

## Imagine Dundrum Public Meeting

### Responding to the Hammerson–Allianz SHD plans for Dundrum Village Taney Parish Centre, April 27<sup>th</sup> 2022

*Well over 400 people (almost 500, according to media reports) attended Imagine Dundrum’s public meeting, which took place three weeks after Hammerson-Allianz submitted their plans for a Strategic Housing Development (SHD) in Dundrum Village.*

*The concern of this capacity crowd for the future of Dundrum was reflected in their intense concentration during the two substantial presentations, and in the number of focused questions asked from the floor in the Q and A session, which was extended by agreement to allow for maximum participation.*

*Less than a fortnight later, over 700 Observations were submitted to An Bord Pleanála, including 8 from local Residents’ Associations, each of which represents significant numbers of people, and 1 from a local National School. <sup>1</sup>*

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**Opening the meeting** on behalf of Imagine Dundrum, group member Nick Armstrong first welcomed everyone, introduced the Chair for the meeting, Dr Alan Mee of UCD’s School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy. Alan introduced the two main speakers, planning consultant Brendan Buck and Imagine Dundrum Chair, Anne Colgan.

#### Overview of the Dundrum Village Plans – Brendan Buck, planning consultant

Planning consultant Brendan Buck gave his professional overview of the Hammerson-Allianz planning application, illustrated by images taken from the developers’ dossier of plans and drawings<sup>2</sup>. He commented that this proposed scheme is one of the largest SHD applications lodged in Dublin in recent years, involving a huge quantity of documentation – to read it all is a major task even for planning experts to undertake, still less a layperson.

**Working with Imagine Dundrum:** As a planning consultant, Brendan frequently works with local residents’ groups opposing planning proposals for their immediate neighbourhood, often on grounds of scale. But working with Imagine Dundrum has been different, because its campaign is supported across a wide local area, and its main concern is for the best possible future for Dundrum and the whole local community.

**SHD system:** Brendan outlined the Strategic Housing Development system (about to be superseded by a new planning process) and its fast-tracking of permission for large scale housing schemes, which are submitted directly to An Bord Pleanála for approval, bypassing the Local Authority, in this case Dún Laoghaire Rathdown (DLR) County Council. This fast-track system severely limits the time available for public consultations and submissions, allowing only 5 weeks after plans are lodged.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier indication of local support was the gathering of over 1,200 signatures supporting Imagine Dundrum’s vision for Dundrum, as part of its ‘1,000 Voices’ campaign.

<sup>2</sup> The developers’ website with all plans and drawings is publicly available at [www.dundrumvillageshd.ie](http://www.dundrumvillageshd.ie)  
Brendan Buck’s Powerpoint presentation can be found on [www.imaginedundrum.ie](http://www.imaginedundrum.ie)

**Outline of the development plans:** the scheme covers Dundrum's old Shopping Centre site and a significant number of buildings on the West side of Main Street – buildings which have been designated as parts of the Dundrum Architectural Conservation Area in the DLR County Development Plan 2022-2028.

It is a primarily residential scheme, with only 5% of buildings categorised as non-residential (including a creche, some retail units and an upgraded Lidl supermarket). It involves 881 apartments in 11 blocks, divided into 4 'zones'. Building heights range from 5 storeys on Main Street to 10/11 on the bypass, with one 16-storey tower at the North end of the site, near the Carnegie Library.

Commenting on the overall scheme, Brendan pointed out that while the overall site plan might look reasonable (as if seen from above), the proposed massing together of large buildings on the site makes for a very dense or "condensed" scheme of wide apartment blocks, similar to those in Barcelona or Berlin – but these generally have large internal courtyards and open spaces to offset their bulk.

**Understanding the developer's drawings and photomontages:** these can be deceptive! Photomontages rarely show views as they will actually appear to passers-by – for example, one image of Main Street looking South suggests that the new 5 storey buildings on the West side are barely taller than the existing low-rise shops and 1-storey Pembroke cottages opposite.

Similarly, the developer's images of views from Sweetmount Park exaggerate the size of gaps between blocks along the bypass, which in reality will be 'read' by those walking or driving by as a continuous wall of masonry. Its overall height is further increased because the base of these buildings will be at 'podium level' in relation to Main Street, and substantially higher than the level of the bypass as a result.

Two particular views give a sense of the enormous size of the scheme: a person looking across Main Street (which is curved as well as narrow) from the East side will see layers of larger buildings looming up close behind the new blocks on the West side of the street - "big, bigger, even bigger!" - making it extremely oppressive in scale. The view from the Luas bridge (likely to be over-topped by the 16-storey apartment tower) reveals "a profound alteration of the existing environment".

