



Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham Master Vision and Public Consultation

A report prepared by Lorne Consultancy for
South Dublin County Council

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Index

Introduction	3
1.0 Master Vision & Values	4
2.0 Background	5
2.1 Public Engagement Process.....	6
3.0 Public Engagement Process: Online Consultation	8
3.1 Characteristics of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham.....	8
3.1.1 Characteristics of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham: Other Views	12
3.2 Activities within the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham.....	15
3.3 Food, Refreshments and Retail	18
3.4 Travel	22
4.0 Public Engagement Process: Focus Group Consultation.....	26
5.0 Recommendations	29

Introduction

In March 2024, South Dublin County Council engaged Lorne Consultancy to facilitate a public consultation on a master vision for the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham.

The proposed master vision is set out on the following pages, and reflects the sentiment expressed by members of the public who took part in an online consultation and focus group discussions.

This vision will now be used by South Dublin County Council in developing plans for the redevelopment of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham.

1.0 Master Vision & Values

Based on the master vision consultation process for the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham, the following vision and values have been developed to reflect the strongest sentiment expressed by members of the public.

Vision

- The Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham will be a thriving, accessible and inclusive space for the community and visitors, alike. It will respect and celebrate its heritage value and consider its sustainability in everything it does.

Values

- **Accessibility and inclusivity:** By creating physical access to the space, and within the space, the Castle Stables and Courtyards will be accommodating to all needs. Through a broad range of offerings, it will be inclusive of a wide range of age groups and backgrounds.
- **Culture and Heritage:** Through respectful development and ongoing management, the Castle Stables and Courtyards will retain important physical heritage features, as well as lean on its past to engage with audiences (by means of its retail offering; programming and interpretation).
- **Sustainability:** The Castle Stables and Courtyards will consider sustainability in all of its activities. Critically, it will place environmental sustainability at the heart of how it operates, including growing the potential of biodiversity to thrive alongside other activities. It will operate a financial model that is sustainable and will see the space, as well as the village of Rathfarnham, thrive.

2.0 Background

Following a review of the South Dublin County Council Development Plan and the County Tourism Strategy, a framework for the delivery of a public consultation on the master vision of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham was developed.

This framework, drawing from the Council's overarching plans, established an anchor for the master vision, objectives of the project and the guiding principles. This framework was presented to the Area Committee (Rathfarnham/Templeogue/Firhouse/Bohernabreena) of South Dublin County Council in April 2024.

The following comprise the agreed framework:

Master Vision Anchor

The master vision for the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham will be anchored in the vision set by South Dublin County Council in the County Development Plan:

*“In 2028 South Dublin will be a place that **our communities are proud of**, that **our businesses can thrive** in and that will help us to live **greener and healthier lives**.”*

The development of the master vision for the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham from 2024 will be a significant step in realising this vision.

Overarching Objectives

The following objectives have been gleaned from the South Dublin County Development Plan and will act as a guide throughout the master planning process for the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham:

- Redevelopment of a brownfield site of significant cultural-heritage importance in Rathfarnham.
- Enhancement of a built heritage asset which can support place-making in Rathfarnham.
- The delivery of a quality design to underpin effective place-making, allowing Rathfarnham to become more attractive for everyone who lives, works, and visits the village.
- The creation of a space that offers social, community and recreational benefits and that fosters a healthy, inclusive, and sustainable community in Rathfarnham.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles have been adopted to frame the master plan for the development of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham. These principles reflect the overarching goals of the County's Tourism Strategy:

- Sustainability
- Heritage Value
- Inclusive Development

2.1 Public Engagement Process

As well as considering the framework, outlined above, the consultation process was designed around best practice and guidance for consultation management, especially as this relates to the adaptive reuse of heritage infrastructure. To this end, it considered:

- Timely, accessible and participative approach (drawing from Consultation Principles & Guidance, Government of Ireland (2016) and aspects of the Aarhus Convention, UN Economic Commission for Europe, Implementation Guide, 2014).
- Representative as possible of the population profile of Rathfarnham (references, as above).
- Rooted in long-term sustainability thinking, with openness to a multi-functioning and adaptive space that will serve contemporary, as well as future, needs. (Drawing from the EU New Green Deal & New Bauhaus; and best practice, in addition to EU-funded Open Heritage initiative).

Public Engagement Process: Components

The non-statutory, public engagement process comprised three phases:

- Inform
- Consult
- Interrogate

Inform

- From 24th – 27th April, over 150 places on tours of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham were offered to the public. These provided historical context, project objectives and details of the public consultation process.
- The tours were promoted through social and traditional media and were fully subscribed.

Consult

- An online public consultation took place in May. The consultation was promoted through social, online as well as direct mail drops.
- The consultation comprised specific questions (based on the guidance provided through the framework, as well as offering respondents to provide their own vision for the future development of the site).

Interrogate and Refine

- Based on results and participant interest in the consultation phase, four focus groups were organised to interrogate and provide a strong qualitative insight into public sentiment.
- Participation in the focus groups was drawn from the online consultation; selection was randomised but was informed by local demographics.
- One of the focus groups was organised specifically for young people (under 18) to reflect the views of this important demographic. Following the focus group phase, a report comprising the results of the consultation will be prepared and considered by the architect and the business partner in developing a bespoke and responsive master plan.

Additional Submissions

In addition to the structured consultation set out above, a number of groups took it upon themselves to make detailed submissions to South Dublin County Council, as follows:

- Rathfarnham Wood Residents' Association: this comprised a specific plan for the redevelopment of the site, including the placement of a car park within the protected structures. 29 respondents to the online survey cited this plan as the approach they would like to see delivered.
- Butterfield Residents' Association: this comprised a letter of support for the plan developed by Rathfarnham Wood Resident's Association.
- An Taisce: this comprised a letter of support for the aforementioned plan.
- Rathfarnham and Ballyroan Historical Society: This comprised a letter of support for the plan.

