



Submission to Kildare County Council as part of the Draft Development Plan 2023-2029

Introduction

We are a group of people with a shared passion for Harristown Common and the surrounding area. We want to highlight the importance of the area in terms of biodiversity, archaeology, heritage and amenity value. We would also like to ensure robust protection for Harristown Commons and its environs so that this special area can continue to exist for future generations.

History

Extracts from 'The Landed Gentry & Aristocracy of Co. Kildare' by Turtle Bunbury

In the 1740s David II (La Touche) purchased the Harristown estate near Brannockstown. The historic Harristown Demesne had previously belonged to the powerful Catholic family of Eustace. A house was built in 1662 by Sir Maurice Eustace, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, who obtained a Royal Charter from Charles II constituting his estates as a manor. Sadly it is not known where the original Harristown House stood. After Sir Maurice's death in 1704, the estate was inherited by his three daughters and divided into three parts – Harristown, Mullacash and Carnalway. In 1781, David II passed the Harristown estates to his youngest son, John, who enclosed the demesne in a high wall and built a new road and bridge over the Liffey. The architect Whitmore Davis was subsequently commissioned to build the present house.

Almost 300 years after the original house was built, the estate consisted of 1024 acres of land and covered the townlands of Rochestown, Harristown, Dunnstown, Carnalway and Brannockstown. The Great Southern and Western Railway had a station at Harristown. There was also an RIC barracks at Dunshane.

Chapter 4: Resilient Economy and Job Creation

4.14 Prevention of Major Accidents

This section states that "this plan seeks to ensure that: Proposals for new industries at risk of causing major accidents take account of the need to prevent major accidents involving hazardous substances and safeguard the public, property and the environment."

We would request that “proposals for new industries at risk of causing major accidents” should be replaced by ‘proposals for new industries and other developments at risk of causing major accidents’ as industry is narrowly defined as ‘economic activity concerned with the processing of raw materials and manufacture of goods in factories’

Chapter 7: Energy and Communications

We welcome the fact that KCC will give consideration to landscape, residential amenities and environmental considerations.

EC 07: Support, encourage and co-operate with Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) in the preparation of energy masterplans for their communities and in the delivery of infrastructure and services and to assist in the development of SECs in towns throughout the County.

Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) play an important role in energy-use efficiency, the transition to renewable energy and in energy generation. The development of SECs in towns but also in rural communities should be encouraged and resourced.

We suggest amending the paragraph to read:

Assist in the development of SECs in urban and rural populations throughout the Country. Support, encourage and co-operate with Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) in the preparation of energy masterplans for their communities and in the delivery of infrastructure and services.

EC P5, EC P6, EC P7, EC P8, EC P9, EC P10, EC P11, EC P12 EC P13

EC 017, EC 027, EC 032, EC 033, EC 035, EC036, EC 039, EC 041

“Development Plans – Guidelines for Planning Authorities” were published by DEHLG in 2007. The Guidelines state that Development Plans should (among other things):

Offer clear guidance to developers in framing development proposals and to the planning authority in assessing such proposals.

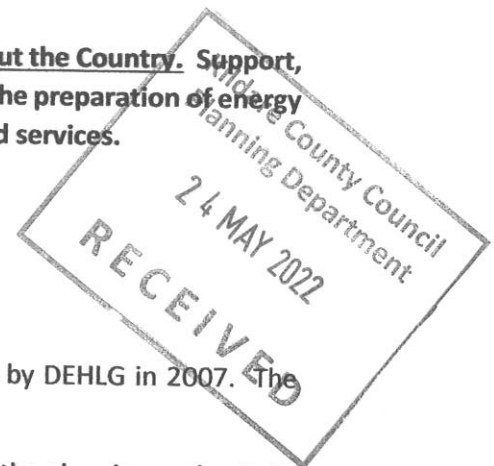
While detailed guidelines for wind farm development exist (Kildare County Council Wind Energy Strategy, Appendix 8), the absence of guidelines for other forms of energy development must be addressed. A case in point is solar energy generation. The national target of up to 1.5 GW of grid-scale solar energy by 2030, as proposed by the Climate Action Plan 2019 reflects the urgency of this requirement. Such guidelines should set out objectives in relation to energy development and methodologies for the identification of appropriate locations in the county, having regard to the relevant policy context.

