



**Restoring the heart of
Dundrum - further thinking
on the planned Civic Centre**

**Submission from
Imagine Dundrum**

July 2024

www.imaginedundrum.ie

Restoring the Heart of Dundrum: further thinking on the planned Civic Centre and new Library

A submission to Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. June 2024

The rationale for this submission

Campaigning for a Civic Centre has been a key element in Imagine Dundrum's work for the future of Dundrum. One of the group's Fundamental Principles from the outset has been the establishment of a civic, community and cultural centre at the heart of Dundrum. Subsequently this has featured strongly in our public consultations, and in a range of campaign documents and formal submissions. The documents can be found in the Documents section of the Imagine Dundrum website: www.imaginedundrum.ie (see Appendix A).

Imagine Dundrum wants to see fully adequate civic, community and cultural facilities at the heart of the redeveloped Dundrum Village, believing these facilities essential to creating a sustainable community as the population continues to grow and diversify. In particular, we have advocated for a Civic Centre as a new and strong public focus for the Village and the wider surrounding area. As the population has grown considerably since 2016, and is estimated to reach 40,000 people by 2040, the need for this facility is ever greater.

Imagine Dundrum welcomed the positive response from Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Executive to our initial approaches in 2017, and their subsequent actions in making a strong business case and securing Departmental funding for the initial consultation/scoping work. The group now warmly welcomes the strong commitment to proceed with the Civic Centre, with a new modern library at its core, as set out in the County Development Plan and the Dundrum Local Area Plan.

The purpose of this submission is to outline Imagine Dundrum's thinking regarding the role of the Civic Centre, the principles that should underpin its design, and the services that are essential to be provided there. We offer this as a contribution to the detailed planning phase of the Civic Centre, based on considered ideas drawn from our discussions and conversations with the local community over the past seven years. We also see this, in line with the basic principle of community engagement, as one strand of a wider public engagement with the local community, which will enable them to have their input into the design and planning of their exciting new local facility.

The role of the Civic Centre

The new Civic Centre and library in its internal and external design, and the programmes within it, will come at a time when libraries in Ireland and beyond are taking on board highly innovative thinking both in terms of the range of programmes

provided and library internal and external design. In the time since Imagine Dundrum first articulated the need for a Civic Centre, to encompass cultural and community uses, a revolution has taken place in the way the role of the public library in contemporary society is envisaged.

This submission is rooted in the latest understanding of the role of the public library, as captured in key local, national and international policy documents. They demonstrate a productive overlap in thinking about the functions of a library and the functions of a civic centre, particularly in relation to community-building and access to all kinds of knowledge and cultural experience.

Traditionally, the centre of most cities has been a “commons”, a civic space built according to democratic principles...major public and cultural institutions are located around [it], forming a civic centre of enormous practical and symbolic importance. Libraries are the cornerstones of many civic centers. They may be joined by city halls, museums, government offices, churches, opera houses, courthouses, or any number of other public-minded institutions. With strong partnerships and a clear purpose, the people behind these buildings can breathe life into their shared public space – the commons – and create a vibrant, cohesive district. A fully-realized civic centre proclaims the mission and identity of its institutions or all to see, so that the commons becomes a forum for public expression and a source of community pride.¹

Design and planning of the Civic Centre: the policy context

The local, national and international policy context for the design and planning of the Civic Centre is set out in local, national and international documents:

The Dundrum Local Area Plan²

Imagine Dundrum welcomes the description and definition of the role of the Civic Centre contained in the Dundrum Local Area Plan 2023:

To provide for the community, civic and cultural infrastructure needs of Dundrum, and its wider area, in a manner that serves the needs of existing and future generations and fosters the development of social cohesion and sustainable communities, a new Civic, Cultural and Community Centre would be built at the Taney Cross Area.

The ‘anchor’ facility in the Centre would be a new and greatly expanded modern library that can meet the needs of the growing population in Dundrum and the wider area, and to

¹ <https://www.pps.org/article/civiccenterssolutions-2>

² <https://www.dlrcoco.ie/dundrumlap>

accommodate best current thinking about the expanded role of the modern library. In addition, the Centre will provide cultural and community spaces. Key council services will operate from this Centre. The Carnegie Building, which currently houses the library will continue to serve as a community space linked with the Civic Centre as part of a network of services.

