

Fingal County Council,
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27th April 2023

Compact Sustainable Settlement Guidelines Consultation
National, Regional and Urban Planning Section
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Custom House
Dublin 1
D01 W6X0

By email to nrupconsultation@housing.gov.ie

A chairde,

We would like to make some observations on the car parking aspects of the proposed sustainable settlements guidelines.

Car parking minimum standards removed from Fingal Development Plan

In our new Fingal Development Plan 2023-2029, minimum car parking standards have been removed in Zone 1 (defined as within 800m of a high-quality bus service, within 1600m of an existing or planned rail station, or in lands zoned Major Town Centre.) This is the vast majority of the development zoned land in the County. This decision reflects the consensus of both professional planners advising the Council and the Councillors ourselves adopting the plan.

(Some of the Councillors, including the signatories, consider that the Plan could have gone further and removed minimum car parking requirements across the County. However, it's important to acknowledge that this wouldn't constitute much of an additional difference in practice to the provision that has been put in place.)

Climate Action Plan advice against car parking minimum standards

We note that the Climate Action Plan 2023 advises as follows:

“Broadly speaking, planning authorities should not require specific minimum levels of car parking, with the exception of disabled parking.”

Housing affordability and car parking minimum standards

Over recent years there has been a growing movement of removing car parking minimum standards around the world, but especially in North America. A consistent feature of these changes is that they are directed at improving the affordability of housing and they have resulted in significant quantities of development which otherwise would not have been expected to have happened. We urge you to include the research in this area in the analysis informing the guidelines as we believe that reduced mandatory car parking provision can significantly improve housing affordability.

We consider that, done right, the changes to the car parking requirements resulting from these guidelines are by far the most likely to have a positive impact on housing affordability.

“Car-free neighbourhoods”

Of course, removing minimum car parking standards will not of itself remove the demand or need for car parking. Therefore it is important to ensure that this demand is addressed correctly. It must be addressed in a way which supports residential amenity, the development of community, safety and health, and active travel within and between cities, towns, villages and suburbs. Given our policy objectives of reduced car dependency, it is also important that car parking provision is flexible, so that parking that becomes surplus over time can be repurposed.

In practice we have seen that new medium and high density neighbourhoods in Fingal have often turned into very car-dominated environments, hostile to active travel use and with a public realm dominated by parked vehicles. This has resulted from a combination of high car dependency and car parking being spread across the area so that it's directly outside the doors of the houses and apartments.

With this in mind, the following provisions as regards car free neighbourhoods were included in the Fingal Development Plan:

Objective SPQH02 – Key Principles

Support development which enhances the quality of the built environment, promotes public health, and supports the development of sustainable, resilient communities. In particular development which supports the following key principles will be supported:

“ Demonstrates compliance with the Guiding Principles for the creation of healthy and attractive places as set out in Healthy Placemaking, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019–2031.

“ Promotes the development of healthy and attractive places to live, work, socialise and recreate through the delivery of high-quality public realms and open spaces which encourage physical activity and support wellbeing.

“ Is inclusive of all members of society, all genders, non-binary or none, irrespective of age, or levels of mobility.

“ Advocates a universal design approach and is socially inclusive.

“ Prioritise sustainable, active transport modes by e.g. providing safe cycle lanes and by facilitating public transport services in conjunction with State agencies to meet the needs of the community and to provide access to local services.

“ Encourages the development of car free neighbourhoods and streets, where appropriate.

“ Contributes to our climate goals.

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Car Free Neighbourhoods

The provision of car free neighbourhoods and streets in accordance with Objective SPQHO2 can bring multiple benefits. Typically, such neighbourhoods and streets would allow motor vehicular access for deliveries only, confining parking to a dedicated parking area at the periphery. Car free neighbourhoods are typically best suited to higher-density neighbourhoods, creating a much better-quality public realm with safety, public health, and green infrastructure benefits for the community, and economic benefits for householders.

Recommendations

In light of the above, we recommend

1. that the guidelines recognise that Fingal (and other authorities who have taken similar steps) have gone most of the way but advise the general removal of minimum parking requirements;
2. that the guidelines advise on the desirability of
 - a. residential and mixed use areas which are car free (generally meaning within which motor vehicles are viewed as temporary guests); and
 - b. clustering of car parking at the edges in order to facilitate the design of residential areas to favour walking, cycling, wheeling and public transport.

Yours sincerely,

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Cllr. Pamela Conroy (Castleknock)

Cllr. David Healy (Howth Malahide)

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