Dundrum Community, Cultural and Civic Action Plan Consultation

Submission from Imagine Dundrum

October 2019
Preface

Imagine Dundrum warmly welcomes Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council’s initiative to appoint consultants to prepare a *Community, Cultural and Civic Action Plan for Dundrum*, and the group is delighted to offer this submission as part of its contribution to this important process.

The redevelopment of Dundrum Village offers an unparalleled opportunity to restore Dundrum’s original strong identity and focus, and to renew the central area as a uniquely thriving and attractive place, with all the facilities and services worthy of the second major town in this County. In addition, the current dynamic growth of Dundrum’s population makes the formulation of plans for the provision of strong civic, cultural and community dimensions to the future Dundrum essential to its future success as a pre-eminently liveable urban village.

The document that follows sets out the background to this submission, first sketching the history of the Imagine Dundrum group and its strong links across the wider local community, and its development of a policy framework highlighting the need for a wide range of facilities and services at present notable by their absence.

The submission outlines those aspects of existing formal County planning policy, and broader Government thinking, which strengthen the argument for a radical transformation of the locality in the spirit of contemporary thinking about ‘placemaking’ and about meaningful involvement of the local community, which are vital determinants of social cohesion, inclusion, and creativity.

Based on the group’s own research and thinking, along with substantial community consultation over more than three years, *this Imagine Dundrum* submission makes the case for a new Civic Centre and library at the heart of the Village area, to act as a hub for a wide range of new and upgraded services and facilities, all set within a revivified and characterful Main Street and surroundings. More detail, and a sketch of a range of possibilities for such a centre, is provided in section 3.

As highlighted in its submission to the pre-draft consultation for the *Dundrum Local Area Plan*, Imagine Dundrum wants to emphasise above all the importance of planning and designing – of both buildings and services - for *everyone* in the community, and of specifically considering the needs of and possibilities for children, young people, senior citizens, those with disabilities and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. If this is done, Dundrum could be a role model for genuine inclusivity in a suburban neighbourhood!

Imagine Dundrum hopes that the consultants will find these proposals helpful to their thinking, and that there will be an opportunity for discussion and exploration as the consultative process develops.

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*Imagine Dundrum, October 2019*
1. THE BACKGROUND TO THIS SUBMISSION

**Imagine Dundrum**

Imagine Dundrum is a coming together of a group of local residents of Dundrum and surrounding areas. We are working together for the renewal of Dundrum’s core built environment, with the aim of bringing a strong community voice to the decisions that will shape our home place for generations.

We have been working since 2016 in close collaboration with the local community, local businesses, the developers of the old Shopping Centre in Dundrum, Council officials and public representatives to help shape the future of our Village in the best possible way for all.

**Dundrum’s recent history**

Following the large-scale housing expansion of the 1960s and 1970s, the Dundrum area developed a strong new sense of community and locality, based around its historic village core. In recent years, however, local people have experienced a sense of loss resulting from the progressive and visible down-grading of much of our local environment.

Significant change came from Dundrum’s designation as a Major Town Centre, the construction of the new shopping centre and the bypass. Then, during the recession years, we witnessed the gradual physical deterioration of our Main Street as a whole. As a result, we have lost a unique place with an individual character and living history, which had nurtured social cohesion and a sense of belonging for local residents.

Imagine Dundrum members are convinced that these lost qualities can be restored to Dundrum, with good planning, sensitive awareness of the social and community dimensions of urban redevelopment, and adequate and timely consultation with local communities and businesses.

**Dundrum needs a Civic Centre and other facilities**

The main focus of this submission is on Dundrum Village, as the centre of a growing population and the second major town in the county of Dún Laoghaire Rathdown, and on the developments needed to make Dundrum a thriving, attractive and welcoming community in which to grow up, visit, work or grow old. We want to see fully adequate civic, community and cultural facilities at the heart of the redeveloped Dundrum Village, believing that these facilities are essential to creating a sustainable community as the population continues to grow and diversify.