National Public Library Strategy 2023-2027³

The Library is the Place: Information, Recreation, Inspiration, is Ireland's National Library Strategy and the Government's policy document on the development of the library service. The strategy proposes new actions on lifelong learning, cultural heritage and digital services, and is the first national library strategy to focus on sustainability and climate action as the UNESCO manifesto does. Actions to be undertaken by the library services are designed to help Ireland achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) The 17 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the UN in 2015 with the aim of "peace and prosperity" for both people and planet and as a way of addressing climate change and other major threats. The SDGs highlight the relationship between the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development.

The actions guided by the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals can take many forms including informing staX, the public and others that SDGs are part of the ethos of the library, and supporting public understanding of the SDGs through book holdings and educational programmes. In terms of building design, creating a sustainable energy-efficient building with solar panels supplying the electricity would be a practical expression of support for the SDGs.

The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022⁴

The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto also stresses that libraries contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, through providing information and resources to allow the development of more equitable and sustainable societies.

The Manifesto looks at the functions of the public library in some detail, and examines the ways that libraries serve their communities and how they are expanding their role. In the Manifesto's vision, libraries must enable people to freely access, produce and share knowledge of all kinds, as the library's mission expands to enable remote and digital access and the development of media and information literacy and digital skills, which can equip and support well-informed democratic societies.

³ <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/263780/847de39a-85fa-4b55-a3e9-c71fefc27e86.pdf#page=null>

⁴ <https://www.ifla.org/public-library-manifesto>

Towards a world-class Civic Centre for Dundrum: drawing on the best new design thinking

Imagine Dundrum looks to the Council to articulate a set of design principles which will guide every stage of the Civic Centre's development, from early planning to fit-out. We note that the most successful contemporary public libraries in Europe and the U S have many design features in common, which make each of them a real "living room for the city". Their flagship architecture and high quality materials underline the principle that buildings for the public must be equal to the best of private provision. Much of this innovative thinking is clearly embodied in our own Lexicon library.

Imagine Dundrum hopes that the guiding principles for the new building's design would include:

Universal inclusivity and access as a core principle: the design must ensure that the needs of all in the community are catered for, including all generational groups, all those with particular access needs including physical access and language access, incomers and newcomers to Dundrum, and marginalised groups including people who are homeless and for whom the library is their only chance of accessing key services, resources for reading, IT, and ready access to staX. Provision of a Changing Places facility will, we assume, be provided as Council policy.

Recognising the social value of the space: the design thinking for the new building must recognise and reflect the role of the Civic Centre and its library as a unique public space, and as one of very few public spaces where everyone is welcome, without exception, and thus a fundamental focal point for building community.

Sustainability: the new Centre should embody the most up to date knowledge and practice in relation to sustainable design and construction. The new Kilkenny Civic Centre is an exemplar in this regard⁵

Ease of physical access: This needs to be at the forefront of design thinking, and must include:

- Ease of navigability within the building (through signage, clear links between spaces etc.);
- Easy access to the building from the outside – an inviting entrance space, with attractive adjacent outdoor spaces; links to the Luas platform; age- and disability- friendly parking nearby.

⁵ Indications are that the Kilkenny Civic Centre will achieve the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) gold standard for measures taken on water efficiency, renewable energy, thermal performance and sustainability.

What should the Civic Centre provide?

A suite of library, arts, music, and public education services for the West side of the County

Alongside all the facilities of a modern public library, the services and programmes provided should be appropriate for a Major Town Centre, located close to citizens on the West side of the County, and modelled on the excellent range of programmes on offer in the Lexicon. These should include:

- Programmes, materials, meeting rooms for workshops and training events suited to needs and wishes of all age groups;
- Arts and cultural activities, including studio space;
- A focus on children's play and learning, and dedicated teen services and spaces

Dedicated Council services in Dundrum for the West of the Count

The advent of the Civic Centre should mean that local people no longer have to travel to Dún Laoghaire for key Council services such as housing, planning, or the local Enterprise Office. So it is essential that these community support services for the area should be located in the new Centre. In addition, a move from the current location in Dundrum Business Park will be greatly beneficial: Council services will be more visible to more people, and there will be much greater ease of access for pedestrians, wheelchair users and parents with buggies.

