



Peter Thomson
Planning Solutions



The Draft Kildare County Development Plan,
C/O The Administrative Officer,
Forward Planning,
Áras Chill Dara,
Devoy Park,
Naas,
Co. Kildare.

23 May 2022

Dear Sir/ Madam,

The Draft Kildare County Development Plan 2023 - 2029

This submission is being made in respect of Chapter 12 (Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure) of the Draft Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029 (“the Draft Plan”) on behalf of the owner of Gowran Grange House, Swordlestown, County Kildare,

A submission has been made to the Draft Plan by the Punchestown Area Community Group in respect of Chapter 12 which seeks to add the Gowran Grange estate and demesne land to the Green Infrastructure network as a “Stepping Stone”.

The Punchestown Area Community Group (“The Group”) was established on 10th March 2022, shortly after a planning application was made for a solar array development within the attendant grounds of Gowran Grange House (planning application ref: 22/111). There are no details of the membership of the Group or whether its interest is confined to local residents or includes commercial interests. We are agents for the owner in respect of this application.

The Group has made submissions to other chapters of the Draft Plan (Chapter 9 (Our Rural Economy (equine) and Chapter 11 – Built and Cultural Heritage (RPSs); with specific references to Gowran Grange House and the proposed solar development.

Green Infrastructure is broadly defined in the Draft Plan as “a strategically planned and managed network featuring areas with high quality biodiversity (uplands, wetlands, peatlands, rivers and coast), farmed and wooded lands and other green spaces that conserve ecosystem values which provide essential services to society”.

The "Stepping Stones" referred to in the Draft Plan Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Chapter comprise one of several specific elements which contribute to the overall Green Infrastructure network. The other elements are Core Areas, Green Corridors, Peatways, Blueways/ greenways and designated EU Habitat sites.

Examples of "Stepping Stones" include Protected Demesne landscapes, with specific reference to Carton House and Castletown House. Carton House and its demesne have been developed as a hotel, golf and conference tourist and visitor destination and Castletown and demesne is part State-owned (OPW) and is also a major tourist and visitor destination within the county.

Gowran Grange House and estate is a private house and property which is not open to the public and would be an inappropriate inclusion amongst the Protected Demesne landscapes listed as Stepping Stones in the Draft Plan.

There is a network of public roads around the Gowran Grange House and estate from which views of the woodlands and grounds can be enjoyed without having to gain access through the private property.

The Groups submission refers to Punchestown Racecourse as a "stepping stone" and the former Tullow railway line as a "green corridor". It states that this railway line forms part of the Gowran Grange Estate and, therefore, that the estate forms part of the green infrastructure network and should act as a link corridor between the two.

There was a section of the former rail line land along the westmost boundary of a single field at the western extremity of the Gowran Grange Estate landholding. The railway embankment has long since gone and the land is encompassed into an agricultural field that falls outside the original demesne lands. Solar arrays are proposed in this field as part of the current planning application and will be set back from the former rail line corridor to ensure the greenway is facilitated if required. The owner's landholding also has the potential to assist in circumventing an existing house that is built on the former rail line adjacent to this field and currently presents an impediment to a through route for the greenway.

The physical connection that The Group suggests should bisect the Gowran Grange House demesne, thereby allowing public access between Punchestown Racecourse and the greenway is impractical, inappropriate and unachievable. There is no logical need for such a connection between Punchestown racecourse and the greenway. The existing public road network and walkways provide sufficient connection between the two if required.

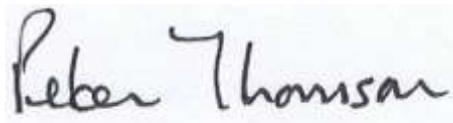
Finally, the Groups submission makes extensive reference to the high ecological and biodiversity value of the Gowran Grange estate in its justification for its inclusion as a stepping stone in the Green Infrastructure network.

Existing wildlife habitats and corridors within the estate will be improved as a result of the proposed solar development. Once operational the area will be further awash with wildlife due to the nature of the proposed use which, unlike many agricultural activities, will not disturb wildlife activity. The introduction of public thoroughfares to the estate, as suggested by The Group, would unnecessarily disturb and threaten the very existence of many existing habitats in contravention of Draft Plan biodiversity policies BI P1 (the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and landscape by minimising adverse impacts on existing habitats) and BI P4 (ensuring new developments do not have significant adverse impacts, incapable of satisfactory mitigation protected habitats).

It is respectfully submitted that the inclusion of the Gowran Grange estate as a Stepping Stone within the Draft Plan Green Infrastructure network would be inappropriate and not be in the ecological and biodiversity interests of the private estate.

We would be grateful for written confirmation of receipt of this observation.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Thomson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Peter Thomson, MSc, MIPI