**The look of Main Street – a lack of sensitivity to the existing 'urban grain':** commenting further on the overall design, Brendan noted that the proposed 'folded paper' style Main Street buildings could be found anywhere, since they bear no relationship to their overall context or to the character and scale of Dundrum's primarily Victorian village streetscape. This incongruity is especially clear when they are seen side by side with Holy Cross Church and with Glenville Terrace.

**Almost no change to the developer's original plans:** these have been largely retained despite criticism in the pre-planning consultation phase by the Local Authority planners (who recommended refusal) and by An Bord Pleanála itself (which sought substantial amendments).

Addressing the overall design, DLR County Council planners considered the scheme as a whole "homogenous, monolithic and insensitive to Main Street" and found the 16-storey block "relentlessly large as it addresses the bypass".

## Summary of main concerns:

- **Ignoring existing planning frameworks – planned demolition of heritage buildings:** the developer cannot have been unaware of the forthcoming Dundrum Local Area Plan and its specific requirements for Main Street’s heritage buildings, which have now received full ACA designation in the new County Development Plan. Yet they are largely scheduled for demolition in these plans, with no justification offered.
- **Contravening existing Major Town Centre zoning:** Dundrum’s zoning as a Major Town Centre (MTC) makes it the second main urban centre in DLR County, along with Dún Laoghaire itself.

MTC status requires a broad mix of uses and services to be concentrated in the immediate Dundrum area, creating a place offering housing, employment opportunities, a wide variety of retail outlets, along with civic facilities and services, and leisure and cultural facilities (including night-time activities), enabling it to function as a hub for the wider surrounding area.

A residential development on this site is in direct contradiction of this statutory planning framework, making it in **‘material contravention’ of the zoning designation.**

- **Lack of adequate public open space:** In terms of civic facilities, the provision of an adequate and easily accessible public open space is essential, and this proposed development offers only a modest ‘Church Square’, set deep behind the church in a transition zone where people will be moving between the residential blocks and the new Shopping Centre (‘Dundrum Town Centre’).
- **The overwhelming scale, height and mass of the scheme:** its dimensions (outlined above) are totally inappropriate for its setting.
- **The “enclosure” effect:** the design seems almost perversely to aim for a closing off of the residential area from Main Street. A more obvious design choice - from social, economic, and aesthetic points of view – would be to open it up to Main Street, and so create maximum permeability between them.

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## Imagine Dundrum presentation – Anne Colgan, Chairperson<sup>3</sup>

Anne first thanked Brendan for his clear explanation of the Hammerson-Allianz planning application, and showing what is at stake for the local community, whose strong affection and concern for the Village was clearly demonstrated by the numbers attending the meeting. Imagine Dundrum, she said, was lucky to be able to engage him for advice and support following the lodging of the plans, and now by holding this public meeting, the group was fulfilling its commitment to sharing such advice and support as widely as possible with the local community.

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<sup>3</sup> Video of this presentation is on [www.imaginedundrum.ie](http://www.imaginedundrum.ie)

She reflected that, while the outcome of the planning application is hugely important to everyone, the process itself is so complex and technical - and allows so little time for public responses – that it can exclude the very people to whom it matters most.

So Imagine Dundrum’s hopes for the meeting were that it (along with an advice clinic to be held a few days later) would help to demystify the process, and make it easier for people to express their views in submissions to An Bord Pleanála by the May 9<sup>th</sup> deadline.

Anne wanted above all to share with the audience the deep concerns of Imagine Dundrum about the Hammerson-Allianz proposals, many of which were already outlined in Brendan’s presentation. Her presentation went on to focus on the group’s engagement with the local community and its gradual development of a set of Proposals for the development of the Village, based on the outcomes of consultations over a five-year period. In conclusion she outlined Imagine Dundrum’s current position in the light of the recent planning application.

**2017 public meeting/ community conversation:** a year after Imagine Dundrum came together, it held its first public meeting , also in Taney, and undoubtedly with some of the same audience. The intention was to start a community conversation about the future of Dundrum Village. Responses to the question, “*Why is Dundrum important to you?*” included:

- ‘There’s a lovely village feel – let’s keep it’
- ‘We love the small shops and the village streetscape’
- ‘It’s a living community’
- ‘Dundrum is a focal point for the surrounding area, a hub connecting us all – we need to strengthen that’
- ‘It’s our homeplace!’

We know that new people coming to live here will expect the same.

