

Maynooth Access Group's response to the draft Maynooth and Environs Local Area Plan 2025-2031.

Maynooth Access Group acknowledges the work and effort that clearly went into drafting the plan and welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultative process in regard to the draft Maynooth and Environs Local Area Plan 2025-2031.

Maynooth Access Group (MAG) is submitting this proposal to express concerns about how the draft Local Area Plan's efforts to address climate change by reducing car reliance in our town could inadvertently have negative effects on the lives of disabled individuals. While MAG acknowledges the need to decarbonize society to mitigate climate change impacts, we emphasise the importance of ensuring that changes to urban environments do not compromise Ireland's commitment to the inclusion of disabled people as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Map 7.5 Movement and Active Travel – Parking Measures

Map 7.3 Movement and Active Travel – Public Transport Measures

MAIN STREET MAYNOOTH

Maynooth Access Group objects to any proposal to reduce access to our Main Street along with its shops and services by pedestrianising it, turning it into a low traffic neighbourhood and/or removing standard and disabled parking bays in the short, medium or long term. In the April 2022 census figures, 20% of the population in Kildare was found to have a disability or a disabling condition. Within that 20% cohort are people who qualify for a Disability Parking Permit (Blue Badge) giving them the right to park in the two disability bays on our Main Street. These disability bays are specifically located close to shops and services to make the Main Street more accessible to people who cannot walk more than 50 m. For disabled motorists and the families and carers of Blue Badge holders the car is essentially their legs, being able to drive or be driven and then park close to areas of high demand etc. is their passport to inclusion, independence and autonomy and giving them ready access to cafes, bars, banks hairdressers etc. However, not every disabled person has a disability parking permit since over 80% of disabilities are hidden disabilities. Disabilities like lupus, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, brain injuries and mental health issues can have a major impact on people's lives and impact their ability to walk and navigate the public realm with ease. Residents in this category rely on the standard parking bays on the Main Street to access shops and banks and stay connected with friends and contribute to the local economy.

Plans to reduce the number of private vehicle journeys in our town can adversely impact disabled people. Firstly, disabled motorists are often far more dependent on their cars than non-disabled people.

Alternative modes of transportation, such as public transport and 'active travel', are frequently not viable options for many disabled individuals. This is due not only to issues with physical accessibility but also because of considerations like time, pain management, anxiety, toilet needs, and other specific requirements. For many disabled people, door-to-door transportation is crucial, encompassing not just cars but also taxis (which are used approximately twice as often by disabled individuals as by those without disabilities) and community transport services. Another reason why measures to reduce car usage can negatively affect disabled people is that they often depend on cars, not necessarily as drivers, but as passengers, and even more significantly, for the assistance they provide to formal or informal carers. Many disabled individuals rely on family visits for transportation and rely on services that come directly to their homes, e.g. delivery of Oxygen tanks, medication from

pharmacies and visits from community nursing staff. Such support networks are not sufficiently accommodated by programs like Blue Badges, and these concerns, as highlighted by the Maynooth Access Group, are frequently overlooked.

Continuing with the Main Street the Draft Local Area Plan (DLAP) states

“It is considered that the overall quality of public realm is of a reasonably good standard particularly along Main Street and Court House Square where there is a generous amount of space allocated to the pedestrian”

It is not difficult to imagine that the comments made in the DLAP in relation to the public realm were made through the lens of a fully able bodied person. In Court House Square the moss-covered cobbles (some of which are loose) are extremely difficult to walk on let alone roll over with a buggy, rollator or wheelchair. The central pathway in the Square is very slippery when wet, many of the uprighters are proud of the surface creating trip hazards and the bright glare from the uprighters pointing directly in pedestrians’ faces can cause temporary blindness and as a result be quite hazardous. The footpaths in the Main Street and surrounding streets are in a very poor state of repair making it difficult for people with reduced mobility to use them for fear of falling or tripping. Poor quality footpaths can have a negative impact on the confidence of elderly and disabled people. This can sometimes cause them to stop walking and wheeling or only going out if they have somebody to accompany them which, in turn, can lead to social isolation and anxiety.

