



To: Working Group Stakeholders
By email

14th February 2024

Re: Proposal regarding Safety, Communications & OPW Staff Vehicles

A Chara,

Having listened carefully to the views of our Community and those of Castletown in recent months, and despite our deepening frustrations at the conduct of OPW throughout the current crisis, the Save Castletown Committee would like to present a new proposal to the working group. The Gate Protector Group remain part of the wider Save Castletown movement. However, they have defined themselves, for the purposes of this Working Group, under a separate vote. Accordingly, their view of this proposal would be a separate matter. Our position is informed by our Community Survey with over 800 responses, which was narrowly in favour of a controlled concession for OPW Staff Cars.

Context

We were initially informed SIPTU's position was that a risk of intimidation was their sole concern, specifically the presence of campaigners and campaign signage at the gates, and elements of public discourse which were objectionable to OPW. On Wednesday 15th November 2023, a proposal was made to OPW and to the Minister, which had near unanimous Community group support including that of the Gate Protector Group and the moderators of key social media platforms. This proposal addressed **all** the concerns that had been raised by SIPTU and thus was an ideal solution to the impasse. However, in response, a new blocking point was introduced by OPW to the Community – that OPW Staff did not want to attend work for fear of harm or assault while walking on Lime Avenue. The risk of harm, per OPW risk assessment, is mitigated by their own return to work and so is a moot point in that respect. Assault was a new suggestion.

We find the introduction of new rationale for insisting on OPW Staff Vehicles on Lime Avenue a further cause for mistrust, as it is so convenient to the narrative from OPW that the only way to get staff back on site is in their cars via Lime Avenue.

Very real fears for public safety have not been allayed by the publication of OPW's Risk Assessments in December 2023. This is because, coupled with OPW obstinacy about the access route and method, the documents appear to be written retrospectively, and contrived such that most risks require OPW Staff vehicles to use Lime Avenue if they are to be mitigated. We reiterate that OPW staff have not been prevented by the Gate Protector Group from attending work, the only issue is their vehicles, they have always been able to use active travel to attend their place of work, just as the incredible skeleton staff have been doing all this time.

There is no mention of the public being at risk, no control measure, and no further action required on the public's behalf in Hazard 6 of Assessment No. 6 rev 02 – "Risk of staff being assaulted while walking on a dark avenue to access the workplace". This implies that either the OPW risk assessment is inaccurate, or that somehow the only pedestrian cohort at risk of assault on Lime Avenue when it is dark are OPW Staff. We would ask that OPW consider the implications of both scenarios, and how they are perceived by the Community.

Minimum Requirements

We firstly draw your attention to the number of times we have experienced a lack of clarity on the situation regarding minimum needs for OPW staff access.

- In the original protocol of 13th October 2023 proposed by OPW, access “before 10am” and egress “between 3pm and 5pm” for a total of circa 20 OPW Staff vehicles per day. Without any further context, we interpret this could mean **up to 5 hours where there are risks associated with the co-location of pedestrians and vehicles**. The Save Castletown Committee were the only Community Group not to endorse this protocol.
- In an email on 23rd October 2023, we learned that one staff group arrives in time for an 8am start, leaving at 4pm, while another staff group arrives in time for 9.30am and leaves at 5.30pm.
- On 10th November 2023, OPW advised that “some [staff] begin work at 7.30am and others do not finish until after 5pm”
- At the Working Group Meeting of 18th December, OPW cited a need for vehicular access “until 9.30am”, which does not fully correspond with the original (failed) protocol of the 13th October 2023.

Throughout these discussions, there have been varying figures presented as to what *numbers* of staff vehicles are required during different seasonal situations, how many staff require their cars as opposed to those who already use active travel etc. In an email from OPW dated 18th January 2024, we finally learned the precise detail, summarised as follows:

- Year-round staff vehicles: 13 vehicles, 8am-4.30pm (3pm on Fridays)
- Seasonal (March to October) staff vehicles: 4 vehicles, 9.30am – 6pm
- Other vehicles: max 3 per day (OPW occasional staff / OPW contractors)

PROPOSAL

What is different about this proposal is the establishment of safety before a new situation on staff cars can be possible. So, it takes a phased approach, with **each phase to be complete before progressing to the next**.

