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22 Hillcrest,
Pembroke Wood,
Passage West,
Co. Cork.

21st August, 2020.

RE: Submission to Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find to follow some of the considerations I would appreciate being included in the next review of the Cork City Development Plan.

I am a public representative in the Carrigaline Municipal District of Cork County Council and a resident of Passage West. Since the extension of the City boundary in 2019, most residents of Passage West travel through the City jurisdiction as part of their daily commute, they shop in Douglas and Mahon as their closest large retail outlets and they regularly enjoy the entertainment and food offerings of Cork City. We share the River Lee and its magnificent harbour. In addition, many of the areas I represented until last year are now part of Cork City. As such, I am very acquainted with some of the needs and aspirations of the residents of these areas.

- The **greenbelt between Rochestown and Passage West** is very important to the town of Passage West. It defines who we are. It is a magical reservoir of countryside that provides refuge for wildlife, nesting and feeding for birds of the Cork Harbour SPA. It gives us a sense of coming home and strengthens our sense of community. Please respect it and do not zone it for building.
- The **R610 from Passage West to Rochestown and on into Douglas** exhibits extraordinary congestion every weekday morning. In 2019, residents from Passage West would typically leave home at 07.25 to avoid the morning backlog. The time for departure gets earlier and earlier each year. Although rush-hour congestion on Carr's Hill gets much air-time, my family chooses to travel Carr's Hill every morning because despite being longer, the delays on the N28 are considerably less than those on the R610.

I ask that Cork City Council would have an aim of providing a **priority bus route along the R610**. This would make the bus a more attractive and realistic option for the thousands of residents living not just in Passage West but also in Rochestown and parts of Douglas. The benefits to these huge residential areas and to Cork City would be multifold.

There are other alternatives for helping to remove commuter traffic from this route. In the 1800s, the primary form of transport to Cork City was by water. Paddle steamers ran up and down the

river from the Lower Harbour to the City competing with one another for business. There is huge opportunity for Cork City Council to work with Cork City Council, the Port of Cork and other relevant statutory stakeholders to support and encourage the resurrection of **water-borne public transport**. It would not merely relieve the roads but it would also be a massive attraction for visitors to Cork City.

A **railway station at Ballynoe on the Great Island** would allow commuters from Rochestown and Passage West to access Cork City by train via the opposite site of the harbour. I appreciate that the Great Island is not part of Cork City Council's jurisdiction but because of the relief it would potentially bring to both congestion on the R10 and Cork City, supporting the provision of a railway station at Ballynoe is very much in the City's interests. I should be grateful if Cork City Council would champion this element of the CMATS proposals at every appropriate opportunity.

- The **Greenway between Passage West and Cork City** is a massive resource for both commuting and leisure. However there can be considerable conflict between pedestrian and cycle users. Cyclists frequently travel too quickly for pedestrians' comfort and rarely use bells. In return, pedestrians wander from one side to the other, walk two and more abreast and frequently wear headphones such that they could not hear a bell in any event.

The rules of the greenway need to be as thoroughly understood as the rules of the road. Keep Left Pass Right signage needs to be present in BIG BOLD LETTERS at every entrance to the greenway. Current signage is attractive but sporadic and often in what are irrelevant locations. Maintenance of the greenway is important. Annual edge cutting needs to be as much vertical as horizontal, ensuring the benefits of the full three metre width.

The greenway provides massive benefits as a biodiversity corridor. I received many, many communications from users of the greenway when Cork City Council cut the grass along the greenway in early July. This cut was devastating for biodiversity. Please can the City Council work with Cork County Council in keeping just one metre of the greenway edge clipped during the growing season whilst letting the rest of the vegetation grow and flower. Then in late August/September when the flowering season is over, it is appropriate to give the entire length and width of the greenway a single cut. The flower diversity will be improved over time if the clippings from this single cut are lifted. This approach is entirely in line with the All Ireland Pollinator Plan aims to which Cork City Council is a signatory.

