

# Straffan Portfolio

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# Straffan

Straffan village is situated in north east Kildare at a particularly low lying point of the Liffey Valley, along the River Liffey and river Morrell. The village name is the anglicised form of the original Irish, *Teach Srafáin*, which translates as “Church of St. Srafán”, a saint of the early Irish church who resided in the area at the end of the 7th century. The second Irish name of the town, *Cluaníní*, means “little meadows.”

The current form of the village is linked to the Anglo-Norman invasion of the 12th century. Norman leader, Strongbow, granted Straffan to Maurice Fitzgerald, ancestor of the Earls of Desmond and of Kildare. A fortress and stronghold was built in conjunction with the granting of land, as was common practice at the time.

Today, Straffan village has a population of over 600 people, with an additional 1700 inhabitants living in the surrounding hinterland. Only 30km from Dublin, Straffan is situated close to the larger towns of Celbridge, Maynooth, Clane and Naas. On the roads entering Straffan you are met with hedgerows, tree lined corridors or stone walls before arriving in a beautifully maintained, village, centred on a pair of crossroads, on which are situated Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland churches.

13th century Barberstown Castle and The K Club, on the grounds of Straffan estate are two luxury accommodation options in the village with historical significance. In recent years, the K Club has also become synonymous with golf in Ireland, hosting the 2006 Ryder Cup, the European Open from 1991 – 2007 and the Irish Open in May 2016. The Ryder Cup alone, as the third biggest sporting event in the world, brought recognition and crowds to Straffan in equal measure.

The community in Straffan is noted for its voluntary effort and a sense of pride in the local area. This spirit is perfectly demonstrated by the local Tidy Towns committee, who have presented the best town in the county every year since 2007. The group claimed the title of Ireland’s Tidiest Small Town at the 2013 Tidy Towns awards, the national environmental and public realm competition.









# Planned Development Approach



Kildare County Council's County Development Plan 2011 – 2017 establishes the sustainable development approach utilised in Straffan village. The associated consultation process involved many individuals and groups, including elected members, community groups and local businesses. Accordingly, the final plan reflected public concerns and aspirations. In addition, it is reflective of county as well as regional policies and guidelines. The main challenge affecting the county, relates to the extent of population growth and associated sustainability issues.

This collaborative approach is the most effective way to ensure sustainable growth and development, maximising the potential of Straffan Village while protecting its surrounding environment. A Strategic Environmental Assessment was also a key element. Environmental considerations such as biodiversity, climate and air/water quality were similarly evaluated in this context. The subsequent assessments have guided the preparation of

objectives, policies and development alternatives that allow for sustainable development without causing adverse harm to the local environment.

Straffan has been targeted for planned and coherent development in order to maintain an attractive and sustainable village, with matching levels of infrastructure and services. Appropriately scaled enterprise, employment and educational development allows for sustainable population growth. The protection of the enhancement of the River Liffey including its ecological and recreational potential are also central aspects. This planning approach recognises the importance of the natural heritage and all policies seek to support and enhance the green infrastructure. The protection, conservation and enhancement of natural heritage are key considerations for future development within Straffan.



# Natural Environment



Straffan is located within the River Liffey catchment, which is a significant natural resource in the village and environs. The quality of the water in the river is of suitable quality to support sensitive species such as Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*) and Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*) which have become the predominant fish species fished for in the area. The K Club operates an active fishery which is a great attraction to visitors to the area and is indicative of the pristine status of the water here benefitting both wildlife and the local people of Straffan.

As recently as 2007, sewage from Straffan was receiving only primary treatment before being discharged into the Liffey just above the Liffey Bridge at Straffan. The sewage is now treated fully by Kildare County Council at the Osberstown Waste Water Treatment Plant and indeed, the bridge at Straffan is a designated monitoring point for Liffey water quality under the Water Framework Directive. Water quality

has remained very good since the additional treatment was commenced.

