

ISSUE 64
AUGUST 2026

Little Village

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EDITORIAL

Where has the summer gone I hear you say? We have spent most of July opening windows, closing curtains and searching the shops for electric fans and in the midst of all of that there are people planning for Christmas..... yes, you heard meChristmas!!!!!!!! Admit it.....you know who you are!!!!!! Have a look at our funny article on "Christmas in July" and I bet you can relate to it.

Influencers!!! Who are they? Who decided we need them and their advice? Apparently, we ourselves have made that decision. We all listen and are influenced by them because they have managed to turn their opinions into a very lucrative career for themselves. Enjoy our piece on the topic and then give your own opinion.

Finally, a lovely humorous submission we received from a committed reader of Little Village about everyone's favourite pet hate.....Ironing.....and no ordinary boring household stuff... but the ironing of bedsheets.

Until next time, enjoy the remainder of our wonderful summer.

The Little Village Team

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- Clonsilla Inn
- The Carpenter Inn
- The Carlton Hotel Tyrrelstown



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We welcome it enthusiastically, complain that it is too hot after twenty minutes and immediately prepare for its disappearance. Solar power once seemed better suited to Spain or Australia than to a country where summer plans usually include waterproof clothing.

Yet a quiet change is taking place on the roofs of Dublin 15.

Mountview Youth and Community Centre has installed 66 solar panels, battery storage and a 35-kilowatt generating system. The project is expected to save the centre about €10,000 a year in energy costs.

There was no great ceremony and no crowd waiting to see the electricity arrive. The panels simply sit on the roof, quietly getting on with the job.

That may be what makes the project so interesting.

Community centres use a considerable amount of electricity. They are often open from morning until late evening, hosting childcare, sports, youth clubs, exercise classes, meetings and activities for older people. There are halls to light, kitchens to operate and equipment to power.

Every euro spent on electricity is money that cannot be used for programmes, repairs or new facilities.

An annual saving of €10,000 could fund a great deal in a busy community centre. It could help keep classes affordable, replace worn equipment or support activities for young people.

The environmental benefit matters, but the financial argument may be what persuades other organisations to follow.

Climate change can feel enormous and distant. An electricity bill arriving at the end of the month is much easier to understand.

Does solar really work in Ireland?

The obvious question is whether solar panels can be effective in a country where the weather forecast

often promises sunshine and rain in the same sentence.

Solar photovoltaic panels use daylight rather than heat. They produce more electricity in strong sunshine, but they also generate power on bright, cloudy days.

Ireland may not have Mediterranean temperatures, but it has long summer days and enough usable daylight to make rooftop solar practical.

Naturally, output falls during winter. No amount of engineering can stop an Irish December afternoon becoming dark before many people have finished lunch.

That is where battery storage becomes useful. Electricity generated when the building is quiet can be stored and used later, particularly when evening activities begin.

The system will not make Mountview completely independent of the national grid, but it should allow the centre to use more of the power produced on its own roof.

From novelty to normality

Not long ago, solar panels on an Irish house attracted attention. Neighbours wondered whether the owners had discovered a secret source of permanent sunshine.

Now the panels are becoming an ordinary part of the suburban landscape.

The important questions have changed. People are less interested in the technology itself and more interested in what it costs, how much it saves and how long it takes to recover the investment.

That is a sign that solar power is moving from novelty to normality.

Dublin 15 has many buildings that could potentially benefit, including schools, sports clubs, community halls, offices and shops.

Schools use much of their electricity during daylight hours. Businesses are often busiest when panels are

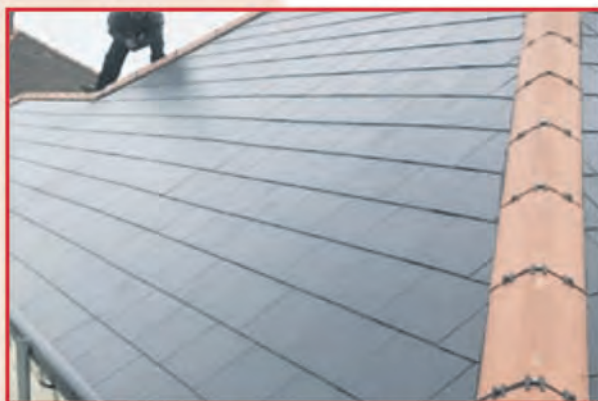


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producing power. Sports clubs may need batteries because their heaviest demand comes in the evening.

Not every roof will be suitable. Some buildings are shaded, some roofs may need repairs and some organisations may not use enough daytime electricity to justify a large system.

Solar power should not be treated as magic. Any proposal should include realistic estimates, equipment warranties and a clear calculation of likely savings.

The phrase “save up to” should always be treated with care. Almost anything can save an impressive amount under perfect conditions, including turning off every appliance and closing the building permanently.

What about ordinary homes?

The same calculations are being made in houses across Dublin 15.

Solar panels may be particularly useful in homes occupied during the day, where more of the electricity can be used as it is generated. Households with electric cars, heat pumps or immersion heaters may also be able to make good use of their own power.

There is usually a behavioural adjustment.

The washing machine and dishwasher may be switched on in the afternoon rather than late at night. Someone in the house begins checking an app and announcing that this is the ideal moment to boil the

kettle.

Tea may occasionally be delayed because a cloud has passed over Castleknock.

Behind the novelty, however, is a major change. Households are no longer simply consuming electricity. They can now generate it, store it and sometimes sell the surplus.

A local example

The Mountview project matters because it is visible and practical.

Residents can see the panels. The savings can be measured. The money retained by the centre can be used in the community below.

Children using the building may grow up regarding solar panels as a normal part of schools, homes and public buildings.

That is how large changes often happen.

Not through one dramatic moment, but through thousands of ordinary decisions: one community centre, one school, one clubhouse and one house at a time.

Ireland will continue to have clouds, rain and those uncertain days when the washing is taken in and put out again three times.

Solar power does not require Dublin 15 to become Spain. It simply requires us to make better use of the daylight we already have.



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CHRISTMAS IN JULY

A fictional heartwarming story

I know we have just had July, and the heat was beyond the endurance of the Irish people. We are opening windows, closing curtains, searching for electric fans and wondering how anyone survives in Spain.

And yet, even now, there are people planning Christmas.

You know the type. They began in January, moving quietly through the sales, buying discounted candles, novelty socks and presents for people they might not even be speaking to by December.

"I'm nearly finished," they will announce in July.

Finished what? Christmas is five months away.

From now on, they will begin the countdown. One hundred and fifty days to Christmas. One hundred days. Ten Fridays. They know these figures without consulting a calendar. They probably have an app.

After Halloween, they will no longer try to hide it. The pumpkins will barely have gone soft before the first Christmas cushion appears on the sofa. Then comes the festive mug, the scented candle and the tea towel showing a robin wearing a scarf.

There must also be a new decoration every year.

No old decoration is ever thrown out. This would be unthinkable. Every bauble purchased since 1987 is still in active service, including several made by children in primary school from cardboard, glue and something that may once have been pasta.

The Christmas tree, therefore, becomes less a tree and more an overloaded shelving system. Every branch carries six baubles, three angels, two wooden reindeer and a snowman whose hat has been missing since 2004.

Once, the Christmas tree went up on Christmas Eve. It was part of the excitement. Now, many trees appear on the first of December, while the more committed Christmas enthusiasts begin in November.

Some would put the tree up after the August Bank Holiday if they thought the neighbours would tolerate it.

Then there are the outdoor lights.

This began in America, where entire houses are illuminated strongly enough to be seen from space. It has now reached Ireland. By late November, perfectly respectable housing estates are filled with flashing



reindeer, inflatable snowmen and illuminated sleighs apparently landing on semi-detached roofs.

There is always one house that goes too far.

You know the one. It has lights around every window, lights along the guttering, lights on the hedge and a glowing Santa halfway up the chimney. Passing aircraft are probably advised to alter course.

The electricity bill must arrive in January with a covering letter from the power company asking if they have recently opened a small factory.