- **I ask that the Cork City Development Plan would have a firm and realistic aim towards achieving safe, separated cycling infrastructure from Rochestown/Douglas through to the City and around Cork City.** It is critical that safe, separated cycling infrastructure would be provided between the The percentage of those commuting by bike is far lower in Cork than in Dublin and in other comparable cities. This is partly due to our topography but it is also due to the vulnerability of the cyclist in a situation where he/she is sharing space with heavy and often fast traffic. The benefits of cycling as a sustainable mode of transport are multi-fold and well versed; it is not necessary to repeat them here. However it must be emphasised that should Cork become recognised as a cycling friendly city, there would be massive knock-on benefits to the City Centre itself in the reduction of commuter traffic, to air quality, to the health of both cycling and non-cycling residents of the City and its hinterland and to tourism.
- **Cork's greatest asset is its river and harbour. The only effective way to interpret, tell and market the wonderful, age-old story of Cork is through its river and harbour.** The City would not be what it is today without that river and harbour; it is the basis of what makes it what it is, the essence of all that is unique and special about Cork.

Sadly it seems to me that in recent decades, Cork may have forgotten what it is about and has increasingly turned its back on the river. I long for the City Development Plan to have an aim of **reclaiming quaysides for people**. Currently many quaysides are used for car parking. In Westport, the then Town Council purchased derelict backlands for parking such that they could remove cars from the riverside environment. This was the first step in making Westport what it is today. The OPW's current plans for walls as a means of flood protection are diametrically opposed to this concept of capitalising on Cork's greatest and most unique asset.

The reality is that a public focus on everyday shopping in Cork City Centre as we knew it 40 years ago is unlikely to ever return. The convenience of hinterland shopping centres is too attractive and marries far better with today's fast pace of life. But there is an alternative vision: Cork City as a desired centre of commerce, a place where indigenous smaller shops with a local, unique product can survive and thrive, a place rich with colour and bursting with life that welcomes visitors from both home and abroad to spend time in its waterside environment, a place where people come to spend several hours of slow amenity time with streets that are safe and welcoming for pedestrians and cyclists of all abilities.

Cork has a deficit of parks generally, both in the City Centre and in the City suburbs. For this vision of the City to be a reality, parks are essential. People need places to sit and absorb. Pocket parks will be a massively valuable tool and I ask that their inclusion would be considered in every street and at every junction. Plazas like that in Emmet Place are similarly valuable. **But possibly the best way to regain parkland in Cork whilst telling the City's story is to reclaim the quaysides for people.**

- **Cork has a Napoleonic landscape of unparalleled magnificence.** When France's military star, Napoleon Bonaparte, became emperor in 1802, he amassed a huge army and 2,000 ships. He planned to invade Britain. At the time, because all food from Ireland to British troops left through Cork, Cork was particularly vulnerable. In response, the incredible network of fortifications from the mouth of Cork Harbour right up through the River Lee to Ballincollig was developed. In short, they include:
 - Fort Camden – 45 acres of what is internationally recognised as one of the best remaining examples of a classical coastal artillery fort in the world.
 - Fort Carlisle – with 4 batteries and over 20 guns, it has been occupied by military forces for its entire 400 years.
 - Fort Westmoreland – on Spike Island, the 24 acre star-shaped fortress housed the British army from 1806 and became the largest prison in the world from which thousands of Irish prisoners were exported to Australia.
 - Two Martello Towers at Ringaskiddy and Haulbowline – built to engage ships that succeeded in getting past the three forts.
 - The Monning, Belvelly and Rossleague Martello Towers – built on the northern shores of Great Island to protect against an invasion by land. The Cork Harbour towers are recognised as being the epitome of British Martello Tower design and construction and the Ringaskiddy tower is today the largest Martello Tower of its kind in any reasonable condition standing in an original moat in the world.
 - The naval base on Haulbowline Island – the site of the world's first yacht club in 1720, Haulbowline had fortifications dating back 200 years before the British Navy and the Board of Ordnance established a base there. In the 1860s, the island was enlarged to accommodate the development of a naval dockyard for warship repair and construction.
 - Collins Barracks – built in 1806, it included a military detention barracks and, after the barracks was handed over to the Department of Justice, was used as a civilian prison until 2016.