The community of Straffan is encouraged in best practice relating to chemical use and encouraged to reduce pesticide usage. Straffan Tidy Towns actively promotes sustainable waste reduction and reduction in resource use such as minimising the use of treated water for gardening and household use. In 2014 Straffan Tidy Towns were successful in securing a grant from Kildare County Council to provide waterbutts to all households in one housing estate. Home composting is encouraged for all the residents of Straffan.

The importance of environmental sustainability in the area is recognised in the Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017, which highlights the importance of adopting new and developing technologies, while outlining policies on renewable energy and transitioning to a low carbon economy.





# Built Environment



Straffan is a uniquely preserved example of the combination of medieval manor, demesne designed landscape and 19th century village which has remained unchanged since earliest map sources. The village has developed around the two crossroads each one over looked by a church. Residential development in the village has progressed from the estate houses of the 19th century to Local Authority cottages and houses to the present day modern residential developments.

Straffan has a wealth of architectural heritage; Barberstown Castle, a 13th century Tower, Straffan Glebe House (1740-1780) a fine example of Georgian architecture and Straffan House (1830-1835), including its enclosed designed landscape. Later development of the village includes St. Brigid's RC Church, the Royal Irish Constabulary Barracks, Church of Ireland Church and Lodge Park with its adjoining 18th century walled garden. There are a number of structures associated with the river; Straffan Bridge, weir and sluice gate. The cast-iron pillar post box, Lych gate and stone cottages together with the sensitive planting contribute to the picturesque character of the village centre.

Planning policy seeks to ensure that the scale and form of new developments in the village respect the historic and special character of the village. Straffan has managed to retain its unique character derived from its layout and the existence of quality well maintained traditional buildings.

In preparation for the Ryder Cup an extensive programme of work (€1.5m) was carried out under the *Straffan Village Enhancement Scheme* which included: drainage, enhanced footpaths/kerbing, undergrounding of overhead cables, public lighting, traffic calming, landscaping, signage and improved surfacing/road markings.

The public areas of the village are maintained by Straffan Tidy Towns in co-operation with Kildare County Council. Some of their initiatives include the "*Adopt an Area Scheme*", which encourages resident groups to take responsibility for litter control in their particular area, twice weekly work nights or days and scheduled work days for members of the Green Schools Committee. In 2013 Straffan was named as the Best Kept Small Town in the island of Ireland.



# Cleanliness & Tidiness



CLEANLINESS &  
TIDINESS

Straffan Tidy Towns have been, and remain, the community group active in the village that really affects how Straffan looks on any given day. Every litterbin that you see on the paths in the village is emptied by the committee- an indication if it was needed that the group wants Straffan to be essentially, a litter-free village.

Apart from emptying the bins, the group are committed to daily litterpicks of the village, while also focussing on some litter “hotspots” where there may be some illegal dumping. The group are pragmatic, so when they pick litter- they also pick weeds by hand! To ensure this is done efficiently, members of the group adopt particular areas, so everybody knows who is working where.

Beyond simply removing litter in the village, and as part of our wider responsibility to maximise recycling and segregate waste, Straffan Tidy Towns have been segregating waste into recyclable and non-recyclable. More recently, the group asked Kildare County Council to provide two additional bins in the village. One is outside the National School and the other is located at the bus stop (Dublin bound) in the middle of the village.

These two bins are unique in county Kildare in that they have two compartments- one for dry recyclables and one for residual waste. The committee are responsible for looking after all the bins in the town. This Tidy Towns group is in fact leading the way in terms of litter control and the two compartment bin is in effect a trial for how the local authority will provide and service street bins in the future.





# Landscape

The landscape of Straffan is a distillation of history, land use and the underlying natural conditions of the area. The Straffan Village area is situated across two major landscape types as defined by the County Kildare Landscape characterisation study the northern lowland plains of County Kildare and the valley of the River Liffey. The slope and topography is gentle; and concentrations of tillage lands and pasture land in this lowland area tend to be characterised by extensive views across large fields with maintained field boundaries, treelines and hedgerows. The River Liffey Valley is characterised by the wooded and pastured valley corridor of the Liffey which flows east and north along the southern and eastern borders of Straffan.

