

DUBLIN 15 COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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Representing: Blanchardstown-Castleknock-Clonsilla-Mulhuddart

By e-mailed to devplan@fingalcoco.ie
Senior Executive Officer,
Planning Department, Fingal County Council
County Hall
Swords
Co. Dublin

14 June 2006

Dear Senior Executive Officer,

On behalf of DUBLIN 15 COMMUNITY COUNCIL I wish to make the following observations on the call for submissions into the study for lands at Abbotstown, Dublin 15

These lands contain an extraordinary range of natural, historical, cultural and recreational opportunities and offer the opportunity to develop national, regional and local sporting infrastructure. It also offers the opportunity to integrate these lands and the adjacent Scribblestown, Dunsink and the Tolka Valley to provide a unique centre of sporting excellence combined with an unparalleled recreational heartland for the nation.

Our vision for these lands is a recreational and sporting zone comprising of:

- ❑ Abbotstown lands primarily for use by more traditional sporting & recreational use
- ❑ Scribblestown study area lands for the development of less traditional recreational and sporting activity. Please refer to our submission dated 25 August '05 for details on our proposals for the Scribblestown study area (copies available on our website).

Transport access is key to the development of this site and will act as a constraint to the phased development of the site. Transport issues that need to be addressed are:

- ❑ Public transport to the aquatic centre is inadequate.
- ❑ Local bus links need to be developed to ensure local access to the facilities.
- ❑ A network of cycle ways to permit local juvenile sportspeople access the site.
- ❑ A clear vision & transport plan to integrate Abbotstown and Scribblestown.

We believe that the key development themes for the study for lands should be:

- Maintain sporting & open character of the land.
- Playing pitches (including some all weather playing surfaces) for Dublin 15 clubs.
- Indoor Community sports centre (squash, badminton etc.) adjacent to playing fields c/w car park & changing facilities.
- Encourage diversity by provide for sports not already catered for in the Dublin 15 area – (See list).
- Develop angling and water sports particularly the white water sports (as per the original CSID plan).
- Regional park for the Greater Blanchardstown area

1.0 General planning issue

This area provides extensive views southwards over the Castleknock area, parts of Dublin City and to the Dublin Mountains. Conversely, it is a highly visible area from these locations although a significant number of these views are long range in nature.

The government decision to proceed with the development of a national sports campus at Abbotstown allows this land to realise its potential for a range of uses including amenity, tourism, ecology, and education.

This is one of the last significant remaining green belt areas in Dublin 15. In all development planning in Dublin 15 over the last 15 years, the green belt zoning of these lands has been enhanced and upheld in recognition of the fact that the Dublin 15 area has undergone tremendous intense development for both housing, industry and commerce. The proper development of the area requires a significant amount of green land, providing space for parks, recreation, amenity, sports and tourism facilities.

It would be totally unnecessary and totally premature to develop any of this site for housing. **It should be noted, that any residential or increased industrial rezoning would be totally unacceptable.** Acceptable development would be short term accommodation for athletes or sports teams, this should be clustered at the north west end of the site near the roundabout at the entrance to Snugborough Industrial estate.

Within the current zoning there is considerable opportunity for recreation and amenity uses which are of themselves significant employment opportunities. Our submission seeks to identify these opportunities.

2.0 Sporting infrastructure deficit in Dublin 15 area.

Infrastructure gaps have occurred in Dublin 15 over the last 20 years as a result of the rapid development of the Greater Blanchardstown Area, where the provision of recreation, sporting and educational facilities has not kept pace with the development of new residential areas.

2.1 Lack of facilities in the Dublin 15 area

We would like to draw attention to The Fingal Sports Strategy 2003-2007 published by the Fingal Sports Partnership (Fingal County Council, the County Dublin VEC and the Campus Stadium Ireland).

The report states (page 10):

“The largest single issue highlighted by sports clubs across Fingal was the access to, availability of, or the complete lack of facilities available to them to provide for their sport. The range of difficulties relating to facilities and grounds varied from security and safety of premises to lack of changing facilities or parking to unavailability of the desired facilities at appropriate times.

