

Leixlip Draft Local Area Plan 2020-2026

General Comment

The Ministerial decision of 6th Mar 2018 regarding the revised Draft Leixlip Local Area Plan stated that the revised plan shall be published not later than 6 months following the issuing of the Direction. It is now over a later and in breach of that timeframe which calls the legal status of this document into question.

National Planning Framework

The NPF “places specific emphasis on the regeneration and rejuvenation of towns through the promotion of compact growth and the consolidation of future Development... The NPF states that this will be achieved through infill and brownfield development **rather than an over-reliance on greenfield, edge of town development**. This draft LAP appears to do the opposite with development proposed in all directions on greenfield sites while Leixlip village has numerous vacant buildings. This Plan is creating Urban Sprawl as Fingal is developing towards Leixlip and the proposed Confey development is stretching towards Dunboyne. It is important to maintain adequate green belts between the various surrounding towns.

The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan– which includes Leixlip.

MASP identifies a number of strategic development areas including Leixlip/Confey in recognition of the area’s location and proximity to the Dublin - Maynooth railway line. However, the railway line must be able to support the population and there is already severe pressure on the train service particularly at peak times as trains are full before they reach Confey. The electrification of this line would have to be completed **in advance** of the development of the Confey KDA. In addition, there would need to be well in excess of the 50 parking spaces proposed in the LAP at the station with further allowance for future expansion as people are parking cars in nearby housing estates which causes further problems within the estates.

Core Strategy of the Kildare County Development Plan - Objectives

S6 - To phase significant future growth in line with the capacity and delivery of supporting physical infrastructure:

The existing infrastructure can barely meet with current demands. We have been without water for 3 days recently due to burst pipes. The Waste Water Treatment Plant is at full capacity as is evident from the frequent smells from it and the stink from the bridge at the west end of the village. Given that this has not been addressed despite attempts in recent years what is the possibility that future demands will be met in line with population growth and the further expansion of Intel.

S8 To protect, enhance, create and connect natural heritage, high quality amenity areas and other green spaces throughout Leixlip for both biodiversity and recreational use:

The LAP is in fact threatening or destroying natural heritage, high quality amenity areas and other green spaces throughout Leixlip especially by the proposed development the Black Avenue and it's impact on St Catherine's Park. This development should not proceed but the lands should be acquired to enhance the park given the future population levels in the North Kildare Area rather than one individual profiting from it following rezoning. It should be zoned as amenity/parkland and acquired by the Council at a reasonable cost. Under no circumstances should any part of St Catherine's Park including laneways be used to facilitate access or egress from this development.

In addition, a road through St Catherine Park linking the M3 to the M4 would contravene S8 of the County Development Plan.

Movement and Transport

MT3.2 To support the implementation of the following road improvement schemes, subject to the availability of funding and environmental and conservation requirements:

- (i) The improvement of the bridge at Confey Railway Station to provide two traffic lanes, segregated cycle tracks and footways.

Cope Bridge Existing residential areas to the north of the town are located east and west of Captain's Hill and the R149 with existing residents living in these areas required to access the wider road network through the town centre or across Cope Bridge leading to congestion during peak times. If the volume of traffic is increased by the proposed housing at Confey it will further increase the difficulty of residents leaving existing estates at Glendale, Riverforest, Avondale, St.Marys Park, etc. An alternative route for traffic will be required for the Confey development to access the M4 but this should not be allowed to impact on St Catherine's Park.

MT3.3

This Objective seems to refer to a link road from Confey to Junction 5 on the M4 as referred to in the Phasing Matrix of the Leixlip Strategic Transportation Assessment through St. Catherine's Public Park and Liffey Valley (a pNHA). If this is the case it is totally unacceptable and it contravenes Objective I5.2 of the Pollution and Environmental Services.

6.4 TOURISM

While the Objective" to promote the Wonderful Barn as an integrated tourism and amenity destination..." is welcome there is no indication when it will be restored! In the meantime, I suggest that the vacant building in the main street which commemorates William Roantree could be established immediately as a Tourist Information/Heritage office. I think that the town centre is the most appropriate place for the information Office as most visitors will arrive in the centre of the town first. They can then get information on where the various sites of interest are and how to get to them.

I find it strange that there is no mention of St Catherine's Park in any of the Tourism Policy Objectives. Therefore, I suggest that in EDT3.12 should read as follows: To support appropriate development of tourism and recreational facilities at **St. Catherine's Park.** (delete Leixlip Manor Hotel and Gardens.)