A clear and consistent policy should be set out in the sections detailed above, indicating that all proposed developments which generate, or supply energy will be assessed in terms of a standard set of criteria including:

1. Viability

2. Impact on the receiving environment, including but not limited to:

(a) Impact on Natural Heritage (including Biodiversity)



(b) Impact on Archaeological Heritage

(c) Impact on Visual Amenity

(d) Impact on Residential Amenity

In addition, there should be clarity regarding regulatory guidelines and the competent authority.

Where possible, previously developed land, industrialised sites and rooftops should be utilised.

General Observation on Chapter 7

In this chapter we would like to see a larger emphasis on energy efficiency. The efficient use of energy helps to conserve precious resources whether that is land for renewable energy plants and power grids, rare metals (used in renewable energy systems such as wind turbines and solar panels), fossil fuels, synthetic fuels or biomass.

Perhaps the section – “Energy Efficiency” could take greater priority within this Chapter.

EC02: We would ask KCC to consider not allowing Renewable Energy Developments near protected or Heritage sites rather than “Adopting an informed approach”.

It is inevitable that large energy developments will have a major impact on the receiving environment therefore we feel public consultation should be mandatory.

EC06: We ask that KCC make it obligatory that all developers must carry out Community Consultations rather than “Encourage Developer’s”.

EC015: EC025: We propose that KCC should place a “Decommissioning Bond” on all Developers of Renewable Energy Facilities.

EC035: Identify Strategic Energy Zones in conjunction with EMRA as areas suitable for larger energy generating projects, community and micro energy production, whilst ensuring environmental constraints and a regional landscape strategy are considered.

We propose that in identifying Strategic Energy Zones, KCC place huge importance on the local landscape and its biodiversity, archaeological and heritage importance.

Chapter 9: Our Rural Economy

RDP1: Support and promote rural enterprises and encourage appropriate expansion and diversification in areas such as sustainable agriculture, forestry, peatlands, foods, crafts, renewable energy at suitable locations in the county, particularly where they contribute to allow carbon resilient economy.

We ask that KCC should add “not at protected sites or sites of national importance”

Chapter 11: Built and Cultural Heritage

11.10 Kildare Archaeology Resource

11.10.1 Urban Archaeological Surveys

In 1986 an Urban Archaeological Survey of County Kildare was conducted. A number of medieval / early modern towns with known archaeological potential were surveyed and Zones of Archaeological Potential were identified within these towns.



Settlements

Ardree, Ardscull, Athy, Ballymore Eustace, Castledermot, Celbridge, Clane, Cloncurry, Dunmanoge, Harristown, Kildare, Kilkea, Kill, Leixlip, Moone, Naas, Old Kilcullen, Oughterard, Rathangan, Rathmore, Silliot Hill

Table 11.1 - Zones of Archaeological Potential

There is no clear indication in Paragraph 11.10.1 of the type of protection afforded to these medieval /early modern towns and the Zones of Archaeological Potential contained therein. This contrasts with Section 11.10.2 Monuments in the ownership/guardianship of the State/subject of preservation orders, Section 11.11 Walled towns, Section 11.12 World Heritage, 11.13 Features of Historical Interest, etc.

A statement, which as a minimum, endorses the importance of these architectural sites would be most welcome.

