

RE Dublin Street North Development plan and the Roosky lands Land Masterplan.

To whom it may concern,

Please find out below my personal opinion on the proposed developments for the Variations 3 and 4 of the development plan as presented to the public on the 18th of January.

To start I would reject the representation of Monaghan Town as presented in public consultation and the desire to “create an attractive place to live and work” Monaghan Town is already an incredibly attractive place to live and work, so perhaps “enhance” would have been a more appropriate term.

Those of us who live in the town already have the much vaunted 15 minute city/town, however the lack of public transport infrastructure in the wider community means that the economic viability of many businesses overly rely on carparking. As the need for the car use is unlikely to change in the future, this masterplan is an opportunity to build on the many positives of the town, increase the core population living in the town and the viability of many businesses and potentially negate the need for so much large format carparking in the long run.

Despite the challenges posed by large format retail, the core of the town is still very strong and vibrant and I would support any plan which seeks to enhance that. For various reasons Monaghan has escaped the worst of the Celtic tiger era development types which have blighted other towns of a similar scale. We now have the opportunities to learn from best practice and the mistakes of others. The danger with this grand scheme is that without a strong guiding principle it risks undermining the value of what we already have.

Unfortunately both variations presented to the development plan have significant deficiencies which could potentially undermine the benefits of both schemes.

15 Minute city. 10 Minute Monaghan

The designers in their presentation and documentation have highlighted the work and theory of Carlos Moreno and his concept of the 15 minute city. However they have not presented any information to show that his research and data have been applied to this project beyond lip service.

As highlighted by Professor Moreno in his presentation to the RIAI conference in November 2021. His approach is not a design lead approach but a scientific data led approach. Which clearly demonstrates that through a process of engagement with the public and stakeholders, an urban environment can be created with access to Housing, work, culture, education, food, health education all within 15 minutes on foot or by bicycle.

His key guiding tenants of Ecology, Proximity, Solidarity and Participation are absent from this masterplan.

Hi process puts people first and is reliant on scientific data and engagement to back it up. This masterplan has taken opposite approach in trying to make their design fit in with his theory which is used as a great sound bite.

The ultimate success within the 15 minute city premise is to reduce the need for cars and road infrastructure not to increase them, increase access to more green spaces, pedestrian areas and routes, not hinder them as is evident within this masterplan.

Dublin Street.

In the Dublin street North plan, Dublin Street was presented a fairly negative light which does have some validity. Within the proposed 2 variations or public presentation, no evidence, either through data, precedents or drawings was presented to show how the backland development would improve this situation. The proposed proposition to develop the green lands north of Dublin street does not appear to address any of the issues of Dublin St. presented to the public.

The unit size and building quality of the existing buildings is a determining factor in the vacancy rates throughout Ireland not just on Dublin street. The existing historic buildings on Dublin Street are simply too small for quality housing, retail or effective commercial use. Alternative, more imaginative uses and incentives should be sought by the council to increase the occupancy of these units whilst preserving them.

The proposal of creating a new road and perimeter block connecting the Diamond car park to Old Cross Sq. would hollow out Dublin street by drawing people away to a location where there are superior housing and commercial units. Despite an uplift in pedestrian numbers and increased accessibility this would likely lead to the further dilapidation of Dublin Street.

Old Cross Square.

The proposals show the creation of a new entrance to Monaghan town through Old Cross Sq and show it as a pedestrianized plaza. This is complete fantasy, as it ignores the fact that Dublin street is a one way vehicular street and that both variations to the development plan would significantly dramatically increase traffic congestion in that area.

The Old Cross square area has gone from being an important open space within the town. Its historical context has been undermined through time with a series of poor interventions. It's now to a series of car parks and a roundabouts which very conveniently appear to serve this development. It difficult to see how any of the current proposals on the table will reverse this decline. Whilst vehicular access is incredibly important for a functioning town there needs to be a balanced approach to this. Too often, economics, commercial interests and roads designs have triumphed to the detriment of creating public spaces.

Traffic,

Both the proposed variations 3 and 4 by virtue of the roads created and number of residential units would increase the traffic congestion in the town particularly in the Diamond and Old Cross Sq. Unless the council is considering zoning buildings for demolition, it would be a significant engineering feat to achieve a road connection to the peace campuses on the North Road/Glaslough street.

Therefore in real terms this development would have to be accessed solely through the creation of two access roads through Old cross square and the Diamond carpark as indicated on the drawings.

