



The National Trust for Ireland

KILKENNY ASSOCIATION

Draft Masterplan for Abbey Creative Quarter – An Taisce’s Submission

The Kilkenny Association of An Taisce welcomes the opportunity to make this submission, and commends Kilkenny County Council (KCC) on the quality of its Draft Masterplan. We acknowledge the open and positive approach by KCC in seeking public opinion at all stages to date, and the constructive manner in which opinions by both the public and environmental NGOs have been dealt with.

General:

Title: Has a name been chosen for the area? The ‘Abbey Creative Quarter’ is an inappropriate name and the word ‘Quarter’ has no meaning in Kilkenny city. Perhaps it should be named the ‘Brewery Area’ – referring to the long tradition of brewing by Monks and Smithwicks and the use of ‘Area’ in the Archaeological Conservation Areas of the city.

Consultation: There should be no finality to a masterplan that extends over decades of development. The public should be consulted at the end of each phase and adjustments made as required. At this point we do not know what the archaeological investigations on site will reveal, or how technology with respect to energy efficient housing and to smarter travel will evolve. Flexibility is therefore essential.

1.1 Introduction.

It is surprising that the Natura Impact Statement (NIS), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) do not appear to comment on the impact of the Central Access Scheme considering that the latter splits the site in two, introduces much traffic and noise and breaks the connectivity between the northern and southern parts of the site.

2.2 Context of Kilkenny.

2.2.1 Vision.....

‘The area will be a permeable expansion of the city for pedestrians and cyclists where smarter travel principles are provided for’.

We suggest that in order to strengthen the smarter travel policy, this be changed to

‘where smarter travel principles will apply throughout’.

3.1 Masterplan Area Context.

The Central Access Scheme (CAS) is not included within this section despite the fact that its construction is well advanced. While the CAS does nothing to enhance the Abbey Creative Quarter, nevertheless it is surprising that

consideration of mitigation measures are not addressed as these will have to be incorporated into the proposed developments on both sides of this route.

3.1.5 Site Analysis - Views

The Mayfair building seriously interferes with the views of the Abbey and the City Walls from Parliament Street. Its retention is a lost opportunity for a spectacular view linking the city centre with the Abbey and proposed park.

Greens Bridge is a beautiful Palladian style 18th century bridge just north of the Masterplan area, but views of it are not included in the assessment. Although the original protected view was delisted to allow for the construction of the CAS, the public may be interested to know whether any potential views of Greens Bridge remain despite the presence of the CAS.

3.1.11 Flood Risk Analysis

We note the proposed finished floor level for each zone, but would like reassurance that the flood defences in place will protect access routes and parks.

3.2 Urban Planning Analysis.

Ideas from Appendix F should be incorporated here under Opportunities, for example, the provision of comfortable public benches in courtyards, squares and parks (W. H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*)

4.1 Movement – revised.

4.1.4 Vehicle Movement

‘...provision must be made for limited vehicular access’.

We recommend that the conditions around vehicular access should be specified at this stage, and we suggest that delivery vehicles be 2-axle only, and residential car parking be located away from all contact with children’s play areas and front of dwelling houses.

The Street from the CAS to Bateman’s Quay has the potential to disrupt the peaceful space around the Abbey and the Park. We do not approve of a continuous street and believe that the area to the East of the Abbey should be limited to cyclists and pedestrians and should not be traversed by vehicles. Vehicle access to the entire area must be strictly limited and if parking is required for any businesses on site, then it must be provided elsewhere.

‘Key to the delivery of a successful cycle network is the provision of a complete supporting infrastructure. This includes providing secure cycle parking facilities at popular destinations’. We recommend that this proposal be expanded as follows:

....such facilities will include covered cycle parks (such as that very recently constructed at County Hall), and will provide maximum efficiency in use of space and security measures (such as enclosed lockable pods).

4.1.5 Public Transportation Strategy

‘Public transport policy is primarily bus and taxi service...’. However, at present in the city, potential bus passengers need to be psychic to understand where bus

routes begin and end, where stops are located and the times and fares. We recommend adding:

'information on public transport will be clearly displayed using graphics.

'Public car parking ...is subject to a tariff system.' The instructions on existing car parking meters in the city are confusing and almost incomprehensible. We recommend that the instructions on the meters should be re-drafted in larger print and include graphic symbols.

Suggestions for the location of off-site car parking would be useful and the provision of such would be of immediate value to the city (as existing car parks e.g. John's Green and St Canice's Church are frequently full), and would encourage pedestrianisation of the centre..

4.2. Conservation.

We welcome the conservation objectives and the emphasis given to the archaeology of the area.

4.2.4

We welcome the proposal to develop a Conservation Plan for the heritage structures onsite but would like to see it expanded to incorporate the entire site if the excavation works on other parts of the site (referred to in Section 4.2.3) justify it.