In particular, we are advocating for a Civic Centre as a new and strong public focus for the Village and the wider surrounding area. The case and vision for this Civic Centre is the main theme of this submission. We fully recognise also the need for significant additional social, community and recreational facilities in this growing area. We favour an integrated plan for these services, with the new Civic Centre at the heart of a network of facilities to meet the diverse range of community needs.
Community infrastructure: current challenges

The need for a well-planned and integrated network of community facilities and services across the Dundrum area was highlighted by Nexus Research Cooperative in a recent research report. Although focusing on a smaller area than the Dundrum Community, Cultural and Civic Action Plan investigation, it noted: overall capacity issues; the geographical and financial constraints of local resource centres; the urgent need for well-staffed advisory/information services; a lack of spaces for people to come together in self-organised interest or support groups and a similar lack of facilities for lifelong and community based learning. The research also identified deficits in supportive infrastructure such as affordable childcare, practical facilities (IT, photocopying etc.), the accessibility of buildings and their availability at evenings and weekends.

The Nexus report highlights especially the lack of coordination among existing facilities and activities – a prerequisite for creating a service for the whole community. Its valuable research-based information gives a clear sense of direction for the new initiatives that will be needed to create fully adequate community services for the whole of Dundrum.

Cultural activity and community wellbeing

A core function of Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council is the promotion of community wellbeing. Cultural activities are an essential to the achievement of wellbeing in an area, as the current dlr Arts Development Plan 2016-2022 clearly states:

*The Council views the Arts as an important service ... for those who live in, work in and visit the County. It ... believes in their intrinsic value and the contribution they make to the wellbeing and quality of life of the County.*

A recent Arts Council England report shows that access to cultural activities really matters to people and communities. The findings of that report show that arts and culture:

- **Promotes wellbeing** – 65% of people think that arts and culture are good for well-being, and 36% think arts and culture are “essential to life”. People who attend a wide range of arts and cultural events are more satisfied with their lives than those who do not (even when accounting for other factors that influence life satisfaction).
- **Attracts a variety of people to live and work in an area** – 44% of people who remained in an area and 43% who moved to an area cited arts and culture as an important factor in their decision – equal to the numbers of people citing schools. These figures were not affected by the type of job a person had, suggesting that arts and culture can help to attract a broad range of residents and workers to an area.
- **Helps build communities** – 49% of people think attending arts and cultural events helps them feel part of a community, with 68% thinking these events are very important for fostering community feeling.
- **Supports high streets** – Arts and cultural organisations are helping to fill the gap left as retail moves away from high streets. By offering unique experiences, these organisations are helping...
to attract visitors and increase footfall, promoting high streets as attractive places to live, work and visit.

There is strong Irish government acknowledgement of the significance of arts, heritage and culture, recognised in Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework, as a critical element in shaping the quality of peoples’ communities and places, alongside and on a par with elements such as health, employment and education. This significant role of spaces and resources for cultural activity in community life is also recognised across the political spectrum, for example:

*Throughout Ireland, cultural activity is a powerful driver of life and wellbeing. Cultural productions can play an important part in the regeneration of urban Ireland, whether through music, drama, dance or other forms of performance. We will facilitate this through finance and mentoring for the development of existing and new centres for cultural activity, comprising of spaces for both creatives and wider arts and community groups, as well as performance and exhibition space.*

This level of commitment is welcome and clearly relevant to the current situation of Dundrum.

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2. CONTEXT: THE TIME IS RIGHT

Dundrum’s status: the second County Town, and poised for renewal

The status of Dundrum as the second Major Town Centre in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown, its designation as a Metropolitan Consolidation Town, the growing population, and, in particular the increasing level of densification of residential provision in the area are all critical parts of the context for the Action Plan for Community, Cultural and Civic facilities in Dundrum.

The imminent redevelopment of the old Shopping Centre, along with the forthcoming Local Area Plan for Dundrum, offer huge potential to create well designed public space in the village, with a Civic Centre integrating civic, community and cultural dimensions at its heart.

A supportive local planning and policy context

Several features of Dún Laoghaire Rathdown’s planning and development provisions provide strong supporting context for Imagine Dundrum’s proposals:

The County Development Plan 2016-2022: Imagine Dundrum has welcomed the commitment in the County Development Plan not just to reviving a moribund retail area but also to restoring and re-energising Dundrum as a living community and a satisfying urban environment for locals and others.