The situation relating to facilities is outlined in greater detail by the Collier & Broderick study. In some parts of the county there are proportionately less facilities per capita (this will be exacerbated by projected population growth) than in older longer established communities. This is the case in many parts of Dublin 15. While particular attention needs to be directed at these areas there are also needs in all of the areas across the county. The Collier & Broderick (p.21, 2002) study illustrates that 3 areas (Blanchardstown, Castleknock and Swords) with the greatest growth in population between 1996 and 2002 are now the most deprived in terms of facilities compared with other parts of the county.”

Chapter 3 page 17 *“In Dublin 15 (greater Blanchardstown and Castleknock) which has 75,000 people and is expected to grow to 100,000 by the end of the decade there very few sports clubs proportionally when compared to the rest of the county. Map 1 illustrates this as there is a higher proportion of sports clubs with their own facilities along the coastal areas and in Swords.*

In addressing the disadvantage experienced by Dublin 15 and Swords area, we believe that the funding should be targeted at these areas. When we talk of disadvantaged areas, the Castleknock, Castaheany and Swords areas are not areas that are associated with disadvantage. In the past clubs in similar areas would have fundraised to acquire playing fields, facilities etc

The issue that make it very difficult for sporting organizations on their own to provide facilities is the cost of acquiring lands. The situation arises due to speculative pressure on land in proximity to residentially zoned land in the Dublin 15 area which has made it virtually impossible for clubs to purchase their own lands.

In addressing the disadvantage detailed in “Fingal Sports Strategy 2003-2007“ experienced by Dublin 15 and Swords area, we believe that the majority of the funding should be focused in these two areas rather than evenly distributed across the county. Abbotstown and the Scribblestown areas are ideal areas in which to target funding.

2.2 Opportunities in the study area

The Dublin 15 area is the largest conurbation in Fingal County. It is a satellite town within the Dublin Metropolitan Area, separated by strategic green belts from Finglas to the East (Scribblestown & Dunsink), Phoenix Park to the South East and from Lucan to the South (Liffey valley).

Access to sporting facilities within the Dublin 15 area is a major problem, with all clubs competing for any available Class 1 Open Space. The new Town of Blanchardstown, with a target population of 120,000 is one of the few areas without it's own Urban Park. Tallaght has Tymon Park, Clondalkin has Corkagh Park and Malahide has Malahide Castle and Demesne. When the issue of an urban Park for the New Town is raised, the Phoenix Park is mentioned. The Phoenix Park is a designated National park providing for passive recreation and institutional use. It is impossible for any new club to gain access to it's facilities. In addition, the Phoenix Park caters for the residents of Dublin 7, 8 10 & 20

Playing fields are either in private ownership (i.e. the Garda sports grounds in Westmanstown) or in public ownership in lands that are transferred to Fingal County Council as a result of Class 1 public open space contributions as a result of residential development.

The rapid increase in the value of land in the Dublin area, and the changes in land zoning in the Dublin 15 area in the last 20 years have made it impossible for clubs to purchase land. This means that new clubs are solely reliant on Class 1 Public open space for playing facilities. We are fortunate in the Dublin 15 area to have existing GAA, Soccer and Rugby clubs but we need to maximize participation by ensuring that sufficient playing pitches are available. Fingal could address the needs discussed above by ensuring local access to playing pitches and the other sports facilities in this study area.

If we are to address the disadvantage experienced by residents in Dublin 15 as detailed in the "Fingal Sports Strategy 2003-2007", additional sports facilities need to be provided in the green belt lands adjacent and accessible from residential areas. These lands contain an extraordinary range of natural, historical, cultural and recreational opportunities and offer the opportunity to address the needs discussed above.

2.3 Minority sports

The major field sports of GAA, Soccer and Rugby have a high national profile and a very large following. The needs of these sports can be addressed by the provision of playing fields with administrative and specialist support (sports injuries clinics, sports science facility, etc.). Clearly transport infrastructure constrains the scale of facilities that can be provided to meet the needs of these very popular sports.

The Abbotstown sports campus offers the opportunity to both address the lack of diversity in sporting facilities in Dublin 15 and the potential to develop a centre of excellence in lesser known sports.

