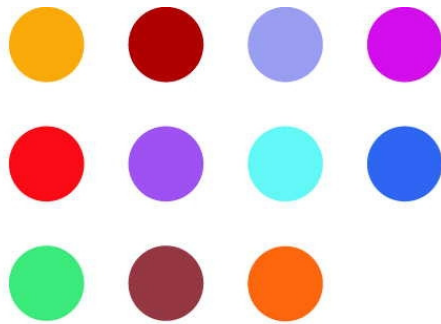


## **“ADAMSTOWN TALKING”**

A summary of two community meetings re pre-draft consultation for review of Adamstown Strategic Development Zone arranged by South Dublin County Council Planning Department



# Adamstown

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# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

## **BACKGROUND**

## **CONTENT OF DISCUSSIONS**

Getting an overview  
An emerging, diverse, modern day community  
Quality of design  
Safety and quality of open space  
Infrastructure

## **CONCERNS**

Community facilities  
Housing profile and future planning  
Infrastructure  
Management

## **ADVICE ON WHAT THE REVIEW SHOULD ADDRESS**

Questioning assumptions  
Concerns re the review  
An emerging consensus

## **PLANNING AS AN ON-GOING PROCESS**

**ENDING FOR NOW.....**

## INTRODUCTION

At the recent community consultation meetings in Adamstown, people noted that it's often easier to have a sense of connection to a community if you have children attending a local school or if there are open spaces where people can mingle and meet. When South Dublin County Council organised two community consultation meetings on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> April and Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2013, it was clear that more organised dialogues also make a vital contribution in building community identity and enabling residents to share their views and experiences of living in a locality.

## BACKGROUND

The SDZ Planning Scheme (2003) for Adamstown is now ten years old and South Dublin County Council decided to conduct a mid-term review. The Planning Department has a strong commitment to engaging with communities in the early stages of review processes. The aim is to be better informed by listening to the direct experience of those who actually live in or beside the area under consideration. As this was Adamstown, the planners decided to enlist the services of external public participation specialists so that the manner of the consultation would mirror the contemporary approaches to planning that created Adamstown in the first instance.

A team of six planners, along with some help from two colleagues in the Council's Community Department worked with Dr Liz Hayes and Margaret Barry from Corporate Community<sup>1</sup> to design, organise and facilitate the two community meetings. It was agreed that an early success indicator would be if fifty people took part in the meetings. The team were delighted that some 120 people took part in the discussions and that age-range, cultural mix and representation from Adamstown and the surrounding neighbourhoods were clearly evident.



<sup>1</sup> Corporate Community is an organisational development practice specialising in community and organisational engagement using creative approaches and collaborative design methodologies.

The events were designed to maximise community participation and create as many opportunities as possible for the planning team to hear very directly from residents. On arrival, people were invited to locate where they lived on a map of Adamstown and the surrounding areas and to make a positive comment about their neighbourhood. A series of “round table conversations” were then completed with the intention of:

- Promoting debate in relation to the medium to long term future of Adamstown (2023) and figure out the ‘big picture’ issues that might impact on its future.
- Considering the most effective ways of continuing to build a sustainable Adamstown community and identity – both for now and for future generations.
- Engaging in conversations between residents, professional planners and any other interests present so that everyone is better informed and therefore better able to shape the future in Adamstown.
- Building a comprehensive picture of the experience of living in what is regarded as a pioneering project with more densely populated urban communities.
- Ensuring that everyone present knows about how the review of the Master plan works and will encourage others to get involved and make an input too.



Following each of the community meetings, the planning team met for a debrief and constructed a series of working notes to inform their own thinking and to enable this summary report to be written by Corporate Community. One of the team summed up her view of the format of the meetings as follows:

*“On the whole the night was a MASSIVE success! The registration, tea / coffee/ putting your sticker on the map and doing the positive note on a post-it was great. There was certainly a lot of mingling and from what I could interpret at my table there were lots of people getting to know each other on the evening. Everyone was really comfortable with one another. Perhaps it’s down to the type of person who is attracted to living in Adamstown – but everyone had very balanced opinions and everyone had a chance to engage in discussion.”(Planner/facilitator)*

## CONTENT OF DISCUSSIONS

This section offers a summary of the various cycles of discussion that happened. Material is drawn from both meetings and is presented under a series of headings.

