

Submission to

Senior Executive Officer
Forward Planning Section
Kildare County Council
Áras Chill Dara
Devoy Place
Naas, Co. Kildare.

in relation to

Draft Newbridge Town Centre Action Area Plan 2007

by

FADA Newbridge

c/o Charlotte House
Charlotte Street
Newbridge
email: fada@kildare.ie
web: www.kildare.ie

Prepared by Éamonn Parker,
FADA Chairperson
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SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this Submission

The purpose of this submission is to highlight serious concerns around the sustainability of the proposed Action Area Plan.

1.2 Background of FADA Newbridge

FADA is a voluntary group formed in June 2006 to promote sustainability and rekindle community spirit in Co Kildare. While drawing its membership from around the county, it has focused its initial efforts in Newbridge. It encourages local solutions to global problems.

1.3 Response to the general thrust of the Action Area Plan

FADA welcomes many aspects of the AAP, including *all* the objectives listed in Section 1.4 (pp 3-4).

1.4 Emerging Threats to the Sustainability of Contemporary Urban Development

FADA wishes to draw attention to the following contemporary issues that are expected to have significant ramifications for national and local development:

Growing signs of the limits to present development trends

- Increasing road congestion
- Serious bacterial infestation of water supplies is becoming more common (e.g. Galway, April 2007)
- Over-dependence on construction to drive our economy
- Signs of a weakening of demand for construction
- A large retail and service sector not balanced by a productive sector (Newbridge itself is over-reliant on retail and commercial)
- Inadequate attention to areas of deprivation, leading to growing alienation and crime

Global warming

- Many governments are now acting to ameliorate the threats (UK, Australia, Holland, etc)
- Many businesses have already adopted strategies (Marks and Spencer's, Tesco, Newbridge Silverware, etc)
- While the theory of the human contribution to Climate Change is being challenged
 - the majority of scientists now accept it as being 90% likely
 - the evidence of Irish Climate Change is mounting by the month

Peaking in global oil production

- Global oil production is expected to peak some time between 2008 and 2015.
- Major infrastructural change to reduce the economy's dependence on oil will be needed in advance (taking 10-15 years according to the US Government's 2005 Hirsch Report)



SECTION 2 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Economic And Cultural Localisation

The impending peaking in global oil production will mean a gap between supply and demand that is likely to grow at 4%-6% per annum (see Dr Colin Campbell, *Kinsale 2021 – An Energy Descent Action Plan*, 2005). One of the early impacts will be a shrinking in global trade as transport costs escalate. The consequences for an economy as heavily oil-dependent as Ireland are thorough-going. The consequences for a town as import-dependent as Newbridge may be serious.

The town may have to combine the most modern technological, ecological and design insights with an historical understanding of how supplies for the town were sourced locally (see *Draft Newbridge Town Centre Action Area Plan 2007*, p 2).

A process of “economic and cultural localisation” may be required. Such a process is now being undertaken by many cities and towns around the world, with the whole state of California now adopting such policies (under a Republican governor!). In Ireland towns such as Cloughjordan, Co Tipperary and Kinsale, Co Cork have already begun. This process has consequences for many sectors including:

- Construction
- Heating
- Security of Electricity Supply
- Transport and Car Ownership
- Manufacturing
- Food Production and Distribution
- Retailing
- Security of Water Supply
- Health
- Education
- Community and Cultural Life
- Planning and Local Democracy

The building of a more local economy and cultural life is going to be critical in a world where hopping on an aeroplane may become something we do once every 10 years instead of 3 times a year or more. There is no more compact and convenient a source of energy than oil, and the era of very cheap oil is coming to an end (as we have seen at the petrol pumps over the last 2 years).

2.2 Principles informing FADA’s approach

- While much of the principles contained in Section 2.3 below emphasise the essential nature of a “more local” approach, FADA does not mean to imply a hostility to global trade. Rather it wishes to emphasise sustainable trade, which in the context of the dual threats of global warming and peak oil, would suggest something like a reversal of percentages of energy and food imports (currently at 90% and 85% respectively) to 90% local energy production (which is beyond the scope of the AAP) and 85% local food production (which could be promoted by the AAP – see below).
- One of the many approaches to this issue is that of Permaculture (see e.g. David Holmgren, *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways beyond Sustainability*, 2002). Permaculture incorporates many principles including multi-functionality, which has informed, for example, the idea (below) of planting coppices and fruit trees, to fulfil several functions.