Phase 1: Safety

Public Safety

A formal, *independent* review of and comprehensive public information campaign about pedestrian safety at Castletown (and particularly Lime Avenue) to be undertaken by OPW, urgently and in advance of any changes to the protocol. This Health and Safety Review to be published to the Community and feedback sought, particularly from vulnerable cohorts. Clear signage that Lime Avenue is not open to vehicles from the general public must be installed.

Only if an independent review of Health and Safety returns an acceptable assessment, and community response has been demonstrably positive, can we move to Phase 2. H&S vendor/provider to be selected cooperatively by Working Group stakeholders. People need to be informed what “pedestrian priority” means in practice, and what their options are if they encounter a vehicle on Lime Avenue.

Phase 2: Statements & Signage

OPW Statement

OPW to make a clear and unambiguous written public statement, including on social media, that Lime Avenue will not be used for general public vehicular access.

Signage

OPW to erect attractive, permanent signage at the Celbridge Gate to reflect that Lime Avenue will not be used for general public vehicular access. (see also, "Demesne Opening Hours" for a note re signage)

Phase 3: Staff Access, School Runs & Services

Having considered the various written and verbal statements on timings for staff cars and noting that the highest sensitivity times for pedestrian use of Lime Avenue is during the weekday school runs, SCC would support a certain pattern of access and egress, only when additional safety actions and communications in Phases 1 and 2 are complete and feedback from the Working Group is supportive.

School Runs – Exclusively Pedestrian

SCC continues to hear of safety concerns from members of the public, and fears have been raised repeatedly from parents about the safety of children on Lime Avenue.

We estimate the 8am-9am hour would be the start of day school run timeframe, whereby children and parents would use Lime Avenue or enter the estate at other points, to walk or cycle to school.

There are various schools in the area, the closing times for schools differ on different days. However, the end of day school run window would be approximately 2.45pm-4.30pm.

OPW Staff Access & Egress

From discussions with OPW, and using information from the OPW email of 18th January 2024, it is apparent that with the absolute minimum of inconvenience to OPW, some access and egress windows could be defined such that, on a temporary basis only and reviewed every 3 months, OPW staff who cannot or will not use active travel alternatives could use their private vehicles to get to their dedicated staff parking spaces at the House using a 30-minute window for each shift start and end time. If all stakeholders were to agree, particularly the Gate Protector Group, this would operate on the basis of a maximum of 17 permanent staff vehicles per day in March to October, and 13 permanent staff vehicles per day November to February.

- Access **7.30am-8am** and again between **9am-9.30am** (i.e. preserving the start of day school run hour as *exclusively pedestrian*)
- Egress between **4.30pm – 5pm** and again between **6pm - 6.30pm** (i.e. preserving the end of day school run hour as *exclusively pedestrian*)
- Friday egress: cars leaving at 3pm to travel in convoy at the end of the working day.

So, four 30-minute windows during which staff could arrive in time for work and leave at their finish times. Staff to travel in convoy wherever possible but certainly at the Friday exit time, and in any event, aided by the traffic management team (i.e. escorted at walking pace) as is the case for 3rd Party Service vehicles today. For the avoidance of doubt, all vehicles using Lime Avenue need to be escorted at walking pace.

Access and egress needs outside of these times *would* arise, according to OPW, but we understand this would be both unplanned and infrequent (OPW staff's occasional needs and OPW staff contractors). Additional occasional staff and contractors would also need vehicular access. We propose that all such ad hoc access and egress needs be facilitated via the Batty Langley entrance. This is to maintain a manageable solution at the gates and to minimise unexpected vehicular use on Lime Avenue.

Status Quo

Gates Locked			School Run - Pedestrians & Vehicles Mixed				Gates Locked		
7.30am to 8.00am	8am to 9am	9am to 9.30am	9.30am to 2.45pm		2.45pm to 4.30pm	4.30pm to 5pm	5pm to 6pm	6pm to 6.30pm	

FEATURES: Demesne opening hours shortened, pedestrians and 3rd party vehicles co-located during the end of day school run, no proper Health and Safety assessment, no clear written guarantee that Lime Avenue is not open to vehicles from the general public. (Blue badge Individual cars are the only exception.)

SCC Proposal Feb 2024

OPW Staff Access 1	School Run - Pedestrians Only	OPW Staff Access 2	School Run - Pedestrians Only		OPW Staff Exit 1	OPW Staff Exit 2		
7.30am to 8.00am	8am to 9am	9am to 9.30am	9.30am to 2.45pm		2.45pm to 4.30pm	4.30pm to 5pm	5pm to 6pm	6pm to 6.30pm

FEATURES: Demesne opening hours restored, School run hours preserved as exclusively pedestrian, OPW Staff back on site to maintain House & Demesne.

