

Date: June 17th 2021

Planning Department
Kildare County Council
Devoy Park
Naas
Co. Kildare

Submission regarding the development of the Monasterevin Masterplan

To Whom It May Concern:

I refer to the above development and wish to make the following submission in contribution to the public consultation.

The 2016 Census recorded Monasterevin as having a population of 4,246. Given the number of new residential developments since that year, it can be safely assumed that the population of the town has continued to rise. This particular submission focuses mainly on ensuring that Monasterevin becomes a suitably liveable and sustainable town for its residents, and a welcoming and unique location that is attractive to visitors.

In reviewing the panels submitted by The Paul Hogarth Company, I have observed that certain elements of the draft plan have already been completed. E.g. Road and path resurfacing, various walking routes. It is my hope that these elements (and associated budget) will be replaced with new objectives in future drafts.

I have also observed some areas of opportunity that I believe could be expanded upon, or could be considered new following the first consultation.

I have listed my suggestions and observations, in numerical order for ease of reference but with no intended implication as to an order of importance.

1. Transformation of main entry points into the town, & overall design strategy

As the draft strategy mentions the “perceived negativity” associated with derelict or minimally maintained areas within the public realm, a renewal of the main entry points into the town would

transform the initial impression of the area to both locals and visitors alike.

New and appropriate town entry signage along the R445 at both ends of the town would greatly contribute to this, and a review of previous works by The Paul Hogarth Company leads me to the opinion that not availing of their design expertise in combining heritage with a more contemporary design aesthetic would be a missed opportunity.

The recent efforts and confirmed design of the Ballykelly Mills redevelopment has perfectly encapsulated this transformation towards a culture and environment that embraces both the town's industrial past, and hopes for the future. Moving towards a design plan that is cohesive with this would support Monasterevin in becoming a unique visitor location within Co. Kildare and the midlands, areas that are already rich in heritage and visitor attractions.

2. Underutilised space outside the Muiriosa Foundation



My observation is that this disused road space is ripe for redesign into a functional area for the people of Monasterevin to use daily. In the draft proposal there is mention of moving the existing limestone monument to somewhere within this location, but there does not appear to be further suggestions regarding this specific area.

I believe that there is huge potential for outdoor seating and dining areas here, with the addition of appropriate bins. Various restaurants within a small radius of this spot have no outdoor dining facilities and, even prior to Covid-19 some did not have indoor dining facilities.

Three of the restaurants in the area list pizzas for takeaway on their menus, and the provision of adequate rubbish facilities for these boxes would make a significant impact on the town and its cleanliness – individuals who have voluntarily collected rubbish that regularly accrues over weekends could attest to the numbers of takeaway-specific rubbish left around this area due to inadequate disposal facilities. Rubbish bins that are appropriately sized for pizza boxes were

recently installed by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council after it was discovered that otherwise empty bins were becoming blocked by one or two boxes; it is my suggestion that Kildare County Council install a similar unit here. The smaller nature of the location and the town in comparison to others within Co. Kildare provide a useful opportunity for a pilot project.



Cathaoirleach of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council Una Power is pictured trying out the new pizza box bins.
Photograph: Peter Cavanagh

Again, as the draft strategy mentions the “perceived negativity” associated with derelict or minimally maintained areas within the public realm, my suggestion is that this location is transformed into a productive and usable space alongside the monument. Monasterevin is a town in desperate need of accessible and safe spaces for people of various age groups to meet and socialise, it would be a shame to miss such an available opportunity.

It is my hope that the suggested outdoor dining and social space (across the road from this unused area) outlined in the draft strategy panels is only one of various spots within the town capable of facilitating residents who wish to enjoy the outdoors. Given the population of the area, this could be easily filled on a normal day. Additional areas would also provide people with varying degrees of shade or sunshine throughout the day, elements that are essential to maintaining good health.

3. The old garage space located along the R445



Appearing vacant for quite a time now, this is where many people (locals and others) have been parking their cars before catching a bus or carpooling. It is my observation that this site could become a properly functional and well-used formal parking area due to its proximity to the market square and the main bus route. Charging points for electric and hybrid vehicles could also be installed, alongside secure bicycle parking facilities such as Cyc-Lok (example below). Again, as the draft strategy mentions the “perceived negativity” associated with derelict or minimally maintained areas – it is my opinion that this is one such area that could be transformed at minimal cost.