I suppose all this brightness is our way of fighting the winter. December is dark, wet and cold, so we fill it with lights, food, drink and songs we have been hearing since October.

For a few weeks, we convince ourselves that winter is magical.

Then January arrives.

The decorations come down. The tree is dragged through the hall, shedding needles and dignity. The outdoor lights are switched off, leaving the house looking strangely abandoned.

There are no festive songs for January. Nobody has written, "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like the Third Week of Rain."

The fridge contains half a jar of cranberry sauce and several cheeses nobody wants. The credit card bill arrives. Outside, it is dark at four o'clock, and the weather forecast offers rain followed by heavier rain.

This is when thoughts turn to a winter holiday in the sun.

We look online at photographs of Tenerife, where happy people sit beside swimming pools under blue skies. We check the prices, quietly close the website and decide that Donegal is lovely at this time of year.

Then we begin counting the days to spring.

And somewhere, one of those organised Christmas people is already in the January sales, buying another illuminated reindeer.



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Dear Resident

I hope you are keeping well. I have included below an update on some issues which I have been working on. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if I can be of any assistance.

All the best, *John*

COOLMINE COMMUNITY SCHOOL – SIGN THE PETITION!

Students and staff in Coolmine Community School are forced to work in completely unacceptable conditions in a 54-year-old school building which is not fit for purpose. Students attending classes and taking public exams should not have to walk past buckets lining the corridors to catch rainwater because the roof is constantly leaking.

- The Minister for Education should act immediately to approve the school's application for a new building. The school management has secured emergency works funding twice in the past year, but this was not even sufficient to repair all the holes in the roof and short-term repairs will last for only two years.
- Only a new school building will allow the school community to meet essential educational needs.

**Please sign the petition launched
by the Coolmine School Parents'
Association here:**



WHAT NEXT FOR DUNSINK?

The proposed urban area plan for Dunsink will involve the development of the largest remaining landbank in the Dublin area. New housing is badly needed but we need to avoid the mistakes of the past in creating isolated housing estates without adequate services and amenities. The final plan must address valid concerns raised in the consultation around high rise development, impact on rural lanes such as Dunsinea lane and Scribblestown lane and protection of the local environment. I have made a submission calling for:

- **Infrastructure led planning so that essential public transport links, schools and community facilities are delivered in conjunction with housing.** Essential bus routes should be provided in the first phase of development and the Luas extension for Tyrrelstown should be brought forward as a priority.
- **Deliver a range of housing types**, including starter homes, family homes and homes for older residents to trade down, while ensuring a new urban quarter is not dominated by high rise tower blocks. **High rise development should not be happening right beside existing estates or sensitive ecological areas.**
- **Planning for significant affordable and social housing on public land as an urgent priority.**
- Minimise impact on rural lanes and protect the environment, especially the Tolka Valley.



TOWN CENTRE FIRST

It is very welcome that Fingal Council has made a commitment to rolling out Town Centre First for Castleknock and Blanchardstown villages this year. Town Centre First is a national initiative which has great potential to promote renewal of our village centres. Well done to Castleknock Tidy Towns who have put this on the agenda.

Dublin 15 has lost out despite being one of the fastest growing suburban areas in the country, because for too long Government policy has unfairly excluded local suburban villages from national urban and town renewal schemes which are traditionally all targeted at rural towns. That's why being included in Town Centre First is important as a gateway to identify funding for improvements in the streetscape and urban realm, based on an inclusive plan to be prepared by a cross-community Town Team.

I have called for a more fundamental change in Government policy to open up national renewal schemes for suburban village centres such as Castleknock, Blanchardstown, Ongar, Clonsilla and Mulhuddart.

DECISION DELAYED ON PARKING CHARGES AT BLANCHARDSTOWN CENTRE

The decision by An Comisiun Pleanála on the plan for parking charges by SVP Capital, which was due by 17th June, has been delayed as the issue is still being considered by the Commission's planning inspector. I made an appeal in January against the decision by Fingal Council to grant permission for the parking charges, on the basis that the plan:

- is unfair to workers, businesses, customers and local communities.
- will restrict access to vital public and nonprofit services such as Draiocht, Jigsaw, the Blanchardstown Library, HSE and Council offices, ignoring the essential character of the Centre as a community hub for Dublin 15.
- threatens the viability of many businesses at the Centre at a time of major cost of living pressures.

A huge thank you to everyone who signed the **#NoBarrierstoBlanch** petition launched by my colleague Luke Daly against the imposition of parking charges and barriers.

We presented this petition of over 10,600 signatures to the owners of the Centre in March, calling on SVP Capital to drop the charges. This shows the strength of community opposition to the charges across Dublin West.



Presenting petition against parking charges with Luke Daly and Cllr Mary McCamley

THE DAY THE STABILISER WHEELS COME OFF



Learning to ride a bicycle is one of those childhood moments adults remember clearly.

There was usually a parent running behind, holding the saddle and making a promise that was not entirely true.

“I’m still holding you.”

They were not.

For a few seconds, the child pedalled alone. Then they looked back, realised what had happened and cycled directly into a hedge.

For many children, this improvised teaching method worked. For others, learning to cycle is much more difficult.

A child may struggle with balance, coordination, concentration or sensory overload. Starting, steering, pedalling and stopping may each be manageable separately, but overwhelming when attempted together.

[Continues P.12](#)

The familiar instruction to “keep pedalling and don’t wobble” is not especially useful. Nobody is wobbling deliberately.

That is why Fingal’s Learn 2 Cycle programme at Ongar Community Centre matters. The six-week course is designed for children and teenagers with additional needs, with the aim of helping each participant ride a two-wheel bicycle independently.

Learning without pressure

The average housing estate is not an ideal cycling classroom.

There are parked cars, kerbs, dogs, younger siblings offering unwanted advice and neighbours watching from windows. A child who is already anxious about falling may also be dealing with traffic noise, uneven surfaces and the possibility of an audience.

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The Ongar sessions take place indoors in a sports hall, where participants can concentrate on the basic skills without worrying about vehicles, potholes or sudden Irish rain.

There is also time to make mistakes.

One child may begin pedalling during the first lesson. Another may spend several sessions becoming comfortable sitting on the bicycle, placing their feet correctly or trusting that they will not immediately fall.

Neither has failed.

Skills can be broken into manageable stages and repeated without the impatience that sometimes enters family cycling lessons.

Parents begin with encouragement.

"You're doing brilliantly."

After twenty minutes of running behind the bicycle, the encouragement becomes shorter.

"Pedal."

Eventually, it becomes a series of breathless noises that no child can reasonably understand.

A structured lesson allows the instructor to identify the difficulty, while the parent can return to being a supporter rather than an exhausted stabiliser.

Small achievements matter

Cycling looks simple only after you know how to do it.

The rider must balance, steer, pedal, judge speed and remain aware of the surrounding space. If one part becomes uncertain, the bicycle quickly develops a mind of its own.

Learning may begin with the saddle lowered so the rider can push along with their feet. They may practise gliding before adding pedals or concentrate on starting and stopping separately.

To an observer, the improvements may seem small.

A child lifts both feet from the floor for two seconds.

They travel across the hall without support.

They steer around a marker.

They stop without falling.

For the child and family, each can be a major achievement.

The breakthrough may arrive quietly. The instructor releases the bicycle and the participant continues across the hall, perhaps without

initially realising that nobody is holding on.

Something that once seemed impossible has suddenly become possible.

More than riding a bicycle

A bicycle may be described as a toy, but it can also be a child's first real taste of independence.

Learning to cycle means joining brothers, sisters and friends rather than watching from the side. Family bike rides become possible. Trips around the park no longer require complicated arrangements involving scooters, car boots and an adult carrying somebody's bicycle home.

The emotional effect can be just as important.

Children notice what their classmates can do. A skill that seems effortless for others may become a repeated reminder of difference.

Mastering it can change how a young person sees themselves. They have not simply learned to cycle. They have discovered that a difficulty can be approached differently and overcome at their own pace.

There is a broader lesson here too.

We often judge ability by whether somebody succeeds using the usual method. When they do not, we assume the task is beyond them.