Community IT facilities

- Printing facilities
- High-speed wifi
- Public computer terminals for those who need them
- IT support

Opportunities for organisations with links to the Council

Local organisations supported by the Council could be offered jointly productive collaborations within the Civic Centre space and programmes. For example, the Mill Theatre is a creative community hub supported by Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, and could be offered a collaboration with the Council through the use of space in the Civic Centre for activities supportive of the Theatre's and the Council's objectives. The scope for linkages with the services offered by the Rosemount Family Resource Centre and the DLR Volunteer Centre should also be examined.

Partnerships with local and national bodies in adult education, arts and culture, and science

The potential also exists for the Civic Centre to engage with key local and national organisations that share a common vision and purpose, and whose work complements the work of the Council. In particular, the Dundrum Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) has a strong presence in Dundrum Village, and both DLR and

the DDLETB share a vision for adult learning, so that their programmes could work effectively together to complement and support their mutual objectives. Collaboration with national arts, culture, theatre and science bodies would also be a valuable means of maximising local access for Dundrum residents to the programmes offered by these bodies.

A public plaza and café

A public plaza has always been envisaged as an essential for a modernised Dundrum Village and has formed part of Imagine Dundrum's proposals from the start. A public plaza adjacent to the Civic Centre would create capacity for outdoor events, including a farmers' market, while providing much-needed places for people to sit, talk, and meet others. In addition, the public space adjacent to the Carnegie Library warrants a reimagining in order to make more of this very valuable, if small, space.

A café in or adjacent to the Civic Centre will be an essential facility for users of the services there, and contribute to bringing people from different sectors of the community together.

Other possibilities

- **Access to general public services**

The Civic Centre should be a source of wide ranging information on *all* public services. Where possible consideration should be given to enabling access to other public services via the Centre, through digital portals and trained staff.

- **A Registry Office**

The provision for a Registry Office for celebration of civil marriages, and where relevant certificates can be obtained, would be a very positive additional facility for local people.

The Civic Centre as the hub of Council services in Dundrum

While we would envisage that most of the services and programmes proposed above will be located in the new Civic Centre, other Council property will, we presume, be available, and the Civic Centre can serve as the hub of a network of locally based council services.

All the public buildings owned by or available to Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council in Dundrum Village can then be the subject of a joined-up plan to deliver the Council's services and programmes in an integrated way to the residents of the West side of the County. These would include:

The Carnegie Library

The Carnegie Library is a much-loved building and a valued part of Dundrum's heritage. A refurbished and modernised Carnegie Library can be an ideal venue to accommodate community-focused programmes such as community childcare, Family Resource Centre programmes, youth services, and provision of community meeting spaces.

Cultural/civic space on the site of the Old Shopping Centre

The Dundrum Local Area Plan provides, as an objective, that cultural/civic space be provided on the site of the Old Shopping Centre.⁶ Assuming this space becomes available as part of the plans for the Old Shopping Centre site in due course, it would add valuable capacity to the Council's civic and cultural services in Dundrum.

Adjacent properties that might be acquired by the Council

Imagine Dundrum has, in previous submissions to the Council regarding the Civic Centre, advocated that the Council would seek to acquire property adjacent to the proposed site for the Civic Centre, s to maximise the scope for the Civic Centre programmes and a linked public plaza. Possibilities include:

- Waldemar Terrace houses and adjacent gym
- Usher House
- Eircom building.

CONCLUSION

Eight years on from our beginnings, Imagine Dundrum believes that there is now a moment and a huge opportunity to be seized by establishing the Civic Centre in the heart of Dundrum, a facility of world class design and standard, anchored by an innovative partnership between the County Council and agencies with a shared vision and purpose, and supported by the parent Government Departments.

The Civic Centre will represent the a hugely significant investment in public infrastructure for Dundrum, and will give scope for major long term improvements in service delivery to the community and the public in this area.

To optimise this objective, Imagine Dundrum calls on the Council to:

- Maximise the site available for these facilities, with a view to meeting the long- term population needs in the area;

⁶ <https://www.dlrcoco.ie/dundrumlap>

- Consult with the community and gather their views and ideas;
- Engage in dialogue with potential delivery partners to ensure optimum programme delivery, and optimum use of resources;
- Prepare and publish for local consultation an outline long term, medium term and short term strategy and plan for the Civic Centre and the Civic Campus.