3.0 Public Engagement Process: Online Consultation

An online survey was developed to garner public views on a master vision for the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham. The survey was comprised of a range of questions with drop answer options. Some questions offered an opportunity to provide comments and open responses.

In general, the questions were constructed using the framework, linked to the ambitions of the County Development Plan and Tourism Strategy. A total of seven questions were posted, including one optional.

The vast majority of respondents (985 out of 1,068) indicated they were from Dublin 14 & 16. As a result, the perspective offered is local, rather than a more comprehensive regional view.

Only a small number of respondents (14) were not familiar with the site at all; the majority were familiar but only from with external walls (695); while a substantial number of respondents (359) had the opportunity to visit the internal site and, as such, could probably offer a more nuanced response given their stronger awareness.

3.1 Characteristics of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham

Respondents were invited to highlight the most important characteristics that should underpin the development of Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham, based on the list below:

- Culture / Heritage.
- Sustainable (from a climate and financial perspective).
- Economic development.
- Tourism.

Out of the list below, what are the most important characteristics that should underpin the development of Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham

● Sustainable (from a climate and ...	734
● Culture/heritage	921
● Economic development	278
● Tourism	203



Culture and Heritage

Overwhelmingly, respondents felt that culture and heritage was integral to the character of the site (921 respondents considered it one of the most important characteristics). A significant range of comments underpinned the strong desire for the cultural and heritage importance of the building to be both prominent and maintained. Many respondents considered the importance of preserving the original architecture and reinstating some of the original features of the space, including a garden. Telling the story of the buildings was also considered important. The following are among the comments that captured the sentiment in this regard:

- I want to see Rathfarnham castle, stables and gardens enhanced, maintained and restored as part of **Rathfarnham's culture and heritage**.
- I would see the castle and its grounds be joined with the village to become a **historic and cultural quarter**, with excellent public realm design including pedestrian and cycle access throughout and effective planting to encourage biodiversity. The historic buildings would be an essential part of the whole and a central attraction.
- A vibrant multicultural community of people and resources that compliments local area needs **without sacrificing established architectural heritage**.
- A **space that reflects the history and culture of Rathfarnham**, in a beautifully restored setting that attracts people and life.
- To be known as a **cultural and heritage site for the community** with a long history informing its tapestry.
- I would like to see the Castle Stables and Courtyards become **a place where people could see the buildings as they were originally intended when they were built**.
- Preservation of the **historical and architectural heritage** with facilities for community and cultural benefit.
- Respecting the **original character of the place**, with architecture in keeping with the castle and stables. Essentially free from glass and concrete blocks.
- Preserving the tranquillity, **preserving the architecture**.

A number of respondents warned against over-developing the site, risking its heritage value:

- Resist new buildings.
- The suggestion of building a large commercial unit is massively unwelcome by the surrounding community.

It must be noted that, in the survey, many respondents did not see any differentiation between the Castle site and the adjoining stables and courtyards and may be unaware of the delineation and management of the sites by OPW and South Dublin County Council.

Sustainability (Environmentally and Financially)

Many saw sustainability as an inherent characteristic of the offering (734 identified it as one of the most important characteristics), particularly as this related to retail, food and site management:

- Calm, culture and heritage that is **sustainable and eco-friendly**.
- Sell **organic foods and handmade goods**. Plant sales and similar. Talks on **sustainable living**, gardening workshops, etc.
- A hub for the community where **sustainable local food produce**, art and entertainment is available.

- That is the beating heart of the area, providing a local hub of all things **carbon-free & sustainable**.
- When developed, I would like to see the space become a place similar to the stables/courtyard at Killruddery and the courtyard in Marlay Park... We also like the **sustainable dining, garden store and events available in Killruddery**, which complement the gardens beautifully... I would like to see the space used for weekly farmers market (not craft), flea/antique markets along with regular community events and small independent dining/coffee option, with an **organic /natural/sustainable leaning**, in line with the history of space which is not otherwise available in the area.
- A site with **sustainable choices**, widely used by the local community.
- I would love to see the Castle Stables and Courtyards be a **zero-waste producing amenity for the people of Dublin**, rich in heritage and cultural events as well as a hub of foraging and reuse information. A **truly circular economy model**.

Others recognised the importance of financial sustainability, particularly in the context of Rathfarnham village, and not just the site:

- Create something that the **community loves that is also financially viable**. Rathfarnham Village is so disappointing, it really needs a lift. Compared to Ranelagh, Rathgar etc. it is run down and lacks anything of much interest. This development is welcomed in the area...
- The opportunity for this development is to **create a space that is commercially viable** while serving the community through art, learning, and gatherings. A place that we're proud of that might then regenerate the village.
- Viable and sustainable resource for the community with a **dual focus on both economic and cultural drivers**.

Economic Development

Those who considered the economic importance of the development, largely considered it in the context of revitalising Rathfarnham village (276 respondents). Others felt that there was no local offering that could entertain and facilitate socialising, particularly in terms of retail and dining experiences. As such the development of the stables and courtyard, which would include retail and restaurants, was welcome:

- Economic development, **the area needs good facilities for families** re food wine etc.
- **Rathfarnham desperately needs an injection of life and culture**. There are no nice places to eat or socialise. The grounds are amazing and should also be complemented by artistic and cultural presence
- An **extension of Rathfarnham Village**
- It would be amazing to have this space open as a place for families to enjoy. I appreciate there are concerns about parking but that is often a first thought when parents are deciding where to go with children. I'd love to have a strong day/night-time food offer too, like Avoca or Saba, casual dining but good food as **there is nothing in Rathfarnham village** and very little in Terenure.
- **Revitalise Rathfarnham** - it's much more than charity shops it needs a place like Avoca And somewhere to eat and drink at night
- Where groups and families can meet and spend time while **contributing to the local economy**
- **Night-time economy** (wine/entertainment/food) – day-time coffee/entertainment + retail to keep a flow of people and avoid anti-social behaviour

- Where locals come together to socialise and mix as a community. **Rathfarnham village is currently dead** because of the lack of parking available. All other local villages are buzzing while we watch on. Charity and betting shops will not rejuvenate the village.
- A place that is central to Rathfarnham. **The village is dying out and there is very little to draw us into it** (in comparison to other villages nearby).