Less use of the words "support" and "promote" and some investment would be appreciated. It seems that Leixlip is the poor relation when it comes to allocation of resources in County Kildare.

Parking

The on-street parking outside the Bank of Ireland on Captains Hill should be reorganised or removed as it causes traffic congestion when cars attempt to park and reverse out into the

traffic. Some longer vehicles actually block the inside lane! It could be used for bicycle parking or some other appropriate use.

The proposal for increased parking in the town is welcome.

10 BUILT HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Insofar as Leixlip is concerned, Kildare County Council's performance in maintaining and promoting the local built heritage and archaeology is very poor. While there was an aspiration to restore the Wonderful Barn as a tourism/ heritage centre in the last Plan no work has been carried out. It would appear to be a little late to implement Objective BH1.5 'A Conservation Study' given that housing construction is already underway on the site.

The state of the Spa and Romanesque Baths are disgraceful. The area is totally overgrown and is an attraction only for unsocial behaviour. See photograph below taken today. This area could be kept as nice local amenity if Kildare County Council would invest in its maintenance. Unfortunately, again Kildare County Council's record of maintaining park areas in Leixlip especially St Catherine's Park is very poor. There has been little or no investment in the park compared to Fingal and South Dublin Councils. (I recently noticed a Blog online titled "Ireland in Ruins" which features the Baths. It is worth a read to see how neglected it is.)

Photograph of Leixlip Spa/ Romanesque Baths



While the Council agreed a to fund a Sensory Garden in the Park to the value of €50,000 it is not even mentioned in the LAP!

An Objective for the conservation of Confey graveyard should be included in the LAP.

Child Care

One facility providing a minimum of 20 childcare places would be insufficient given the projected population increases.

Primary care centre - Location in Collinstown

The location of a Primary Care Centre would not be suitable for those who do not have access to private transport e.g. elderly, etc. Somewhere closer to town centre would be more appropriate.

Additional facilities required in Leixlip and not included in the LAP are:

A swimming pool

The Sensory Garden in St Catherines Park

A Civic Building/ Theatre

Proper maintenance and investment in Park and Green Spaces

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

9.5 Pollution and Environmental Services

Policy I5

An additional objective on Visual Amenity was recommended in the SEA under this policy heading but I note that it has been inserted as BHO1.3 and I will comment on it in that section.









Chapter 13(NH7) of the County Development Plan contains an objective “to contribute towards the protection of ecological, visual, recreational, environmental and amenity value of the county’s National Heritage Areas and associated habitats”. Objective I5.2 of the LAP aims “to avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment aims as a whole through promoting the preservation of best ambient air quality with sustainable development”. It is impossible to see how the proposal to put a link road from Confey to Junction 5 on the M4 as referred to in the Phasing Matrix of the Leixlip Strategic Transportation Assessment through St. Catherine’s Public Park and Liffey Valley (a pNHA) is consistent in any respect with these objectives and clearly shows how inappropriate the proposal is when it would damage the ecology, ruin the visual aspect of the park, remove recreational facilities, pollute the environment (noise and air) and substantially reduce the amenity value of the park to local residents and visitors.

Also the objectives set out in Chapter 13 (NH10) of the County Development Plan “to restrict development within a proposed NHA (Royal Canal and Liffey Valley) to development that is directly related to the area’s amenity potential subject to the protection and enhancement of natural heritage and visual amenity including biodiversity and landscapes” cannot be compatible with the construction of a link road through St. Catherine’s Park which is directly linked to and forms part of the proposed Liffey Valley Park.

North Main Street Backlands Regeneration



Key

Development site		Car parking	
Mixed use development		Pedestrian/cyclist route	
Key public realm intervention		Traffic calming measures	
Soft landscaping measures		Vehicular access	

My main comment on the “The Backlands” is that the name is most unfortunate! Perhaps you would consider something more imaginative and appropriate to the area.

I would have concerns that this new development would further detract from the Main Street or that the development would be started but finished and left as backlands.

Sufficient carparking needs to be provided for the new development and to address the present shortfall.

NATURAL HERITAGE, GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE & STRATEGIC OPEN SPACES

The Lap lists 6 Natural Heritage Objectives and only lists one Action against all of these admiral objectives. **Action:** To survey existing bridge structures in Leixlip to identify if any currently support bat roosts.

I think that this reflects the whole attitude of Kildare county Council to the Leixlip- *high on aspiration low on delivery*.

