



Sallins Park Project Description

Date: 16-08-2021

Introduction

The site is located 500 meters west of Sallins Town Centre and is 42 acres in size. This is divided into 2 land parcels with 37 acres to the south of the Sallins bypass and 5 acres to the north.

Due to the recent Sallins By-pass construction the site's former farmland habitat has been greatly modified to accommodate the By-pass road and additional service infrastructure. A steep embankment housing the new road now divides the site creating a largely flat expanse of land to the South between the Bypass and the Grand Canal and a sloping site to the North from the Bypass to the River Liffey.

The acquisition of these lands has provided Sallins with a prime recreational site to meet the needs of the area's rapidly expanding population. Sallins GAA and Sallins Celtic Football Club were granted use of the site prior to construction works and continued use of the site during these works. The design of the park will see the GAA and Football Clubs formally accommodated within the site with provision of 2 full size GAA pitches, 2 full size soccer pitches and one multi use pitch. Changing rooms, club facilities and parking for the clubs will all be provided within the larger park facilities. (Works to provide sports buildings have been studied but are not included as part of this planning application).

An online community survey was carried out to ascertain the larger community requirements and public aspirations for the site. The findings of this survey were analysed with the top rated elements drawn into the park design including a Kids Playground, a Teen area with Skatepark and basketball, Natural Play, Outdoor gym equipment, a loop path suitable for running and access to the River Liffey for water sports. Beyond play and sport other community facilities were desired such as a mixed use community building, allotments and outdoor space for occasional arts workshops, meetings and markets. In conjunction many comments relayed the desire for biodiversity and the creation of a park linked to nature with tree planting, wildflower and wetland creation.

Primary Design Decisions

With the criteria set the crux of the design layout was formed around fitting the required expansive pitches and car parking within the existing field layout in order to minimise hedge

removal and habitat loss. This required the loss of one existing hedgerow and the rerouting of a central ditch. (see image at end of document describing the analysis process). With these elements in place, links to and from the park as well as internal routes examined, roads and paths were instated and suitable sites for desired facilities located.

The position of the main entrance road was determined by site lines and levels from the by-pass allowing vehicular access to the car park, community building and allotments. Beyond this point the road narrows to allow controlled emergency access only through to the canal.

This canal entrance is likely to be the main pedestrian/cyclist route allowing easy access from Sallins town along the canal towpath, indeed this route will soon be part of the Grand canal greenway and as such will bring increased visitor numbers to the area.

3 more entrances allow access to different sections of the path along the towpath. At the furthest end of the park a route links up to the by-pass footpath and another into meet the parks loop path. At a midway point along the canal a path leads into the new wetlands area and then a wider entrance forms a small plaza to the front of the existing historic farm courtyard, in turn this path links through to the new community building and changing rooms.

The existing farmyard with its large agricultural building and historic stone walls offer an ideal space for a mixed use community yard suitable for food stalls, markets, workshops or group meetings. This area may also be suitable for use by the adjoining allotments which have been placed between the courtyard and the canal. The historic stone walls will be repaired and stabilized with sections removed for access while the existing farm shed will be restored for use as an open sheltered space. These areas will largely be left open so future use can be determined by Kildare County Council.

To the east the courtyard will be flanked by the new community building with integrated changing rooms. Although the building itself is not part of this project an architect was commissioned to prepare a room schedule allowing for the foreseen uses to determine the size of the building footprint and design entrance routes and civic space around the building.

Ecology/Biodiversity

The majority of existing hedgerows are to be retained with small gaps removed from the perimeter canal hedge in order to allow the above-mentioned entrances.

To compensate for the loss of the central hedgerow the reformed central ditch will see water from the existing canal overflow exposed within a planted stream, flanked by marginal riverside plants and nodes of native trees. This stream will link the existing canal and perimeter hedge to the River Liffey via an engineered underpass through the new road embankment, thus forming a strong green corridor linking the two existing wet ecosystems.

Further to this a large area of flat grassland close to the canal will be excavated forming two ponds, planted with aquatic and marginal species; the area will be developed as a wetlands park with raised paths and a viewing platform allowing controlled access to this sensitive habitat. Similarly an existing area of wetland on the Liffey side of the park will be encouraged with additional stream works, planting and access paths.