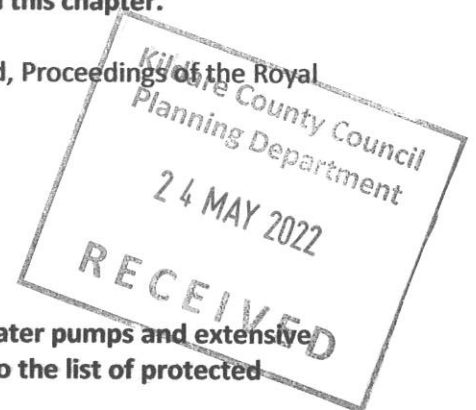
Harristown (mentioned in Table 11.1 above) occupies an almost unique position in Irish archaeology as an example of a seventeenth century deserted borough. We suggest that developmental impact on the site should be avoided in order to protect the site.

A zone of archaeological potential also exists in the townland of Dunnstown. A number of recorded enclosures are present which could date from prehistory onwards and may relate to other recorded enclosures in the area. It is significant that these enclosures lie on the periphery of Harristown Common, a wetland site of national ecological importance.

People have engaged with wetland sites since earliest times. Aidan O’Sullivan in his paper “Exploring past people’s interactions with wetland environments in Ireland”¹, discusses the crucial role of wetland sites in furthering our knowledge of past people’s lives and societies. Wetland sites offer substantial archaeological and paleoenvironmental potential due to their waterlogged, anaerobic situations. Evidence suggests that the marginal land around wetlands is often of archaeological importance. Wetland boundaries were often used for the deposition of objects. The importance of wetland sites as “thresholds” or “liminal boundaries”, often associated with rituals is a fascinating part of our cultural heritage.

We wish to highlight that wetland sites are unique historic landscapes which warrant special protective measures, and we would like to see this acknowledged within this chapter.

¹Exploring past people’s interactions with wetland environments in Ireland, Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Vol. 107C, 147-203.



AH P6: A16: We would like to make KCC aware of the presence of two water pumps and extensive stone walls on the L6044 and would suggest that they should be added to the list of protected structures.



AH A12:

We would ask KCC to note the presence of a disused railway line and road bridges on the L6048.



Kildare County Council
Planning Department
24 MAY 2022
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Chapter 12: Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

12.11 Wetlands and Ramsar Sites

1. In Ireland we are in a unique position. We have no icy tundra, vast plains, wide open prairies and dense rainforests but we do have our wonderful water-logged environments – our wetlands. In 2012, the County Kildare Wetlands Survey estimated that wetlands occupy approximately 10% of the land area of County Kildare. Unfortunately, wetland habitats worldwide are being lost at an alarming rate. Recently, Professor Robert Watson, former Chair of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform, informed Ireland’s (and the World’s) first Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity, that 85% of the World’s wetlands have been lost. We must assume that the rate of decline of our wetlands here in Ireland is similar. The importance of wetlands in sustaining human quality of life is well documented. Wetlands are important reservoirs for biodiversity, supporting a diverse range of plant and animal species but they also perform a wide range of other ecosystem services such as water purification, climate regulation and flood attenuation and cultural services providing inspiration and places of

serenity. The importance of European wetlands has been highlighted by the recently adopted EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 which encourages governments to designate as “strictly protected” ecosystems such as wetlands which store carbon and other greenhouse gases. Here in Ireland, World Wetland’s Day (2nd February) is promoted by the Irish Ramsar Convention organisation. We welcome the recognition of Kildare’s Wetlands and Ramsar sites in the Draft County Development Plan. The protection of our county’s wetlands is of paramount importance.

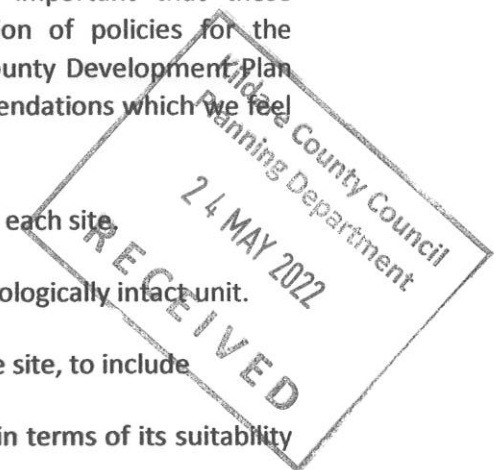
BI P8

Ensure that Kildare’s wetlands and watercourses are retained for their biodiversity and flood protection values and maintain good ecological status of wetlands and watercourses in support of the provisions of the Water Framework Directive and Ramsar Convention.