Connectivity to Rathfarnham village was emphasised by many respondents:

- Would like to imagine a future Rathfarnham as a vibrant place, with a market-style Castle area, **connected via footbridge directly into the heart of the village**, attracting international visitors.
- Better **connectivity to the village** should be considered.
- It should be a **focal point for Rathfarnham village** and I would hope that the pedestrian and cycling connection between the main street and the castle grounds could be enhanced.
- **Linking and complementing** (somehow) the connection to Rathfarnham village.

Tourism

Over 200 respondents viewed tourism as an important characteristic of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham development, while many respondents mentioned the importance of tourists in their vision statement on the future of the project. In most instances, the space was viewed as a place for tourists and community alike. Many saw the cultural and heritage value of the space as something that could attract tourists:

- **A cultural heritage centre for Irish and tourists.**
- **Where tourists visit and find out about the rich history of Rathfarnham** and the castle itself along with learning about the period in time that the castle was built and enjoying walks and picnics.
- **For locals and tourists to engage with the history of the area** in an understated and relaxed environment, free of excessive commercial activity.
- **An amenity not just for tourists but for the local and wider community**, providing a cultural space that takes cognisance of the cultural heritage of Rathfarnham.
- I would like to see this become a **very used and useful space for locals and tourists**. It would include a day & night restaurant and some retail shops along with a multi-use space for classes/ talks/ exercise etc.
- **A cultural heritage centre for Irish and tourists.** Rathfarnham castle has the advantages of location being near to the city centre and easy public transport access.
- I would like to see a self-sufficient unique dining and retail village which will become a **destination venue for both locals and tourists**.
- **A destination for tourists** and a place that will provide employment in nice quality shops and restaurants for local people.

While the vast majority of respondents who mentioned tourism in their responses expressed a desire to see tourists visiting the site, there were a small number who did not support a tourism dimension:

- Not a **commercial cultural spot for the use of tourism**
- This should be for locals to continue to enjoy, **not a major tourist hub**.

3.1.1 Characteristics of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham: Other Views

Outside of the characteristics discussed above, which were in direct response to the options provided for in the online survey, there were several other characteristics which respondents identified as important. These characteristics were cited in the part of the survey where respondents were invited to share their vision for the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham. Overwhelmingly, respondents favoured a mixed-used space that was utilised to its full potential and was inclusive of the community as well as visitors/tourists. This sentiment was one of the strongest that emerged from the online consultation.

A Lively, Living Space

A very strong sentiment from respondents was the desire to have a space that was lively, vibrant and used to its full potential. The comments below represent a cross-section of those who envisaged this characteristic:

- The Castle Stables and Courtyards should be a **hive of economic and social activity**. Not only could it be an amenity for local people but also an attraction for visitors given it is well connected by public transport and by walking and cycling routes.
- **Thriving centre** with all ages welcome, embedding the heritage of the area as the wellspring for creativity, with an inspirational sense of place/local pride, the castle as a locus for the whole regenerated village
- I would love to see a **vibrant, beautiful, culturally significant space**. Green areas should be maintained as much as possible. Events in keeping with the castle's history, both day-time & evening time. Restaurants/cafes with beautiful (reasonably priced) food, craft workshops, social events etc.
- I would like it to be a **vibrant space** with a focus on botany and nature and a quiet haven for the community and creatures that live in it. It should support the creatives of the area and community gardening initiatives.
- I would like to see the castle courtyards and village as a component of a single action plan. **A vibrant buzzy space for kids and families and young couples**. We have the most beautiful opportunity to create a new Monkstown or Ranelagh. The time to plan is now.
- It should be a **welcoming and lively place** for families and gatherings.
- I would love to see this area being **used to its full potential**. Outdoor seating, an area for friends and young families to meet and enjoy the beautiful grounds
- For the **community to gather, for families to spend time together, a European-style outdoor dining**, wine and recreational area.
- I would love there to be an area for **people to meet and socialise, places to sit and enjoy the scenery and the buildings**. More choices for the village with additional coffee shops and restaurants.
- A sustainable, **best-in-class venue** for heritage and cultural development with high-end destination dining in a nature-friendly environment.
- In 20 years, I would love to see a **causally cool and vibrant area** that I would be proud to bring my friends and family to.
- Somewhere to go with a **good atmosphere**.

Accessible and Inclusive Space

Another characteristic which emerged as being of great importance to respondents was inclusivity and accessibility. In envisioning how the space might be used in the long-term future, many respondents saw the space as one where community, visitors and people from different backgrounds came together. A small number of respondents indicated that they would not support accessibility to the space beyond local community/people of Rathfarnham.

Physical accessibility (outside of parking, which is considered later in this report) was also cited as an important characteristic of the space.

Atmosphere of Inclusivity

- More **accessible to the public**. No proper places to eat or have coffee locally.
- **Access for all** in a relaxing environment.
- Vibrant self-sustaining and accessible activities for **all ages**.
- A welcome and accessible area for **all ages**.
- Where the community can be proud of. Where **families can gather** and rent out space for get-togethers. Where **community groups could hire space** at a reasonable cost - where activities are **suitable, accessible and inclusive** to all members of the community. Where there are summer and winter activities - summer fairs/Christmas fairs etc. free activities and workshops
- Interesting, **welcoming, diverse, inclusive, accessible**, and useful.
- Bring the community together both old and young.
- Fantastic setting for both old and young
- A vibrant multicultural community of people and resources that compliments local area needs without sacrificing established architectural heritage.
- It will be a place where celebrations of multicultural events happen throughout the year.
- That will be widely available to anyone who wishes to avail of this lovely space.
- Interesting & welcoming - plenty of use - **linking and complementing (somehow) the connection to Rathfarnham village** - opportunities to meet and make new friends **for all ages**. That local people are proud of and that is thriving. Brings culture/arts and is utilised by both local people and visitors alike.
- Where **every one of all abilities can come** and make use of it. We talk about inclusion, but I don't see that as much in Rathfarnham as I used to.
- I would like to see the **stables inclusive and available for everyone**.
- Full of activity, and **accessible to all ages**.
- That is bustling with families and is also a place for **multigenerational activities**.

