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Submission on Celbridge Town Renewal Plan

To Whom It May Concern

Celbridge Community Council was established as a voluntary community group in 1975 and has for over forty years been actively involved in many aspects of community life in Celbridge. Our goal is to promote and improve community life and to influence in a positive way the physical development of the area for the benefit of all those who live and work there. As a voluntary group and representative voice for the community, Celbridge Community Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission as part of the public consultation on the Celbridge Town Renewal Plan.

Celbridge Community Council recognises the value of the Celbridge Town Renewal Plan and welcomes many aspects of it. Whilst acknowledging the benefit that the suggested priority projects would have for Celbridge when sustainably developed, Celbridge Community Council strongly advocates that the Town Renewal Plan / Masterplan must include the following:

- Proactive embracement of the River Liffey instead of continuing to leave it inaccessible for long stretches - **realisation of a Liffey Valley Park needs to be a priority project in its own right**
- Credible proposals for **building a strong tourism** offering to draw more visitors into Celbridge
- Underpinning of the whole strategy with an urgency to enhance & protect **green infrastructure, biodiversity,** and our **built & natural heritage** - such protection and enhancement need to be included as non-negotiable criteria when assessing the suitability of all projects

Celbridge Community Council's assessment of the Celbridge Town Renewal proposals is that they focus on priority projects that will enhance the town, but fail to fully acknowledge the key observations highlighted in the survey feedback (traffic, pedestrian, and cycle connectivity, links to heritage and community facilities). The priority projects must be underpinned by previous feedback provided by the public and must link to other projects such as those to provide a second bridge / Celbridge-Hazelhatch Link Road, to upgrade the existing bridge, to develop a Transport Strategy for Celbridge, to provide outdoor facilities for young people, to construct an education campus that houses three schools behind Donaghcumper Cemetery, etc. and to leverage opportunities from the introduction of additional local bus routes under BusConnects.



Celbridge Community Council would like to see the Masterplan consider the following key points:

- How to **embrace the River Liffey** rather than leaving it inaccessible and to **realise a Liffey Valley Park** (this needs to be **a priority project in its own right**). This should encompass
 - Extension of the **Liffey Valley Special Amenity Order(SAAO)** to include Celbridge
 - Acquisition of the **grounds of Celbridge Abbey** for use by the public
 - Opening up of the **KCC owned lands** on the eastern bank of the River Liffey (Donaghcumper) and connecting these lands to the Main St via a **pedestrian/ cyclist bridge near the Slip**
 - Provision of a **pedestrian/ cyclist crossing point** from the Ardclough Road to the Clane Road near the weir / Texaco Filling Station
 - Provision of a Greenway along the Liffey from Barnhall to beyond Abbey Farm
 - Provision of **linkages from the Greenway to key destinations** for children and young people such schools (NKETNS, St Wolstan's Community School, new Education Campus behind Donaghcumper Cemetery) and amenity destinations (Celbridge Athletics Club, Celbridge Town AFC Junior Pitches, GAA, Ballyoulster Football Club, etc.). These linkages need to be

- How to **protect the strong green network** made up of the River Liffey combined with the historic demesne landscapes including
 - Addressing concerns acknowledged in the consultation document regarding
 - the protection of vistas and the reconnection of Castletown Demesne to the Wonderful Barn and Conolly's Folly
 - the strengthening of connections to the St Wolstans and Donaghcumper Demesnes
 - Preservation of all existing mature woodlands, waterways and biodiversity habitats
 - Provision of clear guidance on what types of developments would ensure the protection of the above

- With respect to the proposed **Main St/ Town Centre Expansion** priority project:
 - Celbridge Community Council agrees with the suggestion for streetscape improvements with an emphasis on sustainable mobility and for the upgrade and regeneration of existing properties and commercial premises.
 - The achievement of a people-focused town centre amenity with an emphasis on sustainable mobility in a space dominated by car parking and traffic will require a number of measures:
 - **Promotion of alternative mobility options** - allocation of adequate safe space for movement by pedestrians, cyclists and scooter users, parking for e-scooters, more bicycle parking, EV charging spaces, car-sharing spaces (GoCar)
 - **Improvements to how English Row operates** - illegal parking and the nature in which the space is used by taxis coupled with narrow footpaths can make this space unpleasant and bus drivers encounter issues pulling into the bus stop due to illegal parking



