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

24 May 2022

**Re: Draft Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029
Observations by Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Further to the publication of the draft Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029, the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon respectfully request that Kildare County Council takes into consideration this submission in finalising the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029.

The following submission has taken into account, the provisions of the draft Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029, the role of the Development Plan in the facilitation and preservation of *arts and culture* in Kildare, and other statutory provisions and guidance including the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), and the 'Draft Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2021'.

1.0 The Role and Function of the Arts Council /An Chomhairle Ealaíon

The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon is the Irish government agency for developing the arts, which operates as an autonomous body under the aegis of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. The Arts Council works to create central place for the Arts in Irish life and works in partnership with artists, arts organisations, and public policy makers to fulfil this role. In addition the Art Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon is a Prescribed Body under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Arts Council Architecture and Spatial Policies

The Arts Council is guided by its own strategy '**Making Great Art Work, 2016 - 2025**' which sets forth the framework on how the Arts Council intends to progress the development of the arts in Ireland to 2025. Further to that, the Arts Council has recently published its own Spatial and Architectural Policies. The **Spatial Policy** '*Place, Space & People*' provides a framework for the greater integration of arts and culture into land use planning based on its role as a Prescribed Body in the Irish Planning System, whilst its **Architecture Policy** '*Championing Architecture*' sets out a vision for an Ireland where architecture culture is championed and where everyone experiences and benefits from high-quality architecture in their everyday lives. These documents are all available on the Arts Council website (www.artscouncil.ie) with direct links set out in the footnote.¹

Requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)

The provision of cultural and arts infrastructure, like any social capital, requires forward planning and foresight commensurate with identification of need and tangible outputs. The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) acknowledges this and the requirement for spatial planning for arts and culture in the development plan are set out under Section 10(2)(b) of that Act which includes a requirement for;

*"the integration of the planning and sustainable development of the area with the social, community and **cultural** requirements of the area and its population";*

(bold emphasis added)

2.0 Development Plan Considerations

Spatial Considerations of Arts and Culture

Planning for *arts and culture* means more than the development of a physical infrastructure and services. The provision of arts and culture can contribute toward community, societal and spatial development in a number of ways. This includes creative placemaking which can create a vibrant, distinctive sense of place; creation of stronger communities by providing spaces which enable informal social engagement; and enhancement of the physical and economic value of an area through quality and engaging places and spaces as well as supporting areas for arts and cultural events.

Our recent experiences with the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that arts and culture are essential to the community well-being of the county with the pandemic highlighting the value of practical high-quality public open space enabling the provision of formal and informal engagement as an essential part of community infrastructure. (This has been acknowledged by the Draft Kildare Development Plan in its reference to the reclaiming of space at Market Square Kildare Town [section 14.5.5 of the draft plan refers]).

¹ <https://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Local,-Place-and-Public-Art/Place,-Space- -People/>
<https://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Architecture/Architecture-Policy/>

3.0 Observations on the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029

In terms of 'Arts and Culture in the Community', the Arts Council acknowledges the recognition afforded in the Draft Plan to both the Kildare Arts Strategy "*Short Grass Stories: An Arts Strategy for Kildare; 2018-2022*" (your mandated function under the Arts Act 2003) and the "*Kildare - Culture and Creativity Strategy; 2018-2022*" the local response to the Creative Ireland programme.

The Arts Council welcomes the recognition and association given in the Draft Development Plan, between 'arts and culture' and 'social infrastructure' which are essential services which all have a role to play in our quality of life. Furthermore, the Arts Council notes and welcomes the additional commentary set out in Section 10.1 of the draft Plan which states that: "*These services and facilities should ideally be located within each town/village to provide easy access and optimise the opportunity for people to walk or cycle to them*".

That said, the Arts Council makes the following observations and recommendations in respect to the Draft Development Plan;

3.1 Enhanced Support for Spatial Objectives of the Arts Plan and Arts Strategy

The Kildare Arts Strategy (An Arts Strategy for Kildare County Council 2018-2022) suggests, as one of its priority measures; - the provision for Arts, Health and Wellbeing will be made in each Municipal District area within the County. However, the provisions of the Draft Plan appear somewhat more strategic and less specific or definite in terms of supporting arts and culture provision in Kildare for the next 6-years.

Whilst **Policy SC P10** stated that it is the policy of the Council to: - "*Develop and improve the physical infrastructure of arts and cultural facilities throughout the county particularly in areas where there is a deficiency in such provision*"; the Arts Council respectfully submit that Policy SC P10 would appear to present a less decisive intent as well as an element of uncertainty than the priority set out in the Arts Strategy in relation to where such provisions might be provided during the plan period.