4. Furniture: Street, park, & outdoor dining

Another observation is that The Paul Hogarth Company have previously had success in carefully considering furniture additions to their projects.

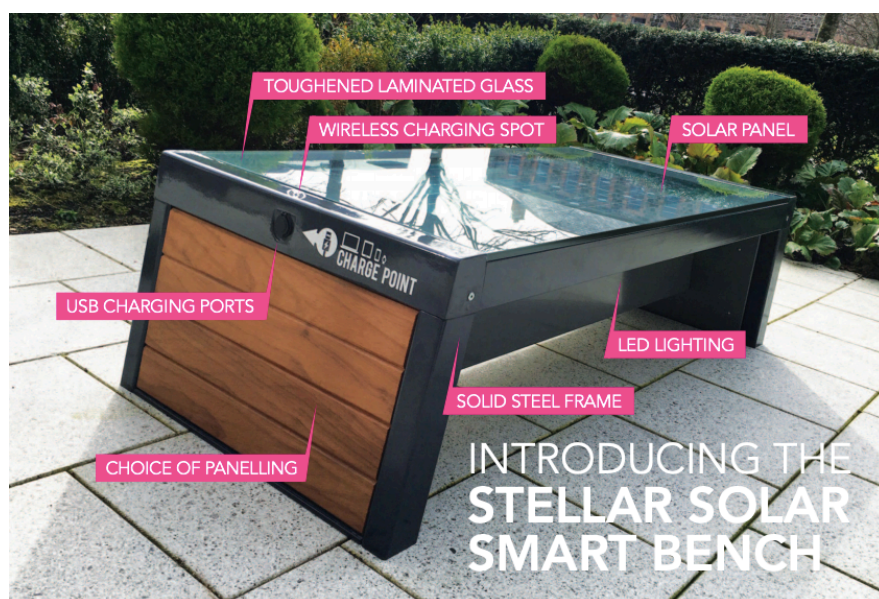
My suggestion is that any new furniture is likewise carefully considered by Kildare County Council - in terms of ensuring accessibility without creating a space that leans towards hostile architecture, and also keeping future maintenance costs low.

There are many forms of highly functional, aesthetically pleasing, and hard-wearing wooden and/or metal outdoor furniture widely available that would most likely suit the budget and needs of Monasterevin more appropriately than some of the inaccessible wooden benches throughout the town.

I would hope that adequate space for wheelchair users and those with other mobility and/or sensory issues is considered and provided throughout the full strategy in relation to both overall design and furniture choices – giving not just access to the built environment, but using the opportunity to show that the local authority can surpass expectations in creating properly liveable town to everyone.

Through personal experience, I have found that additions such as furniture that is easily cleaned and won't require continual weatherproofing is used most regularly. Some permanent tables and chairs for outdoor dining areas also benefit from being covered under forms of shelter, from trees to an appropriately-designed pavilion.

A further suggestion regarding furniture is incorporating technology into the design. Solar smart benches, like those provided by Environmental Street Furniture (ESF, example below), throughout Monasterevin town would provide welcome spots for people to meet and socialise outdoors as well as being sustainable in terms of energy usage, maintenance, and construction. Solar benches are also accessible for many in their simplicity, and the space provided alongside them. They can also facilitate meetings and group schoolwork outdoors, helping people to balance their health needs alongside their work and/or educational obligations.



5. Renewable Energy

My observation from a review of the panels relating to the draft strategy is that there isn't any indication of embracing sustainability on a deeper level. I hope that the following suggestions are taken into consideration:

Vehicles: Car charging points for electric and hybrid vehicles should be included in the town parking strategy. Ireland has a target of 1 million electric cars by 2030, and recent assessments have revealed that we (as a country) are in danger of not reaching this. Part of the reasoning behind this is that adequate charging infrastructure is not in place – installing charging points in a variety of locations around the town would significantly contribute to residents in apartments and rented accommodation switching to more sustainable transport options. Extrinsic motivators such as a wider offering of charging points within a town can lead to greater levels of consumer change. In 2019 there was a government announcement that councils were going to install up to 1,000 on-street charging points, it is my request that Kildare County Council allocate some of these to the new town plan.