Sometimes it is the method that has failed.

A noisy playground may not suit a child who is easily overwhelmed. A shouted instruction may not help someone who needs each movement demonstrated slowly. The answer is not always to lower expectations, but to remove unnecessary obstacles.

At the beginning of the six weeks, bicycles will wobble and feet will slip from pedals. Some participants may wonder why adults are so determined that they should sit on a narrow saddle attached to a machine that cannot stand upright by itself.

But there will also be moments of courage.

A foot lifted from the floor.

A first push forward.

A hand released from the saddle.

And, for some, that unforgettable journey across the hall on two wheels.

To everyone else, it may look like a child riding a bicycle.

To the child, it may feel like freedom.

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The Monday Leftover Meal

Suddenly, Monday is no longer the grim day of leftovers.

We generally eat well at the weekend. Saturday might involve a steak, Sunday could produce a roast with gravy, and by Sunday evening we have eaten as though Monday may never come.

But Monday always comes.

It is written somewhere, possibly in an old household ledger, that Monday must be a day of restraint. Steak on a Monday is regarded as reckless extravagance. A roast chicken would suggest you have won the Lotto and are trying to keep it quiet. Monday is not a day for fresh ingredients. Monday is the day when the fridge door is opened and an inventory is taken.

Half a bowl of mashed potato.

Three carrots.

A spoonful of peas.

Two pieces of broccoli that have lost the will to live.

And something in a covered dish that nobody can immediately identify.

At this point, some readers will be confused. "Leftover mashed potato?" they will say. "What is that?"

These are people who live with growing teenagers, hungry sons, or family members who continue eating until the serving dish has been scraped clean. Other readers belong to households where uneaten food is casually tipped into the bin without a moment's reflection.

These people have clearly never lived with a product of the "waste not, want not" generation.

In our house, leftovers are carefully collected, covered, and stored. Nothing is discarded until it has either been eaten or has developed its own Eircode.

And this brings me to one of the great Monday dishes: bubble and squeak.

Yes, it is English.

I realise I may have lost a few readers there. Some will already be closing the page and muttering something about colonialism. But stay with me. Bubble and squeak is too useful to be dismissed merely because of where it came from.



It has no fixed recipe, which is ideal because neither does the contents of your fridge.

The base is leftover mashed potato. If the mash does not already contain cheese, add a generous handful of grated mature cheddar. This immediately lifts the dish from "using things up" to "carefully planned comfort food."

Then inspect the vegetables. Chop everything small and mix it into the mash. Peas, carrots, cabbage, broccoli, turnip - anything that can still be recognised as food.

Add some finely chopped onion. In fact, add onion whether you have leftover onion or not. Onion gives the impression that you knew what you were doing from the start.

Then wash your hands and get stuck in.

Squeeze the whole mixture together until the

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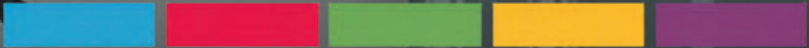
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various components have stopped arguing and become one. Shape it into burger-sized patties, coat them lightly in flour, and set them aside.

Heat a little oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Add the patties and cook them gently for a few minutes on each side. Do not rush them. If you try to turn them too soon, they will collapse into a vegetable landslide.

Towards the end, add a knob of butter to help them develop a lovely golden crust. This also removes any final suspicion that Monday is meant to be healthy.

The finished bubble and squeak can be served with eggs for breakfast, salad for lunch, or sausages and beans for dinner. It can accompany bacon, chicken, fish, or whatever else you happen to find.

Suddenly, Monday is no longer the grim day of leftovers.

It is Bubble and Squeak Night.

The remains of Sunday's dinner have been transformed into something crisp, cheesy, and deeply satisfying. The sad vegetables have been given a second chance. The mashed potato has found a purpose.

And best of all, everyone eats it without realising they are being served the contents of yesterday's fridge.



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Alcoholics Anonymous Corduff D15

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and simultaneously online on:

Zoom Meeting ID: 83297097884

Passcode: 478993

- Our meeting is OPEN to anyone interested in learning about AA and how we help others affected by alcoholism.
- Alcoholics Anonymous is an international Fellowship of men and women who have had a drinking problem.
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Two Hundred Years of Brass in Blanchardstown

It is difficult to keep any organisation going for 200 years.

Governments fall, businesses disappear and local committees can be destroyed by a disagreement over who was supposed to bring the biscuits. Yet Blanchardstown Brass Band has survived since 1826.

When the band was formed, Blanchardstown was a rural village rather than the centre of one of Ireland's largest suburbs. There was no shopping centre, no M50 and certainly no WhatsApp group reminding musicians that rehearsal had been moved to 8.30.

Originally called St Brigid's Brass and Reed Band, it has played through two centuries of social, political and physical change. The name became Blanchardstown Brass Band in 1971, reflecting its all-brass line-up and giving the band a clearer local identity.

That continuity is remarkable. It also tells us something about the value of voluntary organisations.

A brass band cannot survive on history alone. Every generation must find new musicians, teach beginners, raise money, repair instruments, attend rehearsals and persuade somebody to carry the tuba.

A soundtrack to history

The band's story is closely connected to Irish history.

Its first known appearance in a national newspaper came in 1841, when it played at a Temperance Movement Mass in the Phoenix Park on St Patrick's Day. Two years later, it attended one of Daniel O'Connell's great political gatherings at the Hill of Tara.

Over the following decades, the band appeared at political demonstrations, labour events, Home Rule meetings and national commemorations. In 1922, it joined the funeral processions of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, playing alongside bands from across the country on the long route from the Pro-Cathedral to Glasnevin Cemetery.

These were not merely performances. Before radio, television and sound systems, bands gave public occasions their atmosphere. They led marches, marked celebrations and provided the music that told a crowd something important was happening.

Wherever there was a parade, procession, protest or commemoration, somebody eventually had to produce a large drum.

Twice deprived of its instruments

Continues P.24



Roderic O'GORMAN^{TD}

A Chairde,

Below I share some of the latest updates on issues I have been working on in the constituency. Further info and updates are shared on my website and on my social media.



Retailers Pull Sale of Non-Compliant E-Scooters

Retailers have now been pressured into pulling from their shelves any e-scooters that exceed the 20km/h national speed limit or that are marketed to children.

I welcome recent moves to fully ban the marketing and sale of e-scooters to children, however, I remain cautious of excessive restrictions on their legal use as many people depend on e-scooters for their daily commute as lower cost option to driving or where public transport connections are not sufficient.

I will continue to work to ensure that government action does not unfairly penalise law-abiding citizens.



Update on Tackling Ghost Buses

The NTA is set to roll out its new Automatic Vehicle Location System by 2027 - one system for all public transport routes that will relay accurate information via real-time monitors and phone apps. This should massively improve the accuracy of data going forward and minimise the existence of ghost buses. I will continue following this development and on bus reliability in general, particularly with regards to the 37, 38 and 39 services.



I recently attended the opening of the new supermarket in the Kilmartin Centre in Tyrrelstown



Championing Higher Animal Welfare Standards

Despite recent progress in animal welfare, practices like greyhound racing and hare coursing still impact animals' well-being here in Ireland.

Recent figures that I uncovered from the Department of Agriculture reveal that in 2021 alone, 11,600 greyhounds were bred for racing. Of these, only 450 are still racing, 1,500 have been rehomed, and a staggering 3,300 are dead - they did not reach their fifth birthday.

I support decoupling greyhound racing from horse racing funding and remain committed to strengthening legislation that protects animals and ends state support for cruelty.

Please don't hesitate to get
in touch on any issue

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The history of the band has not always been harmonious.

In 1903, a fire destroyed the old thatched society rooms used for rehearsals, taking many of the instruments with it. Replacements were bought the following year, including a drum that the band still possesses.

Then, in January 1923, during the Civil War, the former local courthouse where the band practised was blown up. Once again, instruments were lost. The newly established Department of Finance later awarded the band £80 in compensation.

Losing one rehearsal room in a disaster might discourage an organisation. Losing two suggests that somebody, somewhere, was very determined that band practice should not continue.

