



## **Welcome for the Active Travel Strategy Plan**

Many people of all ages in Skerries walk and cycle locally as part of their commute, as part of the school run or as part of their regular routine (shopping, socialising etc.). The Skerries Cycling Initiative welcomes many of the ideas presented in the Active Travel Plan for Fingal and would be very pleased if they were implemented. To do so requires practical changes in our infrastructure, but even more so requires a will to carry the plans through. There have been grand studies and plans announced before but then nothing came of them.

### **2009 Cycle Study**

In 2009 a detailed report was made, namely the “Malahide and Skerries Cycling Study Report”. Many of the proposals in that study are still relevant and could be implemented today. For instance the Skerries Townpark, from the roundabout near the railway tunnel at the Lusk road, all the way to the tennis courts, are underutilised from an active travel point of view. Serious effort should be made to look at implementing the proposals for joining up cycling and walking routes through that area. It has the advantages of unlocking routes for people and also has no impact on the roads. The plans have details of a new short boardwalk across the Mill Stream to link the Mill Pond area in Greenlawns with the main Townpark and a series of paths and cycle routes linking up the parts of the town around the whole green area. The rest of the plan is similarly useful as a guide to what is possible in Skerries with a small investment.

### **Permeability and Connectivity**

Coupled with this there are a number of estates which are “walled off” from a cycling/walking point of view and require entering and leaving the same way as cars. Many teenagers just climb over the walls, so if the intention was to stop them taking a shortcut then that has failed. This is not just the case with older estates (such as Downside which has a big wall at one end where there should be a pedestrian link through to the Golf Links Road) but also new estates such as Ballygossan Park. While there is a walking route that links up with the end of Hillside Gardens (which is welcome) there is the bizarre situation of the Hillside and Ballygossan greenspaces being next to each other but fenced off from one another, facing each other as if across the Berlin Wall. If children from Hillside wish to use the Ballygossan playground they must make a large detour from their greenspace to the other one. All that is needed is a gap in the fence the size of a gate and tiny path. This would

also open up a pedestrian route from Ballygosson, through Hillside and into the Mills near the Mill Pond etc.

## **Protected Cycleways**

Sadly many children in Skerries are driven to school, and you can see the effect of this between 8am and 9am any weekday morning, as well as at pickup times, as the roads are jammed with cars heading to and from the schools. This is totally avoidable and in fact was not the case when many of us were at school.

We are fortunate in the town to have a train station, but its position in relation to the rest of the town means many drive to it rather than walk. Furthermore there is no all-day bus service to the station itself, linking the station to the town centre and surrounding estates.

Joining up our schools, shops, transport hubs and homes with active travel routes would both make it easier for people to make choices around active travel but also make it easier for people who must drive a private vehicle since many unnecessary car journeys would be removed.

Within Skerries there are many specific actions that could be taken to promote active travel.

A case in point is the Barnageeragh Road, but the principles could be applied to many other parts of the town.

This road now forms part of the main route to Balbriggan, and also connects the train station, Skerries Point, Skerries Educate Together National School (ETNS) and many local estates. There is an obvious opportunity to connect all of these places up together in a cohesive way to promote active travel. For a short stretch from the Train Station car park, to a pedestrian crossing on the main Barnageeragh Road there is a reasonably good quality cycle/walking track (through the Ballast Pit). However at the pedestrian crossing cyclists must join the main road.

There are few double yellow lines so cars park on this road to avoid paying for the car park at the train station. This means that to cycle along this stretch of road and to avoid being hit by a parked car door opening you must cycle in the middle of the road. Children cycling to school here face the choice of cycling in this fashion on a busy road or crossing the road and cycling on the footpath. So, when cycling on this road with children many people opt to cycle on the footpath, thus adults are breaking the law by doing so to ensure the safety of themselves and their children.

Heading North towards the Skerries ETNS you meet a number of side roads leading either into estates or joining up with the R127 coast road. For the entire stretch to the school there is not a single pedestrian or cycle crossing, nor any signage or colour-coded surface to indicate to drivers that this is a crossing point.