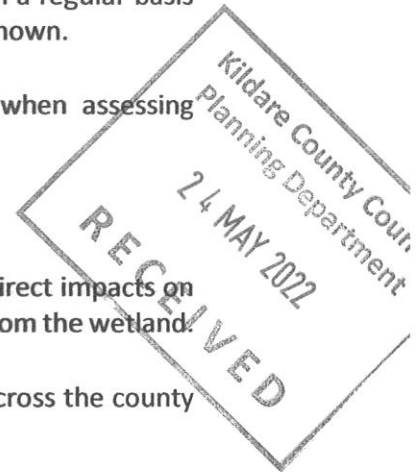
Perhaps this policy could be expanded to give a more complete picture of the valuable contribution wetlands make to our world e.g. carbon sequestration, cultural services.

2. It appears that the County Kildare Wetlands Survey 2012-2014 is the most recent reference point for the state of the county’s wetlands. While it is an excellent resource, the authors of the report admit that it has certain constraints. The report concedes that a significant area of wetland remains un-surveyed, no habitat maps exist for many sites, confusion exists with respect to the wetland type at some sites and further difficulties arise in determining the full extent of some sites. Nonetheless, the report makes many recommendations with regard to the future protection of the county’s wetlands. It is vitally important that these recommendations are given due consideration in the formulation of policies for the conservation and management of our biodiversity including the County Development Plan and County Kildare Biodiversity Action. Here we detail the recommendations which we feel are particularly note-worthy:

- Detailed mapping of the extent of each of the wetland type(s) within each site.
- Mapping of general site boundaries to ensure conservation of a hydrologically intact unit.
- Recording of threats to the conservation and future protection of the site, to include restoration suggestions and management priorities and needs.
- Evaluation of each site on a national scale and ranking of each site in terms of its suitability and priority for designation within the NHA and/or SAC process.
- Datasets developed during the current study should be updated as new information becomes available.
- Extra resources should be put towards enforcing regulations preventing damage to wetland sites throughout County Kildare.
- A public awareness campaign should be run to inform on the diverse wetland resource of the county and the value of this resource through, amongst other things, the provision of important ecosystem services.
- Where a development could adversely affect a wetland – through water abstraction, infilling, drainage, etc. a site visit should be conducted by a suitably qualified ecologist to determine if the area supports a wetland of conservation interest.



- Sites which are listed as being of county importance (C+) or of high value, local importance (C) and of moderate value, local importance (D) should be highlighted and included in any recommendations made under the County Biodiversity Action Plan or included in Local Area Plans, county development plans or other planning strategies legislation.
 - Recommendations for the recognition and listing of sites should be made on a regular basis as further information on the wetland resource of County Kildare becomes known.
 - Council staff should be aware of a variety of issues regarding wetland when assessing development proposals and planning applications including:
 - The need for an appropriate buffer zone surrounding wetland sites.
 - The importance of hydrology in how wetland sites function and how indirect impacts on a wetland system can be caused by activities occurring at some distance from the wetland.
 - The cumulative effect of seemingly isolated losses of wetland habitats across the county on the county resource.
 - The loss of wetland habitats, as a result of fragmentation of sites and impacts on wetland hydrology.
 - The ecological value of wetland habitats adjacent to, and fringing lakes and ponds. The ecological value of large areas of reed and tall sedge swamps, rivers and river flood plains in controlling and reducing the impacts of flooding events.
 - The wetland fauna, some of which are listed on Annex II of the Habitats Directive, found in the county wetlands and the potential impacts on these species as well as their habitats.
 - The limited coverage provided in the initial NPWS NHA survey – this was never a comprehensive survey of the entire county – many sites of high nature conservation value remain undesignated.
 - The potential value of wetland sites which are outside statutory designated areas and the need for adoption of a precautionary approach when assessing applications that may impact on same.
 - The role that the wetland resource plays in combating global warming.
 - A review of the statutory provisions that govern the management of wetlands in County Kildare (such as the Habitats Directive, Wildlife Act, Water Framework Directive, Environmental Liability Directive, Nitrates Directive, Planning Act, etc.) should be conducted and the role of the Local Authority in this regard should be examined. This review could be done in collaboration with other Local Authorities in the Greater Dublin Area. Increased co-ordination between agencies in their policy and operative approaches to wetlands need to be strengthened.
3. Harristown Common is one of 33 wetland sites listed in Table 12.6 with the designation “cNHA”. While a brief explanation of Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) is given in Section 12.6.2, with both NHAs and pNHAs (Proposed Natural Heritage Areas) annotated in Map 12.2, there is no explanation for the acronym “cNHA”. From our research “cNHA” stands for “Candidate