The members persisted.

A disused army hut was bought for £15 and erected on Mill Road as a new band room. It remained in use for decades, until members began raising money for a more permanent centre in the late 1970s.

The fundraising effort included a “Buy a Brick” campaign. The new band centre opened in 1980 and was finally paid for in 1984.

It is a familiar story in Irish community life. A building appears because generations of local people organised raffles, sponsored walks and collections, refusing to accept that the money could not be found.

Uniforms, watches and long service

A brass band requires more than instruments. It also requires uniforms.

The band bought its first full uniform in 1959 at a total cost of £162. Each outfit included a navy jacket and trousers, light-blue trim, a white shirt, blue tie and cap. The parish priest blessed the uniforms outside St Brigid’s Church, ensuring that the musicians were protected both musically and spiritually.

Further uniforms followed as fashions changed. Blue blazers appeared in the 1970s, followed by green uniforms with gold stripes and red-and-gold lanyards. Later came wine-coloured blazers.

Old band photographs are therefore valuable social documents. They record changing faces, changing streets and changing opinions about what constitutes a smart jacket.

The records also reveal extraordinary personal loyalty.

In 1987, five members received gold watches after each had given more than 40 years of service. Mick Harford, who joined as a young musician, remained involved for nearly 70 years and later served as secretary and musical director. Joe McGregor was also a member for more than seven decades.

Modern life does not encourage this kind of commitment. We abandon television series after two episodes and complain when an online delivery takes more than a day. These musicians devoted much of their lives to rehearsals, performances and passing their knowledge to the next generation.

From film sets to the Westlink

The band has appeared in some unexpected places.

In 1977, members featured in the film *The Purple Taxi*, which starred Peter Ustinov, Fred Astaire and Charlotte Rampling. In 1990, the band played at the opening of the Westlink toll bridge. In 2001, it performed at the opening of Farmleigh House, and over the years it has played at the National Concert Hall, Áras an Uachtaráin and numerous festivals, charity concerts and civic events.

This variety is part of the appeal of a local band.

One week the musicians may be performing at a formal national event. The next, they may be standing outdoors at Christmas, attempting to play carols while cold air freezes both fingers and enthusiasm.

The audience may include a president, a film star or somebody trying to persuade a small child not to climb inside the bass drum.

Every performance becomes part of the band’s collective memory.

Passing on the music

The greatest threat to any long-established group is not catastrophe but the failure to find successors.

Blanchardstown Brass Band has continued to teach young musicians and run beginner classes. A training band was established in Scoil Bhríde in 2014, while an adult beginners’ class was started after the pandemic. The adult group later performed at Draíocht.

That work matters because brass instruments do not teach themselves.

A beginner must first learn how to produce a sound. This can be an alarming stage for everyone nearby. The earliest notes from a

brass instrument may suggest that a large animal is trapped somewhere in the building.

Gradually, breath, lips, timing and confidence begin to work together. Noise becomes music. The individual player learns to listen to the whole band rather than merely concentrating on surviving to the end of the piece.

A community band teaches more than music. It teaches punctuality, teamwork and the uncomfortable truth that everyone else notices when you play the wrong note.

A bicentenary worth celebrating

In May 2026, the band marked its 200th anniversary with the Blanchardstown Festival of Brass at Scoil Bhríde. Twelve bands and approximately 400 musicians took part, culminating in a massed performance. Old uniforms, photographs and instruments were also displayed, connecting the present-day musicians with those who had gone before them.

A bicentenary history written by band member and tuba player Paul O'Dwyer has also recorded the story from 1826 to 2026.

The celebration was not simply about the survival of a musical organisation. It was about continuity in a place that has changed almost

beyond recognition.

The rural village became a suburb. Fields became housing estates. Roads, railways and shopping centres transformed the landscape. Generations arrived, raised families and moved on.

Through it all, the band continued to rehearse. That may be its greatest achievement.

For 200 years, people have chosen to give up evenings and weekends, learn difficult instruments, raise funds and turn up to perform for their neighbours. None of it happened automatically.

Blanchardstown Brass Band survived because local people repeatedly decided that it was worth preserving.

When the musicians gather and the conductor raises the baton, the first note carries more than sound. Behind it are old uniforms, vanished rehearsal rooms, funeral processions, sponsored walks, Christmas concerts and generations of players whose names may no longer be widely remembered.

Two hundred years after it began, the Blanchardstown sound is still being heard.

And somewhere at the back, as always, somebody is carrying the tuba.

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The Bathroom Scales

The bad-news machine with a digital screen



There are few things in the house as nasty as the bathroom scales. They sit there on the floor saying nothing, pretending to be useful, when really, they are just waiting to ruin your morning.

You never stand on them at night. Nobody in their right mind does that. At night you are carrying the full weight of the day. Dinner, cups of tea, maybe a biscuit or two, and all the little things you ate while standing at the fridge pretending you were only looking.

No, the scales are for the morning. First thing. Before breakfast. Before tea. Ideally before your body has realised it is awake.

You step on gently, because there is a foolish part of you that thinks a gentle approach might produce a kinder result. You hold your breath, because air must weigh something. Then you look down.

Same as yesterday.

Not an ounce gone.

This is hard to accept, especially when the day before you had behaved like a saint. You had eaten only twice, and one of those meals was more of a rumour than a meal. You had walked until your smartwatch congratulated you, which is always annoying. It lights up as if you have climbed Everest, when in fact you have walked round the block a few times trying not to look in people's windows.

"Goal achieved," it says.

What goal? Not dying on the footpath?

Still, you go to bed pleased with yourself. You imagine the fat quietly leaving during the night, perhaps by some process known only to slim people and personal trainers.

But no. The scales don't care. Same weight.

So the next day you get serious. Eggs. That's the answer. Eggs and no carbohydrates. Bread is gone. Potatoes are gone. Pasta is gone. Basically, everything that makes life bearable is gone.

You eat boiled eggs. Scrambled eggs. Eggs with the sad look of food that knows it is not toast.

By evening, you are not so much hungry as offended. You watch other people eating normal food and begin to resent them. Even the dog looks like he has a better diet.

Still, you hold firm. No biscuits. No crisps. No slice of bread "just to settle the stomach," which is a phrase that has excused many crimes in Irish kitchens.

Next morning, back to the scales.

Same weight.

At this stage you start investigating. Maybe the scales are on a bad tile. You move them six inches to the left. Same result. You move them back. Same result. You take the battery out and put it in again, because that is the full extent of modern technical repair.

Same result.

Then comes the lasagna.

It is in the fridge, looking harmless. Not a big family lasagna. Just a modest little thing from the supermarket with "350 calories" written on the front. Three hundred and fifty calories. That is nearly a salad.

You tell yourself you will eat half. Then you remember life is short and half a lasagna is a ridiculous insult to the person who invented lasagna.

So you eat the lot.

And it is beautiful. Pasta, sauce, cheese, comfort, happiness. For ten minutes, you are at peace with the world.

The next morning, you approach the scales with some nervousness, but also with a solid legal argument. It was only 350 calories. It said so on the packet. In print. Surely that has to stand for something.

You step on.

Two pounds up.

Two pounds.

How can a 300-gram lasagna add two pounds to a person overnight? That is not science. That is black magic. Somewhere inside the body there must be a small office where bitter little men in brown cardigans see lasagna arriving and say, "Right lads, emergency storage."

It makes no sense. You can walk miles, eat eggs, drink water, refuse biscuits, and nothing happens. Then you eat one innocent lasagna and wake up carrying the weight of a small terrier.

So now the scales remain in the bathroom, but the trust is gone. They are not a health device. They are a bad-news machine with a digital screen.

And yet tomorrow morning you will stand on them again.

First thing.
Before breakfast.
Holding your breath.

Because hope, unlike lasagna, seems to weigh nothing at all.

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Almost one in four workers in Ireland would switch jobs for a pet-friendly workplace



- A new survey from Mars Ireland reveals more than a third (36%) of Irish workers prioritize pet-friendly policies over traditional workplace perks and other benefits.