Many of the pavement tiles, including the tactile paving, are loose and cracked and the tiles sink around the myriad of UISCE inspection ports. The drainage channel running along the path on the Main Street makes it very difficult for pedestrians who have a visual impairment to navigate their way. The car traffic passing over the cobble locking has caused the cobbles in these areas to sink. The Council must ensure that footpaths are accessible for all people. They form essential infrastructure for people making journeys to local amenities, using public transport, or simply navigating the public realm. The design and maintenance of footpaths affects how useable they are for all residents and it is not just disabled people who are affected by inaccessible footpaths. Older people, people travelling with children or buggies and people travelling with luggage or deliveries can experience additional challenges when trying to make walking and wheeling journeys. The impacts of footpaths being inaccessible extend much further. Injuries caused by poorly maintained footpaths place a direct burden on our health care system as well as directly on our local authority if negligence is determined.

STREET CLUTTER

Street clutter refers to the accumulation of various obstacles in public spaces, such as footpaths. This includes items like signposts, billboards, street furniture, construction materials, poorly placed refuse bins, parked bicycles, and uneven pavements. While often overlooked, street clutter can pose significant hazards, particularly to vulnerable individuals, such as those with visual impairments and mobility disabilities.

For people with visual impairments, street clutter can create dangerous obstructions. Without the ability to see hazards clearly, these individuals rely heavily on tactile and auditory cues to navigate their environment. Unexpected obstacles can lead to trips and falls, causing injury. Additionally, cluttered environments can confuse or overwhelm guide dogs, which are trained to navigate more predictable and open pathways.

Individuals with mobility disabilities, including those who use wheelchairs, walkers, or other aids, also face heightened risks. Street clutter can block their path or create narrow passages, making it difficult

or impossible to manoeuvre safely. Uneven surfaces or unexpected objects can tip over mobility devices or cause falls. The lack of clear, unobstructed pathways can also significantly slow down their movement and increase physical strain.

Moreover, street clutter can limit access to important facilities, such as ramps and tactile paving (including tactile paving at pedestrian crossings), which are essential for the safe and independent navigation of these vulnerable groups. This not only hinders their mobility but can also contribute to social isolation by discouraging them from venturing out into the community. Irish Standard EN 17210:2021 Accessibility and Usability of the Built Environment provides excellent guidance in this regard.

In summary, street clutter presents serious hazards to vulnerable individuals, particularly those with visual impairments and mobility disabilities. It is crucial for planners and the local authority to prioritize accessible and clear public spaces, ensuring that all individuals can navigate their environment safely and independently.



Therefore, going forward can we please action the removal of the derelict phone box from our Main Street, the ESB cabinet from the Moyglare Road and enforce the policies around signage and sandwich boards as per the Kildare County Development Plan Section 17.1.4.6 which states that:

“The use of freestanding signs / advertising boards on or over the footpath will not be permitted”.



STREET FURNITURE

“Seating is a really important component of Age Friendly communities. Appropriate seating supports people of all ages and abilities to access their local community. Everyone appreciates an opportunity to rest, and this is particularly true for older people and people with certain impairments, whether they are physical, cognitive or sensory”.

<https://agefriendlyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AFI-Seating-Guide.pdf>

Many older residents, people who are mobility impaired or residents with underlying medical conditions find it difficult to walk around our town without somewhere to sit and rest. Respite seating is essential along walking routes to shops and public transport but also is needed near bus stops and areas like schools and churches where people stand and wait. Age-friendly seating, unlike the blue seating currently on our main street, is higher and has arm and back rests to facilitate older people, pregnant women and mobility impaired persons to stand and sit more easily.

ON STREET DINING

“The design and layout of the Main Street has resulted in conflict occurring between cyclists and pedestrians due to the poorly located cycle lanes that have been placed in the centre of both footpaths” (Draft Local Area Plan page 52)

Putting cycle lanes in the centre of the footpaths was clearly a poor decision, let's not compound the problem further by adding outdoor dining furniture to the mix.

