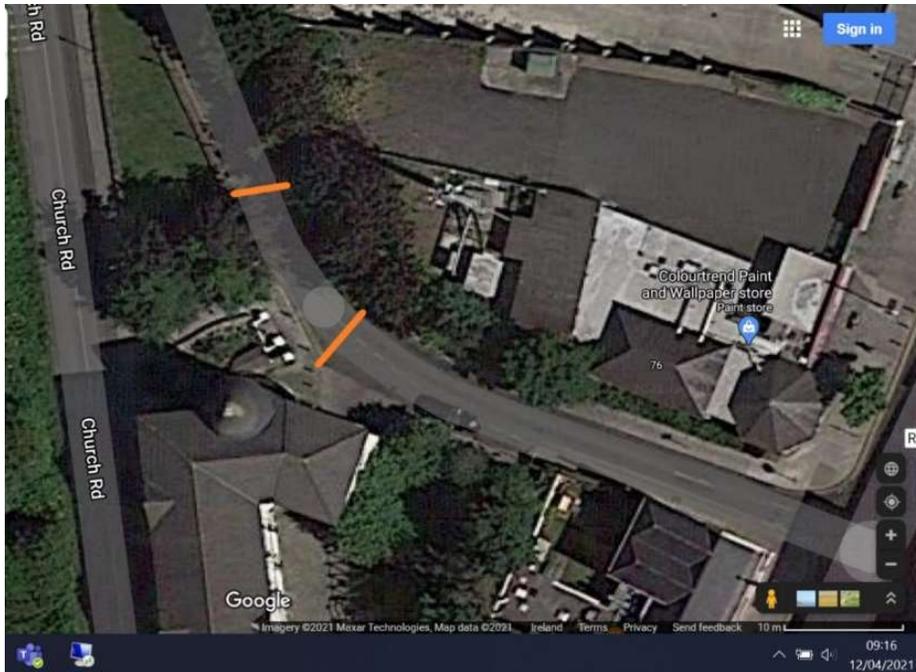


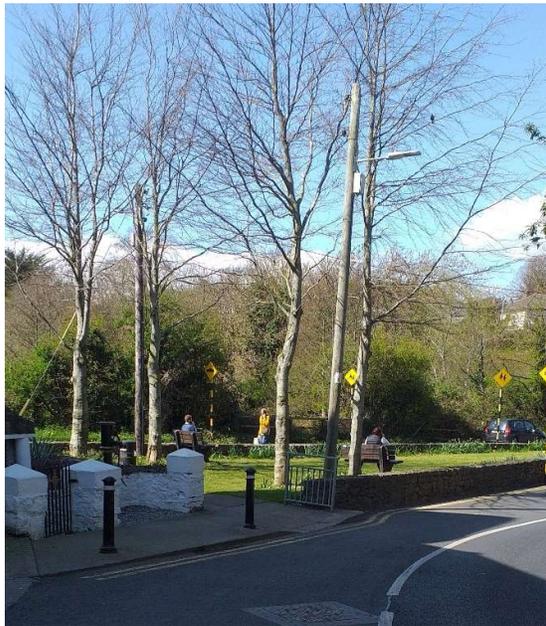
## **SWORDS HOLY WELL AND ST. COLUMBA'S CHURCH – IMPROVING THE LINK TO MAIN STREET, SWORDS**

St. Colmcille's Holy Well and St. Columba's Church, Round Tower and Belfry are two of the most important heritage sites in Swords, but they could be better linked with the centre of Swords. Both sites could be connected to Swords Main Street by a new signposted pedestrian way starting at Well Road and continuing to Brackenstown Road. At the moment, St. Colmcille's Well is on a narrow footpath at the side of Well Road where it is difficult to appreciate; while St. Columba's is effectively detached from the main street of the town. The provision of a pedestrian way would mean that tourists could reach St. Columba's Church, Belfry and Round Tower with a simple five minute walk from Main Street, passing the Holy Well along the way. In the longer term, the Council should work with the Church authorities towards the restoration of the St. Columba's site to improve it as a visitor attraction.