We particularly welcome Special Local Objective (SLO) 149, which sets down that the redevelopment of the old Shopping Centre must provide for a range of cultural, community and civic uses. This provision provides the strong planning imperative to support the case for a Civic Centre in that location.

We also welcome SLO 80, which looks to the potential for Dundrum College of Further Education, located at the centre of Main Street, to be part of strong links between the education, community and business sectors. A good example of this collaboration exists in Bray Co. Wicklow, where the new building for the College of Further Education was successfully integrated as an ‘anchor service’ into the civic centre, which also includes health services, a theatre, gallery space and coffee shop all situated around a multi-purpose central plaza.

The forthcoming Dundrum Local Area Plan (LAP) will also be an essential context for civic, community and cultural facilities. We believe the LAP offers an opportunity to create a sustainable, modern, thriving Dundrum that effectively blends the Village’s rich past and heritage, its unique character and its present strengths, with its future as a modern urban village.

Dundrum Village: A unique placemaking opportunity

Imagine Dundrum regards the research and practical principles adopted by the global placemaking movement, exemplified in the ‘Project for Public Spaces’, to be the ideal conceptual framework for the next stage of development of Dundrum Village. In summary,

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just

6 https://www.pps.org/category/placemaking
promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.

In keeping with the placemaking ethos, we suggest that civic, cultural and community planning for Dundrum is not only about buildings. The Dundrum Community, Cultural and Civic Action Plan must be rooted in a vision for Dundrum Village, and in particular, the Main Street, and in a clear sense of how a Civic Centre will contribute to, and be an integral part of the creation of our re-energised urban village. A vibrant street is itself a community facility, bringing people in and bringing them together. We look to the Action Plan to adopt an imaginative, placemaking approach to Main Street, linking with the placemaking focus of the forthcoming Dundrum Local Area Plan.

Fundamental principles

Imagine Dundrum offers the following placemaking guidelines to underpin the Action Plan, drawing on the principles we adopted at the start, which remain at the core of our work. We, and all those we have consulted over the last three years, want to see:

- **A thriving Dundrum Main Street**, which reflects and respects the character and streetscape of the old Main Street, including its local historical and cultural landmarks, and maintains a style and scale of building in tune with the unique character of the Village.

- **A proper balance between residential, commercial and public/civic spaces in Dundrum**, both on the Main Street and in the overall development, thus restoring the original qualities of Dundrum Village.

- **A substantial public focal point providing for cultural, community and civic uses and forming an integral part of Dundrum’s redevelopment**. This will strengthen and support community life and ensure its sustainability.

- **A Dundrum which is a connected environment, pedestrian- and cycle-friendly**, with easy movement between its different parts, with open and green areas, and smooth links to public transport.

- **A thriving place where small and medium-sized local, independent business are encouraged and provided for**, to ensure authenticity in the commercial landscape, and a thriving day and evening social and commercial life.

- **A renewed Dundrum that is inclusive, open and accessible to all** - including older people, children and young people, people with disabilities and the widest range of residents, workers and visitors.

- **A sustainable, future proofed Dundrum**, showcasing the highest environmental and energy efficient standards in its design, construction and maintenance.
Imagine Dundrum: leading strong local support for a renewed Village and Civic Centre

Imagine Dundrum has, from its beginning in January 2016, been guided by the placemaking ethos, and has adopted a collaborative approach, which has built a strong network of community and civic engagement in thinking about the future of our Village.

Over the past three and a half years, we have brought together residents, businesses, local and national public representatives, and we have linked closely with Council officials. We had constructive engagement with Hammerson, the company who will develop the old Shopping Centre and other parts of Main Street. We have consulted widely and deeply, connecting with children, young people, and people with disabilities, to ensure a shared vision for a truly integrated, inclusive and forward-looking Dundrum.

We are delighted that Imagine Dundrum’s 1,000 Voices project, seeking signatures from local people in support of the fundamental principles listed above, and specifically their endorsement of the call for a Civic Centre in Dundrum, has reached its target, and we are now well on the way to securing a further thousand statements of support.