The sheer volume of on-street dining furniture (some of which has been placed on top of tactile paving) sandwich boards, barrels, sandbags and cafe enclosures etc. present on our footpaths has become intolerable from the viewpoint of many members of our community, in particular those who are trying to negotiate their way along the paths in a wheelchair, using mobility aids, older residents, persons with buggies and small children and persons with visual impairments. The cycle lane is now the only portion of the footpath which is useable in some locations. Pedestrians should not be forced to walk in the cycle lane and share that space with e-scooters, cargo bikes, e-bikes etc as the image on page 52 (DLAP) clearly illustrates. In some cases, where street dining furniture had been placed on both sides of the cycle lane pedestrians have to resort to walking on the road. Unregulated outdoor dining makes advanced route planning difficult for visually impaired pedestrians as footpaths become ever shifting new terrain, and thereby become hazardous. Navigating a pathway through and around people traversing the footpath with hot food and beverages is another safety issue which needs to be given careful consideration. In places on our main street there are no clear boundaries between each business and access to shops and the ATM machine can be difficult. The Council must ensure that a minimum 2 m wide unobstructed width is maintained along the public footpath for safe pedestrian movement as per the conditions set out in the Section 254 Licences and general guidance documents (September 22). The planners also need to be mindful of the fact that the primary function of the footpath is for pedestrian and wheelchair movement. The responsibility for issuing licences and permission to place outdoor dining furniture and other objects on the public footpaths and the monitoring of compliance with the conditions of that licence lies with Kildare County Council. The planners now have a unique opportunity to rectify these matters and ensure that a 2m space is secured for pedestrians. Furthermore, the current eclectic mix of tables, chairs, barrels and signage looks cluttered and congested and requires a more consistent approach by planners and the local authority.



It may have been suggested that the solution to the narrow footpath space for pedestrians is to remove all car parking on the main street and relocate the two disability parking bays and standard parking bays elsewhere instead of strictly enforcing the terms of the Section 254-Licences. A Blue Badge holder is deemed to not be able to travel more than 50 m to their desired destination. Proposals to relocate disabled parking spaces without considering the original locations' importance for providing access to central areas of towns and cities for disabled people is unacceptable. As mentioned previously many non-Blue Badge holders require parking adjacent to their desired destinations and must use the standard parking facilities. (Unfortunately, Ireland has a long way to catch up with its European neighbours who allocate the equivalent of Blue Badges to a wider category of individuals than the permanently mobility disabled). Therefore, the proposed solution of suggesting that the

parking bays would be re-located elsewhere to Carton Retail Park and the Leinster street car park is very discriminatory on the grounds of disability.

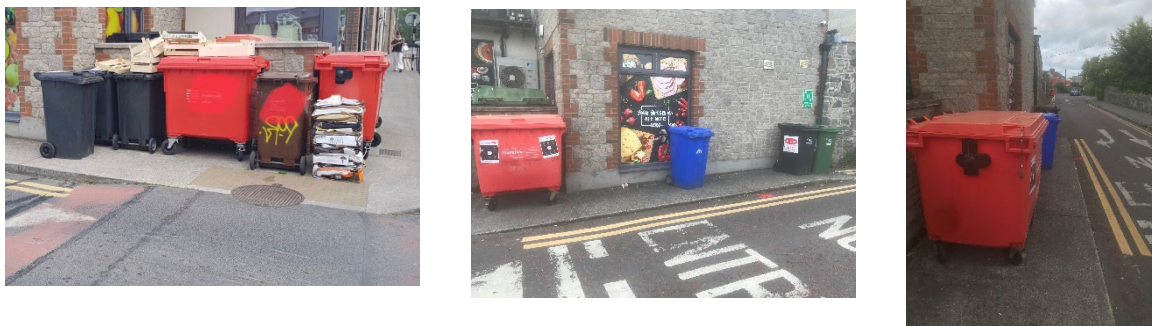
REFUSE BINS

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the narrow footpaths in Parsons Street and sections of Doctors Lane are consistently blocked by refuse bins. Apparently there is nowhere else to store them. To make matters worse the bins on Parsons Street are often upended, scattering rubbish all over the footpaths. Can you imagine how difficult and unhygienic it is to have to walk, push a buggy or a wheelchair through this filth?

An easy solution to the bin problem on Parsons Street is to store the individual bins or communal bins on one of the parking bays on the road. A dropped kerb could be installed to facilitate access. This system is used successfully in many European cities and ensures that footpaths remain free for pedestrians.