### Getting an overview

A number of opportunities were provided to get an overview/first reaction to living in Adamstown. **Some of the comments written on post-its about the neighbourhood included:**

Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup> April 2013	Monday 15 <sup>th</sup> April 2013
Great local amenities	Wonderful neighbourhood
Neighbours, transport, shops and pubs	Clean and well maintained
Happy with Adamstown but I would like community facilities or meeting point in the estate for community spirit	Kind neighbours, tree lined roads, well kept parks (mostly) to walk in. Facilities for young and teenagers (more needed)
Great Community spirit, lovely neighbours, very multi-cultural, colourful, family orientated, friendly, quiet and a great place to live	Family oriented and good transport system
The area looks nice and modern. Houses are good quality	Diverse community, safe enough, good neighbours
Great location, safe environment for my children to grow up in very happy in Adamstown	Beautiful architecture, great parks nearby, modern facilities
Good community so far	Adamstown is a very peaceful area to live in. It’s a very welcoming place
Roads too narrow, not enough parking spaces, nowhere for the kids to play, unfinished roads, lighting etc in the paddocks	Good architecture, high density good paths, good infrastructure
Feel safe, nice to walk around, grounds, well maintained. Quality of the house is good, newly built	It’s really quite friendly, most welcoming neighbourhood, it’s a great place/safe place
Quiet, relaxed, hope it continues, nice open green spaces, old trees	Multi-cultural, youthful, good transport, good schools

The planners/ facilitators were tasked with listening to what people loved about Adamstown. The following key themes emerged:

### ***An emerging diverse, modern day community***

- The general attitude to Adamstown is positive and people living in Adamstown want to stay in Adamstown.
- People view their neighbours as amenable and friendly.
- The sense of a multi-cultural community is seen as a huge benefit and added to the vibrancy of the area.
- International and diverse nature of the place is seen as a benefit that should be encouraged and celebrated.
- Consensus that living in Adamstown represents a 'close' form of living but that this is not overbearing and contributes to communities interacting and feeling safe and secure in the area.
- Residents from outside of Adamstown commented that they would like to be part of such a connected community and that there should be more links physically and socially between Adamstown and the wider Lucan area.
- Some concern that public consultations etc. always run the risk of not reflecting the diverse nature of the community. There was some interest as to why the school population seems more diverse than the profile of the actual Adamstown population.

### ***Quality of design***

- Good plan and vision in place but a concern that Adamstown is incomplete.
- High standard of design and quality of material finishes gives a European feel and creates a modern, urban continental atmosphere.
- Lower energy bills in the apartments and people like the idea of duplex living.
- Adamstown is different to surrounding areas and residents would not like to see it reverting to an average semi-detached estate.

### ***Safety and quality of open space***

- The overall environment is seen to be high quality and easy and pleasurable to get around.
- People generally felt that Adamstown was very safe from a personal point of view although there was a feeling from a few people that property (such as cars) could be targeted.
- Perceived and actual safety was high because of the degree of overlooking.
- The quality of the open space and landscaping featured highly for people.

### ***Infrastructure***

- The progressive nature of the development and the provision of infrastructure in tandem with residential development are welcomed. There is some concern that this might get lost in the next phase of

development. Agreed that people 'bought into the concept' that higher density would result in a higher level of facilities and services and while this is planned, it now needs to be delivered.

- Consensus that transport provision is very good – both train and bus services. Rail services, especially at peak times are very good.
- Great that schools are provided. Halls in primary schools are good but over subscribed. Good sporting clubs emerging but need more activities.
- SDCC mobile library visits are great, but needs a more visible location or anchor (currently parks on a back street).