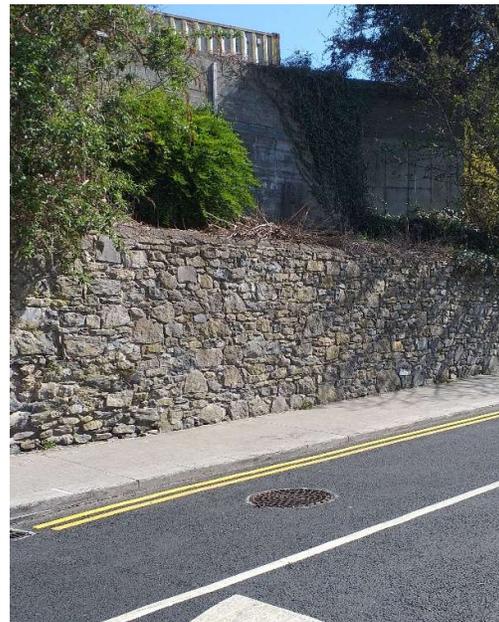
**ST. COLMCILLE'S WELL:** The first section of the way would involve pedestrianizing a portion of Well Road around St. Colmcille's Well to create a small plaza or open space (marked orange on the map). Construction of the Swords – Brackenstown Link Road would remove any need to keep Well Road open for traffic, apart from providing local access from Main Street to the carpark of Cooldriona Court. Seating could be provided to create an environment where the Holy Well could be a focal point. There is an attractive stone wall running along the eastern side of Well Road which would provide a backdrop for seating with a good view of St. Columba's church. Part of the stone wall will have to be removed when the Link Road is constructed, and the stones could be saved and incorporated into the new plaza.