Less obvious sports which could be catered for in Abbotstown are as follows:

- ❑ Cycling in a Velodrome facility.
- ❑ White water sports (use the topography of the site to provide a training ground for canoeing, etc.).
- ❑ Cricket (a sport particularly popular with Foreign Nationals in Dublin 15).
- ❑ Softball.
- ❑ Climbing
- ❑ Still water sports i.e. Rowing.
- ❑ Tennis
- ❑ Badminton
- ❑ Volleyball
- ❑ Gymnastics
- ❑ Table Tennis
- ❑ Martial arts (Karate, Judo, Kick Boxing, etc.).
- ❑ Hockey
- ❑ Yoga
- ❑ Netball
- ❑ Handball
- ❑ Snooker
- ❑ Wrestling & Boxing
- ❑ Squash
- ❑ Basketball
- ❑ Grass bowling
- ❑ Triathlon

The adjacent lands in Scribblestown & Dunsink offer the opportunity to develop facilities for less conventional sports such as: Equestrian, Orienteering, Archery, Moto-Cross, and Skate Boarding

2.4 Lack of community facilities in the Dublin 15 area

The growing areas of Dublin 15 (i.e. Castaheany, Ongar, etc.) are generally without community facilities. In addition to the difficulty in establishing these facilities, there is an ongoing difficulty and cost of keeping the facilities open.

The provision of community facilities is being imaginatively addressed by Fingal County Council in combining the design of new schools with community centres where the facility is planned to be available to the wider community in the evenings (Mary Mother of Hope – Littlepace and St Patrick’s - Diswellstown). This is a welcome development.

However not all community activities take place in the evening, (Parent & Toddler, Active Retirement, Second chance education). Where possible multiuse sports facilities should be available to community groups at reasonable cost.

3.0 Urban Park Land

The new Town of Blanchardstown, with a target population of 120,000 is one of the few areas without it's own Urban Park.

The original Stadium Ireland Report proposes that the surplus lands (280 acres) be rezoned and sold off. Paddy Teahon (Chief Executive Sports Campus Ireland) assured us that they would not sell off the surplus lands. Following meetings with CSID we believe that they are committed to the principle of locating an urban park on the Abbotstown site.

Lands to the south-east due to the topography of the land offer limited potential as sports facilities, this area should be retained as parkland, to join up with Tolka Valley Park and Open space land of the residential development at Connelly Hospital grounds. The area identified by cross hatching on the map "Proposed study for lands at Abbotstown Dublin 15" is considered ideal for an urban park.

We propose that lands within Abbotstown which are surplus to the Sports Campus Ireland's needs would be best used as an Urban Park to provide active and passive recreational facilities for the residents of the New Town and its environs containing:

- Parkland, to be not less than 100 acres, contain walks, wooded areas, child safe play areas and adventure playground , picnic areas, gardens and open space.
 - Park to contain walks, wooded areas, child safe play areas and adventure playground, children's cycle routes, picnic areas, gardens and open space.
 - Given the difficulty of finding sites for neighbourhood playgrounds in the Castleknock area there are many suitable sites in the study area.
- Develop angling and water sport at appropriate locations along Tolka Valley and Royal Canal. Build on the recent project of involving local youth in the stocking of local rivers by establishing relationships with underprivileged youth. Consider a municipal canoe club.
- Facilities for the elderly, a safe supervised environment with a walk that is undemanding – i.e. level and easily accessible. A rose garden or other visual attraction would complement this. Ideally located in proximity to Abbotstown house with tea rooms reasonably near.
- Facilities for teenagers, - rollerblade or skateboard areas. Places that provide a "cool" atmosphere that will appeal to teenagers as being a step up from a children's playground and that will provide an alternative to the pub culture.
 - Our recommendation is that Fingal work with local post primary schools to get transition year students to design a playground specifically for teenagers, with the winning design selected by the students.
 - Locate this facility where there is active supervision to prevent anti social activities.