- 85% of employees in Ireland say pets create a more relaxed atmosphere at work.

- 54% of Irish workers believe companies with pet-friendly policies are more supportive of employees transitioning to increased office-based working.

- 34% say a formal, well-managed pets-in-the-office policy signals that a company genuinely cares about employee wellbeing.

As companies around the world celebrate Bring Your Dog to Work Day 2026, a new study by Mars Ireland has revealed that pet-friendly workplaces are no longer a “nice-to-have” with 23% of workers in Ireland highlighting that they would consider switching jobs for a pet-friendly workplace, while 56% said their employment decisions would be influenced by whether pets were allowed in the workplace – this figure raises to 60% among those aged 25-34.

The Pet-Friendly Advantage (PFA) Report, commissioned by Mars Incorporated, global leader in pet care and creator of beloved brands including PEDIGREE® and WHISKAS®, surveyed more than 1,000 employees across Ireland, revealing pet-friendly policies as a powerful tool for improving workplace wellbeing, culture, and employee retention.

Forget free snacks and employee discounts – Irish employees want pet-friendly offices

With 85% of employees in Ireland saying that pets create a more relaxed atmosphere at work, it is no surprise that pet-friendly offices are becoming a significant factor in employment decisions, often outweighing traditional office perks such as cycle to work schemes, free snacks and social events.

A clear generational shift is emerging in Ireland, with Gen Z and Millennials demonstrating a change in attitudes towards workplace perks. The PFA report reveals that:

- 34% of 18-24-year-olds actively look for pet-friendly policies when job hunting, compared with just 9% of workers aged 55 and above.

- 42% of Ireland’s younger generation prioritize these policies over enhanced personal benefits, such as parental leave or personal healthcare, compared to just 13% of those over the age of 55.

As this generational shift in attitudes continues, it’s now evident that pet-friendly policies are becoming a must-have benefit for companies to secure and keep talent.

Pet policies show that a company cares and influence employment decisions.

Over one third (34%) of respondents agree that having a pet office policy shows that a company genuinely cares about employee wellbeing, and that it suggests a more modern, forward-thinking work culture. Over a fifth of respondents agreed that such a policy would make them feel more loyal to their company or make a company more attractive when searching for a new job.

In terms of employee benefits, the inclusion of pet insurance offered as part of the employee benefits package for pet owners would influence 62% of male employees, rising to 72% among women in their employment choice

Other office pet policies that would influence employment decisions include:

- Flexible or hybrid working policy to accommodate pet care (67%)

- Paid leave for new pet parents or to care for sick pets (61%)

- Financial support for pet care while travelling for work (63%)

- An in-office pet care service such as a dog walker or a pet care zone (64%)

“Bring Your Dog to Work Day is a fantastic celebration, and at Mars we’ve long understood the positive impact pets can have in the workplace,” said Paolo Rigamonti, Regional President, Mars Pet Nutrition Europe. “New data from our Pet Friendly Advantage report makes the case even clearer: pet-friendly workplaces support wellbeing, strengthen culture and are increasingly important for attracting and retaining talent. Every day should be Bring Your Dog to Work Day.”

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Growing More Than Vegetables in Blanchardstown

There is a corner of the TU Dublin campus in Blanchardstown where the usual rules of college life do not apply.

Nobody is rushing to a lecture. There are no examinations, assignment deadlines or anxious conversations about whether an essay submitted at 11.59pm technically counts as being on time.

Instead, people are planting seeds, pulling weeds, turning compost and waiting patiently for vegetables to do something useful.

This is the GLAS Community Garden, a half-acre shared garden developed by TU Dublin, Global Action Plan and Fingal County Council. It occupies an elevated corner of the 56-acre Blanchardstown campus and is open to students, staff and the wider Dublin 15 community.

At first glance, it is a place for growing food.

Look a little closer, however, and it becomes clear that vegetables are only part of the harvest.

A garden without private territory

The word glas means green in Irish, but it is also used here as an abbreviation for Green Living and Sustainability.

The garden was launched in May 2023 as a practical space where people could learn about food growing, biodiversity and more sustainable ways of living. This spring, it celebrated its third anniversary with a gathering attended by volunteers, community representatives and TU Dublin staff. A tree was planted to mark the occasion, which is probably the most appropriate way possible to celebrate a garden's birthday.

Unlike a traditional allotment, the garden is not divided into private plots defended by their owners with the intensity of small European kingdoms.

The work is shared. So is the produce.

Volunteers help with planting, watering, composting and harvesting. Experienced gardeners work alongside complete beginners, including people whose previous horticultural achievements may have consisted of keeping a supermarket basil plant alive for almost a week.

This shared approach is important. Nobody needs to arrive with gardening expertise, expensive tools or a deep understanding of soil acidity. People can learn as they go, ask questions and take part at their own pace.

Global Action Plan says its community gardens welcome people of different ages, backgrounds and abilities, offering opportunities to learn organic gardening while meeting others. The Blanchardstown garden itself was designed to be accessible to a broad range of users.

There is always a useful job available. Some people dig. Some plant. Some water. Others offer encouragement and keep a close eye on the kettle.

Every community project needs a range of talents.

An antidote to suburban isolation

Dublin 15 is one of the most diverse and rapidly developed parts of the country. Thousands of people live close together, yet it is still possible to feel isolated.

Housing estates are not automatically communities. A person may recognise every dog in the neighbourhood without knowing the name of a single owner.

Modern life has also become remarkably efficient at removing casual human contact. We shop online, bank online, work from home and communicate through messages that begin with "Hope you're well" even when

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we have no intention of discussing anyone's health.

A community garden slows things down.

Seeds refuse to respond to emails marked urgent. Potatoes cannot be hurried by a project-management meeting. A courgette will grow at its own pace, regardless of strategic objectives.

Working beside someone creates conversation without forcing it. There is no need for formal introductions or awkward networking. You can simply ask which plants need watering or admit that you cannot tell a weed from something deliberately planted.

The conversation may begin with compost and move on to children, work, food, life in Dublin 15 or memories of gardens elsewhere in the world.

That is one of the quiet strengths of a shared garden. People who might never otherwise meet find themselves working towards the same simple objective: helping something grow.

The garden now brings together students, residents, schools, volunteers and community organisations. Organisers describe it as a place that supports social connection as well as physical and mental wellbeing.

A classroom without walls

The garden is also a practical classroom.

Visitors can learn how compost is made, why pollinators matter, how raised beds work and which plants can survive an Irish summer consisting of sunshine, wind, rain and occasional hail—sometimes before lunch.

Workshops and seasonal events have covered subjects such as raised-bed gardening, fungi, composting and biodiversity. The emphasis is not merely on producing vegetables but on understanding the relationship between food, soil, wildlife and climate.

This matters because food has become strangely disconnected from the ground.

Children may know exactly how to operate a smartphone but be surprised to discover that carrots do not arrive naturally washed and arranged in plastic bags.

Adults are not always much better. Many of us confidently purchase fruit and vegetables while possessing only a vague idea of how they grow. Ask the average person where a peanut comes from and watch uncertainty enter the room.

A community garden restores that connection.

Planting a seed and eventually eating what emerges from it creates a different appreciation of food. It also reveals the amount of work involved. After spending months protecting a cabbage from slugs, few people will regard it as an insignificant vegetable again.

The garden operates using organic and regenerative

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principles, with an emphasis on improving the soil, encouraging biodiversity and sharing knowledge.

This is sustainability made understandable.

Terms such as climate resilience and biodiversity can sound remote when they appear in official documents. They become much clearer when you see insects visiting flowers, food waste becoming compost and healthy soil retaining water.

Good for people who do not garden

You do not need to dream of owning a greenhouse to benefit from a place like GLAS.

Gardening provides gentle physical activity without announcing itself as exercise. Digging, carrying, stretching and walking around the beds all count, even though no smartwatch appears to congratulate you for successfully transplanting onions.

There is also growing recognition of the value of spending time in green spaces. A garden gives people a reason to step away from desks, screens and indoor routines.