Aerial view of proposed pedestrian plaza at St. Colmcille's Well

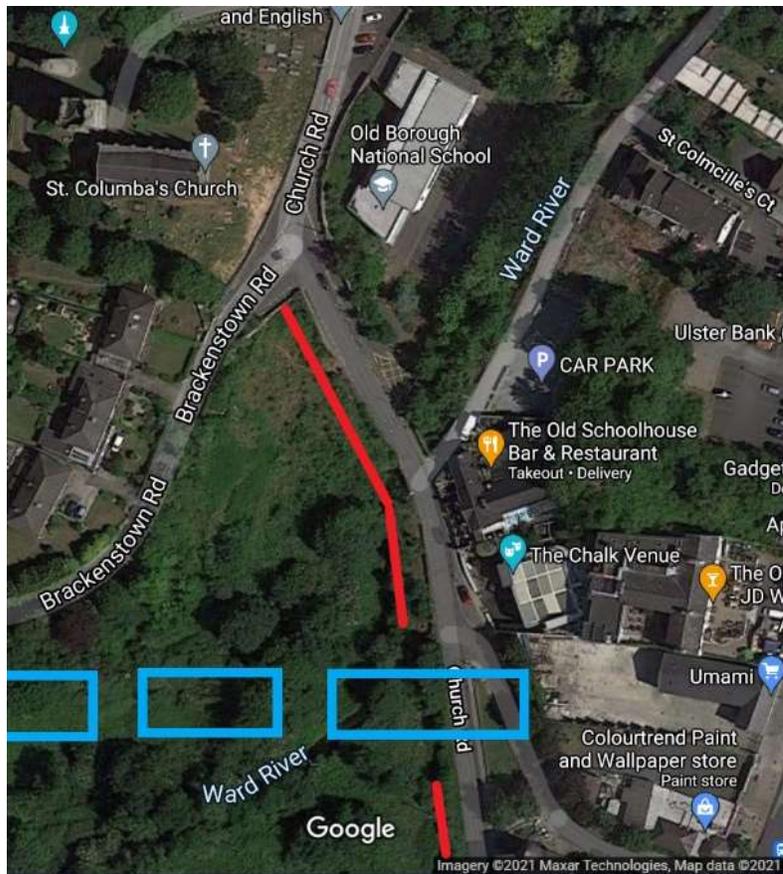


The Well could be a focal point of the Plaza



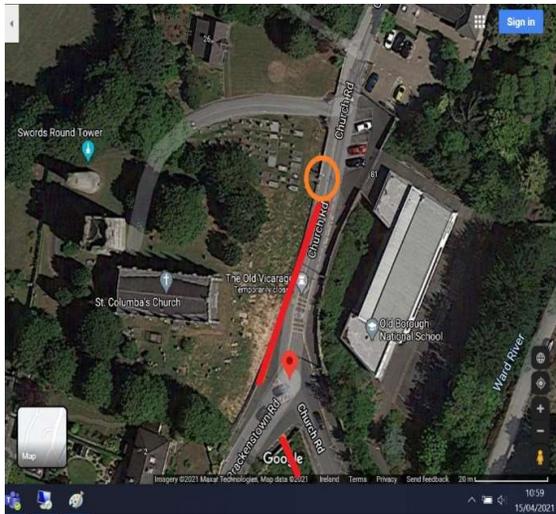
Stone from the attractive wall on Well Road should be reused in the plaza

WARD RIVER VALLEY PARK: The second section would involve creating a pedestrian way along the edge of the Ward River Valley Park to Brackenstown Road. Moving on from the plaza, pedestrians would cross Church Road and the new Link Road and enter onto a pathway in the Ward River Valley Park (marked red on map). The pathway could be incorporated into the proposed cyclepath from Church Road into the Ward River Valley Park. This would involve a slight detour onto the west side of Church Road, but it would be a more pleasant route that avoids the multiple entrances along the narrow footpath of the east side of Church Road. The path would then exit onto the Brackenstown Road, opposite the wall of St. Columba's.



Aerial view of proposed pedestrian way and cyclepath in Ward River Valley Park (Link Road marked in blue)

ST. COLUMBA’S CHURCH: The third section of the pedestrian way would run along Church Road on the existing footpath beside St. Columba’s, and could possibly use the existing pedestrian entrance (marked with orange circle) into the church grounds. This would involve liaising with the Church authorities and the National Monument Service to provide a path towards the Round Tower. This is obviously a sensitive proposal that would require careful assessment to see if it is feasible, but the path could be a low impact narrow gravel surface (or similar). If it was considered an appropriate intervention, the path would be of great benefit in opening up access to visitors, who could avoid coming up the busy main driveway.



Site of pedestrian gate marked in orange



Pedestrian gate on Church Road

Along with the provision of a gravel path, another simple measure would be to improve the site boundary beside the Round Tower, perhaps by the erection of a higher stone wall. The present low concrete breeze block wall provides a jarring contrast with the ancient Tower.



Base of tower with breezeblock concrete wall behind

Finally, an information board outlining the history of the site could be provided close to the tower. These relatively inexpensive measures would go a long way towards improving St. Columba's as a visitor attraction and raise its profile.

**CHURCH, ROUND TOWER AND BELFRY:** In the longer term the Council should engage proactively with the Church authorities to develop proposals for the restoration and improvement of the site that could attract potential national and EU funding. For example, the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Belfry could be examined as a more accessible and feasible candidate for opening up to visitors than the Round Tower. The Belfry was accessible to visitors in the past, and offered panoramic views of four counties from the roof, as well as a close up view of the top of the round tower. If it was possible once again to provide access to the roof of the Belfry, it would provide Swords with a unique visitor attraction. Of course St. Columba's Church itself is an important heritage building, an early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Georgian building with one of the oldest stain glass windows in the country. It is in need of restoration to make it not

only a visitor attraction but also a place of worship once more. The Church, Round Tower, Belfry and Church together are a heritage site of national importance and their restoration should be a priority for the Council .



Visitor access to the Belfry would offer panoramic views

These proposals would properly highlight St. Colmcille's Well, and give St. Columba's the status it deserves as one of the major heritage attractions of the town, second only to Swords Castle. The proposed way would be a boost for tourism in Swords and would also encourage more pedestrian movement between the two sides of the town, increasing permeability and reducing the need for car journeys. For these reasons, it should be made an objective of the Fingal Development Plan 2023 – 2029.

Niall Mac Coitir

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