All of these costs have depleted our reserves, leaving us far short of target to build the sports hall, despite the Govt. grant. We have actively pursued other funding possibilities, and John O'Shea, founder of 'Goal', came to Aurora to speak to us about ways and means of fundraising. And we have not been idle. In January we made a bid for inclusion in the Leader Programme, an EU funded scheme to promote rural development, and in March we were adjudged eligible to submit a proposal. This has been done and we are now invited to give specifications and estimates on a suite of improvements, in the €2/300,000 range. In May we applied to Wicklow Co Council for an €8000 grant from their Outdoor Recreation Fund, with design and costings for an adventure trail in the less used parts of our property. We are still awaiting a response. Through our valued association with the Irish Youth Foundation, which brought 'Fighting Words' to Glencree, we received a contingent of willing volunteers - Starbucks employees - for a day's work in Aurora in 2016, and again in 2017 when the grounds received a smart makeover, funded by their employer. Based on the success of these ventures, the Foundation is suggesting a larger sponsorship for 2018, with defined projects and a bigger team of volunteers.

These are all very promising developments, which could lead to major improvements to our centre in Glencree. Sadly however, the benefits come in the form of materials, equipment and labour and usually the Society must spend some money in order to qualify for the reward. So we are no nearer than ever to building the sports hall. On the positive side, our website has been upgraded, the online booking and payments system is in full swing and more young people than ever have come to discover the magic of Aurora.