All sectors of the local population are ready for change, and excited by the possibilities it offers. We hope those with ultimate responsibility for planning and implementing will match this engaged community’s wishes and vision for the future Dundrum.

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3. IMAGINING A CIVIC CENTRE AT THE HEART OF THE NEW DUNDRUM

Imagine Dundrum sees the forthcoming redevelopment of the old Dundrum Shopping Centre as the perfect opportunity to restore Dundrum’s unique village character, and to enhance it by the provision of a landmark Civic Centre forming a new and strong public focus for the Village and wider surrounding area.

As the second major County Town in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown, Dundrum deserves a Civic Centre befitting this status. Dundrum itself, already densely populated, is at the core of a large and fast-growing area, so that such a Centre will be essential for maintaining and enhancing a vibrant and sustainable community.

Imagine Dundrum’s vision for the Civic Centre

Imagine Dundrum proposes a Civic Centre for Dundrum which will be a prominent building or set of interlinked buildings and surrounding public space, positioned at the heart of the Village. It will be the administrative hub for the whole area, with a modern library as a core facility, and will also house key local Council and other public services, all of which have the potential to consolidate and strengthen community. For the Civic Centre to be a true focal point, its optimum location will be within the re-developed site of the old Shopping Centre.

This landmark building or group of buildings, and its associated public space, will

- Provide access in an open, accessible, and inclusive way to services and spaces beneficial to the entire community;
- Host a wide range of cultural events and community activities alongside its civic functions;
- Enable collaborations with local and national cultural and educational institutions such as the Mill Theatre, ArtNetdlr, Mountains to Sea Festival (Dundrum is the gateway to the Mountains!), Music Network, the National Concert Hall, TCD Science Gallery, the National Gallery; Dundrum Arts and Cultural Festival
- Showcase sustainable, environmentally friendly design and building techniques.

Siting the Civic Centre on a public space – a ‘town square’ or plaza – directly connecting to Main Street will be key to realising its potential in terms of the future of Dundrum Village and the closely associated surrounding area. Placemaking literature is very clear on this:

*Traditionally, the center of most cities has been a ‘commons’, a civic space built according to democratic principles ... In almost every case, major public and cultural institutions are located around the commons, forming a civic center of enormous practical and symbolic importance.*

*Libraries are the cornerstones of many civic centers. They may be joined by city halls, museums, government offices, churches, opera houses, courthouses, or any number of other public-minded institutions. With strong partnerships and a clear purpose, the people behind these buildings can breathe life into their shared public space—the commons—and create a vibrant, cohesive district. A fully-realized civic center proclaims the mission and identity of its institutions*
for all to see, so that the commons becomes a forum for public expression and a source of community pride.7

Core provisions in the Civic Centre8

A modern library offering a range of library services and cultural activities

The National Public Libraries Strategy, Our Public Libraries 2022, describing the broad social functions of a contemporary library, captures exactly the aspirations and expectations of local residents for a new library within a Civic Centre in Dundrum Village:

A modern and well-resourced public library contributes to the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of communities.... It provides information, supports learning and culture and is a focal point for a growing number of public services. The library is a trusted space, integrated into the local community and accessible to all. It supports and facilitates education and skills development. Through the promotion of literacy supports, the library complements mainstream education and provides a space for children and adults to learn and develop. It is a resource for developing digital skills and literacy, it provides cultural and educational outreach programmes that empower communities, facilitates community cohesion, reduces isolation and contributes to pride of place. [p9].

The current Dundrum library, while much loved by residents, lacks the physical capacity to deliver this vision of a modern library – a vision that has been realised in other parts of the County, most notably in the Lexicon Library in Dun Laoghaire. It follows that a new library, with the requisite site space to deliver the key services, must be provided in Dundrum Village.

A library co-located with a ‘one-stop shop’ facilitating access to key public services

Imagine Dundrum envisages the Civic Centre as a space where the modern library, as anchor service, is co-located with the County Council administrative offices (at present housed in a relatively distant and inaccessible location). Other services, including voluntary services with a clear synergy with the Council’s services, could also be housed there.