PLUS: Health & Safety Audit, OPW Public Statement and signage that no general vehicular access permitted on Lime Avenue (Blue badge remains an exception, Castletown Foundation also enabled access under the 3rd Party Vehicles protocol.)

Key: Public Pedestrian Access 3rd Party Essential Services OPW Staff Vehicles

3rd Party Service Vehicles

We propose minor changes to the current arrangements for 3rd Party Service Vehicles:

1. 3rd Party Essential Services are not scheduled during the school run times defined above, and as such could experience delays during this exclusively pedestrian time.
2. Castletown Foundation representatives have explicit access as an essential service to Castletown and to the collection.

Demesne Opening Hours

Demesne opening time to be restored to conventional hours within 2 weeks of recommencement of staff on-site. Kissing gate to remain open 24/7 thereafter. Signage to the contrary should be removed and notices placed on social media etc. to announce the return to normal hours.

Review

A review of the operation of this proposal would take place as a recurring item at every 4th Working Group Meeting (approximately every three months).

Benefits to the Community

If OPW and other Community Groups including the Gate Protector Group were to find a way to temporarily enable staff vehicles to use Lime Avenue under this proposal, the following benefits would accrue to the Community:

1. Safety concerns fully assessed by an independent 3rd party, and the report/outcomes published
2. Demesne Opening Hours would be restored to normal opening times (per Risk Assessment No. 6 Rev 02, Hazard 6)
3. Clarity about no general public vehicular access on Lime Avenue would finally be made available in writing, directly to the public, and highlighted in clear public signage.

4. School-run hours would be defined explicitly as pedestrian only, with a possible exception on Friday afternoons, where staff vehicle egress is tightly controlled.
5. Build-up of leaves, trees or tree limbs at risk, and presence of ice on Lime Avenue and around Castletown Demesne would be managed (Risk Assessment No. 6 Rev 02, Hazards 2, 3)
6. A public information campaign about pedestrian priority / “exclusively pedestrian” time and what that means for safety in practice for all users of Lime Avenue would be launched and maintained until the target audience is satisfied.
7. General necessary conservation work and maintenance could recommence at a normal pace, there would be no further risk to the preservation of the invaluable collection at Castletown House, the OPW’s Museum Status etc. and the Demesne grounds would have the expertise that is needed.
8. The Castletown Foundation, who own much of the collection at Castletown House and have a vital advisory role to the OPW, would be able to access the House to discharge their duties to Castletown and by extension, to the public.

Our survey statistics make it very clear that there is significant support both for and against OPW staff vehicles using Lime Avenue, with only a marginal amount in favour of a mutually agreed arrangement. We are making this a careful, narrow and temporary proposal for that reason. This proposal must be treated with fair consideration for each stakeholder position.

Save Castletown Committee’s primary concern is to assert the public interest, find potential points of compromise, and work towards solutions. If all Community Groups, including the Gate Protectors group, endorse this proposal and OPW do not, we would strongly recommend the appointment of an independent public crisis manager.

Our Position

The Save Castletown Committee’s position regarding Lime Avenue is fundamentally unchanged – we do not want vehicles on Lime Avenue.

Narrow modifications to this stance, such as the 3rd Party Service Vehicles protocol currently in operation and the proposal outlined above, are offered as temporary in nature and can only be in effect while OPW continues its efforts to secure proper, permanent vehicular access and parking for the public, and for OPW staff and services via the M4 or an alternative entrance.

SCC does not and will not support general public vehicular access on Lime Avenue and would urge OPW to reflect on this fact and start to communicate their long term plans when approaching solutions for Castletown.

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Fintan Monaghan, Chair

Copy to: OPW, Working Group Chairman, Friends of Castletown, Castletown Residents Association, Celbridge Community Council, Gate Protector Group, Minister Patrick O’Donovan, Castletown Foundation, Elected Representatives. **Notice:** This document will be shared publicly on our website, savecastletown.ie .

Appendix 2: Summary of Status Quo versus SCC Proposal February 2024

Status Quo

Gates Locked			Gates Locked			School Run - Pedestrians & Vehicles Mixed		Gates Locked	Gates Locked	Gates Locked
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