Imagine Dundrum looks forward to the realisation of the vision for the Civic Centre, and the contribution it will make to the future Dundrum. It will mark the achievement of a key goal of Imagine Dundrum when we first came together in 2016, and, in particular, the vision expressed in the Imagine Dundrum publication “Main Street: A History of the Heart of Dundrum”:

We... believe that with sensitive planning and design, and through engagement with local people, a sustainable, modern Dundrum can effectively blend the rich past, the present strengths of the Village, with its future as a modern urban village.

We look forward to continuing to engage with the Council Executive, elected Councillors and the local community in working towards a future Dundrum we can all be proud of, reflecting its unique history and heritage, and as a place that is thriving, attractive and welcoming for all those who live and work here, and our many visitors.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Imagine Dundrum documents on the Civic Centre and Civic Campus

Campaigning for a Civic Centre has been a key element in Imagine Dundrum's work for the future of Dundrum, and one of the group's Fundamental Principles from the outset has been the establishment of "a civic, community and cultural centre at the heart of Dundrum". Subsequently it has featured strongly in public consultations, and in a range of campaign documents and formal submissions.

All the documents below can be found in the Documents section of the Imagine Dundrum website: www.imaginedundrum.ie/

- **What does the local community want for Dundrum?** Revisiting the community conversations of June 2017: <https://www.imaginedundrum.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/LOCAL-COMMUNITY-HOPES.pdf>
- **Civic Centre campaign leaflet, 2018:** <https://www.imaginedundrum.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/civic-centre-flyer.pdf>
- **Imagine Dundrum submission to Dundrum Community, Cultural and Civic Action Plan consultation, 2019:** https://www.imaginedundrum.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/3-Imagine-Dundrum-DCCCAP-final_compressed.pdf
- **The Regeneration of the Old Shopping Centre site and the West side of Dundrum Village: Proposals from Imagine Dundrum, August 2021:** <https://www.imaginedundrum.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/imagine-dundrum-sep-2021.pdf>
- **Imagine Dundrum: A six-year campaign for Dundrum's future, 2022:** <https://www.imaginedundrum.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Imagine-Dundrum-Brochure2022.pdf>

Appendix B: Libraries as civic spaces: exemplar libraries in Europe and the US

There are many new libraries in Europe such as Ghent's De Krook and Helsinki's Oodi which share the vision of the library as a 'living room' for the modern city. They offer more than just books, even though books remain at their core. All are designed to be a place to learn, develop, connect and collaborate – a meeting place of minds and a centre of the community.

UK

Contemporary extension to an existing Carnegie Library in **Lea Bridge, London:**

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/nov/06/lea-bridge-library-pavilion-lending-new-life-organically-to-a-public-space>

Sidcup: William Morris Meets the Multiplex:

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/dec/17/sidcup-library-and-cinema-drdh-review-the-storyteller-william-morris>

School Green Centre, Shinfield, Berkshire: Where Lidl Meets Idyll, a civic space for

all: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/apr/30/school-green-centre-shinfield-berkshire-aoc-architects-review-a-civic-space-for-all-three-mile-cross>

US

Seattle's Central Library : "the most important library building in a

generation" <https://en.wikiarquitectura.com/building/Seattle-Public-Library/>

Northern Europe

Library and Cultural Centre, Bodo, Norway: Making light work:

<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/nov/18/norway-bodo-stormen-library-culture-centre-free>

<https://libraryplanet.net/2019/08/07/stormen-library-bodo-norway-a-wooden-staircase-to-library-heaven/>

Ghent, Aarhus and Oslo libraries: Libraries for the Future: Europe's new wave of "meeting places for the mind":

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/jan/08/libraries-for-the-future-europes-new-wave-of-meeting-places-for-the-mind>

Vennesla Library and Culture House, near Kristiansand, Norway: "linking an existing community house and learning centre...an extension of the main city square." https://www.archdaily.com/209340/vennesla-library-and-culture-house-helen-hard?ad_source=search&ad_medium=projects_tab