Solar: A further suggestion is the installation of solar charging points (example image of ESF's Street Charge below) for phones, tablets, and camera equipment at a useful location in the town. One such suitable space would be at canal harbour where both residents and tourists already enjoy recreational activities such as boating, fishing, kayaking, running, walking, etc. Once the Barrow Blueway route is completed, charging points for devices will be an additional attractive incentive for tourists to take a break in Monasterevin.



Monasterevin Sustainable Energy Community is a recent group started by locals, who could also be called upon for support and/or feedback in evaluating cost-efficient renewable energy opportunities within the town.

6. The “A Vision for Canal Harbour” Panel

The concept of providing accessible and sustainable recreation areas at this location is very appealing.

However, my observation from reviewing the illustration is that having another playground area for small children meters away from the already existing playground does not seem like the most appropriate use for the space. I suggest that alternative recreation opportunities are explored and considered here, for example: permanent recreation furniture such as outdoor table tennis tables (such as those on Mayor Street Upper behind the Convention Centre in Dublin), outdoor chess tables, outdoor exercise equipment for both young and older people (seen and regularly used in various other towns), more accessible outdoor dining furniture for picnicking, a half basketball court, or a small multi-purpose surface for various sports to be played.

I also sincerely hope that Waterways Ireland are engaged with if works are to be carried out in this space across the road, in order to avoid pollutants accidentally entering the canal.

7. Barrow Blueway

Given that the Barrow Blueway recreational route is nearing completion, I look forward to seeing how this is incorporated into further iterations of the town plan – particularly in relation to the Canal Harbour and the Waterfront Heritage Points. My observation is that there is plenty of opportunity for planners to draw people from the Barrow Blueway route for a short detour around the town, incorporating some heritage points and some of the pre-existing local walking loops.

8. Riverside Park

My observation is that there doesn't appear to be mention of Riverside Park within the draft proposal, and that this is a huge missed opportunity.

At a previous public consultation, I recall speaking to a representative from The Paul Hogarth Company who had great enthusiasm and ideas for renewing the park to make it infinitely more usable for the people of Monasterevin – a section converted into an outdoor amphitheatre area, a universally accessible entrance, outdoor dining areas, permanent and safe BBQ areas, clear and level grassed spaces where temporary event structures could be erected or families could play, a small multi-use games area, an accessible waterfront point into the Barrow, etc. I was disappointed to find none of this was included in the draft plan.

Monasterevin is a town that is desperately lacking in casual recreational facilities for young people and adults. Although the park isn't directly within the town centre, and therefore this could be a potential reason for its omission from the masterplan, I believe that this represents an enormous missed opportunity.

Various gardens along the River Barrow are open for public use, however they do not meet the accessibility needs of many residents or visitors. Nor do they provide much diversity in recreational opportunities. Riverside Park represents a perfect solution to some of these issues.

The need for adequate and well-spaced outdoor recreational areas has been highlighted even more since the last Monasterevin masterplan public consultation. Advice from both the government and public health officials throughout Covid-19 was to socialise and exercise outdoors as much as possible, there are currently very few places within the town of Monasterevin where there is even an appropriate bench for socially-distanced meetings.

Additionally, I suggest that the younger people of Monasterevin are engaged with fully in terms of sourcing suggestions for and workable solutions to their recreational needs. The current offerings within the town focus heavily on team ball sports, with even the old tennis courts having

disappeared into dereliction.

Monasterevin already has various groups that could utilise an outdoor amphitheatre space if it was provided, including: drama, choral, and poetry groups. It would be an ideal space for summertime community film, theatre, and speaking events.

It is my hope that all of this potential with Riverside Park is not overlooked. The benefits to the entire community of Monasterevin, and especially the large number of residents close by, could be remarkably significant.