For students, it offers a break from study and the pressure of college life. For staff, it provides somewhere to clear the head during the working day. For residents, it is an opportunity to spend time outdoors and take part in a shared local project.

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The benefits are not measured solely by the quantity of vegetables harvested.

A person may come away with new skills, greater confidence or simply the satisfaction of having done something practical. Someone who arrived knowing nobody may leave having arranged to return the following week.

That is growth too, although it cannot be weighed on kitchen scales.

A different use for a university campus

Universities can sometimes feel separate from the places surrounding them. People may pass the entrance every day while assuming the campus is only for students and lecturers.

The GLAS garden challenges that idea.

Its location on the campus loop walk makes it accessible to the wider D15 community, while its workshops and volunteering opportunities invite local people onto university grounds for reasons that have nothing to do with qualifications or academic results.

That openness is valuable.

TU Dublin becomes not simply an institution located in Blanchardstown, but part of the life of Blanchardstown. The garden creates a meeting point between education

and community, between experienced gardeners and curious beginners, and between people of different generations and backgrounds.

It also demonstrates what can be achieved with a relatively small piece of land.

Half an acre will not feed Dublin 15. It will not solve climate change or bring an end to supermarket packaging.

But that is not the standard by which it should be judged. The garden teaches practical skills. It supports wildlife. It brings people together. It gives schools and families somewhere to learn how food grows. It turns an unused corner of a large campus into a place with colour, life and purpose.

Most importantly, it proves that community does not always need to be built through major projects and elaborate strategies.

Sometimes it begins with a few raised beds, a packet of seeds and two strangers trying to decide whether a small green shoot is a vegetable or a weed.

At the GLAS Community Garden, they are growing both food and friendships.

The friendships may turn out to be the more valuable crop.



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The Café Where Nobody Has to Buy a Coffee

There are very few places left where you can sit down without first entering into a financial agreement.

In an ordinary café, the arrangement is clear. You may occupy the chair, but only after purchasing a coffee that may cost nearly as much as lunch did a few years ago. Stay too long and you begin to feel morally obliged to buy a second one, even though your heart is already beating like a bodhrán from the first.

Pubs once served as informal meeting places, but they are no longer inexpensive and not everybody wants a drink. Shopping centres provide warmth and seating, but they are designed to encourage spending. Even the comfortable chairs in furniture shops come with the risk that a salesperson will appear and ask whether you are interested in the matching footstool.

That is why a small initiative at Hartstown Community Centre deserves more attention than it might initially receive.

The centre has launched a complimentary Community Café on Tuesdays from 10am until noon. It provides tea, coffee and a place for local people of all ages to meet. According to Fingal County Council, demand has been strong enough for the centre to consider extending the opening hours during the summer.

On the face of it, this is a modest event.

There is no celebrity chef. Nobody is arranging tiny portions of food on slate. There is unlikely to be a discussion about whether the coffee beans have hints of chocolate, hazelnut or a distant hillside in Colombia.

It is simply somewhere to go.

And that may be exactly why it matters.

The importance of somewhere to go

Many of us spend our working lives dreaming of free time. We imagine retirement, part-time work or the departure of children to school as the moment when life will finally become peaceful.

Then the free time arrives.

At first, it is wonderful. There is no alarm clock, no rush-hour traffic and no manager asking whether you have had a chance to look at the email sent five minutes earlier.

But a quiet morning can become a very long morning.

People can be surrounded by hundreds of houses and still have nobody to speak to. A person may know the make and colour of every car in the street without knowing the names of the people who drive them.

Modern housing estates are busy places, but busyness is not the same as community. People leave early for work, return in the evening, close the front door and begin the nightly negotiations over television programmes, homework and what can be made for dinner from one onion and an item



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in the freezer that has lost its label.

A community café interrupts that routine.

It offers a reason to leave the house, but not an intimidating one. Nobody has to join a committee, demonstrate a talent or promise to attend every week until Christmas. You can arrive, have a cup of tea and talk to somebody.

For a person who lives alone, that conversation may be the only one they have that morning.

For a parent at home with a small child, it may be a welcome encounter with an adult who does not demand snacks every eight minutes.

For somebody new to Dublin 15, it may provide the first opportunity to become more than the person who lives at number 27.

No membership examination required

The difficulty with joining anything new is the suspicion that everybody else already knows one another.

You enter a room and discover that the regulars have established seats, private jokes and detailed knowledge of a disagreement that occurred during the Christmas raffle in 2019.

Community cafés work best when they avoid that feeling.

The welcome has to be genuine. A newcomer should not have to stand uncertainly at the door while a roomful of people turn around to examine them. Someone needs to say hello, point towards the tea and explain that there is no complicated joining process.

The Hartstown event is advertised as free, with tea, coffee and biscuits provided, and everyone welcome.

That last part is important.

Community spaces can sometimes become divided by age. There are activities for toddlers, teenagers, parents or older people, but relatively few places where generations naturally meet.

Yet some of the best conversations occur between people who have little in common on paper.

An older resident may know what Hartstown looked like before the newest estates were built. A younger person may be able to explain why the television has suddenly stopped showing Netflix. A newcomer to Ireland may bring a completely different experience of food, family and community.

Everyone has something to contribute, even if it is only a firm opinion on whether chocolate biscuits are superior to plain ones.

The return of the ordinary café

In earlier generations, people met more casually because daily life forced them to.

They spoke in local shops, at church gates, at school entrances and while waiting for buses that had only a distant connection with a timetable. Neighbours borrowed sugar, ladders and occasionally amounts of money that were never mentioned again.

We have gained convenience since then. We can shop online, bank online, work from home and have food delivered without speaking to anyone beyond a brief “thanks” at the front door.

The problem is that convenience removes accidental

conversation.

You no longer have to ask the person behind the counter whether the bread delivery has arrived. An app tells you. You do not need to walk next door to borrow a drill. You can order one at midnight and have it delivered the next morning, after which it will spend the next 15 years unused in the garage.

The Community Café restores a little of what has been lost. It creates a setting in which conversation does not need an appointment or a specific purpose.

You do not have to discuss anything profound. Most human relationships begin with subjects of no importance whatsoever: the weather, roadworks, the price of electricity or somebody parking in a place that is not technically reserved but has been regarded as belonging to one household since 1998.

From such beginnings, friendships grow.

A building needs people

Hartstown Community Centre recently reopened following a €2 million upgrade, with improved facilities intended to support community groups, sport, childcare, meetings and social activities.

That investment gave the community a better building. Initiatives such as the café give the building a purpose.

A community centre should not be merely a collection of rooms available for hire. It should feel like a public living room: somewhere local people can enter without needing to explain why they are there.

The success of the Tuesday café suggests that the appetite exists. Perhaps the need is not confined to one morning each week or to Hartstown.

Dublin 15 is full of community centres, libraries, sports clubs and other buildings that are busy during scheduled activities but quieter at other times. Opening more of them for informal gatherings could make a genuine difference, particularly for people who are isolated, recently retired, working from home or new to the area.

It does not require an elaborate programme. Sometimes a kettle, a few tables and a person willing to welcome newcomers can achieve more than a glossy strategy document.

The value of a free chair

Of course, the tea and coffee are not genuinely without cost. Somebody pays for the supplies, heats the building, arranges the room and washes the cups.

But “free” means something important to the person arriving.

It means they are not measuring whether they can afford to come every week. They are not calculating whether one coffee can reasonably justify occupying a table for two hours. They are not excluded because money is tight.

They are guests rather than customers.

That distinction may be the most valuable part of the whole idea. In a world where almost every space has become commercial, Hartstown Community Café offers something increasingly rare: a chair that does not come with an obligation to buy anything.

All it asks is that you sit down.

And perhaps say hello.

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Could Dublin 15 Become a Weekend Destination?

For most people living in Dublin 15, the words “weekend destination” suggest somewhere else.

G always, perhaps. Kilkenny. Westport if you are feeling energetic, or a hotel in Wicklow where you pay a substantial sum to sit in a bathrobe and discover that dinner is not included.

Dublin 15 is generally regarded as the place from which the weekend begins. We load the car, join the traffic and head towards a location officially described as a “hidden gem”, although it usually has three coach tours and a wedding party already there.