If we in Imagine Dundrum have concerns about what the development plans propose, it’s because we share these views about neighbourhood and community, and what makes a great place to live, work, grow up and grow old, and we have every right to hold on to those ideas. This is not NIMBYISM!

**Imagine Dundrum consultations:** Over the past 6 years, Imagine Dundrum has engaged with the local community – with residents’ associations, business owners, children and young people, older people, and people with disabilities - and in 2021 we drew on the outcomes of these discussions to make our own Proposals for the future development of the old Shopping Centre site and the Village itself, which we publicised widely and forwarded to the developers and to the County Council.

**Advocating for a Dundrum Architectural Conservation Area:** we also made a strong and successful case to the County Council for heritage buildings in the Village to be designated as an Architectural Conservation Area, guaranteeing them a degree of protection.

**Civic Centre campaign:** we campaigned for a new Civic Centre, a modern library and civic offices, befitting the status of Dundrum as the second major town centre in the County, and we welcome the Council’s commitment to that project. We want to see this placed centrally on the site of the old Shopping Centre, with a market square adjoining Main Street. We also made the case for more independent businesses, new facilities and work opportunities,

and all these proposals have been strongly supported by our local representatives and the Council itself.

**Looking at new housing models:** at our 2020 webinar, a respected and experienced Dublin architect showed how human scale neighbourhood housing can still achieve high density, using a mix of duplexes, apartment blocks of no more than 4 storeys, and houses – an internationally recognised approach which could work well in Dundrum.

**Lack of response from Hammerson-Allianz, who have ignored the community:** Imagine Dundrum has communicated all of these proposals and information to the site owners, requesting the meaningful public consultation on which Hammerson has formerly prided itself. It is extremely regrettable that they chose not to engage actively with the local community when planning for the Dundrum site - with an active community ready, willing and able, it would have been a win-win situation.

**Alignment with the County Development Plan:** all these views and ideas put forward for Dundrum Village are fully in tune with the aims of the newly adopted *Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Development Plan 2022-28*. This requires community, cultural and civic facilities on the old Shopping Centre site, and provision of employment, leisure, entertainment, cultural and community facilities. It specifically provides that any development must “take cognisance of the character and streetscape of Old Main Street”.

**Imagine Dundrum’s view of the development plans:** we are greatly disturbed by many aspects of these plans because so much of what we have campaigned for – based on our research into good planning and placemaking and all our consultations with local people – seems to have been disregarded. The main causes of our concern are:

- The proposal for 5-storey buildings on Main Street, which fails to respect the historic character and the scale and overall streetscape of the Village.
- The planned demolition of heritage buildings on Main Street, despite their statutory designation as an Architectural Conservation Area in the new County Development Plan 2022-28.
- The lack of any provision for civic, cultural and community facilities and services on the site. They are critical to serve those who will come to live in Dundrum Village (almost 3,000 in this development alone) along with the ongoing huge population expansion in the surrounding area). A living neighbourhood is so much more than apartments.
- The extremely limited provision for retail, entertainment and other essential facilities, as required by the Major Town Centre zoning, as well as the reduction in retail provision in Dundrum Village.
- And of course the overall height and density of the planned development, with towers that are overbearing and wholly out of keeping with the surrounding low-rise, low density suburban environment.

**Housing patterns and their problems, then and now!** In the 50s and 60s, there was much criticism of the large new council estates, often built without the facilities people needed (local shops, public transport, health centre etc.). Now we are looking at something similar for Dundrum, but instead of suburban horizontal sprawl, we will have vertical sprawl!

**Imagine Dundrum's position:** Imagine Dundrum actively seeks the redevelopment of Dundrum Village in ways that strengthen community, create a truly liveable neighbourhood, respect Dundrum's unique architectural heritage, and protect the environment. The Hammerson-Allianz plans fall far short of this vision.

So we will challenge the plans, both because they are not responsive to local planning policy, and because of their failure to build the best possible place for the current and new community in Dundrum to grow up in, live, work and grow old in, now and into the future. It must be a place that can engender strong civic pride and a sense of belonging.

In conclusion, what is built here in the next few years will shape this place not just for generations, but possibly for hundreds of years. We owe it to those who will inhabit this place after us to do our utmost to make it the very best place it can be.

So this is our challenge and your challenge over the next few weeks, to do our very best for the future of Dundrum. Making an observation to An Bord Pleanála could be the best €20 you have ever spent!

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Alan Mee, chairing, thanked both speakers for their comprehensive and stimulating presentations, and commented that he had never seen so many people gathering together to talk about a local planning matter. He opened the floor to questions and comments, and in the time available around 20 people were able to raise issues of importance, and local representatives had a chance to express their support.