Also the special nature of the landscape of Straffan is enhanced significantly by the presence of strong elements of designed landscape. The designed landscape of Straffan contains complex and elaborate gardens and parklands, the parklands are of late 18th and early 19th century origin. These parklands provide majestic settings

for historic houses such as Straffan Demesne (the K Club) and Lodge Park and to a lesser extent the minor estate parklands at Glebe House and Straffan Lodge. Parkland is traditionally a large area of grazed land with few internal boundaries dotted with trees of some considerable age.

Much parkland at Straffan has been incorporated into golf course layouts, for example at the K Club (formerly Straffan Demesne) but many elements of the original parkland still survive. These elements include wooded copses and veteran trees and are important for biodiversity and scenic value. The Parkland landscape is preserved more or less in its original condition within Lodge Park estate. Straffan also supports some designed small scale features that provide a public purpose such as the Churchyard in the village centre.

The National Spatial Strategy, the Liffey Valley Strategy and the County Kildare Development Plan highlight the need to protect the Liffey Valley and hinterland in its landscape context. In relation to the policies and strategies outlined in these





documents the general guidance to the Kildare Local Authority is to, "...extend and enhance the existing open space network, secure landscape and biodiversity enhancement and improve access."

The principal or core ecological resources of the Straffan area is the Liffey Valley riparian habitat and the significant estate woodlands. This river valley is the principal ecological connector which links Straffan to the wider regional landscape. Both banks of the River at Straffan are well vegetated with mixed deciduous woodland and associated treelines. The species composition of these linear woodland features varies due to factors such as age, management and exposure but includes many native species such as oak and ash. In general land given over to pasture within old estates that are less intensively managed tend to correspond with older and more established linear woodlands of the highest biodiversity value. An example of this is the section of the River which flows through the Lodge Park Estate. These areas of core habitat value are linked to the

village and surrounding landscape by a network of interconnected linear woodlands, hedgerows and treelines and several of these are of great age being at least 200 years old. The landscape in Straffan is extremely permeable to wildlife supporting numerous linear wooded corridors extending from core areas of habitat value and allowing commuting wild life species to range over the wider landscape.

Nationally and internationally important species have been recorded within the riparian and woodland habitats such as the Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) and Otter (*Lutra lutra*). A variety of bats species recorded in the wider area including Leisler's Bat (*Nyctalus leisleri*), Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentonii*). Dr. Tina Aughney, of Bat Conservation Ireland, considers the area around Straffan as being among the best in County Kildare for bat species. The nationally important Natural Heritage Area of the Grand Canal is located near Ardclough.





# Open Green Spaces

The compact designed layout of Straffan Village means that the areas of open green space within the village itself are of small scale. However, the parkland demesnes of the great houses surrounding the village are extensive and grand in scale and impact. The estate woodlands and treelines extend into Straffan village and link the village to the well wooded valley of the Liffey River. The K club, while private is very inclusive and community minded in facilitating the use of its grounds by the local population and visitors. The estate has developed a number of Garden Walks within its extensive grounds. These are waymarked trails which highlight features of formal gardens, a collection of interesting trees and the less formal natural habitats of the Liffey River and Mixed Broadleaf woodland.