The concept of co-locating a modern library with other services and facilities has many potential benefits, especially for library members, including:

• Ease of access to services through a single point, particularly beneficial for older people and people with disabilities, especially those with mobility difficulties
• New partnership possibilities and possible cost-sharing
• Increased footfall for the library.

Alongside the Council Offices other local public services such as the Local Enterprise Office, Community Services, the Centre could usefully accommodate:

• A small-scale Tourism Office (none exists at present in Dundrum) signposting key tourist attractions across the county, as well as the wealth of heritage in Dundrum

7 https://www.pps.org/article/civiccenterssolutions-2
8 A relevant example of a civic centre including a library, theatre, council offices, community advice hub, heritage and courtyard galleries and community services is that in operation in Solihull, UK. https://www.solihull.gov.uk/thecore
• Citizens Information Service, currently on the 4th floor of the Dundrum Town Centre
• A Post Office.

Cultural uses

Imagine Dundrum envisions a Civic Centre designed to accommodate a wide range of cultural activities including collaborations with local and national cultural institutions (see p.10 above). It would offer opportunities for author/literary events, and for local artists and performers across a wide range of arts practices.

A commitment to community-building must involve the inclusion of minority ethnic and people from the ‘new communities’ living in and around Dundrum. Making space in a Civic Centre for a wide variety of multi-cultural arts activities drawing on their diverse traditions and experiences would be a welcoming and an enriching addition to the cultural dimensions of the Centre and could form a distinctive aspect of Dundrum’s offerings within the wider County.

A number of avenues could be explored, such as an intercultural programme with the Islamic Cultural Centre in Clonskeagh, or linking with the active locally-based group which promotes performance of Indian classical music.

Protecting and promoting Dundrum’s heritage

One of the distinguishing features of Dundrum as a suburb or neighbourhood within Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County is its long and well-documented history. A relevant cultural use for new public spaces – or possibly for the Carnegie Building (see below) - would be to house a museum of local history, bringing together the rich and well-researched materials already available with a ‘citizens’ collection’ drawing on local residents’ family treasures, diaries etc. This could be the fruit of a sustained community history project, which would be beneficial in many ways: contributing to a strong local sense of belonging, and involving the active participation of senior citizens and possibly local schools and youth organisations.

The Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Council Archive could also find a home in Dundrum’s cultural spaces.

Multi-use community spaces

There is a serious lack of community and public meeting spaces for the current and future population of the Dundrum area, and a huge dependence on the generosity of private providers, especially the local Churches. It is vital that the new Civic Building be designed to add to the stock of community space, by providing flexible spaces for gatherings and meetings.

External public space for local events (farmers markets etc)

In the earlier part of this submission, Imagine Dundrum made the case for an innovative and imaginative view of civic space as going beyond buildings to include a vision for the life of the community within which those buildings function.

An external public - and, crucially, publicly-owned - space has been part of Imagine Dundrum’s thinking from the start, and has won wide public support. As illustrated in the architectural drawing which concludes this document, a key element in revitalising and animating Dundrum is a ‘town square’ or plaza/ market square associated with the Civic Centre and linking directly to Main Street, thus increasing the ‘walkability’ of the core Village area. Careful thought would need to be given to the provision of seating and possible features such as public art installations and water features – to create a space people will want to use and make their own.
This public square will create opportunities for outdoor events such as summer concerts and dance performances, art exhibitions (similar to Merrion Square), outdoor café space, and indeed a weekly farmers’ market.

**Recreational spaces for children and young people**

The marked lack of recreational facilities in Dundrum for children and young people was highlighted in *imagine Dundrum*’s consultations with local primary and secondary students in 2018 (see our submission to the *Dundrum Local Area Plan* pre-draft consultation, December 2018). While the Council has provided some excellent teen facilities such as the Cabinteely Grainstore, these are not easily accessible for young people living in Dundrum. There are no children’s playgrounds in close proximity to the Village area, and parents with young children have little choice but to travel by car to one of our local parks. This gap will become ever more evident as apartment living in the area expands greatly. Indoor recreational spaces for various age-groups, associated with the new Civic Centre, and small outdoor ‘pocket parks’ close to or within the Village area, could make a huge difference.

With imaginative thinking and design, we can ensure that the future adults of Dundrum are not neglected as our new community facilities are designed.