Natural Heritage Area”, however this term does not appear to be widely used. pNHAs and cNHAs are however explained in the County Kildare Wetlands Survey 2012, Part 1 Main Report, as follows:

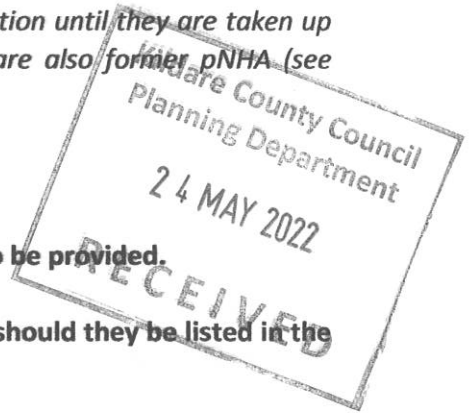
*“Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHA) were published on a **non-statutory** basis in 1995, but have not since been statutorily proposed or designated. These sites are of significance for wildlife and habitats....”*

“Candidate Natural Heritage Area (cNHA) is the name given to wildlife sites that are proposed by NPWS and by third parties for consideration as NHAs. Included within this category are the pNHA described above, together with newly discovered sites recommended for conservation by a variety of third parties. These sites are likely to be of importance for wildlife and habitats. Prior to designation these sites may require further detailed survey and evaluation for their conservation value. If they are considered of national conservation value they may then enter the formal NHA designation process. The cNHA sites have no legal protection until they are taken up into the formal NHA designation process, unless they are also former pNHA (see above).”

We ask that the following might be considered:

- (i) An explanation of the acronym “cNHA” used in Table 12.6 to be provided.
- (ii) Do cNHAs other than wetlands exist in County Kildare, and should they be listed in the County Development Plan?
- (iii) Our understanding is that cNHAs are not designated sites (NHAs), nor are they sites proposed for designation (pNHAs), nor are they County Biodiversity sites. As such they may warrant special mention under Section 12.7 Protected Habitats and Species Outside Designated Areas. This may afford them interim protection while they are progressed through the designation process.
- (iv) We note that the designation of sites is the remit of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), however given the current biodiversity crisis, the critical role of wetlands in climate mitigation and with reference to the Aim of Kildare County Council set out at the beginning of this chapter, i.e. *“To contribute towards the protection, conservation and management of the County’s unique biodiversity.....”*, it would be reassuring to see some statement of the Local Authority’s commitment to engagement with NPWS, in order to expedite the designation process for these “Candidate NHAs”. In the 10 years since the Crushell, Foss, O’Loughlin & Wilson 2012 wetlands survey, there appears to have been little progress in the designation process for these wetland sites.

4. Harristown Common first appears as a townland in an Ordnance Survey of Ireland 6-inch map published in 1839 (Figure 1). On earlier maps the area is annotated as “Carnalway Com” (Alex Taylor’s Map of the County of Kildare, 1783) and “Common” (A map of Harristown, Francis, 1707). A road (bog rampart), constructed between 1839 and 1851 divides the townland into two sections. Apart from this, there has been little change to the area down through the centuries, superficially at least.