2.3 Implications for Newbridge Action Area Plan

For the Newbridge AAP, Economic and Cultural Localisation has implications including the following:

Building and Heating

- All buildings to be as close to 100% passive and non-fossil fuel dependent as possible.
- Where this is not possible, the design should allow for very easy retrofitting of fully sustainable and carbon neutral approaches to heating, etc.
- All buildings to incorporate as many natural, locally sourced raw materials as possible (both as an example of 21st design and to facilitate ease of locally-sourced maintenance and enhancement). This does NOT mean unattractive buildings, rather it means incorporating the best architectural insights with fundamental principles of sustainability.

Food, Retail, Manufacturing and Biodiversity

- As much more food will have to be more locally sourced, the major public square should incorporate facilities to accommodate a large, attractive, varied and vibrant Farmer's Market, where a large proportion of the town's population could do most of its food purchasing.
- The reversal of globalisation will imply a greater need for local skills in crafts and manufacturing. This in turn requires local outlets for local products, some of which need to be incorporated with the Farmer's Market.
- At such a market, the strengthening of local economies elsewhere in Ireland and beyond needs to be encouraged by, for example, giving pride of place to FAIRTRADE tea, coffee and other products which can't be locally sourced.
- In the spirit of encouraging greater self-sufficiency and responsibility for our own food, at least 1 Community Garden should become a visible and central feature of the Town Centre.
- With biodiversity under threat from intense development and global warming, special care needs to be given to protect and promote the biological heritage we have. This **does not** have to preclude economic exploitation. For example, while water features can enhance both aesthetics and biodiversity, the adjacent River Liffey could be a resource for more fishing and fish farming. Such possibilities need to be explored in the AAP process.
- Food security, biodiversity, aesthetics, as well as the supply of local raw materials should be promoted by considering, for example, the appropriate planting of coppices and edible plants, such as fruit and nut trees, both along the Linear Park and in the Town Centre.

Aesthetics

- With fewer opportunities to experience the variety of stimuli that travel has to offer, the whole visual aspect of the Town Centre needs to expose us to a powerful but more localised aesthetic that will sustain a sophisticated population such as Newbridge well into the 21st Century and beyond. As before, the sourcing of raw materials for artists, architects and builders needs to be more localised and sustainable.

(contd.)



Cultural Life

- Likewise with fewer opportunities to experience the variety of peoples and cultures that travel has to offer, the Town Centre needs to become the centre of a rich cultural life, with indoor and outdoor opportunities for communal expression and celebration for a large population, catering for the physical and developmental needs of all age groups. Examples are:
 - skateboard park and other such facilities for the young
 - safe and easy walking and access areas for those less mobile
 - an indoor theatre space much larger than the present Riverbank
 - an indoor Youth Centre
 - a large outdoor area with a display and platform space for Seasonal Festivals, which will take on a renewed significance

NOTE: These suggestions do not necessarily imply separate spaces, but should incorporate flexible and sustainable multi-functionality.

Education

- It is clear that the challenges ahead are great, but our population has never been more varied or educated, thanks to the success of government policy, business and our recent immigrants over the last decade and more.
- Nevertheless, a visionary and co-ordinated approach to Education for Economic and Cultural Sustainability is going to be critical to our survival. A combination of new and ancient skills will have to find their place alongside the traditional curriculum.
- For a town the size of Newbridge, this can be best served by the provision of a set of central and walkable institutions of excellence in Education for Sustainability located in the Town Centre.

Planning and Local Democracy

- It may be difficult to plan for and incorporate all the elements of a sustainable development as outlined above into a single construction phase.
- Another approach is to employ a team of planners and educationalists in sustainability to create a plan that would integrate Education and Planning for Sustainability as a single evolving process. Start by building an educational institution whose role would be to create and implement the elements of the Town Centre in a process of "Action Learning". Such a process could have at its core the consultation of the entirety of the town in an exercise in true democracy and community building.