

# JAMES COLLINS – LIVE IN A CITY THAT WORKS FOR YOU

The taste for politics started in Dooradoyle, developed in Dublin, and now is delivering real results in his native city. It's 17 years since newly married James and Eileen Collins left Dublin and returned to their native Limerick in search of a better life.

"We wanted to live in a city where we enjoyed life, where we could work and have access to good schools when we had children of our own. Life to us was about more than having decent jobs. We both worked in IT and were in our early twenties working hard and enjoying life. I was travelling to London and spending a lot of time in the United States. Life was exciting and our career prospects were good, but more than anything we both wanted a life for all the family.

"Dublin at the time was a very difficult city to live in and to get around: public transport wasn't good; rents were high; buying a house was expensive. A lot like now.

"But more than anything, we felt we were just living to work. We both wanted to build a family life outside of work, to live some place where there was more balance, good schools, and plenty to do after work

and school for all the family. Limerick was where we chose to be."

James grew up in Dooradoyle opposite St Paul's school. His family was in the hospitality trade – his father Michael owned the Railway Hotel, before he

became a TD for Limerick in 1997.

James' uncle is Gerry Collins, a former Minister for Foreign Affairs and MEP. James' cousin is Niall Collins, the Fianna Fail TD for west Limerick, and Fianna Fail spokesperson on foreign affairs and trade. Politics is in his blood.

Eileen shared James' background in pubs and politics. Originally from Ballyclough, Eileen's family, the O'Deas, were licensed vintners too; running John Joe O'Dea's pub on Mulgrave Street beside Limerick Prison. Eileen's mothers family, the

Crawfords of Garryspillane were always steeped in Limerick Fianna Fail and today, Eileen's brother, Councillor Jerry O'Dea, runs the pub. Her Dad, John Joe, is FG. It is probably too late to change him now.



A proud day for the family: with my wife, Eileen, and our four children, Eoghan, 16, Thomas, 14, Daniel, 11, and Beibhinn 8.

Seventeen years after the move from Dublin, the couple has no regrets. When James and Eileen walk around Mungret Park in the evenings or weekends with their four children, Eoghan, 16, Thomas, 14, Daniel, 11, and Beibhinn 8, these are the family moments they dreamed of when leaving life in the capital.

Eileen was studying computer science at Maynooth, while James was doing a Masters in Business in UCD, specialising in management information systems, an early version of Business and Information Technology. James had gone to school at St Paul's and St

Munchins, where he played centre on the same team as his schoolmate and contemporary, the late Anthony Foley. After St Munchins, James went to UL, and played for Munster Under 20s, before graduating in 1995 with a degree in economics and financial services.

"I was doing my masters in 1995 studying ecommerce and creating websites

at a time when people were getting used to the internet. Eileen was doing computer science in Maynooth, but they didn't have enough computers in the class to do her projects, so she used to come out to UCD and use our computers, so much so some of my classmates thought she was actually on the course.

"After I finished my masters, I worked with Accenture for four or five years. I travelled around, working as a management consultant going into businesses in Dublin,

the UK, Europe and the US. I was based in Dublin head office, but would have travelled regularly with them. I got to spend some time in Accenture's Global Treasury Department at their head office in Chicago as part of a project team. I was going into well-established businesses that were undergoing transformational change. I was part of a team of consultants that would help bring about that change. I learned quickly from that about having a vision for something, seeing the obstacles that are there, and planning a strategy for how you overcome those obstacles to bring about

the original vision you have.

Understand the problem, achieve the solution. It sounds abstract, but actually that is exactly what we did to bring about the civic and educational campus at Mungret College."

When James and Eileen married in

2000 and

returned late that year to live in Limerick, politics was part of both their family lives, but it was not in either of their immediate plans.

"Obviously we had a lot in common, not just that we were both from Limerick families involved in the pub trade. But the thing we had most in common was a belief that there has to be more to life than just working and commuting. We wanted to get married and move back to Limerick, where we could raise a family, have good schools



James outside one of the three new schools planned for Mungret. The area is being master planned for several hundred new houses. It is an example of how things should be done: put the services, roads, sports and community facilities in first. Then the houses.



around us, and plenty to do in the evenings. Anybody who lived in Dublin in the early to mid-90s will remember: it was so hard to get around, there was a DART, but no Luas, a limited bus service and queues for taxis at night.”

They moved back to Limerick and began the process of designing and building their

you don't know how to do something, find somebody who does.

“Obviously like most people we had very difficult years beginning around 2007, 2008 and 2009. We were right on the doorstep of Dell. When Dell moved manufacturing operations, 2,000 jobs moved almost overnight. By 2010 at the



own pub on the site in Dooradoyle.