In more recent times, ecological surveillance reports (Irish Semi-Natural Grassland Survey 2010 and Kildare Wetlands Survey 2012-2014) refer to the area north of the road as “Harristown Common”, while the area south of the road is referenced as “Dunshane Common”. This naming convention is also used in Table 12.6 of the Kildare County Development Plan. While welcoming the inclusion of this important wetland in the County Development Plan for the first time and recognising that a distinction may be required on ecological grounds between the wetland areas on either side of the road, we wish to emphasise the importance of the townland name - “Harristown Common”. The wetland follows the boundary of Harristown Common and it is vitally important that the townland name is preserved. Townland names are important from an historical, geographical, etymological and cultural perspective and as such are used as the starting point for many searches. We strongly advocate that the name “Harristown Common” should continue to be used to describe this wetland site in its entirety, both north and south of the road.

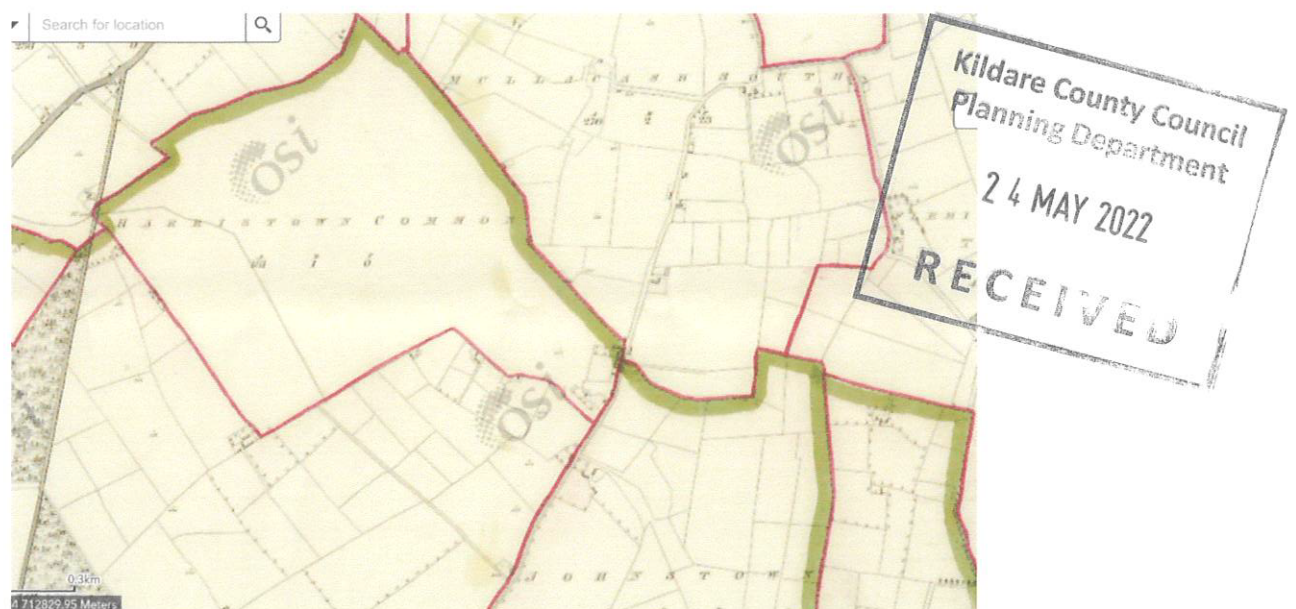
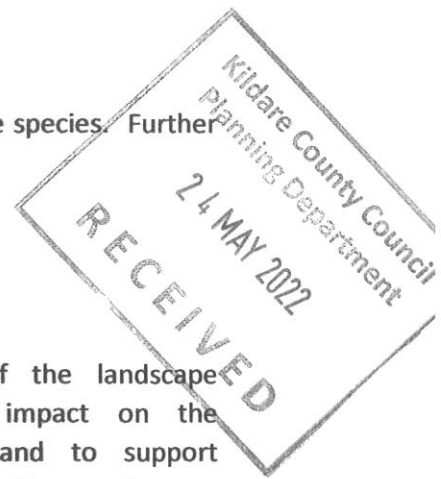


Figure 1: OSI 6-inch map (1839) showing townland of Harristown Common with Dunnstown to the South, Johnstown/Dunshane to the East, Mullacash South to the East, Mylerstown to the north and Stephenstown South to the west. Source: OSI National Townland and Historic Map Viewer.