9. Cassidy's Distillery

The concept provided within the draft strategy panels, "re-imagining this historic landmark as a space to exhibit, perform, work, meet and play – a creative centre for residents and visitors alike" does sound appealing. However, my observation is that this discounts several existing buildings within Monasterevin that already provide such facilities – e.g. the community centre, the council hall. Is this the most urgent use of funds?

I imagine that some of the "perceived negativity" referred to in the draft strategy related to these buildings, I would suggest that following some measures to alleviate this appearance (removing the painted hoardings, ensuring that the existing structure is safe for pedestrians walking by, etc.) would consume much less of the initial budget allocated to Monasterevin.

The town needs appropriate outdoors community spaces, for both social and recreational needs. It is my suggestion that the design and creation of these outdoor spaces is given priority, especially given the on-going unknown nature of the current pandemic and the lack of appropriate and accessible facilities within the town.

A further suggestion relating to the distillery is to consider alternative uses for the structure, should a costly renewal go ahead – hot desking facilities for people who will now be permanently working from home, classrooms for community training, soundproofed areas for music lessons, a community kitchen, etc.

10. Water fountains

I suggest that water fountains with the capability to fill reusable drinkware are provided at high footfall locations throughout the town, including somewhere along a main route to the new school. To realise some health and sustainability goals that both the Irish government and the UN (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]) hold, this would represent an easy and low-cost contribution.

11. Planting and hard landscaping

In relation to developing a Monasterevin Masterplan with sustainability as one of the key themes, I suggest that planting and hard landscaping is carefully chosen in keeping with this.

For example, hard landscaping where maintenance can be continually herbicide free in order to protect the health of both people and wildlife. It also means that an added benefit is that future maintenance would potentially be low-cost to the council.

A second suggestion is that considered planting occurs that supports biodiversity and wildlife (so avoiding dark and/or particularly shaped flowers that are not of benefit to pollinators)

A third is that if new trees are incorporated into the planting scheme, that some are edible fruit trees (dessert apples, pears, plums, etc.) – this could contribute to the health-related goals of the people of the town, and also contribute to a UN SDG goal in relation to food security.

Lastly, given that the midlands can often be quite grey in appearance during winter, a suggestion is to incorporate winter-colour planting that will boost the mood of the environment appropriately and continue to provide pleasing outdoor social and recreational spaces for people.

12. Fire Station



Given that there are plans to relocate the Fire Station from it's current home along Main Street, my observation is that there are plenty of future opportunities in relation to this building.

Monasterevin town, and especially along Main Street with all of the gardens and walking routes, is in need of public bathroom facilities. A portion of this building could be very appropriate for such facilities.

It could also be utilised as a space for community groups to hold meetings and training sessions, and store their various pieces of equipment that otherwise needs to be fit into their family homes.

Training classrooms and/or hot desking facilities for Monasterevin community members are a further suggestion.

It is my hope that consideration is given to the potential that lies within this building in a long-term plan for Monasterevin.

13. Bicycle Racks

Sheffield stands, or similarly unobtrusive and hard-wearing bicycle racks would be a useful incorporation into the cycling infrastructure of the town. Additionally, many people will hopefully be cycling the Barrow Blueway and will need somewhere appropriate to secure their bikes when taking a break.

Furthermore, some secure bike sheds such as those being currently trialled by Dublin City Council could prove to be incredibly useful for the various apartment and small houses in developments around the town.

14. Survey Feedback

As there did not appear to be an appropriate option at the end of the survey, I wish to submit one small piece of feedback in regards to it here. A question was posed near the beginning, asking the respondent: "From the list below, please indicate the top three items that you feel could be improved for Monasterevin:" Within the list that followed, there were no options in regards to recreation or socialisation facilities (outdoor or indoor) within Monasterevin. Nor were there any options in regards to the environment or sustainability. I would hope that in future town surveys (for Monasterevin, or elsewhere), these options relating to the simple liveability of a place are considered and included.

I trust that this document containing my observations, suggestions, and concerns will be considered fairly, and I look forward to discovering how everyone's feedback and contributions are incorporated into future drafts.

Sincerely,

Geraldine Kenny.