Physical Accessibility

- It should be highly **accessible for all bodies**.
- Anything that is there needs to be **buggy-friendly and wheelchair accessible** - there should be no small shops or cafes that make it inaccessible for a large part of the population in Rathfarnham (the majority of the shops within the village are completely inaccessible!). **There needs to be public toilets that are accessible for children, babies, and people in wheelchairs**. The most incredible addition would be a **baby feeding and changing area** (similar to what is in Dundrum) to ensure it is accessible for nursing mothers who are often excluded from public life.
- A **changing place and a bathroom** which would be great.

- To meet family and friends. A place with **wheelchair accessibility** perhaps and **wheelchair/mobility aids to hire for use in the park**.

Some Anti-Inclusive Sentiment

- This should be for locals to continue to enjoy, not a major tourist hub.
- Not a commercial cultural spot for the use of tourism, when that happens the indigenous population do not visit
- It should focus on locals only.

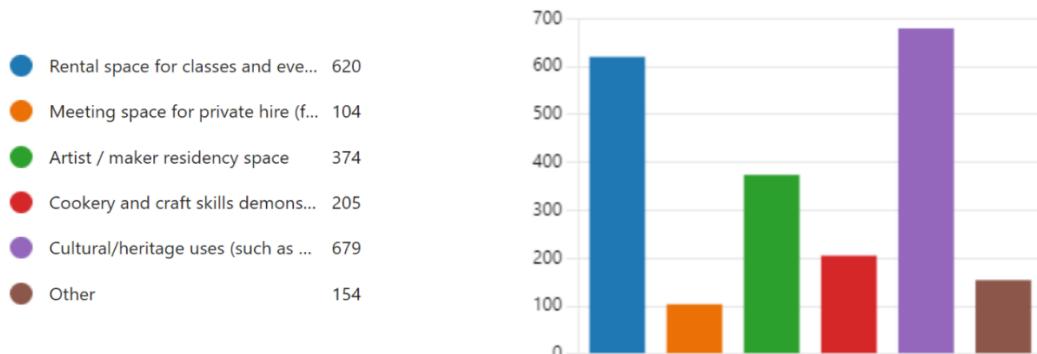
3.2 Activities within the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham

Most respondents favoured a mixed-style development with rooms available for activities ranging from band practice to concerts; yoga and Pilates classes to workshops and demonstrations. There was a strong interest in the provision of spaces for artists and makers (crafts were mentioned favourably by many respondents).

Consideration of the past was recognised by many respondents as integral in its future development: not only was this important in the restoration of the space, but some respondents favoured demonstrations and historical references to be part of the future interpretation of the space.

While the online survey offered no prompts in respect of sports or exercise facilities at the site, there was a notable number of responses who referenced sporting/gym facilities as a potential use (over 50 responses proposed such activity).

Activity:



Mixed Use Space for Community: Arts, Crafts, Heritage/Culture and Performances

- That is at the heart of the Rathfarnham community... A place of welcome to be of use to all ages and groups... whether an **evening Pilates class**... an **art class** in the morning or rooms to hire, a **men's shed and women's too**... a place constantly buzzing with hope and laughter all set to a beautiful backdrop...
- Which serves the social and recreational needs of Rathfarnham residents, provides **commercial opportunities for local businesses and is in keeping with the rich history**, heritage and culture of Rathfarnham and its community.
- Where **local culture and heritage thrive** in the shadow of Rathfarnham Castle. A go-to place for all with quality facilities for **enjoyment, engagement and entertainment**.
- History is our **culture** and the preservation of the Castle Stables and Courtyard, to encompass their **past life**, would awaken the imagination of everyone enjoying a visit.
- Become a place of **Heritage and culture, with arts and crafts**. Where **performance and theatre** can exist.

- A community space for Rathfarnham. A **visitors' centre**. A place for **exhibiting paintings**. Perhaps a **video room** showing the history of the Castle and stables. The list is endless if done on the correct scale and definitely not on a commercial basis.
- Where the community comes together in a family and **pet-friendly** setting, to mark festive times of year, and create steady weekly footfall for **small Irish businesses to thrive**.
- Where every member of the community, young & old feels they have a vested interest in its purpose and future. It should be a **place to be proud of, historically and culturally**, capable of evolving with the times and in keeping with its evolution over 400 years. It is a gem on our doorstep, quite unique in its setting with huge promise. **Community performance spaces, friendship cafés, dog-friendly spaces, and market stalls all should have a place** in our local historic castle site.
- For the community to gather and **support local artists and craftspeople**.
- With **community spaces** for local groups e.g. hall for bands, youth clubs, meeting room(s) for voluntary groups. Some small shops/cafes - a stop on the Dodder Cycle path and linked to the village
- That is a thriving community location that adds to the **economic and cultural life** of the village.
- A well-thought-out plan for **urban bio renewal** will attract huge funding from EU... do it well, don't rush it. A generational chance to do well. So, a place of:
 - Carefully preserved **heritage buildings & spaces**.
 - Restored **wall garden & kitchen garden**
 - Support retail in the village, not in Castle grounds.
 - At stables Develop limited **artisan shops, farmers market, coffee shop/small restaurant**.
 - **To serve the local community** -spaces for recreation clubs/activities/ meeting rooms a home for Rathfarnham **concert bands- practice & performance spaces**
 - To attract tourists -museum area for Rathfarnham **seismograph & artefacts stored from the Jesuit era**.
 - Locate & construct the Turner House built for the castle ground guided & self-guided tours
 - **Heritage Week activities** e.g. Visiting historians & environmental groups
 - **Local Historic Society presentations**
- For displaying **arts and crafts and selling them**. Also, it should be a tourist area for visitors to see our artistic talents and hear some **wonderful music**. This could be a place for **workshops and masterclasses**. It should include a **gift shop**.
- Where people can **see artists and craftspeople at work** in a beautiful and inspiring environment, where ethically produced goods are available for sale, and exhibitions and cultural events are held, giving people a venue to do something other than just shop. Upholding principles of sustainability and offering art and craft workshops, it would be a unique space in Dublin.