## Questions and comments

Many questions looked for clarification on specific matters in the planning consultant's presentation, or further advice on making submissions to An Bord Pleanála, and he provided these:

- *"Does the DLR County Development Plan (recently adopted) supercede the Hammerson plans?"* Although the SHD application was lodged under the previous CDP, An Bord Pleanála has to consider it in the light of the new one, which is fully in conformity with the new building regulations on height etc. introduced by Government in the last few years.

Another difficulty worth mentioning with the timing of the application: it's premature in relation to the Dundrum Local Area Plan, in preparation by DLR County Council for the last 2 years. (Councillors present at the meeting stressed that they have been calling for its completion.)

- *"If the developer asks for 16 storeys, does that mean they hope for permission for 10?"* The consultant urged anyone making a submission to focus on only what is stated in the planning application, and object to the problematic elements in that.
- *"Why is there such a tiny number of parking spaces?"* This is in accordance with new regulations for large housing schemes (1 car space per 5 units). Whatever one's views on this, there's no purpose in objecting to ABP on those grounds.

- *“Is there a problem with having a lot of very similar objections?”* There will hopefully be many objections raising the zoning issue, and the failure of the scheme to meet those requirements, but it is important for individuals to use their own words to express that. It is also important to say what impact this proposal will have on them personally if it is approved.
- *“What will happen if this application fails?”* There’s no point in speculating!

### A question about Allianz

*“What is their involvement - are they hiding behind Hammerson, since all the focus has been on Hammerson? What does their social responsibility statement say? Given how many local people use Allianz services, should we be challenging the company?”*

Asked about approaches to Allianz by Imagine Dundrum, Anne Colgan said that a letter with a hard copy of our proposals for the Village was hand-delivered in 2021, following publicity in the media about their stance on financial involvement in housing schemes which are build-to-rent only. However, Allianz did not even send an acknowledgement.

### Comments and questions on Issues with SHD housing schemes – and with this one:

- *Too many apartment blocks in the Dundrum area:* it was pointed out that there are 10 SHDs close to Dundrum currently in the planning process.
- *Ireland’s housing crisis:* One speaker lamented the commodification of housing and asked how this scheme will address the current housing crisis. It could even make the rental market worse. Another asked, *“Can we lobby the Council to buy the site and use it for social and truly affordable housing for the community?”*
- *Genuine public space?* One speaker pointed out the lack of fully publicly-owned and -controlled space in the new development – what is labelled ‘public open space’ is actually all private property. *“Dundrum needs a proper town square.”*
- *Building standards:* it was noted that, although the development will conform to built-for-sale standards, Hammerson will still have the option of renting all the units in the scheme, or selling en bloc to a private investment fund who will offer units for rent once it is built.
- *Unoccupied units:* one speaker feared that, as in similar schemes recently, the high rents will result in a substantial proportion of apartments being unoccupied, making it more likely to be sold to an institutional fund. This will seriously undermine local community-building.
- *“The wrong scheme in the wrong place!”* A very strong contribution was made by a resident who is also an urban planner. This scheme is simply the wrong use of the site, and is clearly in material contravention of its MTC zoning, which requires a ‘mixed use’ development. This speaker urged objectors to focus on this as the strongest argument against the scheme.

### Future-proofing

*“How will these buildings be powered? We are facing an environmental crisis, yet there’s no mention of renewable energy!”*

### Impact on local transport and other infrastructure

- How can the **Luas service** from Dundrum be considered adequate to service the needs of those moving to the new scheme, along with existing residents? *"There will be approximately 25,000 people living in Cherrywood once it is completed –the Luas will be full by the time it gets to Dundrum!"*
- Barton Road has problems with water pressure – this speaker wondered whether the **water and sewage infrastructure** is adequate to cater for 880 + apartments in addition to the existing demands in Dundrum.
- **Current traffic issues** in Dundrum, especially the Dundrum Road/ Taney-Churchtown Road junction at the North end, are serious for locals, as more than one speaker pointed out. There are already new developments feeding into Dundrum Road, and this new scheme will almost certainly add to traffic chaos.

**Matters affecting specific local areas:** Sweetmount Park residents are concerned about possible anti-social behaviour resulting from the proposed bridge over the bypass from the new development. Anne explained that it was a complicated matter, because there has to be 'permeability' through the scheme, and the bridge could be said to respond to that requirement. But its function is actually unclear.

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### Closing the meeting:

Nick Armstong for Imagine Dundrum closed the meeting with thanks all round and strong encouragement to everyone to write and submit their observations to An Bord Pleanála in good time for the closing date of May 9th!

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