In the case of Doctors Lane there is an empty carpark with ample room to accommodate a number of bins similar to what is happening in the Council car park.



PERMEABILITY LINKS

We are very much aware that residents of Maynooth are deeply concerned about proposals to retrofit permeability links into older estates. Elderly residents are fearful about their personal security and, most importantly, they are terrified of being knocked down by e-scooters and bikes using footpaths in the absence of any real cycling infrastructure. A fall for an elderly resident could result in a hip fracture or head injury with life-altering consequences.

“Hip fractures are associated with significant morbidity, mortality, loss of independence, and financial burden. A recent meta-analysis revealed that women sustaining a hip fracture had a 5-fold increase and men almost an 8-fold increase in relative likelihood of death within the first 3 months as compared with age- and sex-matched control” as per Geriatric Orthopaedic Surgery and Rehabilitation (<https://doi.org/10.1177/2151458510378105>).

Additionally, parents of children who are a flight risk are worried that permeability links will increase the risk of their children wandering off.

Given these significant concerns, Maynooth Access Group strongly objects to the proposal to retrofit permeability links in older estates. The safety and well-being of residents must come first. Introducing permeability links without proper cycling infrastructure is a recipe for disaster, putting our elderly population at risk of severe injuries. The fear of being struck by fast-moving e-scooters and bikes on shared footpaths is not something our senior citizens should have to accept.

Moreover, the risk to children who are prone to wandering off is simply unacceptable. Permeability links would create additional escape routes that are difficult for parents to monitor, increasing the likelihood of dangerous situations. The peace of mind and safety of parents and their children should not be compromised for the sake of urban design.

Instead of retrofitting permeability links, we should focus on enhancing the existing infrastructure to ensure it is safe and secure for all residents. Investing in proper cycling paths, improving street lighting, and increasing community policing are more effective ways to promote mobility without jeopardizing the safety of our most vulnerable residents. We urge the decision-makers to reconsider this proposal and prioritize the health and safety of the Maynooth community.

ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

Accessible tourism, also known as inclusive tourism, refers to the ongoing effort to make tourist destinations, products, and services accessible to all people, regardless of their physical or mental abilities. This concept embraces the idea that everyone, including individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and families with young children, should be able to enjoy and participate in tourism activities without encountering barriers.

Accessible tourism is not just about compliance with regulations; it is about ensuring dignity, equity, and enjoyment for all tourists. The benefits of accessible tourism extend beyond individual tourists with disabilities, contributing to a more inclusive society and expanding the market for businesses in the tourism sector. By making destinations more accessible, the industry opens its doors to a broader audience, including an ageing population and people with temporary injuries or limitations, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and equitable community.

Kildare County Council should promote and encourage the development of accessible tourism activities and facilitate the upgrade of accessible tourism infrastructure in Maynooth and its environs. The use of sign language, Braille, communication boards, and augmentative and alternative means of communication (AAC) should be accepted and facilitated at key tourism attractions, festivals, and cultural sites. An accessible portable Changing Places facility, grass matting, a sensory hub, and wheelchair-accessible viewing/seating areas that cater to the needs of disabled people should be provided at all tourism, festival, and cultural events. Groups and organizations running festivals and cultural events should appoint a member of their team to act as an access officer to liaise and communicate with Maynooth Access Group (MAG) and the County Kildare Access Network (CKAN) on matters of accessibility. Kildare County Council should facilitate a range of additional tourist accommodations and ensure that these establishments have a reasonable number of rooms that are fully accessible without the need for assistance. In supporting the operation and development of Maynooth Castle and the National Science and Ecclesiology Museum as key tourist attractions, KCC must solve the problems of horizontal and vertical access by providing ramps and lifts as appropriate. Special headphones and/or audio induction loop facilities for persons with hearing impairments should also be provided.

In supporting Maynooth retaining its Purple Flag status as a high-quality night time and evening destination, Kildare County Council should facilitate the installation of a Changing Places toileting facility in the town centre to ensure that residents and/or visitors with complex medical needs can have access to hygienic toileting facilities when socialising in Maynooth at night.