Alternative Activity: Fitness and Wellbeing

- Provide facilities for **fitness and health**. Both indoor and outdoor spaces to incorporate physical **training, yoga, Pilates** and community environment.
- With **indoor & outdoor fitness facilities** for all ages & backgrounds & abilities with emphasis on enjoyment **nutrition & healthy living** in our community.
- **Community gym** would be amazing.
- This is an excellent opportunity to promote **exercise and fitness to locals**.
- A space which provides indoor and **outdoor fitness facilities for all ages**, backgrounds and abilities with an emphasis on enjoyment, **nutrition, healthy living and community**.

- Where people can meet. A great asset for the community and businesses alike. **A gym is a necessity for both the mental and physical well-being** of everyone.

3.3 Food, Refreshments and Retail

Markets, ranging from weekly markets to a farmer's market, were strongly favoured. Marlay Park was extensively cited as a good example of what could be emulated at Rathfarnham. Others mentioned Killruddery, St Anne's Park and Malahide Castle as examples of what could be emulated at Rathfarnham.

Places to have coffee and dine were strongly favoured, with an emphasis on quality and affordability. European-style dining, encompassing day and night options as well as indoor/outdoor seating. Dining options for children were mentioned on numerous occasions.

Avoca was mentioned, repeatedly, as a type of retailer/caf  -provider that would be welcomed. There was a strong interest in craft/design shops. In the online survey, the majority of respondents favoured a farm shop as their top choice of retail option: this was reflected in comments about local, sustainable, handmade produce.

There was also opposition to commercial dimensions, with free access, subsidised activity and cheap offerings cited by many. As indicated earlier, many supported commercial activity which might complement existing offerings in Rathfarnham village, rather than take away from them.

There was repeated opposition to a 1,400 sq. meter development that some respondents had understood was being proposed by SDCC. As such, a number of respondents had included a generic comment that was cut and pasted from material provided by the local resident's association: *"I disagree with SDCC's proposed large new commercial development and the acquisition of Sean Keating Garden for car parking. I endorse the Rathfarnham Castle Residents' Association alternative plan as it meets both the Community & SDCC needs."*

Food and Refreshments:

- Daytime restaurant and coffee s... 831
- Nighttime restaurant and wine ... 525
- Casual eateries (e.g. pizza oven; ... 557
- Other 223



Retail:

● Farm shop	631
● Design and craft shop	457
● Garden / home shop	442
● Repair / recycle / regeneration r...	457
● Other	149



Markets

- I would love to see an **organic Farmers market** operating at least once a week. Don't make the mistakes made in Marlay Park - what started as an organic Farmers market has since turned into a collection of unhealthy fast-food stalls. Heritage, culture, sustainability, climate awareness and a low carbon footprint should be the priorities (not commercialism or profit). As the County Development Plan states: "Live greener and healthier lives". Any development must also be sensitive to the historical context of the site.
- That is vibrant and full of **independent vendors instead of large chains**. Places like LX market in Lisbon would be a good model, a destination that has food and retail that people would travel for.
- A place to go with family for a dinner, drink, date night. **Markets on a Sunday like Bushy Park** would be cool. More play areas for kids.
- For social gatherings, entertainment, market spaces, **farmers markets** etc. I would strongly object to converting the exquisitely designed and very well-maintained fountain park which will inevitably become a 'Park and Ride' facility for the forthcoming Bus Corridor.
- A space like Marlay Park with amenities and outdoor space which is free to access and can host a variety of events such as **farmers' markets and craft fairs**.
- A vibrant, busy community space during the day and early evening. **Nice farmers' market-type vibe with a farmer's market at weekends**. Marlay is a very nice example of what is possible. I would hope that any development would benefit Rathfarnham village rather than be to the detriment of the village. The village is struggling, and we need to assist in its development.
- Ideally a **family-run market garden** with a dine-in option and fresh produce for sale with a focus on biodiversity and native plants
- That was really interesting and pleasant to visit with some nice dining options - if there are businesses there then something like the courtyard in Marlay Park.
- The stables should be an area where local residents can shop or dine every day similar to Marlay Park.
- A farmers' market from Thursday to Sunday with eateries would be hugely beneficial to the area. I feel Rathfarnham village is a very poorly utilised area and it could be such a shining light!
- We should be using nelaghRanelagh/Rathgar villages as a template. Bustling with people and feeling very vibrant. If we could attract more people to castle stables the footfall in RV would increase over time and you would hope to improve the choice in the village.

Cafes / Dining Options

- Something resembling Malahide Castle with lovely grounds and castle to visit but with an **Avoca or design-related area with café/restaurant**.
- I'd like a craft yard like in Marlay Park, with a nice food and coffee option, perhaps a smaller version of the **Avoca in Malahide Castle**.
- That was really interesting and pleasant to visit with some **nice dining options** - if there are businesses there then someone like the courtyard in Marlay Park.
- I'd like to see an **Avoca-style** set-up there. The village is very poorly served in terms of family restaurants so would hope this would be a good addition as it would attract other good restaurants to the area.
- A **decent food establishment** like Avoca. Coffee shop (independent). A community gym. Also, a play area for children at the coffee shop.
- I'd love to have a **strong day/night time food** offer too, like Avoca or Saba, casual dining but good food as there is nothing in Rathfarnham village and very little in Terenure. Looking forward to seeing the plans and good luck
- A one-stop destination that would include an activity, something cultural and engaging and a place to enjoy **casual dining during the day and somewhere more formal at night**.
- A nice local place for **coffee and a restaurant with areas for children** also.
- I would love to see a **restaurant with home-farmed produce open daytime and evening** possibly used for private hire on quieter nights. Could be a great small wedding/ event venue. Also, another building could be highly profitable if it was selling **pizza, pancakes, crepes, ice cream etc.** marketed towards teens and young adults.
- To spend time with family and/or friends; take part in cultural events (outdoor movies, concerts, exhibitions, workshops), have **lunch/dinner/coffee**. All in a nice clean environment.