The material generated around the overview of Adamstown came from a round table group exercise using the word "Adamstown" as an anagram for characterising the unique experience of living in Adamstown. Some examples of the anagram include:

### **The unique experience of living in / beside a locality like Adamstown**

- A** *Amenities – lack of*
- D** *Dog litter/Dog Park*
- A** *Amenable (friendly community)*
- M** *Multi-cultural*
- S** *School sports hall incomplete, schools enrolment issues & problems with physical access to*
- T** *Tandys lane – lack of connection to, Train Stations underserved and under utilised*
- O** *Outstanding issues- parks, playgrounds, roads*
- W** *Walkable – watch children (anti-social behaviour, more Garda presence required)*
- N** *Not complete, unrealised vision / no jobs in the area – should be a mix of uses in the area retail / commercial / housing etc (counterbalanced with good proximity to Grange Castle)*

### **The unique experience of living in / beside a locality like Adamstown**

- A** *Architecture*
- D** *Disastrous*
- A** *Attractive brick work*
- M** *Multicultural*
- S** *Spacious / stalled / security ++*
- T** *Terrible bus service / traffic / train car park location*
- O** *Organised / outrageous position of bus stops*
- W** *Welcoming*
- N** *Not enough parking lack of green space / play areas / community centre*

### **The unique experience of living in / beside a locality like Adamstown**

- A** *Abandoned*
- D** *Diverse / disappointing / derelict*
- A** *Active residents committees + groups*
- M** *Missing town centre, gum, pool + facilities*
- S** *Safety - / small parks / small houses / schools good and complete / sports facilities / teams – 4/*
- T** *Transport (lack of for paddocks) / train good in south / time table limited*
- O** *Opportunity*
- W** *Well kept / weather beaten and worn spaces*
- N** *Negative equity*

### **The unique experience of living in / beside a locality like Adamstown**

- A** *Amenities*
- D** *Driving lessons, decade of planning*
- A** *Accessibility*
- M** *M4/M50 – takes you everywhere / multi-cultural / multi-modal*
- S** *Safe / security*
- T** *Train Station / transport*
- O** *Objections, over – ambitious, opportunities*
- W** *Worried about parking*
- N** *New, neighbours/community / never happened!*

In other circumstances, it would have been possible to review the meaning of the different anagrams in a lot more depth. However, we were only able to use the material to construct a summary of what was heard. Essentially, the vision for Adamstown is now a lived reality and there are concerns about sustaining the vision in a very different economic context. There is a wealth of neighbourly connection inside Adamstown and this is in spite of Adamstown being at an early stage where the whole project is still 'unfinished.' Adamstown is a place from which access to local communities and the wider city and region are particularly appreciated. As one planner/facilitator commented, people are concerned and they need reassurance that Adamstown will be completed.

*“Overall, the initial feeling at the table from some residents was negative towards the current situation in Adamstown. This negativity, however, was primarily due to the fact that the services and facilities they were promised (and why they bought into Adamstown) were not delivered. A number of the residents specifically stated that they liked living in Adamstown, agreed that there was a community spirit and it was an attractive looking area but wished that what was detailed on the master plan was delivered. The two main facilities/services that they*



*wished for were a community centre and a playground/park.”  
(Planner/facilitator)*

## **THE CONCERNS**

While a number of concerns are recorded here, it should be noted that the lack of focal points, particularly a town centre, a community centre and park was re-iterated on several occasions. It was even suggested that the former marketing suite could be a temporary community centre.

### ***Community facilities***

- The area is ‘unfinished’ - the facilities and roads are incomplete. Residents have a sense that they have been let down by the fact that a lot of facilities which they thought would be delivered have not yet arrived. Residents from the wider Lucan area are also disappointed that facilities such as a leisure centre/swimming pool have not yet been delivered as they too could use these amenities and provide the numbers to support such services.
- Lack of teenage facilities – this is particularly pertinent as families are growing up in Adamstown and facilities aren’t keeping up.
- Parents are setting up clubs but halls in schools are already over subscribed.
- More social activities are needed and there is a need for additional playgrounds.
- Need to plan also for facilities for older people in the longer term. For now: “Adamstown is a place for young people – encouraged by its design and by current profile of people”.

### ***Housing profile and future planning***

- Very serious concern that the recent planning permission SDZ11A/0002 is not in compliance with the planning scheme and that a change of house design and material finish undermines the quality of the area.
- The phasing of the different ‘bands of development’ were too far apart and not enough was done to anticipate the impact of a downturn
- Apartments are not family friendly and more suited to cities. For example, the two bedroom apartments particularly criticised. Also, apartments do not provide enough storage or play areas
- Size and space of homes: like apartment / duplex living but units too small.
- Dwelling mix fed into the mindset of a ‘property ladder’ during economic boom with pre-family households opting for smaller apartments. Family households are unable to trade up to family sized dwellings post boom.

