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SUBMISSION TO KILDARE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2023-2029.

On behalf of Johnstown Garden Centre, Johnstown, Naas, Co. Kildare.

**Submission prepared on behalf of Johnstown Garden Centre by Derek Whyte, Planning Consultant,
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Introduction.

Johnstown Garden Centre was established in 1974 by John & Elsie Clarke from Newbridge, Co. Kildare. Nearly 50 years later, is managed by the third generation of the Clarke family, the Garden Centre is one of the best-known Garden Centres in Ireland. Johnstown Garden Centre was one of the first purpose-built garden centres in Ireland and today is in the top Garden Centres in the country.¹

Since its relocation to the present site, Johnstown Garden Centre has become the Garden Centre standard that other similar Garden Centres aspire to. Johnstown Garden Centre continues to be the leading Garden Centre location through continued innovation and development. Its presence on the M7/N7 motorway is recognised as an iconic location on the motorway and it is now the leading Garden Centre destination.

The Garden Centre business has changed and evolved dramatically over the last 50 years and Johnstown Garden Centre has had to adapt to these changes to keep relevant to the changing environment. Today, garden centres need to be a destination centre offering a broad and diverse range of home and garden products. Gardens are now being designed and considered as an extension to the living area of a dwelling house and this has required garden centres to adapt their offerings.

Today, house and garden sizes are smaller and more compact, and consequently the garden centre business has had to adapt to all these changes. During the Covid-19 pandemic, gardening was considered one of the recognised therapeutic activities. Johnstown Garden Centre facilitated these activities through continued innovation and adaption to the changing environment.

The business is still family owned, now in its third generation where the second generation was ran by Jim and Sean Clarke for nearly 40 years until Jim's retirement in 2020, now Sean and his wife Bernie and their three children Paul, Barry and Emma now run and manage the business.

¹ The Orchard, Celbridge, Co. Kildare and The Arboretum, Co. Carlow are similar developments.



Today the business employs 40 full-time staff and approximately 50 part-time staff. The majority of all staff are living locally, especially the part-time staff who tend to be local students and people wishing to be involved in the horticulture and retail business. Johnstown Garden Centre has a long history of employing local people. It also provides opportunities for students studying horticulture to gain experience in the horticultural business.

Senior staff in Johnstown Garden Centre, through qualification and experience continue to provide advice and a consultancy service to its many clients and customers.

The business specializes in quality trees, shrubs and bedding plants, house plants, flower and vegetable seeds, bulbs, and all gardening essentials. Johnstown Garden Centre also offers a large selection of garden furniture, barbecues, pots and containers, homeware, and gifts. This latter has grown substantially over the years and is now a large proportion of the business. The Christmas, Halloween, Easter, and all seasonal events have become major events now in Irish people's lives where people deliberately and consciously celebrate these events in a horticultural manner. Johnstown Garden Centre has responded to the demands created by these events.

As with other similar destination centres, The Garden Café is also now very important and significant part of the business. Customers can avail the extensive indoor café or outdoor garden area and have lunch, or just a coffee. Due to its location on the M7/N7 motorway, it is a focal meeting point for families and business people.

The Garden Café is an exemplar of an Age Friendly Café, and we are currently working with Age Friendly Ireland to achieve certified Age Friendly Status, thereby making Johnstown Garden Centre the first Age Friendly Garden Centre and Café in Ireland.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the majority of business was in plant sales with a small amount of garden sundries. Today, which is the normal for large destination garden centres in Ireland and the UK, the percentages have changed dramatically. Our business today is 40% plants, 40% garden accessories and seasonal items, and 20% is from The Garden Café.



Johnstown Garden Centre has approximately 750,000 visitors each year. To give the local authority a flavour of what Johnstown Garden Centre is now and to highlight that Johnstown Garden Centre is more than just a Garden Centre we include the following photographs which will allow the local authority to appreciate the facility.







SUBMISSION.

Johnstown Garden Centre needs to be recognised as more than a Garden Centre. It has now developed and evolved into a major retail destination for horticultural products ranging from plants, garden furniture, seasonal products (Christmas, Halloween, Easter etc.) and a very successful restaurant/café.

Johnstown Garden Centre continues to grow, year on year through a mix of innovation and development of a wide range of products and offerings, and is now one of the most successful Garden Centres in Leinster, if not in Ireland. Its location adjacent to the M7/N7, with national bus routes and good pedestrian access to Johnstown Village enables Johnstown Garden Centre to continue to develop and maintain its standing as one of the leading Garden Centres in Ireland.