But what if we stayed where we were?

Could Dublin 15 become somewhere people deliberately visit for a weekend rather than somewhere they pass through on the way to the M50?

The idea is not quite as unlikely as it sounds.

Fingal County Council launched the Explore Fingal tourism brand in February, presenting

the county as a cultural, culinary and outdoor destination within easy reach of Dublin city. The publicity naturally leans towards Fingal’s coastline, castles and seaside villages, but there is an opportunity for Dublin 15 to claim its share of the visitor market.

D15 may not have a beach, unless there has been a serious planning error around Blanchardstown, but it has more to offer than many of us notice.

We overlook what is on the doorstep

People are often poor tourists in their own area.

We will drive two hours to admire a garden in another county but pass Farmleigh dozens of times without going in. We will photograph a canal in France and then regard our own canal as something running behind the railway line.

Farmleigh alone ought to be a major part of the Dublin 15 visitor story. The 78-acre estate includes ornamental gardens, lakeside walks,

Continues P.45



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an art gallery, a café and the former Guinness family residence, later acquired as the State guesthouse. Farmleigh House itself is closed for the remainder of 2026 because of Ireland's EU Presidency, but the grounds and gallery remain open and admission to them is free.

Next door is the Phoenix Park, with its walking and cycling routes, deer, gardens, visitor facilities and enough open space to make you briefly forget that the M50 exists. The park contains the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre, Áras an Uachtaráin, Dublin Zoo, Victorian gardens and several cafés and attractions.

For a visitor, this is not merely somewhere to walk the dog. It could occupy most of a day.

The Royal Canal provides another ready-made attraction. The railway and canal run together through Ashtown, Castleknock, Coolmine and Clonsilla, connecting several parts of Dublin 15 with the city and the wider canal corridor. The route forms part of the National Famine Way, although anyone attempting a long walk should check the condition and accessibility of individual sections rather than assuming there is a continuous, immaculate greenway.

The great advantage is access. Dublin 15 has several stations on the Maynooth and M3 Parkway commuter routes. A visitor can arrive without a car and, with a little planning, combine rail travel, canal walking, local food and an overnight stay.

More than shopping—but shopping helps

It would be foolish to pretend that Blanchardstown Centre is not part of the appeal.

Shopping may not satisfy the purist who believes every weekend away should involve a ruined abbey and a small craft shop selling candles for €28, but people enjoy it. Blanchardstown offers retail, restaurants, cinema and indoor entertainment in one area, which becomes particularly valuable when the Irish weather remembers what country it is in.

Nearby, Leisureplex provides bowling, pool, arcade games and laser tag, while Draíocht offers theatre, visual art, music and family events. Since opening in 2001, Draíocht has recorded more than 900,000 visits, yet it is still

not always thought of as part of a wider Dublin visitor experience.

That combination matters. A destination cannot depend entirely upon sunshine. D15 has enough indoor attractions to rescue a wet Saturday without requiring a family to spend six hours wandering through shops pretending they are “just looking”.

Millennium Park also hosted Explore Fingal markets during 2026, bringing food, crafts and activity into the heart of Blanchardstown. Events like these can change the way a place is perceived. A park becomes more than a park when there is a reason to gather there. A suburb becomes a destination when something is happening that people do not want to miss.

The weekend already exists—it simply has not been packaged

Imagine the itinerary.

A couple arrives on Friday evening, checks into a hotel in Castleknock or Blanchardstown and goes out for dinner.

On Saturday morning, they walk through Farmleigh and the Phoenix Park, stopping for coffee rather than racing around with the grim determination of people trying to “get their steps in”. In the afternoon, they visit an exhibition or performance at Draíocht, do some shopping and have dinner locally.

On Sunday, they take a walk beside the Royal Canal, visit a market or community event and finish with lunch before taking the train home.

For a family, replace the long lunch with bowling, the cinema or an activity in Millennium Park. For golfers, Dublin 15 has several courses. For a luxury break, Luttrellstown Castle sits within the postcode and has 20 individually designed bedrooms, although this is unlikely to be the budget option after somebody has checked the bank balance.

The ingredients are already here.

What is missing is the recipe.

Give visitors a reason to join the dots

Tourism is not simply a collection of attractions. It is the art of making them feel connected.

Dublin 15 needs suggested itineraries, clearer walking routes, attractive visitor maps

and better promotion of the links between its parks, canal, cultural venues, restaurants, hotels and transport.

A hotel could offer a “Discover D15” weekend that includes dinner, bicycle hire and tickets for a Draíocht performance. Local restaurants could create food trails. Guided walks could tell the stories of Castleknock, Clonsilla, the canal, the railway and the old estates that existed before seemingly every field became a housing development.

Markets and festivals could be coordinated so visitors know there will be something happening when they arrive. Local businesses could promote one another instead of behaving as though every attraction exists on a separate island.

Most importantly, Dublin 15 needs to decide what kind of destination it wants to be.

It is not Killarney, and there is no point searching the Tolka for a mountain range. It is not Howth, Malahide or Skerries either.

Its strength is different.

D15 could offer an accessible city-edge weekend: green spaces without a long drive, culture without city-centre congestion, family entertainment that works in bad weather and restaurants reflecting one of Ireland’s most diverse populations.

That is a credible visitor proposition. Perhaps the tourists are already here. There is also something healthy about seeing your own area through the eyes of a visitor.

A visitor does not complain that a place is “only ten minutes down the road”. That is considered an advantage.

A visitor walks more slowly. They read the information boards. They stop for lunch. They take photographs of buildings we barely notice and ask questions about local history that many residents cannot answer.

Perhaps Dublin 15 does not need to become a weekend destination.

Perhaps it already is one, but the people who live here have been too busy driving somewhere else to notice.

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A Free Family Day Out That Isn't a Shopping Centre

Finding something to do with children during the summer holidays is not difficult.

Finding something that does not cost €80, involve a long drive or end in a fast-food restaurant is considerably harder.

A family day out often begins with optimism. Water bottles are filled, sun cream is packed and everyone is encouraged to use the toilet before leaving.

Ten minutes later, somebody is hungry.

By lunchtime, the adults have paid for admission, parking, drinks, snacks and an object from the gift shop that will be forgotten before reaching the car.

This is why free local activities deserve attention—especially when they offer more than simply somewhere to pass the time.

At Draíocht in Blanchardstown, families can visit Colourings, a creative exhibition and play space built around colour, shape, touch and imagination.

The accompanying Creative Response Space is open from 10am until 3pm daily until 31 August. It is free, operates on a drop-in basis and does not require advance booking.

Even more unusually, children are encouraged to touch things.

An art gallery where touching is allowed

Adults entering an art gallery with young children usually spend most of the visit issuing warnings.

“Don’t touch.”

“Stand back.”

“Put that down.”

“How did you even reach that?”

Colourings takes a different approach.

Created by artist Lucy Hill as part of Draíocht’s 25th-birthday programme, the exhibition includes soft sculptures, strong colours, gentle sounds and objects that can be touched, moved and rearranged. Children are invited to explore at their own pace rather than being marched around while an adult attempts to explain the

deeper meaning of a blue square.

This immediately changes the atmosphere.

The child does not have to stand silently and admire art from a respectful distance. They can interact with it, make choices and discover how shapes and colours work together.

Parents may also discover something important: children are often far more interested in art when nobody is telling them what they are supposed to think about it.

A child may spend ten minutes examining a sculpture or thirty seconds moving everything into a pile.

Both are valid artistic responses.

Creativity without a correct answer

Children spend much of their time being corrected.

There is a correct way to spell a word, solve a sum, tie a shoelace and put on a school jumper. Even colouring books have lines that children are expected to remain inside.

Creative play offers something different.

There is no correct colour for an imaginary animal. A shape does not have to become anything recognisable. A picture can be turned upside down, added to or abandoned entirely when something more interesting appears nearby.

That freedom matters.

Children do not need to demonstrate artistic talent before being allowed to create. They do not have to produce something suitable for framing or for posting proudly on a family WhatsApp group.