Retail

- Destination without putting pressure on parking, artistic, market, **Avoca/Kilkenny designs**, type element.
- A centre for local recreation to include **carefully selected retail**, health coaching, and dining experiences.
- I think it would be amazing if **Avoca** could open an outlet here, like Malahide Castle. Rathfarnham Castle is under-used and under-appreciated at the moment. Such a development would breathe life back into it.
- Where **artists/craft/jewellery makers have studios/shops** and can give demonstrations/classes. A combined Irish design shop that includes their work.
- Preferably to sell organic foods **handmade edibles hand made goods**. **Plant shops** and similar.
- A place where the community comes together through shared activities, especially through food, **farm shops**, locally grown produce, locally made foods, restaurants
- For displaying **arts and crafts and selling** them. Also, it should be a tourist area for visitors to see our artistic talents and hear some wonderful music.
- I would like to see this become a much used and useful space for locals and tourists. It would include a day & night restaurant and some **retail shops** along with a multi-use space for classes/ talks/ exercise etc.
- A bustling, beautiful and dynamic meeting space. **Quality food and coffee is available**, there is **interesting retail** - (fresh flowers, arts & crafts, tasteful gifts) & there is an ever-changing diary of events.

Affordability

- Sustainable and **affordable** for locals
- It would be nice to see the café upgraded but for it to be **accessible and affordable**, not like Airfield.
- Somewhere you can relax with a nice Cafe & snacks & a few nice tourist shops that will **not be over-expensive**
- Used by the community and **not by overpriced money-making outfits**
- ...that does not have the 'usual' generic offerings of other cultural areas i.e. pop-up places selling overpriced coffee but instead offers the opportunity for the community to engage in a productive and learning space.
- Restaurants/cafes with beautiful (**reasonably priced**) food, craft workshops, social events etc.

Opposition / Qualified Support to Commercial Element:

- An opportunity for provision of refreshments to support these business events also supports local business. This should **not be another commercial space or opportunity for one business outside the area**, it should be open to multiple local businesses and people to utilise.
- Would like it **not to be another commercial hub**, especially for big-brand retailers. **Not a place where money is needed** to enjoy the facilities. A place where spending money is not constantly encouraged.
- SDCC's proposed **large new commercial development** and the acquisition of Sean Keating Garden for car parking - is a **huge mistake** in my view.
- A local and day family facility. **Commercially viable but not a noisy drinking and party venue** - there are enough pubs for that.
- That served primarily the local community as an outdoor venue as part of the low level of outdoor civic space we have in this country compared to the rest of Europe. The GROW DIY gardens in Waterford are a perfect model: a thriving, no-waste local restaurant surrounded by organic gardens. I **would absolutely not want another commercial consumerist venue**.
- There will be a need for food and beverage places but it **should be local artisan producers or a small farmers' market maybe**. If it becomes a **bland commercial area** then it will add nothing to the existing area.
- A place that enhances local cultural and artistic activities and **not an area which includes a garden centre or other similar commercial activity**.
- **NOT Shops.** It's very clear that this survey has been designed to promote certain options, in not giving full choice to the respondents with regard to the number of options that should/ can only be selected.

3.4 Travel

Respondents were invited to indicate their preferred mode of transport to the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham. As the majority of respondents were local, unsurprisingly, travelling on foot was the most popular response. However, when offered the opportunity to deposit comments, many respondents did emphasise their desire for active, sustainable travel to the site.

The second most favoured travel option was by car. Explaining their selection, respondents indicated that because of young children or persons with mobility issues, they would be unable to access the site by any other means.

The least favoured option for travel was by public transport, with many lamenting the loss of bus routes and they were critical of the range of availability of public transport to Rathfarnham.

When the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham are refurbished and accessible to the public, what is the likely mode of transport you would use to visit the space:

Car	207
On foot	675
Cycle / travel by scooter	117
Public transport	69



Parking

The issue of parking emerged as a divisive issue: there was a substantial number of respondents who were very opposed to the creation of a car parking space at the Sean Keating Park, but who still favoured additional car parking space. Many of these respondents supported the position of the local residents' association and included a generic response in the open section of the survey. This generic response read as follows:

"I disagree with SDCC's proposed large new commercial development and the acquisition of Sean Keating Garden for car parking. I endorse the Rathfarnham Castle Residents' Association alternative plan as it meets both the Community & SDCC needs. The RCRA plan will:

- *Drive development and tourism in Rathfarnham*
- *Retain Seán Keating Garden*
- *Create performance & cultural space in Cromwell's Fort*
- *Provide new commercial & retail space*
- *Include an interpretative centre about Rathfarnham*
- *Include a renovation and historical exhibit at the original Seismograph House*
- *Provide for additional car parking*

Be environmentally sound by utilising old buildings over a large new build

Please share this message as widely as possible, and feel free to contact BDRA if you have any queries."

Some respondents specifically sought to include a car park within the protected structures that form the Castle Stables and Courtyards. This was in stark contrast to the view of most respondents who felt that the cultural heritage fabric of the site was the most important characteristic to consider in the redevelopment of the site.

Other respondents felt that the decline of Rathfarnham village was attributable to the lack of car parking, and that the new development needed to provide car parking, not only to access the space, but to alleviate parking issues in the village.

A number of respondents expressed concern that the development was proving divisive for the local community: "I am a local and feel the loud voices of those against any development are strangling the potential of the area. **They don't speak for us all, especially the BDRA.** Please note this."

