

DCC statement re development plans at Delgany Convent Lands 31.10.2020

Delgany Community Council (DCC) is aware of considerable local interest at the Drumakilla Ltd. plans for 96 houses and 136 apartments on the former convent lands in the heart of Delgany village.

DCC wants to fairly represent the needs of the local community and engage in a positive and collaborative way with the developer to allay some concerns that have been raised.

The developers have produced a document titled Response to Public Opinion, which has been included as part of their planning application, which includes a map of the Delgany Heritage Trail and suggests the introduction of a one-way traffic system in the village. The developer has taken much of this information off our website. Following feedback from local businesses, DCC does not currently support the introduction of a one-way system.

This document might lead people to believe that there has been extensive local consultation in regard to these plans. However DCC can categorically state that we have not been contacted by the developer prior to the submission of this planning application.

We are aware that a planning application made under the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) initiative skips the normal application to Wicklow County Council, and goes straight to An Bord Pleanála (ABP) for consideration. Applications are to be decided within a mandatory 16-week time period which also includes a public consultation period and the submission of a report by the local planning authority. We are now in a 5-week public consultation phase.

The site is zoned in Wicklow County Council's 2013-2019 Local Area Plan at "R22" which allowed a maximum density of 22 residential units per hectare. The site is effectively a village centre site, even if it is not zoned as such. The applicant (Drumakilla Ltd) is applying directly to ABP under the government's latest SHD provisions, and the applicant states quite clearly that the proposed density would be "a material contravention" of the LAP. Therefore it will now be a matter for ABP to decide whether the applicant's proposal is at an appropriate density for this particular site.

We recognise that it is good planning practice (as well as national policy) to have high density in a village or town centre, and to retain green belts surrounding it. In this respect, this latest proposal is a better example of planning than the sprawling estates which have gradually filled in almost every green field between Delgany and Greystones.

The proposed new apartments and houses in the village centre would increase vibrancy, as the residents will be able to step outside their front door and walk straight into the village. It is a well known fact that better services (shops, businesses, broadband, transport links etc.) will only appear and thrive in areas where the population is concentrated into areas of higher density.

There are some good aspects to the design, such as the provision of green spaces which it appears might be permanently open to the public, preservation of the old orchard garden, water features, plenty of underground car parking, bicycle parking, and good pedestrian permeability to existing adjacent housing estates. Pedestrians will find it easier in future to get from one part of the village to another, which currently involves negotiating the village's notoriously narrow and dangerous footpaths.

Most importantly, it also appears that the former owners have stipulated that the old convent chapel building should be made available to community use, to be kept as a community hall and childcare facility, and managed by trustees. For that we thank the Carmelites, and we acknowledge that it would be legally quite complicated to arrange this.

The developer has committed to provide funding for the community centre, but only for the first three years. WCC has indicated that it will have no role in managing it, and DCC will be seeking further clarification on how the developer intends that this obligation will be fulfilled long term.

Our primary concerns from a community perspective are now as follows;

- That the future of the heritage chapel building be secured for community use.
- Additional public open space allocated close to the main entrance with the village, which could be used by the general public, with a much larger children's playground than is currently planned for, with a consequent reduction in the number of houses.
- That the walls be set back enough to allow a row of public parking spaces, which would go a long way towards alleviating the parking issues in the village. The spaces could be metered and the revenue generated could be used as a long term income stream to help maintain the community centre.
- Vehicular permeability within the site is severely restricted in this plan. This means that to drive from one side of the estate to the other, residents would have to go out of the estate, through the village centre and via the R762 (which is the only east-west route in Delgany) We understand that the developer would not want the new estate to become a "rat run" for commuter traffic, but this could be addressed by installing ramps on any east-west linkages within the estate, or else by building a new east-west link road between this site and the Richview/Gorteen Way site, which is adjacent and to the north.
- DCC is in the process of formulating its formal submission, which has not yet been finalised. We would encourage locals to contact us with their feedback and also to make their own submission. We have a once off opportunity now in Delgany to get the best that we can from this development.

We can be contacted at dcc@delgany.ie or dcc@gmail.com.