Unless cars are removed entirely from the scheme, this would manifest itself in the requirement for a major traffic junction in Old Cross Sq and further congestion in the Diamond.

This is entirely at odds with the goals of achieving an "attractive place to live and work" and the 10 Minute town concept.

Proposed urban spaces.

The designers proposed written development principles and objectives are to be applauded. But this is not evident on the drawings. These ideals are not being put into practice and the benefits to Dublin street and the town beyond the additional housing numbers are not clear.

The designers talk about high quality public realm, but presented a series of carparks under the guise of public spaces. Why do all of the shown "urban spaces" have carparking spaces indicated?

No single pedestrian space has been created in Monaghan town in over a hundred years. The existing public spaces are constantly under threat and in danger of being turned into carparks. Monaghan is not alone in this, but many opportunities have been lost in previous developments ie. the shopping centre, the St Peters Lake and the Diamond development to create a genuine public space and contribute to the urban fabric. Instead we have a series of buildings surrounded by carparks. This development would appear to be no different.

Landmarks, Context

The geographical context around Monaghan has historically led to the development of the town between the hills. With the high points reserved for landmark building, such as the Cathedral, Hospital, St. Macartan's School, St Mary's School. Etc. with the buildings tiered on roads leading to the high points. The one exception to this development format is the housing on the Pound hill and Killygoan which overlooks the town with a solid horizontal roofline, akin to a Napoleonic fort. The concentric circular road layout and design on the Roosky lands seeks to emulate the layout of Pound Hill. This would create a second solid ridgeline ringing the town from the east. Its hard to see how this could be entertained or justified.

The historical precedent of Hill St. Mill St. and High St. suggests that running the access points to the development up the slope would break down the massing of the development and make it less imposing. Also a single focal point building should be created at the top of the hill with all the surrounding building subservient to it. This could easily be achieved by reorientation the roads to radiate up hill to focus on a new Civic offices.

The council should prevent the design drawings being carried forward as they are presented as finished designs. They are overly detailed and prescriptive and very rigid and could be considered as a fait complet. The scale of the proposed blocks and building typologies are more appropriate for a higher density urban environment. Room should be provided for alternative mixed uses not evident in the designs.

The scale of buildings on the town, as drawn, would be disastrous and imposing on the town. This can be seen in the section A/A which clearly indicates the floor level of a three storey building higher than the Diamond Apartments. The would in effect lead to what looks like an eight storey building.

Economics.

At an economic level, there are concerns about the dependency of the both the plans as presented on apartments. The text has noted mixed use development but these are absent from the design

drawings. In principle, apartments will increase density and get population closer to the town centre. However in Monaghan, the construction costs of building apartments particularly on this site with underground and undercroft carparking doesn't tally with sale price of apartments in the town.

Excluding land values or other ancillary costs, for a low rise (low quality) suburban development costs are currently starting at €1950 per sqm to build an apartment. So to build a two bed apartment in Monaghan that would equate to construction costs alone of €126k. To build a good quality would be more like €220K.

Costs taken January report into Analysis of apartment development costs and viability by the Society of chartered surveyors of Ireland and RICS

My concern is that the successful development of this site appears to be dependent on people buying apartments built by private developers. A mixed use approach is mentioned in the text but is absent in the drawings which all appear to show all large format apartment buildings.

Conclusion

Little or no regard has been paid to the existing historic town layout and streetscapes and how that has developed through time. How traditionally the town tackled the problems of building up a very steep hill and on top of the hill. The scale of the 4/5 storey buildings on the hillside to overlook the town are like a university campus, oversized, brutish, monolithic and will dwarf the town. This is demonstrated clearly in the proposed sections. The modern urban streetscapes between the buildings are poor quality and generic.

The plans shows no evidence of enhancing Dublin street and will likely detract from it and the town centre as a whole. Despite the aspirations of the text no priority has been demonstrated on the drawings for pedestrians and cyclists. Little consideration has been given as to how pedestrians would access to high parts of the site. Think along the lines of Mill street and High Street.

The new roads will seriously compromise the already comprised integrity of Old Cross square. The proposed public spaces are in reality carparks, the proposed urban realms are roads, the buildings lack character and any local context.

In principal zoning this land should be positive for the town and whilst I agree with the text of both proposals, the proposed design content does not to match the vision, principles and objectives set out by the architects. There are numerous inconsistencies throughout the proposals which lack credibility upon closer scrutiny.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Mullen

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