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17th June 2021

Re: Monasterevin Masterplan Submission

To Whom It May Concern:

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the public consultation on the draft Monasterevin Masterplan. I note that the aim of the plan is that Monasterevin *“continues to grow and evolve as a great place to live and work in, to visit, and to enjoy.”*

Also that the *“ Masterplan will guide the sustainable growth of Monasterevin, for it to be a safe and enjoyable place to live, work and prosper, while leveraging the town’s unique assets as an exciting place to visit and explore.”*

While I thank you for commissioning this draft plan I think the proposal is too limited both in the area covered and its objectives to bring about the changes needed for our community to meet the many challenges ahead. I also note that some of the work proposed in the Paul Hogarth Company panels e.g. road and footpath improvements have already been carried out. I hope that future drafts of the Monasterevin Masterplan reflect this and funding is redirected elsewhere.

The draft Masterplan makes a lot of reference to Monasterevin’s historic centre and heritage waterways and while we have some wonderful historic buildings and our access to water is truly unique I would like to see more in the plan that would help us become sustainable at a deeper level and promote decarbonisation towards a sustainable future.

I note the plan reimagines the Distillery as *“a space to exhibit, perform, work, meet and play”*. This project sounds as if it will require a multi-million euro investment and I would question if now is the right time to pursue it at this scale. We have other community buildings already in use which could be helped upgrade to make them more comfortable, accessible and

sustainable. Many other projects could be achieved at less total cost than the Distillery project. Perhaps the fire station, when replaced, could be revamped as a smaller version. A less expensive community meeting space with some community classrooms and Hotdesks could help us gauge local demand for Coworking spaces.

Covid has reinforced the importance of our outdoor spaces and public health advice is to exercise and socialise outdoors as much as possible. I believe now is the time to make as much of our outdoor communal space as safe, accessible, functional, attractive, sustainable, and resilient as possible to future water, biodiversity, climate and pandemic challenges.

Approach roads

I would like the plan to start by improving the appearance when approaching the town on the R445 from either direction. The Paul Hogarth Company has designed some stylish signage for other towns and something referencing our unique water heritage could both impress visitors and give locals a sense of pride as they return home.

Streetscapes

I agree with much in the proposal to improve the streetscape along Moore street and Market Square and provide outdoor green communal seating areas. I would like to see this replicated in multiple areas around the town using low maintenance, socially inclusive, non-hostile furniture with renewable technologies, such as solar benches and shelters.

The area, originally an arm of the crossroads at the monument (outside the gates to the Muiríosa Foundation), would be another ideal location for more public seating.

I would be perfectly happy with the Monument remaining in its current location, it really is a local landmark. If the Monument is moved as suggested to this area outside the gates to the Muiríosa Foundation I would hope that that would not become the sole purpose of this location. There are many takeaway restaurants nearby with no outdoor dining areas and I am sure seating in this area would prove very popular. Extra bins could be provided for waste, including those specifically designed to take pizza boxes, which currently take up disproportionate space in the normal rubbish bins.

I believe the town centre would be greatly enhanced if businesses were aided both financially and with design expertise to change their signage to something more aesthetically pleasing and less plastic. This would make Monasterevin town centre more attractive to spend time in for residents and visitors alike.

Canal Harbour

I think the Canal Harbour area would benefit hugely from sensitive development. Many local residents, walkers and kayakers already make great use of this area. I imagine that with the development of the Blueway the numbers walking and cycling and boating here will in all probability increase exponentially. In fact our local walkways have become even busier since the pandemic and have been a great resource to help people keep in touch safely and cope with the stress of living during Covid.

I would not like to see the area adjacent to the Canal Harbour developed as a playground for young children as there is already a well-equipped safely fenced playground for them only meters away. I would prefer to see Canal Harbour developed to accommodate a much wider range of age groups. It would be ideal as an outdoor seating space with solar benches and solar phone and E bike charging stations where local people could meet. Blueway users could rest here before continuing on their journey. This area would be ideal for some outdoor games such as chess or draughts and should have a public drinking water fountain capable of refilling reusable water bottles similar to those provided in many other counties.

Outdoor Public Recreation and Community Spaces

Monasterevin needs an easily accessible outdoor multipurpose community space for casual recreational use. At present there are no informal public recreation activities to engage our teenagers and young adults. I would love to see a space designed for multiple uses. A flat area for kicking a ball around with some outdoor table tennis and basketball nets and outdoor fitness equipment would be wonderful. With thoughtful design this could double as an area to put up marquees for events or to hold concerts and plays. Raised seating around the perimeter

would mean the area could be also be used as an amphitheatre. A public drinking water fountain should be provided also.

Sustainable Transport

With 75% of our working populating commuting outside the area to work (pre-Covid figure) it is imperative that we encourage as many as possible to use public transport. While much of the power to reduce public transport costs is outside the scope of this Masterplan providing better infrastructure will help people make the transition.

- Car Park and Park and Ride facility

The site beside the former Finlay's garage on the Portlaoise Road, being both close to the town centre and bus stops, would make an ideal site for a Park and Ride facility. It should be built with a solar roof and have stations to charge electric vehicles including E bikes, similar to what is becoming standard in many European countries.

- Electric vehicle charging points need to be widely available around the town and along the canal to help people transition away from petrol and diesel. This is particularly important for people living in rented accommodation or apartments as they most likely do not have the option of installing a home charger.

Sustainable Infrastructure

I would like to see:

- lots of nicely designed low maintenance , socially inclusive, non-hostile furniture for people to use in multiple locations around the town. This would facilitate individuals and groups to meet up safely outdoors.

-multiple solar charging stations anywhere people are likely to congregate. Many solar phone and bike charging stations have been cleverly and stylishly designed. Some charging stations will also provide the users with shelter which may be very welcome given our weather!

-I think as much infrastructure should be powered by renewable technology as possible. Our outdoor community recreation spaces should be designed so that moderately sized events can be powered using renewable technology.

-a solar or green roof on our bus shelters.

Sustainable planting

Outside of Environmentally sensitive areas I think planting should be focused on supporting pollinators and promoting biodiversity using herbicide-free maintenance. Plant colours should be chosen to support this and all should be selected with the All Ireland Pollinator Plan in mind.

As the security of our food supply becomes an increasing issue I believe that trees planted in communal amenity areas should have edible fruit or nuts. Lots of advice is available to help choose varieties that will not be too water dependent. I imagine hazelnuts and other members of the Corylus family will be among the most appropriate and have the added benefit of providing a free source of protein.

We are at a critical moment in time in terms of tackling environmental challenges. The decisions we make, and the structures we put in place, as part of this Masterplan will have a huge impact on the future success of our community. In order to become as vibrant and resilient as possible inclusiveness and sustainability need to be central to the design process.

I hope that my suggestions are considered for the next draft of the Monasterevin Masterplan.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted personal information]