ISSUE 66
NOVEMBER 2026

Little Village

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D15 DENTAL CARE
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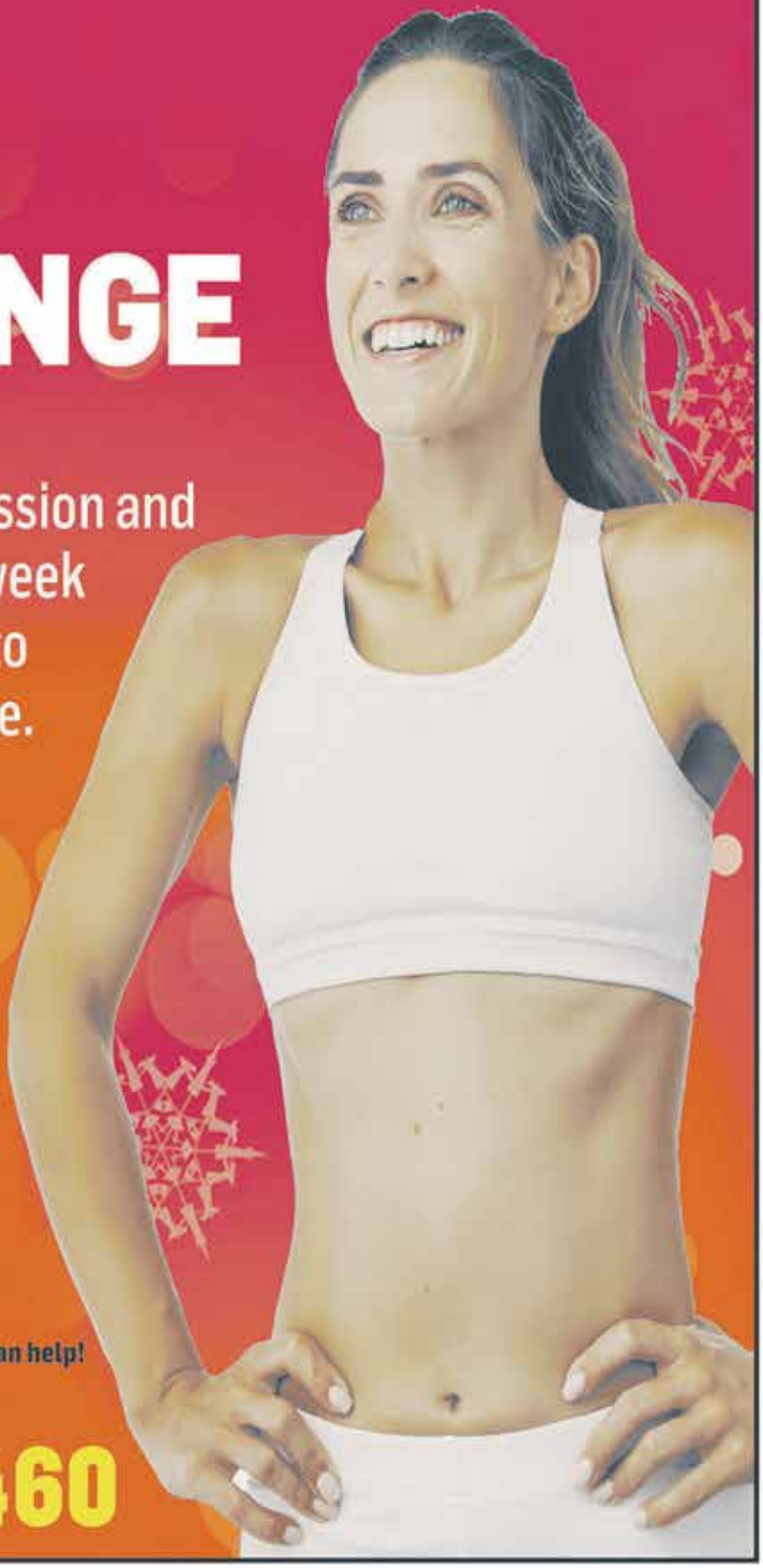
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- The Carpenter Inn
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EDITORIAL

Hard to believe that we are now in Autumn, that lovely time of year o believe we are now in Autumn, that lovely time of year when the leaves change from green to red to orange and gold. The children are just back at school and already planning their Halloween outfits.

We have a Halloween article for you on how it used to be a fairly low-budget affair. We also have our piece on "The Mystery Drawer" – every home has one. We don't set out to have one, but somehow we all end up with one. Whenever we pick up a nut, screw, piece of plastic, or instruction manual and don't know where to put it, we usually end up putting it into the "Mystery Drawer" – just in case!

We also have pieces on how coffee was once simple, how doing nothing was once perfectly acceptable, and a celebration of autumn in D15 – and why it might just be the best season. There's our take on the 15-minute life, the annual drama of who turned on the heating, and a Budget Day piece asking the question we all want answered: are we actually any better off?

So until next time……and a little gentle reminder that on Sunday 25th October our clocks go back an hour and we return to winter time.

The Little Village Team



Ronan Bright
Director / Head of Sales
brightronan83@gmail.com
085 199 8321



Patrick Browne
Graphic Design
hello@patrickbrownedesign.com
086 831 9322

LITTLE VILLAGE MAGAZINE

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Blanchardstown Centre is 30

Thirty years of shopping, spending, socialising and trying to remember where we parked the car

It seems impossible, but Blanchardstown Centre is celebrating its 30th birthday. It opened its doors on 16 October 1996, when Ireland was a very different place, mobile phones were the size of small bricks, and most people still believed that shopping was something you did when you actually needed something.

Back then, going shopping was a serious undertaking. You made a list, got into the car and headed into Dublin city centre. If you were travelling from Blanchardstown, Castleknock or Clonsilla, the expedition required planning, patience and a certain tolerance for traffic. Then along came Blanchardstown Centre, and everything changed. Suddenly, here was an enormous shopping complex on the doorstep, with department stores, fashion outlets, restaurants and thousands of parking spaces. You could buy groceries, clothes, a birthday present and a new pair of shoes without setting foot inside Dublin's city centre. It was revolutionary.

The original development cost more than £60 million in Irish punts. For younger readers, the punt was our currency before the euro, back when money had a reassuringly familiar appearance and a cup of coffee didn't require a credit assessment.

The Shopping Revolution

When the centre opened, there were 83 shops ready for business, with more to follow. Dunnes Stores, Roches Stores and Easons were among the familiar names, and there was great excitement about the cinema and leisure facilities to come. The idea of spending an entire day in a shopping centre was still relatively novel. Previously, shopping was something you endured; now it was being promoted as leisure.

This was a dangerous development, particularly for husbands who had previously survived shopping expeditions by pointing out that the parking meter was about to expire. At Blanchardstown, parking was free. There was no obvious escape. "Would you mind if I just popped into this shop?" became one of the most feared sentences in the English language.

Anyone who has accompanied an enthusiastic shopper will know that "just popping in" can involve trying on seven outfits, reconsidering four of them, leaving empty-handed and then returning twenty minutes later to buy the first one. Meanwhile,

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Continued from P.4

the accompanying partner develops an intimate knowledge of the seating arrangements outside every shop.

More Than Shopping

But Blanchardstown Centre quickly became much more than a place to buy things. It became somewhere to meet friends for coffee, take the children on a wet Saturday afternoon, enjoy a meal or catch a film. For teenagers, it was a social destination. Groups could spend entire afternoons wandering around, apparently without purchasing anything. Parents might have wondered what they were doing, but at least they knew where they were.

There were first dates, teenage romances, arguments, reconciliations and countless conversations over coffee. Some of those teenagers are now parents themselves, bringing their own children to the same shopping centre, probably issuing precisely the same warnings about spending money. And somewhere there will be grandparents who remember bringing their children in 1996 and are now wondering how those children have suddenly turned forty. Time is a cruel business.

Thirty Years of Change

Over the decades, the shops have changed, the centre has expanded and the shopping experience has evolved. Roches Stores disappeared from the Irish retail landscape. Other familiar retailers came and went. New international brands arrived, coffee shops multiplied, and eating out became an increasingly important part of the experience.