The range and scope of views on travel and parking included:

- A social gathering point and focus for community. Not a retail space. **Not a focus on increased car traffic.**
- Where the community of the area can use it as a focal point for cultural and environmental activities. **Car access should be minimised** so as to encourage active and public transport to the location.
- That offers opportunities for the local community to learn new skills and socialise, but I would not like this to occur at the cost of any of the green space we currently have within the park, or at **the cost of bringing even more car traffic to the area. Our local roads are busy, noisy and unpleasant enough already** if you are on foot or on a scooter/bike, so safe active travel (off-road cycle paths) or public transport to the site are essential. I would also like more consideration given to the needs of older children and young teenagers in the offering.
- **Less grey areas and boring car parks.** More character and gather spaces for families, children and young people to celebrate the culture of our village.
- The courtyard and adjoining round garden are currently wasted and under-utilized space. Removing **parked cars from Rathfarnham Main Street is a must**, with the idea being a fully pedestrianised street. Parking at the stables and courtyards will enable this to happen. Some extra shops, public spaces will also encourage a more natural spread of amenities and socialising away from the Main Street and create a more urban hub in Rathfarnham village.
- I would like to see nature and ecology prioritised. Indigenous plants to support Irish wildlife. After that, it would be nice to see the café upgraded but for it to be accessible and affordable, not like Airfield. **Parking is terrible in Rathfarnham and that needs to be addressed. I fear that the plans will penalise car owners** without improving travel infrastructure or providing adequate alternatives to driving, which will prevent access for older people, young families and those of us with dogs that are not on public transport routes.
- I would like to see facilities for families to come together and enjoy time together. I would also like to see a carbon-neutral facility and **plenty of parking (perhaps underground) as parking is a big issue** in Rathfarnham.
- A hub for everyone in the community. Not dominated by an economic interest. The nature of the park is absolutely not interfered with and **zero additional space is given to accommodate private cars.**

- A social space where people can meet up and relax in the Stables and Courtyards. Small little shops and food stalls within the courtyard. **Easy public transport access. An underground car park to cater for the extra footfall.**
- A hub for the village that reduces the chaos on the **main street which should be pedestrianised and has good parking** and accessibility.
- I would like it to be an example of sustainability in the community. **Active Travel** options to the area should be a key priority. The creation of a large car park is an embarrassment to the council, and directly against the Climate Action plan.
- Where locals come together to socialise and mix as a community. Rathfarnham **village is currently dead because of the lack of parking available**. All other local villages are buzzing while we watch on. Charity and betting shops will not rejuvenate the village.
- **Parking will be a problem area**, as providing too much would encourage too many people to come. Too little parking would also cause traffic problems.
- My vision would be that the Sean Keating would remain untouched as it is a beautiful space, possibly introduce some more plants or biodiversity but **NO CAR PARKING IN THAT LOVELY GARDEN UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES**.
- I would like to see **cars DISCOURAGED AND SEAN KEATING GARDEN NOT TURNED INTO A MONEY-MAKING CAR PARK FOR THE COUNCIL**.
- The development should not take place in the **northern courtyards, which should be used for car parking...** and the development should be in the south and central courtyards... this questionnaire is highly restrictive and refers to the "brownfield" site which is really the northern courtyards....also no mention of the elimination of the Sean Keating park!!!!... not my vision!... indeed if such a development goes ahead it would be a short term fix effectively blocking a long term project/opportunity.... the SDCC vision as per the website is NOT APPROPRIATE !!

Sean Keating Park

While a considerable number of respondents, especially those who supported the submissions by local residents' associations, mentioned the importance of retaining the Sean Keating Park in its current form, it was noteworthy that many respondents also pointed to the need to redevelop/restore this amenity.

It is also noteworthy that many respondents referred to the Sean Keating Park as the "walled garden", the "sunken garden" or the "amphitheatre". Such a variety of regularly, repeated references would suggest that, as it stands, the Sean Keating Park is not central to place-making in Rathfarnham.

All that said, there some respondents indicated their deep affection for the space.

The following offer a representation of views on the Sean Keating Park:

- We are all completely against the plans of removing the Sean Keating pond area into a car park. **This pond area is used by so many each day as a chance to sit amongst nature and chat with friends by the pond/sprinklers.** Many people working locally come to sit in this area on their lunch breaks.
- I would like to see the castle as a community and cultural space. **At present the Keating Garden is dull.** Few people walk there compared to the rest of the grounds. Major planting is needed. I would not like to see it cemented over.
- Also, the Sean Keating park would be preserved too **as it's a lovely space for local residents** in the summer.

- The **Sean Keating Garden** needs some additional development and should be promoted with appropriate signage around the Park grounds. Currently, there is no signage and a high number of the population of Rathfarnham and surrounding areas are not aware that it is there.
- My preference would be to see continued use of the **current park and ponds with the development of the courtyard that would enhance the area**.
- The **pond, playground and walled garden should remain** as they are - please do not turn the walled garden into a car park.
- In particular, the **walled Garden should be restored** and operated as a co-operative.
- Rathfarnham Castle, the park and the walled garden are a fantastic setting for both old and young.
- I would like to see the **walled gardens restored and planted**. Hopefully there would be very few parking spaces.

4.0 Public Engagement Process: Focus Group Consultation

Four focus groups were convened (as set out in section 1.0). A focus group handbook was prepared, based on the key themes that emerged from the online survey and they acted as an opportunity to further refine and assess public sentiment in this regard.

The following are the areas discussed at the focus groups, and the sentiment that emerged:

Cultural and Heritage Character of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham

The majority of those who participated in the focus groups wanted the character of the site and the original buildings to be maintained. Respondents discussed 'low key' development which respected the structures already in place. Referencing the past was considered important, but that this should not obstruct efforts to use the buildings for new purposes that reflect current and future needs.

Of note was that, in the focus group for young people, there was a lack of familiarity with older buildings and some expressed a view that they could not recall being inside buildings as old-looking. They especially expressed views around making the buildings 'green' and introducing more light to make them feel like positive places in which to spend time.

Financial Sustainability

While the focus groups echoed much of the sentiment of the online survey about community access, there was a shared understanding that income-generating activities were needed to make the space viable and sustainable from a financial perspective.