The (Straffan Demesne) or K Club has also made a contribution to horticulture, Frederick Burford, head gardener in the 1880's, noticed an unusual snowdrop among the hundreds in the garden which became known as the Straffan Snowdrop (*Galanthus Straffan*), a white spring flowering bulb, which has been re-introduced and planted in the area, along with a new Daffodil (*Narcissus Cill Dara*) which was specially cultivated for The Kildare Hotel & Country Club and registered in September 1992 and planted around the Weeping Beech with the Straffan Snowdrop. The arboretum at the K Club also supports many important and unusual specimen trees including specimens planted as early as 1798, the English Oak (*Quercus robur*) in front of the present day hotel. Additionally planted since the 19th and throughout the 20th century the following are only a few of the notable trees in the estate grounds, Blue Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*), Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodora*), exotic





oaks Holm and Cork Oaks (*Quercus ilex*, *Q. suber*), many Magnolia species, American Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) Tulip tree (*Liriodendron sp.*), Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*), Chinese dawn cypress (*Metasequoia sp.*) and the majestic Giant Redwood (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*). The Lodge Park estate also contains a gem of an 18th Century Garden which been under restoration for the last few years and the old brick-faced walls are clothed with climbers, fruit trees and roses.

Water features in the Straffan area are concentrated in the K Club, where artificial lakes support beautiful fringing reed-beds and of course the wonderful Liffey River with its banks dominated by mixed woodland and treelines.

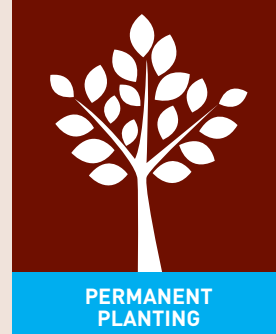
Small scale green space in the Village centre are maintained for community amenity and are most often associated with housing estates, these support lawns, tree plantings and flower beds with annual and perennial species. The Churchyard and Cemetery located in the centre of the village supports a wonderful group of ancient Yew (*Taxus baccata*) trees these are very often associated with cemeteries in Ireland and have an ancient cultural significance associated with eternity and protection of the dead in Irish Folklore. The village also has a public Sports Ground which is operated by Straffan Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

Public green spaces in Straffan are enhanced and maintained through the efforts of local community resident associations, the local volunteer Straffan tidy towns association and Kildare County Council Parks division.





# Permanent Planting



Much of the planting on the approach road to Straffan was carried out during the improvement works carried out to the Village for the 2006 Ryder Cup. The area at Barberstown roundabout is planted with a mixture of *Amelanchier lamarckii* (Snowy mesiplus), *Potentilla* (Shrubby Cinquefoil), *Ceanothus* (Californian Lilac) *Chaenomeles* (Japanese Quince), *Spiraea* (Japanese Meadowsweet) and *Lonicera* (Box leaved honeysuckle). This is complemented by small areas of hedgerows planted with native *Crataegus monogyna* (Hawthorn). The roundabout itself is planted with a mixture of *Erica carnea* (Heather) which is native to Ireland and *Stipa gigantea* (Giant Oat Grass).

The access road from Barberstown to Straffan Village has been planted with a Hawthorn Hedging and *Aesculus hippocastanum* (Horse Chestnut) and *Fagus sylvatica* (Beech) on one side to complement and match the existing mature planting. The remaining side is planted with *Tilia* 'Green Spire' (Lime/Linden), Maple and areas of ornamental shrub planting consisting of *Potentilla*,

*Forsythia*, *Spiraea*. The emphasis on the selection of plants here is to give a mixture of both native plants and ornamentals to both complement the existing native hedgerows and give seasonal colour and interest on the approach to Straffan.

In the village centre the emphasis on planting has been to use perennials to give long seasonal summer colour in the Village which benefits both passing traffic and residents living in the area. This type of planting was also used to complement the cottage garden type planting that occurs in some of the front gardens within the Village. The planting around the cross roads in the Village was carried out for the Ryder Cup and recently partially replanted.

The plants used in the scheme are *Helleborus argutifolius* (Corsican Hellebore), *Helleborus foetidus* (Stinking Hellebore), *Rudbeckia* 'Goldstrum' (Coneflower), *Crocsmia* (Montbretia), *Geranium*, *Periscaria* (Knotweed) *Anemone* (Japanese Anemone) and *Hosta* (Plantain Lily).