“We designed the bar, got on site in March 2004, and we opened 16

December 2004. It was supposed to be

a 12-month build and we did it in nine months. We had to borrow massively. We still have a big commercial mortgage here, and we employ about 30 people, so overheads are high and you've got to keep busy to meet your repayments. Our style is to hire good people, train them and empower them. Give your team responsibility and watch them go. If your good enough, you're old enough. When

“My parents ran the Railway Bar next to the People's Park. Some of my fondest childhood memories were getting ice creams from this kiosk in the park, which is sadly no longer open.”

height of the crash, we had four children under the age of eight. When we opened first, Dell was busy, Limerick was busy.

We were busy.

“What I found here with my customers was they might be working in Dell and married to someone working in Dell, so both of them had lost their jobs. I knew some of our customers who were on their second home – because they'd traded up on their first home or apartment and then rented that out to two people in Dell. So I had customers here who were in double negative equity and unemployed. It was

one of the main reasons I got involved in politics in 2009. Limerick needed jobs. Lots “I had helped out in previous campaigns, canvassing, poster and helping out with constituency clinics but I wasn’t hugely active personally in politics until 2009. Things were tough here and I used my training to re-organise the business and put a strategy in place. But the community was in a bad place, my business was in

of jobs.

particularly, and in housing – making sure everyone has access to the housing market, including social and affordable housing. But we are a long way down the road from a city that was trapped in the boom-bust cycle, over-reliant on one industry – whether that was Dell or Krupps – to provide the main employment.

“Now we have multiple industries and employment sources – Northern Trust, Regeneron, Analog, General Motors, Stryker and Dell, which is still here. I was very outspoken on the need for different types of industries so that all your eggs aren’t in the one basket and as a director of Innovate Limerick I played a significant role in the purchase and development of Troy Studios, something which brings a different type of employment to



the middle of a neighbourhood that needed help to change, and Limerick City needed to change if we were all going to get back to a strong position and survive this downturn. That was when I really felt politics could help people’s lives, so long as it was about having a strategy to achieve a long-term vision, not just doing knee-jerk things for votes. Thankfully we are now in a much different place. It took time for the city and the people to feel confident again. Recent job announcements didn’t happen by accident. It took a while to recover and we still have a way to go yet.

“There’s a renewed pride in Limerick now. We have developed a reputation as a clean city, a location for high-end jobs in finance and technology, a city with good schools and third level institutions, a city that loves its sport and the arts. There’s a lot still to be done – on transport

the city but also adds to our reputation as a liveable, creative city.

“We are now planning our city in a coordinated way, so that Limerick life is about living and working. When we moved back here, we wanted a life where our children would grow up with opportunities after school. We wanted them to be able to go to university here if they wanted to, and we wanted to have job opportunities for them after university. But we also wanted a full life for ourselves as a family, and a full life means enjoying your work, and enjoying your time together after work and school. Limerick has so much more to offer now than it did back then. And there is more to come”

The park, playground and three schools at Mungret College typify the transition, and James Collins was instrumental both in coming up with the idea for the park, and



the strategy required to bring that vision about.

“There were always lots of houses in Dooradoyle and Raheen. But the problem was we tended to build the houses and worry about the amenities afterwards. We’d build big estates, with one road in and out, and create these cul-de-sacs instead of communities.

“There wasn’t enough secondary school places. The local secondary school was a comprehensive, but

it didn’t have a catchment area; it took pupils from everywhere. Some local kids ended up going to Pallaskenry and Croom. Fine schools but a long bus ride away. I believe you should be able to walk to school and sit with your neighbours.

You can play a match together after school, or call around to one another’s houses to complete a

school project or whatever, rather than me being in Dooradoyle, and you being in another village miles away. It’s actually the kids that tie you into the community – as parents, you get to meet other people in your community through the activities your kids are involved in.”

James is a coach for his son’s rugby team, and he has also helped out coaching at local schools also. His two older children attend Ardscoil Ris, while the two younger children attend The Model School, near the family home on O’Connell Avenue.

“I like to get involved where I can, especially in the schools. I could see from 2009 that there was a demand in the Mungret area for a community college similar to the policy they had in Castletroy. I am a board member of Mungret Community College, currently in temporary

accommodation and busy planning a new building. We could also see through the demographics that there was pressure coming on the primary schools. Educate Together was in temporary accommodation in Mungret College, Gaelscoil Raheen was in temporary accommodation down in Garryowen FC. We delivered new buildings for those.”

The previous owner of Mungret College ran into negative equity, the bank

foreclosed and it ended up in Nama. The council had pre-approved a loan to the council’s director of finance and Mungret College was bought with funds from that loan.

“We looked at getting a park and a playground, because it was one of the things that people with young kids didn’t have.