They can experiment.

Adults sometimes find this more difficult than children. We want to know what the finished object is supposed to be.

“What have you made?”

The child studies the collection of paper, tape and coloured material.

“It’s a thing.”

This is a complete answer.

Suitable for a range of children

Colourings was developed as a sensory-friendly experience. Its open-ended format allows children to move around and engage in ways that suit them, rather than requiring everyone to complete the same activity at the same speed.

That can be particularly valuable for families whose children find noisy, crowded or highly structured attractions difficult.

Many conventional family days out involve queues, loud music, flashing lights and repeated instructions to move on because other people are waiting.

A calmer creative space gives families more control. They can stay while the child is interested and leave when they have had enough.

There is no pressure to remain for three hours simply because the tickets cost a fortune.

The exhibition itself, also called Colourings, continues in Draíocht's Ground Floor Gallery until 12 September, while the hands-on Creative Response Space runs through the end of August.

The financial attraction

The word free has become increasingly powerful for families.

A free event does not mean the day will cost absolutely nothing. Children remain capable of detecting ice cream from several streets away, and parking or lunch may still enter the calculation.

But removing an admission charge makes a substantial difference.

It also removes the pressure to extract maximum value from the outing.

When parents have paid heavily for tickets, everyone is expected to enjoy themselves for the entire day. A child announcing after twenty minutes that they are bored can cause a sudden decline in family harmony.

With a free drop-in event, the visit can be relaxed. Stay for half an hour or spend longer exploring. Combine it with the library, lunch, a walk or another local activity.

It becomes part of the day rather than a major financial investment requiring military planning.

Not every outing needs a mascot

We have come to believe that children's entertainment must involve enormous attractions, branded characters and a souvenir photograph costing more than the original admission.

But children often enjoy simpler experiences.

They like making things, moving objects, telling stories and being given permission to use their imagination. They enjoy having an adult join in without checking a phone every two minutes.

A creative visit can also continue after returning home.

Paper, cardboard boxes, crayons and leftover wrapping materials can become the basis of another project. No specialised equipment is required, although parents should accept that glitter, once introduced into a home, remains there for several generations.

Draíocht is also holding another free family workshop connected with the exhibition on 29 August. Rose Coloured Glasses, led by artist Corrina Askin, has sessions at 1pm and 2.30pm. Tickets are free, although advance booking is essential.

Art on the doorstep

The greater lesson is that families do not always need to travel far for a worthwhile day out.

Dublin 15 has theatres, galleries, parks, libraries and community events that can be overlooked precisely because they are nearby.

We assume a proper outing must involve packing the car and joining traffic heading towards another county.

Yet there is something satisfying about finding an activity close to home—particularly one that welcomes children, encourages creativity and does not require a discussion with the bank manager.

The Colourings Creative Response Space may not occupy an entire day. It does not need to.

It offers families somewhere to explore, play and make things together, without queues, expensive tickets or the compulsory purchase of a plastic souvenir.

And when the children emerge covered in colour and proudly carrying something they describe only as “a thing”, you may even have enough money left for the ice cream they were always going to demand.

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Who Is the Park Actually For?

Once, designing a suburban park was simple.

You planted grass, added a few trees, installed two swings and placed a bench somewhere exposed to the full force of the wind. A football pitch occupied the middle, whether anybody had asked for one or not.

Today, parks are expected to do much more.

They must entertain toddlers, challenge teenagers, exercise adults, welcome wheelchair users, accommodate footballers, protect wildlife, provide space for dogs and offer older residents somewhere peaceful to walk.

They must be safe but not boring, natural but not muddy, busy but quiet.

And they must have enough bins.

What happens after the playground?

Young children are generally well served. Most parks have swings, slides and climbing frames, while parents gain additional exercise by pushing swings and carrying abandoned scooters back to the car.

The difficulty begins when children reach ten or eleven. The playground equipment suddenly looks too small and childish.

The park seems to tell them their membership has expired.

Teenagers still need outdoor space. They need somewhere to meet friends and be active without joining a club or booking a pitch.

Yet adults often complain that teenagers spend too much time indoors and then become suspicious when several of them gather outdoors.

Three teenagers sitting on a bench can cause more public concern than twenty adults occupying the same area. They may simply be discussing school or watching videos on a phone, but from a distance they appear to be planning the collapse of civilisation.

Millennium Park in Blanchardstown offers a different approach. Facilities for teenagers and young adults include a parkour area, climbing poles, chess tables and seating.

Parkour may alarm anyone whose preferred method of crossing a wall is to find a gate, but it gives young people something challenging to do without requiring formal training or adult supervision.

Playgrounds are changing

Modern playgrounds are also becoming more inclusive and imaginative.

Plans for Hartstown Park include a large play area with natural landscaping, sensory features, wheelchair-accessible facilities and sand and water play.

That is important because an inclusive playground should not consist of one adapted item placed at the edge while everything exciting remains inaccessible.

Children with different physical or sensory needs

Continues P.46



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should be able to play alongside their brothers, sisters and friends.

The best inclusive design does not draw attention to itself. It simply allows more people to join in.

Adults need parks too

Adults also expect more from parks.

Outdoor gyms and exercise equipment have appeared in many local spaces. These are often approached with confidence, followed by several minutes studying a diagram and pretending to understand it.

Eventually, someone climbs aboard and begins moving backwards and forwards without knowing which part of the body is benefiting.

Exercise equipment is useful, but parks must also serve people who are not already fit. Smooth paths, good lighting and regular seating can be more valuable than complicated machinery.

A bench is not an admission of defeat. For many people, knowing there is somewhere to rest makes a longer walk possible.

It should, however, face something pleasant. Nobody wants to leave home for fresh air only to sit looking directly at a car park.

The dog question

No discussion of parks can avoid dogs.

Owners want open space where pets can run. Parents want children to play without encountering dog fouling. Walkers want excitable animals kept under control, while every owner insists their dog is “only being friendly”.

The dog may be friendly, but it is expressing that friendship by placing two muddy paws on a stranger’s coat.

Dedicated dog areas, clear rules and plenty of bins can help. The ideal park allows dogs to exercise without making everyone else feel they have entered the dog’s private garden.

Sport, nature and empty space

Football pitches remain essential, especially in an area with many active clubs. Corduff Park, for example, is being upgraded with improved sports facilities, paths, a playground and a community garden.

The mix matters.

A park filled entirely with pitches may offer little to people who do not play organised sport. A park designed only for quiet walking may ignore the social value of local clubs.

Good parks provide room for both.

They should also leave some nature alone. Trees, wildflowers, long grass and fallen logs support wildlife and give children places to explore.

Not every patch of grass needs to look like a carpet showroom. Sometimes the most valuable feature is a quiet path under trees where nothing in particular is happening.

The essential facility

There is one thing without which every ambitious park plan eventually fails: a public toilet.

A family may happily spend several hours in a park, but only until a child announces an urgent requirement, usually five minutes after insisting they did not need to go.

Toilets are expensive to build and maintain, but they are essential if parks are genuinely intended for families, older residents and disabled visitors.

Millennium Park has toilets beside the playground, a feature that may contribute more to a successful family visit than the most imaginative climbing frame.

One park cannot do everything

Perhaps the greatest mistake is expecting every park to provide every possible facility.

A small neighbourhood green may need only trees, paths, seating and a modest play area. A larger park can accommodate sports pitches, specialised equipment, toilets and community events.

What matters is that parks are planned around how people actually use them.

Toddlers will ask for the largest slide in Europe. Teenagers will want somewhere beyond the direct view of parents. Dog walkers will request more open space. Football clubs will seek more pitches. Nearby residents will support every proposal except anything likely to create noise, traffic or visitors.

Complete agreement is impossible.

A successful park is not simply an attractive piece of land. It is a playground, sports ground, meeting place, exercise facility, wildlife habitat and public garden.

It should offer enough facilities to attract people, but enough empty space to let them decide what to do.

And after all the parkour areas, sensory gardens, walking routes and biodiversity plans have been discussed, the public will still make one final request.

More bins.



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