

**Subject:** Response to Recommendations in Castle Stables and Courtyards Master Vision Report and Public Consultation carried prepared by Lorne Consulting.

### Introduction

In March 2024, South Dublin County Council commissioned Lorne Consulting to lead a public consultation on a new master vision for the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham. This vision is detailed in the attached *Castle Stables and Courtyards Master Vision Report and Public Consultation*, completed in July 2024. The report captures public sentiment gathered through online surveys and focus groups and concludes with a series of recommendations for the future development of the site.

These insights have played a key role in shaping the Council's plans for the restoration and redevelopment of the Castle Stables and Courtyards.

### **How development brief was updated following public consultation:**

#### Preservation and Restoration Efforts

- A comprehensive Conservation Management Plan was undertaken. This outlined the historical significance of the site, assessed the current condition of existing structures, and identified key risks and threats. It also established conservation strategies and policy recommendations, concluding with a series of informed development strategies.
- A detailed phasing plan has been developed to guide the restoration process in an orderly and sustainable way.
- Leading conservation experts, including a Grade 1 Conservation Architect, have been engaged to ensure all works are carried out in accordance with best practices in heritage preservation.

#### Sustainable Development Initiatives

- Reuse of existing structures to retain embodied carbon and minimize waste.
- New-build elements to meet Part L 2021 energy efficiency standards, with viable upgrades to protected structures.
- Low-energy systems including natural ventilation, heat recovery, and mixed-mode ventilation for the café.
- Electric heating and hot water, powered by air-to-water and water-to-water heat pumps.
- Sustainable features such as water-efficient fittings, energy-efficient lighting, and PIR sensors.
- EV-ready parking with charging for 10 spaces and future-proofing for all.

- Cycling infrastructure and improved pedestrian access, supporting active and low-carbon travel.

#### Adaptive Reuse and Functional Spaces

- Informed by the Conservation Management Plan, the brief was developed to shape future development within a framework that respects the site's heritage.
- Historic buildings within the stables and courtyards are being repurposed for a range of uses, including retail, café, cultural venues, and arts spaces.

#### Access and Infrastructure Improvements

- Plans include enhancements to the existing pedestrian connection between the site and Rathfarnham Village.
- New pathways, signage, and accessibility features will ensure the site is inclusive and visitor friendly.
- Bicycle facilities and on-site parking will be provided, with improved public transport links through the Bus Connects programme.

#### Parking

- Parking provision emerged as a key issue during the public consultation process. While many respondents supported the introduction of additional car parking, there was opposition to locating it within Sean Keating Garden.
- The Sean Keating family were contacted by SDCC and are supportive of the proposal to commemorate Sean Keating within in the courtyards of the proposed scheme.
- As part of the design process, the project team carefully assessed multiple options for parking, including the feasibility of integrating it within the main site. However, concerns were raised that locating the parking within the existing historical walls would compromise the integrity and fabric of the national monument, posing an unacceptable risk to its heritage value.
- Concerns were also raised during the public consultation about the appropriateness of situating parking within the site's protected structures, with some respondents viewing this as incompatible with heritage preservation principles.
- The Conservation Management Plan provided guidance on the matter, noting that car parking should be considered as part of any future development to support the site's long-term viability. It identified limited opportunities for parking within the current site layout but suggested that Sean Keating Garden—a space north of the stables complex and outside the garden wall with no discernible heritage value—could be a viable location.

- After considering expert input and public feedback, SDCC determined that the most appropriate location for parking is within Sean Keating Garden.
  - As part of the Part 8 scheme, historic paths will be reinstated to strengthen pedestrian connectivity between the park, the site, and surrounding areas.
  - Parking bays will feature reinforced grass, permeable paving, and integrated planting to minimize visual and environmental impact.
  - The partial loss of open space in the park is offset by significant gains in accessible public areas within the redeveloped courtyards and enhanced connections to the castle, park, and village.

#### Funding and Strategic Partnerships

- An application for THRIVE funding is currently underway.
- A long-term operator was selected through a competitive tender at project inception, ensuring the future sustainability and activation of the site.

#### Governance and Operating Model

- Comments were proffered by some in relation to how the additional elements of the development outside of the hospitality and retail spaces would be operated in terms of financial sustainability, with a suggestion that key governance and management systems be put in place to manage the location and the tenant mix.
- South Dublin County Council will explore appropriate operational models having regard to best practice and in line with a movement within the sector in how local authority owned assets such as visitor centres, historic buildings, and cultural spaces are being managed. An appropriate operation model would facilitate the governance, management, operations and maintenance needs of the whole development.

## Recommendations Made in Report and How These Have Been Addressed:

### *1. Enhancing Public Awareness of the Site's Heritage*

Feedback showed that while the public values the site's heritage, many were unfamiliar with its history, especially younger residents. As detailed in the report from 24th –27th April, over 150 places on tours of the Castle Stables and Courtyards at Rathfarnham were offered to the public.

These tours provided historical context, an overview of the redevelopment project, and insight into the public consultation process.

### *2. Telling the Story of the Site Through Ongoing Communication*

We recognise the importance of continuous storytelling and community engagement. Plans are underway to introduce digital elements on-site, including QR codes linked to heritage content. These will be complemented by regular updates across SDCC's social media channels and project-specific communication platforms, helping to unlock and share the site's rich history throughout the development phase and beyond.

### *3. Continued Community Engagement, Including Youth Involvement*

We are committed to maintaining open channels of engagement throughout the project. As part of this, we are exploring opportunities to involve Transition Year students in a naming initiative for the courtyards. This project will foster a deeper connection between young people and the site and create a sense of shared ownership and placemaking.

### *4. Incorporating Health, Fitness, and Wellbeing into the Site's Future Use*

The emerging public interest in health and wellbeing, particularly among younger residents, has been noted. We are working with the Council's Parks and Community Departments to explore how open spaces within the development—and nearby—might accommodate fitness and wellbeing activities. This includes considering how any future event or community space could support these priorities.

### *5. Strengthening the Site's Relationship with Rathfarnham Village*

We fully recognise the importance of integrating the development with Rathfarnham Village. The project has been designed to enhance connectivity and provide mutual benefit to both the village and the redeveloped stables. Improvements to pedestrian access and wayfinding will create stronger physical and visual links between the village and the site, supporting local footfall and business.

### *6. Stimulating Ongoing Community Interest through Pop-Up Events*

To maintain community engagement and test new uses for the site, we are exploring the idea of hosting occasional pop-up markets and events in accessible parts of the site. We are also exploring opportunities for greater integration between the village and the Castle, Stables and Courtyards.

## Conclusion

Rathfarnham Castle and its surrounding parklands are valuable local and visitor amenities. The careful restoration and adaptive reuse of the Castle Stables and Courtyards will enhance the appeal of both the castle and the village, offering new cultural, social, and economic opportunities.

Through high-quality design and a commitment to heritage-led regeneration, this project will ensure that these historic buildings continue to serve the community in meaningful and accessible ways. We are committed to implementing the recommendations outlined in the public consultation report and will continue to listen, engage, and refine our approach as the project progresses.