## **Infrastructure**

- North / south link needs to be addressed ASAP and could be provided by a park.
- There are particular concerns about the incomplete work regarding green spaces, lighting and access for the Paddocks
- On-going maintenance / spaces becoming run down in some parts – hoarding mentioned in this context.
- Parking and parking management is a big issue. For example, the level of car parking: – more car parking is needed close to people’s homes and disabled parking proportions seem excessive. Public transport good but people still have cars – even those using bus/train. This needs to be accounted for in design.
- Bike sheds are a good idea but they are not being used and just take up space.
- Adamstown is different to Lucan where the houses are bigger and the gardens are bigger and therefore amenities are key to the success of Adamstown.

## **Management**

- Financial burden of estate management is an issue.
- People feel like they have no control over estate management or its cost as there is too large an area covered by the same company and still controlled by developer. For example there is one large management company for The Paddocks and Castle/Square and developers have been slow to hand this back to residents.
- This kind of management arrangement (and the entire concept) is more susceptible to economic downturn and there does not appear to be any contingency around this.
- Concern that there is a significant proportion of investor housing and therefore less of a contribution and connection to the area.
- The financial position of the developers is a separate issue to the provision of facilities – this raises questions around how the phasing mechanism is working.

## **ADVICE ON WHAT THE REVIEW SHOULD ADDRESS**

There was no shortage of advice! It was even suggested that it was not possible to get at all the issues in an extensive manner in a two-hour meeting. As one of the planner/facilitators commented:

*“This session seemed really fast paced as everyone in the group tried to talk and to ask questions and they certainly could have stayed on and continued this discussion for longer. I felt this was a positive session even though it could have been more organised on my part. I gave time to clarify what issues could be considered in the review and how important it was for people to make a submission. People stayed on after the end to continue to make their points. At this stage, a*

*quieter member of the group stayed back to make very positive comments about Adamstown and the multi-cultural and well connected community that she had seen there that evening. She wished she were part of a community like this."*

People voiced fears around the timing of the review as the first people only took up residence in 2006 and therefore the plan was still at a very early stage. It was hoped that the review would not be manipulated so that the Council and the Developers could renege on their responsibilities.

### ***Assumptions behind the review questioned***

- There was a question regarding whether the Planning Authority is assuming that a change of house type would encourage people to move to Adamstown. Residents would like to see strong independent market research done to back this assumption up. People don't want the plan to be undermined by this assumption
- The review should not be a short-term knee jerk reaction to a banking crisis – the problem is that people can't access mortgages – not necessarily a problem with the housing type in the current scheme.
- The principles of the original concept represent important assumptions that should be sustained. The progressive nature of the development and the provision of infrastructure in tandem with residential development are good.

### ***Concerns about the Review***

A number of concerns were mentioned and those conducting the review were encouraged to 'hold their nerve' and not allow Adamstown to be a victim of the economic crisis in the short term:

- Based on recent planning permissions, people see the risk of weakening of finish / materials/ design. As one group stated "A different layout would be criminal as it would create a divide between the first occupants and the later occupants.
- The phasing mechanism for the provision of facilities and infrastructure risks being changed and this will create a very negative impact. For example, consider phasing and time-scale with perhaps more phases and fewer units in each phase but infrastructure has to be prioritised
- There is an immediate need for a community building and focal point. Has the review got any capacity to address this problem and will it be able to fast track a town centre?
- It is accepted that there is a link between profitable housing output and roll out of infrastructure and facilities. But changes need to be based on independent market research. This cannot only be led from commercial interests.