We coerced Crescent Shopping Centre to put a

playground on their lands as a short-term measure but the idea was always to build a proper playground and park in Mungret. “While we were planning and designing it, some people asked us to make it disability friendly. We got quite involved in the design of it – even down to equipment selection or questions like should we tar the paths or stone-chip it, and we said tar it, so that children could cycle a bike around it. There was protected views, we wanted to keep the park to the front of the college. Myself, Tomas Hannon (Labour) and the late Richie Butler (Fine Gael) said rather than arguing over individual issues, let’s come together and work with the urban renewal scheme in Mungret. We could see that there was an existing population but it was going to get bigger



“Being Mayor Limerick is a tremendous honour. We have a beautiful, storied, historic city. It has a unique creative edginess to it.”

and Mungret was a place people liked to walk and cycle to.

"This growing population needed to have some place to go after work. So the first thing we did was to improve the public realm in the village of Mungret. We slowed traffic down by putting in speed ramps, and made it look a little nicer. We built it back back towards the GAA club – which doubled in size on lands given over by the council at cost to the club – and then back towards Mungret Park itself. Dooneen Athletics club was sold enough space for a running track, at a substantial discount. Some officials wanted to move the park to behind Fr. Russell Road and behind the railway track but we felt Mungret was where it should go. It's been a runaway success.

"We have a lot still that we want to do. We are repairing the roof on the college. There's the Men's Shed group, local scouting, basketball, cricket clubs and community groups that want to get involved there.

We are still working to get a community centre there and I've come up with some innovative proposals for how we might fund that. We are busy master planning for upto 2,000 houses to be built nearby also. "My family were politicians before me but they can't elect you. It's the public that elect you. You have to put your best foot forward, put your face on the poster, and let the public decide whether they are going to vote for you or not. People will know the Collins name, particularly in west Limerick, but Collins family members weren't elected before to represent the people of Limerick City in areas such as South Circular Road, the Ennis Road,

Thomondgate, the North Circular Road, Garryowen, Weston, Prospect, Corbally, Castletroy, Annacotty and out to parts of Tipperary, all of which are going to be in the new constituency at the next general election.

"I've seen what can be achieved through politics in local government. You need to have a vision and a strategy for bringing about the change necessary to achieve that vision. That might sound abstract, but the proof is in the pudding. I'm very proud of the role I played in helping to bring about Mungret Park and Troy Studios and of my role as a director of Innovate Limerick. We recently opened ENGINE, a digital media hub to train Limerick people

**IKEA JOB INTERVIEW**

Please have a seat

**Help me put this together:**  
A New Voice For  
The Next Dáil  
CLLR JAMES COLLINS

FIANNA FAIL

**James COLLINS**

LIMERICK -  
A CITY THAT  
WORKS FOR  
YOU

[www.jamescollins.ie](http://www.jamescollins.ie)

**General Election candidate**

**Join my team**

061 308928  
0874103105  
[james@jamescollins.ie](mailto:james@jamescollins.ie)  
Twitter: @jamesjcollins  
facebook: cllrjamescollins

Write to me at  
Collins Bar,  
Dooradoyle.

to work in film and technology. My focus now is very much on Limerick 2030, The Gardens International, Opera Centre, Cleaves, housing, transport, health, pedestrianisation, festivals and events, tourism and more. We have taken an innovative approach – not least being the first local authority in Ireland and one of the first in Europe to secure low-interest loans from the European Investment Bank to help rebuild our city through major strategic developments. I'm working on other major projects for Limerick which are slowly coming to fruition after years of behind the scenes work. I've also been to the forefront of the fight to stop Irish





Cement from burning tyres and more than 100 types of hazardous waste at its Mungret plant. Limerick wants to move forward not be dragged backwards. “The aim always has been, and always will be, to contribute with others towards building a city that works for you; a city where you can raise a family, work and live; a city that’s attractive not just to foreign and indigenous employers but attractive to tourists and visitors who’ll come to sample our way of life, and once they do, we know from experience that they’ll come back, except this time, they’ll bring more people with them. Limerick is edgy and I like that edginess. It’s what we are. I want to see what we can become. Limerick is a way of life, and a way of living. I want to keep adding to the great things we already have going for us as a city and do that on a national level by representing Limerick City constituency in Dail Eireann.”



12,000 jobs created since 2014. This is a city to live, work and play. We have a beautiful riverside city, a clean environment, and an economy attracting jobs in Fintech, Pharma, and across the digital spectrum. The challenges are obvious: the most overcrowded hospital in the country, a housing crisis, and depleted Garda numbers. But the future is bright for a liveable Limerick. Together let’s build a Limerick that works for all of us.

# CLLR JAMES COLLINS

LIVE IN A CITY THAT WORKS FOR YOU