The internet, of course, was supposed to make shopping centres obsolete. Why leave the house when you can order everything online and have it delivered to your door? Yet people continue to visit Blanchardstown in enormous numbers. Perhaps there's something reassuring about seeing what you're buying, trying on clothes before paying for them, or having a coffee with a friend instead of exchanging another series of WhatsApp messages. And, of course, there's the pleasure of buying something you hadn't intended to purchase. You can go to Blanchardstown for a pair of socks and return with a jacket, a scented candle, three cushions and absolutely no socks.

The Great Parking Mystery

One thing that hasn't changed in thirty years is the challenge of remembering where you left the car. You arrive confidently, park in what seems a perfectly obvious location, and disappear into the shops. Three hours later, you emerge through a different entrance into a car park containing approximately 4,000 vehicles, all apparently identical to yours. You press the remote key repeatedly while walking around trying to look as though you know exactly where you're going. Eventually, the car is discovered three sections away, whereupon somebody invariably says, "I told you we parked over here." They didn't.

Happy Birthday, Blanchardstown

Thirty years after opening, Blanchardstown Centre remains one of the great landmarks of Dublin 15. It has witnessed the transformation of the surrounding area, the growth of new communities and three decades of changing Irish habits. Generations have shopped there, worked there, met friends there and made memories there. For many residents, it's difficult to imagine Dublin 15 without it.

So, happy 30th birthday, Blanchardstown Centre. You've certainly changed over the years, but then, haven't we all? The clothes in the windows have become younger, the coffee more expensive, and the teenagers seem to be getting taller.

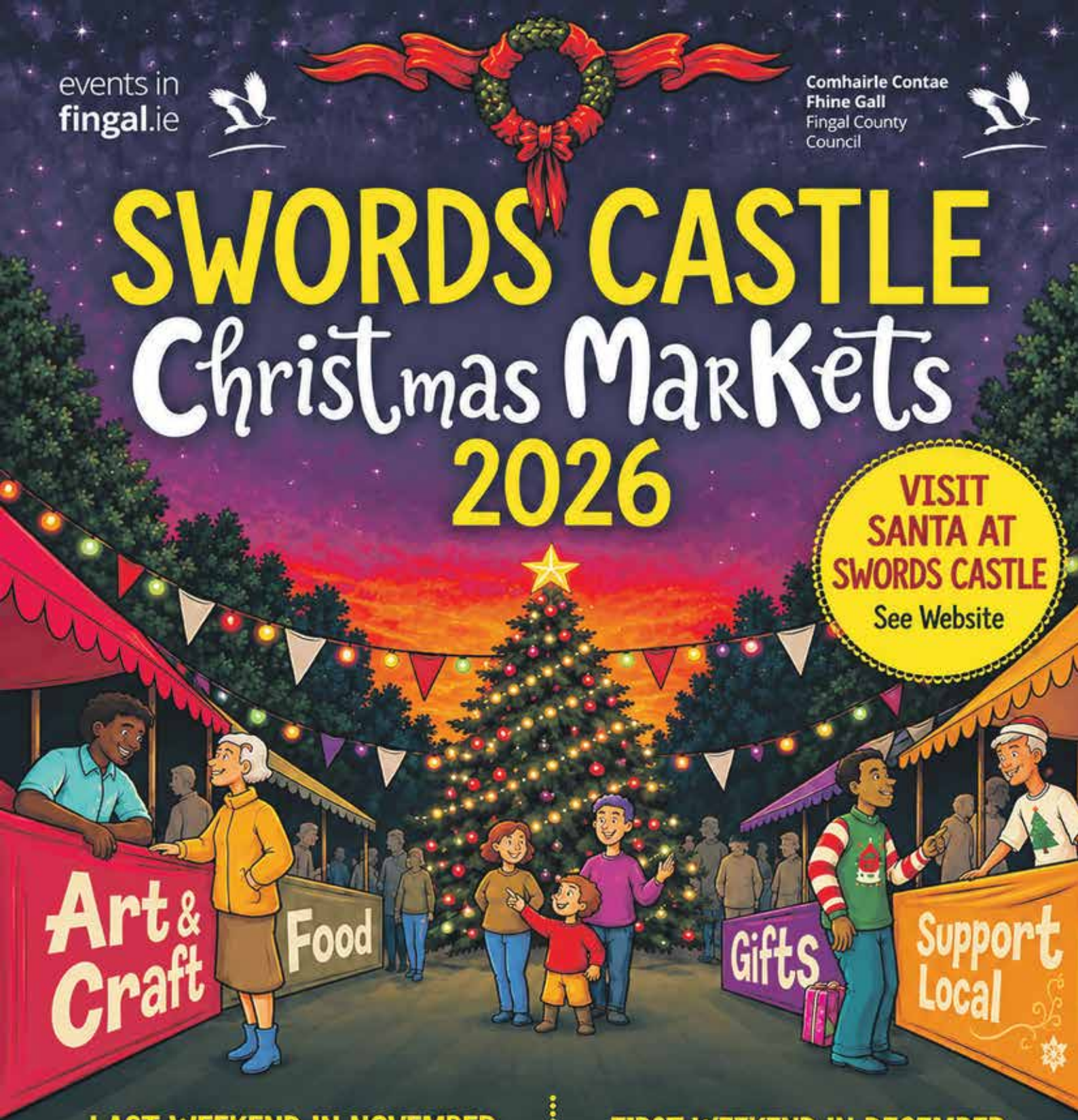
And those of us who were around when the centre opened in 1996 have reached an uncomfortable conclusion. Blanchardstown Centre might be thirty years old, but we remember its opening as though it were yesterday. Which is rather worrying, because we can't always remember where we parked the car this morning.



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This is a political advertisement on behalf of Cllr. John Walsh, Labour Party. Visit labour.ie/transparency for more information.

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Dear Resident

I have included some details of recent issues which I have been working on, please let me know if I can be of any assistance.

All the best, *John*

Major Changes agreed to Dunsink Urban Area Plan

The draft Dunsink area plan proposes a new city quarter between Finglas and Dublin 15 and 1163 submissions were made to the consultation on the plan. I worked with other Councillors to amend the plan and respond to concerns raised by local communities. We approved an amended plan with the following changes to:

Ensure new homes are delivered in conjunction with high quality infrastructure, such as schools, expanded bus services and the Luas - Motion 211 which I proposed requires the Luas to 'under construction or operational' in conjunction with the second phase of development in Dunsink.

Protect Dunsink Observatory and support the all Ireland application by Astronomical Universities of Ireland for UNESCO World Heritage designation. Councillors agreed to undertake a time limited review of the plan within 24 months to adopt any changes required following preliminary review of the application by UNESCO.

Promote a wider range of housing types including family homes and reduce height and density of development in Dunsink West.

Protect Scribblestown Lane and Dunsinea Lane and direct construction traffic along major roads rather than rural lanes.

I would like to thank everyone who made submissions on the plan or took the time to speak with Councillors directly, your input made a real difference to the outcome.

Works on Castleknock Road opposite Bell Pub

The works on Castleknock Road outside Scoil Bhríde National Schools are part of the Safe Routes to School programmes by the Active Travel section of Fingal Council. Road safety for school students is vital. But the narrowing of the road has blocked off part of the left line leading to Blanchardstown Village and caused major traffic congestion leading back to the M50 bridge. Concerns have also been raised that the new road layout is less safe for cyclists. I have raised these concerns with the road safety engineers and the following update has been issued to Councillors:

Works at Castleknock Rd have been reviewed and the design has been altered which will maintain a greater section of the left-hand turning lane leading to Blanchardstown Village.

I have submitted a motion for discussion at our local Area Committee on Thursday 5th November and will give another update after our meeting.

Working with Cllr Mary McCamley and Luke Daly

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These new additions two Irish branches double the company's footprint in the Island of Ireland – with existing branches on Dublin's exclusive Burlington Road and Belfast. This brings the number of branches for the group to 15 across Ireland, the UK and Spain.

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CASH OR CARD?

Is Ireland Saying Goodbye to Money?



Knowing how much money you had used to be easy. You opened your wallet and counted it. Nowadays, your money is invisible, your wallet is redundant, and your phone knows more about your finances than your bank manager ever did.

I remember when money was something you could actually hold. There were notes, coins and the reassuring weight of a few pounds in your pocket. You could count your money, divide it into little piles and decide precisely how much you could afford to spend. If you went out with a twenty-punt note, you knew that once it was gone, the evening was effectively over. Nowadays, you can leave home without a penny in your pocket and spend €200 before lunchtime. All you need is a mobile phone and the ability to wave it vaguely in the direction of a little black machine. It's financial progress, apparently.

The Great Contactless Revolution

Ireland has enthusiastically embraced the cashless society. According to the latest banking figures, almost 90% of in-store card payments are now contactless, with mobile phones and smartwatches increasingly replacing physical cards. We have become a nation of tappers. Buying a newspaper? Tap. Coffee? Tap. A sandwich? Tap. Before you know it, you've tapped your way through €35 without experiencing the slightest sensation of having spent money.

There was something wonderfully discouraging about handing over a twenty-pound note and receiving three pounds in change. You could actually see your wealth diminishing. Nowadays, spending money involves nothing more traumatic than a pleasant little beep. The financial consequences arrive later, when you examine your bank statement and wonder how you managed to spend €147 on Tuesday.

The Disappearing Cash Machine

Of course, the move towards digital payments has had consequences. Bank branches have closed, cash machines have disappeared from some communities, and accessing your own money can occasionally resemble a treasure hunt. For older people, particularly those who prefer managing their finances with cash, this can be a genuine problem.

Fortunately, the Government has recognised the issue. Ireland's Access to Cash legislation, introduced in 2025, is designed to protect the availability of cash machines and banking facilities. The Central Bank now monitors access to cash across the country, with requirements concerning the availability of ATMs and cash service points. It can also investigate complaints where communities believe they have inadequate access.

Interestingly, the legislation protects access to cash rather than creating a universal obligation for shops to accept it. Which means you may eventually find a cash machine, withdraw €50 and then discover that the establishment where you intended spending it prefers cards. You couldn't make it up.

Would You Like to Leave a Tip?

Another curious development is the modern electronic payment terminal. You've enjoyed a perfectly ordinary cup of coffee and approach the counter to pay. The assistant turns the little screen towards you. "Just a question on the screen there."

The question concerns tipping. Would you like to leave 10%, 15%, 20% or a custom amount? There is also a discreet option for no tip, which requires you to demonstrate the moral courage normally associated with storming an enemy position. The assistant is

Continues P.16



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.



DART+ West Update; Contract Signing & Level Crossing Closures Timeline

Irish Rail has informed me that contracts for the major works are due to be signed by the end of 2027, with works to begin by mid-2028. Level crossings are expected to close in 2030, with a DART every 10 minutes at peak times targeted for 2032.

Most works will take place at weekends, so weekday commutes will not be affected for significant parts of the build, and Irish Rail will set out at the start of each year which days or weeks will have closures. Community Liaison Officers will also be in place by summer 2027 to respond to any issues as they arise.



Public Sector Strikes

I stand firmly with public sector workers and their right to fair pay and decent working conditions. With the Public Sector Agreement expiring in June and little provision made for the cost-of-living pressures in the new budget, workers have been left with little choice but to take action. I was proud to stand with the 300,000 workers who have had to take to the picket lines, after the Government failed to engage meaningfully with their unions. A fair deal must be reached and delivered.



With Cllr. Hazel Chu at the recent protest against public transport fare increases



Budget 2027 Reaction

I believe Budget 2027 was a real missed opportunity for our country.

At a time when households are struggling with rising costs, we needed a budget that offered meaningful relief while addressing the root cause of this inflation and investing in a fairer, greener future. Instead, the Government has failed to match its spending with the ambition our country needs.

Afterschool Facilities

I'm calling on the Government to make it mandatory for primary schools to make classrooms available for after-school providers. I've spoken to constituents forced to reduce their working hours because of a lack of childcare places, and using existing school facilities could significantly increase after-school provision and give working parents greater flexibility.

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

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Continued from P.14

watching. The queue is watching. Your conscience is watching. All you've done is order a cappuccino and carry it to your own table. In the old days, you might leave a few coins in a saucer. Now you're being asked to make a financial declaration before an electronic audience.

The Trouble with Invisible Money

Cash has another advantage that is often overlooked: it makes budgeting easier. If you put €100 in an envelope for groceries, you know precisely how much remains after each shopping trip. A bank card, on the other hand, offers unlimited opportunities to convince yourself that another purchase won't make much difference. This is particularly dangerous in supermarkets, where a visit for milk and bread can mysteriously develop into a €75 expedition.

And what happens when technology fails? A power cut, an internet outage or a malfunctioning payment terminal can bring modern commerce to a sudden halt. You stand at the checkout with a trolley full of groceries while the assistant repeatedly attempts to persuade the machine to accept your card. Somewhere behind you, a gentleman produces a €50 note and enjoys a brief moment of technological superiority.

Don't Bury the Cash Just Yet

Despite everything, I rather like the convenience of contactless payments. There's no searching for coins at a parking machine, no wondering whether a shop can change a large note, and no need to carry a wallet containing enough small change to damage your trousers.

But I hope we don't abandon cash completely. Coins and notes remain useful for children learning about money, older people managing budgets, small purchases, charity collections and those occasions when technology decides to take the afternoon off. The Central Bank recently reported that 65% of Irish consumers still consider having the option to pay cash important. So perhaps the future should offer a choice rather than insisting everybody embrace the same technology.

After all, there's something rather satisfying about handing a grandchild a €10 note. It feels like a proper gift. Transfer €10 electronically and the child barely looks up from the phone.

And if we do eventually become a completely cashless society, I have one final concern. What happens to the traditional Irish expression, "Have you got a few bob on you?" "Could you Revolut me €2.50?" simply doesn't have the same charm. Although, knowing modern children, they'd probably send a payment request. With an option to leave a tip.





Councillor
ELLEN TROY
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Dunsink Urban Area Plan Cllr. Troy's Motion Passed.

The Dunsink Urban Area Plan represents a significant opportunity to create a sustainable, vibrant and well-connected community, delivering much-needed housing alongside schools, community facilities, employment opportunities, parks and recreational amenities. A particularly positive outcome is the inclusion of Councillor Ellen Troy's motion that was passed, calling for a comprehensive, Integrated Transport Infrastructure Strategy. This is essential to ensure that roads, public transport, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure are planned, funded and delivered in an appropriate timeline with each phase of development. This will help prevent existing communities from bearing the burden of increased traffic while ensuring Dunsink grows responsibly, sustainably and with appropriate infrastructure supporting its residents. It is most important that the impact of this large development on the unique natural environment is managed responsibly. I am pleased to report that it was agreed by councillors that Dunsinea Lane and Scribblestown Lane will be preserved and that the important work carried out at Dunsink Observatory will continue into the future.



The Foul Odours Problem in Mulhuddart Set To Be Finally Solved

Councillor Troy has worked tirelessly to address the long-running foul odour issue affecting residents across Mulhuddart. Through communication with Fingal County Council and persistent engagement with Uisce Éireann, ongoing follow-up and determined representation of the community, she has helped secure a commitment to carry out the necessary works to seal the decommissioned rising main and eliminate the source of the smell. This is a significant step forward for local residents who have endured unacceptable conditions for far too long. Cllr Troy remains committed to ensuring the works are completed fully and residents get the relief they deserve. Local resident Grant Mason did great work collecting a substantial number of signatures of people affected by this issue.



Cllr. Ellen Troy and the Aontú team have been to the fore in the campaign to have M50 tolls scraped

Aontú's policy is to completely abolish and scrap the M50 tolls. The state has collected over €2.2 billion from the motorway, meaning motorists have paid for the infrastructure thirty times over. Aontú characterizes the tolls as an unjust "tax on work" and a "cash cow" during a cost-of-living crisis, actively campaigning against annual toll hikes and demanding the immediate withdrawal and wind-down of all M50 fees through platforms like Aontú
The current M50 barrier-free toll rates depend on your vehicle type and how your vehicle is registered with eFlow

Transport Infrastructure Ireland has approved further nationwide toll hikes of roughly 10c to 20c across vehicle categories, which are scheduled to take effect in January 2027. The toll for the average car (up to 8 passengers) on the M50 will increase from €2.60 to €2.70 per trip for motorists who have a tag and to €3.30 for video accounts.Castleknock Parish Centre with the Trad 15 group. It is important that we support CTT. These committed and hard-working volunteers have the village and adjacent areas looking magnificent. They meet at MYOS every Saturday at 10am and work for two hours for the benefit of us all. Come and join them.





Dunsink Observatory

Dublin 15's Window on the Universe

One of Ireland's greatest scientific treasures is sitting quietly in Dublin 15, looking towards the heavens while the rest of us worry about what's happening on Earth.

There are certain places we drive past for years without giving them a second thought. We know they're there, vaguely understand what they do, and promise ourselves that one day we'll investigate further. Dunsink Observatory is probably one of those places.

Perched on a hill near Castleknock, this rather handsome Georgian building has been studying the heavens since 1785. That's more than 240 years of looking upwards, which is considerably longer than most of us can manage without developing a stiff neck.

When Dunsink first opened, George III was on the British throne, Napoleon was a relatively unknown young Frenchman, and nobody had yet invented the television, mobile phone or the expression "Have you tried turning it off and on again?"

Yet scientists were already peering into the night sky, attempting to understand the mysteries of the universe.

And they were doing it from Dublin 15.

A Little Local Genius

One of Dunsink's most distinguished residents was Sir William Rowan Hamilton, the celebrated Irish mathematician who became Professor of Astronomy at Trinity College Dublin while still a teenager.

Hamilton was clearly one of those irritatingly clever people who make the rest of us feel inadequate. At an age when most young men are struggling to organise their laundry, he was already making significant contributions to mathematics.

In 1843, while walking along the Royal Canal with his wife, he famously had a mathematical breakthrough and carved his discovery into the

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stone of Broom Bridge.

Most husbands walking with their wives are asked to admire the scenery. Hamilton stopped to invent a new branch of mathematics.

The observatory itself became an important centre for astronomy, scientific discovery and even the keeping of accurate time. Before smartphones and digital watches, knowing precisely what time it was required rather more effort than glancing at your wrist.

A Brush with the Moon

Dunsink returned to the headlines in August 2026 when Ireland experienced a spectacular partial solar eclipse.

For once, the Irish weather cooperated. This was almost as remarkable as the eclipse itself.

Around 150 fortunate visitors gathered at the observatory to witness the Moon passing in front of the Sun. Demand was extraordinary, with thousands hoping to secure a place.

It was a reminder that, despite all our technological distractions, there is still something magnificent about looking upwards and realising how very small we are.

Small, that is, until the electricity bill arrives and brings us firmly back to Earth.

Recognition Among the Stars

Dunsink is now part of an ambitious effort to secure UNESCO World Heritage status, alongside the historic observatories at Armagh and Birr.

The three institutions have joined forces to seek international recognition for their contribution to scientific discovery.

It would be a remarkable achievement and a source of considerable pride for Dublin 15.

After all, there aren't many neighbourhoods that can claim to have helped humanity understand the universe.

Why Not Pay a Visit?

Dunsink isn't simply a historic building gathering dust. It remains associated with active scientific research and public education, with opportunities for visitors to attend astronomy talks, explore its history and, weather permitting, look through its magnificent historic telescope.

Public visitor nights are generally held during the darker months, with advance booking required.

You don't need to understand astrophysics to enjoy the experience. You don't even need to know the difference between a planet and a star.

Just bring your curiosity, a warm coat and perhaps a little patience with the Irish clouds.

We spend so much of our lives looking down at phones, worrying about appointments, traffic, shopping lists and the price of everything that we rarely look upwards.

Yet above Dublin 15 lies an extraordinary universe containing billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars.

And right on our doorstep is a place that has spent more than two centuries helping us understand it.

Perhaps it's time we paid a little more attention.

Although, knowing Ireland, the moment we point a telescope at the sky, someone will announce there's rain coming.



Autumn Newsletter



Dear Resident,

I am delighted to bring you updates on my recent representation in the constituency. Should you need further information on any of the items below or other matters, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Corduff Park Rehabilitation Project



Significant progress has been made on this project. The all-weather pitch is complete, while remaining works continue to transform the 6.6-hectare park into a modern, inclusive public space. The project includes a new themed playground, improved pedestrian routes and boundaries, enhanced landscaping and biodiversity measures, and new parking facilities. This €2 million investment reflects the council's commitment to vibrant, sustainable communities.

Tyrrelstown United FC

I am grateful to Fingal County Council for meeting the club's managers to discuss additional training slots and funding opportunities in the event of financial difficulty.

Corduff FC – 50th Anniversary

Congratulations to Corduff FC on their 50th anniversary. I wish the club increased success over the next 50 years.

Scrambler Menace

I join the community in denouncing the dangerous activities of e-bikes, quad bikes, scooters and scramblers. Despite Grace's Law banning these vehicles in public spaces, they remain a danger on our roads, parks and neighbourhoods. I call on the Gardaí to seize any scrambler used in public, regardless of whether it is being driven dangerously.



Tyrrelstown Square Housing



I was delighted to join Minister Jack Chambers to officially launch 120 homes at Tyrrelstown Square, built by Glenveagh Homes and operated by Tuath Housing – a vibrant new community for its residents.

Dunsink City Quarters



Fingal County Council has adopted plans to build 15,000 homes in the Dunsink landbanks on a phased basis, with an initial 2,500 by 2029. The Plan includes



eight development areas, a Cultural Quarter centred on Dunsink Observatory, a new Regional Park, and enhanced transport connections to Ashtown and Navan Road Parkway stations. Over €20 million has been secured under the Housing Infrastructure Investment Fund. The Council will now consider amendments before further public consultation and final adoption.

Budget 2027

Budget 2027 provides €125.6 billion to improve infrastructure and public services. Key measures include: the 20% tax band rising to €46,500; a €250 tax credit; childcare fees falling to €550 per month, with free childcare for families earning under €38,500; a €10 increase in core social welfare payments; a permanent €500 Cost of Disability payment; Fuel Allowance rising to €43 per week; Help to Buy increased to €35,000; and a €150 cut to the Student Contribution Fee. Full details are available at gov.ie.

Clinics
Please contact me to discuss any matter of concern. Clinics can be arranged at your convenience.

Councillor JK Onwumereh

Fingal County Council, Grove Road, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15
Tel: 0899642783 | Email: jk.onwumereh@cllrs.fingal.ie

Working with your Fianna Fáil team in Dublin West:

Minister Jack Chambers, Barry Andrews MEP, and Cllrs Tom Kitt and Eimear Carbone Mangan.

Clinics

Do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss any matter of concern. Clinics can be arranged at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr. JK Onwumereh
Fingal County Council
Grove Road, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15
Tel: 089 964 2783
Email: jk.onwumereh@cllrs.fingal.ie

Cllr John-Kingsley
ONWUMEREH

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Fianna Fáil
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It's Never Too Late to Be Creative

You don't have to be young, talented or particularly good at drawing to discover your artistic side.

There comes a point when we wonder whether we have undiscovered talents. Perhaps we could have been brilliant artists, musicians or writers, but we were too busy earning a living, raising children and keeping the mortgage company happy to find out. By retirement, many of us conclude our talents are limited to spotting supermarket bargains, remembering obscure football results and knowing exactly how the dishwasher should be loaded.

But perhaps we've been selling ourselves short. Across Dublin 15, opportunities are emerging to discover your creative side – and you don't need any previous talent whatsoever.

Discovering the Inner Artist

Fingal County Council's Arts Office has launched Marks of Mulhuddart: Here & Now, offering free creative workshops for adults. Beginning in October, the programme includes photography, illustration, cartooning and printmaking, with professional artists helping participants explore their local surroundings through art. Workshops are held at Mulhuddart Community Centre and Parslickstown House.

It's an excellent initiative, particularly for those who never considered themselves artistic. My own artistic career effectively ended at primary school: I could draw a house made of a square, a triangle roof and a chimney producing smoke that looked suspiciously like a question mark, beside a tree resembling a cauliflower on a stick. My teacher was encouraging, though I suspect she knew the Royal Academy wouldn't be calling.

The Joy of Being a Beginner

One great advantage of taking up something creative later in life is that there's no pressure to be good at it. At twenty, we worry about careers and impressing people. At seventy, we're delighted if we can find our reading glasses without turning the house upside down. Later life is a wonderful opportunity to experiment.

Photography is an obvious starting point. Almost everyone carries a camera in their pocket, though most of us use it for grandchildren, restaurant meals and the occasional parking sign. But photography teaches us to see familiar surroundings differently – an ordinary street in Blanchardstown, a historic building in Castleknock or a quiet corner of Mulhuddart can become beautiful through a photographer's eye. There is, of course, the danger of becoming one of those people who stops every fifty yards to photograph a leaf.

From Stick Figures to Masterpieces

Many adults insist they can't draw, but perhaps nobody has encouraged them since childhood. Cartooning is particularly appealing – unlike

Continues P.22

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Continued from P.20

portrait painting, the less accurately you depict somebody, the funnier the result. Some of our most recognisable public figures could be drawn using three lines and an exaggerated nose. The workshops include sessions with professional cartoonist Harry Burton, who has worked for the Irish Independent, Irish Examiner and Private Eye. Imagine discovering at sixty-five that you have a gift for political cartoons – after decades of complaining about politicians, you could finally turn the activity into an art form.

Printmaking offers another chance to experiment, though I confess the technical processes remain a mystery to me. My last experience involved cutting a potato in half, carving a shape into it and dipping it in paint. The resulting masterpiece was displayed on the fridge for approximately three days before mysteriously disappearing.

More Than a Hobby

Creative activities also bring people together. Joining a workshop is an opportunity to meet neighbours, learn something different and enjoy conversation with people you might never otherwise encounter. For those recently retired, new to the area, or simply fancying a few hours out of the house, that social connection can be every bit as valuable as the activity itself. And there's something wonderfully satisfying about making something with your own hands. It doesn't have to be perfect – the achievement lies in having tried.

Your Masterpiece Awaits

Perhaps the most encouraging message from initiatives like Marks of Mulhuddart is that creativity doesn't belong exclusively to the young or naturally gifted. You don't have to be the next Picasso – though given some of his paintings, that might not be an entirely unrealistic ambition. You simply need to be curious.

So whether you fancy photography, painting, writing, music or cartooning, why not give it a try? The worst that can happen is discovering you're not particularly good at it – and at our age, we've had plenty of practice dealing with that.

Who knows? Somewhere in Dublin 15 there may be an undiscovered artistic genius waiting for an opportunity. Or, at the very least, somebody capable of drawing a tree that doesn't resemble a cauliflower.





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The DART Is Coming to D15

But When?



Anyone who has spent a wet November morning on a railway platform in Dublin 15 will understand the attraction of the DART+ West project. There you are, clutching a takeaway coffee, sheltering beneath an umbrella that has already turned inside out, checking your phone to see whether the train is on time. Naturally, it isn't. Meanwhile, those who decided to drive are sitting on the N3 or N4, wondering whether they might reach the city centre before retirement.

Commuting into Dublin has never been an activity calculated to improve one's mental health. But help, we're assured, is on the way. DART+ West promises to transform rail travel through Castleknock, Coolmine, Clonsilla and Hansfield, bringing modern electric trains and more frequent services to communities that have relied on diesel commuter trains for generations. It sounds almost too good to be true – which, being Irish, immediately makes us suspicious.

The Great Commuting Adventure

There was a time when travelling to work involved leaving the house at a reasonable hour, catching a bus or train and arriving with enough time to enjoy a cup of tea before starting work. Nowadays, the average commuter seems to require the organisational skills of an air traffic controller: the journey to the station, the search for parking, the question of whether the train will be on time, and the increasingly competitive business of finding somewhere to sit.

Experienced rail passengers develop remarkable abilities. They know exactly where to stand on the platform to be closest to the carriage doors. They can identify an available seat from fifty metres away and have perfected the art of avoiding eye contact with anybody who looks likely to start a conversation. And then there's the person who insists on conducting an entire business meeting on their mobile phone. By the time you reach Connolly Station, you know more about their company's financial difficulties than their accountant.

A Train Every Ten Minutes?

The promised improvements are certainly impressive. DART+ West will electrify the railway serving Maynooth and M3 Parkway, substantially increasing passenger capacity and aiming to provide services at least every ten minutes. That could be a remarkable change for people living along the route. Imagine arriving at the station without having studied a timetable as though preparing for the Leaving Certificate. Miss one train? Another should be along shortly. For anyone accustomed to watching their intended departure disappear into the distance, this would represent a considerable improvement.

Electric trains should also be quieter, more environmentally friendly and capable of carrying more passengers. Of course, an electric train cannot guarantee that the person beside you won't spend the entire journey eating something with an extraordinarily powerful smell. Technology has its limitations.

Goodbye to the Level Crossings

One significant part of the project involves removing several level crossings, including those at Coolmine, Porterstown and Clonsilla. Anyone familiar with these locations knows the particular frustration of arriving just as the barriers begin to descend. You sit patiently. A train passes. You prepare to move. Then another train approaches from the opposite direction. The barriers remain firmly closed, and you begin wondering whether it might be quicker to abandon the car and walk.

The proposed changes should allow trains to operate more frequently without constantly interrupting road traffic. However, the closures will also mean changes to local driving routes, with new pedestrian and cycling bridges and alternative road crossings. For residents and businesses affected, the details will matter enormously. A faster railway is welcome, but people still need practical ways of getting around their neighbourhoods.

Are We Nearly There Yet?

The project has been discussed for years, but significant progress has finally been made. Planning approval was granted in July 2024, becoming operative in June 2025 following legal proceedings. In September 2026, the formal land acquisition process began, affecting 206 landowners along the route.

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Preparations for construction are advancing, with early works anticipated and the main construction programme still ahead.

Unfortunately, there's no firm date on which residents can expect to board their first DART+ West service. This is something of a disappointment to those hoping to throw away their car keys before Christmas. Major infrastructure projects take time, particularly when they involve busy railway lines, bridges, stations and extensive electrical equipment. Nevertheless, commuters might reasonably hope to enjoy the improvements while they're still young enough to remember why they wanted them.

A Better Connected Dublin 15

Beyond making commuting easier, DART+ West could bring considerable benefits to Dublin 15. Better transport connections would make it easier to access employment, education, shopping and entertainment without relying on a car. Families could travel into the city more easily, while older residents and people who prefer not to drive would have greater independence. And perhaps fewer cars on the roads might eventually make life a little easier for those who still need to drive.

It could also change the way people think about where they live and work. An efficient railway makes a growing community more accessible, more attractive and better connected. These are considerable benefits for an area that has experienced such enormous growth over recent decades.

The Waiting Game Continues

For now, Dublin 15 residents must continue using the existing commuter services while looking forward to the promised improvements. The ambition is impressive, and the potential benefits are undeniable. A frequent, reliable electric railway would be a tremendous asset to the area. In the meantime, we'll continue standing on platforms, watching departure boards and listening to announcements apologising for delays.

And when DART+ West finally arrives, I suspect there will be celebrations across Dublin 15. People will admire the shiny new trains, enjoy the comfortable carriages and marvel at the frequency of services. For approximately three weeks. Then somebody will complain that the train is two minutes late, another will object to the fare, and a third will demand to know why there aren't more seats.

Because although the trains may be modernised, one thing will never change: the Irish commuter. And we'd probably be disappointed if we had nothing to complain about.



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The Royal Canal

Dublin 15's Next Great Escape?

An ambitious new greenway could transform one of Dublin 15's most historic waterways into a haven for walkers, cyclists and anyone desperate to escape the television.

There was a time when going for a walk required very little preparation. You put on your shoes, opened the front door and walked until you felt you'd had enough. Then you turned around and came home. Nowadays, walking has become a considerably more sophisticated activity. We have fitness watches, step counters, specialist footwear, breathable jackets and mobile apps that congratulate us for moving our legs. Some people even pay monthly subscriptions to be told they've walked three kilometres.

Fortunately, Dublin 15 could soon have an excellent reason to put all this equipment to good use. Plans for a new 8.1-kilometre Royal Canal Urban Greenway have taken a significant step forward, with Fingal County Council submitting a planning application in October 2026. The proposed route will stretch from the Kildare county boundary through the Clonsilla, Coolmine and Castleknock areas, connecting with the existing greenway at Ashtown. And the really attractive part? Much of it will follow one of the area's most beautiful and historically significant features: the Royal Canal.

A Waterway with a History

The Royal Canal has been part of the Irish landscape for more than two centuries. Originally built to transport goods and passengers between Dublin and the River Shannon, it was once an important commercial artery, carrying everything from agricultural produce to building materials. In those days, travelling by canal boat was hardly an express service. A journey that might now take a couple of hours by car could occupy a considerable portion of your week. On the other hand, you didn't have to worry about motorway tolls, traffic cameras or somebody undertaking you at 120 kilometres an hour.

The arrival of the railways eventually brought the canal's commercial heyday to an end, but the waterway survived, becoming a peaceful refuge for wildlife, walkers and people who simply enjoy watching water move at a pace considerably more relaxed than modern life. And now, more than two centuries after its construction, the canal could be enjoying another transformation.

Walking, Cycling and the Occasional Argument

The proposed greenway promises a shared route for pedestrians and cyclists, creating opportunities for exercise, recreation and more environmentally friendly travel. For families, it could provide somewhere to enjoy a Sunday afternoon without spending a fortune. For commuters, it could offer an alternative to sitting in traffic wondering why the car in front hasn't moved for twelve minutes. And for those of us who have reached the age when a pleasant stroll followed by coffee constitutes a perfectly satisfactory day's entertainment, it sounds ideal.

Of course, shared walking and cycling routes can create their own little tensions. Walkers believe

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cyclists travel too fast. Cyclists believe walkers spread themselves across the entire path. Dog owners occasionally introduce a third complication involving retractable leads that can stretch across a pathway like a police roadblock. Somewhere in the middle of all this, a person wearing headphones will be completely unaware that anyone else exists. Nevertheless, with considerate users and good design, greenways can become wonderful community amenities.

Nature on Our Doorstep

One of the great attractions of the Royal Canal is its wildlife. The waterway and its banks provide habitat for birds, fish, insects and small mammals, while the surrounding vegetation creates a valuable green corridor through an increasingly developed urban landscape. The proposed scheme includes measures intended to protect biodiversity, alongside new planting and improvements to the canal environment.

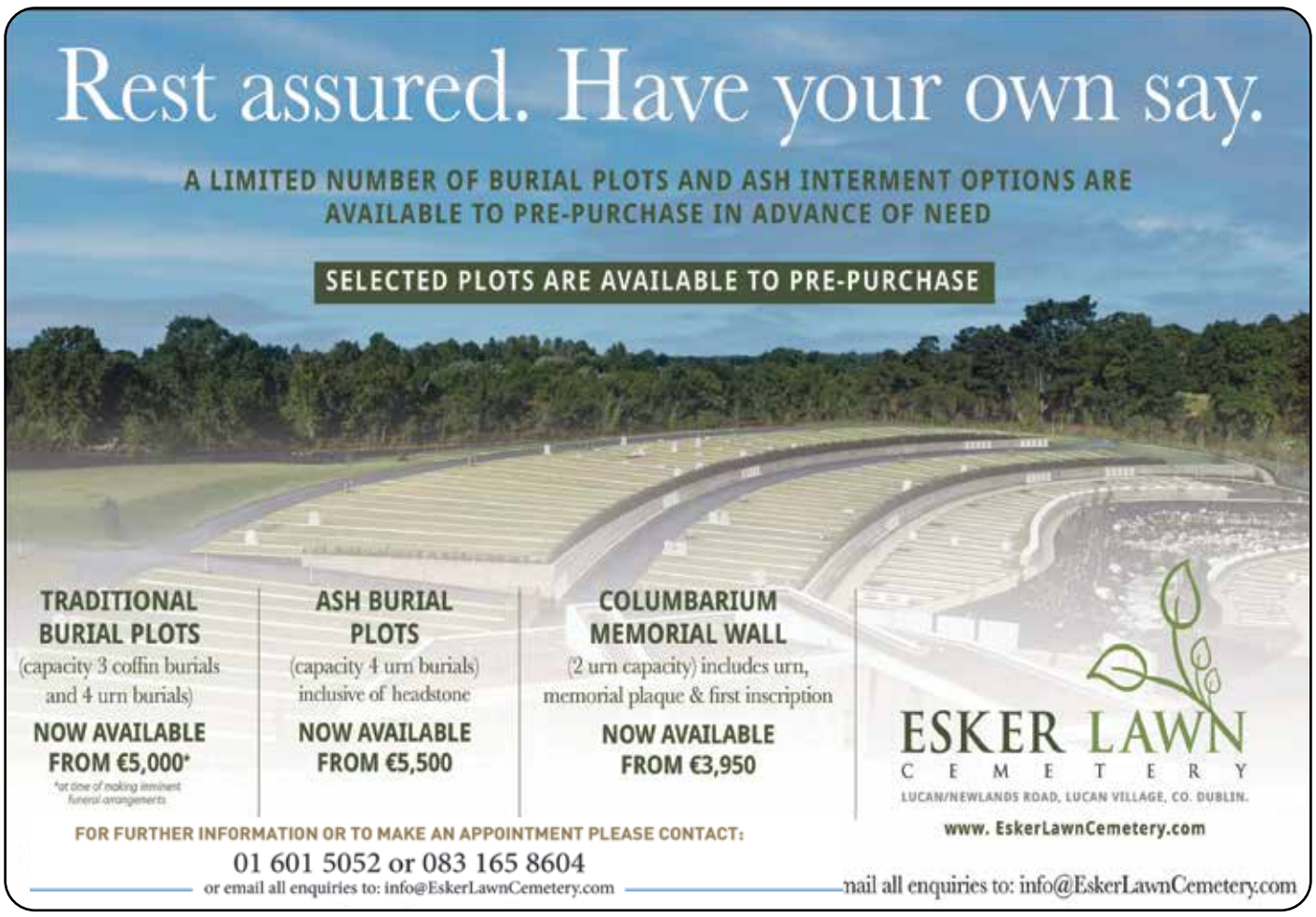
It is an important consideration. Dublin 15 has expanded enormously over recent decades, with housing developments, commercial centres and roads transforming once-rural areas. The canal offers something increasingly precious: a connection with nature that doesn't require driving halfway across the country. And unlike a shopping centre, the scenery costs nothing.

A Different Way to Enjoy Dublin 15

The greenway is still at the planning stage, so there is no guaranteed opening date. Engineering challenges, environmental protections and the proximity of the railway all require careful consideration. But the potential is considerable.

Imagine being able to enjoy a long, largely traffic-free walk, take the children cycling or simply spend an hour beside the water watching the world go by. For local businesses, there could be opportunities too. Walkers and cyclists have an extraordinary ability to develop a sudden need for coffee, sandwiches and cake. Indeed, there is a certain irony in walking five kilometres to improve your health and then consuming enough calories in a café to power a small village. Still, the fresh air must count for something.

The Royal Canal has quietly served Dublin and its surrounding communities for generations. It has witnessed enormous changes while continuing to flow at its own unhurried pace. Perhaps its next chapter will remind us that some of life's greatest pleasures are surprisingly simple: a pleasant path, a little greenery, good company and somewhere to stop for a coffee. And if the fitness watch tells us we've completed 10,000 steps, so much the better. Just don't ask how many of them were taken walking around the café looking for a table.



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Who Speaks for D15?



Everyone has an opinion about what needs improving in their neighbourhood.

But when the opportunity comes to have a say, how many of us actually turn up?

There is one thing the Irish are exceptionally good at, and that's complaining.

Give us a pothole, a broken streetlight, an unreliable bus service or a badly parked car, and we can sustain a conversation for hours.

We complain at the kitchen table, over coffee, in the pub and, increasingly, on social media.

Indeed, some local Facebook groups have become the modern equivalent of Speakers' Corner, except that everybody is speaking simultaneously and nobody appears to be listening.

But what happens when somebody actually asks us what we think?

Your Community, Your Say

In October, Fingal County Council invited Dublin 15 residents to help shape the future of community safety through a public consultation.

A meeting was scheduled for 28 October at the Crowne Plaza in Blanchardstown, giving people from Blanchardstown, Castleknock, Mulhuddart, Ongar and surrounding communities an opportunity to raise concerns and suggest improvements.

The initiative forms part of the new Local Community Safety Partnerships, which bring together residents, community organisations, Gardaí, local representatives and public agencies.

The idea is straightforward. Rather than having decisions made entirely by people sitting in offices, those who actually live and work in an area should have a say in what matters most.

It's a sensible approach.

After all, nobody knows a neighbourhood quite like the people who live there.

They know which footpaths are dangerous, which streets are poorly lit, where antisocial behaviour causes difficulties and which public spaces could benefit from a little attention.

They also know precisely which neighbour insists on parking across two spaces, although that particular grievance may be outside the

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The Great Irish Public Meeting

Public meetings are a fascinating feature of Irish democracy.

There's usually somebody who arrives with a folder containing seventeen years of correspondence with the council.

Another person has come specifically to raise an issue that has been troubling them since 1998.

There's invariably a gentleman who begins his contribution with, "I'll be very brief," which is the traditional warning that everybody should make themselves comfortable.

And, of course, somebody will ask a question that has absolutely nothing to do with the subject under discussion.

But beneath the occasional entertainment, these meetings serve an important purpose.

They give ordinary people an opportunity to be heard.

The challenge is ensuring that the discussion represents the wider community rather than simply those who are most confident about speaking in public.

What Makes a Community Feel Safe?

Community safety involves considerably more than policing.

It includes well-lit streets, safe walking routes, properly maintained public spaces and places where young people can meet and enjoy themselves.

For an older person, safety might mean being able to walk to the local shops without worrying about uneven footpaths or poor lighting.

For parents, it could mean safer roads outside schools or suitable recreational facilities for teenagers.

For younger residents, it might mean having somewhere to go that doesn't involve spending money.

And for the unfortunate person who regularly encounters somebody's unleashed dog while out walking, it might simply mean getting home



with both trouser legs intact.

Different generations have different priorities, and a successful community needs to consider them all.

The Silent Majority

One of the problems with public consultation is that the people who participate are not necessarily representative of everyone affected.

Many residents are too busy working, raising families or caring for relatives to attend evening meetings.

Others simply feel that expressing their opinion won't make any difference.

Then there are those who would rather undergo root canal treatment than speak into a microphone in front of fifty strangers.

An online survey can help, but even that requires people to take the initiative.

It's much easier to complain about something than to complete a questionnaire explaining what should be done about it.

And yet, unless people participate, the same familiar voices may dominate the conversation.

The quiet majority remains quiet, while the loud minority develops considerable expertise in operating microphones.



From Talking to Doing

Of course, the real test of any public consultation isn't how many meetings are held or how many pages appear in the final report.

It's whether anything changes.

Residents understandably want to see practical results, clear priorities and evidence that their concerns have been taken seriously.

Public bodies must balance competing demands, limited resources and differing opinions. What one resident considers an essential improvement, another may regard as an unnecessary expense.

That's why constructive discussion matters.

The challenge is to turn individual complaints into priorities that benefit the wider community.

A Little More Community Spirit

Dublin 15 has changed enormously over recent decades. Its expanding population, diverse communities and growing residential neighbourhoods bring both opportunities and challenges.

But the strength of any community lies in the willingness of its people to take an interest in what happens around them.

You don't have to attend every public meeting, join a committee or develop an encyclopaedic knowledge of council procedures.

Sometimes getting involved is as simple as completing a survey, supporting a local group or raising a concern constructively.

The October consultation provided one such opportunity. What matters now is how the views gathered help shape future priorities.

Because the people best placed to identify the everyday challenges of Dublin 15 are often the people who experience them.

And perhaps, next time something goes wrong in our neighbourhood, instead of immediately reaching for Facebook, we might consider doing something about it.

Although I suspect the Facebook post will still come first.

Preferably in capital letters.

The Christmas Lights Arms Race



Can Your House Be Seen from Space?

Remember when decorating the outside of your house for Christmas involved hanging a wreath on the front door and perhaps placing a string of coloured lights around the sitting room window. If you were particularly adventurous, you might put an illuminated Santa in the porch. That was considered quite sufficient to demonstrate your enthusiasm for the festive season.

Nowadays, certain Irish housing estates appear to be competing for the attention of the International Space Station. Entire houses disappear beneath thousands of flashing lights. Inflatable Santas wave from rooftops, illuminated reindeer graze on front lawns, and enormous snowmen stand guard beside the driveway. Some houses have so many decorations that you half expect the ESB to send an engineer around to investigate an unexplained surge in national electricity consumption. And it all begins with one neighbour.

Keeping Up with the O'Connors

Every estate has somebody who takes Christmas decorating seriously. Very seriously. We'll call him Michael.

Michael begins planning his Christmas display in September. By Halloween, he has inspected last year's decorations, replaced defective bulbs, and purchased several additional items that he insists were reduced in the sales. His wife, meanwhile, has begun questioning why the garage contains more Christmas decorations than gardening equipment.

On the first weekend in November, Michael emerges with a ladder, several extension cables, and the determined expression of a man preparing to restore electricity to a small town. By lunchtime, his house is glowing. There are lights along the gutters, lights around the windows, lights in the trees, and a luminous reindeer on the lawn.

Naturally, this creates a problem for his neighbour, Gerry. Gerry has always considered himself a respectable Christmas decorator. A tasteful string of warm white lights and a modest illuminated star have served him perfectly well for years. But now Michael has introduced a twelve-foot inflatable Santa. Gerry cannot allow this to go unanswered. Within a week, Gerry has installed six illuminated reindeer, a flashing sleigh, and a projector that covers the entire front of his house in moving snowflakes. The Christmas lights arms race has begun.

The Annual Untangling Ceremony

Of course, before any decorations can be installed, there is the traditional ceremony of untangling the Christmas lights. Every January, we carefully wind them up, place them neatly in a box, and store them in the attic. By November, they have somehow transformed themselves into a complicated knot that would challenge an experienced naval officer. There is no scientific explanation for this phenomenon. Lights simply become entangled during storage, apparently without human intervention.

The next hour is spent sitting on the floor, patiently separating cables while muttering increasingly inappropriate things about Christmas goodwill. Eventually, the lights are untangled and plugged in. Half of them don't work. This is particularly frustrating when the defective bulbs are somewhere in the middle of a twenty-metre string. We are informed that modern LED lights last for thousands of hours. This may be true, but apparently nobody has told the lights in our attic.

The Inflatable Invasion

Perhaps the most remarkable development in Christmas decorating has been the rise of the inflatable ornament. Once upon a time, a Christmas decoration was something you could hang on a tree. Now it is a twelve-foot illuminated Father Christmas requiring an electric pump to keep him upright.

The range is extraordinary. There are inflatable snowmen, penguins, polar bears, reindeer,

gingerbread houses, and entire scenes from the North Pole. Some are larger than the houses they decorate. And they have one unfortunate characteristic: switch off the electricity and they collapse. A cheerful Santa standing proudly beside the driveway at midnight becomes a sad heap of red and white fabric by morning. It looks as though Christmas has suffered a catastrophic defeat.

Strong winds create another problem. Across Ireland, householders can occasionally be seen pursuing escaped inflatable reindeer through neighbouring gardens, while children watch the spectacle with considerably more excitement than they displayed during the original installation.

The Domestic Negotiations

Naturally, decorating the outside of the house requires agreement between the occupants. One person generally favours restraint and good taste. The other wants the property to resemble the entrance to Disneyland.

Discussions begin politely.

"Do we really need another reindeer?"

"It's not another reindeer. It's a replacement."

"What happened to the original?"

"It's in the garage."

"So it's another reindeer."

At this point, negotiations generally deteriorate. Eventually, a compromise is reached in which all the decorations are installed, but one particularly offensive flashing Santa is moved behind a shrub. This is regarded as a major victory for moderation.

When Christmas Comes Early

Another interesting development is the date on which the decorations appear. Years ago, Christmas decorations traditionally went up sometime in December. For many families, 8 December was the established date, marking the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and coinciding with the great annual shopping expedition to Dublin. Nowadays, some houses are decorated before the Halloween pumpkins have been collected. By mid-November, entire estates are illuminated. The poor pumpkins have barely finished frightening the children before an inflatable snowman arrives to occupy the same patch of lawn. At this rate, Christmas decorations will soon be appearing during the August bank holiday weekend. Retailers, naturally, would be delighted.

The Neighbours Fight Back

Not everyone appreciates the festive extravaganza. There are residents who prefer a quiet Christmas, without flashing lights illuminating their bedrooms or electronic Santas playing Jingle Bells at eleven o'clock at night. And while most people enjoy a cheerful display, there is a point at which enthusiasm becomes an assault on the senses.

Some houses have lights that flash, chase, sparkle, pulse, and change colour every three seconds. One particularly ambitious display may even be synchronised to music. It is impressive for approximately four minutes. Living opposite it for six weeks is another matter entirely. There is a fine line between festive cheer and turning your neighbour's bedroom into a nightclub.

The Big Switch-Off

Eventually, Christmas comes and goes. The presents are opened, the turkey is finished, and the last of the Quality Street disappears. January arrives. For most households, this means taking down the decorations, packing them away, and returning to normality. But removing an elaborate outdoor display is a major operation.

Michael requires an entire weekend. The inflatable Santa must be deflated, the reindeer dismantled, and several kilometres of electrical cable recovered from the shrubbery. The ladder comes out again. The lights are carefully wound into neat coils and placed in storage boxes. And somewhere, beneath the tangled mass of decorations, Michael discovers a brand-new illuminated polar bear he bought in last January's sales and completely forgot about. He studies it thoughtfully. It really would look magnificent beside the driveway. Perhaps next Christmas.

Let There Be Light

Despite the competition, the expense, and the occasional excess, there is something rather wonderful about Ireland's enthusiasm for Christmas lights. On dark December evenings, a brightly decorated street can lift the spirits, particularly when households make the effort to create something special for local children. Some families also use their displays to raise money for charity, turning their festive enthusiasm into something genuinely worthwhile.

And while the displays may occasionally resemble Las Vegas after a power surge, they are generally created with the best of intentions. Christmas is supposed to be a time of light, warmth, and celebration. So perhaps we should applaud those neighbours who spend hours putting up decorations for everyone to enjoy. Even Michael.

Although I do worry about what he has planned for next year. I overheard him discussing a second electricity meter. And Gerry has apparently ordered a life-sized illuminated sleigh complete with eight reindeer. If this continues, there is every possibility that passing aircraft will mistake the estate for Dublin Airport. On the bright side, at least Santa won't have any difficulty finding it.

Dementia in Ireland

A Growing Challenge We Can No Longer Ignore

Every year in Ireland there are 11,000 new cases of dementia



The 36th Alzheimer Europe Conference takes place in Dublin from 27–29 October 2026, with Taoiseach Micheál Martin scheduled to address the opening ceremony on 27 October. Almost 70,000 people in Ireland are living with dementia, and that number is expected to more than double over the next 25 years. As Dublin hosts a major European conference on the condition, what are we doing to prepare?

Most of us have experienced that slightly embarrassing moment when we walk into a room and forget why we're there. Or spend ten minutes searching for our glasses before discovering they're sitting on top of our head. We laugh about these little lapses, putting them down to age, distraction or simply having too much on our minds. But for thousands of Irish families, memory loss is no laughing matter.

Dementia is one of the greatest health and social challenges facing Ireland, and the scale of the problem is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. The issue has been brought into sharp focus by the 36th Alzheimer Europe Conference, held in Dublin in October, with Taoiseach Micheál Martin announced as the opening speaker. Bringing together more than 1,300 delegates, including researchers, medical professionals, policymakers, people living with dementia and family carers, the conference places Ireland at the centre of an important European conversation. And the figures explain why that conversation is urgently needed.

According to new research published by Alzheimer Europe in January 2026, an estimated 69,949 people in Ireland are living with dementia. By 2050, that number is projected to reach 151,092. That's an increase of approximately 116%, driven largely by our growing and ageing population. Put simply, more people are living longer, and age remains the greatest risk factor for developing dementia. But dementia isn't exclusively a condition of old age. It can affect people in their fifties, forties and, occasionally, even younger. Nor is dementia a single disease. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause, but vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia and frontotemporal dementia are among several other forms. The condition can affect memory, reasoning, communication, behaviour and eventually the ability to manage everyday activities. Importantly, dementia is not an inevitable consequence of growing older.

Behind every diagnosis there is often a husband, wife, partner, son or daughter whose life changes dramatically. The Alzheimer Society of Ireland estimates that approximately 63% of people living with dementia remain at home in their communities. For many, this is made possible by the extraordinary efforts of family carers. A spouse may gradually become responsible for medication, meals, finances and everyday personal care. An adult child may find themselves looking after a parent who once looked after them. The changes can happen slowly. First there are forgotten appointments, misplaced possessions or repeated questions. Later, familiar activities may become increasingly difficult. For the person providing care, the emotional demands can be considerable. There's the sadness of watching somebody they love change, combined with physical exhaustion, financial pressure and the constant responsibility of ensuring their safety. More than 180,000 people in Ireland are estimated to be current or former carers of a family member or partner with dementia. Their contribution is

enormous, yet much of it takes place quietly behind closed doors.

Ireland introduced its first National Dementia Strategy in 2014, recognising the need for better diagnosis, greater public awareness and improved care. Progress has been made, particularly in the development of community services and specialist assessment facilities. Budget 2027 includes an additional €1.4 million for community-based dementia services, intended to provide eight new or expanded day-care services, additional day care at home, five activity clubs for people with young-onset dementia and five more dementia advisers. The Government has also committed to increasing HSE home-support provision to 28.5 million hours in 2027, with at least 24% of the additional hours allocated to people living with dementia. Meanwhile, specialist memory assessment services are being expanded, with new clinics planned in several parts of the country. A national dementia registry is also being developed to improve information about diagnosis, care and future service requirements. These are positive developments, although the crucial question is whether the planned services will become available quickly enough to meet growing demand. For families struggling to obtain a diagnosis, secure home support or arrange respite care, promises of future improvements provide limited comfort in the present.

There have been encouraging advances in dementia research. Two newer Alzheimer's treatments, lecanemab and donanemab, have received European authorisation for certain people with early-stage Alzheimer's disease. Unlike older medicines that primarily manage symptoms, these treatments target processes associated with the disease and can slow cognitive decline in selected patients. However, they are not cures, do not restore lost memory and are unsuitable for many people. They also carry risks requiring careful monitoring. Access through Ireland's public health system is subject to further assessment and funding decisions. Nevertheless, these developments represent an important change in Alzheimer's research. For decades, treatment largely concentrated on managing symptoms and providing care. Scientists are now beginning to develop treatments that may alter the course of the disease itself.

Another encouraging area of research concerns prevention. A major international study published by The Lancet in 2024 suggested that, at population level, up to 45% of dementia cases might potentially be prevented or delayed by addressing fourteen modifiable risk factors. These include high blood pressure, smoking, physical inactivity, diabetes, high cholesterol, hearing loss, untreated vision problems and social isolation. There are no guarantees, and people can develop dementia despite living healthy lives. Nevertheless, the findings reinforce the importance of looking after our physical and mental health throughout life. Regular exercise, maintaining social connections, managing blood pressure and cholesterol, and addressing hearing or vision difficulties may all help reduce risk. Perhaps that provides another good reason to go for a walk, join a club or meet friends for coffee. Not that most of us needed another excuse for the coffee.

Medical treatment and government funding are only part of the answer. We also need communities that understand dementia and support those living with it. A person struggling to find the right words in a shop isn't necessarily being difficult. Someone becoming confused in a familiar place may need patience rather than criticism. Businesses, community organisations and neighbours can make an enormous difference through awareness, understanding and relatively simple acts of kindness. People living with dementia should also have opportunities to remain active, maintain friendships and participate in community life for as long as possible. A diagnosis does not mean that somebody immediately loses their independence, personality or ability to enjoy life. The voices of people living with dementia have an important place in deciding how services are designed and delivered.

The Dublin conference offers an important opportunity to examine what Ireland has achieved and what still needs to be done. But beyond the speeches, presentations and policy discussions, there is a much simpler measure of success. Can somebody living with dementia receive an early diagnosis, access appropriate treatment and continue enjoying a meaningful life? Can their family obtain practical assistance before reaching breaking point? And can we ensure that the growing number of people affected are treated with dignity, respect and understanding? With the number of people living with dementia expected to more than double by 2050, these questions will become increasingly important. Dementia may affect a person's memory, but it should never diminish their value as a human being. And as a society, remembering that might be the most important step of all.

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