In 2021, the Arts Council began a three year investment programme Creative Places Athy with Kildare County Council and this represents a tangible methodology of investing spatially which could become a point of reference within the Draft Plan.

By redress, the Arts Council would recommend greater co-ordination between the Development Plan policy/objectives and the Arts Strategy in terms of the targeted areas within the County for the provision of such arts and culture infrastructure. Parallel to that, the Arts Council would welcome clarity in the Development Plan, as to how it intends to clarify the levels of "*deficiency*" referenced in Policy SC P10 and/or whether it is the intention of the Council to determine this during the lifetime of the development plan and in tandem with the Arts Office or otherwise, and what metrics (spatial, demographic or otherwise) it might suggest to enable monitoring and review of the success of the Development Plan.

3.2 Greater Clarity in the Development Plan's Policies relating to Arts and Culture Infrastructure

The Arts Council acknowledges and supports the specific policies, objectives and related actions provided under Section 10.10 "*Arts and Culture in the Community*", which have set out the local

authority's intention to facilitate *"the need for additional facilities / spaces to cater for the growing population"* within County Kildare.

That said, it is unclear as to how and when certain objectives can be implemented from a spatial planning perspective. For example, in the context of the draft **Policy SCP10, Objectives SC047 – SC057 and Actions SCA11-SCA17**), it is unclear how the Development Plan will/would;

- *"Develop and improve the physical infrastructure of arts and cultural facilities throughout the county particularly in areas where there is a deficiency in such provision"* (SCP10).
- *"Continue to enhance art spaces in libraries, including visual arts and gallery performance and workshop facilities"* (CS048).
- *"will examine the feasibility of identifying a location for a performing arts space theatre..."*, (Action SC A11)
- *"examine the feasibility of providing an arts and craft Co-Operative on Council owned lands...."*. (Action SC A16); and
- *"To investigate the feasibility of providing a museum attraction in North Kildare"*.

(Bold emphasis added)

In the context of the Draft Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities which state that objectives "should be capable of implementation and should be referenced against an indicator for the purposes of monitoring" (Section 5.1), the Arts Council would welcome the inclusion in the Development Plan of clear, definable and implementable policies, objectives and actions which indicate clearly, what the Council intends to provide and carry out during the life of the development plan, and upon which, monitoring of implementation basis such objectives can and will be measured during the Development Plan period.

3.2 Inclusion of Arts and Cultural Facilities in Social Infrastructure Audits

The Arts Council supports the inclusion of Arts and Cultural facilities in the preparation of Social Infrastructure Audits as part of the Local Area Plan process, as required under Objective SC O55.

Further to that, the Arts Council would support and encourage a county wide register of Arts and Cultural infrastructure which would inform the Development Plan as well as the Local Area Plan process and identify any spatial or locational 'deficiency' of arts and culture infrastructure, given the recognition afforded to it in the Draft Plan as essential community service and infrastructure. Such an approach would be reflective also, of the priorities set out in the 'Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018–2022' which suggests an audit and mapping process of cultural and creative resources in County Kildare to enhance and support local cultural and creative network and, it would contribute to a more effective and focused approach to Policy SCP10 referred to previously.

3.3 Placemaking

Section 14.5.4 of the Draft Plan sets out several types of public realm strategies applicable to different urban areas in Kildare in order to *"transform the public realm"* including provision of 'frameworks' for 'Urban Design' and 'Regeneration', 'Masterplans', Town Renewal Masterplans, and 'Public Realm Strategies' (Table 14.1 refers).

In support of these 'placemaking' approaches, the Arts Council would recommend that specific reference is made in the *"Purpose and Level of Detail"* under each type set out in Table 14.1 of the

Development Plan, to the provision of public spaces for the use also for formal and informal public engagement, interaction and/or the provision of arts/cultural activities/events.

3.4 Architecture

In addition to supporting high quality urban-design (referenced in Objective UD01 of the Draft Plan), and in the context of its own Architecture Policy and the forthcoming National Policy on Architecture, the Arts Council would welcome the inclusion of a Policy/objective in the Development Plan to promote high-quality architecture that is built to last, designed for climate resilience and sustainability and that public spaces are of sufficient quality, responsive to their locational characteristics, and designed for public benefit, use and functionality.

3.4 Active Use of Vacant Properties in Town Centres

In order to promote the transition of uses, to assist in active reuse and urban renewal and the 'Town Centre' first concept, the Arts Council would support the inclusion of a policy/objective in the Development Plan that supports the temporary use of vacant commercial / retail premises in town centres for the promotion of arts and culture.

We would be grateful if you could acknowledge receipt of this submission in due course.

Yours faithfully,



Sinéad O'Reilly,
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