Income-generating activities, such as renting out space (including for weddings) and having some retail operations in place, were suggested. However, there was consensus that a balance needed to be struck between over-commercialisation and accessibility. There was some discussion around the community's capacity to pay to rent spaces, and appropriate pricing mechanisms needed to be put in place to encourage a mixed-usage of the space.

Community and Tourism

The focus groups discussed the potential audience of the Stables and Courtyards. It was a widely shared view that the site should be welcoming for both local communities, as well as visitors and tourists. Many expressed the view that success depended on people coming in and spending time and money at the site.

There was some discussion on what community meant. Some viewed community as the group they were directly involved in, and some were even of the view that community comprised of specific groupings within the locality who use / need space. There were some who viewed community as anyone who wished, within reason, to use the space. To this end, some consideration may need to be given to the idea of communal vs. specific community space.

Like the online survey, there was a strong interest in the site being used to its fullest potential and that it would be inclusive of as many people as possible. There were references to 'transgenerational'; 'community and tourists alike' and inclusive of families.

Younger audiences felt that there was not very much, at present, available for older children and teenagers. Catering for the needs of this group through activities such as sports practice areas; activity boxes (containing sports equipment) and nice places to eat/get a smoothie were all suggested to draw in teenagers and young people.

Activities

The adult focus groups considered a wide range of activities for the site, including exercise classes; talks; spaces for music practice; talks and demonstrations. There was a strong desire among the focus groups to see designated spaces for artists and makers. This echoed the sentiment expressed in the online survey, and there was also interest in seeing creatives at work in the space.

And while the adults who took part in the focus groups did mention health and well-being, especially as this related to activities such as yoga and Pilates, young participants wanted to see facilities for more active sports, such as tennis and a small running track. The young people, many of whom were connected to the Rathfarnham Athletics Club, noted that they had to train in poor lighting during the winter months and if there was a small track integrated into the development, they would use it and, ideally, access toilets at the site if needed. They also questioned if there could be a space for the athletics club to store small amounts of equipment.

Some young people mentioned that they often visited the park with their school. In instances where the weather was bad, they had to stand in the rain and listen to talks. They favoured a sheltered space for school activities.

Pop-up libraries, spaces to encourage and learn about biodiversity, and grow plants and flowers were favoured by participants from across the age groups.

Retail / Food / Restaurants Offerings

There was a general consensus across the focus groups for a need to include some retail, café and restaurant offerings at the site. These offerings were considered important from a financial standpoint, as well as making the space attractive to people to visit.

While some felt that the existing coffee shops at Rathfarnham were able to satisfy customer demands, others felt that alternative offerings – with a different personality and approach – would be more attractive for younger age groups.

Specific day and night offerings were considered, with places available which could offer more substantial meals and night-time dinner options. Adults and younger audiences mentioned ice cream and smoothie bars.

Price point and affordability were discussed: there was an understanding that quality, locally sourced produce was not cheap, but people might be willing to pay for this kind of offer.

Again, like in the online survey, there was an interest in farmers' markets; farm shops; artists and makers' markets and Christmas markets.

Travel

The strongest consensus from the focus groups was around active travel: facilitating as many people, as possible, to get to the venue using active travel or public transport. The development of the

greenway and the cycle lane infrastructure were considered important in attracting visitors from outside the area.

Overall, there was agreement that some car parking was needed. As in the online survey, participants identified the lack of parking in Rathfarnham as problematic, leading to inappropriate parking in residential areas.

However, there were very mixed views on where parking might be located. Some participants felt that the Northern Courtyard could be converted into a car park, while others deeply opposed using the historic site for this purpose. Others felt the inclusion of a car park in the protected structures would split the site and take from its heritage value.

There was some opposition to the use of the Sean Keating Park as a car park. Some of those who expressed their opposition to its redevelopment felt it would be better to invest in the park through limited retail (coffee) and replanting. The young people felt the Sean Keating Park was in need of attention, especially as it seemed dirty and has lost biodiversity.

Other

In closing comments, a range of recurring themes were emphasised. These included:

- The importance of biodiversity and environmentally friendly practices at the site (this sentiment was most strongly felt among younger people).
- The importance of linking the development with the village, so that both benefit.
- The importance of creating a space that is welcoming to both community and visitors.
- The importance of having good public facilities, including clean toilets; safe parking; and site security.
- The role of heritage, culture and the arts in giving personality and character to the development.

5.0 Recommendations

- While the public values the cultural/heritage dimension of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham, the majority of those who participated in the public consultation process were not fully apprised of the history and heritage of the space, and only have seen it from the outside. To deepen existing interest in its culture/heritage, while development is awaited, a programme of tours could help the community understand and value, even more, the important heritage value of the space. Young people were especially unfamiliar with the history/heritage of the space.
- Telling the story of the history/heritage of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham should be an ongoing activity: as the site is being developed, active communication through social media and QR codes at the site will help unlock history and increase interest/engagement.
- While the public consultation associated with master visioning element of the project is now complete, there is an appetite for continued public engagement on the future of the site. Engaging with young people on the naming of the courtyards, through a specific TY project, could foster a greater sense of place-making in tandem with community.
- An interesting and unprompted theme that emerged in the consultation was the interest in fitness, health and wellbeing, especially as an attraction for young people. Consideration should be given to the role of any potential future events space and open spaces within the project's design, whilst this should be supported with a broader discussion with the Council's Parks and Community Departments in relation to health and fitness facilities in the general area.
- The importance of the development of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham being in tandem with the village emerged as a strong theme in the consultation process. Positioning the development as a means of bringing added value to Rathfarnham village and supporting existing local business was considered paramount. Creating connectivity through walkways and way-finding is something that should be considered in planning out connections between the village and the site.
- In stimulating continued public interest in the development of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham, SDCC should consider running occasional pop-up markets in accessible areas of the site, combined with pedestrian-only periods at the village to gauge interest and opportunities for connectivity.