# Seasonal Planting



SEASONAL  
PLANTING

The village also contains some mature tree planting mainly the line of veteran Horse Chestnuts, and mature Beech along New Road and the boundary to Coarsemoor estate but also complemented by mature and semi mature Birch. Some of these have died in recent years and have been replaced with similar species.

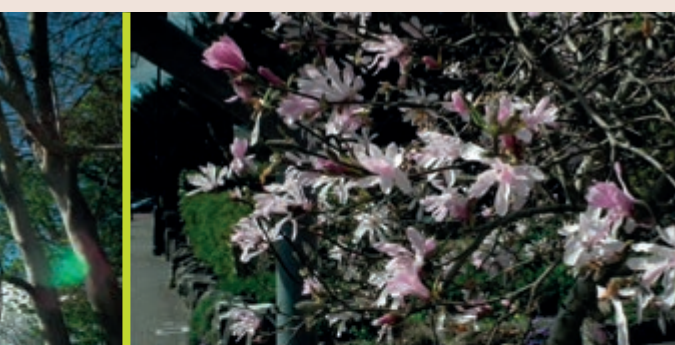
The graveyard contains mainly *Taxus baccata* (Yew). This is used to form an avenue at the main entrance to the graveyard and is also used sporadically throughout the graveyard.

The boundary of the K Club consists of a line of *Populus*, *Prunus spinosa* (Blackthorn) and *Betula* (Birch). Inside the grounds the tree cover is predominantly *Quercus robur* (Oak).



Seasonal Bedding is used throughout the Village in both containers and hanging baskets to complement and enhance the colour provided by the perennials. These are planted and maintained by the Tidy Towns Committee. The types of plants used in them are Begonia both bedding type and tuberous, Petunia up right and trailing, Bidens, Lobelia bush and trailing, Alyssum Bacopa, Pansies and Fuchsia Bush and trailing.

Forty hanging baskets and 20 tubs are planted throughout the village at key locations to bring summer colour to the area. The bedding is maintained by volunteers with Straffan Tidy Towns volunteers who dead head, feed and water the displays throughout the summer. Water retaining gel is used in the containers to minimise the watering needed and retain the moisture in the compost used.





# Environmental Education

Set in a rural landscape with the River Liffey flowing by the edge of village, the natural environment is something the people of Straffan value and want to protect.

Happily, Straffan National School is helping with this. It is currently working on its fifth Green Flag as part of the Green Schools programme. The fifth flag focuses on biodiversity and the pupils are busily learning about the natural world and how they can protect it. The school has developed an outdoor class, with a gardening and wildlife area comprising raised beds and an insect

hotel. The insect hotel is made from recycled wooden pallets and a range of other recycled items. The spaces created encourage wildlife and gives the pupils an opportunity to see nature up-close. The school also participated in the Crann Bring a Tree to School Education Programme in 2015. 'Crann' is the Irish word for tree.

The school is also at the forefront of raising awareness of sustainable waste prevention and resource use. From printing double-sided when needed, to encouraging pupils to walk or cycle to and from school, the children of





Straffan gain a good understanding of how important the environment is, and what they can do to protect it.

It isn't just left to the children to help though. The Tidy Towns committee engages with the wider community to help Straffan reduce waste and resource use. The group purchased a number of water butts for houses in the village. This has helped to cut down on the use of treated drinking water for watering plants and fostered a greater sense of the householder having both the responsibility, and the opportunity, to help the environment.

Local businesses also help to create awareness. The magnificent grounds of both the Steam Museum and Lodge Park Walled Gardens and the K Club contain many habitats and the owners are happy to promote the benefits and attractiveness of these features of the natural world.





# Tourism and Leisure

Straffan is located in north east Kildare, at the heart of Ireland's Ancient East. Visitors will quickly be consumed by the history, splendour, fun and beauty of the village and its environs. Situated nearby the towns of Celbridge, Maynooth, Clane and Naas, Straffan is the ideal base for explore the heritage and history of the county. The village is also within 30km of Dublin city centre, opening up a myriad of possibilities for visitors to the area. The capital is easily accessed through the adjacent M4 and M7 motorways, which also act as gateways to Ireland's south and west.

