

Council gives fulsome support to World War Peace Park proposal.

MAYO County Council have pledged to financially support the development of a Mayo World War Peace Park and Garden of Remembrance in Castlebar.

Members of the authority gave a commitment to the project following a presentation at the *November* meeting by Castlebar-man, Mr. Michael Feeney, who is spearheading the initiative. In his address, Mr. Feeney said the peace park was being put in place at Lannagh Road, Castlebar, to acknowledge and honour all the Mayo people who served and died in world wars *over* the past century.

He stated: "It is fair to say that until *very* recent times, County Mayo was unaware it had such a huge amount of war dead. I "We lost men on U.N. peacekeeping duties with *Private* Fintan Heneghan, Ballinrobe, and *Private* Billy Kedian, Ballyhaunis, being killed in recent years. "Before that we lost men in Vietnam and Korea as well as the Spanish *Civil* War. But the real loss of life was in World War One and World War Two. "Over 1,020 Mayomen were killed in World War One. They came from *every* town and village in the county. So many families lost fathers, brothers, sons, uncles and *relatives*. These families mourned and suffered in silence with no body to bury.

"The *brave* Mayo men and women who served and helped in World War One were ignored and forgotten, airbrushed out of local and national history. "The Second World War also saw the deaths of an untold number of Mayo people. We owe those *brave* people a great deal for the peaceful world we *have* enjoyed since.

"We are proposing to *develop* a Mayo World War Peace Park in their honour. It will go some small way to expressing our gratitude and thanks to all those who served and died in the cause of world peace. It will *give* families a place to pray for the people they lost. It is also an opportunity to right history."



DONATED

Mr. Feeney said his committee has acquired a site adjacent to the gates of the Old Cemetery in the county town. It was donated by a Castlebar businessman and Mayo County Council. A planning application had been lodged with Castle bar Town

Council and it was hoped to start work in February. "We need the council' s assistance to bring the project to fruit ion. In all other countries, local authorities *develop* war memorials of this type; We are merely a voluntary committee and could *never* fund a project of this nature. "We are asking for a contribution from the council's budget to help *develop* this park. We are appealing in the name of all our forgotten war dead."

Mr. Feeney paid tribute to the engineering and architectural staff of Mayo County Council for their help in preparing the plans for the project. Councillor John Cribbin, acting chairman, said all the members knew of people in Mayo who died at war. He assured Mr. Feeney and his committee that the project would *have* the full backing of the council. Councillor Jarlath Munnely stated Ireland would not be a democratic country today if it had not been for those who stood up against tyranny and paid the ultimate sacrifice for doing so.

"One things that has saddened me *over* the years is the manner in which the issue of our war dead has been politicised. The reality is that these men and women went to fight out of sheer starvation; such was the poor quality of life in Ireland at the time. They did not *have* any real political view. These were the poorest of the poor. They thought they were going to be *involved* in something heroic. But they were merely pawns of the imperial powers.

"It is well *overdue, however*, that two things are done in this country. Firstly, to recognise all those people who made the ultimate sacrifice at war and, secondly, to hold ceremonies in their honour that are non-political. "I am one hundred per cent in *favour* of Mayo County Council financially supporting this project."

AIRBRUSHED

Councillor Johnny Mee said Mr. Feeney was correct when he stated that Mayo's war dead had been airbrushed out of existence. "It is a sad indictment, but they were regarded as second class citizens. There is an onus on us to change that, particularly now at a time of better relations between Ireland and Great Britain. We *have* a responsibility to ensure the project becomes a reality." Councillor Pat McHugh, the Fianna Fail whip, said he was hugely impressed by Mr. Feeney's passion for a subject that was obviously *very* close to his heart.

"This is a *very* sobering topic and *whenever* I attended war memorials in Europe or the United States, I was immediately struck by the sense of peace surrounding them . There is definitely an aura about them. But the most shocking thing about them is to see the young ages at which the soldiers died. "We had a brush with that experience here in this chamber when *Private* Fintan Heneghan, a son of the late Councillor Jack Heneghan, was killed on U.N. peacekeeping duties. "As a council, I think we *have* a responsibility to provide a war memorial of the nature being proposed by the Mayo World War Remembrance Committee."



Councillor Michael McNamara said he recently attended a Mass in Tiernaur Church in memory of those who lost their *lives* in the world wars. It was a *very* touching experience and underlined the need for a peace park to honour all the people who lost their *lives*. Councillor Eugene Lavin said the 'peace park would be a monument to the Mayo people who fought for the freedom of Europe. He stated that Mayo County Council should be prepared to be the main contributors to the project. "I believe it is possible within our budget," he added.

ATROCITIES

Councillor Frank Chambers fully supported the concept. "It's time a proper memorial was put in place in this county and negotiations should open between the council and this committee in relation to funding it."

Councillor Chambers said great lessons had been learned from the atrocities of the first and second world wars, most notably that conflict was not a good thing. "People in power who put out a spin to justify war cannot be condoned. What's happening today in certain parts of the world is questionable, to say the least. We must condemn the actions of modern warfare." Councillor Paddy McGuinness, the Fine Gael whip, said he had no doubt that Mr. Feeney would bring his proposal to a successful conclusion as he had already displayed his huge capabilities by putting one of the county's finest sporting facilities, Milebush Park, in place.

Councillor Harry Walsh described Mr. Feeney's presentation and Councillor Munnelly's contribution as 'the best he had heard since joining the council last year.' "Unfortunately," he added, "we are 'still guilty in 'this county of anti-Semitism which manifests itself in many ways." In conclusion, Mr. Feeney thanked the elected members for their support. He said his committee was hoping to publish all the information gathered by Mr. P.J. Clarke, Ballina, and himself and there were so many untold stories of *bravery*. Mr. Feeney was accompanied by Mr. Henry Maroney and Mr. Ernie Sweeney, committee member. A similar presentation was also given at the *November* meeting of Castlebar Town Council.