## ***An emerging consensus***

In reviewing the meetings, at the de-brief afterwards, it was suggested that the table groups generally agreed on the following:

1. The review should position Adamstown in the longer term and knee-jerk reactions to the economic downturn should be avoided.
2. Overall people felt that a slight lowering of the density and a change of house type would be possible. However, there were also reservations as such a change might result in a reduction of the quality of housing or impinge on the character of Adamstown.
3. The high standard of design and material finishes e.g. 'The European feel' should continue through a balanced mix of housing types
4. In reducing housing densities, seek a balance between compact development and low density development. Provide housing units that are flexible to changing household needs and provide for family needs. One suggestion was that the housing mix could be 70% houses and 30% apartments/duplexes.
5. The provision of local services – including a community centre, lighting, public spaces and managed parking – are seen as a priority. Some people even suggested that evidence of infrastructural progress should be seen before further housing development was allowed.
6. Rollout of community facilities needs a rethink – can't be dependent on developers. Business models for the provision of community facilities should be looked at.
7. Access and use of safe open space in an area of high population density is regarded as a necessity. Parks, playing pitches, walks, cycle routes and roads were all seen as necessary when living in a modern-day urban environment. Some of these comments were linked to a desire to see Adamstown as a sustainable, low carbon emitting community.
8. Create a mechanism whereby the district centre could be brought forward, to attract more residential development in the scheme. This would make Adamstown more attractive to potential buyers. The same applies to Tandy's Lane Park: can the delivery of this park be brought forward in phasing, can the developers be required to deliver it?
9. In the same way there has been temporary playing pitches – provide more temporary open space
10. Consider increasing and shortening the number of phases i.e. have 25 phases but with only 100 houses to be delivered per phase.
11. The North/South link was seen as pivotal in enabling access to services within Adamstown but also as a means of sustaining connections between Adamstown and the wider Lucan area.
12. The initial plan for Adamstown was for it to be a stand-alone neighbourhood. But now the inter-connections between Lucan and Adamstown should be addressed. For example, the provision of facilities could be seen as serving these inter-connected communities and this might empower SDCC to provide facilities through property tax and reduce the reliance on developers.

## PLANNING AS A CYCLICAL PROCESS

Interestingly, a theme around how planning needs to be an on-going process and go beyond formal reviews and legislation. For example, there was a suggestion that reviews should happen periodically and there should be a frequent assessment of the scheme to see how Adamstown is progressing both as a physical place and as a community.

People were supportive of the idea that planning has changed and that they do not wish to return to the urban sprawl/semi-detached model of towns from the past. It is believed that the principles and theories that informed how Adamstown was planned are still valid and that the experience of living in Adamstown confirms this. At both meetings, there were lively, respectful exchanges of opinions and it was clear that this was also an opportunity to learn about the original vision and ambition for Adamstown.

*“What I feel was most important about the process was the provision of information on the scheme and what is possible under a review; to provide up to date information on the current status of the scheme and the numbers of units developed etc. This helped to give residents a clear understanding that the intention is to continue to realise the vision for the overall area and to set the context for the review and give the group a clearer understanding that we were not providing a new scheme and what was possible under a review. The group ensured that they discussed the less strategic issues that are of great importance to them in the here and now but were very open to the more strategic issues by the end of the session.” (planner/facilitator)*

The quality of the conversations and the range of people involved suggest that these meetings also have an educative aspect both for the planners and the wider community. Adamstown as a concept is still very new and it still requires an explanation. These community consultation meetings helped to affirm the vision through hearing about the reality of lived experience. As one group suggested, it is time for SDCC to hold its nerve and continue to support the future of Adamstown.

## ENDING FOR NOW.....

In the final analysis (for now) it would be easy to forget that people ‘bought into’ Adamstown with their money and emotion. They want a home, communal facilities, a thriving local economy and ready access to the rest of the city and beyond. These meetings confirmed that people want to be part of a vibrant, urban-based community.

At the facilitator de-brief, it was even suggested that the downturn may provide some breathing space to build community and to take a more considered approach to future planning requirements. The planning team are now well equipped to advise on amendments and they look forward to further engaging with the community as the review happens over the next few months.

## South Dublin County Council

### Facilitation Team

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### A final thank you

*The Adamstown Review team would like to thank everyone who took the time to attend the consultation workshops, to participate in the dialogue and to encourage others to come along. Thank you for contributing to the future success and wellbeing of Adamstown. If you want to add anything else or have any further queries, please feel free to contact a member of the Adamstown Review Team on 01 4149000 ext. no. 2313/2386*