There is a multiplicity of stakeholders interested in the Archaeology e.g. KCC, Heritage Council, KAS, OPW, NMS, Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, Developers, Archaeologists and Citizens. We recommend the establishment of an Advisory Committee to liaise with the stakeholders, and to advise on the archaeological excavations, the development of the Conservation Plan and the implementation of conservation and repair of the heritage structures.

We recommend the development of a Centralized Digital Archive for past and future archaeology at this site as mooted by Courtney Deery, Heritage Consultancy. There is a danger that archaeological reports produced for individual developments on site will get buried in planning applications. KCC already have a Heritage Page (under Services) which could be given more prominence and could temporarily host a portal to the archaeological archive. Eventually it would be desirable to develop a Museum in Kilkenny which would be a centre for technical conservation and would store, curate, display and interpret archaeological objects for the entire city. Such a museum (perhaps at St Marys or on this site) could eventually host the Digital Archive. We know there are financial constraints but a historic city like Kilkenny should have a museum.

It would be advisable to determine in advance what uses the Brewhouse will attract, as this is the critical issue in the ongoing conservation of restored buildings. Perhaps consideration should be given to providing social / sporting facilities for the future residents of the community housing plot, see Section 5.3, Stage 3, which currently shows no provision for them.

4.3. Urban Design Strategy.

4.3.3 Linear Park Strategy

It is important that a balance is struck between the city 'River Garden' concept, and the protection of the natural habitats at the rivers edges. There is value in having formal gardens, but it must not be at the expense of the riverside wildlife and habitats. At present swans are nesting on the River Nore west bank at the Smithwicks' bottling plant, and there have been kingfishers nesting at the same location in very recent years. Existing trees should be retained if possible.

For safety reasons there should be separation of pedestrians and cyclists in the riverside park.

The skatepark location will be vital to getting buy-in from young people to the whole diversity and integration of the site. Their views should be sought on location, design, and facilities.

4.3.5 Public Park

There is a dearth of large trees in the city centre and this park should be designed to incorporate trees (e.g. oak, beech, horse chestnut & Scots pine) which will grow to a much larger size than the linear garden may be able to accommodate.

4.3.8 New Building Strategy

We note the commitment to '*Compile an Architectural Design Guide specifying the building design requirements for each plot within the masterplan area*'. Good architectural design is desirable for all structures onsite, as its absence in the recently constructed Lady Dysart pedestrian bridge is obvious.

We are concerned that it is proposed to put all Community Housing on Plot 1. If this is done we urge that the houses be arranged in groups around communal green spaces that may be used as safe children play areas and garden production units, with only pedestrian/cycle circulation allowed. Vehicle access roads and communal parking spaces should be provided to the rear of the dwellings (see example from 1973 at Newpark Lawn Estate designed by Burke, Kennedy and Doyle). The recent tragic Jake Brennan case has highlighted the risks associated with poor design of housing estates in Kilkenny. The design for social housing provided in Section 5.3 (Stage 3) does not address this issue at all.

The value of shared garden production units (much smaller than allotments and thus suitable for the city centre) for social integration of the resident community should be recognized – 'Without common land no social system can survive' (C. Alexander, Appendix F).

City centres can be very suitable places for sheltered residential accommodation especially for the elderly. Consideration should be given to the provision of this, possibly on Plot 2 of the site, if the noise and nuisance of the CAS can be effectively mitigated.

4.3.9 Urban Grain Strategy

While we welcome the change from mono block to mixed block design, it is important to be restrained and have some common thread running through the design in a block.

4.4 Sustainability.

We welcome the emphasis on the use of renewable energy sources and the conservation of energy in house design and structure. We recommend that the dwellings be planned in such a way that one façade is oriented to the south / south-west and the main living space positioned to take advantage of this.

There is a need for a strategy that encourages the resident community to buy into shared energy sources e.g. district heating and solar panels on roof of community car parks, and use of zero or low emission cars.

There may also be a need for an education program to inform residents how to optimize the use of energy efficient houses.

5.3. Final Urban Plan.

Note that the maps in this section have poorly numbered buildings and are inadequately labelled.

The proposed phasing outlined is welcomed.

The development will take place over a long period therefore flexibility in the masterplan is desirable and there should be no finality about consultation.

Indeed public consultation should take place at the end of each phase to test the resilience of the masterplan and adjust it as required.

Appendix F – Observations on Urban Code.

We note with interest your references to the ideas of distinguished urban planners.

We believe that the ideas in this appendix should form the scaffolding on which the design of the Abbey Quarter is founded.

Declan Murphy (Chairperson)
Mary T Brennan (Honorary Secretary)
July 18th 2015