Objective NH1.5 To identify, protect, conserve and enhance wherever possible, wildlife habitats and species of local importance, not otherwise protected by legislation. Such habitats would include woodland, river, grassland areas and field boundaries (hedgerows, stone walls and ditches).

The Objective you had in the last draft of the LAP to protect St Catherine’s Park has been removed from the Plan and must be reinstated as follows as follows:

'To protect the amenity of St. Catherine's Park. No road proposal shall be considered by this Council through the park within the Council's ownership or jurisdiction.'

It is obvious that this has been done to facilitate the proposed new KDA at Black Avenue and represents a complete “U” turn the council who are now proposing to use part of the park to facilitate private development. This is totally unacceptable as the park was provided for the sole purpose of leisure and amenity.

11.2 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The LAP states that “the dominant environments within Leixlip are improved grassland (for agriculture) and urban, built land. It is important to ensure that ‘Local Biodiversity Areas’,

which form an important part of the county's Green Infrastructure and support connectivity within the network, are **maintained and given the opportunity to increase** their distribution within the town. The habitats of ecological importance present within Leixlip were recorded as: *Woodland and Scrub Habitats*: There are significant areas of woodland particularly along linear corridors such as the Rye Water, the Liffey and within St. Catherine's Park. The woodlands provide some of the main areas of bio-diverse habitat and significant vegetation connectivity across the highly urbanised setting."

Given these statements I fail to understand why you would destroy these habitats by building directly adjacent to St Catherine's Park or putting a road through it.

Policy GI 1– Green Infrastructure - Objectives

GI 1 It is the policy of the Council to protect, enhance and further develop the Green Infrastructure network in Leixlip to provide a shared space for amenity, recreation and biodiversity.

GI1.2 To seek to ensure key trees, woodlands and high value hedgerows identified in the Leixlip Habitat Survey, and the linkages they provide to larger areas of green infrastructure and the wider countryside, are retained and integrated into the design of new developments where appropriate.

GI1.6 To **seek** to preserve, protect and enhance trees (including woodlands) of special amenity, nature conservation or landscape value within the plan area including at the following locations, St Catherine's Park, The Black Avenue & Leixlip Castle Demesne.

The LAP proposes housing developments in all of these locations which would impact negatively on these green open spaces.

GI1.9 (A) To seek to protect, preserve and develop St. Catherine's Park as a public amenity.

If this Objective is genuine why did you remove the protection for the park which was included in the previous draft of the LAP which prevented any road through Kildare land or

under Kildare jurisdiction. This must be reinstated in the LAP if there is to be any trust between the Leixlip community and Kildare County Council.

(B) To protect the amenity of St. Catherine's Park as a dedicated open public open space area and to provide for increased connectivity from Leixlip Main Street to the existing car park through the provision of a new linear parkland access with dedicated off-road pedestrian and cycle access points (Refer to Black Avenue KDA).

It is obvious that this objective is designed purely to justify the provision of a housing estate in this area. I would rather retain the link which already exists via the leafy Black Avenue which should not be destroyed to facilitate development. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to expand the park and at some point but it can never be done if it is built on. I don't believe that there will be a big demand for houses facing a sewage treatment plant.

Confey Urban Design Framework (UDF)

It is my understand that it was agreed at Council meetings that there would be a Masterplan prepared by Kildare County Council for the Confey area which would accompany the next draft of the Leixlip Local Area Plan. Following a query at the public meeting a neighbour of mine was informed that the UDF is the masterplan. However, following a phone call to the Kildare planning office she was informed that the masterplan would be prepared by the developers. The Council members voted last year against the developer carrying out the masterplan and it was agreed that a masterplan would be prepared by Kildare County Council and that this would be done in advance of any rezoning of the Confey lands.

There are a number of specific issues in the UDF which I would like to comment on.

Proposed Relocation of Confey GAA Club

The proposed relocation of Confey GAA Club to the furthest point North West of the new development shows a complete lack of understanding of how to create a sense of community. The current location of the GAA pitches and clubhouse would facilitate both the old Confey

and new Confey communities as it would lie in the centre of both and in my view has the potential to be the only unifying factor between the two communities. Most kids and adults who use the pitches and clubhouse can walk or cycle to it from their estates as could residents from the proposed new Confey area. The proposal to relocate it to the edge of the new development would mean having to drive kids to games and arrange transport to and from the clubhouse at weekends for the existing Confey residents. These are the people who founded the Club in the first place and put their hands in their pockets to help fund it (myself included). By moving it to the extremity of the new site you will totally alienate the two communities from the start because you considered the Confey GAA pitches as being “under utilisation of these strategic lands” i.e. profit before people. It is time that the residents came first and I trust you will amend the UDF to reflect this.