The village is renowned for historic accommodation options, including the 59 bedroom four-star Barberstown Castle. Luxury and history are combined at this famous landmark, originally built and fortified by the Norman Chieftain Nicholas Barby, who gave

his name to the surrounding area, in the 13th century. The surviving battlement keep is 15 metres high with walls almost 2 metres thick and is still used by the existing Hotel owners, along with the adjacent Victorian house added to castle the 19th century.

The K Club is an elegantly restored 19th century Georgian mansion estate. This country retreat is situated on the former site of the original Straffan House, built in 1832 by Hugh Barton in the style of a French Chateau. It was redeveloped in 1991 as a five star resort offering old world charm and modern luxury throughout its now 137 rooms. The original house now forms the east wing of the hotel which is set amid 550 acres of pristine parkland on a private mile long stretch of the river Liffey.







TOURISM & LEISURE

The K Club has also become synonymous with golf in Ireland. The resort boasts two world class championship courses that entice thousands of visitors to test their skills each year. 260,000 people flocked to the venue to witness Europe defeat the USA in the 2006 the Ryder Cup, the biggest sporting ever held in Ireland. The K Club also hosted the European Open on either its Palmer or Smurfit course, between 1995 and 2007. May 2016 saw European Tour action return to Straffan as the Palmer course hosted the Irish Open for the first time.

Straffan hosts many types of sporting activities and events. Every September, the village is the starting point for the Liffey Descent. This annual canoe and kayak race, which has taken place every year since 1960, sees 1000 people race 28km along the river Liffey from Straffan Weir to Islandbridge in Dublin. Straffan is also home to one of the oldest Gaelic Athletic Association clubs

in Kildare. Founded in 1885, the club played a leading role in the formation of gaelic games in the county. Straffan AFC promote soccer in the village and participate in the Kildare & District Football League.

The Steam Museum and Lodge Park Walled Garden is another historic attraction in the village. Open every summer, the Steam Museum is situated in an old railway building that used to stand in Dublin. Engines, models and portraits are on display from the early days of railways. The walled garden was originally built in 1777 to deliver produce for the adjoining Palladian style mansion. The garden is divided into several separate sections, including those highlighting herbaceous borders, rare plants and a rose garden, while a newly restored greenhouse displays rare plants from all over the world.





# Effort and Involvement

The people of Straffan have a strong sense of pace, community spirit and deep pride in their village. The village and its environs are characterised by a tight knit community with many residents getting involved in initiatives like the Tidy Towns Committee, the various sporting organisations, community fundraisers and the local School.

Straffan has had much success in the National Tidy Towns Awards, the national environmental and public realm competition. The village has claimed bronze (2007, 2008, 2010 & 2011), silver (2009) and gold (2012, 2013 & 2014) awards, as well as

triumphing as Ireland's Best Kept Small Town in 2013. The key to this success are the volunteers who work tirelessly for Straffan Tidy Towns, for the benefit of the community and also the strong partnership we have with Kildare County Council, the local Residents Associations and the local school.

A walk through the village on any given day will ensure that you will probably meet one of our volunteers, tending to the many and varied jobs that is undertaken to keep the place neat and tidy, whether they are cutting grass, litter







EFFORT  
& INVOLVEMENT

picking, tending to the flower beds or the hanging baskets or just general maintenance all of this is undertaken to keep our village clean and a village where others want to live.

Residents Associations are encouraged to take ownership of their local area and all groups work together in the improvement and enhancement of the communal areas. Links are maintained with the local Gaelic Athletic Association club, Soccer club and school through the Green Flag committee and all groups have given an undertaken to maintain their properties and adjacent road fronts in pristine condition throughout the year.

The success that has been achieved can only be attributed to the spirit of pride, belonging and partnership that exists in Straffan and the many groups with works with especially Kildare County Council.





# Straffan: Built Heritage

