

Irish Times 25th April 07

Work gets underway on new shopping centre in Naas

Profile: Naas Work has started on the new Naas town centre shopping scheme at Corban's Lane, right off the Main Street. It will provide a 43-unit shopping mall with over 23,000sq m (247,570sq ft) of space and parking for almost 747 cars, writes **Ella Shanahan** .

The centre is being developed by the Marshalsea Property Company at a cost of €45 million and is due to be completed in 2009. The developers are in the final throes of discussions with the anchor tenant who will occupy some 6,912sq m (74,400sq ft). The tenant is a large multiple - not yet named - which will sell food on the lower mall level, with clothing and household goods on the upper mall level.

The 43 units, covering 7,270sq m (78,254sq ft) on two levels, include retail and non-retail business, from cafés, restaurants and banks to hairdressers and travel agents.

The shopping centre will be a landmark and its visibility over the wider context will identify Naas town centre as a whole, says Walsh Associates, Architects and Project Managers, who designed the centre. The main entrance will be through where the Bank of Ireland now stands; the façade will be preserved and the bank will transfer into the centre.

Employment in the new development is estimated at 350 full-time jobs.

An improved road junction is to be created at the junction of the Green and Main Street South and the Newbridge Road and Corban's Lane. This involves demolishing part of Sarah Flood's pub; what remains will be redeveloped as a more modern premises.

Marshalsea Property Company was behind the rebuilding of Dublin's Merchant's Quay; its other projects include a major industrial development in Finglas, the Jamestown Business Park and an apartment block adjacent to the Merrion Hotel in Dublin.

The development is in line with the Naas Town Development Plan 2005-2011 to make Naas a key retail destination, counteracting the growth of Newbridge. The town council and chamber of commerce are conscious that there had been some slippage to Newbridge since the Whitewater shopping centre opened, says town clerk Maura McIvor. "This is one of the biggest things that will happen to Naas," she says. "We feel it will be the answer to bringing business back into the town."

Naas has a smaller shopping centre, Naas Town Centre, with M&S as anchor tenant, close by Poplar Square and two new retail parks in the greater Naas area, Newhall and The Globe, on either ends of the new road network linking the Newbridge end of the town with the Sallins end - the Millennium Link Road and the Caragh Road.

The Globe has been open for a year and a half with Woodies as anchor tenant. Other retail outlets of the nine occupied include Tilemarket, Expert Electrical, Harry Corry, Smyths Toys, Clerys Home Furnishings and Heatons. "It was one of Woodies best openings," says Maria Duffy, assistant director of DTZ Sherry FitzGerald. "Clerys was the last retailer to open and is trading well. Between Naas and Newbridge, you have everything on your doorstep that you would have in Dublin city centre. Demand also has been driven by the Celtic Tiger, the bypass and house prices being so expensive in Dublin."

Duffy says that rents in The Globe are €70 per sq m (€25 per sq ft).

Larry Brennan of Savills HOK in Dublin was agent for the Newhall Retail Park and the company also manages the park. The anchor tenant in the 15,000sq m (161,458sq ft) development is B&Q. Other tenants include Harvey Norman, Halfords, Byrne's World of Wonder, 2Two Seasons and PC World. The park has been open for a year.

Savills HOK also acted for the Naas Town Centre development where, he reports, M&S has been trading very successfully. "Naas is a very busy town, a strong market location. The retail mix tends to be strong local independents instead of multiples, but there is a good multiple demand if the right units are available," he says.

Tesco, on the Dublin Road, has acquired a site with planning permission for a retail development on the Monread Road, but has submitted an amended planning application for a store and warehousing units.

Some observers suggest that Naas is about to be over-supplied with retailing, but retail agent Ben Pearson disagrees. "Everybody is trading well. B&Q is trading well in Newhall; Woodies in The Globe is doing well; Tesco is anxious to get a bigger site. They [Kildare Co Council] wouldn't give planning for 10 years for anything and now they have given it for three. In terms of footage, rents are 20-25 per cent behind Dublin. There's an ease of shopping compared with Dublin. No wonder Dublin city centre is beginning to feel it. There's a catchment area of nearly 40,000 people but, since Newbridge got the Whitewater centre, a good few travel from Newbridge to Naas because traffic in Newbridge is so dire."

Rents in Naas are conducive to the relocation of Dublin-based company headquarters, according to agents. High street rents are roughly €753 per sq m (€65-€70 per sq ft). Office rents are in the region of €215 per sq m (€20 per sq ft) and industrial rents are in the range of €80.7-€107.65 per sq m (€7.5-€10 per sq ft), says Maria Duffy of DTZ Sherry FitzGerald.

But by far the most wide-ranging development yet in the Naas area is Osberstown, a 400-acre site incorporating Millennium Park, whose hoardings are to be seen everywhere as you drive around the outskirts of the town.

The site was acquired last year for €315 million by a consortium of Galway developers: Tom Considine and Paddy Sweeney, and Galway-born Gerry Prendergast, who is based in Osberstown's head office, in Osberstown, on the outskirts of Naas.

Osberstown is set to be the biggest development of its kind, Gerry Prendergast says. It will comprise Millennium Park, the office and high-tech company section; the Gateway industrial section; a private hospital being developed by Renaissance; an enterprise park; an environmentally friendly village centre with accommodation and convenience shops; and the latest range of telecommunications providers, all being linked to, and serviced by, public transport.

Millennium Park is a 165-acre high-tech office development accommodating the HQ of the Health Service Executive, IFS (now part of State Street Bank), GEA Technologies, the Office of Tobacco Control, Mount Carmel Healthcare, Rentokil, Wealth Options and soon-to-include the Show Jumping Association of Ireland and the Equestrian Federation.

ESAT, Eircom, some satellite providers, and now the developers are in negotiation for a link to the T50 system for high-end users.

The 16,723sq m (180,000sq ft) hospital, designed by Portlaoise architect Jason O'Shaughnessy, will focus on oncology. Planning permission is expected within weeks and construction will start immediately.

Meanwhile, planning permission is expected in the next two months for enterprise units in Gateway, while a Naas-based employer is upgrading his company from a three-acre to a 10-acre site in this development. All of these are expected to be under construction within the next four months.

Rents in Osberstown are around €194-€215 per sq m (€18-€20 per sq ft) - compared to €377-€446 per sq m (€35-€60 per sq ft) in Dublin. Parking spaces are around €500-€600.

The village centre will take its cue from Kildare Co Council's award-winning new environmentally friendly HQ, Aras Chill Dara. It will make extensive use of glass outer walls and there are plans to use ground-water systems for heat exchange and for cooling the buildings. "It will be a place where people can eat, meet and socialise without clogging up the roads. It really matches what IBEC are trying to achieve: a work/life balance," says Prendergast.

"The village will be residential, with 800 to 1,000 units, mainly townhouses, not conventional apartments, with emphasis on own-door units. They will not be totally car-dependent but based on Transport 21 initiatives where everybody has access to public transport," says Prendergast. "The retail will be to satisfy the business element of the park and complement what's in Naas town centre. In the short term, we'll be accommodating 6,000 people to work and 3,000 to live. The whole north-west quadrant, when developed, will see us accommodating 12,000 people to work.

"This is based on the public transport infrastructure to match our top-class working environment. We would hope to see corporate headquarters for various companies relocating here. We are in at the top end of what Ireland requires in telecommunications, with all the telecom providers at the highest level operating from the park."