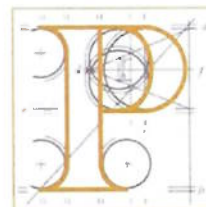


Our Case Number: ABP-318758-23

Your Reference: NPA-OBS-003112



An
Bord
Pleanála

Michelle Hall
7 The Paddocks
Duffs Farm
Termonfeckin
Co. Louth

Date: 15 February 2024

Re: Proposed public realm improvement works known as the "Westgate 2040 Project"
in Drogheda, County Louth

Dear Sir / Madam,

An Bord Pleanála has received your recent submission in relation to the above mentioned proposed development and will take it into consideration in its determination of the matter. Please accept this letter as a receipt for the fee of €50 that you have paid.

Please note that the proposed development shall not be carried out unless the Board has approved it or approved it with conditions.

If you have any queries in relation to the matter please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned officer of the Board at laps@pleanala.ie

Please quote the above mentioned An Bord Pleanála reference number in any correspondence or telephone contact with the Board.

Yours faithfully,

PP O'Keilly

Aisling Reilly
Executive Officer
Direct Line: 01-8737131

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7th February 2024

Submission on Westgate Vision 2040

Drogheda

Louth County Council

Dear An Bord Pleanála,

Firstly, I would like to thank all in Louth County Council, Turley Bros, elected representatives and the stakeholders, including the many people of Drogheda who participated in the public survey consultation, whose opinions and foresight formed the basis of this plan.

Secondly, I welcome so many of the exciting features of Westgate Vision 2040. Drogheda is on the cusp of realising its potential as the next city of Ireland with the highest population of any other town and having a public realm that is worthy for residents and visitors to enjoy is crucial.

The comments below are my personal opinions on the gaps in the plan and lack of potential in some areas. I have collated my comments under the themes that emerged from the public consultation. As an elected representative of Drogheda, it is my duty to promote Drogheda to its full potential and I hope that Westgate Vision is approved with some of my suggestions taken into consideration in the planning process due to:

(i) the implications of the proposed development for proper planning and sustainable development in the area concerned

<https://consult.louthcoco.ie/en/consultation/westgate-2040>

1. Maximise the potential and protection of historic areas

Drogheda is uniquely placed in Ireland, being the largest town divided by the River Boyne and Gateway to the Boyne Valley. The Westgate Vision promotes the use of the Old Abbey as a place to visit and hold events, as we have already successfully seen during Lú Festival of Light. I welcome the design features in this area.

The deterioration and dereliction of many buildings in this area including Fair St., and Narrow West, especially council owned sites should be included in any further phase of the plan to maximise footfall and revitalisation of Westgate.

2. Improve traffic congestion and flow; centralised parking and car-free zones

Considering that this was a vital component of the public survey, I don't feel the Westgate Vision 2040 goes far enough to remove parking at the Abbey shopping centre car park. This car park could have been incorporated into a vibrant meeting area with potential for pop-up cafes/retail units and/or entertainment area. Even for the brief period of closure during the Lú Festival, this area was busy every evening indicating that it would be used. There is a severe lack of public recreational facilities in the centre of Drogheda and this area could have maximised especially for the many who live in Drogheda town centre.

There were a lot of recommendations included in the Road Safety Audit report, with many criticisms for potential dangers for pedestrians and cyclists. I hope that they will/are included in any conditions of the plan.

3. Improve safety and sense of arrival

As above, I hope that the recommendations in the Road Safety Audit report will be implemented to improve safety. I welcome the increase in lighting which make women and young people especially feel safer at night. There must be no delay to connecting lighting when the plan is realised.

I don't have a clear idea or vision of the sense of arrival at George's St. This is not obvious in the plan to me. The drawings are overwhelming with road markings and less of a clear sense of space and that you are being pulled towards an exciting area of Drogheda. A sculpture reflecting the river or myths associated with the Boyne would be welcome here or large aesthetic signage such as 'Westgate' or similar before entrance to Narrow West St.

The most exciting part of the design in the spiral walkway and I can see this being a vital part of the plan. From observing how many people use the recently refurbished Dominics Bridge, with lighting, seating and safe pedestrian and cycling, I would have liked to have seen more seating incorporated into this spiral design. Lighting at night will be crucial here to prevent anti-social behaviour and a sense of safety for users.

4. Develop a focus on culture.

The covered canopy at the Old Abbey promotes the use of this area for culture and it will be exciting to see further use of this space especially during the summer months. However, I feel the plan is lacking in any other focus on culture, historical or contemporary. Drogheda is the closest town to UNESCO World Heritage Site Brú na Bóinne and I don't see elements of this reflected anywhere in the plan. Our nightlife is currently being promoted through the Purple Flag Award and a new Night Time Economy Advisor. Barlow House is located on the corner of Westgate and more collaboration with the Droichead Arts Centre should be reflected in the plan.