- The Ballincollig Gunpowder Mills – taken over and expanded by the British Board of Ordnance at the onset of the Napoleonic Wars. The provision of housing for the mill's hundreds of workers created the basis for a village at Ballincollig. The network of sluices and canals used in the manufacturing process and over 50 of the mill structures still survive on the site of the Ballincollig Regional Park.

These 11 military fortifications form a Napoleonic landscape that stretches as an indivisible part of a whole all the way from the harbour mouth to Ballincollig. The architectural value of this network, its construction (much of which was by prison labour), its function within the wider Cork landscape and its intimate relationship to a period of social history now gone would, in their own right, qualify for consideration for the World Heritage List. But to put forward this military landscape with the massive 1300 year old heritage of Spike Island would surely clinch it. Robben Island, the island prison outside Cape Town has, without the support of an associated group of structures, been a World Heritage Site since 1999. Of particular relevance to Cork is Kingston, Ontario, where the collective of five British-built military coastal defence fortifications and the upstream Rideau Canal were entered on the World Heritage List in 2007. The parallels are myriad. The quality of what we have to offer in Cork is undoubtedly of World Heritage status. Cork's quaysides are all of the same period. The Port of Cork buildings and bonded warehouses are similarly valuable and were constructed during the Napoleonic wars by the prisoners of Spike Island. The bonded warehouses are one of two such remaining in the world. Their inclusion in the Napoleonic landscape enhances the social history element of the proposed designation.

The benefits to Cork City from having this status for its unique Napoleonic landscape would be myriad. **I ask that Cork City Council would recognise the value of the City and Harbour's Napoleonic landscape and would include its designation as a World Heritage Site as a defined aim of the Cork City Development Plan.**

- When the Port of Cork moves downstream, **it is critical that they would be obliged to continue maintenance dredging of the River Lee to the City.** The trade functions of the River Lee are what has made Cork what it is. It will not be possible to tell the story of Cork if the river should be no longer navigable. I ask that this continued obligation of the Port of Cork to the City would be recognised in the City Development Plan.
- Cork City's built heritage is generally closely linked to the City's water heritage. **Our heritage is what makes us what we are. It makes us unique.** The heritage sites listed in the Issues paper are of course special. However they are only the highlights and it is the sum of the parts that makes the whole. The City's Architectural Conservation Areas and designated streetscapes are everything. It is true that re-injecting life into old buildings comes at a cost but one that is worth carrying for the return it offers. I ask that Cork City Council would recognise this return and consider developing **innovative supportive schemes for the reoccupation/refurbishment of buildings in historic streetscapes.** Such schemes might consider, for example, the waiving of planning contributions for upgrades to historic buildings in recognition of the additional costs of achieving energy efficiency and modern functionality.
- I ask that Cork City Council would include **universal design** as being a concept central to the new Cork City Development Plan. This universal design concept extends to playgrounds, public buildings, locations of commerce and retail, parks and streets. To this end, I ask that the City Council would consider giving special attention to the ease with which the City's streets can be navigated by the more vulnerable members of society. In particular, I draw the City Council's attention to the benefits of the junction approaches taken in cities such as Kilkenny, a selection of

which is shown below. These make the pedestrian the priority, invite people to move in the streets and make City stays longer.



- The Issues Paper describes the four urban towns of Cork City as being Ballincollig, Glanmire, Tower and Blarney. It considers Douglas as being part of the City Suburbs. **Douglas is and always has been, a town of its own.** It has a village which continues to be the heart of the settlement. Its church and community park are the village focal points. Voluntary and community groups such as Douglas Tidy Towns of which I was proud to be a working member until May 2019 could not operate with the same gusto and enthusiasm without their current sense of Douglas as its own distinct village.