- **Resolution of traffic congestion issues** - this features as the top priority for many members of the community each time Kildare County Council invites views from the public on how to improve Celbridge. The absence of a Transport Strategy and lack of proactive measures to tackle traffic congestion serves as a distraction and leads to public engagement that repeatedly misses the mark when Kildare County Council attempts to elicit views from the public on other matters. Suggestions of measures that should make a difference:
 - Provision of **welcoming car parking solutions** that are accessed from locations other than the Main Street but close to the town centre thereby minimising the attraction of unnecessary traffic onto the Main St - the consultation's statement that the overreliance on private cars is to the detriment of the town's public spaces fails to make any conclusions regarding the role played by what many consider to be difficult parking options
 - **Enhanced permeability** so distances are shortened and active modes of transport become attractive options - the video mentions analysis that was carried out on movement & permeability, cycle routes and walkability but fails to expand on this
- Celbridge Community Council is anxious to ensure that any infill developments are sensitive about protecting our built and natural heritage and would thus like to see
 - Strategic properties situated on or adjacent to Main Street that are **central to the enhancement & protection of green infrastructure, biodiversity and our built & natural heritage**
 - Brought into public ownership - since the "Town Centre" zoning allows a number of land uses and without a framework/masterplan to guide how the town centre should develop, there is a real fear that private developers and planners will progress planning applications in a manner that risks damaging our built & natural heritage
 - Utilised for the provision of amenities & open space
 - Any proposals for developments in close proximity to the River Liffey must be guided by Inland Fisheries Ireland's [Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment document](#)
 - The limited number of trees in the town centre should be protected and more trees should be planted
- Embedding the Liffey and historic properties bordering it into the plans for expansion of the Main Street / Town Centre - this builds upon our first point regarding the **realisation of a Liffey Valley Park as a priority project** in its own right
- Opportunities must be taken to transform derelict and vacant properties in the Town Centre
 - The consultation document identifies the lower end of Main St, English Row and the Clane Road as the areas having the most vacant buildings



- Every opportunity should be taken to transform the Long Shed at The Mill into an asset for the community - it could be put to a number of uses that could benefit the community, enhance tourism and enhance the public realm; anything from a performing arts space, to a remote working hub, to a tourist attraction (tourist office, museum, etc.), to an “Eco Hub”, etc. The location is strategic and the options are endless.
 - If Celbridge Abbey is indeed vacant, the house needs to be acquired by a public body and repurposed as a tourist attraction
 - The former Londis/Spar and Gogarty’s shops have been vacant for some time and absolutely need to be put to good retail use as residents of the town are unable to get basic things without travelling to Maynooth, Liffey Valley Shopping Centre, Blanchardstown, etc. Celbridge will never be a 10-minute town if parents cannot purchase clothes and shoes for their children locally. A department store selling a mixture of items from clothing to household electrical, etc. might be well suited to this very prominent location.
- With respect to the proposed **connectivity between Castletown and the Town Centre** priority project, the need for this has long been established but a number of challenges must be addressed in order to make this happen:
 - Castletown House and Parklands is a huge attractor of visitors from outside of Celbridge but **the fact that parking is accessed off the M4 means that there is no reason for visitors to venture further into the village**
 - Significant efforts are required to promote Celbridge's built heritage assets in a manner that both
 - Leverages the historic connections between Celbridge’s many historic buildings and Castletown House
 - Promotes the village as an interesting enough destination for visitors in its own right
 - Encouraging additional types of tourism in order to increase the appeal of Celbridge to visitors with other interests should realise benefits for the town. For example, active pursuits centring around the Liffey would take advantage of Celbridge’s other notable asset (natural heritage).
 - Quality eateries and retail outlets at the Castletown end of Celbridge's Main Street would attract visitors to the village.
 - Greenways both along the Liffey and linking the Royal Canal Greenway and the Grand Canal Greenway via Celbridge and Castletown would attract cyclists to the village centre.
 - A novelty way for visitors to Castletown House to travel the 1km distance between Castletown House and the village would help visitors who are unable or not inclined to walk.
 - With respect to the proposal to increase public amenity space at the **St John of God’s campus / Oakley Park**, Celbridge Community Council would like to see this site form a central part of the Masterplan for Celbridge.