- Adventure playground. A model is the Clara-Lara playground in Laragh, Co Wicklow, which is run on a commercial basis. A similar development in these lands would have the commercial advantage of proximity to major urban centres.
- In addition to the lands dedicated to the usage above, the urban park should be complemented by local access for local schools, sports clubs etc. to the national sports campus:
 - Ensure that there are multi use facilities available for all sporting codes.
 - Cater for less popular sports e.g., basketball ,tennis ,volleyball, hockey, cricket, (see list in section 2.3 above)
 - Promote activity for the elderly with sports like bowling, etc.
 - Orienteering course,
 - Climbing wall,
 - An athletics field and all weather track for use by local clubs/schools.

4.0 Security issues

For the Abbotstown lands to meet their potential, the following issues need to be addressed:

4.1 Security.

- Policing & park ranger service along the lines of the OPW support for the Phoenix Park.
- Controlled access to the facilities whether on an individual development or an area based (like the access to the Snugborough Industrial Estate).
- Secure boundaries so that the controlled access can be effective.
- CCTV at locations at risk from vandalism.
- Need active observation, Fingal can not rely on passive observation.

5.0 Mobility issues

To efficiently and fully exploit and the lands at Abbotstown for sporting and recreational purposes we must ensure that mobility and land use planning for the area are integrated.

It will be recalled that when previous plans for the lands in question were being examined, the critical limiting factor for the site was the absence of proper transportation links with the capacity to deal with the intended demand arising from the facilities in question.

Due to the nature of the facilities that will ultimately be offered on the Abbotstown lands we envisage that good quality access will be required to serve the national, regional and local needs of the prospective users.

We have broken this down as follows

5.1 International/ National

- ❑ Air - Dublin Airport with connection to the area via public transport, taxi.
- ❑ Sea - Ferries, good signage from Dublin Port/ Dun Laoire to enable car/ bus users travel easily to the facilities.
- ❑ Road access via key national routes(M50 - possible direct link to Abbotstown lands, N2 & N3).
- ❑ Public transport
 - Heavy rail Maynooth service, with possible connection to Metro North service(at Drumcondra) and therefore the Airport,
 - Metro West line under Transport 21(with a Metro stop at Abbotstown),
 - Bus Eireann(bus stop at the facilities).

5.2 Regional

- ❑ Road access via Snugboro Road,with new intercatchment route to Dublin South in line with proposals as set out by the Transportation Dept. of Fingal County Council.
- ❑ Public transport –
 - Good quality Dublin Bus service into the site (QBC for the Snugboro Road).
 - Private Bus operators(UrBus).
 - Taxi rank.

5.3 Local

Approach by local roads to the facilities during weekends will be difficult because of the congestion on the approach roads to the Blanchardstown Centre.

Provide multiple access points to the Abbotstown lands. These should be planned so as to avoid having local traffic having to approach Abbotstown, at weekends, via the N3 - Blanchardstown Roads North/South, and the N3 - Snugboro Road(north & south).

- ❑ Vehicular access to the recreational zones to be provided from the existing entrance on the Snugborough Road
- ❑ Pedestrian access via the existing entrance to Connolly Hospital (Blanchardstown Village) or the new road with connection to the N3 at “Scott’s roundabout”.
- ❑ Disabled parking in the vicinity of the passive zones to provide access for the less mobile person.

5.3.1 Local Bus services

The Community Council has been a long term advocate of the need to provide a quality local bus service. Such a service should be in place (serving Abbotstown), by the time these lands are developed. Ensure that there is a connection to Abbotstown on a local bus from both North and South Blanchardstown.

Parking

It is expected that the majority of users will travel to Abbotstown in cars. It is vital that adequate car parking is provided at key locations throughout the lands e.g. near regional park, children's playground, etc.

- Provide main car park at the existing National Aquatic pool with
- Limited parking at the national sporting bodies offices.
- Disabled parking in the vicinity of the passive zones to provide access for the less mobile person.

Cycle Routes

Safe cycle routes to Abbotstown and possibly within Abbotstown need to be considered for local users.

Pedestrian Access

Ensure that there are multiple safe pedestrian access points to Abbotstown and that there is a number of high quality walk ways within the lands/park.

- A network of pedestrian/cycle routes to provide access into and through the recreational areas. Locations are suggested along the Tolka River, but detailed site investigation will be necessary to determine the exact location for such routes.

We are available to discuss further any of the issues raised in our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Chairperson,
Dublin 15 Community Council