5. Maximise tourism potential

Any public realm improvements in Drogheda will benefit our tourism potential. Westgate Vision 2040 attempts to bring people to the River Boyne and the centre of Drogheda. However there's a lack of imagination in the use of the space I feel. There is no sense of arrival to the river area with a functional purpose. I would have liked to have seen some form of recreational activity associated with the river incorporated here such as a floating pontoon with access for kayaking.

The canopy on Fr. Connolly Way doesn't seem to serve a function and as a sculptural aesthetic element, it lacks any form that reflects the river, mythology, Drogheda history and it's lobsided design looks odd in my opinion. I understand that it slightly mirrors the canopy in the old Abbey but that has a function and this canopy doesn't seem to have. If the roof could have spiral designs such as those seen in nearby Newgrange that would be more in keeping with a focus on Drogheda as a Gateway to the Boyne Valley and it would let in a view of the sky in places while still providing some coverage from the elements, if that's the purpose of the design. The canopy will also block a view of Millmount along Fr. Connolly Way which is one of our most important historical features in Drogheda.

6. Create structured outdoor space and amenities

I welcome the design elements that provide structured outdoor space such as the Old Abbey, spiral walkway and any cycle lanes that promote active travel but the plan could have been more ambitious. There is a lack of seating in the design especially in George's St and Fr

Connolly Way. I welcome the accessibility seating/benches but there should also be high backed seating for those with mobility issues and various styles of benches that encourage different functions such as play elements for children and encourage different forms of sitting/lying.

There are no obvious elements that appear to have built-in opportunities for children to play and self-expression that is seen in lively areas.

By demolishing an existing public toilet structure that has been in that location on Georges St for many, many decades, albeit shut, and not putting in any other toilet facilities does not reflect the needs of society and the target groups laid out in the plan. Drogheda has no public toilets and I feel that there could have been an aesthetic overhaul of the existing toilets with improved safety and accessibility that would have been functional yet an exciting feature of the Westgate Vision 2040. You only have to do a google search to see how public toilets can be a positive talking feature in other cities.

7. Address underutilisation of the River Boyne

I absolutely agree that Drogheda is a town that turned it's back on the river. However on the 'far side' the Boyne Greenway has totally changed the use of the river to a widely used recreational area. Through the walking and cycling ways, the Westgate Vision 2040 will direct people to the river, across Dominics Bridge and onto Dominics Park and the Boyne Greenway. As mentioned earlier, the decision not to incorporate the Abbey car park in the plan restricts the potential to have a more vibrant meeting place on this side of the river. A pontoon or even some sculptural design even placed in the Boyne would be a unique selling point.

8. Other suggestions

- Designs, materials and colour palate should compliment the recently installed Wayfinding project.
- Landscaping should include more trees on Dominic St., Narrow West St. and planting areas for wildflowers to promote biodiversity
- Air quality should be monitored specifically in this area prior to the commencement of the Westgate Vision 2040 and measured after the development has been completed to provide evidence based information on the health benefits of hopefully reduced air pollution due to less vehicles.

- Cycle access should be given at the side of each entrance to Dominics Bridge as I've highlighted at MD meetings and by Drogheda Cycling. The pole should be removed on the Fr Connolly Way beside Dominics Bridge as it prevents wheelchair and cycle access currently.
- Can uncontrolled pedestrian crossings be allowed as I thought this was only a pilot scheme by the Minister for the Environment? I fully welcome them and encourage many more to be included around Drogheda but they shouldn't be included if they are not legal?
- There are no covered bike shelters in the plan and the bike parking is functional but boring design. I would have liked to see more unusual but safe bike parking ideas like they have for example in Westport. Design should be theft proof.
- The plan recommends Park and Ride/Stride facility but doesn't propose a specific area. I propose somewhere on the North Road as I anticipate that this will be particularly busy once the PANCR opens and cycle lanes are being constructed. Therefore a Park and Ride/Stride facility should be planned and opened prior to commencement of Westgate Vision to prevent further traffic chaos.
- Can you confirm that Ronan Halpin sculpture on Fr. Connolly Way will remain in situ? If so, it is missing a light for many years and if this could be replaced asap. If not, where will it be moved to?
- There is no plan for a bus shelter on George's St. I have requested one from NTA and hopefully it's included in the new €500,000 enhancement programme announced this week. As this stop is one of the busiest in Drogheda, a bus shelter should be included in the plan and it could be designed to compliment other elements of the Westgate Vision 2040.
- Does this plan have provision for a Percent Art Scheme and if so, can it be implemented in the design?

Yours sincerely,

Michelle
Hall.

Cllr Michelle Hall

Drogheda Rural LEA

The Labour Party