Douglas is the commercial focus for some 20,000 people. With such a hinterland population, it should be a thriving, bustling centre. But it is not. Over the past two decades in particular, a sequence of poor planning decisions has seen Douglas village dominated by two shopping centres with independent retailers squeezed out and replaced by a series of food and restaurant outlets. There are 13 non-retail food outlets in the 430 metres between the Douglas Village Shopping Centre and the Fingerpost Roundabout. These are all concentrated into a 270 metre stretch through Douglas East. Of the twelve, six include an element of take-away. There are a further three non-retail food outlets in the 137 metre long East Village quarter, including a McDonald's Drive-Thru. That is a total of 16 on-street non-retail food outlets in just over 400 metres of Douglas Village East.

The Issues Paper includes a photomontage from the Douglas LUTS vision for Douglas East. Published in 2013, DLUTS found Douglas to be a village in trouble, characterised by high vehicular congestion, low footfall during the daytime and a high vacancy level of 20%. DLUTS was a fine study. Sadly though, its advancement has been slow, limited by the availability of funding. Measures implemented to date have been focused primarily on relieving traffic congestion. There have been few if any attempts to initiate key recommendations of the study relating to the urban realm. One such key recommendation is to create the pedestrian priority shared space along Douglas Street East illustrated in the photomontage. This would allow existing non-retail food outlets expand onto the street, engendering a people-friendly, relaxed atmosphere in which retail outlets would thrive simply by virtue of enhanced foot-fall. **I ask that advancing the urban realm recommendations of DLUTS would be a particular priority of the Cork City Development Plan.**

I also ask that Cork City Council would not take a carte blanche attitude to retail planning applications for Douglas village. Despite the dominance of the existing two shopping centres, Cork County Council granted planning permission to Aldi to develop on the site of Douglas Cinema. The cinema was a badly needed amenity and the site itself was one identified by DLUTS as being of potential far greater than simply a discount retailer. Cork County Council granted permission to Lidl to develop in Barry's Field. The village is desperate for amenity space, for a hotel, for a primary care centre and for so much more than what would have been a fourth convenience retail outlet. Fortunately, the proposed development was refused by An Bord Pleanála. Cork County Council granted permission for another take-away on the Old Carrigaline Road. Again, it was thankfully refused by An Bord Pleanála. All of these proposed and permitted developments would bring additional vehicular traffic into Douglas village entirely in contravention to DLUTS and yet further restricting the potential for retail development in existing village units.

I note that the Issues Paper considers regeneration and consolidation of the City suburbs to "require a range of well-planned mixed use urban renewal projects". The future of Douglas village cannot wait for significant funding of this nature. **If Cork City Council were to take a proactive approach to spatial planning in Douglas village,** it would help to nurture retail variety and, over time, bring vitality and viability to Douglas. If every planning application for Douglas village, both East and West, were to be obliged to include an assessment of how that proposed development would contribute to the vitality and viability of Douglas village, it would help nurture Douglas village in a holistic way. It would give effect to that fundamental observation of the Douglas LUTS (ref: paragraph 9.1.4): "***New development should enrich the qualities of existing urban places***".

- I ask that the new Cork City Development Plan would recognise the benefits of urban trees, incorporating a comprehensive tree policy advising of Cork City Council's approach to tree maintenance and planting. Trees, green building and green infrastructure generally will massively enrich the quality of Cork's urban and suburban environment.
- Finally, **PLEASE let us no longer talk about Cork's being an alternative to Dublin.** Cork is Cork. Let us not aspire to being a lesser something else. We are what we are and we has the potential to offer a City and Harbour with a heritage, a quality of life and an offering that is unparalleled anywhere.

Thank you for taking the above into consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Marcia D'Alton.
Independent Member, Cork County Council.