The dry canal basin forms another ecologically sensitive area within the site housing mature dry woodlands to the east which evolves into wet woodlands to the west. All trees within the woodlands are to be accessed with all healthy trees retained and pruned where beneficial, in areas the understorey of bramble will be removed and a low impact decked path will meander through the trees with stepped access in and out of the basin.

Additional tree planting will see extensive areas of native planting on the road embankment and within the sloped western half of the Liffey site, here pockets of forest are set within a native meadow to surround and soften a crescent shaped parking area. To the bottom of this slope lies an existing hard attenuation basin, this will also be softened with the addition of wetlands and riverside planting.

A mix of native and non-native trees have been chosen for use around the site in order to achieve maximum diversity. These will be used to line paths, create feature areas at entrances, form small orchards or shelter belts and break up hard areas such as the carpark. Ornamental grasses and perennial planting will be used in feature areas such as entrances and near buildings and again at the carpark to soften and divide the area, here planting beds will double as suds basins to hold water run off from the hard surfacing.

With the pitches occupying a large central portion of the site it was decided that they should have a mown over run for training which then grades into longer grass and uncut meadow. The longer meadow will in turn reach hedges, the planted embankment or marginal planting to the central stream. In addition several areas of native wildflower meadow will be accommodated around the site adding pops of colour and interest around the playground and exercise areas.

Play and Sport

The GAA and football pitches are full size pitches measured for each sport and spaced to allow the required runover zones. Consultations with the local sports clubs showed that they are happy to share training areas and one all weather pitch.

All pitches will have the relevant markings, goal posts and netting with one pitch flood lite for evening use with the lighting engineered to reduce spill over and impact on wildlife. All drainage from the pitches will be designed to run to the central stream. Tennis and basketball courts have been provided for other sporting options.

Play within the park is split into 3 recognisable sites. A fenced kids playground will cater for toddlers and younger children with safety surfacing below swings, slides, roundabouts and other selected equipment, a skatepark and basketball court will cater for older kids and teenagers allowing a mix of skating and scooters on robust ramps and runs with options for free running, climbing and cross over play. Both areas will be enlivened by the addition of semi-mature trees and feature planting to add colour and texture. A woodland trail within the existing dry canal trees will also allow light touch, sensory play and provide a natural explorative space with timber sculptures and play nodes.

A 3m wide exterior looped path has been designed to allow runners to complete a 1.5KM (approximately) route. Along the northern extent of the route outdoor gym equipment has been located in groups allowing users to stop mid run or use equipment as a warm up or cool down session, being close to the teen play area it may also be used by older children and teenagers.

The Liffey side of the park has largely been developed with watersports in mind, here a decked landing on the Liffey bank has been designed to link via steps to a lower platform just above high water level, allowing easier access to the river. A path from the carpark to the platform will allow users to wheel kayaks and equipment to this node.

Features and Furniture

A co-ordinated suite of high quality steel and timber furniture will be used throughout the site with the same materials and colours applied to bespoke features such as entrance gates, signage, bridges and the feature wetlands observation tower.

Park benches will be located at entrance points, within the play spaces and along paths with matching picnic tables in clusters forming relaxed places to gather.

Steel gates with feature stone walls have been designed to frame the site entrances. The steel of these gates will be finished using the hallmark colour 'Mint Turquoise' (RAL 6003) with the park name in laser cut white steel letters. The stone walls will be formed using large cut stone blocks referencing the stone used in the historic canal locks. A laser cut plate with a designed willow logo connects Sallins to its Irish name, *Na Solláin* which means "the willows". This logo will be used throughout the site on other signage and feature elements.

Bespoke bridges have been designed for the wetlands and central stream; these will be constructed in galvanised steel with hardwood side panels and timber decking to the path, an element of color will be added to the handrail and on small signage elements. Similarly the wetlands observation tower and refurbished farm shed will use the same materials. The observation tower will be topped by a painted steel safety rail appearing as a strong band of colour and the structural steel of the shed and signage will be painted to match.