We note that the current Kildare County Council Development Plan zoning for the Garden Centre is stated as:

“Q1 – To facilitate the operation of Johnstown Garden Centre. Any Future development of the Garden Centre must be in accordance with the Retail Policies and objectives set out in Chapter 9 of this Plan. Any specific development proposal must also be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area”

We submit and would suggest that a more appropriate wording for Q1 would be

To recognise, support and encourage the existing and future development of Johnstown Garden Centre as a destination Garden Centre with Retail/Café ancillary services. Any Future development of the Garden Centre must be in accordance with the Retail Policies and objectives set out in Chapter 9 of this Plan. Any specific development proposal must also be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area”

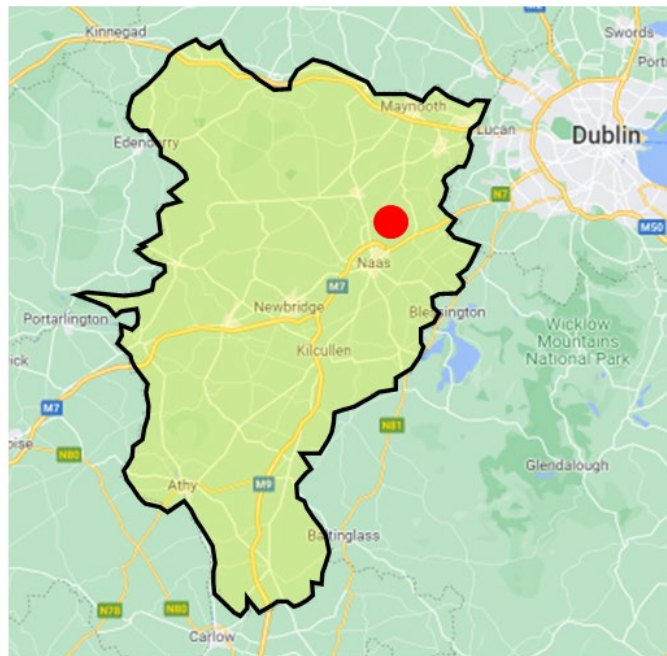
It is submitted based on the contents of this submission, that the zoning matrix for Q1 on Page 68, 69 and 70 of the Kildare County Council Draft Development Plan, be amended to allow for a “Y” value for Land Use Restaurant and Shop (Comparison) as opposed to “O”.



JUSTIFICATION FOR REQUEST.

There are a number of reasons why we believe that the amended zoning is necessary as follows:

- The positive spatial location of Johnstown Garden Centre in the heart of Kildare, with easy access off the M7/N7, close to Dublin and the surrounding counties makes Johnstown Garden Centre a superb location for a destination Garden Centre. Johnstown Garden Centre is located in the heart of Kildare and it is now an iconic feature on the outskirts of Naas town.



- The existing permitted Garden Centre is located in a location that has no residential neighbours and is located in proximity to the Kerdiffstown Public Park and Palmerstown House and Hotel, both destinations in their own right.
- The zoning matrix and the stated policy objective of Q1, needs to be amended to reflect the existing development on site and to recognise the function of Johnstown Garden Centre in Co. Kildare.



- The Café and hospitality area, which consists of external conservatories and external tables with heaters and shading needs to cater for significant numbers of people. Recent Covid restrictions highlighted the need for space. Johnstown Garden Centre needs a site-specific zoning to cater for this demand.
- Johnstown Garden Centre in developing and expanding its range of products and services needs the development plan to better reflect these developments and to recognise its significant contribution to the local economy.
- Johnstown Garden Centre aims to achieve Age Friendly Status with certification from Age Friendly Ireland. As such The Garden Café and range of products offered on the site need to be diverse and accessible while providing a safe and hospitable environment for all visitors.
- The Garden Café is now an integral element of Johnstown Garden Centre, for business meetings in the Garden Centre. Johnstown Garden Centre have designed the interior and exterior hospitality spaces accordingly to cater for a broad clientele.

CONCLUSION

We now respectfully make this submission to highlight to Kildare County Council the importance of Johnstown Garden Centre as a destination centre and the valued contribution it has made and continues to make to the local economy in County Kildare.

Johnstown Garden Centre is a significant employer of local people, has been a very successful business since 1974 and has grown from strength to strength. It is a family business, owned, run, and managed by Kildare people, providing a business and a facility to Kildare. We ask the local authority to accept our request for this site-specific zoning submission on the lands of Johnstown Garden Centre to enable the third generation of the Clarke family to continue to maintain and develop one of the leading Garden Centres in Ireland. Amending the zoning as requested will allow Johnstown Garden Centre to continue to maintain its position as one of the leading and innovative garden centres in Ireland.

Regards,

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