Cars on the side roads have in most cases a Yield sign and pause **in front** of the point where people cross the road thus impeding their ability to cross safely. At busy times you are reliant on goodwill from drivers to cross at all. For some parts of the journey there are some

badly maintained narrow cycle paths next to the footpath with only a painted line for segregation. Each of these cycle paths (which are travelling with the main flow) are expected to yield to cars on the side roads, who are in turn yielding to traffic on the main road. At the same time the cyclist or pedestrian must look three ways to avoid being hit by a car. The cycle lane itself is supposed to be two way but is not actually wide enough to be two way, meaning to overtake you must, potentially illegally, cycle on the footpath.

If the active travel plan has teeth then situations like this must be addressed. For the example above there is another, better solution. Along the entire stretch of the Barnageeragh Road from the Ballast Pit to Skerries Point there is a grass verge on the Western side of the road which could easily be converted into a high quality two way cycle track. This could join up with the existing cycle infrastructure at Skerries Point via a Toucan-style raised crossing to enable crossing the main road. Also double yellow lines could be put in along the full stretch of main road if required. To deal with pedestrian safety on the crossings previously outlined on the Eastern, housing-estate side, the intersections could be altered so cyclists and pedestrians have priority, along with using coloured raised junctions and moving stop lines behind a clearly marked crossing. All the Yield signs on the side roads should be changed to Stop signs. It is quite important that the crossings are clearly marked. As it is, the current crossing points are simply not safe.

As it stands at present, due to how bad the cycle lanes are, nearly all adult cyclists end up just cycling on the main road itself.

## **Bicycle Parking**

For the cycling aspect of active travel there needs to be greater investment in cycle parking at key locations. Many of the estates around the town have no cycle parking at all, so visitors to those estates have nowhere to lock up. Bleeper rental bikes are regularly seen locked in inappropriate places at entrances to estates because there is nowhere else to lock them.

Again, this is not just in old estates but cycle parking is lacking generally regardless of the vintage of the area. In the town centre itself there is very little cycle parking. For example Thomas Hand Street, if you go to the hardware shop in Skerries on your cargo bike there is nowhere to lock-up. There are many other examples.

While cycle parking at Red Island is welcome on a warm summer's day, on a more practical level we need far more infrastructure in the town centre itself for daily use.

## **Ardgillan Castle**

Ardgillan Castle is a fantastic resource for the people of Balbriggan and Skerries and hence it is quite sad to see that there is no safe pedestrian route from Skerries to it. As it is, you have to walk along the coast road and face some dangerous pinch points. This is impossible in a wheelchair or with a buggy, and of course there is no way for wheeled road users to get across the bridge at the Lady's Stairs. Again, a solution stares us in the face - Kelly's Lane leads up from the coast road to Skerries Point. To the north of Skerries Point there is an overgrown lane which leads to lanes on the Western side of the rail tracks. This is currently fenced off. If a modest sized track were put in along the agricultural land on the Western side

of the rail line you could put a safe active travel route from Skerries Point all the way virtually to the main entrance of Ardgillan. There are in fact tracks already there and in centuries past these would have been used by local people to make this journey. A modest investment here by Fingal CC would yield a great reward - linking up with safe travel routes to the train station and the town.

### **Further Afield**

Connecting Skerries with Balbriggan, Rush, Lusk, Donabate and Malahide with the proposed Greenway would not just be a draw for tourists and leisure users of all ages but would also be a viable commuting alternative for many who work in the neighbouring towns, and with that greenway and onward links from perhaps Malahide to Swords this part of Fingal would really open up for many people. The slow pace of the delivery of the greenway so far is disappointing and anything that can be done to speed up its implementation would be welcomed. Coupling the greenway with active travel infrastructure within Skerries and the surrounding towns would transform the quality of life for all - and we really do mean all, even car drivers would benefit by the reduction in the number of cars on the road!

*Submitted on behalf of Skerries Cycling Initiative, a committee of Skerries Community Association CLG*