5. Ireland hosts 16 habitat types which are considered to be in danger of disappearing. These EU designated, Annex I habitat types are those whose conservation requires the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Harristown Common likely contains at least 3 examples of Annex 1 priority habitats under EU Habitats Directive, namely Alkaline Fen (7230), Molinia Meadows (6410) and Petrifying Springs (7220). A breeding population of the Annex II protected *Euphydryas aurinia* (1065) and the possibility of Annex II protected *Vertigo geyeri* (1013) are other indicators of the requirement for a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). A variety of other species have been identified on and around Harristown Common. These include a number of Annex IV and Annex V species, at least 5 Red Listed bird species, 4 Red

Listed butterfly (including *Euphydryas aurinia*) and 1 Red Listed bryophyte species. Further information can be provided to Kildare County Council on request.



Chapter 13: Landscape Recreation & Amenity

Aim: To provide for the protection, management, and enhancement of the landscape of Kildare to ensure that development does not disproportionately impact on the unique landscape character areas, scenic routes or protected views; and to support the provision of high quality and accessible recreational facilities, amenities and open spaces for residents and visitors to the County, in recognition of the contribution of all forms of recreation to quality of life, personal health and wellbeing. **We welcome the above aim of the KCC as we feel that the area around Harristown Common is unique in terms of landscape character. The views across the 182 acres of common are rare in an increasingly developed county and deserve to be protected. The spectacular views of Lugnaquilla, the Liffey Valley and the Wicklow mountains from Mullacash Hill are worthy of mention as well.**



We would make the following observations on the objectives below:

LR 04: *Ensure that local landscape features, including historic features and buildings, hedgerows, shelter belts and stone walls, are retained, protected and enhanced where appropriate, so as to preserve the local landscape and character of an area, whilst providing for future development. We feel ‘providing for future development’ is at odds with the objective.*

LR O6: *Investigate the feasibility of preparing a Landscape Conservation Area Assessment within the county to identify any area(s) or place(s) within the county as a Landscape Conservation Area, in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)*
We welcome this objective, which we feel is particularly relevant to the area surrounding Harristown Commons. This area is, as already stated, rich in archaeology, architecture, biodiversity, scenic views and is a major amenity for the local residents

LR A1: *Review and update the County Landscape Character Assessment, within two years of the adoption of this Plan1, having regard to the European Landscape Convention Florence 2000, in accordance with all relevant legislation and guidance documents and to ensure consistency with the forthcoming National and Regional Landscape Character Assessment. All landscape character designations will be fully reviewed having regard to updated best practice guidance, LCAs of adjoining Local Authorities and other local relevant considerations, including clusters of biodiversity rich areas.*
We feel the area within and around Harristown Commons is deserving of a Landscape Character designation.

Table 13.3 Eastern Transition – high compatibility with major powerlines and solar

We would query the statement that this part of the Eastern Transition area has high compatibility with major powerlines/solar. This area already has the highest concentration of powerlines in the country which do detract from the landscape to some degree. We feel that ‘high compatibility’ is not appropriate with regard to the area around Harristown Commons

LR O14: *Maintain the visual integrity of Eastern Transition Lands which have retained an upland character.*

We feel the visual integrity of the area surrounding Harristown Commons is very special and deserves protection.

We welcome the opportunity to raise the points above and hope they will be given serious consideration when reviewing the County Development Plan 2023 – 2029.

Friends of Harristown Common

Contact Details:

