The RATHMINES INITIATIVE

The Rathmines Initiative is proposing the creation of a

Rathmines Civic Forum

Coordinating Public Services and Community Gain

as a means to optimise the delivery of much-needed public services and facilities for the community of Rathmines.

Background and Contexts

- Rathmines is unique among comparable Dublin urban villages in having no adequate public infrastructure to support community activities – no community centre, no meeting rooms, no community activity rooms, nowhere for local social and cultural groups to meet and interact. This is a significant deficit and militates against the development of a stable, sustainable and inclusive community in Rathmines.
- Unlike the other urban villages, the division of Rathmines (along Rathmines Road Lower) between two different local electoral areas, Kimmage-Rathmines to the West and Pembroke to the East, doesn't facilitate a focussed overview of the area as a whole. Rightly or wrongly, this leads to many believing that Rathmines struggles to get the same attention for its problems as the other urban villages, – Harold's Cross, Rathgar, Terenure, Dolphin's Barn, Kimmage and Crumlin to the West, and Ranelagh, Clonskeagh, Donnybrook, Ballsbridge, Ringsend / Irishtown and Sandymount to the East. This is despite the fact that the area is a major source of income for the City Council through the commercial rates collected from all the businesses there, which amounted to almost €4 million in 2023, as well as the rents from the Swan Leisure Centre and Safari Creche, where the annual rent is €596,000.
- The Swan Leisure Centre was the first significant capital investment by the city council in community development since it built the swimming pool around 1965, and it is an example of the kind of the kind of benefit that can accrue to a community through creative advance planning and local consultation. Opened in 2010 and providing ever more popular wellness services to the community, it is now returning a profit to the council! The Rathmines Initiative was prominent among local bodies promoting the project with the city council.
- If the lack of community facilities in Rathmines is to be addressed, the solution is most likely to be related in some form to the existing publicly-owned buildings in the area.

These are:
    - Rathmines Town Hall, owned by the City Council and leased to the city's Education and Training Board, home to the City of Dublin FET College Rathmines (formerly Rathmines College of Further Education);
    - Rathmines Library, owned by the City Council;
    - The former DIT Music Conservatory, originally Rathmines Technical Institute and now owned by the Department of Higher Education and recently leased to a private school; our local councillors arranged to have this site rezoned as Z15 – Institutional Use, in the latest City Development Plan, to make it less attractive to private developers, thus keeping it in public ownership and saving its potential for future development for the public good.
    - The former Fire Station currently leased to the Mart Art Group.
    - Rathmines Post Office, owned by An Post and now on the market for sale subject to a long lease held on portion of the premises by Eircom.
- A proposed Primary Healthcare Centre at the Gulistan recycling centre site is in the planning process, which if realised in a timely fashion would radically improve health services to the whole community and wellness care to its older citizens.
- The parallel plan to provide social, affordable and age-friendly housing on the Gulistan site currently includes a proposal to refurbish an historic stone building there which is not suitable for housing. Given the lack of local community facilities, the Rathmines Initiative believes this building when refurbished should be devoted to community facilities such as meeting and activity rooms.
- Rathmines Town Hall, which will celebrate its 130th anniversary in 2027, contains a handsome long-disused auditorium which if restored could greatly enhance public facilities in the area. Any refurbishment project would probably require the temporary decanting of the ETB function for which alternative local accommodation would have to be found. The completed project could include spaces available for community use as well as the auditorium.
- The former DIT Music Conservatory buildings could have served to accommodate the ETB College function during the decanting period from the Town Hall, but the opportunity was lost due to the lack of consultation and coordination between the various institutional owners involved. There is also a substantial underused yard to the rear of the premises which could be used to provide housing and, in the future, in conjunction with the Herman White premises if and when it becomes available, form a new street connecting the main road with the St Louis Primary School, opening up opportunities for further development for housing and the much-needed extension of the Swan Leisure Centre.
- The positive potential of these historic civic buildings and sites is being overlooked because of the diffuse pattern of ownership and lack of coordination between the various public sector institutional owners. The Rathmines Initiative is proposing a way to resolve this situation – ***The Rathmines Civic Forum.***

The Rathmines Civic Forum would be a multi-agency network charged with collaboratively coordinating strategy for the optimum use of publicly-owned buildings in Rathmines to ensure the maximum benefit for the local community and the public at large.

It would need to be comprised of representatives of City Council management, the elected Councillors, the four local TDs, City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB), the HSE,

the community Garda service, the South City Partnership, the Department of Higher Education, and to be receptive to input from the local community in some structured format.

Since there would be no statutory basis for the Forum, it would depend on the goodwill of our local Councillors and TDs to persuade City Council management, the ETB, the HSE and the Dept. of Higher Education to participate in it, facilitate it with secretarial backup, and undertake to give positive consideration to its recommendations.

The Strategic Aims of the Forum would be:

- to ensure optimum coordination between public service providers in Rathmines,
- to ensure the optimal use of publicly-owned buildings in Rathmines over time and
- to secure appropriate facilities for the community in Rathmines to promote the development of a cohesive, sustainable and inclusive community.

The Objectives of the Forum would be:

- Promote and monitor the project to refurbish the Town Hall and its auditorium;
- Promote timely progress on the two projects on the Gulistan site, advocating for the use of the historic stone building there for community purposes;
- Promote and monitor the coordination of public services in Rathmines;
- Monitor developments on the disposal of the Post Office, investigating opportunities for promoting the public good;
- Examine the potential of the underused back yard of the former Rathmines Technical Institute for development aligned with the public good.

The Rathmines Initiative will be contacting our local representatives to promote this idea; we would love if you would too!