A Strategic Context/I Landscape- Addendum

Paragraph A Strategic Context and paragraph I Landscape in the addendum are totally at odds with each other. Paragraph A states that the Confey lands are “strategically located within the Dublin Metropolitan Area ss intrinsically connected to existing services within the build up area of Leixlip”. Paragraph I Landscape correctly states that “the lands at Confey are generally rural in character with the capacity to generally accommodate a wide range uses without significant adverse effect on the appearance and character of the area” . This is an extract from your own County Development Plan 2017 to 2023. The scale and density of the overall proposed development at Confey is much too large for the area and despite the claim in paragraph A the proposed new Confey development is totally remote from the town of Leixlip. I believe that the new residents in this area will not see themselves as connected to the town centre. Why would they visit it? They will have any services they need within their own community. The proposal for 3/5 story buildings is totally at variance with the character of the area. The nearest developments to it are Glendale, Glendale Meadows and Riverforest, all of which, are comprised of single and two storey houses only, no 3/5 storey apartments. As stated in your own description of the area (Landscape) it is rural in character (it is almost in County Meath). I believe that the majority of the residential units should comprise of no higher than two storey units in keeping with the character of the adjoining areas and the maximum height of any building in the new Confey area should be restricted to three stories. If there is to be development in this area it should reflect what is around it and should be similar to the estates mentioned above which are nice places to live. It appears

that the UDF is aiming to provide an urban setting with a city feel to it which is not warranted in this rural area.

Place Making

It is not clear what is meant by “a strong night time economy” and should be clarified. Leixlip had a nightclub which thankfully is now gone and so have the problems associated with it. I would not like to see the mistake repeated in the proposed new development which will be mainly residential.

While the provision of a Park and Green Corridors in the UDF are admirable how can we trust the Council to adequately maintain these areas when St Catherine’s Park is neglected and the protection of this Park from a road was removed by the Council from this draft of the LAP despite a members’ vote on the issue in the recent past.

There is a limit to the development which any town can sustain. Leixlip is possibly unique as development is restricted by a number of factors including the Liffey/M4 to the south of the town, the Royal Canal to the North, St. Catherine’s Park/Dublin to the East and Intel/Kellystown Lane to the West. When you go beyond these points, I believe, you are outside the boundaries of Leixlip and that is why this new community will become self-sufficient and bypass the town centre. While north Kildare has to accommodate a certain level of housing under the National Planning Framework it is not sufficient for Planners to simply divide the required housing equally between the number of towns in the area without carrying out an assessment as to whether the towns have the capacity and necessary infrastructure required to meet the demand. Perhaps a new town off the M4 is required in North Kildare rather than stretch the existing towns to their limits and beyond and they trying to install the necessary infrastructure. Perhaps a new Town should be considered.

Traffic

While there are proposals to upgrade certain roads the residents of the new Confey area will be looking for direct access to the M4. I can understand this, but it should not be at the expense of St. Catherine’s Park. I am aware of a recent TII report which identifies 11 possible routes linking the M3 to the M4 and 4 of which are shown crossing St. Catherine’s

Park which is totally unacceptable. We have taken the matter up with the TII and the local relevant authorities.

In summary more account needs to be taken of the potential future links between the old Confey area of Glendale, Glendale Meadows, Riverforest etc. and the proposed new Confey development, which should reflect its scale, density and setting in the landscape.

Celbridge Road East KDA

I have a general comment in respect of this KDA that at an appropriate time in the future the Council/State should seek to acquire Leixlip Castle and Demesne as it would be a major tourist attraction and may be the only hope for the future of Leixlip town as it would act as the centre of a tourist trail from Confey Castle, St. Catherine's Park, town centre, Leixlip Castle, the Wonderful Bar and on to Castletown House in Celbridge. Many years ago Leixlip lost a major tourist attraction "the Salmon Leap" in the interest of the common good which was listed in W H Bartlett's *The Scenery and Antiquities of Ireland* as one of the most scenic places in Ireland to visit in order to create the dam for electricity generation. Perhaps the State would repay the people of Leixlip by acquiring the Castle, should it become available, which would boost tourism in Leixlip and help to regenerate the town centre area which has become very dilapidated in recent years. It would also act as a focal point for the dispersed communities of Leixlip- both existing and proposed.

Shay Kirk

Antoinette Kirk

10 July 2019