- This site is key to the expansion of the town centre and to making Celbridge a more attractive place to live and visit as a tourist destination.
- The following suggestions from the Celbridge LAP 2017-2023 would have real benefit for the community
 - An urban park - this side of Celbridge lacks a public space
 - Housing for older people - housing with supports has the potential to be a game-changer for older people
 - A women's refuge to serve North Kildare - abusive relationships are unfortunately a reality for too many and the lack of supports in North Kildare make an already difficult situation unnecessarily stressful
 - Cultural facilities might include an arts centre but this could equally be located somewhere like the long shed in The Mill
 - A fit for purpose library may be suited to this site
 - Other community/ recreational/ cultural facilities as identified by a social infrastructure audit should also be considered for this site
 - A Swimming Pool is clearly something that the public needs and the closure of the pool in St Raphael's in March 2020 has left many children without swimming lessons.
- The St John of God's campus contains a number of disused or underutilised buildings including squash courts which have not been in use since the 1990s and the courts are now used for storage.
- With respect to the proposals for **More Open and Public Spaces** as a priority project, Celbridge Community Council believes that this lacks specificity.
 - Celbridge Community Council agrees with the summary that open space is unevenly distributed, that many areas are inaccessible and that the public open spaces that exist have limited functionality. Celbridge Community Council **supports all initiatives to provide a hierarchy of high quality multi-functional public open spaces within Celbridge**. Such initiatives should enhance the existing public open spaces such as Willowbrook Park through the provision of street furniture and lighting and crucially should also provide public open spaces in areas of town where residents cannot currently access public open space within a 15-minute walk of home.
 - The thing that stands out most is how essential it is to put a plan in place now to realise the vision of delivering a **Liffey Valley Park** with considerable opportunities for recreation, tourism, economic development and habitat creation. We called this out above as a priority project in its own right.
 - Ensuring that the lands of **Celbridge Abbey** are available for amenity and active transport use (walking & cycling) must be a priority project for Celbridge - whether this comes under the **Liffey Valley Park, Main St/Town Centre, St John of God's Amenity Lands** or the **More Open Space and Public Spaces** priority project or is a project in its own right, it is essential that this is prioritised in the Masterplan due to its strategic location.



- **Adult exercise / outdoor gym facilities** might be provided at multiple locations throughout the town but an interesting location of note for this might be the strip of land alongside the avenue up to Castletown that is not owned by the OPW.
- Kildare County Council's current project to provide an Outdoor Youth Space in Celbridge is very welcome, and Celbridge Community Council is delighted to have a representative on that project team.
- Celbridge Community Council invites you to examine our October 2020 [submission on Kildare County Council's Open Space & Recreation Strategy](#) which includes
 - An **appraisal of the current open space assets** in Celbridge
 - A **summary of findings relating to recreational spaces and amenities** from a June 2020 survey conducted by Celbridge Community Council
 - A 2020 **review of Kildare County Council's Kildare Play Strategy 2018-2028** - there are some great ideas in that strategy but Celbridge Community Council concluded that there has been little progress on the strategy for Celbridge but thankfully an initiative has since kicked off to pursue the provision of outdoor play spaces for young people.

We trust that the points raised by Celbridge Community Council will be taken into consideration as you develop a plan for our town.

Yours faithfully

Liam O'Dwyer

Secretary, Celbridge Community Council