Accessible tourism is of paramount importance, providing significant benefits to the community. By making tourist attractions fully accessible, Maynooth can attract more visitors, including those with disabilities, boosting the local economy. Accessible facilities not only serve residents but also ensure that tourists feel welcome and supported, enhancing the town's reputation as an inclusive and accommodating destination. This inclusivity can lead to increased tourism revenue and a richer, more diverse community experience for all.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Community swimming pool

While we welcome and support the proposed development of a swimming pool in Maynooth, in the absence of a specified timeline, one worries that this much needed community resource is only aspirational. Maynooth is in dire need of an accessible community swimming pool. Currently, residents of Maynooth have to drive to Trim (greater than 10km), Blanchardstown (greater than 15km), or Clondalkin (greater than 15km) just to have a swim. Furthermore, the cost of using the private swimming facilities at Carton House Hotel or the Glenroyal Leisure Centre is beyond the reach of many residents. The benefits of swimming for people with disabilities range from muscle strengthening to improved mental health. This is one aerobic activity that people of any ability level can enjoy. Beyond enjoyment, getting into the water provides a greater sense of independence and confidence. The buoyancy of water allows swimmers to move their limbs more easily through the full range of motion. Doing so regularly helps keep joints supple and improves flexibility, an important factor in older adults' health and well-being.

Providing access to a community pool benefits not only individuals with disabilities and senior citizens but also their families and friends. It promotes social inclusion and overall well-being.

To make a swimming pool inclusive, specific adaptations are required. These include installing ramped access and/or pool lifts to facilitate easy entry and exit for individuals with mobility impairments. Handrails should be placed strategically around the pool. The pool area should have non-slip surfaces and adequate space for manoeuvring wheelchairs. Accessible changing rooms equipped with benches, grab bars, and roll-in showers are essential as is a Changing Places toileting facility. Additionally, providing swimming aids and floatation devices designed for people with disabilities can enhance their safety and enjoyment.

Primary Care Centre

The plan to establish a new primary care centre in Maynooth is a crucial step forward, especially given the town's rapidly growing population. Presently, the allied health professional clinics (physiotherapy dermatology, ophthalmology, audiology and dentistry) in Maynooth operate privately, limiting access for many residents due to financial constraints or forcing residents of Maynooth to drive elsewhere to gain access to these services in public clinics. While the current health centre and its staff are commendably striving to provide the best care with limited resources, the situation remains far from ideal. In the interim, it is essential to redevelop the existing health centre to bridge the gap until the new facility is operational and fully equipped with a primary care team.

The redevelopment of the existing Maynooth Health Centre must ensure adequate parking, including disability bays that meet required IWA standards, full wheelchair accessibility, a Changing Places facility, and a sensory room. Both the existing health centre and newly proposed primary care centre should be designed to be local and easily accessible on foot, by bicycle, and by car, with sufficient parking to accommodate sick, vulnerable, and elderly patients who cannot be expected to travel long distances, particularly on foot or use public transport. Furthermore, it needs to be acknowledged in the planning and development stages that the district nursing team, GPs who provide house calls and locum/floating healthcare professionals require reserved parking which facilitates them leaving and returning to the site as needed to carry out their roles and serve the entire community.

Additionally, it is critical to recognize that the proposed development in Moygaddy might strain healthcare resources further by drawing professionals away from Maynooth, exacerbating recruitment challenges. This plan, therefore, must include strategic measures to attract and retain healthcare professionals to support both current and future healthcare infrastructure.

To provide adequate and holistic care for the population of Maynooth, the new primary care centre must recruit a diverse range of healthcare professionals to allow for an expanded and diverse range of health services in Maynooth many of which currently do not exist in the area. This includes general practitioners, nurses and nurse specialists (stoma care, addiction services, mental health nurses, etc.) physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and mental health professionals such as psychologists and counsellors. Additionally, the centre should have access to dietitians, social workers, speech and language therapists, dentists, pharmacists, podiatrists and paediatric specialists. By assembling a multidisciplinary team, the primary care centre can address the varied and complex health needs of the community, ensuring comprehensive and accessible care for all residents.

The Maynooth Access Group thanks the planners for considering this submission and it is our earnest wish that the planners take on board the issues raised in this document.