**The Civic Centre at the heart of a network of community services**

Alongside the facilities and services provided within the Civic Centre, it can fulfil an important function as the hub of the network of community and cultural services in the West of the County. The Civic Centre can be at the heart of an integrated plan for community and voluntary services in Dundrum itself, and a single point of accessible information about services in the County.

As identified in the Nexus report, there is a significant deficit in relation to the provision of up to date and accessible information for the public on the range of community and voluntary services locally, their catchment areas and target groups, venues and timetables. The Civic Centre can redress this through electronic ‘signposting’ to local services and facilities.

**Links with the College of Further Education**

Discussing the role of the County Council in relation to education, SLO 80 in the *Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Development Plan 2016-22* refers specifically to Dundrum. Its aim is:

*To facilitate, support and enhance educational facilities in the County, in particular the activities of Dundrum College of Further Education that will foster strong links between education, community and the business sector in the County*.

Both in terms of the built environment and in terms of service, the Dundrum College of Further Education occupies a central place in Dundrum Village, with an extensive street frontage and a substantial campus extending back from the Main Street.

Imagine Dundrum believes there is a great opportunity, closely aligned with the development of a Dundrum Civic Centre, to strengthen the links with the library and enhanced cultural

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offerings in Dundrum, to create a visible community/ life-long learning education campus in Dundrum, and to address the impact and utility of the site so that it can make a significant contribution to the future of the Village.

A new role for the Carnegie Building

The Carnegie library was founded 106 years ago, and is no stranger to multiple uses, having been a location for concerts, plays, ceilis, dances, and even serving as a school for a time.

This much-loved building must continue to serve the public, and can be an excellent addition to community spaces and facilities for activities such as youth services, community creche, delivery of outreach wellbeing and public health programmes under the ‘Healthy Ireland’ initiative. Meeting rooms and desk space, with practical facilities (access to the internet, photocopying etc.) are pressing needs for smaller community and voluntary groups, and such a service could be located in a renewed and modernised Carnegie Building.

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4. KEY POINTS IN CONCLUSION

Location and physical context of the Civic Centre
As mentioned earlier (p.11), locating the new Civic Centre for Dundrum at the heart of the Village is critical. Its location will ensure that the Centre, and its associated open public space, together form a strong public focal point, directly connected to the Main Street, which will ensure ‘permeability’ and embed the new development solidly into the old Village context.

Strong linkage with the forthcoming Dundrum Local Area Plan
All planning for a Civic Centre and associated community facilities and services in Dundrum must be linked firmly to the provisions of the Dundrum Local Area Plan, in the interests of a citizen-centred, integrated approach.

In particular, it is hoped that the Plan will re-invigorate proposals made by DLR County Council as far back as 2003 (in their Urban Design Framework for Dundrum) for traffic calming, improvements for both pedestrians and cyclists, and overall improvement in the quality of the public realm. The work of the Project for Public Spaces underscores the importance of such an approach to the pedestrian experience when embedding a Civic Centre securely in its physical context.

Surprisingly, the layout and atmosphere of many civic centers discourage people from getting around on foot. Even though offices, restaurants, shops, and cultural institutions may be located close together, a poor pedestrian environment makes them feel cut off from one another. In many cases, streets are simply designed to accommodate more and faster traffic than what’s needed, which negatively affects perceptions of pedestrian safety.\(^{10}\)

And in conclusion...
We are at a key moment in the decisions that will determine the future of Dundrum. The redevelopment of the Village offers an unparalleled opportunity to restore Dundrum’s original strong identity and focus, and to renew it as a uniquely thriving and attractive place. Imagine Dundrum is keenly aware that what happens over the coming months and years will shape our place for many generations. Civic, cultural and community facilities will be at the heart of guaranteeing the opportunity to build sustainable, living communities into the future.

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\(^{10}\) https://www.pps.org/article/civiccenterssolutions-2
Suggestion for a Civic Centre building fronting onto a Town Square and linking directly to Dundrum Main Street (in foreground)

With thanks to Eamon Regan, Architect

Submission to DCCCAP from Imagine Dundrum, October 2019

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